In the year 1720, Johann Sebastian Bach maintained his post as Hofkapellmeister at the Royal Court of Anhalt-Köthen, under the patronage of Count Leopold, an enthusiastic supporter of the arts. It was also during this year that Bach’s first wife, Maria Barbara, died. Scholars have linked her death and Bach’s choosing to compose his Partita No. 2 in the key of d minor, a key which had elegiac associations according to the then prevalent doctrine of affects. The Partita opens with four dances (though certainly no one would have danced to these chamber music settings) which represent the core of baroque suites: the Allemande, a stout, German dance; the Courante, a tripping, triple metered French dance; the Sarabande, a majestic dance of Spanish origin; and the spirited, English Gigue. In this partita, Bach gives the most weight to the Chaconne, a continuous theme and variations form based on a dance of 16th-century Latin American origin. In this chaconne, Bach sets some thirty different variations against his eight measure theme.

—Notes by Sue Anne Jager
PROGRAM

Georg Philipp Telemann
(1681-1767)
Fantasie No. 9 in B Minor
(1735)

Eugène Ysaÿe
(1858-1931)
Solo Sonata No. 3 in D Minor, Op. 27 “Ballade”
(1924)

Béla Bartók
(1881-1945)
Tempo di ciaconna
Fuga
Melodia-adagio
Presto
Solo Sonata
(1943)

INTERMISSION

Johann Sebastian Bach
(1685-1750)
Partita No. 2 in D Minor, BWV 1004
(1720)
Allemande
Courante
Sarabande
Gigue
Chaconne

Concerts from the National Gallery are broadcast in their entirety at 7:00 p.m. on Sundays on radio station WGTS, 91.9 FM, four weeks after the live performance. The use of cameras or recording equipment during the performance is not allowed.

For the convenience of concertgoers, the Garden Café remains open until 6:30 p.m.

Although Johann Sebastian Bach is oft regarded as the most prominent and prolific composer of the late baroque era, that distinguishing honor is more properly associated with his contemporary, Georg Philipp Telemann, who composed over forty operas, twelve complete cantata cycles for the liturgical year, forty-four passions, and thousands of other church compositions. Telemann, who was a long time friend of Bach and stood as the godfather to one of Sebastian’s sons, Carl Philipp Emanuel, also wrote hundreds of chamber works, including this Fantasie in B minor for solo violin.

Belgian-born violinist, conductor, and composer Eugène Ysaÿe heard one of his young contemporaries, Joseph Szigeti, perform a Bach violin sonata. Inspired by both the Hungarian's performance and the work itself, Ysaÿe immediately sequestered himself in his seaside study in Le Zoute. Twenty-four uninterrupted hours later, he emerged with the detailed sketches of his six solo violin sonatas, each of which bears some evidence of Bach's influence and each of which pays tribute to the virtuosity of one of Ysaÿe's younger contemporaries. The third sonata, dedicated to Rumanian Georges Enescu, is the shortest of the six, being only a single movement entitled Ballade. Despite its comparative brevity, Ysaye's Sonata No. 3, with its lyrical and highly virtuosic passages, embraces broad emotional ranges which culminate in a passionate coda.

Like Ysaye, Béla Bartók was influenced by the Bach interpretations of his contemporaries. Commissioned and inspired by American violinist Yehudi Menuhin, Bartók used Bach's Solo Sonata in C major as a model for his own Solo Sonata. The modeling of Bach's work is most evident in the namings of the movements as well as in the arrangement of the movements according to tempi: slow, fast, slow, fast, respectively. The contrapuntal forms of the first and second movements were also certainly influenced by Bach's work, though the musical development, particularly in the first movement, resembles the classical sonata rather than the baroque chaconne or fugue.

A versatile musician, JAMES BUSWELL is active as a soloist with orchestra, chamber musician and recitalist, conductor, educator, recording artist, and film personality. In all of these capacities, Mr. Buswell elicits the highest praise from audiences, critics, and colleagues alike. Well-known for his affinity for the music of J.S. Bach, Mr. Buswell also serves as an advocate of new compositions, performing the world premieres of works by Charles Wuorinen, Ned Rorem, Gian Carlo Menotti, Gunther Schuller, Peter Schikele, and others. After serving for more than a decade on the faculty of the Indiana University, Mr. Buswell and his family moved in 1987 to Massachusetts, where he teaches at the New England Conservatory in Boston. He is frequently engaged as an artist-in-residence and visiting professor, particularly at Harvard University and Amherst College. During the formative years of his career, Mr. Buswell won First Prize in the famed Merriweather Post Competition in Washington, D.C.