

Matyas Seiber:

*Four Case Studies*

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*Southern Voices*

ISBN 1-876463-39-2

First published in 2007 by  
*Southern Voices*  
38 Diamond Street  
Amaroo, ACT 2914  
AUSTRALIA

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Distributed by The Australian Music Centre, trading as *Sounds Australian*  
PO Box N690  
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ISBN 1-876463-39-2

Printed in Australia by QPrint Pty Ltd, Canberra City, ACT 2600  
and in the UK by Garthland Design and Print, Glasgow, G51 2RL

# Acknowledgements

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# Matyas Seiber

## *Four Case Studies*

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## *Matyas Seiber's Permutazioni per Cinque*

'..... It remains the tragedy of the uprooted composer to substitute polyglot versatility for the security of a national tradition. .... The violent cross-currents of artistic influences ..... may easily result in a creative deadlock or in an encyclopaedic prolixity of style. Seiber manages skilfully to steer clear of both dangers, but only at the expense of musical substance .....

 (Redlich 1954, 148).

These smug, patronising comments from the then Professor of Music at Manchester University can easily be 'deconstructed', viewed from the perspective of 50 years on. Nevertheless, Redlich was undoubtedly right about Seiber's 'polyglot versatility'. It's just that in an age of trans-national biographies, polyglot versatility has come to be viewed much more positively in 2004 than in 1954.

Even in the context of the huge variety of expression of which Seiber was master, and the many different types of works which had come from Seiber's pen by the time he turned 50 in 1955, *Permutazioni per Cinque* represents something of a departure, and certainly does demonstrate his ease with 'polyglot versatility'.

To turn from the intense melodic espressivity of Seiber's *Third String Quartet*, written in the early 1950s, to the chirpy rhythmic bounce of *Permutazioni per Cinque* for wind quintet, written in 1958, is to turn to a completely different world: from autumn to spring, from darker shades to bright colours, from *serioso* to *giocososo*, from a quasi-symphonic work to a *divertimento*. Nevertheless, it was not in Seiber's compositional personality to treat the composition of such a *divertimento* as a trivial matter. Even such small productions had a full measure of care and attention lavished on them, and, as we shall see, *Permutazioni* manifests quite a few interesting new turns in Seiber's musical development.

In terms of cultural lineage, *Permutazioni* also represents a turn from a style which we could term 'post-Bergian' to a 'post-Weberian' one. This is not to suggest that Seiber's style is merely epigonal, in either case: merely to give an impression of the particular genealogy of its style in terms of the compositional practice of the previous generation. Moreover – to pursue the genealogical analogy further for a moment – it takes only a little scratching below the surface to discover additional admixtures of genes in Seiber's style, taken as a whole, as my remarks below on certain quasi-Stravinskian approaches to form in *Permutazioni* indicate.

To be sure, one of the features of the style of *Permutazioni* is the brevity of all of its principal motifs, and the way they are put together to form phrases and textures surely recalls that dialogue of sound and silence which the rising generation of composers after World War II found so novel and so suggestive in Webern's music, and one of the several features which lead to the dubbing of the 1950s by some historians as the 'post-Webern' era. Indeed, in what follows I shall have occasion to make specific references to particular passages in *Permutazioni* and compare them to particular passages in certain works by Webern. Perhaps one could go further and suggest that like many forward-thinking composers of mature years (though he was, of course, only in his mid-fifties in 1958) of our – or any other – time (Haydn and Stravinsky come to mind in this regard), Seiber was simply learning from what the younger generation were up to, but recasting what he learned in terms which were very much his own.

Hugh Wood suggests that this little work anticipates new directions which Seiber's work might have taken had he lived a few years longer.

In fact, the light, *divertimento*-like nature of *Permutationi* masks the considerable potentialities of

the ideas on which it was founded; and, alas, these ideas were never to be worked out in his work.  
(Wood 1970: 890)

To be sure, the works written immediately after *Permutazioni* (such as the *Violin Sonata*, *Improvisations for Jazz Band and Symphony Orchestra* and the ballet *The Invitation*) show few signs of the new directions to which Wood refers, but Seiber had only two more years to live and a longer gestation period might well have permitted the realisation of the conceptions hinted at in *Permutazioni* in a more thorough-going way.

One of Wood's 'considerable potentialities' – indeed, one of the most immediately-striking aspects of *Permutazioni*, and something which makes the work quite different from *Ulysses* and the *Third String Quartet* – is its approach to form. The instrumentation, preoccupation with rhythm, and formal idiosyncrasy of *Permutazioni*, taken together, surely call to mind that most influential of twentieth-century works from the formal point of view, Stravinsky's *Symphonies of Wind Instruments*. Edward Cone's celebrated article in the initial 1962 issue of the journal *Perspectives of New Music* on the formal procedures of the *Symphonies* (Cone 1962) points to several features which immediately also strike the most casual listener in *Permutazioni*. For example: an idea is initiated, but before its characteristics are fully developed, it is interrupted by a second idea, and perhaps by a third. Ideas thus 'left hanging' are later taken up again as material for variation, truncation, extended recapitulation, transformation into new ideas, or interpenetration with ideas already heard, and so on. Seiber's own description, quoted by Wood, conveys something of this:

The various elements constantly enter into new connections with each other so that at every moment different musical situations, so to speak, arise in a rather unpredictable way. (Wood 1970: 889)

The result is a 'non-linear' form, in which the thread of continuity follows a tortuous, winding course, which some writers (Pierre Boulez, amongst others) have designated as 'labyrinthine'. More recently, following up some hints put forth by Stravinsky himself, Richard Taruskin (1996) has shown that the form of the *Symphonies of Wind Instruments* may derive from certain aspects of the Russian Orthodox Funeral Service (*Symphonies* was, after all, written *in memoriam* Claude Debussy). Nevertheless, Cone's analysis still stands as a convincing account of the formal aspect of the work. *Permutazioni*, likewise, may suggest some kind of mysterious ceremony, but not, as far as I can ascertain, a traditional one of this kind: perhaps some kind of imaginary modern dance routine. On the other hand, its light-hearted character, bordering at times on the humorous, is, of course, completely different from the rather sober, funereal expression embodied in the *Symphonies*.

Nevertheless, I hope to show that the labyrinthine form of *Permutazioni* is not simply a messy collage, or an illogical mosaic of bits and pieces, but is constructed with a controlling sense of coherent shaping. The fact that we cannot easily categorise its patterns according to formal stereotypes should not preclude *a priori* an account which demonstrates such coherence. In order to do this, I shall attempt a blow-by-blow account of the way in which I hear this piece. This may not be quite the same as the way in which it was composed, but Seiber's notes on the structure of *Permutazioni* in the Seiber Archive in the British Library (including a fair copy of the score in black ink, with annotations in brilliant red ink written upon it) do seem to lead us along a trajectory of thought which give us a pretty good sense of the compositional process, at least in a general way. My sense of the purpose of these annotations is that maybe Seiber wanted to have by him an *aide-memoire* to which he might later refer, when he composed other pieces, and if that is so, Hugh Wood's 1970 conjecture about the new compositional directions implied in *Permutazioni* was indeed correct, but Seiber simply never lived to realise them.

Herewith, then, is a blow-by-blow account (but with several asides, prompted by curious and interesting things which rise to attention as we proceed!) through *Permutazioni*. For the purposes of my argument, I have divided the work into ten sections. This is probably not the only way in which the work could be partitioned, but it seems to me plausible.

### *Section One (bars 1–10)*

The work begins with a two-phrase musical idea. Since these phrases answer one another (in a sense we shall describe below), I shall use the traditional nomenclature to describe them: antecedent and consequent. But these phrases are framed by a kind of fanfare – a call to attention – which is laid out according to the following rhetorical format: Fanfare > Antecedent > Fanfare > Consequent > Fanfare.

The fanfare also provides the principal harmonic motif of the piece. One might thus compare the fanfare's role in the piece to that of the first 5 bars of Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony*. As in *Beethoven 5*, the role of the fanfare is to provide a point of demarcation: to announce a new section or the end of an old one, to provide material for development and then to form the basis of the peroration with which the work ends. Given that *Permutazioni* is scored for 5 wind instruments, it is idiomatically appropriate that such a principal harmonic motif should take the form of a 5-note chord played by all the instruments in rhythmic unison. Distinctive also is its three-repeated-note (double-upbeat) rhythm, and finally, this principal harmonic motif is distinctive in its idiosyncratic combination of intervals and voicing. Reading from the bottom up, we have intervals of 8, 7, 6 and 5 semitones:



Example 1: *Permutazioni*, bar 1

In addition to these intervallic (8, 7, 6, 5, 4) and textural (rhythmic unison) characteristics, we should also call attention to its features of articulation (staccato) and rhythm (three repetitions). These four features are sometimes modified as the piece goes along, but enough of them are maintained at its many recurrences for us to be able to connect the varied manifestations with the original motif.

We know that the character of this motif was at the forefront of Seiber's mind when composing *Permutazioni*, for his manuscript notes in the Seiber Archive in the British Library show that he wrote down all 24 permutations of the voicing of the four intervals 8, 7, 6, 5, eliminating as he went along those which produced octave replications. The succession 8, 7, 5, 6, for example, was rejected for this reason, and all other permutations in which the intervals 7 and 5 are adjacent. This reduced the possible voicings to 18, most of which are used at some point or other in *Permutazioni*.

In the passage under discussion, as we have already observed, the fanfare initiates and terminates the section, and provides a divider between its two phrases (antecedent and consequent). We shall now call this section as a whole (bars 1–10) the principal theme.

The relationship of divider and terminator to the initiator is that of truncation and expansion respectively. The

divider takes the same rhythmic pattern and textural format (rhythmic unison) and the same staccato articulation, but applies them to a single interval (of 4 semitones). The terminator expands the original idea by adding an upbeat and spreading the initiator's series of intervals (4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 semitones) over two different chords (interval-structures, respectively, reading upwards: 4, 5, 6 and 7, 8, 8, 7)

Example 2: *Permutazioni*, bars 1–10

The result is, clearly, a 4-chord sequence built from (respectively) four different adjacent intervals (5, 6, 7 and 8), then from one (4), then from three (4, 5 and 6) and finally from two (7 and 8).

A different kind of grouping principle (which nevertheless also involves groups of 1, 2, 3 or 4 items) informs the shaping of the antecedent/consequent pair which is framed by this fanfare. In this chapter's opening remarks, I referred to the embryonic post-Webernian character of *Permutazioni*. One could even relate the opening to a specific passage in Webern: that of the celebrated *Concerto for Nine Instruments*, which likewise begins with a concatenation of four tiny elements (trichords in Webern's case: the *locus classicus* of what Milton Babbitt had designated as a 'derived series', where one hears, in succession, four forms of the same trichord summing to a twelve-tone series).

Example 3: Webern: *Concerto for Nine Instruments*, bars 1–3

In the initial antecedent phrase of the first theme *Permutazioni*, the four elements are motifs of 4, 3, 2 and 1 notes, respectively. One might even interpret Seiber's passage as 'taking Webern off' in an affectionately humorous way, given the use of rests to frame each tiny motif in a halo of silence. Humour or not, the phrase also relates to the *fanfare* motif in a structurally significant way. Consider the intervals of these motifs, and firstly the 3-note motif of the clarinet (intervals: 10 and 9) and the two-note motif of the bassoon (interval: 11): in sum, large intervals, complementing the medium-sized ones of the fanfares (4, 5, 6, 7 and 8).

We might thus anticipate that the remaining motif (the flute's 4-note figure triplet figure) would complement these figures with the small intervals (1, 2 and 3), and thus complete the aggregate of all 11 interval-classes. In the consequent phrase which is to follow, that is indeed what Seiber writes. Just here, in the antecedent phrase in bar 1, however, he places an exceptional ('wrong') form of the 4-note motif (intervals: 4, 3 and 11), brought about partly by octave displacement: a wry, humorous gesture of transgression, perhaps? Or perhaps merely an exception designating the motif's *incipit* status? At any rate, the motif reverts to what, in the context of the work as a whole, we can regard as its normal form (intervals: 1, 2 and 3) in the following consequent phrase (bars 5-9).



Example 4: *Permutazioni*, bars 1-4

Let us turn now to the consequent phrase, firstly in terms of its intervallic structure:

Flute and Bassoon 4-note triplet motifs: intervals 1, 2 and 3.

Clarinet 3-note motif: intervals 9 and 11.

Horn 3-note motif: intervals 7 and 5.

Two-note motifs (clarinet > horn > oboe > bassoon): intervals 6, 10, 8 and 4.

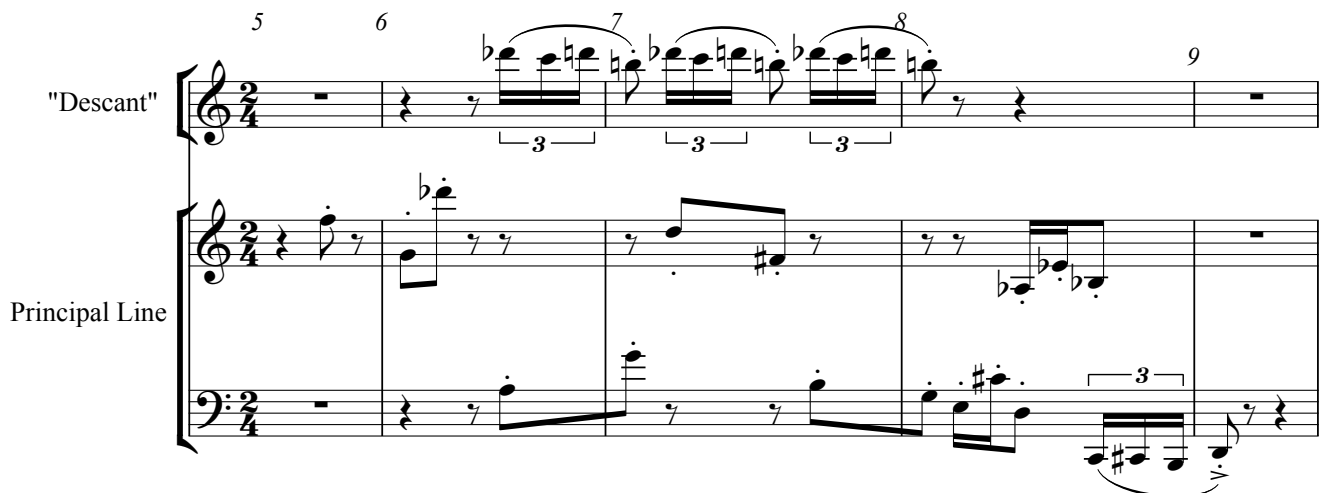
In rhetorical terms, the consequent phrase presents an expanded variant of the antecedent. The antecedent consists of one motif of 4 notes, one of 3, one of 2 and one of 1, whereas the consequent consists of one motif of 1, four of 2, two of 3 and four of 4. The two phrases are parallel in that, in broad terms, they sweep down from the upper register to the lower in both cases. They are parallel – but retrograde-related in rhetorical shape – as the following summary demonstrates.

Antecedent motifs: 4 notes (flute) > 3 (clarinet) > 2 (bassoon) > 1 (horn)

Consequent motifs:

(a) Principal line: 1 note (oboe) > 2, 2, 2 and 2 (clarinet > horn > oboe and bassoon) > 3 and 3 (clarinet > horn) > 4 (bassoon)

(b) Accompanying contrapuntal 'descant': 4, 4 and 4 (all flute).



Example 5: *Permutazioni*, bars 5-9

This summarises most of the main structural aspects of the principal theme, which – overall, because of its antecedent/consequent pairing of phrases – seems to follow essentially a classical *period* pattern. We have not thus far mentioned its general character, except by implication. We shall refer to it as the *giocos*o theme in order to contrast it with what ensues as the work unfolds.

### *Section Two (bars 10–21)*

Immediately following comes a contrasting theme, based on variants of a new motif. This new motif also consists of 4 notes. To distinguish it from the triplet motif of the *giocos*o theme, we shall call it the *cantabile* motif. Its characteristic rhythm, also new, is crotchet > quaver > crotchet > quaver. This new 4-note motif is given out by the bassoon. Its intervals are 9, 10 and 11 semitones. Its shape is also important: rising and falling, an ‘inverted parabola’.



Example 6: *Permutazioni*, bars 10–11

But although this is a new motif, the two tiny development phrases which follow and are built upon it – developments of the kind we might call *unfolding* developments (*entwicklungen*) – share with the first theme a structure of small overlapping units, along the lines of the opening of the Webern *Concerto* (cf Example 3, above). Indeed the Webernian character could be said to be even more marked here, as the four units are overlapping transformations of the bassoon motif. By that I mean that they share the bassoon’s rhythmic motif, but have different intervallic characters:

Example 7: *Permutazioni*, bars 12–14

The different intervallic characters, taken together, sum to an intervallic aggregate structure, as we can see if we tabulate the intervallic characteristics of each:

*Phrase 1 (cf Example 7): four versions of the motif (of 4, 4, 4 and 3 notes respectively):*

Flute: *Cantabile* motif, contour inversion, intervals 9, 10 and 11

Clarinet: *Cantabile* motif, intervals 6, 7 and 8

Oboe: *Cantabile* motif, contour inversion, intervals 5, 4 and 3

Horn: *Cantabile* motif truncated (3-note version), intervals 2 and 1

*Phrase 2, in which the motif is heard in reduced 3-note form ('liquidated', to use Schoenberg's term) passed amongst all 5 instruments:*

Flute: *Cantabile* motif, varied and truncated, intervals 11 and 10

Clarinet: *Cantabile* motif, contour inversion, varied and truncated, intervals 5 and 6

Oboe: *Cantabile* motif, contour inversion, varied and truncated, intervals 9 and 8

Bassoon: *Cantabile* motif, varied and truncated, intervals 7 and 4

Horn: *Cantabile* motif, varied, truncated, and elongated, intervals 3 and 1

This use of intervallic aggregates is, of course, something which this second *cantabile* theme shares with the opening *giocoso* one.

At this point we pause for an aside, since another way of looking at the intervallic aggregate of the second part of Example 7 (bars 12–14) is as a flute motif passed to clarinet, then oboe then horn, undergoing a character-change in the process (because of the contrasting intervals assigned to each instrument). This may remind us of a similar process of instrumental characterisation which appears in (for example) Elliott Carter's *Second String Quartet* – composed in the same year (1958) as *Permutazioni* – and later developed by Carter in much more elaborate and extensive ways. Our example is the beginning of the slow movement of Carter's quartet (see Example 7A).

Phrase 1: The movement begins with a 5-note rising figure in the viola, grouped as 1+3+1. This figure is imitated by the cello: again a 5-note rising figure, grouped 1+3+1, but outlining a different succession of intervals. Note that the pattern of dynamics (crescendo-decrescendo) is also shared. The last three notes of the cello's figure are then imitated by the first violin: same shape and rhythm, different intervals.

Phrase 2: a 3-note *falling* figure (grouped as 2+1), *descrescendo*, passed from viola to second violin to first violin.

Phrase 3: a descending, *decrescendo* 2-note figure with an expressive emphasis on the first note. It is passed from viola (descending tritone) to first violin (descending minor third) to cello (descending minor seventh) to second violin (descending major third).

Phrase 4: a three-note figure, rising and falling, *crescendo-diminuendo*, but each instrument is characterised by very different intervallic and rhythmic features.

Of course, Carter's concept of musical discourse as a kind of dramatic dialogue of instrumental characters depends ultimately on differentiation of behaviour in a more extensive sense than in this small excerpt, but indeed Seiber's sense of dramatic dialogue in *Permutazioni* also becomes more extensive as the work proceeds. It progressively calls into play more extremes of rhetorical differentiation, a process which reach its zenith in the *cadenza* passage (bars 140–169).

Returning to our passage in section 2, we may note that this little unfolding process is then cut short by what we shall call a third motif: its role of bringing an unfolding process to a conclusion suggests that we should call

**Andante espressivo** (♩ = 70)

Violin 1

Violin 2

Viola

Violoncello

286 287 288 289 290 291

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

*mp* *mp* *p*

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

*mp* *mf* *p*

292 <> 293 294 295 296 297

Vln. 1 *mf* *p* *mf* < *f* *p* sub

Vln. 2 *p* *mf* < *f* > *p* sub

Vla. *p*<sub>3</sub> *mf* *f* > *p* sub

Vc. *mp* <> *p* *mf* < *f* *p* sub

Example 7A: Elliott Carter: *Second String Quartet*, bars 286–297

it a *cadence* motif. The motif consists of a flourish (a rapid 8-note *gruppetto*) in octaves and multiple octaves between flute and bassoon (bar 19). Despite this octave doubling, the variation between single-octave doubling and multiple-octave doubling allows the contour of flute and bassoon parts to differ, thus enabling the intervals of the two parts to be either similar and different. The result is: flute 6, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 6, 11 and bassoon 6, 5, 5, 4, 3, 10, 6, 11.

Example 8: *Permutazioni*, bar 19

This *cadence* motif is, however, followed by an afterthought (*anhang*), which completes the set of intervals outlined in the cadence flourish: a chord on horn and clarinet (interval 4) and a scrap of melody, which is a reminiscence of the flute's 4-note triplet motif from theme 1, but with the *cantabile* character of the motif on which theme 2 is built (intervals 3, 2 and 1).

Example 9: *Permutazioni*, bars 19–21

I have analysed this *flourish* motif and its *afterthought* in terms of its complementary intervallic content, in the light of the structure of both the *giocoso* theme and the *cantabile* one, which seem to be conceived in such terms. However, it is probably significant that the flourish also consists of eight different pitch-classes: a truncated pitch-class aggregate in fact. Subsequent developments of this flourish motif suggest that we should think of it as an embryonic twelve-tone aggregate to complement the twelve-interval aggregates on which we have been focussing attention. Most of *Permutazioni* is not conceived in twelve-tone terms, but twelve-tone aggregates – or even, as we shall later see – twelve-tone *series* (ie *ordered* series, not just collections of twelve items) do occasionally emerge.

To conclude this discussion of the second theme, we may notice that its overall shape seems to follow a classical *sentence* pattern (statement of an idea > 'liquidation' of its main features > cadence phrase) with an added *afterthought*: quite different from the first theme's *period* pattern of balancing antecedent and consequent phrases. The two themes are thus contrasted in structure as well as in character.

### Section Three (bars 21–35)

The stage is now set for a dialogue between the various motifs and characters (*fanfare, giocoso, cantabile, flourish*) which have been exposed in the course of putting together these two themes during the work's first 21 bars.

The third section, starting at the change of tempo (crotchet = MM 90, in the second half of bar 21), begins with a development, or more precisely another *unfolding* (*entwicklung*), this time based on versions of the motifs heard during the course of the *giocoso* first theme. The unfolding is built upon a selection of very short rhythmic motifs, and a limited set of intervals: material which is laid out by the bassoon phrase which initiates this section (bars 21–23). Four motifs are exposed, all of them derived from the *giocoso* theme, and the phrase is also built on a selection of 5 of the 11 possible interval-classes. The 4 motifs (a, b, c and d) and the intervals 6\*, 5, 4\*, 7 and 3\* (compound intervals, in the case of the three asterisked intervals) are indicated in Example 10:

A ——— B ——— C ——— D ———

Bassoon

6      5      4      7      3

Example 10: *Permutazioni*, bars 21–23

This use of compound intervals for the *giocoso* material is pretty well new: only the interval 6 (in bar 6) was compound in the first appearance of the *giocoso* theme at the beginning of the work (bars 1–10). These compound intervals in bars 21–31 accentuate the *giocoso* character, that is – appropriately, for an *unfolding* section – the *unfolding* process intensifies the character of the material on which it is based.

The *unfolding* section builds up from this single voice (bassoon) to two voices (add clarinet), to three (add oboe) to five, although the five-voice culmination is of ‘3+2’ texture: 3 voices in rhythmic unison (oboe, clarinet and bassoon), with the other 2 voices (flute and horn) counterpointed against them. The two counterpointing voices are in close rhythmic canon at the distance of a quaver: a Weberian characteristic which can be compared with the opening of Webern’s *Saxophone Quartet*, and which will be taken up more extensively later in *Permutazioni*:

Example 11: Webern: *Saxophone Quartet*, first movement, bars 6–11

Example 12: *Permutazioni*, bars 29–31

This *unfolding* section treats both the rhythmic motifs and the interval-class succession in certain quite precisely-composed ways. Thus, if we annotate the bassoon's opening rhythmic-motif succession as a–b–c–d and its intervallic succession  $6^*-5-4^*-7-3^*$ , as in Example 10 above, the clarinet phrase which enters in bar 24 states the following permutations: a–c–b–d and  $7-6-4-5-3^*$  and continues at bar 26 with c–d–a–b and  $6-4-5-8-3^*$  (the '8' is an 'oddball' exception) while the oboe enters with c–b–a–d and  $6-7-4^*-5-3^*$ . In other words we have here a kind of *invention* based on permutations of 4 rhythmic motifs and permutations of a succession of 5 intervals.

At this point, the flute and horn enter and set up a '3+2' texture (bars 29–31): a double-layered textural dialogue with the three instruments already playing:

- (i) The flute/horn layer comprises 2-voiced counterpoint in close rhythmic imitation; both flute and horn present the motif-permutation d–c–b–a with the interval-permutation  $6^*-7-3^*-4-5^*$  (flute) plus  $4^*-5-6^*-3^*-7^*$  (horn).
- (ii) For the oboe/clarinet/bassoon layer we have a 3-voiced rhythmic unison; all three instruments present the motif-permutation c–d–a–b with the interval-permutation  $3^*-5-4^*-6-7^*$  (oboe) plus two irregular successions for clarinet and bassoon:  $3^*-6-4^*-5-8^*$  and  $3^*-7-4^*-4-9$  respectively (possibly due to misprints in the score?).

But despite certain deliberate or inadvertent transgressions of the formation-principle behind this passage, we can see from the following table that essentially just 6 of the possible 24 permutations of the 4 motifs are actually used. Some of the others appear in later passages, however.

Bar	21 ff	24 ff	26 ff	29 ff ('3+2' texture)
Flute				d–c–b–a $6^*-7-3^*-4-5^*$
Oboe			c–b–a–d $6^*-7-4^*-5-3^*$	c–d–a–b $3^*-5-4^*-6-7^*$
Clarinet		a–c–b–d $7-6-4-5-3^*$	c–d–a–b $6-4-5-8-3^*$	c–d–a–b $3^*-6-4^*-5-8^*$
Horn				d–c–b–a $4^*-5-6^*-3^*-7^*$
Bassoon	a–b–c–d $6^*-5-4^*-7-3^*$	a–d–c–b $6^*-5-4^*-7-3^*$	c–d–a–b $6^*-5-4^*-7-3^*$	c–d–a–b $3^*-7-4^*-4-9^*$

From this table, one can see that what we have here in section 3 is a passage which complements what has taken place during sections 1 and 2 in various ways. The use of a different kind of development is one such way: in

place of the *unfolding* process (*entwicklungsprozess*) which we have had hitherto, characterised by a concentration on ‘motivic narrative’, as the term *unfolding* implies, at this point the themes are led through some dramatically different new contexts (*durchführungen*). The appearance of more obviously cumulative shaping of material is another change indicative of this new level of development process.

More specifically important for later sections of the piece is the idea of a passage based on a restricted bunch of interval-classes (3, 4, 5, 6, 7) in place of sections based on aggregates of all eleven interval-classes.

In this respect, the passage suggests compositional thinking related more specifically to those of other works of this mid-1950s period. Another work based on the interplay of aggregates of intervals and restricted interval-bunches is Milton Babbitt’s *Second String Quartet*, composed in 1954, in which a sequence of passages based on different restricted bunches of intervals precede and lead up to a culminating passage where an all-interval series emerges. Seiber and Babbitt knew one another quite well; they were, for example, both delegates to the ISCM in 1952, Babbitt as the American representative, Seiber as the British one, and ten years after Seiber’s death, when *The Musical Times* ran a series of tributes *in memoriam Matyas Seiber*, Babbitt was one of the contributors. So it is quite possible that this structural feature in *Permutazioni* was more than a matter of the general structural *zeitgeist*, and a quite conscious relationship to a particular composer and work. However that may be, Example 12A shows the eventual all-interval series of Babbitt’s *Second String Quartet*, as it occurs at bar 266:



Example 12A: Milton Babbitt: *Second String Quartet*, bars 266–268

Compare this with Example 12B, the quartet’s opening (bars 1–3), which is based entirely on the first interval of this series (the interval ‘3’) only, and Example 12C, the ‘slow movement’ section, based entirely on the extracted tetrachord (interval-sequence 5–9–1) formed by notes 3 through 6 of the series.

This *unfolding* passage is then terminated by another framing appearance of the original *fanfare* motif. Here we see most of the features of the motif from its original form: note the same rhythmic figure and staccato articulation with intervals, reading upwards, of 5, 6 7, 8, although one can also notice that the horn component has been rhythmically displaced by a semiquaver (picking up, perhaps, the feature of close canon from the climactic passage of the immediately-preceding development section), thus modifying the 5-voiced rhythmic unison textural format to become a ‘4+1’ texture. This ‘4+1’ texture then gives rise immediately to a four-voiced ‘afterbeat’ (intervals 7, 6 and 5).....



♩ = 96

Violin 1 *mp* *ff > mp* *ff*

Violin 2 *pp* *mf > pp* *mf*

Viola *mp* *ff > mp* *ff*

Violoncello *pp* *mf > pp* *mf*

Example 12B: Milton Babbitt: *Second String Quartet*, bars 1-3

♩ = 72  
con sord.

Violin 1 *pp* *p* *mf* *pp* *mf*

Viola *ff > mf* *p* *mf* *p > pp* *mf*

Violoncello *f < ff* *mp* *mf*

Vln. 1 *mp* *> pp* *p* *f > mf > mp*

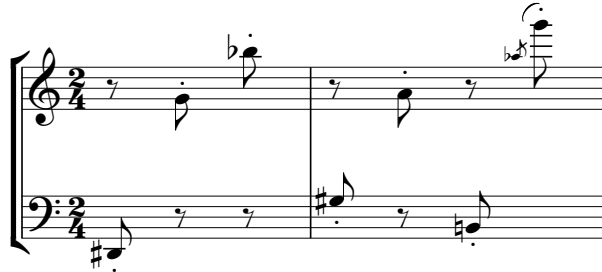
Vla. *mf < ff > pp* *p* *ff* *mf > mp > p*

Vc. *mf* *mp < mf > pp* *< f* *ff > f > mf*

Example 12C: Milton Babbitt: *Second String Quartet*, bars 93-96

Example 13: *Permutazioni*, bars 32–33

Like the second section, this third section then concludes with the introduction of a new 8-note motif, which we shall call, given its textural character, the *klangfarben* motif: a series of 8 isolated single notes and a concluding pair, outlining intervals which complement those of the *fanfare* motif (4, 3, 2, 1, 10, 9 and 11).



Example 14: *Permutazioni*, bars 33–34

Again, this *klangfarben* motif is framed by the *fanfare* motif, which, however, appears in yet another new guise: still recognisable from its rhythmic figure (the 3-note figure ‘c’, to use the nomenclature introduced above), its rhythmic unison textural format (but now with only 4 voices, not 5) and its staccato articulation, but this time its harmonic character is modified (intervals from bottom to top: 3, 2 and 1).



Example 15: *Permutazioni*, bar 35

### Section Four (bars 36–44)

This brings us to section four, and we are now able to see a larger-scale pattern of events emerging from these fragmentary musical motif-groups, for the basic shape of the section again consists of a development of a previously-heard idea, followed by a new idea as *cadence phrase* and the whole framed by a version of the *fanfare* motif.

This fourth section (tempo 66) begins at bar 36. First comes a development of the *cantabile* material. There is no truncation process at this appearance. Four statements of the *cantabile* motif appear: three are complete (4-note) versions, the other an expanded (5-note) version. Indeed, from the rhythmic (or at least the durational) point of view, the motif is actually expanded: in place of the original crotchet > quaver > crotchet > quaver pattern, each of the four notes is now a dotted crotchet. The following table summarises the intervallic characteristics (bars 36–41).

Bassoon: intervals 5, 6, 7 and 8 (expanded version)

Clarinet: intervals 9, 10 and 11

Oboe: intervals 5, 6, 7 and 8

Flute: intervals 9, 10 and 11 (contour inversion of the clarinet part)

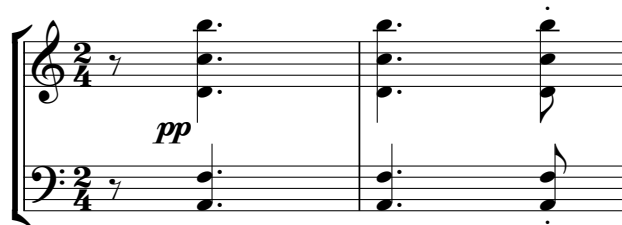
Although in the preceding paragraph I described the cadence phrase as a new idea, it could be construed as a version of the *flourish* motif, for it consists of a rapid 7-note *gruppetto* in the horn (muted and cuivré). Like the *flourish*

motif, it consists of a series of different pitch-classes, and could thus be seen as an embryonic twelve-tone aggregate, and indeed – very definitely, in this case – as an embryonic twelve-tone series, for its ordering of intervals is 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7, a preliminary, fragmentary version of what will ultimately become a twelve-tone series incorporating the interval-aggregate, ie an all-interval series. Because its structure is based on a sequence of different pitch-classes as well as different interval-classes, I will call it the twelve-tone *flourish* motif, despite the fact that it contains only seven pitch-classes at this point!



Example 16: *Permutazioni*, bar 42

Again, the fourth section, like sections 1 and 3 of what has preceded, is framed by the *fanfare* motif, but now in a transformation which will have larger consequences for the later course of the work. Again we have three repeated 5-note chords, but just as the third section closed by applying new intervals (3, 2 and 1) to this chord, it appears here in tandem with yet another new set of intervals (8, 9, 10 and 11). Moreover, although the repeated-note rhythm is retained, the length of the chords and the pianissimo dynamic means that the original *giocoso* character is much dissipated. Clearly, this is a more far-reaching transformation of the *fanfare* motif. Indeed we will give it a new name: the *sostenuto* motif. Its significance is that it becomes the basis of an extended development section (of the *durchführung* type) later on, whereas the original form of the *fanfare* motif has had essentially a signalling (non-developmental) function up to this point.



Example 17: *Permutazioni*, bars 43–44

### *Section Five (bars 45–76)*

The motivic, structural and character patterns which have been established during the first four sections are taken further in section five. Like sections three and four, section five opens with a development phrase, developing material (the *twelve-tone flourish* motif) which has not until this point been subjected to any real development (indeed has only occurred *en passant* hitherto); again a new motif is subsequently introduced (at bar 48). But section five is also the terminal section of what we shall call the expository process: after its conclusion (in bar 76), no significantly new material is thereafter introduced in the remaining 187 bars of the work, though various new transformations of the material laid out in the exposition do later appear.

Section five is therefore also culminating in character in another sense: after the development of the *twelve-tone flourish* motif, the music circles back to bring together some of the material which has occurred earlier and which will acquire greater significance in the later progress of the work. This includes the first complete statement of the twelve-tone flourish with all twelve interval-classes and all twelve pitch-classes in place at the same time (bars 55–56), and an extended development of a version of the *cantabile* motive which appeared as a mere *afterthought*

phrase at the end of section two (bars 20–21). The reason for highlighting this apparently insignificant *afterthought* is not really very apparent in section five itself, but its significance becomes evident later, when it forms one of the three motifs which are used to construct a long cadenza-like passage (bars 136–169), which in general character (relaxed and improvisational) is a foil to the intense motivic consistency and concentration and the technical rigour of most of the rest of the work.

So section five begins with a development of the *twelve-tone flourish* motif. It starts out with a 7-note *gruppetto* (7 different notes outlining 6 different intervals), rather similar to the version of the *flourish* motif which was heard near the end of the previous section (in bar 42), though it is not just a transposition or other obvious transformation of the 7-note *gruppetto* heard there, but a permutation (5–6–3–4–2–1) of the interval pattern of bar 42 (1–2–3–4–5–6). This version of the *flourish* motif is then developed by extension. The extensions consist of further *gruppetti* (of 4, 5, 4 and 4 notes in turn). This time the twelve-tone aspect of the motif is not just embryonic, however, for these *gruppetti* expand the motif to a length of 24 notes in all, and these 24 notes between them spell out two complete twelve-tone aggregates (though they are aggregates unrelated by any of the usual twelve-tone transformations – transposition, inversion, retrogression and combinations thereof – and thus must be counted as ‘independent’ series from the twelve-tone point of view).

The expansion of this *twelve-tone flourish* motif, from a single 7-note *gruppetto* in bar 42 into a phrase of 5 *gruppetti* and 24 notes in the course of bars 45–49, also allows space for the completion of the ‘interval-aggregate’ (of all 11 interval-classes) as well, by outlining the intervals 7, 10 and 11 (in the first 4-note *gruppetto*), and then the intervals 9 and 8 (in the initial two intervals of the 5-note *gruppetto*). Taking these last two intervals as common, the remaining 10 intervals also spell out (well almost! - with the exception of the repeated ‘2’ in place of ‘11’) an interval-class aggregate.

Example 18: *Permutazioni*, bars 45–48

Picking up the rhythmic displacement process which was applied to the *giocoso* motif (in bars 29–31) and the *fanfare* motif (in bar 32), this development process proceeds in the same way, by canonic imitation at the octave: clarinet answered by oboe an octave higher answered by flute an octave higher again.

Then the final new motif is introduced. We shall call it the *horn-call* motif, from its first appearance, which is indeed in the horn (in bar 48), though it is passed back and forth between horn and oboe in the course of unfolding into a complete phrase. Its distinctive features are its dramatic character, its rhythm (using syncopation and quaver triplets), and a predominance of wide intervals (8, 9, 11, 5 followed by 11, 9, 8 followed by 10, 6, 3\* followed by 4\*, 10, 3\*), where asterisks indicate compound intervals.

8 9 11 5 11 9 8 10 6 3 9 4 10 3

Example 19: *Permutazioni*, bars 48–55

This *horn-call* motif is accompanied by a motif which combines characteristics of the *fanfare* motif (see bar 1) and the ‘c’ element of the *giocoso* figuration (see bar 23) on the basis of the rhythmic figure which is common to both. But this time, both the repeated-note element and the rhythmic-unison textural format are eliminated in favour of a melodic feature: a conjunction of the intervals 2 and 1, forming a trichord figure which will be picked up again later in the piece.

Example 20: *Permutazioni*, bars 51–55

Like section two, this first part of section five comes to a halt with the *twelve-tone flourish* motif (forming a cadential phrase) followed by an *afterthought* phrase, precisely like the end of section two (bars 19–21).

Example 21: *Permutazioni*, bars 55–60

This *twelve-tone flourish* motif outlines the twelve-tone succession F, G A flat, D flat G flat, C, A, B D sharp, D, B flat, E (intervals 2, 1, 7, 5, 6, 3, 10, 4, 11, 4, 6: viz an aggregate of eleven interval-classes minus the 8 and the 9). The afterthought which follows (bars 57–60) presents the characteristic elements of the *afterthought* motif, drawn from the afterthought at the end of section two (bars 20–21): a 4-note clarinet motif (intervals 4, 3 and 2) accompanied by a dyad (interval 1) on horn and oboe, with a rhythmic character consisting of an incipit of 3 adjacent semiquaver attacks, the third of which is a long note, and terminated by a single note to end the phrase. Then finally comes another development of the *cantabile* motive, this time much more extended (bars 61–72), and a terminal statement of the *fanfare* motif, more or less in its 5-voiced original form (intervals 8, 7, 6 and 5), albeit slightly modified and extended (bars 73–76).

Example 22: *Permutazioni*, bars 73–76

This variation of the *fanfare* motif rhythm (stuttering groups of 4 attacks, 2 attacks and 1 attack) has extensive implications for the peroration with which the work is to end, where the repeated-note figure will dominate the dialogue between the repertoire of motifs in order to create an intense, emphatic rhetoric, suitable for a final climax and conclusion.

Thus, at bar 76, ends what we might call the Exposition section of *Permutazioni*. Of course, such a description implies expository tendencies, rather than a section from which development processes are excluded altogether, for as we have noted, development of two or three different types has in fact occurred. But development of a much more far-reaching kind does begin to make its appearance thereafter, so I insist on distinguishing the first 76 bars from the idea of a true development section *per se*, beginning at bar 77.

### *Section Six (bars 77–98)*

The development process falls into three parts, each quite different in character from the others. The first part (section 6, bars 77–98) is rather preliminary in nature, and here, for the first time, the *fanfare* motif, which hitherto has played a signalling role, becomes itself the subject of development. In the course of this development, the motif appears in many new variants. Only the *giocoso* ‘c’ motif (which, as we have seen, is closely related to the *fanfare* motif anyway) and a fragment of the *flourish* motif interrupt this development.

### *Section Seven (bars 99–139)*

Section seven represents a kind of stock-taking. All the motifs heard so far are heard in new juxtapositions and variants. The passage commences with a mosaic of fragments, abruptly cutting from one to another, but as the passage proceeds, the sense of fragmentation lessens, because the motifs begin to overlap one another.

So we begin with the mosaic: the *cantabile* motif (bars 99–104), the *sostenuto* motif (bars 105–106), the *klangfarben* motif (bars 109–110), and the *sostenuto* motif again (bars 111–112). Then follows the passage where overlapping begins: the *giocoso* material (bars 113–122) overlaps the entry of the *horn-call* motif, whose two phrases (bars 120–125 and 127–133) provide the section’s climax, counterpointed against a barrage of shrieking fragments – elements of the *twelve-tone flourish* motif, in octave- and multiple octave-doublings (bars 123–131) – from the other four instruments. This *horn-call* motif finally subsides onto a single extended tone, over which is heard the merest hint of the *fanfare* motif (bars 134–135), and then, finally, of the *afterthought* motif. The *afterthought* motif, clearly, is introduced at this point in order to prepare for the next section, where it forms the basis of the oboe’s cadenza.

### *Section Eight (bars 140–169)*

Section eight is a long triple cadenza (bars 140–169). This is the section which most nearly realises a Carterian

dramatic dialogue of instrumental characters which I referred to earlier. Of the three cadenzas, the first is for oboe: a brooding, *recitativo rubato*, built on the rhythmic and thematic material of the *afterthought* motif, but featuring the five intervals 2, 3, 5, 6 and 8, the last used once only, to considerable dramatic effect, at the end of the first oboe passage (bar 144–145), just before the clarinet entry. The second is a brilliant, swirling maelstrom of clarinet passage-work and trills, using only three intervals: 1, 4 and 7. The third returns to the *giocososo* material on bassoon, also using only three different intervals: 9, 10 and 11. Thus with this bassoon cadenza, the interval-class aggregate is completed. We may note that the whole passage outlines but a single such interval-class aggregate, and thus this is the passage of slowest harmonic rhythm in the entire work. Its 30-bar extent may be compared and contrasted with the various statements of the *flourish* motif, which occupy merely a bar or two to complete the interval-class aggregate.

While the bassoon's *giocososo* stutters and peters out, fragments of the clarinet cadenza and then the oboe one are briefly recalled. In terms of dramatic contrast and harmonic rhythm, this section is the relaxed, improvisatory counter-climax, of the piece, contrasting with various different sorts of climaxes – registral, textural, rhythmic and dynamic – occurring elsewhere.

### *Section Nine (bars 170–196)*

Just as the development section began with an extended treatment of the *fanfare* motif (section 6), so it ends here with an extended transformation of that motif's *alter ego*, the *sostenuto* motif. In the course of this, most of the features which originally linked it to the *fanfare* motif are purged from it.

The ninth section begins (bars 170–172) with a version of the *sostenuto* motif, which, to be sure, manifests something of the fanfare's original intervallic character (intervals from the bottom up: 8, 7, 6 and 5), but presented now as a long-drawn-out chord (*Più lento*) and with only a single repetition (which even then, is a rhythmic unison of only 4 or the 5 instruments, under a held flute tone). Later (bars 180–185) it spawns a new outgrowth in the form of a two-note compound interval motif (intervals 1, 2, 3 and 4), by which time, all vestiges of the *fanfare* motif are gone ('killed off', so to speak), though at the end of the section, two final twitches of it (reduced to 2- and 3-note chords) flicker briefly.

As in several earlier sections, the cadence-phrase of section 9 is built from a version of the *flourish* motif (bars 193–195); the final 'twiches' of the *fanfare* motif thus constitutes a final reference to the fanfare's original 'framing' function, since these twiches (bars 192 and 196) now frame the cadence-phrase.

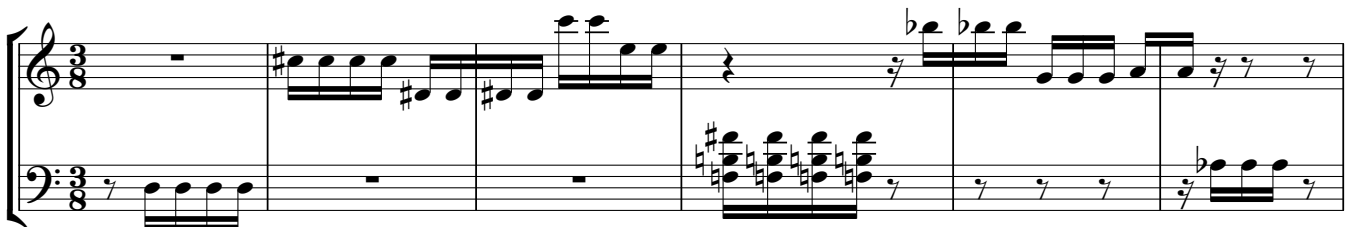
The musical score for Example 23, *Permutazioni*, bars 192–196, is presented in a two-staff format. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef, both in 2/4 time. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The score begins with a *ff* dynamic marking. The first staff contains a series of chords and melodic fragments, including a 'flourish' motif. The second staff contains a series of chords and melodic fragments, including a 'flourish' motif. The score concludes with a *ff* dynamic marking.

Example 23: *Permutazioni*, bars 192–196

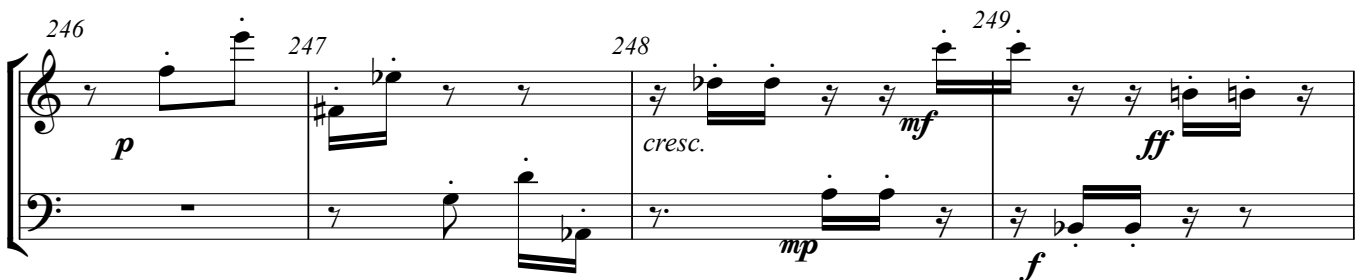
*Section Ten (bars 197–263)*

The stage is now cleared for the return of the *fanfare* motif, to bring the work to a dramatic conclusion. Using the kind of poetic description ('killed off' etc) we have coined in relation to the immediately-preceding section, we might appropriately call it a 'resurrection' of the motif, especially since it takes on a different, extended and more vigorous life. Section ten is thus an *up tempo* peroration and coda (marked, appropriately, *stretto*). The *fanfare* motif dominates throughout, although a fragment of recapitulation (of the first theme's consequent phrase) also appears within it (bars 205–211), along with statements of the *klangfarben* motif, the *sostenuto* motif, the *giocosio* motif ('c' version) and the *flourish* motif.

During the course of this peroration, two passages in which the *fanfare* and *klangfarben* motifs merge (bars 215–220 and 245–249) into a twelve-tone series presented in all-interval order for the first and only time in the work, produce a climax of another sort, which we might call a 'structural' climax



Example 24: *Permutazioni*, bars 215–220



Example 24A: *Permutazioni*, bars 245–249

After this the remaining 14 bars are given entirely to the final ecstatic peroration on four versions of the *fanfare* motif, using, in order, the intervals 1, 2, 3 and 4 (all compound), then 8, 9, 10 and 11 and finally the version characterised by the intervals 8, 7, 6, 5 (the principal harmonic motif: a transposition of the form in which it was heard in the very first bar of the piece).

250 253 256 262

Intervals (bottom to top)  
1 3 2 4      8 10 9 11      8 7 6 5      8 7 6 5

Example 25: *Permutazioni*, bars 250–263

### *Postscript: ‘Eleven Interval’ Composition*

As a footnote to the post-Weberian language which Seiber has developed in this little *divertimento*, one may note that the flexibility which results from the way in which Seiber causes the concepts of pitch-class and register to interpenetrate to produce his own personal counterpart of the classic Schoenbergian twelve-tone language: viz, a kind of ‘eleven-interval’ language. The basic structural component of this ‘eleven-interval’ language is the aggregate of interval-classes, which may – on occasion, but by no means necessarily or ordinarily – be aligned structurally with the aggregate of pitch-classes, but where the aggregate of interval-classes takes precedence and is definitely what drives the musical structure.

In this ‘Seiberian’ eleven-interval language, the interval-class ‘3’ can be represented, in any intervallic succession, in two ways. For example, the interval ‘3’ from the pitch A can be represented by a C (any C) above the A or by an F sharp (any F sharp) below the A. Thus, at any point, there is a choice of two ways in which to represent the interval-class ‘3’, and this allows for considerable flexibility in making decisions about how pitch-class structures are to relate to other structural parameters involved in the passage in question: to contour or to harmony, for instance. Or, to look at it the other way round: the pitch-class succession A–C can represent either of the interval-classes ‘3’ or ‘9’, depending on the choice of register in each case.

The possibilities multiply when *successions* of interval-classes are composed into successions of pitch-classes. To take merely a rather simple and straightforward example, consider the development passage in bars 21–31, based on the 6-note phrase of the solo bassoon, outlining the interval-class succession 6–5–4–7–3. Without taking into account transpositions of this phrase, or the use of octave displacement, there are – in the case of a phrase starting on (say) B – 16 possible pitch-class successions which could represent the interval-class succession 6–5–4–7–3.

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## *Matyas Seiber's Quartetto Lirico (Third String Quartet)*

### Graham Hair

#### *Acknowledgement*

The research on which this paper has been based was made possible by a grant from the Arts and Humanities Research Board of the United Kingdom.

In 1950, a young Australian composer, recently arrived in England, asked Arthur Benjamin, then one of the best-known of Australian expatriate musicians working in London, to suggest a composition teacher with whom he might study. Benjamin directed the 27-year old Don Banks towards Matyas Seiber. Banks knew nothing of Seiber but, following Benjamin's advice, made a point of trying to hear some of Seiber's music. Soon afterwards he heard *Ulysses*, and in later life often recounted how this experience made such a deep impression on him that it prompted him to act on Benjamin's advice. Banks became one of Seiber's longest-serving pupils and, subsequently, a close friend for the last decade of Seiber's life (1950–1960), as well as a great enthusiast for *Ulysses*.

Perhaps we cannot quite relive Banks's experience half a century later, but certainly it was typical of the reactions of other young composers who worked with Seiber at that time: Peter Racine Fricker, who later emigrated to the United States, was another to whom *Ulysses* seemed to be the work of a major figure in British music. Twenty years later, the fact that the tenth anniversary (1970) of Seiber's death was marked by a substantial series of tributes in *The Musical Times* is indicative of the importance which was accorded him at that time, and not only in Britain: the central set of values which some saw as embodied in Seiber's work was articulated by Milton Babbitt in his tribute in the following terms:

Two years later [1954], in London, I saw Matyas in the full range of his extraordinary musical activity, the 'outsider' who, by carrying within him the fully understood and experienced tradition of Central Europe, and particularly that most recent tradition of the decisive and revolutionary twenties, had become the most influential and respected on 'insiders' as teacher, and above all, composer (Babbitt 1970).

The composers of those 'decisive, revolutionary twenties' who most affected Seiber's outlook and development were those of the so-called Second Vienna School, above all that of Alban Berg. In fact, however, there has been hitherto comparatively little reference anywhere in the musicological literature to Seiber's musical relationship to Berg, and certainly no extensive interpretation of the meaning of the relationship, and since it's a crucial fact, I shall return to it again. Nevertheless, the reason for the *lacuna* is not that hard to deduce. It has to do with the external circumstances of Seiber's life, which can easily point the casual listener in the wrong direction. The unsettled nature of this career hints at what Milton Babbitt was getting at when he referred to 'the full range of his extraordinary musical activity'. One can deduce it just by listing a few elements of this activity:

- \* He collaborated with the celebrated sociologist and musicologist (and composer) Theodor Adorno;
- \* He taught, composed and published on jazz, and wrote what were probably the earliest pieces to synthesise elements of jazz with elements of twelve-tone composition (in 1929);
- \* He collaborated with the famous folk-music collector Alan Lomax – whose collections are now housed in

the Smithsonian Institute in Washington – and with Don Banks (his Australian student) on the volume *Folk Songs of North America*;

- \* He wrote the music for Britain's first major animated feature film: Halas and Batchelor's *Animal Farm*, based on the famous novel by George Orwell;
- \* He arranged countless folksongs from many countries for the Morley College choir, arrangements which are still in the repertoire of many choral societies all over the world;
- \* He also wrote the music for the well-known British-Australian war movie of the 1950s, *A Town Like Alice*, starring Peter Finch and Virginia McKenna;
- \* He taught the accordion and arranged several pieces for accordion orchestra;
- \* He represented Britain at the Festival of the International Society for Contemporary Music in 1952 (the year when the other representatives included Milton Babbitt for the US and Don Banks for Australia);
- \* He collaborated with the London Philharmonic Orchestra and the Johnny Dankworth band to produce a substantial piece of so-called 'third-stream' music, *Improvisations for Jazz Band and Orchestra*, in which jazz and symphonic idioms are blended together;
- \* ...and finally: the list would not be absolutely representative without mention of the pop song *The Fountains of Rome* which reached the pop-music charts in 1956.

The omnivorous attitude to music reflected in this catalogue of activities was mirrored in the musical character embodied in Seiber's compositions, but its significance has often been misinterpreted. In these post-modern times of the early twenty-first century, we might well find Seiber's multifarious activity and his multi-faceted compositional personality as engaging, stimulating and inspiring, as the enthusiasm evident in Milton Babbitt's 1970 *Musical Times* tribute suggests. But it's clear that this was not necessarily always the case, despite the *Musical Times* tribute. Even so perceptive a commentator as Hans Redlich, who was Professor at Manchester University at the time, was misled by these circumstances, when he wrote in the *Music Review*:

It remains the tragedy of the uprooted composer to substitute polyglot versatility for the security of a national tradition.....The violent cross-currents of artistic influences.....may easily result in a creative deadlock or in an encyclopaedic prolixity of style. Seiber manages skilfully to steer clear of both dangers, but only at the expense of musical substance. (Redlich 1954).

To understand these conflicting cross-currents of critical opinion we need to consider the cultural context into which Seiber was casting his 'polyglot versatility': to consider the *zeitgeist*, the spirit of the times, and perhaps the spirit of the place as well. The return of hermeneutics to the musicological discourse in recent decades has been made possible by a stronger realisation that meaning in music is not just a function of the sound of the music, but an interaction between the sonic aspect and the context in which the music is received. To get a handle on that with respect to Seiber, I would like to refer in passing to René Leibowitz, whose books, influential at the time, about the Second Vienna School were published during the years when Seiber was composing *Ulysses* and the *Third String Quartet*.

Leibowitz was a prolific writer, and wrote many other books, but the three I have in mind here are:

- \* *What is Twelve-Tone Music?* (a short book devoted entirely to a discussion of Webern's *Concerto for Nine Instruments*);
- \* *Introduction to Twelve-Tone Music* (a rather longer book, devoted principally to a discussion of just one work, Schoenberg's *Variations for Orchestra*, preceded and followed by sections which place the work in theoretical and historical context);
- \* *Schoenberg and His School* (a more general book devoted to an overview of the output of all three members

of the Second Vienna School).

In *Schoenberg and His School*, Leibowitz heads his sections on Schoenberg, Berg and Webern respectively as: ‘Schoenberg: The Origin and Foundations of Contemporary Music’, ‘Berg: The Awareness of the Past in Contemporary Music’, and ‘Webern: The Awareness of the Future in Contemporary Music’.

Clearly, however, 50 years on, it’s hard to swallow this scenario as merely a summary of the facts of the case. It’s at the very least a prediction of the future: a risky undertaking at the best of times. But in the context of the various deconstructive movements in the 50 years since *Schoenberg and His School*, it’s hard for us now not to take this way of reading the significance of Berg’s and Webern’s work as a way of recruiting it to a particular banderole: namely the compositional concerns and ideological priorities of Leibowitz’s own time.

Sabine Meine’s doctoral thesis on Leibowitz (Meine 2000: 108–114) identifies a sense of the euphoria (the ‘Stunde Null’) which prevailed in Paris immediately after the war, and the sense that the time was right for a new musical language to emerge which had nothing whatever to do with that of the Nazi era and the war years or, more broadly, with what was seen as stuffy conventionality more generally: as embodied in the work of, for example, the older generation of neo-classicists, including Igor Stravinsky as well as many French composers. Elliott Carter’s book of interviews with Enzo Restagno (Carter 1989) recalls the era in very much the same terms. It was not merely that this meant that the hour of the Second Vienna School had come, but that young composers emerging at that time endeavoured to realise its innovations in a more radical way than these ‘father figures’ themselves, taking as their starting-point the innovations of Webern, who, according to prevailing opinion seemed, in certain ways – in his anti-metrical rhythmic discourse and radical discontinuity of texture and melodic line – more novel than Berg or Schoenberg.

Nevertheless, 60 years of hindsight on this era suggests that a more measured, less contentious reading of the theme of the two sections of Leibowitz’s book would prompt headings something like: ‘Berg: the awareness of broader musical horizons in relation to the twelve-tone language of contemporary composition’, and ‘Webern: the movement towards a self-sufficient twelve-tone language in contemporary composition’.

The light cast by this reading of the *zeitgeist* and its ideological preoccupations helps to place Seiber’s music of those years in historical context. Works such as the oratorio *Ulysses* and the *Quartetto Lirico (Third String Quartet)* are certainly works deeply influenced by twelve-tone thinking, but nevertheless the composer shows himself acutely aware of the way in which those ‘broader musical horizons’ can be made to impinge on twelve-tone musical language. This awareness may indeed be taken as ‘polyglot versatility’, as Redlich insists, but in the discussion of the *Quartetto Lirico* which follows, I shall endeavour to show that musical substance is not thereby endangered.

Juxtaposition of the opening theme of Seiber’s *Third String Quartet* with the opening theme of Berg’s *String Quartet Op 2*, reveals not just a stylistic affinity, but a close similarity.



Example 1: Seiber: *Third String Quartet*, bars 1–3

Example 2: Berg: *Quartet*, Op 2, bars 1–6

Hugh Wood describes the resemblance between the Berg and Seiber themes as ‘incidental’, and indeed it is if what one has in mind is to defend Seiber against any assumption of epigonism. However, I propose that it indicates an affinity of another sort. Seiber appended to the fourth movement of *Ulysses* a footnote describing that movement as an *Hommage à Schoenberg*. I propose the same French term to describe the *Third String Quartet*: an *Hommage à Berg*. In each case, Seiber takes a scrap of material from Schoenberg or Berg (and indeed, that’s all it is: a *scrap* of material) and treats it in his own idiosyncratically ‘Seiberian’ manner.

It also indicates something of Seiber’s musical lineage. This interpretation of Seiber’s musical language as a ‘post-Bergian’ one, is not intended so much to suggest that somehow Seiber’s style is epigonal with respect to Berg’s, however, as to indicate that it shares with Berg’s something of that ‘awareness of broader musical horizons in relation to the twelve-tone language of contemporary composition’ which I proposed above as an alternative to Leibowitz’s formulation. I shall endeavour to document this proposition in concrete detail as we proceed, because the way this shared aesthetic attitude is realised in actual sound is quite different from Berg in almost every way.

The precise nature of the *hommage* is best understood by describing in detail the nature of this ‘Seiberian’ treatment of Berg’s ‘scrap of material’. In fact two kinds of description are required, referring respectively to concrete detail and to some broader implications for Seiber’s approach to musical language.

### ***Opening Theme and Its Unfolding: Detailed Aspects***

So let us consider first the nature of the ‘scrap of material’ itself (in Seiber’s transformation thereof). It consists of a melodic figure of twelve notes, given to the first violin (see Example 1). This melody is best parsed as a figure consisting of three component motifs: of 6, 2 and 4 notes, respectively. In each case we have a short note – or a bunch on short notes – followed by a long one, making groups of (respectively) 5+1 notes, then 1+1, then 3+1. Except for the viola’s very last B $\sharp$ , the accompanimental figures in the second violin and viola reflect aspects of the first violin melody. They state two-note motifs (let’s call them ‘variants of motif B’) which complement the first violin melody by providing continuous flowing semiquaver movement at the points where the first violin lands on its three long notes.

Of course, the foregoing remarks characterise motifs A, B and C only in the most general way, ie in terms of the numbers of notes and their relative durations (short or long), so let us now be a little more specific and turn

to aspects of interval and pitch. The intervals between the successive notes of the three motifs are:

A: 1, 2, 6, 5, 2

B: 2

C: 1, 3, 1

Motifs A and C appear only in the first violin melody, Motif B in both melody and accompaniment. The accompaniment versions of motif B outline the interval 3 (except for the additional 2 effected by the viola's additional, concluding B $\flat$ , referred to above). An appropriate way of characterising the compositional process here would be to describe it as taking a two-note rhythmically-defined motif (motif B) and giving it variable interval characteristics: the interval 2 in the first violin melody, and the interval 3 in the accompaniment. One might even stretch a point and say of the treatment of the accompaniment: 'the rhythm of motif B with the characteristic interval of motif C'.

Looking at the pitch content of motif A immediately reveals characteristics which decisively differentiate this 'quotation' of Seiber's from Berg's original. Berg's motif has a strong whole-tone flavour about it. Seiber's 'quotation' changes that to an octatonic flavour. In fact, the whole passage is octatonic up to the last two notes (G $\sharp$  and E $\sharp$ ) of the first violin and the aforementioned final B $\flat$  of the viola. One implication of this statement is that the whole passage encompasses eleven of the twelve pitch-classes: only the D $\flat$  is absent.

This opening passage (bars 1–3) of Seiber's quartet is a a trio from which the cello is absent. We may think of it as an antecedent, which calls for a balancing consequent. The consequent duly arrives in bar 3: likewise a trio, but now initiated by the cello instead of the first violin. The consequent is considerably more complex than the antecedent, and – unlike the antecedent – eventually comes to a cadential point of rest: in bar 10, on a triad of C $\sharp$ /D $\flat$  minor. By 'complex' I mean that its style is a contrapuntal, rather than 'melody and accompaniment', and developmental – developmental in the unfolding (*entwicklung*) sense – rather than simply expository. What this means is that each of the voices expounds a 'motivic narrative', derived predominantly from the same motifs which appeared in the antecedent (albeit sometimes in variant form).

Example 3 analyses these 'motivic narratives' in this consequent passage (bars 3–10). It will be noted that each voice begins with motif A, used solely as a 'head motif' (as in the antecedent); the remainder of each voice – except for an occasional 'free' note or two (marked \*) – unfolds entirely as a dialogue between variants of motifs B C, D and E, until the pattern is broken in order to effect the aforementioned triadic point of rest.

The rhythm of all 4 of these motifs is constituted merely of 2 or 4 consecutive semiquaver attacks, starting on the second or fourth semiquaver of the beat and ending on a long note on the first or third. Motif B (4 notes) comprises the intervals minor third–semitone–perfect fourth (respectively rising–falling–falling), Motif C (4 notes) the intervals major third–semitone–minor third (respectively: rising–falling–rising), Motif D (2 notes) the interval 3 (rising) and Motif E (4 notes) the intervals major third–perfect fourth–perfect fourth (respectively: rising–falling–falling). Variants which are transpositions or inversions of one of these four motifs are assigned the same label. Hence motif D, the rising minor third in violin 2 in bar 8, in the viola in bars 4–5, and in the cello in bars 4, 5 (inverted), 6 and 9. Variants which are related in some way other than transposition or inversion are assigned a numerical suffix. For example the motif B1 contains the same three intervals as motif B, but its shape is 'falling–rising–rising', and the motifs E1 and E2 each contain two perfect fourths and a third, like motif E.

One could pursue the logic of this opening 10-bar 'period' structure further down the track in this narrative way, but before doing so I want to backtrack to draw out those broader implications for Seiber's musical language which I mentioned earlier

Violin 2

Viola

Violoncello

3 4 5 6

A A D B1 C A D D E2 D

Detailed description: This musical score shows the first six bars of a string quartet. The Violin 2 part (treble clef) has rests in bars 3 and 4, then enters in bar 5 with a sixteenth-note figure (F#4, G#4, A4) and a slur over bars 5 and 6. The Viola part (alto clef) has rests in bars 3 and 4, then enters in bar 5 with a sixteenth-note figure (F#3, G#3, A3) and a slur over bars 5 and 6. The Violoncello part (bass clef) has rests in bars 3 and 4, then enters in bar 5 with a sixteenth-note figure (F#2, G#2, A2) and a slur over bars 5 and 6. Bar numbers 3, 4, 5, and 6 are indicated above the Violin 2 staff. Labels A, D, B1, C, and E2 are placed above various notes in the Viola and Violoncello parts. A bracket labeled 'A' spans bars 5 and 6 in the Violin 2 part.

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vc.

7 8 9 10

C D B E E1 B B \* \* B B \* D \*

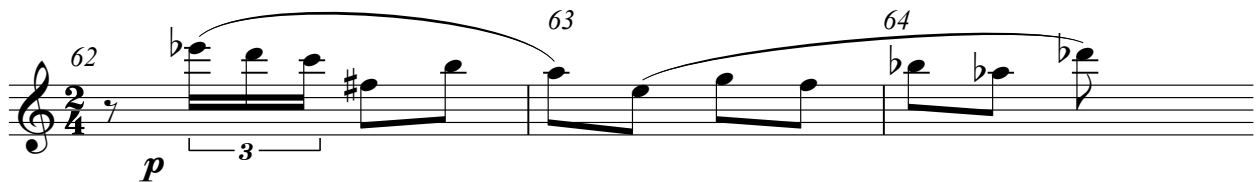
Detailed description: This musical score shows the last four bars of the excerpt. The Violin 2 part (treble clef) has a slur over bars 7 and 8, then a slur over bars 9 and 10. The Viola part (alto clef) has a slur over bars 7 and 8, then a slur over bars 9 and 10. The Violoncello part (bass clef) has a slur over bars 7 and 8, then a slur over bars 9 and 10. Bar numbers 7, 8, 9, and 10 are indicated above the Violin 2 staff. Labels C, D, B, E, E1, B, B, \*, \*, B, B, \*, D, and \* are placed above various notes in the Viola and Violoncello parts. A bracket labeled 'C' spans bars 7 and 8 in the Violin 2 part.

Example 3: Seiber: *Quartetto Lirico (String Quartet No 3)*, bars 3–10

**Opening Theme and Its Unfolding: Some Broader Implications**

Starting only a few bars later (bar 26), we hear motif A in some new contexts; here are some examples, referring to the first violin part only:

- (1) Bar 10. A truncated version of the opening phrase from bars 1-3: motifs A and B only (without C)
- (2) Bars 11–13. Motifs A and C (variant), with the addition of two new 5-note motifs ('D'+ 'D') and motif B.
- (3) Bar 26. A plus several variants of A, with a modified rhythm (resulting in a 'partitioned' variant of A)
- (4) Bars 57–8. The first three notes of motif A (the other three are in the second violin).
- (5) Bar 59. Motif A alone.
- (6) Bar 61. An extended form of motif A, with rhythm taken from bar 26. This extension transforms the original 6-note version of motif A into a twelve-tone series (see Example 4).



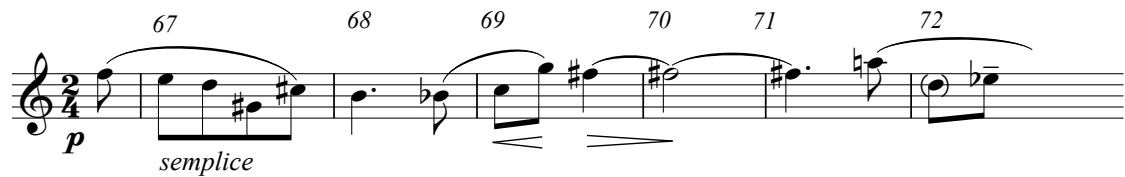
Example 4: Seiber: *Third String Quartet*, bars 62–64

But the evolution which motif A has undergone to reach this point means that our sense of the series is not as a basic 'axiom' underlying the structure of the work, and from which everything in the work is generated, so much as an outgrowth of motif A.

Moreover, even when, in bars 61–63, the twelve-tone variant finally arrives, this is not the end of the evolutionary process, for in later passages several *different* twelve-tone variants appear. One can immediately notice, for example, that the two excerpts in Example 5A and 5B do not extend the six-note motif in the same way: the order of the six complementary pitch-classes is not the same in both cases. An appropriate way to think of the technique involved here might be to describe it as building a phrase by means of different continuations of the same initial six-note motif: something more akin, perhaps, to Schoenberg's concept of 'developing variation' than to twelve-tone composition, strictly interpreted.



Example 5A: Seiber: *Third String Quartet*, bars 66–68



Example 5B: Seiber: *Third String Quartet*, bars 74–80

**Development Section**

The middle section of the first movement comes to a ‘counter-climax’ in the central ‘cadenza’ section. Most of Seiber’s writing in this movement is of the strict variety, in both thematic and rhetorical terms: every pitch is motivic and every phrase follows some variety of a classical period or sentence structure (along the lines outlined in various of Schoenberg’s didactic texts), or else can be seen in terms of a controlled deviation from such motivicity or such archetypal rhetoric. The cadenza section, on the other hand, is of a free nature, as befits its placement and function. The technique here resembles that atomic ‘Kapuziner’ process described by Adorno (see Adorno 1991) in relation to Berg, and exemplified by countless passages in Berg’s music: continuity is constructed by means of a process of growth or decay in which there is a note-by-note addition or subtraction to or from a musical idea, or a variant of such a process. Adorno considers this an example in miniature of a general concept: Berg’s devotion to the idea of ‘continuous transition’ as an aesthetic ideal.



\* repeat ad lib (with accel) like in an improvised Cadenza

Example 6: Seiber: *Third String Quartet*, bars 107–109

Here we start a first-violin melody with the pitch C#, above a chord consisting of the pitch-classes C, Bb and F#. Then the melody expands from the C# by the addition of – in succession – D#, Db, Ab, G#, Bb and F#. Only the pitch-classes Eb and Gb are missing

### **Third Movement**

In placing a slow movement as the *finale* and climax of the quartet, Seiber is following Mahlerian and Bergian precept. A ‘sound-world’ quite new to the quartet is immediately initiated in its opening bars: a world of intense lyrical concentration, which is sustained throughout the movement, but in particular in its opening 24-bar paragraph. The formal strategy of this paragraph is appropriate to its expressive purpose, for what happens is essentially that the paragraph builds up from this new starting-point to a climactic and ‘epiphanic’ statement (bars 20 and 22) of a motif which turns out to be none other than the primary motif of the work as a whole, namely the familiar hexachordal one from bar 1 of the first movement, but now in a slow, lyrical variant, and in an *antecedent-consequent* pairing: a 6-note melodic phrase in the highest register of violin 1, answered by another in the lowest register of the cello.

This expressive strategy is paralleled appropriately in the structural domain, for the movement opens with the first truly ‘thematic’ appearance in the entire quartet of the IR and R set-forms, and the versions of the principal motif which appear in bars 20 and 22 are the S and I versions of the *principal hexachordal motif* at the tritone transposition, preserving that motif’s original ‘E/B $\flat$  axis’ (see the discussion above of the first movement).

This broad expressive trajectory for the opening 24-bar paragraph can best be understood by looking at how it is ‘composed out’. To put it in simple tabular terms:

- (i) the opening statement is followed by a passage which develops its characteristics
- (ii) a new accompanimental figure is introduced in embryonic form against melodic statements derived from these developmental phrases
- (iii) an accumulating transitional passage, manufactured out of the principal hexachordal motif’s opening two intervals (semitone and tone) builds up to the point where
- (iv) the accompanimental figure blossoms extensively as a backdrop to the ‘epiphanic’ re-appearance of the principal hexachordal motif as a whole.

To begin the close reading of this passage, let us identify some characteristics of its 12-tone opening statement (bars 1–3):

- (i) on cello: a single long note (pitchclass C $\sharp$ , duration 12  $\downarrow$ )
- (ii) on viola: a long note preceded by a short one (pitchclasses B $\flat$  – G $\natural$ , durations 1  $\downarrow$  – 9  $\downarrow$ )
- (iii) on violin 2: a long note preceded by 2 short ones (pitchclasses E – F $\sharp$  – D $\sharp$ , durations 1  $\downarrow$  – 1  $\downarrow$  – 6  $\downarrow$ )
- (iv) on violin 1: two groups of notes
  - (iva) a long note preceded by a short one (pitchclasses D – C, durations 1  $\downarrow$  – 2  $\downarrow$ )
  - (ivb) a long note preceded by a shorter one, followed by a still shorter (pitchclasses F – B – A – G $\sharp$ , durations 1  $\downarrow$  – 1  $\downarrow$  – 2  $\downarrow$  – 12  $\downarrow$ )

The reason for characterising this *antecedent* so painstakingly is that it enables us to see in detail how the paragraph as a whole evolves out of it.

Immediately following, in bars 3–5, comes the *consequent*, in which many of the motivic features of the *antecedent* are simply replicated in only slightly varied form. In common are the note-grouping (1, 2, 3 and 2+4 notes respectively in the 4 components) and the same patterns of long and short notes (although the exact durations are slightly different). The instrumental allocation of these note-groups is simply swapped around. Group 1 (cello in the *antecedent*) passes to violin 1 in the *consequent*, group 2 from viola to violin 2, group 3 from violin 2 to cello and group 4 from violin 1 to viola.

Given that the *antecedent* is based on the set-form IR10 and the *consequent* on the set-form R3, it's obvious that the pitchclass structure of the *antecedent* is simply inverted in the *consequent* (around the axis C# / G#). Moreover, if we consider the longest note in each of the four groups of the antecedent (C# G#, D# and G#), the C# in the cello is the lowest, whereas the corresponding note of the consequent, the G# in violin 1, is the highest of the four. A possible interpretation of this is to understand the C# and G# as imposing on the passage a flavour of tonal orientation around the tone-centre C#. Clearly, this orientation refers backwards and forwards to C# orientation elsewhere in the work, most notably at the concluding 'cadences' of the first and third movements.

The shapes which are imposed by octave placement of the pitchclasses of *antecedent* and *consequent* show an element of development in the *consequent*, for although the shapes of the *antecedent*'s groups 2 and 3 are simply inverted in the *consequent*, the treatment of group 4 changes somewhat. It now has a considerably greater range (20 semitones rather than 9) and a slightly more varied contour (*up-down-up-down* rather than *down-up-down*).

This whole passage – *antecedent* plus *consequent* – will be referred to as the 'head' in the discussion which follows. In terms of 12-tone structure, the pattern laid out in the 'head' (a pair of aggregates comprising set-forms IR10 and R3) sets the pattern for the whole 24-bar paragraph, which is comprised of 6 such pairs: 12 aggregates. In the 'head', the IR–R set-form pairing correspond to an *antecedent-consequent* pairing (or a 'motivic' pairing, as we might call it), as we have seen. Aggregate-pairs 7/8, 9/10 and 11/12 (bars 11–15, 15–19 and 19–24) correspond to motif-pairs in an analogous way.

In the case of aggregate-pairs 3/4, 5/6 (bars 6–8 and 8–11) the correspondence would better be described as one between aggregate-pairs and motif-*groups*, since there are two aggregate-pairs and 10 motifs. The way these 10 motifs are distributed by aggregate-membership is (approximately, since motif-boundaries sometimes slightly overlap aggregate-boundaries):

- (i) Aggregate-pair 3/4: motifs 1–5
- (ii) Aggregate-pair 5/6: motifs 6–10

The characters of the motifs themselves supports this reading:

- (i) Motifs 1-5 are characterised by a large range (respectively 17, 14, 20, 26, 21, semitones) and wide intervals (respectively: 11–3–12, 14–3–10, 9–9–20, 9–9–11–15 and 10–5–6–14 semitones);
- (ii) Motifs 6–10 are characterised by a much smaller range (respectively: 8, 6, 6, 3 and 9 semitones) and much narrower intervals (respectively 2–1–3–2, 3–3–2, 2–3–3–2, 2–3 and 3–6–2–1 semitones)

These observations tend to suggest reading of this passage in terms of two 5-motif groups: a 'development-phrase' (aggregates 3/4, more or less) and a 'cadence-phrase' (aggregates 5/6, more or less). The character of all 10 motifs derives from that initially stated in the 'head': a long note preceded by a number of shorter ones and variants of that pattern: *short-long-still longer* or something similar. The shape of all 10 motifs is basically that of a rising and falling arch (contour: *up-down*): on the whole, rather simpler than the shape of the two hexachordal motifs in the 'head', following the archetypal pattern for a 'liquidation' (to use Schoenberg's terminology) section, in which the characteristic features of the 'head' are gradually eliminated.

Development-phrase:

No	Bar	Instrument	Motif Cardinality	Rhythm	Contour	Highest Pitch
1	6	Violin 2	4	♪♪♪♪	U-D-D	Second
2	6	Cello	4	♪♪♪♪	U-D-D	Second
3	7	Violin 1	4	♪♪♪♪	U-U-D	Third
4	7	Viola	5	♪♪♪♪♩	U-U-U-D	Fourth
5	8	Violin 2	5	♪♪♪♪♪	U-U-U-D	Fourth

Cadence-phrase:

No	Bar	Instrument	Motif Cardinality	Rhythm	Contour	Highest Pitch
6	8	Cello	5	♪♪♪♪♪	D-D-D-D	First
7	9	Violin 1	4	♪♪♪♪	U-U-D	Third
8	9	Violin 2	5	♪♪♪♪♪	D-U-U-D	Fourth
9	10	Viola	3	♪♪♪	D-U	Third
10	10	Cello	5	♪♪♪♪♩	D-D-U-U	First

Now (aggregate-pair 7/8) comes the second of the four sub-paragraphs referred to earlier, in which a new accompanimental figure (basically simply a held note and a repeated chord) is introduced. Out of this grows an 8-note viola motif. Chord and 8-note motif comprise an *antecedent* (bars 11–13) which is then answered by a *consequent* (held note, repeated chord, *cello* motif, bars 14–15), just as in the ‘head’ section. What this new departure imports is not clear at the point of its introduction, but that becomes clear only a few bars later.

Before that clarification comes a transition passage (viola/cello with violin 2 joining in at the end). I have characterised it as consisting of another aggregate-pair (9/10), but actually it really consists of a simple rising series of dyads, and moreover, since there are 7 dyads in the viola part, 7-and-a-half in the cello, and 1-and-a-half in violin 2, the term *extended* aggregate-pair would be more appropriate:

Violin 2: (D–C♯) > (F)

Viola: (E♭–D♯) > (F♯–E♯) > (G♯–F♯) > (A♯–G♯) > (B♯–B♭) > (D♭–C) > (E♯–E♭)

Cello: (D♯–C♯) > (E♯–D♯) > (G♭–F♯) > (A♭–G♯) > (B♭–A♯) > (C♯–B♯) > (D♯–D♯) > (F♯)

The relationship to the quartet’s 12-tone series is at best sketchy, but perhaps plausible: the semitone is the first interval of the quartet’s *principal hexachordal motif*, and each semitone-dyad moves up a tone (the second interval of the quartet’s *principal hexachordal motif*). Just as the repeated-chord figure anticipates one element of what is to follow in bars 19–24 (the return of the *principal hexachordal motif* accompanied by the repeated-chord figure), this transition passage thus suggests another (the *principal hexachordal motif* itself).

This leads us finally (bars 19–24, aggregate-pair 11/12) to the paragraph’s apotheosis: the ‘epiphanic’ re-appearance of the quartet’s *principal hexachordal motif*, supported by an extended variant of the ‘repeated-chord’ motif. Again it has an *antecedent-consequent* motivic structure:

*Antecedent*: violin 1, accompanied by the 3 lower strings (set-form = S6)

*Consequent*: cello, accompanied by the 3 upper strings (set-form = I6).

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