André Previn, in full André George Previn, original name Andreas Ludwig Priwin, (born April 6, 1929, Berlin, Germany—died February 28, 2019, New York, New York, U.S.), German-born American pianist, composer, arranger, and conductor, especially sympathetic to French, Russian, and English music of the 19th and 20th centuries.

Previn's family fled Nazi persecution and moved to Los Angeles in 1939. While still a teenager he was recognized as a gifted jazz pianist, and he performed various orchestrating and arranging tasks for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer in the 1940s and then worked under contract with MGM from 1952 to 1960. Working for various studios, he won Academy Awards for his music scores for Gigi (1958), Porgy and Bess (1959), Irma la Douce (1963), and My Fair Lady (1964).

In 1951, while stationed in San Francisco with the U.S. Army, he began studies in conducting with Pierre Monteux. He made his conducting debut with the St. Louis (Mo.) Symphony in 1963. After serving in turn as principal conductor of the Houston, London, and Pittsburgh symphony orchestras, he worked as musical director of the Los Angeles Philharmonic from 1985 to 1989. He was associated with the Royal Philharmonic (as musical director, 1985–88, and principal conductor, 1988–91) and in 1993 was named conductor laureate of the London Symphony. He appeared in a guest conductor role with major orchestras in Europe and the United States.

He composed in varied genres throughout his career. His works included Symphony for Strings (1962); concerti for cello (1968), guitar (1971), piano (1985), and violin (2001); orchestral works such as Principals (1980) and Honey and Rue (1992); chamber music, including String Quartet with Soprano (2003); the opera A Streetcar Named Desire (1998; based on the play by Tennessee Williams); other theatrical music; and songs. His many Grammy Awards were in multiple categories: musical shows (1958 and 1959), pop (1959), jazz (1960 and 1961), and classical (several awards from 1973).

Previn wrote extensively about music. His books included Music Face to Face (1971), Orchestra (1979), André Previn's Guide to Music (1983; editor), André Previn's Guide to the Orchestra (1986), and No Minor Chords: My Early Days in Hollywood (1991).

In 1996 he was created a Knight Commander of the Order of the British Empire (KBE), and in 1998 he received a Kennedy Center Honor for lifetime achievement in music.

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Gershwin successfully combined the sweep and mood of the typical Russian concerto with the blues, jazz, and rag elements he brought from his successful pop music career. And why not? His family had recently immigrated from Russia when he was born in 1898. He had, of course, been immensely successful as a pop tune composer and as a Broadway show composer before he wrote this 1925 concerto. It was, specifically, the success of his Rhapsody in Blue which led Walter Damrosch and the New York Symphony Society to commission this concerto. Gershwin resolved to orchestrate it himself (Grofé had done both the jazz band and the symphonic arrangements of the rhapsody.) Even if he had to delve into textbooks to learn orchestration and even to discover what the form of a concerto might be, he created an entirely successful work. Although some critics thought the concerto was derivative of Debussy and other composers, it is in fact a remarkably original and personally characteristic work for being any composer's first unassisted piece.

Gershwin was not ready for formal innovation; the three-movement form of the concerto is in fact textbook. The introduction is fresh, breezy, and contemporary, based on the rhythm of the very popular dance Charleston by James P. Johnson. A bassoon introduces the sprightly first theme, while the piano itself has the warm-hearted contrasting theme. Throughout the movement -- and the concerto as a whole -- the themes have jazz-like syncopations and make liberal use of the "blues scale."

The second movement is remarkable for its muted trumpet theme, a nocturnal, wistful tune with the potential to haunt the memory. It is contrasted with an upbeat, strolling theme on piano. The form of the movement is reminiscent of the slow movement of Dvorak's New World Symphony, and possesses the same kind of passionate outburst shortly before its conclusion.

A virtual fanfare for timpani, cymbals, and bass drum launches the highly energetic finale in rondo form. Like many of the fast themes of the whole concerto, its main subject makes good use of aggressively repeated notes. There is a lyrical theme which manages not to slow things down, initially. Gershwin recollects the second theme of the first movement and yet another melodic idea for muted trumpet with strings. Gershwin ends this high-energy romp with a brief coda.

George Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue, arguably the most popular work for piano and orchestra written by an American, came about almost by accident. Toward the end of 1923, popular bandleader Paul Whiteman asked Gershwin if he'd consider writing a jazz concerto for his orchestra. Gershwin informally agreed to do so and returned to his regular beat of writing songs for Broadway shows. Imagine Gershwin's surprise on January 4, 1924, when his brother Ira brought along that day's edition of the New York Evening Herald, wherein Whiteman announced that George's jazz concerto was to be premiered at a program at New York's Aeolian Hall entitled "An Experiment in Modern Music" on February 12. This was barely more than a month away. The four-stave manuscript of Rhapsody in Blue, now in the Library of Congress, records that George began work on the piece on January 7, 1924. It was done by February 4, 1924, when arranger Ferde Grofé ordered the orchestral parts be made up in time for rehearsals. Then as now, it was standard procedure for a Broadway composer to use an orchestrator, and Grofé was then producing most of the Whiteman band's original arrangements and leading the rehearsals. George had other help, too: Ira suggested he use the slow second theme based on a melody already composed, and Victor Herbert advised George on some of the transitional material used to hold the movement together. Whiteman clarinetist Ross Gorman improvised the famous clarinet glissando that opens the work as a gag during rehearsals and George asked him to keep playing it that way. The title, Rhapsody in Blue, is not so much related to the final form of the piece as it was inspired by a painting of James McNeill Whistler entitled Nocturne in Black and Gold. The premiere of Rhapsody in Blue was a huge success and it was clear at the outset that the work had enormous commercial potential. Grofé created three more orchestrations of it -- the first being a 21-part version for theater orchestra that became the standard text of the work for the next two decades. Grofé didn't create a version for full orchestra until 1942, and this is now the version that is most familiar and most frequently recorded. About this time, Grofé created yet another incarnation of Rhapsody in Blue for symphonic band in which the piano part is optional.

GERSHWIN

Concerto In F & Rhapsody In Blue

André Kostelanetz and his Orchestra, Andre Previn, piano

Piano Concerto in F Major 32:09

1 Allegro moderato - Cantabile - Poco meno scherzando **12:56**

2 Andante con moto 12:43

3 Allegro agitato 6:30

4 Rhapsody in Blue 13:53

Total Time: 46:02

Released by Columbia Records 1960

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