“Theme and Variations”
for concert band

Band Director Teaching and Rehearsal Notes

“Theme and Variations,” a Grade 2, features easy instrument ranges and pleasing contrast among the variations. The duration is about 2:20.

“Theme and Variations” begins with an eight-measure chorale-like theme followed by five variations. The theme is played mezzo forte. The piece then builds in intensity from the first variation’s mezzo-piano dynamic to a last variation’s double-forte finish. “Theme and Variations” provides ample opportunities to teach lessons in intonation, soli and ensemble playing, blending, phrasing, maintaining a steady tempo, observing dynamics, playing contrasting legato and staccato passages, and easy key changes (the beginning key of E♭ Major to B♭ Major at measure 21 and B♭ Major to F Major at measure 37).

Measures 1-8. Tutti legato chorale-like main theme. Be sure to begin the piece at mezzo forte, not too loudly, and be sure the players don’t begin too tentatively. Observe the slurs and breath marks to ensure a legato quality and pleasing phrasing.

Measures 9-16. First variation. Low brasses and low woodwinds play the theme in unison, harmonized by a contrasting light, staccato accompaniment. Watch intonation here. Rehearse for careful counting to ensure the players’ correct entrances.

Measures 17-20. Transition to the second variation. Bring out the clarinets’ chalumeau-register notes, and hold back the tempo greatly for the assai riten. and during the crescendo in measures 19-20.

Measures 21-28. Second variation. This variation is a little faster in a distinct cha-cha style. Play up the Latin dance mood by keeping the staccato notes light and by bringing out the guiro and maracas parts.

Measures 29-36. Third variation. The ride cymbal, snare drum, and bass drum parts define the light-rock feel. Bring out the main theme in the bassoon, tenor saxophone, horn, trombone, and baritone/euphonium parts. Trumpets exchange a flowing two-measure accompaniment with flute, oboe, clarinets, alto saxophone, and bells. Balance this accompaniment.

Measures 37-44. Fourth variation. Low brass and low woodwinds play the melody with some embellishments. Flute, oboe, clarinets, and xylophone play a light rhythmic, staccato accompaniment, while other instruments play harmony. Keep the staccato eighth notes light, and maintain a steady tempo.

Measures 45-end. This fifth and last variation includes the chorale-like theme with easy syncopation, fresh harmony, and a brighter tempo. Flute, oboe, clarinet 1, alto saxophone, trumpet 1, and bells play the theme with embellishments. The theme’s last four measures repeat, signaling the end, and then the piece closes with a double-forte finish. Even though the last variation’s tempo is a little faster, be sure not to rush, and carefully observe the assai riten. at measure 55.

“Theme and Variations” will enrich any concert program, and players and audiences will enjoy the fresh harmonies and variations’ changing musical qualities.
Theme and Variations
for concert band

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greatly held back

Second Variation

Cha-Cha! \( \text{-tempo} = 110 \)

Fl.

1

Oboe, Opt. Fl. 2

2

Cls.

B. Cl.

A. Sx.

T. Sx.

B. Sx.

1

Tpts.

2

Horn

Tbn., Euph., Bsn.

Tuba

Bls., Xyl.

Snare Drum, Guiro

Bass Drum


Meas., Tri., Ride Cym.