

# Program Notes

for kids

Opening Night:  
New World Symphony  
Saturday, September 15, 2018  
8:00 p.m.  
Hill Auditorium

**Bolcom**                    *Ann Arbor Saturday*  
world premiere

**Gershwin**                *Rhapsody in Blue*  
Aaron Diehl, piano

**Gershwin**                “I Got Rhythm” Variations  
Aaron Diehl, piano

**Dvořák**                    *Symphony No. 9 in E minor “From the New World”*  
featuring the Michigan premiere of original visual choreography by Adrian Wyard

Antonin  
Dvořák is born

1841

Dvořák composes  
New World Symphony

George  
Gershwin is born

1898

Gershwin composes  
Rhapsody in Blue

Gershwin composes "I  
Got Rhythm" Variations

1934

William  
Bolcom is born

1938

Bolcom composes  
Ann Arbor Saturday

2018

# William Bolcom

## About the Composer

Born May 26, 1938 in Seattle, Washington

### Background:

National Medal of Arts, Pulitzer Prize, and Grammy Award-winner William Bolcom is a composer of chamber, operatic, vocal, choral, cabaret, ragtime, and symphonic music. He was a professor at the U-M's School of Music from 1973 until he retired in 2008 after 35 years. Bolcom has won many awards and was commissioned to write *Ann Arbor Saturday* for the premiere of the Ann Arbor Symphony's 90th season. *Ann Arbor Saturday* is about the climate of Ann Arbor before, during and after big football games at stadium. Listen closely to see if you recognize any popular college fight songs in the piece!



### What is a commission?

This piece was commissioned by the Ann Arbor Symphony Orchestra's Commissioning Club. A *commission* is when a person or group of people pay a composer to write a new piece of music. Often, that music is written for a specific event or to honor a person or place. Today's performance of *Ann Arbor Saturday* is the **world premier**, which means this is the first time this piece has ever been performed!

### Think Like a Composer

Use the space below to brainstorm what YOU would write a piece of music about if you were asked to write a commission for someone!

Who would you write the commission for?

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What would you write the commission to honor (ex. an event or person)?

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What would the commission be about?

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# George Gershwin



## About the Composer

Born September 26, 1898 in Brooklyn, NY | Died July 11, 1937 in Los Angeles, California

### Career

Gershwin developed an early interest in music through the popular and classical compositions he heard at school and in penny arcades. He started playing piano at age 11 when his parents bought him an upright piano. When Gershwin was 15 he left school to become a “song plugger” in Tin Pan Alley. This meant he toured music stores, performing new popular songs to encourage the shop-owners to sell the sheet music in their stores. He soon began writing songs of his own, often with his older brother Ira

as lyricist. Gershwin wrote primarily for musical theatre, but also composed orchestra and piano pieces where he combined classical musical style with popular jazz techniques.

## Rhapsody in Blue

On tonight’s concert, you will hear two different pieces by George Gershwin. The first piece is titled *Rhapsody in Blue*. Paul Whiteman, an American Bandleader, asked Gershwin to compose a piece for a concert called “An Experiment in Modern Music”. *Rhapsody in Blue* was supposed to be a jazz concerto but it is more a piece of work for piano and jazz band that includes elements of European symphonic music and American jazz music. The piece was to premiere on February 12th in 1924 and was said to be unfinished the night of its premiere.



### What was happening in Ann Arbor?

The ‘20’s were known as the “jazz age” and Ann Arbor participated fully in it. The prohibition caused movies, dancing, and the soda fountains to very popular past times. The radio was also becoming really popular and was a must have for all homes.

## I Got Rhythm

The second piece by George Gershwin you’ll hear tonight is *I Got Rhythm* from the 1930s musical *Girl Crazy*. It features a 32-bar AABA structure with a chord progression that has served as a famous model for many other jazz tunes. Gershwin scored a piano arrangement of the song, and in late 1933 he arranged the piece into a set of variations for piano and orchestra. *I Got Rhythm Variations* has since become one of Gershwin’s most-performed orchestral works. It gives valuable insight into Gershwin’s use of rhythm and harmony, as well as his own piano style. Gershwin finished *I Got Rhythm* in the 1930s for the musical “*Girl Crazy*.”

# Antonin Dvořák

## About the Composer

Born September 8, 1841 in Muhlhausen, Bohemia | Died May 1, 1904, Prague in Czechoslovakia



Antonin Dvořák was born the oldest of eight children. His father wanted him to follow in the family trade by becoming a butcher. However, Dvořák wanted to learn the violin. By the time he was six he was already taking music lessons. When he was 12, his parents decided to send him to school to learn German, and while at school, he continued his lessons in music, also learning theory as well as studying violin, voice, organ, and piano. Then in 1857, Dvořák began attending the Prague Organ School where he learned how to compose.

By 1874 Dvořák had written four symphonies and two operas. In 1882, Dvořák went to London to conduct several of his own works. Then in 1891 Dvořák was invited to be the director of the National Conservatory of Music in New York. Dvořák arrived in the United States in 1892 and spent three years there teaching, conducting and composing. While he was there, he wrote his famous Ninth Symphony, also called “The New World Symphony,” the *American String Quartet*, and his *Cello Concerto*.

Toward the end of his career Dvořák got homesick and went back to Prague to return to teaching at the Prague Conservatory. He continued to compose, writing several beautiful pieces based on folk stories and two operas based on fairy tales. Today he is remembered for his use of Czech folk music in symphonic and chamber music.

## About the Music - Symphony No. 9 “From the New World”

### What will you be hearing?

Tonight you will be hearing Dvořák famous Ninth Symphony, Symphony No. 9 in E minor “From the New World”. Commonly known as the *New World Symphony*. It was nicknamed this because Dvořák wrote it during the time he spent in the U.S. in the 1890s. This is one of Dvořák most popular symphony’s and is one of the most popular of all time. Dvořák was deeply inspired by American music, but brought some of his own background when writing this piece. While staying in New York, he saw many different cultures that inspired this piece. Native American and African American spirituals inspired him when he was writing the melodies.

### When was it written?

This symphony was composed in 1893 while Dvořák was the director of the National Conservatory of Music of America.

### Fun Facts

Astronaut Neil Armstrong took a tape recording of the New World Symphony along during the Apollo 11 mission, the first Moon landing, in 1969.

