

Robert Sirota

Program Note for *String Quartet #3: Wave Upon Wave*

For the past 250 years - going back to the genre-defining masterworks of Haydn and Mozart, through the towering achievements of Beethoven, Schubert and Brahms, and into the twentieth century with Ravel, Debussy, Schoenberg, Bartok, Shostakovich, Lutoslawski, Carter, my teacher Kirchner (to name just a few) and a rich and diverse output by more recent composers of the past 50 years - for all this time, writing a string quartet has been the composer's mountaintop experience. Composers have attempted to make their most profound statements through this medium. Like climbing a mountain, it requires maximum effort, but can yield maximum rewards. These rewards are amplified by the happy fact that we are living at a time when string playing, and the proliferation of extraordinary chamber ensembles, has reached the highest level of technical proficiency and artistic depth in history.

With *Wave Upon Wave*, my third string quartet, I conclude a trilogy of quartets begun with *Triptych* in 2002. Each of these works is in essence a long journal entry reflecting a response to our times. My first quartet, *Triptych* was an extended meditation on 9/11. In contrast to the elegiac *Triptych*, my second string quartet, *American Pilgrimage*, completed in the spring of 2016, is a celebration of the rich diversity of the American landscape and the American spirit. Now, given the uncertainty of this moment in our history, rife with threats of tyranny, environmental catastrophe and the human potential for evil, I find myself turning inward to examine the topography of the human heart: our vast potential for creative energy, idealism and altruism.

Wave Upon Wave is about our fears, our hopes, and our prayers that we will triumph over the forces of darkness which threaten to overwhelm us.

As I sometimes do, I wrote a poem while working on this piece as a touchstone to the work in progress:

wave upon wave

*the heart . . . beats the heart. beats
the heart . . . beats, beats, beats*

wave upon wave

*the heart . . . beats, the heart. beats
heart beats heart beats heart,*

wave upon wave

*upon. the heart
each beat
each beat
each beat*

wave upon wave upon

*each beat
the heart the heart . . . the
heart*

*each beat
each . . . beat
a. part. hope
a hope. apart*

wave upon wave

*each . . . part
a part a hope each. beat
each beat a hope apart*

wave upon wave

*beats hope upon the heart.
beats hope beats hope upon the
heart. beats. hope. beats hope. beats hope.*

wave upon wave

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