



FAZIOLI

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Johann Sebastian Bach

GOLDBERG VARIATIONS

Introduced & performed by
ANDREA BACCHETTI

BONUS CD with the complete recording
of the GOLDBERG VARIATIONS BWV 988



THE BRILLIANT, THE SCIENTIFIC, AND A BIT OF THE DEMON

It is to the insomnia of Count von Keyserling, former Russian ambassador to the court of Saxony, that we owe the birth of the *Goldberg Variations*. Johann Sebastian Bach composed them in 1741 and the first public printed edition appeared the following year in Nuremberg bearing the title *Aria mit verschiedenen (30) Veränderungen*: air with 30 variations. With a clear specification as to the instrument intended to interpret them: *Vors Clavicimbal mit 2 Manualen* (for harpsichord with two manuals). Only three of the 30 Variations do not carry an indication as to which of the two registers they should be played on.

8 For relief from the anxiety of ever-elusive sleep, the Count asked Bach to compose (if it was an excuse, it was an ingenious one) new music: only music, it seems, could bring respite from the diplomat's disorder. Bach – the anecdote is true – accepted the commission and seemed to comply with the singularity of the request: the work opens with a motive, a cell; there follow 30 mutations of that idea, persistent as an obsession, bewitching and lulling like a call continuously repeated, though always different.

Up to the last ingenious spark: a *quodlibet* – a free song, at will – constructed beginning from two popular canzoni: *Ich bin so lang nicht bei dir gewest* (I have been so long away from you) and *Kraut und Rüben haben mich vertrieben* (Cabbages and turnips have driven me away): a humorous self-mocking allusion to the possibility that, reaching the end of the journey the listener, and maybe the first consignee, might have forgotten the initial theme – which at the end is restated exactly – perhaps preoccupied by the vastness and heaviness (cabbages and turnips) of the work.

Johann Gottlieb Goldberg (1727- 1756), a pupil of Bach dear to von Keyserling, was to play the work in the room next to the bedroom of the noble insomniac. To its first interpreter we therefore owe the name, the definitive title assumed by these Variations, that Bach inserted in the *Clavierübung* as a fourth part.

On this occasion the two peaks of Bach's art come together: invention and exercise, didacticism and creation: a movement in dance-form, a piece of open, virtuoso character and a canon regularly come one after the other, following up on the initial *Aria*, conceived as a bass in the form of a chaconne.

Order and immoderation. We do not know if the piece worked as a sleeping potion; but we know that since then it has never ceased to attract the inspiration, the intelligence of interpreters.

But now it is time to hear about the reasons, the motivations, the choices of the 30-year-old Genoese pianist Andrea Bacchetti, who with the *Goldbergs* continues his own intense Bachian journey.

Let us start with the logistics and production conditions of this recording. Did knowing there were TV cameras play a role in your "reaction"?

I don't think so. Just at the beginning it took some getting used to. After a few bars, though, the mystic atmosphere and the frescoed walls of the Villa Marzotto - Trissino - helped me in the effort of concentration that Bach asks for and the natural daylight made me feel even more at home.

Bach has been a star on your horizon right from the very beginning. How did the choice of the Goldbergs come about?

I wanted to study the *Goldbergs* for many years. I was fascinated on the one hand by the instrumental challenge the player faces, on the other by the mnemonic complexity required, and especially by the "spiritual" pleasure the interpretation brings. Having already taken on the whole *English* and *French Suites* gave me the chance to look at the *Goldbergs* with an eye to those variations which are dances (few in reality), and this convinced me that I was dealing with an essentially instrumental work, that is one of great virtuosity, written in the late period of Bach, many years after the other collections of keyboard compositions.

What is the dividing line between study exercises and artistic creation in this work?

I don't think there is a distinction between the two aspects. I have never thought of separating inspiration from technique, neither when I was preparing the studies of Czerny for the fifth year Conservatory exams, still less for Bach. In the case of the *Goldbergs* I think there exist various phases of "exercise": one above all is the construction of the arch that links all the 30 variations within which the other phases play a part: imaginative fantasy, strength of the fingers, polyphony.

Bach insists, from the title onwards, on the concept of "variation": what significance does he give to this word?

The concept of variation can be understood from various points of view. The “compositional”, which we cannot stretch too much: we just have to take note of the infinite fantasy and the science of reason of Bach. That “required of the interpreter”, for example, to “vary” the touch; a concept which opens a whole world, considering that in much of the execution of Bach on the pianoforte “touch” plays an essential part. Another aspect can be the “variation” of the embellishments, which are already a variation in themselves. In this regard I follow my own inventive whims, according to Baroque practice, naturally. Then there is the “variation of characters”: one of the fundamental aspects in building the arch we talked about before. The contrast of characters in the alternation of the diverse variations avoids boredom and helps especially in finding that essentiality which is very important in the music of Bach.

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The choice of instrument: using the pianoforte, how do you resolve the problem of the two “Klavier” which Bach insists upon with such precision?

The problem of the two keyboards is a bit awkward at the start. On the single keyboard of the pianoforte you have to bear in mind two principles: playing on two different points of the key – as if there were two keyboards available – and, when crossing over, never letting the hands touch, since if that happens the percentage of error rises enormously.

What characteristic must a Bach pianoforte have, a pianoforte for the Goldberg?

I think a Bach pianoforte must have an extremely soft and luminous sound: in my case I have chosen an instrument, the Fazioli model F278, of a darker and more muffled timbre to give a more introspective possibility in the “nocturne” variations such as XXI and XXV. In addition, the moderate tempi that I have adopted need as varied a dynamic range as possible. Then, given that I make assiduous use of the tonal pedal, that also needs to be part of a very well regulated pianoforte. In conclusion I am very satisfied with the Fazioli made available to me.

Work on the dynamic of the sound is a characteristic peculiar to your interpretation. To what effect and affect?

Effects are not what I am looking for. The exploitation of the dynamic colouristic resources of the modern instrument aims to express characters and affects of

the Baroque musical taste: aesthetics, great landscapes, courtly gallantry and in some cases, as in variation XXV, also a little "night demon". All this with the humility and the "humanity" of a young interpreter who has reflected on the world for only a few years and has been able to imagine "that other world" by means of paintings, churches and, why not, listening to period instruments.

Variation number VIII: is that the most brilliant, the most salon-like? And is this the dominant character of the Goldbergs, starting with the initial Air and so on, in French style?

We need to distinguish properly the characters of the variations. There are introspective, poetic ones in which the personality of the interpreter best versed in this way of playing emerges, as in my case. Thus the theme, the gigue of variation VII, all the canons, become explorations of the "romantic spirit" of Bach and, as in the sarabande of variation XXV, of its extraordinary chromatic daring. Naturally in several of these we can see a little of the "salon", that is of German courtesans of the early seventeenth century without forgetting, though, the refined taste and linearity of the music. Then there are the brilliant variations, those which are more exquisitely instrumental, among them number VIII, written to alleviate the Count's insomnia, where the technical difficulties pursue each other and in which I don't find elements of the salon. Everything, that is, must be connected by a coherence that allows the alternation of these factors with imagination, constructing the tesserae of a great mosaic.

How did you resolve the problem of number XXI, the canon at the seventh, for which Bach prescribed neither one nor two registers?

I believe Bach had in mind one keyboard alone, even if the daring chromaticism is misleading. Harmonically it is one of the most beautiful because it is founded on an arabesque in the right hand mixed together with a descending chromatic scale in the left hand, in an atmosphere of extraordinary mysticism which contrasts with the brilliant preceding variation. It is astral and prepares the resurrection of XXII, a bit like the passage between the canon of IX and the fughetta of X.

Why 30 Variations: is there a significance then in this number?

In the seventeenth century as well as in other centuries for that matter, the concept of the Trinity was highly thought of, and everything connected with it.

Bach, on the other hand, was a Lutheran. Then there is also the succession of canons every three variations with the “epicentre” in number XV, a canon at the fifth in the minor of extraordinary ghostliness.

In this project, so vast and also so varied, is there a favourite moment?

There are many of them. I think that for a performer there are many ways to love his or her own work: personally, I love playing the brilliant variations as much as the most reflective. Of the former I include in particular I and VIII, of the latter most of all XXV. Furthermore, I believe very much in the final climax that starts from XXVI, because it is like dawn, the Resurrection after the Passion. A new life begins, the matter is sealed by the spirit which triumphs over the evil of the world, to purify it after the journey of the 25 variations in which everything happens, and to immortalise it.

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Is it preferable for the view of a young interpreter to be virgin, or is it inevitable to have, to perceive within oneself some interpretation of reference?

Naturally I have different performances of reference, which I have listened to and continue to hear without, however, trying to copy. The first encounter with the *Goldbergs* was – obviously – the recording of Glenn Gould of 1955, which I have always admired for its sensational technique. Not so much for its ability to communicate: forgive me if I am critical! Then in 2001 the second version of András Schiff, which for me, at least as a foundation, is little different from the first. I listen to him in concert, he is extraordinary for everything: perfection of timbre – and without pedal! – dare I say Olympic, with a principle of aestheticism. Then, and this is an audition from *compact-disc*, I would add Murray Perahia. A maestro, not only of the pianoforte, but also of Schenkerian theories. It is very interesting to analyse how from a cell, more precisely an interval, a cathedral can grow. Another experience was getting to know the last version of Rosalyn Tureck, which preceded the start of my studies. And perhaps it was that which influenced me most: moderate tempi, impromptu invention of the embellishments in the ritornelli, the mysticism combined with a stupendous “youthful” freshness. Finally, a little listening to the harpsichord. The recent marvellous version of Ottavio Dantone has made me discover in the *Goldbergs*, even here, quite a bit of the demon.

Andrea Bacchetti

Born in Genoa (Italy) in 1977. As a young child he met and gathered advice from musicians such as Karajan, Magaloff, Berio and Horszowski. "Master" diploma at the Imola Academy with F. Scala. Debut at 11 in Milan with the Solisti Veneti directed by C. Scimone.

Since then he has played many times at international festivals such as Lucerne, Salzburg, Belgrade, Santander, Antibes, Bologna, Brescia and Bergamo, Turin, La Coruna, Pesaro, Bellinzona, Ravello, Badworishofen, Husum, etc. and at important musical venues: Konzerthaus, Berlin; Salle Pleyel, Salle Caveau, Piano 4****, Paris; Rudolfinum Dvořák Hall, Prague; Teatro alla Scala and Sala Verdi, Milan; Teatro Coliseo, Buenos Aires; Roman Atheneum, Bucharest; Rachmaninoff Saal Conservatory, Moscow; Auditorium National, Spain (Scherzo cycle), Teatro Real Teatro Monumental, Madrid; Mozarteum Brasileiro, Sao Paulo; Zentrum Paul Klee, Berne; Gewandhaus, Leipzig; Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia, Università La Sapienza, Accademia Filarmonica, Rome; Myra Hess Concert, Chicago etc.; Bacchetti played with conductors and orchestras of international importance like the Camerata Salzburg, Lucerne Festival Strings, Prague Chamber Orchestra, Filarmonica della Scala, MDR Symphony Orchestra (Leipzig), RTVE Radiotelevisione Spagnola (Madrid), Philharmonie der Nationen (Hamburg), George Enescu Philharmonic Orchestra (Bucarest) and the ONBA Bordeaux. He has toured in Japan.

In Italy he performs with the leading orchestras and principal concert associations. He is a regular guest of the Serate Musicali in Milan. He plays duets with R. Filippini and the Prazak Quartet, the Quartetto della Scala, the Ysaye Quartet. His recordings of the *English Suites* of Bach (DECCA) were praised by the American magazine "Classics Today". The disc with the *6 Sonatas* of Cherubini (RCA RED SEAL) was counted among the best recordings of the year by the Italian magazines "Musica", "Amadeus", "Classic Voice", "Suonare News" and by "Diapason", "Le Monde de la Musique", "Luister", "Pizzicato" and Radio France too. His recording of Berio's *Piano Works* (DECCA) was nominated for the Premio Internazionale del disco "Amadeus" 2005 and was praised by the specialized press. The complete recording of Clementi's *Gradus ad Parnassum* (ARTS) was applauded in the Japanese magazine "Record Geijutsu".

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"His warm sonority, singing line, and expressive intensity proudly hold him own in word-class company." *ClassicsToday*

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INCLUDING AN INTRODUCTION BY ANDREA BACCHETTI & A CD RECORDING OF THE GOLDBERG VARIATIONS

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