

# The Compositional Eclecticism of Bohuslav Martinů

## Examining His Chamber Works Featuring the Oboe, Part I

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Although he has been hailed as one of “the most internationally significant Czech composers” by musicologists, Bohuslav Martinů, a composer of a resounding 384 works, remains widely unfamiliar to today’s audiences.<sup>1</sup> Martinů’s biography and compositional output do not grace the pages of mainstream music history textbooks, nor is his music widely performed on the concert stage. Scholars attribute his obscurity to two factors. First, Martinů did not ally himself with one school, composer, or style. Second, Martinů did not filter or revise his published works, resulting in a massive, yet inconsistent collected works.<sup>2</sup>

Martinů contributed to the oboe repertoire with seven known chamber works (defined here as works written for seven or fewer players). As can be seen in the table below, Martinů did not adhere to traditional ensembles; rather, he explored unorthodox combinations of instruments to create new and compelling timbres. (Perhaps the best example of this is Martinů’s *Fantaisie*, which features the oboe and theremin as dueling solo voices.)

Piece	Year	Instrumentation
Wind Sextet	1929	Flute, oboe, clarinet, 2 bassoons, piano
Wind Quintet (lost)	1930	Flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, horn
<i>Quatre madrigaux</i>	1937	Oboe, clarinet, bassoon
<i>Fantaisie</i>	1944	Theremin, oboe, 2 violins, viola, cello, piano
Oboe Quartet	1947	Oboe, violin, cello, piano
<i>Mazurka-Nocturne</i>	1949	Oboe, violin, cello
Oboe Concerto	1955	Oboe, chamber orchestra

Table 1: Chamber works featuring the oboe by Bohuslav Martinů

In examining Martinů’s popular chamber works featuring oboe, it is this writer’s intent to highlight Martinů’s fascinating compositional evolution, and to endorse these lesser-known works as viable performance pieces for the oboe community.

### Introduction

Bohuslav Martinů was essentially a self-taught composer who experimented with various music styles over the course of his career to develop his own eclectic and uniquely cosmopolitan voice. By absorbing stylistic elements of the music surrounding him, Martinů is indebted to numerous composers for his eclectic compositional

output: early Renaissance composers such as Corelli and Orlando di Lasso, Czech folk composers Smetana, Dvorak, and Janáček, German Romantic composers Strauss and Wagner, French Impressionists Debussy and the responding *Les Six*, American Jazz, and Russian composer Stravinsky (during his neo-classic period), to name a few.

Martinů's music career can be divided into four periods, each of which reflects the predominant style that influenced his own compositions during that time. Harry Halbreich<sup>3</sup> categorizes these four periods as seen below:

1. Before Paris (1890-1923) – Czech and Impressionistic influence
2. The Paris Years (1923-1940) – Search for a settled style
3. The American Years (1941-1953) – Success with a proven formula
4. The European Years (1953-1959) – “Fantasy vs. geometry”

In this paper, however, we will begin our stylistic discussion as it relates to the oboe, with Martinů's “Paris Years,” which has been divided into two sub-periods (1923–1930 and 1931–1940).

The works to be examined are the *Wind Sextet*, *Quatre madrigaux*, *Fantaisie*, *Oboe Quartet*, and the *Oboe Concerto*. By exploring Martinů's *Wind Sextet* (1929) of the “Early Paris Years” one will see stylistic influences of jazz and the eighteenth century divertimento. The reed trio *Quatre madrigaux* (1937) of the “Late Paris Years,” portrays influences from the early Renaissance madrigal and the Baroque *fortspinnung* technique (that resulted in Martinů's innovative “cell technique”). Martinů's *Fantaisie* (1944) and *Oboe Quartet* (1947) of the “American Years” portray a mature style that captures neo-classical elements, with a subtle nod to Czech folk music. Martinů's *Oboe Concerto* (1955) of the “European Years” reflects a process of simplification, a return to Czech folk elements, and his allegiance to the early madrigal through his new “fantasy vs. geometry” formula.

### Childhood Years in Policka and Prague: 1890–1923

From each side of the balcony the outlook was different, and a wide expanse of space covered everything [...] This space, I think, was the greatest impression of my childhood. Before everything else it penetrated my consciousness and it was only later that I became aware of people. In my early days people seemed like little dots, shifting I knew not where nor why, figures working in an unknown fashion [...] This picture, I remember, was always changing and was dominated by space. When you consider that I lived more or less in isolation except for spatial phenomena, it perhaps explains why I viewed everything differently.<sup>4</sup>

– Bohuslav Martinů

Thus recalled Bohuslav Martinů of his unique childhood, growing up in a church bell-tower in the quiet country town of Polička, Czechoslovakia. A year before his birth in 1890, Bohuslav's father Ferdinand Martinů, a shoe cobbler, moved his family up to the bell tower of the St. James Church to serve as fire watchman to the

city. An oblong room measuring little over sixteen by eleven feet served as living, working, and sleeping quarters for the five-member Martinů family, in addition to two lodgers. As a child Martinů was too frail to climb the 193 steps from the street to his home, so it was in this cramped room, 118 feet above the world, where he lived for the first thirteen years of his life. Martinů's biographers cite this unique perspective of the world as not only an unusual upbringing for a child, but also as a dominant source of inspiration for the composer. Miloš Safránek begins his first biography on Martinů by connecting the "singular detached quality of Bohuslav Martinů's work and personality" with his unusual childhood brought up in isolation.<sup>5</sup> It is also this extraordinary upbringing that some scholars claim as the source of Martinů's antisocial personality, and has led one biographer to diagnosing Martinů with Asperger's Syndrome.<sup>6</sup> Martinů described his childhood best in saying,

[my childhood] plays a great part in my whole attitude to composition. Not the small interests of people, their cares, joys and griefs [*sic*], but what I saw from a great distance, or rather, from a great height. It was this space that I had constantly before me and which, it seems to me, I am forever seeking in my compositions. Space and Nature, not people.<sup>7</sup>

Martinů was a nervous and shy child, but he found joy in music from an early age. His first exposure to music was likely his father's assistant, "old Stodola," who was always heard singing folk songs and nursery rhymes, accompanied by the tolling of the church bells. It was Stodola who aroused in Martinů an interest in music, and he fashioned Martinů a drum, and later a primitive fiddle and bow that the boy played endlessly. When Martinů turned six, he was carried down the tower to begin school; soon after, he began taking weekly violin lessons with a town musician Josef Černovský. Musicologist Susan Lee Cable attributes Stodola's and Černovský's music making as Martinů's earliest stylistic influences. "Elements of these folk songs and rhythms were later absorbed into his music and became consistent features of his musical style. Czech folk music, then, was the first major influence on the composer."<sup>8</sup> Martinů became highly proficient on violin, and he composed his first work for that instrument at the age of ten, gaining the attention of the town figureheads. In 1906, members of the town offered financial support to Martinů's parents, convincing them to send him to Prague to study violin at the Conservatory where Dvořák, Suk, and Janáček had once been pupils.

Martinů had never experienced life in a large city, and Prague enraptured Martinů with its cultural vitality and endless concerts. In the early twentieth century the city was alive with a resurgence of nationalism, and the latest works by Czech composers such as Josef Suk and Vítězslav Novak highlighted the revival of Bohemian folk music. Prague was also a center for the European crosscurrents of new and old music. German Romanticism of the nineteenth century competed with the new sounds of French Impressionism and American jazz.

Unfortunately, Martinů did not flourish at the Conservatory, as the citizens of Polička had anticipated. Rather than complete the demanding coursework assigned

in the Conservatory, Martinů studied the more compelling culture that surrounded him. Martinů attended every performance by the Czech Philharmonic, Czech Society for Chamber Music, and National Theatre Orchestra that he could afford. In this musical capital Martinů's teachers were not the professors at the Conservatory; rather, the music of Dvořák, Brahms, Strauss, Verdi, Wagner, and Debussy were his teachers and they inspired in him a deep love for composition. Martinů's head swirled with echoes of contrasting styles, making it impossible for the young violinist-composer to develop his own creative philosophy. Thus his compositions from this period portray youthful ramblings that shifted from Debussian Impressionism to Bohemian folk song to Strauss chromaticism within the space of a few measures.

Eventually the young violinist flunked out of the Conservatory, and again a second time after he had re-enrolled in the Organ School the following year. At the outbreak of World War I, Martinů returned to Polička for several uneventful years. He found his way back to Prague in 1919 when he was invited—through the help of a former violinist friend Stanislav Novák—to play with the Czech Philharmonic on a regular basis. It was there, seated in the second violin section, that Martinů received the schooling he would need to be a self-taught composer. In the Philharmonic the reproduction of a wide variety of orchestra literature alighted in Martinů a fascination for the innovative styles of French Impressionists Debussy, Dukas, and Albert Roussel. Martinů saw in French music the ideals of clarity that the prevailing “German metaphysical philosophy”<sup>9</sup> of Romanticism—which was the prevailing style in Czechoslovakia—so clearly lacked. It was Albert Roussel with whom Martinů was particularly enamored. After having performed several of Roussel's works with the Philharmonic—including the nature symphony *Poème de la forêt* (1904–6), the delicate ballet-pantomime *Le Festin de l'araigée* (1913), and the orchestral suite *Pour une fête de printemps* (1921)—Martinů was so entranced by Roussel's music that he was determined to study with him. Fortuitously, the young composer was awarded a small grant from the Czech Ministry of Education, and so Martinů left Prague for that “miraculous city,” Paris on October 1923 to study with Albert Roussel.<sup>10</sup>

### The Early Years in Paris: 1923–1930

I went to France not to seek my salvation but to confirm my opinions. What I sought most on French soil was not Debussy, nor Impressionism, nor, in fact, musical expression, but the real foundations in which Western culture rests and which, in my opinion, conforms much more to our proper natural character than a maze of conjectures and problems.<sup>11</sup>

— Bohuslav Martinů

Upon arriving in Paris, Martinů was surrounded by contemporary composers, artists, and poets who were members of a rich new cultural movement. After the First World War, the French capital glistened as the center of a “new world,” with artists and musicians flocking to the city during the 1920s and '30s.<sup>12</sup> Reacting to the pre-war Romantic era, with its dominance of emotion and musical seriousness

of the nineteenth century, new revolutionary influences—led by Pablo Picasso, the Cubists, and the *Fauves* on the visual arts, the Futurists on mechanical beauty, and Diaghilev's Ballet Russe on a new approach to line and movement—prevailed.<sup>13</sup>

Surprised to see that musical Impressionism—following Debussy's death in 1918—was no longer fashionable in Paris, Martinů found himself amidst the milieu of a changing Parisian and extra-European music culture. Avant-garde composers like Erik Satie were shifting to light-hearted and humorous compositional styles. The sounds of Harlem-style jazz, ragtime, and “Hot Jazz” of Louis Armstrong and Bessie Smith reverberated down the streets of Paris, and elements of this new music appeared in the concert halls. A prime example of the fusion of jazz idioms with classical music is Darius Milhaud's highly acclaimed *La Création du monde* (1923). Meanwhile music of Bartók, Poulenc, Prokofiev, and the influential Stravinsky were also being performed throughout the city.<sup>14</sup>

The early years in Paris marked a period of assimilation for Martinů who disliked much of the avant-garde music of his new environment. Having been captivated by Impressionism, Martinů found it hard to adjust to Paris's latest musical thought.<sup>15</sup> This difficulty of adaptation was reflected in Martinů's early Paris works, which he later described as a “heap of muddled ideas.”<sup>16</sup> Martinů's mentor Albert Roussel guided the composer through this stylistic labyrinth. Brian Large writes in his biography on Martinů, “It was Roussel who was partly responsible for the composer's break with Impressionism and it was he who guided Martinů to follow a style at once neo-classical and nearer his own.”<sup>17</sup> Martinů's Parisian works reflected Roussel's influence with a leaner, more angular compositional style that employed neo-baroque and neo-classical elements.<sup>18</sup>

In 1924 Martinů's attitude changed when he discovered Stravinsky's captivating chamber work *L'Histoire du soldat* and the recently premiered ballet *Les Noces*. Beginning in 1924 Martinů delved into Stravinsky's works and he wrote no less than six articles for the Prague Music Press applauding the composer's disruptive new style, which contrasted drastically from the romantic repertoire that remained so popular in his home country.<sup>19</sup> In his article “Igor Stravinsky,” Martinů writes that Stravinsky has instituted a “new direction” in which the primary traits are “an absolute suppression of romanticism and subjectivism and a return to absolute musical values, to pure music.”<sup>20</sup> Having heard performances of *L'Histoire du soldat*, *Les Noces*, and *Le Sacre du printemps*, Martinů was captivated by Stravinsky's use of harmony, polytonality, and “primitive polyphony.”<sup>21</sup> These works in particular pushed Martinů to finally embrace the musical trends and idioms of his surroundings. Martinů's 1925 composition *Half-Time* marks a new chapter in his career as he left his comfortable Impressionist leanings for new stylistic possibilities. This ten-minute rondo is a product of the times, with an emphasis on rhythmic and dynamic elements indicative of Stravinsky's influence.<sup>22</sup>

Stravinsky's style is more evident in the score to *Half-Time* with its angular rhythms, striking harmonies, polytonal dissonances, and primitive approach to polyphony.<sup>23</sup> Just as a young Martinů had youthfully imitated Debussy's style in his early works of 1910 (for instance, his *Prologue* and *The Angel of Death*) the thirty-four

year old composer was now accused by critics of plagiarizing Stravinsky with its blatant use of rhythmic fragments, obscured tonality, and harsh dissonances redolent of Stravinsky's *Petrouchka*.<sup>24</sup> Whether purposefully copied or not, *Half-Time* did contain three elements that would become characteristic of Martinů's compositional style: the rhythm is irregular and asymmetrical, atonality and dissonances obscure the tonal center, and the piano takes an active role in the orchestration as a color instrument.<sup>25</sup>

While Martinů's works from 1925 to 1926 display his experimentation with music elements introduced by Stravinsky and *Les Six*, in 1927 jazz idioms began to find their way into his scores. Composed in 1927 the eighteen-minute ballet *La revue de cuisine* was Martinů's earliest exploration into jazz, following Milhaud's *La création du monde* by four years.<sup>26</sup> *La revue de cuisine*—subtitled “The Temptation of Sanctimonious Mr. Pot”—is lighthearted in nature and is representative of the comical and playful works by Parisian composers Erik Satie and *Les Six*. Extended harmonies of ninth and eleventh chords, the concurrence of duple and triple rhythms, and dance rhythms like the Charleston are all elements found in *La revue de cuisine* that suggest Martinů's incorporation of jazz.<sup>27</sup> Similar instances of Martinů's use of jazz idioms is seen in his *Sextet* for woodwinds and piano, written in 1929.

### Wind Sextet 1929, fl/ob/cl/2bsn/pno

Having already lived in Paris for six years, Martinů was developing an ability to incorporate popular music and jazz elements into his compositions in a graceful and natural way. Like his ballet *La revue de cuisine* two years earlier, Martinů's *Sextet* portrays his comfort in integrating jazz and popular idioms into his music. Martinů composed his *Sextet* for the unique combination of piano, flute, oboe, clarinet, and two bassoons in the span of eight days, from January 28 to February 4, 1929. Martinů entered the chamber piece into the 1929 Coolidge Prize for chamber music, sponsored by American patron Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge.<sup>28</sup> Martinů wrote to Ms. Coolidge saying that replacing the French horn with a second bassoon resulted in a “combination [that] produces entirely unexpected colours.”<sup>29</sup> He did not win the prize that year, nor was the piece published or performed in Martinů's lifetime. Almost three decades later in 1958, Martinů even expressed his hope that the composition had been lost.<sup>30</sup>

Echoing Roussel's neo-classical influences, this work is structured into five short movements: Preludium, Adagio, Scherzo, Blues, and Finale and it is dedicated to Martinů's good friend and fellow composer Jan Kune, director of the Brno Conservatory. More subtle than *La revue*, Martinů crafts in the *Sextet* a sophisticated blend of chamber and jazz elements, indicating the composer's maturing compositional voice. The *Sextet* is dotted by jazz and ragtime rhythms and idioms that had become popular in Paris during the roaring '20s.<sup>31</sup> Anthony Burton best describes the *Sextet* in his program notes for a 2013 performance by soloists of the London Philharmonic Orchestra.



Strongly influenced by Stravinsky's polyrhythmic and syncopated compositions, Martinů's early years in Paris portray the composer's affinity to complex rhythms. Unlike *Half-Time* where rhythm is paramount over melody or form, the rhythm in the *Sextet* plays a more subservient role. Nonetheless, Martinů does write highly syncopated lines throughout the jazz-intoned score. An example of this is seen in the piano part of the Finale movement, below.

The image displays a musical score for Bohuslav Martinů's *Sextet, V, "Finale,"* measures 24-28. The score is presented in two systems. The first system includes staves for Flute (Fl), Oboe (Ob), Clarinet (Cl), Trumpet (T), Trombone (Tb), and Piano (P). The second system includes staves for Flute (Fl), Oboe (Ob), Clarinet (Cl), Trumpet (T), Trombone (Tb), and Piano (P). The piano part is highly syncopated and complex, featuring many accidentals and dynamic markings like 'f' and 'ff'. The woodwind and brass parts also show complex rhythmic patterns and syncopation. The score is written in a key signature of one flat and a 4/4 time signature.

Figure 3: Bohuslav Martinů, *Sextet, V, "Finale,"* measures 24-28.

Although the *Sextet* primarily depicts Martinů's evocation of contemporary jazz elements, the work as a whole conforms to the eighteenth century *divertimento* genre, of which Martinů was certainly familiar. The Harvard Dictionary of Music defines

a *divertimento* as, “an instrumental composition written primarily for entertainment and hence in a rather light vein. [...] Usually, however, such compositions were written for small ensembles [...] and consisted of a number [...] of relatively short movements.”<sup>37</sup> It is no coincidence that the *Sextet* resembles the eighteenth century *divertimento*. Among the musical forms that Martinů turned for inspiration were those of the eighteenth century. Rather than emulating the ever-popular Mozart or Haydn, Martinů turned most often to the scores of Arcangelo Corelli (1653-1713), whose *Concerti Grossi* and *Sonata da Camera* exuded a clarity of design and musical vitality that Martinů particularly admired.<sup>38</sup> He would continue to experiment with both Corelli’s *Concerto Grosso* and *Sonata da Camera* throughout the 1930s.

### The Later Years in Paris: 1931–1940

During the second half of his residence in Paris, Martinů continued to experiment with various music styles, producing scores for chamber, orchestra, opera, and ballet settings. Some of his celebrated works from this period include: the *Concerto Grosso* for string quartet and orchestra, *Ricercare*, *Sinfonia Concertante*, and the *Double Concerto* for two orchestras. In his Parisian apartment Martinů had music scores that covered practically every era of Western European music history. These scores—which were piled on tables, chairs, and on his bed and piano—included those written by Bach, Corelli, Mozart, Palestrina, and Orlando di Lasso.<sup>39</sup>

Martinů also admired the “primitive, naïve counterpoint of the old Flemish masters” in particular Palestrina, Josquin des Pres, Guillaume Dufay, and Orlando di Lasso.<sup>40</sup> The simplistic, horizontal approach to part writing, variety of contrapuntal devices, and unadorned polyphonic structures of these early composers interested Martinů and likely influenced his inclination towards composing his own madrigals.<sup>41</sup> Though Martinů had moved away from musical Impressionism during the 1920’s—a style he had so strongly admired as a budding composer—his other early musical inspiration was the early madrigal, which made appearances in his scores from the 1930’s. From the 1930’s onward, a myriad of pieces containing the name and form of the early madrigal could be found in Martinů’s music. Miloš Safránek describes Martinů’s interest in the madrigal best,

In the Madrigals he found confirmation of what he felt and what he was not told by his teachers, namely, in what measure the harmonic structure commonly used throughout the 19th century dictated the melodic line of the individual parts and in doing so, did not allow them full and proper freedom.<sup>42</sup>

Martinů was likely first introduced to the early Renaissance madrigal at a 1922 concert by the English Singers in Prague (though he alludes to a 1914 concert, which has been contested amongst scholars.)<sup>43</sup> Regardless of the specific date of his earliest exposure to the madrigal, Martinů did not reference this genre until 1937 with his reed trio *Quatre madrigaux* for oboe, clarinet, and bassoon.

### **Quatre Madrigaux: 1937, ob/cl/bsn**

In a radio interview (New York's W.A.B.C.) on August 4, 1942 Martinů described various musical styles that influenced his compositional style.<sup>44</sup>

In my music I have been influenced by many things, but most of all by the national music of Czechoslovakia, by the music of Debussy, and by the English Madrigals. These I heard before 1914 when the English Singers were in Prague. I was attracted to the freedom of polyphony, which I found very different from that of Bach. I recognized something of Bohemian folk music in these madrigals.

Inspired by his composition student Vítzlava Kaprálová who was also writing a trio (that was not completed) for the Parisian ensemble Trio d'Anches, Martinů wrote *Quatre madrigaux* for the same ensemble.<sup>45</sup> It was the first of many compositions by Martinů to bear the title "Madrigal."<sup>46</sup> Indicative of his study of the Renaissance masters, Martinů's *Quatre madrigaux* for reed trio reflects certain elements that are characteristic of the early madrigal. In examining this trio one can see that Martinů assimilates very well the spirit of the madrigal through free horizontal writing and simple polyphonic structures, but without adapting the madrigal form itself.<sup>47</sup>

Typical of the madrigal style, no voice dominates over the other, and the texture maintains an equal balance of the three voices throughout each of the four movements.<sup>48</sup> The Renaissance madrigal comprised three to six parts of equal importance; those voices often moved together in homophony or followed one another in counterpoint with each voice presenting the melody in turn.<sup>49</sup> Reminiscent of the Renaissance madrigal, Martinů alternates between polyphonic and homophonic structures throughout each movement of his *Quatre madrigaux*. In the first movement of the *Quatre madrigaux* Martinů shifts from three-voice polyphony to homophony three times in the first twenty measures. The first page of the score depicts this textural shift, with a homophonic passage beginning one measure before rehearsal 1 that then returns to polyphony three measures later (*see Figure 4, following page*). In this passage one can see Martinů's equal treatment of the three voices, preventing any voice from dominating the texture. This equality of voicing in both contrapuntal and homophonic textures is a predominant characteristic of the Renaissance madrigal.<sup>50</sup>

Another feature that reflects his admiration for the early madrigal is seen in the fourth movement in measures 1 through 15 (*see Figure 5, page 12*). The playful final movement of the trio begins with each instrument entering individually with the same running sixteenth-note motive. Martinů begins the movement in imitative counterpoint, with each instrument playing the motive, as seen in measures 1 through 5. This in itself parallels the Harvard Dictionary of Music definition of the madrigal as being "animated with graceful points of imitation."<sup>51</sup> Beginning in measure 5, Martinů shifts from a three-voice imitative counterpoint to a two-voice homophony juxtaposed with an independent line. Martinů alternates those instrument pairs, and shifts each instrument from a solo role to a paired accompaniment role. In measure 5 Martinů pairs the oboe and bassoon in parallel eighth-note

The image shows a musical score for three woodwinds: Hautbois (Oboe), Clar. en Ut (Clarinete en Si bémol), and Basson (Basson). The score is for the first 17 measures of Bohuslav Martinů's *Quatre Madrigaux, I*. The music is in 3/4 time and features a complex interplay of melodic lines. The Hautbois part starts with a triplet of eighth notes. The Clar. en Ut and Basson parts enter with a melodic line. The score includes dynamic markings such as *p*, *poco mf*, *mf*, and *poco f*, and articulation like accents and slurs. A circled '1' is placed above a note in the Clar. en Ut part in measure 11.

Figure 4: Bohuslav Martinů, *Quatre Madrigaux*, I, m. 1-17.

motion while the clarinet plays an independent line of running sixteenth notes. By measure 11 the pairs have shifted to clarinet and oboe, allowing the bassoon to play the melodic line. This constant passing of musical roles and timbres became a signature characteristic of Martinů's mature works.<sup>52</sup>

In examining *Quatre madrigaux* one can find another important element that is characteristic of Martinů's compositional style: the "cell technique." The "cell" is Martinů's own term that describes a short melodic and/or rhythmic motive comprised most often of three notes. The cell can exist within a larger motive or function as the entire melody. Martinů's unique approach to a melody resulted in continuously deriving material from that truncated motive.<sup>53</sup> Martinů's strong admiration for the Baroque *concerto grosso* might have inspired his use of the "cell technique," with the similar Baroque *fortspinnung* technique.<sup>54</sup> Martinů used the "cell" in a variety of ways: accompanying figures, transitional motifs, and as a melodic or rhythmic

*Poco allegro*

The musical score consists of seven systems of three staves each (treble, middle, and bass clefs). The tempo is marked *Poco allegro*. The key signature has one flat (B-flat major or D minor). The score begins with a *mf* (mezzo-forte) dynamic. The first system shows a complex rhythmic pattern with many sixteenth and thirty-second notes. The second system continues this texture. The third system introduces a *poco f* (poco fortissimo) dynamic. The fourth system continues with *poco f*. The fifth system features a *f* (forte) dynamic, with a *(meno)* marking indicating a slight decrease in intensity. The sixth system continues with *f*. The seventh system concludes with *f*. The score is characterized by frequent chromaticism and a dense, rhythmic texture.

Figure 5: Bohuslav Martinů, *Quatre Madrigaux*, IV, m. 1-15.

The musical score consists of eight systems of three staves each (treble, alto, and bass clefs). The key signature is one flat (B-flat major or D minor). The score includes various dynamics such as *p*, *mf*, *f*, *poco f*, and *f espress.*. There are also articulation marks like accents and slurs. A circled number '1' appears above the first staff of the fourth system. The piece concludes with a double bar line and repeat dots.

ostinato.<sup>55</sup> Martinů's simplistic "cell technique" allows organic unity and continuity in the formal structure of a work, and it is this technique that is considered to be the composer's most significant contribution to composition.<sup>56</sup> Brian Large describes Martinů's contribution best:

This achievement of musical unity through continuously developing motifs may well be Martinů's greatest contribution to the art of composition. It was this system which occupied his mind more frequently than any other and about two thirds of his entire production shows his adapting this working method. Far more than Sibelius, Roussel, Janáček or Bartók, Martinů has made this technique his own and it holds a place in his life's work quite apart from individual pieces.<sup>57</sup>

The earliest evidence of Martinů's "cell technique" is seen in his 1930 composition *Piano Trio No. 1*. Though Martinů's *Quatre madrigaux* was written seven years later, this compositional method became so ingrained in the composer's style that it arises in much of his later works, including his 1937 trio *Quatre madrigaux*. Evidence of Martinů's "cell technique" is sprinkled throughout the four-movement work, but it is in the first movement that the "cell technique" predominates the melodic development and formal structure. The motive introduced by the oboe in the first measure (seen in Figure 4) does not match the parameters of a traditional melody. There is no rise and fall of a typical three or four-bar phrase; rather, a development of the initial three-note motive ensues throughout the movement. The cell comprises two sixteenth notes and an eighth note rhythm that involves an interval of a lowered fourth that returns to the primary note. As seen in the first nine measures, Martinů develops this simplistic cell by stringing the same rhythmic motive together, creating

Figure 6.1: Bohuslav Martinů, *Quatre Madrigaux*, I, triplet embellished cell, m. 3.

Figure 6.2: Bohuslav Martinů, *Quatre Madrigaux*, I, embellished cell, rehearsal 1.

a melodic ostinato that plays out in all three voices in a playful, contrapuntal texture. The ornamental triplet-sixteenth and eighth note figure that stretches across the bar-line in measures 2 and 3 in the oboe arises again in the score at rehearsal 11 (see Figure 6.1 and 6.2). Martinů develops this embellished cell from rehearsal 11 to three measures after rehearsal 12 with the same approach.

Figure 7: Bohuslav Martinů, *Quatre Madrigaux*, I, reh. 11–12.

The sixteenth-note triplet and eighth note fragment flows from one instrument to the next, driving the rhythm forward while passing the melody in a circular fashion. The motivic cell (manifested also in the embellished triplet cell) becomes the thematic and rhythmic basis for the entire movement. This unique approach to melodic writing followed Martinů through his career, particularly as he moved towards a more simplistic approach to composition while living in the United States.



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## Endnotes

- 1 Paul Henry Lang and Nathan Broder, ed., *Contemporary Music in Europe: A Comprehensive Survey* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1965), 195.
- 2 Keith B. Pettway, "The Solo and Chamber Compositions for Flute by Bohuslav Martinů" (Doctoral dissertation, University of Southern Mississippi, 1980), 45.
- 3 Harry Halbreich, *Bohuslav Martinů: Werkverzeichnis. Dokumentation, Biographie* (Zurich: Atlantis Verlag, 1968), 40.
- 4 Bohuslav Martinů as quoted in Brian Large, *Martinů*, (New York: Homes & Meier, 1976), 5.
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