



# AMERICAN CLASSICS



## GERSHWIN: Concerto in F TOWER: Sequoia • PISTON: Symphony No. 5 HARBISON: Remembering Gatsby

Kevin Cole, Piano  
National Orchestral Institute Philharmonic  
David Alan Miller



## George Gershwin (1898–1937) • John Harbison (b. 1938) • Joan Tower (b. 1938)

### Walter Piston (1894–1976): *Orchestral Works*

#### George Gershwin (1898–1937): *Concerto in F* (1925)

George Gershwin was not given to resting on his laurels. Each success only fueled his desire to aim higher. Plugging songs led to cutting piano rolls. Tin Pan Alley led to Broadway musicals and, eventually, the opera *Porgy and Bess*. And so it was only natural that Gershwin followed the sensational success of his first extended instrumental work, *Rhapsody in Blue* (1924), not with another piece for jazz band, but with his first foray into the concert hall. The opportunity came in 1925, when Damrosch commissioned Gershwin to compose, orchestrate, and perform a piano concerto in a series of performances with the New York Symphony Orchestra.

The premiere of *Concerto in F* on 3 December 1925 marked two sorts of debuts for Gershwin: first, as a pianist and composer at Carnegie Hall, and second, as a composer of score-oriented works. All of his previous music, including *Rhapsody in Blue*, was written according to the performer-oriented conventions of popular genres, in which composers supplied the basic musical shape that singers, arrangers, and producers adapted to their needs and styles. With the *Concerto*, however, Gershwin worked within the norms of concert music, producing a fully orchestrated score that sought to document in detail his musical inspiration and skill.

Despite these ambitions, Gershwin was not yet fully committed to the tedious task of notating a fine-grained score of this length. The *Concerto*'s manuscripts omit numerous expressive indications and tempo markings that are necessary for performance. And although he modified aspects of the notated score for years to come, he failed to distinguish those changes that he intended as revisions from those that were merely adaptations to particular performance contexts. For nearly a century, performances of the *Concerto* have relied on outdated scores in which editors ignored some of these issues and solved others according to their own tastes.

This recording of *Concerto in F* is the first to be made from *The George and Ira Gershwin Critical Edition*. Based on a comprehensive study of the manuscript, print, and recorded sources, this new score presents the *Concerto* as it was notated and performed by the composer. Students of the work will recognize countless small differences from performances based on the old edition. Many parts take on a new character in Gershwin's original articulations. Notice, for instance, the lack of slurs and swing rhythm in the skipping bass clarinet and bassoon solos near the start of the first movement. Other familiar details are missing altogether, like the woodblock punctuations in movement I (1, 5:04) and the orchestral reiteration of the *Concerto*'s final chord. Listen also for the new colors sprinkled throughout, including the glockenspiel (1, 10:54), the un-muted horn in the opening solo of movement II, and new bars for the piano in the outer movements (1, 7:06 and 3, 2:37). Although subtle on their own, the cumulative effect of so many changes is profound, rendering suddenly sharp the well-known yet blurry features of Gershwin's first orchestral masterpiece.

#### Timothy Freeze

#### John Harbison (b. 1938): Remembering Gatsby (Fox Trot for Orchestra) (1985)

John Harbison grew up near Princeton, New Jersey, familiar with the milieu so vividly portrayed in F. Scott Fitzgerald's classic novel *The Great Gatsby*. His uncle, in fact, had been a member of the Triangle Club at Princeton University along with Fitzgerald. One of the composer's early ambitions had been to become an opera composer, but after his first two works in the genre (*Full Moon in March* in 1977 and *Winter's Tale* in 1979) failed to set the opera world on fire, he redirected his composing efforts to other genres. Nevertheless, he continued to make sketches for an opera based on Fitzgerald's novel, a few of which were brought together in *Remembering Gatsby*

(*Fox Trot for Orchestra*). Robert Shaw and the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra commissioned the work, which they premiered in September 1986. Harbison's greater ambition was realized 14 years later when the Metropolitan Opera premiered his third opera, *The Great Gatsby*, commissioned to honor the 25th anniversary of James Levine's debut with the company.

According to the composer (in a note published on the *Wise Music Classical* website), the piece:

"begins with a cantabile passage for full orchestra, a representation of Gatsby's vision of the green light on Daisy's dock. Then the fox trot begins, first with a kind of call to order, then a Twenties tune I had written for one of the party scenes, played by a concertino led by a soprano saxophone. The tune is then varied and broken into its components, leading to an altered reprise of the call to order, and an intensification of the original cantabile. A brief coda combines some of the motifs, and refers fleetingly to the telephone bell and the automobile horns, instruments of Gatsby's fate."

Harbison augments his large orchestra with a trap-set (small bass drum, snare drum, high-hat cymbal, two cow bells and wood block) and a flexatone, both staples of 1920s dance bands.

#### Joan Tower (b. 1938): *Sequoia* (1981)

Joan Tower founded the Da Capo Chamber Players in 1969, playing piano for the ensemble and composing for them a treasure trove of artfully crafted chamber pieces. When the American Composers Orchestra approached her in the early 1980s with a commission for a full orchestra work, she initially turned them down, feeling she wasn't quite ready to tackle a large-ensemble piece. But she relented, and the resulting work, *Sequoia* (strikingly, her first major piece for symphony orchestra), was premiered by the ACO under the direction of Dennis Russell Davies at Alice Tully Hall in New York City on 18 May 1981. It was a

resounding success, subsequently performed by the New York Philharmonic and other orchestras around the world. For Tower, it was a game changer – she was now a major player on the American compositional scene, and in the years since she has also become a passionate advocate for women composers (reflected in her popular *Fanfares for the Uncommon Woman*).

With *Sequoia*, Tower set out to create a work that would explore the concept of balance in music. In a February 2019 pre-concert interview held just before Leonard Slatkin performed *Sequoia* with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra as part of their American Panorama Festival (available on YouTube), she explained, "The piece is just littered with the idea of balances on all musical levels I could come up with."

Compositionally, she focused particularly on register balance (high/low), rhythmic balance (fast/slow) and textural balance (thin/thick). When asked where the idea came from, she said, "It started with Beethoven. I played a lot of his music at the piano, and what I started noticing about him was this kind of thing we're talking about." As for the title, she explained, "I was trying to find an image in nature that involved balance, and the thing about the sequoia tree that's so amazing is ... that they're very tall and they're very wide. And the act of balance is just amazing to me – that this tree could keep going higher and higher, like a tall building." She added one caveat, however: "The thing that's not good about the title is that the sequoias are very quiet." After a beat, she warned the audience with impish humor, "My piece is not quiet." *Sequoia* is scored for large orchestra: woodwinds in pairs, four horns, two each of trumpets and trombones, bass trombone, tuba, harp, piano (doubling celesta), strings and a vast array of percussion requiring five players.

#### Walter Piston (1894–1976): *Symphony No. 5* (1954)

Walter Piston contributed significantly to the development of 20th-century American music as a teacher, author and composer. He taught music theory and composition at Harvard University from 1926 to 1960; his many pupils included Leonard Bernstein and John Harbison. He wrote

four music theory textbooks, all of which are considered classics in the field. His expansive catalog of works encompasses pieces for orchestra (including eight symphonies – of which the *Third* and *Seventh* won Pulitzer Prizes – and numerous concertos), chamber music (five string quartets) and works for solo piano. A suite from his sole work for the stage – the ballet *The Incredible Flutist* – was his most popular success. His music, often described as neo-Classical (and occasionally neo-Romantic) is expertly crafted and steeped in structural logic, rhythmic vitality and emotion. He began experimenting with Schoenberg's twelve-tone technique during the 1930s, and although he never fully embraced serialism, twelve-tone elements continued to appear in his works, as is seen in *Symphony No. 5*.

The first movement opens quietly with tremolo strings and solo flute. As the texture thickens, Piston introduces melodic and harmonic ideas he will develop throughout the *Symphony*. When the tempo abruptly changes to a quicksilver *Allegro con spirito*, an upward-thrusting idea becomes the first theme of a traditional sonata structure. The second theme, introduced on oboe, is more chromatic and less rhythmic. There is no recapitulation after the development; rather, Piston reprises his calm opening for an affective coda.

The central *Adagio* movement, slow and contemplative throughout, opens with a twelve-tone theme in plucked basses and cellos. Violins begin what will grow into an extended cantilena with long, sinuous lines. Woodwinds enter (beginning with clarinet and then oboe) to add color and texture. The music rises to a powerful climax before thinning out and concluding with another pizzicato twelve-tone idea from the nether regions of the orchestra.

In the final movement, the composer introduces an element heretofore missing from the *Symphony*: a sense of joy and optimism. It is in rondo form with two related episodes. The broad principal theme rises optimistically in F major and is extensively developed each time it returns; the episodes feature syncopated ideas in brass and woodwinds. The work concludes with the principal theme rhythmically augmented in cellos and basses, leading to three unison Cs that bring the symphony to a swift, assertive close.

Frank K. DeWald

National Orchestral Institute Philharmonic

Richard Scerbo, Director

Violin

Julian Maddox, concertmaster  
Hannah Price, principal  
Manyá Aronin  
Amelia Bailey  
Beatrice Baker  
Maria Beltovski  
Kara Cantele  
Connor Chaikovsky  
Haley Dietz  
Misty Drake  
Brendan Elliott  
Daniel Fields  
Sara Gudbaur  
Yuna Jo  
Camille Jones  
Moonsu Kim  
Christophe Koenig  
Charrine Liu  
Shannon Lock  
Anna Luginbill  
Alayna Nicotera  
Jane Parris  
Julia Plato  
Hayden Shaner  
Juliana Sharp  
Raphielle Siemens  
Samantha Smith  
Kisa Uradomo  
Johnny Weizenecker  
Abby Wuehler  
Jiazhi Zhang

Viola

Alyssa Yoshitake, principal  
Katie Bracewell  
Joseph Henderson  
Benjamin Kramer  
Weilan Li  
Samantha Peng  
Edna Pierce  
Omar Shelly  
Sebastian Stefanovic  
Lucas Wardell  
Jordan Watt  
Nicholas Wilbur  
Megan Yeung

Cello

Luka Stefanovic, principal  
Naomi Guth  
Byung Kim  
Michael Li  
Hannah Lohr-Peterson  
Rahel Lulseged  
Zi-Yun Luo  
Edward Oh  
Niraj Patil  
Chad Polk  
Marza Wilks

Bass

Maggie Lin, principal  
Holly Alper  
Daniel Chan  
Justin Cheesman  
John DeMartino  
Samuel Dugo  
Noah Strevell  
Kody Thiessen

Flute

Sabrina Bounds  
Kari Boyer  
Trey Bradshaw  
Yejin Lisa Choi

Oboe

Rodion Bolousov  
Paul Chinen  
Gwendolyn Goble  
Jordan Pyle

Clarinet

Amer Hasan  
JuHyun Lee  
Anders Peterson  
Amy Wang

Bassoon

Keegan Hockett  
Philip McNaughton  
Kirk Peterson  
Harrison Short

Saxophone\*

Chad Liley

Horn

Olivia Martinez  
Jonathan McCammon  
Connor Monday  
Shaun Murray  
Joshua Rosenbaum  
Ryan Williamson

Trumpet

Anthony Barrington  
Justin Bernardi  
Sam Dusinger  
Shane O'Brien

Trombone

Jonathan Kraft  
Sarah Lewandowski

Bass Trombone

William Clark

Tuba

Brian Kelley

Percussion

Charley Gillette  
Euijin Jung  
Mary La Blanc  
Connor Nixdorf  
Charles Renneker

Harp

Hannah Allen  
Samantha Bittle

Piano/Celesta

Alex Chan

Orchestra Manager

Cody McVey

\*Harpison only



## Kevin Cole



Kevin Cole has delighted audiences with a repertoire that includes the best of American music. His performances have prompted accolades from some of the foremost critics in the United States. Engagements for Cole include sold-out performances with the Los Angeles Philharmonic at the Hollywood Bowl and appearances with the BBC Concert Orchestra at the Royal Albert Hall and the National Symphony Orchestra at The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. He has also performed with numerous prestigious orchestras including the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra, New Zealand Symphony Orchestra and Philharmonia Orchestra as well as across the US, and at the Ravinia, Savannah Music and Castleton Festivals. Additionally, Cole is an award-winning musical director, arranger, composer, vocalist and archivist who received praise from Irving Berlin, Stephen Sondheim and members of the Jerome Kern and Gershwin families. His discography includes *Gramophone* Musical Album of the Year, 1995, Gershwin's *Oh, Kay!* with soprano Dawn Upshaw, his critically acclaimed solo piano release, *Cole Plays Gershwin* and his vocal/jazz trio album *In the Words of Ira – The Songs of Ira Gershwin*.

## National Orchestral Institute Philharmonic



The National Orchestral Institute Philharmonic is one of the most celebrated festival orchestras in the United States. Having received a GRAMMY Award nomination for Best Orchestral Performance in 2019 for their album of works by Ruggles, Stucky, and Harbison (Naxos 8.559836), its alumni occupy important positions in virtually every major symphony orchestra in the US. Held annually since 1988 at the University of Maryland, the National Orchestral Institute Philharmonic is a leader in orchestral training and creative programming, championing works by underrepresented composers alongside standards of the repertoire.

[www.noi.umd.edu](http://www.noi.umd.edu)

## David Alan Miller



David Alan Miller has established a reputation as one of the leading American conductors of his generation. The GRAMMY Award-winning music director of the Albany Symphony leads the orchestra in exploring unusual repertoire, educational programming, community outreach and recording initiatives. He has reaffirmed the Albany Symphony's reputation as the nation's leading champion of American symphonic music. He and the orchestra appeared twice at Spring for Music, the festival featuring America's most creative orchestras at New York's Carnegie Hall, and in 2018 at The Kennedy Center's SHIFT Festival of American Orchestras. His recent guest appearances include the Tucson and Hawaii Symphony Orchestras, the Sacramento and Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestras, the American Youth Symphony, the National Orchestral Institute Philharmonic, the Vietnamese National Symphony Orchestra in Hanoi, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra at the Ravinia Festival and Portugal's Estoril Festival. Miller received a GRAMMY Award in January 2014 for his Naxos recording of John Corigliano's *Conjurer*, with the Albany Symphony and Dame Evelyn Glennie (8.559757).

# GEORGE GERSHWIN

(1898–1937)

**Concerto in F** (1925) (New Critical Edition, based on  
Gershwin's own notation and performances) **30:17**

- 1** I. Allegro **12:36**
- 2** II. Adagio – Andante rubato **11:00**
- 3** III. Allegro agitato **6:33**

# JOHN HARBISON

(b. 1938)

- 4** **Remembering Gatsby**  
(Foxtrot for Orchestra) (1985) **6:38**

# JOAN TOWER

(b. 1938)

- 5** **Sequoia** (1981) **16:12**

# WALTER PISTON

(1894–1976)

- Symphony No. 5** (1954) **22:08**
- 6** I. Lento – Allegro con spirito **8:42**
- 7** II. Adagio **8:36**
- 8** III. Allegro lieto **4:42**

**Kevin Cole, Piano 1–3**

**National Orchestral Institute Philharmonic**

**David Alan Miller**

Recorded: 13–15 June 2019 at the Elsie & Marvin Dekelbourn  
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## AMERICAN CLASSICS

This program represents American orchestral music in all of its verve and expressive variety. Following the sensational success of *Rhapsody in Blue*, Gershwin's *Concerto in F* was his first foray away from jazz bands into the concert hall, recorded here for the first time in a new critical edition by Timothy Freeze based on the composer's own notation and performances. John Harbison's *Remembering Gatsby* is a foxtrot that evokes the sonorities of 1920s dance bands, while Joan Tower's *Sequoia* reflects her fascination with these silent giants of the tree world. Walter Piston's contribution to the development of 20th-century American music cannot be underestimated, and his *Fifth Symphony* successfully blends twelve-tone modernity with reflective profundity and a finale that evokes a spirit of joy and optimism.

**www.naxos.com**

Playing  
Time:  
**75:31**