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## **An American In Montreal**

“America is my country, and Paris is my home town.” -Gertrude Stein

The following program is comprised of pieces written and arranged during the 1940's in America and France, particularly during the Third Reich of World War II. As the Nazis' seized power, they saw art and music as a threat to their regime and began to censor musical output heavily. The cabarets of the 1920's and 1930's were particularly targeted, as this was a venue devoted to jazz, modern music, freedom of expression, and musical acceptance. Despite the government censorship of music throughout the Third Reich (1933-1945) in Europe, new music continued to thrive and confronted the horrors of war while at the same time celebrated humanity and culture through new styles of jazz, folk music, and the Avant Garde. This time period is of particular interest to me because of the pure humanity and openness of the compositions.

### **Copland Sonata for Violin and Piano (1943)**

Copland began writing his sonata for violin and piano in 1942 and completed the work in 1943 in Hollywood while composing the score for the MGM film, *The North Star*. Copland later revealed that "During the frequent periods when I had to wait for the studio to move ahead on *The North Star*, I played through the piano parts of violin sonatas from various periods ... For whatever reasons, at that time I had little desire to compose a dissonant or virtuosic work, or one that incorporated folk materials. Nevertheless, certain qualities of the American folk tune had become part of my natural style of composing, and they are echoed in the Sonata."

Shortly after Copland completed the sonata, he dedicated the piece to his close friend, Lieutenant Harry H. Dunham, who was shot in the Pacific during World War II. The second movement is particularly somber and barren while the first movement contains warm lyricism and the third movement is fraught with striking rhythmic irregularity and shifting patterns. Copland and violinist Ruth Posselt premiered the sonata at Town Hall in N.Y. on January 17,

1944 at a concert sponsored by the publisher Boosey and Hawkes. Virgil Thomson, a music critic for the *New York Herald Tribune* described Copland's sonata as "one of [the] author's most satisfying pieces ... It has a quality at once of calm elevation and buoyancy that is characteristic of Copland and irresistibly touching."

### **Poulenc Violin Sonata (1943)**

In 1942, in the midst of WWII, Poulenc began composing his Sonata for Violin and Piano. After disposing of two other violin sonatas, Poulenc struggled immensely with this sonata and was still not completely satisfied with the final product saying, "The monster is finished. I will begin the realization. It is not bad, I think, and in any case very different from the eternal "violin-melody line" of the French sonatas of the 19th century.... The violin *prima donna* over piano arpeggio makes me vomit." Another time, Poulenc described his violin sonata as "Frankly, no good."

Poulenc dedicated his Violin Sonata to Federico Garcia Lorca, the famous Spanish poet and playwright whom he greatly admired and who was killed by Fascists at the young age of 38 during the Spanish Civil War. In addition to dedicating the Violin Sonata to Lorca, Poulenc also composed *Trois Chansons*, a set of songs for voice and piano set to three of his poems in 1947. The Violin Sonata was premiered in 1943 by violinist Ginette Neveu for a benefit concert for writers and musicians imprisoned during World War II. Poulenc admitted that he "did not like the violin in the singular" and thus relied on Neveu for motivation and advice. Later he acknowledged that "the few delicious violinistic details of the score" were due to Neveu. Poulenc later revised the sonata in 1949 after Neveu tragically died in a plane accident at the age of thirty.

### **Gershwin Porgy and Bess Suite arr. Heifetz (1944)**

Based on the 1925 novel, *Porgy*, by Dubose Heyward, George Gershwin's opera, *Porgy and Bess*, became one of the most famous and beloved folk operas in the twentieth century. A celebration of American folk culture, Gershwin stated, "*Porgy and Bess* is a folk tale. Its people naturally would sing folk music. When I first began work in the music, I decided against the use of original folk material because I wanted the music to be all of one piece. Therefore, I wrote my own spirituals and folksongs. But they are still folk music – and therefore, being in operatic form, *Porgy and Bess* becomes a folk opera."

Taking place in the slums of Charleston in a tenement neighborhood known as Catfish Row, the opera tells the tale of a young, black street-beggar, Porgy, and his attempts to rescue Bess, a young woman trapped in an abusive relationship and in a precarious situation with a drug dealer. They soon find solace in one another through their tribulations and by the end are

full of romantic love and hope for the future. The opera was first premiered on October 10, 1935 at the Alvin Theater in New York.

### **Theme from Sabrina, John Williams (1995)**

Based on the play, "Sabrina Fairchild" by Samuel Taylor in 1954, the first film production of Sabrina took place in the same year, starring Audrey Hepburn and Humphrey Bogart. In 1995, John Williams composed the music for the remake of Sabrina starring Harrison Ford and Julia Ormond. Sabrina is the daughter of a chauffeur who works for a very wealthy family, the Larrabees, on Long Island. After spending a year in Paris, Sabrina returns to Long Island as a beautiful, confident woman and catches the eye of her long-time crush, David Larrabee, the youngest brother and the "ladies-man" of the family. David, however, is engaged and Sabrina is seen as a risk to upsetting the family fortune that will occur due to David's upcoming marriage to a wealthy woman. Linus Larrabee, the older brother, is sent to divert Sabrina's attention and ultimately disrupt the potential of something romantic occurring between Sabrina and David. While Linus devises a clever plan that sends Sabrina on a plane back to Paris, a city she has grown to love, he ultimately follows her there where he professes his love.