

GERSHWIN

A black and white portrait of George Gershwin, shown from the chest up, looking slightly to the right. He is wearing a dark sweater over a white collared shirt and a dark tie. The background is dark and out of focus.

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LARS BOYE JENSEN · PIANO
World Premiere Recording

George Gershwin (1898-1937) was, by all accounts a remarkable pianist, though he was no "wunderkind" being a relatively late starter, not starting to take lessons until he was about twelve and he probably gave up regular instruction at the age of fifteen (and any thoughts of becoming a concert pianist) when he became a song plugger. A song plugger was a kind of musical salesman: George, employed by Jerome H. Remick & Co., music publishers on Tin Pan Alley, occupied, during the day a parlour – one of eight, side by side, and not soundproofed – occupied by a battered upright piano and a few chairs and here he would pound out Remick's publications for vaudeville dancers, songsters, comedians; anyone wanting a suitable number for their act. "Every day", he said, "at nine o'clock I was there at the piano, playing popular tunes for anybody who came along. Colored people used to come in and get me to play them *God Send You Back to Me* in seven keys. Chorus girls used to breathe down my neck. Some of the customers treated me like dirt. Others were charming. Among the latter was Fred Astaire".

George's incredible ease, spontaneity and originality at the piano, his ability to improvise endlessly to the enjoyment and delight of his friends and fellow-musicians (and himself, for he had a love affair with

the piano) only serves to reinforce the regret that he wrote so little for the solo piano and also that he had so little opportunity to record.

Fortunately, other pianists and composers have been attracted to Gershwin's music, to embroider his melodies for our delight, and this Gershwin himself approved of, for unlike his peers Jerome Kern and Richard Rodgers he loved to hear jazz musicians play his music.

Lars Boye Jensen has diligently cast his net wide and come up with this selection of transcriptions which are recorded here for the first time. These are not jazz arrangements, but transcriptions for the piano (Gershwin's favourite instrument) of grace, ingenuity and stylish pianism. Some of those are by distinguished pianists of classical orientation such as Beryl Rubinstein (male, despite the name!), late professor of piano at the Cleveland Institute, David Saperton, son-in-law of Leopold Godowsky and professor of piano at the Cleveland Institute, and Earl Wild, still gracing the concert platform in his eighties. Most of the other arrangers were considerable pianists whose transcriptions were made for Gershwin's publishers following his death. The arrangement of *He Loves and She Loves* and *Let's Call the Whole Thing Off* were made by the American pianist Sara Davis Buechner and

the arrangements for *Somebody Loves Me* (transcribed from a piano roll) is by Ferde Grofé, the orchestrator of the *Rhapsody in Blue*.

The songs represented here cover the all too short period of Gershwin's creativity from his first "hit" *Swanee*, written in 1919 to *Let's Call the Whole Thing Off*, from the Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers movie of 1937, *Shall We Dance*. The songs here also reflect the range of Gershwin's melodic genius from the mischievous rhythmic facility of *Fascinating Rhythm*, the kinetic energy of *I Got Rhythm*, the charm of *He Loves and She Loves*, the wistfulness of *Embraceable You* and the sheer beauty of *Bess, You Is My Woman Now*. The list is endless.

One more point: Gershwin was not only a great melodist, but was also a harmonist of genius, a fact all the arrangers have respected.

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(Harry Winstanley is editor of the Godowsky Society Newsletter and author of "George Gershwin – His Music and his Musicals" to be published by Toccata Press late 1998.)

The pianist Lars Boye Jensen (b. 1957) has his background in a broad variety of genres from jazz and light music to classical. His discography includes, besides this CD, a collection of virtuoso piano paraphrases on Viennese waltzes by Johann Strauss. Lars Boye Jensen has also recorded an album with Bach transcriptions by Ignaz Friedman.

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Lars Boye Jensen

Photo: Morten Rasmussen