

75TH SEASON OF CONCERTS

NOVEMBER 6, 2016 • NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART



Goldberg Variations

What are the *Goldberg Variations*, and how did they come to be a work of such enduring fascination? Bach's keyboard work, originally published in 1741 under the title *Aria with diverse variations for a harpsichord with two manuals*, is consistently described as both "iconic" and "monumental." The National Gallery of Art has also been described with these words, so it seems only natural to explore in depth this masterpiece of architectural composition inside the Gallery's walls. The legend of the music's original intention — to soothe an insomniac count to sleep — is not true, although entertaining and certainly part of the work's story. The *Aria* was included as the final piece of Bach's *Clavier-Übung* (Keyboard Practice), a study of keyboard technique at the highest level of the time. A copy of the *Aria* exists, probably copied by Bach's wife Anna Magdalena sometime in the 1730s. But the origin of the idea for the variations could be a case of one-upsmanship. In 1733, Handel composed a set of thirty variations, based on an aria of eight measures long. Bach's *Aria* is thirty-two measures. In the end, a much more elaborate and sophisticated showpiece emerged from Bach's efforts.

In the 1920s and 1930s, the *Goldberg Variations* experienced a renaissance, when pianist Rudolph Serkin and harpsichordist Wanda Landowska both, separately, began to perform and record the *Variations*. Canadian pianist Glenn Gould's international career was famously launched with his landmark 1955 debut recording of the *Goldberg Variations*. From these performances emerged the dispute: harpsichord versus piano. What would Bach have thought? While purists have argued that Bach would roll over in his grave at the sound of his keyboard works being played on a modern piano, the fact is, he would probably have no greater delight than to hear how beautifully his music translates not only to the piano, but to the many, many transcriptions, arrangements, and interpretations that have emerged. Today we will hear it as he wrote it, for a two-manual harpsichord. Then you will be surprised how different, but equally transcendent it sounds when played by a string trio, a reed quintet, and on a modern Steinway D concert grand piano, with contemporary jazz improvisations interspersed with the variations, performed by composer-pianist Dan Tepfer.

Danielle DeSwert Hahn, Head of Music Programs, National Gallery of Art

PROGRAM

12:00 • West Building Lecture Hall

Ignacio Prego, harpsichord

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)
Goldberg Variations, BWV 988

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 o vero 2 Clav.

Variatio 6. Canone alla Seconda. a 1 Clav.

Variatio 7. a 1 o vero 2 Clav. (al tempo di Giga)

Variatio 8. a 2 Clav.

Variatio 9. Canone alla Terza. a 1 Clav.

Variatio 10. Fughetta. a 1 Clav.

Variatio 11. a 2 Clav.

Variatio 12. Canone alla Quarta.

Variatio 13. a 2 Clav.

Variatio 14. a 2 Clav.

Variatio 15. Canone a la Quinta (in moto contrario)

Variatio 16. Ouverture. a 1 Clav.

Variatio 17. a 2 Clav.

Variatio 18. Canone alla Sesta. a 1 Clav.

Variatio 19. a 1 Clav.

Variatio 20. a 2 Clav.

Variatio 21. Canone alla Settima

Variatio 22. Alla breve. a 1 Clav.

Variatio 23. a 2 Clav.

Variatio 24. Canone all'Ottava. a 1 Clav.

Variatio 25. a 2 Clav. (Adagio)

Variatio 26. a 2 Clav.

Variatio 27. Canone alla Nona. a 1 Clav.

Variatio 28. a 2 Clav.

Variatio 29. a 1 o vero 2 Clav.

Variatio 30. Quodlibet. a 1 Clav.

Aria da Capo e fine

The Musician

Ignacio Prego won first prize at the 2012 Westfield International Harpsichord Competition and has been described by *El Mundo* as “one of the most versatile Spanish musicians in the Classical scene.” He has performed at leading venues throughout the world. Recent appearances include his debut in New York with The English Concert and Harry Bicket, playing Bach’s F-minor *Harpsichord Concerto*. He also debuted in London with a solo recital at St. Martin in the Fields and in Berkeley, California, playing the *Goldberg Variations*. In addition to numerous appearances as a soloist, and in collaborative concerts, Prego has also given a live performance at WQXR New York Public Radio as part of the Bach 360 Festival. He has presented at the NYIT Auditorium for the New York Philharmonic Insight Series and given recitals with recorder virtuoso Maurice Steger and cellist Phoebe Carrai at the Frick Collection in New York and at Strathmore in Bethesda, Maryland. He has performed at the Chiquitos Early Music Festival in Bolivia, the XI Early Music Festival in Lima, Perú, and the Symphonic Hall in León, Spain.

In December 2014, Prego released his second harpsichord solo CD under the Cantus Records label with J. S. Bach’s *Complete French Suites*. His recording solo debut with Verso in 2012, entitled *Chromatic Fantasy*, was also dedicated exclusively to the music of J. S. Bach. *Scherzo* magazine hailed it as “outstanding mastery of Bach’s complex counterpoint architecture, overwhelming elegance and extraordinary control.” *El Cultural* described it as an “outstanding performance,” and the *Juilliard Journal* referred to it as “heavenly harpsichord music.” As a continuo player, he often collaborates with various ensembles, including Spain-based La Ritirata, with whom he published a DVD for Cantus Records.

Prego is a recipient of the 2005 AECI Grant (International Cooperation Spanish Agency), the 2009 CajaMadrid Foundation Grant, and the 2014 The English Concert — Harry Bicket Fellowship. After graduating with high honors from the Padre Antonio Soler Conservatory in Madrid, he continued his studies in the United States with Luiz de Moura Castro and Émile Naoumoff. He then studied harpsichord at Indiana University with Elisabeth Wright. In August 2012, Prego joined the Historical Performance program at the Juilliard, studying with Kenneth Weiss and Richard Egarr and working with visiting artists, including Jordi Savall, Harry Bicket, Lars Ulrik Mortensen, and Monica Huggett.

Program Notes

Bach composed the *Goldberg Variations* as a study for a two-manual keyboard. While the work goes so much deeper than a technical study — as do all of Bach's works — let us look at the basic form in the driest sense. Bach's previously mentioned thirty-two-measure *Aria* is characterized as a sarabande, which was a stately dance popular in Renaissance courts. The following thirty variations, which are specifically variations of the bass melody (not the treble), are cyclical. Every third variation is a canon at a progressively larger interval: Variation 3 at the unison, Variation 6 at the second, Variation 9 at the third, and so on. Each of these canons is featured in the upper two voices, while a third voice in the bass outlines the harmony. Bach suddenly breaks this trend in Variation 27, which is a canon at the ninth, dropping the bass voice and leaving only the upper canonic voices. The final variation deviates even further, presenting not a strict canon, but a *quodlibet* — an informal piece that quotes popular songs of the day — before recapitulating the initial aria at the close of the work.

The first variation of each group of three (1, 4, 7, and so on) offers much stylistic variety, providing in turns dance-like numbers, a fughetta, and, at the beginning of the second half, a French overture. The second of each group (2, 5, 8, and so on) is generally more flashy and virtuosic. Since Bach composed the work for harpsichord, these knotty variations are usually written for two separate manuals on the instrument, thereby necessitating much hand-crossing and overlapping when played on the modern piano.

While the composition displays superior compositional craft through a tight-knit formal framework, it is also imbued with creativity, humor, depth of emotion, and a profound respect for music to lift the human spirit.

Program notes by Danielle DeSwert Hahn, Head of Music Programs, National Gallery of Art

PROGRAM

1:30 • West Building, West Garden Court

Aspen String Trio

David Perry, violin

Victoria Chiang, viola

Michael Mermagen, cello

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685 - 1750)

Goldberg Variations, BWV 988

Transcription for String Trio

by Dmitry Sitkovetsky

Aria

Variation I

Variation II

Variation III Canone all'Unisuono

Variation IV

Variation V

Variation VI Canone alla Seconda

Variation VII (al tempo di Giga)

Variation VIII

Variation IX Canone alla Terza

Variation X Fughetta

Variation XI

Variation XII Canone alla Quarta

Variation XIII

Variation XIV

Variation XV Canone alla Quinta (Andante)

Variation XVI Overture

Variation XVII

Variation XVIII Canone alla Sesta

Variation XIX

Variation XX

Variation XXI Canone alla Settima

Variation XXII

Variation XXIII

Variation XXIV Canone all'Ottava

Variation XXV (Adagio)

Variation XXVI

Variation XXVII Canone alla Nona

Variation XXVIII

Variation XXIX

Variation XXX Quodlibet

Aria

The Musicians

Sold-out houses and standing ovations characterize the performances of the renowned Aspen String Trio. After more than twenty years of friendship and music-making, Aspen String Trio members David Perry, Victoria Chiang, and Michael Mermagen are an ensemble with magical synergy. Each of these three world-class instrumentalists has a longtime association as artist-faculty with the Aspen Music Festival; combined they have performed across the globe in the world's most prestigious venues. "The energy, spontaneity, and sheer enjoyment we find together is a constant inspiration to us, and a joy to our audiences!"

The trio delights in offering — with humor and insight — virtuoso performances of the rich string trio repertoire, including works by Beethoven, Mozart, and Schubert, as well as lesser-known, blockbuster works by Dohnányi, Hindemith, Martinů, Rozsa, Gideon Klein, Veress, Villa-Lobos, and Ysaÿe, among others. Recent and upcoming performances and residencies include Chicago, Texas, Georgia, South Carolina, Alabama, the University of Delaware, the Los Angeles Music Guild, and Baltimore, where for six seasons they were the Ensemble-in-Residence at the University of Baltimore. A notable upcoming recording project includes the string trios and other music of Martinů for the Naxos label. A regular on Baltimore's classical station WBJC, the Aspen String Trio is regularly featured on *Face the Music* and *Music in Maryland*.

Program Notes

When I first wrote my transcription of Bach's *Goldberg Variations* for String Trio, in 1984, it was both a labor of love and an obsession with the 1981 Glenn Gould recording. For two months I probably had the time of my life, musically speaking, being in the constant company of Johann Sebastian Bach and Glenn Gould. Generally, at that time, transcriptions were out of fashion, and I recall that my own colleagues and managers were skeptical about such an audacious idea.

Since then my transcriptions have been played all over the world, and moreover they have opened the floodgates of new interpretive possibilities for the piece that have included solo harp, wind instruments of all kinds, saxophone quartets, Renaissance viols, and even a fascinating concoction by Uri Caine.

By the time 2009 arrived, I felt that this was the right moment to revisit and somewhat reexamine my original transcription. It was twenty-five years after the piece was first transcribed, I had performed it many times and heard different adaptations of it, and I felt the need to return to a simpler version with hardly any repeats at all.

I have made some changes in orchestration, probably influenced by my string orchestra transcription of 1992, but most of all I tried to inject some fresh, youthful energy into the piece to propel it from the beginning to end.

I hope listeners will share in my lifelong journey through the *Goldberg Variations* and my love of the music, indeed in the very first publication of the *Variations*, in 1742, J. S. Bach stated that the spirit of the piece is "for the enjoyment of music lovers."

Dmitry Sitkovetsky, liner notes from The Art of Transcription

PROGRAM

3:00 • West Building Lecture Hall

Atlantic Reed Consort

Emily Snyder, oboe

Brooke Emery, clarinet

Jeremy Koch, saxophone

John Romano, bass clarinet

Eddie Sanders, bassoon

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)

Goldberg Variations, BWV 988

Arr. for reed quintet by Raaf Hekkema

Aria
Variation I
Variation II
Variation III Canone all'Unisuono
Variation IV
Variation V
Variation VI Canone alla Seconda
Variation VII (al tempo di Giga)
Variation VIII
Variation IX Canone alla Terza
Variation X Fughetta
Variation XI
Variation XII Canone alla Quarta
Variation XIII
Variation XIV
Variation XV Canone alla Quinta (Andante)
Variation XVI Overture

Variation XVII
Variation XVIII Canone alla Sesta
Variation XIX
Variation XX
Variation XXI Canone alla Settima
Variation XXII
Variation XXIII
Variation XXIV Canone all'Ottava
Variation XXV (Adagio)
Variation XXVI
Variation XXVII Canone alla Nona
Variation XXVIII
Variation XXIX
Variation XXX Quodlibet
Aria

The Musicians

The Atlantic Reed Consort (ARC) strives to bring chamber music to a broad audience in an unexpected format. Comprised of oboe, clarinet, bassoon, bass clarinet, and saxophone, the quintet's cutting-edge sound and style both embraces the experimental and adds a new twist to the likes of Bach, Gershwin, and Debussy. The ensemble promotes chamber music through recordings, public outreach concerts, and educational clinics and recitals. One of the region's most sought-after chamber music groups, ARC has been featured recently at the Baltimore Composers Forum, INTERSECTIONS DC Festival, Atlas Theater, Creative Alliance at the Patterson, and numerous chamber music concert series throughout the Mid-Atlantic region. It has also recently completed a residency at Georgia Institute of Technology. Past performances include collaborations with Dissonance Dance Theatre, Moveius Contemporary Ballet, and the Alexandria Choral Society. Committed to new music, ARC has commissioned and premiered works by Stephen Gorbos, John Elmquist, Gregory C. Brown, John Morrison, and Robert Thurston. The group will be making its Carnegie Hall debut in January 2017, followed by the release of a second album in February 2017. Their debut album, *Atlantic Reed Consort*, can be found on iTunes.

Program Notes

This arrangement of J. S. Bach's *Goldberg Variations* is a recent one, completed in 2012 by Raaf Hekkema, a member of Calefax, the original reed quintet. The distinct tonal qualities of each instrument in the reed quintet showcase the intricate counterpoint of this monumental work, lending a unique sound and independent character to each voice. Even those familiar with the *Variations* will gain a new perspective of the piece, as crossing lines, counter melodies, and inversions reveal themselves in new ways, highlighted by the contrasting timbres of the individual instruments. As a way to further enrich the sonic landscape, members of the quintet are called upon to play not only their primary instruments — oboe, clarinet, alto saxophone, bass clarinet, bassoon — but also to double on secondary instruments, including soprano saxophone, E-flat clarinet, oboe d'amore, and English horn.

Program notes by Jeremy Koch

PROGRAM

4:30 • West Building, West Garden Court

Dan Tepfer, piano
Goldberg Variations/Variations

01. Aria (Bach/Tepfer)
02. Variation 1
03. Improvisation 1
04. Variation 2
05. Improvisation 2
06. Variation 3 — canon at the unison
07. Improvisation 3 — canonic 1
08. Variation 4
09. Improvisation 4
10. Variation 5
11. Improvisation 5
12. Variation 6 — canon at the second
13. Improvisation 6 — canonic 2
14. Variation 7
15. Improvisation 7
16. Variation 8
17. Improvisation 8
18. Variation 9 — canon at the third
19. Improvisation 9 — thirds
20. Variation 10 — fugetta
21. Improvisation 10 — fuguelike
22. Variation 11
23. Improvisation 11
24. Variation 12 — canon at the fourth
25. Improvisation 12 — obsessive
26. Variation 13
27. Improvisation 13
28. Variation 14
29. Improvisation 14
30. Variation 15 — canon at the fifth
31. Improvisation 15 — canonic 5
32. Variation 16 — overture
33. Improvisation 16
34. Variation 17
35. Improvisation 17
36. Variation 18 — canon at the sixth
37. Improvisation 18 — sixths
38. Variation 19
39. Improvisation 19
40. Variation 20
41. Improvisation 20
42. Variation 21 — canon at the seventh
43. Improvisation 21 — sevenths
44. Variation 22
45. Improvisation 22
46. Variation 23
47. Improvisation 23
48. Variation 24 — canon at the octave
49. Improvisation 24 — canonic 8
50. Variation 25
51. Improvisation 25
52. Variation 26
53. Improvisation 26
54. Variation 27 — canon at the ninth
55. Improvisation 27
56. Variation 28
57. Improvisation 28
58. Variation 29
59. Improvisation 29
60. Variation 30 — quodlibet
61. Improvisation 30 — mashup
62. Aria (Tepfer/Bach)

The Musician

Born in Paris to American parents, pianist-composer Dan Tepfer has translated his bicultural identity into an exploration of music that ignores stylistic bounds. As the *New York Times* has written, he “combines superb technique with a complex set of impulses: he’s a deeply rational improviser drawn to the unknown.” Tepfer has worked with the leading lights in jazz, including extensively with saxophone luminary Lee Konitz, while releasing seven albums as a leader in solo, duo, and trio formats. His solo work *Goldberg Variations/Variations*, which pairs his performance of Bach’s work with improvised variations of his own, has received broad praise as a “riveting, inspired, fresh musical exploration” (*New York Times*). As a composer, he is a recipient of the Charles Ives Fellowship from the American Academy of Arts and Letters for works including *Concerto for Piano and Winds*, which premiered in the Prague Castle with Tepfer on piano, and *Solo Blues for Violin and Piano*, which premiered at Carnegie Hall. Bringing together his undergraduate studies in astrophysics and his passion for music, he is currently working on integrating computer-driven algorithms into his improvisational approach. Awards include first prize and audience prize at the Montreux Jazz Festival Solo Piano Competition, first prize at the East Coast Jazz Festival Competition, and the Cole Porter Fellowship from the American Pianists Association. His recent soundtrack for the independent feature *Movement and Location* was voted Best Original Score at the Brooklyn Film Festival.

Program Notes

I grew up with the “Goldbergs.” I even remember clearly the first time I ever heard them, when I was eleven years old. I was playing chess with a friend, who went over to the hi-fi and put on one of his parents’ records — it was the 1981 Glenn Gould recording. I flipped out hearing just the Aria. I thought it was some of the most beautiful music I’d ever heard. I think if anyone has experienced it as this totem, I have. I own a ton of recordings of the *Goldberg Variations* and the work has always been with me. But I never thought it would be something that I’d play myself on the piano until a few years ago. I just kept wanting to learn more of it, then all of it. Also, as a composer, I grew to experience very intimately just how perfect Bach’s music is, how complete. And I’ve always felt emotionally the almost sacred quality of the work.

That said, we should remember that the *Goldberg Variations* were originally published as keyboard studies. Each one is clearly trying to teach us something. There are technical ideas that Bach is making the pianist work through, as well as musical ideas that he is displaying. In his time, the baroque era, there was a whole tradition of showing how things were done. But to the listener, that stuff isn’t necessarily relevant. That’s part of the genius of Bach: He is operating on all these levels — his music is mathematically and structurally perfect, but it also expresses the full range of human emotion. The “Goldbergs” aren’t just serious and dramatic; they are also funny and light. There is a whole world in this music. In Bach’s day, people probably responded to the practical, pedagogical aspect of the music, and in our time, people emphasize the hallowed, spiritual aspect of it. The piece has come to mean different things to people in different eras. That’s another thing that makes it great.

I hope listeners feel a sense of surprise — surprise that something like these two approaches can work. And I hope that by the end of the performance listeners think about Bach’s work in a deeper way. In other words, you might not have noticed an element in one of his variations that you now notice because I’m bringing it out in my improvisation. I also hope people come away with the realization that two approaches to music can coexist. And, of course, I hope people are just moved, because I think Bach’s *Goldberg Variations* are among the most profoundly affecting masterpieces ever. From this tiny piece of material, Bach was able to express an incredibly full range of feeling, and the fact that all the variations flow together so beautifully and that they make a complete whole is a way for Bach to convey how all these different emotions are part of life and belong together. You can’t expect to have a life that’s all visceral delight, and you certainly wouldn’t want a life that’s all sadness. The contrast is what makes a complete life, and a complete work of art.

Program notes by Dan Tepfer

Upcoming Events of the Seventy-Fifth Season of The William Nelson Cromwell and F. Lamot Belin Concerts

A Far Cry
Dreams and Prayers
featuring David Krakauer, clarinet
November 20, 3:30
West Building, West Garden Court

Eliot Fisk, guitar
Complete *Cello Suites* of Johann Sebastian Bach
November 26 & 27, 3:00
West Building, West Garden Court

Donal Fox, piano
Presented in honor of *Stuart Davis*:
In Full Swing
December 3, 12:30, 2:00, 3:30
West Building, Gallery M78

Fox Wolf Duo
Virtuosos in Dialogue
December 4, 3:30
West Building, West Garden Court
Washington Performing Arts,

Children of the Gospel Choir
Holiday Caroling
December 10, 1:30 & 2:30
Rotunda

Georgetown Day School
Holiday Caroling
December 11, 1:30 & 2:30
Rotunda

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Cover Georges Braque, *Aria de Bach* (detail), 1913, National Gallery of Art, Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon

Back cover West Building, Constitution Avenue entrance, viewed from Sixth Street NW, 1941, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Gallery Archives