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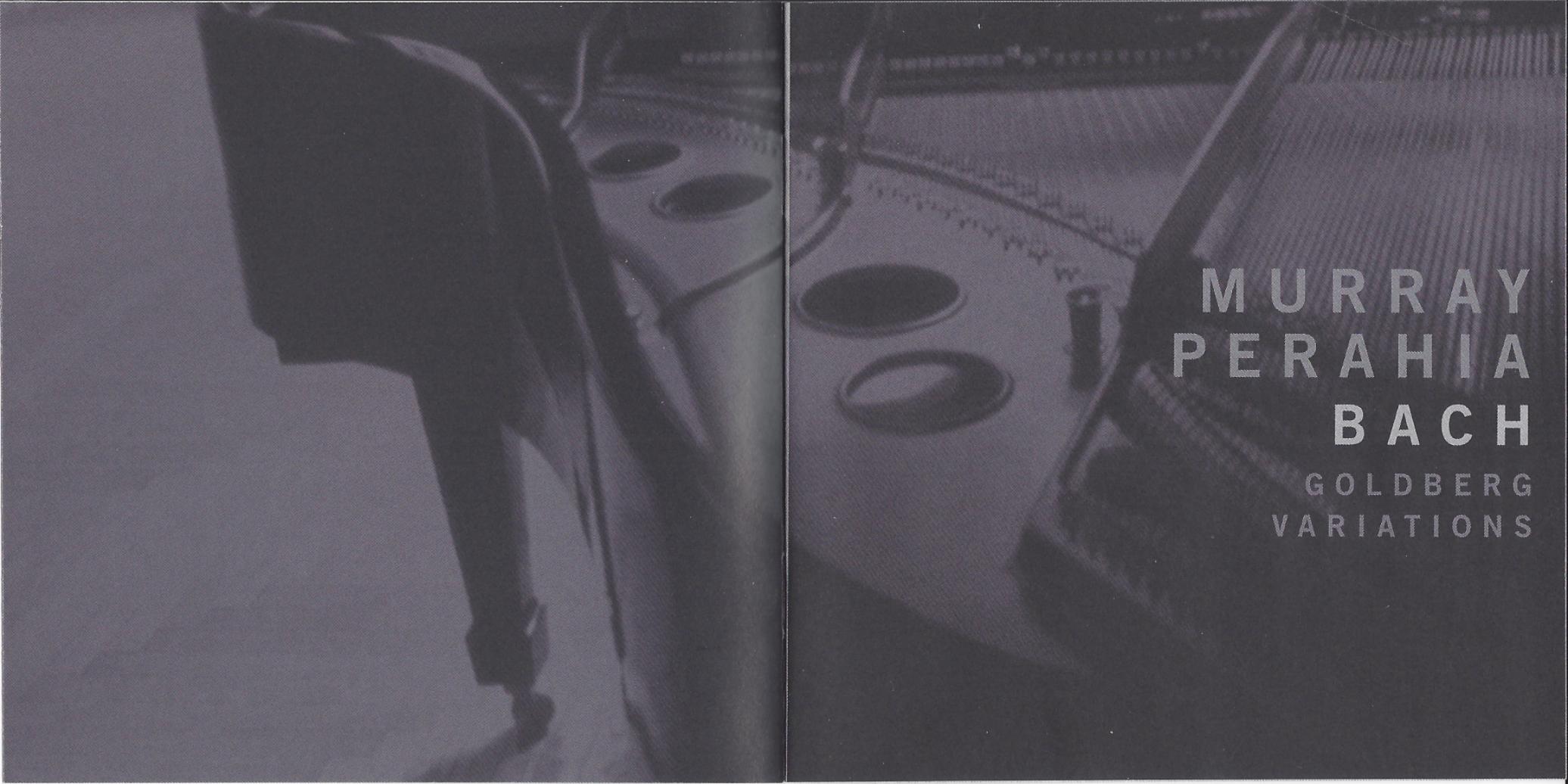
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89243

MURRAY PERAHIA BACH

GOLDBERG VARIATIONS





MURRAY
PERAHIA
BACH

GOLDBERG
VARIATIONS

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685-1750)

GOLDBERG VARIATIONS, BWV 988

1	Aria	3'58
2	Variation 1	1'51
3	Variation 2	1'36
4	Variation 3. Canon on the unison	1'57
5	Variation 4	1'07
6	Variation 5	1'25
7	Variation 6. Canon on the second	1'25
8	Variation 7	1'47
9	Variation 8	1'52
10	Variation 9. Canon on the third	2'12
11	Variation 10. Fughetta	1'33
12	Variation 11	1'47
13	Variation 12. Canon on the fourth	2'17
14	Variation 13	4'59
15	Variation 14	2'06
16	Variation 15. Canon on the fifth	4'19
17	Variation 16. Overture	2'44
18	Variation 17	1'41

19	Variation 18. Canon on the sixth	1'24
20	Variation 19	1'29
21	Variation 20	1'52
22	Variation 21. Canon on the seventh	2'45
23	Variation 22	1'29
24	Variation 23	1'56
25	Variation 24. Canon on the octave	2'32
26	Variation 25	7'24
27	Variation 26	1'58
28	Variation 27. Canon on the ninth	1'39
29	Variation 28	2'11
30	Variation 29	2'10
31	Variation 30. Quodlibet	1'44
32	Aria da capo	2'20

Total Time: 73'29

MURRAY PERAHIA, Piano

Producer: Andreas Neubronner
Recording Engineer: Markus Heiland Editor: Matthew Cocker Assistant Engineer: Andrew Granger
Piano: Steinway D 539525 Piano Technician: Ulrich Gerhartz
Recorded July 9-14, 2000 at Musica – Théâtre, La Salle de Musique,
La Chaux-de-Fonds, Switzerland

Art Direction: Giulio Turturro Booklet Design: Laura Torres Photography: Ken Schles
Product Management: Michelle Errante Editorial Direction: Richard Haney-Jardine
Editorial Production: Laura Kszan

Total Time: 73'28 SK 89243 DDD For this recording, 24-bit technology was used to maximize sound quality.
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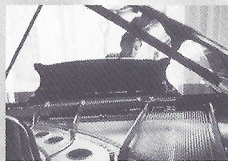
THE GOLDBERG VARIATIONS AND MURRAY PERAHIA

Bach described the *Goldberg Variations*, his seemingly innocent tune followed by thirty variations, merely as a keyboard “practice-piece,” composed for his talented protégé Johann Gottlieb Goldberg to play on the harpsichord. But this scholarly exercise demands the kind of virtuoso skills to strike fear in the heart of *any* keyboard performer. Dexterity, speed, lightness of touch, dazzling independent fingerwork and, ultimately, deeply felt musicianship are essential ingredients of a reading. In addition, the passion and drama in Bach’s music must be readily tangible.

The *Goldberg Variations* remained for many years a greatly admired but often avoided masterpiece. Over-respectful scholarship and careful musicianship had made it into one of those Great Works that few players were anxious to perform in public and only dedicated listeners really wanted to hear. Then, in 1955, an interpretation by the then-virtually-unknown pianist Glenn Gould forced musicians and listeners, fans and critics alike, to reassess Bach’s monumental achievement. And now, nearly half a century later, Murray Perahia, unquestionably one of the greatest pianists of *his* generation, gives his own reading of this cornerstone work.

As the producer of some of Murray Perahia’s early recordings, more than twenty years ago, it is hard to describe how heartwarming it is to hear the joy, pathos, audacity, drama, triumph, thoughtful reflection, and breathtaking virtuosity he brings to his deeply musical interpretation of this great work, helping to remind us why music is the most moving of all the arts.

PAUL MYERS



SOME THOUGHTS ON THE GOLDBERG VARIATIONS

by MURRAY PERAHIA

Playing the wonderfully varied, colorful and emotionally differentiated pieces that make up the *Goldberg Variations* is one of the most challenging experiences a pianist can face. Through all the joys or disappointments, the enthusiasms or frustrations that one goes through in learning the music, an overriding question always presents itself: How does so much invention, so much fantasy and imagination come from such a simple-seeming 32-bar aria based on a "Fundamental Bass"? After all, what is this Fundamental Bass, as Bach called it, but a series of chords, and not very complicated ones at that? Part of this question can never be answered because in a way it would be like defining genius, and what's more, a particular genius, Bach. Part of it, though, every pianist *must* answer for himself or herself, and this is my attempt to explain some of the things that were important to me.

First, I think, one must take a closer look at the chords of the "Fundamental Bass" because the inspiration for the entire piece is found in the accumulation and release of tension by the harmonies of these very chords. And certainly harmony was of crucial importance to Bach. In 1737, after Johann Adolph Scheibe had written a criticism of Bach's vocal music, claiming the compositions were deprived of their "natural element by a turgid and confused style," Bach circulated a reply written by his friend Johann Abraham Birnbaum, defending the complexity of many voices when they serve to bolster or clarify the harmony. As Birnbaum wrote: "Music consists of harmony, and harmony becomes far more complete if all the voices collaborate to form it." Seen from this point of view, these chords are the result of all the voices participating in and unfolding their tensions.

Below is a reduction showing the harmonic plan of the entire Aria (figure 1).

Figure 1



Though, quite naturally, the bass line leads and directs the general movement of the Aria, the top voice, or soprano, as the most exposed member, is an important contributor and not just incidental. The movement of the bass from G to D is answered by the soprano, traversing a fifth from d to g, a process delayed for a considerable time by its going to its own neighboring or auxiliary tone e². The tension caused by these different forces creates the harmonies that we hear.

The structural chords of the Fundamental Bass are delineated in greater detail below (figure 2), with the numbers under the bass notes suggesting the movement of the other voices.

Figure 2

As can be seen, the first 8 bars only define the tonic key (G Major), but in the next eight bars the music explores what seems to be the key of the dominant (D Major). After the double bar, the tension is driven a step further (quite literally, a step above D to E Minor). Here three voices take the place of the usual four, and the effect is more sorrowful than anything experienced thus far in the Aria. Finally, and most touching of all, in the last eight bars, the harmony returns to the tonic.

Through the activity of the top voice in measures 25 to 27 (figure 3), we can see how the melody moves from e^2 down to d^2 and on to c^2 . At that point, measure 23, the motion is speeded up (everything is in semi-quavers to the very end), and the melody rises ever upward, delaying yet again its need to descend to g^1 and transfiguring its return to the tonic. In a kind of extra-musical analysis, it is as if the melody were reaching for heaven before coming to rest on earth.

Figure 3

One reason I have dealt at length with the Aria is because it serves as the structural blueprint for the entire *Goldberg Variations*. Not only does the foregoing plan hold true for each of the Variations, despite their complex counterpoint and intricate canons, but the movement of the Aria is reflected in the progression of all the 32 pieces that make up the *Goldberg Variations* – from the Aria through its 30 variations to its restatement.

Much has been made in the past of the importance of the number 3 in the *Variations* (for instance, a canon occurs every three variations). While that is true, I feel that the number 8 is more significant in terms of the *dramatic* contents. Thus, the division of the Aria into 8-bar sections with an overall caesura at the double-bar (after measure sixteen) is reflected in the structure of the whole piece. Counting the Aria as number one, the first break occurs after the eighth piece played, Variation 7, which is marked “tempo di giga” (Bach’s own designation in the *Handexemplar*), a dance that always ends suites. The equivalent medial break in the Aria at measure 16 is mirrored in the *Variations* by a medial break after Variation 15, the sixteenth piece played. Indeed, Variation 16 signals a new beginning with a French Overture and accompanying fughetta.

When we reach Variation 24, a calming, pastoral canon at the octave, it is as if the piece were entering its final phase. After all, we should not be expecting more canons since intervals after the octave will be the same (i.e., the ninth equals the second, the tenth equals the third, and so on). Still, Bach surprises us with more canonic pieces – the canon at the ninth and the *Quodlibet* – but they will be part of the larger drama that ensues. Variation 24 along with Variation 25 are like the 25th and 26th measures of the Aria, the turning point. Indeed, with Variation 25, the temperature changes completely. The semitoned intensity of this darkly chromatic piece, the minor key, the desperate and anguished mood – all these help to create what seems to be a programmatic depiction of the Crucifixion or, at the very least, of the deathly atmosphere it evokes.

After this and until the *Quodlibet*, all the pieces seem to have a headlong drive, much like the motion in semiquavers we noticed at the equivalent point in the Aria. The programmatic analysis here would be of the Resurrection: Variation 26, ascends like a soul in flight; Variation 27, an unaccompanied canon on the ninth, caught up in this same movement, is like two voices talking animatedly, perhaps even in mocking tones; Variation 28, with its very high register and shimmering trills is all transcendence; Variation 29 brings these trills back down to earth and to glory.

Finally, in Variation 30, the *Quodlibet*, with its earthy folk songs and animated rustic feel, comes the climax, and the accumulated motion of these last variations is at last released. The *Quodlibet* is a climax in many ways, in that while not a strict canon itself, it sums up the idea of canonic imitation in the most compositionally virtuosic manner. The *Variations* come to their final resolution with the restatement of the Aria. These noble, radiant lines bring the music to rest. Indeed its simplicity belies the complexity in this most moving of musical apotheoses.

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J.S. BACH (1685-1750)
GOLDBERG VARIATIONS, BWV 988

MURRAY PERAHIA, PIANO



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Producer: Andreas Neubronner Recording Engineer: Markus Heiland DSD Authoring Engineer: Jen Wyler
Recorded July 9-14, 2000 at Musica – Théâtre, La Salle de Musique, La Chaux-de-Fonds, Switzerland
Art Direction: Giulio Turturro Photography: Ken Schles Total Time: 73'28 SS 89243 DDD

For this recording, 24-bit technology was used to maximize sound quality.

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