

Edexcel A Level Syllabus – Analysis

Joseph Haydn
String Quartet in E flat, Op. 33, no. 2 ‘The Joke’
Movement IV

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Background

Franz Joseph Haydn – b. 1732 (Rohrau); d. 1809 (Vienna) – was a prolific composer of the Classical period of music. He was the son of an Austrian farmer/wheelwright, and showed considerable musical precocity at an early age. He was taught the rudiments of music by a Hainburg schoolteacher, Franck. Haydn was sent to Vienna as a choirboy at the age of eight, where he was to spend a considerable part of his life. After his voice broke at seventeen, he worked as accompanist and apprentice to the Italian composer, Porpora, after which he worked for two aristocratic patrons in the 1750s.

A new epoch in Haydn's life dawned when he was employed by Prince Paul Esterházy as vice-Kapellmeister at Eisenstadt, Hungary. He was to remain with the Esterházy household for thirty years, under both Prince Paul and his successor, who were passionate lovers of music. His duties were numerous, as he was called upon to compose for, administrate, play in and conduct the palace orchestra, arrange and direct operatic performances, compose chamber music, compose for special occasions and festivities, and so on.

It was in this period that the string quartet in E flat was written. Haydn was a prolific composer of chamber music, most notably string quartets, of which he wrote some eighty-three works, which were described originally as divertimenti (essentially 'light' music, for the purposes of entertainment), and which were later dignified by more serious titles by which they are generally known. This particular piece belongs to Op.33, which includes the famous 'Bird' quartet.

The elegance and grace of this quartet is extremely reflective of the circumstances in which it was composed; it is an extremely evocative work. The simple and rather fundamental harmonies, the elegant melodic line and the clear texture combine to make this piece instantly appealing. One can almost visualise the courtly grounds of the Esterházy palace, where this piece was likely to have been presented, the small, social gathering that constitutes the audience, and a young Haydn, who probably played one of the parts in the quartet himself.

The structure of this movement works on two levels. At both levels, it appears to work on a rondo or ritornello form, but in different ways, depending on how one chooses to classify 'an episode'.

If the first pair of phrases, i.e. from bar 1 to 8, is classed as the recurring motif, (section A), the form works as follows:

A – B – A – C – A – B – A – D – A – E – A

Bar number	Section
1 – 8	A
9 – 28	B
29 – 35	A
36 – 71	C
72 – 79	A

80 – 89	B
100 – 107	A
108 – 140	D
141 – 148	A
149 – 152	E
153 – 172	A

However, several anomalies exist within this classification. The twice-repeated pair of A – B is one. The extreme shortness of section E is another. Can it really be called a separate section of development?

Taking the above into consideration, an alternative classification could conceivably be evolved.

If the section lasting from bar 1 to 35, i.e, sections A – B – A were jointly classified as one section and called Q, the following structure emerges:

Q – P – Q – R – Q (fragmented)

However, this makes the ending sections A – E – A difficult to fit into the structure, and we therefore resort to calling the piece a rondo with a fragmented ending. The last three sections may be regarded as an idiomatic divergence from the conventional rondo form; a musical witticism, so to speak, in keeping with the title of the piece, that would have raised a chortle from the Esterházy audience...!

Another interesting point to be noted about this movement is the curious lack of dynamic markings, bowing instructions and so on. Compared with the Beethoven septet in E flat, the Brahms scherzo and so on, this absence of dynamic markings appears peculiar. However, in the Classical period of music, i.e, in the time of Haydn and Mozart, composers seldom provided any instructions except the most basic to their performers, leaving ample scope for interpretation and improvisation. Also, as explained above, Haydn probably did not expect this quartet to be preserved for posterity. He probably also performed it himself with a quartet familiar with his style and used to performing his work. Hence, he did not feel the need for detailed score annotation and performance instructions.

A last point for consideration is the use of baroque devices in the movement, such as hemiole and pedal points. These look back to the days of the baroque fugues and partite, when these were commonly used structural and harmonic devices. The incorporation of these into an altogether classical framework is one of many interesting features of this piece.

Analysis

Movement IV, "The Joke"

Bar No.	Commentary
1 – 2	<p>The piece has an anacrusic start and the thematic motif lasting two bars is introduced. It is built upon the E flat scale and arpeggio and is entirely tonal. The harmonic progressions implied by the 2nd violin, viola and cello is</p> <p>I – V7 – I (E flat root – B flat 7 – E flat root), constituting a classical perfect cadence progression.</p> <p>The viola and cello have almost no melodic interest in this section; they have a purely harmonic or accompaniment function, which is typical of classical part writing – melody and accompaniment has a clear (and often wide) distinction. The second violin plays a more supportive role, although it functions as a harmonic instrument in this section.</p>
3 – 4	<p>An answering two bar phrase follows, which preserves the metric pattern of an anacrusis found in the main motif. This answer is based on the dominant key, B flat major. The cello is interestingly absent here, perhaps to create a lighter texture. The same essential harmonic progression (I – V7 – Ic) in B flat is used, although the last chord is in its first inversion.</p>
5 – 6	<p>The motif is developed into an ending phrase, preserving the anacrusis, with a brief implication of C minor (the B natural in the first violin part) in bar 5. However, this is more of a melodic suggestion than an actual modulation, and E flat tonality is quickly restored in bar 6. The cello forms a suspension by holding the A flat over the chord in bar 5 (implying a B flat⁷), which resolves to an E flat 1st inversion in bar 6.</p>
7 – 8	<p>The classic II – V – I cadential progression underpins a melodic motif with an acciaccatura in the 1st violin, which serves as effective end to the first phrase.</p>
9 – 10	<p>The anacrusis in the thematic motif is to become a very important and distinctive feature of this piece, and is examined closer in the development sections which follow. The original leap of a third down in bar 1 (beats 1-2, first violin part) that makes up the motif is stretched to a leap of a fourth (the technique of intervallic augmentation) to achieve motif development in bar 10. The 2nd violin echoes the 1st violin in 3rds (bar 9) and in tenths (bar 10). The chord implied in bars 9-10 is B flat.</p>

- 11 – 12 The direction of the motif in bar 1 inverted, but pattern in bar 2 is preserved. The tonality returns to E flat. Once again, the seeming brief implication of G minor is more of a melodic inflection than an actual modulation. The E flat drone kept up by the viola and cello strongly asserts this by maintaining a steady harmonic frame of reference. Such frames of reference are to become very important in development sections to follow, as a backdrop for modulations and part-movement.
- 13 – 14 For the first time, the viola and cello take up the anacrusis hitherto stated by the first violin. The harmonies implied in bar 13 are A flat major - C major. Another well-balanced two bar phrase results, which is basically a variation on the main motif.
The quartet appears to be structured around two-bar phrases, each pair forming an effective contrast to the preceding pair.
Harmonically, the B flat in the first violin part functions as an elongated appoggiatura; forming a mild suspension which resolves to the F minor chord implied by the other parts below.
- 15 – 16 This phrase functions as an answer to the previous one with harmonies being distributed between chords I and IV. The quartet as a whole appears to resemble a witty conversation, in which each statement made meets with an equal and eloquent repartee.
In bar 16, the cello begins a long B flat drone, to last nearly until the cadence in bar 27.
- 17 – 20 There is a hint of E flat minor in bar 17, with the held G flat in the second violin part. This sets up a slight tension in the bar, which resolves to a B flat chord in bar 17. The motif in the 1st violin part is also more wide ranging than it was previously and is built upon a 7th arpeggio; another dissonance. The motif and harmony is repeated exactly for the next two bars, heightening the sense of build-up.
- 21 – 26 The motif looks like it is about to be repeated but is truncated halfway through. The same harmonies continue, but cadence abruptly in B flat major. The steady B flat drone is now taken up by the viola, an octave higher, so that the harmonic signpost or frame of reference is left undisturbed. The violin parts, which are doubled in thirds, form an upward-rising chromatic figure, derived from the shape of the motif cited in bar 13. This rising figure, combined with the shorter quaver notes played by the cello creates a sense of urgency and energy in this section, contributing to the effect of a build-up...
- 27 – 28 ...Until the upper parts (violins I and II) form an eloquent double suspension above the chord of B flat major, resolving upwards. The

effect is almost one of an upward appoggiatura. It is a cadence in B flat major, as implied by the B flat pedal points maintained by the viola and cello. The expressive appoggiatura provides a perfect resolution for the chromatic ascending passage that precedes it. This is the climax point of the first section of the quartet.

29 – 35 This is a brief recapitulation of the first theme, a repetition of the material from bar 1 – 8. The melody harmony and rhythmic structure is repeated almost exactly in this section. As stated in the introduction, this piece works on a rondo or ritornello format. This is the first repeat of section A.

36 – 40 This is the beginning of the second main section of development. The opening anacrusis of the theme is preserved in the first violin part. The cello commences the holding of an E flat drone to maintain a tonal backdrop to the harmonies implied in the parts above. The second violin part becomes closely related to the first violin, with a doubling of the parts in thirds and sixths. The rhythm of the crotchet-quaver motif presented in the first violin part in bar 1 plays a prominent part in the second violin part in this section.
The harmony suggested is A flat major (with the D flat in the first violin part). However, the inference drawn is that it is A flat major acting as chord IV of E flat, as suggested by the repeated E flat notes of the cello and viola. The passagework, however is built upon the arpeggio and scale of A flat major. The implication grows stronger until...

41 – 44 A series of perfect cadences in A flat major, establishes the new tonal center. The sudden *sfz* accents that accompany the A flat notes in the violins and viola's part serve to reinforce the change of tonality, as well as to provide energy and dynamism in this part.
The 'surprise' accents are also idiomatically typical of Haydn's style, which includes sudden dynamic and rhythmic twists, sharp contrasts between piano and forte, as well as cunningly placed sforzatos and accents. The harmonic progressions are a series of E flat⁷ – A flat (perfect cadences in A flat) chords that are repeatedly reinforced.

45 – 47 The perfect cadence is slightly altered in this case, with the accent being delivered on the 2nd violin, viola and cello only and a repeat of the previous figuration in the first violin. This implies that a change in harmony is to be expected soon. However bars 46 and 47 cadence normally as before, albeit with a slightly thinner texture than previously.

- 48 – 52 The music suddenly modulates to a bright F major, with the cello drone being resumed on C. A series of perfect cadences in F major are formed. The texture becomes thinner at this point. The *sfzs* are still being delivered on pulse, once in two bars. The progression is Cmaj7 – F major. The chords and inversions are identical to the previous section.
- 53 – 58 The motif in the previous section is repeated an octave higher. In all these sections, the original quaver anacrusis is preserved in the first violin part. The harmonies in all other parts excepting the cello shift upwards by an octave. The harmony also modulates back to E flat major, with some B flat – E flat perfect cadences. (All the cadences in this section are in V – Ic format.)
- 59 – 61 The texture of the passagework changes at this point. It becomes extremely staccato, ‘secco’, and very precise, especially in the first violin part. The three quaver figure found in the second part of the opening motif is developed scalically taking the harmonies through a cycle of perfect cadences on the first three degrees of the E flat major scale. The progressions are as follows: E flat-A flat; F-B flat; Gmin-C. The viola echoes the cello part an octave above for the most part of this section, and the second violin doubles the first violin part in thirds in such a way as to form a three note motif that rises sequentially through the first three degrees of the E flat scale. The result is a quasi-independent second violin part. The texture also becomes busier in this section, with the two active violin parts.
- 62 – 63 In bar 62, we have an A flat-B flat major progression, and an E flat major C minor progression in bar 63. The viola part begins to get more interesting in this section. It takes up the crotchet-quaver motif hitherto stated by the first and second violins for the first time. The suggestion of darker minor harmonies (C minor on the first beat of bar 62, D minor on the second beat, C minor with an augmented fourth dissonance between the second violin and viola in bar 63) leads to tension and excitement. The preceding section with strong cadential progressions also serves to the same effect. This is a build up for the climax at the end of the section.
- 64 – 65 The cello resumes a B flat drone, helping to establish a dominant backdrop. The tonality oscillates between B flat-E flat major, in preparation for an approaching cadence. The viola part continues the crotchet-quaver motif it took up in the previous two bar section.

- 66 – 67 The tonality changes to a B flat-C minor 7 progression, with a predominantly B flat melody line. The section builds up to...
- 68 – 71 A pause on a B flat chord. The anticipated perfect cadence for this section never really materializes, with a rather unfinished pause on B flat major, lasting one bar, a diminished chord in first inversion in bar 69 and a B flat⁷ chord in bar 70, which forms the end of this section. These chords give rather incomplete, anticipatory and “questioning” feel to this section, a thwarting of the expectant ear, which expects a perfect cadence as a culmination to the harmonic implications in the previous section. Also, the fact that a large part of bar 70 and 71 are made up of rests adds to the sense of anticipation and breathless expectation that this section ends with. The rests create an effective fermata on a dominant seventh chord, a dissonant chord usually resolving to a tonic chord. A pause on a dissonance heightens the above-mentioned anticipatory effect. The upward moving bass line (B flat-C-D) appears to pause as well, as if waiting for a resolution. The contrary movement between the violin part and the cello part also contributes to the feeling of expectation and anticipation. Thus, the repeat of the theme that follows in bar 72 acts both as a ritornello and as a resolution phrase for the preceding section.
- 72 – 79 A resolution into E flat major wrought by the appearance of the first theme. Almost a reassuring feel to the section. The harmonies and melodies are an exact repetition of those found in the thematic motif.
- 80 – 98 An exact repetition of section B (from the first classification, see introduction), the material found in bars 10 – 28, harmonies, part-writing and all.
- 99 – 106 A repetition of section A, the thematic material. This, and the two sections preceding it could be seen as a repetition of one main thematic section, section Q, as explained in the introduction.
- 107 – 111 The commencement of the second, dramatic section of development. There is a sudden leap in the tessitura of the first violin, as it moves up to a high register. This leap injects drama to the section as well as providing an urgency and tension. The second violin part becomes extremely interesting as it begins to mimic and actively support the motifs in the first violin part. The cello part maintains an E flat drone through out this section to preserve a backdrop of tonality against which other parts create an exquisite drama. As this is the last main section of development, Haydn must have wanted to make it a dramatic and flamboyant one. The main motif used in this section is a

development and continuation of the thematic motif. This new motif serves almost as an 'answering' phrase, one that represents an alternative scheme of development to the original motif, and takes the piece in a fresh direction. This motif is also built on the E flat arpeggio and scale. Note that the quaver anacrusis is still preserved. The second violin part mimics the first violin in some places in thirds and tenths as it did previously. In bar the first violin begins to hold a B flat note in repeated quavers while other parts become more dynamic.

112 – 115

The second violin takes up where the first left off, echoing the motif used by the first violin a sixth below. The viola makes a dramatic leap to the high part of its register, and gains interest for the first time. It doubles the second violin part in the thirds. The first violin holds a B flat note as an inverted pedal point when the other parts acquire interest. This extensive use of pedal points in the piece is an interesting harmonic feature used by Haydn. It looks back, so to speak, to the days of the baroque fugue, in which pedal points and inverted pedal points were important harmonic points of reference, over which development and part movement takes place. Ordinary pedal points were usually the bass note of a given harmony, held by the lowest part or voice. The cello drones are fine examples. The held B flat quavers in the first violin part in this section are an inverted pedal point, under which development takes place, and is held by the highest voice. The repeated quaver figurations, the high register and the athletic parts make this a very energetic development section. There is a moto-perpetuo in this section with a continuous quaver figuration, produced by movement different parts against each other. However, this cannot strictly be called counterpoint, as the figurations in each part are merely transposed versions of an original motif, and usually occur in synchrony. The movement is directionally downward, and works as a sequence. The next part takes over where the previous part leaves off. The result is an elegant, continuously descending quaver figuration. An interesting textural aspect is that Haydn allows no more than two parts to be active at any given time. When the viola and second violin take up the melodic interest, the first and second violins are static and so on. However, the fact that the inverted B flat pedal point is not a drone but a biting quaver movement is important as the shorter notes add a rhythmic dynamism and energy to the section. This is the most texturally active and energetic section of the whole quartet. The implied harmonies, however, remain firmly rooted in E flat.

116 – 117

The first violin reasserts its interest in bar 116, with a statement of the original motif transposed up a perfect fourth. It develops the motif further, and again assumes the most melodic interest. The harmony in bar 116 is an A flat major implication in its first inversion. The cello, viola and second violin resume their pedal points in the form of busy quavers. These shorter notes manage to keep the texture sounding full and busy, adding, as before, a measure of energy and 'drive' to this

section. Again, the tradition of two active parts against two static parts is preserved. In bar 117, the motif development in bar 116 is cadenced in B flat major first inversion. The texture continues busily, but thins out a little, as the viola part grows more static.

118 – 119 A restatement of original motif transposed upwards by a tone. This is accompanied by downward harmonic movement to F major, second inversion. The viola makes a slight echo or continuation of the cadence in bar 117, a similar situation occurring in bar 116. The result is a descending scalar motif pattern alternating between first violin and viola, as follows: vla: G – F, vln: F – E; an interesting textural and development manipulation. The texture thins out quite a lot in these bars, becoming sparser and more ‘secco’. In bar 119, the harmony returns to E flat major. The harmonic bass-line is also downward shifting, as is all the motivic development in this section. This forms an interesting juxtaposition with the fact this section is a dramatic and the most texturally adventurous in the movement. The downward movement in development and harmony being associated with a scherzo, and with a section that is dramatic and energetic seems to be deliberately against the previous conventions (like Holborne, Pavane and Galliard) in music when downward movement was usually associated with melancholia. The parts in this section are very tightly interwoven.

120 – 123 The texture returns to normal, i.e. as in the beginning with the main melodic interest returning with the first violin. The previously used motif in bar 108 appears to have been inverted and then intervallically augmented. The result is an angular and robust motif, covering a range of an octave and a fifth. The range of the violin is widest at this point, and the close melody line hitherto followed is replaced by a wide-ranging bold motif with open position arpeggios (the motif is built upon arpeggiated patterns, a result of the intervallic augmentation). This, combined with the dry, spare texture as a deliberate contrast against the previous section results in a feeling of anticipation and ‘dry’ energy, the equivalent of a tense whisper, contrasted against the highly active previous section. The harmonic progressions are quite simple, built upon perfect cadences in E flat (B flat⁷ – E flat).

124 – 127 The melody line suddenly becomes much closer, and the first half of the thematic motif is explored. Haydn plays about with the scalar implications of the melody, modulating into G minor, A flat major, F major and finally culminating in a diminished chord from A. The sudden ‘closeness’ of the melody line and the transition from a predominantly arpeggio to a predominantly scale motif creates a mysterious and secretive air about this part, that contributes to the buildup of tension, heightened by the use of the diminished chord in bar 127.

- 128 – 131 The tension described above is heightened by the cello resuming a pedal point in B flat, but in the form of repeated quavers. This gives the music energy and ‘drive’, more so as a result of the timbral power of the cello. Also, the viola note of a G flat in bar 129 creates an interval of a diminished fifth between the viola and cello parts, creating a harmonic dissonance. There is a hint of a remote E flat minor in the interval formed between the second violin and viola, adding further tension. This resolves to a B flat chord in bar 130, but once again, dissolves into a dissonance in bar 131, identical to bar 129. The first violin continues melodic staccato passagework over this dark backdrop until...
- 132 – 140 ...An, abrupt, rather short and business-like resolution occurs on B flat Major, but leaves behind a sense of incompleteness. Haydn plays with anticipation through out this quartet, with many false or short resolutions leading to a perpetual feeling of anticipation. There is yet another dissonance established in these bars. The A natural, juxtaposed with the E flat and B flat create diminished intervals, a very poignant dissonance. It resolves each time to a B flat chord. The dissonance is repeated, with the same diminished intervals, a tone lower commencing on G in bar 136. There is a piquant resolution of the dissonance in the first and second violin parts, in a long upward appoggiatura in bar 139. The motif used in this section are derived from the first three notes of the main motif and used as a disembodied motivic cell. This is a technique of motif fragmentation and development. The resolution itself is on a B flat⁷ chord, and has a sense of incompleteness built into it. The fermata on the rest in bar 140 creates a sense of anticipation to be resolved once again by the appearance of the E flat theme. Each of the development sections end in this way, ending on a B flat⁷ chord which is resolved by the appearance of the theme in E flat major. Haydn appears to be playing about with the idea of perfect cadences, and his harmonic scheme is admirably suited to a rondo, making each appearance of the theme in E flat a harmonic necessity due to the ‘incomplete’ harmony with which each development section ends. Each section of development ends with a B flat or B flat 7 harmony, to be resolved as a perfect cadence with the appearance of the E flat thematic motif.
- 141 – 147 An exact restatement of the thematic material from bars 1-8
- 148 – 152 The time signature suddenly changes to 2/4, after the manner of a hemiola, which has the effect of ‘slowing’ the phrasing automatically. The section is also marked “adagio”, which reduces actual physical tempo as well. The result is a section that is much ‘slower’ in every way than the section preceding it. Haydn’s idiomatic writing and style

of 'surprises' well encompassed here. The progressions are cadential, and the part writing stately and homophonic. This section almost seems to look back to the days of baroque writing, in which hemiole were an often used devices near the ending of a piece to 'slow' things down and create a stately ending. This sudden section of adagio seems a little incongruous and out-of-place, introduced as it is here without a shadow of preparation. (Interestingly enough, the appoggiatura in the theme is preserved in this section as well.) The introduction of a short section that is extremely slow at this point suggests interesting implications. The movement is entitled 'The Joke' and what is humor, but that which is caused by a juxtaposition of the incongruous with the utterly commonplace? The sudden 'heaviness' or somberness introduced seems to stand out sharply against the previous level of light-heartedness and gaiety. This very contrast or juxtaposition leads to the feeling of the occurrence of a joke, reaffirmed by appearance of the theme in the next bars. The harmonic progressions are B flat⁷, E flat.

- 153 -155 The first thematic motif is fragmented, i.e, split into its four component two-bar phrases, the first of which is heard, after which there is a general pause (G.P), lasting one bar. This pause 'thwarts' the audience expectation of a thematic repetition. The motif seems to be left incomplete and 'hanging', until...
- 156 – 159 The second quarter of the theme is repeated, once again followed by a pause which leaves the audience expectant.
- 160 – 164 The third quarter of the theme, followed by a pause.
- 165 – 169 The final quarter of the theme, slightly altered and the acciaccatura being removed to provide a definitive perfect cadence, reminiscent of the ending of a piece. This is followed by a long pause, of three bars. The audience is lulled into believing the composition is over and finished with...
- 170 – end Until a pianissimo appearance of the first quarter of the theme makes a surprising, utterly unexpected climax. (This would have probably drawn a chortle from the Esterházy palace audience...!). This last appearance of the theme constitutes the musical equivalent of a punch line. The fragmented ending with so many built in 'false' endings once again represents the quintessence of a joke, the juxtaposition of the incongruous with the congruous, the collision of the utterly unexpected with convention.