6. *Classical Style: The String Quartet*

'Chamber music' in the 18th century referred to music performed in the small concert-rooms and salons of the aristocracy. The term embraced a large number of assorted forms, including the concerto, symphony, sonata, divertimento, and serenade, played by many combinations of instruments. In the latter part of the century the term 'chamber style' referred specifically to music with one instrument to a part, associated with intimate domestic music-making.

As the number of competent amateurs increased, so did the demand for chamber music. That the string quartet was a popular ensemble is evident from many contemporary writings: 'this instrumental composition for four instruments, which has been such a favourite for many years, is a special category of sonata, and in the strict sense, consists of four concerting instruments, none of which can claim exclusively the role of a leading voice.' (H. Koch, *Musikalisches Lexikon*, 1802.)

Origins

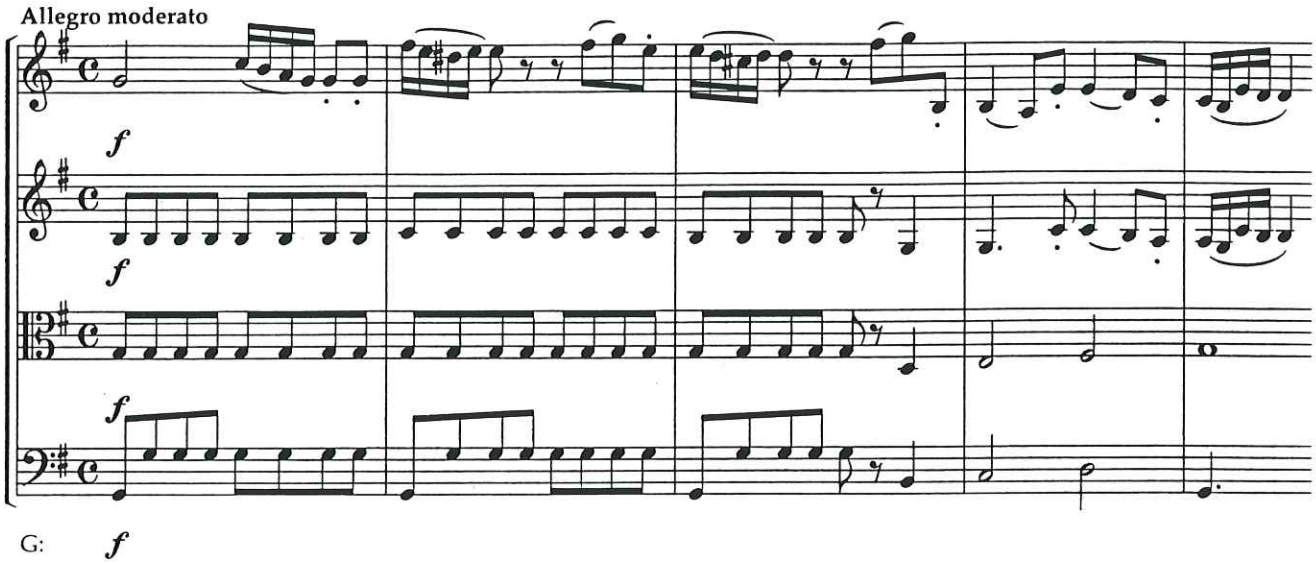
The string quartet developed from the Baroque trio sonata, which was usually scored for two violins (or flutes), viola da gamba, and continuo, a three-part texture with the keyboard filling in the harmonies. The string quartet emerged in the 1750s, as a light, serenade-like piece in which the number of movements varied from two to seven; it was probably played out of doors in the streets and courtyards of Vienna, hence the absence of the keyboard. Haydn gave the name 'divertimenti a quattro' to his string quartets up to Op. 20 (1772).

The Character of the Writing

These early quartets were generally dominated by the 1st violin; later quartets still gave the leader the most prominent part. The other parts played an accompanying role, the addition of the viola providing a 'tenor' voice to fill out the gap left in the middle by the lack of keyboard realization.

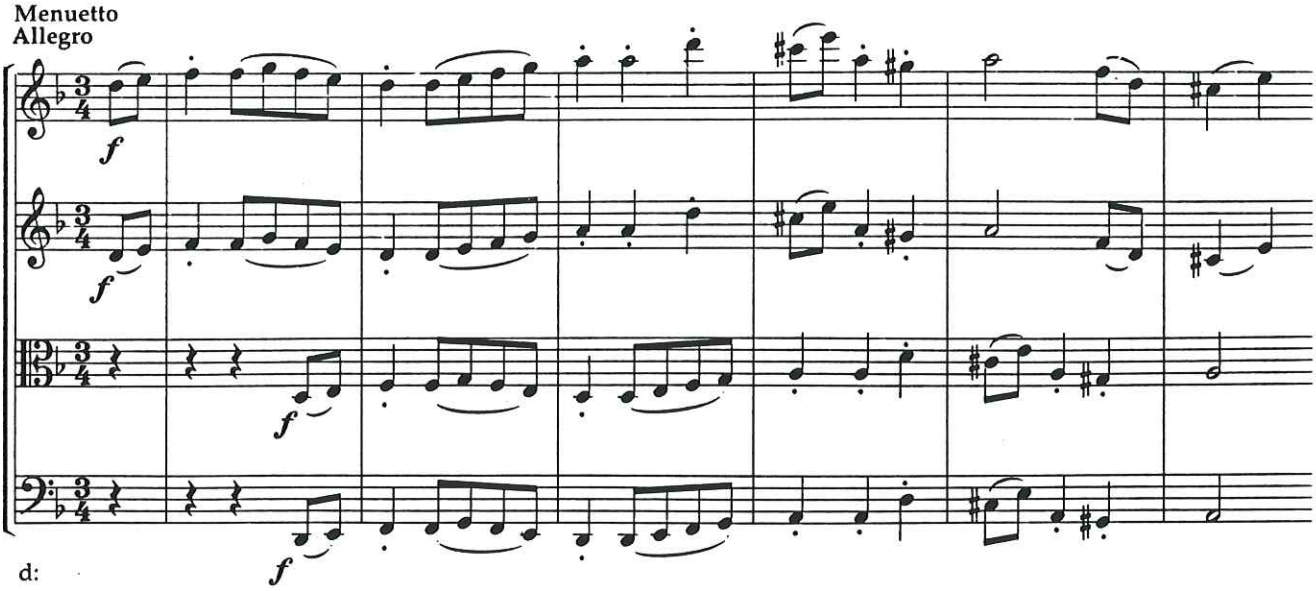
Accompaniment figures were many and varied, including arpeggio and broken-chord figurations, repeated notes, pizzicato patterns, and held chords, or a combination of these. Movement in 3rds (10ths) and 6ths was a common feature:

Haydn: String Quartet in G, Op. 9 No. 3 (*c.*1769)



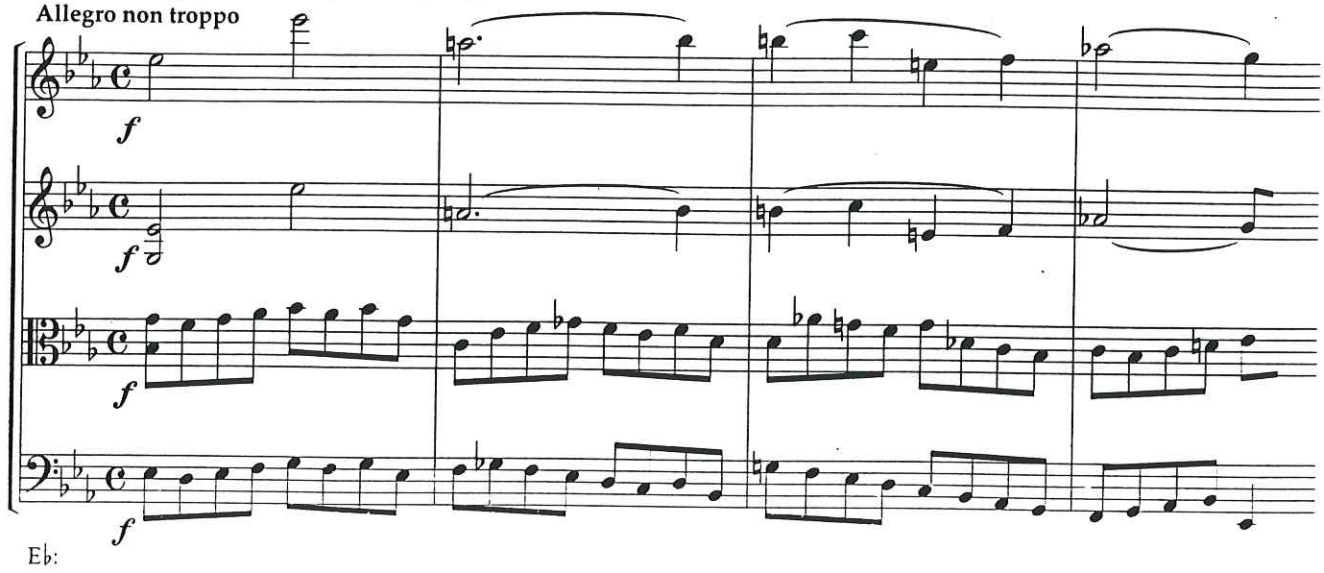
Frequently the texture would fall into two parts, the violins 1 and 2 together, an 8ve apart, and the viola and cello together, also an 8ve apart. Canonic writing was sometimes used, as in the following extract from Haydn's 'Witches' Minuet':

Haydn: String Quartet in D minor, Op. 76 No. 2 (?1797)



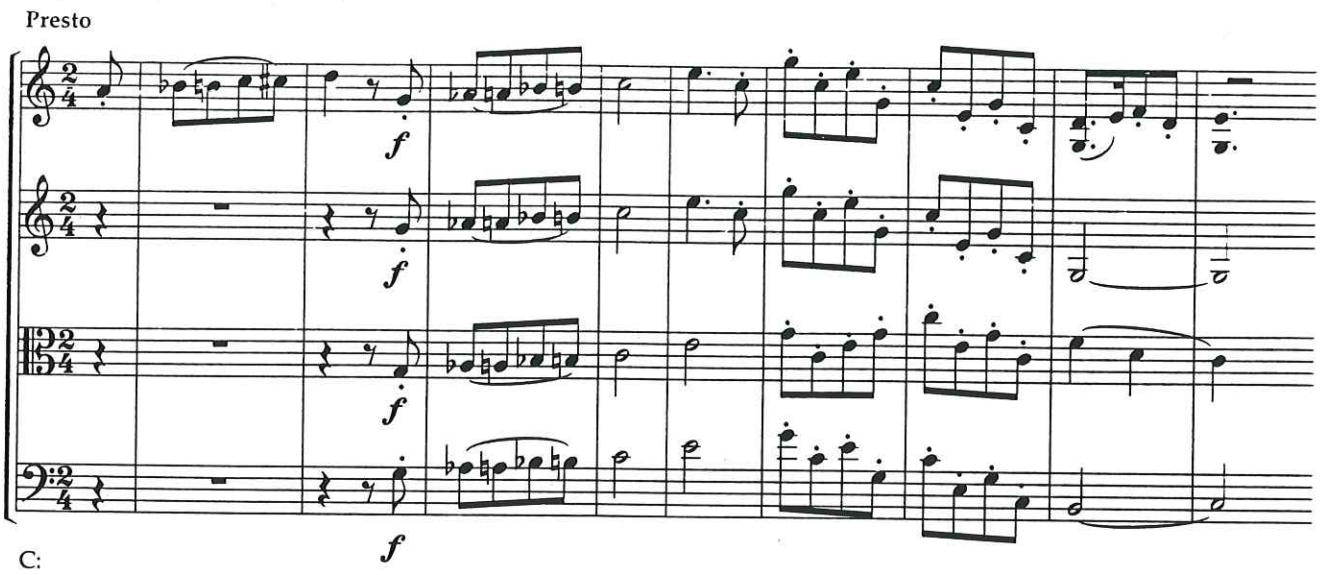
The melody line was often doubled at the 8ve:

Mozart: String Quartet in E♭, K. 428 (1783)



Unison passages were common, usually at the beginning or at the cadence bars:

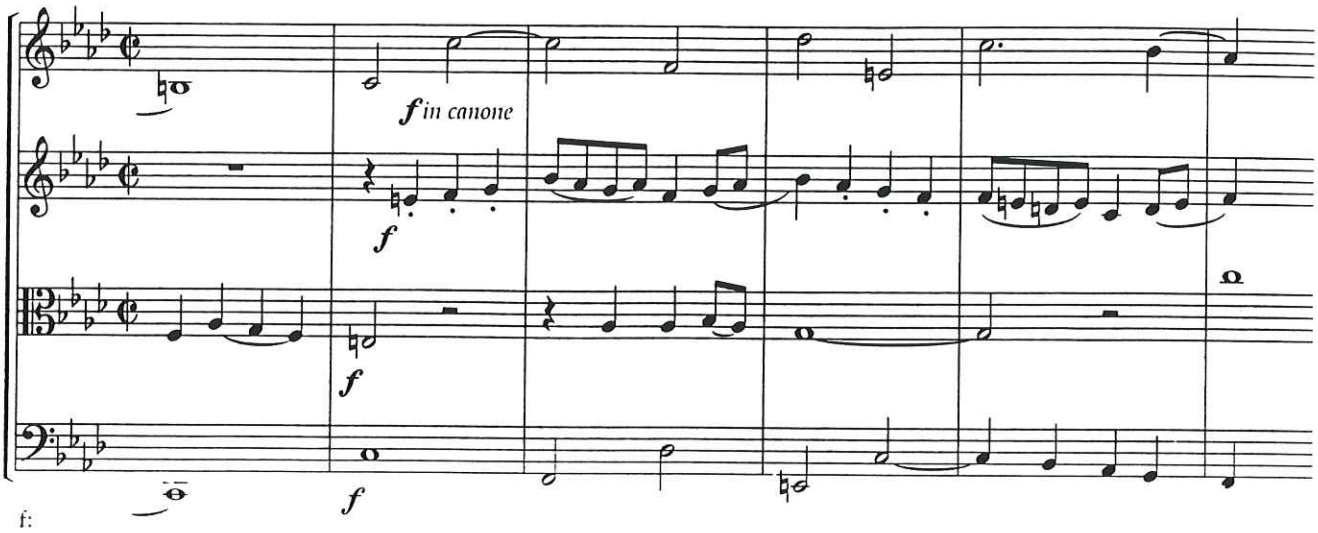
Haydn: String Quartet in C, Op. 9 No. 1 (*c.*1769)



Contrapuntal passages involving imitation were often used. Fugues and fugal textures, as found in the Baroque *sonata da chiesa* (church sonata), were a regular feature, e.g. in the last movements of Haydn's Op. 20 Nos. 2, 5, and 6:

Haydn: String Quartet in F minor, Op. 20 No. 5 (1772)

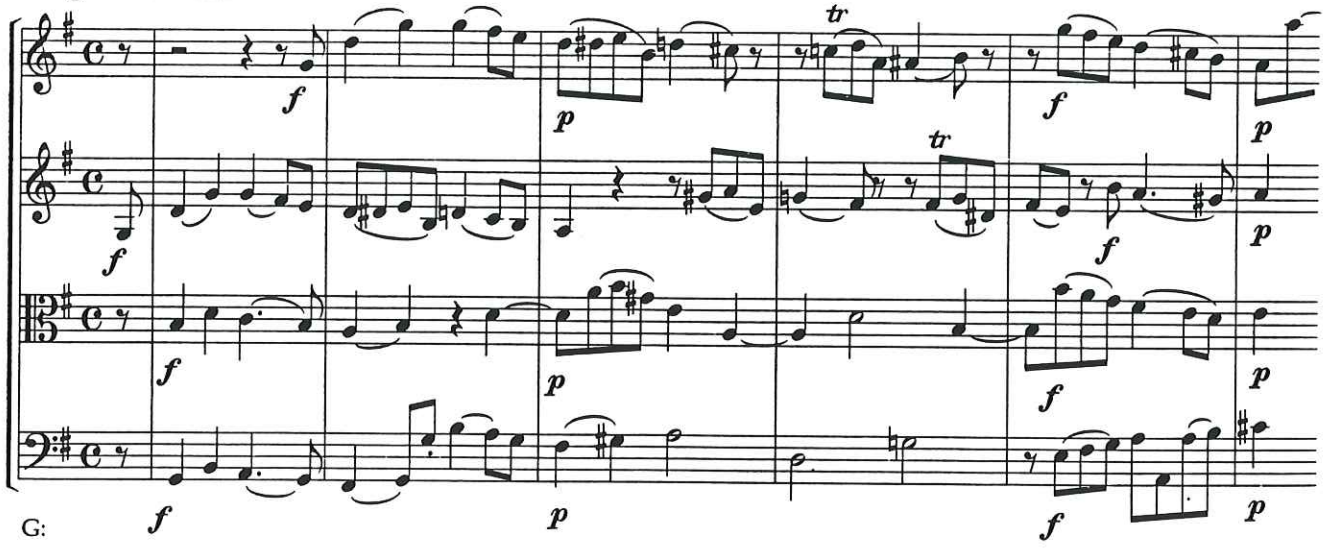
(Moderato)



The development of the form showed the gradual liberation of the 2nd violin, viola, and cello into equal and independent partners with the leader, partly through the use of contrapuntal textures. The later quartets of Haydn, the six quartets dedicated to Haydn by Mozart, and the Op. 59 and late quartets of Beethoven are all major achievements in this form:

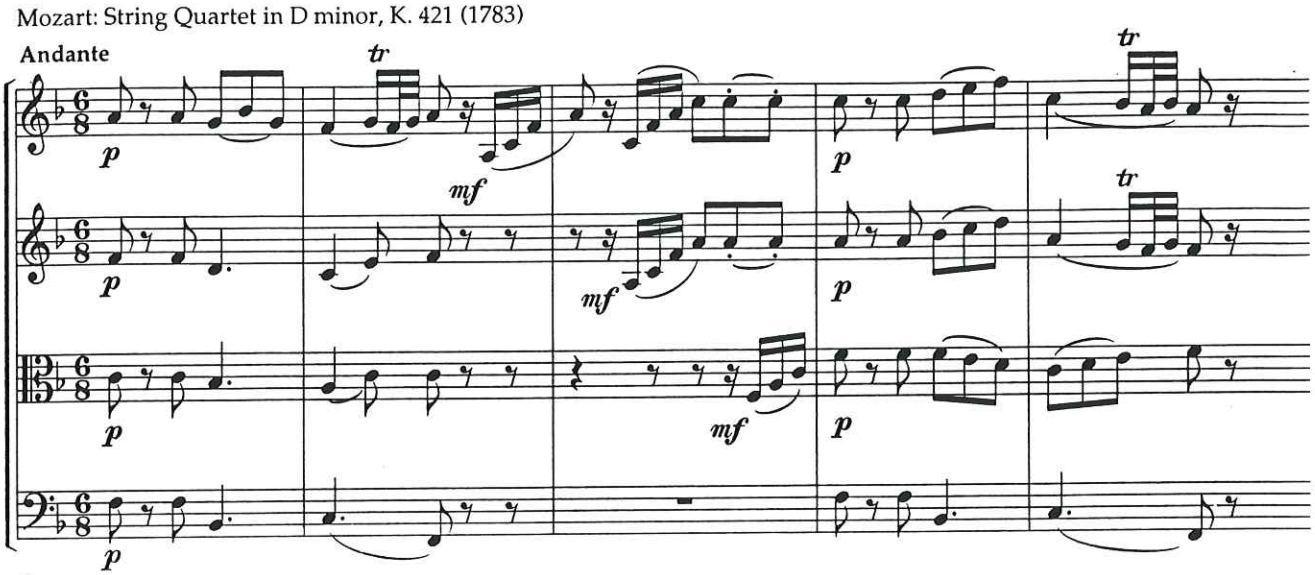
Mozart: String Quartet in G, K. 387 (1782)

Allegro vivace assai



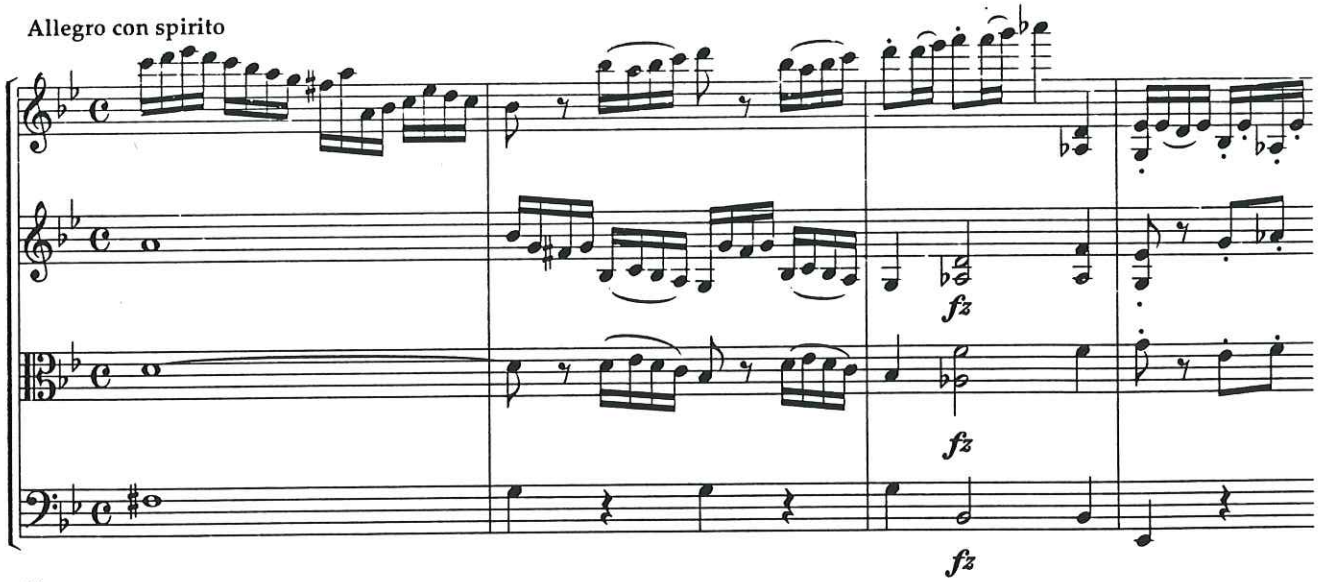
The study of textures in the string quartet is fascinating. Classical composers achieved endless variety in the spacing and grouping of the four instruments, as well as in the type of music they played, homophonic or contrapuntal. An important contributory factor was the use of rests, which allowed the music to 'breathe', and pointed both the rhythm and the sonorities:

Mozart: String Quartet in D minor, K. 421 (1783)



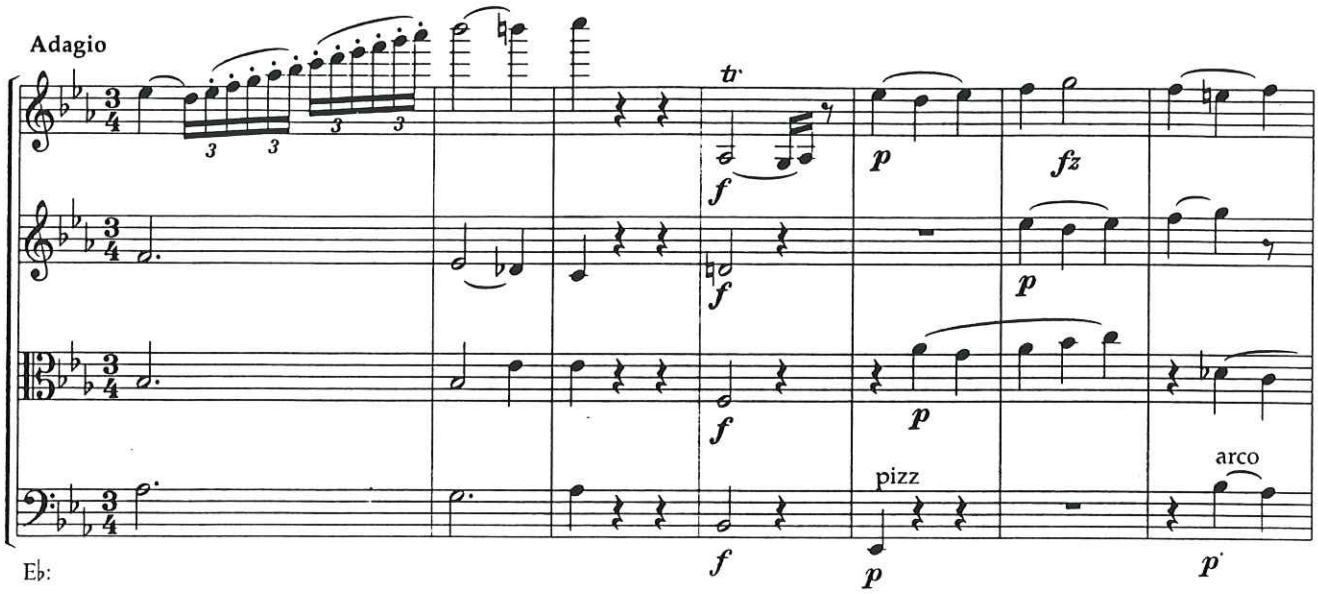
F:

Virtuoso passages involving fast semiquaver figuration and leaps, a trait inherited from the Baroque, were a feature of the style, which also delighted in swift contrasts of mood within the movement: see, for example, the first movement of Haydn's String Quartet Op. 76 No. 4 (?1797):



g:

In a passage from the slow movement of the same work, notice the way in which Haydn varies the texture and spacing:



Some Comments on String Writing in the 18th Century

The services of any string player in the class should be called upon to demonstrate the various technical points mentioned in this section.

1. RANGE

The instruments in the string quartet, two violins, viola, and cello, are tuned as follows:

Early string quartet writing reveals a fairly conservative range for each of the instruments. The late quartets of Haydn and Mozart extend the upper ranges of the 1st violin and cello in particular.

The virtuosity encouraged by Locatelli and Vivaldi in the newly invented violin concerto demanded the use of higher positions. Leopold Mozart in his *Violinschule* (1756) wrote that positions could be put to 'elegant' use, and recommended that the chin should be used to grip the instrument to give greater security in 'shifts' (not universal practice in 1756). These 'shifts' should be made where possible on repeated notes, open strings, and dotted notes, to preserve the uniformity of tone colour of a single string.

2. TONE AND TECHNIQUE

(a) Vibrato

The use of vibrato, an effect produced by rocking movements of the finger on the

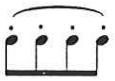
string with the help of the wrist, was accepted practice in the Baroque period, especially in the performance of slow, lyrical music. Geminiani (1687–1762), a pupil of Corelli, advocated its use on short notes 'to make their sound more agreeable' (*The Art of Playing on the Violin*, 1751). Tartini (1692–1770), recognized the application of different speeds of vibrato, depending on the expression needed.

(b) Bowing

The 18th century attached much importance to the bow in achieving an expressive 'nuanced' tone. (The tension of the older bow was less than that of the modern bow, so that a *sf* stroke was hardly possible.) Leopold Mozart, who advocated a 'manly' tone, was the first to mention speed as a factor in the volume of tone. The type of bow-stroke used depended on the character and tempo of the music to be played. A down-bow was probably used for the first stressed note on a strong beat (a convention called the 'rule of down-bow'), even if two down-bows came together.

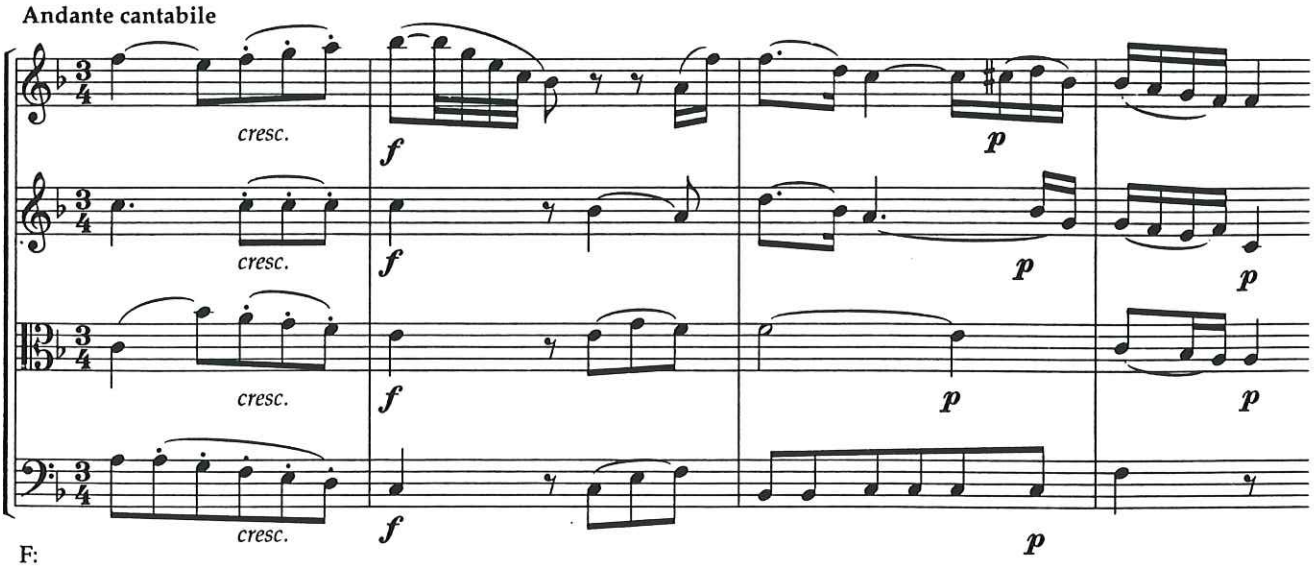
Slurring. Slurring, or the playing of two or more notes in one bow, was used to achieve 'legato'. It was indicated by slurs, or by the word 'legato' (when it applied to the whole piece). Playing in the legato style generally involved the 'nuanced' sound. This depended on the dynamic usually applied to the bow-stroke, a *crescendo*, or a *diminuendo*, or a *messa di voce* (· ·), as opposed to using a 'straight' sound. Notes were rarely slurred over the barline, unless, of course, a syncopated effect was required, since this would affect the rhythmic clarity.

= legato slurred tremolo[1]— in which the bow's impulses on the string meant that there was no actual break in the sound.



= staccato slurred tremolo, often called 'portato'—in which the bow was stopped on the string. This was associated with andante or adagio movements in the 18th century.

Mozart: String Quartet in C, K. 465 (1785)



[1] 18th-century term for 'vibrato' — 'a natural quivering on the violin' (L. Mozart, 1756).

Articulation. Particular conventions were followed in articulation (the degree of separation between notes and the emphasis given to them). Notes without specific slurred or staccato markings were generally played shorter than actually written (*detaché*). Leopold Mozart listed various bow-strokes (his 'divisions'), which included *crescendo*, indicated by · · , *diminuendo*, · , and *messa di voce*, shown by · · on one note.

(c) Other devices

Pizzicato (or pizz.). This term is an instruction to pluck the string, generally with the right hand. Monteverdi's players had used two fingers; by 1750 only the index finger was employed.

Multiple-stops. This is a collective term for chords on the violin; e.g. double-stopping is the playing of strings simultaneously. There are many examples of this device. Three- and four-part chords were usually arpeggiated quickly, with the melody note sustained.

Other terms for string techniques, including *col legno* (on the wood of the bow), *sul ponticello* (on the bridge) and *glissando* (sliding), were known in the 17th century, but rarely used before 1800.

(d) Dynamics

These ranged from *pp* to *ff*, although often only *p* and *f* were used. Other signs include *mf*, *rf*, *sf*, *cresc.*, and *dim.* Beethoven used *ppp* near the end of the String Quartet Op. 59 No. 1 (1806). Composers tended to be inconsistent in the amount of dynamic instruction they gave in different works.

Exercises

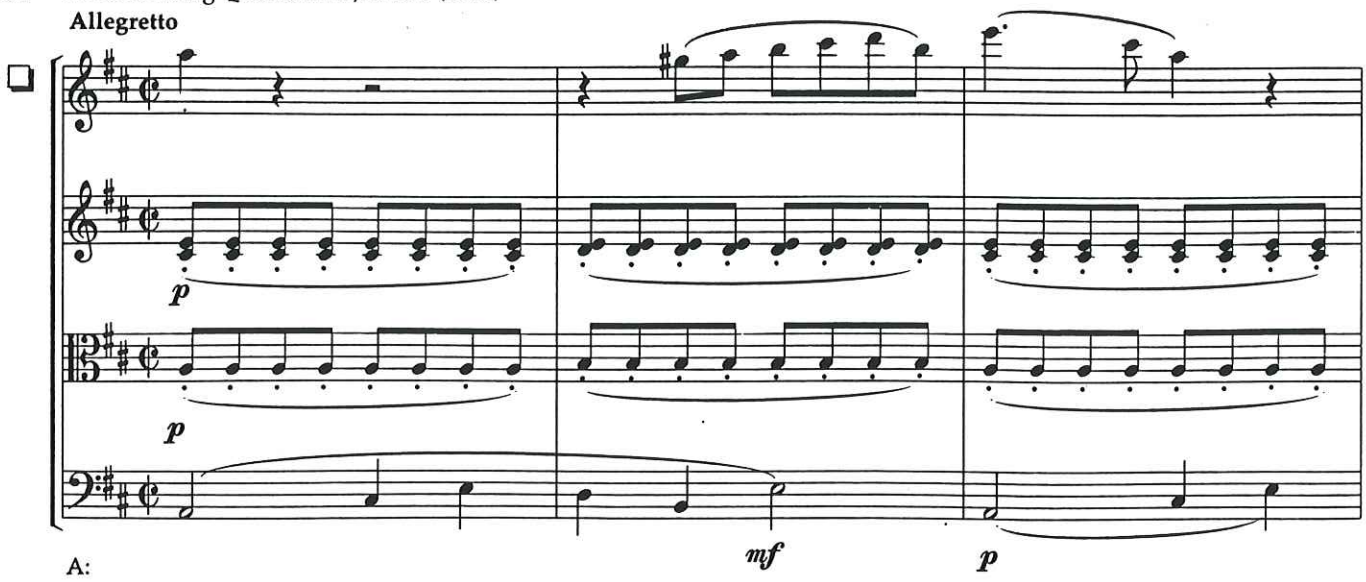
Listen, if possible, to the following extracts and discuss:

(a) the bowing, dynamics, and other instructions relating to performance;

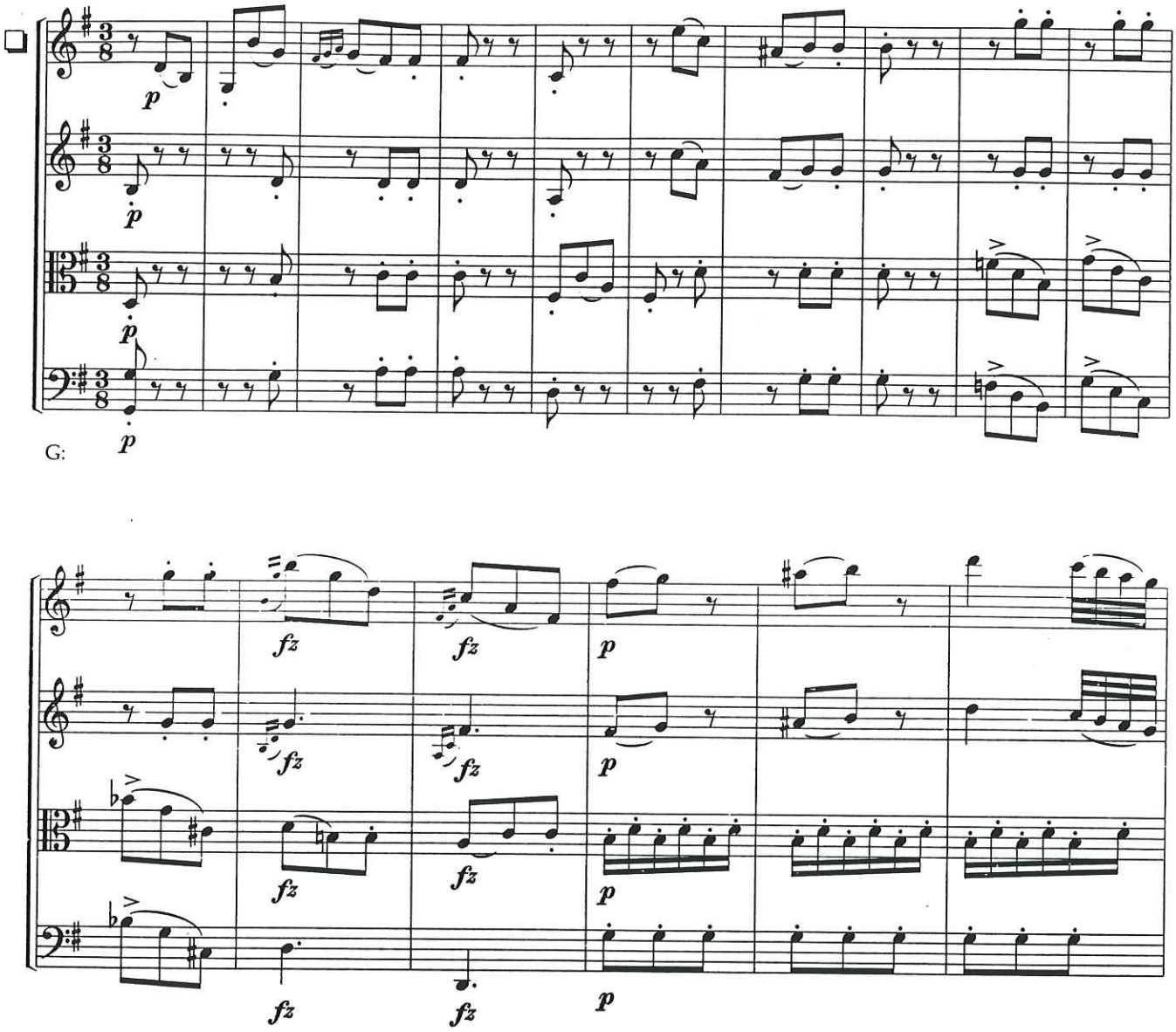
(b) the texture of the music, noting, where relevant, the effectiveness of the scoring, the spacing of the parts, the use of rests, and the accompaniment figurations.

267 Mozart: String Quartet in D, K. 575 (1789)

Allegretto



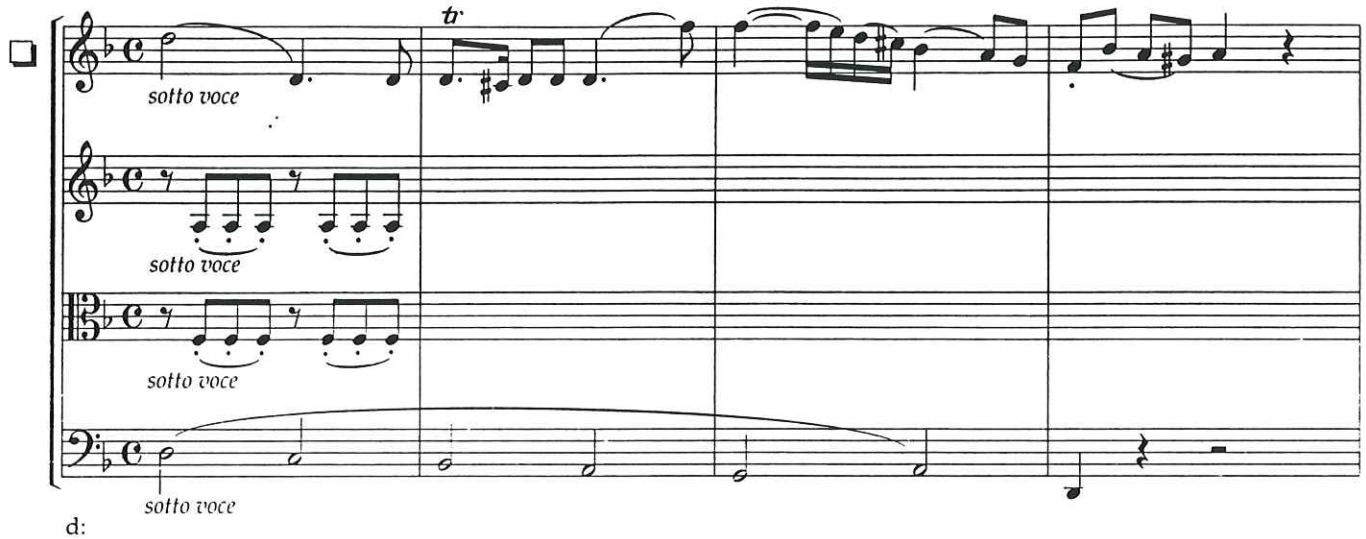
268 Haydn: String Quartet in C, Op. 74 No. 1 (1793)
Andantino grazioso



Complete the 2nd violin and viola parts, maintaining the given textures. As you listen to each passage, notice the writing in 3rds, rests in the texture, imitative writing, and dynamics. Work out the harmony before you complete the extract.

269 Mozart: String Quartet in D minor, K. 421 (1783)

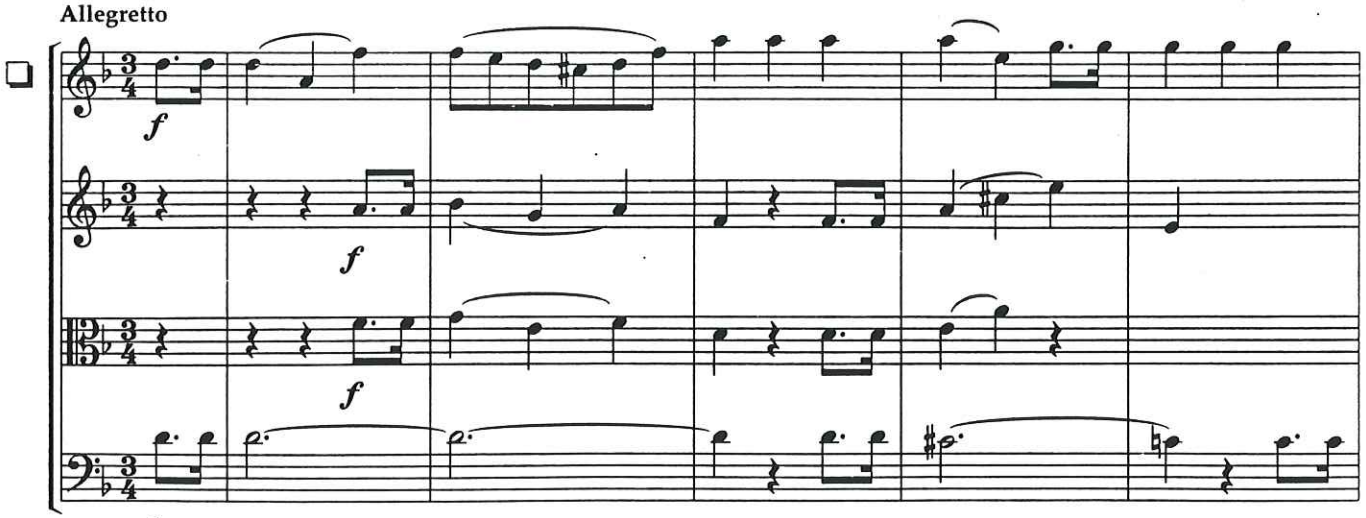
Allegro moderato



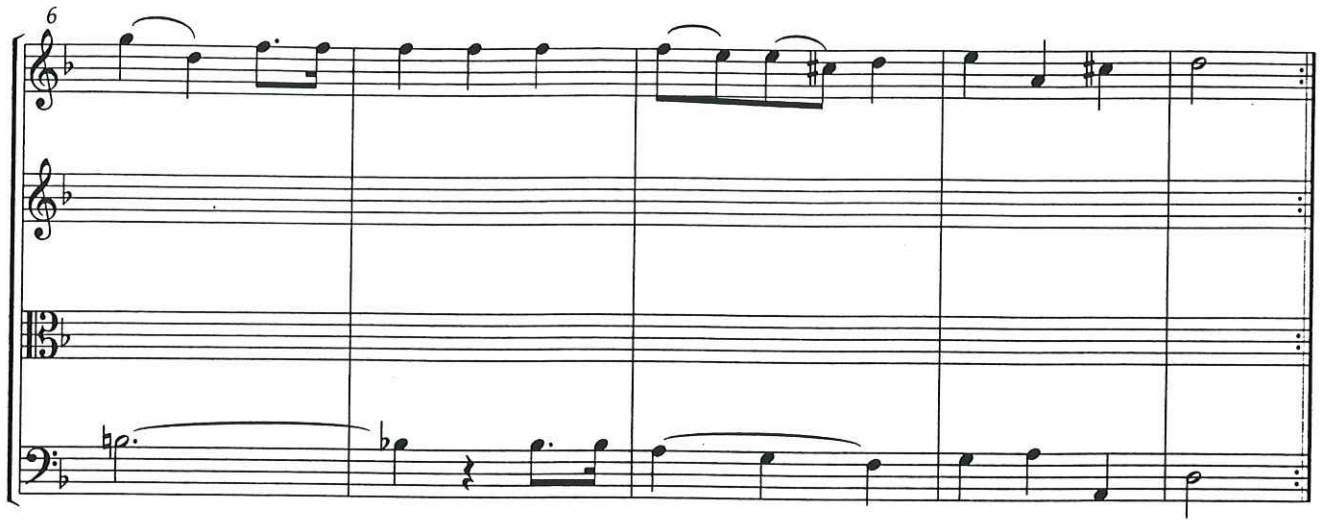
d:

270 Ibid.

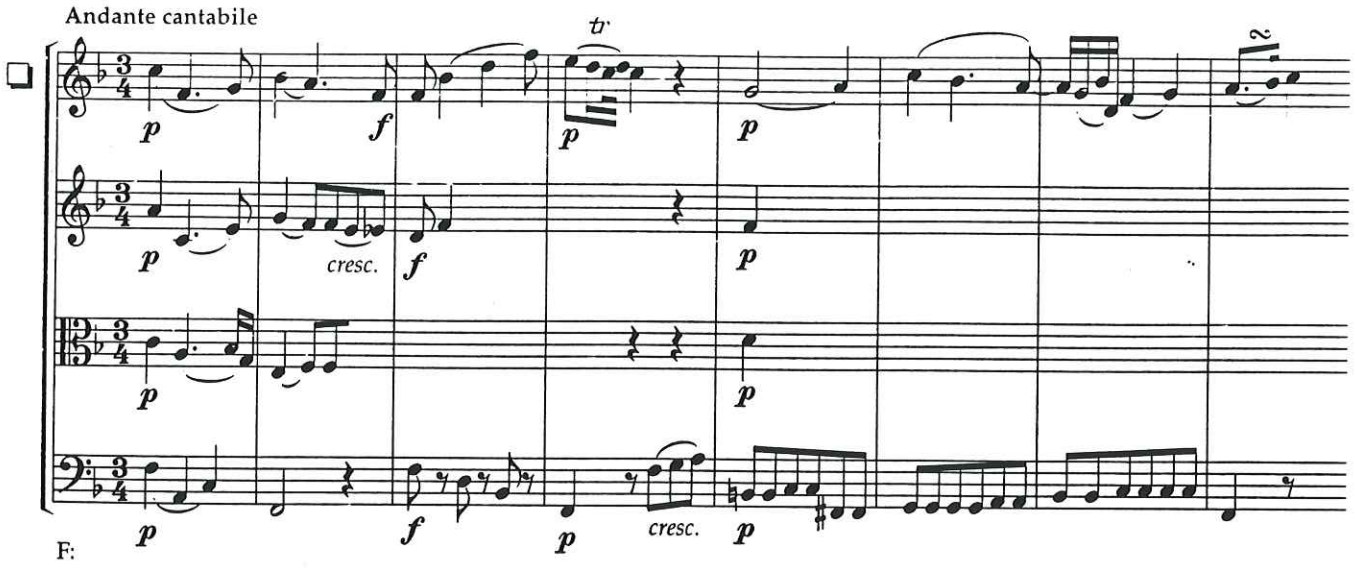
Allegretto



d: *f*



271 Mozart: String Quartet in C, K. 465 (1785)

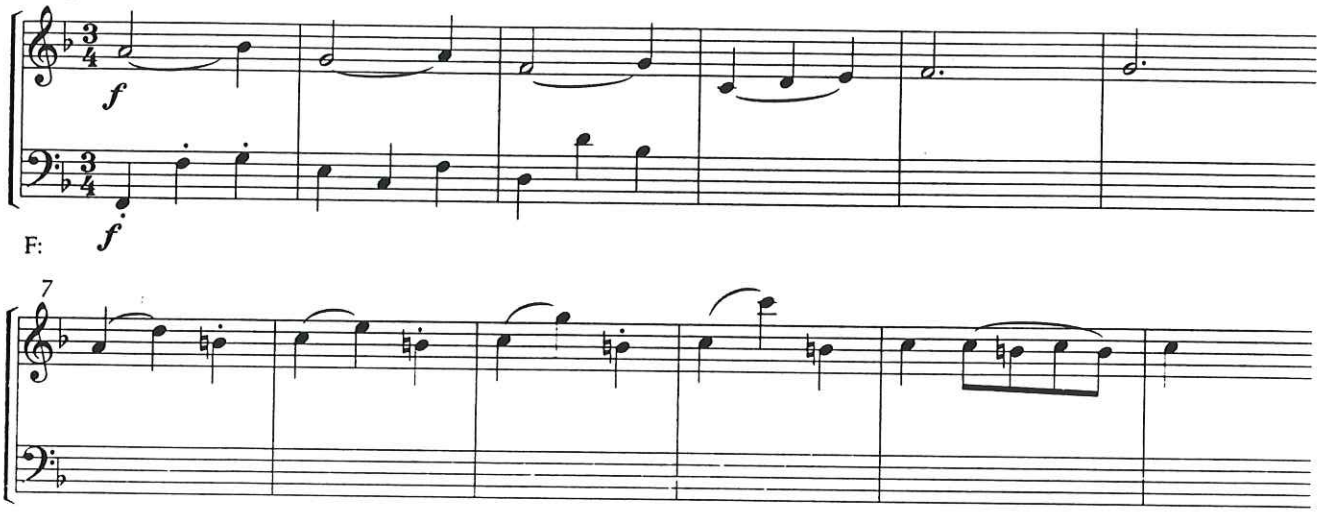


Like that of the Baroque period, all counterpoint of the later 18th century is harmonically based, and chords should therefore be identified before each exercise is attempted; in most cases the more complicated the figuration, the simpler the harmonic structure.

Work these extracts from string quartets in two parts. Remember to indicate the bowing.

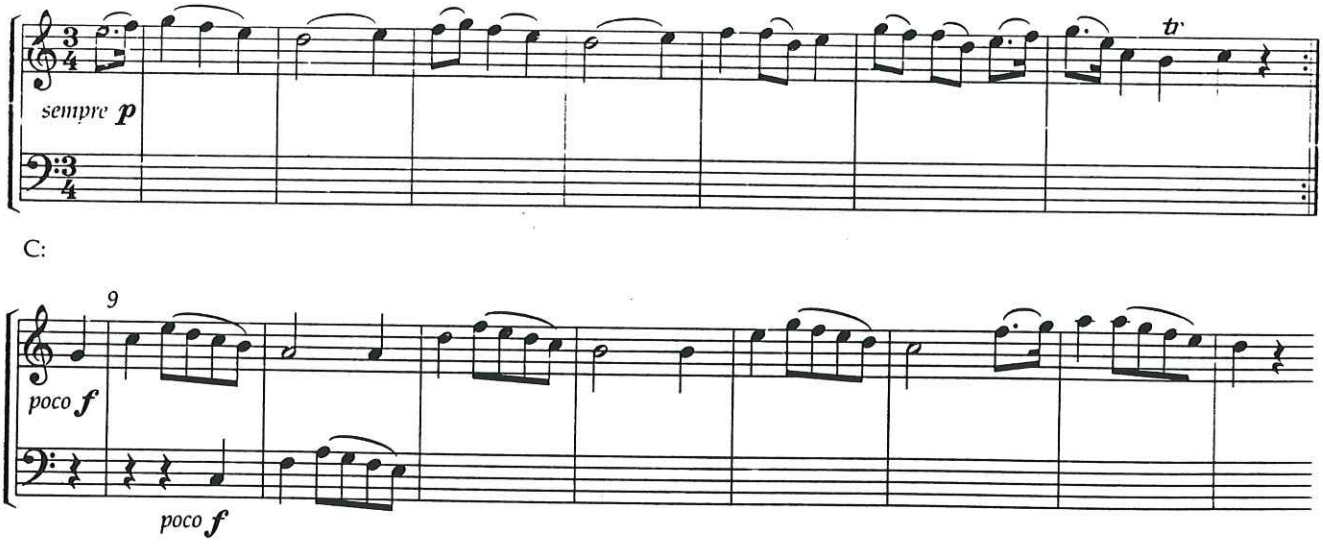
272 Haydn: String Quartet in F, Op. 17 No. 2 (1771)

Menuetto
Allegretto



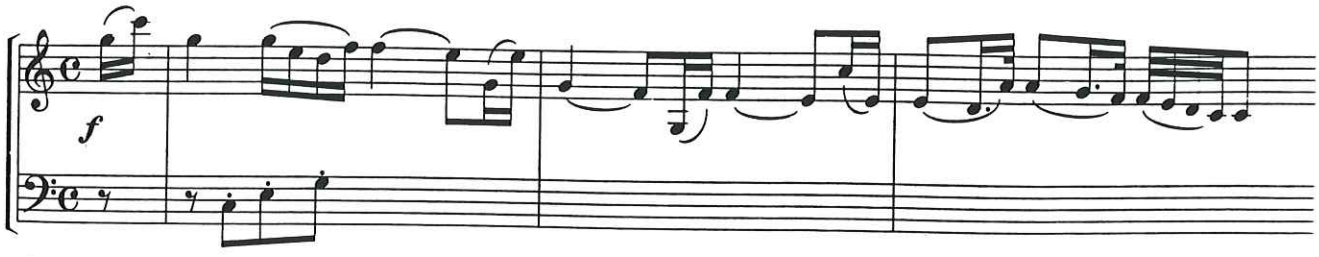
273 String Quartet in C, Op. 3 No. 2 (formerly attributed to Haydn)[2]

Menuetto



274 Haydn: String Quartet in C, Op. 9 No. 1 (*c.*1769)

Moderato

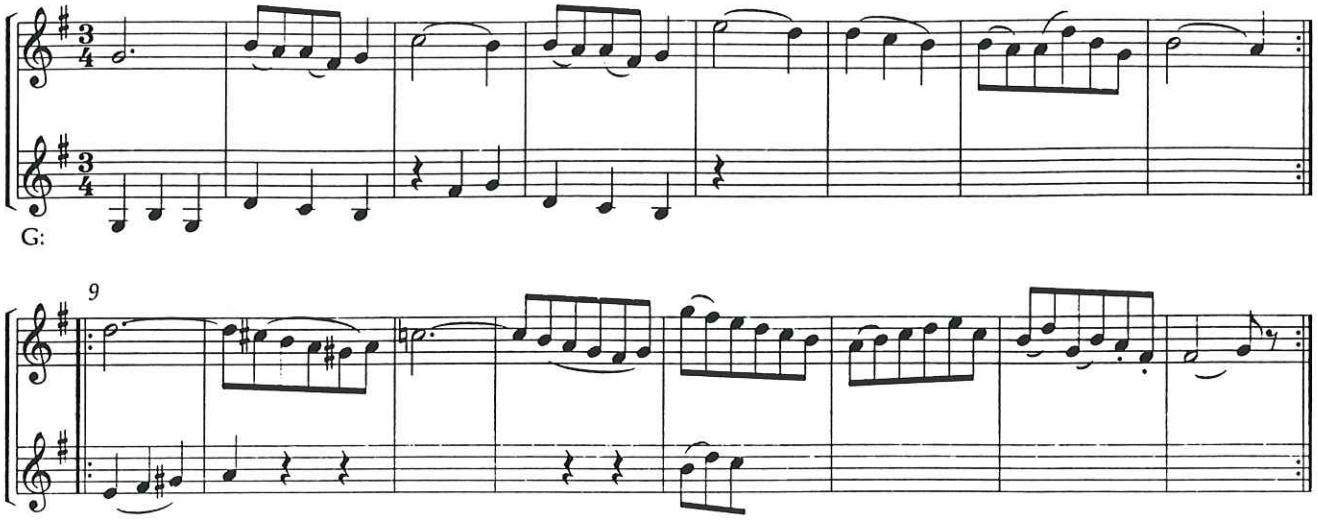


[2] Op. 3 is now believed to be by R. Hoffstetter (1742–1815). See *The Musical Times*, July 1964. Alan Tyson and H. C. Robbins Landon, 'Who composed Haydn's Op. 3?'

Complete the writing for two violins from Mozart's 12 Duos, K. 487 (1785).

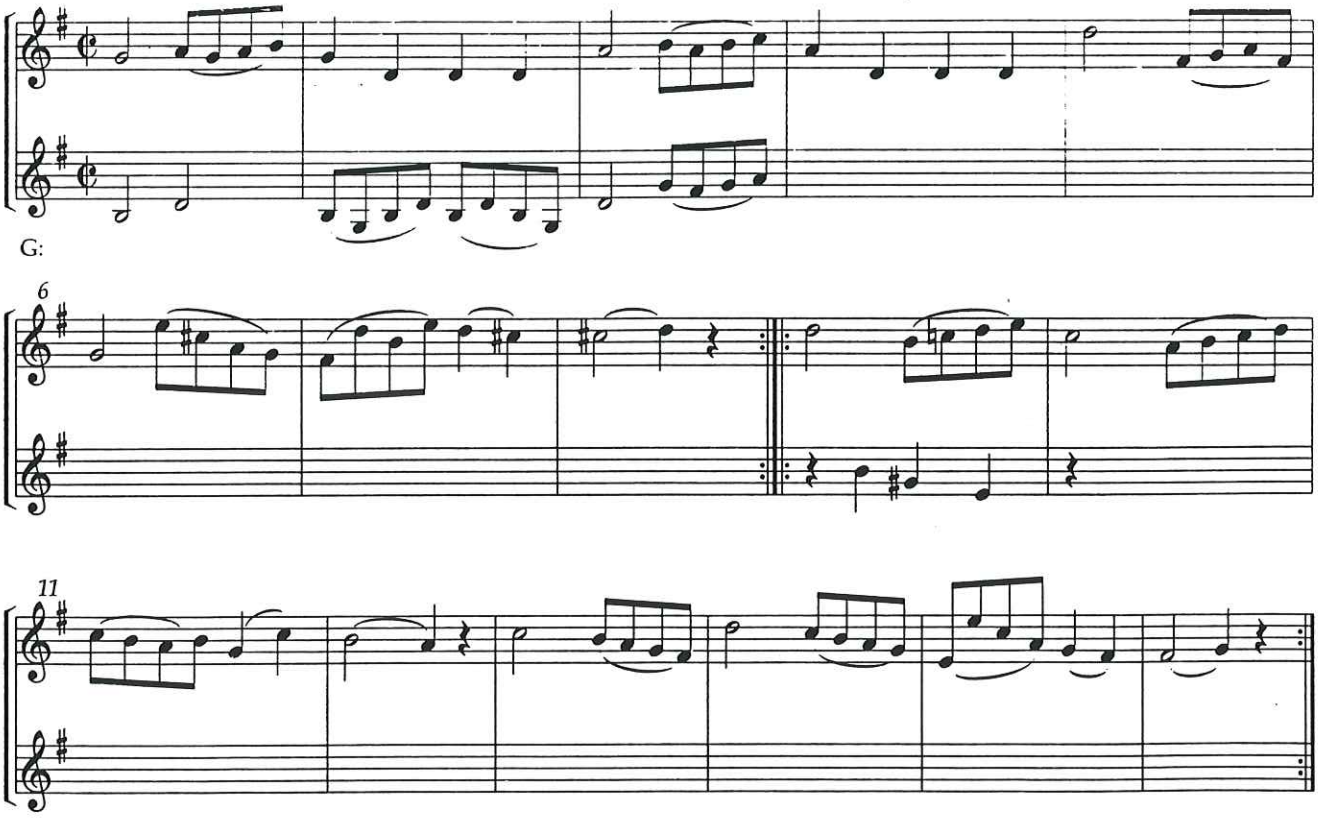
275 No. 9

Menuetto

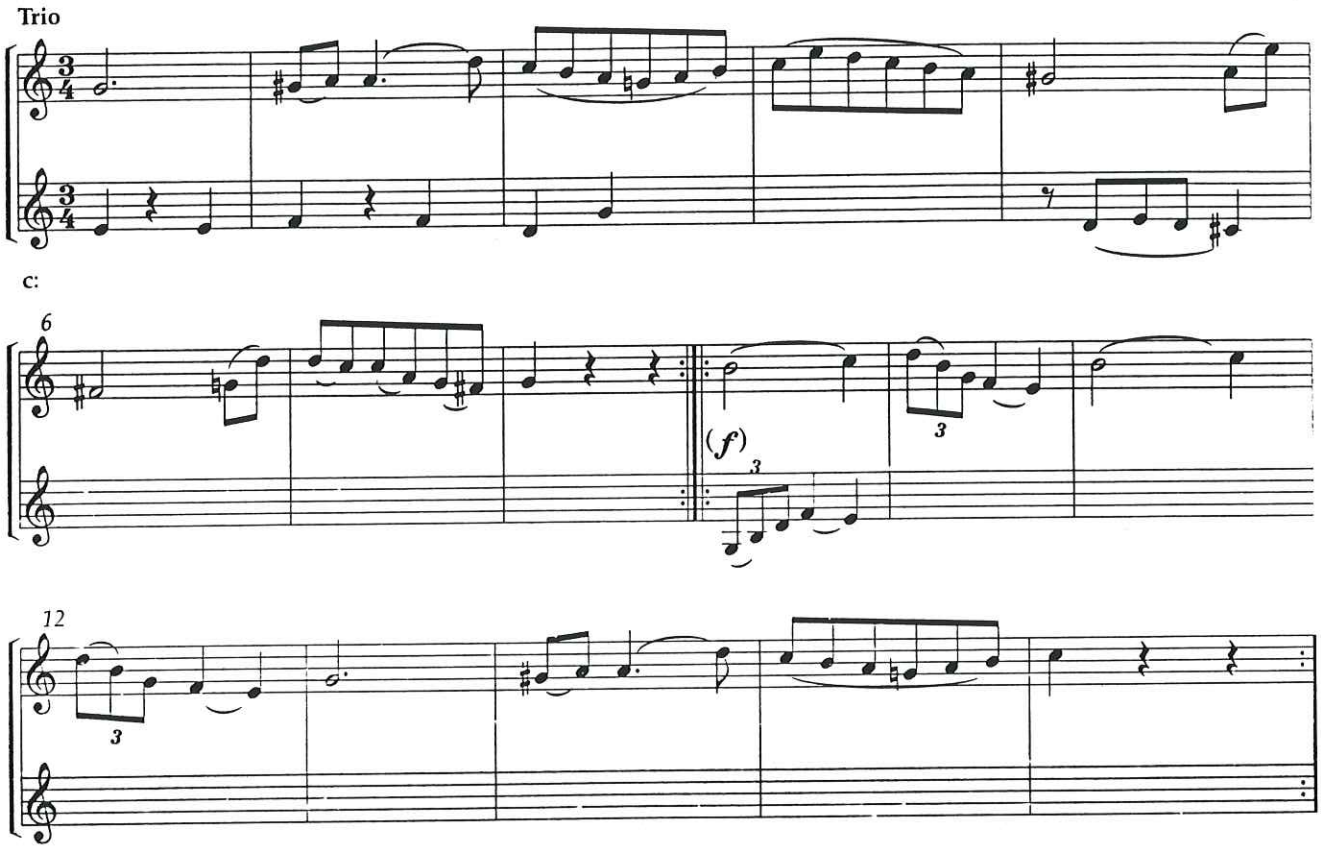


276 No. 10

Andante

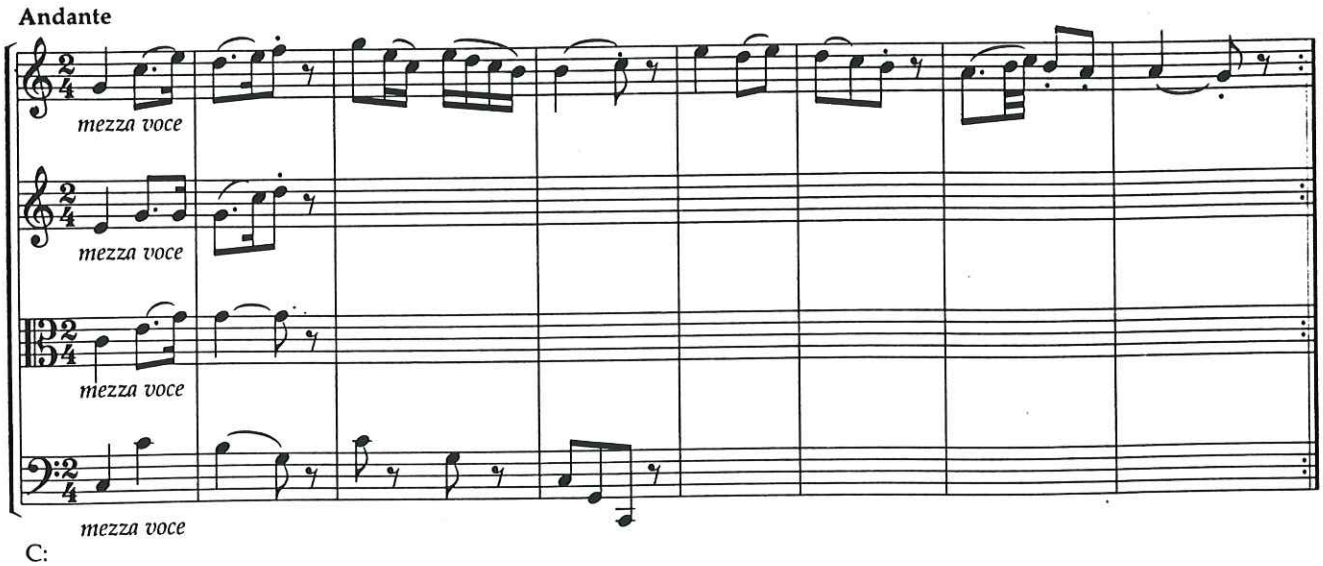


277 No. 11

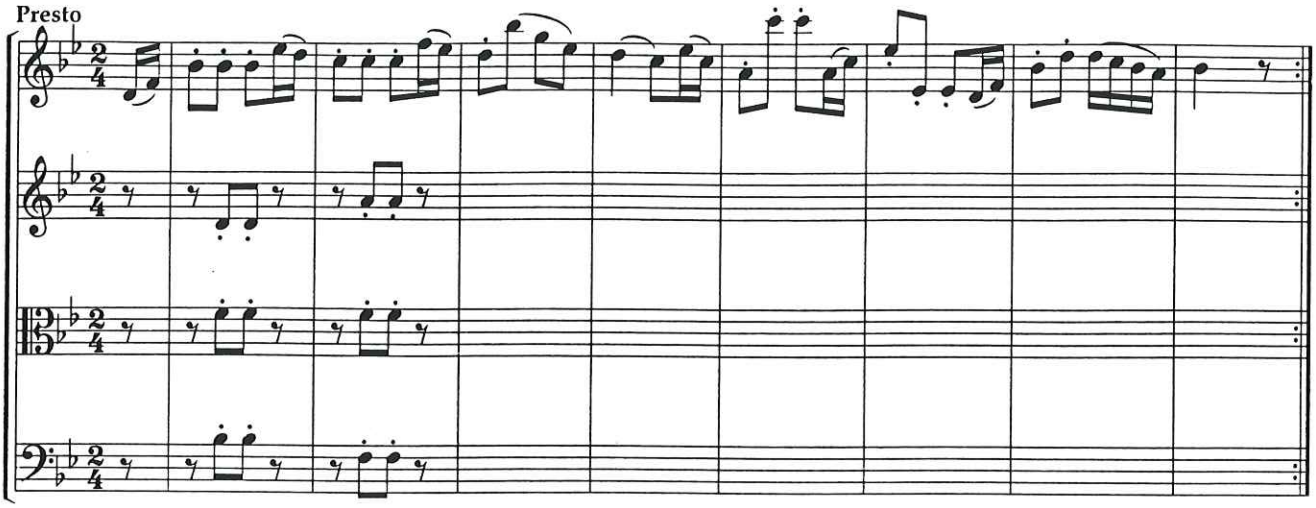


Complete the following for string quartet.

278 String Quartet in C, Op. 3 No. 2 (formerly attributed to Haydn)

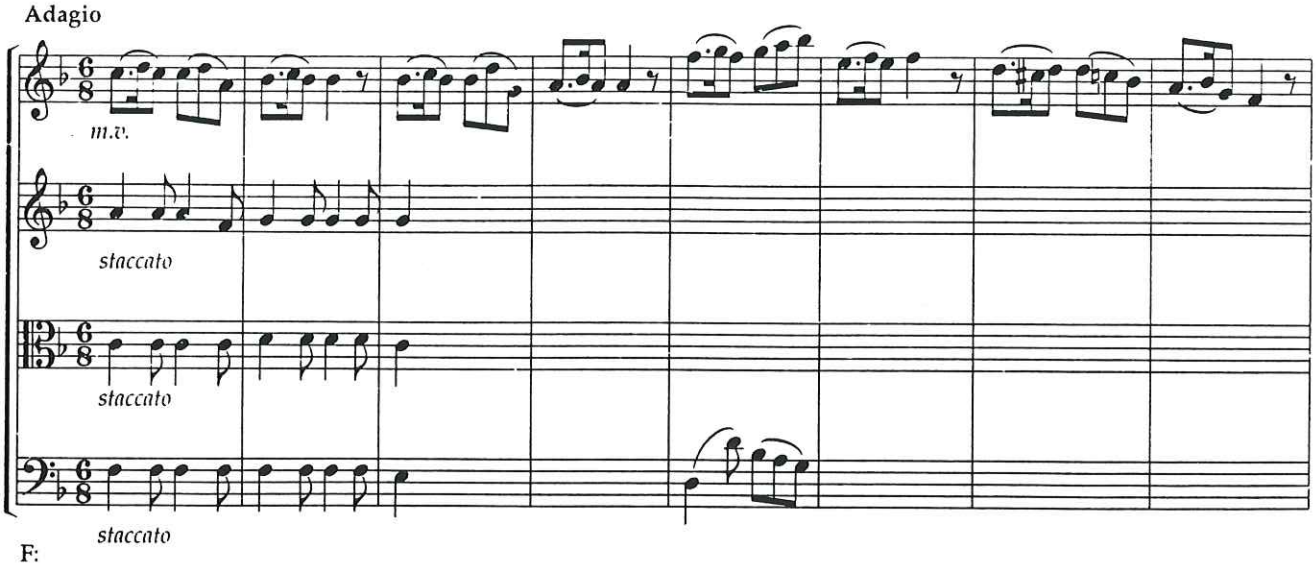


279 Haydn: String Quartet in B♭, Op. 33 No. 4 (1781)



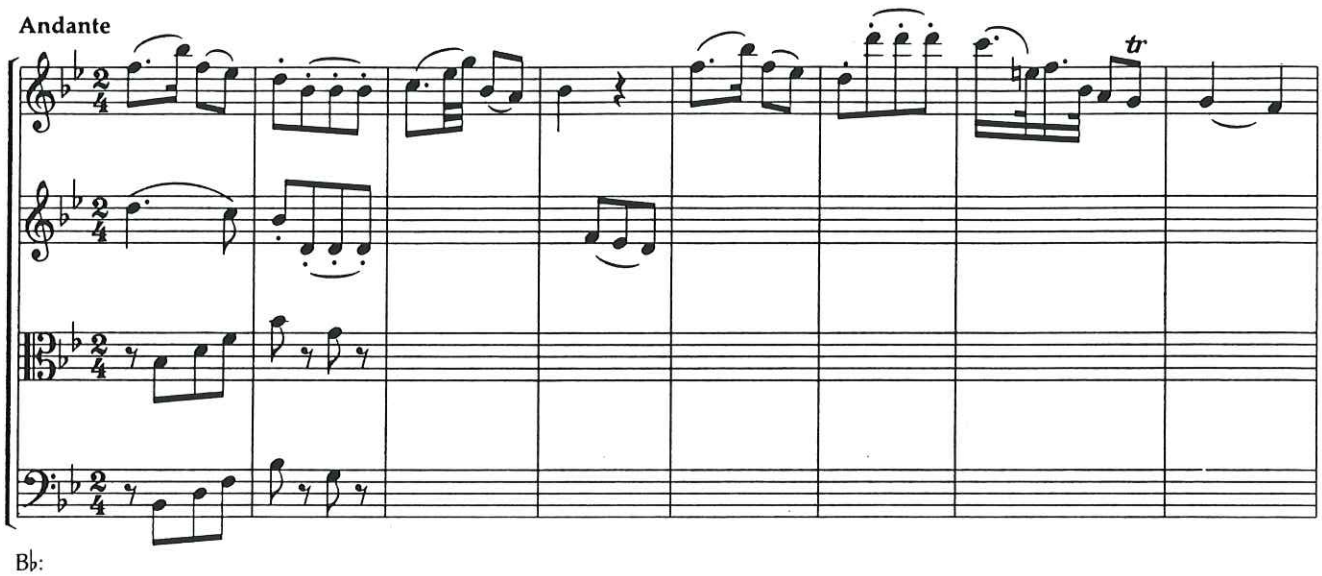
B♭:

280 Haydn: String Quartet in F minor, Op. 20 No. 5 (1772)



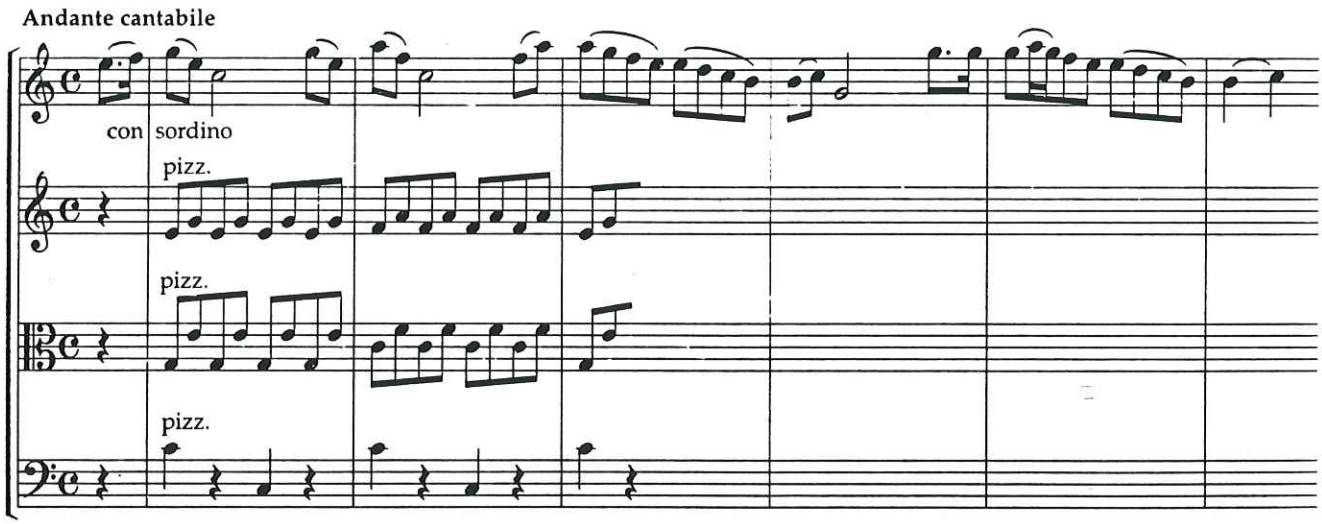
F:

281 Haydn: String Quartet in B♭, Op. 2 No. 6 (?*c*.1761)



B♭:

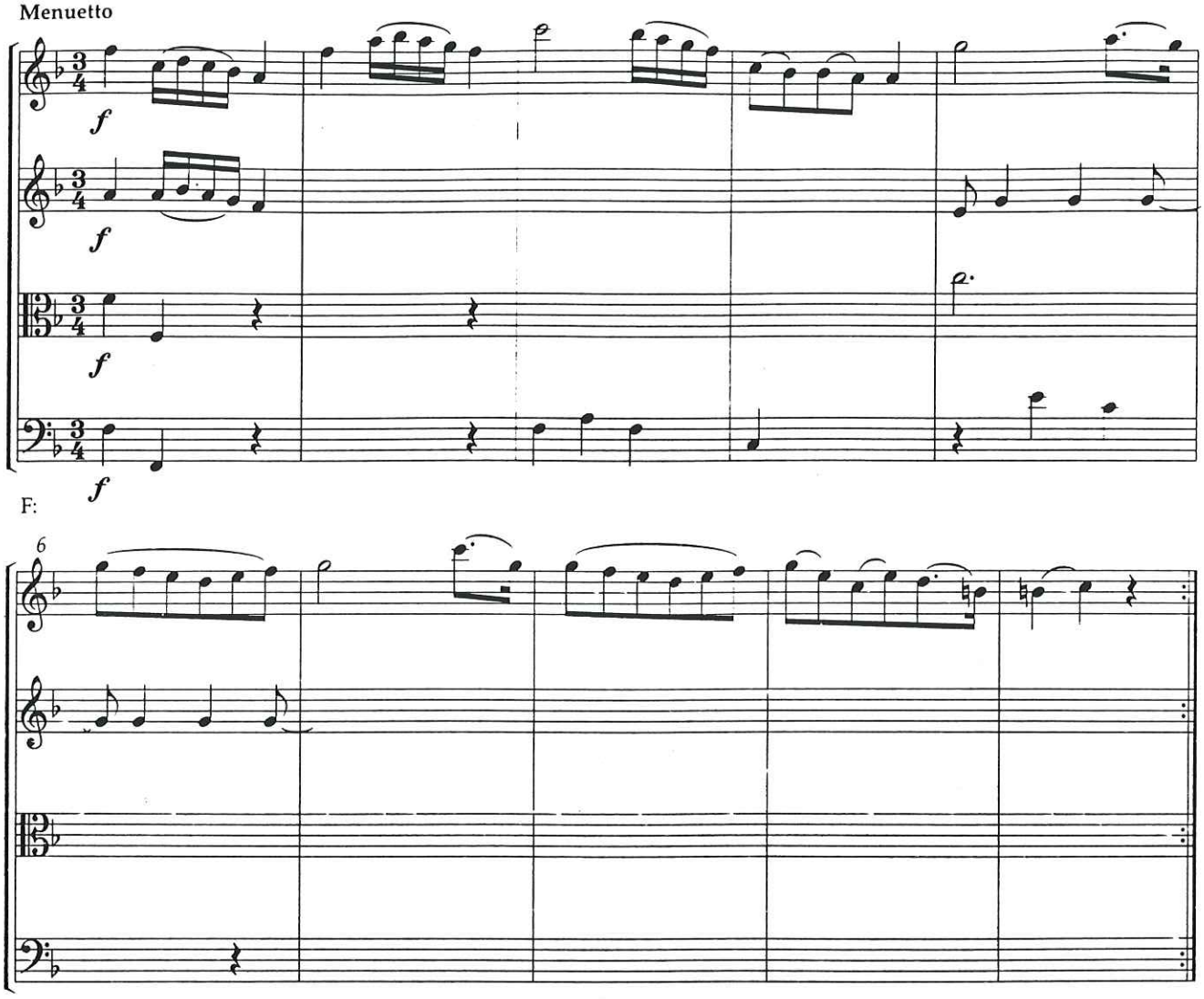
282 String Quartet in F, Op. 3 No. 5 (formerly attributed to Haydn)



C:

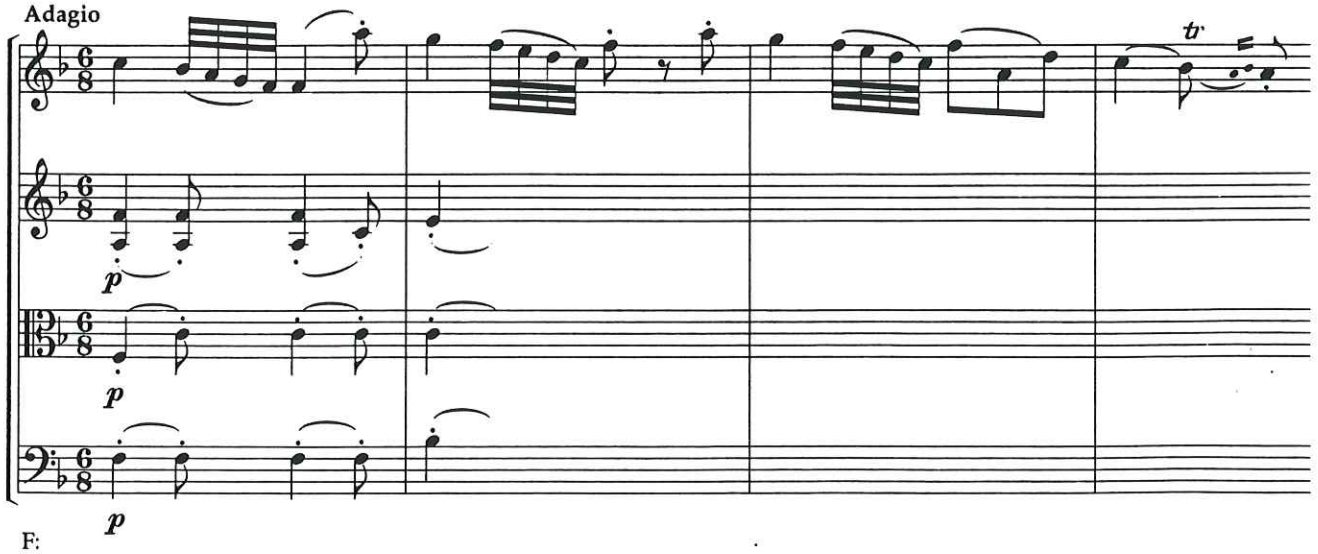
283 Ibid.

Menuetto



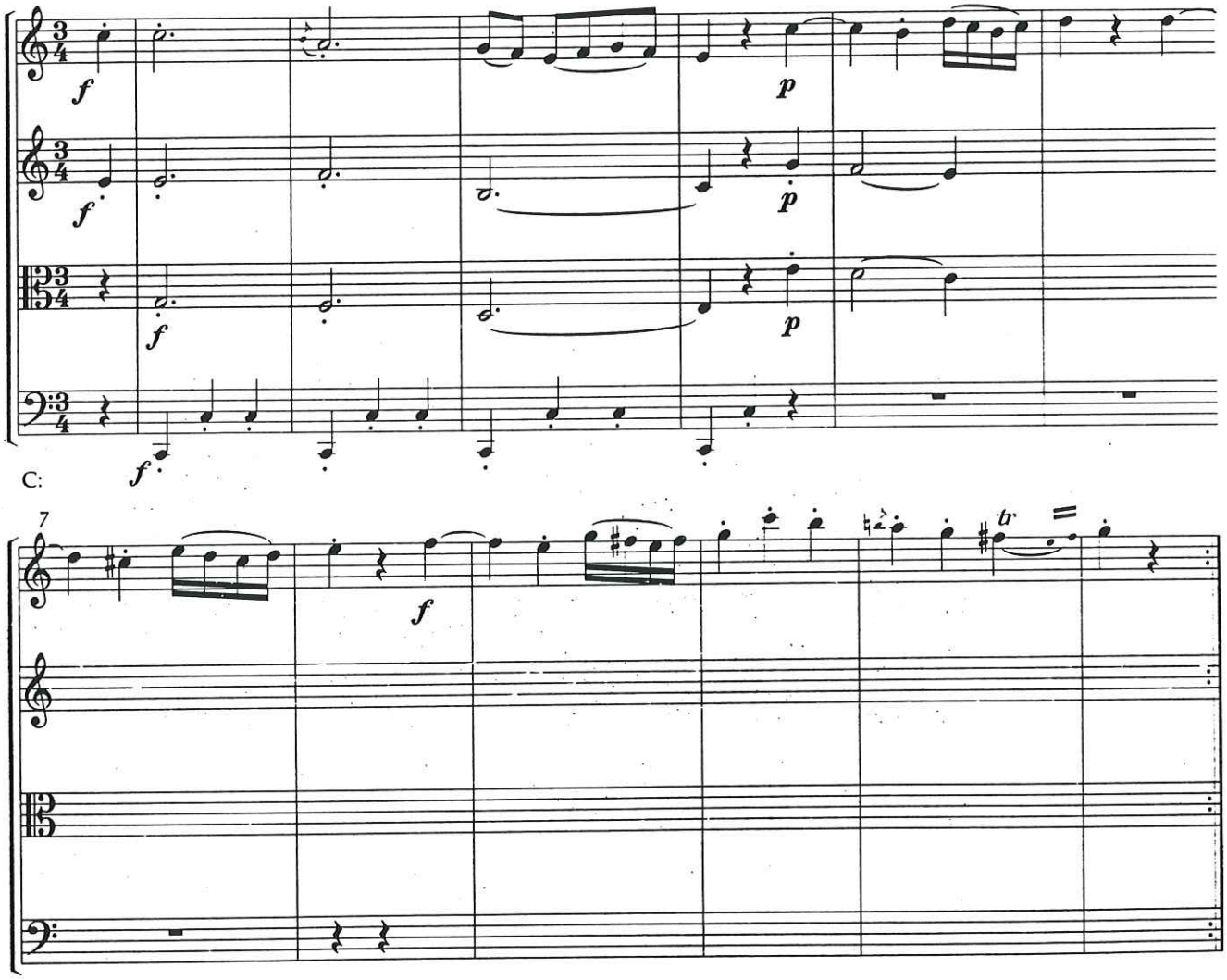
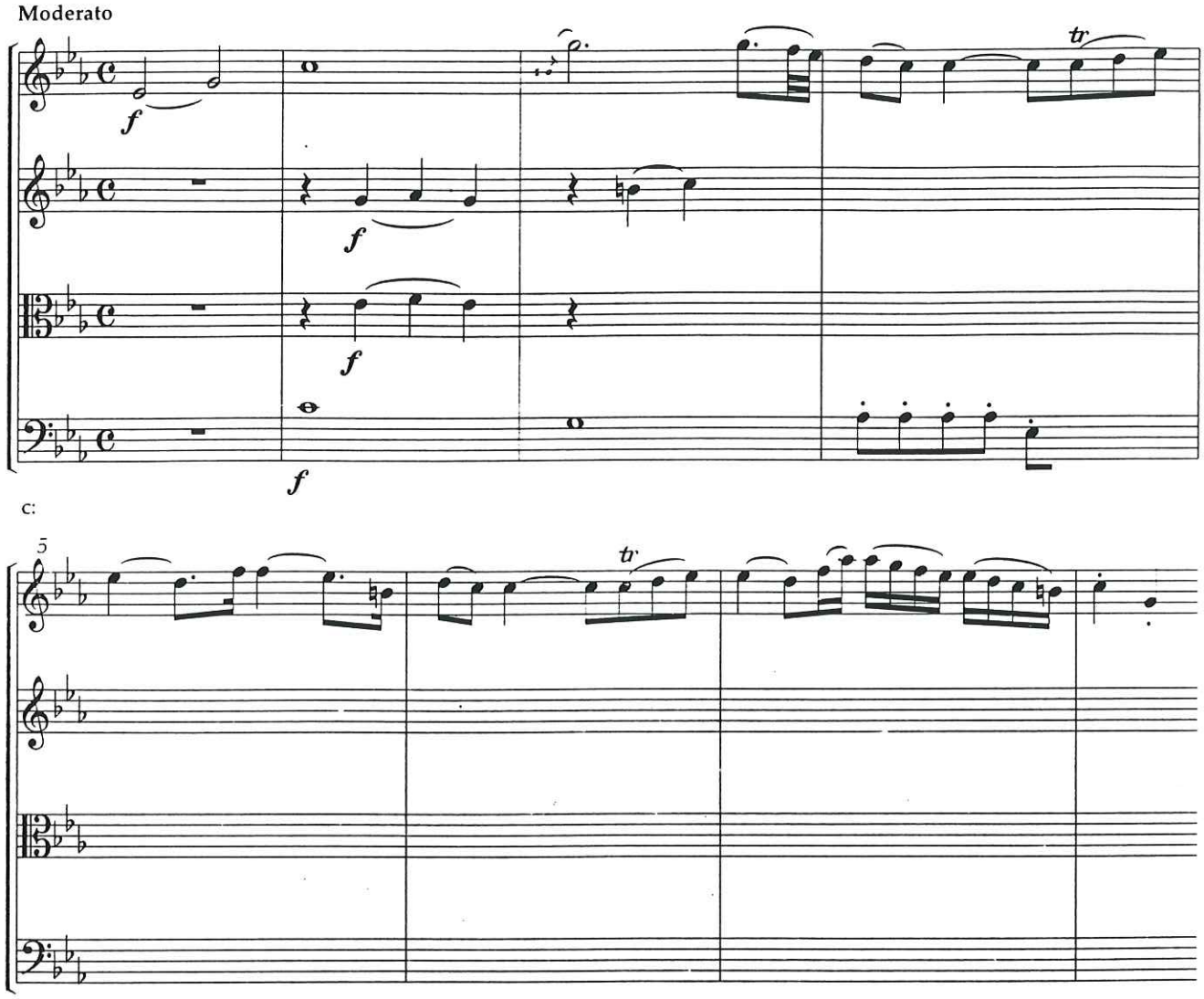
284 Haydn: String Quartet in C, Op. 9 No. 1 (*c.*1769)

Adagio



285 Haydn: String Quartet in C, Op. 9 No. 1 (*c*.1769)

Menuetto
Poco allegretto



286 Haydn: String Quartet in C minor, Op. 17 No. 4 (1771)