

#### Gershwin · Copland Music for Brass Septet · 7

George GERSHWIN (1898–1937) An American in Paris (1928) (arr. Simon Cox and Matthew Knight)  1 Allegretto grazioso – 2 Calmato – 3 Subito con brio – 4 Più moderato – 5 Tempo Blues – 6 Con moto – 7 Allegrot, molto energico – 8 Allegretto Aaron COPLAND (1900–1990) 9 Quiet City (1939) (arr. Simon Cox and Matthew Knight)	18:41 3:42 1:15 1:27 1:33 2:58 2:12 3:14 2:18	George GERSHWIN 3 Preludes (1926) (arr. Matthew Knight)  10 No. 1. Allegro ben ritmato e deciso 11 No. 2. Andante con moto e poco rubato 12 No. 3. Allegro ben ritmato e deciso  Aaron COPLAND Appalachian Spring Suite (1944) (arr. Simon Cox and Matthew Knight) 13 Very slowly 14 Allegro 15 Moderato: The Bride and Her Intended 16 Fast: The Revivalist and His Flock 17 Allegro: Solo Dance of the Bride 18 As at first: Slowly 19 Doppio movimento: Variations on a Shaker Hymn 'Simple Gifts'	7:03 1:34 4:09 1:19 24:40 2:55 2:58 3:24 3:38 4:09 1:12 3:06
		20 Moderato: Coda	3:18
			3:18

#### Septura

Philip Cobb, Trumpet in E flat • Alan Thomas, Simon Cox, Trumpet in B flat Matthew Gee 1–8, Peter Moore 9–20, Matthew Knight, Trombone Daniel West, Bass Trombone • Sasha Koushk-Jalali, Tuba • Patrick Flanaghan, Cor anglais 9 Simon Cox, Matthew Knight, Artistic directors

The cultural richness of 20th-century America is epitomised in the vastly contrasting musical worlds of two great composers: Gershwin and Copland. Both sound unmistakably American, but with distinct and unique musical voices: Gershwin's constant blend of classical and jazz idioms results in a vibrant urban sound, whereas Copland's music is folk-influenced and recalls more readily a kind of timeless Midwest Americana. Both composers had a real affinity for brass instruments in their writing, and so the transcriptions even of their orchestral works – while stretching the brass septet to its technical and musical limits – feel like an incredibly natural fit.

When we undertook the first US tour with Septura in February 2018, we wanted a programme that reflected our transatlantic odyssey. And so we looked to a composer who

had made that trip in reverse, albeit not to the UK, but to our closest European neighbour, France. Gershwin had travelled to Paris in the mid-1920s to study with Ravel, only to be rejected with the riposte 'why become a second-rate Ravel when you're already a first-rate Gershwin?' However, he did manage to persuade Ravel to undertake his only tour of America, in 1928, in which the two composers spent several evenings in each other's company. One of these evenings was a party for Ravel's 53rd birthday, during which Gershwin entertained the guests with selections from his Songbook. Gershwin returned to France soon after, and wrote An American in Paris. This, he claimed, owed more to Ravel's much-respected elder compatriot: 'the opening part will be developed in typical French style, in the manner of Debussy.'

Based on a melodic idea written during his first visit in 1926, called 'Very Parisienne', the music adheres closely to a programme that Gershwin himself spelled out. The first section introduces two 'strolling' themes - the opening one a light-footed Allegretto grazioso, and the next a more energetic Subito con brio – and portravs 'the impressions of an American visitor in Paris as he strolls about the city, listens to the various street noises, and absorbs the French atmosphere.' This opening famously makes use of taxi horns - Gershwin actually brought back some Parisian taxi horns for the premiere of the work in New York in December 1928. Suddenly, a slower section ushers in the American *Blues*, featuring a lyrical trumpet solo played with a 'felt crown' hung over the bell: 'our American friend has succumbed to a spasm of homesickness.' This American longing continues with a more energetic twelve-bar blues. the jazz influence felt in the swung guavers and syncopated rhythms. His mood restored, the American 'once again is an alert spectator of Parisian life.' The opening themes return, and 'the street noises and French atmosphere are triumphant.' Finally the slow 'homesick' blues theme and the street noises combine in a celebratory *Grandioso* – the American is finally at home in Paris.

Copland's Quiet City presents a very contrasting musical cityscape. Like Gershwin, Copland also travelled to Paris to study, in his case with Nadia Boulanger, who persuaded him to embrace his American heritage in his music. This resulted in the clear folk-influence in works like Rodeo that helped to make Copland's name. This influence is distilled into something more personal in the understated Quiet City. The piece was originally incidental music for a 1939 play by Irwin Shaw, and depicted scenes from New York at night. The play was a flop, but Copland resurrected the music - originally scored for trumpet. saxophone, clarinets and piano - creating a throughcomposed piece for trumpet and cor anglais soloists. accompanied by strings. The composer himself commented that 'Quiet City seems to have become a musical entity, superseding the original reasons for its composition.' The soloists represent the play's protagonist - haunted, with obsessive repetitive rhythmic figures, by the abandonment of his Jewish identity. Rather than trying to re-create the unique sound of the cor anglais alongside the solo trumpet we decided for the first time to invite a nonbrass guest into the group. The string parts are played by the remaining six brass players – but with berets placed over the instruments' bells in order to match the warm blend of the original strings as they rise and fall to reflect the shifting shapes of the city.

Gershwin was already extremely well-known (thanks to the success two years previously of Rhapsody in Blue) when he wrote his Piano Preludes in 1926. Like Debussy, he intended to write 24 preludes, but in the end only three were published. Unlike Debussy's these are not overtly programmatic, and they are in a very different style: the synergy of classical forms with the harmonic and rhythmic hallmarks of jazz results in Gershwin's particularly unique musical voice. The first prelude opens with a bluesy call and response, which is then elaborated in an energetic movement in ternary form, dominated by feisty Brazilian baião rhythms. The second is more sedate -Gershwin called it 'a sort of blues lullaby'. Its trudging ostinato gives way to a more upbeat middle section - in our version a tuba solo – before the opening material returns. The agitato finale comes as a bit of a shock, with its dramatic E flat minor introduction. Gershwin referred to this prelude as 'Spanish', perhaps again because of the rhythmic drive. The main theme adopts call and response pairs of phrases, battling between minor and major harmonies, with major only triumphing in the piece's last gasp flourish.

When, in 1943, Copland agreed to write the music for a new ballet choreographed by Martha Graham, his only instruction was: 'This is a legend of American living.' The music for *Appalchian Spring* was largely composed (under the working title of '*Ballet for Martha*') before the scenario was written; and yet audiences so often commented that it vividly conjured the Appalachians that Copland himself remarked, 'I have even begun to see the Appalachians myself a bit.' The music — with its triadic harmonies and open melodies so suited to the nature of brass instruments — does seem to evoke a quintessentially American sound that perfectly fits the ballet's Pennsylvania setting. The ballet premiered in 1944 and the following year it was arranged as a suite for 13 instruments; ours is an arrangement of this version.

The piece is divided into eight sections, with programmatic indications from the composer. The timeless

Introduction of the characters, one by one, in a suffused light' calls for a soft warm sound, with the whole septet using a combination of straight and cup mutes, and berets covering the bells. The ensuing Allegro ('A sentiment both elated and religious gives the keynote to this scene') is an abrupt burst of bright, constant rhythmic movement that gives way to a broad and hopeful American theme. The Duo for the Bride and her Intended – 'scene of tenderness and passion' requires a range of different colours for a raft of emotions ranging from nervousness to passionate intensity. Playful and sometimes boisterous, the folk-influenced The Revivalist and his Flock comes next, with 'suggestions of square dances and country fiddlers.' The Solo Dance of the Bride is frenetic and angular, with a huge span from the lowest tuba to the highest trumpet conveying

the 'extremes of joy and fear and wonder.' As the bride tires the music relaxes and the still, calm sounds of the opening return. The 'Scenes of daily activity for the Bride and her Farmer husband' are made up of five variations on a Shaker theme called *Simple Gifts*: starting in a solo trumpet, the theme soon cascades through the group alongside a bustling accompaniment, before appearing in ever more vigorous and emphatic versions. Finally in the prayerful *Coda* – 'The Bride takes her place among her neighbours' – warm cup-muted trombones intone a solemn chorale before the music of the opening brings the piece to tranquil close; the couple are 'quiet and strong in their new house.'

Matthew Knight

#### Septura

Septura brings together London's leading players to redefine brass chamber music through the uniquely expressive sound of the brass septet. By creating a canon of transcriptions, arrangements and new commissions for this brand new classical configuration, Septura aims to re-cast the brass ensemble as a serious artistic medium. Currently ensemble-in-residence at the Royal Academy of Music in London, the group is recording a series of albums for Naxos, each focused on a particular period, genre and set of composers, creating a 'counter-factual history' of brass chamber music. Weaving this ever-increasing repertoire into captivating live events, Septura is gaining a reputation for engaging audiences with innovative and imaginative programming, built around strong concepts and themes. In recent years the group has toured to the US, New Zealand, Japan, and numerous countries in Europe. Septura's members are the leading players of the new generation of British brass musicians, holding principal positions in the London Symphony, Philharmonia, Royal Philharmonic, City of Birmingham Symphony, Basel Symphony and Aurora Orchestras.

#### www.septura.org

#### Patrick Flanaghan

Patrick Flanaghan is principal cor anglais of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. He attended The Purcell School before studying at the Royal Academy of Music with Celia Nicklin and Geoffrey Browne where he won the Leila Bull Oboe Prize. He received a DAAD scholarship to study with Emanuel Abbühl in Mannheim, and while in Germany regularly appeared as guest principal cor anglais with the WDR Sinfonieorchester Köln and NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchester Hamburg, and as guest principal oboe with the South-West German Chamber Orchestra. Back in the UK, Flanaghan has appeared as guest principal cor anglais with the London Philharmonic Orchestra, BBC National Orchestra of Wales, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and Aurora Orchestra.



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8.573475 8.573526 In this seventh volume of *Music for Brass Septet*, Septura survey two of America's greatest and most representative composers. Gershwin's *An American in Paris* charts a visitor's stroll around the French capital, absorbing the city's atmosphere and charm, whereas the synergy of classical form and jazz animates Gershwin's unique *Preludes*. Copland's *Quiet City* depicts a contrasting and more understated cityscape, while the suite from the ballet *Appalachian Spring* displays Septura's luminous virtuosity.

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**George GERSHWIN (1898–1937)** 

**1**-**8** An American in Paris (1928)\*

**Aaron COPLAND (1900–1990)** 

**9** Quiet City (1939)\* 10:15

**George GERSHWIN** 

10-12 3 Preludes (1926) \*\* 7:03

**Aaron COPLAND** 

**13–20** Appalachian Spring Suite (1944)\* 24:40

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