

Greg Sandow

Mahler Variations

for string quartet

revised 2024

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duration: about 28 minutes

world premiere:

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Notes on the music

This piece is a set of variations on a Mahler theme, the start of the last movement of his Third Symphony.

And the first adventure I had in composing it was to arrange the theme for string quartet. Mahler scored it only for strings, so that gave me a head start. But he split the strings into seven parts, with divided violas and cellos, and of course he also had basses, which won't be found in a string quartet. So with more instrumental voices available than I had, his writing could be richer and more nuanced than anything I could write for quartet. Quite apart from him being Mahler, and me being me.

But I'm not unhappy with what I came up with. Even in rehearsals, when a quartet plays my version of the theme, a hush seems to settle in the room. So I feel as if I've at least entered Mahler's arena.

Though after that, I'm on my own. The piece continues through 22 variations, and the first thing anyone might notice is that it goes through many musical styles. They range from something like a 1950s rock & roll ballad, meant as a love song to Elvis, all the way to 12-tone tributes to Schoenberg, Webern, and Berg. One reason for all the styles — besides that they all came naturally to me as I composed — is that most variations are tributes to something I've loved. Especially to music I've loved, but not only that.

So among the variations there are tributes to two art film directors, Eric Rohmer and Michelangelo Antonioni. And also to the great French writer Marcel Proust, for whom the music takes on the color of French composers of Proust's time, the early 20th century (especially Fauré, whose songs I particularly love).

One variation is a lengthy silence.

Some variations, like the Elvis one, do what variations from Beethoven on have normally done: They build a new piece on the theme's harmony. Others are more free. Sometimes a lot more free, like of course the silent variation, which can't be tied in any way to the theme. Though maybe it evokes the hush that the theme seems to create. And, beyond that, my statement of the theme never finishes. It just trails off into silence. Silences then become a feature of the piece, showing up in a few variations. So the long silence (it should last at least a minute, with the exact length being up to the players) might be an expansion of the shorter ones.

(I call this the John Cage variation, though that's an affectionate joke. There's a lot more to Cage than silence.)

My final variation is a tribute to Mahler himself. Just as I did in my arrangement of his theme, I tried to enter his musical world, to write music like his, even if it's my own. At first I didn't dare confess that I'd done that, so, evasively, I called what I wrote "Conclusion." But then I thought I'd be honest, and so this final variation — emerging softly from the long silence, like the fulfillment of a promise made when the piece began — now is called "Mahler," as it should be. It's built on the harmony of Mahler's theme, and carries my piece toward its close.

Here I'll stop these notes. After the score, I'll add some brief rehearsal ideas, about three variations whose purely musical features might be tricky to work out. These rehearsal notes can give you a head start.

I'll also add notes on what goes on in each variation, including how each one varies the theme (or doesn't, quite, which is another way of saying I let myself be very free). These extra thoughts might be helpful if you're playing the piece, but you don't have to absorb them in any detail. The fine print is there if you want it, but, even for performers, the overall feeling of the piece (and of each variation) might matter more.

And that's because — though I've put a lot into these variations. writing them in many styles, and playing composers' games in some of them — in my experience the music flows easily, from the hush of the start to the pure, sad D minor chord at the end. If you hear that, and, playing the piece, if you feel it, you may not need to know anything more.

And now my music.

Mahler Variations

[The German markings and the slurs in the theme are from Mahler's score]

Langsam. Ruhevoll. Empfundn. [Slowly. Peacefully. Deeply felt.]

♩ = 65 *sehr gebunden, sehr ausdrucksvoll gesungen* [molto legato, sung with deep feeling]

Greg Sandow

G saite [G string]

Violin I
pp

Violin II
pp

Viola
pp *molto espress.* *sehr gebunden* [molto legato]

Violoncello
pp *sehr gebunden* [molto legato]



7 D saite [D string]

Vln I
pp

Vln II
pp *sehr ausdrucksvoll und getragen* [very expressive and slowly]

Vla
pp *sempre pp*

Vc.
sempre pp

1

12 *sehr ausdrucksvoll gesungen* [sung with deep feeling]

Vln I
Vln II
Vla
Vc.



17 *D saite* [D string] *G saite* [G string] *more softly*

Vln I
Vln II
Vla
Vc.

2

Var. 1

A little faster; comodo

23 $\text{♩} = 92$

Vln I *pizz.* *p* arco

Vln II *pizz.* *p* arco

Vla *pizz.* *p* arco

Vc. *pizz.* *p* arco



29 *accel.* *As before*

Vln I *p* *pizz.*

Vln II *p* *pizz.*

Vla *p* *pizz.*

Vc. *p* *pizz.*

3

Var. 2

Very simply

35

♩ = 84

arco

tr

innocent

Musical score for measures 35-39. The score is for four instruments: Violin I (Vln I), Violin II (Vln II), Viola (Vla), and Violoncello (Vc.). The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#) and the time signature is 12/8. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 84. The dynamics are marked as *p* (piano). The performance instruction is *arco* (arco) with a *tr* (trill) marking above the first measure of Vln I. The mood is indicated as *innocent*. The score shows the following notes: Vln I: measure 35 (rest), 36 (trill on G4), 37 (A4), 38 (B4), 39 (C5). Vln II: measure 35 (G4), 36 (A4), 37 (B4), 38 (C5), 39 (B4). Vla: measure 35 (G2), 36 (A2), 37 (B2), 38 (C3), 39 (B2). Vc.: measure 35 (G2), 36 (A2), 37 (B2), 38 (C3), 39 (B2).



Musical score for measures 40-44. The score is for four instruments: Violin I (Vln I), Violin II (Vln II), Viola (Vla), and Violoncello (Vc.). The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#) and the time signature is 12/8. The dynamics are marked as *p* (piano). The score shows the following notes: Vln I: measure 40 (A4), 41 (B4), 42 (C5), 43 (B4), 44 (A4). Vln II: measure 40 (G4), 41 (A4), 42 (B4), 43 (C5), 44 (B4). Vla: measure 40 (G2), 41 (A2), 42 (B2), 43 (C3), 44 (B2). Vc.: measure 40 (G2), 41 (A2), 42 (B2), 43 (C3), 44 (B2).

4

very gently

45

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc.

p *p* *pp* *pp*

p *pp* *pp* *pp*

p *pp* *pp* *pp*

p *pp* *pp* *pp*

5 Var. 3

Slow, intense

♩ = 60

50

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc.

ppp *ppp* *ppp* *ppp*

ppp *ppp* *ppp* *ppp*

ppp *ppp* *ppp* *ppp*

ppp *ppp* *ppp* *ppp*

poco f *poco f* *poco f* *poco f*

dead stop

55

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc.

subito
p

subito
p

subito
p

subito
p



6

Var. 4 [Beethoven]

Fast, as in the second
movement of Beethoven's
Op. 111 piano sonata

♩ = 82

[in tempo]

60 *expressionless*

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc.

pp

pp

pp

pp

f

f

65

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc.

mf

f

mf

f

mf

Detailed description: This block contains the first system of a musical score, measures 65 through 68. It features four staves: Violin I (Vln I), Violin II (Vln II), Viola (Vla), and Violoncello (Vc.). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 9/32. Measure 65 shows Vln I and Vc. with a dynamic of *f*, while Vln II and Vla have a dynamic of *mf*. Measure 66 continues with similar dynamics. Measure 67 shows Vln I and Vc. with a dynamic of *mf*, and Vln II and Vla with a dynamic of *f*. Measure 68 is a whole rest for all instruments. The score includes various rhythmic values such as eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests.



68

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc.

mf

Detailed description: This block contains the second system of a musical score, measures 68 through 71. It features the same four staves as the first system. The key signature remains one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 18/32. Measure 68 shows Vln I and Vc. with a dynamic of *mf*, while Vln II and Vla have a dynamic of *f*. Measure 69 continues with similar dynamics. Measure 70 shows Vln I and Vc. with a dynamic of *mf*, and Vln II and Vla with a dynamic of *f*. Measure 71 is a whole rest for all instruments. The score includes various rhythmic values such as eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests.

70 7

Vln I *mf* *f*

Vln II *mf* *f*

Vla *mf* *f*

Vc. *mf* *f*



72

Vln I *p* *f*

Vln II *p* *f*

Vla *p* *f*

Vc. *p* *f*

74

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc.



76

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc.

ff

ff

ff

ff

27/64

8

Var. 5 [Elvis]

Warmly, flexibly, not quite like classical music

♩. = 38

78

Vln I *mf* *simply*

Vln II *p* *mf* *simply*

Vla *p* *mf*

Vc. *p* *mf*

(the dotted rhythm should be very relaxed; play the stresses like a rock & roll backbeat)



80

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc.

cantabile, like a doowop ballad

82

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc.

Detailed description: This system contains measures 82 and 83. The Vln I part features a melodic line with a long slur over measures 82-83. The Vln II part has a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes. The Vla part has a similar rhythmic accompaniment. The Vc. part has a bass line with eighth notes. Dynamics markings include *mf* and *f*. A double bar line is present between measures 82 and 83.



not too short

84

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc.

Detailed description: This system contains measures 84 and 85. The Vln I part has a melodic line with a slur over measures 84-85. The Vln II part has a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes. The Vla part has a similar rhythmic accompaniment. The Vc. part has a bass line with eighth notes. Dynamics markings include *mf* and *f*. A double bar line is present between measures 84 and 85.

86

9

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc.

poco

mp



88

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc.

soaring

10

Var. 6 [Mozart]

Allegro

♩ = 132

as Elvis would have sung it

very simply

90

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc.

poco

mp

f

pizz.

arco

"can't you see_ that to- night"



94

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc.

arco

104 **11**

rit. *A tempo*

Vln I *mf*

Vln II *p* *mf*

Vla *p* *mf*

Vc. *p* *mf*



107

Vln I *f*

Vln II *f*

Vla *f*

Vc. *f*

12

Var. 7 [Eric Rohmer]

Fast; like a cheesy French rock song
(but very straightforward, not mocking the music)

109 $\text{♩} = 132$

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc.

mf

mf

mf

mf

pizz.

mf



13

114

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc.

pp

pp

pp

pp

pizz.

arco

pp

pizz.

pp

118

Vln I *mf* *p*

Vln II *mf* *p* pizz. arco

Vla *mf* *p* arco

Vc *mf* *p* arco pizz.

122

Vln I *mf*

Vln II *mf* pizz. arco pizz.

Vla *mf* pizz. arco

Vc *mf* arco

14

**Var. 8 [Bach]
At the same tempo**

♩ = 132

126

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc.

mf

arco indicates melody

mf

mf

mf

15

A tempo, more slowly

♩ = 85

*as if from far away,
like a chorale*

**Freely,
like a cadenza**

rit. . . .

130

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc.

p

p

p

f

p

sul D

At the original fast tempo

135

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc.

mf

f

sempre f



Freely again

$\text{♩} = 85$

Fast, as before

$\text{♩} = 132$

139

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc.

mf

f

mf

f

mf

Suddenly slower

♩ = 55

Fast again

♩ = 132

16

142

again as if from far away

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc.

p

mf

f



Freely, but faster than the earlier free tempo

145

♩ = 108

poco rit.

A tempo, faster

accel.

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc.

f

17

Var. 9 [Schoenberg]

Brisk, in the tempo of Schoenberg's fourth string quartet

149 $\text{♩} = 132$

Vln I *f*

Vln II *f*

Vla *f*

Vc. *f*

N

153

Vln I *mf* pizz. 3 arco

Vln II *mf* pizz. 3 3

Vla *mf* 3

Vc. *mf*

H

18

Musical score for measures 156-157. The score is for four instruments: Vln I, Vln II, Vla, and Vc. Measure 156 starts with Vln I playing a half note (H) and a triplet of eighth notes (3) with a *pizz.* marking. Vln II plays a half note (H) with an *arco* marking. Vla plays a half note (H) with a *pizz.* marking. Vc plays a triplet of eighth notes (3) with a *p* marking. Measure 157 continues with Vln I playing a half note (H) and a triplet of eighth notes (3). Vln II plays a half note (H) with a *arco* marking. Vla plays a half note (H) with an *arco* marking. Vc plays a half note (H) with a *pizz.* marking.



rit.

Musical score for measures 158-159. The score is for four instruments: Vln I, Vln II, Vla, and Vc. Measure 158 starts with Vln I playing a half note (H) with a *pizz.* marking. Vln II plays a half note (H) with a *pizz.* marking. Vla plays a triplet of eighth notes (3) with a *pizz.* marking. Vc plays a triplet of eighth notes (3) with a *pp* marking. Measure 159 continues with Vln I playing a half note (H) with a *sul pont.* marking. Vln II plays a half note (H) with a *sul pont.* marking. Vla plays a half note (H) with a *sul pont.* marking. Vc plays a half note (H) with a *pp* marking.

in tempo

*breaking off,
for no reason*

175

arco *pp* *resuming* *p* pizz. *p*

Vln I

pizz. *pp* *p* arco

Vln II

Vla *pp* *p* arco

Vc. *pp* *p*



22

[Quick Toccata]

**Faster, in a
furious rush**

rit.

in tempo

$\text{♩} = 68$

181

arco *ff* *rit.* *in tempo*

Vln I

ff pizz. ₄

Vln II

ff pizz. ₄

Vla *ff* pizz. ₄

Vc. arco *ff* pizz. ₄

23

[Cadential Aria]

Slow, intense

♩ = 67

183 *D string* *accel.* *rit.* *accel.* *rit.*

Vln I *p* *very freely*

Vln II *arco* *p*

Vla *arco* *p*

Vc. *arco* *p*



24 Var. 12

Not too slowly, grinding

accel. *rit.* *A tempo* *rit.*

187 *G string* ♩ = 52

Vln I *p* *mf*

Vln II *p* *mf*

Vla *p* *mf*

Vc. *p* *mf*

191 **molto rit.** **A** tempo **poco rit.** **A tempo**

Vln I
mf

Vln II
mf

Vla
mf
intense

Vc.
mf



195 25

Vln I
p

Vln II
p

Vla
p

Vc.
p

201

follow the viola

5:3

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc.

freely

5:3



26

Var. 13 [Bellini]
Flowing, faster

207 *poco rit.* . . . ♩ = 51

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc.

mf

mf

mf

mf

210

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc.

Detailed description: This system contains measures 210, 211, and 212. The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#). The time signature is 6/8. The first violin part (Vln I) features a melodic line with slurs and accents. The second violin (Vln II) and viola (Vla) parts play a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The cello part (Vc.) provides a bass line with slurs. The score is divided into three measures by vertical bar lines. The first measure ends with a double bar line and repeat dots. The second measure ends with a double bar line and repeat dots. The third measure ends with a double bar line and repeat dots.



213

27

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc.

p

f

Detailed description: This system contains measures 213, 214, and 215. The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#). The time signature is 9/8. The first violin part (Vln I) features a melodic line with slurs and accents, starting with a piano (*p*) dynamic and ending with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The second violin (Vln II) and viola (Vla) parts play a steady eighth-note accompaniment, also starting with a piano (*p*) dynamic and ending with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The cello part (Vc.) provides a bass line with slurs and accents, starting with a piano (*p*) dynamic and ending with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The score is divided into three measures by vertical bar lines. The first measure ends with a double bar line and repeat dots. The second measure ends with a double bar line and repeat dots. The third measure ends with a double bar line and repeat dots.

...press forward... poco rit. A tempo (a little slower)

216

Vln I *mf*

Vln II *mf*

Vla *mf*

Vc. *mf*



28

Var. 14 [Antonioni]

Faster, but without excitement; very straightforward

poco rit. ♩ = 101

221

Vln I *pizz. freely*

Vln II *pizz. p* *arco pp*

Vla *pizz. p* *arco pp*

Vc. *pizz. p* *arco pp*

[dialogue from Antonioni's film *La notte*,
about rockets some boys are shooting off]

The first violinist -- playing the musical version of
this film dialogue -- should be very free with the
rhythm, without coordinating with the other players.
The tone can be as much like speech as like music.

Yes! They go really high. It's very pretty.

225

Vln I *pizz.* *arco* *pizz. arco* *pizz.*

"Si! Van no al - tis - si - ma. E mol - to bel - le." *pp*

Vln II

Vla

Vc.

229

Vln I *arco* *pizz. arco* *pizz. arco* *pizz.*

Don't worry about it.

freely

"Non pri - o - cu - pa - ti." *p*

Vln II

Vla *slide*

Vc.

29

233 *pizz. arco* *f* **Suddenly slower** $\text{♩} = 48$ *pizz.* *pp* *with the viola*

Vln I *f* *pp* 5

Vln II *f* *pp*

Vla *pizz. arco* *f* *subito pp* *very simply* *freely* 5

Vc. *f* *pizz.* *pp* *arco* *pizz. arco*



237 *with the viola* *arco* *ppp*

Vln I *ppp*

Vln II *pizz.* *arco* *poco*

Vla *very freely* *poco*

Vc. *pizz.* *arco* *poco*

Var. 15 [Fugue]

30

A little faster

♩ = 78

242

Musical score for measures 242-244. The score is in 4/4 time with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). It features four staves: Vln I, Vln II, Vla, and Vc. Vln I has a whole rest in measure 242 and 243, and a whole note in measure 244. Vln II has a half note in measure 242, a whole note in measure 243, and a whole note in measure 244. Vla has a half note in measure 242, a whole note in measure 243, and a whole note in measure 244. Vc has a half note in measure 242, a whole note in measure 243, and a whole note in measure 244. Dynamics include *pp* and *inaudible* for Vln II, and *p* for Vc. A double bar line is present at the end of measure 244.



245

Musical score for measures 245-248. The score is in 4/4 time with a key signature of one flat (F). It features four staves: Vln I, Vln II, Vla, and Vc. Vln I has whole rests in measures 245, 246, 247, and 248. Vln II has a half note in measure 245, a whole note in measure 246, and a whole note in measure 247. Vla has a half note in measure 245, a whole note in measure 246, and a whole note in measure 247. Vc has a half note in measure 245, a whole note in measure 246, and a whole note in measure 247. Dynamics include *nothing* for Vln II, and *p* for Vln II, Vla, and Vc. A double bar line is present at the end of measure 248.

249

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc.

p

31

252

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc.

256 **...pushing forward...** **...faster...**

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc.

||

260 **...pushing forward...** **...returning to tempo...** **molto rit.** **A tempo, slower rit.**

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc.

32

Var. 16 [The Minor Third Bird]

Very simply; a little faster

♩ = 73

265

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc.

pp

ppp

pp

269

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc.

poco

pp

poco

33

Var. 17 [Chorale Prelude]

A little faster

272 $\text{♩} = 91$

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc.

mf

mf

mf

Detailed description: This system contains measures 272 through 275. The music is in D major (two sharps) and 4/4 time. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 91. The first violin (Vln I) is silent. The second violin (Vln II) and viola (Vla) play a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes, starting with a half rest in the first measure. The first measure of the system (measure 272) is in 2/4 time. The second measure (measure 273) is in 4/4 time. The dynamic marking *mf* (mezzo-forte) is present for the Vln II, Vla, and Vc. parts.



276

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc.

Detailed description: This system contains measures 276 through 279. The music is in D major (two sharps) and 4/4 time. The first violin (Vln I) is silent. The second violin (Vln II) plays a melodic line with eighth notes and a half note. The viola (Vla) plays a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The first measure of the system (measure 276) is in 2/4 time. The second measure (measure 277) is in 4/4 time.

280

Vln I *mf*

Vln II

Vla

Vc.



285

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc.

34

289

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc.

Detailed description: This system of music covers measures 289 to 292. It features four staves: Violin I (Vln I), Violin II (Vln II), Viola (Vla), and Violoncello (Vc.). The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#), and the time signature is 3/4. The Vln I part begins with a measure rest, followed by a melodic line with slurs and accents. The Vln II part has a similar melodic line. The Vla part plays a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The Vc. part provides a bass line with some chordal textures. The system concludes with a double bar line.



293

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc.

Detailed description: This system of music covers measures 293 to 296. It features the same four staves as the previous system. The key signature remains two sharps (F# and C#), and the time signature is 3/4. The Vln I part continues with its melodic line, featuring slurs and accents. The Vln II part has a similar melodic line. The Vla part plays a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The Vc. part provides a bass line with some chordal textures. The system concludes with a double bar line.

297

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc.

35 Var. 18 [The Lulu Dance (Berg)]

Lightly, very rhythmic

$\text{♩} = 100$

301

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc.

p

pizz.

arco

pizz.

p

pizz.

arco

pizz.

p

pizz.

arco

pizz.



305

Vln I arco *f* *mp* *ff* pizz.

Vln II arco pizz. arco pizz. *f* *mp* *ff*

Vla pizz. arco *f* *mp* *ff* pizz.

Vc. arco pizz. arco *f* *mp* *ff* pizz.

[This small staff is only here to show the setting of the text from Proust (which jumps from instrument to instrument). The music on this staff isn't meant to be played or sung.]

36

Var. 19 [Proust]

$\text{♩} = 28$
molto rit.
p

Slowly

accel.

Long-temps je me suis cou-ché de bonne
For a long time, I went to bed early.

36

Var. 19 [Proust]

[Text under an instrumental staff shows that a player has the Proust melody, sometimes for a phrase, sometimes for only a single note. The player can imagine singing the melody.]

molto rit.

Slowly

accel.

308

arco

 $\text{♩} = 28$

pizz.

arco

Vln I

Vln II

Long temps...

Vla

...je me suis

cou-ché de bonne

Vc.

[The long variation that follows is a musical setting of the first six sentences of Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*, one of the landmarks of 20th century literature. It's the climax of this piece, and should be played slowly, but not too slowly; it should always move forward. The French text is of course not sung, though the players could play as if they were singing it, or reading it out loud. The entire variation should feel hushed, especially in relation to the rest of the piece. Parts of it might actually be louder than passages in other variations, but the feeling this variation should convey is of a hush that's never broken.]

311 *poco rit.* *A tempo* *poco rit.* *A tempo*

heu - re. Par - fois, à pei - ne ma bou - gie é - tein - te,
Sometimes, with my candle barely out,

311 *poco rit.* *A tempo* *poco rit.* *A tempo*

Vln I

Vln II *pizz.* *arco*

Vla

Vc. *pizz.* *arco*

heu - re. Par - fois, à pei - ne ma bou - gie é tein - - te,

314 *più p* *freely*

mes yeux _____ se fer - maient si _____ vi - te que je n'a - vais pas le
 my eyes _____ swould close so quickly s _____ that I didn't have time

314 *più p* pizz. arco

Vln I

314 *più p* pizz. arco

Vln II

314 *più p* *freely*

Vla

314 *più p* pizz. arco

Vc.

Detailed description of the musical score: The score is for page 44, measures 314-317. It features a vocal line at the top and four instrumental staves below: Violin I (Vln I), Violin II (Vln II), Viola (Vla), and Violoncello (Vc.). The vocal line is in French and English. The French lyrics are: 'mes yeux _____ se fer - maient si _____ vi - te que je n'a - vais pas le'. The English lyrics are: 'my eyes _____ swould close so quickly s _____ that I didn't have time'. The instrumental parts include dynamics like 'più p' and 'pizz. arco', and a complex time signature change from 5/8 to 3/8 to 5+4/16 to 3/8. The score is written in a single system with four staves.

317

A tempo **poco rit.** **A tempo, slower** **37**

pp

temps de me di - re : «Je m'en - dors.» Et, une de - mi - heure a -
 to say to myself, "I'm asleep." And half an hour later,

A tempo **poco rit.** **A tempo, slower** **37**

pizz. *arco* *radiant*

Vln I

pizz. *arco* *radiant*

Vln II

pizz. *arco* *radiant*

Vla

temps de me di - re : «Je m'en - dors.»...

pizz. *arco* *radiant*

Vc.

pp

...Et, une de - mi - heure a -

323

près, la pen - sée _____ qu'il é - tait temps de cher - cher le som -
 the thought that it was time s to go to sleep

323

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc.

près, la pen - sée _____ qu'il é - tait temps de cher - cher le som -

38

327 *poco rit.* *A tempo* *rit.*

meil m'é - veil - lait ; je vou - lais po - ser le vo -

would wake me; I'd want to put down the book

38

327 *poco rit.* *A tempo* *rit.*

Vln I *...vo-...*

Vln II *...je vou - lais po ser le...*

Vla

Vc. *meil m'é - veil lait ; ...*

331

A tempo, slower **rit.**

lu - me que je croy - ais a - voir en - core dans les
 that I'd think I still held in my hands

331

A tempo, slower **rit.**

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc.

...-lu - me que je croy - ais a - voir en - core dans les

ppp

ppp

ppp

ppp

334 **A tempo** **poco rit..**

mains et souffler ma lumière ;
and blow out my light;

334 **A tempo** **poco rit..**

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc.

ppp

ppp

mains...
...et souffler ma lumière ;...

39

A tempo, flexibly *pp* *poco rit.* *A tempo* *rit.*

337
 je n'a - vais pas ces - sé en dor - mant de faire des ré - fle - xi -
 I hadn't stopped, while I was asleep, turning over in my mind

39

A tempo, flexibly *pp* *poco rit.* *A tempo* *pizz.* *rit.*

337
 Vln I
 ...sé en dor - mant...
 Vln II
 ...je n'a - vais pas ces...
 Vla
 ...de faire des ré - fle - xi -
 Vc.
pp *pizz.*

A tempo **poco rit.** **A tempo**

341 *pp*

ons sur ce que je ve - nais de li - re,
the things I'd been reading about,

A tempo **poco rit.** **A tempo**

341 *pp* arco

Vln I

pp arco

Vln II

pp arco

Vla

ons sur ce que je ve - nais de li - re,

Vc. *pp* arco

molto accel. **A tempo, faster**
♩ = 41

345 *pp*

Mais ces ré - fle - xions a - vaient pris un tour un peu par ti - cu - lier ; il
But these thoughts would take an unusual turn;

molto accel. **A tempo, faster**
♩ = 41

345 *pizz.* *pp*

Vln I

Vln II *pizz.* *pp*

...un peu par - ti - cu - lier ; ...

Vla *pizz.* *pp*

Mais ces ré - fle -pris un tour... ..-lier ; ...

Vc. *pizz.* *pp* *arco* *pp*

...xions a - vaient... ..il

349 **40** *poco rit.* *A tempo* *molto rit.*

me sem - blait que j'é - tais moi mê - me ce dont par - lait l'ou - vra - ge :

it seemed to me that I myself had become whatever the book was talking about:

349 **40** *poco rit.* *A tempo* *molto rit.*

Vln I *mp* *arco* ...ce dont par - lait l'ou - vra - ge :...

Vln II *pp* *espress., detached* *arco* ...ce dont par - lait l'ou - vra - ge :...

Vla *pp* *espress., detached* *arco* ...ce dont par - lait l'ou - vra - ge :...

Vc. *espress.* ...ce dont par - lait l'ou - vra - ge :

me sem - blait que j'é - tais moi mê - me ce dont par - lait l'ou - vra - ge :

355

A tempo, slower again *p* *poco più f* **Faster** *pp* *detached* **accel.** **Slower** *ten.* **poco rit.**

une é - glise, un qua - tuor, la ri - va - li - té de Fran - çois Pre mie re et de Charles
a church, a quartet, the rivalry of Francois the First and Charles the Fifth.

355

A tempo, slower again *p* *poco più f* **Faster** *pp* *detached* **accel.** **Slower** *ten.* **poco rit.**

Vln I *p* *poco più f* *pp* *detached* *ten.*

Vln II *p* *poco più f* *pp* *detached* *ten.*

Vla *pizz. arco* *p* *sonorous* *poco più f* *pp* *detached* *7*

Vc. *pizz. arco* *p* *poco più f* *pp*

une é - glise, un qua - tuor, ... la ri - va - li - té de Fran - çois Pre - mie - re et de Charles
une é - glise, ...

41

A tempo, not too slowly
♩ = 47

361

Quint. Cette cro - yan - ce sur - vi -
This belief would persist

pp poco rit. A tempo

41

A tempo, not too slowly
♩ = 47

361

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc.

Quint...

...Cette cro - yan - ce...
...sur - vi -

pp poco rit. A tempo

366 *poco rit.*

vait pen - dant quel - ques se - condes à mon ré - veil :
for a few seconds after I awoke:

366 *poco rit.*

Vln I ...pen - dant...

Vln II vait...

Vla ...quel - ques se - condes... ...ré - veil :

Vc. vait... ...à mon...

370 **A tempo** *rit.*

el - - le ne cho - quit pas ma rai - son
it didn't come as any kind of shock to my mind

Vln I 370 **A tempo** *pizz.* *arco* *rit.*

...-quit pas ma...

Vln II

...-le ne cho - quit...

Vla *pizz.* *arco*

el-... ..rai - son

Vc.

42

A tempo

374 *pp* *rit.*

mais pe - sait com - me des é - cail - les sur mes
but would weigh like scales

42

A tempo

374 *pp* *rit.*

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc.

pp

...com - me des... ...les sur mes...

...mais pe - sait... ...é - cail...

A tempo **rit.** **A tempo**
pp

377
yeux et les em - pe - chait de se ren - dre
and would stop them from seeing

A tempo **rit.** **A tempo**
pp

377
...yeux et... ...pe...
...de se ren - dre

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc.

...chait...

379

rit. A tempo, more slowly push forward... A tempo rit.

com - pte que le bou - geoir n'é - tait pas al - lu - mé. that the candle was no longer lit.

Vln I rit. A tempo, more slowly push forward... A tempo rit.

com - pte que le bou - geoir n'é - tait... ...mé....

Vln II

Vla

Vc. pizz. arco ...al - lu...

43

A tempo,
very simply

♩ = 48

383

pp

Puis el - le com - men - çait à me de - ve -
Then everything would begin to become

43

A tempo,
very simply

♩ = 48

383

pp

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc.

pp

...Puis el - le...
...com - men - çait...
...à me de - ve -

386

rit. **A tempo** *stringendo.* **Very slowly**
pp *subito pp* ♩ = 50

nir in - in - te - li - gi - ble com - me a - près le mé - tem - psy -
 unintelligible to me like, after a reincarnation,

386 *rit.* **A tempo** *stringenda* **Very slowly**
pp *subito pp* ♩ = 50

Vln I ...gi - ble... *pizz.* *arco* *subito pp* *pizz.* *arco*

Vln II *pizz.* *arco* *subito pp* *pizz.* *arco*
 ...le mé...

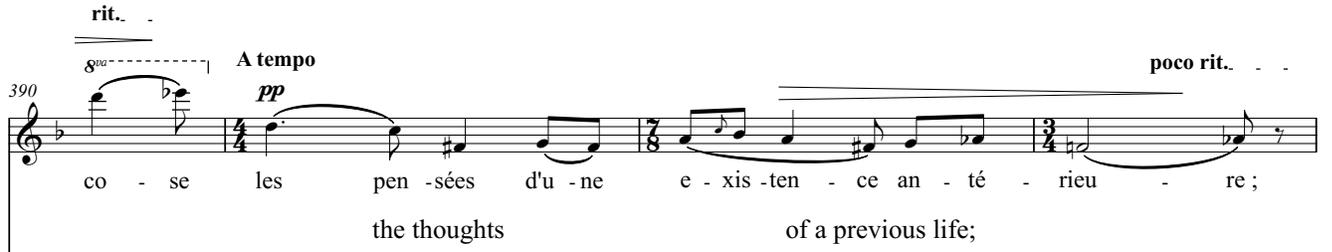
Vla *pizz.* *arco* *subito pp* *pizz.* *arco*
 ...in - in - tel - li-... ...-psy-...

Vc. *pizz.* *arco* *subito pp*
 nir...com - me a - près... ...-tem-...

Detailed description: This is a page of a musical score, page 62, starting at measure 386. It features a vocal line at the top and four string staves (Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Violoncello) below. The vocal line includes lyrics in French and English. The string parts are marked with various dynamics (pp, subito pp) and articulations (pizzicato, arco). The score is divided into four measures, each with a different time signature: 2/4, 3/8, 7/8, and 3/8. Performance markings include 'rit.' (ritardando), 'A tempo', 'stringendo', and 'Very slowly'. A tempo marking of ♩ = 50 is present. The lyrics are: 'nir in - in - te - li - gi - ble com - me a - près le mé - tem - psy - unintelligible to me like, after a reincarnation,'. The string parts have lyrics: Vln I: '...gi - ble...'; Vln II: '...le mé...'; Vla: '...in - in - tel - li-... ...-psy-...'; Vc.: 'nir...com - me a - près... ...-tem-...'.

rit. . .

390 *pp* **A tempo** *poco rit.* . . .



co - se les pen - sées d'u - ne e - xis - ten - ce an - té - rieu - re ;
the thoughts of a previous life;

rit. . .

390 *pp* **A tempo** *poco rit.*

Vln I pizz. arco pizz. arco pizz. arco pizz

Vln II pizz. arco pizz. arco pizz. arco pizz

Vla *pp* arco pizz.

Vc. *pp*

...co-...
...se...
...les pen - sées...
...d'u - ne e - xis - ten - ce...
...an - té-...
...re ; ...



44

A tempo *p* *poco* *rit.* *poco* **A tempo**

le su - jet de liv - re se dé - ta - chait de moi, j'é - tais li - bre de m'y
 the subject of the book would detach itself from me, I'd be free

44

A tempo *p* *poco* *rit.* *poco* **A tempo**

arco

Vln I *p* *poco* *poco* *poco*

Vln II *p* *poco* *poco*

Vla *p* *poco* *poco* *poco*

Vc. *p* *poco* *poco*

...le su - jet... ...dé - ta... ...j'é - tais li -de m'y
 ...se ...-chait de moi, ...
 ...de liv - re... ...-bre de m'y...

399 *poco rit.* . . . *A tempo, very lightly* *pp* *Much more slowly* $\text{♩} = 36$ *accel.* . . .

ap - pli - quer ou non ; aus - si - tot je re - cou - vrais le vue et
to link it to myself or not; all at once I'd recover my sight and

399 *poco rit.* . . . *A tempo, very lightly* *pp* *Much more slowly* $\text{♩} = 36$ *accel.* . . .

Vln I *pizz.* *arco* *pizz.* *arco*

Vln II *pizz.* *arco*

Vla *pp*

Vc. *pizz.* *arco* *pp*

...ap - pli - quer ou... ...re-...
...-quer ou non ; aus - si - tot je re-... ...le vue et...
...-cou-....vrais...

402

rit. . . . *freely poco accel.* . . . *poco rit.* . . .

pp *dreamily*

j'é - tais bien é-ton - né - e de trouver au tour de moi une ob -scu - ri -
 I'd be quite astonished to find darkness all around me,

402

rit. . . . *freely poco accel.* . . . *poco rit.* . . .

pizz. arco *ppp*

Vln I

pizz. arco *pp* *dreamily*

Vln II

pizz. arco *pp* *dreamily*

Vla

pizz. arco *pp* *dreamily*

Vc.

pizz. arco *pp*

...j'é - tais bien é ton-...
 ...de trouver...
 ...moi ob scu - ri -
 ...au tour de...
 ...ob scu - ri...

...j'é - tais...
 ...-né - e de...

45

A little faster, flowing

♩ = 53

pp *dolciss.* *poco rit.* *subito ppp* *Very slowly* *A tempo* *pp*

té, dou - - ce et re - po - san - te pour mes yeux, mais peut
sweet and restful to my eyes

45

A little faster, flowing

♩ = 53

pp *dolciss.* *poco rit.* *subito ppp* *Very slowly* *A tempo*

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc.

pp *dolciss.* *poco* *subito ppp* *pp* *pp*

té dou ce et re - po - san - te pour mes...
...mais peut-
...yeux,...

409

rit. *pp* **A tempo** ♩ = 48 *pp* *very simply* **accel.** **poco rit.**

ét - re plus en - co - re pour mon - es - prit à qui el - le ap pa - rais
perhaps even more for my mind to which it seemed

409

rit. **A tempo** ♩ = 48 *pp* *very simply* **accel.** **poco rit.**
pizz. arco

Vln I *pp* *pp* ...à qui el - le ap...

Vln II *pp* *pp* ...plus en... arco *pp* ...-pa - rais

Vla *pp* *pp* ...-ét - re... arco *pp* ...pour mon es...

Vc. *pp* *pp* ...-co - re... pizz. arco *pp* ...-prit,...

46

413 *accel.* *rit.* **A tempo**
pp

sait com - me u - ne cho - se sans cause, in - com - pré - hen
 like something without any cause, incomprehensible,

46

413 *accel.* *rit.* **A tempo**
pp

Vln I *pizz.* *arco*
 ...-sait... ...-ne... ...-pré hen...

Vln II *pizz.* *arco*
 ...u... ...in - com-...

Vla
 ...com - me... ...cho - se...
pp

Vc.
 ...sans cause,...
pp

418 *poco rit.* **A tempo** *poco* **poco rit.**

si - ble, com - me u - ne chose vrai - ment ob - scu - re.
like something truly dark.

418 *poco rit.* **A tempo** *poco* **poco rit.**

Vln I ...-ble,... ...chose vrai - ment...

Vln II ...si-... com - me u - ne... ...ob - scu - re.

Vla *poco*

Vc. *poco*

47

Var. 20 [Sheep on the Hillside]

A little faster, very factually;
no expression needed

421 ♩ = 56

Vln I pizz. *pp*

Vln II pizz. *pp*

Vla pizz. *pp*

Vc. pizz. *pp*



48

427

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc.

49

molto accel.

A tempo

434

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc.



50

Var. 21 [John Cage]

Commodo

*The exact length of this silence is
up to the players. But it should
last a minute or more. Resist all
temptation to make it too short!*

440

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc.

51 Var. 22 [Mahler]

Very slowly

♩ = 45

Musical score for measures 462-466. The score is for four instruments: Vln I, Vln II, Vla, and Vc. The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#) and the time signature is 3/4. The tempo is 'Very slowly' with a metronome marking of ♩ = 45. The dynamics are marked *pp* for Vln I, Vln II, and Vla, and *pppp* for Vc. The Vln II part has a long note with the marking *aching*. The Vln I part has a long note with the marking *pp*. The Vla part has a long note with the marking *pp*. The Vc part has a long note with the marking *pp*. The score is written in arco.

Musical score for measures 467-470. The score is for four instruments: Vln I, Vln II, Vla, and Vc. The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#) and the time signature is 3/4. The dynamics are marked *pp* for Vln I, Vln II, and Vla, and *pp* for Vc. The Vln II part has a long note with the marking *just a little*. The Vln I part has a long note with the marking *pp*. The Vla part has a long note with the marking *pp*. The Vc part has a long note with the marking *pp*. The score is written in arco. A double bar line is present at the beginning of the system. A box containing the number **52** is located above the Vln I staff in measure 470.

471 **molto stringendo** **returning to tempo.**

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc.

53

476 **Push forward just a little...**

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc.

poco rit. **Freely, a little faster** *returning to tempo...*

481

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc.



486

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc.

pizz.

with the first violin

pizz.

almost inaudible

54**[Coda]**

A tempo, slowly as before,
with slight hesitations

491 *inaudible*

Vln I *pizz.*
pp

Vln II *arco*
ppp

Vla *(pizz.)*
pp *arco*
tr

Vc.



495

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc. *just a wisp*
arco *pizz.*
pp

[in tempo]

very sadly

499

inaudible

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc.

arco

ppp

New York, Corn Close UK,
Warwick NY, Roswell NM
1998-2004

small tweaks and changes,
Washington DC, 2024

Rehearsal Notes

Variation 7 [Elvis]:

In the score, you'll see the melody in the first violin, and in the other instruments a pulsating rhythm, with notes on the offbeats stressed. At the start I write, "play the stressed notes like a rock & roll backbeat."

Here's what that means. At least in my experience, not every classical musician — with no blame to them — knows what a backbeat is. And even people comfortable with current pop may not know how a backbeat feels in rock & roll from the 1950s, which is what this variation should sound like.

So, basically, a backbeat is the stress on offbeats that's found in jazz and rock and just about all pop music since the emergence of rock & roll in the 1950s. (And which came into western music from African rhythms, brought to America by enslaved Africans, though that's a larger story.)

Most of us know it's there. If we clap our hands with the strong beats of a classical piece in 4/4 time, we'll clap on one and three. But in jazz or pop we'd clap on two and four, because the rhythm dances over, under, and around what we in classical music think of as the strong beats.

In current pop, the backbeat lives inside more complex rhythms, but in 1950s rock it's easily heard, often strongly played by the drummer, underlying all the other rhythms in a song.

So that's what you should feel when you play this variation — the backbeat emphasized (though not too strongly), forming the heart of the rhythm, from which everything else grows. In the score, as I said, I marked stresses on the backbeats, but you shouldn't take those too literally. I could have left them out, and simply written "play this with a rock & roll beat."

Two more things. The sense of ensemble in rock & roll isn't what we're used to in classical music. In classical music, someone with a melody might play with *rubato*, pushing the tempo or holding it back, and everyone else follows. In rock & roll (and all other music with a backbeat), the tempo always is steady, pushed by the rhythm. The musician with the melody (in rock & roll usually a singer) can play with the beat, dancing ahead or relaxing behind, but always coming back to where everyone else is.

That's how you should play this variation, though maybe — because in the end this really *is* classical music — the first violinist shouldn't mess with the rhythm too much. But they shouldn't play with classical music *rubato*.

(As a historical note, *rubato* in at least the first half of the 19th century, especially in Italian opera, worked the way it does now in rock & roll, and in fact that's what they meant by the word. The accompaniment never changed tempo, but the player or singer with the melody could get ahead or behind. One notated example I've seen, showing what the tenor who sang in the *Barber of Seville* premiere sang in a duet from that opera, is astonishing. But that's another story.)

Second, if you don't know these old 1950s rock & roll songs (which I grew up with), you can listen to some, to see how the music feels. You could start with an Elvis song, "I Was the One," not one of his most famous, but I love it, and think it has something like the beat and flow (and melodic embellishments) of my Elvis variation. You can find it [on YouTube](#), where you'll also get a fabulous slide show of Elvis photos. Or if you just want the music, [here's the song on Spotify](#).

Or try some other 1950s classics, songs I've loved ever since junior high school (as we called middle school back then). Like "Earth Angel," by the Penguins (you can hear it on [YouTube](#) or [Spotify](#); we used to dance to it, so erotic for 12 year-olds, with the lights out).

And, even better, "In the Still of the Night," by the Five Satins, who in 1956 went to the basement of a Catholic church in New Haven to make what became a classic record. Here I'd suggest listening from the backbeat upwards, so you can hear how it comes to marvelous life, with the drummer taking control, and shaping the rhythm of the lead singer, and (with a quiet snap) especially what the backup singers do. (On [Spotify](#), and [wonderful on YouTube](#), where you can see the group lipsyncing to the record, from a 1950s movie, with the backup singers marking the backbeat with their movements. The group is so sweetly innocent, wearing suits and ties; amazing that some people back then thought this music was barbaric, and would bring civilization crashing down. One last historical note: the group was called the Five Satins, but, for whatever reason, there are only four of them in the video.)

Variation 14 [Antonioni]:

This starts with a rhythmic tune, which sounds like light music from another era. And in fact it's based on exactly that, on a light and bouncy tune playing on the radio in a scene from Michelangelo Antonioni's 1961 film *La notte*, while an unhappy woman makes a phone call.

I could add that Antonioni has been my favorite art film director, and, ever since I was in college, one of my artistic passions. But that's another story. What's tricky at the start of this variation is that, while the second violin, viola, and cello play the bouncy tune, sometimes the first violin plays something unrelated, something that doesn't really sound like organized music. With irregular rhythms, pitches that don't fit any scale, and constant alternations of *arco* and *pizz*.

Plus, these intrusions have Italian words, as if the first violin was singing.

Here's what's going on. The unhappy woman in the film — the main character — has just had a rare happy moment, watching young men shoot rockets high in the sky. She wants to tell her husband about it, and goes to a nearby cafe (really just a few tables sitting outdoors) to phone him. In the quartet, the first violin plays some of what she says, while the other instruments play the tune on the radio. (Of course the violinist doesn't sing the words; they're only there to show where the first violin part comes from, and how it should flow.)

The music for the phone call, in the first violin, should sound more like speech than music. I might suggest learning the tune first, playing it without the phone call passages, with the first violinist silent except where they join in the tune. Then add the music for the phone call. It's marked to be played more softly than the tune, so the tune won't get lost, but still it should be shaped with a quietly decisive attack, so it softly stands out.

This is the first part of the variation. In the second part, the instruments come together, in music meant to evoke moments in the film when the woman walks, alone and feeling lost, through mostly empty streets in Milan.

Variation 19 [Proust]:

Here also I've set to music words the quartet doesn't sing — the first five sentences, in French, of Marcel Proust's novel *À la recherche du temps perdu* ("In Search of Lost Time"), one of the great masterworks of 20th century literature, and for many years another of my deep artistic passions.

The words are set to a melody that unfolds very slowly, with constant small changes in tempo, and which shifts from instrument to instrument, sometimes staying with one of the players only for a single note.

This variation is very long, fully one-fourth the length of the entire quartet. To begin learning it, I could suggest first playing only the melody, which I've added in an *ossia* staff to the score and the parts. Each instrument would of course play in whatever register works best, dropping down an octave if that's ever needed (I'm thinking of the cello, in places where the melody goes way above the treble staff).

Once you've learned the melody, you've understood the heart of the variation, and maybe then it's easier to fit the instruments together.

Further suggestions, not just for getting to know this music, but for playing it when you know it well:

If you find it hard to keep the music moving at the slow tempo I've indicated, speed it up a hair. I'd rather have it go a bit faster than I imagined it, than have it drag, or move so slowly that the music loses its shape.

My dynamic markings may be too soft, with too much *pp*. Maybe I got carried away by my wish to keep the whole variation hushed, or anyway more hushed, as a whole, than the rest of the piece. There's a note about that in the score. I'd suggest interpreting the dynamic markings with at least a little freedom, in a way that feels right to you.