AOSA
American Orff-Schulwerk Association

2019 The Orff Instrumentarium, the Majesty and the Mystique, Part 1

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Theme and Variations

A great way to combine timbres and showcase the Orff instrumentarium, theme and variations can be a wonderful way to provide music for a program, a story, or to just demonstrate the beauty of the Orff Instruments.

Jos Wuytack often composed variations on a theme to show some of the multitude of orchestration possibilities with the Orff instrumentarium. He called this "Orchestration per Contrastem." He simply meant that contrasting orchestrations could be built on a theme by manipulating the elements of music (melody, rhythm, meter, timbre, and form) to create thematically similar pieces.

The three types of variations are Ornamental, Contrapuntal, and Character. The type of variations that Wuytack used for most of his examples and the one that is the most child-friendly is the Character Variation. With Character Variations, subtle and not so subtle adjustments can be made to the theme in all of the basic elements, Melody, Rhythm, Timbre, Harmony, and Form. The examples that follow are character variations and serve as a review of some of the of the orchestration practices in functional harmony possible with the Orff instrumentarium. Each piece is based on a melodic fragment, a stylistic rhythm, a new meter, a unique orchestration or a new harmonization resulting in the original theme taking on a unique character. The following list is a useful guideline for developing Theme and Variations.

Melody

- √ Use a melodic figure or motif from the theme.
- √ Embellish the melody with ornamentation .
- √ Change the mode or the key.
- √ Use techniques of counterpoint; imitation, repetition, contrary motion.

Rhythm

- √ Change the meter; change mixed or odd meter; change from duple to triple or the reverse.
- √ Use a rhythmic figure or motif from the theme.
- √ Use a stylistic rhythm; blues, swing, old time, a renaissance dance rhythm like pavane or sarabande.

Timbre

- √ Change the orchestration to highlight a contrasting timbre.
- √ Change the register from high to low or the reverse.
- √ Spread the melody into different instruments.
- √ Explore and exploit dynamic and expressive contrasts.

Harmony

- √ Use different harmonizations.
- √ Use elemental techniques including paraphony, diaphony, or canon.

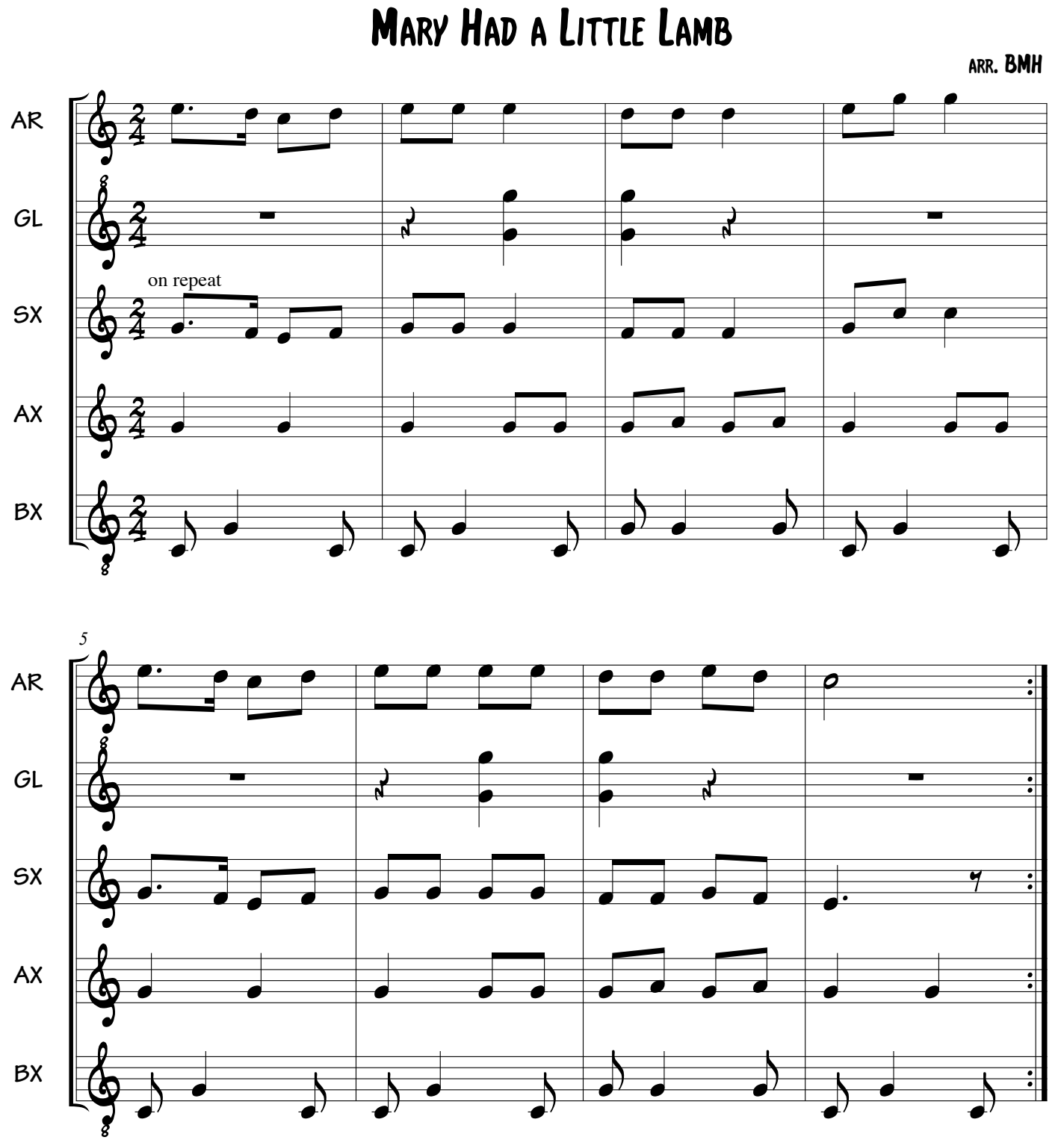
Form

- √ Develop a motif from the theme.
- √ Change the song form (A, AB, ABA, ABC)
- √ Use and extended form like the Rondo or the Sonatina.

Theme and Variations on Mary Had a Little Lamb. (Children's Song, arr.BMH)

Theme

This is a classic I-V orchestration in C Major. Look for the common tone, the tone color formula, the paraphony, and the syncopated bass part.



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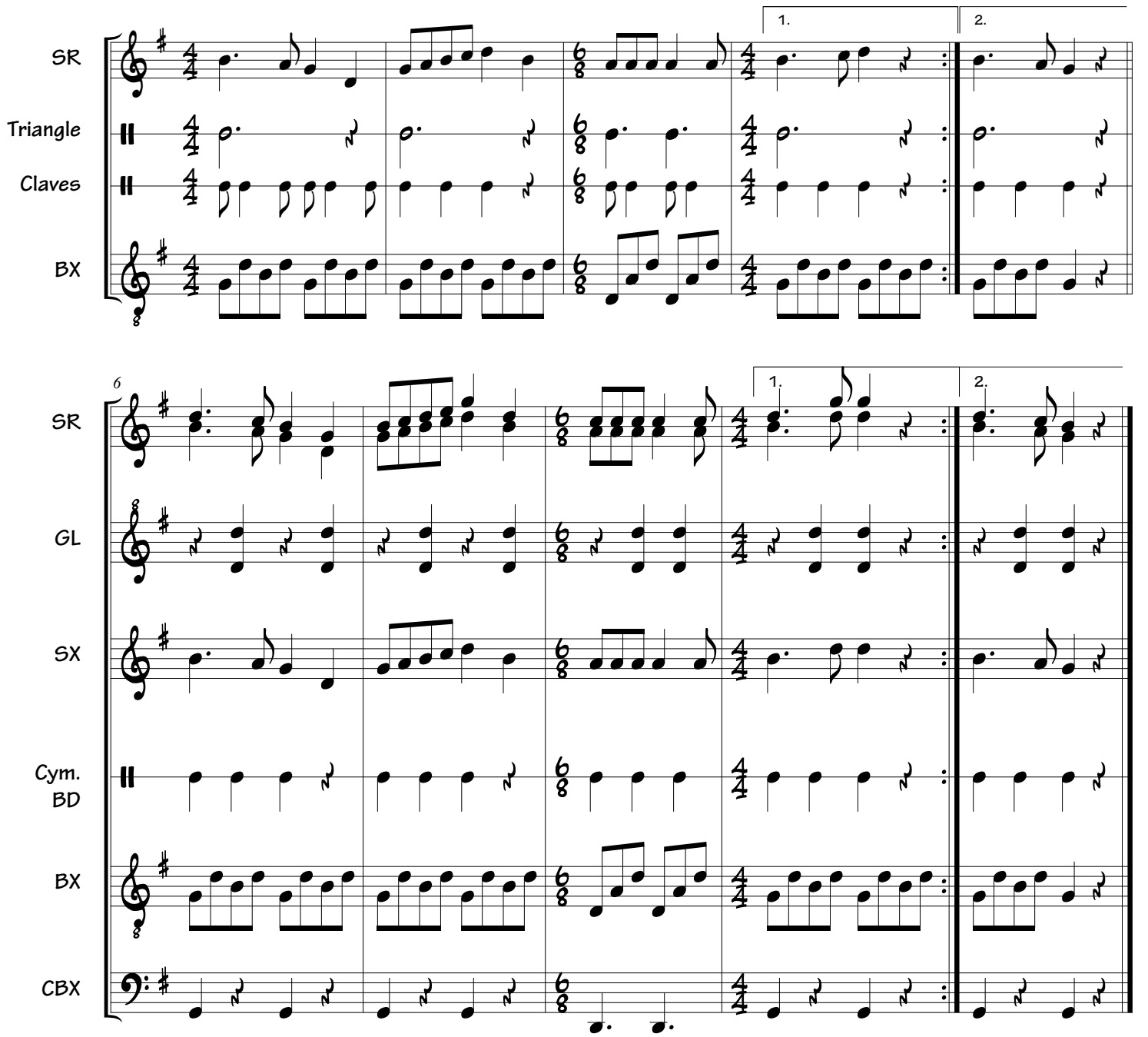
Variation 1 - Gamboling

This is a rhythmic variation of the melody. Moving to G Major, the accompaniment uses combinations of interesting timbres and features mixed meter. The accompaniment is based on a Wuytack-style alberti bass accompaniment found in his wonderful book, Colores.

Gamboling

BMH



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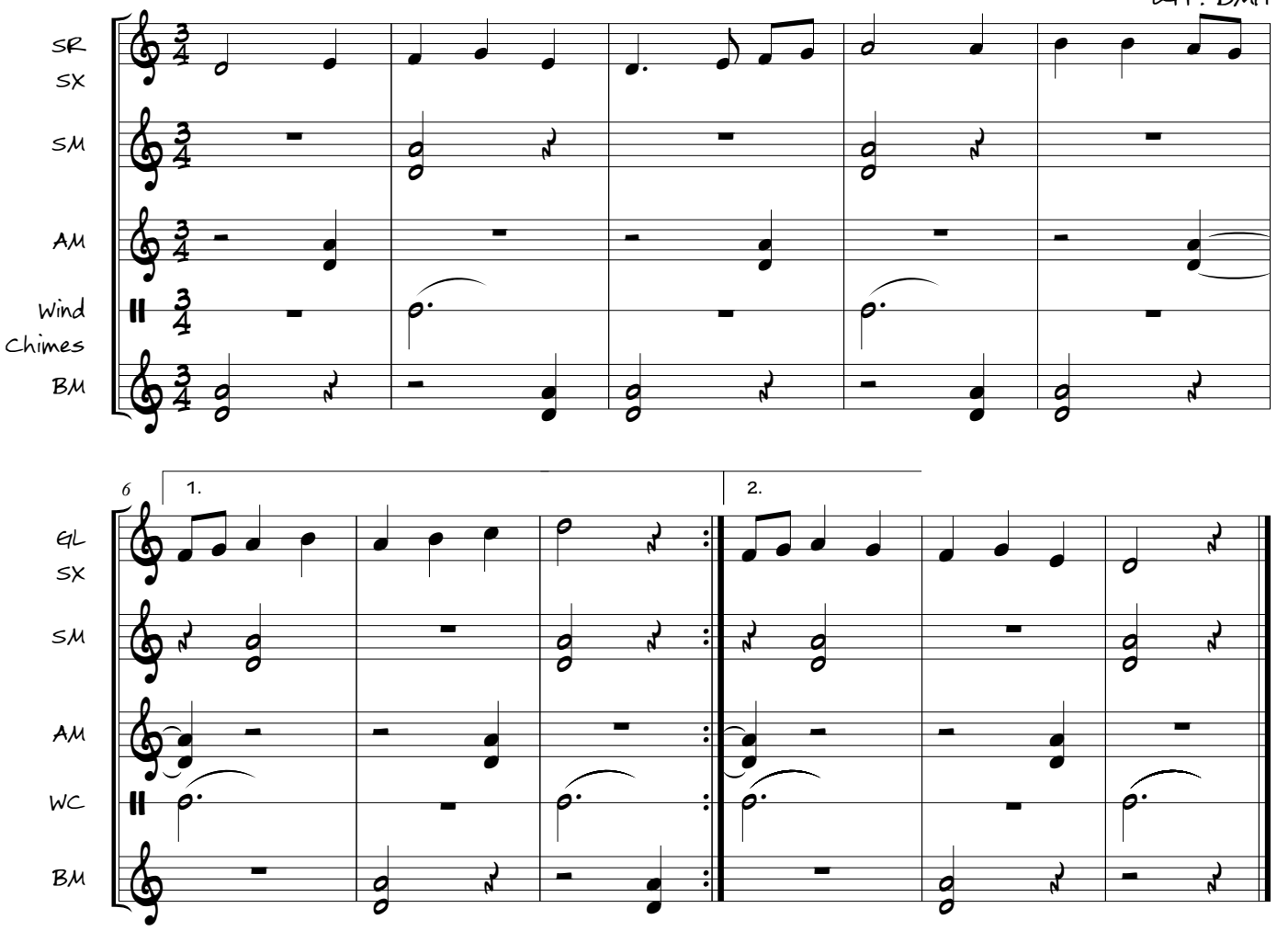
Variation 2 - Counting Sheep

A melodic variation in Dorian Mode, this time the melody is inverted and the meter is ternary. Using only metals with a level bordun using 3 levels plus a solo soprano recorder, let's put the baby to sleep.

Counting Sheep

arr. BMH



"Mary Had a Little Lamb"

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Mary had a little lamb,
whose fleece was white as snow.

And everywhere that Mary went,
the lamb was sure to go.

It followed her to school one day
which was against the rules.

It made the children laugh and play,
to see a lamb at school.

And so the teacher turned it out,
but still it lingered near,

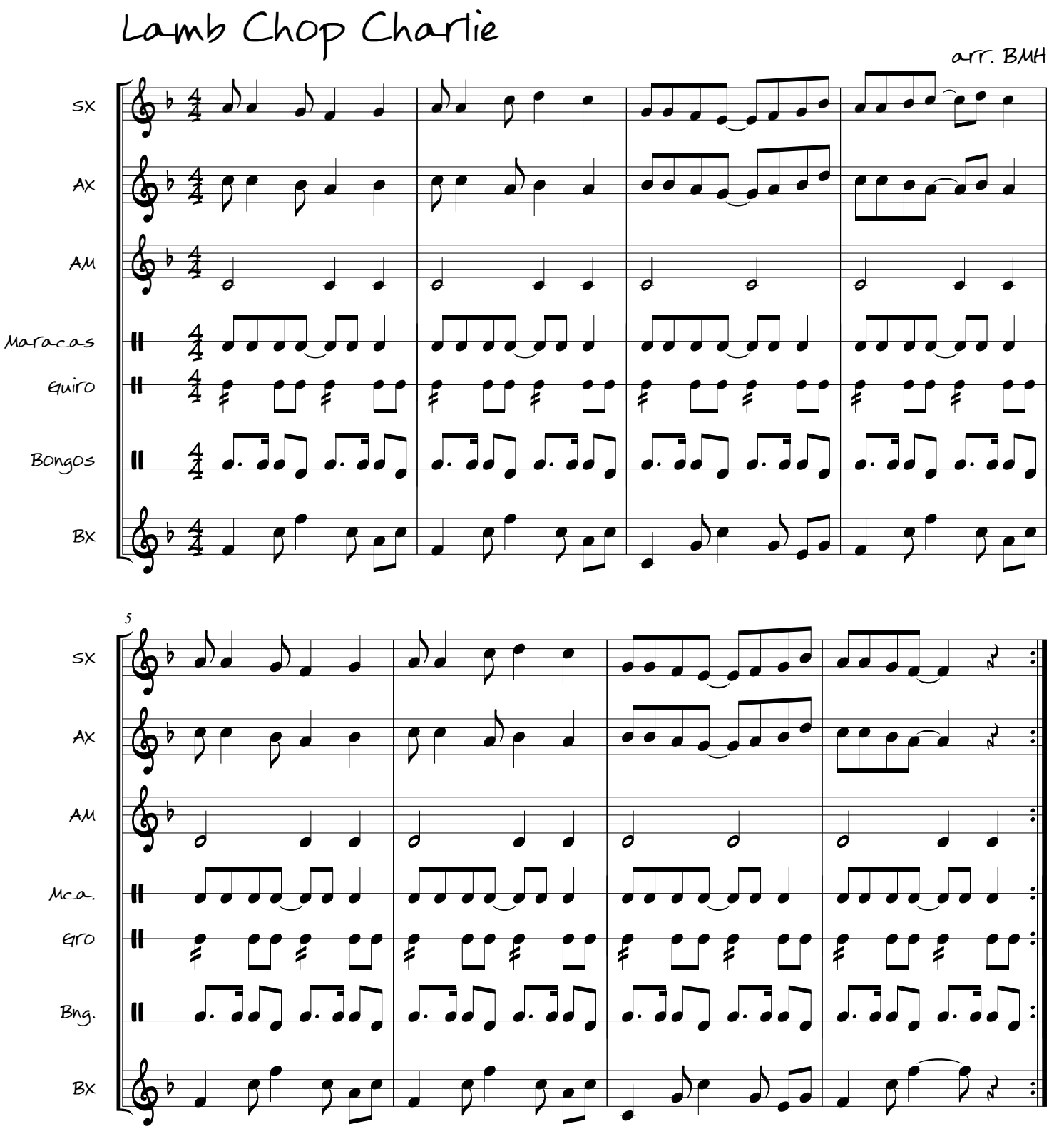
And waited patiently about,
till Mary did appear.

"Why does the lamb love Mary so?"
the eager children cry.

"Why, Mary loves the lamb, you know."
the teacher did reply

Variation 3 - Lamb Chop Charlie

This is a character variation in the key of F that takes the melody to the world of calypso. The contour of the theme is intact with rhythmic variations. Note the classic I-V harmonization.



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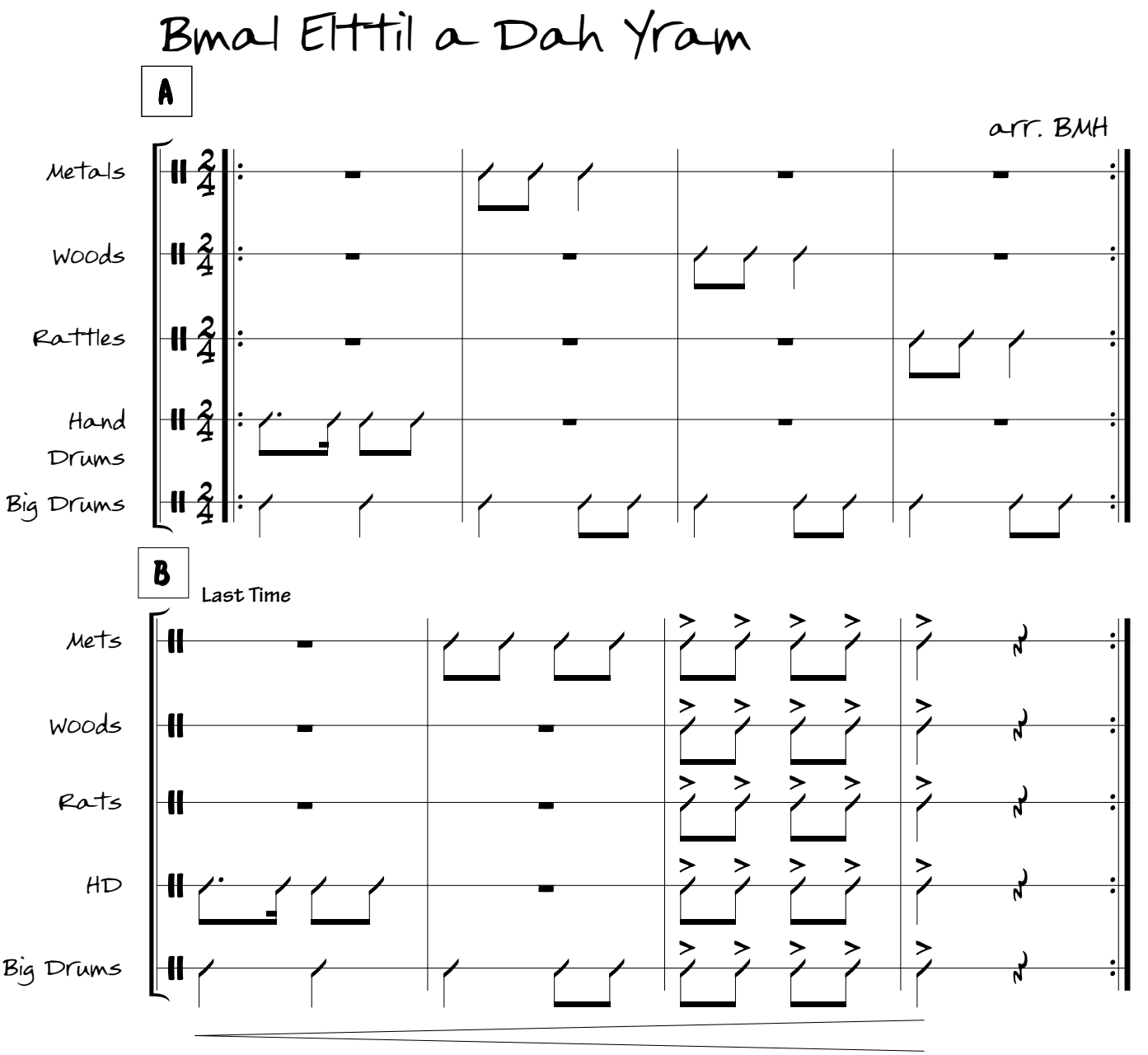
Variation 4 - Bmal Elttil a DahYram

This is also a character variation using the humoristic device of splitting the melody among various instruments for comedic effect.

It's also a little like a drum circle piece. Let the voices in the A section enter one at a time and repeat ad. lib. When a signal is given to end play the last four measures for a big finish.



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