

String Quartet #1

I have always been intrigued by works of art that seem to be one thing, but turn out to be something quite different – works that imply a certain set of stylistic or genre characteristics at the start, but then take an unexpected turn in another direction and throw the opening assumptions into question. The first four or so minutes of my string quartet are in a straightforward minimalist style, reminiscent of Philip Glass, built around a recurring sequence of four chords centered on an Ab-Cb minor third. Shortly after the four minute mark, however, the music gets hung up on a syncopated dissonant chord, and takes a sudden sharp turn in a radically different direction, with aggressive runs in the cello and viola, sliding half steps and octaves in the violins, and a shifting series of off-kilter, dissonant grooves. After building to a searing climax, it dies down; there is a pause; and then, very softly and gently, rising from the wreckage, those opening four chords slowly rise up, re-worked into a tenderly lyrical, almost pop-like ballad. The sequence keeps repeating and building, getting stronger and more confident. A violin melody soars on top, then a duo between the two violins, unabashedly lyrical, emotional, pleading. It winds down. The instruments drop out one by one, until a lone cello fades into silence.