



WASHINGTON
PERFORMING ARTS

2022/23 SEASON THE WORLD IN OUR CITY



VÍKINGUR ÓLAFSSON, piano

SATURDAY, NOV. 19, 2 p.m.

THE JOHN F. KENNEDY CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS
TERRACE THEATER



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2022/23 SEASON

THE WORLD IN OUR CITY

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LEIF OVE ANDSNES, piano

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Effortless virtuosity, penetrating insight, and emotional nuance from Norwegian piano luminary Leif Ove Andsnes.

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COTTON

John E. Dowell, Damien Geter,
Denyce Graves, Justin Austin,
Laura Ward

Feb. 28, 7:30 p.m.

A powerful multi-disciplinary song cycle composed by Damien Geter, connecting African American ancestors and their heirs of today. The legendary Denyce Graves and baritone Justin Austin headline this world-premiere inspired by the photography of John E. Dowell.

COTTON is the inaugural Washington Performing Arts Ruth Bader Ginsburg Memorial Recital.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title Page	<u>4</u>
Program Notes	<u>6</u>
Artist Bio	<u>11</u>
Supporters	<u>13</u>
Board of Directors / Junior Board / Women’s Committee . . .	<u>20</u>
Staff	<u>22</u>

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Presents

VÍKINGUR ÓLAFSSON, piano

SATURDAY, NOV. 19, 2 p.m.

THE JOHN F. KENNEDY CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS
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BALDASSARE GALUPPI
[1706-1785]

Piano Sonata No. 9 in F Minor
I. Andante spiritoso

W. A. MOZART
[1756-1791]

Rondo in F Major, K. 494

C.P.E. BACH
[1714-1788]

Rondo for Keyboard in D Minor, Wq. 61/4

DOMENICO CIMAROSA
[arr. Ólafsson]
[1749-1801]

Keyboard Sonata No. 42 in D Minor

W. A. MOZART

Fantasie for Piano No. 3 in D Minor, K. 397

W. A. MOZART

Rondo in D Major, K. 485

DOMENICO CIMAROSA
[arr. Ólafsson]

Keyboard Sonata No. 55 in A Minor

JOSEPH HAYDN
[1732-1809]

Sonata for Piano in B Minor, No. 47, Hob XVI:32
I. Allegro moderato
II. Menuetto – Trio (Minore)
III. Finale. Presto

W. A. MOZART

Kleine Gigue in G Major, K. 574

W. A. MOZART

Sonata for Piano No. 16 in C Major, K. 545
I. Allegro
II. Andante
III. Rondo. Allegretto

W. A. MOZART
(arr. Ólafsson)

String Quintet No. 3 in G Minor, K. 516
III. Adagio in E-flat major

BALDASSARE GALUPPI

Piano Sonata No. 34 in C Minor
I. Larghetto

W. A. MOZART

Sonata for Piano No. 14 in C Minor, K. 457

W. A. MOZART

Adagio for Piano in B Minor, K. 540

W. A. MOZART
(trans. Liszt)

Ave verum corpus, K. 618

This program will be performed without intermission.

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This is one of twenty 2022/23 season performances included in Washington Performing Arts's The World in Our City initiative, which promotes cross-cultural understanding and cultural diplomacy via the presentation of international visiting artists, globally inspired local programming, and the award-winning Embassy Adoption Program, a partnership with D.C. Public Schools.

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MARS



PROGRAM NOTES FROM THE ARTIST

A BIRD OF A DIFFERENT FEATHER MOZART AND HIS CONTEMPORARIES

Artur Schnabel famously said of Mozart's keyboard sonatas that they were "too easy for children and too difficult for artists." It probably reflects rather poorly on me as an artist that even as a child I found Mozart's piano music very difficult. In fact, being assigned the C Major Sonata, misleadingly called the "Sonata facile" (easy sonata), as an eight-year-old piano student led to my first ever encounter with real struggle in music. As early as the fifth measure there were runs of notes I agonized over; runs which, like so much of Mozart, look deceptively innocent on the page but are strangely difficult in practice. The more I practiced, the worse they sounded. My inner turbulence escalated over a few days and reached a boiling point one afternoon when, in an outburst of anger, I grabbed a pencil and scrawled over the whole score. My relief was short-lived, however, as my mother soon discovered the sacrilege which had taken place in our living room. I was duly made to erase all of it, every little scratch. I still have the score, and the scars are still visible on the old pages today, but my relationship with the music is much improved. I have often since wondered: Was it really the scales? Or was I, even at this early age, weighed down by the excess baggage that the idea of Mozart brings with it? Did the inescapably unfavorable comparison I childishly made between my

ordinary self and the genius of the "eternal child" Mozart come in between me and the music?

THE MOZART OF THIS RECITAL

Far from the glowing image of angelic prodigy, the music in this recital is mostly by the Mozart of the 1780s, a grown man and a mature composer who in the preceding years had come to know adversity: painful disappointment and humiliation as his attempts at gaining suitable employment came to nothing; loss and grief as his mother passed away during his fruitless and frustrating Paris sojourn; and finally exile and a disinheritance of sorts from not only his home town of Salzburg but from the patriarchal family unit. At the same time, he had spread his wings and set out for freedom as he moved to Vienna and married Constanze Weber, much to the dismay of his father. This is the Mozart who was eager to escape the long shadow of his small former self and prove himself a serious musical force worthy of attention. And this is the Mozart that, at least for a few years, was able to sustain himself as an independent musician in a very contemporary sense, organizing his own concert series at repurposed, off-beat venues, securing the necessary number of subscription holders, writing the music, practicing the piano parts, rehearsing the orchestra—even printing the admission tickets.

I find this period of Mozart's life and art endlessly fascinating – in part because his resourcefulness and

hard work could not be further from the old idiot savant view of Mozart as a helpless, passive vessel of divine genius. Primarily, though, I love this Mozart because of the music itself. During this decade, Mozart was not just a composer but a virtuoso pianist; and, writing for himself in this role, I feel he indulged more than ever in the sublime playfulness that lay at the core of his originality and inventiveness. This is the period when Mozart was not just perfecting the Classical tradition but subtly subverting it, his graceful touch as featherlight as always but the shadows darker, the nuances and ambiguities more profound. And, while he was reaching into the realm of the Romantic future that lay ahead, he enthusiastically engaged with the past, embracing the Baroque elements that deeply enriched his music's scope and impact.

AN ECHO OF THE AGE

I have chosen to present some of my favorite keyboard works of Mozart in the company of works by a small selection of leading contemporaries. Two of these, Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach (1714–1788) and Joseph Haydn (1732–1809), were closely connected with Mozart in both music and spirit. The other two, Baldassare Galuppi (1706–1785) and Domenico Cimarosa (1749–1801), were more distant, without significant direct links to Mozart, but belonged to the same ecosystem of 18th-century music. As the center of musical life in Europe arguably shifted north during the maturation of the Classical style that took place during Mozart's lifetime, the two Italian composers and the

two Austro-Germanic ones represent not only different geographies, but the different aesthetic values that coexisted. Perhaps all four provide a chance to calibrate the contemporary ear towards the prevailing ideas, styles and tastes of the times. To me, they offer a kind of echo of the age. It is my hope that this particular context, a mix of the celebrated and the obscure, can slightly alter our psychological attunement, removing some of the baggage we all bring with us as we come to Mozart's music. This is in any case what I set out to do for myself: to approach even the best-known works of Mozart with the same freedom, childlike enthusiasm and spirit of discovery that come with trawling through the almost-never-recorded works of the likes of Galuppi and Cimarosa in search of unknown gems.

GALUPPI AND CIMAROSA

The album opens with a movement by the Venetian Galuppi, an influential champion of the *galant* style and prolific composer of comic operas, widely celebrated in his day but largely forgotten outside Italy by the end of the 18th century. The motivation behind reading through his available keyboard music (most of which is undated) came from encountering, many years back, Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli's impeccably stylish 1962 video recording of the sunny C Major Sonata No. 5. In the *Andante spiritoso*, the opening movement of the composer's F Minor Sonata No. 9, an entirely different atmosphere reigns. I found in it a similar elusive combination of darkly polished

elegance and apprehensive energy as in the opening measures of Mozart's late G Minor Symphony. With its dusky hues, the movement serves as a prelude to the bright F major of the Mozart Rondo K. 494 that follows. Similarly, I have positioned another sonata movement of Galuppi's, the Larghetto in C Minor, to set the scene with its hypnotic arpeggios before Mozart's C Minor Sonata. Although he was born 43 years later, the musical career of the Neapolitan Cimarosa bore many similarities with that of Galuppi. Like Galuppi, he enjoyed great international success with his comic operas (most notably his 1792 opera *Il matrimonio segreto*) and, like Galuppi, he joined a long succession of Italian composers to be engaged for a time at the court of Catherine the Great in St. Petersburg. Following a tip from a friend, I indulged in a similar treasure hunt in the selection of his available keyboard works, unearthing the two "sonatas" (presumably movements from larger works) on this album, the Sonata in D Minor and the Sonata in A Minor. Both have a lamenting, arioso quality and subtle evocations of Vivaldi in the background. The original scores are written in a rather sparse manner, and I have taken the liberty of harmonizing them as I have arranged them for the modern piano.

C.P.E. BACH AND HAYDN

Never shy to admit influence, Mozart had affectionate ways of acknowledging his gratitude to both Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach—of whom he famously said, "Bach is the father, we are the children"—and Joseph Haydn, whose friendship he

cherished to the point of dedicating a set of six string quartets to him. C.P.E. Bach's Rondo in D Minor stems from his collection of six *Clavier-Sonaten für Kenner und Liebhaber* (Keyboard Sonatas for Connoisseurs and Amateurs), written in his late years, 1779–1787, within roughly the same time frame as the Mozart works in this recital. I found it an irresistible choice next to Mozart's work in the same form, as the two approaches are so different—yet imbued with a similarly alluring sense of surprise, virtuosity and quick-wittedness. Bach's refreshingly original Rondo possesses the hallmarks of the *empfindsamer Stil* (sensitive style)—unexpected diversions, countless twists and turns and articulate changes in temperament. Joseph Haydn was himself no stranger to musical surprise and these same elements are at play in his Sonata in B Minor, a riveting work which seems to carry within itself the seeds of Romanticism and at the same time retain a sense of baroque majesty.

THE WORKS OF MOZART

Mozart's variety of surprise is somehow different from anyone else's. Musical expectations are often both met and challenged at the same time with an unanticipated twist; every familiar trope of the Classical style made fresh by some ingenious, subtle invention. That is how I feel when I play the F Major Rondo K. 494 of 1786. Even the staple Alberti bass underneath is inverted, starting the whole work off on a light, nimble footing, and what may seem simple at first glance proves upon further exploration to

be magnificently complex in detail. The amiable main theme is never heard twice in the same way on each of its four outings—not even close. The imagination of the Classical era’s most gifted improviser was simply too vivid to allow for mindless repetition. The twists and turns of these twelve measures are too many to list, undeniably minute yet gloriously indispensable.

Mozart’s *Fantasia in D Minor*, K. 397 is another work where his improvisatory brilliance is on full display, its darkly mysterious atmosphere almost like stepping into a state of altered consciousness. The performer has to retain a sense of uncertainty, of traversing into the mist without knowing what comes next, no matter how often the work has been rehearsed or performed. The date of the work has been subject to debate, but is often put at 1782, a year after Mozart’s first encounter with the works of Johann Sebastian Bach. It has been suggested that he intended this work as a prelude to an accompanying piece—possibly a fugue. Not entirely convinced by the various ways in which the unfinished D major section has been posthumously drawn to a close by other composers and performers, I decided to end the work where the D minor section finishes on a dominant chord and lead into an unrelated work: the quick-paced *Rondo in D Major*, K. 485. Mozart the keyboard virtuoso feels very present in this piece, its cheerful character in direct contrast with the preceding *Fantasia*. There is hardly a minor chord to be heard throughout (and then only in what seems like jest). Every possible side

of the limited thematic material (there really is only one theme here) is illuminated at some point in this ever-modulating tour de force. The *Kleine Gigue*, K. 574 is a small miracle of ingenuity which seems to take the tragic opening subject of J.S. Bach’s last fugue from the first book of *The Well-Tempered Clavier* and twist it into a high-spirited and superbly crafted one-and-a-half-minute tribute to the old master. It was written on May 16, 1789, in Leipzig (on Mozart’s second detour to the city on his long Berlin trip). To me, none of Mozart’s works in this recital would have been conceivable without his engagement with Bach’s music, introduced to him by his friend and patron, the Dutch-born diplomat and librarian Gottfried van Swieten, early in his Vienna years. But in this small piece, after Mozart had had the chance to improvise on Bach’s themes at the grand organ of the St. Thomas Church and leaf through Bach’s autographs, their relationship feels personal and intimate.

The G Minor String Quintet, K. 516 from 1787 was written, along with its sister piece in C Major, for the ensemble of two violins, two violas and cello. Mozart intended to publish the music himself, using a subscriber model as he did in his Vienna concert series. Failing to secure a sufficient number of buyers for the works, he was forced to abandon this plan and the works were in the end sold to a music publisher for a meagre sum. Two years later, his concert series would meet the same fate, as only one patron was willing to subscribe—the aforementioned Gottfried van

Swieten. The G Minor Quintet's tragic atmosphere has been linked by some to Mozart's dwindling success in Vienna, increasing financial worries and his father's illness and impending death. The Adagio movement in E-flat Major offers a moment of grace and consolation. According to one account (by Austrian composer Maximilian Stadler), Mozart performed the work himself at one point, playing one of the two violas in this quintet, with his friend Haydn playing the other. It is easy to imagine the warmth and kindred spirit of that ensemble. However, the sublime music also lends itself wonderfully to a solo piano transcription, something that has tempted me for years.

Following my encounter with the "Sonata facile," K. 545 described above, it would be years before I realized that this sonata was not written by the child Mozart, as I had envisioned. And, far from circumstances of perfect musical happiness, this C Major sonata was in fact written at a time, 1788, when Mozart's fortunes had reversed, as Austria's war with the Ottoman Empire had brought on an economic recession that rendered his concert activities unsustainable. As success in the opera world had yet to materialize, teaching provided a stable source of income for him. It is to this economic necessity that we owe so many of the solo keyboard pieces, including this perfectly distilled work, described by Mozart himself as "a little piano sonata for beginners", which somehow seems to reflect back to Mozart's own beginnings, almost as if recreating happier, simpler times.

If there is a hint of nostalgia in the C Major Sonata, the grand, theatrical tragedy of the C Minor Sonata, K. 457, however, foreshadows the turbulent Romantic era that lay ahead. It is all but impossible to imagine Beethoven writing his *Sonata Pathétique* without Mozart's C Minor Sonata paving the way. There are striking similarities in numerous passages in the opening movement. In the second movement Mozart's third theme, in A flat, seems to be the model on which Beethoven based his famous second movement melody, also in A-flat. Overall, the work feels strikingly bold in conception, its dynamic contrasts pushing the boundaries of what was yet possible on the ever-evolving keyboard instruments of the day.

The two mediums of string ensemble and solo keyboard were not far apart in Mozart's mind, as evident in his transcriptions of J.S. Bach's keyboard fugues for string quartet, dating back to his discovery of Bach's music. Having allowed myself to transcribe the Adagio from the G Minor String Quintet for solo piano, I must now conversely admit that the beautifully organized four-part writing of the late B Minor Adagio, K. 540 has often made me feel as if I were playing a piece for string quartet. Written in March 1788, the Adagio balances dark, introspective tension with tender meditation throughout—and the way it resolves into B major at the end feels like forgiveness itself.

In his piano transcription of Mozart's *Ave verum corpus* K. 618 (1791), Franz Liszt allows himself to marvel at Mozart's genius in his 19th-

century way. There is a sense of death and transfiguration as the music moves up into the starry firmament of the piano's upper register—Mozart has become an angel of sorts. In one of his incomprehensible compositional feats, Mozart's original choral motet was created in what appears to have been the spur of the moment during his visit to the spa town of Baden bei Wien, where Constanze was staying, pregnant with their sixth child. Mozart had six months to live. He wrote the motet

as a present for his friend, the parish cantor, to be performed a few days later at the Mass of Corpus Christi. Intended for a provincial choir and not overly ornate, there is a lucid clarity about its expressive beauty and, despite the swiftness of its creation, every detail seems perfectly thought-through. Two hundred and thirty years on, this music disarms us in a way words can hardly express.

ABOUT THE ARTIST



Pianist Víkingur Ólafsson has made a profound impact with his remarkable combination of high-level musicianship and

visionary programs. His recordings for Deutsche Grammophon—*Philip Glass Piano Works* (2017), *Johann Sebastian Bach* (2018), *Debussy Rameau* (2020) and *Mozart & Contemporaries* (2021)—captured the public and critical imagination and led to album streams of over 260 million. *The Daily Telegraph* called him “The new superstar of classical piano,” and *The New York Times* dubs him “Iceland’s Glenn Gould.”

Now one of the most sought-after artists of today, Ólafsson’s multiple awards include *Gramophone* magazine’s 2019 Artist of the

Year, Opus Klassik Award for Solo Instrumental Recording (twice) and Album of the Year at the 2019 *BBC Music Magazine Awards*.

Ólafsson continues to perform with the world’s leading orchestras and as artist-in-residence at the top concert halls and festivals, and works with some of today’s greatest composers. A captivating communicator both on and off stage, Ólafsson’s significant talent extends to broadcast, having presented several of his own series for television and radio. He was artist-in-residence for three months on BBC Radio 4’s flagship arts program, *Front Row*. Broadcasting live during lockdown from an empty Harpa concert hall in Reykjavík, he reached millions of listeners around the world.

ABOUT WASHINGTON PERFORMING ARTS

One of the most established and honored performing arts institutions in America, Washington Performing Arts has engaged for more than half a century with artists, audiences, students, and civic life. The city is truly our stage: for decades, in venues ranging from concert halls and clubs to public parks, we have presented a tremendous range of artists and art forms, from the most distinguished symphony orchestras to both renowned and emerging artists in classical music, gospel music, jazz, international genres, and more. Washington Performing Arts also has an ever-expanding artistic and educational presence on the internet, addressing the programming challenges of this time of pandemic while envisioning ongoing opportunities for online connection and community in a post-COVID world.

Washington Performing Arts deeply values its partnerships with local organizations and other arts

institutions. Through events online and in a myriad of performance venues and neighborhoods, Washington Performing Arts engages international visiting artists in community programs and introduces local artists to wider audiences. We place a premium on establishing artists as a continuing presence in the lives of both young people and adults through residencies and education programs.

For its achievements, Washington Performing Arts has been recognized with a National Medal of Arts and with three Mayor's Arts Awards from the D.C. Government. We have now embarked upon our second half-century, ever inspired by the motto of our founder, Patrick Hayes: "Everybody in, nobody out."

For more information, please visit washingtonperformingarts.org.

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Washington Performing Arts is grateful for generous gifts from members of our community to support dedicated endowment funds to recognize rising artists. **The Ruth Bader Ginsburg Memorial Fund** was established in 2021 to honor the late Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg's life, legacy, and passion for music with an annual award to a distinguished artist that includes the opportunity to choose a musical talent deserving of wider recognition to be presented in a Washington Performing Arts recital in Justice Ginsburg's memory. **"The Reggie"** is an annual award established in 2018 to honor former Washington Performing Arts Board Chair Reginald Van Lee, granted to a high school junior or senior member of the Washington Performing Arts Children of the Gospel Choir to pursue additional arts-related education or activities. For more information about Washington Performing Arts's endowed fund opportunities, contact Meiyu Tsung at MTsung@WashingtonPerformingArts.org.

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