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# Texture as a Sign in Classic and Early Romantic Music

BY JANET M. LEVY

OF ALL THE VARIABLES of a composition, texture is at once the most surface and the most complex. Insofar as it is surface, it seems largely to have been taken for granted; its effects are, after all, so immediate and palpable.<sup>1</sup> And insofar as it is complex, its analysis has seen little refinement—surely nothing akin to the vocabulary and concepts we have for dealing with melody, harmony, and rhythm. Probably because texture is in many ways the most elusive parameter (once we get beyond customary classifications such as “homophony” or “polyphony”), its role in the delineation of structure and process in Classic and early Romantic music has gone relatively unexplored.<sup>2</sup> Yet, simply using ordinary modes of discourse, it is possible to explore certain aspects of texture’s role in the syntax of particular movements and, especially, its capacity to function as a sign—both for where we are in a piece and for what may or may not happen next.<sup>3</sup>

Texture is, of course, an auxiliary variable. Dependent on melody, harmony, and rhythm, and affected by orchestration, register, and so

<sup>1</sup> One indication of the degree to which texture is thought of as the most immediately accessible variable of music is the number of music appreciation texts that begin with aspects of texture and sound, for example, Jean S. Bamberger and Howard Brofsky, *The Art of Listening: Developing Musical Perception* (New York, 1975).

<sup>2</sup> There are some exceptions, such as Wallace Berry, *Structural Functions In Music* (Englewood Cliffs, 1976), Chap. 2; Frank E. Lorince, Jr., “A Study of Musical Texture in Relation to Sonata-Form As Evidenced in Selected Keyboard Sonatas from C.P.E. Bach Through Beethoven” (Ph.D. diss., Eastman School of Music, Univ. of Rochester, 1966); Orin Moe, “Texture in the String Quartets of Haydn to 1787” (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of California at Santa Barbara, 1970); and Leonard G. Ratner, “Texture, a Rhetorical Element in Beethoven’s Quartets,” *Israel Studies in Musicology*, II (1980), 51–62. The points of view represented all differ from one another and from those presented here.

<sup>3</sup> Monroe Beardsley gives a useful general definition of “sign”: “In its broadest sense, in which it can be applied to words, gestures, and semaphore signals as well as markers that direct our way to exits and rest rooms, the word ‘sign’ denotes any object or event that stands for something else, or leads us to take account in some way of something besides itself” (*Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism* [New York, 1958], p. 332).

on, it involves the total activity of the component parts in any segment of a composition. Although it cannot exist independently, texture can make the functional and sign relationships created by the other variables more evident and fully effective. The role of texture is in some ways analogous to that of tone of voice or inflection in ordinary speech—a role that is necessary but never sufficient for conveying meaning. Thus, although the discussion will often isolate the role of texture, texture, by definition, can never be the only agent that shapes function.<sup>4</sup> The focus of this essay will be on just a few types of conventionalized signs that cut across the repertory of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century music. But I begin with some common-sense matters about the way texture may function as a sign.

#### CONTEXTUAL SIGNS

The sign aspects of texture may reside simply in particular sets of associations or idiosyncratic relationships established between or among textures *within* a given piece. I shall refer to this type of sign—one that arises from contextual treatment within a piece—as a “contextual sign.” Most of us are familiar, for example, with so-called false recapitulations in Classic sonata form—as in the first movements of Haydn’s Symphony No. 102 (m. 185) and Mozart’s Symphony No. 41, the “Jupiter” (m. 161). In both of these examples, after preparatory motions for recapitulation, the melodic material of the opening of the *Allegro* returns in the “wrong” key. Neither composer relies only on our abilities to recognize that the tonality is wrong. Each reinforces the “false” aspects of false recapitulation by means of texture, instrumentation, and dynamics different from those of the opening statement. The texture in such contexts would be considered one concomitant indication, clue, or sign that we ought not to believe this to be the “real” recapitulation.

For a more detailed illustration of how contextual signs may work I turn to the first movement of Haydn’s String Quartet in C, Op. 74, No. 1. Not only is the opening statement (following the two introductory chords) well-defined by melody and harmony but also, importantly, it is given much of its characteristic stamp by the drum bass accompaniment in the cello (see Example 1a). Supporting the upper three parts harmonically, and furnishing a level of pulse, the drum bass acts as a ground against which the other voices are heard.

<sup>4</sup> And, needless to say, a texture under consideration may have functions other than those I discuss.

(That is, the relationship of the upper parts to the drum bass is analogous to that of a figure against a ground in visual perception.) Typically in this style, a restatement in the same textural arrangement (see mm. 11, and, in V, 31) reinforces our association of the opening texture with stability and presentation.

A new textural version of the *alla breve* material occurs for the first time at measure 42, a purely chordal treatment of the opening material of the movement. The absence of the drum bass is conspicuous, as is the concomitant loss of pulse and harmonic underpinning; the chords are now more mobile parallel six-threes (Example 1b). And we take this distinctive, primarily textural deviation as a sign that the phrase thus begun will *not* be another presentation—as in fact it is not.<sup>5</sup> Particularly because a suggestion of the drum bass occurs in measure 41 (Violin 2) and simply stops at measure 42, the destabilization of the opening material is marked for attention.<sup>6</sup> The relative instability provided by this change of texture is intensified in the very next measure (m. 43) by the appearance of a little countersubject (Violin 1) against the previously autonomous opening material. The “question” raised by the removal of the accompaniment pattern and by the contrapuntal and harmonic instability at this point in the second key area gives weight to the restoration of stability at the beginning of the closing area (m. 45). The new texture from measure 42 to measure 45 itself suggests further instability of a contrapuntal type, a suggestion borne out a number of times in the development and in several ways shortly after the beginning of the recapitulation. Indeed, from here on (with two exceptions, to be mentioned) Haydn uses this new treatment of the opening material—i.e., the *alla breve* gesture minus the drum bass—to mark the beginning of each unstable passage in the movement.

Within its first four measures, the opening of the development exemplifies in close juxtaposition a distinction between our reading of texture as a sign of presentation, on the one hand, and as a sign of immediate or impending instability, on the other (see Example 1c). To begin with, in measures 55–56 Haydn takes the textural deviation of measure 42 several steps further by reducing that texture to a unison that maximizes the harmonic ambiguity of the line. If our understand-

<sup>5</sup> The halting or removal of a palpable pulse from a gesture that previously had one may well be characteristic of a whole class of signs that seem to read “not presentation” or “prepare for instability.” That is, though this kind of sign is understood contextually, it may also be a member of a class of conventionalized signs.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. the parallel moment in the recapitulation (mm. 118–19) where the *alla breve* gesture is not preceded by a suggestion of the drum bass; the effect is less marked.

Example 1

Haydn, String Quartet in C, Op. 74, No. 1, i

(a) mm. 1-7

Allegro moderato

(b) mm. 41-45

[mezza voce]

(c) mm. 55-63

(d) mm. 105-10

The image shows two systems of musical notation. The first system covers measures 105 to 107. The second system covers measures 108 to 110. Each system consists of a piano (p) staff in the lower register and a violin (v) staff in the upper register. The piano part features a steady, rhythmic accompaniment, while the violin part carries the melodic line, including several trills (tr) and slurs.

(e) mm. 148-153

The image shows two systems of musical notation for measures 148 to 153. Each system consists of a piano (p) staff and a violin (v) staff. The piano part is highly active, with frequent sixteenth-note patterns and dynamic markings of *f* (forte). The violin part features a melodic line with trills (tr) and slurs, mirroring the texture of the opening material.

ing of the texture at measure 42 as a sign of instability had been tentative, surely here it is confirmed. In contrast, however, the moment we hear the original textural setting of the opening material (m. 57), with its characteristic drum-bass accompaniment, we are cued to listen to this sequential motion not simply as a continuation of the same sequential event begun in measure 55—as we would if melody, harmony, and the rhythm of the upper voices alone were taken into account—but as the beginning of a presentation within the context of development. In other words, the reappearance of the drum-bass texture here is crucial to our apprehension of the passage as a beginning as well as a continuation, and as a presentation of relative stability within an area of general instability. That presentation is the nature of this passage (mm. 57-64) is supported by what happens at measure 61, a graft of a new little tune with accompaniment, firmly in E-flat major. Indeed, this passage (beginning at m. 57) turns out to be the only relatively stable presentation of the opening thematic material of the piece in the entire development. Subsequent passages that

begin with the opening material in its "deviant" arrangement (as at mm. 65, 71, 84) are all comparatively less stable.

As suggested earlier, the texture at measure 43 (as well as similar textures in the development) hinted at the possibility of further contrapuntal—even fugal—procedure. Fugal texture does not, however, occur in the development, where we might expect it. It is saved for a more surprising moment: a stretto fugato is troped into the recapitulation, at measure 105, shortly after its beginning (see Example 1d). Contrapuntal moments in the exposition and development (for example, at mm. 43, 66, 72, 85) have subtly prepared us, and somehow, perhaps because of the small scale of these previous contrapuntal forays, the fugato passage so soon after the beginning of the recapitulation does not seem a serious threat to formal propriety. (Ordinarily a fugato exposition would have preceded the other, more fragmentary contrapuntal passages. Haydn's wit is at last to introduce this little fugato exposition *after* all the earlier moments.)

Finally, in combination with signs in other parameters, the texture of the last presentation of the opening material (mm. 149–52 in Example 1e) tells us clearly that this is the final presentation. Of course we know we are near the end of the movement. But, occurring after strong cadential harmony, and all solidly in the tonic, this *forte* unison version of the beginning of the tune, stamped-out and martial, with double-stopping in viola and cello, virtually precludes further presentation. Because the tensions inherent in the earlier versions of the material—tensions between a harmonized melody and a drum-bass accompaniment, or within the six-three version of the material—are now dissolved in the unanimity and overriding authority of a unison line in the tonic, we are sure there will be no other forays. (Suppose there were a drum bass here instead!) The unison is also the point of entry for one last witticism: it facilitates Haydn's taking the chromatic motion of the second and third measures of the original tune (compare mm. 3–4 with 150–52) further into a kind of spoof on all the prior passing chromaticism.<sup>7</sup>

This example illustrates how texture may function as a sign—directing us to syntax and form—by virtue of its *contextual* use within a piece. What seems involved in such signifying is a simple mode of association (notably by identity) over a musical distance, or a recognition of deviation from a characteristic (in this case, and often, initial) presentation of thematic material. There are likely to be many kinds

<sup>7</sup> The efficiency of a unison texture for play on chromatic lines is discussed below, pp. 516–17.

within the class of "contextual signs" but this example will, I hope, suggest lines along which inquiry might profitably proceed.

#### CONVENTIONALIZED SIGNS

The Andante also found favour, but particularly the last Allegro, because, having observed that all last as well as first Allegros begin here with all the instruments playing together and generally *unisono*, I began mine with two violins only, *piano* for the first eight bars—followed instantly by a *forte*; the audience, as I expected, said "hush" at the soft beginning and when they heard the *forte* began at once to clap their hands.<sup>8</sup>

This is what Mozart wrote to his father from Paris about the last movement of his Symphony No. 31 in D, K. 297 (300a), the "Paris" Symphony. His obvious pride in writing a successful *anti-unison*, in strategic and teasing defiance of what Parisians expected at the beginning of last movements, attests to one kind of textural/dynamic orchestral convention he must have observed in their music. For final allegros, Parisians liked (and those composing for Paris provided them with) rousing unison beginnings or, at least, grand tuttis in rhythmic unison: in our terms, bold calls to attention, "Stop, look, and listen" signs.

But the conventionalized uses of certain types of textures may also have far more particular and, I think, significant roles in syntax. They may cue or instruct us quite specifically about how to comprehend both simultaneous and subsequent musical events.<sup>9</sup> In order to discuss some of the ways in which texture may be said to function as a conventionalized sign, I have chosen three types whose basic constitution is unambiguous. All three fall within the general class of "homophony." They are: (1) homophonic with stock accompaniment pattern such as an Alberti bass; (2) solo (a literal solo line, not solo as in solo versus tutti); and (3) unison passages (including the octave doubling commonly subsumed in this category). They will be considered in that order.

<sup>8</sup> *The Letters of Mozart and His Family*, trans. and ed. Emily Anderson, II (New York, 1966), 558.

<sup>9</sup> Indeed, the texture Mozart did write at the beginning of the finale of the "Paris" Symphony led Saint-Foix to remark: "Only the finale . . . , opening, *piano*, with the two violins announcing a fugato, greatly heightens the whole of the symphony; and this anticipation of the fugato is not wholly deceptive, for the second subject is ranged in a series of imitations . . ." (Georges de Saint-Foix, *The Symphonies of Mozart*, trans. Leslie Orrey [London, 1947], pp. 64-65). Saint-Foix thus made quite specific inferences on the basis of the opening texture of the finale.

## ACCOMPANIMENT PATTERNS AS SIGNS

The beginning of a conventionally figured and regularly measured accompaniment pattern, such as an Alberti bass, is a sign that we will hear a presentational passage—probably a full statement, such as a stable phrase-group or period, or perhaps the close of a bar form.<sup>10</sup>

Consider the familiar and uncomplicated first movement of the *Sonatina in G* traditionally ascribed to Beethoven (Example 2).<sup>11</sup> The

## Example 2

Beethoven (?), *Sonatina in G*, i, mm. 1-8

Moderato

change from an unfigured homophonic accompaniment (mm. 1-4) to a conventional Alberti bass pattern (m. 5) is an instantaneous instruction to perform and/or to take in what follows as a more fully formed statement than what we have heard so far. The beginning of the accompaniment pattern makes it highly probable that motion will coalesce into a longer unit of musical action; and so it does. The sign value of the beginning of the accompaniment pattern is particularly evident here since the melody in measure 5 is identical with that in measure 1. Because of the cues for stability given by the appearance of the Alberti bass, we understand the nature of the passage the moment it begins (beats 1 and 2), even before we hear the harmonic motion to

<sup>10</sup> "Bar form" is used here as aab or aa'b, with proportions 1 + 1 + 2, on any level of structure.

<sup>11</sup> For the doubtful attribution to Beethoven see *Thayer's Life of Beethoven*, ed. Elliott Forbes, rev. ed. (Princeton, 1967), p. 131.

V<sup>7</sup>/IV. Moreover, the beginning of a regular accompaniment pattern cues us to what we will *not* hear. The passage is not likely to be the beginning of a transition, for example, or even of a phrase-group that is complementary to the first, with two-measure units matching measures 1-2 and 3-4.

A similar sort of sign mechanism guides us in a far more sophisticated example of a bar form, the opening of Mozart's String Quartet in F, K. 590 (Example 3). Here texture significantly underscores the unusual phrase construction of the opening. For despite the symmetrical lengths (3 + 3 measures) and complementary harmonic motion of the two opening phrases, the non-matched textures (and dynamics) emphasize an eccentric internal construction. Measure 7, melodically identical to measure 1 but texturally identical to measure 4 (and the solo aspect of measures 4 and 7 calls attention to itself), creates additional, if momentary, uncertainty. Will action now be similar to that in the second phrase, a return to the material of

Example 3

Mozart, String Quartet in F, K. 590, i, mm. 1-12

Allegro moderato

Vlns.  
Vln. 1  
Vln. 2  
Vla.  
Vc.

*p* *f* *p* *f* *p*

7 12

measure 1, or something altogether new? The appearance of the regular repeated-note accompaniment pattern on beats 1 and 2 of measure 8 quickly dispels the uncertainty; these two beats of accompaniment are enough to assure us that this time we will hear a more stable, more fully-formed line. Importantly, along with the move to  $V^7/IV$ , the entrance of the accompaniment pattern gives us the sense that the piece is finally getting under way.<sup>12</sup> The accompaniment (together with the harmony) cues us even before the melody changes (cf. mm. 1 and 2).<sup>13</sup> And, typically, as with the G-major Sonatina example, this third phrase becomes the consolidating member in the bar form, here a construction of 3 + 3 + 6 measures.

There is a kind of double psychic economy provided by our recognition of this kind of textural sign. First, we are "told," by the appearance of the Alberti or other familiar pattern, that stability is likely to reign—at least until closure or until other signs contravene this one. Because for the moment there is no question of what the passage *is*, we can relax and simply experience its unfolding.<sup>14</sup> Second, some of the perceptual work is, so to speak, done for us. The

<sup>12</sup> The sense of "true beginning" (of the musical discourse) is often conveyed by the establishment of an accompaniment pattern after a less stable or less natural texture (for this repertory). See below, pp. 507–508, 524–25. Another, and quite different example is found in the opening of Haydn's String Quartet in F, Op. 74, No. 2. The first eight measures are a unison (see p. 509 and n. 48 below). Not until the conventionalized accompaniment comes in at measure 9 are we sure that the sonata form proper has really begun. This seems to be confirmed by the placement of the repeat sign before measure 9.

<sup>13</sup> The role of an accompaniment as an advance notice is perhaps weightier still when, as in the first movement of Haydn's String Quartet in F-sharp minor, Op. 50, No. 4, the opening motive of the movement, already heard eleven times in about twice as many measures, is also to begin the main tune for the second key area (m. 28). And just a beat-and-a-half of accompaniment pattern prepares us *this* time to listen to the familiar motive as part of a tune, rather than once again as the beginning of a motivic construction, such as characterized the first key area (and had not so far crystallized into a tuneful period).

In a very different, a dramatic, context in Verdi's *Il trovatore*, Act I, Scene 2, the appearance of an accompaniment cues us in advance as to how to listen to the very first notes of Leonora's "Come d'aurato sogno" (before her first aria). One-and-a-half measures before we would know from the rising major sixth of the melody, we are told by the appearance of a highly conventionalized accompaniment pattern (in flutes and clarinets) to change the way in which we have been listening to the recitative. The accompaniment helps to frame Leonora's world of remembered experience, her "golden dream."

<sup>14</sup> It would seem no accident that such textures occur frequently at the beginning of the characteristic passage or profile tune for the second key area in sonata form movements. The move to the contrasting key has been accomplished and such conventionalized textures are among the important signs that we may now listen in a different fashion; we can expect a tuneful, or at least stable, presentation.

Alberti bass (or other regular) pattern provides a kind of palpable motor action that measures or marks off time regularly for us; the palpability of meter is in inverse proportion to the amount of effort the performer/listener must expend. (The constancy of harmonic specification is, of course, also a factor in the psychic economy.) Further, for the performer there would seem to be a connection between the initiation of a regular motor activity and the impulse to continue it: it is possible that the greater the regularity the greater the performer's kinesthetic need for continuation.<sup>15</sup>

The importance of the conventionalized accompaniment pattern not merely as an opening instruction but as a continuing one, where there might be a possibility for misinterpreting the nature of a passage without the accompaniment, is illustrated in Example 4, from Mozart's Piano Sonata in A minor, K. 310 (300d). Imagine—to take but one set of possibilities—a simple F-major chord on the first beat of measure 8 and a dominant seventh chord on the first beat of measure 9, instead of the Alberti bass. We might easily have understood measures 8 and 9 as either a continuation of the erratic quality of movement (the “sensibility style”) of the first eight measures or as the beginning of a transition. Here, even more than in the G-major sonatina, the accompaniment is crucial in establishing the nature of the passage from the outset: it is a *melody*.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, the continuation of the regular accompaniment is an assurance that any internal contrasts, or seeming disruptions, are to be understood as part of the same melody.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> A corollary, if this is correct, would be that the cut-off or interruption of a highly patterned, regular accompaniment would be a source of tension. See below, pp. 494–96.

<sup>16</sup> Particularly in his keyboard sonatas Mozart may use a conventionalized accompaniment for much of the period that ends in departure from the home key. When the period begins it is understood as presentational, largely because of the accompaniment pattern combined with harmonic stability. Retrospectively, because of harmonic motion, we understand that it has also been a transition. The force of the accompaniment pattern may be such that the presentational character carries through the passage despite the harmonic change. And the continuity thus created may be related to our sense of Mozart's lyricism.

<sup>17</sup> Indeed, the Alberti bass may have been one solution to problems of continuity that Alberti and his contemporaries encountered. Their motivic processes were short-winded or bogged down; they were not convincingly welded to move forward (for Alberti himself see William S. Newman, *The Sonata in the Classic Era* [Chapel Hill, 1963], p. 183). Perhaps one reason for the Alberti bass pattern was to provide momentum and impose continuity (and perhaps to bestow a “singing” character) where there might have been uncertainty if one heard only the melody line with a variety of less uniform textures.

## Example 4

Mozart, Piano Sonata in A minor, K. 310 (300d), ii, mm. 1-4, 8-10, 12-14

Andante cantabile con espressione

The musical score consists of four systems, each with a treble and bass staff. The first system (measures 1-4) features a treble staff with a melodic line and a bass staff with a steady accompaniment. Dynamic markings include *p*, *fp*, *p*, *fp*, *cresc.*, and *f*. A fermata is placed over the final measure of the first system. The second system (measures 8-10) shows a more active treble staff with trills and a bass staff with a consistent accompaniment. A *cresc.* marking is present. The third system (measures 12-14) continues the melodic development in the treble staff with trills and a steady bass accompaniment, also marked with *cresc.* The fourth system (measures 15-17) shows a treble staff with a melodic line and a bass staff with a steady accompaniment. Dynamic markings include *p*, *cresc.*, and *f*.

Particularly in a very slow tempo, the establishment of a conventional accompaniment pattern with a well-defined pulse in the context of a relatively slow harmonic rhythm tells us that a melody will take shape or emerge. Chopin's character pieces in a slow tempo are rich in passages where a regular figured accompaniment tells us that what might otherwise have seemed introductory, improvisatory, recitative-like is in fact to be understood as the main line of discourse. How, for

example, would we apprehend what the right hand plays in measures 3 and 4 of Chopin's Nocturne in C-sharp minor, Op. 27, No. 1 had the accompaniment not been well-established? (See Example 5.) Chopin's accompaniments assure us that a slowly unfolding and often hesitant or uncertain-seeming line of tones is, indeed, part of a melodic statement, a presentation and not an introduction or transition.<sup>18</sup>

Example 5

Chopin, Nocturne in C-sharp minor, Op. 27, No. 1, mm. 1-6

Larghetto  $\text{♩} = 42$

The musical score consists of two systems. The first system shows measures 1 and 2. The second system shows measures 3, 4, 5, and 6. The left hand plays a consistent eighth-note accompaniment throughout. The right hand plays a melodic line that is somewhat hesitant. The tempo is marked 'Larghetto' with a quarter note equal to 42 beats per minute. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#). The time signature is 3/4. The score includes performance markings such as 'pp' (pianissimo), 'legato', and 'sotto voce'. A triplet of eighth notes is marked with a '3' above it in measure 3. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5. Dynamic markings like '\*' and 'fz' are present at the end of measures.

Because of our basic association of highly conventionalized accompaniment patterns with relatively sustained presentation and stability, an abrupt denial or break in the continuation of such patterns is likely to be striking. A passage from Donizetti's *Anna Bolena*, Act II, scene

<sup>18</sup> Even in fast tempi Chopin's accompaniments can be crucial in telling us when the main discourse is beginning. A good example is the opening of his "Minute" Waltz in D flat, Op. 64, No. 1, where an introductory gesture, a lead-in, is transformed into a true beginning by the appearance of an accompaniment pattern beneath it (cf. mm. 1-4 with mm. 5 ff.).

An exceptional example of the power of a regular accompaniment established as a "ground" is the *beklemmt* section of the Cavatina in Beethoven's String Quartet in B flat, Op. 130. The accompanimental background (beginning m. 40) makes clear that we should listen to "voice" even here where the first violin line is so broken and moves so erratically. The accompaniment instructs us, so to speak, to make the effort to connect the broken line. For only in imagining the "line" as connected can we know how broken, how anguished the voice is. My husband, Leonard B. Meyer, called this



tions, there are no prescribed lengths for the various kinds of passages. Yet the strength of our association of such accompaniment patterns with sustained presentational statements makes an abrupt break dramatically effective.<sup>20</sup> Here, underlined by the absence of any accompaniment at 120, the premature break epitomizes Jane's distraught state: the conflict between her devotion to Anne and her relationship with Henry. It is as if Jane were about to bare her soul but suddenly drew back. A continuation of impassioned recitative (in the manner of "E infamia e morte") in place of the Andante could not so poignantly—or so plainly—convey the difficulty of the communication. To say that Donizetti employed such an accompanied passage simply for the sake of variety would surely be to miss the point. For a fleeting suggestion of aria calls to mind the dimensions of expression that occur in set numbers—dimensions that, for dramatic reasons, cannot yet be fulfilled.

I have been considering the sign functions of certain highly conventionalized and regular figured accompaniment patterns in Western music of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. But my hypothesis may have wider application—to musics of East as well as West. For it appears that in many musics the establishment of a well-shaped accompaniment pattern is what first conveys the sense that a new and formal segment—a melodic statement or presentation—has begun.<sup>21</sup> It seems possible, then, that the association of

<sup>20</sup> Needless to say, our expectations as to the length of a passage that begins with a conventionalized accompaniment such as an Alberti bass will depend on the implied dimensions or scale of the piece as well as on context. Any relatively premature break from such a pattern will, then, be an agent of tension.

<sup>21</sup> For example, according to Arnold Bake, in classical Indian music "the accompanying drum comes in fully only when the actual composition begins" and this is in contrast to an "unaccompanied prelude in free time [that] may last for an hour or more" ("The Music of India," *The New Oxford History of Music, I: Ancient and Oriental Music*, ed. Egon Wellesz [London, 1957], 215). In a typical contemporary raga improvisation, as soon as the tabla player begins his regular rhythm the listener is cued for a particular kind of formal presentation (even though such presentation, as a dialogue, is subject to the give-and-take of the performers).

From this point of view, a description of events at the opening of Schubert's "Trout" Quintet and of those in some Indian pieces might have significant similarities. In the "Trout" Quintet, the first twenty-five measures are in an improvisatory vein and it is not until the appearance of the regular accompaniment figure in measure 26 that, at least with our retrospective knowledge, we assume the sonata movement "proper" to begin. The establishment of the regular accompaniment pattern also confirms our perhaps provisional earlier understanding of the first twenty-five measures as having been somewhat preludial or introductory in character. The cardinal role of the accompaniment pattern as a sign is underlined by the fact that the melody line in measures 3 and 27 is identical. Yet how differently we apprehend each.

formal presentation with the appearance of a clear accompaniment pattern may be both non-arbitrary and cross-cultural.

One of the most alluring—if also most elusive—aspects of this inquiry is the relation between the semantic (referential) significance of textures and their syntactic usage. And although many textural conventions in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries are culture-bound, it seems that, more than in other parameters, some conventions of textural usage may be rooted in primordial aspects of human experience. Or, put another way, certain natural connotations affect—even infect—syntactic usage. In solo and unison textures the overlap between the semantic and syntactic function is often highly revealing.

#### SOLOS

Wherever there is the real possibility for solo versus group action, a solo in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries almost always either is, leads to, or implies a beginning;<sup>22</sup> a beginning in the sense of point of departure or initiator of action on some level of musical structure—for example, the level of a phrase, a period, a large section within a form. This is not to deny the existence of exceptions (and I shall address myself to a few shortly); yet most can be construed as those welcome exceptions that seem to prove the rule. For if we go beyond the conventions of musical style to the likely roots of such conventions in what may well be essential aspects of human behavior, my premise regarding solos as signs begins to appear more plausible.

From responsorial chant in Jewish and Christian rites, to cheer-leading and political rallies, it is an individual's statement that initiates an action; a group joins or responds. Indeed, in most individual versus group situations in Western culture this relationship is virtually automatic. We take its order—individual, then group—for granted and many conventions in the arts are based on it. In the theater—and perhaps especially clearly in ancient Greek tragedy, with its respond-

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And the fact that Schubert begins the recapitulation (in the subdominant) with the material from measure 26, and *not* measure 1 or 3, also supports the point that measure 26 is where we should, and do, begin to listen for a sonata form to unfold.

<sup>22</sup> The premise *a priori* excludes monophonic pieces for solo instruments or voices—for example, *Syrinx* by Debussy or a solo partita by J. S. Bach. It also excludes the solo section of a concerto when the soloist is accompanying himself or being accompanied by others. In sum, I intend "solo" quite literally to mean a single performing voice in a single line.

ing and commenting chorus—it is the individual who leads the action.<sup>23</sup> Similarly in opera; significant dramatic and musical actions are not generally begun by choruses or ensembles but by individuals.

We tend to identify a solo line with an individual human voice.<sup>24</sup> And often it is not merely that a solo line is taken as a symbolic mime of the social habits of men but it is quite literally taken as if it *were* the voice of a human being. We may even breathe and move our vocal cords as if we were singing. Rooted in basic aspects of human behavior, the conventionalized roles of solos seem to be non-arbitrary in both origin and nature.

The solo line behaves as a group leader frequently in Classic and early Romantic music. The solo may rather literally serve to “conduct” the action to a beginning of a major segment in a formal structure.<sup>25</sup> This role is particularly vivid—rather graphically so—in rondo movements which, by their very definition, involve rounding up the group for refrain or for moving on to a new episode. In most rondo examples melodic and harmonic signs—normally a dominant pedal—will have indicated return or change for some time before the solo lead-back appears. And the sound of such harmonic preparation may indeed carry through in our ears, even while the texture in fact becomes that of a solo. But it is the solo *per se* that will often provide the decisive or clinching indication of imminence.<sup>26</sup> Often it behaves as an extended upbeat, and the sudden reduction of texture—

<sup>23</sup> The Greek chorus itself has a leader, the coryphaeus, who often leads in a solo-response choral dialogue. Wye T. Allanbrook reminded me of this and, in addition, made a number of valuable suggestions from which this study has benefited.

<sup>24</sup> The best general discussion I know on the subject of a listener's identification with a musical line or lines is in Edward T. Cone, *The Composer's Voice* (Berkeley, 1974). See especially Chap. 6, “Participation and Identification.”

Of course there are instrumental solos that are highly idiomatic for the particular instrument and with which we would be hard put to identify kinesthetically—certain complex patterning such as one finds in some of the Paganini Caprices, for example—but then, I think, we listen quite differently. We listen for perfection of execution, and we often criticize such passages for being “mechanical” or “empty” or we object that they are “showy.” It may be that we revel in the virtuosity of a performance when we cannot completely or thoroughly identify; perhaps this is one reason why the virtuoso is popularly considered a breed apart.

<sup>25</sup> Indeed, some seem precisely to focus on pulse and pace of action—gestures that seem physically to behave as a conductor would.

<sup>26</sup> The carry-over of the sound of harmonic preparation and the frequent use of melodic spin-off from the immediately preceding motion maintain continuity. The maximal contrast provided by the usually sudden thinning-out or contraction of the texture to a single line is an important aspect of the articulation—an articulation that is itself a sign of another, and usually more important one, the actual beginning of a refrain or episode.

particularly the absence of a bass—heightens the instability. Examples are numerous and readers will doubtless think of their own. An illustration is provided by the rondo finale of Mozart's String Quintet in G minor, K. 516 (Example 7).<sup>27</sup>

Example 7

Mozart, String Quintet in G minor, K. 516, iv, mm. 171–77

[Allegro]

[Couplet]

A solo may also step forward, so to speak, almost as would a first violinist in an eighteenth-century orchestra, to conduct the action at other conventionalized formal junctures—in the immediate motion into a second key area in a sonata form movement, for example, or in the motion from the end of a Trio to the return of the Minuet in a Minuet/Trio movement (as in Beethoven's String Quartet Op. 18, No. 2, third movement). At times, as in the first movement of Beethoven's String Quartet in F, Op. 18, No. 1, measures 55–57, the upbeat is unstable in its own internal construction, and the solo

<sup>27</sup> Also in the same movement, see measures 143–45, 277–79. See also the rondo finales of Mozart's String Quintet in C, K. 515 (mm. 37–41, 97–102), his Piano Concerto in E flat, K. 449 (mm. 134–35), his Piano Concerto in C, K. 503 (mm. 222–30), and Haydn's Piano Trio in G, Hob. XV, No. 15 (mm. 60–65, 122–31). Because temporal brevity is normal for rondo lead-backs, the exceptionally long solo lead-backs in the Mozart K. 503 and Haydn Trio examples are especially playful and amusing in their very extent.

At times an entire section of an orchestra may function in the same way when the other parts drop out. See, for example, the rondo finale of Haydn's Symphony No. 97 in C, mm. 110–13, 192–95.

treatment heightens and calls attention to that instability. At other times, as in the first movement of Mozart's Piano Concerto in D, K. 537, the "Coronation," the rather deliberate beat-marking (including a *sf* stress on the second beat) is more like the conductor's preparing the group for the "real" beginning (see Example 8). In this case, it is a preparation for what turns out to be the profile, or characteristic, tune for the second key area.<sup>28</sup>

Example 8

Mozart, Piano Concerto in D, K. 537, i, mm 32-39

[Allegro]

W. W. + Str. *p*

Vin. 1 *sf* *sf*

Vin. 2 *mf* *mf*

Vla. *p*

Vc. + Cb. *p*

In leading in, a solo may also delay a beginning. For instance, in the first movement of his Serenade in C minor, K. 388 (384a), Mozart signals the delay of the second key-area tune when a solo line in the oboe echoes a tutti close on the dominant of the impending new key (see Example 9). The solo here transforms an end into a lead-in or beginning. It keeps the structure open and delays the presentation of the second key-area tune for two measures. (Once again, note that the Alberti bass accompaniment immediately ratifies our sense that the characteristic area in the second key really begins where it does and not two measures before.)<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> That Mozart thought of this lead-in in the first violin section alone as a "solo" seems borne out by his writing a literal solo for the keyboard at the corresponding moment in the exposition, mm. 161-62. For another example see the first movement of Beethoven's Piano Concerto in C minor, Op. 37 (cf. mm. 160-63 with 336-39).

<sup>29</sup> Many times in Classic sonata forms the second key is reached before the characteristic tune. A good example occurs in the first movement of Haydn's Symphony No. 103 in E flat, the "Drumroll" (cf. mm. 74-79 with mm. 80-87).

## Example 9

Mozart, Serenade in C minor, K. 388 (384a), i, mm. 37-44

[Allegro]

The image displays a musical score for Example 9, consisting of two systems of staves. The first system includes staves for 1 Obs., 2 Cls., 1 Bsns., 2 Hns., and Ob. 1. The second system includes staves for Cl. 1 and Hn. 2. The score is in C minor, 3/4 time, and marked [Allegro]. The first system shows the beginning of the piece, with the woodwinds and strings playing a rhythmic pattern. The second system shows a solo for the Clarinet 1 and Horn 2, with the rest of the ensemble playing a sustained accompaniment.

It is precisely because we understand them as beginnings—as openers, not closers of action—that solos may help to deny or to delay closes. In addition, it is likely (perhaps the result of a fundamental aspect of perception) that once we have heard a group, a solo will seem an incomplete texture. And something that is incomplete cannot satisfactorily function as a consolidation of events for ending.<sup>30</sup> For both these reasons, solos will tend to emphasize non-closure, to keep musical periods open.<sup>31</sup>

Consider the role of measure 63 in Mozart's Divertimento in D, K. 334 (320b) (Example 10). The phrase beginning at measure 58 is surely one beat away from tonic close by the end of measure 60. The first denial of closure is unprepared and occurs with the repetition of measures 58-59 at measures 61-62. But the sudden disappearance of the lower parts at measure 63, which begins as an octave replica of

<sup>30</sup> General principles related to this point are discussed in Leonard B. Meyer, *Emotion and Meaning in Music* (Chicago, 1956), especially Chap. 4 and Chap. 5, pp. 185-96.

<sup>31</sup> In some sense, all cadenzas (though not all precisely solos in the strict way I have been using the term here) conventionally work this way.

measure 60, and which, like measure 60, might have led to a close, is a clear sign that once again the period will not end on schedule. Measure 64 could, after all, have followed directly from measure 62.<sup>32</sup> The solo measure at once exaggerates and, partly, creates the delay. And, at the same time, in its very solo-ness—self-reflectively, so to speak—it cues us to its own role in delaying the end of the musical period.

Example 10

Mozart, Divertimento in D, K. 334 (320b), I, mm. 58–66

[Allegro]

One of the changes Beethoven makes in revising the first movement of his String Quartet in F, Op. 18, No. 1, would seem to provide interesting support for my view of the function of the solo as a sign of beginning.<sup>33</sup> In the first version of the quartet, both measures 5 and 13 are written as solos (and are identical melodically and dynamically); in prospect, their functions are not clearly differentiated (see Example 11a). In revising the movement, Beethoven specifies the harmony in measure 5 (see Example 11b). The result is not only that the second four measures of the movement are themselves more integrated but also that they are heard unequivocally as part of an

<sup>32</sup> Measure 65 might also have followed from measure 62 but surely closure would have been much weaker without the gestures of measures 63–64.

<sup>33</sup> The revisions are from the complete first version of the movement to the complete second version, the one that has come down to us as "the" Op. 18, No. 1. For a fuller discussion of this, see Janet M. Levy, *Beethoven's Compositional Choices: The Two Versions of Opus 18, No. 1, First Movement* (Philadelphia, 1982).

ongoing statement begun at measure 1—that is, measure 5 is bound more closely with its successive measures at the same time that measures 5–8 are immediately understood as part of the unit of eight measures.

The solo treatment of measure 13 now clearly differentiates that measure from measure 5 and, importantly, cues us for the beginning of a new kind of patterning, a sequence from measures 13–20. By comparison, in the first version, when we hear measure 13 we have no way of knowing that it is the beginning of something different from what occurred at measure 5; that, too, was a solo. In other words, Beethoven's saving the solo for measure 13 in the revised version may be understood partly as an underlining of the "beginning-ness" of measure 13.

Example 11

Beethoven, String Quartet in F, Op. 18, No. 1, i

(a) Version 1, mm. 1–15  
Allegro con brio

(b) Version 2, mm. 5–6

mm. 9–12  
as in mm. 1–4  
but *f*

The development section of Mozart's String Quartet in G, K. 387, first movement, contains an example of a solo texture that not only

helps us to understand events but also makes us retrospectively "correct" one likely apprehension of musical events and substitute another (see Example 12).<sup>34</sup>

Example 12

Mozart, String Quartet in G, K. 387, i, mm. 67-73

[Allegro vivace assai]

After a certain dalliance with the main first key-area material—including quasi-improvisatory composed fermatas—Mozart suggests (m. 68) that perhaps something more serious and systematic is about to begin, with treatment of the opening theme as a subject for imitation. (There are hints of the learned style at measure 68.) But after two measures he abruptly reduces the texture to a solo (m. 70, viola). Combined with the marked registral and dynamic break on the

<sup>34</sup> This example suggests that, in addition to simultaneous and subsequent signs, there are some signs that work retrospectively.

high *d* in the viola line, the solo texture instructs us to revise our notions of "who," so to speak, is the protagonist at this point: not, after all, the opening theme, as we had thought, but the solo passage beginning on the high *d*. It provides the main idea for a series of statements (a kind of accompanied dialogue in which, once again, we find that the accompaniment confirms that this is presentation) that move through a cycle of dominants to the relative minor. In sum, the sudden solo texture lets us know that the music at measure 70, not that at measure 68, is the proper beginning of a passage.

The role of a solo texture in defining the beginnings of fugues, fugatos, canons, and the like is doubtless the most familiar. And blatant denials of such textural implications can be very pointed and witty. The first movement of Haydn's String Quartet in G, Op. 76, No. 1 is an instructive example (Example 13). Both because of the four-measure solo entrance in the cello<sup>35</sup> and also because of the

Example 13

Haydn, String Quartet in G, Op. 76, No. 1, i, mm. 1-14

*Allegro con spirito*

The musical score consists of three systems of staves. The first system shows the Violins and Viola (Vlns. + Vla.) and the Cello (Vc.). The second system shows the Viola (Vla.) and the Cello (Vc.). The third system shows the Violin 2 (Vln. 2) and the Cello (Vc.). The music begins with a four-measure solo entrance in the cello at measure 70, marked with a forte (f) dynamic. The tempo is Allegro con spirito.

<sup>35</sup> H. C. Robbins Landon, in *Haydn: Chronicle and Works* (Bloomington, 1977), IV, 287, writes of this: "but the idea of introducing the main theme entirely unaccompa-

nature of the line itself, with its chains of thirds characteristic of one type of fugal subject,<sup>36</sup> the signs (mm. 3-6) are that this will be a fugal, or at least a fugato, exposition.<sup>37</sup>

The tonal location of the second entrant (the viola, centered on *a*, not *d*) raises questions about the nature of the passage. But by keeping a solo texture, Haydn makes sure that we make no mistake. The cello drops out. There is no counterline, as would be characteristic of a fugal or even a fugato exposition. To have a second solo here is eccentric. And there is still another kind of wit, dependent on the earlier textural cue: in some sense, the reciprocal phrase in the viola forms a kind of consequent to the first phrase (as antecedent) in the cello, a formal relationship antithetical to the character and implications of the opening.<sup>38</sup>

Paradoxically, even negative examples seem to confirm the working hypothesis about solos. And perhaps the ultimate negative examples are solos presented in a row. In the second movement, the *Scherzando*, of Beethoven's String Quartet in F, Op. 59, No. 1, for example, it is not only because of the melodic/harmonic peculiarities of the opening but also because of their nakedness as solos, that the beginning of the movement seems so bizarre (mm. 1-16); the solos all in a row surely expose and emphasize the otherwise dissociated quality of the opening of the movement. The same may be said of the celebrated moment at the beginning of the coda of the *alla Tedesca* movement in Beethoven's String Quartet in B flat, Op. 130, where the main tune is heard backwards in hocket-like fashion. Our disorientation is a function mainly of our recognition of the backwards order of the tune; but it is also the quality of its being pieced together

nied (first by the cello, then by the viola), as if it were the beginning of a fugue, is very comic and at the same time most original."

<sup>36</sup> See Warren Kirkendale, *Fugue and Fugato in Rococo and Classical Chamber Music* (Durham, 1979), pp. 98-100. Kirkendale also writes that the beginning of this quartet is "in the manner of a fugato" (p. xxvii, n. 10).

<sup>37</sup> This despite the fact that one may not expect a fugal first movement in Haydn's string quartets. The statistics of style are not the only determinant of our expectations. In this example, our understanding of the specific nature of measures 3-6 takes precedence over our knowledge of Haydn's previous practice.

<sup>38</sup> At the beginnings of both the development and recapitulation Haydn again plays with our expectations that a fugue or fugato may materialize. But only the fugal spirit implied by the beginning of the movement is realized. The stretto effect, beginning with the upbeat to measure 144—a sequence of six patterns of descending thirds jammed together in a row—is virtually a mockery of the fugue that never materializes.

again—backwards—while not at all integrated by harmony and a “normal” texture. Surely, all these solos (and those in Op. 59, No. 1, second movement as well) are not lead-ins or beginnings. And yet, measure after measure we must overcome our inclination to hear a solo as a lead-in or beginning. Or *are* they beginnings? And if so, which is the real one? The discontinuity seems connected to the discrepancy between what is and what might or ought to have been. At a certain point (or more precisely, *not* so certain a point) perhaps we simply suspend our belief in the reality of the behavior of these solos. So many solos in a row appear so abnormal in this style that we must simply “wait and see” what will happen.

#### UNISONS<sup>39</sup>

There is no single premise for the role of unison passages as syntactic signs. Yet few other textures call as much attention to themselves. And surely no other type of texture seems so laden with semantic significance, with referential connotations. These semantic connotations everywhere suffuse—and, it seems to me, partly determine—syntax. Even more than with solos, the conventions of syntactic usage appear to be deeply rooted in primordial aspects of human experience.

Probably the single most pervasive quality of a unison passage is its aura of authoritative control. For unanimity—as in the crowd singing together in unison—is basically contrary to our sense of the individuality of human beings. It does not appear to occur in nature, to happen naturally.<sup>40</sup> It must, in some sense, be organized, preordained—imposed. On the one hand, it is an authority given by human ritual or ceremony—as in the intoning of chant, patriotic and work songs, heraldic fanfares. On the other hand, it is an authority that seems to rest in compulsions that inhabit the deepest reaches of the psyche (innate evil, wickedness) *or* in forces outside man's nature (the demonic, the supernatural).

Gluck's chorus of the Furies in Act II of *Orfeo ed Euridice* epitomizes one of the semantic roles of unison texture as a special effect for a special situation. The unison chorus (the orchestra is not,

<sup>39</sup> Taken to mean a passage, usually longer than what is commonly thought of as a motive, and in any case never just an intervallic/harmonic unison of one beat. I include octave doublings in this classification.

<sup>40</sup> According to Walter Wiora (*The Four Ages of Music*, trans. M. D. Herter Norton [New York, 1965], p. 89) the unison symbolized Christian unanimity in the early history of the Church.

however, in unison with the chorus) is a powerful agent in the initial portrayal of the Furies as inhuman, unyielding, relentless—in the opening strophes of the first two choruses, as well as in the Furies' "no's" in response to Orpheus' pleadings. Alfred Einstein writes of the "terrifying 'no!' that seems invincible."<sup>41</sup> The Furies' unison is that of a chorus of compellers. But when they are mollified, when their resistance begins to yield and they find themselves sympathizing with Orpheus, the unison texture of the first strophe is supplanted by a harmonized one. Harmony is humanizing. The Furies' yielding of a path to Orpheus is connoted by the yielding of the unison.

There is an interesting parallel in Verdi's *Otello*. The motive that introduces and later reaffirms Iago's "Credo" is in unison, the association of unison with ominous implacability and malevolence very clear.<sup>42</sup> And, as in the Gluck example, when Iago abandons his adamant stance—in Verdi's music with the thought of death as an end—the same motive recurs harmonized.

It is striking that when a unison passage is discussed by writers on music, its texture is not merely noted; it is usually characterized. Thus, far more often than, say, with a melody and accompaniment, or other types of homophonic textures, a unison passage is described with adjectives like "hollow," "ominous," "powerful," "stark," "brutal," "roaring." The descriptive adjectives are often anthropomorphic. We read, for instance, of "horn signals *intoned* in unison by the tutti,"<sup>43</sup> of "*screaming* unisons in the winds,"<sup>44</sup> of "*striding* unisons,"<sup>45</sup> and even of "*ardent* unisons."<sup>46</sup> Tovey's well-known characterization (after Liszt) of the second movement of Beethoven's Fourth Piano Concerto, comparing the harmonized piano passages to Orpheus

<sup>41</sup> Alfred Einstein, *Gluck*, trans. Eric Blom (London, 1936), p. 73.

<sup>42</sup> Another clear instance of Verdi's association of evil with a unison texture occurs in *Falstaff*, Act III, scene 1. When Falstaff intones his comments on the wickedness of the world ("Nasty world," "villainous world") Verdi interjects a unison motive in the woodwinds. As is often the case in Mozart's operas, the instrumental music "choreographs" the text.

<sup>43</sup> Georg Feder, "Similarities in the Works of Haydn," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Music*, ed. H. C. Robbins Landon in collaboration with Roger E. Chapman (New York, 1970), p. 194.

<sup>44</sup> Nicholas Kenyon in *The New Yorker*, 11 February 1980, p. 90; the review is of Shostakovich's "Suite on Poems of Michelangelo Buonarroti."

<sup>45</sup> Nicholas Kenyon in *The New Yorker*, 1 June 1981, p. 128; the review is of Ralph Shapey's "Rituals." Kenyon here also makes an implicit connection between the unison (along with "insistent rhythms") and the strength of the music.

<sup>46</sup> Berlioz, writing about Beethoven's Fifth Symphony in *Beethoven by Berlioz*, compiled and trans. Ralph De Sola (Boston, 1975), p. 28.

taming the wild beasts (the unison strings), suggests a need to account for the presence of the unusual E-minor string tutti in unison.<sup>47</sup>

The majestic and heraldic triadic fanfare in unison, in a major key, when used to open a piece or large section of a piece, is an unequivocal and virtually archetypal use of unison—as in the opening of the exposition (*Vivace*) of the first movement of Haydn's Symphony No. 97 in C or the opening of his String Quartet in F, Op. 74, No. 2,<sup>48</sup> as in Mozart's Concerto No. 4 in D, K. 318, for Violin and Orchestra, or in Beethoven's Sonata for Violin and Piano in D, Op. 12, No. 1.<sup>49</sup> Because our association of the unison with the bold call to attention for political, social, or military events seems so basic as to be emblematic, even in the context of "abstract" music a unison fanfare is tinged with connotations that instruct—indeed, command.

The force of such unisons inheres partly, I suspect, in our relish for that perfect synchrony, that total unanimity demanded by a well-performed unison. As with an exquisitely synchronized *corps de ballet* or a flawlessly executed military formation, we respond to the absolute precision of alignment and of uniform movement.

Of course not all heraldic unisons are opening fanfares. Unisons are often used to announce or to mark other structural moments or to rouse us from a kind of musical action to which we may have grown accustomed. That a unison passage was regarded not only as something special but as one way of rousing an audience in the eighteenth century is clearly indicated by remarks of C.P.E. Bach in his *Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments*:

<sup>47</sup> Donald Francis Tovey, *Essays in Musical Analysis*, III: *Concertos* (London, 1936), 80–81.

<sup>48</sup> There is an interesting difference in the way that I think we understand the beginnings of these two Haydn examples. In the Symphony No. 97, we believe the unison *vivace* opening to be the proper beginning of the exposition, partly because a slow introduction has preceded it, partly because of the very clear rhythmic definition of the fanfare. But in the quartet example it is likely that by the fifth measure we question whether the fanfare is to be taken as an announcement that lies "outside" the movement proper—i.e., as introductory—or as the main discourse. The four measures of tonic followed by four measures of dominant are not well defined rhythmically—there is little feeling of upbeat moving to downbeat. Because of the lack of genuine harmonic motion within four-measure units, as well as the lack of rhythmic definition, somewhere in the middle of this fanfare we know it is not the real beginning of the form.

<sup>49</sup> These are, of course, only a tiny sampling of the hundreds of such fanfares that could be listed. For unison openings in minor keys, see below, pp. 521–25. Other types of bold unison openings in the major exist, too—e.g., that of Mozart's "Haffner" Symphony where the announcement is based not on the triad but on the octave, descending stepwise from tonic to fifth.

Imagine a situation: A composer works industriously . . . . At a certain point he feels that his audience must be roused with something different. He searches enthusiastically for a passage whose splendor and majesty shall be pronounced and striking. He decides to discard the beauty of harmony for a while; the passage shall be played in unison.<sup>50</sup>

The effectiveness of such unisons is demonstrated most clearly when other parameters remain constant, as in Example 14, from the first movement of Haydn's String Quartet in G minor, Op. 74, No. 3. In this short yet vivid example, a unison announces and marks the beginning of the development. The melodic/rhythmic identity of the end of the exposition with the beginning of the development makes the strong contrast in texture, over a minimal time, maximally significant here. This is particularly so because the type of action at the beginning of the development continues in a manner similar to that at the end of the exposition. (Perhaps the unison that opens the development prepares us, too, for the impending reappearance of the striking opening material of the movement, also a unison.)

Example 14

Haydn, String Quartet in G minor, Op. 74, No. 3, i, mm. 74-81

[Allegro]

Vln. 1  
Vln. 2  
Vla.  
Vc.

79

Even without such proximate melodic identity, however, the unison may act as a supercharged sign. In Example 15, from the first

<sup>50</sup> Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, *Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments*, trans. and ed. William J. Mitchell (New York, 1947), pp. 313-14.

movement of Haydn's "Oxford" Symphony, the impact of measure 83 is instantly decisive. Combined with the half-step motion (*b* to *c*) in the tune, the unison at measure 83 is a critical element in the immediate shattering of both the stability and mood of the genial sing-song closing tune of the exposition. Indeed, the unison facilitates the chromatic motion that creates harmonic instability. Compare measures 76-79, the second presentation of the tune, with measures 83-86 (especially 83-84). The tune has quite literally lost its footing—its accompaniment pattern—and, as a result, its balance, too! It is as though the composer were suddenly taking the tune—and the listener/performer, as he identifies with the tune—by the scruff of the neck.<sup>51</sup>

## Example 15

Haydn, Symphony in G, No. 92, the "Oxford," i, mm. 76-86

[Allegro spiritoso]

76 (W.W. omitted)

The musical score for Example 15 is divided into three systems. The first system (measures 76-79) features Violin I, Violin II + Viola, and Violoncello + Contrabass. The second system (measures 80-82) includes Violin I, Violin II + Viola, and Timpani. The third system (measures 83-86) includes Oboe, Bassoon, and Stradivarius. The score shows a transition from a light, sing-song melody to a more complex, chromatic texture starting at measure 83.

<sup>51</sup> Measures 98-114 in the finale of Beethoven's "Waldstein" Sonata make an interesting comparison. For these measures are all in a sudden unison that has an effect similar to that of the Haydn example, though in a very different context. A

The peremptory authority of the unison here is ordained by the very absence of any other action. Haydn has, so to speak, taken us over the "rough road" into Part II of the form.<sup>52</sup>

A more heavily freighted use of texture as a sign is the abruptly introduced unison that virtually commandeers the action less than half-way through the development of the first movement of Beethoven's String Quartet in F, Op. 135 (see Example 16, m. 80). Of all the variables of the moment, it is primarily the sudden, one-measure *forte* unison treatment of the initial gesture of the first tune in the first key area (cf. mm. 4-5; at m. 80 the dominant harmony, V of B<sup>b</sup>, is essentially continued from the preceding measure) that rudely jolts our attention to the false recapitulation that begins (in B flat) in the very next measure. The *forte* unison here is, of course, in very bold

Example 16

Beethoven, String Quartet in F, Op. 135, I, mm. 78-83

[Allegretto]

sequence on the head of the rondo tune, this unison passage leads to the first big refrain of the rondo material. The unison motion allows for looking no other way; it is (as in the Haydn example) as if the listener were grabbed and forced in a single direction. In a special sense, I think, the composer has taken the reins; there is a kind of tyrannical routing of our listening.

<sup>52</sup> In the Finale of his Symphony No. 40 in G minor, K. 550, Mozart takes this kind of unison function at the beginning of the development to a higher power. And the unison has a seemingly self-contradictory double function: it is surely one ingredient in the dramatic disorientation of the passage, but at the same time it commandingly orients us to that very disorientation.

contrast to the preceding (as well as following) action, and Beethoven gives us no other warning or preparation. We are forced, on very short notice, to re-orient our listening. This may be the ultimate in the pre-emptive authority of a unison with the greatest temporal economy.<sup>53</sup>

A unison gesture may also serve to announce tonal locus at a number of important structural junctures along the way of a single piece, as in the development of the first movement of Mozart's Piano Quartet in E Flat, K. 493 (Example 17). Not only does a pronounced unison treatment of the opening of the second key-area tune (from m. 30)<sup>54</sup> mark the beginning of the development, but the same gesture guides us through a tour of keys by assertive announcements within the development (as at mm. 96, 106, 110, 114, 124, 126).<sup>55</sup> (This kind of musical sign is a little like those we get along a thruway, as we

#### Example 17

Mozart, Piano Quartet in E Flat, K. 493, i, mm. 94-101; mm. 105-12

[Allegro]

Vln.  
+ Vla.

Vc.

96

f

p

f

p

<sup>53</sup> For a study in contrast with this passage in Op. 135, see the finale of the String Quartet in B flat, Op. 130, where Beethoven employs a seventeen-measure-long unison before the false recapitulation.

<sup>54</sup> The beginning of this tune is identical with the lead-in, or transition, to it (except in scoring) at measures 28-29. Mozart utilizes the double meaning of this gesture in the development.

<sup>55</sup> The same sort of use of unison textures to mark changes of key in development sections, and to dramatize structural articulations of other kinds, is found in the late eighteenth-century repertory of *quatuors concertants* written for Paris and aimed primarily at amateur players and listeners. It seems likely that, in this repertory, such unisons also served to orient a listener, or, especially, a player who was "lost." The important point, however, is that the use of unison as a syntactic marker during a piece is not limited to works of the most sophisticated composers. See Janet M. Levy, "The *Quatuor Concertant* in Paris in the Latter Half of the Eighteenth-Century" (Ph.D. diss., Stanford Univ., 1971), pp. 269-71.

The image displays a musical score for a piece, likely from a film score, featuring piano, violin, and cello parts. The score is divided into three systems.

The first system shows piano accompaniment. The piano part begins with a melody in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The second system includes violin (Vla. 106) and cello (Vc. b2) parts, both marked *f*. The violin part features a melodic line with a fermata, and the cello part provides a rhythmic accompaniment. The third system shows a violin part marked *110* and a piano accompaniment with a rhythmic pattern.

travel past various towns—presumably en route to a farther destination; periodically we are told where we are along our route by large signs—usually all of the same format, too—as we continue on the grand itinerary.)

In the Mozart Piano Quartet, except for transpositions, the unison gesture of announcement retains its original form (as at the beginning of the development). But there are instances, as in the rondo Finale of Schubert's Piano Trio in B Flat, Op. 99 (Example 18), when the initial impact of a unison is so forceful that even when the gesture is substantially transformed and placed in widely different contexts, it retains an important part of its original character and function. More specifically, on its first appearances, the unison gesture at measures 52–55 and 64–67 is a sign for a change in tonal locus. When subsequently it occurs in very different guises its original heraldic character and function stick in our memories and influence our listening.

Schubert marks the beginning of numerous excursions from the rondo refrain with the gesture (and modified versions of it) shown in Example 18a (mm. 52–55). A sudden contrast in *forte* unison, beginning *alla breve*, and braking the previous pulse and metric/rhythmic patterning, this gesture quickly turns to, and ends in, another key, the relative minor; the *forte* unison is important among the elements of contrast that indelibly set the original nature of the gesture. And so, when the gesture turns up not in unison but in canonic imitation (for instance, mm. 76–88 in Ex. 18b and 140–52), or in a context of repetitive insistence on *non*-movement harmonically, or in a coloristic harmonic see-saw in a remote key, it is at least partly the original behavior of the gesture that contributes to making its new, transformed uses so restive, so colorful, even teasing.

## Example 18

Schubert, Piano Trio in B flat, Op. 99, D. 898, iv (Rondo)

(a) mm. 51–59

[Allegro vivace] 52

52

55

*f* *fz* *fz* *p*

*f* *fz* *fz*

*f* *fz* *fz* *p*

*fz* *p*

(b) mm. 76-80

Musical score for measures 76-80. The score is in 4/4 time and consists of three systems. The first system has a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. It begins with a forte (*f*) dynamic and includes markings for *fz* and *fp*. The second system has a bass clef and includes markings for *fz* and *fp*. The third system has a treble clef and includes markings for *f* and *fz*. The music features a melodic line in the upper voice and a rhythmic accompaniment in the lower voice.

(c) mm. 175-81

Musical score for measures 175-81. The score is in 4/4 time and consists of three systems. The first system has a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. It begins with a fortissimo (*ff*) dynamic and includes markings for *fz* and *tr*. The second system has a bass clef and includes markings for *ff*, *fz*, and *tr*. The third system has a treble clef and includes markings for *ff*, *f*, and a triplet of eighth notes. The music features a melodic line in the upper voice and a rhythmic accompaniment in the lower voice.

(d) mm. 230-39

Musical score for measures 230-39. The score is in 4/4 time and consists of three systems. The first system has a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. It begins with a forte (*f*) dynamic and includes markings for *fz* and *fp*. The second system has a bass clef and includes markings for *f* and *fz*. The third system has a treble clef and includes markings for *f* and *fz*. The music features a melodic line in the upper voice and a rhythmic accompaniment in the lower voice.

(e) mm. 250-52

It is also because of our memory of its original assertive function that the unison gesture from measures 52-55 can be used playfully (as at mm. 176-80, Ex. 18c; and also at mm. 188, 192, 242, etc.) to cue us for harmonic movement that does not in fact take place—harmony that is deflected at “the last minute” on the last melody note (as at m. 179) by some kind of deceptive cadence. In each case the gesture ends up not in arrival at the indicated “place,” but in movement beyond it—to another, a different, temporary tonal center.

There is yet another kind of play on—perhaps a mockery of—the initially established sign when, at measure 234 (Ex. 18d), the gesture (modified, however, to move by step in its third measure) ends up precisely where it began, tonally speaking. This turn of events is particularly amusing because the four-measure perch on the solo repeated note, *f* (mm. 230-33), surely readies us for movement. Still another contradiction of the originally established meaning is the quasi-ostinato use of the gesture in the  $\frac{3}{2}$  section (mm. 250-58 in Ex. 18e). Stubborn non-movement of the gesture that originally seemed fashioned for movement makes us smile.<sup>56</sup>

In addition to heralding certain kinds of change or announcing locus, there are some unisons that seem specifically to herald other unisons. The overture to Mozart's *Idomeneo* provides a clear example (Example 19). As is typical of many opera overtures, the development section is cursory. It is characterized by a quasi-sequential treatment

<sup>56</sup> The discussion of Example 18 points up the intricate connection that often exists between conventionalized and contextual signs. Here an established conventionalized sign also functions contextually. The contextual play with a conventionalized sign (as it is initially presented) is an important aspect of the rhetoric of this movement.

of the gesture in the winds in measure 85, heard in overlapping dialogue with a sequential, stepwise motion in the strings, all over a dominant pedal. At measures 90–92 the rupture of this texture and its sudden replacement by the striking unison (first strings and bassoon, then tutti winds and strings), a *fortissimo* treatment of the gesture from measure 85, reminds us of the beginning of the piece. Indeed, the only other bold unison had been the French-overture-style fanfare that opened the overture. The unison at measures 90–93 is a harbinger of return—the return of another, the opening, unison of the piece. Perhaps it is because of the shortness of the development that Mozart

## Example 19

Mozart, Overture to *Idomeneo*, mm. 85–97

[Allegro]

85 W.W. *sfz* *sfz* *sfz*

Vln. 2

Str. *sfz* Vln. 1 *p* 8<sup>ve</sup> above *f*

Hns.

90 *ff* *ff* *ff* [Return] 93

Str. *ff* Tutti (Str. + W.W.) + 2 Tpts. + 2 Hns. *f*

+ Bsns. *ff* *f*

+ Timp.

gives such a bold textural cue. In any case, this example illustrates that unisons may function as signs of other signs.<sup>57</sup>

More common than unisons that refer to other unisons—a special class—are unisons used more simply as auxiliary signs of close. These are usually gatherings of strands of action and have the effect of consolidation. Or, quite oppositely, depending on context, the effect may be one of dissolution or a “clearing out” into a single line, chord, or even a single structural tone.

In the Classic and Romantic repertoires there are numerous instances of unisons used as confirming signs for closes, particularly for the closes of first key areas or expositions in sonata-form movements. An excerpt from the first movement of Beethoven’s String Quintet in C, Op. 29, shows one of these, in which the unison, as a kind of consolidation and intensification of preceding melodic and rhythmic action and sound, signals the close of the exposition (Example 20).<sup>58</sup> At the close of another exposition, that of the first

#### Example 20

Beethoven, String Quintet in C, Op. 29, i, end of exposition (mm. 91–95)

[Allegro moderato]

The musical score for Example 20 shows three staves: Violins (Vlns.), Violas (Vlas.), and Violoncello (Vc.). The music is in C major and 4/4 time. It begins at measure 91 with a unison of sixteenth-note figures. The dynamics are marked *ff* (fortissimo) and *sf decresc.* (sforzando decrescendo), leading to a final measure marked *p* (piano). The score includes first endings and repeat signs.

<sup>57</sup> Again, of course, there is a clear overlap between the roles of conventionalized and contextual signs. See also the first movements in Schubert’s *Sonatina* for Violin and Piano in D, Op. 137, No. 1 and Mozart’s *String Quartet* in F, K. 590, for unisons that close expositions and help to remind us of the beginning—that is, prepare us for the repeat.

<sup>58</sup> Sometimes conventional (formulaic) triadic motives in unison (not necessarily heard before in the movement) close key areas or expositions. See, for example, the *Presto* second movement of Sammartini’s *Notturmo* No. 2 in D (close of first key area) and the first movement of Haydn’s *String Quartet* in F, Op. 74, No. 2 (close of exposition).

movement of Beethoven's String Quartet in B Flat, Op. 130, unison scale-patterning prepares us for the repetition of the exposition or the continuation to Part II by forcibly reconcentrating the action in a middle-low register, a normal register for repetition or continuation in this movement, after the wide splay of contrary motion that had built up to the cadence (on G flat).<sup>59</sup>

The use of unison for closing is most dramatic in a polyphonic context precisely because several independent strands are abruptly brought under the authority of—rather literally channeled into—one. To step back in time from the principal repertory under consideration, the first movement of Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No. 3 provides a striking group of instances of peremptory harnessing of polyphonic action by unisons employed strategically at cadential points (mm. 7-8, 57-58, 135-36, and, partially, 45-46).<sup>60</sup> Particularly in a polyphonic context, the unison is at one end of the textural-sound continuum. And the consistency with which Bach used the unison for cadences in this movement strongly suggests that he considered it a reining-in element.

In all of these examples, as well as in many others, the unison both underlines and ratifies what we know from other parameters. It is perhaps like what happens when a passenger checks the posted sign as the train pulls into a station. The stop will doubtless have been announced by the conductor; the passenger may even know the order of stops (and so can infer the particular stop). Yet he is likely still to check the painted sign at the station in order to ratify what he knows.

A unison has double value as a close because it maintains the strength of the tutti while as a single line it can also form a smooth transition to a solo beginning. In Example 21 from the first movement of Schubert's String Quartet in G, Op. 161, measures 106-109 are at once both a consolidating close (of a second, long presentation of the characteristic passage of the second key area) and also a kind of clearing-out to a single tone on which Schubert pivots to a new key area. And the single-linedness of the unison provides a smooth

<sup>59</sup> Another, if less boldly dramatic, example of a unison "representing" the reassembly of characters after a splay of melodic motion occurs at the close of the exposition in Beethoven's String Quartet in C minor, Op. 18, No. 4, first movement, measures 70-77. The intriguing aspect of this unison, *pianissimo*, is its conspiratorial character; surely this must be related to the mimetic qualities of a *pianissimo* unison—in a conspiracy men act together as one and in secrecy.

<sup>60</sup> Vivaldi frequently uses a unison in a similar manner, sometimes as a punctuating tutti ritornello.

transition to the solo beginning of another presentation of the characteristic second key-area tune, in another key (B flat).<sup>61</sup>

Example 21

Schubert, String Quartet in G, Op. 161, D. 887, i, mm. 105-111

[Allegro molto moderato] Vlns. 1 + 2

Vln. 1

Vln. 2 + Vla.

Vc.

106

Vln. 2 / Vla.

f

p

109

pp

Vc.

pizz.

pp

Vla.

pizz.

It is probably with the minor mode unison that the maximum potential for dramatic or theatrical effect exists. Both the authority and the metahuman qualities of minor unisons are uncommonly bold and unmistakable. And the connection between the minor unison passage and expressive character in a composition seems at least implicitly to have been recognized. We read, for example, "and the wild command that opens the first movement, *unisono* . . . remaining

<sup>61</sup> In another context see Beethoven's String Quartet Op. 18, No. 1, first movement, the end of the first key area into the beginning of the second key area. (Indeed, this smooth connection in ongoing process was not present in the first version of the same movement and Beethoven's revisions of the quartet suggest that he was concerned with just such matters.) And in yet a different context, see the second movement, the *Scherzando*, of his String Quartet Op. 59, No. 1 (mm. 61-68), where a unison prepares the first big return of the solo opening idea of the movement. For the reverse—a solo preparing a unison—see the rondo finale of Schubert's "Death and the Maiden" String Quartet (mm. 309-17 and 646-51), where a solo at once suggests and leads to the unison refrain of the rondo.

threateningly in the background . . . .”<sup>62</sup> And: “This sonata is startling in its emotional tension and ripeness. From the very opening, with its hollow unison, we are spellbound by the tragic force of the music.”<sup>63</sup> The “wild command” that opens Mozart’s Piano Quartet in G minor, K. 478, might profitably be thought of as a minor mode analogue to the heraldic fanfare unison openings in the major key, but, of course, with very different affective character—a threatening control, as Einstein suggests, rather than stable, affirmative, heraldic authority.<sup>64</sup>

The “hollow unison” opening of Mozart’s Sonata in E minor for Violin and Piano, K. 304 (300c), is quite another story; it provides a telling example and a focus for several matters to be considered (Example 22). This is not a terse “wild command” but rather a full-blown, twelve-measure statement—an eight-measure period, plus a four-measure motive-group that ends on a half cadence. Its affective character is unmistakably on the dark side of the emotional continuum.<sup>65</sup> As with all the examples in this essay, many elements contribute to affect—to the “tragic force,” as Blom puts it. But in this example, the melodic and rhythmic means seem strikingly elementary for such expressive power. It is the presence of a unison for the entire twelve-measure opening—an uncommon extent for an opening statement in the minor—and its combination with a *piano* dynamic level for the first eight measures, that is unusual and of special interest here (see Example 22a).

We recognize at once that several instrumental parts—or agents—are present; but they had been joined, as if in a single dramatic

<sup>62</sup> Alfred Einstein, *Mozart: His Character, His Work*, trans. Arthur Mendel and Nathan Broder (London, 1945), pp. 264–65, discussing Mozart’s Piano Quartet in G minor, K. 478.

<sup>63</sup> Eric Blom in *The Mozart Companion*, ed. Louis Biancolli (New York, 1954), p. 533, discussing Mozart’s Sonata for Violin and Piano in E minor, K. 304 (300c).

<sup>64</sup> Other annunciatory commands—analogue to the “wild command” of the opening of Mozart’s G-minor Piano Quartet—are illustrated by the opening of Beethoven’s Piano Concerto in C minor and the opening of Haydn’s String Quartet in F-sharp minor, Op. 50, No. 4. Another interesting example in this general connection is the introduction to Act II (the monastery of St. Just) of Verdi’s *Don Carlos*, a *piano* unison in F-sharp minor, performed by four horns. The ominous quality of this music is only quietly asserted, but there is an undertone that seems insidious, menacing. Needless to say, the affect comes from the activity in all the parameters and not from the unison *per se*, but it is mostly the horns’ unison that suggests the controlling character of the Church.

<sup>65</sup> Comparing the Counts in Verdi’s *Il trovatore* and Mozart’s *Le nozze di Figaro*, Julian Budden writes of “the classical device of a heavy unison to express negative emotion” (*The Operas of Verdi*, II [New York, 1979], 81).

## Example 22

Mozart, Sonata for Violin and Piano in E minor, K. 304 (300c), i

(a) mm. 1-15

Allegro

5

8

13

(b) mm. 111-17

113

The image shows a musical score snippet with three staves. The top staff is a treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a common time signature (C). It contains a melody line with notes and rests. The middle staff is a bass clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a common time signature (C). It contains a rhythmic accompaniment consisting of eighth notes, with a dynamic marking of *fp* (forzando piano) above it. The bottom staff is a bass clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a common time signature (C). It contains a rhythmic accompaniment consisting of eighth notes, with a dynamic marking of *fp* (forzando piano) above it. The score is divided into two measures by a vertical bar line.

character or persona.<sup>66</sup> No other part or character forms a support (e.g., a bass line), nothing competes, punctuates, responds, imitates. There is, in short, no ground from which to “view” the melody. Everything has been subjugated and absorbed into the one character (the unison line). Perhaps this mime of a dreaded human experience—total emptiness and solitariness, as if there were no one else in the universe to relate to—accounts for some of the “hollow” character described by Blom.

The hushed *piano* dynamic for the first eight-measure statement increases the sense of suppressed energy that we experience in the passage. For it is most natural that the expression of a unison by different instruments be loud and forceful (as in the examples referred to on p. 509, the majestic fanfares). The *piano*, combined with a unison line, creates a double containment: the controlling authority of the unison and the suppression of a normal dynamic. Two things are, so to speak, unnatural.

After the reined-in affect of the first eight-measure period, there is an eerie cast created by the stormy *forte* contrast of the second part of the melody—the sequential motive-group in measures 9–12. Perhaps in its more normal dynamic for a unison, as well as in its stormy character, it is a preparation for entry (m. 13) into a more human—a less empty, less anonymous—world. One of the elements of enchainment in the “double containment” has been lifted; expression is becoming gradually more natural. For a listener identifying with the unison line *qua* character, there is a certain relief when, at measure 13, an accompaniment—at once responsorial and supportive—enters. Although not as sustained or intense, because the *Sturm und Drang* unison statement occurs only in the piano part (for the first eight measures), the same sort of thing happens in the opening of Beetho-

<sup>66</sup> In this connection see Cone, *The Composer's Voice*, pp. 103–104 on the subject of how we hear a single melody line when it is orchestrally doubled or sectionally reinforced.

ven's Sonata for Violin and Piano in C minor, Op. 30, No. 2. Here, too, when a regularly patterned accompaniment appears, together with the new sound of the violin (m. 9), we know we have entered a more natural, nonarbitrary world. In both the Mozart and Beethoven sonatas, the accompaniment patterns themselves are, of course, arbitrary, but not so the principle underlying their use: it is more natural to have a line with a regular accompaniment pattern than to have individual parts of a chamber ensemble performing the same line in unison. With the appearance of the accompaniment in both sonatas we have, at least temporarily, left an alien world.

As the preceding discussion suggests, purely syntactic explanations for lengthy unisons, especially in the minor, are difficult to advance. The mode for understanding such unisons may indeed be largely extra-musical; perhaps there can be no syntactic explanation for sustained unison presence. This may even be so for some less sustained statements in the minor, such as frequently appear in the *Sturm und Drang* symphonies of Haydn (for example, the first and fourth movements of his Symphony No. 44 in E minor) and in other works of this type, such as the finale of Mozart's early Symphony in G minor, No. 25.

The recapitulation of the first movement of Mozart's Violin and Piano Sonata in E minor calls attention to an interesting aspect of the relation between conventionalized and contextual signs (Example 22b). The beginning of the recapitulation is rather elusive because of several violations of normal recall at the moment of tonic return. Not only is the order of material reversed (with the *forte* motive-group, from m. 8, coming first) but, importantly, the recall of the opening theme in the tonic begins as a solo (m. 113)—a conspicuous deviation from the imprint of the original unison presentation, which would have been more normal for the return.<sup>67</sup> Neither the motive-group quote in the tonic at measure 108 (with its ending on V) nor the solo beginning of the most salient part of the first key-area melody satisfies our sense of return.

As a denial of the expected unison, the solo texture at measure 113 warns us that "something is up." Partly it prepares us for the ensuing disruption of stable harmony; what follows is, indeed, an invasion of stability, this time from below, by an augmented sixth chordal drum

<sup>67</sup> This, I think, despite the fact that the second, and less stable part of the opening statement occurred first at measures 108–112; and because of our memory of the original order, this may have suggested the return of the material that had originally followed it—the material that had occurred accompanied at measure 13 in the exposition.

bass; this harmonized drum bass is an escalation of the sort of thing that happened shortly after the beginning of the development.<sup>68</sup> (Stable recall is postponed until the rhyme with material from measures 20ff., essentially the material that closed the first key area in the exposition.)

A solo is altogether less controlled and predictable than a unison; virtually anything can happen to, or against, it. To take previous metaphors a step further: a solo, "speaking" as a lone individual, is felt to be more vulnerable than a unison sounding as the utterance of a group. Relatively speaking, a unison is impervious to invasion and, in this style, normally concludes (on some hierarchic level) before textural change occurs. This is not as often the case with a solo. In the Mozart example something is done *to* the solo. (One can scarcely imagine, say, a harmonic accompaniment in measure 114 had measure 112-13 been a unison.)

A maximum projection of syntactic ambiguity—of line, or rhythm, or both—is also closely affiliated with minor unisons. Such ambiguity is, of course, itself an aspect of expressive character. Because of the relatively greater frequency of chromaticism in minor, intensification of ambiguity by unison textures tends to happen more often in the minor than the major. Two striking instances are the opening of the development section of the last movement of Mozart's Symphony No. 40 in G minor and the opening of the first movement of his Piano Concerto in C minor, K. 491. But ambiguity occurs in the major, too, as in the opening of Mozart's String Quartet in E flat, K. 428, or the opening of Beethoven's "Grosse Fuge" String Quartet. The absence of chord specification in each instance both insures and underlines whatever ambiguity is present as the result of other parameters.

Further, the unison requires and enforces—demands—a temporary acceptance of the ambiguity; as mentioned earlier, a unison in this style is normally impervious to invasion or modification until it has run its course—completed a unit of action on some hierarchic level of structure.

Similarly, the unison facilitates and puts in boldface the possibilities for unusual or extravagant grammar. This is the case with

<sup>68</sup> The solo texture at measure 113 does not seem to be simply a response to a need for contrast with the preceding unison, for Mozart did not bother with such contrast in the exposition. Even if it were, however, the point about the sign value of this moment holds.

chromatic lines that go “too far”—as, for example, the chromatic move to D flat as V of G flat in the first movement of Beethoven's String Quartet Op. 130 (mm. 51–53), the last unison motion in the first movement of Haydn's String Quartet Op. 74, No. 1 (shown in Ex. 1), or the Presto transformation of the unison gesture from measure 52, to begin the coda (m. 611), in the finale of Schubert's Piano Trio in B flat.<sup>69</sup>

If rhythm is unstable or ambiguous, the unison also maximizes those qualities. For example, the uncertainty as to where the downbeat really is at the opening of the Scherzo of Beethoven's String Quartet in A minor, Op. 132 (Example 23) is unrelieved by any indications from other parts.<sup>70</sup> (Surely, *a*, as the first structural tone, is a potential downbeat; the slurs, directing the player to perform the meter, contribute to the ambiguity.) For similar reasons, the unison opening of Part II in the Scherzo of Beethoven's String Quartet in E flat, Op. 127 (mm. 36–40) maximizes the melodic/metric ambiguity; it puts in boldface the instability present as a result of non-congruent action in primary parameters. In such instances, the neutrality of presentation in unison is rather like the straight-faced comic's refusal to express fully the meaning of his action. Something is held back. But the neutrality ultimately intensifies the meaning of his communication.

### Example 23

Beethoven, String Quartet in A minor, Op. 132, ii, mm. 1–6

*Allegro ma non tanto*

<sup>69</sup> Other treatments of the unison gesture are discussed on pp. 513–17 and shown in Example 18 (the Presto version is not included there).

<sup>70</sup> Even with some indication from another part, a unison may strengthen ambiguity. In the first movement of Haydn's Symphony No. 92 in G, for example, despite a pedal tone on the downbeat (mm. 65–69), a unison treatment of a hemiola pattern maximizes propulsion toward the second key area.

A sudden neutrality of this type would also seem to be part of Beethoven's initially noncommittal stance toward the meaning of the gesture (mm. 10–14) shown in Example 24 from the first movement of his String Quartet in F, Op. 135.<sup>71</sup> The neutrality of this unison texture insists upon the non-fit of melody with prevailing meter—calls attention, that is, to the metric displacement of the melody, as well as to a melodic character totally different from anything that has preceded or will follow. In its immediate context the gesture is unassimilated, and the unison is an important element in our puzzlement about its nature and ultimate function. We are forced to suspend it in memory until subsequent events clarify its significance.

Example 24

Beethoven, String Quartet in F, Op. 135, I, mm. 8–16

The image displays two systems of musical notation for a string quartet. The first system is marked [Allegretto] and includes dynamics like *p*, *poco cresc.*, and *arco*. The second system includes dynamics like *p* and *cresc.*. The notation shows various string parts with notes, rests, and performance instructions.

Related to the power of the unison to intensify ambiguity is its power to deny full harmonic definition. By virtue of its association with the ceremonial, the unison can prompt us temporarily to suspend belief in the “reality” of a passage, to take that passage as if in quotes,

<sup>71</sup> Joseph Kerman, *The Quartets of Beethoven* (New York, 1967), pp. 355–57, dubs this theme a “cantus firmus” and Leonard Ratner (in a class on Beethoven’s string quartets) called it a “commedia dell’arte character.” That both characterized this material, if in seemingly contradictory ways, further corroborates points made earlier (see above, pp. 508–509) about the tendency to account for unison passages with metaphors or other extra-musical aids.



apprehension of the passage. By the end of this passage Beethoven confirms our interpretation: he explicitly reduces the texture to the single tone *c* in order to leave this "mistaken" place. The *c* is treated as a seventh in *vii*<sup>7</sup> of E, the proper tonic, and we return to the "real world" of the piece.

The example from Beethoven's Symphony No. 7 illustrates one way in which a unison may threaten or disrupt the world that we inhabit as imaginary participants in the unfolding of a musical drama or discourse. Under normal circumstances, when we participate in the events of a composition we are free to identify with the lines, groupings, etc., variously, as if with characters in a play or story. And though the performer, and especially the composer, leads us, as participating listeners, we are free to assume the roles *we* choose.<sup>72</sup> But when we experience a unison passage we are, like the lines themselves, subjugated to the compelling authority of the one line that is given to all. Because there is only a single group action, there is no choice. We are forced to abandon our connections with individual dramatic *personae* and to enter the shared, authoritarian world of the unison passage. Such unanimity, as noted earlier, appears unnatural.

And yet, taken on a next higher level—from more of a god's-eye view, so to speak—the world of ritual can itself be understood as natural. Clifford Geertz writes: "The world as lived and the world as imagined, fused under the agency of a single set of symbolic forms, turns out to be the same world. . . ."<sup>73</sup> Is it perhaps our experience of that fusion that makes some unisons so powerful, even, at times, bone-chilling in their evocation of a collective past?

But talk of the evocation of a collective past verges on the indefinite and the diversionary—away from musical experience. Quite to the contrary, my subject has been the definite directives—the signs—that certain textures provide for listeners (and, of course, performers-as-listeners). Far from being diversionary, referential connotations of textures, whether culture-bound or cross-cultural, help us to understand functional relations—the syntax—of compositions. Far from leading us *away*, such connotations may serve as instantaneous conduits to syntax. This has been shown in numerous examples of unisons and solos. Contrastingly, the more conventionalized the

<sup>72</sup> I am particularly indebted here to Cone's discussion of the nature of our participation in a musical composition in *The Composer's Voice*. His writing has been highly suggestive for my thinking about the ways in which unison and solo textures affect our identification and participation.

<sup>73</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Culture* (New York, 1973), p. 112.

texture, as with the well established, highly formalized accompaniment patterns, the less we need—or have—referential connotations as clues to understanding syntax. The textural signs considered in this essay may be thought of as lying along a continuum. At one end would be the general “Stop, look, listen!” types, at the other the kind that instruct us specifically how to construe the music. Further inquiry is likely to bring to light other textures that can be interpreted as syntactic signs; and it seems probable that textural types similar to those explored here can be identified and fruitfully studied in the music of other epochs and cultures.

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