

## 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 figures, 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)

Allegro moderato

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)

Molto Allegro

d.

The melody line was often doubled at the 8ve:

Mozart: String Quartet in E $\flat$ , K. 428 (1783)  
 Allegro non troppo

E $\flat$ :

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

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

Presto

C:

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)

Andante

Musical score for Mozart's String Quartet in D minor, K. 421 (1783), first movement. The score is in 8/6 time and features four staves with various dynamics including 'd' (dolce) and 'fu' (fuerzando).

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):

Allegro con spirito

Musical score for Haydn's String Quartet Op. 76 No. 4 (1797), first movement. The score is in 4/4 time and features four staves with a 'ff' (fortissimo) dynamic marking.

8:

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

Adagio

Violin I  
Violin II  
Viola  
Cello

### 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:

Violin  
Viola  
Cello

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. Gemiani (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 *mezza 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'— 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)

Andante cantabile

<sup>1</sup> 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 (*detache*). Leopold Mozart listed various bow-strokes (his 'divisions'), which included *crescendo*, indicated by  $\text{---}$ , *diminuendo*,  $\text{---}$ , and *nessa di voce*, shown by  $\text{---}$  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 *fff*, 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.

A:

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

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

The image displays a musical score for a string quartet, consisting of two systems of four staves each. The first system features dynamic markings 'd' (diminuendo) and 'zf' (zforzando) across the staves. The second system includes a 'C' time signature change and 'd' markings. The notation includes various rhythmic values, slurs, and accents, typical of Haydn's style. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the tempo is '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

sotto voce

sotto voce

sotto voce

sotto voce

t.

270

Ibid.

Allegretto

f

f

f

f

The first system of the musical score consists of four staves. The top staff is the first violin part, starting with a half note G4, followed by quarter notes A4, B4, and C5, then a half note B4, and finally a half note A4. The second staff is the second violin part, which is mostly empty. The third staff is the viola part, which is also mostly empty. The fourth staff is the cello part, starting with a half note G2, followed by quarter notes A2, B2, and C3, then a half note B2, and finally a half note A2. The key signature has one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 3/4.

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

The second system of the musical score consists of four staves. The top staff is the first violin part, starting with a half note G4, followed by quarter notes A4, B4, and C5, then a half note B4, and finally a half note A4. The second staff is the second violin part, starting with a half note G4, followed by quarter notes A4, B4, and C5, then a half note B4, and finally a half note A4. The third staff is the viola part, starting with a half note G4, followed by quarter notes A4, B4, and C5, then a half note B4, and finally a half note A4. The fourth staff is the cello part, starting with a half note G4, followed by quarter notes A4, B4, and C5, then a half note B4, and finally a half note A4. The key signature has one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 3/4. Dynamics include *d*, *f*, and *cresc.* The tempo is marked *Andante cantabile*. A square box is present at the end of the system.

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)

Molto  
Allegretto

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

Molto

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

Moderato

<sup>2</sup> Op. 3 is now believed to be by R. Hofstetter (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

11

6

11

277 No. 11

Musical score for No. 11, Trio section. It consists of two staves in 3/4 time, marked 'C' (C major). The music features a melodic line in the upper staff and a more active line in the lower staff. The key signature has one sharp (F#).

Musical score for No. 11, middle section. It consists of two staves in 3/4 time, marked 'C'. The music features a melodic line in the upper staff and a more active line in the lower staff. The key signature has one sharp (F#). A dynamic marking of *f* (forte) is present. A triplet of eighth notes is marked with a '3' above it.

Musical score for No. 11, first section. It consists of two staves in 3/4 time, marked 'C'. The music features a melodic line in the upper staff and a more active line in the lower staff. The key signature has one sharp (F#). A triplet of eighth notes is marked with a '3' above it.

Complete the following for string quartet.

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

Andante

Musical score for No. 278, Andante section. It consists of four staves in 7/8 time, marked 'C'. Each staff is labeled 'mezza voce'. The music features a melodic line in the upper staves and a more active line in the lower staves. The key signature has one sharp (F#).

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

Musical score for Haydn's String Quartet in B $\flat$ , Op. 33 No. 4, marked Presto. The score is in B $\flat$  major and 2/2 time. It consists of four staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello/Double Bass. The Cello/Double Bass part features a prominent rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The tempo is marked Presto.

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

Musical score for Haydn's String Quartet in F minor, Op. 20 No. 5, marked Adagio. The score is in F minor and 3/8 time. It consists of four staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello/Double Bass. The tempo is marked Adagio. The score includes the instruction *staccato* for the upper parts and *m. r.* (marcato) for the lower parts.



281 Haydn: String Quartet in B $\flat$ , Op. 2 No. 6 (c.1761)

Musical score for Haydn's String Quartet in B $\flat$ , Op. 2 No. 6, measures 1-4. The score is in B $\flat$  major and 3/4 time. It features four staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello/Double Bass. The tempo is marked 'Andante'. The first measure includes a trill (tr) in the Cello/Double Bass part. The second measure has a 'B $\flat$ :', indicating a change in the key signature.

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

Musical score for String Quartet in F, Op. 3 No. 5, measures 1-4. The score is in F major and 3/4 time. It features four staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello/Double Bass. The tempo is marked 'Andante cantabile'. The first measure includes a 'C:' indicating the key signature. The second measure has a 'pizz.' marking in the Cello/Double Bass part. The third measure has 'pizz.' markings in the Violin I, Violin II, and Viola parts. The fourth measure has 'con sordino' and 'pizz.' markings in the Cello/Double Bass part.

Musical score for page 283, measures 1-4. The score consists of four staves. The top three staves are for the first, second, and third violins, and the bottom staff is for the viola. The music is in a 3/4 time signature and features a forte (*f*) dynamic marking. The first violin part has a melodic line with some rests, while the other parts provide harmonic support.

Ibid. 283  
Musetto

Musical score for page 283, measures 5-8. The score consists of four staves. The top three staves are for the first, second, and third violins, and the bottom staff is for the viola. The music is in a 3/4 time signature. The first violin part has a melodic line with some rests, while the other parts provide harmonic support.

Musical score for page 284, measures 1-4. The score consists of four staves. The top three staves are for the first, second, and third violins, and the bottom staff is for the viola. The music is in a 3/8 time signature and features a forte (*f*) dynamic marking. The first violin part has a melodic line with some rests, while the other parts provide harmonic support.

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

Minnetto  
Poco allegretto

Musical score for Haydn's String Quartet in C minor, Op. 17 No. 4, measures 189-192. The score is written for four staves (Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello/Double Bass) in C minor, 4/4 time. The tempo is marked *Moderato*. The first system (measures 189-191) shows the Cello/Double Bass part with a triplet of eighth notes in measure 189, followed by a series of eighth notes. The second system (measures 192-194) shows the Violin I part with a triplet of eighth notes in measure 192, followed by a series of eighth notes. The Viola and Cello/Double Bass parts have rests in measure 192, followed by a series of eighth notes in measure 193. The Violin II part has a rest in measure 192, followed by a series of eighth notes in measure 193. The score includes dynamic markings of *f* (forte) and a *tr* (triple) marking.