
Scherzo

Title	Scherzo for String Quartet (F major)
Time of Origin	1897
Premiere	unknown
Duration	ca. 8 min.

Arnold Schönberg's career as a composer likely began during his violin lessons: "Even before the age of nine, I started writing small and eventually larger pieces for two violins, imitating the music I played with my teacher and a cousin. When I could play the duets of Viotti, Pleyel and others, I imitated their style. So I learned to compose to the extent that I learned to play the violin." In his youth, he wrote mostly songs and smaller instrumental works, probably inspired by his lively chamber music making with friends. When he found a classmate who played the viola, the duo line-up became a trio. With the money Schönberg had earned by teaching German, he obtained Beethoven scores: "[...] they were the Third and Fourth Symphonies, two of the Razumovsky Quartets, and the Grosse Fuge for String Quartet, Op. 133. From then on, I had the urge to write string quartets." The meeting with the violinist and later physician Oskar Adler, Schönberg's friend from his secondary school days, was decisive: Adler taught him the basics of harmony and ear training, and together they also played 18th- and 19th-century classics of the string quartet literature among a circle of friends. Schönberg later vividly recalled that time: "We wanted to play quartets by Mozart and Beethoven, so Adler brought a larger viola strung with zither strings, on which the pitch and range of a cello could be produced. I was supposed to play this instrument, which I did, using viola fingerings, since I didn't know any better. Soon afterwards, I acquired a cello, and I also played it with the same fingerings I had used on the violin, viola, and also the (so-called by me) violoncello. This went on for quite a while until Adler heard from a real cellist that fingerings on the cello were different." Playing quartets had also remained vivid in Adler's memory, as he reported in 1948: "I often think back to the time when we played quartets together, in the Dienstbotenkammerl in Augartenstraße on Sunday afternoons, and the subsequent walks in the Prater engaging in philosophical conversations [...]." From then on, Schönberg kept honing his compositional skills in numerous quartet projects until he completed a string quartet in D major in 1897, his first surviving large-scale composition.

Schönberg's Scherzo in F major is the original second movement of his String Quartet in D major. The similarities between this piece and the later Intermezzo, however, do not extend beyond the use of thematic material in the viola solo. The scherzo theme consists of two-note and then three-note motives, and is followed by a somewhat more motivically detailed continuation in the violin. In the long development section, Schönberg once again demonstrates his early mastery of musical craftsmanship, which is in no way inferior to the opening movement of the D major quartet. In its first appearance, the main theme has a

coarser identity than at the beginning, but gradually returns to its original form through numerous intermediate stages. In the trio, the sound texture becomes somewhat lighter. Schönberg cleverly alludes to the thematic continuation of the first section, which thus far had been rather neglected, through rhythmic and motivic figurations. Given such high compositional intensity, it may seem surprising that Zemlinsky suggested to his pupil that he replace this movement with the incomparably lighter Intermezzo. However, the teacher himself also tended to replace Scherzos with gentler movements in his works of this period. He probably felt that after the opening movement of the quartet, another equally complex movement might upset the balance of the composition.

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