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2024<sup>YEARS</sup>  
2025  
SEASON



## WINTER CONCERTS

Yunchan Lim piano

Sunday March 2 2025

# From the Artistic Director

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Dear Friends:

Welcome to the Vancouver Recital Society at the Orpheum.

We are absolutely delighted to present the Vancouver debut of the remarkable young Korean pianist Yunchan Lim, who has dazzled the world since his remarkable Gold Medal win at the 2022 Van Cliburn International Piano Competition when he was just 18, making him the youngest winner ever.

Yunchan is in huge demand around the globe and we are very fortunate in Vancouver to have captured this date.

We have a few people to acknowledge for their help in supporting our persistence to get Yunchan to Vancouver. First of all, we extend our thanks to our Season Sponsor, the Peak Group of Companies, and to our concert sponsors, Joyce and Tony. We are also most grateful to the Royal Bank Emerging Artists Fund, the Estate of Edwina and Paul Heller, and the City of Vancouver for their support.

Yunchan will open the concert with a short piece by Korean composer Hanurij Lee. After that, he will play J.S. Bach's iconic *Goldberg Variations*. Before he launches into this monumental work, we'd like to remind you that this is an aria with 30 variations lasting about one hour before it ends with the repeat of the original aria.

**We respectfully ask you not to applaud after each variation. Please hold your applause until the very end of the work.**

We hope that you have a wonderful afternoon.

Sincerely,



Leila Getz. C.M., OBC, DFA  
Founder and Artistic Director.



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# Program

This program will be performed without an intermission

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**Yunchan Lim, piano**

**Sunday, March 2, at 3:00 pm**  
**Orpheum Theatre**

LEE, HANURIJ (b. 2006)  
**...round and velvety-smooth blend...**

(approx. 6 minutes)

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. 80 minutes)

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# Yunchan Lim, piano

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**Early Life & Education:** Born in Siheung, Korea, Yunchan began piano lessons at age seven. He entered the Music Academy of the Seoul Arts Center the next year and quickly became immersed in his musical studies. He auditioned for and was accepted into the Korea National Institute for the Gifted in Arts at age 13. Following two years at the Korea National University of Arts, Yunchan is currently studying at the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston with his teacher Minsoo Sohn.

**This Season:** Yunchan's 2024/25 season highlights include orchestral debuts with the National Symphony Orchestra in Washington, the London Symphony, the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, the Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra, the Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra and WDR Symphony Orchestra, as well as returning to the New York Philharmonic, the Lucerne Symphony Orchestra and the Orchestra de Paris. This season will also see his recital debut at the Kennedy Center and a return to Carnegie Hall.

**Recordings:** Yunchan is an exclusive Decca Classics recording artist. His debut studio album, *Chopin: Études Opp. 10 & 25*, has gone triple platinum in South Korea and topped the classical charts around the world. The album won the 2024 Gramophone Award for Piano, and Yunchan was named Young Artist of the Year. His previous releases include his award-winning Cliburn performance of Liszt's *Transcendental Études* (Steinway & Sons), which was also nominated in the Piano category at the 2024 Gramophone Awards; Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 5 "Emperor" (Universal Music Group); and his appearance on KBS's 2020 Young Musicians of Korea album. Since January 2024, Yunchan has been an Apple Music Classical Global Ambassador.

**Awards & Prizes:** In 2018, Yunchan captured international attention when he won both Second Prize and the Chopin Special Award in his first competition: the Cleveland International Piano Competition for Young Artists. That same year, he won both the Third and Audience prizes at the Cooper International Competition, which also provided him the opportunity to perform with the Cleveland Orchestra. In 2019, aged only 15, he became the youngest person to win Korea's IsangYun International Competition, where he also took home two special prizes. In 2022 Yunchan became the youngest person ever to win gold at the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition at the age of 18.



Photo credit: James Hole

Yunchan Lim is represented by IMG Artists, London, UK

# Program Notes

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## LEE, HANURIJ (b. 2006)

### ...round and velvety-smooth blend...

This newly commissioned work for piano, written for Yunchan Lim, delves into the profound interplay of contrasting forces. It unfolds in two major sections, "Élégie" and "Rudepoema", hinting at the contrasting moods that will be explored.

"Élégie", evocative of a mournful song or lament, may initially present itself with hushed, introspective melodies and delicate textures. Yet, within this stillness, seeds of energy may begin to stir, hinting at the "Rudepoema" to come.

"Rudepoema", a term suggesting a raw, unrefined poem, might unleash a more forceful, dynamic energy. This section may feature driving rhythms, bold harmonies, and perhaps even moments of explosive intensity. However, echoes of the "Élégie" may linger, creating a dialogue between the contrasting elements.

Crucially, these two sections are not rigidly defined. They intertwine and evolve organically throughout the piece. Gentle passages may erupt into moments of raw power, while moments of intensity may subside into introspective contemplation. This dynamic interplay creates a captivating tapestry of sounds, inviting the listener on a journey through a richly nuanced sonic landscape.

This piece, in its exploration of contrasting forces, offers a unique counterpoint to the intellectual and intricate architecture of Bach's Goldberg Variations. While Bach's masterpiece demonstrates the pinnacle of order and meticulous craftsmanship, this new work embraces a more fluid, organic approach, celebrating the beauty of both stillness and movement, gentleness and rawness.

Program notes by IMG Artists.

## Johann Sebastian Bach Goldberg Variations, BWV 988

### History

Bach's *Goldberg Variations* (1741) counts as the single largest keyboard composition published in the eighteenth century. In this monumental collection of 30 variations on an elegantly embellished theme, Bach lays out for amateur and professional keyboard-players alike the most advanced techniques for playing the harpsichord, while striking admiration in the hearts of his fellow composers for his mastery of arcane contrapuntal procedures and his command of the popular musical styles of his day.

By the mid-eighteenth century, however, musical tastes had changed, and esoteric feats of contrapuntal wizardry had fallen out of fashion. The Goldbergs were then largely forgotten, although Beethoven appears aware of them when composing his *Diabelli Variations* (1819-1823), as does Brahms when composing his *Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Handel* (1861).

The Goldbergs were then "rediscovered" as concert repertoire in the twentieth century by the feathery flock of harpsichordists, with Wanda Landowska (1879-1959), who first recorded the set in 1933, as Mother Hen to the brood.

Migrating from the harpsichord to the concert grand, however, would take some time. With their "sewing-machine" rhythms, probing explorations of chromatic harmony and awkward hand-crossing textures designed for a two-manual instrument, the Goldbergs were considered too "antiquarian" to compete with the lushly Romantic, deeply emotional repertoire that dominated the recital programs of leading pianists such as Sergei Rachmaninoff and Josef Hoffmann in the early twentieth century.

Until June 1955, that is, when a 22-year-old Glenn Gould walked into the New York studios of Columbia Records to record what was destined to become one of the best-selling classical albums of all time. What Gould revealed 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, brought to life by the fingers alone.

And now, far from being merely a niche interest of “brainy” keyboard-players, Bach’s Goldbergs have gone “mainstream” and are at the centre of the performing repertoire. Proof of which is the fact that Icelandic pianist Víkingur Ólafsson has just won his first Grammy for his recording of ... The Goldbergs.

### The Aria

The theme that Bach wrote for his variations is a *sarabande tendre*, identified by its highly expressive style and stately rhythm, emphasizing the second beat of the bar.



The first system of the musical score for the Aria, consisting of three staves. The top staff is the treble clef, and the bottom two are the bass clef. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The music begins with a half note chord in the bass and a half note chord in the treble. The melody in the treble staff is characterized by a stately rhythm, with a strong emphasis on the second beat of each bar. The bass line provides a simple harmonic accompaniment.

Floridly ornamented in the French manner, its 32 measures unfold in the traditional two-part form of a dance movement, with each half repeated, which provides an opportunity for the performer to vary the performance by means of changes in dynamics, articulation and ornamentation.



The second system of the musical score for the Aria, consisting of three staves. This system covers measures 3 through 12. The music continues with the same stately rhythm and emphasis on the second beat. The treble staff features more elaborate ornamentation, including grace notes and slurs, which are characteristic of the French style. The bass line remains simple and harmonic, supporting the melodic line in the treble.

The harmonic rhythm of the Aria is deliberately slow, one chord to the bar, and Bach’s variations are based not on the melodic content of the Aria, but rather on its bassline 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 book-ended 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 then starts off anew, with a bang, on a robust G-major chord that begins the No. 16 French overture variation.

### Variatio 16. Overture. a 1 Clav.



Thirdly, the 30 variations are organized into 10 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, which is 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.

In Variation 26, one hand actually plays in 3/4 while the other is in 18/16.

### Variatio 26. a 2 Clav.



The display-oriented virtuoso variations feature two kinds of hand-crossing.

First there is 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.

### Variatio 5. a 1 ovvero 2 Clav.



Then there is 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, as in this passage from Variation 8.



This would be easy on a two-manual keyboard instrument, but alas the modern concert grand has only one! The inclusion of *canon variations* helps to mask the recurring regularity of the Aria's four-bar phrases and repeating bass line.

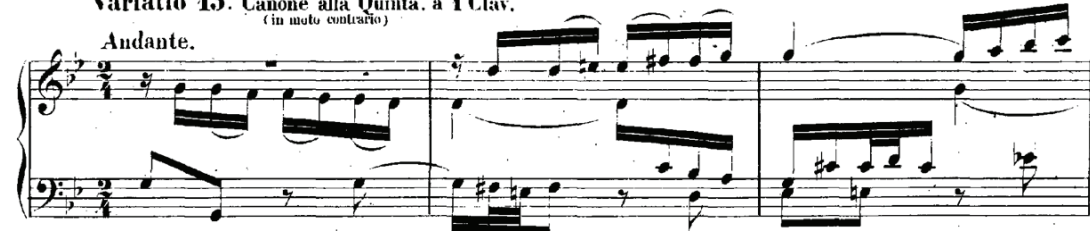
But the canons are not always straightforward rounds. Variations 12 and 15 each feature a *canon inversus*, in which the leading voice is accompanied by itself – turned upside down!

**Variatio 12. Canone alla Quarta.**



**Variatio 15. Canone alla Quinta, a 1 Clav.**  
(in moto contrario)

Andante.



The Goldberg's emotional heart comes in Variation 25 in the minor mode, described by Wanda Landowska as the work's "crown of thorns."

**Variatio 25. a 2 Clav.**



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.

\* \* \*



There then 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

**Variatio 28. a 2 Clav.**



and hammering fists of chords chopping between the hands in Variation 29.

**Variatio 29. a 1 ovvero 2 Clav.**



**The Quodlibet**

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

**Variatio 30. Quodlibet. a 1 Clav.**



The two overlapping folk tunes that Bach shoehorns 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 geblieben

Cabbage and turnips  
have driven me away,  
had my mother cooked meat,  
I would have stayed longer

Coming at the very end of the work, there is something of the chorale in this quodlibet, something good-natured and healing that gathers all hearts in song, as at the end of a church cantata or Lutheran religious service.

### **Aria da Capo e Fine**

It then remains only for the Aria that opened the work to echo once more off the walls of our listening space, repeated note for note as it was at the beginning. This gesture of return, too, has spiritual echoes that are intuitively felt but difficult to put into words.

Bach inhabited a world made comprehensible to him by his Lutheran faith, a world in which the divine presence penetrated every piece of Creation. In the Goldberg Variations, Bach gives form in sound to the secular and the sacred world – the secular through the music of popular genres and dance forms, the divine through canons and the miraculous geometric transforms of their musical themes.

The melodic voice of the Aria, when it returns once again to our ears, seems small and vulnerable with respect to what had come before, and we with it. In this return to the work's beginnings, we hear, and intuitively share, the humble prayer of a pious man before his God.

Program notes by  
Donald G. Gislason, 2025

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