

# JOSÉ SEREBRIER GEORGE GERSHWIN (1898-1937)

Historic GERSHWIN CENTENNIAL EDITION recording

Leopold Godowsky III *piano* · Royal Scottish National Orchestra

- |  |                                      |       |
|--|--------------------------------------|-------|
| 1  | <b>An American in Paris</b>          | 18:45 |
| <b>Three Preludes (Gershwin-Serebrier)*</b>    |                                      |       |
| 2  | I Allegro ben ritmato e deciso       | 1:38  |
| 3  | II Andante con moto e poco rubato    | 3:37  |
| 4  | III Allegro ben ritmato e deciso     | 1:20  |
| <b>Concerto in F for Piano &amp; Orchestra</b> |                                      |       |
| 5  | I Allegro                            | 14:15 |
| 6  | II Andante con moto                  | 12:42 |
| 7  | III Allegro agitato                  | 7:11  |
| 8  | <b>Lullaby (Gershwin-Serebrier)*</b> | 7:47  |

**Total Duration: 67:22**

\*First recordings – orchestrated & edited by José Serebrier

Recorded at the Henry Wood Hall, Glasgow, on July 30 & 31, 1998

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# JOSÉ SEREBRIER GEORGE GERSHWIN

## An American in Paris Piano Concerto in F 3 Preludes · Lullaby

Historic Gershwin Centennial  
Edition recording

Leopold Godowsky III *piano*  
Royal Scottish National Orchestra

José Serebrier *conductor*



The première of the *Rhapsody in Blue*, Gershwin's first concert work, in the Aeolian Hall concert Paul Whiteman billed as "An Experiment in Modern Music", on February 12, 1924, was the event that powerfully and solidly established jazz as a factor in concert music – and made Gershwin himself, who played the solo part, an international cultural hero. He was not the first composer to make use of jazz in works for the concert hall and the theatre; Darius Milhaud, John Alden Carpenter and still others had preceded him earlier in that decade. What made Gershwin different, and far more influential, was that he was not a "classical" composer dabbling in a colourful popular idiom, but a musician thoroughly at home in that idiom who transferred it successfully, and with unimaginable impact, to the concert hall. The *Rhapsody's* historic première led directly to the two symphonic works recorded here.

Virtually every important musician in New York attended that famous event, and some came from other cities. Leopold Stokowski was in the audience, as were Sergei Rachmaninoff, Igor Stravinsky, Fritz Kreisler, Amelita Galli-Curci and Alma Gluck. One of the most excited was Walter Damrosch, who was then conductor of the New York Symphony Orchestra. Damrosch approached Gershwin the very next day with a commission for a full-length concerto; Gershwin accepted at once – and then bought a textbook to teach himself how to orchestrate.

It didn't take him long; the première of the Concerto in F took place in Carnegie Hall on December 3, 1925, with Gershwin as soloist and Damrosch conducting. That was Gershwin's first appearance with a symphony orchestra as either performer or composer, and Damrosch prepared his audience with an enthusiastic program note of his own, in which he observed: "Various composers have been walking



around jazz like a cat around a plate of hot soup, waiting for it to cool off so that they could enjoy it without burning their tongues, hitherto accustomed only to the more tepid liquids distilled by cooks of the classical school. Lady Jazz... has danced her way around the world... but for all her travels and sweeping popularity, she has encountered no knight who could lift her to a level that would enable her to be received as a respectable member of musical circles. George Gershwin seems to have accomplished this miracle... boldly by dressing his extremely independent and up-to-date young lady in the classic garb or a concerto... He is the Prince who has taken Cinderella by the hand and openly proclaimed her a princess to the astonished world, no doubt to the fury of her envious sisters".

In addition to providing the annotation, as George Martin points out in his book *The Damrosch Dynasty*, the conductor “took care to surround the new work with music that would complement or illuminate it without overwhelming it. There was... no work of Beethoven, Brahms or Tchaikovsky that in its familiarity would be certain to please the audience and invite unfair comparison, but, instead, a *Suite anglaise* by Rabaud, and Glazunov’s Symphony No. 5. The latter, which came first on the program, had a purpose that only one reviewer, young Lawrence Abbott of *The Outlook*, bothered to mention, or perhaps noticed: “Its finale burst forth with the identical Charleston rhythm which features so strongly in the Gershwin Concerto”. When Abbott asked [Damrosch] if the purpose of playing the Symphony was to establish the Concerto’s Russian heritage, Walter replied, beaming, “Clever boy!”

Glazunov, in fact, was present at that concert, and Gershwin was pleased and honored to meet him after both of their compositions had been heard. But, to the young American’s effusively respectful statement that he “dreamed of” studying orchestration with him, Glazunov could only respond, after an uncomfortable silence, that the Concerto showed weaknesses in the areas of theory and counterpoint, and that these would have to be remedied before he could think of studying orchestration. Gershwin, despite having received enthusiastic congratulations only minutes earlier from Rachmaninoff, Kreisler and Josef Hofmann, left that important occasion in a mood of depression rather than exhilaration or triumph, because he felt Glazunov’s judgment was sound, even if his delivery was harsh.

(In the context of the present recording, it might be noted that Glazunov dedicated his own First Piano Concerto, in 1911, to the celebrated pianist

Leopold Godowsky, whose eponymous grandson is also Gershwin’s nephew, and that Damrosch, himself a member of a famous musical family, had a connection through that family with the present Godowsky’s father. Leopold Damrosch Mannes, the conductor’s nephew, was a high school classmate of Leopold Godowsky, Jr; they not only formed a close friendship but were also the joint inventors of the Kodachrome process, the essential breakthrough in color photography. Both were accomplished musicians as well – Godowsky a violinist who played for a time in the San Francisco Symphony and the Los Angeles Philharmonic. Mannes a pianist who formed a trio with other associates – and they gave duo recitals together).

The Concerto in F, whose straightforward language obviates the need for detailed analysis, is in the conventional three movements. The first of which opens with an outburst from the timpani which ushers in a dizzying sequence of themes, mostly “nervous” in character but with one sweepingly lyrical one, *Moderato cantabile*, by way of brilliant contrast.

The second movement is a haunting nocturne (*Adagio*) in the style of the Blues, its theme stated by muted trumpet and then by the oboe before the more animated entrance of the piano. In the second part of the movement the tempo picks up to *Andante con moto* and the music builds to a climax of considerable intensity before the opening material returns.

The driving finale (*Molto agitato – con brio*) is a torrent of relentless energy, throwing off new themes like sparks in the brightest colors. There are reminiscences of the preceding movements, and at the end a reprise of the work’s opening movement.

Gershwin did not need Glazunov to point out his shortcomings; he was keenly aware of his lack of training. He had not orchestrated the *Rhapsody in Blue* himself, but left that to Whiteman's famous staff arranger Ferde Grofé (later the composer of the *Grand Canyon Suite*). He had studied harmony and counterpoint earlier with Edward Kilenyi, Sr., and he did get enough out of the textbooks he bought (Forsyth's *Orchestration*, in particular, remained a sort of 'Bible' for him) and the advice of seasoned practitioners among his friends to orchestrate the concerto himself, but after Glazunov's remarks he was concerned enough to seek further instruction from the composers Henry Cowell and Wallingford Riegger, both of whom recommended the theorist Joseph Schillinger. Glazunov is said to have claimed credit himself for referring Gershwin to Schillinger, who was indeed helpful – but Gershwin didn't consult him till after he had composed *An American in Paris*.

In Paris Gershwin once applied to Maurice Ravel, who had tutored several older composers, and received the famous reply, "Why would you want to risk becoming a second-rate Ravel when you are already a first-rate Gershwin?" He did have some lessons from Arnold Schoenberg in the Thirties. Schoenberg, Stravinsky and others have been cited as having said to Gershwin, after learning how much he was earning, "I ought to be taking lessons from you!" Perhaps no one actually made such a remark, but more than a few composers seem to have acted on that thought in creating works that reflect Gershwin's influence. In any event, Gershwin had no help from Ravel or anyone else in composing his musical impression of Paris, which, like the Concerto, was introduced by Damrosch. The cover of the score of *An American in Paris*, at Gershwin's insistence, stated that the work was "Composed and Orchestrated by George Gershwin", and the orchestration boasts some quite original touches.

Gershwin made his first trip to Paris not long after the sensational première of *Rhapsody in Blue* in 1924; by the time he was there again in 1926 he had formed the idea of composing a work based on his impressions of the city, and he made a point of buying taxi horns so that he might decide whether to try to imitate them or actually include them in his scoring. When he arrived there for the last time, in 1928, he had a clear outline in his mind.

"This new piece, really a rhapsodic ballet, is written very freely and is the most modern music I've yet attempted. The opening part will be developed in typical French style, in the manner of Debussy and 'the Six', though all the themes are original. My purpose is to portray the impression of an American visitor in Paris, as he strolls about the city and listens to various street noises and absorbs the French atmosphere.

"As in my other orchestral compositions I've not endeavoured to represent any definite scenes in this music. The rhapsody is programmatic only in a general impressionistic way... The opening gay section is followed by a rich Blues with a strong rhythmic undercurrent. Our American friend, perhaps after strolling into a café and having a couple of drinks, has succumbed to a spasm of homesickness. The harmony here is both more intense and simpler than in the preceding pages. This Blues rises to a climax, followed by a coda in which the spirit of the music returns to the vivacity and bubbling exuberance of the opening part with its impression of Paris. Apparently the homesick American, having left the café and reached the open air, has disowned his spell of the blues and once again is an alert spectator of Parisian life. At the conclusion, the street noises and French atmosphere are triumphant."

Actually, not all the themes are original; helping to establish the atmosphere early on is a brief but emphatic citation of a tune familiar to millions who may not know its title – *La Maxixe*. Among the “various street noises” are four real Parisian taxi horns, which Gershwin decided were indispensable to his score – whose title page pointedly identified him as both composer and orchestrator. Damrosch, whom Gershwin had consulted in preparing what he considered the final version, conducted the première on December 13, 1928, in a concert of the Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra of New York, the newly formed amalgam of the Philharmonic and Damrosch’s New York Symphony Orchestra.

While the Concerto had provided Gershwin the opportunity for his first appearance with a symphony orchestra as soloist, it was with *An American in Paris* that he made his début as a conductor, presiding over a performance by the Philharmonic at Lewisohn Stadium in August 1929, eight months after the Carnegie Hall première under Damrosch. In the same Stadium concert he played the solo part in his Concerto with the orchestra conducted by Willem van Hoogstraten, under whom he had first appeared there two years earlier. Six months later, in what may have been its first performances outside New York, *An American in Paris* was on one of the programs of the Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra that marked the American début of a young conductor named Georg Szell, who nearly four decades later would bring José Serebrier to the Cleveland Orchestra as composer-in-residence (a position Serebrier held during the last three years of Szell’s life).

In a profile in the British magazine *Music and Musicians*, Robert Matthew-Walker observed that José Serebrier “comes from the same stock and background as Gershwin, Bernstein and Copland, all-American quintessential New Yorkers

of Russian-Polish-Jewish parentage”. Serebrier had in fact been active as a composer even longer than he has been conducting (he was only 17 when his First Symphony was conducted by Stokowski), and it was in this role that he was approached by Gershwin’s sister, Frances, to orchestrate the brief works that conclude this record program.

Gershwin himself, of course, was also an active composer in his teens. His first musical comedy, *La, La, Lucille*, was produced on Broadway in May 1919, when he was only 20-years-old, and in that same year, while studying with [Edward] Kilenyi, he tried his hand at writing for string quartet – not a fully developed work in several movements, but the tender, gently melancholy *Lullaby*, which is seldom heard in either its original form or the expanded one for string orchestra. Gershwin probably didn’t expect it to make its way into the repertory, for he re-used the theme only three years later for Vi’s song, ‘Has anyone seen my Joe’, in his one-act stage piece *Blue Monday*. That “opera à la Afro-American”, as it was called, set in Harlem, was put together in about five days (text by B.G. de Sylva), and was so unsuccessful when introduced as part of George White’s *Scandals* that it was withdrawn after a single performance. That performance, though, was attended by Paul Whiteman, and provided the impetus for his commissioning the *Rhapsody in Blue*. At the very end of 1925, some four weeks after the première of the Concerto in F, *Blue Monday* was re-introduced at Carnegie Hall, re-orchestrated by Ferde Grofé (who had orchestrated the *Rhapsody in Blue* nearly two years earlier) and under the new title *135th Street*.

José Serebrier recalls that he was not interested in orchestrating the *Lullaby* at first, but later came to feel there were elements in the piece that suggested

instruments other than strings. "Now I am glad," he advises, that "Leopold Godowsky III persuaded me. His vision was that this little gem would take on a new and different dimension when the repeated phrases could be given new color with woodwinds, and I have tried to keep the scoring as simple and as pure as possible, so that the orchestral version of this poignantly lovely piece might take on a life of its own in a voice that is still recognizably Gershwin's".

After taking on the orchestration of the *Lullaby*, Serebrier was asked about orchestrating some additional pieces for this recording that might thereby add to the rather limited repertory of Gershwin concert music, and his choice was the *Three Preludes*, whose centerpiece is another lullaby of sorts. Gershwin composed six preludes in the mid-1920s and performed them all in public, but eventually chose only three for publication, the first and third are vigorous and dance-like, while the second, which he characterized as a "blues lullaby," is a gentler, more intimate piece. Orchestrating them was "great fun," according to Serebrier. "I had to complete all the work in a matter of days, in order to meet the deadline for our recording sessions, but before I even began I could already hear in my mind all the different orchestral sounds, and when it came time to write it all down my hand could hardly move fast enough. It was extremely exciting".

Richard Freed © 1998

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George Gershwin with Frances Gershwin

## José Serebrier writes

The phone rang one morning in 1998 in my New York apartment and a crackling voice announced "Maestro, I am George Gershwin's sister...". Sensing I was about to hang up, she said "you don't believe me? Speak to my

son, Leopold Godowsky III, Gershwin's nephew". Leopold quickly came on the line and explained that his mother Frances, 96 at the time, had survived George by 60 years, that she had seen me conduct *An American in Paris* and wanted me to conduct their 100th anniversary concert in London, and their Centenary recording; also to commission me to orchestrate the Three Piano Preludes and the early *Lullaby*.

I was thrilled. We made a lunch appointment. On a cold, snowy February Sunday I met Frances and Leopold on a street corner on Fifth Avenue. She was just four feet tall by then, wearing very high heels. She walked so fast, it was hard to follow. At lunch with the Gershwin clan it was memorable to hear them say "remember when uncle Ira told this and that..."

The new orchestral version of the Piano Preludes and the *Lullaby* were quickly published. Days after I finished the orchestrations. I tried to do them as if Gershwin would have done it, using his vocabulary and sound palette. During the luncheon, Frances handed me her recent recording singing not only Gershwin but Arlen and Weill and saying "Maestro, I can still sing in spite of my age, and if you find an opportunity please remember me".

© José Serebrier, September 2018



José Serebrier with Frances Gershwin-Godowsky



Frances Gershwin-Godowsky with her son, Leopold Godowsky III.

Photograph Jan van Steenwijk © Al Hirschfield/the Margo Feiden Galleries Ltd, New York

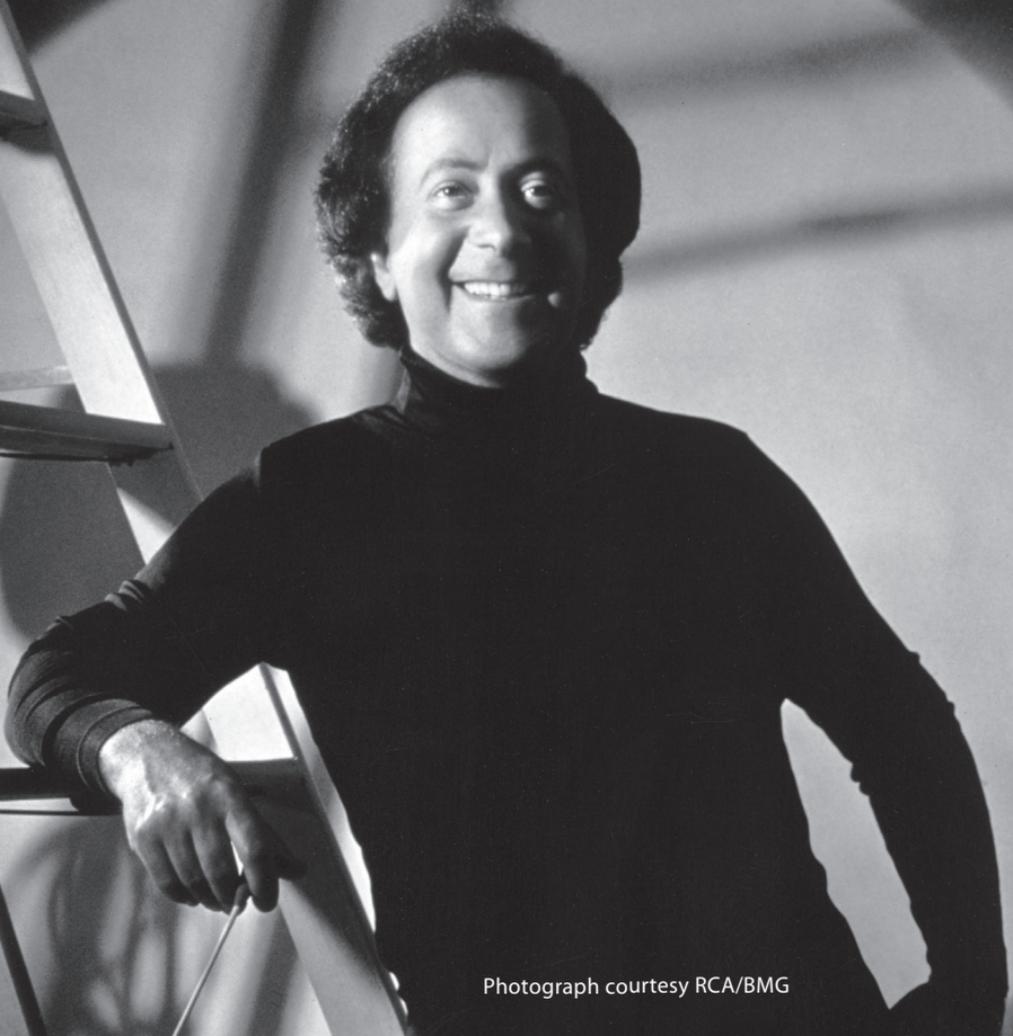
## Leopold Godowsky III

Leopold Godowsky III, heir to a great musical tradition, is the nephew of George Gershwin and grandson of legendary pianist/composer Leopold Godowsky. During his student years, he learned much about his grandfather's interpretive philosophy and technical skills from his father, Leopold Godowsky Jr, himself an accomplished musician and professionally trained concert violinist.

After receiving a B.A. and M.A. in music from Columbia University in New York City, Leopold Godowsky III worked in the music publishing field and in concert management. He also studied piano with David Saperton and Wolfgang Rosé, composition with Charles Shackford and electronic music composition with Vladimir Ussachevsky. Subsequently, in addition to concertizing, he devoted many years to teaching piano, privately and as a member of the faculty at Hart College of Music.

During the last two decades he has composed for different media including chamber music, choral music, songs and music for theater, film and interactive media. His music has been performed on radio, television and in concert halls around the world.

Mr. Godowsky is performing the Concerto in F as a tribute to George Gershwin in the Centennial Year of his birth.



Photograph courtesy RCA/BMG

## José Serebrier

Grammy Award-winning conductor and composer José Serebrier is one of history's most recorded classical artists. He has received 46 Grammy nominations and won the 2004 Latin Grammy Award for Best Classical Recording for his *Carmen Symphony* with the Barcelona Symphony Orchestra. His widely acclaimed box-set of Glazunov's complete symphonies and concertos were re-issued in August 2018 by Warner Classics, who released his complete Dvořák symphonies in 2017.

José Serebrier was 21 when Leopold Stokowski hailed him as "the greatest master of orchestral balance". After five years as Stokowski's Associate Conductor at New York's Carnegie Hall and First Prize-winning success in the Ford Foundation American Conductors Competition, he was the Cleveland Orchestra's Composer-in-Residence for George Szell's last two seasons. Serebrier was music director of America's oldest music festival, in Worcester, Massachusetts, until he organized Festival Miami, serving as its Artistic Director for many years. There, he conducted many American and world premieres and his commissions included Elliott Carter's String Quartet No. 4.

Serebrier's debut recording, Charles Ives' Fourth Symphony with the London Philharmonic Orchestra, received a Grammy nomination. His recordings of Mendelssohn's symphonies and Shostakovich's Film Music respectively won the UK Music Retailers Association Award and Deutsche Schallplatten Award for Best Orchestral Recording. *Soundstage* magazine selected his LPO recording of *Scheherazade* as Best Audiophile Recording.

He has toured and recorded with leading American and international orchestras, including the New York Philharmonic, Pittsburgh Symphony, London Symphony Orchestra, London Philharmonic, Royal Philharmonic, Russian National Orchestra, Oslo Philharmonic, Bamberg Symphony, Royal Scottish National Orchestra, Scottish and English Chamber Orchestras, Czech State Philharmonic, Weimar Staatskapelle, Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide Symphony Orchestras, Orchestra of the Americas, National Symphony of Costa Rica, the Spanish National Youth Orchestra and many others.

Filed at the Sydney Opera House, *Serebrier Conducts Prokofiev, Beethoven and Tchaikovsky* has been shown over 50 times on US television. His conducting appearance at the 2004 Grammy Awards ceremony was telecast live to 175 countries.

As a composer, Serebrier has won most of the important American awards, including two Guggenheims (aged 19, the youngest recipient in that foundation's history), Rockefeller Foundation grants, commissions from the National Endowment for the Arts, Harvard Musical Association and Koussevitzky Foundation Award.

Born in Uruguay of Russian and Polish parents, Serebrier has composed more than 100 works, published by Peer Music, Universal Edition Vienna, Kalmus, Warner Music, Boosey & Hawkes, Hal Leonard, and CF Peters Corp. His First Symphony was premiered by Leopold Stokowski (who premiered several of his works) when Serebrier was 17. He made his US conducting debut at 19 with the National Symphony Orchestra, Washington. Premiered at Carnegie Hall, his Third Symphony, *Symphonie Mystique*, received a 2003 Grammy nomination for Best Orchestral Performance.

Michel Faure's book about José Serebrier was published in France by L'Harmattan. BIS Records recently commissioned Serebrier to write a flute concerto for Sharon Bezaly (recorded with the Australian Chamber Orchestra). BIS and the American Composers Orchestra have commissioned a piano concerto which was recorded in September 2018 with the RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra, Ireland.

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