

Composer Report

George Gershwin

By: Danisha Larson

3/10/2012

Introduction

Early Life

Morris (Moishe) Gershowitz was a Russian-Jew from St. Petersburg, Russia who decided to immigrate to the United States in the early 1890's. Once he arrived to the U.S. , he changed his last name to 'Gershvin'. He then met a lady by the name of Rosa Bruskin who had immigrated to the U.S. earlier. On July 21, 1895 they were married. These are the parents of George Gershwin, the American pianist and composer this report will be about.

Commencement of Music Career

George Gershwin was born on September 26, 1898. He was the second of four children. The first time he began to show an interest in music was at the age ten after he attended a violin recital of his friend Maxie Rosenzweig. His parents had thought that his older brother Ira Gershwin would be the musically inclined one in the family and so bought him a piano; this piano would be the beginning of George Gershwins early career.

Everyone was surprised at the talent George quickly portrayed on the piano. So at age 13 his parents introduced him to piano lessons with the instructor Charles Hambitzer. Charles introduced George to a number of different classical composers including Bach, Liszt and Debussy. He saw George's potential and refused to be paid in teaching George piano. He said: "I have a new pupil who will make his mark if anybody will. The boy is a genius"

At age fifteen he became so skilled at piano playing that he left school at the age fifteen to begin his career. He performed songs in stores and music publishing salesrooms; and at the age of eighteen he added song writing to his career.

Selected works by George Gershwin

La La Lucille

In 1919, at age twenty, George Gershwin composed his first full Broadway musical, *La La Lucille*. He collaborated with Arthur Jackson and B.G. De Sylva to fully complete it. This musical was about a wealthy woman who makes a deal with her nephew that if he divorces his wife, he would inherit her fortune. Her nephew then plots that he would remarry her after he gains his aunts fortune. In order to be eligible to divorce, the scene must portray itself as adultery so he arranges for him to be seen with another woman. To do this he registers his name at a hotel as John Smith, but problems occur when he finds he is not the only “John Smith” that registered at that same hotel. With-in this musical there were three hit songs, one of which were called “Nobody But You”, composed by George Gershwin; this is how George began to gain publicity. This song caught a lyricists attention, his name was Irving Caesar. The first song Irving Caesar and George Gershwin composed together was a great hit; it is said to have taken ten minutes to write while riding a bus in Manhattan and was called “Swanee”.

Swanee

Swanee was a great hit because of the modern Jazz age. It was composed by both George Gershwin and Irving Caesar. It was written for Demi-Tasse, a New York revue. George ended up playing this song at a party where an artist, by the name of Al Jolson, attended. Jolson began to portray this song in a show called *Sinbad* and recorded it with Columbia Records. This began the widespread of *Swanee*. He was able to sell one million sheet copies of the music and two million records. *Swanee* became his first and single most popular hit.

Rhapsody in Blue

George was also a great composer of concert hall music. His first piece, *Rhapsody in Blue*, is my personal favorite. He wrote this piece in 1924. This piece was inspired through the rhythmic sounds George heard while riding a train on his way to Boston. Although most classify this piece as Jazz, it is in fact not true Jazz. It is a one movement song consisting of the piano and the orchestra and is classified as classical music. He wrote this song in a rush, he was short on time because he was set to perform it soon after he was told to create a piece. He was so short on time that he didn't even finish writing down the solo pieces he had to perform and instead played it on the piano from memory. The only way the orchestra new to continue with the next portion of the music was when George Gershwin would nod his head to signal that his solo was done. This song portrayed the great talent and skill he had in improvisation. It became quite popular because it combines the classical style, a pop rhythm and has a unique Jazz-like sound which was new and exciting for the listeners.

An American in Paris

In 1928 George Gershwin was in Paris. He created a piece inspired by the noises around him, the atmosphere of Paris. It was called *An American in Paris*. It is a symphonic toned poem. He cooperated with a critic and composer named Deen Taylor in order to really emphasis and portray, the purpose and meaning of the piece. It is meant to symbolize an American who is strolling through Paris and absorbed by the energy of the atmosphere. The song then goes into a slower blues which is meant to represent this American falling into a homesick state. In the end he his picked up by the "triumphant" noises of Paris. This piece is said to be one of his "best-known compositions".

Dream Sequence and Manhattan Rhapsody

In 1929, Fox Film Cooperation was composing a score for the movie *Delicious*. George Gershwin created a contract with them and worked to on creating many pieces for this film. It turned out that Fox Film ended up using only two of the songs George created for them. *Dream Sequence* was a five-minute piece and *Manhattan Rhapsody* amounted to six minutes. It was said he became so upset that he did not work with Hollywood afterwards for seven years.

Porgy and Bess

In 1935 he composed a folk opera. It was called *Porgy and Bess*. Like his earlier work *Rhapsody in Blue*, in the sense that it was hard to classify as either classical or jazz music, *Porgy and Bess* was hard to classify as an opera or as an “ambitious Broadway musical”. It had music and drama and was inspired by a novel called *Porgy* by: DuBose Heyward. It was about crippled street beggar who was unwanted. He places his fate in the hands of his Gods and chance. Unfortunately, George Gershwin did not live to see this production nor his pieces when they truly became popular.

In 1937, George Gershwin collapsed. Doctors found a rapidly growing cystic tumor in his brain. Tragically the greatest doctor for the job was not able to make it in time and George Gershwin passed away at the age of 38. The above pieces of music were only a few of the great works Gershwin created, even more popular and recognized now than before.

References

- Article, F. w. (n.d.). *Lyrics Freak*. Retrieved from
<http://www.lyricsfreak.com/g/george+gershwin/biography.html>.
- Biography.com. (2012, March 12). *George Gershwin biography*. Retrieved from bio.TRUE
STORY: <http://www.biography.com/people/george-gershwin-9309643?page=1>
- Erb., J. (n.d.). *George Gershwin: Porgy and Bess (1934)*. Retrieved from Classical Net: The
Internet's Premier Classical Music Source:
<http://www.classical.net/music/comp.lst/works/gershwin/porgy&bess.php>
- Kamien, R. (n.d.). *George Gershwin*. Retrieved from <http://www.geocities.com>:
<http://www.geocities.com/heartland/fields/8616/composerfiles/gershwin.html>
- Leonard, J. (2008). *La-la-Lucille (musical)*. Retrieved from Classical Archives: The Ultimate
Classical Music Destination:
<http://www.classicalarchives.com/work/75453.html#tvf=tracks&tv=about>
- Unknown. (2012, March 11). *George Gershwin*. Retrieved from Wikipedia: The free
encyclopedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Gershwin
- Unknown. (2011, August 7). *La La Lucille*. Retrieved from Wikipedia: The free encyclopedia:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/La_La_Lucille
- Unknown. (1937, July Monday 19th). *Music: Death of Gershwin*. Retrieved from Time:
magazine U.S.: <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,882760,00.html>

Unknown. (2012, January 31). *Swanee(song)*. Retrieved from Wikipedia: the free encyclopedia:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swanee_\(song\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swanee_(song))

Music

No Body But You from La La Lucille Broad way musical: 2:33

<http://www.rhapsody.com/search?query=la+la+lucile>

Swanee: 2:18 <http://www.rhapsody.com/#artist/george-gershwin/album/gershwin-plays-gershwin-the-piano-rolls/track/swanee--lp-version>

Rhapsody in Blue: 14:25 <http://www.rhapsody.com/#artist/george-gershwin/album/gershwin-plays-gershwin-the-piano-rolls/track/swanee--lp-version>

Dream Sequence: 4:53 <http://www.rhapsody.com/#artist/various-artists/album/george-gershwin-10-volume-set/track/dream-sequence>

Manhattan Rhapsody: 4:57

http://www.rhapsody.com/#search?query=Manhattan+Rhapsody&_suid=133158107767407133601898686467