



George Gershwin (20th Century Composers)

By Rodney Greenberg

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During his short but prolific career, George Gershwin (1898-1937) produced a varied body of work that combined symphonic composition with the musical styles popular in his era, including jazz and African-American spirituals. Known primarily for his jazz-tinged orchestral work *Rhapsody in Blue*, his folk opera *Porgy and Bess*, and his many wonderful songs featured in the films of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, Gershwin and his lyricist brother Ira were key figures in the songwriting circles of pre-war America. Rodney Greenberg's lively biography paints a vivid picture of this exciting era in the development of American music, and places Gershwin's life and career within the social and cultural contexts in which he flourished.

George Gershwin is part of Phaidon's successful *20th Century Composers* series, which presents authoritative and engaging biographies of the great creative musicians of our time, augmented by striking visual material and essential reference information. This edition of the book features a whimsical new cover by Jean-Jacques Sempé, the world-renowned illustrator and cartoonist.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

As part of its 20th Century Composers series, Phaidon commissioned noted producer and director of television music programs Rodney Greenberg to write a biography of one of the century's most popular composers--George Gershwin, a man who in a regrettably short life (he died in 1937 at the age of 38) sought to straddle the worlds of popular and symphonic music.

"Music," Gershwin once said, "must reflect the thoughts and aspirations of the people and the time. My people are American. My time is today." Gershwin's life, from his days as a "songplugger" in New York's Tin Pan Alley to fame and fortune with Broadway shows and symphonic composition, followed the evolution of American popular music. But he was as much an influence on his time as he was influenced by it. Charismatic, brilliant, and vastly egotistical, his struggle to be recognized as a serious composer was always at odds with the fame and money such songs as "Fascinating Rhythm" and "Lady Be Good" brought him.

While Greenberg's biography is serviceable as an introduction to the composer's life, his analysis of the music is what raises this elegantly short book to the realm of the exceptional. Gershwin's body of work is surprisingly small, considering its lasting influence, and this gives the author the opportunity to discuss at length not only such landmark works as *Rhapsody in Blue* and *Porgy and Bess*, but also minor pieces like "Lullaby" and "Someone to Watch Over Me." Indeed, Greenberg argues that Gershwin's gifts, like those of Cole Porter but also Chopin and Grieg, were best expressed through his shorter compositions, and while he never stopped working to achieve a significant work of length, it was his instinct for 32-bar and shorter pieces that ensured his place in musical history. --John Longenbaugh

Review

"An excellent critical account of Gershwin's musical development in the social and musical context of the first three decades of the century."-BBC Music Magazine "Sharply observed..."-Billboard "...An insightful, well written book..."-Jewish Chronicle "A handsome, illustrated Gershwin biography."-Daily Telegraph "My best tip for Xmas stockings would be Rodney Greenberg's concise and well organised study of the life and music of everybody's centennial hero, George Gershwin."-BBC Music Magazine On the 20th Century Composers Series "As a series, Phaidon's 20th Century Composers has brought remarkable variety and a welter of information, both necessary and delightfully trivial. Intended both for the general reader and for the more enthusiastically musical."-The Scotsman

About the Author

Rodney Greenberg has produced and directed over 300 television music programs in Europe and America. Formerly executive producer of the BBC 'Masterclass' series and of the televised Promenade Concerts, he has directed the Last Night of the Proms eight times. Among other honors, he has won multiple Emmy awards for live NBC telecasts in New York.

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