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## A Comparative History and the Importance of Chamber Music

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California State University, Monterey Bay

A Comparative History and the Importance of Chamber Music

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Senior Capstone Thesis

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### **Abstract**

This capstone presentation focuses on the role of chamber music in both social and academic contexts. Using examples from the past five centuries and including local examples, parallels and divergences are drawn to points of most import. The spotlight is upon three areas: a) what the role of chamber music was in the past, compared to today; b) why it is an important genre, to both musicians, as well as non-musicians, and c) in what ways more exposure to the form can be built. Much of the focus is on composers and their influence, but the impact of and upon performers is noted at length. The theme of chamber music as progressive in nature appears frequently throughout the research, and is shown to be one of the most essential aspects of the genre. Much of the research and argument is centered around instruction and through education; however, emphasis is also placed on societal and behavioral impacts. These topics were researched through a variety of media, including scholarly literature, first-hand interviews with local instructors and chamber musicians, and through analysis of programs and repertoire. This exploration of chamber music will help to change the perception many hold toward the genre, and the contents will be applicable to both music education and within society.

Chamber music as a genre gives an impression of being music for an elite group, for the bourgeoisie or upper-crust of society, even amongst circles of music lovers. It is not hard to imagine why, with most performances consisting of professional musicians, academics, and students seeking some sort of prestige within the community. There have been numerous times through the last 400 years that this has been true; or in the very least, there have been musical settings in which chamber music has been placed on a pedestal from which it is only visible to those who point their nose toward it. It is in fact accessible to people of all ages, classes, and backgrounds. For a number of reasons, chamber music is an essential part of musical history, learning, and society, and it should be explored in some fashion by all people.

### **Music For Amateurs**

In the musical climate today, chamber music is mostly seen to be suited to the persons of high standing both within music as well as the community. This, however, is a large deviation from where chamber music began in its origins: as a genre made for amateurs, to be played in the company of peers (Radice 1). Chamber music was originally termed during the seventeenth century by musical theorist Marco Scacchi, setting it as the third genre of music (*musica cubicularis*) apart from *music thatrialis* (theatre music) and *musica ecclesiastica* (church music) (Radice 1). This classification merely denoted a piece as being meant for performance in a private residence, as opposed to a theatre or church setting. Truthfully, it was even earlier, a century prior to Scacchi's classification, that chamber music surfaced in what could be considered a current form (Thompson-Shade 6). During the Renaissance period, musical expression experienced a rebirth (consistent with the title of the period), that led to composers seeking to write music outside of a religious setting. Coupled with the advent of printing

technology, music was available to a considerably larger group of people, and amateur (albeit wealthy) musicians began to become enamored with the compositions they now had more access to (Shade 6)

Through the latter half of the eighteenth-century, chamber music began to find itself in “more refined” company, as academic musicians and composers were sought out by those with the wealth and power to do so; however, the amateur nature still prevailed. With the “rise of the bourgeoisie” during the time, compositions were being billed as specifically for lovers of the genre and “attempted to appeal to the dilettante and professional musician alike” (Radice 26). Pieces like CPE Bach’s *Sonaten für Kenner und Liebhaber* (translated as *Sonatas for Connoisseurs and Amateurs*) appealed to a wide audience. Additionally, musical instruction manuals were continuing to rise in popularity, giving amateur musicians an incredible amount of resources for a relatively low cost (Radice 26). The increased propagation of chamber music during this time period owes itself to the importance put upon the accessibility amateurs had to it. With the onset of lithography, a print copy method, large quantities were produced very quickly, attracting many more amateur musicians and creating a loop in which demand for compositions increased leading to more production and leading an even larger influx of musicians (Radice 26-7).

The origins of chamber music as an amateur genre are not entirely dissimilar from its place on the musical landscape today. To be sure, it is generally within an academic setting that exposure to chamber music is had, whether it be a classroom setting or private setting. There are those, however, that seek out chamber compositions outside of these contexts. For example, many community colleges offer beginning and intermediate string classes to those willing to learn. Many students simply wish to learn how to play the violin, clarinet, or cello, and have no

true desire to play in any other type of setting outside of college recitals. However, there are some that are grabbed by the power of music and continue to meet outside of the music room to play for and with each other in smaller settings: for neighbors, social gatherings, and similar sites. One such group has been born out of the Kammermuski program at Cabrillo College in Aptos, CA. A revolving and open group led by violinist Denise Becker, players from the program meet frequently to play music that they have heard elsewhere and enjoyed (not unlike a garage band who never performs in public) and play for small social gatherings amongst friends. While it would not be a large leap to turn these gatherings into paying performances (not unlike those from centuries past), the group is content in furthering their own musicality and existing in what has become a niche crowd, even within the musical and orchestral world.

Unfortunately, these types of amateur meetings are relatively uncommon occurrences. Most often, exposure to chamber works come in the form of either performances by professionals or recorded releases of works (often from the live performances, as opposed to session work). Luckily, in the Monterey Bay area, stretching from the southern part of the county through to Santa Cruz, residents are blessed with an incredible density of professional chamber groups and societies compared to the relatively small area and population; these include groups like Ensemble Monterey, who feature a large array of music each season, as well as the Santa Cruz Chamber players, generally featuring of smaller groups (*Santa Cruz Chamber Players*). It becomes evident, however, that most people become cognizant of chamber music through an academic setting. Generally, this applies to music majors that have come to the genre through playing the typical repertoire (Bach, Beethoven, Shostakovich) and becoming enamored, or being forced into playing quartets to meet requirements.

## **Progressive Development**

One of the most striking elements of chamber music is perhaps not its most apparent, at least on the surface level. The genre, in a broader scope, has been at least partially defined and recognized for its progressiveness (Radice 3). Falling into a grouping with symphonies, orchestral works, and centuries-old tonalities, chamber music is now seen as a stodgy genre, stuck with performing the expected works of Vivaldi, Mozart, and of course Haydn, who is commonly referred to as the “father of the string quartet” (Brown) What becomes evident through even the slightest prodding is that chamber music is in fact very forward thinking and eager to break through not only tonal but also socio-economic boundaries, and that these inspirations prevail through to today’s compositions.

The revolutionary and forward-thinking nature of chamber music began in not quite so strong a form as it would take later. As established previously, the genre had a large part of its origin in an amateur form, finding a home in the hearts of enthusiasts and musicians coming from the folk music traditions (Thompson-Shade 5). As small group music began to find its way into the home, art music and the compositions of more famous and coveted composers found their way into the ears and fingers of the amateur player. Combined with both the rise in lithography, leading to large quantities of scores being produced rapidly, and an increase in the import composers gave to amateur players, previously unavailable music to begin entering the lives of dilettante players (Radice 26-7). Reflexively, this led to large growth of the genre as its popularity grew (which will be revisited later).

To avoid stagnation in their music, composers began to seek places where the boundaries could be pushed, stretched, and broken. This is certainly no shock when talking about music in a broader sense, which has always been moving forward while at the same time looking backward,

but chamber music originally gave an outlet for experimentation at little risk. Music at a symphonic or orchestral level needs to be accessible to an extremely large group of people, and as such, the musical content cannot stray too far from what the audience is expecting (Pratorius-Gómez). With small ensembles, and no grand audiences to listen or halls to fill, the tenets of music could be explored and expanded with much less risk.

This expansion and evolution of musical boundaries came in different forms in the earliest inception of chamber music. Small group ensembles were the place where new and unique harmonies and tonalities began to form (Radice 3). One of the most important developments was the naissance of what is now considered the classic string quartet. During the Baroque art period, four-part writing amongst string instruments was common in orchestral writing, but the task of translating that texture to a small ensemble with a single player on each part was not so easily adapted (Radice 34-5). Composers attempted a variety of techniques were attempted to ease this transition. In France, a tradition of creating quartet pieces from recognizable French songs (works classified as *quatuor d'airs connus* or *quartet of familiar airs*) rose in prominence, lasting well into the 19<sup>th</sup>-century (Radice 35). Additionally, a compositional technique pairing a virtuosic first violin line with a piano-like accompaniment created by the other three voices arose through the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. These two methods, as well as a smattering of others, indisputably influenced what would become the quartet, but they did not offer a solid and precise definition of the form. It was not until the Haydn chamber works that the quartet, and subsequently other sizes and combinations of chamber ensembles, began to resemble what is seen now as commonplace (Radice 36).

The Baroque saw the naissance of chamber music, but the genre really gained steam during the Classical period, starting with Haydn. Haydn stretched the exploration of tonality and

theory even further, modulating in his Quartet in E-flat, Op. 71 No. 3 to the key of F-double flat. This was unnecessary from a performers standpoint, but theoretically showed an educated and precise movement and interaction between the instruments (Radice 53). During the totality of his chamber compositions, he explored the depths of timbres and tonalities. Very early on, Haydn attempted to play with timbres, writing pieces that included both double bass and F horns, while at the same time maintaining the emphasis on the development of polyphony and counterpoint, whereas the symphonic and orchestral composers of the period had ventured into homophony (Radice 36-8).

Most notable to the string ensemble, however, was the birth of the true role that the cello played in the setting. Previously, the cello had been seen as merely a bass instrument (perhaps with the exception of the Bach suites), used to lay the groundwork for the rest of the ensemble, but not as a contributor to more complex harmonies or melodic movement. Haydn's imaginative composing realized the cello (and by association, the second violin and viola) could have more to share to the quartet conversation. In 1772 with his Opus 20 collection of works, Haydn found parity between all four instruments in the quartet (Radice 37).

Mozart's quartets and chamber works paralleled Haydn's in the redefining of boundaries. Many of Mozart's pieces imitated those that came before; for instance, the early flute quartets mimicked previous structures of the strings providing accompaniment for the melody line (Radice 57). Early on, Mozart pushed forward with tonality, utilizing tonalities from both the major and parallel minor in what is known as the *Dissonance Quartet*. So striking is the tension, that publishers at the time (and afterward) believed there to be mistakes within the score, and attempted to amend them (Radice 46). By the time he composed his first oboe quartet he found the ability to feature beautiful moving lines throughout all of the instruments. Joined with the

works of Haydn, these chamber works formed an important foundation for compositions to come.

Music continued to be stretched and explored throughout the Classical period in ways that may seem mundane by today's standards, but in fact deviated from common perceptions in a variety of regions. An interesting area of growth came in the form of setting. During this time, outdoor venues rose in prominence and, as the technology for amplification and projection were mere figments at the time, a need for unique arrangements became a necessity. This resulted in the rise of chamber ensembles featuring solely wind instruments, as they were not only light and portable, but also could produce a broad dynamic range needed for an outdoor setting (Radice 59-60).

The change in instrumentation also gave a platform for new and reimagined styles of music. Particularly, the use of winds in Mozart's chamber works reminded him of the styles popular from his childhood, invoking the *style galant* that was so popular in his youth (Radice 60). His contemporaries had the same nostalgic feelings, and the style was given new life in the approachable and lively divertimento, a style that like many others persisted for quite some time.

From Beethoven onward to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, chamber music continued to be a platform for progress. The Classical era saw a continued growth in tonality and harmonic and melodic movement. Formal structure was solidified during Beethoven's time; while not set in stone, fairly rigid adherence to form and to theoretical movement took shape (Radice 76-77). During the Romantic, of particular note are the works of Brahms. Through Brahms's chamber works (and the Romantic in general), the emotional expression of music became the dominant basis for compositions. Pulling from their own experiences and feelings, the composers of the Romantic put both their pain and joy onto the musical staff to be played in a more passionate and

vivid manner than in previous eras, moving through the chamber genre before finding a place in larger ensembles (Radice 157).

As time passed, chamber music continued to be the platform for new and interesting musical ideas to be formed. Unique instrumentation was employed, from Debussy's works for flute, viola, and harp, to more contemporary works like Takemitsu's *Toward the Sea*, featuring a duet between an acoustic guitar and alto flute. The search for new and unique interactions between notes and sound continued through the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with one of its largest deviations in the atonal and serial works of Arnold Schoenberg. Works such as his influential *Pierrot Lunaire* utilized slightly expanded instrumentation (a sextet featuring a soprano voice) in the more intimate chamber setting to facilitate his quest to deviate from traditional tonal music. The result was a piece that by the standards of the time was abrasive and perhaps even offensive, but broadened the scope of what is considered musically possible and pleasurable (Radice 210).

Schoenberg also used chamber music as a platform for the development of serialism. Serial music uses a systematic method of composing elements of a piece of music to provide a method of truly avoiding any kind of implied tonality, which was previously very difficult without an aid (Beaumont). While Schoenberg utilized solo piano to employ his methods, and certainly had no misgivings of adapting serialism quickly to an orchestral setting, some of the most powerful early serial compositions came by way of chamber music. Pieces like his Suite, Op. 29, composed for sextet using a trio of clarinets paired with a traditional string trio, as well as String Quartet No. 3, Op. 30 (in a typical string quartet arrangement) gave Schoenberg a platform to research and apply these serial techniques at great length (Radice 210-11). The smaller chamber setting of these pieces allowed the contrast between the instruments to show easily and highlighted the interactions between the instruments. These qualities can often be lost

with larger ensembles where many instruments and lines are working both with and against each other.

Timbres of the instruments themselves began to be explored in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For strings in particular, different variations on arco and pizzicato bowing styles rose and fell in use, but mostly the production of sound up to the 20<sup>th</sup> century maintained a straight path. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this began to change. Along the lines of more traditional play styles, the works of Georg Freidrich Haas are an exceptional example of the result of timbral exploration, markedly in the piece *String Quartet No. 2* (1998). This work for a conventional string quartet features each instrument playing a series of double stops as well as single note lines, with rhythmic patterns vacillating between drones and syncopations. An incredible wall of sound is produced from just four instruments, creating a timbral combination that is seemingly electronic, and unlike what might be expected from the ensemble.

The benefits of the chamber setting in the search for new and interesting sound are numerous. Primarily, with a single player on an instrument, the risk of unbalanced sound is significantly smaller, as it is obviously easier for one musician to adjust than a large group to do so collectively. Additionally, though a very dense and considerable sound is produced, the danger of aural abrasion (beyond the point of enjoyment) is nigh non-existent; a full symphony reproducing these pieces could have a deleterious effect on the audience. Smaller ensembles allow for the focused realization of ideas with less prospect of poor reception due to means outside of the composition and music themselves.

Another of the most striking examples is the piece *ST-4/1,080262* by Iannis Xenakis. A piece composed for the traditional string quartet, Xenakis called for the full range of available timbres. This included percussive slaps in varied locations of each instrument, shrieking

glissandi upon different strings, staccato harmonic bowings, and fitting pizzicato passages (JACK Quartet). The cacophony of sound, seeming needlessly frantic, blends together in a coherent and focused manner. This piece in particular truly demonstrated a new way of thinking about the classical quartet, breaking a preconceived boundary and opening a vast space to compose within. As with the quartet by Haas, the smaller, more intimate chamber setting allowed for this type of composition to happen. This piece in particular showcases the focus needed for close interaction between players.

While there was still a fair amount of progressive exploration in chamber music with regard to tonality, timbre, and compositional method during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a turn was taken when examining the influence and sub-textual meaning behind the pieces. During this time, chamber music began to take on a role of social commentary of sort. The topics that gave subtext to the music have been fairly indiscriminate across the board: whole pieces commissioned for social movements, collections written to tell of musical pasts, and, perhaps most importantly, social commentary.

### **Commentary and Awareness**

The idea of music being a platform for social commentary is not unknown to listeners today. Music ranging in critique from lyrical works touching on light civil issues to political protests and treatises pervade the musical landscape. Outside of some of the nationalistic music of the mid- to late-Romantic period, this type of musical thought wasn't fully realized until the 20th century. Popular music of the 1900's began to take on some of this role; the naissance of the jazz and blues styles, and the evolution of rock, rhythm & blues, and pop music, owe their early influences to some of the themes present in most social commentary (notably that of race in the

United States). It was not wholly present in the world of art music, however. One of the most prominent beginnings of implied social meaning is in the chamber works of Dmitri Shostakovich.

In the pre-World War II era, the communist regime in the Soviet Union took on a dictatorial structure, seeking to control everything they could; this of course included all forms of art, especially music. Composers of the time were forced to compose in a style and manner approved by the state lest they disappear during the night, which happened with relative frequency. Shostakovich was one of these composers, who went through great strain to compose symphonies for a despotic government, attempting to please the political authority and the capricious audience members. During what is referred to as “The Great Terror,” Shostakovich continued to compose amidst vanishing colleagues who were not satisfying the desires of communist rule (Brooke 407-8). Oppression (at least in this form) largely subsided during the war, but returned shortly thereafter. Having no other platform to vocalize the woes of the people of the Soviet Union without facing imminent death, Shostakovich looked to the musical staff, and chamber music, to fight back as best he could.

It is here that Shostakovich was best able to tell his story. Using the chamber genre, with the quartet in particular, he inscribed his compositions with hidden meanings, using one musical theme but strongly implying another. Shostakovich used the smaller context of the musical form to tell of the people’s tales of oppression interwoven within comparatively thin nationalistic motifs (Radice 251). His works are somber and dense with emotion, with interactions between the instruments that seem to transcend the limitation of music to be mostly aural. It may be true that the story of the Soviet people during the time would have reached ears outside of the Soviet

Union, but none would have been quite so impactful and artful as the chamber works of Shostakovich.

Moving forward through the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, we begin to see compositions taking on an interesting role. Previously, in the Romantic period, nationalism began to seep into both chamber and symphonic music. It is only natural to assume that composers and musicians would seek to return to a sense of identity, to connect with their “roots,” so to speak. The nationalism movement within the late Romantic period reached its peak in the chamber works of Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály, coincidentally both Hungarian. Kodály integrated folk rhythms and culture in his music, bringing the musical lives of the general populace of Hungary to concert attendees around the world. Bartók, on the other hand, traveled much after learning traditional Hungarian sounds. Through his travels, he learned of the modalities of the different Eastern European traditions, and quickly began to integrate them into his music (Radice 195-6)

The synthesis of chamber music and the techniques of other cultures persisted through the century. One of the most outstanding examples is *Vignettes* by William Grant Still, performed at the October 2015 Picasso Ensemble concert. This series of miniatures is based on folk melodies from across the Americas. It is by no means fully inclusive (which would be a gargantuan task), but it features a wide array of themes including those from Peru, Mexico, Wisconsin, Haiti, and the Southern United States, as well as one from the Creole tradition in Louisiana (*Picasso Ensemble*). Pieces such as these spawn a unique portrayal of the musicological as well as ethnomusicological aspects of the regions, as perceived through chamber compositions. As with the works of the nationalist composers, performance guests are treated to an active lesson in the musical heritage of places they would never have thought to explore (Brown).

The Picasso Ensemble themselves have gone to great lengths to work toward social reform within chamber music. An ensemble consisting of all female members, Sue Brown builds repertoire tailored to the musicians while presenting a broad spectrum of musical styles and influences. Typical repertoire is present; frequent is a performance of one of the prominent composers of the past. Unlike many other ensembles, however, Brown also seeks to highlight female and minority composers at every opportunity. The ensemble focuses on finding the works of female composers, both new and old, but certainly does not forget to feature the works of African American and Asian composers, amongst others (Brown).

The last example of chamber music being used as progressive social reform is shown in the works of Toru Takemitsu. A composer of Japanese heritage, Takemitsu has taken the tonalities of his home and blended them with influences from Schoenberg, Messiaen, and Debussy to create his unique and evocative style (Koozin 124). The signature sound of his compositions is what led the organizers of the “Save the Whales” campaign of the 80’s to commission him to compose a series of movements for their cause. In “Toward The Sea”, a three movement piece for acoustic guitar and alto flute, Takemitsu implements German nomenclature to form the word “Sea” (E-flat [S], E, A), impregnating the music with the feeling of the ocean. The result invokes intense imagery in a clear and beautiful manner. The music itself doesn’t talk about saving the whales, as it were, but the premiere of the pieces cemented the occasion and the cause in the minds of those present (Gould).

This is not the only case of chamber music being used for social awareness of a specific issue; the Picasso Ensemble has performed for similar benefits a number of times. In fact, most of their performances are at benefits and like gatherings (*Picasso Ensemble*). Nonetheless, it is the pieces of Takemitsu that take the model to a peak.

## Commission and Patronage

As chamber music began to grow in popularity, so did the necessity for an increasing number of compositions. Unfortunately for the musicians and composers, the life essentials could not be bought and paid for with art alone; their skills needed to be monetized. While there was a large number of amateur musicians playing in small chamber groups in the home, driving much of the production, there was still an incredible need for composers and musicians in the amongst the bourgeoisie. The biggest names in chamber music found employ in the upper class of society during the 17<sup>th</sup> through 19<sup>th</sup> centuries (Thompson-Shade 12).

A number of factors contributed to the rise of chamber music during the Baroque period. The combination of an increase in the quality of education, public demand to hear music, and a large boost in the production of quality musical instruments all contributed greatly to the breadth of music written and played during the 17<sup>th</sup> century. One of the greatest factors, however, was the desire for chamber music in the courts in Europe and, by association, a tradition of patronage of composers and musicians (Thompson-Shade 9). Royal and political figures like Louis XIV of France gave an important platform for which composers could test out their ideas and present their works; with many palaces and estates each possessing at least one room with an excellent acoustic signature for them to specifically tailor their music to.

Seemingly across the board, premier composers utilized the model of patronage to facilitate their works. Notable amongst the popular composers of the time was Arcangelo Corelli. During the years of his most prolific composing, Corelli developed a relationship with the Duke of Modena, a noble of the northern region of Italy; more important, however, was the friendship that grew between Corelli and Cardinal Pietro Ottoboni, the grandnephew of Pope Alexander VIII (Buscaroli). Forging their link prior to his tenure in Modena, after returning to Rome,

Corelli came to live in the Cardinal's palace. Obviously, the ability to create without the constraint and worry of affording living expense and without concern for reception (because of the friendship) gives the freedom to develop the progressive ideas that are so important to the genre.

The most important composer of the Baroque (though perhaps not at the time but certainly retrospectively) was Johann Sebastian Bach. Bach also utilized a patronage to facilitate his chamber compositions. While much of the music Bach wrote was based off of keyboard improvisations he performed while at church and the chorales he composed, his chamber works were based more in the secular sectors. Bach worked under the patronage of a number of nobles during his life time. After a variety of appointments as organist, in 1708 Bach was chosen to be the organist and chamber musician for Duke Wilhelm Ernst in Weimar, Germany ("Timeline"). After auditioning for (and subsequently turning down) a number of presumably more prestigious positions, Bach was promoted to *Konzertmeister* at his post in Weimar in 1714. Bach finally broke free from the grip of Duke Wilhelm in 1717 when he became *Kapellmeister* in the court of Prince Leopold at Cöthen ("Timeline"). Bach greatly enjoyed working with Prince Leopold, who was both a musician himself and expended large sums of money to keep an 18-piece band at the ready. Additionally, Leopold was a Calvinist, a Christian denomination that does not use music in their worship, so Bach was granted the freedom to create interesting and complex secular and instrumental works (Gutmann). The presence of a patron at the very least provided Bach with the necessary income to live while creating music for the courtly nobles. During his tenure with Prince Leopold, however, was when he met Margrave Christian Ludwig of Brandenburg.

Most notable of his chamber works, that came by way of commission, were the six Brandenburg concertos. The Margrave, who after hearing Bach's virtuosity on the harpsichord,

commissioned Bach to produce a score to add to his music library, which was quite expansive. Bach used the opportunity to stretch his abilities and create the masterpieces that are enjoyed today as a type of résumé to once again escape the complacency of remaining in one place for too long (Gutmann). Surprisingly, the Margrave for one reason or another filed the scores away in his vault, only to be found years later and transformed into some of the most recognizable and astonishing works ever written, chamber or otherwise. In fact, it was quite likely that Bach never had the opportunity to hear the Brandenburg concertos performed (Gutmann). Nevertheless, these sufficiently broad works became some of Bach's most popular.

The model of patronage and work on commission persists to this day within the field of chamber music, both on the side of the performers, as well as the composers. In fact, it is difficult to find ensembles that are not under some sort of patronage; even the highest profile groups possess a focused source external funding (Brown). There are a variety of factors for this. Firstly, the reality is that chamber music doesn't lend itself well to models similarly seen in symphonic settings. There are some symphonies, like the San Francisco Symphony, that are beginning to implement some chamber repertoire into their programming. However, even though most symphonies receive both revenue as well as external funds, it is unfeasible to expect a large sum of funding to go toward the marketing of a program and adequate payment of the small musicians for a production of a genre that is, unfortunately, not very popular. The risk of alienating the rest of the symphony is at least partially present and the abilities of musicians in different locations are not necessarily equal; the ability for one chamber group to play a vast library of repertoire does not stand for all chamber groups. (Pratorius-Gómez).

This leaves no other choice (mostly) than for professional musicians to seek out supplementary funding in order to fuel their passion and perform on a relatively regular basis.

This is seen in each of the chamber groups in the Monterey Bay area. It is not an infrequent occurrence to see a moderate list of contributors to an ensemble, like the Picasso Ensemble and Ensemble Monterey, or to a specific program or artistic director, as with many of the performances granted by the Santa Cruz Chamber Players. The combination of all the assisted funding is what helps keep these ensembles afloat; however, many times there is still a single patron providing the monetary means for a group to subsist. Sue Brown, who is herself artistic director and violinist/violist for the Picasso Ensemble (a piano trio/sometimes quartet with mezzo-soprano), mentions this in a recent interview. She says that the Ensemble, while receiving considerable funding from the public as well as Cabrillo College (where she runs the chamber music program), receives the majority of its funding from a single person. The manner in which she conveys this information asserts that without their single main contributor, the ensemble would not be able to perform on such a regular basis.

It is not only wealthy individuals and families that assist in funding chamber ensembles and societies. Organizations of all types join in to help give back to the community through chamber music. A notable contributor in the area is the radio station KUSP. This station, based out of Santa Cruz, CA has recently sponsored the entire 2015-16 season for the Santa Cruz Chamber Players. This extra funding helped bring an incredibly wide array of music to the people of the Santa Cruz and Monterey Counties, and helped employ a large number of local professional musicians and composers (*Santa Cruz Chamber Players*). To stick with the theme of radio station sponsorship, Ensemble Monterey was recently backed in part by KMozart, a classical music radio station based in Los Angeles that has expanded to the Central Coast as of late. A significantly larger operation than the Chamber Players, Ensemble Monterey has benefitted considerably from the funds brought in from their sponsors in a similar fashion, using

the extra capital to finance the production of unique ensembles and obscure compositions, many times in their premieres (*Ensemble Monterey*).

For composers, especially for chamber music, the commission model is still prevalent, if not the main driving force behind the composition of such pieces. It can be assumed that composers love the art of writing music, but it is unfeasible for the motivation and justification of doing so to simply be exclusively “for the love”, so to speak. Also, the publishing of music is not as lucrative or prevalent a route as it once was in the past, with the exception of technique études, workbooks, and music for beginning players (Pratorius-Gómez). These avenues still exist, but not to the same level of prominence as in the past. Again moving to the Picasso Ensemble, composer John H. Robinson recently composed a piece on commission from Picasso entitled “Tarantella with a Twist of Lime”, unsurprisingly a variation on the traditional tarantella form. Using funds procured from their sponsor, the Picasso ensemble has developed a mutual relationship with Robinson to keep both parties creating music, and subsequently bringing it to the public (*Picasso Ensemble*).

The romantic image of musicians playing for themselves in a forest, or composers slavishly writing for hours by candlelight are simply that: romantic fallacies that don’t exist, and never truly have. Composers and performers alike have had to rely on the financial assistance of others for the totality of musicianship, with it being particularly necessary with chamber music. Hopefully, there continues to be sponsors who care enough to support the genre; unfortunately, with the decline in focus on chamber music at the lower and younger instructional levels, it may be a frightening inevitability that patronage desist.

There is one important thing to note in regards to patronage and sponsorship, especially by way of single entities. Sponsors who provide the majority of funding for an ensemble are

generally granted some sort of control over programming, lest they pull their financial backing out (Collins). Unlike the situation surrounding the Picasso Ensemble, which is granted relative freedom in their repertoire, patrons generally like to see and hear similar pieces performed. It is more likely, for example, for a chamber group to play a series of Beethoven quartets than a set of pieces written by John Cage when the patron/s have control over the ensemble's choice in music. This is a departure from the aforementioned progressive attributes of the genre, which shows what chamber music can be at its greatest, and shows what it frequently may be in the hands of those complacent in their musical tastes.

### **Why The Music Matters**

The decline in popularity of chamber music has been due to a number of factors. At first, it may seem like the relatability of the music is non-existent. Brown doesn't think this is necessarily the case. Parallels can be drawn between popular music now and much of the work done in music hundreds of years ago. Harmonically, four-chord progressions in pop music are based upon pieces composed long in the past, and the dissonant tonalities and virtuosic lines of many of the subgenres of metal music can be found in the works of the great composers, back through the Baroque era.

Many scenarios that would have had a performance of a chamber ensemble (a "gig," so to speak) have seen those spots replaced with a variety of other artists. Much of the work that was previously available to chamber musicians has been filled with jazz groups of a similar size; long past are the days of the "danceability" of a string quartet, taken up by swung improvisation. Now a form of art music in its own right, even jazz music has fallen by the wayside. Too easy it is for venue owners and wedding planners to seek out a "record player player," someone who can be

paid less money because they are a single entity that can press a button to recall a song from any style of music (Rollins).

In no small part connected to the fall of art music, the regrowth of chamber music needs to occur; it is extremely beneficial to have chamber music in the lives and ears of people. There are a number of different ways that chamber music is important in the lives of people. Of course, there are the common corollaries of music to brain activity and neural health, so to maintain some sort of brevity, those will not be discussed here. However, many other areas benefit from the genre. The first, touched on previously with the works of Shostakovich, is the historical implications of the music, both by way of musical record but also as a unique timestamp of a period and place, told in a language understood by all. Additionally, there are a number of social and behavioral benefits that come from the genre. The smaller groups lead themselves much more toward interaction between players, opening up communicative pathways. Also, the precise technique and the attention needed to play chamber music competently train the performers in such a way that they increase in abilities much more rapidly than other musicians. Most important is the role the genre plays in the idea of progressivism, both musically and as social activism, as with Takemitsu's "Toward the Sea" and the type of programming put forth at every Picasso Ensemble performance.

### **Historical Importance**

An important aspect of chamber music is the historical significance that the music holds. This manifests in many ways. Most obvious is the marker that the genre holds in regards to musical history. Through the lens of chamber scores, a timeline of theory and technique is drawn out in a thorough, comprehensive fashion. When looking backwards at the TIMELINE of music,

the form shows the foreshadowing of musical ideas to come, where a method or tonality was at its height, and where composers were looking backward to capture musical emotion that had been lost due to progressive ideas being fully expanded upon. Through scores and chamber scholars, musicians are given the tools to build their technique in such a way as to recreate the manner of playing that was popular at any given time (Schoenbach 73). Similarly, with many period instruments surviving and many of the original halls and courts still standing, audiences can hear a nearly perfect recreation of what someone may have heard centuries prior. (Thompson-Shade 19-21). The historical impact teaches much about the music itself, and aids reflection on the past of music.

Much of the time, music is seen as solely the score. Musicians, theorists and aficionados tend to forget that it is more than notes on the page; it is just as important to examine the role of the performance and the functional circumstances of a work (Locke 503). Without also studying the totality of a piece, an incomplete portrait is painted. Chamber music can help approach this point through performance and musicological analysis to discover the true situation surrounding a piece and the social context it held.

Chamber music in particular is helpful for revealing the unwritten or hidden history of a particular time and place. To use the examples previously mentioned, the chamber works of Shostakovich portray a pain and agony in the oppressed peoples of the Soviet Union during the post-World War II era. Though not completely telling in themselves, the entirety of the content in his chamber compositions reveal much of what the powers at be would like the public (and international community) to hear. This unique type of historical text is most prevalent in his String Quartet No. 8, a 20+ minute piece featuring a small Soviet theme supported upon the back of typical Jewish tonalities. In this quartet, a dialogue between the instruments evokes an image

of a man crying, kneeling naked before his interrogators after they have forced an untruthful confession, which was not far from the political climate during the time. Even if it was true that at least the rhetoric in the United States was in opposition during the time period, very seldom did a voice pierce through the Iron Curtain. Counter to his symphonies of imposed nationalism, the chamber music of Shostakovich shows a glimpse of the suffering that was happening, and told the Soviet people that their pain was shared (“String Quartet No. 8”).

One thing to be wary of when studying chamber music and the historical context of the pieces and their writers is the effect of the music on the public perception of the composers. Frequently the behaviors and actions of the great composers are thrown to the side due to the success of their magnificent music.

### **Interaction and Behavior**

Chamber music can, and frequently does, have a major impact on the social interactions and behavioral qualities of its musicians. Music attract all types of people; by no means is there a prototypical “chamber musician” that embodies a strict set of traits that remains true for the whole. It makes sense to then assume that there are musicians who occupy different points on the spectrum of interactivity.

Music in group settings can help alleviate these issues, with the chamber genre being even more capable of doing so. Music in itself draws people to play together; drum circles that crop up in all environments and the ubiquity of guitar sing-alongs at parties are a testament to this. In an educational setting, with the exception of individual lessons, all playing and instruction is done with the group. While it is not the motive, band and orchestra instruction in schools forces students into a situation where they have to interact with one another. This helps

to build the skills necessary to communicate effectively, as well as to instill more confidence in the musician to interact at a previously uncomfortable level than before (Krauth 430).

This is not the perfect scenario for constructing confidence and a new skill set within those toward the side opposite the extroverts. First, it is not likely that there will be perfect communicators in every situation. A large band of 50+ students is likely to have at more than a few cliques that may eschew new members to their group, and there will doubtless be one bully amongst the crowd (Hallinan 898-900). People of all ages have a hard enough time engaging one another, and these problems can be amplified amongst youth. It may simply be that opportunities for positive social interactions are not present. Also, even within a moderately sized group, it is easy for someone to slink away into the shadows and avoid contact with others. Though the size of the cliques may be relatively stable, the effect on the introvert can be the same, allowing for more comfortable behavior.

Chamber ensembles, implicit in their small size, can mitigate some of the strain on gaining new behavioral and social skills. It is virtually impossible for a player in a quartet to remain unseen; even in a larger chamber group, each musician is depended on, and social interaction is required to develop the music. The necessity of reciprocity in chamber music creates the interpersonal communication skills that many do not naturally have. These small groups are not immune to the issues facing larger group interactions, but reinforce the same kind of communication skills upon those who generally have a dominant role in their social circles as are gained by the introverts. Chamber music fosters growth in communication and relationships between players, who then can take those skills to the vast array of other communal situations they are part of.

## Technique

The importance of chamber music on musical ability and technique cannot be understated. It is certainly one of the most significant musical forms that a player of any age and ability can utilize to heighten their abilities. The necessity of extreme control over all musical elements is always present in chamber music, both due to the demand of the compositions (especially after the genre broke away from its more amateur roots), and because of the smaller size of the groups. The latter leads to a much greater exposure of the performance and music as the player cannot hide even subtle mistakes within the rest of the group; at the same time, the musicians are tasked with truly emphasizing the content of each piece as the sound is much softer (in general) compared to that which comes from a larger group (Schoenbach 74). The combination of these elements, as well as myriad of those smaller ones, train the player in ways that other genres of music are less equipped to.

First and foremost, chamber music creates a great sense of musical independence. Most forms of art music, especially in academic settings, rely on a conductor to lead the ensemble along. The conductor shapes and guides the music to fit their interpretation of a piece, using the players as a type of instrument that the conductor is performing through. It is by no means detrimental to have a conductor lead a piece, but the result can lead to a decreased connection to the music by the players (Schoenbach 73). In a chamber setting, the players rely on themselves. More attention must be given to listening to one another and finding the passage to the end of the piece while working together, rather than being guided by a single individual. It may be that there is a leader, or someone who takes the role as such, within a quartet or similar group, but the effect is considerably different than that of a conductor leading the whole group. A violinist,

violinist or cellist leading the group through cues is helping to aid the group in connectivity, but being part of the group itself makes this a more organic and involved process.

To expand on the idea of alertness from the independence that comes from chamber music, the genre also strengthens the player's skills in understanding both meter and rhythm. With the increased responsibility on the musicians to navigate a piece together in an organic manner, greater attention must be placed on playing cohesively. The most basic way of doing this is, of course, through strict adherence to a piece's time signature, and texture as it pertains to interweaving lines particularly (Schoenbach 74). Chamber music frequently mimics a group conversation; speech between a small number of friends or colleagues infrequently has only a single voice talking at a time. There is almost always a line that interrupts the person talking most at any point in time, with other mutterings and other vocalizations occurring. In order to simulate this setting, a precise recreation of the dialogue must be produced through rhythmic interaction and variation. To fall outside of the rhythms in a musical dialogue ironically turns the measured recreation of a natural happening into an incoherent mess.

To move toward the finer points of musicianship, one of the skills chamber music develops best is a performer's intonation. In a bigger group, collective intonations mash together in a blurred interpretation of what is meant to be, with an exception at the highest levels of performance. This is no fault of the group; it is natural for those with even significant training to have difficulty matching their own intonation to the surrounding ensemble. With a chamber group, a player is forced to hear their own faults with clarity and are able to adjust accordingly through practice (Schoenbach 73). Additionally, chamber musicians develop a considerable sensitivity to the intonation of the rest of the group. This of course leads to a deeper understanding of the individual notes; then, by association, a greater comprehension of

theoretical elements is developed. The practical and situational ear training that is implicit with chamber music provides a strong foundation for both performance at a peak level as well as a firm grasp on music theory and its application.

Each of these elements combine together to form an awareness of the music that transcends just knowledge of theoretic and rhythmic interactions. Understanding how all of the parts fit together, and how to apply proper phrasing, to a piece takes an incredibly high level of skill. This is not impossible for an orchestral musician to achieve, but the chamber musician is forced to learn these interactions due to the small and exposed essence of the form. Knowing what voice(s) to accentuate and which lines of dialogue have what role at any point in the music becomes second nature to the chamber musician through development of musical relationships between not only the instruments, but also the musicians themselves (Schoenbach 74). Chamber music instills in the musicians a total awareness of their surroundings to create fluid and organic, but also precise, music much more quickly than can be built from only playing in larger ensembles. The presence of many players present an avenue for composers to develop more complex interactions that (may or may not) have originated in a small group, but it is the chamber genre and setting that can rapidly grow the strength of a musician in the finer areas of technique.

### **Progressiveness**

Perhaps the reason chamber music is most important, to all people, is in its progressiveness. In terms of the musical content itself, chamber music has pushed the limits of what is conceived to be good or acceptable music essentially since its inception. New interactions and tonal qualities have been discovered through chamber music; frontiers have been

explored by the greatest composers of the last few centuries trying to find exciting ways of expression. Though much of this has been mentioned previously, the more in depth aspects of the theory were skimmed over; to make a point as to their import, a brief glimpse of what has happened in music theory will be shown.

Combined with the changes already talked about with the onset of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, music has been forever changed because of what proceed it. These progressive ideas are essentially the sole reason that art music has seen the immense innovation that it has over recent centuries. Without the platform of chamber music, there would inevitably be a stagnation in theory. As Pratorius-Gómez points out, the logistics of testing out new musical ideas in a larger setting is infeasible. Only through the chamber genre can composers make advance ideas in music theory and explore past the bubble of accepted tonality.

The motivation behind much of the music changed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century; the frequency with which chamber music became a platform for social commentary, reform, and awareness increased dramatically. The works of Shostakovich were all important for catching a glimpse of what the political climate of pre- and post-World War II was like in the Soviet Union (Radice 245). The programming of the Picasso Ensemble has been used to raise the profiles of minorities in music, both compositionally and as performers, to great effect. They also bring unfamiliar themes to their performances, as with the Grant Still work discussed above (Brown). Composers like Takemitsu (and Pratorius-Gómez at his own admission) have provided chamber works to social and environmental causes (Gould). In these ways, chamber music is bringing a greater awareness and exposure of many different issues to people that they may not reach normally. As with the content of the music itself, this isn't easily accomplished in a larger symphonic setting. The intimacy implicit to the genre constructs a trust between musician and listener, causing both

to become more open to the concerns of the other (Schoenbach 73). It has been employed to great effect in the past, and chamber music can and will continue to be utilized this way moving forward.

### **Regrowth and Rebirth**

Examination of the state of chamber music in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is valuable in itself; the question of why it matters is perhaps even more important. This leads to a necessity for a plan of implementation, the “how” portion of the “what, why, how” investigation of the genre. A vast number of possible solutions and pathways become evident; there exist a few that rise to the top and have the potential to grow the genre of chamber music, and expose a new generation of both musicians and non-musicians to all that it offers.

Perhaps the largest avenue where change can be found is in the exposure people have to the chamber music style. Many people (including young musicians, or those that have not spent time in an academic setting) have no true concept of what chamber music is, and what multitude of things are going on within the style. It may not be wholly incorrect to assume most recognize the concept of the string quartet and what it is, but generally speaking, that is where the familiarity ends. Unfamiliarity with the genre is a likely factor in its lack of growth, notoriety and popularity. It is this aspect that should be attacked first in helping young musicians become more knowledgeable about the genre and what it can bring them as both musicians and people of society (Brown).

Brown details a straightforward approach to growing chamber music: separate the students into small groups from day one. School groups, especially at the beginning level, are typically large in personnel. An incredibly useful exercise is to get the musicians accustomed to

playing in smaller groups immediately. If the students think about small group performance as typical and viable from day one, as opposed to solely concert band/orchestral settings, then their reception of future chamber settings will not seem so foreign. The music, at this point needn't be any different than what the students may be playing as a large group; it is the acclimation to playing with a handful of players that is the most important (Brown).

In most school settings prior to college, it is concert bands and choirs that see support when there is actual funding for music. Typically, most of the music being played in the environments that students learn falls into two categories. In the first, associated with school band and choir settings, repertoire is chosen based mainly on show tunes and music from pop culture. For example, recent choices from Seaside High School include music from the animated Disney movies *Hercules* and *Pocahontas* for the choir, and *Lilo and Stitch* for the band (*Seaside High*) Disney is known for having a generally high quality of music in their animated works particularly, so it is not that the students are being forced to play mediocre or hollow music; it is quite the opposite. However, the receptiveness of the students to the music dictates much of the repertoire that is given to them. Students do often receive more “classic” works (in the non-musical sense of the term), but often these hold a similar place in the public consciousness, like excerpts from Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* or Holst's *Planets*.

In no small part a genre built upon string repertoire, it is only natural that students have little exposure to chamber music in school settings. The task, then, is to find repertoire that highlights the instruments that are typically associated with a concert band. There are two significant ways in which to accomplish this. First, of course, is to seek out pieces that feature these instruments. For example, a number of chamber pieces exist that focus on the saxophone, created during the mid-1800's. It is perhaps the most prominent instrument in school concert,

marching, and jazz bands. A December 2014 production of the chamber society Ensemble Monterey explored this territory, performing a late-Romantic piece by Charles Koechlin entitled *Septet for Winds (Ensemble Monterey)*. This work called for an alto saxophone as the primary melodic instrument. Played by professional clarinetist Jeff Gallagher, the piece exemplified what could be done musically, both in its interactions and timbre, when putting the alto saxophone in an unfamiliar instrumentation. Unfortunately, not many youth were in attendance; had they been present, they would have seen one of the most popular band and jazz instruments being used in an exotic and engaging manner that they likely could not have foreseen. There has been enough music written to fill out multiple recital programs for all manner of ensemble instrumentations, with emphasis on the totality of the types of instruments. It need only be sought out by instructors and organizers.

In a considerably more jovial example, we see a slightly different model in one of the pieces performed at the Picasso Ensemble's Oct. 2015 presentation. They presented a waltz trio by Germaine Tailleferre intended for piano, violin and cello; being a quartet, however, the ensemble created a part doubling the violin by simply vocalizing the notes like someone singing a melody that has no words: with a series of "Lahs" (*Picasso*). This was seemingly meant as a playful inclusion of the vocalist, but shows that with little effort, a part can be created for a musician not originally intended for a piece. This is seen frequently in ensembles, where a bassist may be present in lieu of a cellist, a cellist replaces violist, a tenor sax substitutes for trumpet, and so on. It would be a small task to apply this model to chamber works, perhaps using a trombone and flute instead of cello and violin in a piano trio, or utilizing a quartet of the common sizes of saxophone instead of a string quartet.

The other main instructional setting students have in their youth and musical naissance is private lessons. Here, a different problem arises. As these lessons are one-on-one, seldom do group performances, or even practices, occur. The majority of playing is done either accompanied by a pianist or solo (almost exclusively in piano instruction). Since the developments of Haydn, chamber music has achieved some semblance of interactive equality between the players (Radice 37). Solo performance and performance with an accompanist can be played in the same locations and environments as quartets and other chamber ensembles, but the lack of supportive dialogue between instruments is contrary to the spirit of what the genre has become.

Though these models are effective, the best way to grow the genre can be seen in “El Sistema.” Started in Venezuela in 1975, Maestro José Antonio Abreu sought to bring art music to a larger body within the youth, who at the time were prone to gang and other illicit activities. Starting with only eleven musicians, Abreu made the decision to stick with his vision regardless of the cost and number of students; the program has grown to encompass hundreds of thousands of musicians at hundreds of locations in Venezuela and around the world (Tunstall 35-6). As much a vessel for social reform as it is a teaching model for music, El Sistema has seen support from the Venezuelan government through extensive funding to grow the program and teach music to any youth who desire to join. All the program requires is the dedication of practice, which the students are more than happy to provide.

Abreu was successful in his attempts to recreate the environment of social playing, which has been lost at the upper levels of instruction (Tunstall 56). The vast majority of instruction within El Sistema occurs in what the refer to as “núcleos”. These are centers in many of the cities, both large and small, where the young musicians have a safe and secure location to come

learn, rehearse and commune with each other. The program even goes so far to provide public transportation to students that live at an unreasonable distance for walking or if they have no other means of getting to rehearsals. These locations serve as a place for students to learn art music of all forms, bringing the works of composers from across the world and across time to the hands of the students regardless of class, and not solely to the elite (Tunstall 54). Instruction can begin with children as young as toddlers, who “play” on paper instruments while learning fingerings and bowing patterns. Most of the time, training culminates in inclusion within the Simón Bolívar Youth Orchestra, a group that travels the world to great renown. The program has produced scores of professional musicians who fill the seats of symphonies across the globe, and has grown incredible conductors, most notably Gustavo Dudamel, who now leads the Los Angeles Philharmonic (Tunstall 122-5).

As the students grow in abilities, a necessity for a model for more advanced players becomes evident. This is where chamber music becomes essential (in the El Sistema model). The inclusion of a chamber program gives the students the opportunity to achieve supreme talent through the development of technique and learning the difficult music implicit in chamber music. El Sistema has provided a variety of ensembles for the upper level players to work in, including wind and the ubiquitous string ensembles, but also has found unique combinations where they have the need (Tunstall 77).

The reason the model of El Sistema is crucial to the development of chamber music going forward is its roots as a social program. Teachers are limited in their abilities to bring in students and can only do so much work within the classroom. Assistance from the government is needed to provide the support instructors need to bring in new students and provide them with what they need to learn. The importance of the music has been established; now help is required

to bring in new musicians to receive instruction. The greatest musicians in the world are amongst the youth of the world, but unfortunately most do not have the means to pursue it.

The model has already begun to be implemented in many urban areas across the United States. Chris Pratorius-Gómez himself is involved in a local program using El Sistema as the framework for their teaching (Pratorius-Gómez). In the United States alone, over 120 programs have cropped up over recent years, and those are only the ones that are affiliated with the Venezuelan program (“Programs”). The framework of what has been achieved in Venezuela has already shown that it can be effective here; it is essential to the development of new music, performers, and the youth of the world that more systems using the structure be realized.

### **Final Thoughts**

While it may not seem to be on the surface, chamber music is a crucial part of music history and performance. Its progressive behavior on all fronts has provided a pattern that music has grown from and contributed a great deal to community, social awareness and ethnomusicology. It helps musicians grow in all areas of their lives, including technique and behavior. Chamber music has also given a glimpse into untold stories of the past, and it creates a unique timestamp of events and eras through the veil of harmony, provoking thought and discourse to discover meanings behind the melodies.

It cannot sustain itself, however. If chamber music is to persist, inventive ways of engaging students will be needed in the future. Involvement of instructors, legislators, and family members will be mandatory and crucial for the development and regrowth of chamber music in youth and subsequently society. The tools are present; they need only to be utilized.

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