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EDITORIAL

John Pickard

This issue of *Tonic* is the last to appear under my editorship. After six years it is time to hand over the reins to someone with new ideas and a more direct involvement in Simpson scholarship than I currently have. I have very much enjoyed compiling the six editions on which I have worked, and would like to take this opportunity gratefully to acknowledge the help, patience and support of the RS Society committee and particularly its Treasurer and all-round good egg, Bob Hill, to whom I wish to extend particular thanks. Though appearances of the journal have been somewhat irregular and infrequent - partly due to a lack of appropriate material, but mainly due to my being unable to spend more time working on *Tonic* - I nevertheless hope that readers continue to find the articles informative and well-presented. I am confident that the journal will go from strength to strength under its new editor, of whom more anon.

The latest issue features articles by Lionel Pike, an old friend to *Tonic,* and by Simon Phillippo, a new and very welcome contributor.

'Eppur si muove', which Lionel Pike discusses on page 3, is RS's only organ work to date. It has been rather overshadowed by the mighty 9th Symphony whose composition immediately succeeded it. This is regrettable, for it is a powerful work of imposing dimensions and, as such, an important contribution to twentieth-century organ repertoire. As far as I am aware, it has been neglected since Christopher Bowers-Broadbent gave the first performances in 1988 and it is now one of the relatively few Simpson works still awaiting a commercial recording. One hopes this will happen soon: it is a difficult, uncompromising piece which, even by RS's standards, needs repeated and concentrated listening for its very particular qualities to emerge. I recall attending one of the early performances in Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral - a bizarre concert in which it was coupled with a seemingly interminable tape piece by a now, (indeed, then), largely forgotten pioneer of *musique concrète*. As I crept out of the building somewhere towards the end of the first half-hour of the tape piece, I remember being struck by the astonishing 'newness' of the sonorities in 'Eppur si muove', compared with the hopelessly dated collection of sonic clichés with which I had just lost patience.

Simon Phillippo's fascinating study of Robert Simpson's Quartets Nos. 4, 5 and 6 (affectionately referred to by some as the 'Simpsonovsky's) is a revised version of material originally presented as part of his BA degree at Cambridge in 1995. It is good to know that Simon is now taking these researches further at postgraduate level. The appearance of his article in this volume is something of a happy coincidence for it provides the perfect opportunity to introduce my successor as editor of *Tonic* - step forward Mr. Simon Phillippo! To him I extend my warmest good wishes for a successful tenure of the editorial hot-seat.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The music examples in these articles are reproduced by kind permission of Alfred Lengnick & Co., a Division of Complete Music Ltd. A brochure of the complete works of Robert Simpson can be obtained by writing to Sally Willison, General Manager, Alfred Lengnick & Co., 27 Grove Road, BEACONSFIELD, Bucks. HP9 1UR and enclosing an A4 stamped, addressed envelope.

A STUDY IN COSMIC MOTION: ROBERT SIMPSON'S *EPPUR SI MUOVE*

Lionel Pike

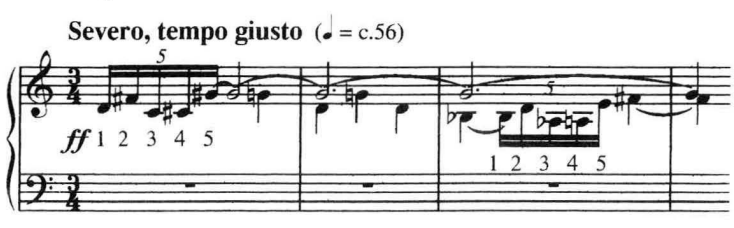
Robert Simpson has had a lifelong interest in the kind of muscular motion that is evident in the great Viennese classics - Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven - and has observed that contemporary composers are, on the whole, poor at handling this kind of rhythm. In his works he has tried to continue the tradition of muscular rhythmic feeling, and when he came to write what is so far his only work for organ he observed that Nielsen had already used the best possible title for a work that encapsulates this command of movement - *Commotio.* After some thought Simpson decided to call his own organ piece - which has many similarities to Nielsen's work - *Eppur si muove* ('But it does move'), the remark Galileo is reputed to have muttered to himself when he was forced by the church to recant his opinion that the earth moved round the sun. Since Robert Simpson is an amateur astronomer, a Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society, with his own telescope, the idea appealed to him on more than one level.

The piece, a vast canvas with the subtitle *Ricercar e Passacaglia,* was begun on 8th January 1985, and finished on 20th May that year: it was the last work to be completed at Simpson's home in Chearsley, Buckinghamshire, for during the composition of the following opus (Symphony No 9) the Simpsons moved to the Dingle Peninsular in Ireland. The work is dedicated to Svend Aage Spange,the Danish organist much admired by Simpson, and to Spange's wife Annalise.[1] Simpson had been much impressed by Spange's performance of Nielsen's *Commotio* and by a performance of Reger's *Introduction, Passacaglia and Fugue,* Op 127, given by Heinz Wunderlich: on hearing the latter he commented to me that there is no reason why the movements of a Passacaglia should all be played at the same speed - a remark that is worth remembering when one comes to play *Eppur si mouve.* Simpson had the North German type of organ in mind while writing this work, knowing that it would ideally suit the uncompromising contrapuntal logic (his opening marking is *Severo, tempo guisto* - warm romantic strings are clearly quite wrong for this type of music).[2]

Simpson is a great writer of String Quartets and Symphonies, and though a lover of and an authority on the symphonic style (and thus of the quartet style too) and its processes, he also has a great love of J.S.Bach. The natural genius of the organ is for counterpoint, and it is fugue that is most characteristic of Bach; so the use of fugue in Simpson's piece (though he actually calls it *Ricercar)* is natural. But the organ also has a genius for contrasting colours, so a form that combines variations with counterpoint also fully satisfies its nature - hence the use of the Passacaglia in this work. The shadow of Bach falls over it, then, as does the shadow of Nielsen's *Commotio.* But the shadow of Bach is evident in more than just the fugal element, for pedals in the *Ricercar* enter with short phrases in longer notes than the surrounding polyphony, rather as in some types of chorale prelude (the idea recurs at the end of the Passacaglia).

But the work is also symphonic: as those who know of Simpson's interest in works whose every element evolves logically will suspect, the entire piece - some 30 minutes of music - grows from the little seed planted at the beginning. That little seed is a quintuplet group of semiquavers; they so permeate the texture that it is well worth numbering them from 1 to 5, as one might a serial piece (though this one is very far from being serial). The gruppeto (as I shall call it in this article) contains a variety of intervals, made all the more obvious if one accepts that the notes might be played in a different order so as to emphasise different intervals (they are not used in inversion, a fact that sets Simpson apart from the strict serialists). (See Example 1, upper part)

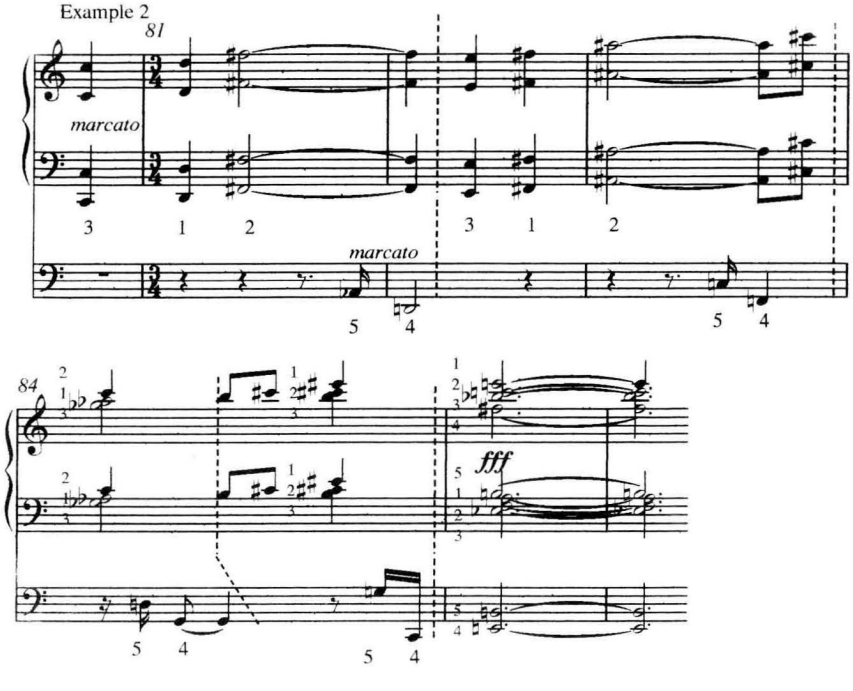
Example 1



The intervals that are included in the gruppeto are a major third (notes 1-2), a tritone (notes 2-3 as well as the interval between the extremes, notes 1-5), a semitone (notes 3-4 as well as notes 1-4), a perfect fifth (notes 4-5), a whole tone (notes 2-5 as well as notes 1-3), a perfect fourth (notes 2-4), and a minor sixth (notes 3-5). There are, then, enough intervals in this little phrase to govern a large work both melodically and harmonically - and that is what happens. It is as if the gruppeto is a set of sun-spots which change their position as the earth moves in relation to them.

The second strand does not begin as if it is the fugal answer, though after five notes it begins to use the material of Example 1. (See Example 1, lower part). The only interval that is new here is the major sixth. Polyphonic entries of this material are interrupted by the pedals, using long notes like a choral prelude: the first entry uses the opening material of Example 1 backwards, the second repeats it a tritone higher. The third pedal phrase begins to change the note order (and Simpson makes the point that he is no strict serialist by repeating some pitches). At bar 64 two statements are telescoped together, the second beginning on the last note of the first so that the whole of the five-note kernel is immediately repeated a tritone higher: a clear sense of onward propulsion is provided by the dovetailing. The climax of the opening section is at bars 79ff; octave statements are followed by a big chord containing all five notes of the main theme, but each note is doubled at the fifth. (See Example 2, in which the dotted lines are editorial).

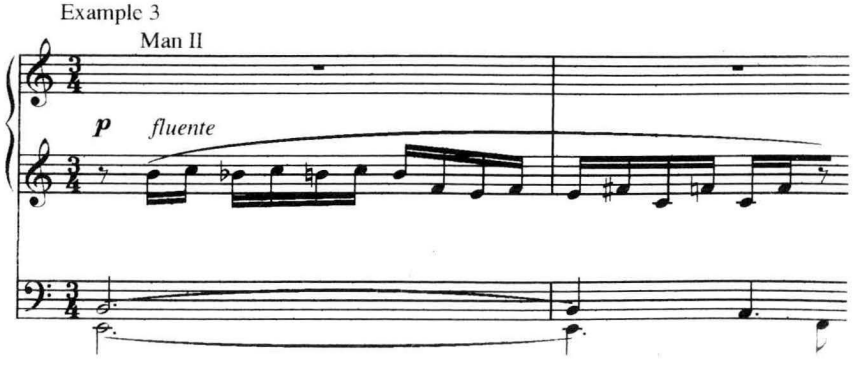
Example 2



Doubling of material at an interval other than the octave had interested Simpson for some time, and in many works preceding this one he had decided to double material at the fifth - the fifth being an interval of the harmonic series near to the octave; the doubling of chords at the fifth is a most novel and characteristic sound in Simpson's late works.

As in *Commotio,* what sounds like a fresh new fugue subject starts up (bar 95). Yet it is not all new, and the learned way in which the second theme grows out of the first perhaps accounts for the use of the term *Ricercar* instead of *Fugue* in the subtitle. (See Example 3).

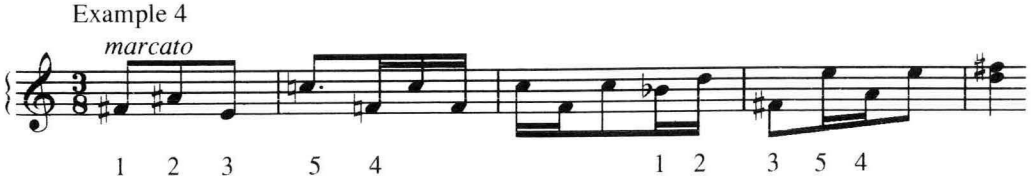
Example 3



The opening semitone derives from notes 3-4 of Example 1, the whole tone from notes 2-5, the major third from notes 1-2, the tritone from notes 2-3, and the perfect fourth from notes 2-4, for example. While this new fugue is proceeding, the chorale-like entries of the pedal continue. The introduction of a theme in smaller note-values gives the impression that an accelerando is taking place.

A third subject begins at bar 203, increasing the effect of accelerando by being cast in 3/8 (Nielsen, too, had moved into a gigue-like triple time in *Commotio*). The contrast with the previous subject, which had many small intervals, is considerable, for the 3/8 theme is almost entirely made up of leaps (See Example 4).

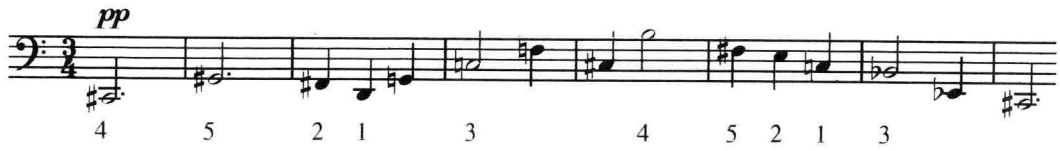
Example 4



Here the notes of the opening gruppetto are again renumbered, and the resulting shape is used at two pitches a major third apart. The pedals cease to use their 'chorale-prelude' interjections during this part of the fugue, and the counterpoint leads to the first pause in the piece, at bar 340. Here the Ricercar section ends and - without a break other than the pause - the Passacaglia begins.

The theme of the Passacaglia is eight bars long, but the first and last notes of statements are dovetailed together so as to form segments of seven bars: this avoids any feeling of four-squaredness which a series of 8-bar phrases might have caused. The act of dovetailing creates a sense of onward propulsion not available when 8-bar segments are used. The theme itself includes two statements of the 5-note gruppetto (the first has its final note interrupted so as to make a line of climbing fourths; again Simpson shows that he has no interest in strict serialism): in time-honoured fashion it is first announced in the pedals, the initial statement beginning and ending on C#. In time-honoured fashion, too, the theme begins with a leap between tonic and dominant: that leap - a rising fifth in this instance - is balanced by a falling fifth just before the end of the theme. (See Example 5).

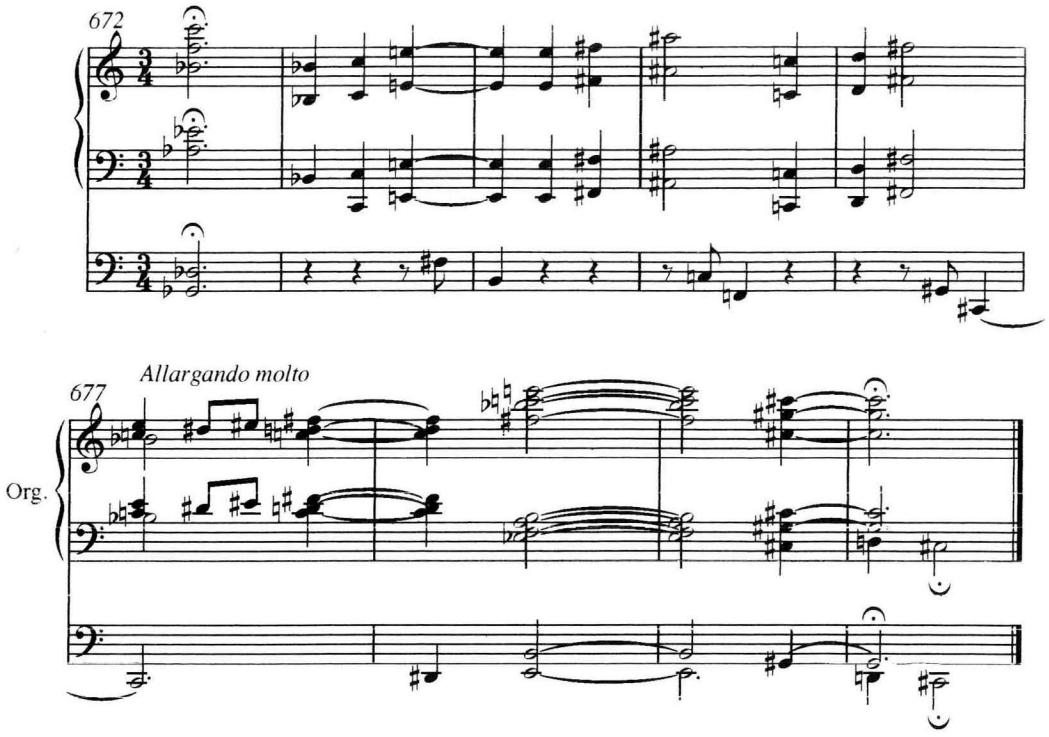
Example 5



The repetitions of the theme vary the pitch so that it rises chromatically through all twelve semitones from C# up to C natural (the last interval of the theme becomes a semitone instead of a tone at the points where the modulation takes place); but it does so in a fan-shaped manner, there being six variations on C#, five on D, and then one less variation at each new semitone shift until F# is reached. F# has only one variation, and then the process is reversed, G having one variation, G# two, and so on in increasing numbers until C natural is reached with its six variations. The next stage, obviously, is C#, rounding off the whole circle as if making a complete orbit, and it is on C# that the work ends.

The variations increase in intensity, starting with relatively long notes and introducing shorter values and a more virtuoso style by degrees; at bar 443 the tension is increased by doubling the manual chords at the fifth rather than by a decrease in note-values. The overlapping downward scales (all different, providing a considerable challenge to the player) that follow this lead to a series of hammer-blow chords, each doubled at the fifth (bars 457ff). In the centre of the Passacaglia, where there are single variations on F and G, the music dies away to a whisper, long held notes being used instead of groups of short notes. From this point to the end the intensity increases yet again, and the speed itself increases (apart from the final broadening).(See Example 6)

Example 6



This work, fine as it is in its own right, provides a look into Simpson's sketchbook, for the ideas used in it were developed further in the opening section of Symphony No 9 (1987). In that work an massive opening Passacaglia, based on a wedge-shaped theme, is interspersed with Chorale-like statements of the main material on the brass. The orchestral setting, the control of steady pace and slowly unfolding logic recall Bruckner's symphonies rather than Nielsen's *Commotio* or Bach's *Passacaglia*, while the work remains quintessentially Simpson. But that is another story, and it must be told elsewhere.

NOTES

1. A photocopy of the composer's manuscript is held in the Robert Simpson Society Archives at Royal Holloway, University of London.

2. I have to confess to a particular interest in the work, for while he was writing it Simpson sent me several pages at a time, and I played them to him in a series of visits to the organ at Royal Holloway, University of London. The first public performance of the work was given by Christopher Bowers-Broadbent in St Marylebone Parish Church, London.

ROBERT SIMPSON'S STRING QUARTETS Nos. 4, 5 AND 6

and their relationship to

BEETHOVEN'S OPUS 59 `RASUMOVSKY' QUARTETS

Simon Phillippo

Composers in most epochs have reworked the substance of existent music to make more. In the twentieth century borrowing from others has become a way of life for some composers, raised to the height of an artistic principle. Although Robert Simpson, with his vehemently classical view of music, would dissociate himself from the cannibal aesthetic, he too has ingested the music of other composers at various times to produce his own. In the 1970s he composed his Fourth, Fifth and Sixth String Quartets, modelling them closely on an entire set of quartets by Beethoven, the Opus 59 `Rasumovskies'. These quartets are remarkable, both as works in their own right and as what amounts to a set of musical commentaries on an unprecedented scale. It is the way in which Beethoven serves as a stimulus, and the diverse modelling procedures Simpson employs, which is the subject of this discussion.

A principle aim of Robert Simpson throughout his creative life has been to "recapture classical momentum"[1] - a momentum which he feels to be missing in much music of this century, and which is needed to generate the kind of symphonic forms that make up the majority of Simpson's output. Such large structures, he believes, require the clear direction, harmonic propulsion, and distribution of tensions and proportions that exist in the music of the classical masters, and in particular in that of Simpson's own "gods", Beethoven, Haydn, Bruckner and Nielsen.

Beethoven has always been a close relative to the music of Simpson. His Second Symphony (1956) recalls the bacchanal rawness of the finale of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony; Simpson's Fourth (1970/72) is cast in the classical four-movement form, taking the *Eroica*'s E flat as its principal tonality, with a very Ninth-like scherzo. John Pickard has demonstrated the correspondences between the Tenth Symphony (1988) and Beethoven's Opus 106 *Hammerklavier* Sonata,[2] and the very close relationship that Simpson's Third (1962) has to Beethoven's Ninth .[3] More explicitly, Simpson has also written Variations on a Theme by Beethoven, for piano.

All of this explains why Beethoven should here prove an enticing focus for Simpson, but the specific reason for his choosing the `Rasumovskies' as models is more complex. The received explanation for the writing of Robert Simpson's Fourth (1973), Fifth (1974) and Sixth (1975) Quartets is as follows. The composer presented a television lecture on Opus 59 No. 3, which was a success, and Simpson was pressed to write a book on the `Rasumovskies'. This he declined to do, favouring instead a kind of analysis-through-music. The composer's preface to the published scores modestly implies that these quartets may have little more than pedagogic value. While this is a gross understatement, it is nevertheless true that part of the experience of these works is as a "close study" of the Beethoven quartets, and this was clearly true of the composing of them. Also, the project was a homage to Beethoven. However, I suspect that there was a much more important, personal reason why these three works were written in this way.

Beethoven's "first" and "second" periods were separated by the confessional document known as the `Heiligenstadt Testament' of October 1802. This letter is a revelation of Beethoven's intense grief at his solitude and deafness. The emotional catastrophe behind the Testament marked a turning point in his artistic life, giving way to music of new determination, exemplified in the "heroic" Third Symphony. After this work, in which proportion, thematic invention and tonality were carried to unprecedented levels of scale and intensity, Beethoven could not return to the

1 From a conversation between Robert Simpson and Malcolm MacDonald, Radio 3, 27th January 1980

2 John Pickard. `Robert Simpson's Tenth Symphony'. *Musical Times*, cxxxii/1775 (January 1991), 703-705.

3 John Pickard. `Simpson's Third Symphony - An Analysis'. Tonic, Vol. 6 (Winter 1994), 3-27.

modest classicism of his Opus 18 quartets. Thus, those of Opus 59 display a new symphonicism of design which makes the set such a landmark in the history of the genre .[4]

Intensity is heightened by the sense that the three works might perhaps form an integrated whole, (though each is of very different character), ending with the colossal finale of the C major Quartet. Above the sketches of this movement is Beethoven's famous note: "Let your deafness be no longer a secret, even in your art." This brings the anguish of the `Heiligenstadt Testament' once more to mind, signifying that this quartet, if not the whole set, has been a cathartic process, culminating in vigorous, affirmative conviction.

Such speculation can be extended to Simpson's quartets also; he had undergone a comparably catalytic experience shortly before writing them. The composition of the Fifth Symphony in 1972 was interrupted by a brain haemorrhage and a serious operation in which Simpson was in danger of losing his life. The symphony, completed during his convalescence, is a disturbing work, in which a still, steady chord is bombarded by violent elements of disruption. This symphony can thus be heard as an equivalent `Testament' of Simpson at this time, following which a return to the intimacy of the string quartet (after nearly twenty years) seems understandable; and it is a telling coincidence that it was to the cathartic `Rasumovskies' that Simpson turned, as if in an attempt to rebuild his language, to "recapture" the "classical (tonal) momentum" which had been such a feature of his previous music, but which had been much less central to the Fifth Symphony .[5]

While it is not the business of this discussion to attempt any amateur psychoanalysis or to pry into the private concerns of Robert Simpson, the above would seem a viable reason as to why this particular project was undertaken; a reason which might also explain the didactic stance, the sense of progression which binds these three works, the powerful feeling of conclusion in the Sixth Quartet and the specific modelling procedures which I shall investigate. Furthermore, I believe that these three works represent a turning point in Simpson's language with profound implications for his later works.

Certainly the composition of Simpson's `Rasumovskies' was a process; partly to explore, partly to rehabilitate and, knowing Simpson's anti-modernist convictions, partly polemic. It is through a study of the composer's methods of modelling on Beethoven's Opus 59 that this process and the works themselves can best be understood.

The first movement of the Fourth Quartet is of them all the most closely and manifestly modelled on its counterpart in Opus 59. Simpson's approach at the beginning of the set is essentially that of *variation* on the model, with formal similarities. As well as the usual sonata components, Beethoven's more innovative structural arrangements are replicated by Simpson; even the bar numbers correspond throughout most of its length.

The essential surface-variations applied to the `Rasumovsky' movement are the faster tempo and the change to 3/4 time from Beethoven's 4/4. This gives the music a lighter character, which has implications for the quartet as a whole. This basic difference apart, Simpson is careful not to conceal the Beethoven in this movement: the initial theme and texture proclaim the model for all to hear:

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4 The string quartet was not the first of Beethoven's principal genres to be infected with the new`heroic' style inaugurated by the *Eroica*; the *Kreutzer* Sonata for Violin and Piano, the *Waldstein* and *Appassionata* Piano Sonatas, and the first two versions of *Fidelio (Leonore)* all came before the `Rasumovskies'. In the same year as these Quartets were written (1806), Beethoven also composed the Fourth Piano Concerto, the Fourth Symphony and the Violin Concerto.

5 The swift Scherzino movement in the Fifth Symphony derives its speed more from insistent rhythmic repetition than from harmonic propulsion; and the outer sections of the Symphony, though highly active harmonically, violently resist the establishment of any fixed tonal centre.

Fig. 1a (Beethoven)

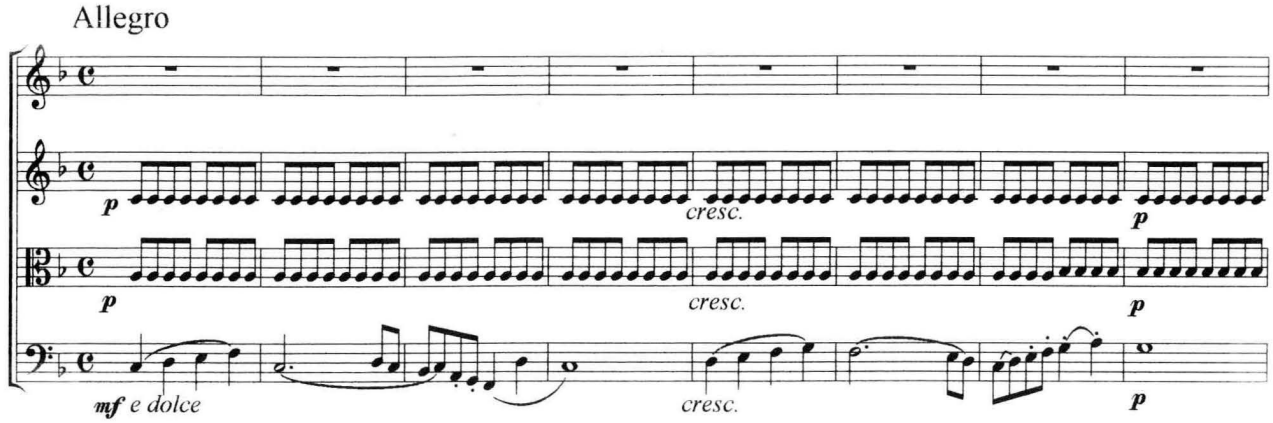
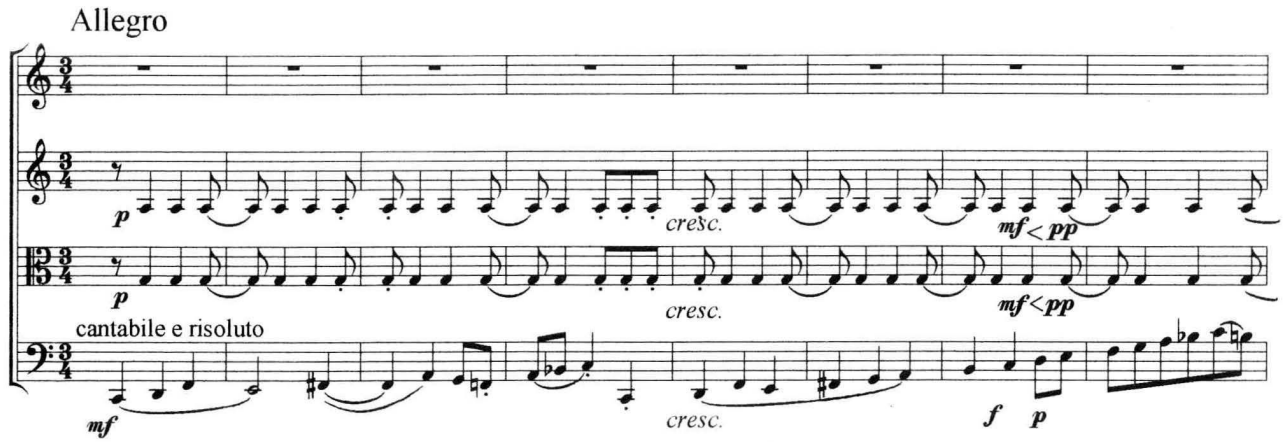


Fig. 1b (Simpson)



Both composers begin with a lyrical passage, over a background of dissonance and crescendo, and the opening accompaniment and cello themes have obvious similarities. By missing out Beethoven's e in bar one, Simpson creates a three-note motif [0, 2, 5] which permeates through the entire movement, as does Beethoven's scalic figure. In both movements, this opening melody ascends through several octaves, and such ascent becomes a thematic principle of much of the ensuing music.

Throughout the piece, the themes share sufficient characteristics with their progenitors to allow recognition of the process taking place, and the texture of the quartets is often similar. This is true even at bar 30, where Beethoven's texture is inverted, with the moving parts in the viola and cello rather than the violins. The variation does not disguise the essentially flowing nature of this second theme, emphasised by its context.

This variation procedure extends to the lifting of details out of the model, to emphasise their function and to enhance their effect within the new context. For example, this happens at the start of the transition in Simpson's movement. The source of the dissonance at bar 45, the a flat^2-g^2 trill-figure in the first violin, is derived from the model; these two notes form a harsh dissonance in bars 53 and 57 of the Beethoven.

Fig. 2a (Simpson)

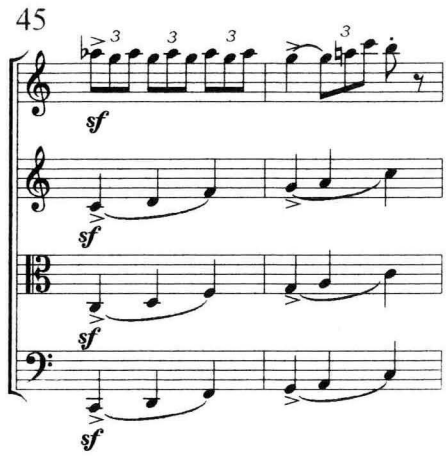
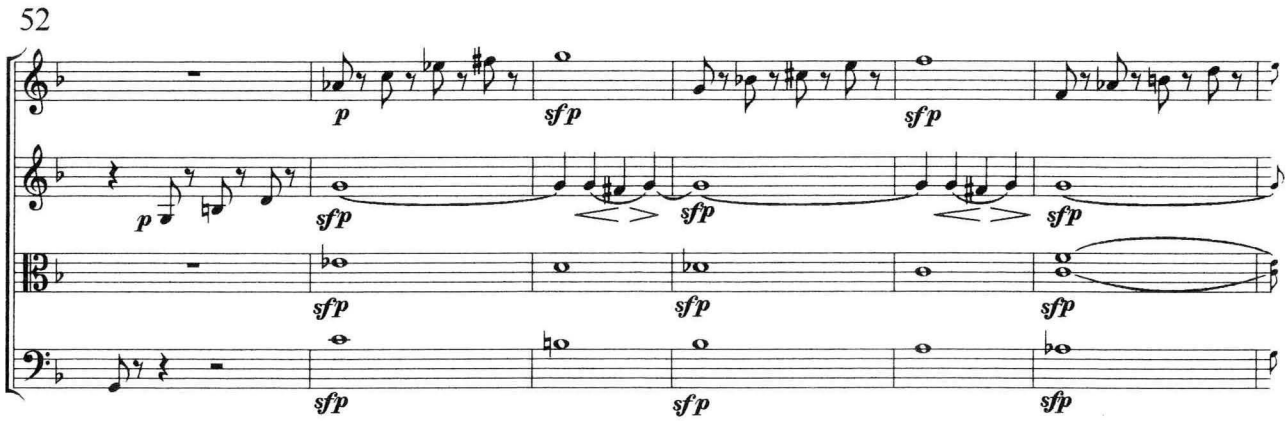


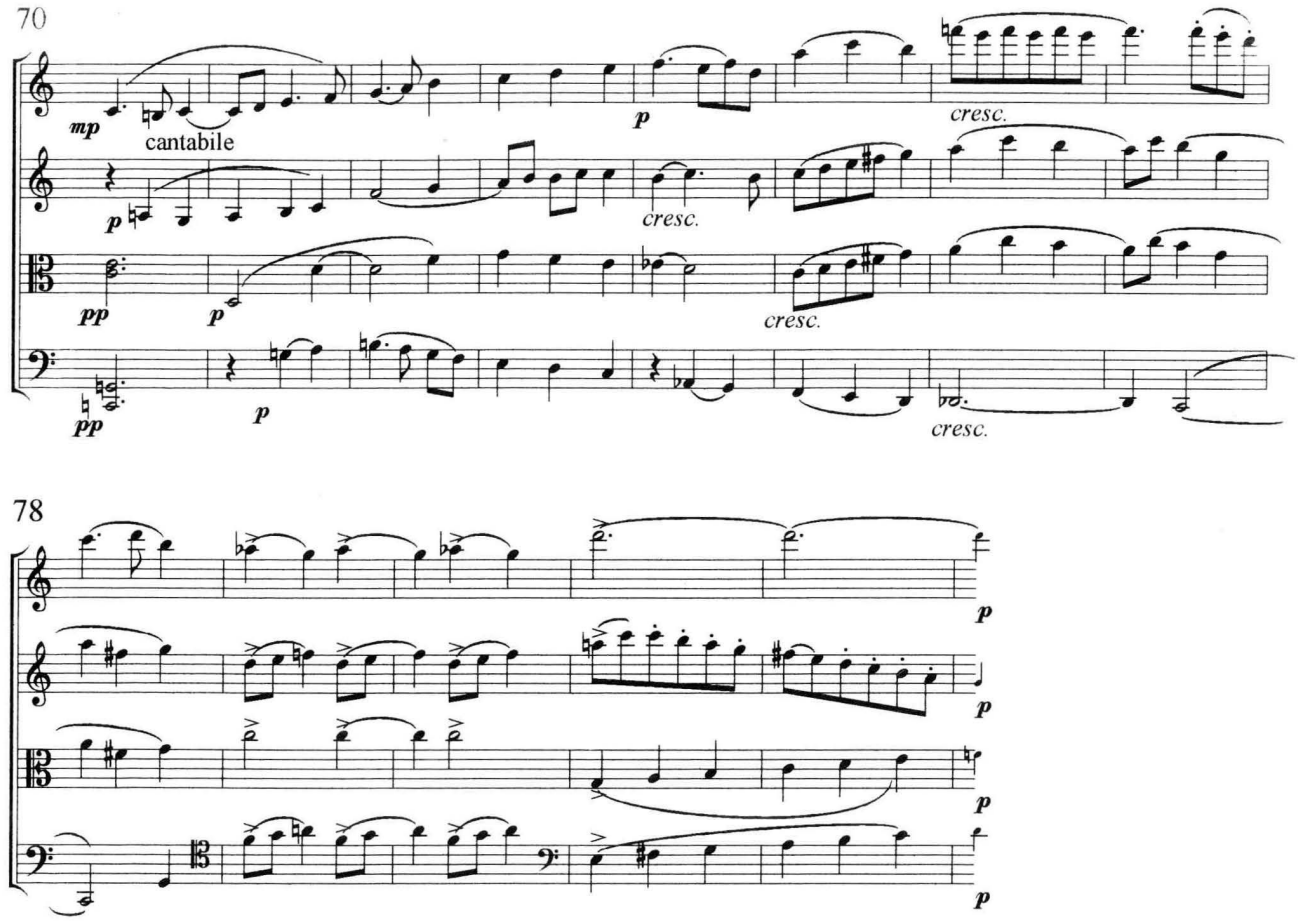
Fig. 2b (Beethoven)



This is not simply a heightened method of variation and derivation. It also has demonstrative value, highlighting the tension that Beethoven creates by means of his equivalent dissonance, and we know that such didacticism was one of the initial reasons for Simpson's quartets being composed. Simpson uses degrees of stability and instability, consonance and dissonance on the surface of the music, as a means of demonstrating the "distribution of tensions" within the Beethoven. This is more profound than the layout of themes, the sonata structure and so on, and it tells us as much about how Simpson listens to Beethoven as it does about the `Rasumovsky' itself.

Simpson's second subject, at bar 60, is the most consonant music in the movement, being purest C major until bar 66. There is a minimum of leaps in the melodic writing, and the use of hemiolas slows the music down. The clarity of this theme stands out after the harmonic and rhythmic pungency of the bridge-passage, but it is also a marked contrast to the primary material. This, in the Simpson, is never heard as a focused F major, and consequently the second subject stands out as harmonically secure. The long-term implication of this is in the recapitulation, where this theme returns in the tonic key.

Fig. 3 (exposition; second subject)



Simpson's point is that Beethoven's first subject is not stable either: his first theme is underlined by $^{6}_{4}$ harmony;[6] his first `tutti', at bar 19, comes to nothing but disintegrates into diminished sevenths; and in the recapitulation, Beethoven takes his meandering theme from bar 30 into the distant key of D flat major before returning to the tonic for the second group. The effect of all this is to throw considerable tonal and structural weight onto the secondary theme, and Simpson's harmonisation emphasises this.

This demonstration of comparative thematic stability is extended by Simpson to the overall tonal architecture of the movement. Not only is the surface-dissonance of Simpson's chromatic tonal language used as an analogy to Beethoven's structural dissonance at specific points in the music,[7] but in this way Simpson also uses it as a means of showing the function of the circle of fifths, the basis of Beethoven's classical tonality. In the bridge-passage, for example, Beethoven moves to the secondary dominant (G) for the strikingly active cello theme. Like the fortissimo at bar 19, this is delusory: the cello idea almost sounds like a fugue subject, but it grinds to a halt in four bars. Simpson replicates this fugal impression and analogises the secondary dominant's function - the overshoot of the new tonic as a means of preparation - by momentarily destroying any sense of tonal gravity, before cadencing in C. The principle of tonal distancing is the same but the method is new, teaching the listener something about classical tonality at the same time.

While the demonstrative value of all this is evident, Simpson is chiefly concerned with the evolution

6 Since Beethoven's opening theme constitutes a large-scale perfect cadence, the fact that the underlying progression is V[$^{6}_{4}$ - V^{7}] - I, as opposed to I^{6}_{4} - V^{7} - I, renders the apparent tonic harmony of the first phrase even more unstable; the initial F major is not yet tonicized.

7 Paradoxically, for the second subject - Beethoven's primary structural dissonance - this procedure is reversed; Simpson replicates the otherness of this theme by means of diatonic consonance.

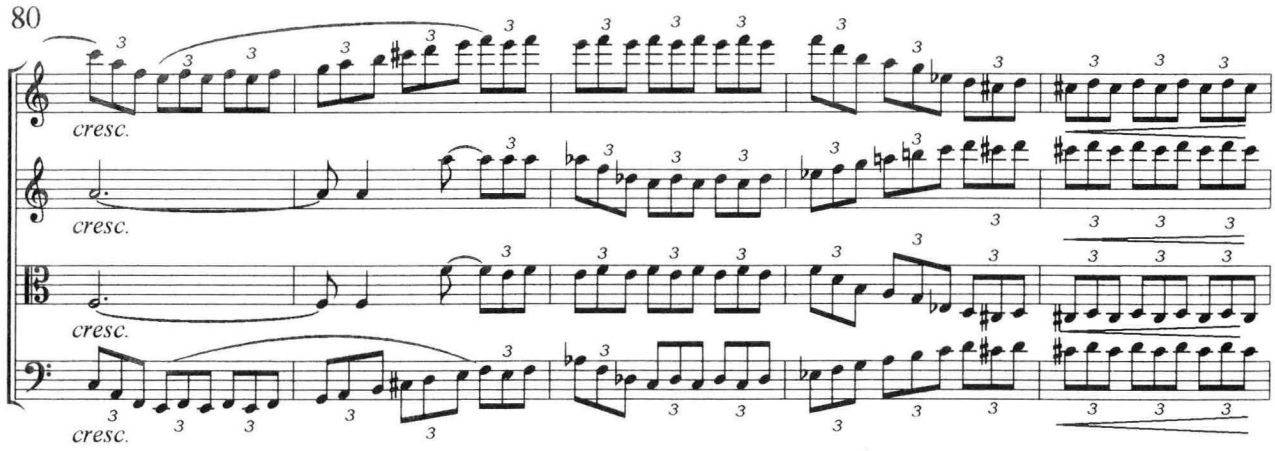
of his own musical ideas. The instability of his primary material mentioned above is caused by the main feature of Simpson's own tonal argument: from the very beginning he establishes D as a powerful anti-tonic to F, the two keys existing almost symbiotically throughout the piece. Although this too serves to expose something in the model, and is also an advanced form of lateral variation, Simpson's tonal scheme in this work supersedes both of these concerns.

The source of the idea is three-fold. Firstly, in the opening movement of Opus 59 no. 1, Beethoven establishes D flat major as a similar kind of anti-tonic, which is used to important structural effect in the development and recapitulation. It does not seriously challenge the tonic, but it presents a tension other than that of the traditional dominant. Secondly, the finale of Beethoven's quartet uses a "theme russe", essentially a dorian melody, wittily harmonised in F. The ambiguity that ensues permeates the tonal substance of the finale; Simpson integrates this idea into the entire work. And thirdly, this practice of conflicting tonalities is used extensively in the music of Nielsen, although this quartet is obviously not an example of "progressive" tonality in any Nielsenesque sense.

Simpson's harmonic instability at the start, comparable with Beethoven's $^{6}_{4}$, derives from the immediate presence of D in the accompaniment. The second violin and viola play a and g, from the dominant seventh chord of D, and the cello theme itself suggests D major as early as the second bar, with the move to F# emphasised by the hemiola. The initial tonal dichotomy is borne out as the first violin enters with [0, 2, 5] on d^1. As mentioned above, F itself is seldom focused, and often themes in this key have their second phrase in D, such as this at the start, the meandering theme at bar 30, and even the fully-harmonised version of the opening theme in bar 348 of the coda.

After the second subject at bar 73 of both movements, the texture fragments. Whereas in the Beethoven this scattered texture gathers together again in a II-V-I cadence in the dominant, Simpson at this point continues his F-D oscillation, with the passing F major of bar 80 giving way to a unison C#-D trill figure in bar 84:

Fig. 4



Throughout the movement much is made of the enharmonic ambiguity of C# and D flat; these equivalent pitches are not used as tonal centres, but act as a pivot between F and D, the spelling of the note depending on the direction of the voice-leading (i.e. C# to D, D flat to C natural). In this particular example above, the pivotal note mediates between the two protagonist keys.

The development sections of these two respective works are of particular interest, especially from the modelling perspective, as here Simpson manages to balance the basic formal outline of the `Rasumovsky', while being faithful to his own material. He does this by departing from the letter of Beethoven's tonal scheme, with his own F-D dialectic receiving a full exploration. It is worth examining certain features of these comparative sections in some detail.

Both developments begin with a mock-repeat of the exposition. Four bars are identical to those at the start of the piece, before foreign notes appear. Beethoven cadences in B flat major at bar 112, which retrospectively suggests that the development actually began in the dominant of the

subdominant. Simpson here allows his own tonal narrative to command the harmonic direction, and he returns to his anti-tonic, D. The retrospective paradox exists here too, for as at the start of the movement, the pulsating accompaniment of a and g in the middle parts can imply the dominant of D. If this is heard, then the move to that key at bar 111 sounds prepared by the ambiguity inherent in this dyad. Simpson replaces the V-I logic of Beethoven's passage with this juxtaposition of twin tonalities, an equivalent aural inevitability having been prepared in the exposition by F continually giving way to D.

Beethoven's development is in two halves, with a tonic-minor "mill pond" at its centre. The first half is comparatively ordinary harmonically, while the second moves from F minor to D flat major - with twenty-four bars of strong D flat tonicity - before a fugato begins in E flat-minor. Simpson's development is also bipartite. Essentially, he focuses on his ubiquitous twin keys, and on the C#/D flat ambiguity. The D major at bar 111 proves temporary, and once the fugato has started up in bar 125 (beginning on A flat) the harmony is closer to F than to D. The cello part, from bar 134, is full of D flats, with the strong implication of downward-resolution heightened by the descending sequence of [0, 2, 5] figures, now inverted, in the viola and first violin. After a head-on clash of semitones at bar 149, the first violin heralds the reappearance of D, with the strong quasi-cadential e^3-$c\#^3$-d^3 figure. Now Simpson creates his own "mill pond" texture, and by bar 170 (the bar of the first real D flat cadence in Beethoven) we hear a relatively clear D major.

The second half of Simpson's development begins, as in the model, with a re-energising of the texture with a fugato; but Simpson highlights the structural division by returning to the A flat tonality of the fugato he has already suggested, as if readdressing the same issue as before from a new stand-point. The C#/D flat problem is renewed, with the fugal passage this time culminating in fierce chords (comparable to Beethoven's diminished sevenths) at bar 210, underlying $c\#^3$-d^3 in the first violin.

The recapitulation follows Beethoven's harmonic structure closely, with the exception of the D flat major return of the model. This would have had no relevance in the new quartet, so Simpson uses A, also a mediant from the tonic. (See bars 280-293). The real problem Simpson faces at the end of his movement is that of balancing the sonata structure with a sufficiently strong tonic. This is difficult when F has been so deliberately destabilised throughout, and Simpson has to provide a powerful dominant preparation for the final cadence, which must adequately discount D as well as C. To achieve this, he writes full-bodied dominant seventh harmony from bar 385 until the sostenuto at bar 394; the first violin ascends into the heights, as in the model, but the slower tempo calms everything, and even the gentle side-step to D in the cello (bar 397) and the A major arpeggio in the first violin (bar 398) pose no real threat to the tonal stasis.

The purpose of this strong cadencing is clear (although admittedly in terms of sonata form it is in an unusual place), and Simpson has to use similar harmonic emphasis elsewhere. Before the development begins, in order to recreate Beethoven's illusion of a repeat, Simpson has to prepare the return of F more strongly prior to the cadence at bar 103 than Beethoven has to, with a six-bar decorated dominant seventh. Evidently, Simpson has to exaggerate these moments to make sense of the sonata elements, and to accommodate the model's harmonic essentials as well as his own.

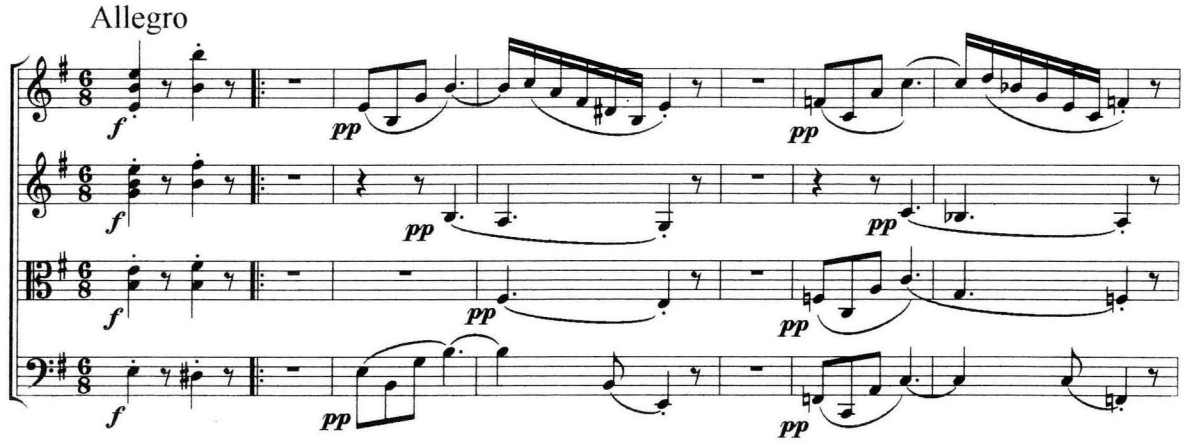
The result is, inevitably, a compromise. The cheerfulness of character, the intricate variation techniques and the overtly `Rasumovskian' formal procedures notwithstanding, this movement suffers somewhat from semantic overload; such rigour in Simpson's modelling can only limit the expression of his own musical ideas. In one sense, the most successful movements in these works are those in which the model and its syntax are completely absorbed into the new piece on all levels. From another perspective, however, it may be argued that the locus of meaning in these quartets lies in this very tension between the various creative and didactic intentions underlying the endeavour; our experience is not of *an independent quartet*, but of a flexible *relationship* between one quartet and another.

On the larger scale of the entire Fourth Quartet, the full-flowering of the F-D dialectic occurs in the finale. This is the weightiest movement of the work, unlike the Beethoven, and it lacks the Arcadian whimsicality of the model. The material is much less obviously derived from Beethoven, and the model's final *Adagio ma non troppo* is given much greater emphasis in order to focus the tonal argument, before the coda equivocally "dismisses" the debate.

In a similar way to the finale of the Fourth Quartet, the slow movement of No. 5 keeps to the broad structural outline of its model, but uses material which is utterly different, with only tenuous surface correspondences. There is, in Simpson's *Adagio*, a feeling of contemplation which one can hear in the Beethoven slow movement, and the feeling of peace emanating from this music sets it apart from the rest of the work.

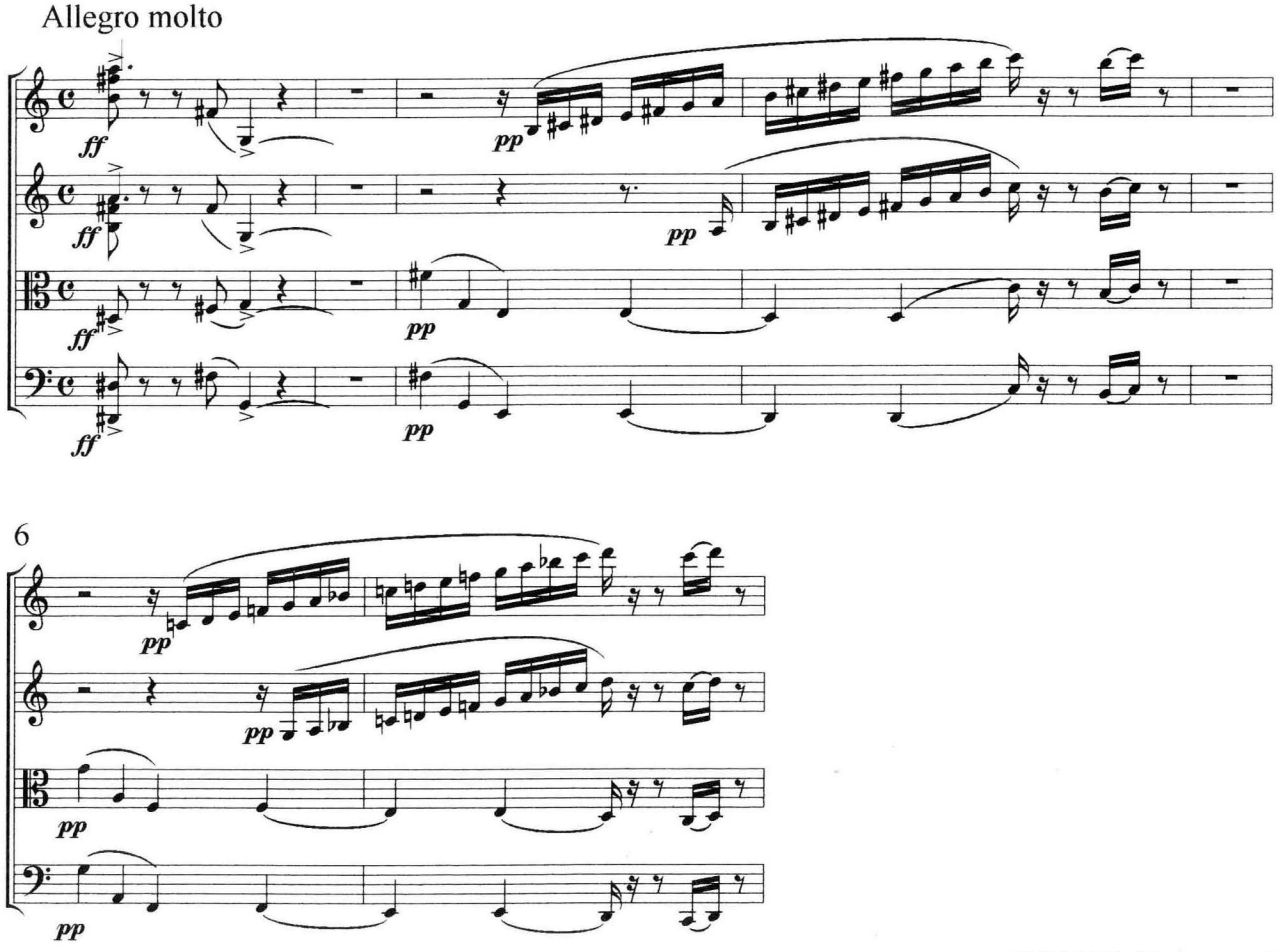
The large-scale tonal organisation of this quartet derives from Beethoven's use of the phrygian mode. The C major/E minor joke in the finale is famous, but the first movement is also full of such Neapolitan relationships; indeed it begins by making this clear, repeating the initial idea up a semitone, with the transposed version disembodied by silence.

Fig. 5a



Simpson begins his first movement similarly:

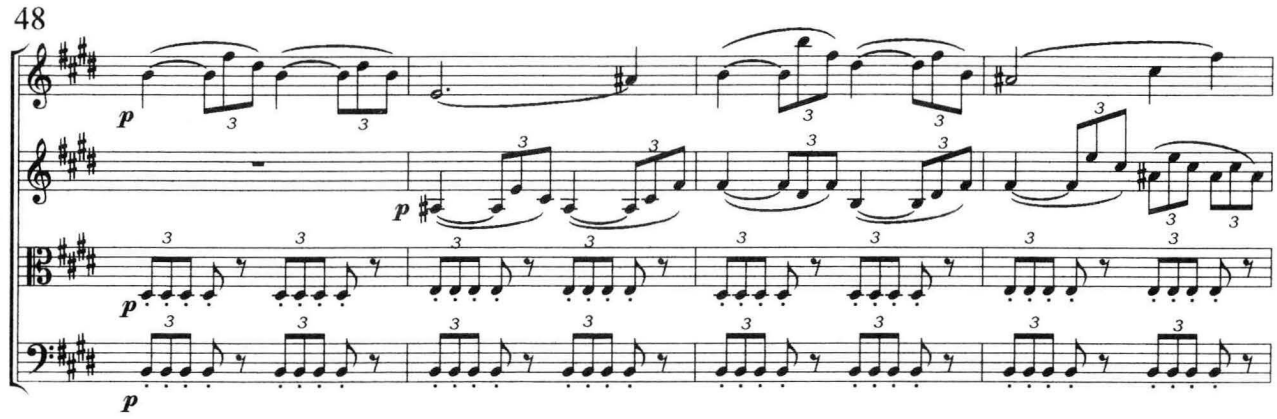
Fig. 5b



In the post-Nielsen manner of the Fourth Quartet, he then proceeds to make E and B, together with their Neapolitan counterparts, F and C, the tonal centres of the work, and the intervals of fifths and seconds yielded by this set of pitches inform much of the material. The important difference between Simpson's use of this technique in this work and in No. 4 is that here the key centres come directly from the model in question; in the Fourth Quartet, D had been extended back from the finale, and was alien to Beethoven's immediate harmonic structure.

Part of the other-worldliness of the *Adagio* of No. 5, therefore, results from the main theme's departure from this phrygian sound-world. It begins in a clear E major, and the tonality is strengthened by the second phrase of the theme, which begins in C# major. Such harmony is foreign to both E minor and E phrygian. The modal inflections return in Simpson's transitional passages, and the codas of both his exposition and recapitulation are very much more tonally active than in the model. The closing pages re-establish the tonal ground-rules of the whole quartet, with chords of B flat major returning from the development section, and C-B semitonal figures appearing throughout the texture. The cadence in the final bar is modal. Beethoven's harmony has elements of concealed modality, most markedly in the development section; the reinstatement of the phrygian key centres towards the end of Simpson's *Adagio*, preparing for the harmonic nature of the scherzo, is an extension of this.

The variation-orientated modelling of the kind used in the Fourth Quartet's first movement would surely have replicated the calm, rocking ostinato figure of Beethoven's bars 48 to 51: (Fig. 6)



Here this kind of surface analogy is not attempted - the model is in the background of the music only, and so the conflict of interests discussed in relation to No. 4 is not an issue.

Despite the surface differences, the slow movement of the Fifth Quartet keeps close to Beethoven's proportions. Even the bar numbers correspond approximately throughout. A profitable case-study of Simpson's departure from the spirit of the models and from their literal structures, as well as from the thematic material, is in his scherzo movements.

The scherzo of Opus 59 No. 1 is unusual; it is a combination of dance-form and sonata elements. While this is at a controlled *Allegretto vivace* tempo, Simpson writes a *Presto* movement. Both share the same tonal plan, with B flat as tonic, and both begin with a naked rhythm, a kind of tattoo which informs much of the movements' material.

Fig. 7a (Beethoven)

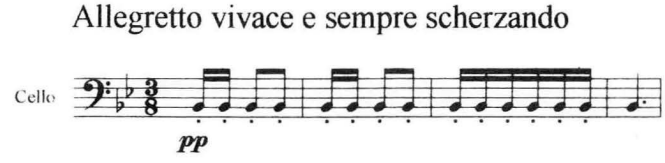
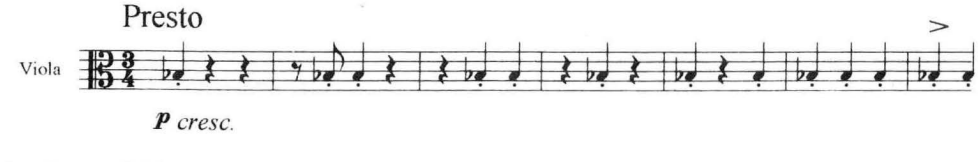
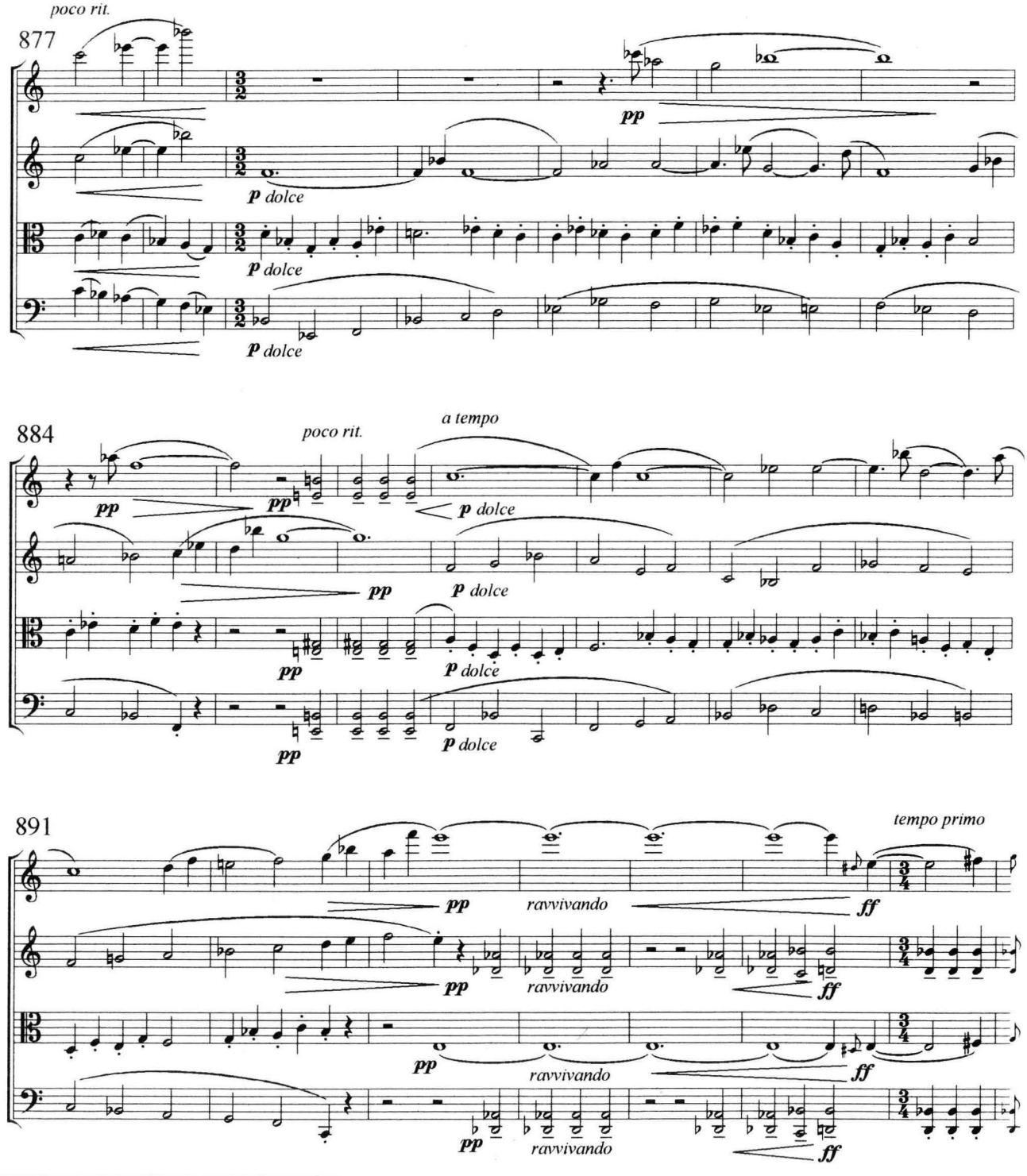


Fig. 7b (Simpson)



There are formal resemblances too, with the "distribution of tensions" being essentially the same. But Simpson's music bears no similarity to the Beethoven in anything but these proportions. It is at a much faster tempo, and has a feeling of frenzy about it.

The main structural difference lies in Simpson's invention of a trio section, which has only the loosest roots in the model. Whereas Joseph Kerman has convincingly identified bars 115 to 150 in the Beethoven as a notional trio,[8] with its regular dance-like phrase structure, together with its return at bar 354, Simpson highlights something different in the model to become his trio material: the B major idea at bar 177. This is doubtless a very striking moment, and Simpson evokes a similar contrast, with a slower tempo and new material, making this a more self-contained section than Beethoven's (bar 340). Having done this, he needs, for the sake of symmetry, to return to this theme - as a second trio, in effect - at bar 879. Its reprise is in the tonic major: (Fig. 8)



8 Joseph Kerman. *The Beethoven Quartets*. New York, 1967

One can discern formal comparisons: both movements are double scherzos, both trios return in the tonic, and thereby both composers combine sonata and scherzo elements. But Simpson has to depart greatly from the structure of the model for his own music to work convincingly, with the required balance. The movement is none the worse for this; indeed, in such an energetic piece, the repeated slower section is a stroke of genius, proving that Simpson is composing first, modelling second. From the latter perspective, however, it is interesting that the formal departure stems from a slightly dubious interpretation of Beethoven's movement - perhaps an example of Bloomian "misprision".[9]

The scherzo of No. 5 represents a still wider deviation from the model. Palindromes have been a source of creative fascination for Simpson throughout his life, but here he extends this principle of symmetry and composes an arch-form movement.

First we hear the scherzo itself, followed by a trio with a simple tune (as in the model, though this is not specifically Russian) which is treated in two mad-cap fugal expositions, culminating in furious stretti. Then, at bar 148, the scherzo returns in a shortened version; but the energetic triplets of the close of the trio are carried over, so that this scherzo actually forms the central climax of the movement. Trio number two begins suddenly at bar 200, and this time the opposite process takes place. There is a textural diminuendo, triplets become duplets, and the final scherzo at bar 232 is a pianissimo repetition of the initial version.

This is a different kind of deviation from the Beethoven model. Again the basic formal divisions remain intact, and there are harmonic correspondences, but there the analogies end. The use of an arch form is an entirely Simpsonian idea, rooted in his own artistic predilections, and the original is held at a distance.

A still more striking departure takes place in the third movement of the Sixth Quartet. Beethoven makes a very surprising return to the Rococo minuet at this point, and this clearly raises serious questions of meaning and intent. Simpson himself describes this movement in `Rasumovsky' No. 3 as "the one point of repose in the whole work".[10] He also suggests that Beethoven, now struggling to come to terms with his deafness, is here concerned to recreate music he used to hear in his younger days.[11]

In 1975 a minuet would have had no meaning except as a relic, or as pastiche. Simpson avoids any such treatment; instead he takes the idea of using an archaic device a stage further, and writes a canon. The chief difference is that, despite this being a very ancient technique, canons still feature in the music of composers today, having been especially important in the music of the Second Viennese School.

Despite the *molto tranquillo* indication, Simpson's double canon is by no means a moment of intellectual "repose". It is strict, and intended to be heard as such. For instance, the composer carefully arranges, within each pair of voices, certain features to be heard in order, such as the four ascending scales in bars 5 and 6.

There is a kind of trio section, at the *Allegro grazioso* (`*grazioso*' being Beethoven's marking for the actual minuet), through which the canonic procedure continues, before the opening tempo returns at bar 119. Here the whole thing is up a fifth, providing a kind of tonal variety and balance which Beethoven has no need for in his very static C major.

The `Rasumovsky' minuet has a long coda which clouds this harmonic simplicity. Simpson writes only a three-bar coda, which contrasts texturally, being chordal, and which outlines the tonal centres of this quartet. These form a series of minor thirds: C - E flat - F# - A.

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9 Kevin Korsyn. `Towards a New Poetics of Musical Influence'. *Music Analysis*, 10 (1991), 3-72. (A discussion of Harold Bloom's literary theories applied to music).

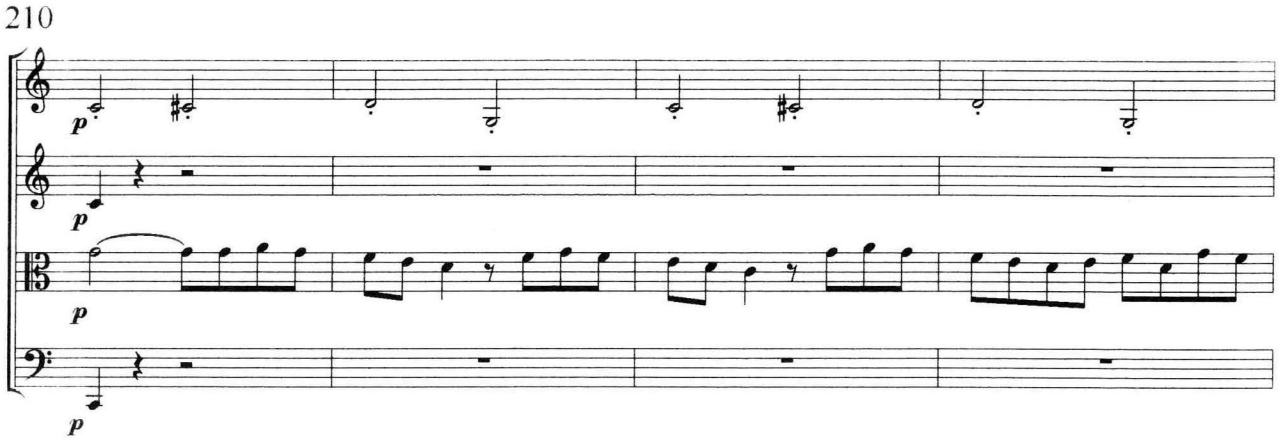
10 BBC broadcast, 10th February 1980

11 More recent Beethoven studies have revealed that some material used in the minuet was actually sketched years earlier. This suggests a certain expediency, and indicates, along with other factors, that op. 59 no. 3 was composed hastily. See William Kinderman. *Beethoven*. New York, 1995. op. cit.

The differences between these two third movements could not be more pronounced. Notwithstanding the basic centricity of C in the Simpson, even harmonic analogies are hard to find, and the spirit of the music is completely different. This is the most divergent of all the movements in these three works, with the real modelling taking place in advance of the music itself. Simpson decides to write a canon after following through Beethoven's pre-compositional thought processes, as he hypothesises them to have been. It is therefore the occasion for the music - the reason for its composition - which is of prime concern, rather than the actual substance of the movement itself.

The depth of the modelling here takes on still broader implications when one considers the network of influences involved in both `Rasumovsky' No. 3, and Simpson's Sixth Quartet as a whole. Joseph Kerman has pointed out that there is a strong reminiscence of Mozart's K465 "Dissonance" quartet in Opus 59 No. 3; not only in the tonicless introduction, but even in some of the *Allegro* material as well.[12] Alan Tyson also connects these two works.[13] Lionel Pike demonstrates some similarities between this Beethoven work and Haydn's quartet Opus 74 No. 1 - also in C major, with structural weight similarly given to E flat and A.[14] Furthermore, in the recapitulation of the finale, the fugue returns with an additional subject, in minims:

Fig. 9a



This has a host of C major forbears:

Fig. 9b Haydn, Opus 74 No. 1

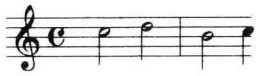
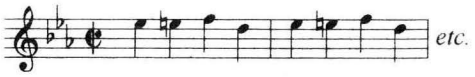


Fig. 9c Mozart, Symphony No. 41, finale

And a famous one in E flat:

Fig. 9d Mozart, `Magic Flute' overture



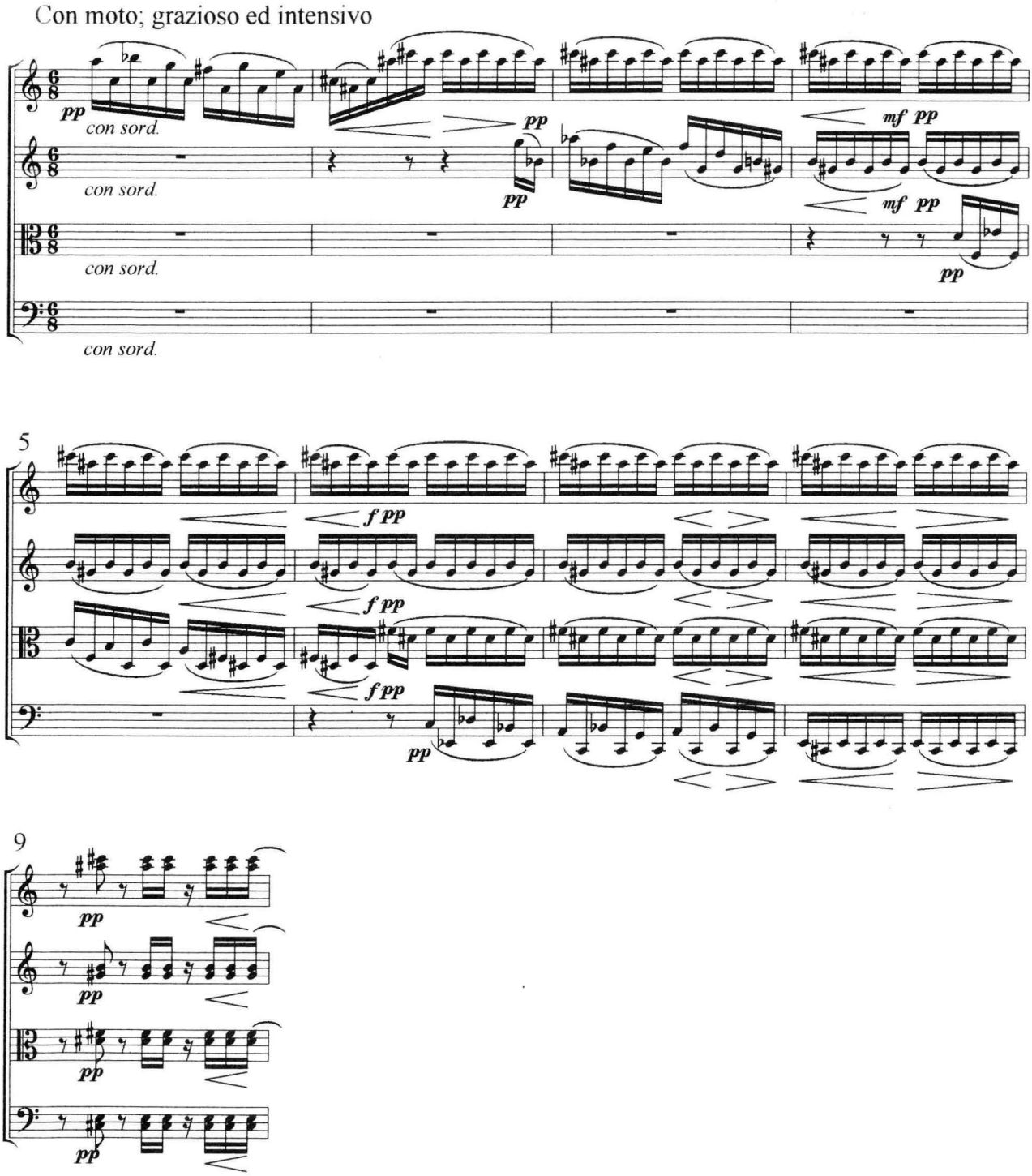
12 op. cit.

13 Alan Tyson. `The `Rasumovsky' Quartets: Some Aspects of the Sources'. *Beethoven Studies 3*, ed. Tyson, Cambridge, 1982, 122-124.

14 Lionel Pike. *The Language of the Rasumovsky Quartets* (unpublished).

Simpson acknowledges Haydn's influence on his model in some of the melodic figurations of his own work, thus adding a further dimension to the compound modelling. In addition, Lionel Pike has pointed out an oblique reference to Shostakovich in the slow movement:[15] a D-S-C-H motif, in the opening theme, appearing at pitch in bars 4 and 5:

Fig. 10

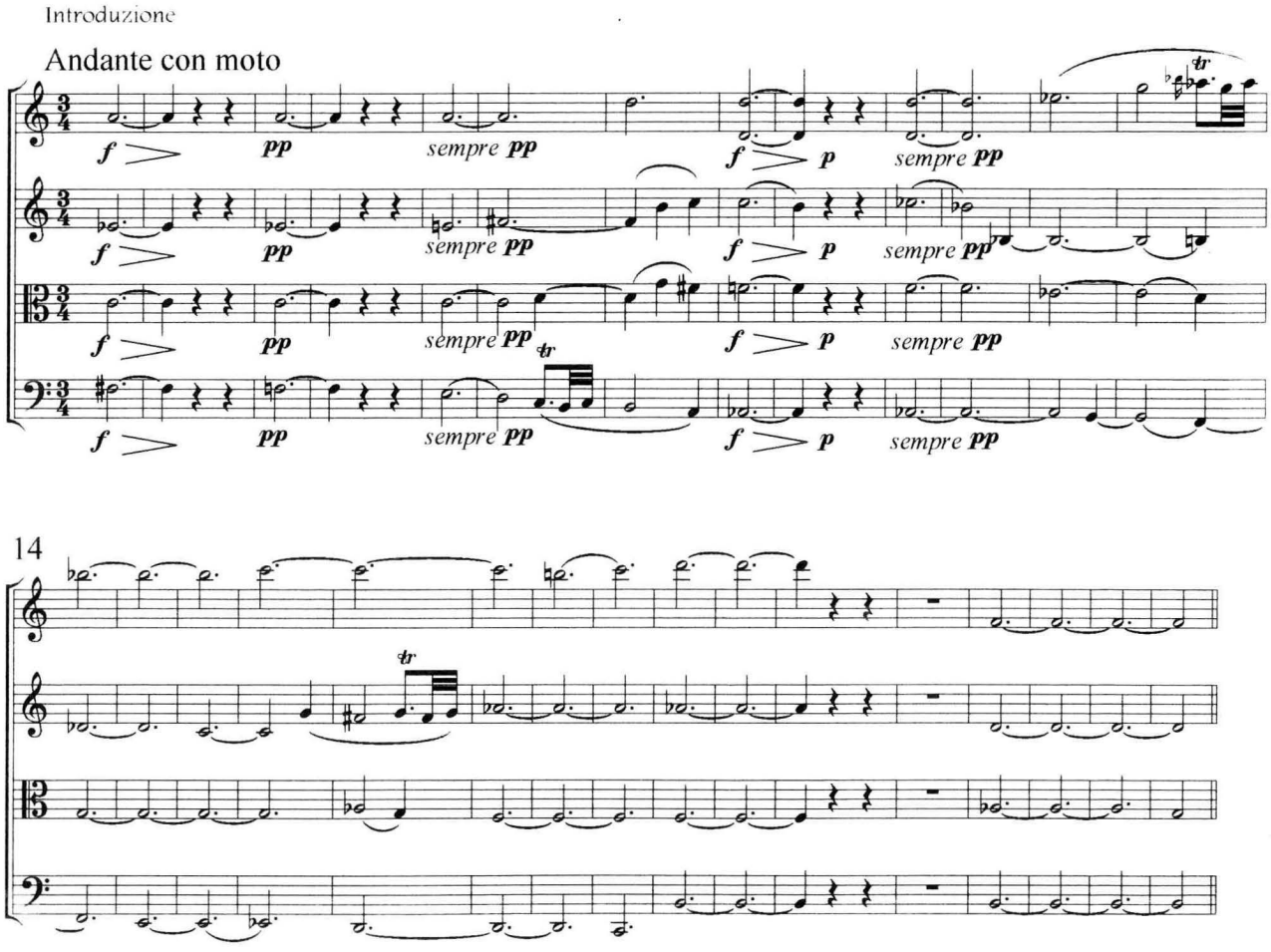


15 op. cit.

There are also striking *appassionata* solo passages for cello and viola, which remind one of the quasi-recitative sections in the Shostakovich quartets (for example, the `Intermezzo' and `Funeral March' movements from No. 15). Deliberate or not, these succeed in conjuring up the Slavic gloom of Beethoven's slow movement.

As mentioned, the keys of A and E flat provide gravitational centres for Beethoven, in addition to the mandatory related fifths, tonic, dominant, subdominant etc. A minor is unsurprisingly used as the key for the slow movement, but E flat appears as an important anti-tonic in all movements of the quartet - even the minuet, in its coda. These keys clearly derive from the diminished harmony heard in the mysterious introduction to the first movement; indeed, Beethoven even discreetly suggests these tonalities in these opening bars.[16]

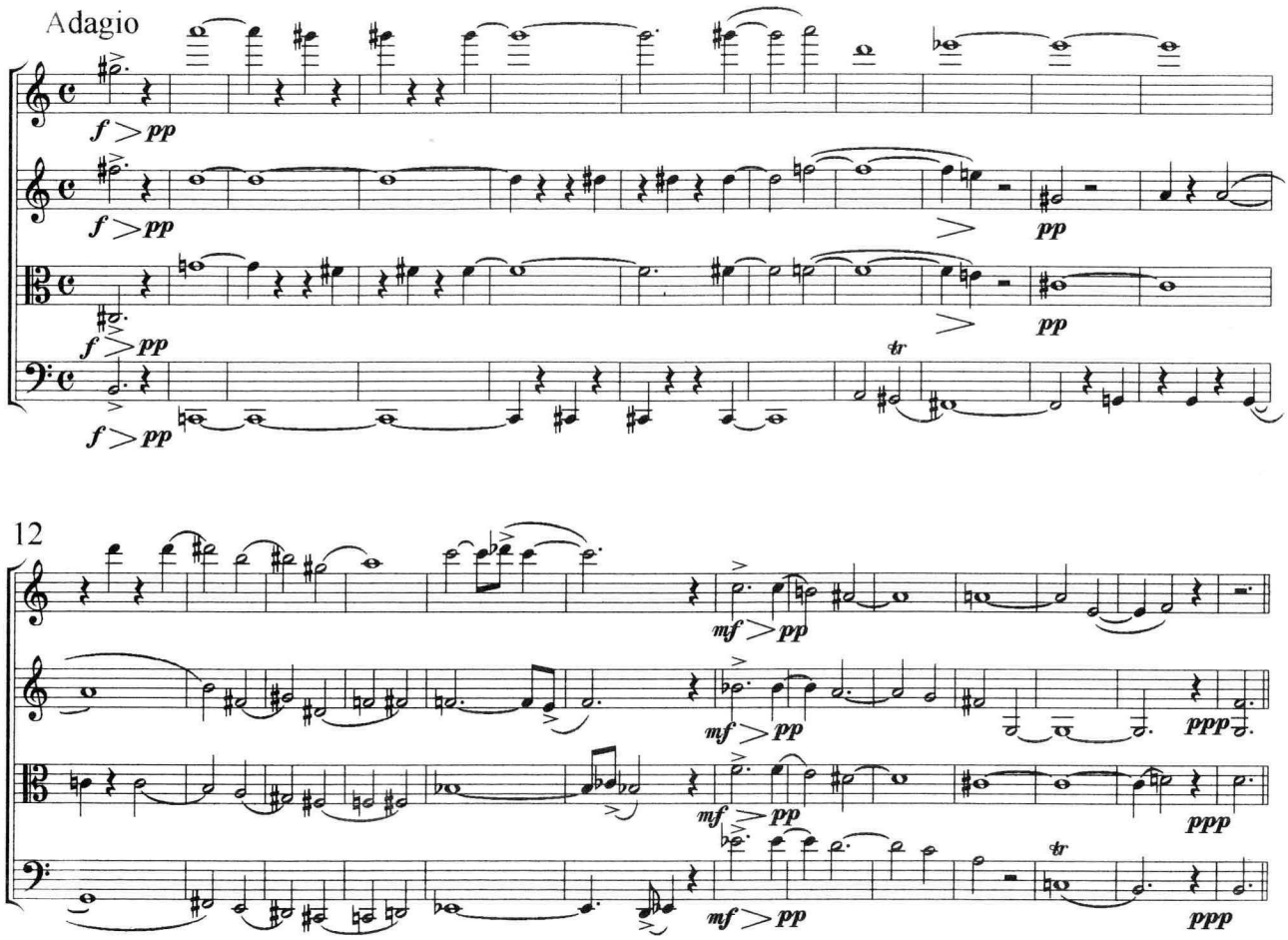
Fig. 11a



Simpson extends this idea, and includes the remaining pitch of Beethoven's initial diminished seventh chord, F#, in his four-fold tonal scheme. Like Beethoven, Simpson gently hints at his various key-centres during his introduction - which is equally indistinct - and just as the model does not give any of these keys a strong root position sonority, Simpson alludes to them only by means of comparative consonance. His introduction is not especially dissonant, but comprises harmony made of major seconds and fifths. As with Beethoven's diminished seventh, Simpson's opening chord can be resolved in a number of ways, each of which he explores here:

16 A minor at bar 5, E flat at bar 12, C at bar 29.

Fig. 11b



It is at the points where he opens the texture in a string of fifths and octaves that his key-centres are suggested, those being bar 2 (C), bar 10 (F#) and bar 16 (E flat). Simpson does not include A here, saving that for his explicitly A-minorish second movement.

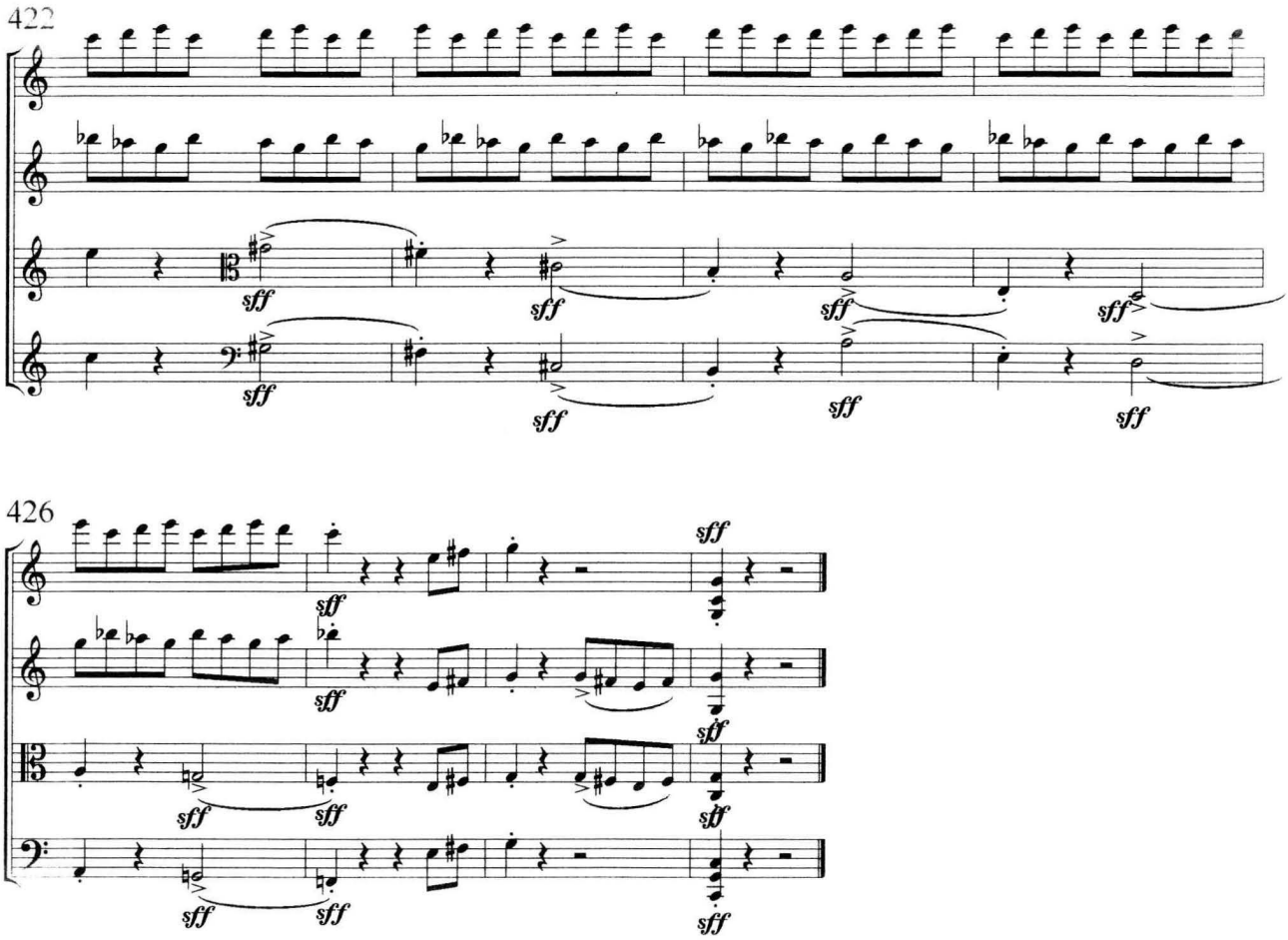
So, in `Rasumovsky' No. 3 we have a surface structure of diminished seventh harmony, and its diverse resolution, and a deep structure which breaks this harmony down into its component minor thirds and tonicizes them. The Simpson apparently presents a disparity between these two structural levels: the surface of the music consists of harmony made of seconds and fifths, while the model's tonal system is employed on the deeper level, with minor third-related keys which have no superficial manifestation.

But Simpson solves this problem. The first movement makes the most obvious use of the seconds and fifths of the introduction, in addition to the textural arrangement of the instruments into pairs in extremes of high and low register, even reintroducing part of his *Adagio* material in the second subject (bars 12 to 15 recur at bars 148 to 155). In the second movement the structural minor thirds take on a thematic significance of their own: each imitative strain of the opening idea culminates in oscillating thirds, all of which are eventually heard as a piled-up vertical sonority, with the thirds separated by the ubiquitous seconds and fifths, in bars 8 and 9. Of course, minor third slow-trills appear in much of Simpson's output - another throw-back to Nielsen - but here their use is particularly justified by the tonal architecture, and by the `Rasumovsky' model.

The finale of No. 6 is the most successful of them all. It is bold, spontaneous-sounding, and races with conviction towards its closing bars. It significantly returns to a more faithful bar-by-bar modelling, even with some clear thematic similarities to the `Rasumosvky' finale, than Simpson has used since the first movement of No. 4. But this finale is free from any kind of self-consciousness, and any linguistic tensions are, if not resolved, allowed positive expression. If elsewhere Simpson strives to distance himself a little strenuously from the sonorities and procedures of his models, in this movement such a strain is not evident.

The finale of the Sixth Quartet is tonally explicit. The key-centres, C, A, F# or E flat, are always audible and strong, and the final cadence in C major is the most affirmative tonic in all three quartets - indeed, one of the most powerful in Simpson's entire output. As early as bar 345 the tonic is prepared, and the harmony travels from a very clear dominant preparation from bar 405 through a more chromatic passage which never loses sight of C. The final *sff* phrase in viola and cello combines voice-leading procedures in an A major descent (beginning with the pitches of the work's first chord) and successive transpositions at the fifth. There is also a very pronounced IV-V-I cadence in the closing three bars. Tremendous concentration is amalgamated with typical "momentum", and direct, unencumbered harmony.

Fig. 12



Everything comes together in this magnificent finale: close modelling, inventive surface-variation, tonal explicitness, energy equivalent to that in No. 5, but with tighter harmonic control, and an overall formal balance to the whole quartet. But while this movement is a worthy counterpart to Beethoven's in its affirmation and heroism, and is in many ways a considerable advance from the earlier movements in this set of quartets, it is not the epiphany which I believe exists in this work. The great imaginative leap occurs in the preceding canon.

This movement has attracted the most extensive critical commentary of all in these works. Bayan Northcott described it as "an elaborate, if somewhat stiff-jointed canon";[17] Lionel Pike indignantly rejoined that "it is worthy of Bach or Beethoven";[18] Simpson himself has taken a defensive stance over this movement. In his BBC interview with Malcolm MacDonald he said:

17 Bayan Northcott. 'Recent Simpson'. *Tempo*, No 135 (December 1980)

18 Lionel Pike. letter to *Tonic*, Vol. 1 (1981).

"It cost me an enormous amount of work, this canon. I'm not ashamed of it; I think it is rather a fine canon, I think it's rather beautiful...It's not canon with a pastiche flavour. I only said archaic in the sense that the canon is one of the oldest devices in music. And so I went back to that and also to the idea of absolute strictness - not the kind of strictness which is possible nowadays, in which you put down the strict intervals whether or not they make sense, but a strictness in relation to fundamental and natural harmonic phenomena..."

This movement certainly deserves to be viewed as exceptional in these works. Whatever one's opinion of it, it is the most individual and Beethoven-less of them all, as I have demonstrated. It has its own harmonic logic, resulting from the shapely counterpoint; tonicity per se is lost; `tonality' is a redundant term. However, it does have a strong sense of direction.[19] .The recurrence of specific intervals and motifs, at various transpositions, gives it surface-coherence and unity, while the interpassing of themes between all four players renders it a perfectly conceived piece of quartet writing.

Although within its context this movement is problematic, being somewhat undermined by the second movement at the same tempo, it does stand out from its surroundings by being so linguistically different. I believe that this canon is the most important movement in these quartets, and the starting point for all of Simpson's later music.

Among the next major works were the Sixth and Seventh Symphonies, both composed in 1977. Neither follow tonal principles in the way Simpson's earlier music had. Instead the methods of generating material and large-scale forms from intervals themselves, which had begun in the three Quartets, come to the forefront of the compositional process.

There are many connections between these works and the two 1977 symphonies. For example, Symphony No. 6 uses canonic devices extensively, with intricate contrapuntal use of inversions and retrogrades. No. 7 derives its material from a 'cluster' of semitones, which is then unravelled and explored in a similar way to the chord at the start of the Sixth Quartet, although with far more single-minded rigour. Furthermore, both symphonies make much use of doublings at the fifth, a sonority which Simpson first used structurally in the Sixth Quartet.

It is the intervallic and contrapuntal processes at which Simpson worked so hard in the canon of the Sixth Quartet which become central to his thinking henceforth. Nielsenesque tonal conflicts, of the kind he uses in the Fourth and Fifth Quartets, and partially in No. 6, no longer feature; indeed, in his later works it is often a single interval or pitch which becomes the central point of reference, rather than a tonality. It is these that give rise to the harmonic and thematic material, and Simpson manipulates these in ways which, as Northcott has pointed out, are surprisingly close to Schoenbergian practice,[20] and indeed the purely intervallic thinking of Webern and late Stravinsky.

All this suggests that the composition of the Fourth, Fifth and Sixth String Quartets, as well as being a gradual refining process of diverse modelling techniques - from the variation-like procedures of the Fourth Quartet, to the superb integration of the Sixth - also resulted in self-discovery. Simpson's music gains in strength and sophistication, exorcising the traumas present in the Fifth Symphony.

This epiphany was the most profound spiritual dimension that Simpson's modelling venture yielded. Paradoxically it does not owe its principal debt to Beethoven's Opus 59. As well as fulfilling the initial motivations - rehabilitation, catharsis and experimentation - the whole adventurous homage had the eventual result of providing Simpson with a strong new language, taking him beyond these three works into the music he has composed since, and providing us, through study of the relationship between the two sets of quartets, with some insight into Simpson's internal creative dialogue.

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19 The Fifth Symphony provides a significant comparison. The two canons in that work are harmonically rooted squarely to the spot. The canon in the Sixth Quartet begins to explore ways in which motivic counterpoint can acquire directionality.

20 BBC broadcast (1992), prior to the first performance of Simpson's Eleventh Symphony.

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