

## Atlanta Symphony Orchestra

*A founding member of the Robert W. Woodruff Arts Center*

**ROBERT SPANO**, Music Director

**DONALD RUNNICLES**, Principal Guest Conductor

## DELTA CLASSICAL SERIES CONCERTS

Thursday, Friday and Saturday, April 2, 3 and 4, 2009, at 8 p.m.

**ROBERT SPANO**, Conductor

**MARCUS ROBERTS**, Piano

CHRISTOPHER THEOFANIDIS (B. 1967)

### **Symphony** (2009)

I. ♩ = 72

II. ♩ = 112

III. ♩ = 160

IV. ♩ = 56

### **World Premiere**

Commissioned by The Atlanta Symphony with the generous participation of The Savannah Music Festival and the Immanuel & Helen Olshan Texas Music Festival.

### INTERMISSION

SAMUEL BARBER (1910-1981)

### **Second Essay for Orchestra**, Opus 17 (1942)

GEORGE GERSHWIN (1898-1937)

### **Concerto in F Major for Piano and Orchestra** (1925)

I. *Allegro*

II. *Adagio; Andante con moto*

III. *Allegro agitato*

MARCUS ROBERTS, Piano

“INSIDE THE MUSIC” preview of the concert, Thursday at 7 p.m., presented by Ken Meltzer, ASO Insider and Program Annotator.

The use of cameras or recording devices during the concert is strictly prohibited.

# Atlanta Symphony Orchestra

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Major funding for the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra is provided by the Fulton County Board of Commissioners under the guidance of the Fulton County Arts Council.

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This performance is being recorded for broadcast at a later time. ASO concert broadcasts are heard each week on Atlanta's WABE FM-90.1 and Georgia Public Broadcasting's statewide network.

The ASO records for Telarc. Other ASO recordings are available on the Argo, Deutsche Grammophon, New World, Nonesuch, Philips and Sony Classical labels.

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# NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

By Ken Meltzer

## **Symphony** (2009)

Christopher Theofanidis was born in Dallas, Texas, on December 18, 1967. *Symphony* is scored for piccolo, two flutes, three oboes, two E-flat clarinets, three B-flat clarinets (two doubling bass clarinet), three bassoons (third doubling contrabassoon), four horns, four C-trumpets, three trombones (third is bass trombone), tuba, timpani, five percussion, harp and strings. Approximate performance time is thirty-five minutes.

*These are the world premiere performances.*

### **Christopher Theofanidis**

**C**hristopher Theofanidis (born, December 18, 1967, in Dallas, Texas, currently living in New Haven, Connecticut) has had performances by many orchestras from around the world, including the National Symphony, the London Symphony, the Oslo Philharmonic, the Moscow Soloists, the Atlanta and Houston Symphonies, the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, and the California Symphony (for which he was composer-in-residence from 1994 to 1996), among others. His piece, *Rainbow Body*, is one of the most frequently performed works for orchestra in the past ten years, having been played by over 100 orchestras internationally. His work has increasingly focused on opera, and he is scheduled to write two new compositions for the San Francisco Opera for 2011, and the Houston Grand Opera for 2014.

Mr. Theofanidis served as Composer of the Year for the Pittsburgh Symphony for their 2006-2007 Season, and he has recently written a violin concerto for that orchestra with Sarah Chang as soloist. He holds degrees from Yale, the Eastman School of Music, and the University of Houston, and has been a Grammy nominee for best contemporary composition, the recipient of the International Masterprize, the Rome Prize, a Guggenheim Fellowship, the Barlow Prize, six ASCAP Gould Prizes, a Fulbright Fellowship to France, a Tanglewood Fellowship, and the American Academy of Arts and Letters' Charles Ives Fellowship.

Mr. Theofanidis's recent projects have included an opera for the Houston Grand Opera in 2007, the ballet, *Artemis*, for the American Ballet Theatre for performances at the Metropolitan Opera in New York and at the Acropolis in Athens as part of the cultural celebrations leading up to the Olympics, a new work for orchestra and electronics for the Austin Symphony co-written with composer Mark Wingate, and a new work for the Pacific Symphony and organist Paul Jacobs. He has served as the US program director and as a delegate to the US-Japan Foundation's Leadership Program and has recently been appointed to the composition faculty at Yale. Mr. Theofanidis has also been on the faculties of the Peabody Conservatory at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore and the Juilliard School in New York City.

Mr. Theofanidis, a member of the ASO's "Atlanta School" of composers, has enjoyed a long and rewarding association with Atlanta Symphony Orchestra Music Director Robert Spano. In 2000, Maestro Spano conducted the Houston Symphony Orchestra in the world premiere of *Rainbow Body*. In 2002, he and the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra recorded the work for Telarc Records. *Rainbow Body* has subsequently been featured as part of several ASO concerts at Symphony Hall, throughout the Atlanta area, and on tour. On May 12, 2005, Robert Spano and the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra and Chorus performed the world premiere of Mr. Theofanidis's *The Here and Now* (2005), a work commissioned by Maestro Spano. In addition to performances in Atlanta and a recording for Telarc, they also presented the New York premiere of *The Here and Now* at Carnegie Hall, on April 5, 2008.

These concerts mark the world premiere of Mr. Theofanidis's *Symphony* (2009), a work commissioned by The Atlanta Symphony with the generous participation of The Savannah Music Festival and the Immanuel & Helen Olshan Texas Music Festival.

### **Christopher Theofanidis Discusses his Symphony**

This is my first attempt at a symphony.

The work is cast in four movements, and the outer two are the big pillars of the piece, both emotionally and in scale. The first movement is about twelve minutes (I became very interested in the way a first movement defines a symphony, and started looking around at the lengths of the major symphonies that I love, and all of them seemed to have first movements in the twelve to fifteen-minute range). The first movement and last movement both hinge on two contrasting types of energies—in the first movement, the feeling is joyous but occasionally takes turns into a slightly out-of-control version of itself. The last movement is quite dark and monolithic in character, but is occasionally tormented by flashes of light and beauty. I saw these two movements as mirrors of each other. The first is mostly quite fast, the last has a certain breadth and grandeur with some occasional faster music.

The second movement is about eight minutes long and is quite lyrical, but not slow. There is a kind of falling (or maybe more appropriately, "raining") music that one hears in the opening bars which comes back throughout the movement. The primary melody is by contrast an upward, surging line. There are some unusual "nocturnal" effects, including various percussion (woodblocks, claves, etc.), but more notable maybe is that the orchestra itself is called upon twice to actually sing (unobtrusively, and on neutral syllables like "ah", but a noticeable presence nonetheless).

The third movement is a brief scherzo-ritornello. It is only about four minutes in length, but moves at a good clip. The ritornello is a swirling dance with the strings darting here and there and an abundance of pizzicato for a light touch.

The main melodic material is heard first in the flutes and clarinets, and that refrain is heard many times in several slightly altered guises. The contour of the darting material of the strings provides the fuel for all of the rest of the material in the movement. This movement would have an almost classical feel to it, were it not for the tidal surges of the brass and percussion from time to time.

My Symphony is gratefully dedicated to Robert Spano, in admiration and friendship.

— Christopher Theofanidis

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## ***Second Essay for Orchestra*, Opus 17 (1942)**

Samuel Barber was born in West Chester, Pennsylvania, on March 9, 1910, and died in New York on January 23, 1981. The first performance of *Second Essay for Orchestra* took place at Carnegie Hall in New York on April 16, 1942, with Bruno Walter conducting the New York Philharmonic. *The Second Essay for Orchestra* is scored for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, cymbals, side drum, bass drum, tam-tam and strings. Approximate performance time is ten minutes.

*First ASO Classical Subscription Performances: January 22, 23 and 24, 1981, Calvin Simmons, Conductor*

*Most Recent ASO Classical Subscription Performances: January 4, 5 and 6, 2001, Marin Alsop, Conductor.*

*ASO Recording: Yoel Levi, Conductor (Telarc CD-80250)*

**I**n the late 1930s, Samuel Barber became established as one of America's most talented and promising young composers. In the spring of 1938, both the New York Philharmonic and Cleveland Orchestra included Barber's *The School for Scandal*, Overture (1931) as part of New York concerts. On November 5 in New York, the legendary Italian conductor Arturo Toscanini conducted the NBC Symphony Orchestra in a nationwide broadcast of the world premieres of Barber's *Adagio for Strings*, Opus 11 (1938), and *First Essay for Orchestra*, Opus 12 (1937).

In 1939, Barber accepted a commission to write what would become one of his most beloved concert works, the Violin Concerto, Opus 14 (1940). Barber's sketchbook reveals that in addi-

tion to the Violin Concerto, he was also working on a *Second Essay for Orchestra*. Barber completed the *Second Essay* on March 15, 1942. By this time, of course, the United States was involved in the Second World War. Barber was keenly aware that he might be called into military service at any moment. He wrote to a friend: “I have been composing very hard, and my music has been going so well that it seems incongruous for times such as these. But I’ve taken the attitude that it is better to continue one’s job *tutta forza* until one’s draft board decides otherwise.” (Barber received his draft notice on September 16, 1942.)

The day after completing his *Second Essay for Orchestra*, Barber showed the score to conductor Bruno Walter, who was interested in featuring American works in his concerts with the New York Philharmonic. Walter and the New York Philharmonic performed the world premiere of Barber’s *Second Essay for Orchestra* at New York’s Carnegie Hall on April 16, 1942. A month later, Eugene Ormandy conducted the Philadelphia Orchestra in the *Second Essay*. The *Second Essay* soon received further performances by several prominent orchestras, further solidifying Barber’s reputation in the United States and indeed, throughout the world. The *Second Essay* remains one of Samuel Barber’s most performed orchestral works.

### **Musical Analysis**

The *Second Essay*’s arresting opening measures feature the flute, and then the bass clarinet, introducing a wide-ranging *dolce, espressivo* theme over hushed accompaniment by the bass drum (*Andante, un poco mosso*). The melody is soon developed by other winds and finally, the strings, as the music builds to a radiant climax. The violas sing the second principal theme (*Con moto*), related to the first, and developed in energetic fashion by the orchestra. A *sforzando* chord by the entire ensemble heralds a vibrant fugue, based upon a puckish theme (again related to the first) and launched by the clarinet (*Molto allegro ed energico*). The fugue reaches a hushed, mysterious resolution. The *Second Essay* concludes with a majestic chorale transformation of music from the work’s opening section (*Più tranquillo, ma sempre muovendo*).

### **Concerto in F Major for Piano and Orchestra (1925)**

George Gershwin was born in Brooklyn, New York, on September 26, 1898, and died in Hollywood, California, on July 11, 1937. The first performance of the Piano Concerto in F took place at Carnegie Hall in New York on December 3, 1925, with the composer as soloist and Walter Damrosch conducting the New York Symphony Orchestra. In addition to the solo piano, the Concerto in F is scored for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, gong, orchestra bells, snare drum, wood block, slapstick, suspended cymbal, xylophone and strings. Approximate performance time is thirty-one minutes.

*First ASO Classical Subscription Performance: January 29, 1950,  
Oscar Levant, Piano, Henry Sopkin, Conductor.*

*Most Recent ASO Classical Subscription Performances: October 12, 13 and 14, 2006,  
Jean-Yves Thibaudet, Piano, Robert Spano, Conductor.*

### **“An Experiment in Modern Music”**

**O**n February 12, 1924, bandleader Paul Whiteman presented a special concert at New York’s Aeolian Hall entitled “An Experiment in Modern Music.” Whiteman intended the program as a forum to demonstrate that American jazz was legitimate concert fare that “had come to stay and deserved recognition.” For this landmark event, Whiteman commissioned a new “jazz concerto” by a young pianist/composer who had already experienced great success on Broadway and Tin Pan Alley. And so it was that George Gershwin appeared as soloist in the triumphant premiere of his *Rhapsody in Blue*.

Whiteman’s Aeolian Hall concert attracted a number of luminaries from the music world, including Igor Stravinsky, John Philip Sousa, Sergei Rachmaninov, Mischa Elman, Fritz Kreisler, Jascha Heifetz, Mortiz Rosenthal, Leopold Stokowski and Willem Mengelberg. Also in attendance was Walter Damrosch, conductor of the New York Symphony. Damrosch was thrilled with Gershwin’s new work, and he decided to convince the New York Symphony to commission a Piano Concerto by George Gershwin.

On April 17, 1925, Gershwin signed an agreement to compose the Concerto and to appear as its soloist. As Gershwin acknowledged: “This showed great confidence on (the) part (of Symphony president Harry Harkness Flagler), as I had never written anything for symphony before.” It should be noted that while Gershwin did compose his *Rhapsody in Blue*, he did not orchestrate the work — that was done by Ferde Grofé. Indeed, over the next several weeks after signing his agreement with the New York Symphony, Gershwin immersed himself in treatises on concerto structure and orchestration.

Gershwin began composition of the new Concerto in the summer of 1925. All told, by Gershwin’s account, “It took me three months to compose it and one month to orchestrate it.” Gershwin originally intended to entitle the piece *New York Concerto*, but ultimately decided upon the more generic Concerto in F. The work was finally completed on November 10, 1925. Prior to rehearsals with the New York Symphony, Gershwin hired sixty New York musicians to participate in a private “run-through” of the work at the Globe Theater. This resulted in some cuts in the score that served to tighten the Concerto’s structure.

When Gershwin rehearsed the Concerto with the New York Symphony, a pipe remained in his mouth at all times. According to a newspaper reporter in attendance, the pipe “wandered in and out of his mouth all through the rehearsal. In particular, he used it to point accusingly at members of the orchestra who were not solving their jazz problems successfully.”

### **“Lady Jazz”**

The premiere of Gershwin’s Concerto in F took place at New York’s Carnegie Hall on December 3, 1925. Gershwin was the piano soloist and Damrosch the conductor of the New York

Symphony. The audience response was ecstatic, “attested (as one reporter observed) in long and vehement applause, so that Mr. Gershwin was kept bowing for some minutes from the stage.” However, the critical reaction was decidedly mixed. According to Lawrence Gilman of the *Tribune*, the Concerto was “conventional, trite ... a little dull.” *The New York Times’s* Olin Downes commented: “Mr. Gershwin has tried earnestly and sincerely to compose a work of symphonic dimensions. But it cannot be said that he had succeeded ... because the form he employs is not native to a composer of his experience.” On the other hand, Samuel Chotzinoff wrote in the *World* that, despite any shortcomings in the work, “Of all those writing the music of today ... (Gershwin) alone actually expresses us.”

And, in a lively commentary that appeared in the program notes for the premiere, Damrosch extolled the virtues of Gershwin and his Concerto in F, a work that continues to entertain concert audiences:

Lady Jazz, adorned with her intriguing rhythms, has danced her way around the world ... But for all her travels and her sweeping popularity, she has encountered no knight who could lift her to a level that would enable her to be received by a respectable member in musical circles. George Gershwin seems to have done it boldly by dressing this independent and up-to-date young lady in the classic garb of a concerto. Yet he has not detracted one whit from her fascinating personality. 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.

### **Gershwin on his Concerto in F**

The Concerto in F is in three movements. Gershwin provided the following musical analysis, which appeared in the *New York Tribune* the Sunday before the premiere:

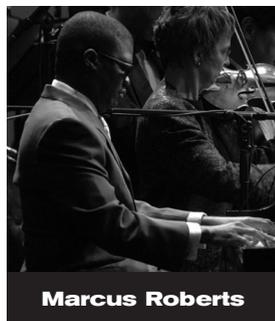
I. *Allegro* — The first movement employs the Charleston rhythm. It is quick and pulsating, representing the young enthusiastic spirit of American life. It begins with a rhythmic motif given out by the kettledrums, supported by other percussion instruments, and with a Charleston motif introduced by ... horns, clarinets and violas (as well as cellos and trombones). The principal theme is introduced by the bassoon. Later, a second theme is introduced by the piano.

II. *Adagio; Andante con moto* — The second movement has a poetic nocturnal atmosphere which has come to be referred to as the American blues, but in a purer form than that in which they are usually treated.

III. *Allegro agitato* — The final movement reverts to the style of the first. It is an orgy of rhythms, starting violently and keeping the same pace throughout.

## MARCUS ROBERTS, Piano

Jazz pianist Marcus Roberts brings to the world of classical music a remarkable keyboard style and thorough perception of jazz as a dynamic influence in the evolution of American music. His new recording, *New Orleans Meets Harlem, Volume 1*, was released on Tuesday of this week and is a celebration of how the early roots of jazz, with its ragtime, blues and New Orleans' influences, can be combined with the virtuosic Harlem styles to create an entirely new sound.



Marcus Roberts

*Portraits in Blue*, Roberts' critically acclaimed debut recording for Sony Classical, explores and reinterprets the jazz elements in the concert music of American composers George Gershwin and James P. Johnson. The focal point of *Portraits in Blue*, Gershwin's signature classic *Rhapsody in Blue*, has been recorded many times, but Roberts' recording is the first in which the piece has been so thoroughly re-conceived through the personalized interpretations of a particular artist. The album also includes Roberts' distinctive reworkings of Gershwin's *Variations on I Got Rhythm* and Johnson's rarely heard *Yamekraw*, named for a historic black settlement on the outskirts of Savannah, Ga. Roberts' arrangements of these classics match his highly individual piano style with the sweep and grandeur of an orchestra, combining 13 members of New York's Orchestra of St. Luke's and 18 accomplished jazz musicians, many of them alumni of Roberts' touring jazz ensembles.

Roberts' recording, *The Joy of Joplin*, released in October 1998, brings a similar approach to the popular music of another uniquely American composer, Scott Joplin. This new collection features Roberts' interpretations of eight classic Joplin pieces, as well as eight original pieces of his own that blend Joplin's ragtime style with European classical music and the sounds of 20th-century blues and swing. His influences range from ragtime to Ravel and Debussy, Erroll Garner and Ron Carter.

"Classical music has always had a huge impact on jazz musicians," Roberts says, noting that his personal listening mix includes Beethoven, Chopin, Mahler, Coltrane and Billie Holiday. "The basic goal of the *Rhapsody in Blue* project is to showcase the art of improvisation from the jazz musician's perspective within a semiclassical form."

Marcus Roberts began his professional career performing with jazz trumpeter Wynton Marsalis. He had already recorded six albums before signing with Columbia early in 1994. During this time, he enjoyed the distinction of being the first jazz musician to have his first three recordings reach number one on Billboard's traditional jazz chart. He has recorded a wealth of original solo and band material, with a continuing commitment to exploring the American solo piano tradition with his versions of classics by Ellington, Monk, Jelly Roll Morton and James P. Johnson.

Marthaniel Roberts was born in Jacksonville, Fla., on August 7, 1963. Blind since the age of five, Roberts was first exposed to music in the local church, where his mother was a gospel

singer. His parents bought a piano when he was eight, and he began nine years of formal training at age 12. While a music major at Florida State University in Tallahassee, Roberts studied with Leonidus Lipovetsky, who, along with Van Cliburn, was a student of the noted Russian piano teacher Rosina Lhevinne. Roberts also cites such diverse pianists as Art Tatum, Vladimir Ashkenazy, James P. Johnson and Mary Lou Williams as early influences.

Aspiring to a career in jazz, Roberts won several state-wide competitions and even earned plaudits from Florida's governor. In 1982, he won the competition at the annual convention of the National Association of Jazz Educators in Chicago, where he met pianist Ellis Marsalis, patriarch of the noted jazz dynasty. Wynton Marsalis heard Roberts play at the convention, and the trumpeter asked his father to have Roberts contact him.

Marsalis went on to have a profound influence on Roberts' artistic development, as he took the young pianist under his wing. By 1985, their relationship had evolved to the point where Marsalis invited Roberts to take over the piano chair in his quartet vacated by Kenny Kirkland.

Roberts was surprised by the opportunity, but so was Marsalis, because by the time the pianist had joined the ensemble, he had learned its entire repertoire from tapes the trumpeter had sent him. Roberts maintained a busy touring schedule with Marsalis from 1985 to 1991 and appeared on virtually all the trumpeter's jazz recordings made during that period. He continued to garner awards, including the \$10,000 first prize at the first Thelonious Monk International Jazz Competition in 1987.

In addition, Roberts' work on behalf of the Jazz at Lincoln Center program has been most impressive. One of the highlights of the summer 1993 Classical Jazz Series at Lincoln Center was the debut of Roberts' remarkably ambitious 70-minute *Romance, Swing and the Blues*, described by the New York Post as "... a rich, life-filled and quite absorbing extended work." Its triumphant performance occurred on August 7, the pianist's 30th birthday, and it marked the beginning of a very promising new decade for Roberts. A vast knowledge of the jazz canon served the artist well during his tenure as music director for the 19-member Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra's coast-to-coast U.S. tour in the winter of 1994. Roberts selected the nightly programs and served as emcee for the mostly sold-out 30-city tour. Throughout 1994, he devoted much of his time to the work of Gershwin, including a spectacular performance as a soloist with Leon Botstein's American Symphony Orchestra in Variations on *I Got Rhythm* at an Avery Fisher Hall concert titled *Common Ground: Jazz, African-American and Jewish Composers (1930-1955)*.

Roberts is active as an educator, conducting seminars and clinics throughout the U.S. He also has a special interest in working with the blind and has recently contributed his time to projects with The Lighthouse and the American Foundation for the Blind, two nationally recognized organizations for people with impaired vision.