



Winner: **First Audience Prize, New Haven Film Fest** • Winner: **Bronze Telly**

Selected: **International Festival of Films on Science**, Budapest, Hungary

Flanders Film Festival, Ghent, Belgium • **Northern Lights Documentary Festival**, Massachusetts

Featured: **Light In Winter Festival**, New York • **Artrail Fest**, Cork, Ireland



What's a *Ballet mécanique* and Who is George Antheil?



George Antheil was a brash young American pianist and composer who was the toast of Europe during the roaring '20s. His "ultra-modernist" music caused fistfights and riots from London to Budapest. He was, as his best-selling 1945 autobiography would be titled, the "Bad Boy of Music."

He lived in Paris, where his friends included James Joyce, Ezra Pound, Picasso, Stravinsky, Dali, and Hemingway. In 1923, at the age of 23, he began work on his magnum opus: the cacophonous, outrageous *Ballet mécanique*, for 3 xylophones, 4 bass drums, 7 bells, a siren, 3 airplane propellers, 2 pianists, a tam-tam, and 16 player pianos. It was supposed to be the score for a Dadaist abstract film by the same name, produced by artist Fernand Léger and cinematographer Dudley Murphy.

But the technology to perform the piece, and to link it to the film, didn't exist: there was no way to get multiple player pianos to play together in sync. Antheil had to reduce the number of player pianos to one, and added a phalanx of live pianists. But even with smaller forces, *Ballet mécanique* had a triumphant premiere in 1925. Aaron Copland said it best: "George had Paris by the ear!"

In 1927, he brought the piece to Carnegie Hall in New York, but there it met with failure—such colossal failure, in fact, that Antheil's reputation as a composer was utterly destroyed. For a time he lived in poverty and neglect, but eventually he moved to Hollywood, where he pursued a successful career in film music. He died in 1959, never having heard his original conception for *Ballet mécanique*.



Bringing Back the *Ballet*

In the 1990s, New York music publisher G. Schirmer decided the time was right to revive *Ballet mécanique*. Thanks to the technological development known as **MIDI** (Musical Instrument Digital Interface), and modern computer-controlled player pianos, the technology now existed to perform *Ballet mécanique* the way Antheil had envisioned it. Schirmer enlisted the aid of computer-music expert Paul Lehrman to create "MIDI files" from Antheil's score, so that a performable version of the piece could be published.



With the help of the enterprising student percussion ensemble at the University of Massachusetts Lowell, and 16 computerized "Disklavier" pianos loaned by Yamaha, Lehrman produced a concert in November, 1999, where the piece was finally given its long-overdue premiere. The following year the "new" *Ballet mécanique* was performed at Carnegie Hall, this time to critical raves, and then at the San Francisco Symphony's acclaimed "American Mavericks" festival, where it got a standing ovation. Since then, it has been performed over 20 more times in the US, Canada, and across Europe.

Working with Anthology Film Archives of New York, Lehrman synchronized Antheil's score for the first time with the Léger/Murphy film, and the newly-realized "multimedia" work had its standing-room only premiere at the Whitney Museum in 2001, followed by a five-year world tour. In 2002, a student ensemble at the Peabody Conservatory in Baltimore did the first live performance of the new score, with multiple player pianos, in synchronization with the film.

The Documentary

Bad Boy Made Good traces Antheil's life, from his boyhood in Trenton, New Jersey, through his flamboyant European years, his Carnegie Hall "crash," and his quiet maturity in California, using the composer's own writings, photographs, recordings, and home movies. The film features first-hand historical accounts, and interviews with family, friends, and colleagues of Antheil's, including Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Henry Brant and the late Hollywood legend David Raksin. Lehrman and experts from Schirmer and Yamaha examine the history and technology of the piece, relating Antheil's struggle to create and perform his monumental work, and the modern-day efforts to re-create it.

Bad Boy Made Good is about music, it's about celebrity, it's about technology, it's about culture, and it's about redemption.

BAD BOY MADE GOOD

The Revival of George Antheil's Ballet mécanique

Directed by **Ron Frank** / Narrated by **Tony Kahn**

NOLA Code: GRGA 000K1
Program Length: 1/ 60
Closed Captioned: Yes
Stereo: Yes
SAP: No
Suggested TV Rating: G

Tag: "Bad Boy Made Good is available in a feature-length version on a special two-DVD set, along with the Leger film, the complete premiere performance of *Ballet mécanique*, and more. To order call 888-749-9998 or visit badboymadegood.com."



Feed: Saturday, July 8, 2006
@ 2100-2200 EDT / 513

Broadcast Rights: U/2YRS
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Rights Period: 08-Jul-06 to 05-Jul-08
Available: **Royalty free** to NETA members and subscribers.
Funding: The Island Fund in the New York CommunityTrust.
Local Underwriting Cleared: Yes

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