

Peoria Symphony Orchestra Program Notes
November 16, 2019
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This program, titled “Unforgettable,” brings together a set of Classical works with Jazz and Soul standards sung by Judy Page in her PSO debut. After Mozart’s brisk *Figaro Overture*, pianist Pei-Yeh Tsai plays Beethoven’s youthful *Rondo in B-flat Major*. The Peoria Symphony Orchestra then presents Maestro Stelluto’s arrangement of four of Bach’s fugal *Contrapuncti*. Following on Bach, Claude Bolling borrows Baroque techniques and styles, morphing them into his *Suite for Chamber Orchestra and Jazz Piano Trio*. After intermission, Judy Page, the Todd Kelly Quartet, and the Derel Monteith Trio join the PSO for a series of six songs that range from 1930s Jazz “standards” to the 1992 hit *Here’s to Life*. The program ends with Milhaud’s quirky, Brazilian-flavored *Le bœuf sur le toit*. Maestro Stelluto explains his concept for this program as follows:

Conductor’s Note: If you saw the PSO/WTVP *SoundBites* program featuring Todd Kelly (our 2019-2020 Artist-in-Residence), you may remember a short discussion we had regarding the similar challenges for performers in both the Classical and Jazz worlds: sophisticated listening, collaboration, precision, and sensitivity. Tonight’s concert is an extension of that discussion, going beyond performance to explore the compositional similarities between these two styles. While enjoying some of the best musical works ever (of both styles), you may notice resemblances between them. For instance: how an “up-tempo” Jazz work creates an excitement akin to Mozart’s *Marriage of Figaro Overture*, the comparable interplay between the soloists and orchestra in both Beethoven and Bolling, and Bolling’s use of Bach’s contrapuntal style to create a *Jazz Fugue*. During the second half, as you enjoy Judy and *the band*, realize that those rich Jazz harmonies introduced to Europe some one hundred years ago directly inspired “Classical” composers like Ravel, Debussy, and Milhaud. And, as you appreciate the wonderful improvisations by our guest artists tonight, remember that Bach, Beethoven, and Mozart were acclaimed improvisors of their time. In fact, the Bach fugues and Beethoven cadenza you will hear on the first half were probably improvised before they were put to paper. Finally, the surreal, Jazz-influenced little ditty by serious composer Darius Milhaud gives you a taste of the Jazz style heard in Europe a century ago.

- G. Stelluto

We open with ***Overture to the “The Marriage of Figaro”*** by **Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart**. *Figaro* (1786) was a rather controversial adaptation of a French stage play by Mozart’s greatest librettist, Lorenzo da Ponte. The play pushed the limits of aristocratic tolerance with its lecherous and gullible central character, the Count. Mozart and da Ponte toned down the more extreme aspects of the play, and created a remarkably realistic (if sometimes ridiculous) and truly funny opera. Its plot centers on the wily servant Figaro and his fiancée Susanna, as they outwit the Count. It was among the greatest successes of Mozart’s life. *Figaro*’s overture—probably written just days before the premiere—does not use any of the opera’s music, but instead sets the stage in a more general way. Set in sonata form, it begins with a wonderfully blustery theme from

the strings and bassoons. Mozart works this out with just a hint of complexity, and then introduces slightly gentler contrasting material, but maintains the same mood of good humor. There is a short development section and conventional recapitulation, before a short coda sets up the comic action of Act I.

As a young man, it was clear to **Ludwig van Beethoven** that his ticket out of his hometown of Bonn was the piano. Today we think of him as a great composer, but he was also a piano prodigy of the first order. Young Beethoven had set his sights on Vienna, the Imperial capital, and he settled there permanently in 1792. He made his living as a pianist throughout the 1790s, playing at private salons at the homes of aristocratic music-lovers and eventually at public concerts. Beethoven's repertoire as a performer showcased his own works and his phenomenal skills as an improviser. We have many accounts that describe his playing. Several of these were written by other pianists, who were impressed—and more than a little scared—by his powerful playing. For public concerts, however, the Viennese public demanded that their virtuosos produce original concertos. Beethoven eventually completed his first mature piano concerto (now known misleadingly as the *Concerto No. 2*) in 1794. It cost him a great deal of effort, and when he finally published in 1798 it was with many revisions and an entirely new third movement. The concerto's original third movement was published after Beethoven's death as the *Rondo in B-flat Major* heard here. It is brilliant little piece, very much in the style of his teacher Haydn. The piano introduces the rollicking main theme at the opening. This idea alternates with several contrasting ideas, including a long, more lyrical episode in the center of the movement. In concluding, Beethoven ends with a sparkling solo cadenza, and a fast-paced coda.

The fugue, exploring a musical subject in complicated counterpoint, was among the most difficult genres of the Baroque. **Johann Sebastian Bach** was its master. In about 1742, Bach completed the second book of his *Well-Tempered Clavier*, a collection of 24 preludes and fugues, one in each major and minor key. He then turned to a collection of fugues and canons, to which he eventually gave the name *The Art of Fugue (BWV 1080)*. This was the ultimate display of his virtuosity in the form. Bach worked on this collection, one of his final masterpieces, over the course of at least five years. Eventually, *The Art of Fugue* included 14 fugues (all of them given the deliberately old-fashioned title "*Contrapunctus*") and six canons. All of the music in the collection is based upon the same musical subject, and the fugues become increasingly complicated. The final fugue, *Contrapunctus XIV*, was a phenomenally complex quadruple fugue that was actually left incomplete at the time of Bach's death. Though the music of *The Art of Fugue* was originally written for keyboard, it has long been common practice to arrange these works for instrumental ensembles. Maestro Stelluto has created an arrangement based of Bach's first, second, third, and ninth *Contrapuncti* for performance by the orchestra.

Claude Bolling, sometimes known as the "French Gershwin," has had a long and successful career in his native France. Bolling is a renowned Jazz pianist and bandleader, and has written scores for over 100 films. However, his greatest international success has been a series of "crossover" recordings in which he blended

Jazz and Classical styles. These began in 1975, with the *Suite for Flute and Jazz Piano*—a collaboration between Bolling and the great French flutist Jean-Pierre Rampal. Bolling went on to record with several other Classical artists in succeeding years. The ***Suite for Chamber Orchestra and Jazz Piano Trio*** from 1983 is one of his most ambitious crossover pieces. It was originally recorded by Bolling’s own trio and the English Chamber Orchestra, directed by his friend Rampal. The *Suite* has elements of the Baroque concerto grosso, where a small group of soloists—in this case the trio—alternates and combines with the larger orchestra. Bolling’s composition also leaves space for Jazz improvisation. Tonight’s program presents three of three of the movements: *Gracieuse*, *Enjouée*, and *Brillante*. The opening movement, *Gracieuse* (“Graceful”), is based upon a quasi-Baroque theme heard at the opening, which the trio transforms into a light jazz waltz. There is a change in mood in the middle before the trio launches into a much more Blues-inflected style. Eventually, the piano and soloists from the orchestra trade playful solo licks before the opening music returns. *Enjouée* (“Playful”) begins with a fugal idea from the orchestra that is seamlessly transformed into hard-swinging Jazz by the trio. The closing movement, *Brillante*, begins like the opening movement, with tense Baroque-style music, transformed into Jazz by the trio. The energy and drive of this music never lets up until the final measure.

Ms. Page’s collection of songs begins in a Latin style with a *samba* version of ***Night and Day***. **Cole Porter** wrote this song as a feature for Fred Astaire in the 1932 Broadway musical ***Gay Divorce***. Its slinky melody may have been inspired by the Arabic music Porter heard on a trip to Morocco.

The lovely ballad ***The Way You Look Tonight*** first appeared in the 1936 movie *Swing Time*, where Fred Astaire sang it to romance Ginger Rogers. Composer **Jerome Kern** wrote the music first, and then played it for lyricist **Dorothy Fields**, who remembered “The first time Jerry played that melody for me I went out and started to cry... I couldn’t stop, it was so beautiful.”

Songwriter **Irving Gordon** wrote the popular ***Unforgettable*** in 1951, when it was a smash hit in a now-classic recording by Nat King Cole. Gordon eventually won a Grammy Award for the song—over 40 years after he wrote it—in 1992, when Natalie Cole recorded it as a posthumous duet with her father. When he accepted the Grammy, Gordon explained *Unforgettable*’s appeal: “It’s nice to have a song come out that doesn’t scream, yell, and have a nervous breakdown while it talks about tenderness...”

Harry Warren and Mack Gordon wrote the romantic ballad ***At Last*** for the 1941 Hollywood musical *Sun Valley Serenade*. The movie was a star vehicle for ice-skating sensation Sonia Hennie and featured several appearances by the Glenn Miller Orchestra. The song was cut from the final film—producer Darryl Zanuck reportedly thought that there were already too many good songs in the movie and wanted to save this one for a later film! It was a hit for Miller in 1942, however, in a version featuring Singer Ray Eberle. The song has been covered dozens of times since, including a performance by Beyoncé at the inaugural ball of President Obama in 2009 and a recording by Aretha Franklin in 2014. However, the greatest recorded performance is

certainly the powerful and soulful 1960 version of *At Last* by the rhythm & blues star Etta James.

Mexican composer **Luis Demetrio** composed his song *¿Quién será?* (“Who Will It Be?”) in 1953. The song, a sensuous *bolero*, was a hit on the Latin charts that year for Mexican bandleader Palo Beltrán. In 1954, **Norman Gimbel** created a set of English lyrics, and the song became a hit for crooner Dean Martin, under the title **Sway**. *Sway*, heard here as a sexy *rumba*, is about dancing... and seduction.

Ms. Page finishes with the bittersweet ***Here’s to Life***, written by the team of **Artie Butler** and **Phyllis Molinari**. It was written for the great Jazz singer and pianist Shirley Horn, and was recorded by her in 1992. *Here’s to Life* is a poignant, but essentially upbeat song about aging. According to Butler, it was inspired by seeing comedian George Burns, then in his late 80s, on *The Tonight Show*. When host Johnny Carson asked him “George, what do you think about life?” Burns, without dropping a beat, answered “I think the second half is going to be better.” Butler later explained: “I wrote the song through the eyes of an older man who was looking back at his life and reminiscing, and yet being totally optimistic about whatever time he had left. I didn’t realize it then, but I was really writing about my father.”

Darius Milhaud was one of the 20th century’s most prolific and creative composers. Though his style evolved greatly during the course of his 60-year career as a composer, one constant was his adoption of an eclectic mix of influences: the music of his native Provence, American Ragtime and Jazz, Brazilian and American folk songs, and music collected during his extensive worldwide travels. In 1917 Milhaud left war-torn Paris to spend two years in Brazil with his friend Paul Claudel. Claudel served as French ambassador, and Milhaud worked as his secretary. While he was in Brazil, the composer fell in love with Brazilian music, and many of his works over the next decade adapt rhythms and melodies he heard there. Milhaud returned to Paris in 1919, and one of his first projects was a piece he imagined as the accompaniment to a silent film. The title, ***Le bœuf sur le toit*** (“The Ox on the Roof”), is the name of one of the *samba* songs he heard during Rio de Janeiro’s famous Carnival celebration. Writer Jean Cocteau soon talked Milhaud into letting him use it as the basis of a surrealist “pantomime-ballet.” The “plot” of the stage version made very little sense. It is set in a Prohibition-era New York City speakeasy, and includes a succession of bizarre characters: a trio of circus clowns, a boxer, a dwarf, and a policeman who is decapitated by a ceiling fan. (Don’t worry—he is later recapitated.) The stage production of *Le bœuf sur le toit* was moderately successful, though even Milhaud seems to have been a little bit confused by just what was going on onstage. However, *Le bœuf sur le toit* works perfectly well on its own as a concert piece, and as a tribute to the Brazilian music he admired. The piece is set as a rondo, tied together by a jaunty little trumpet tune heard at the beginning, which repeats a dozen times in the course of the piece. Between statements of the main theme, Milhaud includes witty quotations of a whole series of *sambas*, *choros*, and *maxixes*—all popular Brazilian forms. He even throws in a bit of Portuguese *fado* music. The overall effect is just as wild and kaleidoscopic as a Carnival celebration, as lively tunes appear and fade into one another, often with more than one key happening at the

same time. All of this is colorfully orchestrated by Milhaud to create a brilliant and delightful effect.

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