

FUNDAMENTAL HARMONY

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Lesson 14: Quartet Textures

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



Harmonic Analysis

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

MENUETTO. (Allegretto.)

Chromatic scale in the bass

d: i vii° i V⁶ V/iv IV⁶ A6(Ger) i₄ V₂ i⁶ ii⁶ i₄ V⁷ i

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

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

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 passage 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, composer like Mozart and Haydn introduced a wider ranges for all instruments.

