



Colonel Jason K. Fettig, Director

MARINE CHAMBER ORCHESTRA  
Sunday, January 15, 2023 at 2:00 P.M.  
Rachel M. Schlesinger Concert Hall and Arts Center  
Northern Virginia Community College  
Alexandria Campus  
Major Ryan J. Nowlin, conducting

Philip Glass (b. 1937)

Violin Concerto No. 2, *American Four Seasons* (2009)

Prologue  
Movement 1  
Song No. 1  
Movement 2  
Song No. 2  
Movement 3  
Song No. 3  
Movement 4

*MSgt Erika Sato, soloist*

### INTERMISSION

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)  
transcribed by Dmitry Sitkovetsky

Goldberg Variations, BWV 988

Aria  
Variation 1  
Variation 2  
Variation 3: Canone all'Unisono  
Variation 4  
Variation 5  
Variation 6: Canone alla seconda  
Variation 7: al Tempo di Giga  
Variation 8  
Variation 9: Canone alla Terza  
Variation 10: Fughetta  
Variation 11  
Variation 12: Canone alla Quarta  
Variation 13  
Variation 14  
Variation 15: Canone alla Quinta: Andante  
Variation 16: Ouverture  
Variation 17  
Variation 18: Canone alla sesta  
Variation 19  
Variation 20  
Variation 21: Canone alla settima  
Variation 22  
Variation 23  
Variation 24: Canone all'ottava  
Variation 25: Adagio  
Variation 26  
Variation 27: Canone alla nona  
Variation 28  
Variation 29  
Variation 30: Quodlibet  
Aria da capo

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## ***PROGRAM NOTES***

### **Violin Concerto No. 2, *American Four Seasons* (2009)**

Philip Glass (b. 1937)

American composer Philip Glass is recognized for his exceptional versatility as a creator and collaborator. He has navigated the disparate genres of the opera house, concert hall, dance world, film, and popular music simultaneously, winning an inter-generational following over many decades. Glass grew up in Baltimore and studied at the University of Chicago and the Juilliard School in New York, before moving briefly to Europe, where he studied under renowned pedagogue Nadia Boulanger and worked closely with sitar virtuoso Ravi Shankar.

Initially drawn to modernist composers of the mid-twentieth century—such as Karlheinz Stockhausen, Luciano Berio, and Pierre Boulez—Glass soon grew dissatisfied with the possibilities of following in this tradition. He began to incorporate aesthetic ideas from a wide range of sources, from the repetitive strains of Indian music to the altered concept of time in Samuel Beckett’s plays. Glass’ early work came to be lumped in with the nascent “minimalist” movement because of its emphasis on repeated musical cells. Since the 1970s, however, he has explored a variety of styles.

Glass’ Violin Concerto No. 2 is the product of a collaboration between the composer and violinist Robert McDuffie, who approached Glass with a proposal to compose an “American” *Four Seasons* as a counterpart to Antonio Vivaldi’s beloved work of the same name. The piece was commissioned by a consortium of arts organizations and two orchestras, the Toronto Symphony Orchestra and the London Philharmonic Orchestra. It premiered in December 2009, with McDuffie as soloist and Peter Oundjian conducting the Toronto Symphony Orchestra.

McDuffie gravitated toward Glass in envisioning a contemporary response to Vivaldi; the two composers share certain common elements in their styles, despite living two-and-a-half centuries apart. Vivaldi’s music—like much of the music in the eighteenth century, including Johann Sebastian Bach’s—includes driving rhythms, repeated patterns (*ostinatos*), and arpeggio figurations, which in turn are also hallmarks of the minimalistic style. Glass’ harmonic structure is built on triads and is largely consonant, as is the music of the eighteenth century, but the triads most certainly do not function in a way that Vivaldi would have recognized.

McDuffie had a few specific requests as the piece took shape. One was that it use synthesizer instead of harpsichord: “I wanted the original, the indigenous, rock-and-roll Philip Glass that turned David Bowie on.” McDuffie and Glass soon learned that they disagreed on which season a given movement evoked: “In the second movement,” said McDuffie, “I thought of icy cold beauty, and he thought of gentle summer winds with people lying on the grass in the sun.” Thus, Glass decided to let the listener decide which season the music describes. He left the four main movements untitled and gave no clues as to where Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter appear. Preceding each “season” is a movement for solo violin.

Violin soloist Master Sergeant Erika Sato enjoys the interpretative freedom that Glass gives to the soloist, using the ambiguity of the seasonal imagery to create musical moods and imagined scenes. She remarked, “much of the fraught tension (winter?) and spicy, fiery energy (summer?) throughout the piece are created very simply by the sequences of repeated patterns. There are moments of aching beauty in both spare and lush places.”

Glass's extensive body of work, and most certainly this concerto, challenges listeners to experience the music in another plane of time and space. While the harmonies might sound simplistic to twenty-first-century ears, Glass explained, "It's not that I'm returning to an earlier harmonic language. We can no longer say, 'Well, if it's consonant, it is old-fashioned, and if it's dissonant, it is modern.' There is plenty of consonant music around now. But what seems to appeal to my audiences is something else, the focus on structure rather than on theme. What's focus? It's the way some music has now of drawing people into a different world without time. And without boredom."

### **Master Sergeant Erika Sato, violin soloist**

Violinist Master Sergeant Erika Sato of Portland, Oregon, joined "The President's Own" Marine Chamber Orchestra in August 2003. Master Sgt. Sato began her musical training at age three. After graduating in 1994 from Beaverton High School in Oregon, she attended the Juilliard School in New York, where she earned a bachelor of music degree in 1998 and a master of music degree in 2000. She studied with Kathryn Gray of the Oregon Symphony in Portland and Masao Kawasaki at Juilliard.

Prior to joining "The President's Own," Master Sgt. Sato was a titled and tenured member of the Colorado Symphony in Denver, a frequent performer with the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts Opera House Orchestra in Washington, D.C., and performed with the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra in Newark. She has given recitals and made solo appearances across the country with such groups as the Colorado Symphony, the Oregon Symphony, and the National Repertory Orchestra in Breckenridge, Colorado. Master Sgt. Sato has participated in music festivals in Aspen, Colorado; Banff, Alberta, Canada; Norfolk, Connecticut; Spoleto Festival USA in Charleston, South Carolina, and Italy; and at the Tanglewood Music Center in Lenox, Massachusetts. She has also appeared as a guest artist with the Strings in the Mountains in Steamboat Springs, Colorado.

### **Goldberg Variations, BWV 988**

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)

transcribed by Dmitry Sitkovetsky

Although the original title page offers a lengthy description—*Keyboard Exercise consisting of an Aria with Diverse Variations for Harpsichord with Two Manuals, Composed for Music Lovers, to Refresh their Spirits*—there is no mention of the name that generations of music lovers have associated with this masterpiece of keyboard writing: Goldberg. The story behind the better-known appellation was first offered in 1802 by an early biographer of Johann Sebastian Bach, Johann Nikolaus Forkel:

We owe [the Goldberg Variations] to Count Kaiserlingk, formerly Russian Ambassador at the Saxon Electoral Court, who frequently visited Leipzig with [harpsichordist Johann Gottlieb] Goldberg, already mentioned among Bach's pupils. The Count was a great invalid and suffered from insomnia. Goldberg lived in the Ambassador's house and slept in an adjoining room, to be ready to play to him when he was wakeful. One day the Count asked Bach to write for Goldberg some Clavier music of a soothing and cheerful character that would relieve the tedium of sleepless nights. Bach thought a set of Variations most likely to fulfill the Count's needs, though, on account of the recurrence

of the same basic harmony throughout, it was a form to which he had hitherto paid little attention. Like all his compositions at this period, however, the Variations are a masterpiece and are the only example he has left us of this form. The Count always called them “my Variations” and was never weary of hearing them. For long afterwards, when he could not sleep, he would say, “Play me one of my Variations, Goldberg.” Perhaps Bach was never so well rewarded for any composition as for this. The Count gave him a golden goblet containing one hundred *louis d’ors*, though, as a work of art, Bach would not have been overpaid had the present been a thousand times as large. It may be observed, that in the engraved copy of the Variations there are serious mistakes, which the composer has corrected in his own copy.

Although musicologists have recently called into question the veracity of Forkel’s account, the charm and romance of the story continue to supersede the allegations of spuriousness, and it is hard to imagine that this work won’t always be known as the Goldberg Variations.

What is beyond question, however, is the ingenuity and creativity manifest in the construction of these variations, the range of which makes this work a veritable catalog of every popular style of the Baroque period. Also evident is the composer’s penchant for symmetry and his fascination with mathematical relationships. As one studies Bach’s *pièce de résistance*, layers upon layers of connections reveal themselves, and while an awareness of these correlations is certainly not necessary to enjoy the work, it does leave one in awe of the composer’s skill and intellect.

Rather than altering the melody of the Aria, a common technique in many theme and variation settings, Bach constructed variations upon the Aria’s bass line and chord progression. (This approach is closely related to the variation technique employed by the chaconne, although chaconnes are generally much shorter.) The Aria’s bass line features one note per measure and is thirty-two measures long, yielding the first element of symmetry in this work: a thirty-two-measure theme and variation built upon a thirty-two-measure bass line. There are also symmetrical patterns evident in the layout of the variations. For example, every third variation is a canon (a melody echoed by a second voice while the first voice is still playing), and these canons proceed in ascending fashion. In Variation 3, the canon begins on the same note; in Variation 6, the canon begins at the second (that is, the echo voice begins at the interval of a second above the first voice); Variation 9 begins at the third; and so on. Musicologist Ralph Kirkpatrick points out additional symmetries in the variations that follow each canon, in which Bach employs “genre” pieces of well-known styles, such as Baroque dances, arias, a fughetta, and a French overture. After each genre variation, Bach inserts what Kirkpatrick describes as an “Arabesque,” a fast variation with rapid-fire notes that cross each other in breathtaking fashion. The resulting ternary pattern of canon/genre piece/arabesque is employed nine times in all, providing a sense of pacing and structure that helps the listener keep their bearings throughout this extended series of variations.

Bach may have been serious about his craft, but that did not mean he was without a sense of humor. Many of his secular works include a “wink and a nod” gesture designed to amuse perceptive players and listeners, and one of the finest of these moments comes in Variation 30, a point at which one might logically expect the final canonic variation of the set. Instead there is a quodlibet, a musical technique dating back to the fifteenth century, in which two or more popular melodies are simultaneously combined. Quodlibets were generally intended to be clever and humorous, not unlike the modern-day popular music “mash-up.” Bach based his quodlibet on several German folk songs, the best known of which are “Ich bin solang nicht bei die g’west,

ruck her ruck her” (“I have not been with you for so long, come closer, come closer”) and “Kraut und Rüben haben mich vertrieben, hätt mein’ Mutter Fleisch gekocht, wär ich länger blieben” (“Cabbage and turnips have driven me away, had my mother cooked meat, I’d have opted to stay”). Scholars have long debated the possible hidden meanings in this variation, stymied by the light-hearted nature of the concluding variation of so monumental an achievement. Again, it is Bach’s earliest biographer who provides perhaps the most compelling answer. According to Forkel, spontaneous quodlibets were a common feature of Bach family gatherings:

As soon as they were assembled a chorale was struck up. From this devout beginning they proceeded to jokes that were frequently in strong contrast. That is, they then sang popular songs partly of comic and also partly of indecent content, all mixed together on the spur of the moment.... This kind of improvised harmonizing they called a quodlibet, and not only could laugh over it quite whole-heartedly themselves, but also aroused just as hearty and irresistible laughter in all who heard them.

If one were to believe Forkel’s accounts, it is easy to imagine that Bach included his quodlibet as a humorous digestif for the insomniac Count, or perhaps as a felicitous reward for Goldberg himself, who was so frequently tasked with the unenviable responsibility of entertaining his sleepless patron.

The immense popularity of the Goldberg Variations has led to a number of transcriptions, a practice that was quite familiar to Bach, who rearranged much of his own music for various instrumental combinations. This setting for string orchestra was created in 1998 by noted violinist and conductor Dmitri Sitkovetsky.