

String Quartet

The chamber music genre gained in popularity during the Classical era. It was music for a small group of solo musicians intended to be played in a room (chamber) rather than a hall with one instrument to a part.

The **string quartet** is the most popular.

1. a sonata for 4 string instruments
2. two violins, viola and cello
3. Evolved from Baroque Trio Sonata
4. Haydn was crucial in establishing the form in the 1750s
5. usually in four movements
 - 1st movement: allegro, tonic key, in sonata form
 - 2nd movement: slow, in a related key
 - 3rd movement: in tonic key, minuet and trio form
 - 4th movement: in tonic key rondo form or sonata rondo form



Uniqueness of the String Quartet

- String Quartets are very different to other instrumental genres of the Classical period. Having only four instruments they can only concentrate on the 'essentials' of the music, so there isn't much opportunity for coloristic effects, indulgent or harmonic padding.
 - Symphonies have many instruments that can enrich the texture by providing layers of harmony beyond the essential 3-note triad
 - Concertos offer opportunities to fully explore the personal characteristics of individual instruments.
- In string quartets, each musician plays a critical role to achieve the overall effect and is simultaneously a soloist and an ensemble performer! This is why the string quartet is considered a prestigious form representing one of the true tests of a composer's skill.
- Early string quartets were often performed outside in the streets and courtyards of Vienna, so the harpsichord was omitted in favour of the viola, which provided a sonorous middle range.

Ex.4 String Quartet in D major 'The Lark' (1790), 1st mvt by Haydn





Textures

- Model 1 - Mozart's String Quartet No.3 in G major, 1st mvt

Presto.

f

f

f

f

tr

tr

- Melody dominated homophony with melody in first violin
- Oom-cha-cha accompaniment with second violin and viola filling in the harmonies
- You could rhythmically adapt this to any time signature



Textures

- Model 2 - Mozart's String No.4 in C major, 1st mvt

The image shows the first six bars of Mozart's String Quartet No. 4, first movement. The score is in C major, 4/4 time, and features a simple bass line with repeated quavers and a viola part that fills in the gaps at the end of the second and fourth bars.

The image shows a close-up of the first six bars of the musical score, highlighting the texture of the top two parts and the bass line.

- Top two parts mostly in thirds
- Simple bass line adds energy with repeated quavers
- Note how viola fills in the gaps at the end of the second and fourth bars!



Textures

- Model 3a - Haydn's String Quartet No.5 in D major Op.2, 2nd mvt

- Melody dominated homophony at the opening
- Texture is lightened and rhythm given a lift by lack of accompaniment on first beat
- Parallel 3rds between second violin and viola in bars 5 & 7 acts as a filler in between the fragments of melody in the first violin
- Violins are in octave unison for the cadence - very common in early Haydn



Textures

- Model 3b - Haydn's String Quartet No.1 in G major Op.77, 1st mvt

- Simple homophonic texture energised by staccato crotchets
- Note echo of main melody in second violin in bar 4

- Note how the idea and texture is developed from the upbeat to bar 9 for the second half of the phrase
- Note how the viola can play in thirds where necessary to fill out the texture (and the second violin could too)



Textures

- Model 4 - Haydn's String Quartet No.5 in F major Op.3, 2nd mvt

The first system of the musical score shows the following details:

- Violin I:** *dol.* (dolce), *Con Sordina.* (with mutes)
- Violin II:** *pizz.* (pizzicato)
- Viola:** *pizz.* (pizzicato)
- Bass:** *pizz.* (pizzicato)

- Gentle pizzicato accompaniment in which the second violin and viola move in quavers and a slower bass part

- Note that all the notes of the chord are covered all of the time



Textures

- Model 5 - Haydn's String Quartet No.5 in D major Op.76, 4th mvt

- Alternation of two contrasting ideas
- Homophonic repeated cadential idea (bb.1-6)

- Double pedal with melody first over the top in the violin and then underneath in the cello



Textures

- Model 6 - Beethoven's String Quartet No.7 in F major, Op.59, 1st mvt

Quartett N^o 7. Op.59. N^o 1.

Allegro.

Violino I.

Violino II.

Viola.

Violoncello.

- Melody appears first in cello and then in first violin
- with a quaver accompaniment in inner parts. The quavers keep a sense of energy that would otherwise be lacking



Textures

- Model 7 - Beethoven's String Quartet No.4 in C minor, Op.18, 1st mvt

Allegro ma non tanto.

Violino I.
Violino II.
Viola.
Violoncello.

- Tension created by quaver pedal in cello with inner part initially just filling in with long notes
- As the the passage builds to a climax, the inner parts start playing quavers too



Textures

- Model 8 - Mozart's String Quartet No.17 in Bb major, K458, 4th mvt

Allegro assai.

- Begins monophonic, but bars 3 and 7 add the violin and viola, and bar 11 add the cello to reinforce the texture
- From bar 17 the question and answer texture is basically two-part writing for four instruments (octaves in each)



Textures

- Model 9 - Beethoven's String Quartet No.1 in F major, Op.18, 1st mvt

Allegro con brio.

The image shows a musical score for Beethoven's String Quartet No. 1 in F major, Op. 18, 1st movement. The tempo is marked 'Allegro con brio.' The score is in 3/4 time and features four staves. The first four bars show an octave unison texture, while the second half of the phrase shows a fuller homophonic texture. The score is marked 'p' (piano).

- Octave unison texture in first four bars contrasts with fuller homophonic texture in second half of phrase
- Note how the second half of the extract takes the opening motif as its starting point



Motif & Texture Analysis

- Mozart's String Quartet No.15 3rd Movement (Minuet & Trio)

MENUETTO. (Allegretto.)

- **The opening motif (a)** = dotted rhythm on repeated note is arranged in descending sequence, but melodic quite 'flat'. It appears everywhere in the texture
- **The repeated crotchet motif (b)** = generated from the tail of the opening motif to become a prominent feature in the middle of the melody



Harmonic Analysis

- Mozart's String Quartet No.15 3rd Movement (Minuet & Trio)

MENUETTO. (Allegretto.)

Chromatic scale in the bass

d: i vii^o i V⁶ V/iv IV⁶ A6(Ger) i⁶₄ V⁴₂ i⁶ ii⁶ i⁶₄ V⁷ i

(V⁶/VII)



The use of Augmented 6th in such an early stage is unusual: harmonically this is highly 'charged'.

Common Features

- The four-part texture frequently falls into two parts: violins 1 and 2 together, an 8ve apart (notated in two treble clefs); and the viola (alto clef) and cello (bass clef) together, also an octave apart.
- Movement in 3rds (10ths) and 6ths was common, but unison passages were common at the beginning or at cadences.
- In contrast to Baroque trio sonatas, the most prominent part was given to the 1st violin, with other instruments providing an accompaniment role.
- Accompaniment was usually a combination of arpeggios, broken-chord figurations, repeated notes, rests, *pizzicato*, held chords.
- Later quartets often had contrapuntal passages involving imitation and fugal writing, showing the gradual liberation of the 2nd violin, viola and cello into equal independent partners with the leader.

- **Instrumental ranges** must be observed. Early string quartets used a limited range of notes, but as the violin became a more virtuoso instrument, composers like Mozart and Haydn introduced wider ranges for all instruments.

The image displays a musical score for three string instruments: Violin, Viola, and Cello. Each instrument's part is shown on a five-line staff. The Violin staff is in treble clef, the Viola in alto clef, and the Cello in bass clef. The notes are written in a melodic line that ascends across the staves. Brackets and dotted lines are used to indicate the range of notes played on each of the four strings (G, A, D, E) for each instrument. For the Violin, the G string is used for the lower notes, and the A, D, and E strings are used for the higher notes. For the Viola and Cello, the C and D strings are used for the lower notes, and the G and A strings are used for the higher notes. The annotations show how the range of notes expands as the instrument's range expands over time.