

Cleveland POPS: an evening of Gershwin with pianist-raconteur Richard Glazier (April 29)

by Daniel Hathaway



Tasting menus can give diners a good overview of the capabilities of a restaurant. On Friday, April 29 at Severance Hall, Carl Topilow and the Cleveland POPS Orchestra offered a similar experience, using the music of George Gershwin to give the capacity audience a broad view of that versatile composer's unique accomplishments — from popular song to Broadway, from jazz to symphonic music — with the delightful assistance in the second half of pianist, raconteur, and social historian Richard Glazier.

Sporting a cobalt blue jacket, Topilow launched the evening with the *Overture to Girl Crazy*, a medley of songs including “Embraceable You” and “I Got Rhythm” that everybody recognizes, even if they don't know their original context.

Dancers Brooke and Bobby Wesner of NEOS Dance Theatre added expert twirls and lifts to *Lullaby*, a lovely Gershwin piece originally scored for string quartet that featured expressive violin and viola recitatives.

Vocalist Hannah Kulawiak, an Aurora High School freshman who won the POPS' recent Jean L. Petitt Memorial Music Scholarship Competition, showed off her musical theater skills with an assured performance of “They can't take that away from me,” from *Shall We Dance*.

The “homesick” section of *An American in Paris* gave trumpeter Gary Davis, concertmaster Carol Ruzika, and flutist Mary Kay Robinson the opportunity for soulful solos, and the Wesners fodder for another expressive dance cameo.

Then, the moment everyone waits for at POPS concerts: what color will Carl Topilow's clarinet come in tonight? The conductor popped offstage to return with a bright blue model courtesy of John Stavish and Educator's Music. After quipping that "it used to be a bowling ball," Topilow brought the first half of the evening to a swinging close, leading a medley of Gershwin tunes.

A similar garland of Gershwin songs launched the second half, this time with Richard Glazier providing piano obbligato for selections from *Meet Me in St. Louis*.

Glazier, who became star-struck with the late George Gershwin after hearing the film score to *Girl Crazy* at the callow age of 9, initiated a correspondence with Ira Gershwin that resulted in a meeting at his home in Beverly Hills, and a lifelong devotion to the music of the Gershwins. Glazier is full of stories about George and Ira and their contemporaries, some of which he engagingly related between the rest of the pieces on the program.

A graduate of the Indiana University School of Music who earned his Doctor of Musical Arts degree at the Cleveland Institute of Music, Richard Glazier demonstrated his command of piano technique in the relentless finale to Gershwin's *Concerto in F*, then flipped the switch to a more popular style for an arrangement by John Green of *Body and Soul*.

After more stories about Oscar Levant and Walter Damrosch, Glazier interpolated a rhythmically incisive performance of Aram Khachaturian's *Sabre Dance* before turning to the last and biggest work on the program, the symphonic version of *Rhapsody in Blue*.

Glazier nailed all the technical challenges of Gershwin's most famous concert work, though his performance felt even more rhapsodic than the title of the piece suggested. He glossed over passages he might have savored a bit more, and his pacing sometimes didn't reveal the structure of the piece. The audience loved it, and gave Glazier, Topilow, and the Orchestra a resounding ovation — having themselves just been given an entertaining and enlightening look at the music of one of America's great composers.

Published on ClevelandClassical.com May 11, 2016.

Click here for a printable copy of this article

[Return to the Front Page.](#)