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Quintet for two violins, viola, cello and piano, and string quartet no. 1 by Lazar Nikolov

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QUINTET FOR TWO VIOLINS, VIOLA, CELLO AND PIANO,
AND STRING QUARTET NO. 1 BY
LAZAR NIKOLOV

A Monograph

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Musical Arts

in

The School of Music

by

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ABSTRACT

Lazar Nikolov (1922-2005) was a representative of the so-called third generation of Bulgarian composers. Together with his closest friend, composer and conductor Konstantin Iliev, Nikolov founded the postwar avant garde in Bulgaria. He was among the first composers in Eastern Europe to abandon the influence of musical folklore and employ non-tonal techniques.

Shortly before graduating from the State Academy of Music in 1946, Nikolov felt that the masters from the previous two generations had already used all the successful means to incorporate neo-Romantic features and Bulgarian folk material into art music. He was perceptive enough to recognize the danger of his generation's music sounding like mere imitation of what was already there before, unless some radical changes were made.

Nikolov had the misfortune to live and work in Bulgaria at a time when any hint of connection with the avant garde music of Western Europe was frowned upon and severely criticized in the entire socialist bloc.

This document is an attempt to explain how Nikolov's work was crucial to the development of professional music in Post-second World War Bulgaria. The main focus is on two chamber works involving string instruments: *Piano Quintet* (1959) and *First String Quartet* (1965). The former is a piece from Nikolov's early compositional period. It is one of the most successful works demonstrating a peculiar approach to twelve-tone writing. The latter is a piece from his second period. It reflects the composer's fascination with timbre.

This paper consists of five chapters. The first chapter provides a brief historical review of the musical situation in Bulgaria before and during Nikolov's lifetime. The second chapter is a short biography. The third chapter presents a concise examination of Nikolov's style and aesthetical views. In the last two chapters, analyses of the selected works follow.

By analyzing these two works, one gets an idea of the composer's aesthetics and goals in the medium of chamber music on the one hand; on the other hand, one acquires an understanding of Nikolov's deep knowledge of and incessant curiosity for stringed instruments.

CHAPTER 1. HISTORICAL REVIEW OF BULGARIAN ART MUSIC

The liberation of Bulgaria from the Ottoman Turks in 1878 gave the country an opportunity to start a completely new developmental path. The Ottoman Empire dominated Bulgaria for nearly five centuries. Because of this, Bulgaria was largely prevented from being influenced by any Western European cultural movements, such as the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, or the Baroque, Classical and Romantic eras. Folk music was the main form of secular music culture. After the liberation, professional music-making developed rapidly. Bulgarian cultural activists realized that in order to keep in line with contemporary Western Europe, they needed to absorb all the missed cultural trends that Western Europe had been developing for five centuries.

The Bulgarian Church Choir was the first choral society in the country. It was formed in Ruse in 1870, eight years before the liberation. One of the choir's aims was to express protest against the Greek church-singing tradition. The first professional union of musicians was called the Bulgarian Musical Union. It organized musical activities from 1903 until 1941. The country's amateur choral activities were unified by the Bulgarian Choral Union, which was established in 1926. It provided funds not only for national choirs, but also for orchestras and chamber ensembles. Private concert management boards sponsored concerts by Bulgarian and foreign artists. In 1904, the first music school in Sofia was founded, later to become the State Academy of Music in 1921. The Opera Society was established in 1908 and was renamed the Sofia National Opera, also in 1921. There were more and more amateur choirs, military bands, and professional orchestras coming into existence, such as the Bulgarian National Philharmonic, 1924; the Academic Symphony Orchestra, 1925, renamed the Royal Military Symphony Orchestra in 1936 and the Sofia State Philharmonic in 1946, respectively.

For many years, one popular application of the term “generation” in Bulgarian musicology reflected the relation of Bulgarian composers to Bulgarian musical folklore, at least until the third generation. In 1929, musicologist Ivan Kamburov distinguished between two groups of composers: those of “folk-musical composition” and those who employed “thematic use of the folk song.”¹ The two groups would later be referred to as the first and second generation respectively.

When we look at the work of the Bulgarian composers from the third generation, however, we’ll see that there is much diversity in the way they treat folklore. Some of them, like Lazar Nikolov and Konstantin Iliev tried to cut their connections with it completely during the 1940s, and work with means of expression close to those of Post-World War II Western Europe. In the 1960s, on the other hand, there was a revival of interest in Bulgarian folk song, which was firmly reestablished by the 1970s. Composers such as Iliev and Simeon Pironkov freely employed folk elements in that decade, whereas Nikolov and Georgi Tutev almost never alluded to them.²

Another classification attempt has been made by considering the level of professional skill of the first and second generation, implying that the second generation had much better training than the first. With such a statement it becomes hard to find a reasonable explanation for the fact that these earlier “insufficiently trained” composers left us such a remarkably diverse and rich choral literature. Presently this theory has lost popularity among musicologists, especially when it comes to distinguishing between second and third generations.³

¹ Ivan Kamburov, “Nay-novoto ni muzikalno tvorchestvo” (Our Newest Musical Art), *Bulgarskite muzikalni deystsi i problemqt za natsionalniya muzikalen stil*, 52; quoted in Ivan Hlebarov, *Istoriya na bulgarskata muzikalna kultura: uvod* (A History of Bulgarian Musical Culture: Introduction) (Sofia: Musica Publishing House, 1985), 89.

Translation by A. Dotcheva.

² Hlebarov, 90.

³ Ibid., 91.

It has been accepted today that the term “generation” is supposed to reflect the artistic tendencies in the historical development of Bulgaria’s professional music. Generally, each generation has formed itself during times of crucial changes in Bulgaria from both historical and musical points of view. According to these criteria, the first generation was formed by composers who were active in the last decade of the nineteenth and the first decade of the twentieth centuries, such as Anastas Stoyanov (1854-1930), Emanuil Manolov (1860-1902), Angel Bukoreshliev (1870-1950), Panayot Pipkov (1871-1942), Dimitar Hadjigeorgiev (1873-1932), Dobri Hristov (1875-1941), Georgi Atanassov (1882-1931), Nikola Atanassov (1886-1969), etc. It was during those twenty years that Bulgarian art music was founded and established as an official system. The formation of the first generation was naturally a continuous process, and this continuity allowed composers with age differences as big as twenty-five years to be united in one generation, since the years for the creative development of each of them coincided with the twenty years in question.⁴

The composers from the first generation were the pioneers of Bulgaria’s art music. All of them worked in diverse regions of the country upon their return from studying in the conservatoires of Russia, Italy, Croatia, Czech Republic, Turkey, Austria, Germany, and France. They were not only composers, but also conductors, pedagogues and public figures. Panayot Pipkov, for example, was a journalist and an actor in addition to the above mentioned activities. Each of these cultural activists contributed to the musical art of newly liberated Bulgaria. What follows is a brief summary of the most prominent figures from the first generation.

Anastas Stoyanov (1854-1930), the father of Vesselin Stoyanov and Andrey Stoyanov, was among the founders of music publishing in Bulgaria. He was also the first to notate Bulgarian folksongs of asymmetrical meters. Emanuil Manolov (1860-1902) composed

⁴ Ibid., 92.

the first Bulgarian opera, although unfinished (*Siromahkinya—The Poor Woman*, 1900). Georgi Atanassov (1882-1931) was the one who further developed the genre of opera. He studied composition at the Conservatoire of Pesaro, Italy, under Pietro Mascagni. In 1903 he graduated as Maestro di Musica, which is why his Bulgarian colleagues called him Maestro Georgi Atanassov. He composed six operas based on Bulgarian folk and historical subjects. Nikola Atanassov (1886-1969) composed the first Bulgarian piano sonata (1911), as well as the first Bulgarian symphony (1912), which was strongly influenced by the classical symphony form.

Dobri Hristov (1875-1941) is considered the “Patriarch of Music” for his contribution to Bulgarian culture. He majored in composition at the Prague Conservatory under the tutelage of Antonín Dvořák, Josef Suk, Václav Novák and Oskar Nedbal. His work consisted mostly of arrangements of Macedonian and Bulgarian folk tunes for choirs in the “classical” tonal harmony of Western Europe. Hristov was the first theorist in Bulgarian musicology, as well as one of the most distinguished Bulgarian music folklorists.

Most of the first generation composers wrote predominantly for choir, because there were many more choirs than orchestras. Although unoriginal, their music is historically valuable mainly because it represents the earliest stage of professional musical development of a country that had been forcefully detached from Europe for centuries.

A new stage in the development of art music in Bulgaria took place from the end of World War I until the mid-1930s. The fast turn of historical events made the time span of the formation of the second generation shorter. During those years the Bulgarian national style was created. Some of its best masterpieces were created in the 1940s. The age difference of those composers is also smaller: about fifteen years. The most influential figures from those years were

Pancho Vladigerov (1899-1978), Dimitar Nenov (1902-53), Vesselin Stoyanov (1902-69), Lubomir Pipkov (1904-74), and Marin Goleminov (1908-2000).

The second generation Bulgarian composers became active after World War I and the September uprising of 1923 (a suppressed communist uprising). This generation has been associated with the foundation of the Contemporary Music Society in 1933. It was later called the Union of Bulgarian Composers (UBC), and has kept this name until the present day. Stoyanov, Vladigerov, Nenov, and Pipkov were among the founders of the Society. They were later joined by Philip Koutev, Marin Goleminov, and others. These composers (who also got professional training abroad and absorbed the European tradition) were more self-conscious about establishing a Bulgarian musical tradition, a national style. They did this by drawing both on national folklore music and Western contemporary principles.

In order to understand why the music of the third generation composers Konstantin Iliev and Lazar Nikolov was hard to accept in its time, we need to examine briefly the most characteristic trends in the works of prominent second generation composers, such as Vladigerov, Nenov, Stoyanov, Pipkov, and Goleminov.

Pancho Vladigerov (1899-1978) is the most famous Bulgarian composer. He wrote mostly works for big symphony orchestra, as well as operas. He was a great pianist as well. His music is a unique symbiosis between late romanticism and Bulgarian folklore. He always collected folk-song themes that he found interesting. After exposing them in his pieces as themes, he developed them in the manner of composers such as Wagner, Strauss (with whom he had a close friendship), and Rachmaninoff. He possessed an extraordinary formal development technique in symphonic genres. A wonderful master of orchestration, he gave his orchestra

everything: sonic richness; attention to timbre; well structured climaxes through accumulation of emotion and strength; and gracious instrumental solos.

Among the things that aroused criticism from contemporaries like Dimitar Nenov and later Konstantin Iliev and Lazar Nikolov was that Vladigerov used the folk song as a theme only, failing to elaborate on it according to its specific characteristics. To mention just one as an example, some Bulgarian folk songs require double voicing, the so called diaphonic development. In Vladigerov's approach, the process is simply mechanical: exposition, development and recapitulation of the folk song, although with some extension of the thematic spheres in question, using the capabilities of the orchestra.

Vladigerov was a conservative musician and teacher. He learned and taught predominantly the stylistic trends of composers whose music he enjoyed, such as Richard Wagner, Richard Strauss and Gustav Mahler. Among the contemporaries whose music was not associated with late romanticism, he respected Shostakovich, Prokofiev, Bartók, Stravinsky and Ravel. He never expressed a desire to discuss or study Schoenberg, Berg and Webern—their music simply did not interest him.

An excellent pianist as well as a renowned composer, Vesselin Stoyanov (1902-69) was a graduate from the Vienna Hochschule für Musik. He was resistant to modern tendencies, from the New Viennese School to the postwar avant garde. He worked within the melodic frame associated with Bulgarian folk music. An advocate for a broad thematic line, he composed primarily themes of song-like, romantic character. He preferred powerful and lengthy developments, as well as grandiose culminations. In those one can trace influences from the late Russian romanticism—mostly Rachmaninoff. His stylistic preferences were inclined towards late romantic composers from the West such as Wagner, Bruckner, Mahler and Richard Strauss, and

in this sense he was perhaps the one who most closely resembled the aesthetics and taste of Vladigerov.

Stoyanov was a master of the big, colorful orchestra. This was one of his main contributions to Bulgarian art music. Like Vladigerov, he incorporated folk songs as themes within the traditional classical structure. He kept everything in the development of the musical ideas subordinate to the classical principles. He wrote tonal music, convinced that this was the only way music should be. Stoyanov was very well acquainted with the techniques of the Second Viennese School even if he remained its ardent opponent until the end of his life.

Lubomir Pipkov (1904-74) developed his style on the basis of Bulgarian traditional music in a much broader sense than just melodic connection between his musical themes and folk melodies. In this sense Pipkov was a composer of modern sensitivity, one that subscribed himself to the art music of the twentieth century with his style characteristics: thematic and harmonic language, rhythm and building of form.

Pipkov was a student of Paul Dukas. Evident in his work is the universality of musical language and a strong familiarity with European writing. He picked up a variety of trends, from expanded tonality through chromatic modes and serial technique in his late pieces. His serial technique was not as pure as Webern's. Rather, it was more subtly applied, since Pipkov was more interested in technique as a means than as an end. In certain later opuses such as his *Fourth Symphony* (1970), he used a twelve-tone row with a missing last pitch, without giving any detailed explanations on the fact, since the approach was unpopular in Bulgaria at the time.

Pipkov took advantage of the metric and rhythmic variety of Bulgarian folk music. In his works, he treated the meter as a leading dramaturgical component in a similar way that Stravinsky did in *The Rite of Spring*. Pipkov's favorite meter was 8/8: he considered it to be very

expressive, strongly dramatic, and sometimes even tragic. He was concerned with social themes such as fight and revolution and therefore reflected them in his music.

Timbre was another component used by Pipkov for dramaturgical purposes. For example, he gave the timpani a prominent role in works such as his *Concerto for Winds, Piano and Percussion* (1929), *Third Symphony* (1965—for strings, percussion, two grand pianos and trumpet) and *Third String Quartet* (1966—with timpani), not unlike Shostakovich treated the piccolo.

Pipkov's treatment of text distinguished him from the rest of this generation. His *Five Songs on Foreign Poets* (in two versions, one for voice and piano and another for voice and string orchestra) precede Shostakovich's *Fourteenth Symphony* and in many respects anticipate it. Each of the *Songs* exists in both its respective original language and in Bulgarian translation.

In his symphonies, Pipkov had a freer approach to form. For example, he would employ new musical material in some of his developments, or he would omit a standard thematic exposition. Even if he used his own modifications, the sonata form was still recognizable like in the works of twentieth-century classicists such as Shostakovich and Britten.

Marin Goleminov (1908-2000) was probably the one of his generation who functioned most naturally as a European composer. Throughout his life, he kept himself updated with the cultural tendencies around the world. In the late 1930s, he composed perhaps the most popular Bulgarian stage work from the first half of the twentieth century, the dance drama *Nestinarka* (*Fire Dancing Woman*), premiered in 1942. This is a work that precisely reflects the slightly earlier European trend (from *Rite of Spring* by Stravinsky through *Scythian Suite* by Prokofiev, for instance), showcasing the archaic, ritualistic side of given folk traditions.

Goleminov's stylistic characteristics are based on the following factors: Bulgarian folk tradition; Bulgarian church music; the combination of German and French training (one of his teachers in France was Vincent d'Indy.) One can feel the presence of the Bulgarian folk tradition in his works through his use of particular motifs or entire themes. From church music he borrowed motifs, which were not used as themes but rather as thematic nuclei, or just as short melodic structures. From the French tradition, Goleminov inherited a very well developed sense for the tiniest detail in music. His work is full of little fragments, cells, small modules, clearly distinguishable, which in no way prevent one from feeling the music's flow and continuity.

The German influence on Goleminov's work could be recognized by the lack of any superfluousness in his musical material. His musical statements are always short and clear. This is one of his most contemporary trends. For example, the duration of his *Fourth String Quartet*, also called *Microquartet* (1966) is about eight minutes.

His musical language includes an extended tonality, modal development, and dissonances mostly based on seconds, which he borrows from the diaphonic structure of the Shopsko singing (a vocal tradition from the Shopsko region.)

Goleminov's knowledge about instrumentation was outstanding. He taught orchestration at the Music Academy for many years and wrote books on the subject as well. He played the violin and the viola, and from 1935 until 1938 was 2nd violin in the Avramov String Quartet. His eight string quartets and *Concerto for String Orchestra* are among his best works.

Dimitar Nenov (1902-53) was the most independent from the European tradition of all of the second generation Bulgarian composers. What is most interesting and to an extent ironic is the fact that he was a person of undisputable erudition on philosophy: he was familiar with all the layers of the term "Baroque" and was completely at home with European literature and art.

Nenov was, however, the first to address the question as to whether Bulgarian folk songs were capable of adoption as thematic material for formal development on the principles of the Western-European tradition. This was what made his works unique and differentiated him from his Bulgarian contemporaries. What united him with them was the fact that he never completely abandoned tonality. He was experimenting with bitonality by 1921.⁵

Nenov graduated in architecture and piano in Dresden, Germany. He also completed a doctorate in art history there. He often viewed music from an architect's point of view and was very homogenous in his elaboration of the musical material. In the case of the Bulgarian folk song, he was mostly interested in its melodic line. Here is an observation of Nenov on the matter:

A characteristic trend of the Bulgarian song is the fact that its melody starts up high (if not so from the very beginning, it does so almost immediately), and then gets down and starts winding. Any ideas about tonic and dominant functions, as well as cadences are out of the question. Such a line is in obvious disagreement with the line of the European song, which builds from low to high (Gothic and Baroque principle).⁶

When working with folk material, Nenov would put fragments from the song before the climax, and would present the entire song, completely recognizable in the climax (as in his *Piano Concerto*, for example). This method is quite opposite from the one used by his colleagues, who would put the song at the beginning as a theme and then cut it into motifs to create developmental sections according to the Western standards.

Another aspect of Nenov's creative independence was the way he treated the musical form. He had a much freer concept of sonata form than both Vladigerov and Stoyanov. He used repetitiveness, however within the framework of the free form. He was very inventive in his orchestration: he combined very skillfully the pedal sonority with a wide variety of timbral color.

⁵ Lazar Nikolov, *Moyat svyat: misli, razgovori, intervyuta* (My World: Thoughts, Conversations, Interviews) (Sofia: LITSE Publishing House, 1998), 30. Translation by A. Dotcheva.

⁶ Dimitar Nenov, "Narodni pesni za glas i malak orkestar," (Folk songs for voice and small orchestra), an autobiographical essay (Sofia: Bulgarian Academy of Sciences; Institute of Art Studies, A.VI, 78) Translation by A. Dotcheva.

He did this in a very economical, subtle and intimate way, not as bright and sparkling as the approaches of Vladigerov or Stoyanov.

Nenov was given a particularly hard time by the communist government because of his German connections, which in turn led him into a deep depression and eventually to his untimely death in 1953. The piano recordings he made for the Bulgarian National Radio, a priceless documentation of his reputedly unprecedented musicianship, were all intentionally destroyed during the regime.

With the new political regime in 1944, the Contemporary Music Society was renamed the Union of the Composers, Musicologists and Concertizing Artists. In 1954 it changed its name for the last time to the Union of the Bulgarian Composers (UBC) even though it still had musicologists among its members. For the purpose of convenience, I will refer to it as the UBC even when talking about events that happened before 1954. The main activity of the UBC members at that time was listening to and discussing newly composed pieces. Everybody was expected and encouraged to actively participate with opinions and suggestions.

The establishment of the communist power in Bulgaria in 1944 was another historical milestone. Art started to be judged by radically different standards and was used as a means for ideological propaganda. The third generation of Bulgarian composers emerged from the mid-1940s to the mid-50s. It included Alexander Raychev (1922-2003), Lazar Nikolov (1922-2005), Konstantin Iliev (1924-88), Georgi Tutev (1924-94), Simeon Pironkov (1927-2000), Dimitar Tapkov (1929), Jules Levy (1930-2006), Dimitar Christoff (1933), Vassil Kazandjiev (1934), Ivan Spassov (1934-96), Krassimir Kurkchisky (1936), and others.

On February 10, 1948, the Soviet government issued a decree called “On the Opera *The Great Friendship* by Vano Muradeli.” The publication of this paper resulted in the

condemnation of several of the most famous Soviet composers. The main targets of the Soviet government were Prokofiev and Shostakovich, but the pressure extended to composers such as Myaskovsky, Shebalin, and even Khachaturian. The accusation was that they dared to write tragic music, considered a felony: “The Soviet citizen” was supposed to be the happiest of all human beings in the world.

Coincidentally in Bulgaria, Communist Party leader Georgi Dimitrov died in 1949 and his successor Vulko Chervenkov, a protégé of Stalin, organized very intense Party purges, which lasted for about four years. The new leader disqualified nearly 100,000 out of 460,000 Bulgarian communists. He imposed a personality-cult, which earned him a nickname: Little Stalin. He established a firm Bulgarian reliance on the Soviet Communist Party’s political and artistic ethics. The approach to the arts that the state then adopted was to be dogmatic and nationalistic in character.

About two years after the publication of the Soviet decree in question, the Bulgarian musical society also got to bear the consequences of this shameful document. From then on, musical works in Bulgaria were to be labeled formalistic or realistic, depending on who wrote them and the whims of those in power at the moment. Iliev and Nikolov, for example, suffered through many humiliating critiques published on a regular basis in Bulgaria’s official journal on musical events, *Bulgarska Musica*, as well as in a number of newspapers. The following reveals K. Iliev’s reflection on this period:

Since we were all so used to conversations about the genius of these three Soviet composers [Shostakovich, Prokofiev and Khachaturian], and there was almost no concert that would not have a piece from one of them on the program; since we all had it non stop hammered in our heads that those were the supreme products of the Soviet musical style, it all of a sudden turned out that they were in fact ideological enemies.

This would have been all right, provided that the Bulgarian music world had kept its dignity. ... It was then that our enichari⁷ got organized and demonstrated a kind of “dutiful responsibility” that was unheard of either in the Czech Republic, or in Hungary, not to mention Poland.⁸

In 1956, following Nikita Khrushchev’s example, the Bulgarian Communist Party condemned Chervenkov’s personality cult during its April plenum. Chervenkov stepped down from power and Todor Zhivkov was appointed First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, which was the highest position in the Party. There was hope and excitement within the intellectual circles that a few fundamental changes would take place, such as more freedom of speech, increased contact with western countries and greater liberty in the arts. This atmosphere of hope lasted until the Hungarian revolt in October 1956. After the bloodshed, the political situation in Bulgaria and other socialist countries changed for the worse for many people. Once again, people who were of “doubtful origin,” that is directly related to former factory owners, or any other influential groups in Bulgarian society prior to September 9 of 1944, were banned from post-high-school educational institutions. Once again, many people ended up in concentration camps, the very existence of which was officially denied by the government.

In 1961, Zhivkov assumed full power as a head of the Bulgarian Communist Party and the government. He established very close connections with Khrushchev and assured the latter that Bulgaria would not make the mistake the Hungarians made. He managed to create the illusion of trying to get closer to the intelligentsia and the artists by slightly liberalizing

⁷ During the Ottoman dominance, young boys from the dominated ethnic groups were frequently taken to fill in for a special branch of the Ottoman army. Many historians observed that when these boys became grown-up soldiers, they were on average crueler to the minorities they were taken from, than the Ottoman soldiers themselves. Iliev here refers to certain composers and musicologists who during those years would readily serve the ideological purposes of the Bulgarian Communist Party by unjustly criticizing their colleagues on a purely ideological, rather than professional basis. Konstantin Iliev, *Slovo I delo* (Word and Deed), comp. Valentina Ilieva, ed. Kipriana Belivanova (Sofia: LIK Publishing House, 1997), 241. Translation by A. Dotcheva.

⁸ Konstantin Iliev, *Slovo i delo* (Word and Deed), comp. Valentina Ilieva, ed. Kipriana Belivanova (Sofia: LIK Publishing House, 1997), 241.

censorship. In fact, however, the pressure was still there. The newspapers always said the same things, movies were banned if they did not convey enough optimism, and decadent artists and writers contemplating real-life issues such as death or starvation were not allowed to show or publish their works anywhere.

In the musical world, things changed slightly for the better, in the sense that composers who preferred to write their music with less conservative and for that matter newer contemporary means, were not so severely criticized in the press by the Communist Party. Their works, however, were barely performed if at all. To illustrate how far behind Bulgaria was from the rest of the cultural world, I would like to give as examples several Bulgarian premieres of works by twentieth-century classics such as Schoenberg, Bartók, Stravinsky, Honegger and Messiaen. These are very few examples of compositions premiered by Konstantin Iliev while he was the musical director of the Varna State Symphony Orchestra, and later on of the Sofia State Philharmonic. Thanks to his broader worldview than those previously in charge of the UBC until the 1980s, these and other works were finally performed on Bulgarian stage for the very first time. Here are some of the most famous works: Schoenberg's *Variations for Orchestra*—1967; Bartók's *Concerto for Orchestra*—1954, *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celeste*—1969; Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*—1962, *Symphony in Three Movements*—1963, *Dumbarton Oaks*—1971, *Symphony of Psalms*—1972; Honegger's *Fifth Symphony*—1957, *Third Symphony*—1961, *Fourth Symphony*—1969, Messiaen's *Turangalîla Symphony*—1963 (this piece has not been performed in Bulgaria ever since), *Meditations*—1977, etc.⁹ Needless to say, performing music by contemporaries such as Stockhausen, Boulez or Ligeti at the time remained wishful thinking by a handful of progressive musicians.

⁹ Ibid., *Conducting chronology*, 443-78.

In the early 1970s, the new term “European provincialism” was to be pejoratively applied by the party-activist composers to their colleagues who employed serial, aleatoric, cluster, or any compositional techniques from post-World War II Western Europe in their works. This term implied that the composers in question were using techniques as old as World War II (almost thirty years old), thus acting as residents of a remote province of Europe. This was an oversimplification of the fact that in post-war Bulgaria, there were never normal learning conditions, nor was ever enough information available about the newest trends in the music of Europe, and composers such as Iliev, Nikolov, Tutev, Spassov, Kazandjiev, Christoff, Pironkov, and later on Georgi Mintchev, Plamen Djurov, Stefan Dragostinov, Emil Tabakov, Bojidar Spassov, Alexander Kandov and so on. Those who were interested in these trends had to either count on chance radio broadcasts of performances outside of Bulgaria, thus enabling imitation of the music by ear, or reliance on close friends or relatives traveling abroad to bring recordings of new music back to Bulgaria. A normal learning process of new music never took place in the educational system of the Bulgarian Music Academy. In fact, in 2005, the entire correspondence between Iliev and Nikolov, which started in the late 1940s and continued up to the mid-80s, was published in a book called *Pisma*, Bulgarian for “letters.” Many of these letters testify to the incredible hurdles these two musicians went through to learn about Western music and then to try to find their own places in this big picture. Composers in Czechoslovakia or Poland, for instance, were capable of getting the desired information long before Bulgarian composers, and therefore could learn and absorb contemporary compositional trends in more regular and consistent step with the rest of Europe. Also, in the case of Czechoslovakia, the more open political system in the late 1960s until the Prague events in the spring of 1968, and the fact

that Prague and Vienna are only 155 miles apart inarguably helped this country to have closer contacts with current cultural events.

Romania was nother former socialist country that could be given as an example of having composers who, in spite of a horrible dictatorship, made everything possible to acquaint their students and young colleagues to modern Western music. Composers such as Anatol Vieru, Tiberiu Olah or Myriam Marbe, contemporaries of the third generation of Bulgarian composers, managed to transmit their knowledge, to the younger generations, keeping them completely updated with current musical events on the world's cultural scene.

Though the Communist regime was a substantial hindrance in the paths of the third generation composers, there was another substantial factor to blame here, that being the extreme conservatism of most of the second-generation composers in charge of the Union of Bulgarian Composers from the 1940s through the mid-80s. The history of the UBC within this timeframe was for the most part one of conservative and unimaginative leadership, imposing extremely outdated and narrow standards to the new members. In this sense it can be said that the political pressure was only one side of the situation. The other side was simply an outstanding reluctance on behalf of the leading second-generation composers to accept and absorb novelty, and to be open-minded in a time when their culture desperately needed open-mindedness.

CHAPTER 2. BIOGRAPHY

Lazar Nikolov was born on August 26, 1922, in Burgas, Bulgaria. His father, Kosta Nikolov, was an economist who studied finance at the University of Freiburg in Germany. He was also a devout amateur violinist. His mother, Elena Nikolova, was a graduate from the American College in Bulgaria. By the time Lazar Nikolov first started piano lessons, his older brother Nikola Nikolov was already a promising piano and oboe player. He eventually studied engineering in Berlin.

Kosta Nikolov was one of the city's most prominent cultural activists from around 1910 up to the mid-1940s. After World War I, he helped in the formation of the first symphony orchestra in Burgas and was its concertmaster. The orchestra musicians played without any compensation. Most of them were amateurs and had jobs outside of music. Their rehearsals were each about four hours long and took place twice in a week. Works from the Classical and Romantic eras were the core of their repertoire. Pieces like Schubert's *Seventh Symphony* in C Major (*The Great*), J.S. Bach's *Piano Concerto* in F Minor (performed by Nikola Nikolov), and movements from Handel's *Messiah* were premiered in Bulgaria by that same orchestra. The most famous Bulgarian singers and instrumentalists at the time were regular guest artists. The citizens of Burgas prided themselves to be among the most supportive music lovers in their country.

Since the age of four, Lazar Nikolov attended the orchestral rehearsals. In a few years, he got acquainted with more than sixty major works from the symphonic repertoire. At the age of ten, he started regular piano lessons under Antoaneta Yancheva, a friend of his mother's. Eight years later, in 1940, he performed Beethoven's *Third Piano Concerto* in C Minor with the Burgas Symphony Orchestra. The next year, at the concert for the 150th anniversary of Mozart's

death, Lazar Nikolov played the *Piano Concerto* in D Major K. 537 (*Coronation*). His contemporaries remarked on his unusual instrumental talent:

Lazar Nikolov was an extraordinary pianist. He used to play Beethoven in a remarkable way; he performed phenomenally his own *Piano Concerto*. This was in 1949-50. You may hear the recording of his *First Piano Sonata* played by him and think you are listening to someone from the best players of the century.¹⁰

In the late 1920s, the great Bulgarian pianist and composer Dimitar Nenov, a regular guest artist with the Burgas Symphony, befriended Kosta Nikolov's family. Young Lazar was extremely fascinated with Nenov's musicianship and erudition. In 1942 he became one of Nenov's piano students at the State Academy of Music in Sofia (the name of which was to be changed to Bulgarian State Conservatory by the communist regime in 1944). At that time Nikolov wanted to pursue a career as a solo pianist. He had already begun composing in 1938, at the age of sixteen. Later on, when asked about the contemporary composers he knew back then, he used to remember:

I was interested in Bulgarian composers who were famous at the time, especially those whose works were published, like Pancho Vladigerov and Vesselin Stoyanov. I knew the names of foreign composers very well, but because of the war and my isolation I couldn't get any music or scores of their works.¹¹

At the Music Academy, Nikolov met composer and conductor Konstantin Iliev, with whom he shared musical ideas and concerns until the latter's death in 1988. Among his other close friends were composers Georgi Tutev and Alexander Raichev, conductor Dobrin Petkov, and violinist Georgi Bliznev, who became one of his most devoted performers.

In the early 1940s, there were a few concert institutions in Sofia whose performances were regularly attended by Nikolov and his friends. The Royal Symphony Orchestra, with music

¹⁰ Georgui Bliznev, interview by Anguelina Petrova, 1999; quoted in Anguelina Petrova, *Kompozitorat Lazar Nikolov* (The Composer Lazar Nikolov) (Sofia: Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, 2003), 23. Translation by A. Dotcheva.

¹¹ Konstantin Iliev, *Lazar Nikolov* (Plovdiv: Act Music Publishing House, 2002), 15. Translation by A. Dotcheva.

director Sasha Popov, used to give concerts once a month. There were new pieces by Bulgarian composers on almost all of their programs. Sasha Popov particularly liked the music of Vladigerov, Stoyanov, and Petko Staynov. Works by Pipkov and Koutev appeared in his repertoire very rarely. The Opera Orchestra, called at that time “Philharmonic”, was said to be the Royal Symphony’s competitor, even though it gave less concerts than the Royal Symphony, and mostly under different conductors. The Avramov String Quartet performed contemporary Bulgarian music on a regular basis, as did also the Nenov-Obreshkov-Popov Piano Trio.¹² The Avramov String Quartet inspired many Bulgarian composers to produce pieces in that genre.¹³ The Contemporary Music Society gave about three concerts per season, which were of particular value to the young composers. The founders of the CMS (Vladigerov, Stoyanov, Pipkov and Nenov) were regarded as “avant-gardists” at that time and the audience perceived their music as “extremely modern”. This in turn would provoke the public’s anger sometimes, as well as the genuine enthusiasm of the young musicians.¹⁴

Iliev and Raychev convinced Nikolov to join the composition studio of Pancho Vladigerov, who was the only official professor in composition at the Academy at the time. Very soon Nikolov realized that he could not be satisfied with Vladigerov’s conservative musical taste: the only composers profoundly respected and nearly worshipped by the latter were Wagner and Richard Strauss. Nikolov felt Wagner’s and Strauss’s aesthetics to be completely alien to him. He shared his early compositions with Dimitar Nenov through all the years he studied piano with him. Their creative exchange started in 1940 and lasted for about nine years. Their contact diminished after 1949: a time when Nikolov’s stylistic direction was becoming radically

¹² The full names of the Academy Trio’s members are Hristo Obreshkov-violin, Konstantin Popov-cello, and Dimitar Nenov-piano.

¹³ Iliev, *Lazar Nikolov*, 17.

¹⁴ Ibid.

different, resisting tonality and the use of folklore. As a composer who always seemed reluctant to subscribe to completely atonal writing, Nenov most likely was disturbed by the new tendencies in the works of his young student Nikolov.

The aggressiveness of the traditionalists, put in an ideological context, is something fundamentally different from the reaction of Nenov, the aesthetician. This whole situation of undertaking an ideological assault [by the government] on one hand, and the “silence” of Nenov, which is the latter’s peculiar way to “confront” the dissolution of tonality, on the other, creates a special territory [for Nikolov.] Its rulers are loneliness and withdrawal, in which Nikolov achieves his aesthetical goals.

In that sense, the spiritual dialogue between Nikolov and Nenov cannot be and has never been interrupted. After all, the modernistic domain of Nenov finds a form of further continuation through the explorations of Nikolov. This way, in spite of the silence that has come between them, the connecting thread still remains. The dedication of the *First Symphony* to Nenov is a fact of a symbolic meaning:¹⁵ “On Sunday afternoon, August 30, 1953, I finished in piano form my *Third Symphony*. Later on it became my *First*. ... The same evening I got a telegram from Konstantin Iliev, saying that Dimitar Nenov had passed away. This is why I decided to dedicate this symphony to him.”¹⁶

Konstantin Iliev described the situation at the Music Academy with a mixture of bitterness and irony:

In fact not just me, but none of our peer-students had the slightest idea about the developments of contemporary music; we knew the names of Schoenberg, Hindemith, Stravinsky, Bartók, Shostakovich and Prokofiev only from reading them in Kamburov’s *Encyclopedia*, or from some random, vague and unreliable sources. The present-day situation at the Conservatory is not much different from the one in the years when I was a student. The twelve-note writing, which fulfilled its role so long ago, is still not supposed to be talked about because of its ideological harmfulness. Aleatory is still a word that our professors struggle to pronounce. The works of Boulez, Stockhausen, Nono, Berio and others are as unfamiliar today as were those of their predecessors in my youth. There is only a difference in the opportunities to get informed, and mostly in the students’ talent and culture. In fact, upon graduation from the conservatory, each young composer starts following the path of a teacher they chose, and whom they never met personally.¹⁷

In the fall of 1944, Iliev came up with the idea of uniting a small group of young and progressive composers under the name Fellowship of the Young Bulgarian Composers. In this group were Raychev, Nikolov, Petar Stupel, Tutev, Iliya Temkov, and Iliev himself. The goal

¹⁵ Angelina Petrova, *Kompozitorat Lazar Nikolov* (The Composer Lazar Nikolov) (Sofia: Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, 2003), 34. Translation by A. Dotcheva.

¹⁶ Lazar Nikolov, Autobiographical writings 3, manuscript from Nikolov’s personal archive; quoted in Petrova, 34.

¹⁷ Iliev, *Slovo i delo*, 196.

of the Fellowship was to promote the music of its members, who were quite diverse in their creative interests. They also wanted to “break through” the barrier that they felt their older colleagues were trying to erect between them and the musical audience. They started concertizing around the country, playing their own music, especially those of them who were pianists, like Nikolov and Raychev. In the beginning, Iliev played some of the violin parts.

In the fall of 1945, the Fellowship of the Young Bulgarian Composers merged into the Union of the Bulgarian Composers (UBC) as a Youth Section. Although the young members were allowed to use the rooms and concert hall of the Union’s building, as well as to be present at the meetings of their older colleagues, they did not have “full rights.” They were not allowed to vote at the discussions but only to participate. In his memoirs, Iliev wrote that shortly after the young composers joined the Union founded by the older generation, the latter gave the impression of being genuinely interested in their works.¹⁸ In December of the same year they organized the first formal discussion of works by Raychev and Iliev himself. However, he was not sure about the real purpose of that meeting, as well as of many other meetings to follow: the whole arrangement of an event like the Fellowship joining the Union could well have been the older generation’s way to keep a close eye on the young composers’ work, especially in the years that followed, when everything was measured through strictly ideological standards.¹⁹ Eventually, in 1947 the members of the Youth Section got accepted as “full” members of UBC, with full rights and responsibilities.

Nikolov graduated in piano under Nenov in 1946, and unofficially in composition under Vladigerov in 1947. The last time he gave a public piano performance was at his graduation concert in 1946, playing Liszt’s *Mephisto Waltz*. He felt that he couldn’t bear the

¹⁸ Ibid., 24.

¹⁹ Ibid.

stage pressure, and also he was frequently sick in general. Later on he shared in a letter to Iliev that he deeply regretted not having contact with live music.²⁰ For his graduation in composition the next year, Nikolov presented his *Suite for Orchestra*, performed by the State Academy Symphony Orchestra under Dobrin Petkov.

Konstantin Iliev spent the 1946/47 season in Prague, studying composition under Jaroslav Řídký and attending microtonal composition classes under Alois Hába. When he came back to Bulgaria, an intense correspondence started between him and Nikolov, since Iliev had moved to Ruse to assume new conducting post. The two of them were already looking for radically new methods of musical composition.

We could not really get influenced by the West, since we didn't maintain any contacts with it. Regretfully, this change in our work coincided with the publication of the decree from 1948 by the Communist party. It could not be emphasized enough that the new path in our work was not a reaction to the decree, less so an ideological reaction. It was a mere coincidence. From then on our development was pointed to a direction quite different from the officially accepted one, but we never sought for it as a means to express revolt or protest against the ideology.²¹

The year was 1948, the year of the decree of VKP,²² which determined the path of musical creativity for decades ahead in the so-called socialist countries. We stopped using or imitating elements from our folk music. The first to do so was Konstantin Iliev with his *First String Quartet*, *Divertimento for Orchestra*, *Concerto Grosso*, and all the works to follow. I joined him eight or nine months later with my *Concerto for String Orchestra*.²³

For the next ten years Nikolov worked as an accompanist for various musical institutions, suffering through bad health and pressure from unsatisfactory work conditions. After the friendly reception of the *Suite* in 1947, the *First Piano Concerto* in 1948 (premiered the next year by the composer himself with Iliev as a conductor) followed. The author made it clear that he had gotten over the influence of Vladigerov, by carefully avoiding the stylistic characteristics

²⁰ Iliev, *Lazar Nikolov*, 20

²¹ Nikolov, 29.

²² The abbreviation stands for Velikata Komunisticheska Partiya – The Great Communist Party.

²³ Nikolov, 24.

of Liszt, Chopin, or Rachmaninov, and leaning more towards Prokofiev, Shostakovich, Ravel and mostly Nenov.²⁴ The piece immediately became one of the favorites of the Bulgarian musical audience. Nikolov dedicated it to his teacher.

In 1952, Khachaturian went for a formal visit to Bulgaria. Being accused of formalism himself by the Soviet government in the 1948 decree, he had to comply with the authorities by writing his “impressions” of what he had seen and heard. As a consequence, he wrote a review in *Musica*. Here is part of it:

...A work that proved to be profoundly offensive to the listeners was the *Concerto for Piano and Orchestra* by the young composer Lazar Nikolov. This formalistic and deprived of any substance work has been written under the influence of Western modernism. It is the duty of the Bulgarian composers’ organization to help the young author in his creative reformation, in overcoming the damageable modernistic tendencies and mastering the basic realistic writing.²⁵

The *Concerto for String Orchestra* was written in 1949 and premiered in 1951, long before the first modern works of Lutosławski, Penderecki and Ligeti came to existence. It was his first work to connect him to the modern musical language of Western Europe. It was also the work (along with his *First Symphony*, to be labeled as “symbol of formalism”) that brought him the most humiliation and insults from the official critics, only to become a complete triumph after 1960. Eventually, it entered the repertoire of every Bulgarian orchestra, receiving multiple performances at home and abroad. After its second performance in 1954, both Nikolov and Iliev were once again officially proclaimed formalists. Nikolov’s music was often subject to brutal censorship and humiliating publications. Among other pieces composed in that period were the *Violin Concerto* (1952), the *First Symphony* (1953, revised 1956-59), and the *Second Piano Concerto*. Here is one of Nikolov’s reminiscences from that period:

²⁴ Iliev, *Lazar Nikolov*, 31.

²⁵ Aram Khachaturian *Muzica*, 5-6, 1952, quoted in Iliev, *Lazar Nikolov*, 31.

In 1955, the Polish musicians Kotoński, Dobrowolski and Striya came to a visit at the UBC. I met them by chance. Georgi Tutev was the Chair Secretary of the Union at the time. He made the connection. They heard some of our works. They kept frowning upon the minor seconds the entire time. Later on, in 1956, Serocki was here. After hearing my symphony, which now is numbered as *First*, he tried to convince me that one could not possibly call “that thing” music, and that this is not how music should be written. He was mocking the works of Pierre Boulez, Stockhausen, and the other representatives of the musical avant garde.²⁶

1956 was the year in which the partisan intolerance towards Nikolov and Iliev reached one of its ugliest climaxes. The reason for it was the premiere of Nikolov’s *First Symphony* on February 16 and 17 in Varna²⁷ by the city’s State Symphony Orchestra under Iliev.²⁸ The reviews were horrifying. There were articles implying that the music of Nikolov was imposing moral and idealistic damage on the development of the younger generations of musicians and the public; that the authorities should do everything possible to censor him from writing such dangerous music in the future.²⁹ According to Nikolov, it was the April plenum that prevented these measures against his friend and himself to be taken.³⁰

That was the peak of the fight against K. Iliev’s and my music. ... It resulted in a decision made by the UBC ... not to allow public performances of our works unless censored by the UBC.³¹

Nikolov’s working situation improved in 1957, when he started teaching chamber music at the State Music School and score-reading at the Bulgarian State Conservatory in 1961. In 1980, by which time the political situation in the country had improved considerably, Nikolov had been granted full professorship at the Conservatory.

²⁶ Nikolov, 106.

²⁷ In fact in February 1956 Varna was still called Stalin. Two months later the April plenum of the BCP took place and the city got its original name back.

²⁸ This was the premiere of this symphony’s first edition. The second edition was premiered in 1959 in Plovdiv by that city’s State Symphony under Dobrin Petkov.

²⁹ Iliev, *Lazar Nikolov*, 94-5.

³⁰ Lazar Nikolov, interview by A. Petrova, 2000; quoted in Petrova, 93.

³¹ Ibid.

Bulgarian avant garde music finally got to be heard outside of Bulgaria in the 1960s: Nikolov participated at the Warsaw Autumn Festival in 1962, 1964, and 1968 with *Sonata for Flute and Piano*, *Second Piano Concerto*, and *Divertimento Concertante* respectively. As a matter of fact, the composer was first invited to participate in 1957 at the second edition of the festival, but the Bulgarian authorities refused to let him go.

In 1965, Nikolov began serving as a Secretary of the UBC's Composers' section for almost four years. During those years, he did his best to encourage the younger Bulgarian composers to explore new territories. His successful endeavors lasted until March of 1969, when he was forced to leave the position because of another major scandal between the progressive composers and the politically "adjusted" older generation. By that time, Iliev and Nikolov were not the only victims of the ideologues any more: they had been joined by Toutev and younger composers Kazandjiev and Spassov.

That same year Nikolov finished his first opera, *Prometheus Bound*, based entirely on Aeschylus. Nikolov viewed himself mostly as a composer of "pure" music. Pure in the sense that the genres he was interested in were predominantly instrumental and non-programmatic. He always thought of the programmatic approach to music as distracting and having nothing to do with the music itself. Being skeptical regarding the ability of the listener to hear the words of a vocal piece past a certain distance from the performers, Nikolov avoided composing for voice prior to the early 1960s, when he wrote two songs for female choir and started working on his first opera. Although the composer claimed he did not like dedications because they distracted the listener's attention from the music,³² his work was nevertheless secretly dedicated to the victims of the Hungarian resistance of 1956. He believed in the value of nonviolent resistance.³³

³² Petrova, 123.

³³ Ibid., 124.

The opera was concert-premiered in 1974 in Ruse under Dobrin Petkov. Two more performances followed the same year in Plovdiv and in Sofia, as well as a sound recording for the Bulgarian National Radio. It was perceived equally by friends and political representatives as an autobiographical work. Due to its high technical demands and a series of other factors, however, it has not been performed ever since. Nikolov's second opera *Uncles*, based on a play by Ivan Vazov was finished in 1975 and with the exception of its final act is yet to be produced.

There are two more works by Nikolov that have connection to personal tragic events: the *Second String Quartet "Meditations"* (1970-1), dedicated to the memory of his mother, and the *Sonata for Organ* (1977), to the memory of his brother. From the mid-1970s onward, when the political situation slightly loosened in Bulgaria, Nikolov's were performed more regularly than in the 50s and 60s. Among the other festivals at which Nikolov was invited to present his compositions during and after the communist regime (ending November 10, 1989) were the Zagreb Biennial (1967), the Berlin Music Biennial (1969, 1973 and 1979), the festival in Witten, Germany (1998).

After the fall of the regime, Nikolov was granted a number of awards: the Académie Internationale des Beaux-Arts Paris - Sofia awarded him the first prize and a gold medal for total work and contribution to contemporary music (1992). He was also awarded the *Doctor Honoris Causa* title by the Academy of Music and Dance Arts in Plovdiv (1997); the First Degree *Stara Planina* award with a decree from the president (1997), and the *Doctor Honoris Causa* title by the State Academy of Music in Sofia (2002). From 1992 until 1999, he was appointed Chair of the UBC.

One very important reason why Nikolov's music was sought after and performed in Bulgaria was the composer's continued and lasting relationships with the active Bulgarian

performers. He was also one of the most dedicated concert attendants until the end of his life. He died on February 7, 2005.

Lazar Nikolov is the author of six symphonies, nine piano sonatas, two sonatas for two pianos, seventeen sonatas for a variety of other instruments with piano, an organ sonata, two piano concertos, a violin concerto, two operas, a concerto for string orchestra, and many other chamber, vocal, orchestral and instrumental pieces. His works were also published outside of Bulgaria by Peters (*Concerto for Violin and Orchestra, Sonata for Clarinet and Piano, Sonata for Double-Bass and Piano*) and Schott Music (*First String Quartet*).

CHAPTER 3. CHARACTERISTICS OF NIKOLOV'S STYLE

The friendship between Lazar Nikolov and Konstantin Iliev was, metaphorically speaking, the only institution of New Music in Bulgaria after 1949. Their connection ... reflected on their professional development, yet without depersonalizing their creative individualities. In the context of Western-European new music, their goals differed substantially from those of the so called serial avant garde circle, with its uniquely institutionalized structure: organized courses in Darmstadt, publications, common manifestos. The alliance of these two composers on a common platform was necessary, yet quite peculiar: it remained only in the frame of free exchange of thoughts and music, without a written theoretical or aesthetical manifesto. Thus unannounced, the appearance of twelve-tone music in our country preserved the enigma of the individual creative approach in achieving a new aesthetics and a new musical language.³⁴

Lazar Nikolov considered logic one of the most important issues in composition, particularly with respect to the organization of notes, which he felt should always be based on a particular principle. He was convinced that the dramaturgy and construction of a piece could have an enormous emotional as well as subconscious impact on the listener.

A brief discussion on Nikolov's style, relating to his treatment of the melodic line, his intervallic choice, as well as the rhythmic characteristics and national trends in his music, was provided by composer Dimitar Christoff.³⁵ According to Christoff, there seemed to be three types of melodic line in the works of Nikolov.

The first type was very well known in the compositional practice from the first half of the twentieth century: the melody was chromatic and was all large leaps, thereby creating a sensation of spaciousness. According to Christoff, this kind of melody had often been referred to as a means for strong expressiveness. Christoff detected the following characteristics in Nikolov's melodic lines: emphasis on a songlike character achieved by persistent employment of step-motion with big distances in between the steps themselves; very well controlled hidden counterpoint through repetition of notes or motives, again at big distances from each other.

³⁴ Ibid., 48.

³⁵ Dimitar Christoff, "Zvukovata krasota na Lazar Nikolov," (The Sound-Beauty of Lazar Nikolov) in *Moyat svyat* by Lazar Nikolov, 16.

The second type of a melodic line was again one covering a large range via big melodic leaps, but this time it was done diatonically. Melodies of this type tended to be delicately expressive and graceful. The third melodic type was the liveliest one, based on continuous repetition of particular notes organized in intervals of seconds. This type seemed to be influenced by the Bulgarian folk tradition, although Nikolov often claimed to have avoided such influences.

Nikolov tended to compose with small rhythmic units thrown randomly together. This was one of Nikolov's most common rhythmic devices. In multiple-voice passages he built complex rhythmic motions in such a way that the entire texture sounded like it was glimmering with rich colors. He frequently employed rhythmic accents. Microelements of folk material could be traced in his works through his use of asymmetrical meters, even though the latter were often far more complex in his pieces than in the folk tradition.³⁶ Nikolov himself used to discuss the uniqueness and complexity of Bulgarian peasant folklore reflected in its dance music based on asymmetrical rhythmic patterns, and even more so in the non-measured songs. The lack of necessity of strict measure in music, or the ability to get rid of the feeling of a bar-line, was an approach similar to Nenov's opinion about the way music should fill up space; Nikolov's style later on reflected liberation from regular periodic pulsations.³⁷

With one minor exception, the stylistic categorization of Nikolov's work has been agreed upon by the composer himself and both of his biographers, Konstantin Iliev and musicologist Dr. Angelina Petrova. The exception comes from the fact that Iliev died in 1988 and therefore was not able to witness the last seventeen years of Nikolov's life. Consequently, in his monograph on Nikolov, finished in 1982 for his friend's sixtieth birthday, Iliev does not refer to the years from 1973 to 1982 as the late 1970s and early 80s period, as Dr. Petrova does.

³⁶ Ibid., 16-8.

³⁷ Nikolov, 23.

Instead, he states that Nikolov's work and aesthetics are not yet finalized but still developing.³⁸

Nikolov's two earliest periods have been determined by Iliev and Nikolov himself with regard to particular trends, which prove to be milestones in his overall career. Although Petrova generally agrees with Nikolov and Iliev regarding the first and second periods, she groups Nikolov's output past the second period in terms of decades.

The compositional development of Lazar Nikolov appeared to have happened extremely gradually and deliberately. He consciously avoided any dramatic leaps into random experimentation. Nikolov was famous for his skepticism towards any sudden changes for the sake of mere originality. He remained interested in the "eternal values in music"³⁹ throughout his career as a composer. Everything in his music that seemed new at the time had been studied in detail by him before being applied to staff paper. For example, he was extremely careful with the employment of aleatoric techniques. He wrote some aleatoric passages here and there, however not without a strong direction of line meticulously indicated.

According to Iliev, the only moment of rapid stylistic change was the *Concerto for String Orchestra* (1949), written after the *First Piano Concerto* (1948). This was two years after Iliev had returned from Prague. During this period of time, Iliev and Nikolov maintained regular correspondence. They exchanged ideas on their latest compositions and searched the radio for contemporary music concerts around Europe. Such concerts were not broadcasted on the Bulgarian National Radio.

Those who knew Nikolov's work up to 1949 found the *Concerto for Orchestra* rather surprising and also quite disturbing with its use of bitonality. It is difficult to say how exactly

³⁸ Iliev, *Lazar Nikolov*, 141.

³⁹ Ibid., 123

Nikolov got to that point, since there is no clear documentation about that.⁴⁰ On the other hand, there are documents about the composer's thorough search for means to enrich his musical vocabulary. This makes it more likely for one to assume that Nikolov wrote numerous sketches (that he did not show to anybody) before he finished his *Concerto for String Orchestra*, rather than the new technique being a kind of a sudden inspiration.

The years from 1949 to 1959 are regarded as the first period in Nikolov's compositional career. It started with the *Concerto for String Orchestra*. This was the first work to separate him decisively from the influence of Vladigerov in terms of harmonic language. In terms of form and character of the thematic material, however, the concerto still resembles Vladigerov's approach.

Nikolov wrote eleven pieces within this timeframe. In each of them, he gradually added new elements to build his own harmonic, contrapuntal and formal language. The harmony was based on the principle of polytonality. This principle led him to the concept of non-repeated notes not only horizontally (melodically), but also vertically (polyphonically). Nikolov developed his twelve-tone technique mostly on his own, although he and Iliev got some idea of Schoenberg's twelve-tone system in 1948. In the early 50s, Nikolov read Stravinsky's writings on the formation of his aesthetics, which gave him powerful inspiration for more creativity in his own work. However, neither Iliev nor Nikolov had the opportunity to listen to Webern until 1957.⁴¹ Even later, when Nikolov became more familiar with the teachings of the New Viennese School, he rarely used those techniques in their "pure" form. Rather, he only referred to them in order to enrich his own approach by the opportunities they offered. When asked about the creative methods in his *First Sonata for Violin and Piano* (1954), Nikolov said that the piece was

⁴⁰ Ibid., 123.

⁴¹ Ibid., 124.

based on voices which developed independently, a new technique, which he called “counterpoint construction founded on the twelve tones which have been used more freely.” This helped him to achieve a new type of expressiveness.⁴²

According to Iliev, however, the earliest works by Nikolov that had a close resemblance to Western pieces employing twelve-tone techniques were the *Sonata for Viola and Piano* (1955) and the *Third Piano Sonata* (1955-6).⁴³ These were written right before the *Quintet for Two Violins, Viola, Cello and Piano* (1959), which was the last piece from the earliest period and it is in fact considered to be its climax. According to Nikolov himself, only in the *Quintet* did he achieve the stylistic ground for many works to follow, namely his “pure twelve-tone writing.”⁴⁴ In the *Quintet*, there is almost no repetition of notes in the melodic or vertical structures. All twelve notes have been used in each structure and none has been repeated or skipped, for the most part. Also, the composer puts a special emphasis on rhythmic microstructures. From that moment on, his efforts would be concentrated on the further development of this method.

In earlier pieces, such as *Piano Sonatas Nos. 1 and 2* (1950, 51), *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra* (1952), *Sonata for Two Grand Pianos N. 1* (1952), and the *First Symphony* (1953—1st edition, 1956-59—2nd edition), he worked with modal configurations, building his chords from them and modulating rapidly, thus developing a sort of a “polymodal” harmony. There is a main, basic note or pitch that acts as a unifying principle in all these works from 1950 to 1954.⁴⁵

⁴² Petrova, 71.

⁴³ Iliev, *Lazar Nikolov*, 124-5.

⁴⁴ Nikolov, 61

⁴⁵ Iliev, *Lazar Nikolov*, 125.

In terms of form, Nikolov referred to his *Third Piano Sonata* (1955-6) as a piece from his early period in which he decisively tried to distance himself from the general traditional principles. He called the first movement *Fantasia*. This piece, together with the *Second Piano Concerto* (1954-5) was also interesting for the beginning of serious experimentation with timbre.⁴⁶ The *Concerto* has remarkable juxtapositions of chords in all ranges, as well as clustered and single voiced sections. In addition, the dynamic changes become more and more sudden and surprising, giving this music peculiar freshness.

The genre Nikolov used extensively for exploring and gradually applying his new ideas was the piano sonata. Konstantin Iliev called the piano sonatas the “battlefield where Lazar Nikolov tried out his new strategies.”⁴⁷ When discussing his friend’s approach to sonata form, Iliev stated that one could hardly detect the type of theme such as those used by classical composers, namely a melodic structure, whose microelements developed the form. Nikolov based the formal development of each movement, as well as of the entire cycle, on skillful augmentation or transfiguration of the structures. There are many structural and temporal contrasts, indicated by meticulous metronome markings. These components together determine the sonata-quality in Nikolov’s work. Moreover, Iliev liked to compare Nikolov’s sonata form to the three piano sonatas of Pierre Boulez when talking about relating his friend’s work to the “creative tendencies of the epoch.”⁴⁸

Nikolov started working on the *Piano Quintet* in 1958 and on the *Second Symphony* in 1959. He considered the period from 1958 to 1962, the year in which the symphony was finished, as particularly painstaking regarding his compositional technical complexity. He used to call those years the “strict writing” period in his multiple interviews with Petrova. The method

⁴⁶ Ibid., 126.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 131.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 135.

(very similar to Webern's approach), involved employment of all the pitches over a range of two or more octaves, each pitch appearing just once. Thus he achieved blocks of 12, 24, 36, 48 and so on, pitches, depending on how many octaves were involved in a particular pattern. In both the *Piano Quintet* and the *Second Symphony* one can detect this method. Later on he allowed himself considerable freedom with regard to the skipping of certain notes within a small musical structure.

During the three years from 1959 until 1962 Nikolov worked at a slower pace, focusing mainly on his *Second Symphony* and film music. The *Symphony*, finished in 1962, marked both the end of the "strict writing" period,⁴⁹ and the beginning of the second period in his music, which would last until 1973.⁵⁰ As Iliev pointed out, the new period did not necessarily mean a different aesthetic view or a different writing technique, since such radical changes were not typical of Nikolov. Rather it meant that a remarkable fluency in applying the twelve-tone technique, a very clear construction of form, and an amazing timbral variety were already to be found in his work. Also, with the *Second Symphony* Nikolov overcame the symmetry of the bar-line by creating a "super-organization of the metric divisions." This system had nothing to do with those of Blacher, Nono or Boulez. It came naturally from Nikolov's own musical ideas.⁵¹ The asymmetrical meters in his music served the purpose of showing most clearly the breathing and direction of his phrase construction. According to Iliev, the asymmetrical meters don't imply any association with Bulgarian folk music.⁵²

⁴⁹ Petrova, 237.

⁵⁰ Iliev, *Lazar Nikolov*, 127.

⁵¹ Ibid., 128.

⁵² Ibid., 129.

In the *Fourth Piano Sonata* there are no bar lines, but the rhythmic segments are organized through frequent changes of tempo markings. This music gives the listener the impression of full liberation from a metric frame.

One of the main compositional parameters he was exploring in his second period was timbre. The *Second Symphony*, the *Fourth Piano Sonata* (1964), the *First String Quartet* “*Virtuosic Games*” (1965), and the *Symphonies for Thirteen String Instruments* (1965) among other pieces have been viewed as cornerstones in the composer’s timbre-oriented experiments. In the *Second Symphony*, Nikolov includes a very large percussion section with added instruments, such as xylophone, vibraphone, celesta, two pianos and a harp. There is no doubling of parts among the instrumental groups (between strings and winds, for example), which helps each group and sometimes each instrument to act as a “cell with its own function.”⁵³ This unprecedented intertwining of voices created a very peculiar color.

The achievements of timbral variety in the *Fourth Piano Sonata* have been considered among the most unique in Bulgarian piano literature. For example, one can hear thick chords, encompassing the entire range of the instrument, under the *ppp* dynamic, which, according to Iliev, not only gives a feeling of spaciousness, but also adds glimmering quality to the music.⁵⁴ A tremendous variety of colors is achieved by masterful use of a pedal, as well as creative use of glissandi and strict annotation of articulation and sound quality. Nikolov employs cluster technique through the juxtaposition of extreme dynamics, from *fff* to *ppp*, adding *almost voiceless* to the latter.

The piece following the *Fourth Piano Sonata* is the *First String Quartet* “*Virtuosic Games*” (1964-5). Its form suggests continued liberation from traditional models, as well as

⁵³ Ibid., 127.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 132.

further development in timbral experimentation. The piece has four movements, consisting of conjoined large sections distinguished by their tempi and timbres. According to Iliev, this is another work that reveals timbre as the main carrier of the musical idea, a dominating concept throughout the second period in Nikolov's music.⁵⁵ One can enjoy thoroughly the richness of sounds the string instruments are capable of producing: harmonics, slides, variety of plucking techniques, playing on the bridge, all these combined with the ordinary bowed playing. There are small sections of controlled aleatory.

Evidence of Lazar Nikolov's sensitivity to relevant issues on the new music horizon is the creation of *Virtuosic Games* in a period recognized as the string quartet's renaissance: Lutoslawski's *Second String Quartet* and Ligeti's *First String Quartet* among others come into existence. This is the rebirth of genres forgotten by serialism. This time, however, nothing in their interpretation reminds the listener of the traditional forms and ways of expression. *Virtuosic Games* fits perfectly in the context of that type of recreation introduced by the sonoristics of the 1960s.⁵⁶

In *Symphonies for Thirteen String Instruments*, Nikolov experimented with clusters again. He sometimes used the term "cluster-like sonority" to indicate two possibilities: doubling notes at an octave when the cluster's range was bigger than an octave; and omission of a note in order to facilitate execution, with the whole construction still sounding like a cluster. In this piece he assigned his clusters a pedal function. He wrote out all the notes and took a full advantage of the double stops in strings. In some places he achieved cluster-like sonority via glissandi.

Nikolov shared in his interviews with Petrova that he always treated clusters with some reservation, even if he often used them in his music. He viewed this and the glissando

⁵⁵ Iliev, *Lazar Nikolov*, 63.

⁵⁶ Petrova, 110.

techniques as a sort of cheap struggles for effect if used inappropriately, without being well thought out.⁵⁷

Nikolov wrote two operas: *Prometheus Bound* (1963-69), based on Aeschylus's tragedy, and *Uncles* (1971-75), based on Vazov's comedy. He used Alexander Nichev's translation of Aeschylus for a libretto and worked with Nichev himself at the beginning of the process. The libretto of *Uncles* was a product of the composer's independent work with the original text.

Before the first opera was finished, the only vocal pieces produced by Nikolov were two songs for female choir. Every other work of his up to that moment had been strictly instrumental. Working with the text presented the composer with a completely different set of problems. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the main reason he had resisted writing for vocalists for so long was his conviction that one could not hear the text if seated farther than twenty meters from the singer, especially if an orchestra was involved. Being able to distinguish occasional words here and there was not satisfactory in Nikolov's view, which is why he frequently referred to his instrumental music as "pure" music.

When Nikolov was working on his first opera, he came to the idea of uniting the concepts of drama and symphony. The form of the work is completely untraditional. It cannot be compared to any other in Bulgarian music. Here is what the composer said about his observations regarding the similarities between a drama and a symphony:

The operas of the Classical composers are constructed differently—through numbers. I do it my way, which is a symphonic or dramaturgical way, if I may say so. I prefer this approach, because I believe the numbers tear the action apart.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Ibid., 69.

⁵⁸ Lazar Nikolov, interview by A. Petrova, 2001; quoted in Petrova, 135.

Nikolov achieves integrity in his opera by using fragments, none of which sounds complete by itself. There is nothing like melodic or harmonic structures that function as leitmotifs. One does not hear arias or duets, or any other traditional opera forms here, nor can one identify themes. The elements that form the musical language are the ones corresponding to the composer's interest during that period, namely timbre, rhythm, pitch organization and cluster technique. The composer used the term "sound motions" to refer to and emphasize the importance of the cluster-sonority structures, since there are no leit-themes in the opera. The layering of speech, singing, silence, symphonic and vocal development results in the peculiar counterpoint of this work. Also, the non-stop coming and going of incomplete fragments gives the effect of clashing.⁵⁹

There have been arguments in the Bulgarian press as to whether this is an opera or an oratorio. Petrova lists it as a chamber opera (3 flutes, 3 clarinets in B-flat, bassoon, trumpet in C, percussion ensemble, 2 harps, 2 pianos, celesta, 4 double basses), adding "oratorio" in brackets. The composer strived to conceive the atmosphere and subtlety of Aeschylus's poetics. He accomplished this by dividing the text into four categories: unaccompanied speech, accompanied speech, unaccompanied singing and accompanied singing. In addition, he provided purely orchestral episodes. Nikolov made it clear in an interview that the music was always the more important component for him. As Petrova views it, the text provides only the matter, whereas the music is the spirit in this case.⁶⁰

Considering the current concepts and aesthetics [in Western music] from the 1960s and 70s, *Prometheus Bound* reveals a direct connection with postmodern disintegration of boundaries between the arts—the musicalizing of drama and the dramatization of symphony. It seems like the musical drama and the symphony have driven themselves away from the worn out forms of tradition, so that they have merged their material essences together. We are unable to determine neither the dramatic nor the

⁵⁹ Petrova, 131-137.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 132.

instrumentally-symphonic as first or leading trend in the creation of the operatic dramaturgy of the work: it has come into being by the mutual rejection and peculiar merging of both at the same time.⁶¹

The *Second String Quartet* “*Meditations*” was started in 1970, after the death of the composer’s mother. He dedicated the work to her memory and completed it the next year. Unlike in the *First String Quartet* six years earlier, there is only one movement with different tempi forming several sections. What is also new here, apart from the involvement of larger sections of controlled aleatoric technique compared to the *First String Quartet* “*Virtuosic Games*”, is the liberation from any sense of meter. Petrova calls the omission of bar lines “a most radical technological discovery,” emphasizing that this is a completely new trend in Bulgarian art music at the time.⁶²

Nikolov’s second opera and last stage work, *Uncles*, although begun in 1971, belongs technically to the so-called third period, because it was finished in 1975. This allows us to think of it as a transition between two periods. Indeed, according to Petrova, there are some important documents in Nikolov’s personal archive which confirm that with this piece he considered himself to have reached new ideas and significant changes in his concepts. In reevaluation of his ideals, he wrote:

New means should be used whenever a composer feels the currently existing ones to be slightly worn out and inadequate for the new substance he strives to present. If the author considers, however, that he [or she] is able to express what he [or she] needs through the already existing “old” means, he [or she] will as a consequence create his [or her] work using those. Indeed, if [an author] can still be contemporary by using familiar techniques, then why not take advantage of them? Thus a question arises as to whether each time has its means. Imagine a work being written with techniques dramatically new for its time, but being presented to the audience for the first time several decades after it has been finished. It has lost its actuality, but given that it has high artistic quality, it will live nevertheless. If this work is worth listening to, is it then so imperative to know the date of its completion?⁶³

⁶¹ Ibid., 135.

⁶² Ibid., 116.

⁶³ Lazar Nikolov, notes on *Uncles*, Nikolov’s personal archive; quoted in Petrova, 147.

This comment in Nikolov's archive refers substantially to his own life as well as others, since the vast majority of his pieces written before the fall of the communist regime (1989) had to wait for years to be premiered. Among the most drastic examples are the first three piano sonatas— nine, fourteen and eleven years respectively; *Sonata for Viola and Piano*— eleven; *Piano Quintet*—eight; *Second Symphony*—seventeen; *Second Sonata for Cello and Piano*—twelve; *Sonata for Clarinet and Piano*—eighteen years. While many of his works were too provocative with the novelty of their musical language at the time they were created, they seemed old-sounding by the time they were finally premiered. The comment cited above turned out to be prophetic regarding the opera *Uncles* itself. With the exception of its final act, it is yet to be performed.

There are two elements that are of interest here with regard to Nikolov's stylistic development in the 1980s. These are his work with the text, and his use of collage and auto-citation. Vazov wrote *Uncles* in prose text. Nikolov decided not to change this and worked out the libretto of the opera by himself. He was truly inspired by the sonority of that particular type of mid-nineteen-century Bulgarian language so characteristic of Vazov. *Uncles* is a story about the concerns of the middle- and upper-class Bulgarian around 1876, the year of the April Uprising against the Ottoman regime. The writer and poet Georgi Konstantinov has been cited by Nikolov in his personal writings:

The language is what turns to a considerable degree Vazov's *Uncles* into a symbol of a particular national psychology. Thus the characters of, let's say, Gogol and Dostoyevsky become very close and keen to Vazov's *Uncles*.⁶⁴

In Nikolov's view, Vazov's prose gave him numerous opportunities for experimentation with the musical language. He noted the "melodies" and metric organization had formed naturally by the inflections and rhythmic characteristics of the language. Petrova

⁶⁴ Note by G. Konstantinov on *Uncles*, cited in Nikolov's personal archive; quoted in Petrova, 148.

calls this process a ceaseless asymmetry and game with metro-rhythm. She observes that even though the composer strove for many years to write music that would not provoke any associations to Bulgarian musical folklore, in this work we see asymmetrical rhythmical nuclei emerging in the melodic structure because of the language specifics.⁶⁵ There are places in which the game with metric microstructures reaches such tension that it is impossible to assign any meter at all. Some of those (Act Five) have been notated without any bar lines, a typical solution in Nikolov's music from the 1970s.⁶⁶ These new rhythmic patterns proved to be essential in the further development of Nikolov's style and particularly noticeable in the *Third Symphony*, which he worked on from 1976 to 1979.

The second new element in Nikolov's work at this time was the employment of collage. Its inclusion would have seemed unlikely in earlier years. In the case of *Uncles*, he attempted to recreate the style of a typical song from the Bulgarian Revival period. This involved musical material that had been carefully "deformed" by him. One can hear this approach in Act Four of the opera. Nikolov borrowed elements from the Revival songs' musical language as well as some structures associated with folklore, but every note in the opera belongs strictly to its author. The Revival songs, for instance, bear the influence of his twelve-tone language. When talking about folklore, it is probably more accurate to say 'folk atmosphere', an example being Nikolov's dwelling on seconds designed to create a peculiar "trembling" effect in Act Two.⁶⁷

Nikolov started working on his *Third Symphony* in 1976, one year after he completed *Uncles*. He finished the *Symphony* in 1979. This work is abundant in bright, colorful musical images. It appears that only the words are missing. The composer characterized the form of the dramatic first movement as fantasia or invention. Sometimes it seems like these images

⁶⁵ Petrova, 148.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 154.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 148.

themselves have been born out of words, since one can distinguish so many different characters in the music. One example is the trombone solo. It appears for the first time at the end of the first *scherzo*, and then reappears, playing an important structural role. Its character is predominantly ironic. This idea comes directly from the context of *Uncles*. One could see an interesting development here: the composer changes his focus from the attempt to unite drama with symphony, which was a leading concept in *Prometheus Bound*, to the presentation of his symphony as a drama. As Petrova puts it, there is no story in it, but an abstract instrumental drama.⁶⁸ She suggests that a transformation of themes into “sound characters” has taken place.⁶⁹ The elements that make the structures in this piece easily recognizable as characters are rhythmic patterns and distinctiveness of sound colors.

One principle of particular importance in Nikolov’s work in the 1980s was the developing variation, called by the composer “the principle of metamorphosis.” He referred to it as a leading idea, an idea that ended up dominating his evolution as a composer. It was closely connected with the composer’s constant desire for changing the sound picture. For example, a relatively short musical episode, would very soon merge with something else, a different episode, thus creating a sense of a constantly developing variation, instead of the separated variations from the Classical era. He de-emphasized the interruptions between the slightly differing episodes. Hints of this method could be seen in the *Third Piano Sonata* from 1956, but the composer enhanced it through the years. Eventually, it reached its peak in the 1980s in a series of pieces deliberately called *Metamorphoses* for different groups of instruments: no.1 for Cello Solo and Chamber Ensemble (flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon and harp, 1981); no.2 for Clarinet, Piano and Percussion Instruments (1986); no.3 for Two Sopranos and Chamber

⁶⁸ Ibid., 242.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 243.

Ensemble (1987); and no. 4 for Twelve Cellos (1991). The “principle of metamorphosis” is also present in Nikolov’s *Fourth Symphony* (1984), dedicated to the Bulgarian expedition to Mount Everest. The Union of Bulgarian Composers awarded this symphony its Grand Prize in 1987.

Another trend in Nikolov’s music, characteristic for the 1980s, was the continuous experimentation with collage. That time it was auto-collage, according to Nikolov and Petova, in fact meaning self-citation. The composer stated that he did not approve of citing somebody else’s music. He viewed this process as “patch-work”.⁷⁰ He rather thought that by citing himself, very few people would be capable of detecting the citation, thus making the whole process ever more personal.

The auto-collage appeared for the first time in Nikolov’s music as early as the mid-1960s, in *Symphonies for Thirteen String Instruments* (1965), in which the composer also included several bars from his *Sonata for Viola and Piano* (1955). In the 1980s, it could be detected in Nikolov’s *Fourth Symphony*, which has very audible thematic similarities with the *Second Symphony*.⁷¹ This technique played a key role in his *Fifth Symphony* (1989), which he dedicated to his wife, Hanya Nikolova. In this piece, the composer cited works from various periods of his life: *First Sonata for Two Grand Pianos* (1952), *Third and Fourth Symphonies* (1979, 1984), and *Voice I* (1989).⁷²

Petrova argues that the auto-collage idea is basically about perceiving the citations as metaphors from different “times”, thus evoking a feeling of disintegration and transfiguration of time, which is in fact one of the most prominent post-modern ideas.⁷³

⁷⁰ Ibid., 248.

⁷¹ Nikolov, 77.

⁷² Petrova, 248.

⁷³ Ibid., 249.

Nikolov's *Fifth Symphony* is an extraordinary example of how widely the soundscape and rhythmic pictures can range within a single score. The evolution of each image to completely changed states is part of the auto-collage idea.

Petrova suggested that Nikolov's music from the 1990s to 2002, the year when the last piece was written, could be viewed as a deep process of rediscovery of old values in the context of a new aesthetical situation. It seemed like the composer was reevaluating the entire path of the formation of his musical language. He had created an "invisible thread" that connected his work from the 50s to the 90s. It is quite tempting to associate Nikolov's late music with the idea of a full cycle being closed. The composer claimed this period to be not only the deepest and most mature for him, but also the most radical, as he was supposedly indulging in a fascination with the power of impulse.⁷⁴

Important works from the late period are the *Third String Quartet* and *Lento for Orchestra* (1990), the last three piano sonatas (no.7, 1991; no.8, 2000; and no.9, 2001), *Sonata for Two Grand Pianos N. 2* (1992), *Trio for Violin, Viola and Piano* (1993), *Pezzo Tempestoso for Cello and Piano*; *Intermezzo per Tre for Violin, Cello and Piano* (1994); *Otblyasatsi i zalez for Soprano and Orchestra* (1995); *Second Sonata for Violin and Piano*; *Trio for Cello, Double Bass and Piano* (1996); and the *Sixth Symphony* (2000).

Nikolov pointed out that there was much more "openness" of form in his works from the 90s, compared to earlier periods in the sense that he was ever more independent from the concept of theme.⁷⁵ His musical language was less defined by twelve-tone structures. At the same time, however, many younger composers who were familiar with the tendencies of Western art music from the late twentieth century appeared to find Nikolov's late style rather

⁷⁴ Ibid., 261-2.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 262.

conservative.⁷⁶ Nikolov insisted that maturity and radicalism were finely intertwined in his late pieces. He focused his attention more and more on anything that would produce in the listener a sense of abstractness, generality or even vagueness, or what he called “music for the music.”

When asked to define this idea more clearly, the composer said:

By music for the music I mean such music that has nothing concrete, nothing illustrative, nothing preoccupying, nor entertaining, music that increasingly splits apart from everyday life. This has first been accomplished by the Renaissance masters. The composers from the Baroque and Classical eras confirm the tendency even stronger. In romanticism, there is a pending towards the other end, sensuality and sentimentality. And here [my music] [there is] a strict balance between sentiments, thought, [there] even [is] a leaning towards abstraction.⁷⁷

There was no one particular scheme that he would follow. The music developed in time, not obeying any particular rules, boundaries or barriers. He explored in depth the effect of ideas being presented as mere open fragments and gave his listeners the feeling of something being unfinished or unspoken. Some post-modern theories defined this kind of writing by the concept of “deconstruction.” It was illustrated by a variety of metaphors. It gave the listener the opportunity to perceive the music from several different angles. For example, Nikolov applied to his music the metaphor of a brook flowing through diverse landscapes, such as plains or mountains. There was no theme. The brook was like the thread of thought: it brought unity to the landscapes. In each movement of a given piece, there would be at least one moment meant as the goal of the development. There could be more than one segment at times. Such moments were most likely dynamic culminations. The brook symbolized the postmodern idea of music with no beginning and no end.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Ibid., 264.

⁷⁷ Lazar Nikolov, interview by A. Petrova, 2003; quoted in Petrova, 270.

⁷⁸ Petrova, 266.

The same way Iliev was referring to the early piano sonatas of Lazar Nikolov as the “battlefield for new strategies,”⁷⁹ Petrova called his last three of them and the *Second Sonata for Two Grand Pianos* a “laboratory for the 1990s style.”⁸⁰ Pianist Angela Tosheva, one of Nikolov’s most dedicated interpreters, said that his sonatas were a tale about his entire life.⁸¹

The *Eighth Piano Sonata* (2000) seems to be especially interesting because the composer included in it the only two movements from the unfinished *Sonata for Harp* (1991). An amazing contrast between gracious harp-sounding and toccata texture has been achieved as a result. The composer clarified that the technical capabilities of the harp (a diatonic instrument) would not allow him to compose fast chromatic episodes, since the pedals cannot be moved so swiftly.⁸² This restriction determined the entire mood of the “harp” episodes within the *Eighth Piano Sonata*.

The *Second Sonata for Violin and Piano* (1996) is considered to be one of the most successful late opuses of Nikolov, by the few musicians who have performed it. The author’s comments on the work focus on polyphony and philosophy. From a polyphonic point of view, there is concentration on voices whose relationships are explicitly asymmetrical as far as meter and occasionally tempi are concerned. Each voice moves on its own pace. Petrova refers to this approach as a monologue-like existence of the violin and piano textures.⁸³ From a philosophical point of view, one can again notice the manifestation of the late 90s tendency towards increasingly abstracted images.

The vivid reminiscences of listening to his father playing the trios by Beethoven with friends inspired Nikolov to produce his three trios in the mid-90s: *Trio no. 1 for Violin, Viola*

⁷⁹ Iliev, *Lazar Nikolov*, 131.

⁸⁰ Petrova, 271.

⁸¹ Ibid., 274.

⁸² Ibid., 275.

⁸³ Ibid., 279-80.

and Piano, a work of five movements, to be performed without interruption (1993); *Intermezzo per tre for Violin, Cello and Piano* (1994); and *Trio no. 2 for Cello, Double Bass and Piano*, another five-movement piece (1996). Together with the *Third String Quartet* (1990), these works reflect most of the above mentioned tendencies of his late style. The *Third String Quartet* has one movement made out of five large sections, which Petrova lists as five different movements in the work list at the end of her monograph, even though she talks about a single movement when discussing the piece.⁸⁴

The *Sixth Symphony* marks the climax of this symbolic approach in the music of Lazar Nikolov. The composer shares in an interview from 2000 that without any deliberate intention from his part, it has so happened that the beginning of the [*Sixth*] *Symphony* sounds like the continuation of something else, whereas its ending sounds like music that is about to be continued.⁸⁵ After the 1970s, Nikolov characterizes the genre of the symphony as drama. In the *Fifth* and *Sixth* symphonies, as well as in other symphonic projects from the late 80s - 90s period, the boundaries between the movements disappear completely. This way, we see that the original idea of viewing the symphony as a drama has been transformed into an approach that is considerably freer and more remote from the classical tradition.⁸⁶

During the 1990s up to 2002, Nikolov felt much more comfortable with spontaneity of ideas, and he was considerably liberated from dependence upon structural formulas. His music was full of symbols, which made it powerful in a different way.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 278, 313.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 234.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 228.

CHAPTER 4. EARLY PERIOD: QUINTET FOR TWO VIOLINS, VIOLA, CELLO AND PIANO (1959)

In the period 1949-62, there are several examples of twelve-tone writing in Nikolov's work. He composed a number of pieces, which he referred to as "compositional exercises"⁸⁷ (and which he later on destroyed), in order to arrive at a technical level that he considered satisfactory to serve his aesthetics. Thus he experimented with free atonalism, twelve-tone rows or, as he called them, margins, and finally reached the stage of "strict writing," in which the fusion of twelve-tonal and contrapuntal writing was at its most successful manifestation. It was mentioned earlier in this paper that in the early 1950s, Nikolov acquainted himself in detail with several books by Stravinsky, which influenced his taste and further development as a composer. The main influence from the latter's aesthetics was the limitation or in some cases full denial of emotions, an anti-romantic point of view in music.

There are two basic characteristics of Nikolov's twelve-tone writing. First, while searching for new expression, he never viewed twelve-tone writing as what Petrova calls a historically legitimate method.⁸⁸ This is how he was different from the representatives of Western serialism, whose prerequisite without exceptions was to master serialism in depth, before each of them further took their own individual path.

Second, Nikolov consistently endeavored to avoid superfluity in his work. This endeavor manifested itself in various levels of disintegration of musical language and form. This second characteristic brought him closer to the tendencies of serialism.

It is also important to remember the fact that in the early 1950s, the idea of writing music without the influence of folklore was truly unpopular in the new music of Eastern Europe. In fact many Eastern composers at the time tried to employ their folklore in a modernistic

⁸⁷ Nikolov, *Autobiographical Writings* 3 (Nikolov's personal archive); quoted in Petrova, 59.

⁸⁸ Petrova, 58.

fashion. In Nikolov's work, the wish to reform the musical language of his predecessors, led to the concept of leaving folklore elements completely behind and the creation of a radically different idiom.

The first edition of the Polish international festival for contemporary music, Warsaw Autumn (the first actually, Eastern European forum for new music), took place in the fall of 1956. Lazar Nikolov was present at the event as a listener. It would take the UBC six more years to grant him participation in Warsaw with a work of his own. He was the first Bulgarian composer to participate in this festival. These six years marked the time known as the strict-writing period in the composer's creative life. Nikolov took the opportunity to absorb the newest musical tendencies of the time. Back in Bulgaria, he developed and elaborated on his own approach to twelve-tone writing. This resulted in music that sounded very close to the music of some Western serial composers. However, he borrowed in fact only a few technological means and ideas from the serialism of the West. This explains the inadequacy of any textbook serial analysis when applied to Nikolov's works.

The radical musical language employed by Nikolov in the *Piano Quintet* did not grant it place on the scene of Bulgarian art-music at that time. At the time of its completion, the *Piano Quintet* was barely noticed, not only by Nikolov's opponents, but also by the circle of closest friends. On the other hand, since the piece got its first performance as late as 1967 (which is eight years after it was finished), the few critical reviews had terms like "dryness" and "conservatism" attached to it. As discussed in the previous chapter, this proved to be a frequent paradox for Nikolov's music.

According to Petrova, the *Quintet* would probably not have received a favorable reception in Western Europe either, because of its unorthodox treatment of the serialism accepted at the time.⁸⁹

Lazar Nikolov avoided the term tone row when explaining the principles of his music. Instead, he used the term “margin,”⁹⁰ thus referring to a group of pitches, or notes. According to the composer, he adopted a method by which he filled in margins of two or more octaves range, with pitches that appeared only once per range. This way, he managed to get blocks of multiples of twelve, depending on how many octaves were included in a particular musical pattern. In this way he talked about twelve-tone, twenty-four-tone, and similar margins. In addition, he employed a variety of rhythmic motifs, which he called nuclei, and the parts of which they were composed, micronuclei. (In later works he took more liberties, using as basic musical statements only eight, nine or ten pitches instead of twelve, which were called eight-, nine- or ten-tone margins, respectively.) In the *Quintet*, he achieved a texture in which there is no repetition of pitches vertically, with very few exceptions in the third and fourth movements, mostly when one voice takes over a line that the former voice had started (mm. 54, 65, etc. in the finale), or for the sake of sound color. Parallel octaves and doublings at an octave are not considered repetition of notes, since the pitches are in different registers. This is done also for sound color, mostly in strong dynamic context.

Nikolov’s skillful work with rhythmic cells was derived from the aesthetics of Stravinsky. He used rhythmic, as opposed to intervallic, models. This is particularly prominent in the second and fourth movements, in which the rhythmic segments (or nuclei) from one or more twelve-tone margins appear numerous times in different orders. The composer called his

⁸⁹ Ibid., 75.

⁹⁰ Nikolov, 45.

approach to rhythm and meter in this piece “traditional”⁹¹ because there are not as many complicated rhythmic or metric structures as one encounters later in the *First String Quartet* “*Virtuosic Games*.” The third movement, which has frequent meter changes, is the exception. This same term could be applied to the way he employs the sound of the string instruments here, namely nothing beyond *arco* and *pizzicato*.

The *Quintet* consists of four movements, lasting about twenty-four minutes. The first movement (*Allegro non tanto*) has four distinct sections, in which two different characters alternate. The first and third sections carry a lively, dramatic mood, whereas the second and fourth are lyrical. There are subtle character changes within the sections, which could be called sub-characters for convenience. Thus we encounter short segments of tenderness in the dramatic parts, as well as moments of intensity in the lyrical ones.

The movement begins with a twelve-tone margin ranging three octaves minus a half step. The pitches appear in the following order: G—G-sharp—A—B—B-flat—E-flat—E—F-sharp—F—D—C—C-sharp. These pitches are distributed between the piano and violins. The meter is 2/4. The rhythm in the piano is predominantly one of short note values, such as sixteenth-notes, eighth-note-triplets, sixteenth-with a dotted eighth-note; in addition, there is an indication *marcato* in *f* dynamic, which gives the piano sound a percussive quality. Even though there is no *marcato* written for the violins and they have to play long strokes at the same time, the *f* sign followed by a *crescendo*, adds up to form a somewhat alarming character of this opening statement. The opening is followed by margins consisting of less than twelve tones and a vast variety of rhythmic micronuclei. From m. 5, the cello takes over from the violins, with accents above nearly every note. The other strings enter one by one, each with a *sf*. The effect is one of layers of sound being added one by one. The texture is full of short rhythmic values,

⁹¹ Lazar Nikolov, interview by A. Petrova, 2000-01; quoted in Petrova, 77.

accents, swells and sudden dynamic changes. The articulation is predominantly dotted, especially in the piano (see Example 1).

Example 1. Nikolov, *Quintet for Two Violins, Viola, Cello and Piano*, first movement, mm. 1-20

Allegro non tanto Lazar Nicolov

The musical score is written for five instruments: Violino I, Violino II, Viola, Violoncello, and Piano. The tempo is marked 'Allegro non tanto'. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The time signature is 4/4. The score shows measures 1 through 20. The Piano part is marked 'f marcato' and includes a triplet. The other instruments have various melodic and harmonic lines, with dynamics like 'f' and 'p' indicated.

(Example 1 continues on the next page.)

Example 1 (continued).

The musical score for Example 1 (continued) spans measures 10 to 20. It is written for a string quartet and piano. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major or D minor), and the time signature is 2/4. The score features a dramatic section with percussive articulation. Measures 10-19 are marked with 'f' (forte) and 'p' (piano) dynamics, with 'p sub.' (pianissimo) markings in measures 11-13. Measure 20 is marked 'mf' (mezzo-forte). The Viola part has a 'Sul G' marking in measure 11. The piano part has a triplet marking in measure 11. The score ends with a double bar line in measure 20.

This percussive articulation lasts throughout the dramatic section, culminating in mm. 35-8 and ending in m. 39. This four bar climax is preceded by a three-bar line in the viola, which can be given as an example of lyrical contrast within the section. A transition takes place from m. 39 until m. 47. The dynamics are suddenly softer, even if there are little accent-marks here

and there, but not *sf*. The music in these nine bars is quite similar to the impressionism of Szymanowski, namely certain spots in his First Violin Concerto (see Example 2).

Example 2. Nikolov, *Quintet for Two Violins, Viola, Cello and Piano*, first movement, mm. 35-44

The musical score is presented in two systems. The first system covers measures 35 to 44. It features five staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Cello, and Piano. The key signature is one sharp (F#). The music is characterized by a high density of accidentals and a complex, impressionistic texture. Dynamic markings include *ff* (fortissimo) in measures 38, 39, and 40. The second system begins at measure 40, marked with a box containing the number 40. It continues the complex texture. Dynamic markings include *p leggiero* (piano, light) for the Violins and Viola in measures 40 and 41, and *p sub. leggiero* (piano, very light) for the Piano in measure 40. The score concludes with a double bar line and a repeat sign.

The meter in this whole section is predominantly 2/4, with a momentary shift to 3/4 for one bar (m. 14) and then immediately back to 2/4 until m. 47.

The second section is in 3/4 meter. It begins in m. 48 with a clear change of character from drama to lyricism. At that point, the most prominent twelve-tone margin in the movement is heard for the first time in the viola. The note values are longer if compared to those in the previous section: eighth-notes, quarter-notes, half-notes, etc. In this first lyrical section, this main phrase is stated twice in the cello in mm. 53 and 64, and later again in the piano in m. 71. The cello entrance six bars after the viola, is in fact a canonic imitation, as far as rhythm and certain leaps in the melody are concerned. While the twelve-tone melody is taking place, the accompanying voices play rhythmic motifs from this melody. The whole section has no *sf* markings. The dynamic swells are very subtle, gentle, such as *p* followed by a *crescendo* to *mp* only, then *diminuendo* back to *p*. When a *f* dynamic appears, it is usually carefully prepared by a *crescendo* from softer dynamics. In m. 68, the sole sudden *ff* appears in strings, which is an example of a dramatic sub-character within the lyrical section.

Another transition comes at the end of m. 74. The rhythmic motifs become very short and condensed. The rhythm is identical in the second violin, viola and cello for the most part, and in m. 77 beat two, the first violin joins the rest. Such identical rhythms are a characteristic trend during transitions throughout the entire *Quintet*. The dynamic tension increases in mm. 77 and 79, and the third section starts from m. 80, back in 2/4 meter (see Example 3).

Example 3. Nikolov, *Quintet for Two Violins, Viola, Cello and Piano*, first movement, mm. 45-83

This musical score excerpt covers measures 45 to 83 of the first movement. The instrumentation includes two violins, viola, cello, and piano. The piano part is highly active, with rapid arpeggiated patterns and dynamic markings such as *mp*, *p*, and *mf*. The string parts are more static, often holding sustained chords or moving in parallel motion. The key signature has one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 3/4.

This section continues the musical score from measure 50 to 83. A box containing the number '50' is placed above the first staff at the beginning of this section. The piano part remains the most complex, with intricate arpeggiated figures. The string parts continue to provide a harmonic foundation. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

(Example 3 continues on the next page.)

Example 3 (continued).

The image displays two systems of musical notation, likely for a piano and voice or instrumental ensemble. The first system consists of five staves. The top two staves are for a vocal or melodic line, with dynamics *p* and *mp*. The bottom three staves are for a piano accompaniment, with dynamics *mp* and *mp*. The second system also consists of five staves. The top two staves are for a vocal or melodic line, with dynamics *mf*, *mf*, and *ff*. The bottom three staves are for a piano accompaniment, with dynamics *mp*, *mf*, and *f*. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings. A box containing the number 60 is visible in the second system.

(Example 3 continues on the next page.)

Example 3 (continued).

The image displays two systems of handwritten musical notation. The first system consists of five staves. The top staff is in treble clef, and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The middle three staves are in alto clef. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like *f*, *mp*, *mf*, and *ff*. The second system also consists of five staves, with a measure number '70' written above the top staff. This system includes more complex notation, including slurs, ties, and dynamic markings like *ff sub.*, *mp sub.*, and *p*. The handwriting is in ink on aged paper.

(Example 3 continues on the next page.)

Example 3 (continued).

The musical score is divided into two systems, each with four staves. The top system includes a piano part (staves 1-4) and a violin part (staves 5-8). The piano part begins with a melody in the right hand and accompaniment in the left hand. Dynamics include *mf* and *cresc.*. The violin part enters with a melody in the right hand and accompaniment in the left hand. Dynamics include *mp* and *cresc.*. The bottom system continues the piano and violin parts. The piano part features more complex rhythmic patterns and dynamics like *mf* and *mp*. The violin part continues with a melody and accompaniment, with dynamics like *mp* and *sempre cresc.*. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, beams, and slurs.

(Example 3 continues on the next page.)

Example 3 (continued).

The image shows a musical score for measures 80 through 84. The score is written for five staves: two for strings (Violins I and II, and Violas and Cellos) and three for piano (Right Hand, Left Hand, and Pedal). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 2/4. Measure 80 is marked with a box containing the number 80. The piano part begins with a forte (*f*) dynamic, playing a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes. The strings enter in measure 81 with long, stretched lines in a quiet (*p*) dynamic. The piano part continues with a similar rhythmic pattern, and the strings continue with their stretched lines. The piano part has a triplet of eighth notes in measure 83. The section ends in measure 84 with a final chord.

One interesting detail at the beginning of this section is a very clear character contrast between the piano and strings. After the two bars of solo piano, in which we hear the familiar percussive style from the beginning of the movement, cello and first violin join with long, stretched lines in quiet dynamics. Again, there is the effect of sound layers due to the two instruments coming in and changing notes at different beats. With the *fp* entrance of second violin and viola in m. 90, the dramatic character is back in all instruments.

An overwhelming richness of tiny rhythmic motifs, or rhythmic micronuclei, dominating the entire section suggests that this section functions as a rhythmic climax (see Example 4).

The large 2/4 section ends without transition in m. 134. In the next measure, we hear again the prominent twelve-tone margin starting the last 3/4 section, this time in the first violin. It reappears immediately in m. 139, played by the same instrument (see Example 5).

Example 4. Nikolov, *Quintet for Two Violins, Viola, Cello and Piano*, first movement, mm. 108-15

This musical score system covers measures 108 to 115. It features five staves: two for violins, one for viola, one for cello, and one for piano. The key signature is one sharp (F#). Measure 108 is marked with a box containing the number 110. Dynamics include *f* (forte), *p* (piano), *mf* (mezzo-forte), and *f* (forte). The piano part has a complex accompaniment with many beamed sixteenth and thirty-second notes. The strings play a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes.

This musical score system continues from the previous one, covering measures 116 to 123. It features the same five staves: two for violins, one for viola, one for cello, and one for piano. The key signature remains one sharp (F#). Dynamics include *f* (forte), *p* (piano), *mf* (mezzo-forte), and *f* (forte). The piano part continues with its complex accompaniment, and the strings maintain their rhythmic pattern.

Example 5. Nikolov, *Quintet for Two Violins, Viola, Cello and Piano*, first movement, mm. 133-45

The musical score is presented in two systems. The first system (measures 133-140) features a piano introduction with a melodic line in the right hand and a more active bass line. Dynamic markings include *sp* (sotto piano) and *mp* (mezzo-piano). The second system (measures 141-145) shows a continuation of the piano part, with a measure number '140' in a box above the staff. The score concludes with a *mf* (mezzo-forte) marking in measure 145.

(Example 5 continues on the next page.)

Example 5 (continued).



This phrase occurs for the last time in the viola in m. 156, eight bars from the end of the first movement. A subtle arch-effect has been created by the fact that the viola plays this statement first and last (see Example 6).

Example 6. Nikolov, *Quintet for Two Violins, Viola, Cello and Piano*, first movement, mm. 152-63

A musical score for a string quintet. The top system contains staves for Violin I, Violin II, and Viola. The bottom system contains staves for Cello and Piano. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The time signature is 4/4. The score shows a phrase in the Viola part, marked with a piano (p) dynamic. The phrase is a descending eighth-note scale: G4, F#4, E4, D4, C4, B3, A3, G3. The phrase is first played in measures 152-153 and then repeated in measures 156-157. The score includes the instruction "poco a poco decresc." and a piano (p) dynamic marking.

(Example 6 continues on the next page.)

Example 6 (continued).



The melody in question is heard seven times. Four times out of seven, it is a three-bar phrase. It appears twice as a four-bar phrase, and once as a three and a half-bar phrase, the third bar extending into the fourth due to an augmentation of its first beat (two quarter-notes instead of two eighth-notes). The pitches within this margin never stay the same, nor are the intervals between notes particularly consistent. The factors that unite its permutations (besides the fact that the twelve notes are there every time) are the rhythm and the consistency of the melodic leaps between the rhythmic figures. The melody always has two eighth-notes and a dotted quarter- with an eighth-note in the first bar, with a leap of a major seventh between the second and third notes. Only the sixth statement has a major thirteenth at that point. Otherwise this is the easiest way to recognize this melody, with one exception: four eighth-notes and a quarter in the second bar (the third statement has a half- and a quarter-note). The third bar has more variations after the first beat of two eighth-notes, and even here there is one exception, namely the sixth time, due to

the augmentation of the first beat. Other characteristically large intervals are the two consecutive leaps between the third and fourth and fourth, and fifth notes (see Examples 3, 5 and 6 above).

The second movement (*Adagio*) has the character of a deep lamentation. The dynamics for the first forty-four bars (which unfold in approximately five minutes), range between *p* and *mp*, with occasional *mf* here and there, and only two *f* (in mm. 27 and 36). The sound here is treated basically as a mosaic: voices come in while other voices are resting (or even breathing, as the shortest rests might suggest).

The main problem for the performers is the smooth entrance of each instrument, as well as its almost imperceptible disappearance from the texture, while allowing the next instrument to come in smoothly and gently overlap, without disrupting the flow of sound. The more the players try to blend the individual timbres of their instruments, the more homogenous the whole sound picture becomes, not unlike a puzzle to which has been applied a special polish after being assembled, so that the boundaries between the tiny pieces become almost completely obliterated.

The movement starts with a five-and-a-half-bar phrase in 4/4, which consists of two sub-phrases, each of which is a twelve-tone margin:

1. F-sharp—G—D—C-sharp—E—F—C—B-flat—A-flat—A—B—D-sharp. This margin ranges two octaves plus a half step.

2. E—F—D—C-sharp—B—B-flat—G—F-sharp—A—D-sharp—G—sharp—C. This margin ranges two octaves minus a half step.

This theme is first introduced by the solo first violin. As can be seen from the example, the note values are supposed to be played with a long, well-slurred stroke (see Example 7).

Example 7. Nikolov, *Quintet for Two Violins, Viola, Cello and Piano*, second movement, mm. 1-9

II

Adagio

Violini I

Violini II

Viola

Violoncelli

Piano

(Example 7 continues on the next page.)

Example 7 (continued).



Mm. 7 (with an upbeat) and 8, in 4/4 and 1/4 respectively, form a short transition to the second appearance of the double-margin phrase in m. 9, this time in viola with a *pizzicato* accompaniment in cello, consisting of rhythmic micro-motifs. Another short transition follows in mm. 14 and 15, which are in 4/4 and 2/4 respectively. Next we hear the whole statement in the cello (*arco*) from m. 16. The violins provide the accompaniment during the first margin, whereas for the second margin, the viola takes over from the second violin, which in turn presents the whole statement from m. 22, right after the cello has finished it. The second violin is accompanied by all other string-quartet members. There is no transition between the cello and second-violin statements, unless we count the rest of m. 21. There are two deviations from the twelve-tone pattern here. One occurs in the cello part in mm. 20-1, in which we detect a D-flat and a C-sharp respectively though a D-sharp or an E-flat is missing in the margin. The other one appears in the second violin part in m. 26: F-sharp occurs twice while an A-flat or a G-sharp is missing (see Example 8).

Example 8. Nikolov, *Quintet for Two Violins, Viola, Cello and Piano*, second movement, mm. 16-27

The image displays two systems of musical notation for a quintet. The first system (measures 16-27) features five staves: two violins (top), viola (middle), cello (bottom), and piano (bottom). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The first violin part begins with a *p* (piano) dynamic. The viola part also begins with a *p* dynamic. The cello part is marked *arco* and *p*. The piano part is marked *mf* and *p*. The second system (measures 20-27) features four staves: two violins (top), viola (middle), cello (bottom), and piano (bottom). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The first violin part begins with a *pizz. vibr.* (pizzicato vibrato) dynamic. The viola part also begins with a *pizz. vibr.* dynamic. The cello part is marked *p*. The piano part is marked *p*. A measure number box containing the number 20 is located above the first violin staff in the second system.

(Example 8 continues on the next page.)

Example 8 (continued).

The image displays two systems of musical notation, each consisting of three staves. The top system features a treble staff with a key signature of one flat and a common time signature. The middle staff is a bass staff with a key signature of one flat and a common time signature. The bottom staff is a grand staff (treble and bass) with a key signature of one flat and a common time signature. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings. The first system includes the marking 'pizz. vibr.' (pizzicato vibrato) in the middle staff. The second system includes the markings 'arco' (arco) and 'pizz. vibr.' (pizzicato vibrato) in the middle staff, and 'mf' (mezzo-forte) in the bottom staff. The dynamics 'mf' (mezzo-forte) and 'f' (forte) are also present in the first system. The notation is written in a clear, legible style, typical of a musical score.

It is important to remember that, as in the first movement, the pitches have no consistent relationship from one thematic presentation to the next. Certain leaps are kept relatively intact. Although at times the theme appears to be in inversion, a careful analysis of its intervals disproves that impression. The consistent factor in each next appearance of this two-part phrase is the rhythm. The first sub-phrase has its peculiar grouping of notes and so does the

second one. The positions of their rhythmic motifs help us recognize them. The first margin consists of five rhythmic motifs, which are almost always separated by four different rhythmic motifs of rests. The second margin consists of four rhythmic motifs of notes, and three rhythmic motifs of rests.

Once the initial phrase or theme has been played by all the strings, a rather complicated canonic development starts from m. 28. There is a hint of the canon to come in the second, third and fourth thematic statements. If we look at each appearance of the very last rhythmic motif of the second sub-phrase, we see that it is the only audibly varying component (the other differing detail is the rest motif between the fourth and fifth rhythmical micronuclei of the first margin). This variation is only noticeable from looking at the score. Originally, that last, fourth rhythmic motif of the second twelve-tone margin (or sub-phrase) has two eighth- notes surrounded by two eighth-note-rests (m. 6, see Example 7 above). In the viola statement this same motif is made of two quarter-notes, with the rests surrounding it also augmented to quarters (m. 14, see Example 9).

Example 9. Nikolov, *Quintet for Two Violins, Viola, Cello and Piano*, second movement, mm. 13-5

The cello then plays the motif as an eighth-and a quarter-note with non-augmented rests (m. 21, see Example 8 above). Finally, the second violin has two quarter-notes and augmented rests in m. 27 (see again Example 8 above). Another factor suggesting that something different is coming is the *crescendo* to *f* in the violins in m. 27, the first micro-climax in the movement. The accent in the cello at the end of the same bar is also a new gesture.

In m. 28, the beginning of the canonic development, we hear the second twelve-tone margin in augmentation times two, still in the second violin. The viola (second sixteenth-note from the second beat of the same bar), and first violin (second beat of m. 29) follow with the same margin in the original rhythm. The cello comes in a sixteenth-note after first violin in m. 29, offering the same margin in a different rhythmic permutation: we hear the motifs in 3-4-1-2-order. Then in m. 32, the first violin, starting on first beat, and the viola on third, reiterate the first twelve-tone margin in the original rhythm. At the second half of beat four in m. 32, the second margin undergoes yet another rhythmic permutation in the cello: 4-2-1-3. Things are a bit more complicated here, however. The third rhythmic motif has been divided and instead of the leap in the two sixteenth-notes at its beginning, there is a step-wise motion, typical of motifs one and two. Instead, the latter two are presented with leaps instead of step-wise motion. The derivation of the above numbers is obviously influenced by the rhythmic nature of the motifs, rather than by intervallic relationships. The same problem is to be observed later in the movement.

We have here two examples of pitch-blocks consisting of forty-eight notes. The first one can be detected in mm. 28-31 and the second one, in mm. 32-35 beat 3. In these pitch-blocks, each note appears in four different registers.

In the next bar-and-a-half, the violins and viola play the second margin in diminution times two. Each instrument has its own order of the four rhythmic motives: first violin—3-1-2-4; viola—1-2-3-4, switching the leap for a step-wise motion in motif 3; and second violin—3-4-1-2. This is the second micro-climax of the movement, in both rhythmic and dynamic sense, starting with a *crescendo* at the end of beat three of m.35 and reaching *f* for the second time in this movement in m. 36, subsiding to *mf* by the end of the bar. Within this bar and a half, there is another pitch-block, this one consisting of thirty-six notes. Therefore, each note appears in three different registers (see Example 10).

Example 10. Nikolov, *Quintet for Two Violins, Viola, Cello and Piano*, second movement, mm. 28-36

The image shows a musical score for measures 28-36 of the second movement of Nikolov's Quintet. The score is written for two violins, viola, cello, and piano. The piano part is marked 'arco' and 'mf'. The violins and viola play a complex rhythmic pattern. The measure number 30 is indicated in a box. The score is in 4/4 time and features a variety of rhythmic values and dynamics.

(Example 10 continues on the next page.)

Example 10 (continued).

The first system of the musical score consists of five staves. The top four staves are for a string quartet (Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Violoncello). The bottom staff is for the Piano. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The first measure shows a Violin I entry with a half note G4, followed by a half rest. The second measure features a piano (*p*) dynamic, with Violin I playing a half note A4, Violin II a half note G4, Viola a half note F#4, and Violoncello a half note E4. The third measure continues with similar textures. The Piano part remains silent throughout this system.

The second system of the musical score continues the composition. The top four staves (Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Violoncello) and the Piano staff are active. The first measure begins with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic in Violin I, followed by a crescendo leading to a piano (*p*) dynamic in the second measure. The Piano part enters in the second measure with a half note G2. The system concludes with a final measure featuring a half note G4 in Violin I and a half note G2 in the Piano.

(Example 10 continues on the next page.)

Example 10 (continued).



Back to the realm of quiet dynamics in m. 37, the viola does the same as the second violin in m. 28, namely an augmentation times two of the second twelve-tone margin. The cello and second violin, on beats two and four respectively, play the first twelve-tone margin rhythmically unchanged. In m. 39, second half of beat two, the first violin reiterates the second margin twice, with the following permutations of rhythmic motifs: 3-1-2-4 and 1-4-2-3 with another switch of leap and step-wise-motion groups. The other three instruments join the first violin in canon (second violin in m. 41, viola in m. 42 beat two, and cello on the upbeat to m. 43), again with the second margin, which undergoes some more of the same types of motivic exchange. The canon ends temporarily in m. 44.

The big climax in this movement begins in m. 45, in which the so far silent piano comes in with an explosive, dramatic cadenza, lasting for thirty-four bars. There is a vast variety of rhythmic cells and drastic dynamic juxtapositions, for example *fff* at the end of m. 50, followed immediately by *ppp* at the beginning of the next bar (see Example 11).

Example 11. Nikolov, *Quintet for Two Violins, Viola, Cello and Piano*, second movement, mm. 43-51

This musical score segment covers measures 43 to 51. It features five staves: two for Violins, one for Viola, one for Cello, and one for Piano. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 2/4. Measures 43-48 show the Cello and Piano playing a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes, with dynamics *p* and *pp*. The Viola and Violins are mostly silent. In measure 49, the Piano has a *Solo* section marked *fff*, featuring a rapid, ascending scale-like passage. Measures 50-51 continue this solo with more complex rhythmic figures.

This segment continues the musical score from measure 52 to 60. The instrumentation remains the same. Measures 52-59 are primarily for the Piano, which plays a series of eighth and sixteenth note patterns, with dynamics *mf* and *f*. The other instruments (Violins, Viola, Cello) are mostly silent, with some rests and occasional notes. Measure 60 shows a final cadence for the Piano and some concluding notes for the other instruments.

(Example 11 continues on the next page.)

Example 11 (continued).

This musical score shows measures 50 through 55 of a piece. Measures 50-52 are for a string quartet (Violins I, Violins II, Violas, Cellos/Double Basses) in 2/4 time, with all staves empty. Measures 53-55 are for a piano in 3/4 time. Measure 53 features a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand and a triplet of eighth notes in the left hand, both marked with an '8' and a bracket. Measure 54 has a forte (*ff*) dynamic marking. Measure 55 has a piano (*pp*) dynamic marking. The piano part includes various articulations and slurs.

The examples above and below demonstrate the most prominent employment of grace-notes in the whole piece. They are found mostly in the *pp* parts in m.56, following a segment with dynamic swells ranging from *pp* to *ff* and back (see Example 12).

Example 12. Nikolov, *Quintet for Two Violins, Viola, Cello and Piano*, second movement, mm. 56-7

This musical score shows measures 56 and 57 of a piece in 3/4 time. Measure 56 is marked with a piano (*pp*) dynamic. Both measures feature grace notes (indicated by an '8' and a dashed line) in the right hand of the piano part. The piano part includes various articulations and slurs. The string parts (Violins I, Violins II, Violas, Cellos/Double Basses) are also shown, with measures 56 and 57 containing various musical notations.

After the abundant sparkle of rhythmic cells, a *pesante* section of long multi-voiced chords follows from m. 63 to m. 72. This chordal section is preceded by a four-bar climactic transition, starting with a *tremolo* in *mp*, moving to *glissando* in *crescendo* back to *tremolo*, culminating in a rhythmic-micronuclei section in *fff* in m. 61. This way, the chords appear to follow the climax as a release of the accumulated energy (see Example 13.)

Example 13. Nikolov, *Quintet for Two Violins, Viola, Cello and Piano*, second movement, mm. 58-73

The image displays a musical score for piano, spanning measures 58 to 73. The score is written for two staves, likely representing the piano and a single melodic line. The key signature is one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 2/4. The score includes various musical notations such as triplets, slurs, and dynamic markings. Notable markings include *mp* (mezzo-piano), *cresc.* (crescendo), *gliss.* (glissando), and *fff* (fortissimo). The score is divided into two systems. The first system covers measures 58 to 60, and the second system covers measures 61 to 73. The notation is complex, featuring many beamed notes and slurs, indicating a highly rhythmic and technically demanding piece.

(Example 13 continues on the next page.)

Example 13 (continued).

The musical score is presented in three systems, each with a piano (p) part on the left and a violin part on the right. The piano part is written in treble and bass staves, while the violin part is in a single staff. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 2/4. The score includes various musical notations such as triplets (marked with '3'), eighth notes (marked with '8'), and dynamic markings like *pesante*, *f* (forte), and *p* (piano). A box containing the number '70' is located above the violin staff in the second system. The score concludes with a double bar line and a final key signature change to one flat (Bb).

M. 73 brings us back to the environment of interspersed rhythmic cells for six bars, which are in fact the conclusion of the piano cadenza, as well as of the piano part in this movement. The string quartet takes over until the end.

In the cadenza-section, there are several meter changes. Starting from m. 45, these are as follows: 2/4, 5/16, 1/4, 3/8, 4/4, 3/4 for five measures, 6/4, 3/4 for three measures, 2/4, 4/4 for three measures, 2/4, 3/4 for eleven measures, 4/4, 6/16 and finally 4/4 for the last three bars of the cadenza until the very end of the movement.

In m. 79, we hear the first sub-phrase (or twelve-tone margin) from the opening statement in rhythmic permutation for the very first time. The entire rhythm is totally reversed in the first violin. The second violin responds by juxtaposing the same sub-phrase in the original rhythm from m. 80. Meanwhile, from the second half of beat two of m. 79, the viola accompanies the violins with the second sub-phrase in rhythmic permutation 4-3-2-1 with augmented rest motifs. This is to say that the four rhythmic motifs of the second segment are presented in reverse order. Measures 79-82 represent a thirty-six-note pitch-block (consisting of three twelve-tone margins), in which all the pitches appear in three different octaves (see Example 14).

In m. 83 then, right after finishing the first sub-phrase, the second violin responds to the viola by juxtaposing the second sub-phrase in augmentation times two in the rhythmic permutation 1-3-2-4. The cello comes in at m. 83 beat two, playing the first sub-phrase for the second and last time with reversed rhythm. The difference from the first violin's statement four bars earlier is that the third rest motif takes a beat from the fourth, thus making the latter a beat shorter. The viola responds with the same margin in the original rhythm, from the third beat of m. 83. Before the conclusion of the movement, the first violin reiterates the second margin from

the second half of beat three in m. 83, in rhythmic permutation, approximately 4-1-3-2. As mentioned above, the approximation here and in some previous appearances of the rhythmically permuted second sub-phrase refers to the rhythmic motifs consisting of two sixteenth-notes, which at the very beginning in motifs 1 and 2 involve step-wise motion; and in motif 3, a leap. By this point, it is already determined to determine which group of two-sixteenth-notes is involved in the third motif of the second sub-phrase. From m. 83 until the second beat of m. 86, there is another pitch-block, this one consisting of forty-eight pitches, which means that all the twelve pitches appear in four different registers.

The last six-and-a-half bars of the *Adagio* movement consist of the two margins of the opening phrase given in augmentation times two. The cello starts in m. 86 on beat three, with the second margin in rhythmic permutation 2-1-3-4. The violins join the cello from beat four of the same measure (the first violin comes in and ends an eighth-note after the second violin), with the same margin in the original rhythm. In m. 86 beat four, the viola pronounces a final statement of the first twelve-tone margin in augmentation, confirmed by two last notes (lowest D and D-flat) in the cello. The mood of this ending brings very successfully the association of death.

There appear to be two more pitch-deviations in this conclusion segment: one in the cello in mm. 86-7, in which a G is encountered twice, leaving no room for an F-sharp; and in the final viola statement in mm. 90 and 92, an F occurs twice and an F-sharp is missing (see again Example 14).

Example 14. Nikolov, *Quintet for Two Violins, Viola, Cello and Piano*, second movement, mm. 79-92

The first system of the musical score consists of five staves. The top staff is a single melodic line with a treble clef, starting at measure 80. It features a series of eighth and sixteenth notes, with dynamic markings *p*, *mf*, *p sub.*, and *mp*. The second staff is a single melodic line with a treble clef, mostly containing rests. The third staff is a single melodic line with a bass clef, containing rests. The fourth and fifth staves are grand staves (treble and bass clefs) for piano accompaniment, also containing rests.

The second system of the musical score continues the piece. The top staff (single melodic line, treble clef) has rests. The second staff (single melodic line, treble clef) contains a melodic line with dynamic markings *mf*, *p*, and *mf*. The third staff (single melodic line, bass clef) contains a melodic line with dynamic markings *mp* and *p*. The fourth and fifth staves (grand staves for piano) contain a complex accompaniment with various rhythmic patterns and dynamic markings including *p*, *mf*, and *mp*.

(Example 14 continues on the next page.)

Example 14 (continued).

The first system of the musical score consists of five staves. The top four staves are grouped by a brace on the left. The first staff (treble clef) contains a melodic line with notes and rests, including a half note G4 and a quarter note F#4. The second staff (treble clef) contains a piano accompaniment with chords and moving lines. The third staff (bass clef) continues the piano accompaniment. The fourth staff (bass clef) contains a bass line. The fifth staff (treble clef) is empty. Dynamic markings include *p*, *mf*, and *mp*. The system concludes with a double bar line.

The second system of the musical score consists of five staves, similar to the first system. The top four staves are grouped by a brace on the left. The first staff (treble clef) continues the melodic line. The second staff (treble clef) contains piano accompaniment with chords and moving lines. The third staff (bass clef) continues the piano accompaniment. The fourth staff (bass clef) contains a bass line. The fifth staff (treble clef) is empty. Dynamic markings include *p*, *pp*, *mf*, and *pp*. The system concludes with a double bar line.

(Example 14 continues on the next page.)

Example 14 (continued).

The image shows a musical score for measures 90, 91, and 92. The score is written for a string quartet, with five staves: two for Violins (top), one for Viola (middle), and two for Cellos/Double Basses (bottom). Measure 90 begins with a box containing the number '90'. The first violin part starts with a half note G4, followed by a quarter rest, then a half note A4. The second violin part starts with a half note F#4, followed by a quarter rest, then a half note G4. The viola part starts with a half note G4, followed by a quarter rest, then a half note A4. The first cello/bass part starts with a half note G3, followed by a quarter rest, then a half note A3. The second cello/bass part starts with a half note G3, followed by a quarter rest, then a half note A3. The score includes dynamic markings: *pp* (pianissimo) for the first violin and second violin in measure 90, *p* (piano) for the viola in measure 91, *dim. sempre* (diminuendo sempre) for the first cello/bass in measure 91, and *ppp* (pianississimo) for the first cello/bass in measure 92. The score also includes a *pp* marking for the second cello/bass in measure 92.

In this movement, Nikolov employs a very peculiar canonic technique, which is considered among his best compositional achievements. The separation of the piano from the string quartet creates a very successful dialogue between instruments representing different acoustic qualities. Here, like in the previous movement, we can only talk of culminations in terms of rhythmic and dynamic complexity.

The third movement (*Vivace*) lasts less than two minutes. It is predominantly sarcastic in character. It has the mood of a *scherzo*, but there is no contrasting middle section. The frequent meter-changes give the phrases peculiar flexibility and swiftness. Even though some of the employed meters resemble those of the Bulgarian folk tradition at a few random places, the pitches have absolutely nothing to do with Bulgarian folk music. Nikolov mentioned in several interviews that his asymmetrical meters were employed in the music only to serve the breathing

of the phrase. In addition, Iliev talks about a conversation among the five instruments on the one hand, and a dialogue between the piano and the string quartet on the other.⁹²

One might conjecture some hints of regional (Balkan) temperament in the music. From listening to and performing this movement, the first association that pops in my imagination is one of a possible discussion among several characters, one which is hardly kept within the boundaries of politeness, so it is more appropriate to call it a quarrel. The piece is full of grotesque accents as well as strong dynamics. The main stroke is *staccato*. This articulation is unified in all instruments with very few exceptions, such as the miniature slurred segments in strings as opposed to the *staccato* stroke in the piano in mm. 34-7.

The precise execution of dynamics seems to be one of the most serious performance problems in this movement. The accents are another important detail, since they have to be carefully coordinated with the dynamics. There are many combinations of compositional components in this very small piece of music, and they occur very quickly, too.

In the very beginning of the movement, there are pitch-doublings in strings, as mentioned above. In the first bar, the viola and cello play in unison, followed by the violins in the next four bars. Then in m. 6, the low strings take over again for one bar. In both instrument-couples, one voice plays *arco* and the other *pizzicato*. This is clearly done for the sound effect, which is one of ringing through space, something like a bell sound. In the violins, this very special effect is achieved by having one instrument play quarter-notes *arco*, while the other is playing the same pitches in *pizzicato* eighth-notes. Right after the strings, the piano comes in with two consecutive octaves. Again, in this piece, and especially in the *Second Symphony* written right after it, a doubling by an octave does not count as a note repetition, as we consider a several-octave range of pitches.

⁹² Iliev, *Lazar Nikolov*, 62.

The third movement, like the preceding ones (as well as the one that follows it), starts with a twelve-tone margin: E-flat—D—E—F-sharp—G—A—B-flat—C—B—F—G-sharp—C-sharp. It ranges three-and-a-half octaves (see Example 15).

Example 15. Nikolov, *Quintet for Two Violins, Viola, Cello and Piano*, third movement, mm. 1-11

III

Vivace

The musical score is for the third movement of Nikolov's *Quintet for Two Violins, Viola, Cello and Piano*, measures 1-11. The score is written for five staves: Violino I, Violino II, Viola, Violoncello, and Piano. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The time signature is 2/8. The tempo is marked "Vivace". The score includes various dynamics such as *f*, *mf*, *mp*, *f sub.*, *arco*, and *pizz.*. Measure numbers 8 and 10 are indicated in boxes. The piano part features a prominent descending line in the left hand and a more active right hand.

There are more than twelve note-heads here, because the doublings appear not only vertically, but also horizontally. Horizontally, there are two immediately-doubled pitches, the E-flat when the strings get the piece started, and the F, which is the entrance of the piano, imitating (perhaps mocking) the strings. In m. 11, there is a chord played by all the instruments, which includes all the twelve pitches with only the sixth pitch, A, doubled. Occasional doublings of short notes keep occurring very sporadically for color enrichment.

Rhythmically, in m. 12 the strings play couples of *marcato* eighth-notes, while the piano responds with couples of *marcato* sixteenth-notes. We see agreement in between rhythmic motives of strings and piano in places with asymmetrical meters such as 7/16, 5/16, 6/16, and so on, in which all participating instruments play identical values occasionally (see Example 16).

Example 16. Nikolov, *Quintet for Two Violins, Viola, Cello and Piano*, third movement, mm. 57-65

The musical score for Example 16 consists of five staves. The top staff is Violin I, the second is Violin II, the third is Viola, the fourth is Cello, and the fifth is Piano. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/8. The score includes various dynamics such as *mf*, *ff*, *p*, *pp*, and *pp sub.* There are also performance instructions like *pizz. p* and *arco*. A measure number 60 is boxed in the top staff. The score shows complex rhythmic patterns with many beamed notes and rests.

(Example 16 continues on the next page.)

Example 16 (continued).

This musical score for Example 16 (continued) consists of five staves. The first four staves are for individual instruments, and the fifth is for the piano. The music is written in 2/8 time. The first staff has dynamics *f* and *ff*. The second staff has *f* and *ff*. The third staff has *f* and *ff*. The fourth staff has *f* and *ff*. The fifth staff has *f* and *ff*. The music features various articulations, including slurs and accents, and a key signature change to one sharp (F#) in the middle.

The mosaic treatment of sound, which is one of the main characteristics of the second movement, is equally present here, too (see Example 17). It is, however, harder to perceive from a first listening since events are happening at a considerably faster speed.

Example 17. Nikolov, *Quintet for Two Violins, Viola, Cello and Piano*, third movement, mm. 79-82

This musical score for Example 17 consists of five staves. The first four staves are for individual instruments, and the fifth is for the piano. The music is written in 2/8 time. The first staff has dynamics *p sub.*, *pizz.*, and *arco*. The second staff has *mf*, *mp*, and *mf*. The third staff has *p sub.*, *p*, and *mp*. The fourth staff has *mp*, *mf*, and *f*. The fifth staff has *mf*, *p*, and *f*. The music features various articulations, including slurs and accents, and a key signature change to one sharp (F#) in the middle.

The fourth movement (*Allegro moderato*) is in 2/4 and is similar in character to the *marcato* sections of the first movement. In some ways, it continues the trend of sarcasm conveyed in the third, even if the mood is somewhat darker. The imagined darkness is not, however, enhanced by lyrical moments. Resemblance to the third movement is also seen in the frequent employment of sudden dynamic changes.

As in the second movement, here the rhythmic motifs are treated as micronuclei in the whole structure of the piece, being the most easily recognizable elements in it. Nikolov permutes them as the piece goes on, thus again creating multiple variations of the original statements.

At the beginning of the last movement, there is a twenty-four-note pitch-block, each of the twelve pitches showing up twice, in a different register. The interesting aspect of this block is that it consists of four overlapping twelve-tone margins: first, in mm. 1-2 between the cello and viola: D—E-flat—F—F-sharp—G—C—C-sharp—E—A—G-sharp—A-sharp—B, ranging three octaves plus a major third. Second, in mm. 1-4 in the cello: D—E-flat—F—F-sharp—C-sharp—E—B—C—A—G-sharp—A-sharp—G, ranging two octaves plus a minor third; this is the primary melodic line (four bars long), to be reiterated multiple times throughout the movement, but it is not as easy for the listener to perceive as is the lyrical line in the first movement. Third, in mm. 2-4 between the viola and first violin: G—C—A—G-sharp—A-sharp—F-sharp—B—D-sharp—D—E—C-sharp—F, ranging two octaves plus an augmented sixth; and this is the secondary melodic line (three bars long), usually following the previous one either vertically (polyphonically, which is currently the case), or horizontally (as a secondary melodic segment). And the last twelve-tone margin is in mm. 3-4 in the first violin, cello and viola: F-sharp—B—C—D-sharp—A—D—E—G-sharp—A-sharp—C-sharp—G—F, ranging three octaves plus a fifth. These margins are followed by another twenty-four-note pitch-block,

this one consisting of two separate, non-overlapping twelve-tone margins, which correspond rhythmically to the first and second basic lines from the first block. These blocks are again polyphonically displayed: first, from beat two of m. 4 until m. 8 in the first violin, taking after the cello statement, with subtly changed rhythm (compare m. 3 in the cello to m. 6 in the first violin: the eighth-note rest and eighth-note go at the very end of the line the second time, in m. 8), and different intervallic relationships; and second, in mm. 5-8 between the cello and second violin, the same technical conditions applying (compare m. 3 in the first violin to mm. 4 and 5 in the cello and second violin: the eighth-note triplet is before the two eighth-notes originally and these groups are switched the second time).

If we compare the registers of the latter twenty-four pitches to the registers of the former twenty-four pitches, we will see that the latter are in fact in two new registers. Thus we can summarize that each pitch appears in four different octaves and that the two blocks can be thought of as one forty-eight-note pitch-block. Of course, we cannot be aware of all this technical detail just from listening. These eight bars form a phrase with two sub-phrases, four bars each. What helps us discover the closer connection between the two sub-phrases is the fact that the beginning of the second one overlaps with the ending of the first one. Conversely, what makes them easy to differentiate from one another is the almost literal repetition of rhythmic motifs, as well as the *mf* with *crescendo* at the beginning of each sub-phrase.

After the first big phrase is over, the principal four-bar line reappears, this time in *f* dynamic in the second violin, accompanied by the first violin and viola, also in *f*. It starts now in the second half of the second beat of m. 8, instead of on a downbeat like the first and second occurrences. This makes this phrase considerably harder to recognize by listening. The rhythm is

otherwise literally repeated. There are twelve different pitches, but again, the intervallic relationships are not consistent with those of any of the previous statements (see Example 18).

Example 18. Nikolov, *Quintet for Two Violins, Viola, Cello and Piano*, fourth movement, mm. 1-10

IV

Allegro moderato

The musical score is written for five instruments: Violino I, Violino II, Viola, Violoncello, and Piano. The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#), and the time signature is 2/4. The tempo is marked 'Allegro moderato'. The score is divided into two systems. The first system contains measures 1 through 10. The second system contains measures 11 through 16. The Violino I part features a prominent melodic line with various dynamics (mf, f) and articulations (accents, slurs). The Violino II, Viola, and Violoncello parts provide harmonic support with various rhythmic patterns. The Piano part is mostly silent, with some low-register notes in the left hand. A measure number '10' is boxed in the top right of the second system.

From m. 12 beat two until m. 16 (not including the cello in m. 16), there is a pitch-block consisting of thirty-six notes, starting in *p*, overlapping with the ending of the second-

violin statement. The block functions as a small transition to the next manifestation of the two basic statements. The rhythm in this transition or interlude is mainly one of triplet and regular sixteenth-notes for a bar and a half. For the first time in this movement we see identical rhythm played by three instruments, the second violin being the only opposition, thus helping the mosaic-sound-effect, since it changes pitch when the other parts have rests. The *p* dynamic ends on the upbeat to m. 14 with a sudden *f* in the first violin, supported by the cello in *mf* and subsiding to *p* at the end of m. 15. The transition gives way through a one-bar *crescendo* in the second violin and viola in m. 16 to the next polyphonic display of the primary and secondary lines. Starting in the cello from m. 16, the primary statement overlaps with the transition ending. The rhythmic nuclei are interspersed among the cello, viola and second violin. The secondary line starts in m. 17 in exchange between the first and second violins until the end of m. 19. The first eighth-note in the first violin at the beginning of m. 17 is the one that appears at the end of the statement as a quarter-note in the original version.

The piano enters for the first time in this movement in m. 18. For two bars, together with the cello, it accompanies the two polyphonically proceeding lines in the other three instruments. From m. 20 to m. 26, the piano plays the primary and secondary lines as one melody, in *f* dynamic, which it reaches via *crescendo* in the second beat of m. 19. This is the only non-contrapuntal appearance of the two basic lines, in which they sound like a single unit. The first one ends on the first half of beat one in m. 24 and the second one takes over immediately from there, ending in m. 26. In these several bars we hear for the second time all the strings playing identical rhythm, this time as an accompaniment to the piano solo-line. The accompaniment is very percussive: all the eighth- and sixteenth-notes in the strings have dots, including those marked *pizzicato*. Also, ever since m. 20, but especially in the next transition

from m. 26 to m. 30, there is another example of a mosaic-treatment of sound, for instance in the eighth-notes in m. 26, then gradually switching to percussive *staccato* sixteenths in the next bar, up to m. 30. The exchange of voices is mainly between the string quartet and the piano: another example of their dialogue.

This new transition is more climactic than the first one. It is twice as long: eight bars as opposed to four. There are two significant *crescendo*-markings in it, in mm. 30-32. The first one goes to *mf* and this is a place in which the five instruments have identical rhythm. They have a rhythm that has not been used until then: a sixteenth-rest, followed by two groups of sixteenth- and eighth-note. The second *crescendo* reaches *ff* for the first time. There are two *ff* chords: one in the strings on the second beat of m. 32 and one in the piano on the downbeat of m. 33. A sudden *pp* follows in the strings on the second half of the same beat, ending the transition in the next bar.

Perhaps this whole segment from the piano melody starting in m. 20 to the downbeat of m. 34 could be viewed as a separate section by some analysts; some might go even further back to m. 16 (which is the end of the first transition and the beginning of a new polyphonic display of the two basic lines), and think of that place as a beginning of a new section up to the end of the climactic transition in m. 34. There are three points that support such an approach: first, there is clearly a transitional segment before m. 16 and after m. 26; second, a new instrument comes in for the first time in m. 20, with a small introduction after the small transition, given by the instruments already taking part in the piece; third, the piano presents the two basic lines horizontally rather than vertically. The reason why I am reluctant to call these segments sections is that after each transition the character stays essentially the same, even if there is a change of instrument, dynamic, and to some extent texture. The contrast in character

after each transition does not seem significant enough to call what follows a new section, as in the case of the first movement. Therefore, I tend to call the music after each transition a new segment rather than a new section (see Example 19).

Example 19. Nikolov, *Quintet for Two Violins, Viola, Cello and Piano*, fourth movement, mm. 11-36

The musical score is presented in two systems. The first system contains measures 11 through 19, and the second system contains measures 20 through 36. The notation includes various musical symbols such as clefs, key signatures, time signatures, and dynamic markings. The piano part is written in the bottom staff, while the other four staves represent the string instruments. The music is characterized by intricate rhythmic patterns and a variety of dynamics, including *mf*, *p*, *fsub.*, and *sfpsub.*. A measure number '20' is marked above the first violin staff in the second system.

(Example 19 continues on the next page.)

Example 19 (continued).

The musical score is divided into two systems. The first system consists of four staves for a string quartet (Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello/Double Bass) and a grand staff for piano accompaniment. The string parts feature various dynamics including *mp*, *mf*, *pizz.*, and *arco*. The piano accompaniment includes a triplet in the right hand. The second system continues the string parts with a *p* dynamic and the piano accompaniment with a *decresc.* marking and a triplet in the left hand.

(Example 19 continues on the next page.)

Example 19 (continued).

The musical score for Example 19 (continued) spans measures 30 to 39. The notation is arranged in two systems of five staves each. The first system (measures 30-33) includes a box around measure 30. Dynamics such as *mp*, *mf*, *sf*, and *ff* are indicated throughout. The second system (measures 34-39) features a sextuplet in measures 35 and 36, with dynamics including *psub.*, *mf*, and *ff*. The piano part is particularly active in the lower register, while the woodwinds and strings provide accompaniment.

The next segment comes in m. 34 beat two. Introducing yet another new rhythmic figure, sextuplet, the violins and cello provide an accompaniment for the two lines in the piano and viola, starting in mm. 35 and 36 respectively, both in *mf*. This is a thirty-eight-note pitch-block that ends in m. 39. Ten pitches show up in three different registers, while B and C appear in four different registers.

This block is followed by another one, which is more complicated. It consists of fifty-four notes, one of which is repeated. Five of the pitches appear in five registers, whereas the rest appear in four. In this block, the two main lines are played by the cello and first violin (mm. 40 in *mf* and 41 in *mp*). The piano accompanies quietly in short note values.

From m. 44, a ten-bar mosaic-sounding transition (the longest so far) takes place with all five instruments participating. The dynamics are primarily soft. Beyond that point (m. 53), everything becomes very condensed: segments with cascades of rhythmic variations of the primary and secondary lines alternate with tiny transitions of fast *staccato* note values, which from their part merge into accompaniment-segments. The whole segment from m. 54 to m. 90 can be perceived as one major rhythmic climax in the *Quintet's* finale (see Example 20).

Example 20. Nikolov, *Quintet for Two Violins, Viola, Cello and Piano*, fourth movement, mm. 53-95

The image displays a musical score for five instruments: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Cello, and Piano. The score is written in a single system with five staves. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The music features a variety of dynamics including *f* (forte), *p* (piano), and *mf* (mezzo-forte). There are also articulation markings such as *pizz.* (pizzicato) and *arco* (arco). Rhythmic markings include a triplet of eighth notes (3). The score shows a complex interplay of melodic lines and accompaniment across the instruments.

(Example 20 continues on the next page.)

Example 20 (continued).

This musical score continues Example 20, starting at measure 59 and ending at measure 62. The score is written for a string quartet, with four staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello/Double Bass. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major or D minor), and the time signature is 4/4. Measure 59 is marked with a box containing the number 60. The score includes various musical notations such as triplets, slurs, and dynamic markings. The dynamics range from *mf* (mezzo-forte) to *p* (piano). The string quartet plays a complex, rhythmic pattern in measures 59 and 60, which then transitions into a more melodic and harmonic texture in measures 61 and 62. The Cello/Double Bass part features a prominent triplet in measure 61. The Violin I and II parts have slurs and accents in measure 61. The Viola part has a triplet in measure 61. The Cello/Double Bass part has a triplet in measure 62. The Violin I and II parts have slurs and accents in measure 62. The Viola part has a triplet in measure 62. The Cello/Double Bass part has a triplet in measure 62.

(Example 20 continues on the next page.)

Example 20 (continued).

The image displays two systems of musical notation, likely for a piano and voice or instrumental ensemble. The first system consists of five staves. The top staff features a melodic line with a triplet of eighth notes, a dynamic marking of *f*, and a *p sub.* marking. The second staff continues the melodic line with a *f* dynamic. The third staff shows a bass line with a *f* dynamic and a *p sub.* marking. The fourth staff continues the bass line with a *f* dynamic and a *p sub.* marking. The fifth staff shows a piano accompaniment with a *mf* dynamic and a *mp sub.* marking. The second system also consists of five staves. The top staff features a melodic line with a triplet of eighth notes, a dynamic marking of *mf*, and a *f* dynamic. The second staff continues the melodic line with a *mf* dynamic. The third staff shows a bass line with a *mf* dynamic and a *f* dynamic. The fourth staff continues the bass line with a *f* dynamic. The fifth staff shows a piano accompaniment with a *f* dynamic. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, beams, and dynamic markings.

(Example 20 continues on the next page.)

Example 20 (continued).

The image displays two systems of musical notation, likely for a piano and violin/viola ensemble. Each system consists of four staves. The top two staves of each system are for the violin/viola, and the bottom two are for the piano. The music is written in a key with one sharp (F#) and a 3/4 time signature. Dynamics include *mf* (mezzo-forte), *f* (forte), *mp* (mezzo-piano), *p* (piano), and *ap* (a piano). The first system ends with a measure marked *mf*. The second system begins with a measure marked *mf* and includes a measure number '80' in a box. The piano part features triplets and slurs. The violin/viola part includes slurs and dynamic markings.

(Example 20 continues on the next page.)

Example 20 (continued).

The image displays two systems of musical notation, likely for a piano and voice or instrumental ensemble. The first system consists of five staves. The top staff features a melodic line with a triplet of eighth notes, a dynamic marking of *p*, and a slur over a triplet of eighth notes. The second staff continues the melodic line with a triplet of eighth notes. The third staff shows a melodic line with a triplet of eighth notes. The fourth staff is a bass line with a triplet of eighth notes. The fifth staff is a bass line with a triplet of eighth notes. The second system also consists of five staves. The top staff features a melodic line with a triplet of eighth notes, a dynamic marking of *cresc.*, and a slur over a triplet of eighth notes. The second staff continues the melodic line with a triplet of eighth notes. The third staff shows a melodic line with a triplet of eighth notes. The fourth staff is a bass line with a triplet of eighth notes. The fifth staff is a bass line with a triplet of eighth notes. The notation includes various musical symbols such as treble and bass clefs, key signatures, time signatures, and dynamic markings.

(Example 20 continues on the next page.)

Example 20 (continued).

The musical score for Example 20 (continued) is presented in two systems. The first system (measures 48-54) features a piano part with a forte (f) dynamic and a first violin part with a forte (f) dynamic. The second system (measures 55-61) features a piano part with a forte (f) dynamic and a first violin part with a forte (f) dynamic. The score is marked with a box containing the number 90.

The big climactic segment starts on the sixteenth-note upbeat to m. 54 in the cello, where the dynamic changes suddenly to *f*. From the second eighth-note of m. 54, we hear the secondary twelve-tone line played mostly by the first violin, with only three notes (beat two in

m. 54) being given to the second violin. The piano provides two short chords as an accompaniment. Next we hear the secondary line again in the viola from m. 57 to m. 59. This time there is a rhythmic variation: the eighth-note triplet and two eighth-notes (second rhythmic nucleus of the secondary line) are switched with the two sixteenth-notes and sixteenth-note triplet (first rhythmic nucleus of the secondary line.) At the same time, there are several different processes going on in the violins for these three bars. First, we hear the first two bars of the secondary line in the original rhythm, the second violin playing the first rhythmic nucleus in m. 57 and the first violin responding with the second one in m.58. Second, in m. 59, we hear both rhythmic nuclei, each of the violins playing a micronucleus from each group. And third, but not least important, we hear the rhythm of all three bars of the secondary line simultaneously three times, since its three rhythmic nuclei are displayed vertically among the parts of the violins and viola for each measure, 57, 58 and 59. The eighth- with a quarter-note rhythm (third rhythmic nucleus in the secondary line) is heard in the first violin, second violin, and viola respectively; the first nucleus is played by the second violin, viola and finally surrenders half a beat to each of the two violins; and the second nucleus fills up the rest in the viola, first violin and then again passes for a beat through the second violin and back to the first. During this exchange of rhythmic motifs (or nuclei), the piano accompanies with short chords. Mm. 57-59 represent a thirty-six-note pitch-block. It begins in *mf* dynamic and reaches *f* in its second bar.

In m. 60, the piano plays the secondary line in the original rhythm in *f*, while the string quartet drops dynamically to *p*, playing identical rhythms of short notes in a mosaic rhythmic and sound relation to the piano, as is often the case when providing accompaniment to the latter. Then from mm. 63-66, the piano plays the secondary line in rhythmic-motif relation 3-1-2; the first violin plays the same line in relation 1-3-2; the cello plays the primary line for the

first time in the climactic segment, while the viola echoes only the last two bars of it; and in m. 65, the second violin and viola divide the first rhythmic nucleus from the secondary line between each other, and the second violin ends the line in m. 66. The interesting detail here is that even if the viola and second violin are playing half statements, what forms between them in these four bars is another twelve-tone margin, this way resembling the complicated margin-structure at the very beginning of the fourth movement. After analyzing the pitches in mm. 63-66, we detect a forty-eight-note pitch block, each pitch being represented in four different octaves.

A three-bar transition follows, starting with the piano in m. 66, overlapping with the endings of lines in the cello and violins. Again, we hear predominantly short, *marcato* sixteenth-notes, mostly in *p* dynamic. This time the sound effect is more one of layers rather than of mosaic. The transition merges into an accompaniment by the piano, cello and second violin in mm. 69-72, while the viola and first violin play the primary and secondary lines respectively. The secondary line in the violin is in rhythmic variation (or rhythmic motif-relation) 2-1-3.

We finally get three rhythmic variations of the primary line in mm. 73-80. Since this line does not appear in variation past m. 80, it will be easier to analyze it by bars. As mentioned above, it consists of four bars. Each bar has its own peculiar rhythm, as the examples demonstrate. Thus the first violin plays the statement twice in a row, the first time in variation 2-4-3-1, and the second time in variation 4-2-1-3. The cello joins in m. 77 in variation 1-4-3-2. In the meanwhile, the piano provides two rhythmic variations of the secondary line: the first one in mm. 73-76, is almost identical to the original, the only difference being the rest between the second and third rhythmic nuclei, which is augmented by a whole beat and thus making the whole line very hard to identify in the score, let alone recognize from listening; the second variation in mm. 77-79, is in fact presented like a *stretto*: all the rests between the rhythmic

nuclei are completely omitted, plus the last two rhythmic motifs overlap. The relation between motifs is 1-3-2. In addition, the micronuclei in both the first and second rhythmic nuclei are switched. Needless to say, this kind of variation also makes the line impossible to distinguish in the whole texture. The accompaniment to these five variations is in the second violin, viola, cello and partly the piano, consisting of short, *marcato* sixteenth notes, as usual. The dynamic vacillates mostly between *mp* and *mf*, with occasional *p*, and a *crescendo* from *mf* to *f* in the three bars that represent the first measure of the primary line (m. 76 in the first violin, m. 77 in the cello and m. 79 in the first violin.) The melodic leap in this bar certainly calls for this *crescendo*. In fact, these are the last appearances of the primary line until the end of the piece.

In the next nine bars, the secondary line is heard five more times before this whole climactic rhythmic segment peaks in a giant multilayered culmination, eleven bars before the end of the movement. In m. 81, the piano plays the line in variation 1-3-2. The micro-motifs of the first motif are switched. The rest between 3 and 2 is skipped. The violins (second violin contributing only on the first beat of m. 82) reiterate the line from the second beat of the same bar in variation 2-1-3, with the rest skipped between 1 and 3. This time, the micro-motifs in the second motif (which here comes first) are switched. The dynamic in these three bars is *p*. In m. 84, the line appears again in the piano, with no variation except for switched micronuclei in the first and second motifs. There is a *crescendo* marking for mm. 84-86, which is the beginning of dynamic build-up for the final climax.

The last two appearances of the secondary line are both in *stretto*, especially the second one, which is the most condensed presentation of the line. Both are distributed between the violins, with overlapping rhythmic motifs and no rests at all. In the first case, which is in variation 2-3-1, the second violin plays motifs 2 and 1 in mm. 87 and 88 in *f*, whereas the first

violin plays motif 3 on the upbeat to m. 88. In the second and last case, the rhythmic nuclei are in the original order, but the micronuclei of the first motif are switched. The first violin starts it on the upbeat to m. 89, and then the second violin comes in with the second motif on the downbeat of m. 89. The third motif is played by the first violin from the second half of beat one in m. 89, coming right after the first motif. There is another *crescendo* in m. 88, which peaks into *ff* in m. 89. The other instruments provide a short-note accompaniment for the nine bars in question.

Measure 90 marks the culmination that results from accumulation of rhythmic variations and dynamic build-ups throughout the segment, starting from m. 54. We hear layers of sound, starting with the violins and viola coming in on an accented second half of beat one, joined by the cello on beat two, and finally by the piano on the upbeat to the next bar. From then on, the rhythm of the string quartet is pretty united, the piano being a rhythmic opposition, symbolizing perhaps the end of a long dialogue. There are many dynamic swells, as well as *crescendi* ending on *sf*, enhancing the feeling of a grand apotheosis (see Example 20 above).

The fourth movement is essentially a summary of the entire *Quintet* in the sense that character-wise it resembles the first and third movements, dynamic-wise it is closer to the third movement, whereas in the way the rhythmic motifs are treated it has a lot in common with the second movement. It borrows the most characteristic trends from all previous movements.

CHAPTER 5. SECOND PERIOD: STRING QUARTET NO. 1 *VIRTUOSIC GAMES* (1965)

In the 1960s, the political situation between Eastern and Western Europe gradually changed towards dialogue. This fact proved beneficial for composers from both the socialist bloc and the West, because they were now given the opportunity to appear with their works in countries on either side of the iron curtain.

In 1962, Lazar Nikolov was the first Bulgarian composer to be invited to participate at the Warsaw Autumn festival for contemporary music. In fact, the very first invitation came from Poland for the second edition of the festival in 1957 but at the time Nikolov was neither allowed to submit a work nor to attend. The piece he composed for the event five years later was his *Sonata for Flute and Piano*.

According to Petrova, the establishment of an aesthetical and musical dialogue through this participation was vital for Nikolov's future work. This was mostly true because the musical tendencies and directions characteristic for this festival would never appear to be Bulgaria's "official position" on the problems of contemporary music.⁹³ This way, Nikolov never fully subscribed to any particular tendency imported from the West, never wanted to blindly follow what appeared to be modern at the time; rather, he always endeavored to adjust or mold what was out there so that it would fully fit his own current aesthetical preferences. In general, each step in his professional development has been accomplished through firm rejection of any technological or aesthetical dogma. Petrova argues that this tendency in Nikolov's professional life was in a way a mirror image of his long lasting disagreement and conflict with the political situation around him, which was also largely based on dogma, in this case ideological.⁹⁴

⁹³ Petrova, 85.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

Of interest was Nikolov's interpretation of certain tendencies from the 1960s. He commented at the time that the powerful move towards experimentation such as new timbre-discovery and new compositional techniques was starting more than ever to resemble a race between composers. It seemed to him that the value of a new musical piece tended to be determined only by the sound phenomena it offered. He argued that the main point was missed, namely the work itself.⁹⁵ He also insisted on employing a new technique only when it proved necessary within a given musical context, depending on the author's idea. This way, a new technique would sound like a natural ingredient in the work and it would attain its true meaning, as opposed to being felt as some random novelty, completely alien to the listener.⁹⁶

There are two new aspects of Nikolov's creative evolution during the 1960s: first, the exploration of timbre, manifested most prominently in works such as the *Fourth Piano Sonata* (1964), the *First String Quartet "Virtuosic Games"* (1965), *Symphonies for Thirteen String Instruments* (1965), and *Divertimento Concertante for Chamber Orchestra* (1968); second, the exploration of the human voice and the genre of opera, which culminated in his first opera, *Prometheus Bound* (1963-9.)

Since the focus of the present chapter is on the *First String Quartet "Virtuosic Games"*, in which, as Iliev points out, the timbre is the main carrier of the musical idea,⁹⁷ it is important to discuss Nikolov's concept of timbre when exploring this work. He emphasized in an interview with Petrova that to him timbre almost always had the meaning of substance, rather

⁹⁵ Lazar Nikolov, "Oshte za savremennata muzika i za nashite tvorcheski problemi" (More about Contemporary Music and Our Compositional Problems), *Bulgarska Muzika* 4 (1971): 55; quoted in Petrova, 87.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Iliev, *Lazar Nikolov*, 63.

than a mere superficial effect.⁹⁸ He liked talking about purity of color: there was always supposed to be the right moment for the right color in his music.

This idea matured in addition to the concepts of pitch and rhythm from Nikolov's early period, the period of his "strict writing", where each pitch and rhythmic micronucleus would only go to one place in a given twelve-tone margin, or in any multiple-of-twelve-note pitch-block, as we saw in the cases of the second and fourth movements of the *Piano Quintet*. Thus he justified his insistence upon writing music in the traditional way. In the rare cases of aleatory in his music, it is always controlled, as one will see in the score of the *First String Quartet*. In his view, pieces written entirely with aleatoric means always ended up sounding less intriguing than they would sound if the text were written out. He did not trust the creative skills of most performers in this sense.⁹⁹

Nikolov treated most of his works from the 1960s as experimental etudes. There appears to be an interesting exchange or complementation of ideas between the instrumental pieces from this decade and the opera *Prometheus Bound*. He mentions the year of the beginning of his work on the opera (1963) as a reference point to certain changes in his musical language, such as the employment of cluster sonorities (*Symphonies for Thirteen String Instruments*), aleatoric techniques (*First* and *Second* string quartets, even if less frequently seen than in the works of Western avant garde composers), as well as large unmeasured sections (*Fourth Piano Sonata* and *Second String Quartet "Meditations"*).¹⁰⁰ Cluster sonorities are prominent in *Prometheus Bound*. Nikolov refers to them as "sound motions,"¹⁰¹ whereas Petrova calls the

⁹⁸ L. Nikolov, interview with A. Petrova, 2000; quoted in Petrova, 107.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 109.

¹⁰⁰ Nikolov, Autobiographical Writings.

¹⁰¹ Petrova, 137.

clusters a “new situation for the twelve-tone sonority” when discussing *Symphonies for Thirteen String Instruments*.¹⁰²

When talking about color of sound and timbre experimentation in the context of the *First String Quartet*, one should also keep in mind the fact that this piece was completed almost in the middle of Nikolov’s work on *Prometheus Bound*, which might raise questions as to the resemblance of certain sections in the *Quartet* to timbres of human voices. It is well known that the sound qualities of the string instruments have been frequently compared to the qualities of the human voice in general. Given the chronology of events in Nikolov’s creative life it is even more tempting to look for these resemblances while studying the colorful and rhythmically complicated score of *Virtuosic Games*.

The duration of the piece is about fifteen minutes. It consists of four brief movements. As the title suggests, it explores the capabilities of the string instruments in great detail. Nikolov experiments with the string quartet in terms of sound-color, pitch, bow strokes, rhythmic diversity, metric complexity, articulation and voicing.

The first movement (*Allegro moderato*) lasts about two minutes and forty seconds. One can distinguish nine miniature sections in terms of character changes, which very often coincide with the changes of rhythmic patterns and sometimes with the changes of metric consistency as well, most prominently so at the beginning of the movement.

The sections are as follows: S1—mm. 1-7; S2—mm. 8-25; S3—mm. 26-56 with an upbeat in the second violin; S4—mm. 57-63; S5—mm. 64-70; S6—mm. 70-8 (S5 and S6 overlap by one beat); S7—mm. 77-85 with an upbeat in the first violin (S6 and S7 overlap by almost two bars); S8—mm. 85-100 (S7 and S8 overlap by a half beat only); and S9—mm. 101-12 (end), with an upbeat in the viola.

¹⁰² Ibid., 112.

Even though Nikolov refused to discuss his instrumental music in programmatic terms, it is helpful from a performer's viewpoint to approach this work in such terms. There are two basic contrasting characters to be noticed in this movement. One of them is serious, stable and at times dark, even ominous, perhaps resembling a personality with overly controlling tendencies. The other character is quite the opposite from the first: childishly playful and confused, almost laughing at times, not stable, and care-free. These two characters either alternate from one section to the next, or come together in some kind of relationship within a single section. Of course, one could view the cases in which the two alternate as a sort of dialogue between them (see Example 21).

Example 21. Nikolov, *String Quartet no. 1*, first movement, mm. 1-12

Lazar Nikolov

I

Allegro moderato

Violino I

Violino II

Viola

Violoncello

(Example 21 continues on the next page.)

Example 21 (continued).

The musical score for Example 21 (continued) spans measures 4 to 16. It is written for a string quartet with four staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello/Double Bass. Measures 4-7 are in 4/4 time, and measures 8-16 are in 3/4 time. The score includes various musical notations such as triplets, glissandos, and slurs. Dynamics range from *mp* to *f*. The score includes various musical notations such as triplets, glissandos, and slurs.

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Section 1 (mm. 1-7) consists of two subsections of three and four bars respectively.

The first character is introduced in the first three bars by the solo viola, in 4/4 meter and *mp* dynamic. It has two typical rhythmic patterns. The first one can be seen in mm. 1-2, which are in syncopated rhythm with accented articulation. The last beat of m. 2 establishes the second rhythmic pattern of constant sixteenth-notes without change in pitch, which continues in the viola until the end of the section in m. 7. The pitches F-sharp and G-sharp establish the interval

of a major second. The second in general is the most prominent pitch relation throughout the piece. There is a dynamic swell culminating in m. 2 and subsiding at the end of m. 3.

The second subsection already gives a hint of the end of stability. The four following bars are each in a different meter: 2/4, 5/16, 4/4/ and 5/4. The sixteenth-note pattern in the viola continues in *mp* dynamic, while the long held notes appear in the violins in the same dynamic without accents, as layers of sound: the second violin starts in m. 4 and the first violin joins with a triplet eighth-note upbeat to m. 5. A similar pattern happens in m. 6, with the addition of accents and a big *crescendo* ending in *f* in the last beat of m. 7. The intervallic relation between the violins is also one of a major second: G and A. The D in the second violin fills in the fifth. The cello joins on the sixteenth-note upbeat to m. 7, in *crescendo* with accented long values, adding even more tension. While the *crescendo* is taking place, there are three *glissandi* in the first violin, from A in first position on the E-string to B-flat from the next octave. The *glissando* is a trend in Nikolov's writing that we don't see in the *Piano Quintet*. The ending notes of the *glissandi* are eighth-notes with dots, very pointed. This, in addition to the unstable meter, is another hint of an approaching change. The sound colors in this subsection vary from dark in the lower strings through more neutral in the second violin to bright and shiny in the first violin.

Section 2 (mm. 8-25) presents an entirely new mood in *p subito*, suggesting that a second character is now speaking after the first one gave a short comment on the latter's appearance. The note values become short and very diverse. There are some melodic leaps in the sixteenth-notes (see Example 21 above). The rhythmic culmination is in mm. 22-24, where thirty-second-notes appear in the cello. The dynamics change rapidly and so do the bow strokes and articulation markings. There are both layer- and mosaic- approaches to sound. Examples of the former can be detected in mm. 8, 9, 11, 14, 17 and 25; and of latter in mm. 10, 20 and 22. In

mm. 16, 21 and partly 22, an amalgamation of both approaches can be seen. In the layered approach, the sound appears most often from the higher to the lower instruments. The meter is stable only in the last four bars of the section: 4/4, 3/8, 2/4, 4/4, 2/4, 5/16, 3/4, 5/16, 5/8, 2/4 for two bars, 3/4, 2/4, 7/16, and 2/4 for four bars. In addition to the *glissandi* in m. 24 in all parts, there are harmonics in the first violin in mm. 11-13. The section ends on beat two of m. 25 with a *sf* in all instruments. The 2/4 meter that persists for the last four bars can be viewed as a corresponding detail to the unstable meter from m. 4 to m. 7 when the coming of the second character is being prepared. In the present case the approach of another character change is announced by setting a consistent metric pattern.

Section 3 starts on the upbeat to m. 26 in the second violin and ends in m. 56. It is the largest section in the movement. It represents a direct exchange between the two characters (see Example 22.)

Example 22. Nikolov, *String Quartet no. 1*, first movement, mm. 24-34

(Example 22 continues on the next page.)

Example 22 (continued).

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There is a feeling of drama and conflict throughout this section. From m. 26 to m. 33, the two violins act as the first character, whereas the viola and cello present the second character. The *sf* upbeat in the second violin on a long B is complemented by a *sf* C on the second half of beat one of m. 26. The minor second is more dramatic than the major second at the beginning of the movement. The changes of bow are accented. The first violin joins two beats later, playing a G and an A-flat—another minor second. The articulation of the long notes is again accented. As mentioned above, this is the first typical rhythmic pattern for the first character. Since both violins play in the high registers of the A- and E-strings, the sound color is extremely bright.

In m. 27, the cello and viola play in short note values typical for the second character, with dotted and accented articulations. The frequent sixteenth-notes are interrupted by sporadic eighth- or sixteenth-rests. The rhythmic organization is at times mosaic-like and at times overlapping. Furthermore, there are more complicated rhythmic patterns, such as five against four in mm. 31 and 32, and three against four in m. 31. A dramatic *crescendo* builds up for four bars in all instruments (see Example 22 above).

The four instruments unite in m. 34, as the first character takes over for three bars. There is a *crescendo* that ends with a *sf* marking at the end of m. 34, enhanced by a *glissando* in the first violin. In m. 36, the repeated-sixteenth-note pattern (the second rhythmic pattern for the first character) is played by the violins and viola while the cello is holding open C- string and playing an ominous, dark sounding B *pizzicato* at the same time. Here the minor second is inverted to a major seventh. In the other three instruments, there are seconds compiled by the different parts, for example A-flat—G and A-flat—B-flat between the viola and first violin, as well as F-sharp—G between the second and first violins. Then there is also C—D between the cello and second violin and C—B-flat between the cello and first violin. The second half of m. 35 and the entire m. 36 are marked *crescendo* that reaches *ff* dynamic on the downbeat of m. 37, in which the second character takes over for two bars. The pitches are in the high register of the violins while the low strings rest. In m. 39, the first character takes over again, its first rhythmic pattern of long held notes being played by the violins (E-flat in the second violin and F in the first) and an alternation between the first and second rhythmic patterns being played by the viola and cello, with persisting major and minor seconds. The dynamic is *f* with *crescendo* to *ff* in m. 41. The meter in m. 40 is 1/4 and in m. 41—5/16. From m. 42, the 2/4 meter is reestablished for another twenty bars. In m. 42, the second character prevails in the second violin and cello while the viola and first violin play the first rhythmic pattern of the first character. In m. 43, the first character is entirely back in the four instruments, with the violins playing the first rhythmic pattern and the viola and cello—the second. These two bars are united by a *crescendo* from *mp subito* after the *ff* in the previous bar, back to *ff* on the downbeat of m. 44. Then again there are two bars of both characters combined; in fact, only a hint remains of the first character as a lonely sustained D in the first violin, while the other instruments are playing mosaic-like

sixteenths with dotted articulation. The dynamic is *ff* until m. 46, where there is a *mf subito* with a *crescendo* to the next measure. The second character prevails for the next three bars. Sextuplets are introduced in m. 47 and thirty-seconds—in m. 49. From m. 50 to the end of this section in m. 56, the first character takes over again. The *pizzicati* in the cello add a very special dark color to this segment.

Section 3 is the period of conflict between the two characters. It starts with them together, then they alternate with very short phrases, then they combine again and intertwine in brief dramatic exchanges. It always sounds like the controlling first character is trying to establish dominance over the unstable second character and it almost succeeds towards the end of the section.

Section 4 (mm. 57-63) is a seven-bar transition to the climactic fifth section. This transition is constructed mainly of thirty-second-notes, mostly appearing in couples interrupted by rests. The second violin, viola and cello play for the first three bars and the first violin comes in for the rest. The dynamic is *pp* with miniature *crescendi* until the two-bar *crescendo* in mm. 62-3. The meter in these last two bars is 7/16 and 11/16 respectively. It is hard to determine which character is in place here: the rhythmic values are short, but do not alternate except for a quintuplet in the cello in m. 61; also, since the lower strings start the section, a dark color is established at first, only to become more and more piercing bright at the end right before the climax of the movement.

Section 5 (mm. 64-70) represents the most dramatic clash between the two characters. Here is the first example of controlled aleatoric technique. The meter is back to 2/4, all the instruments play sixteenth-note sextuplets for three bars. Each instrument except the viola has assigned a range within which to play thirty-six pitches. Also, there are assigned strings on

which to play: A-string for the cello, D- and A-strings for viola, A- and E-strings for both violins. In mm. 67-9, the string quartet plays simultaneous *glissandi*, which end on the last eighth-note of m. 69 for the violins and on the downbeat of m. 70 for the viola and cello. This ending note serves not only as an ending to section 5, but also as a beginning of the next section. M. 67 is in 5/8 meter and the next measure goes back to 2/4 meter. The climactic section starts in *mf* dynamic but it sounds quite bright because of the high registers in which the instruments are assigned to play for the first three bars. There is a *crescendo* from the beginning of the section to its very end, reaching *fff*. Also, there is a *poco a poco stringendo* marking starting in m. 66 (see Example 23).

Example 23. Nikolov, *String Quartet no. 1*, first movement, mm. 64-78

The image displays a musical score for a string quartet, specifically measures 64 through 78 of the first movement of Nikolov's String Quartet no. 1. The score is written for four staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello. The time signature is 2/4. The music is characterized by a 'poco a poco' stringendo marking, indicating a gradual increase in tempo. The dynamics are marked 'mf' (mezzo-forte) and 'cresc.' (crescendo). The strings play a series of sixteenth notes, with the first three measures of each staff marked with a '6' and a 'poco a poco' marking. The score is numbered 64 at the beginning and 78 at the end.

(Example 23 continues on the next page.)

Example 23 (continued).

The musical score for Example 23 (continued) spans measures 67 to 76. It is written for a string quartet, with four staves representing Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello/Double Bass. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 2/4. Measures 67-70 are marked 'stringendo (♩..)' and 'gliss.' with a 'Tempo I' indication. Measures 71-76 are marked 'poco a poco string.' and 'Tempo I' with a 'poco a poco string.' indication. Dynamics range from 'sub. pp' to 'fff'. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and dynamic markings.

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Section 6 (mm. 70-8) is a dramatic arrival point in the viola and cello after the clash between the two characters. It starts with a *Tempo I* indication which changes again to *poco a poco stringendo* in m. 73. A very aggravated side of the first character is presented through the first typical rhythmic pattern after the simultaneous percussive stroke in the violins and viola on beat two of m. 70. There is a wide range of dynamics, from *fff* in m. 70 to *subito pp* in the next measure followed by a four-bar *crescendo* to *ff* in m. 76. In mm. 73-8, the sinister minor second is to be found between the viola and second violin—B and C, whereas the major second appears

in inversion (minor seventh) between the cello and second violin—D and C. In addition, the viola is playing the minor second or in fact augmented prime F-sharp and F melodically. This voice complements another set of inverted major and augmented seconds with the G-sharp held by the cello. The three instruments play in their low registers while the first violin rests from m. 73 to m. 76. There is a meter change to 3/4 in m. 72 for one bar only (see Example 23 above).

This section seems to have a double function. On the one hand, it sounds like the darkest point in the whole movement, therefore it could be viewed as a dark climax, opposite from the preceding extra bright one. On the other hand, however, since it has a *Tempo I* marking followed by another *poco a poco stringendo*, which ends with a second *Tempo I* marking starting the next section, this present section can be thought of as a transition to a sort of recapitulation starting with the lively second character from the second sixteenth-note of the second beat of m. 76 in the first violin, while the other three instruments calm down with a *decrescendo* from *ff* to *mf* in mm. 76-8 (see again Example 23).

Section 7 starts on the dotted eighth-note upbeat to m. 77 in the first violin and ends in m. 85. It obviously overlaps with section 6. The trills in the first violin in mm. 76-8 and later on in mm. 80-3 issue in a new mood, even if they are on a minor second. As demonstrated in Example 23 above, mm. 76-8 sound like a friendly invitation for play on behalf of the first violin to the rest of the string quartet. The starting dynamic is *f* followed by a *diminuendo* to *mf*. The others join playfully one by one from the highest to the lowest instrument in m. 79 in *p* dynamic. The dynamic stays very soft for a while, with tiny ripples of *mp* here and there. In mm. 81-2, the second violin and cello form a rhythmic pattern very close to the second typical pattern of the first character. This is only a hint of it within the second character and a very friendly one for the first time. The section ends on the downbeat of m. 85 in the cello.

Section 8 (mm. 85-100) is again a direct exchange between the two characters but this time less dramatic than in section 3. There is a slight change in the rhythmic patterns of the second character: there are triplet-sixteenths, more quintuplets and sextuplets added to the regular sixteenth- and thirty-second-notes. The texture is also embellished by several trills (mm. 85 and 99 in the second violin, and m. 98 in the first violin), grace-notes and *tremolo-legato* (mm. 86-91 in the first violin). The exchange between the violins in mm. 85-90 resembles a bird song. It continues in the first violin until the end of the section (see Example 24).

Example 24. Nikolov, *String Quartet no. 1*, first movement, mm. 84-93

The musical score for Example 24 is presented in two systems. The first system covers measures 84 to 88, and the second system covers measures 89 to 93. The score is written for a string quartet (Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello/Double Bass). The key signature is G major (one sharp, F#), and the time signature is 3/4. The score includes various dynamic markings (mf, mp, p, f, p sub.) and articulation (trills, grace notes, triplet-sixteenths, quintuplets, sextuplets). The texture is complex, with multiple voices interacting throughout the section.

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The first character is represented by several *crescendo*-patterns such as in m. 90 in the viola and in m. 91 in the viola and cello. The same reference happens in mm. 96-7 in the violins and cello.

Section 9 begins with an eighth-note upbeat to m. 101 in the viola and goes until the end of the first movement in m. 112. By sounding very much like the beginning of the movement, it clearly functions as a coda. It has two subsections of eight and four bars respectively. The first character is entirely in control for the first eight measures. Both rhythmic patterns are in place, the sixteenth-notes following the accented held notes. The held notes appear again in layers, the order being viola – cello - second violin - first violin. The viola holds a major second D—E and the cello adds to the E a reversed minor second with its F. Then both violins come in, each with its own major second: B—C-sharp in the second violin and B-flat—C in the first. There are two sets of minor seconds formed between the violins. These eight bars sound very much like a reminiscence. In m. 104, there is a *poco a poco accelerando* indicated, with a big *crescendo* until the end of m. 108. There is a breath-marking between m. 108 and the next measure.

The second subsection is a four-bar conclusion. The tempo marking is *Allegro possibile* and the dynamic is *ffff*, which makes it the loudest segment of the movement. The four instruments play dissenting *glissando-pizzicato* sixteenth-notes in quadruple stops with indicated beginning and ending chords.

The next movement (*Lento—Allegretto scherzando—Andantino - Lento*) begins from measure 113, even if it has its beginning and ending clearly defined. Each next movement continues the measure numbers from the end of the previous one. As the tempo indications suggest, there are three main sections in the second movement. The first *Lento* section lasts

thirty-six bars (mm. 113-48); the *Allegretto scherzando* section is the largest one and lasts forty-and-a-half bars (mm. 149-89); and the last *Andantino-Lento* section is twenty-four-and-a-half bars long (mm. 189-213). The entire movement lasts almost five minutes.

The first *Lento* section can be divided for convenience into four subsections or segments. The first segment is from the beginning to m. 127 (see Example 25).

Example 25. Nikolov, *String Quartet no. 1*, second movement, mm. 113-131

The musical score for Example 25 is divided into two systems. The first system, labeled "Lento" and "II", covers measures 113 to 127. It features four staves with various dynamics (pp, p, mp, pp) and articulations (arco con sord., p, mp, pp). The second system, labeled "Tempo I" and "accel.", covers measures 129 to 131. It features four staves with various dynamics (pp, p, mp, mf) and articulations (pizz., p, mp, mf).

(Example 25 continues on the next page.)

Example 25 (continued).

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The meter changes constantly throughout these fifteen bars: 9/16, 8/16 for two measures, 2/4, 5/4, 4/4, 1/4, 5/16, 1/4, 2/4, 5/16, 3/8, 6/8, 6/16 and 5/16. The string quartet is muted for the entire *Lento* section. The dynamics in the first segment vacillate from *pp* to *mp*, except for one *mf* for all the instruments at the end of m. 125, which quickly goes back to *pp* in the next two measures. The mood is very mellow. The first five bars resemble choral singing. The first violin starts alone and is gradually joined by the rest from m. 114. The sound is smoothly layered. Major and minor seconds again dominate the intervallic context horizontally and vertically. The articulation is sustained even in the shorter note values. Accents are introduced in m. 118 for two bars in the violins and viola. The cello still plays sustained articulation. In mm. 119-21, there is a close resemblance to the sound of an accordion on which keys are all pressed at the same time. The listener's attention is distracted from this association only by the cello *glissando* in m. 120. In m. 124, there is an *accelerando* for one measure, in which the cello has an ascending three-note stepwise progression with grace-notes from the upper neighboring minor second before each note. The viola supports the cello with *pizzicati* in

unison but without grace-notes. M. 125 is back to *Tempo I*. The segment ends in m. 127 with a chord in all four instruments and a *diminuendo* to *pp*.

The second segment starts in m. 128 and ends in m. 139. There is an accent in all the voices at the beginning, as well as a *subito mp* dynamic, which sounds strong after the preceding *pp*. A moment of particular interest with regard to sound is the ending of the first segment and the establishment of the second segment. The voice configuration from the end of m. 127 until the middle of m. 129 is like a sound-lens. There are eight voices in the last chord of m. 127, which change pitches and dynamic in m. 128, thus creating a shining effect. While the *diminuendo* in the same measure is happening, the number of voices drops to seven with the accented F in the cello ending m. 128 and going into the downbeat of the next measure, when suddenly the viola and second violin emerge as a focused unit while the cello is still gently subsiding and the first violin is resting (see again Example 25).

The meter in this segment is flexible but here the quarter-note-beat prevails: 3/4 for two measures, 4/4, 2/4, 3/4, 4/8 for five measures and 3/4 for two measures. The 4/8 meter feels like a quarter-note-beat: it is in a *Tempo deciso - subito meno mosso* section, which in fact continues until the *Allegretto scherzando* section. This segment is like a distant memory of the two contrasting characters from the first movement. The second violin and viola start together in m. 129 with the sixteenth-note pattern of the first character, which is now in thirty-seconds and the cello joins them at the end of the next measure (see again Example 25).

The three instruments play identical rhythms for seven bars. They switch to the held-note pattern of the first character in m. 131 and from the next bar they alternate patterns. The first violin rests after the downbeat of m. 129 until the second beat of m. 131 when it comes in playing four six-note patterns with sixteenth-rests in between. The first group (m. 131 beat two)

is the fastest, consisting of three thirty-seconds after a thirty-second rest and a thirty-second triplet followed by a sixteenth-rest. In the next measure, the six-note groups are parts of sixteenth-septuplets with a rest at the end of each group. There is a *poco a poco accelerando* indicated above this bar, followed by the *Tempo deciso* in the next measure. These four groups in the first violin bring an association with the second character from the previous movement and so do the couples of thirty-seconds interrupted by rests, continuing the first violin line on top of the second violin, viola and cello representation of the first character. The difference is that both textures have no accents or dotted articulations. The two characters seem distant or maybe old in the context of mm. 133-4. However, the following four-bar *crescendo* to *fff* in the first violin and *ff* in the other instruments brings a dramatic climax in the second half of the last beat of m. 137. The dynamic subsides to *pppp* immediately after the *sf* in the violins two measures later. This segment is not only a reminiscence of past events, but also a transition to the next one, which starts in m. 140 and ends in m. 144 (see Example 26).

Example 26. Nikolov, *String Quartet no. 1*, second movement, mm. 136-42

(Example 26 continues on the next page.)

Example 26 (continued).

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If one thinks of the two characters being old in some of the last eleven measures, then the next three measures can easily be associated with the image of death itself. These are the dreamiest and most enigmatic measures in the entire *Quartet*. The dynamic goes from *p* to *pp* and the range between the voices is very wide. There is one harmonic in the first violin in m. 141. The values are long and there are quiet stinging accents on each pitch change except for one (m. 141 beat three in the first violin). The context changes again at the end of m. 142. There is a dramatic awakening, the rhythms become more diverse and there is a *crescendo* to *fff* in mm. 143-4. The meters in this segment (mm. 140-4) are 4/4 for two measures, 3/4, 5/4 and 3/4 (see again Example 26).

The last segment of the *Lento* section is a transition to the next large section. It lasts only four bars. In the first two bars, the instruments come one after another starting with the cello in *f* m. 145 after an eighth-note rest. The others come in the next bar, also in *f* dynamic. A livelier image of the first character follows in mm. 147-8. The second violin and viola play thirty-seconds while the first violin and cello hold each a single pitch. After the *f* in m. 146 comes immediate *diminuendo* to *p* on the second eighth-note of m. 147, receding into a *ppp*. The meter-

changes in this transitional segment are as follows: 5/16, 3/8, 4/4 and 2/4. The two large sections are separated by a breath-mark at the end of m. 148.

The middle section of the movement, marked *Allegretto scherzando*, begins in m. 149 and ends on the second beat of m. 189 (see Example 27).

Example 27. Nikolov, *String Quartet no. 1*, second movement, mm. 149-52

Allegretto scherzando

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Within this section, there are four indications for slight changes of tempo, but these are not connected to any change of direction in the music itself: in m. 166, there is a *poco a poco stringendo*; an *allargando subito* follows in m. 168; there is another *stringendo* in m. 170, presumably to balance the *allargando* from the previous two measures; and lastly, there is an *Allegretto* indication from the upbeat to m. 183. The character of the music does not change throughout the section, which is why I consider segments only when referring to the frequency of meter change. More specifically, there is one segment in which the meter changes more frequently than in other parts of this section. This happens in mm. 168-82. Before this segment, the pulse is in quarter-notes with one exception. The meters in mm. 149-67 change as follows: 3/4, 3/16, 4/4 for two measures, 3/4 for two measures, 4/4 for four measures, 3/4 and 4/4 for

eight measures. There is only one bar with a sixteenth-note division. By contrast, here is what happens in the segment from m. 168 (where the *allargando subito* takes place) to m. 182: 2/4, 1/8, 2/4, 4/4, 5/16, 9/16, 3/8, 7/16, 4/4 for two measures, 3/4, 3/8, 4/4 and 2/4 for two measures. From m. 183, where the last *Allegretto* is marked (in fact it is marked from the upbeat to this measure), the meter changes to 4/4 and remains so until well into the next large section.

The instruments are not muted for the *Allegretto scherzando* section. The most audible detail regarding sound-color is the frequent alternation of *pizzicato* and *arco*. The two types of sound production appear in several combinations. In m. 149, the four instruments play *pizzicato* for half a bar. Then they switch to *arco* for a bar and a half, and then they go back to *pizzicato* in m. 151. In m. 152, there is a mixture between the two: the first violin plays *arco* for one and a half beat and switches to *pizzicato* only for the last sixteenth-note upbeat to the next measure where it goes back to *arco*. The second violin plays *arco* for half a beat and *pizzicato* for one beat in m. 152. It goes back to *arco* in the next measure. The viola keeps playing *pizzicato* from the previous bar and the cello has indications similar to those in the violin parts: *arco* in the first beat and *pizzicato* in the second beat of m. 152. From m. 153, the violins play *arco* for six and a half bars; the viola plays *pizzicato* for four and a half bars; and the cello has *pizzicato* for six bars. The instruments keep alternating in a similar fashion for the rest of the middle section. There are occasional *glissandi*, for example in the cello in mm. 164-5 and in the viola in m. 165. There are also some harmonics in the first violin in mm. 153, 176-7 and 184; and in the second violin in mm. 150 and 158. These add glittering quality to the sound picture. There is an interesting example of complementary rhythms in mm. 154-6: the cello is playing triplet-eighth-notes, the viola is playing solid eighth-notes and the violins are playing variable sixteenth- and sixteenth-with-eighth-note patterns. The addition of double stops in the cello in m. 156 enhances

the impression of more and more things happening at the same time. There are also plenty of complex triplet and sextuplet patterns, such as in m. 159 in the violins, in m. 160 in the cello part or the alternating patterns in the violins in m. 163. With regard to intervallic peculiarities, once again, the major and minor seconds appear consistently.

The climax in this section is established in terms of dynamics. After endless alternations of sudden and not so sudden extreme dynamics, there is a short but powerful build-up in the violins starting in m. 166, marked *poco a poco stringendo*. The *crescendo* is taken over by the cello in m. 167, then accumulates through the two bars of *allargando subito* and finally culminates into *ffff* in m. 170. This climax lasts for two bars. A *subito pp* follows in *pizzicato* and until the end of the section the dynamics follow the same course as they did before the climax. Again, the two sections are separated by a breath-mark, this one in the middle of m. 189.

The last section of this movement consists of two segments marked *Andantino* and *Lento* respectively. The *Andantino* segment has a transitional function. It starts from the third beat of m. 189 and ends in m. 195. It consists of material employed in the corresponding transitional segment in the first section (the second segment, mm. 128-39). The instruments are muted again. The first violin begins the section, playing again the septuplet pattern with the last sixteenth-note rest, distantly or maybe nostalgically resembling the second character from the first movement. The other instruments repeat the first character's typical rhythmic patterns: the second violin and viola engage in several groups of four thirty-second-notes each in mm. 190-1, and then the second violin plays *pizzicato* for two bars and the viola plays a sustained double-stopped note value. Both instruments go back to thirty-seconds and sixteenths in m. 194. The cello starts by accompanying the first violin with syncopated triplets and sixteenth- with a dotted eighth-note and switches to a sustained low F on the C-string until the *Lento* segment. The

dynamic is *mp* with a *crescendo* to *f* into the accented dotted eight-note of beat two in m. 190, followed by a *diminuendo* to *mp* during the held note. All the instruments have a *crescendo* to *f* in the second half of m. 191. The meter in this segment is 4/4 for the first five bars and 2/4 and 3/16 in the last two bars. The only instrument playing in the 3/16 bar is the cello, finishing its sustained F on the C-string.

The concluding *Lento* segment begins in m. 196 with three bars of long note values in *p* with a *diminuendo* to *pp* and the end of m. 198. The last fifteen bars of the movement are in fact its first fifteen bars in retrograde. Hence, the formal structure of this movement is fairly symmetrical.

The third and shortest movement (*Lento*) begins in m. 214 and ends in m. 248. It lasts less than two and a half minutes. It has three sections, even though there are no additional tempo indications. The material in the first (mm. 214-34) and last (mm. 242-8) sections is very similar and the middle section (mm. 234-41) provides the contrast. The structure of this movement gives a sense of symmetry just as the previous one, only here it is much easier to recognize because of the shortness of the movement.

The first section conveys a very somber, to some extent tragic mood. This whole miniature “piece of sadness” is probably an allusion to the death-like segment (mm. 140-2) in the second movement. However, if the three bars in question were presenting the image of death itself, the beginning section of the third movement is more like the consequence of death. These introductory measures sound like mourning, whereas the three bars in the second movement sound unearthly. The section consists of two segments: one in mm. 214-26 and the other one in mm. 227-34 (see Example 28).

[illegible]

131

The instruments are not muted. The first violin, viola and cello hold the same pitches for three bars. The first violin plays the major tenth E-flat in fourth position on the A-string and G on the E-string. The viola holds a low B, and the cello—a low G-sharp. The diminished octave G-sharp—G-natural, positioned over such a wide range, which is in effect an inverted minor second between the cello and first violin, creates a feeling of deep and unchangeable tragedy. This feeling is helped by the mournful solo line in the second violin, which plays syncopated rhythms on the notes A and B-flat, a horizontally (or melodically) displayed minor second, complementing the existing vertical one in the two outer voices. The A in the solo second violin is acutely audible in combination with the sustained E-flat in the first violin and G-sharp in the cello. However, when the A in the solo violin changes to B-flat, it appears to clash most strongly with the sustained B-natural in the viola. Thus the listener's focus switches from one minor second with a tritone to another minor second. One reason why this creates a powerful impression is because it happens slowly.

After the first three bars, the first violin changes pitches to D and later in the bar (second half of beat two) a C comes in, thus forming a minor seventh or an inverted major second with the D. The second violin holds a B-flat from m. 216 and adds a B-natural at the same time that the first violin plays the C. Thus we have an inverted minor second in the second violin and another one between the two violins. The cello and viola rest in m. 217. They come in together on the downbeat of the next measure, adding three more pitches to the already existing ones in the violins: F-sharp in the viola and E and F-natural in cello. It is obvious that this adds even more seconds to the intervallic spectrum. In m. 220, the C in the first violin changes to an E-flat, the F-sharp in viola goes to a G and the cello changes to a low C-sharp after a rest of one beat. In addition, the second violin enters with double-stopped A—B-flat on the eighth-note

upbeat to m. 221, after two and a half beats of rests in the previous measure. The pitches change again in mm. 222-3, in which the harmonics B and C are applied to the cello part, creating a different sound color. The pitches in m. 222 almost sound like a major chord because of the major triad C, G, E in the violins. The meter in the first segment is 4/4 for three measures, then 3/4, 2/4, 3/16, 3/4, 3/8, 3/4, 2/4, 5/16, 2/4 and 3/8. The beginning dynamic is *pp* with tiny swells to *p* in the solo second violin. After a *crescendo* in m. 217, it reaches *mp* in the next measure and after another *crescendo* it gets to *mf*, which is the first build-up in the section, right on the C-major chord. The dynamic decays to *p* over the next four measures.

The second segment renews the mourning idea, this time only for a bar in the first violin, supported by the cello from the end of the third beat. The intervals in the following changing sustained chords are similarly dissonant. There are harmonics in the viola in mm. 228-9 and in the first violin in mm. 232-4. The meters in mm. 227-34 are as follows: 5/4, 2/4, 3/8, 4/4, 3/8, and 4/4 for the last three measures, going into the next section. The segment starts from *p* dynamic and builds up to *f* two bars later. This is the second and more dramatic build-up in the section. The dynamic drops suddenly to *pp* in the next measure and keeps being soft, ending in *ppp* on the downbeat of m. 234.

The middle section starts from the second beat of m. 234. The only instruments to participate are the viola and first violin. Each instrument is assigned its own independent line melodically, rhythmically and dynamically. The viola starts first on beat two of m. 234 and plays short note values with non-stop melodic alternation of minor and major seconds. At times they are inverted, as in mm. 235, 237 and 239, for example. The pitches are mainly in the middle register, with the exception of two notes in the high register in mm. 238 and 239. There are two rhythmic patterns: one with eighth-notes with dotted articulation and rests in between, and

another one with thirty-second-notes, slurred in groups of eight. The first pattern occurs in mm. 234-5, 237-9 and 241; the second pattern occurs in mm. 236 and 240. The dynamics are soft, with miniature swells following the melodic line in the case of the first rhythmic pattern.

The first violin starts in m. 235. It plays sustained notes in stepwise motion in the high register. Whole steps and half steps alternate as in the viola part. The dynamic does not exceed *mf* but it seems louder than the viola because of the brightness of the violin's high register. The meter is predominantly 4/4, the only exception being m. 139 in 3/4 (see again Example 28).

The last section (mm. 242-8) is a seven-bar recapitulation and the conclusion of the movement. The chords are the same as in the beginning seven bars. The rhythm in the second violin is not as syncopated and the chord changes are slightly different as regards timing because the meters are different from the beginning: 4/4 for three measures, 2/4, 3/8, 2/4 and 5/4. The dynamic fades to *pppp* at the end of m. 248.

The finale (*Allegretto*) begins in m. 249. It lasts slightly more than four and a half minutes. This movement consists of five sections bearing individual tempo indications. Each section is slightly different in character from the previous one. In addition, each section can be divided further into a variable number of segments, some of which are even marked by additional tempo indications.

The music in this movement conveys a very playful mood. There are several associations with previous movements. On the one hand, one can recognize distinct rhythmic patterns that correspond with those illustrating the two contrasting characters in the first movement. The difference here is that these patterns or characteristics appear simultaneously more frequently than they did before. Even if the repeated sixteenth-notes still bring a bit of a tense feeling, they are not isolated by themselves but are intertwined with the more diverse

rhythmic and pitch patterns. In this sense, the last movement unites the two subjects into one. On the other hand, the frequent alternation of *arco* and *pizzicato* resembles the middle section (*Allegretto scherzando*) of the second movement. It can be said that the finale is a fitting logical conclusion of the entire piece in a similar way to the finale of the *Piano Quintet* (see Chapter 4).

The tempi fluctuate from moderately fast to fast and then back to moderately fast. The fastest section in the middle creates the climax of the movement. The five sections are as follows: *Allegretto*, S1—mm. 249-316; *Allegro moderato*, S2—mm. 316-39 (S1 and S2 overlap by a quarter of a beat); *Allegro possibile-Allegro moderato*, S3—mm. 340-52; *Allegretto-Allegro-Allegretto*, S4—mm. 352-86 (the sustained notes in the viola at the end of S3 continue well into the next section and thus become the accompanying voices for as many as four measures); and *Allegretto*, S5—mm. 387-438.

Section 1 (mm. 249-316) is marked *Allegretto*. It consists of three segments which are determined by certain breaths and changes of dynamic or rhythmic level applied to all the instruments at the same time. The first segment is a small introduction ending in m. 259. The last measure of the introduction is in *ritenuto* and the first measure of the next segment reads *Tempo I*. Also, the rhythm becomes slightly more complex from m. 260 onwards (see Example 29).

Example 29. Nikolov, *String Quartet no. 1*, fourth movement, mm. 249-64

IV

249 Allegretto

255

riten. pizz.

260 Tempo I

arco salt. pp 3 mp p mp p pizz. p pizz. arco p < p

sub. mf mp p mp p f p

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In the first three bars of the movement, there is a brief reference to the first character via sustained notes in the cello (a harmonically executed major seventh B-flat –A, or an inverted minor second) and first violin (a trill on a major second F—G) and repeated sixteenth-notes on F-sharp in the second violin. The sound effect is one of layers in the order cello - second violin, and viola and first violin together. The viola is playing a melodic minor second F—E complementing the intervallic relationship of seconds in the parts of the two violins. The fifth that forms between the cello and viola creates a sensation of overtones. In the very first beat of the movement, the four sixteenth-notes that form from the cello and second violin parts are also paired in seconds but in a slightly different way: B-flat—A between the two notes in the middle of the beat, and E-flat –F between the outer two sixteenths. In the next five bars (mm. 252-6), there are references to the second character with the typical eighth- and sixteenth-note patterns, bigger melodic leaps and mosaic treatment of sound, but the repeated sixteenths on a single pitch in mm. 253 and 255 create a feeling of mixed characters. In mm. 257-59, there is some more material that brings back the association with the first character such as more sustained notes and *pizzicato* in the low register of the cello and middle register of the first violin. There is one B-flat harmonic in the first violin in m. 257, coming together with an E-flat in the second violin. The meter in this and in the following segments is never stable. In the present segment, it changes constantly from 2/4 to 3/8 with the exception of m. 257: 2/4, 3/8, 2/4 for two measures, 3/8, 2/4, 3/8, 2/4, 7/16, 2/4 and 3/8. The dynamics range from *pp* to *mf* via very gentle swells. The only exception is again m. 257, in which *f* is reached for one beat only. The segment ends in the *ritenuto* bar (m. 259) with a *diminuendo* from *mp* to an undetermined level.

The second and largest segment in the first section (mm. 260-93) is marked *Tempo I* (see again Example 29). It resembles the middle section (*Allegretto scherzando*) of the *Quartet's*

second movement with the frequent alternation of *arco* and *pizzicato* in mm. 263-77. Again, there are moments with all the instruments playing *pizzicato* (m. 263) or *arco* (mm. 260-2, 264-5, 267, 270, 273 and 275); and there are moments in which the two techniques are combined. From rhythmical point of view, thirty-second- and triplet sixteenth-notes are introduced from m. 260, as well as combinations such as thirty-second- with a dotted sixteenth-note and thirty-second- with a double-dotted eighth-note, all in m. 260. Mm. 266 and 269 are also somewhat rhythmically complex. From a pitch point of view, there are many leaps in the melodic motifs, there is diversity of ranges and colors, for example harmonics in the violins in the last two beats of m. 260 and grace-notes in the cello in mm. 266, 268, etc. There is a new bow stroke in m. 260—*saltato* in the violins and cello. Like in the corresponding section in the second movement, the resemblance with the second character is clear, but again, the occasional repeated sixteenths create a mixed impression. In mm. 273 and 275, there are scales in parallel seconds played by the higher and lower strings respectively. However, only the higher instrument in each couple plays in consistent step-wise motion. These scales appear and end very suddenly, adding a new flavor to the already playful mood. The two bars in question are in triplet sixteenth-notes in a 3/4 meter (see Example 30).

[illegible]

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From the upbeat to m. 279, again starting with the cello and second violin, the first character's material from the beginning of the movement comes back: the repeated sixteenths on a single pitch (C-sharp) in the second violin, the sustained double-stop (E—D-sharp) in the cello, the sustained trill (C—D) in the first violin and the two alternating pitches in the viola (D-sharp—B, this time it is a major third, complementing many of the other voices). The meters are different: mm. 278-80 are in 4/4, 5/8 and 2/4 respectively and the figure starts in the last beat of m. 278. In the first case, the figure begins on the downbeat of m. 249 which is in 2/4, and the next bar is in 3/8 (see again Examples 29 and 30). The layering of voices is almost the same: only the cello has four and a half eighth-notes of rests after sharing the upbeat to m. 279 with the second violin. In mm. 281-2, the second character shows up again. Up to the end of m. 282, the dynamics in the second segment (*Tempo I*) are very diverse, starting from *pp* and undergoing many fluctuations, reaching *f* in the rhythmically condensed places such as mm. 266, 269, etc. M. 281 starts dynamically in *pp*, which builds up to *ff* over two measures. Measures 283-93 are in *ff*, with the cello playing the repeated sixteenths on a C high on the A-string while the viola is sustaining harmonics and the violins are exchanging sustained, short and dotted note values in their highest register. In this first climax, the two characters are clearly combined. The rhythms become more diverse from m. 289 with the addition of triplets in the cello. There is a slide in the first violin to the second beat of m. 290. The climax ends in m. 293 after a two-bar *crescendo* to *fff*. This segment (mm. 260-93) employs a large variety of meters: 4/4, 2/4, 3/8, 9/16, 2/8, 6/16, 9/16, 6/16, 2/8, 3/8, 3/4, 5/16, 3/4 for two measures, 1/4, 3/4 for another two measures, 4/4 for two measures, 5/8, 2/4 for seven measures, 3/8 for two measures, 2/4 for four measures and 3/16.

The third segment (mm. 294-316) is again a combination of different sides of the two characters. There are more sound effects to it, such as the *glissandi* in mm. 297-300, sounding

almost like yawning. In mm. 301-6, the repeated sixteenths appear in the low register of the cello in even more asymmetrical metric pattern: 6/16, 3/8, 7/16, 2/4 for two measures, and 7/16. This pattern is accompanied by the viola and later also by the first violin, both playing very short single eighth- and sixteenth-notes separated by rests, giving the sound a very percussive quality. The sixteenths in the cello start in *subito p* after a *sf* in all the instruments and reach *ff* in m. 306. In the next measure, the dynamic drops to *mp subito*. In m. 309, all the instruments play four chords, the second one of which is in *subito ff*, the third one is in *f* and the last one in *p*. They continue playing identical rhythms until the downbeat of m. 311. Then in m. 312, the first violin acts like the second character for one bar, whereas the cello starting from the second beat anxiously hammers the repeated sixteenths again. This is similar to the beginning of the movement pattern, but the roles are switched: in m. 313, the first violin sustains two pitches, the viola sustains a trill and the second violin plays alternating pitches (see Example 31). The dynamics are soft. In m. 315, the violins bring back the second character for one bar only, while the viola and cello rest. A *diminuendo* to *pp* merges the violins into the downbeat of the next section.

Section 2 (mm. 316-39) is marked *Allegro moderato*. It serves a transitional function to the climax of the movement. From m. 324, there is an indication *poco a poco stringendo* which is apparently valid for the next sixteen measures up to the climax. In addition, there is a *sempre possibile feroce* indication regarding the sound quality, starting at m. 327. This section is one of the most metrically stable sections, together with section 3. With the exception of its last measure, it is all in 2/4 meter, m. 339 being in 3/4 meter.

In m. 316, the muted viola starts a controlled aleatoric pattern, playing pitches of the shortest possible duration, within the limits of an interval (F-sharp—E, a minor seventh or an

inverted major second), shown in small notes at the beginning of the measure. A sound indication *flautato* appears for the first time in the piece. The viola keeps playing the same pattern for fourteen measures (until m. 329). It is joined by the cello from m. 318. The cello plays in the same fashion, with exactly the same assigned pitches and register as the viola. The only difference is that it is not muted. This combination results in some interesting sound colors, with two instruments of substantially different size playing in the same range and one of them muted. The cello pattern ends one beat earlier than the viola one.

Two bars after the cello aleatoric model begins, the first violin has a solo recitative of short note values with dotted articulation. The rhythm is one of triplet eighth-notes and sixteenths separated by rests for mm. 320-1, getting even more complicated in the next measure, with thirty-seconds slurred in groups of four in a syncopated context for the first beat (see Example 31).

Example 31. Nikolov, *String Quartet no. 1*, fourth movement, mm. 312-30

The musical score for Example 31 is in 2/4 time and marked 'Allegro moderato'. It features four staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello. The first three measures (312-314) show a complex rhythmic pattern with dynamic markings like *mf*, *mp*, and *p*. The fourth measure (315) introduces the 'flautato' effect, with the Viola and Cello playing a muted, flute-like sound. The score continues with more complex rhythmic patterns and dynamic markings.

(Example 31 continues on the next page.)

Example 31 (continued).

320 *poco a poco string.*

326 *sempre possibile feroce*

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After the *poco a poco stringendo*, the second violin joins the first in the rhythmic game on the second beat of m. 325. The patterns become more rhythmically organized and so the recitative character is gradually lost. The violins are joined by the cello on the sixteenth-note upbeat to m. 330 and later on by the viola (*senza sordino*), which comes in on the second thirty-second-note of m. 332, after two bars of rests.

There is a dramatic dynamic build-up, starting from *pp* in m. 316 in the viola and cello, and reaching *ffff* in the violins by m. 329, complemented by the viola in m. 332. The cello gets to *fff* in m. 329 and does not reach any further. During its recitative, the first violin ranges

dynamically from *p* to *f* and back. In m. 325, the first violin is already in *fff* and the second violin comes in from the second beat in *ff*. The viola joins everybody else in *ffff* in m. 332.

The rhythmic picture up to m. 339 is mostly one of sixteenth- and eighth-notes with occasional triplet-sixteenths or thirty-seconds here and there. There are harmonics in the first violin in mm. 325-6, 328, 330, 335-6 and 338-9; and in the second violin in m. 332. There are also *glissandi*: in the first violin in m. 332; in the viola right between mm. 334-5; in the violins and viola in m. 336; and in the cello in mm. 337-8. After the 3/4 metered measure 339, there is a breath marking separating this section from the next.

Section 3 (mm. 340-52) has two segments: an *Allegro possibile* segment from m. 340 to m. 343; and, after another breath marking, an *Allegro moderato* segment, starting at m. 344. This section is the climax of the fourth movement. It is a perfect retrograde of the coda of the first movement (mm. 101-12, with an upbeat in the viola). This is another connection-element with respect to the wholeness of the piece. However, this material sounds quite differently in the context of this movement. One might remember that in its first appearance, the pattern in question comes as a sobering reminder of the presence of the controlling first character. In its retrograde version, after the four bars in *pizzicato*, which are now ascending, the music sounds like a hysterical laughter that gradually calms down, clearly an image closer to the associations with the second character (see Example 32).

*** Allegro (possibile)**

340 pizz.

pizz.

pizz.

pizz.

Allegro moderato

344 arco
arco
arco

ff f

ff f

ff

Allegretto

349 p mp p mp mf pizz.
m^f
m^f
m^f
tranquillo
p
p >

145

Example 32 (continued).

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Section 4 (mm. 352-86) is divided into three segments, each of which has its own tempo indication. The first segment is marked *Allegretto* and starts on the second half of the first beat of m. 352. It goes on for fourteen measures. As mentioned above, the viola continues to sustain the major second D—E into this new section, while the first violin presents a slightly different character. The trill in m. 352 brings us back to the bird song in section 8 (mm. 85-100) of the first movement and so does the trill in the cello in mm. 357-8. The first violin line in mm. 361-3 confirms this image again. In the meantime, there are random exchanges between *arco* and *pizzicato* in mm. 353-6 in the first violin, which provide the bird song with additional expression. After the sustained notes are over in m. 355, the viola joins the violins in *pizzicato* in the next measure while the cello is providing the sustained note. In mm. 359-60, the second violin, cello and viola, following this order, come in layers with sustained harmonics and the first violin keeps the bird song going for another two measures. This segment is a manifestation of another successful amalgamation of the two main characters. The pattern in the high register of the first violin brings a feeling of playfulness and the sustained harmonics provide a slight suspense. The

dynamics in this segment are mostly soft, with *mf* occurring three times in mm. 354, 357 and 363, always lasting for no more than a beat, followed by a *diminuendo*. The meter is mostly 2/4, only in mm. 355, 358 and 360 does it change to 5/8 (see again Example 32).

The second segment is marked *Allegro* and lasts only three bars. It starts in m. 366. This and the next measure are in 9/16 and m. 368 is back to 2/4. The first two bars are in constant sixteenths in all the instruments. This rhythmic change causes the feeling of disruption of the suspense that was taking place up to this moment. The first note in each part is slurred to the sustained note ending the previous segment. The combinations of intervals between the voices bring again many major and minor seconds to the listener's attention. A *crescendo* from *mp* starting in m. 366 reaches *f* on the downbeat of the next measure and keeps this level for two measures. The third measure of the *Allegro* segment introduces the sixteenth-note sextuplet in the first violin, which is another reminder of the corresponding section 8 in the first movement.

The third and last segment of this section begins in m. 369. It is marked *Allegretto*. It continues the key ideas from the first segment, namely imitation of bird song and suspense. The song this time appears not only in the first violin, but also in the second violin and viola. The segment starts with sustained harmonics in the violins and a sustained low E-flat in the cello. This combination recalls the suspense. The viola starts the song through tiny groups of slurred thirty-seconds and eighth-notes in mm. 370-1. The violins take over in the next measure and the viola comes back in m. 373. There is a trill in m. 372 in the first violin and in m. 373 in the second violin. In mm. 375 and 379-80, the first violin adds grace-notes to the bird language and so do the viola in mm. 381-3 and cello in m. 383. There is a rich variety of rhythms such as quintuplets, sextuplets, thirty-seconds combined with sixteenths and triplets, among others. The patterns become simpler by the end of the segment, in which the first violin sustains a trill for six

bars, the second violin is holding a note for eight bars, and the viola and cello are playing sporadic eighth-notes with grace-notes or *pizzicati* (the cello in mm. 381-2 and 385). The segment is very stable metrically, with seventeen measures in 2/4 and only the last measure in 3/16 meter, which is clearly used instead of a fermata. The dynamics are initially soft but there is a miniature apotheosis in mm. 377-9 in which the bird song reaches its peak. The indications *diminuendo poco a poco* in m. 383 and *poco a poco ritenuto* in mm. 385-6 indicate of the excitement subsiding and the motion slowing down until a full stop at the end of m. 386.

Section 5 (mm. 387-438) goes back to tempo *Allegretto*. There is an additional indication *Tempo deciso* underneath. This is the conclusion of the movement and of the *Quartet* in general. The section can be divided into four segments according to the changes in character. These do not bear any additional tempo markings. At the beginning of the section (mm. 387-95), there is a last manifestation of the two main characters. The cello and viola play the repeated sixteenth-note (mm. 388-92) and sustained-note patterns (mm. 387-90) respectively, whereas the violins share short-note combinations, occasionally in identical rhythms, with abundant melodic leaps and dotted articulations for the whole first segment. The cello part is embellished by frequent grace-notes. *Glissandi* take place in mm. 390 and 392-5. The viola switches characters and joins the violins in m. 390 and so does the cello in m. 393. The segment starts softly from *p* but from m. 388 onward the *mf* with *crescendo* to *f* over a beat appears frequently. Only the cello plays solid *f* for the whole segment. The last two measures of the segments are *f* in all instruments. The meter is at first 2/4 for four measures and then it changes to 3/8, 7/16 for two measures, 2/8 and 7/16.

The second segment (mm. 396-408) brings a new mood. Sustained harmonic notes coming in layers change the entire picture. Of course, the second, whether major or minor, is the

predominant interval in this texture as well. The instruments switch to *ordinario* (mm. 398-407) also in layers, in order cello – viola - violins. In the last two bars, the harmonics come back in order viola - second violin – cello - first violin. The dynamic is still *f* in mm. 396-7. In m. 398, there is an indication *sempre poco a poco diminuendo* that goes for eleven measures until the end of the segment. The sound of the sustained harmonics in these particular intervallic relationships brings two different associations: crickets at night and a choir. What makes them similar is that they are distant. There is again a variety of meters: 6/16, 7/16, 2/4, 3/8, 7/16, 6/16, 5/16, 2/4 for two measures, 3/16, 2/4, 7/16 and 3/8.

The third segment begins from m. 409 and ends in m. 419. The texture is essentially a combination of short *pizzicato* notes with very few *arco* motifs and sustained harmonics. The *pizzicato* motifs are the carriers of this subtle character change. This third segment has variable dynamics and meters: 7/16, 3/8, 5/16, 2/4, 5/8, 5/16, 2/4, 3/8, 2/4 for two measures and 9/16.

The last segment (mm. 420-38) is differentiated by the five-bar trill in the cello on the lowest D-sharp. The other instruments sustain either harmonics or *ordinario*. A *diminuendo e smorzando al Fine* indication starting in m. 416 determines the dynamic for this entire last segment. The meter is 2/4 until the last measure, which is in 4/4. The music in this segment, as well as in the second segment of the last section of the fourth movement insistently reveals lack of any emotions whatsoever. This new material serves very successfully its purpose of an end of a piece of music that goes by very quickly but has so much going on from the very beginning until the very end (see Example 33).

Example 33. Nikolov, *String Quartet no. 1*, fourth movement, mm. 420-38

The musical score is presented in four systems. The first system (mm. 420-421) begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 2/4 time signature. It features a melody in the first staff and a bass line in the fourth staff. The second system (mm. 422-427) continues the piece with various musical notations including eighth notes, quarter notes, and half notes. The third system (mm. 428-438) shows the end of the piece with a key signature change to one flat (Bb). The score is written for a string quartet, with four staves representing the four instruments.

(Example 33 continues on the next page.)

Example 33 (continued).

433

pppp

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The music in this string quartet is colorful and deeply emotional. It reveals a vast range of associations to many aspects of human life and experience. This masterpiece is just one of the many great accomplishments of Lazar Nikolov in his exploration of the timbre of the string instruments.

CONCLUSION

Lazar Nikolov (1922-2005) was among the first Bulgarian composers to distance themselves from the folk tradition of their country and explore new territories in order to create musical works that would adequately represent them in the context of a post World War II Europe. These new territories were in fact forbidden for many years in Bulgaria during the realm of the communist regime. In spite of all the difficulties Nikolov faced throughout the most creative years of his life, he never compromised his musical endeavors and aesthetic goals. His consistent rejection of the ideological indoctrination was not without a bitter price. His works were constantly subjected to official censorship and often prevented from being premiered closely to the date they were written. Many of his masterpieces had to wait for years to be heard for the first time. Thus, by the time these postponed premieres took place, the rest of musical Europe had already gone many steps forward and Nikolov did not have the chance to be deservedly recognized for his imaginative musical achievements.

Despite the fact that he lived in Bulgaria in a difficult and unfortunate time, he created music that today speaks for itself. The pieces analyzed in this paper, *Quintet for Two Violins, Viola, Cello and Piano* (1959), and *First String Quartet "Virtuosic Games"* (1965), are only two out of many masterpieces deserving the scholars' and performers' attention. In the former, one can observe Nikolov's individual approach to twelve-tone writing and in the latter, one can dwell on the composer's deep fascination with the timbre of the string instruments.

As the third chapter of this paper makes clear, there are many yet undiscovered works by Nikolov that await exploration, performance and recording.

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VITA

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