

THE ARTIST

David Jalbert

PIANO

THURSDAY AUGUST 8 AT 1:00 PM | CHRIST CHURCH CATHEDRAL

SHOSTAKOVICH  
PRELUDES AND FUGUES

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750):

**Tocatta in C minor**, BWV 911

Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975):

**Preludes and Fugues opus 87:**

- No. 1 in C major
- No. 5 in D major
- No. 6 in B minor
- No. 4 in E minor
- No. 7 in A major
- No. 10 in C $\sharp$  minor
- No. 15 in D $\flat$  major
- No. 24 in D minor

Pre-concert chat with  
host Matthew White at 12:15:

David Jalbert



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# PROGRAMME NOTES

BY IRÈNE BRISSON, TRANSLATED BY SEAN McCUTCHEON



A protégé of Alexander Glazunov, then director of the conservatory of his native city, **Dmitri Dmitriyevich Shostakovich** (1906-75) studied piano with Leonid Nikolayev and composition with Maximilian Steinberg, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's son-in-law. He swam like a fish in the waters of the new Soviet culture of that time, the 1920s, which was very open to the modern world. An excellent pianist with his sights set on a career as a performer, from his youth he was interested in the music of Bach, Beethoven, and Liszt. In 1927, he performed at the first international Chopin competition in Warsaw alongside accomplished virtuosos such as Lev Oborin. Although he won no prize, he remained faithful to his instrument nonetheless, while moving towards composition.

In 1932, immediately after finishing *Lady Macbeth of Mtzensk*, Shostakovich wrote his 24 Preludes op. 34 for piano. Following the scheme adopted by Chopin, he wrote preludes in 24 keys, arranged in a cycle of ascending fifths, with each prelude in a major key followed by one in the relative minor. More than 20 years later, he did this again, in his 24 Preludes and Fugues op. 87.

## From Bach to Shostakovich

The 24 Preludes and Fugues op. 87 would doubtless never have existed if Shostakovich had not participated, in July 1950, as Soviet delegate to the festivities organized in Leipzig to mark the bicentenary of Bach's death. As a member of the jury at the first international Bach competition in this city, still bruised by war, he was impressed by his young compatriot Tatiana Nikolaeva (1924-1993), who won the first prize in piano with a remarkable performance of the 48 preludes and fugues of the *Well-Tempered Clavier*. "I feel particularly close to Bach's musical genius," Shostakovich declared during his stay in Leipzig. "Bach plays an important role in my life. Every day I play one of his pieces. It's a real need for me, and this daily contact with Bach's music brings me enormous satisfaction." We are far from the disdain that the Russians had long shown for the Cantor of Leipzig; since Balakirev's day, they had compared him to a "machine for grinding out fugues!" Lamenting the fact that German composers after Bach had abandoned the genre of prelude and fugue, Shostakovich decided to start work on his own cycle, using once again the tonal organization by fifths of his opus 34. The work was composed between October 1950 and February of the following year. Tatiana Nikolaeva gave its

premiere performances in two concerts in December 1952. As expected, the critics condemned the "regrettable cacophony" of these "decadent" pieces!

The 24 Preludes and Fugues op. 87 are at the same time an homage to Bach (prelude no. 22) and a microcosm of Shostakovich's language: works harking back to the past are here present alongside others that bear witness to a continuing concern for renewal. In the cycle, the composer passes through the entire spectrum of emotions, from anguish (no. 14) to caricature (no. 8).

## The Preludes

The collection opens and closes with noble sarabands. The opening saraband, in C major, discretely sprinkled with dissonances, recalls *Lascia ch'io pianga*, the famous aria from Handel's opera *Rinaldo*. The closing saraband, in D minor, has poignant shades as well as a wide palette of nuances and sonic colours, while a lugubrious prelude on tremolos (no. 14) inaugurates, in orchestral fashion, the sequence of the preludes in the flat keys. While remaining within the Classical-Romantic framework, each prelude is original. They include:

toccatas or perpetual movements (nos. 2 and 21); processional music whose atmosphere is worthy of Mussorgsky (nos. 3 and 20); ostinatos (nos. 4, 8, and 17); a delicately arpeggiated minuet (no. 5); a grandiose French overture sprinkled with heartrending dissonances (no.6); a Bach-like invention (no. 10), a spirited gavotte (no. 11); a passacaglia (no. 12, in G sharp minor); an homage to Chopin (no. 13); an ironic ländler, inspired by Mahler, one of Shostakovich's favourite composers (no. 15); a melancholic Slavic theme and variations (no. 16); a popular song (no. 17); sarabands (nos. 18 and 24); a majestic chorale interspersed with piquant and sometimes unsettling commentary (no. 19); and an aria (no. 23).

### The Fugues

In the 24 fugues, Shostakovich shows his profound understanding of contrapuntal language (no. 12). He does not hesitate to apply the rules of the art to develop double fugues (nos. 4 and 24). Whether he is writing for two (no. 9), three, four, or five voices (no. 13, whose layout and range irresistibly evoke the organ), what Shostakovich produces is neither a pastiche nor a simple exercise in style. Rather, while respecting the linearity of the parts, he shows his imagination in creating fugal subjects (no. 21), and in enriching them with modal colours (nos. 20 and 23) and with elements borrowed from Russian folklore (nos. 4, 17, 18, and 20). This results in, for example, fugue no. 16, in which there is an original encounter between delicate ornamentation reminiscent of the harpsichord of Bach or Couperin, and a chant with oriental inflexions.

Rhythmically, the composer likes frequent changes of measure (nos. 15 and 20), and follows trends established by his contemporaries who were drawn by the fugue: Hindemith (no. 14), Stravinsky, Bartok (nos. 12 and 15, in which chromatic marcatisimogaily jostles with rhythmic squareness). At times he toys with atonality without ever really adopting it (no. 19). Alone, the final double fugue (no. 24) synthesizes the spirit that animates this unique 20th-century collection: respectful of Bach in its first section, it slides towards Romanticism before becoming 'pure' Shostakovich. It ends in a quasi-symphonic apotheosis, with a masterly superimposition of the two subjects.

More than half a century has passed since opus 87 was composed and became part of the standard repertoire of pianists. We have enough hindsight now to appreciate the real value of this work, which symbolizes a kind of return to life for a musician who was tormented by many trials. In creating these little musical jewels, Shostakovich fully realized himself, defied the backward ideas of his critics, and uttered a message impregnated with sadness, serenity, intimacy, and humour. In doing so, the composer became in his own way a 20th-century Bach. ■

## DAVID JALBERT

PIANO



A virtuoso with a warm, elegant style and a wide-ranging repertoire, pianist David Jalbert has established himself among the elite of a new generation of classical musicians: "Jalbert's piano playing is remarkable for its sweep, confidence, sensitivity, power and colour, what more can we ask?" (*Fanfare*). Named by the CBC among the 15 best Canadian pianists of all time, Mr. Jalbert performs regularly as a soloist and recitalist in Canada and across the globe. His solo recordings – of the Goldberg Variations, the Shostakovich Preludes and Fugues, of American, French and Russian piano music – have all garnered international praise in venues ranging from *Gramophone* to *France-Culture*.

An accomplished chamber musician, he has collaborated with artists such as Nicola Benedetti, Jean-Philippe Collard and the Quatuor Alcan, and is a member of Triple Forte (along with violinist Jasper Wood and cellist Denise Djokic). As a soloist, he has also collaborated with conductors such as Yannick Nézet-Séguin, Skitch Henderson, Christoph Campestrini, Bramwell Tovey and many more. A national and international prize-winner, David Jalbert has won six Opus Awards (including one this year for his recording of ballet transcriptions by Stravinsky and Prokofiev), was nominated four times for "Classical Album of the Year" at the Juno Awards, and was the 2007 laureate of the prestigious Virginia Parker Prize of the Canada Council for the Arts.

He holds degrees from the Juilliard School, the Glenn Gould School, Université de Montréal and Conservatoire de Musique du Québec, and is now Associate Professor of Piano at the University of Ottawa, as well as a member of the faculty at the Orford Music Academy. ■

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