

Mozart, Fragment of a Sonata Allegro in E minor for String Quartet Fr 1789b

Seven Completions

Editorial Introduction

Mozart rarely wrote in E minor, but his two completed pieces in the key – the Accompanied Sonata K. 304 (1778) and the 'Quoniam tu solus sanctus' from the Mass in C minor K. 417a (1782–3) are masterpieces whose tonal colour contributes significantly to their unique sound world. So there is more than usual regret that he did not complete his projected String Quartet in E minor, Fr 1789b. Even though I am by nature sceptical of any claims that working in a particular key formed habits of invention and compositional elaboration for Mozart, nevertheless I think that when he composed and began to write out the score of this sonata allegro for string quartet, the earlier works in E minor left their traces. Most obviously, the Quartet begins, like the Sonata, with a single line doubled at the octave. Within the first 20 bars of the fragment there are also two unmistakable echoes of the 'Quoniam'. Both pieces begin with a pithy statement which flowers into fourth-species counterpoint (labelled 'x' in the extracts below):

Mozart, 'Quoniam' from Mass in C minor K. 417a: bars 1-15

Mozart, Sonata Allegro in E minor for String Quartet Fr 1789b, bars 1-14

And a peculiar turn of phrase from the 'Quoniam' appears at the start of the short transition passage in the Quartet (labelled 'y' in the extracts below):

Mozart, 'Quoniam' from Mass in C minor K. 417a: bars 82-95

Mozart, Sonata Allegro in E minor for String Quartet Fr 1789b, bars 17-20

Perhaps more significantly, the 'Quoniam' is broadly conceived in terms of four-part conversational dialogue (the three solo voices and an independent instrumental bass) with the rest of the orchestra providing discreet doubling and amplification in the vocal sections. The piece dates, of course, from Mozart's initial work on the 'Haydn' Quartets (in the early 1780s rather than at the end of that decade), but the austerity of its linearity and its motivic economy – relating to the neo-Baroque stylistic trait of the Mass – is closer to his late style than to his instrumental music of the early 1780s. So the 'Quoniam' has the potential to act as an unlikely stylistic touchstone of completions of the quartet fragment, complementing the more obvious models drawn from Mozart's chamber music for strings composed in 1789–91.

The source of the fragment

The only authentic source of the fragment is the autograph manuscript: a single leaf of 12-stave *Querformat* paper completely filled with three systems on each page in light and dark brown ink.¹ It is held in the Bibliotheca Mozartiana of the International Mozart Institute in Salzburg (sig. KV⁶ 417d).² The leaf is quadrant 4a of the original sheet of paper, and was therefore originally joined to quadrant 1a as a bifolium.³ Given that the surviving leaf of the autograph is completely filled by the *particella*, the confidence of Mozart's hand throughout, and considering where the music breaks off (in the middle of what is presumably a perfect cadence), it seems likely that the score continued –

¹ The paper is Tyson watermark 100: see *NMA X*: 33/2 (1992), p. 47. The presence of the different coloured inks is a clear sign that the document is a composing score rather than a sketch or draft.

² A facsimile is in *NMA X*: 30/4, p. 173.

³ Tyson 1992, p. 47

though for how long is impossible to tell – on one or more separate leaves which have been lost since at least the first decade of the nineteenth century.⁴

The musicological reception of the fragment is an object lesson in the dangers of dating a piece on the basis of its perceived stylistic features alone. Alfred Einstein identified the fragment as an early draft of what became the D minor String Quartet K. 421 (1783), based on the motivic similarity between bars 14–16 of the fragment and bar 50 of the first movement of K. 421.⁵ But in neither piece is the motive in question a principal idea, nor are its different harmonic and formal contexts at all similar.⁶ In contrast, St Foix thought that the craftsmanship of the fragment suggested a later date, and he grouped it with the ‘Prussian’ Quartets (1789 onwards), in particular linking its unison *piano* opening to the start of the G minor Quartet fragment K 589a (Fr 1789i). It took systematic paper studies to confirm St Foix’s hunch. The leaf of the autograph manuscript is a paper type found in other fragments and in completed works from the last two years of Mozart’s life, but not before.⁷ Tyson also dated the fragment ‘between the end of 1789 and 1791’ and linked it to the ‘Prussian’ set.⁸ Konrad likewise dates it from 1789 at the earliest, and provides a description of the marginalia in other hands on the manuscript.⁹

The context of Mozart’s work on the fragment

In a letter to his friend and financial supporter Michael Puchberg on 12 July 1789, Mozart sketched out a series of projects that were likely to contribute to his income stream in the coming months. These included six quartets he was writing ‘for the King [of Prussia]’.¹⁰ By the summer of 1790 he had completed three of them (K. 575, 589, 590) and had probably begun at least two more (this fragment and the shorter G minor fragment Fr 1789i). But a series of more pressing projects, with the likelihood of more immediate and greater financial gain, got in the way of further progress on the quartets. Had he returned to them after having completed the Requiem in the spring of 1792, we might now talk of the six ‘Prussian’ Quartets as having been composed, like the six dedicated to Haydn, in two batches of three spread over three years.

⁴ Nissen’s brief description of the source ‘Ein ganz erster Theil des ersten Allegros eines Violinquartetts aus e minore’ (‘The whole of the first part of an opening Allegro of a String Quartet in E minor’) has been interpreted (for example by Jahn and by Konrad, *NMA X*: 30/4, p. 266) as an error; but it is possible that Nissen had access to a second leaf which was subsequently lost, and his description was accurate.

⁵ Hence the catalogue number of the fragment K 417d in the third edition of the Köchel catalogue, and Einstein’s proposed date of June 1783.

⁶ Nor, to my knowledge, is there an example of Mozart abandoning an early draft of an instrumental work and rethinking it in a new key, other than the case of the Basset Horn Concerto in G becoming the Clarinet (or Basset Clarinet) Concerto in A K. 622 for obvious pragmatic reasons.

⁷ Other autograph manuscripts containing this type of paper include K. 312 (the fragment of a Sonata Allegro in G minor for piano Fr 1790e); K. 516c (the fragment of a Sonata Allegro in B flat for clarinet quintet Fr 1789d); K. 562e (the fragment of a Sonata Allegro in G for String Trio Fr 1789g); K. 546a (the fragment of a Sonata Allegro in G for Piano and Violin Fr 1789f); K. 581a (the fragment of a Rondo in A for clarinet quintet Fr 1790g); ff 15–22 of the String Quartet in F K. 590; ff 1–6 and 9–12 of the String Quintet in D K. 593; both acts of *Così fan tutte*; both acts of *Die Zauberflöte*; *La clemenza di Tito*.

⁸ Tyson, 1991, p. 219.

⁹ *NMA X*: 30/4 p. 266.

¹⁰ ‘– unterdessen schreibe ich 6 leichte Klavier=Sonaten für die Prinzessin Friederika und 6 Quartetten für den König, welches ich alles bey Kozeluch auf meine Unkosten stechen lasse;’

Style of the fragment

Like the first movements of the three completed 'Prussian' Quartets, this fragment has a pared-back musical language: *unisono* and two- and three-part textures, exquisite purity in its part writing, an expressively cool harmonic vocabulary, an approach to motive and gesture which is at once economical and very malleable, and a direct -- though not blunt -- attitude to the relation of form to content. All these features mean that while the music is far less obviously learned than the six 'Haydn' Quartets it is nevertheless more fluently conceived for its medium.

Another feature which links Fr1789b to K. 575, 589 and 590 is the cello's role as *Hauptstimme* in several passages. But in several key respects this fragment differs from the three 'Prussians'. As well as blending elements of the Parisian *quatuor concertant* style with the Viennese dialogued style, it also (in its triplet passages) introduces the virtuosos dimension of the *quatuor brillant* into the mix. Can we see Mozart here trying to create a new type of 'Pan-European' quartet (at least triangulating Vienna, Berlin and Paris)?

The fragment's characteristic veering between bravura writing and the more introverted thematic material at the beginning, end and middle of the fragment poses significant challenges for a completion.

Challenges of completing the fragment

How to take forward the contrasting styles: to continue to alternate, or to blend?

What are the proportions of the exposition? And, having established a solution for each version of the completion, what are the formal implications for the rest of the movement?

How to resist compositional display and increasing the density and expressive temperature of the musical argument (ie the style of the 'Haydn' Quartets versus the late chamber music)?

How does one make *il filo* work when the musical material is either (a) so elusive; or (b) so utterly contrasting in its character?

The place of these completions within the wider Mozart Fragments project

From the outset one of the purposes of the wider project has been to research the stylistic implications and openness of the fragments by producing multiple stylistically plausible completions of each fragment. In most cases two or three completions have been sufficient to give some indications of the possibilities and a larger range of alternatives have remained 'komponiert' but not 'geschrieben' (ie the implications of certain compositional choices have been worked through in the head but not committed to paper). This was partly because of self censorship, partly to avoid completion fatigue or completion blindness. (If I want my completions to be performed then it might be a mistake to provide performers with too many alternatives.)

With Fr 1789b I have taken a different approach and have written a far larger number of the compositional options I ran through my head. Version 1 was written in the first week of 2014 and set aside because of my dissatisfaction with some of my completion. I returned to it in the last week of April 2016 and revised away those unsatisfactory details. Versions 2 to 7 were then composed and written down over a three-week period in April-May 2016. Taken together they therefore constitute a sort of journal of my developing responses to the fragment over a short period of time. As anyone with the patience to look at all seven of them will see, as the journal progressed the completions began to comment on each other as well as on Mozart's fragment. But I took care not to repeat

myself, despite the common features that the completions inevitably share in their recapitulations. (Identical material has a different significance in a different context.) And I hope that as individual pieces each of the versions might be worthwhile to perform, hear and read.

Why seven completions?

- Different possibilities of combining dialogued, concertante and brilliant features.
- The gradual process of gaining the courage to pare back and pare back again.
- The desire to keep refining with a view to emulating more vividly the stylistic features of Mozart's late style and exploring the different ways in which they can plausibly be configured and combined.
- The two markedly different ways of interpreting the proportions of the exposition, which has significant effects on the form and details of the completions.
- Lack of skill, imagination and/or judgment.

The seven completions

Because they collectively form a journal, the commentaries on the individual completions will themselves be in the form of a diary, setting out the chronological process of the composition, rather than a piece of writing that accounts for the features of the completions in recollection after the heat of the process has been considerably cooled by time.

Completion 1

Closing period of the exposition: the opening theme reimagined as cantabile; its original pitches reharmonised in G; dialogue between vln1 and vla; modulating transition.

Development section: contrapuntal elaboration of dialogued and brilliant motives; cooling down process in the retransition.

Recapitulation: lots of recomposition (rather than transposition) and some cutting/re-ordering of material (to set up the coda).

Problems: formally over-egged; counterpoint gets over-heated; coda is rhetorically histrionic; the overall effect is closer to K. 499 than to the 'Prussian' quartets.

Completion 2

Closing period of the exposition: thematically combinatorial; pacing of cadential material in bars 62–68 nods to the first movement of K. 595; modulating transition.

Development section: contrapuntal development of the motives from bars 3–4, blended with brilliant style figuration. The counterpoint is overworked; it sounds too much like Haydn (on an off day).

Recapitulation: different transpositional strategies from version 1: they threaten to overheat the music. No coda: good.

Issues: the motivically obsessive aspect of the development section is typical of late Mozart, but it is overworked here. The recapitulation has some registral extremes that have precedents in late

Mozart, but are they well-enough motivated in this context? Does the completion really sound like Mozart, as opposed to all-purpose Viennese quartet writing from the 1790s?

Completion 3

Closing period of the exposition: continues the bravura-style discourse (cf the first movement of K. 593) and has a cooling-down codetta (bars 66–72 to prepare the repeat and set up the start of the development section).

Development section: harmonic twist to flat V is extreme but has precedents; textural fragility of first paragraph in B flat; motive obsession with idea taken from bars 17–18. The flow of the development's harmonic, contrapuntal and rhetorical narratives seems more satisfying than versions 1 and 2 to me.

Recapitulation: adjustments made in bars 131–52 motivated by the shape and content of the development section. Transpositional reworking in the recapitulation as a whole tends to keep shifting towards temporary tonicisations of A minor (again, motivated by bars 98–111 in the development section. Pre-coda in bars 201–210 is very late-Mozart, and prepares the final peroration.

The most successful of the 'maximalist' versions? But still rhetorically quite hot and contrapuntally a little-too self-consciously learned?

Completion 4

An attempt to pare back still further.

Closing period of the exposition: an alternative combinatorial speculation, setting up the development section.

Development section: for the form and overall process of this, cf the first movement of K. 551. It is less extrovert than the earlier versions and its counterpoint doesn't brag about itself as much.

Recapitulation: adjustments to bars 133–43 are motivated by the development section. The ending is unflinching but appropriately matter-of-fact – a step in the right direction?

Completion 5

Much more paring back!

Exposition: no additional material at the end, just a completing of the perfect cadence at the breaking-off point of the surviving particella of the fragment in bar 55.

Development section: begins with another harmonic swerve, then a stable period in flat I, riffing on motives from the exposition (cf K. 575, first movement development section). The harmonically mobile part of the development is much cooler than in the previous versions. In bars 98–108 the cantabile riff from the start of the exposition comes back on V/i but with some key melodic pitches intact (but enharmonically reconfigured). Are bars 111–114 too Keystone Cops?

Recapitulation: everything is kept to the point; bars 169ff are a coda tying up the 'new' material from the development section; bar 173: is flat II inflection too Schubert? (But Schubert picks up where late Mozart left off...)

Completion 6

Yet more paring back.

In some ways, this is a reimagining of version 1, but from the perspective of a more radical rhetorical coolness and with a minimalist approach to each musical parameter.

It works for me...

Completion 7

Paring back taken as far as I dare. The central 'sound image' is the hymn-like transformation of the main theme in bars 70–77 and its consequences. Too Haydn?

Conclusion

This was not a simple path from worst to best solutions. But it did enable (force?) me to confront many aspects of Mozart's late quartet writing that, even having played violin 2 and viola in them in the 1980s and 90s as well as editing them in the 2010s, I had not particularly well understood...