

is amused enough by it to bring it up again at the final cadence of the codetta:

Example 125



The sixfold repetition of the first motivic element, always from E, is a sufficiently tickling idea; the off-beat motif in bar 118 is a delicious addition; but perhaps the smartest little touch of all is the textbook harmony of bar 119.

(The same sort of play with motifs shifted to the second beat enlivens the cadence of the *Scherzando vivace* of the Quartet in E \flat [p. 233]. These two dance movements, as was remarked at the beginning of this chapter, are Beethoven's most extended and contrapuntally his most elaborate; as adjacent compositions, they betray a number of similarities in technique. Yet once again the feeling is of an expressive inversion of means. One piece serves as the active center of its quartet, the other as a distinct resting point. One piece is dry and flat, the other contrasty.)

The work is not short, and needs to modulate—to F and C, keys which also figured in the opening movement. However, the quality of key-contrast differs in these movements as radically as everything else. In the second movement, tonal tension seems no more stirring than in a fugue by Bach. Even the trio comes in the tonic key, without so much as a change of mode—a rare arrangement in Beethoven's works to date, but one that will be employed regularly in the three last quartets.

The tunes and doublets thrown together for this magical medley of a trio were cited on page 202. The trio works with off-beat accents too, but in a quite different way, with the effect of spiritualizing tawdry *allemande* clichés into a strangely insubstantial distillate of popular lyricism. This innocent tone and the sophistication of the main section stand at opposite extremes of some sort of spectrum, and it is not surprising to find the trio harmonically very quiet. A lumbering bear-dance phrase switches momentarily into $\frac{4}{4}$ time: an echo of the "absurd" interruption of the opening movement. The texture closes in warmly. After the dance runs its course—one is tempted to say, after the disembodied band recedes into the distance—the *Allegro ma non tanto* returns verbatim, quite unruffled. For once

there is no full or token return of the trio. Perhaps that reflects an essential lack of engagement between the parts.

One final note on the *Allegro ma non tanto*: a model for it can be found in Mozart's Quartet in A, K. 464:

Example 126



This was the piece that Beethoven had studied twenty-five years earlier, in connection with his other Quartet in A, the Quartet in A major, Op. 18, No. 5. Mozart's minuet—also a second movement—begins similarly with a low unison motif moving up a 2nd, designed to be joined with a more mobile descending figure (bars 9–12). Then the double counterpoint formed in this manner becomes the mainspring of the action, if not the sole spring, as in Op. 132. Mozartian—no, Beethoven's composition is not quite that; but one cannot help feeling that if Mozart had still been living (aged 69), he would have found it to his taste, more so than most of Beethoven's other music. Its grace, workmanship, and something about its humor—so purely professional and strange and inward—would surely have struck a responsive note.

Contrast—the third movement of the Quartet in A minor forces contrast more profoundly than any previous piece of music. Not that such a statement lends itself to nice statistic proofs; we are not furnished with any meter or scale to quantify musical contrast. But there are certain superlatives that Beethoven invites or rather demands. Like the Great Fugue, this movement is utterly radical in conception, a fantastic vision—devastating, *unerhört*.

Stravinsky calls the Great Fugue an "absolutely contemporary piece of music that will be contemporary forever," a characterization that could apply as well to the *Heiliger Dankgesang eines Genesenen an die Gottheit, in der lydischen Tonart* ("Holy Song of Thanks to the Godhead from a Convalescent, in the Lydian Mode"). The Lydian hymn proper opens the

movement and forms the pillars of its *A B A B A* structure. "Contemporary" in that the piece makes up its own new language—in spite of the fact that the Lydian mode was an archaism, and a sufficiently remarkable one. But of course no one had ever used the Lydian mode in this way. To accommodate it, Beethoven imagined a unique harmonic, rhythmic, dynamic, and textural order. This self-contained, hermetic world is twice confronted with the ordinary world of the *B* section, which Beethoven marked *Neue Kraft fühlend*. The two do not mix, they do not understand one another, and it is only by a sort of miracle that they do not wipe each other out or simply collapse. This is one measure of the seriousness of the musical contrast.

As for the archaism, that must have seemed as radical at the time as any of Stravinsky's neoclassic essays. But in spirit Beethoven's gesture was Romantic, not neoclassic. Just as his obsession with folk song in the 1820's owes something to Rousseau and his natural man, so Beethoven's experiments with the church modes in those years—the Dorian *Incaratus* of the *Missa solennis*, the passage for *Brüder, über'm Sternenzelt* in the Ninth Symphony, and the present Lydian movement—owe something to the vogue for medieval Catholicism expressed by Romantic poets like Brentano and Novalis. Schubert was setting Novalis as early as 1819, and Padre Bains's panegyric biography of Palestrina, the "Saviour of Church music," was to come out in 1828. The Lydian hymn summons up some infinitely remote liturgy, a ritual music of romance that tenuously looks ahead to *Parsifal* and the Fauré Requiem. Already in Beethoven's lifetime, pious archaeology was beginning to enshrine the great a-cappella school of church music. The *Heiliger Dankgesang* seems to anticipate the nineteenth-century Palestrina revival in the way that *Pulcinella* anticipated the current Vivaldi fashion.

As astonishing as any of this is the programmatic conception, which is set forth so much more explicitly here than in the tentative or tacit programs attached to not a few earlier slow movements (*les derniers soupirs* . . . *Eine Trauerweide oder Akazienbaum* . . . the "starry heavens"). As is well known, the impetus came out of Beethoven's own experience of illness in April 1825. The Lydian mode gave him a rarefied atmosphere for his hymn of thanks, whispered by a convalescent who has just, and barely, passed a supreme crisis. He still seems to be under oxygen. But the hymn is twice interrupted by a thrilling vision of new strength (*Neue Kraft fühlend*), strength which has not been attained, and which perhaps never will be attained. The determination to include this concrete reference within the convalescent prayer recalls another famous bald gesture of Beethoven's last years: the *Dona nobis pacem* of the *Missa solennis*, which

incorporates a concrete depiction of the warfare against which peace must be sought.

In the opening statement of the *Heiliger Dankgesang*, contrast is minimized to an almost unbelievable degree. Use of an old church mode re-

Example 127

Heiliger Dankgesang eines Genesenen an die Gottheit, in der lydischen Tonart.
(Cantata di ringraziamento offerta alla divinità da un guarito, in modo lidico.)
Molto adagio.

Neue Kraft fühlend.
(Sentendo nuova forza.)
Andante.

duces harmonic tension automatically; and once Beethoven had settled on the Lydian, he held to it scrupulously, using just the diatonic notes—the white notes on the piano—with never a sharp or flat to ruffle them. In the harmony, he restricted himself to triads, one single functional 7th-chord (G_7), and a Spartan ration of nonfunctional dissonance. The five phrases of the very simple hymn tune are all kept the same length (4 bars); the phrases all make the same little *crescendo*; every one of the notes is of the same value (half-note). The harmonization goes note-against-note in the four instruments except for occasional quarter-notes at cadences. Also, the contrapuntal preface and interludes between phrases all last the same length of time (2 bars); they too move exclusively in a single note

value (quarter-note). Between them they make do with only two different canonic motifs—different in melody, though identical in rhythm and analogous in general contour. All the imitations come at the space of a half-note. All but one come at the interval of the unison or octave. These are some of the statistics behind the monumental flatness of this opening hymn, its celebrated mystic aura. There is a primordial quality here that recalls, in a way, the hushed unison folk tune for Schiller at the end of the Ninth Symphony.

(While he was ill, Beethoven scribbled off this preposterous canon for his doctor:

Example 128

Liszt could hardly have thought of a more Mephistophelian travesty of the *Heiliger Dankgesang*.)

The mystic aura is furthered by the unnaturally slow tempo and the scoring or, rather, by what seems to be an unnaturally slow tempo on account of the scoring. The image is orchestral: forty strings could sustain the hymn at this speed with comfort, but four can bear it only with a sense of strain, tenuousness, and a certain gaucherie. This Beethoven certainly wanted, as the contrast with the superbly idiomatic instrumental sound of the *B* section implies clearly enough. Again one thinks of the Great Fugue, another work in which the instruments are made to outdo themselves, and in which their unhappy striving is incorporated into the essential aesthetic.

It is between the hymn proper and the *B* section—*Andante*, *Neue Kraft fühlend*, D major, $\frac{3}{8}$ —that contrast is so profoundly forced. In one massive contradiction, all the asceticisms of scale, melody, harmony, rhythm, and texture disappear. The style resumes that of Variation 2 in the slow movement of the E \flat Quartet (which is also an *Andante*): a delicate, brilliant gridwork of wide-spanning *obbligato* counterpoint sparkling with trills and rests and little syncopations, *spiccato* runs and active, sprung bass lines. In harmony, the vague untonal mysteries of the hymn give way to lucid, even simple-minded tonal progressions freely indulging the two common chords denied to the Lydian mode, the subdominant and the dominant-7th. The organization is lyric; Beethoven had rarely written

such beautiful lyric phrases. Yet the effect of contrast goes deeper than any listing of the details can suggest. It has to do with the total quality of the form, something about the *set* of the contrasting sections: something almost preternaturally aloof and timeless.

Perhaps this can be put in relief by considering another composition of the same period, the *Adagio molto e cantabile* of the Ninth Symphony. The structural diagram looks similar: *A B A B A . . .* an alternation of contrasting tunes—a duple-time *Adagio* (B \flat) and a triple-time *Andante* in third-related keys (G, D)—which belong, very roughly, to the same classes. The great difference lies in the relation between the tunes, which in turn involves a difference in the motivation for their alternation. In the symphony, the motivation is external; the modulation that spurs it comes as an arbitrary surprise. So when later versions of the first tune lead not to D but instead to G and E \flat and D \flat , these different goals give the movement its real centers of energy. The quartet, on the other hand, lacks such energy, for the modulation is internally motivated and never changes. When it is time for the second *B* section, Beethoven impassively repeats the identical move. For some extraordinary reason, the single modulation seems profoundly at rest. Instead of surprise or revelation, the alternation here makes for relief and inevitability.

As for the internal motivation, that comes out of harmonic anomalies of the Lydian mode, which will require a moment's explanation. Since this mode contains the anomalous raised fourth degree, B \flat , it lacks a true subdominant chord, and therefore it pushes hard toward the dominant key, C. Once Beethoven allows this fatal push to take place—already in the second hymn-phrase—a cadence in the tonic key becomes an impossibility. The necessary balance of a subdominant chord is simply unavailable, as the penultimate phrase of the hymn discovers. So the final phrase takes the only way out, retracing its steps and opting boldly for modulation, a deflection to another key center. The move to the A-major triad sounds “right” for a number of reasons, no doubt, A minor and A major having been the keys of the preceding movements, and A being the peak note of the initial imitative motif, in the preface to the hymn. It is also a fact that Palestrinian orthodoxy, as hardened in the textbooks, prescribes A as the cadence for the Lydian mode on F. The old familiar smell of classroom counterpoint emanates from this movement, as from so many others in the quartets from Op. 18 on; half-forgotten rules and legends are animated anew. A standard exercise of Albrechtsberger's contrapuntal curriculum, the “chorale fugue,” half emerges in the concluding *A* section.

That a modulation from F to D via A can stabilize the hymn—that a modulation can stabilize—is perhaps the supreme paradox of this move-

ment. Perhaps the paradox rationalizes the drastic contrast between the worlds of the *Heiliger Dankgesang* and the *Neue Kraft*. After the first appearance of the latter section, the harmony moves swiftly and stilly back to the Lydian F for a decorated version (or light variation) of the hymn. The various musical elements begin to get a little dissociated; contrast very gradually begins to intrude. The tune itself returns verbatim, in pristine, even, *cantus-firmus* notes floating up and away from the other instruments. Below it, the quarter-notes of the original background are slightly agitated into eighths and dotted quarters, twining and making all sorts of peaceful, unbelievable dissonances. Yet they are tracing the exact counterpoint of the original statement, and the original harmony, beat by beat—that unearthly harmony which, as Philip Radcliffe observes, “is sufficiently plain for the dominant sevenths, when they appear, to have an effect of peculiar tenderness and for the inversions of the common chord to sound remarkably rich.”⁷ Thereafter, the very same move to the A-major triad leading to a very light variation—hardly a variation—of the *Neue Kraft* in D. The hymn seems to resume. But how can the piece end?

Beethoven certainly could not bring back the hymn verbatim a third time, for a tonic cadence is impossible. He had to bring either more or less. He chose to bring less: in point of fact, no more than the first hymn-phrase—carefully stopping short of the second, which had modulated to the dominant. The final pillar of the *A B A B A* structure, then, is not another statement or variation of the hymn but a “liquidation,” in the form of a lengthy treatment of the single phrase $F | FEDE | FGF$. In accordance with this limitation, only the first of the imitative fragments (the preface) survives, for newly extended developments. Its contour is related to that of the hymn-phrase, at the cadence: $CA | GC-F | GF$.

To look more closely at this final pillar of the *A B A B A* structure: what is heard first is a newly supple version of the contrapuntal preface, with its characteristic leap up from C to A brought even more beautifully into relief. If a second decorated version of *A* were indeed intended, with the elements a little more dissociated than before, this would be just the way to begin it. But the eccentric emphasis on the important cadential G's in the viola and cello (bars 170 and 171) amounts to an explicit canonic reading of the preface, forecasting severe contrapuntal action to come. The hymn tune enters as expected, only to be cut short indecisively and guided through the various registers by piercing, sober imitations. For the hymn (or whatever is left of it) is no longer harmonized by block chords. The texture has become entirely dissociated and fluid, and the preface-

⁷P. 117.

Example 129

motif for the first time interpenetrates with the hymn, forming a strict double counterpoint exposed fugally along with the shortened hymn-fragment: $F | FEDE . . .$ in violin 2, answered at the 5th in the viola, at the octave in the cello, at the 5th in violin 1, and then at the 2nd in violin 2 (a *stretto* which is not carried through). A cadence pauses very solemnly on D minor—one would almost say piously, with that hollow 5th. Perhaps this means to encourage a final echo of the D-major *B* section. A first course of inquiry has been terminated.

A second course begins by turning quietly back to F—there is no “modulation”—in order to restate the original canon on the preface-motif, with its eccentric cadence G-F (violin and viola, bar 184, and perhaps

carried through to the soaring violin G of bar 185–6). Bar 186 even suggests that the same fugal exposition is going to follow. This time, however, more of the hymn-phrase ensues—all of it, in fact: $F | FEDE | FGF$ low in the cello, answered four octaves higher in the violin (bar 187, last note) and then at the 5th in the cello, *stretto* (bar 188). As the counter-subject dissolves into rich rhythmic agitation, this *stretto* stirs up an astonishing great climax. That four-octave span suddenly grows precarious; dissonance is as brutal as anything in the Great Fugue; the sheer volume generated terrifies, in light of the profound quietism previously. The violin trumpets the end of the hymn-phrase (. . . $F G F$) in two stages, $F G F | G A G$, leaving the cadential F as the real topic of the remaining bars. The step $G-F$ cascades down and imitates itself in a passage of deep relaxation, ending in another very solemn cadence, this one on C .

Once again Beethoven turns quietly back to F , in order to initiate a third course of inquiry. The preface-motif sounds again in its original position, but now free of any canonic involutions. The hymn-phrase is reduced to only two notes, F and E , its second and third (which also echo the descending steps of the prior passage of *decrecendo*). The severity and passion and power are spent; $F E$ is imitated up through four octaves, slowly and, as it would seem, endlessly until a fifth octave adds more of the phrase ($F E D E | F$) with a sort of muted shudder of finality. The movement concludes—or rather ceases—very simply with high A falling to the tonic. This seems to make a last reference to the leap up to A in the preface-motif, and to the A that had modulated away to the section of *Neue Kraft*.

This is one of Beethoven's superb pages. The gradual dissociation of the hymn in its three manifestations from an archaic, awesome chorale prelude into a granitic contrapuntal study of a single phrase—this is heard as a process of increasing spiritualization but also as one of enrichment, a confrontation of inherent complexities. The vision is not, in the end, at all a mystic one. There are commentators who discern deathlike transcendence in this passage, but I do not know what they can be hearing at the tremendous climax in the middle. Beside this strength the *Neue Kraft* pales. In what I have called a three-course inquiry into the first phrase of the hymn, Beethoven molds it and mirrors it with the primary end, surely, of stressing its linearity over any harmonic implications. (And if that was his idea of "medieval" music, he was not far wrong.) Canon and fuge establish a tonal field in which the two modulations—first to D , then even to C —can fade into unimportance by comparison with the purely linear energy of the notes at the start of each of the three courses—the cool

- (1) $F | FEDE$
(2) $F | FEDE | FGF$
 $G F$ (*etc.*)
(3) $F E(D . . .)$
 $F E D E | F$

return to F presages the acceptance of this F as the ultimate high cadence. The "impossible" Lydian cadence is perfectly accomplished.

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The way out of this remote vision, Beethoven seems to have felt, was through another kind of remoteness. One thing we can be quite sure of, when the next music starts: this brisk business is not yet the Finale. It turns out to be a miniscule dance movement with the dimensions of a bagatelle; Beethoven had recently been writing such pieces for piano. If the trio of the second movement suggests a spiritualized country dance, so this *Alla marcìa, assai vivace* suggests a parallel vision—a dandified march

Example 130



The musical score consists of three systems of music, each with a treble and bass clef staff. The first system (bars 25-31) is marked "Piu' allegro" and includes dynamic markings like *cresc.* and *p*. The second system (bars 32-39) is marked "Presto" and includes markings like "immer geschwinder", "accelerando", and "dim.". The third system (bars 40-46) is marked "Poco adagio" and includes markings like "smorzando" and "attaca".