



PIANO
CLASSICS

J. S. Bach
Goldberg
Variations

Klára Würtz piano

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH 1685-1750

GOLDBERG VARIATIONS BWV988

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| 1. Aria | 4'29 | 17. Variatio 16 Ouverture | 2'47 |
| 2. Variatio 1 | 1'44 | 18. Variatio 17 | 2'00 |
| 3. Variatio 2 | 1'18 | 19. Variatio 18 Canone alla Sexta | 1'30 |
| 4. Variatio 3 | | 20. Variatio 19 | 1'45 |
| Canone all Unisuono | 1'59 | 21. Variatio 20 | 1'54 |
| 5. Variatio 4 | 1'04 | 22. Variatio 21 | |
| 6. Variatio 5 | 1'29 | Canone alla Settima | 2'42 |
| 7. Variatio 6 | | 23. Variatio 22 Allabreve | 1'26 |
| Canone alla Seconda | 1'13 | 24. Variatio 23 | 2'04 |
| 8. Variatio 7 Al tempo di Giga | 1'43 | 25. Variatio 24 | |
| 9. Variatio 8 | 1'49 | Canone all' Ottava | 2'45 |
| 10. Variatio 9 Canone alla Terza | 1'31 | 26. Variatio 25 Adagio | 7'59 |
| 11. Variatio 10 Fugetta | 1'35 | 27. Variatio 26 | 2'02 |
| 12. Variatio 11 | 2'06 | 28. Variatio 27 Canone alla Nona | 1'50 |
| 13. Variatio 12 | | 29. Variatio 28 | 2'19 |
| Canone alla Quarta | 2'23 | 30. Variatio 29 | 2'04 |
| 14. Variatio 13 | 5'19 | 31. Variatio 30 Quodlibet | 2'02 |
| 15. Variatio 14 | 2'06 | 32. Aria da Capo | 4'15 |
| 16. Variatio 15 | | | |
| Canone alla Quinta Andante | 4'09 | | |

Klára Würtz *piano*

The history and structure of J.S. Bach's *Goldberg Variations* BWV988

In his Leipzig period – probably in the late 1730s – Bach came into contact with various personalities of the higher aristocracy in Dresden as a result of his connections with the Dresden electoral court. One of these aristocrats was Hermann Carl, Count von Keyserlingk, who became a very special patron of Bach's. Indeed, it was through his intervention that Bach was nominated 'court composer to the King of Poland and the Elector of Saxony'. The Count maintained a small private band, in which a pupil of Bach and of his son Wilhelm Friedemann played the harpsichord: Johann Gottlieb Goldberg. An anecdote handed down to us through the first Bach biography by Johann Nicolaus Forkel (1802) links the genesis of the *Aria mit verschiedenen Veränderungen* BWV988, now known as the *Goldberg Variations*, with Keyserlingk and Goldberg: 'The Count was often sickly, and then had sleepless nights. At these times Goldberg, who lived in the house with him, had to pass the night in an adjoining room to play something to him when he could not sleep. The Count once said to Bach that he would like to have some clavier pieces for his Goldberg, which should be of such a soft and somewhat lively character that he might be cheered up a bit by them in his sleepless nights. Bach thought he could best fulfil this wish by variations. The Count thereafter called them nothing but "his" variations. He was never weary of hearing them. And for a long time, when the sleepless night came, he used to say, "Dear Goldberg, do play me one of my variations".'

In his *Goldberg Variations*, Bach summarised the characteristic species of Baroque keyboard music, the theme and variations. The work, published in 1741 as Part IV of the *Clavier-Übung*, is organised in the fashion of many of the compositions from the latter part of Bach's life. The theme is a sarabande (a slow, majestic Baroque dance) in two balanced sections, the bass and harmonic structure of which are preserved in all thirty variations, and the form of the whole is that of a chaconne or passacaglia. The variations are grouped in threes, the last of each group being a canon, with the canons comprising successive intervals from the unison (first canon) to the ninth (last canon). The thirtieth and last variation, however, is a quodlibet, a mixture of two popular song melodies combined in counterpoint above the fundamental bass. After this the theme is repeated da capo. The non-canonic variations are of many different types, including inventions, fuguettes, a French overture, ornamental slow arias, and, at regular intervals, bravura pieces for two manuals. The diverse moods and styles in these variations are unified by means of the recurring bass and harmonies and also by the symmetrical order in which the movements are arranged; the entirety is a perfectly organised structure of great proportions.

In the *Goldberg Variations*, three essential features of Bach's keyboard music are thus united: stylistic diversity, virtuosity and strict counterpoint. These elements correspond with the tripartite grouping of the variations (the character piece, the virtuoso piece and the canon), and during the course of the work all three become more and more distinctive: the style becomes more diverse in every ensuing character piece, the virtuosity gradually increases, and canon technique grows steadily in interval – even incorporating the novel element of the quodlibet, as mentioned above.

The *Goldberg Variations* were probably first performed publicly by Bach himself at one of his last concerts in the Leipzig Collegium Musicum in 1741. The events in the famous Forkel anecdote – the young virtuoso Bach pupil (only fourteen years old!) playing the work during his patron Keyserlingk's sleepless nights – probably took place shortly after publication, for it is known that Bach stayed in Keyserlingk's Dresden home in November 1741.

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KLÁRA WÜRTZ

'A GENUINE PODIUM PHENOMENON'

Zoltán Kocsis

Through her innate musical intuition and imagination Klára Würtz is able to convey the essential musical message of the works she performs, both structurally and emotionally. By her extraordinary charisma she has the rare capacity to keep her audience spellbound. The complete naturalness, the beauty of her tone and her immaculate technical command make her a favorite and beloved artist with audiences all over the world.

Although she has an extensive repertoire her main strength and focus is on the Classical and Romantic repertoire. A prolific recording artist she made more than 40 albums, ranging from Mozart to Bartók. Her recording of the complete Mozart Piano Sonatas was met with great critical acclaim: "Sensational! Würtz' pianistic finesse, her inclination to let the phrases breathe and "sing", her superb and fastidious equilibrium, and, above all, her inclination to leave well enough alone and let the music speak for itself, represent "centric" Mozart tradition at its attractive best." (Harris Goldsmith in International Record Review). After a concert with the Boston Symphony Orchestra under Bernard Haitink the Boston Globe wrote: "Würtz, who has the best recording of the complete Mozart piano sonatas to her credit, played with the same elegant, spirited style, command of dynamics, and lambent tone that is so admirable on the CD's". Another highly successful recording project is of the piano works by Robert Schumann, a composer with whom she has a strong affinity. Jed Distler wrote

on Classicstoday.com: "Würtz performances unquestionably hold their turf alongside the reference versions. In Kreisleriana for instance she matches Radu Lupu's poetry and sweep, while imparting more shape and meaning...Klára Würtz's will be the finest complete Schumann cycle to have been recorded by one pianist".

Though not claiming to be a "specialist" Klára has a special place in her heart for Franz Schubert. Richard Dyer (Boston Globe) speaks of the "inner radiance of her sound", while Fanfare Classical Magazine rates her Impromptus recording "in the exalted company of Schnabel, Brendel, Lupu, Zimerman and Perahia.. this is very natural and distinctive music-making at a very high level". Her other solo recordings include works by Bartók, Kodály, Janáček, Liszt, Chopin and Debussy. She recorded piano concertos by Mozart, Schumann, Rachmaninoff, Ravel and Bartók. An avid chamber music player she recorded the Beethoven and Brahms violin sonatas with Kristóf Baráti ("Reference recording" according to the leading German newspaper), Beethoven's cello sonatas with Timora Rosler, Kodály cello sonatas with István Várdai, and piano trios by Schubert and Mendelssohn with the Klaviertrio Amsterdam.

From early childhood on Klára was immersed in music. From her 5th year she joined the famous Hungarian radio & Television Children's Choir, which she made extensive international tours. At seventeen she entered the Franz Liszt Academy in Budapest where she studied with such iconic teachers as Zoltán Kocsis, Ferenc Rados and György Kurtág. Later she received scholarship from András Schiff for his chamber music courses in Prussia Cove, UK. In 1985 she won the First Prize in the Ettore Pozzoli Competition in Milan. In 1988 she was a prize winner in the Dublin International Competition and the only one to carry

away a contract with an international agency: she signed up with Columbia Artist Management in New York and played over a hundred concerts in the USA and Canada, at the Ravinia Festival and the Kennedy Center in Washington, with a.o. the Czech Philharmonic under Jiri Belohlavek. She played in the International Piano Festival of Williamstown, the Newport Festival, the Carnegie Hall, Concertgebouw Amsterdam, La Roque d'Anthéron (France), at the Mozarteum during the Salzburg Festival, with the Budapest Festival Orchestra under Iván Fischer. She played chamber music with Janine Jansen, Dimitri Makhtin, Alexander Kniazev, the Pavel Haas Quartet and conductor Bernard Haitink, Theodore Kuchar, Marco Boni, Dirk Vermeulen, Justus Frantz.

Klára Würtz teaches at the Conservatory of Utrecht, and she lives with her husband and daughter in Amsterdam.

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