

# Goldberg Variations

**Johann Sebastian Bach/ François Meïmoun**

A masterpiece if any, the *Goldberg Variations* by Johann Sebastian **BACH** are also a peak of the form "variations on a theme". Universal music originally written for keyboard, these variations have known many transcriptions, sometimes very original. The Ardeo Quartet offers us its version for string quartet, an adaptation commissioned from composer François Meïmoun, where the complicity of the quartet strings ideally serves the incomparable richness of the counterpoint art of the Cantor of Leipzig.



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About ten years ago we met François Meïmoun, a passionate musician and composer. During the course of our association we have played several of his quartets including one of his first Bach transcriptions, Tocatta BWV 913. When François Meïmoun spoke to us about his aspiration to transcribe the Goldberg Variations we naturally encouraged him. Since its first performance at the Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord in Paris in 2015 we have had only one desire: to record this new vision of a consummate work of art in order to be able to share it. We are happy to invite you to discover and rediscover this

magnificent journey undertaken by J.S. Bach's Goldberg Variations. *Quatuor Ardeo*

## Programm

**J.S. Bach: Goldberg Variations**  
arranged for String Quartet by Françoise Meïmoun

## **Françoise Meïmoun about his transcription of Bach's Goldberg-Variations**

### **Transcription: betrayal or revelation?**

Reason maintains: the transcriber

ignores the originals and attends to his own glory alone! In the nineteenth century, transcription partook of that new relationship with History in which a pantheistic veneration of the Ancients was mixed with the worship of modern bustle. Transcription oscillated between literal and respectful replication of the text and the temptation to consider the original as a pretext for the most liberal fancies.

Today, transcription seems, at a first glance, an antiquated activity. Deprived of its ancient social and economic function, transcription appears to be a genre without a future, without relevance. Why transcribe, and for whom? Transcription is something quite different to the contemplation of a by-gone age.

Transcription, particularly for a composer, emerges from that unreasonable and positively jealous attempt of making someone else's work at least in part one's own. When reading a score no longer suffices, the composer decides to transcribe it. When admiration constricts him too much, it becomes salutary to transform the piece in order to allow it to be heard differently. One must, in order to transcribe it, wish to make audible some other aspect of the piece.

A transcription is both homage and betrayal. But it remains one of the most beautiful written derivatives of an original and admired text. It is an act informed by folly and humility. The transcription of the Goldberg Variations took place within a context of total respect for the original text. No change of notes or rhythms.

The transcription is based on an "orchestration" of the text for four string players. As in an orchestra, all the instruments in the string quartet are not systematically required simultaneously: variations for two, three, or four instruments follow in succession. This redistribution of the material enables new lines to be heard that are often difficult to hear within the uniform sound context of the piano or harpsichord.

The Goldberg Variations are a model of polyphonic writing, a synthesis of Bach's art and contrapuntal mastery: the fugue, the canon, the French overture

Nevertheless, the work cannot be reduced to some mere austere exercise: the dances that permeate and most the cycle confer a superior dimension original of accomplishment to the twilight of the baroque era.