

# Season 2019-2020

Thursday, March 5, at 7:30

Friday, March 6, at 2:00

Saturday, March 7, at 8:00

## The Philadelphia Orchestra

**Marin Alsop** Conductor

**Angel Blue** Soprano

**Lester Lynch** Baritone

**Chauncey Packer** Tenor

**Kevin Short** Bass-baritone

**Morgan State University Choir**

**Eric Conway** Director

**Frank** *Escaramuza*

*First Philadelphia Orchestra performances*

**Traditional/arr. Williams** "Done Made My Vow  
to the Lord"

**Montgomery** *Coincident Dances*

*First Philadelphia Orchestra performances*

**Intermission**

**Gershwin** Highlights from *Porgy and Bess*  
Act I  
Introduction  
Scene 1: Catfish Row, a summer evening  
Scene 2: Serena's Room, the following night  
Act II  
Scene 1: Catfish Row, a month later  
Scene 2: Kittwah Island, evening, the same  
day  
Scene 3: Catfish Row, before dawn, a week  
later  
Act III  
Scene 1: Catfish Row, the next night  
Scene 2: Catfish Row, the next afternoon  
Scene 3: Catfish Row, a week later

This program runs approximately 2 hours.

*Porgy and Bess is being recorded live for future release on Pentatone. We ask for your cooperation in making this project a success. Please make every effort to minimize noise during the concert.*

These concerts are sponsored by **Elaine W. Camarda and A. Morris Williams, Jr.** and **Accordant Advisors.**

These concerts are part of The Philadelphia Orchestra's WomenNOW celebration.

Supertitles by Michael Chadwick

Philadelphia Orchestra concerts are broadcast on WRTI 90.1 FM on Sunday afternoons at 1 PM, and are repeated on Monday evenings at 7 PM on WRTI HD 2. Visit [www.wrti.org](http://www.wrti.org) to listen live or for more details.

# The Philadelphia Orchestra

Jessica Griffin



The Philadelphia Orchestra is one of the world's preeminent orchestras. It strives to share the transformative power of music with the widest possible audience, and to create joy, connection, and excitement through music in the Philadelphia region, across the country, and around the world. Through innovative programming, robust educational initiatives, and an ongoing commitment to the communities that it serves, the ensemble is on a path to create an expansive future for classical music, and to further the place of the arts in an open and democratic society.

Yannick Nézet-Séguin is now in his eighth season as the eighth music director of The Philadelphia Orchestra. His connection to the ensemble's musicians has been praised by both concertgoers and critics, and he is embraced by the musicians of the Orchestra, audiences, and the community.

*Your* Philadelphia Orchestra takes great pride in its hometown, performing for the people of Philadelphia year-round, from Verizon Hall to

community centers, the Mann Center to Penn's Landing, classrooms to hospitals, and over the airwaves and online. The Orchestra continues to discover new and inventive ways to nurture its relationship with loyal patrons.

The Philadelphia Orchestra continues the tradition of educational and community engagement for listeners of all ages. It launched its **HEAR** initiative in 2016 to become a major force for good in every community that it serves. **HEAR** is a portfolio of integrated initiatives that promotes **H**health, champions music **E**ducation, enables broad **A**ccess to Orchestra performances, and maximizes impact through **R**esearch. The Orchestra's award-winning education and community initiatives engage over 50,000 students, families, and community members through programs such as Play!Ns, side-by-sides, PopUP concerts, Free Neighborhood Concerts, School Concerts, sensory-friendly concerts, the School Partnership Program and School Ensemble Program, and All City Orchestra Fellowships.

Through concerts, tours, residencies, and recordings, the Orchestra is a global ambassador. It performs annually at Carnegie Hall, the Saratoga Performing Arts Center, and the Bravo! Vail Music Festival. The Orchestra also has a rich history of touring, having first performed outside Philadelphia in the earliest days of its founding. It was the first American orchestra to perform in the People's Republic of China in 1973, launching a now-five-decade commitment of people-to-people exchange.

The Orchestra also makes live recordings available on popular digital music services and as part of the Orchestra on Demand section of its website. Under Yannick's leadership, the Orchestra returned to recording, with seven celebrated CDs on the prestigious Deutsche Grammophon label. The Orchestra also reaches thousands of radio listeners with weekly broadcasts on WRTI-FM and SiriusXM. For more information, please visit [www.philorch.org](http://www.philorch.org).

# Conductor



Adriane White

Conductor **Marin Alsop** is recognized internationally for her innovative approach to programming and audience development, her deep commitment to education, and advocating for music's importance in the world. This season she became chief conductor of the ORF Vienna Radio Symphony, performing in its main series at the Vienna Konzerthaus and Musikverein, recording, broadcasting, and touring nationally and internationally. Her first season coincides with the orchestra's 50th anniversary and is emphasizing women in classical music. Her outstanding success as music director of the Baltimore Symphony since 2007 has resulted in two extensions in her tenure, until 2021. She led that ensemble on its first European tour in 13 years and has created several bold initiatives, including "OrchKids" for the city's most disadvantaged young people. At the end of 2019, following a seven-year tenure as music director, she became conductor of honor of the São Paulo Symphony.

Ms. Alsop made her Philadelphia Orchestra debut in 1990. She regularly conducts the world's major symphonic ensembles, including the Cleveland, Gewandhaus, Royal Concertgebouw, and Budapest Festival orchestras; the Chicago Symphony; the La Scala Philharmonic; and the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment. She has relationships with the London Symphony and the London Philharmonic, where she also returns this season. In addition to these current performances, highlights of the 2019–20 season include appearances with the Orchestre de Paris and the Danish National Symphony. She leads multiple projects each year at the Ravinia Festival, of which she was just named chief conductor and curator, effective this summer.

Ms. Alsop's extensive discography has led to multiple *Gramophone* awards and includes cycles of works by Brahms with the London Philharmonic and Dvořák with the Baltimore Symphony on the Naxos label. For 25 years she was music director of California's Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music. She is the only conductor to receive the MacArthur Fellowship and in 2019 was awarded the Crystal Award from the World Economic Forum. Her conducting career launched in 1989 when she was the first woman to be awarded Tanglewood's Koussevitzky Conducting Prize and began studying with Leonard Bernstein.

# Soloists

Sonya Garza



Soprano **Angel Blue** opened the Metropolitan Opera's 2019–20 season as Bess in a new production of Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*. These performances followed her internationally praised French opera and role debuts in the title role of Puccini's *Tosca* at the Aix-en-Provence Festival in July 2019. Earlier last season she made her debut at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, as Violetta in Verdi's *La traviata*, after which she returned to the Teatro alla Scala in Milan in the same role. She makes her Philadelphia Orchestra debut with these current performances and returns in April for Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 with Yannick Nézet-Séguin. Other highlights of the current season include her debut at the Hamburg State Opera as Mimi in Puccini's *La bohème*, a role she first sang at the English National Opera in 2014 and has since sung for her debuts at the Palau de les Arts Reina Sofia in Valencia in 2015, the Vienna State Opera in 2016, and the Metropolitan Opera in 2017. Dedicated to the support of inner-city youth, she is the founder of the Sylvia's Kids Foundation, an organization that helps America's teenagers continue their studies after high school. Learn more at [www.sylviaskids.org](http://www.sylviaskids.org).

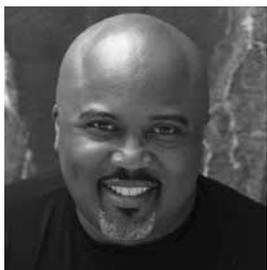


Baritone **Lester Lynch** made his Philadelphia Orchestra debut in 1997 at the Mann Center and makes his subscription debut with these performances. He has performed at the Teatro alla Scala, Covent Garden, San Francisco Opera, the Bregenz Festspielhaus, and the Lyric Opera of Chicago, along with numerous appearances at Dresden's Semper Opera and Seattle Opera, among others. He has appeared with the world's finest orchestras including the Berlin and New York philharmonics, the National and Houston symphonies, and the Cleveland and American Symphony orchestras. He has worked with such conductors as Simon Rattle, Andrew Davis, Plácido Domingo, and Edward Gardner. A champion of living composers, Mr. Lynch has sung roles in Gordon Getty's opera *Plump Jack* and his cantata *Joan and the Bells*. His debut solo album, *On My Journey Now*, a collection of hymns and spirituals, was released in 2017. He can also be heard in Puccini's *Il tabarro* and *Madame Butterfly*, Mascagni's *Cavalleria rusticana*, and Verdi's *Otello*. Upcoming performances include the title roles in Verdi's *Simon Boccanegra* with Washington Concert Opera and Verdi's *Macbeth* with the Florentine Opera.

# Soloists



Tenor **Chauncey Packer**, who hails from southern Alabama, makes his Philadelphia Orchestra debut with these performances. Other highlights of his 2019–20 season include his Metropolitan Opera debut in the roles of Robbins, Crabman, and Sportin' Life in Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*; Mozart's Requiem with the Colour of Music Festival; concerts with the Saint-Georges International Music Festival and the Harrisburg Symphony; Sportin' Life with New York Harlem Theatre's *Porgy and Bess* at the Teatro Regio in Turin, Italy, and on tour throughout Europe; Pinkerton in Puccini's *Madame Butterfly* at Soo Theatre Project in Michigan; and Cavaradossi in Puccini's *Tosca* and Jo the Loiterer in Virgil Thomson's *The Mother of Us All*, both with Chautauqua Opera. Mr. Packer has performed with the Nashville, Mobile, Pensacola, Grand Rapids, Des Moines, and New Orleans operas and has sung roles including Rodolfo in Puccini's *La bohème*, Alfredo in Verdi's *La traviata*, Pong in Puccini's *Turandot*, and the title role in Massenet's *Werther*. He performed the role of Sportin' Life for his 2008 debut with the Opera Comique in Paris, his 2016 debut at the Teatro alla Scala, as well as with Tulsa Opera, Atlanta Opera, Opera Birmingham, and San Francisco Opera.



Bass-baritone **Kevin Short** made his Philadelphia Orchestra debut in 1996 and makes his subscription debut with these performances; he returns in May for Strauss's *Elektra*. Additional highlights this season include Porgy in Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* and Doctor Grenvil in Verdi's *La traviata* at the Metropolitan Opera; Don Pizarro in Beethoven's *Fidelio* at the Beethoven Easter Festival in Warsaw; the Speaker in Mozart's *The Magic Flute* with Washington National Opera; and Castor in the world premiere of Greg Spears's *Castor and Patience* with Cincinnati Opera. He has appeared with the Opera Orchestra of New York; the Cleveland Orchestra; the San Francisco, Boston, St. Louis, Detroit, Baltimore, and RAI symphonies; and the New Japan Philharmonic. He received his training at Morgan State University, the Curtis Institute of Music, and the Juilliard School, and he was a winner of the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, the International Verdian Voices Competition, the Bruce Yarnell Competition for Basses and Baritones, and the Opera America Competition. His solo aria album with Lawrence Foster and the Orchestre Philharmonique de Marseille, *Mephistopheles and Other Bad Guys*, was released on Pentatone in 2018.

# Choir



The choral forces of the critically acclaimed **Morgan State University Choir** include the University Choir, which is over 120 voices strong, and a smaller ensemble, the Morgan Singers. While classical, gospel, and contemporary popular music comprise its repertoire, the Choir is noted for an emphasis on preserving the heritage of the spiritual, especially in the historic practices of performance. The Choir has performed for audiences throughout the U.S. and around the world, and made its Philadelphia Orchestra debut in 1992. Performance highlights have included singing with the Orchestra of St. Luke's and soprano Jessye Norman in Carnegie Hall's One Hundredth Birthday Tribute to Marian Anderson; recording Wynton Marsalis's *All Rise* with the Los Angeles Philharmonic and the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra; and, at the request of First Lady Michelle Obama, singing at the White House for a nationally televised concert accompanying gospel music artists Aretha Franklin, Shirley Caesar, and Tamela Mann. In 2016 the Choir sang in a semi-staged performance of Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* with the Baltimore Symphony and Marin Alsop. The Choir is under the direction of Dr. Eric Conway.

# Framing the Program

## Parallel Events

### 1934

#### Gershwin

*Porgy and Bess*

#### Music

Hindemith

*Mathis der Maler*

#### Literature

Graves

*I, Claudius*

#### Art

Hopper

*East Wind Over*

*Weehawken*

#### History

John Dillinger

shot

The three American composers on this program have been inspired in various ways to mix different musical styles and traditions of either their heritage or surroundings to create innovative works.

Gabriela Lena Frank is currently The Philadelphia Orchestra's composer-in-residence and curator of WomenNOW, a programming initiative aimed at increasing the presence of women in classical music. She calls upon the Peruvian culture of her mother in the thrilling *Escaramuza* (skirmish in Spanish). The work is scored for strings, percussion, harp, and piano and draws from dance music of communities in the Andes Mountains.

In *Coincident Dances* Jessie Montgomery looks to the diverse sights, sounds, and activities of the Lower East Side neighborhood in Manhattan where she grew up. She juxtaposes elements of jazz, pop, and a range of ethnic music with her classical training for a piece in which she says the "orchestra takes on the role of the DJ of a multicultural dance track."

The concert concludes with highlights from George Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*. Gershwin won his first fame with popular Tin Pan Alley songs that led to a brilliant career on Broadway. But he, too, sought to combine jazz, popular, folk, and classical styles in pieces like *Rhapsody in Blue*, the Concerto in F, and *An American in Paris*. Later in his career he wrote his great opera after immersing himself in African-American life and culture in Charleston, South Carolina, to tell a story of oppression, struggle, love, and hope.

The Philadelphia Orchestra is the only orchestra in the world with three weekly broadcasts on SiriusXM's *Symphony Hall*, Channel 76, on Mondays at 7 PM, Thursdays at 12 AM, and Saturdays at 4 PM.

# The Music

## *Escaramuza*

Marrah Tauger



**Gabriela Lena Frank**  
**Born in Berkeley, California,**  
**September 26, 1972**  
**Now living in Boonville,**  
**California**

Western tradition and Andean culture have both helped form Gabriela Lena Frank's musical foundation. As a youth, the Berkeley-born composer and pianist studied Bach's keyboard works ("but without a lot of the baggage," as she has said). At the same time she was impressed by the music, art, and literature of the Latin-American artists who were settling in the Bay Area during her formative years—many arriving as refugees from Chile, Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Peru.

**Connected to Cultural Roots** Frank had long been drawn to the traditions, legends, and mythology of Andean culture. Her father is of Lithuanian/Jewish heritage but her mother is of Peruvian-Chinese descent. A gifted pianist from an early age, she earned bachelor's and master's degrees at Rice University (where she studied piano with Jeanne Kierman Fischer and composition with Sam Jones). She later earned a D.M.A. in composition at the University of Michigan, where she worked with William Albright, William Bolcom, Leslie Bassett, and Michael Daugherty.

An admirer of both Bartók and Ginastera, Frank embraced the former's ethnological impulse and the latter's assimilation of Latin-American rhythms and melodic structures. During her first trip to her mother's native Peru in the 1990s, Frank felt an immediate sense of connection. In subsequent travels, though, she became frustrated in trying to untangle her cultural roots.

"I thought that ... once I could uncover the Inca identity, I would know where I came from," she told Frank J. Oteri in *NewMusicBox*. "I didn't realize that the Incas themselves were a conduit. We've always been multicultural, we've always been migrating, and comfortable with that. ... Once I figured that out, it gave me freedom. I felt like it was okay for me to put a spin on this music."

Frank has received commissions from Yo-Yo Ma, Dawn Upshaw, the King's Singers, the Kronos Quartet, the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, Carnegie Hall, and the orchestras of Philadelphia, Chicago, Boston, Atlanta, Cleveland, San Francisco, and Los Angeles, among others. She has received a Guggenheim Fellowship and a USA Artist Fellowship, and her chamber work *Inca Dances* won

*Escaramuza* was composed in 2010.

These are the first Philadelphia Orchestra performances of the piece.

The composer scored the work for timpani, percussion (bass drum, castanets, claves, contra snare drum, crash cymbals, marimbas, medium nipple gong, roto tom, slapstick, small cymbal, suspended cymbal, tambourine, triangles), harp, piano, and strings.

The piece runs approximately nine minutes in performance.

a 2009 Latin Grammy Award. Her music has been the subject of books and broadcasts, including Aric Hartvig's 2015 documentary *Música Mestiza*, about a chamber ensemble Frank formed at the University of Michigan combining classical instruments with Andean panpipes, which was nominated for an Emmy Award.

**Stories in Music** "There's usually a story line behind my music," Frank has said, "a scenario or character." This is seen in such works as *La Llorona* (2007), which recounts the legend of the weeping mother whose ghost haunts the living. *Apu* for orchestra (2017) tells of an Andean mountain-spirit that watches over weary travelers. In the spring of 2021, Fort Worth Opera presents Frank's first opera, *The Last Dream of Frida and Diego*, on a libretto by Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Nilo Cruz.

Frank has written nearly 100 compositions, including more than two dozen for orchestra or band (including concertos), a wide array of choral and chamber works (many featuring indigenous instruments), and solo keyboard works. "With each new piece, Frank becomes a more exciting and necessary voice," wrote Mark Swed in the *Los Angeles Times* of the *New Andean Songs* for orchestra. She has held residencies at Vanderbilt University, the Pensacola Orchestra, and for the Orchestra of St. Luke's Music in Color series. As composer-in-residence for The Philadelphia Orchestra (through 2021), she assists Music Director Yannick Nézet-Séguin and Orchestra staff in steering WomenNOW, a programming initiative aimed at increasing the presence of women in classical music. In 2017 she formed the Gabriela Lena Frank Creative Academy of Music in Boonville, California—to help identify commissions, residencies, and mentorships for composers from diverse backgrounds.

**A Closer Look** *Escaramuza* was commissioned by the Huntsville Symphony Orchestra Guild and first performed in September 2010 under the direction of Carlos Miguel Prieto. Scored for strings, percussion, harp, and piano, it is a nine-minute romp of sparkle and drive that begins with a mysterious bass drum and finally fades into pianissimo oblivion. The composer has written the following about the piece:

*Escaramuza*, which signifies "skirmish" in the Spanish language, is inspired by the *kachampa* music of Andean Peru. Celebrating the pre-Hispanic Inca warrior, the *kachampa* dance is executed by athletic men who convey a triumphant, even joyful,

spirit. Inspired by the *kachampa* dances done with fast-snapping ropes that I've witnessed in Peru, especially in Paucartambo during the Virgen de la Carmen Festival, I've created a brightly chiseled romp in an asymmetrical 7/8 rhythm that is launched after an extended bass drum solo. Through most of *Escaramuza*, no section of the ensemble is allowed to rest for long, maintaining the high energy typical of *kachampas*.

—Paul J. Horsley

# The Music

## *Coincident Dances*

Jiyang Chen



**Jessie Montgomery**  
**Born December 8, 1981, in**  
**New York City**  
**Now living there**

Born to a musician father and musical theater artist and playwright mother, Jessie Montgomery has achieved a multi-faceted career as composer, violinist, educator, and advocate. As a violinist, she was a founding member of the acclaimed PUBLIQuartet, a violinist with the New York-based Catalyst Quartet, and a collaborator with Yo-Yo Ma's Silk Road Ensemble. She serves as composer-in-residence for Sphinx Virtuosi, the flagship touring ensemble of the Detroit-based Sphinx Organization, dedicated to transforming lives through the power of diversity in the arts. Montgomery has won numerous grants and awards, including the ASCAP Foundation's Leonard Bernstein Award, as well as from Chamber Music America and the American Composers Orchestra. The New York Philharmonic selected her as a featured composer for its Project 19, an initiative to commission 19 works by women composers in honor of the centennial of the 19th Amendment granting women equal voting rights. Educated at the Juilliard School and New York University, Montgomery is currently a graduate fellow in music composition at Princeton University.

Montgomery's recent works include *Banner*, commissioned to honor the 200th anniversary of the U.S. national anthem; reviews commented that she "daringly transforms the anthem, folding it into a teaming score ... to create a musical melting pot." She has been commissioned by Washington's Cathedral Choral Society and the Cincinnati May Festival for a choral work also in commemoration of the 19th Amendment.

Jessie Montgomery composed *Coincident Dances* in 2017.

*These are the first Philadelphia Orchestra performances of the work, and the first time the Orchestra has played anything by the composer.*

*The score calls for two flutes (fl doubling piccolo), two oboes, two clarinets (fl doubling bass clarinet), two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (bass drum, caxixi, cowbell, hi-hat, shaker, snare drum, suspended cymbal, tambourine, timbales, tomtoms, triangle, woodblock, xylophone), and strings.*

*Performance time is approximately 12 minutes.*

*I Have Something to Say*, for chorus, children's choir, and orchestra, will premiere at Washington's National Cathedral later this month. *Coincident Dances* was commissioned by the Chicago Sinfonietta and was premiered September 16, 2017, in Naperville, Illinois.

**Music as a “Meeting Place”** A native New Yorker, Montgomery was exposed to the myriad of diverse sights, sounds, and socio-cultural activities of her Lower East Side neighborhood from an early age. Her father owned a music studio, a mainstay of the neighborhood and hub for musicians of all genres, and her parents regularly took her to rallies and activities celebrating and supporting the social and artistic movements of the time. It is these unique experiences, combined with her musical training, that have enabled Montgomery to imagine music as a “meeting place at which all people can converse about their unique differences and common stories.”

Classically trained on the violin, Montgomery also finds creative inspiration in the jazz, pop, and indie rock music of her youth, and her music interweaves classical genres with elements of vernacular music, improvisation, language, and social justice. More recently, she has found herself drawn to the idea of pairing or fusing seemingly opposite musical worlds, noting that “the world seems to need more unity, harmony, and solidarity than ever in my lifetime.”

**A Closer Look** Inspired by the sounds found in New York's various cultures, *Coincident Dances* captures the frenetic energy and multicultural aural palette one hears even in a short walk through a New York City neighborhood. As Montgomery describes, the work is a “fusion of several sound-worlds: English consort, samba, mbira dance music from Zimbabwe, swing, and techno. My reason for choosing these styles sometimes stemmed from an actual experience of accidentally hearing a pair simultaneously, which happens most days of the week walking down the streets of New York, or one time when I heard a parked car playing Latin jazz while I had rhythm and blues in my headphones. Some of the pairings are merely experiments. Working in this mode, the orchestra takes on the role of the DJ of a multicultural dance track.”

*Coincident Dances* is scored for full orchestra with a wide range of percussion instruments, including cowbell, African caxixi, and a variety of drums. The piece opens with a triplet rhythm solo from the basses, answered by melodic fragments from winds and cellos. Driving syncopated rhythms, punctuated by percussive effects,

propel the music forward. Drawing on her strong interest in West-African music, Montgomery incorporated into the orchestral palette a melodic Ghanaian dance rhythm, heard first from the flutes and then from the accompanying percussion. New layers stack, meld with, transform, and split apart from other layers, while quiet moments interrupt with passionately played solos, and ostinato rhythms played by the brass keep the piece well grounded. The multilayered orchestral texture grows more complex as a city street would on a busy day, with energetic wind instrumentation reflecting the comfort and familiarity of neighborhood people and places. A comingling of varied dance forms, sometimes played simultaneously, *Coincident Dances* is a musical representation of a community coming together.

—Nancy Plum

# The Music

## Selections from *Porgy and Bess*



**George Gershwin**  
**Born in Brooklyn,**  
**September 26, 1898**  
**Died in Hollywood, July 11,**  
**1937**

Despite his extraordinary success as Tin Pan Alley's most brilliant composer of the 1920s, George Gershwin found himself continually struggling for acceptance as a "serious" composer. By 1930 his stature as one of America's greatest songwriters had been well-established through such Broadway hits as *Lady, Be Good* (1924), *Oh, Kay!* (1926), and *Strike Up the Band* (1927). Just as important, though, he had tasted success in more conventional forms: With *Rhapsody in Blue* (1924) and the *Concerto in F* (1925), he had virtually given birth to a new genre, the jazz concerto.

These latter compositions, however, were criticized severely by arbiters of highbrow musical taste, largely because of their use of jazz idioms. It was not until recently, in fact, that Gershwin's art came to be accepted as equal to that of the more traditional composers of his day (Aaron Copland, Roger Sessions, and Virgil Thomson, to name a few). Nevertheless throughout his life Gershwin remained true to himself, despite the fact that his musical credentials were continually being called into question—a nagging situation that caused him more than once to seek out advanced formal training in counterpoint and orchestration.

**A Synthesis of Styles and Elements** *Porgy and Bess*, which the composer called a “folk opera,” would become the most emphatic expression of Gershwin’s unique blend of jazz with traditional styles. It has become an American classic partly for the success with which it synthesized a wide range of musical elements (blues, aria, recitative, traditional counterpoint) that had until that time been viewed as essentially irreconcilable. Composed from 1933 to 1935 and first performed in New York’s Alvin Theatre on October 10, 1935, the work was truly an opera in the sense that it was sung throughout, with vocal recitative in place of the spoken dialogue that was more typical of Broadway musicals.

But more important, its musical texture was far more ambitious than anything Gershwin had previously attempted. Not only did the opera contain some of the most memorable songs ever written by an American, but its orchestral fabric was full of the complicated felicities of grand opera such as leitmotifs (characteristic themes that reappear throughout) and counterpoint. There were even moments in which the composer employed the methods of Arnold Schoenberg, and it is at these points that the score most closely resembles that of Alban Berg’s *Wozzeck*, whose U.S. premiere (in Philadelphia, under Leopold Stokowski’s baton) Gershwin had attended while completing the music for *Porgy and Bess*.

**First-Hand Experience** It was in the fall of 1926 that Gershwin had come upon Dubose Heyward’s novel *Porgy*, which had been published the year before. Recognizing the work’s potential for the musical stage, Gershwin immediately wrote to Heyward proposing a collaboration; it took nearly 10 years before the musical *Porgy* would come into being, and in the meantime Dubose and Dorothy Heyward turned the novel into a highly successful Broadway play, which opened in 1927. Not until 1933 was Gershwin finally able to begin serious work on the opera, much of the music for which was forged during the summer of 1934. In July and August of that year, Heyward and the Gershwins (George and his brother Ira) spent time on the barrier islands off the coast of Charleston, South Carolina, living among, and making music with, the region’s black population. While the extent to which this experience could have engendered an authentic understanding of the lives of African Americans in the south is subject to debate, Gershwin seemed to have absorbed this rich heritage with a relatively unprejudiced mind, and his affection for the people and their music was

genuine. It was the moment at which the love of blues and jazz that he had discovered in his teens became an essential part of his mature artistic personality.

*Porgy and Bess* draws its use of dialect directly from Heyward's novel and play, and although it might sound oddly and uncomfortably dated to contemporary listeners, it grew from the spirit of an era in which artists and intellectuals were seeking in earnest to explore and better understand the various indigenous peoples of the nation. Gershwin's use of the word "folk" in naming his opera was significant, for on one very important level he felt that he was re-creating the art of "the people."

**A Uniquely American Work** Here one must attempt to view *Porgy and Bess* for what it is, and not criticize it for what it is not. If it seems unfortunate to us that the most prominent African-American opera to date grew from the collaboration of a white novelist and a white composer, one should not overlook the genuine human core of the story, which remains fresh and universal. There is something extraordinarily contemporary, uniquely American even, about this story of the love between two people functioning on the periphery of the social order. Both Porgy, the handicapped beggar, and Bess, the "loose woman," have been rejected by human company; they find love partly through their mutual understanding of being rejected, of being "other." If the story can play to us on this basic human level, we can look through its politically charged language and jarringly unmodern stereotypes.

*Porgy and Bess* remains one of the most successful works of American theater. Its melodies, "more memorable than those of any 20th-century opera" (in the words of critic Wilfrid Mellers), are so intensely charged that they have readily functioned as independent "hit tunes." The finished product—with its remarkable songs, instrumental interludes, and complex vocal ensemble scenes—was a collaboration of Heyward and both Gershwins. The lyrics for several of the songs, including "It Ain't Necessarily So" and "There's a Boat Dat's Leaving Soon for New York," were by Ira Gershwin, and the writers were co-credited for the words for "I Got Plenty O' Nuttin'" and "Bess, You Is My Woman Now."

The problematic nature of *Porgy's* genre was a limiting factor in its early performance history: The operatically gauged demands of the vocal parts were antithetical to the theatrical tradition of performing a work every night. Partly because of this, the work was drastically cut—nearly one-quarter of the total!—for the initial New

Porgy and Bess was composed from 1933 to 1935.

*The Philadelphia Orchestra gave the world premiere of the Suite from Porgy and Bess (later renamed Catfish Row) on January 21, 1936, led by Alexander Smallens. Since then, excerpts have been performed by the Orchestra frequently, mostly in summer or on special concerts. Most recently on subscription the Catfish Row Suite was led by Bramwell Tovey in December 2014.*

*The Orchestra recorded Porgy and Bess, A Symphonic Picture (arranged by Robert Russell Bennett) in 1967 for CBS with Eugene Ormandy conducting.*

*The selections on today's concerts are scored for two flutes (II doubling piccolo), two oboes (II doubling English horn), three clarinets, bass clarinet, two alto saxophones, tenor saxophone, three horns, three trumpets, two trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (chimes, cymbals, drum set, glockenspiel, woodblock, xylophone), piano, strings, four vocal soloists, and mixed chorus.*

*Performance time is approximately 65 minutes.*

York performances. Not until 1976, when Houston Grand Opera revived the work in its entirety, did the composer's complete version regain its validity for the stage.

**A Closer Look** The story is set in Catfish Row, a black neighborhood of Charleston, South Carolina, during the 1920s. The men work hard by day, drink and gamble by night; the women coo over their babies and attempt to keep the men in order. In the opera's first act Crown, Bess's stevedore lover, is forced to flee after he kills Robbins during a drunken craps game. Having nowhere to stay, Bess accepts Porgy's invitation to enter his house; she finds love and warmth within, as well as protection from the aggressive advances of Sportin' Life, the neighborhood's fast-living drug dealer. She falls in love with the crippled beggar, who shows her a genuine compassion and respect she has never known from a man.

On a picnic to Kittiwah Island she once again encounters Crown, who has been hiding out there. Overcome by his powers of persuasion, she stays the night with him. With genuine remorse and in a state of nervous collapse she returns the next day to Porgy, whom she truly loves. Knowing that she has been with Crown, Porgy nevertheless forgives Bess and takes her back in.

A storm brews while the fishermen are out to sea. Crown, who reemerges from his hiding place, takes to the sea to attempt to rescue the men. That night he returns to reclaim Bess; but Porgy, who lies in wait, kills him. The police appear and take Porgy in for questioning. While he is gone, Sportin' Life convinces Bess that he will not return, and takes her off to New York with him. When Porgy is freed from jail he returns to find Bess gone; the opera ends not tragically but on a note of hope, as the protagonist sets out for New York in his goat cart to reclaim the woman he loves.

—Paul J. Horsley