

ROB KAPILOW

Biography

“A wonderful guy who brings music alive!” – Katie Couric, NBC’s Today Show

For almost 20 years, Rob Kapilow has brought the joy and wonder of classical music – and unraveled some of its mysteries – to audiences of all ages and backgrounds. Characterized by his unique ability to create an “aha” moment for his audiences and collaborators, whatever their level of musical sophistication or naiveté, Kapilow’s work brings music into people’s lives: opening new ears to musical experiences and helping people to listen actively rather than just hear. As the *Boston Globe* said, “It’s a cheering thought that this kind of missionary enterprise did not pass from this earth with Leonard Bernstein. Rob Kapilow is awfully good at what he does. We need him.”

Kapilow’s range of activities is astonishingly broad, including his What Makes It Great?® presentations (now in their fourteenth seasons in New York and Boston), his family compositions and Family Musik® events, and his “Citypieces”. The reach of his interactive events and activities is wide, both geographically and culturally: from Native American tribal communities in Montana and inner-city high school students in Louisiana to wine-tasters in the Napa Valley, and from tots barely out of diapers to musicologists long out of Ivy League programs, his audiences are diverse and unexpected, but invariably rapt and keen to come back for more. Everyone from business groups and foundations to hospitals, law schools, math departments and conferences are finding connections and intersections between music and the outside world thanks to Rob Kapilow’s insight.

Kapilow’s popularity and appeal are reflected in notable invitations and achievements: he appeared on NBC’s *Today Show* in conversation with Katie Couric; he presented a special What Makes It Great?® event for broadcast on PBS’s *Live From Lincoln Center* in January 2008; and he has written a book – *All You Have To Do Is Listen* – which was published by Wiley/Lincoln Center and won a PSP Prose Award for *Best Book in Music and the Performing Arts* in 2008. A documentary film, named *Summer Sun, Winter Moon* after Kapilow’s choral/symphonic work of the same name, which traces the process of that work’s composition from its conception through to its premiere, has been broadcast more than 200 times on Public Television since 2009. Rob Kapilow is currently working on a sequel to his first book, to be published in 2011.

Rob Kapilow

What Makes It Great? ®

“In my 20 years in this business I have never seen a more innovative musical program help to open minds and change attitudes and perceptions about classical music.”

Martha H. Jones, President of the Celebrity Series of Boston

Kapilow’s What Makes It Great?® (WMIG) made its auspicious debut on NPR’s *Performance Today* nearly 20 years ago, and with its accessible ten-minute format it quickly attracted a wide base of fans and followers. Snowballing in popularity, it developed into a full-length concert evening and was soon snapped up by presenters looking to build new audiences. What Makes It Great?® now sells out regular subscription series in Kansas City (16th season) and Cerritos, CA (13th season), as well as at New York’s Lincoln Center and the Celebrity Series of Boston, both now entering their fourteenth seasons. The latest installment of WMIG concerts is now presented by the Washington Performing Arts Society at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC. Kapilow’s WMIG offerings around the country this season range from Bach’s Double Violin Concerto and Haydn’s String Quartet in G, Tchaikovsky’s Serenade for Strings and Mendelssohn’s Octet, to Shostakovich’s String Quartet No. 8 and Schoenberg’s *Verklärte Nacht*.

In 2008, PBS’s *Live From Lincoln Center* broadcast a special What Makes It Great?® show, bringing it to TV screens throughout the US; worldwide audiences were also able to see and experience Kapilow’s trademarked presentations when Lincoln Center inaugurated a series of WMIG video podcasts. Kapilow designed a series of WMIG events especially for teenagers, and, in 2005, he introduced them to thousands of middle- and high-school children in collaboration with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, in a series that has continued on an annual basis and has been repeated around North America. Kapilow’s Bernstein “Songbook” event at Lincoln Center has been selected as one of the *New York Times*’s “Top Ten Moments” of theater offerings.

Rob Kapilow’s What Makes It Great?® programs are available on CD, on the Vanguard Everyman Classics label. In discs devoted to Mozart’s *Eine kleine Nachtmusic* and the “Jupiter” Symphony, Kapilow breaks the music down in a listener-friendly way – pulling themes apart, demonstrating how the tunes might sound in lesser hands, guiding listeners through the maze of melodies – and then finishes up with a complete performance of the work.

Rob Kapilow

FamilyMusik®

“Kapilow is a kind of Bill Nye the Science Guy for classical music.” – Time Out New York Kids

Rob Kapilow, affectionately nicknamed America’s “pied piper of classical music,” has found many new young fans through his family compositions and presentations.

Kapilow’s most recent family piece is an orchestration of *Paddywak, a Tap Dance Concerto*, co-commissioned by the Toronto Symphony and the National Arts Centre Orchestra in Ottawa, which Kapilow will present in Ottawa in 2011 – both in French and English. Prior to that, he was commissioned by Lincoln Center in New York to write *Jabberwocky* for the 2009 re-opening of

Alice Tully Hall, in collaboration with Music in the Morning in Vancouver and the Celebrity Series of Boston. Kapilow has written numerous other commissioned works, including the first musical setting of a Dr. Seuss work, *Green Eggs and Ham*. Kapilow’s inimitable presentation, “Green Eggs and Hamadeus”, which features his own work alongside Mozart’s *Eine kleine Nachtmusik* in a lively mix of discussion and performance, is available on CD on the Vanguard Classics label.

The Seuss work has achieved great popularity in the theater world, prompting *Boston Globe* music critic Richard Dyer to name it the most popular children’s piece since *Peter and the Wolf*. Other compositions include Dr. Seuss’s *Gertrude McFuzz*; a Christmas-Hanukkah pair of pieces (Chris Van Allsburg’s *Polar Express*, for the Celebrity Series of Boston, and *Elijah’s Angel*, a setting of the children’s book by Michael Rosen); and Kapilow’s first opera, *Many Moons*, based on the James Thurber story, with a libretto by Hilary Blecher. Another popular family piece by Kapilow is *Play Ball!*, a setting of “Casey at the Bat”, which was performed at Lincoln Center as part of their Family Musik© series .

“Citypieces” and Commemorative Compositions

Involving large communities in the inspiration and compositional process of his commemorative works, Kapilow has left a profound mark on the nation’s cities and regions. His most recent such project examined and reflected on the historic impact of the Lewis and Clark expedition (commemorating its bicentennial) from the perspective of the Native American Indians. Co-commissioned by the St. Louis Symphony, the Carlsen Center (on behalf of the Kansas City Symphony), and the Louisiana Philharmonic, the large choral/orchestral work, *Summer Sun, Winter Moon*, received its premiere performances in the fall and winter of 2004. Kapilow invited Darrell Kipp, a writer and educator from the Blackfeet Tribe of Montana, to collaborate as librettist. A documentary film, also named *Summer Sun, Winter Moon*, followed the composition’s process from conception to premiere, and has been broadcast more than 200 times on PBS since 2009. Independent filmmaker Hugo Perez has produced and directed the documentary for New York-based illumine productions; the documentary has received the prestigious and competitive honor of completion funds from the Independent Television Service (ITVS) arm of PBS.

After receiving great acclaim for “Citypiece: *DC Monuments*” (a millennium composition commissioned by the Kreeger Museum for the Kennedy Center and the National Symphony Orchestra), Kapilow reprised his interactive compositional format in a state-wide project commissioned by the Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra and the State of Louisiana, as part of the 2003 celebrations for the bicentennial of the Louisiana Purchase. The work was toured throughout the state of Louisiana.

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Kapilow has conducted many new works of musical theater, ranging from the Tony Award-winning *Nine* on Broadway to the premiere of *Frida* for the opening of the Brooklyn Academy of Music's "Next Wave Festival" and premieres of works for the American Repertory Theater. He is the conductor/creative director of FamilyMusik® for the Celebrity Series of Boston and at New York's Lincoln Center, and has been conductor/director of FamilyMusik® for New York's 92nd Street Y, co-director of the Rutgers SummerFest Festival, assistant conductor of the Opera Company of Boston, Music Director of the touring company Opera New England, and conductor of the Kansas City Symphony's summer FamilyFare program. He was also music director of the Yale Symphony Orchestra for five seasons.

At the age of 19, Kapilow interrupted his academic work at Yale University to study with the legendary Nadia Boulanger. Two years later, after graduating Phi Beta Kappa from Yale, he continued his studies at the Eastman School of Music. After graduating from Eastman, he returned to Yale, where he was assistant professor for six years at the university.

Kapilow's career has been marked by numerous major awards and grants. He won first place in the Fontainebleau Casadesus Piano Competition and was the second-place winner of the Antal Dorati Conductor's Competition with the Detroit Symphony, leading to engagement with many of America's major orchestras, including the Philadelphia Orchestra. As a composer, Kapilow was featured on Chicago Public Radio's prestigious "Composers In America" series and is a recipient of an Exxon "Meet-the-Composer" grant and numerous ASCAP awards.

Rob Kapilow has conducted many of North America's finest orchestras including the Philadelphia Orchestra, the National Symphony, the St. Louis, Atlanta, Toronto, and Detroit Symphonies and the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra. He is an exclusive Schirmer composer and his many compositions have been performed by nearly every major American orchestra as well as orchestras in Europe, Asia and Australia.

He lives in River Vale, NJ, with his wife and three children.