

# Program

Charles Tomlinson Griffes  
(1884-1920)

*Poem for Flute and Orchestra*

Youbeen Cho, flute

Béla Bartók  
(1881-1945)

Piano Concerto No. 3, BB 127

I. Allegretto

II. Adagio religioso

III. Allegro vivace

Ana-Maria Uzunova, piano

INTERMISSION

Johannes Brahms  
(1833-1897)

Concerto in A Minor for Violin, Violoncello, and  
Orchestra, op. 102 ("Double Concerto")

I. Allegro

II. Andante

III. Vivace non troppo

Yilian Concepción, violin

Jon Leonard Cruz, cello

George Gershwin  
(1898-1937)

*Rhapsody in Blue*

Caroline Dratnal, piano

# Artist Biographies



## Youbeen Cho

Hailing from South Korea, flutist Youbeen Cho began her musical journey at age of 10. She went to the prestigious Yewon Arts School and Seoul Arts High School in South Korea.

Youbeen's career is marked by numerous awards, including the Eumyoun Music Competition, Korea Chamber Orchestra Competition, Asia Flutist Federation Competition (Shanghai, China) 6<sup>th</sup> place, Napolinova World Flute E-Competition 4<sup>th</sup> place (Italy).

As a dynamic performer, Youbeen's debut performance was the Yejin Young Artist Concert in 2008 in South Korea. She also

performed many concertos with The Flute Choir of Love, Seoul Philharmonic Orchestra, and several times with Korea Chamber Orchestra(KFO) Summer Festival Orchestra. More recently, Youbeen won the University of Cincinnati-Conservatory of Music Concerto Competition during her undergraduate years.

She participated many summer festivals include, KFO Festival 2008-2019, The Music Festival (2007-2008), The Classical Music Magazine Festival (2008), The National Orchestra Institute (2021), Imani Chamber Music Festival (2023). Recently, she joined New World Symphony as a substitute musician this year.

Youbeen completed her undergraduate and master's degree at the College-Conservatory of Music at the University of Cincinnati. She received guidance from Demarre McGill at CCM and Dr. Esther Yoonyoung Lee in Korea.

Youbeen is recently got Professional Performance Certificate from Lynn University under the mentorship of Jeffrey Khaner and continuing Master's program with him.



## Ana-Maria Uzunova

Ana-Maria Uzunova is a second-year student at Lynn University and is studying piano with Dr. Roberta Rust. She started playing the piano at the age of four and graduated from the National School of Music “Lubomir Pipkov” in Sofia, Bulgaria in 2023. Since the start of her musical journey, she has won various competitions across Europe as a soloist and chamber performer, some of which are:

XXX International Competition “Music and Earth”, Bulgaria, XIII International Music Competition “F. Shubert”, Bulgaria, IV International Piano Competition “From Bach to Jazz”, Greece, XXVIII International Competition – “Flame”, Paris, I International Competition for young pianists “Merci Maestro”, Brussels, XV International Young Artist Competition, North Macedonia, II International Piano Competition “Sanja Pavlovic”, Serbia, III International competition “Cesar Franck”, Brussels. In the last two years she had recitals in Vienna, Prague and Sofia as a soloist and a chamber musician. Ana-Maria has attended masterclasses and festivals and has worked with prominent musicians such as: Prof. Dmitri Ratser, Prof. Emile Naoumoff, Prof. Katarzyna Popowa-Zidron, Prof. Boyan Vodenicharov, Prof. Ludmil Angelov, Prof. Moni Simeonov, Prof. Pavlina Dokovska and others.



## Yilian Concepción

Yilian Concepción, a native of Cuba, began her violin studies at the age of seven. She earned her Bachelor’s degree in Music from the Instituto Superior de Artes (ISA) in Havana, Cuba, and is currently in her first year of the Professional Performance Certificate (PPC) Program at Lynn University, studying under the guidance of Carol Cole. Throughout her career, Yilian has performed in prestigious international festivals, including the Rheingau Music Festival in Germany (2018, 2023), the Orchestra of the Americas (Mexico Crescendo Tour, 2019), and the Alfredo de Saint Malo Festival in

Panama (2019). She has also participated in notable events such as La Clemenza di Tito with the Havana Lyceum Orchestra at The Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. (2020), the Mozart and Mambo Tour in Germany with Sarah Willis (2021), and the Schleswig Holstein Musik Festival in Hamburg (2022). In 2023, she performed at the Pacific Music Festival in Japan and the Mozart Fest Latino in Salzburg, Austria.

Her dedication and passion for music have been recognized through various accomplishments, including winning the John Oliveira String Competition at Lynn University. Most recently, she was honored to win the Concerto Competition at Lynn University, which will give her the opportunity to perform as a soloist with the Lynn Philharmonia.



## Jon Cruz

Born in the city of Sancti Spíritus, Cuba, Jon Cruz began his cello studies at the age of eight. At fifteen, he entered the prestigious National Music School in Havana, where he quickly distinguished himself, performing as a soloist in cello concertos by Saint-Saëns and Elgar. He later earned his Bachelor of Music degree from the Universidad de las Artes in Cuba, solidifying his academic and professional training as a cellist.

Jon has extensive performance experience, both nationally and internationally. In Cuba, he was a member of the Gran Teatro de la Habana Orchestra, the Irene Rodríguez Flamenco Dance Company, the Liceo Mozartiano de La Habana Orchestra, and the Cuban-European Youth Academy Project. One of his most notable achievements was participating in the Mozart and Mambo Tour alongside Sarah Willis of the Berlin Philharmonic.

His international career has taken him to some of the most prestigious stages in Europe, including the Kurhaus Wiesbaden, Konzerthaus Berlin, and the Elbphilharmonie in Hamburg. He has also participated in renowned music festivals such as the Young Euro Classic Festival and the Rheingau Music Festival.

Jon has had the privilege of studying with esteemed cellists such as Christoph Daniel and Thomas Kaufmann, and has taken part in masterclasses with Karlos Rodriguez, Willem Stam, Ludwig Quandt, and Johannes Mosser. Currently, he is pursuing a Master Degree at Lynn University, studying under the guidance of David Cole.





## Caroline Dratnal

Hailing from Calgary, Canada, Caroline Dratnal is a 21 year old junior studying piano under the esteemed Dr. Roberta Rust. A graduate of the prestigious Young Artist Academy at the MRU Conservatory, she has cultivated a rich and diverse musical background.

Caroline has excelled in numerous competitions, most recently being named a winner of the 2024 Lynn Conservatory Concerto Competition. In 2020, she won the Rotary Calgary Concerto Competition, leading to her orchestral debut with the Calgary Civic Symphony in 2022.

Her accolades also include being a runner-up in two FMSTA competitions—the 2023 and 2024 Gray Perry Collegiate for solo piano and the 2023 Byrd Memorial for piano duet. Additionally, she has earned finalist spots in both the Jack Heller Young Artist Competition and the Ocala Symphony Young Artist Competition. Caroline has showcased her talents at provincial and national levels in events such as the Kiwanis Festival, Canadian Music Competition, and Canadian Contemporary Showcase. In 2024, she was honored to attend the Ted Atkatz Percussion Seminar in Los Angeles as a piano fellow, where she performed at the Colburn School.

Beyond her musical pursuits, Caroline works as a sailing coach. She also enjoys knitting, writing, and painting.

# Program Notes

## CHARLES TOMLINSON GRIFFES

### *Poem for Flute and Orchestra*

**Born:** September 17, 1884, Elmira, N.Y.

**Died:** April 8, 1920, New York City

**Composed:** 1918

**First performance:** November 16, 1919, Aeolian Hall, New York; Georges Barrère was the soloist, and Walter Damrosch conducted the New York Symphony Orchestra

**Instrumentation:** solo flute, 2 horns, harp, percussion (snare drum, bass drum, gong, tambourine), strings

**Duration:** About 9-10 minutes

**Backstory:** Like George Gershwin, who also is on this weekend's programs, Charles T. Griffes was a most promising American composer who died too young to realize his full potential. Griffes was just 35 when he died of complications from the so-called Spanish flu, which was the COVID-19 pandemic of the immediate post-World War I period. But like Gershwin, he had made great progress in finding a mature compositional language before his untimely death.

But unlike Gershwin, who was an athletic, gregarious man with a wide circle of friends, Griffes was a shy, modest man who spent his whole adult career as a teacher of music at the Hackley School (founded 1899), a still-operating prep institution in Tarrytown, N.Y. (Hackley was originally a boys' school, but went coed in 1970.) Griffes was from Elmira, N.Y., where he studied the piano at first with his sister Katherine, and then with a piano professor at Elmira College.

Like many American classical musicians of his day he sought professional training in Germany, planning to become a concert pianist. But during his time in Berlin (1903-1907), Griffes began to see his life's work as being in composition instead, and in 1905 and 1906, studied with the German composer Engelbert Humperdinck (1854-1921), best-known for his Wagnerian-flavored opera *Hänsel und Gretel* (1893). Some of Griffes's music was performed during his four years of study, and he also appeared in Berlin as a pianist and accompanist.

Griffes returned to the US in 1907 and took the job at Hackley in September of that year; he would remain there until the end of his life. As biographer Donna K. Anderson writes, the conception of Griffes's life is that of someone stuck in a rural town, kept from his true vocation by endless academic drudgery just to make a living. But this is misleading:

The job may not have offered many challenges or rewards, but his

modest salary, room and board in a beautiful and protected environment, leisure time, the esteem in which he was held by students and colleagues and the prestige of Hackley itself gave him a sense of security and satisfied his need for environmental and financial stability in no small way.

Indeed, it was a good environment for Griffes, who spent most of his free time, including his summers, 30 miles to the south in New York City, where he composed and sought performances for his music and made long and fruitful contacts with the leading lights of the city's musical establishment. He also was a gay man who, perhaps unusually for the time, was unashamed of his homosexuality and had an active romantic life in the city. While his earlier music is in the late German Romantic mainstream, Griffes changed his style sharply around 1911, pursuing instead a more French-oriented impressionist style. He wrote several works built around Asian folk music, including *Sho-jo* (1917), a "Japanese pantomime" in which "the harmonizations omit major thirds and sixths are all in octaves, fifths, fourths and seconds," as Anderson writes. But he also was unafraid to explore the outer limits of tonality, including with his powerful Piano Sonata (1917-1918), for which he created an unusual scale and cloaked his aggressive musical argument in stark and unrelenting dissonance.

The *Poem for Flute and Orchestra* was written in 1918 for the French flutist Georges Barrère (1876-1944), who was principal flutist of the New York Symphony Orchestra, a job he held from 1905 until his death in 1944, years after the orchestra had merged with the New York Philharmonic. Barrère is one of the big names in flute history, the first performer of Debussy's *Prélude to the Afternoon of a Faun* (when he was just 17) and the exemplar in the United States of the French school of flute playing. He founded the woodwind department of the Juilliard School and commissioned numerous works from composers, the two of the most important being Edgard Varèse's *Density 21.5* and Griffes's *Poem*.

The first performance in November 1919 of the *Poem* was widely praised in the press of the day as being a significant work by an important young American composer. "This 'Poem' is a composition of real charm and individuality, written, in a truly idiomatic utterance, which thus is felt as an inevitable interpreter of the musical thought," the eminent *New York Times* critic Richard Aldrich wrote.

But Griffes was already ill with influenza, which was peaking in one of its waves at this time, and only three weeks later, when the Boston Symphony journeyed to New York to play Griffes' *The Pleasure-Dome of Kublai Khan* at Carnegie Hall, Griffes had trouble standing in his box to acknowledge the audience's applause. His condition worsened after his return to Hackley, and he was taken to New York City in early April 1920 for an emergency

operation doctors hoped would help him breathe. It was unsuccessful, and Griffes died shortly afterward of flu-related empyema, which had destroyed his lungs. It was a sad end to a career that was just about to take off, but the music he did leave reveals an unusual and original talent; he would best be honored today with more frequent performances of his works.

**The music:** The *Poem* is delicately scored for flute and a small orchestral ensemble of just strings, harp, percussion and two horns. But Griffes makes expert use of his small forces, showing an instinct and ear for precise color that leads him to call at times for a quartet of four violins and a solo viola, a snare drum and a tambourine, and inventive, idiomatic writing for the two horns.

Cellos and basses play a quiet opening (Andantino) phrase, after which the rest of the string section comes in to finish the introduction. Although centered in the key of C-sharp minor, there are already in the first bars notes outside the ordinary scale that suggest a more modal sound world. The solo flute enters with a melancholy main theme that hints of much older music, the kind that might have accompanied a ballad. Horns and harp join the strings accompanying the flute as it continues, offering exquisite touches of shade.

The music slows slightly, and over hushed strings the flute plays a short, descending melody (*Tranquillamente*) that will return later in the piece. The effect is that of a bard ending the first part of his tale and then resuming. The opening motif returns in cellos and basses, but this time announces a faster, more melodically and harmonically expansive section in which the flute drives the drama with more extravagant upper-register lines, and a feel of agitation and nervousness. The *Tranquillo* music returns, ending this section of the ballad.

The music becomes more frenetic after another repeat of the opening introduction, with the two horns trading bits of melody, leading to pizzicato, then tremolo strings as the flute returns. The soloist's music turns more agitated, driving to virtuosic high-register roulades that signal a change to a faster tempo (*Allegro scherzando*). The fast section that follows is in the major rather than the minor, and strongly suggests a country dance, with its rhythmic string patterns, snare drum riffs and prominent harp.

The mood continues, with just horns and harp supporting the flute, and then the music gets more passionate, building to a trill that introduces a short *Con fuoco* (*With fire*) section that quickly gives way to a new idea (*Vivace*) that breaks with the predominantly triplet-based music up to this point.

The tempo gets faster, increasing to Presto; the flute then sounds several trills and the *tranquillo* music returns, signaling the end of another section of the bard's tale. A solo viola enters with the initial theme of the *Poem*'s opening bars, and the flute returns to the mood and motifs of the first

section. The soloist plays a last fragment of motif at the bottom of its register, and the work ends with hushed notes in the harp.

## **BÉLA BARTÓK**

### Piano Concerto No. 3, BB 127

**Born:** March 25, 1881, Nagyszentmiklós, Hungary (now Sînnicolau Mare, Romania)

**Died:** Sept. 26, 1945, New York City

**Composed:** 1945

**First performance:** February 8, 1946, Philadelphia; György Sándor was the pianist and Eugene Ormandy led the Philadelphia Orchestra

**Instrumentation:** 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons; 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba; timpani, xylophone, snare drum, bass drum, cymbals, triangle, tam-tam; strings; solo piano

**Duration:** 24-26 minutes

**The backstory:** Bartók came to the United States in late 1940 to work for Columbia University on a collection of Serbo-Croatian folk music recordings that had been taken in the field in the 1930s. He also was eager to get out of Europe, fearing a Nazi takeover of Hungary, and had already sent some of his more valuable manuscripts out of the country.

It was at this time, too, that mysterious pains in his right shoulder began to plague the composer, which may have been the first hint of the leukemia that was to claim his life five years later. Bartok and his wife, the pianist Ditta Pásztor, had a difficult time getting used to New York City, and tended to associate primarily with other Hungarians.

We've had enough trouble learning how to cope with various gadgets of the electric, gas, corkscrew, can-opener type, etc., and with means of transportation [he wrote to his sons in December 1940] ... We recently wanted to take the subway to New York's southernmost part: I didn't know exactly where to change to what ... so that we jaunted around for 3 hours under the ground; finally, our time having run out, we sneaked shamefacedly home, underground of course, without having achieved our purpose.

But his work at Columbia, where he was an "associate in music" in 1941 and 1942, was fulfilling. A pioneering ethnographer, Bartók saw a book from the research published in 1943, and he also finished work on his own treatises about music he had collected in Romania and Turkey.

The musicologist Malcolm Gillies notes that Bartók's priority in these years was his ethnographic work, and not composition. But soon his illness, which was tentatively diagnosed in 1942, began to profoundly affect him. He was hospitalized in early 1943, his weight having dropped to about 90 pounds, and it was then that ASCAP took over his health costs, paying out \$16,000



over the next two-and-a-half years, which scholars believe was crucial to extending Bartók's life (he benefited from a new drug, penicillin, in 1945 when he suffered a bout of pneumonia).

In that last part of his life, Bartok returned to composition, creating four major works before his death: The Concerto for Orchestra (1943), the Sonata for Solo Violin (1944), and the Third Piano Concerto and the Viola Concerto (both 1945). During the summer of 1945, while recuperating from his ailment in Saranac Lake, N.Y., Bartók embarked on the Piano Concerto No. 3, intending it for his wife to play. She had difficulty playing the Second Piano Concerto, and he wanted to write something with a lighter texture, drawing inspiration from the popular Piano Concerto of Edvard Grieg. He wrote the bulk of the work in July and August, and managed to orchestrate all of it except for the last 17 measures before his final illness set in.

He died in late September, and his friend Tibor Serly (1901-1978), a Hungarian violist and composer, orchestrated the last measures of the concerto before its first performance in Philadelphia in 1946. It quickly became one of Bartók's most popular works, and has remained so. What remains unknown is whether the more transparent, accessible style the composer demonstrated in the Concerto for Orchestra and the Third Piano Concerto would have been a path he would have continued to pursue.

**The music:** Bartók's extensive, lifelong study of the folk music of Hungary, as well as Central and Eastern Europe generally, led him to develop a style in which the characteristics of their melodies and rhythms is a natural and embedded part of his compositional language. And so the Third Concerto opens (*Allegretto*) over murmuring violins and violas with the piano playing a jaunty, rhythmically complex motif that transforms into display before the orchestra enters with a continuation of the theme. Highly colorful orchestral effects and a variety of melodies and rhythms in the piano give this first section a feeling of lightness and invention.

A secondary theme appears over wide-ranging arpeggios in the piano, a more straightforward melody played by the woodwind section. The piano takes over, and drives the music to a break signaled by a solo horn. The piano then re-enters with a harmonized version of the opening motif, adding sonic complexity. The orchestra forcefully answers with its part of the motif, over pounding simple harmonies in the piano.

The pianist is busy for the rest of the movement in a back-and-forth with the orchestra that extends all the way to the end, when the music breaks down into a repeated series of repeated two-note statements of a major third; a solo flute plays a short reminiscence of the original theme, and the piano quietly and slyly ends the movement.

The slow movement (*Adagio religioso*) opens with strings playing a slowly moving chorale reminiscent of the "Heiliger Dankgesang" of the late A minor



String Quartet (Op. 132) of Beethoven (which the earlier composer had written as a hymn of thanks for being delivered from illness). The piano enters in the same manner, continuing the slow chord progressions.

This moves without a break into the middle section, in which the violins and violas play continual tremolos while the piano converses with woodwinds in a “night music” scene meant to evoke a forest; the song of the rufous-sided towhee, which Bartók had heard in North Carolina, plays a prominent part. This beautiful tapestry of sound fades, and the opening chorale returns in the winds, but this time, the piano plays Baroque-style counterpoint mixed with Lisztian bravura in a way that is witty as well as striking. The piano has a big, granitic statement of the chorale music before a last reminiscence from the strings and a soft chord from the soloist.

The music continues into the finale (*Allegro vivace*) without a break, with an upward rush from the pianist, who introduces a syncopated theme that sounds like it could be a stomping dance; it gets the movement going with great energy. Parts of the orchestra join in, pushing to a sharp chord followed by a solo timpani. This leads to a contrapuntal section, with the pianist playing a spiky two-part invention that is soon joined by violins and violas. After the strings and the rest of the orchestra take up the theme, the piano returns and drives the music to another big chord followed by a solo timpani.

The soloist enters, choosing a fresh new key as the counterpoint in the strings continues. Once again there is a buildup, with the piano hammering out stentorian octaves before the music fades in wash of muted strings. The fugal energy and forward motion resumes, with a gradual climb to a return of the opening material in the strings.

Following another section in which rhythm and instrumental color are paramount, the tempo speeds up to Presto, as the soloist plays a very rapid series of chords over a grinding, rising figure in cellos and basses. The pianist, who rarely rests in this movement, spins out glittering scales, then rapid rising octaves and trills, joined by the orchestra. The short coda that comes next returns the tempo to the opening as brass play part of the first motif. The exceptional drive of this movement continues to the end, as pieces of themes and virtuoso outbursts from the piano gallop to an exciting conclusion.

## **JOHANNES BRAHMS**

### Concerto for Violin and Cello, op. 102

**Born:** May 7, 1833, Hamburg, Germany

**Died:** April 3, 1897, Vienna

**Composed:** 1887

**First performance:** October 18, 1887, Cologne; the soloists were violinist

Joseph Joachim and cellist Robert Hausmann; Brahms conducted  
**Instrumentation:** 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons; four horns, two trumpets; timpani; strings; solo violin and solo violoncello

**Duration:** 32-33 minutes

**The backstory:** The Concerto for Violin and Cello, more commonly known as the Double Concerto, was Brahms's final composition for orchestra. It also was written as a gesture of reconciliation from Brahms to Joseph Joachim (1831-1907), the violinist and composer who was one of his oldest, most cherished friends.

In 1880, Joachim had become convinced that his wife, Amalie, was having an affair with the publisher Fritz Simrock, and filed for divorce, accusing her of adultery. In her defense, Amalie produced as a character assessment a letter from Brahms, who very much liked Amalie, and told her he was sure Joachim was overreacting to things and that the affair was a figment of his imagination. The testimony of this letter, coming as it did from the famous composer, undid Joachim's suit, though the couple did separate.

Joachim could not forgive Brahms for siding with Amalie, and broke off relations with his old friend. Over the next seven years, friends of both men attempted to repair their friendship, with limited success. But Brahms tried again in the summer of 1887, composing a new concerto for two solo instruments, which, he said "might give us some fun" if it turned out successfully. Clara Schumann expressed her excitement about the piece:

I discussed it a good deal with Joachim, who paid me a visit the other day, and we are tremendously pleased about the work. My idea is that one who has written such Symphonies, such Sonatas for violins and violoncellos, must know these instruments to their inmost core, and must be able to conjure unsuspected harmonies from them.

There also is a subtle hint to Joachim in the music; the secondary theme of the first movement recalls in its contour a theme from the Violin Concerto No. 22 of the Italian virtuoso Giovanni Battista Viotti (1753-1824), a piece that Brahms and Joachim greatly admired. The peace offering worked, with the concerto serving to bring the two men back together, though not quite on the same level as before, as biographer Malcolm MacDonald writes. Still, Joachim was crucial to the work's final shape, contributing advice as he had to Brahms for his Violin Concerto of 1879. "Flattered that Brahms should once again compose a work specifically for him, and drawn unresistingly into consultation about the solo parts ... Joachim abandoned his correct but distant manner of recent years and threw himself into the task of promoting the new piece, which he and Hausmann performed under Brahms's direction in many German cities within the first year of its existence," MacDonald wrote.

Audience and critical reception of the concerto was mixed after its first performance in Cologne in October 1887, and because of its need for two masterful soloists, it does not get as many performances today as the Violin Concerto or the two piano concertos. But this work, which the Columbia University professor Walter Frisch calls "much underrated," is also Brahms's most overtly Romantic, one that MacDonald calls "an opera without words" for two characters. In some ways, it is the most accessible of Brahms's concertos, and a performance of it is always a special occasion.

**The music:** There are few precedents for a double concerto for violin and cello, and Brahms's models included Mozart's Sinfonia Concertante for violin and viola (1779) and the Triple Concerto for violin, cello and piano of Beethoven (1803).

The first movement (Allegro) opens with a very short introduction from the orchestra playing a powerful, attention-getting motif; no sooner has it begun than the solo cello enters with an elaborate mini-cadenza. The orchestra enters briefly again with a secondary theme introduced on the clarinet, and then the violin enters with its own statement. The solo cello joins the violin, and the two toss off a bravura gesture that ushers the orchestra back in.

After the orchestra works with both themes, the solo cello, then the violin, take over both themes, varying them slightly as they set the stage for a sometimes tempestuous development section. Here, the violin and the cello often play together, paired in trills, wide-ranging arpeggios and, at the end, a rhythmic motto (short-long-short) that leads to another return of the full orchestra. The soloists re-enter, in a new key, with the tenderest version yet of the secondary theme, which then is echoed by the orchestra. The main theme comes back, and the soloists drive the movement to a powerful conclusion.

Horns introduce the second movement (Andante), which opens with a lovely tune in the two solo instruments and accompanying strings. A secondary theme in the winds enters next, with the violin, then the cello, spinning off gentle triplets as their solo lines intertwine in exquisite fashion. The soloists bring back the main theme, then repeat the triplet answer to the chorale theme, and the movement closes with the soloists locked in a triplet musical embrace.

The finale (Vivace non troppo), a so-called "Hungarian rondo," starts with the solo cello, then the violin, sounding the main theme, an exotically colored, catchy tune reminiscent of the music played by the "Gypsy" tavern bands Brahms could hear in Vienna. The full orchestra enters with the tune, and the soloists follow that with athletic leaps imitative of folk fiddling.

The cello sounds a warmer second theme, taken up by the violin, then both offer the main tune again. The music quiets, but the silence is soon broken

by a new theme, also “Gypsy”-like, and announced by the soloists. The second part of this theme, which recalls the short-long-short motto of the first movement, is sounded next by the clarinets, and it, too, has the flavor of the light music of Brahms’s era.

The soloists play elaborate, sweeping figures, and the full orchestra answers with a statement of the new theme. The cello brings back the main theme of the movement, answered by bassoon, and the violin then takes it up. The orchestra then sounds the main theme, after which the soloists briefly recall the second theme, leading to a coda: Fragments of the main theme are heard as soloists play exuberant, wide-ranging scales before this minor-key movement ends emphatically in the major.

## GEORGE GERSHWIN

### *Rhapsody in Blue*

**Born:** September 26, 1898, Brooklyn, N.Y.

**Died:** July 11, 1937, Los Angeles

**First performance:** Feb. 12, 1924, Aeolian Hall, New York. Gershwin was the soloist; Paul Whiteman conducted his Palm Royal Orchestra

**Duration:** 17-18 minutes

**Backstory:** One hundred years ago this past February, a young American composer made musical history with a piece he didn’t even know he was supposed to write. Many legends have surrounded the creation of *Rhapsody in Blue*, but the facts are just as exciting as the tall tales. The idea for the *Rhapsody* initially came from Paul Whiteman (1890-1967), the most popular dance band leader in the country at the time, a man who had known a good thing when he heard it and transitioned from ragtime to jazz in 1919, two years after the first generally recognized jazz recording was made (though James Reese Europe’s band likely presented the first formal jazz concert in 1912 at Carnegie Hall).

Whiteman had met Gershwin when his band was the instrumental ensemble for *George White’s Scandals of 1922*, the third musical Gershwin had composed for White. Starring W.C. Fields and with future Hollywood legend Max Steiner leading Whiteman’s orchestra, the show had a hit song in “I’ll Build a Stairway to Paradise.” But the most notable thing about it was *Blue Monday*, a 25-minute tragic mini-opera of Black life that got a mix of enthusiastic and brutal reviews and was pulled from the *Scandals* after opening night. It led to two important things in Gershwin’s life: Another opera on Black life, *Porgy and Bess* (1935), and the *Rhapsody*: Whiteman had been impressed by *Blue Monday* and thought Gershwin could write something new for his band.

What Whiteman ultimately had in mind was a big concert that demonstrated how popular and classical musical forms could coexist, and scheduled his

program, called “An Experiment in Modern Music,” for Lincoln’s Birthday in 1924 at New York’s Aeolian Hall (the concert hall closed in 1927, but the building, on West 42<sup>nd</sup> and 43<sup>rd</sup> streets, still stands). Gershwin, meanwhile, was working on New York revisions for the soon-to-open musical *Sweet Little Devil*, with songs he had written with lyricist Buddy DeSylva. As biographer Edward Jablonski tells the story, Gershwin’s brother Ira was reading the *New York Tribune* on Jan. 4 while Gershwin and DeSylva played pool, and came across an item about Whiteman’s concert, which ended with a note that “George Gershwin is at work on a jazz concerto.”

The news took both Gershwins by surprise, and George called Whiteman to say he was too busy to be part of the concert. “Whiteman was persuasive, however; after some discussion Gershwin agreed to attempt a piece for piano and orchestra — not a strictly formed concerto, however, but a freer fantasia or rhapsody,” Jablonski writes.

Gershwin set to work quickly, digging into his sketchbooks, and working out of the Gershwin family apartment in New York. He said later that he soon decided not to write a series of 12-bar blues sections because that would encourage the idea that jazz needed to be in regular dance forms in order to work, and he wanted to show that music could be jazzy without needing a rhythmic crutch. Because Gershwin was unfamiliar with orchestration, that task went to Whiteman’s pianist and arranger, Ferde Grofé (1892-1972), whose *Grand Canyon Suite* (1931) was once a familiar item on pops concert programs. (In 1942, Grofé recast the original jazz band arrangement for full orchestra; this is now the standard version).

The audience at the Aeolian that night included numerous luminaries of the music world, including Sergei Rachmaninoff, Leopold Stokowski, Ernest Bloch and Fritz Kreisler, and opera stars Mary Garden and Amelita Galli-Curci. The program was a hodgepodge of everything from “Livery Stable Blues” to Elgar’s *Pomp and Circumstance* March No. 1, and toward the end of the program, audience interest had faded. Then Gershwin entered to play his new piece, the clarinetist Ross Gorman began it with an upward scale that he bent into a wail, and a star was born — a composer who could convincingly marry the worlds of jazz and classical and make them sound like natural allies thanks to the power of his exceptional melodic gift and pungent harmonic sense. As Jablonski put it:

Overnight, from a composer of a handful of popular songs and a half-dozen musical-comedy scores, he was transmuted into a “serious” composer. He was taken seriously by the musical press, he was discussed at parties, he was interviewed, argued over; he was famous.

Today, a century after its premiere, the *Rhapsody in Blue* remains one of the most popular pieces of classical music ever written by an American. The



singer and conductor Michael Feinstein calls it “bulletproof,” or impervious to criticism; as Leonard Bernstein once noted, the piece continues to work because its ideas are so good and so memorable that its arguable structural defects are unimportant.

With the *Rhapsody*, Gershwin’s classical career began, and even as he worked on projects such as the *Concerto in F* (1925), *An American in Paris* (1928), and *Porgy and Bess*, he continued with his brother Ira to write some of the finest popular songs in the American canon. And yet that career would last only another 13 years: Gershwin’s death from a brain tumor in the summer of 1937 deprived his country of one of its most distinctive creators, a composer whose greatness is alive in every bar of the *Rhapsody*, 100 years after it woke up a glittering but bored audience in a New York concert hall.

**The music:** *Rhapsody in Blue* is stitched together largely by a series of short but arresting motifs, including the one that follows the opening wail: A bluesy theme that is answered by another, more aggressive blues tune in the trombones. A trumpet repeats the opening theme, after which the piano enters, embarking on an extended section in which the themes are elaborated and varied; the music gets more virtuosic and frenetic, building to a full orchestral statement of the main theme.

Trumpets chase that with a new, swinging motif, but this is stopped short by a return to the clarinet theme, followed by the orchestra hammering out the secondary theme we originally heard in the trombones. Short solo utterances from clarinet, trumpet and trombone lead to another catchy blues riff, one that Gershwin is later able to repeat in sequences to drive the work’s motion: a little tune in the trombones and low strings that gets driven to an orchestral peak, after which the piano embarks on another extended solo section; notice how effectively Gershwin is able to make something significant and beautiful out of these tiny bits of music.

After a short cadenza-like passage, the full orchestra enters with perhaps the most well-known part of the *Rhapsody*, its slow middle section, a lovely, sweeping theme in strings and winds with a memorable answering motif in the horns; the piano answers the theme as the full orchestra repeats it. Again the solo piano takes over, playing its own impression of the theme.

The mood breaks off suddenly, and the pianist plays a new minor-key motif, urgent and full of repeated notes. The orchestra reenters, playing a fast, jazzy version of the slow theme that then leads to the return of the trombone tune from the beginning, in triumphant, kick-line fashion; the piano plays one last blues riff before the exultant final chord.



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