

In loving memory of Blessed Bernhard Lichtenberg (1875-1943)

The Goldberg Variations

BWV 988

J. S. Bach (1685-1750)

Piano

Jacqueline Cole



Original manuscript of the theme

Commemorating Yom HaShoah and VE Day 8 May 1945



PORTRAIT OF BACH.

In the upper left-hand corner, the Thomas Church; right-hand corner, the Observatory at Leipzig;
below, the Thomas School and Bach Memorial.

“LIVE IN THE MOMENT, LIVE IN ETERNITY”

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832)

Goldberg Variations BWV988 JS Bach (1685 – 1750)

Although Johann Gottlieb Goldberg was a pupil of J. S. Bach and a keyboard player of considerable distinction and talent, it was the chronic insomnia of his patron that made him famous. According to the familiar and possibly suspect story told by Bach’s early biographer Johann Forkel, Count Hermann Carl von Keyserlingk kept Goldberg in his employ so that he might have music whenever he wanted it. When he remarked to JS Bach that he yearned for some keyboard pieces to entertain him during his many sleepless nights, Bach reluctantly wrote these thirty variations for Goldberg to play. Like a number of works written during the last years of Bach’s life, the *Goldberg Variations* encompass nearly all he knew about music. There are canons at each interval from the unison to the ninth, a four-voice fugue, a siciliana, a French overture, a quodlibet, a number of inventions and dances, and a grand aria for the right hand. There is music for crossing hands, music of deceptive plainness and much that requires extraordinary virtuosity; there is music profound and delightfully witty, and in the final variation, there is a miraculous sleight of hand – a feat attempted by only the greatest of composers – the transformation of two silly and earthy folk songs into music of timeless majesty.

There is no evidence that anyone played the *Goldberg Variations* through from beginning to end during Bach’s lifetime. First published in 1742 by Baltasar Schmid in Nuremberg under the modest title *Keyboard Practice consisting of an Aria with different variations for the Harpsichord with two Manuals*. Like a timeless passacaglia, these variations reiterate the harmonic implications of the ground bass line (as established in the opening 8 bars of the Aria) in thirty gloriously independent and highly organized forms that follow one another in a symmetrical grouping like the beads of a Rosary. The Aria repeated at the end closes the great circle.

“There is something in it of divinity more than the ear discovers: it is an hieroglyphical and shadowed lesson of the whole world, and creatures of God, such a melody to the ear, as the whole world, well understood, would afford the understanding. In brief, it is a sensible fit of that harmony which intellectually sounds in the ears of God”

From *Religio Medici*, Sir Thomas Browne



Johann Gottlieb Goldberg (1727-1756)



Blessed Bernhard Lichtenberg, bust by Klaus Backmund in the Stadtpfarrkirche St. Marie, Hof, Bavaria

Bernhard Lichtenberg (1875-1943), born in Ohlau in Silesia, Germany, studied theology at the seminary in Innsbruck, Austria, and was ordained a priest in 1899. He was an outspoken critic of the Nazis and their anti-Semitic campaign throughout their rise to power and organized protests outside concentration camps, led public prayers for the Jews, and filed complaints against the Nazi party. He was eventually arrested and imprisoned for two years, but, not deterred, resumed his actions and criticisms against the Nazis after his release and was again arrested and sent to the Dachau concentration camp, but never arrived. He was killed 5 November 1943, aged 67, on the train taking him to Dachau. He was beatified by Pope John Paul II in 1996.



Opening bars of Variation 21

Jacqueline Cole is the founder and artistic director of the Viktor Ullmann Foundation whose purpose is to honour, celebrate and remember through performance the life and artistry of the Austro-Hungarian composer Viktor Ullmann (1898-1944) and his contemporaries, all of whom lost their lives in the concentration camps of Theresienstadt and Auschwitz-Birkenau. She was awarded the Nadia and Lili Boulanger International Foundation Scholarship by Yehudi Menuhin and Witold Lutoslawski for the purpose of studying the piano repertoire of Olivier Messiaen with Yvonne Loriod in Paris while at the same time studying Ondes Martenot with Jeanne Loriod. She was also awarded a French Government Scholarship and an Yvonne Loriod bursary in order to attend Messiaen's music analysis class at Centre Acanthes in Villeneuve les Avignons. She made a special study of the music of Chopin with Vlado Perlemuter and that of Bach and Sarasate with Nadia Boulanger.