



PACK TWO · A DEEPER DIVE

Chamber Music

Studying the score, shaping it together, playing it in public

Six sheets for a group that already plays together: how to read the score behind your part, the four textures you will meet, matching articulation and phrasing, the six weeks before a concert, being on stage, and writing a piece of your own.

Learn the other three parts and your own starts to make sense.



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Antonín Dvořák

A viola player before he was a composer, and it shows: in his quartets the inner parts are never filler. He wrote the “American” quartet in three days, from sketches made on walks.

BEFORE THIS PACK

Pack one covers finding a group, reading a part and running a first rehearsal. Start there if you have not played chamber music before.

What is in here

Pack one was about turning up and joining in. This one is about the musical decisions: what the piece is doing, how four players agree on a shape, and how it all survives a concert.

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HOW TO USE IT

Work through sheets one to three with a real piece open in front of you — the exercises are all “do this to the music you are playing now”. Sheet six is a worksheet: fill it in with pencil.

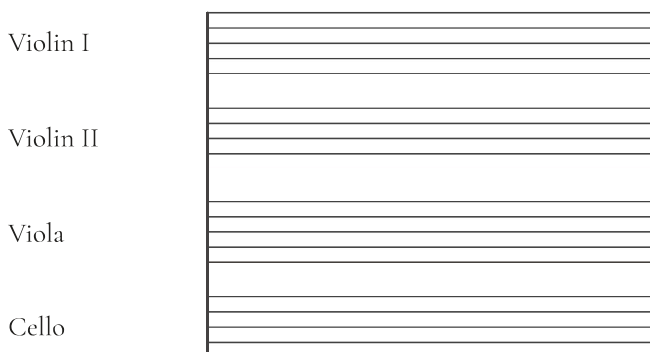
WHAT YOU NEED FIRST

A score of something you are playing, your own part, and a pencil. For sheet six, triads and keys as far as the Grade 2 theory pack.

Reading the score behind your part

A part tells you what to play; only the score tells you why. Twenty minutes with a score, alone, will fix more entries than an hour of rehearsal.

HOW A CHAMBER SCORE IS LAID OUT



Highest at the top, lowest at the bottom, one system for the whole group — so a chord in the music is a vertical column on the page. With a piano in the group, the piano goes underneath everyone.

READ DOWN, NOT ACROSS

To hear a bar, read the column: what note is each player on, and what chord do the four of them spell? Reading across one line at a time tells you nothing about the harmony.

FIND THE TUNE, BAR BY BAR

Mark the melody in your score with a coloured pencil as it moves between the players. In good chamber music it moves constantly, and the marked line is the piece's shape.

FIVE THINGS TO DO TO A SCORE BEFORE THE NEXT REHEARSAL

- 1 **Number the bars** in the score to match the parts, and bracket the sections: A, B, development, return.
- 2 **Mark your entries after long rests** and write beside each one whose note you should be listening for.
- 3 **Circle every change of key and tempo**, then check what your line is doing at that moment — usually it is the thing that must not wobble.
- 4 **Bracket the loudest and quietest bars in the movement.** Everything else is graded between them; a page of *forte* markings does not mean six equal *fortes*.
- 5 **Sing another player's line** while playing your own, slowly. If you can do that, you will never lose your place in that passage.

WHERE TO GET SCORES

Most of the standard repertoire is old enough to be out of copyright, and public-domain score libraries have the full scores and parts free to download — check the terms where you live. Print the score two pages to a sheet and keep it in the case with your part.

Four textures

Almost every bar of chamber music is one of four things. Name the texture and you know instantly how loud to be, whether to lead or follow, and what to listen to.

MELODY AND ACCOMPANIMENT

One leads · three give way

One player has the tune; the rest supply harmony and pulse. The tune shapes the tempo, and the accompaniment places its notes with the tune rather than on its own beat. Listen for: the melody's phrase ends, where you should thin out rather than fill in.

DIALOGUE

Question and answer

A figure is passed between players, each answering the last. The rule is imitation: match the shape, length and volume of what you were handed, then hand it on. Listen for: how the previous player ended, and copy it exactly.

HOMOPHONY — ALL TOGETHER

Four parts, one rhythm

Chords moving in the same rhythm: chorale writing, and almost every ending. Nobody leads, so the attack and the length of each chord must be agreed. Listen for: the bass line, which decides the tuning, and the top line, which decides the shape.

COUNTERPOINT AND FUGATO

Everyone independent

Several equal lines at once, often entering in turn with the same subject. Play your own line as a melody, but drop a dynamic level whenever a new voice enters so the entry can be heard. Listen for: entries, and the moment your line becomes accompaniment again.

TRY IT ON THE PIECE YOU ARE PLAYING

Take one page of the score and write a texture beside every four bars. Then check whether you are playing each of those four bars the way the texture asks.

IF YOU ARE UNSURE

Ask which line a listener would notice. If none stands out, it is homophony; if two do, it is counterpoint.

TEXTURES CHANGE FAST

Haydn will change texture four times in eight bars. That is what makes the music sound like conversation.

FOR COMPOSERS

Write in one texture for too long and the piece goes flat. Change texture at every structural point.

Phrasing and articulation together

Four players who each phrase sensibly on their own still sound untidy. The work is agreeing where a phrase goes to, and making the same note sound the same length in four different hands.

DECIDING A PHRASE, AS A GROUP

- 1 Find the high point.** One note in the phrase is the destination — usually the highest, or the one on the strongest harmony. Everybody marks the same bar.
- 2 Decide the direction.** Growing towards it, then easing away. Write an arrow in every part, not just the one with the tune.
- 3 Decide where it ends.** Does the phrase stop, or run on into the next one? Mark a comma or a tie-over, and agree whether anybody breathes.
- 4 Grade the repeats.** When a phrase comes back, it must be different — quieter, warmer, more urgent. Choose which, and write the word in.

THE SAME MARKING ON DIFFERENT INSTRUMENTS

MARKING	STRINGS	WIND	PIANO
Staccato	Short stroke, bow stays on the string	Light tongue, note kept warm	Finger lifts, wrist stays quiet
Slur	One bow, no re-articulation	One breath, first note tongued only	Legato fingers, no pedal blur
Accent	Faster bow at the start, not more pressure	Firmer air, not a harder tongue	Weight from the arm, released at once
Tenuto	Full bow length, sustained to the next note	Full air to the end of the note	Held to its full value, then lifted
Sforzando	Attack then immediate release	A push of air that decays	One loud note inside a soft bar

The words mean the same thing musically and something different physically. That is why “play it shorter” often fails: agree how *short* sounds by all playing one note together and copying whoever is nearest right.

MATCH THE NOTE BEFORE THE NOTE

Ensemble problems live in the note before an entry, not the entry itself. Rehearse the approach, not the arrival.

COPY, DO NOT COMPROMISE

When two players articulate differently, pick one version and both play it. A middle way sounds like neither.

Six weeks to a concert

Groups run out of time in the last fortnight because the first four weeks had no deadline in them. Give each week one job — week six is the one furthest from the concert.

Week 6	Read the whole programme through. Decide the order, time it, and cut anything you cannot learn. Everyone takes a score home.
Week 5	Slow work on the hardest passages, in tempo by the end of the rehearsal. Fix bowings, breaths and page turns now, in pencil, in every part.
Week 4	Structure: tempos for each movement, the transitions between them, and how the piece is graded from quietest to loudest.
Week 3	First full run of each piece with no stopping. Record it and listen once, together, without commenting until the end.
Week 2	Fix what the recording showed — usually balance and the joins. Practise starting from six different places in each movement.
Week 1	Play it to somebody. A parent, a teacher, another group; anyone in a chair changes how it feels. Then leave it alone.
The day	Warm up, tune in the hall, play one slow passage and one loud chord to hear the room, and stop. Do not rehearse the hard bit an hour before.

TWO THINGS TO SORT EARLY

TIMING THE PROGRAMME

Add up the movements, then add two minutes for tuning, entrances and applause between pieces. Most groups over-run because of the gaps, not the music.

WHO SPEAKS

If you are introducing the pieces, decide who, and write two sentences per piece. What it is, when it was written, and one thing to listen for.

On stage

An audience decides how good a group is in the first ten seconds, before a note is played. All of it can be rehearsed, and takes about five minutes to fix.

IN ORDER

MOMENT	WHAT TO DO
Walking on	In the order you sit, unhurried, instruments up. Agree who leads on before you go anywhere near the stage.
The bow	Together, on a look from whoever is on the outside. One bow for the group, not four separate ones.
Sitting and settling	Stands at the right height already; check you can see the others. A short silence here is worth a lot.
Tuning	Quiet and brief. If it is badly out, tune properly – the audience will forgive ten seconds, not a sour first chord.
Before the first note	Wait for the room to be still. Look round the group, breathe together, then start.
Between movements	Stay in character. Retune only if you must, and briefly. The audience follows your body language about whether it has ended.
The end	Hold the silence a moment before you move. Lower instruments together, then stand and bow together.
If it goes wrong	No faces, no apology, no glancing at the guilty party. Get back in at the next landmark and keep the tempo – nobody in the hall knows the piece as well as you do.

NERVES

Slow breathing out, not in. Practise the first four bars of each piece so often that they need no thought – nerves take the first minute and give it back after.

REHEARSE THE WALKING ON

Once, properly: door to chairs to bow to first note. It removes almost all of the shuffling that makes a group look unprepared.

WORDS YOU WILL MEET ON A PROGRAMME

Op. – opus: the composer's numbering of published works.

attacca – go straight into the next movement.

arr. – arranged for these instruments by someone else.

No. – the piece's place within one opus.

Movements listed with tempos – the running order and character of each.

K. / D. / B. – catalogue numbers for Mozart, Schubert, Dvořák.

Writing for your own group

You have the rarest thing a composer can have: players who will read what you write and tell you the truth. Plan a short piece here first — two or three minutes is plenty.

WHO IS PLAYING IT

Name each player and the lowest and highest note they are happy playing.

KEY, TIME SIGNATURE, TEMPO

Choose a key that suits the instruments — flat keys for wind, open-string keys for strings.

THE IDEA — FOUR TO EIGHT BARS YOU COULD SING

Describe it in words if you cannot write it here yet: rising or falling, smooth or jumpy, long notes or short.

PLAN THE TEXTURES — FILL IN WHAT HAPPENS WHERE

SECTION	WHO HAS THE TUNE	TEXTURE	BARS
Opening			
Answer / second idea			
Middle — new key			
Return			
Ending			

FIVE RULES FOR A FIRST CHAMBER PIECE

Give everyone the tune once. Leave rests — silence is easier to play than notes. Keep the bass line simple and moving. Do not write four busy parts at once. End where the harmony ends, not four bars later.

GETTING IT READ

Write out clean parts with bar numbers, bring a score for yourself, and set a tempo you can actually count. Ask for one thing after the read-through: “what is awkward to play?” Then rewrite that, and only that.