



**The New York Times** | <http://nyti.ms/1gR0fGH>

---

MUSIC

# Melodies Steeped in Memories

## Jeffrey Kahane Conducts New York Philharmonic

By ZACHARY WOOLFE MARCH 21, 2014

Sometimes an outsider is best at showing an institution its own history, and on Thursday evening at Avery Fisher Hall, Jeffrey Kahane held a striking mirror up to the New York Philharmonic of the 1920s and '30s.

He conducted the ensemble with confident energy from the piano in two of the 20th century's finest concertos: Ravel's in G, which Bruno Walter first did with the orchestra in 1933, and Gershwin's in F, given its premiere in 1925 by the New York Symphony, which merged with the Philharmonic three years later. Most valuably, Mr. Kahane led the orchestra in its first performance of Kurt Weill's moodily nocturnal Symphony No. 2 since Walter's in 1934, the work's American premiere.

The symphony was making an important return to the Philharmonic's repertory, but it also has a personal connection to Mr. Kahane, the adventurous and genially charismatic music director of the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra and an admired conductor and pianist. He revealed in remarks from the stage that Weill was a distant cousin of his grandmother's. Both were Jews forced to flee Nazi Germany.

The first sketches for the symphony were among the few possessions that Weill carried with him when he left Berlin in 1933, and Mr. Kahane said that

he hears in it a work of exile. After a brooding introduction, the first movement features broad Romantic melodies, perhaps an evocation of a vanishing past, that yield to martial rhythms. Those curt pulses suddenly relax, though not without an ominous tinge, into something suaver, like a tango, before the movement ends hard, loud and pummeling.

Suavity is also under siege in the central Largo movement, more vigorous than relaxed or reflective. The mood is dirge-like, yet gains a strange sensuality from alluring instrumental combinations: cello with flute, horn with plucks from the strings. A firm timpani heartbeat fades into a murmur. The finale is a swirling, savage dance that becomes yet another march, more sardonic than the first movement's, before a sinister, full-throated gallop to the end.

The music was anxious and harried enough to infect the concertos programmed on either side of it. The high spirits of Ravel's madcap finale darkened when juxtaposed with the Weill, and the jittery changeability of the Gershwin began to seem less playful than scarily surreal, the wail of its climax deeper than mere jazzy melancholy.

Mr. Kahane's conducting and his pianism were clear, straightforward and unassuming, even in virtuosic passages, letting the connections between the works speak, as it were, for themselves. The result was that happy rarity: a symphonic concert with a sustained mood. In this case, it was a feeling of worried, restless pleasure, a trace of the uniquely feverish quality of the period between the world wars.

This program will be repeated on Saturday and Tuesday evenings at Avery Fisher Hall, Lincoln Center; 212-875-5656, nyphil.org.

A version of this review appears in print on March 24, 2014, on page C3 of the New York edition with the headline: Melodies Steeped in Memory.