What is more frequently heard today is the orchestrated version by Debussy’s friend and colleague, Henri Büsser (1872–1973), who did much to assure its popularity. Alfons and Aloys Kontarsky, the renowned German duo-pianists, describe the suite as being a succession of individual “genre” pieces, tied together as one might tie a bunch of flowers. *En bateau*, for example, has the quality of a gondolier’s song that is at once festive and intimate. The distinguished French musicologist and Debussy biographer, Léon Vallas (1879–1956), noted that there are a few audacities in the chordal writing and in the rhythmic accentuation. There is also an abundance of inspired melodies, evidence of Debussy’s rich gift of spontaneous invention.

After the overwhelming success of its first performance in November 1936, Prokofiev’s ballet *Romeo and Juliet* was further popularized with three orchestral suites arranged from it by the composer. The first two suites were introduced in Moscow and St. Petersburg (then Leningrad) just one year after the first performance. The third was introduced in Moscow in 1946. The first two suites contain seven excerpts from the ballet, while the third has only six. Each suite projects an independent sequence, relating to Shakespeare’s tale. While it is a staple in today’s ballet and orchestral repertoire, *Romeo and Juliet* was ground-breaking for Prokofiev, as is explained by writer Malcolm Rayment in his review, *Romeo and Juliet: Ballet Music*: “Prokofiev not only sings of the love of Romeo and Juliet, but also faithfully portrays the growth of this love from adolescent stirrings to maturity. This is something that no composer had succeeded in doing before, although others (notably Berlioz) had matched in their music the beauty of the most tender scenes in Shakespeare’s play.”

-Program notes by Elmer Booze
PROGRAM

Albert Roussel
(1869-1937)
Le festin de l’araignée, Opus 17
(The Spider’s Feast) (1912)
(Symphonic Fragments)

Claude Debussy
(1862-1918)
Petite Suite
(1907)
En bateau (In a Boat)
Cortège (Procession)
Menuet
Ballet

INTERMISSION

Sergei Prokofiev
(1891-1953)
Romeo and Juliet Suite No. 2
(1937)
1. The Montagues and the Capulets
2. Juliet, the Little Girl
3. Friar Laurence
4. Dance
5. Romeo and Juliet before Parting
6. Dance of the Maids from the Antilles
7. Romeo at Juliet’s Grave

Conductor, composer, and pianist George Manos has been director of music at the National Gallery of Art and conductor of the National Gallery Orchestra since 1985. He is also artistic director of the National Gallery Vocal Arts Ensemble and the National Gallery Chamber Players, which he founded. A native Washingtonian, Manos’ career as a performing pianist and teacher has included several years on the faculty of Catholic University and directorship of the Wilmington, Delaware, School of Music. Maestro Manos founded and directed for ten years the Killarney Bach Festival in the Republic of Ireland, and was the music director of the 1992 Kolding, Denmark, Scandinavian Music Festival.

Le festin de l’araignée (The Spider’s Feast) exemplifies Roussel’s considerable skill and understanding of the art of composing for the stage. The music accompanied a ballet-pantomime in its original performance, which took place in Paris on April 13, 1913. The choreography was provided by Gilbert de Voisins, whose model was a work by a French entomologist, Jean Henri Fabre (1823-1915), entitled Souvenirs entomologiques. The background is a garden in which a spider, skulking in his web, is eyeballing his potential victims. Unaware of the danger, some ants approach, pulling a large rose petal. They are followed by two beetles and a butterfly. The latter comes too close, flies into the web, and dies. The spider, away momentarily, is alerted by an apple falling from a tree closeby to return to the web. While the spider is making his way back, two worms manage to eat into the fallen apple without being seen by two praying mantises, who are fighting among themselves. Their inattentiveness causes them to likewise fall into the web. A day-fly is born, dances for only one day, and dies. The spider does a victory dance and commences his anticipated banquet, not noticing that the two beetles have broken loose from his web and subsequently freed one of the mantises, who slays the despot. With all living insects set free from the web, a funeral celebration is held in honor of the day-fly as night begins to envelop the garden.

The adroitly written orchestration, with its kaleidoscopic harmonies, proved Roussel’s talent in characterization of exotic subjects and depiction of humorous situations in lighter works. The ballet helped tremendously in popularizing the work of this prolific composer, and brought him instantaneous success and lasting fame.

Debussy’s Petite Suite was composed originally for piano, four hands, but it is seldom heard in that format today. It was first performed on March 1, 1889, by Debussy and his friend, Jacques Durand, who was also the son of Debussy’s chief publisher, Marie August Durand.
PAUL MELLON

June 11, 1907 – February 1, 1999

This concert is dedicated to the memory of Paul Mellon, philanthropist and patron of the arts