

# PROGRAM NOTES

BY EDWARD YADZINSKY

*Antonin Dvořák  
is born*

⋮

1841

1893

⋮

*Dvořák composes New  
World Symphony*

*George Gershwin  
is born*

⋮

1898

1924

⋮

*Gershwin composes  
Rhapsody in Blue*

*Gershwin composes “I Got  
Rhythm” Variations*

⋮

1934

*Bolcom composes Ann  
Arbor Saturday*

⋮

1938

⋮

*William Bolcom  
is born*

2018

**Ann Arbor Saturday**, A World Premiere commissioned by the A<sup>2</sup>SO to inaugurate the A<sup>2</sup>SO's 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary season, funded by the A<sup>2</sup>SO Commissioning Club  
William Bolcom

*Born May 26, 1938; Seattle, Washington*



National Medal of Arts, Pulitzer Prize, and Grammy Award-winner William Bolcom is a composer of chamber, operatic, vocal, choral, cabaret, ragtime, and symphonic music. He joined the faculty of the U-M's School of Music in 1973, was named the Ross Lee Finney Distinguished University Professor of Composition in 1994, and retired in 2008 after 35 years. Bolcom won the Pulitzer Prize for music in 1988 for *12 New Etudes for Piano*, and his setting of William Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience* on the Naxos label won four Grammy Awards in 2005.

As a pianist Bolcom has performed and recorded his own work frequently in collaboration with his wife and musical partner, mezzo-soprano Joan Morris. Cabaret songs, show tunes, and American popular songs of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have been their primary specialties in both concerts and recordings. Their 25<sup>th</sup> album, "Autumn Leaves," was released recently on White Pine Records.

A native of Seattle, Bolcom concluded his formal study of composition with Darius Milhaud and Olivier Messiaen in Paris. In addition to the awards mentioned above, he was been awarded two Koussevitzky Foundation Awards, two Guggenheim Fellowships, several Rockefeller Foundation Awards and NEA Grants, the Marc Blitzstein Award from the Academy of Arts and Letters, the Michigan Council for the Arts Award, the Governor's Arts Award from the State of Michigan, and 2007 Composer of the Year.

Many of his compositions have been written on commission for a variety of prestigious organizations, including

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Edward Yadzinsky joined the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra as a clarinetist and saxophonist in 1963. As an avant-garde performer, he has appeared across the US, Canada and Europe, and has recordings including *Echoi*, by Lukas Foss, with the composer at the piano. As a composer Yadzinsky has written various chamber music works and a ballet for full orchestra. He is a professor at State University of NY at Buffalo and is the historian of the BPO.

the New York Philharmonic, the Philadelphia Orchestra, the St. Louis Symphony, the Vienna Philharmonic, and the Orpheus Ensemble. Bolcom has also scored important works for leading soloists including James Galway, Yo-Yo Ma, Emanuel Ax, Leon Fleisher, Gary Graffman, and Richard Stoltzman.

Other commissions include the Carnegie Hall Centennial, for which he wrote a song cycle with texts by American women poets, ballet scores for the Pacific Northwest Ballet and the Murray Louis Troupe, as well as a work for the Tenth Van Cliburn International Piano Competition.

The composer shares his thoughts about *Ann Arbor Saturday*:

Ann Arbor has a huge and hugely famous football stadium, which since its redoing, resembles Rome's Colosseum; sometimes passing it I imagine screams of Christians devoured by lions.

You may gather I'm not a football maniac, but I do remember with pleasure and pride our high school team in Everett, Washington, then an ugly town with sulfite belching out of several paper mills, plus cinders from the shingle-cutting mills wafting off Port Gardner to cover my mother's sheets with little black soot marks from being hung outside. Our team won state championships frequently in football and I was proud of them – I think they respected my outgripping some of them because of my strong pianist's hands (how long ago that was!), and it was fun to see some surviving members in 2005 at our 50-year reunion. (The town was totally transformed after I'd left, mostly by Boeing's planting their 747 factory nearby.)

The game of football seemed a lot simpler in the early 1950s, and maybe less brutal; I don't remember headbutting or the other extreme things seen on TV today, and many recent rules I hear of elude me now. But what am I to say, living in one of the premium cathedral towns of college football? There is a certain delicious ozone in the air on game days, even palpable for non-sports fans, and this is what *Ann Arbor Saturday* tries to evoke.

First, we feel the calm of the empty city, before long défilés of cars snake into the city from all directions. (Listen in the orchestra for hints of college songs from warriors who have contended at The Temple for many years, starting with tunes from home.) There are quite a number of fight songs used, sometimes in counterpoint three and four at a time (we should have a contest to see who can guess most of them). See if you can hear snatches of the tunes in the orchestral texture before they surface.

The rumbling grows as the long lines of cars come close to The Game. A quick cut to the almost-ghostly silence of the town, then a fast-forward to a game in progress between the home team and its bitterest rival. Our team's fight song is in upper counterpoint to the rival's and will stay there – until the rival intercepts and the tunes are reversed. After a fast and furious ball-carry, the rival scores a touchdown and the conversion.

A moment of dejection from the home team – but our superior fight song wells up from the tubas, followed by a fugato on the tune's motive depicting our side's rallying. What follows is a Marx Brothers set of impossible touchdowns by our team, followed by instantaneous conversions – a concerto of silliness, but what the heck, they win the game. After a short break for the town's hymn, it is time for revelry.

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## “I Got Rhythm” Variations for Piano and Orchestra

George Gershwin

*Born September 26, 1898; Brooklyn, New York*

*Died July 11, 1937; Hollywood, California*



Early critics, impresarios and conductors were somehow very uneasy about the instant appeal of Gershwin’s gift for melody and rhythm – the great tunes were perhaps just too catchy to be trusted; the sassy/jazzy settings from the iconoclast *New Yorker* were perhaps just too empathic with the American earth. The bias was maintained in high places for decades. For example, it is hard to believe that the Metropolitan Opera in New York required more than 50 years to get over its snobbery and present a full production of *Porgy and Bess* in 1985.

In early 1934 Gershwin needed a new showpiece for a four-week concert tour on which he was the featured soloist with the renowned Leo Reisman Orchestra. The tour began in mid-January at Boston’s Symphony Hall, then (by way of Canada and Nebraska) concluded back home at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in New York. As a performer, Gershwin often added encores by improvising on his own songs. True to form, he based his new concert piece on the tune *I Got Rhythm*, one of the big hit songs from his 1930 musical *Girl Crazy*.

In two acts, the storyline of *Girl Crazy* concerns a Manhattan playboy who rides a taxi all the way to Arizona, where he falls in love with a small-town post mistress. Like a modern TV comedy, the stage scenes were full of droll confusions with a happy ending. Other well-known songs from the musical include *Embraceable You* and *But Not for Me*.

During a recorded radio broadcast after the tour, Gershwin remarked (with his colorful Brooklyn accent):

Good evening. This is George Gershwin speaking. The orchestra just played my song *Mine*. And now I’m going to play you my latest composition which I wrote a few months ago down in Palm Beach, Florida. This is a composition in a form of variations on a tune, and the tune is *I Got Rhythm*.

I think you might be interested to hear about a few of the variations we are going to play. After an introduction by the orchestra the piano plays a theme rather simply. The first variation is a very complicated rhythmic pattern played by the piano while the orchestra fits in the tune.

The next variation is in waltz time, and the third is a Chinese variation in which I imitate Chinese flutes that play out of tune. Next the piano plays a rhythmic variation in which the left hand plays the melody upside down, while the right plays it first on the theory that we shouldn’t let one hand know what the other is doing. Then comes the finale. Now, after all this information about *Variations on “I Got Rhythm,”* how about hearing it?

Gershwin was pleased with his own orchestration for the *Variations* (the last full score from his hand), penned with one ear on modern harmony, another on the rich timbres of Hollywood. The opening phrases from the solo clarinet and piano are at first atonal – doubtless hinting at the cachet of Arnold Schönberg (who was also Gershwin’s tennis partner in Los Angeles). In turn, the tune is presented as a syncopated arabesque with coy accents. The waltz variation offers a slow reverie in triple time, again with progressions far closer to the avant-garde than to Broadway. After the quaint caricature of oriental flutes, further harmonic adventures are conjured by the soloist. In evolving frames, the *Variations* blend into big-screen effects at the final curtain in F major. ‘S Wonderful..!

### Events of 1934 (“*I Got Rhythm*” Variations composed)

- Botsford Tavern renovated by Henry Ford and opened to the public
- Mickey Cochrane leads the Detroit Tigers to an American League pennant – the first in 25 years; they subsequently lose the World Series to the Cardinals
- Hitler consolidates power in Germany
- American Airlines formed
- Radar invented in Germany
- *Tender is the Night* written by F. Scott Fitzgerald
- *Murder on the Orient Express* written by Agatha Christie
- *The Bull Fight* painted by Picasso
- Shirley Temple stars in film at age 6

### Rhapsody in Blue

George Gershwin

Doubtless part of Gershwin’s problem with critics and conductors was the enormous popularity of his own *Rhapsody in Blue* of 1924, a work which once and for all broke the traditional formality of the serious repertoire for piano and orchestra. And it matters little if we make a distinction between a rhapsody and a concerto. The issue is style, simple as that. From the familiar deep trill of the clarinet to the top of its wailing slide, the jazzy motif is tart and true – we are in for a big night on the town and dear George will not let us down. And for good measure he gives us one of the most lyrical themes of all time.

Charming details about the genesis of the *Rhapsody* are noteworthy. The piece was requested by the popular New York cabaret bandsman/conductor Paul Whiteman, who wanted a snappy new piano showpiece for a concert at Broadway’s Aeolian Hall in February of 1924. A bit like Diaghilev, Whiteman had a wizard’s instinct for great talent on the rise, and he was certain that 25-year-old George Gershwin was the man of the moment. Moreover, Whiteman was spot-on to guess that the world was ready for a jazz-inspired concert piece for piano. And when Gershwin replied that he knew little about writing for orchestra, Whiteman was ready: American composer Ferde Grofé was standing by to handle the orchestration.

But at the time, Gershwin was mainly focused on the premiere of his new musical titled *Sweet Little Devil*, scheduled for a trial opening in Boston. So aside from a few passing sketches, he had no time to begin the work on the *Rhapsody*. But the train ride to Boston put his Muse in gear. Gershwin later wrote:

It was on the train, with its steely rhythms, its rattley-bang that is often so stimulating to a composer – I frequently hear music in the very heart of noise – and there I suddenly heard – and even saw on paper – the complete construction of the *Rhapsody*, from beginning to end. I heard it as a sort of musical kaleidoscope of America – of our vast melting pot, of our unduplicated national pep, of our blues, of our metropolitan madness.

Since the “blue-note rhapsody” is so very well known, hardly another word is needed. But beyond the snappy grace of the piece, and apart from its charm and gorgeous tunes, the keyboard writing is extraordinarily challenging. In addition to requiring keen facility from the soloist, the music must be rendered with spontaneity and flair from the soul of American jazz.

Finally, we have this ultimate compliment to the Tin Pan Alley wunderkind: with Gershwin at the keyboard for the premiere of *Rhapsody in Blue*, the audience at the premier performance included Sergey Rachmaninoff, Igor Stravinsky and John Philip Sousa, violinists Fritz Kreisler, Jasha Heifetz and Mischa Elman, and the conductors Leopold Stokowski and Willem Mengelberg. What a gallant gallery..!

### Events of 1924 (*Rhapsody in Blue* composed)

- Paul Whiteman and George Gershwin appear at Detroit's Arcadia Auditorium on May 29
- First Chrysler car produced
- IBM Corporation is formed
- *The Saturday Review* begins publication
- Thomas Mann writes *The Magic Mountain*
- Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer and Columbia Pictures founded in Hollywood
- First Winter Olympic Games are held at Chamonix, France
- Saks Fifth Avenue opens in New York

### Symphony No. 9 in E Minor, op. 95 “From the New World”

Antonin Dvořák

Born September 8, 1841; Nelahozeves, Bohemia (now Czech Republic)

Died May 1, 1904; Prague



A mainstay of the symphonic repertoire, Dvořák's *New World Symphony* of 1893 is a masterwork which combines wide ethnic contrasts into a broad and universal statement about the heart and spirit of one's homeland. Although not intended, almost at once the work became a pan-cultural icon for immigrants who left Europe by the millions for North and South America in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Otherwise the year was chock-full of events – New Zealand became the first nation to grant voting rights to women, Edison demonstrated motion pictures, Henry Ford tested his first motorcar, and open-heart surgery was introduced in Chicago.

Influenced initially by Beethoven and Schubert, and later by Wagner and Liszt, the Bohemian Dvořák was able to combine his deep interest in folk idioms into the vernacular of 19<sup>th</sup>-century Romanticism. His famous Slavonic Dances of 1878/86 are a splendid example of such musical cross reference, employing motifs and modes endemic to his own heritage. Yet, beyond the confines of geography, Dvořák also possessed a deep empathy for the musical roots of cultures altogether remote to European traditions.

By the early 1890s the composer's reputation stretched across the whole of the European continent. Brahms was a close acquaintance, Tchaikovsky a dear friend. Dvořák even received an honorary doctorate from Cambridge University. In 1892 he accepted an offer to become the first Director of the new National Conservatory of Music which was about to open in New York City. While residing here in the United States he was able to spend the summer months in the little Czech community of Spillville, Iowa. Those travels into the heartland of the New World enabled him to experience several prime examples of indigenous American folk music, especially Afro-American spirituals and the rhythmic/melodic expressions of Native American tribes. Moreover, Dvořák was well acquainted with American literature, including Longfellow's *Hiawatha*, and was also knowledgeable about the folk music of the American frontier, including familiarity with the popular melodies and lyrics of Stephen Foster. It is widely believed that all of this played a formative role in his *New World Symphony*, a work that seems to meld myriad ethnic identities into a common, universal musical statement. The symphony was completed in New York City, the metropolis which itself had become the cultural ladle for our great American melting pot.

The *New World Symphony* overall maintains an evocative spirit through all four movements – especially within the languid nostalgia of the second. Its famous *Largo* (the melody for the song *Going Home*) features a haunting melody from the English horn which, in turn, is resonated with increasing depth in the choir of orchestral strings. Graphic momentum is achieved in the colorful tableaux of the first, third and fourth movements. Unmistakable throughout are Dvořák's indelible brush strokes, all deftly applied to create an evocative canvas, tone-painted with the timbres and accents from a brilliant orchestral palette. The work offers alluring symphonic moods and tonal images that range from joyful confidence and feisty determination to the hues of sweet heartache.

The full-screen, visual accompaniment to the *New World Symphony* depicts a journey across the country, with each movement centered on a broad theme, assuring that Dvořák's well-loved music remains the focal point of the experience. For the first movement the theme is water, the second features the desert night sky, the third introduces animals and spring flowers, and the final movement tours majestic mountains through the seasons and concludes our journey across The New World. These visuals premiered with the Tucson Symphony Orchestra in December 2017. Tonight's performance is the Michigan premiere of these visuals.

This accompaniment features the work of landscape photographer Tom Oord.

Fun fact: Astronaut Neil Armstrong took a recording of the *New World Symphony* along during the Apollo 11 mission, the first moon landing, in 1969.

**Events of 1893 (*Symphony No. 9* composed)**

- Detroiters line river bank to see replicas of Columbus's ships sail up the river en route to Chicago
- First policewoman in the U.S. appointed by Detroit Bureau of Police, Mrs. Marie Owen
- New Zealand is first nation to grant voting by women
- World's first open-heart surgery takes place in Chicago
- Steinmetz proves value of using alternating current for electric power
- Henry Ford tests his first motorcar
- Joseph Pulitzer invents color printing for newspapers
- Verdi's opera *Falstaff* premiered in Milan, Italy
- Edison demonstrates technique for making movies
- Hershey's Chocolate begins in Lancaster, Pennsylvania