

# Manhattan to Montmartre

## GERSHWIN and BERNSTEIN

Julian Jacobson, Mariko Brown *piano duo*

<b>Leonard BERNSTEIN</b> (1918-90)	
<b>Symphonic Dances from West Side Story<sup>a</sup></b>	[21:52]
<i>(transc. John Musto, 1998)</i>	
1 Prologue: Allegro moderato	4:17
2 Somewhere: Adagio	3:52
3 Scherzo: Vivace leggiero	1:14
4 Mambo: Presto	2:23
5 Cha-Cha (Maria): Andantino con grazia	0:59
6 Meeting Scene: Meno mosso	0:41
7 Cool – Fugue: Allegretto	3:49
8 Rumble: Molto allegro	1:52
9 Finale: Adagio	2:38
<b>George GERSHWIN</b> (1898-1937)	
10 Second Rhapsody <sup>b</sup> <i>(transc. Julian Jacobson, 2014)*</i>	15:03
11 An American in Paris <sup>b</sup> <i>(transc. Julian Jacobson, 2016)*</i>	18:34
12 Rhapsody in Blue <sup>b</sup> <i>(transc. Henry Levine, 1943)</i>	16:39

**Total duration: 72:30**

<sup>a</sup>For two pianos; <sup>b</sup>For four hands      \*First recordings

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Mariko Brown  
*piano duo*

In 1910, more than three-quarters of the population of New York were either immigrants or the children of immigrants. They naturally brought with them the music of their homelands, which, when combined with that of urban and southern American populations of African descent, led to myriad fusions, including ragtime, jazz, hillbilly and country music, rock and roll – styles which were to travel around the world.

Whilst such stylisations are identifiable in terms of musical ethnicity, there remains another potent thread – the impact on popular music by composers of Russian descent. In considering that Irving Berlin was born in Russia, Vernon Duke was born Vladimir Dukelsky, George Gershwin's parents were immigrants from St Petersburg, Richard Rogers's grandparents were Russian immigrants and Leonard Bernstein's parents were from Ukraine, a 'Russian strain' in 20th-century American popular music is undeniable.

Specialists may argue what this means in terms of musical characterisation. It may be that the inherent melodiousness of Klezmer music, underpinned by occasional syncopation, fired these composers' phraseology. Research into traditional Klezmer music has suggested that characteristics recognised as 20th-century American may have roots in underlying racial or ethnic mores, such fusions immediately appealing to world-wide audiences.

On Gershwin's first arrival in England, the Southampton immigration officer, examining his passport, asked: "George Gershwin? Are you the man who wrote *Swanee*?" This was in 1923, before electrical recording, before national broadcasting, and before air travel.

One may imagine Gershwin's reaction. That his music clearly enjoyed such early transcontinental success was remarkable: 12 months on, the officer might well have substituted the *Rhapsody in Blue* for *Swanee*, following the *Rhapsody's* sensational premiere in February, 1924.

It was the penultimate work in a long programme, entitled 'Experiments in Modern Music', mounted by Paul Whiteman in New York's Aeolian Hall. Whiteman's plans had made front-page news: his concept arose from a recital by the Canadian soprano Eva Gauthier at that same Hall the previous November, which included songs by Gershwin, Irving Berlin and Jerome Kern as well as by Schubert, Schumann and Grieg. In Gershwin's songs, Gauthier was accompanied by Gershwin himself – his first appearance at a serious concert. Music critics were obliged to take the popular section of the recital seriously, impelling Whiteman to proceed with his programme.

Whiteman had asked Gershwin for a new piece for the concert, leaving him just a few weeks to write, rehearse and perform the work to which Gershwin's brother Ira, when asked what the title might be, gave it the immortal name ***Rhapsody in Blue***. There was little time to plan the 15-minute score in finite detail, or orchestrate it for Whiteman's band; staff arranger Ferde Grofé undertook to do so from Gershwin's suggested instrumentation, which was laid out on two or more staves.

The long programme had made audience members restless, but from the *Rhapsody's* opening clarinet glissando – a 'trick' of the Whiteman band's Ross Gorman – everyone's attention was held. The structure of the *Rhapsody* encompasses a seamless outpouring of melodic invention, suffusing the work from first bar to last. Whatever its provenance, the *Rhapsody in Blue* – and through the brilliant Victor recording by the original musicians, made six weeks later – took Gershwin's name, as *Swanee* had done, to an even wider international public. Some idea of the work's impact may be judged from the fact that two further recordings, by different musicians, were made within six months of that premiere, and various transcriptions for solo instruments and ensembles soon followed within a year. Among them was one for piano duet, made by Henry Levine in 1925, which Gershwin himself would play with musical friends. On this recording, we

hear the work as it would have been heard in countless thousands of homes within 18 months of its sensational premiere.

Walter Damrosch, conductor of the New York Symphony Orchestra, was also in the audience. Almost immediately, he commissioned a full-scale Piano Concerto from Gershwin, which was premiered by composer, conductor and orchestra in December 1925.

The European premiere of the Concerto was in Paris in 1928, played by Dmitri Tiomkin: a pupil of Busoni, who had also appeared as soloist with the Berlin Philharmonic, Tiomkin was to become a major composer of film music. George and Ira were present, attending their sister Frances's debut as a cabaret singer. They met Ravel and Nadia Boulanger, both of whom expressed admiration for George's music. On his first visit, two years earlier, Gershwin had begun an orchestral work, a tribute to Paris, which he completed in the Spring of 1928. Damrosch conducted the first performance with the New York Symphony in December 1928.

Although George had not had time to orchestrate the *Rhapsody*, the score of the Concerto in F was entirely his: he had studied orchestration fully – passionate in his search for musical knowledge – and whilst the new orchestral work, ***An American in Paris***, shows a marked development in orchestral technique, it was entirely composed at the piano keyboard.

Gershwin was not unique in this: Stravinsky claimed he always composed at the piano, and it is difficult not to feel the same in music by Prokofiev and Rachmaninoff. *An American in Paris* includes a keyboard instrument – the celeste, which, in RCA's first recording in 1929 conducted by Nathaniel Shilkret, was played by Gershwin himself. Such is the inherent nature of the music that it transcribes naturally for the piano,

permitting us to experience the music in its original form, as Julian Jacobson's splendid new transcription fully demonstrates.

Before the premiere, Gershwin spoke of the work having been "written very freely... the most modern music I've attempted... the opening is developed in typical French style, in the manner of Debussy and Les Six... I've not endeavoured to present a definite scene in music... it is programmatic only in a general, impressionistic way".

An important social change occurred with the arrival in the late 1920s of talking pictures, the immediate success of which made silent movies redundant. Speech – and music – could be added to film, opening a brilliant new art-form for composers. Gershwin soon found himself in demand from film companies, and in 1929 he signed a contract with the Fox Film Corporation (later 20th Century Fox) for a fee of \$70,000 (\$1 million in 2021).

In November 1930, Gershwin arrived in Hollywood to write music for his first film, *Delicious*. It opened in December 1931 but proved little more than moderately successful. He had written a relatively lengthy orchestral sequence for scenes on a New York construction site which was cut from the edited film. Knowing his music did not deserve such a fate, Gershwin fashioned it – along with other music which was used – into a concert work: the ***Second Rhapsody***, for piano and orchestra. He engaged an orchestra for a private run-through of this new *Rhapsody*, making a recording to study and make any changes prior to the public premiere.

Before that took place, *An American in Paris* had had its British premiere in London in 1931, part of the International Society for Contemporary Music Festival. The conductor was the Italian composer Alfredo Casella. This ISCM performance did much to reinforce Gershwin's 'serious' credentials; it is a measure of how far he had travelled in the esteem

of his serious fellow-musicians that, whereas the *Rhapsody in Blue* in 1924 was premiered under relatively trying conditions, Gershwin was the soloist at the first performance of the *Second Rhapsody* on January 29, 1932, with the Russian-born Serge Koussevitzky conducting the Boston Symphony Orchestra. The first British performance was by the English pianist Solomon, with Sir Hamilton Harty conducting the London Symphony Orchestra, at London's Queen's Hall on March 20, 1933.

The *Second Rhapsody* has rarely received the attention it deserves. Gershwin considered it the finest thing he had written, and as a totality it is in many ways the best of his concert works. Some felt the *Second Rhapsody* repeated the gestures of its famous predecessor (it does not, although superficial similarities exist between themes of both works) and, lacking the open-hearted panache of the *Rhapsody in Blue*, the public remained somewhat noncommittal. If the thematic material is not as melodically appealing, its subtleties and creative development run deeper than in any of Gershwin's other works, qualities fully explored in Julian Jacobson's articulate new transcription.

Another reason for the work's neglect was that as conceived by Gershwin the *Second Rhapsody* remained unpublished in his lifetime: it was not until the 1980s that the original score was brought out. The *Second Rhapsody* takes the newer language of *An American in Paris* several stages further. The relationship between solo piano and orchestra is handled with greater confidence than in the Concerto, and with infinitely greater resource than in the *Rhapsody in Blue*. The orchestration is remarkably original, confident and powerful; the thematic material is fully coherent, more 'of-a-piece', than anything he had attempted earlier. There is a sense of elation and self-confidence running through the music, the relative failure of which at its initial performances must have been a bitter pill for Gershwin to swallow, redeemed by the major achievement of *Porgy and Bess* in 1935.

Gershwin's death in 1937, at the age of 38, stunned the musical world. It occurred six weeks before the 19th birthday of Leonard Bernstein, then studying piano, composition and conducting at Harvard University. He was to make his mark in all three disciplines following further studies at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia. On leaving Curtis in 1940, Bernstein moved to New York, where he was based for the rest of his life. His historic conducting debut with the New York Philharmonic in November, 1943 launched his glittering career.

Bernstein's talents were soon widely recognised. What proved to be one of the largest discographies by any classical musician began with his contract for RCA: in 1947, with a pseudonymous Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra of New York, he conducted only the company's second recording of *An American in Paris* – several of the orchestral personnel having played in the work's world premiere 19 years earlier.

Bernstein celebrated New York in his own works – the musical *Wonderful Town* and one-act opera *Trouble in Tahiti* (for which he was his own librettist) – before his greatest achievement, the musical *West Side Story*, appeared in 1957.

*West Side Story* marked a new departure in so many ways – not least in the almost total integration of the entire score in cellular-melodic terms and in tonal planning – the latter foreshadowed somewhat in *My Fair Lady*.

*West Side Story* is in two acts, the first of which begins in C major and gravitates towards E flat, in which key a magnificent quintet ends Act I. Act II begins in E flat and gravitates backwards towards a C major close – albeit in a very different manner. The inherent strength of this remarkable score surely arose from an inner concentration which drove its composition, and the subsequent concert work, the ***Symphonic Dances***, which stands fully-formed without any of the show's lyrics by Stephen

Sondheim (excellent though they be) or of Shakespearean dramatic shape (*Romeo and Juliet* was the original inspiration).

In the *Symphonic Dances*, the dramatic sequence is varied. It is as follows: I – Prologue (*Allegro moderato*); II – Somewhere (*Adagio*); III – Scherzo (*Vivace e leggiero*); IV – Mambo (*Meno Presto*); V – Cha-cha (*Andantino con grazia*); VI – Meeting (*Meno mosso*); VII – Cool: Fugue (*Allegretto*); VIII – Rumble (*Molto allegro*); IX – Finale (*Adagio*).

Such is the inherent nature of Bernstein's score – its brilliant combination of melodic and rhythmic elements – that it can be appreciated in various instrumental guises. The impressive version for two pianos was made by the American composer and pianist John Musto in 1998.

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## Julian Jacobson and Mariko Brown piano duo

Formed in 2011, the piano duo of Julian Jacobson and Mariko Brown is now established as an ensemble of rare distinction, vitality and originality. Performances in London include St John's Smith Square, Fairfield Hall, Blackheath Hall, Royal Academy of Music, Markson's Bösendorfer series and Clapham Omnibus. The duo has been featured in the Lower Machen and Stow-in-the-Wold Festivals, at Manchester Art Gallery, Royal Birmingham Conservatoire, Chetham's School of Music and many other venues. Abroad they have appeared regularly in France including their Paris debut in November 2018, and twice at the Madeira PianoFest. They have given highly acclaimed concerts at the Southbank Purcell Room, in 2014, 2015 and 2019.

Their first recording was of the music of Julian's father, Maurice Jacobson, for Naxos/British Music Society. In 2017 they released their first CD on SOMM Recordings

to outstanding reviews, pairing Busoni's towering masterpiece the *Fantasia contrappuntistica* ("easily the most compelling account I have ever heard" – *Musical Opinion*), with a collection of rare French, Italian and English works. This included premiere recordings of the duet version of Debussy's neglected ballet score *Khamma* and Anthony Herschel Hill's Nocturne for two pianos.

They continually seek out new and neglected repertoire for piano duo. At the Purcell Room they gave the first performance of the piano duet version of Gary Carpenter's *After Braque* in 2014 and of Nathan Williamson's *Instinctive Ritual* (composed for the duo) in 2015. In 2016, at Manchester Art Gallery, the duo premiered Edward Lambert's *Aspects of Work*, written for them and inspired by Ford Maddox Brown's painting *Work*, part of the gallery's permanent collection. They premiered Mariko's *Travels through a Mist of Chinese Mountains* and Julian's *Palm Court Waltz* as well as Julian's virtuoso Gershwin transcriptions.

marikojulianpianoduo.com

## Julian Jacobson

Julian Jacobson studied piano and composition from the age of seven with Lamar Crowson and Arthur Benjamin, subsequently studying at the Royal College of Music, Queen's College Oxford and privately with the great Hungarian pianist Louis Kentner. He enjoys an international career as soloist, chamber musician with many prominent artists, and teacher, appearing in over 40 countries and making regular visits in recent years to the Far East. He has been soloist with several of the principal British orchestras under conductors such as Sir Simon Rattle, Jane Glover and Tamás Vásáry, as well as appearing in most of the leading UK festivals.

He has been particularly acclaimed for his performances of the Beethoven Sonatas, of which he has given eight complete cycles, most recently at The Forge, Camden Town (2011-12). In 2003 he performed the entire cycle in a single day in aid of the

charity WaterAid, an event which attracted worldwide media coverage: he repeated the “marathon” in 2004 and 2013 and is planning a further performance in November 2022. He has recorded for Meridian, Hyperion, Chandos, Decca Argo, Continuum and other labels. Julian Jacobson is a Professor at the Royal College of Music and Royal Birmingham Conservatoire, and also Guest Professor at Xiamen University, China.

## Mariko Brown

Mariko Brown began her piano studies with Martyn Dyke, with whom she performed regularly including at the Fairfield Halls, Croydon, as well as for many outreach community projects. She made her first concerto appearance age nine under Dr Ruth Gipps, subsequently going on to study at the Guildhall School Junior Department with Professor Joan Havill where she won the prestigious Lutine Prize. This led to concerto appearances at the Barbican Hall and St Giles Cripplegate as part of the City of London Festival. She also studied composition with Gary Carpenter, receiving a prize for her Oboe Sonata. She was awarded the Principal’s Prize on graduation from the Junior Department and went on to continue her studies at the Senior Department, with both teachers and also Simon Bainbridge, graduating in 2000. Her Piano Sonata, commissioned and performed by Helen Reid, was premiered at Bridgewater Hall, Manchester in 2004.

She has been Musical Director for productions at the Arcola Theatre, London and Eye Theatre in Suffolk. Enjoying a varied musical life, Mariko has also been for many years a dedicated teacher, including at Junior Guildhall and currently at the Yehudi Menuhin School.

Mariko performed Grieg’s Piano Concerto in 2016 and 2017 with the Amati Orchestra and London Repertoire Orchestra and Gershwin’s *Rhapsody in Blue* with the Sutton Symphony Orchestra in 2018.



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