



VANCOUVER  
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SOCIETY

VIVA VRS!

FALL CONCERTS 2022

Sir Andrés Schiff piano

Thursday October 20 2022

# From the Artistic Director

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Dear Friends:

I can't tell you for how many years I've waited for Sir András Schiff to bring the Goldberg Variations to Vancouver.

We got close in our 2019-2020 Season when he agreed to do a benefit for the VRS for our 40th Anniversary Season! We called it Going for Gold as we were optimistically looking ahead to our 50th season. Or so we thought at the time our brochure went to print. But everything changed and the season shut down shortly after it began, as we all hunkered down during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Well, now we're three seasons closer to our 50th Season, and we're thrilled that the celebration is finally happening!

Once again, we're deeply grateful to our Season Sponsor, the Peak Group of Companies, the Martha Lou Henley Charitable Foundation, and of course, our Going For Gold Sponsors who have each sponsored a variation, in addition to the Aria and the return of the Aria at the end. This auspicious list includes:

Aria: Leon and Leila Getz, Variations: Mary Jane Mitchell, David Harvey and Cecilia Bernabe, Wendy Lee, Helga Murray in memory of Doug Murray, Ally Hart, the late Christine Dryvynsyde, Rob Baker and Holly Sykes, Nancy Wu, Peter Cass, Maryke Gilmore, David McMurtry, Richard and Barbara Bergstrom, Mark Allison and Stephanie Holmquist, Anthony and Kim George, Stephen Gauer, Stephen Schachter and Nancy Stern, Kim Floeck, Linda A. Wong, Susan and Robert Lim, Anonymous, Gloria Wong and Cameron McGill, Karen Shuster, Wilfrid and Sally Mennell, Bill and Risa Levine, Myron Story and Larry Clausen, Christine L. Shiner, Michael and Brenda O'Keefe, Christopher Kin Ming Wong and Yee Cheng Leong, Richard and Lynda Spratley, Tsuyoshi, Tomoko and Toshiko Shibano and the Aria return, Martha Lou Henley.

We are grateful for the support of the City of Vancouver and the Province of British Columbia.

Enjoy another of J.S. Bach's great masterpieces.

Most sincerely,



Leila



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The use of cellphones and recording devices is prohibited in the concert hall. Please take this opportunity to turn off all electronic devices.

音乐厅内禁止使用手机，禁止拍照，录音，录像。请观众关闭所有电子器材，感谢您的合作。

# Program

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**Sir Andrés Schiff** piano

Thursday, October 20, 2022 7:30 pm

Orpheum Theatre

Season Sponsor



Concert Sponsors

Aria: **Leon & Leila Getz**

1. **Mary Jane Mitchell**
  2. **David Harvey & Cecilia Bernabe**
  3. **D. Wendy Lee**
  4. **Helga Murray in memory of Doug Murray**
  5. **Ally Hart**
  6. **The late Christine Dryvynsyde**
  7. **Rob Baker & Holly Sykes**
  8. **Nancy Wu**
  9. **Peter Cass**
  10. **Maryke Gilmore**
  11. **David McMurtry**
  12. **Richard & Barbara Bergstrom**
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  15. **Stephen Gauer**
  16. **Stephen Schachter & Nancy Stern**
  17. **Kim Floeck**
  18. **Linda A. Wong**
  19. **Susan & Robert Lim**
  20. **Anonymous**
  21. **Gloria Wong & Cameron McGill**
  22. **Karen Shuster**
  23. **Wilfrid & Sally Mennell**
  24. **Bill & Risa Levine**
  25. **Myron Story & Larry Clausen**
  26. **Christine L. Shiner**
  27. **Michael & Brenda O'Keefe**
  28. **Christopher Kin Ming Wong & Yee Cheng Leong**
  29. **Ric & Lynda Spratley**
  30. **Tsuyoshi, Tomoko & Toshiko Shibano**
- Aria (return): **Martha Lou Henley**

Additional Support



JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685-1750)

**Italian Concerto in F major BWV 971**

[approx. 13 minutes]

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685-1750)

**Overture in French Style in B minor BWV 831**

[approx. 32 minutes]

INTERMISSION

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685-1750)

**Goldberg Variations BWV 988**

Aria

Variation 1 *a 1 Clav.*

Variation 2 *a 1 Clav.*

Variation 3 *Canone all' Unisono a 1 Clav.*

Variation 4 *a 1 Clav.*

Variation 5 *a 1 ôvero 2 Clav.*

Variation 6 *Canone alla Secunda a 1 Clav.*

Variation 7 *a 1 ôvero 2 Clav. Al tempo di Giga*

Variation 8 *a 2 Clav.*

Variation 9 *Canone alla Terza a 1 Clav.*

Variation 10 *Fughetta a 1 Clav.*

Variation 11 *a 2 Clav.*

Variation 12 *Canone alla Quarta a 1 Clav.*

Variation 13 *a 2 Clav.*

Variation 14 *a 2 Clav.*

Variation 15 *Canone alla Quinta a 1 Clav. Andante*

\* \* \*

Variation 16 *Ouverture a 1 Clav.*

Variation 17 *a 2 Clav.*

Variation 18 *Canone alla Sexta a 1 Clav.*

Variation 19 *a 1 Clav.*

Variation 20 *a 2 Clav.*

Variation 21 *Canone alla Settima a 1 Clav.*

Variation 22 *a 1 Clav.*

Variation 23 *a 1 Clav.*

Variation 24 *Canone all' Ottava a 1 Clav.*

Variation 25 *a 2 Clav. Adagio*

Variation 26 *a 2 Clav.*

Variation 27 *Canone alla Nona a 2 Clav.*

Variation 28 *a 2 Clav.*

Variation 29 *a 1 ôvero 2 Clav.*

Variation 30 *Quodlibet a 1 Clav.*

Aria da capo

[approx. 1 hour & 25 minutes]

# Sir András Schiff piano

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**Early Life & Education:** Born in Budapest, Hungary in 1953, Sir András studied piano at the Liszt Ferenc Academy with Pál Kadosa, György Kurtág and Ferenc Rados, and in London with George Malcom.

**This season:** In North America Sir András will perform eight recitals comprised of Bach's Goldberg Variations and other programs announced from the stage. In April he will remain in New York City performing 9 concerts as Artist-in-Residence of the New York Philharmonic.

**Recordings:** Sir András has established a prolific discography and since 1997 has been an exclusive artist for ECM New Series and its producer, Manfred Eicher. Highlights include the complete Beethoven Piano Sonatas recorded live in Zurich, solo recitals of Schubert, Schumann and Janáček, as well as J.S. Bach's Partitas, Goldberg Variations and Well-Tempered Clavier. His most recent two disc set of Schubert Sonatas and Impromptus was released in the spring of 2019.

**Awards & Prizes:** Sir András Schiff's many honours include the International Mozarteum Foundation's Gold Medal (2012), Germany's Great Cross of Merit with Star (2012), the Royal Philharmonic Society's Gold Medal (2013), a Knighthood for Services to Music (2014) and a Doctorate from the Royal College of Music (2018). He was awarded the Jean Gimbel Lane Prize in Piano Performance in 2021 from The Henry and Leigh Bienen School of Music at Northwestern University.

**Did you know:** Sir András continues to support new talent, primarily through his "Building Bridges" series, which gives performance opportunities to promising young artists. He also teaches at the Barenboim-Said and Kronberg academies, and gives frequent lectures and masterclasses. In 2017 his book *Music Comes from Silence*, a compilation of essays and conversations with Martin Meyer, was published by Bärenreiter and Henschel.



Photo credit: Nadia F. Romanini / ECM Records

Sir András Schiff's recordings are available on the Decca/London, Teldec/Warner and ECM labels.

Exclusive Representation: Kirshbaum Associates Inc.  
307 Seventh Avenue, Suite 506 New York, NY 1001  
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# Program Notes

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## **Bach's *Clavier-Übung* (1726-1741)**

The works on this evening's recital are selected from Bach's collection of keyboard pieces published in four parts between 1726 and 1741 under the collective title *Clavier-Übung* (keyboard exercise). In this collection Bach systematically lays out for amateur and professional keyboard-players alike his mastery of the genres, compositional techniques, and national styles used in the keyboard music of his time.

Bach's self-financed publishing project from the first half of the 18th century has much in common with the promotional strategies of contemporary musicians today who establish a YouTube channel to make their music more widely known, to establish their 'brand' in the mind of the public, and to 'monetize' their talents in the wider marketplace.

This evening's recital presents the second and fourth instalments of Bach's *Clavier-Übung* series. Part II explores the national styles of France and Italy in the *Overture in French Style* and *Italian Concerto*. Part IV gives us a monumentally exhaustive exploration of the variation form in the celebrated *Goldberg Variations*.

\* \* \*

### **Johann Sebastian Bach Italian Concerto in F major BWV 971**

Baroque music was all about national styles and Bach learned the Italian style by copying out and transcribing the works of composers such as Vivaldi, Albinoni and Torelli during his early years of employment in Weimar (1708-1717). It was this knowledge that he applied in composing his *Concerto nach Italienischem Gusto* (Concerto after the Italian Taste) included in the second part of his *Clavier-Übung* published in 1735.

To compose a concerto meant reproducing in some way the textural contrast between the solo instrument (or instruments) and the orchestral tutti on which the *ritornello* form of the Italian concerto relied for its forward progress. It was for this reason that *Clavier-Übung II* was written exclusively for the two-manual harpsichord with its possibility of creating dynamic contrasts by means of hopping up and down between keyboards. This could be done with both hands at once, or one hand at a time, allowing for a wide range of effects to be achieved.

The two protagonists in Bach's *Italian Concerto* are clearly audible in the first movement, in which the 'orchestra' which opens the movement is given a fuller more resonant texture by dint of block chords and a wider range in the bass while the part of the 'soloist' is written in a smaller range, higher up, peppered with smaller note values and occasional ornamentation.

The distinction is even clearer still in the slow movement in which the role of the 'orchestra' is given entirely to the left hand, its ostinato pattern of repeated thirds and long pedal notes a strangely austere accompaniment to a right hand 'soloist' spinning out long strands of highly ornamented melody.

The *Presto* finale returns to the *ritornello* form of alternation between the louder, fuller texture of the 'orchestra', obsessed with its dramatic octave leap downwards and swift follow-up run, in continual dialogue with a more nimble 'soloist' more occupied with broken chord passagework and harmonic sequences.

## **Johann Sebastian Bach**

### **Overture in French Style in B minor BWV 831**

The 11-movement *Overture in French Style* from *Clavier-Übung II* counts as the longest suite that Bach ever wrote. Beefing up its imposing heft is the grand and imposing French overture movement that opens the work and gives it its name. Brilliantly encrusted with the bright ornamental flourishes that characterize the French school of harpsichord playing, the French overture lurches between chordal ‘poses’ in a jerky sequence of dotted and double-dotted rhythms, linked together by exhilarating run-ups and other fast-darting upbeat embellishments. The tone is one of pomp and grandeur that then yields to the more animated and playful—but *learned*—texture of its fugal middle section. Bach adds weight to the movement as a whole by repeating this middle section and its following reprise of the opening material.

The 10 dance movements that follow are comparatively slender by comparison, but remarkable for their variety of moods and their sheer number. Each is in binary form, comprising two roughly equal halves. Repeats of each half allow the performer scope to vary the performance on a second run-through and tastefully ‘riff’ on the printed score. Additional opportunities for varied repetition come in the ‘double dances’, the *passepieds*, *gavottes* and *bourées*, which appear in contrasting pairs, the second dance acting as a kind of ‘middle section’ between the presentation of the first dance and its reprise at the end.

Needless to say, these are not pieces meant to accompany dancing but rather imaginative recreations of these dance genres that reproduce the general character and identifying rhythmic signature of each. That said, the dancelike quality of the slower more serious dances can be hard to discern beneath the thick contrapuntal weave of polyphonic conversation in which they are set. This is especially true of the flowing but irregularly phrased *Courante* and the harmonically rich but melodically wayward *Sarabande*.

A more toe-tapping pulse and regularity of phrase structure is generally to be found in the ‘double dances’, and especially in the light skipping steps of what would normally be the final piece in the set, the *Gigue*. But Bach gives us a bonus piece to close off this suite, a strutting and punchy *Echo* intended to tickle the ear with rapid-fire alternations of soft and loud ‘echo’ effects.

These were to be created by means of daring leaps between the two keyboards of the dual-manual harpsichord for which this suite was written. But given that the modern concert grand has only one keyboard, contemporary audiences will have to use their imaginations to experience the dare-devil, *Cirque du Soleil* thrill of the acrobatic ending that Bach had in mind for the performers of his day.

## **Johann Sebastian Bach**

### **Goldberg Variations BWV 988**

Bach’s *Aria mit verschiedenen Veränderungen vors Clavicimbal mit 2 Manualen* was published in 1741 as the final instalment of his *Clavier-Übung* series of keyboard works. This monumental exploration of the variation form ranks as the largest single keyboard composition published in the 18th century, in which Bach displays his command not only of the popular musical styles of his day, but also of the most advanced virtuoso techniques for playing the harpsichord, not to mention his genius in the arcane skill of writing canons at any given interval.

After its publication, a change in musical taste toward simpler, more transparent textures meant that the *Goldberg Variations* were largely forgotten, although Beethoven appears aware of them when composing his *Diabelli Variations* and Brahms his *Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Handel*. They entered the 20th century as the privileged domain of the feathery flock of harpsichordists, with Wanda Landowska (1879-1959), who first recorded the set in 1933, as Mother Hen to the brood.

For big-name pianists, though, the scaled-down, intellectually concentrated sound world of the *Goldberg Variations*, with their ‘sewing machine’ rhythms, probing explorations of chromatic harmony and awkward hand-crossings, was considered too ‘antiquarian’, too ‘esoteric’ for the piano repertoire. Until June 1955, that is, when a 22-year-old Canadian pianist, Glenn Gould, walked into the New York studios of Columbia Records to record his debut album—an album that became one of the best-selling classical albums of all time.

What Glenn Gould revealed, in a career bookended by his landmark recordings of the *Goldberg Variations*, was the emotional richness and feverish excitement that lay hidden in this much-neglected work. Like

an art-restorer cleansing the Sistine Chapel of the grime and haze that had built up over centuries, in his 1955 recording Gould brought to a public inured to the warmly pedalled sound of Romantic piano music a dazzling clarity of texture and kaleidoscopic range of tone colours, accomplished by the fingers alone. In his 1981 recording, in which the tempo of each variation is regulated by a “constant rhythmic reference point”, he revealed the intellectual depth of the work, and the breadth of interpretive possibilities which it offers to the performing pianist.

Glenn Gould single-handedly placed Bach’s *Goldberg Variations* in the standard repertoire – and not only of the piano. According to the Goldberg Variations Discography website, since 1955 there have been more than 600 recordings made of the Goldbergs, including versions for organ, for string trio and for saxophone quartet. While performance by a historically informed recorder ensemble would no longer be a novelty, a breathless world has still not heard this work on kazoos or in car commercials. And that, as Martha Stewart would say, is a good thing.

## The Aria

The theme that Bach wrote for his variations is a *sarabande tendre*, identified by its stately rhythmic profile, recurring emphasis on the second beat of bar, and highly expressive style. Floridly ornamented in the French manner, its 32 measures unfold in the traditional two-part form of a dance movement, with each half repeated. These repeated sections, as in a dance suite, provide an opportunity for the performer to vary the performance by means of changes in dynamics, articulation and ornamentation.

The harmonic rhythm of the Aria is deliberately slow, one chord to the bar, which allows for maximum freedom in spinning out a wide variety of variations, since these are based not on the melodic content of the Aria, but rather on its bass-line and underlying harmonies, in the manner of a chaconne.

## The Variations

There is a large-scale symmetry in the way that Bach arranges his variations. First of all, the set is rounded out by the Aria’s appearance both at the beginning and at the conclusion of the work. Secondly, the set divides evenly into two halves. The first half ends on an enigmatic open 5th at the conclusion of the plaintive Variation 15. The second half begins anew, with a bang, on a robust G-major chord that begins the No. 16 French overture variation. (Many a performance will see a pause inserted at this juncture, emphasizing the contrast between the two halves of the work.)

Thirdly, the 30 variations are organized into ten groups of three, each group containing: (1) a dance or genre piece, (2) a virtuoso display piece, bright in mood, and most often featuring a number of hand-crossings, and (3) a two-voice *canon*, which is to say a *round*, in which a melody is accompanied by itself, entering a set number of beats after its initial appearance, and beginning a set interval above its initial note. In keeping with Bach’s systematic approach, these canons, spaced out every three variations, begin at the unison and progress to the ninth in Variation 27 (the only canon not accompanied by a running bass line by way of harmonic support). Such a layout ensures variety in the succession of variations, and is aided by the extraordinarily wide range of meters used: 3/4, 2/4, 6/8, 12/8, 9/8 etc. There is even one variation, No. 26, in which one hand plays in 3/4 while the other is in 18/16.

The display-oriented virtuoso variations feature two kinds of hand-crossing: the Italian type, *à la* Scarlatti, in which one hand crosses over and above the other to catch a note perilously distant from its home turf (e.g., Variations 5 and 14); and the French type, *à la* Couperin, in which the running melodic lines of the two hands cross over each other in the same patch of keyboard terrain, risking a digital derailment of both (e.g., Variations 8 and 11). The latter are usually indicated by Bach as being played on both manuals of the harpsichord, but alas! such an expedient is not available to the struggling pianist.

The inclusion of canon variations helps to mask the recurring regularity of the Aria’s four-bar phrases and ground bass, repeated in various degrees of elaboration in each variation. Moreover, the canons are not always straightforward rounds. Variations 12 and 15 each feature a *canon inversus*, in which the leading voice is accompanied by itself – turned upside down!

The emotional heart of the work comes in Variation 25 in the minor mode, described by Wanda Landowska as the work’s “crown of thorns”. At an *Adagio* tempo, it is the longest of the set, although it

has the same number of measures as the other variations. Its extraordinary expressiveness and aching beauty derive from the combination of its plangent melodic leaps, agonizing chromaticisms and halting syncopations.

After this variation begins a build-up in energy as the work races towards its climax, with sonorous written-out trills invading the inner voices of Variation 28 and hammering fists of chords chopping between the hands in Variation 29.

### **The Quodlibet & Aria da capo**

According to the pattern already established, one would expect a canon at the 10th in Variation 30, but here Bach surprises us with musical joke, a *quodlibet* (Latin for “what you please”) that fits two popular ditties into the harmonic scheme of the Aria.

The two overlapping folk tunes that Bach shoe-horns into service over the ground bass of his Aria are the urgent love lyric *Ich bin solang nicht bei dir g'west, ruck her, ruck her* (I have been away from you so long, come here, come here) and the anti-vegetarian anthem *Kraut und Rüben haben mich vertrieben, hätt mein' Mutter Fleisch gekocht, wär ich länger blieben* (Cabbage and turnips have driven me away, had my mother cooked meat, I would have stayed longer).

Coming just before the end of the work, there is something of the chorale in this final variation, something good-natured and healing that gathers all hearts in song, as at the end of a church cantata or Lutheran religious service, to which the final *Aria da capo* provides a contemplative and serene postlude.

Program notes by  
Donald G. Gíslason 2022



# Thank You!

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Presenting exceptional artists is made possible by the generosity of our supporters, who make the journey with us throughout the year.

COVID-19 has changed a great many things about the way in which we move through the world and interact with one another. Over the last couple of years, our supporters have sustained us in ways that we couldn't have imagined, and never have we been more grateful.

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