

String Quartet No. 1: *Vespers* was composed between late 2013 and early 2016, and premiered by the [Samford String Quartet](#) in February 2016. Since then, *Vespers* has been performed more than a dozen times at concert halls, libraries, schools, and churches throughout the country, including such venues as Auburn University, the Alabama School of Fine Arts, Messiah Lutheran Church, and Carnegie Hall's Weill Recital Hall. The work has recently been featured on two studio recordings: the Amernet Quartet's newly-released [Alabama Quartets](#) double album (MSR Classics, 2020) and the Samford String Quartet's 2019 independent release, *Sacred Music for String Quartet*.

Vespers is a three-movement string quartet that spans 25 minutes in duration. The work's cyclic formal structure is based upon aspects of the Evening Prayer service, ranging from the awakening of the heart and quickening of the spirit to the lingering and abiding joy that overflows from time spent in worship, music, liturgy, and meditation. Several sections of this piece were composed in response to the poetry of T. S. Eliot and the writings of Frederick Buechner, whose notion of "listen[ing] to the music of your own life" among the gutturals and sibilants of God's "alphabet of grace" served as a touchstone of inspiration.

Movement II, "Antiphons—Benedictions," consists of variations on the plainchant *Veni Creator Spiritus*, a magisterial hymn used as an invocation of the Holy Spirit for the ordination of clergy. Throughout the movement, the instruments echo and respond to one another in antiphonal fashion, not unlike the interplay between cantor and chorus. As the monophonic chant melody grows and expands in volume, speed, and texture, the polyphonic material that follows evokes a musical dialogic encounter with the sublime, inviting performer and listener alike to contemplate the mystery that T. S. Eliot describes in *Burnt Norton* as the "still point of the turning world" where "the dance is."

String Quartet No. 1: *Vespers* was composed for my dear friends and collaborators from the Samford String Quartet: Jeffrey & Angela Flaniken and Samuel & Caroline Nordlund. The piece is dedicated to Dr. Wilton Bunch & Dr. Victoria Dvonch, with great admiration and affection.
—JSD

Commissioned by Dr. Wilton H. Bunch & Dr. Victoria M. Dvonch.

*World premiere: February 23rd, 2016,
by the Samford String Quartet at Brock Recital Hall.*

*Carnegie Hall performance: October 24th, 2016,
by the Samford String Quartet at Weill Recital Hall.*

*Named a Semi-Finalist and Honorable Mention for the 2017-2018 American Prize.
Nominated by Samford University for the 2020 Arlin G. Meyer Prize in the Performing Arts.*

*Studio recordings available on albums by the Amernet String Quartet
and Samford String Quartet.*