





**Passacaglia in G minor, “Guardian Angel”  
from *Rosenkranz Sonaten*  
Heinrich Ignaz Franz von Biber (1644-1704)**

*Composed around 1674.*

Heinrich Ignaz Franz von Biber, one of old Germany’s most brilliant musical lights, was born into the family of a forester at Wartenberg, Bohemia on August 12, 1644. Little is known of his musical training, but he had made a sufficient name for himself as a composer and violinist by 1668 to be appointed to the staff of the country estate at Kroměříž of Count Karl Liechtenstein-Kastelkorn, Prince-Bishop of Olmütz. Biber bolted from the Count’s service for unknown reasons in the autumn of 1670, closely followed by a warrant for his arrest. He holed up at Absam, near Innsbruck, with the violin maker Jacob Stainer and found a new position at the Salzburg court of Archbishop Maximilian Gandolph in 1672. He married there, and rose steadily through the ranks of the archiepiscopal music establishment — Cathedral Choir Director in 1677, Vice-Kapellmeister in 1679, Kapellmeister and Dean of the choir school in 1684; he was ennobled by Emperor Leopold in 1690. During

this ascendancy, Biber patched up relations with Count Karl in Kroměříž sufficiently to send him copies of all of his works. When Biber died, in Salzburg on May 3, 1704, he was acknowledged throughout the German-speaking lands as the greatest violinist of his time and one of the day’s most distinctive and original composers. The veneration of the Virgin Mary traces back almost to the establishment of Christianity itself. Biber apparently began his *Rosenkranz (Rosary or Mystery) Sonatas* inspired by the life of Mary soon after arriving in Salzburg in 1672, probably with the intent of performing them at the services in October that the Marian Confraternity held in the *Aula Academica (Academic Hall)* of Salzburg University. There are fifteen *Mystery Sonatas* for violin and continuo and a concluding Passacaglia (variations on a repeating chord pattern) for unaccompanied violin. The Passacaglia is built on 65 repetitions of a four-note, descending phrase. The movement’s somber mood recalls the Crucifixion that culminates *The Sorrowful Mysteries* at the heart of the cycle, but its steadfast structural solidity suggests the eternal trust that the believer, represented by the child in the Salzburg fresco, has in the Guardian Angel leading him by the hand.

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## Trio for Violin, Horn and Piano, “Hommage à Brahms” György Ligeti (1923-2006)

*Composed in 1982.*

*Premiered on August 7, 1982 in Hamburg by violinist Saschko Gawriloff,  
hornist Hermann Baumann and pianist Eckart Besch.*

György Ligeti, one of music’s greatest modern masters, was born on May 28, 1923 to a Jewish family in the then-Hungarian province of Transylvania. He studied composition at the conservatory in his boyhood home of Kolozsvár during the early years of World War II, when he also managed to take some private lessons in Budapest with the noted Hungarian pianist and composer Pál Kadosa. In 1944, however, Ligeti, with many other Jews, was pressed by the Nazis into forced labor in dangerous situations, including working in a munitions dump just in front of the Russian advance. After the war, Ligeti continued his studies at the Budapest Academy of Music. He pursued field research in Romanian folk music for a short time following his graduation in 1949, but returned to the Budapest Academy a year later, when he was appointed professor of harmony, counterpoint and analysis. He fled Hungary in the wake of the

Russian occupation of 1956 and settled in Vienna, where he met several important figures of the musical avant-garde, most notably Karlheinz Stockhausen; Ligeti became a naturalized Austrian citizen in 1967. In 1957, he was invited to work at the West German Radio in Cologne, where he again took up several modernistic compositions in daring idioms that he had been forced to put aside because of the repressive political situation in Hungary. He achieved his first wide recognition when his *Apparitions* was performed at the International Society for Contemporary Music Festival in Cologne in 1960. Ligeti continued to compose prolifically while teaching at the Darmstadt Contemporary Music Summer Courses, Stockholm Academy of Music, Stanford University, Berkshire Music Center at Tanglewood and Hamburg Musikhochschule. He was elected to membership in the Royal Swedish Academy of Music, West Berlin Academy of Arts, and Hamburg Free Academy of Arts, and received the Bach Prize of the City of Hamburg and the German decoration *Pour le mérite*. He died in Vienna on June 12, 2006.

Ligeti’s works include compositions for orchestra, voices, chamber ensembles, organ, piano, theater, electronics (though his music after 1958 was written only for live performance) and one experimental piece for 100 metronomes. He achieved his widest audience when Stanley Kubrick used excerpts from his *Lux aeterna*, *Requiem* and *Atmosphères* to stunning effect in his 1968 film *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Ligeti’s music ranges in style from his early flirtations with folk music, Bartók and post-Webern serialism, through the meter-less, blurred chromatic “clouds” of soft, densely packed chords of *Lux aeterna* and *Atmosphères* and the minimalistic repetitions of several ostinato-based works of the 1960s and 1970s, to the more traditional pieces of his later years, which incorporate the influence of non-European music while re-embracing his Hungarian heritage.

Ligeti’s Trio for Violin, Horn and Piano of 1982, inscribed as an “Hommage à Brahms,” bears in common with that composer’s Op. 40 Trio its scoring, its spaciousness of temporal scale, its clarity of structure, and its sharply defined characters for the individual instruments rather than any specific thematic quotation. The opening movement consists of three separate streams of music — violin, horn and piano — flowing independently one beside the other. Though the instruments’ rhythmic interaction seems almost random, it is actually so precisely notated that, rather than performing from parts, the players are each provided with a full score so that they can better coordinate their ensemble. A brief passage in (mostly) unanimous rhythms marks the movement’s mid-point before

the triple-stream of the opening section recommences. Of the buoyant and joyous *Vivacissimo*, the Trio's scherzo, Ligeti noted, "It is a dance inspired by various kinds of folk music from non-existent peoples; as if Hungary, Romania and all the Balkan countries lay somewhere between Africa and the Caribbean." The third movement is a cockeyed *March* in which violin and piano, moving to apparently different drummers, create an atmosphere mid-way between slapstick and surrealism. The horn joins in for a flowing central trio in triple meter that has dropped from some utterly alien expressive universe. The nearly static closing movement, *Lament*, is built from the chromatically falling melodic figures that have been associated with the expression of pathos since the age of the Renaissance. "Never before," wrote Josef Häusler, former director of the Donaueschingen Contemporary Music Festival in Germany, "has Ligeti so uninhibitedly conveyed grief, pain and resignation."

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## **Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Handel, Op. 24 Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)**

*Arranged by Roman Rabinovich for Flute, Clarinet, Horn,  
Bassoon, Two Violins, Viola, Cello and Double Bass*

*Composed in 1861.*

*Premiered in November 1861 in Hamburg by the composer.*

It was upon his skill as a pianist and composer for piano that Brahms' early reputation was founded. As a teenager in Hamburg, he studied the classics of the keyboard literature with Eduard Marxsen (the city's most illustrious piano teacher and a musician whose excellent taste and thorough discipline helped form his student's elevated view of the art), but was at the same time forced to earn money for the always-pinched household budget by playing in what were euphemistically called "dance halls" in the rough dock district, work he began when he was just thirteen. He gave his first public recital in September 1848, when he was fifteen (significantly, the program included a fugue by Bach), and a year later presented a second concert that featured another selection by Bach and Beethoven's "Waldstein" Sonata. In 1850, he met the violinist

Eduard Reményi, who had been driven to Hamburg by the civil uprisings in Hungary in 1848, and three years later they undertook a concert tour through Germany, a venture that not only allowed Brahms to extricate himself from the waterfront taverns, but also to meet Joseph Joachim, who, at 22, only two years his senior, was already regarded as one of the leading violinists of Europe. Joachim introduced him to Robert and Clara Schumann, who were overwhelmed by Brahms' talent when he played them some of his own compositions, including his first published works — the C major (Op. 1) and F-sharp minor (Op. 2) Piano Sonatas. It was because of the Schumanns' encouragement that he began his First Piano Concerto in 1854; Brahms was soloist in the work's premiere on January 22, 1859 in Hanover.

One of the pieces Brahms wrote for his tours through northern Europe during the next decade was the splendid *Variations and Fugue on a Theme* by Handel of 1861. Though published without a dedication, the work was composed as a birthday tribute to his dear friend Clara Schumann, who wrote in her diary after visiting Brahms at his home just outside Hamburg in November 1861, "Interesting talk with Johannes on form. How is it the older masters are perfect in their use of form while modern composers are confined within the most rigid small forms? He, himself, emulates the older masters, and especially admires Clementi's large, free employment of form." The *Handel Variations* exemplifies Brahms' interest in the grand formal gesture, which he here informed with his strict control of motivic development, his supple but rigorous exercise of formal structure, and his rich harmonic palette. Though composed when he was only 28, the work testifies to Brahms' mastery of the traditional modes and forms of musical expression, and even excited the admiration of Richard Wagner when the two met at the redoubtable Richard's villa in the Viennese suburb of Penzing on February 6, 1864. After Brahms played the *Handel Variations* for him, Wagner stated: "It shows what still can be done with the old forms by somebody who knows how to handle them."

Brahms borrowed the theme for this work from Handel's Suite in B-flat major, which in its original version, published in 1733, served as the basis of a set of five variations. The theme and the first variation pay homage to the 18th-century style of their model, but then veer into Brahms' world of Romanticism while preserving the sixteen-measure, two-part structure of the original melody. The 25 variations encompass a wide range of styles, expressive moods and pianistic hues before they are capped by a stupendous fugue in four voices whose subject is freely based

on the opening notes of the theme. The *Handel Variations* has often been compared to Bach's *Goldberg Variations* and Beethoven's *Diabelli Variations* in its scope and achievement and drew the following praise from Brahms' biographer Richard Specht: "The *Handel Variations*, in its purely pianistic problems, in the powerful and healthy concision of variants resembling a series of portraits by old masters, in its sonority and manifold architecture, surpasses even the boldest of Beethoven's works in the form."

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