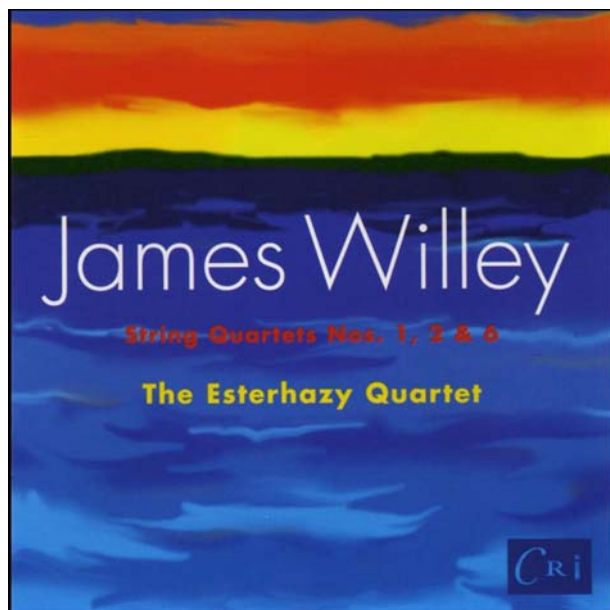


NWCR816

James Willey

String Quartets Nos. 1, 2 & 6



String Quartet No. 6 (1989)	(30:37)	
1. Slow, then Fast	(9:57)	
2. Slow	(6:07)	
3. Very Fast	(8:38)	
4. Very Slow	(5:50)	
The Esterhazy Quartet: Eva Szekely, violin; John McLeod, violin; Leslie Perna, viola; Darry Dolezal, cello		
5. String Quartet No. 1 (1975)	(20:26)	
String Quartet No. 2 (1979)		(19:37)
6. Slow, Moderately Fast, Slow	(6:16)	
7. Fast	(3:24)	
8. Slow	(6:00)	
9. Very Fast	(3:57)	
The Esterhazy Quartet: Eva Szekely, violin; John McLeod, violin; Carolyn Kenneson, viola; Carleton Spotts, cello		

Total playing time: 72:04

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Notes

The String Quartet No. 6 was commissioned by the South Mountain Association in memory of its former director of concerts, Sally Willeke, and written for the Audubon Quartet. Composed between July and October 1989, its four movements are closely connected by three musical ideas, each presented at the outset of the first movement. They are: 1) a melody presented by viola then cello whose three motives are extensively developed over the course of the piece, 2) a two-pitch harmony (C and D-flat) plucked by the cello at the outset of the piece, and 3) hymn-like melodies and textures which are present throughout the work, especially in the original hymn of the first movement and in the allusion to the hymn, "Now the Day is Over," found at the ends of both the second and fourth movements. Outside this complex of common material, each movement contains its own distinctive union of material with mood: the first movement generally fast and agitated; the second slow and brooding; the third very fast, with crosscutting flurries, wild fiddling, and slightly loony whimsy; and the fourth very slow, alternating sadness with ecstasy. The String Quartet No. 6 was premiered by the Audubon Quartet on August 25, 1990 at South Mountain in Pittsfield, Massachusetts.

The String Quartet No. 1 was composed between October 1974 and March 1975 during a sabbatical from the State University of New York at Geneseo. Though in one movement, it divides clearly into five sections, distinguished by their contrasting tempos and moods. The large opening section introduces the principal motivic ideas and a harmonic progression which recur throughout the work. These evolve into themes which are developed over the course of a series of variations, climaxed by ostinati in differing meters derived from the work's opening. The second section of the work continues to develop material from the opening while

introducing new elements: a C-major triad, which dissolves into a scrape; further ostinati derived from the opening; and interrupting flurries of short note values. The third section, a scherzo, serves to introduce the idea of the quartet as an assemblage of infernal fiddles, fiddling against the various ostinati derived from the quartet's opening. The fourth section is an *arioso* in which the first violin's sustained melody is first supported by harmonies developed from the progression found in the opening section, then by a ground derived from the flurries of the second section. Sustained melody, ground and ostinati converge to form both the climax of the work and the conclusion of the fourth section.

The concluding section reintroduces elements of fiddling which, combined with other elements of the work, bring the quartet back to its beginning statement interrupted by chords and a final struggle between the tonal and non-tonal elements of the work. The String Quartet No. 1 was written for the Esterhazy Quartet and was first performed by them on February 21, 1976 in Whitmore Hall of the University of Missouri-Columbia.

The String Quartet No. 2 was composed for the most part in June 1979 while I was staying in New York City. Revision of the New York sketches took place in July and the ink score was completed in August. The work is split into four movements, all of which in their thematic content intersect, coexist, and otherwise influence each other to form a whole of disparate yet related movements. The first movement introduces fixed successions of intervals and durations, bits and pieces of which are explored in all four movements. The second whimsically juxtaposes rhythmic patterns that are somewhat out of kilter with each other and many of which are distortions of rhythms associated with American popular music. The third movement, a slow song, explores in a totally

new emotional context a four-note figure derived from the second movement. The figure functions as a counterpoint to an extended melody begun by the first violin, which alternates with a second body of material cast in A-flat major. As the two kinds of material merge, the character of the melodic writing becomes increasingly agitated. After an interruption by A-flat major triads, the movement closes quietly with allusions to its opening. The last movement aspires to perpetual motion, but is interrupted by the appearance of material developed from the earlier movements. Throughout the entire quartet, the pitches A, D and G#/Ab act to varying degrees as points of tonal orientation. The premiere, which took place on April 7, 1980, at the University of Missouri-Columbia, was performed by the Esterhazy Quartet, to whom it is dedicated.

— *James Willey*

James Willey (b 1939, Lynn, Massachusetts) began composing at an early age. He attended the Eastman School of Music where he studied composition with Bernard Rogers and Howard Hanson. Willey later attended the Tanglewood Music Center where he studied with Gunther Schuller. The recipient of three National Endowment for the Arts Awards, his works have been performed by the Baltimore Symphony, the Rochester and Buffalo Philharmonic orchestras, the Seattle Symphony, the Kansas City Symphony, the Minnesota Orchestra, the Esterhazy Quartet, the Audubon Quartet, the Dorian Quintet, Collage, the Society for New Music, and the Twentieth Century Consort. His Sonata for Horn and Piano was the 1990 winner of the International Horn Society's annual composition competition and his String Quartet No. 6 was a semi-

finalist in the 1991 Kennedy Center Friedheim Awards. Willey's *A Millennial Boogie* was premiered in 1999 as part of a "Dance Mix" by conductor David Zinman and the Baltimore Symphony. James Willey is currently Distinguished Teaching Professor of Music at the State University of New York at Geneseo.

The **Esterhazy Quartet** takes its name from Prince Nikolaus Esterhazy, the eighteenth-century patron of the composer generally considered to be the father of the string quartet—Franz Joseph Haydn. Throughout its distinguished career it has delighted audiences on three continents, from the Haydn Festspiele in Austria to the Banff Centre for the Arts in Canada, to the Mozarteum in Buenos Aires. Critics have praised the quartet for its intelligence, refinement, warmth of sound, and "velvety palette of tonal colors." The Esterhazy Quartet has appeared at several important music festivals in the United States and abroad, including the Western Arts Festival, the Texas Music Festival and the International Chamber Music Festival of Para in Belem, Brazil. National Public Radio has frequently featured the quartet on its broadcasts, including the highly acclaimed "Hear America First" and "Quartessence" series, and in live broadcasts from WGBH in Boston on "Classical Performances." Since its inception more than three decades ago, the Esterhazy Quartet has been quartet-in-residence at the University of Missouri-Columbia. As a musical ambassador for the University, the Quartet performs around the world and seeks to promote the advancement of the string quartet art form through master classes and workshops with young performers and through collaborations with contemporary composers.

Production Notes

String Quartet No. 6 produced by Jeff Tyzik. Balance Engineer: David Dusman. Recorded in Kilbourn Hall, Eastman School of Music, August 13–17, 1998.

String Quartet No. 1 and String Quartet No. 2 recorded January 1981 at the Eastman School of Music; from Spectrum SR-143. Digitally remastered by David Dusman.

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