




Composer Portfolios

GERSHWIN



Name	George Gershwin
Nationality	American
Born-Died	1898-1937
Quote	<i>'Life is a lot like jazz. It's best when you improvise'</i>
	<i>'True music must repeat the thought and inspirations of the people and the time'</i>

Interesting Stories

A Genius

Gershwin studied piano with the reputable instructor Charles Hambitzer, who introduced his young student to the works of the great classical composers. Hambitzer was so impressed with Gershwin's potential that he refused payment for the lessons; as he wrote in a letter to his sister, "I have a new pupil who will make his mark if anybody will. The boy is a genius."

Rhapsody in Blue

Bandleader Paul Whiteman and Gershwin shared the common goal of bringing respectability to jazz, which in 1922 was still regarded as degrading music. In late 1923 Whiteman asked Gershwin to compose a piece for an upcoming concert-An Experiment in Modern Jazz. Apparently, Gershwin forgot about the composition until he read about the major new work he was creating in the newspaper. Gershwin composed his best known work, Rhapsody in Blue, in just three weeks.

Facts:

- George Gershwin was born in New York to a Russian Jewish immigrant family.
- Gershwin's first hit song 'Swanee' was composed in 10 minutes on a bus. It sold a million music sheet copies and an estimated 2 million records.
- In his 20s, George started composing Broadway musical theatre works, with his brother Ira writing the lyrics.
- Gershwin was intrigued by modernist music. He asked Schoenberg to give him lessons but he refused saying 'I would only make you a bad Schoenberg, and you're such a good Gershwin already.'
- Gershwin enjoyed playing tennis with Schoenberg once a week
- Gershwin died of a brain tumour, aged 38 on 11 July 1937

Gershwin's Music

Now we know more about the man, why not listen to some of his music!

- Rhapsody in Blue
- Porgy and Bess
- An American in Paris
- Three Preludes for Solo Piano
- Piano Concerto in F
- Oh Lady, Be Good
- Lullaby for String Quartet
- How Long Has This Been Going On
- Cuban Overture