

STRING QUARTET: ANALYSIS

by

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A MASTER'S REPORT

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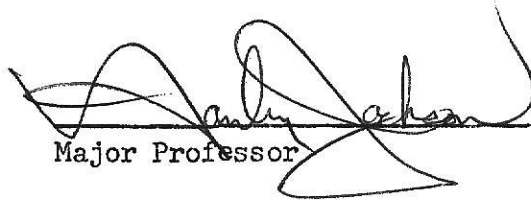
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INTRODUCTION

This report is an analysis of the composition String Quartet (1973), a four-movement work submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Music in composition and theory. The composer's objectives in writing this string quartet were twofold:

(1) To create a large, monothematic work on a theme of particular personal interest and inspiration to the composer.

(2) To write a neo-classical string quartet as a means of defining and illustrating a thorough understanding of a principal vehicle for compositional expression not only in the classical period but throughout the various historical eras since that time.

The composition was not written for performance by any particular ensemble. It is believed that the work, though difficult in some respects, is within the artistic and technical grasp of an average ensemble of professional musicians.

I. MEDIUM

The performance medium for which this work was composed is the traditional string quartet. The instrumentation, therefore, consists of first violin, second violin, viola, and cello.

II. MELODY

The most significant parameter of the work, in the opinion of its composer, is the melodic aspect. The work is monothematic, and the theme is a ten-note melody which is the musical realization of the surname of the dedicatee, Dr. Robert A. Steinbauer.

Four of the ten letters (E, B, A, E) occur normally in the contemporary seven-letter musical alphabet. In order to transliterate the remaining six letters (S, T, I, N, U, R) to musical pitch names, the composer used the table presented in Willi Apel's article on German lute tablature in the Harvard Dictionary of Music. The diagram and its accompanying explanation appear below:

		Frets							
		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Courses	{ g'	5	e	k	p	v	**	ē	Ƒ
	{ d'	4	d	i	o	t	*	ḍ	Ǝ
	{ a	3	c	h	n	s	z	ċ	Ɔ
	{ f	2	b	g	m	r	y	ḃ	ḡ
	{ c	1	a	f	l	q	x	ā	Ǝ
	{ G	7	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

This system is much more awkward than the others, mainly because it was originally designed (15th cent.) for a lute with only five courses and was broadened later (16th cent.) by the inclusion of signs for the sixth (lowest) course. [Apel refers here to the horizontal line of numbers at the bottom of the diagram, 1, 2, 3...8, which represent the signs used for the lowest string.] The table here shows the most common system of designation: figures 1-5 for the open courses (read from bottom to top); the letters of the alphabet (completed by two special signs designated here * and **) for the frets 1-5; the same letters with dashes for the higher frets. The table shows that, e.g., the sign h denotes the tone b (two semitones above a), and the sign x the tone f (five semitones above c).¹

¹Willi Apel, "Tablature," Harvard Dictionary of Music, 2d ed., rev. (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1969), p. 831.

Hence, the reader can determine for himself that the letter s would represent the pitch c# (four semitones above a), t would represent f# (four semitones above d), i would be e (two semitones above d), n would be c (three semitones above a), and r would represent a (four semitones above f). Since the letter u was not included in the German lute tablature, the composer substituted the letter v, which would represent b (four semitones higher than g).

Therefore, the musical realization of the name Steinbauer would be c#, f#, e, e, c, b, a, b, e, a; a particularly fortunate arrangement of pitches which the composer found not only very workable but also quite attractive musically. After consideration of various octave transpositions, these ten pitch names were notated by the composer in the following arrangement:



As can be seen in the above example, the melody ranges a perfect eleventh. There are instances of both conjunct and disjunct motion, and the melodic contour can be diagrammed as follows:



The intervals between successive melody notes are particularly well-suited to the composer's quartal and tonal style of writing. This schedule of interval relationships and direction of motion can be seen below:

↑ P4, ↓ M2, ↓ P8, ↑ m6, ↓ m2, ↓ M2, ↑ M2, ↑ P4, ↑ P4

Other melodic material is used in the work but will not be as thoroughly discussed in this analysis. Instances of melody other than