

VARIATIONS ON A THEME BY HAYDN, OPUS 56B

The *Variations on a Theme by Haydn* was composed by Brahms in the summer of 1873 at Tutzing, Bavaria. It was originally published in versions for orchestra and for two pianos. Although the orchestral version is frequently performed, the two piano version has gained popularity in recent years. Brahms's superb mastery of counterpoint and melodic invention is evident here, as well as his unparalleled sense of form, pacing, and musical storytelling.

The work consists of a theme, the "Chorale St. Antoni" (Brahms mistakenly thought Haydn had composed the tune), eight variations, and a finale. The theme contains two repeated phrases; elegant, warm and noble in its simplicity. The eight variations which follow are in varied styles and tempi: among them a chorale prelude, hunting-style music, a Barcarolle, and a Hungarian dance; all have rich and distinctive characters. The finale is a huge passacaglia (a work based on a short repeated bass motive), a form he also used later in the Fourth Symphony. After exploring many textures and moods, the work concludes with a triumphant and exuberant return of the chorale.

ABOUT THE ORPHEUS DUO

Pianists Mark Uranker and Althea Waites have combined their talents and performing experience to form a keyboard ensemble, The Orpheus Duo. Both artists have concertized extensively as soloists and chamber musicians throughout the United States and Europe and have been critically acclaimed for their performances of new music as well as familiar works from the traditional duo-piano repertoire.

Works written for the Orpheus Duo include those by composers Martin Herman, Carolyn Bremer, and Robin Cox. Recent concerts have included music of Messiaen, Brahms, Stravinsky, and Lloyd Rogers, as well as Mr. Uranker's arrangement of dances from Manuel De Falla's *Three-Cornered Hat*. Both artists are on the keyboard faculty at the Bob Cole Conservatory of Music at California State University, Long Beach and are in demand for concerts throughout the country. They are currently preparing a recording of works by Debussy, Stravinsky, and Brahms.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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THE BOB COLE CONSERVATORY OF MUSIC AT
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, LONG BEACH AND THE COLLEGE OF THE ARTS PROUDLY PRESENT:



ORPHEUS DUO

ALTHEA WAITES & MARK URANKER
PIANO

SUNDAY, MARCH 15, 2015 4:00PM

GERALD R. DANIEL RECITAL HALL
PLEASE SILENCE ALL ELECTRONIC MOBILE DEVICES.

PROGRAM

Adagio and Fugue in C Minor, K. 426..... Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
(1756-1791)

Hallelujah Junction (1998) John Adams
(b. 1947)

INTERMISSION

Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues (1979) Frederic Rzewski
(b. 1938)

Variations on a Theme of Haydn, Op. 56b Johannes Brahms
(1833-1897)

PROGRAM NOTES

ADAGIO AND FUGUE IN C MINOR, K. 426

The Adagio and Fugue in C Minor for Two Pianos was composed in 1783 and later transcribed for string ensemble. At this time, Mozart embarked on a study of the music of Bach and Handel; he was fascinated by their contrapuntal writing. Counterpoint and a renewed sense of rhythmic vitality assumed ever-increasing importance in his own work, including this piece.

The Adagio opens with a stately theme in dotted rhythms, rife with chromatic harmonies and broad melodies; it serves as an introduction to the fugue. In contrast, the fugue is set in a fast tempo with lively, decisive rhythms; it is rather intense, dark, and chromatic.

HALLELUJAH JUNCTION

Hallelujah Junction was written at the request of Grant Gershon and Gloria Cheng, two musicians with whom I have had a long and fruitful history. When they asked me to compose a “short” piece for a special concert at the Getty Museum in 1998 I simply could not decline.

Hallelujah Junction is a tiny truck stop on Route 49 on the Nevada-California border, not far from Reno where I have a small mountain cabin. One can only speculate on its beginnings in the era of prospectors and Gold Rush speculators (although a recent visit revealed that cappuccino is now available there). Here we have a case of a great title looking for a piece. So now the piece finally exists: the ‘junction’ being the interlocking style of two-piano writing which features short, highly rhythmicized motives bouncing back and forth between the two pianos

in tightly phased sequences. This is a technique I first used in the 1982 *Grand Pianola Music* and later expanded in orchestral pieces.

The “hallelujah” is for another Los Angeles friend: Ernest Fleischmann. Like many composers, conductors, and performers, I have benefitted immeasurably over the years by Ernest’s friendship and by his unflagging advocacy. As we all think back over the extraordinary tenure of his service as managing director of the Los Angeles Philharmonic, “hallelujah” seems to be the only appropriate word. We all owe him a debt of deep gratitude.

Hallelujah Junction lasts approximately fifteen minutes and is in four parts, linked one to the other. The first section begins with a short, exclamatory three-note figure which I think of as “-lelujah” (without the opening “Hal-”). This energized, bright gesture grows in length and breadth and eventually gives way to a long, multifaceted “groove” section.

A second, more relaxed part is more reflective and is characterized by waves of triplet chord clusters ascending out of the lowest ranges of the keyboard and cresting at their peak like breakers on a beach.

A short transitional passage uses tightly interlocking phase patterns to move the music into a more active ambience and sets up the final part. In this finale, the “hallelujah chorus” kicks in at full tilt. The ghost of Conlon Nancarrow goes head to head with a Nevada cathouse pianola.

—John Adams

WINNSBORO COTTON MILL BLUES

*Old Man Sargent, sitting at the desk,
The damned old fool won't give us no rest.
He'd take the nickels off a dead man's eyes,
To buy Coca-Cola and Eskimo Pies.*

*I've got the blues,
I've got the blues,
I've got the Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues.*

Winnsboro, South Carolina, like many towns in the Deep South, featured a cotton mill which operated for most of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Songs of struggle were written by the workers in the cotton mills, coal mines and farms of the area; they speak of workplace inequity, corrupt management, dangerous workplace conditions and mocked the stupidity and greed of those who owned the factories. The *Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues* was written sometime in the 1930s and later became well-known after being recorded by Pete Seeger in 1956. Frederic Rzewski, an exceptionally gifted composer and pianist, used the industrial folk song as the basis for the last of his *Four North American Ballads for Piano*, written in 1979. He later arranged the piece for two pianos.

The piece begins with an astonishing sonic portrait of the cotton mill, with it’s hundreds of looms wheezing and creaking, starting up for the day. The work song is woven bit by bit into the texture as the piece unfolds. Except for a brief respite, the unrelenting whirr of the broken-down cotton mill is ever-present throughout the piece.

—Mark Uranker