

Sunday, February 12, 2012, 3pm
Hertz Hall

Kirill Gerstein, *piano*

PROGRAM

- Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750) English Suite No. 6 in D minor, BWV 811
 Prélude
 Allemande
 Courante
 Sarabande and Double
 Gavotte I — Gavotte II — Gavotte I
 Gigue
- Ferruccio Busoni (1866–1924) From *An die Jugend* (1909)
 Giga, Bolero e Variazione (Study after Mozart)
- Oliver Knussen (b. 1952) Ophelia's Last Dance (2009–2010)
*Commissioned for Kirill Gerstein by the
 Gilmore International Keyboard Festival.*
- Carl Maria von Weber (1786–1826) Invitation to the Dance, Op. 65 (1819)

INTERMISSION

- Robert Schumann (1810–1856) Carnaval, Op. 9 (1834–1835)
 Prélambule — Pierrot — Arlequin —
 Valse noble — Eusebius — Florestan —
 Coquette — Réplique — (Sphinxes) —
 Papillons — Lettres dansantes —
 Chiarina — Chopin — Estrella —
 Reconnaissance — Pantalon et Columbine —
 Valse allemande — Intermezzo: Paganini —
 Aveu — Promenade — Pause —
 Marche des Davidsbündler contre les Philistins

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Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)
English Suite No. 6 in D minor, BWV 811

From 1717 to 1723, Bach was director of music at the court of Anhalt-Cöthen, north of Leipzig. He liked his job. His employer, Prince Leopold, was a well-educated man, 24 years old at the time he engaged Bach. (Bach was 32.) Leopold was fond of travel and books and paintings, but his real passion was music. (Reports had it that Leopold spent a whopping 20 percent of the court's annual budget on his musical establishment.) The Prince was an accomplished musician who not only played violin, viola da gamba and harpsichord well enough to join with the professionals in his household orchestra, but he also had an exceptional bass voice. He started the court musical establishment in 1707 with three players (his puritanical father had no use for music), and by the time of Bach's appointment, the ensemble had grown to nearly 20 performers equipped with a fine set of instruments. It was for these musicians that Bach wrote many of his outstanding instrumental works, including the *Brandenburg* Concertos, *Orchestral Suites*, *Violin Concertos* and much of his chamber and keyboard music. Leopold appreciated Bach's genius, and Bach returned the compliment when he said of his Prince, "He loved music, he was well acquainted with it, he understood it."

The six English Suites were probably composed at Cöthen, though ideas and perhaps even complete movements for them may date from as early as 1715, when Bach was serving as organist and chamber musician to Duke Wilhelm Ernst of Weimar. (It is from the early Weimar period [1708–1717] that most of Bach's organ works date.) The origin of the English Suites' name is unknown. An early copy of the First Suite (none of the composer's autographs survive) bears the words, "*Fait pour les Anglois*" ("Made for the English"), though this designation does not appear to have originated with Bach. Johann Nikolaus Forkel, in the first biography of the composer (1802), speculated that these works were created "for an Englishman of rank." In 1933, Charles Sanford Terry made a further pleasing but entirely unconfirmed

conjecture: "Between the Anglo-Hanoverian court [of England] and the petty German principalities, conventions were not infrequent. A military commission perhaps visited Cöthen, was entertained by the Prince, and received from his Kapellmeister the compliment of a composition specially dedicated." To further honor this hypothetical British dedicatee, Bach borrowed for the *Gigue* of the First Suite a theme by Charles Dieupart, then one of the most popular harpsichordists in London. The *Brandenburg* Concertos followed a not dissimilar gestation, when Bach collected together six of his finest concerted pieces and sent them to Christian Ludwig, Margrave of Brandenburg, who was a guest at Cöthen in 1718.

The English Suites, works of imposing scale and expansive expression, adopt the conventional Baroque model for the form: a large opening movement followed by a series of stylized dances. Each of the Suites (except No. 1) begins with a *Prélude* in quick tempo employing the *ritornello* form (orchestral refrain with solo episodes) of the Italian concerto. In the D minor Suite, this music is prefaced by a stately introduction. Bach thereafter followed the standard succession of dances, established in German practice with the works of Johann Jakob Froberger around 1650: *Allemande*, *Courante*, *Sarabande*, *Gigue*. An additional dance of differing character (*Bourrée*, *Gavotte*, *Passepied*, *Menuet*) is inserted before the *Gigue*. The moderately paced *Allemande*, if its French name is to be trusted, originated in Germany in the 16th century. French composers found it useful for displaying their most elaborate keyboard ornamentations, and passed it back to German musicians in that highly decorated form. The *Courante* was an old court dance genre accompanied by jumping motions that was frequently paired with the smoothly flowing *Allemande*. When the *Sarabande* emigrated to Spain from its birthplace in Mexico in the 16th century, it was so wild in its motions and so lascivious in its implications that Cervantes ridiculed it and Philip II suppressed it. The dance became considerably more tame when it was taken over into French and English music during the following century, and it had

achieved the dignified manner in which it was known to Bach by 1700. Bach's example here exists with a "Double," or variation, for each of its two strains. Next comes a delightful pair (one minor, one major) of *Gavottes*, a dance of moderate liveliness whose ancestry traces to French peasant music. The closing *Gigue* was derived from an English folk dance, and became popular as the model for instrumental compositions by French, German and Italian musicians when it migrated to the Continent.

Ferruccio Busoni (1866–1924)
Giga, Bolero e Variazione (Study after Mozart),
from *An die Jugend* ("For the Youth")

Composed in 1909. Premiered on October 16, 1909, in London by the composer.

Ferruccio Busoni was perhaps the most cosmopolitan musician of the early 20th century. The son of an Italian virtuoso clarinetist father and a German pianist mother (he was fluent in both Italian and German from infancy), Busoni was born in 1866 near Florence, raised in Austria, studied in Leipzig, taught in Helsinki (where his students included Jean Sibelius) and Moscow (where he married the daughter of a Swedish sculptor) and Bologna and Weimar and Boston and New York, toured extensively in Europe and America, and chose Berlin as his residence. Such internationalism, coupled with his probing intellectualism, gave Busoni a breadth of vision as composer, conductor and pianist that few musicians of his time could match, but it also meant that he was something of an outsider everywhere, not unequivocally belonging to any single land. He therefore became a man without a comfortable country during World War I, since the Germans regarded him as a foreigner living in Berlin (despite his having resided there for almost two decades) and the Italians felt that he had long since abandoned the country of his birth. When he approached the German Embassy in Washington, D.C., about arranging concerts or finding a teaching post in America, he was coldly refused with the excuse that the

ambassador was unable to offer aid to a citizen of a hostile nation. He had little choice but to move to neutral Switzerland, where he waited out the war in Zurich. Though he had earlier regarded Switzerland as something of a cultural backwater, Busoni liked Zurich and he developed rewarding associations there among both the Swiss and the many refugees who made the city an international haven. In Switzerland, he conducted, gave recitals, read voraciously, acquired as a companion a St. Bernard dog (which he named "Giotto"), and composed, most notably the one-act opera *Arlecchino*, premiered in Zurich with good success on May 11, 1917. He came to be regarded locally with such high regard that the University of Zurich conferred an honorary Doctorate of Philosophy degree upon him in July 1919. He considered making the city his permanent residence, but a lucrative appointment to the faculty of the Prussian Academy of Arts the following year lured him back to Berlin, where he lived until his death in 1924.

Busoni codified his progressive views on the cultural and stylistic evolution of the art in his *Outline of a New Aesthetic of Music* of 1907, which British critic and music scholar Richard Whitehouse characterized as "a then-controversial manifesto for the continuing development of musical creativity in a future of unlimited possibility, a future to be achieved not by disowning the past but by rendering its essential qualities anew, as a catalyst to composition in the present." Busoni distilled his objective in the visionary quotation from his own libretto for the 1905 opera *Der Mächtige Zauberer* ("The Mighty Sorcerer") that he placed at the head of the treatise: "I want to attain the unknown! What I already know is boundless. But I want to go even further. The final word still eludes me." Nurturing future generations of musicians was a fundamental element in Busoni's philosophy, and to that end he created four small volumes of pieces for solo piano in the summer of 1909 that seek to synthesize past and present as a vector for future developments. He titled them collectively *An die Jugend* ("To the Youth"). Volume I (*Preludietto, Fughetta ed Escercizio*), original with Busoni, couches its avant-garde

harmonic language in the venerable forms of the baroque; Volume II (*Preludio, Fuga e Fuga figurata*) is a study based on the D major Prelude and Fugue from Book I of Bach's *The Well-Tempered Clavier*; Volume IV (*Introduzione e Capriccio [Paganinesco]; Epilogo*) draws its thematic substance from the Caprices Nos. 11 and 15 by Nicolò Paganini. Volume III of *An die Jugend (Giga, Bolero e Variazione)*, a "Study after Mozart," begins with an almost literal transcription of Mozart's imitative *Eine kleine Gigue* in G major, K. 574, which he composed in April 1789 during a visit to Leipzig to meet Friedrich Doles, an aging pupil of Sebastian Bach and his successor as Kantor at the Thomaskirche. The next section is a free treatment of the courtly *Fandango* from Act III of *The Marriage of Figaro*, with a reference in the bass near the end to the theme of the *Giga*. The brief closing *Variazione*, which follows without pause, takes a metrically transformed version of the *Giga* subject as its thematic material.

Oliver Knussen (b. 1952)
Ophelia's Last Dance

Composed in 2009–2010. Premiered on May 3, 2010, in Kalamazoo, Michigan by Kirill Gerstein.

Oliver Knussen is one of today's leading British musicians. Born on June 12, 1952, in Glasgow into a musical family (his father was Stuart Knussen, Principal Double Bassist of the London Symphony Orchestra for many years), he showed a remarkable precocity that recalls the early maturation of Benjamin Britten, playing piano very young and composing by the age of six. On April 7, 1968, when he was 15, he conducted the London Symphony in the premiere of his own First Symphony, and led the work again later that year in New York's Carnegie Hall. He attended the Central Tutorial School for Young Musicians in London as a composition student of John Lambert from 1963 to 1969, and from 1970 to 1973 studied on fellowship with Gunther Schuller at Tanglewood, where his Second Symphony won the Margaret

Grant Memorial Composition Prize in 1971. Knussen's creative catalog includes three symphonies, concertos for horn and violin, several orchestral works, a Requiem (in memory of his wife, who died of a blood infection in 2003), songs (among which is the *Vocalise with Songs of Winnie-the-Pooh*), chamber pieces, piano compositions and the companion fantasy operas based on texts by noted children's author Maurice Sendak, *Where the Wild Things Are* and *Higglety Pigglety Pop!*. Knussen has also pursued an active career as a conductor, appearing frequently with the London Sinfonietta and the Philharmonia Orchestra, and guest conducting widely in Europe, Japan, Australia and America; he has led more than 200 world and local premieres. He served as Principal Guest Conductor of The Hague's Het Residentie Orkest from 1992 to 1996, the Aldeburgh Festival's Co-Artistic Director from 1983 to 1998, and the London Sinfonietta's Music Director from 1998 to 2002; he is now the Sinfonietta's Conductor Laureate. He has also been Composer-in-Residence with the Philharmonia Orchestra, Co-Coordinator of Contemporary Music Activities at Tanglewood, Artist-in-Association with the Birmingham Contemporary Music Group, and holder of the Elise L. Stoeger Composer's Chair with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. Knussen's many awards include Honorary Memberships in the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the Royal Philharmonic Society, honorary doctorates from the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama and Birmingham City University, the 2004 Association of British Orchestras Award, and the 2006 Michael Ludwig Nemmers Prize from Northwestern University. He was made a Commander of the Order of the British Empire (C.B.E.) in 1994.

Ophelia's Last Dance was commissioned by the Gilmore International Keyboard Festival for 2010 Gilmore Artist Kirill Gerstein, who premiered the work at the Festival on May 3, 2010, in Kalamazoo, Michigan. Knussen wrote, "*Ophelia's Last Dance* is based on a melody dating from early in 1974, which was among several ideas intended for—but ultimately excluded from—my Third Symphony (1973–1979). Some

of these evolved into the ensemble piece *Ophelia Dances, Book 1* (1975), but not this one—which nonetheless continued to haunt me from time to time over the years. After the death of Sue Knussen [the composer's wife] in March 2003, it strongly reminded me of happier times and eventually, on the occasion of Paul Crossley's 60th birthday recital in 2004, I decided to give it a tiny frame of its own so it could be shared with listeners other than the one in my head.

"It still remained a fragment at that time, because although the melody will never find the form for which it was originally conceived, the new frame suggested the possibility of continuing the dance in various ways. The present work (written at my home in Suffolk in 2009–2010) is the result, in which a number of other 'homeless' dance-fragments—related more by history and mood than by anything more concrete—are bound together by means of variously wrought transitions to and from rondo-like recurrences of the original melody."

Carl Maria von Weber (1786–1826)
Invitation to the Dance, Op. 65

Composed in 1819.

The mania for the waltz first spread across Europe when the delegates to the Congress of Vienna returned home from that music-mad city in 1814. A motley of *Ländler*, German Dances and original waltz melodies was used to accompany the newly popular dance, and Schubert, Hummel and even Beethoven devised some delightful triple-meter confections that would not have been out of place in the ballroom. The first important step in elevating the waltz into a concert vehicle, however, was taken by that pioneer of German musical Romanticism, Carl Maria von Weber, with his infectious *Invitation to the Dance*, composed for piano during the summer of 1819, when he was easing his way back into creative work after a difficult period of ill health and bereavement. (The *Polacca Brillante* for piano that he wrote at the same time also proved to be historically significant as the model for later works

by Chopin and others.) In its organization, the *Invitation to the Dance* is a compact, continuous suite of waltz melodies pleasingly balanced in tempo, character and key in which the opening strain returns, in the manner of a rondo, to buttress the form (Weber subtitled the piece *Rondo Brillante*); thoughtful passages at beginning and end serve as the expressive frame for the principal waltz section. In its mood, the composition evokes subtleties of emotion that had been little broached in earlier music in dance idioms. The style and structure of the *Invitation to the Dance* established the plan that served as the model for the wondrous flood of waltzes produced by Josef Lanner, the Strauss clan and even Maurice Ravel (*La Valse*) during the following century. "Weber was the first founder of the dance-music expressive of deep feeling," wrote the 19th-century scholar Wilhelm Riehl. "He showed how profoundly he was imbued with the spirit of the age. This composition has deep historical significance."

Though the *Invitation to the Dance* may be heard simply as a brilliant evocation of the 19th-century's most popular dance form, the composer provided the following scenario to elucidate the relationship of the slow introduction and postlude of the work to its lilting main central section: "First approach of the dancer to whom the lady gives an evasive answer. His more pressing invitation; her acceptance of his request. Now they converse in greater detail; he begins; she answers him with heightened expression; she responds more warmly; now for the dance! His remarks concerning it; her answer; their coming together; their going forward; expectation of the beginning of the dance. The Dance. End: his thanks, her reply and their parting. Silence."

Robert Schumann (1810–1856)
Carnaval, Op. 9

Composed in 1834–1835.

Early in 1834, Baron von Fricken of Asch in Bohemia heard little Clara Wieck play a recital in Plauen. So impressed was the Baron with the

results of Papa Friedrich Wieck's method of piano tutelage that he determined to send his daughter, Ernestine, to Leipzig to study with the noted pedagogue. Ernestine duly presented herself as a student and boarder at the Wieck household in April, and immediately became acquainted with Robert Schumann, the gifted 24-year-old pianist, composer and writer who was Wieck's chief protégé at the time. When Fricken inquired about Schumann, he was told by Wieck, "There is no limit to the number of things I could write you about this rather fantastic person; headstrong he may be, but also noble, splendid, enthusiastic, wonderfully gifted, highly cultured and a writer and musician of genius." Ernestine, then 17, also found much to admire about the dashing Robert, an affection returned by Schumann, who had been advised by his physician that to fully recover from his nervous breakdown of the previous year, "You need a wife. Medicine is no good here." In July, Schumann described to his mother in Zwickau the many virtues of Ernestine, and then confided that she was "just such a one as I might wish to have for a wife." The affair proved serious enough that he presented Ernestine with a ring in September and presumably proposed marriage, though the engagement was never announced publicly. The following month, her course of study with Wieck apparently completed, Ernestine was summoned back to Asch by the Baron. In the wake of her departure, Schumann's ardor began to cool, and it was further chilled when he learned that the girl was not Fricken's daughter but rather his ward. This amatory adventure was pretty well spent by the end of the year, when Schumann began to turn his attention to Clara Wieck, with whom he was to create one of the great love stories of the 19th century. He remained friends with Ernestine, however, and dedicated to her the Allegro for Piano, Op. 8, and the Three Songs, Op. 31.

Schumann's brief fling with Ernestine von Fricken helped to inspire two of the most important piano compositions of his early years: the *Symphonic Etudes*, a splendid set of variations he erected upon a theme composed by Baron von Fricken; and *Carnaval*, which the redoubtable

Franz Liszt assessed as "one of the greatest works I know." *Carnaval* was conceived in the heat of Schumann's ardor for Ernestine during the summer of 1834, but not completed until, appropriately, carnival season the following winter, by which time his affection had swung round to Clara. Part of the inspiration for *Carnaval* came from the coincidence that each letter of Ernestine's hometown—Asch—had a musical equivalent in traditional German notation: A—E-flat (Es)—C—B-natural (H). This succession of pitches offered Schumann a theme of sorts that became the seed from which the individual movements grew as free variations. He was fond of cryptic musical messages (his Op. 1, the *Abegg Variations*, took as its subject the letters of a friend's name), and he devised permutations that juggled the order of the notes and allowed the inclusion of A-flat (As) as an alternative to the A—E-flat leading. He inserted these tiny collections of pitches in unplayably long notes between the eighth and ninth movements of *Carnaval* (they are not usually performed), and labeled them "Sphinxes," a term he borrowed from the title of a poem by Jean Paul, his favorite author, called *Love, a Sphinx*. "Not since the bass theme of the *Eroica* have four notes yielded such a vast canvas of ideas," wrote Bálint Vázsonyi. The 21 movements of *Carnaval*, "Vignettes on Four Notes," as the composer subtitled them, depict characters at a masked ball, some real, some stock figures from the pantomime and *commedia dell'arte*, though Schumann admitted to the pianist Ignaz Moscheles that he added the titles only after the music was completed. *Carnaval* is a quintessential document of Romanticism—colorful, evocative, virtuosic, varied, melodious, daring, stirring. It is the first music in which Schumann's full genius blossomed, and the work which offers the most rounded view of him as creator, musician and person. "The more one penetrates Schumann's ideas, the more power and vitality one finds in them," wrote Liszt. "The more one studies them, the more one is astonished by their richness and fertility."

Carnaval begins with a heraldic *Préambule* in the manner of a fanfare, the only one of the movements not based on the ASCH theme.

Pierrot, stolid and hesitant, and *Arlequin*, coy and mocking, descend from the stage of the French pantomime to join the fête. The *Valse noble* is an elegant realization of the dance form that was still considered deliciously risqué in the 1830s. Schumann next introduces himself with the contrasting elements of his personality: *Eusebius*, dreamy and romantic, and *Florestan*, impetuous and mercurial. *Coquette*, flirtatious and teasing, draws a reply (*Réplique*) from a suitor or imitator. *Papillons* ("Butterflies") evokes the natty dressed single men whose dancing is more enthusiastic than graceful. Schumann grouped his portraits of Ernestine (*A.S.C.H.*—*S.C.H.A.*, her hometown and the letters of his name that could be rendered musically) and Clara (*Chiarina*) together. The awkward, grace-note treatment of Ernestine's movement leaves little doubt that by the time he wrote this music, his affection had shifted to Clara, whom he portrays with the most impassioned episode in the entire work. A piece of luxuriant counterfeited *Chopin* follows. (Chopin resented having his name and style borrowed by Schumann, and could find nothing better to say about *Carnaval* than that he "enjoyed the charming *mise-en-scène*.") Schumann bids a rather curt farewell to Ernestine in the darkly colored waltz titled *Estrella*. The composer described *Reconnaissance* as "a lovers' meeting." The *commedia dell'arte* figure *Pantolon* is usually a gullible old merchant who is deceived in amorous matters, perhaps, this time, by the sweet-tongued but sly *Columbine*. The *Valse Allemande* ("German Waltz") is interrupted by a brilliant reminiscence of *Paganini*, whose dazzling *Caprices* Schumann arranged for piano as his Opp. 3 and 10. *Aveu* is a tender avowal of love.

A general *Promenade* for all the dancers and a breathless *Pause*, borrowed from an episode in the *Préambule*, lead to the grand finale of *Carnaval*, the *March of the League of David Against the Philistines*. During the early 1830s, before his infatuation with Clara had settled fully upon him, Schumann found companionship in a group of fellow admirers of Jean Paul and E.T.A. Hoffmann, who banded themselves together into the *Davidsbund*—the *League of David*—to do battle against the enemies of all true art, the "Philistines." The principal weapon of these would-be warriors of artistic rectitude was the pen, and to further their aims they established the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* ("New Journal for Music") in 1833, and issued the first number on April 3, 1834. The purpose of the periodical was to stem the rising tide of empty virtuoso pieces and simple Biedermeier musical confections for home consumption while championing the works of the great Classicists and the emerging generation of young Romantics, including Chopin, Berlioz, Mendelssohn and, of course, Schumann. Schumann took over the editorship of the journal soon after it was founded, and became one of the most important and respected music critics in Europe during his decade in that position. This closing *March* flies in the face of convention with its triple meter, and portrays the League's enemies with the *Grandfather Dance*, a mundane 17th-century German tune traditionally used to signal the conclusion of an evening's festivities. The *Préambule* is again recalled to close this musical sortie against the Philistines with total victory for the forces of Schumann.

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Marco Borggrete

Russian pianist Kirill Gerstein has quickly proven to be one of today's most intriguing young musicians. His masterful technique, musical curiosity and probing interpretations have led to explorations of classical music and jazz, advanced degrees by age 20, a professorship in piano by age 27, and a full performance schedule at the world's major music centers and festivals.

In January 2010, Mr. Gerstein was named the recipient of the 2010 Gilmore Artist Award. Only the sixth pianist to have been so honored, the Gilmore Award is made to an exceptional pianist who, regardless of age or nationality, possesses broad and profound musicianship and charisma and who desires and can sustain a career as a major international concert artist. He was also honored by being awarded a 2010 Avery Fisher Career Grant in April 2010.

Highlights of Mr. Gerstein's 2011–2012 season include debuts with the New York Philharmonic and Seattle Symphony and at the Aspen Music Festival and London's Proms; re-engagements with San Francisco, Detroit and Atlanta symphonies, as well as with the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra; a three-week Rachmaninoff concerto cycle with the Houston Symphony; and recitals at Cal Performances, New York's 92nd St. Y, London's Wigmore Hall, and in Vancouver, Miami and Sarasota.

Mr. Gerstein's recent engagements in North America include performances with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Cleveland Orchestra, and the Chicago, Atlanta, St. Louis, Dallas, Indianapolis, Baltimore, Milwaukee and Vancouver symphonies; festival appearances at Chicago's Grant Park, the Mann Music Center and Saratoga with the Philadelphia Orchestra, Tanglewood with the Boston Symphony and Blossom with the Cleveland Orchestra; and recitals in Boston, New York's Town Hall, Cincinnati, Detroit and Washington's Kennedy Center.

Internationally, Mr. Gerstein has worked with such prominent European orchestras as the Munich, Rotterdam and Royal philharmonics, London's Philharmonia, the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Staatskapelle Dresden, Zurich Tonhalle, the Finnish and Swedish radio orchestras, WDR Symphony Orchestra Cologne and the Deutsches Symphonie Orchester Berlin, as well as with the NHK Symphony Orchestra in Tokyo and the Simón Bolívar Youth Orchestra in Caracas with Gustavo Dudamel. He has also performed recitals in Paris, Prague, Hamburg, London's Queen Elizabeth Hall and at the Liszt Academy in Budapest. He made his Salzburg Festival debut playing solo and two-piano works with Andrés Schiff, and he has also appeared at the Verbier, Lucerne and Jerusalem chamber music festivals.

Named one of the ten best recordings of 2010 by *The New York Times*, his first recording for Myrios Classics of recital works by Schumann, Liszt and Oliver Knussen was released in October 2010, following by a duo recital disc with Tabea Zimmermann. In March 2012, he records Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* in its original jazz-band version with students and faculty members at the Berklee College of Music in Boston.

Born in 1979 in Voronezh, Russia, Kirill Gerstein attended one of the country's special music schools for gifted children and taught himself to play jazz by listening to his parents' extensive record collection. He came to the United States at age 14 to continue his studies in jazz piano as the youngest student ever to

attend the Berklee College of Music. However, he also continued working on the classical piano repertoire. Following his second summer at the Boston University program at Tanglewood, he decided to focus mainly on classical music and moved to New York City to attend the Manhattan School of Music, where he studied with Solomon Mikowsky and earned Bachelor and Master of Music degrees. He continued his studies with Dmitri Bashkirov in Madrid and Ferenc Rados in Budapest.

Mr. Gerstein was awarded First Prize at the 2001 Arthur Rubinstein Piano Competition in Tel Aviv, received a 2002 Gilmore Young Artist Award, and was chosen as Carnegie Hall's "Rising Star" for the 2005–2006 season. He became an American citizen in 2003 and is currently a professor of piano at the Musikhochschule in Stuttgart.

Kirill Gerstein appears by arrangement with CM Artists. His recordings are available on the Myrios Classics label.