

Stochastic String Quartet (1963)

The *Stochastic String Quartet* was written in 1962-63 while I was working with Max Mathews and others at the Bell Telephone Laboratories on the development of the computer sound synthesis program which later became known as "Music V". It represents my first effort to use the computer in the process of composition for acoustic instruments (rather than for computer-synthesized sounds), and was apparently one of the earliest essays in the genre of algorithmic composition, having been preceded perhaps only by Lejaren Hiller's *Illiac Suite* of 1957 and the "ST" series of pieces (1962) by Iannis Xenakis. The term "stochastic music" (from the Greek *stochos*, target, aim) was first used by Xenakis to mean a music governed by the laws of probability. In my own work I have defined it slightly differently, to mean a music determined by a constrained random process -- that is, a process which is unpredictable in its details, yet more or less controlled in its general properties and its temporal evolution. The piece was first performed by the Paganini Quartet in Los Angeles, in February, 1963.

- Program note by James Tenney