

GEORGE GERSHWIN

1898-1937



EARLY LIFE

- Originally named **Jacob Gershowitz**
- Born **September 26, 1898** in **Brooklyn, New York**
- Son of Russian-Jewish Immigrants
- At age 11, his parents bought a piano, prompting the start of his musical career
- Studied under Charles Hambitzer



EARLY CAREER

- **Dropped out of school at age 15**
- Earned an income **playing at nightclubs** in New York
- Became a “song-plugger” - Played sheet music for music publishing companies to sell copies.
- Worked as a **rehearsal pianist** for Broadway singers
- Gershwin’s work as a song-plugger greatly improved his skills in jazz
- In 1916, his first song: *“When You Want ‘Em, You Can’t Get ‘Em; When You Have ‘Em, You Don’t Want ‘Em”* Was published



RHAPSODY IN BLUE

- Arguably **Gershwin's best known piece**
- In 1923, Gershwin was asked to compose a jazz piece by bandleader Paul Whiteman for his upcoming concert "An Experiment in Modern Music"
- At this time, **Jazz was largely looked down upon for its lack of structure, rules, and improvisation.**
- Gershwin intended to boost the reputation of the genre with his work.
- Legend says that Gershwin forgot about the request until he read in a newspaper article that the concert would include a composition from him.



RHAPSODY IN BLUE

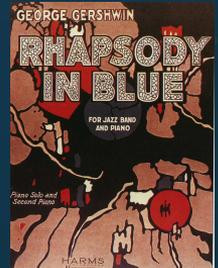
- The composition was completed in just 3 weeks.
- **Jazz, blues, and syncopated rhythms were mixed with classical music and orchestration**
- During the performance, much of the piano solo was improvised by Gershwin as the piece was somewhat unfinished
- It was a **massive success**, causing Gershwin to skyrocket in fame.

- Ave Maria - Franz Schubert
- Romantic Period
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q6zPftIqvnc>



- <https://youtu.be/ynEOo28lsbc?t=69>

- 4:56
- 10:37



NEW STANDARD

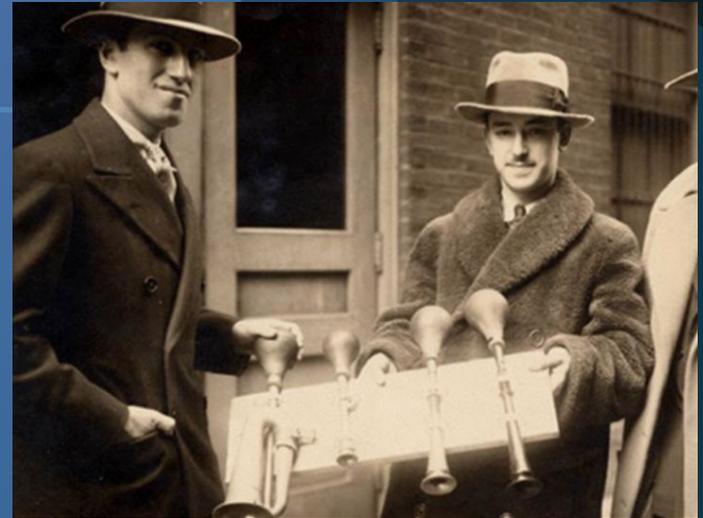
- **Gershwin's songs soon became new standard** for film and stage shows.
- Some of his popular songs include: "Oh, Lady Be Good!", "Someone Watch Over Me", and "Strike up the Band"
- **Collaborated often with his older brother Ira**, who wrote the greatly acclaimed lyrics for the songs.
- Gershwin's songs would often be written in minutes of improvisation, then Ira would spend weeks perfecting the lyrics



AN AMERICAN IN PARIS

- Written in 1928
- **Inspired by Gershwin's trips to Paris** in the 1920s.
- Utilization of **trumpets and saxophones for Blues sound.**
- **Bends and Slides**, techniques present in Jazz music, where used throughout the composition
- Included Taxi horns
- Was met with lasting fame

- <https://youtu.be/OPBp0Xn3Igg?t=35>
- 7:28



LATER CAREER

- Gershwin's *Second Rhapsody* debuted in 1931
- His most experimental work *Cuban Overture* included rumba rhythm patterns
- Gershwin had created many popular works in Broadway shows, however, *Porgy and Bess* (1935), is considered to be his greatest.
- Visited the south to study African American music
- Gershwin died July 11, 1937 during surgery for a brain tumor he had developed
- He was only 38 years old.

<https://youtu.be/solJOWjFUPU?t=394>



SIGNIFICANCE

- **One of the Greatest Composers of the 20th Century**
- Elevated the Jazz genre
- Created a **new standard of popular music**
- **One of the Greatest musical theater composers** of all time.
- His compositions have a **distinctly American sound due to the mixture of Blues and Jazz** with classical sounds.

