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In Search of a Lost Language: Performing in Early-Recorded Style in Viola and String Quartet Repertoires

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4) Early-Recorded String Quartet Analyses

4.1) Introduction

Before Lionel Tertis achieved international fame as a soloist at the beginning of the 20th century, the viola was largely consigned to a collaborative role within orchestral and chamber music spheres. The leading players of the instrument were often active in string quartets, an ensemble setting within which the technical demands on violists, set by the repertoire composed, were steadily increased throughout the 19th century. Lionel Tertis, Oskar Nedbal, Arthur Post, Léon van Hout, and even Pierre Monteux spent all or part of their careers performing in professional string quartets, and a number of the quartets in which they played, like the Czech String Quartet and the Ysaÿe Quartet, were considered to be the foremost ensembles of their time.

The beginning of the 20th century was also a time when a great number of string quartets rose to fame by releasing recordings. The result was a kind of golden age for the professional string quartet, with dozens of ensembles achieving international acclaim. Thus, while I might have included the London, Busch, Flonzaley, Musical Art, Rosé, or Wendling Quartets in this study, I have focused on the first commercially-recorded ensemble, the Haagsche Toonkunstkwartet (referred to as the HTK), and two quartets with concrete connections to the violists studied in Chapter Three—the Czech String Quartet with whom both Tertis and Nedbal were associated, and the Brüder-Post Quartett founded by Arthur Post. Finally, I have also included the Klingler Quartet due to the group's connection to violinist Joseph Joachim and their association with wider 19th-century German traditions. I also make reference to recordings by the Capet and Budapest quartets, but I do not examine these in great detail.

I explore the performance practices of these early-20th-century string quartets through a 'close-listening' analysis of their recordings, following the method used in the previous chapter.²³⁰ String quartet performance practices, like other aspects of WAM²³¹ practice, have changed drastically over time. In reference to the Capet Quartet's 1928 recording of Debussy's *String Quartet* Op. 10, music critic James Leonard writes:

²³⁰ Close listening, examined in Chapter Three, is a term coined by Leech-Wilkinson, and refers to detailed analysis of recordings. See *The Changing Sound of Music*, Chapter 8.2 paragraph 19, <http://www.charm.rhul.ac.uk/studies/chapters/chap8.html>.

²³¹ Western Art Music as discussed in Chapter One.

These recordings were as good as it got, and just because we hear and perform music differently, doesn't necessarily mean that we hear and perform it better... [The Capet Quartet] articulated their understanding in a thoroughly compelling performance that will convince even those who came to musical maturity after 1928.²³²

A *Musical Times* review describes the Capet Quartet's London debut stating that, "the playing was remarkable for its smoothness, admirable balance, and refined quality of tone."²³³ As Leonard rightly observes above, for those open to absorbing early-recorded chamber music performances, the experience can be compelling. This is certainly the mind-set that has guided both the close-listening analyses below, as well as my own experimental quartet performances discussed in Chapter Five.

As discussed in Chapter One, MSP ideology emphasises standards of discipline, control, and clarity, with contemporary chamber music performers striving to synchronise their approaches to sound, expression, and rhythm, while brushing aside the complexity and dimensionality achieved by multi-layeredness as sloppy and de-synchronous. Robert Philip, however, offers a general overview of numerous aspects of early-recorded chamber music performances in *Performing Music in the Age of Recording*.²³⁴ He argues that on early recordings we hear musicians (even those in ensembles that played together daily) tackling parameters in strikingly independent ways within single performances. Here, one notices differences between individual players in vibrato, portamento, note lengths, and articulation—all in a temporal context marked by rhythmic flexibility within individual lines and wide tempo fluctuations across entire movements. The result of individual performers' de-synchronised approaches, while playing together, is multi-layeredness, an effect whereby elements of the musical texture pull in different directions simultaneously. I have examined multi-layeredness in the context of viola solo and viola/piano duo recordings in the previous chapter, discussing its prominence in early-recorded style as well as the depth and complexity it adds to performances. Whereas the multi-layeredness that can be achieved by an individual pianist or string player multiplies in the context of duo performance, this effect can be further increased in quartet settings, as is readily heard on the early recordings examined in this chapter.

²³² James Leonard, review of *Capet String Quartet 5*, Opus Kura OPK2057, accessed December 27, 2017, <https://www.allmusic.com/album/string-quartets-by-ravel-debussy-schumann-mw0001423903>.

²³³ "London Concerts," *The Musical Times* vol. 46, no. 746 (April 1, 1905): 261-62. Accessed December 27, 2018, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/905266>.

²³⁴ Philip, *Performing Music in the Age of Recording*, 104.

The various string quartets studied here share an approach to tempo modification, rhythmic alteration, portamento, and multi-layering with early-recorded violists and singers, and as has been demonstrated in the previous chapter, the use of such parameters is broadly incompatible with MSPs. Although this chapter takes this viewpoint as established, striking cases of distance from MSPs are at times highlighted to show similarities and differences between these quartets. While such early-recorded stylistic parameters are generally shared amongst early-recorded string quartets, they are not used in a streamlined fashion, and there is great diversity in the way they are negotiated amongst various groups—the wide variety of approaches to multi-layering heard on these recordings serving as a case in point.

In an attempt to make sense of this stylistic multiplicity, one might be tempted to group the quartets studied below according to national styles—the HTK as Dutch, the Klingler Quartet as German and the Czech Quartet as Czech—but I fear this would lead to an oversimplification of the diversity represented by these groups, and in some cases, it might contradict the evidence presented by their recordings. While there are similarities within these groupings with regard to timbre, tempo modification, and multi-layeredness, simply noting them does little to describe the rich diversity of their performances. What this chapter sets out to do, therefore, is to chart the diversity of a number of early-recorded string quartets and point to factors that might explain the rich complexity characterizing these quartets' performances while at the same time noting any striking similarities among them. Ultimately, this analysis aims to identify how early-recorded performance practices function in chamber music contexts—insights that can inform their application in contemporary settings.

4.2) Haagsche Toonkunstkwartet: Forgotten Pioneering Recording Artists

RÉPERTOIR
van het

HAAGSCHE TOONKUNST KWARTET

Bestaande uit de Heeren:

HENRI HACK, 1^e viool;
H. VOERMAN, 2^e viool;
BART VERHALLEN, alt;
en CH. VAN ISTERDAEL, violoncel.

o.l.d.	30440	Romance	E. GRIEG.
o.l.d.	30441	Menuet	BOCCHERINI.
o.l.d.	30442	Adagio	SCHUMANN.
o.l.d.	30443	Serenmusik	RUBINSTEIN.
o.l.d.	30444	Andante Cantabile	TCHAIKÓWSKI.
o.l.d.	30445	Presto (G. dur Kwartet)	JOS. HAYDN.
o.l.d.	30446	Menuet	BART VERHALLEN.

Figure 4.01: Pathé catalogue listing for the HTK's recordings.²³⁵

On November 2, 1905, the four gentlemen of the HTK sent a letter to Mr. Charles Pathé, founder of the legendary Paris-based recording company Pathé Frères, thanking him for recording the quartet. This letter, an entry in Pathé's Dutch-language catalogue from the same year, and two of the original recordings, are all that remain of these pioneering efforts in commercial string quartet recording. The HTK, a now-forgotten Netherlands-based ensemble, was given the honour of releasing the first seven commercial recordings of a string quartet. The members of the quartet listed in the catalogue and in the letter sent to Mr. Pathé were Henri Hack (first violin), Herman Voerman (second violin), Bart Verhallen (viola), and Charles Van Isterdael (cello). Of the seven recordings listed in the catalogue, two have been located. Both include a Dutch-language introduction spoken on record by the producer. These recordings are of the *Andante Cantabile* from the *String Quartet* no. 1 by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (Pathé 30444) and the *Presto* from Joseph Haydn's *String Quartet* Op. 54 no. 1 (Pathé 30445). The letter written by the quartet to Pathé reads as follows:

Dear Mr. Pathé

Your phonograph is certainly to be recommended, also for the artist, if needed for self-criticism,

²³⁵ Rolf den Otter, Facebook message to author, July 1st, 2015.

because upon hearing such a complete and true reproduction he is given the opportunity to form an exact judgment of himself. For us it was a revelation.

Sincerely yours,

The Toonkunstkwartet

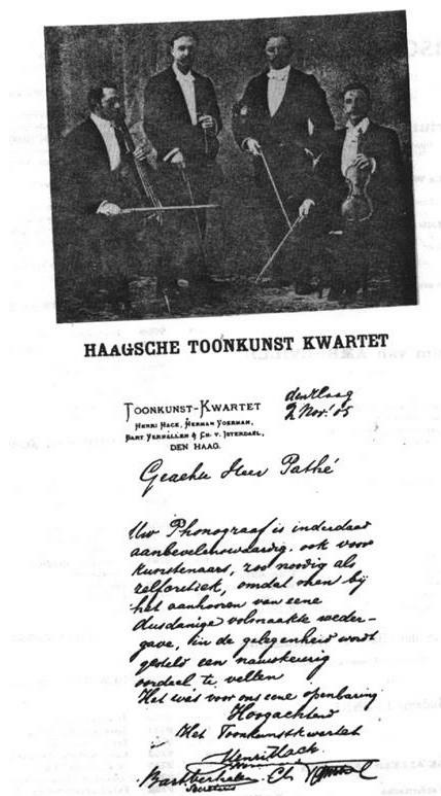


Figure 4.02: Letter from the HTK to Pathé.²³⁶

Starting from the mind-set of MSP ideology, it may be difficult to hear the two surviving recordings by the HTK as ‘complete and true reproductions,’ as the quartet describes them in their letter. The surface noise is immense and the acoustic range of the recording is limited. That the members of the quartet perceived these records as hi-fi, however, connects well with Nicholas Cook’s observation that, “we hear the same technology quite differently from how it was heard in the early years of the twentieth century.”²³⁷ Cook illustrates this point by referring to the tone tests conducted by the Edison record company from 1915 onwards, where live performances and recordings were alternated in a dark concert hall, and audiences were unable to tell the difference.²³⁸ However, it is worth noting that librarian Jan McKee has shed light on the manipulation of these tests by Thomas Edison, who used special equipment and carefully selected

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Cook, *Beyond the Score*, 361.

²³⁸ Ibid., 362.

singers who could imitate their own recordings.²³⁹ Nonetheless, early-20th-century listeners' well-documented amazement at the fidelity of recordings was reason enough for Jonathan Sterne to conclude that, "every age has its own fidelity."²⁴⁰ These recordings underscore the differences between our current understanding of the concept of fidelity and how it sounded and signified over a century ago. The very existence of audio recording technology was considered nothing short of miraculous at the time. The HTK's letter also provides a sense of how performers were affected by the advent of recording technology. For the first time, they were suddenly able to hear themselves as an audience might, and this, along with changes in the medium itself (as discussed in Chapter Two), was one of the most influential factors in the transformation of WAM performance practice, eventually leading to today's 'clean and tidy' approach. The two HTK cylinders were made available to me by record collector Rolf den Otter, who made digital transfers. At the present moment, they are unavailable publicly and known only to a small group of collectors. Below, I undertake the first detailed analyses of these recordings.

4.2.1) Haagsche Toonkunstkwartet: *String Quartet Op. 54 no. 1: IV Presto* by Joseph Haydn (recorded 1905)

The recording can be found in Appendix II - recording 4.2.1 and the annotated score is in Appendix III – score 4.2.1.

On first hearing, this recording can sound jarring and unfamiliar even to the most unschooled of listeners. While in MSPs, 'Papa' Haydn's works are often performed with grace and nobility, the HTK's approach to tempo and rhythmic dislocation gives the impression of haste and disjointedness. Perhaps the 'self-criticism' the group describes in their letter to Mr. Pathé was connected to their hurried approach, leaving us wondering if the HTK were pleased with what they heard. Further, were the sound engineer and the recording company pleased? We can only assume that they were, because a whole set of recordings of different works were made by the group and released as commercially-viable products. Regardless of how jarring these recordings may sound to some of us today, therefore, they represent a professional quartet at the beginning of the 20th century that was deemed fit to make the first commercial recordings in this genre. It is possible that the first violinist or perhaps even the whole quartet may have used Stroh

²³⁹ Jan McKee, "Is it Live or is it Edison," Blogs, Library of Congress, accessed February 12, 2019, <https://blogs.loc.gov/now-see-hear/2015/05/is-it-live-or-is-it-edison/>.

²⁴⁰ Sterne, *The Audible Past*, 222.

instruments for this recording of Haydn's Op. 54 no. 1 and for their recording of Tchaikovsky's Op. 11 no. 1 (discussed below). As explained above (page 105), this might account for the overall timbre and audibility of the group's sound.

Tempo Modification and Rhythmic Flexibility

The HTK's wild approach to tempo and rhythm causes a general blurriness and lack of clarity in texture, which results in a performance that sounds enthusiastic but exceedingly quick and uncontrolled. This underlines features such as unpredictability and fluidity—features that my colleagues and I explore in our experimental recordings discussed in Chapter Five. These features mainly result from the quartet's continual tendency to rush. Given the time constraints of the phonograph (about 2 - 2.5 minutes), the quartet forgoes all repeats and has to end the piece in m. 150 (just before the final occurrence of the rondo-form's A section). Perhaps then, their choice of a quick tempo is related to the limitations of the medium. However, why allow for the long announcement at the start of the recording (approximately 8 seconds)?

The HTK creates fluidity by subverting notated structure on a phrase-by-phrase level. They accomplish this through shortening long notes, rushing through phrase endings, and rushing sixteenth notes. First violinist Henri Hack shortens nearly all of his dotted notes, as can be heard in m. 5, where he hastily moves on ahead of his colleagues before rushing through the end of the phrase. The whole quartet also blurs phrase boundaries by rushing into the start of a new phrase in m. 40. Another example of this can be heard in m. 50, where Hack enters early and forcefully on the second beat. The HTK rushes nearly all of the sixteenth notes throughout, such that they often sound like 32nds. An especially jarring example of this can be heard in m. 37 - 38, where Hack blurs his passage, aligning the second sixteenth of m. 38 with his colleagues' downbeats.²⁴¹ As a result, he ends up with 7 sixteenths in the bar, yet somehow the quartet more or less synchronises to finish the phrase together in m. 39. In addition to these radical alterations of rhythm, there is the continual de-synchronisation of the three-eighth-note motive heard in m. 16, which sounds jarringly unprofessional by contemporary standards. The general effect of the HTK's quick tempo, shortening of long notes, and rushing of phrase endings and sixteenth notes is to undercut the sense that the work's musical structure is divided into phrases, sub-phrases, and longer sections. This, combined with de-synchronisation, lends the performance a kind of slapdash feeling and continual sense of forward movement.

²⁴¹ For readers familiar with the Dutch language, a pun on the word '*gehaakt*' comes to mind.

Vibrato and Ornamentation

The HTK's use of vibrato is ornamental, in that it is applied unevenly to the beginnings or middles of particular notes, much like Oskar Nedbal's as discussed at length in Chapter Three. While the speed of this performance and the paucity of longer note values gives the players few opportunities to use vibrato, examples of ornamental vibrato can be heard on Hack's long notes in m. 1 and 5, as well as on the entire quartet's longer chords in m. 16.

Concerning ornamentation, Hack changes several pitches in m. 130 and m. 147. I am unable to tell whether these are deliberate ornamentations or simply reading errors. In either case, this general lack of adherence to the detail of the notated score is not only noteworthy, given that this recording was viewed as a viable commercial product, but it also results in a highly individual approach to the work.

The Budapest Quartet: An Early-Recorded Comparison

The recording can be found in Appendix II - recording 4.2.1.2.

That wide-ranging stylistic changes in WAM performance practices took place over the course of the 20th century is evidenced by comparing the HTK (1905) and the Budapest String Quartet (1935) in their respective recordings of this final movement of Haydn's *String Quartet* Op. 54 no. 1.²⁴² Interestingly, the Budapest String Quartet's international reputation was due to the widespread availability of their recordings, while the HTK had a local reputation that largely pre-dated the recorded era. While an MSP ideologue might think the Budapest String Quartet sounds 'old fashioned' because of their portamento-laden early-recorded sound, they would likely agree that their recording conveys nobility and grace through its neatness and tidiness, steadiness of tempo, and adherence to notated rhythmic values. The same ideologue, however, would likely be appalled by the HTK's rushed approach to tempo, rhythmic alteration, dislocation, ornamental vibrato, and pitch ornamentation—all of which fall far outside the bounds of MSPs. In sum, the HTK's recording of Haydn's *Presto* demonstrates a wild, haphazard approach to rhythm and tempo, in which rushing is a central feature.

²⁴² Joseph Haydn, *String Quartet* Op. 54 no. 1, Budapest String Quartet, 1935, HMV DB 2906 (78rpm).

4.2.2) Haagsche Toonkunstkwartet: *String Quartet Op. 11 no.1: II Andante Cantabile* by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (recorded 1905)

The recording can be found in Appendix II - recording 4.2.2 and the annotated score is in Appendix III – score 4.2.2.

The HTK's recording of Tchaikovsky's *Andante Cantabile* from his *String Quartet* no. 1 gives us a sense of how the group approached more lyrical repertoires. The movement had to be heavily cut in order to fit it within the time frame of just over 2 minutes allowed by the phonograph. Thus, the recording starts from the middle section at m. 56 with the material between m. 105 and m. 172 cut out, thereby connecting the return of the A section to the final measures. Much like the recording of Haydn's *Presto* discussed above, however, this recording can be jarringly unfamiliar to those whose expectations are tied to MSPs due to the near-constant occurrence of dislocation and rhythmic alteration, demonstrating just how central these features were to the HTK's playing style.

Tempo Modification and Rhythmic Flexibility

Rhythmic flexibility is frequent as well as highly varied on this recording; multi-layering can be heard throughout, resulting from the de-synchronisation of the melody from the accompanying cello pizzicati. Cellist Charles Van Isterdael's pizzicati also create beat-to-beat variation, which cycles between rushing and slowing, as shown in the tempo graph (Figure 4.03).²⁴³ The vertical axis represents tempo in beats per minute, the horizontal axis represents the recording over time, peaks in the graph show early beats, and troughs show late beats. The time signature is 2/4, with each peak and trough covering two measures up until 1:20. Here, we see cellist Van Isterdael creating peaks and valleys in speed, and shifting patterns over a bar and a half to two bars throughout the movement's middle section, causing a kind of regular, irregularity of tempo. While there is regularity in this approach, it is not of the metronomic variety common in MSPs.

²⁴³ I choose to follow the cello line when marking beat placement in my analysis.

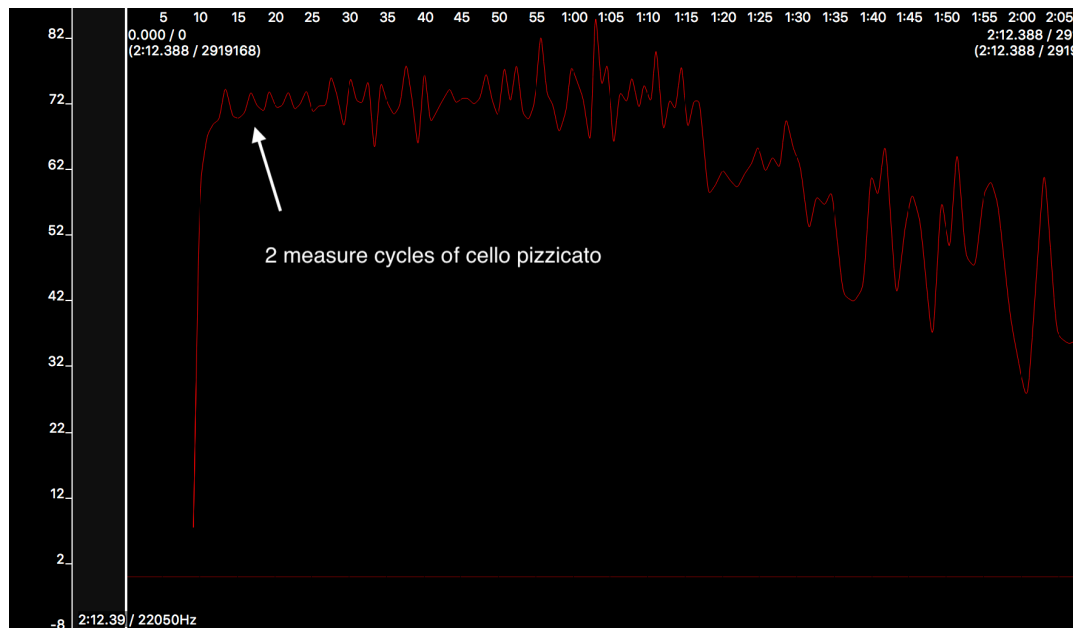


Figure 4.03: Tempo Graph of the Haagsche Toonkunstkwartet's Tchaikovsky recording.

The first violinist, Hack, frequently departs radically from the detail of the notated score in his use of rhythmic alteration. He alters all of the dotted notes and constantly gives repeated figures varied rhythmic treatment. For example, the dotted rhythm in m. 57 is overdotted while in m. 58 it is not. The same applies to his agogic lengthening of the first note of the triplet figure in m. 60, which creates variation after the straight triplet in m. 59. Hack provides yet another example of agogic lengthening in m. 64, where portamento lengthens the second beat of the bar before a broadening of the first beat of m. 65. This broadening is so pronounced that Hack reaches the second beat of m. 65 after the third eighth note of the cello accompaniment, creating wide dislocation. As David Milsom points out, this practice of agogic lengthening can be traced to 19th-century writings on melodic delivery, with Louis Spohr (1784 - 1859) indicating that, “[the figure] is to be played so that the first notes obtain a little longer duration than their value warrants”—a practice that Joachim (1831 - 1907) calls an “imperceptible dwelling on principle notes in the *cantilena*.”²⁴⁴ Tertis also uses this type of agogic lengthening, most notably on his recording of Benjamin Dale’s *Romance*, as does Nebal in Schubert’s *Du bist die Ruh* (both recordings are discussed in detail in Chapter Three).

As mentioned above, one of the outcomes of Hack’s rhythmic alterations is

²⁴⁴ Milsom, *Theory and Practice in Late Nineteenth-Century Violin Performance*, 36.

prominent dislocation between voices. Dislocation is also caused, however, by portamento use in the different voices and arpeggiation. An example of the former occurs in m. 83 where the two violins play the theme in octaves, with second violinist Herman Voerman using portamenti in his triplet figures, lengthening the transition from the second to the third note of the figure, and Hack playing without portamento, ending up slightly ahead of his colleague as a result. It is also worth noting the flatness of Voerman's intonation, especially on the top D flat in m. 84 and 85, which comes across as eerie. Arpeggiation then causes dislocation in m. 173 - 174, where the first pizzicato is started by second violinist Verhallen and the remaining chords by cellist Van Isterdael. The wide variety of dislocations and rhythmic alterations heard throughout the performance reveal a playing style that is rhythmically highly variegated and departs radically from the verticality laid out in Tchaikovsky's notated score.

Portamento

While portamento impacts dislocation as shown above, the quartet uses frequent and both synchronised and unsynchronised portamento with regularity in lyrical passages throughout the recording. Notably, between m. 93 - 95, first violinist Hack uses four portamenti in a row, which all run over the interval of a fifth. He however varies the fingering and colour of each repetition, sliding both from and to notes, as well as during, before, and after bow changes. The effect created by continuous sliding is often heard on early orchestral recordings and results from individual players using the device in different places as well as one after the other.²⁴⁵ The HTK does this in m. 97 (see Figure 4.04), where Hack slides from the F to the G and Verhallen slides from the G to the A, and in m. 100, where Hack, Voerman, and Verhallen synchronise the placement of their portamenti over the rising fifth and descending fourth.

²⁴⁵ *Nimrod* from Elgar's *Enigma Variations*, with the Royal Albert Hall Orchestra conducted by Edward Elgar in 1926, is a notable example of different string players sliding in different places creating a continuity of portamento. Edward Elgar, *Enigma Variations* Op. 36 on *Elgar Conducts Elgar* (CD).

Figure 4.04: Synchronised and unsynchronised use of portamento by the Haagsche Toonkunstkwartet in *Andante Cantabile II* from Tchaikovsky's *String Quartet Op. 11 no.1*.

In sum, there is a richness of detail on the HTK's two recordings, featuring rushing, continual rhythmic alteration of motives, layering resulting from the dislocation between melody and accompaniment, and heavy and frequent portamento. While their approach may make for uncomfortable listening for those who prefer neat and tidy MSPs, these recordings demonstrate a variegated, moment-to-moment form of music-making from over a century ago.

4.3) The Klingler Quartet: *String Quartet Op. 127: I Maestoso, Allegro* by Ludwig van Beethoven (recorded 1935 – 1936)

The recording can be found in Appendix II - recording 4.3 and the annotated score is in Appendix III – score 4.3.

Clive Brown observes that Karl Klingler (1879 - 1971), founder and first violinist of the Klingler Quartet, was among Joachim's most beloved pupils—so much so that Joachim invited him to join his quartet.²⁴⁶ Karl's elder brother Fridolin was the Klingler Quartet's violist and worked as principal viola of the Berlin Philharmonic at the same time that Karl played viola in Joachim's quartet during its final season (1906 - 1907). The original second violinist in the Klingler Quartet, Josef Rywking, had also been a student

²⁴⁶ Brown, "Performing Classical Repertoire," 41.

of Joachim, while cellist Arthur Williams had been a student of Robert Hausmann (the cellist of the Joachim Quartet). Williams, like Hausmann, played without an end-pin. By the time the quartet got around to recording Beethoven's *Quartet* Op. 127 in 1934 - 1935, however, the two non-Klingler members had been replaced by Richard Heber (violin) and Ernst Silberstein (cello) as a result of the turbulence surrounding World War One.²⁴⁷ The Klingler Quartet's recording of Beethoven's Op. 127 is a compelling example of their approach: one based on broad un-notated tempo modification and rhythmic flexibility, which has much in common with written descriptions of Joachim's performance practice. In contrast to the HTK's more haphazard approach, however, these flexibilities are applied with consistency throughout the Klingler Quartet's performance.

Tempo Modification

As with a number of recordings of longer movements studied in Chapter Three, like Tertis and Ethyl Hobday's recording of the *Sonata* Op. 120 by Brahms for example, the Klingler Quartet approaches the first movement of Beethoven's Op. 127 by giving different themes or thematic groups their own individual tempi and treating tempo flexibility within these themes in an individualised manner. This approach is maintained consistently wherever these materials appear in the piece, revealing a carefully crafted tempo plan. Rather than merely following the notated tempo indications, like the opening *Maestoso* and the *Allegro* at m. 7, the quartet starts the *Allegro* slowly and rushes throughout. Likewise, with the return of the *Allegro* material in G major at m. 81, a similar pattern of rushing is followed. At m. 22, a quicker tempo area is reached for the thematic material marked *forte*, and they then slow into m. 40, which leads to a slower tempo area at m. 41 for the G minor theme. This pattern of tempo modification is repeated in the recapitulation from m. 180, demonstrating that this was part and parcel of how the quartet approached this musical material rather than an accidental occurrence.

Tempo is also used to distinguish characters between an enthusiastic group statement and a more majestic and reflective statement on a single instrument, such as when the quartet rushes into m. 66 followed by tenuto chords, starting in the viola, which are delivered at a slower tempo. Longer phrases are also structured through tempo modification, with rushing towards the middle of a phrase followed by slowing. For example, the rising sequences in the middle voices from m. 89 rush forward, while the

²⁴⁷ Tully Potter, liner notes for *The Klingler Quartet 1905-1936, the Joachim Tradition*, Testament, 1998, SBT 2136 (CD).

falling material from m. 94 slows down, thereby shaping the phrase so that its climax coincides with the quickest tempo. This un-notated approach to tempo is used in order to both give direction to musical material and to structure moment-to-moment events within a broader framework. It is substantially at odds with today's requirements of fidelity to the notated detail of the score, a discernible sense of pulse, and an underlying continuity of tempo.

Rhythmic Flexibility

One of Joachim's American pupils, Marion Bruce Ranken, described her teacher's approach to rhythmic flexibility as follows: "In long florid passages...there seemed in Joachim's playing to be no attempt at exact ensemble [or] any attempt to synchronise regularly with the beat." She goes on to state that as a student:

[N]ot only were you 'allowed' this freedom from the beat, but if you did not take it, you were at first looked upon as a novice who required instruction and later on as an unmusical person whom it was not worth instructing.²⁴⁸

This written documentation, when combined with the Klingler Quartet's recordings, gives us a sense of how these localised rhythmic flexibilities, as instilled by Joachim in his pupils, were put into practice. The use of arpeggiation, agogic lengthening, swinging, rushing over crescendo, and multi-layering, results in a blurring of the continuity and regularity of pulse; this phenomenon is so central to the Klingler Quartet's recording of Beethoven's Op. 127 that it must be a deliberate part of their practice. Their arpeggiation of the opening *Maestoso* chords, as well as the return of these chords in m. 74 and in m. 135, stands in stark contrast to most other recorded performances of this piece, either historical or contemporary, where these chords are typically played as solid Teutonic blocks. The arpeggiation softens the verticality of the material, building in a sense of dynamism and forward movement—much like the effect of a pianist arpeggiating chords. In m. 6, Karl Klingler (first violin) further blurs the sense of pulse, which was already weakened by the preceding arpeggiation, by playing the sextuplet and 64th notes at a nearly identical speed. This too goes against a literal delivery of the notated structural and vertical divisions.

Agogic lengthening also plays a significant role here, as for example in the

²⁴⁸ Marion Bruce Ranken, "Some Points of Violin Playing and Musical Performance as learnt in the Hochschule für Musik (Joachim School) in Berlin during the time I was a Student there, 1902-1909" (Edinburgh: Privately Printed, 1939), 79. Cited in Robert W. Eshbach, "Der Geigerkönig, Joseph Joachim as Performer," *Die Tonkunst*, Vol. 1, no. 3 (July 2007): 205 - 217, 76.

opening theme from m. 7 where Karl Klingler broadens the F over the interval of a fourth. This interval is a key facet of the main theme and is subsequently broadened by the entire quartet throughout the movement. There is also a tendency here for the players to lengthen notes for emphasis using time rather than dynamic, as in m. 28 - 30 for example, where the sforzando first eighth of the bar is lengthened rather than emphasised with volume. As shown in Figure 4.05, the cellist also uses agogic lengthening on the first eighth of the two-bar motive at m. 33, followed by rushing then slowing: a pattern the other players then repeat at each reoccurrence of this motive. Similarly, the descending minor second motive on the third beat of m. 57 is always played with an early agogic lengthening of its first note.

The image shows a musical score for measure 33 of Beethoven's Op. 127. It consists of four staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello. The time signature is 2/4. The key signature has two flats. The score is annotated with red arrows indicating agogic lengthening and rushing. A 'swing' label is placed above the staff. Dynamics include 'p' and 'cresc.'. A '2' is written below the first staff. A red box highlights the first eighth note of the first staff.

Figure 4.05: Motivic use of agogic rhythmic flexibility in Klingler Quartet's recording of Beethoven's Op. 127.

In addition to arpeggiation and agogic lengthening, there is also a prevalent tendency to unevenly 'swing' thematic eighth notes here, as heard in m. 9 and in parallel passages throughout. First violinist Karl Klingler uses this approach starting at m. 146, where the same rhythmic material is repeated over 20 bars of changing harmony. Here, the entire quartet lengthens the second beats in a waltz-like fashion, separating the first and second beat every four bars starting in m. 154, thereby structuring this section into four-bar phrases.

They create a sense of excitement and expectation by pushing tempo forward during most crescendi, such as in m. 20 - 21 and m. 119 - 125. As well, on an even more local level, multi-layering can be heard throughout this recording, with individual voices moving independently due to the rhythmically flexible delivery of motivic materials. The most notable example of this multi-layeredness takes place starting in m. 106, where the cellist places downbeats ahead of the first violin and the viola. Notably, however, it is the

context of overall tempo modification on a larger scale that helps tie these individual, multi-layered voices together.

Portamento

There is plenty of heavy portamento throughout this recording: for example, in addition to the agogic emphasis described above, Karl Klingler slides between the first two quarter notes of m. 7, emphasizing the thematic interval of a rising fourth—an approach all four players then apply to this theme throughout.

The majority of the portamenti on this recording, however, are found in the violins. Both second violinist Heber and Karl Klingler slide over nearly all long intervals as well as on nearly all of the ascending and descending intervals of a perfect fourth. There are also prominent moments of portamento in the violins between smaller intervals, as well as a few uses of the L portamento when changing strings to give a repeated note a different colour, as heard in m. 173 for example. In general, portamento seems to be a key part of the quartet's legato technique, particularly as related to their preference for adhering to one string, thereby preserving a uniform colour within a given melody. The heaviness and frequency of portamento use here, much like with the HTK, again transgresses MSP boundaries of neatness and tidiness.

Vibrato

The Klingler Quartet's proximity to descriptions of Joachim's performance practice in terms of tempo modification, rhythmic alteration, and portamento stands in stark contrast to the frequency of the quartet's vibrato, given Joachim's narrow, more ornamental approach to vibrato on his recordings. On other recordings of the Klingler Quartet, such as their 1912 recording of Beethoven's *Alla Tedesca* movement from Op. 130, for example, prominent use of vibrato on long notes can be heard.²⁴⁹ In their recording of Op. 127, non-vibrato playing in accompanying voices contrasts with quick, wide vibrato on most long notes in melodic lines. The inner and accompanying voices often refrain from vibrating, however: for example, violist Fridolin Klingler uses vibrato sparingly and only for melodic materials, such as in m. 15. This is similar to the Czech String Quartet's approach to vibrato (discussed below) as well as Nedbal's approach as described in Chapter Three.

In sum, the Klingler Quartet's recording demonstrates features closely connected with descriptions of Joachim's performance practice such as un-notated tempo flexibility,

²⁴⁹ Ludwig van Beethoven, *Alla Tedesca* from *String Quartet* Op. 130, Klingler Quartet, 1912, *The Klingler Quartet 1905-1936, the Joachim Tradition*, Testament, 1998, SBT 2136 (CD).

which differentiates sections of the movement, and rhythmic alterations, which are consistently applied to thematic motives. This is then combined with heavy, frequent portamento and prominently vibrated melodic materials. The Klingler's approach sounds as though it is based on a structured use of these un-notated devices, given the consistency with which they are used by all four players. By contrast, the HTK seem to use such un-notated devices in a much more haphazard, spur-of-the-moment style.

4.4) Brüder-Post Quartett: *String Quartet KV 458: I Allegro vivace assai* by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (recorded 1921)

The recording can be found in Appendix II - recording 4.4 and the annotated score is in Appendix III – score 4.4.

The brothers Post founded their string quartet in 1911.²⁵⁰ While the Klingler Quartet had two brothers as part of their roster, Karl and Fridolin, the Brüder-Post Quartett was made up of four brothers. Arthur, whose recordings were examined in the previous chapter, played the viola, Max and Willy were the group's first and second violinists respectively, and Richard was the cellist. Arthur had also been Willy and Max's first violin teacher. Not only did the brothers found their own widely respected quartet, they also created the Brüder-Post Conservatorium in Frankfurt am Main, which operated from 1902 - 1921. By the time the brothers quit their teaching duties in order to focus on a career touring with the quartet, the conservatory had over 1000 students. The group performed regularly throughout Germany in the early 1920s and made a small number of records including Mozart's 'Jagd' *Quartet* KV 458. Due to the time limitations of the 78rpm disc, they cut almost the entire recapitulation of the work, from m. 142 to m. 271. This however does not diminish the recording's uniqueness as documentation of one of the earliest German string quartets on record. Notably, the Posts' recordings of the other movements of the quartet reveal a similar stylistic approach to that heard in the first. In fact, their recordings of a number of quartets by Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, and Boccherini are highly similar, evidencing agogic lengthening, rhythmic alteration, prominent vibrato in the first violin, and heavy portamento in slow movements. All four Post brothers were trained and launched their performing careers in late-19th-century Germany and, as such, their recordings—much like those of the Klingler Quartet—can be seen as representative of aspects of the broad and variegated German tradition,

²⁵⁰ "Biographie Willy Post," in "Biographische Notizen zur Familie Willy und Christel Post," Stadtarchiv Frankfurt an der Oder, http://www.stadtarchiv-ffo.de/aktuell/2011/w_post/pdf/w_post_biogr.pdf.

featuring heavy portamento and frequent use of agogic lengthening creating rhythmic flexibility. While the Brüder-Post Quartett uses these devices less consistently than the Klingler Quartet, they are not as haphazard in their approach as the HTK.

Tempo Modification

The Post Quartett's approach to tempo is generally straightforward, with an average tempo of around m.m. ♩.=105, which to some may sound quick to the point of becoming frivolous. Nevertheless, there is some prominent slowing at the ends of phrases throughout, which deviates from MSP norms for Mozart's works. Examples of this slowing occur at the end of the exposition (m. 89 - 90) and in the lead-up to the recapitulation (m. 128 - 136). Furthermore, while the start of the development section at m. 91 is taken at a notably slower tempo, first violinist Max Post rushes forward in m. 93 to restore the general tempo. This approach, with a quick overall tempo and slowing at structural boundaries, is similar to that heard on Tertis and Sammons's recording of Mozart's *Symfonia Concertante*. Although these tempo modifications are relatively mild compared with the recordings of the HTK and Klingler Quartet examined above, rhythmic flexibility plays an important role in shaping the performance.

Rhythmic Flexibility

The Brüder-Post Quartett's approach to rhythmic flexibility makes frequent use of agogic lengthening, swinging, and rushing. Their approach to agogic lengthening is exemplified by Max Post's lengthening of the top note in the middle of m. 31. From m. 32, he then lengthens the second sixteenth note of the bar in addition to the lengthened top notes while rushing between them. This creates a strange asymmetry, whereby the chord tone is emphasised rather than the appoggiatura (see Figure 4.06). Often in MSPs, it is the non-chord-tone appoggiatura that is emphasised in such passages. Even more strangely, perhaps, in m. 35 Max Post plays a dotted quarter G in the first half of the bar, omitting the other notes.

The image displays two systems of musical notation for Mozart's String Quartet KV 458. The first system, starting at measure 26, features a first violin part with a melodic line marked 'uneven' and a dynamic marking 'f'. Red arrows point to specific notes, and a 'sim' (sostenuto) marking is present. The second system, starting at measure 32, includes a first violin part with a melodic line marked 'quick' and a dynamic marking 'f'. Red arrows point to notes, and a 'dotted quarter' marking is present. A circled area in the second system is labeled 'Notes omitted'. The notation includes various rhythmic values, accidentals, and dynamic markings.

Figure 4.06: Max Post's use of agogic lengthening in Mozart's *String Quartet KV 458*.

Swung or uneven eighth notes also play an important role in the quartet's performance. The opening upbeat is played with a slight separation from the downbeat, creating a sense of swing. This is aided by a slight de-synchronisation between the two violins, because they each swing the opening beat slightly differently. The placement of Arthur Post's viola motive at the end of m. 10 is another example of this, as he places his first eighth note behind the beat before rushing the second eighth note into the next bar while Max Post squeezes his upbeat between the two viola eighths and lifts his bow, swinging into the next bar. Dotted rhythms are also continually over-dotted and rushed towards the following beat throughout this performance, but the occurrence of this phenomenon at both m. 5 and then again in the recapitulation at m. 140 demonstrates the consistency with which it is applied.

Localised rushing is also used here, as for example in m. 45 - 46, where the quartet pushes forward as they exchange and compress the motive and, in the sixteenth-note passage in m. 15, where Max Post rushes each of the successive scales upwards, then broadens the top note before starting the next grouping, creating unevenness between the two halves of the bar. This seesawing between rushing and slowing results in the jovial and engaging atmosphere of this recording and leaves an impression of spontaneity in much the way the Klingler Quartet's continual rhythmic flexibility does.

Vibrato

Like all of the quartet recordings examined in this chapter, there is a discrepancy

here in the use of vibrato between the first violin and the rest of the Brüder-Post musicians. While Max Post (first violin) vibrates on most long note values (except in m. 48 where the stopped F precedes the open E string), the other three members of the quartet are much more sparing in their vibrato use, allowing Max's lyrical lines to stand out from the main harmonic texture. M. 71 is a good example of this, with the first violin using a great deal of vibrato and the other instruments using very little or none. When the inner voices have melodic material, however, they do sometimes use more vibrato, as in m. 122 for example. In m. 130, the two violins vibrate equally widely and continuously. This is quite similar to the approach taken by the Czech String Quartet in their recording of Dvořák's 'American' *Quartet* as discussed below.

Portamento

Given both the lively tempo taken by the Brüder-Post and the fragmentary nature of the movement's motives, there are few opportunities here for drawn-out portamenti. That being said, the device is nevertheless present: in the second violin line at the beginning of m. 10, for example, as well as in the slower lyrical lines of m. 92, 96, 98, and 99, where colour is added to this theme through clusters of slides in a manner quite unlike that used in any other passage of the movement. This heavy approach to portamento between m. 92 - 99, however, coincides with a theme Mozart notates only once in the whole movement, thereby emphasising its unique character. Elsewhere, Max Post also makes ample use of portamento in the lyrical material in m. 66 and 69—demonstrating how integral it was to both his, and the quartet's, melodic legato playing.

In sum, the Brüder-Post's approach to rhythmic flexibility with frequent agogic lengthening is similar to that of the Klingler Quartet and may represent a characteristic typical of German performance practice of the time. However, the Brüder-Post Quartett uses these rhythmic devices with less consistency than the Klingler Quartet and, as such, their performance sounds less thoroughly planned out. The Brüder-Post's heavy portamento and their use of vibrato on melodic materials and non-vibrato for accompaniments, however, is broadly similar to all of the other early-recorded string quartets discussed here.

4.5) Czech String Quartet: *String Quartet Op. 96 no. 12 "The American": I Allegro ma non troppo* by Antonin Dvořák (recorded 1928)

The recording can be found in Appendix II - recording 4.5 and the annotated score is in Appendix III – score 4.5.

The Czech Quartet, also known as the Bohemian Quartet prior to 1918, was the first Czech ensemble of international repute. The group had a career spanning over 40 years, performing close to 4000 concerts.²⁵¹ Three of the four members studied composition with Antonin Dvořák, while Josef Suk, the ensemble's second violinist, went on to marry Dvořák's daughter. The members of the quartet (at the time they made recordings in the late 1920s) were Karel Hoffmann first violin (1872 - 1936), Josef Suk second violin (1874 - 1935), Jeří Herold viola (1906 - 1934) who replaced Nedbal (as well as Tertis, who temporarily replaced Nedbal in 1906), and Ladislav Zelenka (1914 - 1934) cello. The group was rapturously received in London at their debut in 1897, with *The Musical Times* noting that their "interpretations of...particularly Dvořák's quartet showed them to be exceptionally finished ensemble players."²⁵² In fact, their London debut was so successful that they were booked for no fewer than five subsequent concerts during their tour in London alone. Two of these concerts included pianist Fanny Davies, a renowned pupil of Clara Schumann. *The Musical Times* lauded the quartet's concerts with Davies, remarking on their "interpretation of Slavonic music, the fervour and rapid changes of sentiment and tempo [all of] which were expressed with unsurpassable fidelity and perfection of detail." This same reviewer then went on to credit "the many beauties which were set forth with unsurpassable fidelity and comprehension of their character," noting that, "the ensemble playing was very fine."²⁵³ It is certainly interesting to consider what to make of these superlatives in light of the quartet's recordings. Their close association with Dvořák and their reputation as the leading professional exponents of his chamber music certainly puts them at the centre of the composer's sound world. There is however a whiff of discomfort in musicologist Jan Králik's CD liner notes for the quartet's digitally-re-mastered recordings released in 1994. On one hand, he notes that, "the quartet refined their interpretative style around a firmly defined groundwork which has continued to be respected by the domestic [Czech] performing tradition to this day," suggesting the existence of a mythical continuity in the Czech tradition of string quartet

²⁵¹ Jan Králik, liner notes for *The Czech Quartet Tradition*, Biddulph Recordings, 1994, 09192 (CD).

²⁵² "The Bohemian Quartet," *The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular* vol. 38, no. 650 (April 1, 1897): 243 - 244. Accessed December 29, 2017, www.jstor.org/stable/3367724.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 243 - 244.

performance from the Czech Quartet down to the present day.²⁵⁴ On one hand, a casual listen to any of the Czech Quartet's recordings is enough to demonstrate the gap between the quartet's performances and their supposed modern successors, like for example the Smetana, Janáček, Prague, Pražák and Pavel Haas Quartets.²⁵⁵ The latter quartets follow the notated detail of the score, perform larger movements within uniform tempi, generally do not rush, and use little or no portamento and continuous vibrato throughout all four voices, which all fits within current MSP standards. The Czech Quartet's approach, by contrast, and as shown in the analyses below, diverges from those of their contemporary Czech successors in all of these areas. This is likely why Králik goes on to offer a number of caveats for the evaluation of their recordings:

Historical recordings...capture the legendary chamber ensemble in the final years of its public productions. Attesting to a zenith that had by then been passed, these tracks exude a peculiar atmosphere, as well as a sense of suspense and depth...At the same time, they also betray the players' advanced age [sic], and offer today's listener the chance to detect certain features typical for the standard performing practice of the period (e.g. the presence of glissandi, or the occasional intonational benevolence), which have since been largely eliminated from concert halls and studios.

I argue that Králik's text can be interpreted in a number of ways. First, one could conclude that having sat down to scrape out a few final records for posterity in 1928 (all four players were born in the 1870s), the Czech Quartet's recordings are not representative of the quality of their performances when they were in their prime. Why then would these four aged veterans of the concert stage have allowed such 'unrepresentative' recordings to be publicly released? Second, Králik might be suggesting that the Czech Quartet were founders and pioneers of a Czech string quartet performing tradition: one improved upon by later generations of ensembles such as the Smetana, Janáček, Prague, Pražák, and Pavel Haas Quartets—groups whose performance styles banished earlier idiosyncrasies of intonation, rhythm, and portamenti. No doubt many ascribe to this notion of 'progress' in musical performance over time, caused by ever-rising standards of technical cleanliness. And third, perhaps Králik is searching for excuses for why a group of such historical import does not fit the standards of contemporary MSPs. In my view, the Czech Quartet's recordings are most probably fully representative of their approach as heard for four decades on the concert stages of

²⁵⁴ Králik, liner notes to *The Czech Quartet Tradition*.

²⁵⁵ Antonin Dvořák, *String Quartets Op. 106 and 96*, Pavel Haas Quartet, recorded 2010, Supraphone B0043XCKJO (CD). Antonin Dvořák, *String Quartets No. 14 and No. 12*, Pražák Quartet, recorded 1999, Praga Digital PRD 250 136 (CD).

Europe: an approach Dvořák heard during his lifetime, and one whose ‘peculiar atmosphere’ represents 19th-century performance practice in all its guts and glory. The wild tempo modifications, rhythmic flexibilities, multi-layeredness, and heavy portamenti of their recorded performances are all wholly typical of their generation, and the consistency with which the Czech Quartet uses these devices is similar to the Klingler Quartet. As such, the Czech Quartet shares much in common with quartets connected to the ‘German tradition,’ with their more radical approach to over- and under-dotting perhaps aligning them with characteristics of what might be described as the 19th-century ‘Czech tradition.’ While a thorough study of the entire recorded output of the Czech String Quartet would likely yield more detailed insights into the quartet’s style, below I examine their performance of the first movement of Dvořák’s ‘American’ *String Quartet* Op. 96—not only because it is one of the most frequently performed string quartets today, but also because if ‘performing in the style of the composer’ is still the ideological goal of many of today’s performers, then the Czech Quartet’s proximity to the composer poses significant challenges to agreed-upon understandings in MSPs about the performance style appropriate for Dvořák’s works.

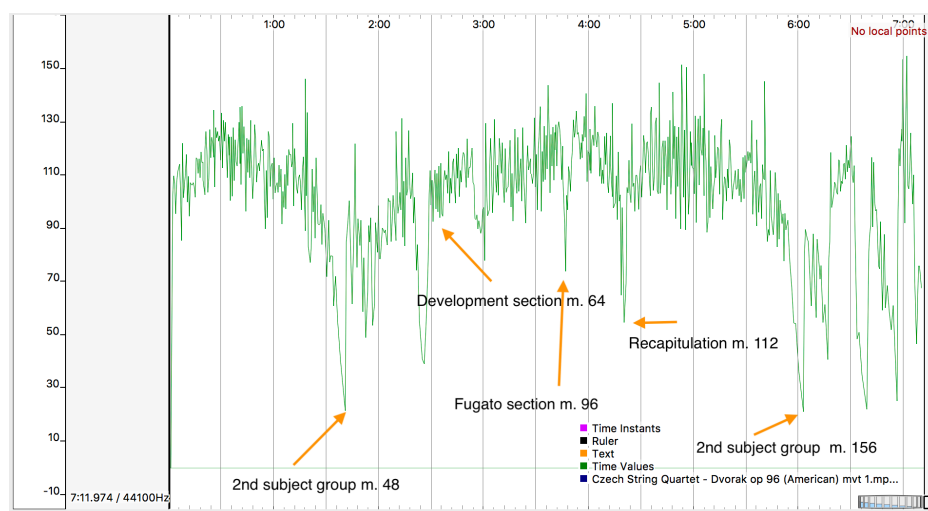


Figure 4.07: Tempo graph of the Czech Quartet’s recording of Dvořák’s ‘American’ *Quartet*, Op. 96, first movement.

Tempo Modification

Elasticity of tempo is the core stylistic feature of this performance. Time is in almost constant flux here, with either radical rushing or slowing throughout. The quartet effectively grinds the music to a halt before bringing it back up to speed on a number of occasions, as for example into the second subject group at m. 40, where amidst heavy

portamento in m. 41, time nearly stops—despite the fact that the notated *ritardando* marking only appears in m. 43. This slowing, however, is preceded by a good deal of rushing in the thematic material starting from m. 11: a process mirrored in the recapitulation, with rushing in m. 149 again followed by heavy slowing into the second subject group. The tempo graph in Figure 4.07, with beats per minute on the vertical axis and the recording unfolding over time on the horizontal axis, reveals that the slowing into the second subject group in both the exposition and the recapitulation are a close match. Notably, both sections are played at the same tempo despite being recorded on different sides and separated by several minutes of music—further evidence for how such seemingly sudden and moment-to-moment tempo decisions can also be structural in nature, mapping out tempo relationships over long movements. These matching tempo relationships over long spans of music and multiple sides are similar to those mapped out by Tertis on his recording of Bach’s *Chaconne* as discussed in Chapter Three.

Continual rushing and slowing, precluding moments of regularity of pulse as illustrated by the tempo graph in Figure 4.07, is a hallmark of this performance. Examples of this can be found in the push-pull of tempo coming out of the second subject group in m. 52, where the quartet presses forward only to slow massively in m. 58 and 59. The events of the development section are also divided by rushing and slowing, like for instance at m. 72, where the quartet slows into Karel Hoffmann’s (first violin) iteration of the opening motive in C sharp minor. Coming out of this at m. 76, they rush forward, building tempo through m. 94. Here they then slow into Suk’s (second violin) start of the fugato section at m. 96. In m. 97, however, Suk suddenly rushes forward, his hurrying continuing until m. 102, where Zelenka (cello) enters early, creating an intensified sense of urgency. In m. 106, the quartet then slows to set up the recapitulation in m. 112. Herold (viola) starts the return of the theme at a slow tempo, before rushing into the next bar. The tempo graph (Figure 4.07) amply illustrates how this push-pull of slowing and rushing becomes compacted in the closing section of the movement, with the quartet slowing dramatically at Dvořák’s *poco rit.* marking before rushing to the end.

Rhythmic Flexibility

The Czech Quartet’s flexibility results in rhythmic looseness through the use of swinging, over-dotting, multi-layering, and agogic lengthening and shortening. One example of uneven swing can be heard in the sixteenth notes in the violins in the opening bars. Another can be found in Hoffmann’s (first violin) approach to the second

theme in m. 44 where he combines lifting the bow with short non-vibrato articulation, swing, and the lengthening and shortening of notes, which results in a kind of ‘spoken’ effect. The notes in m. 45 are then particularly swung, before Hoffmann rapidly accelerates towards the downbeat of m. 47. In the following passage from m. 52, the eighths and sixteenths are also swung, with further examples found in m. 106 in the first violin line and in the ricochet of both violins in m. 121.

Regarding over-dotting, Herold (viola) can be heard significantly lengthening the longer note values of the opening melody. The figure in m. 24 is also over-dotted, with the sixteenth notes being played almost as 32nds both here and in all parallel iterations of this motive (an eighth note followed by two sixteenths). Over-dotting also sometimes creates instances of multi-layeredness: for example, while the notated score (see Figure 4.08) has the dotted rhythms in m. 15 and 16 in the viola and cello lining up with the continuous sixteenth notes in the violins, the Czech Quartet overdots these figures, resulting in dislocation. A similar example can be found in m. 93 - 94 of the development section, which resembles the HTK’s over- and under-dotting of notes on their recording of Haydn’s *Presto* from the *String Quartet* Op. 54 No. 1.

The Czech Quartet is also able to deliver highly contrapuntal music in a way that allows for all voices to be heard simultaneously, usually as a result of both multi-layering and varied articulations. For example, a variegated texture at m. 80 is notable with its over-dotted viola solo, the upper half spiccato in the second violin, long sustained notes in the first violin, and cello pizzicati. A similar moment occurs at m. 123, with divergent articulations and rhythmic flexibilities resulting in each voice individually proceeding in an independent direction.

Finally, agogic lengthening is also frequently used here, such as in m. 9 where Hoffmann (first violin) uses lengthening rather than volume and attack for the notated sforzando before rushing the sixteenth notes that follow. In m. 22 - 23, he again uses agogic lengthening on the first and second beats of the bar, and then compensates by rushing the third and fourth beats. A further example can be found in m. 30 where the third beat is lengthened and the fourth beat is hurried: an approach applied by the quartet to all further occurrences of two eighths followed by a quarter note in this movement. The delivery of the second violin and viola lines in m. 55, however, is a particularly striking example of agogic shortening, with the two sixteenth notes rushed and played spiccato in the upper-half of the bow, giving the motive a lightness of character. Hoffmann (first violin) then takes a similar approach to the triplets in m. 56,

where he lengthens the first note and rushes the second and third. Not only are such rhythmic flexibilities passed from player to player, those heard in the exposition are repeated in the recapitulation, leaving no doubt as to the consistency of the quartet's stylistic approach. As with the Klingler and Brüder-Post quartets, this smaller-scale rhythmic flexibility is at the heart of the Czech Quartet's style.

The image shows a musical score for Dvořák's 'American' Quartet Op. 96, first movement. It features four staves with various annotations. A red box labeled 'senza vib.' is placed above the first staff. Another red box labeled 'slo' is placed above the second staff. Red arrows point to specific notes and groups of notes, indicating over-dotting and dislocation. The score includes dynamics like *ff* and *fz*, and a 'De-synchronisation' label. The score is annotated with 'senza vib.' and 'slo' in red boxes. Red arrows point to specific notes and groups of notes, indicating over-dotting and dislocation. The score includes dynamics like *ff* and *fz*, and a 'De-synchronisation' label.

Figure 4.08: Over-dotting creating dislocation in the Czech Quartet's recording of Dvořák's 'American' Quartet Op. 96, first movement.

Vibrato and Portamento

While the players of the Czech Quartet share a general approach to rhythmic flexibilities, they use vibrato in highly individual ways throughout. Hoffmann (first violin) uses slow and wide vibrato, as for example at the second theme in m. 44, while Suk (second violin) uses narrow and quick vibrato throughout. A striking example of different approaches to vibrato speed and width can be heard in m. 69 - 71, where Suk and Hoffmann pass the same motive back and forth. Both Suk and Herold play accompanying figures non-vibrato or with narrow vibrato. Herold (viola), however, also uses very limited vibrato in melodic materials and only on longer notes, while Zelenka (cello) uses quick vibrato on melodic material, as for instance at m. 160, and little vibrato on bass notes.

All four players, however, make frequent use of heavy portamento throughout the movement for lyrical materials. Similar to Philip's observation that the quartet's use of portamento emphasises contrapuntal materials in the slow movement of Bedřich Smetana's *String Quartet* no. 1 in E minor,²⁵⁶ here in Dvořák's Op. 96, a similar approach

²⁵⁶ Philip, *Performing Music in the Age of Recording*, 118.

can be heard. For example, in m. 74, Suk (second violin) uses an I portamento²⁵⁷ into the first beat of the bar, drawing attention to his inner voice syncopations. In m. 84, Hoffmann emphasises the melodic nature of the double-stopped thirds on the A and D strings, which might otherwise be lost in the contrapuntal texture, by using a long downwards portamento. The fingering he chooses here is technically quite difficult in a passage where most contemporary violinists would chose to remain in first position (as heard on recordings by the Pražák and Pavel Haas Quartets)—clear evidence that the slide is the desired effect here.²⁵⁸ This is similar to Tertis's frequent use of awkward fingerings resulting in portamento, as discussed in Chapter Three. Hoffmann's slow octave portamento on the D string, in m. 111 before the recapitulation, is also notable for its length and audibility. Here, his portamento ties together the wide interval, continuing the legato line. Similarly, in m. 159 he risks it all by taking the high D on the D string before sliding down: a move that does not pan out brilliantly in terms of intonation on this recording. There are also many more routine examples of the device applied within melodies, as for instance in Herold's delivery of the opening melody or in Suk's and Herold's use of it to draw attention to the countermelody in the inner voices in m. 40 - 42. This recording thus shows the centrality of portamento to the Czech Quartet's approach to lyrical passages, allowing them to emphasise wide intervals, create legato lines, and bring out inner voices.

In sum, on this recording by the Czech String Quartet there is a great deal of rhythmic freedom in the individual approach to dotting the motivic materials and creating layering as well as in the group's continual tempo flexibilities throughout the movement as a whole. While their consistent use of unnotated tempo flexibilities and rhythmic alterations is similar to that of the Klingler Quartet, the Czech Quartet's widespread use of over- and under-dottings is more diverse than that of the Klingler Quartet, making this a central, characteristic feature of their style.

²⁵⁷ Intonazione refers to sliding into the beginning of a phrase as discussed in Chapter Three, section 3.3.

²⁵⁸ Dvořák, *String Quartets Op. 106 and 96*, Pavel Haas Quartet. Dvořák, *String Quartets No. 14 and No. 12*, Pražák Quartet.

4.6) Conclusion and Context

While the Czech Quartet may strike listeners accustomed to MSPs as extreme, slapdash, and improvisatory in its use of portamento and rhythmic and tempo flexibility, much of what can be heard on their recordings can also be heard on those of the Klingler, Post and HTK Quartets as examined above. Indeed, not only did the players within these quartets regularly perform and rehearse together over many years but all the quartets examined here share an approach to both rhythmic and tempo flexibility as well as multi-layering, broad portamenti, and varied use of vibrato. This shows just how central, rather than accidental, these flexibilities were to their performance practices. Philip argues that quartet playing at the time was characterized by a great deal of independence between individual performers, and in reference to the Czech Quartet he remarks: “There is the impression that each player is functioning as an individual, they have simply got used to each other’s behaviour and have learned to live with it...they were simply not aiming for our modern notions of ensemble.”²⁵⁹ Indeed, what we hear across the performances studied here is that each player functions as an individual, pulling the performance in various directions, sometimes leading and sometimes following. Still, the performances cohere as a whole, communicating the particular atmosphere of each section—often with the help of tempo modification. This independent individuality is such a central part of these quartets’ performance styles that it seems to take precedence over concerns about the kind of clean and tidy togetherness of ensemble fundamental to MSP ideology. In sum, the performances studied here are broadly representative of turn-of-the-century understandings of expert ensemble playing and perfection of detail, as described by contemporaneous reviewers.

Despite these broadly shared traits, however, the ensembles examined above demonstrate great diversity in the ways in which they use them in their performances. While the Klingler and Brüder-Post quartets share the frequent use of agogic lengthening and a rich timbre as part of what might simplistically be called the ‘German tradition,’ the Klingler Quartet uses rhythmic alteration in a more consistent fashion, especially where motivic materials are concerned. In this regard, therefore, the Klingler Quartet is closer to the Czech Quartet, who use un-notated rhythmic and tempo flexibilities with great consistency, resulting in these features becoming structural parts of their performance practices. This is evident for example in the frequent recurrence of these rhythmic

²⁵⁹ Philip, *Performing Music in the Age of Recording*, 120.

alterations in all four voices, as well as upon repetition across the formal plans of musical works in the Czech Quartet's recording. The Klingler and Czech quartets also share the use of radical, four-voice multi-layering, whereby each of the four players pulls in a different direction at the same time. However, the Czech Quartet's heavy alteration of dotted rhythms and persistent use of swing set them apart from the Klingler Quartet, who favour agogic lengthening and detailed tempo flexibilities for individual motives. The Czech Quartet's unique approach to dotting might thus be described as a characteristic of the 'Czech tradition.' Finally, while the HTK share the use of heavy swing, over- and under-dotting, and multi-layering created by portamento placement with both the Czech and Klingler Quartets, in contrast to these two ensembles, the HTK's recordings sound wonderfully improvisatory and radically uncontrolled as a result of their constant rushing, heavy and continuous use of portamento, wide dislocation, and incongruous intonation.

Studying these four early-recorded string quartets demonstrates just how widely divergent performance styles could be in the context of musical practices featuring unnotated rhythmic and tempo flexibilities, portamento, and multi-layering. The HTK, Klingler, Brüder-Post and Czech quartets all took highly individual approaches to this shared language of musical performance, and this diversity is clearly too complex to be explained solely by national school. While these quartets' approaches are all distant from MSPs, the HTK's recordings are even more so as a result of their radical, slapdash approach. The Czech Quartet's recordings, with their wide-ranging rhythmic alterations, demonstrate the tenuousness of connecting them with the 20th-century Czech tradition of string quartet playing. The Klingler Quartet's consistent use of rhythmic flexibility, when combined with written documentation from the period, sheds light on the performance practices of Joseph Joachim and his pupils. Finally, the Brüder-Post Quartett takes an approach midway between the consistency and deliberateness of the Klingler Quartet and the haphazard freedom of the HTK.

Importantly, the recordings studied here offer concrete tools and techniques for modern performers looking to experiment with this style: an opportunity to connect overplayed canonic works like Dvořák's 'American' *Quartet* with the sound world and atmosphere from which they sprang. Experimenting with the performance practices analysed here can help today's musicians achieve the intimacy and atmosphere present on early-recorded quartet performances, while allowing them to take comfort in the weight of historical evidence linking these practices to the musical performing cultures of 19th-

century composers. Much like Brown in his article “Performing Classical Repertoire,” I too am left wondering how many of these practices may be holdovers from the late-18th century (or even the 17th century) and whether this kind of approach might have been recognisable in Mozart’s time?²⁶⁰ Although many of these practices are foreign to today’s musicians, the great diversity with which they were once used points to an immense richness of possibilities for performances of canonic string quartet repertoires today.

²⁶⁰ Brown, “Performing Classical Repertoire,” 41.