

Biography Charles Owen

Charles Owen enjoys an extensive international career performing a wide-ranging repertoire to outstanding critical acclaim. He appears at many major UK venues such as Wigmore Hall, Bridgewater Hall, The Sage & Kings Place. Internationally, he has performed at Lincoln Center and Carnegie Hall in New York, the Brahms Saal in Vienna's Musikverein, Paris Musée d'Orsay, Amsterdam Concertgebouw and the Moscow Conservatoire. His chamber music partners include Julian Rachlin, Alina Ibragimova, Steven Isserlis and Augustin Hadelich as well as the Vertavo and Takacs Quartets. His piano duo partnership with Katya Apekisheva has received widespread recognition. Together they are Co-Artistic Directors of the London Piano Festival held annually at Kings Place.

A regular guest at UK festivals such as Aldeburgh, Bath, Cheltenham, Leicester and Ryedale he has also performed at the Verbier Festival and in Australia at the Perth and



Australian Festival of Chamber Music, Townsville. Charles' concerto appearances have included the Philharmonia, Hallé, Aurora and London Philharmonic orchestras. He has enjoyed collaborations with many leading conductors including Sir Mark Elder, Ryan Wigglesworth, Nicholas Collon and Martyn Brabbins.

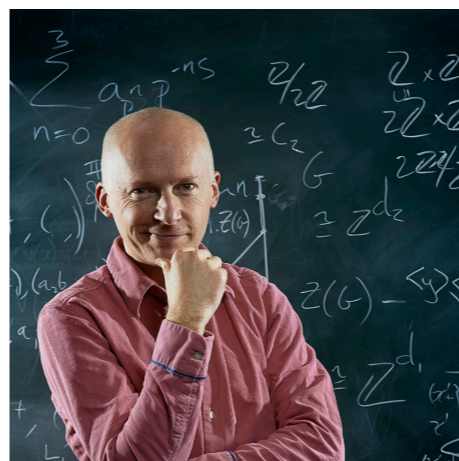
Charles' solo recordings comprise discs of piano music by JS Bach, Brahms, Liszt, Janáček, Poulenc and Fauré. Chamber music recordings include the cello sonatas of Rachmaninov and Chopin with Natalie Clein, the Stravinsky Piano Ballets and Rachmaninoff Suites with Katya Apekisheva and the world premiere of Jonathan Dove's Piano Quintet with the Sacconi Quartet.

Charles Owen is a Professor of Piano at the Guildhall School, Guest Professor at RWCMD and was appointed Steinway & Sons UK Ambassador in 2016. charlesowen.net

Biography Marcus du Sautoy

Marcus du Sautoy is the Charles Simonyi Professor for the Public Understanding of Science at the Oxford University, a chair he holds jointly at the Department of Continuing Education and the Mathematical Institute. He is also a Professor of Mathematics and a Fellow of New College. He was made a Fellow of the Royal Society in 2016. In 2001 he won the Berwick Prize of the London Mathematical Society awarded every two years to reward the best mathematical research made by a mathematician under 40. In 2004 *Esquire Magazine* chose him as one of the 100 most influential people under 40 in Britain and in 2008 he was included in the prestigious directory *Who's Who*. In 2009 he was awarded the Royal Society's Faraday Prize, the UK's premier award for excellence in communicating science. He received an OBE for services to science in the 2010 New Year's Honours List. He also received the Joint Policy for Mathematics Board Communications Award for 2010 and the London Mathematical Society Zeeman Medal for 2014 for promotion of mathematics to the public.

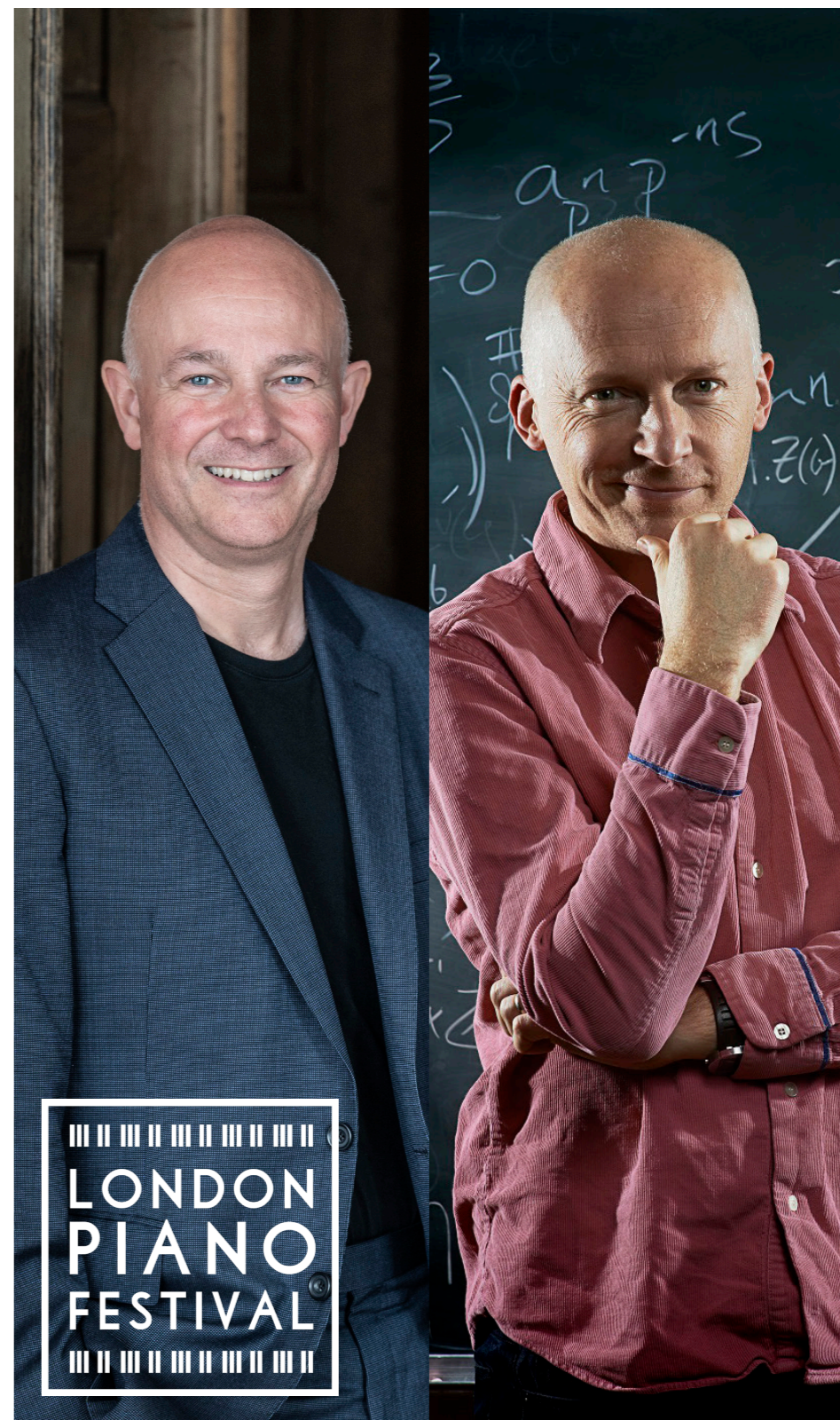
Marcus du Sautoy is author of the best-selling popular mathematics book, *The Music of the Primes* (2003). It was translated into 10 languages and has won two major prizes in Italy and Germany for the best popular science book of the



year. His book, *Finding Moonshine: a mathematician's journey through symmetry* (2008) was longlisted for the Samuel Johnson Prize for non-fiction. His third book, *The Number Mysteries* was published by Fourth Estate in June 2010. He is also Super Geek Consultant for Lauren Child's series of children's books about child spy Ruby Redfort. His most recent books are *What We Cannot Know* and *The Creativity Code* published by Fourth Estate and *How to Count to Infinity* published by Quercus.

Marcus du Sautoy writes for *The Times*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Independent* and *The Guardian* and is frequently asked for comment on BBC radio and TV. His TV credits include *Mind Games*, *The Music of the Primes*, *The Story of Maths*, *Horizon*, *The Beauty of Diagrams*, *The Code*, *Maestro at the Opera*, *Precision: the measure of all things*, *School of Hard Sums*, and *The Secret Rules of Modern Living: Algorithms*. He has written and presented several series for radio including: *5 Shapes*, *Maths and Music for the Essay*, *The Baroque: from ecstasy to infinity*, *A Short History of Mathematics*, and *The Secret Mathematicians*.

Marcus du Sautoy collaborates regularly with different artists. He plays the trumpet and football.



Charles Owen & Marcus du Sautoy The Goldberg Variations Sounding Symmetry – A Lecture-Recital

Sun 10 Oct 2021
Hall One 11am

KINGS PLACE

kingsplace.co.uk

Charles Owen & Marcus du Sautoy

Marcus du Sautoy speaker
Charles Owen piano

Programme

Marcus du Sautoy Lecture: 'Sounding Symmetry'

Interval 20 minutes

Johann Sebastian Bach
(1685–1750)
Aria mit verschiedenen
Veränderungen, BWV 988
Goldberg Variations

Aria	Variatio XVI / Ouverture
Variatio I	Variatio XVII
Variatio II	Variatio XVIII / Canone alla Sesta
Variatio III / Canone all'Unisono	Variatio XIX
Variatio IV	Variatio XX
Variatio V	Variatio XXI / Canone alla Settima
Variatio VI / Canone alla Seconda	Variatio XXII / Alla breve
Variatio VII / Al tempo di Giga	Variatio XXIII
Variatio VIII	Variatio XXIV / Canone all'Ottava
Variatio IX / Canone all Terza	Variatio XXV / Adagio
Variatio X Fughetta	Variatio XXVI
Variatio XI	Variatio XXVII / Canone alla Nona
Variatio XII / Canone alla Quarta	Variatio XXVIII
Variatio XIII	Variatio XXIX
Variatio XIV	Variatio XXX / Quodlibet
Variatio XV / Canone alla Quinta: Andante	Aria

Charles Owen piano

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

Sounding Symmetry

Lots of people talk about the connections between maths and music especially in relation to Bach but too often it is simply numerology. The *Goldberg Variations* reveals Bach's amazing use of mathematical structure and in particular symmetry to frame the journey. I hope that by revealing the secret structure

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*'.

Notes by Simon Heighes © Kings Place

at the heart of this piece it will provide a map for those listening to it for the first time and a new perspective for those familiar with the music. His use of algorithms that take a musical seed and expand it into a complex canon could earn Bach the title as one of the first computer coders (rather than codas!) **Marcus du Sautoy**

The Goldberg Variations – A musician's perspective

JS Bach's Goldberg Variations stands as one of the most iconic, demanding and engrossing pieces of music ever composed. Its monumental sense of scale, depth, ingenuity and sheer variety of ideas encompasses a whole universe of human experience. The many layers of myth and legend that have accrued since the work first appeared in 1741 have done nothing to dull the endless challenges that each successive generation of keyboard players must address when tackling this extraordinary musical edifice. The music can be brought to life in so many different ways, perhaps with a degree of freedom rare in later, more prescriptive composers. The choice of tempi, articulation, dynamics and voicing should convince and illuminate this great score in countless unexpected ways. Of course Bach's staggering degree of invention must take both listeners and players on a unique journey of exploration, never losing sight of the wood for the trees!

Writing from the perspective of a pianist, as opposed to a harpsichordist, I find myself constantly thrilled and occasionally daunted by the rich palette of sound choices available on a modern grand. We pianists can either take Bach's vision at face value, try to clarify and explain the polyphony through voicing choices whilst resisting the temptation to go too far in the search for sonic variety. Perhaps an amalgam of these concepts is the way for us to proceed as the work's architecture builds and rises to resemble an ornate, Gothic cathedral towering over our heads.

On a practical level, each pianist has to face the challenge of

playing many of the variations on a single keyboard, instead of the double manual harpsichord Bach clearly envisioned. The two hands sometimes resemble dancers as they negotiate the twists and turns of each successive variation. The player has to be careful and always remember which partner is leading whilst the other obediently follows, before taking over in a kind of elaborate musical ballet. In terms of the overall trajectory Bach takes us through a myriad range of moods and concepts. Moments of almost Cantata-like joy frequently burst forth only to be contrasted with the more intellectual games of the canons. A childlike feeling for audacious fun and games run through many of the faster variations replete with a rare sense of liberated joy. The reverse of the coin sees three profound, grief-laden G minor variations reminding us of life's brevity. The sublime, final return of the opening Aria brings to mind these wise words of TS Eliot –

'We shall not cease from exploration. And the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time' **Charles Owen**

