

SOME ASPECTS OF VERTICAL TYPOLOGIES IN THE LAST *STRING QUARTET* OF W. A. MOZART, KV 590, F MAJOR

ATTILA FODOR¹

SUMMARY. As a part of the Prussian Quartets, commissioned by the notorious amateur cello player and music lover, Frederick William II, King of Prussia, the *String Quartet* in F, KV 590 occupies a particular place in Mozart's chamber music. In spite of emphasizing the cello part, Mozart found a middle course between his quartet style and the specific demands of the commissioner. This consists of an intensive polyphonic writing applied mostly to the final part of the last quartet, a solution which keeps the "appearance" of emphasizing of a single voice (in our case - the cello) between the condition of keeping the balance of all voices, as a characteristic solution of the polyphonic techniques. Our analysis is focused on identifying the main vertical typologies as specific composition methods like: the unison, as an opening technique, repeated sounds in the context of isorhythmic changing harmonies, arpeggios, the setting up of vertical sounding planes, poly-metric components, and contrapuntal techniques. The complexity of these vertical structures in this Mozart's late composition, bear closely upon the monumentality of the construction, and in such a meaning it has a modern effect in comparison with the musical language of the epoch, anticipating those stylistic elements which are characteristic to the first creative period of Beethoven.

Keywords: vertical typologies, counterpoint, Mozart, string quartet, cello, late style, Prussian cycle, Quartet Concertant.

The present study is focused on the late composition of Mozart, the *String Quartet* in F, KV 590, completed in June, 1790. As it is known, this quartet was conceived originally as a piece of a six string quartets cycle, commissioned by Frederick William II, King of Prussia (1744-1797), a notorious amateur cello player and music lover. Mozart finalized only three compositions of the initial six, called today Prussian Quartets, though none of them has a dedication.

¹ The Partium Christian University, Faculty of Arts, Department of Music, RO-410209 Oradea, Primăriei Str.36, assistant professor, Ph. D., E-mail: musicalaesthetics@yahoo.com.

The reason of interrupting the compositional process has been admitted by the composer himself, who was confronting at that time with increasing difficulties, which were hindering him in completing his works (the three quartets of the Prussian cycle, KV 575 in D, KV 589 in B flat and KV 590 in F, demand him two years of work).²

Among the several reasons one can mention the increasing financial problems of Mozart, which forced him to renounce at composing or finalizing works that may requested a lot of effort and time in favor of others with less implication of energy, and, above all, more and immediate material benefit. However, Mozart not merely renounced to finalize his cycle, but he sold it in this semi-finished state to the *Artaria* publisher on chickenfeed.

According to the general view, the particularity of these string quartets consist of the special treatment of cello, which soloist treatment reflects the nature of commission. Therefore, some musicologists³ reckon them as soloistic string quartets, an existing musical genre in epoch as *Quartet Concertant*, popular mostly in France. Regarding the incompleteness of the Prussian Quartets, it seems that next to the already mentioned problems, there are also some inner, musical considerations.

Firstly, there is a significant difference between the balance-focused writing of Mozart's string quartet style and the specific relationship of the voices, which appears in these quartets owing to the presence of the soloistic cello. On the other hand, one can observe that there is a direct proportional relationship between the standing off of composer from the expected material benefit and the gradual disappearance from the cello's voice of soloistic elements. Thus, there is a visible decrease of the soloist parts along the three quartets, with the almost entirely disappearance in the last of them (excepting the first part).

We have to mention, as a sign of the composer's ingeniousness, that Mozart found a middle course between his quartet style and the specific demands of the commissioner. This consists of the intensive polyphonic writing applied mostly to the final part of the last quartet, solution which keeps the "appearance" of emphasizing of a single voice (in our case the cello) between the condition of keeping the balance of all voices, as a characteristic solution of polyphonic techniques.

Hereunder, we try to sketch out some of the vertical typologies of the last Mozartean string quartet, relating from time to time to other works of Mozart and Beethoven in several genres. At the same time, we have to clarify a terminological problem concerning the subject of our study. Though the

² Several surviving sketches bear witness to the compositional difficulties encountered by Mozart in his late years.

³ Keller, in: *The Mozart Companion* (Edited by H. C. Robbins Landon și Donald Mitchell), Faber and Faber, London, 1956, p. 131

musical phenomenon present in our analysis has different terms in musicology like the facture or in some cases like the polyphonic technique, we found that the expression vertical typology reflects properly those structural particularities of Mozart's compositions examined by us, where the vertical structures and the construction as a whole are inseparable (naturally, an analytical distinction between them is possible). The vertical typology expression means in our conception the sum of relationships between voices in a certain musical segment.

Before examining them in detail, we sketch briefly these vertical typologies:

1. the unison, as an opening technique
2. the repeated sounds in the context of isorhythmically changing harmonies
3. the arpeggios
4. the setting up of vertical sounding levels
5. the poly-metric components
6. the contrapuntal techniques

1. One of the basic ways of sounding of the four instruments is the unison technique. Such an opening cannot be accidental and it leads to some musical consequences:

Ex. 1

W. A. Mozart, *String Quartet in F, KV 590, 1st movement*



The unison openings, especially in works with a minor tonality, often suggest a monumental construction with dramatic coloring. We quote some examples: W. A. Mozart, *Piano concerto in c, KV 291, Symphony in g, KV 183*.

W. A. Mozart, *Piano Concerto in c*, KV 291, 1st Movement

Allegro

Flauto

Oboi

Clarinetti in Sib/B

Fagotti

Corni in Mib/Eb

Trombe in Do/C

Timpani in Do, Sol/C, G

Klavier

Violino I

Violino II

Viole

Violoncello e Basso

The unison opening in the case of major tonalities also can lead to a monumental construction, without the dramatic character of the minor ethos. Here are some examples: W. A. Mozart, *Symphony in C "Jupiter"*, KV 551, *Piano Sonata in B flat*, KV 570, *Piano Sonata in D*, KV 576.

Ex. 3

W. A. Mozart, *Symphony in C “Jupiter”, KV 551, 1st Movement*

In each case, the unison is followed by a moving melodic line based on a harmonic plan. The reason for this is that the occurrence of a new musical material after a unison opening brings forth a surplus of musical information. Naturally, the reappearance of a unison material is not necessary, so the musical process can evolve with several other materials.

In our case, the unison opening of KV 590 is followed by the reappearance of the same material, as a theme's head, within an imitative technique, followed by a counter-plan in comparison with the melodic line, consisting of isorhythmic movements:

Ex. 4

W. A. Mozart, *String Quartet in F, KV 590, 1st Movement*

The occurrence of an imitative technique within a structure based on symmetrical phrases is a typical Mozartean solution. In this instance, the material of the opening is based on two subtractive phrases; each of them

consists of three measures. So these polyphonic procedures do not have a purpose in itself, as we can frequently notice in the baroque music, but they appear as subordinate elements of those musical unities, which form the main structure of the piece.

One can observe the same procedure in the opening of Beethoven's F String Quartet, op. 18, No.1, though in this case it appears in a wider temporal exposition. It often happens at Beethoven, that the unison opening is followed by a melodic line associated with freely moving sonorous levels or a linear polyphony:

Ex. 5

L. van Beethoven, *String Quartet in F, op. 18, No. 1, 1st movement*



Subsequently we may notice the imitative techniques to receive gradating functions. Here, the imitations are following the reappearance of the unison mentioned above, associated with blocks of static or moving voices:

Ex. 6

L. van Beethoven, *String Quartet in F, op. 18, No. 1, 1st Movement*



Summing up, one can point out that the unison opening is a typical Mozartean procedure, taken over by Beethoven, with the difference that the flow of information is denser much more gradually in his music due to some wider structures.

2. Another representative type of these vertical structures is the note repetition under the changing harmonies. Frequently, these repetitions occur in two or three isorhythmically moving voices. Their function consists in the continuation or elaboration of a certain musical material, with a frequent apparition in the development sections. We present here a few variants:

a. level consists of repeated notes, associated with a melodic line and the punctuating bass:

Ex. 7

W. A. Mozart, *String Quartet in F*, KV 590, 1st Movement



b. sometimes the melodic level is intersected by the repeated notes level:
- association with the imitative technique:

Ex. 8

W. A. Mozart, *String Quartet in F*, KV 590, 1st Movement



- association with two contrasting musical materials:

Ex. 9

W. A. Mozart, *String Quartet in F*, KV 590, 1st Movement



In the latter, one can observe the principle of a double counterpoint. Though we cannot talk about a rigorous vertical permutation, it has a same effect. Beethoven took over this technique and used it at a wider scale.

In addition, we have to point out, that the two materials used in the double counterpoint are overlapped. From this moment, the note repetitions are moved on a single instrument, in double stops:

Ex. 10

W. A. Mozart, *String Quartet in F, KV 590, 1st Movement*



The occurrence of such a note repetitions in extensive harmonic structures is a characteristic of the final sections:

Ex. 11

W. A. Mozart, *String Quartet in F, KV 590, 1st Movement*



Sometimes they also can be found in exposition movements:

Ex. 12

W. A. Mozart, *String Quartet in F, KV 590, 4th Movement*



This typically Mozartean solution appears frequently at Beethoven with the difference that the melodic line associated to the isorhythmically repeated block is missing. As an effect, the rhythmic parameter is increasing at expense of the melodic richness. However, in Beethoven's solutions the contrasts substitute the melodic parameter:

Ex. 13

L. van Beethoven, *String Quartet in G, op. 18, No. 2, 4th Movement*

The image shows a musical score for the 4th movement of Beethoven's String Quartet in G, op. 18, No. 2. The tempo is marked 'Allegro molto quasi Presto'. The score is in G major and 2/4 time. It features four staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello/Double Bass. A specific passage is highlighted with a box, showing a rhythmic pattern of repeated notes. Below this passage, a double-headed arrow labeled 'contrast' indicates a change in the musical texture. Dynamic markings include 'p' (piano) and 'cresc.' (crescendo).

- a significantly rare solution occurs, when the technique of repeated notes is associated with the linear voices:

Ex. 14

W. A. Mozart, *String Quartet in F, KV 590, 1st Movement*

The image shows a musical score for the 1st movement of Mozart's String Quartet in F, KV 590. The score is in F major and 2/4 time. It features four staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello/Double Bass. A specific passage is highlighted with a box, showing a rhythmic pattern of repeated notes. The measure number '144' is indicated at the beginning of the passage.

This solution presents in some cases a remarkable complexity, each voice representing a totally different musical entity:

Ex. 15

W. A. Mozart, *String Quartet in F, KV 590, 4th Movement*

3. The arpeggio structures are also present in Mozart's string quartets, including the present, sometimes in latent polyphony. Though tangentially they are related to the typical classical technique called Alberti bass, they are already employed in a more flexible manner and frequently in some incomplete form (namely they do not reproduce the triad). However, according to *New Grove Dictionary*⁴, the Alberti bass concerns the specifically decomposed triads in the piano music. In this instance, these structures can occur in any voice, not only in the bass, and may intersect the main voices:

Ex. 16

W. A. Mozart, *String Quartet in F, KV 590, 1st Movement*

⁴ *** *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd Edition, Macmillan Publishers Ltd., 2001, vol. I, p. 306.

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- sometimes these structures appear within complex polyphonic structures:

Ex. 17

W. A. Mozart, *String Quartet in F, KV 590, 3rd Movement*

Musical score for Ex. 17, showing three boxed musical materials labeled 1, 2, and 3. Material 1 is in the first violin part, material 2 is in the second violin part, and material 3 is in the first bassoon part.

- the above mentioned three musical materials later permute in the spirit of the triple counterpoint:

Ex. 18

W. A. Mozart, *String Quartet in F, KV 590, 3rd Movement*

Musical score for Ex. 18, showing three boxed musical materials labeled 1, 2, and 3. Material 1 is in the first bassoon part, material 2 is in the first violin part, and material 3 is in the first bassoon part.

4. One of the most remarkable components in Mozart's vertical thinking that can be discovered in the present work and also in others is the use of the sounding levels distributed among voices:

Ex. 19

W. A. Mozart, *String Quartet in F, KV 590, 1st Movement*

Musical score for Ex. 19, showing three boxed musical materials labeled 1, 2, and 3. Material 1 is in the first violin part, material 2 is in the first bassoon part, and material 3 is in the first violin part.

It is clear, that the thematic crosses the second violin towards the first, then to the cello. All this, associate with an isorhythmic level consists in repeated and prolonged notes. Therefore a quasi imitative technique joins to a counter plan.

5. Another extremely interesting typology, systematically present in the final movement of the quartet is the poly-metric. It has the function to emphasize the independence of the sounding levels:

Ex. 20

W. A. Mozart, *String Quartet in F, KV 590, 4th Movement*

Here a binary pulsation of two crotchets is overlapped over a repetitive ternary pulsation of three quavers. The poly-metric element is intensified in the development section, where the two crotchets structure is overlapped to ones of the three semiquavers:

Ex. 21

W. A. Mozart, *String Quartet in F, KV 590, 4th Movement*

6. Polyphonic Techniques

- the subject-countersubject technique seems to be masterly applied in the final movement of the string quartet. With this, Mozart presents in overlapping of the two themes of the sonata form, an uncommon solution in the development of such a form. In order to actuate this procedure, both of materials appear in canonic imitation:

Ex. 22

W. A. Mozart, *String Quartet in F, KV 590, 4th Movement*

The image shows a musical score for the 4th movement of Mozart's String Quartet in F, KV 590. It features two systems of staves. The first system (measures 24-30) shows the first violin part with a red box labeled 'subject' and the second violin part with a green box labeled 'countersubject'. The second system (measures 30-36) shows the first violin part with a red box and the second violin part with a green box, illustrating the overlapping of the two themes.

- the polyphonic elaborated phase of the canonic imitation is shown as it follows:

Ex. 23

W. A. Mozart, *String Quartet in F, KV 590, 4th Movement*

The image shows a musical score for the 4th movement of Mozart's String Quartet in F, KV 590. It features two systems of staves. The first system (measures 36-42) shows the first violin part with a red box and the second violin part with a green box. The second system (measures 42-48) shows the first violin part with a red box and the second violin part with a green box, illustrating the polyphonic elaborated phase of the canonic imitation.

- regarding the techniques of imitation, these obtain remarkably diversified applications. Sometimes they appear in stretto, sometimes in another level associating with repeated notes or arpeggio structures:

Ex. 24

W. A. Mozart, *String Quartet in F, KV 590, 4th Movement*

The image shows a musical score for the 4th movement of Mozart's String Quartet in F, KV 590. It features two systems of staves. The first system (measures 30-36) shows the first violin part with a yellow box labeled 'tr' and the second violin part with a green box. The second system (measures 36-42) shows the first violin part with a yellow box labeled 'tr' and the second violin part with a green box, illustrating diversified applications of imitation.

To the aforementioned two themes, Mozart attaches a further musical material in the first violin, which diversifies this structure.

- there are also present the stretto imitations, combined, for example with an inverted imitation:

Ex. 25

W. A. Mozart, *String Quartet in F, KV 590, 4th Movement*

The complexity of these vertical structures in this Mozart's late composition, come closely upon the monumentality of the construction, and in such a meaning it has a modern effect in comparison with the musical language of the epoch. The complexity and the remarkable refinement of the K 590 String Quartet seem to be quite distant from the first attempts of the composer in the field of this genre. The abrupt expositions and massive developments, sustained by the already presented vertical typologies anticipate and necessarily introduce the stylistic elements which are characteristic to the first creative period of Beethoven.

(Translated into English by Fodor Attila)

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