

Quartet # 2, The "Nautical"

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Program & Performance Notes

Though not composed with a detailed narrative program, each movement is intended to be a snapshot of its title. Interpretations should be as vivid as possible, and humorous moments should be hammed up without inhibition.

I. Pegleg He is in charge, but he's a buffoon and not generally an attractive guy. He's unkempt, the wooden leg is not quite long enough, and he stinks of grog. There is no mutiny mostly because no one else wants the job, and so things stumble along, with the mind-numbing routine occasionally punctuated by the bellowing and posturing which he does to assure himself that he's still in command.

Don't rush-- play behind the beat a little. The theme in the 1st violin at measure 9 should be played with a twist of sarcasm. Exaggerate the *fp*. The *sul ponticello* in the violins at measure 21 should be very thin and scratchy; the glissandi in viola and 'cello at 29 should be very broad. The final pizzicato chord should be very harsh; it can be done as a snap pizz.

II. Adrift Becalmed-- captured, quietly rather than violently, by the forces of nature. Though an eerie silence generally prevails, from time to time the sea offers subtle hints that the sailors are not alone. There are many moments of serene beauty that promote

quiet introspection, and a few more ominous moments-- perhaps the calm before the storm-- that stir feelings of fear and dread.

This movement requires two percussion instruments. The 'cello will need a small shaker, popular now with jazz players, in the shape of an egg with small beads

inside. A plastic model, the 'Chicken Shake', sells for about \$2.50. With this, the 'cello will play long rolls behind chords in the other strings, not unlike the sound of a rattlesnake. It is natural, and expected, that as the volume of a roll increases so will the speed of the shaking, and, *visa versa*. A music stand or small table, covered with a towel, will be necessary to hold the shaker when not in use.

The 2nd violin plays a custom-built instrument called an Aqua-Harp. The Aqua-Harp is a stainless steel bucket with a graduated series of 21 metal tines attached to the rim; the largest is a handle which can be used for hanging the instrument from a ceiling or other support (which I strongly recommend). The bucket is filled with an inch (or so) of water, and the tines are struck with rubber-tipped mallets (included). As the instrument is moved side-to-side (in a hanging position), the water inside shifts, producing a beautiful wash as the harmonic spectrum changes. The sound is not unlike a whale song, especially if only one or two tines are struck at a time. I recommend size #6 (\$159, +\$10 shipping & handling), or, for a deeper, richer sound, the #8 (\$189, +\$10 S&H). The Aqua-Harp is built by Mark "Noble Blue" Hammond; his studio address is 940 Monroe N.W., Grand Rapids, MI 49503, (616)-459-9696. It is strongly recommended that the 2nd violinist spend some time improvising with the Aqua-Harp to develop some appropriate sounds for use in the piece. If you cannot purchase the Aqua-Harp, try substituting a large steel frying pan, or some other sort of large metal container; put a little water in it, and strike it with a soft mallet.

This movement is quiet, moody, and atmospheric, and a great deal of impact must be coaxed out of the smallest gestures. Take plenty of time at fermati and rests. Observe the various dynamics, articulations, and timbral variations carefully. It is important that all of the percussive sounds blend unobtrusively with the rest; they are textural, background effects, not solos. The viola in measures 28-39 should be very dramatic, and rhythms can be freely interpreted. The other parts in this section are supportive; the *sul ponticello* in the 'cello should be very thin.

III. Great White The dangers to this ship of fools are obvious now. Seas are rough and it is *not* a good time to fall overboard. The dorsal fins circling the ship make it clear that even if the crew survives, it will not be because the sea has any respect for their efforts or their captain's swagger. The jagged 'cello ostinato and the strong up-down contour of many of the phrases could suggest a shark's fin above the water.....

A sense of urgency and strong forward propulsion should permeate this movement. Except for measures 117-121, the tempo should be kept perfectly steady. All glissandi should be done broadly and gradually. All *arco* solos should be passionate and well out in front of the other parts. In measures 28-43, the viola should coax as many different sounds from the instrument as possible; even an occasional strike *on* the bridge is invited. The notation, which suggests the 4 strings (past the bridge), should not be taken literally. The selection of strings, and the addition of accents and 16th notes, is entirely up to the performer. The string choices suggested by the 'cello notation in measures 104-110 *should* be followed exactly; the same is true of the viola in measures 155-157. Be careful not to let the big crescendo in measures 162-166 peak too quickly.