

J.S. Bach's "Goldberg Variations" Reimagined

Scholars have already discussed the origin of J.S. Bach's *Goldberg Variations*, the structure of the piece, its publication history, and performance practice issues, but recent reimaginings of the work (i.e. arrangements, transcriptions, and recompositions) have received scant attention. This is, perhaps, because of the work's reputation as a masterpiece. Yet honoring and revering a work can assume different guises that go well beyond canonic veneration of a score and twentieth-century notions of textual fidelity. Recent composers have paid homage to Bach by reimagining Bach's subjects, compositional procedures, and forms, using contemporary approaches.

This article aims to broaden Bach reception studies by exploring how the multiplicity of styles in the *Goldberg Variations* inspired new musical material in recent multi-author collections of variations based on Bach's *Goldberg Variations: The New Goldberg Variations* (1997) and *13 Ways of Looking at Goldberg* (2004). Both pieces fall somewhere on a spectrum between the newly composed and the arranged; they simultaneously pay homage to Bach's masterpiece while deconstructing and recombining themes and techniques from Bach's masterpiece to form new wholes. Thus instead of creating a single work that is the culmination of a single lifetime of achievement and experience, as Bach did, several composers collectively presented diverse contemporary perspectives on the music and techniques of Bach. In the process, they revealed as much about the values of their own age as Bach's music and compositional techniques.

Through analyses of these two multi-author compositions in conjunction with close readings of program notes, documents, and composer interviews, the article shows how the plurality of Bach's late style helped generate new pluralistic postmodern compositions based on Bach's *Goldberg Variations*. In doing so, it expands notions of Bach's output as not only summative, but also generative. In the process, the article not only sheds additional light on the reception of Bach's *Goldberg Variations*, but also contributes to ongoing discourse about the expansion of the work concept in the postmodern age.