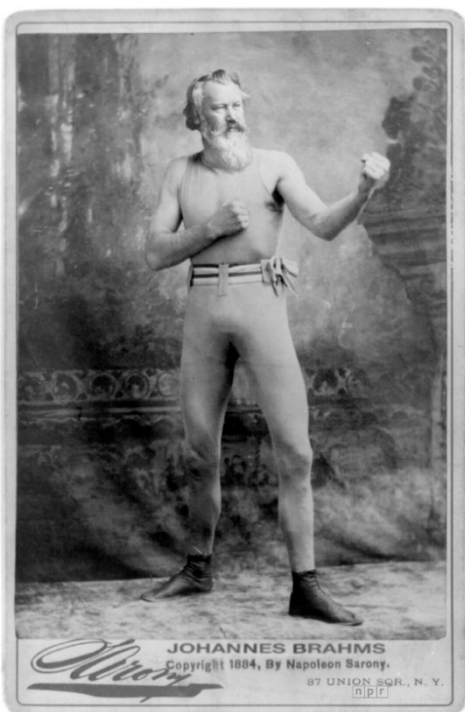


Cubic Deviations

from Brahms' *Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Handel* for Orchestra

Duration: 28 minutes Piano Quintet version October 24, 2022—April 1, 2023
Orchestrated April 2—July 26, 2023



After four years of vacation from composition, in October 2022 I started up again, finding that fallow fields regain fertility. I chose the ensemble that is easiest for me to write for, piano quintet, and the easiest format, a variation on an existing piece. I've done such a variation twice before, for Beethoven's *Grosse Fuge* and for Vivaldi/Bach *Concerto for Four Violins/Harpsichords* (first movement only). This time I picked Brahms' *Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Handel* for piano. That means that this work is *variations on variations on variations*, hence the title *Cubic Deviations*. The piano quintet is the basis of this version for full orchestra.

The instrumentation is: piccolo, two flutes, oboes, clarinets, and bassoons; four horns, two trumpets, two trombones, bass trombone, tuba, timpani, piano, and strings.

Handel was in his twenties when he wrote his original theme for harpsichord, and Brahms was 28. I am 68, and find it handy to borrow the youthful energy in my dotage.

There is a delicate balance in a process like this, where the composition can't be too close to the original, because then it's just a transcription and arrangement, but can't be too far away, because then what's the point? This piece follows the format of the Brahms original, although I have skipped three of the 25 variations. The initial statement of the theme is very close to Handel's original, with a few curve balls, and may deceive the audience into thinking this is a retrograde exercise in nostalgia. The first deviation should dispel that notion. This is a work of the 21st Century, written in my own style.

Accidentals hold through the measure and not beyond, and not to other octaves.

Bill Robinson

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