

Words and Music

BY GEORGE AND IRA GERSHWIN

THE sudden death of George Gershwin in the summer of 1937 brought genuine grief to the tremendous audience of Americans who so loved to hear his music over the radio, in the concert hall, on the stage, or at the concerts given in large outdoor stadiums. But to the serious group of composers and musicians who had been sponsoring jazz as a new art form, as the true musical expression of American life, it meant the loss of a leader, who in a short span of years had done more than any other composer to gain for jazz music serious intellectual consideration from students and critics.

Long will this group and the world of music remember the night of February 12th, 1924, when in swank Aeolian Hall, Paul Whiteman rendered Gershwin's "Rhapsody In Blue". Gershwin's inexhaustible rhythmic inventiveness and skillful melodic moldings were acclaimed by the great and near-great of America and Europe, and for the first time the word 'jazz' was coupled with 'symphonic'.

The term symphonic jazz became a permanent part of the language when Gershwin followed up his initial success with such pieces as "American In Paris", "Concerto In F", "Cuban Overture", and others. Had he lived longer George Gershwin would no doubt have scaled undreamed of symphonic heights.

But there is another, more familiar side to Gershwin. All his early efforts were devoted to turning out so-called popular songs, most of which were originally composed for musical comedies. But even in this field Gershwin expressed something new, a joyous spirit which others imitated but could never equal.

"Words and music by George and Ira Gershwin" has meant as much to this generation as Gilbert and Sullivan had meant to a previous generation. In the many songs for musical comedies on which the brothers Gershwin have collaborated, the lyrics by Ira have contributed much to the success of the songs. Ira's ability as a lyric-writer reaped its full reward when the Kaufman, Ryskind, Gershwin opus "Of Thee I Sing" was awarded the Pulitzer Prize a few years back. The lyrics to "Wintergreen for President" and to "Of Thee I Sing" are comparable in their own right to the best of W. S. Gilbert.

Lyrics can mean nothing or they can contribute greatly to a song's success. In all the collaborations of the Gershwins, Ira's lyrics have managed not only to convey a refreshing exhilaration but have always blended perfectly with the music.

So together we have the master composer and the master lyricist, a combination that has produced America's most popular and most enduring music. In the following pages you will find the finest efforts of these collaborators.



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