

## **Ansel Adams: America**

Dave and Chris Brubeck

*Born in Concord, California, December 6, 1920; died in Norwalk, Connecticut, December 5, 2012/Born in Los Angeles, March 19, 1952*

“Photographers are in a sense composers, and the negatives are their scores.”

—Ansel Adams (1902–1984)

Famous equally as performers and composers *and* for their ability to cross over between the jazz and classical worlds, father and son Dave and Chris Brubeck teamed up to pay tribute to legendary photographer Ansel Adams. This spectacular combination of symphonic music with projected images was commissioned by a consortium of seven orchestras—the Stockton Symphony, Sacramento Philharmonic, Fresno Philharmonic, Monterey Symphony, Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, Temple University Symphony Orchestra, and Abilene Philharmonic—supported by Meet the Composer and the James Irvine Foundation. The Stockton Symphony, conducted by Peter Jaffe, gave the premiere performances on April 2 and 4, 2009. The piece has since been performed across this country and abroad.

A legend himself, **Dave Brubeck** led a multifaceted career spanning over six decades. Despite early thoughts of cattle ranching and veterinary studies, he was always involved with music. He changed his major at the College (now University) of the Pacific to follow this love. He and his wife Iola, whom he met there, gave back to Pacific by donating their extensive collection of jazz-related materials, leading to the establishment of the Brubeck Institute in 2000.

Dave anchored numerous performing groups, played for presidents here and abroad, received every honor the jazz world can bestow, and reached millions through his music. He was also a trailblazer in breaking down barriers of racial prejudice. From jazz standards to classical forms infused with jazz, Dave’s compositions display his lifelong fascination with unusual time signatures, improvised counterpoint, superimposed rhythmic patterns, and simultaneous different keys. Career highlights include the premiere of *Upon This Rock* for Pope John Paul II’s 1987 visit to San Francisco and performances of *To Hope! A Celebration* in Vienna and Moscow. Among his more recent successes were the mini-opera *Cannery Row*, premiered at the Monterey Jazz Festival in 2006 and performed at the University of the Pacific in 2007, and *Millennium Intervals*, premiered in 2001 by the Stockton Symphony conducted by Peter Jaffe.

**Chris Brubeck** has emerged as one of America’s most imaginative composers, from fusing classical and jazz genres to ingeniously combining spoken word or visual images with orchestral sound. He has accumulated an impressive collection of honors—among them the ASCAP Deems Taylor Award—and commissions from such eminent organizations as the Boston Pops (twice) and the Czech National Symphony Orchestra. He has also received two prestigious Music Alive composer residencies—*both* with the Stockton Symphony. He then returned in 2009 for the premiere of *Ansel Adams: America*, cowritten with his legendary dad, and in 2012 for his *Adventure for Jazz Quintet and Orchestra*. More recently he composed a tribute marking Maestro Jaffe’s 20th anniversary with the Stockton Symphony, *Fanfare for a Remarkable Friend*, premiered in 2016.

During the 1970s Chris began touring with his dad, the legendary Dave Brubeck, and he currently maintains a demanding touring schedule with his two bands, the Brubeck Brothers Quartet and Triple Play. He fluidly “switches”—bass, trombone, piano, guitar, vocals—and his irrepressible on-stage enthusiasm is matched by his amazing command of jazz, blues, folk, funk, pop, and classical music styles.

Brubeck’s first Bass Trombone Concerto has been played around the world, recorded by the London Symphony, and televised nationally on PBS. His critically acclaimed 2006 CD *Convergence* features the title work, a concerto for orchestra commissioned by the Boston Pops; Frederica von Stade singing *River of Song*; and his second trombone concerto, the *Prague Concerto*. More recently, in 2015, his *Travels in Time for Three* was premiered by the Anchorage Symphony and his *Theodore Roosevelt: in Cowboy Land* by the Bismarck-Mandan Symphony Orchestra. In 2015 Sharon Isbin premiered his guitar concerto, *Affinity*, with the Baltimore Symphony.

Chris Brubeck credits the inception *Ansel Adams: America* to a conversation with arts patron Susan Carson about performing original music while Adams’s photographic images were projected in the concert hall—a discussion that took into account his previous imaginative collaboration with Peter Jaffe on *Mark Twain’s World*, which featured actors, not singers, with the orchestra. Immediately seized by the idea, Chris said, “The key ingredient for the whole project was to get permission from the Ansel Adams Trust.” Respecting the compositional integrity of Ansel Adams’s art, the images are projected in complete form, without close-ups, panning, or other video techniques.

In reading Adams’s autobiography, Chris took note of Adams’s aspirations as a concert pianist, the stronger lure of photography and Yosemite’s beauty, and his falling in love with Virginia Best at the studio where he found an old Chickering piano to play. “I was impressed,” wrote Chris, “with his philosophical views, beautiful writing, and keen analysis and comparison of musical and photographic techniques. . . . He was an artist and thinker whose experiences were as monumental as El Capitan.

“Growing up in San Francisco, Ansel Adams experienced a variety of historic events that would influence his art—the Great Earthquake of 1906, the Panama-Pacific International Exposition in 1915 . . . , the building of the Golden Gate and Bay Bridges. . . . I didn’t want to simply project his photographs, but wanted to try to present his remarkable story to the audience. . . .

“Because of his talent, hard work, and good fortune, he became a pioneer and icon of an emerging new art form. I couldn’t help but think of my father, who grew up as a cowboy in the foothills of California near Stockton. Even there, he felt the artistic influences of a booming San Francisco. These changes in the mid-twentieth century affected both Ansel and Dave, propelling them and their respective art forms . . . into the new frontiers of American culture.

“Recognizing their similar histories spurred me to ask Dave to become part of this compositional endeavor. . . . At age eighty-eight, Dave was reluctant to commit to such a big project. My strategy to hook my father and my mother, Iola, into the project by giving them the Ansel Adams

autobiography to read, worked!

“Dave began to write a piano score driven in style by Bach and Chopin, immortal music learned and played by Adams as a young man. This music was also part of Dave’s unusual environment, growing up on a ranch where his father was a cowboy, and his mother was a classical pianist who often played Bach and Chopin. Dave’s own style (in part inspired by his studies with Darius Milhaud after World War II at Mills College) evolved to be both polytonal and ‘jazzy.’ This heritage has naturally influenced my compositional language as well. Because the architecture of some of Adams’s photographs was so like the complex structure of a fugue, I suggested to my father that he write one as the heart of this new composition. Dave’s enthusiasm and creativity inspired him far beyond the fugue. He devised many wonderful themes and ideas that we expanded and polished together.

“Once the piano score was complete, my wife Tish and I began to select additional images to be shown throughout the developing score. Dave, Iola, Tish, and I had many good times together ‘auditioning’ different photographs to be shown with various passages of music. Jeff Sugg, an award-winning visual production designer, met with us and also added his opinions and expertise regarding transitions between the images.

“When we had a good sense of where we were heading with our concept, both visually and musically, we involved Maestro Peter Jaffe. We wanted his input on tempos, orchestration, and harmonic spelling (which is tricky when a composition is polytonal). Thus began a very enjoyable dialogue about every aspect of the final score as I orchestrated the piece.

“The beauty of Ansel Adams’s photography inspired Dave and me to create this music.” They hoped then in 2009, as Chris does now, that you’ll “enjoy his breathtaking photographs and the way our composition surrounds these images.”

—©compiled by Jane Vial Jaffe

*A list of the Ansel Adams photographs is available at the concert.*

*Scored for 3 flutes, 3rd flute doubling piccolo, 2 oboes, 2nd oboe doubling English horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, optional contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, snare drums, tenor drum, bass drum, suspended cymbals, crash cymbals, finger cymbals, tambourine, triangle, tubular bells, bell tree, marimba, xylophone, tam-tam, guiro, maracas, shaker, timbales, popper noisemaker, harp, piano, and strings*