

Symphony No. 2: From God's Back 40

Chamber version June 22—October 7, 2017;

orchestrated July 28—Nov. 1, 2023

Duration: ~28 minutes

In June 2017, clarinetist Fred Jacobowitz and pianist Carl Banner, director of Washington Musica Viva, asked me to write a trio for clarinet, viola, and piano. I had just moved to the little town of Cleveland, North Carolina, in rural western Rowan County, nestled in the bucolic Piedmont about an hour drive from the nearest big cities. I had lived in Raleigh since 2001, and retired in May after seven years teaching physics at NCSU.

I settled in with an old friend who had some extra space in his home, where I had time to do what I like and take care of my health. The new environment proved fertile for creativity, and so I called the new trio *From God's Back 40*. After two years, in 2019, I got to the top of the wait list, and moved back to the Raleigh area (Garner, North Carolina) to low-income senior housing.

The first movement is based on various tetrachords, which is very common in my music—not from some theoretical plan, but just because that seems to be how things work out and sound right. I have written a piece before titled *Diatonic Phrygian Tetrachord*, which was more specific about that particular type. There is a somewhat baroque flavor to this section, as I came up with the basic ideas after listening to Bach violin concertos.

The second movement is "Yet Another Waltz", as I have written altogether too many already. I wouldn't recommend trying to dance to this one.

The third movement has a touch of country roots music to it. I appreciate old fiddle tunes, and this flavor was well-suited to the rural surroundings.

The finale is a big fast ending, inspired by my inspiration of albuterol as an inhaled medication for bronchiectasis. One of the main problems of this disease (as well as my arthritis) is extreme fatigue; albuterol is a potent stimulant, as well as helping breathing.

I wrote three symphonies between 1978 and 1984, but later threw them all away. In 2013, I wrote *Birthday Symphony* based on Martin Luther King Jr. speeches, but in 2023 I threw that out as well. I had a symphony written for concert band, *Popular Music of Planet X*, that I orchestrated as *Symphony No. 1*. But first, I orchestrated the clarinet, viola, and piano version of *From God's Back 40* for full orchestra as *Symphony No. 2*. The instrumentation is two flutes (flute 2 doubles piccolo), oboes, clarinets, and bassoons; four horns, two trumpets, two trombones, bass trombone, tuba, timpani, and strings.

Cover photo: "Country Boy" from Jim McGuire's studio, 1997, Charlotte NC.

Bill Robinson

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