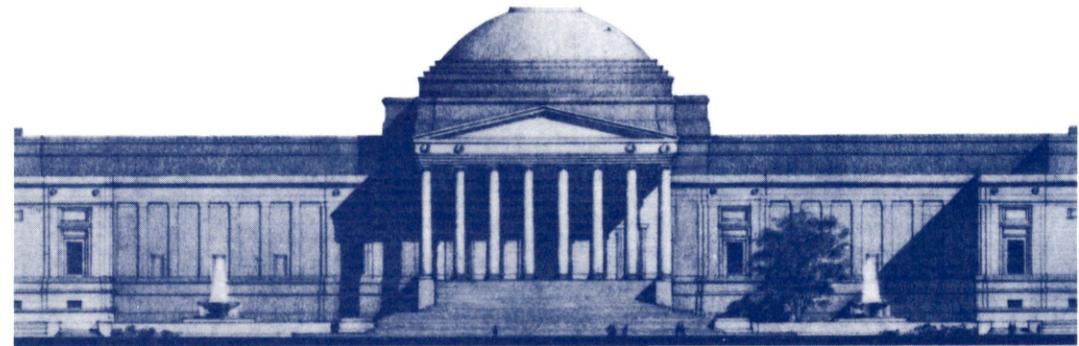


The Fifty-seventh Season of

THE WILLIAM NELSON CROMWELL and
F. LAMMOT BELIN CONCERTS

National Gallery of Art



2301st Concert

NATIONAL GALLERY ORCHESTRA

GEORGE MANOS, *conductor*

Sunday Evening, March 7, 1999
Seven O'clock
West Building, West Garden Court

Admission free

him into some precarious situations, from which he has to be extricated. About the suite's opening selection, *Morning*, Grieg wrote: "It is a morning mood in which I imagine the sun breaking through the clouds at the first *forte*." *Ase's Death* portrays Peer's mother lying on her deathbed, as Peer, having deserted her for adventures in America, returns and whimsically avows that he is motoring her up to the gates of heaven. The insistent, tragic plaint, characterized by muted strings, ultimately fades with the chilling finality of Ase's last mortal breath. *Anitra's Dance* precedes the elopement of Peer and Anitra, who, with all of her seductiveness, dashes off with his stolen jewels. The setting for *Morning* and *Anitra's Dance*, curiously, is Africa, rather than Norway. After breaking into the Mountain King's domain, where all the denizens are trolls, Peer is pursued by the king's daughter, who has fallen in love with him, but he rejects her as a marriage partner because of her ugliness. Making fun of her dance for him, in addition to the music, Peer angers the populace and is chased out of the kingdom to the music of *In the Hall of the Mountain King*, narrowly escaping death.

Jewish-born Felix Mendelssohn was baptized into the Protestant faith in 1816, at his parents' request. In 1830, when the composer was twenty-one years old, protestants in Germany prepared to celebrate the three hundredth anniversary of the Augsburg Confession, drawn up by the first generation of Lutherans in 1530. Apparently feeling compelled to share the experience actively, Mendelssohn did what he could do best, which was to compose a symphony. Originally conceived as "*A Symphony for the Festival of the Reformation of the Church*," the work eventually came to be known as the composer's fifth symphony, even though it was composed earlier than his second, third, and fourth symphonies. The first movement is introduced by the so-called "Dresden" Amen from the Lutheran liturgy. This motivic element also figures in Wagner's *Parsifal* as a "Holy Grail" theme. The second and third movements have no obvious connection to religious music, but the fourth is a festive and highly contrapuntal finale that culminates in a rendition of the choral, *Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott*. Critic John N. Burk's praise for Mendelssohn includes the following observation about the *D Major Symphony*: "The sturdy and noble chorale subject and the beautiful "Amen" cadence, with all their associations, are developed in unchurchly (sic) symphonic fashion. The music bespeaks his personal style, fervid in melody, lucid in orchestration, felicitous in detail, [and is] Mendelssohnian in every bar."

-Program notes by Elmer Booze

PROGRAM

Christoph Willibald Gluck Overture to "Iphigénie en Aulide"
(1714–1787) (1774)

Edvard Grieg Peer Gynt Suite No. 1
(1843–1907) Opus 46 (1874–1875; rev. 1888)

Morning
Ase's Death
Anitra's Dance
In the Hall of the Mountain King

INTERMISSION

Felix Mendelssohn Symphony No. 5 in D Major
(1809–1847) ("Reformation")
Opus 107 (1830–1832)

Andante; allegro con fuoco
Allegro vivace
Andante
Chorale: Ein' feste Burg ist unser Gott
(Andante con moto; allegro vivace
allegro maestoso; più animato poco
a poco)

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. 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.

Gluck, in his desire to make opera more natural by stripping it of the primitive protocols of French court opera, conceived a radical new approach to writing music for operas and declared: "I sought to reduce music to its true function, that of seconding poetry, in order to strengthen the emotional expression and the impact of the dramatic situations without interrupting the action and without weakening it by superfluous ornaments." In taking this approach, he first "modernized" the overture. Previously a festive projection, in Gluck's hands it became a programmatic preview of the opera to follow. Gluck's idea was, in his own words: "to apprise the spectators of the nature of the action and to form, so to speak, its argument."

Gluck enjoyed much success in Vienna in the early 1770s, at which time his French comic operas were immensely popular. He was persuaded by François du Roullet, a member of the French embassy staff in Vienna, to write a French opera. Gluck relished the idea as he wished to seek his fortune in Paris, using as his "calling card" a serious French opera. As a basis for the libretto, he chose the play, *Iphigénie en Aulide*, by the French poet and dramatist Jean Baptiste Racine (1639–1699). The play tells the story of the Greek king Agamemnon, who is asked by the goddess Diana to sacrifice his daughter, Iphigénie. If he were to carry out the deed, a much needed wind would allow the Greek navy to sail across the Mediterranean and defeat the army of Troy. The first theme of the overture is the music for Agamemnon's invocation to Diana, heard again at the rise of the curtain. The ensuing strains in the woodwinds and strings are the imposing directives of Diana, interrupted by aggressive, lamenting utterances by the entire orchestra. The composer provided two endings, one for concert use and another that leads without interruption into Act I.

Grieg was thirty-one years old when the great Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen solicited his services to compose a musical score based on the latter's highly imaginative drama, *Peer Gynt*. Grieg obliged him with enough music to complete an opera. The original score, which comprises twenty-two selections, is never heard today outside of Scandinavia. Allegedly, after its completion, Grieg was told to shorten his score. Later, he stated to his American biographer, Henry Finck: "In no case did I have an opportunity to say all I wanted to say, hence the brevity of these pieces." There are two suites, each containing four selections. The second suite resulted from the overwhelming success of the first. In the Ibsen tale, *Peer Gynt* is obsessed with his desire to become Emperor of the World, but lacks the capacity to be realistic about life. This naiveté leads