

# MUSICMAP NOTES

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## Mozart's Clarinet Quintet in A Major, K. 581 – 1789

“Without a doubt, Mozart’s favorite woodwind was the clarinet, which he almost single-handedly elevated from a position of orchestral obscurity to the status of a soloist. His two major works for the clarinet – a concerto and a quintet, are still among the best ever written for the instrument. ...together the concerto and the quintet represent a substantial part of the modern clarinetist's working capital. [In the quintet,] the clarinet and four strings blend with such elegance that they sound not only with close-knit intimacy but also with orchestral vigor. This eloquence, coupled with a radiant melody, makes the quintet, in the judgment of many, the master's finest woodwind chamber work.” (Time-Life Mozart)

“Mozart wrote his clarinet quintet for Anton Stadler, friend, fellow Mason, and extremely gifted principal clarinetist of the court orchestra in Vienna, giving it the subtitle, ‘Stadler’s Quintet.’ From all accounts, though, Stadler was a scoundrel who lived like a parasite in the Mozart home, never repaid the money he borrowed from his host and even stole and sold some of the composer’s pawn tickets! But apparently a combination of Mozart’s refusal to acknowledge Stadler’s failings, his admiration for him as a musician, and his great love for the clarinet was enough to inspire this superb chamber work. Mozart finished the manuscript on September 29, 1789, and gave the first performance, along with Stadler and others, at the Imperial and Royal Court Theater in Vienna on December 22, 1789.” (Melvin Berger)

Contemporary audiences were reportedly amazed by Stadler’s ability to imitate the sound of the human voice with its every nuance on the clarinet.

“Perhaps no piece of chamber music sets so autumnal a mood as Mozart’s Clarinet Quintet - at least none before Brahms. Nostalgic longing came naturally to Mozart’s musical expression, but he rarely vented it so freely, and at such uninterrupted length, as he did in this quintet, a major-key work with a minor-key aftertaste. In fact, Mozart wrote the piece in autumn...” “...both the Quintet and the Concerto [were written] for a basset clarinet, which is essentially a standard instrument with an extended bass register. It is on such an instrument that Stadler probably played when the work was unveiled... In the Clarinet Quintet we hear Mozart at his most personal, allowing music to stream from his soul without answering to the terms of a commission or the exigencies of a public. It was written from an overflowing heart and offered as a gift. Mozart indulges himself with spacious pacing and luscious timbre.” (James M. Keller)

“The quintet seems immediately to evoke the same limpid and lyrical mood as Mozart’s other late works in A major, such as the piano concerto, K. 488, and the clarinet concerto, K. 622.” (Roger Hellyer)

“The Quintet is the only wind-and-string piece with four movements, no doubt because Mozart could deploy his most versatile of wind instruments in equal counterpoint with the strings, contrast the sonorities of its registers, and use it for discreet accompaniment as well as passage-work and cantilena.” (Julian Rushton)

“...the clarinet is not a soloist in the concertante sense of the word, but it is integrated into the musical texture in the most perfect fusion with the string quartet. There is not a hint of duality, but rather a complete osmosis. Perhaps it is this that invests the work with such a poetic and limpid quality.” (J.V. Hocquard)

Of all Mozart's diverse pieces of chamber music featuring wind instruments, this is the only one to be cast in four movements.

### **Movement I – Sonata form, Allegro, Common-time, A major**

“The themes of the luxurious first movement tend toward the wistful – or even the mournful – and the slow harmonic rhythm holds the vigor of the tempo marking (*Allegro*) in check. The clarinet's warm sonority goes hand in hand with the autumnal spirit, the more so since Mozart spends a great deal of time emphasizing the instrument's rich lower range [‘chalumeau’].” (Keller)

#### *Exposition:*

Main theme I: 8 bars – 6(4+2)+2. Though seemingly a very regular theme, 8 bars with counter-statement, this is actually a wonderfully subtle and idiosyncratic design with the effect of immediately contrasting the corporate identity of the strings with the clarinet as a distinctive solo protagonist. As a unified choir, the strings sing a serene, chorale-style melody of 6 bars that gently flows from half-notes to quarter-notes combined with half-notes, while describing a descent that spans the distance of a 10<sup>th</sup>. The first 4 bars make a very normal antecedent, but the following 2 bars appear to bring the melody to a close sooner than expected, offering a mildly contrasting, more active contour. Also, the last bar changes the texture to a throbbing accompaniment in the lower strings, while the first violin briefly takes on a more soloistic character and signs off with the formal gesture of a concluding trill. At this point, the clarinet completes the 8 bars with a lithe and athletic 2-bar flourish, founded on the tonic chord and well-calculated to exploit the unique timbre of the instrument. Thus, the main theme mostly belongs to the strings, but the clarinet has briefly announced itself as an unmistakable presence. Because the concluding figure will be so important over the progress of the movement, let us look at it a little more closely and break it down into 2 constituent motives: Bar 1 is motive ‘X,’ an 8<sup>th</sup>-note “rocket” (rising arpeggio). Bar 2 switches direction with motive ‘Y,’ a gracefully cascading pattern of 16<sup>th</sup> notes arranged in 4-note legato groupings. It should be noted that ‘Y’ actually continues into the next bar with a final quarter-note that neatly overlaps with the start of the... Counter-statement – This seems to faithfully repeat the theme, but there are some subtle-but-telling alterations. The melody changes slightly in bar 3, while below the inner voices provide mildly intensified harmonies. Also, the clarinet’s wide-ranging response starts a 4<sup>th</sup> higher, and its subsequent shape is significantly reworked, though coming to rest as before on the tonic A.

This time, the theme is immediately extended as the two violins repeat the clarinet's phrase while harmonizing it in 3<sup>rd</sup>s. In this case, the shape of motive 'Y' is smoothed out.

Main theme II/Bridge: At this point, the clarinet truly takes the spotlight with a gorgeous new 8-bar melody of romantic sensuality featuring Mozart's distinctive, expressive chromaticism.

Though this theme, based mostly on running 8<sup>th</sup> notes, sounds like a marked departure, careful listeners will detect the half-note opening of Main Theme I in the gentle string accompaniment.

Quasi-counter-statement – The cello is given its first solo turn as it renders the first 5 bars transposed to the dominant and in a lower octave. Before it can complete the melody, the 1<sup>st</sup> violin takes over with a free extension that sequences and metrically displaces the cello's last figure over the same style of throbbing string accompaniment that appeared briefly in Main Theme I. By now there is no question that we are into bridge material. After this continues for 6 bars, the clarinet, which had been silent since the cello's solo, reenters to initiate the final portion of the bridge. This consists of a dialogue based on the first bar of Main Theme II from the clarinet, answered by a complimentary figure for 1<sup>st</sup> violin. After this exchange is repeated, a virtuoso 16<sup>th</sup>-note clarinet cadenza leads to a *tutti* dominant 7<sup>th</sup> chord and a brief pause to clearly set off the arrival of the...

Subordinate theme: ...in the dominant E major. Because the clarinet's last loud note is an unresolved pitch, the shift in mood to a soft melody for 1<sup>st</sup> violin is particularly striking. "This is a radiant, both passionate and reserved theme which is prettily highlighted by cello pizzicati."

(Hocquard) Statement – 8 bars (4+4), mildly contrasting period. For the first time the 1<sup>st</sup> violin enjoys the limelight for an extended duration, singing over a subdued string accompaniment of sustained harmonies and the aforementioned, gently rhythmic cello pizzicati. The antecedent is largely spun from legato 8<sup>th</sup> notes, as was much of the immediately preceding thematic material.

Counter-statement – This is enhanced by a marvelous transformation as our individualistic clarinet, silent since the bridge, reenters and presents the theme reshaped and in minor. A new syncopated rhythm in the accompaniment of the three upper strings contributes much to the effect. Again we have 8 bars, and in the consequent the normal major mode is restored.

However, instead of cadencing at the end, the music continues with another 8 bars of free extension, the clarinet still in the lead. The first part of this has a searching quality, but then the instrument gains confidence and finishes with a cadenza-like virtuoso turn that briefly highlights its 'chalumeau' register.

Closing material: Part I – Mozart offers us one more richly melodic theme, this time based on even antiphonal exchanges of the melody between the strings in harmony and the clarinet over light string accompaniment. 10 bars – 4(2+2)+6(2+4). This appears to be a balanced parallel period, but then the clarinet's last contribution is expanded by an extra 2 bars. Each time, the strings intone a 2-bar phrase that starts with a distinctive long-note rhythm (2 quarters and a dotted-quarter) with the first two pitches repeated, followed by an accelerating figure. The clarinet's response is a contrasting idea, based on brief stepwise 8<sup>th</sup>-note ascents.

Part II – The beginning of this quite magically overlaps the clarinet's ending of the previous theme in a manner that recalls the elision of the last note of motive 'Y' with the start of the main theme counter-statement. In 5 bars, we are given a concise reminder of the main theme's Part I, providing an effective anticipation of the coming exposition repeat. Beginning ethereally with just the violins, but joined right after by the lower voices in imitation, the strings remind us of the opening of their chorale-style melody, of course transposed here to E major. Still, before they

can get very far, the clarinet smoothly slips in and soon effortlessly takes the lead with one of its animated flourishes (though not incorporating ‘X’ or ‘Y’), this time progressing to a *f tutti* closed cadence. With deft subtlety, Mozart has taken the strongly contrasting elements of the original theme and combined them in sort of an “executive summary.”

*Development:*

“In the development section, each string instrument plays the clarinet's opening phrase. After a while the clarinet joins in, going in broken chords from its lowest to highest notes. While the treatment may seem mechanical to some, there is no denying the amazing sonorities Mozart achieves.” (Berger)

“The development is entirely constructed on successions of chords in arpeggio and on animated harmonic progressions leading from C major to its opposite pole, F-sharp major.” (Hocquard)

Part I: A very brief intro. After the strings establish a harmony with a staccato quarter-note pulse, the clarinet enters with a version of motive ‘X.’

Part II: For a development section, this is a very stable presentation of the entire main theme (not including counter-statement). The significance of this passage is the rescoring and the transposition to a distant key (C major, the major mediant). For the first time, the clarinet sings the opening, hymn-like melody, supported by the strings in somewhat adjusted harmony parts. Then, with impeccable logic, the 1<sup>st</sup> violin counters with the arpeggio flourish that originally served to introduce and differentiate the clarinet.

Part III: A brief *fugato* extension of the previous 2 bars, scored for strings alone.

Part IV: The clarinet now reenters for the longest section of the development, material well-described in the Berger quote above. While the clarinet marches up and down its even arpeggios (‘X’ and ‘X’ inverted), the strings provide a combination of sustained harmonies and repetitions of motive ‘Y’.

Part V: Retransition. This starts with a break for the clarinet as the strings venture on a novel contrapuntal treatment of the entire arpeggio flourish, this time presenting it in stretto entries. Soon the clarinet rejoins, but after playing only ‘X,’ the strings switch to a new texture of shifting harmonies, with a staccato 8<sup>th</sup>-note pulse that recalls the very beginning of the development. A dominant pedal helps to guide us back to A major for the start of the...

*Recapitulation:*

Main theme I: Taking its cue from Part II of the development, the return of this theme is scored for clarinet lead, followed by a string presentation of the 2-bar flourish. Thus, the pattern that originally separated and offset the clarinet is now overturned by incorporating the wind instrument as the top line of a five-voice choir. Mozart adds more interest to the return of the chorale-style melody by substantially reshaping the strings’ harmony parts and also by adding a brief and playful triplet-based ornament to the clarinet’s lead. The first violin then plays the flashy arpeggio, newly enhanced by a cello imitation of ‘X.’ But the material is now abbreviated considerably by skipping the counter-statement and even eliminating the *f* extension of the

flourish that led to Main Theme II. Because of this, the flourish itself has been presented *f* in compensation.

Main theme II/Bridge: After all the tweaking of Main Theme I, a sense of continuity is now achieved by starting this as a literal repeat of its original presentation. Still, after 4 bars, the consequent is decorated by rewriting it as a long, graceful sweep of legato 16<sup>th</sup>s. Before the end, the harmony makes a subtle shift that will lead the cello's quasi-counter-statement to be heard in the sub-dominant this time. Aside from the actual keys, the remainder of the bridge follows the original pattern for the most part, but the series of clarinet and 1<sup>st</sup> violin exchanges is considerably telescoped. Also, "Virtuosic clarinet passage brings Bridge to a close on an explosive low 'note'." (Robert Greenberg)

Sub-theme: This is all very regular through the statement, but then Mozart significantly rewrites the counter-statement. The extension is not only recast and slightly shortened, but there is now a striking deceptive cadence that is followed by a gentle conclusion in marked contrast to the previous flashy ending.

Closing material/Coda: Rather than giving us a regular presentation of the closing material and then concluding with a new separate coda, Mozart instead creates a coda here by inserting a major expansion into the Part I material.

Part I – The first 4 bars of this are faithful to the original antiphonal theme, but from then on it smoothly shifts into the new coda material. This starts quite subtly with the clarinet added for the first time to the strings' 2-bar opening, but then the familiar legato 8<sup>th</sup> notes of the clarinet's response are played instead by the first violin, leading to a freer and freer rhapsodic treatment of this simple gesture. After building to a moment of poignant grandeur, we arrive at a new section that has the effect of an 8-bar cadenza. This first recalls the clarinet treatment of 'X' and 'X'-inverted from Part IV of the development and then transitions to an exciting flurry of rising 16<sup>th</sup>-note runs. The clarinet brings all of this to a fine conclusion with some nimble triplets and the conventional gesture of a "sign-off" trill.

Part II – After all of this animation, Mozart now opts for elegant understatement by ending the movement with a simple reversion to Part II of his original closing material, only subtly modified and of course transposed to the tonic key.

### **Movement II – Song & Trio design, Larghetto (a little less than Largo, which denotes a slow, broad tempo), 3/4, D major (the expected sub-dominant)**

"Having set the mood with an *Allegro* that is hardly an *Allegro*, Mozart turns to the profound soulfulness of the *Larghetto* in which the clarinet offers a hushed song supported...with great harmonic subtlety... Other Mozart slow movements are introspective, but few make their appearance after an opening movement as relaxed as that of the Clarinet Quintet. Together, the two movements achieve an expanse of rarest poignancy from the composer who would survive only another two years." (Keller)

Unlike the Quintet's other three movements, this one is set off by the way the clarinet predominates, almost in the manner of a concerto soloist.

*Principal song:*

Part I: The clarinet sings an extraordinary 20-bar melody that, for all its sublime beauty, is not easily retained in memory on account of its irregular phrase structure and avoidance of repetition. This is not a tune generated from obvious recurring motives, but instead from the constant introduction of unpredictable and novel thematic material. What lends much-needed stability to this daring design is the clarinet's lead throughout in the guise of an idealized, sublimated opera singer and a very consistent rocking 8<sup>th</sup>-note accompaniment in muted strings, providing a buoyant flow of harmonies over which the soloist can effortlessly float. During periodic quarter-note breaths that punctuate the noble procession of ever-changing phrases, this lovely string sonority is briefly foregrounded. Also, the melody derives further coherence from a governing principle of progressive expansion and intensification. At this leisurely tempo, the spinning out of this sprawling theme takes over a minute and a half.

Phrase *a* is 4 bars (2+2), including the first quarter-note breath. Phrase *b* is 5 bars (2+3) and ends with another breath. Here the first 2 bars seem like they are setting up a balancing phrase to *a*, but then the continuation effortlessly dilates to include an extra bar as our singer conveys the impression of having all the time in the world. Phrase *c*, like *a*, is 4 bars again, but this time, after 2 bars, when the pattern established so far would lead us to expect a slight sense of a break, instead we reach a notable climax featuring a leap to the highest pitch so far (high A, the dominant). Also, this phrase is distinguished by faster note-values than before, incorporating two runs of legato 16<sup>th</sup>s. A final breath precedes phrase *d*, at over 6 bars the longest utterance of all, and an effective culmination of the entire theme. Here we encounter the most striking gestures yet, specifically an affecting deceptive cadence, followed by an abrupt plunge into 'chalumeau' register, then countered by a 2-octave upward leap that sets up the more calming final strains. Part of the impact of this deceptive cadence is that it occurs at the point where we might anticipate a 4-bar phrase to draw to a close, and thus this extra-long phrase is lengthened by means of surprise and drama rather than the earlier effect of languid expansion.

Part II: This is lighter, livelier and more accessible in style, and cast as a duet for 1<sup>st</sup> violin (soprano) and clarinet (alto). It is also just half as long as the previous theme. For 4 bars the 1<sup>st</sup> violin and clarinet trade contrasting 1-bar phrases, though each is actually longer to make a slight overlap. The downward motion of the violin's opening salvo, with an operatic long note followed by legato 16<sup>th</sup>s, is suavely countered by an even faster clarinet rise in dotted rhythm, ornamented with turns. After the violin sequences its bit up a step, the clarinet's ascending line is then smoothed out to a fluid 32<sup>nd</sup>-note run (motive 'Z'). The fresh impression created by Part II is enhanced by a new accompaniment effect in the lower strings...the rhythm is still based on 8<sup>th</sup> notes, but here we get pulsating, repeated-note chords. Following a typical duet trajectory, now it is time for both singers to blend their voices in harmony for a 3-bar consequent, a "passage where viola and cello fall silent and the second violin takes the bass." (Julian Rushton) Any sense that this consequent is a bit too short is overridden by the following extension in the form of a poetic 3-bar codetta for strings alone. While the clarinet enjoys a much-needed rest, the 1<sup>st</sup> violin embarks on a series of poignant 3-note sighs that then extend into a freer flow of 16<sup>th</sup>s.

*Trio:*

As the focus of contrast for this entire movement is fixed on Parts I & II of the principal song, we are not presented with yet more fresh material here. Instead, the trio is devoted to a delicate development of the violin & clarinet's duet theme.

Part I: This is a dreamy repetition of the opening 4 bars of the duet, but now with the clarinet and 1<sup>st</sup> violin swapping their original material. The key is still D major, but more richly harmonized, and soon the tonality starts to drift as the theme progresses and the melodic material is treated with considerable freedom. The 1<sup>st</sup> violin only uses the motive 'Z' version of the rising line, and this motive will then continue to form the basis of...

Part II: This sounds even more like something from a development section, as the 1<sup>st</sup> violin repeats its ascending 32<sup>nd</sup>-note line over and over while the clarinet muses through a series of long notes and we float smoothly from key to key. Completing the aural picture, the cello counts out a gentle 8<sup>th</sup>-note pulse and the middle strings harmonize with the clarinet in rhythmically staggered long notes of their own.

Part III: "...a short and aching beautiful cadence theme." (Greenberg) Now, from the mood of free fantasy, a new, more fully formed melody emerges with an elegantly ornamented 3-bar violin antecedent that is answered by a parallel clarinet consequent. However, after 2 bars the clarinet turns this into a rhapsodic passage that extends an extra bar and closes with a lengthy trill.

Part IV: (Retransition.) To conclude his trio, Mozart revisits the material that formed the basis of its Part II, but now the violins have the long notes while the clarinet reclaims ownership of motive 'Z'. As before, this passage lasts 4 bars, except that this time the clarinet continues, mostly *a cappella*, another 2 bars with a cadenza-like setup to the ensuing...

*Principal song return:*

Surprisingly, this is virtually a literal repeat of both Parts I & II (except the codetta). Evidently Mozart feels the glories and challenges of this material warrant simple repetition without rescoring or busy new embellishment.

Part II codetta: In preparation for the upcoming coda, some gentle changes are introduced here, primarily consisting of recasting the 1<sup>st</sup> violin's lead into triplet rhythm.

*Coda:*

Though the clarinet re-enters now, the primary focus is on an elaboration of the newly-introduced triplets by the strings as we pass through a mysterious succession of concluding harmonies. The clarinet merely lends its distinctive tone color to a line that primarily counts out the 3/4 meter in harmonic support. After continuing for 3 bars in the 1<sup>st</sup> violin, the triplets drop down to the viola and then most affectingly to the cello for a rich closing touch.

**Movement III – Menuetto, 3/4, A major.**

An unusual feature here is the presence of two contrasting trios, giving this movement an overall scheme of ABACA. Those primarily familiar with Mozart's more formal works may find this especially surprising, but it is in fact quite commonly encountered in the minuets of the

composer's serenades and divertimentos. Thus, this seems to suggest some spiritual connection between this quintet and those lighter genres.

*Minuet:*

Like the ensuing trios, this is laid out in the expected rounded binary form (with repeats). Here, however, Mozart keeps things relatively brief, presumably because we will hear it three times rather than just twice.

Part I (*a*): 8 bars – 4(2+2)+4. A mildly contrasting balanced period, scored as a 5-voice choir with marvelous part-writing and clarinet lead on top. The use of this texture seems to evoke the main theme of the first movement. The antecedent is marked by the dynamic contrast of its *f* start and subsequent drop to *p* after 2 bars. The melody of these first 4 bars is wonderfully smooth, with its graceful stepwise motion. The *p* part of this constitutes a motive that will reveal its importance soon. The 4-bar consequent returns to *f* and has a less-conjunct line. In the penultimate bar, the 1<sup>st</sup> violin plays an 8<sup>th</sup>-note figure that sounds like a slowed-down trill; this simple idea will also be developed further.

Part II: Contrasting *b* – This feels considerably more expansive, and at 16 bars is in fact twice the length of Part I. We are treated to a subtle development of material from phrase *a*, as shifting instrumental combinations are exploited. At first, the strings combine the brief motive from *a*'s antecedent with the slowed trill of its consequent. As the motive is then dropped, the trill in the 1<sup>st</sup> violin assumes a more extended and melodically-memorable shape. This is then repeated by the clarinet, which has been silent until this point in Part II. To round off phrase *b*, the opening combination of antecedent motive with trill returns, but now rescored to emphasize low strings. This last part of *b* has been modulating to return us to the tonic, and a final 8<sup>th</sup>-note oscillation from the clarinet is used to herald...

*a'* – In this case, this might really be designated as simply *a*, as it is a literal repeat of the entire 8-bar phrase.

*Trio I:* A minor (parallel minor).

Scored for strings only, this provides the clarinet with its longest respite by far in the entire Quintet. The shift to the minor mode is emphasized by beautifully scored, highly expressive writing for our quartet of strings.

Part I (*c*): A full 16 bars long, this is double the length of the minuet's equivalent Part I. Though the scoring might suggest a further division into 8+8, the actual impression is of an impetuous, ever-extending unbroken phrase. While the 1<sup>st</sup> violin spins out its melancholy lead, the other strings exchange staggered 2-note sighing figures that provide syncopation and a sense of restless agitation.

Part II: Contrasting *d* – At 8 bars, this preserves the texture and much of the basic material of Part I and thus provides only relatively mild contrast. Unlike the minuet, here the contrasting phrase is the short one.

*c'* – While still 16 bars and largely faithful to the original *c*, the effect is now considerably enriched by a new viola part that canonically imitates the 1<sup>st</sup> violin and then becomes more freely



animated. Note that this trio turns out to be considerably longer than the minuet and fittingly so, since it isn't repeated.

*Minuet:* Da capo (sans repeats).

*Trio II:* A major (thus no key contrast from the minuet).

Another long trio in comparison to the short minuet. After sitting out Trio I, the clarinet now especially gets a chance to shine with an engagingly tuneful solo turn suggestive of a *Ländler*, while the strings are mostly relegated to subordinate, accompanimental mode.

Part I (*e*): The clarinet launches its engagingly folksy dance tune over simple 'oom-pah-pah' string chords. 12 bars in length, this sounds at first like it will be a parallel 8-bar (4+4) period. However, after 2 bars the clarinet's consequent is briefly hijacked by the 1<sup>st</sup> violin, which extends it by simple repetition. But within moments, the clarinet reasserts itself with a showier, more wide-ranging new idea consisting of a downward triplet leading to an 8<sup>th</sup>-note arpeggio and free concluding run.

Part II: Contrasting *f* – This is quite freely developmental and sprawls a full 23 bars. For 4 bars, the strings explore phrase-*e* material over a pizzicato base, while the clarinet is silent. The basic pattern is then repeated, but with the clarinet supplying a new descant and now touching on the minor mode. After this the clarinet is back in the lead with its own version of the *e*-motive, which it repeats and then freely extends. But soon we lose the clarinet as the strings continue this extension. The last 8 bars, still strings alone, provide a transition to *e'* featuring some marvelously piquant dischords and an effective cello rise crafted from the *e*-motive. A dominant 7<sup>th</sup> chord and expectant pause lead to the welcome arrival of...

*e'* – This is a literal repeat up to the point where the 1<sup>st</sup> violin interrupts, but now it does so with a reshaped line. The following clarinet workout is considerably extended by repetitions and string interruptions, thus expanding all of *e'* to a full 16 bars.

It is interesting to compare this trio II with the trio of the minuet from Mozart's E-flat Symphony (No. 39, K. 543), composed the previous year. With their rustic moods, solo clarinets, and 'oom-pah-pah' accompaniments, they seem to share a close affinity.

*Minuet:* Da capo.

#### **Movement IV – Theme & 5 Variations with Coda, Allegretto, Cut-time (written the same as 4/4, but counted in 2, and often used for marches), A major.**

“Mozart's first thoughts on a Finale petered out after 89 measures, and he replaced them with this set of...variations.” (Hellyer)

“The musical esthetics of Mozart's time exerted pressure for a happy ending, and Mozart complies... The movement explores the clarinet's technical capabilities and the sonic possibilities of combining it in different ways with the string quartet. All the same, happiness seems to be an interloper, and Mozart allows the viola to inject ominous appoggiaturas in the

minor-key third variation, and the clarinet and violin to exchange final nostalgic memories in the fifth, before closing with polite assurance that the clouds are sure to pass.” (Keller)

As Keller suggests, the varied role of the clarinet here seems to sum up the discourse of the entire quintet as it puts the wind instrument through every gradation on the spectrum...from separate, flamboyant individual to understated team player.

*Theme:*

“A delightful bit of insolence seeps into the folklike theme...which is stated by the strings with afterthoughts from the clarinet.” (Berger) “...an ingenuous childlike theme...” (Herrman Abert) “Direct, elegant Viennese-style tune...” (Greenberg) Rounded binary form with literal repeats – at 8 bars long, both parts are equal in length. A jaunty march tune, *p* throughout, and scored to deemphasize the clarinet.

Part I (*a*): This is an 8-bar (4+4) parallel period dominated by catchy rhythmic motives. *a* contrasts staccato repeated notes with legato dotted rhythms. Both the antecedent and the consequent have a 2+2 arrangement that is emphasized by contrasting scoring. The opening contains a clear echo of the start of Movement I in that it consists of the same descent of a minor third from E to C-sharp, only this time broken up into repeated quarter notes. The first 2 bars present both violins harmonizing alone, while the second 2 bars provide a *tutti* response. Thus, we only hear the clarinet during the *tutti* parts, and its distinctive timbre, though noticeable, is still generally incorporated into the overall group sound. However, the end of both the antecedent and its parallel consequent features a trilling figure shared by several instruments, and the sound of this briefly draws greater attention to the clarinet.

Part II: Contrasting *b* phrase, 4 bars (also 2+2). This is strongly contrasting indeed, with its more expansively lyrical material and complete exclusion of the clarinet. The first violin offers a full-throated melody that is immediately imitated by the viola. The next 2 bars start by repeating this pattern, but this time the focus remains on the violin and its new completion of the line, with no competing imitation. All through *b*, the second violin enhances the almost operatic effect by providing a new rhythmic vocal-style accompaniment.

*a'* – Because both halves of the original *a* were so similar, only 4 bars are needed here to provide a satisfying sense of return and conclusion. What we hear is the consequent of *a*, but with somewhat enhanced scoring during the first 2 bars. Now instead of the 2 violins launching the phrase, we instead get 1<sup>st</sup> violin and viola, and then a brief new imitation from the 2<sup>nd</sup> violin.

Over the course of the following variations, Mozart establishes a loose alternation between decorative renderings that preserve the original melody and treatments that almost completely obscure it. Thus, variations 1, 4 & the coda are decorative, while variations 2, 3 & 5 are disguised.

*Variation 1:*

“...one of Mozart’s most ingenious pieces of clarinet writing (*cantabile*, but with skips to the bottom).” (Rushton) Still *p* throughout. By keeping the clarinet so firmly in check during the presentation of the theme, Mozart makes its virtuosic solo turn here all the more impressive.

Part I: As the strings play a very recognizable repeat of the original theme (though with somewhat adjusted scoring), the clarinet weaves a lithe and fanciful counter-melody, heavy on 8<sup>th</sup> notes, that exploits the breadth of its range and inevitably captures the majority of our attention. One string detail to listen for, however, is the way the march tune shifts this time to lower voices for the consequent.

Part II: Here the clarinet gives its own take on the vocal character of the contrasting phrase. *a'* is generally faithful to the pattern established in Part I.

*Variation 2:*

Now that it has had its star turn, the clarinet is once again relegated to a modest supporting part during this vibrant rendition. Here the solo protagonist is the 1<sup>st</sup> violin, singing a graceful and tuneful transformation of the original march. This first of the disguised variations still makes much use of the theme's dotted rhythm motive, which now is exuberantly extended. Adding considerably to the fresh effect is a steady new triplet pulse in the second violin and viola. Also for the first time, Mozart employs dynamic markings with many specific contrasts of *f* and *p*.

Part I: After an antecedent limited to strings alone, the clarinet enters with a harmony part for the consequent starting with subtle effectiveness on a long, sustained pitch.

Part II: Phrase *b* is again strings alone, and *a'* is nearly identical to the consequent from Part I.

*Variation 3:*

Change in mode to A minor (parallel minor). The second variation in a row to keep the clarinet in check with only occasional harmony lines. This time the featured instrument is the viola, whose darker, richer tone is well-suited to the nervous, poignant mood projected here. As it rhythmically transforms the theme into an anxious line featuring grace notes and occasional syncopations, the other strings harmonize with longer notes or play their own busy, rhythmic accompaniment.

Part I: As with the previous variation, the clarinet only enters during the consequent, but this time its inner voice is pitched low in its range and contributes to a subtle new deepening of the sound picture.

Part II: Phrase *b* is for strings alone and finds the viola briefly yielding preeminence to the 1<sup>st</sup> violin. Particularly effective here are the second halves of the violin's 2 short sub-phrases, where the instrument is briefly heard *a cappella*, playing slippery chromatic descents. As we would expect from the pattern so far, the *a'* returns to the original Part I consequent.

*Variation 4:*

The effect here is of an ecstatic celebration of the return to A major. The sense of return is further enhanced by the reintroduction of the original melody, this time against an elaborate flow of 16<sup>th</sup>-note counterpoint. In a way, this seems like a reworking of Variation 1, but with still more bustle and virtuosity. Once again, the march tune is heard as in the background, though here scored with new imitations, while our attention is riveted on a dazzling counter-melody. In

addition to the faster note values, a significant change is the trading off of the ornamentation between the clarinet and 1<sup>st</sup> violin.

Part I: The clarinet starts the impressive barrage of 16<sup>th</sup> notes through the antecedent and is then silent while the 1<sup>st</sup> violin takes over for the consequent.

Part II: For contrasting *b*, the violin continues the 16<sup>th</sup>-note filigree as the clarinet gives a streamlined version of its treatment of the *b*-phrase from Variation 1, characterized here by wider opening leaps. Unusually, *a'* in this case is based on the antecedent of *a* more than the consequent, and thus the clarinet appears to get the last word.

#### *Variation 5:*

Introduction: Before the final variation gets underway, there is a surprising 4-bar transition consisting of expectant chords and ending with an open cadence and fermata. The impression here is one of deceleration, and it provides an effective setup to the adagio tempo now embarked upon.

The theme is here transformed into a noble and refined duet for 1<sup>st</sup> violin and clarinet.

Part I: The 4-bar antecedent consists of strings alone, with the 1<sup>st</sup> violin singing a chastely ornamented melody over spare accompaniment. The clarinet then assumes the lead for the consequent, shifting to a markedly contrasting and more elaborate strain, while a new sense of animation is provided by throbbing strings.

Part II: The clarinet maintains the lead through the *b*-phrase, and this is more recognizably derived from the theme itself...not surprising given the lyrical character of the original *b*. The *a'* neatly rounds things off with a return to violin lead and a climactic new take on the material that seems to draw on both halves of the original *a*.

Transition: The slow tempo continues for another 5 bars of exquisite free extension that casts a final lyrical and harmonic spell before ending unresolved on a fermata that seems to invite a brief improvised cadenza from the clarinet.

With its introduction and concluding extension, this variation shows a freedom that seems to start the process of liberation from rigid phrase structure that we anticipate in the ensuing coda. It is not unusual to have a variation in slow tempo near the end of a theme & variations set, but the length and subtlety here add a substantial island (well over a third of the movement) of seriousness, even profundity, to this finale. One last fermata on a rest creates an expectant pause and perfect springboard for the following...

*Coda:* Allegro (thus faster than original Allegretto).

“Is there a better coda anywhere in the entire classical repertoire than here...? No, there is not. Like smiling, bowing actors taking their curtain calls, the instruments enter...one at a time to the enthusiastic cries of ‘bravo!’ and ‘magnifico!’ from the audience.” (Greenberg) This brief finale to the finale serves a dual role as one last, accelerated reprise of the original theme and also a free fantasy variation on it without concern for strict phrase structure or literal repeats. Still, it progresses in regular 8-bar phrases that break down to 4+4.

Phrase 1 is a clever contrapuntal rendering of *a* with the violins preserving the familiar tune as the other voices either imitate it or introduce new 8<sup>th</sup>-note countermelodies. Phrase 2 launches a freer evolution of the *a* material with a pattern of 4 bars for violins, answered by a contrasting 4-bar clarinet lead. The next 8 bars form a parallel consequent to this that starts out as a literal repeat. Then comes the final wrap-up of the coda in the form of an 8-bar codetta tune based on *a*'s motives, but still sounding engagingly new. There is a 4-bar clarinet antecedent and a parallel violin consequent, yet all voices are employed in lovely polyphonic scoring throughout. This codetta is then extended an extra 4 bars with witty soft-loud antiphonal exchanges that set off the clarinet and the 1<sup>st</sup> violin against the *tutti* ensemble.