

Northwestern University

HENRY AND LEIGH
BIENEN SCHOOL OF MUSIC

Gershwin Salute

Northwestern University Symphonic Band

Shawn D. Vondran, *conductor*

Oliver F. Stark, *graduate assistant conductor*

PICK-STAIGER CONCERT HALL
2025–26 SEASON

Northwestern University Symphonic Band

Shawn D. Vondran, *conductor*

FRIDAY, MAY 29, 2026, AT 7:30 P.M.

Gershwin Salute

Strike Up the Band (1927/1960)

George Gershwin

(1898–1937)

arr. John P. Paynter

Second Prelude (1927/1964)

arr. John Krance

Oliver F. Stark, *graduate assistant conductor*

Cuban Overture (1932/2001)

arr. Mark Rogers

INTERMISSION

Catfish Row: Symphonic Suite based on

arr. Donald Hunsberger

Porgy and Bess (1934/2000)

Introduction: Jasbo Brown

Summertime

I Got Plenty of Nuttin'

Bess, You Is My Woman Now

Fugue

It Ain't Necessarily So

Hurricane

My Man's Gone Now

Finale: Childrens Dance; O Lawd, I'm on My Way

SYMPHONIC BAND

Shawn D. Vondran, *conductor*

Maggie Whiteman, *doctoral assistant conductor*

Oliver F. Stark, *graduate assistant conductor*

Flute/Piccolo

Sophia Bian
Jacqueline Go
Grace Kim
Katelyn Lee
Ruiqu Liu
Joshua Rascon

Oboe/English Horn

Nathan McGough
Emmeline Murphy
Kate Tolchinsky

Clarinet

Jose Aguilar
Josie InTham
Leah Kang
Minjun Kim
Lena Kwon
Erin Lee
Michael Li
Eduardo Ramos
Oscar Tamez
Larry Zhao

Bassoon

Wilson Aron
Micah Cortezzo
Ethan Worthen

Saxophone

Miguel Flores
Boss Lee
Everest Li
Hari Maheswaran
Josephine Mascarenhas

Trumpet

Isaac Brown
Jaelen Dobson
Rachael McKay
Carlee Santel
Sam VanLoo

Horn

Anton Fernandez
Michael James
Ethan McCarter
Molly Sullivan
Isaiah Thomason-Redus

Trombone

Neil Advant
Dylan Halliday
Ian Lilly
Hayden Lovinfosse
Liam Melvin
Lukas Orozco

Euphonium

Brandon Baade
Will Claudius

Tuba

Angel Cocone
Nolan Fallon
Avery Li

Percussion

Sam Carpenter
Alex Davis
Sam Kim
Jonathan Kravchuk
Zoe Li

Double Bass

Brandon Garcia

Piano

Jeremy Lee

Harp

Yulena Zhou

PROFILE

Shawn D. Vondran is in his twelfth year as the Associate Director of Bands at Northwestern University's Bienen School of Music. His responsibilities include conducting the Symphonic Band along with teaching courses in conducting, wind repertoire, orchestral repertoire, and other courses in the music performance and education curricula. During his tenure at Northwestern, the Symphonic Band was selected to perform at the 2020 College Band Directors National Association (CBDNA) North Central Division Conference. The ensemble frequently engages with a number of composers and participates in consortia to support the creation and performance of new music for the wind band medium.

Vondran served on the faculties at Ball State University, Western Illinois University, and Youngstown State University prior to his appointment at Northwestern University. He began his career as a band director at Mentor High School in Ohio, where his ensembles consistently received accolades for their performances.

Vondran was elected by his peers to the prestigious American Bandmasters Association. He also received the College of Fine Arts Dean's Teaching Award while at Ball State University for excellence in teaching and dedication to his students. Additionally, the Ball State University Symphony Band was selected to perform at the 2012 and 2014 Indiana Music Education Association Conference during his tenure.

Vondran maintains an active schedule with engagements throughout the United States as a guest conductor, clinician, and adjudicator. In addition to performance engagements, he is an ongoing contributor to the *Teaching Music Through Performance in Band* series published by GIA and appeared in the *National Band Association Journal*. He has also presented a clinic at the Midwest International Band and Orchestra Clinic. Vondran has worked with a number of composers in the preparation, performance, and/or recording of their works for the wind band medium. These artistic collaborations include John Corigliano, Christopher Rouse, David Maslanka, Michael Daugherty, Steven Bryant, Joel Puckett, and Jennifer Higdon. He is a member of the College Band Directors National Association, where he serves as the Illinois state chair, and Pi Kappa Lambda.

Vondran received his Doctor of Musical Arts degree in instrumental conducting, with an emphasis in music education, from the University of Miami (FL). Vondran completed a Master of Music degree in instrumental conducting at Youngstown State University and earned a Bachelor of Music Education degree (magna cum laude) at The Ohio State University.

PROGRAM NOTES

George Gershwin

“Why be a second-rate Ravel when you can be a first-rate Gershwin?” This quote, attributed to the renowned composer Maurice Ravel, would not be the last refusal Gershwin received from a French master. Gershwin greatly admired Ravel, who in turn wrote famed teacher Nadia Boulanger about the young American composer. Gershwin returned to Paris only to be told by Boulanger that she could not teach him. “What could I give you that you haven’t already got?” Both Ravel and Boulanger feared that imposing classical European standards upon Gershwin would overshadow his unique, jazz-infused voice. Undeterred, Gershwin returned home determined to continue forging a musical style widely regarded as the soundtrack of the “Roaring Twenties.”

It is little wonder that Gershwin’s music captures the convergence of cultures present in early 20th century America. The son of Jewish immigrants from Russia, Gershwin grew up in Brooklyn, surrounded by the blues and ragtime traditions of Black Americans, the dance rhythms he encountered in Hispanic neighborhoods, and the energy of Tin Pan Alley. These influences, along with his familiarity with Jewish musical traditions, formed a distinctly American voice unlike anything audiences had previously heard.

Despite this, Gershwin remained deeply inspired by the works of not only Ravel, but Chopin, Liszt, and Debussy during and after his commercial successes. His interests, writes one historian, ranged from “Bach to Alban Berg.” Having moved to Los Angeles after the premiere of *Porgy and Bess*, Gershwin befriended Arnold Schoenberg and asked him for lessons. Similar to Ravel’s sentiment, Schoenberg told him, “I would only make you a bad Schoenberg, and you’re such a good Gershwin already.” His continued fascination with the European masters reveals a composer determined to place his developing American style within a broader artistic tradition.

What we have of Gershwin's music is perhaps the first volume of a promising yet uncompleted oeuvre, cut short by an undiagnosed brain tumor that took his life at age thirty-eight. One cannot help but wonder what music Gershwin might have written had he lived longer. Writing in 1955, Leonard Bernstein stated, "I don't think there has been such an inspired melodist on this earth since Tchaikovsky." Despite his relatively short life, Gershwin's music has endured for generations, delighting us with its genius, charm, and the unapologetic sound of an emerging America.

—Shawn D. Vondran

Strike Up the Band

Gershwin

Strike Up the Band is a political satire about a proud American owner of a cheese factory who is outraged when Switzerland protests a tariff on imported cheese and convinces the U.S. government to declare a war he would finance. Gershwin saw this as an opportunity to write in the style of W.S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan. The musical failed initially due to its biting critique of both American politics and the military-industrial complex leading to its closure in Philadelphia. It was later heavily rewritten for a successful Broadway revival in 1930.

John P. Paynter originally arranged this work for the Northwestern University 'Wildcat' Marching Band. In 1960, the arrangement was used as the musical material, and show title, for a documentary compiled about the marching band, its history, and enduring legacy. This version for wind ensemble highlights rambunctious trombones, thumping percussion, and dexterous woodwinds, with Paynter masterfully capturing Gershwin's comedic voice in an arrangement that entertains on both the football field and in the concert hall.

Second Prelude

Gershwin's *Three Preludes* are short piano pieces first performed by the composer at the Roosevelt Hotel in New York in 1926. Gershwin originally planned to compose a set of twenty-four preludes, though this number was reduced to five in early performances and eventually narrowed to the three published today. They remain Gershwin's only original works for solo unaccompanied piano.

Gershwin described the *Second Preude* as "a sort of blues lullaby." It begins with a contemplative bass line before other voices enter with a slinking, undulating melody. In this arrangement, the trumpet and alto saxophone

present the initial melodic material. A brief *con moto* middle section introduces brighter, swung musical motives in the trombones, supported by an upper woodwind countermelody, before the work returns to the wandering bass ostinato and original theme. The music then gradually fades into a non-conclusive ending, almost as though drifting into a quiet sleep.

John Krance's 1964 wind arrangement is designed to capture the mood and beauty of the original piano score while also taking advantage of the textural variety inherent of the wind ensemble.

Cuban Overture

In mid-1932, George Gershwin left New York with several friends to take a vacation in Havana, Cuba. He had just presented a successful show on Broadway, *Of Thee I Sing*, and the premiere of his Second Rhapsody for Piano and Orchestra. While there, he became fascinated with the native music of Cuba and returned to New York armed with Cuban percussion instruments and new creative ideas. These ideas culminated in a symphonic work entitled *Rumba*; its first performance was presented in an all-Gershwin concert in Levisohn Stadium on August 16, 1932, conducted by Albert Coates. On November 1st of the same year, it was presented at the Metropolitan Opera under the new title, *Cuban Overture*.

The work is divided into three main sections. The opening, *Moderato e Molto Ritmato*, begins with a forceful introduction that presents several of the work's primary thematic ideas. A solo clarinet cadenza serves as the transition into the middle section, which takes on a more plaintive and reflective character. Written as a gradually developing canon in a polytonal style, this portion steadily builds in intensity before reaching a climactic statement driven by an ostinato based on the canon theme. The final section develops much of the preceding material in a stretto-like manner, ultimately leading back to the principal theme. The work concludes with a vibrant coda that prominently features Cuban percussion instruments.

Cuban Overture portrays a composer in transition. A major source of this change was due to Gershwin's studies with Joseph Schillinger, which started in 1932. This work serves as Gershwin's last effort at composing a significant concert work before his untimely death in 1937 at thirty-eight years old.

Catfish Row: Symphonic Suite based on Porgy and Bess

Porgy and Bess is a landmark American opera that emerged from the collaboration of George Gershwin, DuBose Heyward, and Ira Gershwin. Its origins trace back to 1927, when the New York Theatre Guild produced Heyward's play *Porgy*, based on his novel depicting the life of a crippled African American beggar in Charleston, South Carolina, and the struggles of the impoverished Catfish Row community. Gershwin became deeply drawn to the story after reading the novel, and by 1932 he began composing the opera with Heyward and Ira Gershwin shaping the libretto. After an enthusiastic Boston preview, where Serge Koussevitsky hailed it as "a great advance in American opera," the work faced a more mixed reception in New York, leading to touring productions intended to stabilize costs and audience reach.

In 1936, Gershwin created an orchestral suite from the opera for a five-city tour in which he was to perform his own Concerto in F (1925) with local symphony orchestras. His suite tied together some of the opera's major arias with contemplative and exciting orchestral etudes. Such songs as *Summertime*, *I Got Plenty of Nuttin*, *My Man's Gone Now*, and *It Ain't Necessarily So* are intermixed with a fugue (taken from the Act III, Scene 2 fight in which Porgy kills Crown) and music from the hurricane in Act II. The latter two instrumental works illustrate a strong influence of the master orchestrator Ferde Grofé, who scored *Rhapsody in Blue* (1924) for the Whiteman Band more than a decade earlier.

It was Ira Gershwin who resurrected the score in the 1950s, publishing the work under the title of *Catfish Row*, distinguishing it from Robert Russell Bennett's earlier Symphonic Suite (1941). Today, many consider *Porgy and Bess* to be one of the finest American works of its genre. The current edition has been scored for wind ensemble by Donald Hunsberger.

BAND PROGRAM

Director of Bands	Robert Taylor John W. Beattie Chair of Music
Associate Director of Bands	Shawn D. Vondran
Director of Athletic Bands	Daniel J. Farris
Department Assistant	Emily Whittaker
Doctoral Assistants	Imran Amarshi, Maggie Whiteman
Graduate Assistants	Oliver F. Stark, Rachel Stiles, Michael Witt
Stage Managers	Stewart Bridgeforth, Kolbe Chapman, Andy Hankes, Henry Lazzaro, Cameron Leonardi
Ensemble Librarians	Sarah Perry, Toby Tse, Maggie Umanetz-Lertprasopsak
AV/Equipment Manager	Micah Northam

CONCERT MANAGEMENT OFFICE STAFF

Director of Concert Management	Jerry Tietz
Concert Operations Manager	Kait Samuels
Ticketing Manager	Maxwell A. Johnson
Marketing Manager	Laura Nielsen
Marketing Coordinator	Elizabeth Avery
Technical Services Manager	Bill Milgram
Technical Services Manager	Zach Lovitch
Concert Business Manager	Meg Lindsey
Supporting Staff	150 Northwestern Students
Dean, Bienen School of Music	Jonathan Bailey Holland

KEYBOARD MAINTENANCE

Supervisor of Keyboard Maintenance	Wesley Owen
Piano Technician	Chris Scroggins

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

- Latecomers will be seated at the discretion of the house manager. In consideration of the artists and other members of the audience, patrons who must leave before the end of the concert are asked to do so between pieces.
- Photography and audio/video recording of performances is strictly prohibited without prior written consent of the Concert Management Office.
- A limited number of assisted listening devices are available for the hearing impaired. Inquire at the box office.
- Smoking is prohibited by law in all Bienen School of Music performance venues.
- Every patron who will be occupying a seat must have a ticket in order to be admitted into the concert.
- The presenter reserves the right to ask any patron who is disrupting the event in any way to leave the concert hall.
- In the event of a medical emergency, please notify the nearest usher.
- When joining us for upcoming concerts, please leave the Concert Management Office phone number (847-491-5441) with anyone who might need to reach you in case of emergency.