Festival Closing Night
Gershwin & Friends
Stewart Goodyear, piano | Jens Lindemann, trumpet
Rockport Festival Jazz Orchestra
Matt Catingub, director

RHAPSODY IN BLUE (1924)
George Gershwin (1898-1937), arr. Matt Catingub

Additional works by Duke Ellington, Oscar Peterson and Nat King Cole

** More concert details will be provided in a separate concert program as part of the Gershwin and Friends gala event.
PROGRAM NOTES

Rhapsody in Blue (1924)
George Gershwin (b. Brooklyn, NY, September 26, 1898; d. Hollywood, CA, July 11, 1937)

Composed 1924; 17 minutes; arr. Matt Catingub

"Whiteman Judges Named," ran the headline of a short article in the January 1924, edition of the New-York Tribune. "Committee will decide 'What is American Music.'" Jazz dance band leader Paul Whiteman was in the process of attracting leading lights to his upcoming concert titled "Experiment in Modern Music," designed with the principal goal of showcasing his virtuoso band in popular songs and dances of the time – and in reaffirming his self-proclaimed role as the 'King of Jazz.' Rachmaninoff, Heifetz and Zimbalist, three prestigious Russian-born musicians, and Romanian-born soprano Alma Gluck had a big task on their hands in deciding the nature of American music. A no less imposing task lay in the hands of an American-born composer, whose name is mentioned at the bottom of the article: "George Gershwin is at work on a jazz concerto," it states, though Gershwin, himself, was not aware of the fact. Since it was dooubles a publicity play, the jury never publicly delivered its verdict. Gershwin’s ‘jazz concerto,’ item 22 in a program of 23 pieces, effectively did that for them.

By January 7, 1924, working in the 110th Street apartment he shared with his parents, brothers and sister, George Gershwin began to compose a piece he originally titled American Rhapsody. With his show Sweet Little Devil in its final rehearsals for a run on Broadway, the already seasoned 25-year-old songwriter had to work quickly. His brother Ira came up with the title Rhapsody in Blue. He incorporated it into his Rhapsody, as enlarged for the 1942 concert; Ferde Grofé is at one of the two pianos, back row, right hand side. 22 players plus Whiteman are shown here, not the advertised 23. The string bass player was, no doubt, on his break; his instrument is propped up against Grofé’s piano!

Gershwin at the piano, printed music to Rhapsody in Blue on the stand. "In the Rhapsody, I tried to express our manner of living, the tempe of our modern life with its speed and chaos and vitality. I didn’t try to paint definite descriptive pictures in sound. Composers assimilate influences and suggestions from various sources and even borrow from one another’s works. That’s why I consider the Rhapsody as embodying an assimilation of feeling rather than presenting specific scenes of American life in music."

George Gershwin

Whiteman’s finely-tuned publicity machine invited music critics and writers to rehearsal/luncheons in the Palace Royal nightclub, where the ambience was very much morning-after-the-night-before, and where an enlarged Whiteman band rehearsed the newly minted Rhapsody in Blue. By February 12, many more celebrities from all walks of life had been invited (Godowsky, Kreisler, Souza, Stokowski, Damrosch and Bloch were among the musicians) and interest was high among the general public. The 1,100 seat Aeolian Hall was full to bursting.

Structurally, Gershwin’s score is built around the Big Tune, which he initially hints at, then cunningly holds back until more than halfway through. The other five melodies all fall into some variant on the four-plus-four-bar popular song format, usually left without a closing chord, so that the melodies could be strung together in a variable sequence. The score and the way it sounds are infinitely malleable and have allowed each generation to reformat the piece to its own taste. The most frequently heard version is the expanded symphonic score that Ferde Grofé made in 1942.

The June 1924 acoustic recording that Gershwin made with the original Whiteman band within four months of the premiere – full of Roaring Twenties exuberance and insouciance – filtered the score by one third. However, the concert (and its repeats on March 7 and in Carnegie Hall in April) and November! likely included more improvement from Gershwin, bringing the idiom a little closer to the spirit of jazz. Three years later, the Whiteman band, by now with different personnel, re-recorded the work with an altogether different sound, taking advantage of electric recording technology. Each subsequent version nudges Gershwin’s score in one direction or another, towards the concert hall, or towards its origins as music for jazz dance band. Now just two years shy of a century in front of the public, Gershwin’s Rhapsody in Blue has moved from being the only memorable new piece in a concert titled ‘An Experiment in Modern Music’ to national icon.

This evening’s arrangement by music director Matt Catingub is made for eleven-piece big band, featuring nine horns, bass, drums and piccolo trumpet solo. The ethos behind the arrangement is to have the piccolo trumpet as a secondary soloist in the manner of the Shostakovich Piano Concerto No. 1. Mr. Catingub’s arrangement honors the feel of the original 1924 version – notably its jazz and, jazz roots – while keeping some coloristic elements of the 1942 orchestral version. Enjoy!

— Program notes © 2022 Keith Horner. Comments welcomed: knotes@sympatico.ca

Whiteman’s pencil-written manuscript score of the Rhapsody in Blue, for jazz band and piano, showing the opening six measures. The starting date of its composition, January 7, 1924, is given at the top.

Gershwin originally wrote out all 17 notes of the opening clarinet upward scale. The Whiteman band’s clarinetist Ross German introduced the long clarinet ‘smear’ (or glissando) that has since become the work’s trademark opening in jazz at a rehearsal. Gershwin loved it and incorporated it into his Rhapsody.

ROCKPORT MUSIC.ORG
STEWART GOODYEAR, piano

Stewart Goodyear is an accomplished pianist as a concerto soloist, chamber musician, recitalist and composer. Known as an improviser and composer, in 2017, Mr. Goodyear premiered his suite for piano and orchestra, "Callaloo," with MDR Symphony Orchestra and the Clarosa Quartet premiered his Piano Quartet commissioned by the Kingston Chamber Music Festival. In 2019, his new work for piano and orchestra was commissioned and premiered by the Toronto Symphony. Mr. Goodyear has several acclaimed recordings, including two Juno-nominated albums. His own transcription of Tchaikovsky’s The Nutcracker was chosen by the New York Times as one of the best classical music recordings of 2015. His latest recording, For Glenn Gould, was released in 2018. Goodyear began his training at The Royal Conservatory in Toronto, received his bachelor’s degree from Curtis Institute of Music and completed his Master’s at The Juilliard School.

JENS LINDEMANN, trumpet

Critically acclaimed trumpeter Jens Lindemann is a former member of the Canadian Brass and was recently named “International Brass Personality of the Year” by the Brass Herald. Equally at home in the classical, jazz and pop musical realms, Lindemann has played in every major concert venue in the world. Lindemann has also won major awards ranging from Grammy and Juno nominations to winning the Echo Klassik award in Germany. A prizewinner at numerous competitions including the prestigious ARD in Munich, Jens also placed first—by unanimous juries—at both the Prague and Ellsworth Smith (Florida) International Trumpet competitions. Redefining classical music boundaries, Lindemann performs with artists from Sir Neville Marriner to Doc Severinsen. He is the first classical brass soloist to be awarded the Order of Canada, the country’s highest civilian honor. Lindemann is currently a professor at UCLA Herb Alpert School of Music.

MATT CATINGUB, director

Matt Catingub is an award winning jazz performer, saxophonist, vocalist, pianist, arranger, composer and world-renowned orchestra pops conductor. The son of the great jazz vocalist and “Polynesia’s First Lady of Song,” Mavis Rivers, Matt, a proud pacific islander, was bestowed the Samoan Chief’s title of La’auli by King Malietoa Tanumafili II. After a time as a solo artist, Matt stepped into the world of Orchestra Pops in 1998 when he was asked to become the Principal Pops Conductor for the Honolulu Symphony. Since that time Matt has conducted for some of the most important orchestras in the country, including Nashville, Atlanta, Houston, St. Louis, Buffalo, Hartford, Omaha, Cincinnati and several others.