

Upcoming Events of the Seventy-Fifth Season of The William Nelson Cromwell and F. Lamot Belin Concerts

West Garden Trio
Piano Trios by Kenji Bunch, Charles Ives,
and Paul Schoenfield
May 31, 12:10
West Building, East Garden Court

Eclipse Chamber Orchestra
Music by Piazzolla and Vivaldi
June 4, 4:00
East Building Auditorium

General Information

Admission to the National Gallery of Art and all of its programs is free of charge, except as noted.

The use of cameras or recording equipment during the performance is not allowed. Please be sure that all portable electronic devices are turned off.

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Cover Raoul Dufy, *Blue Train* (detail), 1920–1935, National Gallery of Art, Washington, The John U. and Evelyn S. Nef Collection

75TH SEASON OF CONCERTS

MAY 21, 2017 • NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART



PROGRAM

4:00 • East Building Auditorium

Poulenc Trio

Liang Wang, oboe

Bryan Young, bassoon

Irina Kaplan Lande, piano

Jean Françaix (1912 - 1997)

Trio for Oboe, Bassoon, and Piano

Adagio; Allegro molto

Andante

Finale

Camille Saint-Saëns (1835 - 1931)

Sonata for Oboe and Piano, op. 166

Andantino

Ad libitum; Allegretto; Ad libitum

Molto allegro

Gioachino Rossini (1792 - 1868)

Arr. Charles Triébert and Eugene Jancourt

Fantaisie Concertante on themes from *Semiramide*

Intermission

Viet Cuong (b. 1990)

Trains of Thought

Animation by Elizabeth and Alden Phelps

Alfred Schnittke (1934 - 1998)

Arr. Mikhail Krutik

Suite in the Old Style

Pastorale

Ballet

Minuet

Fugue

Pantomime

Dmitri Shostakovich (1906 - 1975)

Arr. Anatoly Trofimov

"Romance," op. 97a, from *The Gadfly*

"A Spin through Moscow," from *Moscow-Cheryomushki*, op. 105

The Musicians

The Poulenc Trio is the most active touring piano-wind chamber music ensemble in the world. Since its founding in 2003, the trio has performed throughout the United States and at music festivals around the world, including the Ravello Festival in Italy, the San Miguel de Allende Festival in Mexico, and the White Nights Festival in Russia, where the group toured and premiered two new works with violinist Hilary Hahn.

In a recent review, the *New York Times* praised the trio for its "elegant rendition" of Piazzolla's tangos. The *Washington Post* said the trio "does its namesake proud" in "an intriguing and beautifully played program" with "convincing elegance, near effortless lightness and grace." A recent performance in Florida — for which the *Palm Beach Post* praised the group's "polished loveliness" and the *Palm Beach Daily News* said the "potent combination" of oboe, bassoon, and piano had "captured the magic of chamber music" — was rebroadcast on American Public Media's nationally syndicated radio program *Performance Today*. The trio has garnered positive attention in recent full-length profiles by *Chamber Music* magazine and the *Double Reed Journal* and has been called "virtuosos of classical and contemporary chamber music" in a profile on Russian television.

The Poulenc Trio has a strong commitment to commissioning, performing, and recording new works from living composers. Since its founding, the trio has greatly expanded the repertoire available for the oboe, bassoon, and piano, with no fewer than twenty-two new works written for and premiered by the group, including three triple concertos for the trio and full orchestra.

The Poulenc Trio launched a pioneering concert series called Music at the Museum, in which musical performances are paired with museum exhibitions, with special appearances from guest artists and curators. As part of the series, the trio has collaborated with the National Gallery in Washington, DC, the Walters Art Museum, the Baltimore Museum of Art, and the Hermitage State Museum in Russia.

The trio is deeply engaged in musical and educational outreach programs, including Pizza and Poulenc, an informal performance and residency series for younger audiences. The trio regularly conducts master classes, most recently at the University of Ohio, San Francisco State University, Florida State University, and the University of Colima in Mexico.

Program Notes

Trio for Oboe, Bassoon, and Piano

Jean Françaix was a modern French composer very much in the neoclassical tradition of Poulenc: he eschewed the trends of atonality and the rejection of traditional form, choosing wit, color, and a supple lightness in the service of producing musical “pleasure.” Prolific throughout his life, Françaix was a piano virtuoso, an active performer, a skilled orchestrator, and a composer in myriad forms and ensembles. Like great French composers, Françaix had a skillful penchant for the wind instruments.

The Trio for Oboe, Bassoon, and Piano was commissioned by the International Double Reed Society for its 24th Festival in 1994. The Trio is astonishing for its modernity and accessibility. In the tradition of neoclassicism, the music is simultaneously familiar from the past, yet new and different, undeniably of the present. But where the original neoclassicists looked to the eighteenth century and earlier for their inspiration, Françaix, in this work, seems to look back within his own lifespan. In a new loop of neoclassical spirit, the music evokes the popular sounds of a young modernism in the early twentieth century: syncopated urban rhythms, musical theater, the exuberance and occasional plaintive nostalgia of contemporary man. The strengths of the composition are its exquisite detail and complexity, the virtuosic demands placed on the performer, and the expert use of the idiomatic qualities of the instruments. Françaix’s thoughts are as refreshing as his music:

It’s difficult for a composer to talk about his own works. If he praises them, he is accused of boasting; if he disparages them, he is considered guilty of false modesty. If he dissects them into theme A and theme B, musicologists will applaud, but musicians will find him boring. If the work is of any value, it will need no explanation; if it is of no value, no esoteric commentary will render it any better. . . . All I ask my listeners is to open their ears and be brave enough to decide whether they like my music or not. I don’t want any intermediary between me and my listeners trying to sway their judgment one way or the other. They should remember they are free human beings, not obedient automata. I want them to crush snobbery, fashion, and envy with the power of common sense and to enjoy my music if it gives them pleasure; which of course I hope it does.

Adapted from a text by Kai Christensen

Fantaisie Concertante on themes from Semiramide

This *Concert-Fantasy*, based on tunes from Rossini’s last Italian opera, *Semiramide*, is from a collection of delightful opera-inspired arrangements dating from nineteenth-century Paris and the salon music of that time. It contains works by the opera composers Rossini and Donizetti, favorites of the Parisian audiences, in arrangements by the oboe and bassoon virtuosos (and Conservatoire professors) of the day: Charles Triébert, Henri Brod, and Eugène Jancourt. These works were not only “tuneful” but enabled the performers to show off their ample virtuosity.

Semiramide is based on Voltaire’s tragedy *Semiramis*, which in turn was based on the legend of Queen Semiramis of Babylon. It has been called “the last opera of the great baroque tradition: the most beautiful, the most imaginative, possibly the most complete; but also, irremediably, the last.” *Program notes provided by the Poulenc Trio*

Trains of Thought

Composer’s Note on *Trains of Thought*

My goal in writing *Trains of Thought* was to aurally bring life to the mind’s stream of consciousness. Ideas are usually interconnected in the mind through a cohesive sequence of events, but their journeys and destinations can be unpredictable. In this way, the piece deals with the listener’s expectations and attempts to convincingly manipulate them. As the mind deviates from and returns to an original idea, the idea’s return is often informed by its travels. References to the exciting kinetic energy of an actual locomotive can be heard.

Elizabeth Phelps on *Trains of Thought’s* Animation

When Irina approached me about animating *Trains of Thought*, Alden and I had been experimenting on and off in the studio with stop-action animation for several years and the idea of combining stop-motion visuals with live chamber music was intriguing. I had first heard *Trains of Thought* in concert a year earlier and had been delighted and entranced by its driving energy and sense of locomotion. I loved how Viet’s ideas about stream of consciousness played out in the music, his themes and motifs weaving like our thoughts toward a certain end, repeatedly deviating from and returning to, informing and enriching his original musical idea.

I came to animation via live puppetry, theater, and film production. In those worlds, music most often acts as an underscore, part of the scaffolding for a visual or textual narrative. In this project, the music itself needed to be center stage with the animation acting as a complement, illuminating the musical ideas rather than overwhelming them with a strong linear story. The music needed to drive the visuals instead of the other way around. This was new territory for me. I began by deconstructing the piece phrase by phrase, trying to understand how it worked and taking meticulous notes about tempo and timing, living closely with it as music for two months and thinking about it conceptually before allowing myself to approach it visually.

Many of the central visual choices in the piece came about because I was building and shooting it by myself in a small studio within a time frame that was very short for the size of the project. The choice to photograph flat paper figures from above on interchangeable sections of landscape imposed helpful limits on construction and production, as well as saving space and avoiding a lot of specialized rigging. Manipulating scale and proportion opened up interesting possibilities while limiting the need to build most things in multiple sizes. Manually composing as much of the action as possible in real space and time spared us hours of post-production computer work and intentionally made the manipulation process visible in the final piece.

The Poulenc Trio’s rendering of *Trains of Thought* suggests the smart elegance of mid-century New York City to me with a whiff of memory and dream. I drew heavily from old *New Yorker* artists, digging deeply into cover illustrations of city brownstones as well

as Helen Hokinson's funny society ladies, and the wonderful line drawings and paper-bag masks of Saul Steinberg. Viet's musical observations about stream of consciousness took me to the surrealists and to M. C. Escher's drawings of buildings and cities which weave endlessly in and out of themselves. Both the landscape and the figures were cut from dozens of prepared papers and layered with found materials to add texture and dimension. The construction and the manipulation of these objects was painstaking, much of it done with tweezers over the course of six months.

The rehearsal process was a different kind of challenge. I conceived the visual sequences with fluid transitions so the trio doesn't have to hit hard "marks," since they're unable to watch the video while they play; the difficult task of keeping the music in sync with the visuals remains. Working through that together was a lively and exacting process. There were all sorts of wonderful surprises as it began to come together and we could see the music and the images folding into each other, driving and reinforcing each other in unexpected and playful ways, tiny changes in timing and synchronicity eliciting very different effects. My hope is that the animation will reflect the brightness and energy of the music, adding a layer of possibility to the audience's experience of it and maybe even making them smile.

Suite in the Old Style

Following the death of Dimitri Shostakovich in 1975, Alfred Schnittke emerged as Russia's most prominent composer. Under the Soviet regime, Schnittke's excursions into modernism sometimes met with official disapproval, and he was for a while banned from traveling outside Russia. During the less repressive period of the 1980s, however, he fared better. At that time, too, Russian performers like Gidon Kremer, Mstislav Rostropovich, and Gennady Rozhdestvensky began introducing his music to audiences in the West and in Japan. Schnittke soon became one of the world's best-known living composers.

In a cruel counter to this rising recognition, Schnittke's health steadily worsened. In 1985, he suffered a near-fatal stroke. Thereafter he was stricken by a succession of further strokes up to the one that killed him in 1998. Throughout these last years, he continued to compose to the extent that he was able. In 1997, by then partially paralyzed, he laboriously completed his Ninth Symphony by scrawling the notes with his left hand. He lived just long enough to hear a tape of the symphony's first performance from June 1998. He was at that time living in Germany, having moved there in 1991 to teach at the Hamburg Institute for Music.

During the later 1950s, while he was still studying at the Moscow Conservatory, Schnittke became intrigued by the 12-tone music of Schoenberg and Webern. By the mid-1960s, however, he abandoned serialism in favor of a technique that he labeled "polystylism." "The goal of my life," he once explained, "is to unify serious music and light music, even if I break my neck doing so." He fashioned for himself a musical language that freely mixed musical styles and that boldly moved between the traditional and the avant-garde, the classic and the modern.

While far removed from the most radical of his compositions, *Suite in the Old Style* carries traces of Schnittke's arresting eclecticism. Written in 1972 as a duo for violin and piano, the *Suite* draws upon music that Schnittke produced as soundtracks for films. Schnittke, like other Soviet composers, was often called upon to compose movie scores. In Schnittke's case, these assignments often afforded him a freedom to employ techniques that would have been taboo for use in his concert works. As in Grieg's *Suite in the Old Style*, more commonly known as the *Hoberg Suite*, the term old-style in Schnittke's title refers to the baroque. Schnittke based his suite on music he had written for the movies. It consists of five movements: a gentle Pastoral, a bouncy Ballet, an unusually slow Minuet, a vigorous Fugue, and, in a distinct sampling of the composer's polystylistic technique, an easy-going, melodious Pantomime that slides momentarily into an eerily dissonant section that is far distant from any baroque practice. *Program notes provided by the Poulenc Trio*

"Romance," op. 97a, from *The Gadfly*

"A Spin through Moscow," from *Moscow-Cheryomushki*, op. 105

In a musical career spanning half a century, Shostakovich engrossed himself with a staggeringly diverse range of genres and styles. Beyond the fifteen symphonies and fifteen string quartets, the lesser-known works of Shostakovich offer equal intrigue and interest. With the reappraisal of Shostakovich in recent times, his light music is beginning to enjoy unprecedented popularity in concert halls and record catalogues.

The Gadfly (1955) is probably Shostakovich's best-known film score. It is an orchestral suite of incidental music from the film, which was based on a novel of the same name by Ethel Lilian Voynich. Set in 1840s Italy under the dominance of Austria, a time of tumultuous revolt and uprisings, the story centers on the illegitimate son of a cardinal who joins the fight to unite Italy. When caught, he faces the firing squad as a willing martyr. It is a story of faith, disillusionment, revolution, romance, and heroism.

The Gadfly was exceptionally popular in the Soviet Union, exerting a large cultural influence. It was compulsory reading in the Soviet Union and the top best seller; indeed by the time of Voynich's death, *The Gadfly* is estimated to have sold 2,500,000 copies in the Soviet Union alone. Shostakovich composed the score for the film of the same name. Its most famous section, "Romance," was used in the BBC/PBS TV series, *Reilly, Ace of Spies*.

Moscow-Cheryomushki (1958) is a three-act comic operetta in a bewildering variation of styles, from the romantic idiom to the most vulgar popular songs. The satirical plot deals with one of the most pressing concerns of urban Russians of the day: the chronic housing shortage and the difficulties of securing livable conditions. "Cheryomushki" translates as "bird-cherry trees," the name of a real housing estate in southwest Moscow. "A Spin through Moscow" is the first of the four dance-like movements of the orchestral suite from the operetta. *Program notes provided by the Poulenc Trio*