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## String Quartet No. 4, op. 37



Title	String Quartet No. 4, op. 37
Time of origin	1936
Premiere	8 January 1937, Los Angeles, University of California at Los Angeles, Josiah Royce Hall
duration	ca. 32 min.

I. Allegro molto; energico

II. Comodo

III. Largo

IV. Allegro

Arnold Schönberg composed his Fourth String Quartet op. 37 within six weeks in 1936. If one includes the quartet written in 1897 without an opus number, this was Schönberg's fifth string quartet. He never realized plans for a sixth, for which he had made sketches. The work on his Fourth String Quartet came at a difficult time for Schönberg: having emigrated from Germany in 1933, he moved to the East Coast of the United States following a short stay in Paris. At first he taught at two conservatories – in Boston and New York – but his travel between the two cities as well as the climate were seriously injurious to his health, forcing him to cancel concerts and lectures. This, in turn, had a negative effect on the family's financial situation, which was already strained. Largely because of the more pleasant climate, the family decided to move to California, where Schönberg accepted a professorship at the University of California at Los Angeles in the autumn of 1936, following a year's study at the University of Southern California. At the time of the move, Schönberg had just started writing the Quartet op. 37. On 3 August 1936, he wrote to the music patron Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge, who had commissioned both the Third and Fourth String Quartets, that he had completed the quartet on 26 July: "[I] should have sent it to you if only I knew where you are now. [...] You were probably astonished to hear nothing more from us. But you could not imagine how much work we had through the arrival of our furniture. I lost more than four weeks and still have my library and my manuscripts not arranged. [...] But every quarter of an hour I was free I used for the continuation of the string quartet. [...] I am very content with the work and think it will be much more pleasant than the third. But – I believe always so." The Los Angeles Times confirmed Schönberg's sentiment in its review, describing the quartet as being less revolutionary than expected and eliciting feelings not unlike those evoked by euphonious music.

The first movement already begins with an appealing theme that opens with a descending semitone followed by a descending major third. This third tone of the row is repeated three times in eighth notes, with a subsequent eighth note in an upward semitone, the fourth

note of the basic row. The seventh and eleventh tones of the row also have this characteristic accented eighth-note repetition. The basic row is presented in the first five bars and is followed by a lyrical secondary theme that starts in bar six it is contrasted with a more lyrical secondary theme. In the further course of the movement, lyrical episodes develop from this theme; these are repeatedly countered by the relentless main theme. In addition to the basic row, which is notable for its tone repetition, thirds and sixths are heard not only as horizontal intervals but also as chordal pillars of the accompaniment.

The second movement – *Comodo* – shows proximity to the classic quartet model. While there are only vague references to the classical sonata form in the first movement, here the relationship is more clearly recognizable, for example, in the A–B–A form, making it comparable to a minuet or scherzo movement. The trio also assumes the function of a development section; it not only introduces new material but also develops what has been previously heard.

The third movement – *Largo* – sets itself apart from the preceding movements by the presentation of the main theme. Schönberg dispenses with a contrapuntal accompaniment, letting the theme sound in unison. At the beginning of the A–B–A–B form, he first quotes the motif of the main theme of the first movement in fortissimo, but a whole tone lower than the original. The emphasized intervals of a third as well as the cadence of the melodic-thematic phrase, ending with a descending fifth, create a harmonious feeling. The B sections are dominated by the rhythmic character of the second movement, again combined with motivic elements from the first movement. The A section returns with a very clearly discernible fortissimo, unisono entrance, but this time the intervals are inverted. The transition to the B section is now much less distinct. Elements of the first transition are combined with motifs of the B section, and the dividing lines are not clearly recognizable. One reason for this change is described by Schönberg in his "Program Notes" to the four string quartets: "The deviation from the first formulation of this part is far-reaching because of the difference in purpose: the first time it served as a lyric contrast to the dramatic outbursts of the recitative, which it had to overcome by virtue of its intrinsic warmth. The second time, when the insertion of the section has already reduced the tension of the beginning, its purpose is to prepare for an ending." The final movement is in rondo form. The theme appears five times in varied repetitions, contrasted with three episodes, a kind of development following the third and fourth appearance of the varied rondo theme, and a coda. About this movement Schönberg writes: "This Allegro contains a great abundance of thematic material because every repetition is varied far-reachingly and gives birth to new formulations."

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