

After the stunning successes of Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue (1924) and the Piano Concerto in F (1925), Walter Damrosch, then conductor of the New York Philharmonic, was anxious to capitalize on the young composer's growing fame. He requested a work from Gershwin for a first performance in Carnegie Hall in mid-December of 1928. Gershwin had journeyed to Paris and was thoroughly immersed in the mood of the French capital. He brought back authentic Parisian taxi horns, which were used as an integral part of the work. The piece is a true tone poem, inspired by extra-musical considerations -- the sights, sounds, and moods of Paris. Deems Taylor, the 1920s composer and critic, furnished a blow-by-blow program for the piece from which I quote a brief excerpt: "You are to imagine an American visiting Paris, swinging down the Champs-Élysées on a mild sunny morning in May or June....Our American's ears being open as well as his eyes, he notes with pleasure the sounds of the city. French taxicabs seem to amuse him particularly." Although he claimed not to have a program in mind when he wrote the work, Gershwin did sketch his own general scenario: "An opening section, in which an American visitor strolls about Paris and 'absorbs the French atmosphere,' is followed by a rich blues with a strong rhythmic undercurrent," representing an episode of homesickness on the visitor's part. But the American overcomes his spell of depression and once again revels in the sights and sounds of Paris. "At the conclusion," according to the composer, "the street noises and French atmosphere are triumphant."

Milhaud **A FRENCHMAN IN NEW YORK**

Gershwin **AN AMERICAN IN PARIS**

**BOSTON POPS / ARTHUR FIEDLER**



One of the more prolific composers of the twentieth century, Darius Milhaud was born to a Jewish family in southern France during the last decade of the nineteenth century. He learned the violin as a youth. Studies at the Paris Conservatoire from age 17 on gave the young composer opportunity to work with some of the most prominent French composers and theorists of the day, including Charles Marie Widor, Vincent d'Indy and André Gedalge, and allowed him to focus on developing his skills as a pianist.

While serving as an attaché at the French delegation in Rio de Janeiro during the First World War, Milhaud began a long and fruitful association with poet Paul Claudel (who was at that time a Minister at the delegation), several of whose plays Milhaud would go on to provide with incidental music (*Proteé*, 1919; *L'annonce fait à Marie*, 1934) and who, in turn, would supply libretti for many of Milhaud's compositions (e.g. the opera *Christophe Colomb* of 1928).

After returning to Paris in 1919 Milhaud was adopted into the circle of "Les Six," a group of progressive French composers brought together under the guidance of Jean Cocteau. However, like any such artificial collection, Les Six was quick to dissolve, and during the 1920s Milhaud adopted an assortment of new musical influences (notably jazz, which the composer first discovered during a trip to the U.S. in 1922, and which features prominently in much of his subsequent music).

Milhaud composed, performed, and taught ceaselessly during the 1920s and 1930s, only abandoning his homeland in late 1939 after all hope of resisting the German advance vanished. Settling in the United States, Milhaud accepted a teaching position with Mills College in Oakland, California, and continued to compose prolifically. From 1947 he combined his American teaching duties with a similar position at the Paris Conservatoire, remaining at both institutions until 1971, when his poor health forced him into retirement (Milhaud had suffered from a serious, paralyzing rheumatic condition since the 1920s; in later years he was only mobile through the use of a wheelchair). He died in Switzerland three years later.

Milhaud's musical output is impressive, both in terms of quantity and quality. The numbers alone are staggering for a twentieth century composer: nine operas, 12 ballets, 12 symphonies (in addition to six chamber symphonies), six piano concertos (one of them a double concerto), 18 string quartets, and about 400 other compositions in almost every conceivable form and instrumentation. The most frequently discussed feature of his musical language is polytonality (the simultaneous use of multiple tonal centers), though Milhaud was familiar with and fluent in any number of twentieth century "techniques." A skillful contrapuntist, Milhaud composed two string quartets (Nos. 14 and 15, both from 1949) which may also be performed simultaneously as an octet.

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**BOSTON POPS / ARTHUR FIEDLER**

**1 New York with Fog on the Hudson River 4:20**

**2 The Cloisters 5:03**

**3 Horse and Carriage in Central Park 3:45**

**4 Times Square 3:25**

**5 Gardens on the Roof 4:20**

**6 Baseball in Yankee Stadium 3:22**

**7 An American in Paris 15:57**

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