

# GERSHWIN®

## RHAPSODY IN BLUE FOR SOLO PIANO

EDITED BY MAURICE HINSON

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### Foreword

In 1922, well-known American jazz conductor Paul Whiteman (1890–1967) commissioned George Gershwin (1898–1937) to write a jazz piece for piano and orchestra for a concert to be given at Aeolian Hall in New York City. The work came into being in early 1923 in the form of a two-piano sketch, which was orchestrated by Whiteman's arranger Ferde Grofé (1892–1972). Gershwin composed the work in three weeks and dedicated it to Paul Whiteman. Gershwin originally titled the work *American Rhapsody*, but his brother Ira Gershwin (1896–1983) came up with the name *Rhapsody in Blue*.

Gershwin wrote of the piece: “*There had been so much chatter about the limitations of jazz...that it had to be in strict time and stick to dance rhythms. I resolved...to kill that one misconception with one sturdy blow.*”<sup>1</sup>

The performance of the piece was a brilliant success. It was recorded four months later by the Victor Talking Machine Company (later RCA Victor). *Rhapsody in Blue* catapulted Gershwin into a world-famous career. Furthermore, it brought jazz into the concert hall using a musical language that was fresh, spontaneous, and, above all, uniquely American—completely divorced from European influence and formal design.

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This collection is dedicated to Ralph Votapek, with admiration and appreciation.

—Maurice Hinson

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Rimler. *A Gershwin Companion*, p. 81.



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# Rhapsody in Blue

By George Gershwin

Molto moderato (♩ = 80)

13 *tr* *mf* 2 1 1 1 1 17 2 4 3 3 3

3 2 1 3 5

6 1 2 1 1 2 1 2 5 5

10 1 2 3 3

13 *poco rit.* 3 4 5 4 24 2 1 1 10

**Grandioso** (grandly, imposing, not too slow)

430 <sup>d</sup>

*ff marcato*

433

436

439

*8va* -----

<sup>d</sup> This editor suggests inserting these two measures, which appear in the piano-and-orchestra and two-piano scores.

*ff*



(continued from page 1)

## Performing Gershwin's Piano Music

Gershwin gave the following advice about playing popular music at the piano, including his own works:

*To play American popular music most effectively, one must guard against the natural tendency to make too frequent use of the sustaining [damper] pedal. Our study of the great Romantic composers has trained us in the method of the legato, whereas our popular music asks for staccato effects, for almost a stenciled style. The rhythms of American popular music are more or less brittle; they should be made to snap, and at times to crackle. The more sharply the music is played, the more effective it sounds.*

*Most pianists with a classical training fail lamentably in the playing of our ragtime or jazz because they use the pedaling of Chopin when interpreting the blues of Handy. The Romantic touch is very good in a sentimental ballad, but in a tune of strict rhythm, it is somewhat out of place.<sup>2</sup>*

## About This Edition

This edition is based on the piano solo version of *Rhapsody in Blue*, first published in 1924 by Warner Brothers Music Corporation. All parenthetical material is editorial, as well as pedal indications and fingerings. More or less pedal than indicated can be used when playing this work.

<sup>2</sup> *Gershwin at the Keyboard*. New York: no date. Introduction by George Gershwin. Inside front cover.

## About the Music

*Rhapsody in Blue* exhibits great freedom of form. The opening section (measures 1–243) begins with an ascending line, followed by the first motif, which sets a cheerful mood for the entire piece. A second motif appears at measure 11, and subsequently, other motifs continue to enter and combine freely. The second section (measures 244–323) features the central theme, containing some material from the opening. The third section (measures 324–445) leads to a brilliant but brief coda (measures 446–451).

Above all, this piece requires a strong sense of rhythm to project the music properly.

## Suggested Further Reading

Hinson, Maurice. *Guide to the Pianist's Repertoire*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 3rd ed., 2000.

Hitchcock, H. Wiley and Stanley Sadie, eds. *The New Grove Dictionary of American Music*, Vol. 2. London and New York, Macmillan Press, 1986.

Rimler, Walter. *A Gershwin Companion: A Critical Inventory and Discography 1916–1984*. Ann Arbor, MI: Popular Culture, Inc., 1991.

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