

Classical Music Appreciation—Intermediate

Session 6 notes

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Tonight's agenda

Beethoven, String Quartet Op 18 No 6 [string quartet]
The Grand Finale
Dvorak, Symphony No. 9
Rimsky-Korsakov, Scheherazade

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) (Germany) String Quartet Op. 18 No. 6

String quartet (Classical Period)



Historical context

Beethoven was born in Bonn, into a musical family, although none of his forebears was a composer. Beethoven studied piano and music theory with his father and later with Christian Neefe, to whom Beethoven was appointed deputy when Neefe was appointed court organist to the Prince-Elector in 1782. In that same year, Beethoven published his first composition, the Dressler Variations. Encouraged by Neefe's prophetic remark that Beethoven "would surely become a second Mozart were he to continue as he has begun," Beethoven produced several more works—some showing distinct originality—over the next several years.

In 1792 Beethoven had the opportunity to meet Haydn (38 years his senior), who was passing through Bonn on his way back to Vienna from London. After Beethoven had shown Haydn some of his compositions, Haydn agreed to take on Beethoven as a student, and Beethoven left soon after for Vienna, never to return to Bonn.

In Vienna, Beethoven's career blossomed, both as a concert pianist and as a composer. His compositions were much in demand, thus providing income from members of the nobility paying for commissions and dedications as well as income from publication.

The six string quartets of opus 18 are regarded as the finest chamber works of Beethoven's output up to their publication in 1801. Beethoven himself was justly proud of his accomplishment, as revealed in an 1801 letter to his friend Karl Ferdinand Amenda, who had been the recipient of a first draft of one of the quartets. The letter said "Do not part with your quartet, as I have altered it completely, having just mastered the art of quartet writing, as you will see when you receive them¹."

¹ "them" of course being the six quartets of opus 18.

The music

First movement—sonata form—Allegro con brio

<i>bar</i>	<i>time</i> ²	
1	0:00	exposition: first theme (B flat major)
45	0:41	second theme (dominant (F))
1	1:26	exposition repeats
93	2:51	development
175	4:11	recapitulation: first theme (B flat major)
218	4:50	second theme (tonic (B flat major))
265	5:36	repeat of development and recapitulation—or not, as the case may be. (The score indicates it, but this recording does not take it.)

Second movement—ABA form—Adagio ma non troppo

This slow movement is in rather straightforward ABA form, rounded off by a rather adventurous coda.

1	0:00	A theme (E flat major)
17	1:26	B theme (B flat minor (dominant minor))
45	3:45	A theme (E flat major)
61	5:07	coda
69	5:48	a bar and half in the very distant key of C major...
70	5:56	...followed by a bar and a half that gets us all the way back to E flat
79	6:40	a very gentle end

Third movement—Scherzo—Allegro

This movement is constructed as an uncomplicated scherzo and trio, with the repeated scherzo forming the familiar ABA pattern. The scherzo theme itself is Beethoven at his adventurous best, syncopated and punctuated by obstinately dislocated off-beat accents.

The trio contrasts with the scherzo only by rhythm, which is altogether more orderly than that of the scherzo. However, the pace and mood of the trio is consistent with the scherzo.

Fourth movement—“La Malinconia”—Adagio, Allegretto quasi Allegro

“La malinconia” (melancholy) is Beethoven's heading for the slow opening page. And perhaps “La bipolar disorder” would have been an apt title for the movement as a whole, because Beethoven twice interrupts the lively country dance that follows with short bouts of melancholia.

Be that as it may, this movement is perhaps the most strikingly original passage in the entire series of Op. 18 quartets. The predominant dynamic marking is pianissimo and Beethoven exhorts the players to treat the music with the utmost delicacy; yet at the point in the opening melancholia where the music begins to venture so startlingly into distant keys, the innocent turn-like figure of its opening bars assumes an alarmingly menacing tone. Then comes the extreme

² Timings are relative to the BBC recording BBC MM95 by the Jerusalem Quartet.

contrast of the country dance, whose off-beat accents lend it a curious limp. After the two short episodes of depression, the movement finally pushes melancholia aside and ends with a dazzlingly optimistic prestissimo.³

**Antonin Dvorak (1841-1904) (Bohemia (now Czech Republic))
Symphony No. 9 in E minor (“From the New World”)**

Romantic Period; Symphony Orchestra



Dvorak had come to New York in 1892 to take up the highly paid post of head of the National Conservatory of Music by its founder, Jeanette Thurber. Dvorak set out to write a work of unmistakable American influences, and the “New World” symphony, as it is colloquially known, was the result. Dvorak’s explanations of this, his final symphony, were captured for posterity through an interview he gave for the New York Herald on the day before its first performance in 1893. Having immersed himself in American Indian and African-American music, he set out to capture this spirit in his symphony. “I have not actually used any of the melodies⁴,” he said, “I have simply written original themes embodying the peculiarities of the Indian music and, using these themes as subjects, have developed them with all the resources of modern rhythms, harmony, counterpoint and orchestral color.”

Dvorak was particularly taken with the Hiawatha legend, and had attempted to write an opera around it. That opera was never completed, but Dvorak acknowledged that the middle two movements of the *New World* were inspired by Longfellow’s poem *The Song of Hiawatha*, and we can make an educated guess that Dvorak likely repurposed some of the sketches from his now-abandoned opera.

³ As fast as possible.

⁴ Although those with over-active imaginations will insist they can hear “Swing Low Sweet Chariot” in the First Movement’s Third Theme.

Chart of themes

First Movement	
First Theme (Motto Theme)	
Second Theme	
Third Theme	
Second Movement	
First Section	
Second Section	
First Theme	
Second Theme	
Third Movement	
Scherzo	
First Theme	
Second Theme	
Trio	
First Theme	
Second Theme	
Fourth Movement	
First Theme	
Second Theme	
Third Theme	
Fourth Theme	

Map of the symphony

Timings are with reference to the 1987 recording by Neeme Järvi with the Scottish National Orchestra on Chandos CHAN 8510.

<i>bar</i>	<i>time</i>		<i>remarks</i>
		First Movement	slow introduction, fast body in sonata form
1	0:00	Introduction	
16	1:28		(horns) motto theme ⁵ first appearance
		Exposition	
24	2:04	First Theme	(horns) an expansion of the motto theme, in home key of E minor
90	3:12	Second Theme	(flute, oboe) begins in G minor, moves to G major (relative major of home key)
148	4:15	Third Theme	(flute) continues in G major; close relative of First Theme
24	4:52	Exposition repeats	
176	7:35	Development	fantasia on thematic material from exposition
		Recapitulation	much abbreviated, relative to exposition
272	9:12	First Theme	(horn) again in E minor
311	9:53	Second Theme	(flute) in G# minor this time (semitone higher than exposition) Note new horn counter melody from 9 th bar
369	10:58	Third Theme	(flute) in Ab major (again, a semitone higher than exposition)
395	11:30	Coda	very brief, built on the 3 rd theme and motto theme

⁵ A *motto theme* recurs through each movement of a symphony, and thus reinforces its integrity.

<i>bar</i>	<i>time</i>		<i>remarks</i>
		Second Movement	slow throughout. ABA form.
1	0:00	Introduction	tuba player picks up his horn for the first time, plays four bars, then puts it down again. These are four bars of rich harmonic content—the first chord is E major, but by the end of four bars we've been prepared for the arrival of the new key of Db major in the fifth bar.
7	0:44	First Section (A)	(English horn) begins with beautiful melody (in Db major)
		Second Section(B)	notice how the second section—the “B” of the second movement—is itself crafted as an ABA
46	5:06	B(a)	(flute, oboe) a new, slightly faster triplet-based melody with more overall movement; key is C# minor (the tonic minor of First Section)
54	5:42	B(b)	(clarinets) mood changes again with slow dreamy melody over active pizzicato bass; music stays in C# minor
64	6:33	B(a)	(violins) triplet melody returns, with flutes and oboes playing a self-derived counter melody; we're still in C# minor
90	8:45	Bridge	(woodwinds) busy contrasting section to lead into the Third Section; we're back to the movement's home key of Db major, here notated as C# major
96	9:13		(trombones) just 2 bars of motto theme, played twice for good measure. Its only appearance in this movement
101	9:41	Third Section (A)	a reprise of the material of the First Section, in the original key
120	11:59	Coda	an extended reprise of the introduction. Tuba player picks up his horn for only the second time and plays another four bars. Now he's done for the night. And all along he was merely doubling bass trombone anyway.

<i>bar</i>	<i>time</i>		<i>remarks</i>
		Third Movement	Scherzo and Trio
		Scherzo	the Scherzo is itself constructed in ABA form
1	0:00	Introduction	
13	0:09	First Theme (A)	(woodwinds) energetic, in home key of E minor; notice canon
68	1:35	Second Theme (B)	(flute, oboe) flowing and contrasting; note its derivation from English horn melody of Second Movement. We've modulated to E major
		First Theme (A)	
99	2:11		(violins) a modulation passage to get us back to E minor.
119	2:26		motto theme makes a stealth 4-bar reappearance in low register (horns, bassoons, cellos, basses). It's easy to miss in this unfamiliar triple-rhythm guise, and amid muddy orchestration to boot
123	2:30		(violins) first theme reappears in home key
142	2:45	Bridge	a short modulation passage to move into the trio's key of C major

154	2:54		cellos give us 4 bars of motto theme, which starts in E minor but immediately modulates
166	3:04		violas give us 4 bars of motto theme. By this time we've reached Ab minor, and we're still modulating on the way to...
176	3:12	Trio	(woodwinds, horns) a contrasting section, beginning in C major
192	3:39		(violins) Trio's second theme; starts in G major and soon finds its way back to E minor. We're well over halfway through the symphony, and—very unusually—this is the first time that any of the strings have had first crack at a new theme.
223	4:04		Trio's two themes repeat
1	5:04	Scherzo repeats	however, Scherzo's <i>own</i> repeat is not taken 2 nd time around
248/ 389	7:05	Coda	horns play motto theme twice (first in E minor, then in F minor), but can't get anyone else interested
411	7:20		on the horns' third try with the motto theme, up another half step to F# minor, the woodwinds finally join in
417	7:31		trumpet chimes in with the opening snippet of the 1 st movement's 3 rd theme, as the music transitions through E major on its way back to the home key
427	7:36		phew! We made it back to E minor with just 14 bars to spare

<i>bar</i>	<i>time</i>		<i>remarks</i>
		Fourth Movement	a fine finale that pulls the whole symphony together. Basically sonata form, but with some applied freedom typical of the Romantic period.
1	0:00	Introduction	
		Exposition	
10	0:17	First Theme	trumpets and horns announce the E minor theme in declamatory fashion, and repeat it with a higher octave for good measure. Trumpet players live for bits like this: loud, high, and fast.
44	1:17	Second Theme	(violins) a busy triplet-based construction, still in E minor
67	1:55	Third Theme	(clarinet solo) a contrasting lyrical section, starting in G major (the home key's relative major) then moving to F minor
92	2:54	Fourth Theme	flutes and violins introduce yet another theme, this one again in G major. Note points of similarity with the English horn melody of 2 nd movement.
106	3:19	Development	a creative fantasia. There is new material here, but the bulk of the development is about the First Theme, the Motto Theme, and the First Theme of the 2 nd movement. We also hear a longish snatch of the Second Theme, and the merest hints at the Scherzo theme from the 3 rd movement.
157	4:46		(flutes) notice the reappearance of the English horn

			melody from the 2 nd movement
190	5:44		here's the motto theme at last, in horns, bassoons, and low strings
196	5:55		I don't really know why, but these 2 bars make my spine tingle. The SNO trombones are just awesome.
198	5:59		horns maintain the excitement as they play the first theme in G minor, then lead the modulation back to E minor, the home key
		Recapitulation	recapitulation is extremely brief, even omitting the 2 nd theme altogether
208	6:16		(trombones) the start of the recapitulation grows seamlessly—yet boldly—out of the Development as the 1 st theme finds its way back to E minor
227	7:04		(strings) the 3 rd theme, in E major
251	7:59		(flutes, clarinets) a dreamy recasting of the 4 th theme, also in E major
267	8:35	Bridge	solo horn sings the motto theme, then the rest of the horns join in with a frenetic figure leading in to the Coda
275	8:49	Coda	(basses, cellos, bassoons) a rumbling eruption of the motto theme
279	8:57		(trombones) here's the 1 st theme
281	9:00		(strings) and here's the recently neglected 2 nd theme right on top of it
290	9:13		(trombones) the motto theme again
299	9:30		what <i>this</i> ? Why, it's none other than the opening from the 2 nd movement, now very loud and forceful. Why ever did we send the tuba player home? We really could have used him here.
313	9:54		this coda is a masterpiece of integration, isn't it? Now here's a snippet (clarinet) of the English horn melody from the 2 nd movement, punctuated by a delicate reprise of the Scherzo theme (strings), which continues until the 2 nd movement theme gives way to the 4 th movement's 1 st theme (horns).
327	10:22		built by a huge crescendo, the 1 st theme holds the floor in a loud and furious finish, during which the trombones manage a final couple of plugs for the motto theme. Notice the unusual treatment of the final note—everyone but the woodwinds, horns, and trumpets drops out, leaving these few instruments to diminuendo to almost nothing.

Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908) (Russia) *Scheherazade*⁶

Romantic Period; Symphony Orchestra



Rimsky-Korsakov labels *Scheherazade* a “symphonic suite.” Although based on Arabian tales, the work is still firmly Russian in its flavor of “oriental” sound. Rimsky-Korsakov himself wrote that the piece was not meant to be an exact depiction of Scheherazade’s stories, the movements’ titles being meant to “direct but slightly the hearer’s fancy on the path my own fancy traveled.”

The tales of the Arabian Nights themselves were passed down through the centuries by word of mouth; the oldest tales date to the 10th century. They were brought to Europe in 1704 by Anotine Galland, who published several collections of the stories. These included the now well-known sagas of Sinbad the Sailor, Ali Baba and the 40 Thieves, and Aladdin and his magic lamp.

The story of Scheherazade provides the narrative thread between the tales, and runs as follows: Scheherazade was the daughter of the grand vizier⁷ to Sultan Shahriyar. The sultan’s first wife had betrayed him, and in anger and grief he not only executed her but vowed to marry a woman each night and kill her the next morning. The sultan’s cruel order was obeyed for three years, until Scheherazade conceived a plan to stop him and convinced her father to offer her as the sultan’s next wife.

The clever girl talked the sultan into letting her sister spend the night with them in the bridal chamber, and in the morning, as planned, Scheherazade’s sister begged her to tell a story. Scheherazade began one of the exciting tales but stopped before the story ended, causing the sultan, who had listened as well, to put off killing her until she could finish her story the next evening. Scheherazade, of course, never finished her tales, but kept her husband enthralled with story after story for 1,001 nights. By that time the pair had produced three sons and the sultan, convinced of his wife’s fidelity and wisdom, revoked his death sentence.

Scheherazade consists of four movements, which Rimsky-Korsakov originally labeled with the titles (in bold type) you see in the narrative that follows⁸. I say “originally” because Rimsky later removed these titles, not wishing listeners to read too much into the pictorial, descriptive elements of the score⁹. However, Rimsky’s attempt to remove the titles proved futile, because they stuck fast and are well known to today’s audiences.

⁶ With permission, I based these notes on Barbara Heninger’s compilation of program notes (originally written for the Redwood Symphony) at

http://www.barbwired.com/barbweb/programs/rimskykorsakov_scheherazade.html

⁷ A minister under a Muslim prince. This is a civil office, not a religious one.

⁸ Yes, there are three kinds of people in the world: those who can count and those who can’t. Although there are five labels for the movements, the final movement covers both the Baghdad festival and the shipwreck.

⁹ The retrospective suppression of a work’s programmatic inspiration is a common thread in Romantic era music. For example, Tchaikovsky had a program in mind when he composed his 5th symphony, yet he

The movements are linked by a kind of motto theme, which we may suppose represents Scheherazade herself.

The work begins with a very brief introduction based on the primary theme of the first movement. We then hear the “Scheherazade” theme from solo violin [1], leading into the first movement proper, **The Sea and Sinbad’s Ship**. In this movement, the Sinbad theme and the Scheherazade theme ebb and flow over a third rocking melody like the ocean’s waves.

After another appearance of the Scheherazade theme [2], we have the second movement [3]—**The Story of the Kalendar Prince**—a royal prince who disguised himself as a member of a tribe of wandering dervishes¹⁰ called Kalendars—features an “oriental” melody played in turn by both the full orchestra and different solo instruments, including bassoon, oboe, flute, and horn. The theme is offset by a brisk martial tune introduced by the brass, which in turn is interrupted by a clarinet solo that whirls like the dervishes of the title.

[4] The lyric sweep of **The Young Prince and the Young Princess** is colored by a rising and falling counterpoint from woodwinds, harp, or upper strings against lower. Romantic melodies weave in and out, and the movement ends with a series of rapid, quiet figures that seem to dance into the distance.

[5] The solo violin of Scheherazade introduces the final movement, which bursts into a vigorous dance accented by cymbal and tambourine, **The Festival in Baghdad** [6]. The dance becomes wilder, punctuated by snare and bass drum. Eventually, a furious rendition of the festival theme by the brass leads to a return of the Sinbad theme [7]. The music rises and falls with the swell of the ocean until Sinbad’s ship meets with the **Shipwreck on the Rock with the Bronze Warrior**. Thereafter, the music subsides as if the Sultan has been mollified. Scheherazade’s violin ends the tale on a series of harmonics over a broad, sustained chord.

managed to prevent its escape to the outside world until long after his death (see my program note in the [handout](#) for an earlier class). Similarly, Debussy and Bantock warned their listeners against too literal an interpretation, against their stated programs, of their respective works *Prelude à l’après midi d’un faune* and *Prometheus Unbound*.

¹⁰ According to my dictionary, the original non-figurative meaning of “dervish” is ‘A member of any of various Moslem ascetic orders, some of which perform whirling dances and vigorous chanting as acts of ecstatic devotion.’