

# Pieces for String Quartet

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## Commentary on “Pieces for String Quartet”

‘Pieces for String Quartet’ comprises six short movements which have independent characters but also have few subtle connections with each other. The original intention for this piece was to have longer movements. However, while exposing myself into String Quartet repertoire, I came across 3 *Pieces for String Quartet* by Stravinsky, a short gem that changed my whole approach to my piece that I have already worked on quite a lot. Deciding against to abandon what I have already composed, I worked on to shorten the movements instead.

One of the major influences of the first movement was Janáček’s second String Quartet. I was particularly drawn to the way a simple melodic idea was repeated extensively in its second movement and this movement has a similar approach. The next movement clearly demonstrates that I am found of a simpler harmonic language which has stayed with me since I first heard the music of William Walton. His harmonic language in most of his works, namely the *Portsmouth Point Overture*, the two Symphonies and the Viola Concerto had a huge effect on my earliest compositions. In the third movement, I have explored different approaches of organizing the form of a piece by using the Fibonacci series. The movement is dominated by contrapuntal writing, abrupt pauses and a more dissonant harmony, compared to the rest of the movements. In the following movement, a folk melody is presented with homophonic writing, low dynamics and subtle coloristic effects that make this one quite atmospheric in tone. The fifth movement is also based on a folk melody and it is perhaps the most distinct movement due to its simple but rhythmically intense structure. The sole purpose of the final movement is to wrap up the entire piece by referencing previous material and all the while avoiding being pretentious as it does not bring anything new. In other words, I don’t consider this as a movement but rather an afterthought or an epilogue.

## **1. Song**

My whole approach to this movement was to use only a short melodic fragment and to expand it with using minimal new material. This melodic fragment is introduced at the beginning of the piece with solo Viola. It is then repeated number of times with different note values and pitches. Each time it repeats other instruments join in which in turn creates anticipation for a climax. The first climax of the movement starts on bar 21. It's not only the loudest section so far, but also is a brief culmination of the ideas presented earlier and a place where the initial four-note fragment expands to become a longer melody. When the climax ends, there is a brief dialogue between the first and the second violins (bar 29) which at first sounds like cannon but quickly reverts to counterpoint. At the end of this dialogue, the other instruments join in to present a cadence-like progression (bb. 37-45) which suggests G as the insistent tonic. What follows is a short reminder of the 4-note fragment in unisons (bb. 46-49) to further emphasize its importance for one last time. After vaguely establishing a key and repeating the important elements for so many times, given the character of the piece, bringing something new was quite inevitable. The arpeggiated figure that appears within bars 50 to 53 is a buildup towards the next climax of the piece which will last until the end of the movement. The movement ends by slowly reducing the amount of activity to finally (bar 73) arrive at the same cadence-like material that was presented earlier.

## **2. Interlude**

This is a very short movement which takes a fragment of the first movement (fig. 1) and presents it in a completely different context, the main difference being the harmonic language. This fragment is superimposed with a new melodic idea introduced by Viola at the first bar. Similar to the first movement but in a more extreme way, those two melodic

fragments are the only building blocks of the movement. While the cello supplies the harmony throughout the movement, the rest of the instruments have the two fragments in various transpositions and different registers. Since the piece was going to be a short one, it didn't trouble me that the materials are repeated. Moreover, I thought that they were strong enough to have room for repetition.

The image displays two musical staves for a string quartet, labeled '2. Interlude (Bar 22)' and '1. Song (Bar 34)'. Each staff includes parts for Violin 1 (Vln. 1), Violin 2 (Vln. 2), Viola (Vla.), and Violoncello (Vlc.).

**2. Interlude (Bar 22):** This section begins at bar 22. Vln. 1 has a whole rest followed by a melodic fragment starting in bar 23. Vln. 2 plays a melodic line starting in bar 22. The Viola and Cello parts are also present, with the Cello providing a harmonic accompaniment. A dynamic marking of *f* (forte) is indicated.

**1. Song (Bar 34):** This section begins at bar 34. Vln. 1 plays a melodic line starting in bar 34. Vln. 2 plays a melodic line starting in bar 34. The Viola and Cello parts are also present, with the Cello providing a harmonic accompaniment. A dynamic marking of *f* (forte) is indicated. A fermata is placed over the final note of the Vln. 1 part.

*Figure 1*

### 3. Indecisions

The basic idea behind the form of this movement is that there are two contrasting sections that appear and last according to the Fibonacci series, more clearly illustrated on *figure 2*. Each section lasts a specific number of bars and gets progressively longer; the exact number of bars that each section will last is determined by the Fibonacci series. This is the framework of the whole movement.

Figure 2: Implementation of Fibonacci series into the form of the piece

<b>2</b> Bars (Bars 1 and 2)  Only Violins	<b>1</b> Bar (Bar 3)  Contrasting idea	<b>3</b> Bars (Bars 4 to 6)  Viola and cello support.	<b>2</b> Bars (Bars 7 and 8)  Contrasting idea expanded	<b>5</b> Bars (Bars 9 to 13)  First idea developed. Viola joins in. Cello supports and later joins.	<b>3</b> Bars (Bars 14 to 16) A Different contrasting idea
<b>8</b> Bars (Bars 17 to 24)  First idea stretched and expanded.		<b>5</b> Bars (Bars 25 to 29)  Contrasting idea expanded further	<b>21</b> Bars (Bars 30 to 51)		<b>2</b> Bars (Bars 52 and 53)

During the course of the entire movement, the music also gets progressively louder, the texture gets denser and more dissonant and it gradually climbs to a higher register towards the end. These aspects, together with the fact that each section gets progressively longer according to the Fibonacci series makes this movement one long crescendo where every aspect of it expands. For example by the end the piece, the initial 2 bar idea is stretched to last 21 bars. This gradual expansion of the initial idea is emphasized with the fact that when each “white” section starts it begins with the same initial motivic idea to get the sense that the piece is not moving away from it but rather expanding it every time it reappears. The same is true with the “black” sections although they are not given too much importance since they only serve to interrupt the flow and hopefully emphasize the gradual expansion of the individual sections.

#### 4. Tranquil

In contrast with the previous movements, this one is dominated by homophonic textures, very low dynamics and high registers. The source material is from a folk song (figure 3) which originates from Turkey. In line with the first and the second movements, the melodic material is kept at minimum and in this case in favor of achieving an atmospheric

mood. For an inspiration on how to achieve the effect that I was after, I explored Ligeti's String Quartet No.2 and to some extent Lontano and Atmospheres. However, my main challenge with this one was to use the folk song in such way that it could maintain its essence and yet be different and not instantly recognizable. Since the source material was extremely simple, I tried to keep its simplicity up to some point and justify it by making subtle coloristic effects such as the use of harmonics, double stops, and *sul ponticello* bowing technique. In the first three systems, the folk melody is repeated number of times in different transpositions or a different bowing technique. The fourth system is where the second part of the folk song starts. This brief section could be considered the climax of the piece but it is kept short in order not to get away from the character of the piece.



Figure 3

## 5. Interlude 2

This is another short movement which is based on a Cypriot folk tune (fig 4). Where long sustaining chords dominated the previous movement, this one is exactly the opposite with its jumpy and staccato nature. The form aspect of the piece is quite faithful to its source material for repeated sections are somewhat a defining aspect of Cypriot folk music. Having said that, the harmonic language is where the piece departs from its roots. No significant importance has been given to any of the instruments at any time; instead, they all share the

same line, forming parallel chords. By doing this I was hoping to achieve a different sound from the ensemble, one that was not present in the previous movements, rougher and rhythmically defined. More clearly, I was after a sound that dominates the fifth movement of Bartok's String Quartet No.4.

#### Aysen Turkusu



*Figure 4*

## 6. Epilogue

The final movement is based on musical elements from all the previous movements such as texture, harmony and fragments of melodies. It begins with a new theme played in unison, something that was only explored briefly in the other movements. When chords finally arrive there are some familiar ones for example the last beat of bar 7 and the ones that follow it, they all appeared extensively throughout the second movement. After the theme is repeated with Cello (bb. 13-17) where the other instruments provide harmonies, it marks a departure from the homophonic texture. There is another reference to the second movement in bars 21 to 23 which could be considered a shift towards the next section of the piece. There is yet another reference in bars 24 and 25 to the second and the first movement respectively. The same bars also bring a noticeable shift in harmony, complimenting that of the second movement. From bar 29 to the end is a section that could easily be considered a continuation of the first movement, same melodic fragments and harmonies are re-explored in a dying away manner.

# I. Song

♩ = 76

Violin 1

Violin 2

Viola  
*sul tasto*  
*p* *mp*

Cello  
*p*

6

Vln. 1

Vln. 2  
*mp* *mf*

Vla.  
*pp* *p* *mf*

Vlc.  
*mf* *pp* *p* *mf*

11

Vln. 1  
*p* *mf*

Vln. 2  
*mp*

Vla.  
*p* *mp*

Vlc.  
*p* *mp*



16

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vlc.

Musical score for measures 16-19. The score is for four staves: Violin 1, Violin 2, Viola, and Violoncello. The key signature has one sharp (F#). Measure 16 starts with a *p* dynamic and a triplet of eighth notes in Vln. 1. Measure 17 features a *mf* dynamic in Vln. 2 and a *p* dynamic in Vla. Measure 18 has a *f* dynamic in Vln. 1. Measure 19 concludes with a *mf* dynamic in Vla. and a *f* dynamic in Vlc.

20

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vlc.

Musical score for measures 20-23. The score is for four staves: Violin 1, Violin 2, Viola, and Violoncello. The key signature has one sharp (F#). Measure 20 starts with a *mf* dynamic in Vln. 1. Measure 21 features a *f* dynamic in Vln. 2 and a *mp* dynamic in Vlc. Measure 22 has a *ff* dynamic in Vln. 1 and a *mf* dynamic in Vln. 2. Measure 23 concludes with a *f* dynamic in Vln. 1 and a *f* dynamic in Vln. 2.

24

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vlc.

Musical score for measures 24-27. The score is for four staves: Violin 1, Violin 2, Viola, and Violoncello. The key signature has one sharp (F#). Measure 24 starts with a *f* dynamic in Vln. 1 and a *mf* dynamic in Vla. Measure 25 features a *ff* dynamic in Vln. 1 and a *f* dynamic in Vln. 2. Measure 26 has a *ff* dynamic in Vln. 1 and a *ff* dynamic in Vln. 2. Measure 27 concludes with a *ff* dynamic in Vln. 1 and a *ff* dynamic in Vln. 2.

28

Vln. 1 *mf* *mp* *p*

Vln. 2 *mf* *p* *p*

Vla. *mf* *p*

Vlc. *mf* *p*

32

Vln. 1 *mf* *f*

Vln. 2 *mf*

Vla.

Vlc.

37

Vln. 1 *ff* *mf* *f*

Vln. 2 *mf* *f*

Vla. *f* *mf* *f*

Vlc. *mf* *f*

42

Vln. 1 *mp* *pp*

Vln. 2 *p* *mp* *pp*

Vla. *mp* *p* *mp* *pp*

Vlc. *p* *pp*

46

Vln. 1 *ff* *mf* *ff* *p* *mf* *ff*

Vln. 2 *ff* *mf* *ff* *p* *mf* *ff*

Vla. *ff* *mf* *ff* *p* *mf* *ff*

Vlc. *ff* *mf* *ff* *p* *mf* *ff*

51

Vln. 1 *p* *ff* *p* *ff* *mf* *ff*

Vln. 2 *p* *ff* *p* *ff* *mf* *ff*

Vla. *p* *ff* *p* *ff* *mf* *ff*

Vlc. *p* *ff* *p* *ff* *mf* *ff*

55

Vln. 1 *f* *mf*

Vln. 2 *f* *mf*

Vla. *f* *mf*

Vlc. *f*

60

Vln. 1 *f*

Vln. 2 *f*

Vla. *f*

Vlc.

64

Vln. 1 *mp*

Vln. 2 *f* *p*

Vla. *p*

Vlc.

68

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vlc.

*f*

*tr*

*mp*

*mf*

72

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vlc.

*p*

*mp*

*p*

*p*

*mp*

*p*

*p*

77

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vlc.

*pp*

*pp*

*mp*

*pp*

## II. Interlude

Violin 1  
*f* *mf* *f*

Violin 2  
*f* *mf*

Viola  
*mf*

Cello  
*f* *mf* *f*

Vln. 1  
4

Vln. 2  
*f*

Vla.  
*f*

Vlc.  
*f*

Vln. 1  
7

Vln. 2  
*ff* *ff*

Vla.  
*ff* *f*

Vlc.  
*ff* *f*

Detailed description: This musical score is for the second interlude, featuring four string parts: Violin 1, Violin 2, Viola, and Cello. The music is in 4/4 time and consists of ten measures. The first system (measures 1-4) shows Violin 1 starting with a forte (*f*) dynamic, moving to mezzo-forte (*mf*) and then back to forte (*f*). Violin 2 starts forte (*f*) and moves to mezzo-forte (*mf*). Viola and Cello both start with forte (*f*) and move to mezzo-forte (*mf*). The second system (measures 5-6) shows Violin 1 and Violin 2 both starting forte (*f*). Viola and Cello continue with forte (*f*). The third system (measures 7-10) shows Violin 1 and Violin 2 both moving to fortissimo (*ff*). Viola and Cello continue with fortissimo (*ff*) and then move to forte (*f*) in the final measure. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and triplets.

11

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vlc.

*p*

*mp*

15

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vlc.

*mf*

*ff*

*tr*

*mf*

*mf*

*mf*

*ff*

*tr*

*mf*

*mf*

*mf*

*ff*

*tr*

*pizz.*

*mf*

19

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vlc.

*mf*

*mf*

*f*

*mf*

*arco*

22

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vlc.

*f*

*f*

*f*

*f*

3

3

3

3

25

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vlc.

*ff*

*p*

*pp*

*ff*

*p*

*pp*

*ff*

*ff*

3

3



### III. Indecisions

♩ = 68

Violin 1: *pp* sul tasto, *p* sul pont., *ord.*  
Violin 2: *pp* sul tasto, *p* sul pont., *ord.*  
Viola: *p* sul pont., *pizz.*, *sfz*  
Cello: *p* sul pont., *pizz.*, *sfz*

Vln. 1: *mf*, *pp*, *p*, *mf*  
Vln. 2: *mf*, *pp*, *p*, *mf*  
Vla.: *sfz*, *arco*, *pp*, *p*, *mf*  
Vlc.: *sfz*, *arco*, *pp*, *p*, *mf*

Vln. 1: *mp*, *mf*, *f*, *p*, *mf*  
Vln. 2: *p*, *mf*, *f*, *mp*, *mf*  
Vla.: *p*, *mp*, *mf*, *f*, *mp*  
Vlc.: *pizz.*, *sfz*, *arco*, *mf*

12

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vlc.

*f*

*mf*

*f*

*f*

15

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vlc.

arco

*p*

*mf*

arco

*p*

arco

*p*

20

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vlc.

*f*

*mf*

*f*

*mf*

*mp*

23 *rit.* *a tempo*

Vln. 1 *mp* *pp* *p* *mf* sul pont. sul pont.....

Vln. 2 *mp* *pp* *p* *mf* sul pont. sul pont.....

Vla. *mp* *pp* *p* *mf* sul pont. sul pont.....

Vlc. *p* *pp* *p* *mf* sul pont. sul pont.....

29 ...ord.

Vln. 1 *ff* *p* *mf* *3*

Vln. 2 *ff* *p* *mp*

Vla. *ff* *pp* *p*

Vlc. *ff* *pp* *p*

34

Vln. 1 *f* *3*

Vln. 2 *mf* *mp* *3*

Vla. *mf* *p* *mp* *mf*

Vlc. *mf* *mp* *3*

37

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vcl.

*mf*

*mp*

*p*

5

3

40

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vcl.

*f*

*f*

*f*

*f*

3

3

3

5

43

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vcl.

*ff*

*ff*

*ff*

*f*

3

3

3

46

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vlc.

*mf*

*f* *ff*

*mf* *ff* *mf*

*mf* *ff* *mf*

*f* *ff* *f* *ff*

50

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vlc.

*pp*

*f*

*ff* *pp* *f*

*f* *pp* *f* *ff*

53

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vlc.

*sfz*

*sfz*

*sfz*

# IV. Tranquil

♩ = 60

Violin 1  
Violin 2  
Viola  
Cello

ppp p p mf

ppp p p mf

ppp p p mf

ppp p p mf

Detailed description: This system contains the first nine measures of the piece. It features four staves: Violin 1 (treble clef), Violin 2 (treble clef), Viola (alto clef), and Cello (bass clef). The time signature is 2/4. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The first measure is a whole rest for all instruments. From measure 2, the strings play a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. Dynamic markings include ppp (pianissimo) in measures 2-4 and p (piano) in measures 5-9. Articulation includes slurs and triplets (marked with a '3') in measures 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8. The overall texture is light and delicate.

Vln. 1  
Vln. 2  
Vla.  
Vlc.

p p mp ppp p

p mp ppp p

mp p

mp ppp

Detailed description: This system contains measures 10 through 18. The Violin 1 part continues with a melodic line, marked p (piano) in measures 10, 12, and 14. The Violin 2 part has a more active role, marked p in measures 10, 12, and 14, and mp (mezzo-piano) in measures 11, 13, and 15. The Viola and Cello parts provide harmonic support, with dynamic markings of mp and ppp. The music maintains the tranquil character with soft dynamics and delicate articulation.

Vln. 1  
Vln. 2  
Vla.  
Vlc.

mf mf mf

mf

Detailed description: This system contains measures 19 through 27. The Violin 1 part features a melodic line with triplets (marked with a '3') in measures 19, 20, and 21, and a dynamic marking of mf (mezzo-forte) in measure 22. The Violin 2 part also has triplets in measures 19, 20, and 21, and a dynamic marking of mf in measure 22. The Viola and Cello parts continue with their harmonic accompaniment, marked mf. The piece concludes with a final chord in measure 27.

28

Vln. 1 *f* *mf*

Vln. 2 *pp* *mp* *mf*

Vla. *pp* *mp* *mf*

Vlc. *pp* *mp*

34

Vln. 1 *p* *ppp*

Vln. 2 *pp* *mf* *ppp* *pp*

Vla. *pp* *mf* *ppp* *pp*

Vlc. *pp* *mp* *ppp* *pp*

43

Vln. 1 *ppp* *p* *ppp*

Vln. 2 *ppp* *p* *ppp*

Vla. *ppp* *p* *ppp*

Vlc. *ppp* *p* *ppp*

sul pont.

# V. Interlude II

♩ = 98

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Cello

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Musical score for Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello, measures 1-4. The score is in 2/4 time and features a forte (*f*) dynamic. The Violin I part has a tempo marking of ♩ = 98. The Violin II part starts with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The Viola and Cello parts also feature a forte (*f*) dynamic. The music consists of eighth and sixteenth notes with various articulations and slurs.

Musical score for Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello, measures 5-9. The score continues with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The Violin I part has a measure rest in measure 5. The Viola and Cello parts feature a forte (*f*) dynamic. The music consists of eighth and sixteenth notes with various articulations and slurs.

Musical score for Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello, measures 10-14. The score begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The Violin I part has a measure rest in measure 10. The Viola and Cello parts feature a piano (*p*) dynamic. The Viola part includes a pizzicato (*pizz.*) instruction in measure 10 and an arco instruction in measure 11. The Cello part includes an arco instruction in measure 11. The music consists of eighth and sixteenth notes with various articulations and slurs.



16

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

*ff*

*f*

23

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

*p*

29

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

*ff*

*rit.*

# VI. Epilogue

Violin 1  
*f*

Violin 2  
*f*

Viola  
*f*

Cello  
*f*

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vlc.

*rit.* *a tempo*

*p* *mf* *pp* *p*

*p* *mf* *pp* *p*

*p* *mf* *pp* *p*

*p* *mf* *f* *pp* *p*

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vlc.

*mf* *f* *mp*

*mf* *f* *mp*

*mf* *f* *mp*

*mf* *f* *f*

15

Vln. 1 *mf* *pp* Sul pont.

Vln. 2 *mf* *pp* Sul pont.

Vla. *mf* *pp* Sul pont.

Vlc. *pp* Sul pont.

19

Vln. 1 *f*

Vln. 2 *ppp* *f*

Vla. *ppp* *f* Ord.

Vlc. *ppp* *f* Ord.

24

Vln. 1 *mf* *f* *p* *mf* *f* *p*

Vln. 2 *p* *mf* *p* *mf* *pp*

Vla. *p* *mf* *p* *mf* *pp*

Vlc. *p* *mf* *p* *mf* *pp*

♩ = 68  
29 non vibrato

Vln. 1 *pp* *p* *mf*

Vln. 2 non vibrato *pp* *p* *mf*

Vla. non vibrato *pp* *p* *mf*

Vlc. non vibrato *pp* *p* *mf*

35 ord.

Vln. 1 *mp*

Vln. 2 ord. *pp* *p*

Vla. ord. *pp* *p*

Vlc. ord. *pp* *p*

40

Vln. 1 *mf* *pp* *mf*

Vln. 2 *mf* *pp*

Vla. *mf* *pp*

Vlc. *mf* *pp*

47

Vln. 1  
Vln. 2  
Vla.  
Vlc.

*mp* *p* *mp* *p*

5 3

51

Vln. 1  
Vln. 2  
Vla.  
Vlc.

*p* *ppp* *p* *ppp* *p* *ppp* *p* *ppp*