About the Program

The idea for a program entitled *New Worlds* originated when actor Bill Murray and cellist Jan Vogler met and decided to make a project of their mutual love of music and literature. The program showcases American values in both art forms and how American writers, actors, and musicians have built bridges between America and Europe. *New Worlds* is celebrated in 2017 with performances around the world. The world premiere took place on June 4, 2017 at Germany’s Dresden Festival and the American premiere at the Napa Valley Festival on July 20, 2017.


In two readings on this program, Bill Murray treats passages from *The Paris Review*’s historic interviews with famous writers – in this case Ernest Hemingway – in a series entitled “The Art of Fiction No. 21.” The interview “Did You Even Play a Musical Instrument” was Hemingway’s final one with the magazine’s editor George Plimpton. Hemingway’s answer to the question posed in the title was especially appropriate for this program. Yes, Hemingway played the cello. He admitted to not having great talent for it but also spoke of playing in an amateur chamber music ensemble at his mother’s insistence.

**Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750): Prelude from Suite No. 1 in G Major for Unaccompanied Cello, BWV 1007**

With their monumental position in the repertoire today, it is difficult to imagine that Bach’s six suites for unaccompanied cello were virtually unknown before 1900. In 1889 at the age of thirteen, Pablo Casals discovered a manuscript of the suites in a Barcelona thrift shop and set to work on them. He did not dare to perform one publicly until at least a decade of study and was reported to have practiced them daily for the rest of his life.

Along with its companion pieces, the Suite No. 1 in G Major was composed probably between 1717 and 1723 when Bach was Kapellmeister in Cöthen. Like all the suites, No. 1 is a challenge in both technical prowess and emotional content. Among the six suites, No. 1 is the most often performed. The *Prelude* to Suite No. 1 is a strong musical introduction to the six movements of the Suite. It also serves the musical and literary aspects of this program entitled *New Worlds* since few composers have crossed the musical world as lavishly as Bach.

**Walt Whitman (1819-1892): From “Song of the Open Road” and “Song of Myself”**

Walt Whitman’s freedom of style and thought earned him the title of America’s “first poet of democracy.” Fine examples of this are “Song of the Open Road” and “Song of Myself” which are both part of Whitman’s monumental collection of poems, *Leaves of Grass*, that was published in various editions over forty years of his life. “Song of the Open Road,” from the second edition in 1856, pictures the outdoors as a utopia where all men can come together. “Song of Myself,” from the first edition in 1855, is not a self-portrayal as the title suggests but rather a description of Whitman’s vision of common people’s role in society. Passages critical of the slavery rampant at the time brought criticism from conservatives. In 1882, Boston’s District Attorney threatened action against *Leaves of Grass* for violating Massachusetts obscenity laws with specific references to “Song of Myself.” Gone from both poems are the rhyme, stylized format, and flowery descriptions we associate with much traditional 19th century poetry. Here is sterner stuff pointing to the language of Hemingway and the 20th century. With that, the poems also have a distinct and moving sense of poetry and song.
James Fenimore Cooper (1789-1851): from *The Deerslayer*

Bill Murray reads from James Fenimore Cooper’s classic American novel, *The Deerslayer* of 1841, the last of Cooper’s famous series of five novels called *Leatherstocking Tales*. The novels tell the story of Natty Bumppo (also known as Hawkeye, Deerslayer, Pathfinder, Leatherstocking, and Trapper), an 18th century Anglo-American raised in part by Native Americans. The story is a complicated one resting on Natty Bumppo’s objection to the then common practice of taking scalps. A central issue of the story is the conflict between the forces that draw Natty Bumppo to the woods and those which seek to attach him to other human beings. The setting is Otsego Lake in upstate New York, where Natty Bumppo and his friend Chingachgook plot a rescue of Chingachgook’s betrothed who has been abducted by the hostile Huron Indians. Natty Bumppo is conflicted when his manhood is tested by his choice whether or not to shoot another human being. The novel has been treated in film, radio, and television.

Franz Schubert (1797-1828): *Andante un poco mosso* from the Piano Trio in B-flat Major, D.898

Written probably within a year of his death, Schubert’s B-flat Piano Trio marks a period of enormous creative output despite his steadily weakening health. There is some question of whether or not the B-flat Trio was performed at the March 26, 1828 concert of Schubert’s music, the only public performance of his works during his lifetime. When it was published in 1836, Robert Schumann said of it in his *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, “A glance at Schubert’s trio and all miserable human commotion vanishes, and the world shines in a new splendor.”

The second movement, *Andante un poco mosso*, is beautiful song unmatched in its expressiveness. The cello sings out over a piano accompaniment. The violin and piano each restate the theme with countermelodies offered by the other instruments, a fine example of Schubert's ability to create what seems to be an endless melody generating within a continuously evolving structure. While Beethoven and Brahms also did this in their building of musical ideas from one kernel, Schubert employed the device so naturally in his music that we hear it there only in terms of emotional effectiveness. Beneath the expressiveness of the movement lies perfect Classical sonata form.


This reading is taken from *The Paris Review’s* interview with Hemingway when he was asked if he had a “group feeling” with other writers and artists in Paris during the 1920s. Hemingway’s response was negative about any “group feeling,” but he described the respect the famous group had for one another and specifically mentioned notable figures such as Gris, Picasso, Braque, Monet, Joyce, Pound, and Stein.

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937): “Blues” from Sonata No. 2 for Violin and Piano

The second movement, “Blues,” from Ravel’s Sonata No. 2 for Violin and Piano serves as a scherzo in true Classical spirit despite its obvious bow to American jazz. When on tour in the United States, Ravel once commented that the “blues” was one of the great American musical discoveries. Ravel achieves the “blues” effect by assigning a saxophone-like wail to the violin, achieved by slides from one note to the next while the piano imitates the strumming of a guitar.

For the premiere of the Sonata, Ravel was pianist with violinist and composer George Enesco.

Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961): “With Pascin at the Dome” from *A Moveable Feast*


The 1964 edition of the book consists of a series of twenty chapters that can each stand on its own as a story. The eleventh chapter, “With Pascin at the Dome,” treats Hemingway’s friendship with Jules Pascin, a Bulgarian painter and fellow Parisian expatriate, with whom he regularly meets at the Dome Café – this time with two models who are sisters.

Astor Piazzolla (1921-1992): “La Muerte del Ángel”

Piazzolla’s studies with Alberto Ginastera led him to studies in Paris with the legendary Nadia Boulanger. Piazzolla gives a wonderful account of his reluctance to admit to her that he played the bandoneon rather than the piano. He presented to her what he called his “kilos of symphonies and sonatas.” She responded that they were “well-written,” but that she could not find Piazzolla in them. Finally he played his tangos for her to which she responded, “You idiot, that’s Piazzolla!” He commented, “And I took all the music I com-
posed, ten years of my life, and sent it to hell in two seconds.” Despite this, Piazzolla maintained his dedication to classical chamber music and symphonic works even though they retain his native Argentinian instincts leading to his evolution of traditional tango style to what is now called nuevo tango.

“La Muerte del Ángel” (Death of the Angel), composed in 1962, is part of Piazzolla’s incidental music to Alberto Rodriguez Muñoz’s play Tango del Ángel in which an angel heals the spirits of residents of a poor Buenos Aires neighborhood but is ultimately killed in a knife fight. In addition to its nationalistic qualities, the vibrant and delicious work uses classic fugue form evident in its opening passages. A lyrical middle section intervenes before a return to the fugue which ends with a dramatic piano glissando.

George Gershwin (1898-1937): “It Ain't Necessarily So” from Porgy and Bess
Despite its humor, “It Ain't Necessarily So” is still within the overarching serious theme of this program, which is the expression of American values in music and literature. It also expresses the integration of popular and classical art forms in a uniquely American way. This brief and delicious moment in American music is based on the famous song from George and Ira Gershwin’s 1935 opera, Porgy and Bess. It is sung by the character, Sportin’ Life, a drug dealer who expresses his cynical doubts about several biblical statements. Since then, the song has moved through many permutations including one by the great violin virtuoso, Jascha Heifetz. The racially-charged theme of the opera brought initial unpopular reception, but since the 1976 Houston Grand Opera production, Porgy and Bess has come into its own as one of the most frequently performed operas. “It Ain't Necessarily So” remains one of its gems.

Astor Piazzolla (1921-1992): “Oblivion”
“Oblivion,” composed in 1982, is one of Piazzolla’s most popular tangos but not for reasons of gaiety. Its mysterious and forbidding opening leads to a sad lyricism, movingly expressed by the cello while the piano keeps things in order. Bill Murray and Mira Wang will bring sadness to their dancing. “Oblivion” was used in the soundtrack for Marco Bellocchio’s 1984 film Henry IV, the Mad King.

Billy Collins (b. 1942): “Forgetfulness”
American poet William James “Billy” Collins was appointed Poet Laureate of the United States from 2001 to 2003 and was New York State Poet from 2004 to 2006. On September 6, 2002, he was invited to read his poem “The Names” at a special joint session of the U.S. Congress, held in memory of the victims of 9/11. His acclaimed “Fishing on the Susquehanna in July” was added to the preserved works of the United States Native American literary registry. Among his many awards is the 2014 Norman Mailer Prize for Poetry. His many volumes of poetry include The Art of Drowning, The Trouble with Poetry, Horoscopes for the Dead, Aimless Love, and The Rain in Portugal. Collin’s poem “Forgetfulness” gives warning about the nature of forgetting things as one grows older.

Stephen Foster (1826-1864): “Jeanie with the Light Brown Hair”
Stephen Foster’s some two hundred songs have gained him the title of “the father of American music.” You can probably hum many of them, such as “Oh, Susanna,” “Old Folks at Home,” and certainly “Jeanie with the Light Brown Hair” treated on this program. That song, first published in 1854, was inspired by Foster’s separation from his wife Jennie, who is surely the source of longing and dreaming that pervades the song. Despite its lasting fame, it was not successful at the time of its publication and brought Foster only $200 in royalties for its ten thousand copies sold. Such is the sad tale of the beautiful song “floating, like a vapor, on the soft summer air.” Some of us may remember other versions, such as Spike Jones’ humorous treatment “I Dream of Brownie with the Light Blue Jeans,” or Jascha Heifetz’s violin transcription, which became one of his signature pieces still performed by many violinists today. Bill Murray, Mira Wang and Jan Vogler give us a unique version for narrator, violin, cello and piano.

Van Morrison (b. 1941): “When Will I Ever Learn to Live in God”
With the music of Irish singer, songwriter and instrumentalist Van Morrison, we cross the sometimes narrow bridge from classical music to a form we loosely call “soul” or R&B. On a broader level, Morrison’s music has been described as “spiritually-inspired musical journeys that show the influence of Celtic tradition, jazz, and stream-of-consciousness narrative.” One of world’s best-known and prolific producers of such music, Morrison was knighted in 2016 and now bears the title Sir George Ivan “Van” Morrison, although he is still known informally as “Van the Man.” He has received two Grammy Awards and the Brit Award for Outstanding Contribution to Music.

As suggested in his song, “When Will I Ever Learn to Live in God,” Morrison’s lyrics are reflective of such poets as William Blake and William Butler Yeats. Biographer Brian Hinton states that Morrison “is returning poetry to its roots... to form a new reality.”
Mark Twain (1835-1920): from *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

Bill Murray reads from the great American novel that satirizes racism in the South before the Civil War. Told in the first person by “Huck” Finn, the novel was one of the first to use English in the vernacular that portrayed regional life. As portrayed by Twain, Huck is an innocent who tries to do the right thing by helping Jim escape slavery even though he believes he will go to hell for it – a swipe at Christian views on slavery at the time.


Henry Mancini’s famous song with lyrics by Johnny Mercer received an Academy Award for Best Original Song when it was performed by Audrey Hepburn in the 1961 film *Breakfast at Tiffany’s* based on Truman Capote’s 1958 novel. Since then it has received numerous arrangements including this one for cello and piano performed by Jan Vogler and Vanessa Perez. The song’s popularity has caused it to be used as a test sample in a study on people's memories of popular songs.

Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975): Allegro from Sonata for Cello and Piano in D Minor, op. 40

The personal situation that surrounded the composition of the D Minor Cello Sonata cannot explain its excellence, but surely it contributed to the anguished mood of the work. Written in the late summer of 1934, the Sonata coincides with the strains on Shostakovich’s marriage caused by his love for a young translator, Elena Konstantinovskaya. He began composing the Sonata when his wife Nina left him. Soon after its first performance in Leningrad on Christmas of 1934, he asked for a divorce. When Shostakovich learned that Nina was pregnant with their first child, the couple reconciled.

While the emotional factors were significant, so were the musical ones that affected the work. At the time, Shostakovich referred to what he called his “struggle for a simple language.” This may explain the Neoclassical structure of the work, which caused Prokofiev to comment that Shostakovich was following bourgeois trends, a dangerous thing for a composer to do in 1934. Yet Shostakovich’s personal war between Western Neoclassicism and Socialist Realism was a struggle with which he would contend many times during his career.

The second movement Allegro of the D Minor Sonata bursts forth with the force of a Russian peasant dance. It ends abruptly but not before we catch moments of humor. The Sonata was written for cellist Viktor Kubatsky, who premiered the work with Shostakovich reportedly playing the piano part from memory.

James Thurber (1894-1961): “If Grant Had Been Drinking at Appomattox”

James Thurber’s hilarious tale paints Ulysses S. Grant, a notorious drinker, as being confused about who was surrendering when Robert E. Lee showed up at the McLean house in Appomattox for the surrendering proceedings. The story was first published in *The New Yorker* on December 6, 1930 and later included in Thurber’s collection of short stories entitled *The Middle-Aged Man on the Flying Trapeze*.

“If Grant Had Been Drinking at Appomattox” from *The Middle-Aged Man on the Flying Trapeze* by James Thurber. Copyright ©1935 by Rosemary A. Thurber. Reprinted by arrangement with Rosemary A. Thurber and The Barbara Hogenson Agency, Inc. All rights reserved.

Leonard Bernstein (1918-1992): “Somewhere,” “I Feel Pretty,” and “America” from *West Side Story*

Leonard Bernstein’s *West Side Story*, with lyrics by Stephen Sondheim and choreography by Jerome Robbins, retains an iconic place in American musical history. First produced on Broadway in 1957, it ran for 732 performances before going on tour and was nominated for six Tony Awards. The 1961 film version starring Natalie Wood, Richard Beymer, Rita Moreno, George Chakiris, and Russ Tamblyn won ten Academy Awards.

The story, based on Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, explores the rivalry between two teenage street gangs of different ethnic backgrounds, the Jets and the Sharks, on New York’s Upper West Side. Maria and Tony, members of the opposing forces, fall in love despite their different backgrounds. Much violence marks the story, but Bernstein manages wonderful lyrical and even amusing moments in such songs as “Somewhere,” “I Feel Pretty,” and “America” treated by Bill Murray, Mira Wang, Jan Vogler, and Vanessa Perez for the closing moments of their remarkable program.

“Somewhere,” from Act II, is sung by Maria and Tony as they dream about fleeing to a peaceful place. Strangely enough, the theme of the song is borrowed from the slow movement of Beethoven’s *Emperor Concerto*, an uncanny borrowing which Alex Ross describes in his *The Rest is Noise* as “Beethoven Americanized.” The opening statement also resounds from the trains in the New York subway, something this writer heard for years and was happy to have confirmed by *The New York Times* in 2009. “I Feel Pretty,” from an earlier moment in Act II, occurs as Maria innocently discovers her love for Tony and daydreams about seeing him. “America,” from Act I, is a hilarious but provocative moment as Shark girls discuss the differences between Puerto Rico and the United States. One longs for her home country of Puerto Rico and another defends life in America. All three songs are unforgettable moments in *West Side Story*.

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