

GERSHWIN
RHAPSODY IN BLUE
 LEONARD BERNSTEIN
 at the Piano and conducting
 THE COLUMBIA SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
AN AMERICAN IN PARIS
 NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
 LEONARD BERNSTEIN, Conductor

Stereo MS 6091
 Mono ML 5413



"Whiteman Judges Named," read a small item on the amusement page of the New York *Tribune* of January 4, 1924. "Committee Will Decide 'What Is American Music,'" said the subhead. The body copy began: "Among the members of the committee of judges who will pass on 'What Is American Music?' at the Paul Whiteman concert to be given at Aeolian Hall, Tuesday afternoon, February 12, will be Sergei Rachmaninoff, Jascha Heifetz, Efrem Zimbalist and Alma Gluck. . . . This question of just what is American music has aroused a tremendous interest in music circles and Mr. Whiteman is receiving every phase of manuscript, from blues to symphonies. George Gershwin is at work on a jazz concerto. . . ."

The item was read to George Gershwin by his brother Ira. The composer was in the final throes of reading the score for *Sweet Little Devil* for its Boston tryout. He remembered talking to Paul Whiteman about a proposed, eventual jazz concert for which he would produce a large work, a serious composition using jazz rhythms and formulas. But now the date of the concert was suddenly only five weeks away.

Before he took off for Boston and *Sweet Little Devil*, Gershwin talked to Whiteman and was shown that by producing no more than a piano score of the proposed piece he could fulfill this commission in time. For Whiteman had on hand as his arranger the top professional man in the business, Ferde Grofé.

On the train to Boston, with a few themes collected in his mind for possible use, he got down to organizing the piece. "It was on the train," he later stated, "with its steady rhythms, its rattly-bang . . . (I frequently hear music in the very heart of noise), that I suddenly heard—even saw on paper—the complete construction of the *Rhapsody* from beginning to end. No new themes came to me, but I worked on the thematic material already in my mind and tried to conceive the composition as a whole. . . . By the time I reached Boston, I had the definite plot of the piece, as distinguished from its actual substance."

The actual substance was put together in the back room of the Gershwin apartment on 110th Street in New York when George got back from Boston. It was sketched for two pianos, with large empty spaces left where the solo piano part was to go. Grofé was on hand, taking the manuscript as it was completed, one section at a time, and rapidly turning out the orchestration.

Gershwin did make some indications of the scoring he had in mind, but it was done not by naming the instrument but by naming the Whiteman musician or musicians required for the passage at hand!

The selections are ASCAP.

The clarinetist, Ross Gorman, could play a fabulous glissando where others could not, and the opening notes were conceived with his special abilities in mind. Though the work was described as written for "Jazz Band and Piano," Whiteman's band was, rather, a large dance orchestra made up of individuals who, in themselves, had jazz backgrounds and, often enough, successful jazz careers ahead of them in their own names. The final title was provided by Ira.

On the afternoon of the concert George had still not added the complete piano part but nevertheless played with perfect composure before the blank pages.

The *Rhapsody* came next to the last of the twenty-three numbers on the program. Since Whiteman had no complete score he had to wait for Gershwin to cue him to bring the orchestra back in after the solo passages. Nevertheless it went off well and excited an audience that had begun to find this experimental concert of only educational interest.

The reviews were good and bad. It was clear to some of the critics that the composer's aims were ahead of his powers. A few were acute enough to observe, as did Olin Downes, that the audience of hardened concertgoers was nevertheless "excited with the sensation of a new talent finding its voice."

The older the *Rhapsody in Blue* becomes the harder it is to define. We know now that it is not jazz, whatever Gershwin might have thought about it at the time. It is not a rhapsody by Liszt with jazz scoring and tempo. It is not a perfect consolidation of jazz and symphonic techniques, nor even the first attempt at this. It is not, technically, an "important" piece of music; it set no repeatable example and has no prosperous children.

It is a piece of Americana, a great American school from the Twenties, an excited cry of vision and joy and anticipation by an American genius who sees the light and takes a giant step toward it.

"The concert," Carl Van Vechten wrote Gershwin two days later, "quite as a matter of course, was a riot; you crowned it with what I am forced to regard as the foremost serious effort by any American composer. Go straight on and you will knock all Europe silly."

In 1928, Gershwin went to Europe not to knock it silly but to study and familiarize himself with the music of European moderns. Between social engagements he managed to meet Milhaud, Ravel, Stravinsky, Prokofiev and Poulenc and attend a number of concerts.

The idea for *An American in Paris* he brought with him to

the French capital or, rather, brought back with him since it had first occurred to him during an earlier trip to France.

The piano sketch was finished in New York on August 1st, the orchestration on November 18th. Written without the piano part that was until then the crux of any Gershwin composition—and scored by Gershwin with no more than helpful advice from his many friends and advisors—it represents a considerable advance in sophistication over the *Rhapsody in Blue* and also over the *Concerto in F* from 1925.

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

"As in my other orchestral compositions I've not endeavored to represent any definite scenes in this music. The rhapsody is programmatic only in a general impressionistic way, so that the individual listener can read into the music such as his imagination pictures for him.

"The opening gay section is followed by a rich blues with a strong rhythmic undercurrent. Our American friend, perhaps after strolling into a café and having a couple of drinks, has succumbed to a spasm of homesickness. The harmony here is both more intense and simple than in the preceding pages. This blues rises to a climax followed by a coda in which the spirit of the music returns to the vivacity and bubbling exuberance of the opening part with its impressions of Paris. Apparently the homesick American, having left the café and reached the open air, has disowned his spell of the blues and once again is an alert spectator of Parisian life. At the conclusion, the street noises and French atmosphere are triumphant."

The work was given its première under Walter Damrosch at Carnegie Hall, December 13, 1928.

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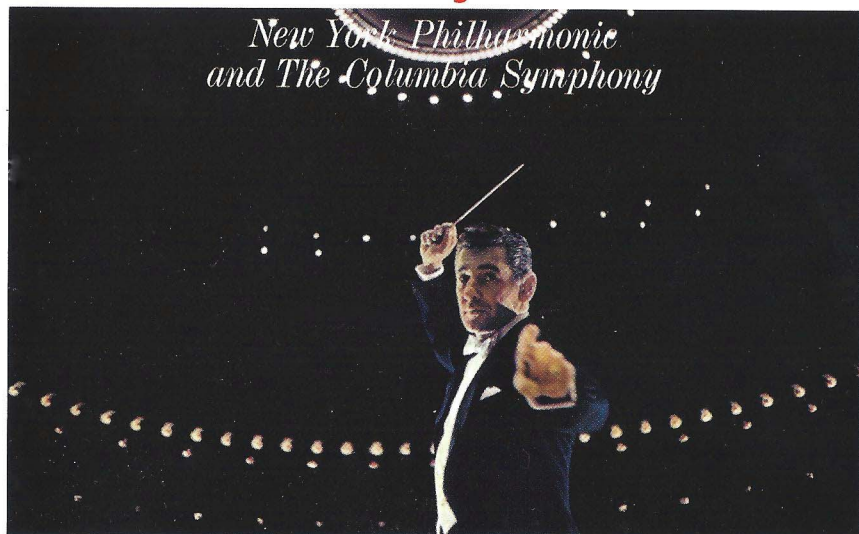
LEONARD BERNSTEIN

Gershwin Rhapsody in Blue

Gershwin An American in Paris

Grofé Grand Canyon Suite

New York Philharmonic
 and The Columbia Symphony



CS 89033

LEONARD BERNSTEIN

GEORGE GERSHWIN (1898–1937)

1 RHAPSODY IN BLUE

16'24

Orchestration: Ferde Grofé

The Columbia Symphony

LEONARD BERNSTEIN, Piano and Conductor

Recorded at St. George Hotel, Brooklyn, New York City, on June 23, 1959.

2 AN AMERICAN IN PARIS

18'23

Recorded at St. George Hotel, Brooklyn, New York City, on December 21, 1958.

New York Philharmonic

LEONARD BERNSTEIN

FERDE GROFÉ (1892–1972)

GRAND CANYON SUITE

3 I. Sunrise

5'11

4 II. Painted Desert

5'45

5 III. On the Trail

7'20

6 IV. Sunset

5'22

7 V. Cloudburst

8'56

JOHN CORIGLIANO, Violin

New York Philharmonic

LEONARD BERNSTEIN

Recorded at Philharmonic Hall, New York City, on May 20, 1963.

Total Time 67'51

Consists of previously released material.

Original Producers: Howard H. Scott (Track 1), David Oppenheim (Track 2) & John McClure (Tracks 3–7)
Produced for SACD by Louise de la Fuente & Dixon Van Winkle.
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A CURIOUS DOVETAIL

The careers of George Gershwin and Ferde Grofé formed a curious dovetail. As pianist and arranger for Paul Whiteman's band, the task of orchestrating Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* (composed for Whiteman's group) naturally fell to Grofé; the fallout was that some critics questioned whether Gershwin could produce a complete symphonic score on his own. Ensuing works quickly put that rumor to rest, especially *An American in Paris*, which sounded fluently symphonic when the New York Philharmonic introduced it, in 1928.

Grofé had the opposite problem: though nobody doubted his ability as an orchestrator, he struggled to prove himself as a composer. Musical depiction of geographical subjects became his specialty, but only one earned an enduring spot in the repertoire: anyone who has witnessed a sunrise at the Grand Canyon will appreciate how exquisitely Grofé painted the scene.

This recording also represents a critical juncture in the "geography" of the New York Philharmonic. Since the late nineteenth century it had performed principally in Carnegie Hall, but the players often traveled to other venues for recordings. One of the most impressive was the St. George Hotel in Brooklyn Heights, where the Gershwin pieces on this disc were committed to tape. It was the largest hotel in New York City: by the 1930s it had grown to comprise 2,632 rooms, a rooftop dance-parlor with sweeping Manhattan views, the "world's largest" saltwater swimming pool, and a grand ballroom that was well suited to symphonic-scale recording.

In 1962 the orchestra relocated to its present home at Lincoln Center. The acoustics of Philharmonic Hall were tested during a "tuning week" in May, and the first public

concert, on September 23, elicited enthusiasm from some and concern from others. By the time this recording of the *Grand Canyon Suite* was made the following spring, the consensus was that Philharmonic Hall was not an acoustic success. Between 1963 and 1969 three separate remodeling attempts proved ineffective, and in 1976 the hall was gutted, reconfigured, and reopened as Avery Fisher Hall, thereby saluting the philanthropist who financed the overhaul. Although recording technology could obviate the hall's original shortcomings, this reading of the *Grand Canyon Suite* documents a bittersweet time when the orchestra struggled to make beautiful music despite the shortcomings of its hall.

James M. Keller
from the notes to SMK 63086

BERNSTEIN: GERSHWIN AND GROFÉ

George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* for Piano and Orchestra owed its composition to a public relations trick. The American band leader Paul Whiteman wanted to demonstrate, by means of a concert in New York's famous Aeolian Hall, that jazz could be entirely acceptable socially, if only it could be dressed up as "symphonic" music. Initially the song writer Gershwin, who was expected to write a large-scale work in jazz idiom, did not feel up to undertaking this task for technical reasons, but accepted the challenge when in January 1924 Whiteman coolly announced in the press that the composer was going to provide a jazz concerto for the gala evening arranged for

February 12. Gershwin chose a free rhapsodic form to which, following a suggestion by his brother Ira, he gave the title "Rhapsody in Blue" after the impressionistic descriptions of pictures by James Whistler, but also with an apposite reference to the typical jazz element of "blue notes."

The orchestration of the composition, which Gershwin himself only wrote for two pianos, was undertaken by Whiteman's arranger, Ferde Grofé. Having originally exploited the specific technical capabilities of the jazz musicians in the Whiteman Orchestra, Grofé later produced two more versions, that for symphony orchestra from 1942 becoming the one which is usually played today. In spite of all the structural inadequacies of which the *Rhapsody* is accused, it was hailed at its first performance with Gershwin as the soloist as an epoch-making work and made its creator world-famous as "the man who had brought jazz into the concert hall."

Gershwin's father Morris once said of *An American in Paris*: "It's very important music – it takes 20 minutes to play." This "important music" was largely written in Paris and Vienna during Gershwin's extended tour of Europe in 1928 and was also orchestrated by him. He saw this composition as a rhapsodic ballet and considered it his most modern music to date; in it Gershwin was not trying musically to depict any particular scenes but only wished to reflect general impressions. Nevertheless he dropped a few hints as to a slight plot (which the music critic Deems Taylor expanded into a detailed description of a stay in Paris in the program booklet for the first performance): an American is strolling through the city (the introductory Allegretto grazioso is the "promenade theme" which accompanies him from sight to sight). He hurls himself into the traffic chaos of the big city (four motor horns – at the first performance the genuine article from France! – provide the necessary local color): he hears a popular old favorite ("La Sorella," with forte trombones) in an "establishment," abandons himself to nostalgic thoughts of home in a café and "has the blues" (a muted trumpet playing an appropriate tune Andante ma con ritmo deciso), is cheered up by a Charleston (Allegro) and once again finds pleasure in the hustle and bustle of Parisian life.

An American in Paris was given its first performance on December 13, 1928 by the New York Philharmonic under Walter Damrosch at Carnegie Hall. It was another triumph for Gershwin in spite of mixed reviews and is regarded today, along with the *Rhapsody in Blue*, as a milestone in the development of an independent American concert repertoire.

Volker Rippe

from the notes to SMK 47529

Translation © 1991 Gery Bramall

Ferde Grofé was actually called Ferdinand Rudolph von Grofe, and his original name makes clear that the roots of his creativity, like those of so many American composers, lay in Europe. Nevertheless he was almost a copybook American musician, who reveled in the sights and sounds of his own country. On the basis of his work as pianist and violinist in Paul Whiteman's jazz orchestra he was in the front rank of the great arrangers: for example, he wrote the orchestral arrangement of Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*. But he was also one of those musicians who wanted to bridge the gap between entertaining Jazz and serious music. All his works reflect this catchy, mixed flavor which, combined with boldly appealing titles such as *Broadway at Night*, *Symphony in Steel*, *Metropolis*, *San Francisco Suite*, *Niagara Falls Suite*, etc., produces an accurate musical portrait of the American landscape. Last but not least in this line of succession is the *Grand Canyon Suite*. While the first movement was written as early as 1921, Grofé only finished the suite between 1929 and 1931 while touring with the Paul Whiteman Orchestra. It was presented to an enthusiastic audience by Whiteman's ensemble at the Studebaker Theatre, Chicago, in November 1931.

Ulrich Tank

from the notes to SMK 47544

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EINE UNGEWÖHNLICHE VERBINDUNG

Die Karrieren von George Gershwin und Ferde Grofé sind merkwürdig miteinander verzahnt. Als Pianist und Arrangeur in Paul Whitemans Band fiel Grofé wie selbstverständlich die Aufgabe zu, die *Rhapsody in Blue* zu orchestrieren, die Gershwin für Whitemans Ensemble komponiert hatte. Daraufhin äußerten einige Kritiker Zweifel, daß Gershwin überhaupt allein eine Partitur für großes Orchester schreiben könne. Seine nächsten Werke ließen diese Stimmen schnell verstummen, vor allem *An American in Paris*, das 1928 bei seiner Uraufführung mit dem New York Philharmonic durch seinen symphonischen Klang überzeugte.

Bei Grofé lag das Problem umgekehrt: Seine Fähigkeiten als Arrangeur waren unbestritten, doch als Komponist mußte er um Anerkennung kämpfen. Seine Spezialität wurde die musikalische Darstellung von Landschaften und Naturstimmungen, aber nur eine einzige sicherte sich einen dauerhaften Platz im Repertoire: Wer einmal den Sonnenaufgang am Grand Canyon erlebt hat, weiß, wie subtil und genau Grofé dieses Ereignis schildert.

Diese Aufnahme markiert auch ein wichtiges Ereignis für die »Geographie« des New York Philharmonic. Seit dem späten 19. Jahrhundert hatten die Konzerte meist in der Carnegie Hall stattgefunden, doch für Aufnahmen fuhren die Orchestermmitglieder oft an andere Orte. Besonders eindrucksvoll war dabei das St. George Hotel in Brooklyn Heights, wo die auf dieser CD vereinten Stücke von Gershwin eingespielt wurden. Es war das größte Hotel in New York City: In den dreißiger Jahren hatte es schließlich 2632 Zimmer, auf dem Dach ein Tanzlokal mit atemberaubender Aussicht auf Manhattan, den größten Salzwasser-Swimmingpool der Welt und einen riesigen Ballsaal, der für Aufnahmen mit großem Orchester bestens geeignet war.

1962 zog das Orchester in sein heutiges Domizil im Lincoln Center. Im Mai wurde die Akustik der Philharmonic Hall in einer »Stimm-Woche« überprüft, und das erste öffentliche Konzert am 23. September löste bei den einen Begeisterung, bei den anderen dagegen Besorgnis aus. Im folgenden Frühjahr, als die vorliegende Aufnahme der *Grand Canyon Suite* entstand, war man sich einig, daß die Philharmonic Hall akustisch nicht gelungen war. Drei Umbauversuche zwischen 1963 und 1969 hatten keinen Erfolg, und 1976 wurde der Saal völlig ausgeräumt, neu gestaltet und als Avery Fisher Hall wiedereröffnet – benannt nach dem Mäzen, der diesen Umbau finanziert hatte. Obwohl die ursprünglichen Mängel des Saals sich durch die Aufnahmetechnik korrigieren ließen, ist diese Einspielung der *Grand Canyon Suite* Zeugnis einer Zeit gemischter Gefühle, als das Orchester sich alle Mühe gab, trotz der Unzulänglichkeit seiner Spielstätte großartige Musik zu machen.

James M. Keller
aus dem Begleittext zur CD SMK 63086
Übersetzung © 1997 Reinhard Lüthje

BERNSTEIN: GERSHWIN UND GROFÉ

George Gershwins *Rhapsody in Blue* für Klavier und Orchester verdankt ihre Entstehung einem publizistischen Trick: Der amerikanische Bandleader Paul Whiteman wollte durch ein Konzert in der renommierten New Yorker Aeolian Hall beweisen, daß Jazz durchaus »gesellschaftsfähig« sein könnte, wenn man ihn nur in ein »symphonisches« Gewand kleidete. Der Songschreiber Gershwin, der für diesen Zweck ein großangelegtes Werk im

Jazzidiom schreiben sollte, traute sich an diese Aufgabe aus musikalisch-technischen Gründen zunächst nicht heran, nahm die Herausforderung dann aber doch an, als Whiteman im Januar 1924 einfach in der Presse verlauten ließ, der Komponist werde für den auf den 12. Februar festgesetzten Galaabend ein Jazzkonzert beisteuern. Gershwin entschied sich für ein Stück in rhapsodisch freier Form, das auf einen Vorschlag seines Bruders Ira hin in Anlehnung an die impressionistischen Bildbezeichnungen des Malers James Whistler den Titel *Rhapsody in Blue* erhielt, womit auch treffend auf eines der typischen Jazzelemente angespielt wurde, auf die »blue notes«.

Die Instrumentierung der von Gershwin selbst nur für zwei Klaviere niedergeschriebenen Komposition besorgte Whitemans Arrangeur Ferde Grofé. Ursprünglich die spezifischen technischen Möglichkeiten der Jazzmusiker des Whiteman-Orchesters ausnutzend, erstellte Grofé später noch zwei weitere Versionen, von denen die für Symphonieorchester aus dem Jahr 1942 die heute üblicherweise gespielte ist. Trotz aller strukturellen Unzulänglichkeiten, die der *Rhapsody* vorgeworfen werden, wurde sie schon bei der Uraufführung mit Gershwin als Solist als epochales Werk bejubelt und brachte ihrem Schöpfer Weltruhm ein als dem »Mann, der den Jazz in die Konzertsäle gebrachte hat«.

»Das ist sehr bedeutende Musik – es dauert 20 Minuten, sie zu spielen«, hat Gershwins Vater Morris einmal über den *American in Paris* gesagt. Diese »bedeutende Musik« entstand zu wesentlichen Teilen in Paris und Wien während Gershwins ausgedehnter Europareise im Jahre 1928 und wurde von ihm selbst orchestriert. Gershwin, der in dieser Komposition ein rhapsodisches Ballett und seine bis dato modernste Musik sah, wollte keine bestimmten Szenen musikalisch nachzeichnen, sondern nur allgemeine Impressionen widerspiegeln. Dennoch machte er einige Andeutungen im Sinne einer kleinen Handlung, die der Musikkritiker Deems Taylor für das Programmheft der Uraufführung zu einer detaillierten Schilderung eines Aufenthaltes in Paris ausgearbeitet hat: Ein Amerikaner bummelt durch die Stadt (das einleitende Allegretto grazioso ist sein ihn von Schauplatz zu Schauplatz begleitendes »Promenadenthema«), stürzt sich ins Gewühl des Großstadtverkehrs (vier Autohupen – bei der Uraufführung waren es

original französische! – sorgen für das nötige Lokalkolorit), hört in einem »Etablissement« die Melodie eines alten Gassenhauers (»La Sorella«; Posaunen im Forte), überläßt sich in einem Café sehnsüchtigen Gedanken an die Heimat und »bekommt den Blues« (eine gestopfte Trompete intoniert im Andante ma con ritmo deciso ein entsprechendes Thema), wird durch eine Charleston-Melodie (Allegro) aufgeheitert und freut sich wieder am bunten Pariser Treiben.

An American in Paris, am 13. Dezember 1928 von den New Yorker Philharmonikern unter Walter Damrosch in der Carnegie Hall uraufgeführt, wurde trotz gemischter Kritiken ein weiterer Triumph für Gershwin und zählt heute zusammen mit der *Rhapsody in Blue* zu den Meilensteinen einer eigenständigen amerikanischen Konzertliteratur.

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aus dem Begleittext zur CD SMK 47529

Ferde Grofé hieß eigentlich Ferdinand Rudolph von Grofe, und allein schon der ursprüngliche Name macht deutlich, daß bei Grofé wie bei so vielen amerikanischen Komponisten die Wurzeln des Tuns in Europa lagen. Gleichwohl war er geradezu ein amerikanischer »Bilderbuch-Musiker«, der in den Bildern und Klängen seines Landes schwelgte. Aufbauend auf seiner Tätigkeit als Pianist und Violinist in Paul Whitemans Jazzband, gehörte er zur ersten Garde der großen Arrangeure – die Orchesterfassung von Gershwins *Rhapsody in Blue* stammt z.B. von ihm. Er gehörte aber auch zu jenem Kreis von Musikern, die zwischen unterhaltendem Jazz und ernster Musik vermitteln wollten. Allen seinen Werken ist dieser eingängige vermischte Ton zu eigen, der sich im Verein mit so plakativen Werktiteln wie *Broadway at Night*, *Symphony in Steel*, *Metropolis*, *San Francisco Suite*, *Niagara Falls Suite* etc. zu einem wahren musikalischen (Landschafts-)Porträt Amerikas verknüpft. In direkter Linie dazu ist – last but not least – auch die *Grand Canyon Suite* zu sehen. Während der erste Satz schon 1921 entstand, vervollständigte Grofé die

Suite zwischen 1929 und 1931 auf Gastspielreisen mit dem Paul Whiteman Orchester. Im November 1931 wurde das Stück im Studebaker Theatre in Chicago von Whitemans Ensemble einem begeisterten Publikum offeriert.

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aus dem Begleittext zur CD SMK 47544

UNE CURIEUSE COMPLÉMENTARITÉ

Les carrières de George Gershwin et de Ferde Grofé formèrent une curieuse queue d'aronde. En sa qualité de pianiste et arrangeur de l'orchestre de Paul Whiteman, la tâche d'orchestrer la *Rhapsody in Blue* de Gershwin (composée, précisément, pour l'ensemble de Whiteman) revint tout naturellement à Grofé – avec, parmi les retombées, un certain doute de la part de quelques critiques quant à savoir si Gershwin était capable de produire à lui seul une partition symphonique complète. Les œuvres suivantes du compositeur vinrent rapidement couper court à la rumeur, surtout avec *An American in Paris* (*Un Américain à Paris*), que la présentation en 1928 par l'Orchestre Philharmonique de New York, révéla merveilleusement symphonique.

Grofé se trouva, lui, confronté au problème inverse : bien que personne ne doutât de ses aptitudes d'orchestrateur, il dut lutter pour établir la preuve de ses talents de compositeur. La description musicale d'objets géographiques devint sa spécialité. Une seule, pourtant, réussit à se faire une place durable dans le répertoire, et quiconque a eu l'occasion de voir le soleil se lever sur le Grand Canyon ne manquera pas d'apprécier le tableau exquis que Grofé en a peint dans sa musique.

Cet enregistrement représente également un carrefour essentiel dans la « géographie » de l'Orchestre Philharmonique de New York. Depuis la fin du XIX^e siècle, l'ensemble se produisait généralement au Carnegie Hall, mais ses musiciens se rendaient souvent ailleurs, pour la réalisation de leurs enregistrements. L'un des lieux les plus impressionnants était l'hôtel St. George de Brooklyn Heights, où furent immortalisées sur bande magnétique les pièces de Gershwin présentées sur ce disque. Le St. George était le plus grand hôtel de la ville de New York : il comptait, dès les années 30, pas moins de 2 632

chambres, un salon de danse, sur le toit, avec vue majestueuse sur Manhattan, la « plus grande piscine d'eau de mer du monde » et une immense salle de bal parfaitement adaptée aux besoins d'enregistrements d'envergure symphonique.

En 1962, l'orchestre prit possession de son domaine actuel au Lincoln Center. L'acoustique du Philharmonic Hall fut testée au mois de mai, durant la semaine dite « de réglage », et le premier concert public, le 23 septembre suivant, provoqua l'enthousiasme des uns et l'inquiétude des autres. Au moment de la réalisation de cet enregistrement de la *Grand Canyon Suite*, au printemps suivant, l'échec acoustique du Philharmonic Hall était généralement admis. Trois tentatives correctives, entre 1963 et 1969, échouèrent et, en 1976, la salle fut éventrée, reconfigurée puis réinaugurée sous le nouveau nom d'Avery Fisher Hall, pour saluer le philanthrope qui en avait financé la reconstruction. Malgré les capacités offertes par les techniques d'enregistrement modernes pour combler les lacunes de la salle originale, cette exécution de la *Grand Canyon Suite* reste le témoin d'une période aigre-douce pour l'orchestre, en lutte pour produire une musique de qualité dans l'enceinte peu favorable de la salle où il avait élu domicile.

James M. Keller

extrait du livret du disque compact SMK 63086

Traduction : Geneviève Haines

BERNSTEIN : GERSHWIN ET GROFÉ

Rhapsody in Blue de George Gershwin, pour piano et orchestre, doit son existence à une astuce de publiciste : le chef d'orchestre de jazz Paul Whiteman voulait prouver par un concert dans le célèbre Aeolian Hall de New York que le jazz pouvait être parfaitement « convenable en société » si on lui conférait un aspect « symphonique ». Le compositeur de musique vocale Gershwin, qui devait écrire à cet effet une œuvre de grande dimension dans un langage musical propre au jazz, hésita au début à accepter cette tâche qui lui paraissait comporter de nombreuses difficultés techniques et musicales ; il releva ensuite le défi, lorsque Whiteman fit tout simplement savoir à la presse, en janvier 1924, que le compositeur allait apporter sa contribution à la soirée de gala du 12 février sous la forme d'un concert de jazz. Gershwin se décida pour une pièce à la structure libre et rhapsodique qui se vit attribuer le titre *Rhapsody in Blue*, proposé par son frère Ira, sur le modèle des désignations impressionnistes des tableaux du peintre James Whistler ; cette dénomination fait en outre directement allusion à certain des éléments caractéristiques du jazz, les « blue notes ».

Gershwin composa son œuvre pour deux pianos et c'est à Ferde Grofé, l'arrangeur de Whiteman, que l'on en doit l'orchestration. Exploitant à l'origine les capacités de jazz de l'ensemble de Whiteman, Grofé écrivit encore deux autres versions ; c'est celle de 1942, pour orchestre symphonique, qui est le plus souvent interprétée de nos jours. Malgré toutes les insuffisances structurales qui sont reprochées à *Rhapsody in Blue*, l'œuvre fut accueillie dès sa création, avec Gershwin lui-même au piano, avec beaucoup d'enthousiasme et marqua son époque. Le compositeur lui doit d'être considéré dans le monde entier comme l'« homme qui a introduit le jazz dans les salles de concert ».

« C'est une musique absolument remarquable – il faut vingt minutes pour la jouer », déclara un jour Morris, le père de Gershwin, à propos d'*Un Américain à Paris*. Cette « musique remarquable » a été écrite en grande partie à Paris et à Vienne pendant le grand voyage que Gershwin effectua en Europe en 1928 et fut orchestrée par le compositeur lui-même. Gershwin, qui voyait dans cette composition un ballet rhapsodique et la considérait comme son œuvre alors la plus moderne, n'avait pas cherché à illustrer musicalement des scènes précises mais à exprimer des impressions générales. Il donna néanmoins quelques indications permettant d'esquisser une action (pour le programme de la création, le critique musical Deems Taylor élaborait à partir de ces éléments une description détaillée d'un séjour à Paris) : un Américain déambule dans la ville (*l'Allegretto grazioso* introductif constitue son « thème de promenade » qui l'accompagnera partout au cours de ses déplacements), se noie dans la cohue et la circulation de la métropole (quatre coups de klaxon de voitures – lors de la création, on utilisa des véritables klaxons français ! – contribuent à établir la couleur locale nécessaire), entend dans un bar la mélodie d'une vieille chanson populaire (« La Sorella » ; trombones *forte*), se laisse aller dans un café à des pensées nostalgiques lui rappelant son pays et « attrape le blues » (une trompette en sourdine entonne dans *l'Andante ma con ritmo* un thème approprié), retrouve sa bonne humeur en entendant une mélodie de charleston (*Allegro*) et reprend plaisir à l'agitation de la vie parisienne.

Un Américain à Paris fut créé le 13 décembre 1928 au Carnegie Hall par l'Orchestre Philharmonique de New York sous la direction de Walter Damrosch. Malgré des critiques mitigées, il constitua pour Gershwin un nouveau succès ; tout comme *Rhapsody in Blue*, cette œuvre compte parmi les plus importantes d'un répertoire de concert typiquement américain.

Volker Rippe

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Ferde Grofé s'appelait en réalité Ferdinand Rudolph von Grofé, et ce nom trahit à lui seul ses racines européennes, communes du reste à tant de compositeurs américains. Cela ne l'empêcha pas d'être, à proprement parler, l'archétype du musicien américain, et de se griser des images et des sons de son pays. Pianiste et violoniste dans le jazz-band de Paul Whiteman, Grofé fit partie de l'avant-garde des grands-arrangeurs – on lui doit par exemple la version orchestrale de la *Rhapsody in Blue* de Gershwin. Mais il appartient aussi au cercle de musiciens qui cherchait à servir d'intermédiaires entre le jazz de divertissement et la musique plus sérieuse. Toutes ses œuvres se caractérisent par ce son métissé facile à retenir, et qui, associé à des titres d'œuvres aussi évocateurs et parlants que *Broadway at Night*, *Symphony in Steel*, *Metropolis*, *San Francisco Suite*, *Niagara Falls Suite*, etc., nous peint un véritable paysage musical de l'Amérique, dont relève également – last but not least – la Grand Canyon Suite. Alors que le premier mouvement avait vu le jour dès 1921, Grofé n'acheva sa suite qu'entre 1929 et 1931 pendant les tournées qu'il fit avec l'orchestre de Paul Whiteman. L'œuvre fut présentée à un public enthousiaste en novembre 1931, au Studebaker Theatre de Chicago, par l'ensemble de Whiteman.

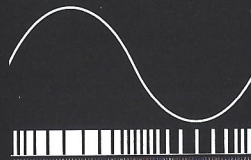
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