

NOTES ON QUINTET FOR CLARINET AND STRINGS IN A, K. 581,  
BY WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

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B. M., North Texas State University, 1967

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A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF SCIENCE

Department of Music

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY  
Manhattan, Kansas

1969

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LD  
2668  
R4  
1969  
P52

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NOTES ON QUINTET FOR CLARINET AND STRINGS IN A, K. 581,  
BY WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

Mozart's Quintet for Clarinet and Strings in A, K. 581, was completed on September 29, 1789. It was composed for Anton Stadler (1753-1812), who had been among Mozart's closest friends for several years. He was one of the leading clarinetists of that time, famous in Prague and Vienna, where he had been a member of the Imperial Court Orchestra since 1787. Both were freemasons and played together at their meetings. Stadler seems to have been a rather unstable character, however, and took advantage of financial help which Mozart gave him although he could ill afford it. Yet, so ardent was his friendship that he wrote for Stadler not only this Quintet but also, later, the beautiful Concerto, K. 622, which was drafted originally for basset-horn, on which Stadler also excelled.<sup>1</sup>

Mozart participated in the first public performance of the Quintet on December 22, 1789, at a concert given by the Society of Musicians as a benefit for its widows and orphans. In the following April he also played in a private performance for some of his friends.<sup>2</sup>

The combination of wind and string instruments in chamber music was not new. Dozens of trio sonatas for flute and violin had been written; Mozart's own quartets used flute and oboe.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>A. Hyatt King, Mozart Chamber Music (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1968), p. 63.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Louis L. Biancolli, The Mozart Handbook (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1954), p. 506.

Mozart first heard the clarinet in London when he was eight and was enchanted by it. As his art matured he used it whenever possible in his orchestral works and operas. But he had only introduced it twice into chamber music: in the Quintet for Piano and Winds, K. 452, and in the Trio for Clarinet, Viola, and Piano, K. 498. In this Trio, where the clarinet matched so well with the dark tones of the viola, he must have realized that the quality of the clarinet was such that it had distinctive possibilities in combination with stringed instruments alone.

"In the Oboe Quartet and the flute quartets, the cool, penetrating quality of the wind instrument had given Mozart little option but to write music conceived partly in concertante style. But the greater range of the clarinet and, especially, the expressive warmth of its middle register made it almost ideal for both blending and contrasting with string tone."<sup>4</sup>

Thus, what is new in the K. 581 is the manner in which Mozart combined the five instruments. "Mozart was faced with the possibilities of treating the clarinet as a solo instrument, thus writing non-chamber music, or of ignoring its special characteristics and treating it as just another voice in a five-voice texture, thus writing dull chamber music."<sup>5</sup> He made neither mistake, but produced a texture in which the solo characteristics of the wind instrument were projected beautifully, yet in which perfect balance of the five instruments is achieved. In the first movement, the first violin and clarinet alternate

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<sup>4</sup>King, op. cit., pp. 63-64.

<sup>5</sup>Biancolli, loc. cit.

in the first announcement of the themes, but as the movement progresses all the instruments share in subsequent thematic statements.<sup>6</sup> The development section has a "concertante" air about it, but in which all five instruments participate. The cantabile character of the second theme is continued in the Larghetto, in which the clarinet is given a broad, flowing song. In the Minuet all five instruments again share perfect equality. The first Trio, in the tonic minor, is for string quartet alone, and in the second, a "Ländler," the clarinet becomes the rustic folk-song instrument which it was and still is in South Bavaria and other Alpine provinces. The Finale is an Allegretto with variations on a child-like theme, "brief and amusing with all its variety and richness, serious and lovable."<sup>7</sup> The result is a piece of music whose charm and beauty make it one of the greatest works in the literature for strings and winds.<sup>8</sup>

The Quintet was one of the last works which Mozart ever wrote. During these years he achieved the perfect synthesis of form and content, of polish and charm on the one hand and of textural and emotional depth on the other. He wrote his three greatest symphonies in 1788. The one in E flat is dated June 26, the one in G minor July 25, and the one in C major with the fugue-finale, August 10. His other works of that year are of little importance with the exception of a piano Concerto in

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Alfred Einstein, Mozart, His Character, His Work, trans. by Arthur Mendel and Nathan Broder (London: Oxford University Press, 1945), p. 194.

<sup>8</sup>Biancolli, loc. cit.

D major which he played at the coronation of Leopold II at Frankfort in 1790. There are canons and piano pieces, and there are six German dances and twelve minuets for orchestra.

The Emperor Joseph II appointed Mozart to be his composer in November, 1787. He commanded no opera, cantata, symphony, or piece of chamber music. He did order the dances named above. With the exception of the clarinet Quintet and a string quartet dedicated to the King of Prussia, the works of 1789 are of little interest. Mozart was never fully appreciated in Vienna during the last years of his life. But in spite of his poverty and personal disappointments, he became one of the supreme artists of all time; the voice of pure beauty in music, and probably the most sheerly musical composer that ever lived.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., pp. 359-61.

## I. ALLEGRO (See Appendix)

The compact opening melody in the strings, beginning on the fifth scale degree, "is a bewitching melody, the effect of which is skillfully enhanced by the following phrase on the clarinet, founded on the common chord."<sup>10</sup> This is balanced by the long-drawn second subject in the dominant, and its extended modulations by the clarinet.<sup>11</sup> This theme is a distinct advance towards romanticism. The development, after a restatement of the first subject (which now appears in the clarinet for the first time) in the remote key of C major, is based completely on the opening clarinet phrase. It is now given to the strings, however, as the clarinet, of secondary importance, arpeggiates the common chord. "The sound effect is what matters here rather than technical treatment."<sup>12</sup> Possibly the most charming touch in the recapitulation is the gentle syncopation of the strings under the second subject restated by the clarinet.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Walter W. Cobbett (ed.), Cobbett's Cyclopedic Survey of Chamber Music, 2nd ed., Vol. II (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 165.

<sup>11</sup>King, op. cit., p. 64.

<sup>12</sup>Cobbett, loc. cit.

<sup>13</sup>King, loc. cit.

## II. LARGHETTO

In the Larghetto, Mozart gave Stadler one continuous, broadly flowing song for the clarinet, with a dialogue in the middle between it and the first violin.<sup>14</sup> The melody bears a distinct resemblance to that in the clarinet Concerto, K. 622, composed in 1791:



Perhaps the most accessible factor in Mozart's music was melody. "The melodies of the late Mozart are supreme art, and their apparent simplicity only shows how the amazing maturity of his artistic genius eliminated all suggestion of difficulty or ineptitude."<sup>15</sup> They nearly all make use of the simple basic scheme of an eight-bar period, though with many variants. Normally the eight-bar period is divided into two four-bar groups, each of which is, as a rule, subdivided into two groups of two bars. There could not be a simpler scheme. Only someone

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<sup>14</sup>Cobbett, loc. cit.

<sup>15</sup>H. C. Robbins Landon and Donald Mitchell (ed.), The Mozart Companion (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), pp. 21-24.



with a keen sense of proportion might notice the slight extension to nine bars which occurs in this work, or the extension of the "response" to eleven bars.<sup>16</sup>

This melodic quality is associated with the simplest of harmony. The tonic and the two dominants usually suffice.

"The rhythm emphasizes the slight inner contrasts within the theme by means of slightly contrary motion; yet these rhythmic shadings are no more than hardly perceptible gradations."<sup>17</sup> The flow of the accompaniment continues quite unchanged, while the melody extends itself above it in very delicate and supple rhythms.<sup>18</sup>

The chalumeau register of the instrument is used with romantic effect, enhanced by all the strings playing with mutes throughout.

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

## III. MENUETTO

All five players are assembled for the minuet, making good use of forte-piano contrasts, and almost perfect equality of all five partners. "All the more striking is the bare melancholy of the first trio, in the tonic minor, where the total silence of the clarinet reveals a strict quartet style."<sup>19</sup> The second half includes a strict canon between first violin and viola.<sup>20</sup> The second trio (a most unusual feature) is a dialogue in the manner of a "Ländler" between first violin and clarinet which assumes the character of a folk instrument. For its final flourish the clarinet picks up the tune from the cello.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>King, loc. cit.

<sup>20</sup>Cobbett, loc. cit.

<sup>21</sup>King, loc. cit.

## IV. ALLEGRETTO CON VARIATIONI

The last movement has variations on an ingenuous child-like theme which has a certain resemblance to that of the first movement. The first variation superimposes a "new" melody on the theme, a device of which Mozart was fond in the solo exposition of concertos (Piano Concerto, K. 466). This melody is heard again in the second and fifth variations, and also retroacts on the preceding second trio.<sup>22</sup>

## Finale; Var. II



## Finale; Var. V, Adagio



## Trio II



In the second variation the clarinet is heard little, with the melody being in the first violin. Continuous triplet figures in the second violin and viola contribute to the increasing velocity of the movement. The clarinet is heard even less in the third variation which, like the first trio, is in A minor. "The tune almost vanishes above the sustained complaint of the viola which is built on repetitions of this

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<sup>22</sup>Landon, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

joyless phrase:<sup>23</sup>



Variation IV again resumes the gay mood of the movement, with the theme appearing in the strings. The velocity of the movement is increased once more, changing the subdivision of the beat from triplets to a continuous sixteenth-note pattern, first in the clarinet, and then in the first violin. The next four bars form a bridge to an adagio interlude. There is a built-in rallentando, ending on a semi-cadence which leads smoothly into the Adagio section.

The Adagio, somewhat in the form of a recitative, again derives its melody from the clarinet in the first variation. Another bridge section, ending on a semi-cadence, leads to the final Allegro which recalls the original theme of the movement.

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<sup>23</sup>King, op. cit., p. 65.

The image shows a handwritten musical score with linear analysis annotations. The score is written on two staves (treble and bass clefs) and is divided into several systems. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and accidentals. Handwritten annotations include:   
 - "MT" at the top left.   
 - A boxed letter "A" in the first system.   
 - A boxed letter "E" in the fourth system.   
 - Roman numeral chord symbols:  $IV_6$ ,  $iii_6$ ,  $ii_6$ ,  $I_6$ ,  $vii^{\circ}_6$ ,  $I$ ,  $vii^{\circ}P7$ ,  $I$ ,  $V_7$ ,  $V_7$ ,  $I$ ,  $vii^{\circ}P7$ ,  $V_7$ .   
 - Measure numbers 25, 30, and 35.   
 - Various other markings including arrows, wavy lines, and numbers like "8".

Handwritten annotations: 40, 45

iv<sub>6</sub> V<sub>7</sub> I II V<sub>3</sub>

Handwritten annotations: 50, 4

I ii<sub>6</sub> I<sub>4</sub> V<sub>7</sub> I i

Handwritten annotations: 55, 4

ii<sup>o</sup> V<sub>5</sub> i iv<sub>7</sub>

Handwritten annotations: 60, 65, CT

I<sub>4</sub><sup>6</sup> V<sub>7</sub> I IV<sub>6</sub>

Handwritten annotations: 70, 75

I<sub>6</sub> IV V vi V<sub>6</sub> I V<sub>7</sub> I<sub>4</sub><sup>6</sup> V I

Handwritten musical notation for the first system, consisting of a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The treble staff contains several measures of music with notes and rests. There are some handwritten annotations above the staff, including a double-headed arrow and a circled 'C'.

ii<sub>6</sub> I<sub>4</sub><sup>6</sup> V<sub>7</sub> I

Handwritten musical notation for the second system, consisting of a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The treble staff contains several measures of music with notes and rests. There are some handwritten annotations above the staff, including a circled 'C' and a '90'.

I V

Handwritten musical notation for the third system, consisting of a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The treble staff contains several measures of music with notes and rests. There are some handwritten annotations above the staff, including a '95' and a circled 'C'.

I V I V/ii ii V/iii iii

Handwritten musical notation for the fourth system, consisting of a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The treble staff contains several measures of music with notes and rests. There are some handwritten annotations above the staff, including a '100', '105', and '110'.

F#<sub>m</sub> V<sub>7</sub> i V<sub>4</sub><sup>4</sup>/IV<sub>6</sub> IV<sub>6</sub> V<sub>4</sub><sup>4</sup>/III<sub>6</sub> III<sub>6</sub> A vii<sup>o</sup>/V

Handwritten musical notation for the fifth system, consisting of a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The treble staff contains several measures of music with notes and rests. There are some handwritten annotations above the staff, including a '115' and '126'. A wavy line labeled 'Recap.' is drawn under the bottom two staves.

Recap.

Musical score system 1 (measures 130-134). Treble clef, key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). Bass clef. Measure numbers 130, 131, 132, 133, and 134 are indicated. Chord symbols V<sup>7</sup>/IV and IV are present below the bass staff. A fermata is placed over the final note of measure 134.

Musical score system 2 (measures 135-139). Treble clef, key signature of two sharps. Bass clef. Measure numbers 135, 136, 137, 138, and 139 are indicated.

Musical score system 3 (measures 140-144). Treble clef, key signature of two sharps. Bass clef. Measure numbers 140, 141, 142, 143, and 144 are indicated. A fermata is placed over the final note of measure 144.

Musical score system 4 (measures 145-149). Treble clef, key signature of two sharps. Bass clef. Measure numbers 145, 146, 147, 148, and 149 are indicated. A fermata is placed over the final note of measure 149, with the letters "ST" written above it.

Two empty musical staves at the bottom of the page.



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## ABSTRACT

The Quintet for Clarinet and Strings in A, K. 581, by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, was completed on September 29, 1789. It was written for Anton Stadler (1753-1812), one of the leading clarinetists of that time. Mozart's friendship with Stadler was so unselfish that he not only wrote for Stadler the Quintet, but also the lovely Concerto for Clarinet in A, K. 622, two years later. At times Stadler took advantage of Mozart's extreme loyalty, but were it not for their association, these two works so important to the clarinet literature might never have been written.

By 1789 Mozart had attained the mastery of his art, achieving a perfect balance between form and content, polish and charm on one hand and textural and emotional depth on the other. He wrote his three greatest symphonies, in E flat, G minor, and C major, in 1788. At this time Mozart lived in Vienna, and was composer in residence for Joseph II, for about half the salary of his predecessor. But in spite of his poverty and personal disappointments Mozart became one of the greatest composers in history.

Mozart had been fascinated with the clarinet since he first heard the instrument at the age of eight. While he used the clarinet in his orchestral works and operas, he had only introduced it twice into chamber music. From one of those works, the Trio for Clarinet, Viola, and Piano, K. 498, he may have realized the possibilities of using clarinet with strings alone. More than any other wind instrument, the clarinet

possessed the qualities to both blend and contrast with the string tone.

Mozart faced the possibilities of treating the clarinet as a solo instrument, thus not writing a quintet at all, or of ignoring the special characteristics of the instrument and producing dull chamber music. Mozart made neither mistake, but made it possible for the clarinet to shine through, yet slighting none of the instruments.

The opening melody of the first movement is announced by the strings and is balanced beautifully by the enlargement of the second theme in the key of the dominant by the clarinet. Not until the development does the clarinet announce the opening theme, in the remote key of C major. The development belongs mainly to the strings, the clarinet moving up and down on the common chord.

In the second movement Mozart gave Stadler a continuous, flowing song for the clarinet. His mastery of the art shines through in the simple charm of the melody.

The Minuet assembles all five instruments in almost perfect equality. The first trio, however, is for the string quartet alone, in the tonic minor. A second trio, which is rather unusual, is mainly a clarinet solo.

The fourth movement is a theme with variations, recognizing the importance of all five instruments. It is a glorious ending to a magnificent work, one of the greatest and most charming works in the literature for wind instruments.