

Art Babayants - Eliška Benešová - Radka Hanáková

Gould-berg Variations



The Czech-Canadian multidisciplinary project *Gould-berg Variations* presents a devised multi-sensory production exploring intersections of sonic, visual and kinetic elements in response to J.S. Bach's music. Inspired by the Canadian pianist Glenn Gould (1932-1982) who challenged the way Bach's famous Goldberg Variations (1741) variations can be played, also Eliška Benešová (dance), Radka Hanáková (piano) and Art Babayants (lighting design and mise en scène) challenge how Bach's music can be performed and perceived by allowing dance and theatre layers to interact in playful and often humorous ways with the live playing of *Goldberg Variations* rather than simply use the music as accompaniment. The project will be developed throughout 2026 to be premiered in Prague to a live audience at the Inspiration Theatre. It will then be presented in Germany and in 2027, the year Glenn Gould would have turned 95 years old, we will bring the project to Canada to be presented in Montreal's Salle Multimedia at Conservatoire de l'art dramatique.



MUSIC

The *Goldberg Variations* BWV 988 represent a perfectly symmetrical, musical-architectural gem. With its breadth and content, it is completely unique in the history of classical music. The Aria and thirty variations (32 parts altogether) can be divided into two halves - 16 and 16. The so-called "Goldberg theme" appears for the first time in the bass line in the Aria. This theme, this essence, runs like an invisible thread through each variation and through the entire work. Although listeners perceive an infinite variety of characters, colours and textures, they do not quite realise that this is in fact a masterful recycling of constantly repeating material - a powerful analogy of our world, its past, present and future. Bach thereby demonstrates that true freedom of spirit can only be achieved after recognising, mastering and respecting a strictly given form.



Listen to the *Goldberg Variations* by Radka Hanáková on <https://open.spotify.com/artist/1L91EZBbrzSoIL0KYCi5gM>

DANCE/THEATRE/LIGHTING DESIGN

Performed by two female artists on stage - a pianist and a dancer, interchangeably leading each other, the *Gould-berg Variations* challenges the typical relation between the classical music and dance where music commonly dictates the movement. The artists explore a creation of a complex theatre dramaturgy where Bach's mathematical precision is complimented and challenged by imprecise, improvisational movement. Famous for his unorthodox lighting designs and the use of practical lights on stage, theatre director Art Babayants joins the two artists to explore how the third element - light can provide an additional layer making what is expected invisible and what is unexpected visible.

Our approach will be to create an aesthetic that gives the audience an opportunity to become active listeners of the piece rather than passive receivers - for example, by taking a breath with the dancer at the start of a particular musical phrase or holding their breath throughout a few bars and then exhaling together on a diminuendo. We would like to infuse this sort of engagement and exploration with humour (another signature element of Gould's thoughts on music and musicians) and create a more relaxed way of perceiving classical music. Alternatively, the more serious admirers of Glen Gould would especially enjoy how Gould's signature performative elements, such as an extremely low chair, hunched posture and his propensity for humming the melody, would transform into dance sequences. All audience members, no matter what their understanding of classical repertoire is, enjoy a rich visual palette of the interaction of dance and light, and especially the absence of light at certain parts of the performance. We will explore the potential playfulness of the chiaroscuro effect that could be achieved through the use of practical lights on stage. Chiaroscuro tends to create powerful contrast between light and darkness, often allowing the audience to see a silhouette of the dancer and a musician with a 'halo of light' around it. Overall, the piece will comment on the value of constant re-interpretation, including humorous interpretation, rather than blind adherence to tradition - something that Glen Gould would have advocated for. It is also an opportunity for the three artists with different national and training backgrounds to collaborate and find a new aesthetic language, inspired by both Bach and Gould.

The performance brings a timeless and at the same time highly topical theme of the search for the meaning of human existence, the importance of creative dialogue, cooperation and tolerance.



This project is a collaboration of Canadian-Armenian theatre director and playwright Art Babayants, PhD (mise en scène, lighting design), Czech dance creator and performer Eliška Benešová, DiS. (choreography and dance interpretation), and Czech-Canadian pianist MgA. Radka Hanáková, DMA (piano interpretation).

Art Babayants

mise en scène, lighting design

Art Babayants/ Արտ Բաբայանց is a Canadian-Armenian theatre artist who has worked with professional, semi-professional and amateur theatre and film makers in Canada, Russia, Turkey and a few other locations across the globe. He also holds a PhD in Theatre and Performance Studies and runs an experimental theatre company - [Toronto Laboratory Theatre](#), an open collective focusing on multilingual work developed by immigrant and refugee artists living and working in Canada.



His stage work now comprises musicals, such as Seussical. The Musical (2009 and 2018), Gypsy (2011), Godspell (2014 and 2022), and Spring Awakening (2019, 2024), The Drowsy Chaperone (2023); contemporary Canadian drama, including Couldn't We Be (2008), The...Musician: An Etude (2012 and 2014), and Wine&Halva (2024); devised performances, including several presentations of "In Sundry Languages" between 2015-2019; and opera, The Diary of One Who Disappeared by Leoš Janáček. His best-known work, a devised collaborative multilingual production "In Sundry Languages" was presented at Toronto Fringe (2017) and Caminos (2017) and called by NOW 'a compelling critique of Canadian inclusiveness'.

In 2023, his first dramatic text Bros/Les gars, translated into French by Governor General Award Winner Mishka Lavigne, speaks about experiences of gay immigrants to Canada and questions the hospitality of "Canadian culture". The play received a reading (in French) at the National Arts Centre in Ottawa in 2023 (directed by Manolis Antoniou). In 2023, it premiered in Saskatoon at La Troupe du jour and received the Excellence in New Work Award (Saskatoon Theatre Awards 2023).

Art continues to teach Acting, Movement, Dramaturgy, Directing, Multilingual Theatre to a new generation of anglophone, francophone and allophone theatre artists hoping that they will eventually start breaking cultural and linguistic silos imposed upon them by previous generations and begin to seek connectedness and acceptance rather than rely on and profit from existing social divides. He also travels around the world to give workshops on Multilingual Theatre and Dramaturgy and collaborating with collectives that promote diversity and new approaches to theatre creation.

Read more: <https://www.artbabayants.ca/>

Eliška Benešová

dance, choreography

Eliška is a dancer, lecturer, creator and performer from the Czech Republic. She studied dance at the Prague Dance Conservatory, the Duncan Centre Conservatory in Prague and abroad at the Escuela Profesional de Danza de Mazatlán in Mexico. She is a certified instructor of the Fighting Monkey educational program, in which she has been actively developing her movement and teaching skills since 2017. In 2023, she founded the 23 Poems Collective, focused on the development and support of multi-genre and international collaboration. She currently also works as a dance lecturer at the Duncan Centre Conservatory.



Since 2020, Eliška has been engaged in original work at the intersection of dance, theatre and fine arts. She is the co-author of the CUBE project (2020-2022), a dance performance created in collaboration with sculptor Kristýna Kužvartová, presented at the Pragovka Gallery and Studio Alta, expanded with a short experimental film created with Lukáš Hausenblas and Michal HōR Horáček for the online version of the EITAI festival in Querétaro, Mexico. In 2021, she created the original dance-theater performance FEAR for the HABITAT cultural-social center in Oaxaca.

In 2023, Eliška presented her original performance Cube_performance of a person and an object, based on the CUBE project, this time in collaboration with Markéta Vacovská (dramaturgical consultation) and musician Libor Mikyška (premiere in the cultural space of the University of Ljubljana). In the same year, she initiated the creation of the 23 Poems Collective, with which she further developed the S.I.O. project - site-specific performance and workshops for the public. This collaboration resulted in the debut production S.I.O. - Sides of In and Out - Performance in Process (cultural space of the University of Ljubljana, 16. 5. 2024).

In 2025, she is preparing two new productions in international collaboration - Poetries Entangled (premiere 30. 9. 2025, Ponec Theatre) with the 23 Poems Collective and The Gould-berg Variations.

Read more: <https://www.eliskabenesova.cz/>

Radka Hanáková

piano performance

Czech-Canadian pianist Dr. Radka Hanáková enjoys her diverse musical career as a soloist, chamber and collaborative musician, researcher, and music educator. Born in the Czech Republic, she has performed at festivals throughout Austria, Poland, Canada and the Czech Republic. She perceives music interpretation as complex, innate expression that reflects both personal and creative journey of the performer in a profound coexistence. As such she strives to share this experience with her audiences and students.



Radka's notable appearances include a debut in Koerner Hall with the "Six Pianos" production by Soundstreams, collaboration with the National Theatre in Prague, Opera Nova, solo performance in Oskar Morawetz's centenary concert that has been recorded and broadcasted by the CBC, and a multiple realisation of Karlheinz Stockhausen's electroacoustic piece *Kontakte*. Radka's recent projects include both solo and chamber music performances for Archaion Kallos Festival, solo recitals in Canada,

Czech Republic, Germany, and England as well as performances of Franz Schubert's *Winterreise* with the Czech tenor Čeněk Svoboda.

Radka obtained her B.A. and M.A. from the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague, studying with Miroslav Langer. During that time she also attended a year study internship at the Karol Szymanowski Academy of Music in Katowice, Poland. In 2011 Radka Hanáková moved to Canada to study at the Glenn Gould School in Toronto with John Perry and David Louie. After graduating from the Artist Diploma Program, she started pursuing her Doctor in Musical Arts in Piano Performance at the University of Toronto, studying with Professor James Parker, which she completed in 2020. Her doctoral thesis *Oskar Morawetz: the Czech Prism* focuses on the oeuvre of the Czech-Canadian composer Oskar Morawetz (1917 - 2007). In the practical part of her research, Radka performed for the first time in history Morawetz's piece *Fantasy in D* in the composer's native land. In 2020 Radka Hanáková released her debut solo recording *Goldberg Variations*.

Read more: <https://radka-hanakova-com.webnode.page/>