JERUSALEM QUARTET

JOSEPH HAYDN (1732–1809)
Quartet in B-flat major Op. 76 No. 4 "Sunrise"
Allegro con spirito
Adagio
Menuetto. Allegro
Finale. Allegro ma non troppo
(approx. 23 minutes)

LEOŠ JANÁČEK (1854–1928)
Quartet No. 1 "Kreutzer Sonata"
Adagio – Vivo
Con moto – Vivo - Andante
Con moto – Adagio – Più mosso
(approx. 19 minutes)

- INTERMISSION -

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770–1827)
Quartet in B-flat major Op. 130
with Grosse Fuge finale Op. 133
Adagio ma non troppo - Allegro
Presto
Andante
Alla danza tedesca. Allegro assai
Cavatina. Adagio molto espressivo
Grosse Fuge: Overtura. Allegro – Meno mosso e moderato – Allegro - Fuga
(approx. 55 minutes)

Joseph Haydn

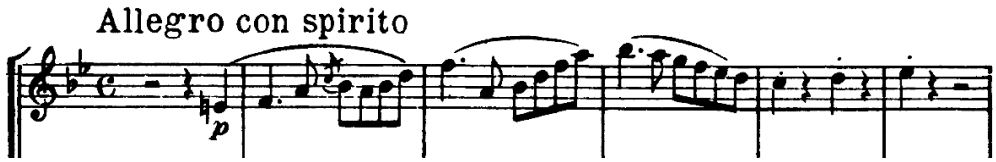
Quartet in B-flat major Op. 76 No. 4 "Sunrise"

In the six string quartets of Op. 76, composed in Vienna between 1796 and 1797, we catch Joseph Haydn at the peak of his powers and the height of his fame. After two lucrative tours in England (1790–1791 and 1794–1795) sponsored by impresario Johann Peter Salamon (1745-1815), as well as an honorary doctorate from Oxford University, Haydn was a "hot property" in the European concert world and was free to compose completely as he wished.

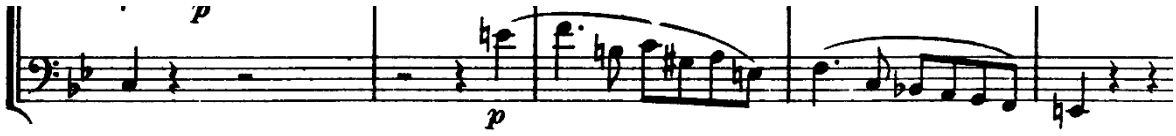
Among the innovations he felt free to introduce in his Op. 76 string quartets were unusually *slow*, deeply emotional slow-movements and, by contrast, unusually *quick*, whimsically playful minuets that could easily pass for scherzos — features that his student Beethoven would go on to develop when, in 1798, he composed his first string quartets, Op. 18.

* * *

The fourth of Haydn's Op. 76 quartets opens with a gesture that prompted its admirers to give it the nickname "Sunrise." This gesture sees the first violin mount up melodically, like the sun appearing at dawn, against a soothing sustained harmony in the lower instruments, which plays the role of the fixed horizon.

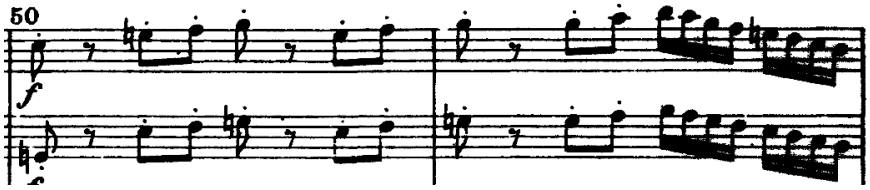


And in this opening are planted the seeds of the movement's motivic discussion. Witness, for example, how Haydn, in another one of his famous "monothematic" moods, uses an inversion of this opening as his second theme, presented by the cello.



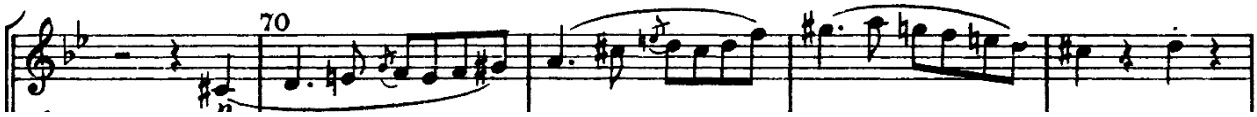
This kind of motivic density is yet another trademark feature of Haydn's style that Beethoven would go on to adopt and develop.

And in that vein, note as well how Haydn even begins to develop his first theme in the exposition itself, in the little "rising 3rd" motives that mimic, in diminution, the last three notes of the opening theme.



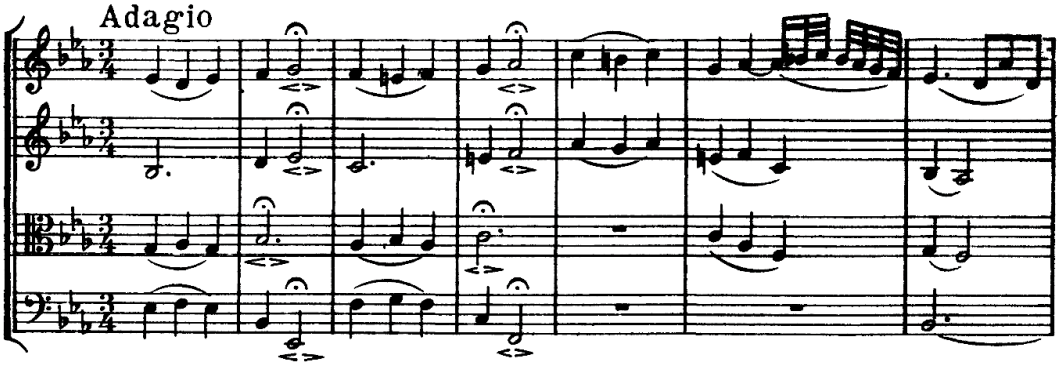
Such was Haydn's talent that he could offer his connoisseur listeners an artwork that combined the Enlightenment Era's taste for the play of ideas with its desire for upbeat optimism and innocent merriment.

Optimism and merriment interrupted by *drama*, of course, in furtherance of which Haydn begins his development section in the minor mode

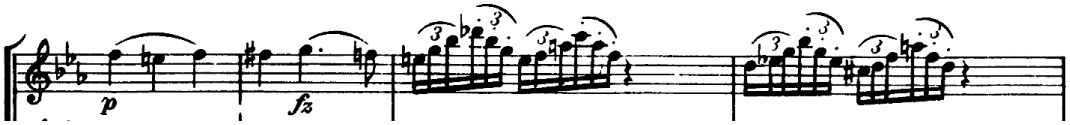


with the "rising 3rds" motif in diminution constantly biting at the heels of whatever dark implications this minor-mode excursion might present. And then the "sunny" mood of the opening returns from behind the clouds to conquer all in a recapitulation that hosts no surprises.

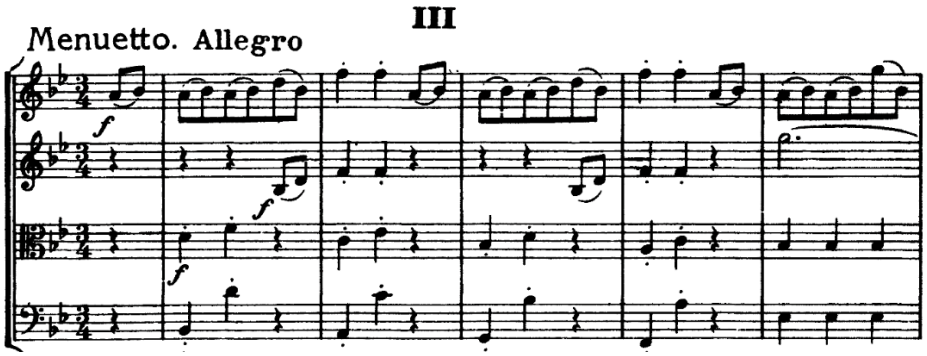
Haydn moves into deeply emotional territory in his ponderous *Adagio* slow movement, with its intense concentration on the opening five notes in the first violin.



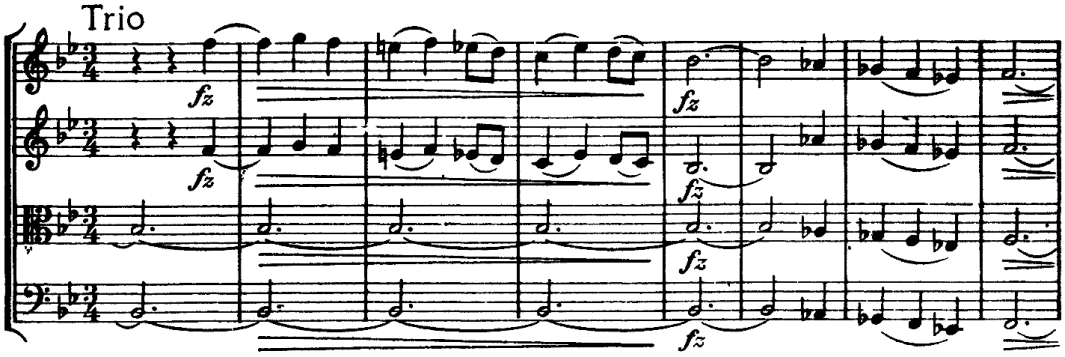
Variously described as being in "modified sonata form" or constituting a "free fantasia," this movement makes clear its obsessive focus on those opening five notes which echo throughout, occasionally decorated with ornamental lacework in 16ths.



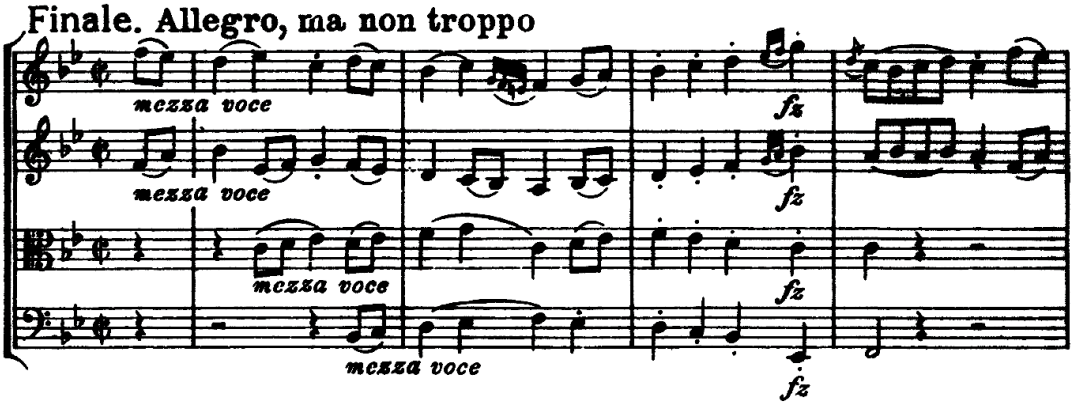
Haydn's third-movement *Minuetto* is a jovial precursor to Beethoven's scherzos with its musingly playful tone, stomping rhythms and its concentration on small repeated motivic units.



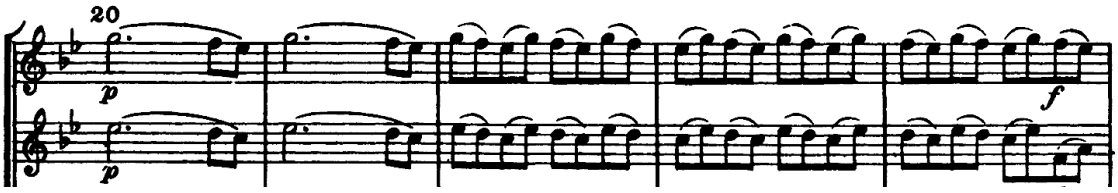
The *Trio* edges even closer to a "country bumpkin" aesthetic in its use of rustic-sounding drones, typical of folk music from the Hungarian countryside.



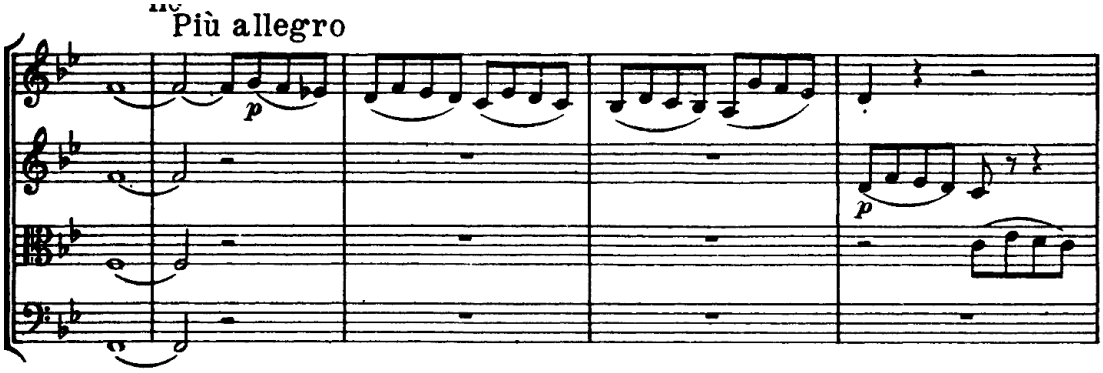
Haydn returns to his penchant for "mono-thematicism" in a finale firmly centered on variations of its opening theme, which is a kind of lilting English shanty tune, made all the more jaunting and merry by the plentiful application of melodic ornaments.



Particularly ear-tickling are moments of rhythmic delirium such as this, in which jazzy triplet groupings overlap with a duplet metrical pulse.



One final surprise awaits the listener, though, in the movement's final pages, which feature a madcap acceleration of tempo that begins as if intending to develop into a right royal *fugato*



but ends up as just another speeded-up chuckle-fest riffing on the prominent motives of the opening tune.

Leoš Janáček

Quartet No. 1 "Kreutzer Sonata"

Janáček's String Quartet No. 1 (1923) is an erotically charged musical narrative based on Tolstoy's short story *The Kreutzer Sonata* (1889), a tale of marital misery and murderous jealousy. In the story, a couple finds relief from their dreary marriage in the home visits of a young violinist with whom the wife enjoys performing Beethoven's "Kreutzer" Sonata, Op. 47. The relationship between professional violinist and amateur pianist is innocent, but the husband, arriving home late one night to find the two of them dining together, thinks otherwise. In a jealous rage, he fatally stabs his wife with the nearest piece of cutlery — an "honour" crime of which he is later acquitted at trial.

Events in the composer's private life, specifically his own unhappy marriage and a series of extramarital affairs, suggest a personal motivation for his interest in this story. In one of his many letters to Kamila Stösslová, a married woman almost 40 years his junior with whom he was in love, Janáček confided that in composing his string quartet

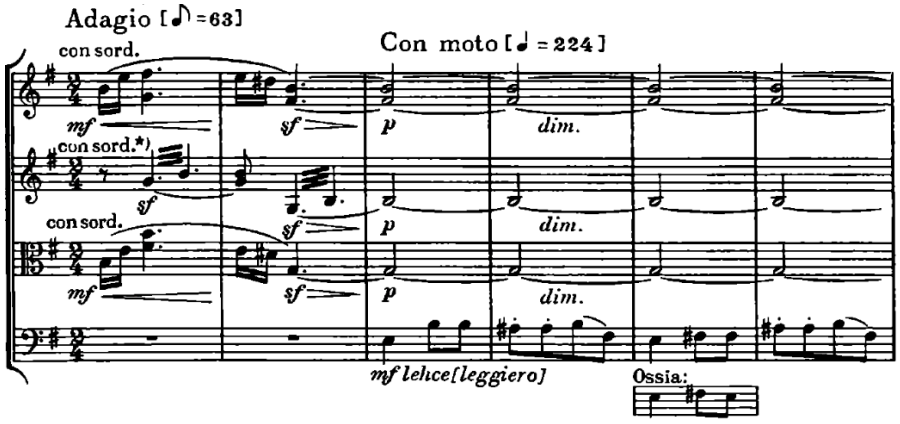
> I was imagining a poor woman, tormented and run down, just like the one the Russian writer Tolstoy describes in his Kreutzer Sonata.

* * *

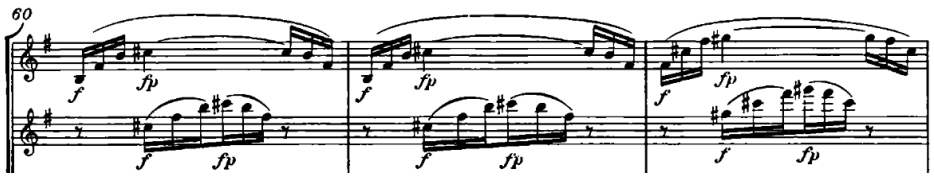
The four movements of Janáček's string quartet may conjecturally be thought of as portraying four scenes from Tolstoy's dramatic tale. The first movement evokes the wife's emotional state in her marriage. The second introduces the young violinist to the household. In the third, a bond of mutual sympathy develops between the wife and the musician as they play Beethoven together, and in the fourth the deadly events at dinner unfold.

Janáček's musical language is all his own, much influenced by the folk traditions of his native Moravia. Modal harmony prevails, neither purely major nor purely minor, with chords often built out of 4ths. His melodies are not the long-limbed, hummable tunes of his fellow Czechs Dvořák and Smetana but are rather doled out in short melodic fragments, patterned after the rhythms of popular speech. These cellular units of a bar or two each unfold in a series of juxtapositions and repetitions that suggest filmic montage. The result is a texture of restless movement, constantly in flux, with frequent changes of meter and tempo, its various sections at times riding atop churning *ostinato* patterns. Spurring the quartet players to pull a maximum of emotional energy from the score of this quartet are indications such as "shyly," "desperately," and "as if in tears."

The most important motive of the work is announced in the opening bars: a pair of heaving sighs, disposed in the form of a melodic arch, the first sigh rising up, the second falling back. This is followed immediately by a jaunty drone-supported folk tune.

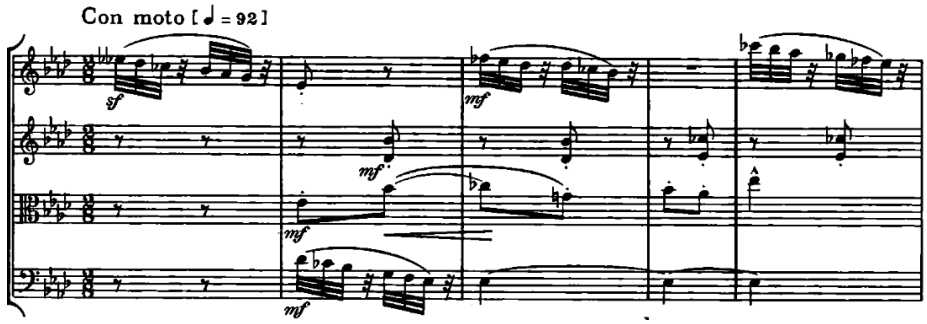


Each movement contains juxtapositions of this kind between expressions of throbbing emotional intensity and elements of playfulness and animation — a representation, perhaps, of the psychological terrain that the unhappy housewife is treading in her "musical infidelity" to her husband. Moreover, a common characteristic of this first movement's musical material, an "arch" pattern of melodies that venture out from a point of origin only to return to it immediately afterwards,

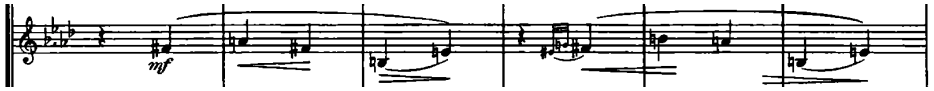


imitates precisely the shape of an important theme from the first movement of Beethoven's "Kreutzer" Sonata that will be quoted more explicitly in the third movement.

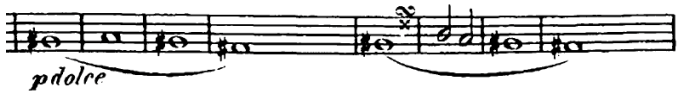
The second movement has a dance-like nimbleness, perhaps evoking the welcome merriment that duo music-making has brought to the household.



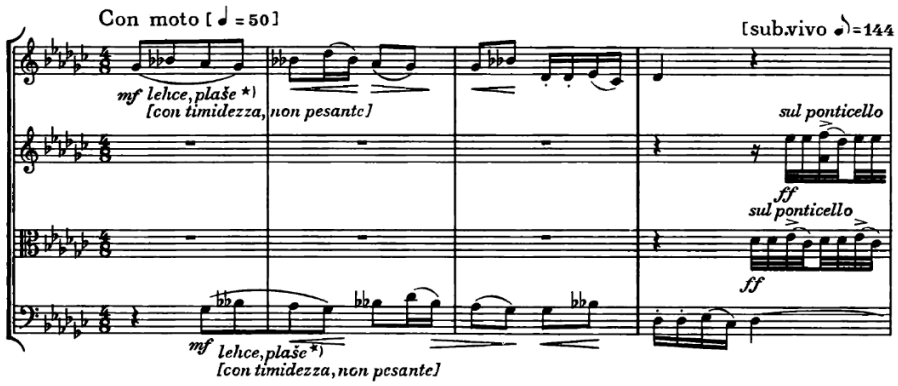
The menacing, scratchy sounds of sections played *sul ponticello* hint, however, at the trouble lying ahead. Even more suspenseful are the intimations — contained in this obsesive 5-note motive that pervades the movement — of the melodic curve of the Kreutzer Sonata theme to come.



And that motif taken from the second theme of the Kreutzer Sonata's first movement



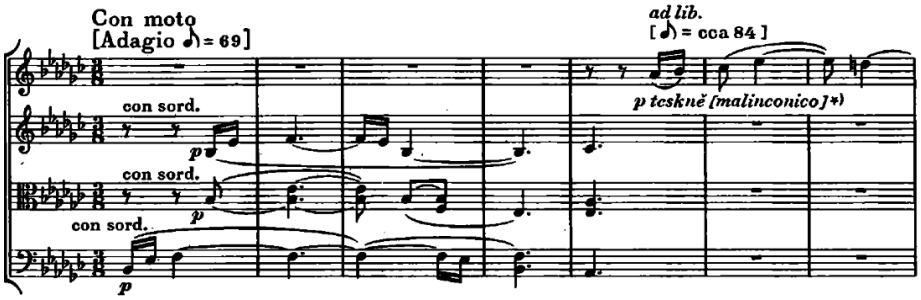
is announced in its most literal form at the opening of the third movement, in imitation between the first violin and the cello.



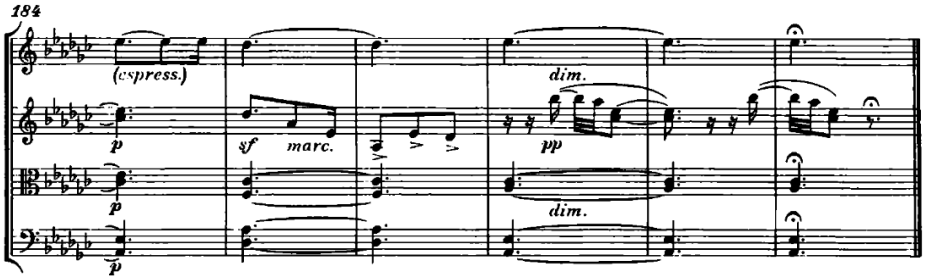
In this opening gesture of the third movement, we hear the housewife pianist and the young violinist artistically (and personally) intertwined in a close imitative treatment of the Kreutzer Sonata motive between first violin and cello. But here, too, portents of danger loom.

The Beethoven excerpt has been recast in the minor mode, and sudden loud interruptions of their imitative play, with the same material played at double speed (as in the *ponticello* motives at the end of the first line), puncture the dream state of their music-making.

The fourth movement opens with a sad meditation on the heaving sighs that opened the work.



The rising-and-falling shape of this motive gradually becomes the focus of increasing animation as the dining scene is enacted. Shockingly, this arch-like melodic motive, emblematic of the unhappy wife's longing and yearning, becomes the very stabbing gesture that kills her in the final bars.



Ludwig van Beethoven
Quartet in B-flat major Op. 130

Beethoven's thirteenth string quartet, written in 1825, is a massive work comprising six movements and lasting more than three quarters of an hour. It is also considered one of the most head-scratching, enigmatic works in the classical canon, one that has baffled musicologists and music theorists to this day.

The aspect of the work most responsible for uniting fingernail to hair follicle in a scratching motion is the last movement, the so-called "Great Fugue," a work of such formal extravagance that it moved Beethoven's publisher to tactfully suggest that the composer might wish to replace it with something a tad more … "digestible." Which he did, in fact, writing a traditional finale for the first publication of the quartet in 1826 and leaving the original Grosse Fuge to be published separately as his Op. 133.

This afternoon, however, the work is being performed according to its original conception, and there is much to recommend this decision. For all its small-scale difficulties (notably the bizarre dynamic markings and frequent changes in metre, tone and mood) the large-scale shape of this work, as originally conceived, is clear. While it may be a hard nut to crack, the nut is clearly divided into an intellectually engaging outer "shell" (the first and last movements) and a meaty inner "core" of rewarding musical "nuggets" (the four movements in between).

The two outer movements are musical hybrids, "fantasies" masquerading as more serious musical forms: the first movement is playing at being in sonata form while the last is a fugue at a masked ball, changing masks faster than a flirt changes dance partners. These outer movements are colourfully "contrasty" (to use Joseph Kerman's term) while the four inner movements are remarkably concentrated, each picking a single mood and sticking with it. The outer movements flash with the dazzling charm of the fast card trick, while the inner movements grab the heart in an ever-closer embrace of simple, nourishing emotion.

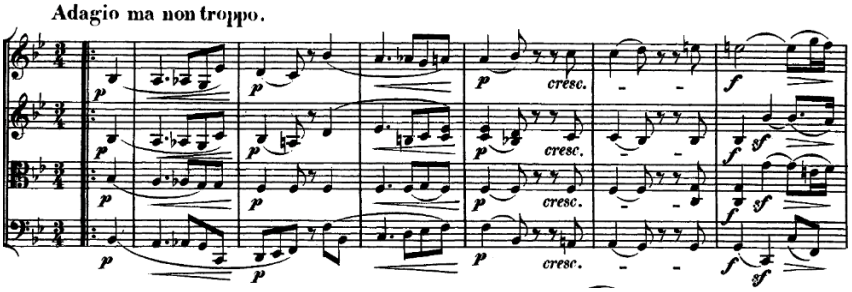
It's quite a ride, this quartet. So here is your dance card.

* * *

The first movement is quite a raucous affair, a kaleidoscope of changing emotional states that playfully toys with the formal expectations of the listener, beginning with the role of the *slow introduction* in sonata form.

This is an ever-so-traditional procedure (used in Haydn's Symphonies 101 and 104, for example, as well as in Beethoven's Symphonies 1 and 7) to ease you gently and solemnly into the sound world of the piece you are about to hear,

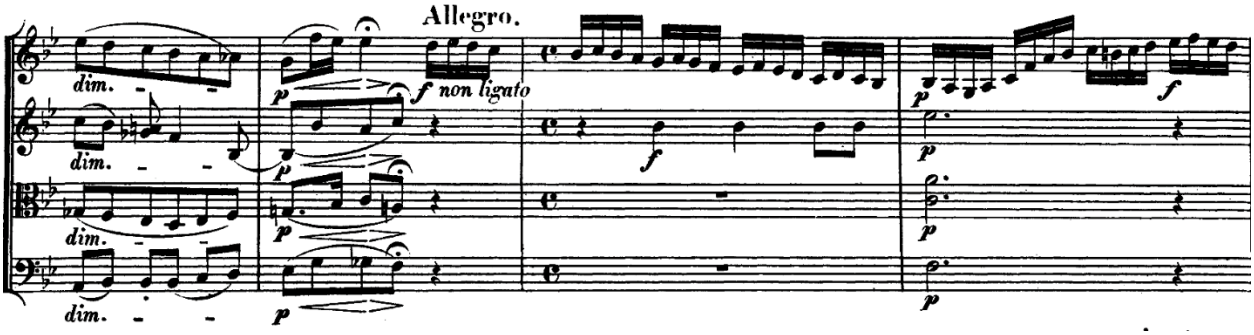
making sure to whet your appetite along the way with mysteriously short phrases and suspiciously loitering harmonies.



Full marks to Beethoven on that score. But then, once this introductory function is fulfilled, the piece proper is roundly expected to take off like a scalded cat with the "real" start of the movement at an Allegro clip.

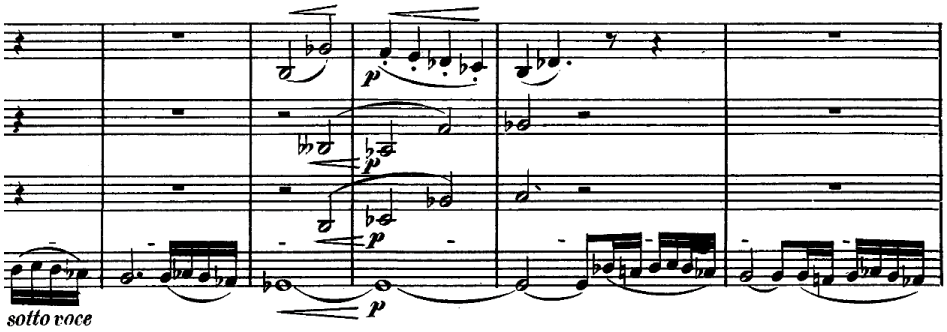
The slow introduction is like an usher who shows you ceremonially to your seat and then leaves you to enjoy your evening's entertainment, never to be heard from again. Said usher, needless to say, is *not* expected to sit down beside you and interrupt every time a stray thought enters his head. And yet, that is just what the slow introduction to this movement does.

No sooner have you left behind the tender musings that open the work, and you start to follow the spiffy tumbling 16th-note figures of the movement's first subject, accompanied by a "trumpet call" motive in the second violin,



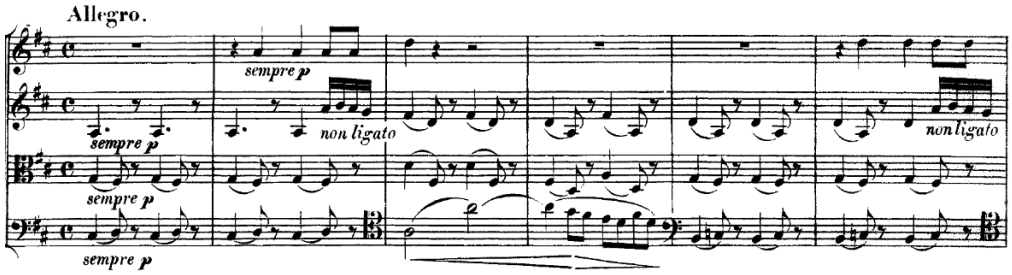
than the slow introduction pops up ***again*** (!) after a few bars to say "You know, I was just thinking…" and then promptly disappears again. Very odd. Anyone who has sat beside a talkative stranger of questionable marble-count on public transit will know just how awkward these situations can quickly become.

But no matter, the exposition finally gets underway in earnest with a vigorously pursued agenda of constantly chattering 16ths that finally give way to a slower, more vocally inspired second subject in longer note values.



At the traditional repeat of the exposition, however, up pops your slow-introduction usher again to show you to your seat (the one you are already occupying) as if the two of you had never met. Within the frame of expectations of the sonata-consuming public, it all seems like this slow introduction is turning out to be more like some kind of "ritornello" framing the onrush of musical events to provide a unifying thread to the proceedings. And in this regard, notice how the second theme, although quite different in melodic character from the first, is accompanied in the cello by scatterings of the first theme's pesky 16ths. Perhaps there is, after all, some method to this madness.

By now, however, this is the least of your problems. The development section that follows is one of Beethoven's strangest. A "development" is normally the place where all the musical washing is done and tumult reigns as the preceding thematic material is sudsed up right proper and put through the contrapuntal wringer. But this development section is the least active segment of the whole movement,



seeming more like an eerie moonwalk of trance-like calm, numbly self-absorbed in its own obsessive rocking rhythm while frequently echoing the "trumpet call" motive from the first theme.

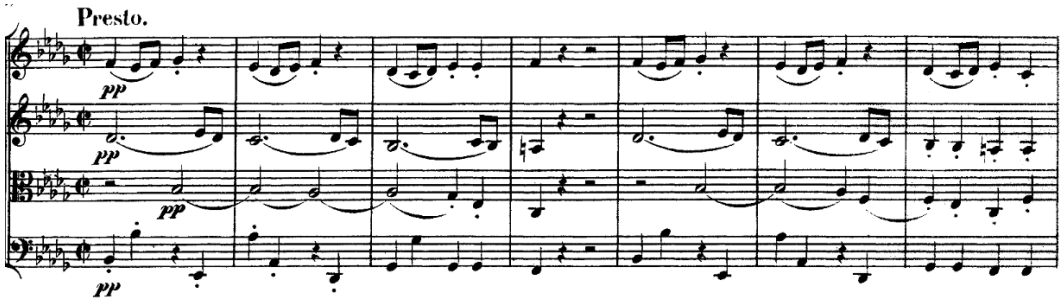
And yet a perfectly normal recapitulation sets you back on familiar ground. But just as things are drawing to a close, here once again comes the slow introduction interrupting every effort to keep the music moving forward, until finally cooler heads prevail and the musical conversation comes to a rousing conclusion.

All this might seem the height of musical impudence, but Beethoven has done this before, in one of his earliest works. His Pathétique Sonata in C minor,

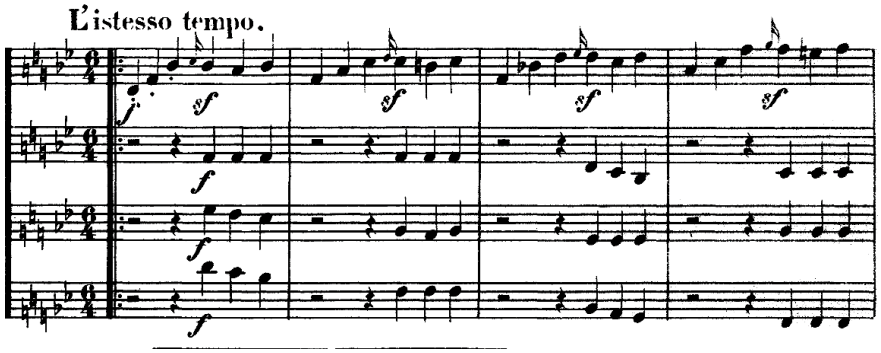
Op. 13, features a slow introduction that occurs, and interrupts, in exactly the same three places within the first movement.

* * *

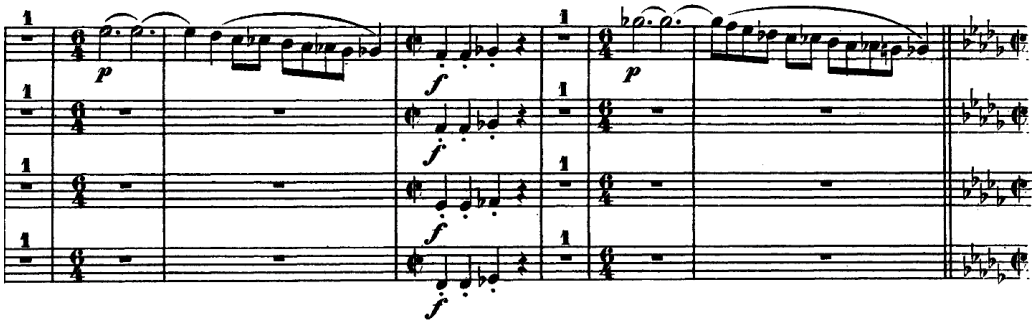
The much more straightforward and emotionally homogenous inner movements begin with a furtively whispered *Presto* in the tonic minor that gives every indication of wanting to be a full-on scherzo in ternary form,



but its "trio" middle section provides little by way of contrast in pacing apart from a change in meter.



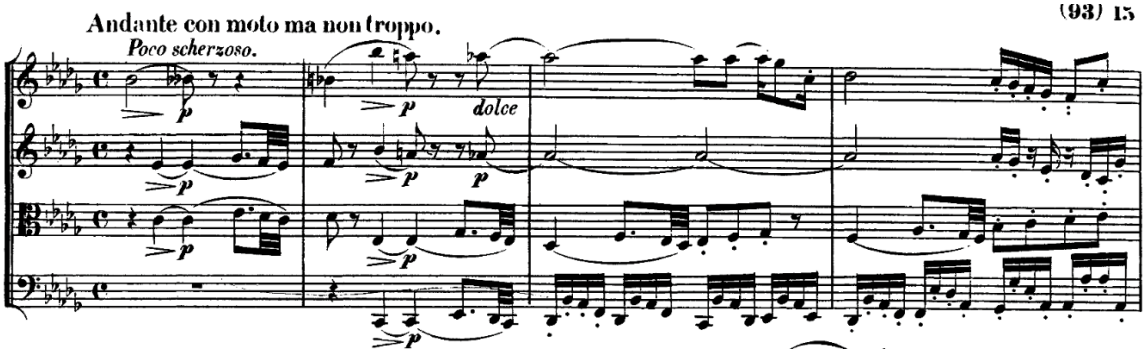
Despite its minor-mode seriousness and breathless heartbeat rhythm, the mood is anything but grim. Its quick, double-hairpin dynamic markings add a humorous "leering" quality to the phrasing that the written-out "peekaboo" glissandi in the retransition to the opening



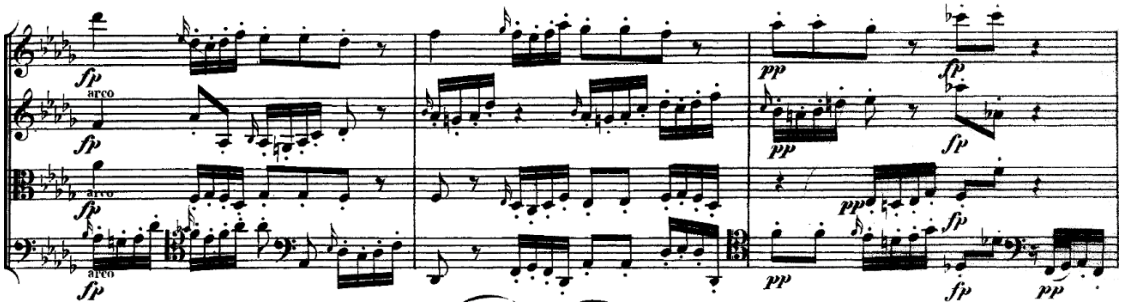
almost push to an open giggle of glee.

* * *

The charm offensive begins in earnest in the third movement *Andante,* where we find ourselves more than knee-deep in the Viennese whipped cream that Brahms serves up in his most sumptuous slow movements. The wonderfully unbuttoned, easy-breathing melody that begins in the viola (measure 3) and then is taken up by the first violin evokes a pleasant walk in the park, the walking pace reinforced by a constant metronomic tick-tock in the accompaniment.



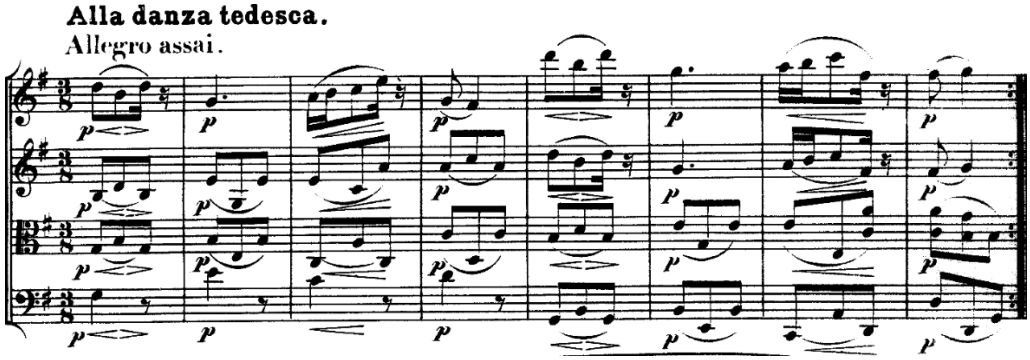
The second theme in this sonata-form movement, with its choppy staccato articulation



provides a measure of contrast to the breezy lyricism of the opening “walk in the park” theme.

* * *

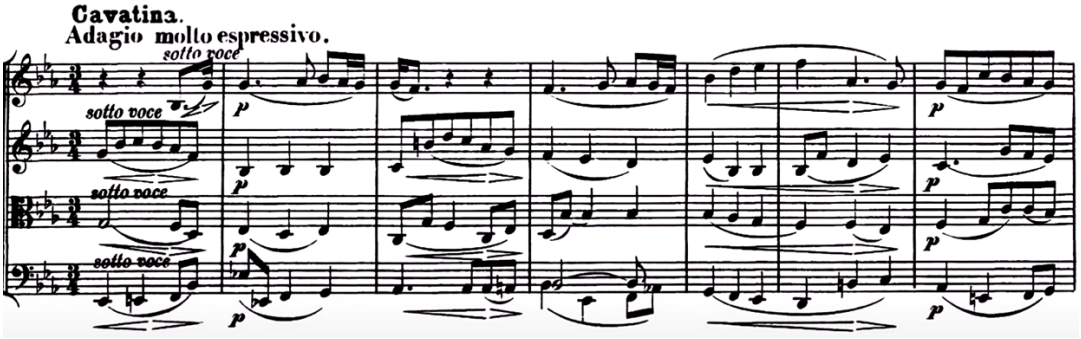
The fourth movement *Alla danza tedesca* takes lilting to a whole new level in its ever more sophisticated textural treatments and melodic variations of a nostalgically simple tune, reminiscent of a waltz.



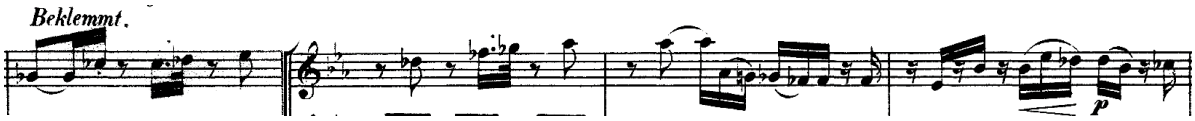
Constructed in the A-B-A form used in the minuet and trio, its reprise features a ravishingly elaborated version of the opening, enlivened by a little game of "Who's got the theme?" at the end, in which each instrument takes a single bar of the tune (and not even in the right order) to round out the movement on a note of wit and whimsy.

* * *

We arrive at the warm beating heart of this quartet in its fifth movement, the operatically named *Cavatina,* and what a wellspring of operatic emotion it is.



Beethoven confessed that he could never think of this movement without weeping, and the score bears every mark of the emotion he felt: the low tessitura of the two violins, the sigh motives on the first beats of the bar, the reluctance to cadence and, above all, the unrestrained pathos of the section marked *Beklemmt* (choked up),



in which the first violin breaks away to sob openly in front of its companions.

This Cavatina was chosen by Carl Sagan for inclusion on the Golden Record placed on the two Voyager spacecrafts launched in 1977, meant to convey the heights of human achievement to whichever intelligent life form might find them.

* * *

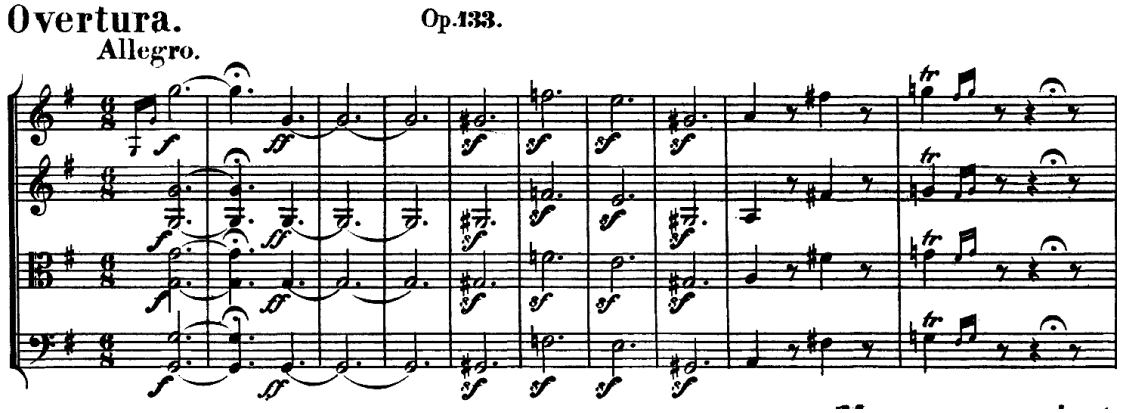
The *Grosse Fuge* last movement, by contrast, has seemed, in the minds of many, to have charted the opposite path, arriving to us on Earth from somewhere deep in outer space. Indeed, musical analysts with cranial cavities considerably larger than that of the present writer have spent many an hour that could well have been more profitably spent sorting laundry trying to understand what are referred to as the "problems of continuity" in this movement, as if its overall form constituted some kind of compositional speech impediment that needed to be excused or explained.

Perhaps it is the sheer scale of this movement, in all dimensions, that so baffles the musical pundits. Was the great composer responding to an inner voice asking: “Would you like to supersize that fugue?”

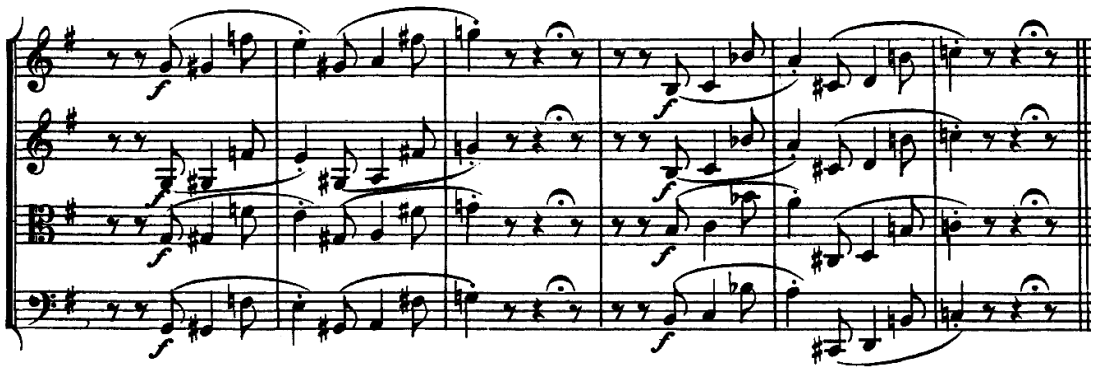
Admittedly, the movement *does* occupy fully one third of the quartet’s entire length, and its range of expression is nothing if not extreme, with dramatically large leaps peppering the melodic outline of its fugue subject, and dynamic indications such as ***ff, f*** and ***sf*** profusely scattered throughout the score, sometimes on every beat for pages on end.

Worse still, the question of formal propriety posed by the first movement’s slow introduction seems to have progressed in this finale to a full-blown case of multiple personality disorder, given the way that it opens. There was, after all, no tradition of starting a fugue with a slow introduction, or an introduction of any kind whatsoever. And yet as the finale opens, under the grandiose name of ***Overtura,*** we are served up a series of short thematic statements, each abandoned immediately after a single phrase, like someone changing TV channels with the remote every five or six seconds. Each short phrase is in a different rhythm and has a different character.

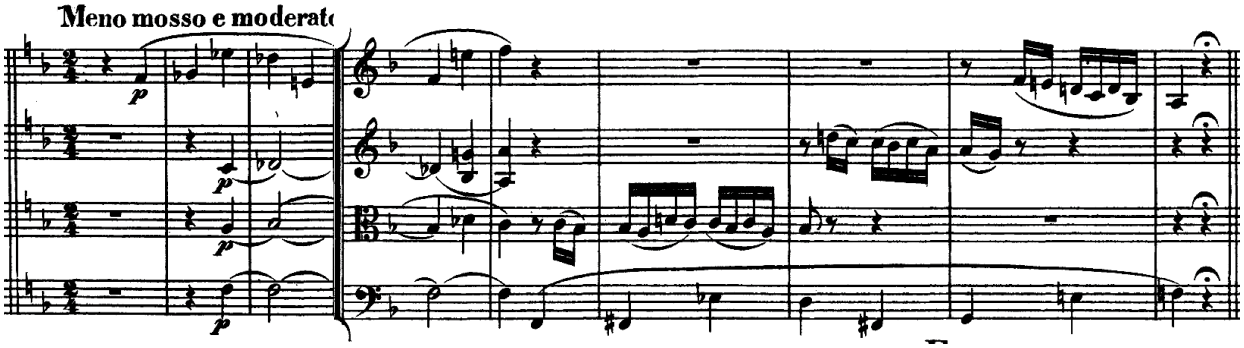
First comes a bold, strident declaration in half notes comprising an odd mix of gaping intervals and stepwise motion, ending in a trill that vanishes into utter silence.



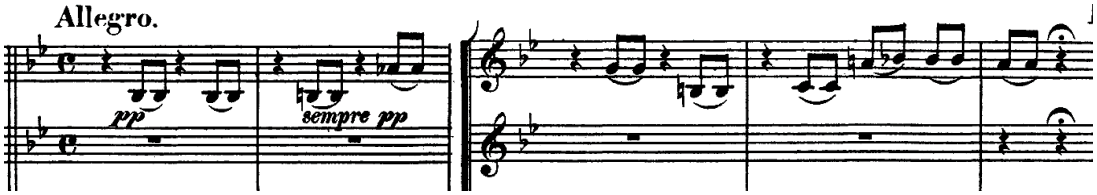
Then an almost flippant, skippy-dippy version of the same melodic intervals, but in a triplet rhythm.



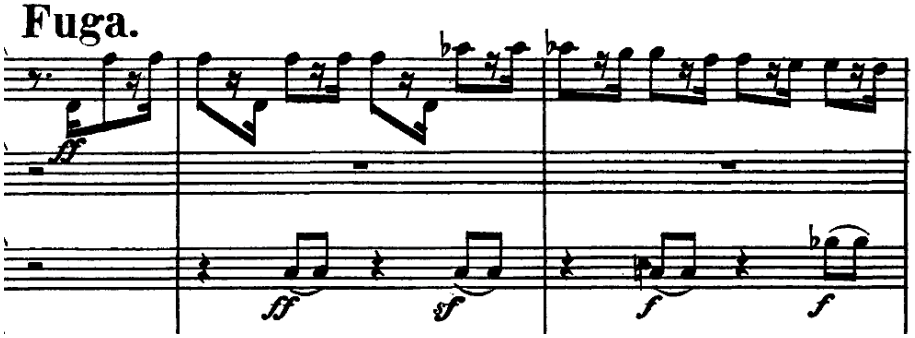
Followed by a more soothing, placid variant of these, with an interesting countersubject in 16ths that will become even more interesting later on.



The same melodic intervals then return, this time chopped up and separated by rests.



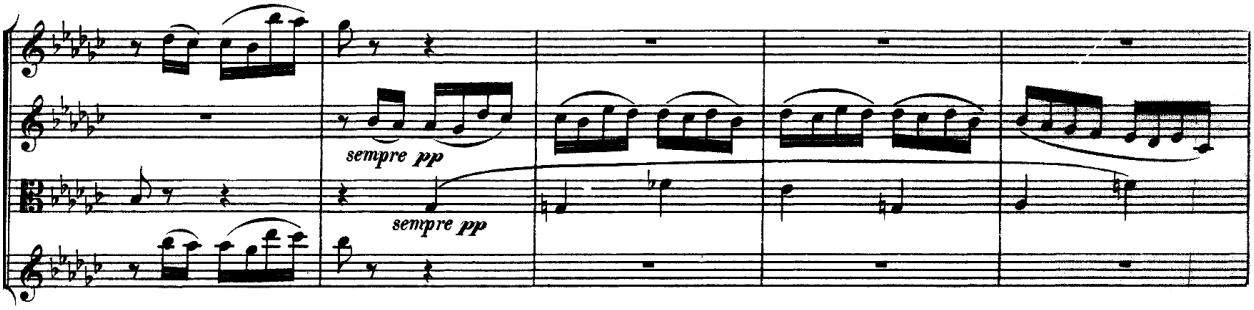
And then finally a jagged-edged, wildly leaping fugue theme arrives, using the "chopped up" theme as its countersubject.



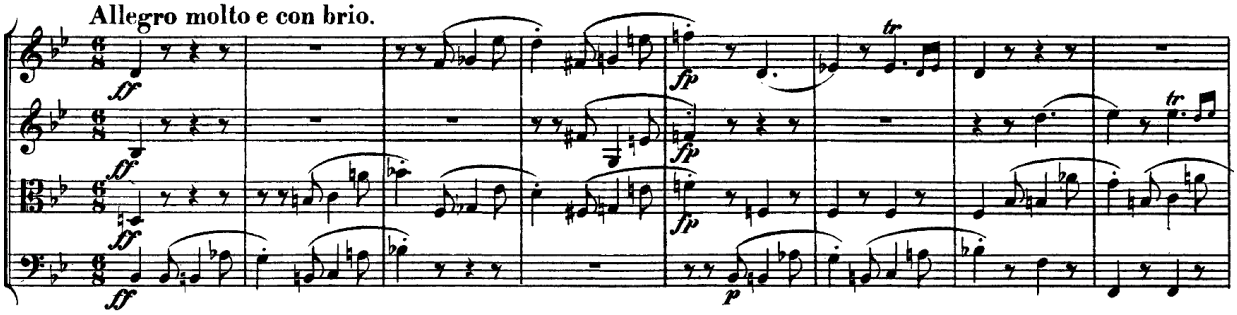
Has Beethoven gone barking mad? Crazy like a fox, I would say. When starting out on a movement of such breathtaking length, what better way to

prepare the listener for the arduous road ahead than to provide a "table of contents" indicating the various transforms of the theme to be encountered along the way?

After the constant jangling of the dotted rhythms in the fugue's first section, there comes welcome relief in the more relaxed exploration of the "countersubject" in 16ths from the third item in the "table of contents."

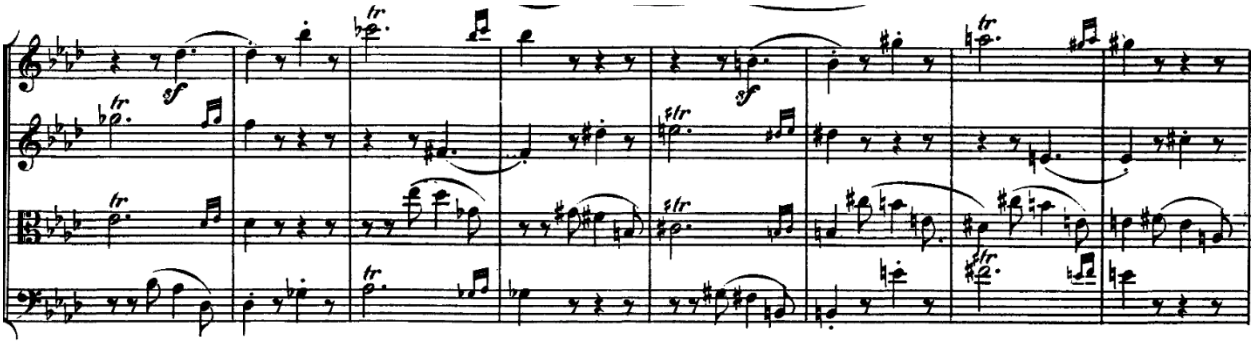


Later, it is the "skippy-dippy" variant in a triplet rhythm that takes over, embellished now with its own countersubject, a trill figure that will have its own day in the sun as the fugue progresses.



In writing this "fugal fantasy," Beethoven not only treats his material according to standard fugal procedures (stretto, inversion, augmentation, etc.), he combines these with the processes of sonata development as well, creating as wildly different versions of the major variants as he presented at the outset.

One of these processes, which he had already used in the Fifth Symphony, is to delete notes from the theme to make it splinter into shorter and shorter fragments. In this case he focuses on that "trill countersubject," reducing it to a duel between competing pairs of players, like dogs snarling at each other in a dispute over a bone.



But the contrapuntal and developmental tricks that Beethoven employs in this titanic movement, both fugal and sonata-form-developmental, are too numerous to itemize in detail. The attentive listener is left dazzled by their sheer profusion and the intellectual brilliance underpinning their construction.

The result is an uninhibited virtuosic display of compositional mastery, an *1812 Overture* of intellectual fireworks unique in the literature of Western music.

Donald G. Gíslason 2025