

The *Goldberg Variations* BWV 988 is a musical composition for harpsichord consisting of an *Aria*, 30 variations, and final reprise of the *Aria*. Composed between 1741 and 1745, it was published in Nuremberg by Balthasar Schmid. The work is named after Johann Gottlieb Goldberg, who was a harpsichordist in the service of Count von Brühl in Dresden.

The *Goldberg Variations* are considered one of the most important examples of variation form in classical music and are considered a masterpiece of Baroque music and a challenge for pianists and harpsichordists. They require great technical and interpretive skill, as well as a deep understanding of the structure and style of the work.

The variations are based on the bass line of the *Aria*, a *Passacaglia* in binary form (a piece in two parts, each repeated). The *Aria* has 32 bars, 32 notes in the bass of the first part and the whole work consists of 32 pieces. Bach explores the melodic, rhythmic and contrapuntal possibilities offered by the bass line, creating a series of variations that showcase his mastery in keyboard writing.

From a formal perspective, the variations are organized in groups of three, with the third being a canonic variation. The canons are particularly noteworthy, as they are constructed using various techniques such as inversion, retrograde, and augmentation. Every canon increases the interval between the voices from *Canone all'Unisuono* (variation 3) to *Canone alla Nona* (variation 27). The 30th variation is defined as a *Quodlibet*, a cross between a chorale and a fusion of popular melodies, *Ich bin so lange nicht bei dir g'west, ruck her* and *Kraut und Rüben haben mich vertrieben*.

In these variations are used different compositional techniques, such as inversion, contrary motion, and fugue. This structure gives the work a sense of coherence and unity while allowing Bach to explore a wide range of musical ideas within this framework.

The 16th variation provides an opportunity to divide the work into two parts, resuming the second with the energy of an *Overture* in the French style.

The 25th variation, *adagio*, represents the true emotional center of the whole work characterized by the use of chromatism.

Variations 13, 14, 17, 20, 23, 26 and 28 are specifically indicated on the score for two manuals, while variations 5 and 29 are indicated as to play on one or two manuals. All variations are in G Major except for numbers 15, 21, and 25 which are in G Minor, all of them are in binary form, which the performer generally interprets by repeating only a section, both or none of these sections.

At the end of the 30th variation, the return of the *Aria da capo* adds symmetry to the work.

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