

2008-2009 Focus Series

at the Margeson Theater,
Lowndes Shakespeare Center



Program 3

“1900-1925: Rags to Riches” *the birth of jazz and jazz-inspired classics*

Monday, April 20, 2009 • 7:00 PM

Christopher Wilkins, conductor

Artists Quadrille (1858)	Strauss, Johann, Jr. (1825-1899)
Liberty Bell March (1893)	John Philip Sousa (1854-1932)
<i>Golliwogg's Cake-walk</i> (1906)	Claude Debussy, orch. André Caplet (1862-1918)
<i>Sunflower Slow Drag</i> (1902)	Scott Joplin, arr. D.S. Delisle (1868-1917)
<i>The Entertainer</i> (1901)	Scott Joplin, arr. D.S. Delisle
<i>Just a Closer Walk with Thee</i> (c. 1905)	Traditional Spiritual style of Bunk Johnson (ca. 1879-1949)
<i>Jazz Me Blues</i> (1921)	Tom Delaney style of Bix Beiderbecke (1903-1931)
<i>Vi bist du geveyzn far prohibition</i> (c. 1922)	Traditional Klezmer style
<i>Dippermouth Blues</i> (1926)	Joe “King” Oliver (1895-1938) style of King Oliver Band featuring Louis Armstrong

Intermission

<i>Rag-time</i> (1918)	Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971)
<i>L'Enfant et les sortilèges: Foxtrot</i> (1925)	Maurice Ravel arr. Roger Branga (1875-1937)
<i>Little White Samba</i>	Alec Wilder (1907-1980)
<i>Neurotic Goldfish</i>	Alec Wilder
<i>La Création du monde</i> (1923)	Darius Milhaud (1892-1974)

Overture

- I. *The chaos before Creation. Giant deities hold council.*
- II. *The confused mass begins to move. A tree appears, then various animals.*
- III. *The animals join in a dance. Two bodies emerge.*
- IV. *The human pair perform a dance of desire; remaining human beings dance to the point of vertigo.*
- V. *The crowd disappears, African Adam and Eve embrace in a lasting kiss. It is springtime.*

*Steinway is the official piano of the Orlando Philharmonic Orchestra.
AirTran Airways is the official airline of the Orlando Philharmonic Orchestra.*

The biography for Mr. Wilkins appears on page 25.

Program Notes

Notes provided by: David R. Glerum, Music Director – WMFE-FM/NPR, Orlando, Fla. (1990-2009); Music Director – WXXI-FM/NPR, Rochester, N.Y. (1980-1990)

Claude Debussy (1862-1918) – “Golliwogg’s Cakewalk” from *Children’s Corner Suite*:

Claude Debussy’s *Children’s Corner* was written in 1908 as a set of piano pieces and was dedicated to his beloved five-year old daughter, Claude-Emma, whom he affectionately called “Chou-Chou.” The music evokes the wonder and fantasy of childhood with the pieces suggesting the games with dolls and other toys typically played with a century ago by a French girl. The daughter’s English governess provided the titles of the six pieces: “Dr. Gradus ad Parnassum”; “Jimbo’s Lullaby”; “Serenade for the Doll”; “The Snow is Dancing”; “The Little Shepherd”; and “Golliwogg’s Cakewalk.”

As with Robert Schumann’s *Kinderszenen*, Debussy’s *Children’s Corner Suite* is intended as a musical picture of childhood rather than as a simple suite meant only for children to play. “Golliwogg’s Cakewalk” – a description of a golliwog as a grotesque doll or figure – is particularly interesting for its mischievous reference to Wagner. A quotation from *Tristan und Isolde* is worked in to poke fun and is to be played “avec une grande emotion.” Debussy also mixes in his enthusiasm for the American cakewalk and ironically tips the hat to the ragtime music just then making its way across the ocean. The music is a droll depiction of a little doll moving about in disjointed and supple movements, resembling those of jazz dancers.

Scott Joplin (1868-1917) – *The Entertainer*:

What was one of the direct predecessors of jazz? The answer is “ragtime” and Scott Joplin was without question the movement’s greatest composer. Joplin was the son of an ex-slave and was born near the Texas-Louisiana border in Texarkana. From an early age he showed promise, singing in vocal groups and even receiving some classical music training from a local German immigrant. These studies later became evident in Joplin’s mature piano rags where he sought to bring together ragtime and classical music.

Following his mother’s death, at the age of only fourteen Joplin traveled for three years around the Mississippi Valley playing piano for the most part in honky-tonks. He landed in Saint-Louis for eight years before moving for a brief while to Chicago, where he put together a band gigging in saloons and bawdy houses. Joplin also took time to pen his own compositions in the period’s most popular styles. Beginning in 1895, Joplin com- 3

posed music for publication, striking a lucrative deal with the music publisher John Stark. Moving back to St. Louis and then to Sedalia, Missouri, Joplin continued his performing career and rapidly earned a reputation as one of the country's finest players of ragtime music.

In Sedalia, Joplin worked as a pianist at the Maple Leaf Club; its members were Afro-American but the clientele was integrated. In 1899 he issued his first piano rags, among them the wildly popular *Maple Leaf Rag* – a work he brashly predicted would make him “the king of ragtime composers.” Bold a prediction as it was, Joplin was right. The sheet music edition of the *Maple Leaf* was so successful that it sold over a half million copies. It became a national sensation and a defining moment for the nascent genre of ragtime.

The piece ignited a ragtime craze that went on for over a decade. Joplin went on to publish more than forty rags, many of them just as well constructed as his signature composition. Unfortunately, in the years to follow, his imitators outstripped him in popularity and financial success.

Perhaps Joplin's best-known rag is *The Entertainer*, published in 1902, most likely taking its title from advertising used by the Maple Leaf Club in Sedalia, where Joplin was billed as “The Entertainer.” Tin Pan Alley composer Monroe H. Rosenfeld described it this way in a 1903 edition of the *St. Louis Globe Democrat*: “It is a jingling work of a very original character, embracing various strains of a retentive nature which set the foot in spontaneous action and leave an indelible imprint on the tympanum.”

The Entertainer brought ragtime back into the limelight when it reached an enormous audience as the title music for the 1973 Academy Award winning film *The Sting*. The movie starred the irresistible pair of Robert Redford and Paul Newman and featured a score adapted by Marvin Hamlisch. The soundtrack caught the public's imagination and sold over two million copies. Some fifty-seven years after his death, Scott Joplin finally became a household name once again.

Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971) – Rag-time :

Igor Stravinsky is universally considered to be one the greatest and most influential composers of the 20th century. He was a dynamic innovator in a number of styles employing strikingly original harmonies, orchestrations, polytonalities, and rhythms. His styles ranged from Romanticism to Impressionism to Neoclassicism to Serialism to Hollywood and to Jazz. The composer Nicholas Nabokov has written, “Despite his many twists and turns, Stravinsky became the unquestioned leader of Western music [in our time].... Stravinsky and Schoenberg remain the lonely founding fathers of the strangely eccentric and highly anarchic state of modern music.”

4 Stravinsky was not afraid to break with convention and was ever on the

lookout for fresh sounds. He caught wind of a vibrant export from America – *Le Jazz Hot* – and out of curiosity asked the conductor Ernest Ansermet, on tour in America with Diaghilev’s ballet company, to send back to Europe all the jazz scores he could find. Ansermet came through and sent piles of this music in numerous piano reductions and instrumental parts. Full of enthusiasm, Stravinsky wasted no time in copying it all out into full scores. He then set about creating a composite in the form of a concert piece that he called an “essay in jazz portraiture.” Stravinsky said of the resulting *Rag-time* that he “borrowed jazz’s rhythmic style not as played but as written.” The instrumental version was completed in November of 1918 in Morges, Switzerland, just as the armistice was signed at the end of World War I.

The instrumental ensemble Stravinsky called for in *Rag-time* brings together contrasting cultural elements. From his investigation of jazz band scoring came the inclusion of the clarinet, cornet, trombone, percussion and bass. (It is interesting to note that Stravinsky only knew of the new jazz style from manuscripts; he would not actually hear a note of jazz in live performance for another year.) The flute, horn, violins and viola recall the traditional instrumentation of European chamber groups. And blended in to this fascinating hybrid is the exotic Eastern European sound of the cimbalom. *Rag-time* is one of Stravinsky’s most appealing and quirky pieces. In the context of a steady 4/4 meter, the work is filled with the kind of syncopations so characteristic of the early ragtime style. Although Stravinsky probably had no inkling, *Rag-time* coincidentally served as a kind of memorial to the greatest of ragtime composers. It happened that Scott Joplin died in 1918, only a year before *Rag-time* was written.

Alec Wilder (1907-1980) – *Neurotic Goldfish*:

The “Alec Wilder Centennial (1907-2007) Site” at www.alecwilder-centennial.com continues to serve as an indispensable resource in understanding and bringing national attention to the work of Wilder as a composer and his highly original contributions to American music. In it is a superb and hard-to-be-improved-upon biographical synopsis compiled by Gunther Schuller, Robert Levin, Loonis McGlohon, and Judy Bell.

Alec Wilder (February 16, 1907-December 24, 1980) was born Alexander Lafayette Chew Wilder in Rochester, New York. He studied composition and counterpoint privately at the Eastman School of Music, but as a composer was largely self-taught. As a young man, he moved to New York City and made the Algonquin Hotel—that remarkable enclave of American literati and artistic intelligentsia—his permanent home, though he traveled widely and often. Wilder died of lung cancer on Christmas Eve 1980 in Gainesville, Florida—“just in time to keep from becoming

better known," as he might have quipped.

Wilder's music is a unique blend of American musical traditions - among them jazz and the American popular song - and basic "classical" European forms and techniques. As such, it fiercely resists all labeling. Although it often pained Alec that his music was not more widely accepted by either jazz or classical performers, undeterred, he wrote a great deal of music of remarkable originality in many forms: sonatas, suites, concertos, operas, ballets, art songs, woodwind quintets, brass quintets, jazz suites - and hundreds of popular songs.

Many times, his music wasn't jazz enough for the "jazzers," or "highbrow," "classical," or "avante-garde" enough for the classical establishment. In essence, Wilder's music was so unique in its originality that it didn't fit into any of the preordained musical slots and stylistic pigeonholes. His music was never out of vogue because, in effect, it was never in vogue. Its non-stereotypical specialness virtually precluded any widespread acceptance.

Mitch Miller, whom Wilder met at Eastman, and Frank Sinatra were initially responsible for introducing his music to the public. It was Miller who organized the historic recordings of Wilder octets beginning in 1939. Combining elements of classical chamber music, popular melodies and a jazz rhythm section, the octets became popular—and eventually legendary—through these recordings, which preceded by years the much-studied Third Stream movement of the 1950s. Wilder wrote more than 20 octets, giving them whimsical titles such as 'Neurotic Goldfish' (1939), 'It's Silk, Feel It' and 'Jack, This Is My Husband.'

[Excerpted from a biographical synopsis compiled by Gunther Schuller, Robert Levin, Loonis McGlohon, and Judy Bell.]

Darius Milhaud (1892-1974) – *La Création du monde* (The Creation of the World):

Darius Milhaud's much familiar *La Création du monde* was premiered in 1923 as a ballet and has become known as the world's first major concert work to use jazz elements. It can claim this distinction since it preceded George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* by two years. *La Création du monde* turned out to be one of the most powerfully inspired of Milhaud's works, serving both as a European homage to the tenderness and the fierce vitality of African music; and projecting an intensity hardly equaled in any of the sophisticated jazz works of its kind to follow.

It was in London – of all places – in 1920 that Milhaud's receptive mind was initially stimulated by the rhythmic and instrumental subtleties of jazz. Straight from New York, Billy Arnold and his jazz orchestra were playing at the steamy Hammersmith *Palais de Danse*. Seated next to Arnold and his band, a fascinated Milhaud systematically studied the sound and technique of this unique new musical phenomenon. In his autobiography, *Notes*

Without Music, he recalled the music's "extremely subtle use of timbre," its "complex rhythms and "freedom from contrapuntal restraints." The composer was enamored by the alluring sound of the saxophone, was taken by the powerful and sentimental use of the trumpet, by the clarinet screeching in the upper registers, and the implementation of quarter-tones in crescendos on the trombone. Still, Milhaud admitted that its "technique still baffled me."

While on tour of the United States in 1922 - as composer, lecturer and pianist - Milhaud continued his investigation into jazz with forays into hotel lounges and clubs. The press was baffled by the French composer's obsession. "When I arrived in New York," he wrote, "I told the newspaper men interviewing me that European music was being considerably influenced by American music. 'But whose music?' they asked me; 'MacDowell's [Edward] or Carpenter's [John Alden]?' 'Neither the one nor the other,' I answered, 'I mean jazz.'... Milhaud sought out jazz performances with visits to performances given by Leo Reisman's band, which played with "extreme refinement"; and to the famous Paul Whitman Orchestra, notable as "a sort of Rolls-Royce of dance music."

As memorable as all these experiences were, however, Milhaud was to be almost overwhelmed by the Negro jazz music he heard further uptown in Harlem. It was there that his strongest impressions of American jazz were to be made. He gushed: "Harlem had not yet been discovered by the snobs and aesthetes; we were the only white folk there. The music I heard was absolutely different from anything I had ever heard before and was a revelation to me. Against the beat of the drums melodic lines crisscrossed in a breathless pattern of broken and twisted rhythms. A Negress whose grating voice seemed to come from the depths of the centuries sang with despairing pathos and dramatic feeling. This authentic music had its roots in the darkest corners of the Negro soul, the vestigial traces of Africa, no doubt. Its effect on me was so overwhelming that I could not tear myself away.... When I went back to France, I never wearied of playing over and over the Black Swan records I had purchased in a little shop in Harlem."

After returning to France in 1923, Milhaud was given the chance to realize his ideal of an authentic modern jazz work when he was commissioned by the Swedish Ballet of Rolf de Maré to write a ballet on a scenario by Blaise Cendrars, with *décor* by Fernand Léger and choreography by Jean Borlin, based on a primitive African view of the beginnings of earthly life. The critics were not amused or impressed and missed the genius of this early larger-scale masterwork successfully integrating the new sounds of jazz with concert music. Reviewers belittled Milhaud for writing music more at home in the cabaret or dance hall than to the ballet. A Max Chop sniped, "A more brutal accusation of sinning against the spirit of true art is

difficult to find. In our times of prevention to animals, this sort of thing should really be prevented.” But it was Milhaud who had the last laugh, pointing out with gleeful vindication, “these selfsame critics were discussing the philosophy of jazz and learnedly demonstrating that *La Creation* was the best of my works.”

Although the Milhaud’s music has long outlasted the ballet, it is nonetheless instructive to have a picture of the scenario. Robert Lawrence offers this synopsis of *La Création du monde*: “The chaos of pre-Creation is seen on a darkened stage as the curtain rises. Three aboriginal deities move among a tangled mass of bodies, muttering incantations. The mass responds to their charms. First a tree rises and lets fall one of its seeds, from which rises still another tree. Now animals appear, every one of them springing – as in the process of evolution – from a more primitive predecessor. Finally, as the three deities pronounce new spells, Man and Woman emerge. They perform a dance of desire, excited by the presence of primeval sorcerers and witch doctors. At last the frenzy of the celebrants subsides; the dancers disperse; and Man and Woman are left alone in a symbolic embrace which assures the fertility of human life.”

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Christopher Wilkins, Conductor



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