

2025–2026 | 126th Season
Marian Anderson Hall

The Philadelphia Orchestra

Thursday, March 5, at 7:00

Naomi Woo Conductor
Hayato Sumino Piano

Gershwin *An American in Paris*

Gershwin/orch. Grofé *Rhapsody in Blue*

Intermission

Gershwin Lullaby, for strings

Gershwin/arr. Bowen *Catfish Row: Suite from Porgy and Bess* / 

- I. Catfish Row
- II. Porgy Sings
- III. Fugue
- IV. Hurricane
- V. Good Mornin' Sistuh!

This program runs approximately 1 hour, 50 minutes.

/  designates a work that was given its world or United States premiere by The Philadelphia Orchestra, part of the Orchestra's 125th anniversary celebration.

Philadelphia Orchestra concerts are broadcast on WRTI 90.1 FM on Sunday afternoons at 1 PM and are repeated on Monday evenings at 7 PM on WRTI HD 2. Visit www.wrti.org to listen live or for more details.



The Philadelphia Orchestra

The world-renowned Philadelphia Orchestra strives to share the transformative power of music with the widest possible audience, and to create joy, connection, and excitement through music in the Philadelphia region, across the country, and around the world. Through innovative programming, robust education initiatives, a commitment to its diverse communities, and the embrace of digital outreach, the ensemble is creating an expansive and inclusive future for classical music. In June 2021 the Orchestra and its home, the Kimmel Center, united. Today, The Philadelphia Orchestra and Ensemble Arts brings the greatest performances and most impactful education and community programs to audiences in Philadelphia and beyond.

Yannick Nézet-Séguin is now in his 14th season with The Philadelphia Orchestra, serving as music and artistic director. His connection to the ensemble's musicians has been praised by both concertgoers and critics, and he is esteemed by the musicians of the Orchestra, audiences, and the community. In addition to expanding the repertoire by embracing an ever-growing and diverse group of today's composers, Yannick and the Orchestra are committed to performing and recording the works of previously overlooked composers.

Your Philadelphia Orchestra takes great pride in its hometown, performing for the people of Philadelphia year-round, at the Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts, throughout the community, over the airwaves, and online. The Kimmel Center has been the ensemble's home since 2001, and in 2024 Verizon Hall at the Kimmel Center was officially rededicated as

Marian Anderson Hall in honor of the legendary contralto, civil rights icon, and Philadelphian. The Orchestra's award-winning education and community programs connect, uplift, and celebrate nearly 40,000 Philadelphians and 250 schools from diverse communities annually, through inclusive arts education and vibrant engagement that reflect our city's voices and expand access to creative opportunities. Students, families, and other community members can enjoy free and discounted experiences with The Philadelphia Orchestra through programs such as the Jane H. Kesson School Concerts, Family Concerts, Open Rehearsals, PlayINs, and Our City, Your Orchestra community concerts.

Through concerts, tours, residencies, and recordings, the Orchestra is a global ambassador and one of our nation's greatest exports. It performs annually at Carnegie Hall, the Mann Center, the Saratoga Performing Arts Center, and the Bravo! Vail Music Festival. The Orchestra also has a rich touring history, having first performed outside Philadelphia in its earliest days. In 1973 it became the first American orchestra to perform in the People's Republic of China, launching a now-five-decade commitment of people-to-people exchange through music.

Under Yannick's leadership, the Orchestra returned to recording with 15 celebrated releases on the Deutsche Grammophon label, including the GRAMMY® Award-winning *Florence Price Symphonies Nos. 1 & 3*. The Orchestra also reaches thousands of radio listeners with weekly broadcasts on WRTI-FM and SiriusXM. For more information, please visit www.philorch.org.

Conductor

Christa Holka



Canadian conductor **Naomi Woo** is gaining worldwide attention for her spirited dynamism and infectious musicality. A widely sought-after symphonic and operatic conductor, she is currently in her second season as assistant conductor of The Philadelphia Orchestra. This season, she debuts with the New York and BBC philharmonics, the Royal Northern Sinfonia, and the Royal Ballet and Opera, Covent Garden. She also returns to Montreal's Orchestre Métropolitain, where she was artistic partner from 2023 to 2025, as well as to the Vancouver

Symphony, the Calgary Philharmonic, and the City of London Sinfonia. A renowned advocate for contemporary music, she conducts the world premiere of Oliver Leith's *Garland* at Bold Tendencies in London and leads a workshop for Huang Ruo's upcoming opera *The Wedding Banquet* at the Metropolitan Opera in New York. In previous seasons, Ms. Woo appeared with the Toronto, Baltimore, and Montreal symphonies; the National Arts Centre Orchestra; London's Philharmonia; the Orchestra della Svizzera Italiana; the Chamber Orchestra of Luxembourg; and at LSO St. Luke's in London with Tangram Sound, an ensemble devoted to celebrating the vitality of Chinese cultures and producing new music by transnational Chinese creators.

On the opera stage, Ms. Woo has conducted the Canadian premiere of Du Yun's Pulitzer Prize-winning *Angel's Bone* in Vancouver, Puccini's *Edgar* at Opera Holland Park, Rossini's *La Cenerentola* with English Touring Opera, and the world premiere of Ellis Ludwig-Leone's *The Night Falls* in New York City. Recognized for her collaborative approach and natural command for storytelling and language, Ms. Woo has conducted more than a dozen operas with students and young professionals in the United States and the United Kingdom, and collaboratively created new, genre-bending operatic works with Sasha Amaya and Catherine Kontz (*A Certain Sense of Order*), Sophie Seita (*Beethoven Was a Lesbian*), and Alex Ho/Julia Cheng. Ms. Woo was music director of the National Youth Orchestra of Canada for its 2024 and 2025 seasons and is the former music director of El Sistema Winnipeg. As a pianist, she has led performances from the keyboard with The Philadelphia Orchestra, the Winnipeg Symphony, and others.

Ms. Woo holds a Ph.D. from the University of Cambridge, where she was a Gates Cambridge Scholar. She has also studied mathematics, philosophy, and music at Yale College, the Yale School of Music, and the University of Montreal. The 2022 winner of the Canada Council's prestigious Virginia Parker Prize, she is a member of Tapestry Opera's Women in Musical Leadership program and was chosen by her mentor, Philadelphia Orchestra Music and Artistic Director Yannick Nézet-Séguin, as a member of the Orchestre Métropolitain's inaugural orchestral conducting academy. She acknowledges generous support over the years from the Manitoba Arts Council, Canada Council for the Arts, Help Musicians UK, and the BC Arts Council.

Soloist



Dario Acosta

Hayato Sumino is an international concert pianist, celebrated for his Grand Prix win at the 2018 PTNA Piano Competition. Since performing as a semi-finalist at the 18th International Chopin Piano Competition in Warsaw, he has appeared with some of the world's top orchestras, including the NHK, Bamberg, Yomiuri Nippon, Polish National Radio, and Chicago symphonies; the Tokyo and Japan philharmonics; and the Boston Pops. His performances have mesmerized audiences across North America, Europe, and Asia, both in concert halls

and through his dynamic online presence. He makes his Philadelphia Orchestra debut with tonight's concert.

In 2025 Mr. Sumino was honored with the prestigious Leonard Bernstein Award from the Schleswig-Holstein Musik Festival, recognizing his exceptional artistry and growing impact on the international music scene. In the 2025–26 season he continues to reach new career milestones with major debuts and international tours. He debuts with the BBC Philharmonic at the Beijing Music Festival, performing Prokofiev's Piano Concerto No. 3 under John Storgårds, and with the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin at the Berlin Philharmonie. His highly anticipated recital debuts include Carnegie Hall (Stern Auditorium) and the Vienna Konzerthaus. He also returns to the Main Hall of the Elbphilharmonie Hamburg and the Basel Stadtcasino. Additional highlights of the season include his first European tour with the Aurora Orchestra, performing in Berlin, Cologne, Munich, Rotterdam, Zurich, Bern, and Geneva, and his debut with the Vienna Symphony at the Vienna Konzerthaus, followed by a tour of Japan under chief conductor Petr Popelka. Highlights of his 2024–25 season included an 11-concert tour across Japan with the Vienna Radio Symphony and Marin Alsop; recital debuts at the Berlin Philharmonie and the Tonhalle Zurich; performances of Messiaen's *Turangalila-symphonie* with the New Japan Philharmonic under Joe Hisaishi; and a tour with the Bamberg Symphony and Jakub Hrůša.

Mr. Sumino signed as an exclusive Sony Classical recording artist in March 2024, a partnership that further elevates his international profile. In addition to his musical achievements, he holds a Master of Engineering from the University of Tokyo and was honored with the University's President's Award in 2020 for his exceptional contributions to both music and academia. His unique style—melding classical virtuosity with innovative arrangements and improvisation—has also made him a digital sensation. His YouTube channel “Cateen,” with over 1.4 million subscribers and 200 million views, showcases his original compositions and arrangements, further cementing his influence in the modern music landscape. Named to *Forbes Japan's* “30 Under 30” list in 2023, he has been a Steinway Artist since 2021 and serves as an ambassador for both Apple Music Classical and CASIO. With his fresh and innovative approach to piano music, he continues to inspire and captivate audiences worldwide.

Framing the Program

Parallel Events

1924

Gershwin

Rhapsody in Blue

Music

Berg

Chamber

Concerto

Literature

Forster

A Passage to India

Art

Hopper

New York

Pavements

History

Lenin dies

1928

Gershwin

An American in

Paris

Music

Walton

Viola Concerto

Literature

Huxley

Point Counterpoint

Art

Munch

Girl on Sofa

History

Fleming discovers

penicillin

1934

Gershwin

Catfish Row

Music

Prokofiev

Lieutenant Kijé

Literature

Graves

I Claudius

Art

Arp

Human Concretion

History

John Dillinger

shot

This special all-Gershwin concert displays different sides of the composer's multifaceted career. It opens with the evocative *An American in Paris*. Gershwin wrote this "rhapsodic ballet" after a trip to Paris during which he had felt homesick for his native New York City. The brilliant score recreates what he called the "impressions of an American visitor in Paris as he strolls about the city, listens to the various street noises, and absorbs the French atmosphere."

Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* caused a sensation at its 1924 premiere in New York's Aeolian Hall at a concert presented by the legendary bandleader Paul Whiteman. On that occasion Gershwin was the piano soloist and Whiteman conducted a jazz ensemble of some two dozen musicians in an instrumentation by Ferde Grofé, who later crafted the version for full symphony orchestra that we hear tonight.

Gershwin was devoted to studying music of all genres in an attempt to expand his knowledge and refine his compositional technique. The eight-minute Lullaby for string orchestra was written as an assignment in harmony and counterpoint. As its name suggests, the work is gentle, quiet, and sweet.

The concert concludes with highlights from Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*. He had won his initial fame with popular Tin Pan Alley songs that led to a brilliant career on Broadway, and then to pieces like the others on this concert in which he combined jazz, popular, folk, and classical styles. Later in his career, Gershwin wrote his great opera after immersing himself in Black life and culture on Charleston's Catfish Row to tell a story of oppression, struggle, love, and hope.

The Philadelphia Orchestra is the only orchestra in the world with three weekly broadcasts on SiriusXM's *Symphony Hall*, Channel 76, on Mondays at 7 PM, Thursdays at 12 AM, and Saturdays at 4 PM.

The Music

An American in Paris

George Gershwin

Born in Brooklyn, September 26, 1898

Died in Los Angeles, July 11, 1937



George Gershwin's career was an American success story, one tragically cut short by early death in his 30s, like Mozart and Schubert before him. Born in Brooklyn to Russian-Jewish immigrants, he grew up in a poor household. As was also the case with Aaron Copland, his slightly younger Brooklyn contemporary, music offered opportunities for advancement. But while Copland went abroad to study in Paris, Gershwin dropped out of high school and started working his way up as a “song-plugger,” playing Tin Pan Alley songs at a music store. Soon he was writing his own

songs (his first big hit was “Swanee” in 1919) and enjoying fame on Broadway. Success followed success—and not just in the theater. Gershwin made history at age 25, on February 12, 1924, when Paul Whiteman and his Palais Royal Orchestra premiered *Rhapsody in Blue*. The Concerto in F for Piano and Orchestra, originally titled *New York Concerto*, followed the next year.

Homesick for the Hudson River After his triumph with *Rhapsody in Blue* it was Gershwin's turn for a European adventure and to write a piece that he described as “impressions of an American visitor in Paris as he strolls about the city, listens to the various street noises, and absorbs the French atmosphere.” He first visited the City of Light following the premiere of the *Rhapsody* and then returned early in 1926, when he got the idea for the work we hear tonight. In a postcard thanking his hosts, Robert and Mabel Schirmer, Gershwin wrote out a melody that he identified as “An American in Paris” and marked it “Very Parisienne.”

Gershwin returned to the tune nearly two years later when he started serious work on what he originally considered an “orchestral ballet.” Now living in New York, far from the Seine, he looked out on the Hudson from his home on 103rd Street:

I love that river and I thought how often I had been homesick for a single sight of it, and then the idea struck me—an American in Paris, homesickness, the blues. So there you are. I thought of a walk on the Champs Élysées, the honking of the taxi. ... There are episodes on the left bank, and then come the blues—thinking of home, perhaps the Hudson. There is a meeting with a friend, and after a second fit of blues [a] decision that in Paris one may as well do as the Parisians do.

In March 1928 Gershwin returned to Europe for three months where he worked on the piece. He went shopping with Mabel Schirmer in search of the taxi horns that he marvelously used to convey “the traffic sound of the Place de la Concorde during rush hour.” The composition

was completed back in New York and then orchestrated. (Whiteman's favored arranger, Ferde Grofé, had scored *Rhapsody in Blue*, but this time Gershwin wanted to do it himself.)

Everything was finished by late November, just a couple of weeks before Walter Damrosch conducted the premiere of the "tone poem for orchestra" with the New York Philharmonic. According to one review, a capacity audience at Carnegie Hall welcomed the work with "a demonstration of enthusiasm impressively genuine in contrast to the conventional applause which new music, good and bad, ordinarily arouses." Other conductors soon began to champion the piece across America, and the next year Gershwin made his debut as a conductor leading it with the Philharmonic at Lewisohn Stadium. Given the original conception as a ballet, it is hardly surprising that the piece inspired various choreographers, including Gene Kelly in a 1951 MGM movie directed by Vincent Minnelli entitled *An American in Paris*.

A Closer Look Gershwin acknowledged that the piece, "really a rhapsodic ballet," was composed "very freely" and was the "most modern music" he had yet attempted, influenced both by Debussy and the French composers known as *Les Six*. The work can be divided into five parts, but as Howard Pollack observes in his excellent Gershwin biography, they "basically form a large ABA structure: the first A (comprising the first two sections) depicting the American 'drinking in the sights, and other things' of Paris; the B episode (comprising sections three and four), his homesickness; and the return of A (section five), his cheerful resignation."

In an article in *Musical America* Gershwin described the composition in this way:

The opening gay section ... is followed by a rich "blues" with a strong rhythmic undercurrent. Our American friend, perhaps after strolling into a café, and having a few drinks, has suddenly succumbed to a spasm of homesickness. The harmony here is both more intense and simple than in the preceding pages. This "blues" rises to a climax followed by a coda in which the spirit of the music returns to the vivacity and bubbling exuberance of the opening part with its impressions of Paris. Apparently the homesick American, having left the café and reached the open air, has downed his spell of the blues and once again is an alert spectator of Parisian life. At the conclusion, the street noises and French atmosphere are triumphant.

—Christopher H. Gibbs

Christopher H. Gibbs is James H. Ottaway Jr. Professor of Music at Bard College and has been the program annotator for The Philadelphia Orchestra since 2000. He is the author of several books on Schubert and Liszt, and the co-author, with Richard Taruskin, of The Oxford History of Western Music, College Edition.

An American in Paris was composed in 1928.

The piece's first Philadelphia Orchestra appearance was on a Special Pops Concert led by André Kostelanetz in December 1951. Most recently on subscription it was performed in April 2016 with Yannick Nézet-Séguin on the podium.

Eugene Ormandy recorded the work with the Philadelphians in 1967 for CBS.

The score calls for three flutes (III doubling piccolo), two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, alto saxophone, tenor saxophone, bass saxophone, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (bass drum, cymbals, orchestra bells, snare drum, suspended cymbal, taxi horns, tom-tom, triangle, wood block, xylophone), celesta, and strings.

An American in Paris runs approximately 17 minutes in performance.

The Music

Rhapsody in Blue

George Gershwin



The signal event of George Gershwin's early career came at age 25, on Tuesday afternoon, February 12, 1924, at a concert in New York's Aeolian Hall given by Paul Whiteman and his Palais Royal Orchestra. Billed as "An Experiment in Modern Music," it featured a variety of familiar pieces, including popular fare and comedy, as well as pieces by Edward MacDowell, Victor Herbert, and concluded with one of Edward Elgar's *Pomp and Circumstance* marches.

An Attempt to "Elevate Popular Music" Whiteman explained that the purpose of the experiment was to highlight "the tremendous strides which have been made in popular music from the day of the discordant jazz, which sprang into existence about ten years ago from nowhere in particular, to the really melodious music of today which—for no good reason—is still being called jazz." The comment that the music came "from nowhere in particular" is striking. As the music historian Richard Taruskin keenly observed, this event was "in essence an attempt to sanitize contemporary popular music and elevate it in public esteem by divorcing it from its roots in African American improvised music and securing endorsements from luminaries of the classical music establishment, many of whom were in attendance that evening." (Among those said to have been there were Sergei Rachmaninoff, Leopold Stokowski, Jascha Heifetz, and Fritz Kreisler.) It was not so much that the music was unusual but rather the idea of presenting performances by a dance band in a concert hall.

Gershwin had written the piece in the space of just a few weeks in a two-piano version that was quickly orchestrated by Whiteman's favored arranger, Ferde Grofé (1892–1972), best remembered today for his own composition *The Grand Canyon Suite*. Grofé was intimately familiar with the marvelous instrumental colors Whiteman's band could produce; he followed suggestions outlined in Gershwin's piano score, which were supplemented by almost daily meetings with the composer. The famous opening clarinet glissando was contributed by Ross Gorman, who asked permission to change a written-out scale to something more enticing.

The *Rhapsody* proved to be the highlight of the concert, an enormous success before a capacity audience, as well as with most of the critics. Deems Taylor said the piece "hinted at something new, something that had not hitherto been said in music." Gershwin, he believed, provided "a link between the jazz camp and the intellectuals." Even a grumpy

voice from *Theatre Magazine* acknowledged that the wildly popular concert “was often vulgar, but it was never dull.” Whiteman repeated the program a month later and then again at Carnegie Hall in April, as well as in Philadelphia and Boston. In June he and Gershwin made their first recording of the *Rhapsody*, which sold over a million copies. Over roughly the next decade performances, recordings, and sheet music earned the composer some \$250,000, an almost unimaginable sum at the time.

A Closer Look Gershwin originally titled the work American Rhapsody, perhaps to capitalize on the popularity of Liszt’s Hungarian Rhapsodies, but his brother Ira suggested using something inspired by paintings of James McNeill Whistler, such as *Nocturne in Blue and Silver*.

The *Rhapsody* basically unfolds as a sequence of five Tin Pan Alley–like songs with virtuoso connecting passagework. The piece has been criticized by some as a loose patchwork of relatively interchangeable parts (Gershwin’s own early recordings made cuts so as to fit on one 78 disc), but Howard Pollack has observed that the work might be viewed as a “compressed four-movement symphony or sonata,” along the lines of Schubert’s “Wanderer” Fantasy. For his part, Gershwin said that he “wanted to show that jazz is an idiom not to be limited to a mere song and chorus that consumed three minutes in presentation,” which meant putting the blues “in a larger and more serious form.” Twelve years after its successful premiere he commented that the piece was “still very much alive,” while if he had “taken the same themes and put them in songs they would have been gone years ago.”

—Christopher H. Gibbs

Rhapsody in Blue was composed in 1924.

Roy Barge was the soloist in the first Philadelphia Orchestra performances of the Rhapsody, in November 1936; Paul Whiteman conducted. The last time the piece appeared on subscription was in January 2024, with the Marcus Roberts Trio and Yannick Nézet-Séguin conducting.

The Orchestra has recorded the Rhapsody twice, both for CBS and both with Eugene Ormandy: in 1945 with Oscar Levant and in 1967 with Philippe Entremont.

The score calls for solo piano, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two alto saxophones, tenor saxophone, two bassoons, three horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (bass drum, cymbals, glockenspiel, gong, snare drum, triangle), banjo, and strings.

Rhapsody in Blue runs approximately 16 minutes in performance.

The Music

Lullaby, for strings

George Gershwin



Gershwin's parents, neither musical, were Russian Jews who immigrated to the United States in the 1890s, settling in New York. George was born in Brooklyn, sharing the heritage of Irving Berlin, Jerome Kern, Richard Rodgers, and many other songwriters who dominated American popular music between the world wars. One factor distinguishes Gershwin from all the major American composers who preceded him—he was the first to approach classical music from the perspective of a popular songwriter. These songs comprised his native musical

language, the reference from which he approached all compositional projects.

When Gershwin composed *Lullaby* in 1919, he was already a success on Tin Pan Alley and Broadway. At the time he was studying with the Hungarian émigré Edward Kilenyi, who introduced him to contemporary European composers, including Schoenberg and Debussy. Gershwin was devoted to studying music throughout his all-too-short life; he was constantly seeking to expand his knowledge and refine his technique. He wrote this one-movement work as an assignment in harmony and counterpoint; it was no doubt conceived at the piano and then scored for string quartet. *Lullaby* became a favorite at private gatherings held by Gershwin's friends.

A Closer Look True to its name, *Lullaby* moves slowly and softly with hypnotic repetition, continually muted. Loosely structured in an ABA form, beginning with a demure introduction, this brief gem offers the mesmerizing, elegant melodic gift and masterful blending of classical and jazz elements evident in Gershwin masterpieces including *Rhapsody in Blue*, *An American in Paris*, and *Porgy and Bess*. The *Lullaby*'s gentle colors, its sweet and lazy swing-like rhythms, and its two infectious and unassuming themes complement the veiled inner, contrapuntal voices beneath the melodies. The mood shifts slightly in the brief central section. The return of the “bluesy” first section is strong, with colorful harmonies and syncopated rhythms. Changes in texture—higher registers and different accompaniment—add contrast to the repetitions. The work comes to a quiet close with a tender unison pizzicato.

The original string quartet version of *Lullaby* didn't receive its first public performance until 1967, with the Juilliard String Quartet at the Library of Congress. When *Lullaby* was finally published in 1968, more than 30 years after George's death, Ira Gershwin noted: “It may not be the Gershwin of *Rhapsody in Blue*, *Concerto in F*, and his other concert works,

but I find it charming and kind.” The main melody of the piece had a second life as part of the aria “Has Anyone Seen My Joe?” from Gershwin’s unsuccessful one-act jazz opera *Blue Monday* from 1922, later renamed *135th Street Blues*. Though the stage work was a failure, hearing it encouraged renowned band leader Paul Whiteman to commission a piece; the result was *Rhapsody in Blue*.

—Lynne Mazza

Lynne Mazza was associate artistic director of Music from Angel Fire, associate artistic director and program annotator for the Ocean Reef Chamber Music Festival, associate artistic director and program annotator for the Bravo! Vail Valley Music Festival, and programming associate at Great Performers and Mostly Mozart at Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts.

Lullaby was composed in 1919.

Skitch Henderson led the first Philadelphia Orchestra performance of the work, in August 1996 at the Saratoga Performing Arts Center. It has only been performed two other times by the Orchestra: in June 2015 with Cristian Măcelaru at the Mann Center for the Performing Arts and on Valentine’s Day 2017 with Scott Terrell.

The score calls for strings alone.

Performance time is approximately eight minutes.

The Music

Catfish Row: Suite from Porgy and Bess

George Gershwin



By 1920 the fabulously successful George Gershwin had begun to contemplate venturing further into the realm of concert music, remarking, “Operettas that represent the life and spirit of this country are decidedly my aim. After that may come opera, but I want all my work to have the one element of appealing to the great majority of our people.” In 1922 he experimented with the creation of a concise, one-act “jazz opera,” *Blue Monday Blues*. This attractive and lively score only whetted the appetite of Gershwin’s legion of admirers for a

full-length opera. Two years later he composed his great “crossover” hit, the *Rhapsody in Blue*.

A Grounding in Classical Music A decisive moment in Gershwin’s musical development came when he was around 10 years old and heard a student violinist perform Antonín Dvořák’s Humoresque. Enraptured, he later recalled, “It was, to me, a flashing revelation of beauty.” Dvořák’s music, especially the Humoresque, had a profound influence on Gershwin’s later music. As his biographer Howard Pollack has noted, “Regarding Humoresque, this included Gershwin’s predilection for pentatonic melodies, dotted rhythms, and even blue notes.” Furthermore, Gershwin’s first piano teacher, Charles Hambitzer, made sure that his precocious student had a thorough grounding in the classical piano repertoire, including music by Chopin, Grieg, Liszt, Debussy, and Ravel.

An omnivorous curiosity led Gershwin to study in later years with Henry Cowell, Wallingford Riegger, and, most importantly, Joseph Schillinger. (Like Sergei Prokofiev, Schillinger was a pupil of Nikolai Tcherepnin in St. Petersburg; he developed an idiosyncratic method of composition based on mathematical principles.) As Ira Gershwin testified, “George from the age of 13 or 14 never let up in his studies of so-called classical foundations and that by the time he was 30 or so could be considered a musicologist (dreadful word) of the first degree besides being a composer.” Upon George’s tragic early death at age 38, his friend in Los Angeles, Arnold Schoenberg, paid him a moving tribute: “Music to him was the air he breathed, the food which nourished him, the drink that refreshed him. ... Directness of this kind is given only to great men and there is no doubt that he was a great composer.”

Like Dvořák, Gershwin believed that one of the cornerstones of any authentically “American” art music must be that of Black people, especially spirituals and jazz. So when

it came time for him to write his grand opera, he turned to their lives, joys, and sufferings as a subject. In 1926 Gershwin read DuBose Heyward's novel *Porgy*, which had been published to great acclaim the year before. It is a tale of love and loss set amid the lives of Black people in Charleston, South Carolina. Work on the opera, titled *Porgy and Bess*, occupied Gershwin, Ira (who wrote many of the lyrics), and Heyward from 1933 until its first performance on Broadway on October 10, 1935. Heyward later recalled Gershwin as a "young man of enormous physical and emotional vitality ... who knew exactly what he wanted and where he was going."

A Closer Look In its first version, which premiered in Boston on September 30, 1935, *Porgy and Bess* lasted some four hours. Gershwin realized that this was too long—the part of Porgy was both grueling and impractical—and began to make cuts to his score with an eye toward the New York production. During the opera's initial run on Broadway, he extracted an orchestral suite that more than two decades later Ira titled *Catfish Row*. George clearly sought to save some of the music that he had cut from the original version but also wanted to disseminate *Porgy and Bess* as widely—and quickly—as possible. This suite, which contains beloved passages such as "Summertime" and "Bess, You Is My Woman" as well as less familiar music, such as the "Fugue," was premiered by the Russian-born conductor Alexander Smallens leading The Philadelphia Orchestra on January 21, 1936.

—Byron Adams

Byron Adams is Emeritus Distinguished Professor of Musicology at the University of California, Riverside. Both composer and musicologist, he specializes in French and British music of the 19th and 20th centuries. Among his publications are two edited volumes, Edward Elgar and His World (2007) and Vaughan Williams and His World (2023), which he co-edited with Daniel M. Grimley.

Porgy and Bess was composed from 1933 to 1935 and the Catfish Row Suite was arranged in 1936.

Catfish Row was given its world premiere by The Philadelphia Orchestra in January 1936, led by Alexander Smallens, with Gershwin himself playing the piano part; the composer also performed his Piano Concerto in F on the same program. The most recent performances of the Suite were on subscription concerts in December 2014, with Bramwell Tovey.

The scored calls for two flutes (II doubling piccolo), two oboes (II doubling English horn), four clarinets (IV doubling bass clarinet), bassoon, three horns, three trumpets, two trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (bass drum, chimes, cymbals, drum set, glockenspiel, snare drum, suspended cymbal, tom-toms, triangle, woodblock, xylophone), piano, banjo, and strings.

The piece runs approximately 23 minutes in performance.

Musical Terms

Aria: An accompanied solo song (often in ternary form), usually in an opera or oratorio

Blue note: A minor interval, especially the third or seventh note of a scale, where a major would be expected; used especially in blues and jazz

Chord: The simultaneous sounding of three or more tones

Chromatic: Relating to tones foreign to a given key (scale) or chord

Coda: A concluding section or passage added in order to confirm the impression of finality

Contrapuntal: See counterpoint

Counterpoint: The combination of simultaneously sounding musical lines

Fantasia: A composition free in form and more or less fantastic in character

Fugue: A piece of music in which a short melody is stated by one voice and then imitated by the other voices in succession

Glissando: A glide from one note to the next

Harmony: The combination of simultaneously sounded musical notes to produce chords and chord progressions

Humoresque: A short, lively, whimsical piece of music

Legato: Smooth, even, without any break between notes

Meter: The symmetrical grouping of musical rhythms

Nocturne: A piece of a dreamily romantic or sentimental character, without a fixed form

Operetta: A light opera with spoken dialogue, songs, and dances

Oratorio: Large-scale dramatic composition originating in the 16th century with text usually based on religious subjects. Oratorios are

performed by choruses and solo voices with an instrumental accompaniment, and are similar to operas but without costumes, scenery, and actions.

Pentatonic: Five tones. B) A five-tone pattern common in folk music of many regions; often used in Western music as an example of exoticism.

Pizzicato: Plucked

Rhapsody: Generally an instrumental fantasia on folksongs or on motifs taken from primitive national music

Scale: The series of tones which form (a) any major or minor key or (b) the chromatic scale of successive semi-tonic steps

Sonata: An instrumental composition in three or four extended movements contrasted in theme, tempo, and mood, usually for a solo instrument

Suite: During the Baroque period, an instrumental genre consisting of several movements in the same key, some or all of which were based on the forms and styles of dance music. Later, a group of pieces extracted from a larger work, especially an opera or ballet.

Syncopation: A shift of rhythmic emphasis off the beat

Ternary: A musical form in three sections, A-B-A, in which the middle section is different than the outer sections

Tempo: The speed of music

Timbre: Tone color or tone quality

Tone poem: A type of 19th-century symphonic piece in one movement, which is based upon an extramusical idea, either poetic or descriptive

Tonic: The keynote of a scale

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