

Program

Sixty-Second Season
First Subscription Concert

Rhapsody in Blue

Thursday, October 3, 2024
Waco Hall, 7:30 p.m.

LAWRENCE LOH, MUSIC DIRECTOR

Danzón No. 2 Arturo Márquez
(b. 1950)

Rhapsody in Blue George Gershwin
(1898–1937)

Orli Shaham, piano

INTERMISSION

Third Symphony Aaron Copland
(1900–1990)

- I. Molto moderato
- II. Allegro molto
- III. Andantino quasi allegretto
- IV. Molto deliberato - (Fanfare) - Allegro risoluto

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The Waco Symphony Orchestra is a member of the League of American Orchestras.

Danzón No. 2

Arturo Márquez (b. 1950)

Mexican composer Arturo Márquez grew up listening to mariachi, the Beatles, the Doors, Carlos Santana, and Chopin. At age twenty he entered the Mexican Music Conservatory and subsequently studied in Paris, was awarded a Fulbright, and went on to earn an MFA from the California Institute of the Arts in Valencia. Little known until the 1990s, today Márquez's music is celebrated worldwide.

Márquez's most popular works are his *danzones*, especially the work we will hear tonight, *Danzón No. 2*. The underlying dance form originated in Cuba and became associated with the musical culture of Veracruz, Mexico. On the dance floor, the *danzón* is elegant and seductive, marked by sensuous gliding motions of the dancers. Commissioned by the National Autonomous University of Mexico, *Danzón No. 2* was first performed in Mexico City in 1994 by the National Autonomous University of Mexico's Philharmonic Orchestra. The work gained popularity when the Simón Bolívar Youth Orchestra of Venezuela under Gustavo Dudamel featured it in its 2007 European and American tour. The piece is often referred to as Mexico's second national anthem. Among its many charms are solos for piano, violin, clarinet, oboe, horn, flute, piccolo, and double bass.

Danzón No. 2 is featured in a 2009 short film in which the composer appears in a cameo as a dance hall pianist. The piece can also be heard in the Amazon video streaming service series *Mozart in the Jungle*.

Márquez wrote this note for the premiere:

"The idea of writing the *Danzón No. 2* originated in 1993 during a trip to Malinalco... and also during later trips to Veracruz and visits to the Colonia Salon in Mexico City. From these experiences onward, I started to learn the *danzón's* rhythms, its form, its melodic outline, and to listen to the old recordings by Acerina Mariano

Merceron and his Danzonera Orchestra. I was fascinated and I started to understand that the apparent lightness of the *danzón* is only like a visiting card for a type of music full of sensuality and qualitative seriousness, a genre which old Mexican people continue to dance with a touch of nostalgia and a jubilant escape towards their own emotional world."

Rhapsody in Blue

George Gershwin (1898–1937)

George Gershwin's family bought its first piano in 1910, when Gershwin was twelve. Fourteen years later he changed the world. As a pianist, Gershwin learned by doing. His first regular job (at age fifteen) was as a "plugger" for a Tin Pan Alley publisher, a trade that required endless hours at the keyboard playing and singing songs for performers. In 1917 he was hired on Broadway as a rehearsal pianist and soon began to produce songs of his own, some of which found their way into Broadway shows.

Early in 1924 Gershwin's attention turned to the task of composing a piano concerto when his brother Ira noticed an announcement in the *New York Tribune*. According to the announcement, band leader Paul Whiteman was planning a concert billed as "An Experiment in Modern Music." The final paragraph read thus: "George Gershwin is at work on a jazz concerto, Irving Berlin is writing a syncopated tone poem, and Victor Herbert is working on an American suite." Gershwin phoned Whiteman to beg off but Whiteman prevailed. Within three weeks Gershwin had produced a two-piano version of the work that came to be known as *Rhapsody in Blue*.

Whiteman's concert drew a large audience that included some of the biggest musical names of the day. Fritz Kreisler was there, as were Sergei Rachmaninoff, John Philip Sousa, and Leopold Stokowski. After a strong start, the concert grew tiresome in the second half. But the mood changed when Gershwin

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stepped shyly onto the stage. From the moment the clarinet began its sassy opening cadenza, listeners were mesmerized. Sixteen minutes later the audience leapt to its feet and applauded for several minutes.

The *Rhapsody in Blue* is not a concerto strictly speaking but a single-movement work of improvisational character. Gershwin's inspiration for the busy opening section was the "steely rhythms" of a recent train ride to Boston. The famous lyrical section came to him while improvising at a party back in New York: "I do a great deal of what you might call subconscious composing, and this is an example. As I was playing ... all at once I heard myself playing a theme that must have been haunting me inside."

Many critics of the period couldn't bring themselves to acknowledge the genius of a concert work that lacked a proper European pedigree. (The distinction between high- and low-brow music was very important in those days.) Gershwin had plenty of detractors, but they were wrong. The Whiteman band performed the work 84 times in 1924, often joined by the composer as soloist. In June of 1924 Gershwin and Whiteman made a recording for the Victor Blue label that sold a million copies. The first published score sold in the hundreds of thousands. The work spawned many arrangements, from solo harmonica to mandolin orchestra, and earned a quarter of a million dollars in royalties in its first decade alone. *Rhapsody in Blue* has surely been

performed more often, and more widely, than any other twentieth-century concert work, and celebrates the 100th anniversary of its creation this year.

Third Symphony

Aaron Copland (1900–1990)

Copland composed his Third Symphony for the Boston Symphony Orchestra's 1946–1947 season under a commission from the Koussevitzky Foundation. It was dedicated to the memory of Natalie Koussevitzky, the famed conductor's wife. Koussevitzky conducted the premiere with the BSO in October 1946.

In this work, Copland came closer than any of his contemporaries to composing the Great American Symphony, a popular idea in those days. The four-movement work is expansive and difficult.

Following are Copland's remarks on the work:

"The Third Symphony, my longest orchestral work (about 40 minutes in duration), is scored for a big orchestra. It was composed in the general form of an arch, in which the central portion, that is the second-movement scherzo, is the most animated, and the final movement is an extended coda, presenting a broadened version of the opening material. Both the first and third themes in the first movement are referred to again in later movements. The second movement stays close to the



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normal symphonic procedure of a usual scherzo, while the third is freest of all in formal structure, built up sectionally with its various sections intended to emerge one from the other in continuous flow, somewhat in the manner of a closely knit series of variations. Some of the writing in the third movement is for very high strings and piccolo, with no brass except single horn and trumpet. It leads directly into the final and longest of the movements: the fourth is closest to a customary sonata-allegro form, although the recapitulation is replaced by an extended coda, presenting many ideas from the work, including the opening theme.

One aspect of the Third Symphony ought to be pointed out: it contains no folk or popular material. Any reference to either folk material or jazz in this work was purely unconscious. However, I do borrow from myself by using *Fanfare for the Common*

Man in an expanded and reshaped form in the final movement. I used this opportunity to carry the Fanfare material further and to satisfy my desire to give the Third Symphony an affirmative tone. After all, it was a wartime piece—or more accurately, an end-of-war piece—intended to reflect the euphoric spirit of the country at the time. It is an ambitious score, often compared to Mahler and to Shostakovich and sometimes Prokofiev, particularly the second movement. As a longtime admirer of Mahler, some of my music may show his influence in a general way, but I was not aware of being directly influenced by other composers when writing the work.”

Copland’s Third Symphony was warmly greeted at its premiere and soon entered the standard repertory.

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