



CHANNEL CLASSICS

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GEORGE GERSHWIN

vocal ensemble

THE GENTS

Béni Csillag **conductor** Johannette Zomer **soprano** Haags Saxophone Quartet

The Gents — George Gershwin

After recordings of English Renaissance and German romantic music, and twentieth-century works from France, we venture across the ocean to the new world, with a CD that takes us to Broadway.

Jetse Bremer has specially arranged the last compositions by George Gershwin for this combination of soloist, choir and instruments. I am delighted that the flexibility and homogeneous sound of The Gents matches these songs so well. For all of us with a classical background this repertoire is a special challenge, raising the question where classical stops or changes into something else.

It is our pleasure to leave the answer to you.

Béni Csillag

Broadway musicals and jazz belong to the cultural heritage of America. But people thought differently in George Gershwin's day – the 1920s and 30s. Broadway shows were immensely popular, but were rarely considered as art. Jazz was a subculture secretly appreciated by many white Americans, but in the same way as they liked to see wild animals at the circus – at a safe distance. It had yet to be realised that amusement music was a unique and characteristic part of American culture. “American music is not jazz, and jazz is not music”, wrote the influential music critic Paul Rosenfeld in 1929. Precisely what, then, was American music? George Gershwin (1898-1937) was one of the first to show the world.

Rosenfeld's opinion reveals a narrow-minded, black and white mentality, and it was Gershwin who added the necessary nuances. His field of work was not only the rift between black and white music, but also between *high* and *low culture*. In the early

1920s he became well-known as a songwriter (his brother Ira often supplying the texts), though on a scale that remained within the confines of New York audiences. His national (and international) breakthrough came in 1924, when the bandleader Paul Whiteman asked him to compose a “concert-like” but jazzy piece. Whiteman wanted to strip jazz of its rancid and “slutty” image: his ambition, he said, was “to make a Lady out of jazz”. Thus the celebrated *Rhapsody in Blue* saw the light of day – according to Gershwin “a musical kaleidoscope of America, of our cultural diversity, our unsurpassed national energy and our big-city madness”. The original version for two pianos was orchestrated by Whiteman's regular arranger Ferde Grofé, since Gershwin had insufficient experience with large instrumentations. The combination of ‘composers’ music’ and jazz caught on, even though audiences were not directly at ease. Remarkably, the European premiere was a huge and immediate success. In

that part of the world audiences were mad about anything exotic, and particularly jazz.

From then on, Gershwin continued to arouse mixed reactions. After the *Rhapsody* came a piano concerto and a ballet, among other works. For many he was a welcome change, but some critics wrote that he 'soiled' concert music and should just remain a *songsmith*. And this he was throughout his life. "I am not ashamed of writing songs at any time as long as they are good songs" are the self-confident words of a composer rather than a songwriter.

In 1935, Gershwin reached the culmination of his career as a composer with the opera *Porgy and Bess*. It was his most ambitious work, in which he put the grandeur of opera into perspective and spotlighted in a remarkable manner the black folk culture of South Carolina. The work is based on the short novel *Porgy* by DuBose Heyward, a story with no moralising tone or viewpoint on exploitation, nor a kitsch-like simplification of the 'exotic' characteristics of a different culture. Heyward's pure fascination for and appreciation of an entirely different lifestyle corresponded precisely with Gershwin's musical broad-mindedness.

This was the opportunity for Gershwin to investigate and develop his intuitive bond with Afro-American culture. He avoided quoting existing, traditional melodies, preferring to write them himself. But he did stay for a summer on Folly Island, near Charleston, to get a taste of the atmosphere. He sought inspiration in spirituals, attended church services where he heard complex hymns of prayer, and undertook an in-depth study

of the language, pronunciation and intonation of the Gullah population. Heyward later recalled how the composer became absorbed by the atmosphere: "The Gullahs have a tradition known as *shouting* – complicated rhythmic clapping and stamping to accompany their spirituals, a genuine rudiment of their African roots. I shall never forget how one evening we were the guests of a group on a remote little island, and George began to 'shout' along with them. They went wild with joy when George finally outdid their champion 'shouter'. I believe he is the only white person in America who could do a thing like that."

When the opera went into production, it took some trouble to form a cast of classically trained black singers, some from conservatories and others from Harlem theatres. But they couldn't do the southern dialect which is so important in the songs, and had to learn it from Gershwin.

The composer called the final result a 'folk opera'. "False folklore and half-baked opera", wrote the critic and composer Virgil Thompson. But Gershwin made sure he had the last word. In the New York Times he wrote: "Opera must be entertaining. The *Porgy* story gave me the opportunity to write both light and serious music, to combine humour and tragedy. Humour is an important part of American life, and an American opera without humour is incomplete."

The publicity around *Porgy* did not only win the attention of theatre directors. Film bigwigs in Hollywood saw the growing importance

of Gershwin's *all-American* aura. An earlier collaboration in 1929 had little success because the Fox Film Corporation made extensive cuts in Gershwin's music. But the invitation to work on the film ***Shall we dance***, with the star duo Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers in the leading roles, was irresistible. Gershwin wrote a series of song and dance numbers, of which ***They can't take that away from me*** was nominated for an Academy Award – remarkably enough the only one he ever received. But once again there was irritation because of the audacity of the producers, who added bombastic choral arrangements to some numbers without consultation. For the film ***Damsel***

in distress Gershwin took the initiative himself, in the hope that he would have more say about the final musical result. In order to be one up on the Hollywood arrangers, he wrote two ironic and lushly harmonised 'madrigals' after early English models – which just happened to match perfectly the British setting of the film story.

Damsel in distress was the last topper in Gershwin's career. More would undoubtedly have followed, had he not been stricken by a brain tumour at the age of thirty-nine.

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Translation: Stephen Taylor



The Gents

The Gents

The Gents is a unique, all-male Dutch vocal ensemble, which, in a very short period, obtained a prominent position on the international music scene. This group of young singers is praised for its characteristic sound, its flexibility, and its unequalled interpretation of a very divergent vocal repertoire. The Gents have their roots in The Roden Boys' Choir, considered one of the Netherlands' top boys' choirs, and inherited its quality and professionalism. Conductor Peter Dijkstra founded the group in 1999. He was the artistic leader / conductor of the ensemble until 2007 and is now its first guest-conductor. As from August 2008, Béni Csillag is the conductor of the ensemble.

Regardless of the music they perform – be it religious music from the Renaissance, romantic English music, contemporary jazz arrangements, pop songs, or works that have been specifically composed for the ensemble – the concerts of The Gents are always an extraordinary experience. As a result, they can count on an enthusiastic audience and good reviews in the press. The Gents have also acquired an international reputation. They have performed in Japan, Canada, Germany, Sweden, Belgium, the United Kingdom, and Spain. In April 2005, The Gents made their first concert tour in Japan. At the invitation of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Japan, they performed at the World Expo in Aichi in front of an audience of 5000 people, including Dutch and Japanese royals. Its overwhelming success made the Gents decide to make a second Japan tour in 2006.

In November 2003, The Gents received the first award in the young talents competition issued by the

Kersjes Foundation, which, by giving them this award, expressed its faith in this enthusiastic ensemble and the role it fulfills within the Dutch music world.

Béni Csillag

Béni Csillag (1976) started his musical education with violin lessons at age six. After having played several instruments at an advanced level, he started his studies of choir and orchestra conducting at the Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music in Budapest, Hungary in 1995. Béni also studied Music Theory and School Music and graduated in choral conducting in 2001.

During his studies he led productions of the Academy's opera department by Monteverdi (*L'incoronazione di Poppea*) and Mozart (*Le Nozze di Figaro*). In the winter of 2001 he was assistant to Peter Oberfrank, working on Puccini's *Il Trittico* in the National Theater in Szeged, Hungary.

In 2003 Béni Csillag was selected for the Eric Ericson Masterclass in Haarlem, the Netherlands. Under supervision of Hartmut Haenchen and Uwe Gronostay. For a week Béni worked with the Netherlands Broadcasting Choir. In 2007 he was selected again, this time the teachers were Simon Halsey and Robert Sund.

In 2004, he assisted Tonu Kaljuste in Vigevano, Italy, with the World Chamber Choir, a branch of the World Youth Choir, in which he has functioned as a singer for years.

Béni Csillag has lived in the Hague since September 2005. He studied choir direction at the Royal Conservatory as a student of Jos van Veldhoven and Jos Vermunt. He got his masters



Béni Csillag

degree (Cum Laude) there in September 2008

He is the artistic leader of the Philips' Philharmonisch Koor in Eindhoven and the Leiderdorps Kamerkoor. Béni regularly leads the Leids Projectkoor and works as repetitor for Vocal Ensemble Musa in Utrecht.

Johannette Zomer

The Dutch soprano Johannette Zomer began her studies at the Sweelinck Conservatorium Amsterdam in 1990 with Charles van Tassel, after having worked as a microbiology analyst for several years. In June 1997 she was awarded her Performance Diploma. Since then she has received coaching by Diane Forlano (London), Claudia Visca (Wuppertal) and Marlena Malas (New York). Her



Johannette Zomer (photo Marco Borggreve)

repertoire ranges from medieval music through all music of the baroque and classical eras, including opera, but also Lieder, French Romanticism and Contemporary music.

Johannette's concert appearances are also many and various. She has worked with Baroque specialists such as Philippe Herreweghe, Ton Koopman, Frans Brüggen, Gustav Leonhardt, René Jacobs, Reinard Goebel, Ivor Bolton, Thomas Hengelbrock and Paul McCreech, but has also worked with conductors including Kent Nagano, Daniel Harding, Ivan Fisher, Marcus Creed, and Valery Gergiev. She regularly gives recitals accompanied by theorbo player Fred Jacobs or fortepiano specialist Arthur Schoonderwoerd.

Johannette made her opera debut as Tebaldo in

Verdi's Don Carlo with the Nationale Reisopera in October 1996. Since then she has made regular appearances in roles including Belinda, Pamina, La Musica, Euridice, Dalinda and Ilia, and also as Amanda in Ligeti's Le Grand Macabre and Mélisande in Debussy's Pelléas et Mélisande.

Regularly she contributes to CD-recording projects. A few of her recent releases – all very well received in both press and radio – are the Bach Cantatas disc with the English ensemble Florilegium for which she won an Edison Award, the CD With Endless Teares with theorbist Fred Jacobs, showing the development of English 17th Century Song –one of the top choices of 2009 on CD Review BBC-, and the cd Love & Madness, a disc with Händel aria's together with oboe player Bart Schneemann.

Haags Saxophone Quartet

The Haags Saxophone Quartet (formerly Python Saxophone Quartet) is an idiosyncratic ensemble with its own unique style. Since its creation in 1998 the ensemble specialized in contemporary chamber music. The ambitious musicians work closely together with young composers to get to the heart of the ensemble's sound spectrum. They also work together with other musicians, actors and dancers.

Michel Ponsioen

Michel Ponsioen studied percussion at the Academy of Music in Utrecht and The Hague and specialized in solo and ensemble performance. As freelance musician he plays in orchestras and ensembles in The Netherlands and abroad. As a teacher he leads various percussion groups.



*Michel Ponsioen
and The Haags
Saxophone
Quartet*

The Gents — George Gershwin

Na opnamen van Engelse muziek uit de Renaissance, Romantische muziek uit Duitsland en Franse muziek uit de twintigste eeuw, wagen we met deze CD de oversteek naar de nieuwe wereld en komen op Broadway terecht. Jetse Bremer bewerkte de laatste composities van George Gershwin speciaal voor deze combinatie van solist, koor en instrumenten. Ik ben erg blij dat de flexibiliteit en de homogene klank van The Gents zo goed bij deze liederen aansluit.

Voor ons allen die een klassieke achtergrond hebben, vormt dit repertoire een bijzondere uitdaging en laat ons stilstaan bij de vraag waar klassiek ophoudt of over gaat in iets anders.

Wij laten het antwoord graag aan u over.

Béni Csillag

Broadway-musicals en jazz behoren tot het cultureel erfgoed van Amerika. Maar in George Gershwins dagen – de jaren 1920 en '30 – dacht men daar anders over. Broadway-shows waren immens populair, maar werden niet als kunst gezien. Jazz was een subcultuur, stiekem gewaardeerd door heel wat blanke Amerikanen, maar op dezelfde manier waarop ze van wilde dieren in een circus genoten: een veilige afstand was geboden. Dat amusementsmuziek juist een uniek, karakteristiek onderdeel van de Amerikaanse cultuur was – dat moest nog ontdekt worden. 'Amerikaanse muziek is geen jazz, en jazz is geen muziek', schreef de gezaghebbende muziekcriticus Paul Rosenfeld in 1929. Wat was Amerikaanse muziek dan wél? George Gershwin (1898-1937) was een van de eersten om dat te demonstreren.

Rosenfelds uitspraak getuigt van een benepen zwart-wit-denken, en daaraan voegde Gershwin

de hoognodige schakeringen toe. Zijn werkterrein was niet alleen de kloof tussen blanke en zwarte muziek, maar ook tussen *high* en *low culture*. In de vroege jaren '20 maakte hij naam als liedjesschrijver (waarbij zijn broer Ira veelal de songteksten leverde), maar op een schaal die beperkt bleef tot het Newyorkse uitgaanspubliek. Zijn nationale (en internationale) doorbraak kwam in 1924, toen bandleider Paul Whiteman hem verzocht een 'concert-achtig', maar jazzy stuk te componeren. Whiteman wilde jazz van zijn ranzige, 'hoerige' imago ontdoen: zijn streven was, zoals hij zelf zei, 'to make a Lady out of jazz'. Zo ontstond de beroemde *Rhapsody in Blue* – volgens Gershwin 'een muzikale kaleidoscoop van Amerika, van onze culturele diversiteit, onze ongeëvenaarde nationale energie en onze grootstedse gekte'. De oerversie, voor 2 piano's, werd door Whitemans vaste arrangeur Ferde Grofé geïnstrumenteerd;

daarvoor had Gershwin te weinig ervaring met grotere bezettingen. De combinatie van 'componistenmuziek' en jazz sloeg aan, al werd er nog wat onwennig gereageerd. De Europese première was, opmerkelijk genoeg, direct een daverend succes. Dáár was men verzot op bijna elke vorm van exotiek, en op jazz in het bijzonder.

Vanaf dat moment zou Gershwin gemengde reacties blijven oproepen. Na de *Rhapsody* volgden onder meer een Pianoconcert en een ballet. Velen beschouwden hem als een frisse wind, terwijl sommige critici vonden dat hij de concertmuziek 'besmeurde' en gewoon een *songsman* moest blijven. Dat bleef hij zijn leven lang doen. 'Voor het schrijven van songs geneer ik me absoluut niet, zolang het maar goede songs zijn' – zelfbewuste woorden, niet van een liedjesschrijver maar van een componist.

Met de opera ***Porgy and Bess*** bereikte Gershwin in 1935 zijn hoogtepunt als componist. Het is zijn meest ambitieuze werk, waarin hij de grandeur van opera relativeerde en een opmerkelijk spotlicht zette op de zwarte volkscultuur van South Carolina. Het werk is gebaseerd op de korte roman *Porgy* van DuBose Heyward, een verhaal dat geen moraliserende toon aanslaat, geen stelling neemt over uitbuiting, en de 'exotische' karakteristieken van een andere cultuur niet versimpelt tot kitsch. Heywards pure fascinatie en waardering voor een totaal andere lifestyle sloten precies aan bij Gershwins muzikale ruimdenkendheid. Hier kreeg Gershwin de gelegenheid om zijn intuïtieve band met de Afro-Amerikaanse cultuur nader te onderzoeken en uit te werken. Hij wilde

geen bestaande traditionele melodieën citeren – die schreef hij dus zelf. Maar wel vestigde hij zich een zomer lang op Folly Island, in de buurt van Charleston, om de juiste sfeer te proeven. Hij liet zich inspireren door spirituals, woonde kerkdiensten bij waar hij complexe gebedsgezangen hoorde en verdiepte zich grondig in de taal, uitspraak en zinsmelodie van de Gullah-bevolking. Heyward herinnerde zich later hoezeer de componist in de atmosfeer opging:

'De Gullahs hebben een traditie die ze *shouting* noemen – een ingewikkeld ritmisch geklap en gestamp waarmee ze hun spirituals begeleiden, een echt rudiment van hun Afrikaanse wortels. Ik zal nooit vergeten hoe we een avond bij een groep van hen te gast waren, op een afgelegen eilandje, en George begon mee te "shouten". Ze konden hun plezier niet op toen George uiteindelijk hun kampioen-"shouter" de loef afstak. Volgens mij is hij de enige blanke in Amerika die zoiets had kunnen doen.'

Toen de opera in productie ging kon met enige moeite een cast van uitsluitend klassiek geschoolde, zwarte zangers worden samengesteld – deels gerekruteerd op conservatoria, deels uit Harlem-theaters. Maar ze bleken niet vertrouwd te zijn met de zuidelijke tongval die in de songs zo belangrijk is; die leerden ze van Gershwin.

Een 'volksopera', zo noemde de componist het uiteindelijke resultaat. 'Valse folklore en halfbakken opera', schreef criticus/componist Virgil Thompson. Maar Gershwin stond erop het laatste woord te hebben. In de New York Times zei hij: 'Opera moet

onderhoudend zijn. Het Porgy-verhaal gaf me de gelegenheid zowel lichte als serieuze muziek te schrijven, om humor en tragedie te combineren. Humor is een belangrijk onderdeel van het Amerikaanse leven, en een Amerikaanse opera zonder humor is onvolledig.'

De publiciteit rond *Porgy* prikkelde niet alleen theaterdirecteuren. Ook filmbonzen in Hollywood zagen het groeiende belang van Gershwins *all-American* uitstraling. Een eerdere samenwerking, in 1929, was geen succes geweest omdat de Fox Film Corporation royaal sneed in de door Gershwin geleverde muziek. De uitnodiging voor medewerking aan de film ***Shall we dance***, met het succeskoppel Fred Astaire en Ginger Rogers in de hoofdrollen, was evenwel onweerstaanbaar. Gershwin schreef een reeks zang- en dansnummers, waarvan *They can't take that away from me* genomineerd werd

voor een Academy Award – de enige die hij ooit in de wacht sleepte, vreemd genoeg. Toch was er wederom ergernis over de vrijpostigheid van de filmproducenten: aan sommige nummers werden zonder overleg met de componist bombastische koor-arrangementen toegevoegd. Voor de film ***Damsel in distress*** nam Gershwin zelf het initiatief, in de hoop meer controle te houden over het muzikale eindresultaat. Om de Hollywood-arrangeurs een slag voor te zijn schreef hij twee ironische, weelderig geharmoniseerde 'madrigalen' naar oud-Engels voorbeeld – die nog prachtig in de Britse setting van het filmverhaal pasten ook.

Damsel in distress was de laatste piek in Gershwins carrière. Ongetwijfeld waren er meer gevolgd, als een hersentumor hem niet op zijn negenendertigste had geveld.

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The Gents — George Gershwin

Nach Aufnahmen englischer Musik aus der Renaissance, romantischer Musik aus Deutschland und französischer Musik aus dem zwanzigsten Jahrhundert, wagen wir mit dieser CD den Sprung in die Neue Welt, und wir landen am Broadway.

Jetse Bremer bearbeitete die letzten Kompositionen von George Gershwin speziell für diese Kombination von Solist, Chor und Instrumente. Ich freue mich sehr, dass die Flexibilität und der homogene Klang von The Gents so gut zu diesen Liedern passt.

Für uns alle, die wir einen klassischen Hintergrund haben, stellt dieses Repertoire eine besondere Herausforderung dar und lässt uns über die Frage nachdenken, wo die Klassik endet oder in etwas anderes übergeht. Wir möchten Ihnen die Antwort überlassen.

Béni Csillag

Broadway-Musicals und Jazz gehören zum kulturellen Erbgut Amerikas. Aber zu George Gershwins Zeit – den 1920er und '30er Jahren – hatte man darüber eine andere Meinung. Broadway-Shows waren immens populär, galten aber nicht als Kunst. Jazz war eine Subkultur, heimlich geschätzt von sehr vielen weißen Amerikanern, aber in gleicher Weise, in der sie die wilden Tieren in einem Zirkus schätzten: eine sichere Distanz war geboten. Dass Unterhaltungsmusik gerade ein einzigartiger charakteristischer Bestandteil der amerikanischen Kultur war – das musste noch entdeckt werden. 'Amerikanische Musik ist kein Jazz, und Jazz ist keine Musik', schrieb der prominente Musikkritiker Paul Rosenfeld 1929. Was war amerikanische Musik aber sonst? George Gershwin (1898-1937) war einer der ersten, der das deutlich machen sollte.

Rosenfelds Urteil zeugt von einem beschränkten

Schwarz-Weiß-Denken, und dem fügte Gershwin noch die dringend erforderlichen Nuancen hinzu. Sein Arbeitsfeld war nicht nur die Lücke zwischen weißer und schwarzer Musik, sondern auch zwischen *High* und *Low Culture*. In den frühen '20er Jahren erwarb er sich einen Ruf als Songschreiber (wobei sein Bruder Ira oftmals die Songtexte lieferte), aber in einem Umfang, der sich auf das New Yorker Ausgangspublikum beschränkte. Sein nationaler (und internationaler) Durchbruch erfolgte 1924, als der Bandleader Paul Whiteman ihn bat, ein 'konzertartiges', aber jazzy Stück zu komponieren. Whiteman wollte den Jazz von seinem ranzigen, 'hurenhaften' Image befreien: er strebte danach, wie er selbst sagte, 'to make a Lady out of Jazz'. So entstand die berühmte *Rhapsody in Blue* – laut Gershwin 'ein musikalisches Kaleidoskop von Amerika, unserer kulturellen Vielfalt, unserer

unvergleichlichen nationalen Energie und unserer großstädtischen Verrücktheit. Die Erfassung, für 2 Klaviere, instrumentierte Whitemans ständiger Arrangeur Ferde Grofé; dazu hatte Gershwin zu wenig Erfahrung mit größeren Besetzungen. Die Kombination von 'Komponistenmusik' und Jazz gefiel, auch wenn noch etwas ungewohnt reagiert wurde. Die europäische Premiere war, bemerkenswerter Weise, sofort ein voller Erfolg. Hier war man geradezu süchtig nach fast jeder Form von Exotik und auf Jazz insbesondere.

Von diesem Augenblick an sollte Gershwin gemischte Reaktionen hervorrufen. Auf die *Rhapsody* folgten unter anderem ein Klavierkonzert und ein Ballett. Vielen galt er als ein frischer Wind, während manche Kritiker meinten, dass er die Konzertmusik 'beschmutzte' und einfach nur ein *Songsmith* bleiben sollte. Das machte er auch sein Leben lang. 'Wegen des Schreibens von Songs geniere ich mich absolut nicht, so lange es nur gute Songs sind' – selbstbewusste Worte, nicht die eines Songschreibers, sondern eines Komponisten.

Mit der Oper ***Porgy and Bess*** erreichte Gershwin 1935 seinen Höhepunkt als Komponist. Es ist sein ehrgeizigstes Werk, in dem er die Erhabenheit der Oper relativierte und ein bemerkenswertes Spotlight auf die schwarze Volkskultur von South Carolina richtete. Das Werk beruht auf der Novelle *Porgy* von DuBose Heyward, eine Geschichte, die keinen moralisierenden Ton schlägt, keine Stellung bezieht zur Ausbeutung und die 'exotischen' Merkmale einer anderen Kultur nicht zum Kitsch degradiert. Heywards reine Faszination und Wert-

schätzung eines völlig anderen Lifestyles passten genau zu Gershwins musikalischer Freizügigkeit.

Hier fand Gershwin die Gelegenheit, seine intuitive Bindung zur afroamerikanischen Kultur näher zu erforschen und auszuarbeiten. Er wollte keine vorhandenen traditionellen Melodien zitieren – die schrieb er also selbst. Aber er wohnte einen Sommer lang auf Folly Island in der Nähe von Charleston, um die richtige Atmosphäre in sich aufzusaugen. Er ließ sich inspirieren von Spirituals, nahm an Gottesdiensten teil, in denen er komplexe Gebetsgesänge hörte, und er vertiefte sich gründlich in die Sprache, die Aussprache und die Satzmelodie des Gullah-Volks. Heyward erinnerte sich später, wie sehr der Komponist in dieser Atmosphäre aufblühte:

'Die Gullahs haben eine Tradition, die sie *Shouting* nennen – ein kompliziertes rhythmisches Klatschen und Stampfen, mit dem sie ihre Spirituals begleiten, ein echtes Rudiment ihrer afrikanischen Wurzeln. Ich werde nie vergessen, wie wir an einem Abend bei einer Gruppe von ihnen zu Gast waren, auf einer abgelegenen kleinen Insel, und George begann mit zu "shouten". Sie waren außer sich vor Freude, als George schließlich ihren "Meister-shouter" übertraf. Nach meiner Meinung ist er der einzige weiße Amerikaner, der das fertig brachte.'

Als die Oper einstudiert wurde, konnte man nur mit ziemlicher Mühe ein *Ensemble* aus ausschließlich klassisch geschulten schwarzen Sängern zusammenstellen – zum Teil an Konservatorien, zum Teil aus Harlem-Theatern zusammengelesen. Aber sie waren nicht mit dem südlichen Zungenschlag vertraut, der für die Songs so wichtig ist; den lernten sie von Gershwin.

Eine 'Volksoper', so nannte der Komponist das Endergebnis: 'Falsche Folklore und stümperhafte Oper', schrieb Kritiker/Komponist Virgil Thompson. Aber Gershwin bestand darauf, das letzte Wort zu haben. In der New York Times sagte er: 'Oper muss unterhaltend sein. Die Porgy-Geschichte bot mir die Gelegenheit, sowohl leichte als auch ernste Musik zu schreiben, Humor und Tradition zu kombinieren. Humor ist ein wesentlicher Bestandteil des amerikanischen Lebens, und eine amerikanische Oper ohne Humor ist unvollkommen.'

Die Publizität um *Porgy* reizte nicht nur die Theaterdirektoren. Auch die Filmbonzen in Hollywood bemerkten das wachsende Interesse von Gershwins *All-American* -Ausstrahlung. Eine frühere Zusammenarbeit im Jahre 1929 hatte keinen Erfolg gebracht, weil die Fox Film Corporation die von Gershwin gelieferte Musik radikal zusammenschchnitt. Die Einladung zur Mitarbeit am Film *Shall we dance* mit dem Erfolgs-paar Fred Astaire und Ginger Rogers in den Hauptrollen war jedoch unwiderstehlich. Gershwin

schrrieb eine Reihe von Gesangs- und Tanznummern, von denen *They can't take that away from me* für einen Academy Award nominiert wurde – den einzigen, den er jemals errang, merkwürdig genug! Dennoch gab es wieder Ärger über die Dreistigkeit der Filmproduzenten: zu manchen Nummern wurden ohne Rücksprache mit dem Komponisten bombastische Chorarrangements hinzugefügt. Beim Film *Damsel in distress* übernahm Gershwin selbst die Initiative, weil er hoffte, das musikalische Endergebnis besser kontrollieren zu können. Um den Hollywoodarrangeuren einen Schritt voraus zu sein, schrieb er zwei ironische, üppig harmonisierte 'Madrigale' nach altenglischem Vorbild – die überdies auch noch großartig zur britischen Fassung der Filmgeschichte passten.

Damsel in distress war der letzte Höhepunkt in Gershwins Karriere. Zweifellos wären noch weitere gefolgt, wenn ein Gehirntumor ihn nicht im Alter von neununddreißig Jahren dahingerafft hätte.

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Übersetzung: Erwin Peters

The Gents — George Gershwin

Après avoir enregistré de la musique anglaise de la Renaissance, de la musique romantique allemande et de la musique française du XX^e siècle, nous nous aventurons avec ce CD dans un nouveau monde et arrivons sur Broadway.

Jetse Bremer arrangea les dernières compositions de George Gershwin spécialement pour cette combinaison de soliste, chœur et instruments. Je suis très heureux que la flexibilité et l'homogénéité de The Gents correspondent si bien à ces chansons.

Pour nous qui avons une formation classique, ce répertoire constitue un défi particulier et pose la question de savoir où s'arrête le classique et où il se transforme en quelque chose d'autre.

Nous vous laissons la liberté d'y répondre.

Béni Csillag

Les comédies musicales de Broadway et le jazz appartiennent au patrimoine culturel de l'Amérique. Mais à l'époque de George Gershwin – les années 1920 et 30 –, il en était autrement. Les spectacles de Broadway étaient très populaires, mais ils n'étaient pas considérés comme de l'art. Le jazz relevait d'une sous-culture, il était secrètement apprécié par de nombreux Américains blancs, mais de la même manière qu'ils aiment les animaux sauvages dans un cirque : toujours avec une distance de sécurité. Il fallut attendre avant que cette musique de divertissement n'acquière le statut de composante unique et caractéristique de la culture américaine. "La musique américaine n'est pas le jazz, et le jazz n'est pas de la musique", écrivit en 1929 l'influent critique musical Paul Rosenfeld. Quelle était la musique américaine dès lors? George Gershwin (1898-1937) fut parmi les premiers à le démontrer.

L'affirmation de Rosenfeld reflète un manichéisme étroit; Gershwin y apporta les nuances nécessaires. Son terrain d'investigation ne fut pas seulement l'écart entre la musique blanche et la musique noire, mais aussi entre *high* et *low culture*. Au début des années 20, il se fit un nom en tant que compositeur de chansons (son frère Ira en écrivait généralement les paroles), mais à une échelle encore limitée au public new-yorkais. Sa percée nationale (et internationale) survint en 1924 quand le chef d'orchestre Paul Whiteman lui commanda une pièce concertante, mais jazzy. Whiteman voulait débarrasser le jazz de son image sale, de son image de "putain" : son but était, comme il le dit lui-même, "de faire du jazz une dame". Ainsi naquit la célèbre **Rhapsody in Blue** – selon Gershwin, "un kaléidoscope musical de l'Amérique, de notre diversité culturelle, notre incomparable énergie

nationale et notre folie des grandes villes”. La version originale, pour deux pianos, fut orchestrée par Ferde Grofé, l’arrangeur attitré de Whiteman, car Gershwin avait trop peu d’expérience avec les plus grands ensembles. L’association du jazz et d’une musique de compositeur frappa les esprits et créa comme un sentiment de malaise. La première européenne fut, assez étonnamment, un succès retentissant. L’Europe était friande de presque toutes les formes d’exotisme, et de jazz en particulier.

Dès ce moment, Gershwin ne cessa de susciter des réactions variées. Après *Rhapsody* suivirent notamment un Concerto pour piano et un ballet. Beaucoup le virent comme une bouffée d’air frais, tandis que certains critiques estimèrent qu’il “souillait” la musique sérieuse et qu’il aurait dû rester juste un *songsman*. Toute sa vie, il continua à faire des chansons. “Je n’ai absolument pas honte d’écrire des chansons, tant que ce sont de bonnes chansons” – des mots pleins d’assurance prononcés non par un chansonnier, mais par un compositeur.

Avec l’opéra ***Porgy and Bess*** (1935), Gershwin atteignit son apogée en tant que compositeur. C’est son œuvre la plus ambitieuse, il y relativisa la grandeur de l’opéra et mit remarquablement en lumière la culture populaire noire de Caroline du Sud. L’œuvre est basée sur le bref roman *Porgy* de DuBose Heyward, un récit dénué de ton moralisateur, qui ne prend pas position sur la question de l’exploitation et qui ne tourne pas au kitsch les caractéristiques “exotiques” d’une autre culture. La fascination et le goût d’Heyward pour un mode de

vie totalement différent correspondaient parfaitement avec l’ouverture d’esprit de Gershwin. Gershwin eut là l’occasion d’explorer et de développer sa connexion intuitive avec la culture afro-américaine. Il ne voulut utiliser aucune mélodie traditionnelle existante – qu’il a tant écrit lui-même. Mais il choisit de passer un été à Folly Island, près de Charleston, afin d’y éprouver la juste atmosphère. Il se laissa inspirer par les *spirituals*, des services religieux locaux lors desquels il entendit les complexes chants de prière et il se plongea dans la langue, la prononciation et le phrasé du peuple Gullah. Heyward se souviendra plus tard à quel point le compositeur s’imprégna de cette atmosphère:

“Les Gullahs ont une tradition qu’ils nomment *shouting* – un rythme complexe faite de battements de mains et de pieds qui accompagne leurs *spirituals*, un véritable vestige de leurs racines africaines. Je n’oublierai jamais comment, un soir, alors que nous étions invités parmi eux sur une île lointaine, George commença à faire du *shouting*. Ils ne purent dissimuler leur plaisir quand George éclipsa finalement leur meilleur *shouter*. Je pense qu’il est le seul Blanc en Amérique qui eût pu faire une telle chose.”

Quand débuta la production de l’opéra, on rassembla non sans mal un casting de chanteurs noirs de formation classique – en partie recrutés dans les conservatoires, en partie dans les théâtres de Harlem. Mais ils n’étaient pas familiers avec l’accent du sud, si important dans les chansons; ils l’apprirent donc de Gershwin.

Un “opéra populaire”, tel est le nom que le

compositeur donna au résultat final. “Du faux folkore et un soi-disant opéra”, écrivit le critique et compositeur Virgil Thomson. Mais Gershwin eut le dernier mot. Dans le New York Times, il dit : “L’opéra devrait divertir. L’histoire de Porgy m’a donné l’occasion d’écrire de la musique à la fois légère et sérieuse, et d’ainsi combiner humour et tragédie. L’humour est un composant important de la vie américaine, un opéra américain sans humour est donc incomplet.”

La publicité entourant *Porgy* ne titilla pas que les directeurs de théâtre. Les patrons de cinéma à Hollywood décelèrent aussi l’intérêt grandissant du rayonnement *all-American* de Gershwin. Plus tôt, en 1929, leur collaboration ne fut pas un succès, car la Fox Film Corporation tailla généreusement dans la musique de Gershwin. L’invitation à participer au film *Shall we dance*, avec le couple en vogue Fred Astaire et Ginger Rogers dans les rôles principaux, était en revanche irrésistible. Gershwin écrivit une série de numéros de chant et de danse, parmi

lesquels *They can’t take that away from me* fut nommé pour un Academy Award – le seul qu’il ait jamais gagné, assez curieusement. Pourtant, Gershwin fut à nouveau agacé par l’impertinence des producteurs: ces derniers ajoutèrent à certaines chansons d’emphatiques arrangements de chœur, sans même consulter le compositeur. Pour le film *Damsel in distress*, Gershwin prit l’initiative lui-même, espérant ainsi garder plus de contrôle sur le résultat musical final. Afin de conserver une longueur d’avance sur les arrangeurs hollywoodiens, il composa avec beaucoup d’ironie deux madrigaux aux harmonies luxuriantes façon vieille Angleterre – qui accompagnaient encore joliment le cadre britannique du film.

Damsel in distress fut le dernier sommet dans la carrière de Gershwin. Sans nul doute y en aurait-il eu d’autres si une tumeur au cerveau ne l’avait pas emporté à l’âge de trente-neuf ans.

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Traduction: Christophe Levaux

Things Are Looking Up

Arrangement: Jetse Bremer

If I should suddenly start to sing
Or stand on my head or anything
Don't think that I've lost my senses
It's just that my happiness finally commences

The long long ages of dull despair
Are turning into thin air
And it seems that suddenly I've
Become the happiest girl alive

Things are looking up
I've been looking the landscape over
And it's covered with 4 leaf clover
Oh things are looking up
Since love looked up at me

Bitter was my cup
But no more will I be the mourner
For I've certainly turned the corner
Oh things are looking up
Since love looked up at me

See the sunbeams
Every one beams
Just because of you
Love's in session
And my depression
Is unmistakably through

Things are looking up

It's a great little world we live in
Oh I'm happy as a pup
Since love looked up at me
(bridge)

See the sunbeams
Every one beams
Just because of you
Love's in session
And my depression
Is unmistakably through

Things are looking up
It's a great little world we live in
Oh I'm happy as a pup
Since love looked up at me

I Can't Be Bothered Now

Arrangement: Jetse Bremer

[Bobby] Bad news go 'way!
 Call 'round some day
 In March or May -
 I can't be bothered now.
 My bonds and shares
 May fall downstairs -
 Who cares, who cares?
 I'm dancing and I can't be bothered now!
 I'm up among the stars;
 On earthly things I frown
 I'm throwing off the bars
 That held me down.

I'll pay the piper
When times are riper.
Just now I shan't -
Because you see I'm dancing and I can't -
be bothered now!
Music is the magic
That makes ev'rything sunshiny
Dancing makes my troubles all seem tiny
When I m dancing I don't care
If this old world stops turning,
Or if my bank is burning,
Or even if Rumania
Wants to figh Albania!
I'm not upset, And I refuse to fret.

[The Girls] He's not upset
[ring] And he'll refuse to fret.
[ring] Hello!

Bad news go 'way!
Call 'round some day
In March or May -
He can't be bothered now.
His bonds and shares
May fall downstairs -
Who cares, who cares?
He's dancing and he can't be bothered now!

[Bobby] I can't be bothered now!
[The Girls] He's dancing watch him shine,
You'll have to hold the line
He'll pay the piper
When times are riper.
Just now, he shan't -

[Bobby] Because you see I'm dancing...(ring)
Because you see I'm dancing...(ring)

Because you see I'm dancing...
[The Girls] Bad news, go away
Call 'round someday
In March or May -
Who cares about his shares
That fall downsta rs
Who cares, who cares
Who cares, who cares
He can't be bothered
Won't be bothered
Shan't be bothered
Can't be bothered now
Not now!
Not now!
He can't be bothered...
Now!
Goodbye!!

Stiff Upper Lip

Arrangement: Jetse Bremer

What made good queen Bess
Such a great success?
What made Wellington
Do what he did at Waterloo?

What makes every Englishman
A fighter through and through?
It isn't roast beef, or ale,
or home, or mother
It's just a little thing they
sing to one another

Stiff upper lip, stout fella
Carry on, old fluff
Chin up, keep muddling through

Stiff upper lip, stout fella
When the going's rough
Pip pip to old man trouble
And a toodly-oo too

Carry on through thick and thin
If you feel you're in the right
Does the fighting spirit win?
Quite, quite, quite, quite, quite

Stiff upper lip, stout fella
When you're in the stew
Sober or blotto, this is your motto
Keep muddling through

When a boulder starts to hiss
You must give him blow for blow
Make the blighter say, "What's this?
'ullo, 'ullo, 'ullo, 'ullo, 'ullo"

Stiff upper lip, stout fella
When you're in the stew
Sober or blotto, this is your motto
Keep muddling through

Keep muddling through
Keep muddling through
Keep muddling through

Sing of Spring

Arrangement: Jetse Bremer

Spring is here
Sing willy-wally-willo
Spring is here
Sing tilly-tal-tillo
Winter's past
Tralalilo!
The shepherd free at last
Sing piminy mo!
Juga, juga, jug!
Spring appaers:
The ploughboy starts to carol
We don our gay apparel
And falala!
We all rejoice!
Come lift up ev'ry voice
And sing of spring.

The Jolly Tar and the Milkmaid

Arrangement: Jetse Bremer

There was a jolly British tar
Who met a milkmaid bonny
He said, "How beautiful you are!"
With a hey and a nonny
With a hey and a nonny

"Such golden hair I ne'er did see
With lips to shame the cherry
Oh, buxom milkmaid marry me!"

With a down-a-derry
With a down-a-down-a-derry

“Our hearts could rhyme,” said she
“Tis flattered I’m,” said she
“But oh, ah me, you see, you see
You see, you see, I happen to be
I happen to be the mother of three
A wife already and mother of three
Of three, of three, of three, of three, of three
The mother of three!”

The jolly tar he laughed a laugh
“Tis for the best, my bonny
That you won’t be my better half”
With a hey and a nonny
With a hey and a nonny

“I near forgot on seeing you
That I’ve a wife in Kerry
In Spain and also Timbuktu”
With a down-a-derry
With a down-a-down-a-derry

“You’ve got me thinking twice
Goodbye to shoes and rice
For oh, ah me, just now you see
Just now you see I happen to be
I happen to be the husband of three
A-spliced already and husband of three
Of three, of three, of three, of three, of three
The husband of three!”

A Foggy Day (in London town)

Arrangement: Jetse Bremer

I was a stranger in the city
Out of town were the people I knew
I had that feeling of self-pity
What to do? What to do? What to do?
The outlook was decidedly blue
But as I walked through the foggy streets alone
It turned out to be the luckiest day I’ve known

A foggy day in London Town
Had me low and had me down
I viewed the morning with alarm
The British Museum had lost its charm
How long, I wondered, could this thing last?
But the age of miracles hadn’t passed,
For, suddenly, I saw you there
And through foggy London Town
The sun was shining everywhere.

Nice Work If You Can Get It

Arrangement: Jetse Bremer

The man who only live for making money
Lives a life that isn’t necessarily sunny;
Likewise the man who works for fame --
There’s no guarantee that time won’t erase his name
The fact is
The only work that really brings enjoyment
Is the kind that is for girl and boy meant.
Fall in love -- you won’t regret it.

That's the best work of all -- if you can get it.
Holding hands at midnight
'Neath a starry sky...

Oh that is nice work if you can get it.
And you can get it -- if you try.
Strolling with the one girl
Sighing sigh after sigh...
Oh nice work if you can get it.
And you can get it -- if you try.

Just imagine someone
Waiting at the cottage door.
Where two hearts become one...
Who could ask for anything more?

Loving one who loves you,
And then taking that vow...
Nice work if you can get it,
And if you get it --

Won't you tell me how?

And you can get it -- if you try.
And you can get it -- if you try.
And you can get it -- if you try.
And you can get it -- if you try

Holding hands at midnight
'Neath a starry sky...
Nice work if you can get it
And you can get it -- if you try.
Strolling with the one girl

Sighing sigh after sigh...
Nice work if you can get it
And you can get it -- if you try
Who could ask for anything more?

They Can't Take That Away from Me

Arrangement: Jetse Bremer / Pete Harden

The way you wear your hat
The way you sip your tea
The memory of all that
No, no they cant take that away from me

The way your smile just beams
The way you sing off key
The way you haunt my dreams
No, no they cant take that away from me
We may never, never meet again
On the bumpy road to love
Still Ill always, always keep the memory of
The way you hold your knife
The way we danced till three
The way you changed my life
No, no they cant take that away from me
No, they cant take that away from me

We may never, never meet again
On that bumpy road to love
Still Ill always, always keep the memory of
The way you hold your knife
The way we danced till three
The way you change my life

No, no they cant take that away from me
No, they cant take that away from me

Fascinating Rhythm

Arrangement: Jetse Bremer / Pete Harden

Got a little rhythm, a rhythm, a rhythm
That pit-a-pats through my brain;
So darn persistent,
The day isn't distant
When it'll drive me insane.
Comes in the morning
Without any warning,
And hangs around me all day.
I'll have to sneak up to it
Someday, and speak up to it.
I hope it listens when I say:

Refrain:

Fascinating Rhythm,
You've got me on the go!
Fascinating Rhythm,
I'm all a-quiver.

When a mess you're making!
The neighbours want to know
Why I'm always shaking
Just like a flivver.

Each morning I get up with the sun -
Start a-hopping,
Never stopping -

To find at night no work has been done.

I know that
Once it didn't matter -
But now you're doing wrong;
When you start to patter
I'm so unhappy.

Won't you take a day off?
Decide to run along
Somewhere far away off -
And make it snappy!

Oh, how I long to be the man I used to be!
Fascinating rhythm,
On won't you stop picking on me?

Summertime

Arrangement: Jetse Bremer

Summertime,
And the livin' is easy
Fish are jumpin'
And the cotton is high

Your daddy's rich
And your mamma's good lookin'
So hush little baby
Don't you cry

One of these mornings
You're going to rise up singing

Then you'll spread your wings
And you'll take to the sky

But till that morning
There's a'nothing can harm you
With daddy and mamma standing by

Summertime,
And the livin' is easy
Fish are jumpin'
And the cotton is high

Your daddy's rich
And your mamma's good lookin'
So hush little baby
Don't you cry

My Man's Gone Now

Arrangement: Erik-Jan de With

My man's gone now
Ain't no use a listenin'
For his tired footsteps
Climbin' up the stairs

Old man sorrow's
Come to keep me company
Whisperin' beside me
When I say my prayers
When I say my prayers

He come around
He come up, he come around
Ain't that I mind workin'
Workin' means travelers
Journeyin' together
To the promised land

But old man sorrow
Mountin' all the way with me
Tell' me that I'm old now
Since I lose my man
Since I lose my man

Since I lose my man

It Ain't Necessarily So

Arrangement: Erik-Jan de With

It ain't necessarily so
It ain't necessarily so
The t'ings dat yo' li'ble
To read in de Bible,
It ain't necessarily so.

Li'l David was small, but oh my !
Li'l David was small, but oh my !
He fought Big Goliath
Who lay down an' dieth !
Li'l David was small, but oh my !

Wadoo, zim bam boddle-oo,
Hoodle ah da wa da,

Scatty wah !
Oh yeah !...

Oh Jonah, he lived in de whale,
Oh Jonah, he lived in de whale,
Fo' he made his home in
Dat fish's abdomen.
Oh Jonah, he lived in de whale.

Li'l Moses was found in a stream.
Li'l Moses was found in a stream.
He floated on water
Till Ol' Pharaoh's daughter,
She fished him, she said, from dat stream.

Wadoo ...

Well, it ain't necessarily so
Well, it ain't necessarily so
Dey tells all you chillun
De debble's a villun,
But it ain't necessarily so !

To get into Hebben
Don' snap for a sebben !
Live clean ! Don' have no fault !
Oh, I takes dat gospel
Whenever it's pos'ble,
But wid a grain of salt.

Methus'lah lived nine hundred years,
Methus'lah lived nine hundred years,
But who calls dat livin'

When no gal will give in
To no man what's nine hundred years ?

I'm preachin' dis sermon to show,
It ain't nece-ain't nece
Ain't nece-ain't nece
Ain't necessarily ... so !

O Lawd, I'm on My Way

Arrangement: Jetse Bremer

Oh Lawd I'm on my way to heav'nly lan'
I'll ride that long long road.
If You are there to guide my han'

Oh Lawd I'm on my way to heav'nly lan'
Oh Lawd it's a long long way
but You'll be there to take my han'

The Gents

counter

Johan van Beijeren Bergen en Henegouwen
Rienk de Jong
Gerben van der Werf

tenor

Gerben Bos
Joost Heutink
Joost van der Linden
Luigi Orsini
Dennis van der Veen
Wybo Vons

baritone

Arnaud van Gelder
Elbert de Jong
Dirk Verloop
Eduard Walda

bass

Robert-Jan Agricola
Henk van Essen
Arnoldus Scharft

Béni Csillag

conductor

Johannette Zomer

soprano

Haags Saxophone Quartet:

Heiko Geerts *soprano saxophone*
Femke Steketee *alto saxophone*
Daan van Koppen *tenor saxophone*
Erik-Jan de With *bariton saxophone*

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Jared Sacks

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Johan van der Linden

Pete Harden

Erik-Jan de With

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Audio Lab, Holland

Amplifiers

van Medevoort, Holland

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Lyrics Ira Gershwin (1896-1983)

vocal ensemble

THE GENTS

From: *A Damsel in Distress* (1937)

- | | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|------|
| 1 | Things Are Looking Up | 3.32 |
| 2 | I Can't Be Bothered Now | 2.52 |
| 3 | Stiff Upper Lip | 2.35 |
| 4 | Sing of Spring | 3.00 |
| 5 | The Jolly Tar and the Milkmaid | 1.45 |
| 6 | Foggy Day (in London town) | 3.27 |
| 7 | Nice Work If You Can Get It | 2.40 |

Arrangement: Jetse Bremer

- | | | |
|---|--------------------------------|-------|
| 8 | Rhapsody in Blue (1924) | 11.28 |
|---|--------------------------------|-------|

Arranged for Saxophone Quartet by Johan van der Linden

From: *Shall we Dance* (1937)

- | | | |
|---|--|------|
| 9 | They Can't Take That Away from Me | 3.36 |
|---|--|------|

Arrangement: Jetse Bremer / Pete Harden

From: *Lady be Good* (1924)

- | | | |
|----|---------------------------|------|
| 10 | Fascinating Rhythm | 3.02 |
|----|---------------------------|------|

Arrangement: Jetse Bremer / Pete Harden

From: *Porgy and Bess* (1935)

- | | | |
|----|-------------------|------|
| 11 | Summertime | 4.42 |
|----|-------------------|------|

Arrangement: Jetse Bremer

- | | | |
|----|--------------------------|------|
| 12 | My Man's Gone Now | 3.49 |
|----|--------------------------|------|

Arrangement: Erik-Jan de With

- | | | |
|----|--------------------------------|------|
| 13 | It Ain't Necessarily So | 3.16 |
|----|--------------------------------|------|

Arrangement: Erik-Jan de With

- | | | |
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| 14 | O Lawd, I'm on My Way | 3.57 |
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Arrangement: Jetse Bremer

Total time 56.42

Béni Csillag **conductor** Johannette Zomer **soprano**

Haags Saxophone Quartet Heiko Geerts **soprano saxophone** Femke Steketee **alto saxophone**

Daan van Koppen **tenor saxophone** Erik-Jan de With **bariton saxophone**

Michel Ponsioen **percussion**