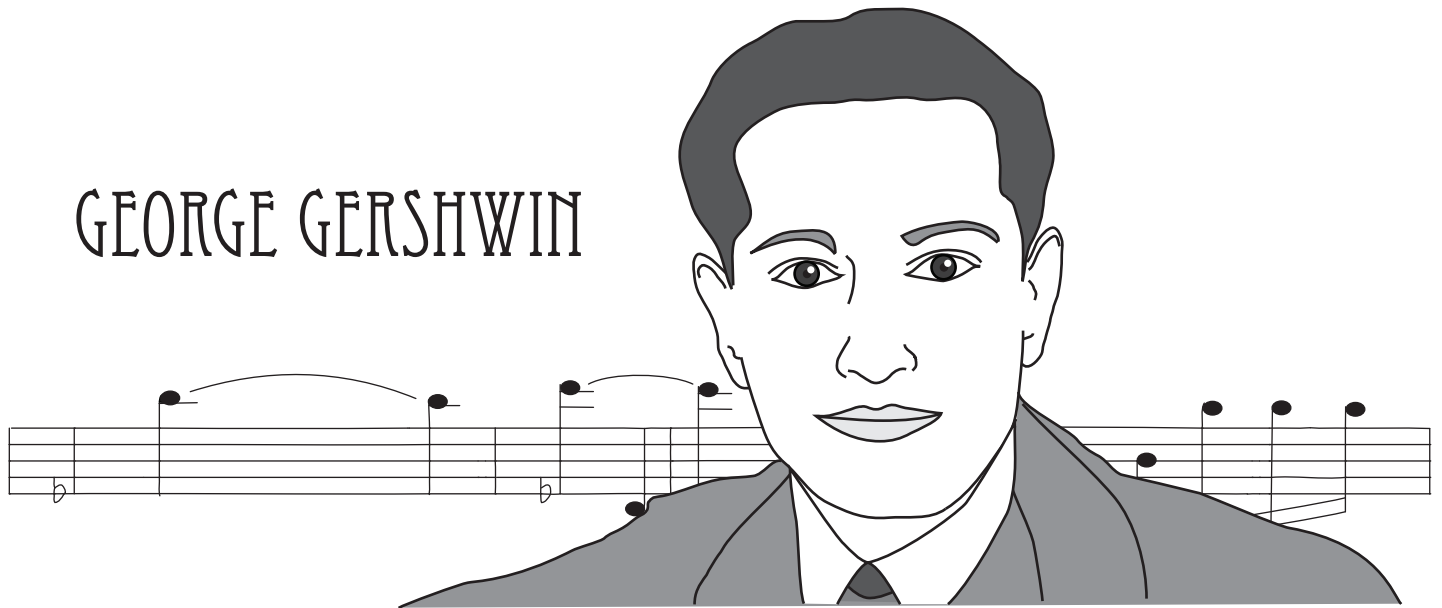


GEORGE GERSHWIN



Composer **George Gershwin** was born in Brooklyn, New York to a Russian-Jewish family in 1898. Gershwin displayed an interest in music at an early age and took piano lessons. Though he was mainly trained in European techniques, he developed an interest in American music as well and studied both. He took a job writing songs on Tin Pan Alley as a teen, and had his first song published at age 17. He continued writing popular music and songs for the theater. In 1924 he wrote *Rhapsody in Blue*, an orchestral composition that blended traditional American concert music with elements of jazz, blues, and other contemporary styles. The release of *Rhapsody in Blue* shook up the conventional music world, and remains one of the most influential pieces of American music to this day.

In 1935, Gershwin completed *Porgy and Bess*, a “folk opera” based on the experiences of African-Americans in the South. The music used many elements of jazz, blues, and folk styles, something unheard of for an opera at the time, and was performed by an entirely African-American cast. *Porgy and Bess* is now considered one of the most important operas of the 20th century, not only for its groundbreaking score, but for fearlessly focusing on African-Americans at a time when many unjust laws against them were still in effect in many places across the U.S.

Gershwin continued to write music until his untimely death from a brain tumor at age 38. Gershwin’s music continues to be performed and studied. Gershwin stands as one of the most influential and respected composers in American musical history.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Search online for a recording of *Rhapsody in Blue*, or look for it on CD at your local library. When you listen to the song, what kinds of music do you hear? How does your mood change as you listen to it? Describe the music, and your reactions, on the back of this sheet.

