

Stephen Jaffe

String Quartet No. 2 (Aeolian and Sylvan Figures)

Aeolian and sylvan figures, in a dance
Muted interlude
Scherzino chickadee
Homage to the breath (syrinx)
Push me pull you

... five sections...about eighteen minutes long...rhythms of wind, the woods, breathing and dance...the physicality of playing stringed instruments... The titles of the movements, and the subtitle *Aeolian and Sylvan Figures* --added after the music was completed--suggest an essence different in quality from the chronologically descriptive String Quartet No. 2.

If I say that the closest thing to the music itself is dance (for example, performances by Paul Taylor or Merce Cunningham companies), this would capture one essence: visual and sonic music before a scrim. Others would be: the hypnotic timbre of the muted violin; the light playfulness of Italian words like *scherzino* or Native American ones like *chickadee*, the sound pizzicato; the feeling of a breathing, suspended pulse, as happens often in my music; the violent and physical concentration of parts going together. Making music of this kind is choreography.

An acrostic may help listeners find a good entry point:

Sylvan and aeolian figures
Tonally new
Rhythms of the wind.
In the overtones
Not to imitate, but to sing.

Great and powerful resonances of the body
Quintuple in design
Under choreographic spell
Aeolian is the breath
Revealing breath

To sing
Even breath's finite song
To breathe

Not to imitate
O.
2 sing.

String Quartet No. 2 (*Aeolian and Sylvan Figures*) was commissioned by the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society for the Miami String Quartet.