

Conductor's Note

The next time you find yourself cueing up "The Blues Brothers" to pass a sleepless night, pay special attention to the scene in which John Belushi's character moves in with Dan Akyord on a noisy El line in Chicago. After the first train roars by, Belushi asks, "How often does that happen?" Akroyd's answer is: "So often you won't even notice."

That's what happens when something is always there. We often fail to notice the omnipresent. But the power of the unnoticed norm is extraordinary. In fact you could say that an historical moment is less identified by what is contended (those nodes of debate and strife that attract our attention) and more by what it takes for granted (the unnoticeably normal part of the texture of our lives.) The crash of an airliner makes big news today, but future historians won't talk about that nearly as much as they'll talk about our increasing mobility—with all of its enormous, economic, social and cultural ramifications—thanks to normal, boring air travel.

Music works the same way. The established composers on this program are *so* established—so often heard and referenced—that we barely notice them. How many times have we heard music in the style of Aaron Copland used to sell a pick-up truck, hype a football game, or elect a political candidate? Ironically Copland's music keeps showing up in the campaigns of far right politicians, recently in Texas governor Rick Perry's anti-Gay ad in 2011—ironic, given that Copland was a New York-based, communist-leaning, gay, Jewish, intellectual activist. Oh well. The fine print gets you every time!

And speaking of air travel, I am approaching 2,000,000 miles with United Airlines, which means I must have heard their theme, Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*, thousands of times. So often I don't even notice it.

But our goal in this concert is to ask you to notice again these staples of American cultural life: to hear Copland with fresh ears, and to allow his subtle but poignant shifts of harmony and texture to register as the sharp, well-crafted musical gestures they are. And we'll listen into Gershwin's standards, *American in Paris* and *Rhapsody in Blue*, not as sure-fire crowd pleasers, but as concise and beautifully framed musical essays that combine genres across a racial divide that was practically unbridgeable at the time. Let's not fail to notice.

Part of our strategy here is to pair these well-used master works with new music. We asked Asher Tobin Chodos to compose a work for two improvising pianists and orchestra—which he will perform today with the great Cecil Lytle. In addition he has made two arrangements of the music of Duke Ellington, actually arrangements of Thelonious Monk's arrangements of Ellington. This act of translation—of removing music from its original context and repurposing it for our contemporary ears—is what gives us freshness. We sense the tension between how this music may have sounded at a first listening and how it sounds to us now. *Solitude*, once a comment on a romantic situation, could develop new

resonance to those of us who live in the overcrowded corridors of coastal California. The social implications of *Mood Indigo*, a dreamy blues tune featured in dozens of movies and television shows, from *The Cotton Club* to *The Sopranos*, might tap deep reaches of our psyches in an age of marked by African-American protests against violence.

By placing these works together in late 2017, we do not instruct you how to listen to them, but instead invite you to hear them as you wish. Each person's individual and personal relationship with the act of listening is one of the least alienable of all our rights. We hope only that you do listen. However often you may have heard the clarinet *glissando* at the opening of *Rhapsody in Blue*, however familiar the taxi horns in *American in Paris* may be, we ask you not to take them for granted.

We might be forgiven for taking things—music, ideas and even people—for granted. It's easy to do. But we do so to our own detriment, because there is no guarantee of permanency, even with what is most familiar.

I'm thinking now of a good friend of all of ours, Ryoko Goguen, who attended practically every Music Department recital there was and who was at every La Jolla Symphony and Chorus performance. She was even present for most of the rehearsals, greeting me afterwards with a smile and a predictable, "Sounding good, Steve-san!" Ryoko was always stylishly dressed. Always covering her quick laugh with a gloved hand. Always open, sunny and kind. She was simply always there. Ryoko did that rarest and most valuable of things: she showed up.

I suppose that I did take her for granted a little bit. I took for granted seeing her more or less every day and in every concert. I took for granted her words of encouragement about our orchestra and our little conversations in support of my infantile Japanese. So when I got the e-mail at the end of August that she had died suddenly after a private illness, it was like a punch in the gut. How could she simply not be there anymore? How could we do without her constancy, her pervasive optimism?

I'm not yet sure how we will do without Ryoko. But I can say that we're not ready to give her up just yet. We dedicate this performance to Ryoko Amadee Goguen. And as we play, we'll imagine her there with us one more time, out in the audience, looking up from under a big hat, and smiling. Always smiling.

Steven Schick