

Notes on the Program by Ken Meltzer

Three Dance Episodes from *On the Town*

Composed in 1944

Premiered on February 3, 1946 in San Francisco, with the composer conducting the San Francisco Symphony

LEONARD BERNSTEIN

Born in Lawrence, Massachusetts; August 25, 1918

Died in New York, NY; October 14, 1990

This work was first performed by the Charlotte Symphony on October 14 & 15, 1994 with Peter McCoppin conducting at the Belk Theater of the Blumenthal Performing Arts Center. The third and most recent performance was on February 23, 1996 with Janna Hymes-Bianchi conducting at the Oasis Shrine Temple.

On November 14, 1943, Leonard Bernstein, then a 25-year-old Assistant Conductor with the New York Philharmonic, made an unexpected and stunning debut. Substituting at the last moment for the ill Bruno Walter, Bernstein led the orchestra in a nationally broadcast concert. American audiences, who had long believed that Europe was the sole birthplace for great conductors, embraced the handsome, dynamic and charismatic Bernstein. He was soon in great demand to conduct the New York Philharmonic, as well as other major orchestras throughout the United States.

During this heady period in Bernstein's life and career, he also found time to compose. On April 18, 1944, at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York, Bernstein conducted the premiere of his ballet, *Fancy Free*. Commissioned by the Ballet Theater, *Fancy Free* was a collaboration by Leonard Bernstein with dancer/choreographer Jerome Robbins. The ballet, set in New York City in 1944, tells the story of a trio of sailors on 24-hour shore leave, in search of romance. *Fancy Free* was an immediate success.

Later that year, Bernstein and Robbins worked on another project with that story line. The Broadway show *On the Town* marked Bernstein's initial formal collaboration with his dear friends Betty Comden and Adolph Green, who wrote the show's book and lyrics. Comden and Green also starred in the show as Claire and Ozzie. After a trial run in Boston, *On the Town* premiered at New York's Adelphi Theater on December 28, 1944, and ran for 463 performances.

For Bernstein, *On the Town* was "a happy and moving show about wartime, in the lightest possible vein, but with a most serious esthetic means." Comden and Green felt the show reflected the "poignancy of young people trying to cram a lifetime of experience into a day."

On February 3, 1946, Bernstein conducted the San Francisco Symphony in the world premiere of *Three Dance Episodes*, an orchestral concert work based upon music from *On the Town*.

On the Town opens in the Brooklyn Navy Yard at 6:00 am. Three sailors—Gabey, Ozzie and Chip, start their 24-hour adventure in New York City. “The Great Lover” (*Allegro pesante*) is a portrait of Gabey and his search for true love. While in Central Park, Gabey laments that for all the glamour and excitement of New York, it is a “lonely town”—“Lonely Town: Pas de Deux” (*Andante—Sostenuto*). All the sailors in New York enjoy their night on the town in the dance, “Times Square: 1944” (*Allegro*).

Duration: c. 11 minutes

The score calls for flute, piccolo, oboe, English horn, clarinet, bass clarinet, 2 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, alto saxophone, timpani, percussion, piano, and strings.

Concierto de Aranjuez

Composed in 1939

Premiered on November 9, 1940 in Barcelona, Spain, with

JOAQUÍN RODRIGO

Born in Sagunto, Spain; November 22, 1901

Died in Madrid, Spain; July 6, 1999

This work was first performed by the Charlotte Symphony on March 13 & 14, 1982 with Leo Driehuis conducting at Dana Auditorium, Queens University of Charlotte. The fourth and most recent performance set was on April 3 & 4, 1998 with Janna Hymes-Bianchi conducting at the Belk Theater of the Blumenthal Performing Arts Center.

In 1927, Spanish composer Joaquín Rodrigo journeyed to Paris, where he studied at the Sorbonne. While there, Rodrigo met the Turkish pianist, Victoria Kamhi. They wed in 1933, and remained married until Victoria’s death in 1997.

It was not until 1940 and the conclusion of the Spanish Civil War that Rodrigo finally returned to Spain; however, Rodrigo’s thoughts were certainly with his beloved homeland. In 1939, he composed his *Concierto de Aranjuez* for guitar and orchestra while living in the Latin Quarter of Paris and “hoping to be able to return to Spain.” Rodrigo dedicated the work to the guitarist Regino Sáinz de la Maza.

In comments reproduced in the liner notes for guitarist Christopher Parkening’s recording of the *Concierto de Aranjuez* (EMI 54665), Rodrigo described his inspiration for the work:

The *Concierto de Aranjuez* evokes a vast array of colorful imagery and feelings. Being a history lover, especially Spanish history, when I created this concerto, I had in mind the courts of Charles IV, a Bourbon king of eighteenth century Spain, whose summer holiday residence was the palace of Aranjuez. Everything about it is awe-inspiring: its lordly palace; its gardens and fountains; its majestic views. Bearing this in mind while listening to the *Concierto de Aranjuez*, one can clearly visualize the fair maidens, noblemen, toreadors and commoners of the kingdom. Each listener is free to seek his or her own interpretation.

The *Concierto de Aranjuez* was Rodrigo's first composition for solo guitar and orchestra. Throughout his life, Rodrigo composed numerous brilliant works for the guitar. As a result, many assumed that Rodrigo was an accomplished guitar virtuoso. However, Rodrigo, who was indeed a fine pianist and violinist, confessed that he couldn't play "four notes in a row" on the guitar!

When Rodrigo composed the *Concierto de Aranjuez*, he "had thought of nothing other than that this concerto should be an especial success, be enjoyed by the public, and be played often." The success of the work must have exceeded even the composer's wildest expectations. Drawing upon a varied array of musical traditions from his country and elsewhere, Rodrigo fashioned, as he described it, "a synthesis of classical and popular, of form and emotion." As a result, Rodrigo created one of the 20th century's most popular concertos for solo instrument and orchestra, an enchanting and captivating work that continues to appeal to the broadest cross-section of music lovers.

The *Concierto de Aranjuez* is in three movements. The following is the composer's analysis of the work.

I. *Allegro con spirito*—"The first movement is animated by a rhythmic spirit and vigor without either of the two themes contained within it interrupting its relentless pace."

II. *Adagio*—"If nostalgia could take form the second movement would be its tightest mold."

"The second movement represents a dialogue between guitar and solo instruments (English horn, bassoon, oboe, horn etc.). There is a constant and persistent beat supporting the entire sound-structure of this movement."

III. *Allegro gentile*—"The third movement recalls a courtly dance in which the combination of duple and triple time maintains a taut tempo right to the closing bar."

Duration: c. 21 minutes

The score calls for woodwinds in pairs, plus piccolo and English horn; 2 horns, 2 trumpets, and strings.

Porgy and Bess: A Symphonic Picture

Composed in 1935/1943

Premiered on February 5, 1943 at Syria Mosque in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, with Fritz Reiner conducting the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra.

GEORGE GERSHWIN

Born in Brooklyn, New York; September 26, 1898

Died in Hollywood, California; July 11, 1937

This work was first performed by the Charlotte Symphony on March 13 & 14, 1982 with Leo Driehuys conducting at Dana Auditorium, Queens University of Charlotte. The fourth and most recent performance set was on April 3 & 4, 1998 with Janna Hymes-Bianchi conducting at the Belk Theater of the Blumenthal Performing Arts Center.

On February 12, 1924, bandleader Paul Whiteman presented a concert at New York's Aeolian Hall. Calling the concert "An Experiment in Modern Music," Whiteman hoped to demonstrate that American jazz "had come to stay and deserved recognition." For the concert, he commissioned a young American composer and pianist by the name of George Gershwin to write a new work for piano and orchestra.

New York Times music critic Olin Downes attended the concert and reported: "Then stepped upon the stage, sheepishly, a lank and dark young man—George Gershwin. He was to play the piano part in the first performance of his *Rhapsody in Blue* for piano and orchestra." The audience, immediately captivated by *Rhapsody in Blue*'s remarkable marriage of jazz and classical elements, erupted with an ovation described by critics as "tumultuous" and "wild and even frantic." From that day, George Gershwin became recognized not only as an important composer of Broadway and popular melodies, but a force to be reckoned with in classical music as well.

Eleven years later, Gershwin attempted a similar kind of jazz-classical fusion with his opera, *Porgy and Bess*. The libretto, by George Gershwin's brother, Ira, and Du Bose Heyward, is based upon the latter's novel, *Porgy*. The work received its premiere in Boston, Massachusetts, on September 30, 1935. After the Boston premiere, *Porgy and Bess* moved to New York, where it opened on October 10, 1935. The opera met with critical resistance and closed after 124 performances, incurring a huge financial loss. Still, Gershwin did not lose faith in what he called his "labor of love." "It is not the few knowing ones whose opinions make any work of art great," Gershwin contended, "it is the judgment of the great mass that finally decides."

Today, George Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* is celebrated for the great masterpiece that it is—a brilliant synthesis of traditional opera, Broadway, jazz, and folk music. *Porgy* has become a mainstay not only of the opera house, but of popular culture as well.

Fritz Reiner, Music Director of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra from 1938-1948, commissioned Robert Russell Bennett to compose an orchestral synthesis of music from *Porgy and Bess*, including such favorites as "Summertime," "I Got Plenty of Nothin'," "Bess, You is My Woman Now," and "It Ain't Necessarily So." Reiner and the

Pittsburgh Symphony gave the first performance of *Porgy and Bess: A Symphonic Picture* on February 5, 1943 and made the world premiere recording two years later.

Duration: c. 24 minutes

The score calls for 2 flutes, piccolo, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, 2 alto saxophones, tenor saxophone, banjo, timpani, percussion, 2 harps, and strings.