

**SYMPHONY SPACE PRESENTS
THE 1939 PROJECT:
AMERICAN ARTS AT A TURNING POINT**

**MULTI-DISCIPLINARY SERIES EXAMINES THE DEVELOPMENT
OF A NEW AMERICAN AESTHETIC**

This February Symphony Space will explore the literature, film, music and dance of a nation quickly developing a new identity with *The 1939 Project: American Arts at a Turning Point*. Worldwide, 1939 was a pivotal year economically, politically and socially. While Europe slid into the morass of war, the Great Depression was coming to an end in America. With *The 1939 Project*, Symphony Space celebrates the spirit of the times and presents a host of watershed works, recognized classics and unknown gems.

The 1939 Project begins on **February 1** with a screening of director George Cukor's *The Women* followed by a double-feature of Ralph Steiner and Willard Van Dyke's *The City* alongside Malachi Roth's documentary about American modern dance pioneer José Limón, *Limón, A Life Beyond Words*. Symphony Space presents **American Culture in Context: The Essence of 1939** on **February 2** in collaboration with *The New York Times* Community Affairs. This event features a conversation about the American cultural and political landscape of 1939 between National Book Award- and PEN/Faulkner Award-winning novelist **E.L. Doctorow** and presidential historian **Robert Dallek**, moderated by Emmy Award-winner **Dick Cavett**. On **February 5** Symphony Space presents **Copland and Ives: Piano Masterpieces**. Pianist **Sara Laimon** (hailed by *The New York Times* as "a commanding and confident player with a strong technique and an ability to find the drama and wit in works that often had daunting surfaces") will perform two touchstone piano works, Copland's *Piano Sonata* and Charles Ives' *Piano Sonata No. 2, Concord, Mass., 1840-60*.

The Music of 1939 continues on **February 6** with Broadway sensation and playwright **Eisa Davis** (*Passing Strange*) performing "**Strange Fruit**," the song that Billie Holiday made into a touchstone for the anti-lynching and civil rights movements, along with other classics of the period and protest songs from 1939 to today and on **February 13** critically acclaimed jazz singer **Miles Griffith** and pianist **Kirk Nurock** explore the **Great Film Scores of 1939** including themes from *The Wizard of Oz*, *Babes in Arms* and more.

Other concerts include the **American Symphony Orchestra** (as part of the ASO's Classics DeClassified series) under the baton of Maestro Leon Botstein on **February 8** offering Revueltas' *La Noche de los Mayas*, spotlighting the fruitful artistic relationship between Mexico and the U.S.; a performance juxtaposing European and American chamber music with works by Cowell, Barber, Bartók and Shostakovich on **February 12** with the **Colorado Quartet** and pianist **Margaret Kampmeier**; and, concluding the festival on **February 26** with a big bang, **The Pulse of 1939** with Talujon Percussion Quartet and works by Cage, Harrison, Beyer, Russell and Cowell.

Jazz vocalists come to the unWINEd Café with standards from the Great American Songbook throughout February on **all Wednesday through Friday evenings** at 9.

On **February 9** Symphony Space becomes a community dance hall with the **Jitterbug Dancejam** on the stage as the public is invited to dance to the music of Glenn Miller, Benny Goodman, Duke Ellington and other big band greats. Free; cash bar by unWINEd.

The **Thalia Book Club** examines the literature of 1939 on **February 11** with a discussion of **Raymond Chandler's *The Big Sleep*** as authors **Jonathan Lethem** (*Gun, With Occasional Music* and *Fortress of Solitude*) and **Judith Freeman** (*The Long Embrace: Raymond Chandler and the Woman He Loved*) join other writers and filmmakers to compare notes on Chandler's style, his place in the mystery canon and his influence on their work. On **February 18 Selected Shorts** will present three tales from ***Black Mask*** mystery magazine, a hugely successful pulp magazine of the era read by masters of the genre.

Throughout the month of February Symphony Space will also be presenting **The Best Films of 1939**. Along with the opening night films, selections include classics from Hollywood's Golden Age, including *The Little Princess*, *Stagecoach*, *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, *Ninotchka*, and a newly re-mastered documentary about the World's Fair, *The World of Tomorrow*. Also featured is *Gone With the Wind*, introduced by film critic Molly Haskell, who will also sign her new book, *Frankly, My Dear: The Screen's Most Exciting Love Story!*, prior to its official release date.

Adding an air of authenticity, vintage newsreels will be screened preceding each film.

The 1939 Project: American Arts at a Turning Point has been made possible by generous donations from American Express and the National Endowment for the Arts.

1939 Cultural Context:

The Great Depression was coming to an end and a new sense of buoyancy was felt across the land. As Europe plunged into war, America remained isolationist, and was both self-absorbed and self-possessed. Spurred by the creative energies of Duke Ellington, John Cage, Billie Holiday, Raymond Chandler, José Limón, Ernest Hemingway, Dorothea Lange, Glenn Miller, John Steinbeck, Frank Capra, Aaron Copland, Martha Graham, Frank Lloyd Wright, Greta Garbo and so many others, the American cultural landscape of 1939 flourished.

American cities grew in size, cars began to crowd the road, the film industry soared and radio spread news and culture from coast to coast. Largely thanks to the Works Progress Administration's support of the arts throughout the Depression, a distinctly American aesthetic began to take form.

The social realism of the 1930s found in the canvasses of Stuart Davis, Edward Hopper, and Ben Shahn, was supplanted by artists grounded in an aesthetic of abstraction; these pioneers including Jackson Pollock, Robert Motherwell and Helen Frankenthaler began to challenge the visual art establishment while swing and jazz music reached out to a new, excited, young audience through performers such as Duke Ellington, Glenn Miller, Count Basie, and Billie Holiday. American classical composers led by Aaron Copland began to create a uniquely American style, while experimentalists such as John Cage, George Antheil and Henry Cowell began to break with the classical tradition altogether. A slew of now classic films were released in 1939: *Goodbye Mr. Chips*, *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, *Gone With The Wind* and

The Wizard of Oz to name a few. American musical theatre made stars of Cole Porter and George Gershwin while John Steinbeck, Daphne du Maurier, J.P. Marquand, Lillian Hellman, Raymond Chandler, Dorothy Parker and others founded a new American literary tradition.

As a new era dawns for the U.S. with President Obama's recent inauguration, we look back 70 years to a golden age in American arts and letters when a charismatic, galvanizing President faced enormous challenges with courage and ingenuity, bringing about necessary changes that helped the country to look ahead with hope.

About Symphony Space:

When Symphony Space opened its doors in 1978 with its first production, *Wall to Wall Bach*, it gathered together an eclectic group of musicians, professional and amateur, well-known and emerging. What began as a natural outgrowth of the cultural epicenter that is the Upper West Side, traditionally home to many of the great actors, writers, dancers and musicians of our time, remains a unique melding of world-class artistry with the informality and intimacy of a neighborhood salon.

BOX OFFICE

Tickets for performances are available:

- In person at 2537 Broadway at 95th Street, Tuesday-Sunday, noon to 7 P.M.
- Over the telephone at 212.864.5400, Tuesday-Sunday, 11 A.M. to 7 P.M.
- Online at symphonyspace.org.

**For more information, please contact
Brian Shimkovitz, Krista Williams or Carla Sacks at Sacks & Co., 212.741.1000,
brian@sacksco.com, krista@sacksco.com or carla@sacksco.com.**