Kansas City Symphony
2012-2013 Classical Series

February 8, 9 and 10, 2013

Michael Stern, Conductor
Garrick Ohlsson, Piano

DVOŘÁK Symphony No. 6 in D major, Op. 60
   Allegro non tanto
   Adagio
   Scherzo. Furiant: Presto
   Finale: Allegro con spirito

— INTERMISSION —

COPLAND Piano Concerto
   Andante sostenuto
   Molto moderato (molto rubato)

GERSHWIN Rhapsody in Blue for Piano and Orchestra
   orchestrated by Ferde Grofè
Notes on the Program by DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)  
*Symphony No. 6 in D major, Op. 60 (1880)*  
Woodwinds in pairs plus piccolo, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani and strings.

**SIDEBAR – BULLET POINTS:**

- Dvořák composed the Sixth Symphony soon after the *Slavonic Dances* had brought him international fame
- The Symphony was composed for the Vienna Philharmonic but anti-Czech sentiment there necessitated premiering the work in Prague
- The Sixth was the first of Dvořák’s symphonies to be published and was for many years known as “No. 1”

On November 16, 1879, Dvořák was in Vienna for a performance by the Philharmonic Orchestra and conductor Hans Richter of his *Slavonic Rhapsody No. 3*, “which was very well received,” he reported. “I had to assure the Philharmonic that I would send them a symphony for the next season.” By 1880, Dvořák had already completed five symphonies — all unpublished — but he did not feel them representative of his best achievements, so he chose to write a new work for Vienna. He could not take up the score until the following August, but once begun he progressed rapidly on it: the sketch was completed in just three weeks and the orchestration in another three (on October 15, 1880), though the composer’s student and biographer Karel Hoffmeister noted that the music “had been slowly maturing in Dvořák’s mind.” Dvořák took the score at once to Vienna to play at the piano for Richter, who, the composer wrote to his friend Alois Goebl, “liked it very much indeed, so that after every movement he embraced me.” The premiere, by Richter and the Philharmonic, was set for December 26th.

Shortly before the scheduled premiere date, Richter informed Dvořák that the performance would have to be postponed because there was no time to rehearse and perform the music in the Philharmonic’s busy schedule. The premiere was put off until March, Richter counseling that introducing such a grand and worthy new work during the frivolous carnival season of January and February was inappropriate. Pleading personal and family problems, however, Richter once again canceled the first performance, and Dvořák started to ask some questions of his Viennese friends. It seemed that there was sufficient anti-Czech feeling in those politically volatile days of the Dual Monarchy to cause local resentment against a young Czech composer who would have two important premieres in successive years. Dvořák, who had no taste for such quintessentially Viennese political machinations, gave the honor of the Symphony’s premiere to the Prague Philharmonic and conductor Adolf Cech, with whom he had played in the viola section of the orchestra of the National Provisional Theater in Prague earlier in his career. The work was first heard on March 25, 1881, in Prague.

The Symphony No. 6 splendidly combines elements of the symphonic tradition as transmitted by Brahms with what Otakar Sourek called Dvořák’s “process of idealization” of Czech folk music. This characteristic style of Dvořák, uniting two great streams of concert and vernacular music, richly illumines the Symphony’s opening movement. The influence of Brahms is clear in the music’s sylvan sonorities, motivic development and careful control of the ebb and flow of the lines of tension, while the folk quality is heard in the tunefulness of the themes and the many harmonic plangencies. Following the first movement are a lovely *Adagio* and a fiery *Furiant*, filled with the same powerful shifting accents borrowed from Bohemian dance that enliven so many of the *Slavonic Dances*. The bracing last movement, according to Hans-Hubert Schönzeler, “is the most convincing finale Dvořák ever wrote.”

Aaron Copland (1900-1990)  
*Piano Concerto* (1926)  
Piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, E-flat clarinet, two clarinets, bass clarinet, alto saxophone, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, celesta, piano and strings.
SIDEBAR – BULLET POINTS:

• Copland’s Piano Concerto, dating from two years after Gershwin’s *Rhapsody in Blue*, was deeply influenced by American jazz
• The composer was soloist in the work’s premiere, in Boston in January 1927
• Copland played the work in Los Angeles, Chile and Mexico, but it did not enter the repertory until Leo Smit performed it with the New York City Symphony conducted by Leonard Bernstein in 1946

In January 1925 Sergei Koussevitzky, the newly appointed music director of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, heard the premiere of Copland’s *Organ Symphony* in New York, and he thought so highly of this new American musical talent that he not only programmed the composition on his BSO concerts, but also saw to it that Copland received a commission from the League of Composers for a new piece for one of the ensemble’s programs later that year. Copland based his work for the commission on popular dance idioms of the day, and the jazzy *Music for the Theater* became his first great success when Koussevitzky introduced it in Boston on November 20, 1925.

At the instigation of Koussevitzky, Copland began a piano concerto two months later in which he would appear as soloist. He started composing the score in New York, did most of the work on the piece during the spring and summer while staying at Guéthary, in the Basses Pyrénées, completed it in October at his studio at 123 West 78th Street, and gave the premiere with Koussevitzky and the Boston Symphony on January 28, 1927. Though Copland projected both his own creative personality and the spirit of 1920s America in his *Music for the Theatre* and his Piano Concerto, he soon left behind the idiom of symphonic jazz because of what he called “its limited emotional scope.” There followed a period of composing works in a more abstract manner, after which Copland devised the style that became the hallmark of American music with *El Salón México* in 1936 and *Billy the Kid* two years later.

Copland wrote of his Piano Concerto, “Though played without interruption, the Concerto is really divided into two contrasted parts, which are linked thematically. The first is a slow, lyric section, the second a fast rhythmic one. A short orchestral introduction announces the principal thematic material. The piano enters quietly and improvises around this for a short space, then the principal theme is sung by a flute and clarinet in unison over an accompaniment of muted strings. This main idea recurs twice during the course of the movement — once in the piano with imitations by the woodwind and French horns, and later in triple canon in the strings, mounting to a sonorous climax. A few transitional measures lead directly to the second part which, roughly speaking, is in sonata form without recapitulation. The first theme, announced immediately by the solo piano, is considerably extended and developed before the second idea is introduced by a saxophone. The development, based entirely on these two themes, contains a short piano cadenza presenting difficulties of a rhythmic nature. Before the end, a part of the first movement is recalled. This is followed by a brief coda.”

George Gershwin (1898-1937)
*Rhapsody in Blue* for Piano and Orchestra (1924)
Orchestrated by Ferde Grofé (1892-1972)
Two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two alto saxophones, tenor saxophone, two bassoons, three horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion and strings.

SIDEBAR – BULLET POINTS:

• Gershwin composed the *Rhapsody in Blue* for conductor Paul Whiteman’s “Experiment in Modern Music” concert in New York in February 1924
• Gershwin conceived material for the *Rhapsody* on a train to Boston whose “steely rhythms and rattlety-bang,” he said, “are often stimulating to a composer”
• Conductor Walter Damrosch told Gershwin that he had “made a lady out of jazz”

For George White’s *Scandals of 1922*, the 24-year-old George Gershwin provided something a little bit different — an opera, a brief, somber one-acter called *Blue Monday* (later retitled *135th Street*) incorporating some jazz elements that White cut after only one performance on the grounds that it was too gloomy. *Blue Monday*, however,
impressed the show’s conductor, Paul Whiteman, then gaining a national reputation as the self-styled “King of Jazz” for his adventurous explorations of the new popular music styles with his Palais Royal Orchestra. A year later, Whiteman told Gershwin about his plans for a special program the following February in which he hoped to show some of the ways traditional concert music could be enriched by jazz, and suggested that the young composer provide a piece for piano and jazz orchestra. Gershwin, who was then busy with the final preparations for the upcoming Boston tryout of *Sweet Little Devil* and somewhat unsure about barging into the world of classical music, did not pay much attention to the request until he read in *The New York Times* on New Year’s Day that he was writing a new “symphony” for Whiteman’s program. After a few frantic phone calls, Whiteman finally convinced Gershwin to undertake the project, a work for piano solo (to be played by the composer) and Whiteman’s 22-piece orchestra — and then told him that it had to be finished in less than a month. Themes and ideas for the new piece immediately began to tumble through Gershwin’s head, and late in January, only three weeks after it was begun, the *Rhapsody in Blue* was completed.

The premiere of the *Rhapsody in Blue* — New York, Aeolian Hall, February 12, 1924 — was one of the great nights in American music. Many of the era’s most illustrious musicians attended, critics from far and near assembled to pass judgment, and the glitterati of society and culture graced the event. Gershwin fought down his apprehension over his joint debuts as serious composer and concert pianist, and he and his music had a brilliant success. “A new talent finding its voice,” wrote Olin Downes, music critic for *The New York Times*. Conductor Walter Damrosch told Gershwin that he had “made a lady out of jazz,” and then commissioned him to write the *Concerto in F*. There was critical carping about laxity in the structure of the *Rhapsody in Blue*, but there were none about its vibrant, quintessentially American character or its melodic inspiration, and it became an immediate hit, attaining (and maintaining) a position of popularity almost unmatched by any other work of a native composer.

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