

Bach J.S. - Goldberg Variations (Gould 1955 Version) [1990]

Written by bluesever

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1. Aria 1:55 2. Variation 1 a 1 Clav. 0:44 3. Variation 2 a 1 Clav. 0:35 4. Variation 3 a 1 Clav. Canone all' Unisuono 0:54 5. Variation 4 a 1 Clav. 0:29 6. Variation 5 a 1 ovvero 2 Clav. 0:36 7. Variation 6 a 1 Clav. Canone alla Seconda 0:32 8. Variation 7 a 1 ovvero 2 Clav. 1:06 9. Variation 8 a 2 Clav. 0:45 10. Variation 9 a 1 Clav. Canone alla Terza 0:37 11. Variation 10 a 1 Clav. Fughetta 0:41 12. Variation 11 a 2 Clav. 0:52 13. Variation 12 Canone alla Quarta 0:55 14. Variation 13 a 2 Clav. 2:09 15. Variation 14 a 2 Clav. 0:57 16. Variation 15 a 1 Clav. Canone alla Quinta. Andante 2:14 17. Variation 16 Ouverture a 1 Clav. 1:16 18. Variation 17 a 2 Clav. 0:53 19. Variation 18 - Canone alla Sesta a 1 Clav. 0:45 20. Variation 19 a 1 Clav. 0:42 21. Variation 20 a 2 Clav. 0:45 22. Variation 21 Canone alla Settima 1:42 23. Variation 22 Alla breve a 1 Clav. 0:42 24. Variation 23 a 2 Clav. 0:53 25. Variation 24 Canone all' Ottava a 1 Clav. 0:56 26. Variation 25 a 2 Clav. 6:27 27. Variation 26 a 2 Clav. 0:51 28. Variation 27 Canone alla Nona 0:48 29. Variation 28 a 2 Clav. 1:10 30. Variation 29 a 1 ovvero 2 Clav. 0:59 31. Variation 30 a 1 Clav. Quodlibet 0:46 32. Aria da capo 2:12
Glenn Gould – piano

Glenn Gould's extraordinary career was bracketed by the Goldberg Variations. It was his first recording of the work, in 1955, that established Gould as a pianistic force of exceptional gifts, while the second studio version he made in 1981 (there is also a Salzburg festival performance from 1957) proved to be his last visit to the recording studio; it was released in September the following year, just days before his sudden death at the age of 50. In the subsequent 20 years, Gould's reputation and stature as one of the most important pianists of the 20th century have been maintained, and these two recordings especially have achieved near legendary status.

In his lifetime Gould was viewed with suspicion, if not downright hostility, in some quarters. No one could deny his phenomenal keyboard mastery, the almost machine-like control of articulation, and the range of touch and colour he brought to a repertoire that extended from Byrd to Schoenberg. But the eccentricity of his performances, some of which seem wilfully

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perverse, with their mannered phrasing and exaggeratedly slow or fast tempos, was less easy to take. His strange and reclusive behaviour (he abandoned recitals altogether in 1964, and concentrated solely on recordings) only added to the controversy.

Reissued together now to mark the 20th anniversary of his death, the two recordings of the Goldberg Variations provide a fascinating comparison. The earlier one has been scrupulously remastered for the new album, and sounds more lifelike and immediate than ever before. The set also includes a disc of outtakes from the 1955 sessions as well as an interview Gould gave in 1982, in which he discussed the differences between the two performances. The most startling contrast is in the sheer length of the performances. In 1955 Gould got through the work in 38 minutes, while in 1981 he took 51; in the later account he does observe some repeats (there were none in 1955), but there is also a broadness, a sense of contemplation in a work that clearly meant more to him than any other.

What remains constant is the mastery of the playing. You may not like everything he does (and the almost arbitrary attitude to repeats in 1981 infuriates purists) but it is piano-playing of an astonishingly high musical and technical order. Both performances are acts of profound artistic creativity, and both are essential parts of any CD collection. This set is also very well documented, and comes with a typically penetrating essay by Gould's biographer, Tim Page. ---Andrew Clements, theguardian.com

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