

CLARICE SMITH PERFORMING ARTS CENTER
PRESENTS

POST-CLASSICAL ENSEMBLE

The Gershwin Project: Russian Gershwin

Angel Gil-Ordóñez, Music Director
Joseph Horowitz, Artistic Director



friday, september 24, 2010 . 8PM
elsie & marvin dekelboum concert hall

PHOTO BY TOM WOLFF



PROGRAM

POST-CLASSICAL ENSEMBLE

The Gershwin Project: Russian Gershwin

ACT ONE

Gershwin: *Prelude no. 2* (1926) (as broadcast by the composer in 1932)
Prelude no. 2 (an improvisation by Genadi Zagor)

Gershwin: *Rhapsody in Blue* (1924) (as scored by Ferde Grofé for the Paul Whiteman Band)
 Genadi Zagor, piano
 (In tonight's performance, Mr. Zagor will improvise the piano solos.)

INTERMISSION

ACT TWO

Gershwin: *Piano Concerto in F* (1925)
 Allegro moderato
 Andante con moto
 Allegro con brio

Gershwin: *Cuban Overture* (1932)

The program will be approximately 1 hour and 45 minutes with one 15-minute intermission.



This project is supported in part by an award from the
National Endowment for the Arts.

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 Joseph Horowitz, Artistic Director

Genadi Zagor, Piano
 Vakhtang Kodanashvili, Piano
 Angel Gil-Ordóñez, Conductor

Violin I

David Salness,
Concertmaster
 Eric Lee
 Yvonne Lam
 Eva Cappelletti-Chao
 Reiko Niiya-Chow
 Jennifer Rickard

Violin 2

Sally McLain
 Tim Macek
 Najim Kim
 Jennifer Himes
 Sara Sherry

Viola

Phillippe Chao,
principal viola
 Uri Wassertsug
 David Basch
 Kyung LeBlanc

Cello

Steven Honigberg
 Liz Davis
 Kerry van Laanen

Bass

Ed Malaga
 Jeff Koczela

Flute

Adria Foster
 Nicolette Oppelt
 Jonathan Baumgarten

Oboe

Mark Hill
 Wes Nichols

English Horn

Carole Libelo

Clarinet

David Jones
 Kathy Mulcahey

Bass Clarinet

Ed Walters

Bassoon

Don Shore
 Ben Greanya

Contrabassoon

Eric Dircksen

Horn

Greg Drone
 Ted Peters
 Mark Hughes
 Paul Hopkins

Trumpet

Chris Gekker
 Tim White
 Phil Snedecor

Trombone

George Allen
 Mark Mauldin
 Paul Schultz

Tuba

Mike Bunn

Saxophone

Ed Walters
 Ben Bokor
 Chris Vadala

Percussion

Bill Richards
 John Spirtas
 Danny Villanueva

Timpani

Jonathan Rance

Piano

Naoko Takao

Guitar/Piano

Wiley Porter

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

INTERPRETING GERSHWIN

No other American composer straddles as many musical worlds. In the realm of popular song and jazz, Gershwin's genius has long been celebrated. In the world of classical music, he was long marginalized as a "pops" composer — but no longer. Post-Classical Ensemble explores "interpreting Gershwin" — the man and the music.

A NOTE FROM THE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Joseph Horowitz, Artistic Director, Post-Classical Ensemble

After World War I, Europeans enthusiastically embraced jazz as unique, exotic, fascinating and fresh — "American." The most ardent jazz supporters included Europe's leading composers, who routinely ignored Aaron Copland and his American classical-music colleagues. Upon visiting New York, they gravitated to Harlem, not Carnegie Hall. Darius Milhaud, who split his time between France and the United States, wrote, "In jazz the North Americans have really found expression in an art form that suits them thoroughly, and their great jazz bands achieve a perfection that places them next to our most famous symphony orchestras." Bartók, arriving in 1927, was observed asking about "the latest things in American jazz ... pretty nearly as soon as he was down the gangplank." Ravel, one year after that, told Olin Downes of the *New York Times*, "I think you have too little realization of yourselves and that you still look too far away over the water. An artist should be international in his judgments and esthetic appreciations and incorrigibly national when it comes to the province of creative art. I think you know that I greatly admire and value — more, I think, than many American composers — American jazz."

Among Americans, however, jazz was infinitely debatable. Racist moral discomfort was epitomized by Henry Ford's *Dearborn Independent*, which took note of "the organized eagerness of the Jew to make alliance with the Negro." "Picturesque, romantic, clean" popular songs had been supplanted by "monkey talk, jungle squeals, grunts and squeaks and gasps suggestive of cave love," all of it merchandized by Jews with just the right "cleverness to camouflage the moral filth." Among music educators, Frank Damrosch of the Institute of Musical Art (later The Juilliard School) denounced the "outrage on beautiful music" perpetrated by musicians "stealing phrases from the classic composers and vulgarizing them." A typical music appreciation response was a Music Memory Contest in Cleveland aimed to "cultivate a distaste for jazz and other lower forms, and a need for the great compositions." Meanwhile, Nikolai Sokoloff, music director of the Cleveland Orchestra, denounced jazz as "ugly sounds" and forbade his musicians to play it.

The trans-Atlantic rift over jazz split opinion on George Gershwin. In American classical music circles, Gershwin was dismissed by highbrows as a lower musical species. Gershwin's first appearance with the New York Symphony in 1925 — the premiere of the *Concerto in F* — furnishes an extreme example. The musicians "hated Gershwin with instinctive loathing," testified the violinist Winthrop Sargeant (later a music critic of consequence). They "pretended to regard Gershwin's music humorously, made funny noises, and played it, in general, with a complete lack of understanding of the American idiom."

Other orchestras were more respectful, but some writers were not. Paul Rosenfeld, who influentially championed Copland in intellectual circles, detected in Gershwin a Russian Jew, a "weakness of spirit, possibly as a consequence of the circumstance that



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the new world attracted the less stable types.” This observation appeared in *The New Republic* in 1933. Rosenfeld’s point was that Gershwin was talented but vulgar, “a gifted composer of the lower, unpretentious order.” More politely, Copland was similarly disposed. He omitted Gershwin from his various surveys of important or promising American composers.

Eminent European-born musicians admired Gershwin without the qualms typically expressed by eminent Americans. In Los Angeles, the composer Arnold Schoenberg befriended Gershwin; he later eulogized him as a “great composer.” Otto Klemperer, the conductor of the Los Angeles Philharmonic, admired him from a distance. A third southern California transplant, Jascha Heifetz, transcribed tunes from *Porgy and Bess* and hoped for a Gershwin violin concerto. Fritz Reiner commissioned (from Robert Russell Bennett) a “symphonic synthesis” for *Porgy and Bess*.

And so we should not be amazed that, behind the Iron Curtain, jazz and Gershwin were embraced with enthusiasm even when Soviet cultural propagandists looked askance. In the 1930s, Alexander Tsfasman, a gifted pianist, toured the USSR with a Paul Whiteman-style jazz band; *Rhapsody in Blue* was his *pièce de résistance*. When, hardly a week after the Nazi surrender, *Porgy* was performed in Moscow, Dmitri Shostakovich was there; he called it “magnificent” and compared Gershwin to Borodin and Mussorgsky.

Tonight’s concert explores the paradoxical American-Russian jazz connection. Our two pianists — Genadi Zagor and Vakhtang Kodanashvili, natives of Russia and Soviet Georgia — are products of Russian training. They grew up in a musical culture that was never ambivalent about Gershwin. Zagor, a gifted improviser (his father was a jazz guitarist), will improvise the solos in *Rhapsody in Blue*. Kodanashvili acquired the *Piano Concerto in F* some years ago, having never heard it; see if you don’t think his interpretation sounds “Russian.”

Paul Whiteman’s Aeolian Hall concert of February 12, 1924, was titled “An Experiment in Jazz.” The featured work, amid more than a dozen much shorter selections, was the new *Rhapsody in Blue* by a young composer/pianist exclusively associated with Broadway, Tin Pan Alley and other playgrounds for popular culture.

“Jazz,” a term first applied around 1916 to a steamy strain of African-American music, did not mean in 1924 what it would come to mean a decade later. Though Whiteman was known as the “king of jazz,” his famous orchestra of strings, winds and brass did not improvise or swing. During his long career, which lasted into the 1950s, his hyper-refinements of style and sound, his portly frame and composed demeanor, his very name aggravated jazz purists. But the high polish and versatility of the Whiteman ensemble was a notable musical feat, and notably conducive to bridging the social and aesthetic gap between earthy Harlem nightspots and prestigious Manhattan auditoriums.

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The landmark significance of *Rhapsody in Blue* was instantly apparent — not least to Whiteman, who found himself in tears midway through the performance. The program was twice repeated — first at Aeolian, then at Carnegie Hall — after which Whiteman took it on a sold-out national tour. Back in New York, he and Gershwin made the first recording of *Rhapsody in Blue*. It sold a million copies and made Gershwin a rich man. *Rhapsody in Blue* became Whiteman’s theme song. Arranged for piano and full orchestra, it also entered the symphonic repertoire. As David Schiff further observes in his admirable *Rhapsody in Blue* (1997), the combination of Whiteman’s jazz spices with Gershwin’s Russian Romantic piano style (not to mention the *Rhapsody*’s Russian Romantic Big Tune, so similar to the “love theme” from Tchaikovsky’s *Romeo and Juliet*) produced “a new cultural sensibility.” Schiff adds, “Had his parents stayed in St. Petersburg, Gershwin might have written many such Eastern European blues.”

Like that of jazz, Gershwin’s appeal to Europe was simple, obvious and fresh. But in the United States — again, like jazz — he poked raw nerves at the very fissures of the American experience: the relation between bloodline Anglos, immigrant Jews and blacks once imported and sold; between high culture borrowed and sacred; and a popular culture born of miscegenation. No less than jazz, Gershwin provoked a cacophony of opinion. Jazzmen and jazz critics were chronically ambivalent. So were classical music critics. So were classical musicians.

Paul Rosenfeld, Copland’s central champion in the press, led the charge. In a 1936 essay for *The New Republic*, Rosenfeld called *Rhapsody in Blue* “circus-music, pre-eminent in the sphere of tinsel and fustian. In daylight, nonetheless, it stands vaporous with its second-hand ideas and ecstasies; its old-fashioned Lisztian ornament and brutal, calculated effects, not so much music as jazz dolled up.” The unveiling of Copland’s *Piano Concerto* in 1926 excited from Rosenfeld the proclamation that jazz, as never in the “hash derivative” compositions of Gershwin, had at last “borne music.”

Rosenfeld was an intelligent critic. He acknowledged that there was “no question” of Gershwin’s talent, of his “individuality and spontaneity,” his “distinctive warmth,” his feeling for “complex rhythm” and “luscious, wistful dissonantly harmonized melodies.” And it is true enough that in *Rhapsody* the stitching shows. But this is somehow beside the point. In the Copland *Piano Concerto* so admired by Rosenfeld, the tunes are never special. The conscious sophistication Rosenfeld endorses cancels

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the illusion of spur-of-the-moment improvisation that Copland strives to sustain. There is every reason that, decades after Rosenfeld's critique, it is *Rhapsody in Blue* that endures. As the pianist Ben Pasternack (a frequent Post-Classical Ensemble guest artist) puts it: "Audiences are simply thrilled and happy whenever they hear the *Rhapsody*. It always has that effect. I think it's probably the best-loved music in the entire American concert repertoire."

Following the success of *Rhapsody in Blue*, Gershwin was invited to compose a piano concerto by Walter Damrosch, conductor of the New York Symphony. Gershwin was the soloist at the first performance, on December 3, 1925. The subsequent performance history of the Gershwin concerto documents Gershwin's vexed reputation in American classical-music circles. His own renditions of the concerto, widely heard, attracted exceptionally enthusiastic audiences. But critics puzzled over the work's pedigree. Many of these local premieres were engulfed in short "pops" numbers. Others, however, took Gershwin "seriously." Damrosch, at Carnegie Hall, premiered the concerto alongside a symphony by Glazunov and a suite by Henri Rabaud. Fritz Reiner, in Cincinnati, coupled it with Beethoven's Seventh, Strauss's *Til Eulenspiegel* and *Rhapsody in Blue*.

After 1950, America's leading orchestras, the New York Philharmonic excepted, mainly sidelined the *Concerto in F*, *Rhapsody in Blue* and *American in Paris* as pops repertoire. Only in recent decades has this changed. Of the most prestigious American orchestras, only Philadelphia and Cleveland continue to marginalize the big Gershwin scores. With the waning of modernism (which equated originality with complexity), Gershwin's American reputation is ever less likely to suffer the reservations once imposed by Copland and Virgil Thomson, among many others.

Upon defecting to the United States from the Soviet Union in 1983, the pianist Alexander Toradze — a teacher of both Genadi Zagor and Vakhtang Kodanashvili — thought to acquire the *Concerto in F*. Two American managers told him that to do so would harm his professional standing. Nowadays, pianists of high professional standing may perform Gershwin with impunity — even in the United States.

The Gershwin concerto is in the usual three movements. That movement one does not adhere to the usual sonata principles can only be purposeful, not inadvertent — Gershwin knew and studied plenty of classical music. Movement two is an exquisite Adagio. The strolling theme first heard in the piano interlocks with the espressivo song introduced in the orchestra following a solo cadenza; the unforgettable trumpet theme coming first and last links motivically with the other two. The jackhammer finale builds to a grandioso restatement of the moody tune with which the soloist entered in movement one. No other American concerto possesses thematic materials as memorable or fresh.

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The *Cuban Overture*, coming last on our program, is for some reason little heard. It is the outcome of a February 1932 trip to Havana, about which Gershwin wrote: "Cuba was most interesting to me, especially for its small dance orchestras, who play [the] most intricate rhythms most naturally." Another influence was the rumba — an adaptation of the Afro-Cuban song — as popularized in the U.S. by the bandleader Xavier Cugat, whom Gershwin befriended. First entitled *Rumba*, the *Cuban Overture* was premiered by Albert Coates and the New York Philharmonic at an outdoor Lewisohn Stadium concert six months after Gershwin's Cuban visit. The scoring includes four Cuban percussion instruments, to be placed "right in front of the conductor's stand."



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ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Stravinsky festival later this season. He previously appeared with Post-Classical Ensemble at the Music Center at Strathmore. An avid jazz pianist, he frequently improvises in concert. He is currently a graduate student at the Michigan State University. Of a recent Zagor performance of *Rhapsody in Blue* with the Waterloo-Cedar Falls (Iowa) Symphony, the *Waterloo-Cedar Falls Courier's* critic wrote: "His glittering interpretation was a triumph, as he swept through the score with incredible speed and sensitivity. Never have I heard the Gershwin played with such careful nuance, such exquisite attention to detail."

The former Associate Conductor of the National Symphony Orchestra of Spain, Music Director **ANGEL GIL-ORDÓÑEZ** has conducted symphonic music, opera and ballet throughout Europe, the United States and Latin America. In the United States, he has appeared with the American Composers Orchestra, Opera Colorado, the Pacific Symphony, the Hartford Symphony, the Brooklyn Philharmonic, the Orchestra of St. Luke's and the National Gallery Orchestra in Washington. Abroad, he has been heard with the Munich Philharmonic, the Solistes de Berne, at the Schleswig-Holstein Music Festival and at the Bellas Artes National Theatre in Mexico City. In the summer of 2000, he toured the major music festivals of Spain with the Valencia Symphony Orchestra in the Spanish premiere of Leonard Bernstein's *Mass*.

Born in Madrid, he worked closely with Sergiu Celibidache in Germany for more than six years. He also studied with Pierre Boulez and Iannis Xenakis in France. Currently the Music Director of Post-Classical Ensemble in Washington DC, Mr. Gil-Ordóñez also holds the positions of Director of Orchestral Studies at Wesleyan University in Connecticut and Music Director of the Wesleyan Ensemble of the Americas. He also serves as advisor for education and programming for "Musica, esperanza de vida," a program in Leon, Mexico, modeled on Venezuela's "El Sistema," conducting its youth orchestra two weeks per year.

A specialist in the Spanish repertoire, Mr. Gil-Ordóñez has recorded four CDs devoted to Spanish composers, in addition to Post-Classical Ensemble's Virgil Thomson and Copland CD/DVDs on Naxos.

In 2006, the king of Spain awarded Mr. Gil-Ordóñez the country's highest civilian decoration, the Royal Order of Queen Isabella, for his work in advancing Spanish culture around the world, in particular for performing and teaching Spanish music in its cultural context.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Artistic Director **JOSEPH HOROWITZ** has long been a pioneer in classical music programming, beginning with his tenure as Artistic Advisor for the annual Schubertiade at the 92nd Street Y. As Executive Director of the Brooklyn Philharmonic Orchestra, resident orchestra of the Brooklyn Academy of Music, he received national attention for "The Russian Stravinsky," "American Transcendentalists," "Flamenco," and other festivals exploring the folk roots of concert works. Now an artistic advisor to various American orchestras, he has created more than three dozen interdisciplinary music festivals since 1985 — including the annual American Composers Festival presented by the Pacific Symphony Orchestra. In Fall 2008, he inaugurated the New York Philharmonic's "Inside the Music" series, writing, hosting and producing a program about Tchaikovsky's "Pathétique" symphony; his subsequent and pending Philharmonic productions explore Dvořák, Brahms and Stravinsky.

Called "our nation's leading scholar of the symphony orchestra" by Charles Olton, former President of the American Symphony Orchestra League, Mr. Horowitz is also the award-winning author of eight books mainly dealing with the institutional history of classical music in the United States. Both his *Classical Music in America: A History* (2005) and *Artists in Exile: How Refugees from 20th Century War and Revolution Transformed the American Performing Arts* (2008) were named best books of the year by *The Economist*. As Project Director of a National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) National Education Project, he is the author of a book for young readers entitled *Dvořák in America*, linked to a state-of-the-art DVD. For the National Endowment for the Arts, Mr. Horowitz serves as Artistic Director of an annual national institute for music critics, based at Columbia University. A former *New York Times* music critic, Mr. Horowitz writes regularly for the *Times Literary Supplement* (UK) and contributes frequently to scholarly journals. He lectures widely in the United States and abroad. His many honors and awards include a Guggenheim Fellowship, two NEH fellowships and a commendation from the Czech Parliament for his many festival projects exploring "Dvořák in America." Website: www.josephhorowitz.com/Blog; www.artsjournal.com/uq.

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