

## Essay on String Quartet no. 2, “the dark well”

John A. Hartmann

Written in 2002, the dark well is a four movement string quartet that contains some interesting harmonic functions and tells a strange little tale. In this paper, I will discuss the formal structures of the quartet in terms of goal-directed movement; and the story that the quartet tells and the motives related to that story.

There are several layers of formal structure to this quartet. To make the shapes more apparent, I will begin with the largest, overall structure. As shown in example 1, the four movements outline an overall dominant to tonic progression. The opening chord has as its root G, and is an altered G major7th chord with C substituted for D. This creates the dominant function of the over-riding progression. The second movement begins with an F minor7 in its first inversion making  $A^b$  the bass note. This chord functions as a vi chord. The next movement opens in the key of  $B^b$  which functions as a vii chord in the overall progression. By the end of the third movement, that  $B^b$  has ascended a half step to B and functions as the leading tone in the large-scale progression. The fourth and final movement has as its key center C and the final cadence of the piece is in C major. This final cadence completes the overall progression because it functions as the I chord. Therefore, the overall progression of the piece is from the dominant (V) to the tonic (I) and creates goal-directed motion through this progression.

example 1

The image shows a piano (Pno) score for four movements. Movement I is a dominant chord (V) with a G# in the bass. Movement II is a vi chord with a flat sign above the staff and a bass note of Ab. Movement III is a vii chord with a flat sign above the staff and a bass note of Bb. Movement IV is the tonic chord (I) with a C in the bass. A horizontal line connects the bass notes of all four movements, showing the progression from G# to Ab to Bb to C.

I will now discuss the formal structure of each individual movement. The first movement is a recurring binary form. This structure is clearly demonstrated in example 2. The first section (A) begins in m. 1 and continues to m. 33 and moves through the key centers of G, F, and  $D^b$ . The second section (B) is contained within mm. 33-99 and is

freely chromatic centered on C, and then freely chromatic. The first return of A occurs in mm. 100-122 and centered on the keys C, A, and G. The return of B begins in m. 123, is once again freely chromatic centered on C and lasts until the final return of the A material in mm. 171. The final section of the piece ends in m. 178 with another altered dominant chord, this time with G<sup>#</sup> and C<sup>#</sup> substituting for G and D respectively.

#### Example 2

Movement 1

THEME AREAS:	<u>A</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>A'</u>	<u>B'</u>	<u>A''</u>
mm.:	1-33	34-99	100-122	123-170	171-178
KEYS:	G	chromatic	E	chromatic	G <sup>#</sup>

The second movement is a five part rondo with a short coda and is described by example 3. The sections are determined not by the appearance of a theme, but by the relative consonance and dissonance of each section. Each section is divided into two halves with the second half being a more dissonant incarnation of the first. The first section (A) is contained within mm. 1-35. This section is centered on an F minor7 chord. The second section begins in m. 36 and lasts until m. 55. This section is centered on G and contrasts the A section by its thicker dissonances. The return of the first section occurs in mm. 56-72 and is a return of the opening F minor7 chord. The C section, mm. 73-94, mark an increase in rhythmic activity and is centered on the key of A<sup>b</sup>. The final return of A occurs in mm. 94-100 and is centered on G. The E<sup>b</sup> in m. 96 is an anticipation of the coda. The coda occurs in mm. 100-104 and centers on E<sup>b</sup>. The surrounding pitches within the coda all emphasize the importance of E<sup>b</sup>, which is played through the attacca and becomes a drone in the third movement.

#### Example 3

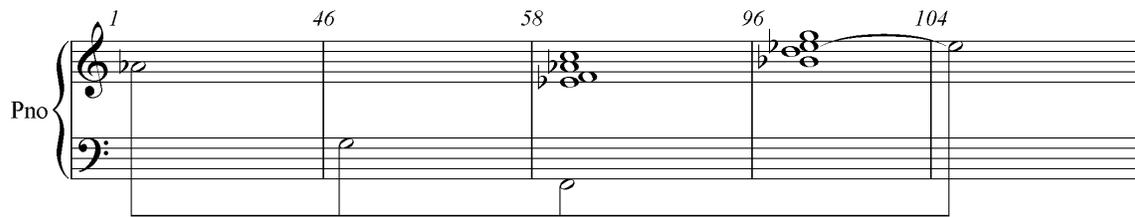
Movement 2

THEME AREAS:	<u>A</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>C</u>	<u>A'</u>	<u>coda</u>
mm.:	1-35	36-55	56-72	73-94	94-100	100-104
KEYS:	F	C/G	F	A <sup>b</sup> /C	G	E <sup>b</sup>

Another interesting facet of the second movement is shown in example 4 by the

descent from A<sup>b</sup> in the first measure through G in m. 46 and F in m. 58 to E<sup>b</sup> in m.96.

example 4



The third movement is a rounded binary form with a coda; this form is shown in example 5. The opening section occurs in mm. 1-63 in the key of B<sup>b</sup> major and is characterized by the drone that alternates between E<sup>b</sup> and B<sup>♯</sup>. The second section (B) in mm. 64-96 consists of a twelve-tone row beginning on F with a climax in mm. 88-96 in the key of C major. The return of the A section in mm. 97-108 is also in the key of C major. The coda begins in m. 108 and is freely chromatic leading to the final chord of F minor in m. 130.

Example 5

Movement 3

THEME AREAS:	<u>A</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>A'</u>	<u>coda</u>
mm.:	1-63	64-96	97-107	108-129
KEYS:	B <sup>b</sup>	12 tone	C	12 tone

The fourth movement, as depicted in example 6, is in sonata form. After the introduction with its shifting tonal centers in mm. 1-12, the A section begins in the key of C and descends to B<sup>b</sup>. In this section, the first theme is heard as a long drawn out idea in contrast to the accompanying figure. A short transition occurs in mm. 46-49 and is drawn from the material in the introduction. The B section begins in m. 50 and is in F Lydian. In the B section, the second theme is heard as a short burst of melodic material which is based on the first theme. The first theme is also heard in the B section; but because of the key, the section is still considered to be contrasting. A re-transition happens in mm. 95-106 and again draws on material from the introduction. The return of the A section occurs in mm. 107-146. In the return, both themes are presented in C major. The final cadence of the piece is in m. 138 and is followed by a cadential extension in mm. 138-

## Example 6

## Movement 4

THEME AREAS:	Intro	<u>A</u>	trans.	<u>B</u>	trans.	<u>A</u>
mm.:	1-12	13-45	46-49	50-94	95-106	107-146
KEYS:		C/B <sup>b</sup>		F		C

The rest of this paper deals with the strange little story and its accompanying motives. The titles of each movement tell a portion of the story, while the music paints the picture a little more clearly. The story is about a dancer who falls into a well after dancing around it. The dancer is now in the well and having to deal with the darkness found in the bottom of a well and the psychological problems that go along with the cramped, wet, darkness. The dancer, being an optimist at heart, then decides to dance in the well while looking for a way out. The dancer finds a way out and quickly ascends out of the well. The dancer then celebrates his/her freedom with a dance, of course.

The first movement, “around the well”, describes the opening of the well and a dance around the well. The opening of the well is described through the use of the sixteenth note motive that opens the piece and is illustrated in example 7. The dance is characterized by the pizzicato eighth notes as shown in example 8. These two motives alternate in their own dance with the well motive winning in the end.

example 7

Musical notation for Example 7, showing a piano accompaniment in 5/4 time. The piece begins with a forte dynamic (f) and features a sixteenth-note motive in the right hand and a steady eighth-note bass line in the left hand.

example 8

Musical notation for Example 8, showing a piano accompaniment in 4/4 time. The piece features a melody of eighth notes in the right hand and a bass line of eighth notes in the left hand, with a pizzicato effect indicated.

The second movement, “the dark well”, is part of the story told from within the well where all one can see is varying degrees of light. The light is portrayed through the use of relative consonance and dissonance. Areas of consonance, such as the opening of the movement and illustrated in example 9, are a description of looking up and seeing light coming down from the opening of the well. The dissonant chords are the feeling of suffocation that the darkness of the bottom of the well instills in the character.

example 9

Musical score for piano (Pno) in 2/2 time, measures 1 through 13. The right hand (treble clef) features a melodic line with a mix of consonant and dissonant chords. Measures 1-4 show a relatively consonant melody. Measures 5-7 introduce dissonant chords. Measures 8-13 show a more complex melodic line with dissonant chords. The left hand (bass clef) provides a simple bass line with sustained notes and rests.

The increased rhythmic activity beginning in m. 73 and shown in example 10, represent the feeling of claustrophobia that occurs after being trapped in the well for any length of time.

example 10

Musical score for piano (Pno) in 2/2 time, measures 73 through 81. The right hand (treble clef) features a highly rhythmic and dissonant melodic line with many accidentals and complex chord structures. Measures 73-77 show a series of dissonant chords. Measures 78-81 show a more complex melodic line with dissonant chords. The left hand (bass clef) provides a simple bass line with sustained notes and rests.

The E<sup>b</sup> that is held through the attacca into the third movement, “dancing in the well”, ties the two movements together. The dance rhythms shown in example 11 are a depiction of the dance happening in the well.

example 11

Example 11 is a piano accompaniment consisting of two systems of music. The first system contains measures 1 through 6, and the second system contains measures 7 through 10. The music is written for piano (Pno) on a grand staff with a treble and bass clef. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The time signature is 3/8. The melody in the treble clef is characterized by dotted rhythms and is grouped into six measures by a single slur. The bass clef part provides a rhythmic accompaniment with eighth and sixteenth notes, also grouped into six measures by a slur. The notation includes various accidentals and rests.

This dance is then joined by the well itself with the introduction of the twelve-tone material in mm. 68 as displayed in example 12. This dance continues with the well and the dancer vying for control. In the end, the well seems to win out, but the dancer has found a way out and has already started to climb up. The dancer has the last word with the final chord.

example 12

Example 12 is a piano accompaniment consisting of two systems of music. The first system contains measures 66 through 69, and the second system contains measures 70 through 73. The music is written for piano (Pno) on a grand staff with a treble and bass clef. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The time signature is 7/8. The melody in the treble clef is characterized by dotted rhythms and is grouped into four measures by a single slur. The bass clef part provides a rhythmic accompaniment with eighth and sixteenth notes, also grouped into four measures by a slur. The notation includes various accidentals and rests.

In the final movement, escape and dance, the dancer climbs out of the well and returns to dancing around the well. This dance is interrupted by the well when the dancer moves dangerously close to the edge of the well again. The opening gesture, as described in example 13, is the dancer climbing out of the well. The dancer then begins dancing around the well. The interruption of the dance is contained in the second section of the piece, while the recapitulation shows the dancer moving away from the well. The final impression of the piece is that of the dancer moving on to better things.

example 13

The musical score for piano (Pno) in 6/4 time, labeled 'example 13', consists of two systems of music. The first system contains three measures: measure 1 (6/4), measure 2 (6/4), and measure 3 (3/8). The second system contains three measures: measure 4 (6/4), measure 5 (6/4), and measure 6 (5/8). The notation includes treble and bass staves with various notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

The dark well has interesting properties that are exploited by the overall harmonic motion of the piece and the story that it tells. This was a fun piece to write and to explore in order to learn more of what I had written.