

2 5 / 2 6 CONCERT SEASON



PACIFIC BAROQUE ORCHESTRA

Sunday, November 30, 2025

Raven's Cry Theatre, Sechelt



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THE COAST RECITAL SOCIETY

| www.coastrecitalsociety.ca

The artists

Pacific Baroque Orchestra

DIRECTED BY Alexander Weimann

Chloe Meyers, *concertmaster & violin*

Christi Meyers, *violin*

Mieka Michaux, *viola*

Elinor Frey, *cello*

Soile Stratkauskas, *flute*

Matthew Jennejohn & Curtis Foster, *oboes*

Christopher Ellis Reyes, *bassoon*

Alexander Weimann, *harpsichord & music director*

Alexander Weimann

The internationally renowned keyboard artist Alexander Weimann has spent his life enveloped by the therapeutic power and beauty of making music. Alex grew up in Munich. At age three he became fascinated by the intense magic of the church organ. He started piano at six, formal organ lessons at 12 and harpsichord at university (along with theatre theory, medieval Latin and jazz piano.) He is in huge demand as a director, soloist and chamber player, traveling the world with leading North American and European ensembles. He is Artistic Director of the Pacific Baroque Orchestra in Vancouver and teaches at the University of British Columbia where he directs the Baroque Orchestra Mentorship Programme.

Alex has appeared on more than 100 recordings, including the Juno-award-winning album *Prima Donna* with Karina Gauvin and Arion Baroque orchestra. His latest album series *The Art of Improvisation* (Volume 1: *A Prayer for Peace*; Volume 2: *Ad libitum*; and Volume 3: *Caravan Variations*, released on Redshift, 2024) unites his passions for both baroque music and improvisation on organ, harpsichord, and piano.



Pacific Baroque Orchestra

"The Pacific Baroque Orchestra under Alexander Weimann are sensitive partners, the flutes especially buttery..." —*Gramophone* review of *Nuits Blanches* (2020)

"Alexander Weimann's pacing of the action, choice of tempi and shaping of orchestral ritornellos are frequently marvellous...one of the most consistently charming Handel opera recordings I've reviewed in ages." —*Gramophone* review of Handel's *Orlando* (2013)

The Pacific Baroque Orchestra (PBO) is recognized as one of Canada's most exciting and innovative ensembles performing "early music for modern ears". PBO brings the music of the past up to date by performing with cutting edge style and enthusiasm. Formed in 1990, the orchestra quickly established itself as a force in Vancouver's burgeoning music scene with the ongoing support of Early Music Vancouver.

In 2009 the PBO welcomed Alexander Weimann as Artistic Director. His imaginative programming and expert leadership have drawn in many new concertgoers, and his creativity and engaging musicianship have carved out a unique and vital place in the cultural landscape of Vancouver.

The PBO regularly joins forces with internationally celebrated Canadian guest artists, providing performance opportunities for Canadian musicians while exposing West Coast audiences to a spectacular variety of talent. The Orchestra has also toured BC, the northern United States and across Canada as far as the East Coast. The musicians of the Pacific Baroque Orchestra have been at the core of many large-scale productions by Early Music Vancouver in recent years, including many Summer Festival performances led by Alexander Weimann.

We would like to acknowledge the generous support of the BC Gaming Commission.



We acknowledge the support of the Canada Council for the Arts.



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The program

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685-1750)

**Goldberg Variations 1 to 15, BWV 988 –
arranged for baroque orchestra by Alexander
Weimann (b. 1965)**

Aria

Variatio 1: a 1 Clav.

Variatio 2: a 1 Clav.

Variatio 3: Canone all'Unisuono. a 1 Clav.

Variatio 4: a 1 Clav.

Variatio 5: a 1 ô Vero 2 Clav.

Variatio 6: Canone alla Secunda. a 1 Clav.

Variatio 7: a 1 ô Vero 2 Clav. Al tempo di Giga

Variatio 8: a 2 Clav.

Variatio 9: Canone alla Terza. a 1 Clav.

Variatio 10: Fughetta. a 1 Clav.

Variatio 11: a 2 Clav.

Variatio 12: Canone alla Quarta. a 1 Clav.

Variatio 13: a 2 Clav.

Variatio 14: a 2 Clav.

Variatio 15: Canone alla Quinta. a 1 Clav. Andante

BACH

Goldberg Variations 16 to 30, BWV 988

Variatio 16: Ouverture. a 1 Clav.

Variatio 17: a 2 Clav.

Variatio 18: Canone alla Sexta. a 1 Clav.

Variatio 19: a 1 Clav.

Variatio 20: a 2 Clav.

Variatio 21: Canone alla Settima. a 1 Clav.

Variatio 22: a 1 Clav.

Variatio 23: a 1 Clav.

Variatio 24: Canone all'Ottava. a 1 Clav.

Variatio 25: a 2 Clav. Adagio

Variatio 26: a 2 Clav.

Variatio 27: Canone alla Nona. a 2 Clav.

Variatio 28: a 2 Clav.

Variatio 29: a 1 ô Vero 2 Clav.

Variatio 30: Quodlibet. a 1 Clav.

Aria da capo

INTERMISSION

The program notes

Bach's Goldberg Variations were originally published under the title *Aria mit verschiedenen Veränderungen vors Clavicimbal mit 2 Manualen* in 1741 as the final installment of his *Clavier-Übung* series of keyboard works. This monumental exploration of the variation form ranks as the largest single keyboard composition published in the 18th century. Here Bach displays his command not only of the popular musical styles of his day, but also of the most advanced virtuoso techniques for playing the harpsichord, not to mention his genius in the arcane skill of writing canons at any given interval.

After its publication, a change in musical taste toward simpler, more transparent textures meant that the *Goldberg Variations* were largely forgotten. They entered the 20th century as the privileged domain of the feathery flock of harpsichordists, with Wanda Landowska (1879-1959), who first recorded the set in 1933, as Mother Hen to the brood.

For big-name pianists, though, the scaled-down, intellectually concentrated sound world of the *Goldberg Variations*, with their 'sewing machine' rhythms, probing explorations of chromatic harmony and awkward hand-crossings, was considered too 'antiquarian', too 'esoteric' for the piano repertoire. Until June 1955, that is, when a 22-year-old Canadian pianist, Glenn Gould, walked into the New York studios of Columbia Records to record his debut album—an album that became one of the best-selling classical recordings of all time.

What Glenn Gould revealed, in a career bookended by his landmark recordings of the *Goldberg Variations*, was the

emotional richness and feverish excitement that lay hidden in this much-neglected work. Like an art-restorer cleansing the Sistine Chapel of the grime and haze that had built up over centuries, in his 1955 recording Gould brought to a public inured to the warmly pedalled sound of Romantic piano music a dazzling clarity of texture and kaleidoscopic range of tone colours, accomplished by the fingers alone. In his 1981 recording, in which the tempo of each variation is regulated by a "constant rhythmic reference point," he revealed the intellectual depth of the work, and the breadth of interpretive possibilities which it offers to the performing pianist.

Glenn Gould single-handedly placed Bach's *Goldberg Variations* in the standard repertoire – and not only of the piano. According to the Goldberg Variations Discography website, since 1955 there have been more than 600 recordings made of the Goldbergs, including versions for organ, for string trio and for saxophone quartet. The version you are hearing today, arranged by the Pacific Baroque Orchestra's Alexander Weimann, is for nine players including strings, winds and harpsichord.

The Aria

The theme that Bach wrote for his variations is a *sarabande tendre*, identified by its stately rhythmic profile, recurring emphasis on the second beat of bar, and highly expressive style. Floridly ornamented in the French manner, its 32 measures unfold in the traditional two-part form of a



The program notes (continued)

dance movement, with each half repeated. These repeated sections, as in a dance suite, provide an opportunity for the performer to vary the performance by means of changes in dynamics, articulation and ornamentation.

The Variations

The set is rounded out by the Aria's appearance both at the beginning and at the conclusion of the work. The set divides evenly into two halves. The first half ends on an enigmatic open 5th at the conclusion of the plaintive Variation 15. The second half begins anew, with a bang, on a robust G-major chord that begins the No. 16 French overture variation.

The 30 variations are organized into ten groups of three, each group containing: (1) a dance or genre piece, (2) a virtuoso display piece, bright in mood and (3) a two-voice canon, which is to say a *round*, in which a melody is accompanied by itself.

The emotional heart of the work comes in Variation 25 in the minor mode, described by Wanda Landowska as the work's "crown of thorns." At an *Adagio* tempo, it is the longest of the set, although it has the same number of measures as the other variations. Its extraordinary expressiveness and aching beauty derive from the combination of its plangent melodic leaps, agonizing chromaticisms and halting syncopations.

After this variation begins a build-up in energy as the work races towards its climax, with sonorous written-out trills invading the inner voices of Variation 28 and hammering fists of chords chopping between the hands in Variation 29.

Coming just before the end of the work, there is something of the chorale in this final variation, something good-natured and healing that gathers all hearts in song, as at the end of a church cantata or Lutheran religious service, to which the final Aria da capo provides a contemplative and serene postlude.

—Donald G. Gíslason 2022

Alexander Weimann adds:

Overall, what does it mean to arrange this intrinsically keyboardist piece? And why would I try to arrange it in the first place? The second question is quickly answered: accessibility. So many of Bach's compositions are lost—not only sacred music, but also orchestral and chamber pieces. During his lifetime, he published very little, and essentially only keyboard music. Think of a world where the only

way to listen to the Art of the Fugue is to hear it on the organ. And while I am convinced that it is meant primarily for that instrument, I enjoy all the renditions out there, and feel they contribute to its beauty, or at least to the perception thereof.

Among all composers I know, Bach's music appears to be the most independent of instrumentation, thus lending itself openly to our imagination. The first question leads to another question: Which instruments would I pick for the Goldberg Variations, and why?

While the majority of the variations don't exceed three part writing, some movements are woven in a rather dense and consistent four-part fabric. Therefore, I settled on the idea of a consort of four instruments. Given the binary structure of the theme and every variation, as well as the context of a double-manual harpsichord and the changes and shifts of colours implied, I decided to go for two consorts à four, one for strings (pretty much in form of a classical quartet), and one for woodwinds with Baroque flute, oboe d'amore, oboe da caccia, and bassoon. This allows for antiphonal use, a coupling of the two sound sources, and all sorts of 'broken consort' between the two bodies.

To 'translate' the canons turned out to be relatively simple, more like transcribing than arranging. Also, the character pieces, such as dance movements or the little fugue, didn't require too much time to find equivalents within the complement of 8 players. However, some of the more virtuosic and keyboard idiomatic variations felt at first insurmountable to me. Thus, I started the project with the intention of leaving them for the harpsichord. But in the process, I grew more and more compelled to find an answer for every variation. I would look at those defiant candidates, almost stare at them (in the nicest way) until they revealed a key to unlock their secret.

Particularly difficult proved to be the huge difference between the range of the harpsichord (which Bach exhausted in his work) and any other given instrument with a much narrower compass. I have tried to abide by the 18th century nature and use of our instruments and by the role-models as to polyphonic texture available to us in Bach's rich orchestral writing.

—Additional notes by Alexander Weimann

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