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

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COVER: Paul Signac, *Barges on the Seine at Sarnois*, 1900, watercolor and gouache over black chalk, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Dyke Collection



The Seventy-first Season of
The William Nelson Cromwell and F. Lamot Belin
Concerts

National Gallery of Art
2,939th Concert

Nima Sarkechik, pianist

Presented in honor of *Color, Line, Light: French Drawings,
Watercolors, and Pastels from Delacroix to Signac*

April 17, 2013
Wednesday, 12:10 pm
West Building Lecture Hall

Admission free

Program

Claude Debussy (1862–1918)

Reflets dans l'eau (Reflections in the Water)

From *Images*, Book I (1905)

Johannes Brahms (1833–1897)

Twenty-Eight Variations on a Theme of Paganini, op. 35 (1863)

Debussy

Hommage à Rameau (Tribute to Rameau)

From *Images*, Book I

Franz Liszt (1811–1886)

Mephisto-Valse no. 1 (1859–1862)

Debussy

Mouvement

From *Images*, Book I

Liszt

Transcendental Etude no. 4 in D Minor ("Mazeppa")

Debussy

Tierces (Thirds)

From *Preludes*, Book II

This concert is made possible in part by support from the Cultural Services of the French Embassy in Washington, DC, and Safran USA

The Musician

NIMA SARKECHIK

Still in his mid-twenties, French-Iranian pianist Nima Sarkechik has established himself as a pianist of extraordinary musical maturity and remarkable technical skills. A graduate of the Paris Conservatory, he won first prize at the international piano competition named for Princess Lalla Meryem in Rabat, Morocco, and went on to take the public and jury prizes at Geneva's Jeudis de Piano Competition. A veteran of many music festivals and concert hall appearances, he made his festival debut in 2005 at the International Piano Festival at La Roque d'Anthéron and his concert hall debut at the Théâtre des Champs Elysées in Paris. Other festivals in which he has appeared include the CIMA Festival, Festival d'Enghien, Festival du Grésivaudan, Festival de Radio-France, and Festival des Serres d'Auteuil. He has played at Lincoln Center in New York City as well as in many of France's most prestigious concert venues, including the congressional palaces in Ajaccio and Strasbourg, Musée d'Orsay, Museum of Grenoble, and Palais du Pharo in Marseille. Outside France, he has performed in Luxembourg (Neumünster Abbey Festival), Portugal (Açores Festival), and Switzerland (Saint Ursanne Festival) as well as at festivals in Canada, Morocco, and Turkey. Sarkechik's recording with Zig-Zag Records of music by Chopin and Dufourt received enthusiastic reviews in *Diapason* and *Monde de la Musique*.

Program Notes

Drawn from the collection of James T. Dyke, one of the most astute American collectors of nineteenth- and twentieth-century French works on paper, *Color, Line, Light: French Drawings, Watercolors, and Pastels from Delacroix to Signac* includes sheets he and his wife, Helen L. Porter, have given to the National Gallery of Art as well as others acquired by the Gallery with funds they donated. Showcasing the broad development of modern draftsmanship in France, the exhibition includes drawings and watercolors by French artists working from 1830 to 1930—including Delacroix, Monet, Degas, Cézanne, and Signac—and reveals a rich diversity of subjects, styles, and techniques from romanticism and realism through the impressionists, Nabis, and neo-impressionists. For his recital in honor of the exhibition, Nima Sarkechik has selected music from romantic composers Brahms and Liszt, both of whom expressed great admiration for the paintings of Eugène Delacroix (1798–1863), and Claude Debussy, who was, like all Frenchmen of his time, under the spell of both impressionist and post-impressionist artists.

Taking his cue from the symbolist poet Charles Baudelaire (1821–1867), Debussy composed numerous short pieces that are perfect musical manifestations of symbolism, with poetic reference to visual images and emphasis on mysterious harmony. He wrote that his *Images* featured “the newest discoveries in harmonic chemistry.” Like many poets he admired, Debussy chose to publish the pieces in series that he called “books.” Book 1 of the series *Images* begins with “Reflets dans l’eau,” in which repetitive rhythms evoke the sound and feel of gently lapping waves. Flowing arpeggios followed by pauses suggest the alternation of disturbance of the water and moments of stillness when reflections can be seen. The slow dripping of final drops—perhaps from the stowed oar of a boat—and the gentle ripples they create bring the piece to a close.

The second and third pieces in the same collection, “Hommage à Rameau” and “Mouvement,” are also included in today’s program. Debussy wrote the homage to Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683–1764) while he was

studying the baroque composer’s opera *Les fêtes de Polymnie* (1753). The sparse texture of the piano piece references Rameau’s own keyboard music, which was written for the harpsichord. “Mouvement” is both a study in perpetual motion and an exploration of syncopated rhythms and melodies built on a whole-tone scale.

Johannes Brahms learned of Delacroix’s importance for romanticism in art through two of his acquaintances, the German romantic painters Anselm Feuerbach (1829–1880) and Adolph Menzel (1815–1905), both of whom were openly indebted to the French master. Brahms was also well aware that Delacroix had painted portraits of two of his musical heroes, Frédéric Chopin (1810–1849) and Nicolò Paganini (1782–1840). The latter musician, whose career as a violinist and composer rivaled that of Liszt, inspired both Liszt and Brahms to write variations on melodies that Paganini had composed and improvised upon in concert.

Originally published under the title *Studies for Pianoforte: Variations on a Theme of Paganini*, Brahms’ variations use Paganini’s *Caprice no. 24 in A Minor* as the theme. Composed for the German piano virtuoso Carl Tausig (1841–1871), the work is uncharacteristically showy for Brahms. His close friend Clara Schumann, to whom he almost always submitted his works for comment before publication, nicknamed it *Hexenvariationen* (Witch’s Variations) because of its difficulty. The twenty-eight variations are grouped in two “books,” each of which begins with a statement of the theme. The final variation in each “book” is the most virtuosic and climactic.

In 1830, at an early point in his meteoric career as a concert pianist, Franz Liszt found himself in a position to commission a portrait of himself, and wasted no time in contacting Delacroix, his first choice among the many artists with whom he was acquainted and whose work he admired. The pianist and the artist had met at a Paris salon maintained by Dutch painter Ary Scheffer (1795–1858) and frequented by Gioacchino Rossini and George Sand. Both Liszt and Delacroix wrote enthusiastically about the salon, where romantic ideas and ideals, then still relatively fresh, dominated the serious conversation.

A typical example of program music, in which the composer conveys a story through descriptive music, Liszt's *Mephisto-Valse no. 1* describes an episode from the Faust legend as told by Nikolaus Lenau (1802–1850). The following program note, provided by Lenau, appeared in the first printed score:

There is a wedding feast in progress in the village inn, with music, dancing, carousing. Mephistopheles and Faust pass by, and Mephistopheles induces Faust to enter and take part in the festivities. Mephistopheles snatches the violin from the hands of a lethargic fiddler and draws from it indescribably seductive and intoxicating strains. The amorous Faust whirls about with a full-blooded village beauty in a wild dance; they waltz in mad abandon out of the room, into the open, away into the woods. The sounds of the fiddle grow softer and softer, and the nightingale warbles his love-laden song.

Liszt's fourth *Transcendental Etude* was inspired by Victor Hugo's (1802–1885) dramatic poem "Mazeppa."

As when a mortal — Genius' prize, alack!
Is, living, bound upon thy fatal back,
Thou reinless racing steed!
In vain he writhes, mere cloud upon a star,
Thou bearest him as went, Mazeppa, far
Out of the flow'ry mead, —
So — though thou speed'st implacable, (like him,
Spent, pallid, torn, bruised, weary, sore and dim,
As if each stride the nearer bring
Him to the grave) — when comes the time —
After the fall, he rises — KING!

The composer follows the poet closely in the etude, another example of program music. The octaves, flurrying thirds, and sweeping chromatic scales and arpeggios evoke the image of a horse galloping in a cloud of dust. The presentation of the theme becomes less forceful with each reintroduction, alluding to the horse's waning physical condition. But once more the horse, in an unexpected burst of energy, gallops faster than ever, as the tempo marking is changed to "Allegro deciso," and the pianist is called upon to play a variation of the original theme at a breakneck tempo. A grandiose finale is Liszt's response to the last verse of the poem.

*Program notes by Stephen Ackert, head, music department,
National Gallery of Art*

Next Concert at the National Gallery of Art

Mykola Suk, pianist

With resident musicians from the National Gallery of Art
and the Phillips Collection

Music by Beethoven

April 21, 2013

Sunday, 6:30 pm

West Building, West Garden Court