

Howard Harold Hanson (October 28, 1896 - February 26, 1981)

In 1916, Hanson was hired for his first full-time position as a music theory and composition teacher at the College of the Pacific in California. Only three years later, the college appointed him Dean of the Conservatory of Fine Arts in 1919. In 1920, Hanson composed *The California Forest Play*, his earliest work to receive national attention. Hanson also wrote a number of orchestral and chamber works during his years in California, including *Concerto da Camera*, *Symphonic Legend*, *Symphonic Rhapsody*, various solo piano works, such as *Two Yuletide Pieces*, and the *Scandinavian Suite*, which celebrated his Lutheran and Scandinavian heritage.

In 1921 Hanson was the first winner of the Prix de Rome in Music [American Academy in Rome|American Academy]]s Rome Prize, awarded for both *The California Forest Play* and his symphonic poem *Before the Dawn*. Thanks to the award, Hanson lived in Italy for three years. During his time in Italy, Hanson wrote a *Quartet in One Movement*, *Lux Aeterna*, *The Lament for Beowulf* (orchestration Bernhard Kaun), and his *Symphony No. 1, "Nordic"*, the premiere of which he conducted with the *Augusteo Orchestra* on May 30, 1923. The three years Hanson spent on his Fellowship at the American Academy were, he considered, the formative years of his life, as he was free to compose, conduct without the distraction of teaching - he could devote himself solely to his art.

(It has been incorrectly stated that Hanson studied composition and/or orchestration with Ottorino Respighi, who studied orchestration with Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov. Hanson's unpublished autobiography refutes the statement, attributed to Ruth Watanabe, that he had studied with Respighi.)

Upon returning from Rome, Hanson's conducting career expanded. He made his premiere conducting the *New York Symphony Orchestra* in his tone poem *North and West*. In Rochester, New York in 1924, he conducted his *Symphony No. 1*. This performance brought him to the attention of George Eastman. Eastman chose Hanson to be director of the *Eastman School of Music*. Inventor of the Kodak camera and roll film, and business master, Eastman had become a major philanthropist. He used some of his great wealth to endow the *Eastman School of Music* at the *University of Rochester*.

Hanson held the position of director for forty years, during which he created one of the most prestigious music schools in America. He accomplished this by improving the curriculum, bringing in better teachers, and refining the school's orchestras. Also, he balanced the school's faculty between American and European teachers, even when this meant passing up composer Béla Bartók. Hanson offered a position to Bartók teaching composition at Eastman, but Bartók declined as he did not believe that one could teach composition. Instead, Bartók wanted to teach piano at the *Eastman School*, but Hanson already had a full staff of piano instructors.

In 1925, Hanson established the *American Composers Orchestral Concerts*. Later, he founded the *Eastman-Rochester Orchestra*, which consisted of first chair players from the *Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra* and selected students from the *Eastman School*. He followed that by establishing the *Festivals of American Music*. Hanson made many recordings (mostly for *Mercury Records*) with the *Eastman-Rochester Orchestra*, not only of his own works, but also those of other American composers such as *John Alden Carpenter*, *Charles Tomlinson Griffes*, *John Knowles Paine*, *Walter Piston*, and *William Grant Still*. Hanson estimated that more than 2000 works by over 500 American composers were premiered during his tenure at the *Eastman School*.

To celebrate the 50th anniversary of the *Boston Symphony Orchestra*, *Serge Koussevitzky* commissioned Hanson's *Symphony No. 2*, the "Romantic", and premiered it on November 28, 1930. This work was to become Hanson's best known. One of its themes is performed at the conclusion of all concerts at the *Interlochen Center for the Arts*. Now known as the "Interlochen Theme", it is conducted by a student concertmaster after the featured conductor has left the stage. Traditionally, no applause follows its performance. It is also best known for its use in the end credits of the 1979 Ridley Scott film *Alien*.

In some ways Hanson's opera *Merry Mount* (1934) may be considered the first fully American opera. It was written by an American composer and an American librettist on an American story, and was premiered with a mostly American cast at the *Metropolitan Opera* in New York in 1934. The *Opera* received fifty curtain calls at its *Met* premiere, a record that still stands. In 1935 Hanson wrote "Three Songs from *Drum Taps*", based on the poem by *Walt Whitman*.

Hanson was elected as a member of the *National Institute of Arts and Letters* in 1935, *President of the Music Teachers' National Association* from 1929 to 1930, and *President of the National Association of Schools of Music* from 1935 to 1939.

From 1946 to 1962 Hanson was active in *United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)*. *UNESCO* commissioned Hanson's *Pastorale for Oboe and Piano*, and *Pastorale for Oboe, Strings, and Harp*, for the 1949 Paris conference of the world body.

Frederick Fennell, conductor of the *Eastman Wind Ensemble*, described Hanson's first band composition, the 1954 *Chorale and Alleluia* as "the most awaited piece of music to be written for the wind band in my twenty years as a conductor in this field". *Chorale and Alleluia* is still a required competition piece for high school bands in the *New York State School Music Association's* repertoire list. It is one of Hanson's most frequently recorded works.

From 1961-1962, Hanson took the *Eastman Philharmonia*, a student ensemble, on a European tour which passed through *Paris*, *Cairo*, *Moscow*, and *Vienna*, among other cities. The tour showcased the growth of serious American music for Europe and the Middle East.



GEORGE GERSHWIN RHAPSODY IN BLUE CUBAN OVERTURE

EUGENE LIST piano
HOWARD HANSON
EASTMAN-ROCHESTER
ORCHESTRA

Born on September 26, 1898, in Brooklyn, New York, George Gershwin dropped out of school and began playing piano professionally at age 15. Within a few years, he was one of the most sought after musicians in America. A composer of jazz, opera and popular songs for stage and screen, many of his works are now standards. Gershwin died immediately following brain surgery on July 11, 1937, at the age 38.

George Gershwin was born Jacob Gershowitz on September 26, 1898, in Brooklyn, New York. The son of Russian-Jewish immigrants, George began his foray into music at age 11 when his family bought a secondhand piano for George's older sibling, Ira.

A natural talent, it was George who took it up and eventually sought out mentors who could enhance his abilities. He eventually began studying with the noted piano teacher Charles Hambitzer, and apparently impressed him; in a letter to his sister, Hambitzer wrote, "I have a new pupil who will make his mark if anybody will. The boy is a genius."

Throughout his 23-year career, Gershwin would continually seek to expand the breadth of his influences, studying under an incredibly disparate array of teachers, including Henry Cowell, Wallingford Riegger, Edward Kilenyi and Joseph Schillinger.

After dropping out of school at age 15, Gershwin played in several New York nightclubs and began his stint as a "song-plugger" in New York's Tin Pan Alley.

After three years of pounding out tunes on the piano for demanding customers, he had transformed into a highly skilled and dexterous composer. To earn extra cash, he also worked as a rehearsal pianist for Broadway singers. In 1916, he composed his first published song, "When You Want 'Em, You Can't Get 'Em; When You Have 'Em, You Don't Want 'Em."

From 1920 to 1924, Gershwin composed for an annual production put on by George White. After a show titled "Blue Monday," the bandleader in the

pit, Paul Whiteman, asked Gershwin to create a jazz number that would heighten the genre's respectability.

Legend has it that Gershwin forgot about the request until he read a newspaper article announcing the fact that Whiteman's latest concert would feature a new Gershwin composition. Writing at a manic pace in order to meet the deadline, Gershwin composed what is perhaps his best-known work, "Rhapsody in Blue."

During this time, and in the years that followed, Gershwin wrote numerous songs for stage and screen that quickly became standards, including "Oh, Lady Be Good!" "Someone to Watch over Me," "Strike Up the Band," "Embraceable You," "Let's Call the Whole Thing Off" and "They Can't Take That Away from Me." His lyricist for nearly all of these tunes was his older brother, Ira, whose witty lyrics and inventive wordplay received nearly as much acclaim as George's compositions.

In 1935, a decade after composing "Rhapsody in Blue," Gershwin debuted his most ambitious composition, "Porgy and Bess." The composition, which was based on the novel "Porgy" by Dubose Heyward, drew from both popular and classical influences. Gershwin called it his "folk opera," and it is considered to not only be Gershwin's most complex and best-known works, but also among the most important American musical compositions of the 20th century.

Following his success with "Porgy and Bess," Gershwin moved to Hollywood and was hired to compose the music for a film titled "Shall We Dance," starring Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. It was while working on a follow-up film with Astaire that Gershwin's life would come to an abrupt end.

In the beginning of 1937, Gershwin began to experience troubling symptoms such as severe headaches and noticing strange smells.

Doctors would eventually discover that he had developed a malignant brain tumor. On July 11, 1937, Gershwin died during surgery to remove the tumor. He was only 38.

GEORGE GERSHWIN RHAPSODY IN BLUE CUBAN OVERTURE

EUGENE LIST piano

HOWARD HANSON conducts the
EASTMAN-ROCHESTER ORCHESTRA

1. Gershwin Rhapsody In Blue 15:17

2. Cuban Overture 11:14

Total Time: 26:31

Recorded by Mercury Records May 4th, 1957 at the
Eastman Theater in Rochester, NY.

Engineer - C. R. Fine Recording Supervisor - Wilma Cozart
Supervised By - Harold Lawrence Transferred By - George Piros



For more info e-mail us:
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Gershwin Rhapsody in Blue and Cuban Overture - Howard Hanson Eastman-Rochester Orchestra List, piano

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