

Here, Again

For shakuhachi and string quartet

A Kyo-Shin-An Arts and Colorado String Quartet commission with funds provided through the Meet the Composer's Commissioning Music/USA program. It is dedicated to James Nyoraku Schlefer.

When James Nyoraku Schlefer asked me to write a piece for shakuhachi, I surprised myself by how natural the idea seemed to me. I remember saying something like “of course—every time I write for flute I am really thinking of the shakuhachi!”

The unmistakable qualities of the shakuhachi represent a sort of musical expression I have always treasured: a poetic marriage between the sounds and organic structures of the natural world and a passionate, angular and intense delivery that can only be identified as “human”.

A *komuso*, or “priest of nothingness” renders himself ego-less in order to honor the higher purposes of Zen Buddhism. Similarly, to me, the western string quartet tradition is the noblest and most sophisticated form of chamber music-making. It inexorably seeks to create a unified voice that nonetheless speaks transparently about the *complexity* of human nature. Like the *komuso*, the string quartet musician contributes a distinct voice but ultimately surrenders his ego to the music.

I am not interested in—or feel capable of—“blending” Japanese and western classical music. Like other composers—notably Toru Takemitsu—I prefer to honor both traditions by inviting them to converse in the context of my work, and with means specific to each tradition. Like many engrossing conversations I have had with people whose spoken language I do not fully understand, I expect sensibility and intuition—*poetry*—to become the surface on which a quartet and a bamboo flute can write the story of their encounter—*here, again*.

Carlos Sanchez-Gutierrez