

## Vytautas Barkauskas' Quintet in a Teleological Aspect

**Abstract.** Uncharacteristically for Barkauskas' creative style, the Quintet for strings and piano (Op. 60, 1980) is a meditative composition that explores the ideas of ethical morality. According to the composer's commentary, the Quintet embodies the idea of the eternal pursuit of spiritual beauty. This study examines the entirety of the Quintet and discusses the composer's choices of the system of images, means of expression and development of sound material. The study shows that the entire development of the Quintet is distinguished by the integrity of the composition and the purposefulness of its idea, which culminates in a philosophical conclusion about the infinity of the process of spiritual perfection aimed at affirming the human need for spiritual community and freedom, as well as the need to rise above the routine of the mundane world. The analysis of the temporal and spatial parameters of the piece, and their connection with semantic aspects of the piece showcases the systems of sound organization, composition techniques and principles of material development that allow the composer to realize his creative idea.

**Keywords:** Vytautas Barkauskas, Quintet, teleology, meditative composition, transcendental ending, multilayered composition, multidimensional image, complex ternary form, systems of sound organization, composition techniques.

The Quintet for two violins, viola, cello, and piano (Op. 60, 1980) is an important musical composition in the creative legacy of Vytautas Barkauskas. The composer wrote this work on the eve of his 50th anniversary and naturally wanted to convey his sense of life, his thoughts about the eternal and the transient. Here is what



Example 1. Vytautas Barkauskas and the Vilnius String Quartet perform a piece by Barkauskas. Druskininkai, 1980

the composer himself said about the Quintet: "I had a lot of grief in my life. I was looking for inner balance and spiritual beauty. The eternal search for spiritual beauty is, perhaps, the main idea of the composition. I wrote the piano part for myself. I really wanted to play with the String Quartet"<sup>1</sup>. The premiere of the Quintet took place in Lithuania (in Druskininkai) on October 1, 1980. It was performed by the Vilnius String Quartet and the composer himself (piano part)<sup>2</sup>. This event is captured in the photograph (Ex. 1).

Therefore, the main idea of the composition is the eternal search for spiritual beauty. This idea is based on several images, or one could more accurately call them musical representations (in a Schopenhauerian sense), which have an intonational harmonic commonality, but belong to different sound systems and are developed differently via a multilayered composition in a complex ternary form. The most important of them are the image of eternity and infinity as well as the image of striving for spiritual beauty.

The image of eternity and infinity is in itself multidimensional. Three components form this image. The first component is the infinite canon of strings, which sparks an association with ancient times. The second component is the sonoric structures in the piano part. They convey the feeling of the vast space of the universe. The third component is the imitation of ringing bells, which signifies the connection with the Creator of the universe.

The beginning of the Quintet introduces us to a medieval atmosphere in a form of an endless canon of the strings. All means of expressiveness highlight its ascetic character and the sense of deep antiquity (Ex. 2).

<sup>1</sup> From a conversation with the composer in 1991: the personal archive, Vilnius, 1991.

<sup>2</sup> Later the composer performed this Quintet with the Lithuania Quartet and with the Moscow Quartet.

Quintet Vytautas Barkauskas  
op. 60, 1980

♩ = 48

Example 2. V. Barkauskas. Quintet Op. 60<sup>3</sup>

The canon is based on a diatonic scale. The canon's melodic line has a downward direction. It is dominated by a smooth, gradual (without leaps) movement of tones. The main intonation of the canon is the interval of a major second. Slow tempo, quiet dynamics, low register, articulation (*con sord. non vibr.*) all these details help to create an atmosphere of mystery and distant past. However, the canon also contains elements of the classical functional system. For example, the cornerstone pitches of the theme (highlighted in Ex. 3) are in the ratio of a fourth to a fifth. The imitating voice enters at a distance of a fifth.

Example 3. The scheme of the canon scale

The theme of the canon is of great constructive importance, as it is the source of the thematic and harmonious development of the entire Quintet. Main intervals of the theme, such as the major second and the fifth, permeate the sound space of the Quintet. Moreover, these intervals form melodic-harmonic complexes. One of them is a chord of fifths in a formation of a major ninth (Ex. 4a). Another complex is a chord in the range of a minor seventh (Ex. 4b). Both complexes have a great rhythmic and textural variety. The linear sequence of pitches included in these complexes acquires a modal connotation in the Quintet code (Ex. 12).

Example 4. Basic harmonic complexes

The development of the canon undergoes several variations, such as rhythmic changes, expansion of the pitch range, changes of playing techniques or the number of sounding voices. Finally, a transition from a diatonic to a twelve-tone chromatic scale is carried out (mm. 41–50). This variability leads to a change in the nature of the canon and a gradual increase in tension, which “explodes” with a sharp dissonance at the end of the first section (m. 49). Further, the diatonic is replaced by micro-chromatics (mm. 92–96). At the beginning of the reprise, we hear the choral based on the core of the canon's thematic material. Eventually, the entire range of the ensemble is covered as the four-voice canon transforms into a more complex polyphony of four layers.

Starting from bar 15, the canon is supplemented by the second component. It is based on a twelve-tone chromatic scale and is located at a half-tone distance from the seven-step diatonic scale of the canon. The central pitch of the canon is A; the central pitch of the second component is A $\flat$ . In other words, the first and the second components are in a polytonal relation. The second component, which conveys the feeling of the vast space of the universe appears as sonic structures, at first in the low (Ex. 5a) and then in the high

<sup>3</sup> All examples from this work come from the manuscript.

register of the piano (Ex. 5b). The second component is performed in an aleatory rhythm, like the pulsating darkness of the primordial and the heavenly chime of little bells. This contrast is associated with the realms of the mundane and the sacred.

Example 5 (a, b). The second component. Facsimile (mm. 17–18; mm. 22–23)

The semantics of this contrasting image is very broad. This is the embodiment of the main idea of the composition and its postulate. It is also a kind of concept that determines the logic of the thought process from the beginning to the end of the Quintet.

The ethical meaning of this image is the need to rise above the routine of the earthly world. It develops in the middle of the Quintet. At the end of the composition, the composer brings us to the brink of transcendence, thus affirming the process of endless and eternal comprehension of the idea of spirituality (Ex. 12).

The third component is an imitation of the sound of the bells. This symbol belongs to the category of eternity and it denotes a connection with the Creator of the universe. In the first part of the Quintet, the bell-like sonorities complement the canon of strings. These are multi-interval chords, which represent a harmoniously linear version of the canon's theme (Ex. 6, piano part). In the last movement, these multi-interval chords are transformed into a polyphonic imitation of chords of fifths and acquire the sonic character of the organ (Ex. 7). In addition, the function of these chords also changes. In the last part, they replace the canon of strings.

Example 6. The third component in the first part. Facsimile (mm. 33–36)

Example 7. The third component in the last part. Facsimile (mm. 152–154)

These three components of the first image sound in parallel and their counterpoint development are based on the principle of contrasting complementarities (counterpoint sounds: diatonic of white and black keys; diatonic and twelve-tone chromaticity; rhythmically strict canon of strings and aleatory rhythms in the piano part; imitative polyphonic texture, turning into a micro-chromatic sonoric structure, and polychords of a diatonic scale, etc.). This creates an impression of vast time and space, which can be associated with eternity and infinity.

The second most important image of the Quintet is a more intimate one—it conveys the idea of spiritual beauty and the pursuit of inner balance. This is an ostinato type of monody in the piano part (Ex. 8).

Example 8. The second image of the Quintet (mm. 53–56)

The theme is based on a melodic figuration of the main harmonic complexes (Ex. 4 a, b). This theme—just like the canon theme—is also diatonic. However, the canon's theme is anhemitonic. Here, on the contrary, the elements of the minor second are pronounced. The development of the first image (infinity and eternity) is based on the principle of variation. The second image (of spiritual beauty and the idea of eternal striving for it) is conveyed through the disturbance and restoration of the ostinato movement. The inertia of the ostinato is disturbed by episodes belonging to another system of pitch and rhythmic organization.

The appearance of the image of spiritual beauty is preceded by a shaky fluctuation of the strings, which creates the impression of tense silence and an atmosphere of anticipation (Ex. 8). Further, this fluctuation accompanies the image of spiritual beauty as a counterpoint. For 34 measures, the strings play one chord on a dominant basis (E–F–A–B), played *vibrato*. Muffled dynamics (*ppp*) is disturbed by breakouts of dynamic waves (*crescendo* reaching *forte*). There are also frequent articulation changes. All this produces a sonoric layer

based on one chord, featuring continuous variability and inner mobility. Thus, the episode in which the image of spiritual beauty is expanded (bars 51–86) has a multifaceted characteristic, since the two worlds sound in parallel. One of them is the explosive sonoristic layer of the strings that transmits internal tension. The other is the monotonous *ostinato* monody of the piano as if it was a state of detachment from the mundane.

The middle part of the Quintet (bars 97–137) creates a contrast to the first and third movements, as is customary in classical forms. It opens up another world to us—the world of human existence, the inner world of a man—but continues to develop the main idea of the composition. This is a statement of the need to rise spiritually above the routine of the mundane world. The connection with the first part of the Quintet is maintained through the use of reminiscences, as well as in the reliance of the thematic material on the main constructive intervals (that is, on the major second and fifth). The harmonic system of the middle part is also based on the twelve-tones (with reference pitches A–E and A<sub>b</sub>–E<sub>b</sub>), but unlike the first movement, here the composer relies on the chromatic scale.

The three contrasting episodes (a, b, c), which are united by the “breakthrough” theme, form the drama of this part. The first (a) and the last episode (c) seem to convey the state of a person involved in the flow of life. There are ups, downs, inertial flow, hopelessness, and attempts to break away from the vicious circle. The first episode (a) is a multiline polyrhythmic layer of strings with a wavy configuration. The lines of this layer are based on general forms of movement, in the figuration of which irregular rhythmic groupings are used (triplets, quintuplets, etc.). Scherzo elegance, accentuated by such playing techniques as *spiccato*, *staccato*, *pizzicato*, is combined with heavy traffic rushing to the top of the wave. The simultaneous flow of the oppositely directed scale-like passages and the change in types of movement and articulation intensify the tension of this episode. The meteoric rise is replaced by a slower ebb, ending in an expression of sorrow and resignation—a chord sequence that functionally belongs to the key of A<sub>b</sub> minor (Ex. 9, bars 115–116).



Example 9. The middle part. End of episode “a”. Facsimile

Episode “b” is the antithesis of the surrounding sections. Its purpose is to show the soaring of the spirit over the vanity of the world. The solo violin becomes the carrier of the philosophical idea. In a multi-layered texture, the first violin rises above everyone. Its ascetic melodic material (major second and fifth) is combined with flexible plasticity (Ex. 10).



Example 10. Episode “b” from the middle part. Facsimile (mm. 118–120)

Unequal lengths of phrases separated by pauses, varied rhythmic pattern, change of tempo, the wide amplitude of ups and downs, timbral and register contrasts—this is like living speech, like an emotionally rich monologue. Sadness and pain, moments of reflection and despair are intertwined in it. There is also a frozen soaring of dreams, ending with a return (fall) to reality.

The multi-layered space of episode “b” is semantically symbolic (Ex. 10). Everything is thought out here. On one pole, there is a floating violin and a fifth F#–C# sharp (viola and second violin) that subtly reacts to the variability of its mood. This is a sliding background that gradually turns into a microtonal band. At the opposite pole in the piano part is the already familiar aleatoric fragment, which is associated with the spheres of the mundane and the sacred. In the center of this multi-layered score is pitch A (in the cello part). It is introduced very effectively and performs the organizing function of the central tone in the polytonal space. For 18 bars, the author presents this pitch in a constant change of articulation and performance techniques. We hear a sharp *sfz* and a *vibrato diminuendo* (Ex. 9), then a quiet flutter of the pitch produced by the harmonic, then an alternation of a soft cold timbre (*sul tasto*) and a rougher timbre (*sul pont.*). In addition, pitch A is a connection at a distance with the beginning of the Quintet, i.e. with the first pitch of the canon. This connection is confirmed by the further appearance of the main motif of the canon. Now, in a multi-layered space, the motif is performed using the harmonics and is perceived as a remote, almost unreal, echo of the past.

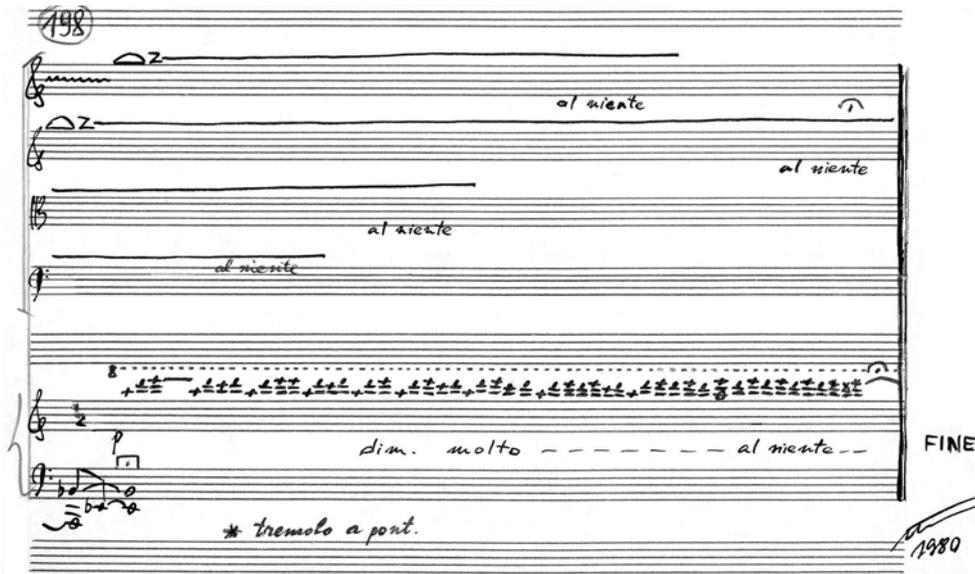
The attempts of the human spirit to rise above the mortal world, the dreams of eternity, both are illusions that collapse in the end. This subtext embodies the last section of the middle part of the Quintet (bars 132–151). Several points are to be noted here. Firstly, it is the steadily decreasing plasticity of movement. Sliding down the descending semitones of non-metric sequential figurations evokes feelings of doom. Secondly, the timbral-instrumental solution of the concept. The composer temporarily removes the strings, instructing the piano to create a chilly, detached atmosphere (by the way, this is the only piano solo in the Quintet). Thirdly, the efforts to counter the passive inertia of a crash are noteworthy. This is felt in the textural and rhythmic design of the material (opposite direction of the lines, polyrhythms, mismatch of rhythmic and metric accents, rhythmic augmentation, etc., all at the same time). The elegiac character of improvisation (aleatory rhythms at the *rubato* tempo) holds back the dynamics of the fall for a short time. The renewed flow of descent ends with the passage of confrontation (bar 136). However, all efforts are in vain. We hear (as if from afar) a severely ascetic chorale of strings, which confirms the tragic meaning of the entire middle section.

The culmination of the whole development is the last part of the composition. The main changes are taking place in the field of textured presentation of musical material. Firstly, both main images sound in parallel. Secondly, the four-voice canon is transformed into a polyphony of four layers. Therefore, the canon theme covers (fills) the entire range of the Quintet’s sound: from low chords in the piano part to high harmonics in the violins part (Ex. 11).

Example 11. The last part. Facsimile

This presentation resembles the architecture of sacred buildings and their vertical construction. Its foundation is in deep antiquity, and the towers rise upward reaching the sky (violin flageolets). This association is also reinforced by the thematic material itself, which is associated with Christian culture (these are canon, chorale, imitation of the sound of bells and organ). In addition, the second image sounds here without disturbing the ostinato movement until the very end. This is associated with litany, with prayer. In other words, in the last part, the composer builds a cathedral—a symbol of faith and spiritual community, which was lost in Soviet times.

The transcendental end of the Quintet (Ex. 12) contains the philosophical and Christian conclusion that the pursuit of spiritual beauty and its attainment is an endless process and that beauty is hidden in Divinity—in the substance of eternal aspiration.



Example 12. Code. Facsimile

### Conclusions

The Quintet (Op. 60) is devoted to the embodiment of the idea of an eternal striving for spiritual beauty, which is quite difficult for a chamber composition. Barkauskas develops this idea in the interweaving of moral, ethical, philosophical, and Christian worldview positions. The main conceptual components of the Quintet are the demonstration of the eternity and infinity of the universe, the awareness of beauty and belief in the power of the human spirit, the regret about the perishable nature of life, the assertion of the need for spiritual freedom and rising above the mundane of the earthly world. The Quintet is structured in a complex three-part form, in which the dramatic development is carried out as follows. The first part is the exposition and development of two main images: the image of eternity and infinity as well as the image of spiritual beauty. The second part is devoted to the inner state of the personality in its connection with the outside world. Note that there is a certain amount of subjective perception of the world—this is a feeling of loneliness and the collapse of illusions as well as volitional efforts to overcome the feeling of helplessness. The third part is like a solemn ascent to the temple of God to be cleansed in prayer and be in connection with Truth, with Love, i.e. with the Almighty. This is the culmination and the aim to which the entire development of the Quintet leads. The coda is perceived ambiguously. It might be conveying the idea of the infinity of the process of spiritual perfection as well as the path to eternity.

Although Barkauskas relies on the classical form, nevertheless it acquires individual characteristics, which are due to the author's concept, means of expression and specific mastery of space and time. Firstly, it is a multi-layered composition in which semantically multi-component images are developed in parallel. This led to the volume, ambiguity of sound matter, a saturated and intense processuality and reduction in the temporal parameter of sound (the performance of the Quintet lasts 17 minutes). Secondly, the form is not closed, which is in accordance with the idea and concept of the composition. Thirdly, there are no clear boundaries (rhythm tectonics, cadence) between the main parts of the form—the end of one section, as if it is linked with

its further development, becomes the beginning of the next section. This is due to the polyphonic nature of the texture and the peculiarities of the drama.

The analysis of the musical text showed that Barkauskas uses different pitch systems, both tone (seven-step modal and tonal diatonic; twelve-tone structures formed on the basis of the chromatic scale or as a result of the chromatic ratio of diatonic scales), and microtone (tempered and non-tempered). We also note the use of different techniques (limited aleatory, ostinato, techniques of polyphony, and techniques of sonorous sound complexes) and the use of different principles of organizing the space-time continuum. We can say that Barkauskas uses all types of sound organization known to him, excluding dodecaphony and serial technique. All these different systems replace each other diachronically and sound synchronously in the counterpoint of the layers. The listener gets the feeling of a wide historical-temporal space, which can be associated with infinity. The composer pays great attention to the articulation and techniques of performance, as well as the use of features of timbre and register for expressiveness and color. This was also noted in the review, speaking of “... unexpectedly colorful tints of light and shadow ... and the variety of *vibrato* techniques” (Maslovskaya 1983: 34).

Therefore, despite a wide variety of means of expression, techniques, and sound systems, the Quintet has a logical direction of thought from the beginning to the very end. The development process starts from the lowest string notes and ends with piano's *al niente* in high register. This movement is determined by the idea of striving towards the sublime. In addition, reliance on tonal functional connections, especially tonic-dominant ones, also contributes to the purposeful movement of thought. They are found in relation to the sections of the composition, and to the layers of texture. They especially activate the course of composition, which is meditative in nature. The whole course of the work is regulated by two main centers—A (with its dominant) and A<sub>b</sub>. The theme of the Canon, its initial motif of the major second and the interval of the fifth form the melodic and harmonic structure of the Quintet (its horizontal and vertical dimensions). It also contributes to the unity of the entire composition.

### References

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### Vytauto Barkausko Kvintetas teleologiniu aspektu

#### Santrauka

Kvintetas dviem smuikams, altui, violončelei ir fortepijonui (op. 60, 1980) – tai retas Vytauto Barkausko kūryboje meditatyvinės nuotaikos kūrinys, kurio idėją pats kompozitorius įvardijo kaip „amžino grožio siekimą“. Ši idėja glūdi etinių, moralinių, filosofinių ir krikščioniškų nuostatų sampnyoje. Jos įgyvendinimas tampa kūrinio tikslu, kuriam naudojamos visos kompozicinės dramaturginės ir išraiškos priemonės. Kadai apie tai recenzijoje užsiminė ir Osvaldas Balakauskas (Balakauskas 1981: 13). Kvinteto analizė, nukreipta į muzikinio kontinuumo erdvės ir laiko parametrų ryšius su semantiniais aspektais, traktuojama teleologiškai. Būtent – suvokti kūrinio koncepciją, atskleisti muzikinio teksto organizavimo ir vyksmo logiką, išaiškinti išraiškos priemonių pasirinkimą.

Visatos begalybės ir grožio suvokimas, *sacrum* ir *profanum* santykis, dvasinės bendrystės ir kilstelėjimo virš kasdienybės būtinumas, tikėjimas žmogaus dvasios stiprybe – tai Kvinteto koncepcijos postulatai. Jie įkūnyti sudėtinėje trijų dalių dramaturginio vyksmo formoje. I dalis – pagrindinių vaizdinių (t. y. amžinybės ir begalybės bei dvasinio grožio) ekspozicija ir plėtra. Šie vaizdiniai yra daugiakomponenčiai, priklauso skirtingoms garsinėms sistemoms ir įvairiai plėtojami daugiaplanėje kompozicijoje. Jų tarpusavio santykis pagrįstas kontrastinio papildymo principu. II dalis atveria vidinį žmogaus pasaulį, jo santykį su aplinka. Čia rasime ir subjektyvios pasaulėjautos dalelę. III dalis – kulminacija – lyg iškilmingas pakilimas į šventovę, kai maldoje galima susijungti su aukščiausiaja tiesa, su meile. Transcendentinė Kvinteto pabaiga (koda) teigia, kad grožis slypi Dieviškume – amžino siekio substancijoje.

Nors Barkauskas remiasi tradicine forma, tačiau ji turi savitus bruožus, nulemtus individualaus sumanymo bei specifinių erdvės ir laiko pojūčių. Pirma, Kvinteto kompozicija daugiaplanė, čia vaizdiniai skamba paraleliai. Taip suteikiama minties ir veiksmo koncentracija, audinys pasižymi daugiaprasmiškumu, erdviniu talpumu, intensyvumu. Antra, forma lieka atvira – *al niente* pabaiga nukreipia tarsi į begalybę. Trečia, nėra ryškių prasminių ir tektoninių ribų tarp pagrindinių formos dalių. Ši dramaturginį sprendimą lengvai įgyvendina polifoninė faktūra.

Išraiškos priemonių analizė atskleidė, kad Barkauskas naudojami įvairiomis garsinėmis sistemomis: tonine (modalinio ir tonalinio atspalvio septynių garsų diatonika; dvylikagarsė sistema, kuri vienais atvejais grįsta chromatiniu garsaeiliu, kitais atvejais susidaro dėl politonalumo) ir mikrotonine (temperuota ir netemperuota). Kūrinys dar pasižymi kompozicinių technikų

(t. y. kontrapunkto, ostinatinė, ribotos aleatorikos, sonorinių kompleksų) ir faktūros organizavimo įvairovė. Siekdamas tembrinio spalvingumo ir išraiškingumo, autorius daugiau dėmesio skyrė artikuliacijai, techniniams atlikimo būdams bei instrumentų registų savybėms. Visos įvairios sistemos ir technikos, besikeisdamos diachroniškai, formuoja kontrapunktinių sluoksnių sinchroninį skambesį. Tai leidžia pasijusti tarsi erdvėlaikyje, kuris gali asocijuotis su amžinybe ir begalybe.

Nepaisant išraiškos, techninių priemonių, garsinių sistemų įvairovės, Kvintetui būdinga logiškai kryptinga minties eiga ir vientisumas. Bendras judėjimo vektorius – nuo žemų styginių iki tolstančio fortepijono solo – atspindi dvasinio grožio siekio idėją. Šios mediatyvinės kompozicijos vyksmas aktyvinamas remiantis tonaliniais funkciniais santykiais, ypač tonikos–dominantės. Kvinteto vientisumą užtikrina tiek išorinės (reprizos, reminiscencijos, išsitiesis pagrindinio vaizdinio plėtojimas, „proverzio“ temos pasikartojimas), tiek giluminės priemonės (horizontalę ir vertikalę formuoja du konstruktyvūs intervalai, t. y. didžioji sekunda ir kvinta, o visą eigą reguliuoja ir jungia du pagrindiniai centrai – *A* ir *As* garsai ir jų dominantės).

Kvinteto premjera įvyko Druskininkuose 1980 m. spalio 1 d., atliko Vilniaus kvartetas ir kompozitorius (fortepijono partija).