


SEPTEMBER 10, 2023 3:00 PM

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AMERICAN SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

AMERICAN EXPRESSIONS



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The American Symphony Orchestra was founded 61 years ago in 1962 by Leopold Stokowski with the mission of providing music within the means of everyone. Music Director Leon Botstein expanded that mission when he joined the ASO in 1992, creating thematic concerts that explore music from the perspective of the visual arts, literature, religion, and history, and reviving rarely performed works that audiences would otherwise never have a chance to hear performed live.

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As part of its commitment to expanding the standard orchestral repertoire, the ASO has released recordings on the Telarc, New World, Bridge, Koch, and Vanguard labels, and live performances are also available for digital streaming. In many cases, these are the only existing recordings of some of the forgotten works that have been restored through ASO performances.

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GEORGE ANTHEIL

A JAZZ SYMPHONY MUSIC FOR SMALL ORCHESTRA

RUTH CRAWFORD SEEGER

AARON COPLAND

MUSIC FOR THE THEATRE ANDANTE MODERATO FOR STRING ORCHESTRA

FLORENCE PRICE

JOHN ALDEN CARPENTER

KRAZY KAT



AMERICAN EXPRESSIONS

LEON BOTSTEIN, CONDUCTOR

GEORGE ANTHEIL (1900-1959)

A Jazz Symphony, 1925, rev. 1955

RUTH CRAWFORD SEEGER (1901-1953)

Music for Small Orchestra, 1926

AARON COPLAND (1900-1990)

Music for the Theatre, 1925

FLORENCE PRICE (1887-1953)

Andante moderato for string orchestra, 1929

JOHN ALDEN CARPENTER (1876-1951)

Krazy Kat, 1921

Today's concert will run approximately 1 hour with no intermission.

Continuing a partnership forged in the wake of COVID-19, the American Symphony Orchestra presents this concert in partnership with the Bryant Park Corporation.

This program is supported, in part, by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council.

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This program is supported by the Music Performance Trust Fund.

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FROM THE MUSIC DIRECTOR

AMERICAN EXPRESSIONS By Leon Botstein

Welcome to our season-opening concert, one that celebrates an extremely creative moment in the history of American music. The composers on this program were selected on account of their originality and their commitment to writing music that properly mirrored the American experience.

Classical and concert music in America, until the first decade of the twentieth century, was largely dominated by European models, particularly German, Russian, and French. A younger generation of composers thought to break away from the European heritage. They were encouraged first by Antonín Dvořák, who briefly took a position at the end of the nineteenth century as the head of a national conservatory of music in New York. He urged his American students to look to the experience of African Americans and the indigenous populations of the continent for inspiration. Among the routes to independence that appeared attractive to a generation of American composers eager to strike out on their own was the advent of modernism and the rejection of the practices of Romanticism in music. Twentieth century modernism sought explicitly the international and cosmopolitan, and forged an approach to writing music that signaled a break with the past.

Each of the composers on this program developed a different approach. Florence Price was less concerned with rejecting musical Romanticism than with adapting it to give expression to the African American heritage and experience. George Antheil sought to take his place as an experimentalist and innovator and took on the role as *enfant terrible*, first

within a European context with his *Ballet Mécanique*. Among other things, he foregrounded jazz as a path to a modern American sound. Later in his career, his music became more conservative, but his adventuresome spirit remained alive, particularly through his patent for radio frequency hopping, developed together with the actress Hedy Lamarr, for an innovative radar dependent weapon.

Ruth Crawford Seeger followed the modernist move to smaller ensembles, thereby avoiding the lush Romanticism of the nineteenth century. She also experimented with new ways of organizing pitch. Her exact contemporary, Aaron Copland, after studying with Rubin Goldmark, the nephew of the distinguished late nineteenth-century Hungarian-born Jewish composer, Karl Goldberg (whom Sibelius went to Vienna to study with), sought the tutelage of Nadia Boulanger, the great teacher and associate of Igor Stravinsky, in France. Throughout the 1920s until the 1930s, Copland sought to perfect a distinctive American modernism that adapted elements of jazz and novel melodic elements that mirrored the post-war American urban cultural scene. It would then turn in the 1930s to a more populist style that enabled him to express a profound affinity for the American landscape and the democratic spirit of its peoples.

I hope this concert gives the audience a sense of the aspirations and incomparable energy of America during the first decades of the twentieth century, particularly after America made its decisive entrance into world affairs in 1917 when it played its indispensable role on the battlefields of World War I.

THE ARTISTS



Leon Botstein, Conductor

Photo by Ric Kallaher

Leon Botstein has been music director and principal conductor of the American Symphony Orchestra since 1992. He is also music director of The Orchestra Now, an innovative training orchestra composed of top musicians from around the world. He is co-artistic director of Bard SummerScape and the Bard Music Festival, which take place at the Richard B. Fisher Center for the Performing Arts at Bard College, where he has been president since 1975. He is also conductor laureate and principal guest conductor of the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra, where he served as music director from 2003–11. In 2018 he assumed artistic directorship of the Grafenegg Academy in Austria.

Mr. Botstein is also active as a guest conductor and can be heard on numerous recordings with the London Symphony (including a GRAMMY-nominated recording of Popov's First Symphony), the London Philharmonic, NDR-Hamburg, and the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra. Many of his live performances with the American Symphony Orchestra are available online. His recording of Paul Hindemith's *The Long Christmas Dinner* with the ASO was named one of the top recordings of

2015 by several publications, and his recent recording of Gershwin piano music with the Royal Philharmonic was hailed by *The Guardian* and called "something special...in a crowded field" by *Musicweb International*.

Mr. Botstein is the author of numerous articles and books, including *The Compleat Brahms* (Norton), *Jefferson's Children* (Doubleday), *Judentum und Modernität* (Böhlau), and *Von Beethoven zu Berg* (Zsolnay). He is also the editor of *The Musical Quarterly*. For his contributions to music he has received the award of the American Academy of Arts and Letters and Harvard University's prestigious Centennial Award, as well as the Cross of Honor, First Class from the government of Austria. Other recent awards include the Bruckner Society's Julio Kilenyi Medal of Honor for his interpretations of that composer's music and the Leonard Bernstein Award for the Elevation of Music in Society. In 2011 he was inducted into the American Philosophical Society.

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

By Sebastian Danila

The period around World War I, from about 1910 to the late 1920s, was arguably the most consequential one for Western music, in general, and for the American musical scene, in particular. The belief that the dominant Romantic tradition had reached an irreversible crisis point was widely shared among many young composers. In what became the most turbulent time in music history – stylistically and aesthetically – this quest for new modes of musical expression led to an unprecedented degree of technical experimentation and divergent compositional tendencies. Rejecting the tonal ambiguity and extreme chromaticism of late Romanticism, some composers sought new principles of organization, ones that would expand the possibilities of the twelve-note chromatic scale. In works like *Erwartung* (1909), *Pierrot lunaire* (1912) or later in his *Five Piano Pieces* (1923) Arnold Schoenberg moved progressively from a chromaticism freed from any rigid diatonic substructures to a completely novel system of pitch organization, the dodecaphony (or twelve-note system). Other composers, like Igor Stravinsky or Béla Bartók, attempted to renovate musical expression with atavistic explorations of ancient musical cultures, from a distant past. Others, like Maurice Ravel in *Le tombeau de Couperin* (1917) or Sergei Prokofiev in his “Classical” Symphony (1916–17) reflect a new interest in reestablishing links to earlier eras, the Baroque and the Classical, respectively.

In the years immediately following World War I, this ‘spirit of the new’ that produced such immense cultural transformations in Europe, was also present in the United States, where the artistic scene experienced an unprecedented burst of creativity. Responding to the horror and whole-scale destruction of that war, American artists, writers and composers rejected the exalted ideals of the previous century, focusing instead on creating new means of expression, ones that would accurately reflect the realities this new age required. Just as in Europe a decade earlier, the gradual erosion of the Romantic tradition, with its more or less “universal” language, led to the emergence of a musical pluralism that freed the American composers to flourish and develop in extraordinary ways. With jazz, many composers found a new source of inspiration, one distinctly American, as well as thoroughly fresh, modern, and exciting. Some of the works offered on this program reflect a fascination in the Roaring Twenties with this language, with its irresistible rhythmic energy and catchy melodies. Other composers sought to push the boundaries of musical expression with radical, ‘ultra-modern’ languages. Whether by polytonality, pentatonic scales, jagged counterpoint and asymmetric ostinatos, or brash atonality, the creative impulses of this generation are presented here in their arguably finest exponents.

ANTHEIL

GEORGE ANTHEIL
A Jazz Symphony
Born July 8, 1900, in Trenton, New Jersey
Died February 12, 1959, New York, New York

Composed 1925, revised 1955
Premiered on April 10, 1927 in New York, New York
Conducted by Allie Ross
Performance Time: Approximately 8 minutes

Among the composers on the leading edge of musical practice in the 1920s George Antheil, (1900–1959) was indubitably the *enfant terrible* of this generation (indeed, his own 1945 autobiography was titled *The Bad Boy of Music*). Having already scandalized post-war Parisian society with his concerts – which included works with titles such as *Airplane Sonata* or *Death of Machines* – Antheil was admired and championed by illustrious contemporaries like Joyce, Pound, and Picasso, who recognized in him many of their own ‘modernist’ ideas.

Long fascinated with jazz, having incorporated elements from it in his Symphony No. 1 or the *Jazz Sonata*, it wasn’t until *A Jazz Symphony* of 1927 that he fully integrated that style within a “classical” framework. The result, as he modestly put it, was “...one of the very first symphonic expressions which attempted to synthesize [sic] American jazz as a legitimate artistic expression.” He was fully aware of that other, much more famous attempt by Gershwin to do just that and was forced to begrudgingly admit that

his own work post-dated *Rhapsody in Blue* “only slightly.”

Written in one movement, and here presented in its 1955 revision which tightened the orchestration and condensed the material, the *Jazz Symphony* exemplifies Antheil’s striking language from this period of rhythmically propulsive, self-contained blocks juxtaposed with supercharged ostinato patterns. The soloistic piano moments in this version – another nod to Gershwin, perhaps? – while not as prominent in the original version, run the gamut from upbeat ragtime tunes to tone clusters. Starting with a comical Latin-inspired tune and ending with a mawkish waltz, with quotes from Scott Joplin and the *Rite of Spring* thrown in along the way for good measure, Antheil creates a thoroughly original and entertaining score, one that marries unabashedly the vernacular with the highbrow.

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

SEEGER

RUTH CRAWFORD SEEGER

Music for Small Orchestra

Born July 3, 1901, East Liverpool, Ohio

Died November 18, 1953, Chevy Chase, Maryland

Composed 1926

Premiered in 1969 at West Texas University in Canyon, Texas

Performance time: Approximately 10 minutes

Long associated with the circle of 'ultra-modern' composers which included the likes of Varèse, Cowell, and Ruggles, Ruth Crawford Seeger (1901–1953) was also amongst its most forward-looking exponents. Her highly structured organizations of pitch, durations, rhythm and dynamics in *String Quartet 1931*, for example, anticipate the post-World War II integral serialism of Boulez. A product of Chicago's American Conservatory of Music, she developed a radical vocabulary that employed asymmetric meters and rhythms, dissonant counterpoint, juxtaposed ostinato patterns, 'stacked-fourth' chords – which Ives has also used to great effect – and polytonality, all suffused in a language of remarkable freshness and originality.

Written in 1926, Crawford's *Music for Small Orchestra* dates from her early period in Chicago, one marked by renewed experimentations and constant explorations of ever-widening musical paths. The scoring alone is unique, not to say odd: flute, clarinet, bassoon, piano, four violins and two celli. By omitting violas and basses, and reducing the piano to a role of equal partner to the others – unlike the outsized role it plays in Antheil's

Jazz Symphony – she is free to create a fresh palette of colors and possibilities. Structured in two movements of similar length, the first movement opens with a single tone (F) repeated insistently by the piano in syncopated patterns, punctuated by low chords and shifting polyrhythms. This slow-paced, obsessive repetition of a single pitch (it last for more than 20 measures) foreshadows the pitch-derived aural experimentations of Scelsi or Feldman more than 30 years later. As solemn, slow and quiet the first movement is, where the dynamic level hardly rises above piano, the second movement is a boisterous affair. Marked 'in roguish humor,' Crawford playfully takes here the idea of rhythmic and melodic ostinatos to new extremes, creating layers upon layers of increasingly loud and cacophonous expressions in one spirited Scherzo. To further emphasize the 'roguish' character here, the thematic ideas in this movement are very angular, with wide intervals between the pitches, as if to imitate some raucous laughter. Again, the contrast with the opening movement could not be greater, as the thematic material there is smoother, with the notes moving ever so slightly, in an imperceptibly undulating manner.

COPLAND

AARON COPLAND

Music for the Theatre

Born November 14, 1900, Brooklyn, New York, New York

Died December 2, 1990, Sleepy Hollow, New York

Composed 1925

Premiered on November 20, 1925 in Boston

Conducted by Serge Koussevitzky

Performance Time: Approximately 21 minutes

For most people at that time, American or otherwise, the most impactful, the most quintessentially American music of the 1920s was jazz. It comes thus as no surprise that upon returning to the United States in 1924 after a few years abroad, Aaron Copland (1900–1990), in his quest to write music that was at once modern and American, turned to jazz. As he later recalled: "Our concern was not with the quotable hymn or spiritual: we wanted to find a music that would speak of universal things in a vernacular of American speech rhythms. We wanted to write music on a level that left popular music far behind – music with a largeness of utterance wholly representative of the country that Whitman has envisaged." To him, jazz was more than a medium, an idiom to be incorporated into his own language; it was a symbol of "Americanism," a manifestation of the dynamism that American society represented after World War I. Moreover, and perhaps because of that, it was perceived as a symbol of modernism and modernity itself.

Of the works he wrote at this time, *Music for the Theatre* (1925) was the first to explicitly show the

influence of jazz. Conceived as a suite for small orchestra in five symmetrically ordered movements, the work's bichordal harmonies, motoric rhythms, and squeaking sonorities displayed the same anti-Romantic aesthetic as his 'ultra-modern' contemporaries.

A declamatory motto theme introduced by the trumpet makes occasional appearances throughout the piece, providing a fully unified, coherent overall narrative arc. In the second movement, titled "Dance," brassy colors, muted trumpets and extensive solos visibly display here Copland's affinity for jazz. In one instance, the solo E-flat clarinet is instructed to play certain notes "a little sharp" while the solo trumpet response a few bars later with the same notes is marked "a little flat" – thus indicating the bending of pitches typical of blues (blue third). In the middle of the fourth movement, a racy trumpet solo over a punctuated, accented bass line played by the low winds and strings indicates that the title of the movement ("Burlesque") is perhaps more than a suggestion: "It is whorehouse music!" a horrified Roy Harris commented at the time. *Music for the Theatre* captures the energy and spirit of the Jazz Age and proudly proclaims its commitment to a national, "American" identity.

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

PRICE

FLORENCE PRICE

Andante moderato for string orchestra
Born April 9, 1887, Little Rock, Arizona
Died June 3, 1953, Chicago, Illinois

Composed in 1929
Arranged for string orchestra in 2020
Performance Time: Approximately 7 minutes

Florence Price (1887–1953) had a career that was marked by many “firsts”: the first black American woman to win the Wanamaker competition in 1932 for her Symphony in E minor, the first black woman to win have an orchestral work performed by a major American orchestra in 1933, when Chicago Symphony Orchestra premiered her symphony led by Frederick Stock. Yet in spite of that, recognition was intermittent, if not elusive, in her lifetime. She had no illusions as to the reason for that: “...two handicaps – those of my sex and race” as she wrote in a letter to Serge Koussevitzky, were major impediments for her not receiving wider appreciation. Having divorced her abusive husband to support herself and her two daughters, she took on a variety of projects: played the theatre organ for silent films, made numerous choral arrangements, worked as orchestrator, wrote popular music for commercial purposes, etc.

Like Ruth Crawford Seeger, she was active in Chicago circles in the 1920s and yet, unlike Crawford Seeger, her outlook was decidedly aligned with the more American cultivated ideal of music, represented by composers like Howard Hanson or

Harris during that decade. She often incorporated spirituals and African–American dance rhythms (such as the Juba) in her music, and, while her musical language was essentially conservative, her colorful harmonic gestures were singularly fresh and inspired. The *Andante moderato* performed tonight exemplifies her stylistic approach from this period. Originally written as the second movement of a string quartet (here presented in a string orchestra arrangement by Peter Stanley Martin), the entire movement displays a gentle lyricism that harkens back to Dvořák and Tchaikovsky, and is infused with the pentatonic inflections of spiritual music. Even in the minor mode of the middle faster-paced ‘B section,’ the mood remains one of tender contemplation. The piece ends with a coda that effortlessly and gracefully combines materials from both contrasting sections. After a long period of wrongful neglect, following the discovery in 2009 of numerous boxes of her manuscripts in a long-abandoned house outside of Chicago, Price’s music has finally seen a resurgence of interest, with many performances taking place and recordings being released, which attests to her appeal to newer generations of listeners.

CARPENTER

JOHN ALDEN CARPENTER

Krazy Kat
Born February 28, 1876, Park Ridge, Illinois
Died April 26, 1951, Chicago, Illinois

Composed 1921
Premiered on on January 20, 1922 in New York, New York
Conducted by George Barrère
Performance time: Approximately 13 minutes

Another Chicagoan, this time born and raised, John Alden Carpenter (1876–1951) was from an older generation than the other composers present on this program. A son of a rich industrialist, he studied at Harvard with John Knowles Paine, after which he moved back to Chicago where he worked in his father’s firm, dividing his time between composition and business (much like his almost-exact contemporary Charles Ives did – albeit with insurance). Among the first to recognize the importance and potential of jazz music as a true, American genre, he employed many of its elements as early as 1915, in his Concertino for Piano and Orchestra.

Some of the same elements are to be found in his 1921 choreographic sketch – which Carpenter referred to as a “jazz pantomime” – *Krazy Kat*, based on the comic strip by George Herriman. First performed in concert, in Chicago, in December 1921, the ballet was then premiered in New York at Town Hall in January 1922 and has remained something of a rarity since. Set to a scenario by Herriman himself, with choreography by former *Ballets Russes* dancer Adolph Bolm (who created the role of the Moor in *Petrushka*), the ballet tells the

story of Krazy, who after waking up and seeing a poster for a dance ball that evening, starts preparing for the ball and dances a Spanish dance. Ignatz Mouse then enters in disguise, offers Krazy a catnip bouquet, which it smells and after which, in a fit, it starts dancing the ‘Katnip Blues.’ Krazy’s dance is interrupted as Ignatz throws a brick at it, after which the mouse runs away. Krazy, stunned by the blow, falls asleep, leaving the cat in the same state as it was at the beginning.

The ten-minute ballet is divided into brief episodes, each comprising short sections. Suffused with humour and delicately orchestrated, abundant with syncopated jazz rhythms, tempo changes, and rich yet elegant harmonic progressions, the score remains a testament to the fascination of so many composers of the 1920s with jazz and their attempts – to varying degrees of success, but always with entertaining results – to assimilate its style and its language.

Leon Botstein, *Conductor*

Violin I

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Concertmaster
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Robert Zubrycki
Kobi Malkin
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Violin II

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Viola

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Bass

John Beal,
Principal
Jack Wenger
Peter Donovan

Flute

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Oboe

Julia DeRosa,
Principal

Clarinet

Todd Palmer,
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Alto Sax

Lino Gomez

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September 18 & 25, 2023 at **Bryant Park** - Free

Featuring a new work commissioned by the American Symphony Orchestra, written by composer and percussionist Javier Diaz, whose studio credits include Steven Spielberg's *West Side Story* and Lin-Manuel Miranda's *In The Heights*. Performed by a chamber ensemble of ASO musicians (violin, percussion, double bass, clarinet and trumpet), featuring GRAMMY-nominated Imani Winds' oboist Toyin Spellman-Diaz.

Judas Maccabaeus

December 14, 2023 at **Riverside Church**

This holiday season the ASO offers an alternative to George Frideric Handel's *Messiah* with another oratorio, *Judas Maccabaeus*. Set amidst the story of Hanukkah, the oratorio is a dramatization of the Jews' resistance towards their oppressors during the Maccabean revolt. Handel's depiction of a people's triumph over tyranny is brought to life through exultant choruses (sung by members of the Bard Festival Chorale and Riverside Choir) and intensely emotive vocal solos.

Dvořák's Requiem

January 25, 2024 at **Carnegie Hall**

Antonín Dvořák's *Requiem* is nowhere nearly as well known or frequently performed as the composer's late symphonies, chamber pieces, or other choral works. While rich in invention and expressivity, its melancholic examination of the mysteries of life and death make this requiem more deserving of further exploration in the public sphere.

Schoenberg's Gurre-Lieder

March 22, 2024 at **Carnegie Hall**

One hundred years after its world premiere—and more than 90 years since ASO founder Leopold Stokowski premiered the work in the U.S.—the ASO presents Arnold Schoenberg's massive *Gurre-Lieder*. The sheer size of the work—the orchestra alone requires more than 150 musicians—and the logistical challenges it poses renders *Gurre-Lieder* the undeserved status of a rarity.

For more information and tickets, please visit our website: americansymphony.org

ASO Online

americansymphony.org/online

In addition to our live performances, the ASO provides digital content on our streaming platform, ASO Online. Content includes live video recordings of Bard SummerScape operas, video recordings from our live chamber performances, and two short films, all of which you can enjoy in your home for free.

