

American Pilgrimage  
Program Note

I composed my first string quartet, *Triptych*, in 2002 as an impassioned response to the 9/11 tragedy. It was written for the Chiara String Quartet, who have played it many times. Other groups have also taken it up, most notably the American String Quartet, who made it a part of their concert repertoire, and who asked me to write a new quartet for them. I must confess that while I was grateful for the impact that *Triptych* has had on performers and audiences, I was also hesitant to compose another quartet until I had a clear vision of what it would be. I think that in *American Pilgrimage* I have found that vision.

*American Pilgrimage* is conceived as a true companion piece to *Triptych*. *Triptych* is a meditation on one of the most tragic chapters in our national history. *American Pilgrimage* is a celebration of the beauty, pathos, and variety of both our geography and culture. It is laid out in four movements:

- I. Morning: Waldo County, Maine
- II. Mid-day: Mother Emanuel Church, Charleston, South Carolina
- III. Sunset: High Desert, Santa Fe, New Mexico
- IV. Evening: Manhattan

The raw material of *American Pilgrimage* is drawn from four sources: Protestant hymnody, Gospel music, Native American songs, and jazz. Since I am currently in the throes of creating this work, I am the last person to speak objectively about whether it is successful or not. What I can say is that the foremost thought in my mind is to capture a glimpse of the epic quality of our country – the awesome diversity of its landscape and its people.

Robert Sirota