

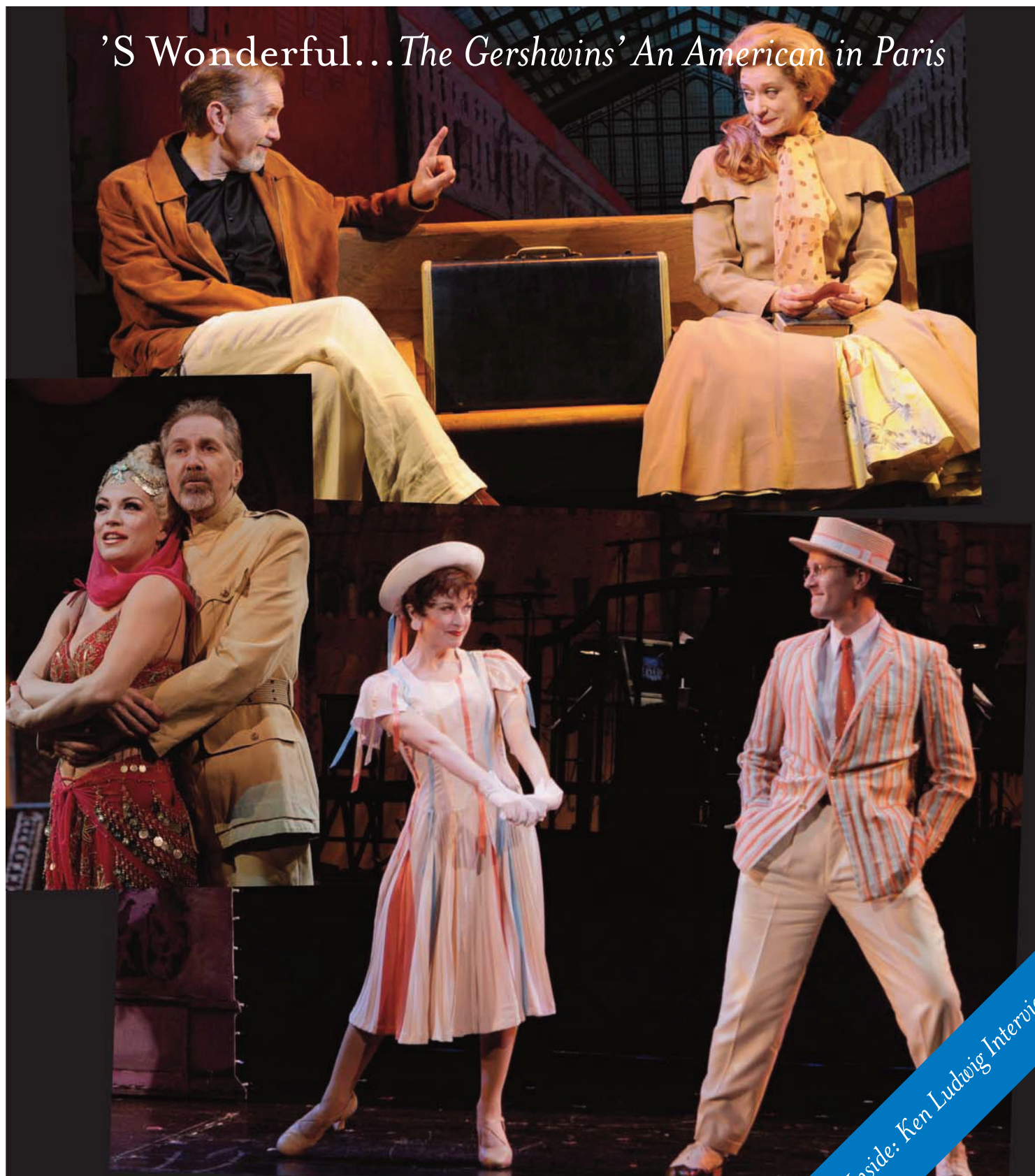
WORDS WITHOUT MUSIC

The Ira Gershwin Newsletter



No. 3, 2008

'S Wonderful...*The Gershwins'* An American in Paris



Inside: Ken Ludwig Interview

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Cover: (top) Harry Groener & Kerry O'Malley (photo by George Hixson), (left) Felicia Finlay & Harry Groener (photo by Michal Daniel), (bottom) Meredith Patterson & Jeffry Denman (photo by Michal Daniel)

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Letter from Michael Strunsky

Welcome to the third issue of *Words Without Music*. As you can see from the cover montage, our main story is on the world premiere of *The Gershwins' An American in Paris*, which recently concluded a highly successful run at Houston's Alley Theatre. Those of us in the Gershwin world were delighted with the Alley's production, which featured a witty, romantic book by our good friend Ken Ludwig, and a cast of energetic, engaging singers and dancers, who made the songs of the Gershwin brothers come alive in a new, full-blown musical for the first time in more than 15 years. I overheard one audience member at intermission say that the show made her want to put her tap shoes on. We hope that many more audiences will have the opportunity to see the show, hear these great Gershwin songs, and dig out their tap shoes in the months and years ahead.

This issue's article on three recent productions of *Porgy and Bess* reminds us that the original Bess, Anne Brown, recently celebrated her 96th birthday in Oslo, Norway. We wish her all the best.

To conclude on a sad note, Bruce Adler, who played the role of Bela Zangler in the original Broadway production of *Crazy for You*, passed away in July, at the age of 63. His unforgettable performance – particularly his memorable duet with



Harry Groener in "What Causes That?" – was certainly of great importance to the success of that show ... and he was truly a nice guy too.

ASCAP FOUNDATION IRA GERSHWIN SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS

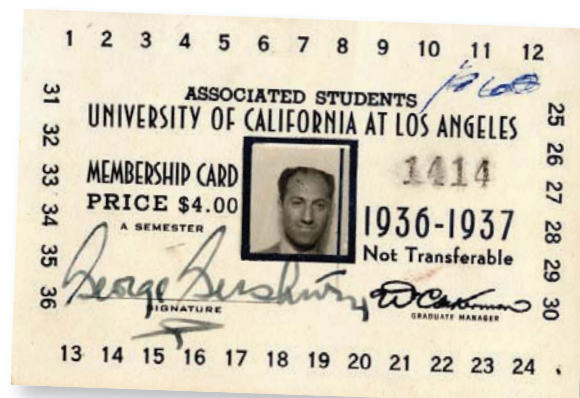
Mi-Kyung Kim and Tamara Kim (no relation) shared the ASCAP Foundation's Ira Gershwin Scholarship for 2007, which was presented last December at the Foundation's annual awards ceremony. The scholarship is given to a junior-year orchestra member at the LaGuardia High School of Music & Art & Performing Arts in New York City and is made possible by a grant from the Ira and Leonore Gershwin Philanthropic Fund. Korean-born Mi-Kyung, a pianist, is a resident of Brooklyn, N.Y. Tamara, also a pianist, lives in Queens, N.Y.

Dwight Rivera of Manhattan, N.Y., a pianist and composer with a strong interest in jazz, has already been informed that he is the winner of the 2008 Ira Gershwin Scholarship. He will receive the award at the Foundation's ceremony this coming December.

STRIKE UP THE BAND FOR UCLA

A March 20, 2008, article in the Los Angeles Times by Larry Gordon brought to light the largely forgotten story of George and Ira Gershwin's more than 70-year connection to the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). Mr. Gordon's story, "Bruin Tune Rooted in Music History," timed to the appearance of the UCLA men's basketball team in the NCAA March Madness tournament, related how George and Ira, after being approached by the Associated Students of UCLA, converted their rousing title song from *Strike Up the Band* into the university's official rally song, retitled "Strike Up the Band for UCLA."

According to the Los Angeles Times, Maxson Judell, a graduate of the University of Wisconsin, who had contacts in the music industry and promoted himself as a liaison to the world of collegiate fight songs, first made contact with the Gershwins in the spring of 1936; the final decision about which song to use did not occur until George and Ira arrived in Southern California in August to begin work on their first film for RKO, *Stepping Toes* (eventually called *Shall We Dance*). Interestingly, a September 24, 1936, article in the Daily Bruin, UCLA's campus newspaper, featuring an interview with the Gershwins, credits lyricist Gus Kahn – who worked with George and Ira on 1929's *Show Girl* – with bringing



the idea to their attention. The Daily Bruin article notes that the brothers eventually picked "Strike Up the Band" because it had "the right amounts of liveliness, catchiness, and personality to qualify as a topnotch collegiate pep number," and that Ira was able to revise the lyrics "with only a few corrections."

On September 23, 1936, in a ceremony at Blechhoff Hall on the UCLA campus, the Gershwins were made honorary Bruins and were awarded lifetime tickets to UCLA's home football games at the Los Angeles Coliseum.

Continued on page 12

"Strike Up the Band for UCLA"

(Lyrics by Ira Gershwin Music by George Gershwin)

*We stand undaunted in the fray,
Rum-ta-ta tum-tum-tum!
And sing of old UCLA,
Rum-ta-ta tum-tum-tum!*

*We're Sons and Daughters of the Bear,
We're the California Bruins;
We fight the foe and do and dare,
And the foe is left in ruins!*

*We're standing firm! Our line will hold!
Rum-ta-ta tum-tum-tum!
Strike up the band for Blue and Gold!
Rum-ta-ta tum-tum,
Rum-ta-ta tum-tum,
Rum-ta-ta tum-tum-tum!*

*Let the drums roll out!
(Boom-boom-boom!)
Let the trumpets call!
(Ra-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta!)*

*Let the whole world shout –
(Hooray!)
UCLA!*

*With our battle cry –
(Grrrah! Grrrah! Grrrah!) –
Bruin! Conquer all!
(Ta-ta-ra-ta-ta-ta!)
We will do or die!
(Hooray!)
UCLA!*

*There's a game to be won, to be won!
Put the foe on the run, on the run!
And it's got to be done, to be done,
Here today!*

*With our flag unfurled
(Boom-boom-boom!)
We can lick the world!
You see, we're UCLA!*



KEVIN COLE SINGS THE LYRICS OF IRA GERSHWIN

(PLAYS PIANO AND COMPOSES TOO!)

On June 8, pianist – and now singer – Kevin Cole previewed his new CD of Ira Gershwin songs in a concert at the Martin Theatre in Highland Park, Illinois, as part of the 2008 Ravinia Festival. Cole’s recording, entitled *In the Words of Ira: The Songs of Ira Gershwin*, comprises material Ira wrote with composers other than his brother George. Among the 14 songs are such rarities as “It Happens Ev’ry Time” (music by Burton Lane, from the film *Give a Girl a Break*, 1953), “Sunny Disposish” (Philip Charig, from the revue *Americana*, 1926), “Fun to Be Fooled” (Harold Arlen, lyrics written with E.Y. “Yip” Harburg, from the revue *Life Begins at 8:40*, 1934), “This Is New” (Kurt Weill, *Lady in the Dark*, 1941), “Goodbye to All That” (Arthur Schwartz, *Park Avenue*, 1946), “Oh Me! Oh My!” (Vincent Youmans, *Two Little Girls in Blue*, 1921), “Words Without Music” (Vernon Duke, *Ziegfeld Follies of 1936*), “Sure Thing” (Jerome Kern, from the film *Cover Girl*, 1944) and “Shoes With Wings On” (Harry Warren, from the film *The Barkleys of Broadway*, 1949). Also featured are two world premieres (see below). Cole is accompanied by Tom Knific on bass and Tim Froncek on drums; Robert Kimball, the Ira and Leonore Gershwin Trusts’ Artistic Advisor, provided the liner notes. The recording will be released this fall on Cole’s own



label, Musicole, available at www.kevincoletonline.com. Cole’s earlier recordings include *Lady Be Good! First Recordings of the Unknown George Gershwin* (Pro-Arte, 1984) and *Cole Plays Gershwin* (Musicole, 2004).

IN THE WORDS OF KEVIN COLE

“Taking No Chances On You”

“Taking No Chances on You” had music by Harry Warren and was written for Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers to sing in the 1949 film *The Barkleys of Broadway*. When it became apparent that the original Warren music was incomplete, Kevin Cole decided to compose his own musical setting for Ira’s surviving lyrics. Cole said, “While pouring through the hundreds of lyrics by Ira, this one struck me because of its comic setting and its intention for Astaire and Rogers. It is a tricky lyric, but considering the actors it was intended for, I started thinking about the people who wrote for them—namely Gershwin and Berlin. This thought in mind, I worked to create a style that resonates with the big band feel of an American standard. The tune came within an hour.”

“I’ll Supply the Title (You’ll Supply the Tune)”

While Ira found it difficult to return to work for several years after George’s death, he managed to write some songs during that period with Jerome Kern and Harold Arlen. According to Edward Jablonski, biographer of the Gershwins and of Harold Arlen, this Arlen-Gershwin collaboration was written in 1939. Kevin Cole said, “I knew the written music did not survive, but still wanted their collaboration to be heard. With help from Ira Gershwin archivist Michael Owen, I accessed a recording of Arlen playing the piano and humming the melody. By listening to the old recording and reading Ira’s lyric, I was able to create this new arrangement. This is the premiere of a new-old song you might say.”

PARK AVENUE FINDS ITS WAY TO LONDON

More than 60 years after it closed on Broadway, *Park Avenue* made it across the pond for a short run this past spring as the opening production of the 2008 season of Ian Marshall Fisher's Lost Musicals organization. The cast of the London performances at the Lilian Baylis Theatre included Elizabeth Counsell, David Firth, John Rawnsley, Valerie Cutko and Nuala Willis. The production was "put across with great élan," according to Michael Billington in *The Guardian*, who deemed it "an occasion for curio-collectors." Billington also noted that "Ira Gershwin's lyrics [in "There's Nothing Like Marriage for People"] uncannily anticipate Sondheim's 'The Little Things You Do Together' from *Company*," a point also made by Michael Darvell in his review at www.classicalsource.com. Prior to the London staging, the only production of *Park Avenue* since the original closed in January 1947 was a short run at New York's Theater Ten Ten in 1999.

Coming off the unsuccessful *Firebrand of Florence* with Kurt Weill, Ira was approached by George S. Kaufman in late 1945; as he wrote to future Gershwin biographer, Edward Jablonski: "Am giving up the [motion] picture propositions to do a show with G.S. Kaufman and Nunnally Johnson – A. Schwartz to do the music." Kaufman assured Ira "that [Park Avenue] will give you plenty of opportunity ..." and Arthur Schwartz, in a letter to Ira from the Waldorf-Astoria in January 1946, said he was "never so confident of a wonderful result."

Bringing together the talents of Kaufman, Johnson, Schwartz and Ira, this "smart" musical about a group of rich Long Islanders who switch marital partners too readily, seemed to have the elements for a success, but by the time Ira wrote to Jablonski on October 16, 1946 from the Warwick Hotel in Philadelphia (where he was staying during the show's out of town run), the outlook wasn't so rosy: "We're still working hard trying to get it in first rate shape ... There's a chance we'll get by when we open in New York."

But that chance dimmed with the generally negative reviews that greeted *Park Avenue* after it opened on November 7, 1946, at New York's Shubert Theatre. The show couldn't overcome the critical brickbats ("singularly unimposing" – wrote Brooks Atkinson in *The New York Times*) and shut its doors after 72



performances. *Park Avenue*'s backers, Ira being one of them, suffered a loss of nearly \$200,000. Unfortunately, as Ira put it in his book, *Lyrics on Several Occasions*, "... charm wasn't enough ... [and] divorce is a ticklish subject to be funny about for an entire show." It seemed that jokes about divorce were particularly unfunny to families reuniting after the Second World War and at a time when shows such as *Okla-homa!* and *Carousel* had caught the imagination of the play-going public. Ira wrote, "Arthur Schwartz told me that a friend of his ... cried through most of it. She had recently been divorced and just couldn't take it." Schwartz conceded to Ira that

"we didn't deliver a show good enough to please the critics and the customers."

Though George S. Kaufman, among others, asked him in later years to write for the stage again, *Park Avenue* was Ira Gershwin's last show on Broadway; as he expressed it to Edward Jablonski, "I can't afford to do any more flops – two in a row is about six too many." Ira's lyrics would not find their way to Broadway again until 1983, when the Tony award-winning *My One and Only* opened three-and-a-half months before his death.



Mary Wickes, Ruth Matteson, Arthur Margetson, Leonora Corbett and Wilson Smith in the original 1946 Broadway production



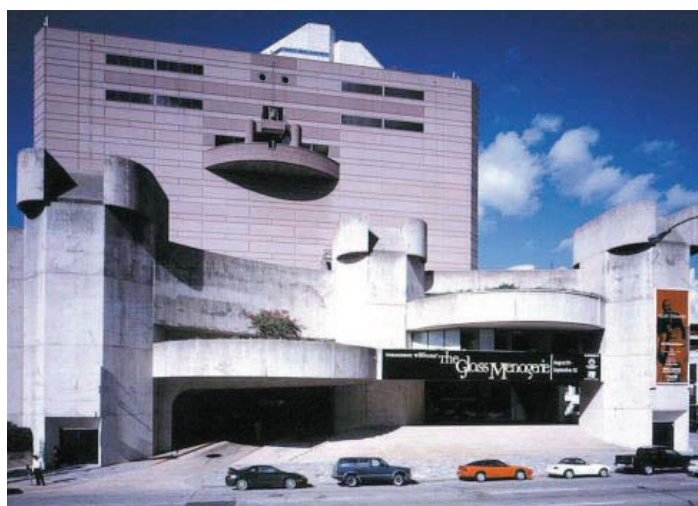
MICHAEL DANIEL

Harry Groener (Michel) and Kerry O'Malley (Miss Klemm). Below: *The Alley Theatre in Houston, Texas.*

An American in Houston

The Gershwins' *An American in Paris*, a new musical with songs by George and Ira Gershwin, had its world premiere in May at Houston's Alley Theatre. A "prequel" to the famous 1951 MGM movie musical, *An American in Paris*, it was conceived and written by Ken Ludwig, author of the 1992 Tony award-winning Gershwin show, *Crazy for You*. The unexpected twist in this fictional account of the events supposedly leading up to the making of the film is that the American in Paris is no longer the free-wheeling painter portrayed by Gene Kelly; in his place is a prim, timorous secretary named Miss Rebecca Klemm (Kerry O'Malley), who is dispatched by her movie mogul boss, Louis Goldman (Ron Orbach), to Paris to find his missing French leading man, Michel Gerard (Harry Groener). In the end, love conquers all – and the link to the "real" movie is revealed. But along the way, Ludwig introduces a potpourri of memorable characters – among them, Goldman's "yes man" Preston (Jeffrey Denman), Michel's niece Yvette (Meredith Patterson), the brassy blond movie star Hermia (Felicia Finley) and her doorman lawyer Hamish (Stephen DeRosa).

The songs, chosen by Ludwig from the *American in Paris* movie as well as from the entire Gershwin canon, represent a mix of the familiar and the lesser known. The standards include "Funny Face," "(I'll Build a) Stairway to Paradise," "Clap Yo' Hands," "S Wonderful," "Love Walked In," "Fascinating Rhythm" and



The songs, chosen by Ludwig from the American in Paris movie as well as from the entire Gershwin canon, include “Funny Face,” “(I’ll Build a) Stairway to Paradise,” “Clap Yo’ Hands,” “S Wonderful,” “Love Walked In,” “Fascinating Rhythm” and “They All Laughed.”

“They All Laughed.” Among the rarities are “Wake Up, Brother, and Dance,” in its theatrical debut at the Alley (it was to have been sung by Fred Astaire in the 1937 film *Shall We Dance*, but was not used), “Meadow Serenade” (from *Strike Up the Band*, 1927), “Just Another Rhumba” (written for but not used in the 1938 film *The Goldwyn Follies*), “Delishious” (the title song from the 1931 film *Delicious*), “Home Blues” (from the 1929 musical *Show Girl*, with the music based on the blues theme of the 1928 symphonic work *An American in Paris*) and “The Bad, Bad Men” (dropped from 1924’s *Lady, Be Good!* during its pre-Broadway tryout.)

An American in Paris was directed by Gregory Boyd, the Alley’s longtime artistic director. Rob Berman’s vocal and dance arrangements (including an abridged version of the movie’s title

ballet) and Doug Besterman and Larry Blank’s orchestrations were performed by a 21-piece onstage orchestra. The choreography for the numerous dance sequences was provided by Randy Skinner. Douglas Schmidt’s scenery and Carrie Robbins’ costumes captured the ambience of Paris in the 1950s.

The show, which opened at the Alley on May 18 after three weeks of previews, was scheduled to run through June 1 but was extended to June 22.

Congratulations to American in Paris cast members Erin Crouch and Jeffry Denman, who were married in New York on August 17, 2008.

See it Online!

Clips from the show can be seen online at http://youtube.com/watch?v=_R-aM3cQjaE&feature=related. Jeffry Denman’s not-to-be-missed rap video about the show is also available online at <http://youtube.com/watch?v=7lhyFM9GTmE>.

“I Have an Idea for How to Approach the Musical” Behind the Scenes with Ken Ludwig

[Words Without Music editor Abigail Kimball spoke with playwright Ken Ludwig in June 2008.]

Q: Can you tell us about the genesis of the show *The Gershwins’ An American in Paris*?

KL: Over the years I had heard that there were different readings of [a stage version of *An American in Paris*]. A decade and a half after *Crazy for You* – I can’t be exactly precise – I remember someone bringing up the fact that there was another attempt to do it by someone in England and that it had fallen through. I said in passing to someone, “If the opportunity ever becomes available, I’d be interested in being involved. I have an idea for how to approach the musical.” And not long thereafter, someone from the Gershwin family called me and said, “Whatever we were working on didn’t work out and we would be interested in hearing what you have to say about it.” I’ve always had this idea of not following the story of the movie, but writing a whole new show, a

new musical comedy, about an American in Paris – but not Gene Kelly after World War II. The way I approached it was to do a musical called *An American in Paris* about an American, in this case a woman, who goes to Paris, and to set it in the world of the movies in the 1950s. I love the idea of movie-making in that era. It’s very much the world of *Singin’ in the Rain*.

Q: You always planned to have your American be a woman?

KL: I did. I thought that was a fun twist. I’ve become convinced over time that probably 99 percent of the people that walk into a theater to see a show called *An American in Paris* really don’t know what the original movie was about and don’t know whether it’s a departure or not. They just want to see a show that has a good, strong emotional core, that’s funny, that’s colorful, has great music, good lines, that’s a great night at the theater. Ultimately, whether it’s

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Ken Ludwig, *Continued*

the same story or not as the underlying movie really doesn't matter very much. But from the beginning, I thought that for people who have seen the movie, it would be fun to do something unexpected, to completely surprise everybody and make it about a woman who is the American in Paris.

Q: *As you conceived it, An American in Paris is a prequel to a famous movie. Wicked, which opened in 2003, is, similarly, the back-story of another beloved movie musical, The Wizard of Oz. What role, if any, did Wicked play in your thinking about An American in Paris?*

KL: I never thought about that parallel. Of course, *An American in Paris* is a prequel in a sense, but in a different sense than in *Wicked*. If you think about *Wicked*, it is a prequel to the story in *The Wizard of Oz*. It's not a musical about the making of the movie *The Wizard of Oz*. And *An American in Paris* is the story of the making of the movie *An American in Paris* or – yet even further afield – the story of the first draft of the movie of *An American in Paris*.

Q: *So it's not an issue for you that the show has the same title as the movie even though it's a different story since you think most people haven't seen the movie and are not expecting a stage version of the movie?*

KL: That's right.

Q: *This is your second show using Gershwin songs. Did you feel a special connection to Gershwin songs before Crazy for You? And how did that connection change as you worked on your second show based on Gershwin songs?*

KL: I did feel a special connection even before *Crazy for You*. In this sense. I was a music theory and composition major in college. Music has always been a big part of my life ever since I was a kid and American popular music has been a great love of mine. I was very familiar with it even before doing *Crazy for You*. And I always knew that George and Ira Gershwin music was the best there was. It was the *crème de la crème*. It's the caviar of American popular music and I loved it. So when the opportunity of *Crazy for You* came along, I was absolutely ecstatic and loved getting into it, rolling up my sleeves, getting to know songs I didn't know and whole musicals I didn't know. It was a treat. I really got involved at that time and learned a huge amount about George and Ira's work. I was amazed at how great it was in that first round. But in the second round, fifteen years later, I came to it with a different sensibility. I'm a different person fifteen years later. I've had children. I've seen them start to

grow up. And I discovered, yet again, this enormous, and new-found in its own way because I hadn't expected it, respect for George and Ira. Having written *Crazy for You*, having gotten well below the surface and learned about all their work, I knew they were great. But revisiting them, with more maturity myself, and more sense of depth about what art is, I was knocked out at how truly great they are. They were both geniuses.

Q: *Is there a specific example you could give of something that struck you in the second round as even greater than you had sensed the first time around? Is there a particular song perhaps?*

KL: Yes. "Isn't It a Pity?" I listened to it, I suppose, in the first round, but I don't remember specifically considering it for *Crazy for You*. *Crazy for You* and *An American in Paris* have different tones. *An American in Paris* is a musical I would write now and *Crazy for You* is a musical I'd write as a younger man. If "Embraceable You" is the key-note ballad for *Crazy for You*, "Isn't It a Pity?" is the key-note ballad for *An American in Paris*. It's a more complex, more profound piece of music. It's not greater. I think they're equally great. I think they're just different.

Q: *How would you describe the different tones of the two shows?*

KL: I'd say that *Crazy for You* is more of a farce and *An American in Paris* is more of a romantic comedy.

Q: *How did you decide which songs to use in An American in Paris?*

KL: I decided very much the same way I did for *Crazy for You*. I listened to virtually every single song I could by George and Ira jointly. I went through every single disc I have. I also read *The Complete Lyrics of Ira Gershwin* edited by Robert Kimball and found lyrics that I didn't have the music for, and I called Robert and asked, "Can you help me find it?" And I also called Michael Feinstein, who was very helpful in finding the music to some lyrics. The story line and the songs ended up being created at the same time. This very much happened with *Crazy for You* too. A song would give me an idea for a story moment and the story line would make me go seek a song that did what I needed it to do in that moment. So it was very much a symbiotic relationship.

Q: *You didn't start off with a complete script and then go back and find songs to fit the moment? You worked the two things together?*

KL: Exactly. Now I did go in knowing it would be great to use some of the key songs from the movie because I am



JANN WHALEY

Kristen J. Smith, Sara Brians, Erin Crouch, Alison Levenberg, Sae La Chin and Shannon M. O'Bryan in rehearsal

doing the making of the movie. When Miss Klemm goes to Paris with Preston, they see this café, and it ends up being the café that appears in the movie. So I very much said to [scenic designer] Doug Schmidt, “I want our café to look like the café in the movie.” Because I wanted Miss Klemm and Preston and the others to discover things that they will then bring artistically into the movie. And I did that with the songs as well. So, for example, when we see Michel Gerard in a music hall doing “Stairway to Paradise,” it is the same number Georges Guetary performs in the movie.

Q: *We’re guessing that you had fun setting up some of those playful song connections in the script. For example, in “Isn’t it a Pity,” after telling Michel that she had studied German philosophy, Miss Klemm sings “My nights were sour / Spent with Schopenhauer” and Michel, who boasts to Miss Klemm that his career had even taken him to China, sings “You, reading Heine, / I, somewhere in China.” And in “’S Wonderful” Miss Klemm jokes about Michel’s sometimes fractured idioms: “You’ve made my life so ting-a-lish / I’ll even overlook your Eng-a-lish.”*

KL: It was fun trying to make Ira’s lyrics resonate in the show. If Ira had written a different lyric, Michel would have said, “I was in Russia.”

Q: *What are the advantages of developing a new show at a regional theater, and in particular at the Alley?*

KL: I think there are huge advantages. You are not under the gun the way you are in a pre-Broadway tryout, when you’ve already set the Broadway date and all. I love the line by Larry Gelbart that if Hitler were still alive, what he’d wish on him is that he’s out of town with a musical. It is so stressful that you just end up wanting to commit *hara-kiri* by the end of the first few weeks because you’re under such pressures. You know the deadline of finally opening is there no matter what you do. I think that brings out a lot of great things in an artist. I think even better is knowing that you have a big opening, but the opening is in a regional theater where you really get to just work on the piece and try to make it better and also have a chance to experiment more than you would otherwise. There are huge advantages to being able to say that we want to get the musical right before we get to Broadway. We want to get it right so when we open on Broadway it’s as right as we can get it. Having a production as professional as it was at the Alley, with all the

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Ken Ludwig, *Continued*

resources of a Broadway musical – the best cast you can ever imagine, the best music director and orchestrators and designers – and then get to put it up in that space and have lots of time to rehearse is just heaven. And working at the Alley is as good as regional theaters get in this world. It's fabulous. Its resources are terrific. It runs like a clock. They delivered on every one of their promises. I've worked with them before and they're just a joy to work with.

Q: *You did Treasure Island there?*

KL: I did. And two other shows. A comedy called *Leading Ladies*, which I directed, and a comedy called *Be My Baby* with Hal Holbrook and Dixie Carter, directed by John Rando.

Q: *What's next for you?*

KL: I just finished writing the first draft of a movie for Walt Disney.

Q: *A children's movie or a grown-up movie?*

KL: Grown-up movie.

Q: *Can you say anything more about it?*

KL: Can't or they'd murder me.

Q: *We wouldn't want that!*

KL: But it's all done and it's now with the director. I'm sure I'll continue to be involved with it as the movie gets filmed. *Treasure Island*, which had its premiere at the Alley last year, is going to be done in the West End, opening around November 1st. It's going to be a big West End production. I'm mostly busy writing my next play. I'm just in the process of finally sitting down, locking the door and writing. Also, one of my plays, an adaptation of *The Three Musketeers*, is about to be published by Oxford University Press and I'm getting that ready for publication. What else? A new volume of Thornton Wilder adaptations coming out for which I've written an introduction.

Q: *You're done two shows now using the songs of George and Ira*



Ron Orbach as Louis Goldman

Gershwin. Have you ever written a musical with a living composer and lyricist?

KL: I have. I wrote a musical called *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* with a wonderful country music composer/lyricist named Don Schlitz. It was on Broadway. He wrote a fabulous score.

Q: *Would you want to do another musical?*

KL: I would love to. It's always a question of finding a really great subject matter. I guess you could say the same thing about a play, but musicals are a more extended deal because so many other people are involved. Rolling up your sleeves, having meetings, collaborating with a whole room full of people – that's sort of what musicals are all about.

When I write a play, I lock myself in a room, sit quietly and I write it myself. I only want to do my next musical when there's an animating idea behind it that I feel so enthusiastic about that I'm ready to commit the time and effort required.

Q: *Is it true that even though you majored in music theory and composition in college, you wound up going to law school?*

KL: Yes. And I did practice law for a while.

Q: *And then one day you said, "That's it. I'm writing a show!"?*

KL: Well, I was writing shows ever since I was a little kid. I always wanted to be in show business, ever since I was a youngster. Really, since I was six years old and met a star and was agog with admiration. But my parents were very much in favor of me having something to fall back on because they thought, how are you going to make a living in show business? So although I was always in shows and writing shows, plays, for years, it wasn't until I had my first big West End and Broadway success with *Lend Me a Tenor* that I said, "Okay, I can afford to become a playwright rather than be a lawyer."

Q: *Had you written Lend Me a Tenor at night during your off hours?*

KL: Actually mornings. From 6 o'clock to 8 o'clock in the morning. That was my routine for years and years. It was tough, but I loved doing it. 🐼

A special patrons' event at New York City's Paley Center for Media on May 15 honored George Gershwin and Kay Swift. Narrated by music director Aaron Gandy and showcasing songs by the two composers, the program featured performances by Broadway star Christine Ebersole, singers Klea Blackhurst and Jimmy Ray Bennett and pianist Joseph Thalken, as well as movie clips and, from the Paley Center's archives, radio and television clips of musical performances and interviews.

George Gershwin already had both a Broadway hit, *Lady, Be Good!* and *Rhapsody in Blue* to his credit when he met Katharine Swift Warburg, a classically trained musician and the wife of James Paul Warburg, a scion of the German-Jewish banking family, in 1925. Among the "intersections" cited by Gandy in the creative lives of the two composers during their ensuing decade-long personal relationship were Kay's *Fine and Dandy*, a 1930 hit and the first complete Broadway score composed by a woman (with lyrics by her husband, who used the pseudonym Paul James), and *George Gershwin's Song-Book*, published in 1932 and dedicated to Kay, who had transcribed the pieces as George played them. In 1934 the Warburgs divorced. When George left New York for Hollywood in August 1936, however, he and Kay decided to put their relationship on hold while he was in California. Less than a year later George died of a brain tumor. Although Kay continued to compose, she became actively involved in promoting George's music, working with Ira Gershwin, for example, to adapt material for the 1947 film *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim* from George's manuscripts and helping such artists as Michael Tilson Thomas, Bobby Short, and William Bolcom and Joan Morris on their Gershwin recordings. Kay died in 1993 at age 95.

Among the musical highlights on the Paley Center program were performances of Swift and James's "Nobody Breaks My Heart" by Klea Blackhurst and "Fine and Dandy" by Blackhurst and Jimmy Ray Bennett, "There's a Boat Dat's Leavin' Soon for New York" from the Gershwins' *Porgy and Bess*, sung by Christine Ebersole, and the *George Gershwin's Song-Book* arrangement of "Liza" played by Joseph Thalken, who also accompanied the singers. Television clips included Ella Fitzgerald and Frank Sinatra in a duet of the Swift and James classic "Can't We Be Friends?" and Leslie Uggams singing the Gershwins' "Someone to Watch Over Me."

Kay Swift's family was represented at the event by her granddaughter, novelist Katharine Weber, co-trustee of the Kay Swift Memorial Trust. Aaron Gandy is the artistic advisor to the Trust. Further information can be found at www.kayswift.com.



Kay Swift and George Gershwin at the Warburg farm in Connecticut, c. 1929

STRICTLY GERSHWIN

Strictly Gershwin, a new musical extravaganza produced by the English National Ballet with choreography by Derek Deane, took over London's vast Royal Albert Hall for 10 days in June. The show, described by its conductor/musical supervisor Gareth Valentine as "a celebration of Gershwin and Hollywood music and dance," featured hoofers, ballroom stars from British TV's *Strictly Come Dancing*, ballet dancers, a full orchestra, a big band, glittering costumes, film clips – and Broadway/cabaret legend Barbara Cook.

The London reviews were mixed, ranging from Debra Crane's description, in *The Times*, of "a sleek and hugely enjoyable production that celebrates some of the greatest popular music of the 20th century" to Sarah Frater's evaluation in *The Evening Standard* that the show was a "jaw-dropping folly." However, critics had only words of praise for the 80-year-old Cook. Zoë Anderson in *The Independent* called her the "glory of the evening ... [whose] warmth and presence [made] *Strictly Gershwin* ... intimate" even in cavernous Albert Hall.

Contemporary social relevance sparked three productions of the classic Gershwin folk opera, *Porgy and Bess*, staged in the United States and France this year.

In Austin, Texas, the Zachary Scott Theater Center's jazzy, gospel *Porgy and Bess*, set in New Orleans in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, showed Catfish Row's residents huddled on a rooftop after the Act II storm scene. Dave Steakley, the theater's producing artistic director, described his production in *The New York Times* ("‘Porgy’ Meets Katrina, and Life's Not So Easy," January 29, 2008) as an attempt "... to draw attention to the resonance this has for our community." Texas received many refugees in the wake of Katrina; Marva Hicks, who played Bess, said that she "... hope[d] the spirit in which we [did] it captures their spirit of survival."

"What we need now is a new Porgy and Bess that's relevant for today....I hope [the audience] will question certain things, go beyond the anecdotal."

—Serge Dorny — Opéra de Lyon

The Opéra de Lyon in France (which had recently staged Kurt Weill and Ira Gershwin's *Lady in the Dark*) premiered its critically-acclaimed hip-hop take on *Porgy and Bess* on May 17. Serge Dorny, the company's general director, told Elizabeth Withey of *The Edmonton Journal* that "what we need now is a new *Porgy and Bess* that's relevant for today....I hope [the audience] will question certain things, go beyond the anecdotal." Dorny also said that one of the challenges of producing the opera is "getting away from conceptions of what it 'should' be ... even if you have not seen a *Porgy and Bess*, you imagine a *Porgy and Bess*." The production that resulted was described by Withey as "a moving, unsettling portrait of discrimination today," which asks the audience, "How far have we come in the fight against racism?" Images of old tenement housing and the American civil rights movement were juxtaposed with photos of contemporary housing projects and the 2005 French riots by second-generation African and Arab immigrants.

In Paris, the Opéra Comique staged *Porgy and Bess* using projections of Soweto-like townships in South Africa to emphasize the universal struggle for human rights. Conductor Wayne Marshall, leading an American cast plus the New World Symphony and Atlanta Opera Chorus, fashioned a jazzy, explosive sound that impressed *The New York Daily News*' "Cultural



Texas production: huddled on rooftops. Photo and set design by Michael Raiford. Courtesy Zach Theater.

Tourist," Howard Kissel, who wrote about the production in his blog on June 4, 2008 (<http://www.nydailynews.com/blogs/culture/2008/06/paris-rounding-things-off.html>).

Strike Up the Band for UCLA

Continued from page 3

After George's death in July 1937, Ira continued his support of UCLA not only by frequently attending their home football games, but also by donating musical and literary items from his collection to the university library – including his multi-volume set of the English humor magazine *Punch* – and encouraging the creation of a George Gershwin Memorial Scholarship.

In 1988, with the blessing of Ira's widow, Leonore, UCLA introduced a George and Ira Gershwin Award, which is presented annually as part of the university's annual Spring Sing. Honorees over the years have included Burt Bacharach, Ray Charles, Ella Fitzgerald, Quincy Jones, Angela Lansbury and Frank Sinatra. The 2008 award was given to Lionel Richie.

Though "Strike Up the Band for UCLA" received a lot of play during the NCAA tournament, the team was eventually knocked out before reaching the Final Four.

Heading North

England's Opera North has scheduled new productions of two of the Gershwins' great political satires, *Of Thee I Sing* and *Let 'Em Eat Cake*, in its upcoming season. Opera North, based in Leeds, will launch *Of Thee I Sing* on October 4, 2008, with *Let 'Em Eat Cake* to follow on January 29, 2009. London performances at Sadlers Wells Theatre will take place on February 18, 2009 (*Sing*) and February 20, 2009 (*Cake*); the shows can be seen back-to-back on February 21, 2009. According to director Caroline Gawn, both shows will be fully-staged and presented in as complete a musical rendition as possible. *Let 'Em Eat Cake* will include material that was restored for Michael Tilson Thomas' performances at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in 1987. In 1998, *Of Thee I Sing* was presented by Opera North in semi-staged performances. For further information, see www.operanorth.co.uk.

News on the Rialto

Warner Bros. Theatre Ventures is planning a stage version of the 1954 film musical, *A Star Is Born*, with a revised book by

Michael John LaChiusa that includes all the songs by Ira and Harold Arlen heard in the film, possibly some that were dropped before production, and additional tunes from the Arlen catalogue written with Ira and other lyricists. The producers are looking at a number of A-list actors for the role of Norman Maine, played in the film by James Mason. The search for a new Esther Blodgett, portrayed on the screen by Judy Garland, is also underway.

Gershwin Prize Winner Announced

The Library of Congress has named Stevie Wonder as the second recipient of the Gershwin Prize for Popular Song, to be awarded at a ceremony in the Library's Great Hall on February 23, 2009. Wonder has also been commissioned by the Library to create a new musical work for the event. A concert gala is currently being planned for the evening following the award ceremony. Paul Simon, who received the initial Gershwin Prize in 2007, was among the members of the advisory committee that selected Wonder.

bruce d. mcclung's* *Lady in the Dark: Biography of a Musical* (Oxford University Press, \$39.95, 274 pages) recounts how Moss Hart, Kurt Weill, Ira Gershwin, Gertrude Lawrence, Danny Kaye and a myriad of collaborators came together to create one of the most influential, if problematic, musicals of the 20th century. Drawing on a wealth of research and archival visual material, mcclung retraces the journey of 1941's *Lady in*

the Dark through pre-production, Broadway and subsequent touring, and analyzes its place in the contemporary musical theater world. Debra Griboff of Encore Magazine has described the book as "the next best thing ... to a Broadway revival" of the show and Studies in Musical Theatre cited it as "a prototype for how future 'biographies' of other shows might be written."



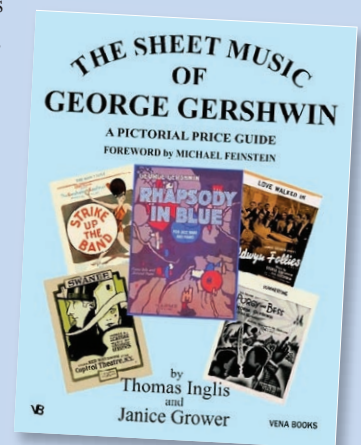
The BOOK REPORT

Thomas Inglis and Janice Grower's *The Sheet Music of George Gershwin: A Pictorial Price Guide* (Vena Books, \$49.95, 116 pages), is

a follow-up to Inglis' compilation of Irving Berlin covers published in 2004. The authors present, in chronological order, Gershwin sheet music covers from 1916 through 1992's *Crazy*

for You. This attractive, comprehensive volume, with an introduction by Michael Feinstein, will be of particular value to collectors since it includes current prices of original sheet music.

*Like e.e. cummings, bruce d. mcclung writes his name entirely in lower-case letters.





IRA AND LEONORE GERSHWIN TRUSTS

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AROUND THE WORLD WITH *PORGY AND BESS*

A calendar of recent and upcoming productions

**Fleetwood-Jourdain Theatre
Evanston, IL**

Concerts 6/14/08-7/22/08

**Théâtre National de l'Opéra Comique
Paris, France**

Caen: 6/26-28-30/08

Luxembourg : 10/7-9-11/08

**Deutsche Oper Berlin
Berlin, Germany**

7/4/08-8/10/08

**Living Arts, Inc.
(based in New York)**

Salonika, Greece: 7/10/08-7/12/08

Athens, Greece: 7/14/08-7/20/08

Latvia: 7/21-22/08

Estonia: 7/23-24-27/08

**Norwegian National Opera
Oslo, Norway**

8/08

**New York Harlem Productions, Inc.
(based in Munich, Germany)**

Tour Europe '08

Hamburg, Germany: 8/12/08-8/31/08

Baden-Baden, Germany: 9/02/08-9/07/08

Zurich, Switzerland: 9/09/08-9/21/08

**Lyric Opera of Chicago
Chicago, IL**

11/01/08-12/31/08

**The Baltimore Opera Company
Baltimore, MD**

5/9-13-15-17/09

**San Francisco Opera Association
San Francisco, CA**

6/6/09-6/28/09