

DATE#
12,439

CASS#
12,440

PROGRAM

CD 1

CD 1 293
14292

DATE
ID 2 TWENTY-FOUR PRELUDES, Op. 28 (38'52) Frederic Chopin (1810-1849)

ID 3 "Encore"
 2 Prelude Op 45 in C# minor - Chopin (4'44)

INTERMISSION

CASS SIDE A
CASS SIDE B

CD 2

ID 5 THE "GOLDBERG VARIATIONS" (48'30) Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)
BWV 988

Aria
30 Variations
Aria

Tonight's program contrasts two of the greatest sets of short pieces ever written (it might come as a relief to the audience, as well as helping to get tonight's performer off the hook, to know that these program notes are also likely to be relatively short!). Chopin was twenty-nine when the Preludes were published in 1839, Bach was fifty-seven when the "Goldberg" variations were published in 1742.

In the Autumn of 1838, Chopin, already suffering from early but unmistakable signs of the tuberculosis that was eventually to kill him, decided to leave Paris and go with George Sand and her children to Mallorca for the Winter. In a letter to his friend, Julian Fontana, he joked that three doctors had come to see him in Mallorca and, in his words, "The first said I should die, the second that I was dying and the third that I was already dead!" All kidding aside, the precarious state of Chopin's health proves that the majority of these short pieces (several were actually composed before he went to Mallorca) were initiated under great physical duress—all the more wonder that they should turn out such perfect gems of hope, wisdom, and faith. George Sand, in her autobiography "Histoire de ma Vie," talked about Chopin's disquieting imagination during this period, perhaps occasioned by their daily walks to a nearby abandoned cloister. (Upon coming into the room where Chopin was composing late in the evening, it would often take him some minutes to recognize her, so mesmerized was he by his task.) These visits to the monastery caused

terror to rear its face in the fiendishly difficult sixteenth prelude in B flat, or the twenty-second and twenty-fourth preludes, in G minor and D minor respectively. Premonitions of death stalked the middle section of the famous "Raindrop" prelude (#15). Yet those months were hardly unmitigated suffering. The joys of nature, the innocence of children playing under Chopin's window—such happy influences are to be found in these pages. And Chopin's relationship with the broad canvas of "love" is certainly referred to on numerous occasions. While the seventeenth prelude in A flat is a direct affirmation of such (Mendelssohn said of this piece that he liked it so much because he couldn't have composed it himself), the thirteenth in F sharp major, particularly in the middle section, shows a purity of spirit hardly equalled before or since (excepting the theme of the "Goldberg" Variations!). One immediately thinks of Beethoven's "An die ferne Geliebte" ("To the departed loved one"). It is clearly not of this world. The twenty-four preludes follow the circle of fifths, alternating relative major and minor keys (C major, A minor, etc.).

The story of the genesis of the "Goldberg" Variations has been largely debunked in recent years in the name of Baroque scholarship. Yet it has its provenance in Bach's first official biographer, Forkel, and as such provides an interesting backdrop to the work—namely, Bach was asked to write these variations on an original theme (which appeared in his wife's notebook) to accompany and assuage the sleepless nights of a certain Count Kaiserling, the Russian ambassador to the court of Saxony. The harpsichordist in Kaiserling's entourage was a gentleman by the name Goldberg, and it was his duty to play these pieces of a "smooth and lively character" to keep the count from being depressed. The truth of the matter, sleepless nights or not, is that Kaiserling offered Bach a princely sum for the work, the most Bach ever received (by far) in his life for any of his compositions. What sets the "Goldberg" apart from most other works of this genre is that they are based not on the theme in the right hand, but rather on the bass line (sometimes called "fundamental" bass). Three of the variations are in the minor key (numbers 15, 21, and 25—the latter the famous "Black Pearl") and are decidedly darker in character than the rest. Every third variation is a canon, starting at the unison, and finishing at the ninth in variation 27. The variation following each canon indicates a particular style of composition (such as the "Fughetta" of number 10) or a type of dance (the "Siciliano" of number 7). The second variation after each canon is a virtuoso display originally written for a two-manual harpsichord. Matters of light, shade, and dexterity allow these variations to be played successfully on a modern-day Steinway (it is helpful for the performer to look upon the hand crossings as more fun than harrowing!). The variations come to a close with a "Quodlibet," which mixes together two well-known folk tunes of Bach's day, and had as its origin the communal singing, very much part of the ethos of the time in a musical household, that always resulted from the highly spirited gatherings of

Bach and his family and friends. The whole work finishes poignantly with a repetition of the theme that begins it all.

A word about repetitions of the sections and about ornamentation: Repetitions have always been left to the discretion of the performer. The time limit imposed on a program that deals with more than just the "Goldberg" Variations precludes doing more than a handful of repeats, however, and tonight's performer is inclined to do only those which render a clearer picture of the voice writing (notably in the canons). With regard to Baroque ornamentation (*pace* historians amongst us!), no amount of reading up on the subject, nor listening to recordings by the "experts", will take the place of what one's instincts say. Everything else is a guideline—the instincts are, at very least, honest.

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Artist-in-Residence in Piano at the University of Washington School of Music since September 1993, **Craig Sheppard** was born and raised in Philadelphia. His teachers included Rudolf Serkin and Sir Clifford Curzon, and he graduated from both the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia and The Juilliard School in New York City. Following a highly successful New York debut at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1972, he won the silver medal that year at the Leeds International Pianoforte Competition in England (the same year Murray Perahia won the gold.) Moving to England the following year, he quickly established himself through recording and frequent appearances on BBC radio and television as one of the pre-eminent pianists of his generation, giving cycles of Bach's *Klavierübung* and the complete solo works of Brahms in London and other centers. While in England, he also taught at both the Yehudi Menuhin School and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. He has performed with all the major orchestras in Great Britain as well as those of Philadelphia, Boston, Chicago, San Francisco, Atlanta and Dallas amongst others, and with such conductors as Sir Georg Solti, James Levine, Leonard Slatkin, Michael Tilson Thomas, Sir Yehudi Menuhin, and Erich Leinsdorf. His work with singers (amongst whom Victoria de los Angeles, José Carreras, and Irina Arkhipova), musicians such as trumpeter Wynton Marsalis, and such ensembles as the Cleveland and Bartok string quartets have also played a significant role in his musical development. Sheppard is also known for his broad academic interests, particularly in foreign languages. He performed the complete Etudes Tableaux and Preludes of Rachmaninoff at this summer's Seattle Chamber Music Festival, and will begin a project to record the complete solo work of that composer this coming spring. His recordings can be heard on the EMI, Polygram (Philips), Sony, Chandos, and Cirrus labels.

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CRAIG SHEPPARD

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8:00 PM

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OCTOBER 4, 1994