

William Auerbach-Ley



ODYSSEY
FESTIVAL
ORCHESTRA



Portrait of George Gershwin by William Auerbach-Ley, 1926

THE LAST WALTZ
ODYSSEY FESTIVAL ORCHESTRA
QUEEN ELIZABETH HALL
13 January 2023

King Carter Jazzing Orchestra, Houston Texas – Photo by Robert Runyon, 1921



THE LAST WALTZ



Maurice Ravel (1875-1937): *The Language of Flowers*
(aka *Noble and Nostalgic Waltzes*)

George Gershwin (1898-1937): *An American in Paris*

INTERVAL

George Gershwin: *Rhapsody in Blue*

Maurice Ravel: *La Valse (The Waltz)*

Narrator:
Sir David Suchet

Piano Soloist:
Sebastian-Benedict Flore

Odyssey Festival Orchestra

Leader: Leon Human
Conductor: Peter Ash



Schubert, Vienna and the Waltz



The waltz is a dance in three time whose origins go back to rural Germany. What made it distinctive was that couples rotated around the dance floor, facing each other, holding hands and with prolonged body contact. In the 1790s the dance took Vienna by storm and

Napoleon later introduced it to Paris. Some condemned it as degenerate, shameless and indecent, but by 1900 the waltz had become the most popular dance form in the world. Thanks to the genius of Johann Strauss – it also became closely identified with Vienna.

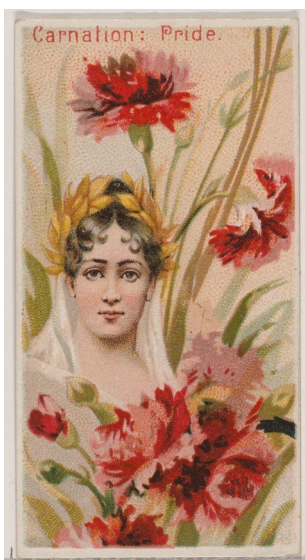
Franz Schubert's waltzes (including his *Sentimental and Noble Waltzes*) were written in the 1820s for household dancing. They were among his most popular works.

Extract from Lord Byron's *The Waltz* (1813)

Endearing Waltz! To thy more melting tune,
Bow Irish jig and ancient rigadoon,
Scotch reels, avaunt! And country dance forego
Your future claims to each fantastic toe!
Waltz - Waltz alone - both legs and arms demands
Liberal of feet, and lavish of her hands;
Hands which may freely range in public sight
Where ne'er before - but - pray "put out the light"

Extract from Ballet Scenario to *The Language of Flowers* by Maurice Ravel

The story begins with a soirée at Adelaide's home. Couples are dancing. Others are conversing tenderly. Adelaide comes and goes among her guests, inhaling the intoxicating fragrance of a tuberose, a symbol of her sensuality. Lorédan enters, sullen and melancholy. He offers Adelaide a buttercup. An exchange of flowers expresses Adelaide's inconstancy and Lorédan's love.... Adelaide pulls the buttercup apart, one petal at a time – he loves me, he loves me not – before the buttercup tells her that Lorédan's love is sincere. Then Lorédan similarly plucks the petals of a daisy. The daisy tells him sadly that he is not loved. Adelaide begs him to try again. This time the daisy offers him a positive answer.



Maurice Ravel reflects on his childhood and on his tributes to the waltz

I was born in Ciboure in the Lower Pyrenees, near St. Jean-de-Luz on March 7th, 1875. My father was a civil engineer. My mother belonged to an old Basque family. At the age of three months, I left Ciboure for Paris, where I have lived ever since.... Even as a child I was sensitive to every kind of music.

Noble and Sentimental Waltzes (1911) reflected my desire to compose a series of waltzes in imitation of Schubert. They were first performed [on the piano] amid jeers and boos at a concert of the *Independent Music Society* at which the identity of the composers was not revealed. The audience voted on who they thought had composed each piece. A small majority correctly identified me as the author. *The Waltz* (1920) is a choreographic poem which I composed as a sort of summation of the Viennese waltz. This was mingled in my mind with an impression of a sort of fatalistic fantastic whirling. I imagined it set in an imperial palace about 1855. Although intended as a dance piece, until now it has only been staged in Antwerp and by Madame Ida Rubinstein's ballet company.

Maurice Ravel, *Autobiographical Sketch*, 1928

Floriography or The Language of Flowers

The idea that every flower has a symbolic meaning was current in mediaeval times but became truly popular in the 19th century, when convention made it difficult for people to say to each other what they really meant. Direct communication, particularly in courtship, was frowned upon and flowers provided an alternative way of telling someone how you felt about them. A bouquet of flowers could convey a complex message and dictionaries of floriography became essential to ensure the posy was properly conceived and interpreted. And, for those who could not afford a to buy a dictionary, there might be cigarette cards to help you.

Though the practice started to fade after World War I, Ravel remained fascinated by floriography and used it when he developed a ballet scenario for his orchestration of *Noble and Sentimental Waltzes*.

Ravel's own private life was fastidious and his sexuality a source of speculation. He was fussy to the point of obsessiveness in his dress, manners and habits, refusing to go on stage if a single detail of his costume was out of place. He never had a partner.

George Gershwin's Childhood

My brother was the second of four children of Morris and Rose Bruskin Gershwin. I was the oldest, then came George, then Arthur and last, our sister Frances. Most of our early childhood we spent on the Lower East Side of Manhattan where my father engaged in various activities: restaurants, Russian and Turkish baths, bakeries, a cigar store and pool parlor.... When my father sold the business and started another we would inevitably move to a new neighbourhood. George and I once counted over 25 flats and apartments we remembered having lived in during those days...

It was when we were living on Second Avenue that my mother added a piano to our home. George was about 12 at the time. No sooner had the upright been lifted through the window to the front room floor, than George sat down and played a popular song of the day. I remember being particularly impressed by his left hand. I had no idea that he could play....

Ira Gershwin from *My Brother George Gershwin*, 1938



Gershwin (L) with the car horns he used for *An American in Paris*, 1926



Tin Pan Alley, New York, 1925

Gershwin's Trip to Paris, 1926

George Gershwin began his career, aged 16, bashing out tunes on an upright piano for music publishers and other composers on West 28th St, the street that became known as *Tin Pan Alley*. Despite a lack of formal musical education, within a few years, Gershwin had become a successful commercial composer in his own right. By the age of 27, he had a string of Broadway hits to his name and had become the first American-born musician to grace the cover of *Time* magazine. But he was not content with this. He harboured ambitions to be a 'serious' composer and combine the American jazz tradition with serious European art music to create an authentic new 'American' musical tradition. *Rhapsody in Blue* was premiered in New York in 1924 and presented at a concert entitled "An Experiment in Modern Music". Its name was inspired by the paintings of American artist James Whistler, whose canvases often had titles such as *Nocturne in Blue and Silver*. The *Rhapsody* was an instant success and inaugurated a new chapter in the history of Western music.



Nocturne: Blue and Silver by James McNeill Whistler

Gershwin travelled with his brother Ira to Europe in 1926 to attend performances of *Rhapsody in Blue* in Paris and London. In Paris he met European composers like Ravel, Stravinsky, Milhaud and William Walton. He also wrote his orchestral piece *An American in Paris*, which was later expanded into a successful musical.

"This new piece, really a rhapsodic ballet, is written very freely and is the most modern music I have yet attempted. The opening part will be developed in the French style... though all the themes are original. My purpose here is to portray the impression of an American visitor in Paris, as he strolls about the city, listens to the various street noises, and absorbs the French atmosphere."

Gershwin Presents a New Work, Musical America, August 1928



Maurice Ravel, 1925

Ravel's Tour of the USA

In late December 1927, Ravel set sail for a four-month tour of the USA. His engagements included playing the piano, conducting his own compositions and giving lectures. He was dreading it. "As soon as we arrived in the harbour, a swarm of journalists invaded the boat, with cameras, movie cameras and cartoonists." he wrote to his brother Edouard from New York on January 13th, complaining that he was so busy giving interviews that he could not find time to practise. "I was even in a film, with make-up 2cm thick!" he declared. Fortunately, in the evenings, things improved: "Relaxation: dance halls, negro theatres, gigantic movie houses..."

Ravel on the state of Contemporary American Music

"There are always self-appointed promoters of nationalism in music... One group believes that folklore is the only requisite to national music.... Within this clan there is always dissension: "Folk music? But what is our particular folk music? Indian [Native American] tunes? But are **they** American? Negro spirituals? Blues? But are **these** American?" And so on, until nothing is left of national background.... Even if negro music is not of purely American origin, it will prove nevertheless to be an effective factor in the founding of an American school of music. At all events, I hope this national American music will embody a great deal of the rich and diverting rhythms of your jazz, a great deal of the emotional expression in your blues, and a great deal of the sentiment and spirit, characteristic of your popular melodies and songs, worthily deriving from and in turn contributing to, a noble national heritage in music.

Maurice Ravel, from a lecture given in Houston, Texas, April 1928

George Gershwin on Jazz

Let jazz speak for itself. It is here and all the tirades of our musical Jeremiahs cannot take it from us or abate its profound influence on the music of the present and the future...

Does Jazz belong to Art? 1926

Unquestionably modern musical America has been influenced by modern musical Europe, but it seems to me that modern European composers, in turn, have very largely received their stimulus, their rhythms and impulses from Machine Age America.... Jazz is a word which has been used for at least five or six types of music. It is really a conglomeration of many things. It has a little bit of ragtime, the blues, classicism, and spirituals. Basically, it is a matter of rhythm. After rhythm in importance come intervals... intervals which are peculiar to the rhythm. After all, there is nothing new in music.

The Composer in the Machine Age, 1930

Jazz, I regard as American folk-music; not the only one, but a very powerful one, which is probably in the blood and feeling of the American people more than any other style of folk-music. I believe that it can be made the basis of serious symphonic works of lasting value, in the hands of a composer with a talent both for jazz and symphonic music...

The Relation of Jazz to American Music, 1933



Self-portrait, 1925

Maurice Ravel tells America: "Take Jazz Seriously!"

You Americans take jazz too lightly. You seem to feel that it is cheap, vulgar, momentary. In my opinion it is bound to lead to the national music of the United States. Aside from it, you have no veritable idiom as yet. Most of your compositions show European influences - either Spanish, Russian, French or German - rather than American individuality. Nor do I believe that this is due to the mixture of foreign peoples who comprise the American people. *Pas du tout. C'est ridicule, ça!* [Not at all. That's ridiculous]

Look at the *mélange* we have in France. In one section you will find Frenchman who resemble Germans, in another some who resemble Italians more closely than French. Besides we have Arabs, Algerians, expatriated Americans and intermarried Americans. Still, who would deny that our music is characteristically French?

Mais non. [Of course not]... I could sit down and play you some French music written about 1849 that you would take for jazz, so characteristic is it, so syncopated in rhythm, nevertheless it retains a French flavour. What is more, it is considered as classical music.

Abroad we take jazz seriously. It is influencing our work. The Blues in my sonata, *par exemple*, is stylised jazz, more French than American in character perhaps, but nevertheless influenced strongly by your so-called "popular music". Personally I find jazz most interesting: the rhythms, the way the melodies are handled, the melodies themselves. I have heard some of George Gershwin's works and I find them intriguing...

The age we live in is an auspicious one for composers. We are experiencing an economic upheaval, a polite revolution. Internationalism is developing parallel to nationalism; constructive measures are being adopted alongside destructive ones. We devise methods of hygiene and instruments of war. One part of the world was never so civilised; other portions seem more uncivilised than ever. The world is changing and contradicting itself as never before.

I am happy to be living through all this and have the good fortune of being a composer. I am also happy to come to America at last and although I've hardly been outdoors, I can testify that Broadway After Dark is *ravissant* [enchanting].

Maurice Ravel, Musical Digest, March 1928.

Ravel celebrates George Gershwin to Nadia Boulanger

The Biltmore Hotel – 8 March, 1928

My dear friend,

There is a musician here, endowed with the most brilliant, most enchanting, and perhaps the most profound talent: George Gershwin. His worldwide success no longer satisfies him, for he is aiming higher. He knows that he lacks the technical means to achieve his goal. In teaching him these means, one might ruin his talent. Would you have the courage, which I lack, to undertake this awesome responsibility?"

Maurice Ravel, from a Letter to Nadia Boulanger



Nadia Boulanger, 1925

Celebrating Ravel's Birthday in New York

Ravel and Gershwin met on several occasions in New York in 1928. On March 7th, the mezzo-soprano Eva Gautier gave a dinner party in honour of Ravel's 53rd birthday. She later recalled the evening:

"The menu consisted of all the things he really liked to eat, and especially plenty of red meat, which he loved – he really preferred it raw to the point of being purple – as his complaint was that all the meats here were overcooked... The late George Gershwin was one of the honored guests, since Ravel had expressed great desire to meet him and hear him play the *Rhapsody in Blue*, *The Man I Love* etc... It was a memorable evening. George that night surpassed himself, achieving astounding feats in rhythmic intricacies, so that even Ravel was dumbfounded. George was very keen to study with Ravel, but the Frenchman's answer was that, "you might lose that great melodic spontaneity and write bad Ravel."

Eva Gautier, Reminiscences of Maurice Ravel, New York Times, 1938

Programme Notes: (c) Donald Sturrock, 2022



Eva Gautier with Ravel at the piano and George Gershwin (R), 1928

Gershwin was twenty-five years younger than Ravel, but there were unexpected parallels in their lives. Neither married, which was unusual at that time and both died within six months of each other in 1937 of brain disease. Gershwin suffered from a brain tumour that afflicted him in his last six months of life and Ravel from a form of dementia that had caused him to retire from public life in 1932.



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*inspiring young people on
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Artistic Director, Peter Ash

Violin I

Leon Human
Christine Amirashayeri
Grace Byrne
Imaan Kashim
Alexander Lee
Lizzie McEaney
Martha Neugarten
Samy Okuma-Chin
Leyla Robertson
Lynden Schreker

Violin II

Willoughby Baars
Joshua Gordon
William Gowing
Naomi Isaacs
Joanna Phillips
Ryan Power
Jack Robinson
Esther Rumney
Ralph Rusconi

Violas

Morgan-mei Arnold
Benedict Baily
Pablo Barba

Mina Hobson-Mazur
Emmeline Macdonald
Charlotte Mountford
Nolitha Olusanya

Cellos

Jaeho Bae
Claire Biek
Eleanor Bogle
Raphael Herberg
Anna Leary
Clara Neather
Lucy Neil
Lucas Robson
Alexander Scott-Brown
Ellie Welch

Basses

Manon Bristow
Bethany Higgs
Lydie Horsford
Sam Nolan
Ginny Small
James Trowbridge

Flutes

Daisy Noton

Alexia Pasquariello
Daniel Swani

Oboes

Lilia Goldstein
Katherine Jones
Billy Liu

Clarinets

Fresca David
Lucia Porcedda
Nelson Sinclair-Strong

Saxophones

Rosemary Ball
TBC
TBC

Bassoons

Emily Ambrose
Francesco di Matteo
Sacha Neugarten

Horns

Cathryn Nuta
Sarah Pennington
Joshua Pizzoferro
Isabella Ward Ackland

Trumpets

Samuel Balchin
Sasha Canter
Ishmael Human

Trombones

Nathan Joseph
Ben Loska
Jonny Lovatt

Tuba

Barry Morro

Timpani & Percussion

Meadow Brooks
Daniel Lauro
Bogdan Skrypka

Harp

Emily Sullivan
TBC

Celeste

TBC

Banjo

TBC



Odyssey Festival Orchestra Debut Concert at Cadogan Hall, September 2022



ODYSSEY FESTIVAL ORCHESTRA

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Odyssey Festival Orchestra is an ensemble for gifted musicians, whether amateur or professional, aged largely between 18 and 30. It has evolved out of Peter Ash's forty years of work with young musicians, twenty of which were spent as Artistic Director of the London Schools Symphony Orchestra, which was described by Sir Simon Rattle as "an incomparable ambassador for the dynamism and excellence of British youth." There, he and Donald Sturrock developed projects that broke the conventions of the concert-going experience, using readings, dancers and lighting to give both players and audience a sense of context around the music they were performing.

Odyssey aims to take that concept to a new stage. Our intention is to achieve the highest standards, presenting music in a bold and creative atmosphere through which we hope to build a new, younger, more philosophically engaged audience for our musical adventures. Odyssey Festival Orchestra aspires to be diverse, inclusive and free at the point of entry. This is only possible thanks to the generosity of its supporters, whose vital support is hugely appreciated.

Odyssey welcomes collaborations with schools and local community groups. Tonight we welcome students from Ark Walworth Academy, Dartford Grammar School, Dwight School, Haberdashers' Borough Academy, Harris Academy Peckham, Oaks Park High School (Carshalton), Compass School Southwark and Uxendon Manor Primary School.



Peter Ash's career as conductor has been characterised by ambitious new projects: from first performances at the Salzburg Festival with members of the Berlin Philharmonic and Haydn operas at Garsington, to the premiere of Tobias Picker's *Fantastic Mr. Fox* for the Los Angeles Opera. Recent projects have included the world premiere of Jamaican-born Eleanor Alberga's

Trumpet Concerto at the Barbican Hall and an immersive production of Richard Strauss's opera *Salome* in the USA. Born in Iowa, Ash has been resident in London for over forty years, where he is passionately committed to broadening audiences for classical music. As a composer, he has written two family operas: *Keepers of the Night* and *The Golden Ticket*, based on Roald Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*.



Sir David Suchet is one of Britain's greatest actors. Most famous for playing Agatha Christie's Belgian detective Hercule Poirot for twenty-four years and in over seventy television episodes, he also has a distinguished career in film and live theatre. His range and variety are remarkable – from Shylock in Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* at the RSC to Lady

Bracknell in Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*. His work has won him numerous awards and honours.

He was created a Knight Bachelor in the Queen's 2020 Birthday Honours List, for services to Drama and Charity. He is an associate artist of the Royal Shakespeare Company and a member of the Fight Directors association of Great Britain. He is delighted to be a Founder Supporter of Odyssey Festival Orchestra.

Sebastian-Benedict Flore was born in Rome and began playing the piano aged five. He studied for five years at the Centre for Young Musicians under Francis Reneau and is currently in his second year of study at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama with Katya Apekisheva.



He has won prizes in various competitions, including the Beethoven Piano Society of Europe's Junior Intercollegiate Piano Competition in 2019. He went on to play for their concert series of 35 sonatas celebrating the 250th anniversary of Beethoven's birth in 2020. He has played with orchestras including the LSSO under the baton of Peter Ash. "I am delighted to be playing this exhilarating work which is perhaps the musical embodiment of New York and also to be playing with Odyssey Festival Orchestra and with Peter Ash as the conductor."

Leon Human started playing the violin and piano aged 7 and currently studies with Stephanie Gonley at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. Leon has worked with conductors such as Richard Farnes, Sian Edwards, Ryan Wigglesworth and Peter Ash. In 2021, he made his solo debut at the Barbican directing Bach's Violin Concerto in E.



Leon plays contemporary music with his group Rothco Collective, which recently won the non-classical competition 'Battle of the Bands,' curated by Gabriel Prokofiev. They will shortly host their own event and release an album.

Artistic Director: Peter Ash
Executive Director: Donald Sturrock
Orchestral Manager: Gillian Tarlton
Fundraiser: Helen Varma

Outreach Agents: Clara Neather and Martha Neugarten

Programme Editor: Bridget Mahoney
Front of House: Elaine Lewis
Orchestral Transport: Steve Allison
Pastoral Care: Theresa Freeburn
Video Recording: Black Swan Film and Video



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NEXT CONCERTS

10 May, 2023

Shostakovich the Subversive

An exploration of how the Russian composer Dmitri Shostakovich made instrumental music political.

Programme to include:

Shostakovich: Concerto for Piano, Trumpet and Strings Op. 35

Shostakovich: Chamber Symphony Op. 110a

13 September, 2023

Mahler and Sibelius: The Symphony in the 20th century

Two master writers of symphonies had different ideas about what a symphony was. One favoured compression, the other expansion. They even debated the subject against each other. Who got it right?

Programme: Mahler: Symphony No. 4; Sibelius Symphony No. 7



Peter Ash leading students on a walking tour in Transylvania in 2019

In association with Icon Arts and ACFEA Tour Consultants, Odyssey Festival Orchestra plans to tour to Romania in the summer of 2023, with a residential course in the Saxon village of Biertan, Transylvania

Odyssey Festival Orchestra's first season has been blessed by a crew of supporters, who have helped in many different ways. In particular we would like to thank:

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Richard Savage, John Singer, Hilary Sturt, Stephen Walker and Stephen Walsh.

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If you would like to take part in, or simply keep up to speed with, what Odyssey is doing, you can become a member,
just by registering at <https://www.odysseymusic.org>.

If you would like to support the orchestra financially then you can donate via The Grasshopper Music Trust,
a UK registered charity (No. 1196165). If you are a UK Taxpayer, you can claim Gift Aid on your donation.
Gift Aid forms are available in the foyer and are enclosed with each programme.



King Carter Jazzing Orchestra, Houston Texas - Photo by Robert Runyon, 1921

Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec *Two Women Waltzing in the Moulin Rouge*, 1892

