

Variations on the Grosse Fuge for String Quartet and Orchestra



Bill Robinson

Variations on the Grosse Fuge for String Quartet and Orchestra

January 6—March 22, 1987 (synth version), Las Cruces, New Mexico
revised 2003-2005, revised and orchestrated 2007, edited 2014 and 2024
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 the 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.

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. A decent college orchestra should be able to play this work; the quartet will have to be of professional quality. During the orchestration I recomposed some sections and made several improvements. In late 2014, I revised the layout of the orchestral score and extracted a fresh set of parts.

There is also a 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 by the Ciompi Quartet with Randall Love, piano, at the NC Museum of Art in January 2009.

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.

The instrumentation is winds in pairs (flute 2 doubles piccolo), four horns, two trumpets, two trombones, bass trombone, tuba, timpani, string quartet, and strings.

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

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billrobinsonmusic.com

p

VGf

[illegible]

This page of the musical score contains the following instruments and parts:

- Flutes (Fl.):** 1 and 2 (double Piccolo).
- Oboes (Ob.):** 1 and 2.
- Bass Clarinets (B♭ Cl.):** 1 and 2.
- Bassoons (Bsn.):** 1.
- Horns (Hn.):** 1, 2, 3, and 4.
- Trumpets (B♭ Tpt.):** 1 and 2.
- Trombones (Tbn.):** 1 and 2.
- Euphonium (BTbn.):** 1.
- Tuba:** 1.
- Violins (Vln.):** I and II.
- Viola (Vla.):** 1.
- Cello (Vc.):** 1.
- Double Bass (DB):** 1.

The score includes dynamic markings such as *mp* (mezzo-piano), *ff* (fortissimo), and crescendo/decrescendo hairpins. It also features articulation marks like accents and slurs, and a rehearsal mark 'A' in a box. The page number '64' is visible in the top left corner.

76

Fl. 1

Ob. 1

Ob. 2

B♭ Cl. 1

B♭ Cl. 2

Hn. 1

Hn. 2

Hn. 3

Hn. 4

B♭ Tpt. 1

B♭ Tpt. 2

Tbn. 1

Tbn. 2

BTbn.

Tuba

Timp.

ff

76

Quart. Vln. 1

Quart. Vln. II

ff

ff

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc. unis.

76

DB

f

f

f

89

Bsn. 1 2

Hn. 3

B♭ Tpt. 1

Vln. I

Quart. II

Vla.

Vc.

Vln. I

II

Vla.

Vc.

DB

ff

f

f

ff

f

ff

ff

f

div.

[illegible]

This page of the musical score covers measures 110 through 114. The instrumentation includes Oboe 1, Bassoon 1 and 2, Horns 1 and 2, Trombones 1 and 2, Tuba, Timpani, Violins 1 and 2, Viola, Violoncello, and Double Bass. The score is written in 4/4 time. Key features include:

- Measure 110:** Oboe 1 and Bassoon 1 enter with a half note G4 (B-flat). Bassoon 2 and Horn 1 have a half note G4 (B-flat). Horn 2 and Trombone 1 have a half note G4 (B-flat). Trombone 2 and Tuba have a half note G4 (B-flat). Timpani has a half note G4 (B-flat). Violins 1 and 2 have a half note G4 (B-flat). Viola has a half note G4 (B-flat). Violoncello and Double Bass have a half note G4 (B-flat).
- Measure 111:** Oboe 1 and Bassoon 1 have a half note G4 (B-flat). Bassoon 2 and Horn 1 have a half note G4 (B-flat). Horn 2 and Trombone 1 have a half note G4 (B-flat). Trombone 2 and Tuba have a half note G4 (B-flat). Timpani has a half note G4 (B-flat). Violins 1 and 2 have a half note G4 (B-flat). Viola has a half note G4 (B-flat). Violoncello and Double Bass have a half note G4 (B-flat).
- Measure 112:** Oboe 1 and Bassoon 1 have a half note G4 (B-flat). Bassoon 2 and Horn 1 have a half note G4 (B-flat). Horn 2 and Trombone 1 have a half note G4 (B-flat). Trombone 2 and Tuba have a half note G4 (B-flat). Timpani has a half note G4 (B-flat). Violins 1 and 2 have a half note G4 (B-flat). Viola has a half note G4 (B-flat). Violoncello and Double Bass have a half note G4 (B-flat).
- Measure 113:** Oboe 1 and Bassoon 1 have a half note G4 (B-flat). Bassoon 2 and Horn 1 have a half note G4 (B-flat). Horn 2 and Trombone 1 have a half note G4 (B-flat). Trombone 2 and Tuba have a half note G4 (B-flat). Timpani has a half note G4 (B-flat). Violins 1 and 2 have a half note G4 (B-flat). Viola has a half note G4 (B-flat). Violoncello and Double Bass have a half note G4 (B-flat).
- Measure 114:** Oboe 1 and Bassoon 1 have a half note G4 (B-flat). Bassoon 2 and Horn 1 have a half note G4 (B-flat). Horn 2 and Trombone 1 have a half note G4 (B-flat). Trombone 2 and Tuba have a half note G4 (B-flat). Timpani has a half note G4 (B-flat). Violins 1 and 2 have a half note G4 (B-flat). Viola has a half note G4 (B-flat). Violoncello and Double Bass have a half note G4 (B-flat).

DB

139

B♭ Cl. 1

139

Hn. 1 3

mp

p

139

Vln. 1 II

Quart.

Vla.

Vc.

p

139

Vln. I II

unis. *p*

p

Vc.

139

DB

This page of the musical score covers measures 155 through 160. The instrumentation includes Flute (Fl.), Piccolo (Picc.), Oboe (Ob.), Bassoon (Bsn.), Horn (Hn.), Trumpet (Tpt.), Trombone (Tbn.), Baritone Trombone (BTbn.), Tuba, Timpani (Timp.), Violin (Vln.), Viola (Vla.), Violoncello (Vc.), and Double Bass (DB). The score is written for a full orchestra, with measures 155 and 160 marked at the beginning of their respective staves. The music features a variety of dynamics, including *mf* (mezzo-forte), *f* (forte), and *ff* (fortissimo), as well as articulation marks like accents and slurs. The woodwinds and strings play a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes, while the brass instruments provide a harmonic foundation. The overall texture is dense and dynamic, typical of a late 19th or early 20th-century orchestral work.

162

Fl. 1

Fl. 2 (dbl. Picc.)

Ob. 1

Ob. 2

B♭ Cl. 1

B♭ Cl. 2

Bsn. 1

Bsn. 2

Hn. 1

Hn. 2

Hn. 3

Hn. 4

B♭ Tpt. 1

B♭ Tpt. 2

Tbn. 1

Tbn. 2

B Tbn.

Tuba

Timp.

Vln. 1

Quart.

Vc.

162

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

DB

162

ff

ff

mp

ben marcato

ff

 ♩ = 120
Allegro bigga fuga

173

Fl. (dbl. Picc.)

Vln. I

Vln. II

Quart.

Vla.

Vc.

ben marcato

ff

ff

ben marcato

ff

ben marcato

f

ff

ben marcato

ff

[illegible]

[illegible]

203

Vln.

Quart.

Vla.

Vc.

203

Vln. I

Vla.

Vc.

203

DB

21

[illegible]

[illegible]

This image shows a page of a musical score, likely for a symphony, featuring staves for various instruments. The instruments listed on the left include:

- Fl. (Flute)
- (dbl. Picc.) (Double Piccolo)
- Ob. 1 (Oboe 1)
- B♭ Cl. (B-flat Clarinet)
- Bsn. (Bassoon)
- Hn. (Horn)
- B♭ Tpt. (B-flat Trumpet)
- Tbn. (Trombone)
- BTbn. (Baritone Trombone)
- Tuba
- Timp. (Timpani)
- Vln. (Violin)
- Quart. (Quartet)
- Vla. (Viola)
- Vc. (Violoncello)
- DB (Double Bass)

The score includes musical notation such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like *ff* (fortissimo). The page number 234 is visible at the top left.

26

VGF

F

1

240

Fl.

(dbl.
Picc.)

1

2

Ob.

1

2

B♭ Cl.

1

2

Bsn.

1

2

Hn.

1

2

3

4

B♭ Tpt.

1

2

Tbn.

1

2

BTbn.

Tuba

Timp.

8^{vb}

ff

f

Vln.

I

240

ff

Quart.

II

ff

Vla.

ff

Vc.

ff

Vln.

I

240

unis.

F

ff

II

unis.

f

Vla.

unis.

Vc.

f

DB

240

[illegible]

249

1 Fl.

2 (dbl. Picc.)

Ob. 1

1 B♭ Cl.

2

1 Bsn.

2

249

1 Hn.

2

4

1 B♭ Tpt.

2

BTbn.

Tuba

249

1 Vln.

Quart.

Vc.

249

I Vln.

II

Vla.

Vc.

249

DB

936

Hn. 4

Quart.

Vln. I

I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

DB

256

256

256

pp

p

pp

pp

pp

pp

pp

$\text{♩} = 120$
[H] Allegro bigga fuga

1 279

Fl. 1

2 (dbl. Picc.) (Fl.2) *p*

Bsn. 1

2

Hn. 1

2

3

Vln. 1

II

Quart. *mp*

Vla. *mp*

Vc. *mp*

[H] $\text{♩} = 120$
Allegro bigga fuga

I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

DB 279

283

Ob. 1 *ff*

Ob. 2 *ff*

Bsn. 1 *ff*

Bsn. 2 *ff*

Hn. 1 *ff*

Hn. 2

Hn. 3 *ff*

Hn. 4

B $\flat$ Tpt. 1 *ff*

B $\flat$ Tpt. 2 *ff*

Tbn. 1 *ff*

Tbn. 2 *ff*

BTbn. *ff*

Tuba *ff*

Timp. *ff*

Vln. 1

Quart. II

Vla. *f*

Vln. I *mf* *ff*

Vln. II *mf* *ff*

Vla. *ff*

Vc. *ff*

DB 283 *ff*

1

289

FL.

2

(dbl. Picc.)

1

2

Ob.

1

2

B♭ Cl.

1

2

Bsn.

1

2

Hn.

1

2

3

4

B♭ Tpt.

1

2

Tbn.

1

2

BTbn.

Tuba

Timp.

1

2

Vln.

Quart.

1

2

Vla.

Vc.

Vln.

I

II

Vla.

Vc.

DB

[illegible]

1

Moderato I

1

Fl.

2

(dbl. Picc.)

Ob. 1

1

B $\flat$ Cl.

2

1

Bsn.

2

2

Hn. 3

3

4

B $\flat$ Tpt. 1

1

Tbn.

BTbn.

Tuba

Timp.

1

Vln.

Quart. II

Vla.

316

Moderato I

1

Vln.

2

Vla.

Vc.

DB

[illegible]

327

Fl.

(Picc.)

Ob.

B♭ Cl.

Bsn.

Hn.

Timp.

Vln.

Quart.

Vla.

Vc.

DB

327

327

327

mp

pizz.

mp

mp

arco

trem.

arco trem.

unis.

mp

1

Fl.

2

(dbl.
Picc.)

1

Ob.

2

1

B♭ Cl.

2

1

Bsn.

2

348

1

Hn.

2

3

4

1

B♭ Tpt.

2

1

Tbn.

2

BTbn.

Tuba

Timp.

unis.

348

I

Vln.

II

Vla.

Vc.

348

DB

[illegible]

[illegible]

This musical score page contains measures 382 through 395. The instrumentation includes:

- Ob. (Oboe):** Two staves. The first staff has a melodic line with many accidentals. The second staff has a more rhythmic accompaniment.
- Bsn. 1 (Bassoon):** One staff with a melodic line.
- Hn. (Horn):** Three staves. The first two staves have a sustained melodic line. The third staff has a rhythmic accompaniment.
- B♭ Tpt. (Bass Trombone):** Two staves. Both staves have a rhythmic accompaniment.
- Tbn. (Tenor Trombone):** Two staves. Both staves have a rhythmic accompaniment.
- BTbn. (Baritone Trombone):** One staff with a rhythmic accompaniment.
- Tuba:** One staff with a rhythmic accompaniment.
- Timp. (Timpani):** One staff with a rhythmic accompaniment.
- Vln. (Violin):** Two staves. The first staff has a melodic line. The second staff has a rhythmic accompaniment.
- Vla. (Viola):** One staff with a rhythmic accompaniment.
- Vc. (Violoncello):** One staff with a rhythmic accompaniment.
- DB (Double Bass):** One staff with a rhythmic accompaniment.

The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, accidentals, and dynamic markings like *ff* (fortissimo) and *unis.* (unison). The key signature is one flat (B-flat major or E-flat minor).

VGF

[illegible]

1

440

Fl.

(Fl.2)

ff

(Picc.)

f

1

ff

Ob.

f

1

ff

B♭ Cl.

1

ff

Bsn.

1

440

Hn.

1

ff

B♭ Tpt.

1

ff

Tbn.

1

ff

BTbn.

1

ff

Tuba

1

ff

Timp.

1

440

Vln.

ff

1

ff

Quart.

1

ff

Vla.

1

ff

Vc.

1

440

Vln.

ff

1

ff

Vla.

1

ff

Vc.

1

440

DB

ff

(Picc.)

f

unis.

f

(Picc.)

446

Fl. 2 (dbl. Picc.)

Ob. 1

Vln. I

Quart. II

Vla.

Vc.

ff

446

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

DB

446

f

ff

unis.

ff

ff

ff

[illegible]

1

Fl.

(Fl.2)

(dbl.
Picc.)

1

Ob.

2

1

B♭ Cl.

2

Bsn. 1

1

2

3

4

Hn.

1

2

B♭ Tpt.

B♭Tbn.

Tuba

Timp.

1

II

Quart.

Vla.

Vc.

I

II

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

457

DB

1

462

Fl.

(Fl.2)

(dbl. Picc.)

1

2

Ob.

1

2

B♭ Cl.

1

2

1

462

Hn.

3

4

B♭ Tpt.

1

2

1

462

Vln.

II

Quart.

Vla.

Vc.

1

462

Vln.

II

Vla.

Vc.

DB

f

ff

div.

467

Fl. 1

2 (dbl. Picc.)

Ob. 1

2

ff

ff

ff

Hn. 1

3

B $\flat$ Tpt. 1

2

ff

ff

Vln. I

II

Vla.

Vc.

DB

467

Detailed description: This page contains the musical score for measures 467 through 472. The score is arranged in three systems. The first system includes parts for Flute 1, Flute 2 (doubling Piccolo), Oboe 1, and Oboe 2. The second system includes parts for Horn 1, Horn 3, and B-flat Trumpet 1 and 2. The third system includes parts for Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Violoncello, and Double Bass. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The score features various musical notations including notes, rests, dynamics (ff), and articulation marks (accents). The woodwinds and brass play melodic lines, while the strings provide a harmonic foundation.

This page of the musical score covers measures 473 to 476. The instrumentation includes:

- Flutes (Fl.):** Two parts, 1 and 2 (double Piccolo). Measures 473-474 have rests, while measures 475-476 play sustained notes.
- Oboes (Ob.):** Two parts, 1 and 2. Both play melodic lines starting in measure 473.
- Bassoon (Bsn.):** Two parts, 1 and 2. Both play sustained notes in measures 473-474 and melodic lines in measures 475-476.
- Clarinets (Cl.):** Two parts, 1 and 2 (B-flat). Both play sustained notes in measures 473-474 and melodic lines in measures 475-476.
- Horns (Hn.):** Four parts (1-4). Parts 1 and 3 play sustained notes, while parts 2 and 4 play melodic lines.
- Trumpets (Tpt.):** Two parts, 1 and 2 (B-flat). Both play sustained notes throughout.
- String Quartet (Quart. Vc.):** One part (Violoncello). Plays a melodic line in measures 473-474 and rests in measures 475-476.
- Solo Instruments:** Violin I and II, Viola, Violoncello, and Double Bass. All play melodic lines throughout.

Key musical markings include *ff* (fortissimo) for the woodwinds and strings in measures 473-474, and *p* (piano) for the woodwinds in measures 475-476. A *unis.* (unison) marking is present for the strings in measure 474.

478

Ob. 1

1

B♭ Cl.

2

1

Bsn.

2

478

1

Hn.

2

3

4

1

B♭ Tpt.

2

BTbn.

ff

478

I

Vln.

II

Vla.

Vc.

478

DB

pizz.

This musical score page contains measures 478 through 481. The instrumentation includes Oboe 1, B♭ Clarinet (1 and 2), Bassoon (1 and 2), Horns (1, 2, 3, 4), B♭ Trumpet (1 and 2), Baritone Trombone, Violins (I and II), Viola, Violoncello, and Double Bass. Measure 478 features a complex woodwind and bassoon entry with various articulations and slurs. The brass section enters in measure 479 with a powerful *ff* dynamic. The string section provides a harmonic foundation with sustained notes and a pizzicato effect in the double bass in measure 481. The score is written in a key with one sharp (F#) and a common time signature.

482

Ob.

1

2

B♭ Cl.

1

2

Bsn.

1

2

Hn.

2

4

Vln.

1

II

Quart.

Vla.

Vc.

Vla.

DB

482

ff

p

ff

p

p

p

ff

p



487 *non stacc.*

Vln.

1

II

Quart.

Vla.

Vc.

rit.

Vln. I

487

p

Vla.

487

p

VGF

499

Fl. (Picc.)

Ob.

B♭ Cl.

Bsn.

1

2

1

2

1

2

1

2

ff

ff

ff

ff

ff

ff

ff

ff

499

Hn.

B♭ Tpt.

Tbn.

BTbn.

Tuba

Timp.

1

2

3

4

1

2

1

2

1

2

ff

ff

ff

ff

ff

ff

ff

ff

ff

ff

499

Vln.

Quart.

Vla.

Vc.

mp

mp

mp

mp

499

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

DB

div.

unis.

ff

ff

ff

ff

1 556

Fl. (Fl.2) *ff*

Ob. *ff*

Bsn. *ff*

Hn. 5

B $\flat$ Tpt. 5

Vln. I 556

Quart. Vln. II

Vla. 556

Vc. 556

Vln. I 556

Vln. II

Vla. 556

Vc. 556

DB 556

This musical score page contains measures 556 through 561. The instrumentation includes Flute (Fl.2), Oboe (Ob.), Bassoon (Bsn.), Horn (Hn.), B-flat Trumpet (B $\flat$ Tpt.), Violin I (Vln. I), Violin II (Vln. II), Viola (Vla.), Violoncello (Vc.), and Double Bass (DB). The woodwinds and brass sections play a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes, often with triplets, marked with a forte (ff) dynamic. The strings play a more melodic line, with the Violins I and II parts featuring many sharps, indicating a key signature of one sharp (F#). The Double Bass part also features a rhythmic pattern with triplets. The score is written in a standard musical notation with various dynamics and articulations.

