



Gershwin

The First Recordings



This set brings together for the first time all of the première recordings of George Gershwin's works for the concert hall and opera house that were issued on 78 rpm discs, from acoustic recordings to the dawn of the LP, including several items not previously on CD.

Gershwin's first recording of *Rhapsody in Blue* was set down only four months after its début. It is heard in Ferde Grofé's original jazz band orchestration, with cuts totaling about a third of the work to fit it onto a single disc. The alternate take of Side 2 was accidentally issued during the early 1940s along with the electric version of Side 1, a quickly-corrected error which made it a rarity.

The electric remake of three years later did not go smoothly. Whiteman reportedly argued with Gershwin over the tempo, and Victor house conductor and Gershwin friend Nat Shilkret was brought in to lead the session. The result was a swifter performance, with the composer appearing to play with somewhat less sensitivity than on the original acoustic.

The "Andante" section of the work was recorded as the filler to the Three Preludes. Two other piano works were adapted into *Short Story* by Gershwin and American violinist Samuel Dushkin, most remembered for his collaborations with Stravinsky.

After Whiteman had problems with the rhythms of the Concerto in F, another Gershwin associate, Bill Daly, was called in to lead the recording. Grofé made the jazz band reduction presented here from Gershwin's orchestral original, and some of his instrumentation sounds decidedly strange to ears accustomed to the symphonic version. The last two movements were shortened for the recording.

The première recording of *An American in Paris* featured the composer playing the small celesta part because the orchestra contractor had forgotten to hire a keyboard player. A unique advantage of this first recording is hearing the actual taxi horns the composer brought back from France for the work's début.

Gershwin wrote his *Second Rhapsody* in 1931 as a follow-up to *Rhapsody in Blue*. Roy Bargy, the Whiteman band piano soloist who appeared in the Concerto in F recording, is featured again here, once more in a cut version which leaves out about a third of the work.

After Gershwin's death in 1937, Paul Whiteman wanted to revive interest in the composer's *Cuban Overture*, which had seen few performances since its 1932 première. The piano concerto-type arrangement that he commissioned Allan Small to make would be more accurately described as "freely based on themes" from Gershwin's original.

The recording sessions for the excerpts from *Porgy and Bess* began just four days after the work's Broadway opening. The two Black leads were replaced for the recording by White Met stars Lawrence Tibbett and Helen Jepson. While Tibbett confirms his reputation as one of the all-time great singing actors here, Jepson sometimes brings an unidiomatic "art song English" diction to her role.

The final new work presented here is a recording which straddles the age of the 78 with that of the LP, and was originally issued in both formats. Pianist Oscar Levant was a longtime Gershwin friend who became something of a specialist in his works.

Concluding our program are two recordings of *Rhapsody in Blue* made in 1927, the first of which features a 21-year-old Levant as soloist, omitted from Sony's recent "complete" Levant set. The final track takes us to Weimar-era Berlin, and the first recording of any of Gershwin's "serious" works made outside the U.S. Mischa Spoliansky was then known mainly as a composer for cabaret and reviews, while Julian Fuhs' direction is the most energetic of all of these early *Rhapsody* recordings.

Mark Obert-Thorn



gershwin

the first recordings

disc one

1. **Rhapsody in Blue** - Acoustic version (9:20) (r.1924)
2. **Rhapsody in Blue** - Acoustic version - Side 2 alt. take (4:47) (r.1924)
3. **Rhapsody in Blue** - Electric version* (8:53) (r.1927)
George Gershwin (piano)
Paul Whiteman and His Concert Orchestra · Paul Whiteman and *Nathaniel Shilkret

4. **Rhapsody in Blue** - Andante (2:38) (r. 1928)

Three Preludes (r. 1928)

5. No. 1: **Allegro ben ritmato e deciso** (1:25)
6. No. 2: **Andante con moto e poco rubato** (2:37)
7. No. 3: **Allegro ben ritmato e deciso** (1:09)
George Gershwin (piano)

8. **GERSHWIN-DUSHKIN Short Story** (3:03) (r. 1928)
Samuel Dushkin (violin) · Max Pirani (piano)

Piano Concerto (Concerto in F) (r. 1928)

9. 1st Mvt. - **Allegro** (11:35)
10. 2nd Mvt. - **Adagio - Andante con moto** (7:33)
11. 3rd Mvt. - **Allegro agitato** (4:39)
Roy Bary (piano)
Paul Whiteman and His Orchestra · William Daly

12. **An American in Paris** (16:18) (r. 1929)
George Gershwin (celesta)
Victor Symphony Orchestra · Nathaniel Shilkret

Producer and Audio Restoration Engineer: Mark Obert-Thorn

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Total duration: 2hr 30:48 CD1: 73:58 CD2: 76:50

disc two

1. **Second Rhapsody** (8:48) (r. 1938)
Roy Bary (piano)
Paul Whiteman and His Concert Orchestra · Paul Whiteman

2. **GERSHWIN-SMALL Cuban Overture** (12:45) (r. 1938)
Rosa Linda (piano)
Paul Whiteman and His Concert Orchestra · Paul Whiteman

Porgy and Bess (selections) (r. 1935)

3. Act I: **Lullaby (Summertime)** (2:34)
4. Act I: **Summertime and Crap Game; A woman is a sometime thing** (3:21)
5. Act I: **My man's gone now*** (4:13)
6. Act II: **I got plenty o' nuttin'** (3:10)
7. Act II: **The Buzzard Song** (3:54)
8. Act II: **Bess, you is my woman now** (5:00)
9. Act II: **It ain't necessarily so** (3:06)
10. Act III: **Oh, Bess, oh where's my Bess?** (3:12)
Helen Jepson (soprano) · Lawrence Tibbett (baritone)
Orchestra and Chorus · Alexander Smallens and *Nathaniel Shilkret
(Recordings supervised by the composer)

11. **'I Got Rhythm' Variations** (9:03) (r.1949)
Oscar Levant (piano)
Morton Gould and His Orchestra · Morton Gould

12. **Rhapsody in Blue** (9:24) (r.1927)
Oscar Levant (piano)
Frank Black and His Orchestra · Frank Black

13. **Rhapsody in Blue** (8:22) (r.1927)
Mischa Spoliansky (piano)
Julian Fuhs' Symphony Orchestra · Julian Fuhs