

## Summertime by George Gershwin

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George Gershwin was born Jacob Gershowitz on September 26, 1898 in Brooklyn, New York. He had two brothers, Arthur and Ira, and one sister, Francis (Frankie). Although George is the most well known of the family, Ira Gershwin was also a successful lyricist and wrote lyrics to many of George's songs.

At the age of 12 years, George began to learn the piano and went on to study music seriously with the American composers Rubin Goldmark, Henry Cowell, and Wallingford Riegger. He began his professional career in "Tin Pan Alley," the area in New York City where most music publishers were based, to which aspiring composers and songwriters would bring their scores in the hope of selling their music for a small amount of money. He became established here with the success of his song "Swanee" in 1918. This led to even greater success with the production of many musicals during the 1920s, written with his brother.

One of his most famous works is Rhapsody in Blue, which combined influences of popular music and jazz with classical elements. He also wrote a Piano Concerto in F, and other orchestral works such as An American in Paris. Gershwin died at the young age of 38 in Hollywood in 1937 following cancer surgery.

The folk-opera, Porgy and Bess was written in 1935 and is based on a novel by the American writer DuBose Hayward. Like much of Gershwin's music, it draws on many influences and is a fusion of 5 musical styles: black folk music, jazz, blues, the popular and film music of the 1930s, and classical music to produce a work unique in style. Porgy and Bess dealt with the poverty of the ghettos and their inhabitants' daily lives and loves; one of the first efforts to reflect a minority culture. It did not become popular, however, until after Gershwin's death but is now seen as one of the most successful American operas.

'Summertime' is a lullaby in strophic form sung by the character Clara in the opera, and is a good example of the fusion of musical influences.

From folk music, we see the use of the pentatonic scale with the notes B - D - E - F# and A predominating. Also, portamento is used (Bar 21) by the singer who also adds some embellishment at the end in a style often used in spiritual or gospel music.

Gershwin uses an orchestra of mainly strings to accompany the voice, with woodwind adding colour and short linking phrases (bar 19). In the clarinet part we see some rhythmic augmentation between bars 5 and 6. This is the influence of classical music.

Popular music provides the lush chromatic harmony such as that in bars 20-22, chromatic melody (bar 14-15) and we see chords with added 6ths (bars 8-11), 7ths and 9ths. A rather more obvious link to the style of popular music and films is the use of crooning backing singers in the second verse.

From blues comes the use of blue notes, known as false relations in classical music, such as the E and E# in bar 14. This has a clashing, dissonant effect.

Jazz has a particularly significant influence in terms of rhythm: swung rhythms are used, as is some gentle syncopation (bar 15). These elements occur both in the vocal part and accompaniment.