When the premiere performance of *Boléro* took place in New York City, Louis Biancolli wrote the following: “Staged widely in Europe and America, *Boléro* was first performed in this country as a concert number at a Carnegie Hall concert of the Philharmonic-Symphony [sic] conducted by Arturo Toscanini. The date was 14 November 1929. The audience was scarcely prepared for the sensation. Few of the musicians suspected at rehearsals that they were working on a bombshell. The effect on the Carnegie audience was almost unprecedented. Many critics joined in the frantic storms of applause....

For the prime object of *Boléro* musically is the creation of nervous tension....A two-limbed melody of Spanish character, uttered first by the flute, after the drum has given out the rhythm, is reiterated by solo instruments in groups while the volume of sound increases steadily, inexorably....When it seems that human nerves can endure no more, the key shift comes with the impact of dynamite. This Philharmonic-Symphony debut made *Boléro* an American craze” (Julian Seaman, ed., *Great Orchestral Music: A Treasury of Program Notes*).

American music critic and lecturer Edward Downes (1911–2001) wrote: “Ravel’s *Boléro* was an experiment consisting of what he called ‘orchestral tissue without music.’ In its deeply French combination of the utmost discipline, even rigidity of form, with an intensity of passion that threatens to tear the whole thing apart, the *Boléro* embodies another of the many paradoxes which made up Ravel’s nature and were also a part of French tradition.”

Programs notes by Elmer Booze

For the convenience of concertgoers

*the Garden Café remains open until 6:30 p.m.*

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*The Sixty-first Season of*

THE WILLIAM NELSON CROMWELL and F. LAMMOT BELIN CONCERTS

National Gallery of Art

2461st Concert

NATIONAL GALLERY ORCHESTRA

GEORGE MANOS, conductor

*Presented in honor of the 25th anniversary of the opening of the East Building of the National Gallery of Art*

Sunday Evening, 1 June 2003

Seven O’clock

West Building, West Garden Court

*Admission free*
Program

Felix Mendelssohn  Symphony No. 3 in A Minor ("Scottish")  Op. 56 (1842)
(1809–1847)

Andante con moto; allegro un poco agitato;
assai animato
Scherzo: Vivace non troppo
Adagio cantabile
Allegro vivacissimo

Intermission

Maurice Ravel  Le tombeau de Couperin
(1875–1937)  (1919)

Prélude
Forlane
Menuet
Rigaudon

Ravel  Boléro
(1928)

Musicians

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 American Music Festival and of the National Gallery vocal and chamber ensembles, which he founded. Manos’ career as a performing pianist and teacher has included several years on the faculty of The Catholic University of America in Washington, DC, where he taught piano, conducting, and chamber music. In addition, he held the directorship of the Wilmington, Delaware, School of Music, presenting an annual jazz festival and clinic. Maestro Manos founded and directed for ten years the renowned Kilarney Bach Festival in the Republic of Ireland and was the music director of the 1992 Scandinavian Music Festival in Kolding, Denmark.

First convened in 1942 and consisting of members of the National Symphony, the National Gallery Orchestra has presented concerts at the Gallery on a regular basis ever since. Under the direction of George Manos since 1985, the orchestra has performed eight of the nine Beethoven symphonies and all of the symphonies of Mendelssohn and Brahms, as well as rarely heard works for symphonic ensemble. In the context of the Gallery’s American Music Festival, the orchestra has presented the world premiere and Washington premiere performances of more than 150 works, including thirty-four symphonies and fifteen concertos.

Program Notes

Mendelssohn’s Symphony No. 3 in A Minor, Op. 56 ("Scottish") is a direct result of the composer’s visit in 1829 to Edinburgh Castle and the Palace of Holyrood House in Scotland, now the official residence of Queen Elizabeth II. Mendelssohn was captivated by the setting and made initial notes and sketches for a symphony while staying there. He did not complete the work until thirteen years later, on 20 January 1842. Although numbered third in Mendelssohn’s series of five symphonies, this work came to completion eight years after his Fourth Symphony ("Italian"). It is his last symphonic composition and is considered to be
his best and most refined work. Mendelssohn dedicated the symphony to
Queen Victoria and applied the subtitle *Scottish*, remembering his
reaction to the stunning milieu of the Holyrood Palace. He protested
against any suggestion that he had created programmatic music, but
many of his listeners would beg to differ. The brilliance and beauty of the
symphony prompted the renowned German pianist and conductor Hans
von Bülow (1830–1894) to write: “Among symphonies after Beethoven,
Mendelssohn’s *Scottish Symphony* occupies the highest rank as a self-
contained work of art.”

The four movements are played without pause, making the
symphony a precursor of the *symphonische Dichtung* (symphonic poem),
a one-movement work established as a genre by Franz Liszt. The
shadowy introduction of the first movement (*Andante con moto; allegro
un poco agitato; assai animato*) soon gives way to a more passionate
undertaking that leads to what may be interpreted as a call of the
Hebridean winds. The second movement (*Vivace non troppo*) is not
designated a *scherzo*, although it exhibits the swiftness Mendelssohn’s
*scherzi*. It is a dance in 2/4 time that alludes to folk music of Scotland,
although Mendelssohn did not intentionally import Scottish folk
melodies into this work. The poignant emotion of the third movement
(*Adagio cantabile*) is extracted from its lyrical opening melody, which is
varied and slightly elaborated each time it returns. The fourth movement
(*Allegro vivacissimo*) explodes in a spirited dance with devilish energy.
The movement has earned a universally accepted nickname, *The
Gathering of the Clans*, as it is seen to epitomize the untamed soul and
vivacity of the Highland people.

*Le tombeau de Couperin* (*The Tomb of Couperin*) began as a
suite of six pieces for solo piano that Ravel initially entitled *French
Suite*. It was also, ironically, his last significant composition for the
piano. The work was to be a tribute to the French composer François
Couperin le Grand (1668–1733), one of the great figures of French
baroque music, and, more importantly, to the music of the eighteenth
century. Ravel’s work on the suite was interrupted when he was drafted
for military service in World War I. He resumed his work immediately
after his discharge from the army and completed it in 1917, at which time
he changed the title to *Le tombeau de Couperin*. Six of Ravel’s friends
were killed in the war and, as a tribute to them, he dedicated a movement
to each one. Two years later, in 1919, Ravel orchestrated four
movements from the suite.

The *Prélude* is a rich and sparkling statement of elegant,
ornamental styling, as applied to Couperin’s rhythmic weaving and the
musical spirit of the eighteenth century. The *Forlane* is a reiteration of a
brilliantly decorated French courtly dance that had lascivious
notations. The effective simplicity of the *Menuet* supports Debussy’s
assessment of Ravel as having “the finest ears in the world,” and the
*Rigaudon*, under Ravel’s hands, “retains the simple rhythms, phrasing,
and homophonic texture of music to be danced” (*Harvard Dictionary of
Music*).

The *boléro*, as defined in the *Salsa* Web site, is “a slow, lyrical
ballad, usually about romantic themes, love and yearning—an ideal
dance for a flirt....The pains and pleasures of love are the subject of
boléro, a style of popular song and dance practiced through much of
Latin America for more than a century. In Cuba there is no love without a
boléro (love song).” Ravel’s *Boléro* gained popularity in America
through the orchestral version of a ballet score he wrote in 1928, on
commission from a ballet company run by the Russian dancer and
actress, Ida Rubenstein (1885–1960). Rubenstein initially asked Ravel to
orchestrate six pieces from Isaac Albéniz’ *Iberia Suite*. The copyright
protection on Albéniz’ work, however, prevented Ravel from carrying
through with the transcription without permission from the composer.
When Albéniz eventually gave his permission, Ravel politely declined,
preferring instead to write an original work, the now famous *Boléro*. The
ballet was performed at the Paris Opera in 1928, choreographed and
danced by Bronislava Nijinska (1891–1972), the sister of the great
Russian ballet dancer Vaslav Nijinsky (1890–1950). As part of the
classical ballet repertoire, Ravel’s *Boléro* remains on the active list, even
though it is performed less frequently than it was in the 1930s and 1940s.
As an instrumental work, *Boléro* is quite popular in the two-piano
version as well as in the often-performed orchestral version.