

HIGHLAND VARIATIONS for string quartet

Michael Parsons

Highland Variations was written in 1972. The melodic structure is based on that of pibroch (Gaelic: piobaireachd), the classical music of the Scots highland bagpipe. This is an austere, slow-moving and formalised music based on fixed melodic conventions, traditionally associated with the MacCrimmons, clan pipers to the MacLeods of Dunvegan in the Isle of Skye.

The work makes use of some of the features characteristic of pibroch, such as the drone and the systematic repetition of a single type of figuration in each section. The theme is based on a hexatonic version of the modal scale of the Scots bagpipe, and is built up in three lines of 6, 6 and 4 bars, with internal repetitions characteristic of a pibroch melody. As in the traditional form, the variations are constructed not on the theme itself but on a melodic outline or 'skeleton' (stated in the 1st violin part in Variation 1). There are eight variations, the seventh of which is for solo violin. After the eighth variation the work concludes with a restatement of the opening theme.

Performing instructions:

The tempo should remain constant at $\text{d} = 30$ throughout the statement of the theme and in Variations 1 and 2. In Variation 3 there should be a very gradual increase in tempo to $\text{d} = 40$ at the beginning of Variation 4. The original tempo is resumed (with new note value, $\text{d} = 30$) in Variation 5.

The work is to be played continuously, without breaks between sections, except for a pause at the end of Variation 7 (violin solo).

Double bars indicate structural divisions, not pauses. The restatement of the theme follows the end of Variation 8 without a break.

To end: the last note in bar 16 of the theme should be sustained in all parts for an extra tied minim, making this in effect a 3/2 bar.

Vibrato should be used very sparingly in the statement of the theme (violin 1) and in Variations 1 and 2 (inner parts), and not at all in Variation 8.

Sustained long notes in the lower parts are generally to be played close to the bridge. A fuller tone with some controlled vibrato may be introduced in Variations 3 and 4, which may be treated more freely and expansively.

Parts II and III may be played either by violin or viola.

The duration of a performance is between 9 and 10 minutes.

Highland Variations for string quartet

Michael Parsons (1972)

Theme

Lento Sostenuto ($d = 30$)

I

mf

II

mp (senza vibrato)

III

mp (senza vibrato)

IV

mp (senza vibrato)

Preview File Only

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

26

27

28

29

30

31

32

33

34

35

36

37

38

39

40

41

42

43

44

45

46

47

48

49

50

51

52

53

54

55

56

57

58

59

60

61

62

63

64

65

66

67

68

69

70

71

72

73

74

75

76

77

78

79

80

81

82

83

84

85

86

87

88

89

90

91

92

93

94

95

96

97

98

99

100

101

102

103

104

105

106

107

108

109

110

111

112

113

114

115

116

117

118

119

120

121

122

123

124

125

126

127

128

129

130

131

132

133

134

135

136

137

138

139

140

141

142

143

144

145

146

147

148

149

150

151

152

153

154

155

156

157

158

159

160

161

162

163

164

165

166

167

168

169

170

171

172

173

174

175

176

177

178

179

180

181

182

183

184

185

186

187

188

189

190

191

192

193

194

195

196

197

198

199

200

201

202

203

204

205

206

207

208

209

210

211

212

213

214

215

216

217

218

219

220

221

222

223

224

225

226

227

228

229

230

231

232

233

234

235

236

237

238

239

240

241

242

243

244

245

246

247

248

249

250

251

252

253

254

255

256

257

258

259

260

261

262

263

264

265

266

267

268

269

270

271

272

273

274

275

276

277

278

279

280

281

282

283

284

285

286

287

288

289

290

291

292

293

294

295

296

297

298

299

300

301

302

303

304

305

306

307

308

309

310

311

312

313

314

315

316

317

318

319

320

321

322

323

324

325

326

327

328

329

330

331

332

333

334

335

336

337

338

339

340

341

342

343

344

345

346

347

348

349

350

351

352

353

354

355

356

357

358

359

360

361

362

363

364

365

366

367

368

369

370

371

372

373

374

375

376

377

378

379

380

381

382

383

384

385

386

387

388

389

390

391

392

393

394

395

396

397

398

399

400

401

402

403

404

405

406

407

408

409

410

411

412

413

414

415

416

417

418

419

420

421

422

423

424

425

426

427

428

429

430

431

432

433

434

435

436

437

438

439

440

441

442

443

444

445

446

447

448

449

450

451

452

453

454

455

456

457

458

459

460

461

462

463

464

465

466

467

468

469

470

471

472

473

474

475

476

477

478

479

480

481

482

483

484

485

486

487

488

489

490

491

492

493

494

495

496

497

498

499

500

501

502

503

504

505

506

507

508

509

510

511

512

513

514

515

516

517

518

519

520

521

522

523

524

525

526

527

528

529

530

531

532

533

534

535

536

537

538

539

540

541

542

543

544

545

546

547

548

549

550

551

552

553

554

555

556

557

558

559

560

561

562

563

564

565

566

567

568

569

570

571

572

573

574

575

576

577

578

579

580

581

582

583

584

585

586

587

588

589

590

591

592

593

594

595

596

597

598

599

600

601

602

603

604

605

606

607

608

609

610

611

612

613

614

615

616

617

618

619

620

621

622

623

624

625

626

627

628

629

630

631

632

633

634

635

636

637

638

639

640

641

642

643

644

645

646

647

648

649

650

651

652

653

654

655

656

657

658

659

660

661

662

663

664

665

666

667

668

669

670

671

672

673

674

675

676

677

678

679

680

681

682

683

684

685

686

687

688

689

690

691

692

693

694

695

696

697

698

699

700

701

702

703

704

705

706

707

708

709

710

711

712

713

714

715

716

717

718

719

720

721

722

723

724

725

726

727

728

729

730

731

732

733

734

735

736

737

738

739

740

741

742

743

744

745

746

747

748

749

750

751

752

753

754

755

756

757

758

759

760

761

762

763

764

765

766

767

768

769

770

771

772

773

774

775

776

777

778

779

780

781

782

783

784

785

786

787

788

789

790

791

792

793

794

795

796

797

798

799

800

801

802

803

804

805

806

807

808

809

810

811

812

813

814

815

816

817

818

819

820

821

822

823

824

825

826

827

828

829

830

831

832

833

834

835

836

837

838

839

840

841

842

843

844

845

846

847

848

849

850

851

852

853

854

855

856

857

858

859

860

861

862

863

864

865

866

867

868

869

870

871

872

873

874

875

876

877

878

879

880

881

882

883

884

885

886

887

888

889

890

891

892

893

894

895

896

897

898

899

900

901

902

903

904

905

906

907

908

909

910

911

912

913

914

915

916

917

918

919

920

921

922

923

924

925

926

927

928

929

930

931

932

933

934

935

936

937

938

939

940

941

942

943

944

945

946

947

948

949

950

951

952

<p

Highland Variations

page 2

Variation 1

(d=30)

Musical score for Variation 1, page 2, measures 1-4. The score consists of four staves. The first staff has a dynamic of p and a instruction "mp (senza vibrato)". The second staff has a dynamic of f and a instruction "(un poco marcato)". The third staff has a dynamic of p and a instruction "p (senza vibrato)". The fourth staff has a dynamic of p . Measures 1-4 show a repeating pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes.

Musical score for Variation 1, page 2, measures 5-8. The score consists of four staves. The first staff has a dynamic of p . The second staff has a dynamic of f . The third staff has a dynamic of p . The fourth staff has a dynamic of p . Measures 5-8 show a repeating pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes.

Musical score for Variation 1, page 2, measures 9-12. The score consists of four staves. The first staff has a dynamic of p . The second staff has a dynamic of f . The third staff has a dynamic of p . The fourth staff has a dynamic of p . Measures 9-12 show a repeating pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes.

Musical score for Variation 1, page 2, measures 13-16. The score consists of four staves. The first staff has a dynamic of p . The second staff has a dynamic of f . The third staff has a dynamic of p . The fourth staff has a dynamic of p . Measures 13-16 show a repeating pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes.

Variation 2

The musical score consists of four systems of music, each with three staves. The top staff uses a treble clef, the middle staff an alto clef, and the bottom staff a bass clef. The key signature is A major (no sharps or flats). The time signature is common time (indicated by 'C'). The score includes dynamic markings such as *p* (pianissimo), *v* (volume), *mf* (mezzo-forte), *pp* (pianississimo), *smile*, and *pizz.* (pizzicato). The first system starts with *p* and *semitone*. The second system starts with *v* and *mf* (poco vibr.). The third system starts with *smile*. The fourth system starts with *p*. There are two blank lines of music below each system. A blue diagonal watermark reading "Preview File Only" is visible across the middle of the page.

Variation 3 (piu risoluto) ($d=30$, gradually increasing to $d=40$ at beginning of Variation 4)

The musical score for Variation 3 is divided into four systems of four measures each. The instrumentation includes three staves: Violin (top), Cello (middle), and Bass (bottom). The key signature is one sharp. The score features eighth-note patterns and sixteenth-note figures. Dynamic markings include *mf*, *v*, *p*, and *simile*. Performance instructions like '(vibr.)' are present. The score shows a gradual increase in tempo from $d=30$ to $d=40$ at the start of Variation 4.

Variation 4 ($d = 40$)

The musical score consists of four staves of music, each with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a time signature of 4/4. The score is divided into four measures by vertical bar lines. The first measure contains sixteenth-note patterns with dynamic markings like pif , v , and x . The second measure includes dynamic markings such as (simile) and sf . The third measure features a dynamic marking sostenuto . The fourth measure contains a dynamic marking simile . The score is annotated with several large, sweeping black arcs underneath the staves, likely indicating performance dynamics or phrasing. A blue watermark reading "Preview File Only" is diagonally overlaid across the middle of the page.

Highland Variations

page 6

Variation 5

piv lento (d.=30)

calmo

P subito

(secca vibr.)

(II tacet)

Variation 6

(d.=30)

I

III

I

III

Highland Variations

page 7

Variation 7 - violin solo

I (♩ = 60) (sostenuto)
mf

Variation 8 (♩ = 30)

II P senza vibrato
III P senza vibrato
IV

Preview File Only

(Repeat Theme)