AN ANALYSIS OF THE DOMENICO DRAGONETTI STRING QUARTETS
AND THEIR MANUSCRIPTS

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by
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ABSTRACT

Domenico Dragonetti (1763-1846) contributed to the double bass repertoire as a composer and extended the scope of the instrument as a virtuoso performer. Despite the increasing respect paid to Dragonetti by bassists in the 165 years since his death, he remains largely absent from modern musicological discourse. An examination of Dragonetti’s musical and non-musical activities and his “forgotten” compositions sheds new light on musical society of the nineteenth century and the influence of middle-class ideals on the development of music. The string quartets, which exist in manuscripts copies currently housed at the British Library, show the middle-class, cosmopolitan, and Classical-Romantic elements that make Dragonetti’s works a reflection of the times.

An investigation of the string quartet (Lbm Add. MS 17727-17730) manuscripts’ features illuminates some of the problems that have prevented the dissemination and discussion of his works. The manuscripts containing the quartets divide each volume into three sets, but thorough inspection of the works reveals the sets represent different versions of the same works. Thus, what looks like eight quartets at first glance actually contains only five quartets with separate “draft” and “fair copy” versions preserved together in the bound volumes. Because no one has considered Dragonetti as a composer in previous studies, these works have heretofore gone unexamined, and no modern scholarly or performing edition exists.

Dragonetti’s string quartets bear signs of the transitional style that flourished around the turn of the century, with elements of a clearly Classical aesthetic appearing alongside Romantic elements. The quartets make use of conservative structures to try out innovative techniques and harmonies, assimilate cosmopolitan features from styles and traditions around the globe, and show evidence of domestic middle-class music-making. Analysis of Dragonetti’s “forgotten” string quartets unveils how lesser-known composers’ music, more than that of their more famous
contemporaries, reveals what average musicians and patrons of music heard, bought, played, and enjoyed during the early nineteenth century.
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In London, I encountered numerous institutions and people who made my travel and research a wonderful experience. I would especially like to extend my sincere appreciation to the British Library and Nicholas Bell, the Centre for Performance History and Paul Collen, the Woodville Guesthouse, and all their employees.

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Chapter 1

Domenico Dragonetti and the Early 19th-Century Middle Class

In the history of the double bass, Domenico Dragonetti (1763-1846) stands out as a significant figure in the development of the instrument’s reception and success during the early nineteenth century. His significance to the English musical community has been explored through a singular focus on his career achievements, personal connections, and contributions to the double bass repertoire. However, even with these investigations and the insights they bring, an important aspect of Dragonetti’s contribution has so far been ignored—his compositions for instruments and ensembles without the double bass.

Despite the reverence paid to Dragonetti by bassists over the years, the wider musical community has not known much about the bassist. The first obstacle to overcome in understanding his role in music history is examining his convoluted biography. The historical dialogue was clouded over time by erroneous repetition and inconclusive biographies to present, at worst, a caricature and, at best, a piecemeal memoir. In order to clear the way for continued discussion of the bassist’s impact in music history, conflicting accounts and misconceptions about his life needed clarification. Using primary material as the foundation for interpretation and analysis, Fiona Palmer—in her book Domenico Dragonetti in England—was the first researcher to rectify the conflicts and anecdotal inconsistencies from previous twentieth-century narratives.1 Her biography of Dragonetti gave the musicological community its first comprehensive account of the bassist, from his birth and youth in Venice to his stellar career in England lasting over fifty years.

A second and more difficult obstacle to a fuller understanding of Dragonetti’s contributions to musical life is the disarray and inaccessibility of his musical manuscripts. At present, his music available today is mainly his compositions including the double bass, though the prodigious size and variety of his collection includes, for example, pieces for violin, piano, voice, in addition to the string quartets that are the main concern of this study. Overall, Dragonetti’s music remains largely absent from discussion of his individual achievements and of the wider topic of early nineteenth-century musical life, despite its potential importance for modern scholarship, especially in terms of understanding the influences of society and contemporary musical tastes on an English composer of the early nineteenth century.

This thesis departs from previous research in its attempt to present a new perspective on the bassist and his compositions using biographical accounts and current musicological dialogue on the middle class’s influence in music. The aims of this paper are threefold: to establish Dragonetti’s role in the middle class, to uncover and work out the problems in the string quartet manuscript volumes² that prevent dissemination and discussion of their contents, and to highlight the importance of those string quartets to scholarship. In this chapter, I will demonstrate the ways in which Dragonetti’s public career and private life exemplify the middle-class ideals of his day. His musical activities, everyday lifestyle including his domestic pastimes, and friendships point towards Dragonetti’s conscious cultivation of a middle-class persona in London. Analysis of one of his most familiar works, the Andante and Rondo, shows the influence of these social and cultural factors on his compositions and reception of his music, and it illustrates the importance of this full context for our study of his less familiar works, such as the unpublished string quartets.

² Domenico Dragonetti, Dragonetti’s Quartets, Add. MS 17727-17730, British Library, London.
Dragonetti’s Bourgeois Career and Lifestyle

Understanding Dragonetti’s success in the bourgeois society of London requires a brief look at the beginning of his life in order to fully appreciate the “mythos” later surrounding the bassist. The earliest biographies available by Francesco Caffi³ and Vincent Novello⁴, two close friends of the composer, discuss Dragonetti’s rise from poverty in Venice to his success in London through dedication to music. This “Cinderella” story of rags to riches is an important part of the middle-class identity, which idealized overcoming social rank by birth through cultural edification, hard work, and fiscal success.

Official documents state Dragonetti was born in the parish of St. Travaso, Venice, to a local musician, Pietro Dragonetti.⁵ Because Dragonetti grew up in a poor neighborhood with his father’s meager income, a paid education for the young man was beyond the family’s means.⁶ He grew up learning music instead, taking on the guitar and violin under local tutelage, and the double bass under the instruction of St. Mark’s bassist Michele Berini.⁷ At the start of his career as a professional musician, Dragonetti joined Venice’s Opera Buffa and St. Mark’s chapel orchestra. He later enrolled in the Arte dei Suonatori, a guild of instrumentalists, to secure his position in the Venetian musical community. In 1791, singers Gasparo Pacchiarotti and Brigida

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⁵ Palmer, Domenico Dragonetti, 9.


Banti wrote to Dragonetti, encouraging him to leave for the cultural hotbed of London. It would seem that looming financial crises in Venice and the opportunity for success led the bassist to England in 1794. Though his work in Venice provided Dragonetti an opportunity to advance from poverty to prosperity and begin his virtuoso career, London offered the cultural benefits that would help him create his middle-class lifestyle.

Excluding a voyage to Vienna and Venice from 1808-1814, Dragonetti remained situated in London for the rest of his life. This sort of “settling” down into one area would be expected of a bourgeois man who counted on the benefits of respect from colleagues and society. Middle-class families aspired to own property, effectively tying their history to towns or cities. In Dragonetti’s case, Britain’s laws on immigration prevented ownership of property by aliens and the government required he rent and report his relocations, therefore removing the benefits of privacy, financial security, and social status that usually accompanied land ownership. Despite this inconvenience encroaching on his independence, the benefits of the musical community in London far outweighed the negatives and he surmounted the ownership expectation by maintaining other middle-class values.

This is not to say that Dragonetti never left London at all. His seasonal contracts held him in the city, but other engagements in the provinces kept his income flowing steadily during the off-season. A routine schedule maximized the number of performances he could manage in a short amount of time and demonstrated his reputable career to the middle class. Additionally, appointments he took offered career stability through the patronage of the upper-middle class and

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8 Palmer, *Domenico Dragonetti*, 22-23.
aristocratic audiences. Seasonal longstanding positions included the King’s Theatre—home of the Italian Opera—the Ancient Concerts, and the Philharmonic Society. He also participated in public and private chamber ensembles, benefit concerts, and subscription concerts that broadened his social respectability and camaraderie within the capital. In the musical “off-season,” Dragonetti entertained the middle class and aristocracy in private spheres outside London. These provincial engagements secured financial opportunity in many ways, but they served to validate his reputation as a virtuoso and offer time for personal leisure interests within bourgeois musical society as well.

Though he belonged to the London middle class, Dragonetti relied on the aristocracy to continue his popularity. His first performance at the King’s Theatre met with praise, but the gradual switch from solo career to ensemble musician between his first appearance and 1815 reflects his desire to position himself firmly in London’s musical scene. Virtuosi and popular musical fads rarely lasted in London under the “persistence of the aristocratic patronal tradition,” as William Weber states, and a musician’s success relied upon the ability to make scheduled, seasonal appearances. Unlike other musical centers in Europe, “the bourgeois and the aristocratic elite had close, intimate relations” in the English capital. The English aristocracy’s social calendar revolved around “seasons,” when some families spent a few spring months in London before returning to their estates. This resulted in the bourgeois and aristocratic elites mingling on neutral ground and sharing, to some degree, the cultural opportunities of London. However, concert life depended on the continual patronage of the aristocracy and, though they

11 Ibid, 61.
13 Ibid, 52.
14 Ibid.
mingled in audiences with the upper-middle class, musical life remained largely under their control.

Catering to the venues of the bourgeois elite could be seen as a financial survival technique. As a shrewd businessman, Dragonetti possessed the middle-class principle of entrepreneurship that defined the class from both the lower working classes and the aristocracy. His fees were among the highest in London’s instrumental community during his lifetime,\textsuperscript{15} he often negotiated the prices of his fees, and the noble birth of the venue management could never intimidate him from doing so.\textsuperscript{16} Even before his arrival at the King’s Theatre in 1794, reports circulated that in Italy “his salary was always equal to that of the first singers.”\textsuperscript{17} Dragonetti also held benefit and subscription concerts at the birth of his London career until shortly before his Viennese excursion as a platform for his virtuosity and talent. If we take Weber’s statement on the elites’ regards towards virtuosi into consideration, taking a brief leave to spread his name and reputation in Europe—raising his value in the market as a profitable musical investment—before returning to London to establish a localized career could be seen as a political-social move on Dragonetti’s part. Though we cannot ascertain Dragonetti’s intentions, this way of approaching his livelihood matches the meticulous accounts of monetary management and income in his bank ledgers with Coutts & Co.\textsuperscript{18}

Dragonetti also participated in teaching lessons, a valuable source of income, patronage, and part of the ideal of middle-class community engagement. German writings emphasized the need for \textit{Bildung} or higher intellectual education that solidified middle-class spiritual and moral

\textsuperscript{15} Palmer, \textit{Domenico Dragonetti}, 147.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid, 136.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid, 98.

\textsuperscript{18} Palmer, \textit{Domenico Dragonetti}, 240-249.
development through learning music. The teacher not only imparted musical knowledge and encouraged skill, but also acted as a mouthpiece for conveying middle-class, quasi-religious and societal values in music. As a dependable, stable musician, local towns could rely on the teacher to provide lessons for the length of time needed to learn an instrument without worrying about the itinerancy or long absences found in traveling virtuosi willing to teach. In their writings on the virtuoso phenomenon, Triest and Granzin described the virtuous performer as upholding the ethical purposes of music: to build a solid moral and intellectual foundation. Similarly, with the distaste for popular music-fads or virtuosi by the aristocratic patronal system in cosmopolitan London, the role of teaching, especially in the case with the Duke of Leinster, conveyed Dragonetti’s concrete position in society. He obviously intended to stay in London and contribute to the bourgeoisie community.

Dragonetti’s occupations centered on stable occupations in intellectual and business sectors the middle class valued. His choices of private soirees and the long list of acquaintances he made over the years, however, demonstrates his effort to building and maintaining his social status. In addition to John Barnett, who eventually became so close to the composer that he named a child after him, the bassist associated with composers like Haydn, Paganini, Mendelssohn, Beethoven, Clementi, Rossini, Spohr and Cramer. The radical middle-class critic


21 Ibid, 89.


and journalist Leigh Hunt, was close to Novello, who introduced him to Dragonetti. Among Dragonetti’s other recurrent acquaintances and associates were Robert Lindley, Sir George Smart, Charles Lucas, George Pigott, Augustin Tolbecque, the Cowden Clarkes, Cipriani Potter, and Simon Sechter. He worked with many of these colleagues in performances, whereas others were mutual friends. His will, with 59 separate clauses, illustrates the prodigious number of associates he kept through his lifetime.

On his deathbed, Dragonetti invited a group of musicians with whom he was close to play his Quartet No. 4 in his sickroom. Novello’s annotation in the incomplete thematic catalogue of Add. MS 17727 now housed with all of Dragonetti’s manuscripts at the British Library states that “Camillo Sivori, Tolbecque, George Pigott and C Lucas” carried out the bassist’s request. All of these quartet members were associates involved in Dragonetti’s career. Sivori, Tolbecque, and C (Charles) Lucas had played alongside Dragonetti in the Philharmonic Society, the Italian Opera, or the Ancient Concerts. George Pigott appears in a Singing Class Circular listing as a


25 This list of friends and acquaintances comes from multiple sources including Palmer’s Domenico Dragonetti in England and Vincent Novello (1781-1861): Music for the Masses, as well as a catalogue of Novello’s autograph collection found in Music & Letters by Pamela Weston.

26 Palmer, Domenico Dragonetti, 233-239.

27 Dragonetti, Dragonetti’s Quartets, Add. MS 17727, Lbm, 2v.


music publisher\textsuperscript{31} and in Dragonetti’s obituary as an inheritor of the “miscellaneous concertos, arrangements, and studies for the double bass” that the writer of the obituary hoped “Mr. Pigott may some day make…public.”\textsuperscript{32} That all four of these performers were members of the middle class and played in a very private situation, with equally private music as discussed in the second chapter, shows the degree of Dragonetti’s foundation in the bourgeois culture of London. It shows the depth of his friendships in his life, some of which took on an even greater domestic nature than others.

An active domestic and social life outside of one’s occupation formed the cornerstone of middle-class culture in the nineteenth century; Dragonetti’s numerous deep friendships made with upstanding families in the musical society of London demonstrate this aspect of his assimilation into that culture. His lack of family and perpetual bachelorhood must have set Dragonetti apart from the traditional bourgeois family unit. Thus, he created a family for himself by relying on his social circle, much as Schubert did with his intimate gathering of friends.\textsuperscript{33} The Barnetts and Novellos were lifelong friends who routinely asked for his presence at family gatherings. Mary Novello wrote in her diary that Dragonetti’s “playful manner with children [was] charming”\textsuperscript{34} and Thomas Greatorex, in a letter inviting the bassist to dine with his family, playfully wrote, “You will know every one who dine (sic) with us!”\textsuperscript{35} His apparent gift for dealing with children must have made him a welcome addition in domestic spaces. These kinds of familial connections no doubt played a role in furthering Dragonetti’s career; however, they also supplemented the

\textsuperscript{31} Anonymous, “Front Matter [Corelli’s Solos edition published and sold by George Pigott],” \textit{The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular} 3/65 (October 1, 1849), 209.

\textsuperscript{32} Anonymous, “Music and Musicians,” \textit{The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular} 2/31 (December 1, 1846), 50.

\textsuperscript{33} Ruth A. Solie, \textit{Music in Other Words}, 137-138.

\textsuperscript{34} Palmer, \textit{Domenico Dragonetti}, 54.

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid, 56.
middle-class ideal of a nuclear family household. Dragonetti shared relationships that rejoiced “in the principles of voluntariness, community of love, and cultivation,” which defined the model private sphere of the nuclear middle-class family.

Possibly the most concrete evidence of strong familial ties Dragonetti made in the middle class is shown during the “Dragonetti ‘Havoc’ Affair.” At risk to his own career, Vincent Novello publicly defended the bassist after writers in *The Musical World* falsely claimed that “age and illness [made] sad havoc” when he appeared late to a performance in May. Harsh words were traded in full public view, with Novello disparaging the writer’s cowardice in anonymity and asserting the bassist’s health. *The Musical World* responded by defaming Novello’s character and asserting their own views on the “perceptible and recent change” in Dragonetti’s vivacity. Leigh Hunt anonymously joined the criticism of *The Musical World* in *The Examiner*, and by June the reviews of Dragonetti only offer praise of the power of his performance with a muted reference to the circulated arguments.

A heated public argument served to clear up any assumptions by the public about the ability of Dragonetti continuing a career in his old age. However, the possible repercussions for Novello were much greater, and put him in a position of scorn if the outcome had not resolved. Even so, *The Musical World* continued to lampoon Novello for months after the favorable June 6th review. Novello put his career and respectability on the line for Dragonetti by publicly

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41 Palmer, *Vincent Novello*, 89.
defending the bassist’s honor, livelihood, and his ability to remain active in the musical community. These aspects mattered to members of the middle class, and the support from Novello and Hunt offers the conclusion that they were helping Dragonetti retain his own career under the rapt gaze of bourgeois readership.

In addition to the class implications in financial earnings and social interactions, Dragonetti’s habits within the London community also marked him as a member of the bourgeoisie. Like many other middle-class and bourgeois men of his day, Dragonetti was an avid collector of cultural artifacts. Much has been made in program notes and anecdotes about the composer’s collection of dolls. Though it seems unusual for a grown man to collect dolls in modern times, the nature of collecting items was customary for the middle class, who participated in consumer culture partly as means to display their wealth through conspicuous consumption.42 Fiona Palmer’s book disqualifies rumors of life-size dolls, which may have been too odd to be considered merely an “eccentricity,” and a visit to the Centre for Performance History in London backs up these statements in physical form.43 Most likely his propensity to carry around dolls on trips, such as those with Lindley in famous accounts, came as part of his love for children. The dolls’s presence also ensured that the community would talk about him (he showed them to visiting friends often44) and keep his career in the limelight without risking ostracism.

Less remarked upon than the dolls, though more interesting when viewed with middle-class consumerism in mind, are Dragonetti’s other collections. These include artwork, music,


43 I had the wonderful opportunity to examine “Blackie” while researching the quartets in London, thanks to the permission of Paul Collen, the Curatorial and Administrative Assistant at the Centre for Performance History. “Blackie,” the only remaining doll, is approximately 70cm in height and preserved in a manner that small details are still visible, such as the carvings of curly hair on her head and the red paint on her tongue. She is dressed in red and blue tartan cloth, with pearl buttons on the tongues of her shoes and small red and blue beaded hoop earrings.

instruments, and snuffboxes. While they served as leisure purchases meant for possible use, in the case of the snuffboxes and instruments, they also served an intellectual purpose and functioned as investments for later sale. Artwork in the home was a form of private entertainment whereby the middle class “acquired a surrogate experience of art” and landscapes portraits became a favorite household addition.\(^\text{45}\) Dragonetti was no exception: a number of his purchases in artwork included landscapes and views of Venice, many of which were bequeathed to his student the Duke of Leinster upon his death.

Consumerism displayed wealth in the private sphere, but it indicated leisure time in the public sphere as well. Cultural consumption of artwork, music, and instruments for Dragonetti displays time for browsing shops and consideration of objects. As a repeatable activity that could be enjoyed over and over again as new items were sought out and added to the assemblage, collecting became a form of entertainment affordable to the bourgeoisie.\(^\text{46}\) Visitors to Dragonetti’s apartments commented on the small living spaces and the amount of room these purchases took up in his quarters. His travels in Europe and his time in London allowed him to build up immense collections of items from across the world, and friends bestowed purchases on Dragonetti that increased the size of these collections. The frequency of his art purchases became so regular that he was a known connoisseur to merchants and families in art, the latter group referring him to relatives.\(^\text{47}\) Such cultural consumption encouraged the networking and social leisure required to build a respectable relationship.

Dragonetti’s supposed illiteracy, a condition embroidered by biographers since his death, interferes with the picture of a socially fluent man. Living in poverty allowed the young musician


\(^{46}\) Ibid, 87.

\(^{47}\) Palmer, *Domenico Dragonetti*, 33.
little time or monetary allowances for education the middle classes required of their own children. Personal accounts from friends do note his inability to accurately speak the English language despite living in London for fifty years, but not his inability to write. Palmer provides evidence that he wrote both in English and fluent Italian, but preferred to overcome foreign “linguistic handicap[s] with the help of friends who penned letters for him.”

Musical talents were the basis on which his career was founded. Requesting others to write letters implies that in the cases where comprehensible communication via the written word was required, he supplemented his abilities with that of native English speakers for clarity. His ability to expand and continue his career indicates that, despite contemporary rumors, within middle-class social circles his language barrier was not an all-consuming impediment to networking or socializing.

**Dragonetti’s Music for the Bourgeoisie**

Dragonetti’s career, relationships, and behaviors place him firmly in the formative circle of London’s bourgeois musical society, but his main classification as a performer necessitates a consideration of his music in relation to the status as well. Current scholarship ignores his compositions in their dialogue on early nineteenth-century middle-class music because only a handful exist in modern publication and private premieres produced few reviews in contemporaneous journals and newspapers. Reviews of his public performances of other composers’ works are accessible, but combining these reviews with the known performances of his ensembles adds little to the discussion of bourgeois music in London. Pairing a discussion of his unpublished works with a consideration of bourgeois “popular” music, however, highlights their importance in understanding the role of Dragonetti’s music and other music like his during the early nineteenth century. Dragonetti’s *Andante and Rondo* displays elements of the

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48 Ibid, 35.
transitional Classical-Romantic style of its day as well as the middle-class style with which composers like Dragonetti addressed their social peers. Analysis of these traits in music of this period adds a new dimension to current research.

As a solo concerto performer in his early London career, Dragonetti performed his own compositions at benefit concerts. These concerts, providing a range of musical genres and performers, and attended by the London middle class, “did much…to establish his reputation for virtuosity and exceptional talent” and exposed English audiences to the revelation of the bass as a vehicle for virtuosity. In the first decade of the nineteenth century, he also presented “Ladies Concerts” and other concerts requiring subscription, but as his career progressed, he declined most offers for solo performance at metropolitan, public musical gatherings. The reasons for the change remain unclear, as the demands for his performance at benefit concerts in London remained popular; however, Palmer suggests that the income for other engagements outweighed the time and expenses related to putting on one’s own benefit concerts.

Few reviews of Dragonetti’s music survive for modern scholars because of the nature of these private performances. Regarding the solo works, Thomas Milligan has noted:

> With respect to composition, he wrote for his own performances numerous works that astounded the audiences but that remained unpublished. Thus, in the controversy over the merits of modern music Dragonetti could have been cited either as an example of the great improvements in instrumental music or as an example of the decadent tastes of the multitudes.

> These words highlight Milligan’s modern pejorative sense of “popular” music or “popularity.” The “decadent tastes of the multitudes” in music were simply the musical tastes of the time. Having never heard the double bass played in such a manner, the British audiences

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49 Palmer, *Domenico Dragonetti*, 188.

50 Ibid, 192.

expected to be amazed, and Dragonetti provided this effect with spectacular results. This does not make his work any less valuable or unworthy of study, as evidenced by the cultural and social insights in the music. Affording a neutral opinion on the subject rather than comparing it to the outliers of music history gives us a better perspective of Dragonetti’s music in context with his audiences.

His works favor genres that appealed to the early nineteenth-century middle class. In the collection of his manuscripts, solo works include *Variations on ‘God Save the King’*, an *Irish Air*, various arrangements of popular Italian secular or opera songs, twelve waltzes for the double bass, and unnamed solo pieces for the double bass with piano accompaniment. Dragonetti’s ensemble works include concertos, sonatas, string quartets and quintets, and arrangements for solo bass with string and piano accompaniment. The wide range of genres housed in his manuscript collection illustrates the demands made by his audience during his time in London and his response to the middle-class musical atmosphere. His solo works played to the bourgeois desire for theme and variations genres, folk music, new “hit” opera tunes, and virtuosic display. For private performances in the company of friends, the chamber music elicits the character of domesticity, with participants sharing an experience of communal musicking.

Though this thesis focuses on the string quartets by Dragonetti, it is important to provide an example of a well known, currently published work from his collection that demonstrates some of the qualities seen in the quartets as well. This example stresses the point that Dragonetti’s music often straddles the divide between conservative Classical form and innovative Romantic technique, and is simultaneously in dialogue with middle-class values in his music.

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52 Palmer, *Domenico Dragonetti*, 250-252.


Because the amount of published material by Dragonetti is so rare in comparison to his extensive oeuvre, I will focus on a brief example of a well-known solo work, *Andante and Rondo*.

A sense of Classical form and harmony controls the work, juxtaposed against the Romantic lyricism and virtuosity of the bass. In the *Andante*, Dragonetti demonstrates the double bass’s ability to achieve an aria-like lyricism over the conservative ensemble accompaniment. While the conventional part writing in the ensemble provides the bass with room to flex its virtuosic muscle in a melodic space, the periodic structure confines it to a Classical form. This would give the audience an appreciation of the double bass as a new solo instrument, but present it in a familiar configuration. Similarly, in the *Andante*, Dragonetti demonstrates the flashier innovations of double bass virtuosity with harmonics, high registers, sudden articulation changes, and rapid-fire melodic lines (Ex. 1.1) as the ensemble theme forms a structure that lines up with Classical musical ideals.

Example 1.1: *Rondo*, virtuosic episode followed by the original theme

One could compare Biedermeier musical aesthetics, contemporary to the English Georgian period, to the aesthetics presented in the Andante and Rondo’s accompaniment. Together, the accompanying orchestra and solo bass live in “comfortable domestic harmony” and respond to one another while holding a polite musical conversation. Parts of the Rondo demonstrate a musical conversation that reflects the bourgeois appreciation for ensemble equality (Ex. 1.2). When the bass finishes a phrase, the orchestra counters with its own similar response, until the solo instrument and orchestra reach a final, tutti agreement of theme. If Dragonetti performed this work in a private setting, or in the company of friends, each member of the ensemble received a chance, no matter how brief, for recognition. A shared style of part arrangement grew popular during the early nineteenth-century rise of the middle class, when entire families participated in domestic music-making.

Example 1.2: Rondo, ensemble interruptions of the solo double bass

In the Andante, a repeated rhythmic triplet ostinato appears and underscores the lyrical melody of the bass (Ex. 1.3). This lulling compositional technique appears frequently in Biedermeier music and reflects a desire for “preservation of the status quo” — the currently

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56 Ibid.
dominating bass solo. Constant nostalgia also plays a significant role within the *Andante* portion of Dragonetti’s composition with a returning theme, introduced in the first eight measures, that appears between contrasting episodes. The repeating theme juxtaposed against the lighter harmonic progressions and major-key episodes imitates the mindset of the bourgeois class, remembering simpler times in the face of economic downturns and the Industrial Revolution.

Example 1.3: *Andante*, ostinato triplet rhythm in the accompaniment

The continued appearance of Biedermeier (or Georgian) features, as well as both Classical and Romantic styles, exemplifies a work of music set well within popular movements of the time. Discussion of this work illuminates the type of music Dragonetti composed against the backdrop of his bourgeois audience in London. The string quartets contain similar features of the divide between Classical and Romantic ideals, and demonstrate the stylistic priorities of the middle class. By continuing the dialogue on the bassist’s compositions in the current musicological interchange on the middle classes, his importance to scholarship becomes clear.

Domenico Dragonetti was not just a triumphant leader of double bass virtuosity in the early nineteenth century. After rising from poverty in Venice, he established a bourgeois lifestyle
for himself in London maintained by his active participation in public social spheres. His careers and associations ensured success lasting well over half a century and created a legacy even after his death. Remembered for his performances and behaviors in modern scholarship, his role as a composer remains largely forgotten in the scope of music history. With a wealth of compositions present, but yet unpublished or ignored, Dragonetti provides an undiscovered frontier of information on the middle-class music of the Classical-Romantic divide.
Chapter 2

Historical and Analytical Value in the Quartet Manuscripts

Chapter 1, dealing with Dragonetti’s place as a middle-class member in London’s musical society, sought to expand the biographical accounts of the bassist into a new perspective on how exactly Dragonetti fits into the rising musicological dialogue on early nineteenth-century middle-class society and music. As a musician, Dragonetti would have been surrounded by the musical tastes of the middle classes, and his response to the large role of the bourgeoisie in his life through his compositions has gone unexplored. His unpublished manuscripts offer a key to understanding the relationship between Dragonetti’s personal musical life and that of the middle class to which he belonged. In this chapter, I will turn the discussion towards analysis of the current physical condition of volumes within the Dragonetti music manuscript collection held in the British Library, specifically the String Quartets contained in Add. MS 17727-17730.

The string quartet functioned as the soul of domestic music making for the middle classes of the early nineteenth century. Christina Bashford suggests, in her article on invisible musics, that British domestic chamber music often goes undetected under the weight of Austro-German standards\(^1\) and “conventional wisdom…that *ad hoc* music making of this ilk had largely disappeared from the British home by the early 1800’s, along with the indigenous composition of serious chamber music”\(^2\) despite evidence to the contrary, which she then provides in abundance. Dragonetti’s access to the private spheres of music through his colleagues and his knowledge of his audiences’ tastes make his string quartets valuable additions to research on early nineteenth-century music. They serve as a window into middle-class music making and underscore

\(^{1}\) Christina Bashford, “Historiography and Invisible Musics: Domestic Chamber Music in Nineteenth-Century Britain,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 63/2 (Summer 2010), 295.

\(^{2}\) Ibid, 292.
Dragonetti as one of many examples of significant nineteenth-century musicians who played a role in musical life, but have fallen out of the historical narrative.

The string quartets found in Add. MS 17727-17730 hold a unique position in the collection, not only as some of the few compositions by Dragonetti excluding the double bass, but also as an indicator of the disarray of the manuscripts’ condition that has prevented assessment of his contribution to the musical society of his day. At first glance, the quartet manuscripts’ confusing order raises questions about the number of quartets contained in the volumes. Thorough examination of the musical content of these volumes unveils the presence of draft and fair copy versions as well as sketches of movements found in other quartets. By comparing his quartet manuscripts with the works of a contemporaneous celebrity musician (Paganini), we find that Dragonetti’s composition of works for instruments outside his own virtuoso vehicle offers an avenue for investigating the “forgotten” music of the early nineteenth century.

The Current Condition of the Manuscripts

Dragonetti’s music manuscripts are currently housed in the British Library as a set of 16 individual entries in the British Library catalogue. It should be noted that both Add. MS 17727-17730 and Add. MS 17828 contain more than one volume despite listings as a singular entry. Palmer includes the two additional volumes from Add. MS 17828 in her count of volumes, bringing the total to 18, but she only includes the four volumes of Add. MS 17727-17730 as a single volume. This total count should be rectified to 21 to reflect all of the individual physical volumes in the collection. Physically, the volumes in the collection were either bound shortly after being written or after being bequeathed to the British Museum by Novello. In the case of the string quartet volumes, the manuscript pages were originally loose leaves and have since been

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3 Palmer, *Domenico Dragonetti*, 76.
bound by sandwiching the long edge of the page between two lengths of paper, then binding the pages in individual red leather covers.

Palmer’s descriptions of the contents for these entries suggest that the manuscripts were kept in original order by the receiving archival department. The principle of *Original order* in archiving demands that unless requested by the donating party or in the case of “original chaos” and misfiled items, the original order of the materials is kept. This archival principle has been established to help prevent loss of items from the collection through mishandling, and it “preserves existing relationships and evidential significance that can be inferred from the context of the records.” Even during preservation stages, as compared to the “active” stage when the records are currently in use by the owner of the collection, original order is maintained. At the point and time of preservation, archivists may impose order if needed, as “respect for original order does not extend to respect for original chaos.”

Dragonetti’s manuscripts, therefore, were kept in original order because of the sequence of his records. Many entries in the catalogue describe a volume as having one particular work as its contents, separated into individual instrumental parts—as in the quartet manuscripts—while others appear to have a variety of loosely connected material such as sketches, solos, variations on other composers’ works, or small compositions in a single volume. This overall juxtaposition of “ordered” versus apparently “unordered” volumes within the collection points towards a collection that arrived at the archival department in satisfactory condition. Further intervention would either require dismantling the volumes, damaging the pages already bound, or negating the principle of original order.

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5 Ibid.
The quartet manuscripts contain both qualities of ordered and unordered, making them particularly confusing to understand upon first glance. A single volume exists for each instrumental part and is divided into three Sets within each volume, designated by Novello’s annotations. Sets contain between one and four individual string quartets, complete or incomplete, which are nearly parallel across all the instrumental parts. Table 2.1 illustrates the organizational structure of the volumes. Deeper analysis exposes differences between repetitions of the quartets within the Sets, distinguishing them from one another despite their corresponding titles. For the time being, I will discuss only the complete, recurring Quartets Nos. 1-3.

Table 2.1: The Quartet Manuscripts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Set 1</th>
<th>Set 2</th>
<th>Set 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Violino Primo (17727)</strong></td>
<td>Quartet No. 1</td>
<td>Quartet No. 1</td>
<td>Quartet No. 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quartet No. 2</td>
<td>Quartet No. 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quartet No. 3</td>
<td>Quartet No. 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quartet No. 4</td>
<td></td>
<td>Quartet No. 1 (Y)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Violino Secondo (17728)</strong></td>
<td>Quartet No. 1</td>
<td>Quartet No. 1</td>
<td>Quartet No. 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quartet No. 2</td>
<td>Quartet No. 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quartet No. 3</td>
<td>Quartet No. 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quartet No. 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Viola (17729)</strong></td>
<td>Quartet No. 1</td>
<td>Quartet No. 1</td>
<td>Quartet No. 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quartet No. 2</td>
<td>Quartet No. 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quartet No. 3</td>
<td>Quartet No. 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quartet No. 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Violoncello (17730)</strong></td>
<td>Quartet No. 1</td>
<td>Quartet No. 1</td>
<td>Quartet No. 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quartet No. 2</td>
<td>Quartet No. 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quartet No. 3</td>
<td>Quartet No. 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quartet No. 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Though labeled with the same titles, the identically named works are not identical in their contents in every case. Quartets Nos. 1-3 appear in both Sets 1 and 2, but with subtle differences, rendering the matching quartets fraternal rather than identical twins and suggesting a certain amount of editing on Dragonetti’s part from Set 1 to Set 2. Dragonetti cut down the length of
matching quartets by removing or reordering certain movements, and he frequently opted for alternative tempo designations, as laid out in Table 2.2. Shaded cells in both tables indicate the presence of musically related material in the respective quartets between Sets, while unshaded cells denote musically unrelated material.

Table 2.2: The Construction of the Duplicate Quartets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quartet No. 1 in F Major</th>
<th>Set 1</th>
<th>Set 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adagio (non tanto)</td>
<td>Andante</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Presto</td>
<td>Presto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Andantino</td>
<td>Andante</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Allegretto</td>
<td>Allegretto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vivace tempo di allemande</td>
<td>Allegro tempo di allemande</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adagio</td>
<td>Adagio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vivace tempo di allemande</td>
<td>Allegro tempo di allemande</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quartet No. 2 in C Major</th>
<th>Set 1</th>
<th>Set 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Andantino</td>
<td>Allegretto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Andante</td>
<td>Andantino</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Un poco allegretto</td>
<td>Un poco allegretto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Andantino</td>
<td>(removed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adagio non tanto</td>
<td>(removed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prestissimo</td>
<td>Prestissimo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Andante</td>
<td>Andante</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prestissimo</td>
<td>Prestissimo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quartet No. 3 in EbM</th>
<th>Set 1</th>
<th>Set 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Andante Sostenuto</td>
<td>Adagio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Un poco vivace</td>
<td>Vivace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Andante</td>
<td>Andantino</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Presto</td>
<td>Presto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adagio con sordini</td>
<td>Adagio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Presto</td>
<td>Presto</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Quartet No. 1, Dragonetti altered the movements’ tempo markings between Sets 1 and 2, and the Set 2 version has a musically unrelated third movement. Quartet No. 2 shrinks in size between Sets, curbing the length from eight to six movements, as the Set 2 version is missing the two slower middle movements that appear in Set 1. This quartet also receives significant revisions of tempo marking and an altogether new first movement in Set 2. Quartet No. 3 received the fewest obvious changes, showing no significant omissions or replacement of
materials between the Sets, and undergoing only a change in tempo markings in a manner similar to the preceding quartets.

Analysis of the manuscripts shows how the recurring quartets relate to one another between Sets. A number of features point toward the conclusion that the quartets found in Sets 1 and 3 contain polished drafts meant for performance and Set 2 contains fair copies, meant for possible publication as stated in Dragonetti’s will. These conditions include physical qualities in the paper and ink and scratch-outs and paste-overs in Sets 1 and 3, and musical changes between Sets 1 and 2.

Paper and ink quality through the Sets provide physical evidence for performance drafts versus fair copies, especially in the case of the quartets where similar changes appear across all the volumes. Most striking is the change in paper between the Sets. Both Set 1 and Set 3 throughout the four volumes contain pieces written on larger paper, while Set 2 contains paper approximately an inch shorter lengthwise than the other Sets. Additionally, the pages in Set 2 have a lower quality than Sets 1 or 3, with lighter weight, frequent bleed-through of ink, and a noticeably browner shade to the paper and ink. The Set 2 pages also lack signs of wear visible in Set 1 and 3, which have blackened, creased corners suggesting frequent page turns.

Paste-overs and scratch-outs indicate continuity between Sets 1 and 3 as well. The first violin part of Sets 1 and 3 contain more corrections and revisions than the other three parts, denoting drafts in their final stages of completion. In the first violin part of Sets 1 and 3, pages 3\textsuperscript{r}, 5\textsuperscript{r}, 7\textsuperscript{r}, 14\textsuperscript{v}, and 29\textsuperscript{v} contain some examples of the more obvious paste-overs. The scratch-outs in the first violin’s Sets 1 and 3 are evident on pages 4\textsuperscript{v}, 15\textsuperscript{r}, and 30\textsuperscript{r}. Only one instance of a scratch-out appears in the first violin’s Set 2, on page 18\textsuperscript{r}, and the number of obvious paste-overs is

\footnote{Palmer, \textit{Domenico Dragonetti}, 238.}

\footnote{Size difference of the pages in Set 2 have forced the archival binding of the individual pages to be in an alternating up-down position, assuring even distribution of the volume’s physical depth.}
reduced to pages 21, 22, and 25. The three remaining parts show similar editing marks. Pasteovers are largely reduced in Set 2 from Sets 1 and 3 in comparison, with examples apparent on pages: 3, 4, 6, 13, 14, 25, and 25 of 17728; 2, 5, 8, 11, 12, 19, 21, and 23 of 17729; and 4, 7, 14, and 27 of 17730. The bolded page numbers in this list identify the marks found in Set 2; thus, Set 2 contains only three of nineteen total paste-overs, or about sixteen per cent. An unusual feature of the remaining three parts is the absence of any scratch-outs excepting page 12 of the second violin part (17728) in Set 1.

The lengths of revisions also vary among volumes and Sets. As a whole, the paste-overs and scratch-outs in Sets 1 and 3 focus on structural flaws or compositional decisions. For the first violin, in particular, the edits indicate larger changes in melodic shape or rhythms. In the three other parts, Sets 1 and 3 contain paste-overs that fix individual notes, lengths of bar rests, or small swatches of eighth notes. It is impossible to identify the writing under the paste, but based on their physical size it appears that the edits made are possibly no more than an interval of a fourth apart from the original. The reduction of all these markings across the volumes in Set 2 indicate finalized works, edited in particular for accuracy throughout the parts.

Understanding the frequency and extent of changes in ink and paper helps point toward a probable time or process in the development of the quartets, but the most significant proof resides in the musical content that the manuscripts transmit. Except in the case of Quartet No. 3, tracking the musical alterations in the recurring quartets from Set to Set exposes a system of diminution in length of the movements from “draft” to “final” version. The replacement and omission of movements from Sets 1 to 2 in Quartet No. 1 and No. 2 (unshaded portions of Table 2.2) demonstrates a gradual process of refinement and tightening of overall structure. Minor alterations to melodic and harmonic structure in individual parts appear as well as superficial changes such as removing or adding repeat brackets from one Set to the next and the addition of more articulation markings in Quartets Nos. 1-3.
Quartet No. 1 underwent minimal changes between Set 1 and 2 other than the more noticeable removal of an *Andantino* third movement in favor of new, unrelated music in Set 2’s equivalent *Andante* movement. Both *Adagio* movements and the final *Allegretto (Vivace) tempo di allemande* remain the same note-for-note. Dragonetti makes small alterations in material and construction, however, in the *Presto* and first *Allemande* movements. The *Presto* is altered in note length during the first set of repeat brackets and a second ending is added in the Set 2 version. In the Set 2 version of the first *Allemande*, the work is visually streamlined through the addition of repeat brackets, and the closing material is extended. The removal of most of the repeat brackets throughout the quartet is also a consistent, though less disruptive, modification.

Quartet No. 2 contains the only complete omissions of movements from Set 1, the fourth and fifth, without substitution of new material in Set 2 and consequently is the only work pared down in such a manner. Set 2’s *Allegretto* is musically unrelated to the Set 1 *Andantino*, another example of new material substitution similar to Dragonetti’s tactic in Quartet No. 1. However, despite all the cuts Dragonetti made of entire movements, the musical material between the two versions remains relatively the same. As before, streamlining changes appear to be the most common, with volta brackets in Set 1 missing in both Set 2’s *Prestissimo* movements, and the removal of the last two notes in the *Un poco allegretto* movement. The missing volta brackets do not impose any problems with the continuity between Set 1 and 2, though the missing last two notes in Set 2 do exclude a suspension chord that channels the key in the upcoming movement.

Unlike the first two works, Quartet No. 3 retains all of its movements between Sets 1 and 2 without replacement. Set 2’s *Andantino, Vivace*, and two *Adagio* movements are musically identical to their corresponding movements in Set 1 aside from the Dragonetti’s continuing practice of removing repeat brackets. The largest changes occur in the *Presto* movements, where each gains additional closing material. In the case of the last *Presto*, the Set 1 “Allegretto” material notated in all the parts is completely cut in favor of a longer, musically unrelated closing
section that lengthens the movement. In this particular case, Quartet No. 3 in Set 2 increases in length somewhat from Set 1, compared to the trend seen in Quartets No. 1 and No. 2 to shorten between Sets 1 and 2.

Removal of repeat signs in the quartets and the additional accent, dynamic, and tempo markings in Set 2 show Dragonetti considering his music’s impact on a future audience. Repeated sections may have been regarded as too repetitive for the players or listeners, and added articulation and tempo markings clarify the composer’s original intent for the performance of the music. Dragonetti rarely alters individual measures of existing Set 1 music material in Set 2, opting instead to remove a movement or section, replace the movement with new material, or extend closing materials in Set 2. These are all elements that make Set 2 a later evolution of the musical material through editing and careful consideration of how best to create a fair copy of Set 1. While Quartets Nos. 1-3 seem to clearly represent preliminary and reworked versions of Dragonetti’s first set of string quartets, the remaining works in these manuscripts present the analyst with an altogether different mystery.

**Anomalies and Unrepeated Works within the Quartet Manuscripts**

Continuing this line of thought, we can proceed to the unique works—the two incomplete versions titled Quartet No. 1, and the singular Quartets No. 4 and No. 5—which excite different speculations and possible justifications of this conclusion. It should be noted, however, that complete assurance of Dragonetti’s intention for the quartet manuscripts is not possible due to the lack of dating on the compositions or mention of compositional process of these quartets in any correspondence.

While all the volumes contain two versions of three quartets within Sets 1 and 2, the first violin part (17727) stands out among the four volumes because it contains “extra” music not in
the other three parts. Dragonetti indicates “No. 1” at the beginning of the draft and fair copy versions of the F-major quartet discussed above, as in the other three parts. But this notation also appears in two other instances in the first violin volume (Table 2.3). These subsequent appearances indicate the beginnings of incomplete quartets that do not recur in any of the other parts (see Table 2.2). I will refer to the first appearance of the incomplete “No. 1” in Set 2 as *Quartet X*, in reference to large crosses that appear on the pages (Illus. 2.1). The pseudonymous “No. 1” of Set 3 will be referred to as *Quartet Y*, whose movements are dispersed in the finalized versions of Quartets No. 1 and No. 2. Table 2.3 below gives the starting page numbers of each appearance of quartets labeled “No.1”.

Table 2.3: Starting Page Numbers of Quartet “No. 1”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quartet No. 1 (Draft)</th>
<th>Quartet No. 1 (Fair Copy)</th>
<th>Quartet No. 1 (X)</th>
<th>Quartet No. 1 (Y)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3\textsuperscript{r}</td>
<td>18\textsuperscript{r}</td>
<td>26\textsuperscript{r}</td>
<td>33\textsuperscript{r}</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Quartet X appears in what I have described as the “fair copy” (Set 2), making this particular appearance an anomaly of sorts. In addition to the cross marks across the entire page, the music itself is only a three-page *Allegro vivace* movement. Though it shares an F-minor key, which appears in the first *Adagio/Andante* movement of the complete Quartet No. 1 in Sets 1 and 2, the melodic material does not correlate with that section. Editing marks also exist on page 27\textsuperscript{r}, with a three-bar scratch-out, and two paste-overs on page 27\textsuperscript{v}. Additionally, the typical *V.S.* (Volti Subito) script, which Dragonetti uses throughout the quartets, is missing from the bottom of the page. This passage is a unique fragment detailing what looks like a scrapped project based on the observable elements.
MS Add. 17727’s Quartet X is, in fact, duplicated elsewhere in the collection. It appears as the fifth movement in Quartet No. 5, which begins on 30\(^\circ\) without a key signature or clef. This is most likely a copying error on the composer’s part, given that the same naturalized notes occur in each version despite the lack of key signature, and the remaining melodic lines focus on the key of F minor. Dragonetti extended the movement in some areas by adding of repeats and inserting of previous material. On the same page as the missing key signature, a two-measure scratch-out occurs three times; two of these contain the same material underneath the marking and precede the same material. This indicates the music was still under revision and Dragonetti may have been deciding the proper amount of melodic sequence repetitions to include, if he wrote

Illustration 2.1: Quartet X, found in Add. MS 17727, Lbm, 27\(^{r}\)
from the top voice down, or realized he added one too many after measuring it against the other parts and removed the excess.

Quartet Y in the first violin part of Set 3 shares a similar situation with Quartet X. Also titled “No. 1,” this work comes after Quartet No. 5 in the volume as a complete, four-movement quartet—*Un poco allegretto, Andantino, Allegretto tempo di Allemande, and Andantino*—starting in F major. This could be a stand-alone piece in its own right, not a sketch, based on the appearance of a *fine* marking on page 35; however, another complete *Andantino* movement follows directly afterwards with no *fine* marking. It is entirely possible that the manuscripts were rearranged prior to donation and the final *Andantino* simply ended up in the back after the *fine* during Dragonetti or Novello’s ownership.

Quartet Y appears to be a collection of individually drafted movements that Dragonetti later reworked into the recurring Quartets No. 1 and No. 2. Quartet Y’s *Un poco allegretto* is the same *Un poco allegretto* in Set 1, Quartet No. 2’s third movement. The first *Andantino* of Quartet Y is altered only in repeat brackets to become Set 1, Quartet No. 2’s *Andante* second movement. The *Allegretto tempo di allemande* in Quartet Y becomes the *Vivace tempo di allemande* in Set 1, Quartet No. 1’s fifth and seventh movements with more significant alterations that split the Quartet Y version in half and add closing material (fifth movement) and additional virtuosic melodies (seventh movement). In Set 1, Quartet No. 2, Dragonetti drastically cuts the last *Andantino* movement found in Quartet Y to create an *Andantino* first movement and removes the virtuosic closing theme for the *Andantino* fourth movement. The reappearance of this musical material and its alterations in the recurring Quartets No. 1 and No. 2 suggest that Quartet Y is a draft work set aside, then revisited, separated and incorporated into its current manifestations in Set 1.

Taking all of this information into account, I conclude that the two anomalous appearances of works labeled “No. 1” in 17727’s Sets 2 and 3 exist as the earliest drafts of the
quartets. Both X and Y contents and titles suggest that Dragonetti began these works before the other quartets, cultivating musical ideas in the first violin and later reusing or building on these materials in the complete Quartets No. 1, No. 2, and No. 5. Quartets X and Y, as sketch materials, were probably bound with the completed quartets at a later time, possibly by Novello or the British Library.

The confusing structure of this first violin part exemplifies one of the main concerns of the Dragonetti manuscript collection. Original order of the manuscripts suffices for archival purposes—retaining the order gives researchers the ability to evaluate the manuscripts as they were structured in Dragonetti’s lifetime and to draw conclusions from their context—but their current condition and lack of discussion in academic fields provides a complicated starting point for research of his compositions. If reorganization of the manuscripts were allowed, Quartet X and Y, being predecessors, would occupy their own designated space in the 17727 volume as a “sketchwork” Set. In all of the volumes, Quartets Nos. 1-5 (Sets 1 and 3) would be assembled into a Set marked as “drafts”, and Quartets Nos. 1-3 (Set 2) would follow as a “publishable” Set.

The notable lack of recurring Quartets No. 4 (Set 1) and No. 5 (Set 3) in all volumes, except in the case of Quartet X’s relation to No. 5 in 17727, presents a question about the purpose of Set 2. If these two works are truly a continuation of the drafted quartet cycle, based on their numbering system in the titles, where are the final versions in Set 2? It seems clear that Dragonetti never completed the final drafts of these two works or they went missing in the time between the execution of Dragonetti’s will and Novello’s donation to the British Library based on the following evidence: the information present in No. 4’s inclusion in Set 1 and No. 5’s paper and ink quality in Set 3 correlate with the qualities found in Set 1.

A unique handwriting change across all the volumes in Quartet No. 4 provides further evidence of physical continuity. Beginning at the Adagio movement on pages 16’ (17727), 12’ (17728), 11’ (17729), and 12’ (17730), the ink takes on a sharp, defined trait as compared to the
previous pages, most notably in the movement titles and the musical notation. Put side-by-side against earlier pages in Set 1, both the cursive script and musical notation appear less smooth. It is possible that this section was completed at a later date, that Dragonetti changed pens, or that he replaced a pen nib. It does confirm, however, that this movement was written at the same time in all the instrumental volumes.

Another anomaly occurs when Novello incorrectly identifies Quartet No. 5 as being in Set 2, not Set 3, and does not catalog the appearance of recurring quartets in his incomplete thematic catalogue found at the beginning of the first violin part (17727) (See Illus. 2.2.). It is possible Novello began the catalogue based on passing knowledge of Dragonetti’s compositions and discontinued the effort later on. Nearly all of the Dragonetti manuscripts in the British Library collection include brief introductory statements by Novello with a location and date of “Craven Hall Cottage, Bayswater, May-morning 1849” near his signature. At this time, Novello was preparing to move to Nice, France, to join his wife and daughter. Considering that he left England for France in August 1849 and in light of the significant size and relative disorder of some parts of the collection, it is most likely that he simply could not complete the task in the time given. He evidently considered the most important mission to be notating the historical aspects of Dragonetti’s music (as seen in the starred note beside the thematic catalogue in Illus. 2.2) and his own personal encounters with the music, along with anecdotes of the composer’s life and assurances of the manuscripts’ authenticity. These detailed notes are spread across the entire collection and point out the deep friendship between Novello and Dragonetti, as well as Novello’s commitment to preserving the manuscripts and explaining their contents for future generations.

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Illustration 2.2: Novello’s Thematic Catalogue of the String Quartets found in Add. MS. 17727, Lbm, 2v
Thorough explanation of the physical and musical qualities of the quartet manuscripts clarifies the puzzling organization of the volumes. Identifying the matching physical qualities of paper and ink reveal a link between Sets 1 and 3 in all four instrumental volumes and clearly differentiates them from Set 2. Meanwhile, identifying the musical contents and noting the changes made among the recurring versions of Quartets Nos. 1-3 enhances the evidence in place for separation of these Sets based on compositional processes. Uncovering the anomalies and discussing the attributes of the unique quartets, as well, helps verify these deductions by uncovering physical and musical associations. Historical associations in the condition of the manuscripts appear in addition to these features when comparing his quartet manuscripts with the works of a contemporaneous musician. A final assessment of the value and import of these works within Dragonetti’s overall output and musical activity can be demonstrated through a brief comparison to one contemporaneous musician in a similar situation historically and historiographically.

**Comparing Dragonetti’s Manuscripts to Those of a Contemporaneous Virtuoso**

Dragonetti’s quartet manuscripts provide an example of the composer-bassist’s musical activities beyond his virtuoso appearances, demonstrating just how little we understand his role in the musical life of nineteenth-century London. Niccolo Paganini (1782-1840), a contemporary virtuoso and colleague, shares similarities with Dragonetti. Both musicians exerted a powerful influence and succeeded in their careers despite criticism from the middle class on the acceptability of instrumental virtuosity. Their manuscripts, in particular, share a common theme of “forgotten” compositions buried under the renowned impact their performances made on history. Comparing Dragonetti and his music to similar figures of his time gives us a greater
understanding of performers’ roles outside of their traditionally labeled domains and broadens our discussion of lesser-known composers.

Both musicians were widely regarded for their virtuosity on their respective instruments, but also excelled on other instruments. Secondhand accounts state Dragonetti played violin as a child\(^9\) and, on occasion, viola at musical soirees.\(^10\) Nineteenth-century biographers note the prevalence of guitar in Paganini’s compositional output and the greater public’s ignorance of his proficiency on the instrument.\(^11\) Likewise, both musicians rarely published their works for these instruments during their lifetime despite their success with audiences.

Another factor in avoiding publication of works that employed instruments outside of the expected includes the personal nature of these works. Lack of evidence of Paganini’s performances on the guitar in front of the greater public indicates his private enjoyment of the instrument: it was a “hobby,” so to speak. In the face of public stardom in his career on the violin, the guitar provided a welcome personal sphere for relaxation and musical experimentation without pressure. Berlioz described violinist M. Sina and Paganini as spending “long evenings alone” playing together where “even the most important people were not admitted.”\(^12\)

Dragonetti’s string quartets served as a private engagement among the composer’s family and friends in intimate settings, not public audiences in music halls. Novello notes overwhelming evidence of the quartets’ personal nature for Dragonetti in the thematic catalogue of 17727 (Illus. 2.2): four close colleagues played Quartet No. 4, the composer’s personal favorite, on the eve of his death in his Leicester Square apartment.

\(^10\) Ibid, 204.
\(^12\) Ibid.
Paganini’s solo guitar works and Dragonetti’s string quartets also share a “forgotten”

history. Both composers expressed an interest in future publication of their compositions, and
both works traded hands various times after their deaths before preservation in archives.\textsuperscript{13}
Paganini’s family raised objections against publication of his music after inheriting it, and the
manuscripts went through multiple ownerships until the Italian State purchased the collection in
1971 and donated the works to a Roman archive the next year.\textsuperscript{14} With no family in London,
Dragonetti bequeathed his quartet manuscripts to Beale, a London publisher, in his will with the
 provision that it be published if possible.\textsuperscript{15} How exactly the manuscripts ended up in Novello’s
care is not recorded, but it is safe to say that the publisher likely refused to take on the project and
Novello, as Dragonetti’s closest friend, became the next inheritor before donating the volumes to
the British Museum. During their time in the collections of private owners and library archives,
the works of Paganini and Dragonetti existed in relative obscurity.

Giuseppe Gazzelloni noted, “it was left to Fritz Reuther of Mannheim to… gather
[Paganini’s] disparate parts from all over the world.”\textsuperscript{16} Though Dragonetti’s string quartets are
held together in a public institution, its organization imparts the same problems the solo guitar
works faced before assembly. Original order had already been destroyed in the case of Paganini’s
compositions, and therefore Reuther had free reign to assemble the collection in numerical order.
The Dragonetti collection, on the other hand, filed under the principle of original order, provides
researchers with a complicated first impression based on its confusing arrangement of the
quartets.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[15] Palmer, ibid.
\item[16] Paganini, ibid.
\end{footnotes}
Gathering public and academic attention to open the door for continued dialogue requires dissemination of these valuable works by Dragonetti. Three of the five quartets have been recorded at present: No. 4 in 1994 by Teodora Compagnaro, and No. 1 in 2009 and No. 2 in 2010 by John Feeney and the Loma Mar Quartet. Though they remain unpublished, I hope that the analysis provided here illuminates the contents of Add. MS 17727-17730 and clarifies their structure for future researchers and may one day lead to a scholarly and/or performing edition of these superb works.
Chapter 3

Analysis of the Dragonetti String Quartets Nos. 1-4

In 1849, Vincent Novello, who eventually gained ownership of the quartet manuscripts as described in the previous chapter, made an intriguing autograph annotation on the introductory page of the first violin part:

These quartetts (sic) for stringed instruments are one of the only specimens known to have been composed by my most dear friend, the late Signor Dragonetti…and is amongst the most rare and valuable in the whole of any Musical Library.¹

Only three years after the death of the composer, his close friend recognized the exceptional nature of the quartets and their importance within the entire manuscript collection. These quartets belong to a small group of complete works, written by Dragonetti himself and not arranged by another, that do not utilize his instrument, the double bass.² Given Dragonetti’s penchant for playing a wide range of parts on his bass at gatherings and the appearance of unspecified “basso” instrumentation in other manuscripts, the specific designation of “violoncello” in this particular set of works reveals a clear intention in the instrumentation of a traditional string quartet.

Analysis of the quartets’ musical contents suggests that Dragonetti probably wrote the string quartets during his early years in London, between 1794 when he arrived and 1808 when he left for Vienna. These would have been the formative years of his career as a bassist and as a composer. As he participated in London’s musical society and built his bourgeois social circle, he would have been exposed to the works of composers like Pleyel, Mozart, Clementi, and Haydn. He began giving benefit and subscription concerts during this time as well, and he wrote

¹ Dragonetti, Dragonetti’s Quartetts, Add. MS 17727, Lbm, 2r.
² Palmer, Domenico Dragonetti, 250-254.
compositions for his virtuoso performances on the double bass with these settings in mind. The quartets may have grown out of Dragonetti’s desire to experiment with new musical ideas through a genre that brought success to his contemporaries in London during the late eighteenth century. String quartets also had a particular resonance for the nineteenth-century middle classes. A quartet’s small ensemble size and musical communication reflected the idealized middle-class family; therefore string quartet music was an essential addition to the family repertoire through cultural consumption—both as listeners at private gatherings and as purchasers of sheet music. Perhaps for these reasons, Dragonetti’s works do not follow the model of Haydn, Mozart, and early Beethoven as we might expect them to do. They diverge from what we consider normative procedures in noteworthy ways.

In this chapter I aim to elucidate the unique features in Quartets No. 1 and No. 2 (from Set 2), and No. 4 (from Set 1) that diverge from conservative, normative procedures carried over from the Classical era as well as the quartets’ engagement with the musical dialogue present in nineteenth-century London society. Musical analysis reveals elements of the transitional period between the Classical and Romantic styles, cosmopolitan features that assimilate multiple styles and traditions from across Europe, and evidence of middle-class domestic music-making. By analyzing the historical contexts within the early nineteenth century and the music at a deeper level, we can see differences and similarities in comparison to the quartet tradition and to contemporaneous music in Dragonetti’s four quartets, thus opening the path for continued dialogue on his “forgotten” works.

Transitional Aspects of the Quartets

When considering the string quartets, readers must keep in mind the era in which Dragonetti composed these pieces. The Classical and Romantic divide did not happen instantaneously in
music, but rather occurred over a long transition period during which Classical traditions combined with new, Romantic innovations. The music of this era often uses novel approaches within or overlaid onto conventional frameworks and these techniques appears in works by both well-known and “lesser” composers. In his string quartets, Dragonetti used forms present in both the Baroque and Classical traditions, but incorporated innovative features that include the quartets in dialogue with the early nineteenth-century transitional atmosphere.

The most overt use of a conservative framework occurs within Quartets No. 1 and No. 2, where Dragonetti suggests a suite-like organization of movements. During the Baroque era, the dance suite served a functional purpose in accompanying dance in courts. By the late eighteenth century, however, that functional purpose had dissolved, and the stylistic principles of the dance suite movements became a part of autonomous music, evolving into the divertimento and eventually influencing sonata form. Many of the previously danced musical styles (e.g., Minuet, Allemande, Gavotte, Corrente) became stylized and were composed for the enjoyment of stationary listeners and the musicians themselves, rather than for active dancers. Dragonetti’s choice, therefore, in employing a suite-like organization makes these first three quartets highly unusual for their time.

Some movements within the quartets carry features similar to the dances of a suite, including the bourrée, allemande, contredanse, and minuet and trio. Quartet No. 1’s Presto second movement (Ex. 3.1) carries itself in a light manner with a short upbeat and stressed third beat similar to the French bourrée. In addition to the stressed third beat, the Presto maintains a clear eight-bar phrase structure built out of four-bar units and focuses mainly on homophonic

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textures. Dragonetti takes liberty with some traditional features of the bourrée by altering the
“standard” duple meter to triple meter and adding idiomatic violin melodies into the otherwise
simple texture. These stylizations of the bourrée highlight Dragonetti’s experimentation with
Classical forms and techniques in other movements.

Example 3.1: Quartet No. 1, *Presto*, mm. 49-55 (bourrée topic)

Other movements specifically call on a recognizable dance style in their rhythmic titles. The *Allegretto tempo di allemande* movements from Quartet No. 1 (Ex. 3.2) would have been
recognized by performers as a movement played in the German dance style, with a quicker tempo
than a minuet and a graceful, elegant movement accentuating the first downbeat and lifting
briefly after the second to allow the dancer a momentary pause to lift his or her foot, seen in
Example 3.2’s first and second measures below. Dragonetti plays with expectations as the
movement progresses, however, increasing the tempo, lengthening the rhythms, and shortening
the pauses between notes until returning to the original theme in the last section. Though the

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composer specifies the dance style in this movement, he continues experimenting with traditional forms.

Example 3.2: Quartet No. 1, *Allegretto tempo di allemande*, mm. 356-359 (allemande topic)

Dragonetti also experimented with a dance style still popular in England at the turn of the century\(^5\) in the *Un poco allegretto* movement of Quartet No. 2 (Ex. 3.3). This movement embodies the contredanse style, with a duple meter, quick rhythm, brilliant texture, and repetitions of thematic material. In the first sixteen-measure phrase, the first violin carries the melody as the supporting strings below keep a regular pulse that drives the ensemble forward. The second violin and viola then take over the melody in the next phrase with provincial-sounding thirds as the first violin interrupts in short ornamental chirps. The cello adamantly carries on with chord roots on the downbeats quickening to eighth notes at cadences, supporting the conversation among the other instruments. In the third phrase, the first violin charges forward in a virtuosic overthrow that puts the entire quartet back into its place as the harmonic supporter

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of the first violin before the final phrase repeats the original music found in the beginning of the movement (Ex. 3.4). Earlier contradances avoided ornamentation because the phrases repeated so often, making a simple melodic line the accepted model. Dragonetti again modifies the conventional techniques and, as the movement develops, adds a virtuosic violin melody. He keeps the conservative structure, however, using repeated harmonic material underneath variations on the thematic and ensemble textures. This brings the movement’s foundation in line with Classical principles of the dance and yet provides a novelty for the listener. By writing a contredanse, which enjoyed popularity until the 1840’s, Dragonetti communicates directly with his audience’s knowledge of dance.

Example 3.3: Quartet No. 2, *Un poco allegretto*, mm.76-80 (contredanse topic)

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7 Burford, ibid.
Example 3.4: Quartet No. 2, *Un poco allegretto*, mm. 99-117
(virtuosic overthrow by the first violin)
Example 3.4: cont’d
In both Quartets No. 1 and No. 2, Dragonetti employs a minuet-and-trio form for the last three movements, demonstrating the ambiguous nature of his dance-like works. Each of these two pieces includes three related, individual binary-form movements at the end that function as a larger ternary form, using ABA thematic content despite markings that would otherwise suggest they function as separate movements. For example, Quartet No. 2 begins with a three-part C-major A section (the first Prestissimo) followed by an Andante G-major “trio” in binary form (the B section), and closes with the final C-major Prestissimo movement, which acts as the A section’s da capo return. Composing movements in this manner allows the individual movements
to stand on their own if removed from the quartet, and yet they can function as larger blocks in the overall dance-style within their original quartet design. Dragonetti’s quartets are clearly in dialogue with dance styles that could serve a functional purpose in a domestic setting, but that operate musically within the intellectualized suite structure using stylized dance-like movements altered to fit the Classical procedure.

Within these self-contained sections and shorter binary forms, Dragonetti continues to employ Classical procedures in his use of clear, periodic phrasing. Each of these movements uses nested phrasing of between eight and twenty-four measures. Quartet No. 2’s Andantino second movement, for example, contains large phrase divisions of 24:16:24 corresponding with the formal key sections of C major—C minor—C major. These break down further into smaller phrasings of eight measures within each section. An example of the nested phrasing can be found in Examples 3.5 and 3.6, which highlight the two equal phrases found in the C-minor section of Quartet No. 2’s Andante movement.

Example 3.5: Quartet No. 2, Andante, mm.36-43 (C-minor first nested phrase)
Example 3.5: cont’d

Example 3.6: Quartet No. 2 *Andante*, mm. 44-51 (C-minor second nested phrase)
Quartet No. 4 holds a unique position within the group of quartets that distinguishes it from the others discussed so far in this chapter. This particular work deviates from the suite form Dragonetti adopted for Quartets No. 1 and No. 2, instead taking on the four-movement cycle that, by the early nineteenth century, stood as the standardized form of autonomous string quartets. In this quartet we can see Dragonetti engaging in musical dialogue with a more modern style familiar to him, his audience, and musical society in London. It employs the segments and tonal schemes of the sonata cycle that modern listeners have come to expect of string quartets by
Dragonetti’s predecessors and contemporaries—composers with whom he would have been personally connected or whose music he would have known, such as Haydn, Spohr, and Beethoven.

Dragonetti labels the movements of the fourth quartet with the same tempo markings seen in the previous quartets, but the individual movement forms follow a by-now standard four-movement cycle with traditional tonal centers. We find a single movement for each in tonic and relative major key areas as labeled in Table 3.1 below. In the Vivace first movement, Dragonetti constructs a conventional ABACDABA rondo form in the tonic of E minor. Through these sections he explores the expected key areas of E minor, E major, G major, and A major, creating a harmonic structure in line with the functional tonality of contemporaneous works. The remaining movements follow a similar adherence to Classical conventions: the ternary Minuetto and Trio uses an E-minor—E-major—E-minor tonal scheme; the Adagio centers on the relative major of tonic; and the sonata-form Allegretto movement treats tonic (E minor) and its relative major (G major) in the primary and secondary key areas. Although Dragonetti adopts the four-movement cycle in this work, he modifies the conventional arrangement by reversing the order of movements. He places the rondo, typically reserved for finales, first, and he ends the work with a sonata form. Quartet No. 4’s Classical sonata cycle segments and tonal schemes demonstrates Dragonetti’s knowledge and active compositional dialogue with the genre that was a carrier of greatness for his contemporaries.

Table 3.1: Quartet No. 4 Movement Keys

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vivace (Rondo)</th>
<th>Minuetto and Trio</th>
<th>Adagio</th>
<th>Allegretto (Sonata-allegro)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E minor</td>
<td>E minor</td>
<td>G major</td>
<td>E minor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
These examples illustrate the Classical structures that Dragonetti builds for his music, but within these structures innovative Romantic leanings bring these quartets into the body of works from early nineteenth-century transitional chamber music by composers like Spohr and Cramer. Associates deeply involved in the Classical tradition, such as Haydn, surrounded the composer, but his numerous musical engagements and relationships with other colleagues, such as Beethoven and Clementi, must have exposed him to the transitional atmosphere in musical life of his time. His use of innovative or “Romantic” musical features such as a colorful harmonic palette within the individual movements and deceptive cadential material altering the stylistic structure of movements reveals an active engagement with the innovative Romantic currents of his lifetime.

The largest indicator of innovative influences occurs in Quartet No. 1. Throughout Quartets No. 2 and No. 4, Dragonetti composes the tonal schemes of movements on the tonic and relative major (No. 4), and on the tonic, subdominant, and dominant (No. 2). Similarly, Dragonetti focuses on the same tonal relationships in Quartet No. 1, except in the Andante third movement where the unusual appearance of $bVII$ tonal center signifies a departure from conservative practices. Dragonetti sets up this movement through the preceding Presto in F major and modulates to the subdominant in its B section. Instead of continuing on to the expected dominant, Dragonetti emphasizes a $B^{b7}$ chord in the last seven measures of the work (Ex. 3.7) and signifies his intent for the next movement. In conjunction with the $bVII$ Andante, the cadence makes perfect sense as a $V^{7}/bVII$ connecting the two separate movements together. The presence of a $bVII$ is unusual in an early nineteenth-century string quartet. Effectively, Dragonetti reveals an innovative Romantic undercurrent in his music by stretching the normative harmonic palette of the Classical quartet, exploring harmonic progressions between and within movements, and using those progressions to connect separate movements and create a sense of unity.
Example 3.7: Quartet No. 1, *Presto*, mm. 116-126 (V<sup>7</sup>/bVII cadence into E<sub>b</sub>-major *Andante*)

Extension of cadential figures at the end of movements to create an air of suspense and to unseat the listener reveals another innovative side of Dragonetti’s composition. Quartet No. 1’s final F-major *Allegretto tempi di allemande* is the only movement in these works (Quartets No. 1, No. 2, and No. 4) that employs the use of a thematic interruption and interrupted cadence toward the close of a movement. In addition, this movement serves as the “da capo” resolution of a minuet-and-trio-like form and suggests the composer is altering the movement’s expected Classical progression. Just as the melody and harmony point towards a large cadence in C major (V) followed by coda material (mm. 421-424), the entire quartet abruptly falls silent before
restating the original F-major thematic material (m. 425) and leading the listener to believe a full repetition of the theme approaches (Ex. 3.8). Dragonetti waylays closure yet again with an interrupted cadence and another expectant pause (m. 431) before progressing into the true cadential sequence (m. 432). In the final statement of the closing material, ornamented by the second violin’s trills (mm. 438-440) and oscillating dominant-tonic pitches in the whole ensemble (mm. 441-444), the composer finally releases the audience’s attention with a grand perfect authentic cadence. This unique example demonstrates Dragonetti’s harmonic experimentation in his quartets with an unconventional cadential procedure for a minuet-and-trio-style structure.

Example 3.8: Quartet No. 1, Allegretto tempo di allemande, mm. 421-434 (theme interruption and interrupted cadence)
Through the use of innovative techniques within conservative forms, Dragonetti exemplifies early trends that later became a herald of the Romantic movement in conjunction with the Classical ideals still in place during the early nineteenth century. The structures of these quartets embrace the Classical structure of suite-like dance movements and use Classical harmonic foundations, while the quartets’ interiors reflect the novel developments in harmonic palette and progressions. Taken as a whole, the quartets embrace the mixture of Classic and Romantic characteristics typical of much music circulating in Dragonetti’s lifetime.

**The Quartets’ Cosmopolitan Aspects**

In addition to blending conservative techniques and innovative trends in a fashion similar to contemporaneous works of the early nineteenth century, Dragonetti’s quartets assimilate styles and traditions from across Europe, demonstrating their composer’s cosmopolitan career and persona. Using dance forms from various countries and musical “ethnicities” that influence the
harmonic and melodic structures, the quartets come alive as portraits of styles and techniques Dragonetti absorbed during the formative years of his career.

The most audible international features in Quartets No. 1 and No. 2 are the use of the French _quatuor brillante_ style throughout these works. Quartets relying on the first violin “allowed musicians of unequal caliber to exhibit their respective talents”\(^8\) and the _stile brillante_, a style derived from the _quatuor concertant_, had a light, elegant quality paired with “color and effect represent[ing] principal values and taste”\(^9\) in the genre. Dragonetti’s Quartets No. 1 and No. 2 embody the _quatuor brillante_ style, pairing virtuosic melodies and opera-like thematic materials in the first violin with simple ensemble accompaniments.

In Quartet No. 1, the violin embellishes the melodic line with frequent trills and rapid arpeggiations and scales in the _Andante_ first movement. For example, the F-minor thematic section uses the soloistic quality of the violin to elaborate the otherwise plain harmonic progression in the three other instruments (see Ex. 3.9). This section provides a spectacle for the audience and juxtaposes the elegance of the ensemble’s F-major legato rhythms and melodies against a stormy second thematic section characterized by a static ensemble and aggressive first violin. As the sole melodic instrument in the passage, the violin freely embroiders the melody by ascending quickly up from the lowest position on the fingerboard to briefly rest at the peak before embellishing the harmonic progression with a trill and working its way back down. This section in particular demonstrates the left-hand dexterity of the violinist with the speed of the notes requiring deft and precise finger movements. When the ensemble returns to the regal F-major

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thematic material, the first violin steps back and uses its virtuosity to lead the ensemble’s modulations through shorter melodic phrases rather than dominating the quartet.

Example 3.9: Quartet No. 1, *Andante, quartor brillante*, mm.17-18
(first violin with a static ensemble)

Quartet No. 2 takes the melodic control seen in the first violin in a different direction, using the introductory movement as an opportunity to demonstrate the violinist’s sensitivity in aria-like passages that display a softer demeanor (Ex. 3.10). As the rest of the quartet accompanies in a dramatic *subito tremolo*, the violinist demonstrates left-hand dexterity between the longer notes requiring vibrato and the juxtaposition of the sixteenth-note triplets. Large melodic leaps and trills in the expressive melody evoke an operatic aria style, in which the performer’s individual talents come into focus, supported only by the static harmonic movement of the ensemble, for the listener. Drawn-out notes and arpeggiated melodies offer the performer abundant opportunities for embellishment through dynamics and different impacts on the melody through various styles of bowing. Dragonetti’s involvement in the Italian Opera shines through in this movement’s style as the composer explores the techniques available in virtuosic playing.
The influences Dragonetti encountered during his time in London and on the European continent may explain the appearance of more conservative, Classical forms and features in Quartets No. 1, No. 2, and No. 4. As far as we know, Dragonetti received no formal training in composition during his years at St. Mark’s.\textsuperscript{10} Any compositional knowledge he acquired likely came through performance experience, in lessons from friends, and by listening to the music performed at soirees and private musical evenings he attended. These provided numerous opportunities for emulation of styles and forms he experienced. We do know Dragonetti met Haydn through Novello, and that he traveled to Vienna at least once. As a resident Londoner, he

\textsuperscript{10} Palmer, \textit{Domenico Dragonetti}, 76.
lived in the cultural hub of a nascent British empire. During this time he certainly encountered the music of Pleyel, Haydn, and Mozart, three composers whose string quartets bear some similarities to Dragonetti’s works. Quartets No. 1, No. 2, and No. 4 emulate the styles found in string quartets of the late-Classical repertoire, with their virtuosic writing for the first violin, their additive structures, and light character.

Quartet No. 2 shares similar features with the Parisian model of *quatuor concertants*. It uses lyrical themes; avoids harmonic shock by focusing on tonic, subdominant, and dominant tonal centers (C major, F major, G major); focuses on simple structures (binary and ternary); and concludes with a minuet.\(^{11}\) Though it contains more than two or three movements and does not follow the exact form of the French *quatuor concertant*, it is likely that Dragonetti emulated the Parisian string quartets popular in London with amateur musicians during the late eighteenth century\(^{12}\) and developed his own unique variation on the style.

Quartets No. 1 and No. 4, on the other hand, combine the Viennese and Parisian styles. The harmonically adventurous *Presto* and second *Andante* of Quartet No. 1 fit in with the Viennese tendency to require more complexity from their works to meet the taste of connoisseurs,\(^{13}\) but the rest of the movements fall in line more clearly with the Parisian preference for pleasant third relationships and simple structures. In Quartet No. 4, Dragonetti shortens the length of the total work to four movements like those found in the works of Haydn and Mozart.\(^{14}\) However, the harmonic scheme of the *Vivace* movement focuses on the third relationship between E minor and G major and adopts the use of highly lyrical themes for each quartet member, reflecting a Parisian influence as well.

\(^{11}\) Ibid, 44-45.

\(^{12}\) Ibid, 44.

\(^{13}\) Ibid, 45.

\(^{14}\) Ibid, 44.
Even in the dance-suite-style works of Quartets No. 1 and No. 2, Dragonetti adopts a colorful, multi-national palette. The bourrée, minuet and trio, contredanse, and allemande represent the dances of various countries: France, England, and Germany. That Dragonetti never truly settles into one distinct style demonstrates the assimilative approach he took in composing these works. Rather than designating a specific city or influential composer through his music, he adopts a wide range of musical ethnicities he may have heard during his early years in London.

**Functional Purposes of the Quartets**

Dragonetti adopted the style of his social class as well as that of his compositional predecessors and of the cities he visited in his career-related travel. The quartets demonstrate the importance of domestic music making for the development of musical style and show Dragonetti writing for his known audience in London. He designed these works to serve multiple purposes, including intellectual consumption and functional music within the community, which characterizes the quartets as works designed for the social circles Dragonetti worked and relaxed within.

Quartets No. 1 and No. 2 could have actually been used to accompany active dancing in the home. A movement separated from the others, such as Quartet No. 2’s *Andantino* or the contredanse-style *Un poco allegretto* from Quartet No. 1, stands well on its own and does not rely on the surrounding movements to support its thematic or harmonic material—excepting Quartet No. 1’s *Presto* and second *Andante* movements. The lack of connecting thematic or harmonic material between movements and the ability to separate the sketched movements and place them in two different quartets, as seen in Quartet Y, demonstrates the compartmentalization that could easily make the movements “mobile” among the works. In both quartets, there is also a homogeneity of tonal schemes, with five movements total focusing on F major, four on C major, two on B♭ major, and one on G major. The complementary tonal schemes provide options to
create multiple combinations of movements by focusing on the F-major—B₃-major—C-major relationship or the C-major—F-major—G-major relationship.

This variability combined with frequent repeats of large phrase sections and periodic phrasing would lend itself well to a dance atmosphere. Based on requests from fellow performers or guests, the quartet members could rearrange the movements at their leisure. Repeats of large phrase sections allow both the dancers and performers to enjoy multiple repetitions of the music and extend or shorten the length of the quartet as needed. For example, musicians performing the quadrille, a popular dance in the nineteenth century, used these phrase repeats to allow each dancing couple a turn at a particular dance move.¹⁵ That Dragonetti regularly uses periodic phrasing and binary and ternary forms suggests that these movements could have easily worked in a functional dance setting where confusion might arise in the dancers over unexpected forms not suitable for dancing. In addition, Set 1 contains many more repeats and wear than Set 2, supporting the notion that Dragonetti may have used the draft Set 1 in a domestic atmosphere before refining the quartets for future publication and an audience that would have preferred more autonomous qualities.

Quartet No. 4 focuses on a different aspect of domestic music making. Its more autonomous nature suggests an atmosphere suitable for amateurs who enjoyed the intellectual pastime of playing new chamber music. Within the movements, more examples of trading melodies appear among all the instruments in the quartet, making it a prime example of the communicative textures (Ex. 3.11) benefitting performance by families and friends. The short solos in Quartet No. 4’s Vivace (Ex. 3.12, 3.13) provides everyone an opportunity to display their talent and play with different textures of the ensemble. Expected cadences after long melodic passages with harmonic intrigue in the progressions would help keep the group together even

with the varied skills and training of each member. Quartet No. 4’s autonomous form and connections to standard eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century string quartets designates this work as a piece of music meant for intellectual settings shared in a domestic space.

Example 3.11: Quartet No. 4, *Vivace*, mm. 149-157
(communication between the first and second violin)
Example 3.12: Quartet No. 4, *Vivace*, mm. 158-165 (cello solo)
As a whole, the quartets link Dragonetti firmly to a musical culture in transition. They assimilate styles of the cosmopolitan centers of Europe and integrate conservative and innovative trends, revealing their function with domestic music making. Dragonetti’s ongoing involvement in the musical culture of London strongly points towards the impacts that his colleagues, travels, and social class made on his music. By understanding the influences in addition to discussing his quartets, we can make connections to contemporaneous works by his peers and add a new dimension to the current musicological discussion of early nineteenth-century music.
Bibliography


**Musical Examples**


**Manuscript Sources**