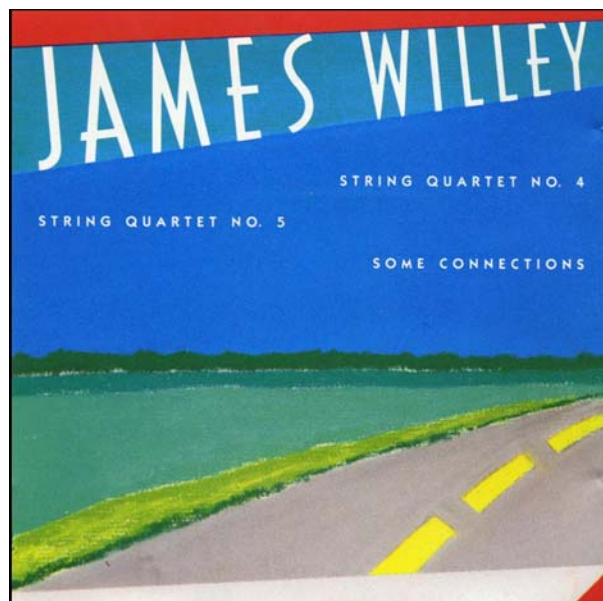


NWCR562

James Willey



1. String Quartet No. 5 (14:49)
Esterhazy Quartet: Eva Szekely, violin I; John McLeod, violin II; Carolyn Kenneson, viola; Carleton Spotts, violoncello

Some Connections (9:29)

2. I (3:20)
3. II (2:53)
4. III (3:15)
Szekely/Schene Duo: Eva Szekely, violin; Daniel Shene, piano

String Quartet No. 4..... (18:57)

5. I (4:56)
6. II (4:27)
7. III (3:43)
8. IV (5:50)
Esterhazy Quartet: Eva Szekely, violin I; John McLeod, violin II; Carolyn Kenneson, viola; Carleton Spotts, violoncello

Total playing time: 55:62

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Notes

The relationship between composer and performer, like the relationship of one body of music to another, is complex, and the influence of one over the other tends to range widely and subtly. When a composer writes for a group of performers, the performers' concept of instrumental sound and views on an appropriate performance technique will directly influence the nature of the music written for them. When the performing medium is a string quartet, the composer/performer relationship is extended to the collective sound and personality of the four players as a unit. When the relationship of a composer to a quartet is longstanding, and my relationship to the Esterhazy Quartet heard on this recording dates back to 1975, the relationship becomes very specific. The personalities of the players get bound up with the kind of material assigned to them. It is a very special relationship, which, combined with a love of and obsession with the sound of fiddle-music and textures of hymnody has provoked five string quartets thus far, as well as the kinds of material directed towards the players of *Some Connections*.

In both the Fourth and Fifth Quartets, as well as in *Some Connections*, hymn cadences, fiddle-like passages, abstract material, and outright hokum converge upon and collide with each other to merge as a single idiom. The result is a style that cross-sects and mixes allusions to many kinds of American music, creating a musical metaphor which links disparate things—a linkage central to my sense of the United States and its music.

The String Quartet No. 5, written for and premiered by the Esterhazy Quartet, was begun during October of 1985 and completed during March of 1986. Its single movement is dominated by a four-note fiddle figure, which appears at its opening. This figure, transposed, inverted, turned around backwards, its whole-step half-step makeup used to generate a

variety of scales, appears throughout the work as the principal idea and background to other ideas. It surfaces then recedes throughout the alternating fast and slow sections, only to appear in all instruments at the work's conclusion as a single element, binding together the many ideas which have surfaced over the course of the work.

The quartet is divided into seven sections, with the principal material of the work laid out in the first two. In the first section, the four-note fiddle figure described above is combined with both a syncopated shuffle in second violin and viola, and with a broad, impassioned melody in the cello, all of which play important roles in subsequent sections of the quartet. The second section introduces a slower tempo and two new elements; a melody, initially presented in the viola, and a hymn cadence. These materials are also developed in subsequent sections. In effect, sections one through three (fast-slow-fast) and four through six (slow-fast-stow) act as expositions and developments for material set out in *da capo* form. Section seven pulls all the other sections of the work together in a final outburst of collective fiddling.

Some Connections, three short pieces for violin and piano, was composed in 1981. Each of its pieces projects a radically different mood: the first, pensive then wild; the second, rambunctiously silly in two voices, one tonal and one atonal; the third, anxious then reflective. All three pieces are linked, hence their collective title, by a common tonality of C, and the "blues third" (or combined major and minor thirds) which dominate both the melodic and harmonic material of each piece. Formal divisions are set out in as dramatic or jarring a fashion as possible, and then knit together through common musical materials.

The String Quartet No. 4 was composed at the request of the Tremont String Quartet, quartet-in-residence at the State

University of New York at Geneseo, and is dedicated to them. It was begun during November of 1984 and completed during March of 1985. While each of the work's four movements asserts its own tone and mood, each is also linked to its neighbors by a body of material derived from the opening hymn-like melody in the cello, the major second sustained against it, and by the pitches B-flat and A, which are used referentially to support and disturb the tonal underpinnings on F-sharp and F, which underlay the structure of the work.

In spite of the fact that each movement can stand alone, a sort of musical narrative can be traced across the work taken as a whole. In the first movement, a hymn-like tune and major-second backdrop are presented and then taken apart. In the second and third movements, the principal motives of the hymn are reassembled to create new themes, which function as the principal theme of the second movement's simple ternary form, as the principal element in the third movement's aggressively loony rondo, and as the basis for the principal tune of the last movement's fast section. The final movement takes materials and processes from the first three movements and reworks them, first in frenzied fiddling, then, through a series of distortions, to a sustained conclusion full of allusions to hymnody and other music from America's past.

—James Willey

James Willey (b 1939, Lynn, MA) began composing at an early age. He attended the Eastman School of Music, where his principal composition teachers were Bernard Rogers and Howard Hanson. Willey later attended the Berkshire Music Center, where he was a student of Gunther Schuller. The recipient of two National Endowment for the Arts Awards, his works have been performed by the Rochester and Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestras, the Seattle Symphony, the Esterhazy and Tremont String Quartets, the Dorian Wind Quintet, Collage, the Society for New Music and other ensembles throughout the United States. James Willey is

currently professor of music at the State University College of Arts and Sciences at Geneseo, New York.

The Esterhazy Quartet, founded in 1960, has come to prominence in the United States through performances on National Public Radio and on the "Hear America First" series. The Esterhazy was chosen as one of the few premiere quartets in the nation for the highly acclaimed "Quartessence" series. In addition to appearances on the East and West Coasts of the United States, the Esterhazy Quartet regularly makes extensive tours of Latin America. The quartet has served as artists-in-residence at the Banff Centre for the Performing Arts (Banff, Canada), the Conservatório Gomes (Belém, Brazil), and at the Sun Valley and Western Music Festivals. They are currently artists-in-residence at the University of Missouri-Columbia. The Esterhazy Quartet has previously recorded the First and Second String Quartets of James Willey.

The Szekely/Schene Duo first performed together in 1976 at Indiana University and has appeared regularly since then on the concert stage.

Violinist **Eva Szekely** has studied at the Juilliard School of Music, the Accademia Guiana in Sienna, and the Banff Centre for the Performing Arts. She has been a student of Ivan Galamian, Franco Gulli, and Christine Delhier, and has worked closely with the Juilliard and Hungarian string quartets. The recipient of numerous awards and prizes in her native Rumania and in Italy, she has concertized extensively throughout the United States, Canada, and South America.

Pianist **Daniel Schene**, born in New York City, studied at Indiana University, the Eastman School of Music, and the North Carolina School of the Arts. He is the recipient of the prestigious Battista Memorial Award and a Performer's Certificate from Indiana University. Mr. Schene has appeared in both solo and chamber music recitals throughout the United States and Canada, and is currently head of keyboard studies at Webster University in Saint Louis, Missouri.

Production Notes

String Quartet No. 5, MS—Composer (ASCAP)

Some Connection, MS—Composer (ASCAP)

String Quartet No. 4, MS—Composer (ASCAP)

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Produced by James Willey and Eva Szekely

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