



ONLINE

**GERSHWIN**  
Concerto in F

**BERNSTEIN**  
The Age of Anxiety

**INGRID JACOBY**

RUSSIAN NATIONAL ORCHESTRA

DMITRY LISS



George Gershwin

The two works on this disc are notable instances of works for piano and orchestra, such as have been a prominent feature of American concert music during the past century and more. Interestingly, neither composer is known primarily for his orchestral music as opposed to their output of musicals and stage-shows. Both of them, however, were fine pianists and though Gershwin's talent focused largely on transcriptions of his songs, while Bernstein's energies were increasingly directed towards conducting (notably of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, whose Principal Conductor he was between 1959 and 1969), they were more than equal to the task of giving the first performances of their respective works. While both pieces were received with some degree of scepticism at the time, they have since gone on to enjoy frequent performance in keeping with the general reassessment of the composers over recent years.

Immediately after the successful premiere of his *Rhapsody in Blue* in February 1924, **George Gershwin** (1898–1937) was commissioned by conductor Walter Damrosch to compose a full-length concerto. Despite still having little formal training in composition, and being contracted for several Broadway musicals, Gershwin managed to work intensively on the project from May of the following year – managing to complete

and orchestrate his *Piano Concerto in F* that November. The premiere, with the composer joined by Damrosch and the New York Philharmonic, took place in New York on 3rd December 1925. Reaction was mixed but the main point of contention, that the concerto freely combined elements of both classical and popular music, came to be seen as its greatest virtue. Its achievement encouraged Gershwin to continue his study of abstract forms, and he wrote several more concert works in the few years left to him.

The first movement opens with a brusque call to attention from the percussion and a lively, dance-like orchestral introduction in which several future themes are alluded to. At length, the piano enters with a pensive and blues-inflected melody which is presently joined by the strings. An animated orchestral transition builds to a full restatement of the melody by strings with piano accompaniment, the soloist then leading into a vivacious theme marked by a liberal use of syncopation and an engaging repartee with the orchestra. This becomes the basis of an expressive interlude for strings and woodwind, playfully decorated by the piano, which gains in ardour before being cut short by a further racy passage dominated by the piano. The orchestra re-enters for a climactic restatement of the melody heard near the outset – after which, the return of the initial percussion gesture sees the movement through to its hectic close.

The second movement begins with subdued woodwind exchanges, before a languorous theme on solo trumpet assumes centre-stage. Woodwind offer a reflective response prior to its restatement, and only then does the piano enter with a theme that is capricious and winsome by turns, and which soon involves a lively dialogue with the orchestra. A brief transition featuring solo violin brings the return of the trumpet theme, after which a short yet wide-ranging piano cadenza paves the way for an eloquent melody in which strings are to the fore. This is soon taken up by the piano, the music rapidly building to a fervent restatement of the melody on full orchestra which is unexpectedly cut off at its height, leaving just the piano and solo woodwind to round off the movement in musing serenity.

The finale is launched by an energetic theme with piano to the fore, and which is made a refrain between episodes of different ideas – several of them being derived directly from themes heard earlier in the work. One of these is the expansive melody from the preceding movement, while another picks up on its capricious theme – both of them alternating with a nonchalant idea from the soloist. At length the initial theme returns to see the movement to a climax which, after a theatrical stroke on the tam-tam, proves to be none other than the first movement's blues-inflected melody. The coda brings back the percussion gesture from the very opening, then a signing-off from the piano precedes the emphatic final orchestral chord.

As mentioned, **Leonard Bernstein** (1918–1990) is not always thought of as an orchestral composer and yet his catalogue includes three symphonies, several works for soloist and orchestra, and a number of suites derived from theatre and stage music. It would be more accurate to say that he never tackled a work the same way twice, giving rise to various hybrid works whose ambiguity reflects that of a musician caught between the European classical tradition and the American vernacular of jazz and musical. One of the ways in which he strove to reconcile them is represented by the present work.

By 1948, Bernstein's career as composer and conductor was well underway. Reading the verse-drama *The Age of Anxiety* by W. H. Auden, he seized on it as the subject for his **Second Symphony**. Written partly in Israel during the war of independence, it was premiered by Serge Koussevitzky along with the Boston Symphony Orchestra on 8th April 1949 – Bernstein taking on the concertante piano part. Originally the piano was almost silent in the final section, but the composer revised the work in 1965 so that the soloist's personal perspective is maintained right through to the close.

Auden's so-called 'Baroque Eclogue', a fable of disillusion concerning Western society that emerged in the aftermath of the Second World War, concerns the gradual and painful self-discovery of four people who meet in a Western Avenue bar. Bernstein reflects their spiritual journey in musical terms by dividing the work into two equal parts.



Leonard Bernstein

## Part One:

A – ‘The Prologue’, which introduces the four characters: Quant, a second generation Irish-American; Malin, a medical intelligence officer with the Canadian Air Force; Rosetta, an employee at a department store; and Emble, who is serving in the Navy. After the pensive clarinet duo, a descending flute solo leads straight into

B – ‘The Seven Ages’, in which the four characters’ discussion is depicted in seven variations on the clarinet theme. Following a tranquil piano solo (1), piano and orchestra exchange moodily descending gestures (2), before strings unfold a lyrical theme (3). A sardonic scherzo for the piano and percussion (4) precedes a restless toccata-like idea in which piano and orchestra confront each other (5), before an uncertain piano solo (6) brings a plaintive woodwind dialogue (7). A descending piano scale leads straight into

C – ‘The Seven Stages’, in which seven further variations represent the four characters as they engage in a variety of relationships. After a stern passacaglia for the piano and strings (8), an incisive section (9) leads to a syncopated dialogue for piano and woodwind (10), followed by a lively fugal passage (11) and then an ironic *moto perpetuo* led

off by the piano (12). The passacaglia theme now returns as a powerful orchestral chorale (13), the piano presently re-entering (14) to see the first part through to its hectic close.

#### Part Two:

A – ‘The Dirge’, which depicts the four characters as they take a taxi-ride to Rosetta’s apartment, regretting the absence of a spiritual ‘father figure’ in their lives. Opening with a subdued but intense twelve-note row on piano, the music soon alights on more expressive qualities before building to an impassioned climax that dies down to a softly dissonant string chord – itself making way for

B – ‘The Masque’, a scintillating scherzo where the four characters throw an increasingly reckless party. The piano is accompanied only by harp, celesta and percussion, while the music alternates jazz-inflected writing with a more lyrical theme whose glittering scoring suggests the charade of the party. The full orchestra suddenly bursts in, before an off-stage piano is left to fade into

C – ‘The Epilogue’, which begins with the four characters deciding to leave their pasts behind them for more spiritual realms, indicated by the solo trumpet. The music unfolds as a slow but implacable chorale, featuring (at least in the revision) eloquent exchanges for the piano and orchestra as well as a solo cadenza that combatively reviews previous themes (listen out for allusions to ‘The Masque’ on off-stage piano), before building in intensifying waves of sound to a climax of hard-won triumph, confirmed by the affirmative piano cadence prior to the massive concluding chord on full orchestra.

*Richard Whitehouse*

## INGRID JACOBY

Praised by *The New York Times* for her “clear articulation... unequivocal phrasing... (and) expressivity”, Ingrid Jacoby has established herself as one of the most poetic and admired pianists of her generation.

Born in St. Louis, Missouri, Ms. Jacoby began her piano studies at age four. She later studied with Larisa Gorodecka, a pupil of Heinrich Neuhaus, and went on to win the Baldwin Piano Competition and the Concert Artists Guild International Competition. She has since performed to critical acclaim in major concert venues in North America, Europe, Asia and Africa, and worked with many of the world’s leading conductors, including Sir Charles Mackerras, Leonard Slatkin, Giuseppe Sinopoli, Walter Susskind, and Lord Yehudi Menuhin. Currently making her home in the United Kingdom, Ms. Jacoby has appeared with the London Symphony Orchestra, the London Philharmonic Orchestra, the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, and the London Mozart Players. She has performed solo recitals at Wigmore Hall, Queen Elizabeth Hall, and, at the invitation of HRH The Prince and Princess of Wales, at Apsley House. Ms. Jacoby is a frequent performer at international music festivals such as the Aldeburgh, Aspen, Covent Garden, Tuscan Sun Festival, and the Salzburg Festival.

Ms. Jacoby has made numerous recordings for various labels, including a CD of Beethoven piano works, voted the *Classic FM* “Top Classic Release” in 1995, and a recording of Russian solo piano music, which was named a *Gramophone* “Pick of the Year 2001”. In addition, Ms. Jacoby has recorded piano concertos by Grieg, Schumann, Shostakovich, and Ustvolskaya, together with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, to great acclaim.

Ms. Jacoby is a Steinway Artist and a member of the Steinway Hall of Fame. In the United States, she received a Career Award from the National Society of Arts and Letters in 1994, together with soprano Jessye Norman and actress Shirley MacLaine.

[www.ingridjacobyc.co.uk](http://www.ingridjacobyc.co.uk)

## THE RUSSIAN NATIONAL ORCHESTRA

The Russian National Orchestra was founded by the conductor and pianist Mikhail Pletnev in 1990, following sweeping changes in the former USSR. Under his artistic leadership, the orchestra soon achieved international renown and established its hallmarks of innovation and excellence. Vladimir Jurowski served as Principal Guest Conductor from 2005 to 2009. In 2008, a panel of international critics named the Russian National Orchestra as one of the world's top orchestras. In recognition of both its artistic quality and its pioneering structure, the Russian Federation recently awarded the Russian National Orchestra the first-ever grant to a nongovernmental orchestra.

The orchestra is a frequent guest in the music capitals of Europe, Asia, and the Americas. After the Russian National Orchestra's 1996 debut at the BBC Proms in London, the *Evening Standard* wrote, "They played with such captivating beauty that the audience gave an involuntary sigh of pleasure." They have been described as "a living symbol of the best in Russian art" (*Miami Herald*) and "as close to perfect as one could hope for" (*ClassicsToday*). Recently the RNO was called "the most important cultural story of our time" (*International Piano*). A regular visitor to the Schleswig-Holstein, Gstaad, and Rheingau Festivals, the Russian National Orchestra is also the founding orchestra of the Napa Valley Festival del Sole, the Festival of the Arts BOCA in Florida, and the Singapore Sun Festival. In 2009, the orchestra launched its own annual festival in Moscow.

*Gramophone* magazine called the first Russian National Orchestra CD release in 1991, of music by Tchaikovsky, "an awe-inspiring experience; should human beings be able to play like this?" More than 60 recordings have followed since, mostly on the Deutsche Grammophon and PentaTone labels. The charity recording of Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf* and Beintus's *Wolf Tracks*, conducted by Kent Nagano and narrated by Sophia Loren, Bill Clinton, and Mikhail Gorbachev, won a 2004 Grammy Award, the first such recognition for any Russian orchestra.

[www.rno.ru](http://www.rno.ru)

## **DMITRY LISS**

Dmitry Liss is recognized as one of today's most exciting young conductors. As Principal Conductor of the Ural Philharmonic Orchestra and guest conductor of the Russian National Orchestra, he has won praise and rave reviews for his interpretations of the Russian masterworks as well as of contemporary music.

Born in the former Soviet Union, Dmitry Liss graduated in 1984 from the Moscow Conservatory, where he studied under Dmitri Kitayenko. By 1991 he had risen to Principal Conductor in Kuzbass, becoming at age 31 the youngest chief conductor in Russia at that time. In 1995, Dmitri Liss was named Artistic Director and Chief Conductor of the Ural Philharmonic Orchestra. During the same year, he won the First International Competition of Young Conductors in Zagreb, Yugoslavia. Following his debut with the Russian National Orchestra in 1997, he began to tour internationally with the RNO and was appointed Associate Conductor in 1999.

Dmitry Liss has toured Asia and the United States and throughout western and central Europe. As guest conductor, he has led major international orchestras, such as the Moscow Philharmonic Orchestra, St Petersburg Philharmonic Orchestra, Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra, Budapest Philharmonic, Orchestre philharmonique de Strasbourg, Staatsorchester Rheinische Philharmonie, American-Russian Youth Orchestra, and the World Youth Orchestra. Prominent soloists who have performed under his baton include Mikhail Pletnev, Gidon Kremer, Yuri Bashmet, Peter Donohoe, Mstislav Rostropovich, and Wynton Marsalis.

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Dmitry Liss

**GEORGE GERSHWIN (1898–1937)****Concerto in F****[32'27]**

for piano and orchestra (1925)

- |   |                               |       |
|---|-------------------------------|-------|
| 1 | I. Allegro                    | 13'27 |
| 2 | II. Adagio – Andante con moto | 11'29 |
| 3 | III. Allegro agitato          | 7'31  |

**LEONARD BERNSTEIN (1918–1990)****Symphony No. 2 “The Age of Anxiety”****[36'54]**

for piano and orchestra (1949; rev. 1965)

(after W. H. Auden)

**Part One**

- |   |   |      |
|---|---|------|
| 4 | <b>A) The Prologue</b> (Lento moderato –)   | 2'28 |
| 5 | <b>B) The Seven Ages</b> (Var. I. L'istesso tempo – Var. II. Poco più mosso –<br>Var. III. Largamente, ma mosso – Var. IV. Più mosso – Var. V. Agitato –<br>Var. VI. Poco meno mosso – Var. VII. L'istesso tempo –)                               | 8'25 |
| 6 | <b>C) The Seven Stages</b> (Var. VIII. Molto moderato, ma movendo –<br>Var. IX. Più mosso. Tempo di Valse – Var. X. Più mosso – Var. XI. L'istesso tempo –<br>Var. XII. Poco più vivace – Var. XIII. L'istesso tempo – Var. XIV. Poco più vivace) | 6'05 |

**Part Two**

- |   |  |      |
|---|--|------|
| 7 | <b>A) The Dirge</b> (Largo –)  | 5'51 |
| 8 | <b>B) The Masque</b> (Extremely fast –)                                | 5'43 |
| 9 | <b>C) The Epilogue</b> (L'istesso tempo – Adagio – Andante – Con moto) | 8'10 |

**INGRID JACOBY**, piano**Russian National Orchestra****DMITRY LISS**, conductor