



CMP Plan
Josh Chodoroff
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Piece

Variations on "Scarborough Fair"

Composed by Calvin Custer

Composed in 1989

Published by Hal Leonard Corporation

Analysis

Broad Description

A work for concert band which presents variations on a traditional folk melody.

Background Information

Scarborough is a small town on the coast of England. The "Scarborough Fair" was a popular gathering in Medieval times, attracting traders and entertainers from all over the country. The fair lasted 45 days and started every August 15th. In the 1600s, mineral waters were found in Scarborough and it became a resort town. Today, Scarborough is a quiet town with a rich history.

"Scarborough Fair" is a traditional English ballad about this Yorkshire town. The song relates the tale of a young man who instructs the listener to tell his former love to perform for him a series of impossible tasks, such as making him a shirt without a seam and then washing it in a dry well, adding that if she completes these tasks he will take her back. Often the song is sung as a duet, with the woman then giving her lover a series of equally impossible tasks, promising to give him his seamless shirt once he has finished.

As the versions of the ballad known under the title "Scarborough Fair" are usually limited to the exchange of these impossible tasks, many suggestions concerning the plot have been proposed, including the hypothesis that it is about the Great Plague of the late Middle Ages. In Medieval England, this became a popular folk song as Bards would sing it when they traveled from town to town. The author of the song is unknown, and many different versions exist.

Perhaps the most iconic version of this song was done by Simon and Garfunkel. Paul Simon learned the song in London in 1965 from Martin Carthy, who had picked up the tune from the songbook by Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger and included it on his eponymous 1965 album. It was the lead track of the 1966 album *Parsley, Sage, Rosemary and Thyme*, and was released as a single after being featured on the soundtrack to *The Graduate* in 1968.

Additional Considerations

- There are some exposed solo moments for flute, alto saxophone, and clarinet. If your ensemble is weak in these areas, you may want to think twice before choosing this piece.
- The piano part always doubles other instruments with the exception of m.112-115. While it adds a very interesting timbre, the piece can be performed effectively without this instrument.
- There are eleven different percussion instruments plus piano employed in this work. While many of the parts can be covered by one player, this piece offers the opportunity to keep percussionists busy.

Analysis

Form

The piece is written in a traditional “Theme and Variations” form, based on the original folk tune. This form provides a perfect canvas for Custer on which to “paint” his different conceptions of a very simple folk melody. This choice of form is perhaps the most critical decision in terms of the aesthetic of the piece. In the original song, the lyrics are what creates the variety in each new verse; the absence of lyrics in this instrumental version requires the variety to come from elsewhere in order to avoid monotony. It is the form that provides the appropriate room for creativity. The overall form is as follows:

- Introduction (m.1-12)
- Theme (m.13-51)
- Variation 1 (m.52-72)
- Variation 2 (m.73-93)
- Variation 3 (m.94-119)
- Variation 4 (m.120-143)
- Coda (m.144-end)

In each different section, Custer puts a new “spin” on the folk melody. He does this through the manipulation of the other elements of music (melody, harmony, texture, timbre, rhythm, and expressive qualities). However, it is the composer’s deliberate choice to use the Theme and Variations form which provides the platform for all of this creativity.

Rhythm

In general, the rhythms of the piece are simple combinations of eighth notes, quarter notes, sixteenth notes, half notes, and whole notes. However, Custer masterfully manipulates these rhythms throughout the piece to alter the energy of the music.

Introduction: This is the most rhythmically complex section of the piece, probably because it is the only original music composed by Custer. This section demands that the performer be able to quickly change subdivisions from eighth notes to triplets to sixteenth notes. The rhythmic complexity of the Introduction only enhances the contrast of the simplicity of the ensuing statement of the Theme. The Introduction is written in 4/4, which contrasts with the triple meter which will then be utilized for much of the remainder of the work.

Theme and Variation 1: The simple rhythmic treatment of the tune serves to preserve the beauty of the melody. This is also vital to the intent of the piece, because the listener must hear the tune for the first time in its most basic form. Only if this melody is grasped will the ensuing variations make sense to the performer and listener. To accompany the beautifully simple melody in this section, Custer frequently writes running eighth notes to give the music a sense of forward motion and momentum; it's as if there is a "current" moving the melody forward. This occurs at at m.13 in the percussion, and at m.34 in the flute.

Variation 2: Without changing the tempo, Custer makes the music feel faster by increasing the speed of the rhythms. Eighth note and sixteenth note combinations in the upper woodwinds and percussion create an impetuosity which remains until m.91.

Variation 3: At m.94, the simple rhythm of the melody is again preserved and highlighted, this time without any running eighth notes. Long, sustained dotted half notes under the melody create a yearning mood. At m.112, Custer again adds the running eighth notes to the accompaniment, this time in the clarinets. These eighth notes then become sixteenth notes in m.118, and finally 32nd notes in m.119, which generate a sense of excitement as we are propelled into the next section.

Variation 4: A meter change into 4/4 time occurs at the beginning of this fugal section. The rhythms become more syncopated in this section through the use of ties and the dotted quarter note. This syncopation, along with accented weak beats in m. 137-139, create a slightly unsettling feeling that has not yet been heard or felt in this piece.

Coda: The unsettled rhythmic feel of Variation 4 is resolved at the beginning of the Coda, when the music returns to 3/4 and once again feels solidly grounded to the beat. Like Variation 2, the melody is presented in very basic rhythms with faster eighth note and sixteenth note rhythms layered on top in the upper woodwinds. A slight augmentation of the melody occurs at m.149, which serves to heighten the sense of resolution which we receive at m.153. The last 5 measures of the work rhythmically drive the piece to its triumphant conclusion.

Melody



All melodic content in this piece is derived from the original 17th century English folk tune, *Scarborough Fair*. This melody is a prime example of how simplicity can be extremely beautiful. The complete melody is a very symmetrical sixteen bars in length and is divided into four 4-bar phrases. The melody begins, climaxes, and ends on the tonic pitch. The entire melody spans a ninth, with the lowest note being the subtonic and the highest note being the tonic. It is a combination of leaps and steps in the diatonic scale with absolutely no chromaticism. The perfect fifth is a featured interval, beginning both the first and fourth phrases. This interval, which can often feel heroic in music, is made softer and more delicate in this melody by immediately descending back down to the tonic pitch. The second phrase drives the melody upwards to its ultimate climax which occurs at the beginning of the third phrase. The third phrase gently works its way from the highest note to the lowest note of the melody at its conclusion.

While the melody is often presented in this piece in its most basic form as described above, there are some key manipulations that Custer uses to subtly change the feel of the melodic content. One way that Custer chooses to alter the melody is to elongate the last measure of each phrase. This provides him with space to add some interesting countermelodies, as well as to slow down the overall pacing of the piece. This occurs frequently in Variation 2 and 3. Another technique is fragmenting the melody. This is a highly effective way of reminding the listener about the melody without necessarily writing the whole thing. This occurs in m.112, as well as in Variation 4 where the fugue subject is derived from only the first four bars of the melody.

Harmony

Variations on "Scarborough Fair" is tonally centered in D Dorian, and does not depart from this key center. The piece features very simple harmonic language which focuses on these characteristic Dorian chord qualities:

- i - minor tonic chord
- III - major submediant chord
- v - minor dominant chord
- VII - major subtonic chord

Custer probably chose to keep the harmonic language quite basic so as not to interfere with the manipulation of other elements of music in the set of variations. The simplicity of the harmony also serves as a way to keep the listener focused on this well-constructed and popular melody.

Custer makes a few very interesting harmonic departures at certain points in the piece. In Variation 2, he surprises the listener with a Major Dominant chord in m.80 and a Major Tonic chord in m.91. These moments serve to briefly brighten the timbre of the music, as well as to prepare the listener for Custer's harmonic choice for the end of the work. At m.112, the end of Variation 3, Custer creates eight measures of slightly ambiguous harmony. It is a deceptive moment where, although the music feels like it is leaving "home," it ultimately finds its way back. The piece flirts briefly with tonicizing C Major or F Major, but ultimately holds its original D Dorian tonality as is evidenced by the downbeat of m.120. The fugue at m.120 remains firmly rooted in D Dorian despite the expected presentation of the fugal subjects and answers in both the tonic and dominant. The final harmonic surprise comes at m.153 of the Coda, when Custer chooses to end the piece in D Major. This harkens back to the major tonic chord he introduced in m.91. More importantly, coming on the heels of a rather strict fugue, this choice feels almost like the appropriate "Picardy 3rd" found at the conclusion of so many Baroque works.

Timbre

The tone color choices for the piece are rather straightforward. The most interesting timbral color occurs in the Theme section. The Theme at m.13 features the mysterious and almost hypnotic accompaniment of vibes, bells, piano, and triangle. These support the melody, presented by a solo flute at m.17. The marriage of the flute with the mallet instruments creates an ethereal, almost other-worldly setting of the melody. At m.34, the flute solo becomes an obligato to the entrance of the solo alto saxophone. The addition of the alto sax, plus a solo horn and suspended cymbal (played with a triangle beater), darken the timbre a bit but also maintain the unique, other-worldly sound.

Custer also creates some stark contrasts by juxtaposing bright and dark timbres. A few of the significant changes occur as follows:

- The first three notes of the piece are sounded by trumpets alone to establish a fanfare-like beginning. This is enhanced by the downbeat of m.2 being marked by the crash cymbals. However, the timbre then darkens quickly at the beginning of the Theme.
- The choice of D Dorian creates a rather dark color. However, the surprising D Major cadence at m.80 provides a brilliant timbre.
- A rich, warm timbre is created at m.94 through the combination of clarinet, alto and tenor saxophones, euphonium, and tuba. This adds to a more melancholy atmosphere. These instruments are written in their middle to lower registers, which adds to the lush sound. This timbre begins to brighten at m.112 through the addition of flutes in the upper register, ascending clarinet lines, and the trumpet entrance. The timbre becomes more and more brilliant until the downbeat of m.120.
- As with the timbral decisions discussed earlier in the piece, the fugue in Variation 4 also moves from a bright to dark color. This adds a gradual heaviness to the section. The fugue is initially presented by the first clarinets and solo alto saxophone. The answer is provided by the flutes and oboes in m.123. The second subject is presented by the tenor saxophone and bassoon in m.130. At m.139, the tuba, bass clarinet, baritone saxophone, bassoon, and piano present a “last gasp” of the answer.
- At m.144, the Coda utilizes the upper register of many instruments to create and maintain a very bright timbre. The timbre of the work is perhaps at its brightest at m.143, when Custer chooses to end the work in the brilliant tonality of D Major. This provides a really unique color that was briefly foreshadowed at m.80, but is maintained for four full measures at the end of this work.

These changes from bright to dark serve to create more and more variety in the work. They are used effectively in conjunction with the overall form of the piece to transform the familiar folk melody into something new.

Texture

The many textural changes in *Variations on “Scarborough Fair”* create a great deal of interest for both the listener and the performer.

Introduction: This is a homophonic section with a very thick texture. The result is a powerful, opening to the work.

Theme: This homophonic section has an extremely thin texture. This contrasts beautifully with the Introduction, and creates a quiet, introspective stage on which to present the initial theme. It forces the listener to lean-in and listen closely to the melody.

Variation 1, 2, and 3: These variations are all homophonic and thicker in texture. While this might seem redundant from a compositional standpoint, Custer provides variety in the melody, tempo, style, and rhythm to keep the piece interesting.

Variation 4: This variation is a startling and brilliant contrast in texture to the the other sections of this piece. Variation 4 is a fugue, so it has a polyphonic texture. The fugue begins with a very thin texture, and gradually, through the addition of voices playing the fugue subject and answer, grows to a very thick texture. The focus of Variation 4 is indeed this unique and complex texture.

Coda: Like the beginning, Custer chooses to “bookend” the piece with a thick, homophonic texture.

Expressive Qualities

Dynamics: Generally, the major sections of the form of the piece alternate between loud and soft dynamics. The loud Introduction quiets down to a soft, introspective presentation of the Theme. Variation 1 gradually crescendos and builds to a much louder Variation 2. It is worth noting that the second *fortissimo* marking of the piece occurs in tandem with the first hearing of the D Major chord; this enhances the brightness of the moment. Variation 3 returns to a quieter dynamic before pushing to the loud fugue section. The *forte* dynamic of Variation 4 is sustained until it is heightened to a *fortissimo* at m.144, and finally the loudest dynamic of the piece, *fff*, occurs at m.153. Thus, the dynamics ebb and flow throughout the work, but ultimately build to the end of the piece. The dynamics provide contrast for the variations, and also serve to enhance the sense of inevitability of the conclusion of the work.

Section	Articulation	Tempo	Purpose
Introduction	<i>Maestoso</i> style with prominent use of accents.	With energy, q = 130	Creates a triumphant beginning to the work. This opening style also makes the contrast of the next section more apparent.
Theme	<i>Molto legato</i> with all notes being slurred by all instruments.	<i>Andantino</i> , q = 112	The slower tempo and legato style of this section create an eerie, <i>mysterioso</i> sound. It helps create an ethereal mood to present the thematic material for the first time.

Variation 1	<i>Molto legato</i> with all notes being slurred by all instruments.	<i>Andantino</i> , q = 112	The articulation and tempo for Variation 1 are the same as the Theme. Custer probably chose to keep these elements the same because he was developing the timbral and dynamic contrasts.
Variation 2	<i>Marcato</i> style with prominent use of accents and short note lengths. Slurred passages are punctuated by other instruments maintaining the <i>marcato</i> style	<i>Andantino</i> , q = 112	Although the tempo remains the same in this variation, the shorter style makes the music feel much different. These shorter articulations, in tandem with quicker rhythms, make the music feel more martial.
Variation 3	<i>Molto legato</i> with prominent use of slurs	<i>Andante</i> , q = 88	This is the slowest section of the work. It is preceded by a <i>ritardando</i> which helps the music “wind down” from the previous section. The slow tempo and <i>sostenuto</i> style make this moment in the piece feel yearning and almost desperate. It is a major shift in mood from the last section.
Variation 4	<i>Maestoso</i> style. Accents and slurs are both used in this section, but all slurs should be released in a <i>staccato</i> manner to maintain the appropriate style.	<i>Allegro</i> , q = 120	The quicker tempo and sharper style of Variation 4 serve to enhance the angular feel to the fugue. The precision of the articulation directly corresponds to the rhythmic precision needed for the fugue.
Coda	<i>Maestoso</i> style with a juxtaposition of accents in the brass and percussion, and slurs in the upper woodwinds.	<i>Allegro</i> , q = 120	Although the style and tempo remain the same as in Variation 4, they become seemingly bolder when coupled with the increased dynamic. This creates a strong and exciting finish.

Heart Statement

The heart of *Variations on "Scarborough Fair"* is the use of the Theme and Variations form to transform a simple, timeless melody into a tapestry of rich, complex, and contrasting moods.

Introducing the Piece

The Happiest Faces (this is an affective strategy) - Students will enter the classroom to find five happy faces drawn on the board. Four volunteers will be asked to add whatever features they like to one of the faces without erasing any of the original features. Once all of the faces are completed, the class will examine the faces together. The point of the exercise is for students to realize that the new features that have been added are all variations of the same original happy face. The original happy face is still present in each of the drawings, even though they may now look completely different. This is exactly the same way in which composers create variations on themes.

Take Out the Piece

- Written in "Theme and Variations" form
- With a fugue
- Based on a British folk tune
- With a melody written in Dorian mode
- By Calvin Custer
- With a melody made famous by Simon and Garfunkel
- That ends with a "Picardy 3rd"
- That uses piano
- Composed in 1989
- Based on a song famous for the line "parsley, sage, rosemary, and thyme"

Outcomes and Strategies

Skill Outcome

Students will identify, interpret, and perform a wide range of articulations.

Skill Strategies

- *A Visual Guide* - Students will receive a copy of visual representations of various articulations. We will discuss the various names and how to create the appropriate sonic shapes.
- *Articulation Explanation* - Students will play a C Major scale with 4 quarter notes on each pitch. However, each time the exercise is played the teacher will draw a symbol for

a different articulation on the board. Students will discuss the name, spelling, meaning, and performance practice of each articulation.

- *Articulation Exercise Sheet* - Students will receive a copy of a sheet that has a place for them to draw and define the different articulation symbols. They will complete this sheet, and also sightread the various exercises on the page with specific attention to the articulations.
- *Change the Style* - Ask the students to find Variation I at m.52, and identify which articulation marking is pervasive in their parts (slurs). After playing the Variation as written, ask them to play the entire section staccato. Review the proper note shape, and perform it in this manner. This exercise can also be done with accent and marcato articulations.
- *3-Type Scale* - As part of a warm-up, students will play the Concert Bb Major Scale with 3 differing articulations: staccato, legato, and slurred. The scale will be performed 3 times seamlessly with the focus being on creating the different articulations.
- *Implied Articulation - Play Variation 4* (the fugue, m.120-144) which does not specify an articulation for the performance of eighth notes. Ask students to try this section performing the eighth notes first legato, then staccato. Discuss which is the appropriate choice
- *Student Conductors* - Students will learn how to conduct a basic 4/4 pattern. They will then learn how to conduct the gestures for staccato, legato, and marcato. A class discussion will ensue concerning how the conducting gesture mimics the desired articulation.
- *4-Quarter Notes* - Students will play a scale with four repeated quarter notes on each pitch. However, they will have to watch the conductor and alter their articulations appropriately according to the conducting gesture. Student Conductors can also lead this strategy once they get comfortable with the gestures.

Skill Assessments

- *Written Quiz* - Students will be asked to write down the symbols and definitions of the following articulations: staccato, tenuto, marcato, accent. This will be done on an index card which will be turned in.
- *Playing Assessment* - Using their Chromebooks, students will record themselves playing one of the exercises on the Articulation Exercise Sheet. This recording will be uploaded to Google Classroom where it will be assessed.
- *Name that Articulation* - Each student will create his/her own order of the following articulations: staccato, tenuto, accent, marcato. They will have to use three of the articulations once, and one of them twice. Using this order, they will be given 45 seconds to practice playing the "4 Quarter Notes" exercise listed above. Volunteers will

then individually play for the class, and all students will write down in which order they think the articulations were performed. Answers will immediately be reviewed.

Knowledge Outcome

Students will expand their scale vocabulary to include modal scales.

Knowledge Strategies

- *What's a Half-Step Among Friends?* - As a class, students will generate the sequence of whole steps and half steps which make up a major scale. This will be done by having students hold-up "W" and "H" signs. The teacher will then pose the question "If we keep the placement of the half steps the same but start and end at a different place in the scale, is it still a major scale?" A student will be asked to choose a different starting point, the student card-holders will move, and the group will play that scale. A discussion will follow about whether or not it is still a major scale...or what is it?
- *The "Ians"* - With questioning and assistance from the teacher, students will generate a list of all of the modes. This will be the introduction of new material for some if not all of the students. Students will label Ionian, Dorian, Phrygian, Lydian, Mixolydian, Aeolian, and Locrian modes. *The focus of this strategy is merely to show them all of the modes that exist.
- *Which Mode is It?* - Students will be given the melody to *Scarborough Fair*. After playing the melody in unison, they will choose a partner and determine which modality the melody is written in. The students will be told that the tonic pitch of the melody is D. They will then figure out the half steps and whole steps present in the melody, and compare it to the "Ian" list they generated previously to determine their answer. After identifying that the melody is in Dorian, they will play the Theme and Variation 1 sections, having anyone playing the Dorian melody stand when they are playing it.
- *Harmonic Comparison* - Students will play the concert C Major scale in 3 groups with upper voices playing first, middle voices following two notes later, and low voices coming in two notes after that (this generates the triadic harmony). They will then play the D Dorian scale in 3 groups and discuss how the sounds of the harmony is different.
- *Do I Know You?* - Students will use their Chromebooks and Google "famous 'insert mode here' songs." They can each pick whichever modality they want. The idea is to show them that they are already listening to these modes, whether they know it or not. Students will be asked to report back some of the songs they found. Then, as a class we will listen to examples of music in different modes.

Knowledge Assessments

- *Discussions* - Much of the assessment for this outcome will come from informal discussions throughout the various strategies. By hearing the answers of students of questions posed, the teacher will have a good idea as to whether or not concepts are being learned.
- *Listening Comparison Exit Slip* - Students will be played two excerpts of music, one in major and one in dorian. They will be asked to contrast the way the music feels using adjectives. This slip will be turned in.
- *Write the Scale* - Students will be asked to write out the D Dorian scale (using letters), and label the whole step and half step relationships.

Affective Outcome

Students will explore the concept of “Theme and Variations” form as it relates both to music and to the world around them.

Affective Strategies

- *The Happiest Faces* - Students will enter the classroom to find four happy faces drawn on the board. Four volunteers will be asked to add whatever features they like to one of the faces without erasing any of the original features. Once all of the faces are completed, the class will examine the faces together. The point of the exercise is for students to realize that the new features that have been added are all variations of the same original happy face. The original happy face is still present in each of the drawings, even though they may now look completely different. This is exactly the same way in which composers create variations on themes.
- *Twinkle, Twinkle Variations* - The teacher will play a simple rendition of Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star on the piano. The question will then be posed, “What elements of music can we manipulate in order to create a variation of this song?” As students volunteer answers, the teacher will play Twinkle, Twinkle with the suggested variation. Students will suggest answers such as changing the rhythm, the range, the mode, etc.
- *What Just Happened?* - Students will play the 4 variations in *Scarborough Fair* (Variation 1 (m.52-72), Variation 2 (m.73-93), Variation 3 (m.94-119), Variation 4 (m.120-143). They will stop after each section and either write down or discuss how the composer is creating the variation. What element of music is being manipulated? How does this change the feeling of the piece?
- *Variations on America* - Students will very quickly review the tune “My Country ‘Tis of Thee” by singing it once through. They will then be played excerpts from Charles Ives’ “Variations on America,” and asked to write down what they composer did to the melody in order to create variation. Class discussions will ensue.

- *Ted Talk* - Students will watch the short Ted Talk by Peter Randall-Page concerning the use of Theme and Variations in nature. A class discussion will follow, as well as an assignment which will be discussed below.

Affective Assessments

- *Discussion* – Through discussions with a partner or as a full group, students will discuss the aesthetic implications of the variations in the “What Just Happened” strategy.
- *Exit slip* - Accompanying the *Variations on ‘America’* strategy, students will turn in their answers as to how Ives created variation in the piece.
- *Composition project* - Using free Noteflight accounts on their Chromebooks, students will create a short “Theme and Variations” of their own. They will be given a choice of three easy folk melodies and a sheet of requirements. Compositions will be assessed on a rubric. Extra credit for anyone who performs their composition in front of the class!
- *Classroom Variations* - Based on the Ted Talk, students will ponder the idea of “Theme and Variations” in the world around them. They will each bring in a picture/pictures of an example of this concept. Each student will explain his/her picture to the class, and we will put all of them up on a bulletin board to create a “classroom variations” display.

Music Selection

Variations on “Scarborough Fair” is worth studying for many reasons. This piece is rooted in folk music which is important to study because it provides a glimpse into the culture and lives of other peoples. In our global community, studying and understanding other cultures is a vital part of living in the 21st century. Also, folk music has provided a wealth of material to the band repertoire, and has played a vital role in the growth of the wind band repertoire. Great wind band composers like Percy Grainger, Ralph Vaughan Williams, and Gustav Holst all turned to folk music for inspiration. To study folk music is to study the evolution of our ensemble.

Variations on “Scarborough Fair” also provides a textbook introduction to both the “Theme and Variations” form, as well as the fugue. These items are presented in the framework of a popular, catchy, and easily-recognizable tune. This makes it easy for young musicians to study for the first time.

Perhaps most importantly, *Variations on “Scarborough Fair”* is an extremely well-crafted piece of art. Custer masterfully employs compositional techniques to enhance and highlight the original setting of the famous melody. The piece is musically, technically, and intellectually challenging for performers and listeners. It is appropriately written for a solid Grade 3+ wind band, and will provide them with a rich experience. The piece yields great aesthetic impact for both young musicians and the audience.