

MORNING CHORALE

I love a chorale. It's a style that I find myself returning to over and over again in my music. There is nothing else quite like it, and it's something a string quartet does incredibly well – the blending of similar, but slightly different and complementary voices. It becomes hard to tell where one instrument ends and the other begins.

There is a natural reverence and a kind of majesty that such a sound creates. A lot of listening is required to make this sort of thing work properly. Blending is an art.

This particular chorale is generally a quiet one, inspired by tranquil and peaceful times when no one else is around. Most of this piece is actually written in only three voices, a more intimate sound than the full quartet. The cello sits out the first statement of the main theme. The answering second section starts with the first violin resting, and then as it gets higher and grows more intense, the cello drops out and the first violin re-enters. A similar low-to-high transition between trios occurs in the third phrase, which is a warmer and lower re-statement of the main theme.

The center section of the piece is where the full richness and body of all four voices playing together is finally heard, with the cello laying out pedal tones under the top three voices. The main theme then returns, smaller as before in three voices, and leads us towards a prayerful ending played in hushed tones by the whole group.