

THE SAINT PAUL
CHAMBER
ORCHESTRA

BACH'S GOLDBERG VARIATIONS

April 8-9, 2022

Ordway Concert Hall

About the Program

Johann Sebastian Bach 1685-1750

Arr. James Ferree

Goldberg Variations for Chamber Orchestra

— World premiere, SPCO Commission

— Aria

Var. 1 [Meet Your Lower Neighbor]

Var. 2 [Leap Frog]

Var. 3 Canon at the Unison [Bass Brook]

Var. 4 [Brass Quartet. It's a Brassoan.]

Var. 5 [Dueling Fiddles]

Var. 6 Canon at the Second [Game of Pairs]

Var. 7 [The Merry Minstrels]

Var. 8 [Dans le Style de Whack-a-mole]

Var. 9 Canon at the Third [Ballet Recital]

Var. 10 Fughetta [A great name for your baby girl!]

Var.11 [Dance Break!]

Var. 12 Canon at the Fourth [A Study in 18th Century German Disco]

Var. 13 ["To Everything There is a Season"]

Var. 14 [Runaway Horse]

Var. 15 Canon at the Fifth [Mirror, Mirror on the Wall...]

Var. 16 Overture [Freedom Overture]

Var. 17 [The Singing Washing Machine]

MOVEMENTS

- Var. 18 Canon at the Sixth [For Grandpa]
- Var. 19 [The Lumpy Wheel]
- Var. 20 [BachX Hocket Launch]
- Var. 21 Canon at the Seventh [Echoes from E. Lake Street]
- Var. 22 Alla Breve [Decorating the Tree]
- Var. 23 [Hey kids, don't forget to practice your scales]
- Var. 24 Canon at the Octave [Sunny Day for Sailing]
- Var. 25 ["The Black Pearl"]
- Var. 26 [#toomanynotes]
- Var. 27 Canon at the Ninth [The Rooster and the Hen: A Love Story]
- Var. 28 ["It's flutastic!" "It's trillific!"]
- Var. 29 [Rocking the Boat]
- Var. 30 Quodlibet [Reunion: A Prayer and a Party]
- Aria da Capo ["There and Back Again"]

The charming tale behind Johann Sebastian Bach's original 1791 work for keyboard is well-known, if not reliably-sourced — the work was commissioned by a Count, who on many sleepless nights would summon Bach's pupil, Johann Gottlieb Goldberg, to "play me one of my variations" to lift his spirits. (Arranging this work during the opening stages of the pandemic, it became quite personal and therapeutic for me as well.) Beginning with a heavenly Aria, Bach sets the bass-line to 30 variations in G Major (except for the three variations in G minor), exploring the extremes of keyboard technique, counterpoint, mood, and style. With nine canons punctuating the work like Grecian columns, in-between lie all kinds of flavors: fugue, menuet, French overture, chorale, invention, gigue, etc. Add to that the thematic motives tightly knitting the variations together, and Bach's compositional wizardry is on full display.

But it was the intimacy of the work, the virtuosity, and the variety of characters that convinced me (and SPCO violinist Daria Adams, who proposed the idea to me) that *Goldberg* was ripe with potential to arrange for my colleagues in the SPCO. The work becomes a tour of the orchestra and its musicians, and the instruments add their unique colors as a painter splashes color on the black-and-white frames of the earliest moving-pictures. Whatever character might be present in the music — whether stark (such as the famous "Black Pearl" variation), sweet (Var. 13), or just plain fun (Var. 11) — my intent is to magnify it here through the orchestral lens.

Bach is among the most revered composers of all time, and he is truly my number one. His music must be treated with the utmost respect, and the greatest success of this arrangement will remain Bach's own ingenuity. Yet alongside the gravitas of Bach's music is his fantastic sense of humor. (I highly recommend a quick internet search on "Bach *Goldberg* quodlibet.") With an entire orchestra available to render a solo keyboard work, I felt freedom to flesh out textures and voices, or pare things down as I felt served the music.

A word about the subtitles: I began nicknaming each variation just as a way to tell all the *Goldberg* "children" apart as I worked, referencing music theory, world events, my reaction or approach to each variation, or just wordplay. But these rather free-association titles became a sort of window into how I experience *Goldberg*, and they stuck. Maybe because they grant permission to mere mortals like me and you to engage Bach's music on a personal level — it's still Bach, but Bach reimaged. My hope is that more people may experience the riches of *Goldberg* in a new light.

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Artist Profiles



James Ferree

Principal Horn

Formerly the Principal Horn of the Richmond Symphony in Virginia since 2012, James Ferree is the newly appointed Principal Horn of the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra in 2018.

An Atlanta native, James began piano studies at age 6, and when singing as an 11-year-old choir boy behind the horn section of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra with Robert Shaw in 5th grade, James was inspired to pursue a career in the horn. Soon after he began studies with Richard Deane, and in 2003 he was the recipient of the Jon Hawkins Memorial Scholarship of the International Horn Society. After a timely family move to Germany, where he studied with horn legend Hermann Baumann, he was accepted to the Juilliard School with Presidential Distinction to study with Jerome Ashby (BM) and William Purvis (MM). He then joined the New World Symphony in Miami under music director Michael Tilson Thomas, followed by his tenure at the Richmond Symphony. James has also performed as guest with the orchestras of Atlanta, Virginia, Florida, Jacksonville, Charleston, and Kansas City, and the Los Angeles Philharmonic. With the LA Phil, under the direction of Gustavo Dudamel, James has performed as Guest Associate Principal, including on their 2016 NY-European Tour, subscription concerts, and at the Hollywood Bowl.

Solo appearances include the Britten Serenade for Tenor, Horn & Strings with the RSO, Messiaen's *Des Canyons aux Étoiles* at Juilliard, and Schumann *Konzertstück* for Four Horns with the Richmond Philharmonic. When he performed Glière's *Horn Concerto* as a member of the New World Symphony, the South Florida Classical Review wrote, "The accuracy of James Ferree's playing stood out...and [James] displayed a mastery of the instrument that allowed him to paint all the moods...golden sounds."

As a chamber musician, James is active as a chamber artist, having performed with the Chamber Music Society of Central Virginia, Atlantic Chamber Ensemble, Richmond Chamber Players, and the Staunton Music Festival. He can also be heard alongside the American Brass Quintet in their 50th Anniversary album. James has also participated in the festivals of Tanglewood, Spoleto USA, and Music Academy of the West, and has been a member of the Verbier Festival since 2010, performing with them and violinist David Garrett on his 2014 Germany tour.

While at Juilliard, James also devoted study to composition and theory with Dr. Philip Lasser and Eric Ewazen. Notable premieres include *Sonata on its Knees* with renowned horn soloist David Jolley, *Love for a Sweater* with RSO concertmaster Daisuke Yamamoto, and his quintet *For a Newborn* with the RSO's principal winds.

James lives with his wife, conductor Chia-Hsuan Lin, and their cats, Monk and Lana, who are perhaps the two fiercest critics of his horn playing. When not performing, James enjoys a good game of baseball or disc golf, reading a book over coffee, and participating at his church.

Learn more about the SPCO musicians, including biographies and photos:

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September 9-11, 2022 **Opening Weekend: Beethoven's Seventh Symphony**

September 16-20, 2022 **Mozart's Sinfonia Concertante for Violin and Viola**

September 23-25, 2022 **Mozart's Sinfonia Concertante for Winds**

September 30-October 2, 2022 **Express Concert: Conrad Tao Plays Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 24**