

Program Notes
by Chris Morrison

Reno Chamber Orchestra

“Gershwin: All That Jazz” – May 2 and 3, 2026

Florence Price

Born: April 9, 1887, Little Rock, Arkansas

Died: June 3, 1953, Chicago, Illinois

Florence Beatrice Price was one of the first prominent African-American woman composers, producing some 300 works in most of the main musical genres. Price made her public debut as a pianist at age four, and had her first composition published at eleven. After graduating with honors from the New England Conservatory of Music, she taught briefly in Arkansas before moving to Atlanta to become head of the music department of what is now Clark Atlanta University. After marrying, she moved back to Little Rock. But the racism her family encountered there led them to move to Chicago, where Price continued her studies and composed extensively, becoming part of a community of intellectuals and social activists known as the Chicago Black Renaissance. She befriended fellow composer Margaret Bonds, through whom Price met Langston Hughes and Marian Anderson, both of whom championed Price's music. In 2009, a trove of Price's works and papers were rediscovered in an abandoned house in Illinois. Since then, her music has attracted rapidly increasing international attention.

Andante moderato from String Quartet No. 1 in G major

Composed: 1929

Duration: 7 minutes

Instrumentation: strings

Florence Price wrote only three works for string quartet. Her String Quartet No. 2 in A minor from 1935 and the Five Folksongs in Counterpoint of 1951 were preceded by the String Quartet No. 1 in G major, which Price seems not have completed. Only two movements have come down to us, the second of which, often performed on its own, is a lovely, songful Andante moderato, with a playful central section providing some contrast.

Claude Bolling

Born: April 10, 1930, Cannes, France

Died: December 29, 2020, Garches, Saint-Cloud, France

Pianist, bandleader, composer, and arranger Claude Bolling became world-famous for music that effortlessly combined jazz and classical music styles. He was born in 1930, just as jazz was becoming a sensation in France. A prodigy who by his teens was performing with the likes of Lionel Hampton and Roy Eldridge, Bolling made his first recording at eighteen. He soon also became known as an arranger, working on music for movies and television (he eventually provided scores for over one hundred films) as well as leading his own big band. He became famous for his collaborations, as he composed works for flutist Jean-Pierre Rampal (their recording of Bolling's Suite for Flute and Jazz Piano Trio was on the Billboard classical charts for an amazing 530 consecutive weeks, and won Bolling one of his three

Grammy nominations), as well as cellist Yo-Yo Ma, violinist Pinchas Zukerman, and others. In later years, Bolling worked with performers like violinist Stéphane Grappelli while continuing to lead his own band.

Suite for Chamber Orchestra and Jazz Piano Trio

Composed: 1983

Duration: 48 minutes

Instrumentation: jazz piano trio (piano, bass, drums), 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, strings

Bolling became a familiar name in the United States and all over the world after the 1975 release of the *Suite for Flute and Jazz Piano Trio*, recorded with flutist Jean-Pierre Rampal. The success of that album, which reached number one on the Billboard Classical chart, surprised even Bolling. In *DownBeat* magazine, he recalled, "It was made seriously in one way, but really for fun." In the years that followed, Bolling wrote and recorded many similar suites with violinist Pinchas Zukerman, cellist Yo-Yo Ma, guitarist Alexandre Lagoya, trumpeter Maurice André, and others. There were further collaborations with Rampal as well, including a second *Suite for Flute* in 1987 and, with Rampal conducting this time, the *Suite for Chamber Orchestra and Jazz Piano Trio*, which Rampal and Bolling recorded with the English Chamber Orchestra in the year of the work's composition, 1983.

The opening movement lives up to its *Gracieuse* title, opening with a graceful orchestral theme, with a quasi-Baroque feeling, punctuated by phrases from the cello. The piano trio then extends the melody in a lighthearted manner more jazz than Baroque. After a few minutes, a new, laid back episode is introduced, with the piano taking the lead over a walking bass, the regular beat from the drums, and discreet orchestral backing. The opening theme returns to round out the movement.

An ascending chordal idea from the piano, with a gentle rocking motion, opens the second movement, *Sereine*. The orchestra enters, with the oboe presenting a melancholy theme over the piano and orchestra. The trio then plays a more funky, blues-flavored idea. The orchestra takes up both the piano's ascending theme and the bluesy idea. The trio then takes over again, as the piano plays an ornamental line over the bass and drums. The opening music makes a closing appearance.

The Baroque is evoked once again at the beginning of the third movement, *Enjouée* (Playful), with a chipper theme from the orchestral woodwinds. The piano trio elaborates on that music with jazzy flourishes. Variations on the opening theme take the music in new directions. A short cadenza for the pianist leads to a restatement of the opening theme, with elaboration from the piano, and a lively coda.

The opening section of the lengthy fourth movement, *Aria – Animée*, employs elements familiar from the famous *Air on the G String* from Johann Sebastian Bach's *Orchestral Suite No. 3*, but taking them in a different direction. Delicate colors from the orchestral winds – prominently the flute, perhaps an homage to Rampal – and strings add sweetness to the melodic line. The tempo speeds and the music becomes more animated, as the piano provides embellishments to the orchestra's restatement of the opening idea. A transition, with brilliant flourishes from the piano, leads into the *Animée*, a fugue involving the piano and orchestra. The fugue theme becomes the basis of new, improvisatory episodes for the trio, including solos for each of the trio members.

The *Brillante* finale begins with an energetic, scurrying theme from the orchestral strings. A new, languorous idea is introduced by the orchestra, with the trio providing embellishment. The orchestra

and trio trade off, as arpeggios from the piano and phrases from the woodwinds combine to increase the excitement level. Once again the piano engages in brilliant display. Both the orchestra and trio contribute to the buildup to the work's brilliant conclusion.

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Arturo Márquez

Born: December 20, 1950, Alamos, Mexico

Arturo Márquez became familiar with a variety of Mexican musical styles – which he now incorporates into his own compositions – through his father, a performer of mariachi as well as dance and salon music. As Márquez once put it, “My adolescence was spent listening to Javier Solis, sounds of mariachi, the Beatles, Doors, Carlos Santana and Chopin.” He studied first at the Mexican Music Conservatory and later, on a Fulbright Scholarship, in the United States at the California Institute of the Arts. By the 1990s, his music was being performed around the world. Márquez is probably best-known for his eight pieces titled *Danzón*, which are popular in both concert and ballet presentations. In 2006, he became the first musician to receive “La Medalla De Oro De Bellas Artes de Mexico” (Gold Medal of Fine Arts of Mexico). He currently works at the National University of Mexico, Superior School of Music and the National Center of Research, Documentation and Information of Mexican Music.

Danzón No. 4

Composed: 1996

Duration: 11 minutes

Instrumentation: flute, oboe (English horn), clarinet, bassoon, saxophone, horn, trumpet, trombone, timpani, percussion, piano, strings

The *danzón*, which originated in Cuba and quickly became part of the musical culture in the port city of Veracruz, is a partnered dance, not unlike the tango, that uses syncopation, offbeats, and pauses, during which the dancers hold elegant positions. Márquez has written eight works to date in the form for a variety of ensembles. The most popular has proven to be *Danzón* No. 2, which has become one of the most frequently-performed of all Mexican orchestral works, and is even thought of by many as a second Mexican national anthem.

Danzón No. 4 was commissioned by the International Cervantino Festival for the group La Camerata, which gave the work its premiere, under the direction of Enrique Arturo Diemecke, in Guanajuato on October 27, 1996. What Márquez wrote about *Danzón* No. 2 applies equally well to the No. 4: it “is a tribute to the environment that nourishes the genre. It endeavors to get as close as possible to the dance, to its nostalgic melodies, to its wild rhythms, and although it violates its intimacy, its form and its harmonic language, it is a very personal way of paying my respects and expressing my emotions towards truly popular music.”

Danzón No. 4 starts with the percussion and piano providing the typical syncopated beat of the traditional *danzón*, with rhythms of 4/8 and 5/8 alternating. The sinuous main theme is introduced by the bassoon, extending into its high register. The English horn takes up the theme, with the melodic lead subsequently taken up by the flute and the other winds, including French horn, saxophone, trumpet, clarinet, and trombone. Pizzicato strings join the piano and percussion in providing the rhythmic foundation, as the intensity of the dance builds, then subsides, then builds again, eventually

calming for the work's quiet ending.

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George Gershwin

Born: September 26, 1898, Brooklyn, New York

Died: July 11, 1937, Los Angeles, California

George Gershwin is one of the most beloved American composers of the twentieth century. His songs, orchestral music, Broadway shows, and his most ambitious work, the “folk opera” *Porgy and Bess* (1935), effectively bring together the worlds of classical music, jazz, and popular music – musical realms that Gershwin never felt were mutually exclusive. Gershwin studied piano as a teenager and worked as a song plugger, performing pop songs in public places to help sell sheet music. The first of his own compositions to become a huge hit was the song “Swanee,” written when he was 21 and popularized by Al Jolson. He had several further successes with his own songs and on Broadway, including shows like *Funny Face* (1927), *Strike Up The Band* (1929), *Girl Crazy* (1930), and *Of Thee I Sing!* (1931), the first musical comedy to win the Pulitzer Prize. In 1924, Gershwin composed his first major classical work, *Rhapsody in Blue*; it and *An American in Paris* (1928) have remained staples of the classical repertoire. In 1935, Gershwin moved to Hollywood, composing film scores until his death from a malignant brain tumor.

Porgy and Bess Fantasy (arr. Farrington)

Composed: 1934-35/2018

Duration: 26 minutes

Instrumentation: flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, 2 horns, trumpet, trombone, piano, percussion, strings

From the beginning of his career in music, George Gershwin aimed to, as one writer put it, “bring musical significance to American popular music.” After the great success of his concert work *Rhapsody in Blue* in 1924, Gershwin had a string of popular musical comedies. But Gershwin had long nurtured the desire to write a serious opera. Around 1926 Gershwin read the novel *Porgy* by DuBose Heyward, and immediately wrote Heyward to suggest they collaborate on an operatic adaptation of the book. Gershwin’s many commitments meant that it was not until 1934 that they could pursue their plans. They spent that summer in Charleston, South Carolina, the setting of the novel, allowing Gershwin to absorb the local atmosphere and to experience the music of the Gullahs of James Island, as well as spirituals, songs, and street cries, all of which are evoked (but none quoted directly) in what became the opera *Porgy and Bess*.

Gershwin lavished more time and attention on *Porgy and Bess* than on any of his other works – the composing and orchestrating of the opera took fully twenty months. When it was finally premiered in Boston on September 30, 1935, and taken to New York a couple of weeks later, however, the reception was mixed. It was only after Gershwin’s early, sudden death from a brain tumor that his effort was recognized as one of the great American operas. The action revolves around Charleston’s Catfish Row, once a mansion, now a crowded waterfront tenement. Amid drugs, poverty and violence unfolds the story of the beggar Porgy and his love for the prostitute Bess. *Porgy and Bess* is the source of some of Gershwin’s best known and most moving melodies, including “Summertime,” “Bess, You Is My Woman Now,” “I Got Plenty of Nuttin’” and “It Ain’t Necessarily So.”

Many of those famous tunes are included in Iain Farrington's Porgy and Bess Fantasy for chamber orchestra, about which Farrington's website says:

“Porgy and Bess has inspired countless adaptations, arrangements and re-interpretations since its premiere, the earliest being Gershwin’s own orchestral suite from 1936, Catfish Row. In this suite, Gershwin left out many of the hit songs, preferring to use the lesser-known orchestral material. However, the dramatic narrative of the story was of secondary importance, and many subsequent operatic suites are essentially medleys of the best tunes. This new Fantasy is a symphonic work incorporating many of the songs and orchestral scenes in a continuous one-movement structure. It follows the course of the story in order and attempts to condense the action into a seamless dramatic framework, using only Gershwin’s music. The arrangement for small orchestra brings the music closer to a Broadway pit band, edgier and punchier, as opposed to the gleaming glossy sound of a large symphony orchestra.”