

2012th Concert

June 9, 1991

LEON BATES, *pianist*

PROGRAM

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart Phantasie in C Minor, K. 475
(1756-1791) (1785)

Johannes Brahms Variations on a Theme by Handel
(1833-1897) (1861)

INTERMISSION
(*Twelve Minutes*)

Friedrich Gulda Prelude and Fugue
(b. 1930)

Arthur Cunningham Engrams
(b. 1928) (1970)

Béla Bartók Sonata (1926)
(1881-1945)

Allegro moderato
Sostenuto e pesante
Allegro molto

• Pianist LEON BATES was born in Philadelphia, where he began his formal study of piano and violin at the age of six. He was a pupil of the late Irene Beck at Philadelphia's Settlement Music School and of Natalie Hinderas at Temple University, both of whom recognized his musical genius and groomed him for a concert career. As a college student, Leon Bates won the National Association of Music Teachers Collegiate Artists Competition, and went on to win the National Association of Negro Musicians Competition, the Philadelphia Orchestra Senior Auditions, the Symphony of the New World Competition, and the Rhode Island International Competition. More recently, he has been awarded a National Endowment for the Arts Solo Recitalists Fellowship grant and an honorary doctorate from Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Virginia.

Mr. Bates' career as a performer has taken him to many of the world's important cultural centers, and he has appeared with the Orchestra of France, the Vienna Symphony, the Sinfonia dell' Accademia Nazionale di

Santa Cecilia in Rome, and the symphony orchestras of Victoria, British Columbia, Strasbourg, France, and Basel, Switzerland. In 1988 he performed to enthusiastic ovations at Milan's *La Scala*, and in 1989 undertook a major tour of the United States featuring a program of works by George Gershwin entitled "Gershwin by Request". Mr. Bates is a sports enthusiast and a disciplined body builder, which he feels aids his playing ability. He has recorded for Orion and Performance Records and appears at the National Gallery by arrangement with Joanne Rile Artists Management, Inc., of Jenkintown, Pennsylvania.

Mozart's *Phantasie in C Minor* is his most significant work in this genre, which can be described as written down improvisation. The composer's genius is revealed in that, with all the flights of freedom and imagination that characterize his improvisations, the work has well balanced structural logic.

Just as the *Phantasie* is acknowledged as Mozart's finest work in that form, so also the *Variations on a Theme of Handel* have come to be respected as Brahms' best theme and variations for piano. The theme comes from the last section of Handel's *Suite in B-flat Major* for harpsichord, where it appears with five variations. Brahms provides the theme with twenty-five variations and a fugue, which explore as they unfold the contrasts of color, texture and emotional content that can be achieved at the piano. Always the master of counterpoint and harmony, Brahms carries the keyboard fugue to new heights in the intensely climatic fugue with which he closes the work.

The Austrian composer and pianist Friedrich Gulda is one of the more enigmatic figures among contemporary musicians, in that he abandoned a promising career as a classical pianist after fifteen years of successful concertizing to branch out into jazz. He founded a jazz combo in the 1950s and mixed classical repertoire into his jazz club appearances and jazz into his classical recitals, much to the consternation of some of his more conservative European audiences. During the 1960s Gulda founded a big band which he called the Eurojazz Orchestra and initiated a modern jazz competition in Vienna and an international conference on improvisation. Offered an award for outstanding achievement in music by the city of Vienna, he returned it as a protest against the established music education system, which he found far too conservative.

Arthur Cunningham is another composer for whom jazz has been an important influence. Having been a jazz performer as a youth, he has drawn from that experience in many of the compositions he has written later in life, as well as from rock music and the serial techniques prevalent in the 1960s and 1970s.

Next to Stravinsky and Schoenberg, Béla Bartók has proven to be the most influential composer of the twentieth century, and his *Sonata* (1926) is his largest keyboard work. Continuously striving for new frontiers of sound, Bartók here treated the piano as a percussion instrument, with tone clusters playing an important role. Although tonally adventurous, the work uses traditional forms: the first movement is in sonata-allegro form, the second is in three distinct sections with the repeat pattern ABA (ternary form), and the third is a rondo with variations.