

Peter Boyer (b. 1970) *Rhapsody in Red, White, and Blue* (2024)

A note from the composer:

This work was conceived by the prodigious American pianist Jeffrey Biegel, who approached me in early 2020 with his ambitious idea for a project to celebrate the centennial of George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*, in February 2024. I hesitated before accepting the commission, knowing that the piece I was being asked to compose would be performed repeatedly alongside *RIB*—one of the most iconic and beloved works of American music. I wondered how any piece of mine could withstand the inevitable comparisons to the Gershwin work—especially with Jeffrey's chosen title, *Rhapsody in Red, White & Blue*. However, he is as persuasive as he is gifted, and so I accepted the commission.

Like the Gershwin work, my *Rhapsody* is in a single long multi-sectional movement. As Gershwin did a century ago, I have attempted to capture a sense of American energy and optimism in much of this music. Though my musical style typically does not employ any jazz elements, in this work it seemed appropriate to include some allusions to a 1920s, "quasi-Gershwin" style. There is one section of the work, largely pastiche, which does this, in the form of a "bluesy scherzo." The slow, lyrical section of the work, coming after its midpoint, might be heard as both an allusion to America's wide open spaces, and to my personal belief in the country's promise, despite its many challenges.

Rhapsody in Red, White & Blue was premiered with Jeffrey Biegel and the Utah Symphony, Benjamin Manis, conductor, on June 30, 2023 at the Deer Valley Snow Park Amphitheater in Park City, Utah. In that splendid outdoor setting, the new work received a prolonged standing ovation from an audience numbering over 3,000, which was a joy to experience. That performance launched the "Rhapsody National Initiative," a remarkably ambitious endeavor created by Jeffrey to perform this work in every one of the 50 United States by 2026. As of this writing, a total of 54 orchestras in all 50 states have committed to this project, a group which, to my knowledge, is unprecedented in its scope for a new work for soloist and orchestra.

In November 2023, I conducted the London Symphony Orchestra in a recording session of *Rhapsody in Red, White & Blue*, with Jeffrey as soloist. Naxos Records released this recording in February 2024, coinciding with the centennial of Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*, and I'm thrilled that, through extensive radio play and streaming, this new work is reaching a large international audience.

— P.B., July 2024