

GERSHWIN PROGRAM April 30, 1995

1. Rhapsody in Blue

Welcome - Julie Bonser

- (A) Chalice: I'll light the chalice this morning for George Gershwin and all other high school dropouts. George Gershwin dropped out of high school when he was 15 and went to work for song publishers in New York City. Although he went on to become a very successful composer, he always remained aware of his lack of a diploma, and he continued to take lessons in composing almost until the year of his death in 1937. So, you young people should heed his lesson and finish school.

I'll also light the chalice for Ginger Rogers, who died this week, and who will be remembered by many of us as one of the most successful performers on film of the music of George Gershwin.

2. Strike Up the Band!

- (B) George Gershwin was born in New York City in 1898. His parents were Jews who had immigrated from Russia. His father was a not too successful businessman, and the family wasn't very well off when George was growing up. There were 3 sons and 1 daughter in the family, and all of them got involved in music in one way or another. Ira was the oldest, two years older than George. He DID graduate from high school and had a way with words, and he wrote the words for many of the songs that George composed. One of them was the next number we'll hear, written for a Hollywood musical that was produced in 1937. Oscar Levant, a friend, said that George and Ira took advantage of the possibility of writing a work in the madrigal style for the movie and that people might think of it as being a 17th century English madrigal....especially when accompanied by recorders, which they played back then.

3. The Jolly Tar and the Milkmaid

Children leave for RE classes.

- (C) George wrote the music for many Broadway musical comedies. Some were very successful. "Pardon My English," produced in 1933, was not, but it still had some good music, including our next number, Lorelei.

4. Lorelei

- (D) When George went to work on Tin Pan Alley in 1914 he joined a great many other Jews there. A great many of the popular song composers had been Jews, from the beginning of the 19th century, and many of the song publishers were Jews. It helped to know Yiddish to get along on Tin Pan Alley, although others could also thrive, like the Irish-American George M. Cohan.

George started at about the bottom on Tin Pan Alley. It really was a little neighborhood, with the offices of many publishers. One job George had was to play the music submitted by composers for the prospective publishers. On a summer day one could hear many other pianists doing the same for other publishers. George also worked as a song plugger for the publishers, playing their music in cafes and other public places in order to induce people to buy the sheet music. (He also made 130 piano roles 1915-1926.)

But George was also exposed to European classical music from the time

Irving Berlin

Jerome Kern

he had his first music lessons. Once he got known, he associated with classical music performers. The next piece was written ~~in~~ with Ira in 1921 to be played at parties where they were present, Mischa is Mischa Elman, the violinist
 Yascha is Jascha Heifitz, another violinist
 Toscha is Toscha Seidel, and
 Sascha is Sascha Jacobson, all Jews of Russian origin.
 For a while in the 1920's, George courted Jascha's sister, Pauline Heifitz.

5. Mischa, Jascha, Toscha, Sascha

(E)

A Rhapsody in Blue of 1924 was Gershwin's first really successful attempt to write music for a classical orchestra. (No time for the anecdote about how they heard of the commission, Peyser, p. 74.) Later on, in a letter, he wrote how he got the ideas for some of it. He was riding on a train ---

"It was on that train, with its steely rhythms, its rattlety-band that is so often stimulating to a composer --- I frequently hear music in the heart of noise --- I suddenly heard --- and even saw on paper --- the complete construction of the rhapsody from beginning to end."

Our next number is from the musical comedy Girl Crazy, produced in 1931. It was the first time Ginger Rogers appeared in a Gershwin musical. It was also the first time for Ethel Merman, who attracted notice for holding a high C for 16 bars in our next number, I Got Rhythm.

6. I Got Rhythm.

(F)

Gershwin spent the last couple of years of his life in Hollywood. Despite the fact that he was ill much of the time, and had to work with the barbarians who ran the studios, he wrote lots of good songs there, and just by chance our program this morning is loaded with them. A Foggy Day, from the movie A Damsel in Distress, is one of them.

7. Foggy Day in London Town

(G)

Samuel B. Goldwyn was one of those barbarians, and our next number is from the Goldwyn Follies of 1937, a film ~~xxx~~ George never got to see.

8. Love Walked In

(H)

One of those Hollywood musicals was Shall We Dance, and as I recollect it was one of the Fred Astaire - Ginger Rogers musicals. Our own ~~xxxx~~ Astaire - Rogers team will next perform Let's Call the Whole Thing Off (without dancing, I suppose).

9. Let's Call the Whole Thing Off.

(I)

*Lullaby of 1919 for string quartet
is great enough as far as I'm concerned.*