

Monica Jakuc Leverett

piano and fortepiano

A PERSONAL NOTE

Sixty years ago I studied at Juilliard with an 80-year-old Scotsman named James Friskin, famed for his Bach playing as the first pianist to play both books of the Well-Tempered Clavier by memory in New York in 1934. Earlier, in 1925, he was the first to perform the Goldberg Variations in the United States.

At the time, I wanted a musical challenge for myself, a kind of personal Mount Everest, and I hit upon the Goldberg Variations as my answer. I walked into my lesson with Friskin and asked with trepidation, "Do you think I could learn and play the Goldberg Variations?" "Of course, you can," he said, "they are no big deal - I learned them at age 15 and played them for Joachim." (He meant Joseph Joachim, Brahms' close friend and favorite violinist.) "Why, I'll even give you my fingerings." And so he did.

The issue of fingerings is crucial if you want to play a piece written for two keyboards on only one keyboard. The hands constantly cross each other, and quite a tangle can ensue if you don't have your fingerings carefully worked out. Pianists over time have come up with different solutions, though most people do what Friskin worked out: we follow the hand dispositions as Bach wrote them, and wrangle our way around the roadblocks. To this day, most of my fingerings are from Friskin.

I played the work in concert at Smith College a number of times, and on the East and West Coasts. In 1986, I used it for my New York debut recital, and was lucky enough to be heard by NY Times critic Tim Page, who wrote: "She... fashioned a distinctly individual interpretation, characterized by a combination of grace, propulsion and Platonic detachment... One will observe Miss Jakuc's career with more than usual interest."

I also took the piece to Kyoto and Tokyo, as well as London, and continued to play parts of it in many concerts. Now in my 80th year, I am once again celebrating my musical journey with the work. At this point, the *Goldbergs* are an old friend that has accompanied me through all the stages of my life and career. As I have grown, my interpretation has matured and deepened. Today, I am delighted to be sharing this great masterwork with friends and guests of the Eagle Hill Music Program. In the words of James Friskin, "There is perhaps no other work which displays so many aspects of Bach's broad humanity, or such a varied emotional range."

---Monica Jakuc Leverett



Monica Jakuc (Ya'kutch) Leverett is Elsie Irwin Sweeney Professor Emerita of Music at Smith College, where she taught piano from 1969 until 2008. She has performed on three continents, with the Goldberg Variations as her signature piece in both NY and London debut recitals. She also presents lecture-recitals on women composers, and has been a featured artist at International Alliance for Women in Music concerts in London and Washington, D.C. She has been a toy piano artist since 2015.

Inspired by Malcolm Bilson, Monica has performed on early pianos since 1986. A former member of the board, she has appeared as soloist with the Arcadia Players period instrument ensemble using her two Paul McNulty fortepianos. As guest artist in a series of Historical Piano Concerts, she has played instruments from The Frederick Collection in Ashburnham, MA. Her latest of three fortepiano CDs, *Fantasies for Fortepiano*, features the "Moonlight Sonata."

Born in Newark, New Jersey, Ms. Jakuc Leverett received B.S. and M.S. degrees from Juilliard, where she studied with James Friskin and Beveridge Webster. She has also worked with Russell Sherman, a pupil of Eduard Steuermann, and Leon Fleisher and Konrad Wolff, pupils of Artur Schnabel.

Please visit www.monicajakucleverett.com

Monica Jakuc Leverett, piano

KEYBOARD PRACTICE

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The Goldberg Variations
BWV 988, published in 1742

~~~~Saturday, July 15, 2023 at 5 pm~~~~



ARIA (Sarabande)

- 1 Duet ( polonaise)
- 2 Imitation over free bass
- 3 *Canon at the unison*
- 4 Imitation - passepied
- 5 Duet (corrente)
- 6 *Canon at the second*
- 7 *al tempo di Giga* - French gigue
- 8 Duet
- 9 *Canon at the third*
- 10 *Fughetta*
- 11 Duet (Italian gigue)
- 12 *Canon at the fourth in contrary motion*
- 13 Florid arioso melody
- 14 Duet
- 15 *Canon at the fifth in contrary motion - andante*

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- 16 *Ouverture*
  - 17 Duet
  - 18 *Canon at the sixth*
  - 19 Dance piece
  - 20 Duet
  - 21 *Canon at the seventh*
  - 22 *alla breve* - imitation
  - 23 Duet
  - 24 *Canon at the octave*
  - 25 *adagio* - florid arioso melody
  - 26 Duet (sarabande) - virtuoso figuration
  - 27 *Canon at the ninth* - unaccompanied
  - 28 Fantasia: trills
  - 29 In concertato style
  - 30 *Quodlibet*

ARIA da Capo è Fine

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Bach's titles are in italics.

All canons are in two parts over a free bass, except for the canon at the ninth.
All duets (except Var. 1) are virtuoso display pieces for two keyboards.
My interpretive descriptions are in normal type.

NOTES ON THE GOLDBERG VARIATIONS

The Goldberg Variations constitute the fourth and final part of Bach's Keyboard Practice (Clavierübung), an eclectic compilation of keyboard suites and other large works in diverse forms and styles which he composed over a sixteen-year span. The work owes its nickname to an anecdote in the first detailed biography of Bach, written by J.N. Forkel in 1802, half a century after the composer's death. According to Forkel, the piece was commissioned by a Count Keyserlingk of Dresden, who retained in his service a harpsichordist by the name of Johann Gottlieb Goldberg. Keyserlingk, a sickly individual afflicted with insomnia, had requested some keyboard pieces that Goldberg could play for him during his *nuits blanches*. Although Bach was generously rewarded with one hundred louis d'or in a golden goblet, Forkel noted that the artistic value of the work would still not have been met had the gift been even a thousand times greater.

As appealing as this story is, its accuracy is open to doubt. Had the work indeed been written for Keyserlingk, why did not the original edition carry the customary formal dedication? It is possible instead that Bach dedicated a copy of the variations to Keyserlingk during one of his visits to Dresden; the Count may have had the eponymous harpsichordist play frequently from the work thereafter.

However one may dispute Forkel's story on points of authenticity, his assessment of the work is beyond question. This acknowledged masterpiece is nothing less than encyclopedic: comprising an aria, thirty variations and a reprise of the aria, the music ranges through different styles of the period, exploring a multitude of techniques and procedures. Canons are devised, direct and in contrary motion, at successively greater intervals; there are duets, elaborate two-keyboard arabesques of virtuosic character; we find fughettas and freer imitative writing; stylized dances, such as the sarabande, corrente, gigue and passepied are represented, as is the French overture; there is even a quodlibet – "what you will" – in which several well-known tunes are introduced and woven into the musical texture.

All of this prodigious musical inventiveness is governed by the bass line of the opening aria, a gentle unassuming sarabande of 32 measures. It is divided into two sections of equal length, each of which is repeated; each section is punctuated by two cadences – on the tonic and the dominant in the first section, on the submediant and the tonic in the second. The series of variations itself is divided into two halves, the second of which opens with the French overture in Variation 16. The piece is further organized according to technique of composition; every third variation in a strict canon, which is preceded in most cases by a duet. As the program listing shows, the canons are ordered according to the interval of imitation; the first canon, Variation 3, is at the unison; the second, Variation 6, is at the second, and so on, up to the ninth canon, Variation 27 at the ninth. The canons point to the last variation, number 30, a quodlibet which combines the tunes to two folksongs:

I've not been with you for so long,
Come back, come back, come back.

and

Cabbages and turnips have driven me away
Had my mother cooked some meat
I would have stayed much longer.

It is the aria melody, of course, that has been separated from its bass line for so long; indeed, the variations – the musical "cabbages and turnips" – have driven them apart. As if in response to the plea of the first folksong, the modestly elegant aria returns to close the work -- but it has been transfigured in the course of the journey. One is reminded of T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*:

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

- - - Anonymous