

# American Music Legends

From Gershwin to Anne Dhu McLucas

**T**here's a possibly apocryphal story that an American in Paris, George Gershwin, once asked one of his idols, the great 20th-century French composer Maurice Ravel, for music lessons. Ravel is said to have politely declined. "Why should you be a second-rate Ravel when you can be a first-rate Gershwin?" Ravel may have also responded by asking the young songwriting superstar how much money he made, and upon hearing the answer, replied, "Then I should take lessons with you."

Ravel admired Gershwin's genius so much that he quoted Gershwin's jazzy *Rhapsody in Blue* in one of his own greatest hits, the dazzling *Piano Concerto in G*. We'll get to hear both jazz age classics Thursday, Sept. 20, at the Hult Center when the Eugene Symphony and the excellent guest pianist perform two of the greatest combinations of jazz and classical music — not to mention piano and orchestra — ever created. The concert opens with another American classic, Leonard Bernstein's rollicking *Candide* overture, and closes with one more danceable 20th-century delight: excerpts from Manuel de Falla's ballet score, *The Three Cornered Hat*.

Classical and pop music collide again on Friday, Sept. 21, at Corvallis's Majestic Theater, when the Portland Cello Project (which is winning increasing national fame thanks to its clever covers of rock, hip hop and classical tunes) teams up with the award-winning, Chicago-based wind quintet City of Tomorrow (two of whose members live in Portland), Portland's Alialujah Choir (featuring Weinland frontman Adam Shearer) and Portland singer Stephen Marc Beaudoin (who has worked with Pink Martini and FearNoMusic). Together, they'll perform a classically inflected version of Radiohead's *OK Computer*.

It's fitting that this week's column concerns American music because it was a guiding passion of the late former dean of the UO School of Music and Dance, **Anne Dhu McLucas**. A pioneering female scholar in the hitherto male-dominated field of ethnomusicology, McLucas transcended the narrow overemphasis on 19th-century



European sounds and shone the spotlight on equally important music from the Americas and the rest of the world, including folk traditions. She served as president of the Society for American Music and the College Music Society.

McLucas reached beyond the ivory tower to connect the UO to civic institutions like the Oregon Festival of American Music, Oregon Bach Festival, Oregon Mozart Players and Eugene Opera, all of which she served as a board member. She continued to teach even while serving as an administrator. "She was first and foremost an advocate for the students," says UO music professor Brian McWhorter, who knew McLucas well when he was a student at the school in the '90s and later as a faculty colleague. "I've seen it from both sides."

The UO had already planned to honor McLucas, who was due to retire from teaching this December, at a symposium exploring one of her primary research interests: oral traditions in American music featuring scholars from around the world. Presentations are scheduled for Sept. 29, Oct. 19 and Oct. 20. A memorial service, open to the public, will be held Saturday, Oct. 20, at 4 pm in the UO's Beall Concert Hall.

The honors are appropriate. McLucas helped vault the school to greater recognition, not least by her effort to refurbish the crowded, outdated music school building before stepping down as dean in 2002. However, her Herculean fundraising efforts weren't quite enough to entirely fulfill her vision. As I wrote in *Oregon Quarterly*, the "rebuilding omitted a major proposed item that had to be left off the list, as it would have consumed the entire budget: a new, flexible performance hall that can stage the kind of multimedia, dance, and theater performances that Beall Hall's concert-only setting can't. Nevertheless, the architects made sure that the redesigned space could easily accommodate a new hall someday." When that day comes, they should name it after one of Oregon's greatest advocates for music, Anne Dhu McLucas. **EW**

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