

While looking for ideas for **Among Friends**, I happened to hear a performance of a piano sonata by Alfred Schnittke. I had admired Schnittke's *Concerto for Choir* and was hoping for something equally moving in the piano sonata, but nothing really touched me until I heard a brief reference to Shostakovich. I began to imagine what I wished Schnittke had written, and that is how the first movement begins, with slow, somber low notes. Gradually the tempo increases, and a ghostly little waltz is heard, as well as a vaguely Arabic melody in the clarinet, the Shostakovich motive (D/Eb/C/B), and a fugue that eventually goes out of control. The second movement is a scherzo in all but its meter, which is in two rather than three. Its unrelenting cascade of musical ideas is an ironic comment on the frenetic pace of contemporary life, and scrubbing strings, the Woody Woodpecker motive, and fragments of two folk tunes add to its humorous character. After such frantic activity, the quartet ends with a slow "*Barcarolle/Lullaby*," in which references from the previous movements are combined in an homage to two other favorite composers, Paul Hindemith and Dominick Argento.