

Johann Gottlieb Goldberg is generally remembered today on account of the so-called Goldberg Variations, although this set of variations by Johann Sebastian Bach was actually entitled “Aria with diverse variations”. However, it is unjust to reduce the merits of Bach’s pupil, who died at the age of 29, to his role as harpsichordist of Count Hermann Carl von Keyserlingk (1696–1764), for Goldberg’s chamber music surpasses the average compositions of his time to such a degree that the Trio Sonata in C major was long considered to be a work by his teacher (BWV 1037).

Johann Gottlieb Goldberg (sometimes Golberg, Gollberg or Goltberg) was baptized on 14 March 1727 in the Protestant Marienkirche in Gdansk, probably only a few days after his birth as the son of the well-known lute and violin maker Johann Goldberg. We lack more information on his youth and education, but he may well have been tutored first by the local capellmeister Johann Balthasar Christian Freisslich (1687–1764), before Keyserlingk discovered him and arranged for him to move to Dresden, where he apparently became a student of Wilhelm Friedemann Bach. No later than 1742, at the age of fifteen years, he was in Leipzig, where he was “one of the most excellent pupils of the great Seb. Bach in composition and on the keyboard”, according to testimony given by Ernst Ludwig Gerber in 1790. In 1791, Johann Friedrich Reichardt reported, “Of his immense skill wonderful things are told: he is said to have played the most difficult things easily and fluently not only at sight, but also with the page upside down. [...] He was engaged in music day and night and didn’t concern himself with anything

else.” Johann Wilhelm Hertel as well, who met Goldberg in Berlin 1747/48, admired his sight reading: “Never was anyone more adept at playing *à livre ouvert*, for which reason he was called the Notenfresser (Music Glutton).” In the *New Historic-Biographical Encyclopedia of Musicians*, published in 1812, Gerber ended his report on Goldberg, which he had based upon Reichardt, with the phrase, “For the rest, he was melancholic and extremely obstinate.”

In 1751 he became a chamber musician in Count Heinrich von Brühl’s (1700–1763) ensemble in Dresden as the successor of Gottlob Harrer (1703–1755), who had become the choir director at St. Thomas in Leipzig after Bach’s death in 1750. Goldberg may have composed his harpsichord concertos for the Brühl ensemble. In 1805, Reichardt wrote in his autobiography, published in the Berlin Musical Journal, that Goldberg “had led a most strange, stubborn life in the house of the Minister Count Bruhl.” Here he died of tuberculosis, and was buried in St. John’s Cemetery on 15 April 1756.

Goldberg is said to have destroyed most of his compositions; others are now lost. Four trio sonatas (BP1463, 1488, 1494 and 2720) and the c minor quartet have survived in sources in the Berlin State Library - Prussian Cultural Heritage. The set of parts of the quartet (shelf mark: Mus. ms. 7920) was originally labeled “Sonata | per | 2. Violini | Viola | e | Basso | Di Sig^e Goldberg.” The scribe of these parts demonstrated a careless lack of understanding concerning phrasing and bass figures. Analogy allowed the supplementation of some slurs. In the source of the Allegro fugue, bar 72, 2nd violin, the b-flat accidental is missing for the last beat.