



GUERRERO CONDUCTS AN AMERICAN IN PARIS

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 23, AT 7 PM

FRIDAY & SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 24 & 25, AT 8 PM

NASHVILLE SYMPHONY

GIANCARLO GUERRERO, conductor

Martha & Bronson Ingram Music Director Chair

PAUL JACOBS, organ

BRIAN RAPHAEL NABORS

Pulse

12 minutes

WAYNE OQUIN

Resilience

13 minutes

Live Recording

INTERMISSION

20 minutes

CHRISTOPHER ROUSE

Organ Concerto

18 minutes

Live Recording

GEORGE GERSHWIN

An American in Paris

16 minutes

The performance of Pulse by Brian Raphael Nabors is supported by The Alice M. Ditson Fund of Columbia University.

This concert will be recorded live for future broadcast. To ensure the highest-quality recording, please keep noise to a minimum. It will last approximately one hour, 19 minutes, including a 20-minute intermission.

BRIAN RAPHAEL NABORS

Pulse

Born on April 10, 1991, in
Birmingham, Alabama

Currently resides in
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Composed:
2017-19



Estimated length:
12 minutes

**First performance, as well as
Nashville Symphony premiere:**
September 9, 2019, with Giancarlo
Guerrero conducting the Nashville
Symphony Orchestra.

Among the most sought-after of today's young composers—and the youngest of the four American composers on our program—Brian Raphael Nabors was raised in a close-knit family in Birmingham, Alabama. He developed a deep-rooted sense of music's direct emotional power from an early age through his participation in worship services at the African American church where his father served as a pastor and his mother played Hammond organ. In November, Nabors himself appeared as the soloist in the premiere of his Hammond Organ Concerto—one of several world premieres of his music taking place this season.

Pulse is the first part of a triptych of symphonic pieces in which Nabors explores a spectrum of ideas involving perpetual motion and breath—in both musical and philosophical terms. The other two panels are *Onward* (2019) and *Upon Daybreak* (2022). These performances of *Pulse* also represent a homecoming. In 2019, Nabors was one of five young composers invited to take part in the Nashville Symphony Orchestra's Composer Lab, which culminated in a showcase of the resulting orchestral pieces led by Giancarlo Guerrero.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Pulse originated from the composer's contemplation of "daily life as we know it, combined with thoughts of life in nature" and the "natural rhythm" of the universe itself: "It is as if every living and moving thing we are aware and unaware of is being held together by a mysterious, resolute force."

Nabors describes *Pulse* as "an episodic rhapsody that explores several phases and colorful variants of rhythm all held together by an unwavering pulse. Each episode is meant to symbolize a different scenario of life for the listener, be it a buzzing modern metropolis, a deep wilderness abundant with animalia or the scenic endless abyss of the ocean. All of these worlds and their philosophical meanings are then brought together in a contemplative theme of 'unification' in the strings that symbolizes our deep connection as living beings to everything within, over, under and around us."

Scored for 3 flutes (3rd doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, English horn, 3 clarinets (3rd doubling bass clarinet), 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, 3 percussionists, harp, piano, celesta and strings

WAYNE OQUIN

Resilience

Born on December 9, 1977,
in Houston, Texas

Currently resides in
New York, New York

Composed:
2015

**Estimated
length:**
13 minutes



First performance:

February 4, 2016, Paul Jacobs
at the organ led by Carl St. Clair
Pacific Symphony.

**First Nashville Symphony
performance:**

These are the Nashville
Symphony's first performances
of this work.

The Texas-born composer Wayne Oquin has been widely commissioned by ensembles across the United States and Europe and has built an impressive catalogue ranging from symphonic wind compositions to choral and orchestral works. Among the illustrious performers who have commissioned music from him is Paul Jacobs, with whom Oquin has for years enjoyed a close association. Both musicians follow parallel careers as highly regarded educators at the Juilliard School of Music, where Oquin has taught since 2008.

The idea of a “mini-concerto” for the organ began when the conductor of the California-based Pacific Symphony, Carl St. Clair, asked Oquin to compose a piece for organ and orchestra that would have a “celebratory” character. The composer recalls realizing from the start that this would entail “writing for two vast ensembles, each of which is rivaled only by the other in terms of both power and subtlety.” The resulting work, *Resilience*, he describes as “a 13-minute exploration of two seemingly limitless spheres.”

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Resilience is based on a variety of call-and-response patterns between the soloist and orchestra that is apparent from the outset. The orchestral

replies, writes Oquin, are meant to be “as wide-ranging as the King of Instruments itself,” while “a feeling of urgency, a sense of struggle” emerges in several passages—above all at the close of the piece, “where, with each orchestral harmonic strike, the organ is simultaneously shot down and summoned to new heights, pushing the boundaries of the soloist’s technique to the utmost limits... no hands!”

Regarding the title, Oquin explains that the composition is based on developing a limited number of motives, with the first two chords expressing an “emphatic resolve” that saturates the score. “Though the initial idea transforms and travels far,” he notes, “its influence is never abandoned.” Even when the rhythmic pulse is “temporarily suspended” in slower passages, “the music’s insistence on the original harmonic material does not diminish. My hope is that this motivic allegiance in some way mirrors real-life tenacity, determination and perseverance; that the human capacity to excel, even amidst life’s tumult, is reflected in every bar.”

In addition to solo organ, scored for 3 flutes (3rd doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, harp, celesta and strings.

CHRISTOPHER ROUSE

Organ Concerto

Born on February 15, 1949
in Baltimore, Maryland

Died on September 21, 2019,
in Towson, Maryland

Composed:
2014

**Estimated
length:**
18 minutes



First performance:

November 17, 2016, with Paul Jacobs as the organ soloist and Yannick Nézet-Séguin conducting the Philadelphia Orchestra.

First Nashville Symphony performance:

These are the Nashville Symphony's first performances of this work.

Christopher Rouse, who died just a little over three years ago at the age of 70, played a vital role in re-establishing the appeal for contemporary audiences of age-old orchestral genres like the concerto and symphony. His command of orchestration combined with his skill as a musical storyteller made him one of the most frequently commissioned and performed American composers of his generation. His music has figured prominently on Nashville Symphony Orchestra programs; the orchestra's recording of his Symphony No. 5—a work that tips the composer's hat to Beethoven's Fifth—earned Rouse a posthumous GRAMMY® Award in the Best Contemporary Classical Composition category in 2021.

When Rouse was coming of age, much of the creative energy in new music centered around rock (Led Zeppelin left a particularly strong impression on his musical psyche), while music composed for the traditional orchestra seemed to many to have reached a dead end. Rouse made his name by helping turn that perception around. His Trombone Concerto, commissioned to mark the New York Philharmonic's 150th-anniversary season and an homage to Leonard Bernstein, received the Pulitzer Prize for Music in 1993.

Rouse found the concerto format particularly attractive and produced more than a dozen such works for prominent soloists, including (in addition to trombone) works for flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, trumpet, violin, cello, percussion, piano, harp, guitar and organ. It was for Paul Jacobs that he wrote the last-named work, which is dedicated to the

organist. Along with its innovations, Rouse noted that the Organ Concerto is “certainly...intended to show off what the organ—and, of course, the soloist—are capable of.”

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Rouse often devised tailor-made formal designs for each of his works, taking into account the unique characteristics of the instrument and soloist in question. But for the Organ Concerto, he opted to follow the conventional three-movement pattern: two fast outer movements frame a slow one at the center.

By restricting his orchestra to very low woodwinds and leaning on other instruments in the lower depths, Rouse intensifies the dark coloration of his soundscape, setting in relief the high registers provided by the organ, violins and trumpets. The music similarly develops a tension between knotty dissonances and familial harmonic colors. Rouse's rhythmic virtuosity comes to the fore in the finale, which the critic George Loomis likened to “a fiendish, magic gigue.”

In addition to the solo organ, scored for bass clarinet, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, 3 percussionists and strings

GEORGE GERSHWIN

An American in Paris

Born on September 26, 1898,
in Brooklyn, New York

Died on July 11, 1937, in
Hollywood, California

Composed:
1928

**Estimated
length:**
16 minutes



First performance:

December 13, 1928, with Walter Damrosch conducting the New York Symphony.

First Nashville Symphony performance:

February 16, 1954, with Guy Taylor conducting at War Memorial Auditorium.

George Gershwin burst onto the scene as a “classical” composer with the smash success of his genre-crossing *Rhapsody in Blue* in 1924. It so impressed Walter Damrosch, then director of the New York Philharmonic, that he commissioned a piano concerto, known to posterity as the Concerto in F. Gershwin’s subsequent commission from the orchestra turned into *An American in Paris*. Gershwin decided to fulfill the new commission by writing what he called a “rhapsodic ballet” that would convey “the impression of an American visitor in Paris as he strolls about the city and listens to various street noises and absorbs the French atmosphere.”

Largely self-taught as a composer, Gershwin himself had traveled to Paris in the mid-1920s to study European tradition firsthand after striking up a friendship with the French composer Maurice Ravel. The title of the piece thus alludes to his own musical journey—an American attempting to take on the classical tradition. But Gershwin emphasized that he intended only to prompt “impressionistic” responses, leaving it up to individual listeners to interpret the music as they see fit.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Unlike *Rhapsody*, which was orchestrated by another composer, Gershwin had developed the confidence and skill to prepare a fully orchestrated score for *An American in Paris* on his own—

notably making room for a trio of saxophones and taxi horns, which he painstakingly procured while abroad to bring back to New York for the premiere. The busily striding rhythms that open the piece transport us at once to the scene—with those taxi horns soon adding authentic local color—while Gershwin ensures we perceive it from a fresh-eyed American’s perspective. Snatches of French popular song and more reflective passages follow, and the seductive energy of the City of Light comes into play during an exchange between solo violin and celesta.

A blues-tinged strain on the trumpet heralds a bout of homesickness: the music becomes more emotion-drenched as this blues interlude builds to a magnificent climax. After another violin solo, memories of life back home take on a more exuberant air with a Charleston. Gershwin notes that “the homesick American, having left the café and reached the open air, has disowned his spell of the blues and once again is an alert spectator of Parisian life.” The extroverted music from the opening returns, Gershwin mixes the blues tune in one more time, and the American heads back into the bright city lights.

Scored for 3 flutes (3rd doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, 3 saxophones, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, celesta, 4 taxi horns and strings

– Thomas May is the Nashville Symphony’s program annotator.