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Ressort: Kunst, Kultur und Musik

Bach in Space

Wiener Konzerthaus, 27.04.2026 [ENA]

At the Vienna Konzerthaus, Bach in Space offers an unusually compelling fusion of live piano performance and cosmic imagery, and the concept proves far more than a novelty. What might on paper sound like a multimedia experiment reveals itself in practice as a remarkably coherent act of musical imagination. The idea is simple but potent: the universe is projected in vast, high-resolution images while Mona Asuka performs selected works by Johann Sebastian Bach on the piano. Yet the simplicity of the premise conceals its deeper effect. Bach's music, so often approached as abstract perfection, suddenly acquires a spatial dimension. It seems to expand outward, to breathe in relation to the stars, nebulae, and galaxies unfolding across the screen.

This is not because Bach requires illustration. On the contrary, his music has always contained an almost cosmic order of its own. But the visual context sharpens our awareness of its architecture. In the Well-Tempered Clavier, the listener hears not merely a sequence of preludes and fugues, but a living system of proportion, tension, and release. In the Goldberg Variations, Bach's genius for transformation becomes especially vivid: every variation feels like a change of perspective on the same immutable structure, much as the telescope repeatedly alters our view of the same universe.

Mona Asuka is ideally suited to such a project. She is a pianist with the rare ability to combine clarity, imagination, and emotional poise. Her Bach playing is never dry or academic, but it is also free of mannerism. She understands that Bach on the modern concert grand must retain rhythmic precision and articulation while still allowing for expressive color. In this performance, she finds exactly that balance. Her phrasing is supple without becoming sentimental, her touch varied but never exaggerated, and her sense of line exceptionally strong. Most importantly, she gives the impression of thinking through the music in real time, so that each phrase feels discovered rather than simply repeated.

What makes the evening especially effective is the relationship between sound and image. The NASA and ESA projections do not compete with the music; instead, they expand the listener's attention. The immense scale of the visuals does not dwarf the piano but places it in a different perceptual field. Bach's counterpoint, often described in architectural terms, is here experienced almost physically. One begins to hear how voices interlock like celestial movements, how sequences return like orbiting bodies, how harmonic tension can feel as immaterial and inevitable as gravity. The result is not merely synesthetic, but contemplative. The concert encourages a rare kind of listening: alert, spacious, and inwardly expansive.

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This is also why the project succeeds as an introduction to Bach for audiences who may not regularly attend solo recitals. The visual environment lowers the threshold of entry without diluting the musical substance. Those already familiar with Bach will appreciate the freshness of the framing, while newcomers may find that the images help them enter the emotional and formal logic of the music more intuitively. It is an intelligent way to present a composer whose work can sometimes be wrongly perceived as distant or severe. In fact, Bach is one of the most human of composers precisely because his order never feels mechanical; it is animated by devotion, curiosity, and profound expressive life.

The Vienna Konzerthaus is an excellent setting for such a venture. Its acoustics allow the piano to project with warmth and detail, while the great hall provides the scale needed for a project of this visual ambition. Nothing about the presentation feels cramped or gimmicky. Instead, the event benefits from a clear artistic identity: it is neither a lecture nor a spectacle, but a genuine concert experience with an imaginative conceptual frame. The Italian Concerto, too, gains an unusual freshness in this setting, its dialogue between brilliance and intimacy reading almost as a miniature drama of light and distance.

What ultimately lingers is the sense that Bach's music and the universe belong together not because they are the same, but because both confront us with order, mystery, and infinity. Bach in Space does not explain that mystery away. It lets us feel it. And that is its greatest achievement. By pairing live Bach with images of the cosmos, the concert creates a space where contemplation becomes almost inevitable. It reminds us that great music can change not only how we hear, but how we see. In that sense, the evening is more than a successful crossover project: it is a moving meditation on beauty, structure, and the endlessness of artistic and cosmic imagination.

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