THE MELODY LINGERS ON:

REBELLION AND REINVENTION IN THE MUSIC OF IRVING BERLIN, GEORGE GERSHWIN AND HAROLD ARLEN

MELANIE S. COOPERMAN

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Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
School of Sacred Music
New York, New York

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Advisor: Carole B. Balin, Rabbi, Ph.D.

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Introduction

Between 1881 and 1924 over 2 million Jews immigrated to the United States. Among them were Moishe Gershowitz, Rosa Bruskin, Samuel and Celia Arluck and the Baline family. It would have been impossible to imagine that their children would help shape something truly remarkable: a new American Sound. Of course, those children would become better known as Irving Berlin, George Gershwin, and Harold Arlen.

While there has been debate about the "Jewishness" of their work, it's important to remember: All three composers were, simply, Jewish. Their parents fled their homes because they were Jewish. And for Irving Berlin and Harold Arlen, whose fathers were cantors, they grew up hearing liturgical music. George Gershwin grew up with another Jewish institution: the Yiddish Theater. Gershwin hoped to compose for the theater and throughout his career expressed a desire to integrate Jewish stories into his work.

Their Jewish backgrounds did - consciously and subconsciously - inform their musical imaginations. Though they did not create music specifically for Jewish audiences. All three composed, instead, for American audiences.

It's understandable that Judaism as a religion would not hold much appeal for the young Irving Berlin. His family lived through a pogrom and his father – the Cantor – beat him. Once they left for America, life did not get any easier. Berlin's father Moses was unable to find work in a synagogue and when he died, the family was left in dire financial straits. Berlin could have lived – like many on the Lower East Side did – within a distinct, separate community apart from the larger community. Instead, a young Berlin

would compose ethnic-specific songs for the multi-ethnic melting pot of New York, rejecting the family trade (the cantorate) and many of the traditions of Judaism.

As he matured as a composer, that sense of ethnicity was replaced by something more universal. Instead of viewing himself "ethnically" he reinvented himself musically as – for better or worse – a mainstream American. Berlin understood what many lyricists did not - the 'I' in lyric-writing is more about the listener than the lyricist. At the height of his power, he created a "national anthem:" a song that manages the ambitious feat of being both soaring and sing-able. And while his interest was not in Judaism per se, his hope with God Bless America was to "stir" a country into action during World War II. Seventy years after his family left for the United Sates, Berlin would still include Yiddish – the language of his boyhood home - in his yearly birthday cards to friend Harold Arlen.

While Irving Berlin ultimately removed ethnicity in his music, George Gershwin freely used ethnicity – just not his own. Gershwin blended styles of music, thereby creating memorable musical hybrids. This process began early on. When Gershwin learned classical piano (his teacher wanted him to be a classical pianist), Gershwin fought to play jazz (Berlin's "Alexander's Ragtime Band"). This skill set led him to Tin Pan Alley, a perfect place for a burgeoning jazz musician to learn his trade. In fact, it was Gershwin's skilled piano playing that led to the creation of his most famous work. It's startling how early "Rhapsody in Blue" emerged in Gershwin's career; the bold, audacious insistence of fusing together two disparate styles of music is a clear indication of the youthful rebellion of its composer. He dared to mingle "Black" music with European art music.

As Gershwin's work grew artistically, we can detect in it traces of jazz, classical, and, arguably, Jewish (filtered through the Yiddish theater) music. In his later career, Gershwin understood how best to hide the "fusing" of the disparate styles of music, and his musical reinvention then shifted from the sound of Tin Pan Alley into a more mature, fully-realized form, opera. These first operatic stirrings came with his desire to create a work based on the Yiddish folktale, *The Dybbuk*. These stirrings came to fruition when Gershwin – with DuBose Heyward and Gershwin's brother Ira - created the "folk opera" *Porgy and Bess.* The reinvention was complete.

Harold Arlen's rebellion was more of the classic teenage variety. The son of a cantor, he snuck out to bars, drank and, eventually dropped out of school and moved to New York City. Undoubtedly, Arlen thought he was rebelling against his father's music but, actually, he came to produce a secularized version of it. Arlen didn't see the difference between the minor modes (Black or Jewish) and, like Gershwin, was unafraid to use jazz in his compositions.

Arlen received his jazz education at the Cotton Club where – as a young composer – he wrote for and worked with black musicians, singers and performers. Interestingly, Gershwin's early hit "Swanee" was performed by Al Jolson in blackface. Arlen's experiences taught him that the lament of black and Jews were the same; he thus did not feel the need to "fuse" per se but, rather, simply to create. This reflects as well his "mystical" songwriting approach. His incredible early work at the Cotton Club with lyricist Ted Koehler included; "Get Happy," "Stormy Weather," and "The Devil and the

Deep Blue Sea." Their early work displays an effortlessly interwoven style consisting of Jewish, jazz, popular and blues elements.

The culmination of this uniquely Arlen style are "Blues in the Night" and "Come Rain or Come Shine." Perhaps the greatest compliment to pay Arlen would be to say that – at his best – it's impossible to tell the color of the composer. However, the listener could certainly discern the country of origin of all music created by these composers: America.

Rebellion

"What're you rebelling against, Johnny?" she asked.
"Whaddya got?"he replied.
---Mildred to Johnny in *"The Wild One"*[1]

To rebel against something, there must be something to rebel against. For Irving Berlin, George Gershwin and Harold Arlen, rebellion was evident in interactions with their parents and Judaism. As the composers matured, they demonstrated this rebellious streak by rejecting the established, dominant European music culture. This daring was evident in Irving Berlin's "Alexander's Ragtime Band," George Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue," and Harold Arlen's "Stormy Weather."

Like many children of recent immigrants, these three composers chose a path at odds with that of their parents. For Berlin and Arlen—sons of cantors—this meant creating secular music. For Gershwin, who was from a non-musical home, this meant pursuing a career in music. None felt beholden to his ancestral community and so each targeted his music to a quintessentially American audience, rather than a specifically Jewish one. They unapologetically created music that transcended their personal feelings toward being Jewish.

[1] "Memorable quotes from The Wild One," http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0047677/quotes, accessed 12/15/10.

By bursting out beyond their musical inheritance, they redefined a new genre of "American music"-a music that reached far beyond the revues, the nightclubs, and the theaters, which featured their compositions. Their songs made their way into American homes and lives and hearts. As America began to carve out a unique identity and break with European traditions, this trio of musical geniuses inscribed the emerging nation with a wholly new sound.

During the 1910s, New York's Lower East Side became a nucleus of musical transformation, given its densely populated neighborhoods and chaotic, crowded cacophony of Eastern European immigrants. There, Jews of Russia and Poland found a new home, and secular Jewish music began to develop and thrive. The epicenter of this phenomenon was the Yiddish Theater. Remarkably, at its height, it was more popular and a greater artistic success than Broadway.

The music that emerged from the Yiddish theater rivaled that of the synagogue. Even then, as today, there seemed to be a split between liturgical music and theatrical music. And the theater held more allure for Jews than synagogue. At the same time, the openness of American society enabled second-generation Jewish immigrants to move

beyond the ghettos.[2] As Pulitzer Prize winning playwright Donald Margulies said, "…my parents didn't go to synagogue, they went to Broadway."[3]

"I Didn't Go Home at All" (1909, Berlin)[4]

The story of how the scrappy Israel Baline became a distinguished songwriter by the name of Irving Berlin rests on one factor: the need to survive. Israel Baline, the youngest of eight children, was born in Tyumen, Russia in 1888. His father Moses was a traditional hazzan and, as the music historian Ian Whitcomb claims, Berlin lived in the shadow of a punishing God:

> Life might have seemed irksome to Israel Baline: God was watching you everywhere. From the dawn bath to the night straw cot, everything was of religious significance. God was in the food and in the clothing. When Moses caught Israel pulling on his little shoes in a manner proscribed by the Talmud he beat him. [5]

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[2] Even today, a lot of great Jewish composers create music for theater and not for synagogue. Ex. Stephen Sondheim, Marc Blitzstein, Paul Simon

[3] Kara Manning, "Are We Not Jews," www.tcg.org/publications/at/2000/jews.cfm (2006), accessed 10 October 2010.

[4] Philip Furia, Irving Berlin: *A Life in Song* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1998), 267.

[5] Ian Whitcomb, *Irving Berlin and Ragtime America* (New York: Limelight Editions, 1988), 17. There is a talmudic dictum that you put on right shoe first and then left found in the Babylonian Talmud: Tractate Shabbat, 61a.

In 1893, the Baline family watched as their house burned to the ground in a pogrom. Homeless, the family decided to make the arduous trek to America. They settled on New York's Lower East Side. But, even after two years, Moses could not find work as a cantor, and so labored long hours at a kosher meat market. Upon his death, the Baline family was left in dire straits. Forced to take on any work possible, young Israel sold newspapers.[6] At the same time, Berlin's love of music began to turn a profit. He sang for pennies in restaurants and on street corners. He taught himself to play piano and began writing "blue" versions of popular songs -- his first job as a lyricist. Before long, he was "plugging songs" for Tony Pastor's Music Hall, a job that entails playing songs for potential buyers of sheet music (a sort of old-time "itunes preview" before purchase).

Born in Brooklyn in 1898, Jacob Gershowitz's rise to fame as a composer was certainly unexpected. His was a nomadic childhood; Jacob's family moved twenty-eight times before his eighteenth-birthday. His father held many odd jobs that amounted to very little household income.[7] His mother frequented the National Theater – the renowned Yiddish playhouse on 2nd Avenue - but only to play cards with the actors

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[6] Philip Furia, *The Poets of Tin Pan Alley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 47.

[7] Charles Schwartz, *Gershwin: His life and Music* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1973), 5.

backstage.[8] Consequently, young Gershwin spent time hanging around the Lower East Side. He ran errands for the actors and even appeared onstage in a walk-on role. It was during these formative years that Gershwin developed a fondness for the Yiddish Theater.

In 1910, Moishe and Rosa Gershowitz purchased a second-hand piano for their son Ira – an odd choice for a family that was not particularly musical. As Ira noted, "There was no Jewish religious music [in my home]– in fact, no music at all." When Ira's brother Jacob sat down and could plunk out simple tunes with ease, his astounded parents enlisted Charles Hambitzer, a classically trained pianist, to teach him. Hambitzer recognized Gershowitz's "genius" early on, but complained to his sister in a letter, "He wants to go in for this modern stuff, jazz and whatnot. But I'm not going to let him for a while."[9] We can imagine that the "jazz and whatnot" was a reference to Irving Berlin's "Alexander's Ragtime Band."

Hyman Arluck was born in 1905 in Buffalo, New York to Samuel, a traditional hazzan, and Celia.[10] At seven years-old, young Hyman sang in his father's choir at the Pine Street Synagogue. He had a pure, boy soprano voice, and he loved to sing. His father listened not only to religious music (he loved Yosele Rosenblatt), but also had a

[8] Ibid.7.

[9] Schwartz, 16.

[10] Edward Jablonski, Harold Arlen: Rhythm, Rainbows, and Blues (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1996), 4.

love of opera-especially Enrico Caruso.[11] Like Gershwin, young Arluck found classical music beautiful, but had a strong desire to play more modern music.[12] Celia decided to send Hyman for music lessons in hopes he'd become a music teacher. Her reasoning was that, as a teacher, he could make his own schedule and have the freedom to be an observant Jew. Her dream would not quite play out the way she had hoped. [13]

"Alexander's Ragtime Band" (1911, Berlin)[14]

Given the enormous popularity of "Alexander's Ragtime Band," it's not surprising that it might have influenced young Gershwin When it debuted in 1911, four different versions of the song charted at number one, two, three and four , as cited in *Newsweek* magazine. Though Jews could be counted among the song's admirers, it was was a complete departure from the synagogue music of Berlin's father. In fact, the major mode heard throughout "Alexander's Ragtime Band" is the exact opposite of the minor modes heard in the synagogue. Lyrically, too, there is no introspection– a staple of Jewish liturgical music.

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[11] Ibid., 5.

[12] S.A. Music Company, "The Early Years," http://www.haroldarlen.com/bio-2.html, accessed 10 October, 2010.

[13] Jablonski, 5.

[14] Philip Furia, *Irving Berlin: A Life in Song* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1998), 269.

Berlin himself acknowledged the transformational power of the work, expressing as he did: "With all due modesty, I think that I can say that I was the first to write a popular song that was a decided change from the conventional music of that time."[15] "Alexander's Ragtime Band" signaled a shift away from the rural folk sound of Stephen Foster to the urban sounds of the citified Berlin. In "Alexander's Ragtime Band" Berlin drew from "the hum of an engine, the whirr of wheels, the explosion of an exhaust."[16] In its repetition of theme, the listener can hear the churning of machinery as industry begins to boom. Berlin's words unveil the success of his intentions, as he told the New York Times, "An international critic of the arts said that our modern American music was the only thing new in the world of the arts. Music and motor cars! To the average thinker one typifies art, the other industry. Taken together they show how closely related are our modern American arts and industries."[17] In the same interview, Berlin asserted that he wrote the song for a "speeded up" country looking for a sound that matched its new pace of life.

Meanwhile, the young Gershwin continued studying piano with tremendous success and was offered a job as a song plugger at Remick's publishing house. When Gershwin asked his mother for permission to leave school for work, she was naturally

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[15] Staff Writer, "Finds Kinship between Music and Motor Cars," *The New York Times*, 17 August 1924, XX10.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid.

reluctant because of his young age. Gershwin, however, was adamant. Eventually, Rose allowed her son to take a position, and so began a musical career at the age of fifteen.[18]

Gershwin played at Tin Pan Alley, a neighborhood between 5th and 6th Avenues on West 28th Street Avenue in New York. It was home to many song publishers and songwriters, and the name was a derogatory reference to the sound of all the pianos "banging on tin."

While working at the Tin Pan Alley institution. Remick's, Gershwin learned to play popular songs in various tempos and styles. He also mastered, on the fly, the art of adapting songs to accommodate singers with limited range and ability. In other words, he learned how to improvise. His piano skills improved greatly, given eight-hour days and long nights at clubs. By 1915, Gershwin was regarded as, "possibly the finest pianist at Remick's."[19]

It would seem as though Gershwin's long hours would pay off when his longtime dream to work at the National Theater nearly came to fruition. When composer (and Gershwin favorite) Joseph Rumshinksy left the National Theater around 1920[20], actor and producer Boris Thomashevsky approached Gershwin with an offer to collaborate on a Yiddish operetta with Sholom Secunda. But Secunda rejected the idea, partially because having studied at the Institute of Musical Art (which became Juilliard), he considered

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[18] Schwartz, 18.

[19] Schwartz, 23.

[20] Jack Gottlieb, *Funny it Doesn't sound Jewish to Me* (New York: State University Press, 2004) 80.

himself an established composer steeped in the traditions of Jewish music. To him, Gershwin was an inexperienced rookie with no formal musical education or training.[21] Perhaps Secunda's appraisal was correct as, ultimately, he went on to have a lengthy career in the Yiddish Theater, while Gershwin moved beyond the Jewish world, albeit to become a world famous musician. The history of Jewish music might have been changed forever had Secunda agreed on the collaboration. Instead, the emerging American sound would prove the perfect soil for a budding Gershwin.

"Let's All be Americans Now" (1917, Berlin)[22]

When the United States entered World War 1 in 1917, nationalism was on the rise, and music was used as an expression of national identity. While Europe prided itself on creating music for the wealthy and educated elite, American music was designed to appeal to a wide audience. Gershwin and Berlin wrote for the masses because they were part of the masses. Released from the stranglehold of the European "high art" tradition of Bach, Beethoven and Wagner, they spread their ir new Tin-Pan Alley sound quickly from Brooklyn to Buffalo.

[21] Schwartz, 27.

[22] Furia, 272.

"I was Born with the Blues in My Heart" (date unknown, Arlen, *Biff-Boom-Bang*)[23]

After singing in his father's synagogue choir as a boy, rebellious teenager Hyman Arluck sought out secular music. Instead of going to class, Arluck and childhood friend Hymie Sandler would go to the Maple Leaf Café, drink beer and listen to bands playing Tin Pan Alley tunes, including those of Berlin and Gershwin. (By this point, Berlin was known as "The King of Tin Pan Alley," and Gershwin had had numerous songs published.) At age fourteen, Arluck and Sandler had dropped out of Hutchingson Central High School and though their parents bribed them to go to night classes (at a dollar each!), they elected to drink beer at the Iroquois Bar.[24] This growing ease with the bar scene would later help define the early Cotton Club career of Harold Arlen.

However, Prohibition would present him with a problem. Agents eventually closed down the Pine Ridge Inn, where Arlen's jazz band, Se-Mor Jazz Band, regularly played.[25] Arlen rebelled not only against his family, education and religion but also the United States government!

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[23] David Bickman and Edward Jablonski, "Composition Catalogue," http://www.haroldarlen.com/year.html, accessed 12-1-10.

[24] Jablonski, 7.

[25] Ibid, 12.

"Was there Ever a Pal Like You?" (1919, Berlin)[26]

By the second decade of the twentieth century, Berlin began working on the business side of the music industry. He became involved in the Ziegfeld Follies, overseeing the popular 1919 season, which included "A Pretty Girl is like a Melody," the most famous song to originate from the Follies. In that year as well, Irving Berlin formed his own music publishing company, Irving Berlin, Inc.[27] This was yet another interesting step in Berlin's artistic development and seems entirely appropriate given his lifelong concern with the financial aspect of his career.

It was around the same time that Irving Berlin began searching for a music secretary to transcribe the tunes he'd plunk out at the piano. One of the applicants happened to be a young composer and ardent admirer of Berlin's "Alexander Rag Time Band" who was known by then as George Gershwin. Remick's had recently published his first song "Swanee," and his style was just developing. After debating the hire together, Berlin and Gershwin agreed that such employment could stifle Gershwin's musical ambitions.[28] Legend has it that Berlin told Gershwin, "Don't take the job. If you do, you may develop into a second-rate Berlin. But if you insist on being yourself, some day, you'll become a first rate Gershwin." But what, exactly, could a "first-rate" Gershwin do?

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[26] Furia, 273.

[27] Edward Jablonski, *Irving Berlin: American Troubadour* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1999), 87-88.

[28] Schwartz, 33-34.

"Something Peculiar" (1921, Gershwin) [29]

Gershwin was busily creating a new musical style, as exemplified by *Blue Monday,* a jazzy one-act musical that was featured in the revue Scandals of 1922 (a series featuring pretty girls in costumes.) Despite his best hopes, Gershwin's *Blue Monday* was a colossal failure. He had partnered on the project with Buddy De Sylva, a forward thinking lyricist, businessman and, later, founder of Capitol Records. Critics described De Sylva's libretto as "naïve" and "trite" and claimed that Gershwin's "music compounded the problem."[30] Critic Charles Darnton called it "the most dismal, stupid, and incredible blackface sketch that has probably ever been perpetrated." [31] In time, critics would come to appreciate *Blue Monday* (at least in the attempt) and dubbed it the "first piece of symphonic jazz" that attempted to fuse classical, popular and operatic music. [32] Gershwin would have better luck with his next attempt.

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[29] Howard Pollack, *George Gershwin: His Life and Work* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006), 253.

[30] Schwartz, 61.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Betty King, "American symphonic jazz: an excursion into the geography of music," *La Scena Musicale* (February, 2001) Vol.6/5.

"Rhapsody in Blue" (1924, Gershwin)[33]

In 1924, Paul Whiteman, a popular American bandleader and early proponent of "jazz," asked Gershwin to write a piece for piano and orchestra with the hope that he would also play the piano part. By this time, Gershwin had begun having some success on Broadway. Whiteman was regarded as an important figure in distilling the essence of jazz, "to a broad pubic, mainly middleclass and white." John Wilson, New York Times critic, wrote about Whiteman, "He was not really a 'King of Jazz' and he knew it; his relationship to jazz was more talk than fact."[34]

Despite the uneven opinion of his talent, Whiteman persuaded Gershwin to collaborate with him on a concert showcasing eclectic American music entitled "An Experiment in Modern Music." For the better part of the evening, the experiment failed until Gershwin's piece, "Rhapsody In Blue" brought the house down.

Gershwin described Rhapsody as " . . . a sort of musical kaleidoscope of America, of our vast melting pot, of our unduplicated national pep, of our blues, our metropolitan madness."[35] Thus, the famous opening—a wailing, klezmer-inspired clarinet glissando—is a metaphor of the Jewish entrance into that "metropolitan madness." The sly, street-smart clarinet is then swallowed by the sounds created by Gershwin's piano, trumpets and drums.

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[33] Schwartz, 340.

[34] Schwartz, 73.

[35] David Schiff, *Gershwin, Rhapsody in Blue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 12.

Similar to the traditions of Bach and Beethoven, Gershwin starts out with the cell of a melodic idea and turns it in every direction, exploring the possibilities within that single melodic idea – a trick he undoubtedly learned with Hambitzer and, no doubt, perfected at Remick's. Yet what is unique about Gershwin is that he takes an improvisatory genre (i.e. jazz) and couples it with traditionally non-improvisatorially instruments. This sets the entire piece, stylistically, so that it maintains a breath of freedom. Tension is created between the very free-sounding, improvisational piano parts and the more exacting sound of the orchestral sections. It is a dialogue between the individual (the solo instrument) and society (the orchestra).

Biographer Charles Schwartz wrote,

> "When the Rhapsody ended, there were several seconds of silence and then all hell broke loose. A crescendo of tumultuous applause and enthusiastic cries swept the house. Henry Botkin, artist and a cousin of Gershwin, vividly remembers that all around him 'members of the audience, including Victor Herbert, were standing and clapping and cheering wildly in their enthusiasm for the composer and his piece.' Gershwin was recalled to the stage again and again in response to the vociferous outcries of pleasure that greeted him and his work. In their enthusiasm for the Rhapsody, many in the hall quickly forgot their disenchantment with the earlier part of Whiteman's 'experiment.' Gershwin had saved the day."[36]

Despite the vociferous applause, the critical response was mixed. Some hailed the work. New York Times Critic Olin Downes said, "the audience was stirred, and many a hardened concertgoer excited with the sensation of a new talent finding its voice."[37] Others did not think as highly of the music; Lawrence Gilman of the Tribune felt it, "trite

[36] Schwartz, 87.

[37] Olin Downes, "A Concert of Jazz," *The New York Times*, 13 Feb., 1924, 16.

and feeble and conventional."[38] Of course, anything groundbreaking is controversial, and it's not hard to see how critics who persisted in applying a European musical standard would be disappointed. Nevertheless, the "Experiment in Modern Music" was performed multiple times over the next months, with Gershwin's piece the main attraction.

"What'll I Do?"(1924, Berlin)[39]

While Gershwin experimented with classical-jazz musical hybrids, Berlin continued to plug along at the *Ziegfeld Follies* and partnered with Sam Harris in creating the Music Box Theater. Over the next few years, Berlin would have a string of hits, including "Always," "What'll I do," "Blue Skies," and "Puttin' on the Ritz." Berlin himself quipped, "Never hate a song that's sold a half million copies." While his career was successful, his personal life improved as well. In 1926, he married Ellin Mackay, the daughter of wealthy, Catholic businessman Clarence McKay. Her parents opposed the intermarriage; and for Berlin, it was a final act of rebellion against his own family.

"Easy Strain" (1925, Arlen)[40]

Arlen's longtime desire was to be a performer, not a writer. In 1925, he arrived in New York City with his band, The Buffalodians. Shortly thereafter, Harry Warren

[38] Lawrence Gilman, Herald Tribune, 13 Feb., 1924

[39] Furia, 275.

[40] Jablonski, *Harold Arlen: Happy with the Blues* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 1986), 363.

arranged a meeting between Arlen and Ted Koehler. And, before long, the pair began to write songs together and was offered a three-year contract by the George and Arthur Piantadosi firm. Thus, Arlen's performing dreams came to an end as he and his partner composed hit after hit while working together at the Cotton Club. As Arlen later admitted, "[Composing] got me away from that which I had loved, a goal I had set. And yet I suddenly realized that goal had become something my temperament couldn't take."[41]

"Someone to Watch Over Me" (1926, Gershwin)[42]

In 1926, George Gershwin and his lyricist brother, Ira, were hired to write the musical *Oh, Kay!* , after their previous success with *Lady, Be Good*, which ran on Broadway and the West End. *Oh Kay!* generated the famous song "Someone to Watch Over Me" – yet another example of Gershwin's provocateur status. The song contains biblical language and metaphor, as in "Where is the shepherd for this lost lamb?" and "Seek and Ye shall find," as well as the notion of "being good" to the "someone" who's watching over "me." But it's not a religious song per se; it's a love song. Gershwin's use of a sequential staircase - a repetition of three notes descending – creates a sense of longing in the listener. But it's not solely a feeling of longing because at the end of the sequential staircase, the listener is brought back to the top, creating a circular melody. That circular melody states and restates the main question; will "he/she" turn out to be

[41] S.A. Music Company, "A Dream to Perform," http://www.haroldarlen.com/bio-3.html (accessed 10 October, 2010)

[42] Schwartz, 342.

the “someone” to watch over “me”?

Despite his commercial success on Broadway and in the concert hall, Gershwin still felt he was not taken seriously as a composer. To that end, in 1928, he travelled to Paris in the hopes of studying with Nadia Boulanger, the most prominent composition teacher in Europe. All the great classical composers studied with her. Boulanger declined, saying that she feared that rigorous classical study would interfere with Gershwin’s jazz-influenced style.[43] However, in Vienna, Gershwin met Alban Berg, a disciple of Arnold Schoenberg, the inventor of the 12-tone system. Berg was an innovator like Gershwin (although stylistically drastically different), and the latter admired the former’s musical complexity and emotionalism. The two became fast friends. In many ways, Berg (and Schoenberg) was the European equivalent of Gershwin (and Arlen).

“Get Happy” (1929, Arlen)[44]

The next year Arlen/Koehler scored their first hit with “Get Happy.” Arlen’s tune deviated from the standard AABA song form by transposing the second section – possibly an echo of the blues, in which a phrase on the tonic cord is followed by a phrase on the subdominant -- a fourth higher. Koehler “filled in the lyrical blanks with words rooted in Negro spiritual, which had become a part of the American musical

[43] Edward Jablonski, *Gershwin: A Biography.* (New York: Double Day, 1987), 155-170.

[44] Jablonski, Happy with the Blues, 45.

consciousness…" These words included, "Judgment Day," "Hallelujah," "Troubles," "Sinners," "The Lord," and "The River." [45]

It's a fascinating sign of the topsy-turvy time that here was the son of a reinventing Negro Spirituals for white audiences. It was no coincidence that Arlen had, seemingly, followed in Gershwin's path by utilizing traditionally "black" music in non-traditional ways; Arlen had long admired Gershwin's music, and his work was proof of that fact. Their style generated a fair amount of controversy:

> This generation of young composers left behind, or "contaminated," established American musical culture in several ways: intercourse with popular materials, whether through the incorporation of jazz elements into concert music or, in the case of Gershwin, wholehearted embrace of the popular idiom; status as members of recently immigrated families; Jewish heritage; a different approach to family life, exhibited in their decision not to marry; and, finally, a shift in musical focus from Boston to New York City.[46]

In a similar vein, historian MacDonald Smith Moore suggests that white Americans felt jazz was the opposite of responsibility and would promote loss of self-control. Even by supporters, jazz was regarded as sensual and sexual.[47] One could argue that Gershwin's perceived hedonistic lifestyle was a good example of that fear being realized.

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[45] Jablonski, *Harold Arlen: Rhythm, Rainbows, and Blues*, 28-29.

[46]Susan Richardson, "Gershwin on the Cover of Rolling Stone" in The Gershwin Style, ed. Wayne Schneider (New York: Oxford Press, 1999),164- 165.

[47] Ibid., 165.

"I'm Out For No Good Reason Tonight" (Gershwin, 1929)[48]

While Berlin became a family man, marrying twice and starting a family, Gershwin played the role of social bon vivant. Gershwin "rejected the traditional notions of family, never married, and fostered the reputation of being something of a ladies' man."[49] Persistent rumors that Gershwin frequented brothels also emerged. All of these facts point to a rebellious personality, fighting as he did against societal norms of the day. Gershwin, himself, declared himself "[a] man without traditions." Like it or not, he symbolized a rejection of the stereotypical Jewish passivity of the Old World and offered a radically different idea of what it meant (and still means) to be Jewish.

"If You Believed in Me" (1932, Arlen)[50]

Harold Arlen and E.Y. Harburg's first collaboration was for the Coney Island-set Broadway musical, *The Great Magoo*. The producers approached Arlen to compose a song for the carnival barker who falls in love with a showgirl. While the musical closed after eleven performances, the song "If You Believed in Me" lived a long life after it appeared in the film *Take a Chance* and was renamed "It's Only a Paper Moon."

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[48] Schwartz, 344.

[49] Richardson., 166.

[50] Jablonski, *Happy with the Blues*, 245.

Arlen's melody is melodically buoyant and airy, suggestive of something floating on the surface of something much deeper. One could imagine how lyricist Harburg would take that carefree mood and partner it with the façade of the carnival, which typically hides something disturbing (especially at Coney Island). The result is a deceptively simple song, which touches on the complicated issue of faith, something which, no doubt, resonated with Arlen. While Arlen was now dabbling in writing songs for Broadway shows, the vast majority of his time was still spent writing with Ted Koehler for the Cotton Club.

"Stormy Weather" (1933, Arlen)[51]

It was at the Cotton Club that Arlen matured as an artist. There, he gained his "cred" as a jazz musician (a status he holds to this day) and a "hands-on" approach to the creation of Jewish/Black musical hybrid. Beginning in 1930, Arlen and Koehler penned songs for the *Cotton Club Parades*, a twice-yearly series of shows held at the nightclub, including astounding numbers like "Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea," "I Love a Parade" and "I've Got the World on a String." Their most famous collaboration would come in 1933 with "Stormy Weather."

By 1933, the country was mired in the depths of the Great Depression, and Prohibition had not yet been repealed. Though neither of these facts was much in evidence at the

[51] Jablonski, *Happy with the Blues*, 246.

Cotton Club, a festive place where drinks were still being served. Legend has it, "Stormy Weather" was written in half an hour while the songwriters attended a party. Whether or not that is true, the song (and its title) certainly reflects the mood of the country at the time. Ethel Waters gave "Stormy Weather" a career-making performance on opening night, when she sang an astonishing twelve encores.[52] Later, Waters described Arlen as "the Negro-est white man" she'd ever known .[53]

About "Stormy Weather," music critic Will Friedwald wrote, it "feels more like a pop tune that already has its jazz ornamentations built into it. Its melodies strong, simple, and extremely catchy, its structure rudimentary, and those chords – 'harmonic sequences' is a better term for them – are amazingly rich, providing unendingly fertile soil for growing a jazz solo."[54] Arlen's "fertile soil" held much appeal to a widely diverse audience, enabling it to become both an artistic and commercial success. Arlen's friend and lyricist E.Y. Harburg said, "Synthesis of Negro rhythms and Hebraic melodies. They make a terrific combination, a fresh chemical reaction. Gershwin did this too, in his own brilliant way. Gershwin and Arlen created a new sound in American theater music by combing black and Jewish elements."[55]

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[52] Jablonski, *Harold Arlen: Happy with the Blues* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 1986), 64.

[53] Gottlieb, 214.

[54] Will Friedwald, *Stardust Melodies: A Biography of Twelve of America's Most Popular Songs* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2004), 144.

[55] Gottlieb, 214.

A necessary starting point for Berlin, Gershwin and Arlen was, simply, a rejection of the past. For Berlin, this rejection included a decided move away from his family and submerging himself in the Lower East Side's multi-cultural population. That break away allowed him the freedom to create the landmark "Alexander's Ragtime Band." And it was that song which struck a young George Gershwin so profoundly that he told his classical piano teacher, Charles Hambitzer, that he wanted to play jazz. Thirteen years later, Gershwin wrote "Rhapsody in Blue," a combination of classical and jazz music--which defied the rules of Western Classical music. In Buffalo, a young singer and his band played covers of Berlin, Gershwin and other Tin Pan Alley artists. That young man would eventually become the resident composer at the most well-known jazz club in New York City. The common denominator among this trio of supremely talented composers was that they were of Eastern European Jewish descent and were exposed to Jewish music via the synagogue and Yiddish theater. Although neither composed for these institutions, the synagogue and the theater can be heard in their work most notably later in their careers.

Reinvention

To reinvent is to recast something familiar or old into a different form. Irving Berlin, George Gershwin and Harold Arlen reinvented themselves by transforming their heritage into something brand new. Their musical compositions drew – in different ways for each—on the Judaism left behind, creating an altogether new sound for an American nation-in-the-making. As each of their lives took a different direction, each moved into a genre of his own.

Berlin continued to write patriotic songs, no longer along the ethnic lines (poking fun at ethnicities by making them into caricatures), like his early work. He began to regard America as a gestalt, and thus sought to write universal songs that reached beyond race, ethnicity and religion. In this chapter, I will show how Berlin's "God Bless America" came to encapsulate this vision and served as a means to unify and even homogenize a disparate populace in the melting pot of early twentieth century America.

Gershwin's reinvention was characterized by a fusion of his Jewish roots with the African-American spiritual of the South. He took that mix and applied it to the most elite genre of music: that is, opera. His composition of *Porgy and Bess* brought, what some considered, "low brow" music into a "high brow" medium. It is a stark rejection of the Western European operatic tradition to meld it with a black/Jewish music. Through this rejection of traditional Western European tradition, Gershwin reinvents the American opera into what he called "folk-opera."

While some might say Gershwin dabbled in the African American musical idiom, Harold Arlen bathed himself in it. While he wrote music with Ted Koehler at the Cotton Club between 1930 and 1934, Ethel Waters called him "the negro-est white man I ever met." Arlen drew on both jazz and Jewish music.. As a fully-realized artist, he broke the rules of form and harmony.

IRVING BERLIN: God Bless America (Berlin, 1918, 1938)[56]

The reason our American composers have done nothing highly significant is because they won't write American music. They're ashamed of it as if it were a country relative. So they write imitation European music which doesn't mean anything. Ignorant as I am, from their standpoints, I am doing something they all refuse to do: I am writing American music.

~Irving Berlin[57]

Irving Berlin self-consciously set out to write popular music to appeal to an American audience. But in so doing, he sacrificed (or willingly surrendered) aspects of

[56] Jablonski, *Irving Berlin*, 353.

[57] Theatre Magazine, 1915.

his own identity. As noted historian Charles Hamm asserts: "Berlin wrote virtually no songs after 1915 reflecting his own ethnicity, and very few with protagonists drawn from other marginalized ethnic groups. His latter songs tended to be generic pieces devoid of reference to locale, ethnicity or class, rather than echoes of life in New York City." [58] Unlike Gershwin, who attempted to ethnicize his music, Berlin evoked in his music a simple, sentimental, and largely nostalgic view of American life.

"Oh! How I hate to get up in the morning!"

(1918 Berlin, *Yip! Yip! Yaphank*)[59]

Unlike, Gershwin and Arlen, Berlin was drafted and served in the United States Army. This experience colored the rest of his life and the development of his music. – A development humorously noted by a newspaper headline "United States takes Berlin." [60] One could argue that this fact was crucial to Berlin's reinvention as an "American Songwriter." Berlin was stationed (far, far from the action) at Camp Upton in Yaphank, Long Island. He did not like the highly-regimented Army life and found "[m]arching, drilling, and doing KP (kitchen police) . . . intolerable [as one] . . . accustomed to working at all hours of the day and night, reveling in the bustle and glamour of Broadway…"[61] But Berlin, skilled at turning "lemons into lemonade," turned his dislike

[58] Charles Hamm, "Irving Berlin's Early Songs As Biographical Documents," *Musical Quarterly* 77/1 (1993), 14.

[59] Edward Jablonski, *Irving Berlin*, 344.

[60] Furia, 79.

[61] Furia, 79.

for the military life into music. Berlin's "Oh! How I hate to get up in the morning" is a wonderfully clever, tongue-in-cheek song, which soldiers of all ranks came to love. And it came easily to the lips of the non-enlisted as well. The song's success inspired Berlin to capitalize on enlisted men's talent as performers and its ranks as a ready audience. He convinced Major General J. Franklin Bell to allow him to develop a show in the style of the Ziegfeld Follies, in the hope of taking it to Broadway. Berlin believed the show would "boost morale, help recruiting, everything!" [62] Given the go-ahead for the project, Private Berlin would no longer have to wake up in the morning for reveille. Indeed, what may have started as a self-serving plan to escape army service resulted in the highly-successful revue *Yip! Yip! Yaphank.*

While writing *Yip! Yip! Yaphank,* Berlin penned an additional song that ultimately did not make the final cut. The tune was shelved when Berlin's musical secretary criticized him for writing yet another patriotic song like countless others of the day. Years later, however, the song resurfaced when Kate Smith's manager asked Berlin to write a song in honor of the twentieth anniversary of Armistice Day. Berlin returned to that patriotic tune, tweaked it a bit lyrically, and lengthened its melody. When Kate Smith debuted the simple yet majestic song known as "God Bless America" on November 11, 1938, a new American anthem was born.

In retrospect, we can agree that Berlin was correct in keeping the tune locked up in a trunk for two decades. The solemn tone was far more appropriate for the 1930s. [63] By

[62] Furia, 82.

[63] Furia, 192.

1938, Americans were mired in the Depression and could hear the song as a rallying point around which a fledgling country could be unified by an idealized notion of "America." People had begun referring to the country not as "America" but rather the "United States," which indicates "a shift in nomenclature that reflected 'the era of the Depression and growing worldwide Fascism, when the limits of American power became painfully visible.'" [64] By returning to the term "America," Berlin subtly evoked a stronger, more unified nation.

Berlin also adapted the original lyrics. Tellingly, he revised "Stand beside her and guide her to the **right** with a light from above" to "Stand beside her and guide her through the **night** with a light from above." By the 30s, the word "right" had become rife with political implications and Berlin's word change showed that his song was decidedly not about politics.

Berlin was clear that his music was meant to promote peace, not war. The 1918 lyric "Make her victorious on land and foam" became "From the mountains/To the prairies/To the oceans/White with foam." The additional wording led to a lengthening of the melody, resulting in the song's signature movement: a sequential step-like building leading to the climax of the song. Some have described this effect as "wave-like" which significantly peaks on the word "God." [65] In a time of collapsing domestic institutions, both financial and social, and a crisis of international proportions (World War II), Americans (re)turned to religious belief. If we read the song as a prayer (a petition to the

[64] Ibid.

[65] Furia, 193.

divine to bless America) then the song's crescendo on "God" underscores its plea-like nature. God, not America, becomes the most important word in the song. If the song were to build toward the word "America" then the implication is that God's blessing of America is a given.

Interestingly, Berlin took the song's title from his mother words who would recite this phrase with "emotion" bordering "almost [on] exaltation." [66] As Berlin claimed, "It's not a patriotic song, but rather an expression of gratitude for what this country has done for its citizens, of what home really means." [67] It can be argued that Berlin's song appealed broadly because of its simplicity. As reported in the NY Times, for "Americans who find The Star-Spangled Banner hard on their voices, 'God Bless America" is . . . a patriotic song they can sing." [68] Patriotic in deed as well as word, Berlin donated all royalties from "God Bless America" to the Boy and Girl Scouts of America but retained total artistic control.

Despite their popularity, a backlash emerged against Berlin and his music. Some scholars attribute it to "the smoldering anger of the WASP establishment over what Irving Berlin and other immigrants had been doing to pop culture since 1910."[69] Not surprisingly, the Ku Klux Klan denounced the song because of Berlin's religion. A

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[66] Furia, 192.

[67] S.J. Woolf, "What Makes a Song: A Talk with Irving Berlin," The New York Times, 28 July 1940, *The New York Times*, 80.

[68] Furia, 194.

[69] Furia, 195.

newspaper editor snidely referred to Berlin as "nee-Izzy Balinsky, ex-Singing Waiter" and suggested the song failed to show the "real American attitude." [70] In spite of the fact that he had written the song as a debt of gratitude to the country he loved, because he was a Jew – and an immigrant at that – he could hardly represent America, according to his critics.

It came to pass that, on some level, Berlin internalized these criticisms. He feared being exposed as a poor immigrant Jewish songwriter who could neither read music nor play the piano. Such anxiety fueled his career, which persisted into his 100th year.

Blue Monday (1922, Gershwin, *George White's Scandals of 1922*.)[71]

In some ways, George Gershwin's operatic experimentation began as a response to those classical musicians who criticized him for his inadequate "classical" training. By charting the unexplored territory of experimental opera based on an African American idiom, he hoped to avoid negative comments. He learned otherwise, however, when his 1922 one-act, jazz opera *Blue Monday* was denounced for its weak libretto, "laughable" use of blackface and an overall "absurd treatment of an opera with pretensions of realism." [72] He would not make the same mistake twice.

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[70] Furia, 195.

[71] Charles Schwartz, 338.

[72] Ibid., 61.

As early as 1924, newspapers were reporting that the Metropolitan Opera sought to create a new, grand American opera—"not of the old sentimental type, but some modern American type." [73] To that end, the Opera House contacted three composers: Irving Berlin, Jerome Kern, and George Gershwin. Kern declined, saying he supported the idea but felt as though he wasn't the right fit. Berlin, of course, wanted to do the project, but felt he lacked the technical proficiency for such a work. That left Gershwin. Fresh off the success of *Rhapsody in Blue*, Gershwin had been hailed as "the first to carry modern American ideas of syncopated rhythm and colloquial harmony into a concert work of the serious order." [74] Thus, all agreed, he was the Met's man.

Porgy (DuBose Heyward Novel 1925 [75]; Play 1927 [76])

In the summer of 1926, Gershwin read DuBose Heyward's novel *Porgy* about southern black life. The story, characters and subject matter resonated with Gershwin, given its resemblance to *Blue Monday*. Within the year, Gershwin and Heyward met to discuss the project and came to a tentative verbal agreement. Gershwin told Heyward he

[73] Staff Writer, "Jazz Opera in View for Metropolitan," The New York Times,18 November 1924, 23.

[74] Howard Pollack, 568.

[75] Hollis Alpert, *The life and Times of Porgy* and Bess (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1990), 37.

[76] Ibid., 41.

"wanted to study more before undertaking an opera." [77] In 1927, a stage version of *Porgy* opened based on an adaption of DuBose's novel by his wife Dorothy. This show marked the Broadway debut of director Rouben Mamoulian, who would later be at the helm of Gershwin's operatic treatment of the story. The stage *Porgy* debuted to critical acclaim, commercial success and ran for 367 performances. Gershwin himself called it "the most outstanding play that I know, about the colored people." [78] In a 1928 letter to friend Isaac Goldberg, Gershwin wrote, "I have seen two performances that appeal to me as much as anything I have ever seen from the standpoint of operatic possibilities. One was DuBose Heyward's *Porgy*, and the other was *The Dybbuk*."

True to his words in 1929, Gershwin signed a contract with the Metropolitan Opera to write an operatic version of the Yiddish play *The Dybbuk* by S. Ansky.[79] While vastly different in locales (Russia and America) and tone (mystical and realistic), *Porgy* and *The Dybbuk* do share thematic elements. Both narrations tell of an oppressed minority living in an insular community during a time of social change. [80] Gershwin wrote early musical sketches of *The Dybbuk* but discontinued the project after learning the rights had been sold to an Italian composer.

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[77] Pollack, 568.

[78] Pollack, 573.

[79] Pollack, 461.

[80] Deena Rosenberg, *Fascinating Rhythm: The Collaboration of George and Ira Gershwin* (New York: Penguin Books, 1991), 267.

Still, years passed and Gershwin had not begun work on *Porgy*. During this time, the Great Depression negatively affected many financially - including the Heywards. In an attempt to incentivize Gershwin to finally begin to write the opera, Heyward wrote Gershwin expressing the fact that Oscar Hammerstein and Jerome Kern had approached him with the hope of writing a blackface version of *Porgy* to star Al Jolson. Gershwin was unwilling to use Jolson: He envisioned, radically, an all-black cast. Gershwin wrote to Heyward,

"I think it is very interesting that Jolson would like to play the part of Porgy, but I really don't know how he would be in it…It might mean more to you financially if he should do it—provided that the rest of the production were well done. The sort of thing I have in mind is a much more serious thing than Jolson can ever do. If you can see your way to making some ready money from Jolson's version, I don't know that it would hurt a later version done by an all-colored cast." [81]

Eventually, Heyward sold the story to Hammerstein and Kern, but his heart was still with Gershwin's anticipated production. Heyward wrote Gershwin saying he hoped they'd work together "before we wake up and find ourselves in our dotage." [82] That hope began to materialize when the Hammerstein/Kern production fell apart and, finally, Gershwin, asserted he was ready to devote himself to the opera. The year was 1933; seven years after Gershwin had read *Porgy*.

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[81] Hollis Alpert, 75.

[82] Ibid., 76.

Porgy and Bess marks Gershwin's reinvention as a serious, fully-realized artist. Still as bold as the Gershwin of *Rhapsody* fame, Porgy would utilize all of the composer's experience in writing for theater, classical music and jazz. The audacious Gershwin dared to reinvent a form in which he had not previously worked. Yet he set out to redefine the genre in a uniquely American way. He not only understood that the use of blackface would undermine authenticity of character. But from the criticism of *Rhapsody*, he learned to create more as a "whole" rather than a stitching together of (albeit wonderful) musical parts.

Porgy and Bess (1935, Gershwin[83])

In order to gather inspiration for the musical style appropriate for the opera, Gershwin visited Heyward in Charleston, South Carolina. His intention was to use "folk" music but folk music reinvented in his own musical language. Gershwin spent weeks in and around Charleston and immersed himself in African American culture at black recitals and church services. Heyward observed that, for Gershwin, life there seemed "more like a homecoming than an exploration." One night, he explained, "at a Negro meeting on a remote sea-island, George started 'shouting' with them, and eventually to their huge delight stole the show from their champion 'shouter.'" Years later, Gershwin told Anne Brown (the singer who originated the role of Bess) that when the 'shouting'

[83] Schwartz, 346.

ended, an elderly man clapped him on the back and told him, "You could be my own son." [84]

The world premiere of *Porgy and Bess* took place at the Colonial Theatre in Boston on September 30, 1935. Like today, it was standard practice for Broadway productions to have out-of-town debuts prior to the high stakes of a Broadway opening. The Boston version of the show ran approximately four hours, and cuts had to be made. As theater/film director Rouben Mamoulian remembered, "George, who loved his own stuff as much as he did, never hesitated to make any cuts that were necessary." [85] Added singing coach Alexander Steinert, "Very few composers would have stood by and witnessed with comparative calm the dismemberment of their brainchild until it had been reduced by nearly a quarter!" [86]

Despite the show's length, the critical reception was very positive. Betty Alden, society editor at the *American,* wrote "The opening recaptured the glory of those now almost legendary days, before the advent of the motion picture; when the green room and the theatre were the focal point of social attention." Critic and writer S.N. Behrman noted, "It should be played in every country of the world except Hitler's Germany—it doesn't deserve it." [87] Given the Boston raves, anticipation mounted for the New York

[84] Pollack, 578.

[85] Alpert, 112.

[86] Ibid.

[87] Ibid., 111.

opening, which came a mere ten days later at the Alvin Theater. A lavish celebration immediately followed the performance at Condé Nast's apartment.

Though the reviews were generally positive, they paled in comparison to the Boston write-ups. Some critics were bothered that the work could not be easily classified – it did not fit the traditional operatic form. Others regarded musical inconsistency (a criticism of *Rhapsody*, as well) as its most egregious fault. New York Times music critic Olin Downes wrote, "The style is at one moment of opera and another of operetta or sheer Broadway entertainment." [88]

In addition to Downes, the New York Times sent theater critic Brooks Atkinson to cover the production. Unconventionally, the paper ran both reviews, side-by-side, thereby "allowing the reader to consider the work from dramatic and musical vantage points" [89] Atkinson was more supportive and did not attempt to categorize the new work. He praised Gershwin's skill at transposing the work from play to opera and added that "fear and the pain go deeper in '*Porgy and Bess'* than they did in penny plain '*Porgy*.'" [90]

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[88] Olin Downes, "Porgy and Bess, Native Opera Opens at the Alvin" *New York Times*, 11 October 1935, 30.

[89] John Andrew Johnson, "Gershwin's 'American Folk Opera'" (Ph D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1964), 539.

[90] Brooks Atkinson, "Porgy and Bess, Native Opera Opens at the Alvin" *New York Times*, 11 October 1935, 30.

Yet most did not share Atkinson's enthusiasm. Stark Young of the New Republic wondered whether "the trouble with the whole thing" was the fact that the actors were not black enough and needed "to be darker or made up so." [91] The most scathing critique came from fellow composer Virgil Thomson who called the production "crooked folklore and halfway opera." At a later point, even condemning Gershwin for his "lack of understanding of all the major problems of form, of continuity, and of straightforward musical expression" which is not surprising given "the impurity of his musical sources and his frank acceptance of them." Thomson viewed the opera as a "highly unsavory stirring-up together of Israel, Africa, and the Gaelic Isles." [92]

The critics' biting reviews belie a mix of discomfort and prejudice, if not outright racism and anti-Semitism. They could not abide Gershwin's assigning serious operatic roles to African Americans. Nor could they accept operatic writing from a Jew who mixed high "art" music culture with low "folk" culture. Essentially, these critics, who had been trained in a European idiom of opera and music were being asked to evaluate the first American opera. It's not surprising that the "guardians of culture" would be disappointed by an American opera by a Jewish composer with black performers. Over time, such criticism fell away.

"Summertime" is the best known song from Porgy and Bess and also exemplifies best Gershwin's mingling of a high art operatic aria with southern folk culture. Sung

[91] Alpert, 118.

[92] Ibid.

near the top of the show, “Summertime” simply and directly sets the tone of the piece and reveals the character of Clara magnificently. The melody of “Summertime” sweeps large and expansive phrases, evoking open space amid a country setting. Clara sings a dreamy lullaby while rocking her baby while imagining a better life for herself and her child.

Musicologist Jack Gottlieb observed that Gershwin’s “Summertime” emerges from an Eastern European lullaby and a spiritual. Gottlieb illustrates the fusion of “Sometimes I feel like a Motherless Child” and Yiddish lullaby, *Pipi-pipipee* into “Summertime.”[93] Gershwin himself was concerned when he said to film composer, Bernard Herrmann, “I’m still worried. It starts my Porgy and Bess. People may think it sounds too Yiddish.”[94]

Gershwin’s use of the pentatonic scale gives “Summertime” its folksy quality and makes the melody easy to improvise upon. The theme consists of only six notes, which lends it the simplicity appropriate to a lullaby. At the same time, thought, Gershwin’s lush harmonies elevate the melody into art. The cross-over quality—between high and low music (classical/folk) evinced in “Summertime”—is representative of the entire opera.

The A section of the song cleverly delays the tonic until the end of each phrase, creating a feeling of suspension throughout the first part of each phrase. This leaves the

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[93] Jack Gottlieb, *Funny, It Doesn’t Sound Jewish to Me*. (NY: State University of New York Press, 2004), 42-43.

[94] Max Wilk, “Tin pan Alley Wits”, *Variety*, 8 January 1986, 239.

listener intoxicated with Clara's dreamlike state and adds dramatic tension as it resolves into the tonic.

Of course, the passage of time would prove that in *Porgy and Bess* Gershwin had created a provocative masterpiece that would come to be known as the first great American opera.

"Blues in the Night" (1941, Arlen, *Blues in the Night*)[95]

Unlike his Cotton Club days (and rebellion phase), Arlen incorporates all elements of his upbringing and musical experiences into his work which ultimately creates the unique, intriguing sound of Arlen's maturity. Arlen's reinvention is defined through the mixing of his multiple influences. Through movie music ("Blues in the Night") and music written for Broadway ("Come Rain or Come Shine") Arlen reinvents his previous style. He uses the theatrical/cinematic stages and draws on his rebellious, Cotton Club days and the synagogue music of his youth in order to reinvent himself in song.

[95] Edward Jablonski, Harold Arlen: Happy with the Blues [1961] (New York Da Capo Press, 1985), 371.

In 1941, Warner Brothers approached Harold Arlen and Johnny Mercer to pen a song for the film *Hot Nocturne.* Specifically, the studio needed a song for the scene where the hero/protagonist, an aspiring musician, is thrown in jail. Fixing on the notion of composing something in a folk blues style, Arlen began studying this genre's structure. In some ways, this evidenced a return to the Cotton Club of his youth rather than his recent "Oz" excursions (with the Academy Award winning *Wizard of Oz.*).

As usual, Arlen's desire to be original would not allow him to follow the standard formula of the typical 12-bar blues song. Instead, his "blues" song turned into what Arlen referred to as a "tapeworm" – a melodically wandering phrase. This was typical of Arlen's work and explains why he relied so heavily on his lyricist in order to sustain the interest of the listener. As Arlen stretched out melodic lines to get into another key or to resolve the phrase, the lyricist would be forced to create a matching phrase to follow, leading to all sorts of surprises. As Arlen said: "A fine musical idea can lose itself because it doesn't happen to have the right frame, the happy wedding of lyric and music."[96] Rather than writing simple melodies, Arlen's method of composing for the lyrics is the same compositional style of traditional composition for the synagogue. The lyrics are primary, and the music serves them. In both styles, sometimes the music "wanders" in order to accommodate the text.

[96] Ibid, 233.

Regarding the Academy Award-nominated "Blues in the Night," journalist William Zinsser asked: "Is there a more evocative American song?" [97] Indeed, Arlen's blues variation work because (while not exactly a blues riff), the riff he did create is repeated throughout the song as though it were the blues. One modification is the upturn of the melody at the end of each phrase; whereas, traditionally, blues melodies end in a downward turn. In an interesting and unusual way, Arlen's upward turn drives the music forward with a sense of relentlessness. In typical blues tradition, Arlen did use the walking bass. This grounds the tune and connects it to the blues traditional form. The walking bass stops in phrases as the voice shifts from the man singing the blues in the jail cell to a narrative voice. The stopping points are Arlen's cues to the listener to pay closer attention to the lyric.

There is an unmistakable sense of theatricality (non-realism) about "Blues in the Night." Arlen and Mercer are painting a picture of a man in jail, lyrically and musically. They use their musical and lyrical knowledge in order to paint the picture, but the song is not a personal reflection of either of them. Arlen reinvents his music in "Blues in the Night" by writing the song about the character rather than about Arlen, himself.

[97] William Zinsser, *Easy to Remember: The Great American Songwriters and Their Songs* (Jaffrey, NH: David R. Godine, 2001), 160.

"Come Rain or Come Shine" (1946 Arlen, St. Louis Woman[98])

If Berlin rejected his Jewish ethnicity and Gershwin used others' ethnic identities in his work, Harold Arlen viewed himself as a product of the multiplicity of his life experiences. The synagogue, the Cotton Club, Broadway and Hollywood all formed a part of his creative imagination. Arlen described his creative process as "Drift, wait, and obey." Unlike Berlin and Gershwin, Arlen took a "mystic" approach to songwriting. Like his father, Arlen held the belief that musical inspiration is derived from God. Yip Harburg said Arlen was "deeply religious" and Gershwin talked about Arlen's "almost supernatural belief in 'inspiration.'" Gershwin said the composer "never would approach the simplest musical requirement or idea without first calling upon 'the fellow up there' – jabbing his finger at the ceiling." [99] Fascinated in the subject, Arlen read many books on the creative process. He expressed this interest by referencing Vaughan William's definition (of art): 'Art is the means by which one man communicates spiritually with another…'" This makes sense given Arlen's nearly complete reinvention from synagogue into the Cotton Club into Broadway into Hollywood and then back again into…synagogue?

In his biography of Arlen, historian Jablonski notes, "[Arlen's] father frequently wove some of his son's best known melodies into the music for the services" while he

[98] Jablonski, *Happy*, 374.

[99] Ibid, 89.

served as the cantor at Temple Adath Yeshuron in Syracuse. [100] It's been widely reported that he actually used the melodies for "Come Rain or Come Shine" and "Over the Rainbow" during worship. Samuel Arlen (Harold's son, Cantor Arluck's grandson) claims that his grandfather (Cantor Arluck) would test out his son's (Harold Arlen's) budding melodies on the congregation at Temple Adath Yeshuron to get their opinion. Thus, it seems that these incredibly popular melodies made their debut in Cantor Arluck's synagogue. [101]

The "Jewish DNA" built into the Arlen/Mercer tune "Come Rain or Come Shine" is quite evident. In the autumn of 1945, as Arlen and Mercer were working on a new musical that came to be known as *St. Louis Woman*. the former sat down to play a new melody for the latter.. "Mercer liked the tune, [and] even came up with a fitting opening line 'I'm gonna love you like nobody's loved you,' after which he paused for a moment. Into the brief silence Arlen jokingly injected, 'Come hell or high water…' To which Mercer reacted with, "Of course, why didn't I think of that – 'Come Rain or Come Shine.'"[102] Jack Gottlieb notices structural similarities between Arlen's song and the erotic *Shir HaShirim*. It would make sense, then, that Arlen would respond to Mercer's

[100] Edward Jablonski, Harold Arlen: Happy with the Blues [1961] (New York Da Capo Press, 1985), 192.

[101] Personal email from info@haroldarlen.com, 11/19/10

[102] S.A.Music Co., "My Shining Hour: The Great Composer (Part I), http://www.haroldarlen.com/bio-7.html, accessed 12/22/10.

opening line “I’m gonna love you like nobody’s loved you” with the phrase “Come hell or high water.” Mercer removes the overtly biblical language but keeps Arlen’s intention. In the following line, Mercer continues the biblical imagery (using it positively) with the lines “Come Rain or Come Shine.” In the following line he continues this heightened language “high as a mountain/deep as a river/Come Rain or Come Shine.” This biblical imagery lends the song a much larger scope than that of a simple “love” song; the song feels grander and thereby more romantic.

Textually, the content between the lyrics of “Come Rain or Come Shine” and the poetry of *Shir Hashirm* share commonalities. “ Come Rain or Come Shine” uses the phrase, “high as a mountain and deep as a river”. In *Shir Hashirim* 4:6-4:15, mountains and streams of water are juxtaposed in erotic imagery which could also be interpreted as references to female anatomy.

The tone of both the lyrics of “Come Rain or Come Shine” and *Shir Hashirim* are aggressive, passionate and sensual. If Harold Arlen thought about what he wanted for the musical setting for “Come Rain or Come Shine”, he may have associated it with Lazar Saminsky’s setting of *Shir Hashirim.*[103] At the same time, the musical style in the opening is similar to a recitative style in Chazzanut. The A^1 section consists of a single repeated pitch for 2 bars and then swoops down a major third. In the A^2 section, the vocal line, again, goes back to that same repeated pitch and returns to the major third lower. The $A^{1-}A^2$ section acts much like a passionate declamation, similar to *Shir HaShirim*-all the while staying in major. Then, a jazzier B section shifts to minor, but ironically

[103] Gottlieb, 167.

juxtaposes a lighter tone with a minor mode. One of the unique qualities of the song is that going into a C section, Arlen quotes the opening section (A^1), but the text is slightly changed to "You're gonna love me, like nobody's loved me, come rain or come shine." This plays with the listener's expectation. The listener expects the song will follow the typical AABA format of Tin Pan Alley songs. But instead, Arlen moves into territory we have not yet heard. Staying in the recitative style of the A section and starting off in major, the song builds "Happy together, unhappy together-- and won't it be fine." The recitative pitch on this lyric is a step higher then where we started, adding to the excitement. Big octave leaps (mimicking the "swoops" in the opening, but more extreme), and higher pitches characterize the vocal line. This C section is all in major until the very end where he adds a tinge of minor hinting at something painful under this confident, passionate exterior. "Come Rain or Come Shine" is perfect example of Arlen's innovative song structuring. Arlen said, "Sometimes I get into trouble; in order to get out of trouble I break the form: I start twisting and turning, get into another key or go sixteen extra bars in order to resolve the song. And often as not, I'm happier with the extension than I would have been trying to keep the song in regular form." [104]

Harold Arlen, George Gershwin and Irving Berlin were all fearless innovators of their time. Gershwin credits Berlin as a pioneer and Arlen said Gershwin was a hero. The incredible musical leaps from *Alexander's Ragtime Band* to *Rhapsody in Blue* to *Come Rain or Come Shine* are evidence of their musical breadth, ingenuity and sheer *chutzpah*.

[104] Jablonski, Happy, 234-235.

Conclusion

The Song Is Ended (but the Melody Lingers On)
(Berlin, 1927)[105]

Because they rebelled against – and, in some cases, were rejected by – the Jewish world, they created music for the masses. In so doing, they, unwittingly or not, assisted in the assimilation of Jews into American mainstream society. At its core, America gave these composers (and their families) freedom, namely, a place free from persecution due to religion and thus an opportunity to pursue their God-given musical ambitions.

While Judaism, neither in content or form, was at the heart of their creative output, elements typical of "Jewish" music can be found in all their work. In their early *oeuvre*, there is a sense of youthful rebellion, representing a push away from their parents' religion amid the new found freedom in America. Their goal – clearly stated – was to write American music by exploring all avenues of cultural ethnicity, not just 2nd Avenue. Yet they did not stray completely from their roots. As more mature artists, all three would incorporate Jewish musical expression.

Nearly all composers would agree that compositional voice is a product, intentionally or not, of the sum total of musical influences throughout a life. And

[105] Jablonski, Irving Berlin, 349.

America, specifically the Lower East Side of New York, was an ideal place to hear a multitude of sounds.

Of all the sounds heard at that time and in that place, "Black" Jazz profoundly influenced all three composers. In fact, in 1931, the composer Henry Cowell defined jazz as "Negro minstrel music as interpreted by 'Tin-Pan-Alley' New Yorkers of Hebrew origin." Similarly, the music historian, John Tasker Howard has written that jazz "in a very real sense…has become a Jewish interpretation of the Negro." [106] Untangling the relationship between jazz and Jewish music is complex because the two share certain qualities. As the musicologist David Lehman writes, "A lot of it has to do with sound: the minor key, bent notes, altered chords, a melancholy edge. Even happy songs sound a little mournful."[107] Harold Arlen's work provides the best example of this combination, not surprisingly, given his early and frequent exposure to both the synagogue and the Cotton Club. Lehman perfectly captured the feeling of Arlen's "Stormy Weather," "It's there in the plaintive undertow, the feeling that yearning is eternal and sorrow not very far from the moment's joy."[108]

In the popular music world of the 1930s, critics tended to focus on the "Jewish-ness" of Berlin and Gershwin's music.[109]. Yet it's difficult to know how each composer

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[106] Polluck, 49-50.

[107] David Lehman, A Fine Romance (New York: Schocken Books, 2009), 3.

[108] Ibid, 4.

[109]1930s critics mentioned the "Jewish-ness" present Berlin and Gershwin's work. These "critiques" were noted amidst a rising wave of anti-Semitism fueled by Henry Ford and made evident by American hero Charles Lindbergh.

himself felt about Judaism in his personal life, and its impact on his work. Because of the time in which they lived – with its anti-Semitic Henry Fords and Charles Lindberghs—they might have felt a need to downplay their Jewishness. Though in more intimate settings, their Jewish roots may have been exposed. As Irving Berlin's granddaughter recalled, "What I remember was this welcoming, man–of–the–earth grandfather who made me feel my ethnic origins, Jewish from the bottom up."[110] It is clear that Gershwin understood the Jews as a unique people. In his 1925 interview with *American Hebrew* magazine he stated, "To write good music one must have feeling. This quality is possessed to a great degree by the Jewish people. Perhaps the fact that through the centuries the Jews have been an oppressed race, has helped to intensify this feeling. As a result we have had many great Jewish composers."

In contrast, Harold Arlen was more of a mystic. He believed that his melodies came from God. A piece in The *New Yorker* described Arlen's creative process and the arrival of a song as "a sort of blessing," continuing, "Before he began his day's work at the piano, he lowered his eyes, brought his hands together, and put himself in a worshipful state of mind." That worshipful state of mind would be familiar to Arlen's father, Cantor Arluck. The two remained close throughout Arlen's adulthood.

As Berlin and Arlen grew older, they seemed to share a common nostalgia for the difficulty of their early lives (Berlin once quipped, "Everyone ought to have a Lower East

[110] Mary Ellin Barrett, Irving Berlin: A Daughter's Memoir (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), 291.

Side in their life.")[111] Such nostalgia is evident in the annual birthday cards they sent each other. Berlin signed his 1976 card *"Zei mir gezunt."* In an earlier note, Berlin had invoked the Yiddish song "*Bei mir bist du schoen*." Berlin also used the Yiddish more casually, vulgarly, when he called Arlen "a schmuck."[112] The intimacy between the two is quite apparent, and Berlin's knack for turning-a-phrase is abundantly clear even as he neared 90.

As a cantor-in-training, I bemoan the fact that none of these gifted composers wrote for the synagogue. It's possible for me to imagine how a George Gershwin service might sound, how clever an Irving Berlin Purim spiel would be, or Cantor Harold Arlen singing a blues-y *Sim Shalom* accompanying himself on fancy-work piano. But it is impossible to imagine a world without the music they did create. In an interview prior to his seventieth birthday, Yiddish theater composer, Sholom Secunda was asked about the fact that he had early on rejected partnering with a young George Gershwin on a Yiddish theater piece. Secunda responded, "Maybe it's just as well. Maybe he would have just written for the Yiddish theater and would never have been heard from."[113] Secunda is right. It is just as well.

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[111] Carole Dingle, *Memorable Quotations: Jewish Writers of the Past* (Lincoln, NE: IUniverse, 2003), 16.

[112] Robert Kimball and Linda Emmet, *The Complete Lyrics of Irving Berlin* (NY: Knopf Publishing, 2000), 497-498.

[113] Richard Shepard, "Secunda Will Pass 70 (Years) Going 90 (mph) on 3 Projects." *The New York Times*, 21 July 1964, 29.

Appendix

Song Lyrics and Opera Synopsis

IRVING BERLIN

Alexander's Ragtime Band

Oh, ma honey,
Oh, ma honey,
Better hurry
And let's meander,

Ain't you goin',
Ain't you goin'
To the leader man,
Ragged meter man?

Oh, ma honey,
Oh, ma honey,
Let me take you to Alexander's grand stand, brass band,
Ain't you comin' along?

Come on and hear,
Come on and hear,
Alexander's Ragtime Band.

Come on and hear,
Come on and hear,
It's the best band in the land.

They can play a bugle call like you never heard before,
So natural that you want to go to war;
That's just the bestest band what am,
Honey lamb.

Come on along
Come on along
Let me take you by the hand,

Up to the man
Up to the man
Who's the leader of the band

And if you care to hear the Swanee River
Played in ragtime
Come on and hear, come on and hear,
Alexander's Ragtime Band.

GOD BLESS AMERICA

While the storm clouds gather far across the sea,
Let us swear allegiance to a land that's free,
Let us all be grateful for a land so fair,
As we raise our voices in a solemn prayer.

God Bless America,
Land that I love.
Stand beside her, and guide her
Thru the night with a light from above.
From the mountains, to the prairies,

To the oceans, white with foam
God bless America, My home sweet home.

GEORGE GERSHWIN

SOMEONE TO WATCH OVER ME

There's a saying old, says that love is blind-
Still we're often told, "seek and ye shall find"
So I'm going to seek a certain lad I've had in mind.

Looking everywhere, haven't found him yet,
He's the big affair I cannot forget.
Only man I ever think of with regret.

I'd like to add his initial to my monogram,
Tell me, where is the shepherd for this lost lamb?

There's a somebody I'm longin' to see-
I hope that he, turns out to be-
Someone who'll watch over me.

I'm a little lamb who's lost in the wood,
I know I could, always be good,
To one who'll watch over me.

Although he may not be the man some
Girls think of as handsome-
To my heart he carries the key.

Won’t you tell him please to put on some speed
Follow my lead, oh, how I need
Someone to watch over me.

SUMMERTIME

Summertime,
And the livin' is easy
Fish are jumpin'
And the cotton is high.

Oh, Your daddy's rich
And your mamma's good lookin'
So hush little baby
Don't you cry.

One of these mornings,
You're going to rise up singing,
Then you'll spread your wings
And you'll take to the sky.

But ‘til that morning
There's a'nothing can harm you
With your daddy and mammy standing by.

Summertime,
And the livin' is easy
Fish are jumpin'
And the cotton is high.

Oh, Your daddy's rich,
And your mamma's good lookin',
So hush little baby
Don't you cry.

HAROLD ARLEN

IT'S ONLY A PAPER MOON

Say, it's only a paper moon
Sailing over a cardboard sea
But it wouldn't be make-believe
If you believed in me

Yes, it's only a canvas sky
Hanging over a muslin tree
But it wouldn't be make-believe
If you believed in me

Without your love
It's a honky-tonk parade
Without your love
It's a melody played in a penny arcade

It's a Barnum and Bailey world
Just as phony as it can be
But it wouldn't be make-believe
If you believed in me.

STORMY WEATHER

Don't know why
There's no sun up in the sky,
Stormy Weather,
Since my man (gal) and I ain't together,
Keeps rainin' all the time.

Life is bare,
gloom and mis'ry everywhere,
Stormy Weather.
Just can't get my poor self together,
I'm weary all the time, the time.
So weary all the time.

When he (she) went away
The blues walked in and met me.
If he (she) stays away
Old rockin' chair will get me.
All I do is pray the Lord above will let me
Walk in the sun once more.

Can't go on,
Everything I had is gone,
Stormy Weather.
Since my man (gal) and I ain't together,
Keeps rainin' all the time.

GET HAPPY

Hallelujah! Hallelujah!
Come you sinners gather round.
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!
All you sinners, I have found
a land where the weary forever are free.
Come you sinners and just follow me.

Forget your troubles come on get happy,
You better chase all your cares away .
Sing Hallelujah come on get happy,
Get ready for the judgment day.

The sun is shining come on get happy!
The Lord is waiting to take your hand.
Shout Hallelujah come on get happy-
We're going to the Promised Land

We're heading 'cross the river,
Wash your sins away in the tide,
It's all so peaceful
On the other side.

Forget your troubles come on get happy,
You better chase all your cares away.
Shout Hallelujah come on get happy,
Get ready for the judgment day.

COME RAIN OR COME SHINE

I'm gonna love you, like nobody's loved you

Come rain or come shine.

High as a mountain, deep as a river

Come rain or come shine.

I guess when you met me,

It was just one of those things-

But don't you ever bet me,
'Cause I'm gonna be true if you let me.

You're gonna love me, like nobody's loved me
Come rain or come shine.

We'll be happy together, unhappy together
And won't it be fine.

Days may be cloudy or sunny,
We're in or out of the money.

But I'm with you always

I'm with you rain or shine.

Porgy and Bess Synopsis:[114]

Act I

Scene 1: Catfish Row.

As couples dance and Clara sings a lullaby to her baby, the men shoot craps. Despite Serena's objections, Robbins joins the game. Porgy arrives in his goat cart, soon followed by Crown and his woman, Bess. The game becomes rowdier as Crown becomes intoxicated on the liquor and "happy dust" supplied by Sportin' Life. Crown disputes Robbins' roll and they start fighting. Crown kills Robbins with his cotton hook, then runs away. Everyone scatters to their homes before the police come; only Porgy will hide Bess from them.

Scene 2: Serena's Room.

Robbins' body lies on the bed while money is collected in a saucer to pay for his funeral. The Detective and a policeman arrest Peter as a material witness until Crown is caught. Serena laments her husband's death and Bess leads the group in a spiritual.

Scene 3: Catfish Row, a month later.

The fishermen sing a rowing song as they repair nets; Porgy joins in with a happy song. "Lawyer" Frazier, discovering that Bess has been with Porgy since Crown ran away, sells Porgy a "divorce" of Bess from Crown to make the new liaison "legal." Mr. Archdale, whose family used to own Peter's parents, comes to inquire about Peter; he promises to post Peter's bond.

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[114] The Dallas Opera, "Porgy and Bess Synopsis," http://www.dallasopera.org/the_season/070804-synopsis.php 2011, accessed January 10, 2011.

Sportin' Life offers Bess some "happy dust," which she refuses; Porgy intimidates him into leaving. *Porgy and Bess* declare their feelings for each other. The crowd gathers in holiday attire for a picnic excursion; Porgy convinces Bess to go along.

Scene 4: Kittiwah Island.

During the picnic, Sportin' Life makes fun of biblical literalism and is denounced by Serena. As everyone hurries to catch the boat going back to town, Crown emerges from the thicket and prevents Bess from returning.

Act II

Scene 1: Catfish Row, a week later.

As day breaks, the fishermen leave for their boat. Peter returns, still wondering why he was jailed. Porgy and Serena pray for Bess, who has been delirious since she got back from Kittiwah. The strawberry woman, the honey man (Peter), and the crab man sing of their wares. Bess finally wakes and tells Porgy about Crown's intention to come for her. She declares that she loves Porgy and wants to stay with him. Clara worries about Jake and the fishermen in the oncoming hurricane.

Scene 2: Serena's Room, dawn of the following day.

At the peak of the storm, the people gather to pray, especially for the missing men. Crown bursts in, tries to reclaim Bess, and ridicules the prayer session. Clara gives her baby to Bess and rushes into the storm to search for Jake; Crown follows.

Scene 3: Catfish Row, the next night.

The storm has ended; people wonder what has become of Clara, Jake and the others. Bess sings to Clara's baby at the window of Porgy's room. Crown tries to sneak into Porgy's room, but Porgy stabs then strangles him.

Scene 4: Catfish Row, the following afternoon.

The Detective and the Coroner try to find out who killed Crown, but everyone pleads ignorance. They question Porgy, then force him to go identify Crown's body. Afraid that his guilt will be revealed, Porgy resists. After they leave, Sportin' Life gives Bess some "happy dust" and tries to get her to go to New York with him. She refuses, but he leaves more "happy dust" on the doorstep and bides his time.

Scene 5: Catfish Row, one week later.

Porgy is released from jail, where he was sent for contempt of court when he refused to identify Crown. Having won at craps while in jail, he brings presents for everyone. When he is told that Bess has gone to New York with Sportin' Life, he vows to go there to find her.

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