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AMERICA!

GERSHWIN, FROM BROADWAY TO THE CONCERT HALL

SONGS | RHAPSODY IN BLUE | CONCERTO IN F | SUMMERTIME . . .



Volume 1

GEORGE GERSHWIN (1898-1937)

PIANO SOLO

Song Book (18 hit songs arranged by the composer)

- | | | |
|----|--|-------|
| 1 | The Man I Love. Slow and in singing style | 2'25 |
| 2 | I'll Build a Stairway to Paradise. Vigorously | 0'44 |
| 3 | 's Wonderful. Liltily | 1'00 |
| 4 | I Got Rhythm. Very marked | 1'05 |
| 5 | Do It Again. Plaintively | 1'38 |
| 6 | Clap Yo'Hands. Spirited (but sustained) | 0'56 |
| 7 | Oh, Lady Be Good. Rather slow (with humour) | 1'04 |
| 8 | Fascinating Rhythm. With agitation | 0'51 |
| 9 | Somebody Loves Me. In a moderate tempo | 1'17 |
| 10 | My One and Only. Lively (in strong rhythm) | 0'51 |
| 11 | That Certain Feeling. Ardently | 1'36 |
| 12 | Swanee. Spirited | 0'38 |
| 13 | Sweet and Low Down. Slow (in a jazzy manner) | 1'05 |
| 14 | Nobody But You. Capriciously | 0'53 |
| 15 | Strike Up the Band. In spirited march tempo | 0'56 |
| 16 | Who Cares? Rather slow | 1'30 |
| 17 | Do Do Do. In a swinging manner | 0'59 |
| 18 | Liza. Languidly
© Warner Bros Music Corporation 1919-1931 | 2'50 |
| 19 | Jasbo Brown's Blues (from <i>Porgy and Bess</i>). Allegro moderato
© Warner Bros Music Corporation 1935, 1962 | 2'34 |
| 20 | An American in Paris (1928). <i>Transcription for solo piano</i>
by William Daly
© New World Music Corporation, New York 1929 - Chappell & Co Ltd, London | 17'21 |
| 21 | Promenade. Allegretto moderato
© Chappell & Co Ltd, London, 1958, 1960
<i>Frank Braley, piano</i> | 3'24 |
| 22 | I Got Rhythm (from <i>Girl Crazy</i> , 1930) - Arr. James Cohn
© WB Music Corp.
<i>Jon Manasse, clarinet / Jon Nakamatsu, piano</i> | 2'24 |

EARL WILD (1915-2010)

- | | | |
|----|--|-------|
| 23 | Fantasy on Gershwin's Porgy & Bess (1976)
© WB Music Corp o/b/o Dubose & Dorothy Heyward Mem. Fund Pub. /WB Music Corp o/b/o George Gershwin Music /WB Music Corp o/b/o Ira Gershwin Music
<i>Michael Sheppard, piano</i> | 27'58 |
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Volume 2

ORCHESTRAL MUSIC

- | | | |
|---|--|-------|
| 1 | "I Got Rhythm" Variations for Piano and Orchestra (1934)
Original orchestration by George Gershwin | 8'29 |
| 2 | Summertime
George Gershwin, DuBose Heyward. From <i>Porgy and Bess</i> , 1935 | 4'05 |
| 3 | Rhapsody in Blue (1924)
Original 'jazz band' version
© Warner Bros. Music Corporation
<i>Lincoln Mayorga, piano (1-3)</i>
<i>Harmonie Ensemble / New York, Steven Richman</i> | 15'31 |

Piano Concerto in F

- | | | |
|---|---|-------|
| 4 | I. Allegro | 13'18 |
| 5 | II. Adagio | 12'32 |
| 6 | III. Allegro agitato | 6'48 |
| 7 | Cuban Overture
© WB Music Corp.
<i>Jon Nakamatsu, piano (4-6)</i>
<i>Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra, Jeff Tyzik</i> | 10'36 |

AMERICA!

En 1932, c'est un compositeur tout proche des sommets de la gloire qui faisait publier un recueil de dix-huit arrangements de sa main, le *George Gershwin's Song Book*. En "simplifiant pour les petites filles aux petites mains qui ne sont pas encore très avancées dans leur étude du piano" ses hits issus des musicals, les comédies musicales de Broadway, Gershwin souhaitait sans doute raviver l'intérêt du public pour les chansons qui avaient assis sa notoriété pendant treize ans, depuis *Swanee* (1918) jusqu'à *Who Cares?* (1931)...

Entre Harlem, l'Eastside et Brooklyn, George a grandi dans la rue : il n'a rien de l'enfant prodige. Alors qu'il a treize ans, c'est à son frère aîné, Ira, que l'on achètera un piano... mais c'est George qui l'utilise, et très vite, d'un professeur à l'autre, il va découvrir *for free* Liszt, Chopin et Debussy. Dès l'âge de quinze ans, il parvient à convaincre sa mère d'abandonner ses études de commerce afin de se faire engager comme pianiste démonstrateur dans la boutique d'un éditeur de musique. C'est là que, pendant deux ans et à raison de dix heures par jour au clavier, il va se faire la main – les deux mêmes, et pour devenir un drôle de virtuose ! Les dix années suivantes voient la notoriété de Gershwin croître autant pour ses talents de pianiste de jazz que pour ses compositions destinées aux musicals, d'où proviennent les *songs* présentées sur ce double disque.

Jusqu'à ce jour de 1924 où il découvre dans le *New York Herald Tribune* que le célèbre chef Paul Whiteman a prévu la création d'un

"jazz concerto de George Gershwin" cinq semaines plus tard à l'occasion d'un concert destiné à défendre la musique américaine – et ce, devant un parterre de juges internationaux parmi lesquels un certain Serge Rachmaninov (cf. vol.1 de notre série "America"). Qu'à cela ne tienne ! Au terme du délai imparti, il peut seulement livrer une version pour deux pianos de ce qui va devenir son œuvre orchestrale la plus célèbre, *Rhapsody in Blue*. Une fois orchestré, c'est un immense succès, suivi un an plus tard du *Concerto en Fa*, pas si éloigné de Ravel. D'ailleurs, Gershwin viendra plusieurs fois à Paris consulter les grands compositeurs qui s'y trouvent alors. Il commence à travailler sur *An American in Paris* au cours de son deuxième séjour ; ce "ballet rhapsodique" aux accents parfois impressionnistes sera créé à New York en 1928. La transcription pour piano seul, un redoutable morceau de bravoure réalisé magnifiquement par William Daly, rend justice aux dimensions orchestrales du piano et s'applique à retrouver l'extraordinaire densité de cette histoire qui, selon son auteur, doit autant à la contemplation de la Hudson River qu'à la trépidante "vie parisienne", avec ses klaxons parfaitement imités sur le rythme deux brèves longues... De 1926 à 1935 (l'année du semi-échec de *Porgy and Bess*, d'où est tirée la superbe fantaisie présentée sur le CD 1) Gershwin va connaître les dix plus belles années de sa carrière, bien trop courte hélas : en 1937, succombe brutalement d'une tumeur cérébrale celui qu'on surnomme parfois "le Mozart américain". Il n'avait pas 39 ans.

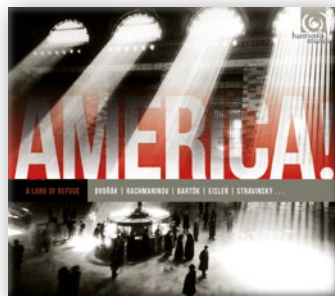
In 1932, a composer very close to the peak of his fame published a collection of his own pieces, *George Gershwin's Song-Book*. In 'simplifying' these hit tunes from his musical comedies for Broadway for 'little girls with little hands who have not progressed very far in their study of the piano', Gershwin doubtless wanted to revive public interest in the songs that had established his reputation over the past thirteen years, from *Swanee* (1918) to *Who cares?* (1931). Gravitating between Harlem, the Lower East Side, and Brooklyn, George grew up in the streets, and apparently had nothing of the child prodigy about him. Indeed, when he was twelve, the family actually bought a piano for his elder brother Ira – but it was George who made use of it. Very soon, going from one teacher to another, he discovered Liszt, Chopin, and Debussy 'for free'. By the time he was fifteen, he had persuaded his mother to let him abandon his business studies and take a job as a 'song-plugger' with a famous Tin Pan Alley publishing house. It was there that, in the space of two years with ten hours a day spent at the keyboard, he honed his skills until he was quite a virtuoso! The ensuing decade saw Gershwin build an increasing reputation for both his talents as a jazz pianist and his compositions intended for Broadway musicals, which are the source of the songs presented on this double album.

Such was his destiny until that day in 1924 when he found out from the *New York Herald Tribune* that the celebrated band-leader Paul Whiteman had planned the premiere of a 'jazz

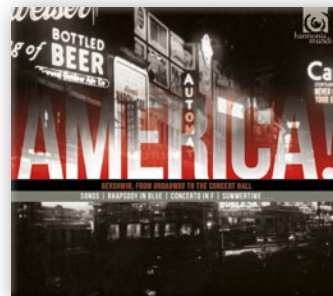
concerto by George Gershwin' five weeks later, on the occasion of a concert intended to champion American music before an international audience of luminaries including a certain Sergey Rachmaninoff (cf. vol.1 of our series 'America')! Given this tight deadline, he only managed to deliver a version for two pianos of what was to become his most famous orchestral work, *Rhapsody in Blue*. Once orchestrated, it was an immense success, and was followed a year later by the *Concerto in F*, a piece not so remote from Ravel. Indeed, Gershwin subsequently made several trips to Paris to consult the great composers then resident there. During his second stay, he began work on *An American in Paris*; this 'rhapsodic ballet', sometimes impressionist in tone, was premiered in New York in 1928. The transcription for piano solo, a formidable bravura piece, magnificently arranged by William Daly, does full justice to the piano's orchestral dimension and attempts to reproduce the extraordinary density of a scenario which, according to its creator, owes as much to contemplation of the Hudson River as to the hectic pace of *la vie parisienne*, with its perfectly imitated taxi horns in the rhythm of two short-one long. From 1926 to 1935 (the year of the relative failure of *Porgy and Bess*, which provided the material for the superb *Fantasy* included on CD 1) Gershwin was to enjoy the ten finest years of his career, which alas was all too brief: in 1937 the man sometimes known as 'the American Mozart' died suddenly of a brain tumour. He was not yet thirty-nine years old.

Translation: Charles Johnston

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