



Arts Learning

Student Resource Guide

American Rhapsody The Gershwin Songbook

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About FirstWorks Arts Learning

The FirstWorks Arts Learning Program is a community engagement program providing live arts experiences for public, private, and home schools throughout Rhode Island. This exceptional program enriches school curricula while providing students with the cultural experience that comes from early exposure to professional live performance.

Teacher Resource Guides, such as this one, relating to each artist are provided to teachers, giving them the opportunity to use the student lecture/demonstration matinee experience as educational tools in their classrooms. Question and answer sessions are frequently offered after these student matinees, providing an opportunity for students to interact directly with the performers.

Since 2009, FirstWorks Arts Learning programs have reached more than 30,000 students and teachers through live student-focused lecture/demonstration matinees, in-school workshops and Master Classes, access to main stage performances of world premieres and Rhode Island premieres, and, student-focused community engagement opportunities.

Extended performance residencies allow students to participate in a layered learning experience over several months to motivate students to continue learning well beyond their workshop or performance experience. For many students, this is their first introduction to live performance and performers who are recognized as foremost artists in their field. Most performers are recipients of prestigious accolades of the highest artistic distinction such as the Kennedy Center Honors, the National Medal of Arts, MacArthur Fellowships, Guggenheim Fellowships, and Grammy Awards.

FirstWorks Arts Learning Programs commence along with the start of the school year and conclude with the PVDfest in June. These opportunities are generously made possible through the continuous support from businesses through our Adopt-A-School Program, local and national foundations, and community donors.

FirstWorks Arts Learning is dedicated to honoring and raising community awareness about the strong commitment our sponsors make to the children across Rhode Island and surrounding areas who experience artistic “firsts” through our programs. For more information about our Arts Learning Program please contact Kathleen McAreavey, Education and Community Outreach Manager at 401-868-1149, or by e-mail: kathleenm@first-works.org. To learn about our Adopt-A-School Program, or discuss support for our Arts Learning Program please contact Isabelle Tadmoury, Director of Development at 401-868-1071, or by e-mail: isabelle@first-works.org.

Thank you for connecting your students to these unforgettable powerful, live performance experiences. Enjoy the show!



Composer George Gershwin, at the piano, and his lyricist older brother Ira, circa 1937.

2 Meet George & Ira Gershwin



George Gershwin, at left, and his brother Ira in rehearsal for one of the many RKO Pictures they worked on in 1937.

“True music must repeat
the thought and
inspirations of the people
and the time. My people
are Americans and my
time is today.”

-George Gershwin

“A song without music is
a lot like H2
without the O.”

-Ira Gershwin

Ira Gershwin was born Israel Gershowitz in New York City on December 6, 1896. He was the oldest of four children. His parents, Morris (Moishe) and Rose Gershowitz (née Rosa Bruskin) were Russian Jews born in St. Petersburg who had emigrated to the United States in 1891. Ira's siblings were George (Jacob, b. September 26, 1898), Arthur (b. 1900) and Frances (b. 1906). Morris changed the family name to "Gershwine", or alternatively "Gershvin" many years before Ira and George became famous. The name was spelled "Gershwin" much later.

Shy in his youth, Ira spent much of his time at home reading, but from grammar school through college he honed his literary skills by writing for several school newspapers and magazines. George first became interested in music at the age of ten when he attended his friend Maxie Rosenzweig's violin recital on Manhattan's Lower East Side. At this time, the Gershwin family was not particularly musically inclined, but, Morris and Rose purchased a piano so that Ira could learn to play. Much to everyone's surprise, and Ira's relief, George was the one who immediately sat down and started playing songs. He had been teaching himself to play by following the keys with his fingers on a neighbor's player piano. After trying various piano teachers for his first two years of study, George was introduced to Charles Hambitzer, the pianist with the Waldorf-Astoria Orchestra. Hambitzer mentored George's musical development until his death in 1918. Mr. Hambitzer taught George traditional piano technique, introduced him to the classical music of European composers, and encouraged him to attend orchestral concerts to hear their music.

All of the Gershwin children frequented the local Yiddish theaters since their childhood home, located on the second floor of 91 Second Avenue, between East 5th and East 6th Streets, was in the center of the Yiddish Theater District. As a child, Frances was the first to perform on stage, bringing home an income that helped support the family. Sometimes George appeared onstage as an extra.



A young George Gershwin, circa 1915, at approximately age 17.

Ira was graduated from Townsend Harris High School in 1914. He later went on to attend the City College of New York before dropping out. At the age of 15, George left school and found his first job as a “song plugger” in Tin Pan Alley earning \$15 a week from the Jerome H. Remick Company publishing house. (That’s approximately \$375 a week in 2017 currency value.) Later, he worked for the T. B. Harms publishing house where he earned thirty-five dollars (\$838 value in 2017) a week writing songs on commission. By 17, George had published his first song, “When You Want ‘Em, You Can’t Get ‘Em, When You’ve Got ‘Em, You Don’t Want ‘Em”. It earned him \$5, that’s \$106 in today’s currency.

A “song plugger” is a profession that still exists today. In the early 20th century, pianists would be employed by music publishers to demonstrate sheet music to customers in music stores and department stores. This was a time before the internet existed and before quality recordings were available. The song plugger played whatever sheet music a customer requested so that he or she could hear a preview before buying it. Today, while they can be found at any musically centered area, song pluggers are mostly found in Nashville, Tennessee, where the country music industry offers the most opportunities to place songs that were not written or co-written by the artists and/or producer.

George’s first visit to London came with the opportunity to write the score for “The Rainbow”, a musical revue. It paired him with English lyricist Clifford Grey. In a letter to Ira from the Savoy Hotel, George wrote that he was very pleased by his reception, which included a customs official who recognized him as the composer of “Swanee,” and a reporter who made him “feel like I was Kern or somebody.” George arrived in London just four days before rehearsals began; fortunately he brought with him a number of already-written songs that could be inserted into the production. Gershwin and Grey turned out many more. Though successful during its London run, it never received an American production. George’s passport photo for this trip is shown at right. He used his legal name, Jacob Gershwine.



Ira did not become involved in the music business until 1921 at the age of 25. Broadway producer Alex Aarons signed him to write the songs for his next show, *Two Little Girls in Blue*. So as not to appear to trade off George’s growing reputation, Ira wrote under the pseudonym “Arthur Francis”, after his two youngest siblings. His lyrics were well received. The May 4 review in *The New York Clipper* stated: “The lyrics written by Arthur Francis are the best, and seem to show that there are some lyricists who are still able to write a lyric that rhymes and also means something.” This success allowed Ira to easily enter the show-business world after just one show. Later that same year, George and Ira collaborated for the first time on a score for *A Dangerous Maid*. This musical is remarkable in that it is one of the few Gershwin collaborations that never made it to Broadway. It premiered in Atlantic City, New Jersey on March 21, 1921, touring until it closed on April 16, 1921 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Ira and George continued to collaborate with all of their hard work being rewarded in 1924 with their first Broadway hit *Lady, Be Good*. Their combined talents became one of the most influential forces in the history of American Musical Theatre, elevating the musical comedy to a sophisticated American art form. Together, they wrote the music for more than two dozen Broadway shows and Hollywood films. Their ambitious opera *Porgy and Bess*, continues to reveal and reflect African American life through its nonstop revivals. Some of their more famous works include the songs “But Not for Me”, “Embraceable You”, “How Long Has This Been Going On?”, “I Got Rhythm”, “I’ve Got a Crush on You”, “Let’s Call the Whole Thing Off”, “Love Is Here To Stay”, “The Man I Love”, “Nice Work If You Can Get It”, “Swonderful”, “Someone to Watch Over Me”, “Strike Up the Band”, “They Can’t Take That Away from Me”, and “Fascinatin’ Rhythm”.

In 1926, at the age of 30, Ira married Leonore Strunsky. They were married for fifty-seven years, until his death in 1983. Leonore passed away in 1991.

In 1932, Ira, along with George S. Kaufman and Morrie Ryskind, won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama for *Of Thee I Sing*. It was the first musical comedy to be awarded this honor. Since the Pulitzer Prize was considered a literary award, George, being the composer, was not included in the original award. But, in 1998, at the centennial of his birth, he was posthumously awarded an honorary Pulitzer. The musical lampoons American politics where the main character, John P. Wintergreen, runs for President of the United States on the “love” platform. When he falls in love with the sensible Mary Turner instead of Diana Devereaux, the beautiful pageant winner selected for him, he gets into political hot water. The original Broadway production, directed by Kaufman, opened in 1931 at the Music Box Theatre and ran for 441 performances, gaining critical and



The cover of the music to the song *Just To Know You Are Mine* from the musical *A Dangerous Maid*.

box office success. It has been revived twice on Broadway and in concert stagings in the United States and in London.

In addition to collaborating with his brother, George attained great success in the concert arena as a piano virtuoso, conductor, and composer of such celebrated works as *Rhapsody In Blue*, *An American In Paris*, and the *Concerto In F*. It was his *Rhapsody in Blue* written in 1924 that truly made him a star.

Their partnership continued until George’s sudden death from a brain tumor on July 11, 1937 in Hollywood, California. He was only 38 years old and had never married.

In 1937, George received his sole Academy Award nomination for Best Original Song for “They Can’t Take That Away from Me”, written with Ira for the film *Shall We Dance*. George’s nomination was posthumous as he had died two months after the film’s release. They did not win. Ira was nominated in 1944 for “Long Ago (and Far Away)” and again in 1954 for “The Man That Got Away”. Again, neither won the award.



1937 movie poster for *Shall We Dance*.

Following his brother’s death, Ira waited nearly three years before writing again. After this temporary retirement, he teamed up with accomplished composers such as Jerome Kern for the film *Cover Girl*; Kurt Weill for the film *Where Do We Go from Here?* and the Broadway musical *Lady in the Dark*.

Ira teamed with Harold Arlen for the Broadway musical *Life Begins at 8:40* and the 1954 film remake of *A Star Is Born* starring Judy Garland. Their song “The Man That Got Away” was so popular that it became a standard sung by Ms. Garland at all of her concerts.



The failure of *Park Avenue* in 1946, a “smart” show about divorce, co-written with composer Arthur Schwartz, was his farewell to Broadway. As he wrote at the time, “*Am reading a couple of stories for possible musicalization (if there is such a word) but I hope I don’t like them as I think I deserve a long rest.*”

In 1947, Ira took eleven songs that George had composed but never used, provided them with new lyrics, and incorporated them into the Betty Grable film *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim*. He later wrote comic lyrics for Billy Wilder’s 1964 movie *Kiss Me, Stupid*, although most critics believe his final major work was for the 1954 version of *A Star Is Born*.

American singer, pianist and musical historian Michael Feinstein worked for Gershwin in the lyricist’s final years, helping him catalogue his archive and unearthing several lost musical treasures in the process.

Ira died in Beverly Hills, California, on August 17, 1983 at the age of 86. He is interred, along with his siblings and parents, in the Gershwin mausoleum at Westchester Hills Cemetery, Hastings-on-Hudson, New York.

In 1985, the Congressional Gold Medal, the highest civilian honor bestowed by the United States Congress, was awarded to George and Ira in recognition of “*George and Ira Gershwin’s outstanding and invaluable contributions to American music, theatre and culture.*”

In 1987, Ira’s widow, Leonore, established the Ira Gershwin Literacy Center at University Settlement, a more than one hundred year old institution at 185 Eldridge Street on the Lower East Side, New York City. The Center is designed to teach English as a second language to residents of the neighborhood, primarily Hispanic and Chinese Americans. As children, Ira, George, Arthur, and, Francis spent many after-school hours at the Settlement which was established in the early 1900s as “*a physical, psychological and spiritual haven where people of all ages, from all countries and every walk of life could seek advice, assistance, education or a simple respite from the harsh realities of everyday life.*”



Children at University Settlement, circa 1900.

In 1988 UCLA established The George and Ira Gershwin Lifetime Musical Achievement Award in recognition of the brothers’ contribution to music, and, for their gift to UCLA of the fight song “Strike Up the Band for UCLA”.

In 2007, the United States Library of Congress re-named its Prize for Popular Song *The Gershwin Prize* for Ira and George. Recognizing the profound and positive effect of American popular music on the world’s culture, the prize is annually presented to a composer or performer whose lifetime contributions exemplify the standard of excellence associated with the Gershwin brothers.

In September 2013, a partnership between the estates of Ira and George Gershwin and the University of Michigan was created to provide the university’s School of Music, Theatre, and Dance access to the Gershwins’ entire body of work. This includes all of the Gershwin papers, compositional drafts, and scores, providing opportunities for musicians, composers, and scholars to analyze and reinterpret their work with the goal of accurately reflecting the composer’s and lyricist’s visions in order to preserve their legacies. The first part of The Gershwin Critical Edition covers the 1924 jazz band version of *Rhapsody in Blue*, *An American in Paris* and *Porgy and Bess*.

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Coloring Page: George at His Piano



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Coloring Page: Gershwin Brothers by Al Hirschfeld



7 Gershwin Word Search

Find the following words in the chart below: COMPOSER, FASCINATING-RHYTHM, GEORGE GERSHWIN, I GOT RHYTHM, MUSIC, NEW YORK, PIANO, RHAPSODY IN BLUE, SONG PLUGGER

D	P	I	I	R	U	M	L	J	W	S	Q	A	H	R
K	S	Q	G	G	H	H	S	Q	N	K	Z	K	M	H
H	Q	A	M	K	F	T	T	Z	W	W	R	Q	D	A
N	C	Q	C	Q	T	Y	Y	Z	G	O	R	I	L	P
F	X	K	A	B	U	H	T	L	Y	R	M	G	I	S
J	X	W	Y	E	O	R	R	W	N	R	V	Z	M	O
G	E	O	R	G	E	G	E	R	S	H	W	I	N	D
K	Q	S	E	M	P	N	H	J	Z	G	C	A	F	Y
I	Z	C	S	A	H	I	M	U	S	I	C	G	L	I
F	E	H	O	Y	E	T	A	F	L	S	E	L	L	N
D	J	E	P	T	V	A	Y	N	Q	J	G	O	Z	B
B	V	Z	M	J	E	N	J	H	O	V	S	P	W	L
H	O	R	O	B	Q	I	C	Q	R	X	E	N	O	U
T	G	T	C	R	I	C	V	A	Y	T	M	A	E	E
T	M	W	W	Y	L	S	V	D	C	B	O	S	J	C
L	R	E	T	Q	A	A	W	X	N	E	Z	G	V	F
I	E	K	H	Y	E	F	F	Q	P	F	L	L	I	G
R	E	G	G	U	L	P	G	N	O	S	N	A	F	M

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Set List & Musicians

Some of these song titles are scheduled to be performed at the Gershwin student matinee:

I GOT RHYTHM
A FOGGY DAY
LET'S CALL THE WHOLE THING OFF
THE MAN I LOVE
LADY BE GOOD
SUMMERTIME
SLAP THAT BASS
RHAPSODY IN BLUE
STRIKE UP THE BAND
I'VE GOT A CRUSH ON YOU
BLUES FROM AN AMERICAN IN PARIS
NICE WORK IF YOU CAN GET IT
LOVE IS HERE TO STAY

THE MUSICIANS:

Michael Andrew - Bandleader/singer
Michelle Amato - singer

SAXOPHONES

David MacKenzie
Brian Snapp
Gabe Carson
Ceasar Martinez

TRUMPETS

Frank Greene
Bob Franklin
Elaine Burt
John DePaula

TROMBONES

Scott Whitfield
Corey Paul
Rob Stoneback
Will Nestler

RHYTHM SECTION

Tedd Kooshian - piano
Kevin Palacky - guitar
Charlie Sylva - bass
Scott Neumann - drums

Classroom Reading:

My First Gershwin Songbook: A Treasury of Favorite Songs to Play, Amazon Digital Services, 2016.

Celenza, Anna Howell, *Gershwin's Rhapsody In Blue*, Charlesbridge, 2006.

Gerou, Tom, *5 Finger Gershwin Classics Book for Piano With Optional Duet Accompaniments*, Alfred Publishing, 2008.

Gershwin, George and Ira Gershwin, *The Music and Lyrics of Gerge and Ira Gershwin: Piano, Vocals, Chords, (Sheet Music)*, Alfred Music, 1998.

Heyward, Dubose and Dorothy Heyward, et al., *Summertime*, Aladdin, 2002.

Kesh, Paul, *An American Rhapsody: The Story of George Gershwin (Jewish Biography Series)*, E.P. Dutton, 1988.

Mitchell, Barbara and Jan Hosking Smith, *America I Hear You: A Story About George Gershwin*, Carolrhoda Books, 1987.

Slade, Suzanne and Stacy Innerst, *The Music in George's Head: George Gershwin Creates Rhapsody in Blue*, Calkins Creek, 2016.

Venezia, Mike, *Getting to Know Gershwin (Getting to Know the World's Greatest Composers)*, Children's PR, 1995.

Whiting, Jim, *The Life and Times of George Gershwin*, Mitchell Lane Publishers, 2004.

Book & Film Resources:

Biography:

Feinstein, Michael, *The Gershwins and Me: A Personal History in Twelve Songs*, Simon and Schuster, 2012.

Furia, Phillip, *Ira Gershwin: The Art of the Lyricist*, Oxford University Press, 1996.

Gershwin, Ira and Robert Kimball, *Ira Gershwin: Selected Lyrics (American Poets Project)*, Library of America, 2009.

Jablonski, Edward, *Gershwin: A Biography*, Harper Collins, 1988.

Pollack, Howard, *George Gershwin: His Life and Work*, University of California Press, 2007.

Rimler, Walter, *George Gershwin: An Intimate Portrait (Music in American Life)*, University of Illinois Press, 2015.

Rosenberg, Deena Ruth, *Fascinating Rhythm: The Collaboration of George and Ira Gershwin*, University of Michigan Press, 1997.

Music:

George and Ira Gershwin in Hollywood: Motion Picture Soundtrack Anthology, Rhino, 1997.

Gershwin Plays Gershwin: The Piano Rolls, CTS Digital, 1993.

Gershwin: Rhapsody In Blue/An American In Paris, Leonard Bernstein conducting the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, Sony Classical, 1987.

I Got Rhythm: The Smithsonian George Gershwin Collection, Smithsonian Collection, 1995.

The Essential George Gershwin, Sony Classical/Legacy, 2003.

Some Films The Gershwins Composed Music For:

A Damsel in Distress, 1937.

A Star Is Born, 1954.

An American in Paris, 1951.

Girl Crazy, 1930.

Porgy and Bess, 1959.

Shall We Dance, 1937.

The Barkleys of Broadway, 1949.



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FirstWorks Arts Learning programs help K-12 students build connections between art, their academic subjects, and their lives.

These school-based **Arts Learning** programs meet grade-level standards and model pathways to the future through exposure to cultural firsts.

FirstWorks Arts Learning enables K-12 youth to interact directly with some of the most inventive, creative minds of our time; bolstering student achievement and broadening career possibilities.