

## ***Idylle: Concertino on the Pastoral Fourth***

**Joseph Marx**

Born: May 11, 1882, Graz

Died: September 3, 1964, Graz

Written: 1926

Premiered: March 4, 1926, Vienna

Approximate Duration: 15 minutes

Instrumentation: 3 flutes, 2 oboes, English horn, 3 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, 4 French horns, 2 trumpets, timpani, percussion (tambourine, triangle, xylophone), 2 harps, celeste, strings

Joseph Marx was born in Graz, Austria. His mother taught him piano at an early age, and he taught himself how to play violin and cello. He went to Graz University. His father wanted him to study law, but Marx initially focused on philosophy, earning a Ph.D. in that field. When he turned more fully to musical studies it led to a break with his family, who forbade him to go into music as a career. He was a key figure in the emerging musical languages of the early twentieth century. He wrote an important scholarly study of tonality in which he coined the term “atonal.”

Marx began composing as his primary occupation in 1908, ultimately writing over 150 songs. He focused on orchestral pieces in the 1920s and 1930s, followed by a time devoted to chamber music. He assumed a faculty position at the Vienna Music Academy in 1914 and eventually became the director. He had a lot of influence on many musicians and composers, teaching over 1300 students from around the world. He was also one of the most prominent music critics in Vienna, particularly in the 1930s, and published influential books on music theory. When the Nazis came to power he had to resign his posts, instead speaking on cultural topics, but found various ways to secretly help Jewish families.

As a composer Marx was concerned about upholding the Viennese classical tradition, both in the forms he used, such as waltzes, and the use of Austrian folk music. He also included Impressionist, Slavonic, and Italian elements. Following World War II he thought of himself as a “father figure” for conservative, tonal music. He was well known in his lifetime but much of his music fell out of notice due to cultural and political upheaval.

Marx wrote *Idylle—Concertino on the Pastoral Fourth* during a time in his life when he focused on impressionistic orchestral music. This piece is the middle part of his *Nature Trilogy*, which opens with *Symphonic Night Music*, written in 1922, and closes with *Spring Music*, composed in 1925. This trilogy is a blend of romantic lyricism and impressionism all trying to depict Marx’s homeland. Marx uses more restraint in *Idylle*

than in the other two movements, writing for a traditional-sized orchestra and using a sensitive style. His subtitle, "Concertino on the Pastoral Fourth," refers to the "perfect fourth," a musical interval spanning a four note range. With his gentle impressionistic tenderness, he creates a pastoral fantasy in F Major (the same key as Beethoven's sixth "pastoral" symphony) based on that interval. The piece is inspired by Debussy's "Afternoon of a Faun" and has been called its "Austrian counterpart. Marx transports his listeners into dreamy atmospheres and southern landscapes, all at a hazy distance. The piece is framed by a solo clarinet, which sets the feel and character of the work, in an adaptation of the solo flute part in Debussy's work.

### ***Toccata Festiva for Organ and Orchestra, Op. 36***

#### **Samuel Barber**

Born: March 9, 1910, Westchester, PA

Died: January 23, 1981, New York City

Written: 1960

Approximate Duration: 14 minutes

Instrumentation: 2 flutes, piccolo, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 French horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, 1 tuba, timpani, percussion (bass drum, cymbals, snare drum, triangle, tam-tam, xylophone), strings

In 1906 the Philadelphia Academy of Music installed a new pipe organ. Mary Curtis Zimbalist, who had founded the Curtis Institute of Music in the 1920s, funded the organ. She told Eugene Ormandy, conductor of the Philadelphia Orchestra at the time, "I'm giving you that pipe organ you've been longing for," assuring him that cost was no obstacle. The result was a massive Aeolian-Skinner organ which was said to be the largest movable pipe organ in the world. It had three manuals and 4102 pipes, and could be moved on stage for a performance and stored away afterward. It cost \$150,000 at the time.

Samuel Barber was a natural choice to write a piece for the inauguration of this new instrument. He was a son of Philadelphia and one of the first students at the Curtis Institute of Music, soon becoming one of its most famous alumni. Zimbalist offered Barber \$2000 for the commission, but Barber wanted to donate the piece to the orchestra and to the Curtis Institute. He wrote it in the spring of 1960 at his summer home in Mt. Kisco, New York. It was premiered on September 30, 1960, with Paul Callaway, the organist and choir director at the National Cathedral, as the soloist.

Barber composed a single movement festive toccata for the occasion. The term *toccata* is derived from the Italian word for touch. As a musical form, it is a loosely defined term for a piece written for a solo instrument, usually a keyboard instrument, that was full of

fast passages, chords, and other virtuoso techniques intended to show off the performer's "touch." Toccatas date back to the renaissance but found their peak in the time of Johann Sebastian Bach, who wrote several difficult and groundbreaking toccatas. Barber included many virtuosic elements, including a cadenza just for the pedals, along with his characteristic lyricism. The organ and orchestra work together; a theme in the organ's reed pipes is repeated by the English horn, and the trumpets and trumpet stops echo each other's melodies. It has a celebratory quality and derives much of its energy from a motif in 5/8 time. It was received with excitement and acclaim, and has remained an important milestone in organists' repertoire since its inception.

### ***Dances in the Canebrakes***

#### **Florence Price**

Born: Little Rock, Arkansas, April 9, 1887

Died: Chicago, Illinois, June 3, 1953

Written: 1953 (solo piano version)

Orchestrated: William Grant Still

Approximate duration: 9 minutes

Instrumentation: 2 flutes, piccolo, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, alto saxophone, 3 French horns, 3 trumpets, 2 trombones, timpani and percussion (castanets, claves, glockenspiel, snare drum, suspended cymbal, triangle, vibraphone), harp, and strings

Florence Price was born in Little Rock, Arkansas. Her mother was a music teacher and her father was the only African-American dentist in the city. Even though Little Rock had lots of racial issues, the family was well-respected. Florence's mother guided her early musical studies. At age four she performed for the first time on the piano, and published her first composition at age eleven. After graduating high school as valedictorian at age fourteen, she attended New England Conservatory of Music in Boston, majoring in organ and piano teaching. She also studied composition.

Upon her graduation in 1906, Price taught at Clark Atlanta University, becoming head of the music department. She eventually got married and moved back to Little Rock, where she raised two daughters. She had trouble finding work in that segregated town. After a series of racial incidents, including a lynching in 1927, the Price family moved to Chicago. Price met a lot of other musicians there and began her composition career. She also worked for a time as an organist for silent film showings. She studied with many of the city's leading teachers, spending time at Chicago Musical College, University of Chicago, and American Conservatory of Music, and became part of the Chicago Black Renaissance. Ultimately she composed over 300 works. In 1932 she

became the first African American woman to have a work played by a major orchestra when the Chicago Symphony played her first symphony. Chicago honored her in 1964 by naming an elementary school after her.

After she died, much of Price's work fell out of favor as new styles emerged. A lot of her music was lost until the discovery of over 200 pieces in an abandoned house in 2009 outside St. Anne, Illinois, that Price used as a summer home late in her life. In recent years many of her works have been re-published or published for the first time. Orchestras, in an effort to recognize underrepresented composers, have helped audiences discover and enjoy her delightful music.

Price's music draws heavily on the American musical sounds that surrounded her. She was a devoted Christian and used a lot of spirituals—both their melodic sounds and rhythms—in her symphonic pieces. Many of her works focused on the experience, folk songs, and dances of Black Americans. This is true of *Dances in the Canebrakes*, a collection of three piano pieces. Canebrakes are dense clusters or fields of tall cane plants that grow in marshy areas. They resemble thick bamboo patches. They are common in the south, and often had to be cleared before cultivating land for cotton crops.

These three pieces are based on stage and ballroom dances that were common in the early 1900s, when Scott Joplin's music was popular. The first movement, "Nimble Feet," is a rag with a cheerful melody. The second dance, "Tropical Noon," is a "slow drag" with a dream-like melody, contrasted by a more assertive middle section. The last movement, "Silk Hat and Walking Cane," is based on the "cakewalk," full of the excitement and whirling energy of a crowded Harlem ballroom. These dances were orchestrated by William Grant Still shortly after Price's death.

### ***An American in Paris***

#### **George Gershwin**

Born: September 26, 1898, Brooklyn, NY

Died: July 11, 1937, Hollywood, CA

Written: March - June 1928, while Gershwin and his siblings were vacationing in Paris

Premiered: December 13, 1928, New York Philharmonic

Approximate Duration: 17 minutes

Instrumentation: 3 flutes, one doubling piccolo, 2 oboes, English Horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, 4 French horns, 3 trumpet, 3 trombones, tuba, 3 saxophones (alto, tenor, baritone) timpani, percussion (bass drum, cymbals, glockenspiel, 4 taxi horns, 2 tom-toms, triangle, wood block, xylophone), celeste, strings

George Gershwin, born Jacob Gershwine, is one of America's most beloved composers, known for incorporating popular music and jazz into classical music. He began his musical career as a pianist and "song plugger," usually a singer or pianist employed by a department store, music store or song publisher to promote and sell new sheet music, which is how publishers advertised before recordings were readily available. Gershwin also wrote Broadway songs along with his brother Ira. During this time, from 1915 to 1921, he took "classical" harmony and counterpoint lessons to improve his compositional skills.

Gershwin, looking to advance his compositional career, moved to Paris, hoping to study with Nadia Boulanger or Maurice Ravel. Boulanger refused him, saying that too much "classical" training would ruin his jazz-influenced style. Ravel had recently been impressed by Gershwin's compositional abilities and his skill as a pianist during a performance of *Rhapsody in Blue* in Ravel's honor. Ravel also turned down Gershwin's request for composition lessons, telling Gershwin that he should be "a first rate Gershwin rather than a second-rate Ravel." Ravel also complimented Gershwin by writing his *Piano Concerto in G* in the style of Gershwin the following year.

*An American in Paris* was an important compositional milestone for Gershwin. He wrote *Rhapsody in Blue* a few years earlier, but Ferde Grofé orchestrated the piece, for which Gershwin was criticized. With *An American in Paris*, the first piece that Gershwin composed and orchestrated, he quieted the skeptics who doubted his abilities, demonstrating his skill at using the diverse palate of orchestral colors. The premiere by the New York Philharmonic was a big success. Some critics doubted the piece's longevity. A writer for the *New York Evening Post's* suggested that while *An American in Paris* might be popular in 1928, "to conceive of a symphony audience listening to it with any degree of pleasure or patience twenty years from now, when whoopee is no longer even a word, is another matter." Those critics have been proven wrong by almost a century of ongoing performances and recordings. As Gershwin said, "It's not a Beethoven symphony, you know. If it pleases symphony audiences as a light, jolly piece, a series of impressions musically expressed, it succeeds."

*An American in Paris* doesn't have a formal structure, but instead follows an "episodic" path. Gershwin said, "My purpose here is to portray the impression of an American visitor in Paris, as he strolls about the city and listens to various street noises and absorbs the French atmosphere.... As in my other orchestral compositions, I've not endeavored to represent any definite scenes in this music. The rhapsody is programmatic only in a general impressionistic way, so that the individual listener can read into the music such as his imagination pictures for him." It is structured in three large sections with a concluding coda, interspersed with a lot of themes meant to portray walking. The opening section is based on the *maxixe*, a Brazilian dance,

evoking the busyness of Paris with many short rhythmic cells, including those produced by taxi-horns, and a big variety of pitched percussion instruments. Of this first section, Gershwin noted: "it will be developed in typical French style, in the manner of Debussy and the Six [*Les Six*], though all the themes are original." A violin cadenza leads into "a rich blues... Our American friend, perhaps after strolling into a cafe and having a couple of drinks, has succumbed to a spasm of homesickness." This is portrayed by a bluesy trumpet solo. This "American" section concludes with a Charleston played by a couple of trumpets. The concluding section is an energetic finale meant to portray all the excitement and glitter of nightfall in the City of Light.