

## THE ARTIST

### Benjamin Alard

HARPSICHORD

Double-manual harpsichord from the collection of Early Music Vancouver, built in the mid-70s by Edward R. Turner of Pender Island after a superb eighteenth-century instrument by Pascal Taskin, now housed in the Russell Collection in Edinburgh.

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## VANCOUVER BACH FESTIVAL 2018

MONDAY JULY 30 AT 7:30 PM | CHRIST CHURCH CATHEDRAL

## GOLDBERG VARIATIONS

— THIS PROGRAMME WILL BE PERFORMED WITHOUT AN INTERVAL —

### Johann Sebastian Bach

(1685-1750)

### Goldberg Variations BWV 988

(1741)

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

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.

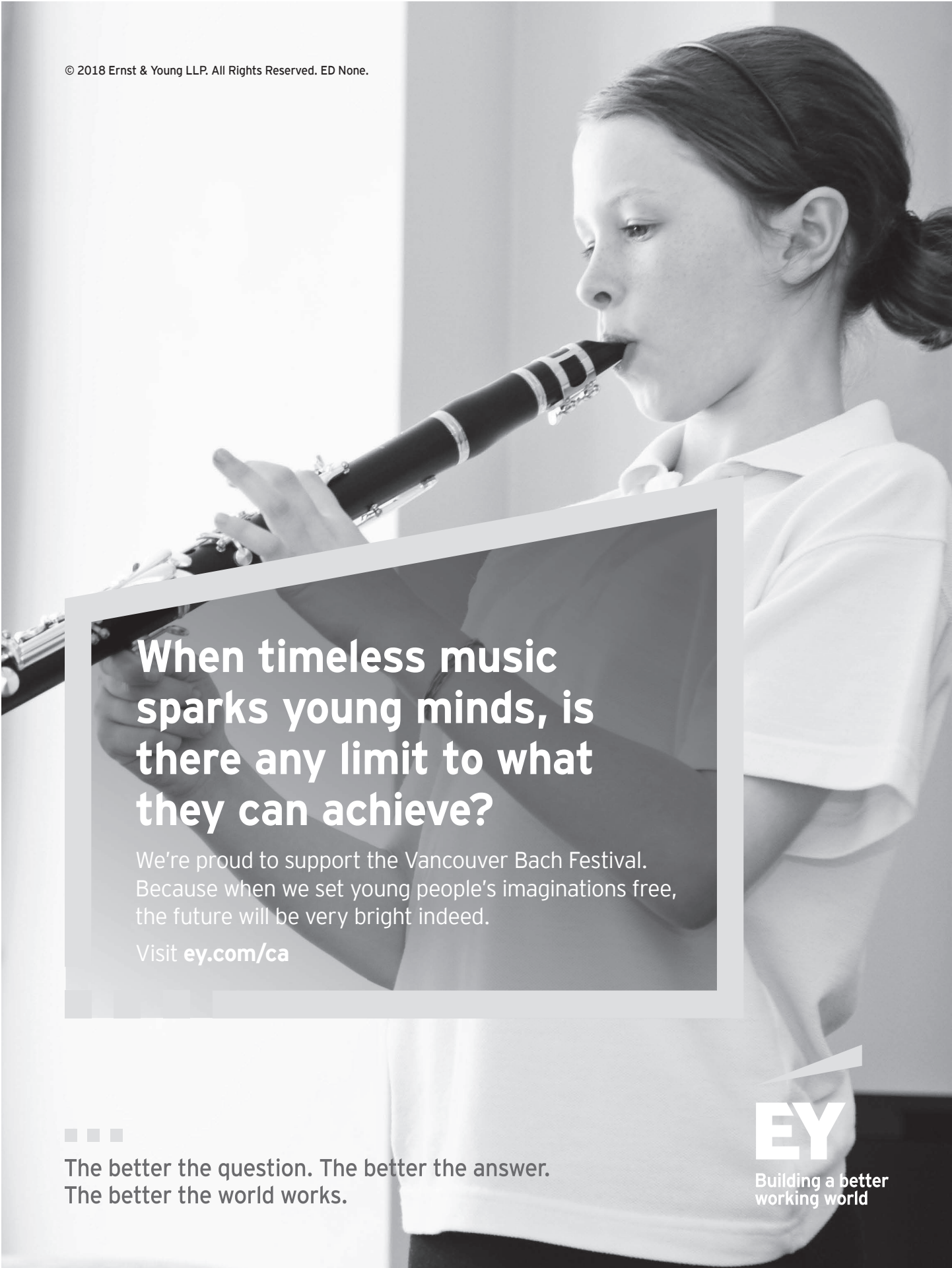
Variatio 27: Canone alla Nona. a 2 Clav.

Variatio 28: a 2 Clav.

Variatio 29: a 1 ô Vero 2 Clav.

Variatio 30: Quodlibet. a 1 Clav.

Aria da capo

A black and white photograph of a young girl with her hair in a ponytail, wearing a white polo shirt, playing a clarinet. She is shown in profile, looking down at the instrument. The background is a bright, slightly out-of-focus window.

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## BENJAMIN ALARD

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Benjamin Alard was awarded first prize in the 2004 International Harpsichord Competition in Bruges, and since 2007 he has been organist at the church of Saint-Louis-en-l'Île (Paris). He performs recitals and chamber music on both the harpsichord and organ. He also appears in works for two harpsichords, in duo with the violinist François Fernandez, and with the brothers Barthold, Sigiswald and Wieland Kuijken.

Since 2005 he has been a member of La Petite Bande, and has conducted the group from the harpsichord in the last few years.

Benjamin also works regularly with the actor and director Benjamin Lazar. Their production "Visions" was performed at the Bach Academy in Arques-la-Bataille, and in Louvain with La Petite Bande.

In June 2017, Benjamin made his USA debut with very highly regarded performances at the Boston Early Music Festival, and performed Bach's entire *Clavier-Übung*, in a series of seven concerts, on harpsichord and on organ, at the Utrecht Early Music Festival 2017.

Benjamin Alard has recorded for the label *Hortus* and has



made several recordings of works by J.S. Bach for *Alpha* which have consistently received high praise from the press, and have been awarded multiple prizes. In August 2017, Harmonia Mundi announced that Benjamin will join their artist roster and will record the complete works for organ and harpsichord of J.S. Bach over the next several years.

■ [www.benjaminalard.net](http://www.benjaminalard.net)

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## BENJAMIN ALARD: PERFORMING THE GOLDBERG VARIATIONS

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"My first opportunity to play the Goldberg Variations came in 2006 when I was still young. Starting my relationship with this work so early in my career was fortuitous as it has given me the opportunity, over time, to overcome the bewilderment and excess that can accompany the early interpretations of such a rich and seductive score. Though I was offered the chance to record the work in these early days, I am happy to say that I decided to wait. Since then I decided to play them less often, and eventually to put them down for two years. Now that I have returned to playing them regularly, two things have helped me develop a freer outlook on these pieces.

The first is that I have decided to play them from memory. I find it easier to separate myself from old habits when I am not looking at a score. When I came back to the work in this way, I seemed more able to realize what Bach really wrote rather than to simply recreate the interpretation I had synthesized earlier in my career.

The second is that I have invested in the effort of transcribing the work to be effective on a grand French organ. This work

was decidedly not about trying to determine what Bach would have done with one of his own German instruments, but rather, to find ways in which to make the most out of the orchestral abundance of distinct colours typical of the best French instruments while still highlighting the natural opposition of the two hands that Bach intended. Figuring out how to make some movements effective and distinct on the French organ came easily, for instance, some canons were transformed easily by relating them to the masses of Couperin. Others, however, resisted and required more serious modifications in my approach.

In the process, aspects of Bach's compositional intentions that had previously escaped me became clear. Playing these works on the organ has led me to re-think a thousand choices that I was not even aware I had previously made - including a re-assessment of a lot of my tempos. While the harpsichord made it easy to give over to displays of sheer virtuosity, the organ reminded me that this work flourishes only when it can be played with perfect clarity."

— Benjamin Alard

# DOCUMENTARY AND PERFORMANCE SCREENINGS DURING THE FESTIVAL

AFTERNOONS AT 4 PM AT CHRIST CHURCH CATHEDRAL'S PARISH HALL (DOWNSTAIRS)

- ADMISSION FREE -

WEDNESDAY AUGUST 1 AT 4 PM:

## Tales of Two Cities: The Leipzig Damascus Coffee House

Alon Nashman and Maryem Tollar, narrators, Trio Arabica, Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra, Jeanne Lamon, conductor, Marshall Pynkoski, stage director, Glenn Davidson, production designer

It's 1740, and coffee houses are the places to listen to music and share stories, in both the famous trading centre of Leipzig and one of the oldest cities in the world, Damascus. Experience the visual splendour, music, and contemporary tales of these historic locations, with music by J.S. Bach, Handel, and Telemann.

Tafelmusik Media 2017, 97 minutes

THURSDAY AUGUST 2 AT 4 PM

## Franz Schubert: The Greatest Love and the Greatest Sorrow

Christopher Nupen, director

"The Greatest Love And The Greatest Sorrow" tells of the last 20 months of Schubert's life and tries to bring audiences a closer understanding of his emotional state during that time and how it affected the kind of music he produced in those final months. It is not done in the form of a traditional music documentary. The watcher is not fed dates, compositions and life events but rather excerpts from his diary, his correspondences, the lyrics of his songs and the farewell letters he eventually sent to his friends and family.

Allegro Films 1994, 120 minutes

FRIDAY AUGUST 3 AT 4 PM

## BBC - Great Composers: J.S. Bach

Kenneth Branagh, narrator

"The Great Composers" is a BBC documentary series narrated by Kenneth Branagh, presenting the lives and works of some

of the most important figures in Western classical music, with outstanding performances, dramatizations, and insightful interviews with respected artists and scholars.

BBC Documentary 1997, 59 minutes

WEDNESDAY AUGUST 8 AT 4 PM

## The Hidden Heart (The Life of Benjamin Britten & Peter Pears)

Teresa Griffiths, director

This is a story about how two great musical talents, Benjamin Britten and the tenor Peter Pears met and fell in love and how their subsequent lifelong relationship influenced the course of twentieth century classical music.

Oxford Film and Television for Channel Four Television and RM Associates 2001, 78 minutes

THURSDAY AUGUST 9 AT 4 PM

## Monteverdi's "Combattimento": Two different approaches

Two highly contrasting performances of Monteverdi's dramatic madrigal "Il Combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda", from his 8th Book of Madrigals.

The first version is presented as a fierce and exhaustive battle scene between the two knights in full armour, as staged by Pierre Audi for The Netherlands Opera (1993), in a musical adaptation of the score by Luciano Berio, and with tenor Guy de Mey in the main role of narrator.

This version will be followed by a simpler, but gripping and highly evocative concert presentation as a madrigal, directed by tenor Paul Agnew (who also appears in the main role of narrator) with the musicians from Les Arts Florissants.

Opus Arte, Netherlands Opera (1993)  
Medici tv, Les Arts Florissants (2016)

VANCOUVER



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Sometime during the 1740s, Johann Sebastian Bach at Leipzig performed a church cantata for five voices and instruments for the Feast of St. John the Baptist. There was nothing unusual in this, as Bach had been composing and directing performances of church cantatas there since 1723. But those works normally called for four voices, and this one was not of his own composition. It was instead by Johann Gottlieb Goldberg, born at Danzig in 1727 and apparently a pupil of Bach, or possibly of Bach's son Wilhelm Friedemann.

This same Goldberg was a child prodigy at the keyboard (so was his sister Constantia Renata). In addition to two impressive vocal works, he is known to have composed keyboard music, including a set of twelve variations on a minuet, as well as a trio sonata that is good enough to have been mistakenly attributed to Bach. By the 1740s he was working for Bach's friend and patron Carl von Keyserlingk, Russian ambassador to Dresden in Saxony. It is this Goldberg for whom Bach is often supposed to have composed the famous set of variations that go by his name. According to Bach's early biographer Forkel, Goldberg would play Bach's variations for Keyserlingk during the latter's sleepless nights. Presumably his doing so was not intended to put the diplomat to sleep, but rather to keep his mind occupied while he remained awake. For no attentive listener could have quickly grown tired of the endless variety and unparalleled inventiveness of Bach's composition.

Goldberg's name has become inextricably tied to Bach's set of variations. But their original title, as published in 1741, was simply "Aria With Thirty Variations For Two-Manual Harpsichord". The work was a continuation of Bach's modestly entitled "Keyboard Practice" (Clavierübung), a series of extraordinary publications for harpsichord and organ that he had been issuing since 1726.

Variations based on either new or existing themes were a favourite musical form in 18th-century Europe. Handel and Rameau, among others, had published sets of variations during the preceding decades. Bach is likely to have known these as well as earlier examples by such composers as Frescobaldi and Pachelbel (from whom he might have taken the term "aria" for the initial movement). But Bach seems to have had little interest in variations, having composed only a few examples early in his career. When, however, he returned to the form late in life, he evidently was determined to outdo every previous composer of such pieces.

Bach probably knew that certain predecessors had composed lengthy sets of variations as a way of demonstrating mastery of the compositional forms and performing techniques of their day. With the Goldberg set Bach did the same, creating a work which surpassed all previous variations in ingenuity,

difficulty, and sheer length. By creating a transcendent set of variations for keyboard he provided a model for future composers, including Beethoven, Liszt, and, in our own day, Frederic Rzewski.

Like some earlier sets of variations, the Goldbergs are based not on a melodic theme but a bass line. The melody of the Aria with which the work opens and closes is never repeated within the thirty variations. The latter are instead built upon the underlying bass and the progression of chords or harmonies which it implies. Also common to the variations is the precise symmetry of the Aria, which comprises thirty-two measures. These are divided into two equal halves, both of which Bach asks to be repeated. This design recurs in all thirty-two movements (counting the variations as well as the restatement of the Aria at the end, as dictated by Bach).

Bach organizes the variations into groups of three. In general, every third variation is a duet in which the two hands play independent melodic lines. Bach directs the player to execute most of the duets on the two keyboards of a double-manual harpsichord, with one hand on each keyboard. This allows the two hands to cross continually over or under one another, producing a kaleidoscopic interweaving of the contrasting sounds of the two keyboards.

Each duet is followed by what can be called a "free" variation, an imaginative take on one of the conventional musical forms of the day. Thus Variation 7 is a dance, Variation 10 is a little fugue or fughetta, and so on. Each group of three concludes with a canon, the strictest of all contrapuntal forms. Here one melodic line exactly repeats or imitates another, as in a round. But unlike a simple round, such as the children's song "Three Blind Mice", all but the last of the Goldberg canons also includes a bass line derived from that of the aria. And in each canon after the first, the imitating voice begins one note higher than in the previous one, producing what musicians call canons at the second, the third, and so forth. Thus the series of nine canons has a continually changing musical physiognomy.

This complicated plan might have produced something dry, of merely technical interest. But each canon and duet is one of a kind and virtually without precedent. Even the "free" variations, drawn from conventional types, sound very unlike their ostensive models. Although the idea of hand-crossing etudes could have been suggested by Domenico Scarlatti's *Essercizi*, published around 1738, no one had ever written keyboard duets that are at once so rigorous in design and so imaginative in execution. On the other hand, this was hardly Bach's first keyboard work inspired, in part, by considerations of "keyboard practice". His *Inventions* and many of his organ

pieces also began with ideas suggested by keyboard fingering patterns, useful for exercising both the hand and the mind. It is usually assumed that Bach wrote the Goldbergs shortly before their publication. But a set of variations composed in 1735 by his son Carl Philipp Emanuel seems to draw on them, suggesting a somewhat earlier date for the Goldbergs. Although Bach tended to write his vocal works quickly, he took more time on his instrumental compositions, returning to them repeatedly for revision. He might have worked on the Goldbergs during an extended period, gradually hitting upon their three-fold design, which emerges only after the first few variations. It has been suggested that he composed the canonic variations first, then inserted others around them - but one can imagine other scenarios.

None of the above conveys the special character of the Goldberg Variations, which are unique even within Bach's extraordinary output. Most Baroque music, including Bach's, follows what were, at the time, well-established stylistic guidelines. French dance rhythms, Italian ornamental formulas, and other conventional devices made most Baroque compositions easy for players - and listeners - to interpret, at least at a superficial level. Earlier composers, such as Froberger and Bach himself, had included readily recognizable dances in their variation sets. But in the Goldbergs even seemingly traditional variations, such as the Fughetta no. 10 and the Overture no. 16, differ from regular examples of these genres, which, for example, hardly ever fall into two equal halves. Players who have toiled long hours to learn this work, or listeners who hear it regularly, may forget that even the initial Aria is unlike anything else. It resembles a French sarabande, yet its variegated style is not that of Couperin, Rameau, or even Bach himself in other sarabandes. It changes toward the end, becoming more flowing. But otherwise it is a singular combination of French Baroque gestures with ideas taken from the new galant style of Bach's younger contemporaries, such as Quantz and his own sons.

The three-fold cycling of the variations begins with No. 3, the first canon. This is preceded by Variation 1, a boisterous hand-crossing duet played on a single keyboard, and Variation 2, which imitates the type of trio sonata that Bach might have written for two violins and continuo (cello and harpsichord). With Variation 3, the listener is confronted with the problem that counterpoint can be difficult to follow when played on a single keyboard instrument. This is especially true in a "canon at the unison", as Bach calls this variation, for the two criss-crossing melodic lines are both played by the right hand while the left adds a running bass. Yet although this music is too complex to understand every detail at first hearing, the flowing lines of this first canon readily convey the idea of exquisite, ever-varied melodic writing.

Here and in the subsequent canons, Bach's use of a special contrapuntal device did not necessarily have implications for the musical style. Yet the angular lines of the canonic melodies twist and turn in ways that go against the conventions of 18th-century music. This is particularly true in the two canons by inversion - Variations 12 and 15, in which the melodic line is turned upside down when it is imitated, so that each upward step becomes a downward one, and vice versa. Variation 15 is also the first of three variations in the minor mode, standing out darkly against the bright G Major of the other movements.

The duets are sometimes called "arabesques", using a term that might describe the delicate filigree of Variations 8, 11, or 17. But even these are composed with a strong-minded logic that derives every moment of each variation from one or two simple musical ideas - a scale, an arpeggio - which may be exchanged between the two hands and inverted in the second half. The duets grow more rambunctious as the series progresses, incorporating athletic leaps of one hand over the other in Variations 14 and 20. They reach a climax with what Rameau called "batteries" in Variations 23 and 29,

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where the two hands alternate rapidly to produce a single line of chords. Most remarkable is Variation 26, where one hand plays a halting French sarabande, the other running Italianate figuration. The combination of two lines in distinct styles, even different metres or tempos, would be rediscovered by Mozart in the first-act finale of *Don Giovanni* and in the 20th century by Elliott Carter.

The free variations naturally form the most diverse group, and several of them can serve as landmarks as one traverses the set. At the centre is Variation 16, which opens the second half of the work and marks a new beginning after the dark Variation 15. Modeled on the overtures of French Baroque opera, Variation 16 opens in the grand “dotted” style; its second half is a fugue. Two earlier variations constitute guideposts within the first half of the set. The skipping rhythm of Variation 7 marks it as a French *gigue* of the type known as a *canarie*. Variation 10, the *fughetta*, is a four-part working-out of a lively theme (marked by a trill) which the left hand states all alone at the beginning.

In the second half, Bach alludes to another type of fugue with Variation 22, marked “*Alla breve*”. This refers to a type of vocal motet that went back to the Renaissance. What makes this variation stand out, however, is the luminous quality of its G-Major tonality after the jagged chromaticism of the preceding canonic Variation 21, in G Minor. The series achieves its most profound expression in the last of the minor-mode variations, No. 25. Here Bach wrote the tempo mark “*adagio*” into his own copy of the printed edition. The Italian word signified less a slow speed than the need for expressive freedom in executing the highly ornate melodic line. Equally crucial for the effect of this movement is the chromatic harmony, which moves inexorably to keys as remote as B-flat and E-flat Minor just before a miraculous recapitulation of the opening phrase.

From that point onward the variations grow freer, Bach’s imagination even more unbridled. The three-fold design evaporates, and Variation 28, ostensibly the last of the duets, dissolves into trills. The title of the final variation, “*Quodlibet*” (literally “What you will”), connects it to a composition for four voices that Bach had written as a young man. That quasi-dramatic early piece is very different from this one, but both quote popular tunes, echoing what Forkel described as improvised quodlibets sung at Bach family gatherings. Thus the variations end with the strains of simple folk melodies like *Kraut und Rüben* (“Cabbage and Beets”). But Bach directs the player to repeat the *Aria* before ending, and this serves as a reminder that everything heard during the last hour has grown out of the same bass line. The abstract idea represented by the latter has been embodied in each variation through a mysterious combination of clear logic and unfettered fantasy.

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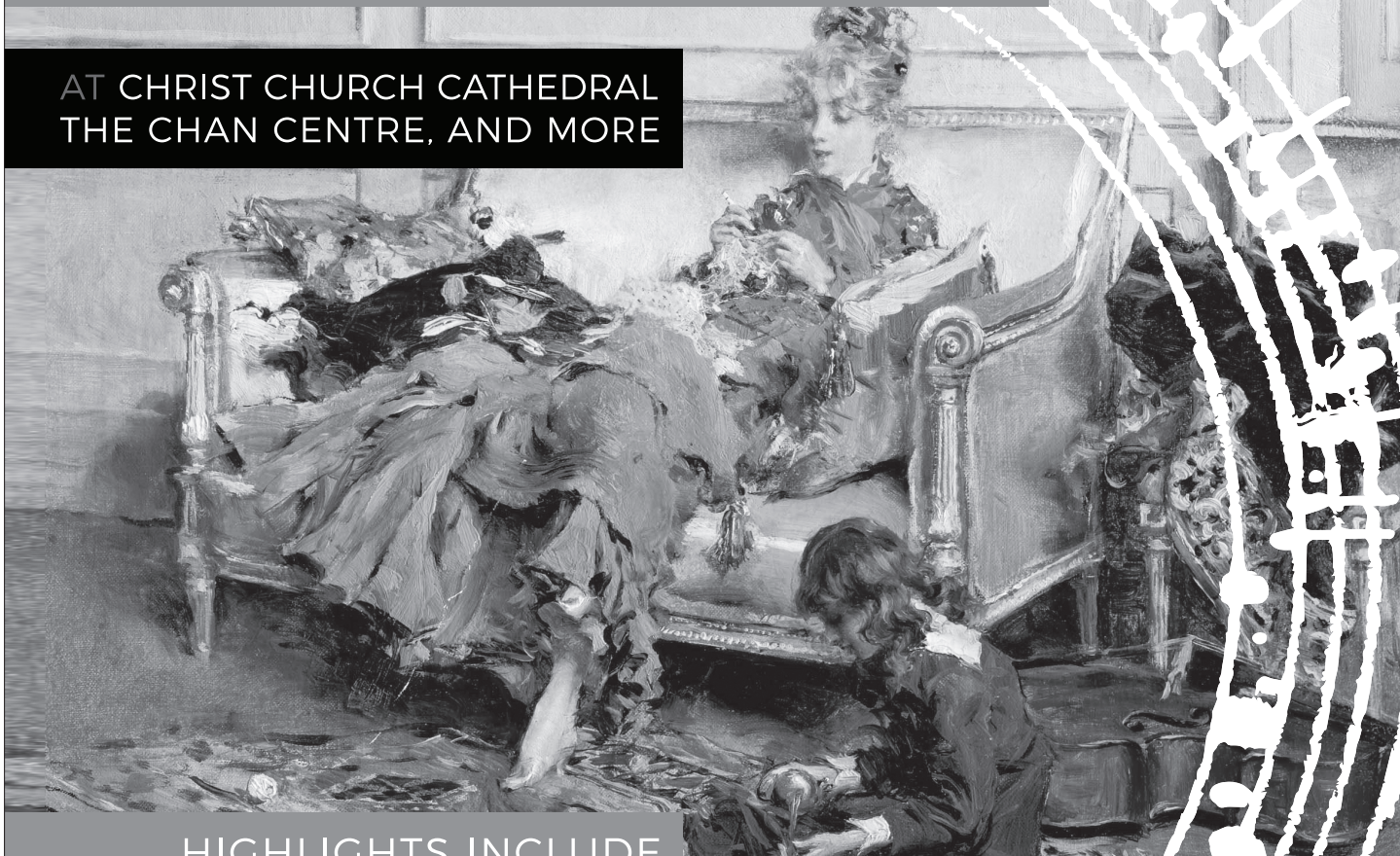


# EARLY MUSIC VANCOUVER

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- SEP 29 **Vivaldi *L'Estro Armonico*** PBO with Enrico Onofrio at Christ Church Cathedral
- OCT 13 **Purcell *Funeral Music for a Prince and a Queen*** Vox Luminis at Christ Church Cathedral
- DEC 09 **Bach Collegium Japan – Bach, Handel, Vivaldi Masaaki Suzuki conductor at 3pm**
- DEC 23 ***Festive Cantatas: A Monteverdi Christmas Vespers*** with David Fallis at 3pm
- JAN 25 **Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra – *J.S. Bach: The Circle of Creation\****
- FEB 09 **The King's Singers – *Royal Blood: Music for Henry VIII***
- MAR 10 **Schubert *Death and the Maiden* and works by Mozart at Vancouver Playhouse**  
Chiaroscuro Quartet & Kristian Bezuidenhout fortepiano | *A Collaboration with Vancouver Recital Society*
- APR 14 **Handel *Coronation Anthems*** PBO at 3pm

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