



Great Harpsichordists • Landowska

8.110313

ADD



BACH

Goldberg Variations

Italian Concerto

Chromatic Fantasy
and Fugue

Wanda Landowska

1933-1936 Recordings

Wanda Landowska (1879-1959)

J.S. BACH: Italian Concerto, BWV 971 • Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue, BWV 903 Goldberg Variations, BWV 988

Wanda Landowska's father was an amateur musician and lawyer in Warsaw. Her mother spoke six languages and was the first person to translate the works of Mark Twain into Polish. She also founded the first Berlitz Language School in Warsaw. Their daughter Wanda was born in Warsaw in 1879 and began to play the piano at the age of four. Her first teacher was Jan Kleczyński and she continued her tuition at the Warsaw Conservatory with Aleksander Michalowski. At seventeen she went to Berlin to complete her studies in piano with Moritz Moszkowski and took lessons in composition from Heinrich Urban.

In 1900 Landowska moved to Paris, where she married Henri Lew. It was Lew, whom she had met in Berlin, who encouraged her to explore music from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Landowska was introduced to Vincent d'Indy, Charles Bordes and Alexandre Guilmant who founded the Schola Cantorum in order to promote ancient music, as well as Albert Schweitzer. Between 1905 and 1909 she wrote a number of scholarly articles which were published in book form as *Musique Ancienne* in 1909. From 1903 Landowska began to appear in public as a harpsichordist, and it is with this instrument that her name is usually connected, although she did continue to play the piano in public.

In 1907 Landowska visited Russia with her harpsichord, and on the second visit two years later played for Leo Tolstoy. She toured throughout Europe as a harpsichordist and just before the First World War taught at the Hochschule für Musik in Berlin. She and her husband remained in Berlin, but as civil prisoners on parole, because they were French citizens. After the war she taught harpsichord at the Conservatory in Basel for a short period and then returned to Paris, teaching at the Sorbonne and Ecole Normale de Musique.

Landowska's husband had been killed in a road accident in 1919. She founded the Ecole de Musique Ancienne near Paris at Saint-Leu-la-Forêt where she had settled in 1925. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s she continued to tour and perform on both the harpsichord and piano, often playing works specially written for her and her harpsichord such as the *Concert Champêtre* by Poulenc and the *Concerto for Harpsichord* by Manuel de Falla.

At the Nazi invasion of Paris, Landowska and her pupil and companion Denise Restout escaped, first to a town on the Spanish border, then to New York. In 1947 she settled in Lakeville Connecticut with Restout, whom she had met in 1933, and remained there for the rest of her life. She continued to perform into the 1950s and became renowned as the most eminent harpsichordist of the first half of the twentieth century, and the individual responsible for resurrecting the instrument and for a scholarly approach to the performance of music from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Landowska's recordings of Bach's *Italian Concerto*, *BWV 971*, and *Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue*, *BWV 903*, were made in July 1935 at her Ecole de Musique Ancienne at Saint-Leu-la-Forêt some ten years after she had settled there. The engineers had to return in September 1936 for a few retakes of the *Italian Concerto*.

In his editorial in *Gramophone* magazine of June 1936 Compton Mackenzie wrote, 'Madame Wanda Landowska deserves the gratitude of all Bach lovers for her superb performance of the *Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue in D minor*....The privilege accorded to the gramophone possessor of having Madame Landowska whenever he feels in the mood is inestimable.' A critic who reviewed the recording at the time was 'carried

away by the bold conception of this performance, masculine in its sweep and control'. Even in 1936 the reviewer found that Landowska 'fully brings out the heroic size of the music, but one needs to get acclimatised to the scheme of registration she adopts on her instrument – from which, indeed, she gets an astonishing variety of tone – the mechanics of which are at first a little disturbing'. This is even more the case today where her large Pleyel harpsichord sounds very different to the historic instruments and copies of which we are now accustomed to hearing; it can sound overblown and anachronistic. When the recording was reissued in 1988 critic Stephen Plaistow found that 'Her Pleyel in full cry is a monster of a machine.....These days her accounts of the *Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue* may make us wince, but who would argue with her that assertive rhetoric has no place in Bach?' As is often the case with Landowska's performances, however, it is her complete conviction in all that she does that transcends our perceived limitations or unsuitability of the instrument she uses.

In the first half of the twentieth century Bach's *Goldberg Variations* were rarely heard. Claudio Arrau and Wilhelm Backhaus performed them in public on the piano during the 1930s, but in May 1933 Landowska gave her first performance of this work on the harpsichord. Six months later she recorded it in Paris for HMV, who issued it as a limited edition of their 'Bach Society' series. This was the first ever recording of the *Goldberg Variations* and at the time of its release it was extremely influential as most people had never heard

the work at all, and certainly not on a Pleyel harpsichord. Her recording almost single-handedly resurrected the work, bringing it back into the public's consciousness. A contemporary critic wrote, 'Of Landowska's performance one can only speak in superlatives. Beautiful as was our own Mrs Gordon Woodhouse's playing of the harpsichord [Violet Gordon Woodhouse (1872-1948), English harpsichordist] she never had the authoritative command of the instrument possessed by Landowska. This, moreover, is allied to a striking intellectual and technical grasp of the music which gives all the brilliance called for in a work written primarily for entertainment.....' The *Goldberg Variations* were very dear to Landowska's artistic and musical soul: she wrote, 'Along with the *Art of Fugue* and the *Musical Offering*, this work stands as a dazzling secular temple erected in honour of absolute music.....There is no other work which, like the *Goldberg Variations*, leaves such a vast field for interpreters to display qualities of imagination, skill, and virtuosity, while giving the most substantial nourishment to musicians.'

Landowska recorded the *Goldberg Variations* again in 1945 for RCA Victor in New York. A recording made on the piano by Claudio Arrau in 1942 for the same company was precluded from release at the request of the pianist owing to the release of the Landowska recording.

© Jonathan Summers

Producer's Note

The sources for the present transfers were U.S. Victor "Z" pressings for the *Italian Concerto* and *Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue*, and laminated French "Voix de son Maître" shellacs for the *Goldberg Variations*. The original engineers had an apparent horror at recording the sound of the keys being released at the ends of sides, and either faded the music out too soon or required Landowska to hold the notes into the run-out area of the grooves. As a result, I have had to join many of the sides (particularly in the *Goldberg Variations*) by fading outgoing sides and overlapping them slightly with incoming sides in order to avoid abrupt cut-offs.

Mark Obert-Thorn

J. S. BACH

Italian Concerto, BWV 971

1 (Allegro)	4:01
2 Andante	5:04
3 Presto	3:31

Recorded 9th July, 1935
and 25th-26th September, 1936
at St-Leu-la-Forêt, Paris
Matrices: 2LA 1249-1, 606-3 and 1251-1
First issued on HMV DB 5007 and 5008

Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue, BWV 903 13:24

4 Fantasy	8:32
5 Fugue	4:52

Recorded 10th and 16th July, 1935
at St-Leu-la-Forêt, Paris
Matrices: 2LA 624-4, 608-4 and 609-2
First issued on HMV DB 4993 and 4994

Goldberg Variations, BWV 988 46:35

6 Aria: Andante espressivo	2:24
7 Variation 1	1:47
8 Variation 2	0:55
9 Variation 3: Canone all'Unisono	1:00
10 Variation 4	1:02
11 Variation 5	0:57
12 Variation 6: Canone alla Seconda	0:51
13 Variation 7	1:11

14 Variation 8	0:55
15 Variation 9: Canone alla Terza	1:09
16 Variation 10: Fughetta	1:36
17 Variation 11	1:08
18 Variation 12: Canone alla Quarta	1:13
19 Variation 13	2:52
20 Variation 14	1:11
21 Variation 15: Canone alla Quinta	2:35
22 Variation 16: Ouverture	1:55
23 Variation 17	0:46
24 Variation 18: Canone alla Sesta	0:54
25 Variation 19	0:50
26 Variation 20	1:00
27 Variation 21: Canone alla Settima	2:15
28 Variation 22: Alla breve	1:34
29 Variation 23	1:11
30 Variation 24: Canone all'Ottava	1:41
31 Variation 25	3:56
32 Variation 26	1:04
33 Variation 27: Canone alla Nona	0:53
34 Variation 28	1:19
35 Variation 29	1:14
36 Variation 30: Quodlibet	0:53
37 Aria (da capo)	2:26

Recorded 9th and 13th-15th November, 1933
in the Studio Albert, Paris
Matrices: 2PG 1207-1, 1206-5, 1217-1, 1220-2,
1221-1, 1218-1, 1228-1, 1222-2, 1229-2, 1227-1,
1230-1 and 1219-1
First issued on HMV DB 4908 through 4913

Playing
Time
72:35

J.S. BACH
Goldberg Variations

Wanda Landowska (1879-1959)

8.110313

ADD



8.110313

LANDOWSKA : Bach: Goldberg Variations

NAXOS Historical

ALL RIGHTS IN THIS SOUND RECORDING, ARTWORK, TEXTS AND TRANSLATIONS RESERVED. UNAUTHORISED PUBLIC PERFORMANCE, BROADCASTING AND COPYING OF THIS COMPACT DISC PROHIBITED.
© & © 2005 Naxos Rights International Ltd.

Italian Concerto, BWV 971

12:36

- | | | |
|----------|-----------|------|
| 1 | (Allegro) | 4:01 |
| 2 | Andante | 5:04 |
| 3 | Presto | 3:31 |

Recorded 9th July, 1935 and 25th-26th September, 1936
at St-Leu-la-Forêt, Paris
Matrices: 2LA 1249-1, 606-3 and 1251-1
First issued on HMV DB 5007 and 5008

Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue, BWV 903

13:24

- | | | |
|----------|---------|------|
| 4 | Fantasy | 8:32 |
| 5 | Fugue | 4:52 |

Recorded 10th and 16th July, 1935 at St-Leu-la-Forêt, Paris
Matrices: 2LA 624-4, 608-4 and 609-2
First issued on HMV DB 4993 and 4994

Goldberg Variations, BWV 988

46:35

- | | | |
|-------------|--------------------------|-------|
| 6 | Aria: Andante espressivo | 2:24 |
| 7-36 | Variations | 41:45 |
| 37 | Aria (da capo) | 2:26 |

Recorded 9th and 13th-15th November, 1933 in the Studio Albert, Paris
Matrices: 2PG 1207-1, 1206-5, 1217-1, 1220-2, 1221-1, 1218-1, 1228-1,
1222-2, 1229-2, 1227-1, 1230-1 and 1219-1
First issued on HMV DB 4908 through 4913

Wanda Landowska, who continued to perform and record up to her death in 1959, was renowned as the greatest harpsichordist of the first half of the twentieth century, resurrecting the instrument and taking a scholarly approach to the performance of music from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This Naxos disc features the first ever recording of Bach's *Goldberg Variations*, of which a contemporary critic wrote: 'One can only speak in superlatives...[her] authoritative command of the instrument... is allied to a striking intellectual and technical grasp of the music'.

MADE IN
THE EU



Producer and Audio Restoration Engineer: Mark Obert-Thorn



www.naxos.com

Cover Photograph: Wanda Landowska (Private Collection)

