

GEORGE
GERSHWIN

PIANO CONCERTO IN F
RHAPSODY IN BLUE
CUBAN OVERTURE

JON NAKAMATSU piano

ROCHESTER
PHILHARMONIC
ORCHESTRA

JEFF TYZIK conductor

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Cover: Empire State Building, photograph by Nat Herz
(1920-64) / Bridgeman Art Library

Publisher: WB Music Corp.

**The Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra gratefully
acknowledges Alfred L. Davis and Dr. Jacques and
Mrs. Dawn Lipson for their generous support of this
recording project.**

Steinway piano donated in honor of pianist Jon Nakamatsu,
a special friend of the RPO / Piano Technician: Marvin Rus

All texts and translations © **harmonia mundi usa**

© 2007 **harmonia mundi usa**
1117 Chestnut Street, Burbank, California 91506

Recorded July 2006 at the Eastman Theatre,
Eastman School of Music, Rochester, New York

Executive Producer: Robina G. Young

Sessions Producer, Recording Engineer & Editor: Brad Michel

DSD Engineer/Co-Engineer: Chris Barrett

Recorded, edited & mastered in DSD

PRODUCTION **USA**



THE MUSIC OF GEORGE GERSHWIN

Labels mean nothing at all. Good music is good music, even if you call it 'oysters.' – GEORGE GERSHWIN

GEORGE GERSHWIN

b. September 26, 1898, Brooklyn, New York
d. July 11, 1937, Hollywood, California

PIANO CONCERTO IN F

- | | | |
|---|---------------------|-------|
| 1 | I Allegro | 13:18 |
| 2 | II Adagio | 12:32 |
| 3 | III Allegro agitato | 6:48 |

- | | | |
|---|--|-------|
| 4 | RHAPSODY IN BLUE
Clarinet solo: Kenneth Grant | 17:49 |
|---|--|-------|

- | | | |
|---|----------------|-------|
| 5 | CUBAN OVERTURE | 10:36 |
|---|----------------|-------|

JON NAKAMATSU *piano*

ROCHESTER PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

JEFF TYZIK *conductor*

GERSHWIN'S MUSIC really is hard to label. With a creative range that won him successes both on Broadway and in Carnegie Hall, it could scarcely be otherwise for this pioneer "crossover" artist. But why try to pigeonhole such brilliance? Better simply to enjoy it.

His parents, Moshe Gershovitz and Rose Bruskin, emigrated separately from Russia to America in the 1890s. They married in 1895 and settled in New York's tough Lower East Side neighborhood. They had four children: sons Ira, George and Arthur, and a daughter, Frances. Father ran a Turkish bath. Ira dabbled in writing song lyrics while helping out with the customers, sowing the seeds of his long, marvellous partnership with his kid-brother composer.

George was a vigorous, active child, playing street hockey and roller-skating through the area. He had little interest in schooling. There was hardly any music in the household until a piano arrived in 1910. Intended primarily for Ira, it was George who was drawn to it most strongly. If it hadn't appealed to him, he might have followed many of his friends' paths and become a gangster.

One of his piano teachers gave him Chopin, Liszt and Debussy to play, inspiring an early ambition to become a concert pianist. But the family's need for money led him to drop out of high school at 15. He got a job as a song 'plugger' in the retail department of Jerome H. Remick & Co., one of several major popular music publishers located in Tin Pan Alley. His job was to sell their songs by playing and singing them for performers. That was how he met and befriended Fred Astaire, destined to be one of his greatest interpreters.

He gradually broke into the pop song market he had come to know so well from the inside. The first of his songs to see print appeared in 1916. It bore the memorable title *When You Want 'Em, You Can't Get 'Em, When You've Got 'Em, You Don't Want 'Em*. He had to start somewhere! By the early '20s, he was earning a healthy income from his own material. For several years he had also been taking private instruction in classical techniques. Sooner or later these two streams were bound to merge.

In 1922 he contributed a one-act opera, *Blue Monday*, to a Broadway revue. It was pulled unceremoniously after a single performance. One of the few people who were impressed by it was bandleader Paul Whiteman, the self-styled "King of Jazz." He and Gershwin discussed the idea of a jazz-flavored piano concerto, without setting a firm date for launching it.

Two years later, Whiteman decided it was time to show off the growing popularity of jazz by staging the type of formal concert that would earn it new respectability. Without telling Gershwin, he published a newspaper article stating that Gershwin's "jazz piano concerto" would be premiered on Whiteman's program - in four weeks' time! He then convinced Gershwin, who harbored doubts about his ability to write such a large-scale piece, that he had what it takes. Whiteman placed his arranger, Ferde Grofé, at Gershwin's disposal to help with the scoring. Grofé later prepared the arrangement with fully symphonic orchestral accompaniment in which the music is best known, and which is used on this recording.

The première of *Rhapsody in Blue* took place as planned on February 12, 1924, in New York's Aeolian Hall. Gershwin himself played the solo part. It came at the end of a long, varied program, but it was still received with overwhelming enthusiasm. This irresistible blend of '20s jazz and daredevil classical virtuosity remains one of the most beloved and frequently performed of all American compositions.

Walter Damrosch, conductor of the New York Symphony Orchestra, was in the audience when Gershwin's rhapsody made its debut. Impressed by its unprecedented amalgamation of popular and classical styles, he commissioned Gershwin to compose a full-scale piano concerto.

"Many persons had thought that my rhapsody was only a happy accident," Gershwin wrote. "Well I went out, for one thing, to show them that there was plenty more where that came from. I made up my mind to do a piece of 'absolute' music. The rhapsody, as its title implied, was a

blues impression. The concerto would be unrelated to any program.” This time Gershwin orchestrated the piece himself.

The first performance of the *Concerto in F* took place in Carnegie Hall on December 3, 1925. The audience acclaimed the work and its composer/performer, but the critics were more reserved in their judgment. They found the concerto less convincing than the rhapsody on several fronts, including novelty and length. Listeners have never stopped caring for it, however, making it the most frequently played concerto by any American composer.

For the première, Gershwin wrote the following description: “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 motive given out by the kettledrums, supported by the other percussion instruments, and with a Charleston motive introduced by bassoons, horns, clarinets and violas. The principal theme is announced by the bassoon. Later, a second theme is introduced by the piano. 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. The final movement reverts to the style of the first. It is an orgy of rhythms, starting violently and keeping the same pace throughout.”

By February 1932, Gershwin was in sore need of a vacation. His movie musical *Delicious* had just opened, as had his Broadway musical *Of Thee I Sing*, and he had recently premiered his *Second Rhapsody* for piano and orchestra. In search of relaxation, he visited Havana. The Cuban city was a popular tropical retreat for wealthy Americans, as well as a convenient place to consume liquor during the days of Prohibition in America.

Under the warm tropical sun, he golfed, boated, gambled and danced to his heart's content. A non-stop round of parties was always accompanied by Latin bands, with their exotic melodies, rhythms and home-grown percussion instruments. Gershwin decided to create a musical impression of what he heard. He took some of the instruments home to study, then the following July created an orchestral souvenir of his trip – maracas, claves, bongos, gourds and all.

He originally gave this festive and sultry piece the name *Rumba*, then changed it to *Cuban Overture* when it was published. “When people read *Rumba*,” he explained, “they expect *The Peanut Vendor*. *Cuban Overture* gives a

more just idea of the character and intent of the music. In my composition I have endeavoured to combine the Cuban rhythms with my own thematic material. The result is a symphonic overture which embodies the essence of the Cuban dance.”

The première took place on August 16 at New York's Lewisohn Stadium, with Albert Coates conducting. It was the first-ever all-Gershwin concert. Nearly eighteen thousand people attended, with another five thousand turned away. Gershwin called it “the most exciting night I have ever had.”

– DON ANDERSON

JON NAKAMATSU *piano*

Californian **Jon Nakamatsu** gained immediate international attention in 1997 when he was awarded the Gold Medal at the Tenth Van Cliburn International Piano Competition. He has since pursued a busy performing career, appearing in recital and with major orchestras throughout the world. His playing is acclaimed for its combination of effortless virtuosity and elegant singing piano sound.

Nakamatsu has made seven prior recordings for **harmonia mundi usa**: his Gold Medal performance at the Cliburn Competition (HMU 907218); the First Piano Concerto by Lukas Foss (HMU 907243); the Rachmaninov *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini* and Piano Concerto No. 3 (HMU 907286), four Piano Sonatas by Joseph Wölfl (HMU 907324), and much-praised recitals of the music of Brahms (HMU 907339), Chopin (HMU 907244) and Liszt (HMU 907409).

JEFF TYZIK *Principal Pops Conductor*

Jeff Tyzik, who has been the Principal Pops Conductor of the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra since 1994, has earned a reputation as one of America's foremost pops conductors and symphonic arrangers.

Mr. Tyzik has led many of America's top orchestras including the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the symphony orchestras of Dallas, Detroit, Saint Louis, Baltimore, Seattle, Houston, Indianapolis, Pittsburgh, Minnesota, Milwaukee, and New Jersey; the Boston Pops, the New York Pops and the Cincinnati Pops. He is a frequent guest of Canadian orchestras including Toronto, Vancouver (Principal Pops Conductor), Edmonton, Calgary and Winnipeg (Principal Pops Conductor). In 2005, Mr. Tyzik conducted the Orchestre Philharmonique de Monte Carlo.

Mr. Tyzik's *Concerto for Trombone and Orchestra* was premiered at Carnegie Hall in 2005. He has also created symphonic orchestrations for many of Duke Ellington's masterpieces, including *Black, Brown and Beige* and the *Nutcracker Suite*. Mr. Tyzik's compositions and arrangements have been recorded by the London Symphony Orchestra, the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra, the Summit Brass, Erich Kunzel and the Cincinnati Pops Orchestra, the Vancouver Symphony, and Doc Severinsen with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra in London, England.

Mr. Tyzik has six prior albums to his credit. His record production skills earned him a 1986 GRAMMY® Award for an album entitled *The Tonight Show Band with Doc Severinsen*.

ROCHESTER PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

Since its founding by George Eastman in 1922, the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra has inspired listeners through the art of music. As one of the leading American orchestras, the RPO is known for its high standard of artistic excellence, unique tradition of musical versatility, and deep commitment to education and community engagement.

The RPO has performed under the batons of such renowned guest conductors as Fritz Reiner, Leonard Bernstein, Sir Thomas Beecham, and Leopold Stokowski. Today, Music Director Christopher Seaman continues the traditions of his notable predecessors Eugene Goossens, José Iturbi, Erich Leinsdorf, and David Zinman, while Principal Pops Conductor Jeff Tyzik maintains the Orchestra's national reputation for distinctive pops programming.

The RPO presents more than 140 concerts each year, reaching nearly 350,000 listeners per season through concerts, education and outreach events, an annual residency at the *Bravo! Vail Valley Music Festival* in Colorado, regional performances, and live radio broadcasts on WXXI 91.5 FM. In 2005 and 2006, the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP) and the American Symphony Orchestra League honored the RPO with ASCAP Awards for Adventurous Programming, recognizing the Orchestra's commitment to music written in the last 25 years. For more information about Jeff Tyzik and the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra, please visit www.rpo.org.

ROCHESTER PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

CHRISTOPHER SEAMAN Music Director • **JEFF TYZIK** Principal Pops Conductor

Violins I

Juliana Athayde
• Concertmaster
*The Caroline W. Gannett
& Clayla Ward Chair*

Wilfredo Degláns
• Associate Concertmaster
Corinne Stillwell
• Assistant Concertmaster
Perrin Yang
Tigran Vardanyan
Ellen Rathjen
Janice Macisak
Sabina Slepecki
Kenneth Langley
Lise Stoddard
Margaret Leenhouts
Patricia Sunwoo

Violins II

David Brickman • Principal
Daryl Perlo • Assistant Principal
Shannon Nance
John Sullivan
Boris Zapesochny
Liana Koteva
An-Chi OuYang
Jeremy Hill
Ainur Zabenova
James Dumm

Violas

Melissa Matson • Principal
Michael Larco • Assistant Principal
Marc Anderson
Elizabeth Seka
Olita Povero
Michail Verba
Linda Kirkwood
Sidney Killmer

Cellos

Stefan Reuss • Principal
*The Clara & Edwin
Strasenburgh Chair*
Kathleen Murphy Kemp
• Assistant Principal
Robert F. Taylor
Jason Wang
Don Reinfeld
Ingrid Bock
Melissa Burton Anderson
Mary Artmann

Basses

Robert Zimmerman • Principal
The Anne Hayden McQuay Chair
Michael Griffin • Assistant Principal
Jackson Stauber
Jesse Watras
Joshua Kerr

Flutes

Rebecca Gilbert • Principal
The Charlotte Whitney Allen Chair
Joanna Bassett
Jan Angus

Piccolo

Jan Angus

Oboes

Ariana Ghez • Principal
The Dr. Jacques M. Lipson Chair
Jeffrey Stephenson

English Horn

Monica Fosnaugh

Clarinets

Kenneth Grant • Principal
The Robert J. Strasenburgh Chair
Robert DiLutis

Bass Clarinet

Ramon Ricker

Saxophones

Ramon Ricker
James Doser
Chien-Kwan Lin

Bassoons

Abraham Weiss • Principal
Charles Bailey

Contra-Bassoon

Charles Bailey

Horns

W. Peter Kurau • Principal
The Cricket & Frank Luellen Chair
Matthew Annin
• Assistant Principal
Jennifer Burch
David Angus
Stephanie Zimmerman

Trumpets

Douglas Prosser • Principal
The Elaine P. Wilson Chair
Wesley Nance
Guy Piddington
Paul Shewan

Trombones

Mark Kellogg • Principal
The Austin E. Hildebrandt Chair
Mark Salatino
David Richey

Tuba

W. Craig Sutherland • Principal

Timpani

Charles Ross • Principal
The Harold & Joan Feinbloom Chair

Percussion

Jim Tiller • Principal
Brian Stotz
John McNeill
Robert Patterson
Jillian Pritchard
Robert Bridge
Kristen Shiner-McGuire

Personnel Manager

Joseph Werner

Librarian

Kim Hartquist