

Variations on a Simple Theme

Composer: Avner Dorman

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Orchestration: fl, va, hp

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Program Note

Composer note

When the Myriad trio approached me to write them a piece I was very excited. I love the combination of flute, viola, and harp, and the repertoire for this ensemble holds a special place in my heart. As I started to work on the piece, I quickly realized that I have many ideas for textures and for combinations of these three wonderful instruments. I knew that I had to choose a form that accommodates frequent changes and a large variety of ideas. A set of variations (or perhaps more accurately, a chaconne), seemed to be a good choice for the task — as it allowed me to explore a large variety of textural and tonal ideas that are bound together by a simple underlying chord progression.

The structure of the piece opens with the theme, followed by twelve variations, and then returning to the theme. I kept the theme very simple, reminiscent of a Troubadour's song. The low flute has a wonderful color that reminds me of ancient European folk music, especially when accompanied by the harp and plucked viola. Moreover, I hope that a simple theme would make it easier for the listener to follow the structure throughout the various variations. The variations stretch the materials in all directions, pitches are thrown around the octaves, instruments are playing in different meters and in polyrhythms, chords become clusters, scales become 12-tone rows, expressive moments include quotes from Bach, and some sections follow the ideas of Isorhythm from 13th-century France.

Like many longer sets of variations, there are several gradual processes, leading to a climatic point that is then followed by a slow and very expressive variation (no. 9). Next, the piece speeds along to the last variation, which is a quodlibet (a

common Baroque musical game where the theme of the piece is juxtaposed against a popular tune in a playful manner). The piece ends with an altered restatement of the theme.

— Avner Dorman

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