

School of Music

Johann Sebastian Bach
(1685-1750)

Goldberg Variations, BWV 988

Adapted for the organ by
Stephen Tharp

Stephen Tharp, Organ

Sunday, February 9, 2003

2:30 p.m.

Organ Hall, School of Music

PROGRAM

Aria

Variation I.

Variation II.

Variation III. (Canon at the Unison)

Variation IV.

Variation V.

Variation VI. (Canon at the Second)

Variation VII.

Variation VIII.

Variation IX. (Canon at the Third)

Variation X. (Fughetta)

Variation XI.

Variation XII. (Canon at the Fourth)

Variation XIII.

Variation XIV.

Variation XV. (Inverted Canon at the Fifth)

Variation XVI. (French Overture)

Variation XVII.

Variation XVIII. (Canon at the Sixth)

Variation XIX.

Variation XX.

Variation XXI. (Canon at the Seventh)

Variation XXII.

Variation XXIII.

Variation XXIV. (Canon at the Octave)

Variation XXV.

Variation XXVI.

Variation XXVII. (Canon at the Ninth)

Variation XXVIII.

Variation XXIX.

Variation XXX. (Quodlibet)

PROGRAM NOTES

As long as there has been melody, there have been variations. A composer invents a tune and immediately sets about examining how that tune can lend itself to the technique of variation, subtly changed by alterations of rhythm, tempo, even harmony, without entirely losing its original shape or personality. The clever composer and the cleverly devised tune can generate a set of variations of almost any length. The “cleverly devised tune,” in fact, is often on its surface a simple creation, not at all as promising as we first hear it. The marvel of the great sets of variations – the Bach Goldbergs, Beethoven’s enormous set on a dopey little tune by one Anton Diabelli, Brahms’ lovely expansion of a simple melody attributed to Haydn (but probably by someone else) – lies in the infinite richness of expression that their respective composers have been able to carve out of the bare outlines of their chosen themes.

The Goldberg of Bach’s monumental set of variations was a young harpsichordist. Johann Gottlieb Goldberg, who studied with Bach in Leipzig around 1743. The familiar story – and if it isn’t true it ought to be – is that Goldberg’s employer, a certain Count Karl von Keyserlingk, suffered from insomnia and requested that his young employee play him to sleep every night from his keyboard. We don’t, however, know why Bach should have been inspired to furnish his sixteen-year-old protégé with this set of variations, one of his longest, most complex and subtle keyboard works. One safe guess is that, Goldberg or no Goldberg, he relished the challenge of deriving an hour’s worth of musical variety from a simple, slow dance tune that he had already composed as a teaching piece for his wife, Anna Magdalena.

The result is one of music's greater glories: thirty infinitely varied, subtle ways of looking at the simplest dance melody, alternating between serious, contrapuntal studies and others of less complex outline, culminating in a hilarious final variation in which two popular songs of the time – “It has been so long since I've been at your house” and “Cabbages and turnips have driven me away” – are played simultaneously and blended into the outline of the original tune. The *Goldbergs* may suggest a formidable, unapproachable, mist-shrouded compositional exercise – until you actually listen, that is.

— Alan Rich

BIOGRAPHY

Stephen Tharp is one of North America's most internationally acclaimed and active concert organists, playing more than 50 concerts per season worldwide. Hundreds of U.S. concerts and 18 intercontinental solo tours throughout the United States, Canada, Europe, Asia and Australia since 1987 have included major performances at such distinguished venues as the Royal Albert Hall and St. Paul's Cathedral, London; St. George's Hall, Liverpool; York Minster; Notre Dame Cathedral, St. Sulpice and St. Eustache, Paris; the Hong Kong Cultural Centre; the Townhall, Adelaide, Australia; the Tonhalle, Zurich; the Thomaskirche, Leipzig and the Jakobikirche, Hamburg, Germany; St. Bavo, Haarlem, The Netherlands; Woolsey Hall, Yale University; Washington National Cathedral and The United States Air Force Academy, Colorado Springs, Colorado.

Tharp holds the M.M. degree in Organ Performance from Northwestern University, where he was a student of Wolfgang Rubsam and harpsichordist for the Northwestern University Chamber Music Ensemble. He received the B.A. degree in Organ Performance, Piano Performance and Accompaniment,

magna cum laude, from Illinois College, Jacksonville, Illinois, studying organ with Rudolf Zuiderveld and piano with Garrett Allman. Further organ studies have included work with Jean Guillou, Naji Hakim, Harald Vogel and Gillian Weir.

A champion of new music, Tharp continues to commission and premiere numerous new compositions for the organ. He is also a leading advocate of the art of transcription, having adapted for the organ J. S. Bach's *Goldberg Variations* and the *Italian Concerto in F*; G. F. Handel's *Music for the Royal Fireworks*; Shostakovich's *Symphony No. 5*; Copland's *Symphony No. 3*; Liszt's *Sonata in B Minor*; *Totentanz*; Stravinsky's *Petrouchka* and the *Circus Polka*; the Toccata from Jongen's *Symphonie Concertante*, arranged for four-hands/four-feet; and an organ and percussion transcription of Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du Printemps*. Tharp's concerto repertoire is equally as vast, having performed works for organ and orchestra by C.P.E. Bach, Barber, Copland, Dupré, Eben, Escaich, Guillou, Guilmant, Handel, Jongen, Langlais, Piston, Poulenc, Rheinberger, Widor and Wills, both in the United States and in Europe.

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Herberger College
of Fine Arts

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Organ virtuoso Stephen Tharp brings his own adaptation for organ to Bach's famous Goldberg Variations.

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