



PROGRAM

JOPLIN	<i>Maple Leaf Rag</i> Jeffrey Biegel, piano
GERSHWIN	<i>An American in Paris</i>
WEILL	<i>"Mack the Knife" from The Threepenny Opera</i> Denean Dyson, vocals Ron Kobayashi Trio
HANDY	<i>"St. Louis Blues"</i> Denean Dyson, vocalist Barry Perkins, cornet Ron Kobayashi, keyboard
GERSHWIN	<i>Rhapsody in Blue</i> Jeffrey Biegel, piano

2022-23 Sunday Matinees

RHAPSODY IN BLUE

Sunday, May 14 @ 3 p.m.

Carl St. Clair, conductor
Jeffrey Biegel, piano
Denean Dyson, vocalist
Ron Kobayashi Trio
Barry Perkins, cornet
Pacific Symphony

The 2022-23 season piano soloists are generously sponsored by **The Michelle F. Rohé Fund**

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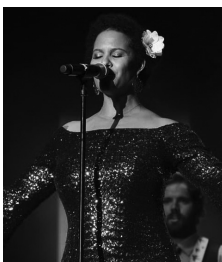


Performance at the Segerstrom Center for the Arts
Renée and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall



Jeffrey Biegel's career reflects an unprecedented journey as a pianist having created the most diverse commissioning projects, premieres, and recordings of his generation, building bridges to break divides through music. His life takes its roots from age three, barely able to hear or speak, until

corrected by surgery. The 'reverse Beethoven' phenomenon explains his lifelong commitment to music, having heard only vibrations in his formative years. The pandemic year of 2020 focused on composing original *Waltzes of Hope*, *Sonatina*, and *Three Reflections: JFK, RBG, and MLK* for solo piano, and for piano and orchestra, orchestrations by Harrison Sheckler. The following year saw the world premieres of Biegel's *Reflection of Justice: An Ode to Ruth Bader Ginsburg* with the Dallas Symphony Orchestra, and Ellen Taaffe Zwilich's *Remembering Ruth Bader Ginsburg* for mezzo-soprano, piano, and orchestra in tribute to the late Supreme Court Justice, with Denyce Graves in the mezzo-soprano role. Also, the world premiere of Ellen Taaffe Zwilich's *Shadows*, newly arranged for piano and seven players with the Idaho State Civic Symphony. In 2022, Biegel premiered Jim Stephenson's Piano Concerto, Daniel Pertu's *A Planet's Odyssey* for piano and orchestra, Farhad Poupel's *The Legend of Bijan and Manijeh* for piano, orchestra and chorus, his own concerto, *Three Reflections: Freedom (JFK), Justice (RBG) Equality (MLK)*, and Christopher Marshall's *Thanksgiving Variations on "We Gather Together."* For 2023, world premieres of Peter Boyer's *Rhapsody in Red, White, & Blue* and GRAMMY®-winning singer/songwriter, Melissa Manchester's *AWAKE* for piano and orchestra will take the stages across America. Biegel studied at The Juilliard School with Adele Marcus, herself a pupil of Josef Lhevinne and Artur Schnabel, and is currently on faculty at the Conservatory of Music at Brooklyn College.

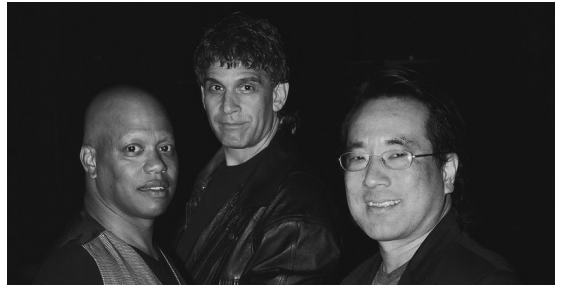


Mezzo-soprano Denean Dyson is classically trained yet accomplished in many genres: her additional vocal capabilities in R&B, soul, and jazz allow her to deliver a beautifully artistic sound imbued with skill and emotion in every performance. Denean Dyson earned a bachelor's degree in Music from

California State University, Fullerton and immediately launched

into a career as a professional artist, entertaining audiences in the US and abroad.

Dyson's incredible vocal agility has earned her the privilege of sharing a stage with many talented artists like renowned mezzo-soprano Susan Graham, jazz and blues legend Barbara Morrison, and singer and actress Reba McEntire. As a featured soloist, Dyson has performed such notable compositions as Carole King's "A Natural Woman," "Satisfied" from *Hamilton*, "One Night Only" from *Dreamgirls* for Segerstrom's Cabaret Series, "I Don't Know" from Bernstein's *Mass* with Pacific Chorale, and "A Wonderful Guy" in *South Pacific in Concert* with Pacific Symphony.



The Ron Kobayashi Trio (with Baba Elefante on bass and Steve Dixon on drums) have been together for 30 years. They have performed with such artists as Mel Tormé, Kenny Burrell, Margaret Whiting, Peter Frampton, Tom Scott, Peter White, Roy Hargrove, Frank Stallone, and "Kansas" vocalist John Elefante. Some of the venues they've played include the Playboy Jazz Festival Pasadena, the Long Beach Jazz Festival, 54 Below in New York, Disney World in Florida, the Yuma, Arizona Jazz Series, Segerstrom Center for the Arts, and the Irvine Barclay Theater in Irvine, CA.

The Trio was voted "Best Jazz Group in Orange County, CA" by readers of the *OC Weekly* in 1996, and was nominated for "Best Jazz Group in Orange County" in 2012 by the Orange County Music Awards. In 2005, Ron was awarded "Role Model and Inspiration for Asian Americans in the Field of Music" by the Orange County Asian Business Association. (Please note: **Kendall Kay** will be sitting in for Steve Dixon on drums for this concert.)



Saxophonist Jonathan A. Gómez is Assistant Professor of Musicology at the USC Thornton School of Music. He earned a

Ph.D. in Historical Musicology with a secondary field in African and African American Studies at Harvard University, and he holds an M.A. in Musicology from Michigan State

University and a B.M. in Studio Music and Jazz from the University of Miami's Frost School of Music. Gómez's research interests are consistently informed by his practice and experience as a jazz saxophonist. He has studied jazz and improvisation with Gary Keller, Mark Small, Rich Perry, Hal Crook, and George Garzone. He appears as a saxophonist on pianist Roberto Magris's 2016 album, *Live in Miami @ the WDNA Jazz Gallery*, and Rhode Island-based group Geo Trio's 2019 release, *We Made an Album!*

PROGRAM NOTES

Roaring Twenties!

When historians talk about “cultural ferment,” watch out: mayhem, social upheaval and armed conflict will soon enter the conversation. But to students and critics of the arts, social ferment is a bit more like biological fermentation, producing beauty from decay. Extraordinarily difficult times can produce extraordinarily great art.

The period that we call the “Roaring Twenties” shows us both sides of this strange divide, separated by an ocean and wedged between two world wars. In Europe, as industrialization took hold and the Ottoman Empire gave way, World War I approached with a sense of ghastly inevitability. The prevailing mood is often described as “neurasthenic,” with an enervating sense of gloom, foreboding, loss, and powerlessness. The war itself proved even worse than the collective nightmare portended, but failed to resolve underlying political conflicts. Yet as the pessimism continued into the Twenties, there was an outpouring of creativity in literature, music, and the visual arts that still astounds and captivates us today. The cultural capital of Europe moved from Vienna to Paris and became the place for artists to be. Gertrude Stein was there. Pablo Picasso was there. Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald were there. George Gershwin went there to meet Maurice Ravel, and to study composition with Nadia Boulanger—as did other American composers, including Elliott Carter, Virgil Thomson, and Aaron Copland.

In America, too, the arts were burgeoning. But things were far different here. The Great War was thousands of miles away; the U.S. had joined hostilities only after Woodrow Wilson campaigned for the cause, stirring up controversy and a spate of popular songs both pro and con (George M. Cohan’s 1917 rabble-rouser “Over There” on one side; “I Didn’t Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier,” the pacifist anthem that became a hit in 1915, on the other). For America, sending troops to Europe was a loss of innocence. With their return, and with the easing of the influenza epidemic of 1918, renewed optimism brought a sense of exuberance and limitless possibility. Values were increasingly permissive, and everyone, it seemed, could get rich. This was the decade we still romanticize as the Roaring Twenties, seemingly unstoppable until it all stopped—on “Black Tuesday,” October 24, 1929, with the stock market crash that inaugurated the Great Depression. As Cole Porter wrote in “Anything Goes”: “The world has gone mad today / And good’s bad today / And black’s white today / And day’s night today / And that gent today / You gave a cent today / Once had several chateaux...”

If Paris was the European locus of culture in the Twenties, in America we had New York, with the lights of Broadway and the Harlem Renaissance. Gershwin was a pillar of Broadway, often with several shows running at once and orchestral compositions programmed at Carnegie Hall. At the same time, Harlem was the scene of a virtual explosion of artistic genius in music and literature. Aficionados knew that the vibrant club scene in Harlem was unsurpassed for great American music. In fact, if there was one link between the cultural scenes of New York and Paris, it was the greatness of jazz and its African

American roots. Boulanger understood this and pointed her American students toward it; so did French composers such as Darius Milhaud, who sought to incorporate jazz and blues motifs in their music.

Gershwin did not need convincing; African American music had always been one of his chief influences. In his *Rhapsody in Blue*, from 1923, and *An American in Paris*, from 1928, we hear a commingling of European and jazz influences that has not been equaled in the century since. There are the “blues notes,” flatted sevenths and thirds, and the syncopated, complex rhythms that help make jazz swing. In *Rhapsody*, we hear it announced in the opening bar—the electrifying clarinet glissando that seems lifted from a hot lick at a jazz club.

Urban sophisticates knew that for great American music, the clubs in Harlem—where you could hear rags by jazz masters such as Eubie Blake and Scott Joplin and songs that became instant classics by artists such as W.C. Handy—were unsurpassed. There was just one little problem: as African Americans, the revered artists who brought this music to the public in the Twenties were generally not allowed in the front door where they performed...not even the great orchestra leader and composer Duke Ellington, whose bespoke wardrobe made him a symbol of sartorial elegance. With the benefit of hindsight, we can get a glimpse of this hypocrisy in the lyric of Richard Rodgers’ and Lorenz Hart’s “The Lady Is a Tramp”: “I don’t like crap games with barons and earls / Won’t go to Harlem in ermine and pearls / Don’t dish the dirt with the rest of the girls / That’s why the lady is a tramp.”

Meanwhile, back on the Continent...the twenties in Germany, far from pacifying and de-fanging German nationalists, presaged the horrors of the rise of Nazism and World War II. This era of remilitarization, brutality, and decadence is evoked in the movie *Cabaret*; we also see and hear it in the brilliance of *The Threepenny Opera*, the blazingly cynical sociopolitical satire by playwright Bertolt Brecht and composer Kurt Weill. First presented in 1928, *Threepenny* became the chicest theatre-piece in Berlin while making Brecht, Weill, and Weill’s wife Lotte Lenya into fugitives from the emergent Third Reich. All three escaped to the U.S.; Weill, a musician trained in the European classical tradition, found success on Broadway and in Hollywood. And in a superb translation by the American composer and writer Marc Blitzstein, *Threepenny* finally found its place in the American theatre via a historic production in 1957 with future TV stars Beatrice Arthur and Charlotte Rae. Weill, too, incorporated elements of American jazz into *Threepenny*. But—improbably—we owe the success of “Mack the Knife” as a jazz standard to the pop vocalist Bobby Darin, who knew a good thing when he heard it, and covered it as a hit single in 1959. The rest, as they say, is history.

Michael Clive is a cultural reporter living in the Litchfield Hills of Connecticut. He is program annotator for Pacific Symphony and has written numerous articles for magazines and newspapers in the U.S. and U.K. and hundreds of program notes for orchestras and opera companies. Operahound.com