



SCHOOL OF MUSIC, THEATRE & DANCE
GERSHWIN INITIATIVE
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

GERSHWIN CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION:
RHAPSODY IN BLUE AT 100

ALL MUSIC BY
GEORGE GERSHWIN (1898–1937)

CONTEMPORARY DIRECTIONS ENSEMBLE
JAYCE OGREN, CONDUCTOR
KEVIN COLE, PIANO

Sunday, February 11, 2024
Michigan Theater, Ann Arbor
4:00 PM

Prelude: A Selection of Gershwin Tunes

Justin LaVoie, organ

Opening Remarks

Mark Clague, Editor-in-Chief, Gershwin Initiative

Selections from *Of Thee I Sing* (1931)

lyrics by Ira Gershwin

Love Is Sweeping the Country
Of Thee I Sing

orch. William Daly Jr. & Robert Russell Bennett

Alex Humphreys, Sam O'Neill, Keyon Pickett & Aquila Sol, voice
Contemporary Directions Ensemble
Jayce Ogren, conductor

Centennial Songs

Someone Believes in You

lyrics by Buddy DeSylva

from *Sweet Little Devil* (1924)

Somebody Loves Me

lyrics by Ballard MacDonald & Buddy DeSylva

from *George White's Scandals of 1924*

From *Lady, Be Good!* (1924)

lyrics by Ira Gershwin

The Man I Love

Fascinating Rhythm

Keyon Pickett, Aquila Sol, Alex Humphreys & Sam O'Neill, voices
Jacob Kerzner, piano

The use of all cameras and recording devices is strictly prohibited.
Please turn off all cell phones and pagers or set ringers to silent mode.

Three Preludes (1926)

I. Allegro ben ritmato e deciso

II. Andante con moto

III. Agitato

Gershwin Medley

arr. Kevin Cole

Kevin Cole, piano

Intermission

Selections from *Primrose* (1924)

lyrics by Ira Gershwin & Desmond Carter

Wait a Bit, Susie

Some Far-Away Someone

Keyon Pickett, Alex Humphreys, Aquila Sol & Sam O'Neill, voices

Jacob Kerzner, piano

Three Gershwin Songs

arr. Logan Skelton

(I'll Build a) Stairway to Paradise (from *George White's Scandals of 1922*)

Someone to Watch over Me (from *Oh, Kay!*, 1926)

Swanee (1919)

Logan Skelton & Tzu-Yin Huang, pianos

Selections from *La, La, Lucille* (1919)

lyrics by Arthur J. Jackson & Buddy DeSylva

Somehow It Seldom Comes True

orch. Frank Saddler

From Now On

Aquila Sol & Keyon Pickett, voice

Contemporary Directions Ensemble

Jayce Ogren, conductor

Message from the Dean

David Gier, Dean and Paul C. Boylan Professor of Music

Rhapsody in Blue (1924)

orch. Ferde Grofé

ed. Ryan Raul Bañagale

Contemporary Directions Ensemble

Jayce Ogren, conductor

Kevin Cole, piano

Remarks before selections delivered by Andrew S. Kohler and AJ Banta.

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

by Andrew S. Kohler, PhD, Alfred and Jane Wolin Managing Editor, Gershwin Initiative

On February 12, 1924, conductor Paul Whiteman (1890–1967) presented a concert called “An Experiment in Modern Music” at Aeolian Hall in New York, at which he conducted his Palais Royal Orchestra with George Gershwin as soloist in the world premiere of *Rhapsody in Blue*. The event was a resounding success thanks to George’s vivid blend of diverse musical styles and the contributions of his collaborators: Ferde Grofé (1892–1972) inventively orchestrated the work for Whiteman’s distinctive ensemble,¹ which is the instrumentation you will hear tonight, and clarinetist Ross Gorman (1890–1953) discovered an unusual way to realize his opening scalar passage as an upward wailing glissando.² Tonight, we celebrate the centennial not only of *Rhapsody in Blue* but also of the four Gershwin shows that opened in 1924: *Sweet Little Devil* on January 21, *George White’s Scandals of 1924* on June 30, *Primrose* on September 11, and *Lady, Be Good!* on December 1.

The seeds of magnificent music to come were planted in this pivotal year. In a solo piano passage of *Rhapsody in Blue* omitted from the first publication, we hear material that occurs in the tone poem *An American in Paris* (1928) and as one of the most important motives in *Porgy and Bess* (1935), George and Ira Gershwin’s monumental collaboration with DuBose Heyward (1885–1940) and Dorothy Heyward (1890–1961). Tonight, you will hear the influence of diverse musical traditions that George absorbed, among them Tin Pan Alley, Broadway, blues, Jewish music, 1920s jazz clubs, Romantic piano concerti, and British operetta. The famous tag of *Rhapsody in Blue*—the first music played by the solo piano and the final theme we hear—invokes the common vaudeville tune “Good evening, friends”³ and echoes another jazz-inspired classical work, the 1923 ballet *La création du monde* (Opus 81a) by the Jewish French composer Darius Milhaud (1892–1974).

We hope you enjoy this journey through the art of George Gershwin, featuring his own piano, which is now housed in the University of Michigan School of Music, Theatre & Dance. We also celebrate several of his most important collaborators, above all his older brother Ira (1896–1983), as we commemorate their successes of 1924 and share with you some of the Gershwin Initiative’s current projects.

SELECTIONS FROM OF THEE I SING

Of Thee I Sing boasts several historical achievements. Opening the day after Christmas in 1931, it had a Broadway run of 441 performances, the longest of any musical the Gershwins wrote together. The libretto was the first to be published for a musical and the first to win a Pulitzer Prize. The music, however, was not a part of the award; Ira so deplored this snub of George that he kept his prize hanging on the inside of his bathroom door.⁴ George was belatedly honored with a posthumous Pulitzer in 1998 to celebrate the centennial of his birth.

This musical satire is the second of three that the Gershwins wrote with eminent playwright George S. Kaufman (1889–1961) and Morrie Ryskind (1895–1985), preceded by the anti-war *Strike Up the Band* (1927, rev. 1930) and followed by a sequel, *Let ‘Em Eat Cake* (1933).⁵

¹ Ryan Raul Bañagale, *Arranging Gershwin: Rhapsody in Blue and the Creation of an American Icon* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 14–46.

² Howard Pollack, *George Gershwin: His Life and Work* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 302.

³ Bañagale, *Arranging Gershwin*, 8.

⁴ Michael Feinstein, *Nice Work If You Can Get It: My Life in Rhythm and Rhyme* (New York: Hyperion, 1995), 109.

⁵ See Larry Maslon, “Stars and Swipes: The Poisoned, Patriotic, Political Pens and Piano of the Gershwins, Kaufman, and Ryskind,” *Words Without Music: The Ira Gershwin Newsletter*, no. 10 (Fall 2016): 3–8, <https://gershwin.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/WWM-10-final-for-website-use.pdf>; Wayne Joseph Schneider, *George Gershwin’s Political Operettas: Of Thee I Sing (1931) and Let ‘Em Eat Cake (1933), and Their Role in Gershwin’s Musical and Emotional Maturing* (PhD. dissertation, Cornell University, 1985).

Of Thee I Sing tells the story of presidential candidate John P. Wintergreen (the “P.” stands for “Peppermint”⁶). The wide-ranging satire includes a unanimous Supreme Court ruling that corn muffins are more important than justice and the loser of an election charging fraud in seven states. Kaufman and Ryskind did not reveal the partisan affiliation of any character, as they “don’t know which they are—they are willing to be anything to win.”⁷

Our edition uses the original orchestrations, which are by two of the Gershwins’ most important colleagues, William Daly Jr. (1887–1936) and Robert Russell Bennett (1894–1981), excepting one number that George orchestrated himself.⁸ Tonight’s excerpts come from the first act, with Wintergreen on the campaign trail. The first begins with an instrumental introduction reprising the music of the opening chorus (“Wintergreen for President! He’s the man the people choose; loves the Irish and the Jews”). There are two musical quotations: John Philip Sousa’s quintessentially American “The Stars and Stripes Forever” (1896), and Gus Edwards and Vincent Bryan’s “Tammany” (1905), the title of which refers to a major political organization in New York City.⁹ The music then switches to the upbeat “Love Is Sweeping the Country.” Wintergreen is campaigning on love, although he occasionally alludes to strong, albeit unspecified, stances on policy; one of his staff tells the assembled crowd that “we appeal to your hearts, not your intelligence.” Wintergreen proposes to Mary Turner, who accepts. They then sing the campaign song, which just so happens to be the title number, conflating amorous love and love of country. It is taken up by all present: “The Crowd yells itself blue in the face. When they are good and blue, the curtain falls.”¹⁰

CENTENNIAL SONGS

The first of the musicals for which we mark the centennial is *Sweet Little Devil*, which has lyrics by Buddy DeSylva (1895–1950). This show has special relevance to our commemoration of *Rhapsody in Blue*: George recounted that he came up with the themes for that celebrated work on a train ride to Boston for a tryout of *Sweet Little Devil*.¹¹ After the tryouts in Providence and Boston (under the titles *My Dear Lady* and *The Perfect Lady*), the show opened in New York on January 21, 1924, mere weeks before the premiere of *Rhapsody in Blue*. The commissioner and conductor of that iconic work, Paul Whiteman, is even name-dropped in a song from this musical (“Quite a Party”). The book by Frank Mandel (1884–1958) and Laurence Schwab (1892–1951) has an irreverent tone, and the sardonic song “Hooray for the U. S. A.” foreshadows the Kaufman-Ryskind collaborations.

Sweet Little Devil features an ethically dubious Follies dancer named Joyce West and her cousin, Virginia Araminta Culpepper. After Joyce jettisons a fan letter from a man named Tom Nesbitt, who is living in Peru, Virginia saves it from the wastebasket and corresponds with Tom herself, pretending to be Joyce, healthy communication being anathema to this genre. “Someone Believes in You,” presented as a solo number this evening, is an epistolary duet in its original context, with Tom in Peru reading one of the sweet (albeit forged) letters, after which Virginia recalls her words in the northern hemisphere.

From 1920 to 1924, George Gershwin annually wrote the music for a revue produced by George White (1892–1968), a former *Ziegfeld Follies* dancer who named his show the

⁶ Ira Gershwin, *Lyrics on Several Occasions* (New York: Limelight Editions, 1959/1997), 337.

⁷ Pollack, *George Gershwin*, 503 (internal quotation marks omitted).

⁸ The opening number of the second act is orchestrated by George Gershwin.

⁹ The name of the organization, Tammany Hall, derives from Tamanend (ca. 1625–ca. 1701), a chief of the Lenni-Lenape nation; regrettably, the song includes crude imitations of indigenous culture.

¹⁰ George S. Kaufman, Morrie Ryskind, and Ira Gershwin, *Of Thee I Sing: A Musical Play* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1932), 89.

¹¹ Isaac Goldberg, *George Gershwin: A Study in American Music* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1958), 139–40.

George White's Scandals (1919–1939). Of the several dozen songs George Gershwin supplied for the *Scandals*, only two became widely known, both featured on tonight's program.¹² One of these came from his fifth and final *Scandals* in 1924, for which White co-wrote the book with William K. ("Billy") Wells (1883–1956). So productive was the composer this year that he missed the premiere on June 30, being already at work on his next musical, *Primrose*, in London. "Somebody Loves Me," with lyrics by Ballard MacDonald (1882–1935) and DeSylva, was first performed by the comic actress Winnie Lightner (1899–1971), but its lyrics have genuine longing and the music has striking inflections of the minor mode throughout, from the dramatic introduction to the blue notes of the refrain.¹³ The arrangement presented tonight is prepared from the original orchestral manuscript of Maurice DePackh (1896–1960) and includes the seldom-heard patter section, which was omitted from the first publication. With its sly rhymes, the patter skews the song decidedly toward the comic, replete with references to the popular culture of its day: film actors Harold Lloyd (1893–1971), William S. Hart (1864–1946), and Jackie Coogan (1914–1984) are all treated to a shout-out.

By the winter of 1924, George and Ira had collaborated on many songs together, but it was not until *Lady, Be Good!* opened on December 1 that they had a full-show collaboration reach Broadway. With 330 performances, its Broadway run was longer than any of the brothers' joint shows other than *Of Thee I Sing*. *Lady, Be Good!* is the second Gershwin musical with a book by Guy Bolton, this time in collaboration with Fred Thompson (1884–1949), who later worked on several other Gershwin shows. The plot involves various amorous entanglements and other machinations of the kind to be expected in musical comedy. The impecunious sibling dance-duo on whom the show centers was played by the actual sibling duo of Fred Astaire (1899–1987) and Adele Astaire (1896–1981).

In the summer of 1924, George wrote to Ira that a tune of his for which lyrics had yet to be written "seems to be a riot with everyone," and that the Astaires were "crazy about" it.¹⁴ That tune became "The Man I Love," intended for *Lady, Be Good!* Financier Otto Kahn (1867–1934) loved this song so much that it made him decide to fund the show, yet it was dropped after only a week during tryouts; Ira recalled that the audience reaction was "appreciative" but hardly "the vociferous applause given dancing duets and novelty numbers."¹⁵ George's friend Lady Edwina Mountbatten (1901–1960), a London socialite and later the last vicereine of India, had the good sense and taste to ask the composer for the sheet music to bring back with her to England, where it became a hit.¹⁶ Publisher Max Dreyfus (1874–1964) convinced the brothers to publish it, which proved to be a wise decision as it sold about a hundred thousand copies within six months. Popular though it was, it was destined to remain standalone. The song was featured in *Strike Up the Band* in 1927, at which point the cover of the sheet music advertised that it had been "successfully introduced" in that show—a dubious boast, as the musical did not reach Broadway until 1930, by then in a thoroughly reworked version from which "The Man I Love" had been dropped. In 1928, legendary producer Florenz Ziegfeld (1867–1932) wanted to include the song for Marilyn Miller (1898–1936) in the new musical *Rosalie*.¹⁷ Ira obliged by modifying the lyrics, but it came to naught. By this time, Ira had

¹² Regarding George Gershwin and Buddy DeSylva's brief opera *Blue Monday*, originally included in the 1922 *Scandals* but soon dropped, see Ellen Sauer, "The Persistence of a Flop: Revivals and Re-Imaginations of *Blue Monday*," The Gershwin Initiative Blog, January 27, 2021, last accessed October 31, 2022, <https://smt.d.umich.edu/ami/gershwin/?p=10772>.

¹³ Pollack, *George Gershwin*, 318–19.

¹⁴ Letter from George Gershwin to Ira Gershwin, July 9, 1924, Ira and Leonore S. Gershwin Trust Archive, Music Division, Library of Congress (hereafter ILGT). Thanks to Michael Owen.

¹⁵ Gershwin, *Lyrics on Several Occasions*, 5.

¹⁶ See Sarah Sisk, "Fascinating Woman: George Gershwin's Friend, Lady Mountbatten," The Gershwin Initiative Blog, December 5, 2017, last accessed January 12, 2024, <https://smt.d.umich.edu/ami/gershwin/?p=3512>.

¹⁷ The Gershwins' collaborators on *Rosalie* were composer Sigmund Romberg (1887–1951), lyricist P. G. Wodehouse, and book authors Guy Bolton and William Anthony McGuire (1881–1940).

grown “bored” with trying to fit the hit song into a show, but he deemed it “Still pretty good” when inscribing a copy of the sheet music in 1951.¹⁸

“Fascinating Rhythm” also was written for *Lady, Be Good!* Like “The Man I Love,” it became one of the Gershwins’ tremendous hits, and this one remained in the show. It was performed by the Astaires with Cliff Edwards (1895–1971), known as “Ukulele Ike,” who played an entertainer and accompanied himself as his nickname would suggest. In the original show, it is one of those dance numbers that Ira said tended to elicit “vociferous applause.” The opening verse has an inner voice that resembles a section of “I Got Plenty o’ Nuttin’” from *Porgy and Bess*, and it would seem *Rhapsody in Blue* was still on George’s mind when he composed both “The Man I Love” and “Fascinating Rhythm”: in each of these songs, the famous tag motif (the first material the soloist plays) may be heard. Listen for it at the beginning of the refrain in “The Main I Love” (on the text “he’ll come along”) and in the singer’s opening phrase in “Fascinating Rhythm.”

THREE PRELUDES

One might expect a virtuoso pianist like George Gershwin to have composed a great deal for solo piano, but in fact the entirety of that output is only about fifteen minutes of music, depending on which sketches and posthumous arrangements one includes. In March 1925, prominent author and photographer Carl Van Vechten (1880–1964) reported that George was at work on a set of twenty-four preludes. By one account from the next year, the composer intended to write a collection called *The Melting Pot*.

On December 4, 1926 at the Roosevelt Hotel in New York City, George shared a recital with contralto Marguerite d’Alvarez (ca. 1886–1953). The first half ended with him playing “Five Preludes,” of which the program gives no specification. It has proven difficult to determine what exactly George played on this occasion, or even which of his extant compositions for solo piano should be categorized as preludes; the only ones published as such are the Three Preludes that appeared in 1927, dedicated to William Daly.

The Three Preludes follow a fast–slow–fast pattern and, like so much of this composer’s music, evince a wide array of stylistic influences. The first (in B-flat major) emphasizes blue notes, and the composition has a quintessentially George Gershwin tempo marking: *Allegro ben ritmato e deciso* (indicating a fast tempo, a good sense of rhythm, and a decisive performance). George called the second prelude a “sort of a blue lullaby.” Its tempo marking is *Andante con moto* (i.e., moderately slow but with a sense of motion), to which *e poco rubato* (indicating flexibility in slowing the tempo) was added in the first publication. Although it is in C-sharp minor, it frequently juxtaposes and even ends in the major mode. Its prominent oscillating minor third foreshadows an important motive in *Porgy and Bess* (e.g., in Porgy’s poignant “Dey pass by singin’”). This piece has drawn comparison to the lullaby from Igor Stravinsky’s *Firebird* (1910) and the second of Frederic Chopin’s Preludes, Opus 28 (1839), a set of twenty-four presumably on George’s mind as he considered his own. According to fellow composer Kay Swift (1897–1993), with whom George had a significant romantic relationship, he referred to the last of the Three Preludes as “Spanish.” The manuscript is marked *Agitato*, but it was published with the same tempo marking as the first of the set. This final prelude begins in E-flat minor but also vacillates between the minor and major modes, ending with a flourish.¹⁹

¹⁸ Gershwin, *Lyrics on Several Occasions*, 4–7 (quotation 6). The signed archival copy of “The Man I Love” is part of the Lester S. Levy Sheet Music Collection, Sheridan Libraries, Johns Hopkins University, Box 196, Item 030, <https://levysheetmusic.mse.jhu.edu/collection/196/030>.

¹⁹ All information from Pollack, *George Gershwin*, 389–92; Robert Wyatt, “The Seven Jazz Preludes of George Gershwin: A Historical Narrative,” *American Music* 7, no. 1 (Spring 1989): 68–85.

GERSHWIN MEDLEY

Pianist Kevin Cole has recorded numerous arrangements of Gershwin songs. His 1985 album *The Unknown Gershwin* features medleys with music from two shows on tonight's program, *Primrose* and *Of Thee I Sing*. The medley you will hear tonight (which appears on the 2004 album *Cole Plays Gershwin*) combines several Gershwin standards, some heard elsewhere on tonight's program: "The Man I Love," "Someone to Watch over Me," "S Wonderful" (from *Funny Face*, 1927), "Oh, Lady Be Good!," "Sweet and Low-Down" (from *Tip-Toes*, 1925), "Clap Yo' Hands" (from *Oh, Kay!*), "Embraceable You" and "But Not for Me" (both from *Girl Crazy*, 1930), "Swanee," and the title number from *Strike Up the Band*. All of these songs have lyrics by Ira aside from "Swanee," which has lyrics by Irving Caesar (1895–1996).

SELECTIONS FROM PRIMROSE

In addition to being one of tonight's centennial shows, *Primrose* is one of the first musical theater editions the Gershwin Initiative is undertaking. It is the first Gershwin show for which an essentially complete piano-vocal score was published, and it features George's own orchestrations—some of his earliest that survive—for three numbers ("Isn't It Wonderful," "Berkeley Square and Kew," and "Naughty Baby").²⁰ It may come as a surprise that this work, which opened at the Winter Garden Theatre in London on September 11, 1924, is more British operetta than Broadway. It has topical references to British politicians and amateur golf champion Cyril Tolley (1895–1978), and there is even an excursive and disarmingly jaunty duet about the demise of Mary, Queen of Scots (1542–1587). For this reason, it was never performed in America during the Gershwins' lifetimes, contrary to George's hopes.²¹ It was a success in London, and it toured in New Zealand and Australia, where many of the archival materials remain; we are consulting digitized copies from Canberra for our edition, including instrumental parts for several orchestrations that had been presumed lost.

Primrose is the first Gershwin musical with a book coauthored by Guy Bolton, this time with British comic actor and playwright George Grossmith Jr. (1874–1935). Although Ira was not actively involved, his lyrics are used in seven numbers, including his Gilbert and Sullivan tribute "Four Little Sirens" (recalling "Three Little Maids" from *The Mikado*, 1885), an unused number from the brothers' first full-show collaboration, *A Dangerous Maid* (1921).²² At least one other of Ira's contributions to *Primrose* originated in that show; the others, including the two numbers on tonight's program, were likely trunk songs (i.e., not written with a particular show in mind but intended for future use).²³

The lyricist for the remainder of *Primrose* was the Englishman Desmond Carter (1895–1939). "This boy Carter writes some of the neatest lyrics I've seen," George wrote to Ira from London. "He is a nice quiet chap who doesn't look as though he were capable of writing lyrics." George, who made sure that Ira was given due credit and compensation, informed his brother that he would find some of his own "old lyrics" unrecognizable but would appreciate that "they had to be altered to fit certain situations," a task that fell to Carter.²⁴

²⁰ Other than a modified earlier scoring by Frank Saddler for "Boy Wanted," reused from *A Dangerous Maid*, the orchestrator for the remainder of *Primrose* is presently unidentified, as this important role too often went uncredited. Robert Kimball has suggested John Ansell (1874–1948), who conducted the first production, as a candidate; see Ira Gershwin, *The Complete Lyrics of Ira Gershwin*, ed. Robert Kimball (New York: Da Capo Press, 1998), 42.

²¹ Letter from George Gershwin to Ira Gershwin, July 9, 1924, ILGT.

²² The book for *A Dangerous Maid* is by playwright Charles William Bell (1876–1938). By the time this show reached Broadway, it had been retitled and the Gershwins' work wholly jettisoned; see Pollack, *George Gershwin*, 257.

²³ In addition to "Boy Wanted" (see n. 20 *supra*), it is likely that "Naughty Baby" was intended for *A Dangerous Maid* at some point (Pollack, *George Gershwin*, 758n10; George's scoring provides further evidence). The other numbers of *Primrose* with Ira's lyrics are "Isn't It Wonderful" and its reprise in the finale of Act I.

²⁴ Letters from George Gershwin to Ira Gershwin, July 9, 1924 and July 22, 1924 (quotations), ILGT. See also Crawford, *Summertime*, 137–41.

As with many comedies from this era, the plot of *Primrose* centers on romantic entanglements and misunderstandings, in this case often stemming from a general agent of chaos named Toby Mopham. The two duets we present for you tonight involve the central couple: Hilary Vane, a famed author, and Joan Falls. Hilary has been at work on the latest installment of his serial about a young woman named Primrose, whose plight just so happens to mirror Joan's—what *are* the odds? Since tonight's concert celebrates numerous centennials, it should be noted that the leading man at one point threatens to “become very 1924 and unpleasant.”

“Wait a Bit, Susie,” with lyrics credited to Ira and Carter, occurs in the second of three acts, after the resolution (achieved, uncharacteristically, by an adult conversation) of the requisite kerfuffle that ended Act I. The eponymous Susie is another of the characters in the literary saga by Mr. Vane that mirrors the tribulations of Miss Falls, and the song offers assurance to those waiting patiently for love. George's attention to musical unification is evident in the connection between the opening theme of this duet and the middle section of the heroine's first number, “Isn't It Wonderful,” in which she describes the idealized man whom she awaits.²⁵

“Some Far-Away Someone” reuses music from George Gershwin and Buddy DeSylva's song “At Half Past Seven,” written for a revue called *Niffies of 1923*, which had the tag line “Glorifying American Clean Humor” (deemed by a critic for *Theater Magazine* to be “not very funny”).²⁶ Ira entirely replaced the lyrics in “Some Far-Away Someone,” although both he and DeSylva are credited in the original publications while Carter is not, despite George's correspondence suggesting Carter's involvement.²⁷ The duet occurs shortly after the main couple's first meeting. The music is characterized by repeated sighing figures, at some points reminiscent of Giacomo Puccini's score for “Musetta's Waltz” from *La bohème* (1896), and the lyrics center on philosophies of love.

THREE GERSHWIN SONGS

SMTD Professor Logan Skelton, a tireless enthusiast of the Gershwins' work, has made numerous two-piano and four-handed arrangements of their music, the most ambitious to date being of Mark Clague's critical edition of *An American in Paris*.²⁸ We present three tonight.

In addition to “Somebody Loves Me,” the only Gershwin standard to emerge from his five years writing for *George White's Scandals* is “(I'll Build a) Stairway to Paradise” from the 1922 revue, which had a book by White and W. C. Fields (1880–1946). The song's lyrics are by DeSylva and Ira Gershwin writing under his early pseudonym, Arthur Francis, which combines the names of the younger Gershwin siblings, Arthur (1900–1981) and Frances (“Frankie,” 1906–1999). “Stairway to Paradise” first brought George into contact with Paul Whiteman, whose on-stage band in this number thrilled the composer.²⁹

“Someone to Watch over Me” originally was sung to a rag doll by the famed Gertrude Lawrence (1898–1952) in the 1926 musical *Ob, Kay!*, which has a book by Guy Bolton (1884–1979), who collaborated on six Gershwin shows, and P. G. Wodehouse (1881–1975), an author whom Ira greatly admired. The lyrics are Ira's, but by his account the titular phrase came from the Gershwins' friend Howard Dietz (1896–1983), who suggested it upon hearing George's still wordless tune.³⁰

²⁵ Thanks to Jacob Kerzner (correspondence, March 16, 2023). The music for “Wait a Bit, Susie” was reused in George and Ira's song “Beautiful Gypsy,” dropped from *Rosalie* (the slur in the title was less widely recognized as such at that time).

²⁶ Pollack, *George Gershwin*, 287 (internal quotation marks omitted).

²⁷ Letter from George Gershwin to Ira Gershwin, July 9, 1924, ILGT.

²⁸ See “Gershwin's An American in Paris // A New Two-Piano Arrangement // Faculty and Student Collaboration,” posted February 14, 2023, last accessed January 12, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e5cYhiAFjY>.

²⁹ Richard Crawford, *Summertime: George Gershwin's Life in Music* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2019), 84–86.

³⁰ Gershwin, *Lyrics on Several Occasions*, 111–12.

“Swanee,” a collaboration with lyricist Irving Caesar, was first used in a review called *Demi-Tasse* (also known as *Capitol Revue*) in 1919, the same year as George Gershwin’s first full-show score, *La, La, Lucille*. George recalled that the name of the Suwannee River fascinated him, and by his account he and Caesar wrote the song in the span of an hour in the Gershwins’ New York apartment. “Swanee” became George’s first major hit, in large part due to Al Jolson (1886–1950)—never underestimate what can be accomplished in an hour.³¹

SELECTIONS FROM *LA, LA, LUCILLE*

In 1919, the same year as “Swanee,” his first runaway hit, George Gershwin completed his first score for an entire musical, *La, La, Lucille*. Eight of the show’s songs were published individually in piano arrangements, but much of the music was presumed to be lost due to the era’s lamentable lack of care in preserving this form of entertainment. In the summer of 2023, Associate Editor Jacob Kerzner examined a recent acquisition in the Samuel French Collection at Amherst College and found a set of manuscript orchestral parts for the complete show.³² The songs on tonight’s program were among those published (George also made a piano roll for “From Now On”), but the orchestrations, which add expressive instrumental lines and even have differences in harmony from the publications, likely have not been performed in about a century.

La, La, Lucille is another project on which George worked with Buddy DeSylva, this time in tandem with lyricist Arthur J. Jackson (1893–1922), whose older brother, Fred Jackson (1886–1953), wrote the book. The Gershwins had further collaborations with Arthur Jackson, but the working relationship tragically was cut short by his premature death in 1922.³³ *La, La, Lucille* also incorporated songs with lyrics by Irving Caesar, Ira in tandem with DeSylva (for the song “Kitchenette,” dropped from both this show and *Sweet Little Devil*), and the Gershwins’ close friend Lou Paley (1885–1952), the latter of whom in 1920 married Emily Strunsky (1897–1990), whose sister Leonore (1900–1991) became Ira’s wife in 1926. The show was successful enough to be made into a silent film in 1920 by Universal Pictures, but as with many movies from that era, largely due to the unstable and flammable nitrate film in use at the time, no prints are known to survive.³⁴

The materials in the Samuel French Collection are for a reduced touring orchestra, which made its way as far as the west coast. The only numbers for which original scoring is presently known to survive (held in the Library of Congress) are for three that were dropped early on, all orchestrated by Frank Saddler (1864–1921) or Maurice DePackh, and DePackh’s orchestral manuscript for “The Ten Commandments of Love,” reused from the revue *Half-Past Eight* (1918). It is likely that Saddler was the main orchestrator for the show and that the touring orchestra is a reduced version of his work.

Fred Jackson was an author of bedroom farces, which were highly popular on Broadway at the time,³⁵ perhaps influenced by the successful French farces of Georges Feydeau (1862–1921). *La, La, Lucille* fits neatly into this genre with its outlandish premise, confused identities, misunderstandings, people concealed under beds or behind doors, and scenes in a disreputable hotel. The central couple, John and Lucille Smith, are offered a way out of dire financial straits when a lawyer informs them that John’s Aunt Roberta has died and that he may inherit two million dollars from her (the equivalent of about \$35 million in 2024). The catch is that he must promptly get divorced, due to the opprobrium of Lucille having worn satin pants on

³¹ Pollack, *George Gershwin*, 237–41.

³² For more on the archive, see <https://www.amherst.edu/library/archives/holdings/samfrench>, last accessed January 30, 2024.

³³ The lyricist died of pulmonary tuberculosis acquired during his enlistment in World War I; see “Arthur J. Jackson Dies in New York,” *The Pittsburgh Press*, June 20, 1922, page 5. Thanks to Sam Bessen.

³⁴ “La La Lucille Has Big Cast of Comedy Players,” *Edmonton Journal*, vol. 17, no. 102 (November 13, 1920), page 33.

³⁵ Pollack, *George Gershwin*, 234.

stage when she was in an act with her juggling father. Hijinks ensue as the couple concocts a sham infidelity to have sufficient grounds for the divorce, after ascertaining they may remarry. Naturally, three other couples get sucked into the absurd vortex, but all is resolved happily (leaving aside that some of the characters really *should* get divorced); it turns out that Aunt Roberta is still alive and was testing their love.

“Somehow It Seldom Comes True” occurs in the third act as the characters are at a nadir: Lucille is convinced John was actually unfaithful with the eloped newlywed Peggy Hughes, who is being hounded by her disapproving father. Peggy’s husband, Britton, is crestfallen under the same misapprehension, so Lucille sings this song of rueful consolation, which stands apart from the farcical proceedings in its poignancy and inward wistfulness. The same expressive oscillating minor third from the Three Preludes is present at the beginning of the refrain. “From Now On” occurs in the first act, after John and Lucille decide they will remain together rather than take the money (although they will try to do both). It is a duet in the original context, both upbeat and sentimental, and it recurs in the finale ultimo, paired with a vaudeville dance, after all has been satisfactorily resolved.

NOTE ON RHAPSODY IN BLUE

by Ryan Raul Bañagale, PhD, Volume Editor and Editorial Board, Gershwin Initiative

On the afternoon of Friday, January 4, 1924, lyricist Ira Gershwin picked up his copy of the *New York Tribune* and saw a headline reading “Committee Will Decide ‘What Is American Music?’”³⁶ This panel was to adjudicate a concert taking place on February 12 at Aeolian Hall called “An Experiment in Modern Music.” Ira also learned something else from this newspaper article, which he shared immediately with his younger brother: “George Gershwin is at work on a jazz concerto.” As the story goes, this public announcement jump-started composition on the piece that would become known as *Rhapsody in Blue*. It made its world premiere a mere forty days later, but Gershwin probably only spent about ten total days working on the piece. He had many other concurrent obligations, not the least of which was a new musical, *Sweet Little Devil*, opening in Boston.

Gershwin began his work on the *Rhapsody* as a two-piano short score: one grand staff for the solo piano and another for the accompanying ensemble. That ensemble was under the direction of Paul Whiteman—the self-proclaimed “King of Jazz.” His “jazz orchestra” included many of the instruments that we associate with jazz today, including trumpets, trombones, and saxophones. But it also included instruments that have largely fallen out of use in the jazz idiom, such as the clarinet, tuba, and banjo. Whiteman’s musicians also played the oboe, bass clarinet, soprano saxophone, French horn, and violin. All of these instruments are featured in the original arrangement of *Rhapsody in Blue*, which was prepared by Ferde Grofé, who took Gershwin’s initial two-piano score and orchestrated it for performance by the timbres and talents of the Paul Whiteman Orchestra. Very few of these instrumental assignments or indications of tempo or muting were given by Gershwin in the short score; rather, these choices were made primarily by Grofé.

In attendance at Whiteman’s “Experiment” were luminaries such as Igor Stravinsky, John Philip Sousa, and Willie “the Lion” Smith. But the version of *Rhapsody in Blue* they experienced was not heard again in quite the same way until recently. For more than half a century, concert presentations of the *Rhapsody* have been dominated by an arrangement of the piece for a standard symphony orchestra. Also arranged by Grofé, that version was famously recorded by Leonard Bernstein and the New York Philharmonic during the 1950s. As popular as the orchestral *Rhapsody* has become, its

³⁶ “Whiteman Judges Named: Committee Will Decide ‘What Is American Music,’” *New York Tribune*, January 4, 1924, page 11. Reprinted in Robert Wyatt and John Andrew Johnson, eds., *The George Gershwin Reader* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 44–45.

lush scoring for the full sonorities of large string, brass, and woodwind sections presents a smoothed-out version of the 1924 original, which was full of imaginative, nuanced, and novel sounds—music that captures the energy and playfulness of the “jazz age” from which it sprang.

The version of *Rhapsody in Blue* encountered on this performance represents our best attempt at capturing what the audience heard that fateful night in February 1924. It restores forty-four bars of piano solo, including some percussive and dissonant passages that lend the piece a modernist feel. Additionally, we experience Grofé’s original instrumentation, including a reduced string section and the presence of the oboe, soprano saxophone, tuba, and banjo. Yet this edition is not meant to be a fixed text, but rather one that may be interpreted with fluidity depending on the particular aims of an individual conductor, ensemble, or soloist. This flexibility is one of the reasons the piece maintains such a presence to this day.

ABOUT THE GERSHWIN INITIATIVE

The University of Michigan is the world’s leading institution for the study of the work of George and Ira Gershwin. Its signature Gershwin Initiative combines research, learning, and performance. Students are involved in every aspect of this work, enrolling in classes and seminars, working as editorial and research assistants, and as performers in the concert hall and on stage. The Initiative started in 2013 with Mark Clague as Editor in Chief. Jessica Getman was the first Alfred and Jane Wolin Managing Editor, a position currently held by Andrew S. Kohler. The position of Associate Editor was created in the fall of 2022 and is held by Jacob Kerzner.

The Initiative’s centerpiece is *The George and Ira Gershwin Critical Edition*, a multi-decade project to create new musical scores for study and performance that truly represent the composer’s and lyricist’s creative vision. The edition began when Todd Gershwin (U-M graduate, 1997) contacted the University’s School of Music, Theatre & Dance about helping to preserve his great-uncles’ legacies. A decade later, the edition has released its first volumes, including a centennial edition of George Gershwin’s *Rhapsody in Blue* (1924) for piano and jazz orchestra. *The Gershwins Abroad* (ed. Michael Owen), Ira’s notebook from their 1928 journey through Europe, is forthcoming.

The new critical editions of such iconic works as *An American in Paris* (ed. Mark Clague) and *Concerto in F* (ed. Tim Freeze) have been performed worldwide and recorded by leading ensembles, such as the Grammy-nominated compact disc made by the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Louis Langrée, as well as recordings by Jeffrey Biegel with the Adrian Symphony, conducted by Bruce Anthony Kiesling, and by Kevin Cole with the National Orchestral Institute, conducted by David Alan Miller. Our largest project is the new edition of the Gershwins’ and Heywards’ opera *Porgy and Bess* (ed. Wayne Shirley), which was premiered by New York’s Metropolitan Opera in 2019.

For more information about the Initiative, visit the University’s American Music Institute website, smtd.umich.edu/ami/gershwin/, or e-mail smtd-gershwin@umich.edu.

RYAN RAUL BAÑAGALE, PhD is Associate Professor and Chair of Music at Colorado College, where he also serves as Director of the Crown Center for Teaching. He holds degrees from Harvard University, the University of Washington, and Colorado College. His research explores the realm of Arrangement Studies, having applied such approaches to a variety of American musical subjects and genres. He is the author of *Arranging Gershwin: Rhapsody in Blue and the Creation of an American Icon* (Oxford, 2014) and co-editor of “*We Didn’t Start the Fire*”: *Billy Joel and Popular Music Studies* (Lexington, 2020). Presently he is editing the *Oxford Handbook of Arrangement Studies*. He serves on the editorial board of *The George and Ira Gershwin Critical Edition* and *Open Access Musicology*, and is Digital and Multimedia Editor for the *Journal of the American Musicological Society*.

MARK CLAGUE, PhD, a specialist in the music of the United States, serves as Editor in Chief of *The George and Ira Gershwin Critical Edition* and founding director of the University of Michigan’s Gershwin Initiative. His editions of George Gershwin’s *An American in Paris* (standard and unabridged versions) were premiered by the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Louis Langrée, and their subsequent recording was nominated for a 2019 Grammy Award. In 2022, his book *O Say Can You Hear?: A Cultural Biography of “The Star-Spangled Banner”* was featured in *The New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *Washington Post*. He serves as Professor of Music at the University of Michigan School of Music, Theatre & Dance and as Interim Executive Director of the University of Michigan Arts Initiative.

KEVIN COLE has performed with over 100 orchestras worldwide, including sold-out performances with the Los Angeles Philharmonic at the Hollywood Bowl, the BBC Concert Orchestra at Royal Albert Hall, and the National Symphony at the Kennedy Center and Carnegie Hall. An award-winning musical director, arranger, composer, vocalist, archivist, and producer, he garnered the praises of some of America’s greatest songwriters: Irving Berlin, Harold Arlen, E. Y. Harburg, Hugh Martin, Burton Lane, Marvin Hamlisch, Stephen Sondheim, and members of the Jerome Kern and Gershwin families. His discography includes *You Are Tomorrow* (unpublished songs of Harold Arlen and Martin Charnin with Grammy Award-winning vocalist Sylvia McNair), the Gershwins’ *Oh, Kay!* (Gramophone Record of the Year with Grammy Award-winning vocalist Dawn Upshaw), and first recordings of George Gershwin’s *Concerto in F*, the symphonic version of *Rhapsody in Blue* (ed. Jessica Getman), and *Second Rhapsody* (ed. James Wierzbicki) using the Gershwin Initiative critical editions with David Alan Miller and the National Orchestra Institute for the Naxos label.

TZU-YIN HUANG began playing the piano at age four in Taiwan. After many years of study, she came to the United States, where she received her master’s and doctoral degrees from the University of Michigan. She has won many awards, including First Prize and Orchestra Prize at the 12th Hastings International Piano Competition in East Sussex, England. Ms. Huang believes that artists have a responsibility to bring music and inspiration to others; she particularly enjoys the connections she is able to make through community outreach in schools and retirement homes. She truly loves performing as nothing in the world makes her happier. In all her studies, she has learned that the most important thing is to play music from the heart. It is only this way that allows music to touch people’s souls.

JACOB KERZNER serves as the Associate Editor for *The George and Ira Gershwin Critical Edition* and Staff Pianist for the SMTD Department of Musical Theater. He holds an MA in Musical Theatre (Music Directing) from the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland in Glasgow, culminating in a season of shows at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, and has worked on the development teams for the Tony Award-winning productions of Daniel Fish’s *Oklahoma!* and *Hadestown*. Recent projects include *Tribute: Simon & Garfunkel* (The Encore), *The Secret Garden*

(Berkshire Theater Group), *La bohème* (Berkshire Opera Festival, University of Memphis), and *The Falling and the Rising* (Opera Memphis). For more information, visit www.jacobkerzner.com.

ANDREW S. KOHLER, PhD, has been with *The George and Ira Gershwin Critical Edition* since 2015 and became the Alfred and Jane Wolin Managing Editor in 2020. Hailing from the Pacific Northwest, he holds both a doctorate in historical musicology and Master of Science in Information from the University of Michigan, where he currently teaches bibliography for the musicology department. His dissertation, “*Grey C, Acceptable*”: *Carl Orff’s Professional and Artistic Responses to the Third Reich* (2015), focuses on art under totalitarianism, and he has a published chapter on the music of *Twin Peaks*. He is a tenor with the UMS Choral Union, has studied piano, and has had his compositions performed at U-M.

JAYCE OGREN has established himself as one of the most innovative and versatile conductors of his generation. From symphonic concerts to community service programs to operatic premieres, he is a leader in breaking down barriers between audiences and great music. Mr. Ogren is Music Director of the Monterey Symphony in Carmel-by-the-Sea, CA, and an Assistant Professor of Music at the University of Michigan, where he conducts the Philharmonia Orchestra, Contemporary Directions Ensemble, and the Michigan Youth Symphony Orchestra. A devoted educator, he has worked with students at the Bowdoin International Music Festival, Cleveland Institute of Music, the Juilliard School, Music Academy of the West, Princeton University, and Verbier Festival. Mr. Ogren began his career as Assistant Conductor of the Cleveland Orchestra, an appointment he held from 2006 to 2009. In the years since, he has conducted many of the world’s most prominent orchestras, including the BBC Symphony, Boston Symphony, Ensemble Intercontemporain, Hong Kong Philharmonic, Los Angeles Philharmonic, New York Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony, and Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra. Among the major projects Mr. Ogren has led are the world premieres of David Lang’s *symphony for a broken orchestra* at Philadelphia’s 23rd Street Armory and Jack Perla’s *Shalimar the Clown* at Opera Theatre of St. Louis; the New York premiere of Leonard Bernstein’s *A Quiet Place* at Lincoln Center; and the U.S. and Scandinavian premieres of Rufus Wainwright’s *Prima Donna*. Jayce Ogren holds degrees from St. Olaf College, New England Conservatory, and the Royal College of Music in Stockholm, where he studied as a Fulbright Scholar with Alan Gilbert and Jorma Panula.

LOGAN SKELTON is a pianist, teacher, composer, and arranger whose work has received international critical acclaim. Skelton concertizes widely in the United States, Europe, and Asia, and has been featured on many public radio and television stations, as well as on radio in China and national television in Romania. He has recorded numerous discs for Centaur, Albany, Crystal, Blue Griffin, Supertrain, and Naxos Records. He has been repeatedly honored by the University of Michigan, including the Arthur F. Thurnau named professorship, among the highest honors given to faculty members at the university. Skelton’s former students hold positions in music schools and conservatories throughout the world. He has served on the faculties of Manhattan School of Music, Missouri State University, and the University of Michigan.

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Your donation makes events like today's concert possible, allowing us to bring the music of George and Ira Gershwin to students, scholars, performers, and audiences worldwide.



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Gershwin Initiative Student Assistants: Some 39 University of Michigan students have contributed to the work of the Gershwin Initiative since its founding in 2013. Current editorial assistants include AJ Banta, Olivia Davis, Emily Graham, Clara Griffin, Lisa Keeney, Caleb Middleton, and Brandon Scott Rumsey. Alumni Evan Ware and Rotem Weinberg especially contributed to the edition of *Rhapsody in Blue*.

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Roshanne Etezady, Artistic Advisor

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Camille McLean

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