

JÖRG WIDMANN'S *JAGDQUARTETT*

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Abstract: Jörg Widmann's work embraces everything music history – and beyond – has to offer: Lachenmann, Boulez, the poetry of Baudelaire, Rilke's Late Sonnets and the Screaming Pope paintings of Francis Bacon. His transformative re-imagining of traditional forms is seen nowhere better than in the *Jagdquartett*, the third in a cycle of five quartets that comprise the core of his oeuvre. In the interview around which this article is based he discusses the *Jagdquartett* and its inspirations in detail, and the possibility of his music representing a kind of meta-modernism.

The name Jörg Widmann carries an inherent duality. This internationally renowned clarinetist regularly appears with performing luminaries such as Tabea Zimmermann, András Schiff and Hélène Grimaud, and he is the dedicatee of more than one concerto,¹ but it was his initial interest in the clarinet which inevitably led to the exploration of a deeper impulse: composition. When asked how this came to be, he cites the felicitousness of his childhood, growing up in Munich, his early, positive experiences with the music of 'tradition', and especially, his choice of instrument (which, it appears, was initially something of a parental quandary):

My parents were not musicians but were really interested in music. They had a 'hobby-string quartet' at home – so that is what my sister (who was a violinist) and I had as our first impressions. My parents took us to concerts and to the opera; it was kind of our childhood. We heard the Haydn string quartets played at home; my sister started playing the violin and I started playing the clarinet . . . I heard the clarinet and said to my parents 'I want to learn this instrument'. They said, 'are you *really* sure?' And for some reason I was really sure. They asked me 20 times more and I said 'yes, I think so'. So that was really my instrument – I started at the age of 7 – I think everything in my musical language until today comes from playing, from the physical aspect – improvising as well.²

Widmann instinctively sought a means of transmitting this physical aspect, and he started writing music:

I always was kind of sad that I did not remember the melodies that I played the day before which I made up, so I had to find a way to notate them. Two years later I had composition lessons; I would not call them pieces, what I wrote at

¹ He is the dedicatee of *Musik für Klarinette und Orchester*, by his teacher Wolfgang Rihm, *Cantus* by Aribert Reimann and *Rechant* by Heinz Holliger, to name a few.

² Jörg Widmann, interview with the author, Toronto, 3 March 2012. Subsequent quoted material is taken from these unpublished notes unless otherwise cited.

that time – I was imitating what I knew. My first piece was a Waltz in F major for piano.

These strong interests continued with Widmann's study of clarinet performance at the Hochschule für Musik in Munich and subsequently at the Juilliard School in New York (in 2001, he was appointed as professor of clarinet at the Freiburg Staatliche Hochschule für Musik). Simultaneous to his studies of performance, he studied composition, with Wilfried Hiller, Hans Werner Henze, Heiner Goebbels and Wolfgang Rihm. He has emerged as one of the leading composers of the present day.

Central to Widmann's ambitious, incandescent oeuvre are two cycles: the five String Quartets – the third of which, *Jagdquartett*, will be explored here – and a triptych of orchestral works entitled *Chor*, *Messe* and *Lied*; as is evident, these are vocal forms re-imagined as instrumental canvases. *Chor* is a spectacular amplification of the vocal choir. Widmann depicts here 'the individual voice magnified to gigantic proportions; the whole orchestra is a singing and speaking body, a choir'.³ *Messe* is a 40-minute spiritual catharsis – a richly contrapuntal orchestral *singing* of traditional mass movements Kyrie, Gloria, Crucifixus and Et Resurrexit (each bearing personal significance for Widmann). The lushly romantic *Lied*, in particular, has engendered admiration. In the forward of this work – intended as a Schubert homage – Widmann includes the famous thoughts of Adorno: 'In the presence of Schubert's music, tears spring from our eyes without first consulting the soul: they flow metaphorically but tangibly within us. We cry without knowing why'.⁴

Another orchestral work, *Armonica*, was premiered in 2007 by Pierre Boulez and the Vienna Philharmonic – this piece sets front and centre a 'relic of the 18th century and an instrument Mozart wrote for at the end of his life, but which has scarcely been used in the 20th and 21st centuries'⁵: the glass harmonica. Service's observant description continues: 'The piece casts an ethereal web of sound that seems to radiate from the harmonica's ghostly, almost electronic textures with slow-moving, overlapping chords and sensuous orchestral glitter, and an accordion acting as a kind of sonic intermediary between the glass harmonica and the rest of the orchestra'. Among Widmann's other orchestral works, one may recognize the Beethoven homage, *Con brio*, a Violin Concerto premiered by Christian Tetzlaff and the Junge Deutsche Philharmonie, or a recent Flute Concerto (*Flûte en suite*) premiered in Europe by the Berlin Philharmonic under Sir Simon Rattle, with soloist Emmanuel Pahud. Equally prolific in chamber music, Widmann has written a now-famous solo clarinet *Fantasie* (recorded by the composer), violin *Études* (written with his sister in mind), *Fünf Bruchstücke* for clarinet and piano (again, recorded by the composer), and a variety of works for two, three, four or more instruments in chamber ensembles. Of these one will find many in traditional formulations (piano

³ Jörg Widmann, Forward to *Chor* (Mainz: Schott Music GmbH & Co., 2004.)

⁴ 'Vor Schuberts Musik stürzt die Träne aus dem Auge, ohne erst die Seele zu befragen: so unbillig und real fällt sie in uns ein. Wir weinen, ohne zu wissen warum'. The powerful translation is by Max Paddison. See Tom Cochrane, Bernardino Fantini and Klaus R. Scherer, *The Emotional Power of Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 18.

⁵ Tom Service, 'A Guide to Jörg Widmann's Music', *The Guardian* (8 October 2012), <http://www.theguardian.com/music/tomserviceblog/2012/oct/08/jorg-widmann-contemporary-music-guide> (accessed 4 March 2013).

and violin/clarinet, piano trio, etc.) but also the odd accordion and clarinet, or trombone and electric guitar.

The subtitle to Tom Service's 'Guide to Jörg Widmann's Music' puts this ever-growing body of music in perspective: 'Widmann's essential project is to reveal the continuing vitality of Mozart or Schubert – and he brings it kicking and screaming into the present day'.⁶ This project of 'kicking and screaming' revitalization is indeed worked out through Widmann's unique compositional voice, which attentively sublimates for its own ends not just Mozart and Schubert, but also Helmut Lachenmann, Boulez (Widmann speaks with reverential awe of the shattering second piano sonata), the poetry of Baudelaire, Rilke's Late Sonnets and even the screaming pope paintings of Francis Bacon. Some might find his kind of music an extension of metamodernism – especially in its most characteristic and joyous 'free(dom) to plunder the entirety of music history'.⁷ Certainly, this most *meta* practice is a reflection of artists pursuing a new and different way of gathering materials – something which often stands in stark contrast to *Postmodernism*: 'New generations of artists increasingly abandon the aesthetic precepts of deconstruction, parataxis, and pastiche in favor of aesth-ethical notions of reconstruction, myth, and metaxis. These trends and tendencies can no longer be explained in terms of the postmodern'.⁸ This recent aesthetic is perceived by some as one that, more than outstripping any means of explanation offered by the postmodern, in fact 'move[s] beyond the worn out sensibilities and empty practices of the postmodernists not by radically parting with their attitudes and techniques but by incorporating and redirecting them. In politics as in culture as elsewhere, a sensibility is emerging from and surpassing postmodernism; as a non-dialectical *Aufhebung* that negates the postmodern while retaining some of its traits'.⁹

Equally resonant in the music of Widmann is the 'triple crisis' described in this recent manifesto – and especially with the work looked at here, the *Jagdquartett*:

The ecosystem is severely disrupted, the financial system is increasingly uncontrollable, and the geopolitical structure has recently begun to appear as unstable as it has always been uneven. This triple crisis infuses doubt and inspires reflection about our basic assumptions, as much as inflaming cultural debates and provoking dogmatic entrenchments. History, it seems, is moving rapidly beyond its all too hastily proclaimed end'.¹⁰

It cannot be argued that much of Widmann's music, especially the *Jagdquartett*, goes beyond any 'hastily proclaimed end' to be found elsewhere in his Mozartian or even Beethovenian archetypes. But as interesting as these and some other observations may be, Widmann's own remarks (seen below) on the uselessness of labels are pointed and on point – he reiterates that the ideas behind *post*, and *meta* were in full swing as much in the Art of Fugue as in the late quartets of Beethoven, and highlights the impossibility of categorization found in the contemporaneous music of late Bach and those around him, or in that of Richard Strauss and those around him:

⁶ Service, 'A Guide to Jörg Widmann's Music'.

⁷ Service, 'A Guide to Jörg Widmann's Music'.

⁸ Robin van den Akker and Timotheus Vermeulen, 'Notes on Metamodernism', *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture*, 2 (2010) DOI: 10.3402/jac.v1i0.5677, abstract.

⁹ Robin van den Akker, et al, 'What is Metamodernism?' *Notes on Metamodernism* (15 July 2010), <http://www.metamodernism.com/2010/07/15/what-is-metamodernism> (accessed 27 February 2012).

¹⁰ Akker, et al, 'What is Metamodernism?'.

I understand that one wants to label things and categorize them, but even in the music of the past, I'm not so interested in the Russian School, the Munich School, the Paris School – I'm interested in the personal language of Debussy, the personal language of Mahler. When we hear something or we see a painting or we hear a poem we try to link it to something we already know, and that's very understandable.

At the same time, one may link some of what Widmann says to his forebears – other reflections on the problematic past (Webern's *Path to the New Music* and Boulez's *Schoenberg est mort* come to mind) echo resoundingly here:

Of course what's very true about this whole discussion of all these names is that the fact of, or the term of 'progress', as it was in music history since Beethoven – or Hegel, in philosophy – does not work anymore. After all these horrible things that happened in the twentieth century, progress is not only positive in connotation. In the arts, and especially in German philosophy (Adorno) the word *progress* and the meaning of progress was something very important. So, 'good music' was that which gave progress to music history – but, sometimes the people who did not fit into their time are the most interesting. Like the late Bach – he was totally out of fashion – his sons had already written completely different music, and they thought him old fashioned, and his contemporaries thought he was old fashioned, but it was the Musical Offering and the Art of the Fugue they were looking at, you know? It's probably timeless music and probably gave more 'progress' to music than any other music. And in our time it's even more extreme – so many things exist.

Widmann's continuing discussion of his compositional method touches with remarkable precision on the issue of the postmodern (again, Boulez comes to mind: 'Messiaen does not compose; he juxtaposes'¹¹):

What I'm really opposed to is this kind of postmodernism where anything goes. Of course, anything is possible, but that gives many obligations for me as a composer, so the pieces themselves have to be really consistent then. Or, if you are allowed to do anything, then choosing your material becomes a real part of composing. Now, in a time where I can do really everything, I really have to choose – in a literal sense, that's my image of composing. In a literal sense: com-posing – things which at first sight do not seem to belong together, but I put them together, maybe I force them together and maybe they still don't seem to belong together, but it's com-posing.

For Widmann, then, *meta* and *post* are not as important as the act of com-posing; for him the act of composing is in fact a distillation of a mixture whose ingredients do not necessarily belong together – even that which might react volatily with something else is forced into the melting pot. The source of Widmann's ingredients is indeed 'music history'; for him the past serves at once as a rich landscape that gives fuel and inspiration and a source that continually demands to be explored in a new way. While for some Widmann's music may well represent 'a continuation of an incipient lyrical German tradition that has already been carved out by Zemlinsky, Schoenberg, Berg, Henze and Wolfgang Rihm',¹² his works harbour little irony or *postmodern*-ly subversive intent toward these Teutonic forebears. There is often a subversive, full-on narrative re-working of their models, and an equally subversive execution of this narrative (a combination that is quintessentially Widmann-ian).

¹¹ Pierre Boulez, *Notes on Apprenticeship*, trans. Herbert Weinstock (New York: Knopf, 1968), p. 64.

¹² Graham Lack, 'At Fever Pitch: the Music of Jörg Widmann', *TEMPO*, Vol. 59, No. 231 (2005), pp. 29–35, here 32.

One finds this dialectic at work everywhere in his music – even in, for instance, the most inconspicuous set of five *Intermezzi* for solo piano. This work is dedicated to the celebrated interpreter of Beethoven and Schubert András Schiff, and everything about this book's cover would suggest a conservative work tied up with the legacy of late romanticism. Instantly the spectre of Brahms comes to mind; and to be sure, the piano writing and gestures – even in the opening bars, where a process of Brahmsian/Beethovenian fragmentation is clearly at work – seem to project the vague silhouette of an older ancestor. Indeed, where the perhaps subliminal or suggestive organic symmetry in a Brahms opus does not literally bind the performer, here it is explicit – the *Intermezzi* are meant to be performed as a set (just as the cycle of five string quartets, from which the *Jagdquartett* serves as a Scherzo third movement). But a continued study reveals a reworking and re-imagining of many seemingly antiquated tropes; by the end of the fourth *Intermezzo* (entitled *Wiegenlied*) we glimpse something as wildly 'radical' as it is explicit – a quintuple fortissimo with forearm clusters over the lowest notes on the keyboard; what begins in the cradle ends somewhere else far removed. The absence of an enlightening narrative from Widmann (as found in the forward of the *Jagdquartett*) is something that makes this music even more strangely unsettling and effective.

The explicit, *meta*-questioning of a traditional narrative and disavowal of expectations that follows here is only astonishing if one can take in its 'relief': a milieu of tradition. But it is this same disavowal of expectations that feeds the increasingly frenetically unstable character of the *Jagdquartett* and so many others of Widmann's works. This article seeks to discern and articulate this and the point of Widmann's vibrantly assimilative compositional voice by looking at one of his most incandescent works to date, the String Quartet No. 3, *Jagdquartett*.

Jagdquartett

Written in 2003, Widmann's Third String Quartet is a 12-minute, single-movement work commissioned for the Römerbad-Musiktage Badenweiler; it was premiered later that year by the Arditti Quartet on 12 November in Badenweiler, and has since been recorded by the Leipzig, Ragazze and Minguet Quartets (and performed by many others). Tom Service gives this description of the work:

The piece starts healthily and energetically, with the four players whipping the air with their bows and shouting 'Hai!' There is a constant hunting rhythm, the same as the obsessive pattern that dominates the first movement of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony. 'But at the end, it's only bones', Widmann says, 'a skeleton of strange, white noise. So it's not that I take the Beethoven rhythm and steal it; it's more like I'm analyzing what it means to hunt. Because a hunt is violent. Someone or something is killed. In my piece, it's the cellist who dies with a long scream at the end. Audiences sometimes smile at this moment, but what I wanted them to feel was that they would start laughing, but it dies in their throats. It's ambivalent'. The Hunt Quartet is a piece that explores the ambiguities in a musical idea we're familiar with in countless pieces from the classical tradition, but whose real meaning we've become deaf to.¹³

¹³ Tom Service, 'The Musical Double-Agent', *The Guardian* (13 March 2009), <http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2009/mar/13/jorg-widmann-clarinettist-wigmore-hall> (accessed 4 March 2012).

Realization of this narrative is facilitated perfectly by Widmann's procedure of com-posing – his sometimes forceful fusing of vastly different materials into one entity – the effectiveness of this procedure are most striking in moments where these elements from tradition are juxtaposed very smoothly with new things. Stefan Fricke's description of a 'racing or quiet vortex of notes feeding on a single gesture'¹⁴ is apt – the gesture from which the hunters feed here is a theme found in Schumann's *Papillons*, Op. 2 (which Schumann most likely lifted from an even older German folksong called 'Es klappert die Mühle am rauschenden Bach'). Concerning his selection of this theme, Widmann notes:

I am obsessed with Schumann. In almost every piece of mine there's one link to Schumann, whether it's his favourite key (A minor) or an 'almost'-quote-but-not-quite in my *Elf Humoresken* for piano, which are a Schumann homage. And my *Fieberphantasie* for clarinet and piano and string quartet is a real homage to Schumann. I think his melodies are built up like fever curves – like from the hospital, the oscillographs – they go like that.¹⁵ Mozart melodies are built a totally different way.

Schumann's characteristically 'oscillographic' transmission of this German folk tune is, as Widmann notes, only the initial attraction – the raw, catalyzing energy of this song's roots are clear in the almost propagandizingly optimistic third stanza (which belies Widmann's use of this melody as something doubly subversive):

Wenn reichliche Körner das Ackerfeld trägt:
 Klipp, klapp.
 Die Mühle dann flink ihre Räder bewegt:
 Klipp, klapp.
 Und schenkt uns der Himmel nur immerdar Brot,
 so sind wir geborgen und leiden nicht Not.
 Klipp, klapp, klipp, klapp, klipp, klapp.

When harvests of plenty are brought in the fall:
 Clip, clop.
 It's then that the mill wheels turn fastest of all
 Clip, clop.
 For heaven does always provide us with bread,
 And we are protected from sorrow and need:
 Clip, clop, clip, clop, clip, clop.¹⁶

The thoroughly positive tone of both the music and text are completely subverted by Widmann's many-layered musical contextualization, whose outcome, he reveals in the Foreword of the score, is intended as 'an analogy of social behavioural patterns'. But even the timbral settings of this initial melody are concerns for Widmann – as is evident immediately in the opening of (and then throughout) the Quartet, where the performers are instructed to shout 'Hai!' at certain important moments (Example 1). Widmann also noted that he was interested in creating a sound as dramatic as possible, which might approximate the sound of hunting horns; and this is heard in the proliferation of double-stop writing throughout the score.

¹⁴ Quoted in Graham Lack, 'At Fever Pitch: the Music of Jörg Widmann', p. 32.

¹⁵ In his Foreword to the *Fieberphantasie*, Widmann notes: 'I often feel Robert Schumann's melodic shape to be like the amplitude of a temperature curve: nervous, flickering, feverish, an infinite number of small and large wave crests and troughs within the principal line'.

¹⁶ Jerry Silverman, *Songs of Germany/Deutsche Lieder* (Pacific, MO: Mel Bay Publications, 2008), p. 81.

Also, it's an even older German folksong called 'Es klappert die Mühle am rauschenden Bach' – it's a kind of folk tune. And that you see in the instructions – what I write for the performers – it should sound like a fiddle, an Irish fiddle or something – folk, like a folk tune. Therefore, I have so many open strings to really make it sound – I was trying to make it sound like eight horns. So it's four instruments only but they sound like much more because they are playing double-stops most of the time. When they play something, they have one resonating open string with it so that changes the sound dramatically. So sometimes when you have the hunt rhythm you think a whole orchestra is playing. I just needed some 'horn call' and some gesture, of course, to start the whole thing. . . . I really wanted to try to have a really positive start.

The Foreword to the score of the *Jagdquartett* reflects Service's earlier description, revealing the basic procedure and the narrative present in the work: "This is the development of a "healthy" hunting theme in dotted rhythm (borrowed from Schumann's *Papillons*) which culminates in the fragmentation and final skeletonization of an initially positive hunting figure. Simultaneously, the situation of the four musicians changes: the bragging hunters are successively transformed into those pursued and hunted. The additional (fatal) change in perspective in which the three upper strings gang up on the cellist and pin the blame on him is an analogy of social behavioural patterns. The consistently playful-overexcited inflection only barely masks the earnestness which has forced itself into this work".¹⁷

The hunter narrative corresponds to the idea of development – is this representative of a German development-driven dialectic? Widmann discusses the narrative-development of the *Jagdquartett*:

Writing a 'cute' hunting tune would have not been enough for me. I wanted to have a development, and also a musical development, from this horn call or hunt-call, from this 'healthy' atmosphere until something really distorted and sick in the end. It's the same rhythm throughout – when you look on the page, you know one part is in major and sounds really positive but in the end when the musicians only play on the bridges of their instruments and you have all these sounds, you hardly recognize it (as) the hunting rhythm.

Here the *Papillons* rhythm acts as a narrative coagulant to the episodic states of a gradual psychological meltdown; these increasingly disturbed, pessimistic states of being are illustrated by events in the

Jagdquartett / Hunting Quartet

(3. Streichquartett / 3rd String Quartet)

Allegro vivace assai (♩. ca. 132) Jörg Widmann
© 1973

Violine I brüllen / roar
Hai!

Violine II brüllen / roar
Hai!

Viola brüllen / roar
Hai!

Violoncello brüllen / roar
Hai!

Bogen prestiss, durch die Luft schleudern
Thresh bow through the air prestiss.

fff possibile *sempre sim.*

fff *ord.* *ff* *sempre*

Example 1:
Widmann, *Jagdquartett*, bars 1–6. ©
SCHOTT MUSIC, Mainz –
Germany.

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¹⁷ Jörg Widmann, Foreword to *Jagdquartett* (Mainz: Schott Music GmbH & Co., 2003).

Example 2:
Widmann, *Jagdquartett*, bars 80–84.
© SCHOTT MUSIC, Mainz – Germany.

score often punctuated with violent vocalizations from the performers. One of the first important moments in the narrative structure is a curious ‘disappearance’ of the first violin (bars 83–84) following the *sehr wild* marking in bar 82 (Example 2). The execution of this moment is facilitated by an act of Widmann-ian compositional assimilation – here of graphic score notation.

Two further moments of developmental *frisson* occur. In bars 98–99 the musicians are instructed to increase bow pressure, and then, in bar 103, Widmann gives the instruction to alter the position of the bow (Example 3) – effectively broadcasting the increasing instability of the hunters’ collective psyche.

These departures from ‘tradition’ (so far, the use of graphic score notation, violent vocalizations from the performers and the thrashing of bows through the air) are constantly underpinned by the subversive narrative of the hunters. The unease engendered first by the violin’s unaccountable departure rapidly and incessantly spreads to the

Example 3:
Widmann, *Jagdquartett*, bars 103–105. © SCHOTT MUSIC, Mainz – Germany.

sehr langsames Vierteltonvibrato auf und ab, unkoordiniert / extremely slow quarter-tone vibrato, up and down, uncoordinated

molto sul pont.

pos. ord. deciso

p *pp* *p < mp* *ff sub*

sehr langsames Vierteltonvibrato auf und ab, unkoordiniert / extremely slow quarter-tone vibrato, up and down, uncoordinated

molto sul pont.

pos. ord. deciso

p *pp* *p < mp* *ff sub*

col legno* batt. salt. (salt.) 4xbatt. gliss.*** (batt.) salt. arco ord.*** gliss. deciso *ff sub.* (quasi Echo)

* links immer abdämpfen / always dampen with the left hand
 ** gliss. Kontaktstelle Bogenposition / gliss. point of contact bowing position
 *** aber so stark schlagen, dass Bogenholz auf jeder Note mitklingt / but hit so strongly that the wood of the bow sounds at every note

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Example 4:
 Widmann, *Jagdquartett*, bars 113–115. © SCHOTT MUSIC, Mainz – Germany.

other top instruments – soon after this event the second violin joins in on the utilization of quarter-tone in bar 113 (Example 4). This moment Widmann names as the beginning of the second theme area, if a strict analysis is applied.

These three increasingly wild moments precipitate an ‘overheating’ – an enormous burn-out of energy as the music gets stuck in a gridlock (Example 5). Widmann describes this as a ‘what is going on?!’ moment; perhaps this is where ‘the situation of the four instrumentalists changes: the braggart hunters go on to be hunted, to be pursued’.

After this statically frightening ‘record-skip’, a clear shift is engineered. The rhythm persists, but after what Widmann describes as its ‘suffocation’ (Example 5), it continues in E-flat, ‘not innocently’ (Example 6). Visually the impression is one of heterogeneity (more so than yet seen), and the cello’s frantic throbbing seems an implicit

arco *ff* *più ff* *più ff* *più ff* *più ff* *ff*

arco *f* *mf ff* *p poco ff* *mp*

non salt. salt. ord. salt. ord. *pp poco ff* *mp*

non salt. salt. ord. salt. ord. *pp poco ff* *mp*

arco *ppp cresc. (al fff)* *ppp cresc. (al fff)* *ppp cresc. (al fff)* *ppp cresc. (al fff)*

* quasi stolpem / quasi stumbling

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Example 5:
 Widmann, *Jagdquartett*, bars 136–141. © SCHOTT MUSIC, Mainz – Germany.

Example 6:

Widmann, *Jagdquartett*, bars 215–219. © SCHOTT MUSIC, Mainz – Germany.

foreshadowing – the high strings are beginning to ‘conspire against the cello in a further (deadly) change of perspective’.¹⁸

Widmann notes one, further, penultimate event (Example 7) as certainly the most climactic signpost; even the most uninformed listener could not miss this moment. It is here that the dichotomy between instrumentalists becomes most resoundingly clear, as the top three instruments join in a frenzied rhythmic sawing, while the cello – independently of the others and losing energy while the others gain it – wavers with snowballing desperation.

The bloodthirsty narrative culminates in bars 311–318 (Example 8), with the death of the cello. All instruments play on the bridge, without pitches; one-by-one the first violin, second violin and viola place their instruments ‘between the knees’.

In my interview with Widmann he reiterated what he has already mentioned elsewhere about the ending:

In the end people laugh most of the time – after the piece or during the piece, which is absolutely correct. I did as well when I wrote it, but it’s a laughter which, at the end, when the cello is really done, kind of stops in an odd way.

This subversion of expectations is what Widmann gleefully exploits – but it is not the *Jagdquartett*’s *raison d’être*; as Tom Service has so succinctly articulated, he is interested in exploring ‘the ambiguities in a musical idea we’re familiar with in countless pieces from the classical tradition, but whose real meaning we’ve become deaf to’.¹⁹ Evidence of this – in particular realizing the dark, subversive impulses that exist behind the Scherzo as a compositional apparatus – was voiced by Widmann’s reflections on what this music means to him, and

¹⁸ A recent music video of the *Jagdquartett* performed by the Ragazze Quartet gives a literal, staged dramatic shift at this point in the score, reflecting that in the musical narrative. This adapted staging of Widmann’s work is entitled *The Hunt*, and is directed by Robin Coops and produced by Olya van Poppel.

¹⁹ Service, ‘The Musical Double-Agent’.

314 ♩ ca. 100 (ritard.)

ff sempre) *quasi cresc.*

ff sempre) *quasi cresc.*

ff sempre) *quasi cresc.*

ff sempre) *quasi cresc.*

immer von oben nach unten / always from top to bottom

Klang immer mehr zerbröckeln/ersterben lassen
allow tone to disintegrate/fade away progressively

dimin. *quasi al niente*

317 ♩ ca. 50 (ritard.) **senza misura**

fff ancora più cresc. *tutta la forza* *stacc / rigid*

fff ancora più cresc. *tutta la forza* *stacc / rigid*

fff ancora più cresc. *tutta la forza* *stacc / rigid*

Aaaa** *con dolore* *gliss.* *solange wie möglich nachklingen lassen*
allow to resonate as long as possible

con tutta la forza *con dolore con tutta la forza* *quasi cresc.* *niente*

* mit Bogen in die Luft dreschen = erster Klang im Stück, hier aber brutaler nach unten „peitschen“, mit jedes Mal identischer Bewegung / *thresh with bow through the air = first note of work, but here "whip" downwards in more brutal fashion; identical movement each time*

** existentieller Schrei (wie von * getroffen) / *existential roar (as if hit by *)*

© 2006 Schott Music GmbH & Co. KG, Mainz

Example 8:
Widmann, *Jagdquartett*, bars
311–318. © SCHOTT MUSIC,
Mainz – Germany.

For instance, the *pesante*, dark tune in Mahler’s sixth which cannot dance any-
more – there is no chance that this will ever be alive again. It’s already dead.

This profoundly dark description of what Widmann perceives to be at work in Mahler is comparable to the equally disturbing intimations of *die Jagd* depicted in the Third Quartet, which itself, as mentioned previously, serves as the Scherzo of a larger cycle. If Widmann here has crystallized for himself the most aortic impulse of the Scherzo (for composers such as Beethoven, Mahler and Shostakovich), the complementing counterparts that complete the cycle must presumably attempt similarly virtuosic realizations of other movement types. One reads from Schott’s own description of these works: ‘it is the string quartets which form the core of Widmann’s oeuvre: String Quartet No. I (1997), followed by *Choralquartett* (2003/2006) and *Jagdquartett* ... This series was completed in 2005 by String Quartet No. IV (first performance given by the Vogler Quartet) and Quartet No. V with soprano, *Versuch über die Fuge* (Attempt at a Fugue), premiered by Juliane Banse and the Artemis Quartet. The five string quartets are intended as a large cycle, with each individual work following a traditional form of setting’.²⁰

This transformative re-imagining of the quartet – via scores that draw on every technical possibility found in the repertoire, and may yet subsist by ‘feeding on a single gesture’ – is the perfect manifestation of Widmann’s aesthetic. Certainly, Widmann’s own personal language is most characterized by this two-fold richness of inspiration and of execution. These two elements, which at once work to infuse the old with new life, are what continually and successfully allow Widmann to engender among musicians and audiences a realization of Western Classical music’s potency, veracity and necessity.

²⁰ Jörg Widmann: Profile, Schott Music GmbH & Co. KG <http://www.schott-music.com/shop/persons/featured/joerg-widmann/> (accessed 8 August 2015).