

Music for Strings (1995)

Robert Wellington Pound

plus ou moins de • exempli gratia • Georgia • altocumulus • plus de cadmium, moins de thé

In composing this piece, I incorporated the pitches of the violin's open strings as the principal structural pitches for this work: hence the title and the names of the movements also. Those pitches (G, D, A, and E) serve as the basis for all major choices in the piece concerning register, pitch selection, and rhythm. The pitches also serve in successive pairs as the central pitches of each movement, and one may note the contrasts in register, characteristic rhythms and characteristic harmonic structure which distinguish each movement from the next and yet associate the odd and even movements, with the exception of the last. The fifth movement is based on C which may be said to have been suggested by the order and registral distribution of the first four.

After a brief, explosive introduction of sudden contrasts, the first movement clips along blithely as pitches are presented with constantly altering rhythms, a jangling kaleidoscope. The clamor gradually softens as the violin ascends to the airy heights of the second, more serene movement. Elements of the third movement interrupt the tranquility of the artificial harmonics for longer and longer durations, drawing the violin to its middle register for a demonic dance. Rests fracture the restless surface of this movement with continually greater frequency culminating in a long pause separating the third and fourth movements. "Altocumulus" comprises fragmented, short phrases again in the violin's higher range. These phrases grow and connect as the rhythms become more lively, and the piece plummets to its lowest register for a galloping romp (*plus de cadmium*) which finally erupts into pyrotechnic flourishes (*...moins de thé*).