

# Mozart Quintet, K452: wider listening

## Hanh Doan

### Introduction

Alongside the prescribed work in OCR's Area of Study 1 (Instrumental Music of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven), it's essential that students familiarise themselves with wider listening from this period. This is so that students are able to put the prescribed work into the context of its place within its genre and the Classical period overall. Studying a wealth of other works from the period will improve aural familiarity, which is essential for Section A, whereas a deeper exploration of similar works will be essential for Section B.

As mentioned in my resource on this prescribed work itself ([Music Teacher, April 2022](#)), creating a Classical timeline, plotting key dates and compositions of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven alongside key events from the period (eg periods spent in certain countries or cities) will give students a visual understanding and a location where they can place works they study.

### Context

When searching for wider listening, we might automatically look for works with similar numbers of instruments, in other words chamber music in this case. However, it's worth taking a step back and considering the forces in this work and their original roles. We know that the piano played a significant role in the home, both as a solo instrument and in chamber works. It was expected that the daughters of the home would learn and spend time practising, whereas the sons, who often played stringed instruments, had simpler parts to play. The piano concerto had also been made popular by Mozart in recent years, and was well known in the public domain.

It is, however, the instrument's combination with wind instruments that makes the work stand out. The Classical period was one of emergence for these instruments. They were mainly confined to their roles within the orchestra, so their appearances in chamber music were rare (Mozart wrote three flute quartets, one Oboe Quartet, one Horn Quintet and one Clarinet Quintet). The number of concertos Mozart wrote for these instruments were similar in number, with Mozart completing the first of his three horn concertos in 1783, the year before he completed the Quintet for piano and winds.

Only a couple of years before this, his Serenade for Winds, K361 ('Gran partita') was composed (in 1781 or 1782), an exploration of texture and sonority of this unique combination of wind instruments, with its rapturous Adagio exemplifying this exploration of wind timbres. Alongside this, shortly before Mozart completed his Quintet for piano and winds, he had finished his Piano Concerto No. 15 in B flat, K450, in which he brought woodwind to the fore. Thus his interest in wind instruments at this time was clear.

And perhaps to return to its category, given its premiere being at the Imperial and Royal National Court in Vienna, it seems that Mozart had intended this piece to be disseminated as widely as other concert pieces, especially after he had written to his father that 'I myself consider it the best thing I have written in my life' and that it had received 'extraordinary applause'.

The Quintet for piano and winds stands alone in its genre in Mozart's works, though his preoccupation with wind sonorities during this period is clear. It's also said to have been the inspiration for Beethoven's Quintet in E flat for piano and winds, Op. 16, composed in 1796 for exactly the same forces.

Hanh Doan is a former AST and Head of Music, and currently works as a freelance music education consultant. She is the author of various books, and writes articles and resources for *Music Teacher* magazine, exam boards and other music education publishers. She is also the OCR A level Music Expert and currently works in Initial Teacher Education at the University of Hertfordshire.



Mozart painted posthumously by Barbara Krafft in 1819

---

## Structure and tonality in the Classical period

Sadly, there's not enough space for a deep analysis of structure and tonal journeys of the chosen works in this resource. However, it's worth bearing in mind the following when listening to any works in the Classical period.

### Form

Much of the form used in the Classical period expands on the forms from the Baroque period, particularly binary form. The tonal journey was from the tonic to the dominant, followed by a return to the tonic. Often the confirmation of the tonic was with a restatement of material that had originally been presented in another key. Forms found in the Classical period included:

- ▶ First movement form: this was usually sonata form.
- ▶ Slow movement sonata form (often omitting themes and repeats).
- ▶ Variations form (used in some slow and final movements).
- ▶ Minuet and Trio form (often present in quartets and symphonies), later developing into the Scherzo and Trio under Beethoven.
- ▶ Rondo form: common in final movements.

Although not every movement will fall into one of these forms, it's worth remembering them as typical of the period, since they provide the listener with a good frame of reference, along with the hallmarks above.

---

## Wider listening

In order to listen widely, playing some of these pieces is always invaluable. Even a class performance of a slow movement on glockenspiels will give learners a means of remembering music in a style that's not entirely familiar to many of them. Analysis can take place during performance, with starts and stops to highlight key features and what they sound like. IMSLP ([https://imslp.org/wiki/Main\\_Page](https://imslp.org/wiki/Main_Page)) provides scores for most works from the Classical period, and simplifications and arrangements can be found in a number of places online.

The pieces selected for some brief analysis and comparison with Mozart's Quintet for piano and winds in this resource focus on Mozart's exploration of wind sonorities. There's absolutely no obligation for you to teach these: they're simply suggestions that pull on one specific thread. OCR gives the freedom for teachers and learners to search for their own wider listening and make meaningful connections and comparisons, and hopefully this resource may prompt even further listening for all.

The following works will be explored in this resource:

- ▶ Mozart: Piano Concerto No. 15 in B flat, K450
- ▶ Mozart: Serenade for B flat, K361 ('Gran partita')
- ▶ Beethoven: Quintet in E flat for piano and winds, Op. 16

## Mozart: Piano Concerto No. 15 in B flat, K450

Though it might not be an obvious choice for a related work, this Piano Concerto is worthy of note given the manner of its departure from previous piano concertos. In 1784, Mozart composed half a dozen piano concertos for his subscription concerts in Vienna. The first of them, K449, was scored for piano and strings, but with oboes and horns *ad libitum* – giving the potential for work to be performed as chamber music without losing any essential material. He'd written his three previous piano concertos in this manner (K413-415), but after this came the very different B flat major Concerto. In this work, Mozart brings the woodwind to the fore in the following ways:

- ▶ The oboes and bassoons (with some horn punctuation) open the first movement with the main theme (a task usually given to the first violins accompanied by the rest of the strings), answered by the strings. While there are plenty of moments where the strings return to their dominant position in the texture, the oboes and horns make their presence known with playful interjections.
- ▶ In the second movement, the oboe and bassoon are given long, serenade-like melodies over the hymn-like texture in the first variation (not dissimilar to the opening the second movement of the K452 Quintet).

Contrasting the piano writing in the Concerto with that of the Quintet will also give students a better understanding of the context of the works. In the Concerto, Mozart exploits the capabilities of the piano with some virtuoso movements in the first and last movements. Scales and arpeggios ripple through a cycle of 5ths in towards the end of the exposition and recapitulation, with the piano texture clearly dominating the overall texture, even in the second movement, where the sonorities of all the instruments are exploited. In the Quintet, the piano blends into the woodwind ensemble, emerging for some moments of its own, but often proving an accompaniment to the woodwind texture.

Like the final movement of the Quintet, the final movement of the Concerto is in rondo form. The sprightly opening motif is presented in the piano. The texture here is more typical of that of a Concerto, demonstrating the brilliance in piano writing.

## Mozart: Serenade for B flat, K361 ('Gran partita')

Composed in 1781 or 1782, this Serenade is scored for 13 instruments:

- ▶ 2 oboes
- ▶ 2 clarinets
- ▶ 2 basset horns
- ▶ 2 bassoons
- ▶ 4 horns
- ▶ double bass (sometimes replace by a contrabassoon)

This richness of this extraordinary wind texture is explored in each of the seven movements of the work, and clearly had a great influence on Mozart when he was writing the Quintet two years later. The serenade was often intended for outdoor and informal performances, something between a symphony and a concerto. It was often in four movements, but it's clear that in this work, Mozart has pushed conventions with not only the number of instruments, but also the number of movements (seven):

- ▶ Largo – Molto allegro
- ▶ Menuetto
- ▶ Adagio – Andante
- ▶ Menuetto: Allegretto
- ▶ Romance: Adagio
- ▶ Tema con variazioni: Andante
- ▶ Finale: Molto allegro

The first three movements are summarised below.

### **Largo – Molto allegro**

This exciting new texture is announced with full and rich chords at the start of the movement, which are contrasted with the clarinet solo lines in between. The range of textures and rhythmic interest is huge in the movement's slow introduction. The legato unison texture and syncopated rhythm of the oboes, clarinets and basset horns contrast with the staccato quavers of the bassoons and bass, before a crescendo to another rich and resonant chord. These alternating textures are typical of the introduction, before the music explodes into the Allegro.

We enter a monothematic sonata form with a texture that really does remind us of the string orchestra's counterparts. The repeated 'chugging' quavers of the bassoons remind us of the violas and cellos in the strings. Unlike in a string texture, where the first violins would soar with the melody, in this texture the melody is often harmonised in 3rds or 6ths, taking the dominance of the top instrument (in this case the oboe) away and adding more sonority to the texture. Themes are often presented in pairs of instruments – sometimes the two oboes in 3rds, or an oboe and clarinet in 3rds. Later in the development, we hear the theme in the bassoons in 3rds. This pairing of instruments, which creates dialogue in the texture, reminds us of how Mozart (and Haydn and Beethoven) explores pairings in the string quartet.

Harmonically, we hear tonal functional harmony, with the exploration of keys in the development, including cycles of 5ths and suspensions.

### **Menuetto**

This minuet features two contrasting trio sections. The minuet section uses all of the instruments, and in similar fashion to the opening, contrasts chordal moments with individual lines. The first trio (in E flat major – subdominant) is for the clarinets and basset horns only. The descending arpeggios of the clarinets in harmony remind us of horn hunting calls, and contrast with the scalic basset horns. The upper register of the clarinet sings to the listener, a precursor to the Clarinet Quintet and Concerto.

The second trio is in G minor and makes extensive use of the solo oboe, basset horn and bassoon. The writing here reminds us of a Baroque dance movement, with shorter ideas being imitated in descending sequences. New rhythmic interest is created by the bassoon triplets.

### **Adagio**

It's not difficult to hear why this is the movement that attracts listeners to the rest of the work. It was made particularly famous in the 1984 film *Amadeus*, in which Mozart's rival Salieri is begrudgingly enraptured by this Adagio. After a simple arpeggio in the basset horns, the opening pulsating texture (referred to in the film by Salieri as a squeezebox) remains throughout, over which long, lyrical lines and interplay take place between the solo oboe, clarinet and basset horn. The seamless alternating between instruments gives the impression of one long melody and one long breath – much like the second movement of the Quintet.

**Beethoven: Quintet in E flat for piano and winds, Op. 16**

Composed in 1796, this work was allegedly inspired by the Mozart Quintet for piano and winds, and both have the same scoring. The structure is similar: three movements, with the first also having a slow introduction and the final movement also being a rondo:

- ▶ 1 Grave – Allegro ma non troppo
- ▶ 2 Andante cantabile
- ▶ 3 Rondo: Allegro ma non troppo

**1 Grave – Allegro ma non troppo**

There are many similarities between Mozart’s and Beethoven’s slow introductions. Both alternate textures between solo piano and woodwind, along with solo instrumental lines, after which the piano emerges with an accompanying figure:

Largo (Mozart)	Grave (Beethoven)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Opening forte chords (solo piano interspersed (bars 1-4).</li> <li>▶ Idea repeated but texture ‘reversed’ (chords in piano and melody interspersed by woodwind, bars 5-8).</li> <li>▶ Piano accompaniment emerges at bar 9.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Unison idea spilling into solo piano, followed by unison idea again (bars 1-6).</li> <li>▶ Idea is ‘reversed’ and woodwind takes on a similar idea to that of the piano (compare bar 7 with bar 3).</li> </ul>

The dotted rhythms give the movement a much more ‘serious’ feel, indeed Beethoven does indicate *Grave*. While woodwind ranges and ideas are comparable to those of Mozart, the real difference here is in the piano chords and textures. Typically, Beethoven’s chords are fuller (more notes), with octaves being filled in with one or even two more notes in the chord. This denser sound again contributes to this more ‘serious’ nature of Beethoven’s work.

The Allegro ma non troppo opens with an extensive piano solo in 3/4 time, reminiscent of his writing in his piano sonatas. As with Mozart, repeating the idea with a changed instrumentation occurs. Beethoven’s themes are also passed around the woodwind in the first movement. More chromaticism occurs and the music moves through more distant keys, as we would expect of Beethoven.

**2 Andante cantabile**

While Mozart’s lyricism is unmatched in many ways, Beethoven’s second movement reveals a tender approach, in great contrast to his first movement. In the dominant key of B flat major, the piano opens the movement, again in the manner of one of his piano sonatas. The Alberti bass rocks gently and gives the listener a moment to recover from the exciting ending of the first movement. When the wind instruments enter, the clarinet takes the melody, changing the sonority of the winds (where the oboe has usually taken the top line). This new and sonorous texture is supported by piano demisemiquavers in the lower register. The melodies remind us of Beethoven’s operatic writing.

Interspersed between repeats of this theme are episodes in which the wind instruments are given an opportunity to sing and demonstrate their capabilities. These longer lines, which move effortlessly between solo instruments, remind us exactly of the same thing in Mozart’s Quintet, with the winds occasionally coming together like an operatic quartet. As with the first movement, it’s Beethoven’s piano textures that have fuller chords and explore a larger range of the piano than Mozart. The horn is also given an extensive solo moment – again, something not quite seen in Mozart’s writing.

The journey through keys takes us from B flat major through related keys (G minor, B flat minor), though within them, chromatic chords (mainly diminished) appear and colour the harmonies in a dramatic fashion.

### 3 Rondo: Allegro ma non troppo

Like the Mozart, the finale of the Beethoven is a rondo, but unlike Mozart's simple time, Beethoven opts for a lighter 6/8 time. Once again, the piano opens the final movement, with the material being repeated by the wind, again with the clarinet taking the melody. The theme is embellished and embroidered by the piano and winds in a whirl of activity. As in the Mozart, the piano has a cadenza in this movement, but in the Beethoven this falls in the first half of the movement. In this particular movement, the piano asserts its dominance. While the wind instruments play the main themes, there is a focus on the piano and its virtuosic capabilities, more like the final movement of a piano concerto. Like the other movements, the piano writing here gives away the composer with much bigger chords and uses a greater range of the piano.

---

### Meaningful listening: final considerations

As already mentioned, the above are merely suggestions, and teachers will still need to go into some more detail in order for learners to understand and hear connections. Finding time to listen widely in lesson time can be difficult, but students must be taught how to approach this before it is set as an independent task.

This will really depend on the experience of your students and the styles with which they're most familiar. Even the most experienced of instrumentalists does not necessarily make an experienced listener. How will you break it down? Can you find a focus for each session, for example instrumentation, texture, harmony, etc? How will you break that down even further? It might be worth even comparing shorter sections, as I did in the table above. Even comparing movements may be overwhelming for students. And finally, if you're still struggling to engage learners in the listening, I urge you to return to playing together, whether it be from original scores or a simple collection of themes from a work.