

The String Quartet



A LIFE Institute Course
Session One

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<http://LIFECourses.ca/Quartet>

Personal Discovery

- Knew the string quartet was important
 - Great composers wrote for it
- Presented Shostakovich course
 - Deeply personal quartets
- Looked around at other string quartets
 - Often deeply personal music
- Why not a LIFE course?

Personal Background

- Music was important to me
 - Started French Horn at age 5
 - American Wind Symphony - '57
- Non-musical career after high tech
 - Listened but played little
- Then I discovered LIFE
 - Three previous music courses

My Music Course Style

- Put music in a context
 - Social focus: time & place
- Goals
 - Improved musical appreciation
 - Explore less well-known examples
- YouTube
 - Illustrate with YouTube examples
 - Slides available on-line
 - Full performances from YouTube

LIFE Course Goals

- Enlightening
 - You should go away knowing some new things
- Engaging
 - Members should have a chance to comment and critique
- Entertaining
 - And the classes need to be enjoyable
- Unlike university courses!

Initial Plan

- Session 1: Background, origins, etc
- Session 2: Haydn, Mozart & more
- Session 3: Beethoven, Schubert & more
- Session 4: Mendelssohn, Schumann & more
- Session 5: The Russians
 - Taneyev, Glazunov, Myaskvsky, Shostakovich, etc
- Session 6: The Moderns
 - Bartok, Britten, Hindemith, Reger, etc.

What do you want?

- Are there works we *must* sample?
- Are there composers we *must* examine?
- What's the ideal mix
 - Short examples – less than 5 minutes
 - Whole movements – up to 10 minutes
 - Whole compositions – up to 30 minutes
- ... do you have any quartet connections?

Starting Point



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6QZJ9B4tc3w>

Why 4 string players?

- Easy to find the players for a quartet
 - They are the most common instrumentalists
- 4 voices = comfortable complexity
 - Can hear 3 parallel musical lines
- Only violin family of instruments
 - Purest musical expression – color unimportant
- Chicken & Egg question
 - Easy for composer to find a quartet, easy for quartet to find music, easy for computer to find a quartet, easy for a quartet to find music, etc.

Origins

- No single source for the string quartet
 - Confluence of forces led to the string quartet
- Baroque Trio Sonata
 - Two leading voices (often strings)
 - Plus figured base – keyboard & deep string
- Haydn (1732-1809)
 - Often credited with the origin
 - Was first highly successful proponent
- Let's go back to Baroque Sonata

Pachelbel Canon in D Major



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JvNQLJ1_HQ0

String Quarter Version



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jJRdLZyOU4w>

Differences

- Figured base clearly sounds different
- Third string moves down to viola
- String quartet = purer musical expression
- Personally, I find for the string quartet
- What did you prefer? Why?
 - On to Orchestra Version

String Orchestra Version



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OFFYGoVstgc>

Orchestral Version

- No longer individuals working together
 - Multiple player on single musical line
 - Requires external co-ordination, conductor
- Different experience
 - Sound is more lush
 - Not as pure a musical experience
- Do you agree?

Not just evolving form

- Music went up a half-tone
 - Baroque A ~ 415 Hz
 - Modern A ~ 440 Hz
- The instruments all changed
 - Went from viol family (with “C” hole)
 - To the violin family (with “*f*” hole)
- And the instruments were modernized
 - Larger halls => louder sounds

Changes to the violin



The Baroque Violin and the Modern Violin:
Similar, but *very* Different

with Garry Clarke

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UhTqpmHu5yg>

The Four Voices



Bach – Art of the Fugue
Juilliard String Quartet

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ILd81jY1v4>

- Bach composed it as four musical lines
 - Not written for keyboard, organ or trio
 - Many years viewed as academic exercise
- Quartet is almost ideal realization
 - Four interwoven independent voices

One Adventuresome Destination

- Gunther Schuller –
2014 String Quartet
 - Schuller's father was a professional violinist, mine also
 - Schuller started out on the French Horn, me too
 - But he went on to distinguished music career, definitely not me



Ending Bon-Bon ...



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BKezUd_xw20