P: Student paper on Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven quartets

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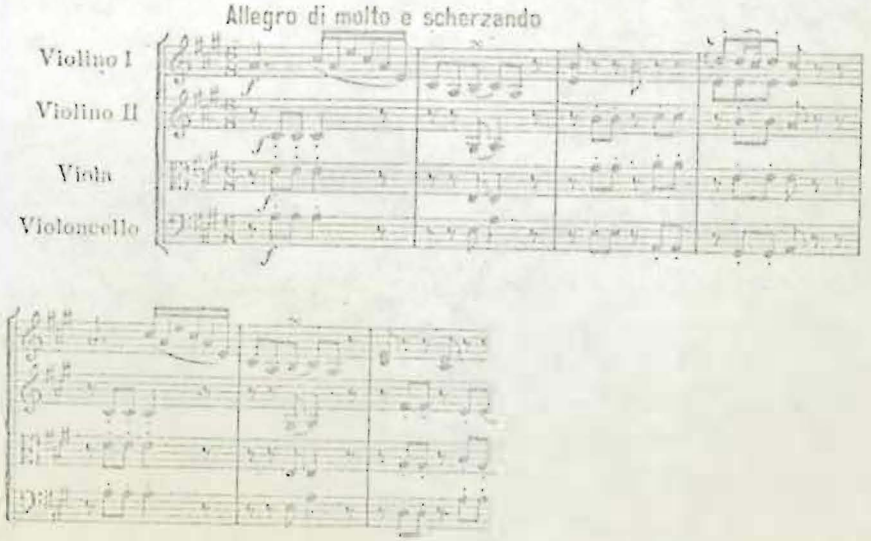
Jenna Orkin

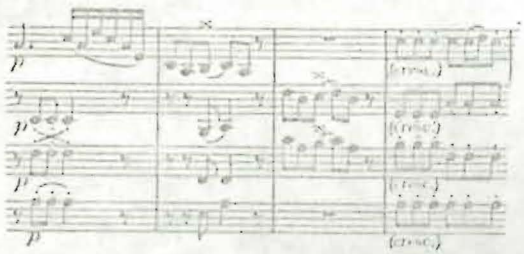
A COMPARISON OF THREE QUARTETS

It is the intention of this paper to compare three quartets: Haydn's Quartet No. 36 in A Major, Op. 20, No. 6, from the group known as the Sun Quartets; the "Hunt" Quartet of Mozart in B Flat Major, K. 458, from the set known as the "Haydn" Quartets; and the Quartet in A Major Op. 18, No. 5, of Beethoven. These three have been chosen because of similar characteristics: in theme, style and compositional procedure. It is commonly accepted that while Mozart was influenced by Haydn's "Sun" Quartets in some of his earlier quartets, K. 168-73 in particular, his "Haydn" Quartets are more inspired by their namesake's Op. 33. One might profitably have decided to use Op. 33, No. 6, the Quartet in D Major for this study. However, certain relationships between the Quartet from Op. 20 and Beethoven's Op. 18, No. 5 appealed to this student. It is also enlightening to see in Op. 20 the origins of those techniques which were to become so pervasive in the most important works of the three composers.

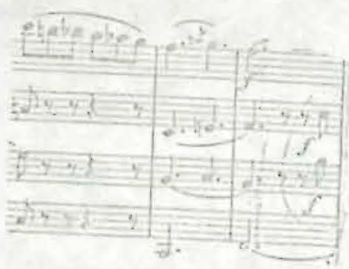
The similarity in character of the three pieces is immediately obvious. Their themes all rely on some form of arpeggiation of the tonic triad. The Quartet of Mozart is the most lyrical, beginning with an upbeat in place of the assertive chord of the other two. The Quartets of Beethoven and Haydn both feature a turn. The simple, straight-forward nature of all three themes is corroborated by the regularity of phrasing and the repetition of the phrases. Haydn's penchant for asymmetrical phrasing presents itself only in the most subtle ways. When he repeats the theme for the first time, he uses the subdominant instead of the dominant in the third measure of the phrase.



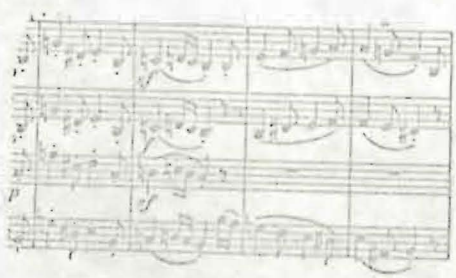
By simple repetition of m. 8, he extends the second phrase to six measures instead of four,the six, in turn, divisible into three plus three. The third repetition of the theme uses an echo of the second measure before returning to a variant of m. 4.



Thus the phrase consists of measures grouped in the following manner: 1,2,1. The solo violin passage in mm. 15-17 derives from the turn figure as does the passage in mm. 19-21, preparing for the arrival in E Major. The unison segment in mm. 17-18 is highly significant. Its chromatic characteristics, its angular shape, outlining a diminished triad, both of which contribute to a sense of harmonic ambiguity, are qualities one often finds in comparable passages in the works of Mozart and Beethoven. In the Mozart Quartet, for example, the first violin has a solo, chromatic line before an important cadence in m. 75.

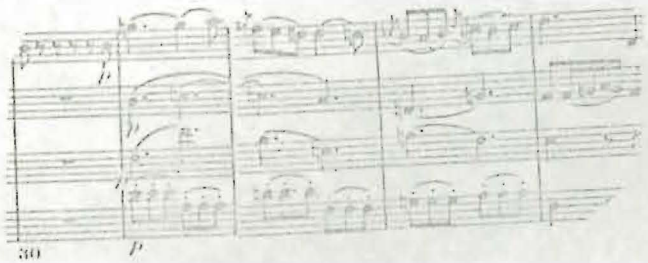


In the Beethoven Quartets, one finds a passage that is more strikingly similar to that in Haydn: the unison passage in mm. 24-6.

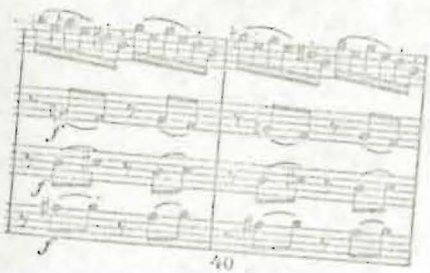


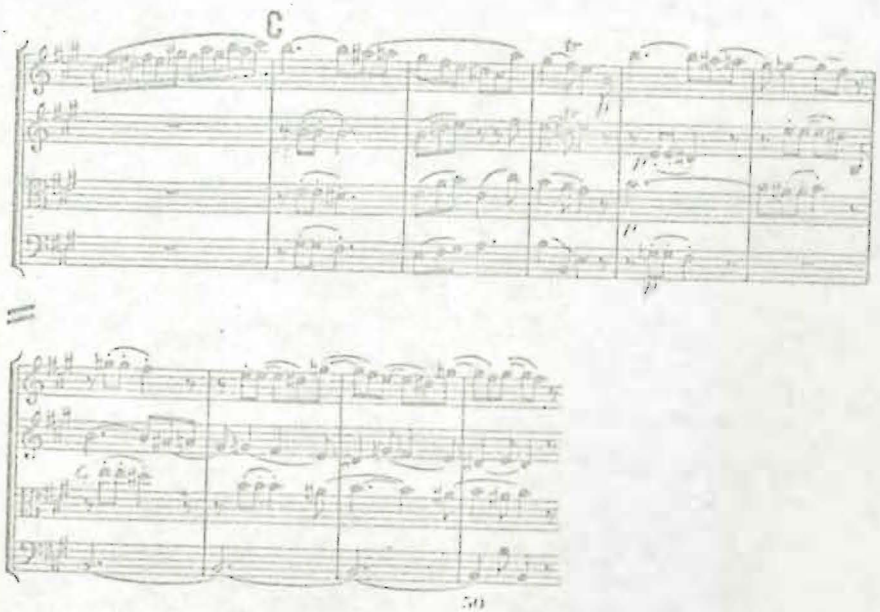
This, like the Haydn passage, is disjunct and chromatic. Also as in the case of Haydn, it is answered by a harmonized , diatonic passage. A more celebrated instance of this practice occurs in the introduction to the Scherzo of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony.

Haydn's second subject also has much in common with the same passage in the Beethoven Quartet. It begins with the same skip of the minor sixth,(B to G Natural) in E Minor.And, just as Beethoven does in mm. 28-32, Haydn modulates to a major key by the end of the phrase.



The passage beginning in m. 42 is extremely interesting from the point of view of later composers. First of all, Haydn uses modal mixture, the repetition in the minor of what has been heard in the major, a device which was later to be associated with Beethoven, Schubert and Brahms.

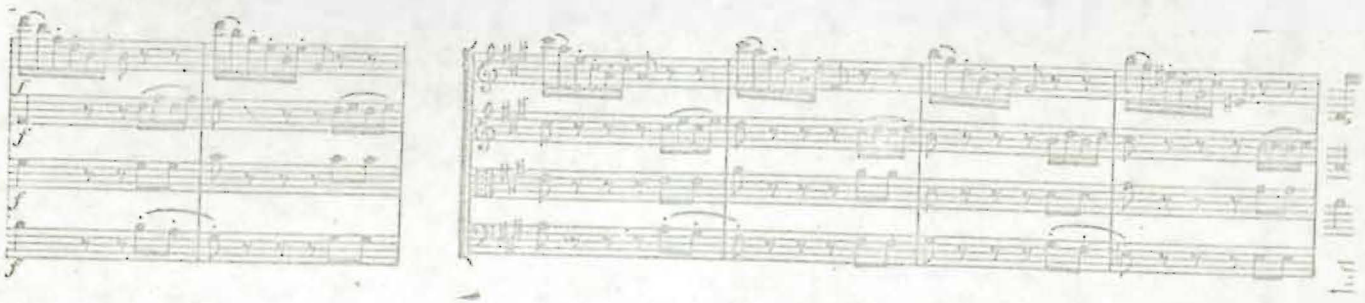




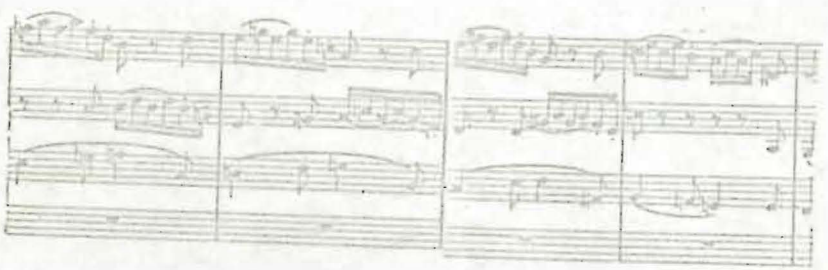
It may also be seen from the previous example that both rhythmically and harmonically, the passage originates in the three preceeding measures. This becomes more clear when it is heard in a new variant (upbeat to m. 47.). The syncopations which then follow are th e rh ythmic counterpart to the harmonic, chromatic elements which make for a sense of ambiguity. The phrase structure,too, is "odd" here. Haydn brings back an old theme after a pulse of a bar and a half, instead of at the beginning of the bar. (mm. 50-1). Invertible counterpoint is used in the first violin in the coda of the exposition(mm. 59-62).

The harmonies of the development section are not too unorthodox, with the exception of the augmented sixth chord which, in two analogous section, is re-spelled to become a dominant seventh(a device later to be exploited more extensively by Schubert). One does not so often find this re-interpretation as one does its opposite: the dominant seventh becoming an augmented sixth. The most potent force in this section is the consistently chromatically moving bass line.

The recapitulation is harmonically "advanced" in a number of ways. Rather than repeat the theme exactly, as he had in the exposition, Haydn employs modal mixture. (m. 112). His bridge recalls the development in its use of the circle of fifths.



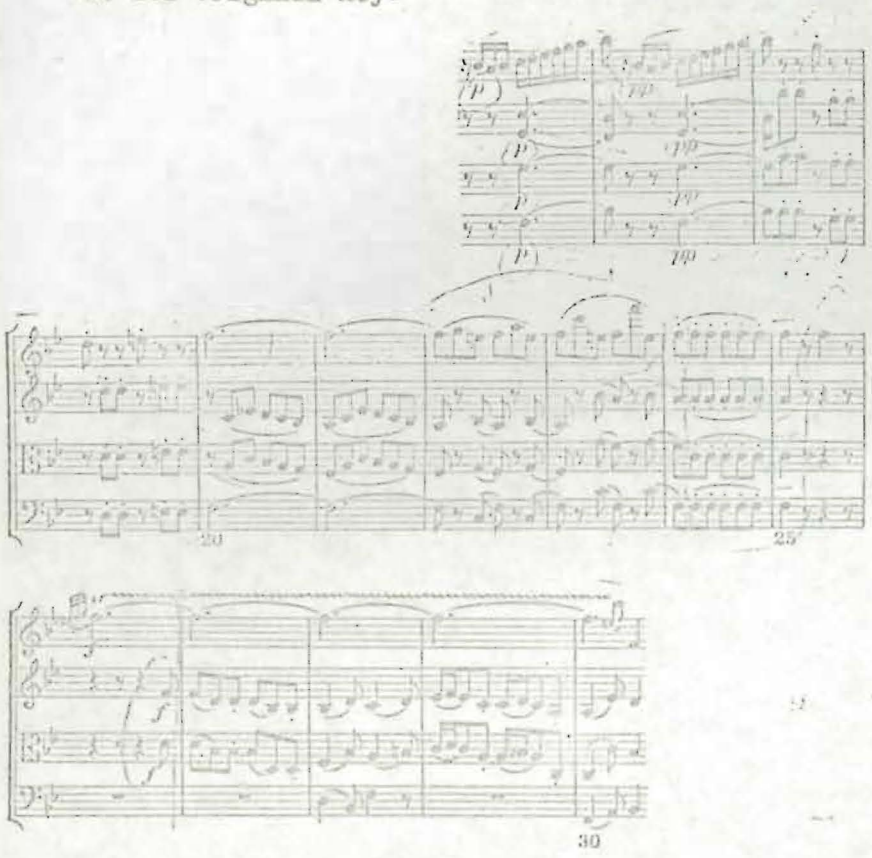
mm. 83-87



mm. 114-118

The final four measures of the piece employ invertible counterpoint when compared with the corresponding four measures of the exposition.

In the "Hunt" Quartet, the techniques borrowed from Haydn are striking. Yet Mozart betrays his identity almost immediately: in the variation of the melody in the second part of the phrase, (m. 5), using ornamentation that recalls vocal practice, and in the even more mellifluous melodic elaboration of a section based on the same structurally significant tones(E Flat to D in the viola is reiterated in the first violin, in mm. 9- 12, albeit over a different bass note.) Mozart varies this figure in a third way in m. 15. Haydn's monothematicism is found in Mozart's work in a particularly striking way, when the first theme is recalled <u>after</u> the modulation to the dominant, in its original key:



Melodic variations are not the only way in which Mozart manifest an interest in asymmetry. While Haydn frequently employs rests to elongate his phrases and leave the listener in suspense, Mozart employs repetition. (First violin, mm. 15-17). Sometimes he compensates for the resultant irregularity by

employing the same device again. Thus, the previous example is "amended" by the following phrase, mm. 24-6. In a similar way, Mozart may divide a four-bar phrase into one bar plus three(mm. 41-4). Or he may create a novel kind of symmetry by balancing a single measure on either side of a two-bar phrase.(mm. 65-8).

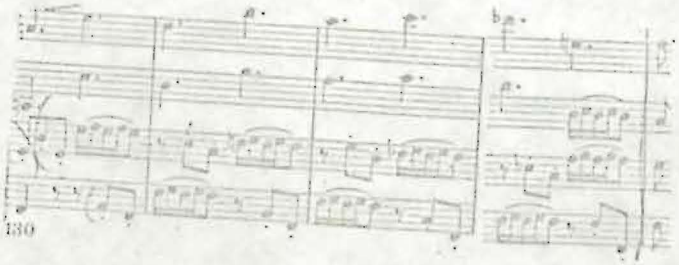
Like Haydn, Mozart is fond of disturbing the regularity of phrase structure before a point of great resolution. Simultaneously, he leaves the listener in harmonic suspense by using tortuous chromaticism (mm. 71-6). Mozart compensates for the ellipticism here by adding a bar at the end of the exposition (mm. 84-90). One sees in this section an expansion of the "feminine" cadence which is expounded in the very first phrase of the piece and which is so essential not only to the ensuing asymmetry but to the grace of the movement from resembling a very banal idea, as one quickly discovers if one attempts to fit the phrase within exactly two measures: F F D D D B Flat B Flat C.

Asymmetry is even important incorporated into the cadences at the beginning of the movement, which three times, in mm. 2,4 and 6, resolve on the dominant, and the last time, end in a "Cadence ferme".

Like Haydn, Mozart employs many developmental techniques in the exposition, to an even greater extent in fact, than Haydn does in the quartet with which we have dealt here. Thus, we find a circle of fifths in the transition to the second theme, whereas Haydn does not use it until the development, and borrowing from the parallel minor mode before a structurally important cadence in the dominant major: mm 47-51.

Having developed his themes so extensively in the exposition, Mozart begins the actual development of the quartet in the relaxed manner of the opening of the exposition, with a theme very closely derived from the main theme of the movement.(mm. 91 ff).

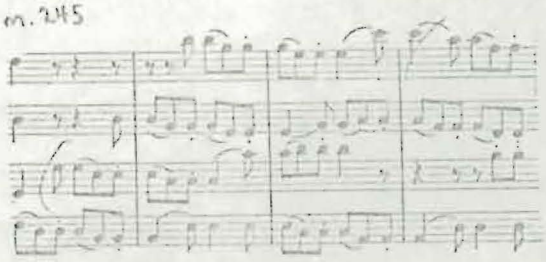
This development is considerably more fully fledged than Haydn's. Whereas Haydn had transitional sections using harmonic sequences, for instance in mm 69-89, Mozart, in analogous spots, actually modulates to different keys, rather than passing through them in continuous harmonic flux. In mm. 107-128, he modulates to C Minor, G Minor, F Minor and E Flat major. Like Haydn, in the analogous spot in his quartet, Mozart uses large skips in the melody, these deriving from the "Sturm und Drang" style popular at the time.

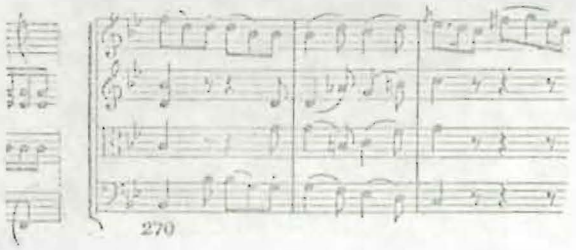


To balance this deeply involved development, Mozart appends a coda, thereby deviating from the practice of the Quartet of Haydn discussed here. This section is in some ways the most complex of the entire movement. Stretto at the half bar creates ambiguity of phrasing, and, again towards the same end, Mozart uses Haydn's technique of adding rests.

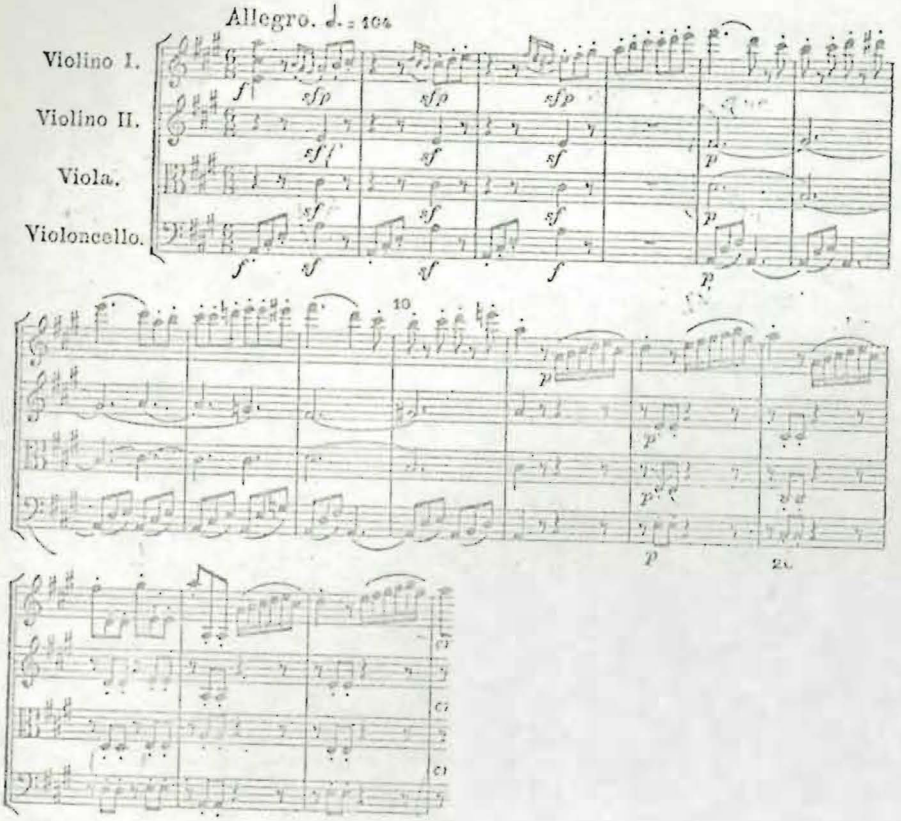
Other devices contribute to make this the most climactic section of the piece: instrumental doublings where there had been solo instruments before (m. 255, by contrast with m. 43), and diminution of the time between echoes of the trill motive. (mm. 261-3, as compared with mm. 42-5). As in Bach, Mozart uses imitation at the octave and the fifth below so that the theme is heard harmonized both by the third above and the third below, when place against itself in stretto.

m. 245

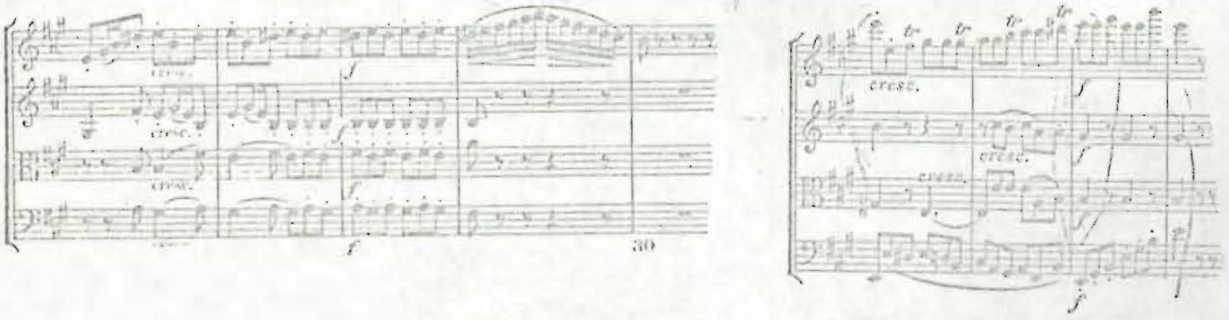




The quartet of Beethoven which is to be undertaken expands the techniques already seen. This is apparent from the outset of the work. The harmonic rhythm is much slower than in either of the two above cases, thus hinting at a more expanded scale for the movement as a whole. As one finds in the work of Bach, Beethoven begins with tonic, subdominant and dominant harmonies all over a tonic pedal. The first harmony lasts for four measures. The second phrase covers the same harmonic formula in diminution.

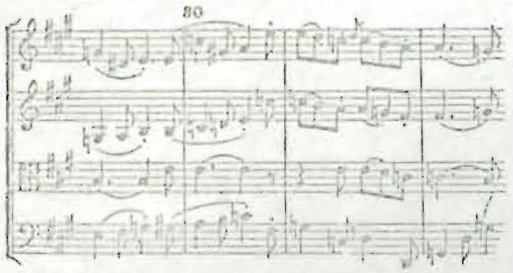


A Scherzo-like quality prevails in this sonata, as opposed to the lilt of the Mozart work. This is revealed particularly clearly at moments of structural importance, such as the arrival at a new key for a new theme, when Beethoven uses repeated notes, as Haydn does.



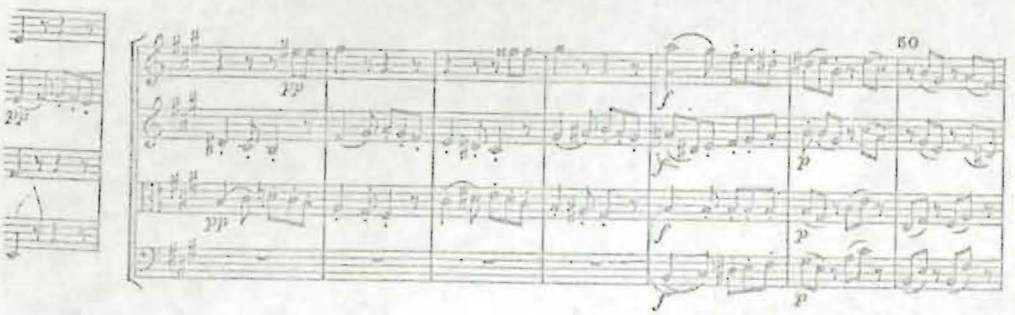
There is even a strong similarity between this movement and the introduction to the Scherzo of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, as was observed earlier. If one considers the phrase which takes place between mm. 25-9, one finds a chromatic unison

answered by a diatonic, harmonized line. The first phrase descends while the second ascends. Beethoven even, in the Fifth Symphony and here, outlines the dominant seventh harmony in the melody of the second phrase. As in the Fifth Symphony, the repetition of the new theme takes it further.



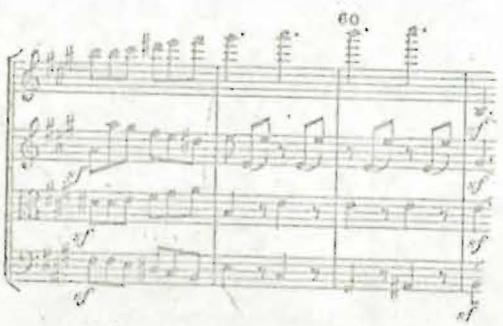
Beethoven also introduces major-minor mixture earlier in the movement than either

Stretto is already exploited in the exposition:

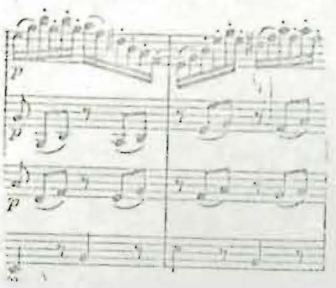


and, as in the Mozart coda, obscures the regularity of phrasin.

The "orchestration" in this quartet is more demanding than in either of the other two examples: i.e the skip of over three octaves in the first violin:

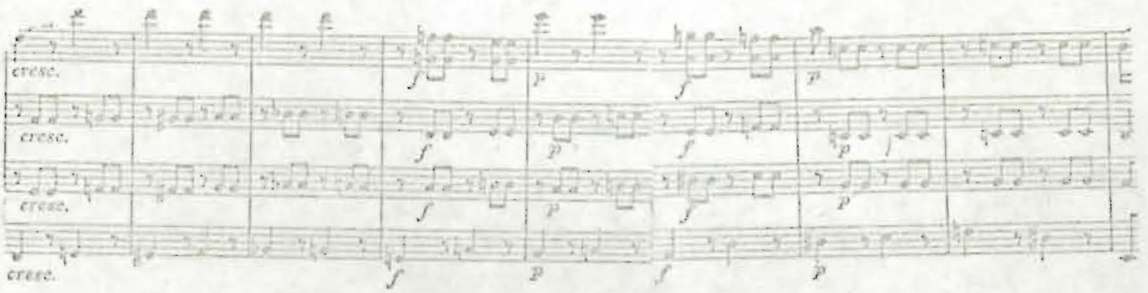


Although the style is classical, Beethoven incorporates Baroque techniques when questions of range or texture demand that he do so. The passages in mm. 57-8 and 74-5, for instance, both use invertible counterpoint, or something derived from it, as may be seen in the illustration below:



This example also shows Beethoven's adaptation of another technique found in contrapuntal music: melodic inversion. The first violin in the second bar plays a quasi- inversion of its motive in the first bar. Both of these contrapuntal devices are the mainstay of the opening of the development. At this point, the movement takes on the characteristic of a rondo, since the lyrical portion of the theme is heard in its entirety in a new key, without any developmental techniques such as sequence or transformation applied. Thus, the implications of the quality of the first theme, its lilting, 6/8 meter, and the melodic part of the first violin with the pedal or drone bass, are fulfilled. True development takes place later however, with the customary techniques of invertible counterpoint and major-minor mixture.

The recapitulation, as is often the case, proves the most interesting in the transition, which Beethoven extends by six measures. The passage is based totally on an ascending chromatic scale:



The present paper was, of course, intended as a comparative study of the stylistic characteristics of the three greatest classical composers as they are exemplified in the medium of the string quartet. This "cross-section" approach to analysis has not been sufficiently explored. To see music in juxtaposition with other, comparable pieces is as illuminating as seeing a figure with a mirror behind it, adding a new dimension to the image. Obviously, a work of art is an end in itself, an absolute, and should not be considered, as is so often the case among certain musicologists, as mrely a historical phenomenon. (This is the hazard of the majority of trades: the loss of sight of the ends in favour of the means). Thus, the study of a work in isolation is deeply rewarding, an end in itself in the analysis of music. An analysis such as the present one may assist such a goal, however. For by juxtaposition, the works seem to take on more clearly defined characteristics.

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