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EASTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY

Classical String Quartets: A Transformation to Vocal Jazz

Honors Thesis

Submitted

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By

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ABSTRACT

Classical String Quartets: A Transformation to Vocal Jazz

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Music is capable of manipulation, adjustment, and exploration. It is with these capabilities that we are able to recreate music that has been well-known for centuries. This creative project centers around the transformation of musical genres. The Classical period features characteristics of simplicity and liveliness. Furthermore, the genre of Jazz music features syncopation and chord extensions. Can these two genres of music be combined?

In this project, I explored the concept of transforming one genre of music to another; the

Classical string quartet and its relation to vocal jazz.

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Victoria B. Sizemore

EKU Honors Thesis

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Classical String Quartets: A Transformation to Vocal Jazz

Music is known as a universal language that can touch the hearts of any person from anywhere in the world. It is from the world's collective love for music that countless musical genres have formed and flourished since the beginning of time. These genres each contain their own history, tradition, characteristics, and theory that contribute to their individual complexity and intricacy. Music is capable of many things. Each complex element of music is capable of disassembly and manipulation which can ultimately create another genre of music. It is in this handling that music becomes malleable, genres become flexible, and creative possibilities become endless. Baroque can become modern pop, country can become Romantic, and electro can become Renaissance. Music is music is music.

For my Honors Thesis Project, I focus on the idea of manipulating one genre of music to become another. More specifically, classical music to jazz music – a string quartet to a vocal jazz quartet! String instruments are known as having the most human-like sound; therefore, it was only natural to match string instruments with the voice. Therefore, I

dove deeper into the music of string quartets. This is where I found Classical music. I decided to take a Classical string quartet and arrange it as a vocal jazz quartet.

It is possible to arrange Haydn's String Quartet Op.9 No.1 as a vocal jazz quartet.

- I. The Classical period took place between 1730 and 1820 and established many new characteristics that contrasted from the previous Baroque period.

- A. The Meaning of Classical

1. The term *classical* is commonly used to describe any music that isn't modern pop, folk, country, rock, jazz, or other genres that are recently popular. For our purposes, *classical* refers to the genre of Western Classical Music which took place between 1730 and 1820. This period took place after the Baroque period and before the Romantic period.

- B. The Preclassical Period

1. The Preclassical Period was the transition between the Baroque and the Classical period. It was the phase between the two periods where some composer used techniques from the Baroque period while others used techniques from the emerging Classical period.
2. The Preclassical Period spawned new ideas as to how music should be written. The Classical style was encouraged by society's desire for structural clarity and simplicity. This was due to the complexity of Baroque music which featured polyphonic textures and contrapuntal

melodies. Amateur listeners desired to listen to music that was easy on the ear and simple to understand, thus, Classical music.

B. The Classical Period

1. The Classical Period featured music with a simple, light, and clear tone.

It favored emotional contrast and homophony. The major composers during this time were Haydn, whom we will discuss further momentarily, Mozart, and the early music of Beethoven.

2. There were several characteristics of the Classical Period which were especially important for this process. Classical music emphasizes the importance of balance and elegance, simple and clear melodies, and contrasting emotions. For example, one section of a piece could use musical techniques to portray a lively emotion while the next section could portray a sorrow emotion. The sonata allegro form was very prevalent during the classical period. This form includes three components: the exposition, development, and recapitulation. The exposition is the initial presentation of the thematic material of the music. It sets the tone for the rest of the piece. The development is the transformation and the restatement of the initial material from the exposition. The recapitulation is the restatement of the musical themes from the exposition. Due to the desire for simplicity, Classical music is characterized as "easy to listen to". It is pleasant to the ear and doesn't leave a lot to chew on like the music of the Baroque period. The last characteristic I would like to mention is diatonic harmony. Diatonic

harmony refers to notes or chords that relate to a certain key. For example, the note G is the second scale degree in the key of F major. The note G is only the second scale degree in this key. It will never be the second scale degree of any other key. This is because G is diatonic to the key of F major. Moreover, if G was changed to G flat, it would no longer be diatonic to the key of F major. It would be considered non-diatonic to the key because it is no longer related.

C. Joseph Haydn

1. Joseph Haydn was an Austrian composer alive from 1732-1809. He was born and raised within the Classical period. Haydn was a tutor to Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) and was friends with Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791). Today, Haydn is known today as the “Father of the string quartet”. He wrote 68 string quartets during his musical career and is credited for having established the structure of the string quartet that we still use today.

2. Joseph Haydn’s compositions were unique and have carried on centuries after his death. Some characteristics of his music include his tendency to develop large musical structures out of small, simple motifs. This refers to taking a small group of notes and creating full musical scores. Haydn’s music also has the tendency to develop rather quickly. He normally starts with something simple and quickly begins to expand his musical ideas. Lastly, Haydn’s music is very lively and

upbeat. He brings several emotions into his pieces which creates beautiful contrast between sections.

D. The String Quartet

1. The string quartet gained its popularity during the Classical Period. It consists of four instruments: the violin 1, violin 2, viola, and cello. The violin 1 plays the higher range of the treble clef while the violin 2 plays the lower range of the treble clef. The viola plays on the alto clef. The alto clef is also known as the C clef because the center of the clef lies on middle C on the center of the staff. Finally, the cello plays the lowest range in the ensemble and is notated on the bass clef.

2. The standard structure of the string quartet consists of four parts. The first part is in Sonata Allegro form which was discussed previously. Sonata Allegro has three different sections and is played in the tonic. Tonic means that the piece is played in the home key. The second part is the Slow Movement. This differs greatly from the first movement in that the tempo is decreased to largo or andante. The second movement is also played in a key related to the tonic. The third movement is a Minuet and Trio which is played in the tonic key. Finally, the last movement is a Rondo or a Sonata Rondo form and is also played in the tonic key.

II. The Jazz genre is an intricate culmination of styles, influences, cultures, and theory that expands over many decades of music.

A. The Influences of Jazz Music

1. After the voyage of Christopher Columbus in 1492, the Atlantic Slave Trade developed. This was a trade of African people between Europe and America. The purpose of this trade was to provide slave workers to southern American plantations and resulted in the dehumanizing of an entire race of people. During this transfer of human populations, the African people brought with them determination and a devotion to their traditional music. African traditional music revolves around music for the everyday life. The music of Africa has purpose as there is specific music for almost any occasion. When Africans were forcefully brought to America, their music, unknowingly, would start a long chain of developments, styles, and popularity. Today's music would not be the same without the styles of African music.

Traditional African music brought many valuable characteristics to America. The main component being a heavy emphasis on rhythm. The rhythms from Africa feature polyrhythms as well as improvisation. These elements are currently a large component of American Jazz music. As African slaves worked in the fields, they developed work songs and African spirituals which are both heavily reliant on call-and-response form. This was a way for African slaves to communicate with one another as well as lift each other's' spirits in song. Work songs are songs of sorrow; nonetheless, they were also songs of hope.

2. During the late 1800s, the style known as Ragtime took over the industry and became very popular within the black community. Ragtime music was specifically created for the piano and introduced elements of jazz such as syncopation and a steady baseline. The music of Ragtime has become a staple in the history of jazz music and the empowerment of black musicians. Ragtime was the first ever African-based music to make its way into the mainstream popular music of its day.

Moreover, the influence of black oppression and segregation in America directly caused the Blues styles. The Blues style was popular in the early 1900s and relied heavily on the vocal form. This style was created around expressing sorrow, despair, and overall melancholy. African American vocalists such as Mamie Smith, Ora Alexander, and Black Ace used the Blues style to emote their struggles with love, money, and oppression. This emotional, yet empowering style of music incorporated sliding or bent pitches and jazz harmonies.

3. The music of New Orleans is one that has been influenced by several cultures, races, and genres. During the 1800s, African American people began to gather in New Orleans as a way of escaping their world of segregation, oppression, and hardship and expressing their traditional African culture. New Orleans became a haven for Africans to play their music and sing their songs. Though African culture provided a large influence on modern jazz, there were several other genres that came to New Orleans. Brass bands, Ragtime bands, orchestras, drumming and

chants were all prevalent throughout the history of New Orleans jazz. Musicians had several opportunities to play their music due to the music that accompanied several New Orleans events such as parades, store openings, rallies, picnics, church revivals, sporting events, weddings, and funerals. The jazz music of New Orleans developed from a culmination of sounds, instruments, people, and styles and is a mighty force in the jazz community.

B. Jazz Theory and Characteristics

1. Jazz theory stems from a large assortment of cultures, styles, and influences. The first characteristic of jazz theory is called syncopation.

Syncopation is singing or playing on the offbeats of the rhythm.

Syncopation can be accomplished by emphasizing the weak beats of the music or by only singing or playing on the off beats of the music.

Syncopation disrupts the listener's ear in that it makes the listener desire a normal, equal beat.

The second characteristic is rhythmic swing. Rhythmic swing happens when musicians alternate between long and short durations. For example, in a 4/4 measure of four quarter notes, the rhythmic swing would sound as though the musician is playing or singing a dotted quarter note followed by an eighth note. The resulting sound provides a rocking motion, thus the name, swing.

Extended chords are chords with added notes beyond the seventh scale degree. Diatonic chords include the first, third, and fifth scale degrees to

create major or minor chords. The addition of the ninth, eleventh, and thirteenth scale degrees are all examples of extended chords. The thirteenth scale degree is the highest diatonic extension possible.

Moreover, the second sixth scale degree can be added to create a sense of tension and release. These chords make the harmonic chord progressions very interesting and provide more opportunities for traveling to different chords.

2. Improvisation is the spontaneous creation of music during a performance. This is music that is not rehearsed beforehand, and that the musician composes on the spot. The improvisation is normally done by a soloist and can last a short or long amount of time. The remaining band members provide what is known as a “vamp” underneath which allows the improviser to play or sing for as long as he/she desires. This also provides structure and foundation for the soloist to improvise over.

The next technique is known as scatting. Scatting happens when vocalists use wordless vocals to sing melodies or chords. These can include vocals such as “Ba”, “Ow”, “Doo”, and “Wa”. Scatting can either be improvised or rehearsed and provides an effortless transition from one note to the next. This also allows the vocalist to focus on the complexity of the melody rather than the lyrics.

The last jazz characteristic to discuss is sliding or bending pitches. This is accomplished when musicians begin a note on the written pitch and finish

by slurring upwards or downwards. Sliding or bending pitches can be done in unison or on a jazz chord which creates a beautiful effect.

III. The process in which I created a vocal jazz quartet from Haydn's string quartet Op. 9 No.1 included several stages as well as many trials and errors.

A. Developing a Score

1. The first step in this creative process was introducing the original score to the vocal quartet. The score that I provided was Haydn's string quartet Op.9 No.1, which was written for violin 1, violin 2, viola, and cello.

During our first rehearsal we worked to learn as many pitches as possible in order to keep the music authentic to the original. However, there were several issues that arose during this process. The human voice cannot do the things that a stringed instrument can do. With this being said, there were many things about the initial score that needed to be altered so that it was singable by a vocal quartet. The first component that required manipulation was slowing the tempo to a reasonable speed. Stringed instruments can play much faster than a vocalist can sing due to the strokes of the bow. Multiple notes can be played in one bow stroke; therefore, they can play many notes in a short span of time. Moreover, stringed instruments do not require time to take breaths while vocalists can sing only as long as their breath lasts. This change in tempo allowed us to

sing as much of the original music as possible while still having time to take breaths.

The second aspect that had to be altered was exchanging the moveable C clef in the viola part with a G clef in the tenor part. This was important for our tenor to easily read the notes on the staff and in making the process much simpler.

The third aspect we manipulated was the number of pitches in each part. As previously stated, stringed instruments can play multiple notes in a short amount of time. Throughout this piece are several melismas, embellishments, and accent notes played in each instrument. While these are beautiful and natural in a string quartet, they are not entirely possible in a vocal quartet. Therefore, I worked with my quartet to omit notes that weren't entirely necessary in order to retain the main melody and themes. Doing this made the quartet singable and allowed us to proceed quickly. The final component that required manipulation was the range of each individual part. Stringed instruments have a much larger range than the human voice. There were several instances in which the range of the notes were either too high or too low. The solution to this was to either omit the problem note, change the octave of the note, or change the pitch of the note completely. This was a process that continued throughout the entirety of the project because the notes and chords were continually shifted throughout the process to create new music.

After addressing each of these issues with the vocal quartet, a new score was created for each vocalist to have a clearer, idiomatic part to read. This score was used to complete the second part of this project which was to sing the score from the string quartet as authentically as possible.

3. After solidifying notes, rhythms, and blend within the vocal quartet, we added articulations to further exemplify the sound of a stringed instrument. We compared the scores, adding legato and staccato lines when necessary and implemented vibrato to reflect that of the strings. To represent the legato line of the strings, we used our arms to mimic bow strokes. This actively reminded us to sing legato as the strings did in the original. The final challenge was deciding what words or syllables to sing. Because string instruments do not necessarily play words or vowels, there was debate among the vocal quartet as to which vowel to sing. Eventually, we decided on the “ah” vowel for multiple reasons. The first reason being that it sounded closest to the sound of the string quartet. The second being it was the easiest vowel to sing both in the high and low range for all voice parts. Lastly, the “ah” vowel was the smoothest for blending purposes.

B. Creating Vocal Jazz

1. The third and most time-consuming part of the creative process was implementing jazz theory concepts and characteristics in the new vocal score. The first step in doing this was to manipulate the original rhythm. In

doing so, I focused on the primary melody and accompaniment. I spent many days juggling multiple possibilities for which beats to emphasize and which rhythms to swing. Deciding which chords to focus on in each phrase was more difficult because I had not yet added any extended chords. Gradually, I changed the straight rhythms from the vocal score to swung rhythms which made the melody sound much more anticipatory. The lower three voice parts were then syncopated and accented to emphasize certain chords and specific beats.

The second theme of the piece was more difficult to rhythmically adjust because of its already complex rhythm. There were several attempts at adding syncopation or swing; however, most of them felt pressed and awkward. Therefore, I decided to make the original rhythm simpler in order to draw focus to the jazz chords which would later come into play. The resulting intended effect was that of a “Classical Throwback”. We put more emphasis on our blending and vibrato to make the second theme sound very choral and mellow. After confirming the rhythm for most of the piece, I began to analyze each individual chord and make adjustments.

2. Most of this project consisted of taking the original chords from the string quartet and manipulating them with extensions and suspensions to become stacked jazz chords. The challenge of this component was in keeping the integrity of the original score while still adding noticeable jazz flair. The piece still needed to be recognizable and retain the skeleton of the primary themes and melodies.

The most important voice part for this piece was the soprano line. This part could be manipulated; however, I changed as little as possible to guarantee that the melody would still be clear, and the piece would be overall recognized from the original. The majority of the work came from the lower three voice parts: alto, tenor, and bass. These voices provide the accompaniment and foundational support for the soprano melody.

As I began working with the chords, I ran into a problem with the lack of voice parts. Most extended chords require five or six voices to accomplish a fully sounding jazz chord. With there only being four voices available, I had the challenge of deciding which notes were most important and which notes could be omitted.

The root of the chord is essential because it establishes the relationship to the key of the piece. Moreover, the third of the chord is important because it establishes the mode of each chord. Lowering the third results in a minor chord while raising the third could result in an augmented chord. The fifth of the chord is the least important note; therefore, it can be taken away.

However, taking away the fifth of the chord only leaves two other spaces for incorporating extensions or suspensions. With those two opportunities for notes I was able to add suspensions such as seconds and sevenths or extensions such as ninths, elevenths, and thirteenth. There were also several opportunities to add seconds.

After rewriting each chord, I had to consider the voice leading for each note in the chord. Voice leading is the process of aligning each note in

each chord so that vocalists do not have to sing unreasonably large leaps or awkward intervals. Each voice part should include smooth transitions from one part to the next. This process is important in providing easy-to-read scores for vocalists. In creating new jazz chords, I experimented with the different voicings for each chord in order to make transitions seamless as well as emphasize certain pitches.

The last component of this process was the addition of jazz characteristics such as improvisation, scatting, and bent pitches. I added an improvisation solo after the first statement of the first theme. This improvisation was based on the melody of the first theme; however, I played with the melody by adding a long chromatic line at the end.

In addition to the improvisation solo, we added scatting to the entirety of the piece. The addition of scat was also a trial and error because we took time to experiment to what sounded best based on the notes being sung. For example, when singing a high note, a closed vowel such as “ee” is more difficult to execute because it leaves very little space for sound to escape. Therefore, we assigned scatting syllables to accommodate for the pitches being sung. Another component to this revolves around the transitions between syllables. When singing a scatting line, it is important that the syllables run smoothly together so that there are no hesitations. The final element that we added to the vocal score was bent pitches. Bent pitches are used on single notes or entire chords to create a slide off the initial note. Sliding pitches are excellent transitions between chords and

are added for jazzy effect. For this project, we added a bent chord at the end of the first theme as well as to transition into the last chord.

In conclusion, can Haydn's String Quartet Op.9 No.1 be arranged to emulate characteristics of a vocal jazz quartet? It is very possible for music to be manipulated to fit into other genres. This creative project was very challenging and pushed my creative limits; however, it was uplifting and inspiring to have the opportunity to explore musical influences and histories.

The intricacy of music is what makes it so fascinating and gives it life. As stated previously, music is a universal language that has the power to surpass any boundary. There is so much potential in twelve little notes. All that we must bring is an openness and a readiness to explore its capabilities.

The creation of a musical genre is built from several centuries of composers' failures and successes as they explore the beautiful world of music and discover what their creativity can become. Music is flexible and can fit into almost any mold. This is just one component of music that makes it so very special to me and, hopefully, to you as well.

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