Bach to School
“A Goldberg Variation”

PRESENTED BY THE
WASHINGTON BACH CONSORT
FROM THE DIRECTOR OF "A GOLDBERG VARIATION"

SOME MUSIC IS TIMELESS. BACH WROTE HIS MUSIC MANY YEARS AGO, BUT IT IS JUST AS IMPORTANT TODAY AS IT WAS IN HIS TIME.

FOR MANY YEARS, PEOPLE FORGOT ABOUT BACH. HIS TIMELESS MUSICAL MESSAGE WAS ALMOST LOST COMPLETELY! LUCKILY, SOME PEOPLE FOUND HIS WORK AND STARTED PLAYING IT AGAIN, AND THEY CHANGED THE WORLD – JUST AS BACH DID IN HIS TIME.

ALL OF US AT THE WASHINGTON BACH CONSORT HOPE THAT YOU WILL HELP DR. GOLDBERG KEEP BACH'S MUSIC ALIVE FOR THE FUTURE. ALL YOU HAVE TO DO IS LISTEN!

ERIC SHIMELONIS
DIRECTOR, "A GOLDBERG VARIATION"

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YOU CAN'T IMAGINE THE THINGS THAT I HEARD ... MUSIC!

AND THE THINGS I SAW ... INSTRUMENTS!

I WENT BACK IN TIME, I TELL YOU, AND IT WAS FANTASTIC!

DO YOU THINK DR. GOLDBERG REALLY WENT BACK IN TIME?

I THINK HE'S GUDDOO!

I THINK HE MIGHT HAVE LOST HIS MIND A LITTLE.

WAIT! WHERE ARE YOU GOING?

YOU'RE BEING SILLY, DR. GOLDBERG. IT'S A WASTE OF OUR TIME!

I - I'M NOT CRAZY, I SWEAR!

I REALLY DID GO BACK IN TIME!
They don't believe me, but it's true. I went back hundreds of years into the past!

I'm just as sure of that as I am the nose on my face!

Heh ... just checking!

Still, I wish I had brought back a souvenir, something from the past that would prove to them, once and for all, that I really did travel in time, backwards to a different age.

Wait a minute ... that's it!

I shall build them an instrument that I saw, and I shall play for them the music that I heard!

I mean, how hard can it be? I paid attention. After all!
SEVERAL NOISY HOURS LATER

WELL, THE PROOF OF THE PUDDIN' IS IN THE EATING, SO LET'S HEAR HOW SHE SOUNDS!

THAT WAS A DISSONANT NOTE, FOR SURE. INTERESTING, BUT NOT QUITE THE SOUND I WAS LOOKING FOR.

T-T-THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE! IT PLAYED A SOUND, BUT I DIDN'T EVEN HIT A KEY!

OF COURSE YOU DIDN'T, DR. GOLDBERG . . . BUT I DID!
"YOU" DID? BUT WHO IS "YOU"?

ME!

BACH!

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH!
FROM THE 18TH CENTURY??

AS IF YOU KNOW
OF ANY OTHERS?

BUT, HOW IN THE WORLD
DID YOU GET INSIDE OF MY
HARPSCORD?

BECAUSE THE HARPSCORD IS MUSIC!
AND WHEREVER THERE IS MUSIC ... THERE IS BACH!

NOW, NORMALLY, I'M IN OUTER SPACE,
ROCKETING TO NEW GALAXIES AND SOLAR SYSTEMS.
HAVE I TOLD YOU ABOUT THAT?

BUT MUSIC IS MY TRUE LOVE.
WHEN YOU PLAYED YOUR NOTE,
YOU SUMMONED ME.

HMMMM, DID YOU CALL THIS A
HARPSCORD, DR. GOLDBERG?
I sure did, Bach! It's just like one that you used to play!

I built it myself, you know.

Well, it's close to being a harpsichord, but not quite.

What you built is more like a piano, where you push a key, and a hammer hits the strings to make the music.

A harpsichord, though, plucks the strings, instead. They date back to the 1400's, you know.

Still, a bit of tuning, and I reckon that this harpsichord will be just peachy keen.

Still not quite there.

Dr. Goldberg, give me a high e, will you?

A high what?

That means it's a particular sound, in music.

A high E. It's a musical note.
I'll show you. Go and open that box.

OK, but I hardly see how a box will help me understand what a high E is.

What the...??

Haha! There! That's a 'high E'?

EEEeeeeeeeeeeeee ffffffff

It sounds like they're having... fun?

Yeah, but it also sounds like... like...

What do you guys think is going on in there?

Ah, come then, Dr. Goldberg, let's a play a fugue, shall we?

You do know what a fugue is, don't you?

Hey, what is that other sound?
AND WHAT ARE ALL THESE NOISES YOU'RE MAKING?

AND WHY ARE YOU WEARING THOSE ODD CLOTHES?

ALL RIGHT, WHO ARE YOU, AND WHAT'S GOING ON?

'ODD CLOTHES'? WHY, I COULD SAY THE SAME ABOUT YOU!

BUT INTRODUCTIONS, FIRST. MY NAME IS JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH.

PLEAS'D TO MEET YOU!

AS FOR MY CLOTHES, I ASSURE YOU THAT THEY'RE QUITE NORMAL. IF YOU HAPPEN TO BE ONE OF THE FINEST MUSICIANS AND COMPOSERS OF THE 18TH CENTURY... AS I JUST SO HAPPEN TO BE!

THE 18TH CENTURY?

IT'S A LONG WAY BACK. I ADMIT, BUT THAT'S THE POWER OF MUSIC... WHEN IT'S GOOD, IT SPANS THE CENTURIES:

1740, TO BE PRECISE.

SO, HOW COME YOU'RE HERE? DID WE CALL YOU UP, OR SOMETHING?

NOT BY NAME, EXACTLY, BUT WE ALL SPEAK THE SAME LANGUAGE WHEN IT COMES TO MUSIC.
Every instrument, every song, has a voice all its own that you and I can each understand.

You mean like my harpsichord?!

"Yes, like Dr. Goldberg's harpsichord, here. It's a complex instrument, with a very distinctive sound."

Other instruments have their own sounds, too.

"Stringed instruments, like this violin, make their sound when a bow is moved across the strings. The strings vibrate and produce a most lovely sound!"

OR TAKE THE FLUTE - A WOODWIND INSTRUMENT, WHEN YOU BLOW AIR ACROSS THE OPENING, IT MAKES A SOUND THAT IS AMONGST THE OLDEST IN HUMAN EXPERIENCE.

"Do you recognize the next instrument?"

"It looks like a violin, but it's a cello! It's bigger body produces a deeper sound, showing how even similar instruments have unique attributes all their own."

Even a simple sound, like Dr. Goldberg's voice, has a particular quality that we can recognize.

But you see, music is the art of taking all of these different sounds, and putting them together to make something beautiful.

Ha ha ha!
LET ME SHOW YOU, IF I GET DR. GOLDBERG TO MAKE HIS SOUND...

Eeeeeeeeee

THEN THAT'S CALLED A NOTE.

AND A NOTE, ON PAPER, LOOKS LIKE A POINT.

AND IF I PLAY MUSIC ON THE HARPSICHORD, IN RESPONSE TO DR. GOLDBERG'S VOICE...

THEN THAT'S CALLED COUNTERPOINT!

IT'S LIKE THE HARPSICHORD AND THE VOICE ARE HAVING A CONVERSATION.

EXACTLY!

BY PLAYING THE MUSIC ONE WAY, SUCH AS AT A FAST SPEED OR TEMPO, I CAN MAKE DR. GOLDBERG REACT A CERTAIN WAY.

BUT, BY CHANGING THE RHYTHM, OR THE TIME BETWEEN NOTES, I CAN MAKE IT SOUND SLOWER AND SADDER...

AND SEE THE EFFECT ON DR. GOLDBERG, NOW!
But so what, Bach! We don't have those instruments anymore, and there's no music like that these days.

We can?

Not precisely, perhaps. But you can change that.

How?

Well, let's say that you have a favorite musician, and you practice to play just like him.

And then you realize that your favorite musician—who must have had a favorite musician, too, that he tried hard to sound like!—and your favorite musician's musician, she had a favorite musician, before her...!

So you see? Everyone has to learn and grow from those who came before, even I did!

It's true, I was around a long time ago. But, that just means that many people have been able to learn from me!

Music changes, because people change, but music itself never really goes away.

In fact, have I told you that some of my music is on the Voyager space ship flying around in outer space?

It's true! I'll explain...

Hey, Mr. Bach?
CAN WE PLAY TOO?

AHY! THERE IT IS! THAT'S THE SPIRIT!
I WAS HOPING I'D FIND!

SAY, DO YOU KNOW WHAT IT'S CALLED
WHEN FOUR MUSICIANS PLAY TOGETHER?

A QUARTET?

LET'S START WITH SOMETHING EASY,
TO PRACTICE OUR USE OF TEMPO, COUNTERPOINT,
AND RHYTHM, SHALL WE?

HOW ABOUT A PART
CANON PERPETUUS FROM
"THE MUSICAL OFFERING"?

YOU BET!

THEN LET'S DO IT!

AND A ONE, AND A TWO AND A ONE —
— TWO —
— THREE —
— FOUR!
WOAH!

HAAAA, POOR DR. GOLDBERG... IT LOOKS LIKE HE GOT A BIT CARRIED AWAY WITH THAT PIECE!

OOF!

TRULY, I CAN SEE THAT YOU'RE MOVED BY THIS MUSIC, DOCTOR!

HEH HEH, VERY GOOD, BACH, BUT I WONDER...

...COULD I PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE PLAY TOO???

PRETTY PLEASE?
OF COURSE, OF COURSE!

HERE, TRY PLAYING THIS VERSION OF THE SONG THAT WE JUST PLAYED.

EXACTLY! VARIATIONS ARE PIECES THAT ARE MADE FROM, OR ARE INSPIRED BY, OTHER TUNES OR THEMES. IT'S LIKE "CAUSE AND EFFECT," EXCEPT, IN THIS CASE, IT'S "THEME AND VARIATION."

"VARIATIONS"... SAY, BACH. THAT REMINDS ME! DIDN'T YOU AND MY GREAT... I MEAN, MY GREAT GREAT... ER, THAT IS...

... MY ANCESTOR!

DIDN'T YOU ONE TIME WRITE SOME VARIATIONS FOR AN ANCESTOR OF MINE?

QUITE TRUE, DR. GOLDBERG. IN THE 1700'S, I WROTE 30 VARIATIONS ON A THEME FOR YOUR ANCESTOR, YOUR GREAT, GREAT, GREAT...

... GREAT, GREAT, GREAT...

... GREAT GRANDFATHER. IN FACT, TO THIS DAY, THEY'RE STILL CALLED THE "GOLDBERG VARIATIONS."
AND NOW, LET'S MAKE ONE MORE GOLDBERG VARIATION, THIS TIME WITH YOU TAKING THE LEAD.

THIS WILL HAVE TO BE THE LAST VARIATION, WITH ME AROUND FOR IT, ANYWAY.

AFTER ALL, I CAN'T STAY HERE FOREVER. I HAVE OTHER PLACES TO VISIT, OTHER LANDS AND MUSICIANS, YOUNG AND OLD, TO SEE.

WELL, THEN, KIDS, LET'S GIVE BACH A PROPER SEND-OFF.

AND A ONE, AND A TWO ...

... AND A ONE, TWO, THREE, FOUR!
LIKE I SAID, I'M NOW IN OUTER SPACE, WHERE SOME OF MY MUSIC IS ON THE VOYAGER SPACECRAFT.

I SPEND MY DAYS SAILING AROUND THE UNIVERSE, LOOKING FOR NEW LISTENERS.

IT'S A LONG WAY FROM HOME, BUT THAT'S OK.

WHEREVER THERE IS MUSIC, THERE IS BACH.

SO WHenever I GET LONELY, I JUST HAVE TO THINK OF INTERESTED KIDS, LIKE YOU, ON EARTH.

I THINK OF THAT, AND I KNOW THAT MUSIC WILL BE IN GOOD HANDS!

THE END
JOHAN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685-1750)
A GERMAN COMPOSER AND MUSICIAN, REVERED FOR HIS EXCEPTIONAL USE OF MUSICAL FORMS AND TECHNIQUES, SUCH AS THEME, VARIATION, RHYTHM AND COUNTERPOINT. BORN IN THE TOWN OF EISENACH, BACH COMPOSED IN A STYLE KNOWN AS BAROQUE, MEANING DECORATIVE AND FANCY. HE WROTE BOTH SACRED MUSIC FOR THE CHURCH AS WELL AS SECULAR MUSIC FOR FAMOUS PEOPLE.

THEME: A MUSICAL IDEA OR SUBJECT
VARIATION: THE REPEITION OF A THEME IN AN ALTERED FORM
POINT: THE WRITTEN FORM OF A NOTE
COUNTERPOINT: HAVING TWO LINES OF MUSIC RELATE TO EACH OTHER
NOTE: A MUSICAL SOUND
RHYTHM: THE MOVEMENT FROM NOTE TO NOTE
TEMPO: THE SPEED OF THE MUSIC
CANON: DIFFERENT MUSICIANS PLAYING THE SAME TUNE AT DIFFERENT TIMES, TO MAKE A MORE COMPLEX WORK
FUGUE: A COMPOSITION OF MUSICAL TUNES THAT ARE PLAYED AND REPEATED IN A VERY COMPLEX FORM

THE GOLDBERG VARIATIONS
A SERIES OF CHALLENGING KEYBOARD PIECES, WRITTEN BY BACH, AND CONSISTING OF AN ARIA AND THIRTY VARIATIONS. THEY WERE WRITTEN FOR JOHANN GOLDBERG (1727-1756).
THE MUSIC

Goldberg Variations: Aria and Variations 1, 2, 4, 7, 29, 30
Keyboard Concerto in D
Adagio Keyboard Partita #4 in D
Musical Offering: Canon Perpetuus
Art of the Fugue: Contrapunctus I and IX
Musical Offering: Ricercar
Brandenburg Concerto # 3, Allegro

PLAY BY ERIC SHIMELOIS

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COMIC WRITTEN AND DRAWN BY ANDREW COHEN

Andrew Cohen is a comic booker in Washington, D.C. In addition to the comics that he has made for the Washington Bach Consort, he has self-published mini-comics, such as "Howzit Funnies" and "Dr. W."
His comic "Surrealism: Chapter One," with Billy Lopez, appeared in "Mount Hope," the literary journal of Roger Williams University. He contributed to the Eisner Award nominated "Trickster," and his story for the Harvey Award nominated "District Comics" was excerpted in the Washington City Paper. He is an original member of the D.C. Conspiracy comics collective and helps put out the free comic newspaper, Magic Bullet.

His work can be seen at www.howzitfunnies.blogspot.com