

J. S. BACH
GOLDBERG VARIATIONS

Recomposed by
Peter Navarro-Alonso

Alpha

GOLDBERG VARIATIONS

Composed by **Johann Sebastian Bach** (1741)

Recomposed by **Peter Navarro-Alonso** (2013)

ALPHA

Bolette Roed, recorders

Peter Navarro-Alonso, saxophones

David Hildebrandt, percussion

GOLDBERG VARIATIONS		
1	Aria	2:35
2	Variation 1	2:02
3	Var. 2	2:42
4	Var. 3	2:01
5	Var. 4	1:32
6	Var. 5	1:31
7	Var. 6	1:29
8	Var. 7	2:10
9	Var. 8	2:03
10	Var. 9	1:21

11	Var. 10	0:47
12	Var. 11	2:18
13	Var. 12	1:49
14	Var. 13	2:23
15	Var. 14	1:11
16	Var. 15	2:27
17	Var. 16	2:54
18	Var. 17	2:03
19	Var. 18	2:54
20	Var. 19	1:00
21	Var. 20	1:19
22	Var. 21	2:38
23	Var. 22	1:42
24	Var. 23	2:01
25	Var. 24	2:12
26	Var. 25	4:49
27	Var. 26	1:53
28	Var. 27	0:47
29	Var. 28	2:01
30	Var. 29	2:15
31	Var. 30	2:04
32	Aria da Capo	2:27

Total: 65:22

World premiere recording

Bach's instruments often feel beside the point. It is as if he composed ideal music, music that transcends instruments, music that was invented to reinvent itself. It's often assumed that a piece of music by Bach is so musically indestructible that it can be played with excellent results on kazoo, pennywhistle, banjo, marimba, saxophone – you name it. Such is Bach's street cred.

Eric Siblin, *The Cello Suites*, 2009

As our understanding of Johann Sebastian Bach's music has accelerated in recent decades, so our attitude to the man and his masterpieces has come full circle. It can still seem unfathomable that a single human being managed to wed mathematics and musicianship so fluently in the creation of art both exuberant and profound. Yet we have begun to understand that Bach was an ordinary person who led an ordinary life. He was no stranger to professional rejection. He was often resentful and occasionally held grudges. Bach, it turns out, was so very human.

So is his music. Even more fascinating than its deep emotional and spiritual reservoirs is that 'indestructible' property – the result, first and foremost, of human intellectual endeavor. It means a score for solo cello can be respectfully reinvented by an entire orchestra; that a work for harpsichord can be beautifully rendered by a trio of recorder, saxophone and percussion. Bach's musical science transcends aesthetics. For all the numerology, his music is always more natural than it is mechanical.

The liberation of Bach's works from spurious instrumental orthodoxies has meant open season for the *Goldberg Variations*, one of his most fertile creations. This set of 30 variations for keyboard on a single musical idea is one of Bach's most robust works and at the same time one of his most shatteringly beautiful. It has resonated with increasing power the more its creator has receded into the distance of history. Its mathematical qualities make it an enduring puzzle; the music that springs from the number games traverses more states of mind than most operas.

The process of freeing the Goldbergs from their ideological straightjacket has been hastened by the shattering of their creation myth. Gossip tells us that that Bach wrote the Variations for



Alpha – David Hildebrandt , Bolette Roed, Peter Navarro-Alonso

Johann Gottlieb Goldberg to play, in order that his boss Count Keyserlingk – Russian ambassador to the Saxon court – could be entertained while he couldn't sleep.

It is almost certainly a fiction. More likely, Bach played the Variations for Keyserlingk when he visited the Count in Dresden in November 1741, having performed them for the first time at one of his Collegium Musicum concerts in Leipzig some months before. Goldberg, who was just 14

years old at the time he was Keyserlingk's private harpsichordist, surely took the score to heart. Later on, his technique fully developed, it's likely he made his name playing the Variations and in turn, his name stuck to them.

The word 'Goldberg' certainly doesn't appear on the 1741 publication. Instead, it was presented simply as 'Aria with diverse variations for the harpsichord with two manuals'. If Bach was commissioned to write a work to that brief, he didn't quite fulfill the terms. The variations are not based on the aria that sounds before and after them, but on the bass line that aria's melody implies (some say the melody itself is too ornate and gallant to be from Bach's own hand). The composer was always more keen on chord-sequence or bass line variations than on melodic ones, as his great C minor Passacaglia for organ and D minor Chaconne for violin testify (needless to say, both works have been transferred to other instruments and even ensembles to magnificent effect).

The set falls into two halves: No 15 ends conclusively in G minor, before No 16 launches in the manner of a French Overture, an unequivocal fresh start. The variations progress in miniature three-part cycles of study, character piece then canon. That makes nine canons in all, equally spaced along the way; each one increases the space or 'interval' between the canonic parts by one integer, from the second to the ninth. There are two small fugues, No 10 and No 22, each one six variations away from the work's exact centre point. The aria itself is 32 bars long, divided into two halves of 16 bars each. The entire score is an exercise in perfect symmetry.

The structure tells of Bach's generosity. He knew his own interest in rigorous counterpoint – the braiding of two or more musical lines that create a greater whole while at the same time maintaining their separateness – was enough to overwhelm the listener. He therefore took care to vary the character of each of the canons and separate them with singing arias, springing dances and exhaling laments. There is an immense, encyclopedic range of moods and styles within the movements: from the simple to the complex, the frivolous to the profound. All are anchored by the aria's bass line. As in the B minor Mass and *The Art of Fugue*, Bach sought to create something at once completely unified and utterly diverse.

Realising and communicating the intense focus of the *Goldberg Variations* with a combination of human minds rather than a single one has proved an irresistible challenge for generations of musicians. There exist arrangements of the Goldbergs for accordion, organ, two pianos, guitar trio, harp, orchestra and all manner of string ensembles.

"The combination of recorder, saxophone and percussion is clearly not very well suited to a baroque-style re-orchestration," claims Peter Navarro-Alonso, responsible for this version tailor-made for the members of Alpha. "But the richness in that combination lies in its enormous diversity in timbre and dynamic."

There is a strong tradition, Navarro-Alonso reminds us, of composers taking on Bach's music while looking beyond the borders of the original text – among them Hans Abrahamsen and Anton Webern. In his 'un-authentic' instrumentation, Navarro-Alonso accentuates certain elements and structures in the original work in a manner that could never be realised on the two manuals of a harpsichord or on the single keyboard of a piano. "Therefore, without adding a single note, these *Goldberg Variations* present new perspectives on a well-known score: perspectives that have always been imminent, but which are now brought forth into daylight," he says.

So, Bach's emotional encyclopedia isn't so much changed as presented in very different upholstery. Sometimes its rawness is exposed, at other times its gentility is indulged. We get the impression of Bach meeting us in disguise. The marimba adds a ghostly touch to the already bluesy first rendition of the 'aria', blown by a saxophone and recorder passing the theme to one another. Navarro-Alonso emphasizes the idea of Bach's expanding textural and imaginative scope as the journey proceeds: as each three-variation cycle passes (study – character piece – canon), he adds another instrument to the percussionist's marimba: vibraphone, glockenspiel, woodblock, guiro, taiko drum, tom tom and so on. As Bach's mental universe expands, so does the sonic universe with which it is being relayed.

The tuned instruments preserve Bach's melodic, harmonic and contrapuntal designs. But the new textures, not to mention their combination, frees-up any idea of rhetoric. The gigue of Variation 7 lifts off the dance-floor into airborne fantasy courtesy of soprano recorder and glockenspiel. The cosmic jangling of Variation 9 spatchcocks Bach's contrapuntal joinery. The guiro in Variation 13 flings open the doors to an otherwise private, coiled song. The taiko drum in Variation 16 foregrounds the French grandeur with which Bach relied mostly on silence to muster. The steady tread of Variation 21 sounds even more inexorable when underpinned by a drum. The mania of its successor heightened by the thwacking of drum, marimba and tom toms. The emotional heart of the work, Variation 25, dips underground courtesy of a smoky baritone

sax and shadowy percussion. The X-Ray scoring of Variation 28 lets us into all the secrets of Bach's part writing. Variations 29 and 30 use all manner of sounds to celebrate the ecstatic exuberance that was flowing through Bach's fingers by this stage in the work.

And then we are back to the beginning: the same room we started out in at a different time of day. But in the final airing of the aria we encounter, unusually in the Goldbergs, an actual, textural change. In a reversal of his steady process of complication, Navarro-Alonso gives us the aria dressed in plainer clothes than those in which we heard it to begin with. Just as we have started to know too much, he reminds us of the bright yet simple wisdom behind it all.

Andrew Mellor, 2018. Andrew Mellor is a journalist and critic with a particular interest in the culture and music of Denmark and the Nordic countries.

Alpha is a unique Danish ensemble, founded by Bolette Roed (recorder), Peter Navarro-Alonso (saxophone) and David Hildebrandt (percussion) who all graduated from the soloist class at the Royal Danish Academy of Music, Copenhagen. As early as in 2003, they were the first to explore this instrument combination, attracted by its many possibilities. Alpha was an immediate success and became double prize winner in the Danish Radio's Chamber Music Competition in 2006 and they have been finalists in many international competitions while all of their CDs have been nominated for P2 Prisen, the Danish Music Awards for Classical music. Alpha was also nominated for the Nordic Council's Music Prize in 2009. For Dacapo the trio has released the CD's 'Alpha' (2006), 'Through the looking glass' (2013) with new interpretations of known works by Per Nørgård, Poul Ruders, Hans Abrahamsen og Bent Sørensen as well as 'Le quattro stagioni' (2018), which includes Peter Navarro-Alonso's version of Vivaldi's 'The Four Seasons'.

alphatrio.com

VIDEN ER FRIHED af Andrew Mellor

Bachs instrumenter føles ofte uvæsentlige. Det er, som om han komponerede ideel musik, musik, der rækker ud over instrumenter, musik, der er skabt til at genskabe sig selv. Det er ofte antaget, at et musikstykke af Bach er så musikalsk uforgængeligt, at det kan spilles – med strålende resultater – på kazoo, tinfløjte, banjo, marimba, saxofon – hvad som helst. Så stærk er Bachs street-cred.

Eric Siblin, The Cello Suites, 2009

I takt med at vores forståelse af Johann Sebastian Bachs musik er øget voldsomt i de sidste tiår, således er også vores holdning til manden og hans mesterværker vendt tilbage til udgangspunktet. Det kan stadig synes ufatteligt, at et enkelt menneske forstod at forene matematik og musikerskab på så naturlig en måde og derved skabte kunst, der både er jublende og dybsindig. Og dog er vi begyndt at forstå, at Bach var en almindelig mand, der levede et almindeligt liv. Han var ofte fortørnet og bar af og til nag. Bach, viser det sig, var såre menneskelig.

Det er hans musik også. Hvad der fascinerer endnu mere end dens store følelsesmæssige og åndelige dybder, er denne 'uforgængelige' egenskab – resultatet, først og fremmest, af menneskelig intellektuel stræben. Det betyder, at et værk for solo-cello kan genskabes respektfuldt af et helt orkester; at et værk for cembalo kan foredrages smukt af en trio af blokfløjte, saxofon og slagtojs. Bachs musikalske videnskab rækker ud over æstetikken. Trods al numerologien er hans musik altid mere naturlig end mekanisk.

Frigørelsen af Bachs værker fra tvivlsomme instrumentale ortodoksier har ført til u hæmmet frihed til fortolkning af 'Goldberg-variationerne', et af hans mest givende værker. Dette sæt af 30 variationer for tasteinstrument over en enkelt musikalsk idé er et af Bachs mest holdbare værker, og på samme tid et af hans allermest knusende smukke. Det har vundet stedse mere genklang, jo længere dets skaber er kommet på historisk afstand. Dets matematiske egenskaber gør det til en evig gåde; musikken, der kommer ud af tallegene, gennemlever flere sjælestilstande end de fleste operaer.

Processen med at frigøre 'Goldberg-variationerne' fra deres ideologiske spændetrøje blev hjulpet på vej, da deres skabelsesmyte faldt til gulvet. Ifølge sladdereren skrev Bach variationerne,



så Johann Gottlieb Goldberg kunne spille dem, så hans chef Grev Keyserlingk – russisk ambasadør til det saksiske hof – kunne blive underholdt, når han ikke kunne sove.

Dette er næsten helt sikkert blot en god historie. Efter al sandsynlighed spillede Bach variationerne for Keyserlingk, da han besøgte greven i Dresden i november 1741, efter at have spillet dem for første gang ved en af sine Collegium Musicum-koncerter i Leipzig nogle måneder tidligere. Goldberg, som var bare 14 år, da han var Keyserlingks private cembalist, har helt sikkert taget værket til sig. Senere, da hans teknik var fuldt udviklet, er det sandsynligt, at han skabte sig et navn ved at spille Variationerne, og med tiden hang hans navn fast ved dem.

Ordet 'Goldberg' er ikke at finde på 1741-udgivelsen. I stedet er værket helt enkelt præsenteret som 'Aria med forskellige variationer for et cembalo med to manualer'. Hvis Bach havde fået til opgave at skrive et værk med den formulering, havde han ikke helt levet op til den. Variationerne er ikke baseret på den arie, der lyder før og efter dem, men på den baslinje, som ariens melodi bærer med sig (nogle mener, at selve melodien er for udsmykket og galant til at stamme fra Bachs egen hånd). Komponisten var altid mere optaget af akkord-progressioner eller variationer over baslinjer end af melodilinj, hvilket for eksempel hans store *Passacaglia* for orgel i c-mol og *Chaconne* for violin i d-mol vidner om (unødvendigt at sige, at begge værker er blevet versioneret til andre instrumenter, og endda ensembler med fremragende slutresultat).

Sættet falder i to dele: Nr. 15 ender meget tydeligt i g-mol, før nr. 16 tager afsæt som en fransk ouverture, en uomtvisteligt ny begyndelse. Variationerne skrider frem i små tredelte cyklusser af etude, karakterstykke og kanon. Det giver ni kanoner i alt, med lige stor afstand mellem hver; hver øger afstanden eller 'intervallet' mellem kanon-stemmerne med et trin, fra en sekund til en none. Der er to små fugaer, nr. 10 og nr. 22, begge med seks variationers afstand til værkets midterpunkt. Arien er i sig selv 32 takter lang, delt i to halve på 16 takter hver. Hele partituret er et eksempel på perfekt symmetri.

Strukturen fortæller os også noget om Bachs gavmildhed over for sine lyttere. Han vidste, at hans egen interesse i strengt kontrapunkt – sammenfletningen af to eller flere melodilinj, der skaber et større hele, og dog bevarer deres selvstændighed – meget nemt kunne overvælde lytteren. Derfor bestræbte han sig nøje på at variere karakteren af hver kanon og adskille dem med syngende arier, hoppende danse og sukkende klagesange. Der er en enorm, altomfattende variation af humører og stilarter i satserne: fra det enkle til det sammensatte, fra det fjantede

til det dybsindige. Alle er forankret i ariens baslinje. Som i Messen i h-mol og i 'Kunst der Fuge' forsøgte Bach at skabe noget på en gang fuldstændig forenet og aldeles varieret.

At udføre og formidle 'Goldberg-variationernes' intense fokus med flere menneskesind end blot et enkelt har vist sig at være en uimodståelig udfordring for generationer af musikere. Der eksisterer arrangementer af 'Goldberg-variationerne' for akkordeon, orgel, to klaverer, guitartrio, harpe, orkester og alle slags strygerensembler.

"Kombinationen af blokfløjte, saxofon og slagtøj er helt klart ikke særlig velegnet til en re-instrumentering i barokstil," hævder Peter Navarro-Alonso, der står bag denne version, skræddersyet til Alphas medlemmer. "Men fordelene i kombinationen ligger i dens enorme mangfoldighed i timbre og dynamik."

Der findes en stærk tradition, minder Navarro-Alonso os om, med komponister, der binder an med Bachs musik, og samtidig ser ud over grænserne for det originale materiale – blandt andre Hans Abrahamsen og Anton Webern. Med sin 'uautentiske' instrumentation fremhæver Navarro-Alonso visse elementer og strukturer i det originale værk på en måde, der aldrig ville kunne realiseres på et cembalos to manualer eller et klavers enkelte klaviatur. "Derfor, uden at tilføje en eneste tone, præsenterer disse Goldberg-variationer nye perspektiver i et velkendt værk: perspektiver, der altid har været der, men som nu for første gang bringes frem i dagens lys," siger han.

Så altså, Bachs følelsesmæssige opslagsværk bliver ikke så meget forandret som præsenteret med helt nyt betræk. Nogle gange afsløres dets rå kvaliteter, andre gange gives der efter for dets påtagne delikatesse. Vi får indtryk af en Bach, der møder os i forkældning. Marimbaen tilføjer et åndepust til den allerede sørgmodige første udgave af arien, spillet af saxofon og blokfløjte, der afleverer temaet til hinanden. Navarro-Alonso fremhæver udvidelsen af Bachs teksturmæssige og opfindsomme palet, som rejsen skrider frem: i løbet af hver tredelt cyklus (etude – karakterstykke – kanon) tilføjer han et instrument mere til slagøjsspillerens marimba: vibrafon, glockenspiel, woodblock, guiro, taikotromme, tom tom og så fremdeles. I takt med at Bachs mentale univers udvider sig, udvider sig også det lydlige univers, hvormed det bliver formidlet.

De stemte instrumenter fastholder Bachs melodiske, harmoniske og kontrapunktiske planer. Men de nye teksturer, for ikke at nævne kombinationerne af dem, frigør al tanke om retorik.



Giguen i variation 7 hæver sig over dansegulvet i en luftbåren fantasi ved hjælp af sopranino-blokfløjte og glockenspiel. Den kosmiske skramlen i variation 9 flækker Bachs kontrapunktiske snedkerarbejde. Guiroen i variation 13 slår dørene op til en ellers privat og sammensnoet sang. Taikotrommen i variation 16 trækker den franske grandeur, som Bach ellers forlod sig på, at stilheden skulle mønstre, frem i forgrunden. Den jævne fremadskriden i variation 21 lyder endnu mere ubønhørlig, når den understøttes af en tromme. Manien i dens efterfølger understreges af smældene fra tromme, marimba og tom tom. Værkets følelsesmæssige hjerte, variation 25, bøjer sig ned under jorden ved hjælp af en støvet baritonsaxofon og skyggefuld slagstøj. Røntgen-

arrangementet af variation 28 indvier os i alle hemmelighederne ved Bachs stemmeføringer. Variation 29 og 30 bruger alle slags lyde til at prise den ekstatiske yppighed, der på dette sted i værket flød ud gennem Bachs fingre.

Og så er vi tilbage ved begyndelsen: det samme værelse, vi begyndte i, på et andet tidspunkt af døgnet. Men i den afsluttende udgave af arien møder vi, meget usædvanligt i 'Goldberg-variationerne', en faktisk, tekstuel forandring. Med en fuldstændig omvæltning af sin stedse mere komplicerede fremadskriden giver Navarro-Alonso os arien klædt i simple gevandter end den, vi hørte i begyndelsen af værket. Netop som vi begynder at vide for meget, minder han os om den lysende og dog enkle visdom bag det hele.

Andrew Mellor, 2018. Andrew Mellor er journalist og kritiker med særlig interesse for kultur og musik fra Danmark og de nordiske lande.

Alpha er et unikt dansk ensemble dannet og bestående af Bolette Roed (blokfløjte), Peter Navarro-Alonso (saxofon) og David Hildebrandt (slagtpøj), alle uddannet fra Det Kongelige Danske Musikkonservatoriums solistklasse. Så tidligt som i 2003 udforskede Alpha som de første denne instrumentkombination og blev med det samme tiltrukket af de mange klanglige muligheder. Alpha fik straks succes og blev dobbelt prisvinder i DR's kammermusikkonkurrence i 2006 og har siden været finalist i flere internationale konkurrencer, nomineret til P2-prisen for samtlige sine CD-udgivelser og nomineret til Nordisk Råds Musik Pris 2009. For Dacapo har trioen udgivet cd'erne 'Alpha' (2006), 'Through the looking glass' (2013) med nyfortolkninger af Per Nørgård, Poul Ruders, Hans Abrahamsen og Bent Sørensen og 'Le quattro stagioni' (2018), der blandt andet indeholder Peter Navarro-Alonsos udgave af Vivaldis 'De fire årstider'.

alphatrio.com

DDD

Goldberg Variations was recorded at Hørsholm Church on 11–16 November 2015

Recording producer: Stephan Reh

Engineering: Stephan Reh

Editing: David Hildebrandt

Mix and mastering: Stephan Reh

No use of overdubs

© & © 2018 Dacapo Records, Copenhagen

Liner notes: Andrew Mellor

Danish translation of liner notes: Camilla Toldi Bugge

Proofreading: Svend Ravnkilde

Cover design: Denise Burt, elevator-design.dk. Digital collages by Denise Burt, using original images by Noah Hornberger: 'Bill Gates', 'Britney Spears', 'Lady Gaga' and 'Barack Obama' (CC BY 2.0)

Photos: Caroline Bittencourt

Bolette Roed plays recorders made by Fred Morgan, Cho Jin-Hee, Fred Morgan/Nikolaj Ronimus and Yamaha.

The recording was generously supported by the **Augustinus Foundation**



AUGUSTINUS FONDEN

STIFTET 24. MARTS 1942

DACAPO

8.226210

DANMARKS NATIONALE
MUSIKANTOLOGI

Dacapo Records, Denmark's national record label, was founded in 1986 with the purpose of releasing the best of Danish music past and present. The majority of our recordings are world premieres, and we are dedicated to producing music of the highest international standards.

