From Unsung To High-strung: The Development Of The Viola Through The Nineteenth And Twentieth Centuries, As It Is Used To Introduce Fugues

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INTRODUCTION

This paper looks at the development of the viola through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and considers why it has been used to introduce fugues more and more often. The viola has historically been an unimportant filler instrument, but beginning in the nineteenth century, and continuing to the present day, it has been given an increasingly important role in contrapuntal orchestral and chamber music. This paper considers twelve pieces in which a fugue is launched by the viola.

The physical construction has also gone through changes, as luthiers developed new dimensions for the instrument to make it project more. Beginning at the start of the nineteenth century, the viola went through many of the same developments that the violin did, with a lengthened and thrown-back neck, longer and heavier bass-bar, and a slightly higher bridge, among other changes.¹ In addition to these modifications, makers such as Villauime experimented with extremely wide bouts for the viola, and Charles Henri of Paris even built a viola with the entire left side that was larger than the right.²

The authors of the viola entry in the New Grove, David Boyden and Ann Woodward, quote Berlioz, who said, “Of all the instruments in the orchestra, the viola is the one whose excellent qualities have been longest ignored.”³ The authors add, “A greater equality of part-writing and a notable advance of viola technique can be observed in the mature chamber music, especially string quartets, of Mozart and Beethoven.”⁴ It is these enhanced capabilities that have excited new interest in this previously overlooked

² Ibid.
³ Ibid., 693
⁴ Ibid., 692.
instrument, and that composers have started to draw from the viola in orchestral and chamber works.

The musical examples of this study are examined in chronological order throughout the course of this paper, and they include both chamber and orchestral works. The pieces are Beethoven’s *String Quartet No. 11*, Op. 95, Mendelssohn’s *String Quartet No. 2*, Op. 13, and his *String Quintet No. 1*, Op. 18, Schumann’s *Piano Quartet in E-flat*, Op. 47, Brahms’s *String Quintet No. 1*, Op. 88, Rimsky-Korsakov’s *String Quartet on Russian Themes*, Ernest Bloch’s *Concerto Grosso No. 1*, Bartók’s *Music for Strings, Percussion, and Celesta*, Stravinsky’s *Septet (1953) for Clarinet, Horn, Bassoon, Piano, Violin, Viola, and Violoncello*, Shostakovich’s *Quartet No. 7*, and William Schuman’s *American Festival Overture* as well as his *Symphony No. 4*.

An examination of the composers to see if any of them had a bias toward the viola (such as being a violist, or simply having a love for the instrument) can give some insight as to their particular compositional choices within these fugues. Of course, starting a fugue with the viola holds a certain appeal in that the resonance of the instrument allows the fugue to build very naturally. The transformations that the viola has seen, both physically and musically, in orchestral and chamber settings, is evidence that there was a desire to expand on this “new” medium.
CHAPTER ONE  The History of the Viola

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, several composers and violists aspired to make the viola a more prominent instrument and to shape the perspective of the musical community on this underappreciated instrument. The recognition of the viola as a solo instrument could not have taken place in a musical climate where personal expression and instrument timbre were declining.\(^5\) Perhaps the most famous English violist of this era was Lionel Tertis. Born in 1876 and passing away in 1975, he produced such emotionally moving sonorities from the viola that his contemporaries were eager to produce works for him.\(^6\) Another fine example of a composer who focused a great deal of his attention on the viola was Paul Hindemith (1895-1963). This German composer not only wrote music for this instrument, but as he was a violist, he performed his works as well.\(^7\) Last, but certainly not least, there was William Primrose (1903-82). This Scottish violist used his outstanding technique to show other musicians and audiences that the viola can be, and should be seen as, an important virtuosic instrument.\(^8\)

The transformation that the viola has made was brought on by its poor reputation in the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries. This reputation was quite possibly worst in England, as Quantz wrote in 1752: “The viola is commonly regarded as of little importance in the musical establishment.”\(^9\) Although some composers recognized and tried to change this view of the instrument, it was still just as bad when Tertis came around. “The viola was generally played by violinists too inferior to gain a position in

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\(^6\) Ibid.
\(^7\) Ibid.
\(^8\) Ibid.
\(^9\) Ibid.
orchestras as such,” wrote Tertis, adding, “A wretchedly low standard of viola playing was, in fact, accepted.”

There is a need for the musical community to find the value in the instrument. As Aaron Copland has said, “The principal concern of the composer is to seek out the expressive nature of any particular instrument and write with that in mind.” Those composers and musicians who have a better understanding of the viola are going to showcase the rich timbre of the instrument more clearly, rather than delegating it to a non-vital role.

An understanding of the simple acoustics of the instrument is necessary in understanding the alterations that luthiers were making to change the sound of the viola. Pythagoras used simple division of the vibrating string, a division that yields octaves, fifths, and fourths, which explains why these instruments are tuned in fifths. The actual lengths of viola strings vary considerably, depending on the different-sized violas, and the slant of the neck of each particular instrument. Perfect fifths are not equal to the fifths of a well-tempered instrument, and conscious efforts to adjust pitch need to be made in duos with piano. If a viola is tuned accurately from the A (440), the C string will sound flat with the piano. The solution to this issue is to tune the A slightly up, or start from the C and tune upwards. If the dimensions of a standard violin are considered to be ideal, a viola—since it is a fifth lower—should have ratio of 3:2 to those of the violin, but this would make the viola 21 inches, which is far too large to play.

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10 Ibid.
11 Ibid., 194.
12 Ibid., 235.
13 Ibid., 236.
14 Ibid., 244.
The quickest explanation to define a viola is to describe it as a larger violin. But, whereas the physical construction and dimensions of the violin have changed very little since the sixteenth century, the viola has undergone many transformations to help improve both playability and projection.

The viola has produced more problems for luthiers during the last three centuries than the rest of the violin family. One such problem is the need to splice the top and back of the instrument when the quality wood wasn’t wide enough (this goes for entire violin family), and this technique was used for the Primrose Andrea Guarneri viola, with added extensions, sometimes called wings. Another problem that luthiers ran into was the need to lengthen neck and fingerboard of instruments made before c.1780 to meet the new demands of players towards the end of the eighteenth century. These new demands also necessitated a higher bridge and longer or thicker bass bar. One aspect of these older instruments that remained untouched was the scroll, as this was part of the artistry of the original luthier. Perhaps the most difficult challenge was trying to make the old tenors (large violas) playable. These old instruments range between 17-20 inches, far too large to play with any sort of comfort. In order to make these large instruments more playable, it was necessary to cut off the bottom and top of the instrument, as well as the central section, to shorten it. Unfortunately unskilled luthiers mutilated several fine violas during this delicate procedure.

16 Ibid.
17 Ibid., 218-219.
18 Ibid., 219-221.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
Several attempts, some successful and others not, were made by luthiers to remedy the problems encountered with the viola. Many instruments were designed and produced in the nineteenth century to solve these problems; one of the first ones was by Michael Woldemar (1750-1816) in Paris.\textsuperscript{21} He added a C string to a violin, making it five strings rather than four, which was similar to what many violists were doing: playing on a violin which had simply been restrung.\textsuperscript{22} The French luthier B. Dubois built the \textit{Violon-tenor}, with a body length of 17-1/8 inches (27 total).\textsuperscript{23} This instrument was an octave lower than the violin, with the pitches tuned to GDAE, but was supposed to be played between the knees like a cello. Fellow Frenchman Charles Henry (1803-59) constructed his \textit{Baryton} in 1847, which was also tuned an octave lower than the violin.\textsuperscript{24} Possibly the most famous French luthier during the nineteenth century was Jean Baptiste Luillaume (1798-1875).\textsuperscript{25} He built his \textit{Contralto} in 1855, and this monstrous instrument had a total length of 26.5 inches, which was so wide that it wasn’t possible to play above third position.\textsuperscript{26}

With all of these changes, and the desire to “improve” the instrument, some devotees of the instrument were rather alarmed. Wecker von Gonterhausen warned: “[The viola’s] tone has a gentle somberness to which a peculiar nasal quality imparts a distinct charm . . . The resonance of our violas is weak in comparison with that of the violin and of a different tone color, by raising the ribs the power of its sound might easily be increased, but thereby the characteristic gentleness combined with a homely nasal quality of its tone

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 225.
\item \textsuperscript{22} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{25} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 225-227.
\end{itemize}
would be sacrificed, which is of the greatest advantage to our orchestras.”

This warning, and others like it, fell mostly on deaf ears.

Herman Ritter (1849-1926) was a German violist who saw the need for a change in his beloved instrument, and, in his efforts to make that change, he inspired and commissioned the most influential viola of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. He was encouraged and supported by Richard Wagner, and came up with the Viola alta. Its companion instruments, the Viola tenore and Viola bassa, were among the most important experiments with new models and dimensions for members of the violin family during the nineteenth century. It was the common practice at the time in most German orchestras to use small violas, instruments that were hardly bigger than violins, and it was their muffled tone and lack of resonance that became Ritter’s chief concern. His exploration in finding a solution to these problems included research done by Antonio Bagatella in 1782, which dealt with the resonance of the instrument. Bagatella felt that the relationship between the viola and violin was that of the tonic to sub-dominant, and therefore the dimensions of the air chamber should be 2:3, or 1:3/2.

Up until this point Ritter’s improved viola was merely an idea, but through the intense care and effort on the part of the luthier, tangible progress was made. The assignment of making this new instrument was given to Karl Adam Hörlein (1829-1902), a German luthier working in Würzburg. He created the first Viola alta in 1875, which, according to Ritter, would have needed to be 21-¼ inches, but he made it 18.9 inches
instead.\textsuperscript{34} This was the largest the viola could be while still being playable.\textsuperscript{35} Ritter was a large man and could play the instrument with ease, but it was still too big for many, and he amended this size issue by adding an E string so that there wasn’t a need to shift into higher positions.\textsuperscript{36} The most frequent criticism of the instrument was that it lacked the nasal, somber tone associated with the viola, and that it sounded more like a cello.\textsuperscript{37} Many of these Ritter model violas are still in use, while others survive in collections. The Vitali Import Company in Los Angeles has a five-string \textit{Alta-geige} made by Karl Niedt (1872-1950) in 1902, and Hans Weisshauer (a Los Angeles luthier) has a \textit{Viola alta} by Phillip Keller from 1882.\textsuperscript{38}

Ritter and Hörlein’s contemporaries were also significant because they were successful in their developments, and more importantly, their instruments were put into use. One of the other Germans who was designing large violas was Heinrich Dessauer (1863-1917) from Linz, who built a 16-\(\frac{1}{4}\)-inch viola with the fingerboard and string length exactly like the violin.\textsuperscript{39} Building the viola with violin fingerboard and string length was done in an attempt to make the common transition from the violin to the viola a little easier, for very few musicians start out on the viola. Johann Reiter (1879-1959) from Mittenwald created the \textit{Octave violin}, which was the same length as Dessauer’s, but it was tuned an octave lower than a violin, GDAE.\textsuperscript{40} Dr. Alfred Stelzner (1852-1906), a composer and luthier from Wiesbaden, made his \textit{Violetta} for Mehr Erfolg in 1891, with a

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 231.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 232.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 233.
body length of 16-1/8 inches and a total length of 27.9 inches.\textsuperscript{41} His instrument evoked more interest than any other viola invention in the nineteenth century (with the exception of Ritter’s viola made by Hörlein).\textsuperscript{42} Eugene Sprenger (1882-1953) from Frankfurt am Main made one of the most successful experiments with the dimensions of the viola.\textsuperscript{43} His instrument had a body length of 15-3/4 inches (with an overall length of 26 inches), and he increased the air chamber by one third.\textsuperscript{44} He was able to accomplish this air chamber increase by widening the bouts and raising the ribs, which preserved the characteristically dark viola tone, but this change gave the instrument a more penetrating sound.\textsuperscript{45} The famous composer and violist Paul Hindemith was an enthusiast of this particular instrument and others by Sprenger.\textsuperscript{46}

Not all of the innovations were coming out of Germany, for the Italians and English were just as active and influential in the development of the physical aspects of the viola. Valentino de Zorsi (1837-1916) from Florence, Italy, made a \textit{Contraviolino} in 1908, with the tuning being GDAE.\textsuperscript{47} Big violas tend to give their players big problems, with issues such as severe soreness of the chin and neck, tendinitis, bursitis, and fibrositis of the arms and shoulders. Lionel Tertis played a large 17-1/8-inch viola in his younger years, but he was a small man, and the injuries that he suffered from playing that larger viola resulted in his first retirement from concert performance.\textsuperscript{48} Prior to his retirement, he worked on getting the same sound out of a smaller and more playable viola, and he took his ideas

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid.
and measurements to Arthur Richardson in England.\textsuperscript{49} Richardson made his first \textit{Tertis Model Viola} in 1937, with a smaller body of 16-\(\frac{3}{4}\) inches, and this instrument was highly successful and is still in use today.\textsuperscript{50} Named after the familiar violist, the Tertis model viola illustrates that changing the size of the viola helps it project more. The Tertis model was created with the aim of establishing dimensions of the viola that give good sound, but also allow playability in the higher positions.\textsuperscript{51}

Many of these “experiments” have not really been given any general acceptance, and a fine example of one such experiment is Otto Erdesz’s solution to solve the issue found when playing in higher positions.\textsuperscript{52} The problem that many violists face is that the upper bout gets in the way, and Erdesz’s solution was to make the right side of the upper bout have a concave shape to it.\textsuperscript{53} These remedies and solutions discussed in this chapter have contributed in small but significant ways, and helped develop further interest in remedying problems with the viola.

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 235.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 237.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.
CHAPTER TWO  

**Ludwig van Beethoven**

The firstborn of our composers, Ludwig van Beethoven used his training in both violin and viola to write powerful fugue subjects, using emotions he experienced in life to influence his compositions, as we will examine in his String Quartet No. 11, Op. 95.

The birth and early childhood of Ludwig van Beethoven hold several confusions and questions that lead to a certain intrigue. He was born on December 16, 1770, to parents Johann and Maria Magdalena.\(^{54}\) His older brother, also named Ludwig, was born in 1769 (and baptized on April 2), but died after only six days.\(^{55}\) Our Ludwig was baptized on December 17, which suggests that he was born on December 16; in catholic Bonn, the custom was to baptize infants the day after birth.\(^{56}\) A note on the back of an announcement of Beethoven’s death (made by a clerk in Simrock’s publishing establishment) said, “L.v. Beethoven was born on 16\(^{th}\) December 1770,” which is significant because the clerk lived in Bonngasse at the same time that the Beethovens did.\(^{57}\) Beethoven’s father observed young Ludwig’s gift for music, and Johann hoped with his “stupid cleverness, to make of the child a second Mozart—a Wunderkind” to bring him money and fame.\(^{58}\) Johann knocked a couple of years off of Beethoven’s birth year to make Beethoven seem more impressive, and this plan was practical because Beethoven was small for his age and couldn’t remember his own beginning.\(^{59}\) In fact, young Beethoven believed for the larger part of his life that he was born in 1772, and the


\(^{55}\) Ibid.

\(^{56}\) Ibid.

\(^{57}\) Ibid., 12.

\(^{58}\) Ibid.

\(^{59}\) Ibid.
matter was not cleared up until he turned forty, when a copy of his birth certificate was sent from Bonn to Vienna.\textsuperscript{60}

The final bit of mystery surrounding his birth was perhaps the most controversial of all: it was rumored that he was the illegitimate son of King Frederick William II of Prussia.\textsuperscript{61} This story was put into circulation in 1810 and continued till 1826, something that annoyed Beethoven greatly. He wrote to a friend about the subject, saying: “I have made it a principle never to write anything about myself nor to reply to anything written about me. For this reason I gladly leave it to you to make known to the world the honesty of my parents, and of my mother in particular.”\textsuperscript{62}

The drive that his father showed in pushing Beethoven to be a musician shows the seriousness of the role that music played in his life, and moreover that greatness was expected of him. Beethoven was taught music at an early age, and his father trained him on both the violin and clavier when he was between four and six years old.\textsuperscript{63} Marion M. Scott stated, “Our hearts revolt, as did those of the neighbors, at the picture of poor little Ludwig standing in front of the clavier, weeping and playing. To rob a child of its childhood is a theft nothing can repair. Only the grace of God and the genius in him saved Ludwig from loathing music.”\textsuperscript{64} Theodor Fischer, of the Fischer house (the house in which the Beethovens lived) records: “The Beethoven children were not brought up with kindness; they were often left to servants: the father was very severe with them,” and it seems true that Johann beat Beethoven and locked him in the cellar at times.\textsuperscript{65}

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., 14.
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., 16.
1778, Johann thought Beethoven was ready to be presented as a prodigy, and unveiled him at a concert on March 26. It was also around this time that Beethoven had lessons from someone other than his father, when he started studying with Gilles van den Eeden (1708-1782) (the court organist); unfortunately van den Eeden was unsuccessful as a teacher.

Beethoven then started taking lessons from Tobias Pfeiffer (?1751-?1805), who was a thorough teacher, but a bad person, and both Pfeiffer and Johann were like alcoholic birds of a feather. They would come home from drinking and wake everyone in the Fischer house. When Pfeiffer skipped Beethoven’s lessons during the day, he would wake him up at night to make him play, but oddly enough, Beethoven didn’t resent him, because Pfeiffer was a true musician. Marion Scott describes the situation nicely when she says, “To an artist, bad art is almost the one unforgivable thing.” Beethoven worked with Pfeiffer for a year, and on the few occasions that Pfeiffer would play the flute while Beethoven played the piano, people would stop in the street to listen and applaud.

In same year that Beethoven was taking lessons with Pfeiffer, Beethoven’s cousin, Franz Rovantini (the son of his mother’s sister) also became a resident in the Fischer house. He gave Ludwig lessons on both the violin and the viola, which afforded Beethoven the knowledge to write idiomatically for each of those instruments.

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66 Ibid.
67 Ibid.
69 Scott, Beethoven, 17.
70 Ibid.
71 Ibid.
72 Ibid.
73 Ibid.
74 Ibid.
75 Ibid.
String Quartet No. 11, Op. 95, Mvt. II

Beethoven’s String Quartet No. 11 is a very powerful quartet, and the melancholy fugue subject of the second movement is indicative of the personal aspect of the work. Composed in 1810, the F-minor Quartet, or Quartetto serioso, was dedicated by Beethoven to “his friend” Nikolaus Zmeskall of Domanovecz.\(^\text{76}\) The fact that Zmeskall wasn’t an important figure in society shows that Beethoven chose to honor him, and that their relationship was very important to Beethoven. This was one of Beethoven’s shortest quartets, and he withheld it from publication and performance for an unusually long time, due to its problematic and personal nature.\(^\text{77}\)

This is an example of Beethoven branching off from the characteristics of the classical era, using unrelated keys and starting the fugue in the middle of the second movement, at the pickup to measure 35. The key of the first movement is F minor, and the key of the second is D major, a mediant relationship, which is very uncharacteristic of the classical era.\(^\text{78}\) Although the key of the second movement is D major, the fugue subject itself is not in straightforward D, as the chromatic nature of the subject indicates. This chromaticism makes the subject stand out, something that Beethoven surely did intentionally. The string quartet is an excellent medium to feature the viola, for the viola’s natural projection isn’t as overpowered in this setting as much as it might be in a string quintet, or even in a piano quartet.

Beethoven uses his knowledge of both string playing and fugue writing to create an idiomatic and climatic fugue led by the viola. As we can see, the subject has a sense of melancholy, and is slightly chromatic with a lowered 7th (C♭) and lowered 6th (B♭). It is fairly conjunct, making use of several open strings, and starting on the A string helps to make it project, as it is the brightest-sounding string on the instrument. The subject is four measures long, and the descending line adds to its melancholy mood. The fact that it is slurred gives the chromatic line a greater sense of flow, almost like tears rolling down. The tonal answer is found in the second violin, in the pickup to measure 39. As the answer is playing, the countersubject in the viola is an ascending chromatic scale, which, when paired with the descending answer, gives a sense of tugging the listener in different directions.

As in a traditional fugue, Beethoven breaks the fugue with episodes, and his choice of compositional devices create a sense of urgency in addition to sorrow. He employed two episodes, with the first at measure 65, and lasting fourteen measures, and the second at measure 113, lasting thirty-two measures. The first of the devices that he chose to use was stretto, and the first instance of stretto is at the pickup to measure 84 in the second violin (when it comes in after three measures instead of four). The next stretto occurs at the pickup to measure 92 in the viola; it enters after just two measures, creating a feeling of insistence and suspense. The next instance of stretto is at the pickup to measure 147 in the first violin, in which the answer arrives after merely one measure.
Beethoven may also show his love of the viola by allowing it to introduce other significant aspects of the fugue. Another device that Beethoven used in his Op. 95 is inversion, and an example is in the viola at the pickup to measure 88. The viola starts on E and goes down fifth, not fourth, making it tonal. This is noteworthy because Beethoven used the viola to introduce a new element in the development of the heart-wrenching subject.

Beethoven used the dark and textured timbre of the viola in this fugue to represent tumultuous emotions. The descending, slurred subject adds the melancholy character of the subject, which he expands and explores throughout the fugue. Beethoven’s skill as a composer and his knowledge of strings enabled him to produce an idiomatic and emotionally compelling subject for his fugue.
CHAPTER THREE

Felix Mendelssohn

Felix Mendelssohn was born just one year before our previous fugue was composed, and the influence of Beethoven can be seen in Mendelssohn’s String Quintet No. 1, Op. 18, as well as in his String Quartet No. 2. Mendelssohn was able to synthesize his string knowledge to create fugues and fugue subjects that bring a focus to the viola.

Felix Mendelssohn grew up in a musical home, and being exposed to the arts at such a young age focused his attention on his craft and helped him grow as a musician and as a composer. All four of the Mendelssohn children were musical, with Fanny the eldest being a fine pianist and accomplished composer. The two youngest (Rebecka and Paul) were less gifted, but they could sing and play various instruments. Born Jakob Felix Ludwig on February 3, 1809, in Hamburg, Felix was from the start the jewel in Mendelssohn family crown. Music was encouraged and integrated into all of the children’s educations, but both parents, Leah and Abraham, were reluctant to recognize their son as a musical prodigy; they didn’t know if music was a career fit for a gentleman.

Mendelssohn had a range of talents, given by divine grace and fostered by the choice of his parents to host weekly concerts in their home. At nine, he showed himself a pianist of unusual accomplishment, at ten, a talented composer, and at sixteen, a musical genius. Mendelssohn had a range of lesser-known abilities, such as playing the violin, sketching with ink or charcoal, and painting with watercolors. It was traditional to give

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80 Ibid.
81 Ibid.
82 Ibid., 24.
83 Ibid., 10.
84 Ibid.
Sunday morning concerts in the Mendelssohn home. These parties became famous within the arts community, and, more importantly, they became opportunities for Mendelssohn to showcase and develop his talents, since when he was not conducting a small orchestra, he would play the violin or the piano.  

The musical education that Mendelssohn received from his top-notch tutors fostered his talents, and helped give him all the tools that he would need to write intriguing and idiomatic music for strings. Carl Henning (1784-1867) and Eduard Rietz (1802-1832) were principals in the Royal Berlin Orchestra, and they taught Mendelssohn the violin and the viola. Carl Friedrich Zelter (1758-1832), director of Berlin’s Singakademie, was hand-picked by Abraham as Mendelssohn’s general music instructor. Overcoming one of the greatest challenges when teaching young children, Zelter knew exactly how to stimulate the interest of Mendelssohn; one such method was to give him riddles to turn counterpoint into a game. Their lessons together began when Mendelssohn was eight, and it was under Zelter’s tutelage that he progressed in leaps and bounds.

Mendelssohn’s The Uncle from Boston (1823) was a pivotal turning point for him. It was a one-act opera, and after the first performance Zelter turned to his fourteen-year-old protégé and said, “My dear boy, from this day you are no longer an apprentice, but a full member of the brotherhood of musicians. I hereby proclaim you independent in the name of Mozart, Haydn and old father Bach.” Despite this claim, Mendelssohn’s father still had doubts about him being a musician, and decided to ask the advice of the best

\[85\] Ibid.
\[86\] Ibid., 21.
\[87\] Ibid., 22.
\[88\] Ibid., 23.
\[89\] Ibid.
\[90\] Ibid., 29.
musician he knew, Luigi Cherubini.\textsuperscript{91} If Cherubini thought Mendelssohn had the makings of a first-class musician, Abraham would support him, but if not, he would insist Mendelssohn turn to something else for a career. Father and son left for Paris in the summer of 1824, and when Mendelssohn played for Cherubini, Cherubini said, “Your boy is talented. He will do well. He has already done well.”\textsuperscript{92}

\textit{String Quintet No. 1, Op. 18, Mvt. III}

Mendelssohn’s \textit{String Quintet No. 1} held significant emotional value for Mendelssohn, and we can see this in the revisions of the movements, as well as the string writing. This piece was composed in 1826, when he was just 17 years old.\textsuperscript{93} He substituted a new movement for the original second movement, and he dedicated the adagio (intermezzo) to Eduard Rietz who died suddenly on January 23, 1832.\textsuperscript{94} Rietz won Mendelssohn’s respect and affection as a teacher, and Rietz also helped with the famous performance of the \textit{St. Matthew Passion} when Rietz was the concertmaster.\textsuperscript{95} We can see in the quintet’s string writing that Mendelssohn was delving into the capabilities of the instruments, especially that of the viola. This work was originally four movements: Allegro con moto, Scherzo, Minuet and Trio, and Allegro vivace, but the intermezzo, captioned "Nachruf" (In Memoriam), was inserted as the second movement.\textsuperscript{96} Mendelssohn then moved the original scherzo to become the third movement, and he got

\textsuperscript{91} Ibid., 31.  
\textsuperscript{92} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{94} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{95} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{96} Ibid.
rid of the minuet and trio. Mendelssohn published the work in the newly revised form as his Op. 18.

Although this quintet isn’t Mendelssohn’s most popular work, it is still a fine example of his craftsmanship as a composer. He uses his knowledge of strings to create a simple yet resonant fugue subject in the third movement. With its light and joking staccato bowing, the fugue’s character is in stark contrast to the previous “memorial” movement. This is a five-voice fugue, and the medium is two violins, two violas, and a cello. The medium is significant in this work, as the medium of some string quintets as two violins, one viola, and two cellos. This choice of medium shows that Mendelssohn is already placing an emphasis on the violas. The tempo of this fugue is Allegro di molto and the key is D harmonic minor. The range is from G♯-F, which is in the middle/upper range of the instrument, not the dark and rich tone, but lighter and clearer, as demonstrated by the bouncing subject.

To introduce the scherzo, Mendelssohn created a somewhat joking and lively subject that enhances the limited resonating qualities of the viola. Introduced by the second viola, this subject is fairly conjunct, and starts pianissimo on the offbeat. This eight-measure subject starts on D, and the open string helps to resonate on the repeated note, especially since the pitch is at such a low dynamic range. The many repeated staccato notes create stability in this subject. The pianissimo answer is in the first viola, starting at measure 9. (It is a real answer, beginning on the dominant [A]). It is interesting
that the viola is used to introduce both the subject and the answer, as it suggests that Mendelssohn had something very specific in mind when he chose the viola. Having the viola introduce the subject and answer gives the sense that the answer is more of a continuation of the subject, as the timbre for both the subject and answer are the same.

Mendelssohn includes stretto and two episodes to develop the subject further, and it is through these tools that the climax of the fugue is reached. He employs stretto in this fugue, as we can see just after the second episode, in the second violin at measure 258 when the answer comes in after three measures instead of eight. The first episode is at measure 138 and lasts for 22 measures. The second episode is at measure 206, and lasts for 48 measures. Mendelssohn uses these episodes to set up the development of the subject, and he also reaches the climax in the development. This climax occurs during the stretto of the subject fragments starting at measure 226, when there is a large crescendo leading up to a passage where the voices are entering in quick succession, and all while the first viola is playing a pedal bass on D.

String Quartet No. 2, Mvt. II

The beautiful String Quartet No. 2 can be seen as having Beethoven’s influence. It was composed in 1827, when Mendelssohn was only eighteen years old. Beethoven died in March of the same year, and Felix modeled this quartet on the quartets of Beethoven. Moreover, this string quartet was not based on the early “easier” ones, but rather on the later string quartets that present more of a challenge. It has been said Beethoven’s portrait must have been on Mendelssohn’s desk when he composed this quartet, because of its

intense energy. We can find a similar energy in Beethoven’s *String Quartet No. 11*. Beethoven’s last quartet was his Op. 135, where the final movement opens with the motto underneath which Beethoven wrote, “Muß es sein?” (Must it be?) The slow introduction to Mendelssohn’s first movement quotes a song by Mendelssohn called ‘Frage’ (Question), which was written earlier in 1827. The motive from Mendelssohn’s ‘Frage’ is “Ist es wahr?” (is it true?) In both cases we don’t know what “it” is, and Mendelssohn was able to continue this sense of the unknown, with a fugue subject that has a range of a diminished fifth.

Mendelssohn used harmony to set up a meaningful fugue subject. The key of this movement is F major, but the subject isn’t in F; rather, it is in A major. Mendelssohn does a masterful job of setting up the introduction of the subject. The rest just before the subject is preceded by an F chord, with the violins and cello tripling the root while the viola is on the third. This voicing leads to the viola introducing the fugue, as it is the only instrument playing something other than the root, and by playing the third, the attention is focused on the viola.

Despite the fugue subject’s diminutive size, Mendelssohn grabs the listener’s attention by using the resonant strings of the viola and setting up the subject perfectly. The viola introduces the “espressivo” subject at measure 20, where the conjunct melody is first heard. The subject starts on the A string, which could be played on the open string

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99 Ibid.
100 Ibid.
or not, depending on the fingering, but even if it is fingered on the D string, the open A string will produce sympathetic vibrations. The brighter sound on the A string counteracts the naturally softer projection of the instrument in relationship to the violins and cello. The subject has a range of a diminished fifth (E-B♭), and this tritone elicits an emotional response of unease from the audience, even if it is on a subconscious level. The subject lasts only two measures, which is very short in comparison to most other fugues. The crescendo and decrescendo at the beginning follow the melodic contour of the first measure and a half of the subject. Mendelssohn employs the principle of increasing animation as well, as he starts with quarters/dotted quarters, moves to eighths, and finally to sixteenths.

This subject is very melodic, more so than the quintet’s subject. The tonal answer is in the second violin at measure 22, and it starts on D but leaps up a minor third instead of the minor second in the beginning. The answer employs the same dynamic and expression markings as the subject, which helps to connect the two, as they both stay in the mid- to upper range of the instrument.

Mendelssohn used devices such as stretto and inversion to develop the subject further, creating more tension and unease as the fugue unfolds. Stretto is seen in the first violins at measure 35 when the answer comes in just one measure after the subject. The effect of this stretto was not quite as dramatic as when Beethoven employed it, but it still contributes to the discomfort that we felt during the initial subject. Mendelssohn also used inversion, as the cello at measure 66 descends a second (because it is tonal) instead of a third, and this choice to make the answer tonal is no doubt due to the tritone range of the subject.
Mendelssohn used his knowledge of strings to write idiomatically for the viola in both of his fugues. This is true when the subject was more melodically driven, and also when it was more rhythmic. Mendelssohn parallels the character of the fugue with the viola, whether it was the delicate unease of his *Quartet*, or the urgency of the *Quintet’s* subject. Mendelssohn showcased the viola in a worthwhile manner, thus portraying the best of this beautiful instrument’s capabilities.
CHAPTER FOUR  Robert Schumann

“*At school [Schumann] was an average student, rather dreamy and inattentive. But what soon struck me about him was the absolute certainty in his own mind that one day he would become famous. In what he would become famous—that had yet to be determined—but famous whatever the circumstances.*”

–School friend Emil Flechsig

As stated by Flechsig, it was set in Schumann’s mind that he was destined for something greater than an ordinary life. Born just one year after Felix Mendelssohn, Schumann had a slow start to his career, but eventually enjoyed an astronomical ascent through the musical community. We will see what made him such an admired composer as we examine his Piano Quartet in E-flat, Op. 47.

Although some felt that Schumann’s earliest teacher was under-qualified to teach him, Schumann recognized the importance that Johann Gottfried Kuntsch (1775-1855) had in his development as a musician. Kuntsch was the most knowledgeable and prominent musician in Zwickau, although there is very little known about his musical background or ability. They began their piano lessons together when Schumann was seven. Kuntsch taught Schumann piano only; they did not work on theory or harmony. Schumann later described Kuntsch’s playing as “tolerable.” Biographers don’t treat Kuntsch kindly, saying that the student was more gifted than the teacher, and Clara Schumann stated in 1889 that Kuntsch wasn’t “distinguished enough to be

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102 Ibid., 7.
103 Ibid.
104 Ibid.
105 Ibid.
[Schumann’s] teacher.”106 Despite what others said though, Schumann had a different view: “[Kuntsch was] the only one who recognized my strong musical gifts, and early on pointed out to me the way which, sooner or later, my inner nature would have obliged me to follow.”107 Much of Schumann’s time was spent improvising; he would do it “for many hours each day,” and many of his early compositions were improvisatory in origin.108 This is also the case for the fugue subject that is to be analyzed, as the flowing line is improvisatory in its character.

The Wiecks were very instrumental in Schumann’s development as a person and as a musician, both father and daughter. It was probably on March 31, 1828, that Schumann first met Friedrich Wieck (1785-1873) and his eight-year-old daughter, Clara (1819-1896).109 Wieck was an impassioned and eccentric man, and made his living primarily as piano teacher.110 He became Schumann’s teacher, and he was the one who got Schumann to the point of making music a career. Friedrich was also the one to calm Schumann’s mother about Schumann’s choice to be a musician, saying that within three years he would make Schumann “into one of the greatest pianists now living.”111 This claim was enough reassurance for Schumann to continue in his studies with Wieck.

_Piano Quartet in E-flat, Op. 47, Mvt. IV_

Schumann began to focus his attention on piano quartets, and the effort that he put in this new genre led to a gradual change in his musical style, with craftsmanship and clarity

106 Ibid., 8.
107 Ibid.
108 Ibid., 9.
109 Ibid., 22.
110 Ibid.
111 Ibid., 34-35.
becoming of increasing importance. We can see how he implements these qualities in his Piano Quartet in E-flat, Op. 47. With this medium, it is easy to get a muddled mixture of voices, but Schumann does an exceptional job of retaining articulate and independent lines. Clarity and independence of line had been notable characteristics of much eighteenth-century chamber music, and Schumann used imitation and fugues to accomplish this precise writing in the contrapuntal finales to both his piano quintet and quartet (1842-43).

Although the instrumentation is tricky, Schumann is still able to balance the voices to create a wonderful piano quartet. The string trio is one of the hardest string ensembles for which to write, as it doesn’t have the full texture of a quartet or quintet, but it doesn’t have the invigorating power of a duet either. And as if writing for a string trio wasn’t challenging enough, adding the piano makes it harder, both antiphonally and harmonically. Schumann does a good job of offsetting this challenge, though, since often times two of the voices are in unison or in imitation. As Schumann was trained as pianist, and he had no practical familiarity with strings, it is understandable that there is a slight emphasis on the piano. This piece is considered by many to be the “younger brother” to the Piano Quintet, and it is equally as important, but less popular, which is due in part to the instrumentation.

The tumbling triple-meter subject is not too challenging to play, and yet its rapid and

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112 Ibid., 199.
113 Ibid.
115 Ibid.
118 Ibid., 382.
somewhat virtuosic nature establishes the tone of the finale. The tempo indication is Vivace, with the quarter equaling 152, and the hurried pace contributes to the virtuosic character of the piece, as does the forte opening of this four-voice fugue (the piano acts as one voice). The conjunct subject makes the theme a little easier to play at tempo, but the flats don’t help, as string players tend to prefer sharps to flats. All of the voices play in parallel and lead into the subject, which the viola introduces starting at measure 4. This subject is five measures long; the separate bowings of the eighths and sixteenths make it sound more aggressive. The subject does start on C, which helps the viola to resonate, and since the starting note isn’t on the open C, there will be sympathetic vibrations.

Despite not having much training in string practices, Schuman is still able to write a balanced fugue, showcasing the viola in an effective manner. The answer is presented by the piano at measure 8, starting on G with octaves in the right hand. As the answer is being played, the viola stops playing sixteenths and starts to play ascending eighths, which contrast nicely with the descending answer.

This is the first piece in this essay that lacks the traditional devices such as inversion and augmentation, and these omissions support the rushed and aggressive nature of the fugue. The only evidence of stretto is between mere fragments of the subject, as seen throughout the finale in places such as measures 74 and 75 (incorporating all of the instruments). Although they are only subject fragments, they are still enough for the
listener to recognize, and the stretto happens rapidly and somewhat haphazardly, giving a rather hurried feeling to the fugue.

Of all the composers considered thus far, Schumann had the least amount of string experience, but that did not prevent him from composing a beautiful subject for the viola. He was able to write this subject using the full timbre of the viola, which mellows the somewhat aggressive nature of the subject.
Despite his lack of training with strings, Brahms was able to write for the viola in a way that showcased its natural tendencies. One might even go as far to say that there are similarities between his personality and the timbre of the viola: dark and somber, yet rich and warm underneath. We will be examining his String Quinter No. 1, Op. 88.

Johannes Brahms, born on May 7, 1833, in Hamburg, was a gruff man, rude and not caring of what others thought of him. But there was much more to his personality than the crotchety exterior. He was kinder under the surface, and he had a boyish awkwardness about him. Brahms was also very self-critical and self-deprecating, and he threw away a vast amount of his work, as it is estimated that we have about one third of his output. He did have his moments of self-importance, though, for when at a Vienna Philharmonic rehearsal of one of his serenades, he got up on the podium and said, “Gentlemen, I know I am not Beethoven, but I am Johannes Brahms.” (He was only thirty-three at the time.) This instance shows that Brahms had yet another facet to his personality that wasn’t immediately apparent. Otto Gottlieb-Billroth compared Brahms’s behavior to a hedgehog’s defensive/aggressive posture, saying that Brahms had a “soft heart under a rough exterior,” and said that he had incomparable humanity, being helpful to the point of self-denial.

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120 Ibid.
121 Ibid.
122 Ibid.
124 Ibid.
125 Ibid.
Even at a young age, Brahms exhibited a sense that he had work to accomplish. He lived with the awareness that time was a precious commodity, and he was unwilling to waste his efforts doing other things.\textsuperscript{126} Although he was in demand as pianist, he considered it secondary to composing, so he composed.\textsuperscript{127}

The Schumanns were the most influential couple on Brahms’s life. Brahms wrote to Robert, who never responded, so Brahms showed up at their doorstep in 1853. He played them his op. 8 and op. 5, which thoroughly impressed both Robert and Clara.\textsuperscript{128} Robert wrote about him and put Brahms in the eye of the public as a composer after that experience.\textsuperscript{129} Moreover, Brahms was enamored with Clara, but he did trust her for her honest feedback on his works as well.\textsuperscript{130} She was a strong female figure in his life, which was something that he desperately desired.

\textit{String Quintet No. 1, Op. 88, Mvt. IV}

One of Brahms’s least famous works, the \textit{String Quintet No. 1} was written using a traditional medium that emphasizes the viola, but he manipulates the inner workings in a surprising manner. This F-major quintet was composed and published in 1882.\textsuperscript{131} Brahms’s medium in this work is Mozartean, with two violins, two violas, and a cello, versus the Schubertian (two violins, a viola, and two cellos), which—as in Mendelssohn’s quintet—allows Brahms to showcase this beautiful instrument. Although this quintet is one

\textsuperscript{126} Ibid., 28.
\textsuperscript{127} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{128} Ibid., 30.
\textsuperscript{129} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{130} Ibid.
of Brahms’s least popular chamber pieces, he described it to Clara Schumann as “one of my finest works.”

Brahms’s understanding of the viola’s timbre is evident in his choice to use it to introduce a witty and unexpected fugue subject. This five-measure subject begins at a forte on the third beat of the first measure. The first viola starts on C, so there are sympathetic vibrations occurring on the open C string just one octave below. This subject is conjunct, yet the few leaps make it deliberately awkward and clumsy, and since the viola isn’t a bright and naturally projecting instrument, it can sound muffled when played at a quick tempo.

There is not much rhythmic variation in this subject, as it is in straightforward eighths. The real answer is found in measure 5, and is introduced by the second violin. Although the writing for the viola is slightly awkward, the answer actually complements it very well. The undeveloped subject in measure 29 is jocular, as the subject fragments there appear to be breaking the continuous motion, and that is not what we expect. Brahms doesn’t use the traditional devices in this fugue, which makes it all the more unexpected, and in turn, comedic.

Brahms used the viola not to convey sorrow or pain in this fugue, but rather comedy. By choosing the viola to introduce the fugue, he showed that the capabilities of the

\[132\] Ibid.
instrument did not have to be relegated to dark and somber tones, but that the viola has a range of possibilities in regards to tone color. Despite his lack of training with strings, Brahms manages to control the viola and its tone superbly.
The first of our Russian composers, Rimsky-Korsakov is also the first of our composers to employ nationalism in his composition. He was instrumental in the shaping of modern Russian classical music as we know it today. In this chapter we will examine his String Quartet on Russian Themes.

It was due to Rimsky-Korsakov’s parents and early teachers that he continued in music, as he didn’t have a strong love of it early in life, but merely an aptitude for it. He was born on March 6 [18], 1844, in Tikhvin in the Government of Novgorod. Russia used the Julian Calendar until 1923, which was 12 days behind Gregorian Calendar (which the rest of Europe was using), hence the two different dates of birth. Rimsky-Korsakov manifested his musical abilities from an early age, and he grew up with music since the family had a piano in their home. His father played it by ear, even such operas such as The Magic Flute. His mother played the piano in her youth, and when singing she would reduce the speed of the song, a habit that was inherited by her son. His first practical demonstration of musical sensibility was his manipulation of a drumstick, when he kept accurate time with his father on the piano, but deliberately varied the rhythms. Rimsky-Korsakov started to learn the piano at age six, studying with an elderly lady who lived nearby, who taught him for two years to the limit of her capabilities. She didn’t inspire him, and he didn’t show a love for music; he only

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134 Ibid.
136 Ibid.
138 Ibid.
139 Ibid., 14.
tolerated it. It was with his next teacher, who was the governess of a neighboring family, that he made solid progress during their three years of study.

Childhood games, such as imitation, cultivated Rimsky-Korsakov’s love for music later on in his life. Unlike some of the composers that we have examined, Rimsky-Korsakov’s parents didn’t dream of the possibility of him being a great musician, because as a child he didn’t display any considerable liking for music. His demeanor in childhood was viewed as healthy and normal, and his parents intended him to follow a naval career, as his elder brother and uncle were both in the service. It was Rimsky-Korsakov’s love for mimicry, not music, that played a huge role in his development, for it convinced him that he possessed musical ability beyond the common. This skill was particularly noticeable when he “played” composer, and while those around him viewed these youthful attempts at composition with some amusement, it was these seemingly unimportant experiments in composition that changed his view on music later on in life.

Rimsky-Korsakov’s change in music teachers while he was away from home turned his interest to more serious compositions, and he started taking lessons from a cellist. As we will see in his String Quartet on Russian Themes, this training had an influence on his writings for strings.

It was only when Rimsky-Korsakov began his career in music that he realized he needed to develop his theoretical skills, and by expanding these skills he was later able to

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140 Ibid.
141 Ibid.
142 Ibid., 15.
143 Ibid.
144 Ibid.
145 Ibid.
compose a fugue with traditional contrapuntal devices. Up to this point in 1871, he had relied purely on his musical instincts, with no formal training, which was fortified by the Circle’s (comprised of Balakirev, Cui, Mussorgsky, Borodin, and Rimsky-Korsakov) indifference to academic training. He was offered the post of professor of composition and orchestration, and conductorship of the orchestra at the Petrograd Conservatoire; it was then that he realized his ignorance of theoretical matters couldn’t be tolerated anymore. While many people would be nervous and self-conscious in his position, he thought it was amusing that he didn’t have knowledge of counterpoint or harmony, that he did not know the names of intervals, and that his lack of experience in conducting might prove “a little awkward for a professional musician.” The progress that he made in his studies can be seen in his *String Quartet on Russian Themes*.

*String Quartet on Russian Themes*, Mvt. IV

Rimsky-Korsakov’s nationalism can be found in his *String Quartet on Russian Themes* through the use of a church theme in the subject, and the inclusion of this liturgical aspect is perhaps the reason he did not discard the piece, despite the fact that he didn’t like it. This quartet was composed in 1878-79, and the fugue is found in the last movement, subtitled “At the Monastery.” This work didn’t have a public performance, rather, Rimsky-Korsakov had it played at a quartet rehearsal, and Rimsky-Korsakov later said of the experience: “I did not venture to let the public hear my quartet.” To this

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146 Ibid., 34.
147 Ibid.
148 Ibid.
150 Ibid.
151 Ibid.
day, this work is not very popular. Despite this, it is worth evaluating, because in the string writing Rimsky-Korsakov showcases the viola in a very prominent manner.

Rimsky-Korsakov was a good theoretical contrapuntist, and some of his works (the Sextet, String Quartet, and Third Symphony) are monuments of academic counterpoint. We will see this as we examine his fugue, and the skill that he exhibits in the development of the fugue. The somewhat abrupt insertion of the subjects in his String Quartet is indicative of the Russian way of fugue writing.

Rimsky-Korsakov had an acute understanding of the tone color that would be produced by the viola, and he strategically placed it at the beginning of this piece. It is a double fugue, using all four of the voices in a traditional quartet: two violins, a viola, and a cello. With the repeated notes found in the first subject, and the very melodic character of the second subject, it is likely that Rimsky-Korsakov chose the viola because he knew the instrument would resonate to the best of its ability.

Rimsky-Korsakov uses the viola in the beginning of this quartet to introduce the quiet and chant-like subject, which was a commonly sung church theme (“Reverend father so and so, pray God for us,”) and no doubt a deliberate choice in regards to the timbre of the instrument. The viola is first heard at measure 1 introducing this four-measure first subject. The subject starts on D, and although it is marked piano, the subject resonates on the open string. If the violist chooses to finger the D, there will sympathetic vibrations

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152 Ibid.
from the open string. This subject is conjunct, and is easy to play with lots of open strings, as it has a range of only a fifth (B-F♯). This limited range also helps to centralize the sound coming from the instrument, and the lack of large leaps keeps the attention on the range of the viola.

Although he changes instruments to the second violin to introduce the three-measure second subject in measure 4, Rimsky-Korsakov keeps the subject at the same range as the first, perhaps in an attempt to mimic the viola. Starting on G, this second subject starts off piano, with a conjunct and simple melody, much like the first subject. The difference between these two subjects is that the second subject is much more flowing than the first chant-like subject. The range of this second subject is E-A, and this effectively keeps the range of both subjects the same, which is a further indication that the viola’s tone is what Rimsky-Korsakov desired.

Despite Rimsky-Korsakov’s limited training, his manipulation of the subjects and countersubjects throughout this fugue shows that he had developed the skill to compose a compelling fugue. An instance of stretto is found at measure 149, when the first violin has the second subject, and the second violin comes in at measure 150. He doesn’t stop there, though, and he has the viola come in at measure 151, and the cello at measure 152. These occurrences of stretto show Rimsky-Korsakov’s skill in manipulating all instruments of the ensemble in the fugue. An illustration of augmentation is first seen in the first subject in violin I at measure 13, when the subject is played as quarters instead of eighths. We see this augmentation again with the first subject at measure 40 in the second
violin, when the subject is once again played as quarters instead of eighth notes. This augmentation serves the purpose of creating an agogic accent that wasn’t present in the subject when we first heard it.

We can also see the value that Rimsky-Korsakov placed on the viola, as we further examine this fugue. There are two episodes in this quartet; the first occurs in measures 36-39, and the second spans measures 98-101. The viola is used to introduce the first subject, the first countersubject, and the second countersubject. It is obviously a very important voice in this fugue. The viola doesn’t introduce the second subject, because there needs to be a distinction between the two subjects. But Rimsky-Korsakov keeps the range of the second subject the same as the first, which gives the sense that he desired the tone that the viola produced so beautifully.

Despite the limited training that Rimsky-Korsakov received in counterpoint, he was successful in showcasing the viola in this fugue. He keeps the range of both subjects the same, so that it seems more like one instrument (the viola) rather than two. His choice to introduce so many aspects of the fugue with the viola is an indication of the level of importance that the instrument held for Rimsky-Korsakov.
CHAPTER SEVEN  

Ernest Bloch

Bloch regarded composing as an act of faith, a means of making man more human. His music possesses an ethos and spirituality associated with the music of Bach and Beethoven, and he shares in large measure their unmistakable faith in an eternal God, and their humanistic concerns with mankind’s problems.

–Robert Strassburg\textsuperscript{155}

Ernest Bloch is the first composer at whom we have looked whose piece was written for pedagogical purposes. He is also our first composer who excelled at a stringed instrument as a child, and wrote music to showcase his youthful and joyous love for strings. This love and care will be shown as we examine his Concerto Grosso No. 1.

Music was Bloch’s calling from a young age, and he had a sense of how important of a role it would play in his life. He was born on July 24, 1880, in Geneva, Switzerland, and there were no musicians of renown in his genealogy.\textsuperscript{156} However, there was some indication of his precocity at a young age, and he recalled at the age of 75, “I don’t believe that I was more than nine or ten when I made up my mind what I would do. Certain professions were closed to me. Neither of my parents were musical. Yet music it was to be. I would compose music that would bring peace and happiness to mankind.”\textsuperscript{157}

Bloch’s teachers instilled in him from a very young age the fundamentals of string knowledge, which set the stage for exciting string writing to occur. At the age of six his mother bought him a toy flute, and since he didn’t have an instructor, he improvised tunes on his own, but he lost interest in the flute after his parents gave him a violin at age

\textsuperscript{156} Ibid., 1.
\textsuperscript{157} Ibid., 5.
nine.\textsuperscript{158} He responded enthusiastically to this exciting new instrument, and began to take lessons with a local violin teacher Albert Gos (1854-1942).\textsuperscript{159} He made remarkably rapid progress, and at the age of nine he had composed his first melodies for the violin.\textsuperscript{160} By age 14, he was considered a prodigy by local musicians, and that he was destined for a career as virtuoso.\textsuperscript{161} In December of 1894, his parents brought him to Émile Jaques-Dalcroze (1865-1950), the professor of theory and composition at the Geneva Conservatory of Music.\textsuperscript{162} Dalcroze was impressed by Bloch’s ability, and personally supervised him in solfège and composition, but wanted him to continue violin with Louis Étienne-Reyer (1832-1909), the professor of violin at the Geneva Conservatory of Music.\textsuperscript{163}

Bloch’s natural ability as a composer was enough to gain him entrance into the study of composition, but it was through the connection of the French violinist Martin Pierre Marsick (1848-1924) that Bloch would meet his most influential teacher. In 1896, Bloch heard Marsick, and he played for the Frenchman after the concert, afterwards showing him his recently completed string quartet. They went immediately to Bloch’s father’s house, where Marsick urged Bloch’s parents to have their son follow the career path of a musician, and he suggested that Bloch be sent to study with Marsick’s teacher, Eugene Ysaÿe (1858-1931), in Brussels.\textsuperscript{164} Bloch’s parents didn’t want him to go, partially because of his mother’s overprotectiveness, and also because of his father’s desire for

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{158} Ibid., 4.
  \item \textsuperscript{159} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{160} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{161} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{162} Ibid., 6.
  \item \textsuperscript{163} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{164} Ibid., 9.
\end{itemize}
Bloch to run the family business. Fortunately, Marsick convinced them that it was the right thing for him, and Bloch left for Brussels a short while later.

Ysaÿe was possibly the most instrumental of Bloch’s instructors, and it was under his instruction that for the first time emphasis was put on composition and not performance. Ysaÿe auditioned Bloch in spring of 1896, and he was not so impressed with his violin playing; rather, it was Bloch’s gift for composition that intrigued Ysaÿe. He taught Bloch composition, and urged Bloch to pursue a career as a composer rather than a virtuoso. Ysaÿe still gave Bloch occasional lessons on the violin, but for more regular violin lessons he sent Bloch to Franz Schörg (1871-1923). The three-year period of studying under Ysaÿe was of great importance in Bloch’s development as a musician and composer, and Bloch was influenced by Ysaÿe’s style of playing and writing for the violin. Ysaÿe was impatient with superficiality in any form and he scorned virtuoso display for its own sake, something that Bloch would take with him later in life.

Despite being a violinist, Bloch showed a love for the viola in his Viola Suite, creating one of the most significant solo works for the viola. He started it in 1918, and this was the first composition that marks his departure from his music of Jewish inspiration, the Jewish Cycle. The Viola Suite won the Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge Chamber Music Award, with its prize of $1,000. Bloch orchestrated the work for the

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165 Ibid.
166 Ibid.
167 Ibid., 10.
168 Ibid.
169 Ibid., 11.
170 Ibid.
171 Ibid.
172 Ibid., 51.
173 Ibid.
Berkshire Chamber Music Festival of 1919. It is a testament to Bloch’s skill as a composer that, in the orchestral version, the viola maintains its preeminence. The keenly written orchestration rarely overwhelms the solo viola, while the orchestration manages to maintain the chamber music character of the original work. Of this piece, O. G. Sonneck said, “Ernest Bloch has given us the greatest work for viola in musical literature and what is more important, one of the most powerful and significant works of our time.” This suite is considered one of Bloch’s three greatest compositions for solo stringed instruments, the other two being his cello rhapsody *Schelomo* (1916) and the *Violin Concerto* (1938).

*Concerto Grosso No. 1, Mvt. IV*

One of his most commonly performed works, Bloch’s *Concerto Grosso No. 1* is a testament to both his skill as a composer and his care towards his students as a teacher. This work was composed in 1924-25, when some of his students at the Cleveland Institute expressed their doubts about the validity of tonality and form in contemporary music. Some of the students couldn’t even distinguish the difference between major and minor thirds, and they composed by “groping” the piano and making clusters of notes. Bloch told them that one could still write music that was both alive and original with the means that had existed for so long, and Bloch felt that he had to prove his

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174 Ibid.
175 Ibid.
176 Ibid.
177 Ibid.
178 Ibid.
180 Ibid.
In doing this, Bloch created one of the most memorable fugues of the twentieth century.

Although Bloch followed the classical scheme of a fugue in his work, he made it his own through the disjunct nature of the subject. He decided to end his work with the Fugue, which has no “novelty” or special effect whatsoever, and this compositional choice shows that he was using the instruments and their respective timbres to create a distinctively personal work. Its “Blochian” characteristics are its skips of sevenths. Bloch said about his new piece: “I think this work might some day be published, and could be played in schools.” He didn’t know how right he was, as this work is now a regular part of orchestral repertoire for students.

This fugue subject is a glorious moment for the violas, with the string writing being playable yet engaging; it is a fine example of synthesizing Bloch’s knowledge of the instrument to showcase it. The open strings in the subject help the viola to project, and the notes ring out with each of the string changes. Introduced by the violas, the six-measure disjunct subject is marked marcato and forte, establishing a strong presence right from the anacrusis. A point of interest is that the slurs are used only on descending intervals, which gives an emphasis to the falling motion in a subject that is initially characterized by ascending leaps.

\[\text{\footnotesize\begin{align*}
181\text{ Ibid.} \\
182\text{ Ibid.} \\
183\text{ Ibid.}
\end{align*}\]
Bloch uses traditional devices further in an attempt to show his students that it is possible to create new music using old techniques and methods. There are five episodes in this fugue, more than what we have encountered in any of our previous examples. The first episode is from measures 25-32, the second is from 40-60, the third is from 67-82, the fourth is from 136-141, and finally the last episode is from measures 161-164. Other devices that Bloch employs are stretto, augmentation, and inversion. Bloch was especially excited about the stretto at the pickup to measure 123, when the augmented theme comes in twice as slowly in the first violins.\(^{184}\) Bloch was equally excited about the augmentation that occurs there in the first violins as well.\(^{185}\) Measure 123 is the climax of the fugue, with its simultaneous augmentation and stretto of the subject. Bloch also created an inversion of the subject at the pickup to measure 105 in the first violin. There are two more subject inversions, one in the bottom celli, the bass, and the piano at measure 141, and the last is at the pickup to measure 164 (rehearsal 62), in the first violins. These inversions showed Bloch’s students that the traditional devices are still achievable, even with new music.

Bloch was immensely influential as both a composer and a teacher, and he took his love for the viola and displayed it in his compositions. In his attempt to create something new and exciting, Bloch took an old form, and introduced it with a still-uncommon medium. His treatment of the viola in this fugue expands on the tone colors and characteristics of the instrument, and raises it to a higher standard.

\(^{184}\) Ibid.
\(^{185}\) Ibid.
CHAPTER EIGHT  

Béla Bartók

[Bartók] had the outward appearance of a fine-nerved scholar. Possessed of fanaticical will and pitiless severity, and propelled by an ardent spirit, he affected inaccessibility and was reservedly polite. His being breathed light and brightness; his eyes burned with a noble fire. In the flash of his searching glance no falseness nor obscurity could endure.

–Paul Sacher 186

The only Hungarian musician to be considered in this paper, Béla Bartók is an example of a composer who began to expand on the timbre of the viola by muting and other devices within his Music for Strings, Percussion, and Celesta.

Bartók was a very musical child, and the environment created by his parents enabled him to cultivate his talents at a young age. He was born in Hungary on March 25, 1881, to parents Béla senior and Paula Voit. 187 He was an exceptionally musical child, able to play folk songs on the piano with just one finger. 188 His mother was an accomplished amateur pianist and teacher, and she initiated his musical training at the age of five, his first lesson being on his fifth birthday. 189 His father learned the cello so he could play in an orchestra, but he passed away when Bartók was seven years old. 190 Initially, Bartók’s musical lessons stopped, as the family tried to continue on after such a loss, but in the year after his father’s death, Bartok’s musical training resumed. 191 He began composing

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188 Milne, Bartók, 10.
189 Milne, Bartók, 5.
190 Milne, Bartók, 8.
191 Ibid., 11.
short pieces for the piano, and began to gain the attention of local and visiting musicians alike.\textsuperscript{192}

Although Bartók had displayed an aptitude for music at a young age, it wasn’t until he began his serious lessons that he knew that he would make it his life’s work. He started under the tutelage of László Erkel (1845-1896) in 1894, who taught Bartok harmony and piano, and also made him attend concerts.\textsuperscript{193} After Erkel died in 1896, Bartók studied with Anton Hyrtl, and as his school years came to an end, there was no question that his life lay in music.\textsuperscript{194}

Bartók chose to go to the Academy of Music in Budapest, where he received the musical and personal attention that modeled him into a well-known composer. His piano teacher at the Academy was István Thomán (1862-1940), a former pupil of Liszt, who supervised his technical progress and growth, but also cared for Bartok’s personal wellbeing.\textsuperscript{195} His composition teacher was János Koessler (1853-1926), an immensely capable musician and teacher, but a representative of the old school of thought.\textsuperscript{196} A staunch Brahmsian, he was a stickler for correct academic procedures, and had an innate mistrust of novelty in any shape or form, a characteristic that he and Bartók did not share.\textsuperscript{197} One characteristic that we appreciate in Bartók’s music is his novelty, and it was perhaps the negative view expressed by Koessler that pushed Bartók to new musical boundaries.

\textsuperscript{192} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{193} Ibid., 12.
\textsuperscript{194} Ibid., 13.
\textsuperscript{195} Ibid., 17.
\textsuperscript{196} Ibid., 18.
\textsuperscript{197} Ibid.
Music for Strings, Percussion, and Celesta, Mvt. I

Bartók’s *Music for Strings, Percussion, and Celeste* was commissioned for the tenth anniversary of the Basle Chamber Orchestra, and this work marked the height of his contrapuntal writing.\(^{198}\) It was composed between June and September 7, 1936, in Budapest.\(^{199}\) The piece premiered in Basle, on January 21, 1937, with the Basle Chamber Orchestra conducted by Paul Sacher.\(^{200}\) The Basle premiere was hugely successful, and this was the climax of his career to this point. This first performance was enjoyed so much that the last movement had to be repeated. The Hungarian premiere was in Budapest on February 14, 1938, and was performed by the Philharmonic Society Orchestra conducted by Ernő Dohnányi.\(^{201}\)

Describing this piece, the director of the Universal Edition (a publication dedicated to the promotion of musicians and their works) said:

Bartók’s work provided the intellectual experience on this occasion, far surpassing everything else. I do not have to tell you anything about the work. The musicians . . . they showed the kind of enthusiasm I have not seen for a long time. The audience was also very appreciative and the orchestra was loudly applauded. If Bartók had been present it would have been a sensational occasion . . . . There was an atmosphere of great tension throughout the performance. It was one of those rare occasions when even those who were against Bartók were carried away by the power of expression.\(^{202}\)

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\(^{199}\) Ibid.

\(^{200}\) Ibid.

\(^{201}\) Ibid.

\(^{202}\) Ibid.
Bartók’s *Music for Strings, Percussion, and Celesta* contains the most unusual instrumentation of any piece that we have looked at thus far, showing that Bartók was pioneering, and that he also had specific timbres in mind. Bartók said that he played the string parts to test them out, claiming that they weren’t too difficult.\(^{203}\) The instrumentation is of great interest and novelty, making use of two full string orchestras, percussion (which consists of a side-drum with snare and without snare, a bass drum, 2 cymbals, 2 small cymbals, a tam-tam, timpani with pedal, and a xylophone), a harp, a piano, and a celesta.

Bartók wrote program notes himself in March of 1937, and they show how objectively he looked at his work, restricting himself to the analysis of form and technique.\(^{204}\) These are his original program notes:

The 1\(^{st}\) movement (in A) is Fugue-like, strictly developed. Each new entrance of the subject is in a tonality a fifth higher (2\(^{nd}\), 4\(^{th}\), 6\(^{th}\), etc. entrance), or in a tonality a fifth lower (3\(^{rd}\), 5\(^{th}\), 7\(^{th}\), etc. entrance); in addition, the later 2 neighboring entrances appear in stretto several times; at times the entrances bring only fragments of the subject. When the furthest tonality in both directions (E flat) has been reached (the climax of the movement) further entrances bring the subject in inversion, until they again reach the main tonality (A). This is where the Coda begins in which the subject appears in both its forms.

The 2\(^{nd}\) movement. Sonata form. The main tonality C, second theme in G. In the development a highly altered form of the 1\(^{st}\) movement’s fugue subject appears (the strings’ pizzicato chords and pianos), after this a new theme, an anticipation of the

\(^{203}\) Ibid.  
\(^{204}\) Ibid.
main theme of the 4th movement, appears in an imitation development. The recapitulation changes the 2/4 rhythm of the Exposition to 3/8.

The 3rd movement (in F sharp). Bridge form: ABC+CBA. The four segments of the 1st movement’s fugue subject are inserted among the various sections.

The 4th movement (in A). Form outline: ABACDEDFGA; the G passage brings the fugue theme of the 1st movement, its original chromatic form turned into diatony.205

The ethereal and eerie tones that Bartók is able to draw from the viola, with the chromatic lines and phrasing of this subject, indicate that he had an acute understanding of the instrument. Introduced by the first and second violas, this four-measure long subject is muted and pianissimo, which gives an airy and somewhat ethereal sound. The

subject reaches its climax on the E♭ in the second measure. This tritone from A to E♭ adds to the supernatural character of this subject. The subject is conjunct, and slurred, which again contributes to the very light and smooth tone that Bartók established with the dynamics and by muting the violas.

Bartók’s employment of contrapuntal devices is evidence that he tried to accomplish a great deal with the same material. There is stretto starting at the pickup to measure 34 when the non-muted violas come in on F, and the non-muted violins come in on a C♯ on

205 Ibid.
the third eighth note of beat one in measure 34. At measure 82, the subject and the
subject inversion are in stretto as well. A two-part canon is found at measure 26, and
again at the pickup to measure 65. Bartók’s treatment of stretto and the canons in this
fugue are an attempt to add to the other-worldly character set by the violas, as there is a
slight sense of unease during his use of these devices.

Bartók employed his knowledge of strings, especially the character of the viola, to
produce the ethereal subject that set up the rest of the fugue. His use of new string
techniques in *Music for Strings, Percussion, and Celeste*, coupled with the somewhat
muted timbre of the viola, perfectly set the tone for the fugue. Bartók’s desire to push the
boundaries in all aspects of his art was also a reason to showcase the viola in such a
prominent fashion.
CHAPTER NINE  

Igor Stravinsky

Their attitude certainly cannot make me deviate from my path. I shall assuredly not sacrifice my predilections and my aspirations to the demands of those who, in their blindness, do not realize that they are simply asking me to go backwards. . . . I live neither in the past nor the future. I am in the present. I cannot know what tomorrow will bring forth. I can only know what the truth is for me today. That is what I am called upon to serve, and I serve in all lucidity.

—Igor Stravinsky

Born just one year after our previous composer, Stravinsky is the last of our composers born in the nineteenth century. He is also a composer who began to step away from tonality in the piece to be analyzed, venturing into uncharted territories. We will examine his Septet (1953) for Clarinet, Horn, Bassoon, Piano, Violin, Viola and Violoncello.

Stravinsky was from a fairly musical family, and it was his parents’ love of music that set him on the path to make it his life. His mother was Anna Kholodovsky, and his father was Feodor Ignatievich, who had a law degree from Kiev, but was also a bass singer. Feodor started out at the Kiev Opera, but later went to the opera in St. Petersburg, which was one of focal points of Russian music at this time. Stravinsky was born Igor Fedorovich Stravinsky on June 18, 1882 (according to the modern calendar) in Oranienbaum. There were three brothers, but only one of them excited Stravinsky’s real affection, Goury (1884), who studied law but decided to pursue a

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208 Ibid.
209 Ibid.
career of singing.\textsuperscript{210} This relationship with his brother further shows how important
music was to Stravinsky, for the only sibling whom he liked was the one who chose to be
a fellow musician. Stravinsky showed musicality at a very young age, and his parents had
aspirations for him as a pianist, so they had him start lessons at the age of nine under the
instruction of Mlle. A. P. Snetkova.\textsuperscript{211}

Stravinsky had no aspiration to become a concert pianist, and his desire to focus more
on composition was due to his self-criticism, as well as how he viewed performance
versus composition. As he was a pianist, he invariably composed at the piano, and he
lovingly referred to it as ‘the fulcrum of all my musical discoveries.’\textsuperscript{212} Despite this, he
didn’t want to be a performing pianist for several reasons: he was modest about his left-
hand technique, and, more importantly, he didn’t want to develop the memory of a
concert pianist.\textsuperscript{213} He felt that his composer’s mind was too sharp, and his imagination
too acute and selective, to permit him to “memorize, automatically and simply, like a
camera.”\textsuperscript{214} This lack of concert pianist-memory can be seen during the public premiere
of the Piano Concerto (May 22\textsuperscript{nd}, 1924), when the conductor Serge Koussevitzky had to
hum the first few notes of the “Largo” when Stravinsky forgot them.\textsuperscript{215}

Stravinsky’s art was constantly changing, never staying the same, as we can see at the
end of the Chronicle writings in 1935: “[The public] cannot follow me in the progress of
my musical thought. What moves and delights me leaves them indifferent, and what still
continues to interest them holds no further attraction for me.”\textsuperscript{216} This musical evolution

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Ibid.\textsuperscript{210}
\item Ibid., 2.\textsuperscript{211}
\item Ibid., 31.\textsuperscript{212}
\item Ibid.\textsuperscript{213}
\item Ibid.\textsuperscript{214}
\item Ibid.\textsuperscript{215}
\item Ibid.\textsuperscript{216}
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
is significant for us to keep in mind as we look at his Septet, for Stravinsky has branched off from his contemporaries and begun to venture into unfamiliar musical territory with this work.

Stravinsky began to compose for strings, and to cultivate the skills that he would use in his Septet, after he began to associate with string players. In 1931, his new publisher (Willy Strecker) introduced him to the violinist Samuel Dushkin (1891-1976), and it was not long until a violin concerto was commissioned for Dushkin.\(^{217}\) Since Stravinsky didn’t look on the violin as solo instrument in the same way he did for the piano (something he played and understood), he actually consulted Paul Hindemith, who was a close acquaintance and who helped to guide his efforts.\(^ {218}\) Stravinsky began the Violin Concerto early in 1931, and it premiered in Berlin on October 23, 1931.\(^ {219}\)

isSelected = True

\textit{Septet (1953) for Clarinet, Horn, Bassoon, Piano, Violin, Viola and Violoncello}, Mvt. III

The very disjunct subjects and abstract media found in the double fugue of Stravinsky’s \textit{Septet (1953) for Clarinet, Horn, Bassoon, Piano, Violin, Viola and Violoncello} indicate that he had a desire to showcase the viola, as he shifts from the traditional timbre accentuations of the instrument. Despite this shift, Stravinsky still manages to maintain the natural resonance of the viola. There is no key, as this is twelve-tone writing, but not in the conventional sense, because Stravinsky has his own set of rules in regards to the execution of his rows. Below is the row for the first subject, followed by the subject itself:
Introduced by the viola in measure 1, this highly disjunct subject has a range of an eleventh, from G-A. There are many accidentals that make this subject much more challenging to play, and the accents also exaggerate the open strings, which make it difficult to keep the line balanced. The rich timbre of the viola adds a fullness to this subject that would otherwise be missing. The real answer is heard at rehearsal 24, in the violin that starts on B. The viola stays busy as the answer is being played, and it flows seamlessly as a continuation of the subject.

The bassoon, an instrument that is considered by most to be the woodwind equivalent of the cello, presents the second subject in a fashion that is similar to that of the viola with the first subject. This subject’s row and the respective subject are pictured below:

This subject is introduced by the bassoon at rehearsal 32, and like the first subject, it is both mezzoforte and marcato. It has a range of an eighteenth, from E-G, and this disjunct melody is characterized by its ascending leaps, accidentals, and trills. This second subject is slightly longer than the first, being seven measures in length. Stravinsky’s choice of the
bassoon to introduce the second subject indicates the overall tone that he wanted for both subjects, which was rich.

Stravinsky was ambitious in his development of the contrapuntal material here, as he uses rare devices such as retrograde. Moreover, there is a point when Stravinsky uses an augmented retrograde, which can be seen in the clarinet at rehearsal 53. Another instance of augmentation is at rehearsal 54, when the bassoon presents an augmented inversion of the subject.

Stravinsky used unusual aspects of both contrapuntal and string writing in this fugue. He gave the viola an extremely technical subject, but despite the complexity, he wrote it in such a way that the listener is still able to pick out the intricate line.
CHAPTER TEN  

_**Dmitri Shostakovich**_

“In [Shostakovich], there are great contradictions. In him, one quality obliterates the other. It is conflict in the highest degree. It is almost a catastrophe.”

–Mikhail Zoshchenko

The first composer in this study to have been born in the twentieth century, Shostakovich is known for his highly personal works, and the emotion that he pours into his compositions, as we will see in his Quartet No. 7.

The social unrest in which Shostakovich was born and raised forced him to grow up quicker than he would have in a normal setting. The social upheaval of Russia in the early 1900s led to instability and bloodshed, such as the massacre in St. Petersburg Palace Square by imperial troops on January 9, 1905, which would become known as Bloody Sunday. Shostakovich was born at 5 pm on September 12, 1906, according to the old-style Russian calendar (the new-style date is 25 September). His parents wanted to name him Jaroslav, but the priest said it was an unusual name and had no suitable nickname, so he suggested they call him Dmitri like his father, which would give him the nickname Mitya. Shostakovich spent most of his time practicing, composing and improvising, and was to be hailed as the Soviet Union’s first ‘home-grown’ composer.

His father died when he was young, and the children had to work to help support the family. Shostakovich played for the cinema, improvising and composing for films, but

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222 Ibid., 2.
223 Ibid., 3.
224 Ibid., 2.
this was a terrible hardship for him.\textsuperscript{225} He was sometimes able to use the time for himself, such as when he composed the \textit{Piano Trio}, and he and his friends would play it for whatever film was showing, which was how they learned it.\textsuperscript{226}

The formal education that he received while at the Petrograd Conservatoire helped to cultivate Shostakovich’s musical and personal development. He entered the conservatory at the young age of thirteen.\textsuperscript{227} The director of the conservatory was Alexander Glazunov (1865-1936), who recognized Shostakovich’s talent and helped him focus on pianoforte and the theory of composition.\textsuperscript{228} He secured Shostakovich a monthly stipend during his education, as we can see in Glazunov’s 1921 appeal to A. V. Lunacharsky (the Commissar for Enlightenment):

\begin{quote}
We have at the Petrograd Conservatoire a most gifted pupil studying piano and the theory of composition. He will undoubtedly be a composer in the future. His name is Dmitri Shostakovich. He is making outstanding progress, but unfortunately his sickly organism is much affected, weakened as it is by malnutrition. I humbly ask you not refuse my request on his behalf to provide the means of feeding this most talented boy and building up his strength.\textsuperscript{229}
\end{quote}

It was also while he was at the conservatory that Shostakovich first studied the violin with Victor Walter, and gained the skills to write idiomatically for stringed instruments.\textsuperscript{230}

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\textsuperscript{225} Ibid., 11.
\textsuperscript{226} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{227} Ibid., 10.
\textsuperscript{229} Wilson, \textit{A Life Remembered}, 28.
\textsuperscript{230} Ibid., 40.
\end{flushright}
In addition to what Shostakovich would learn from the conservatory, his success as a composer was due in part to the raw gifts with which he was born. According to his younger sister Zoya, their mother started them all on piano at the age nine, and Zoya said that Shostakovich picked up musical notation instantly.\(^{231}\) She recounted that within a few days of lessons he was playing four-hand music with their mother.\(^{232}\) He had several natural facilities that helped him as a composer: he wrote very quickly, he was hardworking, and in addition, he had perfect pitch.\(^{233}\) Shostakovich also wrote all of his music out onto full score right away; he never needed to try things out on piano, as he just sat down and wrote whatever he heard in his head.\(^{234}\) He had a quality that is rarely found in musicians: he never demanded or appeared to need silence to compose.\(^{235}\) These are all attributes that contributed to his success as a composer.

One of the most significant aspects of Shostakovich’s chamber writing is the considerable attention that he gives to the viola. In several different ensembles, such as his quartets and quintets, the violas are entrusted with significant episodes.\(^{236}\) The quartets are said to be his most profound and intimate works, and it was here, in the best of his chamber pieces, that he strove for simplicity and clarity of instrumentation.\(^{237}\) Classic influences are seen in his chamber works, but also influence from modern composers, particularly Paul Hindemith.\(^{238}\) One aspect of Hindemith that we can see in Shostakovich’s *Quartet No. 7* is the husky and rich timbre conveyed by the viola.

Hindemith, as a violist, certainly was an advocate for that characteristically dark timbre.

\(^{231}\) Ibid., 8.
\(^{232}\) Ibid.
\(^{233}\) Ibid., 12.
\(^{234}\) Ibid., 12-13.
\(^{235}\) Ibid., 10.
\(^{236}\) Martynov, *Dmitri Shostakovich*, 145.
\(^{237}\) Ibid., 99.
\(^{238}\) Ibid.
Quartet No. 7, Mvt. III

Although not as famous as the eighth quartet, Shostakovich’s Quartet No. 7 is just as personal, and shows his pain and suffering. This piece was composed in 1960, the year that he created two of his most intimate works, his Quartets 7 and 8.\textsuperscript{239} This quartet premiered on May 15, 1960, and was played by the Beethoven Quartet (Dmitri Tsyganov, Vasili Shirinsky, Vadim Borisovsky and Sergei Shirinsky) at the Leningrad Glinka Concert Hall.\textsuperscript{240} Quartet No. 7, Op. 108, in F♯ minor was Shostakovich’s shortest quartet, lasting only about 13 minutes.\textsuperscript{241} It was dedicated to his late wife Nina Varzar, and was written to commemorate her fiftieth birthday.\textsuperscript{242} All of Shostakovich’s prior quartets had followed a strict pattern in regards to keys, and each quartet’s key was based on the submediant of the previous quartet.\textsuperscript{243} If Shostakovich had stayed true to this pattern, the key of No. 7 would have been E♭ major.\textsuperscript{244} Therefore, the key of F♯ minor is very significant, as it has been historically known to represent sorrow and anguish.\textsuperscript{245} An example occurs in Bach’s St. John Passion, when Peter cries out his remorse after he denied knowing Jesus three times.\textsuperscript{246} In Shostakovich’s Quartet No. 7, the key is used to show the agony he endured at Nina’s loss.

The strong presence that the violas establish in the third movement, with the flurry of swelling sixteenth notes, is perhaps indicative of the love that Shostakovich had for this underappreciated instrument. This seven-measure subject is conjunct, and not muted,

\textsuperscript{239} Wilson, A Life Remembered, 374.
\textsuperscript{240} Lesser, Music for Silenced Voices, 194.
\textsuperscript{241} Ibid., 134.
\textsuperscript{242} Ibid., 134.
\textsuperscript{243} Christopher Norris, Shostakovich: the Man and his Music (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1982), 23.
\textsuperscript{244} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{245} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{246} Ibid.
which helps the viola to project and resonate more, especially on its open strings. The subject is fairly idiomatic for the instrument, and the lack of rhythmic variation makes this subject easier to play than some of our other examples.

The word that comes to mind when listening to this fugue is fury. The viola, with its dark and somber character, represents the dark emotion perfectly. The real answer in measure 19 starts off fortissimo and on C♯, and it is introduced by the second violin. The answer sustains the mood that is so effectively established by the viola. As the answer is being played, the viola stops playing momentarily, which gives the sense of two distinct thoughts occurring. This sense adds to the mood of the fugue, which is a war of emotion, and an internal struggle with the loss that Shostakovich suffered.

Psychologists have identified five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance, and this third movement of Quartet No. 7 might be regarded as a progression through all five stages. The first eleven measures of this third movement are reminiscent of the first movement, with an almost inverted melody that was first heard in the first violin. Reprising the initial melody gives the sense of not being able to move on: a denial of sorts. Anger makes an appearance in measure twelve, when the viola introduces the fugue subject with its furious sixteenth notes and aggressive staccatos. The subsequent interjections of subject and answers only add to the anger, and they build the tension as the fugue progresses.
Later in the fugue, Shostakovich moves through three more stages of grief. “Bargaining” could be illustrated by the exchanges between the violins and the cello at measure 170, as they go back and forth, each insistent on its own line, and all trying to come out on top as the victor. The augmentation of the once-furious subject in measure 182 could depict depression; it lacks the gut-wrenching pace and anger that was present when we first heard the subject. Moreover, the legato bowing and muted strings give a defeated and depressed tone to the otherwise angry and energetic movement. The tempo changes at this point as well, and going from the quarter note equaling 176 to the dotted half equaling 80 further conveys a sense of depression at this point in the fugue. Finally, what better way to signify acceptance than to switch the minor mode to major? Beginning at measure 293, we start to have slight glimmers of major, both in the melody and accompaniment. But it isn’t until the last four measures of the quartet that there is a true sense that the major key has been attained, and the airy bowings, along with the pianissimo dynamic, help the musicians to settle on a resplendent F♯ major chord.

This fugue is the height of Shostakovich’s contrapuntal writing, as he employs his knowledge of both strings and music theory. His choice to use the viola to introduce this emotional subject shows that he felt the timbre of this underused instrument would best portray his emotions most accurately.
CHAPTER ELEVEN

William Schuman

William Schuman won success without any compromise on his part. It is precisely because he remained faithful to his ideals that he has been able to impress his personality, both as a composer and educator, upon the American scene. In both capacities he has made a vital contribution to our musical life.

–Joseph Machlis

William Schuman is our last composer, and he is the first American whom we have considered. He was an opinionated man in both his personal and musical life, which helped him to become one of the most influential American composers of the twentieth century. We will be examining his American Festival Overture and his Symphony No. 4.

One of the most famous American composers of the twentieth century, Schuman received help and support from his family that enabled him to reach his full potential as a musician and composer. He was born William (Billy) Howard Schuman on August 4, 1910, to parents Samuel and Rachel in New York. The Schumans embodied the values that characterized immigrant families in the beginning of the twentieth century: an optimistic outlook, and the belief that success is within the grasp of any person who is willing to work hard enough. Samuel was extremely patriotic, and he instilled that patriotism in his son, going as far as to change their name from Schuhmann to Schuman in an attempt to sound less German. It was also Samuel’s patriotism that led him to name their first son after the sitting president, William Howard Taft. Samuel was

249 Ibid.
250 Ibid.
251 Ibid.
happy and outgoing, and he would sing popular songs all the time, even when he was in a hospital bed.\textsuperscript{252} Rachel was very musical, and she could play tunes on piano that she had just heard at a Broadway show. She was also quieter and self-restrained (in contrast to William’s father), suffering bouts of depression, and was often ill.\textsuperscript{253} Schuman’s paternal grandfather, Morris Schuhmann, occasionally played the flute, but died when Schuman was only four years old. His maternal grandfather was Louis Heilbrunn, or Grandpa Hy, and Schuman had fond memories of him throughout his life.\textsuperscript{254} Grandpa Hy made the astute observation of his grandson: “That boy is only interested in two things: the fiddle and baseball.”\textsuperscript{255} Schuman started playing the violin with local teacher Blanche Schwartz, and during a recital with his sister, who was playing the piano, she froze up, and he played the whole thing unaccompanied.\textsuperscript{256} One of their relatives in the audience said of that performance, “That boy is going to be something someday.”\textsuperscript{257}

Grandpa Hy introduced Schuman to live musical performances, and this encounter had quite an effect on Schuman’s life. It was April 4, 1930, at age nineteen, when Schuman attended his first orchestral concert of the New York Philharmonic in Carnegie Hall.\textsuperscript{258} The Philharmonic played Kodály, Wagner, and Schumann, but it wasn’t the music \textit{per se} that affected him most profoundly, it was the combined visual and aural stimulus of the large group playing together.\textsuperscript{259} He was so inspired that the day after the concert he decided to leave the university in order to pursue a career in music.\textsuperscript{260} He

\textsuperscript{252} Ibid., 5.
\textsuperscript{253} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{254} Ibid., 7.
\textsuperscript{255} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{256} Ibid.,12.
\textsuperscript{257} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{258} Adams, \textit{William Schuman}, 4.
\textsuperscript{259} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{260} Ibid.
recounted what happened next: “‘I’ve got to be a musician,’ I thought. ‘My life has to be in music.’ All those sounds were still going ’round and ’round. As I passed 78th Street and West End Avenue, I noticed a sign on a private house: Malkin Conservatory of Music. I walked in and said: ‘I want to be a composer. What should I do?’ The woman at the desk said promptly: ‘Take harmony lessons.’ So I signed up to study harmony with Max Persin.”

Schuman’s study of theory and counterpoint led to some intriguing contrapuntal writing. Max Persin (1886-1953) had a rather unorthodox approach to the study of harmony, as he was one of the rare teachers who preferred the study of musical scores over textbook exercises, something that affected Schuman. Charles Haubiel (1892-1978) was another one of his teachers, and in 1931 they began counterpoint lessons together. By the end of that year of study, Schuman was composing contrapuntal exercises using up to 14 voices. The combination of his training on stringed instruments and his counterpoint lessons gave Schuman the tools to write idiomatic subjects for the viola, showcasing its beauty as an instrument.

*American Festival Overture*

Ultimately, it was Schuman’s persistence that led to the great success of his *American Festival Overture*. Published in 1939 by G. Schirmer, it was composed for ASCAP’s Festival of American Music in Boston, 1939. It was completed with the approval of Roy Harris, who initially said, “Koussevitzky is never going to agree to perform

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262 Ibid.
263 Ibid.
265 Ibid., 27.
something by you after the disaster you had with your Second Symphony.\textsuperscript{266} However, Harris didn’t know that the conductor had told Schuman he would welcome the opportunity to perform other works by the young composer.\textsuperscript{267} Serge Koussevitzky (1874-1951) authorized Schuman to write the \textit{American Festival Overture}, although he did not guarantee that it would be performed.\textsuperscript{268}

Koussevitzky was pleased enough with the \textit{American Festival Overture} that he premiered it on October 6, 1939, in Boston with the Boston Symphony Orchestra.\textsuperscript{269} However, Schuman was unhappy with the ending, because it had too many “consecutive fourths . . . melodic fourths, and I recognized it just wasn’t right.”\textsuperscript{270} Koussevitzky let him rewrite it, and the conductor had a special rehearsal to get the new ending mastered before the New York performance.\textsuperscript{271} The \textit{American Festival Overture} was the greatest success of Schuman’s career up to that point, as this was his first successful work.\textsuperscript{272}

Schuman was able to take the warmth, joy, and energy of the experiences of his early years and put them into his compositions. We can see these experiences in the short program notes that he wrote for the premiere in Boston:

The first three notes of this piece will be recognized by some listeners as the “call to play” of boyhood days. In New York City it is yelled on the syllables, “Wee-Awk-Eee” to get the gang together for a game or a festive occasion of some sort. This call very naturally suggested itself for a piece of music being composed for a very festive occasion. From this it should not be inferred that the Overture is program music. In

\textsuperscript{266} Polisi, \textit{American Muse}, 57.
\textsuperscript{267} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{268} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{269} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{269} Adams, \textit{Schuman}, 28.
\textsuperscript{270} Polisi, \textit{American Muse}, 58.
\textsuperscript{271} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{272} Ibid., 60.
fact, the idea for the music came to mind before the origin of the theme was recalled. The development of this bit of “folk material,” then, is along purely musical lines. The first section of the work is concerned with the material discussed above and the ideas growing out of it. This leads to a transition section and the subsequent announcement by the violas of a fugue subject. The entire middle section is given over to this fugue. The orchestration is at first for strings alone, later for woodwinds alone and finally, as the Fugue is brought to fruition, by the strings and woodwinds in combination. This climax leads to the final section of the work, which consists of opening materials paraphrased and the introduction of new subsidiary ideas. The tempo of the work, save the last measures, is fast.\textsuperscript{273}

It was plain to the musical community that Schuman had provided them with a monumental piece of American music. As Elliott Carter said, it “has vitality and conviction behind it,” and he concluded that “Schuman’s gift is undeniable, though so far his musical material has shown a tendency to be slight.”\textsuperscript{274} This piece had a huge impact on Schuman’s career and his other compositions, as Karl Miller noted: “The extroverted optimism of the \textit{American Festival Overture} set the tone for much of Schuman’s work.”\textsuperscript{275} The importance of this work was perhaps stated best by Leonard Bernstein:

\begin{quote}
[There is] an energetic drive, a vigor of propulsion which seizes the listener by the hair, whirls him through space, and sets him down at will. This involves a buoyancy and lust-for-life which I find (at the risk of being called old fashion and artificially nationalistic) wholly American. To help me make my point I wish I could somehow
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{273} Ibid., 59.
\textsuperscript{274} Adams, \textit{William Schuman}, 8.
\textsuperscript{275} Ibid.
\end{flushright}
perform the *American Festival Overture* on these pages for each reader, to prove that Young America exists, acts, and speaks in this music.\(^{276}\)

This is a very jubilant subject, with its cascading sixteenth notes, intricate rhythms, and chromatic lines. The joyous subject is introduced by the violas in measure 84, which is marked leggiermente, although the dynamic marking is piano, which helps to build the fugue nicely over the course of the work. The subject starts on F, and is characterized by the leap of a minor third and tricky rhythms. It is conjunct for the most part, and is eight measures in length. Through the rich timbre of the violas in this subject, Schuman was able to capture the wonder and freedom that children experience while they are out playing.

Schuman’s choice of contrapuntal devices help to parallel the story that he is telling. There are two episodes, with the first being found at measure 150, and lasting for 24 measures. The concluding episode is at measure 185, and this lasts until the end of the movement. Just as a child playing has to take breaks, so does the fugue. Schuman uses only stretto in this fugue, and it is found at measure 139 when the second violins come in after just one measure of the subject. Stretto occurs again at measures 140, 141, and 143.

\(^{276}\) Polisi, *American Muse*, 60.
These instances of stretto increase the tension and raise the adrenaline of the listener, which parallels the portrayal of a childhood game in this work.

_Symphony No. 4, Mvt. III_

The underwhelming response by the musical community to Schuman’s _Symphony No. 4_ might have been disheartening, but Schuman used it as an opportunity to continue his growth and development as a composer. He finished the composition in August of 1941, even before the premiere of his _Symphony No. 3_. It premiered on 22 January, 1942, with the Cleveland Orchestra under the eccentric conductor Artur Rodzinski. It was greeted with a critical reception, a far less enthusiastic welcome than his previous two symphonies. Olin Downes and Virgil Thompson both wrote negative reviews, and Downes added insult to injury by spelling Schuman’s name with two n’s throughout the review. Christopher Rouse later observed that the Fourth Symphony “lacked the monolithic monumentality and heroic grandeur—not to mention the fascinating structural cohesiveness—of its predecessor, and it remains to this day less popular.” Although it is not very popular, it is still a pertinent work, one worth examining.

Schuman created an intriguing subject, with the syncopated rhythms and the disjunct melody shown in the incipit. Introduced by the violas in measure 162, this disjunct

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278 Polisi, _American Muse_, 66.
279 Ibid., 67.
subject is a challenge to play. The accidentals add to the difficulty as well, but the jagged nature and the accidentals do make it a more interesting subject. It is marked leggiero, which means it needs to be light and delicate, creating the perfect opportunity for the fugue to build dynamically. The naturally soft projection of the viola makes it an obvious choice for Schuman to use to begin the fugue. The more “involved” rhythm in this five-measure subject, with its off-beats and syncopation, catches the attention of the listener, and these rhythms make the player pay more attention as well. The more involved that the music is, the more involved the player(s) will be, and this is because they feel like they have a more important role in the music.

Schuman uses the traditional contrapuntal methods of further developing the fugue, and he showcases the timbre of the viola and instruments with a similar timbre. He uses stretto in the fugue, and the first instance is at measure 213, when stretto and augmentation occur simultaneously. At measure 257 we have another example of stretto, with the flutes, English horn, clarinets and violins starting on beat one, and the oboes, bass clarinet, bassoon, violas and cellos echoing on beat two.

Another device that Schuman uses is augmentation. For instance, at measure 213, the cellos and horns have the subject, but the eighth notes of the original subject are now treated as half notes, a much greater augmentation than we have encountered in any of the other examples. At measure 257, a similar augmentation of eighths stretched into halves can be heard in the English horn. This large durational difference draws out the subject, helping the listener to perceive the intervallic differences that might be lost at the
faster pace. The English horn is considered by many to be the woodwind equivalent of the viola, and Schuman further showcases that specific timbre throughout the development of this contrapuntal material.

Schuman used his training in both string practices and contrapuntal writing to create two intriguing fugues that showcase the viola and its capabilities. It is entirely possible that he chose the viola because of the soft and unassuming disposition of this under-utilized instrument.
CHAPTER TWELVE  

What Does It All Mean?

As one would expect, the similarities between all of these fugues and the way that the viola is treated in them are abundant, but there are also some marked differences as well, most notably in the idiomatic quality of each subject. Most of the fugue subjects examined in this paper are idiosyncratic for the viola, but if they were intentionally written in this way is unknown in some examples. In the cases of Schuman and Bartók (two of the more challenging fugues to perform), both composers were able to play them, which begs the question: did they make the subjects more challenging on purpose?

Something that violists tend to appreciate is when the composer gives them an integral and technical part. These intricate and challenging viola parts are most often found in chamber music, and are often lacking in the orchestral repertoire. Oddly enough, a similarity that is found within this particular group of pieces is that the chamber works (one on a part) tend to be less challenging, which is not what is normally expected. Stravinsky, though, is the outlier of this group, with a rather challenging subject to play.

Although the timbres and rhythms of the subjects in these dozen works appear to be similar, there are a few differences in how they are scored, such as in their voicing. Nine out of the twelve subjects start on an open string, or on an octave above an open string, which resonates more and helps to counter the instrument’s naturally quiet disposition. The examples that start on an open string or the octave are Beethoven’s String Quartet No. 11, Op. 95, Mendelssohn’s String Quartet No. 2, and his String Quintet No. 1, Op. 18, Schumann’s Quartet in E-flat, Op. 47, Brahms’s String Quintet No. 1, Op. 88, Rimsky-Korsakov’s String Quartet on Russian Themes, Ernest Bloch’s Concerto Grosso No. 1, Bartók’s Music for Strings, Percussion, and Celesta, Shostakovich’s Quartet No.
7, and William Schuman’s *Symphony No. 4*. By incorporating an open string (or at an octave above or below), the viola will resonate more, and this will create more projection and a slightly brighter sound.

One of the most underappreciated means of getting the viola to resonate is to employ frequent string crossings, and disjunct subjects cross the strings more often. The Mendelssohn *Quintet*, Bloch *Concerto Grosso*, Stravinsky *Septet*, and the Schuman *Symphony* all have disjunct subjects. Although a disjunct subject presents more of a challenge for the player because it is much more difficult to place the fingers correctly, there is a benefit to playing the subjects at a faster pace. When the string crossings occur on an open string, the naturally-occurring accent will cause the notes to resonate more.

The placement of the subject within the measure, and the rhythmic variation therein, can have a significant impact on how the subject is perceived by the listener. The degree of rhythmic complexity spans quite a spectrum in our examples. Five of the subjects would be considered to have “more complex” rhythms: Beethoven’s *String Quartet*, Mendelssohn’s *Quartet*, Bartók’s *Music for Strings Percussion, and Celeste*, Stravinsky’s *Septet*, and Schuman’s *Overture*. While these subjects are a bit more challenging to play, it is much easier to follow along as the fugue develops. The rest of the works are straightforward, employing one or two note values, and no syncopation, but they add an agogic accent to help the viola to resonate more. Nine of the twelve examples start with an anacrusis or on an offbeat; the exceptions are the Mendelssohn *Quartet*, the Stravinsky, and the Schuman *Overture*. Starting on an anacrusis helps to signal the start of the subject, and the pickup is something that we are accustomed to hearing.
Looking simply from an acoustic point of view, the viola doesn’t project as much as other stringed instruments, so starting the fugue with it allows the composer to build the fugue up dynamically as it progresses. Starting a fugue subject at piano helps to accentuate the layering and addition of the various voices, while starting at forte establishes a much-needed strong presence from the viola to begin the fugue. The fugues are fairly evenly split between starting at piano or pianissimo, and forte or fortissimo. Schumann, Brahms, Bloch, and Shostakovich’s fugues all start at forte or fortissimo, but even then the naturally soft timbre of the viola still allows the fugue to build nicely. Stravinsky’s fugue is the only example that starts at mezzo forte, and he seems to be the odd one out in several aspects as we further delve into the analysis of these fugues.

The contrapuntal tools that are used in each fugue are for the most part the same. The devices that are used most commonly throughout the fugues are stretto and augmentation, while there are some instances of inversion, canon, and retrograde. For the most part, all of these devices are employed in the same manner. However, these devices are used to represent a wide variety of emotions, whether it is the loss of a loved one, comic relief, or childhood innocence.

All but one of the fugues start in a later movement of the work, with some sort of break in the sound that draws attention to the start of the subject, even when the fugue is started partway through the movement. Bartók presents the exception, as his fugue is introduced in measure one of the first movement of his work. Starting a fugue later in the work can be dramatic, simply from an acoustic point of view. To have all the instruments drop out, and to hear only the viola launching the subject, focuses attention on both the melody and the viola.
One of the most significant aspects of the subject is its length. This aspect allows the listener to become familiarized with the subject, so it is recognizable when it comes back in its various forms. The lengths of these fugues tend to be between four and eight measures, but the Mendelssohn Quartet is the exception, being only two measures long.

The structures of the Beethoven and Brahms examples show similarities, but their differences—although they may seem slight at first glance—completely change the tone of the fugue. Both of these subjects are four measures long, both of them start on a resonating note and on an offbeat, and they are both conjunct. One of the more prominent differences is that Beethoven has a more involved rhythm. But perhaps the most significant difference between these two subjects is the opposite bow markings. Beethoven’s subject is slurred, while Brahms’s subject is all separate, and this contrasting articulation makes a marked difference in the sound and overall mood of the subject. Slurring is smoother, helping to support the imagery of rolling tears, whereas the separate bowing sounds almost jolting, which contributes to the comedic awkwardness that Brahms was portraying.

As we have seen in many different aspects of Stravinsky’s fugue, it is the outsider, and this difference from the other examples is perhaps most notable in the structure of the work. His is the only example that has serial rows in the fugue, which naturally make it stand out, both aurally and visually. The highly disjunct melody is another aspect that catches the attention of the audience.

Why was the viola used to launch the fugue in each case? There is no single answer to the question, but rather a combination of several possibilities, some dependent on the individuality of the composers, others on the era in which they were born. One of the
aspects is the physical improvements made by luthiers to the instrument over time, by condensing the size, but also trying to improve the projection and sound quality of the viola. Another reason is the love of the instrument held by some composers, shown in their choices to showcase it in the fugues, and the idiomatic choices made throughout to bring attention to the viola. This instrument was also employed because of the desire to use a medium that allows the fugue to build naturally. Even if the piece is marked fortissimo, using the viola starts the fugue at a lower dynamic level. The choice to feature the most underappreciated instrument of the string family was instrumental in the portrayal of all of the characters that spanned our musical examples, ranging from comedy to agonizing sorrow. All of our composers had an acute understanding and appreciation for the timbre and personality of this magnificent instrument; their fugal treatment of the viola has given it an enhanced position in nineteenth and twentieth-century repertoire.
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