



SAN FRANCISCO
PERFORMANCES

presents...

ALEXANDRE THARAUD | Piano

Tuesday, April 23, 2019 | 7:30pm

Herbst Theatre

BACH

Aria with Thirty Variations, BWV 988 (Goldberg Variations)

Aria

Variation 1

Variation 2

Variation 3 Canone all' Unisono

Variation 4

Variation 5

Variation 6 Canone alla Seconda

Variation 7 al tempo di Giga

Variation 8

Variation 9 Canone alla Terza

Variation 10 Fughetta

Variation 11

Variation 12 Canone alla Quarta

Variation 13

Variation 14

Variation 15 Canone alla Quinta

Variation 16 Ouverture

Variation 17

Variation 18 Canone alla Sesta

Variation 19

Variation 20

Variation 21 Canone alla Settima

Variation 22

Variation 23

Variation 24 Canone all' Ottava

Variation 25

Variation 26

Variation 27 Canone alla Nona

Variation 28

Variation 29

Variation 30 Quodlibet

Aria da capo

This presentation is generously supported by the Bernard Osher Foundation.

Alexandre Tharaud is represented by Opus 3 Artists

470 Park Ave South, 9th Floor North, New York, NY 10016

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Yamaha CFX concert grand piano provided by Yamaha Artist Services New York in association with Piedmont Piano Company.

ARTIST PROFILE

San Francisco Performances presents the San Francisco recital debut of Alexandre Tharaud.



Alexandre Tharaud has distinguished himself as one of France's leading pianists. Recognized on the international stage as an artist of unique vision and originality, Alexandre is heralded for his brilliantly conceived programs and bestselling recordings that range from Bach, Chopin, Rameau, and Ravel to music inspired by Paris cabaret of the 1920s.

This season's highlights in North America include performances with the Cleveland Orchestra and Franz Welser-Möst, and his return to the Montreal Symphony. His recent recitals in the U.S. include his return to Carnegie Hall, and recitals in Washington, DC, Boston, Montreal, and Chicago Symphony Hall. He also continues to appear frequently with Les Violons du Roy—with whom he has recorded Bach and Mozart for Warner Classics—on tour and in Canada, and in recent seasons made his debuts with the Philadelphia Orchestra and the Atlanta Symphony and returned to the Toronto Symphony. Other recent highlights in North America include appearances at Boston Symphony Hall and at Walt Disney Hall. Alexandre has enjoyed working with such conductors as Peter Oundjian, Bernard Labadie, Daniele Gatti, Lionel Bringuier, Stéphane Denève, Vladimir Jurowski, Rafael Frühbeck de Burgos, and Yannick Nézet-Séguin, among others.

In Europe, Alexandre performs extensively in Germany (Essen and Cologne Philharmonies; Alte Oper Frankfurt; Ludwigsburg Festival), France (Théâtre des Champs-Élysées; Opéra de Versailles), as well as at the Warsaw Philharmonie; Victoria Hall, Geneva; Muziekgebouw and

Concertgebouw, Amsterdam; BOZAR, Brussels; Wigmore Hall and Queen Elizabeth Hall, London; Auditorio Nacional, Madrid; Santa Cecilia, Rome; Tonhalle, Zürich; Casino, Bern; Rudolfinum, Prague and Musikverein, Vienna. His festival appearances include the BBC Proms, Edinburgh International Festival, Gergiev Festival in Rotterdam, Aix-en-Provence, La Roque d'Anthéron, Schleswig-Holstein, Rheingau, Ruhr Piano Festival, Nuits de Décembre de Moscou, Rimini, Domaine Forget and Lanaudière.

A Beethoven CD featuring the three last sonatas was released on the ERATO/Warner Classics label in Fall 2018. This followed a tribute to one of the greatest French singers of all times, Barbara, presented at the Philharmonie de Paris in October 2017, and a Brahms CD together with cellist Jean-Guihen Queyras, a regular chamber music partner for 20 years.

Among the performing highlights of the next two seasons: a European tour with the Metropolitan Orchestra and its chief-conductor Yannick Nézet-Séguin (Ravel *Piano Concerto for the Left Hand*); and a tour of Japan including a concert with the Tokyo Metropolitan Orchestra (Shostakovich *Piano Concerto No. 2*). Further tours will take place across France, Germany, Austria, Italy and Switzerland together with NDR Radio Philharmonie, Orchestre de la Suisse-Romande, Münchener Kammerorchester, Junge Deutsche Philharmonie, Bayerische Kammerphilharmonie and Orchestra Verdi.

Contemporary music has always featured prominently in Alexandre's activities and January 2016 saw him present the world premiere of Danish composer Hans Abrahamsen's new piano concerto for the left hand (*Left, alone*) at the Cologne Philharmonie, together with the WDR Sinfonieorchester. Subsequent performances followed with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, the DR Symfoni-Orkestret and Rotterdam Philharmonisch Orkest, the latter under the baton of Yannick Nézet-Séguin.

Alexandre's discography reflects his eclectic affinity to many musical styles. His recordings range from Bach, Mozart and Haydn (with Les Violons du Roy) to *Le Bœuf sur Le Toit: Swinging Paris* (a homage to the roaring twenties). Other discs for ERATO include *Autograph*, *Alexandre Tharaud Plays Scarlatti*, *Chopin—Journal Intime*, and the major release of 2016: Bach's *Goldberg Variations*. His latest recording features Rachmaninoff's *Piano Concerto*

No. 2, together with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra.

In 2014, he published his first book, *Piano Intime*, which was followed in early 2017 by a more personal narrative view on his career: *Montrez-moi vos mains*. Alexandre Tharaud is also featured in a film directed by Michael Haneke (*Amour*), and Swiss film maker Raphaëlle Aellig-Régnier, *Le Temps Dérobé*, and has completed a new edition of Maurice Ravel's complete solo piano works for the German publisher Bärenreiter.

PROGRAM NOTES

Aria with Thirty Variations, BWV 988 (Goldberg Variations)

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH
(1685–1750)

In November 1741 Bach, then 56 years old, made the hundred-mile trip east from Leipzig to Dresden to visit an old friend, Count Hermann Keyserlingk, the Russian ambassador to the Saxon court. Keyserlingk's court harpsichordist was the 14-year-old Johann Gottlieb Goldberg, who at age ten had been a student of Bach. There are several stories as to what happened next, all impossible to confirm. One is that Keyserlingk commissioned a work for his young harpsichordist and gave Bach a goblet full of gold coins in payment. Another is that Keyserlingk was an insomniac who specified that he wanted a piece that Goldberg could play to him as he went to sleep. What is certain is that the following year Bach published (as the fourth part of his edition of keyboard works, the *Clavier-Übung*) a work he called simply *Aria with Thirty Variations*, composed for two-manual harpsichord. The score bore neither dedication, nor any mention at all of Keyserlingk or Goldberg. But Bach did give the count a copy of this music, and the conclusion is that this is the piece that had been requested in Dresden. By a process of (perhaps random) association, one of the greatest works ever written immortalizes a 14-year-old harpsichord player, and we know this music today simply as the *Goldberg Variations*.

For his theme—which he calls *Aria*—Bach uses a sarabande melody that he had written as part of *Anna Magdalena Bach's Notebook*. It is 32 measures long and already ornately embellished on its first appearance, though it is not this melody that will

furnish the basis for the variations that follow but the bassline beneath it. This lengthy harmonic progression will become the backbone of the *Goldberg Variations*, functioning much like the ground bass of a *pas-sacaglia*. The 30 variations that follow are grouped in ten units of three, of which the third is always a canon, and each successive canon is built on an interval one larger than the previous. Such a description makes the *Goldberg Variations* sound like one of the more densely-argued works of the Second Viennese School, but in fact this is some of Bach's most moving and exhilarating music, and it is a measure of his genius that such expressive music can grow out of such rigorous compositional procedures.

In fact, listeners do not really need to understand the complexity of Bach's techniques to feel the greatness of this music. One is certainly aware of the original bassline as a structuring element, but beyond that each successive variation can be

taken as an individual pleasure. Some incidental observations: the keyboard writing here is unusually brilliant—this is virtuosic music, and that virtuosity appears not just in the dazzling runs across the range of the keyboard but in the complexity of the contrapuntal writing, where the pianist—limited to just two hands—must keep multiple strands clear. Bach changes meter at virtually every variation, with the music leaping from its original 3/4 meter through such permutations as 4/4, 3/8, 2/4, and on to 12/16 and 18/16. The tenth variation is written as a *Fughetta*, and of special importance to the work are the three minor-key variations (Nos. 15, 21, and 25): all of these are slow, all begin in G minor (but can go far afield harmonically), and all are darkly expressive. In particular, No. 25—which lasts well over six minutes by itself—forms the emotional climax of the work before the spirited conclusion.

That close is unusual all by itself. The

thirtieth and final variation is marked *Quodlibet*, which means simply a gathering of tunes. Here Bach incorporates into the harmonic frame of his variations some of the popular tunes that he had heard sung around him on the streets of Leipzig. Donald Francis Tovey has identified two of these, and their first lines translate "It is so long since I have been at your house" and "Cabbage and turnips have driven me away. If my mother'd cooked some meat, I might have stopped longer." To a listener of Bach's day, the joke would have been obvious, though it has to be explained to us—we feel only that the work is approaching its close in an unusually relaxed and tuneful manner. And then, a masterstroke: rather than rounding off the *Goldberg Variations* with a rousing display of contrapuntal brilliance, Bach instead concludes with a simple repetition of the opening *Aria*.

—Program notes by Eric Bromberger

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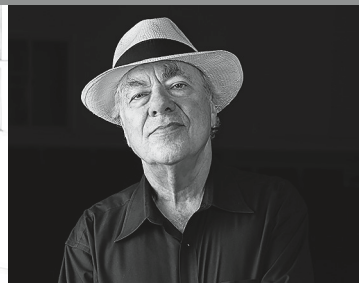


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