

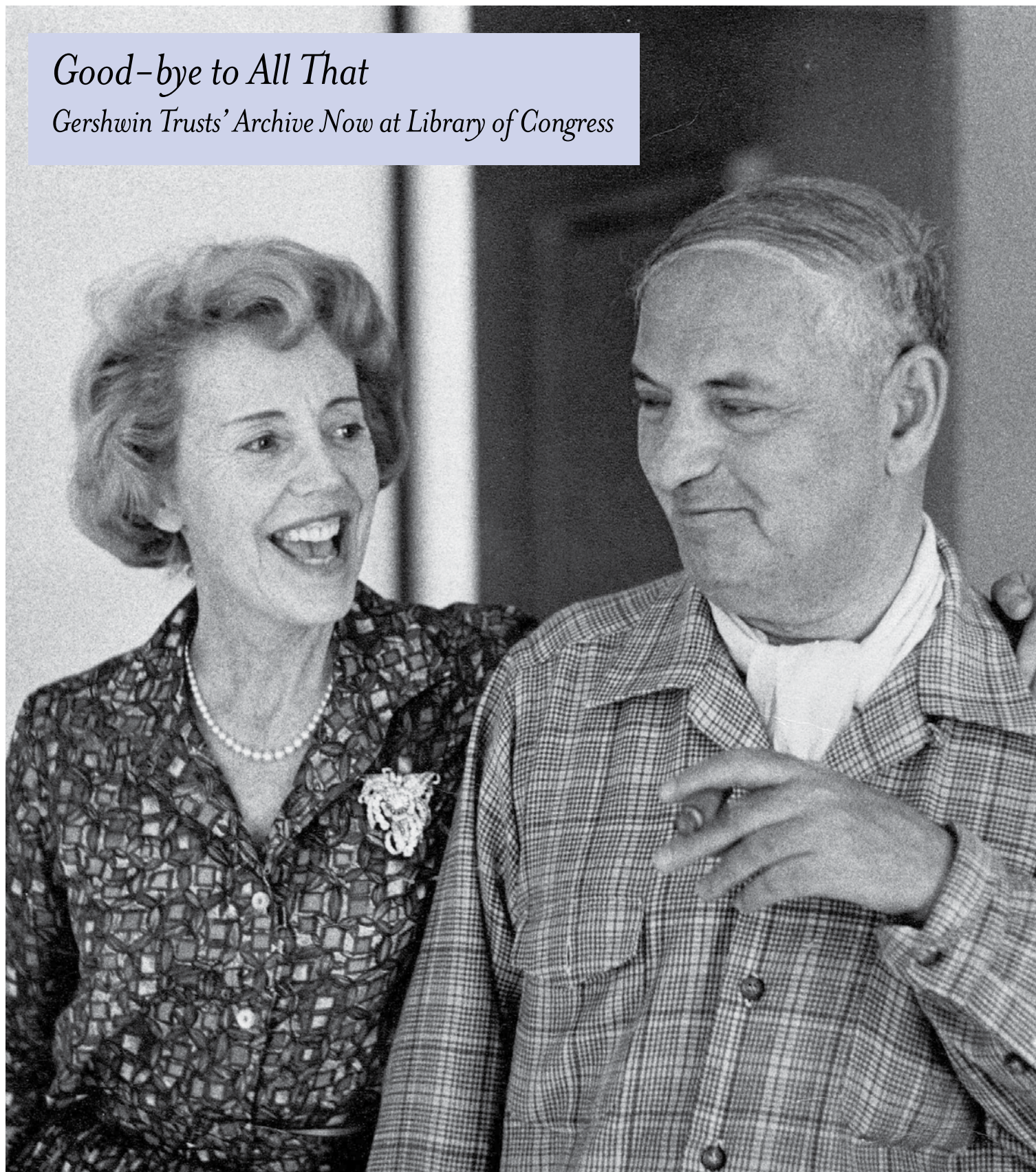
# WORDS WITHOUT MUSIC

*The Ira Gershwin Newsletter*



No. 6, Spring 2011

*Good-bye to All That  
Gershwin Trusts' Archive Now at Library of Congress*





# WORDS WITHOUT MUSIC

## The Ira Gershwin Newsletter

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Cover: Leonore & Ira Gershwin, Beverly Hills, 1959.  
Photograph by Sam Shaw.

Faithful readers of this newsletter,

For 20 years I have had the good fortune and the opportunity to "look after" the legacy of Ira Gershwin. I was not the first person to take on this task. I had a hard act to follow in the person of Leonore S. Gershwin, Ira's widow and my aunt, who, for eight years, preceded me as Trustee. She set the criteria for how to assure that the legend and the work of both the brothers Gershwin are remembered, celebrated, protected, and marketed. She established the relationship, which I follow today, with the Library of Congress, where most of the Gershwin archives and manuscripts reside. She was the one who made sure every letter, photo, recording, and document found its way to scrapbooks, file folders, and shelves. My job (with the aid of our archivists, the late Mark Goldberg and, since 2005, Michael Owen) was to provide a home office, finally in San Francisco, where people with definite interest could visit and find material for biographies, old and new shows, and eclectic general interest. And, don't forget, the responsibility to conduct the business of the estate. In San Francisco we have aggressively licensed Ira's songs and worked every day to enable and promote old and new Ira Gershwin projects.

Which brings me to this question: To what extent do we (and I am not unique in my responsibilities to the memory of towering figures in American music) also defend our charges when the quality of their work is challenged or denigrated? Words on paper can hurt. It is certainly easier to attack intellect and talent when you can't be answered by the creator himself since he has passed on. So, is the "keeper of the flame" responsible to find a venue for reply or does he even possess the intellectual firepower to properly challenge a shooter of sitting ducks? Probably not.

So you won't hear anything from me about Steve Sondheim's new book.

—Michael Strunsky

*We thank the following organizations and individuals for their permission to reprint excerpts of correspondence to Ira Gershwin on page 6:*

*Excerpt of letter dated March 31, 1926 from Lorenz Hart. Reprinted by permission of the Estate of Lorenz Hart; Courtesy Liza Minnelli [Vincente Minnelli]; By permission of The Capote Literary Trust [Truman Capote]; By permission of Curtis Brown Ltd. [Ogden Nash]; Excerpt of letter dated December 14, 1959 from Oscar Hammerstein II. Reprinted by permission of Hammerstein Properties LLC; Courtesy of Alan Jay Lerner Estate.*

## A “MODERN PERSPECTIVE”

In late 2010, the George and Ira Gershwin families and the DuBose and Dorothy Heyward estate authorized a new musical theater version of *Porgy and Bess* by the American Repertory Theatre (A.R.T.) in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The adaptation, staged by A.R.T. Artistic Director Diane Paulus, a 2009 Tony nominee for her direction of the Broadway revival of *Hair*, will launch the company's 2011-2012 season.

Pulitzer Prize-winning author Suzan-Lori Parks (*Topdog/Underdog*, 2002), who is reinventing DuBose Heyward's 1935 book, has said that “we're working to retain all the best-loved elements of the original while crafting a piece that speaks to contemporary audiences.” Musical Director Diedre Murray has described the forthcoming re-imagining of *Porgy and Bess* as a “modern perspective” on a masterpiece.

A workshop will take place in New York during April and May, followed by rehearsals in mid-July. Preview performances begin August 17, with press night scheduled for August 31. Opening night for A.R.T.'s *Porgy and Bess* will be September 8, 2011, nearly 76 years after the opera premiered at Boston's Colonial Theatre on September 30, 1935. The impressive cast will be led by multi Tony award-winner Audra McDonald as Bess. Norm Lewis, whose credits include Javert in the Broadway and current London revivals of *Les Misérables*, will portray Porgy; David Alan Grier, known for his comedic roles on film and television and for his appearance on Broadway in David Mamet's *Race*, will play Sportin' Life.



MICHAEL WILSON

A.R.T.'s *Bess*: Audra McDonald

In conjunction with the production, a panel discussion entitled “Reimagining *Porgy & Bess* in the 21st Century” was held on March 23, 2011 at Oberon, American Repertory Theatre's second stage in Cambridge. Co-sponsored by the W. E. B. Du Bois Institute for African and African American Research, the discussion was moderated by the Institute's Director, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Panelists included Suzan-Lori Parks; Diane Paulus; Marjorie Garber, William R. Kenan, Jr. Professor of English and Visual and Environmental Studies at Harvard University; and Ingrid Monson, Quincy Jones Professor of African American Music at Harvard University.

Among those in the audience were the Ira and Leonore Gershwin Trusts' Mike Strunsky and students from a Harvard undergraduate class on *Porgy and Bess* (see box).

Professor Gates opened the event with the provocative question, “Do we think *Porgy and Bess* is racist?” The conclusion of the panel was that although *Porgy and Bess* in its original form was a white man's view of African American society, it would not be considered racist today. Paulus and Parks expressed their belief that their reimagining of the story will be closer to the reality of African American life during the first decades of the 20th century.

### PORGY AND BESS GOES TO HARVARD

Harvard University undergraduates were offered a special course this semester on *Porgy and Bess* taught by A.R.T. Artistic Director Diane Paulus and Harvard English professor Marjorie Garber. English 198: *Porgy and Bess: Performance and Context*, billed as an “experimental course,” offered a “multi-disciplinary, multifaceted case study exploration” of the opera, “bringing students into the pre-production planning of the A.R.T.'s original musical adaptation of the work.” Among the guest lecturers for the course was Gershwin Trusts artistic adviser Robert Kimball, who said, “The students were terrific. They asked smart, incisive questions about the opera and its history.”



COURTESY OF AMERICAN REPERTORY THEATER

From left: Suzan-Lori Parks, Diane Paulus, and Diedre Murray



MICHAEL OWEN

*In December 2010, the estimable Gershwin archive maintained by the Ira and Leonore Gershwin Trusts ended its long run in California. Ensconced until 2000 in Beverly Hills and since then in San Francisco, the archive was transferred in February to the Library of Congress, where it has become part of the Library's own vast Gershwin collection. Housed in a beautifully renovated 1907 building on Natoma and Second Street in San Francisco's South of Market neighborhood, the archive was a treasury of Gershwiniana. Its file cabinets and shelves, spread over three floors, held correspondence to and from George and Ira, sheet music, manuscripts, photographs, scripts, programs, posters, audio and video recordings, and Ira's library from his Beverly Hills home; a selection of sheet music covers and show posters and other memorabilia adorned the walls. Archivist and Words Without Music managing editor Michael Owen, who oversaw the archive and made its material available to scholars, writers, and performers since 2005, shares the notes he kept about the relocation of the diverse and extensive holdings to their new home in Washington, DC.*

From July, when the closing of the archive was announced, until November, it was largely business as usual, but in the six weeks leading up to the physical closing of the doors on December 31, requests for access to the archive came fast and furious. After that, it was a matter of responding to the final inquiries regarding photocopies, duplications of audio recordings, and information related to the work and lives of George and Ira Gershwin — and preparing for the transfer, which entailed the completion and/or elaboration of the finding aid and other indexes I had been working on for the past five years.

**THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 3.** And so the process begins. Deloss Wood of Peeters Transportation in South San Francisco, the local company handling the move, spends two hours in the office estimating the size of the collection and identifying the types of items to be

packed and shipped. I call Chris Hartten, the Library of Congress Music Division Archivist, and he and Betty Auman, the Library's Donor Relations Officer, decide that the Music Division staff will examine the contents of the archive on Monday and Tuesday, February 14 and 15, and determine a plan for the packing and labeling. The movers will then start work on Wednesday morning and finish by Friday. The audio and video recordings — spanning the range from fragile 16" radio transcription discs to compact discs and 16 mm films to DVDs — will be delivered to the Library's Packard Campus of the National Audio-Visual Conservation Center in Culpeper, Virginia, to be permanently housed there, while everything else is destined for the Library's Madison Building in Washington, DC.

**FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 4.** Questions arise about the amount of material in the twelve drawers in the second-floor file cabinets, which contain lyric and music manuscripts, and a song-by-song and show-by-show collection of sheet music. I estimate it will take approximately 35 bankers boxes to pack it all.

**MONDAY, FEBRUARY 14.** I can hardly believe that the day has finally arrived when all these things that have become part of my daily life are about to start their journey. The Library's Music Division staff, who flew in from Washington yesterday, arrive at the office: Betty Auman, Senior Music Specialist Loras Schissel, Curator Ray White, and Chris Hartten. After some discussion, a decision is reached to package and ship the fragile audio material, consisting of approximately 700 commercial and non-commercial 78s and 16" transcription discs, via an art shipper rather than with the commercial carrier. Most of the day is spent answering the Library staff's questions about the arrangement and contents of the archive. But not all goes smoothly: in the late afternoon three of the Library staff get stuck in our elevator and the San Francisco Fire Department is called in to rescue them. Fortunately, they are fine and the elevator isn't put out of commission, which would have made the work of the packers more difficult; a firemen switches the main elevator power on and off a few times until one of the Library team can force open the door of the elevator cab.

**TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 15.** After yesterday afternoon's events, I look forward to a quieter day, but as I hang up my coat in my office, one of the overhead lights explodes just to my left and I am partially showered with glass and plastic fragments. I'm beginning to wonder if there is a ghost in the building. Staffers from Ship/Art International arrive at 9:15 to look at the fragile





L to R: Hartten, White, and Ira Gershwin trustee Mike Strunsky examine photos

audio discs. They think four workers should be able to pack the discs in one day once the special packing material from Culpeper arrives. Deloss Wood visits the office in the afternoon to discuss arrangements. Three movers will start at 8 a.m. Wednesday; Wood now believes the work can be finished by Thursday afternoon. The plan is to load boxes on the truck at the end of each day so they are not blocking access in the office. Continuing their examination of the archive, the Library staff come across a favorite item of mine: a 1926 letter from Lorenz Hart to Ira Gershwin praising him for his *Tip-Toes* lyrics. Loras Schissel says it's one of the best items the Music Division has received in years, and will likely be on display in the Library of Congress's Gershwin Room in the near future.

**WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 16.** It's Mark Trent Goldberg's birthday. The late Executive Director and Archivist of the Ira and Leonore Gershwin Trusts, and the man who gave me my start in the archival world in 2000 when he hired me to assist him with a number of special projects, would have been 55 years old today. I arrive at the office at 7:30 to be ready for the movers and to talk to the "ghost," but there's no sign of him or her. Loras and one of the movers begin work on the second floor, boxing and labeling the song files; by 10:00 they have finished. 32 boxes. The other two movers, along with Ray and Chris, begin work in the basement archive, which houses the vast majority of the collection, including more than 9,000 pieces of correspondence; 4,000 photographs; 750 programs; sheet music for 600 songs; 1,500 recordings in all musical styles and formats (LPs, cassette tapes, and compact discs); 250 videos, laser discs, and DVDs, as well as a number of one-of-a-kind 16 mm. films; myriad scores and parts (many of them created for the Roxbury Recordings restorations of the Gershwin musicals); 175 scripts; and a large amount of ephemera. By 2:00 packing in the basement has stopped for the day and more than 180 boxes are brought upstairs. Still left are the non-fragile audio materials, programs, scripts, and the miscellaneous items in the basement's far grotto. Sadly, the photograph collection — one

of the sections of the archive I have spent much time with — was included in today's packing. By 4:00, more than 200 boxes are on the truck to the South San Francisco warehouse.

**THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 17.** By 2:00, everything is packed — all the cabinets are empty save the fragile audio material to be packed and shipped by Ship/Art — and final loading of the truck begins. By 3:30 the movers have finished and the truck is gone. 375 boxes total for both days. We spend a little time straightening up the basement, close all the cabinets, turn off the lights, and lock the door.

**FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 18.** With the physical labor completed, we have discussions on how the collection will be processed and accessed in its new home, as well as how to transfer the contents of our digital photo database to the Library of Congress. This database, which includes historical information written by Lawrence Stewart — Ira's secretary for more than a decade — and me for the more than 4,500 images in the collection, should be an invaluable asset to future researchers.

**TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 22.** It feels strange as I make my usual trip down to the basement on the first work day after the removal of the archive. When I open the door, the first thing I see — as always — is the big photo of Ira and Lee, still keeping benevolent watch, but now over empty shelves and cabinets. The photo [which appears on the cover of this issue of *Words Without Music*] makes me feel better, but I am amazed — and saddened — at how quickly everything can disappear.

**THURSDAY, MARCH 10.** An email from Loras Schissel at the Library of Congress says the boxes arrived at the Madison Building and are being shelved for easy processing access. I'm relieved to hear that the collection has arrived safely at its new home.

**APRIL 2011.** The fragile audio recordings are on their way to Culpeper. 🐘



## “DEAR IRA...”

*Excerpts from letters (and one telegram) to Ira that were in the Gershwin archive and are now part of the Gershwin Collection in the Music Division of the Library of Congress. Several refer to Ira's book, Lyrics on Several Occasions.*

“Your lyrics [for *Tip-Toes*] gave me as much pleasure as Mr. George Gershwin's music.... I have heard none so good this many a day.... Such delicacies as your jingles prove that songs can be both popular and intelligent.”

— Lorenz Hart (31 March 1926)



“Your handsome book ... had one disturbing effect: it left me hoarse. For it was not enough merely to read those wonderfully made lyrics — I had to sing them, too.... As for the pages of prose in between, I was not only grateful for the vacation they gave my ‘voice,’ but for the wit, the charm, the precision of language.”

— Truman Capote (8 November 1959)

“[*Lyrics on Several Occasions*] is a book for all time and is a (sic) unique as the lad who wrote it.”

— Vincente Minnelli (2 October 1959)

“Thanks for the book. It's a charmer. Whether it will sell to any great extent is in the lap of the gods. (That lap is a very slippery one.) I certainly hope it does because I know how desperately you need the money.”

— Groucho Marx  
(7 December 1959)



“I must say you have given me trouble before; on several occasions when I was working with Vernon Duke, I don't know how many times I came up with nifty and appropriate off-beat rhymes only to be told brusksly (sic) that they had already been done by Ira.”

— Ogden Nash (5 November 1959)

“[Your book] is a way of telling the public something about which they know very little — the work and worry that goes into a song. I believe all these accounts are written very gracefully, intelligently, and entertainingly, and I am very glad such a book exists. Reading over the lyrics again reminded me of how good you are at this job and how much I envy you for some of the ‘nifties’ that you have pulled off in your time.”

— Oscar Hammerstein II (14 December 1959)



“To me you will always be the darling young man of May 27, 1917. You were adorable then, you were witty and erudite and gifted and you liked lox. To me you have changed hardly at all.”

— Emily Strunsky Paley,  
Ira's sister-in-law,  
(2 December 1971)

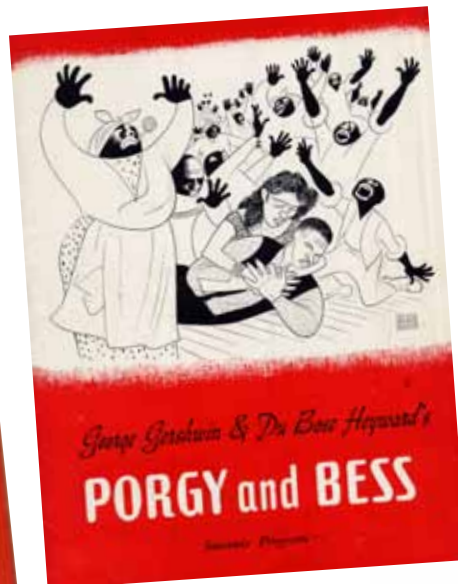
“I think of you so often, so much more often than you know. I can't tell you how many times your name pops into the conversation. In spite of all the Scrabble games I lost to you, you and Lee and Roxbury Drive and all the fun we had when the ‘group’ was still all together will always be one of my most precious memories.”

— Alan Jay Lerner (6 August 1975)

*Images (top to bottom): Vincente Minnelli and his wife, Georgette; Groucho Marx; Ira Gershwin and Emily Strunsky Paley. All photos taken at Ira's house, 1021 North Roxbury Drive, Beverly Hills.*



# FROM THE ARCHIVE



Ira's coffee set



## IRA AND LEONORE GERSHWIN TRUSTS

101 Natoma Street  
San Francisco, CA 94105-3703

### AROUND THE WORLD WITH PORGY AND BESS

*A calendar of upcoming productions*

**Shaw High School, East Cleveland, Ohio**  
2 performances: May 6-7, 2011

**Court Theatre, Chicago, Illinois**  
6 weeks of performances: May 12-June 19, 2011

**Ithaca College School of Music, Ithaca, New York**  
1 concert performance: May 13, 2011

**Nassau City Opera Company, Nassau, The Bahamas**  
4 performances: July 4, 6, 8 & 10, 2011

**Seattle Opera, Seattle, Washington**  
8 performances: July 30-August 20, 2011

*Thanks to Sargent Aborn at Tams-Witmark Music Library*

### BREAKING NEWS

PS Classics is preparing a 2011 CD release of the 1930 version of the Gershwins' musical satire *Strike Up the Band*. When Elektra Nonesuch released its 2-CD set of *Strike Up the Band* in 1991, the bulk of the songs were from the original 1927 production, which closed out of town before reaching Broadway; the 1930 revision of the show was recorded as well, but only a few songs made it onto the Elektra Nonesuch set. The PS Classics release is taken from the original master tapes, which were in the possession of the Ira Gershwin estate. Cast members for the recording include Brent Barrett, Don Chastain, Rebecca Luker, and Jason Graae. The orchestra was conducted by John Mauceri. Retail and online release, including iTunes and Amazon, is scheduled for June 21. The recording will be available on June 7, as an exclusive pre-release download, at [www.psclassics.com](http://www.psclassics.com).

