

74TH SEASON OF CONCERTS

MAY 19, 2016 • NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART





Photo by Amy Carmichael Smith

PROGRAM

12:30 • West Building, West Garden Court

Aphrodite Mitsopoulou, piano

Frédéric Chopin (1810 - 1849)

Mazurka in G Minor, op. 67, no. 2

Scherzo no. 2 in B-flat Minor, op. 31

Nikos Skalkottas (1904 - 1949)

"The Trawler," from *The Land and the Sea of Greece*, a ballet suite for piano

Yannis Costantinidis (1903 - 1984)

Eight Dances from the Greek Islands — Suite on Dodecanese Folktunes

Franz Liszt (1811 - 1886)

Étude no. 2, La leggerezza

Étude no. 6 in A Minor

Cosponsored by the Embassy of Greece for the European Month of Culture

The Musicians

Aphrodite Mitsopoulou was born in Greece and started her musical studies in the National Conservatory of Athens. In 2006, she earned her soloist's diploma from the Conservatory of Art and Technology and in 2009 her master's degree from the Boston Conservatory. Mitsopoulou is the recipient of several awards and honors, including first prize in the Golden Muse Competition for her interpretation in Greek and contemporary music. Her notable teachers include Valery Sagaidachny, Janice Weber, Anna Ouspenskaya, and Thomas Mastroianni. Highly trained as an educator, Mitsopoulou has worked as a faculty tutor while at the Boston Conservatory, and her students have had success in major national and international events. Mitsopoulou has performed as an accompanist and solo performer in numerous venues including the 1898 Intimate Chapel concert series, the Angels Concert series, the Holy Trinity Church of Christ, the Kreeger Museum, the Baha'i Center of Sterling, and the Steinert Hall in Boston.

Program Notes

Romanticism was an intellectual and artistic movement found in literature, music, painting, and architecture. It originated in Western Europe in the late eighteenth century and continued through the mid-nineteenth century. A rejection of the aesthetic of classicism — balance, order, science, and rationality — romanticism emphasized the individual, spontaneity, imagination, and emotion. In music, Frédéric Chopin and Franz Liszt were among the most important representatives of the romantic style. Chopin was known for his elegant and fragile melodic lines, in which he used a harmonic texture and a musical language that highlighted the element of dignity in pain and the nostalgia for your homeland. Liszt's contribution as an innovator of piano technique changed our perspective on the limitations of the human body and the human spirit. Through his technical experimentation, he created transcendental pieces that celebrate the unlimited possibilities of both instrument and human potential. Within this rich European influence, Greek composers of the twentieth century tried to create their own musical identity. Many Greek composers, including Yannis Costantinidis, emphasize the intense nationalistic elements of their country and present the unique folkloric tradition of Greek culture. Nikos Skalkottas — greatly influenced by his teacher Arnold Schoenberg — composes in a style closer to Igor Stravinsky and the second Viennese school. The juxtaposition of the music of Chopin and Skalkottas exposes the musical innovation that happened between the romantic period and the second Viennese school.

Before Chopin, the mazurka was an unknown genre outside of Poland. It originated as a peasant dance in Mazovia, the region of the composer's birthplace. As a child, Chopin often visited the countryside, where he became familiar with the local folk melodies. He published forty-one mazurkas in eleven opuses and two other pieces without opus number. A triple meter is one of the basic characteristics of the traditional Polish mazurka, often with an accent on the third weak beat. Chopin doesn't experiment with the form, but he added chromaticism, dissonance, and unexpected modulations to create his personal mazurka style. The *Mazurka in G Minor* is considered his last in this genre and expresses the sadness, artistic doubts, and loneliness of the composer in his last years.

The second of Chopin's four scherzi is among the most celebrated pieces of the pianist repertoire. Chopin was the first to imagine the scherzo as an independent genre. Before Chopin, scherzi were part of larger works, such as symphonies and sonatas. The *Scherzo in B-flat Minor* was composed and published in 1837, five years after the first one. Chopin's student, Wilhelm von Lenz, said about the sotto voce opening: "For Chopin it was never questioning enough, never soft enough, never sufficiently weighted."

Nikos Skalkottas was born on the small island of Chalki and at age five took his first violin lessons from his father. He continued his studies in the Athens Conservatory, where he graduated with distinction in 1920. A scholarship allowed him to study at the Prussian Academy of Arts in Berlin, first in violin but later in composition with Paul Juon, Kurt Weill, and Arnold Schoenberg. Skalkottas used traditional forms but also experimented with harmony. Throughout his career he used the techniques of tonality, atonality, and twelve-tone theory. His love and dedication to his Greek heritage are prominent in such works as

the *Thirty-Six Greek Dances*. “The Trawler,” is part of his ballet suite for piano, *The Land and the Sea of Greece*. Composed in 1949, it is tonal yet has many unexpected harmonic color changes. A trawler is a small fishing boat, often employed during the night. Seen from the shore, it appears as a small light in the middle of the dark ocean.

Yannis Costantinidis was born in Smyrna in 1903 but moved to Athens toward the end of the Greco-Turkish War (1919 - 1922). In 1923, he moved to Berlin to continue his studies and returned to Greece in 1931. Costantinidis composed chamber music, symphonic works, operettas, and popular music. The *Eight Dances from the Greek Islands* is a work with intense nationalistic and folkloric elements. Each dance has a different rhythmic and melodic pattern, representing the style of its island’s dance. The meter (5/4, 7/8), the notation, the grace notes, and the harmonic and dynamic changes create a unique color for each dance. Most Greek dances are performed in a circular way with the dancers holding each other’s hands to symbolize the continuation of the generations. For a Greek, it is hard to listen to this work without remembering the color of Greece’s seas, its volcanic rocks, wild beauty, and feeling of freedom.

La leggerezza is the second of the *Three Concert Études* by Franz Liszt, published in 1849 with the titles, *Il lamento*, *La leggerezza*, and *Un sospiro*. The word *leggerezza* originates from the Italian word, *leggero*, meaning light, thus light and sensitive touch. In this work, Liszt seems to be influenced by the fine legato and the melodic singing passages of Chopin’s compositions. In the romantic period, études were supposed to challenge the pianist; however, they weren’t merely virtuosic showpieces but also character pieces intended for public performances. The work is a masterful combination of beautiful melodic lines and technical challenges for the pianist, such as melody on the left hand and thirds on the right, or irregular rhythmic groupings and virtuosic runs.

Program notes by Aphrodite Mitsopoulou

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

Jenny Scheinman's
Kannapolis: A Moving Portrait
Original score accompanying
a documentary
May 22, Sunday, 4:30
East Building Auditorium

Winners of the 2016 Joseph and Goldie
Feder Memorial String Competition
and Misbin Family Memorial Chamber
Music Competition
Presented in cooperation with
Washington Performing Arts
June 5, Sunday, 2:00 and 4:00
West Building, West Garden Court

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