

An Archive of the musical compositions by Herb Bielawa

Composition: **String Quartet**

Date: 1989

Duration: 14:52

Recording: by Alexander String Quartet—Eric Prichard, violin; Frederick Lifshitz, violin;  
Paul Yarbrough, viola; Sandy Wilson, cello

Program Note:

String Quartet is one of those pieces that took 24 years to write. It was begun in 1966, sat unattended for 21 years and then got completed on 1989. Motion and repose are elements generally situated in separate movements but are contained in this one movement as discursive commentaries and debates. The debate is among four instrumental personalities, some thoughtful and lyrical, others brash and aggressive. The deliberative process of the discourse is carried on in the first half of the work through complex counterpoint, point against point, idea against idea. The tension generated from such a procedure increases until the most aggressive debater (the first violin) manages to bring the others into line with its 32nd-note runs. At that climactic point the quartet makes a significant shift in its oratorical style. Now differences in the debate are handled by consensus; opposing views are shared one at a time, serially, by all the players together. What was earlier a parallel debate by confrontation has become a discussion of issues by consensus. The debate eventually exhausts itself. The issues are resolved it would seem. Energy still unspent, however, finds its release through a rush of contrapuntal passagework again, now more celebratory than confrontational.