2019 The Orff Instrumentarium, The Majesty and the Mystique Part 2

Brent Holl

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.

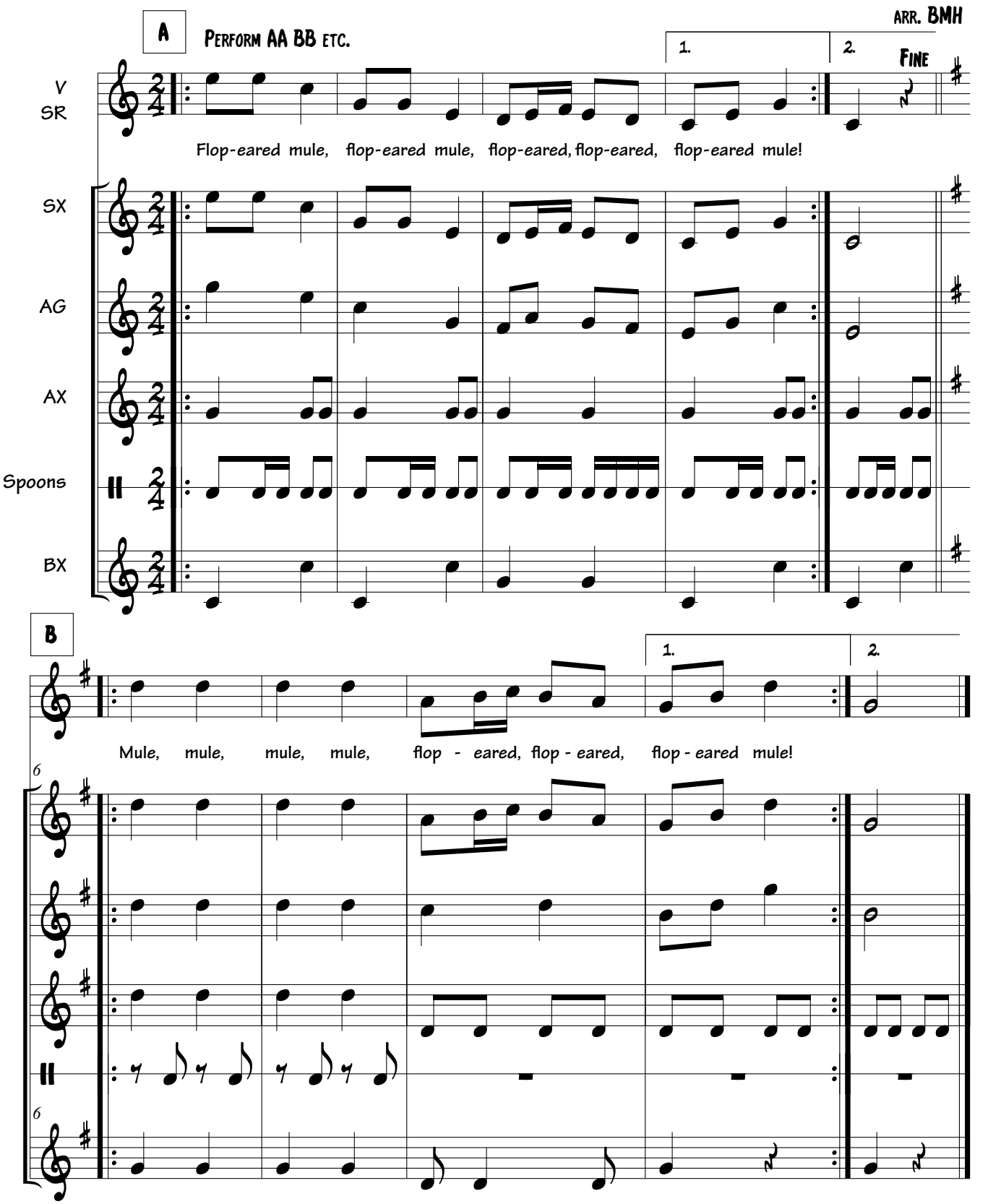
Form

- √ 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 Flop-eared Mule. (Galax Fiddle Tune, arr. Brent Holl)

Theme - This is a classic I-V orchestration with a contrasting B section modulating to the dominant key. Look for the common tone, the paraphony, and the simplicity of the arrangement. Stay true to the tune and perform as AABB etc.

Flop-Eared Mule



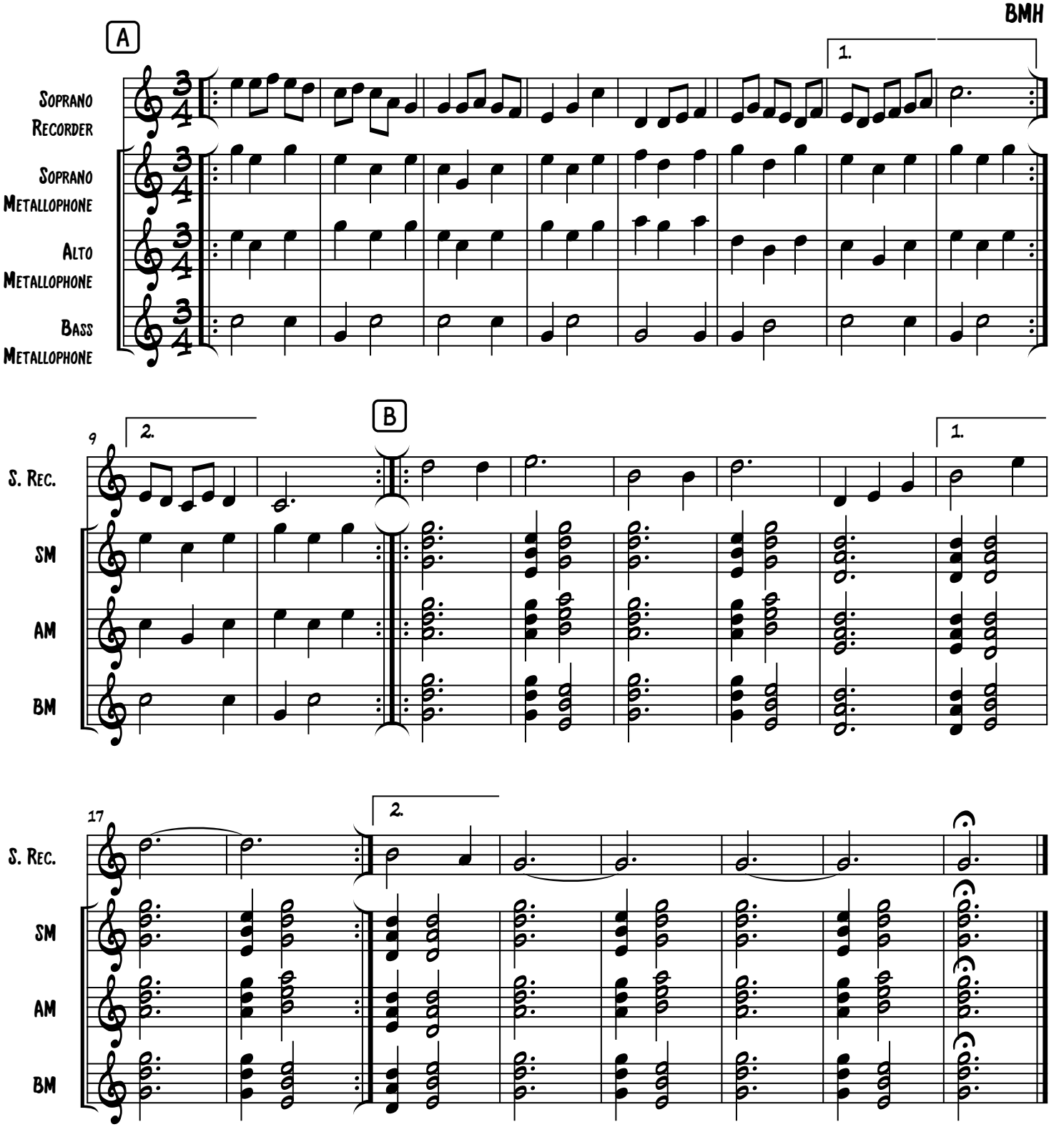
© 2019 Brent M. Holl. All rights reserved.

Variation 1 - The Fish Pond

This variation is a melodic variation of the theme and expanding it with a new melody in the B Section. The accompaniment is complex using compound mixtures to accompany the solo recorder.

The Fish Pond

BMH



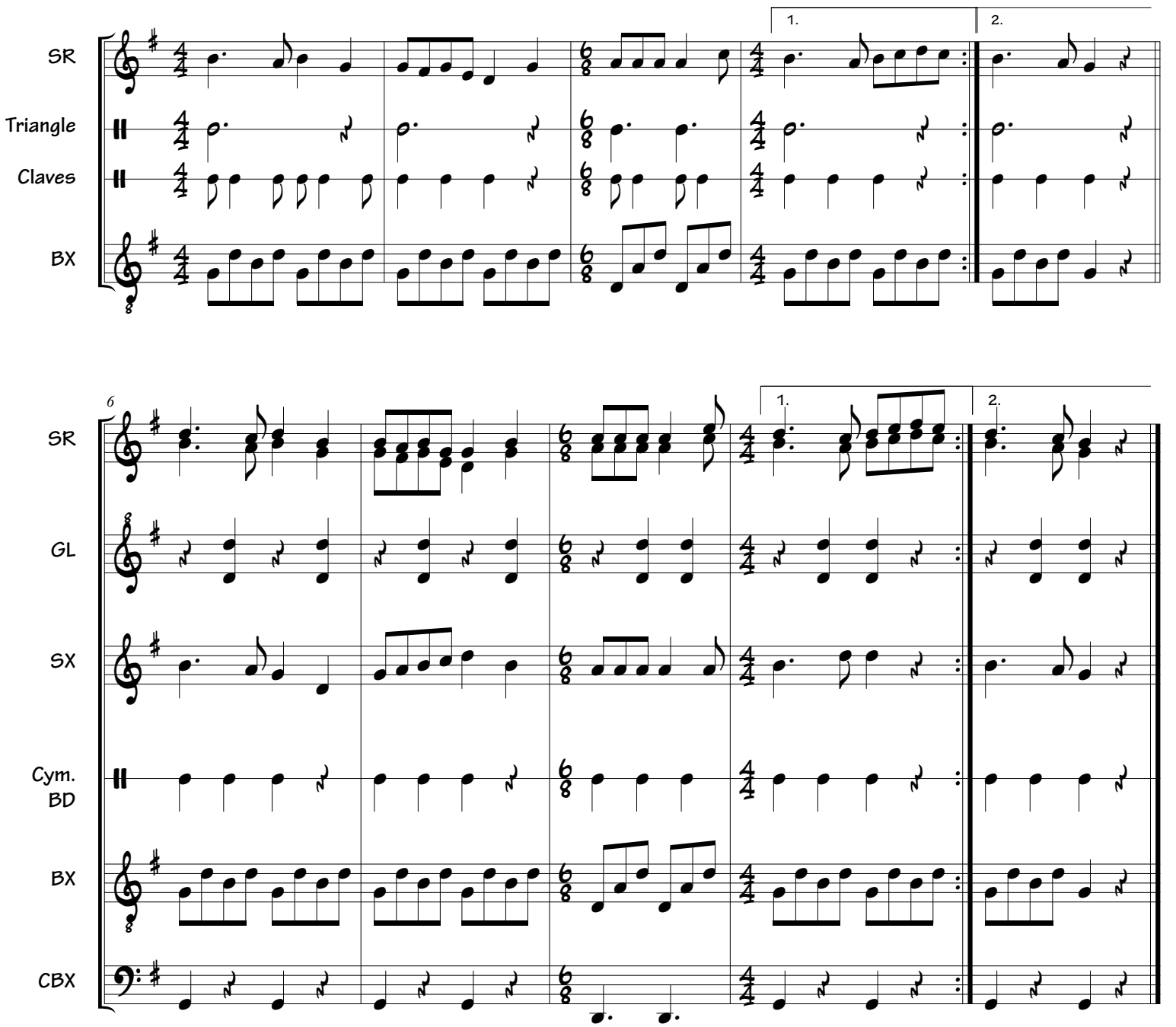
© 2019 Brent M. Holl. All rights reserved.

Variation - 2 Have You Seen My Mule?

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 uses a variant of the simple bordun, the Alberti Bass. Paraphony is featured.

Have You Seen My Mule?

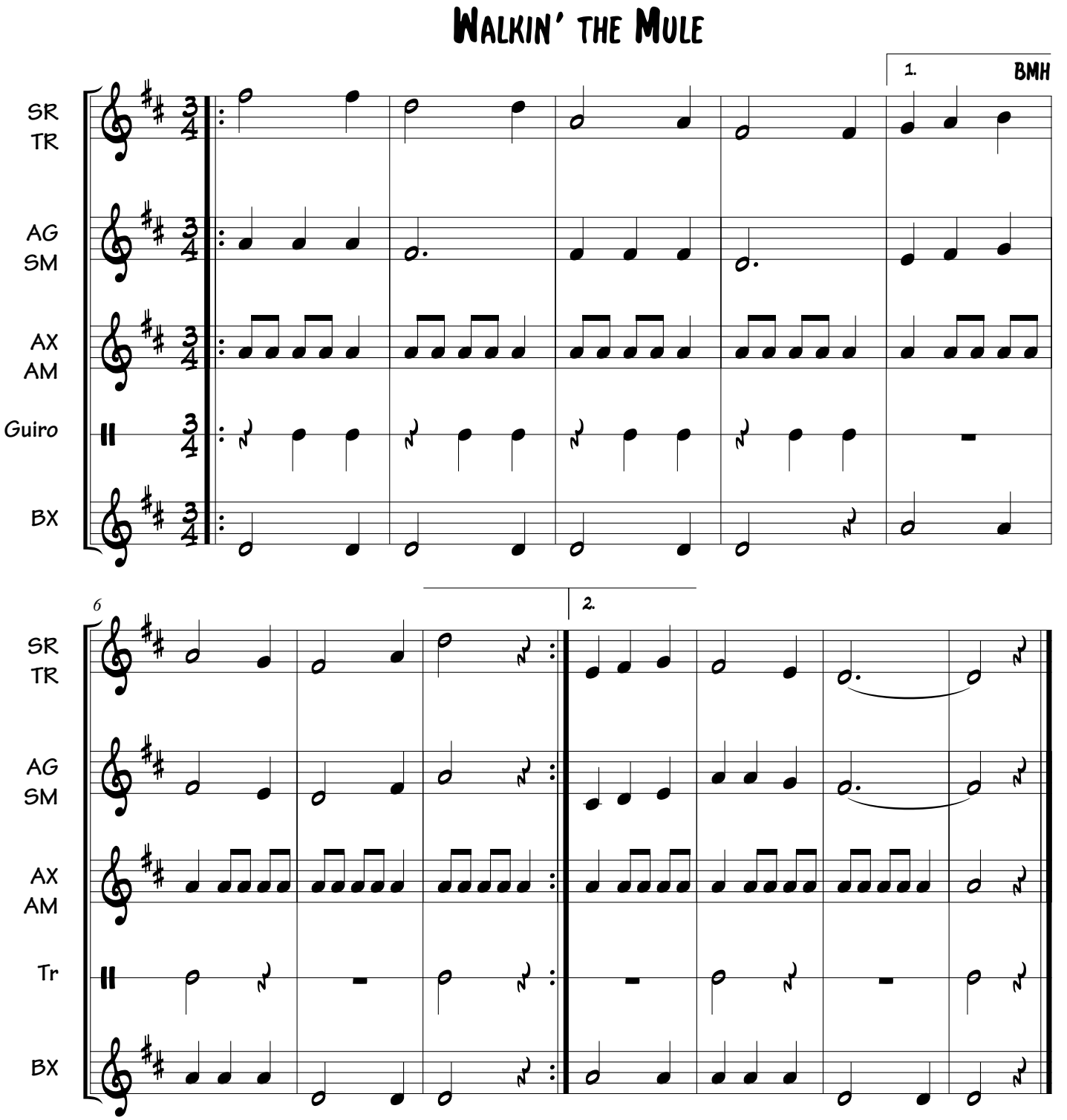
ARR. BMH



© 2019 Brent M. Holl. All rights reserved.

Variation 3 - Walkin' the Mule

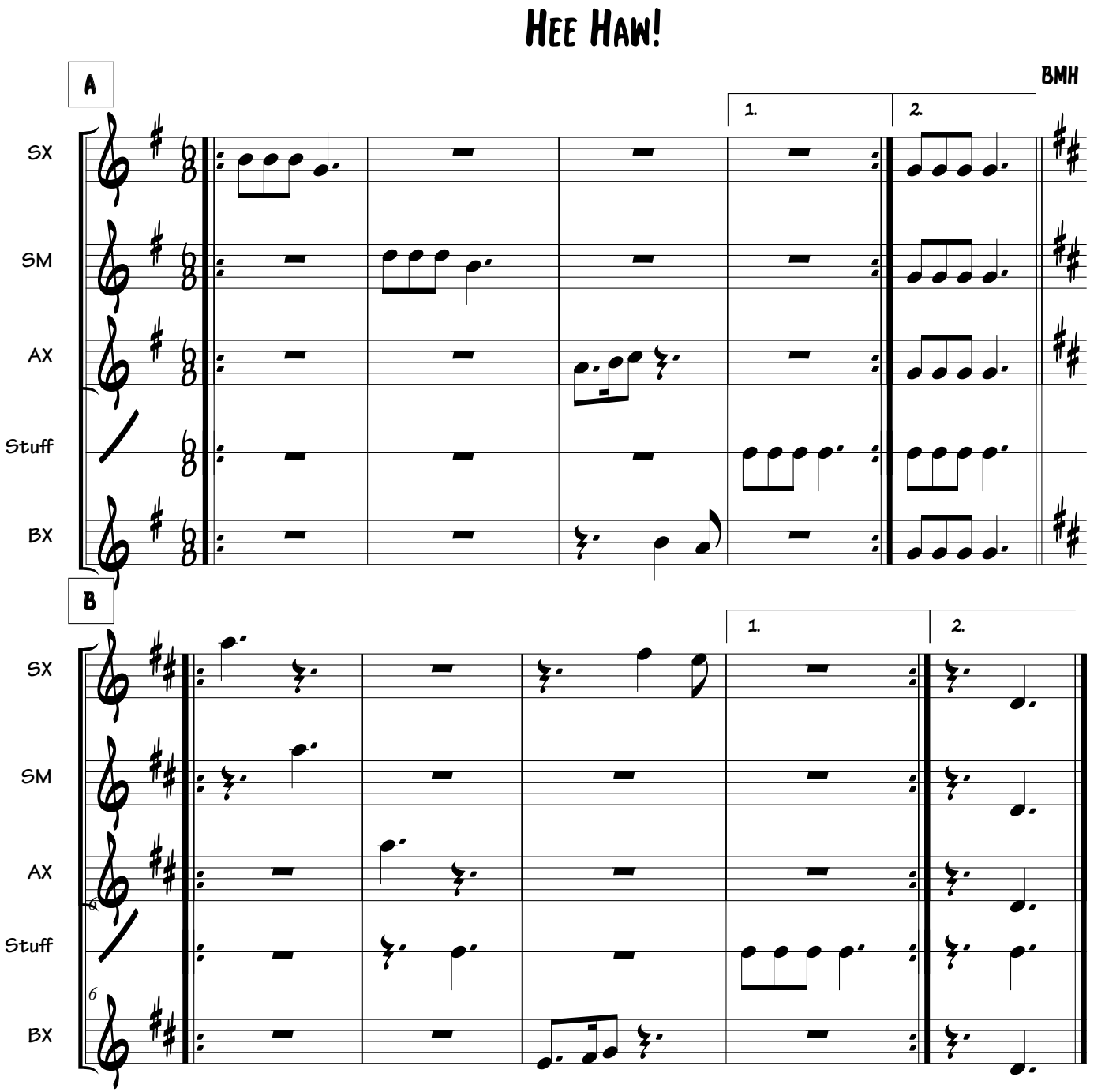
This variation uses a motif from the A section of the theme and also shows a different meter and key. This is a character variation, using the special effect of imitating a music box with a dancer.



© 2019 Brent M. Holl. All rights reserved.

Variation 4 - Hee Haw!

This is also a character variation using the humoristic device of splitting the melody among various instruments for comedic effect. The meter is changed as well as the key.



© 2019 Brent M. Holl. All rights reserved.