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Johann Sebastian Bach

Goldberg Variations

Sarabanda con Partite

Aria Variata

Matthew Halls harpsichord

J.S.Bach Goldberg Variations Matthew Halls *harpsichord*

DISC ONE

Sarabanda con Partite BWV 990

① Sarabanda - Theme	2.01
② Partita One	1.26
③ Partita Two	0.51
④ Partita Three	1.41
⑤ Partita Four	1.26
⑥ Partita Five	1.07
⑦ Partita Six	2.02
⑧ Partita Seven	1.14
⑨ Partita Eight	1.24
⑩ Partita Nine	0.49
⑪ Partita Ten	1.09
⑫ Partita Eleven	1.36
⑬ Partita Twelve: <i>Allemanda</i>	1.46
⑭ Partita Thirteen: <i>Courante</i>	1.30
⑮ Partita Fourteen: <i>Aria Variata</i>	1.10
⑯ Partita Ultima: <i>Giguetta</i>	0.54

Goldberg Variations BWV 988

Fourth Part of the Clavierübung

⑰ Aria	4.42
⑱ Variatio 1. <i>a 1 Clav.</i>	2.03
⑲ Variatio 2. <i>a 1 Clav.</i>	2.20
⑳ Variatio 3. <i>Canone all'Unisuono. a 1 Clav.</i>	2.00
㉑ Variatio 4. <i>a 1 Clav.</i>	1.17
㉒ Variatio 5. <i>a 1 ó vero 2 Clav.</i>	1.57
㉓ Variatio 6. <i>Canone alla Secunda. a 1 Clav.</i>	2.01
㉔ Variatio 7. <i>a 1 ó vero 2 Clav. Al tempo di Giga</i>	1.50
㉕ Variatio 8. <i>a 2 Clav.</i>	2.03
㉖ Variatio 9. <i>Canone alla Terza. a 1 Clav.</i>	3.00
㉗ Variatio 10. <i>Fugetta. a 1 Clav.</i>	1.51
㉘ Variatio 11. <i>a 2 Clav.</i>	2.21
㉙ Variatio 12. <i>Canone alla Quarta. a 1 Clav.</i>	3.37
㉚ Variatio 13. <i>a 2 Clav.</i>	5.50
㉛ Variatio 14. <i>a 2 Clav.</i>	2.29
㉜ Variatio 15. <i>Canone alla Quinta. a 1 Clav.</i>	4.40

TOTAL TIME : 66.25

harpsichord: two-manual instrument by Ian Tucker
(after Ruckers/Hemsch)
pitch: 415
temperament: Niedhardt (1724)
keyboard technician: Edmund Pickering

DISC TWO

Goldberg Variations BWV 988

(continued)

① Variatio 16. <i>Ouverture. a 1 Clav.</i>	3.05
② Variatio 17. <i>a 2 Clav.</i>	2.17
③ Variatio 18. <i>Canone alla Sexta. a 1 Clav.</i>	1.38
④ Variatio 19. <i>a 1 Clav.</i>	1.49
⑤ Variatio 20. <i>a 2 Clav.</i>	2.18
⑥ Variatio 21. <i>Canone alla Settima. a 1 Clav.</i>	3.18
⑦ Variatio 22. <i>a 1 Clav.</i>	1.31
⑧ Variatio 23. <i>a 2 Clav.</i>	2.22
⑨ Variatio 24. <i>Canone all'Ottava. a 1 Clav.</i>	3.48
⑩ Variatio 25. <i>a 2 Clav.</i>	7.08
⑪ Variatio 26. <i>a 2 Clav.</i>	4.01
⑫ Variatio 27. <i>Canone alla Nona. a 2 Clav.</i>	2.08
⑬ Variatio 28. <i>a 2 Clav.</i>	2.44
⑭ Variatio 29. <i>a a 1 ó vero 2 Clav.</i>	2.12
⑮ Variatio 30. <i>Quodlibet. a 1 Clav.</i>	2.04
⑯ Aria	4.48

Aria Variata BWV 989

⑰ Thema	2.00
⑱ Var. 1. <i>Largo</i>	2.31
⑲ Var. 2.	1.17
㉑ Var. 3.	1.10
㉑ Var. 4. <i>Allegro</i>	1.12
㉒ Var. 5. <i>Un poco allegro</i>	1.03
㉓ Var. 6. <i>Andante</i>	2.29
㉔ Var. 7. <i>Un poco allegro</i>	0.54
㉕ Var. 8. <i>Allegro</i>	0.55
㉖ Var. 9.	1.01
㉗ Var. 10.	2.07

TOTAL TIME : 64.05

recorded 4th-6th June 2007

St Silas, Kentish Town, London

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J.S. Bach (1685 - 1750)

Sarabanda con Partite BWV 990

Though listed both in volume 42 of the *Gesamtausgabe der Bachgesellschaft* and in Roitzch's supplement to the Peters edition of Bach's keyboard works (revised in 1904 by Max Seiffert), the authorship of this charmingly beautiful set of variations upon a Sarabande has been hotly contested. Considerable concern has been voiced that the form and musical style of the work differ from other Bachian models, leading to speculation that it may have been composed by any number of slightly lesser-known North German composers. Although two sources explicitly attribute this piece to Johann Sebastian (two manuscripts bear the ascription "Da mio J. S. Bach"), they cannot be entirely trusted since all of the available sources derive from an unknown original source.

Weighing up all the evidence it seems impossible to assert with any real confidence that Johann Sebastian was the author of this work. However, if another source should come to light in the future, strengthening the association, it would be in many ways immensely satisfying as it would provide us with an important precedent for the 'Goldberg Variations'. For here, as in BWV 998, is an ingenious set of variations upon the underlying harmonic structure of a simple Sarabande. Some have tried to suggest that the piece was composed in the mid-seventeenth century (Eichberg 1975), but, given the complexity of the figuration and at times highly developed harmonic idiom in some of the more expressive movements, a later date would seem more appropriate. Whatever the case, this is a superbly attractive set of variations upon the most simple and beautiful of dance-inspired themes – without doubt the work of a highly-skilled composer and absolutely worthy of its current (albeit peripheral) status in Bach's keyboard oeuvre.

One unusual feature of the variation set is the inclusion of a suite at the end, occupying the final four partitas (numbers XIII-XVI). After the seemingly climactic fanfare-like partita XII this comes as something of a surprise and marks a significant departure from the norm compared with mainstream developments in the variation tradition

of the early eighteenth century. However, the inclusion of the four dance movements (*Allemanda*, *Courante*, *Aria Variata* and *Giguetta*) lends the work a certain charm and there is something recognisably conclusive about the rustic and up-beat gigue which brings the work to a close. The use of delicate style *brisé* textures throughout leaves little doubt that these variations were conceived for the harpsichord rather than the organ.

Goldberg Variations BWV 988

The work which nowadays we refer to simply as the ‘Goldberg Variations’ was originally published in 1741 as the fourth part of Bach’s monumental *Clavierübung* under the much lengthier title: “Keyboard practice, consisting of an aria with diverse variations for the two-manual harpsichord”. The more popular title came later and owes its existence to the writings of Forkel, Bach’s earliest biographer. The story goes that Bach wrote these variations for his young student, Johann Gottlieb Goldberg, who was at the time working in the services of Count Keyserlingk and, it would seem, was often called upon to provide musical diversions well into the night when his employer’s insomnia became too much. Those who doubt the basis of Forkel’s anecdotal recollections relating to the genesis of this extraordinary work have pointed to the unlikelihood of the thirteen-year old Goldberg being able to actually play the variations, although we do know that he went on to become a celebrated keyboard virtuoso. One thing we can be sure of however is the fact that J. S. Bach did visit the court in Dresden in 1741 at the invitation of Count Keyserlingk and, whilst BWV 988 may well have been composed before such a visit, it is entirely plausible that on this occasion Bach presented a special copy of the work to the Count.

Whatever the impetus behind the composition of such a massive set of variations, Bach was revisiting a form that he had not explored for some considerable time. Perhaps when Bach decided once again to embrace the tradition of the encyclopaedic variation set (a tradition reaching well back into the sixteenth century) he was primarily fascinated by the pedagogical benefits of such an undertaking. What better way for a composer to exhibit his compositional prowess whilst offering along the way insights into all manner

of compositional techniques and innovative developments in keyboard technique? There are of course many aspects of the work that continue to fascinate and astound performers and listeners alike but perhaps the single most important achievement of the ‘Goldberg Variations’ in purely compositional terms is the remarkable multiplicity of styles and forms surveyed by the composer over the course of the thirty variations. In fact, given the scale and sheer audacity of the work, it’s almost as if Bach set himself the challenge of showing that almost any genre – including the most complex of contrapuntal forms such as canon and fugue – can be realized above a simple recurring underlying harmonic structure.

The underlying structure in question is of course that of the aria, which takes the form of an exquisitely beautiful sarabande. The graceful and flowing melody of the right hand almost seems to disguise the fact that it is the harmonic progression underneath which is the integral feature of the whole set. One can be forgiven for not grasping the full potential of this bass line upon first hearing – especially given the pleasant distraction of the right-hand melody – due to its sheer length. Thirty-two bars employing one principal change of harmony per measure (sixty-four if you count the repeats) constitute the underlying harmonic theme – far longer than most variation set bass lines. Four descending bass notes lead us quickly to the dominant chord of D major and commentators have been quick to find precedents for such a simple idea in the works of others such as Johann Christoph Bach and Handel. However the real beauty of invention lies in the scale of the bass line – a binary structure built upon two perfectly balanced sections of sixteen measures.

In terms of the variations themselves three different cycles appear to be running throughout the course of the work. First of all there are the character pieces (consisting of dance forms and cantabile arias) followed by the virtuoso variations (revealing the likely influence of Domenico Scarlatti’s recently-published *Essercizi*) employing all sorts of highly original keyboard techniques, and then the sequence of canons that neatly frame each group of three movements. This pattern is almost entirely consistent with the exception of the first and last three variations (leaving the overall symmetry of the

work completely intact). There is also a strong binary structure to the work (mirroring the theme itself) with an important hiatus occurring after the fifteenth variation before the exuberant French Overture (Variation 16) opens the second half of the work.

In many ways the cycle of nine canons forms the backbone of the Goldbergs and what makes them so intriguing is the fact that the interval of canonic imitation increases by one step each time. The first canon is instantly recognisable as such with its imitation at the same pitch (canon at the unison), but as we move progressively through the canon at the second, canon at the third etc. the canons begin to create unusual – often mesmeric – sound worlds which at times might seem to verge on the austere. The level of complexity in terms of the chromatic voice leading in some of these canons is quite simply breathtaking.

From the most introverted and hauntingly beautiful variations (Variation 25) to the most exuberant and extroverted displays of virtuosity (Variations 28 and 29) the Goldbergs are as rich in variety as it is in innovation. One of the most surprising and delightful features of the work is the *Quodlibet* (Variation 30) that occurs just before the return of the aria. The evocative title denotes what is essentially nothing more than a light-hearted and entertaining nonsense piece, of the type improvised by the Bach family at their annual gatherings. Here the texture almost gives way under the weight of invention, containing no less (and perhaps even more) than six distinct melodic fragments woven into a sort of musical patchwork quilt. Two of these melodies are known to have been popular folk songs and the texts are intriguing. The first of these, *Kraut und Rüben*, formed the basis of Buxtehude's thirty-two part partite entitled *La Capricciosa*, giving perhaps some insight into the extent to which Bach revered this earlier variation set and the music of his old mentor.

<i>Kraut und Rüben</i>	Cabbage and beets
<i>haben mich vertrieben,</i>	have driven me away;
<i>hätt' mein' Mutter Fleisch gekocht,</i>	had my mother cooked meat
<i>so wär ich länger bleiben</i>	I might have stayed longer.

The second folk tune used in the *Quodlibet* worthy of mention appears to have belonged to a tune used as the final dance at a wedding party and it has been described as a sort of wanderer's melody. The text seems entirely appropriate – indeed beautifully poetic – at this climactic point in the work just before the return of the graceful aria.

Ich bin so lang nicht bei dir g'west
I have been away from you for so long a time

Aria Variata “alla Maniera Italiana” BWV 989

Given the doubts already discussed about the authenticity of BWV 990, the *Aria Variata* stands as the only truly authentic work of the composer's early years in this form, with the exception of the chorale partitas. It is rather more serious and introspective in its style, largely due to the choice of the minor key and the chorale-like chordal nature of the somewhat melancholic opening aria. Lest there be any misunderstanding the term 'aria' should be interpreted here – as in the Goldberg Variations – as a short theme in binary form which establishes the underlying harmonic structure and phrasing patterns of the subsequent variations. It is once again the harmony that forms the real basis of the variation treatment and not the melodic line – a style of variation cultivated by Italian and Southern German keyboard composers towards the end of the seventeenth century. In the case of this work the aria seems to have been composed by Bach himself and amongst the most attractive features are the poignant chromatic harmony (including a bold sideways step through G minor to D minor in measure 8) and the rich embellishments (taken from the version in the Andreas Bach Book) that here form the basis of the repeats.

The variations are almost entirely written in two-part style with the occasional addition of some harmonic filling out. Even in the climactic final variation – a virtuosic *tour de force* – employing running semiquavers in both hands, the two-part texture is maintained. The style here is similar to that of Bach's early *manualiter* fugues and also bears a strong resemblance to the figurations employed in two final variations found in Pachelbel's *Hexachordum Apollonis*. A great deal of the musical material employed

in the earlier variations suggests the influence of composers such as Sweelink and Scheidt and the insistent use of a number of rhythmic fragments such as the *figura corta* (dancing figure) in Variation 1 is certainly more in keeping with earlier styles of keyboard writing.

One of the slight mysteries of this work is the large left-hand spreads in the opening and closing movements. The spacing of some of the more expansive chords allows for the right hand to come into play in order to render the harmony complete whilst in other places there seems to be no other alternative than for the left hand to stretch an octave and a fifth – something beyond the scope of most hands! In view of this dilemma it has been suggested that the piece was conceived with the pedal harpsichord in mind (certainly a possibility) or perhaps it was written to exploit the possibilities of a special type of keyboard (Krebs's version of the piece is entitled *all'manual Italiana*). In the absence of either of these possibilities it is left to the modern performer on the harpsichord to use his or her imagination in order to decide how best to realise these wide spacings in performance.

Goldberg Variations A Performer's Perspective

Aria

A simple cantabile melody in the right hand above a left-hand accompaniment of broken harmony, every so often generating a third polyphonic strand in the texture, serves as the point of departure for one of the most satisfying and enriching of musical journeys. The underlying slow pulse of the French *sarabande tendre* with its characteristic poise on the second beat lends an almost hypnotic grace and elegance to the opening movement. It is the tessitura of the right-hand melody that gives it its almost ethereal quality, starting unusually high and creating space in the middle of the texture. The many melodic embellishments and grace notes that adorn the melody create a heightened sense of expressivity and despite its key (G major) there is an unavoidable feeling of melancholy and introverted reflection.

Variation 1

Beginning the variation set proper, the first of our character pieces has something of the air and noble swagger of a *polonaise* about it. It's a steady triple-time dance with a definite spring in its step and is strongly characterised by the anapaestic (short-short-long) first beats in the right hand, coupled with some rather jazzy cross accents in both voices. As early as measure thirteen the performer is confronted with the first appearance of hand crossings – a technical feature of the work that will be exploited to the full in the *études*.

Variation 2

Two imitative voices in the right hand above a simple walking bass invite immediate comparison with the Corellian trio sonata style. In the case of Variation 2 however the voices are so very nearly canonic that one could be forgiven for wondering if perhaps the idea of a cycle of canons came to mind at this point in the compositional process. The mood is one of an uncomplicated andante up until the point at which the bass quavers turn to semiquavers in the second half, injecting a certain momentum as the final cadence comes into sight.

Variation 3

The first of the cycle of nine canons is an exuberant and almost restless dance in compound time. The canon in the right hand is *all'Unisono* and the second voice enters after one whole measure, meaning that there is extremely close proximity between the two melodic strands throughout. The left hand accompaniment starts with a simple quaver rocking motion, tracing arpeggios, before a gear change into almost constant semiquaver motion.

Variation 4

A gracefully lilting triple-time dance forms the structure of the fourth variation, employing four voices in an intriguing contrapuntal discourse. The head motif is a simple pattern of two upbeat quavers leading to a downbeat and the disjunct, almost jerky, melodic motion lends an air of playfulness. Appearing in almost every bar (either *rectus* or *inversus*), this simple motivic fragment is spun out amongst the four voices, with gentle syncopations and hemiolas adding to the rhythmic interest.



Variation 5

The first of the *études* or virtuoso variations is designated to be played on either one or two keyboards (on this recording two are used). The bass line of the aria is heard clearly at the beginning in the left hand – accentuated further by the long upbeats that anticipate each change of harmony. The right hand is engaged in a decorative semiquaver line until bar 8 when the roles are reversed. Hands crossings are a distinctive feature, reminiscent of the *pièces croisées* of Jean-Philippe Rameau or the virtuoso keyboard studies of Domenico Scarlatti.

Variation 6

The sixth variation takes the form of a canon at the second above a rolling bass line of semiquavers. There is a strong connection here between the melodic material employed in the right hand (essentially a falling scale spanning a sixth) and cadential material already encountered in Variation 4. There are some beautiful moments of chromaticism and the many suspensions across the bar line give the whole a sense architectural grandeur.

Variation 7

Marked explicitly '*al tempo di Giga*', the seventh variation is a spirited and playful gigue written in two voices. The sprightly dotted figure found in every bar contributes to the lively effect of the movement, as do the fast trills and upbeat demisemiquaver scales (*tirades*). There is a strong stylistic link between this movement and the gigue of the C minor French Suite, where one also finds a close relationship between the two hands.

Variation 8

The second of the *études* is a virtuoso showpiece, once again employing challenging hand crossings and unrelenting semiquaver motion. The bass line is once again clearly exposed at the beginning of each section before becoming embroiled in a sort of see-saw exchange, taking the left hand right up into the upper regions of the keyboard as the right hand descends below.

Variation 9

The Canon at the third is not altogether dissimilar in style to Variation 2 with its Corellian *andante* bass line. There is a gentle ease about this movement largely as a result of the fact that the interval of canonic displacement is in itself a consonance. There are none of the more austere canonic harmonies found elsewhere in the work and a sense of balance and calm is restored. The gentle acceleration towards the two cadences at the end of each section is once again achieved by means of rhythmic diminution in the left hand.

Variation 10

Taking the form of an *alla breve fugetta*, Variation 10 is a miniature contrapuntal masterpiece. Here the first four bars of the bass line (theme) are paraphrased and miraculously transformed into a fugue subject, replete with distinctive ornamental touches. The subsequent fugal entries are skilfully manipulated in such a way as to ensure that the music comes to a close in the right key at the end of each half.

Variation 11

Another hand crossing *tour de force*, Variation 11 bears a close resemblance in terms of melodic material to the Prelude in B flat from Book II of The Well-Tempered Clavier. The metre here is a rather unusual 12/16 (interpreted by Kirnberger as implying a quick tempo), but the almost hypnotic effect of the scales descending each time by an interval of a seventh seems to call for at least a little bit of breathing space in the execution.

Variation 12

Variation 12 is a canon at the fourth, gracefully dancing along in a stately triple time. One interesting feature of this canon is the use of a theme that never begins with the left hand on the strong beat of the bar, seeming to create at times a slight rhythmic stutter in the texture. In terms of the contrapuntal technique employed, it is important to recognise that the subject is turned upside down (*inversus*) for the answer. The chromatic inflection of the semiquaver scales in bars 24-26 are a particularly enjoyable feature of the second half.

Variation 13

An aria-inspired movement follows next, employing simple two-part counterpoint in the left hand as an accompaniment to one of the most beautifully memorable and exquisitely embellished melodic lines that Bach ever composed. Thinking back to the opening *sarabande* (aria) leads one to begin to view this movement as a *sarabande doublée* of the type encountered in Bach's keyboard suites (eg. the French Suite in G major). There are also parallels to be drawn here with the many decorative cantata movements for *obbligato* solo instrument.

Variation 14

In marked contrast to the transcendental qualities of the preceding movement, Variation 14 takes the form of a rather cheeky *scherzetto*. The three-octave leap of the right hand in bar one combined with the quirky ornaments creates from the outset an air of light-hearted playfulness. At various points throughout the variation the two hands seem to engage in a game of musical chase with frequent hand crossings and frenetic rhythmic acceleration towards the cadence points.

Variation 15

Heralding the halfway point of the variations, the canon at the fifth is the first variation to resort to the minor key. The character of the movement is slightly austere and melancholic and once again the canonic voices enter just after the main beat, incorporating sighing descending slurred semiquavers, creating a sense of heaviness. A beautiful harmonic touch comes in the second half with the move to E flat major, and at the very end of the movement the right hand rises step by step to the high D, leaving the first half of the variation set open-ended and seeming to echo the basic structure of the aria with its half close at the end of bar 16.

Variation 16

Opening the second half of the variation set is a grand French *Ouverture*, making a bold structural and musical statement. Like the other two large-scale works of the *Clavierübung*, the *Italian Concerto* and the *Ouverture in B minor*, the piece begins with a thick left-hand chord and proceeds entirely in keeping with its French model with

its many rushing upbeat scales and dotted rhythms. After the monumental opening section follows a short fugue, beginning (in typical French fashion) on the weak beat of the bar in triple time.

Variation 17

The first *étude* of the second half scurries along with its running semiquaver passages of broken thirds and sixths. The bass line is more heavily disguised now as a result of the left hand's dextrous passagework, and a direct comparison with the early sonatas from Scarlatti's *Essercizi* (1738) is unavoidable.

Variation 18

The *alla breve* canon at the sixth looks rather antiquated on paper with its preponderance of semibreves and minims in the right hand. The bass line however is somewhat reminiscent of a *Bourrée* with its recurring dactylic patterns. Of note here is the use of canonic stretto – i.e. introducing the second voice after a half bar rather than the usual full bar – and the effect this has on the momentum of the movement as a whole.

Variation 19

Many different opinions have been expressed concerning the true *affekt* of Variation 19. Some consider it to be a straightforward *Minuet* whilst others view it as something altogether more active. Under the fingers it feels like a three-part invention and with its gentle rhythmic pulsations on the second beat, coupled with the semiquaver note-spinning in the background, a more relaxed tempo might seem the safer of the two bets. The sense of ebb and flow generated by the texture makes this a charming piece of exquisite simplicity.

Variation 20

As we progress through the *études*, the hand-crossing techniques seem to become more and more developed. By the time we reach Variation 20 there are in fact only a handful of bars that allow the hands to operate in their more familiar uncrossed manner. Two principal musical ideas are explored here, beginning with a series of rising and falling arpeggios in the two hands (crossing each other) and leading into an extended passage of fast triplet scales, employing some exotic chromaticisms in the second half.

Variation 21

The canon at the seventh has something of the noble style of the *Allemande* about it, as well as appearing to be quite closely related to earlier imitative keyboard chorale settings. It is the second of the variations to explore the minor mode and the poignantly beautiful chromatic harmony resulting from the canonic imitation at the seventh gives the movement a wonderfully dark character.

Variation 22

Very similar in style to Variation 18 (canon at the sixth), the imitative four-part texture (reminiscent of a motet) that constitutes Variation 22 always causes momentary confusion as one wonders whether in fact this movement might actually be another canon. The deceit - if indeed it was ever intended so - is short-lived. It is yet another example of Bach's ability to construct a dense polyphonic texture from a single melodic motif. Hardly a bar goes by without the appearance of this motif in one or more of the voices.

Variation 23

The opening three bars of Variation 23 always seem to conjure up the sound world of pealing bells. The simplest of musical ideas (a sequence of descending scales) is here put to ravishing effect in a movement that engages the two hands in a series of humorous and childishly playful exchanges. The sheer variety of witty rhythmic figures and technical devices in this movement make it one of the most inventive of the *études*.

Variation 24

The canon at the octave is characterised by gently lilting pastoral rhythms in a compound metre and an unusually long theme in the right hand. The answering voice remains silent for two whole bars before entering the musical dialogue and when it does it is at the lower octave (in the tenor). The fact that there is this extra time before the canon begins makes this one of the more immediately comprehensible of the canons for the listener. The gentle rocking motion, ultimately leading us to some extremely low bass notes in the final bar, prepares us well for the extraordinary movement that follows.

Variation 25

Set once more in the minor key and never failing to create an atmosphere of profound introspection, Variation 25 is in many ways the beating emotional heart of the 'Goldberg Variations'. The bass line is adorned with delicate chromaticisms, supporting a coloratura right-hand solo voice that meanders gently, passing through the most poignantly beautiful dissonances along the way. It is easy to forget for a moment that the underlying thirty-two bar harmonic progression that has become so familiar continues to form the structural foundation as the bitter-sweet voice leadings propel the solo voice to ever more extreme flights of fancy.

Variation 26

Emerging from the darkness of the preceding variation, the work slowly comes back to life by way of a major-key *sarabande*, accompanied by continuous rippling semiquavers. The underlying harmonic structure becomes clearer once again as the familiar sarabande rhythm gently conflicts with the accompanimental *moto perpetuo*. With the right hand beginning in an 18/16 metre and the left hand in a simple 3/4 Bach seems to be cautioning against any form of rhythmic synchronization between the two hands.

Variation 27

The final canon in the cycle is a canon at the ninth and in marked contrast to all of the previous canons it employs only two voices without a supporting bass line. The theme is rather a whimsical one in 6/8 and in order to complete each section satisfactorily the composer is forced to provide extra cadential material.

Variation 28

As the variation set begins to gain momentum towards its climax, Variation 28 immediately serves to quicken the pace. The predominant features of this movement are the long measured trills (written out) that predominantly serve as pedal points in the middle of the texture. Accompanying the trills is a leaping quaver bass line and a rather pointillistic third voice that perpetually stabs at the main beats of the bar. Moments

of respite from this busy texture come in the form of simple semiquaver arpeggios and towards the end chromatically rising and falling melodic lines momentarily disorientate.

Variation 29

Variation 29 is a climactic virtuoso *tour de force* employing two musical devices: firstly, the rapid alternation of three-part semiquaver chords between the two hands in extremely close proximity (almost a form of multiple trilling) and secondly, roulades of semiquaver triplets shared between the two hands. At the point at which the chordal batteries give way to the passagework, one senses the influence of the *stylus phantasticus* or fantasia style.

Variation 30

Much has already been said about the *Quodlibet* above in the introductory notes. In performance it is impossible to view this movement as anything but celebratory and it therefore seems entirely fitting that Bach should have adopted such a festive character piece at this crucial point in the work, just before the magical return of the opening aria.

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Matthew Halls harpsichord

Matthew Halls has rapidly established himself as one of Britain's most exciting young conductors as well as a leading harpsichordist and organist. He was Associate Director (2005-2007) and Artistic Director (2007-2009) of The King's Consort before taking up his current position as Artistic Director of the newly-formed Retrospect Ensemble. He studied at Oxford University, was organ scholar and later assistant organist at New College and graduated with a first-class degree in music. Whilst completing postgraduate research at Oxford he was also director of music at the University Church. In 1998 he joined the European Union Baroque Orchestra, with whom he toured

extensively throughout Europe and the Middle East. Since leaving this orchestra he has enjoyed a busy and exciting career, playing with many of the world's leading period instrument orchestras, including the Amsterdam Baroque Orchestra, Les Arts Florissants, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, Academy of Ancient Music, Theatre of Early Music, Montreal and New York Collegium. As a keyboard soloist he has appeared at the Cheltenham International Festival; Händel Festspiele, Göttingen, Händel Festspiele, Halle; Enescu Festival, Bucharest; Ottawa International Chamber Festival; Antiquarium Festival, Moscow, Lamèque Festival, Canada and Dias da Música, Lisbon.



As Artistic Director of The King's Consort he conducted in many of Europe's leading festivals and concert venues (most recently Concertgebouw, Amsterdam; La Cité de la Musique, Paris; and Palais des Beaux Arts, Brussels) and broadcast extensively both on television and radio. His recently-released world premiere recording of Handel's 'Parnasso in Festa' for the Hyperion record label met with widespread critical acclaim and was awarded the Stanley Sadie Handel Recording Prize in 2009. With Retrospect Ensemble he has recently directed tours to South Korea, Portugal and Israel in addition to their annual concert series at London's Wigmore Hall and further UK appearances at the Edinburgh International Festival and Norfolk and Norwich Festival. Besides his work with Retrospect Ensemble and The King's Consort, he has conducted many other period-instrument ensembles around the world, including The English Concert, Portland Baroque Orchestra, USA, and Holland Baroque Society.

Working regularly as a guest conductor with many of Europe's leading symphony orchestras, Matthew has recently made important début appearances with the Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin, the Orchestre Philharmonique de Monte-Carlo, Hessischer Rundfunk Sinfonieorchester, Scottish Chamber Orchestra, London Mozart Players, Norrköping Symphony Orchestra, Iceland Symphony Orchestra, Hamburger Symphoniker and Ulster Orchestra. Matthew is also active in the opera world, having worked extensively as a freelance conductor and chorus master at De Nederlandse Opera and the Nationale Reisopera in The Netherlands, the Komische Oper in Berlin and the Bayrische Staatsoper, as well as with English Touring Opera and New Chamber Opera. Most recently he has conducted new productions of Rinaldo (Central City Opera, Colorado) and Floridante (International Handel-Festspiele, Halle).

For a number of years, Matthew was a tutor at St Peter's College Oxford and taught harpsichord at Oxford University. He is also a tutor for the European Union Baroque Orchestra and frequently leads courses on summer schools such as the Jerusalem Early Music Workshop and the Dartington International Summer School.

RETROSPECT ENSEMBLE

Launched on 1 May 2009, Retrospect Ensemble gave its inaugural UK performance at the Norfolk and Norwich Festival, opening the festival with a critically acclaimed performance of Handel's late masterpiece, Jephtha. Recent concert appearances have included a Bach recital at the Edinburgh International Festival with soprano Carolyn Sampson and foreign tours to the Republic of Korea, Portugal and Switzerland.

Conducted by Matthew Halls, Retrospect Ensemble is embarking on a new journey both for its musicians and audiences – exploring the repertoire of four centuries and embracing the practices, styles and aesthetics of former ages with renewed vigour and a fresh approach. The choice of the name Retrospect Ensemble ensures that the group need not restrict itself to one particular historical period nor to a rigid configuration; concerts range from small chamber ensemble to full orchestra and choir.

This versatility has led to the formation of a small fixed-personnel group, Retrospect Trio, in which Matthew Halls is joined by three of Europe's leading period string specialists: Matthew Truscott, Sophie Gent and Jonathan Manson. The group's debut CD recording of Purcell's exquisite Sonatas of four parts was chosen as 'CD of the week' by The Sunday Times and selected as 'Editor's Choice' by Gramophone Magazine, in addition to being nominated for a Classic FM Gramophone Award in the Baroque Instrumental Category. This debut release marked the first in a series of collaborations with the innovative label, Linn Records.

The arrival of Retrospect Ensemble has been warmly received and forming the backbone of its UK concert season is their annual London series at Wigmore Hall.

Forthcoming projects include tours to Israel, Portugal, Singapore and Germany. As part of the group's flourishing Young Artists Programme, they will be embarking upon a major collaboration with the Israeli Baroque Ensemble, Barrocade, which will culminate in a series of performances and masterclasses.

For further information and news of forthcoming concerts and recordings please visit:
www.retrospectensemble.com

