What to Listen For

Haydn: String Quartet, Op. 75, No. 3 (Emperor), II

Here’s what to listen for in the second movement of Haydn’s String Quartet, Op. 75, No. 3 (Emperor).

- Two violins, one viola, and one cello
  A string quartet is a work written for two violins, one viola, and one cello. As you listen to this work, remember that you are hearing only four instruments.

- Theme in five phrases (a-a-b-c-c structure), homophonic texture, and quadruple meter
  The form of this slow movement is theme and variations: the theme is stated first, and then each successive statement of the theme is altered, or varied. This theme is in five phrases, stated in homophonic texture, with simple accompaniment, and in quadruple meter, metrical pattern of four beats to a measure. Listen to the first phrase (a) and hear that the second phrase is a repeat of the first (creating a-a): [0:00–0:30]. The third phrase is contrasting (b): [0:30–0:45]. The fourth phrase is also new (c), and it repeats as the fifth phrase (creating c-c): [0:46–1:17].

- Four variations of the theme in more polyphonic texture
  After the statement of the theme, you will hear four variations, or alterations of the original statement of the theme. In each variation, you will hear the other instruments playing more actively, creating a more polyphonic texture than you heard at the beginning of the movement. As you listen to the theme in the lower violin part in Variation 1, notice how the upper violin plays faster-moving notes: [1:19–2:27]. In Variation 2, the cello has the theme accompanied by the other instruments: [2:28–3:45]. The viola plays the theme in Variation 3 while the other instruments provide lively interplay: [3:45–5:03]. And in Variation 4, the higher violin plays the theme again in polyphonic texture with the rest of the string quartet: [5:04–6:17].

So remember to listen for (and even sing along with) the statement of the theme in homophonic texture at the beginning of this movement. You’ll then hear the theme in four variations, each of which becomes more polyphonic and features a different instrument playing the theme.