

Clarinet Quintet

- I Andante
- II Scherzo on Seven Notes: Allegro con Slancio – Andante – Tempo Primo
- III Interlude: Tranquillo – magical
- IV Lento – Piu Mosso – Andante

Clarinet quintets are traditionally significant and weighty pieces. I am only too aware (and in awe) of the masterful but wonderfully generous and warm works written by Mozart and Brahms. With such an inspired inheritance, I have attempted to make my somewhat smaller offering to the medium/genre (which one James?) as thoughtful and considered as I am able.

My Clarinet Quintet consists of four contrasting movements most of which are in arch form and which they themselves then form an extended arch across the whole work.

The opening quasi-recitative material for string quartet alone becomes an important motto throughout the work. This idea attempts fruitlessly to establish itself in different tonal centres, gradually extending itself, but not becoming fixed until the clarinet makes an impassioned and lyrical entry. Tension then builds into a dramatic dialogue between the clarinet and violins accompanied by rapid arpeggiated figures in the viola and 'cello.

The first movement ebbs away and a scherzo begins without a break. This whole movement is based upon only seven notes: a symmetrical pair of three notes fixed around a central axis of B (G - A - A# - **B** - C -Db - Eb). Hopefully this is not as dry as it looks! The economy of pitches is intended to give the excitement and driving energy of the music a clear focus, creating an unrelenting, even claustrophobic environment. A gentler trio section creates some superficial relief from the tension, but is still hewn from the oppressive seven-note world.

A short break precedes the third movement, which is a strange and magical interlude. A view of a purer spiritual even visionary world away from the endless journeying and yearning of the first movement and away from the claustrophobic tension and fruitless, wearying energy of the second. A simple held-chord provides the still backdrop to what was intended to be a rather other-worldly melody in high first violin (played in harmonics) coupled with Eb clarinet. The motto theme from the opening makes an appearance in the music, but viewed rather elliptically from this new perspective. An eerie but somehow rather pure sound: the high Eb clarinet now replaces the Bb clarinet of movements one and two until the end of the piece.

The third movement moves into the fourth without a break, and we review and reprise much of the past material from earlier in the work, beginning with the trio from the second movement. Not only is the music much altered (the result of the magical transformation that occurred in the *Interlude*), but the new sonority of the Eb clarinet also sheds a completely new light on the material. But nothing is ever quite resolved, as the 'cello proves right at the very end.

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