

Lincoln Center's
white light festival

T E N T H A N N I V E R S A R Y

October 19–November 24, 2019

Sunday, November 10, 2019 at 11:00 am

Goldberg Variations

Kit Armstrong, Piano

BACH ***Goldberg Variations* (1741)**

Aria

Variation 1, 2

Variation 3, Canone all'Unisuono

Variation 4, 5

Variation 6, Canone alla Seconda

Variation 7, Al tempo di Giga

Variation 8

Variation 9, Canone alla Terza

Variation 10, Fughetta

Variation 11

Variation 12, Canone alla Quarta

Variation 13, 14

Variation 15, Canone alla Quinta

Variation 16, Ouverture

Variation 17

Variation 18, Canone alla Sesta

Variation 19, 20

Variation 21, Canone alla Settima

Variation 22, Alla breve

Variation 23

Variation 24, Canone all'Ottava

Variation 25, Adagio

(continued)

Please make certain all your electronic devices are switched off.

This performance is made possible in part by the Josie Robertson Fund for Lincoln Center.

Steinway Piano

Walter Reade Theater

White Light Festival

The White Light Festival 2019 is made possible by The Shubert Foundation, The Katzenberger Foundation, Inc., Mitsubishi Corporation (Americas), Mitsui & Co. (U.S.A.), Inc., Laura Pels International Foundation for Theater, Culture Ireland, The Joelson Foundation, Sumitomo Corporation of Americas, The Harkness Foundation for Dance, J.C.C. Fund, Japanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry of New York, Great Performers Circle, Lincoln Center Patrons and Lincoln Center Members

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UPCOMING WHITE LIGHT FESTIVAL EVENTS:

Wednesday, November 13 at 7:30 pm at the Church of St. Mary the Virgin

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Traditional a cappella folk, sacred, and work songs from the Republic of Georgia

Thursday, November 14 at 7:30 pm in the David Rubenstein Atrium

Attacca Quartet

Caroline Shaw, voice

ALL-CAROLINE SHAW PROGRAM

Entr'acte; Valencia; Plan and Elevation

Songs for Strings and Voice

Sunday, November 17 at 3:00 pm in David Geffen Hall

National Symphony Orchestra

Gianandrea Noseda, conductor

Christine Goerke, Isolde

Stephen Gould, Tristan

WAGNER: Tristan und Isolde, Act II (concert performance)

Pre-concert lecture by Cori Ellison at 1:45 pm in the Stanley H. Kaplan Penthouse

For tickets, call (212) 721-6500 or visit WhiteLightFestival.org. Call the Lincoln Center Info Request Line at (212) 875-5766 to learn about program cancellations or to request a White Light Festival brochure.

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We would like to remind you that the sound of coughing and rustling paper might distract the performers and your fellow audience members.

In consideration of the performing artists and members of the audience, those who must leave before the end of the performance are asked to do so between pieces. The taking of photographs and the use of recording equipment are not allowed in the building.

Variation 26
Variation 27, Canone alla Nona
Variation 28, 29
Variation 30, Quodlibet
Aria da capo

This program is approximately 70 minutes long and will be performed without intermission.

Please join us for a cup of coffee following the performance.

This performance is also part of Great Performers' Sunday Morning Coffee Concerts.

Snapshot

By Paul Schiavo

“Unity is in multiplicity, and multiplicity in unity.” This Sufi aphorism finds echo in many of the world’s religious and philosophical teachings, from classical thinkers to modern mystics. While it may seem an abstract idea, the concept of a single reality underlying a wealth of diversity is confirmed by observations of nature. There we discover that snowflakes and seashells, leaf shapes and crystals are distinct iterations of singular molecular or organic structures. No two pinecones may resemble each other precisely, yet each reveals the pattern that defines its species. This notion of unity within diversity has also become an ideal in human thought. Marsilio Ficino, a philosopher of the Italian Renaissance, stated the matter succinctly: “All composition originates from a simple source.”

That principle is at the heart of one of music’s most fruitful compositional procedures: theme and variations. The practice of restating a melody in ways that alter its surface details while retaining its essential shape has fascinated musicians for centuries and produced some extraordinary works. Beethoven’s *Diabelli Variations*, Brahms’s *Variations on a Theme of Haydn*, and Elgar’s *Enigma Variations* are among the most famous examples.

But at the head of this list, both chronologically and in brilliance of conception and execution, stands J. S. Bach’s *Aria and 30 Variations*, better known as the *Goldberg Variations*. Its premise—the “simple source” from which it originates, in Ficino’s formulation—is a brief and unassuming instrumental “aria.” This establishes a harmonic framework that Bach clads again and again with brilliant compositional invention, yielding a work that is one of the great achievements of Western musical thought. That each variation is entirely different yet fundamentally identical is a contradiction that cannot be adequately explained except through listening. And in listening, we hear a composition that is both outstanding in its intellectual lucidity and also a manifestation of the nearly mystical concept of a seminal idea giving rise to nearly limitless variation.

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By Paul Schiavo

Goldberg Variations, BWV 988 (1741)

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

Born March 21, 1685, in Eisenach, Germany

Died July 28, 1750, in Leipzig

Approximate length: 70 minutes

According to Johann Forkel, Bach's earliest biographer, the composer wrote the *Goldberg Variations* in around 1741 for a former student, a young harpsichordist named Johann Theophilus Goldberg, to play for his patron, one Count Hermann Keyserlingk. Forkel asserts that Goldberg used this music to lull the Count to sleep during restless nights.

Charming as it is, we have neither corroborating account nor documentary evidence to lend credence to this story. The music certainly offers no indication that it was conceived as a palliative for Herr Keyserlingk's insomnia. Much of it is vigorous in character and hardly suitable for inducing slumber. Moreover, it is doubtful that Bach had any interest in what is today called "music therapy." But what did interest him, vitally and over the whole of his long career, was the thorough and orderly exploration of certain musical challenges and the arrangement of his solutions into large-scale, logical, aesthetically satisfying formal designs. We find this in the comprehensive examination of tonality and fugal character that makes up *The Well-Tempered Clavier*; in the exhaustive contrapuntal treatment of Frederick of Prussia's "royal theme" in *The Musical Offering*; and in the compendium of fugal technique undertaken in *Art of Fugue*. The *Goldberg Variations*, with its extended discourse on a single musical premise—the harmonic skeleton of a brief keyboard aria—and its systematic use of counterpoint, is very much the peer of those works.

The "subject melody" of the *Goldberg Variations* is a modest keyboard piece, rhythmically like a sarabande but titled only "Aria." Among its virtues is a very clear harmonic outline, and it is this, rather than any of the aria's melodic features, that Bach retains through the 30 variations that follow. Indeed, we hear nothing like the melody that launches the *Goldberg Variations* until the very end of the work, when the aria returns unaltered.

The variations offer a wealth of figuration, textures, and musical character, and none quite repeats what another has said. Several are cast as typical Baroque-period movements. Among these are a gigue (Variation 7); a four-voice fugue (Variation 10); a French Overture, replete with the sweeping scales and auspicious rhythms of that genre (Variation 16, which, significantly, begins the second half of the composition); and a toccata featuring chords played in rapid alternation (Variation 29). Three of

the movements—Variations 15, 21, and 25—change the prevailing tonality from major to minor, the last of these proving unexpectedly poignant. Variation 30, “Quodlibet,” quotes two folksongs popular in Bach’s time.

Even more notable than these different “character pieces” is the display of contrapuntal ingenuity Bach offers. Echoic counterpoint pervades the *Goldberg Variations* to an extraordinary extent. The above-mentioned fugue is but one instance of this. Beginning with Variation 3, Bach constructs every third movement as a strict two-voice canon, and each successive one of these pieces finds the second voice following the first at a progressively higher scale degree. Thus, while in Variation 3 the answer comes at the same pitch, in Variation 6 it sounds a step higher, in Variation 9 a third above, and so forth. In following this scheme, Bach set himself a compositional problem of exceptional complexity, and one cannot imagine any other composer solving it so successfully.

All this might seem merely erudite were it not carried off so convincingly and with such virtuosity. Of the many wonders encountered in the *Goldberg Variations*, the greatest may be that Bach seems to treat its compositional demands as an exalted form of play. The restrictions dictated by self-imposed contrapuntal rigor, no less than by the variations’ immutable harmonic framework and the need for diverse figuration and melodic ideas to offset this, evidently inspire rather than daunt him. One senses that fashioning such severely constrained music is for him a wonderful game—and that the stricter the rules, the greater his enjoyment.

There is a lovely irony in this. The *Goldberg Variations* constitutes musical thought of self-evident brilliance, but it wears its learning lightly, the sheer delight that evidently attended its creation shining through all the compositional intricacies. It is possible to hear a touch of levity even in the return of the aria after all its elaborate reconstructions have paraded before us. Listening to it at the work’s conclusion, one can imagine Bach smiling at our amazement as the unassuming aria reminds us that it was from so little he has made so much.

Paul Schiavo serves as program annotator for the St. Louis and Seattle Symphonies, and writes frequently for concerts at Lincoln Center.

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The Second Music

By Annie Lighthart

Now I understand that there are two melodies playing,
one below the other, one easier to hear, the other

lower, steady, perhaps more faithful for being less heard
yet always present.

When all other things seem lively and real,
this one fades. Yet the notes of it

touch as gently as fingertips, as the sound
of the names laid over each child at birth.

I want to stay in that music without striving or cover.
If the truth of our lives is what it is playing,

the telling is so soft
that this mortal time, this irrevocable change,

becomes beautiful. I stop and stop again
to hear the second music.

I hear the children in the yard, a train, then birds.
All this is in it and will be gone. I set my ear to it as I would to
a heart.

—“The Second Music” by Annie Lighthart from *Iron String* © Airlie Press,
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*For poetry comments and suggestions,
please write to programming@LincolnCenter.org.*



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Kit Armstrong

Pianist Kit Armstrong performs as a soloist with some of the world's leading orchestras while maintaining an active career as a recitalist and composer. Born in 1992, Mr. Armstrong appears today at major international venues such as the Musikverein (Vienna), Concertgebouw (Amsterdam), Berlin Philharmonie, Elbphilharmonie (Hamburg), NHK Hall (Tokyo), Wigmore Hall (London), Théâtre des Champs-Élysées (Paris), and Palais des Beaux-Arts (Brussels). He has collaborated with such conductors as Christian Thielemann, Herbert Blomstedt, Riccardo Chailly, Kent Nagano, Manfred Honeck, Esa-Pekka Salonen, Mario Venzago, and Robin Ticciati.

Recent highlights include performances with the Vienna Philharmonic, Academy of St. Martin in the Fields, Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, Philharmonia Orchestra, and the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra. Mr. Armstrong's critically acclaimed solo albums include *Liszt: Symphonic Scenes* and *Bach, Ligeti, Armstrong*, both released by Sony Classical. The live performance of his solo recital at the Concertgebouw, *Kit Armstrong Performs Bach's Goldberg Variations and Its Predecessors*, received worldwide praise as one of the most outstanding performances on record, winning the Instrumental Choice December 2017 from *BBC Music Magazine*. His compositions are published by Edition Peters. Commissioners include the Leipzig Gewandhaus and the Musikkollegium Winterthur.

Born in Los Angeles, Mr. Armstrong studied at the Curtis Institute of Music and at the Royal Academy of Music in London. At age seven, he started studying composition at Chapman University and physics at California State University, and later chemistry and mathematics at the University of Pennsylvania and mathematics at the Imperial College London. He earned a master's degree in pure mathematics at the University of Paris VI. Mr. Armstrong's relationship with Austrian pianist and mentor Alfred Brendel was captured in the film *Set the Piano Stool on Fire* by Mark Kidel.

White Light Festival

I could compare my music to white light, which contains all colors. Only a prism can divide the colors and make them appear; this prism could be the spirit of the listener.—Arvo Pärt. Celebrating its tenth anniversary, the White Light Festival is Lincoln Center's annual exploration of music and art's power to reveal the many dimensions of our interior lives. International in scope, the multidisciplinary festival offers a broad spectrum of the world's leading instrumentalists, vocalists, ensembles, choreographers, dance companies, and directors complemented by conversations with artists and scholars and post-performance White Light Lounges.

Lincoln Center's Great Performers

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Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, Inc.

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