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Musical Dialogue in John Harbison's *String Quartet No. 4*

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Dramatic instrumental dialogue is often found in the instrumental music of 18th century music; nevertheless, in the early 21st century it is best heard in Harbison's *String Quartet No. 4* (2001). Although this Quartet is not a dramatic nor programmatic work, it still evokes a kind of instrumental dialogue and dramatic quality presentation through its instrumental design. Each instrument in the quartet is treated as an individual character in the composition. These different instrumental characters "call" and "respond" to one another in an imaginative and abstract way, contributing various intriguing musical qualities to the composition. The dialogue is consistent throughout the quartet. This study aims to enhance our appreciation of the diverse materials and ideas used in Harbison's music, and at the same time provide us with a better understanding of the compositional techniques that he employed.

Harbison's music is often described as "unabashedly 'complicated,' invested with highly developed interrelationships between text and music, tone and temperament, past and present, obvious and subtle, direct and indirect."[1] And yet it is "original, varied, and absorbing—relatively easy for audiences to grasp and yet formal and complex enough to hold our interest through repeated hearings—his style boasts both lucidity and logic."[2] As a composer, Harbison tries "to make each piece different from the others, to find clear, fresh large designs, to reinvent traditions."[3] Moreover, he encourages composers to have a self-conscious awareness of history, tradition and precedent in music. He believes that "composers must have a clear sense of history—not the usual chronological sequence, but a distinctive view of music history from their own perspective. This understanding

[1] Jess Anderson, "John Harbison, Composer," Madison Music Review, August 1996, accessed August 17, 2015, http://www.madisonmusicreviews.org/doc/p_199608_harbison.html.

[2] Quote in Joe Patti and Jill Pasternak, "How Sweet The Sound: John Harbison's Music Inspires Philadelphia Composers," *WRTI*, March 28, 2014, accessed: August 17, 2015, http://wrti.org/post/how-sweet-sound-john-harbisons-music-inspires-philadelphia-composers#stream/0.

[3] Quote in William Witwer, "Musical Influence in John Harbison's 'The Flight into Egypt'," *The Choral Journal* 43, no. 9 (April 2003): 7.

develops initially by studying music history and the major composers and works. From there a composer can explore more adventurous paths."[4]

Harbison encountered music of early periods at a young age from his father, a history professor at Princeton, who introduced him to J. S. Bach's cantata and other church music that influenced his later work.[5] During different stages of his creative career Harbison studied the compositions of Bach, Schütz, Mozart, Wagner, Gershwin, and many others. These composers not only had a profound influence on his music, but also led him to find his own voice. Harbison said:

> In adolescence: Mozart *String Quintets* and Bach *Cantatas*, Stravinsky Symphony of Psalms, Bartók Concerto for Orchestra. With jazz groups: Kern and Gershwin songs. Oscar Peterson, and later Horace Silver […] Nat King Cole. During college: more Stravinsky, some Hindemith and Dallapiccola. Bach and Mozart even more preponderant. Discovery of Monk and Parker. After college: Schütz a revelation of five hundred more things music can do. Schoenberg likewise but the price higher. Verdi, from complete misunderstanding to adoration, […] Bach still central […][6]

Harbison is especially intrigued with instrumental dialogues, and he introduces them in different styles. To him, music can be creatively captured and expressed to project and invoke any idea or imaginative image. As he once said, "music, [is] far from being powerless to express anything at all […]"[7]

In this *Quartet No. 4*, Harbison imagines each instrument as an operatic character. "It chooses as its protagonists the first violin and the cello, and projects them into an instinctive relationship, like encounters between operatic characters," he said.[8] These include dialogue between two or more instruments in either confrontation, or with agreeable manners. In most cases, melodic ideas are evenly distributed among individual instruments and complement each other. There are also times when Harbison does not make one or more instrumental characters speak when he has nothing to say. Indeed, in this composition much attention is given to the matter of a close relationship among instruments.

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4 Witwer, "Musical Influence," 8.

5 Barbara Isenberg, "Courting the Muse in the 20th Century: Despite a Pulitzer and a MacArthur Grant, Contemporary Composer John Harbison still Has to Fight the Good Fight," *Los Angeles Times*, April 22, 1990, accessed: August 17, 2015, http://articles.latimes.com/1990-04-22/entertainment/ca-218_1_composer-john-harbison.

6 John Harbison, "Six Tanglewood Talks (1, 2, 3)," *Perspectives of New Music* 23, no. 2 (Spring–Summer 1985): 14.

7 John Harbison, "Six Tanglewood Talks (4, 5, 6)," *Perspectives of New Music* 24, no. 1 (Autumn–Winter 1985): 46.

8 Preface to John Harbison, *String Quartet No. 4* (New York: Associated Music Published, Inc., 2002).

Throughout the composition, the four movements of the quartet demonstrate various, yet individual conversational characters between instruments. This inspiration came from his earlier encounter with Mozart's music. Harbison sees Mozart's pieces as the "antecedent" of his *Quartet*:

> After composing this piece [*String Quartet No. 4*] I began to think about possible antecedents for this kind of chamber music, and two passages from the slow movements of Mozart's *String Quintets*, in C major and G minor, came to mind. In these moments the first violin and first viola engage in an intimate dialogue that alters the entire color-scheme.[9]

Indeed, one hears musical dialogue in *Mozart's String Quintet in C major*, K. 515, in particular between violin 1 and viola 1 in the Andante movement and the third movement of *String Quintet in G minor*.

There are two main types of instrumental dialogues emphasized in the late 18th century. One is the "happiest conversation" that involves "no competition, no vanity, but a calm, quiet interchange of sentiments," suggested by Samuel Johnson, and its opposition is "a battle of feelings […] feelings of clash, repel one another, or triumph over one another."[10] In his *Quartet No 4*, Harbison balances between happy conversation (agreement) and confrontation (disagreement); nevertheless the dialogues are polite in manner.

Musical dialogue certainly benefits from the dynamic to create intensity and to illustrate confrontation. To project a clear image of interaction in musical dialogue of the *Quartet*, dynamic levels are emphasized and adequately employed to express emotion. In addition, Harbison also employs a formal scheme that derives from operatic musical structure and characteristics such as recitative accompaniment, instrumental introduction and prelude to a song.

Not only does each movement begin with a unique musical conversation between characters, but Harbison also arranges each movement to end its dialogue differently. His creation of dramatic scenes is certainly demonstrated in the movements.

The impression created by Harbison's instrumental dramatic scene can also be felt in his other, early compositions such as *Concerto for Oboe, Clarinet and Strings* (1985). "One astute writer referred to the piece [*Concerto for Oboe, Clarinet and Strings*] as 'scenes from a marriage.' This metaphorical marriage between solo

[9] Preface to Harbison, *String Quartet No. 4*.

[10] Quoted in Simon P. Keefe, *Mozart's Viennese Instrumental Music: A Study of Stylistic Re-Invention*. (UK: The Boydell Press, 2007): 127, 129.

winds and strings contains quarrels, precarious balances, comic relief, misunderstandings, and eventual unanimity," said Harbison.[11]

Nevertheless, in *Quartet No. 4* Harbison generates a different kind of listening pleasure. Thus, it is worthwhile to examine how he presents and concludes each movement in the composition.

The *Quartet* not only presents the music as characters in dialogue, but also as musical styles that can be associated with Baroque and Classical periods. It is especially the Baroque musical style that has been one of the main influences on Harbison's compositional writing, which can be heard in several of his compositions. However, in *Quartet No. 4* the music does not sound simply old-fashion, but also reveals intriguing musical ideas and characteristics.

Harbison also experiments with pop and poprock culture in his works. One often encounters Harbison carefully incorporating jazz with traditional Western art musical style in his compositions. This approach can be seen in the Quartet as well, in which Harbison appropriately balances the two musical fashions without one overly dominating the other. He asserts that "jazz has become more important to me because I've felt the need to experience that kind of performing, and also because I need it more in the foreground for the other work I do."[12] The fact that different musical styles and notions are mirrored in Harbison's composition has provided a unique characteristic to his music, and which has precedent in earlier musical periods.

Instrumental Musical Dialogue in the Past

One often associates musical dialogue with opera and other stage works. Since the 18th century, musical dialogue has been treated in instrumental music in ways that show close relevance to characteristics found in an opera, a drama or a play. Richard Will explains that in the past "composers, publishers, lexicographers and others in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries frequently used dialogue as a metaphor for instrumental works, particularly string quartets and other chamber genres."[13] In fact, it was popular in the 18th century to say that music was a metaphor for language. It is often said that "music is a language," "music is a type of speaking," and "melody does not merely imitate, it speaks,"

[11] John Harbison, "Program Note: John Harbison *Concerto for Oboe, Clarinet and Strings*," *Music Sales Classical*, accessed January 17, 2017 http://www.musicsalesclassical.com/composer/work/627/24167.)

[12] Joan Anderman, "Harbison Follows a Jazz Train of Thought," *The Boston Globe*, September 16, 2009, http://www.boston.com/ae/music/articles/2009/09/16/pulitzer_prize_winning_composer_harbison_takes_a_jazz_turn/.)

[13] Richard Will, "When God Met the Sinner, and Other Dramatic Confrontations in the Eighteenth-Century Instrumental Music," *Music & Letters* 78, no. 2 (May 1997): 183.

among other phrases.[14] Indeed, to many composers of past eras, instrumental music could be filled with interesting and imaginative ideas. Such composers portrayed human emotions and actions in their compositions, creating distinctive instrumental language and pleasure.

The interpretation of the alternate playing between a soloist and a full orchestra in the late 18th century concerto is often seen as dialogue between the two. The word "Concerto" is believed to mean "to dispute" or "to work together" which derives from the Latin *concertare*, and "to agree" or "to get together" in Italian.[15] Koch claims that, unlike in the sonata in which "the expression of feeling by the solo player is like a monologue in passionate tones", the concerto is a "passionate dialogue [*leidenschaftliche Unterhaltung*] between the concerto player and the accompanying orchestra," and draws its connection to spoken drama.[16]

On the other hand, Jean François de Chastellux writes that German symphonies "are a type of Concerto, in which the instruments shine in turn, in which they provoke each other and respond; they dispute and reconcile among themselves. It is a lively and sustained conversation."[17] For example, Simon P. Keefe argues that there is a dramatic dialogue found in the finale of Mozart's *Jupiter Symphony*.

Musical dialogue is illustrated not only in concertos and symphonies, but one also witnesses such handling in chamber music of the late 18th century. An example is C.P.E. Bach's programmatic chamber piece, *Trio Sonata in C minor*, H579 (W.161/1) "Sanguineus und Melancholicus" (1749), subtitled "A conversation between a Cheerful Man and a Melancholy Man." In this piece two contrast tempi, *allegretto* and *presto*, alternate in turns in a manner of "complaining, playfulness, pleading, questioning, melancholy, high spirits, bitterness, sadness and so on,"[18] giving a sense of dialogue responses between Sanguineus and Melancholicus. Many scholars claim that the music "is meant to portray a conversation between a Sanguineus and a Melancholicus, who are in disagreement throughout the first and most of the second movements; each tries to draw the other over to his own side, until they settle their differences at the end of the second movement, at which point the Melancholicus gives up the battle and assumes the

[14] Simon P. Keefe, "Koch's Commentary on the Late Eighteenth-Century Concerto: Dialogue, Drama and Solo/Orchestra Relations," *Music & Letters* 79, no. 3 (August, 1998): 370–371.

[15] Denis Arnold and Timothy Rhys Jones, "Concerto," *Oxford Music Online*, accessed March 15, 2017, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t114/e1550?q=concerto&search=quick&pos=3&_start=1#firsthit.

[16] Quoted in Keefe, "Koch's Commentary," 369.

[17] François Jean de Chastellux, *Essai sur l'union de la poesie & de la musique* (Paris, 1765), 49–50, quoted in Keefe, *Mozart's Viennese Instrumental Music*, 145.

[18] Ashley Solomon, "Bach—Sanguineus and Melancholicus," *Channel Classics Records*, accessed March 13, 2017, http://www.channelclassics.com/florilegium-sanguineus-and-melancholicus.html.

manner of the other."[19] Bach certainly seeks to provide individual beauty and an original trait to the piece, giving a somewhat dramatic characteristic in the music.

Confrontation settings can achieve "a semantic clarity and complexity rare in instrumental works of this period [18th century], even programmatic ones; they seem to describe and develop characters, to express psychological and emotional states and to communicate moral, comic and political meanings."[20] Susan Wollenberg views C. P. E. Bach as the "master of both comedy and tragedy in his instrumental style."[21] Johann Karl Friedrich Triest also asserts that "what was stirring in him [Bach] was a kind of aesthetic idea, i.e., one that combines concepts and emotion, and that does not allow itself to be expressed in words, although it comes very close to the specific emotion that song can depict for us, and of which it is, as it were, the archetype. He translated this in his keyboard (or into notes)".[22]

The stylistic emphasis of the quartet as a conversation metaphor was also discussed in the late 18th century. As Gretchen A. Wheelock remarks, "the metaphor of conversation is obviously attractive in charactering the voices of the string quartet as listening and responding to one another—agreeing, contending, even changing the subject."[23] Simon P. Keefe also claims that "the string quartet was persistently likened to a conversation in the late eighteenth century, the common perception being that themes and motifs passed from instrument to instrument was comparable to the easy, yet cultivated spirit of salon conversation."[24] Similarly, Triest writes that composers "are intended to elevate all the participating instruments to an equal or near equal rank, for example in quartets (literally: musical conservations for four voices)."[25]

This tradition was well extended into the 19th century. For example, Schumann utilized the same approach in his string quartets. He claims that string quartets should resemble a four-way conversation.[26] In his *String Quartet No. 1*, for instance, each instrumental part has its significant and characteristic role in the music. Instead of being a mere accompaniment to the violin 1, all instruments have their turn to present their ideas. Imitation texture is employed, giving an

[19] Solomon, "Bach."Will, "When God Met the Sinner," 176.

[20] Will, "When God Met the Sinner," 175–176..

[21] Susan Wollenberg, "Changing Views of C.P.E. Bach," *Music & Letters* 69, no. 4 (October 1988): 463.

[22] Johann Karl Friedrich Triest, "Remarks on the Development of the Art of Music in Germany in the Eighteenth Century," in *Haydn and His World*, ed. Elaine Sisman (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), 346.

[23] Gretchen A. Wheelock, *Haydn's Ingenious Jesting with Art* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1992), 90.

[24] Keefe, *Mozart's Viennese Instrumental Music*, 127.

[25] Triest, "Remarks on the Development," 370.

[26] John Daverio, *Robert Schumann: Herald of A "New Poetic Age"*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 248.

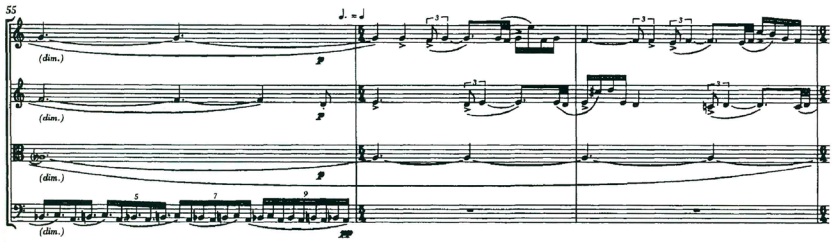
effect that is reminiscent of dialogue. Equality and coherence of participation in parts is certainly presented in the composition.

String Quartet No. 4

Following on from this tradition, Harbison's String Quartet No. 4 consists of four movements in the Baroque trio sonata slow-fast-slow-fast structural design. Each movement not only demonstrates a unique musical characteristic and idea, but also concludes with a clear-cut ending; there is no emphasis on the continuity between movements. Nevertheless, the uniqueness of this quartet is on Harbison's use of various characteristics in musical dialogue among instruments.

Musical conversation can be heard at the beginning of the first movement between the solo cello and the other three instruments, although Harbison indicates the violins and viola as the accompanying parts in the music. The cello starts the conversational line while the other instruments are in long-note values, acting as though they are listening to what the cello is calling. The interchange effect occurs while the cello is in static, long note-values and tie-notes, and the other three instruments respond to it in a short, small group of descending pitches. It is as if it were a dramatic scene where a group of people reply in a few words to the question asked, despite the fact that it is impossible to say exactly what the exchange is about in the dialogue. Moreover, most often a leap of sixth or more in interval between two pitches is indicated in cello before the response comes in, creating a smooth dialogue between them. At times, both the solo and the accompaniment share some similarity in musical gesture, such as a leap of interval.

The gesture of instrumental dialogue is also shown at the end of the first movement with lesser instruments. It begins at measure 56 where a "conversation" is established between violins 1 and 2 (Example 1). The musical gesture of the two instruments here are enacted with only slight changes; one or two pitches in violin 2 are either taken off, or added in different intervals from violin 1. The passage is presented very similar to that of free imitative handling. Such writing can be also heard in the fourth movement.



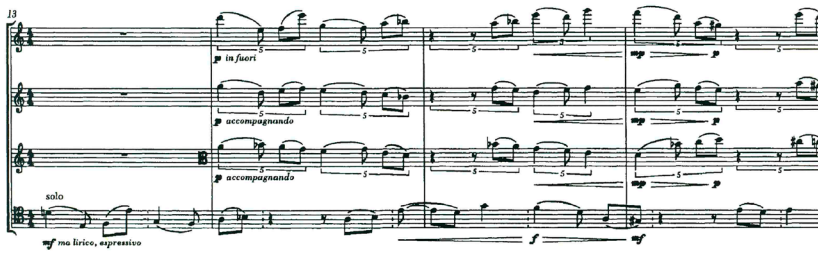
Example 1 Harbison's *Quartet No. 4*, 1st movement

What is interesting here in the first movement is that, when the music progresses, there are times when the dialogue between the solo cello and other instruments is shortened, cut-off and replaced by a new idea, providing more "dramatic" effects in the music. On the other hand, the shortened event can also project a sense of discontinuity and disruption in their conversation. For example, the conversation between the solo cello and other instruments at the opening is interrupted and cut-off at measure 24, replaced by a new musical idea conversed by violins 1 and 2, and viola. It is as if Harbison tends to progress to a new musical event, demonstrating various stylistic practices in the music and giving different listening experiences to the listeners.

In the *Quartet*, there are also times when the cello and violin 1 are given the prominent role, taking alternate turns to respond to each other in an intriguing way. An example is shown in the second movement beginning at measure 13 where the cello begins a solo melodic line with pitches, (D4-E3-F3-E4-G3-F3-A3-B flat3-etc) (based on middle C as C4), and it is responded to by a different solo melodic idea in violin 1 (F#5-G#5-B-A#5-C#6-B5-D6-F#5-E5-etc) at measure 23. Both melodic lines respond to each other in *lirico expressivo*. The two parts (violin 1 and cello) finally come to unity where both share a new melodic idea (F-E-F-E-F-C-G-etc) three octaves apart in similar rhythmic pattern beginning at measure 33.

Similarly, as the music progresses, violin 1 starts a conversation with another brand new solo idea in *cantabile* (A2-B flat2-G4-A4-G4-B flat3-A3-D4-E4-G4-etc) at measure 53, and the cello also responds in *cantabile* to it differently (G4-F#4-B3-G4-F#4-A3-B3-F#4-E4-F#4-etc) at measure 63. Nevertheless, a goal-oriented direction is also given in this dialogue process; the two instruments finally come into unison at measure 73 (A3-D4-E4-A4-A4-etc). Such musical handling suggests that it is as if Harbison is creating a conversation between "disagreements" at first, and finally they come to "agreement" between the two instruments. Nevertheless, with the dynamic markings Harbison indicates, the dialogues are peaceful and polite in character.

Another use of Baroque musical idioms in the second movement falls on the musical gestures that accompany each solo line. For instance, the beginning of each solo line is soon canonically imitated two octaves apart by its accompaniment part, especially between violin and cello and vice versa, giving the roles of a "leader" and its "follower" as in a fugal style. An example can be heard at measure 13 where the cello is imitated strictly by its violin accompaniment part. Such musical handling is also creating a sense of "agreement" between the two instruments, since both are sharing the same melodic idea (Example 2). This musical manner also appears at measure 23.



Example 2 Harbison's *Quartet No. 4*, 2nd movement

Moreover, different contrasting dynamic levels are employed in the movement to differentiate the two different groups of instruments; solo is always louder than the rest of the instruments. It must be added that the middle parts (violin 2 and viola) are not in an imitative manner, although they tend to share the same rhythmic patterns with the solo lines. Perhaps there are more "conversations" created among instruments in the composition.

A Corelli-like musical writing also can be heard in the coda of the third movement at measure 77 between violin 2 and viola. The two instruments are treated alike, giving a sense of a forward moving force, heading from one musical idea to another as the music progresses. Such writing can also be comparable to the dialogue manner in a play that provides a teleological function. The music is set out from one point and arrives at another determined point. Joseph de Laporte claims that the dialogue in a play should serve "the development of the action. Each step would be a new step towards the denouement, a new link in the plot; in a word, a means of weaving or developing, of preparing a situation, or of moving to a new situation."[27]

The fact that the conversation passes from one instrument to another instrument in imitative style can also be seen as a conversation metaphor. Keefe claims that, "the late eighteenth-century fugue is often likened to dialogue among a group of people."[28] Neal Zaslaw writes that "fugal writing might go beyond its stile antico," and George Joseph Volger (1749–1814), a classical theorist, asserts that "the fugue is a conversation among a multitude of singers […] The fugue is thus a musical artwork where no one accompanies, no one submits, where nobody

[27] Quoted in Keefe, *Mozart's Viennese Instrumental Music*, 150.
[28] Keefe, *Mozart's Viennese Instrumental Music*, 147.

plays a secondary role, but each a principal part."[29] Baroque fugal-like and free imitative styles are employed throughout Harbison's quartet and his other music.

The opening of his fourth movement, for example, portrays a different approach in musical dialogue, producing another imaginative power of the composer's compositional idea. Harbison begins a conversation in a fugal-like manner between two instruments, the viola and cello from measures 1 to 12, followed by a different two-part dialogue in violins 1 and 2 from measures 13 to 19. A new idea is brought in, beginning at measure 20, where the music is developed into a four-part instrumental dialogue.

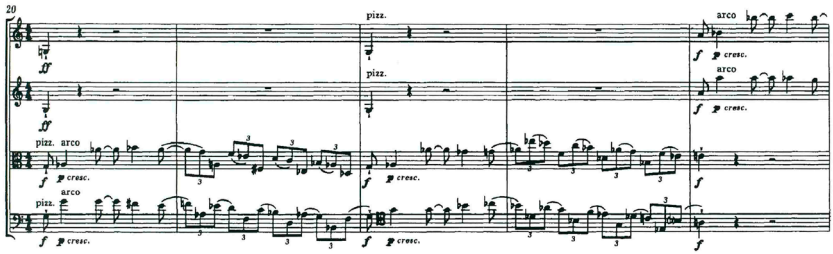
Strict imitative musical idiom can also be seen in the fourth movement. For instance, following a fugal-like imitative texture at measure 101, Harbison introduces a canonic imitation that can be heard in the movement beginning at measure 112, where violin 1 begins and is followed by violin 2, cello, and last by viola. This handling brings to mind the vocal canonic compositions of the early periods. Canonic techniques and works were prolific during the Renaissance. Harbison is also very familiar with the vocal music of Palestrina and Lassus, composers of the Renaissance period. He has also written vocal compositions such as *Chorale Cantata* (1995) and *Madrigal* (2007), and works that use religious chants such as *Veni Creator Spiritus* (1996), *Four Psalms* (1998), *Psalm 137* (1998), among others.

Apart from sharp contrasting effects such as *arco* and *pizzicato* articulation, static and flowing, and forte and piano demonstrated in the Quartet, Harbison also reshapes stylistic features of some musical passages in the fourth movement, giving the music a Baroque flavor. William Witwer writes that, "although many critics have incorrectly labeled his [Harbison's] musical styles as 'new Romantic,' Harbison considers the seventeenth century as the main influence upon his style, preferring the term 'neo-Baroque' to describe his music."[30] Indeed, as a composer, Harbison also takes deep insight from J. S. Bach music. He once said:

> Bach was a great innovator, constantly trying out new instruments like the slide trumpet, the fortepiano and the five-string cello. At the same time, rather than follow the new musical fashions developing around him in his later years, he continued to serve his own muse, diving ever more deeply into the underlying musical ideas in such works as the *Art of Fugue*.[31]

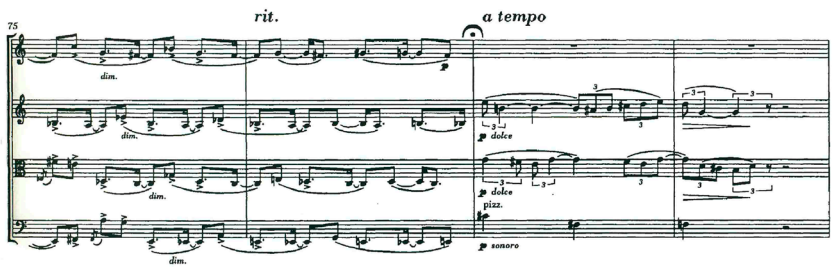
[29] Neal Zaslaw, *Mozart's Symphonies: Context, Performance Practice, Reception* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 544.
[30] Witwer, "Musical Influence," 7.
[31] Anderson, "John Harbison, Composer."

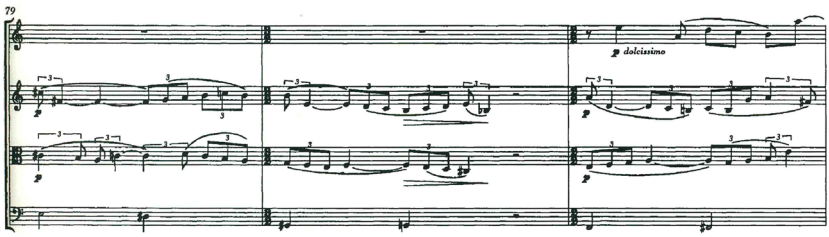
Harbison is certainly aware that Baroque music contains rare use of crescendo and decrescendo; indeed, one encounters dynamic changes that are often abrupt, shifting immediately from soft to loud and back. Such examples can be seen in Jean de Sainte-Colombe's *Concert* "Le tender," and many of Jacques Aubert's violin sonatas such as the Presto in *Violin sonata No. 2 in F* and Giga in *Violin sonata No. 3 in D*, Andrea Bernasconi's *Sinfonia No. 2 in D major*, *fort* (forte) and *doux* (piano) and vice versa, and many other composers' works. In Harbison's fourth movement, the contrasting dynamic idea is employed and presented in his own way, for instance, beginning at measure 20 (Example 3), where a sudden change of sharp dynamic contrast occurs from *forte* to *piano* between pizzicato viola and arco cello.



Example 3 Harbison's *Quartet No. 4*, 4th movement

Harbison also is familiar with the operas of past composers. At times, a ground bass-like musical characteristic idea, reminiscent of Monteverdi and Purcell's lament basses, is used in the third movement beginning at measure 77 in the cello (Example 4). Harbison draws his listeners' attention to this moment by employing a pause before it.





Example 4 Harbison's *Quartet No. 4*, 3rd movement

Similarly, Harbison may have acquired his inspiration of instrumental dialogue from the character interaction in an operatic work, as throughout his creative career Harbison has written in such genres as opera and music theatre. In an interview, Harbison mentioned that he had undertaken many studies on the operas of past composers during his student years and also while he was writing *The Great Gatsby* (1999).[32] It is not surprising, then, that Harbison is familiar with the operas of Verdi and other composers.

In the second movement Harbison presents an introductory passage that consists of alternating *pizzicatos* and static texture in *arco* playing before the musical dialogues begin. The idea may have derived from the opening scene of operatic singing where an instrumental introduction is given before an aria or recitative singing. Indeed, here in the *Quartet* this contrast of *pizzicato* and static *arco* prepares the mood for the dialogue "scene" that follows in the movement.

Harbison also employs a musical practice that brings to mind a recitative accompanying style. It can be seen in the third movement beginning at measure 9. Spare texture, chord-like manner stresses on strong beats, and a repeated and simple rhythmic pattern in quarter-note are used to accompany a flowing solo violin. Such recitative writing can be traced to his early operas such as *Winter's Tale* (1974), *Full Moon in March* (1977), *The Great Gatsby*, and songs such as the "Recitative and Aria" in his "Samuel Chapter" (1978) and *Chorale Cantata* (1995). It is therefore natural that Harbison exercises his vocal and operatic writing in this *Quartet*.

As in the second movement, Harbison prepares in the third movement an opening introduction that is commonly found in an operatic scene, which sets the mood before the role comes in. In the Quartet, simple rhythmic patterns in the quarter-note are notated for eight measures in *poco marcota*, *espressivo* with

[32] Infinite History Project MIT, "Infinite History Project: John Harbison," accessed March 7, 2017, YouTube video, 1:46:09, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RCPmNfsqdog.

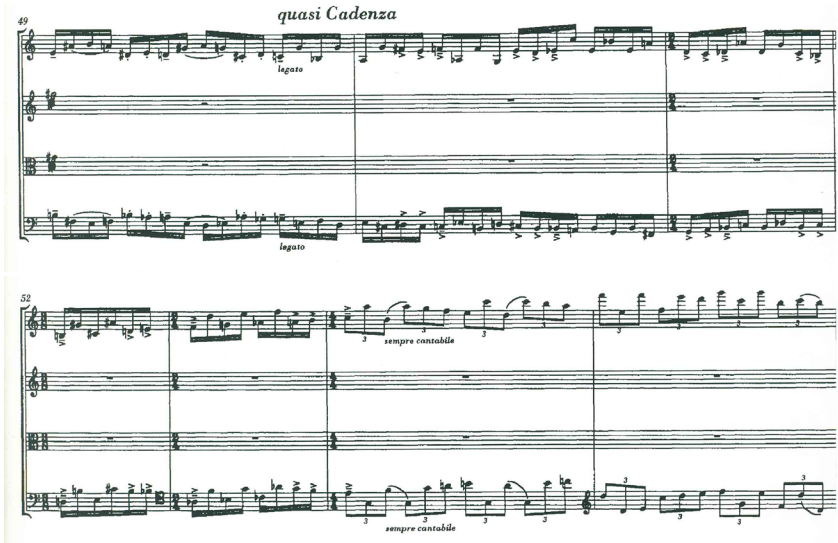
various dynamic ranges to set the opening mood of the movement. The solo violin begins with a lyrical melodic line right after a short silent break in *appassionato*. It is as if Harbison is writing for a vocal line rather than an instrumental part. Expression indications are useful metaphors in the music, seeking to imitate dramatic characters.

This preparatory passage also can be comparable to the piano prelude of songs, especially in the Romantic period. Schumann, for instance, often employs a piano prelude before the vocal part begins. This musical feature can be heard in some of Harbison's songs such as *Books of Hours and Seasons* (1975) and *Simple Daylight* (1988).

On several occasions there are only two or three instrumental parts in the music, which is particularly obvious in the third movement. For example, Harbison employs whole rests for several measures in some instrumental parts when there is no need of one or more music roles in the passage. At times, in the other movements, a long sustaining tie-note is given to an instrumental part when Harbison feels that there is no necessary dialogue role for it in the music. An example can be heard in the viola part at the beginning of measure 56 of the first movement.

On the other hand, there are moments when Harbison portrays an operatic conversational scene by featuring every instrument, each of which gets its turn to present an idea in a musical passage. An example can be heard in the fourth movement beginning at measure 46 where violin 2 begins a melodic idea, violin 1 takes over with a different idea at measure 53, followed by viola at measure 62, and finally in cello at measure 68. All these show Harbison's careful integration of ideas in his compositional writing.

A concerto-like musical manner can be heard here in the *Quartet*. As in the Classical period, where most cadenzas are often found in the first movement of a concerto, they are also found nevertheless in the slow movement, such as Haydn's *Cello Concerto No. 1 in C major*, Hob.VIIb:1. In Harbison's *Quartet No. 4*, a written-out cadenza-like passage is introduced in the slow third movement beginning at measure 50. The passage is arranged in such a way that it is similar to the traditional cadenza which precedes the final tutti of a concerto movement. Nevertheless, instead of assigning the passage to a solo instrument, Harbison emphasizes violin 1 and cello in different melodic lines in *cantabile* with the same rhythmic patterns (Example 5), as if featuring two characters singing to one another at the same time. However, various musical gestures and motions such as similar and contrary motions used between the two instruments also project a sense of dialogue.



Example 5 Harbison's *Quartet No. 4*, 3rd movement

Other creative approaches by Harbison also can be seen throughout the composition. For example, there are solo melodic dialogue lines and passages where syncopated rhythms are stressed, off-beats are accented and emphasized in the music, giving a sense of jazz-like writing. A clear example can be heard in the passage beginning at measure 74 in the fourth movement, in which not only off-beats are accented, but also irregular rhythmic patterns of tie-notes are exaggeratedly used. In fact, tie-notes are often filled in the melodic lines, creating a sense of swing, giving a flexible and irregular rhythmic effect in the music.

Indeed, Harbison's music often reflects the influence of jazz. Harbison grew up with pop music; he was a jazz piano player alone, had played in a jazz band and worked with jazz groups. Harbison claims that jazz is "a big part of the way I hear. What we give back artistically is what hit us when we were 13,"[33] and "the songs I admire most are from the jazz period, songs with tremendously rich and inventive vocabulary and melodic curve, criteria which have much in common with the great Lieder period."[34] Throughout his compositional career he has also written compositions such as *Three City Blocks* (1993), *Thanks Viktor* (1994) and *Mary Lou* (2008) that are in some ways connected with pop, poprock and jazz.

[33] Quoted in Isenberg, "Courting the Muse."
[34] Anderman, "Harbison Follows a Jazz Train of Thought."

Not surprising, then, that Harbison's style is an eclectic modernism, with echoes of musical styles of jazz and Bach. Indeed, in the Quartet there are also some passages presented in imitative textures, reflecting the old and new musical styles.

Harbison's design of musical dialogue in each movement has stimulated great curiosity to hear how the composer would conclude the entire composition. The work does not abruptly end the dialogues among instruments. Instead, the *Quartet* ends with a gesture that all instruments share one melodic idea in different octave ranges, propelling themselves with forward momentum with loud dynamic markings, creating a happy scene, and agreement in the final conclusion among all instrumental parts.

Conclusion

Composers in the past intended to write music with diverse ideas that would arouse interest and provide enjoyment to listeners. They combined and infused dramatic styles and characters in the instrumental pieces, creating great success in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. What they did was not only contribute new ideas to composers of later centuries, but they also earned great respect in the development of music literature.

String Quartet No. 4 significantly displays Harbison creatively reintroducing the late 18th century musical dialogue fashion in a new way. Throughout the music, various styles of dialogue presentations serve to emphasize the equal roles of two or more instruments. This also involves several manners of imitative writing. Moreover, different approaches to the style of musical dialogue, including a sudden change of textures and ideas, are demonstrated to create "scenes" and dramatic effects in the composition. Harbison also designs a structure that suggests the style of an orchestral introduction placed right before an aria, duet or ensemble operatic scene.

Throughout the composition Harbison engages his listeners with expressive musical language. Dialogues are projected in various natural, smooth and emotional ways through dynamic levels and expression markings. Each part makes its own particular contribution to the music. Dynamic markings and expressive indications that are furnished in the music demonstrate Harbison's imaginative thoughts and creativity. Similar and different rhythmic patterns and melodic gestures are also employed to illustrate the "agreement" and "disagreement" between the "dialogues" of the instruments. Harbison certainly leaves one in little doubt of his intense desire to provide his audiences with a different listening experience.

The composition also shows Harbison's creative musical mind of linking the music styles and characteristics of Baroque and Classical with his own idioms. Not only are Mozart's and Bach's music the main source of inspiration

for Harbison, but he also stresses the off-beats and syncopated rhythm, heard at times in the fugal-like and canonic strict imitation passages. The music also draws our attention to Harbison's use of operatic musical characteristics such as recitative and opening introductory passages in the movements. These seemingly diverse musical elements are placed coherently and are connected. Indeed, there is never a lack of elaboration and development in the music. The distinctive quality of the Quartet certainly shines a bright light on Harbison's compositional ideas on instrumental dialogue.

Musical Dialogue in John Harbison's *String Quartet No. 4*

Abstract

The study explores different instrumental dialogues that experimented in Harbison's *String Quartet No. 4* (2001). Harbison imagines each instrument as an operatic character in the composition. The musical dialogues are presented in different fashions, including between two or more instruments in either confrontation, or with agreeable manners. The piece significantly displays Harbison creatively reintroducing the late 18th century musical dialogue fashion in a new way. Not only is Mozart's and Bach's music the main source of inspiration for Harbison, but also stresses of the off-beats and syncopated jazz fashion are at times heard in the fugal-like imitation passages.

Hudební dialog ve *Smyčcovém kvartetu č. 4* Johna Harbisona

Abstrakt

Studie zkoumá různé instrumentální dialogy, s nimiž experimentuje Harbisonův *Smyčcový kvartet č. 4* (2001). Harbison si každý nástroj představuje jako operní postavu ve skladbě. Hudební dialogy jsou prezentovány různými způsoby, včetně dialogu mezi dvěma či více nástroji buď v konfrontaci, nebo se souhlasnými manýry. Ve skladbě se výrazně projevuje Harbisonovo tvůrčí znovuzavedení podoby hudebních dialogů z konce 18. století novým způsobem. Nejenže je pro Harbisona hlavním inspiračním zdrojem Mozartova a Bachova hudba, ale ve fugových imitačních pasážích občas zaznívají i důrazy off-beatu a jazzových synkop.

Keywords

John Harbison; Musical Dialogue; 21st century String Quartet

Klíčová slova

John Harbison; hudební dialog; smyčcový kvartet 21. století

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