

ST CECILIA'S HALL
"GOLDBERG VARIATIONS"

played by

Peter Williams

Saturday August 28th 1971 at 3 p.m.

Preceded by an Introductory Talk

Ticket £1.25

(including tea and admission to galleries on August 28th)

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

St Cecilia's Hall

Niddry Street, Cowgate

HARPSICHORD RECITAL

by

Peter Williams

Saturday 28 August 1971

at 3 p.m.

For the Funds of the
Society of the Friends of
St. Cecilia's Hall

PROGRAMME

KEYBOARD - PRACTICE

consisting

of an

A R I A

with several Variations

for harpsichord

with 2 Manuals

Prepared for the rejoicing of the

soul of music lovers

by

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

Composer to the King of Poland and

Elector of Saxony, Organist and

Master of the Choristers in Leipzig

ARIA

- D 1 2-part invention, one manual 3/4 (Polonaise?)
A 2 3-part invention, one manual 2/4
C 3 Canon at the unison 12/8
D 4 3-part invention, one manual 3/8 (Passepied?)
A 5 Two manuals 3/4
C 6 Canon at the second 3/8
D 7 2-part invention 6/8 (Siciliano?)
A 8 Two manuals 3/4
C 9 Canon at the third 4/4
D 10 Fughetta 2/2 (Quasi gavotte?)
A 11 Two manuals 12/16
C 12 Canon at the fourth 3/4 (inverted canon)
D 13 Two manuals 3/4 (Sarabande doublée?)
A 14 Two manuals 3/4
C 15 Canon at the fifth 2/4 (inverted canon, G minor)
16 Overture (Introduction and Fugue)
A 17 Two manuals 3/4
C 18 Canon at the sixth 2/2
D 19 3-part invention 3/8 (Minuet?)
A 20 Two manuals 3/4
C 21 Canon at the seventh 4/4 (G minor)
D 22 3-part invention, alla breve (Quasi gavotte?)
A 23 Two manuals 3/4
C 24 Canon at the octave 9/8
D 25 Two manuals 3/4 (G minor)
A 26 Two manuals 18/16
C 27 Canon at the ninth 6/8
D 28 Two manuals 3/4
A 29 One or two manuals 3/4
C 30 Quodlibet 4/4

ARIA

D - dance

A - arabesque

C - canon

Peter Williams

Purcell Room

Stanley Sadie

29/3/71

A performance of the Goldberg Variations that keeps the audience wide awake, may, historically-speaking, be a failure. On every other count Peter Williams's was a success. He used a harpsichord by Dowed of Boston, full, sweet and clear in tone. He confined registration changes to breaks between variations: they were always functional, not only in serving the content of the variation in hand but also in implying groupings and relationships between variations—as too did the lengths of the pauses he made between them.

That was symptomatic of his fresh thinking. The work emerged in different perspectives from usual, differently shaped, with different symmetries. Dr. Williams played the Aria in a manner more spirited than spiritual, with no pretensions to an inherent profundity, simply as a fine-etched line—but not of a fineness so sacrosanct as to rule out ornamentation in the repeat. Many repeats were embellished, in fugal and rapid variations as well as slow ones, often with that kind of fanciful flourish or sharp piece of fingerwork which comes instinctively to the born player and which is surely aptest to the music.

There were some unorthodox tempos. Dr. Williams did not unleash the virtuoso element too

soor. Some of the more brilliant-seeming early ones were soberly taken—though by contrast the four-square No. 4 and the trio-sonata-like 6 usually treated as Ardante moderatos, were brisk. Later he gave virtuosity more head. No. 26 was very fast, 27 was quick enough to maintain the sense of acceleration, 28 had a measured brilliance which allowed room for its lines and its harmonic design to be clearly articulated, and 29 was resplendent with its flittering chords and cascading arpeggios. These last few, and the difficult two-manual duets showed the power of his technique; in the easier music there were occasional slips of the fingers.

Dr. Williams has an unusual rhythmic sense. He often eases into a movement, taking a moment to arrive at his ultimate tempo. His basic pulse is extremely strong; the music has a fine momentum. There was ample flexibility, applied with a clear ear to harmonic or textural structure. His melodic articulation, too, is subtle. The canonic No. 12, for example, was illuminated by his phrasing and variety of touch; so was 19 (done rather slowly), by his contrasts of semi-staccato and legato. The gentle lyricism of 13 responded warmly to his supple phrasing; possibly 25, the slow chromatic G minor, was a little cool. One was left feeling that, except in broad outline, it might all be quite different next time; not because it needed to be, but because so active and searching a musical mind was unlikely to rest content for long.

Scotsman, 31. 8. 71.

Fascinating account of Goldberg Variations

Goldberg Variations: St Cecilia's Hall

By CONRAD WILSON

One of the pleasures of living in Edinburgh is the opportunity it provides every so often of hearing Peter Williams play Bach's Goldberg Variations. Each performance he gives is different from its predecessor; each tells us fresh things about the music, and the ways in which a single gifted musician can approach it. Deservedly, at his latest performance, Dr Williams has been able to present his ideas on this great work to an international public.

Some performances of the Goldbergs, by omitting all the repeated sections, manage to squeeze the music into half a programme, or on to a single gramophone record, but thereby reduce the scale of the work and at the same time lose the opportunity to vary the repeats with extra ornaments and subtle changes of colour and rhythm. Other performances, by including some repeats and omitting others, not only reduce the scale of the work but confuse and damage its proportions.

Dr Williams, however, performs it all—which means that, with an improvised prelude and fugue included as preface and with an interval after variation 15 (it is worth mentioning that St Cecilia's is the only Edinburgh concert hall that supplies refreshments), his performance last two hours. This may seem

a considerable feat of concentration, both for him and for his audience, on an afternoon in mid-Festival. Yet for all the intellectual apparatus which Bach brings into play in this music, the Goldbergs are uncommonly easy to listen to, so full are they of fine tunes, changes of mood, rhythmic and contrapuntal ingenuity which may in one sense be "cerebral" but which is also marvellously communicative.

This was certainly true yesterday afternoon in a performance, given on a beautiful Taskin harpsichord from the Russell Collection, which took constant delight in the sheer diversity of these variations, and in what could be called their sublime improvisational qualities. Often Dr Williams would seem almost to feel his way into the music, as if inviting the notes to set their own momentum—an effect which, as at the start of variation 23, could sometimes sound a little tentative, but at other times appropriately spontaneous.

One of the most captivating features of Dr Williams's performances of the Goldbergs, however, is his willingness to take risks. Not all his ideas work every time, nor did they yesterday; but the result is a living, fascinating account of an endlessly fascinating work.