

# Bach 2 Bach



Sunday, November 15 at 5 pm

*Digital Program Book*

ARS LYRICA HOUSTON AND MUSIC AT ST PHILIP

present

## ***Bach 2 Bach***

WORKS FOR VIOLIN AND HARPSICHORD BY  
JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

2020/21 Chamber Series Program  
Sunday, November 15, 2020 at 5 pm

featuring

Elizabeth Blumenstock, Baroque violin  
Matthew Dirst, harpsichord

*Violin by Andrea Guarneri (1660)*

*Harpsichord by John Phillips (2020), after the work of Gräbner (early 18th century)*

*Video and audio by BEND Productions, LLC*

**Sonata No. 1 in B Minor for Violin & Harpsichord, BWV 1014**

Adagio  
Allegro  
Andante  
Allegro

**Adagio & Fugue in D Minor, BWV 1001/1-2**

(transcribed for harpsichord from the Sonata in G minor for unaccompanied violin)

**Excerpts from the “Goldberg” Variations, BWV 988**

(transcribed for unaccompanied violin)

**Sonata No. 2 in A Major for Violin & Harpsichord, BWV 1015**

[Andante]  
Allegro  
Andante un poco  
Presto

## NOTES ON THE MUSIC

How many players are needed for a trio sonata? This trick question, meant to elicit groans from students of Baroque music, has no single answer. Instrumental works with three independent parts were common in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, but realization of at least one of those lines was typically left unspecified. The bottom part in the texture, the *basso continuo* (continuous bass), might feature a plucked, keyboard, or melody instrument—or several of these at once, depending on circumstances. A chordal instrument was especially useful, since it sounded both the bass line and harmonies above it, with the help of figures (a kind of harmonic shorthand), and in Bach’s day it was often combined with a bowed bass. But in his Six Sonatas for Violin and Harpsichord, Bach assigned two of three independent parts to the harpsichordist by means of a fully notated treble (right-hand) line, with the violinist on the remaining treble part.

This had a profound effect on the genre itself: sonatas by Mozart and his contemporaries embrace this obbligato texture wholeheartedly in works for solo instrument and keyboard. The ability to realize a figured bass waned steadily in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and by 1800 had virtually disappeared from musical practice, hence the popularity of this new kind of trio for two instruments. Bach’s sonatas in this format, which include works for viola da gamba and flute, each with obbligato harpsichord parts, charted a new path for the sonata. Some of these show signs of having been transcribed by the composer himself from lost concertos or trio sonatas. Others seem to reference the style of the emerging “Sonaten auf Concertenart,” a sonata that behaves like a concerto, with recurring melodic material that articulates overall shape in fast movements especially.

The “accompanied sonata” or “harpsichord trio,” as C. P. E. Bach called such pieces, may not have been Sebastian Bach’s invention, but Bach *père* perfected this new subgenre. Titles of such works emphasize the expanded role given to the keyboard player: several French collections bear titles advertising sonatas “for harpsichord and violin” (not the other way around), and the earliest source of Bach’s six sonatas (copied by his nephew Johann Heinrich Bach) likewise notes that they are “for obbligato harpsichord and solo violin.” From this collection of six works, our program offers two sonatas: Nos. 1 and 2 in B minor and A major, respectively.

Both of these works embrace the formal scheme of the *sonata da chiesa* (church sonata), which in its classic Corellian guise comprises four movements in alternating tempi (slow-fast-slow-fast). The first and third movements of such pieces tend toward the *cantabile*, and in Bach’s slow movements the harpsichord sings with as much ardor as the violin; the third movement of the A-major sonata even features canonic (exact) imitation between the top parts. Second movements tend toward showy contrapuntal display and are usually the longest of the lot, while final movements often reference popular dances like the gigue.

This program also includes excerpts from other works of Bach for either harpsichord or violin solo, but delivered here on the “wrong” instrument. Bach himself transcribed the

Fugue from the Sonata in G Minor for Unaccompanied Violin (BWV 1001/2) for organ, setting it in the new key of D minor (BWV 539). Some years ago, the Dutch harpsichordist Gustav Leonhardt transcribed for keyboard solo the entire sonata, using the same transposition as Bach's organ fugue. The recent publication of Leonhardt's complete Bach transcriptions gave keyboard players a great gift: more Bach to play.

The second of these transcriptions consists of selections from the "Goldberg" Variations, as transcribed by the performer for unaccompanied violin. Given the thorny counterpoint of these legendary keyboard variations, any rendering on violin might seem futile, but Bach's penchant for transcriptions and his unparalleled development of the unaccompanied violin repertoire serve as inspiration. Certainly the "moto perpetuo" character of Variation 5 transfers easily enough, and the Giga (Variation 7) lands quite happily on the violin fingerboard.

– *Elizabeth Blumenstock & Matthew Dirst*

## ABOUT THE ARTISTS



Ars Lyrica Artistic Director **Matthew Dirst**, recently described in the *Washington Post* as an “efficient, extremely precise conductor who has an ear for detail,” is the first American musician to win major international prizes in both organ and harpsichord, including the American Guild of Organists National Young Artist Competition and the Warsaw International Harpsichord Competition. Widely admired for his stylish playing and conducting, Dirst leads a period-instrument ensemble with several acclaimed recordings, one of which—J. A. Hasse’s *Marc Antonio e Cleopatra*—was nominated for a Grammy Award in 2011 for Best Opera. His degrees include a PhD in musicology from Stanford University and the *prix de virtuosité* in both organ and harpsichord from the Conservatoire National de Reuil-Malmaison, France, where he spent two years as a Fulbright scholar. Equally active as a scholar and as an organist, Dirst is Professor of Music at the Moores School of Music, University of Houston, and Organist at St Philip Presbyterian Church in Houston. His publications include *Engaging Bach: The Keyboard Legacy from Marburg to Mendelssohn* (Cambridge University Press, 2012) and *Bach and the Organ* (University of Illinois Press, 2016).



Widely admired as a Baroque violinist of expressive eloquence and technical sparkle, **Elizabeth Blumenstock** is a long-time concertmaster with the Bay Area's Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra and American Bach Soloists, concertmaster of the International Handel Festival Orchestra in Goettingen, Germany, and Artistic Director of the Corona del Mar Baroque Music Festival in Orange County, California. Her love of chamber music has involved her in several accomplished and interesting smaller ensembles including Galax Quartet, Live Oak Baroque, Sarasa, and Voices of Music. Ms. Blumenstock teaches regularly for the Juilliard Historical Performance program, at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, the American Bach Soloists' summer Festival and Academy, the International Baroque Institute at Longy, and the Valley of the Moon Music Festival. She plays a 1660 Andrea Guarneri violin built in Cremona, Italy, on generous permanent loan to her from the Philharmonia Baroque Period Instrument Trust.

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### **About Ars Lyrica**

Founded in 1998 by harpsichordist and conductor Matthew Dirst, Ars Lyrica Houston presents a diverse array of music in its original context while creating connections to contemporary life. Ars Lyrica's acclaimed programming features neglected gems alongside familiar masterworks, and extracts the dramatic potential, emotional resonance, and expressive power of music. Its local subscription series, according to the Houston Chronicle, "sets the agenda" for early music in Houston. Ars Lyrica appears regularly at international festivals and concert series because of its distinctive focus, and its pioneering efforts in the field of authentic performance have won international acclaim, including a Grammy nomination for Best Opera.

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# Ars Lyrica's Next Performance



## Comfort & Joy

December 18, 2020 | 7:30 pm

This festive holiday program includes seasonal favorites alongside seldom-heard gems of the Baroque era, all with abundant vocal and instrumental display.

Scarlatti's celebrated cantata, written for a festive 1711 Christmas Eve entertainment in Rome, proclaims a universal message of hope and expectation. Vivaldi's most inventive psalm setting, along with a tuneful Telemann concerto and some lively French noëls, complete this multi-national holiday gift for the Ars Lyrica family.

- Scarlatti, *Christmas Cantata*
- Telemann, Concerto in D Major for Flute and Strings
- Vivaldi, *Nisi Dominus*
- Charpentier, *Noëls*
- J.S. Bach, Aria (Duetto) from *Gesegnete Christen*, BWV 184/2

This program will be broadcast online.



Cecilia Duarte  
mezzo-soprano



Camille Ortiz  
soprano