



AMERICAN CLASSICS



MORTON GOULD

Symphonettes Nos. 2-4 **Spirituals for Orchestra**

ORF Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra
Arthur Fagen



Morton
GOULD
(1913–1996)

Symphonette No. 4 ‘Latin-American Symphonette’ (1940)

1	I. Rhumba	5:42	
2	II. Tango	5:30	
3	III. Guaracha	3:37	
4	IV. Conga	6:18	

Symphonette No. 3 ‘Third American Symphonette’ (c. 1938)

5	I. Moderately fast	3:29	
6	II. Intermezzo: Slowly	4:46	
7	III. Gavotte: Bright tempo	3:03	
8	IV. Finale: Very fast	3:02	

Symphonette No. 2 ‘Second American Symphonette’ (c. 1935)

9	I. Moderately fast, with vigor and bounce	3:47	
10	II. Pavanne	3:46	
11	III. Fast and racy	3:23	

Spirituals for Orchestra (1941)

12	I. Proclamation	5:09	
13	II. Sermon	4:20	
14	III. A little bit of sin	2:13	
15	IV. Protest	2:59	
16	V. Jubilee	4:08	

Morton Gould (1913–1996)

Symphonettes Nos. 2–4 • Spirituals for Orchestra

Morton Gould was an American musical phenomenon, equally at home in the worlds of “serious” and “light” music. In the words of *Chicago Tribune* music critic John von Rhein, he was “a crossover composer well before crossover had a name.” The Recording Academy nominated him a dozen times in various categories; he won the Best Classical Album GRAMMY Award for his recording of Charles Ives’ *Symphony No. 1* with the Chicago Symphony in 1967. The Academy honored him further with a posthumous Lifetime Achievement Award in 2005. A Kennedy Center honoree in 1994, Gould received the Pulitzer Prize in Music for one of his last compositions, *Stringmusic*, in 1995. His success as a conductor, orchestrator and arranger – especially on such popular “easy listening” albums as *Blues in the Night* and *Moon, Wind and Stars* – tended to overshadow his achievements as a *composer*, at least during his lifetime. But in the years since his death in 1996, his compositional work has continued to attract attention from conductors and listeners, beginning to redress the balance.

According to Gould biographer Peter W. Goodman, “the title ‘symphonette’ was a clever attempt to Americanize and modernize the term ‘sinfonietta,’ linking it with such up-to-the-minute concepts as kitchenette and dinette. Although Gould came to regret using what became a dated, kitschy word, it is both accurate and effective, describing a short three- or four-movement work with relatively orthodox classical structure.” Gould composed and premiered the first three works in the series during the 1930s. The *Latin-American Symphonette (No. 4)* followed in 1940, and is one of Gould’s best-known and most popular compositions. Conductor Fritz Mahler gave the premiere with the National Youth Administration Symphony in New York on 22 February 1941. Six weeks later, Gould conducted a radio performance broadcast over the Mutual Network.

Unlike the first three *Symphonettes*, which use the vernacular of jazz and swing in the context of a concert work, the fourth derives its special character from Latin-

American idioms and dance forms. The opening *Rhumba* employs two contrasting themes. The first, introduced on muted trumpets, is playful and rhythmic; the other – introduced on alto sax and oboe – is more lyrical and characterized by smooth triplet rhythms. In the central development section, Gould uses the “pull” of these differing rhythmic ideas against each other to keep the music in a constant state of flux. The slow movement is a *Tango* in which Gould suggests the Latin folk character by using pizzicato strings, harp, piano and guitar. For all the reputation the tango has as a seductive dance, Gould’s *Tango* might be considered a rather chaste affair with its staid, classical string lines and prim woodwinds. But, then again, perhaps it is made even more suggestive by being so reserved and leaving more to the listener’s imagination.

The *Guaracha* movement was inspired by a dance without specific form that originated in Cuba. It was particularly associated with comic or satiric theatre, making it a good choice for the *scherzo* position in Gould’s *Symphonette*. He presents two themes in A–B–A form, with near-constant eighth-note motion – further enlivened by syncopation – driving the music irresistibly forward. The distinctive rhythms of the conga dance became wildly popular in the US during the late 1930s and early 1940s (as parodied in a song from Leonard Bernstein’s *Wonderful Town*), and Gould used them effectively and infectiously in his concluding movement, also in A–B–A form. The A sections develop two rhythmic motifs, whereas the B section offers a remarkable contrast: oboe and clarinet soloists accompanied by guitar, harp, vibraphone and marimba in an evocation of a sultry, Latin night.

In 1947, the San Francisco Ballet staged *Latin-American Symphonette* as *Parranda*, described in *The Stanford Daily* as a sort of Latin-American *Gaité Parisienne* in which “a fat colonel, dock workers, mulattoes, pious ladies, a romantic couple, and a vivacious confetti vendor (and even some dancing

skeletons) unite in a carnival of Latin rhythms." The ballet remained in the company's repertoire until 1952.

The *Symphonette No. 3* was heard in a broadcast performance in September 1938; Gould made the first recording of an excerpt (*Gavotte*) in 1940 – part of a Decca album featuring several of his compositions for solo piano. The work wears its popular music trimmings quite openly, emphasizing that, for all its classical roots, the piece is intended primarily for entertainment. Goodman describes the first movement as "a collection of dance band licks, full of bent notes and syncopations." The second movement, *Intermezzo*, evokes the blues, while the third movement, *Gavotte*, features two brief thematic ideas tossed about and occasionally combined in the development section.

The *Finale*, while thematically fragmented, combines athletic abandon with balletic grace. It could well have found a home on Broadway alongside Richard Rodgers' *Slaughter on 10th Avenue* (from *On Your Toes*); it also anticipates some of the music Leonard Bernstein would write for *On the Town* six years later.

The second movement of *Symphonette No. 2*, *Pavane* (with tongue in cheek, Gould spelled the word *Pavane* to ensure that radio announcers would pronounce it properly!) received national exposure when Fritz Reiner – an early and enthusiastic promoter of Gould's music – performed it with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra on the CBS Radio Network's *Ford Sunday Evening Hour* on 1 May 1938. Gould himself led the complete work's New York premiere the following summer when he programmed it on one of two New York Philharmonic outdoor summer concerts at Lewisohn Stadium at which he appeared. Critical response was a bit condescending; *The New York Times* reported that the composer "made it evident ... that he was far more technically proficient at this sort of thing than the majority of those who have tried their hand at it." Even so, the Mutual Broadcasting System – which ran Gould's weekly show of *Original Music in the Jazz Idiom* – took out full-page advertisements that declared: "New York Critics Unanimously Hail America's Outstanding Composer-Conductor With Unprecedented Tribute."

Despite its brevity, the first movement is a fully worked-out sonata-allegro form with three themes. The first, marked "with vigor and bounce," is a short declamatory statement in G minor. A shift in tonality to B flat major marks the appearance of the second theme, a bit more easy-going than the first, followed quickly by the third: a suggestive chromatic idea in violins. The development begins after a clearly audible break (a very 18th-century touch in this neoclassical-cum-jazz piece) and includes a fugal passage based on the opening theme (first trumpet, then clarinets and finally trombones/bassoon with the sinuous third idea in counterpoint). The recapitulation presents the three themes in the same order but re-orchestrated and slightly foreshortened, with a final, forceful statement of the opening theme.

The central *Pavane* – one of Gould's biggest "hits" – is lighter in mood but no less grounded in traditional forms. A four-note pizzicato idea underpins a bluesy trumpet motif, persisting throughout almost the entire movement, disappearing only briefly as strings introduce a second thematic idea. Gould combines both motifs in counterpoint during the final third. Jazz touches include the use of drum set (with light brushes keeping a steady off-beat rhythm), the pizzicato bass line and cup mutes and lip slurs for trumpets and trombones. The concluding movement, marked "very fast" and "racy," is closer to rondo form, its nervously energetic opening idea for strings set off by contrasting episodes that focus more on brass and woodwinds. The underlying Haydn-esque sense of humor suggests that, however little else the two composers had in common, Gould may have had Prokofiev's "*Classical*" *Symphony* in the back of his mind.

Gould conducted the debut of *Spirituals for Orchestra* in New York on 19 February 1941 – just three days before the premiere of *Latin-American Symphonette* – but the performance was not ideal. Because of a union dispute, the players who rehearsed the work with Gould for the New York City Festival of American Music were not the same as those who showed up for the concert, which Gould later described as "the most disastrous performance you ever heard." But the work's fortunes

soon improved. When Gould sent the manuscript to Toscanini hoping for a broadcast performance by the NBC Symphony, the Italian maestro chose to premiere the composer's *Lincoln Legend* instead. But Stokowski, who alternated with Toscanini as conductor of the orchestra during the 1942–43 season, picked up the work and gave the premiere broadcast on 15 November 1942. Artur Rodzinski led a series of performances with the city's Philharmonic soon after, including at a concert given aboard a Navy training vessel at a Manhattan pier to commemorate the first anniversary of the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Dimitri Mitropoulos, Pierre Monteux, Alfred Wallenstein and Efrem Kurtz were also early champions of the work.

Spirituals for Orchestra is sometimes designated *A Work for String Choir and Orchestra*, as laid out in the composer's program notes: "The string section is used as a choir, with antiphonal responses and accompanying development in the rest of the orchestra." The suggestion of choral singing is apt because it evokes the long vocal tradition behind American spirituals, but the string lines are often angular and not especially lyrical. There is virtually no literal quotation of authentic spirituals – although the humorous and good-natured third movement, *A little bit of sin*, suggests the tune of *Shortnin' Bread*, a plantation work song dating back to the 1890s. The composer says rather that he set out "to realize the texture of this idiom ... [embracing] the different feelings and characteristics of the folk expression."

The stark opening of the first movement, *Proclamation*, suggests the determined spirit of the African American community, imbued, in the composer's words, with "a dramatic-religious intensity." *Sermon*, set entirely for strings, presents a simple narrative with a hymn-like quality given added depth by the presence of mild dissonance. In the third movement, aspects of the orchestration – pizzicato bass lines, slides on muted trumpets and trombones, the use of wire brushes on snare drum and the presence of vibraphone – suggest the mutation of spirituals into jazz. In movement four, marked *Brutal and Crying Out*, Gould anticipates, with his suggestion of a protest march, the public civil rights struggle that took place nearly two decades after he wrote the piece. He concludes the work with a triumphant *Jubilee*, in which he develops the spiritual idiom "with some of its more contemporary rhythmic patterns."

As he neared his 80th birthday, Gould told John von Rhein, "I write music for two reasons. One, because it's the only thing I know how to do. Two, because composing is a visceral thing for me. I love it and enjoy it. I express whatever ability I have and hopefully I do it with discipline and craft." The discipline, the craft, the love and enjoyment are all present in the works on this album.

Frank K. DeWald

ORF Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra



Photo: Lukas Beck

An ensemble of international renown, the ORF Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra (Vienna RSO) is a paragon of Viennese orchestral tradition. Known for its exceptional programming, the orchestra combines 19th-century repertoire with contemporary works and rarely performed pieces from other periods. All Vienna RSO performances are broadcast on the radio, and the orchestra performs in two subscription series in Vienna, in the Musikverein and the Konzerthaus. In addition, it appears every year at major Austrian and international festivals, such as the Salzburg Festival, musikprotokoll im steierischen herbst and Wien Modern. The Vienna RSO enjoys a successful collaboration with the Theater an der Wien, has an excellent reputation as an opera orchestra, and is also equally at home in the film music genre. The orchestra regularly tours internationally, and its discography spans a broad range of cross-genre recordings. Under the leadership of its former chief conductors, which include Milan Horvat, Leif Segerstam, Lothar Zagrosek, Pinchas Steinberg, Dennis Russell Davies, Bertrand de Billy and Cornelius Meister, the orchestra has continuously expanded its repertoire and its international reputation. Marin Alsop has served as chief conductor since September 2019. www.rso.orf.at

Arthur Fagen



Photo: Indiana University
Jacobs School of Music

Arthur Fagen has conducted at the world's most prestigious opera houses including the Metropolitan Opera and Vienna State Opera, and has led acclaimed orchestras such as the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande and Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie. He has recently conducted the London Symphony Orchestra, the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and the Philharmonia. Fagen has served as principal conductor in Kassel and Brunswick, chief conductor of the Vlaamse Opera and music director of the Queens Symphony Orchestra. From 2002 to 2007, he was music director of the Dortmund Philharmonic Orchestra and the Dortmund Opera. Fagen has made recordings for BMG, Bayerischer Rundfunk, SFB, and WDR Cologne. He regularly records for Naxos, with releases including a cycle of the Martinů *Symphonies* [8.553348, 8.553349, 8.553350], and a recording of Martinů's *Piano Concertos Nos. 3 and 5* with Giorgio Koukl [8.572206], which was selected as an Editor's Choice in the March 2010 issue of *Gramophone* magazine. Fagen has been music director of The Atlanta Opera since 2010 and is also chair of orchestral conducting at Indiana University's Jacobs School of Music in Bloomington. fagen.chronosartists.com

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Symphonettes Nos. 2–4

- 1–4** Symphonette No. 4
'Latin-American Symphonette'
(1940) **21:12**
- 5–8** Symphonette No. 3
'Third American Symphonette'
(c. 1938) **14:24**
- 9–11** Symphonette No. 2
'Second American Symphonette'
(c. 1935) **10:58**
- 12–16** Spirituals for Orchestra (1941) **18:58**

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Symphony Orchestra**

Arthur Fagen



A detailed track list can be found inside the booklet.
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AMERICAN CLASSICS

Morton Gould was an American musical phenomenon, equally at home in classical, crossover and film genres, and the recipient of both GRAMMY and Pulitzer awards during his long and distinguished career. The *Symphonettes* represent Gould's best crossover work – the *Symphonette No. 4* deriving its character from Latin-American dance forms to make it one of his most popular compositions. The first movement of *Symphonette No. 3* has been described as “a collection of dance band licks, full of bent notes and syncopations” and the central *Pavanne* of *Symphonette No. 2* with its bluesy trumpet motif is one of Gould's biggest hits. *Spirituals for Orchestra* utilizes the strings as a choir, with antiphonal responses in the rest of the orchestra.

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