

ONE HUNDRED TWENTY-SIXTH SEASON

**Chicago Symphony Orchestra**

**Riccardo Muti** Zell Music Director

**Yo-Yo Ma** Judson and Joyce Green Creative Consultant

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Friday, March 24, 2017, at 7:30

Saturday, March 25, 2017, at 1:30

**Bramwell Tovey** Conductor and Piano

**Music by George Gershwin**

**Arr. Rose**

Overture to *Strike up the Band*

**Arr. Tovey**

A Foggy Day

BRAMWELL TOVEY

*Catfish Row: Suite from Porgy and Bess*

Catfish Row

Porgy Sings

Fugue

Hurricane

Good Mornin', Sistuh!

**INTERMISSION**

**Orch. Grofé**

*Rhapsody in Blue*

BRAMWELL TOVEY

*An American in Paris*

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These concerts are sponsored by United Airlines.

The Chicago Symphony Orchestra is grateful to WBEZ 91.5 FM for its generous support as media sponsor of these performances.

This program is partially supported by a grant from the Illinois Arts Council Agency.

The Chicago Symphony Orchestra Association celebrates Music In Our Schools Month this March. United Airlines salutes music teachers across Chicagoland for sharing the joy of music.

## George Gershwin

Born September 26, 1898; Brooklyn, New York  
Died July 12, 1937; Hollywood, California



George Gershwin, born Jakob Gershin in Brooklyn, New York, to a Russian immigrant father, rose from plugging songs in Tin Pan Alley as a teenager to become Broadway's brightest light, the toast of Hollywood, and one of society's

darlings. But that was not enough for him—he had to prove himself in the concert world as well. First there was the *Rhapsody in Blue* of 1924, which, according to Walter Damrosch, conductor of the New York Symphony Orchestra, “made a lady out of jazz.” A year later came the Piano Concerto in F. There followed *An American in Paris* (1928), *Cuban Overture* (1932), and, in 1935, the masterful folk opera *Porgy and Bess*. The wonderful legacy that Gershwin left is as fresh and invigorating today as when it was new. The words of novelist John O’Hara, written a few days after the composer’s death, are still valid: “George Gershwin died last week. I don’t have to believe it if I don’t want to.”

**S**trike Up the Band was George and Ira Gershwin’s first attempt at political satire in musical comedy. Producer Edgar Selwyn engaged George S. Kaufman to write the book, and Kaufman devised a barbed story about the United States and Switzerland going to war over

a trade dispute involving cheese that pilloried militarism, American big business, politics, international relations, and “Babbitry”—the self-satisfied attitude with conventional middle-class ideas and ideals and material success of the title character of a popular 1922 novel (*Babbitt*) by Sinclair Lewis. The original 1927 show closed after just two weeks, but a greatly revised 1929 version played for 191 performances on Broadway before being taken on a national tour and then returning for yet another stint in New York. “Soon,” “I’ve Got a Crush On You,” and the title song filled sheet-music racks across the country, and the entire musical was published in score. The show was a harbinger of the political musical satires that filled theaters for the next decade.

The Depression of the 1930s saw a slump in business on Broadway, so the Gershwins turned their attention to the still lucrative venue of Hollywood in 1936, when they contracted with RKO to provide music for the Fred Astaire–Ginger Rogers movie *Shall We Dance*. Though the film’s producer, Pandro Berman, expressed some initial concerns about the current state of George’s melodic genius (he had not had an unqualified hit show since *Of Thee I Sing* in 1931 and had even ventured into the suspect realm of opera with *Porgy and Bess* the preceding year), Gershwin provided a score for *Shall We Dance* that contained a string of songs equal to the best he had ever written: “I’ve Got Beginner’s Luck,” “They All Laughed,” “Let’s Call the Whole Thing

Above: Publicity photograph of Gershwin, Herman Mishkin, New York City, ca. 1935

## Overture to *Strike Up the Band* (Arranged by Don Rose)

### COMPOSED

1927

1929 (revised)

### FIRST PERFORMANCE

September 5, 1927; Shubert Theatre, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

### INSTRUMENTATION

three flutes and two piccolos, three oboes and english horn, two clarinets and bass clarinet, two bassoons and contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones and tuba, timpani, percussion, harp, piano/celesta, strings

### APPROXIMATE

### PERFORMANCE TIME

4 minutes

Off,” and “They Can’t Take That Away From Me.” The following year, *A Damsel in Distress*, another Fred Astaire feature (with Joan Fontaine, George Burns, and Gracie Allen to a script by P.G. Wodehouse), yielded such standards as “Stiff Upper Lip,” “Nice Work If You Can Get It,” and “A Foggy Day (In London Town).”

**G**ershwin’s music drama about the crippled Porgy and his determined love for Bess, premiered at the Alvin Theatre in New York on October 10, 1935, is among the most popular and widely performed of all American operas. “This, Gershwin’s last serious work,” wrote American musicologist David Ewen,

... possesses that richness, vitality, and variety of melody, that vigor of rhythm, that spontaneity and freshness we associate with Gershwin’s best music. Of all Gershwin’s serious works, it is the only one to reveal compassion, humanity and a profound dramatic instinct. Its roots are in the soil of the Negro people, whom it interprets with humor, tragedy, penetrating characterizations, dramatic power and sympathy.

Besides its musical significance, *Porgy and Bess* also occupies an important place in the

social awareness of our land—its premieres in Charleston, South Carolina, where the story is set, and Washington, D.C., were desegregated both on the stage and in the audience for the first time in the histories of those cities. Gershwin, who spent an entire summer in an African American community near Charleston collecting material and ideas for his work, would have been proud to know that *Porgy and Bess* was the cause for such a significant step in our national life.

In 1935, seeking to make the music of his opera available to a wider audience, Gershwin adapted from the score a five-movement concert suite called *Catfish Row*—named after the tenement in which *Porgy and Bess* takes place. The composer presented *Catfish Row* in concerts across the country during the last years of his life, but it was soon supplanted by the more lushly scored *Symphonic Picture* that Broadway arranger Robert Russell Bennett made for conductor Fritz Reiner in 1941. It was not until 1953 that George’s brother Ira again brought to light *Catfish Row*, which not only offers a different selection of numbers from the opera than Bennett’s tone poem, but also allows the music to be heard in Gershwin’s original theatrical scoring. *Catfish Row*, the suite’s opening movement, follows the opera’s opening sequence through “Summertime.” *Porgy Sings* includes “I Got Plenty o’ Nuthin’” and “Bess, You Is My Woman

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## **A Foggy Day (In London Town)** (Arranged by Bramwell Tovey)

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**COMPOSED**

1932

**INSTRUMENTATION**

solo piano, two bassoons, four horns, three trombones and tuba, percussion, solo violin and rhythm bass

**APPROXIMATE**

**PERFORMANCE TIME**

5 minutes

**FIRST PERFORMANCE**

November 19, 1937, RKO Radio

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## **Catfish Row: Suite from Porgy and Bess**

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**COMPOSED**

1935–36

**INSTRUMENTATION**

two flutes and piccolo, two oboes and english horn, four clarinets and bass clarinet, bassoon, three horns, three trumpets, two trombones and tuba, timpani, percussion, piano, banjo, strings

**APPROXIMATE**

**PERFORMANCE TIME**

28 minutes

**FIRST PERFORMANCE**

1936

Now.” The Fugue depicts the death of Crown at Porgy’s hands. Hurricane provides the music for the dramatic storm scene. Good Mornin’, Sistuh! concludes the suite with Porgy’s powerful melody, “Oh, Lawd, I’m On My Way.”

For George White’s *Scandals of 1922*, the twenty-four-year-old George Gershwin provided something a little bit different—an opera, a brief, somber one-acter called *Blue Monday* (later retitled *135th Street*) incorporating some jazz elements that White cut after only one performance on the grounds that it was too gloomy. *Blue Monday*, however, impressed the show’s conductor, Paul Whiteman, then gaining a national reputation as the self-styled “King of Jazz” for his adventurous explorations of the new popular music styles with his Palais Royal Orchestra. A year later, Whiteman told Gershwin about his plans for a special program the following February in which he hoped to show some of the ways traditional concert music could be enriched by jazz, and suggested that the young composer provide a piece for piano and jazz orchestra. Gershwin, who was then busy with the final preparations for the upcoming Boston tryout of *Sweet Little Devil* and somewhat unsure about barging into the world of classical music, did not

The composer was on hand for the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra’s performances of *An American in Paris* On March 1 and 2, 1929, led by music director Fritz Reiner. In this image, Gershwin (left), Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra percussionist James Rosenberg (center), and tenor Richard Crooks (right) pose with the original taxi horns used for those concerts.

Reiner later served as Chicago Symphony Orchestra music director from 1953 until 1962 and musical advisor for the 1962–63 season. Rosenberg (who later changed his last name to Ross) was a member of the CSO’s percussion section from 1954 until 1967 and served as principal from 1957 until 1959. Ross also was the father of current CSO percussion James Ross, who joined the section in 1979.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF THE IRA AND LEONORE GERSHWIN TRUSTS



pay much attention to the request until he read in *The New York Times* on New Year’s Day that he was writing a new “symphony” for Whiteman’s program. After a few frantic phone calls, Whiteman finally convinced Gershwin to undertake the project, a work for piano solo (to be played by the composer) and Whiteman’s twenty-two-piece orchestra—and then told him that it

## **Rhapsody in Blue** (Orchestrated by Ferde Grofé)

### **COMPOSED**

1924

### **FIRST PERFORMANCE**

February 12, 1924; Aeolian Hall, New York City. The composer as soloist

### **INSTRUMENTATION**

solo piano, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets and bass clarinet, two bassoons, three horns, three trumpets, three trombones and tuba, timpani, percussion, two alto saxophones and tenor saxophone, banjo, strings

### **APPROXIMATE**

### **PERFORMANCE TIME**

15 minutes

had to be finished in less than a month. Themes and ideas for the new piece immediately began to tumble through Gershwin's head, and late in January, only three weeks after it was begun, the *Rhapsody in Blue* was completed. Its premiere—New York, Aeolian Hall, February 12, 1924—was one of the great nights in American music. Many of the era's most illustrious musicians attended, critics from far and near assembled to pass judgment, and the glitterati of society and culture graced the event. Gershwin fought down his apprehension over his joint debuts as serious composer and concert pianist, and he and his music had a brilliant success. There was critical carping about laxity in the structure of the *Rhapsody in Blue*, but there was none about its vibrant, quintessentially American character or its melodic inspiration, and it became an immediate hit, attaining (and maintaining) a position of popularity almost unmatched by any other work of a native composer.

In 1928, George Gershwin was not only the toast of Broadway, but of all America, Britain, and many spots in Europe, as well: he had produced a string of successful shows (*Rosalie* and *Funny Face* were both running on Broadway that spring), composed two of the most popular concert pieces in recent memory (*Rhapsody in Blue* and Piano Concerto in F), and was leading a life that would have made the most glamorous socialite jealous. The pace-setting *Rhapsody in Blue* of 1924 had shown a way to bridge the worlds of jazz and serious music, a direction Gershwin continued in the exuberant yet haunting Piano Concerto in F the following year. He was eager to move further

into the concert world, and during a side trip in March 1926 to Paris from London, where he was preparing the English premiere of *Lady Be Good*, he hit upon an idea, a “walking theme” he called it, that seemed to capture the impression of an American visitor to the city “as he strolls about, listens to the various street noises, and absorbs the French atmosphere.” He worried that “this melody is so complete in itself, I don't know where to go next,” but the purchase of four Parisian taxi horns on the Avenue de la Grande Armée inspired a second theme for the piece. Late in 1927, a commission for a new orchestral composition from Walter Damrosch, music director of the New York Symphony Orchestra and conductor of the sensational premiere of the Concerto in F, caused Gershwin to gather up his Parisian sketches, and by January 1928, he was at work on the score: *An American in Paris*. When he returned to New York in late June, he discovered that the New York Symphony had announced the premiere for the upcoming season, so he worked on the piece throughout the autumn and finished the orchestration only a month before the premiere, on December 13, 1928. *An American in Paris*, though met with a mixed critical reception, proved a great success with the public and it quickly became clear that Gershwin had scored yet another hit. ■

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## **An American in Paris**

### **COMPOSED**

1928

### **FIRST PERFORMANCE**

December 13, 1928; Carnegie Hall, New York City

### **INSTRUMENTATION**

three flutes and piccolo, two oboes and english horn, two clarinets and bass clarinet, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones and tuba, timpani, percussion, celesta, alto saxophone, tenor saxophone, baritone saxophone, strings

### **APPROXIMATE**

### **PERFORMANCE TIME**

17 minutes