

South Plainfield Public Library

Presents

'S Wonderful: The Life & Music of

George Gershwin



George Gershwin was born in Brooklyn in 1898, the second of four children from a close-knit immigrant family. He began his musical career as a song-plugger on Tin Pan Alley, but was soon writing his own pieces. Gershwin's first published song, "When You Want 'Em, You Can't Get 'Em," demonstrated innovative new techniques, but only earned him five dollars. Soon after, however, he met a young lyricist named Irving Caesar. Together they composed a number of songs including "Swanee," which sold more than a million copies of sheet music.

In 1924, George collaborated with his brother, lyricist Ira Gershwin, on a musical comedy *Lady Be Good*. It included such standards as "Fascinating Rhythm" and "The Man I Love." It was the beginning of a partnership that would continue for the rest of the composer's life. Together, they wrote many more successful musicals including *Oh Kay!* and *Funny Face*, starring Fred Astaire and his sister Adele. While continuing to compose popular music for the stage, Gershwin began to lead a double life, trying to make his mark as a serious composer.

In the early thirties, Gershwin experimented with some new ideas in Broadway musicals. *Strike Up The Band*, *Let 'Em Eat Cake*, and *Of Thee I Sing*, were innovative works dealing with social issues of the time. *Of Thee I Sing* was a major success and the first musical comedy to win the Pulitzer Prize. In 1935, he presented a folk opera *Porgy and Bess* in Boston with only moderate success. Now recognized as one of the seminal works of American opera, it included such memorable songs as "It Ain't Necessarily So," "I Loves You, Porgy," and "Summertime."

In 1937, after many successes on Broadway, the brothers decided go to Hollywood. Again they teamed up with Fred Astaire, who was now paired with Ginger Rogers. They made the musical film, *Shall We Dance*, which included such hits as "Let's Call the Whole Thing Off" and "They Can't Take That Away From Me." After becoming ill while working on a film, Gershwin had plans to return to New York to compose concert music; he planned a string quartet, a ballet and another opera, but these pieces were never written. At the age of 38, he died of a brain tumor. Today, he remains one of America's most beloved composers.



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REGISTRATION REQUIRED