

Making Beautiful Music

George Gershwin was born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1898. He was an American pianist and composer who did not have much musical training until he was in his early teens. He is best known for his jazz piano concerto, *Rhapsody in Blue*, which he completed in 1924. This piece was commissioned by Paul Whiteman and his orchestra and featured the piano as well as the jazz orchestra.

Gershwin, like many of his contemporaries, was a composer of many popular songs that have endured through the years because they were easy to sing and people enjoyed listening to them. He wrote a number of musicals and other songs to be sung on the stage, such as "Lady be Good," "Strike Up the Band," "Funny Face," and "Showgirl." An important element in his compositional style was the use of jazz and the harmonies inherent to jazz.

Two other important works by Gershwin have also endured through the years. His folk opera entitled *Porgy and Bess* was completed in 1935 and was designed to be sung by an all-black troupe. It has enjoyed enduring success both in America and internationally. Another important work, a symphonic poem entitled "An American in Paris," was completed in 1928. The music for this song was used as the basis for a film by the same title that starred the famous dancer/singer Gene Kelly.

Gershwin undoubtedly would have contributed a great deal more to the popular idiom and to musical theater had he not suffered from a brain tumor and died at the young age of 39.

Because jazz was a prominent musical form of the time, many composers were incorporating jazz harmonies in their music. Therefore, these songs could be played by amateur musicians at home and by professional jazz musicians who were able to incorporate them into their repertoire and perform them regularly in concerts and other settings.

Another composer of the time period was Cole Porter, who was born in 1891. He also contributed greatly to the repertoire of the musical theater with such musicals as *Wake Up and Dream*, *The Gay Divorcée*, and *Anything Goes*. His most successful musical was *Kiss Me, Kate*, which he completed in 1948. Cole Porter's music and style were extremely sophisticated and complete, even more so than George Gershwin's. His works have been very successful and have continued their popularity to the modern day.

George Gershwin and Cole Porter helped as much as any of the other composers that we have or will discuss in continuing the development of the American popular music style. These composers and the people who sang their songs on recordings set the example that was followed years later in Europe and other parts of the world. Indeed, this was a trend-setting style that led to the successful careers of many popular singers.



George Gershwin

Name _____ Date _____

Find These Notable Words

Find the words below and circle them in the search word puzzle. Words may be printed in the puzzle forward, backward, horizontally, vertically, or diagonally.

F V S H P O R G Y A N D B E S S R Z U Z
 P T G Q R E C O R D I N G S P P U Y V B
 A S N A H C B S O P H I S T I C A T E D
 U I I U T M O R X C L U I V D E N L B K
 L R T E Y M Y E I O D B E E T X I E O T
 W A T A K E V A W L E C S U P R W S D X
 H P E L K O H R P E V U E L Y O H E U C
 I N S E T P Z T O P P M I B J T S V O W
 T I D F V C R S L O D G N N W R R A G E
 E N N U T I H E I R L X O I H E E O E W
 M A E N W N K H K T J U M Y U C G E N I
 A C R N D O H C Y E J P R D H N E T E V
 N I T Y J H F R M R I Z A O Z O G A K B
 I R P F F P L O G A S G H S I C R K E R
 V E N A T M A I N G G Q Z P V L O E L O
 U M T C F Y R I G B N B Z A P E E M L O
 W A N E Z S S G D L T W A H D P G S Y K
 P N N F V T M Z O G S J J R W Z F S P L
 E A S H O W G I R L S T Y W X L J I M Y
 S D B A Q S L A C I S U M Y T E X K U N

WORD LIST

An American in Paris
 Funny Face
 Kiss Me, Kate
 pianist
 Showgirl

Brooklyn
 Gene Kelly
 musicals
 Porgy and Bess
 sophisticated

Cole Porter
 George Gershwin
 orchestra
 recordings
 symphonic poem

concerto
 jazz harmonies
 Paul Whiteman
 Rhapsody in Blue
 trend setting

Name _____ Date _____

Questions for Consideration

1. For what piece of music is George Gershwin best known?

2. For what instruments was the piece written?

3. Who commissioned *Rhapsody in Blue*?

4. Why have Gershwin's songs endured through the years?

5. Name two works by Gershwin intended for the stage.

6. What was unusual about *Porgy and Bess*?

7. What type of harmonies were composers incorporating into their works at this time?

8. Who was the composer of the musical *Anything Goes*?

9. What was Cole Porter's most successful musical?

10. How was Cole Porter's music and style described?
