



College of Music
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

TAYLOR JOHNSTON
EARLY MUSIC SERIES

Jean Rondeau, harpsichord

The Goldberg Variations

Tuesday, November 1, 2022
Fairchild Theatre, 7:30 p.m.

PROGRAM

Goldberg Variations, BWV 988

Johann Sebastian Bach
(1685–1750)

Aria

Variatio 1. a 1 Clav.

Variatio 2. a 1 Clav.

Variatio 3. Canone all'Unisono. a 1 Clav.

Variatio 4. a 1 Clav.

Variatio 5. a 1 ô vero 2 Clav.

Variatio 6. Canone alla Seconda. a 1 Clav.

Variatio 7. a 1 ô vero 2 Clav. al tempo di Giga

Variatio 8. a 2 Clav.

Variatio 9. Canone alla Terza. a 1 Clav.

Variatio 10. Fugetta. a 1 Clav.

Variatio 11. a 2 Clav.

Variatio 12. Canone alla Quarta. a 1 Clav.

Variatio 13. a 2 Clav.

Variatio 14. a 2 Clav.

Variatio 15. Canone alla Quinta. a 1 Clav.

Variatio 16. Ouverture. a 1 Clav.

Variatio 17. a 2 Clav.

Variatio 18. Canone alla Sexta. a 1 Clav.

Variatio 19. a 1 Clav.

Variatio 20. a 2 Clav.

Variatio 21. Canone alla Settima. a 1 Clav.

Variatio 22. a 1 Clav.

Variatio 23. a 2 Clav.

Variatio 24. Canone alla Ottava. a 1 Clav.

Variatio 25. a 2 Clav.

Variatio 26. a 2 Clav.

Variatio 27. Canone alla Nona. a 2 Clav.

Variatio 28. a 2 Clav.

Variatio 29. a 1 ô vero 2 Clav.

Variatio 30. Quodlibet. a 1 Clav.

Aria

PROGRAM NOTES

Program Notes by Scott Fogelsang

There's an oft-told backstory to the composition of the **Goldberg Variations**. Dresden courtier Hermann Carl, Reichsgraf (Count) von Keyserlingk, had trouble sleeping at night. Apparently, he mentioned in J.S. Bach's presence just how nice it would be if his bouts of insomnia could be graced by "gentle and somewhat merry music" played by his resident harpsichordist, teen prodigy Johann Gottlieb Goldberg. Bach picked up the dropped hint, made a beeline for his writing desk, and a towering masterpiece of Western music was born.

Commentators never can resist that story—neither could this commentator—despite some glaring contradictions, not the least of which is the notion of the *Goldberg Variations* as "gentle and somewhat merry." Nor did Bach (1685-1750) dedicate the work to the Count, which one would think mandatory under the circumstances. Furthermore, the *Goldbergs* were printed *before* Bach's 1741 Dresden visit when the alleged quasi-commission took place. Best evidence points to Bach's beginning work on the variations in 1739, when J.G. Goldberg was all of twelve years old. None of it adds up. Sadly, the attractive anecdote turns out to be apocryphal, perhaps seeded by a soupçon of fact that gradually sprouted into luxuriant fancy. Probably Bach brought copies of the newly-engraved variations with him on his 1741 visit to his son Wilhelm Friedemann in Dresden. It would have been a proper gesture to present the Count with a copy, which Goldberg would have played, and thus was a sobriquet—and a story—born.

Newcomers to the "Aria with diverse variations" (a.k.a. *Goldberg Variations*) might be puzzled by just what is being varied—it certainly isn't the Aria. Bach employs an unchanging ground bass that underpins every movement of the work, thus it's the music above the bass that varies, and not the tune. The reiterated bass line provides the framework for the vast sweep of the *Goldberg Variations*, by imposing consistent structure and harmonic stability while allowing unlimited melodic exploration.

That said, Bach wasn't about to organize the *Goldberg Variations* on just the bass line alone. The work proceeds along a great arch-like plan, symmetrical, balanced, and humming with internal resonances. Thirty-two individual movements mirror the thirty-two-

PROGRAM NOTES (cont.)

bar length of the bass line itself. Thirty-two is a flexible number, capable of multiple groupings and divisions. The most pervasive division is by threes: the block of thirty variations is flanked by statements of the Aria, creating a tripartite cruciform shape. The thirty variations are grouped by threes—ten groups in all. Each trio of variations culminates in a canon—i.e., a piece in which each melodic line rigorously imitates the other. The canons progress sequentially: The first canon is at the unison (i.e., the imitating voice starts on the same pitch as the original), the second canon at the second (i.e., the imitating voice begins a step higher), and so on through variations 25–27, which culminate in a canon at the ninth. Variations 28–30 modify the pattern by ending with a *Quodlibet*, a whimsical mix of light tunes in a canonic style.

The *Goldbergs* also display a division by two, in particular the broad bipartite structure of the work (articulated between variations 15 and 16) that mirrors the two-part form of the bass line.

The numerical (and numerological) underpinnings of the *Goldbergs* have fascinated and even obsessed generations of analysts. For the present purpose we'll limit ourselves to the work's broadest divisions: the Aria and the trios of variations.

Aria

The *Goldberg Variations* opens with a tender sarabande, delicately ornamented in the French manner and characterized by an overall falling, or sighing mood. It is not unique to the *Goldbergs*, having appeared in the 1725 *Little Notebook for Anna Magdalena Bach*, but its appearance here bestowed immortality. As the Aria progresses, it becomes smoother and more allemande-like, as steady sixteenth notes prepare the listener for the first variation.

Variations 1–3

That Variation 1 is a dance is beyond a doubt, but precisely *what* dance remains unresolved—it could be either minuet or polonaise. Variation 2, on the other hand, is strongly reminiscent of an allemande, with duple meter and smooth rhythmic contours, while at the same time hinting at the canon to come. Said canon (at the unison) duly arrives in Variation 3, but listeners expecting something starchy or overly intellectual will be surprised by its graciousness and quiet good humor.

PROGRAM NOTES (cont.)

Variations 4–6

So far, the *Goldbergs* have been characterized by long, limber melodies, but Variation 4 breaks the pattern with short phrases, snappy rhythm, and densely-packed counterpoint. Yet it remains dancelike, in the manner of a *passepied*. Variation 5 marks the first appearance of overt virtuosity, with one hand's quicksilver register changes against zippy riffs in the other. In some ways, Variation 6 (canon at the second) acts as a continuation of Variation 3, in that it partakes of a similar geniality and graciousness.

Variations 7–9

Until Bach's personal copy of the engraved *Goldbergs* showed up, most performers and commentators treated this movement as a *siciliano*, lilting, gentle, and rocking. But the composer himself put a stop to all that, indicating that it should be played "*al tempo di giga*", and establishing once and for all that this is a *gigue* in the French manner, sharply angular and vital. Variation 8 is another virtuoso affair, but this time made up of extremely short phrases—one measure each—that nonetheless make up an orderly whole. With Variation 9, Bach writes a canon that actually *sounds* like a canon—at the third, in this case. The points of imitation are clear and the mood is dignified, perhaps even a bit dark.

Variations 10–12

The near-fugue of Variation 9 now solidifies into the real thing with Variation 10, a bona fide four-voice fugue that could have wandered over from *The Well-Tempered Clavier*. Variation 11 is written to exploit the cross-hand gymnastics possible on dual keyboards. (It's one of the riskier variations for pianists as a result.) Careful listening applied to Variation 12 (canon at the fourth) will reveal that the imitation is an inverse of the original—i.e., upside-down.

Variations 13–15

Variation 13 hearkens back to the Aria in a sarabande that demonstrates Baroque ornamentation in all its sophisticated eloquence. It turns out to be a rest stop before the blistering virtuosity of Variation 14, one of Bach's most unbuttoned and showy romps. After the party, the benediction: Variation 15 (canon at the

PROGRAM NOTES (cont.)

fifth) occupies its position at the close of part one with all due gravitas. Pungent chromaticisms in a minor mode, falling sighs in one voice answered by rising supplications in the other, rich but not overbearing ornamentation: all join together in a conclusion of unforgettable poignance.

Variations 16–18

Part two opens with a Beethovenian left-hand wallop that introduces the French *Ouverture*, a genre consisting of a regal introduction leading into a faster concerto-like passage. The intricate cross-hand writing of Variation 17 treats the listener to an ingratiating burble of descending notes. Variation 18 (canon at the sixth) marks an abrupt contrast with its densely-packed counterpoint, four-square *alla breve* rhythm, clear harmony, and overall concision.

Variations 19–21

Variation 19 is likewise succinct, although of a decidedly more dancelike character. What that dance might actually be is a matter of opinion; it could be a minuet, passepied, or even an up tempo corrente. It makes for an excellent curtain-raiser to the virtuoso sprint that is Variation 20, a toccata-like display piece *à la* Domenico Scarlatti. Then the mood abruptly darkens. Variation 21, a minor-mode canon at the seventh, stretches harmonic coherence to the limit via near-nonstop chromaticism that leaves matters in a constant state of flux.

Variations 22–24

At this point listeners may find that the ground bass line has dropped below their aural radar. Variation 22 provides a reaffirmation in a clearly chiseled bass underneath a muscular, compact four-voice texture. Variation 23, on the other hand, is like a miniature book of keyboard etudes. Practice in scales, trills, double thirds, and double sixths is on offer, all conforming primly to the dictates of the ground bass. The bucolic grace of Variation 24—surely this is a siciliano, or pastorale—masks a compositional *tour de force*, a canon at the octave in which the imitation occurs both above and below the original voice, a challenge guaranteed to flummox all but the most masterful of contrapuntists.

PROGRAM NOTES (cont.)

Variations 25–27

We arrive at the emotional nexus, the “black pearl” of Variation 25, a Bachian landmark that is as impressive in its economy as it is striking in its expressiveness. Night gives way to the morning light of Variation 26, a fascinating hybrid that blends exuberance with the measured stateliness of a sarabande. Then, a surprise: the one and only *Goldberg* Variation without a clear bass line, as Variation 27’s canon at the ninth restricts itself to pure canon without any overt references to the still-present harmonic underlay.

Variations 28–30

Trills upon trills: Variation 28 is a veritable aviary. It is also a celebration of hand-crossing so brilliant as to imply a ghostly third hand somewhere there in the mix. Solid chords (especially on the harpsichord) can have a brilliant, even martial, sound, and in Variation 29 Bach creates a variation made up of almost nothing but chords. Overheated and pompous, it revels in a sense of the absurd, heightened by the barnstorming *Quodlibet* of Variation 30, a combination of three folk-like songs that reminds us of Bach’s high-spirited and earthy *Peasant* Cantata, BWV 212.

Aria

The *Goldbergs* could have ended there, but instead after a moment’s silence, we hear the Aria again—but how it has changed! The graceful little sarabande now reveals itself as yet another manifestation of the endless possibilities that lie hidden within a seemingly unremarkable pattern of bass notes. An ending to be sure, but one that promises a beginning as it hints of the infinity of variations that yet await discovery. All we need is our imagination.

GUEST ARTIST BIO

Described as “one of the most natural performers one is likely to hear on a classical music stage” by the *Washington Post*, **Jean Rondeau** is a veritable global ambassador for his instrument. His outstanding talent and innovative approach to keyboard repertoire have been critically acclaimed, marking him out as one of today’s leading harpsichordists.

Following a year that saw his debut with the Orchestre de Paris performing Poulenc’s *Concerto Champêtre*, Rondeau’s most recent season included concerto engagements with the Orchestre de Chambre de Genève, a concert tour with the Freiburger Barockorchester, and a C.P.E. Bach tour with the Kammerorchester Basel with Rondeau play-conducting from the harpsichord. In the realm of chamber music, Rondeau shared the stage with Nicolas Altstaedt at the Berlin Staatsoper and re-reunited with his fellow co-founders of the Nevermind Quartet for recording projects and performances in Madrid, Dortmund, and la Chaux-de-Fonds. He also rejoined long-time collaborator Thomas Dunford following recent appearances at the Stockholm Early Music Festival, the Festival Concentus Moraviae, the Ribeira Sacra Guitar Festival, the Haapsalu Festival and the Hindsgavl Festival. A notable highlight of the 2021-22 season (continuing this fall) was Rondeau’s tour of major European venues performing Bach’s *Goldberg Variations* – a project long in the making; it included visits to the Berlin Philharmonie, the Frankfurt Opera House, Amsterdam’s Concertgebouw, the Liszt Academy in Budapest, Geneva’s Victoria Hall, the Philharmonie de Paris, and London’s Wigmore Hall, and tonight, Michigan State University. Rondeau also featured in multiple performances at the Salle de la Musique in La Chaux-de-Fonds as part of a six-concert “artist portrait” series in conjunction with a joint residence with the Orchestre de Chambre de Genève.

Rondeau is signed to Erato as an exclusive artist, with whom he has recorded several albums championing ancient music. His latest solo album *Melancholy Grace* (2021) was acclaimed as “soulful [...] varied, [and] wonderful” by the *NY Times* and “sublime” by *Le Devoir*. Rondeau’s previous album *Barricades* (2020), recorded with Thomas Dunford, garnered widespread critical acclaim, as did his 2019 Scarlatti Sonata recording, which won that year’s Diapason d’Or de l’Année. Earlier publications include his debut album *Imagine* (2015), which received the Choc de Classica and recognition from the Académie Charles Cros; *Vertigo* (2016, winner of that year’s Diapason d’Or), which paid tribute to two Baroque composers from his native France: Jean-Philippe Rameau and Joseph-Nicolas-Pancrace Royer; and *Dynastie* (2017), which explores keyboard concertos by Bach and his sons Wilhelm Friedemann, Carl Philipp Emanuel, and Johann Christian.

TAYLOR JOHNSTON EARLY MUSIC SERIES

The Taylor Johnston Early Music Series is made possible through the generosity of Dr. Taylor Johnston and recognizes his lifelong interest in informed performance of music of the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries. Through public performances and workshops for MSU students, the Series provides those interested in this repertoire with increased opportunities to study, hear, and perform this music as it was originally performed.

Dr. Johnston studied both agriculture and vocal music at the University of Tennessee and received his M.S. and Ph.D. degrees in plant physiology at the University of Illinois. He served on the MSU faculty for 51 years, retiring in January 2019. While being captivated by the challenges and rewards of a career in science, he maintained his passion for music through singing as a soloist and ensemble member and by playing early music on wind instruments, primarily recorder. He studied recorder with Michael Lynn of the Oberlin Conservatory for eight years and formed the Beaumont Baroque Ensemble in 1985 as an outlet for his passion for early music. The group, featuring the renowned viola da gambist Enid Sutherland, performed throughout mid-Michigan for twelve years.

Dr. Johnston passed away in July 2019, leaving behind an enduring legacy in the Taylor Johnston Endowment for Early Music, which will fund this series in perpetuity.

UPCOMING EARLY MUSIC SERIES CONCERTS

Artifex Consort

Feste Champêtre: Courtly Delicacies for Viols, Rustic and Refined

Tuesday, February 28, 2023

7:30 p.m., Fairchild Theatre \$\$

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- **James and Susan Bonfiglio** (Symphony Orchestra, October 30 and Spring Opera)
- **Beth Cafagna in loving memory of my husband Al Cafagna**, MSU professor of Philosophy, a lifelong jazz fan and saxophone player, and worker for civil rights (Jazz: Spirituals, Prayer and Protest Concert)
- **Joanne and Bill Church** (West Circle Series)
- **April Clobes and Glen Brough** (Piano Monster)
- **Trustee Emerita Dee Cook in memory of her husband Byron Cook** (The Best of the Baroque)
- **Susan Davis** (Fall and Spring Opera)
- **Dean Transportation** (Spectrum Festival)
- **Double E Support** (Marc Embree, October 23)
- **Alena Fabian, M.D.**, (Margarita Shevchenko, September 9)
- **John and Gretchen Forsyth** (Ralph Votapek, September 23)
- **Thea Glicksman** (Guy Yehuda, November 28)
- **Howard and Pam Gourwitz** (Joe Lulloff, March 19)
- **Lauren Julius Harris** (Symphony Orchestra, October 30, Guy Yehuda, November 28, Dmitri Berlinsky, March 29)
- **Stanley and Selma Hollander Endowment for Chamber Music** (Dialogues and The A, B and C of Baroque)
- **Eleanor H. and Harold E. Leichenko Opera Endowment** established by Lauren Julius Harris (Spring Opera)
- **Taylor Johnston Early Music Series Endowment** established by Taylor Johnston (Taylor Johnston Early Music Series)
- **Hari Kern and the late Ralph R. Edminster, M.D.** (Ralph Votapek, March 15)
- **Ann, John and Abby Lindley**, (Chorale and State Singers, April 2 and Mark Rucker, April 7)

- **Merritt Lutz** (Spectrum Festival and Wind Symphony, April 27)
- **Clare Mackey** (Red Cedar Organ Recital: Renee Anne Louprette, May 21)
- **Joseph and Jeanne Maguire** (A Jazzy Little Christmas and Jazz on the Grand)
- **Mary and Patrick McPharlin** (The Beauty of Brahms and Jazz: Spirituals, Prayer and Protest Concert)
- **Dr. and Mrs. Roy Meland**, (Happy Birthday Mozart!)
- **Gordon E. Miracle** (Rick Fracker, October 26)
- **Mike and Midge Morrow** (All American)
- **MSU Federal Credit Union** (Showcase Series, Spartan Spectacular, and Spectrum Festival)
- **MSU Federal Credit Union Entrepreneurial Musical Artist-in-Residence Endowed Fund** (Musique 21 and Nois Saxophone Quartet, October 31)
- **George Orban and Rae Ramsdell** (Red Cedar Organ Spring Concert, May 21)
- **Liz and Tony Raduazo in honor of Andrew Raduazo** (Sensory Friendly Spartan Concert, April 25)
- **Joy A. Rimpau** (Tuba-Euphonium Ensemble, February 2)
- **Nancy and Charlie Seebeck** (Romance in the Air and A Celebration of the Beautiful Voice)
- **Brenda Sternquist** (A Jazzy Little Christmas)
- **Leonard and Sharon Tabaka** (Annual Jazz Spectacular Finale Concert)
- **Dr. Robert W. Uphaus and Dr. Lois M. Rosen** (Dmitry Berlinsky, November 14, Suren Bagratuni, March 17, 19 and 31)
- **Linn Van Dyne and Mike Knox, in loving memory of Hal W. Hepler, Ph.D.** (Symphony Orchestra, September 30)
- **Provost Teresa K. Woodruff, Ph.D. and Thomas V. O'Halloran, Ph.D.** (Spectrum Festival, Christmas Oratorio and Symphony Orchestra, April 29)
- **Worthington Family Foundation** (Opera Season)
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- **WKAR** (Artist-Faculty and Guest Recital Series)
- **Andrea L. Wulf** (Piano Monster)

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UPCOMING EVENTS

11/3 Thursday

Percussion Ensemble

7:30 p.m., Fairchild Theatre \$

11/4 Friday

Jazz Octets with Dwight Adams, jazz trumpet

8:00 p.m., Fairchild Theatre \$

11/6 Sunday

Spartan Spectacular

3:00 p.m., Cobb Great Hall, Wharton Center \$\$\$

11/7 Monday

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Brian KM Live!

7:30 p.m., Cook Recital Hall \$

11/11 Friday

Jazz Orchestras: Swing Dance

8:00 p.m., Murray Hall \$

11/14 Monday

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Dmitri Berlinsky Celebrates César Franck

7:30 p.m., Cook Recital Hall \$

11/6 Sunday

Spartan Spectacular

3:00 p.m., Cobb Great Hall, Wharton Center \$\$\$

11/7 Monday

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Brian KM Live!

7:30 p.m., Cook Recital Hall \$

TICKET PRICES

\$ \$12 Adults, \$10 Seniors (age 60 and older), Students with ID and anyone under age 18 are free but require a ticket for admission.

\$\$ \$17 Adults, \$15 Seniors, \$7 Students with ID and anyone under age 18.

\$\$\$ \$22 Adults, \$20 Seniors, \$12 Students and those under age 18.

Please note: *All events scheduled in Murray Hall are general admission seating.*