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String Quartet No.1 in G Major

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STRING QUARTET NO.1 IN G MAJOR

by

Wataru Niimori

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String Quartet No.1 in G Major is an original composition comprised of four movements: 1\textsuperscript{st} \textit{(Allegro Con Brio: a fast tempo with spirit)}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} \textit{(Adagio: a slow tempo)}, 3\textsuperscript{rd} \textit{(Minuet and Trio: a moderate tempo with triple meter)} and 4\textsuperscript{th} \textit{(Presto: very fast)}. This four-movement form, in other words, the sonata cycle, was developed during the 17\textsuperscript{th} and 18\textsuperscript{th} centuries in Western Europe for instrumental music. It reached its heyday in the middle of the 18\textsuperscript{th} century through the next whole century. Composers in the Classical Period such as Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809), Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-91) and Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827), wrote a large number of solo piano, string quartet and orchestral works employing this form. My musical background and long-term focus on the study of classical music, jazz and film scoring hugely influenced my composition hereupon incorporating the traditional musical language.

The first movement is written with the sonata-allegro form, which consists of an exposition followed by a development and recapitulation with coda. This form, employed in the first movement, was popular among composers in the Classical Period. G Major is the central key of this movement and this lively main theme is introduced in the first two measures, but also frequently appears through the entire movement as variations. The second movement has a solitary mood overall in E minor, applying specific bowing techniques such as \textit{sul ponticello}. The third
movement, starting from minuet in G minor, is thoroughly written with triple meter, 3/4, however, the rhythmic modulation, two against three, occurs. The contrapuntal compositional technique is applied. Trio of the second part of the third movement reflects more jazz vocabulary in harmony and melody, though still using the original theme of this movement. The fourth movement is the grand finale and returns the mood of the first movement. An 8-note motif is introduced in the first four measures of the fourth movement and varied in the exposition and recapitulation of the sonata-allegro form. I was highly influenced by a style of film scoring in writing for strings in the development section: polymeter (7/4) and ostinato.
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OVERVIEW

“String Quartet No.1 in G Major” is an original composition comprised of four movements: Allegro Con Brio: a fast tempo with spirit, Adagio: a slow tempo, Minuet and Trio: a moderate tempo with triple meter, and Presto: very fast. My main interest in composition is writing music for media including films, televisions, commercials, and video games. Strings are capable of expressing a variety of emotions and reflecting the characters and scenes in cinema, and as such, are employed widely by composers across commercial media. Through my composition, it was important for me to understand the function and role of strings in media music. Moreover I had two reasons that I was interested in gaining knowledge and technique for writing music for the string quartet. First, I wanted to learn the instrumental character of individual strings: violin, viola and cello. Second, I was fascinated with the style of string quartet as an ensemble from the compositional aspect. Sylvette Milliot argues that the string quartet is the complementary ensemble, which covers the following register: soprano, alto, tenor and bass, and they share the similar timbre even though each string has their own role and creates an unity as an ensemble. When I elaborated a plan to write a string quartet piece, I modeled the four-movements with each specific tempo as stated above because I was highly influenced by Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven’s works; however, I included my own musical vocabulary in melody, harmony and rhythm, which reflected on my long-term study of classical music and jazz.

In the first movement, Charles Rosen claims that the first movement concentrates the greatest weight in the opening and has the most elaborate and
dramatic structure in harmony, thematic material and texture. In my first movement, the tempo is Allegro Con Brio (fast), the time signature is 4/4 and the key, G Major. The exposition contains one main theme, which slightly varies notes and rhythms through the entire 1st movement. The composers in the 18th century typically used the galant style, which was simpler, elegant and utilized song-like melody. The sound of the theme was cheerful and uplifting. They also tended to utilize an 8-measure phrase in the theme as Bill Caplin argues that “the sentence is an eight-measure theme built out of two four-measure phrases . . . the theme expresses three formal functions – presentation, continuation, and cadential” (Caplin 35). Furthermore, in my long term of study of jazz, I noticed that there were many jazz standards written between 1930s and 50s with AABA, 32-bar form, being composed of 8-measure phrases. I employed the galant style with 8-measure phrases in the first theme (mm.0-8).

I incorporated the sonata or sonata-allegro form in this movement, which consists of an exposition, development and recapitulation, used by the composers in the classical period. However, as Charles Rosen claims that it is difficult to define what the 18th century’s sonata is because it is not clear that the 18th century’s music called “sonata” always has the same form and style. Rosen also argues that it is not accurate that the Haydn’s music defines the sonata form even though Haydn’s way was more successful in the 18th century. As I did research on the sonata form, I began to understand more about its complexities. This made me realize that what I learned about the sonata form in the school’s theory and history class is merely an introductory level. Due to my limited time, I picked up several scores of string quartet composed by Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven, and then started to study them and
absorb their technique. When I started writing my string quartet piece, I tried to incorporate my own ideas such as harmony and melodic line referring to what these three composers used. For example, in Mozart’s String Quartet No. 14 in G Major, the first theme is introduced in the key of G major (I) and then the second one is in the key of D major (V).

**Example 1. The first subject (mm.0-2):** *String Quartet No. 14 in G Major* (Mozart)

**Example 2. The second subject (mm.24-26):** *String Quartet No. 14 in G Major* (Mozart)

Although the first theme of my piece is in the key of G (mm.0-8), the second theme stays in the same key with a slight modification (mm.18-20). I employed a G dominant 7th chord with flat 7th (F) and sharp 11th (C#) instead of G major in the second theme. First, I wanted to emphasize on the key of G scale, the first theme in G major scale and the second one in G dominant. Second, I observed that jazz musicians such as Charlie Parker and Bud Powell alternately used G major and dominant scales based on a G chord. For example, they changed to a G7 from G major chord and improvised on it. Vice versa.
In the end of the exposition, I followed the conventional sonata-allegro form, which the tonal key of the movement is G major (I) and the final chord of the exposition is D major (V). I followed this custom except for adding extended notes, flat 7th, sharp 9th and 11th, on the D chord: D-F#-A-C-F-G# (mm.61).

The development section is a combination of the developed original theme and new ideas. I also incorporated several “jazz vocabularies” in this section. For example, harmonically, I use a series of, ii-v, chord progressions, which is frequently seen in jazz such as the bridge of rhythm changes: D7-G7-C7-F7. In Example 6 (mm.68-69), I employ a melodic line similar to how bebop jazz musicians such as Charlie Parker and Bud Powell improvise over the dominant chord. They play scale degrees: 3-flat-9-5-#5 on a dominant chord and then resolve to 5 on the next chord.
Example 5. Improvised by Bud Powell: *Ornithology* (Parker)

Example 6. Jazz vocabularies (mm.68-69): 1st Movement (Niimori)

The development ends on the V chord of the main key (D), followed by the recapitulation. Although the original subject comes back in the recapitulation, I used slight variations such as, modulation, to give a contrast between the exposition and recapitulation. For example, the first theme is played in tonic, G major, though the
second one is in subdominant, the key of C (IV), starting from measure 151. I chose this change because, first, I was not interested in copying the exposition and emphasizing the key of G again. Second, I wanted to incorporate the concept of the cycle fourths instead of fifth, which is widely used in jazz. Harmonically, the entire exposition of my piece is solidly in the key of G; however, the recapitulation is moving in the cycle of fourths, G-C-F, and goes back to G. Another example of the variation is that the second violin plays the first theme (mm.30) in the exposition while the cello plays it (mm.163) in the recapitulation. It was important for me to insert a coda (mm.197) because the recapitulation of my piece did not have a strong closure (mm.194). Bill Caplin argues one possible reason to add a coda, “to shape a concluding dynamic curve that differs from (or surpasses) that of the recapitulation” (Caplin 179). The two violins play the first subject alternately followed by the variation of the first subject played by the first violin (mm.202). The cadence is a perfect authentic, V-I; however, the final chord is the tonic with #11 (C#) in the G major triad, which is also often used in the ending in jazz to provide a special effect and avoid crushing the notes of 3rd and 11th in the major chord.

In the second movement, I was highly influenced by one scene from the Stanley Kubrick’s film, 2001: A Space Odyssey. The scene depicts five astronauts on the way to Jupiter, two of whom are not in the condition of suspended animation but have controlled the spaceship for eighteen months. The music Kubrick used for this scene was Aram Khachaturian’s Gayane Suite (Adagio) played by only string instruments. When I heard this music accompanying the scene, I imagined how isolated and lonely these two astronauts were because the timbre of the strings was
dry and the melody was plaintive. Originally this piece was composed for ballet with full orchestra; however, the arrangement used in the film is for string orchestra only. Although I was unable to find the score for this particular arrangement, I was forced to do an analysis solely by ear. The melody is in B-flat natural minor (0:54:43), followed by a chromatic counter melody (0:55:47). The melody and counter melody written as they are for string orchestra, create a mysterious and solitary effect. It is remarkable how the image and music are synchronized in this scene: there are only two people in the image with only two melodies provided. Kachaturian’s piece also has a lack of a rhythmic pulse, which makes it ideally suited for this scene in space, where a sense of time does not exist. I wanted to evoke a similar mood in this movement.

The second movement follows convention is its use of a slow tempo. I incorporated more modern techniques such as unique ways of bowing (sul ponticello and sul tasto), timbre of strings (harmonics), dissonant harmonies and ambient style of music. Caplin claims that the slow movements commonly employ several different forms such as sonata, sonata without development, large ternary, and theme and variations, and is inherently simple and considerably less complex. Caplin also argues, “The basic plan is simple: a main theme, constructed as either a small ternary or a small binary, is followed by an indefinite number of varied repetitions” (Caplin 217). I applied the motif and variation with the binary form in the second movement.

In this movement, first, I wrote music using a MIDI (Musical Instrument Digital Interface) keyboard watching the short movie of outer space, without the soundtrack, which I randomly chose for sake of practice to write music with the
image. This is one of the common writing methods that film composers employ: composing music with MIDI keyboard while watching the image on the computer monitor. This method depends on one’s intuition and gives one a focus on what the image truly suggests.

Example 7. The main motif (mm.1-2) by Cello: 2nd Movement (Niimori)

Cello plays the main theme with mute (mm.1-2) in the beginning of the movement. I sporadically inserted this 4-note motif and its variations through the movement. One compositional technique I employed is dissonance, seen in Example 8, when the second violin plays F# and G simultaneously while the viola plays C# (mm.32).

Example 8. Use of dissonance (mm.32): 2nd Movement (Niimori)

Moreover I used several bowing techniques aforementioned (mm.20 and mm.55) and
harmonics (mm.65) to produce a special sound effect such as sul ponticello, “an eerie, somewhat glassy timbre” (Adler 32), sul tast, “a rather flutelike, soft, and hazy tone” (Adler 31).

In the third movement I used the conventional Minuet and Trio form, which is tripartite. Although the tonic is normally given in the Minuet of the later works of Mozart and the early ones of Beethoven, the key of my Minuet is G minor, which is a parallel minor of tonic, G Major. There are two characteristics I used in Minuet; one is a fugal technique. Another is polyrhythm, wherein one feels 2/4 against 3/4. The viola introduces the five-measure subject in G minor followed by the second violin and cello simultaneously imitating the subject (mm.5). In succession, the first violin and viola imitate the subject again (mm.9) followed by the second violin playing another imitation (mm.14).

Example 9. The opening theme of Minuet (mm.1-5): 3rd Movement (Niimori)

I incorporated the fugal technique called fughetta, in which the form is not necessary to follow a strict sense of the Baroque fugue, but a short fugue, with exposition plus only a few restatements of the subject. The following table outlines the use of the subject in the exposition. The note choices are based on G natural minor and G diminished-dominant scales.
Example 10. Table of the use of subject: Minuet (Niimori)

I intentionally kept the time signature 3/4 from the beginning to the end; however, I incorporated cross-rhythms and metric modulation, 2/4-feel, into Minuet.

Example 11. Cross-rhythms and Metric Modulation: Minuet (Niimori)
Polyrhythms, such as cross-rhythms and metric modulation, are observed in the works of composers in the 20th century. In jazz, the pianist Thelonious Monk, recorded “Brilliant Corners” in the album Brilliant Corners (1956) using metric modulation. Another jazz pianist, Bill Evans, played “Someday My Prince Come” in Bill Evans at the Montreux Jazz Festival (1968) using cross-rhythms and metric modulation. In my Minuet, for example, the groupings with green and red box create 2/4-feel against the time signature in Example 11. The red boxes indicate cross-rhythms, where melodic figures cross the bar line several times to repeat. This gives the illusion of creating a different time signature but the original pulse is maintained. I used this effect because of my long-term practice of jazz as a piano player. A large number of example of polyrhythms can be seen in the piano music of ragtime such as Scott Joplin’s and Jelly Roll Morton’s works. Lee Evans argues citing Gunther Schuller’s book, Early Jazz: Its Roots and Musical Development, “African phrases are ‘built up of the number 2 and 3 or a combination on 2 and 3,’ and that this ragtime rhythm again demonstrates the African American’s urge to combine two rhythms simultaneously within the European musical framework” (Evans 2). Furthermore, after ragtime, an extraordinary number of examples can be cited from their recordings, in which jazz pianists provide a great sense of rhythm as an accompanist along with the bassist and drummer. I listened to many jazz recordings made throughout the history of the music, and in particular studied the rhythm sections and how they provided rhythm. One thing I learned is that piano players such as Herbie Hancock provide 3/4-feel rhythm in 4/4 song, and 2/4-feel in 3/4 song while the original pulse is kept such as “Stella by Starlight” and “Footprints” from the Miles Davis’ albums, My Funny Valentine (1964).
and *Miles Smiles* (1966). In the Minuet and Trio, it was effective to create 2/4 time feel while the original pulse is maintained.

In the Trio, I wanted to make a contrast with the mood and color though I still incorporated the theme of the third movement. The approach I employed is same to the classics except for shifting tonality. Caplin points out that a trio must provide a distinct element of contrast while still maintaining the same meter and tempo. In my piece, the meter and the tempo are same although the mood is calmer and quieter than the Minuet. In other words, the dynamics are lower and the longer value of notes is often used in the Trio. Instead of giving a distinctive key signature, I employed the open fourth harmony in the Trio. This is different from the conventional trios, which most follow the same tonal plan, although they more often stay entirely in one key. For example, the cello restates the main theme of the Minuet (mm.61-70) but the key center is not in G minor, which was the center in the Minuet. I gave G-flat Lydian mode over the melody (G minor).
The open fourth harmony is also called the suspended chord, which the third note of the dominant chord is raised up to the fourth degree, for example, C\(^7\) (C-E-G-Bb) becomes C\(^7\text{sus}^4\) (C-F-G-Bb). The Roman numeral indicates V\(^7\text{sus}^4\). This was not a new technique, which was witnessed in the Western music of the 16th century, the jazz musicians in the 1960s started incorporating this harmony into their improvisation and composition to build independent sonorities in modal jazz styles. For example, a jazz pianist, Herbie Hancock, recorded “Maiden Voyage” from the album, *Maiden Voyage* (1965). This song starts from the open fourth harmony, D\(^7\text{sus}^4\), played by the piano, and the entire tune is comprised of a series of open fourth harmony. In my Trio, the quartet plays A-flat\(^9\text{sus}^4\) chord, Ab-Db-Gb-Bb, and shifts to B-flat\(^9\text{sus}^4\) and D-flat\(^9\text{sus}^4\) (mm.53-58). In the conventional form, the final chord in the
end of trio is typically tonic or dominant followed by the Minuet (tonic). However, I give A\(^7\) dominant chord adding extended notes, flat 9\(^{\text{th}}\) and 13\(^{\text{th}}\): A-C#-E-G-Bb-Gb. Although the convention of the last Minuet section literally repeats the first Minuet section as \textit{da capo}, the last Minuet is played in the key of D (V) instead of the tonic (I) so that this provides a sense of connection to the final movement (the tonic is G). Moreover, I apply the same reason that the final chord of the cadence (mm.192) is D\(^7\) (V\(^7\)) with #9\(^{\text{th}}\): D-F#-A-C-F. I gave the half cadence because the fourth movement is in G major and I wanted to make the sound of the final chord obvious as dominant 7\(^{\text{th}}\) chord so that the music offer a continuous transition from third to fourth movement. Furthermore, sharp-9\(^{\text{th}}\) of the dominant chord is a part of the blues scale (1-#9-11-#11-5-b7), which creates a tension on the dominant chord due to the dissonance of the 3\(^{\text{rd}}\) and sharp-9\(^{\text{th}}\); however, this provides a bluesy sound.

The final movement is regarded as a grand finale. In the conventional fourth movement of the 18\(^{\text{th}}\) century, the tempo is fast, composers tend to use the rondo form, the melody and overall mood is galant style, and some composers incorporate the fugal technique. I used some of these characteristics in my fourth movement such as galant style, fast tempo and fughetta. The form is the large ternary form with coda (ABCDABCE). The tempo is presto and the key is G major (I). The main theme is diatonic and comprised of eight notes, which appears through the entire movement as variations.
Example 13. The main subject (mm.1-4): 4th Movement (Niimori)

From measure 42, the second subject is introduced in E minor and dorian scale, which is the relative minor of tonic, G major. It is notable to mention that I employed “jazz vocabulary” (mm.43-44): the second violin, viola and cello while play tutti while the first violin represents the melody as if they were a rhythm section, piano, bass and drums, of the jazz quartet providing a rhythm to the soloist. For example, the last chord of measure 43, G minor with 6th, is highly syncopated so that the chord anticipates the harmony of the next measure (mm.44). Moreover, I put *Marcato* and *sforzando* so that the chord is highly emphasized, which gives a powerful and jazzy rhythmic gesture. This 2-bar rhythmic gesture continues till measure 50 followed by superimposed rhythm creating polyrhythm. For example, the second Violin and Viola provide triplet-half note rhythm while the first violin plays the 8th-note melody (mm.50 -53).
While most composers did not use fugue form to contextualize their final movements, some (Mozart used it in the entire fourth movement of String Quartet No.14 and Haydn employed in the middle section of String Quartet Op.64, No.5) did. As such, I wrote a fughetta in the last part of the first section of the ternary form. The first subject is introduced by the 1st violin (mm.83-86) in E minor and the tonal answer is played by the second violin (mm.87-90) with a perfect fifth down from the first subject. The first violin immediately plays the counter subject after the first subject (mm.87-90) is introduced. The Viola plays the first subject (mm.90-93) followed by a partial answer in the cello who plays a part of the tonal answer (mm.93-94).

In the middle section of the large ternary form (mm.120-172), although the convention is development-like unit, I employed non-diatonic melodic line, dissonance with the major 9th harmony, and the rhythmic ostinato with 7/4 time signature. In the modern film scoring, especially action and chase scenes, composers commonly use rhythmic ostinato passages witnessed in “The Deputy chases Kimble”
from *The Fugitive* (1993; composed by James Newton Howard), “African Rundown” from *Casino Royale* (2006; by David Arnold), “Agent of Chaos” from *The Dark Knight* (2008; by Howard and Hans Zimmer), and “Mombasa” from *Inception* (2010; Zimmer). The short rhythmic pattern in these films effectively supports the action and aggressive scene. The following two examples from *The Dark Knight* are the ostinato composed by Zimmer, which are played by the strings percussively. They emphasize the accents and create a rhythmic pattern.

Example 15. Ostinato: The Opening of “Agent of Chaos” from *The Dark Knight* (Zimmer)

Example 16. Ostinato: “Agent of Chaos” (0:40) from *The Dark Knight* (Zimmer)

Concert composers in the early 20th century also used the rhythmic ostinato in their
works such as Stravinsky’s “The Augurs of Spring” and “Dances of the Young Girls” from *The Rite of Spring* (1913) and Bartók’s “146. Ostinato” from *Mikrokosmos* (1939). Two common characteristics of the rhythmic ostinato from Bartók’s and Stravinsky’s works, are the repetition and emphasis on certain beats with thick texture and dissonance. For example, Stravinsky gives E-flat dominant 7th above F-flat major chord. Bartók’s chord is D⁵ (no 3rd) with sharp-11th. The rhythmic ostinato is not necessary to have a thick chord.

Example 17. Ostinato: *The Rite of Spring* (Stravinsky)

Example 18. Ostinato: “146. Ostinato” from *Mikrokosmos* (Bartok)
Both Bartók’s and Stravinsky’s ostinatos have an accent on the beats shown in red circled in Example 13 and 14, but these accents are repeated in several measures to create the energetic and driving sound. In my fourth movement, I used the time signature 7/4 and put an accent on the beat 1, 4 and 6. In short, the rhythm could be divided by $3 + 2 + 2$. The following example excerpts the beginning of the rhythmic ostinato played by viola and cello in the fourth movement of my work. The harmony is the use of a major 7th interval between a D and C#. This short rhythmic pattern is repeated through the whole middle section.

Example 19. Ostinato by Viola and Cello (m.m.139): 4th Movement (Niimori)

The last section of the fourth movement starts from measure 173. The first and last section of this movement is identical but my piece is slightly different in harmony, melody and instrumentation. For example, although the composers in the Classical period typically return to tonic in the last section, I used subdominant, C major (IV). As I mentioned in the recapitulation of the first movement, I have same reason in this section. First, I wanted to avoid the repetition previously employed, and I also wanted to incorporate a cycle of fourths pattern. Another example of my slight variation is that the second theme in the first section (mm.42-45) is E minor.
accompanied with E minor and G minor chords; however, the second theme in the last section (mm.215-218) is E dominant 7 with E\(^7\) and G major chords. Finally, the coda (mm.283-329) starts from the viola and cello creating a repetition of the rhythmic pattern while two violins simultaneously play a variation of the main subject with major 6\(^{th}\) apart. I used a G mixolydian scale in the melody based on G\(^{7\text{sus4}}\) chord. The music maintains the uplifting mood and then leads to the final cadence with a series of open and giant chords of tonic, which is the conventional ending of the 18\(^{th}\) century.

In this, my first composition for the string quartet, I wanted to use conventions from the 18\(^{th}\) century along with my own musical ideas. In pursuant of this I followed the recommendation of the renowned composer, Dr. Robert Sirota, to study the works of Haydn, the late works of Mozart, and the early works of Beethoven before I started writing music. Although these three composers represent archetypal examples of musical styles of the 18\(^{th}\) century, they all responded differently to these conventions in how they incorporated musical ideas into their works. It was a great pleasure and meaningful time for me to study their works. This made me realize that there are more materials I need to learn from them in the future to improve my musicianship as a composer whatever styles of music I write, concert music or film scoring. The whole process I worked on my string quartet piece is merely the beginning of my long musical journey.
I. Allegro Con Brio

II. Adagio

III. Minuet and Trio

IV. Presto

Instrumentation

Violin I
Violin II
Viola
Cello
String Quartet No.1 in G Major

Allegro con brio  \( \frac{j}{=} = 143 \)

1st Movement

Wataru Niimori

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rit.

\[ v1 = 143 \]

Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
String Quartet No.1 in G Major

\( A \)

Con sordino

\( p \) expressively, mysteriously

Vc.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Sul ponticello

\( p \)

Sul ponticello

\( p \)

\( \text{decresc.} \)

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gliss sul D  

Vln. I

pp  legato

Vln. II

pp  legato

gliss sul C  

Vla.

pp  legato

Vc.
String Quartet No. 1 in G Major

Minuet  \( \frac{\text{d}}{\text{d}} = 130 \)

3rd Movement

Wataru Niimori

A

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Violoncello

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.
String Quartet No.1 in G Major

Presto  \( \frac{d}{4} = 148 \)

4th Movement

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rit.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

mf

mf
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