

# FOREWORD

It was while George Gershwin was putting the finishing touches on the score of "Sweet Little Devil" back in 1923, just prior to its Boston opening, that Paul Whiteman asked him to compose "something" for his epoch-making concert of symphonic jazz at Aeolian Hall on Lincoln's Birthday 1924. Gershwin, at the moment, was against it and, indeed, had almost forgotten about it were it not for the shock of learning from an item in the New York Herald-Tribune early in 1924 that he, Gershwin, was busy on a symphony for the much heralded Whiteman concert.

Here indeed was a challenge which could only be answered by "doing something about it." The symphony idea was definitely out. Gershwin originally thought of doing a conventional "blues" and let it go at that, but he realized that something more important was at stake and promptly set to work with a purpose. He decided to aim what he wrote at a misconception regarding the inflexibility of jazz rhythms. He worked the composition out in his mind and in three weeks turned out the *Rhapsody in Blue*.

The famous Whiteman concert which gave the *Rhapsody* to the world is now a matter of history. The concert itself proved conclusively that genius and artistry existed and flourished in Tin Pan Alley. The *Rhapsody* proved to be the cornerstone of what has now become a type of music thoroughly divorced from European influence and formalism, and magnificently American. So far as Gershwin was concerned, the *Rhapsody* merely proved his point—jazz was not confined to strict rhythm!

Gershwin composed the *Rhapsody in Blue* for Piano and Jazz Band. Ferde Grofé, the brilliant innovator in orchestration for the Whiteman band scored the *Rhapsody* for the following instrumentation: 8 Violins, 2 String Basses, Banjo, 2 Trumpets, 2 Trombones, 2 Pianos, Drum, 3 Saxophones and 2 Horns. With such an instrumentation, nearly every player "doubled" on some other instrument or instruments other than his principal one. This then, was the first available score of the *Rhapsody*. As demand for performances increased, it became necessary to, in a measure, recast the score, though retaining its original intent, but permitting the standardization of the instrumentation in such fashion that concert orchestras could cope with the work. This Grofé accomplished with much skill so that balance and color was maintained. It was not long however, before the *Rhapsody* found its way into the standard symphonic literature. Again Grofé was consulted, but rather than recast the entire instrumentation for one of symphonic proportions, Grofé cautiously and wisely added only such instrumental voices as would provide greater clarity and brilliance, still retaining in toto the original instrumental concept.

The present setting for Piano Duet of the *Rhapsody in Blue* was made by Henry Levine, one of a few privileged to study the work with Gershwin himself. Mr. Levine has based his transcription entirely on the original score, admitting of no departures or fanciful interpolations tending to distort the concept of the composer. In effect, the transcription is quite as amazing as is its well-designed and expertly plotted course for four hands at one keyboard, and makes a welcome addition to the available media for aristocratic performance.

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