

Program Notes: “Impressions”

“**Impressions**” is a musical response to the artists of the Impressionist period in both music (Debussy and Ravel) and painting (Monet and Seurat). This work, like the Debussy and Ravel quartets, is in four movements. “Bright Palette”, the first movement, refers both to the bright harmonic language of these composers and the brilliance of the paintings from this era, where light and bright colors are the focus. The second movement, “Quiet Art”, is about the solitude in which artists work, and the passion and consistency that help to create a work of art. “To The Point” is a direct response to the Debussy and Ravel second movements, which both imitate the Gamelan that they heard at the 1889 World Exposition. In this movement, there is extensive use of pizzicato and other string colorings (as a reflection of the Gamelan ensemble’s colorful percussion instruments). Each instrument has its own theme (as would a Gamelan instrumentalist) and there is no development of those themes (following Debussy and Ravel’s lead). In addition, the word “point” in the title refers to the pointillistic technique in Impressionist painting. The final movement, “Noted Canvas” is a musical portrait of painting (in tribute to the many well-known canvases from this period). The chromatic, edgy language reflects the intensity of the Ravel 4th movement, and one of the motives is shaped similarly to one of the principal themes from the Debussy 4th. Musical materials from both the first and second movements are recalled in tribute to these two composers’ craftsmanship in their own thematic development.

It was wonderful to be able to respond to the Debussy Quartet, written in 1893, the Ravel Quartet, written in 1903, with a quartet written in 2003.

This work was commissioned in 2003 by the Cypress String Quartet as part of their Call & Response series.

--Jennifer Higdon