

GAGA FOR GERSHWIN

OFAM delves into Gershwin, and contemporary classical music shines

What historically informed European musicians have done for Baroque music, James Ralph does for American musical theater. For years, the **Oregon Festival of American Music** (OFAM) impresario has been painstakingly supervising the reconstruction of the original scores of George and Ira Gershwin's classic 1920s musicals, which have been performed for decades only in relatively bastardized remakes for stage or screen.

With help from the Gershwin estate, the Gershwin Trust and the Library of Congress, The Shedd has successfully restored and staged musicals by the Gershwins, Cole Porter and other legends.

From June 17-26, OFAM revives 1928's *Funny Face* at The Shedd. The daffy plot features an attractive young bachelor, a trio of spunky, sexy young ladies he's supposed to chaperone, a pair of thieves, a scandalous diary (the 20th-century equivalent of naughty sexts), cops on the chase and the requisite happy ending.

The twisty story is only slightly more convoluted than the process of bringing it to the stage. Ralph of The Shedd first had to navigate a Byzantine process of obtaining the long-unavailable performing rights, finding the original script, updating it to what was actually performed in 1927-28 and reconstructing the original performing score from various sources, including Gershwin's piano sketches.

Ralph says he believes such pre-"book" musicals (i.e. those made before integrated story musicals like *Oklahoma!*) have been unfairly neglected because primarily they were thinly plotted excuses for songs and dances rather than integrated, compelling stories told in music. Yet, when presented in their original context, the cream of these dizzy Jazz Age classics offers both a window into American cultural history and pure entertainment, with some immortal songs ("S Wonderful," "How Long Has This Been Going On?") and lesser-known gems that deserve another listen — experienced in the closest approximation to their original setting.

On another note, one of last year's most impressive Oregon music events happened not at a concert hall but at a famous downtown Portland gallery, where the New York-based duo piano team **Stephanie & Saar** and some of their friends from Eugene and Portland played five hours of music by some America's leading 20th-century composers.

With abundant wine, a half-dozen terrific pianists and an intimate, informal atmosphere that allowed listeners to come and go as they pleased, the **Makrokosmos Project**, a new Portland music festival, proved so successful that Stephanie & Saar are bringing it back for a second installment, and doubling down by adding a Eugene performance 5 to 10 pm Sunday, June 26, at Oveissi & Company (22 W. 7th Ave.)



FUNNY FACE RUNS AT THE SHEDD JUNE 17-26

The entirely different program includes six pianists performing one of the most famous combinations of radical politics and radical classical music: 36 variations on *The People United Will Never Be Defeated!* As relevant now as when American composer Frederic Rzewski penned it four decades ago in support of the Chilean people fighting oppression by the murderous, American-backed military dictatorship, the massive piano work has been called a 20th-century *Goldberg Variations*.

The show also includes music by Philip Glass, Gerald Levinson, Eugene's Alexander Schwarzkopf and Pulitzer winners David Lang, John Adams and George Crumb, whose own major piano composition gave the festival itself its name.

Speaking of wine and intimate contemporary classical music, Eugene's own rising ensemble, the excellent **Delgani String Quartet**, is playing a benefit for another of the city's most valuable classical music institutions, the **Oregon Mozart Players**, Sunday, June 19, at MarshAnne Winery. Call the OMP office 541-345-6648 or email kaiser@oregonmozartplayers.org to reserve a spot.

Finally, for yet another intimate musical experience, catch one of the world's finest fiddlers, **Kevin Burke**, Thursday, June 23, at Tsunami Books. Long based in Oregon, the English-born Burke was named the world's greatest Irish fiddler before starring for decades with Celtic groups.

It's a rare chance to hear one of traditional music's brightest stars, a member of the Oregon Music Hall of Fame, play solo in a uniquely congenial setting.

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