

String Quartet no. 4, "Arrivi"
Program Note

Compared to my previous three string quartets, "Arrivi" is by far the most compact—it takes only about 13 minutes to play from beginning to end.

"Arrivi" is an Italian word which means "arrivals" and this word refers to a recurring series of events in the piece—the arrival of a 12-tone passage which, although never exactly the same each time it appears, is nevertheless recognizably the same musical material. This 12-tone passage stands out clearly from the rest of the music both because none of the rest of the quartet is 12-tone and because it has a static quality, also not a feature of the rest of the piece. Since all the other music is built as a series of musical sentences that constantly move forward (kinetic, not static), the recurring 12-tone passages therefore function as arrival points—but arrivals to what? They are not answers to questions, nor are they resolutions to conflicts; they are simply there... as isolated, unknown provocative objects whose function is not at all clear and must be invented by the musicians in the quartet if the piece is to make sense. In this way, the piece has been left "unfinished" by the composer—the notes were all written but it has been left to the musicians to accomplish the task of finding the meaning behind those notes.

The last 12-tone passage in the piece, on the other hand, does eventually give way to forward-moving music and spills out onto a field of quick, rhythmically accented music in 7/8 time. Thus, the last "arrival" finally leads somewhere—to a musical departure, with which the piece ends just as it gathers a great deal of energy.

"Arrivi" was commissioned by WGUC-FM, Public Radio in Cincinnati, with generous funding support from Stanley Troup. It is dedicated to Stanley and Paula Troup.

Joel Hoffman