

# VARIATIONS ON "INNSBRUCK"

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*Dedicated to my father on his retirement  
From St. James' Episcopal Church, Lancaster, Pa.  
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## VARIATIONS ON "INNSBRUCK"—NOTES

The tune "Innsbruck" received its first well-known setting at the hands of Heinrich Isaac (ca. 1450–1517), one of the masters of fifteenth-century polyphony. While Isaac spent most of his life in Italy, in the service of Lorenzo de Medici and other princes, he was German by birth. From 1496 to 1502 he was based at Innsbruck, in Austria, as the principal court composer to the Hapsburg emperor Maximilian. The words and tune of the song "Innsbruck" were probably already popular before Isaac harmonized them.

Isbruck, ich muss dich lassen,  
Ich fahr dahin mein' Strassen  
In frembde Land dahin;  
Mein' Freud' ist mir genommen  
Die ich nit weiss bekommen  
Wo ich im Elend bin.

*Innsbruck, I must leave you,  
I travel away on my road  
Into a foreign land;  
My joy is taken from me  
So that I cannot accept it  
Where I in sorrow am.*

Perhaps Isaac sang the song to himself when he left Austria for Italy, in his fifties, several years later.

Luther said the Devil should not have all the best tunes, and a hymn, "O Welt, ich muss dich lassen" [O world, I must leave you], was written in 1598, sung to the same tune and based on the original secular words. Its themes are the imminence of death and our firm faith in resurrection. The hymn was given its greatest settings by Bach in the two Passions. At one point in the *St. Matthew Passion*, Jesus tells the disciples that one of them will betray Him. Eleven interlocking voices quietly sing, "Is it I?" Before Jesus can answer, the choir and congregation cry out, singing to the Innsbruck tune, "It is I!"

The tune appears today in the Episcopal Hymnal at number 46, set to a text paraphrased from another old German hymn. It is an evening hymn, one that was often heard at the choral Evensong services at St. James' twenty-five years ago.

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As an introduction to the piece "Variations on 'Innsbruck'", the organ plays Isaac's original setting of the tune. The piece itself begins as the flute gives out the tune with a quiet accompaniment. The organ begins a fugue, introducing a theme in minor derived from the first line of the tune. The theme is restated and varied in several sections. It alternates with episodes based on the other parts of the tune. The piece ends with a full four-part organ setting of the tune. We remember the last verse of the hymn at number 46:

Awhile this mortal blindness  
May miss God's loving-kindness,  
And grope in faithless strife:  
But when life's day is over  
Shall death's fair night discover  
The fields of everlasting life.

# Variations on "Innsbruck"

Mark McConnell – Summer 1996

1 Introduction: Setting by Heinrich Isaac

Flute

Organ

Is - bruck, ich muss dich las - sen, Ich fahr da - hin mein'  
Inns - bruck, I now must leave you, I tra - vel on my

6

Stra - ssen In fremb - de Land da - hin, Mein' Freud' ist mir ge - nom - men Die  
high - way In - to a for - eign land; My joy is ta - ken from me And

11

ich nit weiss be - kom - men Wo ich im E - lend  
I can - not con - ceive it Where I in sor row

16 **Trio**  $\text{♩} = 58$

*Like a Song*

*bin. am.* *Gently*

22

27

32 **Fugue**

*With Strength*

(b)

38

38

38

43

43

43

47

47

47

51

51

51



55

61

Gently

67

(Ich fahr da - hin mein' Stra -

73

sssen...)

Bolder

Bolder

78

78

78

83

83

83

83

88

88

88

88

94

94

94

94

100

*Gently*

100

100

106

*Gently*

106

106

113

113

113

120

*cresc.*

120

120

*cresc.*



126

126

*f*

126

131

131

131

135

*ff*

135

138

Chorale

*rall.*

*Maestoso*  $\text{♩} = 40$

A - while this mor - tal blind - ness May

Pedal

142

miss God's lov - ing kind - ness, And grope in faith - less strife: But

147

when life's day is o - ver Shall death's fair night dis cov - er The fields of ev - er -

152

last - ing life.