



The Sixty-fifth Season of  
The William Nelson Cromwell and F. Lammot Belin  
Concerts

“Sixty-five, but not retiring”

National Gallery of Art  
2,595th Concert

Shaun Tirrell, *pianist*

December 3, 2006  
Sunday Evening, 6:30 pm  
West Building, West Garden Court

*Admission free*

The Mason and Hamlin concert grand piano used in this performance  
was provided by Piano Craft of Gaithersburg, Maryland.

## Program

Domenico Scarlatti (1685–1757)

*Sonata in F Minor*, K. 466 (1738)

Frédéric Chopin (1810–1849)

*Ballade in F Major*, op. 38 (1840)

Franz Liszt (1811–1886)

*Funérailles* (1849)

*Vallée d'Obermann* (1855)

## INTERMISSION

Sergey Rachmaninoff (1873–1943)

*Sonata no. 2 in B-flat Minor*, op. 36 (1913)

Allegro agitato

Lento

Allegro molto

## The Musician

Shaun Tirrell is an internationally acclaimed pianist who has made his home in the Washington, DC, area since 1995. A graduate of the Peabody Conservatory of Music in Baltimore, where he studied under Julian Martin and earned a master of music degree and an artist diploma, he received a rave review in the *Washington Post* for his 1995 debut recital at the Kennedy Center's Terrace Theater. The reviewer praised his "impressive control of phrasing and dynamics and the kind of expressive freedom and emotional depth that lie in the heart of Chopin's style." In June 2005 he was the featured soloist with the Saint Petersburg (Russia) Symphony Orchestra, playing George Gershwin's *Concerto in F Major*. Tirrell's solo debut in Dublin with the National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland was broadcast live over the radio and was critically acclaimed in the *Irish Times* and the *Irish Independent*.

Tirrell has recently performed in the Kennedy Center Concert Hall, playing three different concertos with the National Symphony Orchestra and several works for two or more pianos. He has performed with the Collegium Musicum of Heidelberg, Germany, under the baton of Peter Shannon, and with the Chesapeake Chamber Orchestra, with which he played Franz Liszt's *Totentanz* as well as works by Camille Saint-Saëns and Felix Mendelssohn. He made his Boston debut in Jordan Hall with the Longwood Symphony Orchestra, followed by a live radio recital on Boston's classical music station, WGBH.

Tirrell earned a bachelor of music degree at the Oberlin College Conservatory of Music, where he studied with Joseph Schwartz and received the college's most prestigious prizes for pianists, the John Elvin Prize and the Rudolph Serkin Prize. He also shared the first prize in the Pro Piano International Competition in New York. He has recorded a solo CD on the MRC label featuring the works of Bach, Chopin, Liszt, and Rachmaninoff.

## Program Notes

In this program, Shaun Tirrell shares with the National Gallery audience his skill in interpreting both baroque and romantic music. To represent the music of the early eighteenth-century masters of the harpsichord (the keyboard instrument of choice in that era), he has chosen a sonata by Domenico Scarlatti. Born in Naples, Scarlatti was employed as harpsichord instructor to Infanta Maria Bárbara (1711–1758), daughter of King John V of Portugal. When she married the crown prince of the Spanish royal family, Scarlatti moved with her household to Madrid. His relatively light duties at court left him ample time to compose, and he produced operas, oratorios, and songs for solo voice in addition to more than five hundred keyboard sonatas. The resurgence of interest in Scarlatti owes much to the research of the American harpsichordist Ralph Kirkpatrick (1911–1984), whose chronology provides the sonatas with their unique “K” numbers.

Each of the three romantic composers represented in the program was a legendary virtuoso whose compositions were pivotal to the development of piano literature. Frédéric Chopin and Franz Liszt were almost the same age and knew each other’s work well. There is much evidence of Chopin’s influence in the music of Liszt, especially in the works written after Chopin’s death, including *Funérailles*. Many scholars believe Liszt composed this piece in 1849 to commemorate Chopin’s death, in October of that year. Others theorize that this music of remembrance was written in honor of three of Liszt’s friends who perished in the revolutionary turmoil of 1848. The impetus for Liszt’s tone poem *Vallée d’Obermann* was a novel by Étienne Pivert de Sénancour (1770–1846). Liszt evokes a transcendental experience of the novel’s main character with a melancholy theme that is transformed in the course of three sections into a joyful paean.

Chopin’s *Ballade in F Major*, op. 38, is dedicated to another close contemporary, Robert Schumann (1810–1856). Both composers were drawn to the power of poetry, and Chopin’s inspiration for this work was a ballade entitled *Świtez*, by the Polish nationalist poet Adam Mickiewicz (1798–1855). The

ballad is marked by a generous use of rubato, tempo fluctuations that allow the inner chromaticism of the music to blossom more fully.

Sergey Rachmaninoff is certainly the most famous of the pianist-composers who carried the romantic tradition into the twentieth century. His keyboard music is not only florid in texture and massive in scale, but also very demanding on the pianist's technique, thanks to the unusual size of the composer's hands, which could easily span an octave-and-a-half on the piano keyboard. When he wrote his second piano sonata in September 1913, Rachmaninoff was occupying a small apartment on the Piazza di Spagna in Rome that had once been inhabited by Pyotr Ilich Tchaikovsky (1840–1893). Rachmaninoff was given to mystical musings, and it is likely that he sensed the presence of the older composer. He may have remembered meeting Tchaikovsky years earlier in the home of friend and fellow student Matvey Pressmann, who is the dedicatee of the sonata. In 1931 Rachmaninoff revised the sonata, reducing its length by 120 measures and simplifying sections that he deemed too complex. The later version reflects an emphasis on lyricism that marked his late years and shows how much his style changed over the course of twenty years. The three movements are closely linked; the second proceeds into the third without interruption.

*Program notes by Sorab Modi*

Next Week at the National Gallery of Art

**Anonymous 4**

With special guests

Darol Anger, *fiddler and mandolin player*

Scott Nygaard, *guitarist*

“Long Time Traveling”

American hymns and tunes from the 19th century

December 10, 2006

Sunday Evening, 6:30 pm

West Building, West Garden Court

For the convenience of concertgoers  
the Garden Café remains open until 6:00 pm.

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

*Mailing address*  
2000B South Club Drive  
Landover, MD 20785

[www.nga.gov](http://www.nga.gov)