

*American Sketches* was written in 1996 to a request from Bruce Leek, the eminent recording engineer, for a work to be recorded by the Capitol Quartet. The resulting recording was produced by Douglas C. Monroe. I dedicate this work to Bruce and to Doug in gratitude for our longstanding friendship, and to the Capitol Quartet in appreciation of their performance of the piece.

*American Sketches* is a concerto in five movements for four saxophones, and is symbolic of the vast diversity to be found in our country. Each of the first four movements is inspired by a musical style of a particular ethnic origin, and each features a different member of the quartet. The last movement brings the ensemble together and recapitulates all of the material previously heard.

The first movement, *Ragas* (Alto Saxophone), is spirited and technical, and is inspired by two contrasting raga scales. A drone D is sounded throughout the movement, imitating a sitar.

*Impressions* (Tenor Saxophone), the second movement, is largely jazz-inspired. It is cast as a series of cadenzas and drifts smoothly through several contrasting styles ranging from funk and "classical" to spirituals and blues.

The third movement, *Sueños* (Soprano Saxophone), employs several of the characteristics of Spanish music. The music is mostly tranquil, somewhat sentimental and introspective, as indicated by its title which is the Spanish word for "dreams."

The fourth movement, *Shamrocks* (Baritone Saxophone), is cast mainly in 6/8 time and explores the rhythms and vitality of the Irish jig. The characteristic sound of the baritone saxophone, particularly its low register, is frequently contrasted with that of the rest of the ensemble.

The last movement, *Mosaics*, presents a collage of material drawn from each of the previous movements. One by one, *Ragas*, *Impressions*, *Sueños* and *Shamrocks* each pass in review to the jovial tempo set by the alto saxophone at the beginning of the movement. In contrast to the concerto aspect of the preceding movements, *Mosaics* brings the entire ensemble together. The piece ends with the spirited music drawn from the ragas which opened the work.

The Capitol Quartet's recording of *American Sketches* has been released by Klavier Records as KCD 11078.

Aldo Rafael Forte