New Zealand Symphony Orchestra

The New Zealand Symphony Orchestra, the country's leading arts organisation, is based in Wellington, but performs regularly throughout the country. Formed in 1946, the orchestra was until 1988 part of the Broadcasting Corporation of New Zealand, but thereafter has enjoyed independence as a Crown Owned Entity, with a Board of Directors appointed by the Government. The Chief Conductor, appointed in 1990, is Franz-Paul Decker. Now with some ninety players, the orchestra gives around 120 concerts a year, in addition to its work in the theatre and in television, broadcasting and recording studios. Foreign tours include performances at the Seville Expo in 1992 with Dame Kiri Te Kanawa, one of a long line of distinguished musicians, from Stravinsky to John Dankworth, who have appeared with the orchestra. The New Zealand Symphony Orchestra acknowledges major funding support from the New Zealand Government through the Ministry of Cultural Affairs / Te Manatu Tikanga a Iwi.

James Judd

James Judd is Music Director of the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra, Music Director of the Florida Philharmonic Orchestra and a sought after guest conductor. He came to international attention as the Assistant Conductor of the Cleveland Orchestra, and later returned to Europe when Claudio Abbado appointed him Associate Music Director of the European Community Youth Orchestra, an ensemble he currently serves as Artistic Director. Judd has led the Berlin and Israel Philharmonics, and conducted in the great concert halls of Europe, including the Salzburg Mozarteum and Vienna's Musikverein. He has made guest appearances with the Vienna Symphony, Gewandhaus Orchestra of Leipzig, Prague Symphony, Orchestre National de France, Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, National Arts Centre Orchestra of Ottawa, Cincinnati Symphony, NHK Symphony of Tokyo and the Mozarteum Orchestra, and conducts the major British orchestras, including the London Symphony Orchestra, Hallé Orchestra, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, London Philharmonic, Royal Scottish Orchestra and the English Chamber Orchestra. He was co-founder of the Chamber Orchestra of Europe with whom he has toured throughout the United States, the Far East and Europe. He conducted the NZSO with Kiri Te Kanawa at the Gisborne Millennium concert which was seen by a world-wide television audience. Recently he recorded Vaughan Williams's Sinfonia Antarctica with the NZSO and conducted this work at the Sydney 2000 Olympic Arts Festival, as well as the international première of Gareth Farr's work Hikoi with percussionist Evelyn Glennie. His recordings include an award-winning release of Mahler's Symphony No. 1 with 'Blame'.

AMERICAN CLASSICS
GEORGE GERSHWIN
An American in Paris
Porgy and Bess Suite • Gershwin in Hollywood

New Zealand Symphony Orchestra • James Judd
An American in Paris (1928-1937)

Porgy and Bess, written by a libretto by DuBose Heyward and Ada Gershwin. Based on Heyward's novel Porgy about life among the black inhabitants of Catfish Row in Charleston, South Carolina, the opera was first performed in February 1934 and the seven hundred page full score was completed in September 1935. Heyward memorably described the idiosyncratic working methods of the Gershwin brothers, those who "would get at the piano, pound, wrange, waush, burst into wierd stratches of song, and eventually emerge with a polished lyric." It numbers amongst its classic songs "Summertime," "I Loves You, Porgy," and "It Ain"T Necessarily So." The orchestral suite based on this recording, the Symphonic Picture from Porgy and Bess arranged by Robert Russell Bennett, has become the standard version since its premiere in 1934, this despite the fact that Gershwin made his own arrangement in 1936. Evidently long forgotten about by the time Bennett made his arrangement. Gershwin's suite was retitled Catfish Row by Ira when it was rediscovered in 1958. The opera, a commercial and critical failure at the Chicago premiere, became one of the greatest achievements of twentieth-century American music.

Peter Quinn
George Gershwin (1898-1937)

An American in Paris • Porgy and Bess (Suite) • Cuban Overture • Gershwin in Hollywood

Unquestionably one of the greatest melodists of the twentieth century, the American composer, pianist, and conductor George Gershwin first made his mark as the most prodigiously talented of an exceptional generation of composers writing for Broadway in the 1920s and 1930s. Though he would doubtless be remembered for his incomparable songs alone, Gershwin went on to write a number of concert works which have since become established in the repertoire, including Rhapsody in Blue, An American in Paris and his most outstanding work, the opera Porgy and Bess. In the apt judgment of Merle Armstrong in his 1938 biography, Gershwin’s music articulated ‘the excitement, the nervousness, and the movement of America’.

George Gershwin was born in Brooklyn, New York, on 26th September 1898, the second of four children born to Morris (Gershowitz) and Rose Bruskin, both of whom had emigrated from Russia to the United States in the early 1900s. In 1910 the Gershwin family moved to Minneapolis and in 1913 to New York. From there Gershwin was later to study intermittently with a number of other teachers, including Rubinstein, Hambitzer, and Joseph Schillinger.

In 1914, aged fifteen, Gershwin dropped out of high school to become a demonstration pianist and song-plugger for the music publishers Remick & Co. on Tin Pan Alley. Having had his first song published in 1916, he left Remick’s in March 1917 and found work as a rehearsal pianist for Max Dreyfus, head of a famous publishing company, and was subsequently engaged as a staff composer. In 1919 Gershwin wrote his first complete score for Broadway, La La Lucille, his first worldwide hit. Swannee, made famous by the singer Al Jolson who recorded it in 1920, and from 1920 to 1924 contributed the music for five of George White’s Scandals. Over a fourteen-year period following La La Lucille Gershwin musicals including Lady Be Good! (1924), Oh, Kay! (1926), Fanny Foss (1927), Girl Crazy (1930), Of Thee I Sing (1931) and Let ‘Em Eat Cake (1933) would grace the New York stage.

Gershwin’s entry into the world of concert music came in 1924 at the invitation of the bandleader and thus called ‘King of Jazz’, Paul Whiteman. Rhapsody in Blue for jazz band and piano, orchestrated by Ferde Grofé and first performed in New York’s Aeolian Hall on 12th February 1924, was followed by the Piano Concerto in F (1925), an American in Paris (1928), the second Rhapsody (1931), the Cuban Overture (1932) and the opera Porgy and Bess (1935-38). Tragically, other projected works including a string quartet, a symphony, a ballet score, an additional opera, and songs for a Kaufman-Hart musical never came to fruition. On 11th July 1937 George Gershwin died at the age of 38 from a brain tumour.

The first work here included, the ten-minute orchestral suite Gershwin in Hollywood, is actually an arrangement by Robert Russell Bennett of some of Gershwin’s most popular songs including ‘They Can’t Take That Away From Me’, ‘A Foggy Day’, ‘Love Walked In’, ‘Nice Work If You Can Get It’ and ‘Love Is Here To Stay’.

Gershwin began work on An American in Paris in the spring of 1928 and its premiere by the New York Philharmonic Orchestra under Walter Damrosch took place the following year on 13th December in Carnegie Hall (three years earlier in the same venue Damrosch had conducted the first performance of Gershwin’s Piano Concerto in F). In this hugely popular one-movement symphonic poem, whose richly orchestrated music features two saxophones and several other exotic instruments, the composer intended to ‘portray the impressions of an American visitor to Paris as he strolls about the city, listening to the various street noises and absorbing the French atmosphere’. The memorable melody theme announced by the solo trumpet, suggesting a sudden burst of homesickness on the part of the protagonist, is one of the finest Gershwin wrote.

Following the premiere in Boston’s Symphony Hall of his Second Rhapsody, conducted by Serge Koussevitzky on 29th January 1932, Gershwin and several friends took a two-week holiday in Havana. The composer, fascinated by the small Cuban dance orchestras with their novel rhythms and unusual percussion instruments such as guiros, maracas, claves and bongos, was inspired to write the Cuban Overture. He orchestrated the work between 6th and 9th August 1932, completing it just a week before the first All Gershwin Concert at the Lewiston Stadium in New York, an open-air concert attended by some 18,000 people which was, according to the composer, ‘the most exciting night I have ever had’. Cast in Gershwin’s characteristic fast-slow-fast form, he wrote that he had ‘endeavoured to set down the spirit of Cuban rhythms with my original thematic material. The result is a symphonic overture which embodies the essence of Cuban dance’.

Gershwin’s magnum opus, the three-act opera Porgy and Bess, was written to a libretto by DuBose Heyward and Ira Gershwin. Based on Heyward’s novel Porgy about life among the black inhabitants of Catfish Row in Charleston, South Carolina, the opera was first performed in early February 1935 and the first hundred page full score was completed in September 1935. Heyward memorably described the idiosyncratic working methods of the Gershwin brothers, who ‘would get at the piano, pound, wrangle, argue, burst into wild squabbles of song, and eventually emerge with a polished lyric’. It numbers amongst its classic songs ‘Summertime’, ‘I Loves You, Porgy’ and ‘It Ain’t Necessarily So’. The orchestral suite based on this recording, the Symphonic Picture from Porgy and Bess arranged by Robert Russell Bennett, has become the standard version since its première in 1935, the fact that Gershwin made his own arrangements in 1936. Evidently long forgotten about by the time Bennett made his arrangement. Gershwin’s suite was retitled Catfish Row by Ira when it was rediscovered in 1958. The opera, a commercial and critical failure at the time, is now considered one of the greatest achievements of twentieth-century American music.

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AMERICAN CLASSICS

GEORGE GERSHWIN

An American in Paris

Porgy and Bess Suite • Gershwin in Hollywood

New Zealand Symphony Orchestra • James Judd
George Gershwin
(1898 - 1937)

New Zealand Symphony Orchestra
James Judd

2. An American in Paris 18:47
3. Cuban Overture 10:43
4. Porgy and Bess (Symphonic Picture) 25:13

George Gershwin's An American in Paris provides a further synthesis of the jazz that he saw as the essentially American folk-music and the traditional classical orchestra. This finds a further place in his triumphantly successful black opera Porgy and Bess, from which Robert Russell Bennett has drawn a Symphonic Picture. Cuban Overture turns to the characteristic rumba, while Gershwin in Hollywood is an instrumental arrangement by Bennett of some of Gershwin's best known songs.