



Pavel Kolesnikov *piano*

Sun 7 Nov: 3pm | Perth Concert Hall

JS Bach (1685-1750) *Goldberg Variations, BWV988*

Aria

Variatio 1

Variatio 2

Variatio 3 *Canone all' Unisuono*

Variatio 4

Variatio 5

Variatio 6 *Canone alla Seconda*

Variatio 7 *Al tempo di Giga*

Variatio 8

Variatio 9 *Canone alla Terza*

Variatio 10 *Fugetta*

Variatio 11

Variatio 12 *Canone alla Quarta*

Variatio 13

Variatio 14

Variatio 15 *Canone alla Quinta: Andante*

Variatio 16 *Ouverture*

Variatio 17

Variatio 18 *Canone alla Sexta*

Variatio 19

Variatio 20

Variatio 21 *Canone alla Settima*

Variatio 22 *Alla breve*

Variatio 23

Variatio 24 *Canone all Ottava*

Variatio 25 *Adagio*

Variatio 26

Variatio 27 *Canone alla Nona*

Variatio 28

Variatio 29

Variatio 30 *Quodlibet*

Aria da Capo e Fine

JS Bach (1685-1750): Goldberg Variations, BWV988

Johann Gottlieb Goldberg was an extremely talented musician - a child prodigy taken on as personal harpsichordist to the distinguished Russian Ambassador to the Court of Saxony in Dresden, Count Hermann Carl von Keyserlingk. His career was stellar but short (he died aged only 29), and he could never have imagined his name living on in history as it has done through its posthumous association with one of the greatest works ever composed for keyboard. J.N. Forkel claimed in his 1802 biography of Bach that Keyserlingk commissioned the 'Aria with diverse variations' as a kind of musical sleeping draft to cure his insomnia and that Goldberg had to be on standby to play them during the count's frequent sleepless nights - a story now thought to be (at best) improbable. If Keyserlingk did ask his 14-year-old harpsichordist to play the work to him it was probably *after* the work's publication, but Forkel's more colourful myth quickly became accepted wisdom, and the work has been known as the *Goldberg Variations* ever since.

Bach may, in fact, have given the first performance himself at one of his Collegium Musicum concerts in Leipzig. At any rate he published the variations in 1741 as the last book in his four-volume *Clavier-Übung* (*Keyboard practice*) series for harpsichord and organ - a compendium of major works, including the six partitas and the Italian Concerto, "*prepared for the soul's delight of lovers of music*" and intended to demonstrate his mastery of

keyboard style and compositional technique. In that regard the *Goldberg Variations* succeed spectacularly and on an unprecedented scale, making them one of the most formidable challenges any keyboard player can undertake - difficult enough on a two-manual harpsichord and even harder (because of the hand-crossing required in some variations) on a single manual instrument or on a modern piano.

The foundation of the 30 variations is the bass line of the little Sarabande-like aria with its implied sequence of harmonies. The aria's graceful melody isn't important - in fact it doesn't recur until the aria's reprise at the end and as the pianist Glenn Gould said, it seems to "*shun the patriarchal demeanour, to exhibit a bland unconcern about its issue, to remain totally uninquisitive as to its raison d'être*".

The virtuosity required by the player is more than matched by Bach's virtuosity as composer and the mastery with which he marshals an extraordinary range of techniques and styles to give the work its unique character. Except for the first three and No.s 28-30 of the 32 sections, the work is subdivided into groups of three variations in which the pattern is 'character' piece (in the form of a dance, another aria or a fugue), followed by a virtuosic variation (often employing elaborate crossing of hands) and after that a canon (a form of strict counterpoint where one voice is copied exactly by another, as in a round). In the first canon, the imitative voice enters at the same pitch (unison), in the second the imitation

starts on the second note of the scale, in the third it begins on the third note of the scale - and so on all the way up.

Add to this contrapuntal ingenuity, a fair amount of number symbolism (32 sections, starting with a 32-bar aria and so on) and it would be easy to misconstrue Bach's intentions as a self-advertising display of cleverness. However, on hearing the *Goldberg Variations*, one's overwhelming impression is of the work's great humanity - its pathos and its wit, its spiritual intensity and its scintillating playfulness. Halfway through its great span, Bach seems to take a breath (and at last allow his audience one!) when the poignant 15th Variation fades away upwards into the ether. Immediately, in complete contrast, the flamboyant roudades of the grand Overture, the 16th Variation, launch the second half on its homeward trajectory. The final variation, a 'quodlibet' (literally meaning 'whatever you like'), would have been specially enjoyed by Bach's listeners at Zimmermann's Coffee House where his Collegium Musicum played in Leipzig. It is a brilliant fantasy on well-known popular tunes, including *Cabbage and beets have driven me away and I've been so long away from you*. As indeed has the aria with which we started, now simply restated to convey a satisfying sense of arrival and completion, but also a moving note of farewell.

Hugh Macdonald, 2017

Pavel Kolesnikov

"Pavel Kolesnikov is an engrossing musician. He is perhaps the most introspective and meditative pianist that I know of, and with his deep and delicate sensitivity to sound, he is able to bring out a sophisticated gradation of colours particularly in the quieter ranges of the instrument. He is a poet of the piano, rather than say, a novelist or a storyteller." Bachtrack, October 2018

Pavel Kolesnikov became Prize Laureate of the Honens International Piano Competition in 2012, and recital and festival appearances resulting from this include Zankel Hall at Carnegie Hall, Berlin's Konzerthaus, the Louvre (Paris), Vancouver Recital Society, La Jolla Music Society, Spoleto Festival USA, Canada's Ottawa ChamberFest and Banff Summer Festival.

Pavel has performed with the Toronto Symphony and Calgary Philharmonic, the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra, the Russian National Philharmonic, London Philharmonic, Philharmonia Orchestra, Orquestra Sinfônica Brasileira, the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, the Hallé, the BBC Symphony, the BBC Philharmonic, the BBC Scottish, and the BBC National Orchestra of Wales. He has undertaken UK and European tours with the Tchaikovsky Symphony Orchestra, the Czech National Symphony and Flanders Symphony Orchestras. Pavel made his BBC Proms debut performing Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 2 with the National Youth Orchestra of Scotland conducted by Ilan Volkov. He also joined the BBC Proms at the inaugural

event in Australia. He has given recitals at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, London, as part of the international Piano Series, and at Kings Place, London. He enjoys collaborating with other musicians, such as the Brahms Violin and Viola Sonatas with Lawrence Power, again at the Queen Elizabeth Hall in London. Pavel has also given recitals in South Korea, Japan, Spain, and Germany, and at the La Roque d'Antheron festival, the Musiq3 Festival in Brussels, and the Aldeburgh Festival. He returns regularly to the Wigmore Hall in London.

Pavel is currently undertaking a major project with the Rosas Dance Company, performing the Bach *Goldberg Variations* with the company's founder Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker. The project has so far been performed in Vienna, Brussels, Montpellier, Bruges, and Seville. London-based, Pavel was born in Siberia into a family of scientists. He studied both the piano and violin for ten years, before concentrating solely on the piano. He has studied at Moscow State Conservatory with Sergey Dorensky, at London's Royal College of Music with Norma Fisher and at Brussels' Queen Elisabeth Music Chapel with Maria João Pires thanks to the generous support of Mr Christopher D Budden, the RCM Scholarship Foundation and Hattori Foundation.

Pavel is the recipient of the Milstein Medal and is the RCM Benjamin Britten Piano Fellow and was a member of BBC Radio 3's New Generation Artists from 2014 to 2016. He received the Young Talent (piano) Award for 2019 from the UK Critics'

Circle and is co-founder of the Ragged Music Festival, held annually at the Ragged School Museum in East London.

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