

# HIGH SCHOOL NIGHTS

HOUSTON  
SYMPHONY

EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES FOR OCTOBER 17, 2025

We are excited for you and your students to attend the Houston Symphony at Jones Hall next weekend! The concert you will be attending is directed by German guest conductor Christian Reif and centers around twentieth-century classics. The concert begins with Julia Perry's *Short Piece for Orchestra* and continues with Kurt Weill's *Symphony No. 2*, concluding with George Gershwin's *Piano Concerto in F*, written as a sequel to *Rhapsody in Blue* and performed by piano virtuoso, conservationist, and human rights activist Hélène Grimaud. You can find the full program, complete with guest artist bios, [on our website](#).

The resources below were compiled for you to use as you see fit, to complement your current classroom objectives or pass along to individual students attending who you think would benefit from certain ideas.

## I. JULIA PERRY'S *SHORT PIECE FOR ORCHESTRA*



Julia Perry was “one of the most captivating figures in American musical history. She was born to a prosperous African American family in 1924...but suffered from neglect and ill-health in her later life,” which led to an early death when she was only 55.

–Calvin Dotsey

Though born in Kentucky, Perry wrote *Short Piece for Orchestra* while studying in Florence, Italy.

How does Perry use **contrast** throughout this piece? Consider contrast in dynamics, tempo, and orchestration. How do these contrasts affect the overall energy of the piece?

### Videos to Learn More:

[An introduction to Julia Perry: with Professor Michael Harper](#)

[Listen  
Here!](#)

## II. KURT WEILL'S *SYMPHONY NO. 2*



“As a famous composer of stage works, a leftist, and a Jew, Kurt Weill knew he was in danger when President Paul von Hindenburg appointed Hitler Chancellor of Germany.” Weill left Germany just two days before the Enabling Act was passed, “which effectively rendered Hitler a dictator. He lived in Paris and London before landing in New York City in 1935, just two years after leaving Germany.

*Symphony No. 2* was composed while Weill was living in Paris and despite his escape from Nazi Germany, Weill still faced many hostile critics in the press and at his concerts. To his wife, he wrote:

"I'm staying quite calm and remain absolutely secure about my work. For all this there is only one answer: just keep going. The symphony will be very beautiful; I hope to be finished with the sketch in eight to ten days."

#### Questions to Consider:

- Weill's work includes many well-known Broadway and popular music standards. Do you hear any theatrical or dramatic elements in this piece? What strategies does Weill use to create drama?
- Consider that this piece was written while Weill was displaced from his home country. What do you hear in this piece that suggests feelings of conflict, tension, or resilience?

#### Videos to Learn More:

[Life and art of Kurt Weill](#)

[Beyond the Baton with Yannick Nézet-Séguin: Weill's Symphony No. 2](#)

[Listen  
Here!](#)

### III. GEORGE GERSHWIN'S *PIANO CONCERTO IN F*

"Amid a busy schedule of composing hit Broadway and West End musicals, George Gershwin found time to fulfill a commission for a new Piano Concerto in 1925. He had made a name for himself in the concert hall the year before with his epochal fusion of jazz and classical music, *Rhapsody in Blue*. Regarding his new concerto, Gershwin said,



"Many persons had thought that the *Rhapsody* was only a happy accident. Well, I went out, for one thing, to show them that there was plenty more where that had come from."

The 27-year-old Gershwin performed the solo part himself at the world premiere with the New York Symphony." –Calvin Dotsey

This piano concerto provides an opportunity to explore how the soloist and orchestra work together to develop themes. Consider the opening theme when the piano enters in the first movement, copied below. Can you play the melody (notated in the treble clef) on your own instrument? What words would you use to describe this theme?

[Listen  
Here!](#)

50

Pno

54

Pno

At the end of the first movement (about 11 minutes in), this theme returns, this time played by the string family:

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc.

D. B.

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc.

D. B.

Note that only part of the theme is shown here, but you can find the full excerpt on pages 56-60 of the [score](#).

### Things to Consider and try:

- Play this excerpt on your own or with a group of your classmates. What sounds different about this theme when it is played by the string family, as opposed to the solo piano?
- While the strings are playing the main theme in the excerpt above, what does the piano play to provide support?
- Does the entrance of the piano in the first movement (shown above) match the entrance of the piano in the other movements? What effect does each entrance have on the overall momentum of the piece?
- Gershwin was known for fusing jazz and classical music on a symphonic stage. What elements do you hear that remind you of jazz music? Classical music?
- What other melodic or rhythmic patterns do you hear throughout this piece?

### Links to Learn More:

[Gershwin plays Concerto in F fragments](#)

[George Gershwin | Short Biography | Introduction To The Composer](#)

[Gershwin Concerto in F, complete performance and analysis](#)

[GERSHWIN Is Great and here is Why](#)

[A Jazzy Classic: Gershwin's Influence on Classical Music](#)

We are looking forward to seeing you all at Jones Hall soon!