



RHAPSODY IN BLUE TURNS 100



Friday, September 15, 2023
Alpharetta First United Methodist Church



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RHAPSODY IN BLUE TURNS 100

Friday, September 15, 2023

Alpharetta First United Methodist Church
69 N. Main Street, Alpharetta

Grant Gilman, *conductor*
Tiffany Uzoije, *soprano*
Raphael Fleuristal, *baritone*
Mac Frampton, *piano*
Alpharetta Symphony

Please silence all cell phones and other electronic devices.

<i>An American in Paris</i>	George Gershwin (1898-1937)
<i>I Got Rhythm</i> Tiffany Uzoije, <i>soprano</i>	Gershwin
<i>Strike Up the Band</i> Raphael Fleuristal, <i>baritone</i>	Gershwin
Selections from <i>Porgy and Bess</i> Tiffany Uzoije and Raphael Fleuristal, <i>vocalists</i>	Gershwin

INTERMISSION

<i>Embraceable You</i> Mac Frampton, <i>piano</i>	Gershwin
<i>Lullaby</i>	Gershwin
“Someone to Watch Over Me” from <i>Oh, Kay</i> Tiffany Uzoije, <i>soprano</i>	Gershwin
“Let’s Call the Whole Thing Off” from <i>Shall We Dance</i> Tiffany Uzoije and Raphael Fleuristal, <i>vocalists</i>	Gershwin
<i>Rhapsody in Blue</i> Mac Frampton, <i>piano</i>	Gershwin

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ABOUT THE SOLOISTS



Tiffany Uzoije, *soprano*

Soprano Tiffany Uzoije has gained attention as a “tonally and technically impressive performer”. She has been praised for her “authentic and rich tone” as well as her “engaging stage presence”. Ms. Uzoije studied at Belmont University under the training of soprano Jocelyn Fisher. During her time at Belmont, she performed with Nashville Opera and was featured in a recording of *Porgy and Bess* as the Strawberry Woman with the Nashville Symphony conducted by John Mauceri for the Decca label. Ms. Uzoije studied opera and vocal performance at The Peabody Conservatory at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland.

Currently Ms. Uzoije lives in Atlanta, Georgia and regularly appears in productions at Atlanta Opera. She has been featured in roles such as Mrs. Charlton in Jake Heggie’s *Dead Man Walking*, Handmaiden in *Turandot* and most recently, Annie in *Porgy and Bess*. Ms. Uzoije has performed two solo concerts with the Rome Symphony Orchestra in Rome, Georgia. She is featured regularly in recitals and other performances in Georgia.



Raphael Fleuristal, *baritone*

Haitian-American Baritone Raphael Fleuristal, received his vocal Training from the University of South Florida. Raphael has performed throughout the United States and in Europe. Performed with many groups such as the New York Lyric Opera, Opera Tampa, Opera Naples, St. Petersburg Opera Company, to name a few, and recently joined the Atlanta Opera ensemble. He enjoys performing classic musical theater, Jazz classics and all things classical. Recently became an Atlanta area resident, you can find him singing with the Alpharetta First United Methodist church on most Sundays.



Mac Frampton, *piano*

Nothing in Mac Frampton's early life would have suggested that he was destined to become one of the most influential pop pianists of our era. He was born in South Carolina to a Presbyterian pastor who couldn't carry a tune and to a mother who had a beautiful voice but knew nothing about the piano. A lady in the church donated a dilapidated upright piano to the parsonage, and before Mac was six years old he was drawn to that large instrument. So his mother started him with piano lessons. By the time Mac was graduating from high school his reputation as a prolific pianist had already grown. Local TV stations began to feature him on a regular basis. He was being called on to perform for the local service organizations. And then Mac Frampton traveled to Long Beach, California, as a seventeen-year-old to compete in the International Key Club Talent Competition, and to his utter shock his name was called as the winner and superstar Pat Boone was handing him a trophy. Mac never looked back.

In the decades since that life-changing event, Mac has traveled the world, performing well over 4,000 concerts in all 50 states, across Canada, and in Europe. Although, as a Bronze-Medal-Winning contestant in the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition Mac had opened the door to a strictly classical career, he opted to become a pop pianist. He has produced over 20 recordings, several of them selling over 100,000 units. He has appeared on national television programs such as Merv Griffin. He has performed for audiences as large as 50,000 people.

Today Mac brings his wealth of experience to the stage in a program that showcases the great pop standards, Broadway/West End hits, beloved Ragtime, and a sprinkling of Classical favorites like George Gershwin's "Rhapsody In Blue." Throughout it all Mac Frampton has held to a fundamental belief that music is a gift we all share in a language we all understand. It has the power to transport us, to seduce us, and to give us great joy.

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

George Gershwin (1898-1937)

As the Jewish New Year celebration of Rosh HaShanah begins this evening, it is a privilege for your Alpharetta Symphony to celebrate the beloved Jewish-American composer George Gershwin. The second son of Russian-Jewish immigrants, his parents made great sacrifices to escape the anti-Semitic sentiments in their homeland and build a prosperous life in the United States. George was born Jacob Gershwine, named after his grandfather, Jakov Gershowitz, who had labored for the right of free travel and residence within the Russian Empire. Once he began working as a professional musician, he became known as George and altered the spelling of his last name to Gershwin.

Throughout their childhood, George and his older brother Ira, were surrounded by music, frequenting the Yiddish Theater District. At the age of 11, their parent's managed to buy Ira a second-hand upright piano, but it was George who quickly displayed a knack for the instrument (He taught himself songs by watching the keys move on a neighbor's player piano); therefore, it was George who ended up receiving piano lessons. Fortunately, he studied with Charles Hambitzer, the noted pianist who introduced George to classical music. Hambitzer was so impressed by his young pupil that he refused payment for the lessons stating that George, "will make his mark if anybody will. The boy is a genius". At the age of 15, he left school, earning an income by recording rolls for player pianos, playing in nightclubs, and demonstrating sheet music, aka "plugging" songs, on Tin Pan Alley. For 3 years, Gershwin was stuck in "plugger's purgatory" where his creativity was stifled, but his dexterity with transposition and improvisation blossomed. As a teenager, he was known as one of the most talented pianists in New York, working as a rehearsal pianist for various Broadway productions, some of which began incorporating his songs into their shows. In 1919, Al Jolson performed Gershwin's song "Swanee" in the musical Sinbad; the song sold over 2 million copies, rocketing him to a household name and opening doors. That same year, he composed Lullaby as a study in harmony; his first "serious" work. These early experiences were essential building blocks for his unique style that blends jazz and popular music with classical symphonic composition.

Rhapsody in Blue

For the next few years, he contributed several songs to various Broadway productions, including a one-act jazz opera that fared poorly, but led to a kinship with bandleader Paul Whiteman who, like Gershwin, was interested in making jazz respectable. In 1923, Whiteman asked Gershwin to contribute a

piece to his upcoming concert titled “An Experiment in Modern Music”; originally declining the request, Gershwin was finally persuaded with only 5 weeks left before the premier. Frantically writing what would become Rhapsody in Blue, he found inspiration while on a train journey to Boston:

“It was on the train, with its steely rhythms, its rattle-ty bang, that is so often so stimulating to a composer.... I frequently hear music in the very heart of the noise. And there I suddenly heard—and even saw on paper—the complete construction of the rhapsody, from beginning to end. No new themes came to me, but I worked on the thematic material already in my mind and tried to conceive the composition as a whole. I heard it as a sort of musical kaleidoscope of America, of our vast melting pot, of our unduplicated national pep, of our metropolitan madness.”

In three short weeks, Gershwin passed the nearly completed Rhapsody in Blue to Paul Whiteman’s arranger Ferde Grofé to work out the orchestration for Whiteman’s band (he later arranged the piece for pit orchestra in 1926 and full symphonic orchestra in 1942). Due to the tight deadline, Gershwin had to improvise much of the piano solo during the premier, cueing Whiteman with a nod when the orchestra should reenter. The unmistakable opening clarinet solo, was created by Whiteman’s clarinetist Ross Gorman as joke during rehearsals; however, Gershwin loved the whimsical nature, and asked Gorman to perform it that way for the premier, adding as much “wail” as possible. From its syncopated rhythms, jazzy blue notes, to its dreamy melodies, everything about Rhapsody in Blue encapsulates the zeitgeist of the Jazz Age.

An American in Paris

Throughout the mid 1920’s, George visited Paris multiple times. While there, he applied to several composition tutors, only to be turned down by everyone with the worry that proper classical training would ruin his unique jazz-influenced style. Maurice Ravel turned him down saying, “Why become a second-rate Ravel when you’re already a first-rate Gershwin?” Although he was turned down as a pupil, he came home with the inspiration for his second most famous orchestral composition, An American in Paris. Gershwin’s aim was to “portray the impressions of an American visitor in Paris as he strolls about the city, listens to the various street noises, and absorbs the French atmosphere”; he even brought home real French taxi horns to use in the performance! With varied rhythms and harmony based on blues traditions, but melodies that repeat without alteration in a ballet-esque free structure classical form, Gershwin beautifully seams together the classical and jazz styles. Adding to the composition’s lasting popularity, Gene Kelly incorporated the piece into the closing ballet sequence of the 1951 film An American in Paris.

Porgy and Bess

After reading DuBose Heyward's book *Porgy*, Gershwin proposed a collaboration with Dubose, and his wife Dorothy Heyward, to use *Porgy* as the basis for a folk-opera. Gershwin spent the summer of 1934 in Heyward's native Charleston, South Carolina in order to immerse himself in the cultural locale and music. The opera tells the story of a disabled street beggar, Porgy, in the Charleston slums as he attempts to rescue Bess from both her drug dealer, as well as her abusive lover. A bold choice for the time, the Gershwin brothers stipulated the cast be comprised of classically trained African American singers; the lead roles were created by Todd Duncan and Anne Brown, the first African American vocalist admitted to Juilliard. Upon hearing that Gershwin was writing an operatic form of *Porgy*, she wrote to him, asking to sing for him and be considered for a part. Gershwin was so impressed with her singing, that he expanded the role of Bess, telling her, "I want you to know, Miss Brown, that henceforth and forever after, George Gershwin's opera will be known as *Porgy and Bess*."

Even though *Porgy and Bess* is often considered Gershwin's greatest masterpiece, the original production was a commercial failure. Critics had mixed reactions; some were enthusiastic for the daring new opera; others were disappointed by the use of "lowly" popular music in a classical idiom. Over the years, black audiences have shown concern regarding the stereotypes in the work, as well as the misappropriated use of black cultural music. On the other hand, the piece has been praised for launching the careers of several prominent black opera singers. Various productions throughout the years have sought to soften the racial tones, as well as to restore the work to its original operatic form and length (instead of the shortened popular musical theater version that George created for Broadway); only since then has the work been accepted as a true opera, securing its place in American history.

Various Song Collaborations

Throughout his career, George collaborated with his brother Ira on numerous popular songs and Broadway shows. The brothers made a somewhat unique composition team in that George wrote the music first and Ira painstakingly worked out the lyrics to fit, polishing them until they were perfect. The song "Someone to Watch Over Me", popularized in the 1950's by Ella Fitzgerald, was originally written for the successful 1926 musical *Oh, Kay!* In the musical, the main character is vulnerable and alone on stage as she sings to a raggedy doll about the unavailable man with whom she has fallen in love. In Contrast, *Strike Up the Band* from 1930 is a satire about a chocolate manufacturer waging a war on Switzerland, the show's writer described it as "War and Peace for the Three Stooges". The musical is full of silliness as is evident from the interjecting Conga motif. One of their most popular

collaborations, “I Got Rhythm”, was sung by Ethel Merman in the 1930 Broadway musical *Girl Crazy*. The song’s chord progression has since become a standard foundation for many other jazz tunes. In 1936, George relocated to Hollywood to work on movie scores where the brothers collaborated on what would be one of their last projects, “Let’s Call the Whole Thing Off”. The beloved song was composed for the 1937 Hollywood film *Shall We Dance*, starring Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers as they danced on roller skates.

But in 1937, George began complaining of blinding headaches and the smell of burnt rubber. In February he experienced coordination problems and suffered from black outs while performing his *Piano Concerto in F* in San Francisco. Tragically, in July, he collapsed at a friend’s house where he was staying. By the time he was rushed to the hospital, he had slipped into a coma, only then did the doctors realize that he was suffering from a brain tumor. Friends frantically set out to find a pioneer neurosurgeon. The search involved a call to the White House, a Coast Guard vessel, and a chartered cross-continental flight to bring the desired neurosurgeon to Los Angeles; however, with Gershwin in critical condition, the doctors were forced to operate before the neurosurgeon could arrive. George died the next morning at the age of 38.

In a quote, where he spoke about *Rhapsody in Blue*, George Gershwin seems to have summed up his entire compositional oeuvre stating, “There had been so much chatter about the limitations of jazz, not to speak of the manifest misunderstandings of its function. Jazz, they said, had to be in strict time. It had to cling to dance rhythms. I resolved, if possible, to kill that misconception with one sturdy blow...No set plan was in my mind, no structure to which my music would conform. The *Rhapsody*, you see, began as a purpose, not a plan.”

— Missy Mahon

Missy Mahon writes all of the program notes for the Alpharetta Symphony and she has been a part of the Symphony since 2017. Missy has a Master’s degree in Musicology from Temple University and a Bachelor’s degree in Flute Performance from Columbus State University.



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Briana Darden
Susan Hanna
Jane McRae
Laurie Niedfeldt
Qolett Richardson-Jackson
Michael Woodward

Violin II

Benjamin Cork *
Karen Anderson
Rachel Calahan
Leesha Jones
Sponsored by Stephen Jones
Karen Kolpitcke
Cassandra Sutton
Paul Wakim
Rand Wesker

Viola

Kim Stocksdale *
Sponsored by Joel and Kim Stocksdale
Justin Brookins
Crystal Harrison
Janeé Minnick
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Isobel Robinson-Ortiz
Peace Stegall
Amanda Zhang

Cello

Rachel Bender *
Rosalie Camarillo
Damian Mycroft
Alex Paul
Arianna Valentino

Bass

Mark Ribbens **
Vance Meholic

Flute

Kelly Meholic *
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Chris Petre-Baumer
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Michael Faire

Tuba

Brian Faire

Timpani

Dominic Ryder *

Percussion

Bryan Wysocki *
Jordan Benafort
Noah Samuelson

† Concertmaster

* Principal

** Acting

All other musicians listed in alphabetical order after the section principal.