

Richard Lavenda

String Quintet: Thoughts Fly

The three movements of my quintet, *Thoughts Fly*, are in the traditional fast-slow-fast arrangement, and I've given each a title that I think reflects its essential character: the energy and drive of the first movement approaches incendiary levels; the second has a wistful, reflective lyricism; and the third is extroverted, flamboyant and acrobatic. While each movement is different in obvious ways, they share certain important features. An audible one is how the musical material is distributed among the instruments. There is great variety of presentations, ranging from all five playing together to solos

for each, with as many combinations of either counterpoint or melody and accompaniment as I could think of between those two poles. The players must change roles rapidly; indeed, "thoughts fly" in numerous ways and directions.

Perhaps the most significant feature of the piece is how my friendships with the performers guided many of my compositional decisions. I have had the pleasure of knowing Norman Fischer and the members of the Chiara String Quartet for many years and in many contexts. Writing this quintet for them truly has been a pleasure. I decided that I wanted to

have important aspects of the piece come from either my relationship with them or my sense of their relationships with each other: without being too programmatic or literal about it, there are numerous places in the piece where this is apparent, either in the musical material itself or in the way that the instruments respond to each other. Of course, my hope is that the piece will be enjoyable and coherent without anyone in the audience having to know any of this. I mention it only to describe the personal connections that both inspired and pleased me as I composed.

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Richard Lavenda's music has been performed around the world by, among many others, the Houston Symphony, Musica Nova/Tel Aviv, the Slovak Radio Orchestra, ZAWA!, the Fischer Duo, and the Sun, T'Ang, and Ensō String Quartets. His compositions include an opera, *Barricade*, which won a First Prize Award from the National Opera Association, numerous pieces for orchestra, and a wide diversity of chamber music. He has been a guest composer on many campuses and concert series around the United States, at festivals in Germany, the Czech Republic, Australia, Ukraine, Finland, and Slovenia, and on programs at Carnegie Hall and the Kennedy Center. Recent projects include Clarinet Concerto, commissioned with funding from the National Endowment for the Arts by the Houston Symphony for its principal clarinetist, David Peck, conducted by music director Hans Graf in May 2005; *Chiar-*



*oscu*ro, written for and premiered by bassoonist Benjamin Kamins; *Heat of the Moment*, commissioned by Texas Christian University for and premiered by its Trio con Brio; *Flight of Fancy*, written for and premiered by William Ver Meulen and Jon Kimura Parker; and *The Language Between Us*, commissioned and recorded by the New Israeli Vocal Ensemble. A native of New Jersey, Lavenda received his education at Dartmouth College, Rice University and the University of Michigan,

where he received a doctorate in 1983. He joined the faculty of the Shepherd School of Music at Rice in 1987, and is now Professor of Composition and Theory and Director of Graduate Studies.