

ZOFO Duet

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Gorell Recital Hall
Indiana University of Pennsylvania
September 30, 2013 • 8:00 p.m.

George Gershwin (1898-1937)
Cuban Overture (1932)

Allen Shawn (b.1948)
Three Dance Portraits (1994)

1. Liltig
2. Grazioso
3. Hard Edged

Samuel Barber (1910-1981)
Souvenirs Op.28 (1951)

1. Waltz
2. Schottische
3. Pas de deux
4. Two-Step
5. Hesitation-Tango
6. Galop

• Intermission •

Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971)
The Rite of Spring (1913)

The pieces in the first half of the program are from ZOFO's second commercial CD on the Sono Luminus Records label, *Mosh Pit*, which was released in April 2013.

The Rite of Spring is featured on ZOFO's debut album, *Mind Meld*, which was released in April 2012 and received a Grammy nomination for Best Chamber Music/Small Ensemble Performance.

Program Notes

Provided by the Artists

George Gershwin

Born on September 26, 1898 in Brooklyn, New York, George Gershwin (born Jacob Gershowitz) was the son of Russian-Jewish immigrants. During his early childhood, George was dedicated to sports; but that all changed when, at age 11, his family bought a secondhand piano for his older brother Ira. Although Ira was considered the serious musician at the time, George took an immediate liking to the piano and began playing popular songs by ear. Noted piano teacher Charles Hambitzer, a neighbor, was so impressed by George's playing that he began giving him free lessons and acting as his mentor.

A natural talent, Gershwin began his foray into music in earnest when he dropped out of school and started playing piano professionally at age 15, performing popular songs in Tin Pan Alley. In the following years, he began to collaborate with his brother, lyricist Ira Gershwin. Together, they went on to write captivating songs for stage and screen that quickly became standards, including *Oh, Lady Be Good!*, *Someone to Watch over Me*, *Strike Up the Band*, *Embraceable You*, *Let's Call the Whole Thing Off*, and *They Can't Take That Away From Me*.

In 1924, Gershwin composed his first and most popular major classical work, *Rhapsody in Blue* for orchestra and piano, followed by another signature orchestral work, *An American in Paris*, in 1928. In 1935, a decade after composing *Rhapsody in Blue*, Gershwin debuted his most ambitious composition, *Porgy and Bess*. The composition, which drew from both popular and classical influences, is considered to not only be Gershwin's most complex and best-known work, but also among the most important American musical compositions of the 20th century.

Throughout his 23-year career, George Gershwin was one of the most sought after composers of jazz, opera, and popular songs for stage and screen. He died immediately following brain surgery on July 11, 1937, at the age 38.

Cuban Overture (1932)

After spending a two-week holiday in Havana, Cuba, in February 1932, Gershwin was inspired to write this masterpiece for full orchestra the following summer. Originally titled *Rumba*, the piece was premiered at New York's now-demolished Lewisohn Stadium on August 16, 1932, as part of an all-Gershwin program presented by the New York Philharmonic. The work was greeted favorably by critics and was renamed *Cuban Overture* three months later at a benefit concert conducted by Gershwin at the Metropolitan Opera.

The orchestral version of *Cuban Overture* is dominated by Caribbean rhythms and Cuban native percussion, with a wide spectrum of instrumental color and technique. It is a rich, exciting, and complex work illustrating the influence of Cuban music and dance. The one-piano-four-hands version, arranged by Gershwin himself, retains the color and excitement of the original. With a clearly defined ternary form, a driving *rumba* in the outer sections, and a more sensuous *adagio*

at the center, this is the world of Gershwin's "American" shifted from the multifaceted experiences of Paris to the heady club life of Havana in the first half of the twentieth century.

Allen Shawn

Allen Shawn, born in 1948, grew up in New York City and has been on the faculty of Bennington College in Vermont since 1985. Shawn is the son of *The New Yorker* editor William Shawn and the brother of actor and playwright Wallace Shawn. He received a bachelor's degree from Harvard University and studied in France with composer, conductor, and teacher Nadia Boulanger. Shawn's musical output includes a dozen orchestral works and concertos; three chamber operas; and a large catalogue of chamber music, songs, choral music, piano music, and music for ballet and theater.

Shawn performs frequently as a pianist and is the author of articles for the *Atlantic Monthly*, *The Times Literary Supplement*, *The Musical Times*, and *Film Forum*. He has written three books titled *Arnold Schoenberg's Journey* (2002), *Wish I Could Be There* (2007), and *Twin* (2011) and is currently working on a book about Leonard Bernstein. For his compositions, Shawn has received a Goddard Lieberman Award and an Academy Award in Music from the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

Three Dance Portraits (1994)

(notes provided by the composer)

I composed *Three Dance Portraits* in just a few days in December, 1994, in response to a request for music from two pianist friends, Joan Stein and Betty Rosenblum, who were preparing a program of four-hand music. Listening to this piece now, one might imagine a composer deliberately writing 'in a lighter vein,' perhaps in the summer. In fact, I was at home with a cold and a fever, rather gloomy, in the dead of winter, and the exuberant character of the music simply asserted itself, without my expecting it.

The process was so quick and so natural, that I cannot reconstruct it. I remember only that I enjoyed the contrast between the detailed intensity of the notes and the dancing buoyancy of the rhythms; that I plotted the key relations between the three movements so that one would lead to the next; and that I inserted the theme of the first movement into the climax of the last. The three dances are highly contrasting but share high energy and moderately fast *tempi*. The first, which is primarily in 7/8 time, is jazzy and also seems tinged with a Hungarian or Bulgarian folk influence, by way of Bartok. The second suggests a 'Latin' influence. The third blends rock-and-roll with highly dissonant harmonies and romantic pianism. This, too, was not by intention—my knowledge of rock music being quite limited—but simply grew out of a short riff I had been playing for my children for fun, on top of which I added hints of *Le Sacre du Printemps* and Rachmaninoff.

Samuel Barber

Samuel Osborne Barber, II, was born March 9, 1910, in West Chester, Pennsylvania, into a comfortable, educated, and distinguished Irish-American family. He showed a deep interest in

music from an early age, writing his first piece at age seven and attempting his first opera at age ten. At age 14, Barber entered the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia where he studied voice, piano, and composition. At Curtis, he met Gian Carlo Menotti with whom he formed a lifelong personal and professional relationship.

In his 20s, Barber wrote a large number of compositions launching him to the forefront of the classical music world. Widely distinguished for his gorgeous melodies composed in a romantic vein, his most recognizable and beloved composition, *Adagio for Strings*, was written when he was 28 and was premiered by the NBC Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Arturo Toscanini in 1938.

Barber was the recipient of numerous awards and prizes over his lifetime including the American Prix de Rome and two Pulitzers and election to the American Academy of Arts and Letters. He died of cancer in 1981 in New York City and was buried in his hometown of West Chester.

Souvenirs, Op. 28 (1951)

Composed in 1951, *Souvenirs* is one of Barber's very few works that could be considered light in style, or referred to as "salon" music. This suite, written for piano four-hands, was composed at the suggestion of Barber's friend, Charles Turner, who would often relax with the composer in New York City at the bar in the Blue Angel Club. Barber dedicated *Souvenirs* to Turner, and the two performed the composition at parties they attended in New York and across Europe.

The *Souvenirs* suite consists of six short movements, each representing a different style of dance. In the preface of the original copy of the four-hand piano version, Barber suggests that the suite was inspired by the music he heard from around 1915 to 1920 when he and his mother would visit the Palm Court of the Plaza Hotel in New York. In some later notes, Barber reflects on this inspiration:

"In 1952, I was writing some duets for one piano to play with a friend, and Lincoln Kirstein (general director of the New York City Ballet) suggested that I orchestrate them for a ballet. The suite consists of a waltz, schottische, pas de deux, two-step, hesitation-tango, and galop. One might imagine a divertissement in a setting reminiscent of the Palm Court of the Hotel Plaza in New York, the year about 1914 -epoch of the first tangos; 'Souvenirs' - remembered with affection."

Barber did go on to arrange *Souvenirs* for orchestra to accompany dancing for a ballet. The sequence of ballet scenes corresponds to the six parts of the suite: The first five scenes are in the hotel, the sixth the next day:

- 1 - Waltz - The Lobby - guests gather
- 2 - Schottische - Third-Floor Hallway
- 3 - Pas de deux - A Corner of the Ballroom
- 4 - Two-step - Tea in the Palm Court

5 - Hesitation-tango - A Bedroom Affair

6 - Galop-coda - all the guests visit the beach for a jolly good afternoon (3)

Igor Stravinsky

Russian-born American composer Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971) is widely recognized as one of the most important and influential composers of the 20th century. The son of a distinguished Russian singer, Stravinsky spent his early years in Russia, either in St. Petersburg or at the country estate of his relatives during the summer. He studied music briefly with Rimsky-Korsakov, but it was when he attracted the attention of Russian impresario Sergei Diaghilev that his musical career became well established. Diaghilev commissioned Stravinsky to write three ballet scores for his Ballets Russes: *The Firebird* (1910), *Petrushka* (1911/1947), and *The Rite of Spring* (1913).

In 1920 Stravinsky settled in Paris where he solidified his admiration for and friendship with Claude Debussy. The two composers met for the first time in 1910 when Stravinsky came to Paris for the first performance of *The Firebird* by the Russian Ballet. During his time in Paris Stravinsky's compositional style moved toward neoclassicism, with his works from this period making use of more traditional musical forms – concerto grosso, fugue, symphony. While living in Paris Stravinsky also began appearing as a pianist and conductor to help support his family, so he began to write works to take advantage of his own keyboard mastery, such as the *Concerto for Piano and Wind Instruments* (1924).

In 1939 Stravinsky moved to the United States where he became a naturalized American citizen in 1945. There, in the post-war years, he turned away from the neoclassical style to composing in the twelve-tone technique propounded by Schoenberg. Always a versatile composer, inventive in changing styles, Stravinsky's legacy may be seen as the musical counterpart to Picasso.

***The Rite of Spring* (1913)**

Stravinsky's earliest conception of his third ballet, *The Rite of Spring*, was in the spring of 1910 in the form of a dream. In his own words: "I saw in imagination a solemn pagan rite: wise elders, seated in a circle, watching a young girl dance herself to death. They were sacrificing her to propitiate the god of spring" [*Chroniques de ma Vie*]. Stravinsky's vision for the piece did not take form until he composed the work between 1912 and 1913 for Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes. The 1913 premiere of *The Rite of Spring* at the Theatre des Champs-Elysees in Paris provoked a classical music riot, not only because of the revolutionary nature of the music but by the shocking choreography of the ballet. Nevertheless, *The Rite of Spring* is widely recognized as a ground-breaking milestone in the history of masterworks that firmly established Stravinsky's reputation as a composer willing to push the boundaries of musical design.

Before finishing the orchestral score of *The Rite of Spring*, Stravinsky completed a piano four-hands version of the work which he sight-read for the first time with Claude Debussy in the summer of 1912 at the home of Debussy's close friend and musicologist Louis Laloy. It was in

this piano four-hands version that *The Rite of Spring* was first published in 1913. The orchestral score was not published until 1921, so the piano four-hands arrangement was the predominant version by which the piece gained public exposure.

The initial reading of *The Rite of Spring* by Stravinsky and Debussy left a lasting impression on the two composers and Louis Laloy. Laloy recalls, "When they had finished, there was no question of embracing, nor even compliments. We were silent, overwhelmed by this hurricane that had come from the depths of the ages and torn up our life by the roots" [Eric Walter White: Stravinsky and Debussy]. Years later, Stravinsky apparently recalled the occasion and said that what had impressed him most at the time was Debussy's brilliant piano playing. In a letter to Stravinsky some months after sharing the bench, Debussy wrote, "Our reading at the piano of *Le Sacre du Printemps* at Laloy's house is always present in my mind. It haunts me like a beautiful nightmare and I try, in vain, to reinvoke the terrific impression."