Stopping/Restarting Play during String Quartet Rehearsals: An Ethnographic Approach to Performance Analysis

Nishida, Hiroko
Faculty of Design, Kyushu University

Yokomori, Daisuke
Faculty of Languages and Cultures, Kyushu University

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Hiroko NISHIDA and Daisuke YOKOMORI

Abstract:
The field of musicology has long focused on the history of music and music structures; however, research that focus on music as an activity—“musicking” (Small, 1998), including and not limited to performance analyses (Cook, 2007) and performers’ interpretations of the piece (Cook, 2013)—have gained more attention in recent years. In addition, scholars of performance studies have focused on the ethnographic approach to music rehearsals. As a case study of the ethnographic approach in performance studies, this paper investigates the players’ stop/restart management in a string quartet rehearsal. During rehearsals, players occasionally need to stop playing and deal with problems they have detected and after doing that, they also need to restart playing, either to check how they sound during the section in question or to move on to the next section of the piece. Studies have explored how participants stop/restart musical activities such as an orchestra rehearsal or a vocal master class. However, little is known about how players deal with contingencies concerning stopping/restarting play when it comes to cases where there is no participant playing the role of a conductor or instructor. The purpose of the present study is to explore how players manage the issue of start/stop in a rehearsal with neither a conductor nor an instructor. An 8.5-hour video recording of 3 rehearsals of a professional string quartet in Japan is analyzed. Looking at verbal and non-verbal details of players’ behaviors, we have examined instances of the Stop–Restart sequence: how players share the problem with other members and what happens before they restart. As a result of our analysis, compared to Stop–Restart sequences in other musical activities with a conductor or instructor, those in a string quartet rehearsal are revealed to be more contingent on players’ subtle behaviors.

1. Introduction

1.1. Ethnographic Studies on Performance Analysis

The demand for empirical research on classical music rehearsals is increasing. The field of musicology has long focused on music history and music structure; however, research focusing on music as an activity—“musicking” (Small, 1998), including and not limited to performance analyses (Cook, 2007) and performers’ interpretations of the piece (Cook, 2013)—have gained more attention in recent years. More specifically, according to the most recent performance studies, the ethnographic approach to performance in the field of music theory and analysis has received considerable attention:

More recent scholarship has witnessed welcome efforts to formulate models of “performer’s
analysis” that expand the definition of analysis beyond its default meaning as the text-based, intra-
opus examination of the score, as well as descriptive studies of recorded or live performances that
explore the analytical implications of performance decisions. (Mak, 2016: 53–54)

However, this line of research has progressed slowly due to a lack of academic research teams capable of
using the “musicking” approach and because it is difficult for music researchers to attend music
rehearsals.

On the other hand, Weeks, whose research was later regarded as a landmark study in the field of
Ethnomethodology/Conversation Analysis, analyzed interactions in orchestra and chamber music rehears-
als (Weeks, 1996a; 1996b). As multi-modality research is on the rise (Streeck et al., 2011), researchers
have begun to make use of video tapes of rehearsals and master classes for classical music research (Reed
et al., 2013; Tolins, 2014).

1.2. Stops and Restarts in Music Rehearsals

One of the most important tasks in classical music rehearsals is to detect potential problems and find
their solutions. In order to do that, performers must stop the rehearsal, resolve the problem, and replay
the particular segment or restart from the next segment. The “stop/restart” question is also investigated
in the Ethnomethodology/Conversation Analysis research field.

For example, Weeks (1996a) and Reed et al., (2013) have each researched how performers handle
stops/restarts in orchestra rehearsals and vocal master classes, respectively. Weeks (1996a) has analysed
the sequential relationship between players’ stops and conductors’ directions, adopting the model of repair
organization in talk-in-interaction (Schegloff et al., 1977). Reed et al. (2013) has investigated the ways in
which students and accompanists in vocal master classes manage to start and stop their play, orienting to
masters’ instructions. While those studies have revealed the details of interaction among participants
during orchestra rehearsals and master classes, where a conductor or instructor acts as the leader and
decides where the stops/restarts will be, little has been explored about how players deal with the issues of
stop/restart in a chamber music rehearsal, where there are no conductors or instructors and the behaviors
of each participants are likely to affect the stop/restart of their play. Based on the preliminary study that
analyzed one rehearsal (Yokomori and Nishida 2017), the present study aims to investigate the stop/restart
management in a string quartet rehearsal.

2. Methodology and Data

2.1. Rehearsal Data

The present study analyzes video data of three rehearsals of a professional string quartet based in
Japan.

(1) Rehearsal 1

The first data were collected on August 3rd, 2016, the day when the quartet was preparing for a concert
held on August 6th and 7th, 2016. The rehearsal was still in its early stage. Pieces performed included the
first to third movements of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart’s Divertimento K.138 (Mozart), the first to fourth
movements of Leoš Janáček’s Kreutzer Sonata (Janacek), and lastly, the first and fourth movements of Giuseppe Verdi’s String Quartet (Verdi). Approximately 33mins were spent on Mozart, 41mins on Janacek, and 121mins on Verdi. The rehearsal lasted for 3.5 hours, breaks inclusive. There were neither leaders nor members who acted as leaders during the rehearsals. Informed consent was obtained prior to the start of recording.

(2) Rehearsal 2

Rehearsal 2 was run through as a Generalprobe at the venue on January 22nd, 2017 to prepare for the concert that was held on the same day. The musical pieces that were rehearsed were Ludwig van Beethoven’s String Quartet Hess34 (arranged from Piano Sonata No.9, Op.14-1), Maurice Ravel’s String Quartet, and Beethoven’s String Quartet No.13 Op.130 (hereinafter, they are abbreviated to “Hess34,” “Ravel,” and “Op.130.” Approximately 35mins were spent on Hess34, 35mins on Ravel, and 45mins on Op.130. The whole rehearsal lasted for 2 hours, breaks inclusive.

(3) Rehearsal 3

Rehearsal 3 was in preparation for the concert on March 27th, 2017. Rehearsal 3 was run through on the February 27th, 2017. The rehearsal was still in its early stage. The musical pieces that were rehearsed were the first to third movements of Franz Schubert’s String Quartet No.2 D.32 and the first to third movements of Schubert’s No.8 D.112 (hereinafter, they are abbreviated to “No.2” and “No.8”). Approximately 95mins were spent on No.2 and about 80mins on No.8. The rehearsal lasted for 3 hours, breaks inclusive.

2.2. Stop/Restart Data

Video recordings of approximately 8.5 hours were observed and cases in which playing was stopped/restarted were identified using annotation software called ELAN. As a result, 210 stops and 236 restarts were identified in total (the transitions between movements are not included). The first to third tables show a breakdown of stops and starts and the number of those per minute by each rehearsal day and each musical piece.

In Table 1, the significantly higher number of stops/restarts recorded during Verdi can be attributed to

| Table 1 The number of stops and restarts for each piece (Rehearsal 1) |
|-------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
|                   | Minutes | Stops (per minute) | Restarts (per minute) |
| Mozart            | 33      | 11 (0.3)           | 11 (0.3)               |
| Janáček           | 41      | 15 (0.4)           | 17 (0.4)               |
| Verdi             | 121     | 77 (0.6)           | 86 (0.7)               |
| Sum               | 195     | 103               | 114                     |

| Table 2 The number of stops and restarts for each piece (Rehearsal 2) |
|-------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
|                   | Minutes | Stops (per minute) | Restarts (per minute) |
| Hess34            | 35      | 10 (0.3)           | 13 (0.4)               |
| Ravel             | 35      | 0 (0.0)            | 0 (0.0)                |
| Op.130            | 45      | 6 (0.1)            | 8 (0.2)                |
| Sum               | 115     | 16                | 21                     |
the fact that it was the first time the quartet practiced the piece together. Rehearsal 2 in Table 2 had the lowest frequency of stops/restarts because it was a Generalprobe. Schubert’s two quartets in Table 3 were pieces that the members were attempting for the first time. For this reason, the rate was increased. In this way, the number of stops/restarts depends on members’ experience with the piece that they are rehearsing.

Cases where the quartet tried to stop but did not do so in the end, and those where the quartet failed to restart, were also counted in the analysis. Conversations and non-verbal cues were marked down onto a transcript with the use of ELAN.

2.3. Interaction Analysis

Our analytical emphasis in the present study is on the fact that both stopping and starting of play are sequential phenomena and are achieved interactionally (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973). Let us here clarify what we mean by that.

First of all, one characteristics in classical music rehearsals is that once musicians start playing, they basically do not stop, unless any trouble occurs, until the end of a unit defined by the musical structure, which can be the whole piece, a particular movement of the piece, or a particular segment on which they are focusing. Thus, those stops at the end of a musical unit are not included as cases of stops in the present study.

Stop occurrence is a spontaneous process, and it is impossible to decide beforehand the timing of the pause. Since stops are very common during rehearsals, performers are always faced with the question, “when will a stop happen?”.

Secondly, stops do not always call for an entire halt for all the performers. For example, the performers might often continue playing even if they knew something went wrong. Even restarts do not resume automatically once the performers have resolved the problem.

As stated in the above, instead of drawing a causal relationship between stops/restarts and problem detection/resolution, we have determined that stops/restarts are products of social interaction, which is essentially a sequence of action–reaction among participants.

Therefore, rehearsal participants sense stops/restarts based on verbal and non-verbal cues, including changes in postures, gestures, and glances. Furthermore, they adjust their own behavior knowing that they are also being monitored by other performers. Based on the data collected, we have noticed the following four points to be observed: 1) what kind of a problem causes the stop, 2) how players share the problem with other members, 3) how they solve the problem, and 4) what happens before they restart. In this study, 2) and 4) are examined in detail.
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3. Analysis: Stopping/Restarting Play

The results of our analysis are summarized as follows. First, as for stopping play, we have found that even an apparent mistake or problem does not necessarily result in stopping the play and that players recurrently show their orientation toward continuing. In order to stop, a player needs to make an issue public and to get other players to accept that it is significant enough to stop. In other words, stopping is achieved through a sequential negotiation among players. Second, as for restarting play, it has turned out that players do not simply resume play after they have dealt with the immediate cause of the stop. Stops are used by players as occasions to raise any latent issues that had not come to the surface before the stop. Here again, players can arrive at a restart by going through a sequential negotiation. In the rest of the paper, we will demonstrate these points by showing you several data excerpts.

3.1. Stopping Play
3.1.1 A Mistake/Problem does not necessarily Result in Stopping

As stated above, even an apparent mistake or problem does not necessarily result in stopping the play. In the first example, the violist (Va) utters *a, machigaeta* ‘Oh, I made a mistake’ during their play, but members keep playing.

(1) 01 ((members playing))
    02 → Va: a machigaeta.
        Oh, I made a mistake.
    03 ⇒ ((members playing))

In Excerpt (2), the first violinist (Vn1) says *are?* (‘what?’ or ‘huh?’) and simultaneously looks at the cellist (Vc) and slows down her bow. However, the rest of the quartet does not stop, and the first violinist ends up continuing to play.

(2) 01 ((members playing))
    02 → Vn1: are? ((looks at Vc and slows her bow))
        Huh?
    03 ⇒ ((members playing))

In Excerpt (3), the violist bursts into laughter after her (hearably) problematic play, and the cellist and the second violinist (Vn2) smile, which demonstrates that they share an awareness of the possible trouble. Note that the quartet keeps on playing for quite a while until the first violinist stops at her solo passage and (jokingly) complains to the violist, saying *majimeni yare yo!* ‘Be serious!’

(3) 01 ((members playing))
    02 → Va: hhhh
    03 Vc: ((smile))
    04 Vn2: ((smile))
05 ((members playing until the first violinist’s solo passage))
06 ⇒ Vn1: majimeni yare yo!
   Be serious!

3.1.2 Resources to Make an Issue Public

How, then, do players come to stop? There are various types of resources which can be exploited to make an issue public, and which thereby leads to a stop. First, players utilize verbal and non-verbal resources, whose subtypes include: pointing out another’s problem, admitting one’s own mistake, apologizing, producing hand gestures, and stopping one’s own play. It seems that these resources differ in the extent to which they explicitly request a stop. Let us consider each type of resource.

- Pointing out another’s problem
Let us look at Excerpt (4), which presents an example where one player points out another player’s problem. In this excerpt, in the middle of their play, the first violinist abruptly produces an utterance telling the second violinist to play the passage a bit louder, extending her (Vn1’s) right arm toward her (Vn2). This utterance in line 02 serves as a strong and explicit cue for soliciting a stop.

(4)

01 Vn1: [((stops her play, extending her right arm toward Vn2))
02 ⇒ Vn1: [soko ↑ moo::[sukoshi hi[te. ]]   
   Play it a bit louder.
03   [((Vn2, Va & Vc stop playing. Vn2 then takes a look at Vn1, relaxing her arms.))
04 ⇒ Vn2: [>gome]n ne< ((downs the bow))
   >Sorry.<
05 Vn2: ( ) (0.2) soo. pia[no- pianissimo] ni narana( )
   Right. (I should) not (play in) piano- pianissimo.
06 Vn1: [akarui kanji de. ]   tse:] dua.
   (Play it) brighter.  (It’s) C major.

- Admitting one’s own mistake
Less explicit cues for stopping include utterances admitting one’s own mistake. In Excerpt (5), the first violinist says watashi machigaeta ‘I made a mistake’ and immediately after that, the rest of the quartet stops their play.

(5)

01 ⇒ Vn1: wata(h)shih(h) machi(h)gaeta(h)
   I made a mistake.
02    ((Va, Vc & Vn2 stop playing))
03  Va: [HEHHEHEHEH
04 Vn2: [hhhh
05 Vn1: >gomen gomen gomen<.
The reactions by the three players (line 2) are so quick that it could appear as if all the players stop simultaneously. However, if we closely examine the video-recording of their behavior, it is observable that at least the violist and the second violinist are still playing in the moment right after the first violinist produces watashi ‘I’ in line 1.

**- Apologizing**

The third type of verbal resources used to stop is producing an apology. An apology is a weaker cue for stopping; it has an equivocal nature between a stop-trigger and what Goffman calls a “response cry” (Goffman, 1981). In other words, players may or may not stop after one member produces an apology. In Excerpt (6), the violist utters a gomen! ‘Oh, sorry!’ and the quartet stops playing.

(6) 01 ((members playing))  
02 → Va: a gomen!  
    Oh, sorry!  
03 ⇒ ((members stop playing))

In contrast, Excerpt (7) shows a case where the members do not stop playing after an apology from the violist has been produced.

(7) 01 ((members playing))  
02 → Va: a gomen!  
    Oh, sorry!  
03 ⇒ ((members continue playing))

**- Producing hand gestures**

Let us now turn to non-verbal resources for soliciting a stop. In Excerpt (8), the cellist asks the others to stop by raising his hand and shaking it.

(8) 01 ((Everyone playing))  
02 ((Vc stops his play))  
03 → ((Vc raises his hand))  
04 ⇒ ((members stop playing))  
05 Vc: etto akusento o tsukenaide[ moratte ii?]  
    Well, please don’t put accents on your notes.  
06 Vn2: [aa hai. ]  
    Oh, yes.

Note that, until his hand gesture (line 3), the rest of the quartet continues playing even though it is observ-
able that the cello has stopped his play in line 2.

- **Stopping one’s own play**
Moreover, even without producing any linguistic or gestural signals, the fact that a player stops one’s own play also invites others to stop as well. Excerpt (9) shows us a sequence of three moves: (i) the first violinist stops her play, (ii) the rest of the quartet attends to her stop, (iii) they stop playing. Let us look at what is going on here on a moment-by-moment basis.

(9)
01 ((Everyone playing))

02 ((Vn1 starts relaxing her body posture for playing))
03  ((Vn2 stops her play while holding her instrument; Va glances at Vn1; Vn1 takes off her handkerchief))

04  ((Vc glances at Vn1 with a “change-of-state” face))

05  ((Va & Vc stop their play; Note the upward position of Vc’s bow))
Note that, as we have seen in Excerpt (8) where the three players do not stop after the cello’s apparent stop, one member’s stop does not necessarily invite the others to stop.

In this section, we have demonstrated that stopping in a string quartet rehearsal is achieved through interactional negotiations.

3.2. Restarting Play

Now let us turn to restarting. Our data suggests that players do not simply resume play after dealing with the immediate cause of the stop, and that stops are used by players as occasions to raise any latent issues.

A typical case of conversational exchanges occurring from stop to restart is presented below, divided into six successive segments in Excerpts (10-1) through (10-6). First, after the quartet has stopped their play (lines 1–4), the violist makes fun of the cellist, referring to his mistake (line 5). Instead of a verbal response to the violist’s teasing, the cellist starts playing the phrase he has played right before the stop (line 7). Because of the local context described here, the cellist can be recognized as dealing with the direct cause of the stop. Then the cellist produces an interjection u:::n ‘Hmmm,’ indicating that he has brought his checking activity to an end.

(10-1)
01 Vc:  gomen. ((Turns to Vn1 and Va and raises his left hand.))
02 Va:  hKh hah[    hah    [ hah hah hah hah    ]hah
03 Vn1:           [HAHHAH][HAHHAHHAHHAHHAHhah]
04 Vn2:               [     h h h h h h     ]
05 Va:  su(h)te(h)kina ontee datta. ((to Vc))
06  "Your pitch was lo(h)we(h)ly."
07 Vc:  ((playing the 42nd measure alone))
08  (0.2)
09 Vc:  ((playing the 42nd measure alone))
10  (0.8)
Although the quartet has gone through a sequence dealing with the direct cause of their stop, they do not restart immediately. Instead, they bring up a number of issues concerning their play. Overlapping with the cellist’s interjection, the second violinist starts sharing her concern about the abruptness found in their play (line 12), which does not receive a response.

(10-2)

12 Vn2: [nanka, totsuzen] koofun su(h)ru(h) kan(h)ji(h) ga(h) suru.

Well, I think we get excited too abruptly.

(10-3)

14 Vn1: anosa, (1.1) oto chigau hito ina(h)i(h)

You know, (1.1) Has somebody played the wrong notes?

15 (0.3)
16 Va: e[e?

Huh?

17 Vn2: [ (>sore<) doko?

Where is it?

18 (1.1)
19 Vn1: etto mazu,(0.2) B:, (0.5) kara no su- suu shoosetsu kan toko, chottor,

I mean, first of all, several measures from section B, …

20 (1.5)

Instead of producing an answer to the question by the first violinist, the violist declares how she is playing around section “B” and asks the other members to be cautious about it (lines 21 and 24).

(10-4)

21 Va: koko sa:, chotto B sa:, forutishimo hairu toki ippaku ura, chotto,

Here, at section B, when we go into (the measure marked)
fortissimo, the upbeat of the first beat, …

22 (0.6)
After the violist’s statement gets accepted by the other members, the first violinist proposes that the others slowly play a segment around the beginning of section B (line 34), which could result in restarting their play. However, the cellist raises another issue, namely whether they are supposed to play that portion in forte or not (line 36). The issue of the volume (forte or fortissimo) develops into a rather long exchange, which continues until line 58.

(10-5)

34 Vn1: chotto soko yatte? (0.7) yukkan.  
*Can you play that? (0.7) Slowly.*

35 (1.0)

36 Vc: (ima) forute?  
*Are (we) playing it forte now?*

37 (0.6)

38 Vn1: forutishimo.  
*Fortissimo.*

39 (0.5)

40 Vc: B ga?  
*Section B?*

41 (0.7)

42 Va: B no ichi ura kara.  
*From the first upbeat of (the first measure of) B.*

43 (2.6)

44 Vc: sono ato wa?  
*And after that?*
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45 Va: (sono sa:) yon shōsetsu me de forute no ato diminuendo.

At the fourth measure, (we) start diminuendo from forte.

47 Vn2: aa, soo nan da.

Oh, I see.

48 Va: >sorede< go shōsetsu me de piano [(ni ochiru).]

And then, at the fifth measure, (we) drop to piano.

49 Vc: [pianono( ).]

50 Vc: soko made wa:- aa demo forute ni na- (0.3) forute ni naru tteiunowa ( )

Until there, … Oh, but turning to forte is …

51 Vc: foruteshimo? forute?

(Was it) fortissimo? Forte?

52 Vn2: demo biora dake [(ka).]

(It) only (applies to) Viola, though.

53 Vc: [hai] hai.

Yes, yes.

Upon completing the discussion about the volume around section B, the first violinist again proposes starting to play from the beginning of section B (line 60), which is accepted by the other members, both verbally (line 61) and non-verbally (line 62). This sequence of proposal and acceptance leads, for the first time since the quartet stopped at line 1, the first violinist to move further toward restarting: she produces her verbal cue san, shi; ‘Three, four’ to (re)start their play (line 63), which indeed results in their restarting finally (line 64).

60 Vn1: B ne?

From B, okay?

61 Vn2: hai.

Yes.

62 ((members get their body postures and instruments ready for playing))

63 Vn1: san, shi;

Three, four.

64 ((members start playing))

In this section, we have examined a single but long case, by which we have illustrated that players do not
simply resume play after dealing with the direct cause of a stop, and that stops are used by players as occasions to raise latent issues.

4. Conclusion

In this study, we have investigated the stop/restart management in a string quartet rehearsal using actual video-recordings of a professional string quartet. Our analysis shows that, compared to Stop–Restart sequences in other musical activities with a conductor or instructor, those in a string quartet rehearsal are more contingent on players’ subtle behaviors. Not only does the present study contribute to music theory and ethnomusicology research (Davidson and Good, 2002; Mak, 2016), but also to multi-modal social interaction research (Streeck et al., 2011). There is a need to further investigate factors such as the effect of piece choices and rehearsal stages, in addition to the need for the consolidation and expansion of our current study. It will also be important to develop an efficient transcription method that is most appropriate for recording social interactions in music rehearsals. Together with interviews and other research methods, we hope to provide a multi-perspective investigation of music rehearsals in the near future.

One of the possible future directions based on the present work is to pursue the issue of “progressivity” in social interaction. While issues related to progressivity in interaction have been studied mainly through examining ordinary conversations, as Schegloff (2007:15) points out, progressivity can be realized and oriented to by participants differently depending on the context or institutional setting in which the interaction is embedded, and further empirical studies on progressivity management in various settings are awaited. Rehearsals for classical music performances are one of the various settings that show unique constraints on progressivity. As we have seen above, players occasionally need to stop playing and deal with problems they detect during rehearsals. After addressing the problems, they also need to restart playing, either to check how they sound during the segment in question or to move on to the next segment of the piece. Thus, further analyses of chamber music rehearsals would contribute to shed light on the nature of human interaction implemented in a particular setting.

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Notes

1 The subject who stop(s) and restart(s) the performance is also one of the interesting points to be
analyzed, though the former is not always identified. This will be examined in future studies.

Participants in a conversation or any type of social interaction are constantly faced with progressivity management issues. That is, they construct their interaction through incrementing elements of conduct one after another in a certain order, and there exists a normative relationship between elements, whether they are syllables, words, or turns-at-talk, such that one element is expected, and recognized when it actually occurs, as being “next” to another element (Schegloff, 2007:14–15). Thus, participants recognize that the progressivity of the interaction is halted or delayed if any lapse or other element occurs between one element and the next element that is due. Participants behave so as to maintain the progressivity of the interaction (Heritage, 2007; Stivers & Robinson, 2006), and use the normative relationship as a reference frame for understanding particular elements (Schegloff, 2007:15).

Literature


Streeck, J., Goodwin, C. and LeBaron, C. D. (eds.): *Embodied Interaction: Language and Body in the Material


