

Walter Susskind Born: May 1, 1913 – Czech Republic / Died: March 25, 1980 – Berkeley, California, USA

The distinguished Czech-born English conductor, Walter Susskind (originally, Jan Süsskind), studied composition with Suk and Karel Hába and piano with Hoffmeister at the Prague Conservatory. He also studied conducting with Szell at the German Academy of Music in Prague.

Walter Susskind made his debut as a conductor in 1934 with La Traviata at the German Opera in Prague. He was also pianist with the Czech Trio from 1933 to 1938. After the German occupation in 1938, he went to London, where he continued to serve as pianist with the exiled Czech Trio until 1942. He became a naturalized British subject in 1946. He was music director of the Carl Rosa Opera Company in London from 1943 to 1945. Then he went to Glasgow in that capacity with the Scottish Orchestra in 1946, remaining with it after it became the Scottish National Orchestra in 1950. After serving as music director of the Victoria Symphony Orchestra in Melbourne from 1953 to 1955, he was music director of Toronto Symphony Orchestra (1956-1965), the Aspen (Colorado) Music Festival (1962-1968), Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra (1968-1975), and the Mississippi River Festival in Edwardsville, Illinois (1969-1975). It was under his direction that Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra came together as a leading American orchestra. He also appeared regularly as guest conductor with the major orchestras of Europe, the UK, and North America. His last position was that of music advisor and principal guest conductor of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra from 1978 until his death.

Walter Susskind also taught at the University of Southern Illinois (1968-1975). Susskind was also known as a great mentor of young conductors. Two of these, Leonard Slatkin and Gerhardt Zimmermann, both assistant conductors brought on by Susskind, went on to notable careers.



Music of Morton Gould

Spirituals for String Choir and Orchestra

Walter Susskind
London Symphony Orchestra

Interplay for Piano and Orchestra

Latin American Symphonette

Morton Gould And His Orchestra



Spirituals for String Choir and Orchestra (1941)

Morton Gould, composer, conductor, pianist, arranger and administrator, was born on December 10, 1913 in New York City. By the age of four, he was playing the piano and composing; at six, he had one of his first compositions published (a waltz called, appropriately, Just Six); and by the time he was eight, he had played piano on broadcasts of WOR Radio in New York. In 1932, when he was nineteen, he became staff pianist at Radio City Music Hall. After a brief stint with NBC, he was engaged as composer, arranger and conductor by WOR, where he did a weekly broadcast; from 1942 to 1945, he performed the same duties for the Cresta Blanca Carnival and Chrysler Hour programs on CBS. It was for those broadcasts that he composed his popular American Concertette (which was choreographed by Jerome Robbins as Interplay) and the Latin-American Symphonette.

In addition to his light compositions for radio, Gould has written for film (Windjammer), television (the World War I series, Holocaust and Celebration), ballet (Fall River Legend), Broadway (Billion dollar Baby and Arms and the Girl), symphonic band, chamber ensembles and chorus, and has also produced some fifty works for orchestra, including American Salute, Spirituals, Vivaldi Gallery, Apple Waltzes, Burch field Gallery, Lincoln Legend and Symphony of Spirituals. He is also widely known as a conductor, having won a Grammy Award for his recording of the music of Charles Ives with the Chicago Symphony. His other honors include twelve Grammy nominations, the 1983 Gold Baton Award from the American Symphony Orchestra League, the 1985 Medal of Honor for Music from the National Arts Club, membership in the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, and the National Music Council's Golden Eagle Award. In addition, Morton Gould is president of ASCAP (American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers).

Gould's Spirituals, the work which established his reputation as a concert composer, was introduced under the composer's direction at the WNYC Festival of American Music in New York on February 9, 1941. Soon after Spirituals was premiered, Gould said of it:

I have tried to write music the way one speaks. I tried to make it as direct and simple as possible. Part of the "Jubilee" section, for example, is in boogie-woogie pattern. Of course, many contemporary jazz effects coincide with certain rhythmic patterns in our spirituals. What I tried to do was to synthesize some of these features. My starting premise was that our spirituals develop a wide gamut of emotions, musically. These emotions are specifically American. The songs range from strictly spiritual ones that are escapist in feeling, or light and gay, to those having tremendous depth and tragic impact. My idea was to get five moods, widely contrasted in feeling. Although most of the work is original as far as thematic material goes, I have used fragments of folk tunes here and there. The first movement ("Proclamation") has a dramatic religious intensity. The second movement ("Sermon") is a simple narrative - a sort of lyrical folk tale. The third movement ("A Little Bit of Sin") is humorous and good-natured. The fourth movement ("Protest") is bitter, grim and crying-out. The last movement ("Jubilee") is a festive and dance-like piece.

Morton Gould's American Concertette for piano and orchestra became a more important work when it stopped being a concerto. Originally written for Jose Iturbi, it was, in the composer's own words, "conceived as a little concerto for piano and orchestra" which used "popular idiomatic materials in a classical framework and fabric." But the choreographer Jerome Robbins happened to hear the work's premiere on the radio on August 25, 1943, and decided it would make perfect ballet music. Now the American Concertette is better known as Interplay, the ballet which premiered two years later and which inaugurated a series of important dance works by Gould. When one hears the American Concertette, it is obvious why Robbins saw dance in its future. Its music is primarily movement, even sometimes at the expense of melody. Just as with popular material, catchy rhythmic motives are repeated in different forms to produce excitement and momentum. The first movement, for example, begins with some high-energy alternation between piano and orchestra; this eventually settles into a quicksilver theme with some strong rhythmic accents. Even the more relaxed (and more usually "classical") theme which comes later gets caught up in the excitement eventually. "Gavotte" is the subtitle of the second movement, which bears a lot more resemblance to popular song than to the seventeenth-century French court dance whose name it bears; Gould treats the movement's modest, winning melody with grace and wit. The third movement is subtitled "Blues" and features two slow, wistful tunes that fit that description, with appropriately delicate orchestral accompaniment. This movement acts as an oasis of stillness before the storm of the finale, which begins with a running start and does not let up with its swirling, exuberant music until the final chord. The geniality and energy of the American Concertette is infectious.

The Latin-American Symphonette (1933) is one of a large number of Gould's works that illustrate how effective and convincing well-crafted examples of "light" concert music can be. The four-movement Symphonette, based on several Latin-American and Caribbean dance rhythms and popular forms, approximates the scope of a Classical-era symphony and, indeed, exhibits a like clarity of form and melody. Not surprisingly, Gould makes colorful use of a variety of Latin percussion instruments. Throughout, the Symphonette is characterized by memorable and finely crafted tunes and lively rhythms; the slow movement provides a change of mood with a gentle nocturnal song, while the work draws to a close with a pulse-pounding finale.

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Spirituals For String Choir And Orchestra

1. Proclamation 5:06
2. Sermon 3:40
3. A Little Bit Of Sin 2:00
4. Protest 3:48
5. Jubilee 3:47

Interplay

6. First Movement 4:09
7. Second Movement (Gavotte) 2:34
8. Third Movement (Blues) 4:35
9. Fourth Movement 3:30

Latin-American Symphonette

10. Tango 5:38
 11. Guaracha 3:13
- Total Time: 42:00

Spirituals transferred from a 15ips 2-track tape

Recorded 1958 by Everest Records

Interplay and Latin American Symphonette transferred from a RCA 4-track tape

Recorded 1960 by RCA



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