

PROGRAMM

Spring Concert 2026

University Orchestra Polyphonia Zurich

Alex Cattaneo, Piano
Hadži Gregor Bugar, Director

Friday, 22. Mai 2026
19:30, Kirche Neumünster Zurich

Tuesday, 26. Mai 2026
19:30, Kirche St. Peter Zurich

Programme

George Gershwin (1898–1937)

Overture to „Girl Crazy“

*

Leroy Anderson (1908–1975)

Piano Concerto

I. Allegro moderato

II. Andante

III. Allegro vivo

- Break -

William Grant Still (1895–1978)

Symphony No. 1 „Afro-American“

I. Moderato assai

II. Adagio

III. Animato

IV. Lento

*

Arturo Márquez (*1950)

Danzón No. 2

Dear audience!

We are very pleased to present a new and exciting programme to you again this spring! This time, we have ventured into the New World. Instead of Dvořák, however, we are joined today by the great names of 20th-century American orchestral literature: George Gershwin, Leroy Anderson, William Grant Still, and last but not least Arturo Márquez. They all combine jazz, musical lightness, and dance-like elements into an auditory mosaic that nevertheless loses none of its depth. At the same time, all of these works are imbued with the same joy that we experienced while rehearsing them, that the composers themselves likely felt while writing them, and that will hopefully also captivate you as you listen.

After this entertaining excursion to the West, we will return to the Old World next semester, with music by Antonín Dvořák, Ralph Vaughan Williams, and Cécile Chaminade. You can especially look forward to our soloist, who will be making a long-awaited Polyphonia comeback. But no spoilers yet – stay tuned!

We are looking forward to spending a wonderful evening with you!

Jan & Julian

Co-Presidents University Orchestra Polyphonia Zurich

About the programme

George Gershwin (1898–1937): Overture to "Girl Crazy"

To this day, George Gershwin is best known for his successful Broadway musicals. As a composer, pianist, and conductor, he combined classical music with emerging jazz influences and thus became the most celebrated American composer of the 1920s and 30s.

Gershwin, who grew up in New York as the son of Russian immigrants, showed little interest in school as a child. However, when a piano was added to the household during his youth, he immediately claimed it for himself and displayed extraordinary talent. He soon became a student of the piano teacher and musician Charles Hambitzer. Early on, Gershwin began experimenting with classical pieces infused with modern rhythms – with what would later be called *jazz*. After completing nine years of schooling, he found work as a song plugger for a music publishing company on Tin Pan Alley. His job was to perform songs publicly in order to promote them, which he did for little pay but with great musical passion. Once Gershwin also began composing his own songs, he decided to try his luck on the Broadway musical stage.

It was not long before renowned music producers took notice of him, and his songs were incorporated into musicals. Soon afterwards, he began creating musicals of his own. Gershwin's first musical comedy, *La La Lucille*, premiered in 1919, when he was only twenty years old. More productions followed, and he achieved his breakthrough in 1924 with *Lady, Be Good!*.

Gershwin's successful juxtaposition and fusion of classical and popular music created a space for reflection on the traditional privileging of classical music and also earned him an audience rooted in the classical tradition. With his composition *Rhapsody in Blue* for piano and orchestra (1924), he attracted widespread attention by innovatively integrating jazz into syncopated symphonic arrangements. While opinions at the time were divided, Gershwin is today regarded as the pioneer who brought jazz into the concert hall.

In the following years, the composer expanded his stylistic repertoire without losing his popularity. Since he worked primarily as a songwriter, he produced hundreds of songs not only for Broadway but also for Hollywood films and as standalone compositions. Gershwin's musical *Girl Crazy* (1930), his final success, whose overture is part of today's concert programme, contains three songs that can be recognised as distinct sections within the overture: *But Not For Me*, *Embraceable You*, and *I Got Rhythm*. The latter in particular gained widespread fame beyond the musical itself throughout the 1950s and beyond, becoming part of the standard repertoire of swing

and jazz. Characteristic of this passage is the structure of the so-called *rhythm changes*, which developed into the most common refrain form in the jazz tradition.



Broadway programme, 1931

of a central motif. Following a build-up of rhythmic lightness accompanied by dissonant undertones, the motif dissolves, giving way to the first playful romantic themes, which repeatedly reappear throughout the work. In the closing passage of *Embraceable You*, these themes develop into an expressive climax of dramatic intensity. Immediately afterwards, however, the fundamental mood shifts rapidly and characteristically back to exuberance, as the famous jazz motifs of *I Got Rhythm*, with their syncopated energy, invite the audience to tap along. In the subsequent *Mexican Dance Scene*, tension is gradually intensified while the cheerful spirit remains intact. Soon afterwards, romantic and melancholic passages return, only to be replaced once more by wit, exuberance, and dramatic motifs, ultimately culminating in a powerful and expressive conclusion.

Galina Ramseyer

Leroy Anderson (1908–1975): Piano Concerto

The American composer Leroy Anderson had an impressively versatile career. As a child, he received piano lessons from his mother, who worked as an organist. Later, at the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston, he learned several additional instruments, including the accordion, trombone, and double bass. At Harvard University, he graduated *magna cum laude*, not only in music — where he studied harmony, orchestration, and composition among other subjects — but also in German and Scandinavian languages. The composer of Swedish descent mastered nine different Germanic, Scandinavian, and Romance languages.

From an early stage, composing and arranging were never elitist pursuits for Anderson aimed solely at an educated audience; rather, his work was conceived as entertainment accessible to all social classes. His activities were correspondingly diverse: in the early 1930s, he taught at a college, conducted the Harvard University Band, and composed and arranged music for dance bands. His pieces rarely exceed three minutes in length, making them perfectly suited to gramophone records. Relaxed jazz influences and catchy melodies made Anderson's music highly popular. From the very beginning, recordings of his works brought him considerable success. His recording of *Blue Tango* (1951) earned him a Gold Record and became the first instrumental recording to sell one million copies. Anderson's compositions were also used as theme songs for television shows, allowing him both to engage with and shape the rise of popular music.

Anderson's style was strongly influenced by George Gershwin and combines vivid, expressive moments with the casual ease of jazz. His contribution lay in promoting popular short orchestral works that reached and were appreciated by a broad public not only in popular concerts but also on radio and television. This popular appeal also reflects the compelling influence of emerging film music. In this way, Anderson broadened both the horizons and the audience of orchestral composition. His individual style is characterised by experimentation with arranged motifs and the use of unusual instruments.

In 1953, Anderson composed the *Concerto in C Major* for piano and orchestra, his only large-scale orchestral work. The piano concerto combines melancholic and light-hearted elements, thereby blurring the boundaries between classical-traditional composition and popular entertainment music. The work was initially received critically, and Anderson himself was dissatisfied with it, prompting him to withdraw it with the intention of revising it. However, he never returned to the project during his lifetime; in 1988, several years after his death, his family decided to republish the concerto. This time, the work received recognition from critics.



The piano concerto opens with a brilliant and powerful entry, immediately presenting the work's main melodic motif. Soon, however, softer passages emerge, gradually increasing in emotional intensity. This expressiveness establishes a fundamental atmosphere throughout the piece, giving it a cinematic character. Tension is maintained across the entire first movement, while moments of lightness are also present. After a dramatic conclusion to the first movement with an expressive cadenza, the second movement introduces initially melancholic passages, soon joined by more

relaxed jazz reminiscences. In the third movement, with its rhythmic underpinning, the emphasis on exuberance becomes stronger, although intensity is also further developed. A cheerful basic mood evolves into romantic phrases and later into an expressive, climactic build-up. In the final sequence, various central thematic ideas merge into a lively, dramatic, and incisive conclusion.

Based on the underlying idea of togetherness, the concerto takes the audience on an emotional journey through drama and lightness, through classical tradition and film music, with a touch of jazz.

Galina Ramseyer

William Grant Still (1895–1978): Symphony No. 1 "Afro-American"

"God didn't place only roses on earth, or only lilies or only violets. He put flowers of many sorts and many colors here, the beauty of each enhancing that of the others. Anyone who underestimates the great value of differences would do well to remember that life would indeed be dull without variety. Progress would be impossible of all thought alike."

William Grant Still expressed a central aesthetic principle of his work with these words. As an African American composer of the 20th century, Still is considered one of the most important figures in American music history.

In his *Afro-American Symphony* (1930), Still combines African American musical idioms, particularly the blues, with the European symphonic tradition. A specially developed blues theme forms the foundation of the entire work and appears in many variations as a unifying structural element.

The symphony consists of four movements, each expressing a specific emotional attitude and introduced by epigraphs from poems by Paul Laurence Dunbar. These poetic quotations function as an extramusical device and reinforce the respective expressive message of each movement.

The first movement (Longing) begins with a blues theme in A-flat major, initially presented by the English horn. This theme is based on the typical twelve-bar blues structure and serves as central motivic material that appears in various forms throughout the movement, contributing to its formal unity. The longing character of the movement is already made clear in the preceding poem:

*All my life long twell de night has pas',
Let de wo'k come ez it will, So dat
I fin' you, my honey, at las',
Somewhaih des ovah de hill.*



1st movement: introductory theme

The main theme of the second movement (Sorrow, Adagio) is initially presented by the solo oboe, accompanied by violas and divided cellos, as well as an obbligato flute line. The resulting timbre gives the movement an elegiac and spiritual character.

The secondary theme of the second movement presents a variation of the blues theme and is first introduced by the flute. It is followed by a transformation of the main theme, which, according to Still, represents the

ascending prayers of a suffering people. This musical idea is symbolized by rising arpeggios on the harp.

It's moughy tiahsome layin' 'roun' Dis sorrer-laden earfly groun', An' oftentimes I thinks, thinks I, 'Twould be a sweet t'ing des to die An' go 'long home.

The third movement (Humor, Animato) forms a clear contrast and has a lively, dance-like character. Rhythmic elements, syncopations, and echoes of popular musical styles give the movement a playful and animated expression.

An' we'll shout ouah halleluyahs On dat mighty reck'nin' day,

The fourth movement (Aspiration, Lento) brings together the various musical elements and is characterized by increased harmonic complexity. The movement conveys an atmosphere of hope and inner elevation, thereby forming a concluding climax of the symphony.

*Be proud, my Race, in mind and soul, Thy name is writ on Glory's scroll
In characters of fire. High mid the clouds of Fame's bright sky Thy banner's
blazoned folds now fly, And truth shall lift them higher.*

Blues and symphonic music, tradition and modernity, Black and White, Europe and America — apparent opposites that come together in William Grant Still's *Afro-American Symphony* to form a new musical unity. Through this connection, an independent musical language emerges. As Still himself wrote, beauty does not consist of a single flower, but of many different ones.

Siyi Hua

Arturo Márquez (* 1950): *Danzón No. 2*

In 1950, Arturo Márquez was born as the eldest of nine children in Álamos, Sonora, and is today one of the best-known contemporary Mexican composers. Through his father and grandfather, he came into contact with music at an early age, particularly traditional music, which both of them played. He spent his later childhood and adolescence in La Puente, California, where he learned to play the violin, tuba, trombone, and piano. At just 16 years old, he composed his first works before shortly afterwards returning to Sonora. There, he became the conductor of the Navojoa Municipal Band.



Márquez initially studied in Mexico City at the Institute of Fine Arts and the Conservatory of Music, focusing on piano and music theory. He later received a scholarship to study composition in Paris. After Paris, he continued his studies at the California Institute of the Arts after being awarded a Fulbright scholarship, where he earned a degree in composition. Today, he lives with his family in Mexico City.

Arturo Márquez's works combine jazz, Latin American, and contemporary music. He has also written several works that incorporate classical alongside electronic instruments, or are entirely electronic.

The idea for *Danzón No. 2* came to Arturo Márquez during a trip with Irene Martínez and Andrés Fonseca in 1993. Both had a strong passion for the dance style "Danzón," which they passed on to Márquez.

"I was fascinated and I started to understand that the apparent lightness of the danzón is only like a visiting card for a type of music full of sensuality and qualitative seriousness, a genre which old Mexican people continue to dance with a touch of nostalgia and a jubilant escape towards their own emotional world;" – Arturo Márquez

In *Danzón No. 2*, Márquez seeks to capture this dance in its various facets and moods. The dance style *danzón* originally comes from Cuba and is a slow, formal, traditional partner dance. It combines African rhythms in particular with melodic elements and instrumentation from European music. The *danzón*, as something uniquely Cuban, served as a means of exchange between different social classes.

Riana Wildhaber

Soloist: Alex Cattaneo

Alex Cattaneo was born in 1997 in Locarno (Ticino). From 2008 to 2016, he attended the Conservatorio della Svizzera Italiana, where he received piano lessons from his teacher Redjan Teqja. He then continued his training from 2016 to 2022 in the higher education division of the same institution, studying with Nora Doallo. He completed his Bachelor of Arts in Music in 2019 and his Master of Arts in Music Performance in 2022, both with distinction. In 2025, he also completed a Master of Arts in Music Pedagogy at the Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK) under the guidance of Eckart Heiligers, likewise with distinction. Alex Cattaneo currently works full-time as a piano teacher at the Horgen and Wädenswil-Richterswil music schools.

He has participated in various national and international competitions in Switzerland and Denmark, including a grant from the Friedl-Wald Foundation as well as taking part in the Swiss Youth Music Competition (SJMW), the Aarhus International Piano Competition, and the Duttweiler-Hug Competition.

In addition to competitions and his teaching activities, he regularly performs as a soloist and in chamber music ensembles. He has also participated in various musical events, including the “Serie Debut” of the Settimane Musicali di Ascona, the LAC series “Nuova Generazione,” as well as two live radio broadcasts on SRG SSR RSI Rete Due.



Conductor: Hadži Gregor Bugar

Hadži Gregor Bugar has been associated with the University Orchestra Polyphonia Zurich for some time, where he also occasionally played as a violist. He was born in 1997 in Locarno and began playing the violin at the age of four. Later, he discovered the viola, which became his main instrument. At the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Hadži Gregor Bugar studied music with viola as his major subject and conducting as a minor. He completed his studies with a *Master of Arts in Music Performance (Classical)*.

Hadži Gregor Bugar has extensive experience both as a violist and section leader, as well as a conductor of various orchestras and ensembles in Switzerland and abroad. In 2019/20, he also turned to the musical genre and worked as an assistant conductor in various productions. Today, in addition to his direction of *Polyphonia*, he is the conductor of the *Ars Excelsis Ensemble*, the youth project *AUFTAKT* of the *ZJSO*, where he has also served as artistic director since September 2023, and the *Orchester Kriens-Horw*.

“With freedom, everything is possible” is his credo. A trusting working atmosphere is created through mutual appreciation, respect, trust, and honesty.

What particularly excites Hadži Gregor Bugar about the current concert program is its impressive stylistic diversity: “The colourful Afro-Latino-American potpourri takes the audience on an exhilarating musical journey. The opening bursts with energy through vibrant musical theatre music, before we immerse ourselves in a piano concerto shaped by rich film music elements. The journey then continues through the jazz-infused sound worlds of Afro-American symphonic music – and the evening reaches its climax in the fiery, rhythmically compelling atmosphere of the *Danzón*.”



University Orchestra Polyphonia Zurich

The University Orchestra Polyphonia Zurich was founded in 2015 by a group of students who were looking for an alternative to the existing fully staffed student orchestras in Zurich. The aim of the newly established orchestra, at that time under the direction of Leon Felix Schlagintweit, was to make music together regularly without excessive performance pressure, while still maintaining high musical standards. The idea was well received, and since then the University Orchestra Polyphonia Zurich has enriched the university music scene by presenting a concert program at the end of each semester.

As in the previous semester, Hadži Gregor Bugar is conducting the orchestra, as the long-standing founding conductor Leon Felix Schlagintweit is currently in Ljubljana pursuing his conducting studies. A particular highlight of this semester was the rehearsal weekend, during which three days filled with music, games, and leisure activities were spent in the mountains of Graubünden.

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Harp Luise Woisetschläger

Subject to change.

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We would like to give special thanks to aki (the house of the Catholic Student Community in Zurich) and its directors, Rachel Philipona and Franz-Xaver Hiestand. For many years now, we have been able to use the rooms at aki – not just for our weekly rehearsals, but also for sectionals and even for simply spending time together in the evenings. The team at aki has not only provided their support completely free of charge, but has also offered countless opportunities to make music, such as performing at Sunday services in the Liebfrauenkirche or at the aki opening ceremony. Thank you very much for your support.

Impressum

- Editorial: Galina Ramseyer & Riana Wildhaber
- Graphic: Sverrir Arnórsson & Jan Steiner (Cover)
- Texts: Siyi Hua (Still); Galina Ramseyer (Gershwin, Anderson und Compilation Biography Bugar); Riana Wildhaber (Márquez); Hadži Gregor Bugar (Parts of Biography Bugar), Alex Cattaneo (Biography Cattaneo). All texts are original contributions created for this programme booklet.
- Figures: Wikipedia (Girl Crazy); New York Times (Anderson); The Broadway Bach Ensemble (Márquez); © Alex Cattaneo (Alex Cattaneo); © Jan-Philip Dolci (Hadži Gregor Bugar); Archive of the University Orchestra Polyphonia Zurich.

Save the date – Herbstsemesterkonzerte

Donnerstag, 17. Dezember 2026 – Kirche Neumünster

Freitag, 18. Dezember 2026 – MKZ Florhof, Grosser Saal

Programm: Vaughan-Williams, Chaminade, Dvořák

