

## IN SEARCH OF “THE MORE IMPORTANT” IN STRING QUARTET NO. 1 BY DIETER ACKER

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**SUMMARY.** Dieter Acker’s String Quartet No. 1 represents a turning point in the composer’s output, being an opus composed in his last year of study in Sigismund Toduță’s composition class (1964) and one which brought him international recognition, winning second prize at the 1966 Prague Spring International Festival. This study presents biographical, historical, and analytical aspects of the work which are reflected in its musical structure, revealing both a respect for the historical tradition of past centuries and the search for new orientations of the musical avant-garde. Through arguments related to the biography of the young Dieter Acker, trained under Franz Xaver Dressler and Sigismund Toduță, the study presents the unity of meaning and content that is directly reflected in String Quartet No. 1.

**Keywords:** Dieter Acker, String Quartet No. 1, Sigismund Toduță, Anton Webern reception, Palindrome

This study is a result of the project *The musical culture of Saxon and the composition school in Cluj: Dieter Acker and Hans-Peter Türk* initiated by the author and supported by the Gheorghe Dima National Academy of Music in Cluj-Napoca through a research scholarship at the Music Conservatory Library in Düsseldorf, and at the Library of the Transylvanian Institute in Gundelsheim. I hereby express my gratitude for the support during my research stays of Mr Jonas Lamik from the Music Conservatory Library in Düsseldorf, who was kind enough to mediate the necessary guidance in the vast library, as well as the director Dr Ingrid Schiel, the head librarian Mr Christian Rother, and Ms Hannelore Schnabel from the Transylvanian Institute in Gundelsheim, who supported my inquiries with patience and commitment.

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String Quartet No. 1 represents the first time that Dieter Acker's unquestionable creative cogency was acknowledged beyond the Romanian border. It was a valuable moment in the composer's career that made the young Acker, then 36 years old, not only a renowned composer in the eyes of his masters and colleagues in Romania, but also in the eyes of the international world. Composed in 1964, the year in which Dieter Acker completed his studies in Sigismund Toduță's composition class, it was immediately afterwards that Acker was hired as the maestro's assistant at the Cluj Conservatory (today the Gheorghe Dima National Academy of Music). In 1966 this first quartet won second prize at the composition competition organized by Prague Spring International Music Festival, where it was also performed by the Dvořák Quartet Ensemble, and the work can be regarded as the composer's first opus of creative maturity; a compositional mastery based on tradition can be observed and, at the same time, peculiarities of style can be grasped that will go on to become constant in his output.

### Biographical Outline

Dieter Acker (1940-2006) was a composer of Transylvanian Saxon ethnicity whose remarkable career reveals talent of uncompromising tenacity and character of unquestionable morality. Until his departure from Romania, he struggled in a world of unequal opportunities as a renegade of the communist regime, being considered *persona non grata* in public life after his emigration to West Germany. After the fall of the Ceaușescu regime, Acker's personality was recovered in Romanian public life, and those who kept him in their thoughts were able to find opportunities for collaboration again.<sup>2</sup>

Acker's interview with Stephan Schmitt on 19th May 2004 passes over, in oppressive silence, the tragedy of the Acker family,<sup>3</sup> but when the subject switches to music, we discover that in his hometown Acker was supported by Franz-Xaver Dressler, a distinguished musician, organist, teacher and conductor settled in Sibiu. Dressler's merit is nowadays considered of historical importance: in his desire to ensure a professional musical life, he founded vocal ensembles (the Bach Choir, the Brukenthal Choir), organised concerts and tours, and brought music performance up to

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<sup>2</sup> In 2000 Dieter Acker was awarded the title of *Doctor honoris causa* of the Gheorghe Dima National Academy of Music in Cluj-Napoca.

<sup>3</sup> Acker spent his childhood with his grandparents, Professor Wilhelm Georg and his wife, a priest's daughter, Helene Georg. His father, Michael Acker, fell in the battle at Stalingrad in 1943, and his mother, Helene-Friederike Acker (1914, born Georg) was deported in Russia from 1944 until 1948 in a labour camp.

modern standards. The Bach Choir, founded in 1931, has become an emblem of Sibiu;<sup>4</sup> and Dressler went on to adopt the model of Leipzig musical life: in 1934, he was the founder of the Brukenthal Choir, a boys' choir like the Thomanerchor, which enriched the musical life of the city until 1948, when the authorities decided to disband it.<sup>5</sup>

Acker's talent was discovered by Dressler, who became his piano, organ, and music theory teacher; equally, Acker found in Dressler an early model of a professional musician, one who was dedicated to the community. Dressler's lessons were accompanied by notions and exercises in music theory, harmony, and counterpoint, so Acker learned these skills long before he arrived at the Conservatory in Cluj.<sup>6</sup> With Dressler, Acker had invaluable artistic experiences<sup>7</sup> that would be reflected in his later creative and organisational activities, which were equally concerned with artistic exigency and the importance of music's role in the community. From Acker's interview, we learn that Dressler discovered a rare talent in the eleven-year-old student: absolute hearing and the ability to identify simultaneously up to twelve sounds.<sup>8</sup> Along with choral singing – a common activity in the Transylvanian Saxon community in church, in public life, at school, even in the family's inner circle – Acker also learned to play several instruments. He learned to play the piano and the recorder as a child, later taking up the organ and the trumpet, and his curiosity led him to other brass instruments also.

After turning 18, Dieter Acker headed for Cluj. Despite his talent and training being well above the average for students entering the Conservatory's composition class, Dieter Acker was initially rejected for admission to Transylvania's highest music institution in 1957. The reasons were not connected to his musical education, but instead the "unhealthy" origins of his family, both on his father's and mother's side. While the grandfather on his father's side had been a landowner in the past, the family on the mother's side also included priests and teachers active in Reformed churches.<sup>9</sup> The

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<sup>4</sup> The existence of the Bach Choir was saved by reorganising its belonging to various state institutions: in 1959, it was separated from the church, being declared a choral ensemble of the House of Culture; in 1963, it became a choir of the State Philharmonic of Sibiu, where it could contribute to the continuation of the public concert secular and sacred repertoire (oratorios).

<sup>5</sup> See Stieger 116.

<sup>6</sup> See Schmitt 14.

<sup>7</sup> „Mit vier Jahren saß ich bereits als stiller Beobachter bei den Proben zwischen Chor und Orchester und habe selber später dann jahrelang auch mitgesungen und viele wertvolle Erfahrungen gemacht.“ (At the age of four I already sat as a silent observer at the choir and orchestra rehearsals, and later I also sang with them for years and gained many valuable experiences.) Schmitt 13.

<sup>8</sup> Schmitt, 14.

<sup>9</sup> Schmitt, 15-16.

following year, however, his attempt to become a student at the Conservatory was successful; the credit for this surely must go to Sigismund Toduță – renowned for his “immunity” from all political interference and for his impartiality<sup>10</sup> at a time when “social origins” outweighed competence – who must have recognised the young Acker’s prowess in the fundamental musical subjects (harmony and counterpoint) already acquired under Dressler’s supervision. Between 1958 and 1964 Acker studied at the Music Conservatory in Cluj, in Toduță’s composition class, a period marked also by his starting a family with Heyde Roth in 1963.

The Communist regime’s harassment of Dieter Acker continued in the following years. The most telling example was the refusal to award him the George Enescu scholarship because he had an uncle living in West Germany (although the uncle had left Romania before the Second World War, before Dieter Acker was even born, and that the family left in Romania did not keep in touch with him). Acker’s desire to leave Romania became more and more deeply ingrained.<sup>11</sup>

Despite the impediments caused by his “unhealthy” origins, Dieter Acker had achieved remarkable successes for a “representative of the Saxons” in Romania: his admission to the Cluj Conservatory (after a first failed attempt), the Second Prize at the Prague Spring International Music Festival for his String Quartet No. 1 (and its printing by the only publishing house in Romania – the state one), and his success in obtaining the position of university assistant at the Cluj Conservatory immediately after graduating in 1964, a post which he held until he left abroad. Following a string of unsuccessful attempts, Dieter and Heyde Acker were accepted to participate at the famous Darmstadt Summer School in 1969, and they used this opportunity to emigrate. Their two daughters were left in the care of their grandparents, and it was a year before the family reunited.

The uncertainty of a new beginning in Germany was certainly real, and it manifested itself in the difficulty of making a living; but after the first year he had already obtained a position at the Düsseldorf Conservatory, and from 1972 he was employed at the Munich Conservatory. He was soon accepted into the German Composers’ Union and the GEMA, and international awards over the years confirmed the promising start from Prague.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Türk, *Mein Lehrer Sigismund Todutza*, 104-105.

<sup>11</sup> Schmitt 17-18.

<sup>12</sup> Stamitz Prize (Stuttgart, 1970), City of Stuttgart Composition Prize for *Texturae I* for large orchestra (1971), *Marler* Composition Prize at the *Jugend musiziert* Competition for the *Stigmen* piano trio (1971), *Lions Club International* Composition Prize for String Quartet No. 4 (Düsseldorf, 1972), International *Stroud Festival* Prize for Clarinet Quintet (United Kingdom, 1973), Hitzacker Prize for Duo for Violin and Cello (1974), *Henriette Renié* Prize of the Académie des Beaux Arts for *Music for Strings and Harp* (Paris, 1988), Stamitz Prize (Mannheim, 1990).

## Cultural and Musical Background

Acker was trained in the spirit of German musical culture, as Hans-Peter Türk, Acker's friend and colleague at the Cluj Conservatory, points out:

Seine rumänischen Musikerkollegen glauben ihm ein besonders erfreuliches Kompliment machen zu können, indem sie in einigen seiner Werke Anklänge an rumänische Volksmusik herausgehört haben wollen. Die biedere Höflichkeitsgeste hat aber in Wirklichkeit mit Ackers Musik nichts, aber auch gar nichts zu tun. Für gewöhnlich quittiert er solche Bemerkungen mit einem etwas verständnislosen Lächeln, denn dies wäre sein entferntestes Anliegen.<sup>13</sup>

Indeed, Acker's interest in German and Saxon culture is reflected not only in the music itself, but also in his investigations of music history and musical analysis, in which he focuses on figures from the history of the Transylvanian Saxons (Gabriel Reilich<sup>14</sup> and Norbert von Hannenheim, "our country's first composer of serial music"<sup>15</sup>), and he also wrote about modernists such as Anton Webern.<sup>16</sup>

Acker's student life was marked by the cultural vicissitudes of the communist period. Acker mentions Bartók, Stravinsky, Hindemith, Webern as his role models, and he showed a particular attraction to the latter. Training in Sigismund Toduță's composition class laid solid classical music foundations, culminating in his analysis of modern works from the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Bartók, Enescu, Schoenberg, Webern, Stravinsky, Lutosławski, etc.) in his sixth, and final, year of study. The Sigismund Toduță Foundation still preserves detailed unpublished analyses which must have been presented in the maestro's composition classes, with up-to-date

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<sup>13</sup> Türk, Dieter Acker – Wie ich ihn sehe, wie ich ihn höre, 33.

<sup>14</sup> Acker, Un manuscris transilvănean din secolul XVII: „Neu-Musicalische Concerten” de Gabriel Reilich (A Transylvanian Manuscript from the 17th century: „Neu-Musicalische Concerten” by Gabriel Reilich), 153-170.

<sup>15</sup> Acker, Un discipol din Sibiu al lui Schönberg: Norbert von Hannenheim (A Disciple of Schoenberg in Sibiu: Norbert von Hannenheim), 182. Dieter Acker is the author of an article about Hannenheim in *Melos* (1969, Norbert von Hannenheim. *Melos* 1: 6-8), as well as of the article from MGG (see Acker, 1979. Hannenheim, Norbert Wolfgang Stephan von. In Fr. Blume (ed.), *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart. Allgemeine Enzyklopädie der Musik*, 16. Kassel – Basel – Paris – London – New York: Bärenreiter: 588-589.).

<sup>16</sup> Acker, Trăsături ale creației vocal-instrumentale a lui Webern (Features of Webern's vocal creation), 36-40.

bibliographical resources.<sup>17</sup> Among these is a manuscript containing an analysis of Anton Webern's Piano Variations Op. 27, dated March 1966.<sup>18</sup> In the second half of the 1960s the publication of analyses of Webern's work was facilitated,<sup>19</sup> as a clear sign of "canonisation" of his aphoristic style among the younger generation of composers anchored in the European cultural circuit.<sup>20</sup> Dieter Acker was, in turn, an assiduous analyst of Webern's work.<sup>21</sup> He acknowledges in a statement that his maestro brought it to his attention,<sup>22</sup> and it was from Toduță that he received the scores which he copied entirely by hand in order to study it in detail,<sup>23</sup> as did many of his colleagues.

Acker's only study published in Romania on a modern European composer is the one on Anton Webern. It saw the light of day in the same year his String Quartet No. 1 was awarded and published. We discover in his analytical study a penetrating and synthesising spirit, a comprehensive survey of Webern's work, with illustration of specific stylistic issues, then known only in informed circles of contemporary composers, with up-to-date bibliographical references on Webern's music (Leibowitz, Eimert, Kolneder). At the time Webern was, as Ligeti put it, "*die Vaterfigur (...) der*

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<sup>17</sup> „Unzählige bibliographische Auszüge, Notenbeispiele, schriftlich fixierte Analysen waren allein dem Kompositionsunterricht zugeordnet, den er übrigens in jedem Jahr im Hinblick auf die Fähigkeiten und Neigungen seiner Studenten neugestaltete.“ (Countless bibliographical excerpts, note examples, and written analyses were dedicated solely to composition lessons, which he incidentally redesigned each year regarding the abilities and inclinations of his students.), in Türk, *Mein Lehrer Sigismund Toduzta*, 103.

<sup>18</sup> The manuscript is preserved in the „Sigismund Toduță” Foundation Archive, and is published in the volume Sigismund Toduță, *Inedite. Conferințe – Interviuri* (Unpublished. Conferences – Interviews), 46-90.

<sup>19</sup> On the short period of relaxation of the communist regime, see Valentina Sandu-Dediu, *Rumänische Musik nach 1944*, 29.

<sup>20</sup> Niculescu. (1965). Anton Webern. *Muzica* 4: 29-36, republished in Niculescu. (1980). *Reflecții despre muzică* (Thoughts on music). Bucharest, Editura Muzicală, 208-223.

<sup>21</sup> Acker, Trăsături ale creației vocal-instrumentale a lui Webern (Features on Webern's vocal creation), 36-40.

<sup>22</sup> Acker, Maestrul Toduță în amintirea unui discipol din München (Master Toduță in the memories of a disciple from Munich), 7.

<sup>23</sup> „Bei Nacht und Nebel habe ich mir zum Beispiel alle Werke von Anton von Webern besorgt, abgeschrieben und studiert (Kopiergeräte gab's ja noch keine). Man musste dies auch heimlich machen, denn die junge westliche Moderne, vor allem aber die ganze zweite Wiener Schule, war von Staats wegen verpönt. Sie galt als dekadente Musik des späten Bürgertums.“ (In the dead of night, I got hold of all the works of Anton von Webern, copied them and studied them (there were no photocopiers yet). This had to be done secretly, because the young Western modernism, especially the entire Second Viennese School, was frowned upon by the state. It was considered the decadent music of the late bourgeoisie), in Schmitt, 17.

*Komponistengeneration.*"<sup>24</sup> The mindful analysis of Webern's style suggests a considerable amount of time was devoted to Webern's oeuvre on a regular basis,<sup>25</sup> and that there was a critical absorption of the style's novelty.

### **String Quartet No. 1 by Dieter Acker**

String Quartet No. 1 was the result of a decisive stage in the young composer's career, completed at the end of his composition studies under Sigismund Toduță. With its firm and expressive writing, it is valuable beyond the level of "schoolwork", and reaches a first degree of compositional maturity, both in terms of acquired technical skills and in assimilating the novelty of style with judiciousness. Our analysis aims to observe which contemporary orientations were pursued by Acker, and to what extent the new was assimilated by this young composer, whose musical education was based on the tradition of European musical culture.

The preface to the String Quartet, signed by Doru Popovici, is the only published text about this piece. Here is also a brief description of the musical content, which places the work in a tradition of academic classicism of the string quartet genre, permeated by a cyclical musical idea:

The work is structured in four strongly contrasting parts: slow Introduction, Sonata Allegro, Intermezzo and Finale. The whole quartet has as its intonational basis an initial cell, made up of 5 sounds, exposed in the very first bars of the first movement. With its help, the composer will create the idea of the introductory part, the first and second themes of the sonata Allegro, the leading idea of the Intermezzo, and the two themes of the concluding part. In this respect, the work is faithful to the principle of the cyclic sonata.<sup>26</sup>

The Quartet's description entails aspects of formal structure and anchors the piece in the Western classical tradition, with stylistic similarities to Paul Hindemith's work, with certain specific writing techniques, and with "an affinity for polyphony, for sober, almost austere melody, with classical

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<sup>24</sup> Krones, *Webern, Anton Friedrich Wilhelm*, in *MGG Online*, <https://www.mgg-online.com/article?id=mgg13669&v=1.0&rs=id-ebb0600c-fb56-f4a2-73b6-632d93e8f4f4&q=anton%20webern>, accessed on 15 July, 2022.

<sup>25</sup> Schmitt, 17.

<sup>26</sup> Popovici, 3.

rhythm.”<sup>27</sup> Essentially, the Quartet is in line with tradition, “but (it is) often enriched by appealing asymmetries in the formulas used.”<sup>28</sup> Indeed, the author of the preface indicates as the first part a “meditative Lento,” which precedes a “traditional sonata form”. About the *Intermezzo*, the slow part of the Quartet, Popovici notes veiledly that it “brings a strong reassurance of the soul’s turmoil,” using at the same time a technique similar to a “cantus firmus”. The finale, the third part of the Quartet, has the traditional role of a rondo to provide “metrical vivacity”. Despite all the clues about the music’s relationship with Western tradition, Popovici concludes that “Dieter Acker attracts attention not so much by the novelty of the elements of form, which he develops logically and with a fine musicality, but rather by the renewal of expression itself,”<sup>29</sup> without referring, or without being able (due to communist censorship) to refer to the innovative elements in the score. The preface places this work within the limits of traditional forms, and the pointers to its innovative aspects – as we shall see below – are exposed to us through euphemisms to bypass communist censorship.

### **1<sup>st</sup> Movement. INTRODUZIONE. Moderato – SONATA. Allegro**

The first movement is structured according to the Classical model of sonata form with slow introduction (Table 1). Although regarded as an “academic” musical model, the genre and sonata form, though pretentious and elitist, is still of interest to 20<sup>th</sup> century composers because of its functional and effective principles: “Sonatendenken nun ist im frühen 20. Jahrhundert integraler Bestandteil des Formbewußtseins (...). Wird der Formtypus Sonatensatz eliminiert, so sind doch Züge von sonatenhaftem, dialektisch-prozessualen Denken in neuen Konzeptionen verankert.”<sup>30</sup> At the same time, in Sigismund Toduță’s school of composition in Cluj there was a solid training in the tradition of “academic” forms, which had to be mastered with virtuosity before any search for individual compositional style commenced.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Popovici, 3-4.

<sup>28</sup> Popovici, 3-4.

<sup>29</sup> Popovici, 4.

<sup>30</sup> Mielke-Gerdes, *Sonate 20. Jahrhundert*, <https://www.mgg-online.com/article?id=mgg16076&v=1.0&rs=id-98a55f97-99f2-28a2-a0d0-d3bc67c9f60c&q=sonate>, accessed on 14 July, 2022.

<sup>31</sup> Türk, *Mein Lehrer Sigismund Todutza*, 102-103.

**Table 1**

<i>Introduzione. Moderato</i>	<i>Sonata. Allegro</i>						
	Exposition			Development	Recapitulation		
	T <sub>1</sub>	bridge	T <sub>2</sub>		T <sub>1</sub>	bridge	T <sub>2</sub>
1-28	29-64			81-126	127-158		

Exposition					
T <sub>1</sub>	T <sub>1</sub> inversion	T <sub>1</sub> rhyth. var.	transition	T <sub>2</sub>	T <sub>2</sub> , T <sub>2</sub> inversion.
29-44	45-52	53-58	59-63	64-75	76-80

Development				
T <sub>1</sub> , T <sub>2v</sub> dim.	T <sub>2v</sub> , T <sub>2v</sub> inversion	T <sub>1v</sub> stretto	T <sub>1v</sub> reverse	α cadenza
81-83	84-89	90-103	104-120	121-126

**Dieter Acker, String Quartet No. 1, first movement (formal scheme)**

***Introduzione. Moderato***

The first five measures of the introduction set out the motivic material of the entire section, which will be repeated in various formulations. Hans-Peter Türk's discovery, that the generative essence of this Quartet is a solid motivic base which stands as the principle of the whole work,<sup>32</sup> is reflected in the score by the cyclic element, and this is also noted by Popovici. The Introduction has, therefore, an additional role exposing the musical motto (α-cell), which will run through the whole piece.

<sup>32</sup> Türk, Dieter Acker – Wie ich ihn sehe, wie ich ihn höre, 32.

Moderato

3 2 1 2 1

*pp* < > *p* < > *mf*

$\alpha$

*molto p* 5 *p* 5 *pp* < > *p* < > *mf*

*mf* *poco f* *f cresc.*

*p* < > *mp* *poco f* *f* *f cresc.* *pizz.* *arco* *p*

*mf* *poco f* *f cresc.* *f* *pizz.* *f*

*cresc.* *poco f* *f cresc.* *f* *pizz.* *f*

### Dieter Acker, String Quartet No. 1, First movement, measures 1-7

Regarding the pitch configuration, we observe in the structure of the cell-motto ( $\alpha$ ) a rigorous intervallic construction (perfect 4th, minor 2nd, and minor 3rd), in which the perfect fourth plays a determining role. From the very first page, one notices the double role of the rest synthesised by Sigismund

Toduță, as "function of punctuation",<sup>33</sup> but also as a factor to use for the aforethought imbalance of the metre, a constitutive element that generates a "space of silence"<sup>34</sup> characteristic of Webern's style. In his analysis of Webern's vocal creation, Acker also notes the role of the rests, which "become more than ever a constructive, tectonic, logical element framed in fine, oscillating lines",<sup>35</sup> and in his Quartet, too, the rest has two defining roles: the unstressed beat and separation of the opening gestures by a considerable rest create the illusion of a beginning *ex nihilo*, generating indefinite "spaces of silence", and the subsequent motivic development with asymmetrical constructions are separated by short rests, which manifest themselves as "punctuation" signs, masterfully delimiting the constituent cells and motifs, sometimes even with a rhetorical role. Using the rest, the composer creates vast sections of metric imbalance throughout the Quartet:

**E.g. 2**

**Dieter Acker, String Quartet No. 1, First movement, measures 24-27**

The  $\alpha$ -cell at the beginning of the Quartet is set to an anacrusis, reiterated after a long pause. The following harmonic progression is placed on the stressed beat, but its rhythmic arrangement – the note lengths being

<sup>33</sup> Toduță, Anton Webern, Variațiuni pentru pian op. 27, p. I (Anton Webern, Piano Variations Op. 27, 1<sup>st</sup> mov.), 73.

<sup>34</sup> Toduță, Anton Webern, Variațiuni pentru pian op. 27, p. I (Anton Webern, Piano Variations Op. 27, 1<sup>st</sup> mov.), 73.

<sup>35</sup> Acker, Trăsături ale creației vocal-instrumentale a lui Webern (Features of Webern's vocal creation), 37.

3, 2, then 1 semiquavers – again creates the illusion of metrical imbalance, especially as the chord sequence is altered when it resumes after a new rest by eliding the first of the three chords. In this case, the rest has a rhetorical role, delimiting the two chord progressions (3-2-1 and 2-1 respectively). Variation techniques through subtraction and addition are common as patterns in developing musical material, both in moments of transition and as thematic developments (see E.g. 1).

### **Sonata. Allegro**

The sonata form following the slow introduction is combined with contrapuntal techniques specific to the fugue. While the sonata form retains its three main sections (Table 1), there are only references to the fugue form in terms of contrapuntal technique used (the theme is joined by a figurative counterpoint that follows it closely, but the inconsistency of its use does not allow us to consider it a countersubject), and only as an exception do small clues to the tonal plan appear, one example being the characteristic alternations between *dux* and *comes* (E.g. 3).

### **E.g. 3**

### **Dieter Acker, String Quartet No. 1, first movement, measures 114-116**

Both the sonata form themes are produced from the  $\alpha$ -cell, but they follow the expressive binary contrast one would expect from the form: a first theme which is vigorous, even aggressive, with a rhythmic presence and leaping melodic outline, and a lyrical second theme, with undulating melodic profile and a rhythmic configuration which supports the melodic continuity. The differences in expression are complemented by the structure-related antinomy: while the first theme displays the  $\alpha$ -cell in the original, the second theme displays it in reversed form.

E.g. 4

**Dieter Acker, String Quartet No. 1, first movement**  
**T<sub>1</sub> (measures 28-29) with respect to T<sub>2</sub> (measures 63-65)**

The whole first part is composed with thematic economy and the cyclical idea in mind, interests shared by Sigismund Toduță's musicological investigations.<sup>36</sup> The two themes of the sonata form are subject to variation techniques characteristic to polyphonic forms: inversion and retrograde, rhythmic diminution and *stretto*. Of course, the rhythmic developments are much more diverse and not limited to the rigorous versions of Baroque polyphony (diminution and augmentation). One can find structural elements of the  $\alpha$ -cell in both the main themes and transitional material: from illustration of sonata form in Table 1, we can also observe the density of thematic material throughout the first movement of the Quartet.

String Quartet No. 1 preserves Classical notation and posture, reflected in the thematic contrast (the melodic and rhythmic profiles of the themes) and the choice of Classical (one could see them even as obsolete) forms, in some moments even outlining *dux-comes* relationships a perfect fifth apart (just as they would be in a fugue form).

### **Intermezzo. Andantino**

The middle movement of Dieter Acker's String Quartet No. 1 continues the Brahmsian tradition of the intermezzo, having a lyrical, intimate chamber tone, in which the musical texture remains sparse (like pieces such as

<sup>36</sup> Toduță, *Ideea ciclică la Enescu* (Cyclic idea by Enescu).

Intermezzo, Op. 116/4), composed as a permanent responsorial dialogue between the violin/cello and the ensemble's harmonic progressions. The lightness of the *Intermezzo. Andantino* movement is also reflected in the free developments of the cyclic cell: unlike the first part, in which it becomes the generator for the two themes of the sonata form, worked on contrapuntally with a wide variety of procedures, here only the first sounds of the cell are preserved, in a free, pseudo-improvised variation of the main intervals (minor 2nd, perfect 4th, and minor 3rd).

## E.g 5

The musical score is for the second movement of Dieter Acker's String Quartet No. 1, measures 1-8. It is in 8/8 time and marked 'Andantino'. The score consists of four staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello. The music is characterized by long, sustained notes and a gradual fall in pitch. Dynamics range from *pp* to *mf*. Performance instructions include 'molto p', 'sempre in rilievo', 'poco', 'pizz.', and 'mp'.

## Dieter Acker, String Quartet No. 1, second movement, measures 1-8

The main melodic line in the middle part illustrates a gradual fall of the soloist instrument, as slow as it is inexorable. Towards the end of the movement, the viola hands over the falling melody to the cello, the lowest-pitched instrument of the ensemble. The piece begins in the high-pitched register of the violin ( $G^2$ ), as a suspended emergence of sound, a sound image also found in German works, for example in Brahms' *Intermezzi*, Op. 118/6 or 119/1. On the long notes of the solo instrument conversing interventions from the other three string instruments appear, in a responsorial development, of which a famous example in the Classical tradition is the second part of Ludwig van Beethoven's Piano Concerto in C minor, Op. 37.

The “aphoristic” scale of the two-page slow movement (the other movements stretch to eight pages apiece) does not allow for extensive thematic development. However, the melodic profile is structured around the two generative intervals first mentioned in the  $\alpha$ -cell (minor 2nd and perfect 4th). The ternary form (a b a<sub>v</sub> coda; see Table 2) unfolds itself through small steps, by means of motivic development (addition or subtraction); these technical procedures are common in the Western classical music tradition, but in these two pages they are “condensed” into small-sized shapes.

**Table 2**

sections:	a	b	a <sub>v</sub>	Coda
measures:	1-8	8-20	20-27	28-32

**Dieter Acker, String Quartet No. 1, second movement (formal scheme)**

The middle movement retains its transitional character between the two main outer movements. The dictionary definition of intermezzo – “eine in der Ausdehnung kürzere und dem Gehalt nach leichtere Komposition als die sie umgebenden Sätze.”<sup>37</sup> – seems apt for an expressive “camouflage” meant to conceal one of the strictest procedures used by Anton Webern. The descent – which Doru Popovici sees as a *cantus firmus* – of the soloist instrument from a high to low register of the string ensemble is composed according to a palindromic series (1 5 1 1 3 3 1 1 5 1), which dominates the outer sections of the musical form (a and a<sub>v</sub>).

**E.g. 6**



**Dieter Acker, String Quartet No. 1, second movement, measures 1-12  
Palindrom series**

The middle section b accumulates increased tension, and the series fragments into micro-series, confirmed in the gestural profiles through rhythmic and melodic unfoldment, which do not entirely maintain their symmetry.

<sup>37</sup> Cooper and Höpfner, *Intermezzo (Instrumentalsatz)*, in MGG Online <https://www.mgg-online.com/article?id=mgg20005&v=1.0&rs=id-b9198e1e-9b2d-4525-e3f0-69206be2f330&q=intermezzo>, accessed on 17 July, 2022.

Table 3

measures:	13	14	15-16	16-18	19	20
semitones:	(1 1 5 1 1) 3 2	(1 5 1) 1 3 3	2 1 3 2 2 1	(1 2	1 5	1 2) 3

## Intermezzo, section b, micro-palindrome series

E.g. 7

m. 13

m. 14

m. 16-20

[1 1 5 1 1) 3 2 [1 5 1) 1 3 3 2

1 3 2 2 1 - [2 1 5 1 2] 3

Dieter Acker, *String Quartet No. 1*, second movement, measures 13-20.  
palindromic series

The intervallic structure of the melody in the final section also follows the mirrored form of the palindrome, initially in small gestures and then in phrases that display the full palindromic series.

Table 4

measures:	20	20-21	22-23
semitones:	(2 1 2)	(1 5 1)	(2 1 2 1 2 1 2 1 2)

measures:	24-31	31-32
semitones:	(1) (1 5 1 1 3 3 1 1 5 1)	2 3

Dieter Acker, *String Quartet No. 1*, second movement, measures 20-32  
Section a<sub>v</sub>, palindromic series

The analysis of the palindrome indicates a relatively free management of the basic structure (set out in section a and repeated in a<sub>v</sub>). However, even guides to the use of serial-dodecaphonic music describe small deviations from the rigid “corset” of the abstract scheme as desirable, to retain the expressive content of the music and the natural shaping of musical lines, indicating, in fact, a much more effective assimilation of the rules than a sterile and unconvincing takeover.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Křenek, 8.

**Finale. Molto allegro**

We can elaborate on Doru Popovici's description of the finale as "a music of metrical vivacity, with a rondo character" by noting the scherzo disposition (suggested by the *pizzicato* playing technique, the ternary rhythm, and the playful specificity of the melodic content), and the cyclical role the finale plays within the string quartet genre by evoking the introduction from the first movement. The "metrical vivacity" perceived by Popovici can be observed in the rests of the four-bar introduction, in which, like the incipit of the first movement, the harmonic cell (two chords) is subjected to a metrical phase-shifting process in order to create the illusion of metrical disorientation; thus the initial cell begins each time on a different beat of the 3/4 measure: first beat one, then beat three, and then beat two. The hemiola metrical play is complemented by the pitch structure, where two chords are subject to an intervallic exchange: the two minor 7ths separated by a perfect 5th in the first chord are followed by two perfect 5ths separated by a minor 7th.

**E.g. 8**

**Dieter Acker, String Quartet No. 1, third movement, measures 1-6**

The extraordinary variety of metre and rhythm is then counterbalanced by homogeneity at the pitch level. On the same chord (C Bb Eb), a passage of no less than 14 bars unfolds, in which variety and contrast are achieved through hemiola, contrasts of playing techniques (*pizzicato* and *arco*) and dynamics (between *forte* and *pianissimo*). It is a vibrant, robust music, in which Doru Popovici discovers "attractive asymmetries of the formulas used."

Table 5

sections:	Introduction	A	A1	B	A	A1	$\alpha$ (introd.)	A-A1
measures:	1-4	5- 24	25- 43	44- 74	75- 93	94- 124	125- 144	145- 163

### Dieter Acker, String Quartet No. 1, third movement (formal scheme)

Where the A section manages to create a magnetic rhythmic energy from a single chord, section A<sub>1</sub> transforms the same pitch material into a rigorous polyphonic discourse: viola and cello execute, in canon, a rhythmic dynamization of the C B $\flat$  E $\flat$  chord, a rhythmic construction that also follows the Fibonacci sequence (E.g. 9). Over this carefully constructed material, performed by the instruments in the ensemble's mid-low register, the two violins will display in varied imitations motifs originating from the  $\alpha$ -cell.

E.g. 9

The musical score consists of two systems of staves. The first system includes the first violin, second violin, viola, and cello parts. The second system includes the first violin, second violin, and cello parts. The score is characterized by intricate rhythmic patterns and dynamic markings such as *p*, *mf*, *mp*, *fp*, and *poco f*. It also features *pizz.* (pizzicato) markings and various articulation symbols.

### Dieter Acker, String Quartet No. 1, third movement, measures 24-34

In section B (bars 44-71), the cello presents a broad melodic line in the high register. The melody is a palindrome-like intonational development, "hidden" by brief interventions which disrupt the specific symmetry of the

form: a small break within the phrase "cleaves" the mirrored form, and the end of the phrase conclusively repeats the last three sounds; the axial sound, underlined by the tensest dynamic indication (*più forte*) in the entire musical phrase, confirms the composer's intention to configure the musical structure as a palindrome.

**E.g. 10**



**Dieter Acker, String Quartet No. 1, third movement, measures 44-71**

**Melodic palindrome, semitones between first 20 notes:**

**5 3 1 5 1 2 (2 2) 3 11 11 11 11 3 2 1 5 1 3 5**

In the kinetic energy of vitalizing expression, we discover other "gems", based on abstract principles generating form, from which we are able to understand what were, in fact, those "more important concerns" to which Acker referred when he recalled the period when he was in Sigismund Toduță's composition class.<sup>39</sup>

The three movements of the String Quartet are subject to the pattern of traditional musical forms in the Western classical music tradition (sonata form combined with fugue elements, ternary form, and rondo-scherzo) and are composed by means of traditional compositional techniques (polyphony, the cyclic principle, and motivic development based on simple additive or subtractive variations), but by delving into the morphology of musical phrases, we discover other structuring principles, taken from the modern conception of music (Fibonacci's sequence, and symmetrical palindromic structured melodies), which were integrated into Webern's serialism out of a need for unity and comprehensible laws of generating an opus. These laws are like the laws of organic nature, more specifically of the composing out of a single cell into a living organism.<sup>40</sup> While the analyses which reveal the principles of the golden section, in the work of composers who have been shown to

<sup>39</sup> „Als ich später zur Hochschule kam, waren mir diese Dinge alle schon längst geläufig. Ich konnte mich Wichtigerem widmen." (When I came to the university later, I was already familiar with all these things. I could devote myself to more important things) in Schmitt, 14.

<sup>40</sup> Krones, Webern, Anton Friedrich Wilhelm, in *MGG Online*, <https://www.mgg-online.com/article?id=mgg13669&v=1.0&rs=id-ca02b08d-7630-7666-f97d-cf0dd3a4e4a9&q=palindrom>, accessed on 25 August, 2022.

have arrived only intuitively at such results, were later criticized, since the 1950s composers have consciously employed principles of numerical proportion, following the theories of proponents of serial music.<sup>41</sup>

These creative principles are also reflected in String Quartet No. 1, but the stylistic imprint remains that of a composer rooted in tradition, who incorporates the new into Classical techniques, thus underlining the biographical training mentioned: both in the culture of the Transylvanian Saxons, under the guidance of Franz Xaver Dressler, and as an eminent student of Sigismund Toduță's composition class. If Dieter Acker's style had continued to keep within the same limits, we might have been tempted to classify the style of this opus in what Walter Frisch called Historical Modernism – which Valentina Sandu-Dediu identifies in the work of composer Wilhelm Georg Berger (in a relevant comparison with Max Reger) as “an attempt to bridge a historical gap without denying, destroying or overcoming it in order to return to the past.”<sup>42</sup> But instead Acker's later opus String Quartet No. 3, *Cantus lugubris* (1966, rev. 1968) was a creation contrary to all expectations, written in the characteristic notation of aleatoric music, as proof of the young composer's interest not only in the values of the past, but also in the novelty of the avant-garde.

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<sup>41</sup> Möller, Goldener Schnitt, in *MGG Online*, <https://www.mgg-online.com/article?id=mgg15434&v=1.1&rs=id-e3be402b-330e-0c07-9247-278ac082c49a&q=fibonacci>, accessed on 25 August, 2022.

<sup>42</sup> Sandu-Dediu, Înainte și după neoclasicism: Max Reger și Wilhelm Georg Berger (Before and after Neoclassicism: Max Reger and Wilhelm Georg Berger), 49.

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