

KINGS PLACE

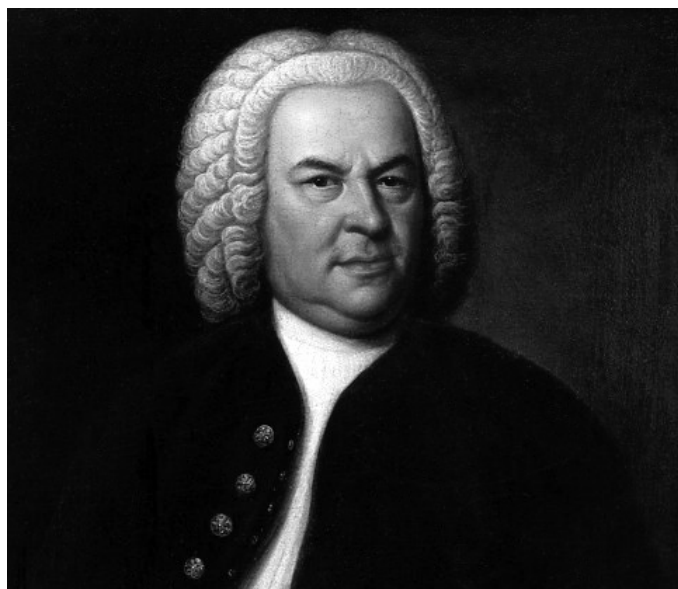


BACH WEEKEND 2021

Sat 26 Jun | 11.30am
Kings Place Hall One

Steven Devine
The Goldberg Variations

This performance will last approx. 80 mins with no interval.



Programme

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)

Aria mit verschiedenen Veränderungen, BWV 988

Goldberg Variations

Aria

Variatio I

Variatio II

Variatio III / Canone all'Unisono

Variatio IV

Variatio V

Variatio VI / Canone alla Seconda

Variatio VII / Al tempo di Giga

Variatio VIII

Variatio IX / Canone all Terza

Variatio X Fughetta

Variatio XI

Variatio XII / Canone alla Quarta

Variatio XIII

Variatio XIV

Variatio XV / Canone alla Quinta: Andante

Variatio XVI / Ouverture

Variatio XVII

Variatio XVIII / Canone alla Sesta

Variatio XIX

Variatio XX

Variatio XXI / Canone alla Settima

Variatio XXII / Alla breve

Variatio XXIII

Variatio XXIV / Canone all'Ottava

Variatio XXV / Adagio

Variatio XXVI

Variatio XXVII / Canone alla Nona

Variatio XXVIII

Variatio XXIX

Variatio XXX / Quodlibet

Aria

Steve Devine harpsichord

Programme Notes

'He needed only to have heard any theme to be aware – it seemed in the same instant – of almost every intricacy that artistry could produce in the treatment of it.' When Bach's second son, Carl Philipp Emanuel, penned these words in his obituary of 'the world-famous organist Mr Johann Sebastian Bach', he may have been thinking above all of *The Art of Fugue*, and the *Musical Offering*, yet for 'every intricacy that artistry could produce' in the exploration of a single theme, no composition by Bach – or for that matter anyone else – surpasses the so-called *Goldberg Variations* published in 1741 as the fourth and final part of his *Clavier-Übung* cycle.

The nickname comes from a story in Johann Nikolaus Forkel's 1802 biography of Bach. As Forkel tells it, the Variations were commissioned by Count Keyserlingk, Russian ambassador at the Dresden court, for his young resident harpsichordist Johann Gottlieb Goldberg (1727–1756), a former student of Bach's. 'On one occasion the Count gave to understand that he would like to have some Clavier pieces for his Goldberg, which would be soothing and rather cheerful in character, and which might raise his spirits somewhat during his sleepless nights. Bach thought that he would best be able to fulfill this wish by composing variations, a task which he had hitherto regarded as thankless in view of the unchanging nature of the underlying harmonies.' Forkel also informs us that for his pains Bach received 'a golden goblet with 100 louis d'or' – worth over £2000 today.

We should take the story with at least half a pinch of salt. Bach did not dedicate the variations to Keyserlingk, as etiquette would have demanded, or anyone else; and it is highly improbable that he would have composed his most technically demanding keyboard work specifically for a 13- or 14-year-old, however talented. In any case, it would be hard to imagine a less likely non-chemical cure for insomnia than this work of dazzling, encyclopaedic scope that evokes a whole musical universe within the confines imposed by a single theme and its bass line. We do know, though, that Bach stayed with Keyserlingk in Dresden in 1741. He may well have presented his host with a special copy of his newly published work, which Goldberg could then have studied and played to the count, a few variations at a time.

Bach builds his mighty structure on a floridly galant 'Aria' which may date from a few years earlier (it appears in Anna Magdalena Bach's notebook, headed 'Sarabande'). While several of the 30 variations hint at the aria's melodic outline, the chief binding elements are the theme's strong, simple bass line (beginning with a descending scale), its implied harmonies, and its phrase structure, symmetrically based on two

sections of 16 bars each. Characteristically, Bach manages to convey

a sense of exhilarating diversity and freedom within a rigorously planned grand design. After the first two, free, variations, a pattern emerges of strict canon, at the unison, second, third, fourth, and so on (variations 3, 6, 9, 12, etc), free variations (4, 7, 10, 13, etc) and two-part inventions, beginning with Variation 5. At the work's centre, Variation 16 takes the form of a French Overture, comprising a stately Prelude and a bounding fugal Allegro.

The *Goldbergs* are at once a contrapuntal *tour de force*, a celebration of virtuosity (the most brilliant variations suggest that Bach knew Domenico Scarlatti's influential *Essercizi*) and an exploration of every conceivable Baroque affect, from zany playfulness – say in the two-part inventions, Nos 14, 17 and 23 – to profound meditative inwardness. After the gleeful hand-crossing and chirping ornaments of No. 14, No. 15 turns from G major to G minor, for a sombre 'Canone alla Quinta', where the treble imitates the alto voice a fifth higher while simultaneously inverting the theme. Glenn Gould, one of the greatest exponents of the *Goldbergs*, wrote of this variation that 'it would not be in any way out of place in the *St Matthew Passion*'.

Programme note © Simon Hughes

Biography

"fantastic touch and élan" *Gramophone Magazine*

Steven Devine enjoys a busy career as a music director and keyboard player working with some of the finest musicians.

He is the Principal Keyboard Player with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment and also the principal keyboard player for The Gonzaga Band, The Mozartists and performs regularly with many other groups around Europe. He has recorded over 30 discs with other artists and ensembles and made six solo recordings. His recording of Bach's *Goldberg Variations* (Chandos Records) has been received critical acclaim – including *Gramophone Magazine* describing it as 'among the best'. The complete harpsichord works of Rameau (Resonus) has received five-star reviews from *BBC Music Magazine* and Steven's latest recording of Bach's Italian Concerto has been voted *Classic FM's* Connoisseur's choice. Steven has also released Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier* ('it's the one of all I've heard in the past ten years that I am happiest to live with.' *Early Music Review*).

He made his London conducting debut in 2002 at the Royal Albert Hall and is now a regular performer there – including making his Proms directing debut in Aug 2007 with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment.



He has conducted the Mozart Festival Orchestra in every major concert hall in the UK and also across Switzerland. Steven is Music Director for New Chamber Opera in Oxford and with them has performed repertoire from Cavalli to Rossini. For the Dartington Festival Opera he has conducted Handel's *Orlando* and Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*. He is currently conductor and Artistic Advisor for the English Haydn Festival in Bridgnorth.

Steven works regularly with the Norwegian Wind Ensemble, Trondheim Barokk, the Victoria Baroque Players (BC, Canada) and Arion Baroque Ensemble (Montreal). He teaches harpsichord and fortepiano

at Trinity Laban Conservatoire in London and is Early Keyboard Consultant to the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire and Royal Welsh Colleges.

Finally, Steven is thrilled to be a member of the ground-breaking Art of Moog: an electronic music group specialising in the performance of Bach.

'He proved to be inspired, directing a performance full of vigour and forward movement and some excellent singing.' *Church Times* May 2019

'One cannot ignore the immensely intelligent and impeccably placed keyboard continuo work of Steven Devine.' *International Record Review*, January 2012

KINGS PLACE LONDON UNWRAPPED

The 'London' Bach
Feinstein Ensemble
with Christopher Suckling

JC Bach | Abel | Handel | Haydn

Also part of Bach Weekend 2021

TOMORROW Sun 27 Jun | 7pm

kingsplace.co.uk/london

