

Composing String Quartets in the Classical Style

Introduction

The string quartet consists of two violins, viola



In the Classical period, composers wrote little for the upper registers of stringed instruments, although the late quartets of Haydn and Mozart and certainly Beethoven extend at least the upper ranges of violin I and cello.

The Classical string quartet typically comprises four movements, the first movement being a sonata-Allegro, followed usually by a Minuet, Adagio and quick Finale. In his Op. 33 quartets, Haydn introduced the Scherzo into the genre instead of the Minuet. As the string quartet developed, the slow movement was placed as the second movement in the four-movement scheme. Beethoven's string quartets considerably expanded the four-movement scheme. His late quartets illustrate marvellous innovations, radically altering the original four-movement scheme and straining the boundaries of the four-movement form.


Tone colour

The normal tone of the violin, viola and cello is obtained by passing the bow smoothly over the strings, agitating them and causing them to send vibrations through the bridge to the belly and through the sound-post to the back. A great variety of bowstrokes and other techniques are used to enable players to produce notes of differing smoothness and detachment. The most common requirements in the Classical quartet style are:

- a down bow to stress a beat and/or accent a strong beat, to play *sf* marked notes, and to make sudden musical surprises
- slurring – the playing of two or more notes

and cello. The open strings of the violin, viola and cello are as follows:

in a bow to achieve a *legato* effect. The effect of slurring creates a less marked, more expressive 'nuanced' tone, often used in slow movements. At this time notes were rarely slurred across a bar line

- notes with a *staccato* and slur across , sometimes called *portato*, necessitates the bow being stopped on the string. Again, this type of playing is often associated with slow movements in the Classical period.

Vibrato

An effect produced by rocking movements of the finger on the string. A slow rocking movement creates a more languid, expressive tone, very characteristic of solo 'romantic' string melodies, while a quick, sharp *vibrato*, as used in the Baroque and Classical periods, makes the tone more vibrant but with less of an expressive overlay.

Pizzicato

This relates to the plucking of the string or strings, usually with the right hand. The direction, *pizzicato*, abbreviated to *pizz* on scores, indicates that this way of playing continues until the word *arco* appears which signifies that the bow should be used again. *Pizzicato* is a form of *staccato*; the sound dies away almost immediately. The difference between *pizzicato* on the violin and *pizzicato* on the cello is that on the smaller instrument, the violin, the strings are shorter and less resonant, while on the cello, the quality of tone is more vibrant and resonant because the strings are longer.

Multiple stops

This refers to the pressing of two, three or four strings simultaneously to produce double, triple or quadruple stops, also known as double-stopping. In the Classical period, two notes were usually played simultaneously, while three- or four-part chords were usually played as a quick arpeggio, with increased emphasis on the melody note, usually the highest note.

Dynamics

The most prevalent dynamic markings in the Classical period ranged from *p* – piano to *f* – forte. Other common markings were *crescendo* and *dimuendo*, *sf*, *mp* and *mf*. Beethoven expanded the dynamic potential to previously unknown levels. His works frequently range from *ppp* to *ff*, and demand many more sudden, dynamic and robust contrasts from musicians.

Writing string quartets in the Classical style

Key considerations

When starting to compose string quartets in the Classical style, you need to consider the following points:

Tonality and harmony

You need to write a solid harmonic scheme with characteristic harmonic progressions, both within phrases and at cadence points. This is in part produced by a good, directional cello line with a sense of forward movement. Classical harmonic schemes are constructed in a simpler harmonic style than in Bach chorale harmonisations, based predominantly on tonic, dominant harmonic schemes with added dissonances in the form of dominant 7ths, 9ths and 13ths, and diminished 7th chords, suspensions and appoggiaturas. Dominant 7th chords held a significant position as they defined keys clearly and could firmly establish a modulation. During the Classical period they were used in all inversions.

Chromatic chords are mostly found in minor key pieces which lend themselves more easily to expressive writing. Augmented and Neapolitan 6th chords need to be used sparingly, and usually either just before a cadence or to modulate to another key. The Neapolitan 6th chord is normally in the 1st inversion, often replacing chord II in the progression II(b) Ic V.

Characteristic progressions include passing and cadential 6/4 patterns, a particularly common progression being V/I IIB Ic V7 I.

Think carefully about chords you choose in your harmonic scheme. It is only a part of the procedure to know which notes go in which chord. The important point about good harmonic schemes is that they are devised through an understanding of the function and expressive power of harmony. For example, root position and dominant 7th chords can firmly establish a tonality, while 1st inversion chords are less strong. Diminished 7th chords can be used in appropriate places instead of dominant 7th chords, particularly in the minor key, in modulating sequences and as secondary dominants.

In general, the harmonic pace is slower than that of the Baroque period.

Modulation to close key relationships are an integral part of the style; to be stylistically convincing, pieces cannot remain in one key throughout.

Texture

Texture in Classical quartets constantly changes. There are endless variations which include melody and accompaniment, pairing of instrumental lines, contrapuntal writing, all of which affect the spacing and grouping of instruments.

Idiomatic accompaniment

Use idiomatic accompaniment patterns. Accompaniment patterns used are many and varied and include broken chord and arpeggio figurations, repeated notes, sustained chords, syncopated figurations and pizzicato patterns.

String writing

Your writing for strings needs to be characteristic of the genre, for example instrumental lines often move in intervals of 3rds and 6ths. For dramatic contrast, the melody line is often doubled at the octave. Unison or octave passages frequently occur at the beginning or end of sections. As the form developed, equally significant parts were written for all four instruments, with

less dominance of the violin I. Virtuoso passages as well as sustained *cantabile* passages were a feature of the Classical style as well as contrasts of mood, texture, and accompaniment figures. It would be wise to take a cautionary approach in writing in the extreme upper ranges for all instruments.

Stylistic fluency and originality

- Show stylistic fluency, in terms of sectional divisions, phrase divisions and how and when to introduce new thematic material.
- Show an ability for originality, for example through unexpected turns of phrases, suspensions and appoggiaturas.

Approaches on how to start composing a string quartet

If you are composing your string quartet from a given *incipit* (first two or three bars and possible subsequent bars on a skeleton score), or from a given violin I part throughout the extract, you may find the following approaches useful:

- 'Read' the opening given phrase and any other given bars in the extract
- Work out the structure: the tonic key, modulations (usually highlighted by accidentals); where the cadence points are (many are Ic-V(7)-I, or IIb-V(7)-I)
- Work out the phrase structure, by adding up the bars, marking in the cadence points, analysing the opening phrase, places where a new texture is implied or given and so on. Phrases usually fall into some kind of balanced 2+2+4, or 4+4, sometimes sequentially splitting into derivations of 1+1+1+1
- Look for points of imitation and identify which instrument 'leads' and how others are to follow
- Identify if there is a change of character during the extract; the given melody line should show this
- Actively look at and analyse the idioms used in accompaniment parts; work out how long the particular accompaniment patterns will go on for by identifying any changes in the melody, cadence point or textural change
- Look out for changes in the texture; there is a great variety of continually changing textures in Classical string quartets
- Be prepared to include some movement, usually in one or all parts, where the violin I has long sustained notes
- Be prepared to include some contrapuntal techniques, often occurring in passages where a given part is more motific, or where parts seem to move towards imitation instead of straightforward melody and accompaniment patterns
- If the given violin I line looks to be an accompanying, more decorative line, (often recognisable with semiquaver passages, sometimes separated by rests), consider if another instrument is to take the melody, or introduce a new melody, or develop motifs from the melody
- Let the music breathe; remember to use rests appropriately.

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Further work and listening

- Listen to some works mentioned in this section, comparing and contrasting the different styles and the way that the genre developed. For example Haydn's *String Quartet Op. 2, No. 3* and Mozart's *String Quartet K465*.
- Explore the compositional style of Beethoven, comparing an early quartet such as one of the *Op. 18* quartets with a later quartet such as one from *Op. 127*. Look closely at how Beethoven develops the motifs, varies the textures and uses the full range and capacities of the instruments within the Classical style.

Identifying compositional techniques

In order to develop your ability to construct string quartets, you first need to understand and be able to identify characteristic compositional techniques, patterns and stylistic features.

Haydn

String Quartet Op. 2 No. 3, 3rd movement

Below is an analysis of a part of the slow movement of one of Haydn's earliest quartets, *Op. 2 No. 3*. Study the score below noting the key analytical points which relate directly to compositional features.

String Quartet Op. 2 No. 3, 3rd movement Haydn

Adagio

Violino I
Violino II
Viola
Violoncello

Violino I
Violino II
Vla.
Vlc.

p con sord
p con sord
pizz p con sord
p con sord

tr
tr
tr
tr

I V I IV I
I^c V⁷ I I/IV → F Major V⁷d I^b II V⁷ I II/V^b

Analysis

Harmonies and harmonic progression

Cello line

The cello plays a combination of diatonic leaps, repeated notes and gradually rising step-wise passages, often working in contrary motion with violin I. It has a steady pulse of four notes in each bar, changing in bar 9 to a more prominent motif, as part of the lower strings dialogue with violin I.

Accompaniment

The accompaniment patterns are characteristic of the genre. The cello provides the harmonic framework while the inner parts play a lilting broken-chord motif, the last two semiquavers of which are slurred to create the lilting flow.

Cadences and modulations

The movement has frequent cadence points, and modulations fluctuate between the tonic

key of B \flat and the dominant, F major. Note how the modulation at bar 5 is subtly introduced with the E \sharp first heard in the violin II part and gently reinforced on the off-beat violin I semiquavers, before being more firmly presented at the cadence point. The brief return to B \flat in bar 7 is more strongly emphasised by the E \flat in the violin I part, against steady repeated B \flat s in the cello line. The passage begins in B \flat major and ends in the dominant, F major.

Texture

The texture in bars 1–5 is a characteristic melody and accompaniment. Violin I takes the melody while the inner parts play a flowing, arpeggio accompaniment and the cello provides a *pizzicato* bass, underpinning the harmonic scheme. At bar 5 the texture changes and now the semiquaver figurations are played by violin I while all the other strings play chords; the texture again alters in bar 9, as discussed above to create a dialogue between violin I and lower strings. At bar 11 a more contrapuntal texture elaborates the cadence point.

Other points

Bars 7–8

The basic shape of the melody line is one of two descending phrases. This is counterbalanced by the steady rising bass line, in contrary motion with the melody, and the quite stationary inner lines.

Bar 9

Texture – individual instrumental lines and the shape of the melody line contrasts with the previous two bars, the unity being maintained by rhythmic similarities throughout; the melody includes rests at this point which often indicates that other parts have more significance. In this case, a dialogue is created between violin I and the lower strings. The effect is heightened by the cello being marked *arco*, the dynamic marking *f*, and the octave leap in the cello motif. This bar also stands out as it is based on repeated notes, in contrast to the preceding and subsequent phrases.

Bar 11

The long note in the violin I part and ornamentation at the end of the bar, moving the line towards the final bar, is a common feature in slow movement cadences, as is the appoggiatura in the final bar. Long notes in the violin I part often implies more movement in the lower parts.

Key features

Look closely and analyse other Haydn and Mozart quartets as you prepare to write your own. Key features of Haydn quartets are:

- as the genre developed, the four instruments made an increasingly individual contribution, the emphasis changing away from the dominance throughout of the violin I part
- the violin I part usually takes the more virtuosic line

- there is much use of contrapuntal techniques
- a typical format is the statement of a theme, followed by a 'looser' passage when motifs or fragments of a theme are passed from one instrument to another
- Haydn often marks *forte* in unison or octave passages to announce new sections
- some quartets are infused with a light hearted, witty humour, especially in Minuets
- melodies are more motific than lyrical
- Haydn enjoyed including 'surprise' tactics – sudden dynamics, pauses, rests, or changes of register
- The later quartets explored more minor keys which allowed for increased expressive feelings to be conveyed. With violin II, viola and cello now equally as important as violin I, the variety of textures increased to include contrapuntal techniques and increased motific development passing between all instrumental lines.

Mozart

String Quartet in F Major K590, 2nd movement

Now study the following extract, considering throughout what you would write if you were given just the opening phrase, followed by the violin I part, and were asked to complete the extract.

Read through the given analysis from a composing view point, keeping in mind the approaches given above. Remember, this is one interpretation, albeit Mozart's! When you have a go at composing your own quartet, while composing 'in-style', you can explore all possibilities.

String Quartet in F major, 2nd movement
Mozart

Andante
[Allegretto]

Violino I
p

Violino II
p

Viola
p

Violoncello
p

Detailed description: This system contains the first four measures of the string quartet. It features four staves: Violino I (treble clef), Violino II (treble clef), Viola (alto clef), and Violoncello (bass clef). The tempo is marked 'Andante' with the instruction '[Allegretto]'. The dynamics are marked 'p' (piano) for all instruments. The music consists of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some rests and slurs.

5

Vi. I

Vi. II

Vla.

Vlc.

Detailed description: This system contains measures 5 through 8. The Violino I part has a measure rest at the beginning of the system, indicated by a '5' above the staff. The other instruments continue with their melodic lines. The notation includes slurs and various note values.

10

Vi. I

Vi. II

Vla.

Vlc.

Detailed description: This system contains measures 9 through 12. The Violino I part features a complex, fast-moving melodic line with many sixteenth notes, starting at measure 10. The other instruments provide harmonic support with simpler rhythmic patterns.

Vi. I

Vi. II

Vla.

Vlc.

Detailed description: This system contains measures 13 through 16. The Violino I part continues with its intricate melodic line. The other instruments maintain their roles, with the Viola and Violoncello providing a steady bass line.

15

VI.I
VI.II
Vla.
Vlc.

This system contains measures 15, 16, and 17. Measure 15 features a complex melodic line in VI.I with many sixteenth notes and a sharp sign. VI.II, Vla., and Vlc. have simpler accompaniment. Measure 16 has rests in VI.I and VI.II. Measure 17 continues the melodic development in VI.I.

20

VI.I
VI.II
Vla.
Vlc.

This system contains measures 18, 19, and 20. Measure 18 has a long note in VI.I. Measure 19 has a melodic line in VI.II. Measure 20 has a melodic line in VI.II and a long note in VI.I.

VI.I
VI.II
Vla.
Vlc.

This system contains measures 21, 22, and 23. Measure 21 has a melodic line in VI.I. Measure 22 has a melodic line in VI.II. Measure 23 has a melodic line in VI.II.

25

VI.I
VI.II
Vla.
Vlc.

This system contains measures 24, 25, and 26. Measure 24 has a complex melodic line in VI.I. Measure 25 has a melodic line in VI.II. Measure 26 has a melodic line in VI.II.

VI.I
VI.II
Vla.
Vlc.

First system of musical notation for a string quartet, measures 1-3. The staves are labeled VI.I, VI.II, Vla., and Vlc. The music is in treble clef for the first two staves and bass clef for the last two. Measure 1 has rests for all instruments. Measure 2 features a complex rhythmic pattern in the first violin and a steady eighth-note accompaniment in the cello. Measure 3 continues the patterns from the previous measures.

VI.I
VI.II
Vla.
Vlc.

Second system of musical notation, measures 4-6. Measure 4 is marked with a '30' above the first violin staff. The first violin plays a melodic line with slurs, while the other instruments provide harmonic support. Measure 5 shows a change in the first violin's melodic line. Measure 6 concludes the system with a final chordal structure.

VI.I
VI.II
Vla.
Vlc.

Third system of musical notation, measures 7-10. Measure 7 is marked with a '35' above the first violin staff. The first violin has a melodic line with slurs, and the cello provides a steady accompaniment. Measure 8 continues the melodic development in the first violin. Measure 9 shows a change in the first violin's melodic line. Measure 10 concludes the system with a final chordal structure.

VI.I
VI.II
Vla.
Vlc.

Fourth system of musical notation, measures 11-13. Dynamic markings *f* and *p* are present. Measure 11 starts with a forte (*f*) dynamic in the first violin and piano (*p*) in the second violin. Measure 12 continues the melodic line in the first violin. Measure 13 concludes the system with a final chordal structure.

Analysis

In the opening eight-bar phrase, the texture is chordal and in close harmony. The melody is in the violin I part and the phrase structure is 2+2+4.

The structure

The extract is 46 bars long and begins in C major. It has a 6/8 metre and is marked *Andante*. In bars 21–22 the music passes through G major, in bars 23–27 modulates to D major, and in bars 29–36 to G major/C, touching through A minor at bar 37 before ending in G major. Hints of D minor appear in bar 4, hints of G major appear in bars 7–8, and of D minor in bars 12–13. When working out the modulations, look at broad sweeps and overall phrases, taking in the cadence points. Work out whether the modulations are established by an end cadence or are transitory modulations – passing through keys on travels back to the ‘home’ or another key.

The phrase structure

The main section breaks occur at bar 16, bar 24, bar 33 and bar 46. Less clear cut phrase endings, punctuated by cadences occur almost every eight bars, following the phrase structure of the first eight bars. This whole section is based on varied repeats of bars 1–8.

The Detail

The opening phrase

The opening eight-bar phrase is perhaps not fully characteristic of the usual lyrical Mozart style. There is much use of repeated notes in the melody, and the overall melodic line is broken up into short motifs. The phrase, however, is typically based on a diatonic harmonic framework, consisting of tonic/dominant progressions. Note the transitory modulatory cadence into D minor at bar 4–5 and G major at bar 8–9.

What makes the opening phrase appealing?

The close harmonisation, with all instruments

playing melodically constructed lines, the balanced phrase structure of 2+2+4, the sequence in the first four bars; the sense of direction to the cadence point in bar 8.

How is the sense of direction created?

Again, a combination of musical elements: the balance of the phrases, the rising sequence, in particular the harmonic progression and movement of the cello line in bars 5–8 in which at the end of bars 5 and 6 the lyricism in the phrase works over the bar line, gently driving the music forward. This contrasts with the first four bars where the two phrases are separated by rests at the end of each phrase.

The violin I part from bars 9 – 16

As violin I now plays continuous decorative semiquaver figurations, it is clear that the melodic interest will lie in one or more of the lower parts. Here, the melody is now taken by violin II accompanied in close harmony by the lower strings, as in the opening phrase. The decorative figurations of violin I follow the shape of the melody. Note the subtleties in these passages: the scalic passages parallel the phrase endings in bars 10 and 12. When there is less movement in the melody – repeated notes – the violin I passages in contrast are more expansive, playing arpeggio-like passages, and when the melody is more lyrically conceived, Mozart enhances the lyricism with subtle contrary motion; when one line leaps, the other is more step-wise. In the second half of the eight-bar phrase, Mozart varies the melodic line.

The violin I part from bars 16 – 24

The rests in the violin I part in bar 16, together with the cadence point here, usually imply that some action needs to happen in another part. This section, built on the first eight-bar phrase, is this time accompanied by a rising semiquaver figuration which begins in the cello and gradually moves up through the instruments, finally returning to violin I for the cadence point at bar 24. Again the first phrase is varied, now being heard with violin I playing one octave higher and the cello playing two octaves higher. The texture is additionally altered as the semiquaver

passages move through the instrumental parts.

The violin I part from bars 24–32

The decorative violin I part indicates thematic interest elsewhere in one or more of the other instrumental parts. Here, the inner strings play a varied repeat of the opening phrase while the outer strings imitate each other with sweeping semiquaver and repeated-note passages. Note the texture change from the previous eight bars; also the characteristic suspensions in bars 30–32 in the stepwise descending violin I line and the subtle dissonances thus created with the cello part.

The final section from bar 33

Compare the first four bars of this section with the opening four bars. By 'staggering' the viola and cello lines, Mozart not only varies this phrase from the opening but also, through drawing the quaver movement across all four bars, creates increased momentum. The sudden contrasting dynamic markings at bar 37 emphasise the change of treatment and also of key. Decorative figurations in the violin I part which begin on an off-beat, as do the rising arpeggio motifs in bars 40–42, will often imply other instruments playing on the beat. The descending stepwise line to the final cadence is characteristic of this typical cadential progression. Note how the bass underpins the harmonic progressions, rhythmically working in alternation with violin II, while the viola keeps the momentum going with rising semiquavers, imitating the previous bars of the violin I.

Summary

The 'material' of this extract is fairly straightforward. Basically, it comprises the eight-bar first phrase, scalic and arpeggio semiquaver accompaniment figurations and typical cadential progressions. The interest lies in the changing textures; the individual instrumental contributions in alternately taking the theme and accompanying, small variations in the repetition of the main melodic theme; the modulations, all of which maintain close key relationships with the 'home' key of C major; and the increased harmonic tension points which give the extract its sense of direction.

String Quartet K590, 1st movement
Mozart

Allegro moderato

Violino I
Violino II
Viola
Violoncello

p *f* *p*

This system shows the first four staves of the score. The Violino I and Violino II parts begin with a *p* dynamic and transition to *f* in the second measure. The Viola and Violoncello parts also begin with *p* and transition to *f* in the second measure. The music is in 3/4 time and features a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes.

5
Vi. I
Vi. II
Vla.
Vlc.

p

This system continues the score from measure 5. The Violino I part has a measure rest in measure 6. The Violino II part has a measure rest in measure 6. The Viola and Violoncello parts continue with their respective parts. The dynamic *p* is indicated at the start of the system.

10
Vi. I
Vi. II
Vla.
Vlc.

This system continues the score from measure 10. The Violino I part has a measure rest in measure 11. The Violino II part has a measure rest in measure 11. The Viola and Violoncello parts continue with their respective parts. The dynamic *p* is indicated at the start of the system.

Vi. I
Vi. II
Vla.
Vlc.

f

This system continues the score from measure 15. The Violino I part has a measure rest in measure 16. The Violino II part has a measure rest in measure 16. The Viola and Violoncello parts continue with their respective parts. The dynamic *f* is indicated at the start of the system.

Characteristic features of Classical string quartets

Allegro movements

The opening of this movement presents an octave announcement of the theme, followed by

the theme repeated but now harmonised. This opening, with its contrasting textural treatment of the main theme is very common. The melody continues in the violin I, the harmonic framework in the cello, accompaniment in block repeated harmony by the inner strings.

String Quartet K458, 1st movement Mozart

Allegro vivace assai

The musical score consists of two systems of staves. The first system includes Violino I, Violino II, Viola, and Violoncello. The second system includes Violino I, Violino II, Viola, and Violoncello. The tempo is marked 'Allegro vivace assai'. The first two measures of the first system are marked with a forte 'f' dynamic. The key signature has one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is 3/8. The score shows the initial presentation of the theme in octaves across the string quartet.

Predominantly, the melody is played by violins I and II in 3rds, the cello provides the harmonic bass and the viola plays an inner melodic line, as a counter-melody.

String Quartet Op. 76 No. 2, 1st movement
Haydn

Allegro

Violino I
f

Violino II
f

Viola
f

Violoncello
f

VI.I
p

VI.II
p

Vla.
p

Vic.
p

VI.I

VI.II

Vla.

Vic.

This has a characteristic Classical melody and accompaniment, with the melody clearly in the topmost part in the opening phrase. The

accompaniment comprises jogging repeated notes, maintaining the harmonic scheme.

String Quartet K465, 1st movement
Mozart

Extract 1: bars 22–32

Allegro

VI.I
p

VI.II
p

Vla.
p

Vlc.

25

VI.I

VI.II

Vla.

Vlc.

30

VI.I
f

VI.II
f

Vla.
f

Vlc.
f

This is an example of a more lyrical opening melody, again with the repeated jogging accompaniment patterns. Note how lyrical all the instrumental lines are, including those with repeated notes. The phrases are very regular

and clear cut, again typical Classical features. In the *fin!* two bars of this extract we see a different, but characteristic textural melody and accompaniment arrangement.

Extract 2: bars 107-134

110

Four staves of music. The top two staves are in treble clef, and the bottom two are in bass clef. The music is marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The first two staves feature melodic lines with slurs and ties, while the bottom two staves provide a steady bass accompaniment.

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115

Four staves of music. The top two staves are in treble clef, and the bottom two are in bass clef. The music is marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The first two staves feature melodic lines with slurs and ties. The bottom two staves provide a steady bass accompaniment. The word *cresc.* appears in the left margin of the first staff, and *f* appears in the right margin of the second and third staves.

120

Four staves of music. The top two staves are in treble clef, and the bottom two are in bass clef. The music is marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The first two staves feature melodic lines with slurs and ties. The bottom two staves provide a steady bass accompaniment. The word *p* appears in the right margin of the second and third staves.

String Quartets in the Classical Style: Composing

125

f

130

p

tr

p

p

p

f

f

f

f

Later in the quartet the melody is developed as shown above. The harmonic scheme here is maintained in the cello, the other three instrumental lines are contrapuntally derived, a common development technique. Consider the interplay of these lines, the way in which they fragment at bar 117, and the concluding octave arpeggio passage. This extract also illus-

trates the melody now being played by the cello, the other strings responding with answering phrases from bars 121–125. The extract also shows how syncopation can stimulate movement in a passage. Notice the two-part imitative counterpoint between the violin I and the cello from bar 125.

String Quartet Op. 18 No. 6, 1st Movement
Beethoven

Extract 1: bars 1-16

Allegro con brio

Violino I
Violino II
Viola
Violoncello

5
10
15

fp
fp
fp
fp
p
p
p
p
pp
pp
pp
pp

Extract 2: bars 92–100

Violino I

Violino II

Viola

Violoncello

95

Vi. I

Vi. II

Vla.

Vlc.

100

Vi. I

Vi. II

Vla.

Vlc.

105

Vi. I

Vi. II

Vla.

Vlc.

These two extracts are taken from one of Beethoven's early quartets and illustrate his characteristic development method of introducing a small motif unobtrusively in an opening which becomes the central core in the subsequent development section. In this case it is the short semiquaver motif. The first extract (bars 1-16) shows the opening of the movement, the arpeggio, motivic theme in typical Beethoven style. The example also illustrates the increased prominence of the cello with its answering phrase to the violin I opening. Note how the

semiquaver motif is taken out of the arpeggio theme and used as a link to the next section. In the second extract (bars 92-100) - the opening of the development section - we see how this motif is now the centre from which the development begins. The motif is passed through all instruments and Beethoven typically uses this fragment of the main theme with the energetic quavers, now in the bass.

Slow movements

String Quartet Op. 17 No. 1, Adagio
Haydn

This is an example of a clear melody and accompaniment texture. The melody is in regular phrases and the accompaniment is a

characteristic slow movement lilting pattern, marked staccato, but played semi-staccato as opposed to legato playing.

String Quartet Op. 17 No. 1, Andante
Haydn

In this extract the melody is now accompanied in a different way, with an arpeggio-like accompaniment.

String Quartet K387, Andante
Mozart

Andante cantabile

This shows the use of a syncopated accompaniment pattern, common in slow movements to keep the momentum going. Note the repeated

bass, now with the octave leap. The melody is characteristically ornamental.

String Quartet K465, Andante
Mozart

Andante cantabile

Musical score for Violin I (VI.I), Violin II (VI.II), Viola (Vla.), and Cello (Vlc.). The score is in a key with one flat and a common time signature. It features four staves with musical notation including notes, rests, and dynamic markings such as *p*. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5 above notes. The Cello part has a significant melodic role.

This is an example of the start of a warm, expressive slow movement, conveyed through the composer writing full lyrical lines with chro-

matic moments, which makes for a rich texture. The cello takes a significant, melodic role.

String Quartet Op. 76 No. 3, Variation 4, Andante
Haydn

Musical score for Violino I (Violino I), Violino II (Violino II), Viola (Viola), and Violoncello (Violoncello). The score is in a key with one sharp and a common time signature. It features four staves with musical notation including notes, rests, and dynamic markings such as *p*. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5 above notes. The texture is rich and sustained.

In this extract from Haydn there is again a full, rich, sustained texture with all the instruments

playing melodic and significant lines. The repetition of the first four bars is an octave higher.

String Quartet Op. 74 No. 3, Largo assai
Haydn

The score for Haydn's String Quartet Op. 74 No. 3, 'Largo assai', is presented in two systems. The first system includes Violino I, Violino II, Viola, and Violoncello. All parts are marked 'mezza voce' and 'ten.' (tension). The second system includes Violino I and II (VI.I and VI.II), Viola, and Violoncello. Dynamics include 'cresc.' (crescendo), 'ff' (fortissimo), and 'p' (piano). A measure number '10' is indicated at the end of the second system.

This is another example of rich, textural expressive writing, but this time the theme comprises ten bars, builds up to a tension point and resolves into the dominant key. Look closely at the way Haydn develops and expands the first

two-bar motif, increasing the interval on the last two notes, and then writing a melody which ascends higher and higher in each bar to bar eight, before coming to resolution in bar 10.

String Quartet Op. 131, Adagio
Beethoven

The score for Beethoven's String Quartet Op. 131, 'Adagio', shows the first four parts: Violino I, Violino II, Viola, and Violoncello. The dynamics are marked 'p' (piano) and 'cresc.' (crescendo). The music features a complex texture with overlapping lines and a sense of building tension.

150

VI. I *p*

VI. II *p*

Vla. *p*

Vlc. *p*

cresc. dim.

cresc. dim.

cresc. dim.

155

VI. I *p*

VI. II *p*

Vla. *p*

Vlc. *p*

cresc.

cresc.

cresc.

cresc.

The intensity of the Adagio in this late Beethoven quartet is clearly apparent in the expressive, chromatic instrumental lines, all of which now play an equally significant role. The

extract also illustrates the range, rhythmic diversity, and sheer richness of the composer's innovatory string writing.

Minuets and trios

String Quartet Op. 76 No. 1, Minuet
Haydn

Presto

Violino I
Violino II
Viola
Violoncello

5
10
15
20

p
ff
f
dim.

This is an example of typical rustic minuet writing with all the interest being in the violin 1 part, with chordal flourishes at the cadence point. Look closely again at the shape of the two

ten-bar phrases. Shape plays a key role with the harmonic framework in giving the music a sense of direction.

String Quartet Op. 74 No. 2, Menuetto
Haydn

Allegro

Violino I
Violino II
Viola
Violoncello

5

VI. I
VI. II
Vla.
Vlc.

This is an example of a more complex minuet style, shown in the more elaborate melody line and in the rhythmic variety between the instru-

mental lines. The character of this minuet is of a less rustic nature than the previous example.

String Quartet K458, Trio
Mozart

Violino I
Violino II
Viola
Violoncello

tr. 80 tr.

sempre p

sempre p

sempre p

sempre p

String Quartets in the Classical Style: Composing

This is an example of a typical Mozart trio section in a minuet. A lyrical, balanced melody is played by violin I, with the inner instrumental

lines playing a typical accompaniment quaver pattern and the bass providing the harmonic framework.

Finales

String Quartet Op. 77 No. 1 Haydn

Extract 1: bars 1-8

5

VI. I
VI. II
Vla.
Vlc.

sf
f
sf
sf

This finale has an octave, presto beginning and the melody is adventurous, covering a good range in a short phrase space. The use of two-note slurs, *staccatos*, sudden *sf*'s, short

semiquaver motifs and regular balanced phrase lengths are all common finale features. The second example shows how the music is developed at the start of the next section.

Extract 2: bars 100-108

Presto

Violino I
Violino II
Viola
Violoncello

sf
sf
sf
sf

105

VI. I
VI. II
Vla.
Vlc.

sf
sf
sf
sf
p
p

String Quartet Op. 18 No. 5
Beethoven

Allegro

Violino I
Violino II
Viola
Violoncello

VI. I
VI. II
Vla.
Vc.

VI. I
VI. II
Vla.
Vc.

Contrapuntally derived, the opening to this finale shows the ways that Beethoven drives a movement forward, the independence of the

instrumental lines, the textural contrasts and the robust energy in the music

Introduction

The variation principle of composing has long been a favourite with composers and dates back to the instrumental music of the sixteenth century.

Sixteenth century variation form

There are many examples of sets of variations on dances and popular tunes in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. A frequent composition method involved improvising variations over simple bass line *ostinato* patterns. The melodies used were usually short, simple, and tuneful with regular phrasing, either in binary or ternary form and with clear cadences.

Chaconne and passacaglia

The *chaconne* is a Baroque dance and variation form which originated as a dance-song in Latin America and was popular in Spain and Italy in the seventeenth century. The *chaconne* can be recognised by its strict *ostinato* ground bass and it is usually in triple metre and at a slow tempo. The ground bass is relentlessly repeated throughout the composition with little or no melodic variation. Chaconne basses were governed by the interval of a 4th. A typical *chaconne* ground bass comprises a descending four-bar formula based on either a major, minor or chromatic scalar pattern, covering the interval of a 4th. Another type of *chaconne* bass consisted of a sequence of 4ths and a cadence formula. While the harmonic scheme and progression is fixed, in each variation the figuration or some other feature changes to produce the variation.

The *passacaglia* originated in Spain as a *ritornello* – a repeated passage with a fixed pattern of guitar chords which was played between the verses of a song. It also evolved into a variety of bass formulas, usually in triple metre and slow tempo. Since the eighteenth century, the difference between the *chaconne* and *passacaglia* has become confused, with composers using the terms indiscriminately, although some

theorists maintain that the *passacaglia* bass originally had no recognisable *ostinato*, but just recurrent patterns and harmonies.

Theme and variations

In the sixteenth century, dances were frequently used as frameworks for instrumental variations. The art reached a high form in the keyboard works of Cabezón. The English virginalists, notably Byrd, also excelled, their works influencing composers such as Sweelinck and Scheidt. A characteristic technique of composers writing at this time involved repeating the melody almost exactly in each variation, but varying the contrapuntal schemes. Other composers maintained the same harmonic scheme in each variation but embellished the melody, which was almost always the top voice.

The variations of Frescobaldi in the seventeenth century illustrate a further technique – that of fixing the bass and harmony framework as the constant factor, with the melody being less important. Chorale variations for organ developed at this time, notably by Sweelinck and Scheidt who varied each verse of organ chorales, often with motifs related to the text. The form of free variations was perfected by Buxtehude, particularly in his chorale fantasias. In contrast, strict variation forms were developed by Pachelbel.

J. S. Bach used almost all variation types: *passacaglia* and *chaconne* in works for organ and solo violin; grounds in several vocal movements, including the 'Crucifixus' in the *Mass in B minor*; chorale partitas and canonic variations for organ. The *Goldberg Variations* represent the highest artistic development of the bass-framework variations.

Variation types in the Classical era

Although C.P.E. Bach and Haydn continued to cultivate the ground bass type of variation, from 1770 the melodic type dominated. In the Classical period, variation techniques occur in three broad situations: