

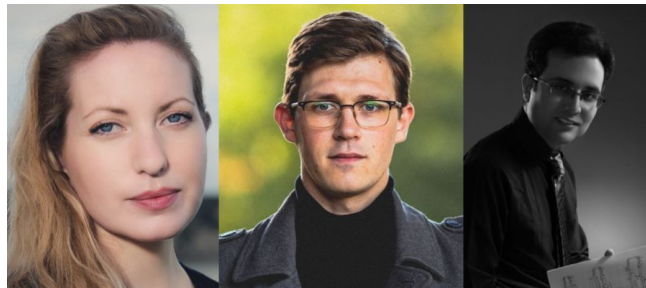


T B S



Cristian Sandrin

JS Bach - Goldberg Variations (with three new variations)



Louise Drewett

Philip Dutton

Farhad Poupel



16 February 2025

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Programme

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Goldberg Variations BWV 988

Aria - Thema

Variation 01 - hand-crossing curling scales, a dance, maybe a polonaise

Variation 02 - a serious conversation between two old good friends, at times they poke fun at each other

Variation 03 - Cannone all'Unisono: naivety cast into a prelude, its imitation is inescapable like a shadow

Variation 04 - a passepied with trumpets signalling the arrival of a surprise guest: the court virtuoso

Variation 05 - the harpsichord master performs spellbinding tricks on the manuals: blistering fast scales with notes bobbing up and down the keyboard

Variation 06 - Cannone alla Seconda: two voices that contemplate each others' perfect guise within the mirror.

New Variation: *Reng* by Farhad Poupel

Variation 07 - a fast yet delicate Gigue, the audience claps as one

Variation 08 - streams of arpeggios in both hands that meet in the middle and become entangled

Variation 09 - Cannone alla Terza: an unperturbed canon in thirds

Variation 10 - a strong-willed idea, growing into the semblance of a proper fugue

Variation 11 - a waterway: an outflow of very quick, tightly entwined scales in both hands

Variation 12 - Cannone alla Quarta: a composed canon at fourths, inverted

Variation 13 - an imperturbable Sarabande

Variation 14 - tremors in the ground lead to melodic outbreak

Variation 15 - Cannone alla Quinta: the first minor variation, an other-worldly canon at fifths, inverted. Impenetrable melodic imitations that produce eerie harmonies

Variation 16 - the keystone of the set: a resplendent French ouverture followed by a stretto fugue

Variation 17 - a musical duet conveying the image of the warping stairs of Escher - the printmaker

Variation 18 - Cannone alla Sexta: a high-spirited rollicking canon in 6ths, stretto

Variation 19 - a fast menuet, three voices, an intimation of the organ sonority

Variation 20 - hand-crossing oscillating jumps and spinning runs in thirds. Fireworks.

Variation 21 - Cannone alla Settima: the second gloomy minor variation, an inexorable canon in sevenths. Dark earthbound dissonant sonorities. A slow Allemande.

Variation 22 - crack of dawn. Nature is awakened by the sway of the morning sun. Droplets of dew.

New Variation - *Kanchejunga (The Golden Mountain of India)* by Philip Dutton

Variation 23 - a deluge of scales running down the keyboard. Rapturous.

Variation 24 - Cannone all'Ottava: a pastoral canon in octaves

Variation 25 - an exquisite supplication in the minor key

Variation 26 - a collage of whirlwind scales and sarabande rhythms

Variation 27 - Cannone alla Nona: a duet in sevenths. A quarrel

Variation 28 - clocks and glockenspiels ring against a shimmer of trills

Variation 29 - a batterie signals the looming victory

New Variation: *Cannone alla Decima* by Louise Drewett

Variation 30 - quodlibet. Same bassline as Variation 22. Two popular songs are juxtaposed in insightful ways.

Aria - Da capo

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Notes

Regarded by many as a pinnacle of the piano repertoire, *The Goldberg Variations* are a perennial presence in concert hall programmes, appearing in an ever growing number of professional recordings, prize winning fiction novels, even Holly-wood movies (Variation no. 7 is used in *The Silence of the Lambs*).

The Goldbergs have already entered the realm of myth. Count Keyserling of Dresden was suffering from agonisingly sleepless nights. He commissioned this work from Kappelmeister Bach from Leipzig, essentially as a remedy to relieve him from his insomnia. The work was to be performed by harpsichord-virtuoso Johann Gottlieb Goldberg. One must regard this story with a certain distrust.

A sequence of thirty variations arise from the *Aria's* harmonic structure. The music meanders through highs and lows, moments of utter stillness and passages of mind-boggling bravura. They outline nearly all of Bach's compositional techniques: canons, fugues, dances, toccatas, preludes and French overtures. It is essentially a digest of Bach's unfathomably immense body of work.

Bach's scheme of variations follows the bass-line of the *Aria* – meaning that all of Bach's variations correspond to the same bass-line or harmonic sequence as the theme. This is not a novel model, but a technique that had been used by composers for a long time. It was called *passacaglia*. In fact Bach breaks with the norm innumerable times, altering the harmonic sequence, changing the metre of the variations, inserting variations in altogether different keys (in G minor, as opposed to the G major of the Theme). No doubt that some moments in the *Goldbergs* would have sounded eccentric to Bach's contemporaries – some may seem strange even to us, today.

For this reason, we have commissioned three *new variations* by three contemporary composers, Louise Drewett, Philip Dutton and Farhad Poupel. Each composer has been asked to write a short work, a variation on Bach's *Aria - Thema*. All new variations take the bass-line of the *Aria* as a starting point, after which they diverge in three completely different directions. The *New Goldberg Variations* are offsprings of Bach's work, and express each composer's imagination in a different way: crucially, we will find that Bach's *Goldbergs* will be revealed to us in a new light too.

The *Goldbergs* encompass dances from all over Europe, they are a veritable travelogue for the court-dancer of the 18th Century: Variation 7 is a *Gigue* (a traditional English dance), Variation 4 is a *Passepiéd* (French-Breton dance), Variation 1 sounds like a *Polonaise* (obviously a Polish court-dance), Variation 21 is a slow *Allemande* (German dance), Variations 13 and 25 are both *Sarabandes* (slow dances from Spain) and the list goes on. Hence why **Iranian-born Farhad Poupel's variation, Reng**, takes the dance as its starting point – *reng* is a traditional Persian dance. Farhad's dance follows Bach's bass-line, but it is composed in the minor key (just like variations 15, 21 and 25).

Another aspect of Bach's variations is the use of canons, where the same melody is repeated, successively. Bach overlaps a melody with its own imitation. The imitation may come two or three beats later, hence it never overlaps perfectly with the melody. This is a very difficult composition technique, a manner of composition which flourished during the Renaissance, Early Baroque and in Bach's own day. Bach composes a canon for every third variation, moreover – he changes the interval between the melody and its imitation accordingly. Variation 3 is titled *Canone all'Unisuono* – this means that between the melody and its imitation there is an interval of *unison*. This would be a challenge in itself, but Bach goes further and composes 8 more canons in all possible intervals (from unison, to seconds, thirds and finally ninths). Instead of a *Cannone alla Decima* (Canon at a Tenth) we have a *Quodlibet* - the final variation.

This is where Louise Drewett steps in, and composes the missing *Cannone alla Decima*. Louise's composition is a *strict canon*, more strict than any of Bach's canons: it is a single thread in the right hand which is closely followed by its perfect imitation at the interval of a *Major Tenth*. Louise's composition aims to draw our attention to the interaction of these two identical melodic threads: they spin around each other creating audible and inaudible imitations, alternating between crackling and eerie-like harmonies.

Finally, **Philip Dutton's composition** is a play on the word *variation* itself. Philip contemplates the word *Goldberg* and looks into its German significance, which would translate as *Golden Mountain*. Composed in a modernist fashion, the piece takes various elements of the bass-line and scatters them all around the work. The only aurally recognisable element from Bach appears in the lowest octave of the piano: a rhythmically distorted version of the *Aria's* melody. Afterwards, the piece turns away from music and contemplates a work from the visual arts: Nicholas Roerich's painting *The Golden Mountain* (1944), where mystical hues illuminate the mountain peaks. The roar of the mountain begins to be heard in the lowest notes of the piano against twinkling permutations in the highest octave of the piano. Philip's piece emphasised the physical gesture of playing on two extremes of the keyboard, the lowest and the high register of the piano – a gesture that is omnipresent in Bach's virtuosic variations, but escapes us, because we forget that keyboard instruments during Bach's time were much narrower than today's modern piano. Mid-way through the piece, the two opposed sides of the keyboard converge into each other and develop into a frenzied rhythmic canon driving the music back into the original *Goldbergs*.

Cristian Sandrin was born into a family of musicians from Bucharest, and has been surrounded by classical music all his life. His frequent visits to the historic Romanian Atheneum concert hall and his attendances at the prestigious Enescu Festival shaped his musical aspirations from early childhood. Years later, he would have his own debut at the Atheneum at the age of 13.

Cristian is especially devoted to the Classical and Romantic repertoire. His passion for Mozart's piano concertos led him to direct from the keyboard several concertos during Summer Festivals at the Royal Academy of Music, as well as for the official opening of the Angela Burgess Recital Hall. He is a scholarship holder of the Imogen Cooper Music Trust benefiting from her unique one-to-one guidance and mentorship since 2017.

In 2023 he was been invited to become the co-Artistic Director of the much-admired Kettner Concerts which are held in the David Lloyd George Hall of the National Liberal Club, Rachmaninov's favourite London recital room and the venue where he performed his European farewell concert.

Cristian has performed challenging solo programmes including Beethoven's last three sonatas and Bach's *Goldberg Variations* in famous venues across Europe from Berlin's Konzerthaus, the Radio Hall in Bucharest to London's LSO St Luke's and Holywell Music Room Oxford. In February 2025 Cristian will have his debut recital at Sala Puccini in Milan during the *Serate Musicale* series.

His debut CD *Correspondances* (Antarctica Records 2022) featuring music by Ravel, Enescu and Cyril Scott has been highly acclaimed in Europe and across the Atlantic: the German Magazine *Piano News* selected it as the CD of the Month whilst the American Record Guide named it "the highlight of this month's listening."

Louise Drewett is a British composer, based in London. 'Clearly a talent with a very distinct sensibility' (The Telegraph), Louise writes music that draws on her formative experience working with community choirs. Her music has been commissioned and performed by ensembles and institutions including the London Symphony Orchestra, the London Philharmonic Orchestra, the International Guitar Foundation and ABRSM. Her community opera 'Daylighting' was nominated for an Ivor Novello Award at the Ivors Composer Awards 2022. Louise is a Professor of Composition at the Royal Academy of Music, co-directs Sing Healthy Choirs and is acting Artistic Director of the New London Chamber Choir. She holds a PhD in Composition from the RAM where she studied on a scholarship with Philip Cashian, Hans Abrahamsen and Oliver Knussen.

Farhad Poupel is a UK-based Iranian composer whose works have been/will be performed at prestigious venues like Suntory Hall (Tokyo), National Opera (Warsaw), and Sage Gateshead (Newcastle). His music has been/will be interpreted by renowned artists/orchestras such as Peter Jablonski, Kotaro Fukuma and the National Symphony Orchestra (US) and featured on BBC Radio 3 and NPR Radio 4. Drawing inspiration from literature, mythology, art, and cinema, Poupel blends influences from composers like Sibelius, Brahms, and Ravel, as well as his own heritage, creating a distinct musical voice. Born in Isfahan, Iran, he trained under Saeed Sharifian. He debuted internationally in 2019 with *Zayande-Rud*, performed by the Windsor Symphony Orchestra and has been performed and commissioned worldwide ever since. Farhad Poupel is currently the holder of the prestigious Global Talent visa which allows him to work on a range of composition projects with the international community of musicians.

Philip Dutton is a British-Czech composer whose music is increasingly heard internationally. Between 2022-24, Philip was a Britten Pears Young Artist, a London Philharmonic Orchestra Young Artist, and a Royal Philharmonic Society Composer. He is currently working on a new commission for the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra's 2025/26 season. His music, often colourful and direct, draws upon his rich Czech-British-Jewish cultural heritage for inspiration. Performers of Philip's music include the BBC Singers, ORA Singers, Engegård Quartet, EXAUDI, clarinettist Scott Lygate, conductors Jonathan Berman and Brett Dean, and the London Philharmonic Orchestra. His works have been performed in venues across the UK and Europe including the Aldeburgh International Festival, Brucknerhaus Linz, Cadogan Hall, Lille Opera, Wigmore Hall and Queen Elizabeth Hall, and have been broadcast on BBC Radio 3.

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