

George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*:

Performances and Recordings in the 1920s.

Part 1. The United States.

By Albert Haim

Overture.

Paul Whiteman about *Rhapsody in Blue*:

One of the numbers in our Aeolian Hall program is *Rhapsody in Blue* and unless I am ignorant of my own business, the number will be a knockout success.

Walter Damrosch about George Gershwin.

George Gershwin is the Prince who has taken Cinderella Jazz by the hand and openly proclaimed her Jazz Princess to the astonished world, and has succeeded in having her accepted as a respectable member of music circles.

George Gershwin about Jazz.

The Rhapsody in Blue represents what I have been striving for since my earliest composition. I wanted to show that jazz is an idiom not to be limited to a mere song and chorus that consumed three minutes in presentation. I succeeded in showing that jazz is not merely a dance, it comprises bigger themes and purposes.

1. Introduction.

When, in early January 1924, George Gershwin, a 25 year-old Tin Pan Alley songwriter, composed *Rhapsody in Blue*, combining

elements of jazz and classical music, the former was still in its infancy. The Original Dixieland Jass Band began recording in 1917. King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band, with Louis Armstrong, recorded a number of legendary jazz numbers beginning in April 1923, but it was not until the second half of the 1920s that Louis Armstrong and His Hot Five and Hot Seven and Duke Ellington's orchestra waxed their seminal jazz recordings. Before 1924, George Gershwin had been composing songs for Broadway musical shows but had not cultivated the art of classical music. It is therefore remarkable that Gershwin undertook the daunting task, at Paul Whiteman's urging, of writing a concert piece that merged jazz and symphonic music. In *Rhapsody in Blue*, Gershwin created a sophisticated, complex composition that defies classification—a revolutionary work that cannot be anticipated from the musical forms that preceded it.

In the 1920s, jazz was viewed by many as a lower and vulgar form of music. The performance of *Rhapsody in Blue* in the concert hall helped jazz gain legitimacy as an art form, and, moreover, represented a turning point in the evolution of jazz: African-American musicians and composers were encouraged to create serious works using the jazz idiom. Some examples are James P. Johnson's *Yamecrow, A Black Rhapsody* (1928), William Grant Still's *Afro-American Symphony* (1930), and Duke Ellington's *Creole Rhapsody* (1931).

In the present article, Part 1 of 2, I present information about performances (live and broadcast) and recordings of *Rhapsody in Blue* in the United States. Part 2 will cover performances and recordings of the *Rhapsody in Blue* in Europe. The material covered is restricted to the 1920s. Trying to extend the material to the following decades and into the 21st century would be inappropriate for an article in this Journal. The chosen period begins with the world premiere of *Rhapsody in Blue* by Paul Whiteman and His Orchestra with George Gershwin as pianist in 1924 at Aeolian Hall in New York City and ends with the performance of *Rhapsody in Blue* also by Paul Whiteman and His Orchestra in 1929-1930 at Universal Studios in Hollywood, CA for the film *King of Jazz*.

2. The World Premiere of *Rhapsody in Blue*.

On Feb 12, 1924, a snowy Tuesday in New York City, Paul Whiteman had lunch with Jules Glaenzer, Zez Confrey and George Gershwin. Confrey and Gershwin were pianists/composers. Jules Glaenzer was a Cartier (jewelry) executive, an amateur pianist who hosted dinner, cocktail and opening night parties in his fashionable East 65th Street duplex.

Following the lunch, Whiteman, Gershwin and Confrey went over to 29-33 West 42nd Street the location of the Aeolian building which housed the 1100-seat Aeolian Hall.



Figure 1. Aeolian Hal, New York City.

At 3 pm, Paul Whiteman's orchestra presented a concert billed as "An Experiment in Modern Music." Paul Whiteman was known as the King of Jazz and the concert included several numbers that were viewed as jazz at the time. However, this was not the first time that jazz had been played in Aeolian Hall. A little over three months earlier, in the same venue, Canadian mezzo-soprano Eva Gauthier performed two jazzy numbers –Gershwin's *Swanee* and Berlin's

Alexander's Ragtime Band— in a recital of otherwise concert works. For the non-classical numbers, Ms. Gauthier was accompanied by George Gershwin on piano.

Whiteman's experiment —an unconventional and novel combination of jazz, popular music, and concert music— was a smashing success: an enthusiastic audience brought back Whiteman's orchestra for five curtain calls. The concert was one of the most important musical events of the 1920s. The highlight of the concert was the premiere of Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*, the archetypal example of symphonic jazz.

PAUL WHITEMAN
... AND HIS ...
PALAIS ROYAL ORCHESTRA

WILL OFFER

**An Experiment
in Modern Music**

ASSISTED BY

**ZEZ CONFREY and
GEORGE GERSHWIN**

New Typical American Compositions by VICTOR
HERBERT, IRVING BERLIN and GEORGE
GERSHWIN will be played for the first time

AEOLIAN CONCERT HALL
ENTRANCE AND BOX OFFICE 34 WEST 41st STREET

Tuesday, February 12, 1924

Lincoln's Birthday, at 3 P. M.
Tickets on Sale Now: **From 55c to \$2.20**

Victor Records Exclusively
Chickering Pianos Buscher Band Instruments

Figure 2. Advertisement for Whiteman's
"Experiment in Modern Music."

About six weeks earlier, the New York Tribune of January 3, 1924, reporting about a "Paul Whiteman concert to be given at Aeolian Hall, Tuesday afternoon, February 12, 1924," carried the following item: "George Gershwin is at work on a jazz concerto." That was news to Ira Gershwin and he informed his brother of the newspaper announcement. George knew about his commitment to write a piece of serious jazz music for Whiteman, but had forgotten as he was busy writing for the Broadway show "Sweet Little Devil" which premiered in the Astor Theatre on January 21, 1924. George telephoned Whiteman at 6 am on January 4, 1924. Whiteman assured Gershwin that the concert at Aeolian Hall was on. Three days later, on January 7, 1924, George Gershwin began working on his composition which he titled initially "An American Rhapsody," but changed to "Rhapsody in Blue" at the suggestion of his brother Ira.

In the next few weeks, Gershwin wrote an arrangement for two pianos. The original manuscript from January 7, 1924 with the title *Rhapsody in Blue for Jazz Band and Piano* was written in pencil and has been housed, since 1963, in the George and Ira Gershwin Collection of the Library of Congress.

RHAPSODY IN BLUE.

FOR JAZZ BAND AND PIANO.

George Gershwin
Jan 7, 1925

The image shows a handwritten musical score for 'Rhapsody in Blue' by George Gershwin. The score is written on five systems of staves. The first system is for the Jazz Band, with a 'slowly' tempo marking. It features a melodic line in the upper staff and a bass line in the lower staff. The second system is for the Piano, with a 'P' dynamic marking. The third system is for the Jazz Band, with a 'J.B.' marking. The fourth system is for the Piano, with a 'P.' marking. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

Figure 3. First page of Gershwin's Two-Piano Manuscript. From the Library of Congress.

Every day, George made good copies in ink of his pencil sketches for Ferde Grofé, the principal arranger for the Paul Whiteman orchestra at the time. Ferde Grofé would go to the Gershwins home on the corner of 110th Street and Amsterdam Avenue to pick up the new pages George had written in ink. As time was of essence, Grofé told George to just provide the pencil sketches and had the chief copyist for Harms, Inc. do the copying. Grofé would take the parts written on piano staves for the jazz band and make his orchestration for Whiteman's orchestra. The final arrangement, also currently located in the Library of Congress, was made for an augmented version of Whiteman's orchestra and consisted of 23 musicians: two trumpets and flugelhorns, two trombones, two French horns, three reed players (who played saxophones and clarinets as well as flute and oboe), tuba, string bass, two pianos, banjo, drums and eight violins.

Wikipedia gives the following roster of musicians for the Aeolian Hall Feb 12, 1924 Experiment in Modern Music concert:

Reed I (Ross Gorman)—clarinet, bass clarinet, oboe, E flat soprano (sopranino) saxophone, alto saxophone; Reed II (Don Clark)—soprano, alto, and baritone saxophones; Reed III (Hale Byers)—soprano and tenor saxophones. (Gorman, Clark and Byers played other woodwinds for Whiteman, but these are the instruments used in the 1924 scoring.) 2 B flat trumpets (Henry Busse and Frank Siegrist); 2 Horns in F (Arturo Cerino and Al Corrado); 2 Trombones (Roy Maxon and James Casseday), and Tuba (in the 1924 the score it alternates with String Bass; Whiteman's personnel included Gus Helleberg and Albert Armer); Percussion (one player playing traps, timpani and bells; George Marsh for the premiere); Orchestral piano (Whiteman's roster included pianists Ferde Grofé and Henry Lange); Tenor Banjo (Michael Pingatore); Violins (8 for the 1924 premiere).

Whiteman's experiment was daring: bringing jazz into the concert hall at a time when jazz was viewed as a lower form of music. Some critics had rather negative comments about the *Rhapsody in Blue*, others were very enthusiastic. As an overall summary review, it is worth quoting the headline of critic Abel Green's review in the February 14, 1924 issue of *Variety*: "PAUL WHITEMAN'S BRILLIANT RECITAL SAYS JAZZ CRAZE WILL NEVER DIE."

The Aeolian Hall Whiteman concert consisted of two distinct parts.

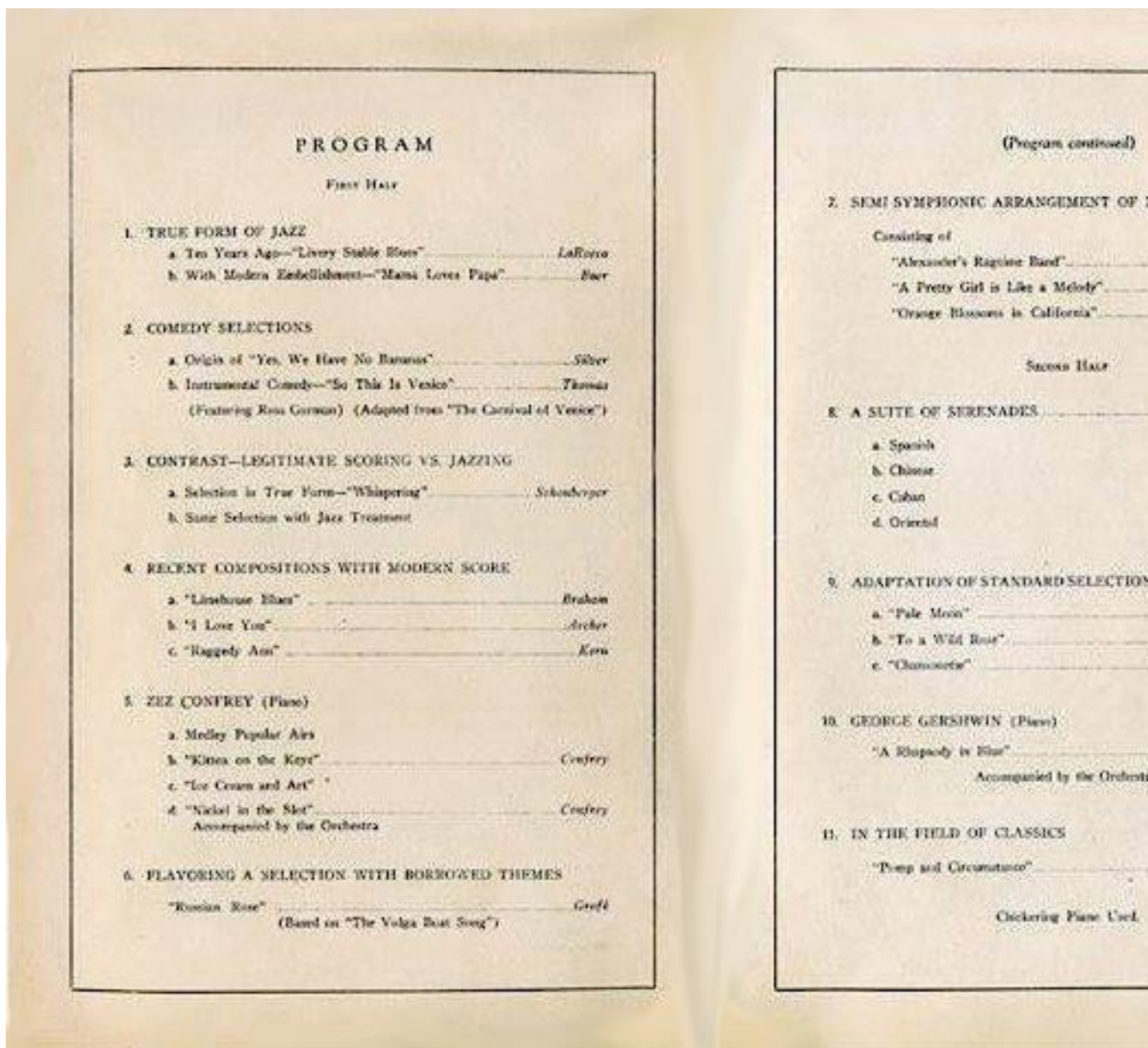


Figure 4. Program for February 12, 1924 Concert in Aeolian Hall.

The first half was a combination of jazz, dance band, and novelty numbers. The second half included mostly semi-classical compositions. One of these was *Rhapsody in Blue*, a composition by George Gershwin for jazz band and piano.

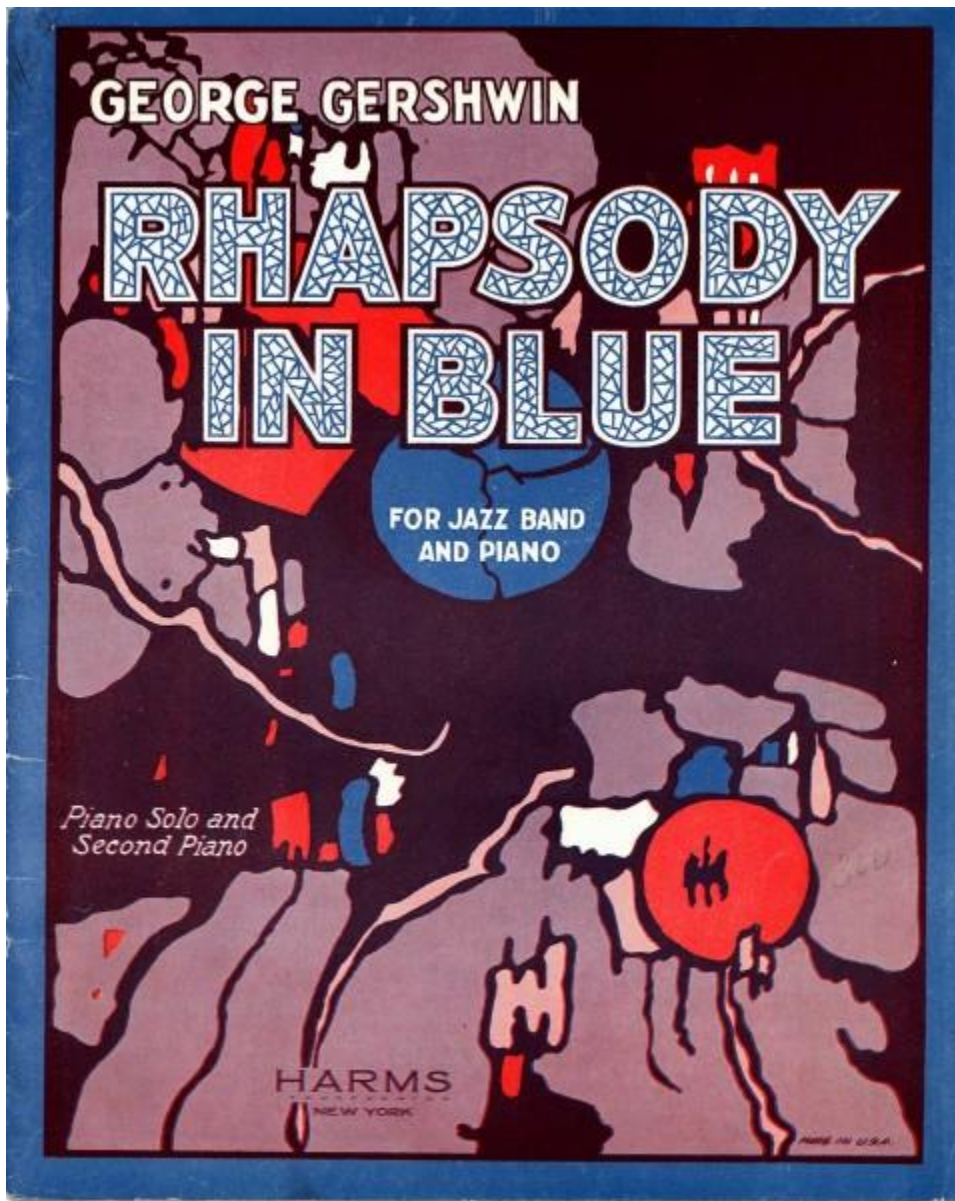


Figure 5. Cover of Original Sheet Music.

George Gershwin's best known serious composition, *Rhapsody in Blue*, represents a milestone in the history of American music. The premiere on February 12, 1924 at Aeolian Hall was received with high praise by some critics. Olin Downes wrote in the February 13, 1924 issue of the New York Times: "This composition shows extraordinary talent, as it also shows a young composer with aims that go far beyond those of his ilk ... There was tumultuous applause for Mr. Gershwin's composition. There was realization of the irresistible

vitality and genuineness of much of the music heard on this occasion.”

Rhapsody in Blue has been criticized for its lack of structure. Leonard Bernstein described it as “not a composition” but as “a string of separate paragraphs stuck together.” [1] In contrast, Howard Pollack, in his massive Gershwin biography [2], writes: “the work’s melodic material reveals an extraordinary unity and tightness.” Wikipedia also has commented on the “strong motivic interrelatedness” of the work. From the vantage point of nearly a century after the premiere, George Gershwin’s *Rhapsody in Blue* is an extraordinary composition, a masterpiece, an amalgamation of jazz and concert music, an entirely new and unique type of music, America’s ultimate gift to world’s civilization. Credit must also be given to Ferde Grofé for his highly imaginative orchestration, to the members of Whiteman’s orchestra for their extraordinary musicianship and versatility, and, last but not least, to Whiteman for being the catalyst and executor who transformed an idea, a concept into a tangible reality.

As far as I know, there are no extant photographs of the Whiteman orchestra on the stage of Aeolian Hall. There is a photo of the Whiteman orchestra which, according to Don Rayno, [3] is the “Whiteman Orchestra augmented with violins and French horns just before the Aeolian concert.” I count 22 musicians. The only one missing is Gus Helleberg.



Figure 6. The February 12, 1924 Aeolian Concert Whiteman Orchestra.

3. Whiteman with *Rhapsody in Blue* on the Road.

Following the successes of the Aeolian Hall and Carnegie Hall Concerts [see below] and the acclaim of *Rhapsody in Blue* by critics and public alike, Whiteman's New York office was flooded with offers from around the country. Whiteman decided that it was time to bring the *Experiment in American Music* to the hinterlands. Thus, on May 14, 1924 Whiteman's outfit consisting of twenty five musicians and a road crew that included, among others, a band manager, stage manager, electrician and piano tuner, boarded its private train car at Grand Central Station for an eighteen-day tour of upstate New York

(Rochester, Buffalo), the Midwest (Pittsburgh, Indianapolis, Louisville, Cincinnati, St. Louis, Des Moines, Davenport, Milwaukee, Chicago, Cleveland, Toledo, Detroit) and Canada (Toronto, Ottawa and Montreal). One of the musicians was George Gershwin himself who, because of a commitment to the 1924 George White's Scandals, could participate in the tour only for the first twelve days. His replacement for the last nine concerts was pianist Milton Rettenberg. The program presented in the concert tour was very similar to that for the Aeolian Hall concert. The tour lasted until June 2, 1924.

The appearance of Whiteman's orchestra was well advertised in each town it played. Here is one of four announcements in the Davenport press. Note the specification: "At one of these pianos will be George Gershwin, arranger, composer and world-famous musician. Mr. Gershwin accompanies Mr. Whiteman mainly for the purpose of demonstrating certain compositions and effects."

Don't Miss This Unique Musical Event



PAUL
WHITEMAN

AND HIS
ORCHESTRA

AT THE

Coliseum

8:15 P. M. May 23rd
Davenport

**WHITEMAN ORDERS
THREE PIANOS FOR
HIS CONCERT HERE**

The manager of the Paul Whiteman orchestra which plays at the Coliseum, May 23, today ordered three Chickering concert grand pianos to be used in presenting "An Experiment in American Music." The make of piano is specified by Mr. Whiteman, it is said.

At one of these pianos will be George Gershwin, arranger, composer and world-famous musician. Mr. Gershwin accompanies Mr. Whiteman mainly for the purpose of demonstrating certain compositions and effects.

In addition to its enormous popularity this concert experiment by Mr. Whiteman and his orchestra brings to the musician and critic a realization that our modern popular music is eventually to provide a significant contribution to the piano literature of the world.



The official piano of Paul Whiteman and his orchestra

MR. WHITEMAN WRITES:

"The wonderful tone of these glorious Chickering pianos brings an entirely new character into the modern orchestra and gives us both a solo instrument of rarest beauty and an ensemble piano which blends perfectly with the saxophone, violins and brasses."

EXCLUSIVE REPRESENTATIVES

Schmidt Music Co.
111-113 West Third Street. Davenport, Iowa

Hear this Orchestra---Then Hear the "AMPICO"

Figure 7. Ad in Davenport Democrat and Leader of May 19, 1924.

During the summer of 1924, Whiteman's orchestra gave concerts in New England, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania and Maryland, Again, the program for the concerts was very similar to that in the Aeolian Hall.

On September 19, 1924, Whiteman and his orchestra left Pennsylvania Station for their transcontinental tour that lasted for nearly eight months, with a few visits to New York City during that period. The band gave about 200 concerts in nearly two thirds of the states. The program was similar to that for the February 12, 1924 Aeolian Hall concert and included *Rhapsody in Blue* in every appearance. The piano soloist for the performances of the Rhapsody was Harry Perella, but on two occasions George Gershwin himself was the pianist: the November 27, 1924 concert in Philadelphia's Academy of Music and the December 4, 1924 concert in Boston's Symphony Hall. There is one fascinating bit of information associated with the August 10, 1924 Whiteman concert in the Garden Pier Theater in Atlantic City. Ben Bernie switches from his role as band leader to that of music critic and provides an analysis of the Whiteman concert. From the August 14, 1924 issue of Variety, here is a comment relevant to the present article "George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* was the piece de resistance. The number has created a sensation in even the high-brow musical circles. Paul Whiteman deserves great credit for bringing to the attention of the public this undisputed masterpiece of the new and modern school."

The appearances of Whiteman's orchestra in the towns it visited in its transcontinental tour were extensively advertised in the local newspapers. Here is an ad for the concert on February 4, 1925 at the Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Hall in Brownwood, Texas..

Paul Whiteman and His Orchestra

THEY WILL SOON BE HERE



Paul Whiteman and His Concert Orchestra

At the Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Hall. Hear them, in person, then buy His Victor Records From Us. We have just put in a complete line of Victrolas and Victor Records.

L. E. HALL MUSIC CO.
Phone 560. 110 East Lee St.



PAUL WHITEMAN
himself and his **ORCHESTRA**

of 25 Artists
4 Famous Soloists

MORTON DOWNEY, Tenor
ROSS GORMAN, Saxophone
HARRY PERELLA, Piano
MICHAEL PINGITORE, Banjo

60 Instruments, 3 Grand Pianos
Gorgeous Stage Setting

Seats Sale at Jones & Dublin's
Prices \$1.00, \$1.50, \$2.00, \$2.50.
Boxes \$3.00. No Tax



PAUL WHITEMAN and His ORCHESTRA in Person



With a Victrola and his Victor Records you can have a **Whiteman Concert**

in your home any time. COME IN AND LET US PLAY HIS latest records for you.

SOME OF HIS LATEST DANCE RECORDS

No. 19467—A. All Alone (Waltz)
No. 19467—B. I Wonder What's Become of Sally (Waltz)
No. 19331—A. By the Waters of Minnesota (Fox Trot)
No. 19299—B. Meditation From This (Fox Trot)
No. 19467—A. Hard Hearted Hans (Fox Trot)
No. 19467—B. Ragdoll (Fox Trot)
No. 19467—C. Where Is That Old Girl of Mine (Fox Trot)
No. 19467—D. Mandolin (Fox Trot)
No. 19299—A. What'll I Do? (Waltz)
No. 19299—B. Lullaby (Fox Trot)

HIS CONCERT NUMBERS

No. 52228—A. A Suite of Serenades, Part 1
No. 52228—B. A Suite of Serenades, Part 2
No. 52229—A. Rhapsody in Blue, Part 1
No. 52229—B. Rhapsody in Blue, Part 2



L. E. HALL MUSIC CO.
337 Cotton Ave., Brownwood, Texas
A Dependable Music House

Auditorium Tomorrow Night at 8:15

Figure 8. Ad in in the Brownwood (Texas) Bulletin of February 3, 1925.

The last Whiteman tour to include *Rhapsody in Blue* in every concert was the three-month transcontinental tour that began on September 22, 1925. One of the last concerts in the tour took place on December 9, 1925 in Princeton University. The concert was advertised in several issues of the Daily Princetonian, the student newspaper.

WHITEMAN WILL PRESENT GLORIFIED JAZZ TONIGHT

**George Gershwin's "Rhapsody in
Blue" to Be Played for First Time
Here in Alexander Hall at 8:30.**

When Paul Whiteman and his famous concert orchestra appear at Alexander Hall at 8:30 tonight, they will present for the first time in Princeton George Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue".

This highly ingenious work for piano and orchestra is the first composition of its kind presenting jazz themes with symphonic treatment, and it has been recognized by critics as an indication of the development which American popular music may follow in the future.

Figure 9. Announcement of Whiteman Concert in the December 9, 1925 Issue of the Daily Princetonian.

For the rest of the 1920s, Paul Whiteman and his orchestra would play *Rhapsody in Blue* on several occasions. By the end of the 1920s, Whiteman's orchestra had played *Rhapsody in Blue* more than a thousand times.

4. *Rhapsody in Blue* at Carnegie Hall.

April 21, 1924. Repeat performances of the *Experiment in Modern Music* took place in Aeolian Hall on March 7 1924, in the Philadelphia's Academy of Music on April 13, 1924 and in Carnegie Hall on April 21, 1924. The latter represented George Gershwin's debut at Carnegie Hall.

CARNEGIE HALL, Monday Evening, April 21, at 8:15

**PAUL WHITEMAN
AND HIS ORCHESTRA**

Soloists:
GEORGE GERSHWIN **ZEZ CONFREY**
FOR THE AMERICAN ACADEMY IN ROME
TICKETS NOW ON SALE AT CARNEGIE HALL BOX OFFICE
Chickering Pianos—Buescher Instruments—Victor Records

Figure 10. Ad for Carnegie Hall Concert, from the New York Times of April 13, 1924.

The program was slightly different from the one at Aeolian Hall.

NICK LAROCCA (1889–1961)	Dixie Land One Step
NICK LAROCCA (1889–1961)	Medley One Step
FRANK SILVER (1896–1960)	Yes, We Have No Bananas (1923)
HARRY WARREN (1893–1981)	So This Is Venice (1923) Ross Gorman, Bagpipes
RICHARD A. WHITING (1891–1938)	Japanese Sandman (performed in "true form") (1920)

RICHARD A. WHITING (1891–1938)	Japanese Sandman (with "Jazz Treatment") (1920)
PETER BRAHAM	Limehouse Blues (1922)
VINCENT ROSE (1880–1944)	Linger Awhile (1923)
ISHAM JONES (1894–1956)	Shanghai Lullaby
ZEZ CONFREY (1895–1971)	Medley Popular Airs Zez Confrey, Piano
ZEZ CONFREY (1895–1971)	Ice Cream And Art Zez Confrey, Piano
ZEZ CONFREY (1895–1971)	Kitten On The Keys (1921) Zez Confrey, Piano
FREDERICK KNIGHT LOGAN (1871–1928)	Pale Moon
EDWARD MACDOWELL (1861–1908)	Woodland Sketches: To a Wild Rose, Op. 51, No. 1 (1896)
RUDOLF FRIML (1879–1972)	Chansonette (1923)
FERDE GROFE (1892–1972)	Russian Rose
VICTOR HERBERT (1859–1924)	A Suite of Serenades (1924) Spanish Chinese Cuban Oriental

GEORGE GERSHWIN
(1898–1937)

Rhapsody in Blue (1924)

George Gershwin, Piano

Figure 11. Program for Paul Whiteman's Concert at Carnegie Hall, April 21, 1924

November 15, 1924. Paul Whiteman's orchestra with George Gershwin as piano soloist performed *Rhapsody in Blue* once more at Carnegie Hall. The occasion was the November 15, 1924 concert "An Entertainment in Modern American Music." The program included George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* and *Somebody Loves Me* and several numbers by American composers and songwriters: Eastwood Lane, Isham Jones, Thurlow Lieurance, Con Conrad, Ferde Grofe, Vincent Rose and Phil Spitalny.

There was a preview of the concert on November 14, 1924, by invitation only, in the Earl Carroll Theatre. The following are excerpts from Abel Green's review of the concert for *Variety*, November 19, 1924:

"The ultra mastery of each instrumentalist has made the Whiteman orchestra the peer it is. With nothing further in view in the dance field, the maestro of syncopation looked around for new fields. His advance into concert was a natural step ... it was inevitable that Whiteman should be the pioneer and the first to lead his orchestra in the concert realm. Musically and otherwise Whiteman is not only far away from the rest ... but he is so far advanced no one can approach him."

March 1, 1926. Violinist and Concertmaster of the New York Capitol Grand orchestra Mayo Wadler (né Waldo Mayo, child prodigy who made his debut at age 8 in Carnegie Hall) gave a concert in the Main Hall of Carnegie Hall. One of the works he performed was his own transcription for violin and piano of Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*.

November 15, 1927. Violinist Helen Jeffrey and dancer Dmitri Jeffrey presented a concert/ballet in the Main Hall of Carnegie Hall. Some of the numbers played by Helen Jeffrey were by Bach, Dvorak,

Rachmaninoff, Paganini and Chopin. Dmitri Jeffery played a gay boulevardier to Helen Jeffrey's arrangement of Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* for violin and piano, with Helen Jeffrey on violin and Raymond Bauman on piano. In his review of the recital in the November 16, 1927 issue of the Brooklyn Daily Eagle, music critic Edward Cushing described Helen Jeffrey's performance as "masterful" and Dmitri Jeffrey's dancing as "inexpert."

December 14, 1929. The New York Philharmonic with Ernest Schelling as conductor presented the New York Philharmonic Young People's Concert in the Main Hall of Carnegie Hall. It was an all-American composer recital. One of the works performed on that occasion was Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* with George Gershwin himself as pianist.

The Philharmonic-Symphony Society of New York

1842-1878
CONSOLIDATED 1928

1929 . EIGHTY-EIGHTH SEASON . 1930

FIFTH JUNIOR ORCHESTRAL CONCERT CARNEGIE HALL

Saturday Morning, December 14, 1929
AT ELEVEN

Under the Direction of
ERNEST SCHELLING

Soloist:
GEORGE GERSHWIN

PROGRAM

1. DE LAMARTER....."Dance of the Sweetheart," from "The Betrothal"
2. LOEFFLER....."Memories of My Childhood"
3. SCHELLING....."A Victory Ball": Fantasy for Orchestra
(By Request)
4. MACDOWELL-STOCK....."To a Water Lily"
5. GERSHWIN....."Rhapsody in Blue"
GEORGE GERSHWIN
- SKILTON....."Cheyenne War Dance"

ARTHUR JUDSON, Manager
EDWARD ERVIN, Associate Manager

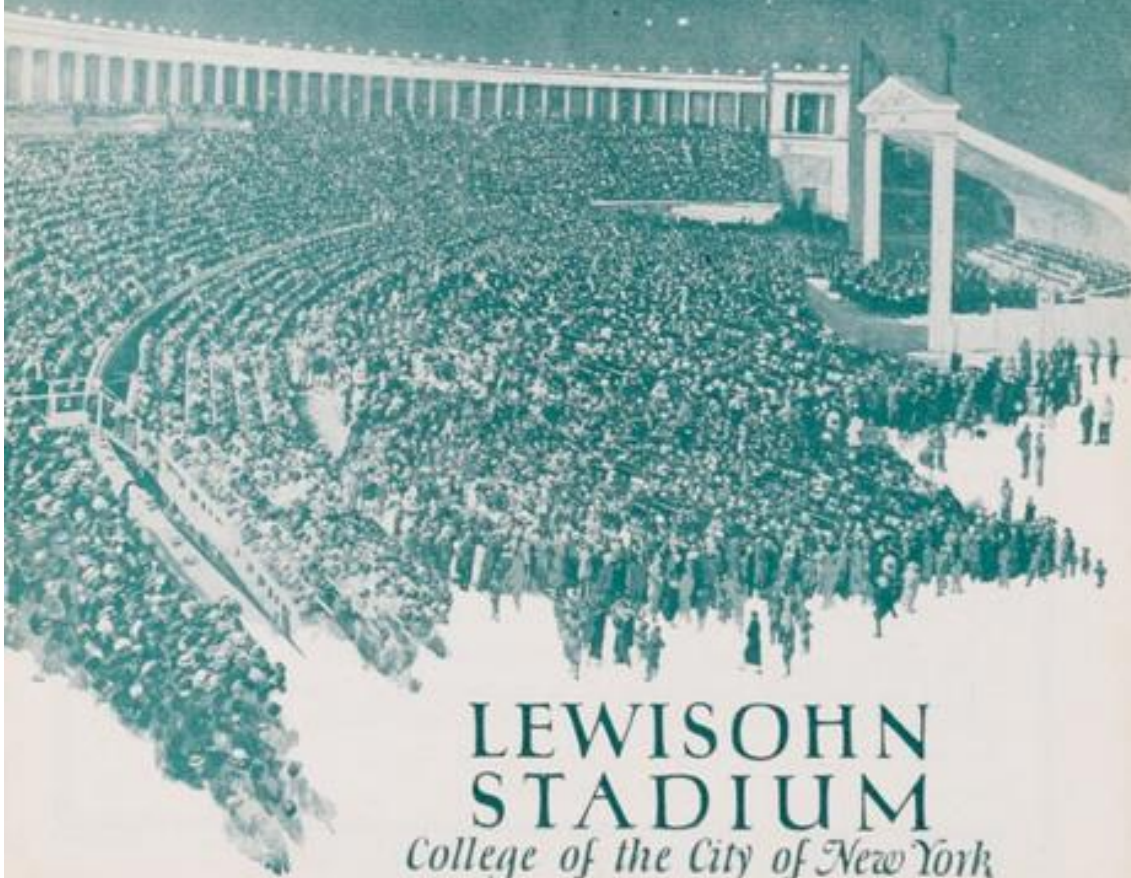
ERNEST SCHELLING USES THE STEINWAY PIANO
THE STEINWAY is the Official Piano of The Philharmonic-Symphony Society
GEORGE GERSHWIN USES THE STEINWAY PIANO

Figure 12. December 14, 1929 Junior Orchestral Concert at Carnegie Hall.

5. George Gershwin and the Lewisohn Stadium Concerts

Financier and philanthropist Adolph Lewisohn funded the construction of a stadium on the campus of the City College of New York. The stadium opened in 1915 and was demolished in 1973. One of the uses of the stadium was for classical concerts that began in the summer of 1918 and ended nearly 50 years later. Attendance to the concerts was in the thousands.

STADIUM CONCERTS REVIEW



LEWISOHN
STADIUM
College of the City of New York

Figure 13. Cover of Booklet.

The premiere of *Rhapsody in Blue* in Lewisohn stadium took place on July 25, 1927. As seen in the program, George Gershwin himself was the pianist. The concert was attended by 16,000 people.

- MONDAY EVENING, JULY 25th**
Soloist: **GEORGE GERSHWIN, Pianist**
1. Overture to "Benvenuto Cellini" **BERLIOZ**
 2. Concerto in F major, for Piano and Orchestra..... **GERSHWIN**
 - I. Allegro
 - II. Andante
 - III. Allegro agitato

GEORGE GERSHWIN, *Pianist*
(*First time at the Stadium*)

INTERMISSION
 3. "Rhapsody in Blue," for Piano and Orchestra..... **GERSHWIN**

GEORGE GERSHWIN, *Pianist*
(*First time at the Stadium*)
 4. Spanish Caprice **RIMSKY-KORSAKOFF**
 - (a) Alborado
 - (b) Variations
 - (c) Alborado
 - (d) Scene and Gypsy Song
 - (e) Fandango

Figure 14. Program for Lewisohn Stadium Concert of July 25, 1927.

The next appearance of George Gershwin in the Lewisohn stadium was on August 26, 1929. In addition to being the pianist in the performance of *Rhapsody in Blue*, Gershwin was guest conductor for his composition *An American in Paris*.

- MONDAY EVENING, AUGUST 26th**
George Gershwin, Guest Conductor
1. Overture Freischutz *Weber*
 2. Rhapsody in Blue *Gershwin*
(Solo played by Mr. Gershwin)
 3. Three Hungarian Dances *Brahms*
 4. American in Paris *Gershwin*
(Conducted by Mr. Gershwin)

INTERMISSION

 - 5. Symphony *C. Franck*

Figure 15. Program for Lewisohn Stadium Concert of August 26, 1929.

6. *Rhapsody in Blue* in Whiteman's Old Gold Hour.

Paul Whiteman had misgivings about regular radio broadcasts. According to Don Rayno, Whiteman feared overexposure “and a cheapening of his musical offerings.” [3] After hesitating for several years, Whiteman decided to go on the Columbia network with a one-hour weekly program, the Old Gold Hour, sponsored by the P. Lorillard Tobacco Company. Whiteman viewed a weekly coast to coast radio broadcast as another experiment and was not deterred by the \$5,000 fee per program. Each broadcast featured about a dozen numbers and it was necessary for Whiteman to add two members of his orchestra, pianists Roy Bargy and Lennie Hayton, to the regular Whiteman arrangers Ferde Grofé and Bill Challis. In addition, Whiteman hired the distinguished African American composer William Grant Still to produce two arrangements per week at \$100 each. The Old Gold Hour premiere took place on Tuesday, February 5, 1929 from WABC in New York City and was relayed over 43 radio stations. The weekly broadcast continued until May 6, 1930. *Rhapsody in Blue* was used as the signature of the program, as well as in musical interludes and station breaks. The complete *Rhapsody* was played in the programs of February 19, 1929 and April 15, 1930. The program was heavily advertised in newspapers and magazines.

PAUL WHITEMAN—conducting

The OLD GOLD
PAUL WHITEMAN HOUR.
 Over Columbia network,
 every Tuesday night, 9 to
 10 P. M. . Eastern Stand-
 ard Time.

(TED HUSING, announcing)



Part of Paul Whiteman's own 33-piece orchestra which the King of Jazz leads in every OLD GOLD Hour.

Over the radio . . . **Old**

**asks Nation to
 the 4 leading**

Here are the first returns, ju
 and as audited by certified pu

**How 17,972
 smokers voted**

We certify that we have audited re-
 ports received from radio fans,
 showing how 17,972 smokers
 voted, in comparing the 4 leading
 cigarettes, and that the following
 is an accurate summary of this vote.

1st CHOICES	RESULT
OLD GOLD	8812 49%
Brand X	3879 22%
Brand Y	3103 17%
Brand Z	2178 12%

Every Tuesday night, Paul White-
 man's orchestra thrills the radio

Did o
 sured

Figure 16. Ad for the Old Gold Hour.

7. Other Significant Performances of *Rhapsody in Blue*, Live and on Radio.

February 22, 1925. Mention was made above of arrangements of *Rhapsody in Blue* for violin and piano. But the first performance of *Rhapsody in Blue* arranged for violin and piano took place at Aeolian Hall almost exactly one year after the legendary premiere of the work in the same venue. Samuel Dushkin, violinist, composer and educator, was born in Poland in 1891 and died in New York in 1976. He studied with Leopold Auer and Fritz Kreisler and worked with Igor Stravinsky on various projects. Dushkin made his New York debut in 1924 with the New York Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Walter Damrosch who, that same year, commissioned George Gershwin for a concerto for piano and orchestra. Dushkin published arrangements and transcriptions for violin and piano of works by, among others, Bizet, Stravinsky, Mussorgsky, Rachmaninoff and Gershwin. The Gershwin piece included in the Repertoire is *Short Story*, a composition for violin and piano written by Gershwin in early 1925 in collaboration with Dushkin. Gershwin and Dushkin premiered the piece on February 8, 1925 at New York's University Club.

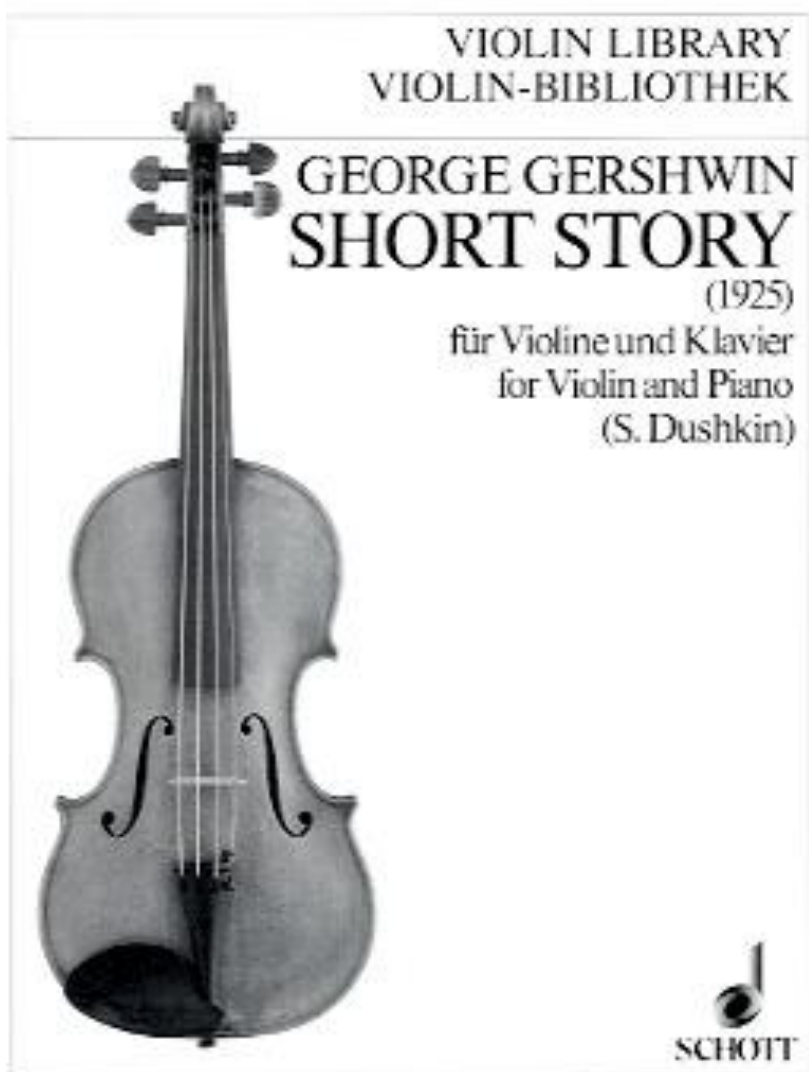


Figure 17. Cover of Sheet Music for *Short Story*.

Dushkin's February 22, 1925 concert at Aeolian Hall included works by Bach and Mozart and Gershwin's *Short Story*. The last number in the concert was an arrangement for violin and piano of selected parts of Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*, with Dushkin on violin and Gregory Ashman at the piano. According to the review in the *New York Times* of February 23, 1925, George Gershwin himself was present at the concert in a balcony box.

The review of the concert in the February 23, 1925 *New York Times* includes the following comments about the Gershwin compositions: "Mr. Gershwin's pieces –frankly jazz– moved the house to laughter by

oddly imitative effects in the fiddle strings. Here again, however, there was a fresh charm of restless harmony and rhythm that held attention under skillful hands.”

December 4, 1926. A concert in the Hotel Roosevelt New York City, began with George Gershwin playing his “Six New Piano Preludes.” It was followed by George Gershwin and William Daly on a two-piano arrangement of *Rhapsody in Blue*.

December 11, 1926. Jean Goldkette Victor Recording Orchestra (with Bix Beiderbecke on cornet) made a special appearance at the Detroit Athletic Club. An excerpt of Gershwin’s *Rhapsody in Blue* was included in the program:

- I. A. Adoration Borowski
- B. Transcription of Indian Melodies
- C. Hurricane Mertz
- D. Waltz Selection of Popular Melodies
- E. Excerpt of *Rhapsody in Blue* Gershwin
- F. On the Road to Mandalay Speaks-Kipling
- II. The Revelers
- III. American Concerto [Goldkette himself at the piano]
 - Lento Scott
 - Andante and Presto MacDowell
- IV. The Revelers
- V. Valencia
- VI. The Revelers

Figure 18. Program for Goldkette’s Concert

January 1, 1927. The Bakelite Hour was a radio program that ran on Sundays from 8:00 PM to 9:00 PM over radio station WJZ, New York City, the flagship station for the [NBC Blue Network](#). The Bakelite hour had its debut in February of 1926, before WJZ was part of the NBC Blue Network. The special January 1, 1927 broadcast included an address by Alfred E. Smith who was beginning his fourth term as governor of the Empire State; a play by play description of the football game between Stanford University the University of Alabama at the Bowl of Roses in Pasadena, CA; a performance of *Rhapsody in Blue*

from the Chamber Music Hall at Carnegie Hall by George Gershwin on piano and Walter Damrosch conducting the New York Philharmonic Orchestra. The special New Year program ended with performances by Irish tenor John McCormack, violinist Mischa Elman, pianist Alfredo Cortot and the Victor Salon Orchestra directed by Nathaniel Shilkret.

March 11, 1927. The Cincinnati Symphony orchestra conducted by Fritz Reiner played two of Gershwin's works with the composer at the piano in the 2,000-seat Emery Auditorium, According to Leopold Stokowski, the quality of the acoustics of the Auditorium was comparable to that of Carnegie Hall. The program consisted of the following works:

Ludwig van Beethoven: Symphony No. 7

George Gershwin: Piano Concerto in F

George Gershwin: Rhapsody in Blue

Richard Strauss: Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks

May 11, 1927. Maxwell House Coffee sponsored numerous radio programs from the 1920s into the 1940s. From late 1926 to early 1931, the Maxwell House Concerts were broadcast over the NBC Blue Network. The particular broadcast of May 11, 1927 included *Rhapsody in Blue* played by the Maxwell House Coffee Concert orchestra directed in this instance by Nathaniel Shilkret.

Display Ad 35 -- No Title

New York Times (1923-Current file): May 11, 1927;

ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times with Index
pg. 30

"Rhapsody in Blue" on the air tonight

A SENSATION in music — George Gershwin's famous "Rhapsody in Blue"! Hear it played tonight by the Maxwell House Coffee Concert Orchestra, Nathaniel Shilkret, Conductor. Musical comedy hits also will be given by three fine soloists. Tonight from 9 to 10 P. M., Eastern Daylight Saving Time, from WJZ New York, WBAL Baltimore, WSB Atlanta, WBZ Springfield, WBZA Boston, KDEA Pittsburgh, KYW Chicago, WHAS Louisville, WSM Nashville, WMC Memphis. Tune in tonight! And remember Maxwell House, the coffee that has pleased more people than any other coffee ever offered for sale.

MAXWELL HOUSE
COFFEE *Radio Program*
every Wednesday, 9 to 10 P.M.

(Eastern Daylight Saving Time)



Figure 19. Ad in the New York Times of May 11, 1927.

July 9, 1927. From 1926 to 1933, Jesse Crawford was the featured organist at the Paramount Theatre on Broadway in New York City. The Wurlitzer theatre organ in the Paramount Theatre was designed for Crawford who was an adviser for the construction and installation of the 33-ton organ. In 1927, organist Jesse Crawford made an arrangement of *Rhapsody in Blue* for organ. A typical program where Crawford played on the organ began with an overture, *Musical Notions* (a compilation of popular tunes for violin, soprano, and brasses), continued with Crawford at the organ with the *Rhapsody in Blue* and ended with a Paul Whiteman's revue, the patriotic *Fireworks*.

November 6, 1927. For the weekly *Intimate Hour* program of this date, the combined orchestras of the Columbia Broadcasting System with Arthur Schutt at the piano performed *Rhapsody in Blue*.

January 4, 1928. The NBC Network broadcast a special coast to coast radio program from four cities. The program, The Dodge Victory Six Radio Hour was sponsored by Dodge Brothers, Inc and rebroadcast via forty-three radio stations. This marked the introduction of the "Victory Six Automobile." The program featured Will Rogers in Hollywood, Fred and Dorothy Stone in Chicago, Al Jolson in New Orleans and the Paul Whiteman orchestra, with Bix Beiderbecke, in New York. The Whiteman band played *Rhapsody In Blue*, *Among My Souvenirs* , and *Changes*. Bix soloed in *Changes*.

TO-NIGHT



10.30 P.M. to 11.30 P.M.

*Hear the Most Unusual
Radio Program Ever Broadcast*

DODGE BROTHERS VICTORY SIX RADIO HOUR

**WILL
ROGERS**

Master of ceremonies
throughout the pro-
gram, speaking from
his home in Beverly
Hills, California.

**AL
JOLSON**

In a series of char-
acteristic Jolson
songs, from his
home in New
Orleans.

**PAUL
WHITEMAN**

With the Internation-
ally famous Whiteman
band in New York.
Mr. Whiteman him-
self will announce
each selection.

**FRED
AND DOROTHY
STONE**

In a typical Stooe
program — Fred
talking, Dorothy
singing—in
Chicago.

Tonight all America will become one vast radio audience.

Maximum facilities of the National Broadcasting Company and the American Telephone and Telegraph Company will be utilized. 33 broadcasting stations, 3 transcontinental telephone circuits with 12,000 miles of wire, scores of engineers and more than 200 station operators will cooperate in the most extensive broadcasting hook-up ever attempted.

Will Rogers will act as master of ceremonies throughout the hour. His inimitable quips will be carried from Hollywood, California, to station WEA, New York, and from there will

be retransmitted to the world.

From New Orleans, Al Jolson will sing, as only Jolson can. Fred and Dorothy Stone will entertain in Chicago, while from New York the music of Paul Whiteman's band, Paul Whiteman himself wielding the baton, will be broadcast to the four corners of the nation.

President E. G. Wilmer will announce Dodge Brothers epochal new car — The Victory Six — the most spectacular engineering triumph of the decade, and the only car of its kind in the world.

Remember the hour, 10:30 to 11:30 Eastern Standard Time.—tonight.

Figure 20. Ad for Victory Six Radio Hour.

April 15, 1928. A new symphonic orchestration of *Rhapsody in Blue* by Maurice Baron (1889-1964, composer, arranger and staff conductor for the Radio City Music Hall) was played by the 110 musicians of the 6214-seat Roxy Theatre orchestra augmented by three saxophonists and a banjoist. *Rhapsody in Blue* was the closing number of Erno Rapée's (1891-1945, pianist, composer and symphonic conductor) twenty fourth Sunday noon concert at the Roxy. The noon concerts were broadcast over the NBC Blue Network and heard by millions of radio listeners across the country.

1929, Frank Black and the Revelers: A Vocal Version. The Revelers, a vocal quartet under the direction of Frank Black, pianist, composer, arranger, dance band leader, conductor of the NBC Symphony orchestra, music director for Brunswick, were regular artists appearing in the Palmolive Hour, a radio program broadcast on the NBC network between 1927 and 1931. One of Black's specialties was writing lyrics for and arranging instrumental classics for the vocal quartet. Throughout 1929, the Revelers included in their Palmolive Hour broadcasts Black's vocal arrangement of *Rhapsody in Blue* which the Revelers sang with Frank Black at the piano. The Revelers, using the pseudonym Seiberling Singers, also included the vocal arrangement of *Rhapsody in Blue* in some of their Seiberling Tires NBC radio broadcasts. In addition, the Revelers sang in live appearances Black's vocal arrangement of *Rhapsody in Blue*, billed in the programs as Frank Black, assisted by the Revelers: February 14, 1929, Canton, OH; February 20, 1929, Sheboygan, WI; February 25, 1929 in Joplin, MO.

September 5, 1929. The Sunshine broadcasts were heard over WEA (New York City, became WNBC in 1946) and 46 other stations in the NBC Red network every Thursday at 8 pm. For the opening program, George Gershwin himself played piano excerpts of his *Rhapsody in Blue*. Other notable artists in the program were Ben Pollack's orchestra playing *Sunshine, Shine on Me* and singers Scrappy Lambert and Gene Austin singing *A Garden in the Rain* and *Singing in the Rain*, respectively, two numbers a bit incongruous for a radio program titled *Sunshine*.

September 15, 1929. The Majestic Theater of the Air or Majestic Hour was a musical radio program broadcast between 1929 and 1930 on Sunday evenings over the CBS network. It was sponsored by the Grigsby-Grunow Company, manufacturers of Majestic radios. The September 15, 1929 episode featured George Gershwin at the piano playing his *Rhapsody in Blue* and some of his other compositions.

8. *Rhapsody in Blue* Adapted to the Ballet.

Mention was made of the *Rhapsody in Blue* concert/ballet performed in Carnegie Hall on November 15, 1927. But there are earlier examples of *Rhapsody in Blue* being used as a vehicle for ballets. As a matter of fact, *Rhapsody in Blue* became a popular, background music for ballet presentations. As stated in the New York Times of November 27, 1927, "This undoubtedly admirable piece of music (Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*) is rapidly becoming to the dancer what Dvorak's justly famous *Humoresque* is to the violinist."

October 1925. *Ciro's Rhapsody in Blue.* The most famous nightclub with the name *Ciro's* was located in the Sunset strip in Hollywood, CA. It opened in 1940. But already in the 1920s there was a chain of fashionable *Ciro's* restaurants/dance clubs in Europe with branches in London, Paris, Monte Carlo and Biarritz. In the 1920s there was a popular *Ciro's* night club in New York City, but it had no relation to its European counterpart. Famous entertainers and orchestras appeared at *Ciro's*, among them Clifton Webb, Blanche Calloway, Leroy Smith, Eddie Elkins. The club was owned at various times by Ben Bernie [4] and by Harry Richman, among others. At the end of 1926, band leader Roger Wolfe Kahn purchased the club and changed its name to "Le Perroquet de Paris." The revue "*Ciro's Rhapsody in Blue*" opened on Oct 22 , 1925.

Ciro

141 West 56th Street

NEW YORK'S SMARTEST
NIGHT CLUB

announces this room will be
dark on Monday, Tuesday
and Wednesday of next
week pending plans for the
elaborate presentation on
Thursday night, Oct. 22nd,
of

CIRO'S
RHAPSODY
IN BLUE

*Further details in
Monday's newspapers.*

Figure 21. Ad in the New York Times, October 16, 1925.

Rhapsody in Blue was the last number in the 75-minute revue that lasted for. Singer/dancer Frances Williams (1901-1959) sang special lyrics for *Rhapsody in Blue* while ten girls danced to the music played by the eleven-men band under the direction of Eddie Elkins. Later in the year, Frances Williams was doubling in the Broadway show *The Cocoanuts*. According to the critic in *Variety*, October 28, 1925, the *Rhapsody in Blue* number was “Done under blue lights and with the cigarette and cigar smoke to help, the effect is both impressive and worthy.” The show was quite successful and George Gershwin himself was honored at Ciro’s on December 24, 1925. The following ad appeared in the New York Times. George Gershwin was present at the performance.

**TO-NIGHT
AFTER THEATRE**

Sammy Lee will give a testimonial party to the modern American Mozart

George Gershwin

Composer of

**“Ciro’s Rhapsody
in Blue”**

at which America’s greatest composers of musical comedy triumphs will be present to honor this genius of melody

at

CIRO, 141 W. 56th St.

**For Table Reservation call
Circle 6180**

Figure 22. Announcement in the New York Times, December 24, 1925.

February 20, 1926. The show in the Metropolitan Theatre (changed its name to Paramount in 1929) in Los Angeles featured, among other numbers, a ballet interpretation of *Rhapsody in Blue*. The arrangement seems to have been inspired by that in Ciro's revue of October 1925 with blues singer Nora Schiller (known as "The Half Pint of Blues") providing the singing, a chorus of girls providing the dancing and violinist/band leader Verne Buck's 22-piece band providing the music. Verne Buck was given the sobriquet "Prince of Pep" by the Prince of Wales when he visited Toronto in the 1920s.

May 10-17, 1926. One of the numbers presented in the daily shows in the Hippodrome in New York City was a ballet interpretation of *Rhapsody in Blue* by Albertina Rasch (born 1891, Vienna, Austria, died 1967, Woodland Hills, CA, ballerina, teacher and choreographer) and her ballet. According to the New York Times of May 11, 1926, the presentation was ingenious but "the idea was a little better than the execution." The music was played by pianists Georg Davidoss and Dimitri Tiomkin who married Albertina Rasch on May 27, 1926 and later became a distinguished film music composer. [5]



Figure 23. Courtesy of the Dimitri Tiomkin Webpage.

March 8, 1927. According to the Stanford Daily, Volume 70, Issue 60, 17 January 1927, the woman's physical education department presented in Stanford University's Assembly Hall "dances of humor and whimsy, with *The Melancholy Meditations of Felix the Cat* performed to the jazz strains of Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*."

October 9, 1927. Helen Tamiris, born Helen Becker (1905-1966) was a dancer, choreographer and teacher. She is best known for her *Negro Spirituals* dances created between 1928 and 1942 and her emphasis on racial and social issues as themes governing her dancing. But already in 1927, she had presented jazz movements to *Rhapsody in Blue* in the Little Theatre. The program consisted of dance moods described in the New York Times of October 10, 1927, as a "pantomimic and interpretative style of dancing with delicately synchronized gestures and movements to the melodic phrase." It is noteworthy that Tamiris was invited to the prestigious Salzburg Festival in Austria July 26-August 30, 1928 where she presented her dance to *Rhapsody in Blue*.

November 9, 1929. The third anniversary revue at the Paramount Theatre in New York City ranged from slapstick comedy to male eccentric dancers to lavish numbers. The last number was an interpretation of Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* with girls in blue tinsel dresses dancing to the music played by violinist David Rubinoff (born in Russia in 1897, died in Columbus OH in 1986) conducting the pit orchestra. The *Rhapsody* number ended with a fire backstage behind a protecting scrim.

8. *Rhapsody in Blue* in Film.

St. Louis Blues is a 1929, two-reel film produced by RCA Phototone Studios in Astoria, Queens, NY and directed by Dudley Murphy, it is the only film appearance of the legendary blues singer Bessie Smith.

SACK AMUSEMENT ENTERPRISES

Presents

ST. LOUIS BLUES

WITH

Bessie
SMITH

"QUEEN OF THE BLUES"



Figure 24. Poster for the 1929 Short Film *St. Louis Blues*.

The story, a woman whose lover takes advantage of her, is based on the lyrics of W. C. Handy's most famous composition, *St. Louis Blues*. The soundtrack has Bessie singing a nearly seven-minute version of *St. Louis Blues*. Most of the film soundtrack amounts to various W. C. Handy and Rosamond Johnson arrangements of *St. Louis Blues* played by Jimmy Johnson's (James P. Johnson) Colored Syncopators with Thomas Morris and Joe Smith on cornet. After Bessie finishes singing and her lover picks her pocket, there is a 20-second interpolation of the clarinet glissando of *Rhapsody in Blue*. Ryan Banagale [6] comments, in a highly elaborate manner, on the inclusion of the *Rhapsody in Blue* fragment in the *St. Louis Blues* film: "After Jimmy (Bessie's lover) flashes his newly acquired bankroll and tips his hat to the distraught Bessie, the opening glissando of *Rhapsody in Blue* begins." "This explicit introduction of Gershwin's famous piece complicates, contextualizes, and informs larger contemporary considerations of black music. Connecting the *Rhapsody* to the errant actions of Jimmy effectively links the piece to concurrent discourses regarding the appropriation (i.e., theft) of jazz from the black community." "The first instance of *Rhapsody in Blue* on film offers a subtle but astute commentary on the racial economics and politics of popular music."

The interpolation of fragments of *Rhapsody in Blue* in 1920s jazz and dance band recordings was a rather frequent event. Some notable examples are Paul Whiteman's 1925 recording of *Birth of the Blues*, Ben Selvin's 1927 recording of *Shaking the Blues Away* from the 1927 Ziegfeld Follies and Louis Armstrong's 1929 recording of *Ain't Misbehavin*.

1929-1930. King of Jazz. On May 24, 1929, Paul Whiteman and about 50 members of his organization—musicians and staff—left Pennsylvania Station in New York bound for Los Angeles where the film *King of Jazz* was to be produced by Universal Studios. The Old Gold Special, Whiteman's private deluxe train, consisted of three sleepers, a club car, two baggage cars and an observation car. Musician's wives traveled separately and arrived in Los Angeles two weeks before the Old Gold Special which stopped along the way in several cities where the orchestra gave free concerts. The Old Gold

Special arrived in Los Angeles on June 6, 1929 and after a brief stop went on to San Francisco, to return to Los Angeles on June 15, 1929. For two and a half months, Whiteman discussed various scripts with an army of Universal screenwriters, but no satisfactory script was produced in the summer of 1929. Frustrated by the delay, Whiteman decided to return to New York on August 27, 1929, but before leaving, agreed to Universal doing the *King of Jazz* as a revue or stage production. Whiteman's orchestra returned to Hollywood on October 29, 1929 and rehearsals began on November 8, 1929 with John Anderson as director and songs written by Milton Ager and Jack Yellen with contributions by Mabel Wayne, Billy Rose, Harry DeCosta and Harry Barris. *King of Jazz* was filmed on a two-color Technicolor process and the soundtrack was pre-recorded. By February 1930, the film was ready for editing. Retakes were needed and finally the film was finished on March 20, 1930. The most elaborate number in the film was Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* with the piano part played by Roy Bargy.



Figure 25. Paul Whiteman Orchestra Playing *Rhapsody in Blue* in the 1930 Film *King of Jazz*.

According to a review of the film in the Bright Lights Film Journal, [7] “Unsurprisingly, *The King of Jazz* pulls out all stops for *Rhapsody in Blue*. Whiteman himself introduces the number, which begins with a dancer dressed as a giant black tree dancing on top of a huge drum. (This is supposed to represent “Africa.”) Then we cut to five young gentlemen in white tie and tails, who sit on an outsized piano bench and pretend to play a gigantic blue piano. As the music swells, the piano lid opens, to reveal the entire Whiteman band! Later, the Markert girls, in blue tights and top hats, dance briefly on the piano keys *en pointe* (not all that well).” The reviewer failed to mention Jacques Cartier pretending to play the clarinet while doing a bit of a dance interpretation of the music.

9. Recordings.

Paul Whiteman and His Concert Orchestra. June 10, 1924.

In the three months following the legendary Aeolian Hall concert of February 12, 1924, Paul Whiteman’s orchestra was very busy. It repeated the *An Experiment in Modern Music* three times, made several appearances in New York City and had nearly a dozen recording sessions. They were also the orchestra for the Ziegfeld Follies of 1923 that ran from Oct 20, 1923 to May 10, 1924. On May 14, 1924 the Whiteman orchestra left New York City on a two-week tour that took them to Upstate New York, the Midwest and Canada. The orchestra played *Rhapsody in Blue* in every appearance. They were back in New York on June 2, 1924 and were on vacation for a few days.

On June 10, 1924, Paul Whiteman and His Concert Orchestra went to the Victor Machine Co. in New York City and recorded *Rhapsody in Blue* in two parts, the first recording ever of George Gershwin’s composition. It was not until February 26, 1925 that Victor and

Western Electric produced the first commercial recording using electric technology (*A Miniature Concert*, Victor 35753, released in July 1925) and therefore *Rhapsody in Blue* was recorded using acoustic technology.

- First, the orchestra recorded part 2, matrix number C-30173. (The letter C in front of the matrix number designated a 12-inch disc.) Four takes were cut. Takes 1 and 3 were destroyed; take 4 was held for 30 days, and was unissued; take 2 was mastered and issued as side B of Victor 55226.
- The orchestra then recorded part 1, matrix number C-30174. Three takes were cut. Take 2 was destroyed; take 3 was held for 30 days and unissued; take 1 was mastered and issued as side A of Victor 55226.



THE Nipper & Co. Inc. Copyright, 1924

Victor

For best results use
Victrola Tungs-tone Needles

Rhapsody in Blue-Part 1

(George Gershwin)

(Arranged by Ferde Grofé)

Paul Whiteman and His Concert Orchestra

(The Composer at the piano)

55225-A

THIS RECORD IS PATENTED BY THE FOLLOWING U.S. PATENT, OWNED BY THIS COMPANY:

VICTOR TALKING MACHINE CO. Camden, N. J.
NO. 896059 DATED AUGUST 11, 1924

55225-A

Figure 26. Label of 1924 Whiteman Recording.

The disc was twelve inches in diameter with a blue label which was reserved by Victor for symphonic works. The total time for both parts was about 9 minutes, shorter by several minutes in comparison with Ferde Grofé's arrangement played at the Aeolian Hall concert. The abbreviated version was also arranged by Ferde Grofé to fit the time allowed in a 12-inch shellac disc. George Gershwin himself was the pianist and multi-instrumentalist Ross Gorman played the famous introductory clarinet glissando. The instrumentation consisted of two trumpets, two French horns, four reeds, four violins, piano, banjo, brass bass, percussion and celesta. The celesta is not cited in the Victor ledgers, but it is clearly heard in part 2.

This record was inducted in the Library of Congress National Recording Registry in 2002 under the category Classical/Opera.

Adrian Schubert and His Concert Orchestra. March 9, 1927.

Recorded in two parts, matrix numbers 7185 and 7186, in 10-inch discs for several record labels: Perfect 15309, Banner 2153, Regal 10008, Also issued on Domino 0181 and 4855 as by Schubert's Society Orchestra. An abbreviated version (about 6 minutes) of Grofé's arrangement for Whiteman's 1924 recording.

Paul Whiteman and His Concert Orchestra. April 21, 1927.

At the request of the Victor Company for an electric recording of *Rhapsody in Blue*, Paul Whiteman and his musicians went to Liederkrantz Hall, New York City and recorded the composition. Ferde Grofé prepared the arrangement, a minor modification of what he had produced for the 1924 acoustic recording. For this occasion, Grofé added some instrumentation: one trumpet, one trombone, one violin,

two violas and one violoncello. Chester Hazlett played the clarinet introduction and George Gershwin was at the piano.

- First the orchestra recorded part 2, master number CVE-30173. (The C stands for a 12-inch disc and the VE for Victor Electric. The master number, 30173, is the same as for the 1924 recording session.) Takes 5-9 were cut; 5, 6 and 9 were destroyed; 7 was held and was unissued. Take 8 was mastered as side B of Victor 35822.
- Part 1 was recorded next, matrix number CVE-30174. Takes 4-6 were cut; 5 was destroyed, 4 was held and unissued; take 6 was mastered as side A of Victor 35822.

Victor 35822 is a 12-inch black label disc. The label includes the symbol VE for Victor Electric and the phrase "Orthophonic Recording," used by Victor in their electric recordings beginning in 1925.



Figure 27. Label of 1927 Whiteman Recording.

This record was nominated for a Grammy Hall of Fame Award in 1974.

Nat Shilkret , composer, musician, conductor and Victor executive, was present at the recording session as music director. According to Shilkret in his autobiography [8], there were several problems in the recording studio and Whiteman walked out. Shilkret recalls:

“I was connected with Paul Whiteman’s recordings, and often, when Paul was busy or annoyed by his boys, he would ask me to record for him. In fact, when the *Rhapsody* was recorded again for electrical recording, I recorded and George Gershwin was piano soloist. There was a good reason for my substituting for Paul. After the great success of the *Rhapsody* at Aeolian Hall, Paul played the number on his road trip. The audience, now wanting to hear the Whiteman band do their special dance arrangements, was not enthusiastic about the *Rhapsody*.

Whiteman believed in the *Rhapsody*’s ultimate recognition and kept on playing it. To make people like it, he made cuts and, to create more excitement, he even accelerated the tempo. As it happened in time, every audience requested George Gershwin’s *Rhapsody*—it became a classic.

So when Paul came to record the *Rhapsody in Blue* with Gershwin, he had two strikes against him. First of all, the changes in tempo he made during his road trip had become a habit with him, whereas Gershwin the soloist and composer, heard the music as he had conceived it. However, the greatest obstacle was the position of the recording engineers insisted upon. To get the proper results, they placed the piano one hundred feet from the orchestra and the conductor two hundred feet from the orchestra. With these problems, Paul and George would not get together. Paul finally said, “Nat, take over.” Since I had recorded at the Hall (Liederkrantz), I was able to control the orchestra and the piano. Soon after that, our engineers rectified the problem of separating the orchestra from the piano and the conductor.”

Victor Irwin and His Orchestra. May 18, 1927.

Recorded in two parts and issued as Harmony 422-H, a double-sided 10-inch disc.



Figure 28. Label of Victor Irwin's Recording.

Side 1 (matrix 144170) lasts for 2 minutes 45 seconds and side 2 (matrix 144171) for 2 minutes and 49 seconds. The orchestra consisted of two trumpets, trombone, three reeds, two violins, banjo, brass bass and drums. Irwin's orchestra played the *Rhapsody in Blue* as a straight fox-trot. Victor Irwin was the pianist.

Willard Robison and His Deep River Orchestra. May 25, 1927.

Part 1, Matrix 107541. Part 2, matrix 107542. Issued on Pathe Actuelle 36644 and Perfect 14825. Played as a fox-trot, 2 trumpets, trombone, 3 reeds, banjo, brass bass and drums.

The Edisonians (B. A. Rolfe's Orchestra?). November 4, 1927.

Recorded in two parts and issued as the two sides of Diamond disc 52145. About nine minutes in duration, the arrangement is very similar to that by Ferde Grofé's for the 1924 Whiteman recording. Frank Banta, Jr. was the pianist.

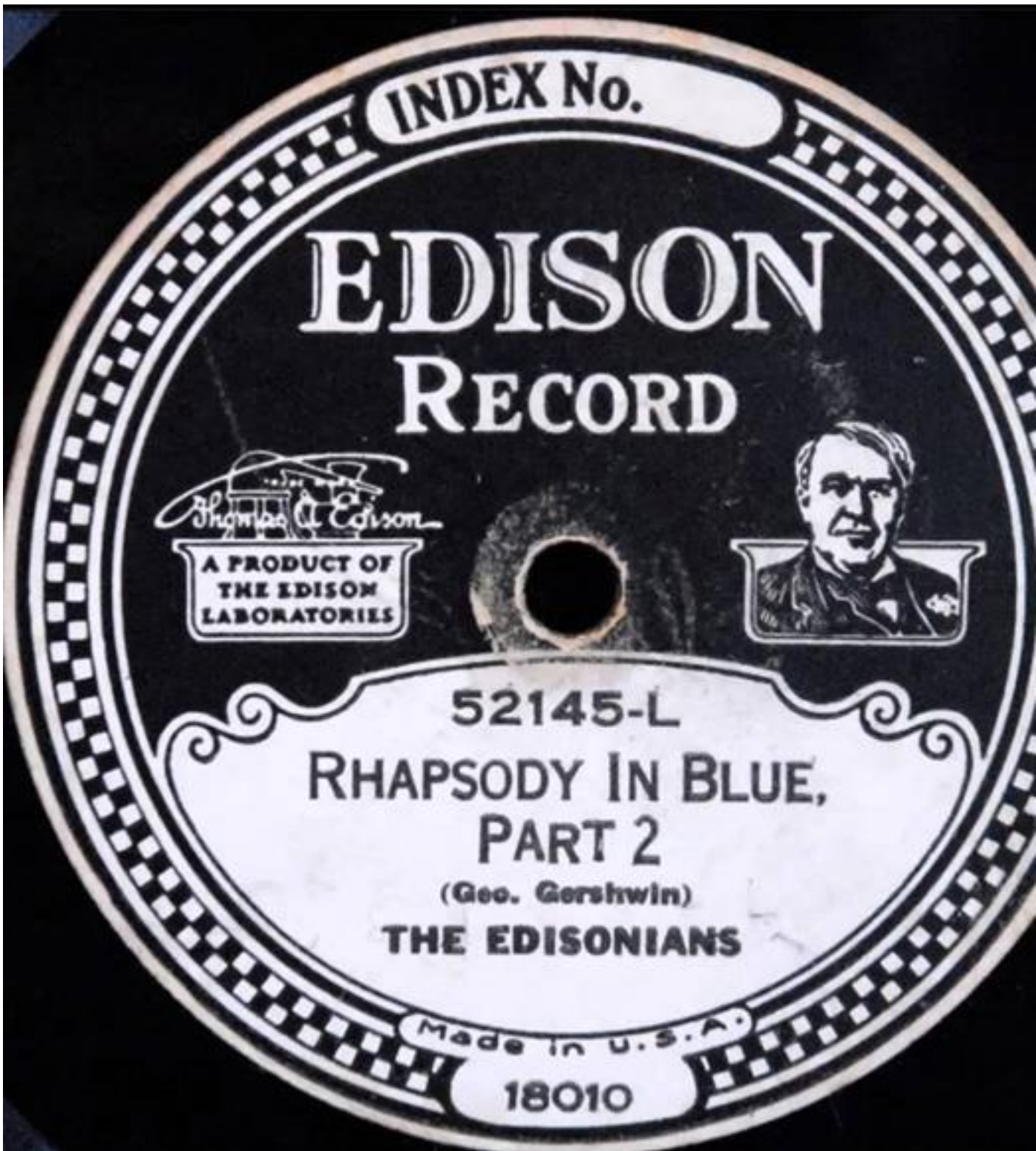


Figure 29. Label of The Edisonians Recording.

Frank Black and His Orchestra. December 2, 1927.

Recorded in two parts, matrix numbers XE25382 and XE25385, and issued on the 12-inch disc Brunswick 20058.



Figure 30. Label of Frank Black's Recording.

An orchestra of 27 musicians including Oscar Levant on piano and Harry Reser on banjo. An arrangement by Frank Black based on Grofe's arrangement of Whiteman's 1924 recording. The image above is for an overseas issue; note the inclusion of "BIEM," Bureau International de l'Edition Mecanique. T. B. N. Y. 5 stands for music publisher T. B. Harms, New York 5. "5" is the postal code used by the USPS before zip codes were introduced.

Leroy Smith and His Orchestra (the colored Paul Whiteman). February 23, 1928.

The orchestra consisted of two violins, three saxophones, two cornets, trombone, tuba, banjo, piano, and traps. This was a test session and the matrix number (BE-43428, 10-inch Victor Electric) was not allocated until the next recording session of the orchestra. Two takes were cut: take 2 was mastered as Victor 21328 with *St. Louis Blues* on the flipside. This is a straight fox-trot version arranged by Leroy Smith. It lasts for a little over three minutes and moves at a pretty fast pace.

George Gershwin, June 8, 1928.

Columbia 50107-D is a 12-inch disc with George Gershwin playing his Preludes no. 1 and no. 2 on side A (matrix AX3758-2) and Prelude no. 3 and the *Andante* of *Rhapsody in Blue* (matrix AX3759-1) on side B.

Fomeen Brothers. November 1, 1928.

Recorded in Camden, NJ with matrix number BE-47875 and issued as Victor V-5, a 10-inch doubled-face international (with *Oriental One Step* on the flipside). The recording consists of excerpts from *Rhapsody in Blue* arranged by Basil Fomeen and played by the accordion duet of Basil Fomeen and Nick Hope.

Paul Whiteman and His Orchestra. November/December 1929.

In late 1929 and early 1930, Paul Whiteman and his boys were in Hollywood filming *King of Jazz* for Universal Studios. Whiteman convinced the people at Universal to pre-record all the musical numbers played by his orchestra. The music was recorded from the inside to the outside on sixteen shellac, 16-inch discs running at 33 1/3 rpm, production number 4975. Here is an image of one of the discs.



Figure 31. Label of Columbia Special Recording for King of Jazz Film

The version for the film is a somewhat abbreviated version of Grofe's arrangement for the 1927 Whiteman recording. Roy Barye was the pianist and Irving Friedman the clarinetist.

Rhapsody in Blue. A Piano Roll by George Gershwin. 1925-1927.

Between 1916 and 1927, George Gershwin made well over 100 piano rolls for such companies as Mel-O-Dee, Universal, Duo-Art (Aeolian) and Welte. Gershwin made two rolls of his *Rhapsody in Blue* using his own arrangement. It is likely that the two parts were made in early 1925, with part 2, Duo-Art 68787, issued in May 1925, and part 1, Duo-Art 70947, issued in January 1927.

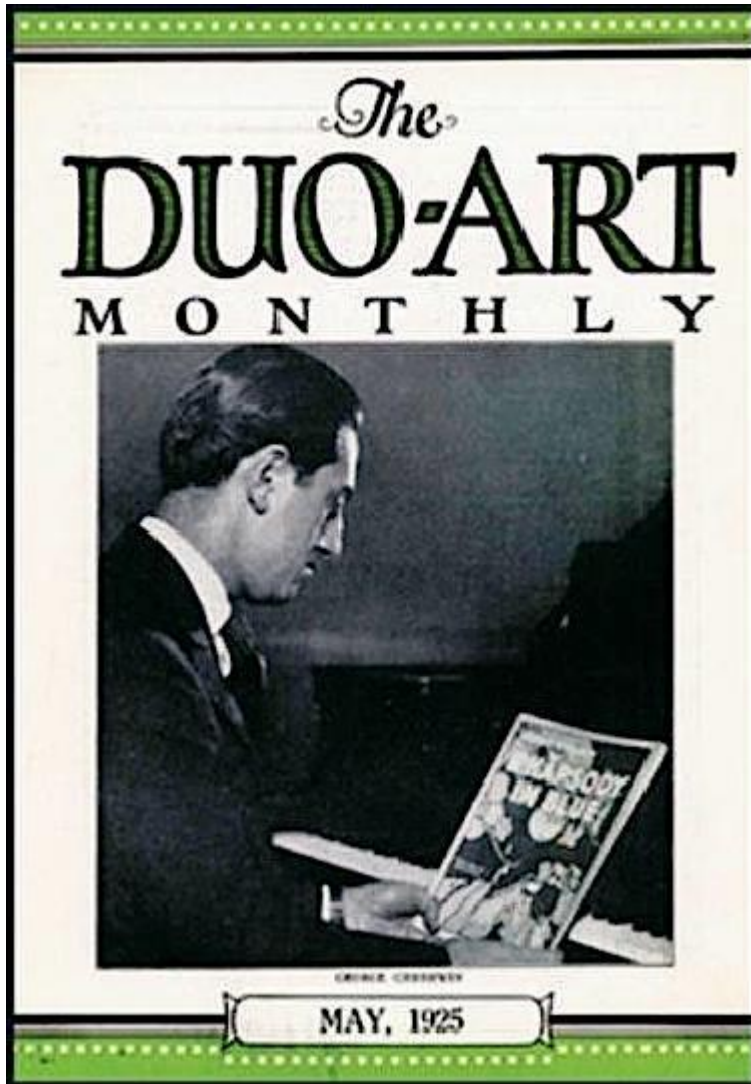


Figure 32. Cover of Duo-Art Monthly, May 1925.

According to Howard Pollack, "Taking advantage of the capabilities of piano-roll technology, Gershwin recorded this two-piano version in 1925 (released in two parts, 1925 and 1927), a spirited performance

that constitutes the composer's most complete and in some ways most authoritative rendering of the work." [2]

Coda.

Following the world premiere of George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* on February 12, 1924 at Aeolian Hall, the popularity of the composition exploded, mostly because of its intrinsic quality but also in part because of Paul Whiteman's promotion in his concert appearances and his radio broadcasts and the composer himself performing the number in a variety of venues. The popularity of *Rhapsody in Blue* continued unabated in the following decades of the 20th century and into the 21st century. Here are a few of the highlights; they include films, recordings, concerts, performances and awards.

1945. The film *Rhapsody in Blue*. A Warner Brothers biopic about George Gershwin directed by Irving Rapper with Robert Alda playing the role of Gershwin. The *Rhapsody in Blue* in the 1924 Aeolian concert is recreated in the film with Paul Whiteman conducting the Warner Brothers orchestra and Oscar Levant playing the piano part. It is an abbreviated version lasting about eight minutes. Levant, in an interview (New York Times, July 8, 1945) recollected: "The camera was supposed to catch me as part of the audience in the balcony of Aeolian Hall, going nuts over the performance. There were these guys Alda and Whiteman on the stage, taking bows for music I myself had played and which I was applauding them for. It got very Pirandelloish."

1945. The First Recording of *Rhapsody in Blue* for Symphony Orchestra. Between 1924 and 1942, Ferdie Grofe ("the Prime Minister of Jazz" according to the New York Times, October 16, 1932) prepared several arrangements of *Rhapsody in Blue*.

- 1924 For Paul Whiteman's orchestra.

- 1926 For a "pit" Theatre orchestra.

- 1942 For full symphony orchestra; probably used by Ferde Grofe as conductor and Harry Kaufman as pianist at the 1937 Gershwin Memorial Concert in New York.

The 1942 arrangement was used by Eugene Ormandy and the Philadelphia Orchestra for their 1945 Columbia recording, set number MX 251. The set consisted of two 12-inch, 78 rpm records. Oscar Levant, personal friend of George Gershwin and probably the most faithful interpreter of his works, was the pianist.

1959. Leonard Bernstein's Interpretation. Recorded on June 23rd, 1959 for Columbia by Leonard Bernstein, conductor and pianist, and the Columbia Symphony at the St. George Hotel in Brooklyn, N.Y and issued as the LP album MS6091. Selected by NPR as one of their list of 50 essential classical recordings. Bernstein was ambivalent about *Rhapsody in Blue*. Although he performed the piece beginning in 1937 and continuing throughout his professional life, Bernstein had rather negative comments about the composition; "it is not a real composition."

1984 Summer Olympics. *Rhapsody in Blue* was played by eighty-four pianists at the opening ceremony in the Los Angeles Coliseum.

February 10, 2008. 50th Grammy Awards. Jazz legend Herbie Hancock and classical superstar Lang Lang took turns at playing the piano parts of *Rhapsody in Blue* accompanied by a full symphonic orchestra.

2012 Grammy Award. The [Grammy Award](#) for Best Instrumental Arrangement was introduced in 1963 and awarded in 2012 to Gordon Goodwin, composer, pianist and leader of the 18-piece jazz ensemble the Big Phat Band for his arrangement of *Rhapsody in Blue*.

July 4, 2015. A Capitol Fourth. According to Wikipedia, "A Capitol Fourth is a free annual concert performed on the west lawn of the United States Capitol Building in Washington, D.C., in celebration of Independence Day each July 4. Broadcast live on PBS, NPR and the American Forces Network and presented by WETA, the concert is viewed and heard by millions across the United States and the world, as well as attended by more than half a million people at the Capitol. The concert traditionally features elements of the 3rd U.S. Infantry

Regiment (The Old Guard), the U.S. Army Band (Pershing's Own), the National Symphony Orchestra and the Choral Arts Society of Washington, who provide much of the music during the show for various celebrity artists. A celebrity host and a variety of guests entertain and pay tribute to their country throughout the evening.” T One of the numbers at the 2015 edition of the concert was *Rhapsody in Blue*, played by the National Symphony Orchestra with Lang Lang at the piano.

October 20, 2015. The 92Y Concert was an all-Gershwin event. The two most important Gershwin works for piano and orchestra – *Rhapsody in Blue* and *Concerto in F*– were performed by Vince Giordano and the Nighthawks orchestra, Ted Rosenthal on piano and Maurice Peress as conductor.

References.

- [1] *A Gershwin Tune* by Leonard Bernstein, *Atlantic Monthly*, April 1955.
- [2] *George Gershwin, His Life and Work* by Howard Pollack, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA, 2006.
- [3] *Paul Whiteman, Pioneer in American Music, Volume I: 1890-1930* by Don Rayno, *Sudies in Jazz*, No. 43, The Scarecrow Press, Inc., Lanham, Maryland, and Oxford, 2003.
- [4] In early 1925, Oscar Levant, who later became a close friend of George Gershwin and the most faithful performer of his compositions, was playing in a six-piece Society Orchestra at Ciro's. The orchestra leader was Dave Bernie, Ben Bernie's brother. Ben appeared as guest conductor for his brother and liked Levant's musical abilities. He offered him a job and Levant joined the Ben Bernie Orchestra at the Roosevelt Hotel in the Spring of 1925. On August 10, 1925 Oscar Levant, with Ben Bernie's Orchestra, waxed his first record, "Yes, Sir, That's My Baby" and "Collegiate."
- [5] The European premiere of Gershwin's *Concerto in F* took place at the Opera Theatre in Paris on May 29, 1928. The pianist was film composer Dimitri Tiomkin. George Gershwin was present at the premiere. He was very pleased with Tiomkin's interpretation as seen from the dedication in this portrait.



Figure 33. Gershwin's Portrait Dedicated to Dimitri Tiomkin.

[6] *Arranging Gershwin: Rhapsody in Blue and the Creation of an American Icon* by Ryan Banagale, Oxford University Press, New York NY, 2014.

[7] Bright Lights Film Journal, November 1, 1999. Available on line at http://brightlightsfilm.com/forgotten-fantastic-king-jazz/#identifier_5_15853

[8] *Sixty Years in the Music Business* by Nathaniel Shilkret, Edited by Niel Shell and Barbara Shilkret, The Scarecrow Press, Inc., Lanham, Maryland, Toronto, Oxford, 2005.