

Porgy, Preludes & Paris

Gershwin arrangements for piano duo



Piano à Deux

intangible classics

divine art

Porgy, Preludes & Paris

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4	I Prelude No. 1 / Stairway to Paradise	4:02	
5	II Prelude No. 2 / A Foggy Day in London Town	8:02	
6	III Prelude No. 3 / Someone to Watch over Me / The Man I Love	7:50	
7	An American in Paris Revisited with 'By Strauss' and 'I Got Rhythm'		15:06
	Total playing time:		63:52

Music by George Gershwin (1898-1937)
Arranged and adapted by Piano à Deux
(Linda Ang Stoodley & Robert Stoodley)

Gershwin and the music

George Gershwin was born on 26 September 1898 in Brooklyn, New York. George grew up close to the Yiddish Theatre and even appeared on stage as an extra. In 1908, his parents bought a piano for his elder brother, Ira, to have lessons but it was George who took to it.

In 1928, Gershwin visited Paris and asked to study with Maurice Ravel. Learning how much Gershwin earned, Ravel famously replied; "You should give *me* lessons."

Ira Gershwin described his brother in a 1961 Canadian radio broadcast:

"In person my brother was a good deal like his music: vibrant, dynamic and honest, and, if I may, charming. He was full of life and lived a full day. Although most of it was devoted to the piano and his music, it was a continual source of amazement to me that he found time to engage in so many other activities. He was a fine painter, a good golfer, a discerning and courageous art collector, an excellent photographer, a wonderful dancer... whether at a ballroom or taking a moment out of a show rehearsal to break into a tap dance. And socially he was one of the most sought after young men in New York or whatever city he happened to be in. George moved fast, lived fast, studied hard, and learned fast."

Gershwin's aim was to create a fusion of classical music and jazz. In 1926, Gershwin wrote in *Theatre Magazine*:

"When I realized beyond any possibility of error, or need of recantation, that the voice of America, the expression of its soul, is jazz, a determination to do the best possible in that idiom filled me. Jazz is young. It is not more than ten years old. Ragtime is dead. It was dying when my ear began to be attuned to the voice of the spirit of America."

Although a pianist himself, Gershwin only wrote a handful of works for solo piano and no original works for Piano Four Hands. For this recording Piano à Deux have created Piano Four Hands arrangements combining the original instrumental works with Gershwin songs that are complementary to each piece.

Scenes From 'Porgy And Bess'

[1] Piano à Deux have created a rhapsody on themes from *Porgy and Bess* (1935) using similarities in melody or harmony from different parts of Gershwin's "folk opera" to guide the direction of the music. The arrangement gives the opportunity to separate the vocal lines from the accompanying figures and capture the chorus lines in all their harmonic glory, often saving all four hands for the most dramatic sections.

The fantasy opens with the flourish of the opera's introduction before cascading down into *There's a Boat dat's Leavin' Soon for New York*. The opening of Act 1 then leads to an extended section based on *My Man's Gone Now*, the high tremolando melody conveying Serena's sighs. The section ends with a suggestion of *It Ain't Necessarily So* and a return to the quayside and the approaching boat.

An expansive arrangement of the lullaby *Summertime* provides a restful interlude. Then, a short rousing introduction using stage band music leads to the up tempo chorus, *Oh, I Can't Sit Down*, the inclusion of the chorus parts highlighting the chromatic harmony and blue notes.

The music winds down again into the duet for the lovers, Porgy and Bess: *Bess You is my Woman Now*, the tone row from Gershwin's introduction to the duet reappearing as a counter melody.

The previous suggestions of *It Ain't Necessarily So* are realised as we join the dope peddler, Sportin' Life, in full flow. The tone row from the duet's introduction leads us back into *Bess you is my Woman Now*, then back again to the chorus of *It Ain't Necessarily So*.

The finale reaches a triumphant climax with a return to the music of *There's a Boat dat's Leavin' Soon for New York* that forms the end of the opera.

Diversions

[2] I. Novelette with 'Love Walked In'

Prelude (Novelette in Fourths) (c. 1919) is a cake-walk and may have been written for inclusion in Gershwin's intended set of 24 preludes. The 'fourths' give the piece a slightly oriental feel, and reappear in Gershwin's song *Idle Dreams* (1920). The title might be a reference to Robert Schumann's Op. 21 *Noveletten*.

The arrangement opens with the prelude followed by a demonstration that much of the prelude's melodic material fits very neatly over the chorus of the song *Love Walked In* (1938). A return to the prelude is followed by the verse and chorus of the song and the final section of the prelude.

[3] II. Rialto Ripples with 'Love is Here to Stay'

The novelty ragtime, *Rialto Ripples* (1917) was written for piano roll and was published as a joint composition with Will Donaldson (1891-1954). At that time it was common for new composers to be 'paired' with older ones in order to increase sales. Considering the rhythmic variation and interesting harmonies, it is possible that the piece is entirely by Gershwin himself.

The piece does not seem to relate to the bridge of that name over the Grand Canal in Venice and may be a reference to the recently opened Rialto Theatre, a New York City movie palace located at 1481 Broadway, at the corner of 42nd Street. This is reinforced by the sheet music featuring silhouettes of dancers against a cityscape.

A fragment from the rag serves as an introduction to the arrangement, leading into the rag in full. The music then gently slows down into the chorus of the last song Gershwin composed: (Our) *Love is Here to Stay* (1937). Next is a "Trio" (still in split common time) leading into the song's verse and chorus. A reprise of the rag ends the arrangement.

A Suite Of Preludes

Gershwin originally intended to write a set of 24 Preludes but only completed seven. Of these the *Three Preludes* (1926) were published and two (including *Novelette in Fourths*) were adapted to form *Short Story* for violin and piano.

[4] I. Prelude No. 1 with 'Stairway to Paradise'

Prelude No. 1 in B-flat major begins with a short motif on which nearly the entire prelude is based. It returns in various guises throughout the prelude but is not developed. Reversing the triplet scale at the end of the prelude's first section neatly leads to the verse and chorus of *I'll Build a Stairway to Paradise* (1922) with a modulation to C major. This then flows into the middle section of the prelude with its repeated notes injecting energy into the music before returning to the song's chorus now flamboyantly stated in B-flat major, suggesting music for the chorus line at Les Folies Bergères. The arrangement at this point highlights the similarities between the two pieces by overlaying the song with the prelude's motif. A dramatic final statement of the prelude with its turns and scale in fourths concludes the track.

[5] II. Prelude No. 2 with 'A Foggy Day'

Westminster chimes and the song, *A Foggy Day in London Town* (1937) start this arrangement. However, the opening bars of *Prelude No. 2* in C-sharp minor are never far away. The central, faster, section of the prelude is presented first, overlaid with the prelude's opening theme. A few bars of the *Foggy Day* introduction bring us to the C-sharp minor opening of the prelude, which Gershwin referred to as "a sort of blues lullaby". It has an ostinato-like, rocking bass line that is maintained for the whole of this first section.

The chorus of *A Foggy Day* returns in full leading back to the prelude's central section and, after a brief *Foggy Day* interjection, the prelude ends with a shortened re-statement of its opening theme.

[6] III. Prelude No. 3 with 'Someone to Watch Over Me' and 'The Man I Love'

Gershwin described his **Prelude No. 3** in E-flat minor as "Spanish" possibly due to the Latin American feel of the rhythm. The prelude quickly segues (with no new material required) into the song ***Someone to Watch Over Me*** (1926) in E-flat major. A brief interjection from the prelude leads to the complete song, the prelude's theme neatly fitting into the gaps between phrases. A new section of the prelude leads into an adaptation of Gershwin's own solo piano arrangement of the song: ***The Man I Love*** (1924), again in E-flat major.

Next is a final return to the prelude's (written out) cadenza and a repeat of its main theme, this time ending emphatically in E-flat major.

An American In Paris Revisited

with 'By Strauss' and 'I Got Rhythm'

Gershwin called ***An American in Paris*** (1928) a "rhapsodic ballet" and explained "My purpose here is to portray the impressions of an American visitor in Paris as he strolls about the city, listens to the various street noises, and absorbs the French atmosphere."

Piano à Deux's arrangement extracts the principal themes from the work. It also gives the opportunity to incorporate elements of the score omitted from the solo piano reduction. The arrangement incorporates recent research by the University of Michigan into the pitches of the taxi horns Gershwin had brought back from Paris. The 'corrected' taxi horns form part of the harmonic language of the section and are no longer just dissonant. Two songs featured in the 1951 MGM film, *An American in Paris*, have also been included to reflect the way in which many people first encountered the music.

The work opens with the eponymous American strolling around Paris avoiding the taxis. The music then jumps the Alps to Vienna in a song asking for music ***By Strauss*** (1936) "in three quarter time" for good measure. Back in Paris, the American is homesick despite a new romance depicted by a haunting blues melody. The tempo of the music picks up and, following a short transition, leads into the song ***I Got Rhythm*** (1930), based on Gershwin's own solo piano arrangement of the song, with further virtuoso embellishments. A return to a bustling Parisian scene and a reminder of the blues melody provide a rousing finale.

Notes © Iain Sneddon 2018



George Gershwin

Piano à Deux : Robert & Linda Ang Stoodley

Surprisingly, Robert & Linda met online, not through music. They married in 2008 and "Piano À Deux" was formed in 2010.

Their unique charisma and comedy set in scintillating original arrangements has won them a large following. They have performed in Europe, the UK and Singapore, and were live on Radio 3's 'In Tune' in 2015 with the prize-winning violinist Erzhan Kulibaev.

Their first CD, 'Strictly Not Bach' (2011), raised £2,000 for various charities, including WorldVision, and critics have been unanimous in describing their second CD, "France Revisited" (2016), containing a sonata by neglected composer George Onslow, as "piano four hands at its very best...." Their "Petite Suite" (Debussy) won high praise. It was also suggested that they are worthy of taking on the mantle of Goldstone & Clemmow whose performing story was ended by the untimely death of Anthony Goldstone.

Both were successful in their own right. Award-winning Robert is a linguist, (York University) and studied the piano with Dorothea Law. He has performing and teaching diplomas from the Royal College of Music and Royal Academy of Music.

Robert gained the Premier Prix at the Conservatoire de Lyon (France), has broadcast on BBC Radio 4, and has performed throughout the UK. He was also recently Musical Director for the legendary Tommy Cannon (Cannon & Ball).

Robert's songs are sung worldwide, and have been published and recorded, the most recent recording being "St. Michael-le-Belfrey: the Vinyl Years".

Whilst at the Guildhall School of Music, Linda (B. Mus. Edinburgh) won many prizes including the Royal-Overseas League Accompanist's Prize. She was harpsichordist of the Guildhall String Ensemble when they won the Internationales Jeunesses Musicales Competition (Belgrade).

Since then, Linda has focussed on the piano and was an official accompanist for the International Vocalisten Concours in s'-Hertogenbosch (Netherlands). She has performed in the UK, Europe, Mauritius, Singapore, on Dutch and Mauritius television, Radio Scotland, Radio Oxford, Radio 3, and live on Premier Radio and Classic FM. She has also recorded with several artistes and has released seven CDs of her own.

Visit the duo's website at www.pianoadeux.com



Another fine recording by Piano à Deux:



'France Revisited'

George Onslow (1784-1853)

Sonata for Piano Four Hands no. 1 in E minor, Op. 7

Six Pièces pour Piano

Claude Debussy (1862-1918)

Petite Suite

Francis Poulenc (1899-1963)

Chansons de l'amour et de la guerre
(arranged by Linda Ang Stoodley)

'An example of piano four hands performance at its very best.' – Alex Baran (The Whole Note, Canada)

This album was recorded at the church of St. Peter and Paul, Church Hanborough, Oxfordshire on 1,2,7 & 8 August, 2018.

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Linda Ang Steedley & Robert Steedley : Piano à Deux