

*Diverse Variations on A-C-P*  
**for Oboe, Violin, Viola, 'Cello, and Piano (2009-2010)**  
**Jon Jeffrey Grier**

The three movements of *Diverse Variations* are all based on the notes A-C-B, the “B” serving as a stand-in for the letter “P.” The “B” is derived by going through the musical alphabet of 7 notes (i.e. letters) two times, plus one more A and B, so that this last B lands on the 16<sup>th</sup> letter of the English alphabet, P. This little pattern is the essential DNA of the entire work. Virtually all melodic and harmonic material is somehow generated from it, and it makes possible a whole that is at once highly variable and intensely unified.

The A-C-B pattern is manipulated in various ways to take each of the movements through a similar sequence of melodic and harmonic flavors: octatonic (a fairly tense quality) at the start, whole tone (vague, static) in the middle, and lydian mode (bright, essentially major) toward the end. These contrasts are most obvious in the second movement, which quickly reviews the sequence in its coda. Each movement recycles its introduction in the coda; this material is shared between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> movements. In keeping with the spirit of the Rapido! Competition, each movement is an adaptation of a classical form.

**I. Introduction and Canonic Variations** At the opening the A-C-B(P) motive is morphed into the famous B-A-C-H motive (B flat-A-C-B natural), announcing that this movement will rely on that classic contrapuntal device, the canon—essentially a sophisticated round. After a frantic introduction obsessing with this and the A-C-B motive, a varied series of canons in slow tempo unfolds, each featuring a different length of delay between the parts and a different pair of instruments.

**II. Theme and Rapid Variations** This movement mimics a classical theme and variations movement, following the typical pattern of a relatively bold theme, in binary form, followed by more elaborate variations (three, in this case) that each adhere to the binary form. Here, the slow tempo theme is reprised in the coda. This movement was the one first composed as my entry in the Rapido! Competition.

**III. Lyric Variations, Interrupted** This movement is a rondo, a form commonly employed in final movements of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. After a frantic re-working of the intro from the 1<sup>st</sup> movement, a bold and not at all lyrical unison statement is heard. This is a gesture that will return three more times (i.e. a *ritornello*), each time varied and interrupting a series of relatively lyrical solos. Each solo features a different instrument, with a second “helper” instrument providing counterpoint. The oboe, in a briefly slower tempo, gets the last and most lyrical passage of all, as it does in the other movements. The conclusion returns to its introduction, this time in the brighter lydian mode and progressing rapidly through the keys of A, C, and B.

Though there is no descriptive or narrative program behind any of this music, it does honor the ongoing work of the Atlanta Chamber Players by embracing a mix of the old and the new, in a shifting variety of moods, in chamber music scoring in which every player is vital. It is dedicated to them in deepest gratitude.