

November 16, 2024

7:30 pm

“Rhapsody in Blue and Another Copland Journey!”

Armed Forces Salute

Arr. Bob Lowden (1920 - 1998)

Piano Concerto in D minor ('Piano Concerto in One Movement')

Florence Price (1887 – 1953)

Michelle Cann, piano

Rhapsody in Blue

George Gershwin (1898 - 1937)

INTERMISSION

Symphony No. 3

Aaron Copland (1900 - 1990)

Molto moderato

Allegro molto

Andantino quasi allegretto

Molto deliberato - (Fanfare) - Allegro risoluto

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“Rhapsody in Blue and Another Copland Journey!”

Armed Forces Salute

Arr. Bob Lowden (b. Camden, New Jersey, July 23, 1920; d. Medford, New Jersey, October 30, 1998)

To honor our veterans of the Armed Forces for Veterans Day, we feature a piece that’s a favorite: *Armed Forces Salute*, arranged by Bob Lowden. This is a wonderful medley of service songs including *The Caisson Song* (Army), *Semper Paratus* (Coast Guard), *The Marines’ Hymn*, *The Air Force Song*, and *Anchors Aweigh* (Navy).

The short melodic tunes are easy to spot at the beginning of the piece, including phrases from *Columbia*, *the Gem of the Ocean*, and *America the Beautiful*. We also hear *When Johnny Comes Marching Home*.

Robert William “Bob” Lowden, an internationally known arranger and composer, was one of the best-known modern-day arrangers for orchestra, bands, and jazz bands. His works encompass professional orchestras, film, and recordings, and he was a major contributor of musical arrangements for America’s college and high school performers. Appropriately, during World War II, he served as a trombonist in the Military Music Chapel of the 322nd United States Army in Fort Dix.



Robert “Bob” Lowden

Piano Concerto in D minor (‘Piano Concerto in One Movement’)

Florence Price (b. Little Rock, Arkansas, April 9, 1887; d. Chicago, Illinois, June 3, 1953)

Michelle Cann, piano

Florence Beatrice Price was a composer, pianist, organist and music teacher. She studied at the New England Conservatory of Music and was active in the music circles of Chicago from 1927 until her death in 1953. She also studied at the Chicago Musical College, the University of Chicago, the Chicago

Teachers College, and the American Conservatory of Music, according to The *Biographical Dictionary of American Music* by Charles Eugene Claghorn. She studied languages and liberal arts subjects as well as music. Price was a piano soloist with the Chicago Symphony under Frederick Stock in 1932, playing her own compositions.

During this time, she worked as an organist for silent film screenings and even composed songs for radio ads. Yet, in 1932, Price submitted compositions for the Wanamaker Foundation Awards. She won first prize with her *Symphony in E minor*, and third for her *Piano Sonata*, earning a \$500 prize. In 1940, Price was inducted into the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers (ASCAP) for her work as a composer.

Price, born in Little Rock, Arkansas, is noted as the first African-American woman to be recognized as a symphonic composer, and the first to have a composition played by a major orchestra. Price composed over 300 works: four symphonies, four concertos, as well as choral works, art songs, chamber music and music for solo instruments. In 2009, a substantial collection of her works and papers was found in her abandoned summer home. Later, in November 2018, the music publisher G. Schirmer announced that it had acquired the exclusive worldwide rights to Florence Price's complete catalog.

Her mother was a music teacher who guided her early musical training. The young student gave her first piano performance at the age of four and had her first composition published at the age of 11. She attended school at a Catholic convent, and in 1901, at age 14, she graduated as valedictorian of her class.

In 1902, after high school, she enrolled in the New England Conservatory of Music with a double major in organ and piano teaching. At the Conservatory, she studied composition and counterpoint with composers George Chadwick and Frederick Converse. Also, while there, she wrote a string trio and symphony. She graduated in 1906 with honors, earning both an artist diploma in organ and a teaching certificate.

Price returned to Arkansas in 1910, where she taught briefly and then moved to Atlanta, Georgia. There, she became the head of the music department of what is now Clark Atlanta University. In 1912, she married Thomas J. Price, a lawyer, and gave up her teaching position moving back to Little Rock, Arkansas.

The Price family decided to leave Arkansas and moved to Chicago, in 1927. There Florence Price began a new and fulfilling period in her composition career, studying composition, orchestration, and organ with the leading teachers in the city, including Arthur Olaf Andersen, Carl Busch, Wesley La Violette, and Leo Sowerby.

In 1964, the Chicago Public Schools opened Florence B. Price Elementary School (also known as Price Lit & Writing Elementary School) in the North Kenwood neighborhood of Chicago in her honor. The school operated from 1964 until the school district decided to phase it out in 2011, which ultimately led to its closing in 2013. A piano owned by Price was housed at the school.



Florence Price

Rhapsody in Blue

George Gershwin (b. Brooklyn, New York, September 26, 1898; Los Angeles, California, July 11, 1937)

Orchestra instrumentation includes solo piano, two flutes, two oboes, three clarinets including a bass clarinet, two bassoons, two alto saxophones, one tenor sax, three horns, three trumpets, three trombones, one tuba, timpani and additional percussion instruments (one suspended cymbal, one snare drum, one bass drum, one tam-tam, one triangle, one glockenspiel, and cymbals), banjo, and strings.

What could be better than hearing a performance of ***Rhapsody in Blue***? Well, hearing more concerts featuring ***Rhapsody in Blue***!!! Soon after the first performance on February 12, 1924, composer and pianist George Gershwin was informed that his new work was going to be published. Quickly, the publication sold several hundred thousand copies, according to the biography, ***George Gershwin: His Journey to Greatness*** by David Ewen. By 1956, Gershwin had become a towering figure throughout the world of music!

It all started when the swing band and orchestra leader Paul Whiteman suggested that his composer friend and colleague, George Gershwin, write a new work in a jazz idiom. Author Walter Rimler writes in ***George Gershwin, an Intimate Portrait***, “Whiteman wanted to demonstrate the malleability of jazz and show that this new type of music was worthy of admittance to the concert hall.”

Gershwin was busy with his latest musical, and gave no definite promise to compose this piece, writes Ewen. “Yet, at a dinner party in which Gershwin was entertaining the guests by improvising at the piano, he suddenly thought up the core of a broad and flowing melody while playing which he instantly realized would become the heart of Whiteman’s new work. That melody was destined to become the basis of the famous slow section of the ***Rhapsody in Blue***.”

After much thought, Gershwin finally chose the form of the rhapsody because its elastic structure allowed him freedom in working out his materials. His brother, Ira, came up with the title of ***Rhapsody in Blue***.

Gershwin began the ***Rhapsody*** in a two-piano version on January 7, 1924 (note how swiftly it was composed, orchestrated, and premiered). Ferde Grofé, Whiteman's arranger, orchestrated the work, and since time was running out before the scheduled premiere, the orchestration was completed in a short period of time. It took Gershwin about three weeks to finish his ***Rhapsody***, and Grofé's orchestration for piano and jazz band was completed a week before the performance, reads ***George Gershwin: His Journey to Greatness***.

"Two years later, Grofé made a new adaptation for piano and symphony orchestra. It must be noted that his colorful jazz orchestration really added to the charm of the piece. About the same time Gershwin provided his own orchestration for the ***Rhapsody in Blue***. It is this version, and not that of Grofé, that has since been performed throughout the world," continues Ewen in ***George Gershwin: His Journey to Greatness***.

Ewen continues, "The premiere was a very special affair and took place at Aeolian Hall in New York City. Many of the city's musicians and artists came to hear this wonderful new work. Among the world-renowned musicians present were John Philip Sousa (band director and composer), Walter Damrosch (Director of the New York Symphony Orchestra), Leopold Godowsky (virtuoso pianist, composer, and teacher), Jascha Heifetz (virtuoso violinist), Fritz Kreisler (violinist and composer), Sergei Rachmaninoff (composer, virtuoso pianist, and conductor), Leopold Stokowski (Director of the Philadelphia Orchestra), Mischa Elman (violinist), Igor Stravinsky (composer and conductor), Victor Herbert (composer, cellist and conductor), Ernest Bloch (composer and first Musical Director of the newly formed Cleveland Institute of Music), and William Mengelberg (Music Director of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra)." Gershwin became a very well-known musician right alongside the attendees.

Describing the concert, author Walter Rimler writes in ***George Gershwin, an Intimate Portrait***, "the audience remained rapt as Gershwin, the slender young pianist/composer walked on stage and then played the new piece with élan and confidence, improvising some passages he had not had time to complete."

"The opening wail in the clarinet seized the attention of the audience! There was a spontaneous ovation at the end of ***Rhapsody in Blue*** – with Gershwin at the keyboard – which lasted several minutes. There was no question about the reaction of the audience," adds Ewen.

The complete program also included the world premiere of Victor Herbert's ***A Suite of Serenades*** and a performance of ***To a Wild Rose*** by Edward MacDowell, an earlier New York City composer (1860-1908).

According to ***George Gershwin: His Journey to Greatness***, over one million copies of the recording, made by Whiteman, on RCA-Victor were sold. In the concert hall, ***Rhapsody in Blue***, has outstripped any other single contemporary work for frequency of performance. It has entered the repertory of every major American symphony orchestra. The work has been heard not only in its original version for piano and orchestra, but also in various transcriptions: for piano solo, two pianos, two pianos and orchestra, eight pianos, and violin and orchestra.

The royalties from the sale of sheet music, records, and other subsidiary rights gathered more than a quarter of a million dollars in a decade. The *Rhapsody* made Gershwin a wealthy man. And it spread his fame around the globe. It also lifted Paul Whiteman to altogether new heights as king of jazz in the theater, on the screen, in nightclubs, and over the radio.

Speaking of “around the globe,” The *BBC Music Magazine* in its February 2024 edition, carries a lengthy review of *Rhapsody in Blue* written by Mervyn Cooke. He relates that, “Gershwin was fast becoming established as a pre-eminent figure in popular songwriting.” Cooke continues, “Yet, Gershwin received a scathing review of the work’s premiere in February 1924 in the *New York Tribune*.” He adds, “Gershwin showed his bold attempt to meld elements drawn from jazz, popular music, and the romantic rhapsodizing of Liszt.”



George Gershwin

INTERMISSION

Symphony No. 3

Aaron Copland (b. New York City, New York, November 14, 1900; d. December 2, 1990, Sleepy Hollow, New York)

Molto moderato

Allegro molto

Andantino quasi allegretto

Molto deliberato - (Fanfare) - Allegro risoluto

Orchestra instrumentation includes: four flutes, piccolo, three oboes, English horn, three clarinets, bass clarinet, three bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, four trumpets, three trombones, one tuba, timpani and additional percussion instruments, two harps, celeste, piano, and strings. The length of the work is 43 minutes.

Brooklyn-born Aaron Copland was the composer who best represented the United States in the public and professional eye, writes Harold C. Schonberg in *The Lives of the Great Composers – Third Edition*. “Copland brought American music into a powerful, modern, very personal kind of speech.”

As a young pianist and aspiring composer, he first studied harmony and composition with Rubin Goldmark (who was a student of Anton Dvořák's at the National Conservatory in New York) and then went to Paris where he studied with Nadia Boulanger at the new School of Music for Americans at Fontainebleau (he was her first American pupil). "Those studies with Boulanger were later described by Copland as the most important musical experiences of his life," continues Schonberg.

Award-winning author Léonie Rosenstiel in her biography *Nadia Boulanger – A Life in Music* writes, "The younger students like Aaron Copland, were captivated by Nadia. They found her motherly, gracious, and infinitely knowledgeable. When the summer session was over, they remained in France to continue their work with her, convinced that their future as composers were inextricably bound up with her method of teaching."

Nadia Boulanger, observed, "Aaron is one of the most balanced persons I know; the most tactful, knowing exactly what to say to each person. He always knows exactly the right thing to say in the right circumstances. He has an extraordinary sense of justness."

Copland was in Paris at a good time and was intellectually stimulated by Stravinsky, Ravel, Prokofiev, Picasso, and Hemingway. He had the brains, determination, and skill to arrive at his goal. At first, he was influenced by Stravinsky, but later he became the leader of the new American school. Elements of the new Copland style crept into the writing of many American composers; he was the most 'modern' of all Americans.

"He was modest about his musical accomplishments," writes Howard Pollack in his biography *Aaron Copland: The Life and Work of an Uncommon Man*. "He exuded calm. He was, in general, extremely discreet and low-keyed. He knows exactly what dignity means."

"As the most articulate spokesman for American music and musicians, he was writer, critic, analyst, conductor, educator, and administrator," continues Schonberg. "In his books and articles, he had for years been explaining new music. As an educator he guided the young students at the Berkshire Music Center in Tanglewood, in western Massachusetts, (also summer home of the Boston Symphony Orchestra), which he headed from its inception in 1940 to 1969. Aaron Copland was the urbane, respected symbol of a half century of American music."

"What emerges basically from his music is a gentle and lovable personality, unashamed of romanticism," reads *The Dictionary of Composers*, edited by Charles Osborne, article authored by Colin Wilson. "His final importance may well be that, together with Gershwin, he is the most typically American composer that his country has so far produced."

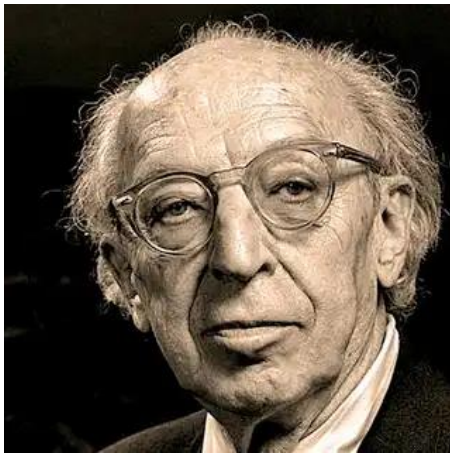
Quoted in Pollack's book, Leonard Bernstein – a close friend of Copland's – acknowledged that Copland's music "can have an extraordinary grandeur, an exquisite delicacy, a prophetic severity, a ferocious rage, a sharp bite, a prickly snap, a mystical suspension, a wounding stab and an agonized howl."

"Copland's symphonic legacy was secured with the *Third Symphony*." Vivian Perlis writes, "In the '40s, American composers were searching for 'The Great American Symphony,' and Copland's big four-movement work filled the bill. Composed for Serge Koussevitzky and the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the jubilant full orchestral forces were a celebration of the end of WWII. Koussevitzky said, 'There is no doubt about it — this is the greatest American symphony. It goes from the heart to the heart.'"

Howard Pollack notes in his biography *Aaron Copland: The Life and Work of an Uncommon Man*, that French composer Darius Milh ud commented about Copland, “What strikes one immediately in Copland’s work is the feeling for the soil of his own country. His recent *Third Symphony* has more grandeur and a deeper lyricism, but the melancholy simplicity of its themes is a direct expression of his own delicate sadness and sensitive heart.”

Howard Pollack writes in his biography *Aaron Copland: The Life and Work of an Uncommon Man*, “Often he used music that he had composed years earlier. He fastidiously preserved sketches and manuscripts, which he recycled from time to time. He had a tendency toward self-borrowing.”

The *Third Symphony* makes little or no use of folk materials, but Copland borrows from himself again by incorporating his triumphant *Fanfare for the Common Man* in the last movement of this grand work.



Aaron Copland