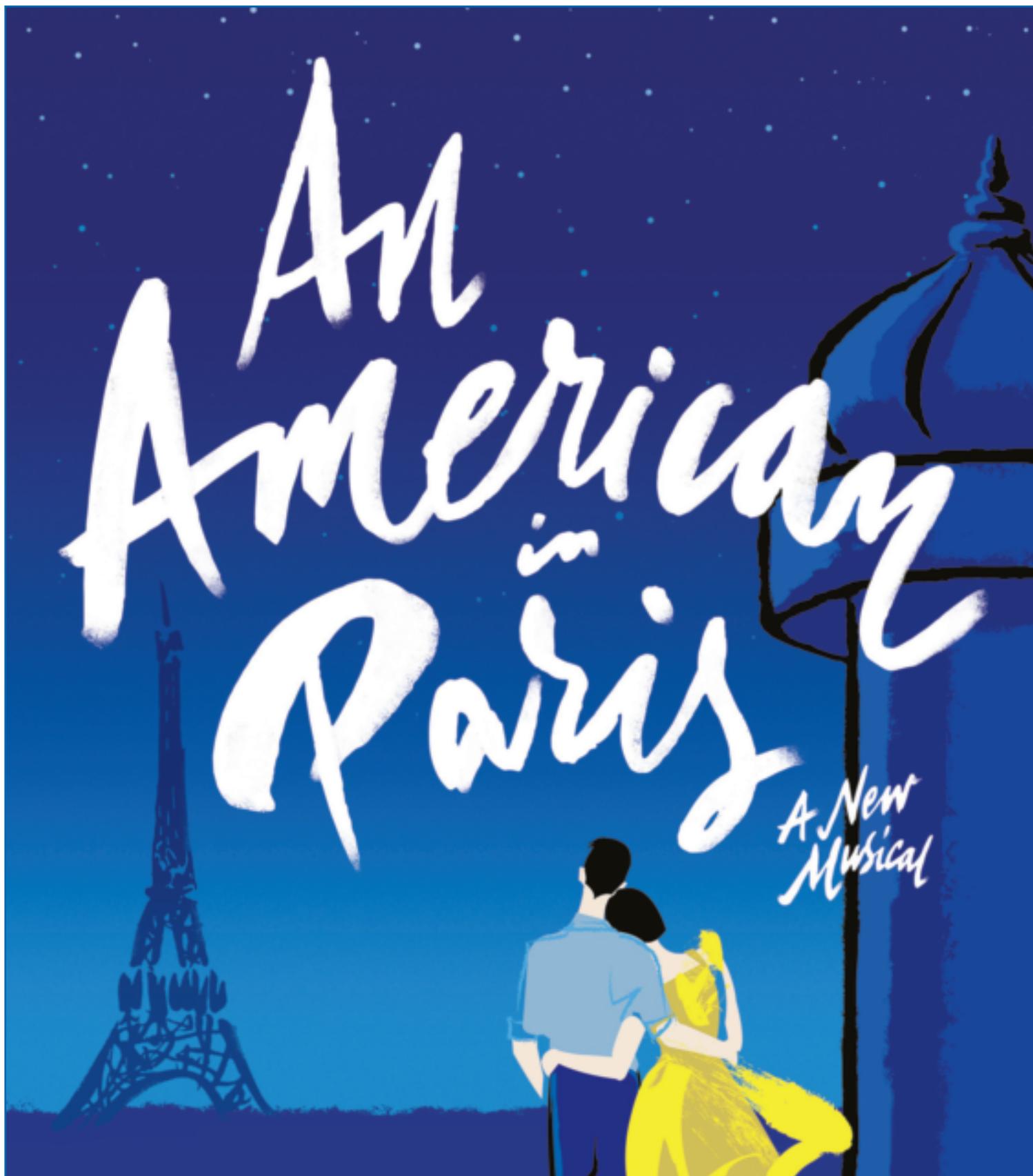


WORDS WITHOUT MUSIC

The Ira Gershwin Newsletter



No. 9. Winter/Spring 2015



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Dear readers,

During the recent Gershwin Prize for Popular Song concert in Washington, D.C., honoring singer-songwriter Billy Joel, Michael Feinstein reminded the capacity audience at DAR Constitution Hall that in 1985 the United States Congress awarded the Congressional Gold Medal to George and Ira Gershwin in recognition of their “outstanding and invaluable contributions to American music, theatre and culture.” The success of the Gershwin Prize proves that it is (to quote President Obama) “the most important award in American Popular Music.”

George and Ira are no longer with us, but audiences around the globe continue to enjoy their remarkable creations. The world-premiere production of *An American in Paris*, a brilliant new musical stage presentation, based on but not replicating the 1951 movie, recently concluded a sold-out and lavishly praised run at Paris’ historic Théâtre du Châtelet. The show makes its highly anticipated Broadway debut at the Palace Theatre with previews starting March 13.

The United States tours of *Porgy and Bess: The Broadway Musical* and *Nice Work If You Can Get It* have captivated audiences from coast to coast, while a separate production of *Porgy and Bess: The Broadway Musical* at London’s Regent’s Park last summer met with raves from critics and audiences alike.

I have frequently wondered why Gershwin shows such as these and *Crazy for You* remain so popular, finding fans among longtime Gershwin aficionados while simultaneously being embraced by people newly exposed to the brothers’ work. One reason is, of course, the quality of the songs George and Ira wrote together. Howard Pollack, author of a 2007 biography of the composer, commented that George’s music combined – in equal measure – “verve and melancholy, wit and joy,” while Ira’s lyrics were – in the words of another Gershwin biographer, Ed Jablonski – “a unique blend of scholarly craftsmanship [and] gentle whimsy.” I guess that really answers the question, doesn’t it?

But of equal importance is the quality of the people we have chosen to work with to develop these shows over the past 20+ years. Since my Aunt Leonore’s death in 1991, notable names such as Trevor Nunn, Diane Paulus, Ken Ludwig, Suzan-Lori Parks, Kathleen Marshall, Christopher Wheeldon, Joe DiPietro, Craig Lucas, Susan Stroman, and the late Mike Ockrent have brought us magic nights at the theater by combining sparkling Gershwin songs with their own dazzling imaginations. I am proud that we have put together this “crew.”

It’s been an exciting two-and-a-half decades for me and for those around me who help in maintaining the Gershwin legacy. We look forward to an equally exciting 2015 ... and beyond.

—Michael Strunsky

ON THE ROAD AND ACROSS THE POND

It was thumbs up from both critics and audiences for the recently-concluded national tour of *The Gershwins' Porgy and Bess: The Broadway Musical*. Directed by Diane Paulus, who also helmed the multiple Tony award-winning Broadway production, the immensely successful 21-city journey began at San Francisco's Golden Gate Theatre in November 2013 and ended eight months and nearly 15,000 miles later at the Belk Theatre in Charlotte, North Carolina, returning a handsome profit to its investors.

Led by Nathaniel Stampley and Alicia Hall Moran in the title roles, and featuring Kingsley Leggs as Sportin' Life and Alvin Crawford as Crown, *The Gershwins' Porgy and Bess: The Broadway Musical* delivered on its promise to bring the story to audiences in venues other than opera houses. Gasping as Bess succumbed to the charms of happy dust and loudly booing Sportin' Life and Crown during the bows, audiences reveled in the steamy atmosphere of Catfish Row and the classic Gershwin score.

★★★

Another well-received production of *The Gershwins' Porgy and Bess: The Broadway Musical*, the first outside the United States, ran during July and August 2014 at the Open Air Theatre in London's Regent's Park. Directed by Timothy Shearer, it starred Nicola Hughes as Bess (she also performed the role in Trevor Nunn's 2006 West End production) and Rufus Bonds Jr. as Porgy. Phillip Boykin from the Broadway production again played Crown and Cedric Neal was Sportin' Life.

Directed by Timothy Shearer, it starred Nicola Hughes as Bess (she also performed the role in Trevor Nunn's 2006 West End production) and Rufus Bonds Jr. as Porgy. Phillip Boykin from the Broadway production again played Crown and Cedric Neal was Sportin' Life.

★★★

The national tour of the Tony award-winning Gershwin musical *Nice Work If You Can Get It* hit the boards on September 2, 2014 at Dallas' Music Hall at Fair Park.



Boykin, Hughes, Bonds Jr., and Neal (center) with members of the company in the Regent's Park production of The Gershwins' Porgy and Bess: The Broadway Musical

JOHAN PERSSON

Two fresh faces, Alex Enterline as playboy Jimmy Winter and Mariah MacFarlane as the bootlegger Billie Bendix, head the lively cast in director David Eggers' adaptation of Kathleen Marshall's original Broadway production. The 30-city tour runs through March of 2015 with final performances at the Segerstrom Center in Costa Mesa, California. Please visit the official website, www.niceworkontour.com, for further information about *Nice Work If You Can Get It* and ticket availability.

Information on booking *The Gershwins' Porgy and Bess: The Broadway Musical* and *Nice Work If You Can Get It* is available from the Tams-Witmark Music Library at www.tamswitmark.com or (800) 221-7196.



JEREMY DANIEL

Enterline and MacFarlane head the lively cast of the *Nice Work If You Can Get It* national tour

The Gershwins' Porgy and Bess: The Broadway Musical U. S. tour

"Phenomenal ... absorbing down to its smallest detail."
– Colin Dabkowski, *Buffalo News*

"This show demands – and commands – your attention."
– Mark Meszoros, *Cleveland News-Herald*

The Gershwins' Porgy and Bess: The Broadway Musical London production

"Finely nuanced and exquisitely sung"
– Lyn Gardner, *The (London) Guardian*

"The most truly engaging [production of] Porgy I have ever seen."
– Michael White, *The (London) Telegraph*

Nice Work If You Can Get It U. S. tour

"It's enough to make one's heart melt and stands as a testament to the joyous power of theater."
– Cheryl Callon, *TheaterJones: North Texas Performing Arts News*

"A comedy crew that bubbles like champagne."
– Judith Newmark, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*

AN AMERICAN IN PARIS ... IN PARIS!

What could be a more appropriate – and appealing – venue for the debut of the stage adaptation of the Gershwins' *An American in Paris* than that city's storied 19th century Théâtre du Châtelet?

A smashing success in its sold-out, six-week pre-Broadway Paris engagement, *An American in Paris* starts previews at New York's Palace Theatre on March 13, 2015 and opens on April 12.

Getting the 1951 Academy Award-winning movie musical *An American in Paris* to the stage has been a quarter-century-long saga. The George and Ira Gershwin families were first approached in the late 1980s about a Broadway adaptation of the iconic movie; despite several attempts, including one by the late Wendy Wasserstein, no iteration was deemed viable until producers Stuart Oken (*The Addams Family*) and Van Kaplan (Executive Director of the Pittsburgh Civic Light Opera, one of the top non-profit theaters in the United States) proposed Christopher Wheeldon, a choreographer acclaimed in the ballet world, and Tony and Pulitzer Prize-nominated playwright Craig

Opening Night at Châtelet

There were Americans onstage and Americans in the audience at the December 10 opening night of *An American in Paris* at Paris's Théâtre du Châtelet. Joining the large American contingent in a spirited standing ovation at the curtain call were the many French in attendance. For those wondering how an American musical, with all the words spoken and sung in English, would fare in France, it seems, at least at the Châtelet, very well. (While the dancing needed no translation, and probably the songs didn't either, French subtitles for both dialogue and lyrics were provided on either side of the proscenium.) The theater, which dates back to 1862 and boasts a splendid, old-world gold and burgundy horseshoe-shaped auditorium, has presented numerous American musicals – from classics such as *My Fair Lady* to Stephen Sondheim's *Sweeney Todd* – along with opera, ballet, and symphonic programs since Jean-Luc Choplin took the helm in 2006. *An American in Paris* is Châtelet's first venture as a co-producer of a Broadway show.



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Fairchild and Cope: Dancing to Gershwin's famous tone poem

Lucas as the perfect partners to refashion the movie for contemporary theater audiences.

With a cast led by Robert Fairchild, a New York City Ballet principal dancer, English ballerina Leanne Cope, and Broadway actors Brandon Uranowitz, Max von Essen, Veanne Cox, and Jill Paice, the new musical retells – on its own terms – the story of former American G.I. and aspiring artist Jerry Mulligan (Fairchild in an impressive singing and acting debut) in post-World War II Paris. In one of many departures from the cinematic version, the action is moved back from 1949 to the immediate aftermath of the war, with a dramatic scene-setting sequence at the beginning of the show depicting returning soldiers, waiting sweethearts, Parisians on breadlines, and a huge Nazi flag replaced by the French Tricolor. Jerry encounters and is immediately smitten by Lise (the lissome Cope), a young French ballet dancer. Unbeknownst to the feisty, lovesick Jerry, his new buddies, Adam, a self-deprecating Jewish-American composer (portrayed with endearing vulnerability by Uranowitz), and Henri, a genteel Frenchman (in an ingratiating performance by Von Essen), are also in love with Lise. Meanwhile, as Jerry contends with the advances of American heiress and arts patron Milo Davenport (a perky Paice), Henri, whose dream is to become a song-and-dance man, tries to put on a good face as he humors his stuffy, overbearing mother (the comedic Cox).

While the shadow of World War II is an underlying motif in the stage version, the heart of the show is the exuberant

AN AMERICAN IN PARIS



©2014, ANGELA STERLING

Fairchild, Uranowitz, and von Essen (center): Three buddies in love with the same mademoiselle

Gershwin score, which incorporates George's *American in Paris* tone poem, as the movie did, as well as both movie and non-movie songs and excerpts from George's *Concerto in F* and *Second Rhapsody*. Given its origins in a movie that celebrated dance and a director who came to prominence as a choreographer, the new adaptation is, not surprisingly, a paean to movement as an expressive element, from the opening sequence depicting the liberation of Paris to scenes that suddenly erupt in dance, to the modernist title ballet near the end. Even the scenery has its own choreography as the cast seamlessly moves panels and stage furniture while video projections flesh out the changing settings.

In addition to Wheeldon, making his debut as a theater director, and Lucas, the creative team includes Tony winners Bob Crowley (sets and costumes) and Natasha Katz (lighting), Jon Weston (sound design), 59 Projections (animation and projections), with musical supervision by Rob Fisher and orchestrations by Christopher Austin.

Information about the Broadway production can be found at www.americaninparisonbroadway.com. 

“The result is bold, satisfying and witty, greatly helped by the colourful fluency of Bob Crowley’s virtuosic projected designs which bowl around Paris, creating everything from boats on the Seine to the interior of the Galeries Lafayette.”

– *The Telegraph*, Sarah Crompton

“Be it breezy or tender, lush or hard-hitting, in your face or introspective, Wheeldon’s choreography brings the plot, the characters and the passions to life.”

– *The Times*, Debra Craine

“...[Wheeldon] achieves a true miracle; by making the audience almost forget about the 1951 Vincente Minnelli film starring Gene Kelly ...”

– *Le Monde*, Rosita Boisseau

“... for the viewer, it’s getting into the country of dreams, with the gorgeous Leanne Cope from the Royal Ballet, a Leslie Caron look-alike, and with the dazzling Robert Fairchild ... as Jerry Mulligan.”

– *Le Figaro*, Ariane Bavelier

“A great company, excellent dancers, great singers, choreography as intricately designed as a fireworks display, and stunning staging”

– *Paris Match*, Sacha Reins

NOT A STAGED VERSION OF THE FILM

An Interview with Christopher Wheeldon

How did you discover An American in Paris?

As a child, I remember that musical films were scheduled on television during the Christmas holidays. I must have been 6 or 7 years old when I discovered *Singin' in the Rain*, which remains my favorite film. The following year I saw *An American in Paris*. I confess that at that time, the plot didn't interest me much. I only wanted to watch the dance numbers, and with *An American in Paris*, I must say I got what I wanted. The final ballet sequence is truly remarkable. Very quickly, Gene Kelly became my idol, and those two films played a determining role in my desire to become a dancer.

About ten years ago, you were supposed to choreograph An American in Paris on Broadway. In 2005 you presented your version of the finale ballet with dancers from New York City Ballet. And now you are directing and choreographing this world premiere. There's a long history between this piece and you ...

It's been with me a long time. I was associated with some attempts to mount *An American in Paris* on stage, but they never panned out. This time, it's an enormous pleasure for this project to finally see the light of day.

How different is the stage version from the film?

The plot of the film remains our point of departure, but we have placed it in 1945, just as the war has ended. Paris is rebuilding, and the main characters are on the verge of discovering what fate has in store for them. In 1950, when the film was made, the trauma of war was still very fresh in the minds of American audiences. Today we have the benefit of a certain distance from the events of the Second World War, which allows us to more easily evoke its historic context.

How do you handle the legacy of Gene Kelly?

The imprint of Gene Kelly is indelible. But I am sure that he wouldn't have appreciated our copying his steps or even reworking them. I had the chance to meet Patricia Kelly, his widow, who assured me that Gene would have been delighted that his original concept had continued to evolve, he had always been such an advocate of the modern. I was very touched to hear that. So the stage version is my own interpretation of Gershwin's

music. Many styles of dance will be co-existing in this show. Obviously there will be ballet as well as tap, jazz, modern dance, and so forth.

You have already choreographed long ballets like Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and The Winter's Tale, but nothing with words. How did you meet the challenge of directing spoken lines?

I worked with my friend Nicholas Hytner, director of the National Theatre in England, on a film, *Center Stage*, in 2000, and a musical, *The Sweet Smell of Success*, in 2002. In devising the choreography for *Carmen* at the Met in 2010, I was able to observe Sir Richard Eyre create his production over the course of six weeks. These are some formidable teachers. After *Alice* and *Winter's Tale*, the musical was the next obvious step. I quickly realized that directing a musical doesn't just mean being the creative nucleus; you have to stay connected to all the other jobs.

How did you come to choose Robert Fairchild for the role of Jerry, and Leanne Cope to play Lise?

Robert is one of the best dancers of his generation. I had the chance to work with him when I was resident choreographer at New York City Ballet. A huge fan of Gene Kelly, he was very excited by the idea of adding a new string to his bow, learning to express himself not just with his body but also with his voice. Leanne was part of the corps de ballet at the Royal Ballet. She has an exceptional presence onstage and inhabits dramatic roles marvelously. I always thought she had a gift for acting, even if she wasn't aware of it.

The "dream ballet" which ends the film is a series of dance numbers across Paris. How is this section treated on stage?

In the film version, this sequence is shot in a very artistic manner, but it doesn't really advance the story. In the stage version, the ballet will unite the different forms of artistic expression of the protagonists. At the beginning of the show, Lise rehearses in a dance studio, and as we go on, she becomes a star dancer, then ends up having a ballet created just for her. Adam gets to compose the magnificent music of *An American in Paris* which is the score for the ballet. And finally, Jerry will also have an artistic role to play in the ballet, but I don't want to reveal to you just how. 🦋

Reprinted with special permission of Théâtre du Châtelet. Interviewer: Oscar Héliani. Translator: Emily King

THE LIGHTS GO UP ON BILLY JOEL

by Libbie Hodas

An enthusiastic crowd of fans, colleagues, and bipartisan well-wishers saw the lights go up on renowned American songwriter/pianist/singer Billy Joel when he received the 6th Library of Congress Gershwin Prize for Popular Song at the DAR Constitution Hall in Washington, D.C. on November 19, 2014.

The one-time resident of the Levittown section of Hicksville, Long Island, was saluted via video by musical icons Barbra Streisand, James Taylor, and fellow Gershwin Prize winner Sir Paul McCartney, who told Joel that the award was only fitting as it was “from a great American composer from the past to a great American composer of the present.” A smiling and modest Joel accepted the night’s accolades and standing ovations from his seat between Librarian of Congress James Billington and Supreme Court Justice Sonya Sotomayor.

Since his solo recording debut more than 40 years ago, Joel’s achievements have included 33 top 40 hits, six Grammys, a Tony, and prestigious honors from the Kennedy Center, the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, and ASCAP. Most recently, he has played to sold-out crowds at Madison Square Garden, where he will continue his monthly residence in 2015.

In the spirit of George and Ira Gershwin, the Gershwin Prize recognizes outstanding artists whose compositions – featuring words and music – achieve widespread appeal and reach beyond the traditional confines of the genre in which they were created. Throughout the evening, audiences were reminded of the mastery of Joel’s work and how intimately it illustrates universal ideas such as love, loss, and joy.

The celebration ignited with a dynamic performance inspired by Twyla Tharp’s Broadway hit *Movin’ Out*. Set to the catalog of Joel’s music, the jukebox musical tells the tale of American youth growing up on Long Island in the 1960s, and their experience with life and war – stories found throughout Joel’s well-known songs. Later in the evening, Tharp introduced “Shameless,” a breathtaking second number from *Movin’ Out*, by recalling that when she proposed the Broadway show to Joel his response was, “What do you need?” When Tharp said she needed all of his music, Joel told her “you got it,” and never wavered from his word.

Nathan Morris, Vanya Morris, and Shawn Stockman of the famed R&B vocal group Boyz II Men performed a rousing version



SHAWN MILLER

Librarian of Congress Dr. James Billington presents Joel with the award: A night of accolades for ‘a great American composer of the present’

of “For the Longest Time,” which showcased the rich, joyous harmonies of Joel’s music. The evening continued with impassioned tributes to the honoree’s songbook from Leann Rimes (“Goodnight My Angel”), Gavin DeGraw (“It’s Still Rock and Roll to Me”), Josh Groban (“She’s Always a Woman”), Natalie Maines (“She’s Got a Way”), and John Mellencamp (“Allentown”).

Michael Feinstein played a few bars from *Rhapsody in Blue* and reflected on the historical significance of the award, while Tony Bennett brought down the house with his rendition of “New York State of Mind,” a song he recorded with Joel in 2001.

Joel was then brought up on stage where, flanked by Congressional leaders from both parties, he received the award from the Librarian of Congress and Supreme Court Justice Sotomayor. Overwhelmed, he told the audience, “I’m verklempt!” He went on to reminisce how *Rhapsody in Blue* had played a key role on his now-famous 1987 tour of the former Soviet Union, a

Continued on next page

GERSHWIN PRIZE FOR POPULAR SONG



AMANDA REYNOLDS

Host Spacey performs: A harmonica man honors a piano man

groundbreaking moment in rock and roll ambassadorship. Not sure how Russian audiences would accept an American touring band, he opened each show with the beginning section of the *Rhapsody*. The Gershwin music, he said, resonated across ideological lines and built bridges as only music can.

To the delight of the crowd, the evening wasn't over yet. Carefully setting his award on the grand piano, Joel sat down and with one chord he and his band launched into his 1977 hit "Movin' Out (Anthony's Song)" from the album *The Stranger*. Next he rolled out the ever-moving "Vienna" from the same album. Reaching back to *Turnstiles* (1976), he rocked the emotionally-charged "Miami 2017 (I've Seen the Lights Go Out on Broadway)," before plunging into a riveting version of "You May Be Right" from the album *Glass Houses* (1980) – reminding everyone in the hall that it's still rock and roll to Billy Joel.

Kevin Spacey, who hosted the star-studded evening, returned to the stage to tell Joel that the show wouldn't be complete without one final song. Taking out a harmonica, Spacey began to play the opening bars of the legendary "Piano Man" as the evening's artists and a cheering audience joined Joel in the well-known melody that defines popular song.

Billy Joel: The Library of Congress Gershwin Prize was broadcast on January 2, 2015 on PBS. 📺

Libbie Hodas grew up listening and singing to the music of the Gershwin brothers and Billy Joel, while living in Dousman, Wisconsin – her own version of Allentown. She currently works at Berkeley Repertory Theatre.



SHAWN MILLER

Members of Twyla Tharp Dance: A dynamic salute inspired by Tharp's Movin' Out, a jukebox musical set to Joel's songs

CARING FOR WHO CARES?

by Robert Kimball

Over the years no Gershwin ballet has been as acclaimed as or enjoyed the popular appeal of *Who Cares?* It was premiered in 1970 by the New York City Ballet and choreographed by George Balanchine (1904-1983), the company’s director and considered by many the preeminent choreographer of the 20th century. The score of the 45-minute ballet was based on 17 Gershwin songs orchestrated by Hershy Kay. In November 2013, the original male lead, longtime NYCB principal Jacques d’Amboise, was filmed coaching segments of *Who Cares?* for The George Balanchine Foundation’s Interpreters Archive, a video series created to document the insights of dancers who had worked closely with Balanchine on his major works. Four current NYCB principal dancers also participated in the taping: Robert Fairchild (starring in the new Gershwin musical, *An American in Paris*; see page 4), Tiler Peck, Sara Mearns, and Ana Sophia Scheller. Funding for the session was provided by the Ira and Leonore Gershwin Philanthropic Fund. When the editing is completed, the *Who Cares?* tape will be made available, as coaching tapes of more than 40 Balanchine ballets already have been, to libraries around the world.

In 1972, d’Amboise spoke to me about *Who Cares?* for the book *The Gershwins*:

One day at rehearsal Mr. Balanchine said, “Jacques, come here! I want to do a ballet to the songs of Gershwin.” That was exciting for me because when I was growing up in the Washington Heights section of New York City I was exposed to the great popular songs of Kern, Gershwin, and Berlin, and I’ve always liked them.

Sometimes when Mr. Balanchine suggests a ballet, it may take years before it is actually done. He has so many ideas, so many things he wants to do, that some things take longer to get started than others. But this time suddenly we were rehearsing and it went really fast.

Who Cares? is not really tap dancing and not jazz, although it suggests and hints at both. It is a classical ballet in two parts. The first part with the corps is like an extended musical-comedy opening. The second part begins with “The Man I Love,” and if the ballet contained nothing else but that one pas de deux, it would be wonderful.

“Liza” and “Clap Yo’ Hands” are fun because I can do different things with them every night. I try to do what I feel, and with my jazz dance training I can, in a classical ballet, do things within the framework of the ballet itself.



COSTAS

Fairchild, Scheller taping “Embraceable You”: ‘Music ... so natural for dancing’

The music is great fun and I hope we convey that feeling. It is especially gratifying to see young kids watching the ballet and hearing the Gershwin songs.

Mr. Balanchine also shared recollections of *Who Cares?* for *The Gershwins*:

One night I took out my copy of George Gershwin’s Song-Book that Alajalov, the artist, had given me. The book had his illustrations. I played the songs as they were set down in George’s own arrangements and I had the idea for the ballet Who Cares? Most of the songs are right from the book, and some are Gershwin’s arrangements. On “Clap Yo’ Hands” we use a recording of George himself playing.

The people like it wherever we go because they know the songs. Melodically, George was Russian. He was a fantastic pianist with a special, personal quality. Who Cares? is a classical ballet with American social dances, but the familiarity to the audience is through the words and the music. They know them and love them.

George’s music is so natural for dancing, so easy to work with. George is dead – how long? – 35 years. It’s hard to believe. I remember he spoke often to me about wanting to write for the ballet. So I like to think this is George’s ballet, this is the ballet we have done for him.

In fact, Balanchine had worked with Gershwin many years before in Hollywood.

In late 1936 the Gershwins were engaged to write the score for *The Goldwyn Follies*; George Balanchine was the choreographer. Balanchine and Ira Gershwin collaborated on a scenario for a ballet, called “Exposition,” for the film; George would write the music. The ballet was to take place at a fair in an unidentified city, with tap dancer Paul Draper among the many visitors – a Maharajah and his retinue, boy scouts, girls from a finishing school.

Continued on next page

RECALLING A GERSHWIN/BALANCHINE “COLLABORATION”

Infatuated by one of the girls (ballerina Vera Zorina, the film’s female lead), Draper follows her around the fair, futilely it turns out. As Ira and Balanchine’s rough draft of the scenario describes the end of the ballet, “Draper, seeing his cause is hopeless ... walks out as the gates are closing. ...The Exposition lights are being turned off as Draper hails a taxi.”

On a few occasions over the years Balanchine spoke to this writer about his ballet for *The Goldwyn Follies* and the ideas he had for it; he said he had even worked out a model for the set.

I went to California to make my first movie in America. Samuel Goldwyn was the boss and he arranged a conference at which I met George and Ira. My English was poor then, and Goldwyn spoke English with such an accent that we could not communicate very easily. So George Gershwin tried to be the translator, and he spoke to me like this: “Me Tarzan, you Jane.” It was such crazy English, who knew what he was saying? Finally, Ira said to his brother, “George, why don’t you speak a little real English?”

When I first saw George, he seemed all right. He was writing songs for The Goldwyn Follies and then we were going to do a ballet together.



D’Amboise and Kimball, November 2013

We met a few times and then I heard George was sick. I went to visit him and found him lying in bed in a dark room with all the shades drawn. He had a towel against his head and obviously was in great pain. He said to me, “It is difficult for me to work now, but I’ll be all right.” He knew I was trained in music, so he also said, “Do what you must. I know it will be good.” He had more confidence in me than Goldwyn did then. “When I’m all better, we’ll do our ballet just the way you want it.” A week later he was dead.

After George’s death, *The Goldwyn Follies* was released with dance numbers by Balanchine but not the “Exposition” ballet.

Some years after Balanchine’s death, Barbara Horgan, his longtime assistant, told me that among the scores Balanchine had bequeathed to Harvard was a marked-up one for *An American in Paris*, another Gershwin project that never came to fruition. *Who Cares?* was indeed the ballet Balanchine finally did for George. 🎭

Robert Kimball, artistic advisor to the Ira and Leonore Gershwin Trusts, is co-author with Alfred Simon of The Gershwins (Atheneum, 1973), and editor of The Complete Lyrics of Ira Gershwin (Knopf, 1993).

GERSHWIN CRITICAL EDITION UPDATE

Recent events focused a spotlight on the Gershwin Critical Edition project. In early August, the Music Division of the Library of Congress and the University of Michigan School of Music, Theater, and Dance hosted a three-day symposium in Washington, D.C., for prospective editors. Presentations on the resources of the LoC and its Gershwin Collection were made by Music Division staff, and retired LoC senior music specialist Wayne Shirley discussed his work on *Porgy and Bess*, the edition’s first release. University of Colorado professor Ryan Bañagale spoke about *Rhapsody in Blue* in its myriad incarnations, the subject of his newly-published book, *Arranging Gershwin* (Oxford University Press). Ira Gershwin archivist, Michael Owen, highlighted the lyricist’s contributions to the multi-volume project, which will include the entire George and Ira Gershwin Broadway oeuvre in addition to the composer’s orchestral and instrumental works. The final

day was devoted to the editors’ first opportunity to work with the Gershwin Collection.

On October 10, the University of Michigan dedicated the George Gershwin piano it received in 2013 from the composer’s nephew Marc George Gershwin with a concert in the university’s Hill Auditorium. “Perfect Partners: The Art of Collaboration” covered a wide range of Gershwin performances in diverse configurations, many featuring the newly-restored piano in its first public hearing. From large orchestra to small jazz combo, from dance-accompanied Broadway highlights to chamber music, the capacity audience heard classic songs (“They Can’t Take That Away from Me,” “Summertime”) and instrumentals such as the rarely-heard “Rialto Ripples” and the *Three Preludes for Piano*. The evening concluded with a rendition of the original 1924 Paul Whiteman Orchestra jazz band arrangement of *Rhapsody in Blue* by Ferde Grofé.

ENCORES! REVIVES *LADY, BE GOOD!*

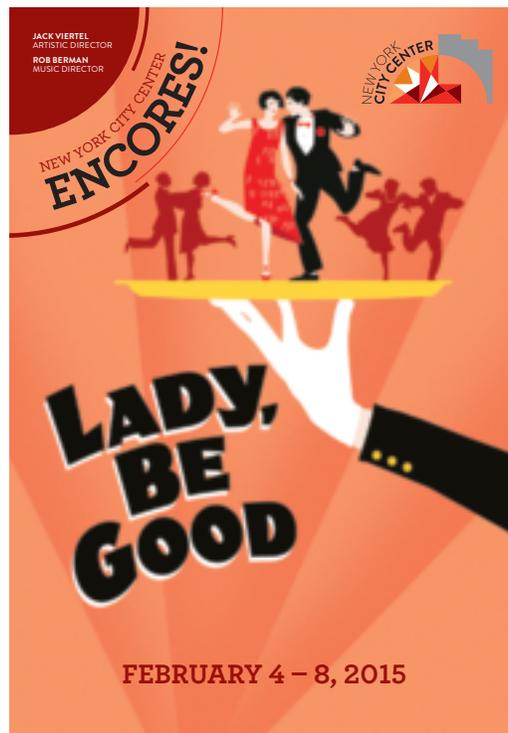
by Robert Kimball

The first producing venture of the newly formed team of Alex Aarons and Vinton Freedley, *Lady, Be Good!* (1924), was noteworthy for two reasons: outstanding performances by the brother-and-sister team of Fred and Adele Astaire, and a superb score by George and Ira Gershwin. The shopworn musical comedy formulas weathered the evening intact, but the quality of the songs, their originality and excellence, and their complexity and sophistication in rhythm, harmony and lyric writing, raised musical comedy writing to new heights and provided a standard of achievement for the musicals that would follow.

Lady, Be Good! which launched the 2015 Encores! season at City Center (February 4-8), was directed by Mark Brokaw and choreographed by Randy Skinner. Rob Fisher, who supervised the restoration of the orchestral score, was the guest music director. The story, about a penniless brother and sister who crash a garden party, find love, and encounter a variety of complications, is of course happily resolved in the end. The cast featured Colin Donnell, Danny Gardner, Jeff Hiller, Erin Mackey, Patti Murin, Richard Poe, Jennifer Laura Thompson, Kristen Wyatt, and special guest Tommy Tune.

Many regard “The Man I Love” as the greatest song written for *Lady, Be Good!* It’s also possibly the most famous song dropped from three shows. First sung by Adele Astaire during the Philadelphia tryout of *Lady, Be Good!* it was gone before the New York opening. While it became a hit in London after Lady Mountbatten brought a copy of the song back to England, it was dropped again from both the 1927 version of *Strike Up the Band* and the 1928 Marilyn Miller production, *Rosalie*. Within a year, though, thanks to Helen Morgan and others, it finally became a success on both sides of the Atlantic.

I remember an early summer afternoon in 1972 at Ira and Leonore’s house in Beverly Hills. Ira’s second floor bedroom was



almost as warm as the steam room of the Turkish baths where he had worked, read, and wrote as a young man. Over the intercom we heard Lee Gershwin saying, “It’s Oscar, dear,” referring to the curmudgeonly pianist-raconteur – and Gershwin neighbor – Oscar Levant. “He said you should turn on *The Mike Douglas Show*.” The television set was quickly tuned in and there was Benny Goodman performing “Oh, Lady, Be Good!” on his clarinet. Ira listened in rapt attention to the legendary band leader caressing the Jazz Age anthem. It had been a theme song for a generation and had even found its way into the literary offerings of such diverse writers as John

Galsworthy, who mentioned it in his 1926 play *Escape*, and Ezra Pound, who mocked it cleverly in his “Canto LXXIV.” When Goodman finished, Ira noted wistfully, “George and I wrote that song in 1924. I can’t believe that it is still being played today.” 🎷

Congratulations to

Amanda Lubin, recipient of the 2014 ASCAP Foundation Ira Gershwin Scholarship. Every year the ASCAP Foundation honors Ira Gershwin, who was educated in the New York City public school system, with the presentation of a scholarship in his name to a junior year orchestra member at LaGuardia High School of Music and Art & Performing Arts. A classically trained pianist, Amanda began piano lessons at age 4. From kindergarten through eighth grade she attended New York City’s Special Music School at Kaufman Center, a unique public elementary/junior high school where students receive both an academic education and music training. She was also a member of the Metropolitan Opera Children’s Chorus from 2004 to 2009.



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An American in Paris opening night curtain call, Théâtre du Châtelet, Paris, December 10, 2014 (see page 4)