

a masterpiece of musical endeavor, but also the most important piano concerto to come from the pen of an American composer to date. The work was given its premiere on 12 February 1924 at Aeolian Hall in New York City. The American conductor extraordinaire Paul Whiteman (1890–1967), who commissioned the work and to whom it was dedicated, led the first performance. The score was orchestrated from Gershwin's original two-piano version by Ferde Grofé (1892–1972), the American composer and pianist who was Whiteman's principal arranger. Not all of the reviews following the premiere were favorable, but several of the critics who recognized the work's intrinsic value voiced their enthusiastic approval. One New York critic wrote: "Then came a number on the program that established what many of us suspected before, that George Gershwin is the most promising figure in popular music today. Certainly his *Rhapsody in Blue* broke ground in a new field. He has written, out of original and distinctive material, and using popular American rhythms and harmonies, a piano concerto that has strength and structure. The rhapsody is different [from] anything you have ever heard in popular or classical music, yet it is not 'freak' music. It has form, beauty, [and] meaning." The piano solo version of the *Rhapsody* was published in 1927 by New World Music Corporation.

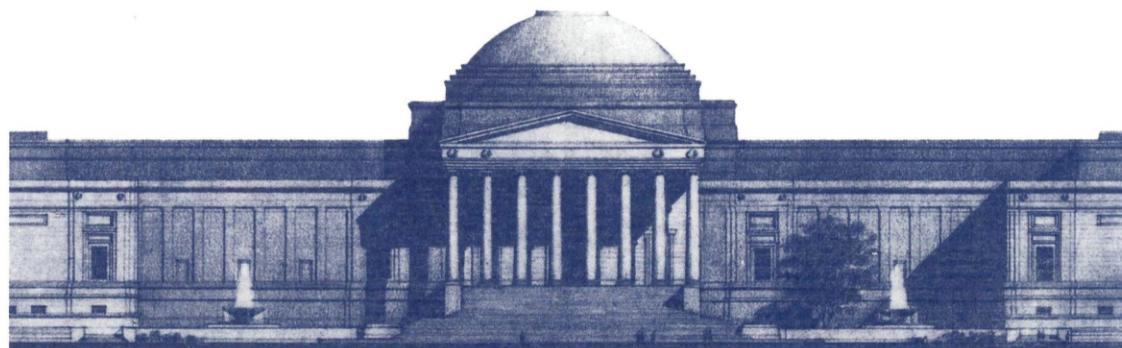
Program notes by Elmer Booze

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The Sixty-second Season of

THE WILLIAM NELSON CROMWELL and
F. LAMMOT BELIN CONCERTS

National Gallery of Art



2484th Concert

FREDERICK MOYER, *pianist*

Sunday Evening, 8 February 2004
Seven O'clock
West Building, West Garden Court

Admission free

reputation as a composer and pianist had already been firmly established in America by his debut performance in 1909 in New York, at which he played both his second and third piano concertos. However, he was well aware that he had to transform himself into a superstar virtuoso in order to make a profitable living as a pianist. To supplement his solo repertoire, Rachmaninoff turned to the art of the transcription, and his experiments in this genre proved to be paragons of the art. His nine transcriptions for solo piano are bold, brilliant, and full of virtuosity. At the same time they deftly unleash the spectrum of human emotions. The effective performance of these transcriptions as well as many of Rachmaninoff's other compositions requires an Olympic technique. The Bach *Prelude*, as he transcribed it, remains close to the original version, using the high register of the keyboard to imitate the violin in nonstop perpetual motion, and it retains the striking polyphonic clarity that is a hallmark of Bach's genius.

Anton Arensky composed *Twenty-four Characteristic Pieces*, op. 36, in 1894 during a recuperative sojourn in the Caucasus, a region between the Black and Caspian Seas on the dividing line between Europe and Asia. Although they are not designated as such, these twenty-four pieces are believed to have been inspired by Johann Sebastian Bach's preludes and fugues from *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, particularly in their key relationships, beginning in C major and ending twenty-four preludes later in the chromatically distant key of B minor. Arensky's suggestive subtitles add an element of allure and complement the use of the word "characteristic" in the title of the set. In the liner notes accompanying the first recording of the complete *Characteristic Pieces* (by pianist Anatoly Sheludiakov, [Moscow, 2002]), a former pupil of Arensky, Alexander Goldenweiser (1875–1961), is quoted: "It is my opinion that in this large-scale work Arensky placed all of his intellect, like a dictionary defining his poetics and aesthetic." Frederick Moyer has selected ten of the twenty-four pieces for this program for their musical and technical challenge as well as their lasting expressive qualities.

Internationally acclaimed as a composer, pianist, and improviser in both the jazz and classical fields, Donal Fox has garnered numerous awards, among which are a 1997 Guggenheim Fellowship in music composition and a 1998 Fellowship from the Boglaisco Foundation (Italy). Two of his most recent commissions have come from the Westdeutscher Rundfunk Köln and the *Paris New Music Review*. During the 1991–1992 concert season, Fox served as composer-in-residence with the St. Louis Symphony under then music director Leonard Slatkin. He maintains an active schedule as a concert pianist, performing with the Richmond Symphony and playing solo recitals at Merkin Concert Hall in New York City. Donal Fox has made several appearances on National Public Radio and public television programs, such as *JazzSets*, hosted by Branford Marsalis; *The Connection*, with BBC host Judy Swallow; and *Say, Brother*. He has recorded as composer and pianist for New World Records, Evidence Records, Music & Arts, Yamaha's Original Series, and Wergo Records.

Fox has provided his *Piano Etudes*, written on a Guggenheim Foundation commission, with the following commentary: "The three etudes (*Études de concert*) composed for Frederick Moyer (a complete set will be eventually written for him)—*Velocity Runs*, *Rhythm Primitive*, and *Toccata on Bach*—are Washington, D.C., premieres. Each etude, by definition, is a study that explores a different technical or musical problem for the pianist. *Velocity Runs*, as indicated by its title, deals with colorful and powerful fleeting scalar runs up and down the keyboard that eventually thin out into a hammering two-handed trill. *Rhythm Primitive* explores screaming, unrelenting chords, and hairpin rhythmical attacks. *Toccata on Bach* is a jazzy essay based on the last movement of the Bach *Toccata in E Minor, BWV 914*. The toccata, like the etudes, requires brilliant technical execution. Almost all of the notes for *Toccata on Bach* are derived in some way or another—transposition, augmentation, inversion, etc.—from the Bach work." These contrapuntal devices are also known as devices of figure treatment.

When Gershwin completed his *Rhapsody in Blue* for piano and jazz band in 1923, he had no inkling of the extent to which it would influence the subsequent development of American music. It is not only