

Streichquartet Opus 18 No.1
By Beethoven
Analysis by David Mitchell

The higher-level structure is a compound period with an antecedent=presentation + continuation structure. The total measure length is twenty measures. The extra four measures occur in the continuation phrase. They are due to extension using the formal process of harmonic sequencing. The harmonic sequence starts at measure thirteen and is probably the most unusual feature of the piece. The sequence is down a half step up a minor third from measure thirteen through measure seventeen. The antecedent phrase is also interesting because it features an extended tonic prolongation that ends at measure seven.

Dynamically, there are some interesting features. The presentation phrase in the antecedent is piano and its return in the consequent is forte. It gives you the sense of a gentle introduction of the basic idea followed by a forceful return growing out of the harmonic tension in the half cadence.

The melodic sense of opening up is achieved by motive a. It is repeated at the octave in measure five. The octave transposition opens up the melodic line. The melody closes down somewhat at measure eight. But the melody does not resolve all the way to note f until the downbeat of nine. But measure nine starts forte and emphatically propels the melody forward in the harmonic sequence that follows.

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