

The Sixty-seventh Season of
The William Nelson Cromwell
and F. Lammot Belin

Concerts

National Gallery of Art
2,685th Concert

Gilles Vonsattel, *pianist*

Presented in connection with
“Spotlight Switzerland”

October 12, 2008
Sunday Evening, 6:30 pm
West Building, West Garden Court

Admission free



Program

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)

Tocatta in C Minor, BWV 911

Franz Schubert (1797–1828)

Sonata in C Minor, D. 958 (1828)

Allegro

Adagio

Menuetto and Trio: Allegro

Allegro

INTERMISSION

Nico Muhly (b. 1981)

Booklet

Washington Premiere Performance

Luigi Dallapiccola (1904–1975)

Sonatina canonica (1942–1943)

Franz Liszt (1811–1886)

Après une lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi sonata

From *Années de pèlerinage*, Book II (Italy) (1849)

This concert is made possible in part by funds provided by the Swiss Arts Council Pro Helvetia; the Ernst von Siemens Musikstiftung of Munich, Germany; Nespresso; and the Embassy of Switzerland.

The Musician

A laureate of the Cleveland and Dublin piano competitions, Swiss-born pianist Gilles Vonsattel is a 2008 recipient of an Avery Fisher career grant, and was the top prizewinner at the 2006 Geneva International Music Competition. In 2002 he won the Walter W. Naumburg Foundation's International Piano Competition and made his Lincoln Center debut at Alice Tully Hall. He has appeared as soloist with the Boston Pops, the Grand Rapids Symphony Orchestra, the Naples (Florida) Philharmonic Orchestra, the National Symphony of Ireland, the Orchestre de Chambre de Genève, and the Utah Symphony Orchestra.

In addition to two recitals at Lincoln Center's Alice Tully Hall, Vonsattel has performed in Atlanta's Spivey Hall, Boston's Symphony Hall, Cleveland's Severance Hall, Geneva's Victoria Hall, Paris' Musée d'Orsay, San Francisco's Herbst Theatre, Tokyo's Opera City Hall, and Zürich's Tonhalle. Among the festivals at which he has appeared are the Chopin Festival in Warsaw, Poland, the Davos Festival in Davos, Switzerland, and La Roque d'Anthéron in Provence, France. A member of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, Vonsattel has collaborated with renowned chamber musicians Kim Kashkashian, Ida Kavafian, Cho-Liang Lin, Yo-Yo Ma, Paul Neubauer, and David Shifrin.

In October 2007 Vonsattel's recording of Liszt solo works and Beethoven's *Piano Concerto no. 1* with l'Orchestre de Chambre de Genève was released on the Pan Classics label to critical acclaim. After studying with pianist David Deveau in Boston, Vonsattel received a bachelor of arts degree in political science and economics from Columbia University and a master of music degree from the Juilliard School of Music, where he studied with Jerome Lowenthal. Gilles Vonsattel appears at the National Gallery by arrangement with John Gingrich Management, Inc., of New York City.

The Program

This recital and the concert by Festival Strings Lucerne on October 19 are the culmination of a series of events that began on October 8, when a new film biography, *Alberto Giacometti, Eyes on the Horizon*, was shown at the Gallery. The series continued with films by Swiss filmmakers about artists and performers who were born in Switzerland or made that country their home—concert pianist Martha Argerich; architects Jacques Herzog and Pierre DeMeuron, who designed Beijing’s Olympic stadium; Giacometti; and conceptual artist Roman Signer. This spotlight on Switzerland at the National Gallery is poised between the closing of the internationally renowned film and music festivals in Locarno, Lucerne, Montreux, and Willisau, and the anticipated January 2009 opening of a Gallery exhibition of works by Swiss-born photographer Robert Frank: *Looking In: Robert Frank’s The Americans*.

Composed between 1705 and 1714, Johann Sebastian Bach’s seven keyboard toccatas, BWV 910–916, date from his earliest period of composition. Written after the young Bach traveled to Lübeck to hear Dietrich Buxtehude (1637–1707), the greatest organist of the time, these works were clearly influenced by the master’s *stylus fantasticus*, a free and unrestrained compositional technique. Though the term “toccata” was initially assigned to music written for the lute, by Bach’s time it was also applied to keyboard pieces requiring some amount of facility on the part of the performer, including arpeggios, runs, and flourishes. Bach was free in this genre to use his creativity and legendary improvisational skills with great success. The *C Minor Toccata* begins with a brilliant prelude, followed by an adagio that leads into the first fugue. After a short interlude, a second fugal subject is introduced, which continues to the end, where chordal embellishments tie the piece together.

Franz Schubert's last three piano sonatas were written in the summer of 1828, when he had reached his maturity as a composer and was finally beginning to gain public recognition for his compositions. Ironically, it was also the year of his untimely death at age thirty-one. The pieces from the last years of Schubert's life are profoundly private, and explore the depths of sadness as well as heights of sublime joy. The trilogy of final piano sonatas is ranked with his song cycle *Winterreise*, his *Mass in E-flat Major*, D. 950, and his *String Quintet in C Major*, D. 956, as one of his greatest achievements.

The first of these sonatas, the *Sonata in C Minor*, D. 958, opens with a direct reference to Beethoven's *Thirty-two Variations in C Minor*. Schubert was a great admirer of Beethoven, who had died in 1827. The dark and haunting theme dominates the feeling of the movement, though the second theme is a lyrical cantabile in a major key, which brings in a lighter atmosphere. The coda brings the two themes together and ends the movement in a contemplative mood, which carries over into the beginning of the second movement. Here Schubert plays with two contrasting themes again, but with a different balance, a clear ABABA form. The scherzo continues with restlessness, defined by sudden shifts in rhythm and stops and starts. In the galloping, tarantella-like finale, Schubert again brings in minor and major key changes. The theme, a potentially lyrical melody, remains locked in the somber embrace of the driving rhythmic force and the predominant minor key.

Luigi Dallapiccola was born in Istria, an ethnically Italian region of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, in 1904. As a child during World War I, he experienced prejudice when his family was deported to Austria. Though his musical studies were put on hold, he was exposed to other types of music. When he returned to Istria, he continued his compositional studies, later becoming fascinated with the Second Viennese School. Again subjected to persecution in World War II, as his wife was Jewish, Dallapiccola often gravitated to the theme of liberty in his works.

Despite being first and foremost a pianist, Dallapiccola did not write much music for his instrument, concentrating mostly on opera and other vocal works. His first solo work, *Sonata canonica*, is a delightful piece, neo-classical in style, and based on Paganini's *Caprices*. The four contrasting movements incorporate various contrapuntal techniques employed by the serialist composers.

Born in Vermont in 1981 and raised in Providence, Rhode Island, Nico Muhly graduated from Columbia University in 2003 with a degree in English Literature. In 2004 he received a master of music degree from the Juilliard School, where he studied composition under Christopher Rouse and John Corigliano. Muhly's orchestral works have been premiered by the American Symphony Orchestra, the Boston University Tanglewood Institute Orchestra, the Boston Pops, the Chicago Symphony, and the Juilliard Orchestra. In 2005 the Clare College, Cambridge, Choir broadcast Muhly's *Evensong Canticles* live on BBC3, and New York's Saint Thomas Church commissioned and performed his *Bright Mass with Canons*. With designer and illustrator Maira Kalman, Muhly created a cantata on Strunk and White's *The Elements of Style* that was premiered in the New York Public Library. Described by the *New York Times* as "finely wrought," the cantata earned a place on *New York* magazine's list of the year's best events of 2005. Muhly's film credits include his scores for *Choking Man* (2006) and *Joshua* (2007), and he has worked extensively with Philip Glass as editor, keyboardist, and conductor for numerous film and stage projects. Recently, Muhly conducted excerpts from *Einstein on the Beach* for a new ballet by choreographer Benjamin Millepied at the Opéra de Paris. In October 2007 American Ballet Theatre commissioned and premiered Muhly and Millepied's collaboration *From Here on Out*, and in October 2008 the Paris Opéra Ballet will premiere their newest work, *Triade*.

The works in Franz Liszt's second book of *Années de pèlerinage* (Years of Pilgrimage) were based on his travels in Italy. Of particular influence were the writings, paintings, and sculpture of the Renaissance. *Après une lecture du Dante* (After Reading Dante) was influenced by Dante's *Divine Comedy*, although the title was taken from a Victor Hugo poem of the same name. Fierce in texture, color, and technical difficulty for the performer, the sonata-like fantasy describes Dante's journey through the inferno using two contrasting themes. The opening sequence of tritones, reputed to be "the Devil's interval," and the following first theme represent the descent into the inferno and the suffering of the tormented souls there. The second theme, chorale-like and melodic, prevails triumphantly in the end, witnessing that Liszt, like Dante, saw hell as a place from which rescue is possible and life as a divine drama with a happy ending.

Program notes by Danielle DeSwert

Next week at the National Gallery of Art

Michele Campanella, *pianist*

Sonatas by Domenico Scarlatti

Presented in honor of *Pompeii and the Roman Villa*

October 15, 2008

Wednesday, 12:10 pm

East Building Auditorium

For the convenience of concertgoers
the Garden Café remains open until 6:00 pm.

The use of cameras or recording equipment during the
performance is not allowed. Please be sure that cell phones,
pagers, and other electronic devices are turned off.

Please note that late entry or reentry of
the West Building after 6:30 pm is not permitted.

Music Department
National Gallery of Art
Sixth Street and Constitution Avenue NW
Washington, DC

Mailing address
2000B South Club Drive
Landover, MD 20785

www.nga.gov

Alberto Giacometti, *Walking Man II*, 1960, bronze,
National Gallery of Art, Washington, Gift of Enid A. Haupt