



Wednesday | October 22, 2025 | 8pm
Symphony Hall

Yunchan Lim piano

Hunurij Lee *...Round and velvety-smooth blend...*
Élégie
Rudepoema

J.S. Bach *Goldberg Variations, BWV 988*

Aria	Variation 16. <i>Ouverture</i>
Variation 1	Variation 17
Variation 2	Variation 18. <i>Canone alla sesta</i>
Variation 3. <i>Canone all'unisono</i>	Variation 19
Variation 4	Variation 20
Variation 5	Variation 21. <i>Canone alla settima</i>
Variation 6. <i>Canone all seconda</i>	Variation 22. <i>Alla breve</i>
Variation 7	Variation 23
Variation 8	Variation 24. <i>Canone all'ottava</i>
Variation 9. <i>Canone all terza</i>	Variation 25. <i>Adagio</i>
Variation 10. <i>Fughetta</i>	Variation 26
Variation 11	Variation 27. <i>Canone alla nona</i>
Variation 12. <i>Canone alla quarta in moto contrario</i>	Variation 28
Variation 13	Variation 29
Variation 14	Variation 30. <i>Quodlibet</i>
Variation 15. <i>Canone alla quinta</i>	<i>Aria da capo</i>

There will be no intermission in this evening's program,
which will run approximately one hour and 45 minutes.

Yunchan Lim appears by arrangement with IMG Artists

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NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

...Round and velvety-smooth blend... (2024)

Hanurij Lee (b. 2006)

This newly commissioned work for piano, written for Yunchan Lim, delves into the profound interplay of contrasting forces. It unfolds in two major sections, *Élégie* and *Rudepoema*, hinting at the contrasting moods that will be explored.

Élégie, evocative of a mournful song or lament, may initially present itself with hushed, introspective melodies and delicate textures. Yet, within this stillness, seeds of energy may begin to stir, hinting at the *Rudepoema* to come.

Rudepoema, a term suggesting a raw, unrefined poem, might unleash a more forceful, dynamic energy. This section may feature driving rhythms, bold harmonies, and perhaps even moments of explosive intensity. However, echoes of the *Élégie* may linger, creating a dialogue between the contrasting elements.

Crucially, these two sections are not rigidly defined. They intertwine and evolve organically throughout the piece. Gentle passages may erupt into moments of raw power, while moments of intensity may subside into introspective contemplation. This dynamic interplay creates a captivating tapestry of sounds, inviting the listener on a journey through a richly nuanced sonic landscape.

This piece, in its exploration of contrasting forces, offers a unique counterpoint to the intellectual and intricate architecture of Bach's *Goldberg Variations*. While Bach's masterpiece demonstrates the pinnacle of order and meticulous craftsmanship, this new work embraces a more fluid, organic approach, celebrating the beauty of both stillness and movement, gentleness and rawness. —Hanurij Lee

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

***Goldberg Variations*, BWV 988**

There are a handful of works whose nicknames conjure emotions of intellectual wonder, visceral excitement, joyful adoration, and the comfort of an old friendship, like *Emperor*, *Hammerklavier*, *Winter Wind*, and the *Goldbergs*. Memorably, the *Goldberg Variations* became culturally iconic in 1955, when a young, eccentric, Canadian pianist named Glenn Gould stepped into the recording studio and made a now legendary recording of the work (Pablo Casals did something similar for Bach's *Six Suites for Solo Cello* in 1936). Since then, they have been recorded hundreds of times. Far from being redundant, each new rendition recaptures the imagination with seemingly endless nooks and crannies for exploration. Like the dialogue of a fiercely witty movie, the interplay of relationships between the notes and variations reveal themselves on a deeper level with every listen—aptly described in an NPR story as a “Rubik’s Cube of invention and architecture.” There are even inside jokes, if you know them (and you will, by the end of this annotation).

Aria mit verschiedenen Veränderungen, “Aria with Diverse Variations,” was the original title for BWV 988. The nickname *Goldberg* comes from a story that might be apocryphal, but merits re-telling. It originated in 1802 with Bach's first biographer,

Johann Nikolaus Forkel, who related an anecdote about Johann Gottlieb Goldberg, a virtuoso harpsichordist who studied with the Bach family:

The Count [Hermann Karl von Keyserling] was often sickly, and then had sleepless nights. At these times Goldberg, who lived in the house with him, had to pass the night in an adjoining room to play something when the Count could not sleep. The Count once said to Bach that he should like to have some clavier pieces for his Goldberg, which should be of such a soft and somewhat lively character that he might be a little cheered up by them on his sleepless nights.

Thus, so the story goes, Bach wrote the *Goldberg Variations*.

More likely, Bach wrote the *Goldbergs* as the culmination to his *Clavier-Übung* ("Keyboard Exercise"), a collection of harpsichord and organ works published in four volumes from 1731-1741. Part I included the six Partitas, Part II consisted of the *Italian Concerto* and the *Overture after the French Manner*, Part III is a master compendium of organ works, and Part IV is the *Goldberg Variations*. As a whole, the *Clavier-Übung* traverses every style and skill set a keyboardist would need to know.

The opening theme in the Aria owes its harmonic underpinnings to one of Bach's contemporaries whom he admired greatly: George Frideric Handel. A side-by-side comparison of Handel's *Chaconne with 62 Variations* (HWV 442) reveals an identical base line in the first eight bars of both works. One of the marvels of the *Goldberg Variations* is the elegant symmetry of its entire construction. The thirty variations are divided into two sections of fifteen: Nos. 1-15, and Nos. 16-30. Including the Aria that appears both at the outset and the conclusion, the *Goldbergs* consist of thirty-two parts total. This macrostructure is reflected in the microstructure of each variation, most of which are either 16 or 32 measures in length. There are only three minor key variations, the first being No. 15—the last variation of the first part. Variation No. 16 is marked "Overture" to herald the beginning of the second half. Every third variation is a canon at an increasing interval (i.e. No. 3 is a canon at the unison, No. 6 a canon at the second, No. 9 a canon at the third, etc.), up to a ninth in canon No. 27. Playing with our expectations, Bach chooses to skip a canon at the tenth in variation No. 30 and instead offers a *Quodlibet* ("what pleases"), which is a mashup of counterpoint and popular tunes. Here, toward the end of this lengthy musical journey, is where Bach's sense of humor shows most prominently. With a knowing wink, the *Quodlibet* includes well-known songs from Bach's day with the words, "I have been away so long from you" and "Cabbage and turnips have driven me away (had my mother cooked meat, I'd have opted to stay)."

After meandering through all the musical possibilities, staying almost entirely in the major mode and home key of G, the variations come to an end, and return home to the Aria once again.

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ABOUT THE ARTIST

Yunchan Lim piano

Since becoming the youngest person to ever win gold at the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition at age 18 in 2022, Yunchan Lim's ascent to international stardom has been meteoric.

His audacious performance of Liszt's *Transcendental Etudes* "created a buzz throughout the international piano community" (*Gramophone*), and his appearance with Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 3 delivered the defining moment of that competition. The video of Yunchan's Rachmaninoff performance trended globally on YouTube in the days after and has now become the most-watched version of that piece on the platform, amassing well over 17 million views. The *New York Times* later listed it as one of the Top 10 Classical Music Performances of 2022.

In the years following his Cliburn win, Yunchan made successful orchestral debuts with major American, Asian, and European orchestras, including the Boston Symphony. Recital appearances have included performances at Carnegie Hall, as well as European capitals and Tokyo.

Yunchan's 2025/26 season highlights include orchestral debuts with the Philadelphia Orchestra, Staatskapelle Dresden, and the Santa Cecilia, Concertgebouw, and Gewandhaus orchestras, as well as returning to the New York Philharmonic, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Boston Symphony, Chicago Symphony, and Orchestre de Paris. The season also sees recitals in Los Angeles, Chicago, Boston, Carnegie Hall, and Wigmore Hall among other major stages.

As an exclusive Decca Classics recording artist, Yunchan Lim's acclaimed debut studio album, *Chopin Études Opp.10 & 25* has gone triple platinum in South Korea and topped the classical charts around the world. The album won the 2024 Gramophone Award for Piano; he was named Young Artist of the Year, received a prestigious Diapason d'Or de l'année, and was nominated for an Opus Klassik. He also made history winning three awards at the *BBC Music Magazine* Awards. His other releases on the label include the live recording of his Cliburn Competition final, Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 3, and Tchaikovsky's *The Seasons*. Since January 2024, Yunchan has been an Apple Music Classical Global Ambassador.

Born in Siheung, Korea, Yunchan Lim began piano lessons at age 7. He entered the Music Academy of the Seoul Arts Center the next year. He won a place in the Korea National Institute for the Gifted in Arts at age 13, where he met his teacher and mentor, Minsoo Sohn. A year later, in 2018, he captured international attention when he won both Second Prize and the Chopin Special Award in his first competition: the Cleveland International Piano Competition for Young Artists. That same year, his wins at the Cooper International Competition provided him the opportunity to perform with the Cleveland Orchestra. In 2019, aged only 15, he became the youngest person to win Korea's Isang Yun International Competition.

Following two years at the Korea National University of Arts, Yunchan is now studying at the New England Conservatory of Music here in Boston with his teacher Minsoo Sohn.