

The use of cameras or recording equipment during the performance is not allowed. Please be sure that cell phones, pagers, and other electronic devices are turned off.

Please note that late entry or reentry of the West Building after 6:30 pm is not permitted.

Music Department
National Gallery of Art
Sixth Street and Constitution Avenue NW
Washington, DC

www.nga.gov

COVER: Wassily Kandinsky, *Improvisation 31 (Sea Battle)*, 1913,
National Gallery of Art, Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund



The Sixty-ninth Season of
The William Nelson Cromwell and F. Lamot Belin
Concerts

National Gallery of Art
2,819th Concert

VERGE ensemble

“When Kandinsky Met Schönberg:
A Wind from Another Planet”

January 23, 2011
Sunday Evening, 6:30 pm
West Building, West Garden Court

Admission free

Program

Arnold Schönberg (1874–1951)

Drei Klavierstücke, op. 11 (1909)

Mässig

Mässig

Bewegt

Steve Antosca (b. 1955)

traces of spirit whispers~1. circulation of the light (2003)

Györgi Ligeti (1923–2006)

Continuum (1968)

Elliott Carter (b. 1908)

Caténaires (2006)

INTERMISSION

John Cage (1912–1992)

Amores (1943)

John Luther Adams (b. 1953)

Red Arc/Blue Veil (2002)

This concert is made possible in part by support from the Randy Hostetler Living Room Music Fund.

The Musicians

VERGE ENSEMBLE

As the modern music ensemble-in-residence at the Corcoran Gallery of Art and the performing group of the Contemporary Music Forum, VERGE ensemble actively develops collaborative partnerships with Washington institutions and generates innovative performances involving music and technology. In 2007 VERGE was awarded a National Endowment for the Arts grant to create a year-long project promoting American and French music. Events included concerts at the Corcoran Gallery, the Festival de musique Américaine in Paris, and Washington's Maison Française, as well as at the National Gallery. In the 2008–2009 season, VERGE partnered with the same institutions and the Corcoran Gallery to create the 3gen Festival, celebrating the 100th birth anniversaries of Elliott Carter and Olivier Messiaen. The ensemble's current project—a concert series titled “When Kandinsky Met Schönberg”—explores the development of expressionist music since 1911, when the two artists met. In addition to this concert, the series includes a concert at La Maison Française subtitled “A Spark of the Sacred Fire, A Rumble of the Sacred Voice.” More information about VERGE ensemble is available at www.VERGEensemble.com.

Members of VERGE ensemble performing in this concert are:

Audrey Andrist, *piano*

Steve Antosca, *computer*

Jenny Lin, *piano and harpsichord*

Quintin Mallette, *percussion*

William Richards, *percussion*

Doug Wallace, *percussion*

Program Notes

On January 2, 1911, Wassily Kandinsky attended a concert in Munich that included several of Arnold Schönberg's compositions. Kandinsky, who had heard Schönberg's music prior to the concert but had not met him, had come to Munich to be exposed to the avant-garde. He was immediately attracted to Schönberg's newer music, noting that the composer had crossed a crucial point in his style, motivated only by direct emotional expression. Shortly thereafter Kandinsky created one of his landmark paintings — *Impression III (Concert)* (1911), now in Munich's Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus. On January 18, 1911, he wrote to Schönberg: "What we are striving for and our whole manner of thought and feeling have so much in common that I feel completely justified in expressing my empathy." In his reply, Schönberg wrote: "Every formal procedure that aspires to traditional effects is not completely free from conscious motivation. But art belongs to the unconscious!" Kandinsky invited Schönberg to become a member of an artists' collective known as "Der blaue Reiter," and to submit works for its pending eponymous exhibition. Schönberg eagerly accepted, submitting a number of self-portraits. (At that time in his life, Schönberg was still undecided as to whether his career would be in art or in music and was equally active in both endeavors.)

Kandinsky's work underwent a remarkable transformation between 1911 and 1914, which can be attributed to his contact with the composer and is documented in the many letters the two men exchanged during those years. Paintings that represent the transformation include *Composition v* (1911), *With a Black Arc* (1912), and *Improvisation 31 (Sea Battle)* (1913), featured on the cover of this evening's program. Kandinsky was concerned with making painting more abstract by removing figuration from it, and found a collaborator in Schönberg, who had moved away from any sense of tonality in his music with the groundbreaking *String Quartet no. 2, op. 10* (1908) and *Three Piano Pieces op. 11* (1909). These works, while not twelve-tone, avoid any hint of traditional major or minor tonality. In 1912 Kandinsky published three essays — *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, *Der blaue Reiter Almanac*, and *Klänge*

(*Sounds*) — by way of clarification of what he (and Schönberg) were doing. The paintings, the music, and what was written about them at the time had a powerful ripple effect in the arts throughout the twentieth century.

Schönberg was widely known early in his musical career for his success in extending the traditional German Romantic style, exemplified by his *Verklärte Nacht* (Transfigured Night), which was completed in 1899. With the dawn of the new century, he began bold experiments in harmony and form, exemplified by *Fünf Orchesterstücke* (Five Pieces for Orchestra) (1909), *String Quartet no. 2 with Soprano*, (1907–1908), *Pierrot lunaire* (1912), and *Kammersymphonie no. 2* (1906, revised in 1939). In the 1920s Schönberg developed the twelve-tone technique — also referred to as dodecapronic music or serialism — a compositional method of manipulating an ordered series of all twelve notes in the chromatic scale. He described it as the "method of composing with twelve tones which are related only with one another," in which the twelve pitches of the octave are regarded as equal, and no one note or tonality is given the emphasis it might have occupied in classical harmony. His writings on harmony and style in music are still in print and used by musicians and composers. An influential teacher of composition, his students in Vienna included Alban Berg and Anton Webern. After immigrating to the United States, he taught at the University of Southern California, where his students included John Cage and Lou Harrison.

For Schönberg, as for many early twentieth-century composers, the piano was the instrument for experimentation. He wrote *Drei Klavierstücke* at an important moment in the evolution of his compositional style. The first two movements, both marked *Mässig* (moderate), are significant early examples of the composer's abandonment of the remnants of traditional tonality. The second opens with a hypnotic *ostinato* bass in the left hand and a continually changing cycle of chords in the right, leading into a static, time-suspending episode in the middle, where a series of descending trills transitions into the final set of chords and the return of the *basso ostinato*. The final movement, marked *Bewegt* (with motion), is brief yet powerful, breaking through all constraints of traditional language or structure. It shifts

abruptly from extremes of eruptive power, as in the massively congested opening, to moments of passionate introspection. It builds to extreme intensity, only to end delicately and quietly.

Steve Antosca, an American composer who lives and teaches in the Washington, DC, area, integrates instruments with computers for real-time processing and prerecorded audio processing and spatialization. He has received a Fromm commission from Harvard University, a McKim commission from the Library of Congress, and support from Meet the Composer, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Argosy Foundation Contemporary Music Fund. His violin and computer composition *One Becomes Two* was selected as a winner in the electroacoustic music with instruments category of the Thirty-sixth Bourges International Competitions. In the format of a series of concerts and lectures titled “crossingPOINT,” Antosca has collaborated with American University, the Library of Congress, the Peabody Institute, the Smithsonian Institution, the University of California Washington Center, and the University of Maryland. The recipient of a master’s degree in computer music composition from the Peabody Conservatory of Johns Hopkins University, Steve Antosca is the artistic director of VERGE ensemble and the National Gallery of Art New Music Ensemble. He maintains a website at www.steveantosca.com.

traces of spirit whispers is a set of seven pieces for piano, computer, processed piano samples, and voice. *circulation of the light* is the first piece of the set. The text for the composition is extracted from the Taoist manuscripts *The Secret of the Golden Flower* and *Hui Ming Ching—The Book of Consciousness and Life*, ancient manuals on the art of meditation. An element of Taoism is the desire to preserve, in a transfigured form, the idea of the person, through the traces left by experience. *traces of spirit whispers* suggests these transfigurations through extended piano techniques, computer processed piano samples, and evocative transformations and traces of spoken word. *circulation of the light* features piano samples of prepared piano, bowed piano, and extended piano techniques that were recorded, then transformed through computer processing. The text for the piece, which follows, was likewise recorded,

computer processed, organized into a flowing narrative, and combined with the piano audio.

circulation of the light, which works from without upon what lies within.	make the light circulate: that is the deepest and most wonderful secret.
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when the light is made to move in a circle, all the energies of heaven and earth, of the light and the dark are crystallized.	circulation of the light— the backward-flowing movement. the way of the Golden Flower depends on the backward-flowing movement.
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Hungarian composer Györgi Ligeti studied at the Franz Liszt Academy in Budapest, where he began teaching in 1950. His early music followed in the style of Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály, often making use of folk songs. In 1956, as a result of the unrest that eventually led to the Soviet invasion of Hungary, Ligeti fled to Vienna, and later settled in Germany. In Cologne, Ligeti began writing his first electronic compositions, influenced by Karlheinz Stockhausen and Pierre Boulez. He worked in the electronic music studio at Cologne and taught at the Darmstadt summer institute. His position in twentieth-century music as a composer schooled in traditional forms who created adventurous new sounds led him to tell the *New York Times*: “I am in a prison. One wall is the avant-garde, the other is the past. I want to escape.”

About *Continuum*, which he composed for harpsichord in 1968, Ligeti wrote:

I thought to myself, what about composing a piece that would be a paradoxically continuous sound... but that would have to consist of innumerable thin slices of salami? I call this style of composition “pattern-meccanico,” an “auditory streaming” process in which extremely fast and even pitch successions

gradually unfold, creating a smooth, evolving musical texture. A harpsichord has an easy touch; it can be played very fast, almost fast enough to reach the level of continuum, but not quite—it takes about eighteen separate sounds per second to reach the threshold where the listener can no longer make out individual notes, and the limit set by the mechanism of the harpsichord is about fifteen to sixteen notes a second. The score is marked “prestissimo,” that is, extremely fast, so that the individual tones can hardly be perceived, but rather merge into a continuum.

Play very evenly, without articulation of any sort.

Ligeti also states that the correct tempo has been reached when the piece lasts less than four minutes.

Continuum has been characterized as a composition based on granular synthesis concepts, heard as a continuous sound that emerges through the blending of large numbers of very small grains. Two contrary cells of trilling and waves of three- four- or five-note runs are played incessantly. Gradual changes occur, relying on the organization and merging of tiny sound grains into larger sonic events. The human ear perceives this blurring process as a continuous sound.

Elliott Carter, who celebrated his 102nd birthday on December 11, 2010, was born in New York City. He attended Harvard University from 1926 to 1932, where he studied with Walter Piston. Carter followed that period of study by going abroad to Paris, where, like many of the great composers of his generation, he honed his technique under the tutelage of the legendary French pedagogue Nadia Boulanger, studying privately with her from 1932 to 1935. He returned to America to devote his time to composing and held teaching posts at various institutions, including Saint John’s College in Annapolis, Maryland; the Peabody Conservatory, Columbia University, Queens College in New York, Yale University, Cornell University, and finally the Juilliard School of Music, where he joined the faculty in 1972 at age sixty-four.

Of *Caténaires*, the composer wrote: “When Pierre-Laurent Aimard, who performs so eloquently, asked me to write a piece for him, I became obsessed with the idea of a fast one-line piece with no chords. It became a continuous chain of notes using different spacings, accents, and colorings, to produce a

wide variety of expression.” Aimard played the world premiere performance of *Caténaires* on December 11, 2006—Carter’s ninety-eighth birthday—at Zankel Hall in New York. *Caténaires* are the curves formed by a wire or chain hanging freely from two points that are on the same horizontal level, such as might occur in a bridge structure. Here Carter reduces the keyboard texture to flowing left-hand and right-hand lines that form arcs without any vertical, i.e. harmonic, element. Marked *Jaillissant* (Gushing), the rapid stream of notes constantly fluctuates in register, reaching the highest note on the piano just before the end of the piece, then disappearing into the instrument’s lowest sonority through a seamless flow of notes.

John Cage was among the most influential and controversial composers of the American avant-garde. His inventive compositions and unorthodox ideas profoundly influenced and altered mid-twentieth-century music. Cage briefly attended Pomona College and then traveled in Europe for a time. Returning to the United States in 1931, he studied music with Henry Cowell (1897–1965) and Arnold Schönberg. Schönberg told Cage he would tutor him for free on the condition he devoted his life to music. Cage readily agreed, but stopped lessons after two years when it became clear to him that he had, in his own words, “no feeling for harmony.” Schönberg famously described Cage as “not a composer, but an inventor—of genius.”

On hearing *Amores* for the first time, one may be struck and perhaps even puzzled by the variety of Cage’s materials. It is challenging, at times, to understand just how its four movements are connected to one another—how these seemingly disparate entities could add up to a single, unified composition. Cage’s intent is to create a sense of unity through a process of maximizing diversity. The structure of *Amores* is based on principles of discontinuity and dissociation, rather than continuity and connection. Viewed in these terms, *Amores* represents an instance of maximal diversity, both with respect to method and materials, as well as an instance of the integration of opposites. As such, the form of the entire piece may be perceived as a reflection of the limitless possibilities that composers have at their disposal in the creation of their musical designs. Recognizing that there is no single “correct” way to integrate materials and compositional methodologies, Cage seeks an expression of the full range of such possibilities.

From his home in Alaska, composer John Luther Adams has created a unique musical world grounded in the elemental landscapes and indigenous cultures of the North. His music includes works for orchestra, small ensembles, percussion, and electronic media, and can be found in recordings on the Cold Blue, New World, and New Albion labels. Adams has worked with many prominent performers and venues, including Almeida Opera, Arena Stage, Bang On A Can, the California E. A. R. Unit, FLUX Quartet, the Paul Drescher Ensemble, Percussion Group Cincinnati, and the Sundance Institute. He has received awards and fellowships from the Foundation for Contemporary Performance Arts, Lila Wallace Arts Partners, Meet the Composer, the National Endowment for the Arts, Opera America, and the Rockefeller Foundation. Named the 2010 winner of the Michael Ludwig Nemmers Prize in Music Composition, he has taught at the University of Alaska, Bennington College, and the Oberlin College Conservatory of Music, and has served as president of the American Music Center. More information about Adams and his music is available at www.johnlutheradams.com.

In his notes for the score of *Red Arc/Blue Veil*, Adams writes:

[It] is the first piece in a projected cycle exploring the geometry of time and color—what Kandinsky called “those inner sounds that are the life of the colors.” As in all of my recent music, I imagine the entire ensemble (piano, percussion, and processed sounds) as a single instrument, and the entire piece as a single complex sonority. The processed sounds are derived directly from the acoustical instruments. In *Red Arc/Blue Veil*, the electronic sounds are layered in tempo relationships of three, five, and seven, while the piano and mallet percussion trace a single arc, rising and falling from beginning to end.

Red Arc/Blue Veil was commissioned and premiered by Ensemble Sirius.

Program notes based on material provided by Steve Antosca

Notes on Amores by Thomas DeLio

Next week at the National Gallery of Art

Victor Goldberg, pianist

Music by Brahms, Mendelssohn,
Mozart, and Scriabin

January 30, 2011
Sunday Evening, 6:30 pm
West Building, West Garden Court



National Gallery of Art Vocal Ensemble

Gregorian chant and
music by Italian composers

February 2, 2011
Wednesday, 12:10 pm
West Building, West Garden Court