

Gerald Barry

Piano Quartet No. 1

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Note for students: Getting Started

Many people are quite content to listen ‘innocently’ without bothering to think of the historical importance of a work, its structure or its instrumentation. Indeed, a great deal of pleasure is to be gained in this way, and people must be free to listen to music in any way they wish.

However, there are several responses when listening to music: physical, emotional, intellectual; of this the intellectual response is the most sophisticated, and occurs when music is played and appreciated for its sheer beauty and the way the composer has manipulated musical form.

Therefore, the greater the knowledge of the way the music is constructed, the greater the response intellectually. With Leaving Certificate Music, the course aims to develop your capacity to respond to, and appreciate, all that is to be found in the music you play and hear.

Elsewhere you will find explanations and examples of musical structure, technical terms and details about the composer Gerald Barry. The specimen analysis is given to help you prepare and revise for your set work. Remember that composers did not write their music so that exam candidates could analyse them — they are works of art that sometimes defy being put into categories. There is often more than one way to analyse a piece. Thinking out the different ways of explaining its construction will help your own thoughts on the work.

The following principles will assist your approach to the Piano Quartet No. 1

- Listen to and follow through the set work as many times as you can, improving your score reading as you do so. You won't have time (in faster music) to read every note.
- Learn to scan, and if you count carefully you should at least be in the right place. Follow the shape of the lines first; it will certainly become easier with practice.
- Mark into your score any important points that you have been taught, your own ideas, or any that you find in the composer's notes.

The Piano Quartet in Chamber Music

The piano quartet as a genre in chamber music established itself during the Classical era in the eighteenth century as a work for piano, violin, viola, and cello. Mozart wrote two famous examples (K478 & K493). Good examples in the nineteenth century include those of Mendelssohn (3), Schumann (1), Dvořák (2), Fauré (2) and Brahms (3). In the twentieth century, a piano quartet can also use different combinations of instruments such as Webern's Quartet Op. 22 (1930) for piano, violin, clarinet, and tenor saxophone, or Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time* (1941) which substitutes the viola with a clarinet. Gerald Barry's Piano Quartet No. 1, however, retains the original instrumentation.

COMPOSER'S NOTES ON THE PIANO QUARTET No. 1

Structure

This piece does not fit any standard form, it was not constructed according to any method, not written with any view of the piece as a whole, there was no formal pre-planning, no blueprint. The only guide was intuition.

Intuition means feeling one's way, often in the dark, letting the music make its own demands, listening to the sounds and their needs, not having preconceptions as to how the music should be treated, not being cowed by tradition.

The quartet may not have a traditional form but it is possible (in retrospect) to trace a clear map of the journey it has taken. If we apply letters of the alphabet to designate the different kinds of music in the quartet, and how often they return, we get the following sequence:

A/B1/C1/C2/B2/C3/D1/D2+B3/E1/C4/C5/E2+D3/C6/C7/F+C8/C9/G/H.

(It could be regarded as an unusual rondo form.)

From the above we can see that there are eight different kinds of music, four of which (**A/F/G/H**) appear once only. It is structurally satisfying to note that the piece begins and ends with music played only once. This is a nice symmetrical point. Notice that **F/G/H** come near the end making a climax because the ear is confronted by three kinds of new material heard for the first time in quick succession at the end of the piece. This is unusual. Normally pieces of music end with a recapitulation of material and a sense of coming home. Here instead we have a piece ending with completely new possibilities pointing in different directions. The piece opens up as it closes.

To return to the map.

B occurs three times, **C** nine times, **D** three times and **E** twice. Clearly **C** contains the dominant thematic material and the anchor to which the music frequently returns. There is never an exact repetition of material. It is always viewed either from a slightly different angle or transformed considerably.

String playing

Usually the strings are asked to play either without vibrato or with very little. The clarity of the music demands this. Vibrato is like cholesterol. It clogs the music's arteries. In our time the use of vibrato is misunderstood by many teachers and performers and is used and abused indiscriminately. Vibrato was never meant to be used constantly; this is a relatively recent phenomenon. Early twentieth-century recordings show that it was not used heavily and that players were much more discriminating and subtle in their approach to it.

Analysis

A Bars 1–52 are based on an inversion of the tune *Sí Bheag Sí Mhór*.



Example 1: *Sí Bheag, Sí Mhór*

This section is in C major and in two parts. The first, bars 1–26, is a four-part canon at the octave at a crotchet's distance, and the second, bars 27–52, a five-part canon at a crotchet's distance. The intensity of this section comes from the speed, the frenetic canonic activity, and the music's sense of abandon. Part two of the section (bars 27–52) is even more intense than part one, on account of its being higher in volume, register and density (i.e. having an extra canonic part). This pushes the music to a greater extreme. There is no sense of introduction or 'setting of scenes' in this music. It begins immediately with all instruments actively involved.

B1 Bars 53–107

Here, a tune is played three times, the third time with gigantic piano clusters giving it an ecstatic, hysterical quality. This section could also be seen to be in C major despite the perverse recurrence of the note C sharp in the tune. The clashing of this C sharp with an accompanying C natural (minor 9th) or G (tritone) is relished greatly. In the first two renditions of the tune the oom pah flavour of the accompaniment gives it the atmosphere of a village band. The deliberate 'getting out' of the accompaniment at bars 60–62 and 78–80 is perhaps a reference to those contented amateurs who go their own way regardless of the melody. The sudden change of time signature to $\frac{5}{8}$ also introduces instability and throws the accompaniment off balance.

C1 Bars 108–139

This section is anchored harmonically around A flat. The third above that alternates between C and C flat giving the music an oscillating quality.

The flow of the music is interrupted by the sudden change to $\frac{3}{8}$ at bar 111, $\frac{3}{16}$ at 114, and $\frac{3}{16}$ at 121. The changes to these smaller time signatures make the music dart nervously and unpredictably. The cello part could be compared to the piano's sustaining pedal. It takes notes from the harmony implied by the melodies in the violin and the viola, and sustains them in longer durations. The cello's harmonics give a pale colour to the sound and surround it with a warm acoustical halo.

The melody in this section is played twice, moving from a general *mf* (bars 108–123) to a savage *ff* in the repetition (bars 124–139). In the repetition the music is played an octave lower so many of the notes lie below the violin's register. As a result, the notes it can play are sometimes isolated, as in bars 134–136, and this adds a choppy, rhythmic edge to the texture of the piece.

Intensity comes about by repetition of the tune, the obsessive canonic treatment, the vying of the strings with one another at close quarters, the cellist having to play in a high range, the addition of registers on the piano, one after the other, and the high dynamic. The effect is one of exhilaration and power.

C3 Bars 256–317

Here the **C** material is played four times. The second, third, and fourth versions begin at bars 272, 288 and 303 respectively. The first time round, the viola and cello repeat the music from the version of **C2** in bars 140–154, with a violin descant superimposed. There follow increasingly intense and expanded harmonic and melodic versions. Overall, the section amounts to a crescendo dynamically from *mp* to *mf* to *f* to *ff*. As the music proceeds the harmony becomes grittier, the textures fuller and, in the violin, the compass wider.

D1 Bars 318–334

The emotional crescendo in **C3** culminates inevitably in the outburst which is **D1** — new material centred around A minor. In atmosphere it recalls the rough music of **B1** and shares the same kind of accompaniment, but it is a wilder music and more unstable rhythmically. This section merges seamlessly with the following.

D2 + B3 Bars 334–357

Here both strands of music are heard simultaneously, **D2** on violin and piano (both hands), **B3** on viola, cello and piano (left hand). Because **B3** is forced to fit into a new metrical framework it is quite distorted rhythmically. This makes it hard to play, more virtuosic, and the resulting tension adds an excitement which becomes an integral part of the music. **D2 + B3** are repeated, beginning at the close of bar 343. In this repetition some notes are omitted from **D2** resulting in a shorter, more compressed and asymmetrical version.

The same applies to **B3** here. In cinematic terms these omissions, or 'holes', in the music are rather like jump cuts or jolts in the sound.

E1 Bars 357–372

The violin F in the middle of bar 357 marks both the end of the **D2+B3** section and the beginning of **E1**. It stands Janus-faced, looking backwards and forwards, for the music of **E1** is based on the retrograde of **D2**, but is heard by the ear as new material. It is as if in the middle of bar 357 a principal part of the music begins to rewind immediately.

E1 is a canon at the octave in four parts at a quaver's distance

C4 Bars 373–402

A version in octaves of **C2** as represented in bars 140–169. Here the atmosphere is totally changed from the earlier refinement and the music is presented as a dazzling display, a homage to the legendary Russian virtuoso, Vladimir Horowitz (1904–89), whose hands often seemed like a blur when playing octaves. This is the only section of the quartet devoted to a solo instrument and it is therefore a significant, dramatic moment in the music's journey. It also provides a psychological breathing space for the other players, and on their re-entry the colour of their instruments seems refreshed and new. The piano solo is a cleansing of the palate between courses.

C5 Bars 403–425

This is a revisiting of the violin part of **C3** presented earlier in bars 256–271. Here it is truncated and played twice as a canon in three parts.

E2 + D3 Bars 426–458

Transposed up a semitone to B flat minor from its original appearance (bars 357–372). Played on violin and viola, it reveals its origin as the retrograde of **D** by having that music played simultaneously on cello and piano, though much distorted rhythmically.

C6 Bars 458–468

A version of the previous appearance of **C5** (403–425), but half its length. It is transposed up a semitone to B flat to make it gel harmonically with the forgoing **E**, also centred around B flat. The players are asked to use the colour of flautando which means bowing over the fingerboard to produce a flutey, soft and hazy tone.

C7 Bars 469–489

Even though it is based directly on the **C** material it counts as a new section because the music sounds different. It has a different atmosphere (striding as opposed to hushed), speed and dynamic. It is made up of transposed versions of the music in their inverted and original forms. As with **C3** in bars 256–317 this music is again used to whip up tension which can only be resolved by, and demands the appearance of, new music, which comes with **F + C8**.

F+C8 Bars 491–512

F comes in the violin with its retrograde (not strict) in the piano. Simultaneously an augmented version of **C2** is present in the viola and cello. In effect, **F** and **C8** are at different speeds, and at bar 502 they actually part company and have different time signatures, the only example of polymetry (combining different metres simultaneously) in the piece.

C9 Bars 513–518

The shortest and slowest appearance of **C** in the piece. **C9** also contains a canon at the largest compass — two octave distance between the parts. Here approaching the final moments of the quartet the music stretches to the highest and lowest reaches of the instruments, but in a hushed manner.

G Bars 519–527

The shortest section in the piece. New music, but derived completely from the rest of the quartet. The whole work is here presented in the shortest space of time as if telescoped into one brief explosion. Bars 519–523 consist of the first moments of each section, and bars 524–527 the last moments of each section. In the following example the bar numbers are written above each note to indicate their origin in the quartet.

subito! ♩ = 126

519 1 53 108 222 288 318/319 334 469 482 491

519 524 528 532 536 540 544 548 552 556 560 564 568 572 576 580 584 588 592 596 600 604 608 612 616 620 624 628 632 636 640 644 648 652 656 660 664 668 672 676 680 684 688 692 696 700 704 708 712 716 720 724 728 732 736 740 744 748 752 756 760 764 768 772 776 780 784 788 792 796 800 804 808 812 816 820 824 828 832 836 840 844 848 852 856 860 864 868 872 876 880 884 888 892 896 900 904 908 912 916 920 924 928 932 936 940 944 948 952 956 960 964 968 972 976 980 984 988 992 996 1000

subito! ♩ = 126

524 528 532 536 540 544 548 552 556 560 564 568 572 576 580 584 588 592 596 600 604 608 612 616 620 624 628 632 636 640 644 648 652 656 660 664 668 672 676 680 684 688 692 696 700 704 708 712 716 720 724 728 732 736 740 744 748 752 756 760 764 768 772 776 780 784 788 792 796 800 804 808 812 816 820 824 828 832 836 840 844 848 852 856 860 864 868 872 876 880 884 888 892 896 900 904 908 912 916 920 924 928 932 936 940 944 948 952 956 960 964 968 972 976 980 984 988 992 996 1000

Example 3: bars 519–527

It is as if with the end in sight new experiences are being continually introduced to keep the music afloat, as if the music were juggling ideas it wanted to keep in the air and never wanted to land. So with the new music introduced at **F + C8** we moved to **C9**, the shortest appearance of the **C** music, and followed it with **G**, the shortest section in the whole piece. The brevity of these two sections is emphasised by the hushed quality of one and the violence of the other. This extreme juxtaposition is further enhanced by the last section of the piece and the last surprise: new music heard for the first and the last time.

H Bars 528–571

Based on an Irish tune, *Lord Mayo's Delight*, it is in three parts: the first is a canon in two (viola and cello) at the unison (*molto flautando*); a middle part (bar 542) with the addition of piano and violin in a canon in three; and a return to the first part at bar 558, another canon in three. The piece ends with a new musical horizon. In a way it comes full circle: just as the quartet began with music never to be repeated, it ends with music heard for the first time.



Example 4: *Lord Mayo's Delight*

FEATURES

Rhythm

Syncopated and interesting rhythms are generated by the following techniques which, punctuated occasionally by sudden pauses, give an unpredictable, exciting and energetic feel to the piece.

- *Changing Time Signatures*

Barry changes time signature constantly, a technique much used by Igor Stravinsky and others. The Piano Quartet No. 1 has over 330 changes of time signature in its 571 bars (the Sextet 1992/93 for clarinet (bass clarinet), trumpet, piano, double bass and two marimbas [also on the CD] displays a similar number of changes). Time signatures range from $\frac{1}{8}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$. Examples are widespread.

- *Changing Tempo Indications*

There are 20 different indications of tempo.

- *Polymetric Rhythm*

In bars 502–510, different time signatures are superimposed on each other. The violin and piano stay in $\frac{2}{4}$ while the viola and cello play in $\frac{3}{4}$, $\frac{4}{4}$ etc.

Instrumentation

For Barry, the instrumental *line* is more important than instrumental colour. In 1986 in an interview with Michael Dervan, Barry stated that:

In recent years one of my aims was to find a music which would be independent of tone colour, which could be played on any instruments with the appropriate registers . . . I think I achieved a certain purity of sound in pieces like Sur les Points, which has been played, sung and danced in innumerable versions. I find the temptation of letting people hear those pieces from different angles irresistible.

Excursive Nature of Barry's Music

Michael Blake writes that

One of the most important aspects of his style is the fact that his music is not necessarily going anywhere; it does not need to: The listener derives satisfaction from what he/she experiences on the way and the composer's treatment of the material rather than feeling the onward thrust of a goal and the inevitable arrival. Therefore in the musical argument we find an elaboration rather than the conventional development of ideas . . .

Volans & Bracefield trace this aspect of his style back to the eighteenth-century Hiberno-English literature of Laurence Sterne, in which a sentimental journey through France and Italy never gets to Italy, and the life and opinions of Tristram Shandy tell us little of the life, and nothing of the opinions, of the hero. Volans & Bracefield note that '*the pleasure lies in the conversation on the way, the artistry in handling the language. Thus there is elaboration rather than development, and the structures are episodic rather than lyrical.*' Rather than spending too much time looking for sections and themes, the students should learn to *experience* the piece and consider the notion of a musical adventure.

Performance of Barry's Music

We can hear the difficulty involved in performing Barry's music. Barry himself says

the speeds in my music are crucial. They are for me as important as the actual music and notes. If somebody performs the music at the wrong speed it is completely disastrous. . . (Clarke, p. 11).

THE MUSIC OF GERALD BARRY (EXCERPT)

By Kevin Volans

Barry's music is written with passion, bullying, tenderness, but with objectivity of an instrument builder. The outward intensity of the music belies its craftsmanship — what may appear as emotional abandon is constructed with almost classical formality.

He uses technique in the manner of a diviner throwing the bones. Technique itself has no particular validity for Barry. It is used to generate material, frequently at random, in the hope that some chance configuration will spark off a sensation, an instant of insight, in which the dead notes on the page will come alive. He uses these anonymous pitches to clear away the knowingness of adulthood, helping him perhaps to recapture a moment of wonder from his childhood, and make it concrete and eternal in the composition. This doesn't come easily — an arbitrary series of pitches is more likely to be banal than interesting — so he pounds away at them, turns away from them and reads a book, always convinced of their potential, until they give up their secrets and something satisfactory begins to emerge. This couldn't be in starker contrast to those composers for whom the Craft itself is held up as validation of the work. Barry is essentially an ecstatic composer.

Some of the pieces which begin with Irish melodies have notes inserted into or subtracted from them until the source disappears. Having set off in a particular direction Barry hones and polishes the material, paying particular attention to catching a mood and holding it as long as possible, before abruptly changing course with a strongly contrasting tempo and texture. By and large, his rhythm is thrusting and stomping, set off against haunting moments of sensuality. He delights in regular rhythms which are, however, tripped up now and then by the insertion of an irregular beat.

By pushing the music (and the musicians) to the limit he creates a focus, a concentration, in which time can be suspended. Great care is taken over the proportioning, relative duration and weight of each section. One of his principal concerns is that the music should never outstay its welcome, never lose grasp of the moment.

Quotes on the Quartet

- Vincent Deane described it as ‘*the most explicitly Irish sounding of [his] works*’, and that it ‘*consumes itself in frenzied bursts of energy, before a spectral fade out*’. (CD notes)
- Robert Maycock in the *Independent* stated that ‘*there is a layer of ironic detachment but it is overwhelmed by a manic intensity of expression, often in gleeful dance rhythms driven by some raging demon*’.
- Anthony Bye in the *Musical Times* described how ‘*its rugged and relentless transjectory is refreshingly idiosyncratic, outrageously perverse and hugely personable*’.

Glossary

(Barry, *Piano Quartet No. 1*)

Apart from common terms such as *espressivo*, *poco accel*, *subito*, etc, the following may require explanation or elaboration:

senza vibrato without vibrato (see bar 53)

sim. short for simile, in a similar or same manner. For example, in bar 56, the player should continue playing staccato although the indication is not marked.

détaché literally detached. A bowing term to indicate that a separate bowing stroke should be made for each note to clearly emphasise the detached nature of the passage (see bar 124).

clusters a note cluster is the simultaneous sounding of all the notes between two indicated notes. A cluster can be played with the elbows, a piece of wood, or in the case of bars 89–106, with the hands.

flautando literally ‘like a flute’. This is a direction for the player to bow lightly near the fingerboard with the point of the bow (see bar 458).

loco at the normal pitch, often after an indication to the contrary. For example, in bars 487 & 489, although the upper notes in the violin part are to be played an octave higher, the A remains at the normal pitch.

Vladimir Horowitz (1904–1989) one of the most famous pianists of the twentieth century and noted for his interpretations of Chopin, Liszt, Schumann, and Scarlatti. He was born in Russia but became an American citizen in 1944.

NOTES ON TWENTIETH-CENTURY IRISH ART-MUSIC

What does 'Irish music' mean?

Traditional, folk, popular? 'Irish art-music' embraces contemporary 'classical' music written in Ireland.

The main source for contemporary Irish art-music is the Contemporary Music Centre in Dublin. The Contemporary Music Centre is an archive and resource centre open to all who are interested in music in Ireland. Its library contains the only major specialist collection of music by modern Irish composers. It also has a sound archive and a collection of information materials of all kinds, from concert programmes and biographical details to specialist periodicals and books. *New Music News*, issued free three times a year, gives the latest information about music in Ireland. The Centre is used by performers, composers, teachers, students, and members of the public interested in finding out more about music in Ireland. The Contemporary Music Centre is situated at 95 Lower Baggot Street, Dublin 2.

Tel: 01-6612105, Fax: 01-6762639, email: info@cmc.ie.

Open to the public Monday–Friday, 10:00am–1:00pm, 2:00–5:30pm.

Pre-War Composers (i.e. from the turn of the century to the 1940s)

Charles Villiers Stanford (1852–1924)

Hamilton Harty (1879–1941)

Arnold Bax (1883–1953)

John Larchet (1884–1967)

E. J. Moeran (1894–1950)

The above composers are part of the so-called Celtic Twilight school (which consists of both British and Irish composers). Late nineteenth-century harmony, lyricism, incorporation of elements of traditional Irish music such as characteristic modes, rhythms, and intervals.

Post-War Composers

Aloys Fleischmann (1910–1992)

Frederick May (1911–1985)

Brian Boydell (b. 1917)

A.J. Potter (1918–1980)

Gerard Victory (1921–1995)

James Wilson (b. 1922)

Seán O'Riada (1931–1971)

John Kinsella (b. 1932)

Seóirse Bodley (b. 1933)

Assimilation of avant-garde techniques such as atonality, the twelve-tone method, and aleatoricism (or chance music); synthesis of Irish and contemporary techniques (Bodley & O'Riada); octatonicism (Boydell).

Contemporary Composers (selective)

Frank Corcoran (b. 1944)
Jerome de Bromhead (b. 1945)
Jane O'Leary (b. 1946)
Philip Martin (b. 1947)
Eric Sweeney (b. 1948)
Roger Doyle (b. 1949)
Kevin Volans (b. 1949)
John Buckley (b. 1951)
Paul Hayes (b. 1951)
Gerald Barry (b. 1952)
Raymond Deane (b. 1953)
Eibhlís Farrell (b. 1953)
Michael Holohan (b. 1956)
Rhona Clarke (b. 1958)
Fergus Johnston (b. 1959)
Martin O'Leary (b. 1963)
Ian Wilson (b. 1964)
Marian Ingoldsby (b. 1965)

Contemporary Irish music reflects the pluralist and diverse scene in the arts internationally. Not an age that could be defined as the Baroque, Classical, and Romantic eras were defined. No single current style but rather numerous different styles which can include atonality, neo-tonality, serialism, minimalism, electronic and computer music, and the discovery, incorporation, or revisiting of any ethnic or historical musical language. The noted American musicologist Robert Morgan sums this up as follows:

However one feels about contemporary music, one thing nevertheless seems clear: it faithfully reflects the fragmentary character of the larger world in which it exists. The absence of a consensus in such areas as politics and religion, to say nothing of such more ephemeral matters as clothing and furniture design, finds its precise corollary in the arts. In a period in which great emphasis is placed on 'doing your own thing', music, following the general tendency, mirrors the world. Whether or not one likes what one hears, current music represents an honest, if perhaps unflattering, image of a cluttered and unfocused age.

(Morgan, 1991, p. 489)

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Recordings & Further Reading

Chamber Music (including the Piano Quartet No. 1) performed by Nua Nós, Noriko Kawai (NMC D022).

CDs in preparation include Barry's orchestral music (Marco Polo 8.225006) and *The Triumph of Beauty and Deceit* (Largo 5135)

A good, brief (and budget) overview of the music of the twentieth century is Paul Griffiths, *Modern Music: A Concise History*, Thames and Hudson (London, 1978) circa £7.00.

Representative works by leading twentieth-century composers are available on budget CD labels such as Naxos.