

GEORGE GERSHWIN

1898 – 1937

3 Preludes

for Piano
für Klavier

Herausgegeben und mit Fingersätzen versehen
Edited with fingerings by
Monika Twelsiek

ED 095

PREVIEW
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Preface

"I lived in a lot of places, but the piano was my home."

(George Gershwin)

George Gershwin (Jacob Gershowitz) was born in East New York (now Brooklyn) on 26 September 1898, the second of four children of Russian Jewish immigrants. George, as his parents called him from his early childhood, was a restless, inquisitive child; his family moved house no less than 28 times, well suited his taste for exploring new territory. George was very good at hockey and roller-skating. He heard pop and jazz music on the streets of New York, but did not become seriously involved with it until some years, until he happened to hear the child prodigy Maxie Rosenkrantz playing the violin and the two became friends. At the age of fourteen George started piano lessons, learned harmony, counterpoint and instrumentation with Charles Hambitzer, who introduced him to the music of Debussy and Ravel. At the same time the young Gershwin began to work as a pianist. At sixteen he started work as one of the youngest 'pluggers' employed by a music publisher in 'Tin Pan Alley' (28th Street in New York, between Fifth Avenue and Broadway). Tin Pan Alley took its name from the cacophony of all the pianos being played at once as the 'pluggers' hammered out songs for potential customers of the music publishers. As the headquarters of all the most important American music publishers between 1900 and 1930, Tin Pan Alley was a melting pot for musical styles and became a keyword for American light music of that era.

Gershwin went on to work as co-composer on the Jewish-themed Victor Herbert Show and had his first successes with his songs and the revue *Swing Time*. His big breakthrough, however, came in 1924 with 'Rhapsody in Blue', first performed at the Aeolian Hall in New York brought George Gershwin the greatest triumph of his life as composer and pianist and carried his fame beyond America to Europe. It also made him a millionaire; work and sheet music alone earned him a quarter of a million dollars in royalties in one year.

In March 1925 *Time* magazine was the first to report that George Gershwin – inspired by Frédéric Chopin – was working on 24 preludes titled 'The Melting Pot'. In 1926 he presented three of the 24 preludes for the first time at an evening of songs performed with the singer Marguerite Monaghan at the Ritz Hotel in New York. Only these three preludes were eventually published; the others were never in manuscript form alone as recently as 1990. There is also a fragment of music with the title 'The Melting Pot' which was probably intended to become the first in the set; Gershwin later worked this theme into his Concerto in F.

In 1927 Gershwin met Maurice Ravel in New York and asked if he would take him on as a student. Ravel answered: 'You are a first-rate Gershwin; why would you want to become a second-rate Ravel?' Constantly doubting his own abilities, Gershwin also asked Igor Stravinsky for lessons. Stravinsky asked him how much he earned in a year and, on learning how much it was, replied: 'Perhaps I should take lessons from you!'

Gershwin travelled to London, Paris and Vienna: besides Ravel, he also met Georg Auric, Darius Milhaud, Sergei Prokofiev and Igor Stravinsky, Franz Lehár and Alban Berg. Back in New York, he poured these impressions into his work 'An American in Paris'. In 1934/35 he wrote his only opera, 'Porgy and Bess' (given its first performance in Boston in 1935), but he did not live long enough to see it achieve worldwide success.

'I am now 38, rich and famous, yet unhappy – why is that so?' wrote Gershwin in 1936. By then he had left New York and moved to Hollywood to write film music, but he found the superficial life there repugnant. Always searching for new experiences, Gershwin found it difficult to maintain close personal ties and he never married. He did have a close relationship with his brother (rapper, though, whereas George was an introvert and who wrote the words to most of George's songs and the libretti for his operas).

George Gershwin died in Beverly Hills of a brain tumour on 11 July 1937, aged 38. Ten days after his death his friend Arnold Schoenberg paid tribute to him and wrote that Gershwin was one of those rare musicians for whom music is not a profession but a way of life. Music was the air he breathed, the food that nourished him, the drink that he drank. There was what aroused feeling in him and music was the feeling to which he gave shape.

Gershwin's music is considered to embody all that is new in the 20th-century. His songs 'I Got Rhythm' and 'Summertime' have formed the basis of innumerable films and musicals. Gershwin was not the first, nor the only composer to include elements of jazz in his music. His jazz-influenced works – jazz elements also feature in music by Debussy, Stravinsky, Poulenc, Bartók, Copland, Milhaud, Prokofiev and Krenek. Perhaps his music sounds more authentic and lively than theirs because he was inspired on the streets where the composer used to wander. Gershwin's great gifts were largely self-taught. Though he always looked up to the great composers of his art, Gershwin himself got through to people directly, talking to them in their own language. Mamoulian said of him that 'George playing the piano was like watching a genius who was not on his day off.'

There are not a great many recordings of Gershwin's piano playing still in existence. Hardly any have survived of the recordings of his own compositions recorded, and on disc there are just a few recordings of 'Rhapsody in Blue' by Gershwin himself. Gershwin was a brilliant pianist and improviser who performed his pieces in an informal way, playing the piano short and rarely using the pedal, declaiming freely over a steady rhythmic accompaniment which may serve as a guide for modern interpretations.

The 'Preludes' are a 'classic' cycle with their sequence of fast-slow-fast. They have an immediacy and directness, dealing with the rhythmic vitality of the two preludes marked 'Allegro ben ritmato e deciso' and the lush idyll of the middle prelude 'Andante con moto e poco rubato' with its song-like melody. In public performances Gershwin himself always played all three preludes one after the other as a cycle. Many arrangements were later made of these pieces: for orchestra, for two pianos, for piano and piano, trumpet and piano, saxophone and piano and for piano trio.

Vorwort

„Ich hatte viele Wohnungen, aber zu Hause war ich am Klavier.“

(George Gershwin)

George Gershwin (Jacob Gershowitz) wurde am 26. September 1898 als zweites von vier Kindern russisch-jüdischer Einwanderer in East New York (heute Brooklyn) geboren. George, wie ihn die Eltern seit früher Kindheit riefen, war ein unruhiges, neugieriges Kind; dass die Familie nicht weniger als einmal umzog, kam seinem Entdeckungsdrang entgegen.

Er war Hockey- und Rollschuh-Champion. Er hörte Schlager- und Jazzmusik auf den Straßen New Yorks, kam aber erst spät ernsthaft mit Musik in Berührung. Zufällig lernte er das Gitarrespiel des Wunderkinds Maxie Rosenkrantz (Max Rosen), mit dem er sich anfreundete. So erhielt er Klavierstunden, dazu Unterricht in Harmonielehre, Kontrapunkt und Orchestration bei Charles Hambitzer, der ihn für die Musik Debussys und Ravel begeisterte. Selbst begann der junge Gershwin Songs zu schreiben und arbeitet – mit 16 Jahren als einer der ersten – in diesem Job – als „plugger“ bei einem Musikverlag in der Tin Pan Alley. Die „Tin Pan Alley“ – „Zinnpfannenallee“, 28. Straße zwischen Fifth Avenue und Broadway in New York – ist ihnen wegen der Kakophonie der gleichzeitig hämmernden Klaviere, auf denen die „plugger“ alle neuen Lieder der Musikverlage Songs präsentierten. Als Sitz der bedeutendsten amerikanischen Musikbranche zwischen 1900 und 1930 wurde die „Tin Pan Alley“ zum Schmelztiegel der Musik. Sie umfasste den Begriff der amerikanischen Unterhaltungsmusik der damaligen Zeit.

Gershwin wechselte als Korrektor zum Verlag von Victor Herbert Shaw und hatte mit seinen Songs und der Revue „La La Lucie“ erste Erfolge. Durchbruch gelang 1924 mit der „Rhapsody in Blue“. Die Uraufführung in der New Yorker Aeolian Hall brachte dem Komponisten und Pianisten George Gershwin den Triumph eines Lebenswerkes. Er wurde über Amerika hinaus auch in Europa bekannt – und ein reicher Mann. Plattenfirmen brachten ihm in 10 Jahren Tantiemen in der Höhe einer Viertelmillion Dollar.

Im März 1925 gab das New Yorker „Führer Magazine“ seinen ersten Hinweis, dass George Gershwin – inspiriert von Maurice Ravel – an einer Sammlung von 24 Präludien mit dem Namen „The Melting Pot“ arbeitete. 1926 präsentierte er im Roosevelt Hotel in New York bei einem Liederabend mit der Sängerin Maudie Allen zum ersten Mal drei der fünf Preludes. Nur diese drei wurden letztlich veröffentlicht. Die anderen waren sogar bis 1990 nur als Manuskript vorhanden. Schließlich gibt es noch ein Fragment zum Titel „Prelude“, das wohl Gershwins erstes geworden wäre. Er baute dieses Thema später in „Concerto in F“ ein.

1927 lernte Gershwin in New York Maurice Ravel kennen und fragt, ob er sein Schüler werden könne. Ravel antwortet: „Sie sind ein erstklassiger Gershwin. Warum wollen Sie ein zweitklassiger Ravel werden?“ Auch Igor Strawinsky bittet der ständig an sich selbst Zweifelnde um Unterricht. Strawinsky fragt ihn daraufhin, wie viel er jährlich verdiene und telegraphiert, nachdem er die hohe Summe erfahren hat: „Möchte Unterricht bei Ihnen nehmen“.

Gershwin reist nach London, Paris und Wien und trifft – außer Ravel – Georg Auric, Darius Milhaud, Sergej Prokofiew und Igor Strawinsky, Franz Lehár und Alban Berg. Zurück in New York, fließen seine Eindrücke in das Werk „An American in Paris“. 1934/35 entsteht die einzige Oper „Porgy and Bess“ (Uraufführung 1935 in Boston), deren Welterfolg der Komponist nicht mehr erlebt.

Prelude 1

George Gershwin
(1898–1937)

Allegro ben ritmato e deciso

(♩ = 100)

a tempo

f con licenza

ff

f

pp

cresc.

mf

dim.

Red.

24

1 3

p

cresc.

f

20

1 2 5 1 3 1 2 3

p

mf

33

1

p

37

1 3

f

p

f

1 3 5 4 3 2 1 3 2 1 4 3

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