



VANCOUVER
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VIVA VRS!

FALL CONCERTS 2022

Jean Rondeau harpsichord
Sunday November 6 2022

From the Artistic Director

Dear Friends:

On paper, the time lapse between Sir Andrés Schiff's performance of Bach's *Goldberg Variations* at the Orpheum last month and that of Jean Rondeau's performance at the Beth Israel Synagogue seems longer than it actually is. Perhaps it is because we experienced a truly extraordinary event that has remained vividly in our consciousness. But in this performance by Jean Rondeau on the harpsichord, we shall hear the instrument for which Bach intended the piece. It is one of only three pieces that he wrote for a double-keyboard harpsichord.



Jean Rondeau wowed the audience when he played at our annual Surprise Concert in the Telus Studio Theatre at the Chan Centre in April, 2018, and I promised that we would bring him back as soon as possible. That return has been delayed by the pandemic, but we are delighted that he is back in Vancouver performing for the VRS.

This is our first concert in the Sanctuary of the Beth Israel Synagogue, and we have our fingers crossed that it will be a memorable event. We tested the acoustics a couple of times with a solo cello and we marvelled at what we heard. The sound of the harpsichord is a little different and I hope that our "gamble" pays off! I want to thank the staff at the Beth Israel for being so accommodating and helpful.

I would also like to thank Stephen Schachter and Nancy Stern for sponsoring this concert, and Craig Tomlinson for the use of the harpsichord which he has provided (and built!).

We are grateful to our Season Sponsor, the Peak Group of Companies, and the City of Vancouver and the Government of British Columbia for their support.

The Goldberg Variations will be performed without an intermission. The duration of the performance is 1 hour and 40 minutes.

Enjoy!

Leila Getz



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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

Jean Rondeau harpsichord

Sunday November 6 2022 3:00 pm

Congregation Beth Israel

Season Sponsor



Concert Sponsor

Stephen Schachter and Nancy Stern

Additional Support

Dr. Carol Tsuyuki and Craig C. Tomlinson



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 & 40 minutes]

Jean Rondeau harpsichord

Early Life & Education: Jean Rondeau studied harpsichord with Blandine Verlet for over ten years, followed by training in basso continuo, organ, piano, jazz and improvisation, and conducting. He graduated with honours from the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique in Paris and also studied at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London.

This Season: His recent performances include 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 Jean play-conducting from the harpsichord. Jean also features 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.

Recordings: Jean is an Erato exclusive recording artist. His debut album of music by J.S. Bach, *Imagine*, was released in January 2015 and received the Choc de Classica and Prix Charles Cros. The second recording on Erato, *Vertigo*, saw Jean pay tribute to two Baroque composers from his native France: Jean-Philippe Rameau and Pancrace Royer. His latest album, *Dynastie*, explores keyboard concertos by Bach & Sons. In 2016, he composed his first original score for a film, Christian Schwochow’s *Paula*, which premiered at the 2016 Locarno Film Festival. His latest solo albums *Melancholy Grace* (2021) and *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.

Awards & Prizes: In 2012, at just 21 years old, Jean became one of the youngest performers ever to take First Prize at the International Harpsichord Competition in Bruges (MAfestival 2012), also winning the EUBO Development Trust prize, an accolade bestowed on the most promising young musician of the European Union. That same year, he claimed second place in the Prague Spring International Harpsichord Competition, along with a nod for the best interpretation of the contemporary piece composed specially for that contest. In 2013, he also won the *Prix des Radios Francophones Publiques*.



Photo credit: Clement Vayssieres

Jean Rondeau is represented by Harrison Parrott, London, UK.

Program Notes

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.

Thank You!

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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