



American Composers

Darius Bermudez



John Coolidge Adams

- American Minimalist
- “Short Ride on a Fast Machine” was commissioned for the Great Woods Festival
- “On the Transfiguration of Souls” was written following 9/11 and includes a track with the names of victims
- “Nixon in China” includes an iconic foxtrot scene
- “Doctor Atomic” is an opera about Robert Oppenheimer



Charles Ives

- Focused on New England settings in his works (for example, “Three Places in New England”)
- “Concord Sonata” has movements named for key transcendental thinkers like Emerson and Thoreau
- “Central Park in the Dark” is meant to depict just that, clues will often mention park benches at nighttime



Leonard Bernstein

- Composed the “West Side Story” which tells of the rivalry of the Sharks and the Jets
- Composed the opera “Candide” which tells of Voltaire’s life. Has a song called “Glitter and Be Gay”
- Director of the New York Philharmonic, and has hosted numerous “Young People’s Concerts”



Samuel Barber

- Composed “Adagio for Strings” which is often played at presidential funerals
- Composed “Knoxville: Summer of 1915” for James Agee’s “A Death in the Family”
- His piano concerto’s second movement is known as Canzone



John Cage

- Also a minimalist
- Composed “Four minutes, Thirty-three seconds” which is entirely made of rests (silence)
- To “prepare” a piano, he once put screws and rubber bands between its strings
- Constructed an organ at St. Burchandi Church that will play a piece by him until 2640
- “Music of Changes” based on the ancient Chinese “I Ching” texts



Aaron Copland (See Presentation on Operas)

- “Fanfare for the Commonman” commemorates ordinary soldiers in World War II, and has a F- B-flat - F motif



Scott Joplin

- King of Ragtime
- Composed “Maple Leaf Rag” which is often claimed to be the first sheet music to have sold a million copies. This piece is associated with a club in Sedalia, Missouri (Maple Leaf Club)
- Wrote “A Guest of Honor”, an opera about Booker T. Washington’s meeting with Teddy Roosevelt.
- Composed works based off of Teddy Roosevelt’s speeches: “The Strenuous Life” and “The Easy Winners
- His waltz “Bethena” was inspired by the death of his Freddie.
- In his opera “Treemonisha”, the title woman is rescued from a wasp’s nest by Remus
- Many of his works were used in the movie “The Sting”, including “The Entertainer”
- Many of his works include syncopations (including “Elite Syncopations”)



George Gershwin

- “Rhapsody in Blue” - opens with a clarinet glissando - premiered by Paul Whiteman’s orchestra
- Opera of “Porgy and Bess” - takes place on Catfish Row - included the song “Summertime” which has the lyric “the livin’ is easy, the fish are jumpin”
- His brother Ira wrote the lyrics for the song “I Got Rhythm”
- Composed “An American in Paris” which was inspired by train ride in France - uses taxi cab horns
- Used bongos and maracas in his “Cuban Overture”