

Variations on the Grosse Fuge

for Piano Quintet



Bill Robinson

Variations on the Grosse Fuge for Piano Quintet

January 6—March 22, 1987 (synth version), Las Cruces, New Mexico
revised 2003-2005, revised and arranged 2007
duration: about 18 minutes

in memoriam Ben Marcato

While a student at Eastman School of Music in 1973-74, I listened every other night to Beethoven's opus 133 string quartet *Grosse Fuge* with a couple of friends for at least two months. (The alternate nights were usually spent with *Hammerklavier*.) As a result this string quartet was branded on my brain, which may not have been the best thing for my early composition style—which tended to be too noisy and too crowded with notes, not to mention horribly hard to play.

I went to NTSU (now UNT) in Denton Texas in the fall of 1974, and started working on a string quintet/string orchestra piece that would be a variation on the *Grosse Fuge*—re-writing the piece in my own idiom and with significant differences. After about two years of work it was premiered at my senior composition recital in 1977. The performance was rather rough and the recital failed; I left school without a degree. (I returned to NTSU in the early '80s and got a BM in 1984.)

I took a break from composing in the fall of 1985 to start work on an experiment in transcendental physics. After moving to Las Cruces New Mexico in the fall of 1986, my project was at a standstill, and I livened up my life in a desert trailer slum by composing a completely new variation on the *Grosse Fuge*, disposing of the string quintet and using instead five synthesizers. I had written new and arranged older works for five synths. With this experience, but not having a synth or any electronic equipment myself, I simply imagined what I would like the piece to be like and designed it for live performance. The composition took from January 6 to March 22, 1987. I could neither find performers nor afford equipment to sequence or record the synth scores I'd written.

In 2003 I started using Finale which allowed synthesis, and so put a recording on my first CD in September 2003. I revised the score in January 2005 but still did not have a performable piece. I then realized in early 2007 that a string quartet could take on the most difficult passages, leaving more playable material for an orchestra with a reasonable skill level. During the orchestration I recomposed some sections and made several improvements.

From that score in turn comes this version for piano quintet, where the string quartet takes on considerably more material. As a result it is not simply a version with piano taking orchestral parts, but rather is a unique and separate rendition. Not surprisingly, considerable skill for all performers is required for the chamber version. The piano quintet was premiered at the NC Museum of Art in January 2009 by the Ciompi Quartet with Randall Love as the pianist.

With no apology, this music is intense, hypercomplex, and maybe just a little crazy—as such not so different from the original; but if a focused listener someday can achieve some familiarity with the music, I do hope that the sweat required for its production will have been worthwhile.

Whoever tells a lie cannot be pure in heart—and only the pure in heart can make a good soup. ---L. v. B.

Second Edition December 2014

Publisher Parrish Press

Raleigh NC

billrobinsonmusic@yahoo.com

billrobinsonmusic.com

Variations on the Grosse Fuge

[18']

Bill Robinson

Allegro *ben marcato*

I
Violins
II
Viola
Violoncello

ff
ben marcato
ff
ben marcato
ff
ben marcato
ff

Allegro $\text{♩} = 133$ (as in 'opus')
ben marcato

Piano

11

11

18

18

2

27

27

35

35

44

44

54

mp

f

f

54

ff

ff

64

mp

f

f

f

64

ff

ff

A

73

ff

ff²

ff

ff

A

73

ff

ff

4

83

83

92

92

100

100

108

This page contains four staves. The top staff has a treble clef, the second has a soprano clef, the third has a bass clef, and the bottom has an alto clef. The music consists of six measures. Measure 108 starts with eighth-note patterns in the upper voices. Measures 109 and 110 show more complex rhythmic patterns with sixteenth notes and eighth-note pairs. Measure 111 begins with a sustained note followed by eighth-note pairs. Measure 112 concludes the section.

108

This page continues the musical score from the previous page. It features two staves: a treble staff and a bass staff. The bass staff begins with a sustained note followed by eighth-note pairs. The treble staff follows with sustained notes and eighth-note pairs. The music consists of six measures, continuing the rhythmic patterns established in the previous section.

115

This page contains four staves. The top staff has a treble clef, the second has a soprano clef, the third has a bass clef, and the bottom has an alto clef. The music consists of six measures. Measure 115 starts with eighth-note patterns in the upper voices. Measures 116 and 117 show more complex rhythmic patterns with sixteenth notes and eighth-note pairs. Measure 118 begins with a sustained note followed by eighth-note pairs. Measure 119 concludes the section.

115

This page continues the musical score from the previous page. It features two staves: a treble staff and a bass staff. The bass staff begins with a sustained note followed by eighth-note pairs. The treble staff follows with sustained notes and eighth-note pairs. The music consists of six measures, continuing the rhythmic patterns established in the previous section.

122

B Largo

This page contains four staves. The top staff has a treble clef, the second has a soprano clef, the third has a bass clef, and the bottom has an alto clef. The music consists of six measures. Measure 122 starts with eighth-note patterns in the upper voices. Measures 123 and 124 show more complex rhythmic patterns with sixteenth notes and eighth-note pairs. Measure 125 begins with a sustained note followed by eighth-note pairs. Measure 126 concludes the section.

122

B Largo

$\text{♩} = 40$

This page continues the musical score from the previous page. It features two staves: a treble staff and a bass staff. The bass staff begins with a sustained note followed by eighth-note pairs. The treble staff follows with sustained notes and eighth-note pairs. The music consists of six measures, continuing the rhythmic patterns established in the previous section. The tempo is marked as $\text{♩} = 40$.

130

130

p

p

p

137

p

f

p

p

137

p

144

mp

f

mp

mp

144

p

Musical score for piano, page 151, measures 1-8. The score consists of four staves (two treble, two bass) with various dynamics and performance instructions:

- Measure 1: Treble staff has sixteenth-note patterns. Bass staff has eighth-note patterns.
- Measure 2: Treble staff has sixteenth-note patterns. Bass staff has eighth-note patterns.
- Measure 3: Dynamics: *mp*. Bass staff has eighth-note patterns.
- Measure 4: Dynamics: *cresc. p. a. p.* Bass staff has eighth-note patterns.
- Measure 5: Bass staff has eighth-note patterns.
- Measure 6: Bass staff has eighth-note patterns.
- Measure 7: Dynamics: *mp*. Bass staff has eighth-note patterns.
- Measure 8: Dynamics: *cresc. p. a. p.* Bass staff has eighth-note patterns.

Performance instructions: Measures 1-2 have a crescendo bracket above the treble staff. Measures 3-4 have a decrescendo bracket below the bass staff. Measure 8 ends with a decrescendo bracket below the bass staff.

Musical score for piano, page 151, measures 151-155. The score consists of two staves. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. Measure 151 starts with a single note in the treble staff. Measures 152-153 show eighth-note chords in both staves. Measure 154 begins with a sixteenth-note chord in the treble staff, followed by eighth-note chords. Measure 155 continues with eighth-note chords. The dynamic instruction *cresc. p. a. p.* is placed between measures 154 and 155. The bass staff has three labels: *Reo.*, *Reo.*, and *Reo.* below the staff.

Allegro bigga fuga

C ben marcato

ff

ben marcato

ff

ben marcato

ff $\text{♩} = 120$

C Allegro bigga fuga

170

176

176

181

181

185

185

189

189

193

193

10

197

197

D
D
201

D
201

D
201

205

205

210

p
pp
p

210

p

217

p
p

217

8vb

223

E

mp cresc.
p cresc.
p cresc.

(mf)
(mf)
(mf)

223

E

mf
f

Musical score for orchestra and piano, page 10, measures 230-231. The score consists of six staves. The top three staves are for the orchestra, featuring woodwind instruments like oboes and bassoons. The bottom three staves are for the piano. Measure 230 begins with a rest followed by eighth-note patterns. Measure 231 continues with eighth-note patterns, with dynamic markings *ff* and *ben marcato*. Measure 232 begins with a bassoon solo, followed by a piano section with dynamic *ff* and *ben marcato*. Measure 233 concludes with a piano section, ending with a dynamic *ff* and *ben marcato*.

A musical score page showing four staves of music. The top two staves are for the orchestra, featuring violins, violas, cellos, and double basses. The bottom two staves are for the piano. The page is numbered 234 at the top left. The music consists of two measures of music, separated by a vertical bar line. Measure 234 starts with a half note in the first violin, followed by eighth-note pairs in the second violin and viola. The cellos play eighth notes, and the double basses provide harmonic support. Measure 235 begins with a half note in the first violin, followed by eighth-note pairs in the second violin and viola. The cellos play eighth notes, and the double basses continue their harmonic function.

Musical score for piano, page 10, measures 234-235. The score consists of two staves. The top staff uses a treble clef and has a key signature of one flat. The bottom staff uses a bass clef and has a key signature of one flat. Measure 234 begins with a forte dynamic. Measure 235 continues the musical phrase.

238

239 *8va*

242 F

ff

242 F

ff

246

246

3

250

250

254

G Largo

254

G Largo ♩ = 40

261

261

271

271

275

275

278

278

280

H Allegro bigga fuga

280

H Allegro bigga fuga $\bullet = 120$

285

285

8va

290

290

Reo. *Reo.* *Reo.*

293

293

I

Reo. *

297

297

301

301

305

ben marcato

305

310 (8^{va})

310

315

Moderato I $\text{♩} = 88$

ff — pp
ff — pp
ff — pp
ff — pp

p
p
p
p

trem.

315

Moderato I

ff — pp
ff — pp

p
p

ff — pp
ff — pp

p
p

Fermata

321

321

326

326

330

330

334

accel.

334

accel.

341

K Piu Mosso

= 80

341

K Piu Mosso

348

348

8va

355

355

361

361

sva-----,

370

A musical score for piano, featuring two staves. The top staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. It contains five systems of music, each starting with a quarter note. The bottom staff has a bass clef and a key signature of one flat. It also contains five systems of music, each starting with a quarter note. Measures 381 through 385 are shown.

392

ff

(8va)

8va

393

Musical score for orchestra and piano, page 104, measures 1-10. The score consists of five staves: Violin 1, Violin 2, Cello, Double Bass, and Piano. The Violins play eighth-note patterns, the Cellos play eighth-note patterns, and the Double Basses play eighth-note patterns. The Piano part features sustained notes with dynamic markings of *p*, *pp*, and *o.* Measure 10 includes a rehearsal mark "104".

Musical score for piano, page 104, measures 8^{va} and 8^{va}. The score consists of two staves. The upper staff (treble clef) starts with dynamic ***ff***, followed by a measure of ***pp*** with the instruction *legato*. The lower staff (bass clef) has a dynamic ***v*** and a tempo marking ***Reo.***.

414

414

423 M **Moderato II**

pp

pp

pp

pp

423 M **Moderato II** $\text{♩} = 96$

pp

430

430

$\frac{8}{8}$

$\frac{8}{8}$

$\frac{8}{8}$

24

Fugato Bordello

N

436

Fugato Bordello $\text{d} = 154$

441

ff

445

ff

449

449

453

453

457

457

461

461

465

465

469

469

473

P

473

P

477

477

481

481

484

484

rit.

488

rit.

488

492

Q Really Really Largo

pp

$\text{J} = 45$

492

Q Really Really Largo

pp

498

498 *8va*

501 Allegro

501 Allegro $\text{♩} = 133$

508

508

30

517

517

527

527

536

536

545

(mp) cresc. p. a. p.

(mf)

(mf)

(f)

mp

S

545

(mp)

(mf)

(f)

551

ff

ff

ff

ff

551

ff

558

558

5

5

5

Big Slow Ending

8va - - - - -

564 ff pp ff pp ff pp

Big Slow Ending $\bullet = 60$

564 ff ff ff ff

Rev.

This block contains two staves of musical notation. The top staff has four measures, each starting with a woodwind entry (ff) followed by a sustained note (pp). The bottom staff has three measures, each starting with a woodwind entry (ff) followed by a sustained note (ff). Measure 570 begins with a woodwind entry (ff) followed by a sustained note (ff). The tempo is indicated as $\bullet = 60$. The section concludes with a repeat sign and the instruction "Rev."

8va - - - - -

570 ff ff ff ff

570 fff *8va* - - - - - *8va* - - - - - *8va* - - - - -

Rev. Rev. Rev. *

This block contains two staves of musical notation. The top staff has four measures, each starting with a woodwind entry (ff) followed by a sustained note (ff). The bottom staff has four measures, each starting with a woodwind entry (fff) followed by a sustained note (ff). The section concludes with a repeat sign and the instruction "Rev." followed by "Rev." and an asterisk (*).