

GOLDBERG VARIATIONS



SOUTHWARK CATHEDRAL

Friday 18 September 2020, 2.00pm and 7.15pm

Welcome to City of London Sinfonia's (CLS) performance of Bach's *Goldberg Variations* – our first concert to a live audience indoors since Monday 16 March. We are delighted to welcome audiences back to one of our favourite venues, Southwark Cathedral, for what we hope will be the first of many performances here over the coming weeks and months.

Goldberg Variations is thought by many to be Bach's most numerical piece. He manages to transform a simple theme (an aria) into 30 variations through his use of contrasting structures and patterns, and in his harmonies and melodic counterpoints. The piece was first written for harpsichord in the 1740s and has since been transcribed and arranged for many different ensembles, with each arrangement illustrating the many different parts to Bach's mathematical design. Arguably, the most iconic of these are versions for string orchestra and string trio by Russian violinist Dmitry Sitkovetsky (1954-) – the latter of which you will hear performed today.

These concerts have been designed in accordance with current safety guidelines around live public performances during the Covid-19 pandemic. We encourage those with Roaming tickets to explore the Cathedral and create their own musical journey through the architecture and music, while maintaining social distancing.

PROGRAMME

J.S. BACH arr. DMITRY SITKOVETSKY Goldberg Variations

Alexandra Wood Violin

Ruth Gibson Viola

Joely Koos Cello

Ruth will start the performance with a short mindfulness introduction – open to audience members who would like to take a moment of calm reflection before the music begins.

BROADCAST

Goldberg Variations is being recorded by Apple and Biscuit Recordings for broadcast on City of London Sinfonia's Facebook and YouTube channels on Wednesday 30 September. The performance will be available to watch online for 30 days.

STRING TRIO BACH TOGETHER AGAIN

These concerts will see Alexandra Wood (Leader), Ruth Gibson (Sub-Principal Viola) and Joely Koos (Co-Principal Cello) perform together to a live audience for the first time in over six months. We asked them a few questions about what that means to them and why Bach's music and performing at Southwark Cathedral is so special.

Goldberg Variations will be CLS's first live, indoor concerts since 16 March. Have you missed performing to a live audience?

Alex: An audience has been the thing I have missed most during lockdown. Whilst we can practise, or play music by ourselves, most musicians do what we do so that we can share our joy of music-making, so that we can connect to people. I did my first live performance [since lockdown] last week and it was incredibly emotional to hear applause again; to watch people's faces and reactions as they were transported somewhere else by the power of music. To feel that energy and atmosphere again was thrilling.

Joely: I have truly missed the connection one makes with a live audience and the fantastic atmosphere they bring. Performing a piece online with no response afterwards has made me feel subdued. However, I really enjoyed the rising hearts [on Facebook] with Comfortable Classical at Home and ongoing text comments when I gave live presentations on YouTube. Also, every Thursday during lockdown, our family performed on the street to give thanks for the NHS. All our neighbours came out to listen – it created a beautiful community spirit; we chatted across the road swapped stories and drank wine afterwards.

Ruth: Definitely! Although I have managed to play to neighbours and also to friends over Zoom (which is not the same, but great to find a way to connect still – especially if you can get hold of a good mic!). I'm glad that events – including pilot events like the 18th September – are going ahead, as I think it will be a trial process for us all for some time to come. And if we can find ways to play to live audiences and also still bring the music to those at home who can't make concerts, well then we can look at this period as the time we discovered new ways to make music even more available and accessible. So, not all bad!

Tell us a bit about how this string trio arrangement differs to the string orchestra version and how Bach's music makes you feel.

Alex: The *Goldberg Variations* seems to encompass everything about what it is to be a human; everything about the cycle of life, and in that respect, it feels like the right piece for this time. We performed the string arrangement after my own quasi-mini lockdown (the birth of my son), so personally it will also feel incredibly restorative to return to it now. Both Sitkovetsky's arrangements – the trio version and the full string version – are genuine masterpieces and transcribe Glenn Gould's interpretation brilliantly. The string version is perhaps grander in scale, more monumental, whereas the trio allows for more intimacy and experimentation.

Joely: Bach is my rock. And the *Goldberg Variations* has always been a favourite. But this trio differs substantially from the keyboard version. I like that! We are playing the same notes and the music is still wonderful, but the colours are different, the voices are clearer, and I feel we can dare to go in adventurous directions, creatively.

Ruth: It's harder! There is no doubting that. You have no friends with you [on the same part], supporting the crazy writing at times. But there is such a special energy with the trio version: three of us singing and battling our hearts out together. It's incredible music as one moment you are being a jester, scurrying and fitting in as many notes as possible, and the next you have these incredible moments of stillness and reflection, almost as if we each have our own soliloquy, but at the same time.

What is it about our Southwark Cathedral concerts that feel special to you?

Alex: Southwark Cathedral is a special place. The architecture is just wonderful, and the fact that audiences are free to roam during performances to appreciate it, and find a 'perfect' spot for themselves, helps to create a unique atmosphere – of informality but also occasion. Quite how that is possible, I am not sure, but it is the case!

Joely: I simply adore the ambience, the acoustics and the architectural space and beauty that Southwark Cathedral offers. It chimes perfectly with CLS's ethos of how we can connect with our audience through music.

Ruth: I think the venue itself is so beautiful, historical and spiritual. For me, when you play in a church or cathedral (especially Bach), it feels safe and sacred. And as Southwark Cathedral has been a home for CLS, it feels special to be able to have our first concert there – especially playing *Goldberg Variations*. Also, with the space in Southwark Cathedral, the audience can move comfortably with enough distance. It's such a natural reaction to want to move when listening to music, so it's great we can make this available.

Read their answers in full on our blog at cityoflondonsinfonia.wordpress.com.

COMING SOON

We are pleased to say that there are more concerts on the way to Southwark Cathedral:

Thursday 22 October
Wednesday 4 November
Thursday 26 November

Ensure that you are signed up to our mailing list at cls.co.uk for further announcements. You can also follow us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram for regular updates.

CITY OF LONDON SINFONIA

City of London Sinfonia (CLS) is the orchestral home to over 40 outstanding professional musicians who come together in the shared belief that music has the power to transform the lives of people across all areas of society. They bring a distinctive, seriously informal style to everything they do, breaking down the barriers between their musicians and audiences – whether performing on a world-famous music stage or sharing musical, creative experiences with residents in care homes and hospital schools.

Led by Creative Director and Leader Alexandra Wood, CLS conceives and delivers innovative artistic programmes with associate partners and artists, including project leaders with specialist skills, musicians in classical, jazz, folk and contemporary music, and artists in film, dance or visual art. The imaginative concepts and themes – often relating to science, nature, history or philosophy – influence and inform their wellbeing and education projects just as much as their concert series, bringing the adventure, intrigue and enjoyment of these programmes to all their audiences.

THANK YOU

At the start of the Covid-19 lockdown in March, we announced, along with the rest of our friends and colleagues across the arts, that there would be no more performances or participation projects in person for a while. These past few months have been difficult, but through the creativity of our musicians, determination of our producing team and trustees, and the generosity of our funders, we have managed to continue to bring music to those who need it most through our online Comfortable Classical at Home concerts and Mindful Music sessions.

Despite the challenges, we have much to be positive about as we start to emerge from lockdown, including the phenomenal engagement and support we have had from our online audiences. We would like to say a big thank you for your ongoing support as we now pursue the steep road back to performance and bring music experiences to our participation groups.

Our *Goldberg Variations* concerts are supported by the Royal Philharmonic Society Audience Fund and using public funding by the National Lottery through Arts Council England.



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