

Program Notes

By Composer in Residence Bruce Brown
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Tonight's concert by the JSO features unique works that bridge the gap between the classical world and jazz. Actually, great jazz deserves the term classic as much as any other genre. Jazz is one of the most important cultural developments of the last century, and without question, it is America's most significant contribution thus far in music.

Jazz originated in New Orleans and was inspired by a cauldron of influences including Creole and Cajun folk songs, spirituals, ragtime, and many other elements. Over time, many different styles of jazz developed in cities such as Chicago, St. Louis, and Kansas City.

The hallmarks of jazz include complex harmonies, syncopated rhythms, and elaborate improvisations. Jazz rhythms are virtually never played exactly as they are written down. Players "swing" by stretching some notes and shortening others very freely. Jazz melodies, especially in the blues, involve free bending of pitches and the lowering of the "blue notes," the 3rd, 5th and 7th notes of the major scale.

Sit back and relax as the JSO explores the world of jazz!

American Symphonette No. 2

When Morton Gould (1913-1996) published his first composition at the age of six, he started a whirlwind career that never seemed to slow down. Gould had an uncanny knack for mastering new styles of music as they emerged, and his works beautifully incorporate idioms from popular culture in classical settings.

Gould's remarkably diverse output included compositions written for orchestras throughout the United States as well as film music, Broadway and television scores, ballet scores, and three commissioned works for America's bicentennial. He appeared as a conductor with most of the major orchestras in the United States, Mexico, Canada, Europe, Japan and Australia. With his own orchestra he recorded many classical standards, including Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*, for which he also played the piano!

Along the way, Gould picked up a Grammy Award, the Pulitzer Prize, Kennedy Center Honors for lifetime achievement, and many other kudos.

Gould's *American Symphonette No. 2*, written in 1938, has been described as "one of the most convincing classical attempts to create a jazz spirit," even though it doesn't include specialized jazz soloists or improvisation.

You probably know the theme of the second movement, *Pavanne*, even if you don't know you do. The tune is so convincing that jazz performers from John Coltrane to David Baker and Dizzy Gillespie have quoted it in their own recordings.

Concerto for Saxophone Quartet

The music of Philip Glass (born 1937), one of the most influential musicians of the last half-century, is often described as "minimalism." Like most creative artists, he dislikes categories, and he describes himself as a composer of "music with repetitive structures." His imaginative music has led the way toward a lively and appealing "minimalist" approach that has captivated audiences and become familiar in movie scores and many other popular genres.

Glass grew up in Baltimore, where he often sat with his father after dinner, listening to a wide range of recordings, until almost midnight. He studied flute as a child, before encountering a dazzling variety of musical influences including Anton Webern's serialism, Parisian films, the music of Indian sitar player Ravi Shankar, and keyboard studies at Juilliard.

Glass worked as a plumber, cab driver and mover as he developed his skills by performing with his own Philip Glass Ensemble. In 1975, the success of his groundbreaking opera *Einstein on the Beach* established his reputation as a force to be reckoned with.

Since that time he has been an incredibly prolific composer with performances by all the major orchestras in the world. He has written many operas and musical theater works, eleven symphonies, eleven concertos, seven string quartets, and many other works, including film scores, three of which have been nominated for Academy Awards.

Glass wrote his jazzy *Concerto for Saxophone Quartet and Orchestra* in 1995 for the Raschèr Saxophone Quartet. That group's leader, Sigurd Raschèr, is one of the finest and most respected saxophonists in the world.

The quartet specifically asked for a work that could be performed with or without orchestra. The Raschèr Quartet premiered the quartet version in July of 1995 at the Schleswig-Holstein Music Festival in Germany. They debuted the orchestral version on September 1, 1995, in a performance with the Swedish Radio Orchestra in Stockholm.

The concerto provides ample opportunities for the soloists to display the expressive power of each of the saxophones. A lovely melody in the soprano sax floats above the texture in the first movement. The baritone ("bari") sax introduces a lively tune in the second. The third movement, featuring the tenor sax, has been described as "restful as a lullaby." All four saxophones join the fray in the exciting finale.

Girl Crazy Overture

No composer has combined jazz music and classical styles more perfectly than George Gershwin (1898-1937).

Gershwin taught himself to play piano by imitating piano rolls and soon became "probably the youngest piano pounder ever employed in Tin Pan Alley." When he submitted a song for publication, at the tender age of fifteen, he was making fifteen dollars a week – a pretty respectable sum in those days! His employer, Jerome Remick and Company, told him he was there to play piano, not to write music.

He didn't publish his first song until 1916, three years later, but he quickly became one of the most influential musicians of his time, or any other time. Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*, immortal songs from *Porgy and Bess*, and many other works for the Broadway stage, movies and recordings, have become an indelible part of our musical experience.

The musical *Girl Crazy*, with music by Gershwin and lyrics by his brother Ira, gave Ethel Merman her Broadway debut and turned Ginger Rogers into a star.

Girl Crazy opened at the Alvin Theatre on October 14, 1930 and ran for 272 performances. The show introduced some of Gershwin's most memorable tunes, including *Embraceable You*, *But Not for Me*, and *I Got Rhythm*. The opening night pit orchestra included some of the greatest luminaries of the jazz world: Benny Goodman, Gene Krupa, Glenn Miller, and Jimmy Dorsey

Hollywood adapted *Girl Crazy* for films three times: the first in 1932, a classic production with Mickey Rooney and Judy Garland in 1943, and a 1965 MGM remake for Connie Francis with the title changed to *When the Boys Meet the Girls*.

An American in Paris

Gershwin pursued his dream to learn more about classical composition by traveling to France in 1926 and again in 1928. He approached the gifted composer Maurice Ravel and the legendary teacher Nadia Boulanger, but both felt he should forge ahead on his own. Boulanger, especially, urged him not to copy others, but to be himself. “Why be a second rate Ravel,” she said, “when you are already a first rate Gershwin.”

The experience led Gershwin to write *An American in Paris*, a sparkling orchestral evocation of the excitement of his visit to the French capital. Walter Damrosch commissioned the project, and he conducted the New York Philharmonic in the premiere on December 13, 1928, in Carnegie Hall. It quickly became an audience favorite and has been recorded many times.

Gershwin completed the score on November 18th, less than four weeks before the premiere. In the orchestration, he included four taxi horns he had brought back from Paris, and there is an interesting controversy over which pitches he actually intended them to play.

Gershwin gave a vivid description of the piece in an interview in the August 18, 1928 edition of *Musical America*:

This new piece, really a rhapsodic ballet, is the most modern music I have ever attempted ... The opening gay section is followed by a rich blues with a strong rhythmic undercurrent. Our American... perhaps after strolling into a café and having a couple of drinks, has succumbed to a spasm of homesickness. The harmony here is both more intense and simpler 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 impression of Paris. Apparently the homesick American, having left the café and reached the open air, has disowned 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.

Some critics at the time questioned whether *An American in Paris* should be played alongside the other, more classical, works on the program. Gershwin gave them an excellent response:

It's not a Beethoven Symphony, you know... It's a humorous piece, nothing solemn about it. It's not intended to draw tears. If it pleases symphony audiences as a light, jolly piece, a series of impressions musically expressed, it succeeds.