

MUTH 301: Assignment on Bartók, String Quartet No. 4

Though we will study it together with freely atonal music because of its use of pitch-class sets, Bartók's String Quartet No. 4 is strongly centric in places, as we shall see.

You have the first and last pages of the first and last movements. Sound is linked on the page of listening examples for freely atonal music. Start by listening to the ends to the two movements; as you will notice, the movements end in the same way. This underlines the symmetrical design of the five-movement quartet, in which two pairs of movements (1 and 5, 2 and 4) surround a central slow movement.

What is the tonal center at the ends of the movements, and how is it emphasized?

What collection is emphasized by the final gesture, and how so? (Not all of the notes come from a single collection.)

Now listen a few times to the start of the movement, shown in the first two pages of the score. What is the most important motive, and when do we hear it first? What pitch-class set does it represent?

Look at the first four measures, looking both at individual parts and their interrelationships. What trichords are prevalent? Circle them on your score.

In measure 5, each of the staggered entrances presents an 013. Looking at the entrances as they relate to each other (e.g. all of the first notes, all of the sustained notes...), what pitch-class set is projected?

Now examine the music through m. 10, continuing to look at interrelationships among parts, either taking parallel parts of entrances or else looking at vertical simultaneities. Leaving aside other sets formed by momentary neighboring motions, etc., there are two main sets used here – what are they, and how do they most obviously relate to each other?

Finally, look at the end of m. 10 and the beginning of m. 11. How does this passage obscure the relationship between the two sets? And could it potentially point to a different relationship?