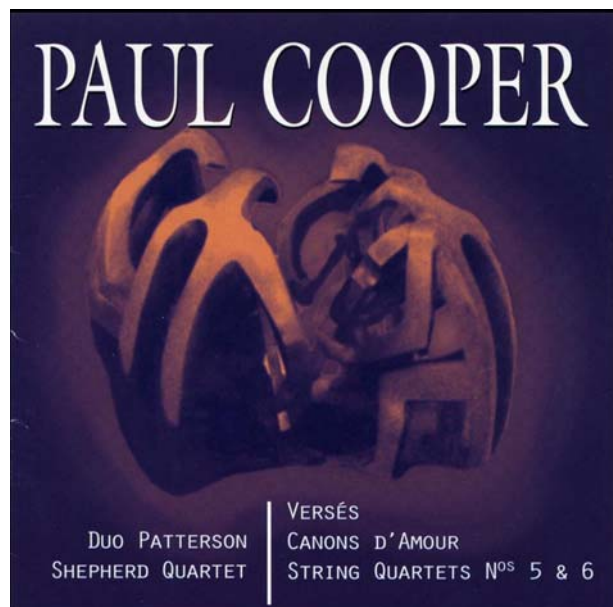


NWCR687

Paul Cooper

Verses / String Quartet No. 5 (Umbræ)

Canons d'Amour / String Quartet No. 6



String Quartet No. 5 (<i>Umbræ</i>) (1973)	(14:51)
6. I.	(4:12)
7. II.	(3:36)
8. III.	(2:55)
9. IV.	(4:48)

<i>Canons d'Amour</i> (1981)	(10:31)
10. I.	(2:08)
11. II.	(1:49)
12. III.	(2:19)
13. IV.	(0:58)
14. V.	(3:17)

String Quartet No. 6 (1977)	(21:00)
15. I.	(11:16)
16. II.	(6:06)
17. III.	(3:38)

Duo Patterson: Ronald Patterson, violin; Roxanna Patterson, viola

The Shepherd String Quartet: Ronald Patterson, violin; Raphael Fliegel, violin; Wayne Crouse, viola; Shirley Trepel, cello

<i>Verses</i> pour violon et alto (1991)	(13:14)
1. I.	(5:34)
2. II.	(1:54)
3. III.	(1:40)
4. IV.	(2:15)
5. V.	(2:41)

Total playing time: 59:42

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Notes

Acknowledged by Ross Lee Finney, a dean of American music, as “one of America’s most distinguished composers,” **Paul Cooper** (*b* Victoria, IL, 19 May 19 1926; *d* Houston, 4 April 1996) has built an impressive reputation as a teacher, author, critic, and composer of international stature.

The music of Paul Cooper includes a large number of works that have been published, performed, and recorded throughout the United States and Europe. His highly selective catalogue includes six symphonies, six concertos, six string quartets, four oratorios, and a vast amount of instrumental and vocal chamber music. Ross Lee Finney comments, “[Cooper’s] music has deep emotional motivation and at the same time a simplicity and clarity that comes from his mastery of craft. The inner fabric is so subtle and the melodic flow so natural that on each hearing I find relationships I had not previously noted. Perhaps I like his music so much because his roots are so much like my own.”

Following his education at the University of Southern California, Los Angeles, and at the Conservatoire National and the Sorbonne in Paris, Cooper made his professional debut as a composer with a commission from the Los Angeles Philharmonic in 1953. Since then, Cooper has received virtually every award and honor in music offered in the United States: a Fulbright fellowship (during which he studied with Nadia Boulanger), two Guggenheim fellowships, and

awards or grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Ford, Rockefeller, and Rackham Foundation, the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, and yearly awards from ASCAP since 1966.

His teaching posts have included the University of Michigan (Ann Arbor), the University of Cincinnati, and the Shepherd School of Music at Rice University in Houston, where he currently holds the Lynnette S. Autrey Endowed Chair and is composer in residence. Cooper has held guest professorships at the Royal Academy of Music in Stockholm and the Royal Conservatory of Music in Copenhagen.

Though Cooper’s training with Boulanger and his later association with Finney suggest both a neoclassical and a serial background, he has grown beyond these influences to develop a uniquely personal voice, contained within a communicative framework that is created with careful artistry.

Like his large-scale instrumental works, Cooper’s chamber music is characterized by clarity of texture and form, idiomatic writing, and a deeply expressive harmonic palette. Standing at the core of the chamber music are the six string quartets. From the first (1952, rev. 1978) to the sixth (1978), these highly intimate, evocative and otherworldly works rely on different musical vocabularies, but share a common thread of expression that ties them together as if they were one work.

In fact, even the first quartet sounds as if it might have been written yesterday, with its lyrical warmth in the solo writing, tolling bell-like accompaniments (often in harmonics, lending a luminous aura to the piece), transparently textured scherzo, and granite-chiseled, almost angry themes superimposed on scurrying, coloristic washes of plucked sounds. The next two quartets employ a more chromatic vocabulary, as does most of Cooper's music from the 1960s. Even in his more "international" style, however, Cooper does not lose his personal voice, an idiosyncratic fusion of Classical and Romantic tendencies. As with the symphonies, Cooper's fourth string quartet shows a maturing of style and craftsmanship. While remaining abstract in their approach, the last three quartets display a luminous surface of infinite color and nuance of emotion girded by a Haydnesque structure, a masterful use of proportion and large-scale gestures, and attention to the intricate details of contrapuntal and harmonic scoring. The fifth and sixth quartets (1973 and 1978, respectively) achieve a new level of intensity and intimacy without losing their human voice, and explore the technique of mensuration canon employed by Renaissance composers such as Ockeghem. Paul Cooper's string quartets, taken as a whole, represent a highly personal yet uniquely transcendental vision.

—John Carbon

Verses was composed for the tenth wedding anniversary of Roxanna and Ronald Patterson, the Duo Patterson, beloved friends and esteemed colleagues. Unlike all of the other purely instrumental works in my catalogue, *Verses* is based on a preexisting composition, the song cycle *Last Call*. When my wife died in 1989, Sergiu Luca, the founder and director of Da Camera in Houston, commissioned me to compose a vocal/instrumental work using the seven last poems of my wife, the distinguished poet C. E. Cooper. Six of the poems were written in the hospital and the seventh was penned at our beautiful home overlooking the pool, lush landscaping, and the flights of numerous species of birds. The work was probably the most difficult I have ever had to compose. *Last Call* had seven movements and was scored for soprano and six instruments. "Recomposing" a composition of seven lines down to two is difficult. Some movements had to be eliminated; musical ideas that were subliminal in *Last Call* now come to the fore—perhaps it would have been easier to start fresh. I felt strongly, however, that had the poet been alive she would have written several poems on the Patterson's anniversary.

There are five movements, each with a different tempo, mood, and set of expressions. These modest duos express the anger, hope, reflection and resignation of dying—but with a most positive denouement.

String Quartet No. 5 (*Umbrae*) was first performed in September 1975 by the Shepherd Quartet. Composed in London during my second Guggenheim Fellowship year, the work is, in accordance with its title, veiled and atmospheric in quality. The strings remain muted throughout much of the work. The many harmonics often simulate the sound of bells, as though heard in fog. Rhythms are free, sometimes improvised, but always set within a predetermined framework. Pitches are always specific but their occurrence is sometimes aleatoric or improvisatory. No single instrument dominates but each acts independently, yet in concert with the others in true quartet style.

The work is cast in a Classical design of four movements. The first movement is in a tripartite form, whose opening measures set a translucent, shimmering atmosphere. The

central section uses a circular canon written for the 65th birthday of Ross Lee Finney, my mentor and friend. (The canon also appears in Symphony No. 4—*Landscape*). The movement closes with a return to the shadowy quality of the opening measures.

The second movement is slow and very expressive, sometimes densely chordal, other times producing a chiaroscuro play of musical light and shadow. This is followed by a very fast movement in which the canon reappears. Combinations of various sound textures, sometimes in free, improvisatory rhythms, dominate this section. The last movement, similar to the opening in mood, uses material from the first two movements. The last 18 measures are dedicated to the memory of Igor Stravinsky, and end the work in a soaring first violin line that rises above the simulation of bells.

Canons d'Amour was also composed as a present for Roxanna and Ronald Patterson—for their wedding in April 1981. The previous months were spent fulfilling a number of large-scale commissions and I decided not to compose for a few months. I was quickly enticed to amend the decision, however: a broad terrace of a beautiful villa in Monaco, with a spectacular view of the blue Mediterranean, perfect sunny weather. What composer could resist? Each morning I took some manuscript paper out on the terrace and each morning produce a "Rule of Love" for the impending wedding.

There are five short free canons of different tempi, moods, and textures. The fifth canon contains a quote of nine measures from the Archibald MacLeish/Ross Lee Finney choral work, *Edge of Shadow*: "Love I said, O my love, and I leaned upon her." I vividly remember the day in the late 1950s when Mr. Finney came out of his studio at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, with an elated comment: "I have just written a strict 12-tone passage and it sounds like William Byrd." Other than this quote there is, to my knowledge, only one other programmatic aspect. There is only one unison in the entire set, that being the final note D, representing the beauty, sanctity, and oneness of marriage.

String Quartet No. 6 was completed in December of 1977. The Shepherd Quartet, to whom the piece is dedicated, premiered the work on January 25, 1978. It consists of two movements and a coda. In its emotional intensity and its emphasis on the pitch C-sharp, the piece is an homage to Beethoven's Quartet, Op. 131.

The first movement opens with an imitation of wind chimes. Later, dense harmonic textures are contrasted with scurrying figures, both derived from the opening bell-like sounds. The second movement is a whirlwind of motion derived from two three-note cells—one dark, the other bright. Unlike the rhapsodic first movement, this movement resembles a Classical rondo: A, B, A, C, A.

The coda—39 measures in length—calls for the players to hold and play their instruments like renaissance viols. The final measures reveal the emotional values of serenity, seriousness, and above all, warmth and spirituality.

—Paul Cooper

The **Shepherd Quartet** was formed in 1975 with a unique configuration: Ronald Patterson, concertmaster of the Houston Symphony Orchestra, and the three principals of the string sections: Raphael Fliegel, principal second violin, Wayne Crouse, principal viola, and Shirley Trepel, principal cello. The quartet's debut concert achieved both audience and critical acclaim.

The repertoire of the Shepherd Quartet was broad, embracing Classical, Romantic, and twentieth-century compositions. The

group championed the works of Paul Cooper, giving more than 40 performances of Quartet No. 5 (*Umbræ*). It commissioned the Sixth Quartet and premiered the work at the Friends of Music in Houston a short time after its completion. In addition to giving numerous performances in the United States, including at the Stetson and Orkney Springs festivals, the quartet made a triumphant tour of England and Germany, to rave reviews, in the summer of 1979.

Violinist **Ronald Patterson**, a brilliant Heifetz student who has concertized extensively in the United States and Europe since the age of eleven, has been acclaimed for his "skill, authority and imagination" (*New York Times*). He has performed chamber music with some of the greatest musicians of our day, including Heifetz, Piatigorsky, and Szeryng. Currently, he is the *super soliste* of L'Orchestre Philharmonique de Monte Carlo. His recording of Paul Cooper's Violin Concerto No. 2 appears on CRI.

Violist **Roxanna Patterson** is in great demand as a chamber music performer and recitalist in the United States and Europe. She studied with Karen Tuttle, Eudice Shapiro, and Ronald Patterson. "She plays with the richness one expects from the viola, but maintains the delicacy and sweetness of the violin, to achieve a remarkably elegant tone" (*Fort Worth Star Telegram*).

Duo Patterson has performed in recital and with orchestras throughout Europe and the United States since their first concert in 1980. They received the first Princess Grace Foundation U.S.A. Special Award in 1984, and have appeared frequently on American and European television. This unique ensemble performs not only contemporary works, but also works from a vast Classical and Romantic repertory that, due to the scarcity of violin/viola duos, has to a great extent been forgotten or is, at least, rarely heard. The couple resides in Monte Carlo.

Production Notes

Recording credits:

Verses and *Canons d'Amour* recorded at Digital Rendez-Vous, Nice, France, June 1994. Francis Gavet, producer/engineer.

String Quartet No. 5 (from CRI SD 369) recorded in Houston, Texas, March 1974. William Holford, engineer; Carter Harman, producer. Original recording sponsored by the Shepherd School of Music, Rice University.

String Quartet No. 6 (from CRI SD 402) recorded in Miami, Florida, July 1978. Douglas Potts and Arland Peterson, engineers; Carter Harman, producer. Original recordings sponsored by the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

CD mastered by Robert Wolff and Richard King, engineers at Sony Classical Production, Inc., New York City.

All works published by G. Schirmer, New York. (ASCAP).