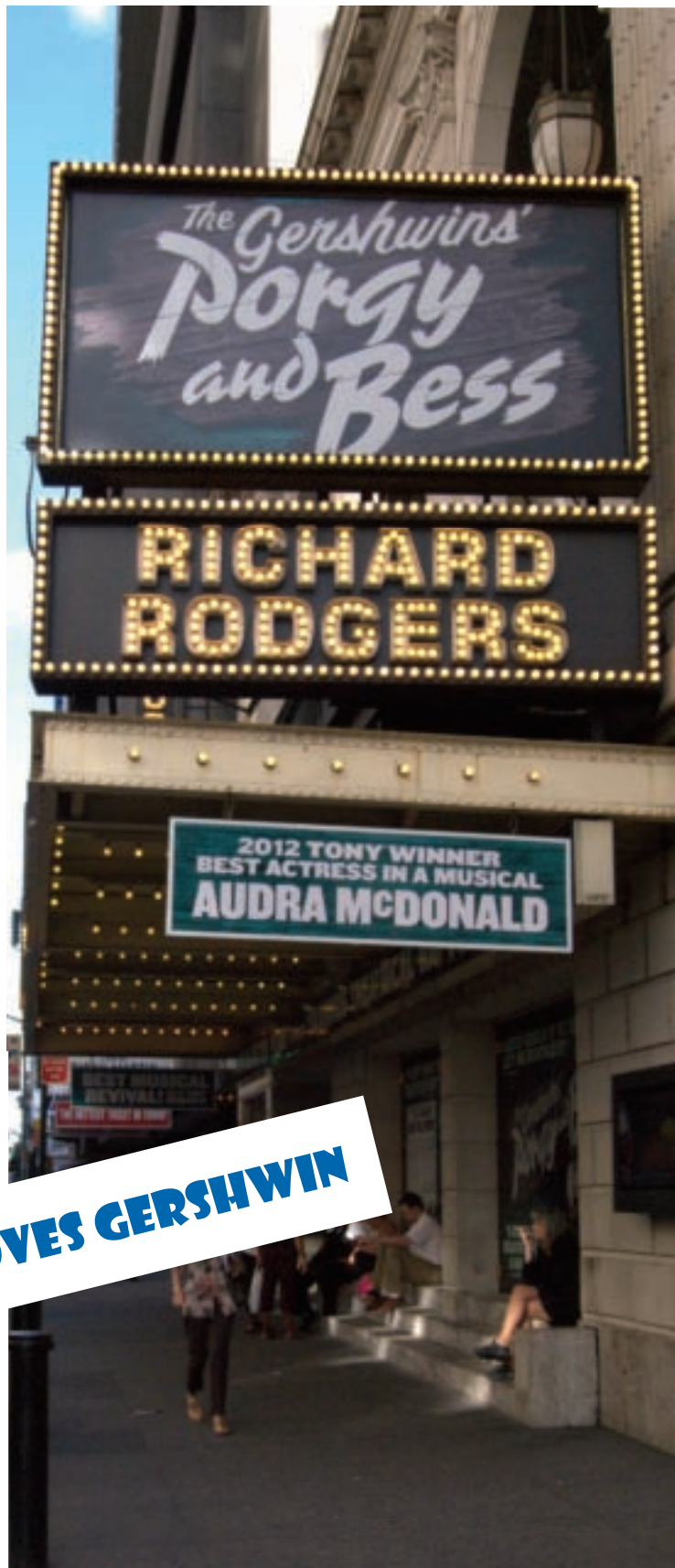


WORDS WITHOUT MUSIC

The Ira Gershwin Newsletter



No. 7, Fall 2012



BROADWAY LOVES GERSHWIN

WORDS WITHOUT MUSIC

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Cover photos by Philip Z. Kimball of the marquees of the two Gershwin shows on Broadway in the 2011-2012 season

Dear readers,

The Gershwins' Porgy and Bess as a Broadway musical closed in September – and I am thankful to Dr. Seuss, my favorite 20th century philosopher, for the following quotation:

“Don't cry because it's over.

Smile because it happened.”

For making it “happen,” my thanks go out to a lot of people, each of whom contributed in his or her own way. Most were standing on the stage of the Richard Rodgers Theatre on West 46th Street in New York, on September 23rd, after the final curtain of this marvelous, sometimes joyful, often heart rending, musically enthralling and uplifting production about sadness and hope after tragedy.

Of course, the journey really started when George and DuBose and Ira created their masterpiece opera in 1935. But, as with any theater production of artistic and emotional value, the final product always bears the fingerprints of the creators-of-the-moment too: the actors, musicians, stagecraft providers, and book adapters (rarely is Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* performed with every line or stage direction exactly as originally presented in about 1595). For this recent “version” of *Porgy and Bess*, here are some people whose skills made it “happen.” I know there were more helping hands than the ones I list below and I'm grateful for everyone's contribution.

Jeffrey Richards, our lead producer

Diane Paulus, our director

Suzan-Lori Parks, our adapter and book writer

Trevor Nunn, who, in recent times, had the idea to create a *Porgy and Bess* for theater audiences rather than opera audiences

Audra McDonald, our Bess

Norm Lewis, our Porgy

David Alan Grier, our Sporting Life

Phillip Boykin, our Crown

Kudos also to the Gershwin family (of which I am a member by marriage). Twice now, in major productions, with each iteration, the work has become more relevant to 21st century theater. The family saw the need for a *Porgy and Bess* that cried out to audiences unreached or unmoved by the conventions of grand opera. The project, without the family's courage to overcome critical comments by the naysayers, never would have, as Dr. Seuss put it, “happened.”

— Michael Strunsky

Website Relunched

The revamped official George and Ira Gershwin website is now online! (See back cover for a view of the site's homepage.) New graphics and expanded information about the brothers' work and lives are just some of the features to be found at www.gershwin.com.

A CLASSIC RE-IMAGINED

As reported in the spring 2011 issue of *Words Without Music*, the George and Ira Gershwin families and the DuBose and Dorothy Heyward estate authorized a new musical theater version of *Porgy and Bess* by director Diane Paulus and her collaborators, Suzan-Lori Parks and Diedre Murray. That adaptation, first staged at the American Repertory Theatre in Cambridge, Massachusetts in August 2011, transferred to Broadway's Richard Rodgers Theatre this past January with Audra McDonald (Bess), Norm Lewis (Porgy), David Alan Grier (Sporting Life), and Phillip Boykin (Crown) leading the cast.

The Gershwin-Heyward 1935 *Porgy and Bess* has been long-considered the greatest American opera ever written. As always stated, the motivation behind *The Gershwins' Porgy and Bess*, as the new adaptation is called, was to expose a seminal American work to a wider and more diverse audience than would ever see it on the world's opera stages. It was never meant to take the place of the opera, which continues to be performed frequently around the world.

Weathering the storm produced by a stinging rebuke from Stephen Sondheim in *The New York Times* that was published before the Cambridge production even opened, *The Gershwins' Porgy and Bess* ran for 28 previews and 293 performances on Broadway before closing on September 23, 2012.

In a conversation with Josh Ferri at broadway.com, Norm Lewis said the controversy actually “made us stronger ... We knew we had something special, and we wanted the work to speak for itself. We knew that it was a very respectful piece of musical theater. The [Gershwin] family saw what we were

CAST ALBUM

PS Classics released a two-CD set of *The Gershwins' Porgy and Bess* in late May.

Critics lavished praise on the vocal performances. “Treasure this *Porgy and Bess*,”

the *Los Angeles Times*' Charles McNulty advised, “for McDonald's heartbreaking portrayal of a woman who loves her Porgy as well as she can. The beauty and tragedy of this are captured in this recording of a landmark performance by a Broadway legend who thankfully is just entering her prime.” Norm Lewis, wrote Andy Propst of *Theatermania.com*, “uses his rich baritone to fine effect, bringing a deeply felt warmth and vulnerability to both the role and the music. And when he and McDonald join voices for the soaring ‘Bess, You Is My Woman Now,’ the melancholy hopefulness that fills their voices is simply spine-tingling.” Available via the PS Classics website at www.psclassics.com or as a download at iTunes.



doing; they gave us permission, and they also pulled the reins on some things. We definitely wanted to bring *Porgy and Bess* to a broader audience, and most of our audiences know the music but they have never seen the show.” 🐼

WHAT THE CRITICS SAID

David Rooney, *Hollywood Reporter*: “*The Broadway revival of The Gershwins' Porgy and Bess evinces a profound love for the original material. But more than that, it straddles with confidence the inherent divide of this ravishing work between opera and musical theater, making the production accessible, ripely theatrical, and emotionally full-bodied.*”

Mark Kennedy, *Associated Press*: “*In [their] duets, [McDonald and Lewis] go beyond merely singing a tune: They reach inside and act the songs with a powerful honesty and intensity.*”

Ben Brantley, *The New York Times*: “*It's hard to imagine any hurricane matching the tempest that is the extraordinary Audra McDonald... [her performance as Bess is] a major work of musical portraiture, one that realizes the ambition of Ms. Paulus and company to bring fresh psychological complexity and visceral immediacy to a classic.*”

Scott Brown, *New York magazine*: “*A gorgeous and transportive theatrical rapture.*”

Don Aucoin, *Boston Globe*: “*A fully realized work that pays homage to a classic while infusing it with new, thrilling life.*”



PHOTO © 2012 JOAN MARCUS

'S Wonderful!: An endearing tomboy bootlegger (O'Hara), and an endearingly bumbling playboy (Broderick), feel "a tender push"

A SHOW WITH FOUR NAMES

Nice Work If You Can Get It began its circuitous journey to Broadway in 1926 with the opening of *Oh, Kay!*, starring Gertrude Lawrence, at New York's Imperial Theatre. One of George and Ira Gershwin's biggest successes, *Oh, Kay!* ran for 256 performances before transferring to London in September 1927 for another 215 performances. Its score included two songs that would become classics, "Someone to Watch Over Me" and "Do, Do, Do."

A production of *Oh, Kay!* at the San Francisco Shakespeare Festival in 1994 prompted Ira Gershwin estate trustee Mike

Strunsky to think about a new Gershwin musical in the mold of Tony Award-winners *My One and Only* (1983) and *Crazy for You* (1992). He invited playwright Joe DiPietro to take a crack at it. DiPietro devised a show he called *They All Laughed*, inspired by the original *Oh, Kay!* book by Guy Bolton and P. G. Wodehouse; it premiered at Connecticut's Goodspeed Opera House on June 29, 2001. Over the next decade, DiPietro retooled his book, adding and subtracting musical numbers from the vast Gershwin catalog, but generally keeping to his original concept of a Prohibition-era musical comedy about bootlegging.



PHOTO © 2012, JOAN MARCUS

Kaye and McGrath: A pesky Prohibitionist and a butler with attitude

The show went through yet another title change to *Heaven on Earth* before *Nice Work If You Can Get It* got the nod. A number of readings of the revised musical – under the aegis of director/choreographer Kathleen Marshall – took place in New York between 2008 and 2010. Marshall and her husband, lead producer Scott Landis, persevered and on April 24, 2012, *Nice Work* opened on Broadway – at the Imperial Theatre. The cast, led by Kelli O’Hara as an endearing tomboy bootlegger and Matthew Broderick as an endearingly bumbling playboy, features Michael McGrath – the only performer with the show since its Goodspeed days – as Cookie, a wise-cracking bootlegger; Judy Kaye as Duchess Estonia Dulworth, a pesky Prohibitionist and “founder of the Society of Dry Women”; Chris Sullivan as Cookie’s dim-witted sidekick; Jennifer Laura Thompson as Jimmy’s fiancée (“the finest interpreter of modern dance in the whole world”); Stanley Wayne Mathis as the Chief of Police; Terry Beaver as Eileen’s father, Senator Max Evergreen; and Estelle Parsons in an “11 o’clock” appearance as Jimmy’s mother.



PHOTO © 2012, JOAN MARCUS

CAST ALBUM

The cast recording of *Nice Work If You Can Get It*, with David Chase’s witty musical arrangements and Bill Elliott’s spark-ling orchestrations, will



be released as a digital download on September 30, with the compact disc on the Shout! Factory label available for purchase on October 30. The compact disc can be found at www.niceworkonbroadwaymerchandise.com; the songs are available for download at

WHAT THE CRITICS SAID

Nice Work pokes fun at itself and the light-hearted Broadway musicals of the 1920s when Duchess Estonia pontificates, “Do you know what they put on the stage nowadays? Frothy comedies! Frivolous boy-meets girl sex farces! And the music – don’t even talk to me about the music!” A sampling from the critics:

Wilborn Hampton, *The Huffington Post*:

“It is O’Hara and Broderick who provide the romantic sparks that light up the stage. By now O’Hara has established herself as the reigning diva of the Broadway stage, and her delivery of ‘Someone to Watch Over Me’ alone shows why. Broderick is forever the sort of innocent imp that audiences take to their hearts on sight. He has the best dead-pan since Jack Benny and can get a laugh just by blinking his eyes.”

Adam Markovitz, *Entertainment Weekly*:

“The Gershwin songbook, a portable fireworks kit of dazzlers, [is] guaranteed to charm just about anyone, theater fan or not.”

Tickets for *Nice Work If You Can Get It* can be purchased online at www.telecharge.com, by phone at 212-239-6200 or 800-432-7250 (outside New York), or in person at the Imperial Theatre box office, 249 West 45th Street. 🐦

Our sympathies go out to the family of Martin Pakledinaz, Tony-nominated costume designer for *Nice Work If You Can Get It* and Tony Award winner for *Kiss Me, Kate* (2000) and *Thoroughly Modern Millie* (2002), who died on July 8 after a long battle with cancer. He was 58. (See photo at left for an example of his brilliant costumes for *Nice Work*.)

AWARDS

With two musicals, *The Gershwins' Porgy and Bess* and *Nice Work If You Can Get It*, on Broadway simultaneously, 2011-2012 was a banner season for George and Ira Gershwin. The first major productions to feature the Gershwin name on Broadway since *Crazy for You* closed its Tony Award-winning run in January 1996, the shows enjoyed the recognition conferred by numerous theatrical awards and award nominations.

Topping the list was the American Theatre Wing's Tony Award for Best Revival of a Musical, which went to *The Gershwins' Porgy and Bess* in an unexpected win over Stephen Sondheim's *Follies*. Accepting the award, Jeffrey Richards, lead producer of *The Gershwins' Porgy and Bess*, thanked the Gershwin estates "who gave permission for us to do this show and a mission to bring *Porgy and Bess* into the 21st century."

This was just one of four Tony Awards handed out to the two Gershwin shows during the star-studded ceremonies held at New York's Beacon Theatre on June 10. Also winning that evening was Audra McDonald, who took home the award for Best Performance by an Actress in a Leading Role in a Musical for her luminous, critically acclaimed realization of Bess. The show's 10 Tony nominees included her colleagues Norm Lewis




"And the Tony goes to ..." (left to right) McDonald, McGrath, and Kaye

(Porgy), David Alan Grier (*Sporting Life*), and Phillip Boykin (*Crown*) as well as director Diane Paulus.

Nice Work If You Can Get It also scored 10 Tony nominations, including ones for leading lady Kelli O'Hara, director-choreographer Kathleen Marshall, and book writer Joe DiPietro. It hit the jackpot twice, with Tonys for Best Actor and Best Actress in a Featured Role in a Musical going to Michael McGrath and Judy Kaye respectively for their hilarious portrayals of a bootlegger turned recalcitrant butler and a duchess on the warpath against "demon rum." Kaye had the Tony audience chortling during her acceptance speech when she commented that "chandeliers have been very, very good to me" – a reference to her show-stopping gymnastics in Act II of *Nice Work* and her Tony-award winning performance in *Phantom of the Opera* in 1988. (In a touching acknowledgment to her father, who died just a few days earlier, she noted that he was "like me... a lifelong fan of the brilliance of George and Ira Gershwin.")

It was a triumphant season for McDonald, McGrath, and Kaye, who also picked up Drama Desk and Outer Critics Circle awards for their performances. McDonald landed the Drama League's Distinguished Performance Award as well. Other Drama Desk Awards went to Joe DiPietro for his *Nice Work If You Can Get It* book and to Acme Sound Partners for their work on *The Gershwins' Porgy and Bess*.

The Ira and Leonore Gershwin Trusts are very proud of "our" winners and nominees and indeed of all who made the 2011-2012 season such a brilliant Broadway success for the enduring music and lyrics of George and Ira Gershwin. 



Norm Lewis: *A Porgy for the 21st century*

Gershwin Prize 2012

The 2012 Library of Congress Gershwin Prize for Popular Song was awarded to the legendary songwriting team of Burt Bacharach and Hal David – the first duo to receive the award named in honor of George and Ira Gershwin. It was presented by President Barack Obama in the East Room of the White House on the evening of May 9.

At the conclusion of a star-studded, celebratory concert featuring Stevie Wonder, Sheryl Crow, Lyle Lovett, Diana Krall, Michael Feinstein, Mike Myers, Arturo Sandoval, Rumer, and Sheleá, President Obama lauded Bacharach and David as “two kings of songwriting,” comparing them to the Gershwins in having “never been limited to one genre or even one generation.” Accepting the award, Bacharach, 83, expressed his appreciation that it recognized the body of his work rather than an individual song or score, “and for that, it means so very much.” He also saluted his lyricist partner, Hal David, citing “Alfie” as “one of the best lyrics anybody ever wrote, in anybody’s lifetime.” David, 91, recovering from a recent illness, was unable to attend the ceremonies. His wife, Eunice, received the medal on his behalf. [Mr. David, who also served as the President of ASCAP during much of the 1980s, passed away on September 1 in Los Angeles. We extend our condolences to Mr. David’s family and many friends.]

For the first time since the Prize was awarded in 2007, the White House concert was offered twice, the initial performance taking place at the Library of Congress’ Coolidge Auditorium on May 8. Among the highlights of the program were Stevie Wonder’s re-harmonized rendition of “Make It Easy on Yourself,” Diana Krall’s bossa nova version of “The Look of Love,” fresh accounts of “A House Is Not a Home” by Rumer, and “Anyone Who Had a Heart” by Sheleá, and emotional performances of “This Girl’s in Love With You” and “What the World Needs Now” by quintessential Bacharach and David interpreter Dionne Warwick, who sang at the Library of Congress concert but not at the White House.

The White House performance was broadcast as part of the PBS series *In Performance at the White House*, and is available for viewing at <http://video.pbs.org/program/in-performance/>.

A New Recording

On the same day that it released *The Gershwins’ Porgy and Bess* set, PS Classics issued the first-ever recording of George Gershwin and Buddy De Sylva’s little-known musical, *Sweet Little Devil*,



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS PHOTO/ ABBY BRACK LEWIS

At the Library of Congress, the cast salutes “two kings of songwriting”

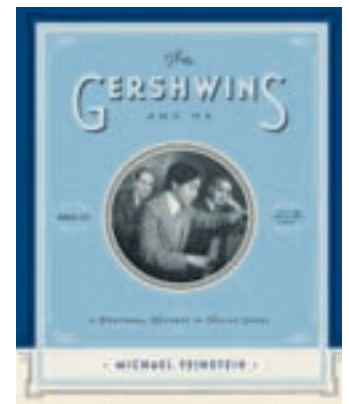
the 1924 show George was working on while writing *Rhapsody in Blue*. The Ira and Leonore Gershwin Trusts was pleased to be able to provide the original scores for the project prior to the transfer of the materials to the Library of Congress in 2011. The compact disc is available at the PS Classics website (www.psclassics.com) or can be downloaded via iTunes.

ASCAP Winner

Adam O’Farrill, composer/performer/trumpet player and a student at LaGuardia High School of Music & Art and Performing Arts, was the recipient of the ASCAP Foundation Ira Gershwin Award at the Foundation’s annual award ceremony last December. Adam’s impressive resume already includes appearances at jazz festivals and a compact disc recording.

Michael Feinstein

Available on October 16th from Simon & Schuster is the lavishly-illustrated *The Gershwins and Me: A Personal History in Twelve Songs* by the ultimate ambassador of the American Songbook, Michael Feinstein. The 352-page book includes an exclusive compact disc of Feinstein’s renditions of a dozen classic George and Ira Gershwin songs he discusses in the text.





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