

Examples of Really Good Analysis Writing

1. *A*

2. *An introductory passage.* From W. Dean Sutcliffe: “Haydn: The Op. 50 Quartets” (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1992)

The Op. 33 quartets, finished in 1781 after a gap of nearly a decade, have been, together with Op. 20, subject to more intensive investigation than any other set of Haydn quartets. This scrutiny was prompted by the now-famous letter that Haydn circulated to possible patrons offering them manuscript copies of the work prior to publication. Three copies of the letter have survived, and that sent to the Swiss writer J.C. Lavater in Zürich reads:

Most learned Sir and
Dearest Friend!!

I love and happily read your works. As one reads, hears and relates, I am not without adroitness myself, since my name (as it were) is known and highly appreciated in every country. Therefore I take the liberty of asking you to do a small favour for me. Since I know that there are in Zürich [*sic*] and Winterthur many gentlemen amateurs and great connoisseurs and patrons of music, I shall not conceal from you the fact that I am issuing, by subscription, for the price of 6 ducats, a work, consisting of 6 Quartets for 2 violins, viola and violoncello *concertante*, correctly copied, and WRITTEN IN A NEW AND SPECIAL WAY (FOR I HAVEN'T COMPOSED ANY FOR 10 YEARS). I did not want to fail to offer these to the great patrons of music and the amateur gentlemen. Subscribers who live abroad will receive them before I print the works. Please don't take it amiss that I bother you with this request; if I should be fortunate enough to receive an answer containing your approval, I would most appreciate it...

The emphatic ‘new and special way’ has received varied interpretations: one camp sees it principally as a mercantile slogan, the other takes Haydn at his word and finds in these works a new perfection and maturity of the Viennese Classical Style. The former group has therefore fixed upon Op. 20 as more deserving of ‘special’ and pivotal status in the composer’s wider output, while both opuses have been ransacked for clues in order to establish priority for one of the sets. There is, however, no problem in accepting both senses of the phrase. If Haydn’s musical technique had advanced in the intervening nine years, then so had his business acumen; he was becoming an accomplished marketer of his own wares and operator in the murky waters of music publication. He would also have become aware of the generally increased cultivation of the medium, as his letter to Lavater makes clear, although it was particularly strong in Vienna; such composers as Gyrowetz, Ordoñez, Dittersdorf, Vanhal, and Pleyel were both helping to shape and responding to the demand for quartets. On the other hand, Haydn hardly needed the best part of a decade to come up with new ideas; while the ‘new and special way’ may have been an attempt to re-establish his pre-eminence and market-leadership in this form, it could also stand as a motto for most of what the composer wrote.

NOTES:

Sutcliffe is very careful with his quotation here: note the use of “[*sic*]” in the letter. This indicates that the misspelling is in the original, and is an error in the quotation. I’ve used his precise citation, so you can see how to cite something which is the work of an editor, rather than an individual author. (Editor names come after the title, but author names go before it.)

Sutcliffe’s second paragraph (following the quoted letter) concentrates beautifully on one idea: whether or not the Op. 33 quartets are really ‘new and special’ or if we’re reading marketing propaganda. Sutcliffe discusses the various opinions having to do with this in a very general way — by expressing it in terms of ‘camps’, he isn’t obliged to quote various authors, but can stay more general, less personal, in his coverage. This kind of broad discussion is quite good for an analysis paper, which should steer clear of specific scholarly disputes on the whole (unless you have good reason to disagree with somebody). But note that he has done his homework carefully — he knows what the scholarly opinions are about this issue.

3. *The opening of an analytical passage.* From Frisch: Brahms: The Four Symphonies (New Haven: Yale University Press 2003)

The finale of the Second Symphony is structurally and expressively the most straightforward of the four movements. It is in a broad sonata form, with a full exposition (mm. 1–155), which is not repeated; a development section (155–244); a recapitulation (244–353); and a substantial coda (353–429). Despite its prevailing cheerfulness and the genuine jubilation of its ending, the finale is by no means all lightness and joy. As if acknowledging the difficulty of casting off the shadow of the sustained chord near the end of the Allegretto, the movement begins *sotto voce*, with a theme whose first two measures unfold in tightly controlled octaves (ex. 4–18).



Example 4-18: Second Symphony, IV

That both main themes of the exposition (mm. 1, 78) are based on motive *x* is an indication of how actively the finale resumes the larger business of the symphony. In the first theme, the motive completes complete with the D-C#-D neighbor note and the drop of a fourth, D–A. The second four measures of the theme and the consequent phrase, beginning in m. 9, develop the descending fourth, which is to become a key element in this movement.

NOTES:

This is the perfect introduction to the analysis of a movement of a work. Note how Frisch begins with a general statement that will set the tone for the rest of the analysis. He then outlines the overall form, quite clearly. (He could also have done this with a little table.) He then makes a few more general remarks (“the finale is by no means all lightness and joy”) which he then uses as the *entrée* into the more formal analysis.

Right from the start he provides a musical example, and then begins discussing motivic resonances from the earlier movements. It's a terrific way to draw the reader into the technical aspects of an analysis.

Incidentally, Frisch constantly stays on the side of the angels between analysis and program notes, but he doesn't hesitate to use subjective phrases where he thinks they will help support his analysis. Note the sentence that introduces the musical example: "As if acknowledging the difficulty of casting off the shadow of the sustained chord..." which flirts with anthropomorphizing a nonsentient, inanimate thing (a movement of a piece of music). This about as close to the boundary as one should go, but as long as one doesn't dribble over into the program-notes camp, it can be quite effective.