

CBSO

City of
Birmingham
Symphony
Orchestra

Goldberg Variations
Town Hall
Sunday 10 November 2024,
3pm

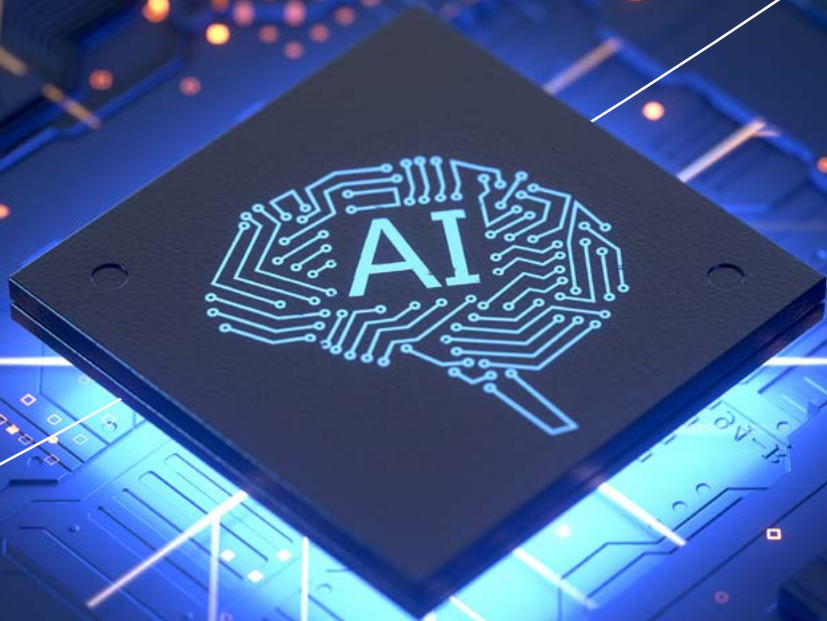
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GOLDBERG VARIATIONS

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INTRODUCTION

We all have at least one piece of music that we would take with us on a desert island...
The Goldberg Variations are definitely in my top five.

I discovered the piece when I was very young by listening to (surprise, surprise) Glenn Gould's version and it quickly became one of those pieces that bears a true therapeutic quality for me, a piece that became a life companion of sorts.

In my late teens I discovered Dmitry Sitkovetsky's transcription for string trio, that I very much hoped and wished to play one day, and eventually did, extensively. I met Dima in 2003 and we became quite close, I owe him my "violinistic awakening" amongst many other priceless mentorship episodes. I had the fortune of playing alongside him in the most diverse settings over the years, including this very version for chamber orchestra that he masterfully completed in 1992.

Count Kaiserling, a former Russian ambassador at the Court of Saxony, often stopped in Leipzig and brought along his young protege, a young man named Goldberg, to have lessons with Bach. The Goldberg Variations are a set of pieces for the Clavier, which Bach wrote for Goldberg to play during the Count's sleepless nights.

I think we can all agree that Bach exceeded all expectations with this work; the sheer virtuosity of his harmonic, contrapuntal and atmospheric imagination in every variation is mind-boggling. With very small exceptions, every variation has such a distinct character, feel, colour, temperament and personality that result in little gems and masterpieces of their own right.

Very similar to his equally famous Chaconne for solo violin, the Variations are organized in three un-interrupted parts of 15, 10 and 5 variations in a "circular pyramid" because they start and end with the same theme, in this case, the famous Aria. One could (and probably Goldberg had to) start all over as many times as needed to soothe his master's insomnia - but to me this circular motion is also a symbol of eternity and infinity.

Bach (Arr. Sitkovetsky), Goldberg Variations, 78mins

Please note this performance has no interval.

Eugene Tzikindelean Play/Direct (Violin)

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Sit back and enjoy one of Bach's most famous works for keyboard, wonderfully arranged for string orchestra by Dmitry Sitkovetsky, and led by CBSO's Eugene Tzinkindlean. An afternoon listening to the inventive, joyful, and dance-like Goldberg Variations is time well spent indeed.

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750),
arr. D. Sitkovetsky

GOLDBERG VARIATIONS, BWV 988

The legend.

On 1st May 1730, Johann Sebastian Bach advertised a collection of suites for single-manual harpsichord under the title *Clavier-Übung*, or "Keyboard Practice". An additional heading, "Opus 1", made it clear that this would be part of a series, and in 1735 appeared *Clavier-Übung II* – two substantial works for a state-of-the-art harpsichord. *Clavier-Übung III* was published in 1739 – an ambitious collection of works for organ. And in 1741 came a fourth and final collection, or rather, a single work: a colossal set of variations for keyboard, published under the following title:

Clavier-Übung, consisting of an ARIA with diverse variations for harpsichord with two manuals. Composed for music-lovers, for the refreshment of their spirits, by Johann Sebastian Bach, composer for the royal

court of Poland and the Electoral court of Saxony, Kapellmeister and Director of Choral Music in Leipzig. Nuremberg, Balthasar Schmid, publisher.

That was how Bach advertised the first edition of these extraordinary variations. The "Goldberg" name came later, and if Bach's first biographer Johann Forkel, is to be trusted (and it's quite a big "if"), it derives from one of the most touching stories in baroque music:

"[For the Variations] we have to thank the instigation of the former Russian ambassador to the court of Saxony, Count Keyserlingk, who often stopped in Leipzig and brought there with him [his house-harpsichordist] Goldberg...The Count was often ill and had sleepless nights. Once, the Count mentioned in Bach's presence that he would like to have some clavier pieces for Goldberg, which should be of such a smooth and somewhat lively character that he might be a little cheered up by them in his sleepless nights."

"Bach thought himself best able to fulfil this wish by means of Variations...Thereafter the Count always called them 'his' variations. He never tired of them, and for a long time

sleepless nights meant: 'Dear Goldberg, do play me one of my variations.' Bach was perhaps never so rewarded for one of his works as for this. The Count presented him with a golden goblet filled with 100 louis-d'or."

Bach certainly knew Count Keyserlingk. The Count was a major patron of music in the Saxon capital of Dresden, a city with which Bach – as Kantor of St Thomas's Church in the neighbouring (and equally cultured) city of Leipzig – was in regular contact. Bach's own son Wilhelm Friedemann held a post there, and had tutored the young Goldberg, at Keyserlingk's expense. Friedemann, in due course, had passed the budding virtuoso on to his dad, and he seems to have been one of Bach's more brilliant pupils. Goldberg, they said could play any score at sight - even when the sheet music was upside down.

There's only one problem. Johann Goldberg could have been no older than fifteen in 1741 – and no golden goblet was found amongst Bach's effects (though he did have a rather fine tobacco box of gold and agate). It's possible – indeed, probable, that Bach conceived the *Variations* wholly independently, as a grand conclusion to the *Clavier-Übung*. But works of art are about more than mere fact, just as Bach's inspiration is about more than the ordering – however masterful – of harmonies and counterpoints. The notes of the *Variations* have inspired generations of artists, and lingering behind them (in imagination, if not fact) has remained the melancholy figure of the sleepless nobleman, pacing his mansion by candlelight as Bach's music flowed consolingly over his troubled mind.

The legacy.

Like much of Bach's music, the *Variations* – though studied, played and revered by connoisseurs and composers – were not widely performed after his death. Their influence was quieter. Beethoven took them as inspiration for his own mighty



PORTRAIT OF JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (AGED 61), 1746.
ELIAS GOTTLÖB HAUSSMANN, PUBLIC DOMAIN, VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS.

Diabelli Variations and Johannes Brahms played them in private after the death of his mother. "They're like balm", said Brahms to his friend Josef Gansbacher, who had found him at the keyboard, immersed in the *Goldberg Variations*, with tears streaming down his face.

Brahms played Bach on a grand piano, rather than the harpsichord that Bach would have known. That was normal in the 19th century, and it's still common in the 21st. Only in the 20th century were the *Goldberg Variations* performed regularly in public on the harpsichord – a practice pioneered by Wanda Landowska (1879-1959) and Rosalyn Tureck (1913-2003). Landowska was startled when large audiences started flocking to her performances of the *Goldberg Variations*, and she didn't wholly approve. "Is it through love of this music?" she asked. "No, they do not know it. They are prompted solely by the base curiosity of seeing a virtuoso fight with the most difficult work ever written for keyboard".

By then, however, the idea that a musical imagination as vast and rich as Bach's should be confined to a circle of experts – or, indeed, to any one instrument – was becoming hard to sustain. In 1955, the brilliant young Canadian pianist Glenn Gould made a recording of the *Variations* using a modern Steinway grand piano that came to define the work for a generation: clear, searching, and played with an infectious mixture of intellectual cool and jazz-like verve. It became a surprise hit; a global bestseller and a cult classic.

Gould took Bach into popular culture: paving the way for the *Goldberg Variations* to appear in movie soundtracks from *The Silence of the Lambs* to *Snowpiercer*. A 1993 biopic of Gould, *Thirty-Two Short Films about Glenn Gould*, was structured around Bach's *Variations*. That, in turn, inspired *22 Short Films about Springfield* – generally reckoned to be the single greatest episode of *The Simpsons*.

The music.

The *Goldberg Variations*, in other words, have infinite stories to tell. This is music at its purest, its boldest and its most profound, and since that sleepless night in Leipzig (whether or not it ever happened) Bach's limitless inventions have travelled far beyond the harpsichord and the piano. The *Variations* have been adapted for organ, guitar and saxophone quartet; for harp, for electronics and for jazz ensemble. The Russian-American violinist and conductor Dmitri Sitkovetsky created this version for string orchestra in 1992.

Bach himself, of course, regularly adapted his own music for different instruments. Not that it matters, but the instruments of a modern orchestral string section would probably have seemed more familiar to Bach (who was also an excellent violinist) than the modern grand piano.

In any case, the wonder of the music shines through undimmed. Space precludes a detailed description (and none is strictly necessary, though if you're inclined, Donald Tovey's and Glenn Gould's guides to the *Variations* are both worth digging out).

The *Aria* (theme), a stately dance melody that Bach had copied as early as 1725 for his wife Anna, is followed by 30 variations exploring the potential of the theme's bass rather than the shape of its melody. Every third variation is a canon (Glenn Gould compared these recurring musical puzzles to a classical colonnade, in the way they punctuate and balance the great structure). The 25th variation has become known as the "black pearl" and the 30th is an exuberant quodlibet - a playful medley of North German folksongs, one of which, we know, was sung to the distinctly earthy words "Cabbages and Turnips have Driven Me Away".

Is Bach joking? Well, why not? Laughter is as important a part of the universe as prayer or sorrow – and Bach is certainly creating a universe here. To finish, Bach simply repeats the *Aria*, setting a coping-stone on the whole majestic structure. Or perhaps he's simply preparing to start all over again...

© Richard Bratby

Johann Sebastian Bach.

Play/Direct (Violin)

EUGENE TZIKINDELEAN

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Born into a musical family in Romania and educated in Bucharest and Paris, Tzikindelean won top prizes in international competitions including the Enescu Competition in Romania, the Carl Nielsen International Competition in Denmark and France's Long-Thibaud-Crespin Competition. After holding a position with the Orchestre du Capitole de Toulouse, he has been Concertmaster of the Odense Symphony Orchestra in Denmark since 2012, before joining the CBSO in early 2020. Eugene has been invited to guest-lead ensembles such as Orchestre de Paris, London Philharmonic Orchestra, Danish Royal Opera, NDR Elbphilharmonie, BBC Philharmonic, Oslo Philharmonic, Trondheim and Stavanger Symphony Orchestras, Singapore Symphony Orchestra, to name the most prominent. He also keeps a busy schedule as a chamber musician, teacher and soloist, performing along conductors such as Alexander Vedernikov, Kazuki Yamada, Nikolaj Znajder, Dmitry Sitkovetsky, Hans Graf, Pierre Bleuse and Cristian Mandeal in a repertoire ranging from Bach to Walton.

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 The late Alan Goodwin
 The late Colin Graham
 The late Averil and Terry Green
 The late Kenneth Guest
 The late Mrs Marjorie Hildreth
 The late Roger Hill
 The late Estella Hindley
 The late Patricia Homeshaw
 The late Mr Hucker
 The late Rosalind Jackson
 The late William Jones
 The late Michael Jordan
 The late Mrs Thelma Justham
 The late Beresford King-Smith
 The late Professor Robert Knecht
 The late Mr John Thomas Knight
 The late Mr and Mrs F. McDermott
 and Mrs C. Hall
 The late Blyth and Myriam Major
 The late Mrs Mahon
 The late Joyce Middleton
 The late Christine Miller
 The late Peter and Moyra Monahan
 The late Arthur Mould
 The late June North
 The late Martin Purdy
 The late Cyril Reeves
 In memory of David Reeve,
 a true music lover
 The late J Renwick
 The late Frederick Richardson
 The late Mrs Edith Roberts
 The late Trevor Robinson
 The late John Roe
 The late Mr Andrew Roulstone
 The late Carl Schwalbe
 The late Thomas Edward Scott
 The late Barbara Shields
 The late Margaret Skene
 The late Mrs C E Smith
 The late Mrs Sylvia Stirman
 The late Marion Stone
 The late Mrs Eileen Summers
 The late Sheri Tullah
 The late Lorraine Westcott
 The late David Wilson

Our anonymous donors and those
 that have pledged to support
 the CBSO through a legacy gift
 in the future.

Credits correct as of
 4 November 2024

MEET THE TEAM

Emma Stenning Chief Executive
Joe Graham Executive Assistant

ARTISTIC PLANNING

Maddi Belsey-Day Artistic Planning and Tours Manager
Jean Attard Assistant Artistic Planning Manager

CONCERTS

Graham Sibley Director of Orchestra Operations
Felix Lo Orchestra Manager
Nicole Wood Assistant Orchestra Manager
Peter Harris Platform Manager
Robert Howard Assistant Platform Manager
Jack Lovell-Huckle Librarian
Nathan Isaac Assistant Librarian

LEARNING & ENGAGEMENT

Tom Spurgin Creative Director –
 Learning & Engagement
Carolyn Burton Learning Programme Manager
Georgia Wells Learning Programme Producer
Jo Wright Community & Talent Development Manager
Helen Butcher Community & Talent
 Development Producer
Alexandra Parker Chorus Manager
Helen Poulter Chorus Producer
Jenna Hyde Wellbeing Lead

AUDIENCES

Beki Smith Director of Audiences
Ruarq Jon-Stevens Director of Audiences
 (Maternity Cover)
Melanie Ryan Audience Experience and
 Insight Manager
Lee Hunt Data Analyst
Jude Radley Audience Experience Officer
Anna O'Connor Marketing and Content Manager
Alexandra Georgiadis Marketing and
 Campaigns Coordinator
Isabel Clarke Content Coordinator
Hannah Blake-Fathers Content Creator
Liam Churchard Designer

DEVELOPMENT

Claire Tilt Director of Development
Rachel Bowden Senior Development Manager
Ruj Sanghera Membership Manager
Amy Self Individual Giving Manager
Megan Bradshaw Corporate Partnership Manager
Charlotte Wheeler Events Manager
Rachel Cooper Development Administrator

FINANCE & RESOURCES

Sally Munday Director of Finance and Resources
Alan Johnson CBSO Centre Manager
Hollie Dunster HR Manager
Mark Pallett Finance Manager
Jaspreet Hothi Assistant Accountant
Susan Price Senior Finance Officer
Lindsey Bhagania Assistant Payroll Manager
Peter Clarke Assistant CBSO Centre Manager
Ellis Hudson Assistant Buildings and Facilities Manager
Suni Dhew Receptionist
Molly Welling Receptionist

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GET IN TOUCH

CBSO Centre, Berkley Street, Birmingham, B1 2LF
 General Enquiries: email information@cbso.co.uk
 or phone **0121 616 6500**. For ticket enquiries,
 or queries directly relating to Symphony Hall,
 please contact B:Music.

UPCOMING CONCERTS...



RUSH HOUR CONCERT: ELGAR'S VIOLIN CONCERTO

The CBSO's leader Eugene Tzikin delean inhabits the enigmatic 'soul' of this piece in the soloist role.

Tue 3 Dec 2024, 6pm



CBSO WINDS PLAYS MOZART

Two pearls of beauty for wind ensemble.

Sun 26 Jan 2025, 3pm



KAZUKI CONDUCTS CBSO BRASS & PERCUSSION

Dance the tango around an exhibition – all in one fantastic concert!

Sun 2 Mar 2025, 3pm

Book online at [cbso.co.uk](https://www.cbso.co.uk) or call the B:Music Box Office on **0121 780 3333**

CBSO MEMBERSHIP

From priority booking to members' events and behind-the-scenes information, there are plenty of reasons to join the CBSO.

But it is the people themselves who are at the very heart of our membership. CBSO members can enjoy the chance to share the company of musicians and artists and meet new like-minded friends.

JOIN THE FAMILY

Simply visit [cbso.co.uk/membership](https://www.cbso.co.uk/membership) to sign up online, or call Rachel Cooper on **0121 616 6510**.

We look forward to welcoming you to the family!



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Berkley Street Birmingham, B1 2LF
information@cbso.co.uk
0121 616 6500

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We'd love to hear from you!

Complete our survey and be in with the chance of winning a £50 voucher for a restaurant of your choice.

We're working to better understand our audiences, and by completing a survey following a CBSO concert, you can opt in to be entered into the prize draw.



If you'd like to share any additional feedback, or have any questions, please email us at marketing@cbso.co.uk.