

Porgy and Bess

1986

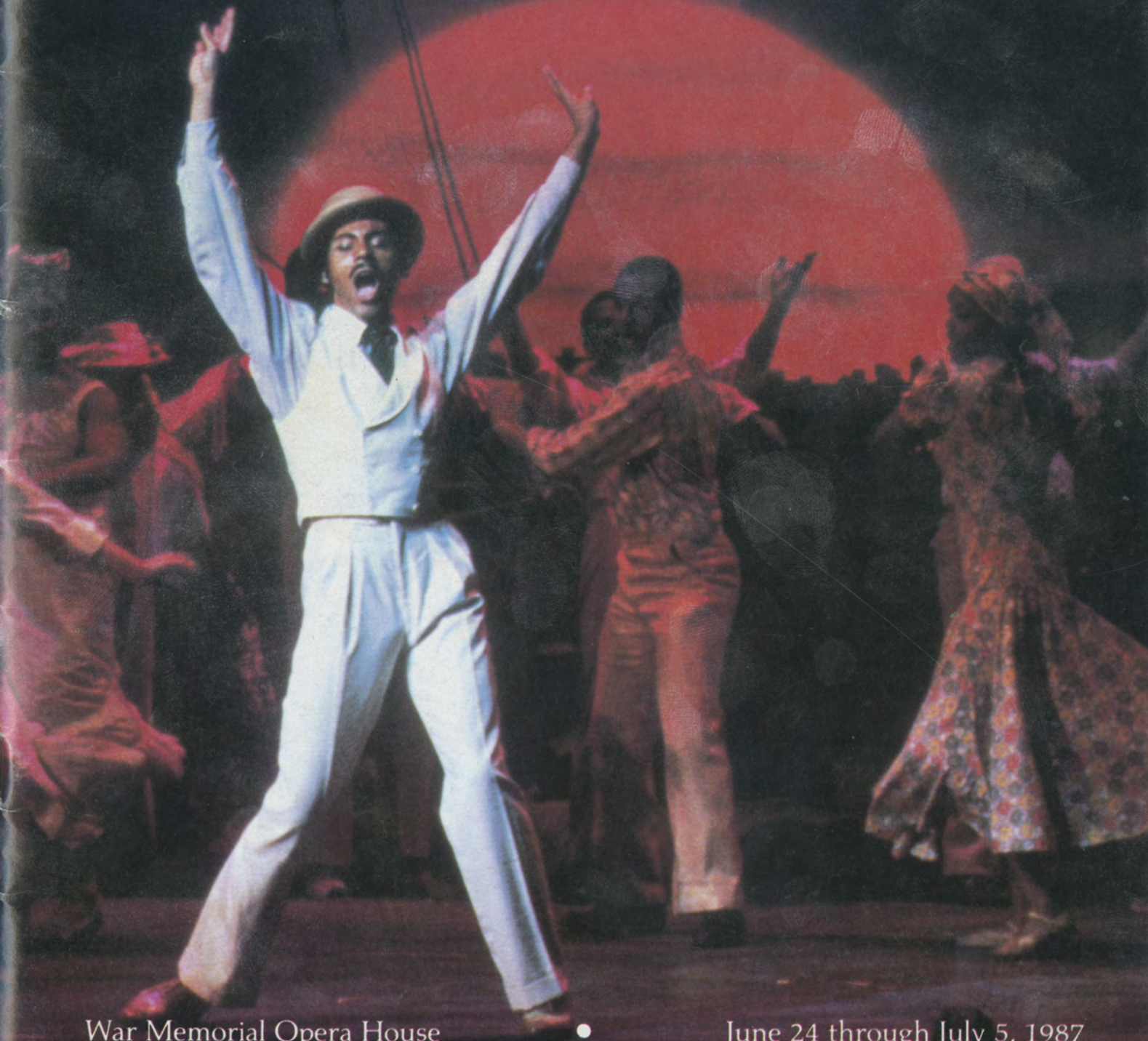
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The Musical Adventure of Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*

By WILLIAM HUCK

Henrietta Davis as Bess and Gregg Baker as Crown in Porgy and Bess.



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Serena (Patricia Miller) and friends during the "Oh, Doctor Jesus" segment of Act II.

When George Gershwin died in 1937 at the miserably premature age of 38, just two years after the premiere of his masterpiece, *Porgy and Bess*, all America mourned. Yet few could measure the composer's importance more precisely than Arnold Schoenberg. At the time of Gershwin's death, the dean of 20th-century music was moved to say "I grieve over the deplorable loss to music, for there is no doubt that he was a great composer."

Writing a year later and in a more restrained mood, Schoenberg cut through the rigmarole surrounding Gershwin's reputation: "Many musicians do not

consider George Gershwin a serious composer. But they should understand that, serious or not, he was a composer—that is, a man who lived in music and expressed everything . . . by means of music, because it was his native language." Schoenberg was choosing his words carefully, but nevertheless he concluded with a sturdy affirmation of his colleague's originality: "I know he was an artist and a composer; he expressed musical ideas; and they were new—as was the way in which he expressed."

Gershwin thus earned the respect of his severe judge not just because he was a natural—an apple tree was Schoenberg's

image, which produced its fruit oblivious to the world's censure—but because he was willing and able to think through the building blocks of music to create something all his own. Gershwin's music, Schoenberg understood, derived its power from the melding together of melody, harmony and rhythm.

William Huck is a San Francisco-based music critic and opera librettist. His writing appears in the Sentinel, Opera Quarterly and the Los Angeles Times. He is editor and program annotator for San Francisco Ballet magazine.

Of the three, melody is the one most obviously within Gershwin's power. He could improvise a good tune on the piano seemingly at whim. Many a 19th-century pianist-composer had this gift, yet their works have faded without a trace. What makes Gershwin's music live so vividly today, and what will ensure its future, is that it uses a quick rhythmic sense and deep harmonic awareness to create the adventure implicit in those melodies.

Yet the very fecundity of Gershwin's talent was also his most cunning enemy. Like Schubert, Gershwin found it easier to invent a new melody than learn how to vary and develop the one he had. The long-range planning that is an essential feature of the European symphonic tradition eluded him for most of his life. He never fully mastered it, but by the time he sat down to write his full-length opera, *Porgy and Bess*, he had recognized this problem and begun to face it squarely. He studied anew with the finest teachers he

could find: Henry Cowell and Joseph Schillinger.

In October of 1935, soon after the opera's premiere, Gershwin clarified his intentions and methods in *Porgy and Bess* in an article he wrote for *The New York Times*. There, the composer explained that "I have written my music to be an integral part of the story. It is true that I have written songs for *Porgy and Bess*. I am not ashamed of writing songs at any time so long as they are good songs. In *Porgy and Bess* I realized I was writing an opera . . . But songs are entirely within the operatic tradition . . .

"Of course, the songs in *Porgy and Bess* are only a part of the whole. The recitative I have tried to make as close to the Negro inflection in speech as possible, and I believe my song-writing apprenticeship has served invaluable in this respect, because the song writers of America have the best conception of how to set words to music so that the music gives added

expression to the words. I have used sustained symphonic music to unify entire scenes, and I prepared myself for the task by further study in counterpoint and modern harmony."

Within this scheme, Gershwin naturally began composing *Porgy* by turning to those songs, and once he had launched the project with the incandescent "Summertime," he must have known that he was on his way to greatness. Furthermore, the composer was too modest when he noted that songs are "entirely within the operatic tradition." They are more than that: they are the essence of many of the works we cherish most in the opera house.

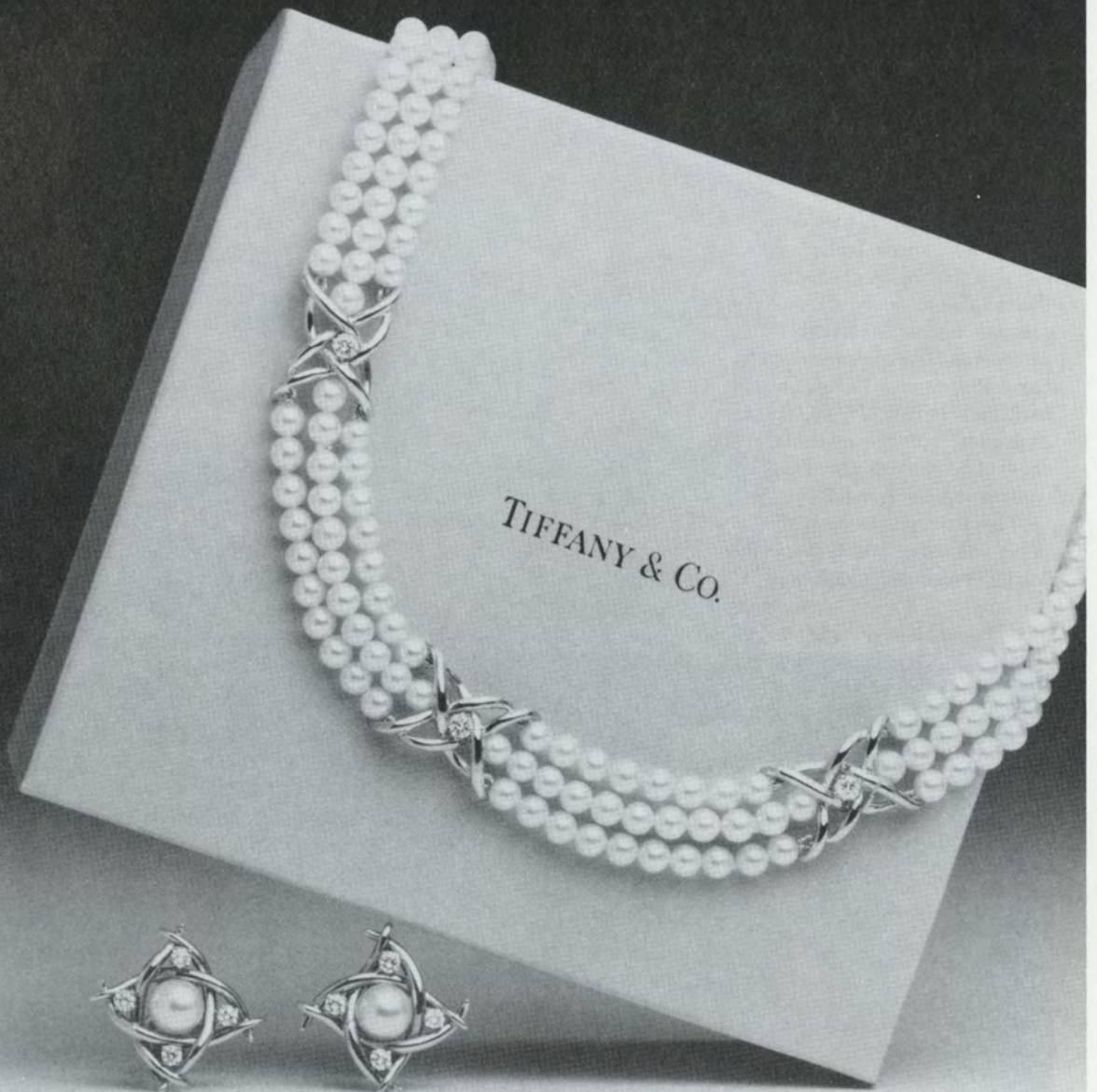
Porgy and Bess, it must be remembered, is the work of a young composer and its basic methods are most profitably compared to those used by the other great composers when they, too, were still beginners. Verdi, for example, had sixteen operas to his credit when he built *Il Trovatore* principally out of songs of surpassing power, and Wagner had four when he did the same in *Tannhäuser*. Both composers, like Gershwin almost a century later, used solo numbers to do more than just add zest to their scores; they used them to portray character. How aptly is Azucena's Gypsy bravura defined by "Stride la vampa," for example, or Leonora's aristocratic melancholy by "D'amor sull'ali rosee"! *Tannhäuser's* sensual passion is distilled in his hymn to Venus, while all of Elisabeth's innocence is there in her prayer! For Gershwin it would be the same.

The central character in Gershwin's opera is Porgy. His defining song is the irrepressible "I got plenty o' nuttin'," which shows that the cripple who longs for the prettiest girl on the block is rich in his own rhythmic vitality. Porgy's beyond self-pity, and, despite his handicap, ready for a good time. His tune is in Gershwin's best Broadway style, but its power is greater than its origins.

When the composer was searching for his original Porgy, Olin Downes, music critic for *The New York Times*, sent him a baritone named Todd Duncan, who was not only a classically-trained opera singer but a professor of music at Howard

George Gershwin in 1936, as he was completing a portrait of his friend Arnold Schoenberg.





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University. For his audition, Duncan performed some Italian recital songs Gershwin had never heard but was nevertheless able to catch quickly by ear and so provide the baritone with fluent accompaniments. The composer's natural musicianship impressed Duncan, just as the baritone's beautiful voice impressed the composer, but before the singer would agree to take on the assignment, he wanted to hear some of Porgy's music.

Gershwin was up to the challenge. "This will make you famous all over the world," he chuckled and began playing "I

got plenty o' nuttin'." At first, shock ran through Duncan. "A banjo song," he thought in despair, but as he listened, he saw the genius in it and instantly took the job. Years later, Duncan would ask, "How did that wonderful man know," for by then Duncan had indeed sung Porgy's ballad throughout the world and it had indeed made him famous.

The heroic power of Porgy's imagination is best seen in his leading of the love-duet, "Bess, you is my woman now." One can hear in the magnificent harmonic pull of this melody the essence of Porgy's

appeal. The composer himself knew the resonance of this musical portrait of his hero, for when the gangster Crown chides Porgy about not being man enough to go out into the storm to save a drowning man, the orchestra poignantly recalls the cripple's love song. Immediately the audience knows who the "real" man of the two is.

If anyone doubts the classical basis and power of Gershwin's art, this duet should settle the issue once and for all. As Peter Yates noted in his seminal study, *Twentieth Century Music*, Gershwin is not the only composer to have conceived of this melody. Arnold Schoenberg himself had used it, to a vastly different effect, but still note for note the same, thirty years before, in the slow section of his First String Quartet. It is highly improbable that Gershwin knew this source; nor is the point that Gershwin was a clever student. Rather, the coincidence plainly says that the American songwriter was a master in his own right, capable of molding a melody with skill and inspiration equal to that of the preeminent Austrian composer of this century. Is it any wonder that Gershwin won the older man's respect?

Porgy's counterparts in the opera are the two other men involved with Bess: the brutal Crown and the cracker-jack Sportin' Life, the opera's bass and tenor, respectively. Musically, Crown is a heavy-handed villain, full of leaden inevitability in his rhythms and tight-fisted traditions in his harmonies. Furthermore, the Tin Pan Alley number, "A redheaded woman makes a choo-choo jump its tracks," with which Gershwin tries to lighten his portrait of the arrogant stevedore, seems to me one of the composer's miscalculations.

On the other hand, Sportin' Life is always alive with a quick wit and a snappy tune. He is the tempter in the drama, and Gershwin understood instinctively that if the dope peddler was to be effective, he had to be likeable as well as sinister. Sportin' Life's defining song is his nose-thumbing at the Bible, "It ain't necessarily so." This tour-de-force is captivating in the lightness of its meter and the seem-

Todd Duncan as Porgy and Anne Brown as Bess in the opera's premiere production.





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In 1952, *Porgy and Bess* toured across four continents, and featured Leontyne Price as Bess and William Warfield as Porgy.

ingly effortless attention it spends on Ira Gershwin's lyrics. However, since the composer treated this music to a pattern of block repetitions that he had learned from popular song, it wearies some listeners and makes them point to it as a prime example of the primitiveness of Gershwin's compositional technique.

Such impatient critics are partially correct. Gershwin's usual method in *Porgy and Bess* is to lay out his songs according to established popular patterns he had learned from the cabaret. Within a song, Gershwin rarely bothers to vary his melody, content to repeat the principal refrain almost exactly at least three times. And that's not all. When the composer wants to bring back a song from an earlier scene, as he does with "Summertime" and the work song, "It takes a long pull to get there," he often compounds his problems by blatantly indulging in the whole origi-

nal refrain once again. This sort of insistent repetition, however, was not a sign of desperation; it was an active decision on the composer's part. He believed in those patterns, believed that they would serve him best. Nor were they the only methods he would use to tie the whole opera together.

When Gershwin wants to play with his melodies for coherence's sake, he can be an adept developer. *Porgy's* third act, for example, is almost entirely an allusive tissue of symphonic references to the songs of the first two. In these passages, Gershwin proves unequivocally that he is not bound by a literal quotation. He can dip into an earlier melody and pull out a tiny hint or most telling factor. He can suggest an old tune indirectly or extend its statement intriguingly.

In this, Gershwin was hardly Richard Strauss' equal, to make a decidedly unfair comparison. Strauss was infinitely better educated and substantially more practiced at it, but the last act of *Porgy and Bess* shows that Gershwin had learned the essence of the German's secret, even if he had not yet learned all of Strauss' skill. However, the American never completely succumbed to the allure of Wagnerian allusions. It is characteristic of this son of Tin Pan Alley that he put a full-dress rendition of Sportin' Life's smash hit, "There's a boat dat's leavin' soon for New York," right in the center of his most symphonically textured scene.

In comparison to her men, the heroine is something of a musical cipher. Most of Bess' finest moments are prima-donna soprano turns designed to show off

John W. Bubbles, the original Sportin' Life, and Anne Brown, the first Bess, enact "There's a Boat . . ." for the camera.





George Gershwin and conductor Walter Damrosch during preparations for the premiere of the Concerto in F.

a gorgeous voice and a haughty temperament. Her mad scene, for example, luscious though it is, is too short for much more than bravura. Even her signature piece is not really hers, for Clara sings "Summertime" twice through before Bess can even get to it.

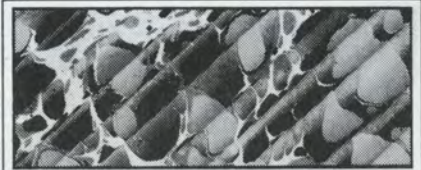
Nevertheless, through Bess, Gershwin deals with one of his most important issues. In that *New York Times* article, Gershwin made the point that his apprenticeship prepared him for writing operatic recitative because popular songs had taught him "how to set words to music so that the music gives added expression to the words." The composer especially wanted *Porgy and Bess* sung all the way through. He did not want the music to stop and the dialogue to begin as in a musical comedy. This insistence on the grand convention was more than just a point of pride for the still-emerging opera composer.

Since Gershwin planned to depend on his song technique for so many of his finest moments, he wanted the flexibility that sung recitatives could give him in creating a rich musical language. He also

knew that by periodically intensifying his recitative passages he could gain yet a third musical style that would add both variety to his score and intensity to his drama. In the great duet between Crown and Bess on Kittiwah Island, when the stevedore tries to win back Porgy's woman, Gershwin uses this third style to create Bess' greatest moment. "Oh what you want wid Bess," she wails to Crown, against a strongly syncopated rhythm in the orchestra, and thus sets up a musical structure that is less formal than the song pattern but richer than bare recitative.

"It's like dis, Crown," Bess tells her antagonist, "It's the only woman Porgy ever had, an' I's thinkin' now, how it will be tonight when all these others gets 'em go back to Catfish Row. He'll be sittin' an' watchin' the big front gate, a-countin' 'em off, waitin' for Bess." It is in this speech that Bess proves her worth. When she comes to "tonight," her music blooms. There, with supple skill, Gershwin turns her sung recitative into melody and the change sweeps us all into her secret world of sensual delight.

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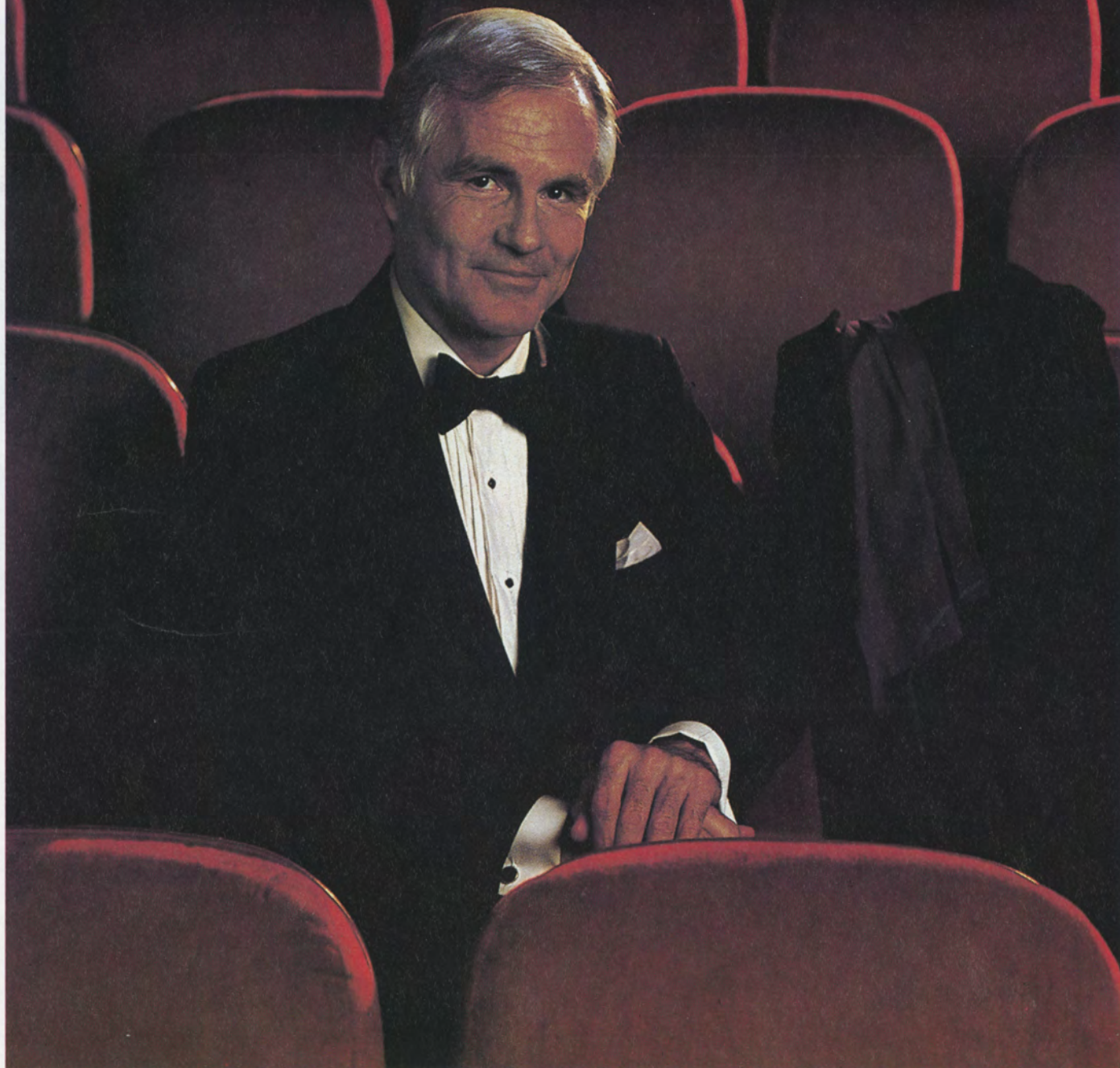
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until it reaches melody was the composer's way of establishing the particular strength and validity of a character. He does it most tellingly on the entrance of his hero. Porgy is being laughed at because the crowd sees that he is "soft on Bess." "No, brudder, Porgy ain't sof' on no woman . . . When Gawd make cripple, he mean him to be lonely. Night time, day time, he got to trabble dat lonesome road." Almost imperceptibly as Porgy unveils his thought, he moves from speech to song. Later Gershwin will underscore Porgy's special achievement here by using the melody for "Night time, day time" as one of the crucial orchestral underpinnings of Act III.

But the drama of Gershwin's opera is larger than just Crown and Porgy and Sportin' Life and Bess. All of Catfish Row is its subject and Gershwin lavished some of his finest music on the portrait of this harbor community tucked away in the deep South. After a brief prelude, full of colorful dissonance and jazzy energy, Gershwin immediately distills the languorous world of the Carolina coast in his glorious melody for "Summertime." This song is our first entry into the hopes and dreams of Catfish Row. It appears as a lullaby, sweet and comforting, but barely before it can die away, a turbulent crap game sets up a counter-image. When Crown kills one of the crapshooters in a petty dispute, there's no more hiding from the violence that shadows the lullaby's blooming ease.

It should come as no surprise that Gershwin could enter into this Southern black community so readily. From childhood, the musician had been thoroughly familiar with the musical world of the



George Gershwin on the cover of Time magazine in 1925.

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transplanted Northern black. Indeed, when the composer visited DuBose Heyward, the author of the book on which the opera was based, in Charleston, as a preparation for composing *Porgy*, the author/librettist saw that the trip "was more like a homecoming than an exploration" for the composer. "The quality in him that had produced the *Rhapsody in Blue* . . . found its counterpart in the impulse behind the music and bodily rhythms of the simple Negro peasant of

the South," Heyward observed.

One night the two white men went to a community prayer meeting. As they approached the dilapidated cabin, Gershwin stopped and held his companion by the arm, while they listened to what was going on inside. "Perhaps a dozen voices [were] raised in loud rhythmic prayer," Heyward later remembered. "The odd thing about it was that, while each had started at a different time, upon a different theme, they formed a clearly defined rhythmic pattern . . . almost terrifying in its primitive intensity."

On another occasion, Gershwin himself joined in the singing. As Heyward tells the story, "the Gullah Negro prides

himself on what he calls 'shouting.' This involves a complicated rhythmic pattern beaten out by feet and hands as an accompaniment to the spirituals . . . I shall never forget the night when, at a Negro meeting on a remote sea island, George started 'shouting' with them. And eventually to their huge delight stole the show from their champion 'shouter.' I think he [was] probably the only white man in America who could have done that."

The second act of *Porgy* is Gershwin's tribute to those community meetings with their shouting music. Indeed, the shouting passages give this act not only its particularly Southern flavor, but its awesome cumulative power. The act

begins traditionally enough with the work song, "It takes a long pull to get there." It continues with some of Gershwin's finest numbers, Porgy's "Oh I got plenty o' nuttin'," and his "Buzard Song" and then even the tender duet "Bess, you is my woman now." When the scene shifts to Kittiwah Island for the lodge picnic, drums with their hard-driven rhythms push the drama away from the lovers and towards the black community as a whole.

When the ravaged Bess gets back to Catfish Row after her encounter with Crown, she collapses into a fitful coma. One of the religious women, Serena, comes to pray for her, in the first formal version of a "shout" that we hear. Serena's

"Summertime" in the current production of Porgy and Bess, with Rita McKinley as Clara.

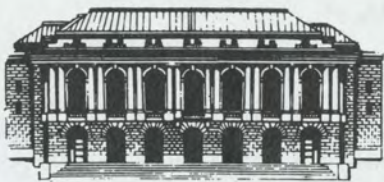


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A Complete *Porgy*

These performances of *Porgy and Bess* reveal the complete score of Gershwin's masterpiece. In 1976, the Sherwin M. Goldman and Houston Grand Opera production became the first one to put the full opera onto the stage as Gershwin imagined it.

Acceptance of this complete version was first obstructed by the composer himself. Gershwin had conceived of this work as an opera, a "combination of the drama and romance of *Carmen* and the beauty of *Meistersinger*, if you can imagine that," he said. But the composer also longed for a theatrical success for *Porgy*. Although the Metropolitan Opera was vying for its premiere, the composer did not want this opera to suffer the usual fate of a new work at the Met: three or four performances in its debut season, perhaps a couple more the next, and then oblivion.

Gershwin had two conditions that determined the venue of his new work. He wanted *Porgy* to reach a large audience of Americans and he felt strongly that it should be performed by a cast made up primarily of black singers. Thus, when contracts were signed for the opera's premiere, it was given to the Theatre Guild, which had first produced the play upon which the opera was built.

By locking himself into a theatrical format, the composer knew that he had to compress his opera to the dimensions of an ordinary Broadway show. Theater audiences were simply not prepared to sit through the almost *Rosenkavalier* length of the new work. In addition, theaters in which the work was to be seen did not have orchestra pits sufficient to accommodate the composer's original score. Nor was the Theatre Guild prepared to spend the money on all the scenery that Gershwin had asked for. The opening scene thus was taken out of Jasbo Brown's night club, because this would have meant

an additional set—this change has never been reversed, for the dramatic tension of placing the first scene directly in Catfish Row was immediately recognized.

Nevertheless, much damage was done. Forty-five minutes of music were cut even before opening night. Giant slices were taken out of that opening scene—the sinuous dance and chant of the townsfolk that precedes "Summertime," for example, was gone. Maria's aria, "Oh, Doctor Jesus," and the climactic sextet at the beginning of the Storm Scene disappeared from Act II, while the final trio in Act III was drastically cut back. The worst blow fell on the recitatives, over which the composer had lavished some of his finest talents; their change to spoken dialogue unbalanced the work's carefully planned musical structure.

After the Boston opening, Gershwin saw that by running *Porgy* like a stage play, with six evening performances and two matinees a week, he was forcing his hero beyond his means. Therefore, *Porgy's* "Buz-zard Song" and more of his music from Act III had to go. "If we don't," the composer explained, "we won't have a *Porgy* by the time we reach New York. No one can sing that much."

It was this pared-down version that the drama critics of 1935 enthusiastically applauded and the music critics haughtily dismissed. It was also this version that held the stage, sometimes with even further disfiguring cuts, for more than 40 years. Part of the vision that has made the Houston Grand Opera production such a resounding success involved the restoration of Gershwin's opera to its true dimensions, worthy to stand with *Carmen* and *Meistersinger* on the Opera House stage.

—W.H.

shout is almost a wailing cry, punctuated by the rest of the women. Its primitive power has lost nothing in its translation to opera. As Serena leaves to let Bess return to consciousness, Gershwin lightens his texture and creates an open-air market where a strawberry woman and crab man stroll in and out, shouting their street cries. This episode is at once one of the most natural in the score and one of the most sophisticated, for in it Gershwin not only faithfully recreates the inflections of the streethawkers but also uses their commercial shouts to mirror the spiritual ones that surround them. The device keeps the musical form of the shout foremost in the audience's mind, while at the same time varying the mood considerably.

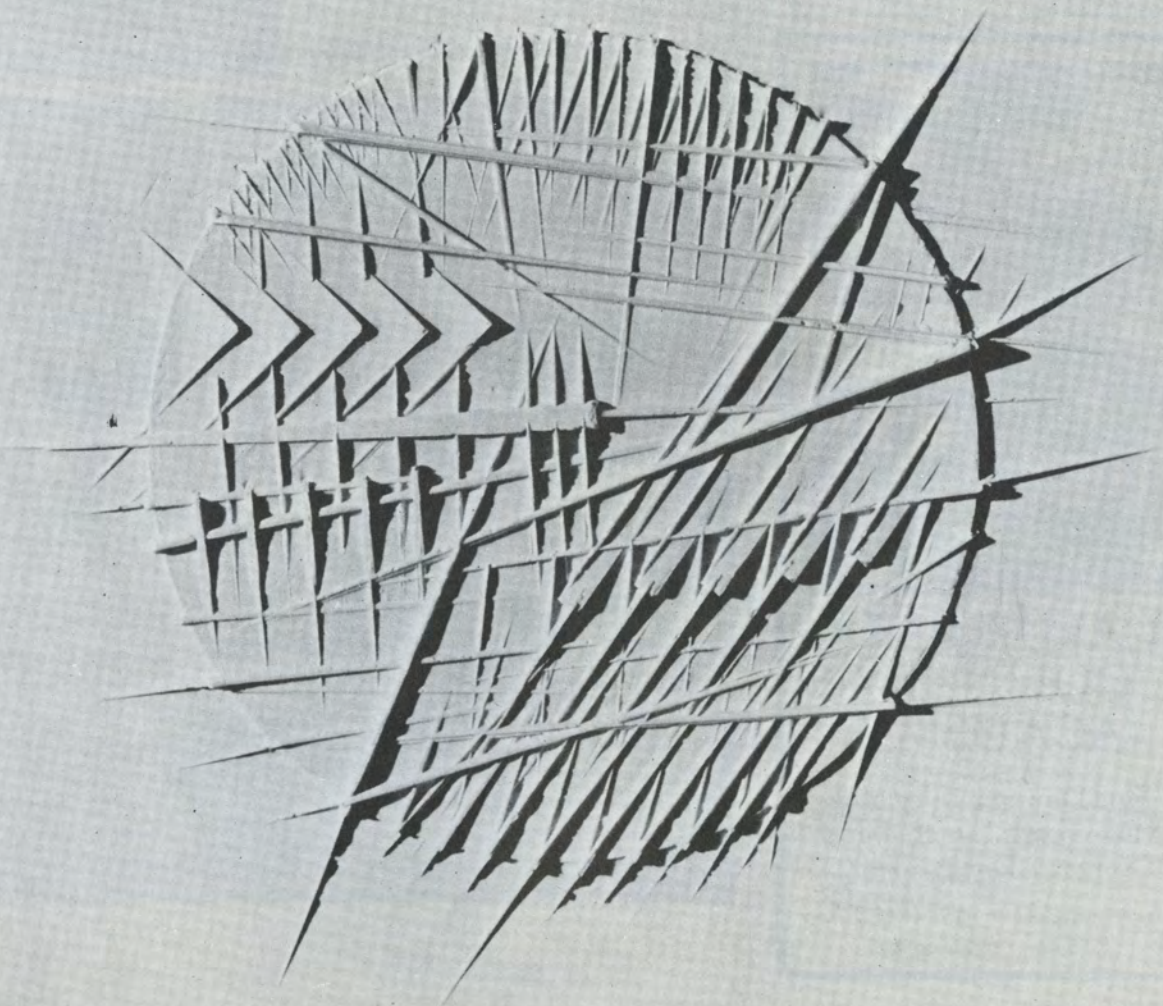
Suddenly the winds start up and the hurricane bells close down the market. As the storm rages, the scene shifts into Serena's room where the community gathers to pray. Here the composer moves to the heart of his opera as he stands poised for his most dazzling display. Two sopranos, a tenor, alto and two basses raise up their voices to combine six prayers, each with its own melody and sharply differentiated rhythm, into a haunting evocation of belief in the face of terror. It is all just as Heyward described it, but different, because this is Gershwin's own prayer meeting.

Though *Porgy and Bess* is saturated with folk music, not a note of it is copied from life. Gershwin learned the underlying principles of the music he heard so that he could write his own. In this way, certainly, he was a most serious composer.

The prayer meeting in Serena's room is not just Gershwin's most dextrous piece of counterpoint, it is the emotional center of his drama, for, as Gershwin explained, "*Porgy and Bess* is a folk tale. Its people naturally would sing folk music. When I first began on the music, I decided against the use of original folk material because I wanted the music to be all of one piece. Therefore I wrote my own spirituals and folk songs. But they are still folk music—and therefore, being in the operatic form, *Porgy and Bess* becomes a folk opera." ■

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(L. to r.) George Gershwin, DuBose Heyward and Ira Gershwin in 1935.



Porgy and Bess: Meet The Authors

By NINA BECKWITH

"Whenever he entered a room he captured it instantly and completely ... he had an irresistible, infectious vitality, an overwhelming personal magnetism."

Quite a tribute from a sister-in-law, and an impression shared by all who knew George Gershwin during his too-short, immensely creative life. All the rest of us know him too, for as his fellow songwriter Harold Arlen said, "Anyone who knows George's work knows George. The humor, the satire, the playfulness of most of his melodic phrases were the natural expression of the man."

Music gushed from Gershwin in an unquenchable torrent. He was unique among American composers up to his time (and who can think of anyone since except Bernstein) in attaining a double career: popular songwriter and "serious" composer.

Gershwin was also a remarkable pianist. Conductor Serge Koussevitzky observed that "the sweeping brilliance, virtuosity and rhythmic precision of his playing were incredible; his perfect poise and ease beyond belief; his dynamic influence on the orchestra and on the audience electrifying."

George was 12 when a secondhand upright piano was hoisted through the front window of the Gershwin home on Manhattan's Lower East Side. Born in

Brooklyn on September 26, 1898, he was the second child of Morris and Rose Bruskin Gershwin who had emigrated separately from Russia in the early 1890s. His brother Ira was two years older and there were to be two more Gershwin children, Arthur and Frances.

The piano was intended for Ira's lessons but the minute it arrived, George sat down and played a popular tune. Ira remembered being "particularly impressed by his left hand. I had no idea he could play and found out that despite his roller skating, kid parties, and street games, he had found time to experiment on a player piano at the home of a friend." The kid had also been sitting on sidewalks in Harlem, listening to jazz, blues, rags, and spirituals.

George began to study, first with neighborhood teachers and from 1912 on with Charles Hambitzer, a gifted pianist and composer who introduced the boy to Chopin, Liszt, and Debussy, encouraged him to attend concerts, and sent him to Edward Kilenyi to learn harmony and theory, but could not wean him away from enjoying popular music.

There really was a Tin Pan Alley, just off Fifth Avenue on 28th Street. George dropped out of high school and went to work there for music publishers Jerome H. Remick & Co. as a pianist and song-

plugger. He was 15 years old, the youngest piano pounder ever employed in Tin Pan Alley. His salary was \$15 a week.

George spent nearly three years in "pluggers purgatory," augmenting his income by cutting player-piano rolls. Among those who heard him play at Remick's was a young brother-sister dance team fresh from Nebraska, Fred and Adele Astaire, for whom he would later write Broadway musicals. The pop song racket began to get on his nerves, but fortunately there were new influences at work, namely Irving Berlin and Jerome Kern. "Kern was the first composer who made me conscious that most popular music was of inferior quality," George said later, "and that musical-comedy music was made of better material." One day George submitted a song of his own to Remick's. He was told "You're here as a pianist, not a writer." Soon after, he quit his job.

In 1916, his first song was published,

continued on p.35

Nina Beckwith is a free-lance writer specializing in arts. A former Time magazine overseas correspondent, she has been associated with the San Francisco Opera and the Festival of the Two Worlds in Spoleto, Italy.

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CAST

Porgy, a crippled beggar Terry Cook (June 24, 26, 28 mat., 30; July 2, 5 mat.)
 Mic Bell (June 25, 27, 28 eve.; July 1, 3, 5 eve.)

Bess Carmen Balthrop (June 25, 27, 28 eve.; July 1, 3, 5 eve.)
 Henrietta Davis (June 24, 26, 28 mat., 30; July 2, 5 mat.)

Crown, a stevedore Gregg Baker (June 24, 26, 28 mat., 30)
 William Bradley-Johnson (June 25, 27, 28 eve.; July 1, 2, 3, 5)

Serena, Robbins's wife Priscilla Baskerville (July 1, 3, 5 eve.)
 Patricia Miller (June 24, 26, 28 mat., 30; July 2, 5 mat.)
 Theresa Hamm (June 25, 27, 28 eve.)

Clara, Jake's wife Rita McKinley

Maria, keeper of the cook-shop Marjorie Wharton

Jake, a fisherman Jubilant Sykes

Sportin' Life, a dope peddler Larry Marshall (June 24, 26, 28 mat., 30; July 2, 5 mat.)
 Kriss St. Hill (June 25, 27, 28 eve.; July 1, 3, 5 eve.)

Mingo Ronn K. Smith
 Robbins Irwin Reese
 Peter, the honey man Mervin Wallace
 Frazier, a "lawyer" Russell Saint John
 Annie Geraldine McMillian
 Lily, Peter's wife Yvette Matthews
 Strawberry Woman Denise Woods
 Jim, a cotton picker Jerry Godfrey
 Undertaker Autris Paige
 Nelson Robert McDaniel
 Crab Man Cornelius White
 Detective Alfred J. Kiggins
 Policeman Ted Bouton
 Coroner Richert Easley
 Scipio Kiah Jackson
 Jasbo Brown Philip Eisenberg

Dancers

Karen Eubanks, Linda James, Reggie Leon, Ronn K. Smith

Residents of Catfish Row, fishermen, children, stevedores, etc.

The action takes place in Charleston, South Carolina, in the 1930s.

ACT I

Scene 1: Catfish Row, a summer evening
Scene 2: Serena's Room, the following night
Scene 3: Catfish Row, a month later
Scene 4: Kittiwah Island, late afternoon

INTERMISSION

ACT II

Scene 1: Catfish Row, before dawn, a week later
Scene 2: Serena's Room, dawn of the following day
Scene 3: Catfish Row, the next night
Scene 4: Catfish Row, the next afternoon
Scene 5: Catfish Row, a week later

UNDERSTUDIES

Understudies never substitute for listed players unless a specific announcement is made at the time of performance.

PORGY: Jimi Ray Malar, Mark Coles; BESS: Naomi Moody; CROWN: Jerry Godfrey; SERENA: Luvada Harrison-Davis; CLARA: Roberta Gumbel, Geraldine McMillian; MARIA: Linda E. Thompson; JAKE: Jimi Ray Malar, Autris Paige; SPORTIN' LIFE: Ronn K. Smith, Cornelius White; MINGO: Robert McDaniel, Cliff Hicklen; ROBBINS: Robert McDaniel; PETER: Dwight A. Ransom; FRAZIER: Autris Paige; ANNIE: Jan Forney-Davis, Linda E. Thompson; LILY: Jo Ann Harris Ingram; STRAWBERRY WOMAN: Jan Forney-Davis; JIM: Jerry Godfrey, Reggie Leon; UNDERTAKER: Russell Saint John; CRAB MAN: Dwight A. Ransom; DETECTIVE: Richert Easley.

ENSEMBLE

Timothy Allen	Reggie Leon
Wilbur Archie	Jimi Ray Malar
Earl L. Baker	Yvette Matthews
Roslyn Burrough	Robert McDaniel
Mark Coles	Geraldine McMillian
Karen Eubanks	Autris Paige
Jan Forney-Davis	Dwight A. Ransom
Jerry Godfrey	Natalie Reese
Roberta Gumbel	Irwin Reese
April A. Haines	Russell Saint John
Theresa Hamm	Ronn K. Smith
Luvada Harrison-Davis	Vanessa Stewart
Gurcell Henry	Linda E. Thompson
Cliff Hicklen	Mervin Wallace
Jo Ann Harris Ingram	Cornelius White
Linda James	Denise Woods

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<i>Production Stage Manager</i>	Mark Baltazar
<i>Stage Manager</i>	Pamela Young, Margaret Stenger
<i>Assistant Stage Manager</i>	Ted Bouton
<i>Dance Captain</i>	Karen Eubanks
<i>Master Carpenter</i>	Brian McGarty
<i>Assistant Carpenter</i>	Michael Holmes
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Porgy and Bess—opening scene.



ARTIST PROFILES

PORGY & BESS



CARMEN BALTHROP

A native of Washington, D.C., soprano **Carmen Balthrop** returns to San Francisco as Bess in *Porgy and Bess*. Since she began her professional singing career, she has appeared with some of the leading opera companies in the United States, including San Francisco Opera (Roggero in the 1979 *Tancredi*), Spring Opera Theater (Soprano in the *St. Matthew Passion*, 1973 and 1976), the Metropolitan Opera, Dallas Opera, the Baltimore Opera, Santa Fe Opera and Houston Grand Opera. She received critical acclaim for her performance in the title role of Scott Joplin's *Treemonisha*, produced by the Houston Grand Opera in Houston and then performed at the Kennedy Center and on Broadway. She has appeared as recitalist throughout North America, Europe and Asia, and has sung with the symphony orchestras of San Francisco, Boston, Detroit, St. Louis and Pittsburgh. Miss Balthrop has recorded and filmed the role of Poppea in Monteverdi's *L'Incoronazione di Poppea*, and recently sang the role with the Canadian Opera Company and the Santa Fe Opera. She is currently a Professor of Voice at the University of Maryland.

Soprano **Henrietta Davis**, the daughter of a San Francisco clergyman, sings Bess in *Porgy and Bess*. She sang the roles of Bess and Clara during the 1978 European and American tour of this production, and again appeared as Bess for the Broadway revival in 1983. She was heard in the title



HENRIETTA DAVIS

role of Oscar Hammerstein's *Carmen Jones* with Oakland Opera and, with San Francisco Opera's Spring Opera Theater and Brown Bag Opera, performed in *Death in Venice*, *Lost in the Stars*, *Così fan tutte*, *Carmen*, *The Marriage of Figaro* and *Don Giovanni*. In demand in churches throughout the United States as an interpreter of sacred music, Miss Davis is a frequent performer on the "Hour of Power" television program. She received her bachelor's degree in voice from San Francisco State University, where she is currently pursuing a master's degree in music.



PRISCILLA BASKERVILLE

Priscilla Baskerville is Serena in *Porgy and Bess*. A graduate of the Manhattan School of Music, the New York-born soprano made her Metropolitan Opera debut during the 1985-86 season as Bess in that company's new production of *Porgy and*

Bess and returned there for the role of Musetta in *La Bohème* in the 1986-87 season. Among highlights of her recent activities was her debut with the New York City Opera in *X, the Life and Times of Malcolm X*. Her repertoire includes the Countess in *The Marriage of Figaro* and Nedda in *Pagliacci*. A frequent guest artist with such groups as the Houston Symphony and the Springfield Symphony, she has also appeared in the film *The Cotton Club* and in the original Broadway cast of *Sophisticated Ladies*. She recently appeared at the White House in a televised performance featuring the music of George Gershwin.



THERESA HAMM

Appearing as Serena in Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* is soprano **Theresa Hamm**, a graduate of the Houston Grand Opera Studio. She was a 1984 national winner of the Metropolitan Opera Auditions and in 1985 was awarded the Grand Prix Lyrique by the government of Monte Carlo, where she recently performed with the Monte Carlo Symphony Orchestra. She has also appeared with the Atlanta Civic Opera, and has been guest soloist with the Louisiana Symphony, the Atlanta Symphony, and the Atlanta Pops Symphony Orchestra.

Mezzo-soprano **Patricia Miller**, Serena in *Porgy and Bess*, is a graduate of Boston University and the New England Conservatory of Music, with an additional degree from the Accademia di Santa Cecilia in



PATRICIA MILLER

Rome. She has appeared around the world in the title role of *Carmen*, and recently portrayed the role while on the European tour of Peter Brook's celebrated *The Tragedy of Carmen*. She has performed with San Francisco Opera and Spring Opera Theater, Charlotte Opera, Greater Miami Opera, Basel Opera and Lyons Opera, among others, and her roles have included Santuzza in *Cavalleria Rusticana*, Laura in *La Gioconda*, Dalila in *Samson et Dalila*, and Isabella in *The Italian Girl in Algiers*. Equally at home on the recital and concert stage, she has been guest soloist with the Boston Symphony, the RAI-Rome Symphony, L'Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, the American Symphony Orchestra and the Arkansas Symphony, with which she recently sang Bess in concert performances of *Porgy and Bess*.

**Porgy
and
Bess**



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✓ RITA MCKINLEY

Recent first-prize winner of the Leontyne Price Vocal Arts Competition, soprano **Rita McKinley** is Clara in *Porgy and Bess*. She is the winner of many vocal competitions and awards, including an Artist-in-Residence award from the Tri-Cities Artist Training Program, in addition to grants and fellowships from the Astral Foundation. She has appeared as the Countess in *The Marriage of Figaro*, the First Lady in *The Magic Flute* and, with Philadelphia's Opera Ebony, Violetta in *La Traviata*.



✓ MARJORIE WHARTON

A native of Philadelphia and a frequent performer in that city, **Marjorie Wharton** sings Maria in *Porgy and Bess*. She toured throughout Europe in the same opera with the Schatz Theater as Serena, a role she had sung previously in a concert version for Opera Ebony. She also sang the role of Queenie in Jerome Kern's *Showboat* with the same company on another tour of Europe. Her operatic performances in the United States include the roles of Frasquita in *Carmen*, Ludmilla in *The Bartered Bride*, Giovanna in *Rigoletto*,

Inez in *Il Trovatore*, Suzuki in *Madame Butterfly*, and the Mother in *Amahl and the Night Visitors*.



✓ MIC BELL

Bass-baritone **Mic Bell** sings Porgy in *Porgy and Bess*. A versatile actor and singer, he spent many years as a member of the popular singing group The Fifth Dimension, and made many appearances with them world-wide, and on television, radio and records. He performed the title role in the West Coast premiere of the monodrama *Artist with Conscience: Portrait of Paul Robeson*, which was subsequently taped and shown on cable television. His operatic credits include the title role in *Don Pasquale*, Colline in *La Bohème*, and Reverend Blicht in Carlisle Floyd's *Susannah*. He has also appeared as soloist in Orff's *Carmina Burana*, Handel's *Messiah*, Bach's *Mass in B Minor* and *Magnificat*, and in Requiem masses by Mozart, Verdi and Fauré.



TERRY COOK

Bass **Terry Cook**, a native of Texas, portrays Porgy in *Porgy and Bess*. He started his career as a member of the Lyric

Opera of Chicago School, and joined the Metropolitan Opera's Young Artists Development Program in 1982. In 1984, he sang Argante in the Met's new production of Handel's *Rinaldo*, and has subsequently appeared there in *Tannhäuser*, *Aida* (the King), *Samson et Dalila* (Abimélech), Handel's *Samson* (Harapha), *Simon Boccanegra* (Pietro), *Idomeneo* (Neptune) and *Otello* (Lodovico). An acclaimed concert artist, Cook has appeared as soloist with the Boston Symphony, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Houston Symphony and the Cleveland Orchestra, among others. He has sung with the Lyric Opera of Chicago, Portland Opera, Minnesota Opera, Seattle Opera, Santa Fe Opera, the Paris Opera (*Otello* and the Verdi Requiem) and at the Théâtre Musical de Paris/Châtelet. He was a featured artist on the PBS television series "In Performance at the White House."



GREGG BAKER

A native of Memphis, Tennessee, baritone **Gregg Baker** is Crown in *Porgy and Bess*, the role he has sung to acclaim at the Metropolitan Opera and at the Glyndebourne Festival in England. After graduating from Northwestern University (where he pursued his original career goal of professional football), he studied theater and dance at Chicago's Goodman Theatre. He then began his professional career on Broadway, appearing as the Lion in *The Wiz*, Hadji in *Timbuktu*, and Willie Harris in *Raisin*. He returns to the Metropolitan Opera in the 1986-87 season for a variety of roles, including his first Escamillo in *Carmen*. He is scheduled to sing Escamillo in a new production mounted in Tel-Aviv by the Israel Philharmonic, directed by Jean-Pierre Ponnelle and conducted by Zubin Mehta. Additional roles in Baker's operatic repertoire

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Gioacchino Rossini

Mentzer,* Neves; Power,* Nucci, Taddei, Ghiaurov
Zedda* ~ de Tomasi ~ Siercke ~ Arhelger
Sept. 11 (7:00pm), 16 (7:30pm), 20 (2:00pm), 24, 26, 29, Oct. 2

SALOME

Richard Strauss

Jones, Dernesch; King, Devlin, Bender*
Pritchard ~ Lehnhoff ~ Munn ~ Hoheisel
Sept. 12, 15, 18, 23 (7:30pm), 27 (2:00pm), Oct. 3

NEW PRODUCTION

THE MAGIC FLUTE

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Csavlek;* Serra, Parrish; Araiza, Malis, Langan, Stewart, Kelley, King
Laver ~ Cox ~ Hockney ~ Munn
Sept. 19, 22, 25, 30 (7:30pm), Oct. 6, 8, 11 (2:00pm)

PRODUCTION NEW TO SAN FRANCISCO

TOSCA

Giacomo Puccini

Stapp; Mauro, Fondary**/Pons†
Bradshaw ~ Farruggio ~ Pizzi ~ Munn
Oct. 4† (2:00pm), 7† 10,† 16,† 22,† (7:30pm), 25† (2:00pm)

NEW PRODUCTION

FIDELIO

Ludwig van Beethoven

Connell; Parrish; McCracken, Plishka, Welker,* Bender, Stewart
Pritchard ~ Hampe* ~ Gunter* ~ Arhelger
Oct. 13, 18 (2:00pm), 21, 24, 27, 30, Nov. 5 (7:30pm)

NEW PRODUCTION

LA TRAVIATA

Giuseppe Verdi

Miricioiu, Begg*; Araiza, Pons
Meltzer ~ Copley ~ Conklin ~ Walker* ~ Munn
Oct. 17, 20, 23, 28 (7:30pm), Nov. 1 (2:00pm), 4, 7 (1:00pm)

NABUCCO

Giuseppe Verdi

Dimitrova, Richards; Cappuccilli, Plishka, Winter
Arena ~ Freedman ~ Munn ~ Montresor
Oct. 31, Nov. 3, 7, 10, 13, 19 (7:30pm), 22 (2:00 pm)

PRODUCTION NEW TO SAN FRANCISCO

THE TALES OF HOFFMANN

Jacques Offenbach

Dahl; Gustafson, Johnson, Quittmeyer†/Bruno;† Domingo†/Lima,† Morris†/Krause,† Egerton, Howell
Plasson ~ Mansouri ~ Schneider-Siemssen ~ Munn
Nov. 11,† 15† (2:00pm), 18,† 21,† 25† (7:30pm), 28,† Dec. 8,† 11†

PRODUCTION NEW TO SAN FRANCISCO

ROMÉO ET JULIETTE

Charles Gounod

Swenson, Renée*; Lima, Dickson, Howell, Rouleau
Plasson ~ Uzan ~ Deiber ~ Gérard* ~ Munn
Nov. 14, 17, 20, 24, 29 (2:00pm), Dec. 2 (7:30pm), 4

THE QUEEN OF SPADES

Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky

Evstatieva, Crespin, Cowdrick; Ochman, Noble, Raftery
Tchakarov* ~ Coleman ~ O'Hearn ~ Munn ~ Arhelger ~ Sulich
Nov. 23, 27, Dec. 1, 5, 9 (7:30pm), 13 (2:00pm)

* San Francisco Opera debut

** American opera debut

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WILLIAM BRADLEY-JOHNSON

Born in South Bend, Indiana, baritone **William Bradley-Johnson** sings Crown in *Porgy and Bess*. He received his education at the Indiana University School of Music where he appeared as Prospero in the University's premiere of John Eaton's *The Tempest*. Other roles he has performed include the elder Germont in *La Traviata*, Marcello in *La Bohème*, Rangoni in *Boris Godunov*, and the title role in *Sweeney Todd*. He has sung the role of Crown in Houston and Seattle, and has also appeared with the New Jersey State Opera and at the Glyndebourne Festival.



LARRY MARSHALL

Larry Marshall, Sportin' Life in *Porgy and Bess*, received nominations for both the Tony and Drama Desk awards for his portrayal of the role in the 1976 Broadway revival of the opera. He has also appeared on Broadway in *Hair*, the musical version of *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, as Puck in the Lincoln Center production of *A Mid-*

summer Night's Dream, and as Lucifer in Arthur Miller's *Up From Paradise*. Marshall's film credits include *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Panic in Needle Park*, and most recently, *The Cotton Club*, in which he portrayed Cab Calloway. In addition to many off-Broadway credits, he has appeared as guest soloist with the Boston Symphony, the New York Philharmonic, and was a featured performer in Leonard Bernstein's *Mass*, both at the opening of the Kennedy Center and at the Metropolitan Opera.



KRISS ST. HILL

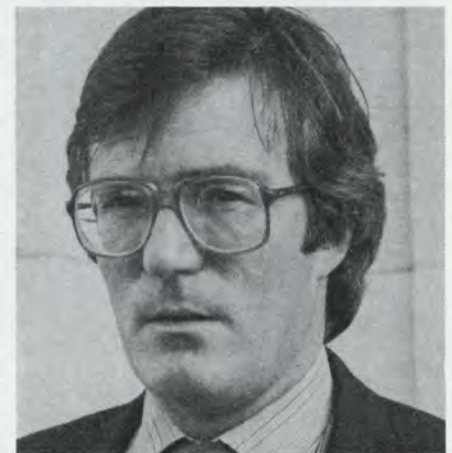
Baritone **Kriss St. Hill** sings Sportin' Life in *Porgy and Bess*. The Swedish singer and dancer made his stage debut in 1979 in the first non-English production of *A Chorus Line* in Stockholm and the following year joined the Swedish National Theater Center touring company for performances of *Godspell* and *West Side Story*. St. Hill's operatic roles include Escamillo in *Carmen*, Sancho Panza in Massenet's *Don Quichotte*, Belcore in *L'Elisir d'Amore* and Nick Shadow in *The Rake's Progress*. He has appeared in recital with artists such as Elisabeth Söderström, Nicolai Gedda, Kerstin Meyer, and Mattiwilda Dobbs and has recently made a recital tour of Sweden. Last year he made his film debut in the Swedish movie *Brother Mozart*. His recordings include a collection of Swedish folk songs and Negro spirituals as well as a collection of Christmas carols.

A native of Southern California, baritone **Jubilant Sykes** sings Jake in *Porgy and Bess*, the role in which he has toured throughout the United States and Europe. Roles in his operatic repertoire include Jazz in the Houston Grand Opera production of Marc Blitzstein's *Regina*, Figaro in *The*



JUBILANT SYKES

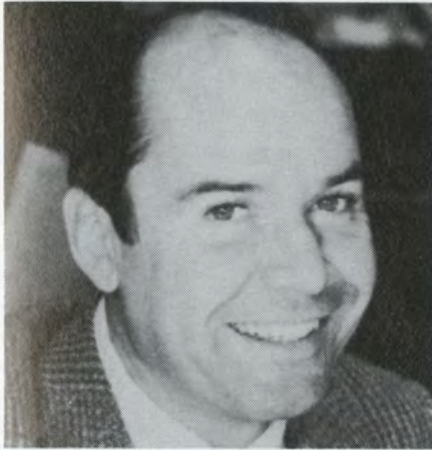
Marriage of Figaro, Papageno in *The Magic Flute*, Malatesta in *Don Pasquale*, and King Melchior in *Amahl and the Night Visitors*. He has also appeared as soloist with the Minnesota Orchestra and the Los Angeles Philharmonic. On television, he was a featured performer on "The Captain and Tennille" show, and performed at the White House in a Bicentennial tribute.



RICHARD BRADSHAW

English conductor **Richard Bradshaw** returns to the War Memorial podium for *Porgy and Bess*, a work he will also conduct for the second consecutive year at this summer's Glyndebourne Festival. He made his 1977 American conducting debut with San Francisco Opera, where he has since led productions of *Faust*, *The Marriage of Figaro*, *La Traviata*, *Madama Butterfly*, *Falstaff* and *Eugene Onegin*, as well as various works for Spring Opera Theater and the Opera Center Showcase. He has appeared with most of the major British orchestras; recent symphonic engagements include concerts with the Rotterdam Philharmonic, the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and

the Hong Kong Philharmonic. In 1985 he led the world premiere of Eaton's *The Tempest* for Santa Fe Opera and inaugurated the Lincoln Center Opera-in-Concert series with Verdi's *Giovanna d'Arco* with Margaret Price. Recent assignments include opening the Hong Kong Performance Center with a new production of *Don Giovanni*; *The Rake's Progress* for Hawaii Opera Theater; *Tosca* in Edmonton; and Verdi's *Otello* in Seattle.



JACK O'BRIEN

Jack O'Brien returns to San Francisco Opera as director of *Porgy and Bess*, having staged *The Magic Flute* here in 1975. Experienced as a writer of book and lyrics for musical theater, O'Brien is currently artistic director of the Old Globe Theatre in San Diego, where he has directed numerous shows. His opera credits include *Aida*, *Così fan tutte* and *Porgy and Bess* for Houston Grand Opera, *Tosca* for Santa Fe Opera, the Michigan Opera/Broadway revival of *The Most Happy Fella*, and *Street Scene* for New York City Opera. He received a Tony nomination for his direction of *Porgy and Bess*, which received the Tony Award for the most innovative revival of 1976. He has also directed numerous televised productions, as well as works for San Francisco's A.C.T. and the San Diego Symphony's staging of *The Soldier's Tale*.

Douglas W. Schmidt designed the sets for *Porgy and Bess* as seen at Radio City Music Hall in New York and subsequently on national tour. Acclaimed for his designs for many theatrical productions on and off-Broadway, as well as for numerous regional companies, Schmidt has designed several productions for San Francisco Opera, including the world premiere of



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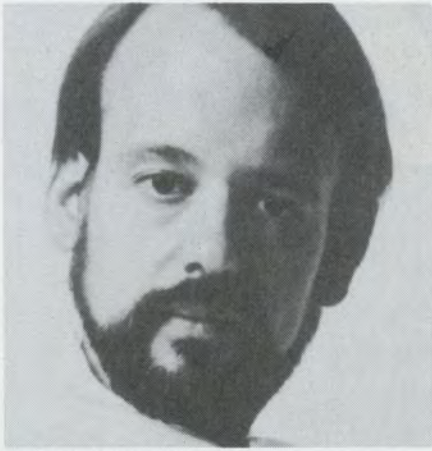
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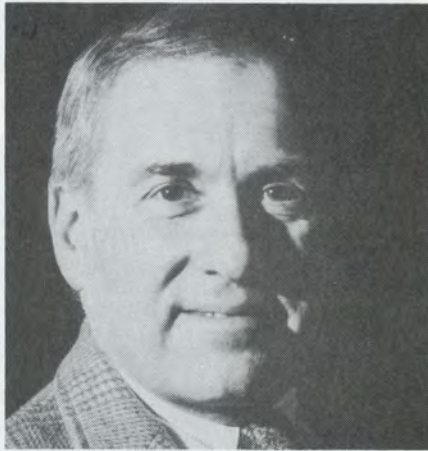
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DOUGLAS W. SCHMIDT

Imbrie's *Angle of Repose* (1976) and the nationally televised productions of *Samson et Dalila* (1980 and '83) and *Aida* (1981 and '84). His work has also been seen on a number of Public Television productions in the *Playhouse New York*, *Theatre in America* and *American Playhouse* series.



JOHN McLAIN

John McLain designed the lighting for *Porgy and Bess*, adding to a list of credits that includes three seasons with the Washington Opera, four seasons at the Spoleto Festival, Tom O'Horgan's production of Bernstein's *Mass* at the Kennedy Center, Ken Russell's staging of *The Italian Girl in Algiers* in Geneva and the opening production of *Falstaff* for the new opera house in Amsterdam. McLain has worked with every major regional theater in the country, and his various Broadway credits include *On Your Toes* with Natalia Makarova. He is also credited with such long-running spectacles as *Hello Hollywood*, *Hello* at the MGM Grand Hotel in Reno.



GEORGE FAISON

George Faison choreographed *Porgy and Bess*, for which he received a Tony Award nomination when the work appeared at New York's Radio City Music Hall. Formerly a principal dancer with the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre, he has created ballets for several leading dance companies, and since 1981 has worked on numerous major Broadway productions, including *The Wiz*, for which he received a Tony Award. Other awards have included the Drama Desk, Miami Critics Circle and Pied Piper awards. He is also a leader in staging concerts and music videos for such top performers as Natalie Cole, Gladys Knight & the Pips, Dionne Warwick, Stevie Wonder, and Earth, Wind & Fire.



NANCY POTTS

Five-time Tony Award nominee **Nancy Potts** designed the costumes for *Porgy and Bess*. Her work has been represented at all of America's major regional theater companies, and she has designed for the Alvin Ailey Dance Theatre, the Kansas City Opera, Houston Opera and Dallas Opera. Her first departure from classical theater was the history-making production of the rock musical *Hair*, for which she earned the *Theatre Yearbook* Best Costume Design Award, among others. Her credits now include more than 60 Broadway and off-Broadway productions, including *Children of a Lesser God*.

Porgy and Bess — Performance Schedule War Memorial Opera House, San Francisco

Wednesday, June 24 — 8 p.m.
Thursday, June 25 — 8 p.m.
Friday, June 26 — 8 p.m.
Saturday, June 27 — 8 p.m.
Sunday, June 28 — 2 p.m. and 8 p.m.
Tuesday, June 30 — 8 p.m.
Wednesday, July 1 — 8 p.m.
Thursday, July 2 — 8 p.m.
Friday, July 3 — 8 p.m.
Sunday, July 5 — 2 p.m. and 8 p.m.



George Gershwin's first place of employment, on Tin Pan Alley, as it looked around 1916.

by another house. He was working as a rehearsal pianist and occasional accompanist when two of his songs were sung by Vivienne Segal and heard by music publisher Max Dreyfus, head of Harms, Inc., who had discovered Jerome Kern a decade earlier and later added Vincent Youmans and Richard Rodgers to his stable. Dreyfus offered the 19-year-old Gershwin \$35 a week to do nothing but compose songs.

Within a year, George had written a revue and had begun interpolating his songs in other shows. His lyrics were mostly by Irving Caesar but he also started using lyrics by Arthur Francis, a name Ira Gershwin had concocted from those of his brother and sister. Their first

joint effort, in 1918, was called "The Real American Folk Song Is A Rag."

One evening at dinner with George, Irving Caesar came up with an idea for a song with an American, Stephen-Fostery flavor in the fashionable one-step rhythm. They went to George's home and in less than an hour had turned out "Swanee." At a party, Al Jolson heard George play it and interpolated it into his revue *Sinbad*. "Swanee" became one of the greatest hits of all time; the sheet music and Jolson's record sold millions. No other song George ever wrote was such a commercial success.

The same year, 1919, saw the opening of *La La Lucille*, George's first complete



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Broadway score. The popularity of "Swanee" brought him other show assignments, including the music for five consecutive *George White's Scandals*, 1920-1924. He continued to study with Kilenyi and took music courses at Columbia University. He also started to keep "Tune Books," jotting down ideas for songs and piano pieces.

For the *Scandals* of 1922, George and lyricist Buddy DeSylva wrote "I'll Build A Stairway to Paradise," pinpointed as the true beginning of the mature Gershwin style, and a short one-act "Negro" opera performed by white singers in blackface, called *135th Street*, quickly changed to *Blue Monday*, and as quickly yanked out of the show after opening night. (It would be ten years before George returned to Negro themes.) But Paul Whiteman, whose orchestra played in the pit, was impressed by the piece and its composer. Some of George's other *Scandals* music is now being rediscovered but one song from the 1924 edition has always been popular: "Somebody Loves Me."

After writing a revue in London, which flopped dismally, George returned to New York and made his first appearance on the concert stage as accompanist to Eva Gauthier. The next day's reviews made little of the fact that Schoenberg's "Song of the Dove" (From *Gurrelieder*) had received its American premiere, but raved about the "jazz" songs by Berlin, Kern, and Gershwin, and George's playing of them.

George had little time to bask in his triumph; as usual, he was busy with a new show. So busy that he forgot about a concert that Paul Whiteman was going to produce with new works by Deems Taylor, Victor Herbert, and George Gershwin, until he saw it announced in the paper a few weeks before the scheduled date.

"Finding in his notebooks a theme (the clarinet glissando) which he thought might make an appropriate opening for a more extended work than he had been accustomed to writing, he decided to chance it," his brother Ira wrote. And George recalled that "On the train (to Boston for the show tryout) with its steely rhythms, its rattledy-bang . . . I suddenly heard—and saw on paper—the complete construction from beginning to end."

It was Ira who contributed the title, *Rhapsody in Blue*.

On February 12, 1924, Whiteman's concert took place in Aeolian Hall. There were 23 numbers on the program; George Gershwin's was the 22nd. The capacity audience, which included Walter Damrosch, Jascha Heifetz, Rachmaninoff, Ernest Bloch, Mengelberg, Stokowski, and Fritz Kreisler, was getting bored and fidgety by the time George took his place at the piano. He had not had time to write some of the piano solos and improvised them during the performance.

That opening clarinet glissando electrified the audience; at the end, the composer was given an ovation. There was adverse criticism, as there was to be for all of his major works, but *Rhapsody* made George Gershwin rich and famous.

Typically, George was working on his last *Scandals*, so he did not perform in Whiteman's two repeat concerts of 1924 and soon took off for another London show. *Primrose* was such a success that for the first time George saw his full score published. Some of the *Primrose* lyrics were written by Ira who (as Arthur Francis) had finally made his own mark in the theater.

Ira and George were as dissimilar as siblings could be. Ira was square-headed and stocky, unflappably calm, rather shy and closed in his own world. (Years later *The New York Times* would report that "Ira Gershwin is probably the only man in Hollywood who underacts.") He was an omnivorous reader who had a lifelong distaste for physical activity—he refused even to drive a car—but when there was no escape, he was capable of great bursts of energy.

As a youth, Ira dabbled in light verse. He studied chemistry and calculus in college, though he much more enjoyed writing for the school paper with his old Lower East Side friend E.Y. "Yip" Harburg, who would also become a lyricist, notably for *Finian's Rainbow*. Ira took a number of odd jobs and kept jotting down ideas for verses or song lyrics. He always sought to rise above the June/moon clichés of Tin Pan Alley; his idols were W.S. Gilbert and P.G. Wodehouse.

George was trim and taller, with a high forehead and underslung jaw, a restless man and a natural athlete—he would try any sport and had a private gym in his New York penthouse—an exuberant partygoer, and an irrepressible performer who loved the spotlight. While Ira preferred to work in solitude, George



George and Ira Gershwin in 1935.

could and did compose surrounded by noisy friends and relatives. Different as they were, the brothers had deep mutual

love and respect, complementing each other in their work as two more similar natures might not have done.

From 1918 until 1924, "Arthur Francis" wrote songs with his brother and with other composers such as Vincent Youmans. In 1921, he had a real success with *Two Little Girls in Blue* and its two hits "Dolly" and "Oh Me! Oh My!" For a show called *Be Yourself* in 1924 Ira suitably dropped his pseudonym.

A year after *Rhapsody* appeared, Walter Damrosch commissioned George to compose a work for the New York Symphony Society. This was the *Concerto in F*. From this time on, George did his own orchestration (Ferde Grofé, composer of *Grand Canyon Suite*, had orchestrated *Rhapsody*) and he was also working on two new shows. "All three works had their premieres within a few days of each other," Ira recalled, "and in addition Whiteman revived *135th Street* at Carnegie Hall. With George playing six performances of the *Concerto* during that period, his energy was seemingly inexhaustible."

1924's *Lady Be Good*, starring the Astaires, was the first complete George and Ira Gershwin musical. As well as the title number "Fascinating Rhythm," the score included one of their most famous

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Fred and Adele Astaire around 1924, the time of the premiere of *Lady Be Good*.

songs, "The Man I Love." It was dropped from the show and from later ones, but it soon became a hit on its own.

The pattern of work for both George and Ira that developed in 1924—an important serious work by George and a successful musical comedy by both brothers—continued through the 1920s and into the '30s. In 1926, George completed five *Piano Preludes* and the brothers wrote *Oh, Kay!* for Gertrude Lawrence's American musical comedy debut. In it she introduced "Someone To Watch Over Me" and "Do, Do, Do."

During the last stages of rehearsals for *Oh, Kay!* George went home one night too keyed up to sleep. He picked up a best-selling novel, hoping it would relax him. On the contrary. At four a.m. he was writing to the author, DuBose Heyward, proposing that they collaborate on a musical version of *Porgy*.

George was moved not only by the plot but by the author's musical sensitivity in such passages as "The rhythm swelled, and the voices in the court and upper rooms took it up, until the deeply-rooted old walls seemed to rock and surge with the sweep of it."

Neither George nor Heyward knew then that Heyward's wife Dorothy was writing a play based on the novel. But by the time Heyward went north to visit George, the secret was out. George agreed to postpone the project until he made further musical studies, for what he

had in mind was an opera.

The play *Porgy* was produced to great acclaim in 1927. Meanwhile, George and Ira were writing a new show for the Astaires, *Funny Face*, which contained "S'Wonderful" and "My One And Only," and went on to do seven songs for their first Ziegfeld show, *Rosalie*, and the first version of *Strike Up The Band*, with a biting satiric book by George S. Kaufman. It folded in Philadelphia.

In the spring of 1928, during a European tour with Ira and Leonore Gershwin (who had married two years earlier) and with sister Frances, George worked on "a tone poem for orchestra." In December, *An American in Paris* was first performed by the New York Philharmonic under Damrosch.

Two and a half years later, *Strike Up The Band*, with a new book by Morrie Ryskind, and with George conducting in the pit, opened in New York. (George had made his conducting debut in 1929 at Lewisohn Stadium, when he was also soloist in *Rhapsody*.)

The last and greatest 1920s-style musical the Gershwins did was *Girl Crazy*, which opened in October of 1930 to rave reviews. No wonder. Ginger Rogers had a leading role and a new star was born, Ethel Merman, who belted out "I Got Rhythm" so the Central Park pigeons could hear it. Also in the score were "Embraceable You," "Sam and Delilah," and "Bidin' My Time." The pit

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George Gershwin at work around 1927.

band included—hard to believe—Benny Goodman, Jack Teagarden, Glenn Miller, Jimmy Dorsey, and Gene Krupa.

With this hit under their belts, the Gershwins headed for Hollywood to write their first movie, *Delicious*. All this time George was thinking about an opera and at one point he even had a tentative arrangement with the Metropolitan and its Maecenas, millionaire Otto Kahn, for a work based on *The Dybbuk*, though a Negro theme still attracted him.

"Nearly everybody comes back from California with a Western tan and a pocketful of moving-picture money," George said. "I decided to come back with both those things, and a serious composition." That work became his *Second Rhapsody*, given its premiere by Serge Koussevitzky and the Boston Symphony in January of 1932.

By the 1930s, the Depression had changed the mood of the country. *Strike Up The Band* had given the Gershwins a taste for political satire and they happily

came home from Hollywood to work on *Of Thee I Sing*, with book by both Kaufman and Ryskind, starring Victor Moore and William Gaxton.

Up to then, George had usually written the music first, to which Ira developed the words. *Of Thee I Sing*, however, required that the songs be integral parts of the plot so Ira began by sketching his lyrics and letting George devise musical ideas for them. In fact, they turned the play into a comic opera. Brooks Atkinson said it was "funnier than the government and not nearly so dangerous."

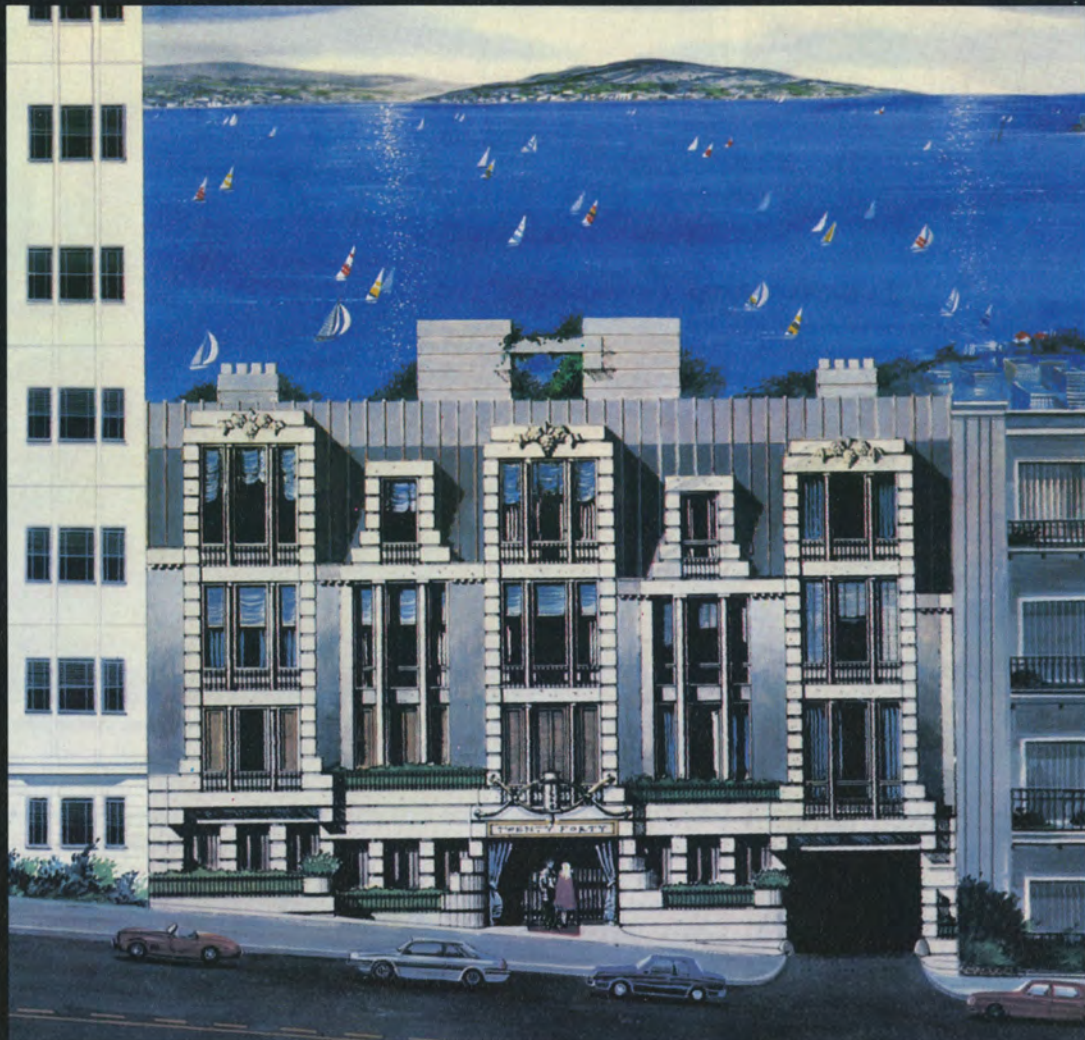
Ironic then that after overwhelming critical and audience acclaim and a run of 441 performances (the longest run of any Gershwin show), *Of Thee I Sing* was awarded the 1932 Pulitzer Prize for drama, there being no award for musical theater, and George's music was omitted from the published book.

The same team tried to repeat their success with *Let 'Em Eat Cake* in 1933. Though brilliantly witty, the show was a

These performances of *Porgy and Bess* coincide with the fiftieth anniversary of the composer's death. Although George Gershwin died on July 11, 1937, his genius lives on with unabated vigor: on the opera stage, in the concert hall, on the musical comedy stage, and (through records, radio and television) in practically every living room of the globe. *Porgy and Bess* celebrates the anniversary in a wonderful way, by bringing back to life the masterpiece of the American composer.

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A scene from the Heywards' 1926 play, *Porgy*: (L. to r.) Percy Verwayne as Sportin' Life, Frank Wilson as Porgy, and Evelyn Ellis as Bess.

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flop. It was to be the Gershwins' last Broadway musical.

Early in 1932, George had gone to Havana for a short holiday and was so intrigued by Cuban music and its percussion instruments that he began sketching a *Cuban Overture*, his last major orchestral work. In March, he resumed his correspondence with DuBose Heyward about setting *Porgy* to music but he did not actually begin the composing until January of 1934. In the interval, plans for a Jerome Kern/Oscar Hammerstein musical with Al Jolson as Porgy had fallen through. Some years earlier George had asked Kern "Do you think I am capable of grand opera? Because, you know, all I've got is a lot of talent and plenty of chutzpah."

From the outset, Heyward got along famously with George and later with Ira, too. Edwin DuBose Heyward was born into an aristocratic Charleston, South Carolina family in 1885. He left school early and worked on the waterfront. At

18, he was stricken with polio and during his recovery he began writing poetry at first and later novels and screenplays. He drew upon his waterfront experience in creating the teeming life of Catfish Row in *Porgy*, his first and most successful novel.

Heyward's treatment of black life was innovative for the time. He wrote not out of pity for an exploited people, nor with any desire to propagandize; rather, he wanted to dramatize a world he found fascinating and worthy of serious artistic expression. When he collaborated with the Gershwins, he was able to rethink the play of *Porgy* in terms of a libretto and lyrics. To finance the work, he wrote two outstanding Hollywood screenplays based on Eugene O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones* and Pearl Buck's *The Good Earth*.

It began as a long-distance collaboration. Heyward preferred to stay in South Carolina. Ira Gershwin soon came into the picture both as editor of Heyward's lyrics and contributor of others. George,

too, was kept in New York by a weekly radio program, *Music by Gershwin*, sponsored by Feenamint, a chewing-gum laxative, in which he featured songs by his peers as well as his own. To those who teased him about the laxative connection he replied "Without Feenamint I would not have been able to write *Porgy and Bess*."

"DuBose was a poet," Ira recalled, "which I am not. He could do something like 'Summertime' which is poetry. DuBose wasn't much good on a rhythm number, though, like 'It Ain't Necessarily So'."

The first song George composed was "Summertime," the first song in the opera. He had completed the first scene by the time he could leave New York to spend the summer of 1934 with the Heywards on Folly Island near Charleston. While there, he would become excited and inspired by the spirituals of the Gullah Negroes; he would also paint. Art had become his passionate avocation; his portraits are highly skillful. Eventually, he acquired one of the finest private collections of modern French masters.

In December of 1934, production plans were being made with the Theatre Guild. Composer and author wanted to call the work *Porgy* but the producers feared that might be taken as a revival of the original play. There had of course been *Pelléas and Melisande*, *Samson and Delilah*, *Tristan and Isolde*, Heyward pointed out, "So why not *Porgy and Bess*?"

To which George replied, "Of course, it's right in the operatic tradition."

George completed the opera in 11 months and made the orchestration in nine; during this period he also did a good deal of broadcasting. *Porgy and Bess* opened on September 30, 1935, in Boston, where 45 minutes were cut from the score, and ten days later at the Alvin Theatre in New York. Fifty years later it reached the Metropolitan Opera House.

Although *Porgy and Bess* was a box-office failure, George never lost faith in it. In the summer of 1935 he reassembled the cast for a concert of selections at Lewisohn Stadium. George played his *Rhapsody* and *Concerto*. That was the last time New York heard Gershwin play Gershwin.

Concertizing in other cities, early in 1936 he introduced his Suite from *Porgy and Bess*. That summer, George and Ira and his wife settled in Beverly Hills to work on the movie *Shall We Dance* for Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. Belying moviedom's fears that the Gershwins had gone highbrow and lost their light touch, they wrote the rollicking "Let's Call The Whole Thing Off" and "They All Laughed" for *Shall We Dance* and went right into another Astaire film, *A Damsel in Distress* with Joan Fontaine which included "A Foggy Day (In London Town)" and "Nice Work If You Can Get It."

George's active social life continued unabated. He met Stravinsky and became

George Gershwin in DuBose Heyward's Charleston garden in 1933.



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Ruby Elzy, the first Serena, and George Gershwin at work on her portrait.



a friend and tennis partner of Arnold Schoenberg, whose portrait he painted. As always, he made news: his romances with actresses Kitty Carlisle, Simone Simon, Paulette Goddard and others were hot items. Ira relaxed and basked in the sunshine when he wasn't working.

George made his last concert tour in January of 1937. On the 15th and 16th he performed with Pierre Monteux and the San Francisco Symphony at the War Memorial Opera House, then less than five years old. After the *Meistersinger* Overture and Mendelssohn's Fourth Symphony came the first San Francisco performances of the Concerto, with the composer as soloist, and of the Suite from *Porgy and Bess*, followed by the "Fête Polonoise" from *Le Roi Malgré Lui* by Chabrier. The next day in Berkeley, after Beethoven's Fifth, George conducted the Suite and played the Concerto. The concert ended with his *Rhapsody in Blue*.

Back in Hollywood, the Gershwins were working on *The Goldwyn Follies* when George began to get the headaches which proved to be caused by a brain tumor. The last song he composed was "Our Love Is Here To Stay." He was 38 when he died on July 11, 1937.

Ira completed *The Goldwyn Follies* with Vernon Duke. In 1940, Moss Hart

asked him to collaborate with Kurt Weill on *Lady in the Dark*, starring Gertrude Lawrence, a new kind of musical and a Broadway smash hit. Among its songs were "My Ship," "Jenny," "This Is New," and "Tchaikovsky," the clever patter song that first revealed the talents of Danny Kaye.


With Jerome Kern, Ira wrote the score for *Cover Girl* in 1944. Its "Long Ago And Far Away" sold more sheet music in a single year than any of Ira's other songs. After several more films, in 1954 Ira collaborated with his old friend Harold Arlen on two movies, *A Star Is Born*, with Judy Garland singing their "The Man That Got Away" and *The Country Girl*, for which Grace Kelly won an Oscar.

George Gershwin was played by Robert Alda in a very fictionalized screen biography *Rhapsody in Blue* in 1945. Later, Ira helped to prepare the 1951 Academy Award-winning all-Gershwin musical film *An American in Paris*, in which that work was used for one of Gene Kelly's most memorable dance sequences.

Writing no more lyrics after the 1950s, Ira lived quietly on in Beverly Hills as keeper of the flame, the custodian of George's piano, George's paintings, and the family chronicles. He died on August 17, 1983. ■

KKHI PROGRAM SCHEDULE

Time	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
mid.	Music Till Dawn	Music Till Dawn	Music Till Dawn	Music Till Dawn	Music Till Dawn	Music Till Dawn	Music Till Dawn
6 AM	Composer Spotlight An in-depth look at a single composer.	Sunrise Serenade	Sunrise Serenade	Sunrise Serenade	Theme Day An entire day of music built around a single motif, beginning at midnight and continuing for 24 hours.	Sunrise Serenade	Weekend Serenade
7 AM							
8 AM	8:30 Latin Mass	Hum-Along Hour	Hum-Along Hour	Hum-Along Hour		Hum-Along Hour	Young at Heart Music for children.
9 AM	Sunday A.M. Concert	What's New	What's New	What's New		What's New	Overture*
10 AM			Morning Concert: Detroit Symphony	Morning Concert	Morning Concert		Morning Concert
11 AM	Our Youth in Concert						*Starting time varies. Stay tuned for details.
noon	Concert in the Park	Pledger Plays Classics	Pledger Plays Classics	Pledger Plays Classics	Pledger Plays Classics	Pledger Plays Classics	
1 PM	Local Orchestras Live concerts from Bay Area orchestras.	Afternoon Concert	Afternoon Concert	Afternoon Concert	Theme Day, cont.	Afternoon Concert	
2 PM			2:30 World of Opera	2:30 World of Opera	2:30 World of Opera	2:30 World of Opera	2:30 World of Opera
3 PM	Operetta Hour	Matinee Melodies	Matinee Melodies	Matinee Melodies	Theme Day, cont.	Matinee Melodies	By Request Requests from the listeners.
4 PM	McEwen on Opera						
5 PM	World of Dance						Live Concert: Boston Pops Orchestra
6 PM	Pledger at the Opera	Dinner Concert	Dinner Concert	Dinner Concert		Dinner Concert	Footlights The best of Broadway
7 PM	Sunday P.M. Concert						
8 PM	Live Concert: Great Festivals of the World	Live Concert: Cleveland Orchestra	Live Concert: Philadelphia Orchestra	Live Concert: Chicago Symphony	Live Concert: San Francisco Symphony	Live Concert: New York Philharmonic	Live Concert: Boston Symphony Orchestra
9 PM							
10 PM	Major Statements A time for more extended works.	Chamber Music	Carnegie Hall Tonight	Lieder Hour	Theme Day, cont.	Choral Hour	Major Statements A time for more extended works.
11 PM		11:30 Community Dialogue	Music Now	Early Music Hour		Keyboard Classics	


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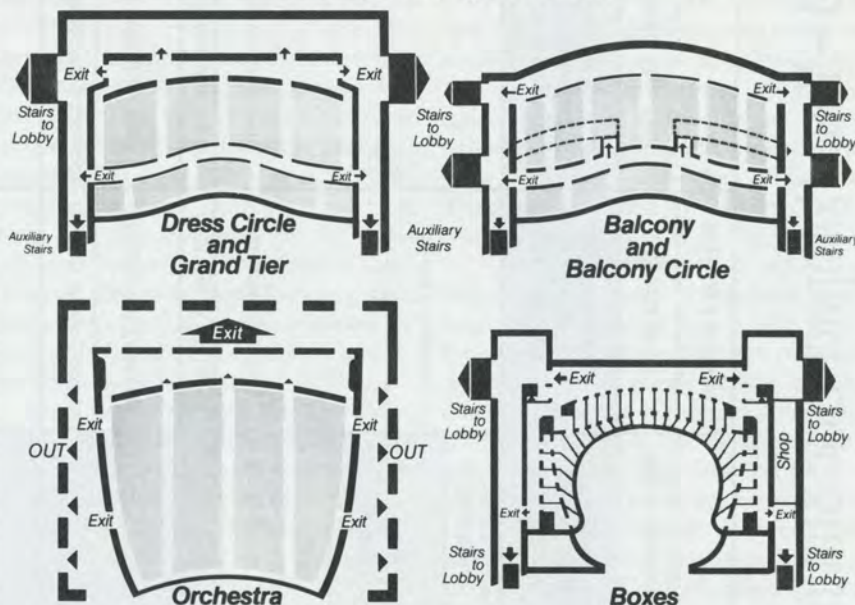
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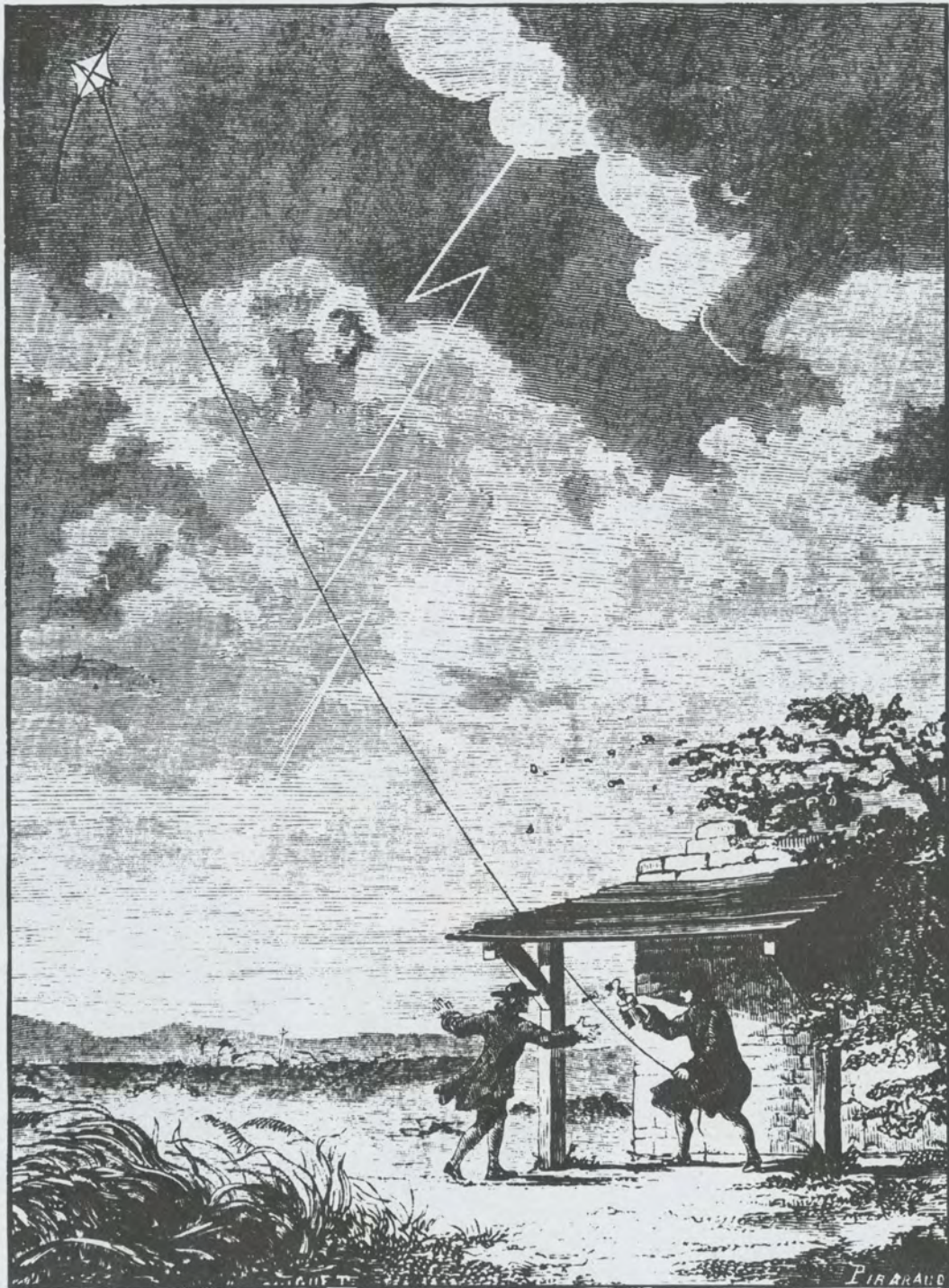
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