GEORGE PERLE
(1915-2009)

String Quartet No. 2 in D minor, op. 14 (1942) (22:14)
1) I. Moderato (7:53)
2) II. (3:54)
3) III. (10:16)

String Quartet No. 5 (1960, rev. 1967) (14:24)
4) I. \( J = 92-96 \) (6:59)
5) II. \( J = 132 \) (2:08)
6) III. \( J = 80 \) (5:37)


8) Molto Adagio (1938) (12:31)

Daedalus Quartet
Min-Young Kim, violin 1
Matilda Kaul, violin 2
Jessica Thompson, viola
Thomas Kaines, cello

Reflections on George Perle & His Music
by Paul Lansky

It's surely a sign that a composer has added something to our lives when merely the mention of his name will conjure up musical images in our minds' ear. It is only necessary to say Chopin, for example, in order to recall the rich legacy of his music in our aural memories. We even go so far as to form adjectives, such as Mozartian, or Schopenhauerian, to describe musical features in meaningful ways.

For many people today the name George Perle has this magic. Just its mention sings with the sound of his music; it recalls arful phases, overlapping, colliding, dovetailing, dancing with wonderful elegance one moment, coming to a sudden halt the next, rich harmonies which seem to have an internal logic and consistency all their own, unlike that of any other music, clear, brilliant, and inventive orchestration which masterfully captures the color and subtleties of instruments and allows them to sound free and natural: a high-minded and deeply serious concern with making music all that it can be, a rich and harmonious texture full of musical equivalents of puns, jokes, and riddles; and most of all a music which is clear, understandable, and inviting.

For those fortunate enough to know the composer personally, his name also conjures an image of tiredness and passion for music; he sleeps little and is totally absorbed by his work—how else could he have written seven important books and numerous articles.
dozens of extraordinary pieces, both as a devoted and
effective teacher for more than forty years, and become
known as an important theorist of contemporary music
as well as the world's leading Berg scholar.

Conversation with George invariably revolved about
music—he always has an infectious enthusiasm about
something musical. Whether he is entertaining you
with the mysteries of Berg, his own compositional theories,
or any of the musical discoveries he makes daily, you always
feel enlightened and uplifted. For him music is simply
the most wonderful thing there is, and after having talked with
George you feel this way too.

Despite the depth and breadth of his activities, he
is basically a deeply a composer, and his music is
his finest and most eloquent accomplishment. The
sound and surface of his music is marked by a relative
simplicity which is actually the underpinning of a
rich and complex language based on principles he
has developed and which owe much to the thinking
of Bartok, Stravinsky, Schoenberg, and Berg. He has
achieved serialism, however, and his compositional
approach is one which differs fundamentally from most
post-Schoenbergian practice.

Moreover, Perle's music does not present itself in radical
disjunction with serial music and music of the past. In
fact, his way of composing owes as much to comodity
as it does to post-chromatic serialist thinking.
Concepts of harmony, counterpoint, formal consequence,
and coherence are as vivid and lively in Perle's music as
they are in serial music. His music is a special language,
and while each piece strikes uniquely and individually, his
language is consistent, convincing, and all his own. The
quality and character of his body of work is remarkable
and unforgettable; there is nothing else remotely like it. It
posses no sense of arbitrary abstraction, formalism, or the
shells of fashion. The notes are alive with life, breath, and
purpose which only a superbly gifted musician can create.

George Perle often talks enthusiastically about dance;
Balanchine and Stravinsky hold a special place in his
heart. It is therefore not surprising that one of the
most palpable features of his music is his compelling
and persuasive rhythmic profile. His music moves
with the sublety and success of good ballet—it has
the real physical, rhythmic presence. Some might say it
"swings," but I prefer to say that George's music really
dances.

1999. Princeton University

Notes by Malcolm MacDonald

In what was usually a very varied musical life, George
Perle's international reputation was principally as
a theorist, for his works Serial Compositions and Formality
(1962) dealing with the Second Viennese School and
Tone Center Theory (1976), explaining his own developed
compositional procedure—related to but distinct from
that of Schoenberg— which he also very widely known
for his book work in creating the music of Alban Berg
better known. It would then be easy to assume, then,
that Perle's own music was in some way a demonstration
or exemplification of his theories of composition. Just
as with Schonberg, the music preceded any application
of theory, and as such the theoretical work was involved
it was in the same way as the instinctive everyday
involvement of traditional harmony and counterpoint,
as seamlessly part of the process as a pen or music-paper.
But just as with Schoenberg—it seems to have been
vitally necessary for Perle to find a new theoretical
qualification for the music he was writing and where
Schoenberg was led to develop the 'method of
compositions with 12 tones related only to one another',
Perle discovered the concept of '12-tone tonality'.

To make yet another comparison with Schoenberg,
the string quartet, as a genre, seems to be central
to Perle's output. He regarded his first encounter,
in 1937, with the score of Alban Berg's Lyric Suite
for string quartet, as decisive within five minutes
of playing the score at the piano, 'my whole future
direction as a composer was established'. As he
explained in an interview with Josephine Carron
published in the September/October 1989 number
of the periodical Strings, 'the whole of what I had
been searching for lay before me in one composition
— that the twelve notes of the octatonic scale could
be understood as an integral and autonomous structure.'

If we accept the unfinished Quartet No. 1 and
the unfinished Sonata Adagio, Perle wrote eight
quartets in all (Nos. 2-9), though he tended to say
there were only five (Nos. 5, 7, 8, and 9). We
should also remember the String Quartet of 1957-58
(a quartet with 2nd viola like those of Mozart,
Bruckner and Brahms, rather than a Schoenberg
2-cello quartet). In the interview cited above Perle
briefly characterized his numbered quartets Nos. 1-6
and gave devastatingly objective verdicts on each of
them: "In the case of the First String Quartet, I wrote

1 This realization is surely related to Busoni's prophecy, in Seicenti a New Avenue of Music (1917) that
the 12-note chromatic scale would supplant the diatonic scale as the key of harmony. The idea goes
even further back—it is found in the published theoretical notes of Charles Ives's father, George Ives.

2 The String Quintet and String Quartet No. 9, 'Brief Encounters' (1998) may be found on Bridge Records
2-CD set, "George Perle: A Retrospective" (BRIDGE 9214 A/B).
only 17 bars—what I think of as marvellous bars, by the way—but then I got stuck. I thought I was working in the 12-tone system, and in a sense I was, but it wasn't Schönberg's 12-tone system. The point is that the problem I faced here led me into the whole future of my career. I've always wanted to go back and finish that quartet so I left it at the legitimate No. 1 of the string quartets, even though it's been 52 years now since I stopped working on it. No. 2 in D minor is a seminal piece. I wrote it in prose I could do it. It's been played, and I like it, but I don't consider it a real part of my oeuvre. And No. 3 is in the conventional 12-tone serial system and not at all relevant to my work at all. No. 4 was performed but I consider it an unsuccessful work.

With No. 5 I reached a certain stage of maturity in the development of my musical language. It is one of the most successful compositions of my earlier 12-tone serial works. No. 6 was the first piece after a big breakthrough in the evolution of 12-tone seriality. In 1969, [Paul Lansky and I worked together for eight years, 1949–73, resulting in] a radical expansion of the original theory [of 12-tone seriality] and an immense enlargement of its compositional possibilities which quickly took me far beyond what I had been able to do in the sixth quartet that I was no longer satisfied with it by the time I had finished with it.

The earliest work on this disc is Pele's Moltol Adagio, composed in August 1938 in La Porte, Indiana and first performed by the New Music Group of Chicago in May 1941. In an interview given in 1985 Pele said: 'I had been a big success and quite a few performances at that time... I quote it in my violin quintet which I think is one of my best pieces... it was a real attempt to find some way of to write serious music... I'm embarrassed at some way because it's a little too derivative, but maybe I'll revise it. As far as the music is being 'written' goes, Pele also noted that he knew the Second Quartet of Bartók before he wrote the Moltol Adagio, and that it has bars and bars that are derived from Bartók's work.

Dedicated to Frank Keeny, this is a warmly and intensively expressive piece in a broad ternary form. If its 'modernity' hinders here and there at a key-central of C sharp, and allows both non-repetition and the softer sonal intervals, it certainly saturates the chromatic spectrum, and the Berg Lyric Suite seems just as much an influence as the last movements of the Bartók quartet (Pele even makes quotation use of the Second Viennese School's Hymnus ligne sign to indicate the principal voice, though usually this 'would be obvious anyway given the clarity of the part-writing'). Behind those contemporary models, the awareness of the Moltol Adagio perhaps reaches back to great classical precedents such as the slow movement of Beethoven's op. 132. The piece opens molto sostenuto, and stays for quite a while in the lower register; a repeated-note idea, initially shared by Violin II and Viola, conveys an impression of soft, slightly irregular breathing. A five-note motif in Violin I (at first A–G–B–E–A) and a four-note one occurring a little later in the cello (at first C–F–B–E) are the thematic kernels out of which the music is spun, relentlessly reworking itself from phrase to phrase. There is a slightly quicker central section, Andante, making use of the full gamut available to the four instruments and keeping the textures airy, the Adagio tempo returns and, after further development, the music ends away the 'breathing' figure in Violin II and Viola being the last sound, as it was the first.

It seems as if Bartók's Second String Quartet was still exercising some fascination for Pele when he came to compose his own String Quartet No. 2 in D minor, Op. 14, which like the Bartók is laid out in three movements with an opening Adagietto, a quicker second movement and a slow finale. As noted above, Pele said he composed the work, which he completed in Chicago on 20 November 1942, 'to prove I could do it'. In the 1985 interview he also stated: 'I would say to myself: I don't trust a composer who can't sit down and write a quartet in D minor! I wonder if I can write a quartet in D minor? And it turns out that I could, and I think it's very good that I did...

This first movement is a fascinating piece. Pele's D minor is chromatically saturated from the start, and at first the sense of elasticity is as elusive as in the Moltol Adagio. The opening gambit— a rising chromatic scalar figure in Violin I, filling in the space between D and A—is initiated and invigorated by the other instruments, with a contrasting texture in triplet rhythms whose repeated notes recall, if anything, Schönberg's 12-tone Third Quartet of 1928. When a more 'tonal' feel takes hold, it partially relies on an extensive use of echo pedal points, first D and then E

The scalar figures and the triplet rhythms are only some of the motivic entities in a very varied first subject group, with a longer-beamed second group, more meso-melodic appoggiaturas, while the rising chromatic scales, now sounding over two and a half octaves, appear more decorative. The sense of flow is immediately attractive, while imaginative writing, in the form of lyrical canons and inversions, keep the textures continually on the move. A short solo for Violin I, a ff theme, marks the movement's mid-point. The second half continues to develop what has previously been experienced, though with a feeling of recapitulation and codas.

The second movement is a Waltz, complete with section-repeats in the manner of some of Schoenberg's works from the 1920s; the logic signature suggests B flat, but the feeling remains D, balanced by F. This is very

3 Why particularly in D minor? The obvious example is Schoenberg's official String Quartet No. 1, op. 7 (which not many composers could just sit down and write!), and Pele may have been thinking of the fact that Schönberg was a 'Spectrechen'sc composer throughout his career and its ethos remains in his music.'
much the idea of the waltz filtered through Mahler and Berg, though a brief "lyric" trio in an unexpectedly plentiful C major shows we should not take Perle's affinities for granted— as does a second, more playful trio nominally in C-sharp major but soon modulating out of it through a thicket of accidentals.

The final movement is unmistakably music of lament. It grows, Adagio, out of a falling melodic figure in the violins and an accompanying two-note tritone hendecasyllable figure in viola and cello, the melodic line soon being expanded and decorated, the two-note figure recurring obstinately in many contexts. The feeling here is prophetic perhaps of some of Shostakovich's later quartets. There is a quicker, more dance-like contrasting Andante episode, much fuller in texture than the bare lines of the Adagio but it is the grimmer music that has the last word — not only on that but on a seismic faulting melodic flight for the two violins in unison, and a decisive coda—on a repeated union D to conclude. Considering the facial year in which this quartet was composed, it seems likely that Perle's Jewish and Eastern family origins are relevant to the somber emotional content of this finale.

The emotional world of String Quartet No. 5 is much less focused; rather it speaks of mastery achieved, in a time of peace. It was composed in 1960 and is dedicated to The Composer's Quartet. As we have seen, Perle voted it one of the most successful of my early 12-tone tonal works; and in fact from a purely harmonic aspect it is probably more beguiling than either the Melos Adagio or Quartet No. 2. Each movement ends with the same chord, but a third lower at each appearance, and this seems emblematic of the tonal universe that Perle is creating in Quartet No. 5—one that sounds in some ways like traditional tonal music but is in fact arrived at through his own personal adaptation of the 12-tone method. At the opening of the first movement his pianism custom seems to be with continuity: the sinuous melody made in conjunct intervals in association with a steady marching in minor thirds [4] in the other voices, and pulsing repeated quavers [2], the even rhythm embellished by syncopations and occasional changes of meter. Later material is more dissonant angular fragmentary, using extremes of register. But the overall impression is one of calm, expressive lyricism, and when the recapitulation sets in — for this is a kind of sonata movement — it is as if order has been restored.

There follows a short and very lively scherzo, essentially good-tempered but rhythmically tense and even frenetic in its continually changing time signatures. It alternates two main ideas: the first is driven by scurrying, scurrying quavers while the second is a more songful, wide-ranging theme in rhythmic unison; both ideas come round twice, and the busy quavers seem to be coming round a third time, only swiftly to dissolve in this air.

While the first two movements therefore are easy to characterize—a sonata, a scherzo—the finale is much more capricious invention, meandering and juxtaposing several kinds of music together in a small space. It also uses the widest range of textures and effects. Warm-hearted and often lyrical, it can also be pugnacious, and humorous: its progress is interrupted a couple of times by a little meandering march, like the movements of a clockwork toy. Mysterious tremolandi, first heard in the opening bars, introduce a mood of gentle relaxation.

It was years after the composition of Quartet No. 5 that Perle finally developed his conception of 12-tone tonality whose central principle is that a harmonic vocabulary of chords that are related to each other in a special way can interact just as chords do in traditional, diatonically-based tonality. Perle ultimately creates the relationships between these chords on principles of symmetry, and different 'keys' can arise through the different pitches acting as centers of symmetry. Within such a 'key' the music proceeds through a harmonic landscape not in a clearly defined serial manner, but according to the composer's fantasy and invention: just as in traditional tonality. He does not use a basic grouping of the 12 chromatic pitches, but the result is often closer to Bartók or even Scriabin than to Schoenberg.

Perle's most deeply developed language may be heard in a work such as Windows of Order (String Quartet No. 8), which was commissioned for the Juilliard Quartet by American Public Radio and the Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge Foundation in the Library of Congress and composed between 15 December 1987 and 25 April 1988. The title Windows of Order is a phrase that occurs in James Gleick's book Chaos, which examines chaos in its relation to order: the book climax with Perle, as he said in 1989, because he had long been referring, in discussing early atonal music in my classes, to something I simply called "order amid chaos". Atonal music, in its chaotic character, seems chaotic when compared to traditional tonal music. The expression "order amid chaos" was my way of denoting certain elements in atonal music which could be called "reversals" in that they establish connections between different post-diastatic compositions... I chose that as the title of my flagship quartet as a way of alluding to such reversals.

Quartet No. 8 is cast in a single large movement, but interweaves passages in four different tempi, each of which has its own material. Tempi II, III, and IV all have a mathematical relationship to each other and to tempo I, whose basic unit is crochets [1]: 68. Thus tempo II is three-quarters of the speed of tempo I at 58; tempo III is three times the speed of tempo II at 175, and
Tempo IV is two-thirds the speed of Tempo III (or twice the speed of Tempo II) at crotchet = 1:02. (The basic unit in Tempo III and IV, which open in 7/16 and 9/16 respectively on their first appearance, is in fact the dotted quaver.) All four Tempi are briefly presented in the first 30 bars of the work, which serve as a prelude or introduction. But in fact there is an underlying four-movement shape, which these tempi define. Throughout the first principal span of the movement the context or polarity is exclusively between Tempo I and Tempo IV, the former warm and lyrically meditative with a recurrent signature viola tremolo, the latter volatile and almost hyperactive, characterized first by a rapidly-moving cello part against repeated staccato pitches in the other instruments, and then by swift contrapuntal activity for the entire quartet, tending to motricity and brief bursts of fugato. Although the music is constantly in flux, the space devoted to each Tempo progressively expands. Thematic entities—generally what was presented in those first 30 bars—recur several times, and do so quite recognizably, providing the listener with signposts if they are not, indeed, the "windows of order" themselves.

While this first span has something of the sense of a sonata allegro (because of the onward momentum of Tempo IV, in relation to which Tempo I appears something like the relaxation of a second subject), the next span interweaves Tempo I and Tempo II (characterized by an initial rising figure in rhythmic unison) in what is in effect a slow movement. Here Perle's lyricism flowers most expansively, in quartets-writing of great richness and refinement. With the long-delayed return of Tempo III, a kind of scherzo begins, powered at first by scurrying triple quavers in viola and violon 2 over a pedal ninth or tenth in the cello whose lowest note is always bottom C. It has a more complex, development "tripe" and then returns to the scurrying music throughout this section Tempo III prevails, and then hands over to the somewhat slower but still energetic Tempo IV for a pugnacious finale that has touches of repeated-note trill and brief, trailing solos for the individual players. As in the work's first span, Tempo IV alternates with Tempo I in what seems to be a kind of developmental summarizing-up of the argument to date. Tempo I has the last word, as it had the first. Quartet No. 8 ends with a relaxed liquation of its opening gesture.

Such a description of this music may seem dry (and a total or serial analysis would be dire). What is hard to convey in words, but is plain to the ear, is the sheer wealth of Perle's inventions in musical shapes and sounds. His obvious delight in the quartet medium itself, the wit and wisdom of his discourse throughout what must be ranked one of the string quartet masterpieces of the later 20th century.

Praised by The New Yorker as "a fresh and vital young participant in what is a golden age of American string quartets," the Daedalus Quartet has established itself as a leader among the new generation of string ensembles. In the eleven years of its existence the Daedalus Quartet has received plaudits from critics and listeners alike for the string's technical finish, interpretive unity, and the sheer gusto of its performances. Since its founding the Daedalus Quartet has performed in many of the world's leading musical venues, in the United States and Canada these include Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center (Great Performances series), the Library of Congress, the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, D.C., and Boston's Gardner Museum, as well as on major tours in Montreal, Toronto, Calgary, Winnipeg, and Vancouver. Abroad the ensemble has been heard in such famous locations as the Musikverein in Vienna, the Mozarteum in Salzburg, the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, the Cine de la Musique in Paris, and in leading venues in Japan.

The Daedalus Quartet has won plaudits for its adventurous exploration of contemporary music, most notably the compositions of Elliott Carter, George Perle, György Kurtág and György Ligeti. The Daedalus has forged alliances with some of America's leading classical music and educational institutions: Carnegie Hall, through its ECHO Rising Star program and Lincoln Center which appointed the Daedalus Quartet as the Chamber Music Society's Pro Quartet for 2005-07. The Daedalus Quartet has been a member of Columbia University's Quartet in Residence since 2005, and has served as Quartet-in-Residence at the University of Pennsylvania since 2006.

The Daedalus Quartet's debut recording, music of Stravinsky, Sibelius, and Ravel, was issued by Bridge Records, followed by Haydn's six "Sun" Quartets, Op. 20, an album of chamber music by Lawrence Dillon, and the complete string quartets of Fred Ledebur, all on Bridge.
Producer: David Starobin
Engineer: Adam Abeshouse
Editor: Doron Schächter
Mastering Engineer: Adam Abeshouse
Annotator: Malcolm MacDonald
Graphic Design: Douglas Holly

Cover based on a portrait of George Perle by Hannah Ridolfi (1950)
Photograph of cover painting: Emon Hassan
Photograph of Daedalus Quartet: Lisa-Marie Mazzucco

Executive Producer: Becky Starobin

Recorded at the Dimenna Center, New York City, June 4, 5, 13, 18; September 29, 2012
String Quartet No. 2, Windows of Order (String Quartet No. 8), Molto Adagio published by ECS Publishing
Corporation; String Quartet No. 5 published by Carl Fischer/Theodore Presser

This recording was made possible with generous assistance from the Music Division of the New York Public Library
for the Performing Arts, George Boziwick, Chief; and the Aaron Copland Fund for Music, Inc.

Special thanks to: Shirley Perle, George Boziwick, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts
Jacqueline Z. Davis, Executive Director, Robert Besen, Stanley M. Hoffman, Christa Lyons, and John Glover.

For Bridge Records: Barbara Bersito, Brian C. Carter, Douglas Holly
Doron Schächter, Allegra Starobin, and Robert Starobin

Brad Napoliello, webmaster | E-mail: Bridgerec@bridgerecords.com
Bridge Records, Inc. • 200 Clinton Ave. • New Rochelle, NY 10801