

Concerts of Thursday, September 21, and Saturday, September 23, 2017, at 8:00p

Robert Spano, Conductor

Jean-Yves Thibaudet, piano

John Stafford Smith (1750-1836) (arr. Walter Damrosch)

The Star-Spangled Banner

Leonard Bernstein (1918-1990)

Symphony No. 2 for Piano and Orchestra, “The Age of Anxiety” (1949, rev. 1965)

Part I

a) *The Prologue: Lento moderato—Poco più andante*

b) *The Seven Ages: Variations 1-7*

c) *The Seven Stages: Variations 8-14*

Part II

a) *The Dirge: Largo—Molto rubato*

b) *The Masque: Extremely fast*

c) *The Epilogue: L'istesso tempo*

Jean-Yves Thibaudet, piano

Intermission

John Stafford Smith (arr. Michael Kurth)

The Star-Spangled Banner

Michael Kurth (b. 1971)

A Thousand Words (2015)

I. *Above: Radiance*

II. *Beneath: My Sinister Groove Machine*

III. *Within*

IV. *Beyond: We Will Puncture the Canopy of Night*

George Gershwin (1898-1937)

***An American in Paris* (1928) (ed. Mark Clague)**

Notes on the Program by Ken Meltzer

Symphony No. 2 for Piano and Orchestra, "The Age of Anxiety" (1949, rev. 1965)

Leonard Bernstein was born in Lawrence, Massachusetts, on August 25, 1918, and died in New York on October 14, 1990. The first performance of the Symphony No. 2 took place at Symphony Hall in Boston, Massachusetts on April 8, 1949, with the composer as piano soloist, and Serge Koussevitsky conducting the Boston Symphony Orchestra. The Symphony No. 2 is scored for piano solo, piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, snare drum, bass drum, tenor drum, tam-tam, cymbals, temple blocks, triangle, glockenspiel, xylophone, celesta, two harps, piano, and strings. Approximate performance time is thirty-six minutes.

First Classical Subscription Performances: May 2, 3, and 4, 1974, Leonard Pennario, Piano, Robert Shaw, Conductor.

Most Recent Classical Subscription Performances: April 21, 22, and 23, 1988, Jeffrey Kahane, Piano, Robert Shaw, Conductor.

"Like a shoestring catch in center field"

Early in the morning of November 14, 1943, Leonard Bernstein, then a 25-year-old Assistant Conductor with the New York Philharmonic, received a call from Bruno Zirato, the Orchestra's Manager. Zirato informed Bernstein that Bruno Walter, the conductor scheduled to lead that afternoon's New York Philharmonic program at Carnegie Hall, was ill. Bernstein would substitute for Walter and conduct the nationally broadcast concert. The young conductor was about to lead the first complete concert program of his conducting career, and without benefit of a rehearsal!

Despite all the challenges presented by these extraordinary events, the concert was a triumph for Bernstein. The next day, the *New York Times* featured the story on its front page. The *Daily News* reported that Bernstein's debut was "one of those opportunities like a shoestring catch in center field. Make it, and you're a hero. Muff it and you're a dope...He made it."

American audiences, who had long believed that Europe was the sole birthplace for great conductors, embraced the handsome, dynamic, and charismatic Bernstein. He was soon in great demand to conduct the New York Philharmonic, as well as other major orchestras throughout the United States. Despite Bernstein's whirlwind schedule, he still found time to compose. On January 28, 1944, Bernstein, at the invitation of his mentor, Fritz Reiner, made his conducting

debut with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, leading the world premiere of his Symphony No. 1, "Jeremiah."

"One of the most shattering examples of pure virtuosity"

The inspiration for Bernstein's next Symphony came from a masterpiece of secular literature. W.H. Auden's book-length poem, *The Age of Anxiety*, first published in 1947, won the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry the following year. Set in New York City during World War II, *The Age of Anxiety* concerns the meeting and interaction of four people in a bar on Third Avenue. They are: Quant, a shipping clerk; Malin, a medical intelligence officer serving in the Canadian Air Force; Rosetta, a buyer for a department store; and Emble, recently enlisted in the United States Navy. The four principals attempt to come to grips with a war-torn, increasingly materialistic world. Auden's narrative is set for the most part in alliterative tetrameter.

Bernstein regarded Auden's *The Age of Anxiety* "as one of the most shattering examples of pure virtuosity in the history of English poetry." Bernstein first read Auden's poem in the summer of 1947. In program notes for the work's premiere, Bernstein confessed: "From that moment the composition of a symphony based on *The Age of Anxiety* acquired an almost compulsive quality..." Bernstein worked on the score over the following several months, completing the Symphony on March 20, 1948. The premiere took place at Symphony Hall in Boston, Massachusetts, on April 8, 1949. Bernstein was the piano soloist, and another of his mentors, Serge Koussevitsky, conducted the Boston Symphony Orchestra.

The Age of Anxiety

Bernstein viewed Auden's narrative as depicting "the record of our difficult and problematic search for faith." In his program notes, Bernstein describes the role of the solo piano:

I imagine that the conception of a symphony with piano solo emerges from the extremely personal identification of myself with the poem. In this sense, the pianist provides an almost autobiographical protagonist, set against an orchestral mirror in which he sees himself, analytically, in the modern ambience.

The score is in two Parts. Each Part has three subsections, played without pause, that track the progression of Auden's original poem.

Part I

a) *The Prologue: Lento moderato—Poco più andante*—The four principals meet late at night in a Third Avenue bar. There, according to Bernstein, they attempt "through drink, to detach themselves from their conflicts, or, at best, to resolve them." The brief *Prologue* features an improvisation by two clarinets, resolving to

a descending scale, “which acts as a bridge into the realm of the unconscious, where most of the poem takes place.”

b) *The Seven Ages: Variations 1-7*—The protagonists offer their takes on the progression of one’s life. Bernstein portrays this exchange with a series of variations. But the variations are not based upon a single central theme. Rather, each succeeding variation incorporates and develops some characteristic of its immediate predecessor.

c) *The Seven Stages: Variations 8-14*—The quartet embarks upon a “dream-odyssey,” in which “they go on an inner and highly symbolic journey...” The variations gather energy and momentum, leading to “a hectic, though indecisive, close.”

Part II

a) *The Dirge: Largo—Molto rubato*—The principals take a cab to Rosetta’s apartment for a nightcap. Along the way, they “mourn the loss of the ‘colossal Dad,’ the great leader who can always give the right orders, find the right solution...”

b) *The Masque: Extremely fast*—The group arrives at Rosetta’s apartment, “weary, guilty, determined to have a party, each one afraid of spoiling the others’ fun by admitting that he should be home in bed.” Bernstein scores this jazzy episode for piano solo and percussion. An upright piano reprises *The Masque*, “repetitiously and with waning energy,” leading to the *Epilogue*.

c) *The Epilogue: L’istesso tempo*—Bernstein observes: “What is left, it turns out, is faith.” In Auden’s poem, Rosetta and Malin embrace that faith, despite the challenges of reconciling it with their world. A trumpet intones a statement of “something pure.” *The Epilogue* journeys “to a positive statement of the newly recognized faith.”

A Thousand Words (2015)

Michael Kurth was born in Falls Church, Virginia, on November 22, 1971. The first performance of *A Thousand Words* took place at Atlanta Symphony Hall in Atlanta, Georgia, on February 4, 2016, with Robert Spano conducting the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra. *A Thousand Words* is scored for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, E-flat clarinet, 2 B-flat clarinets, B-flat bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, glockenspiel, marimba, vibraphone, tambourine, ratchet, triangle, tam-tam, kick drum, snare drum, hihat, toms, splash cymbal, suspended cymbal, cowbell, gong, bass drum, congas, brake drum, shaker, salsa bell, claves, chimes, cabasa, optional Berlioz bells, harp, piano, celesta, and strings. Approximate performance time is twenty-seven minutes.

First Classical Subscription Performances (World Premiere): February 4, 5, and 6, 2016, Robert Spano, Conductor.

A Thousand Words was commissioned by Robert Spano and the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra. The composer provided the following program notes for the work's premiere.

This work is more difficult to write about than my previous Atlanta Symphony Orchestra commissions; parts of it are slightly programmatic, but mostly it's just music from inside my head spread all over the orchestra for half an hour. One of my favorite authors, Richard Powers, in his novel *Orfeo*, says: "Music doesn't mean things. It is things." I hope that this music will be things to listeners; it is things to me.

Why *A Thousand Words*? The title alludes to the inherent difficulty in expressing verbally the images or memories that occupy our minds. When we remember visits to meaningful places, the images we recall are often accompanied by sensory memories and sentiments difficult to capture with words. I could share pictures of places I've visited or events I've experienced, I could try to describe them, or I could relate these things to you musically. In the absence of images or words, the music conveys the meaning, but more; the music becomes its own experience, independent of its source, like a tide pool, or a feral animal.

A Thousand Words is symphonic in form, and has four movements:

I. *Above: Radiance*—The first movement was inspired by a sunrise over the Atlantic ocean on a January morning at Tybee Island. The movement lasts just about as long as it takes the sun to fully crest the horizon.

II. *Beneath: My Sinister Groove Machine*—Parts of the second movement were inspired by the basalt cliffs at Reynisfjara, on the southern coast of Iceland; parts were inspired by the Sloss Furnaces in Birmingham, Alabama. Both places are eerily beautiful, and you should visit them. The music grooves in a mechanically sinister way, hence the subtitle.

III. *Within*—The third movement at first appears fragile, but as it develops, it reveals its strength.

IV. *Beyond: We Will Puncture the Canopy of Night*—Parts of the fourth movement were inspired by birds in flight, and also by seeing millions of stars in places where that's still possible. It ends with a joyful Carnival parade.

—Michael Kurth

***An American in Paris* (1928) (ed. Mark Clague)**

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 *An American in Paris* took place at Carnegie Hall in New York on December 13, 1928, with Walter Damrosch conducting the New York Philharmonic-Symphony Society. *An American in Paris* is scored for piccolo, three flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets in B-flat, bass clarinet in B-flat, two bassoons, three saxophonists (1: B-flat soprano sax, E-flat alto sax; 2: B-flat soprano sax, E-flat alto sax, B-flat tenor sax; 3: B-flat soprano sax, E-flat alto sax, E-flat baritone sax), four horns in F, three trumpets in B-flat, three trombones, tuba, timpani, snare drum, wood block, suspended cymbal, taxi horns, (optional crash cymbals), bass drum, triangle, wood block, tom-toms (small/large), ratchet, glockenspiel, xylophone, (optional celesta), celesta, and strings. Approximate performance time is nineteen minutes.

First Classical Subscription Performance: March 3, 1953, Henry Sopkin, Conductor.

Most Recent Classical Subscription Performances: April 30, May 1 and 2, 2015, Robert Spano, Conductor.

In March of 1928, George Gershwin departed New York for Europe, and trips to Paris, London, and Vienna. Prior to that time, Gershwin received a commission from conductor Walter Damrosch and the New York Symphony Society (later, the New York Philharmonic-Symphony Society) for a new orchestral work. While in Paris, Gershwin stayed at the Hotel Majestic. In their book, *The Gershwin Years*, Edward Jablonski and Lawrence Stewart relate:

George worked on *An American in Paris* and readily played it for the usual stream of callers, among them the young British composer William Walton, Vladimir Dukelsky (better known as Vernon Duke), Dick Simon, the publisher, and pianist Mario Braggiotti. One day Leopold Stokowski dropped by and became greatly interested in the work in progress, but this lasted only until he heard that the first performance had been promised to Damrosch.

Gershwin returned to New York in June, where he completed *An American in Paris* a month before the work's premiere. Walter Damrosch conducted the Carnegie Hall concert, which took place on December 13, 1928.

These concerts present the United States premiere of a new edition of *An American in Paris*. It is part of the comprehensive *The George and Ira Gershwin Critical Edition*, a collaboration between the Gershwin family estates, their

publishers, and the University of Michigan. Edited by Mark Clague, the new edition draws upon various original sources. These include the composer's handwritten holograph score that resides in the Library of Congress, as well as the February 4, 1929 world premiere recording, supervised by Gershwin, and featuring his performance of the celesta part. Notable departures from the familiar performing version (compiled in the early 1940s by Frank Campbell-Watson) include the pitching of the taxi horns in accordance with Gershwin's original wishes, as well as an expanded saxophone section. While Gershwin's brilliant synthesis of classical and jazz elements remains, the latter receives its full due in the new critical edition.

An American in Paris

Gershwin provided a description of *An American in Paris*, which is included below (indented and in italics):

Allegretto grazioso—

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 the themes are all original. My purpose here 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.

An American in Paris opens with a jaunty "Walking Theme," introduced by the violins and oboes, evoking a leisurely stroll along the City of Light. The inclusion of French taxi horns in the percussion section is a delightful, atmospheric touch (Gershwin went to great time and expense to secure these horns for the premiere). Other Parisian elements include the popular song, "La Maxixe," played by the trombones. An episode featuring a magical combination of celeste and solo violin (*Calmato*) may, according to program notes for the premiere, suggest a brief conversation between the American and a Parisian woman.

Andante ma con ritmo deciso—

As in my other orchestral compositions, I've not endeavored to represent any definite scenes in this music. The rhapsody is programmatic only in a general impressionistic way, so that the individual listener can read into the music such as his imagination pictures for him.

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 simple than in the preceding pages.

A solo trumpet (with felt crown) plays a haunting, *espressivo* blues melody, soon taken up by other instruments. The music builds to a *Grandioso* climax, and finally resolves to a hushed episode, featuring a lilting violin solo. The blues melody temporarily yields to a playful Charleston (*Allegro*), introduced by the trumpets.

Allegretto—

The blues rises to a climax followed by a coda in which the music returns to the vivacity and bubbling exuberance of the opening part with its impressions 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.

A varied reprise of material from the opening “Walking” section joins with a reappearance of the blues melody, as *An American in Paris* reaches its grand conclusion.