



Gershwin By Knight



Hyperion Knight
P I A N I S T

Gershwin By Knight

Hyperion Knight / pianist

SIDE 1

FANTASY ON PORGY AND BESS
(Gershwin/Wild)

(INTRODUCTION) (SUMMERTIME)

(OH, I CAN'T SIT DOWN) (MY MAN'S GONE NOW)

(I GOT PLENTY O' NUTTIN) (BUZZARD SONG)

(IT AIN'T NECESSARILY SO)

(BESS, YOU IS MY WOMAN; I LOVES YOU PORGY)

THERE'S A BOAT DAT'S LEAVIN' SOON FOR NEW YORK)

(OH LAWD, I'M ON MY WAY)

SIDE 2

RHAPSODY IN BLUE
(Gershwin)

EMBRACEABLE YOU
(Gershwin/Wild)

FASCINATING RHYTHM
(Gershwin/Wild)

THE MAN I LOVE
(Gershwin/Wild)

I GOT RHYTHM
(Gershwin/Wild)



GERSHWIN'S MUSIC

The music brought together on this album represents many of the most popular of George Gershwin's creations. Earl Wild's Virtuoso Etudes are transcriptions of some of the most beloved Gershwin songs of the early American theatre. These, along with Wild's "Fantasy on Porgy and Bess," and Gershwin's own arrangement of "Rhapsody In Blue," trace Gershwin's evolution from a commercially successful song writer to a composer of serious intent who was quite conscious of his posterity.

The songs "I Got Rhythm" and "Embraceable You" (from the 1930 show "Girl Crazy"), as well as "The Man I Love" and "Fascinating Rhythm" (written for "Lady Be Good" of 1924), were conceived for a musical theatre which had yet to achieve its current level of sophistication. There was no real relationship between the songs used and the narrative of the show (songs were, in fact, often used interchangeably). The American musical theatre as we know it today, a synthesis of music, dialogue and song (much like early German comic opera), was foreshadowed in *Showboat*, but really only came to maturity with the work of Rodgers and Hammerstein.

"Rhapsody In Blue" (1924) and the opera *Porgy and Bess* (1935), on the other hand, were written for a concert audience by a self-conscious Gershwin who wanted to legitimize American music. Often doubting his own abilities, Gershwin, at one point, felt compelled to approach Maurice Ravel for lessons in "serious" composition. Instead, Gershwin received the famous reply: "Why would you want to be a second-rate Ravel when you are already a first-rate Gershwin?" Gershwin's larger purpose in these works was to establish the credibility of jazz (and hence his own credibility), as music worthy of the concert hall and opera house.

"Rhapsody In Blue" was conceived with the idea of correcting a misconception on the part of the American audience. While the word "jazz" implies to modern listeners a widely varied brand of music, in Gershwin's day the name implied little more than syncopation. For the critics of jazz, this meant rhythmic monotony. It was Gershwin's desire to demonstrate that jazz rhythms could be more flexible, as varied as those of concert music; the result has been a staple of the concert hall ever since.

The creation of *Porgy and Bess* took several years of planning and two years of active composition (as opposed to the three weeks which produced "Rhapsody In Blue"). Gershwin was now concerned with a wider variety of aesthetic questions: How to make jazz seem a natural musical language for opera singers? How to use a libretto which required a predominantly Black cast? How to avoid the strong emotional associations of Black spirituals? Use only original music (although cast in the form of hymns or spirituals)? What to do with the dialogue of the White characters? Have it spoken while the Black dialogue continues in musical recitative? Gershwin's success with the difficult aesthetic questions was sufficient to eventually find his opera staged at La Scala.

With both "Rhapsody In Blue" and *Porgy and Bess* now firmly established in the mainstream repertoire, Gershwin's presence in the world of "Classical" music is now permanent. Still, the larger question remains — are these works "serious" compositions, or are they "popular" music in concert attire? While this question may be indicative of the confusion of the "post-modern" world, it seems doubly perplexing with the output of Gershwin. "Rhapsody In Blue" has, after all, been accepted into the "serious" concert repertoire because it is so "popular" with audiences. Is the song "Summertime" somehow a more "serious" work than the song "I Got Rhythm" because it was conceived as part of a full opera? Indeed, *Porgy and Bess* was criticized for being not a "true" opera, but rather a collection of songs (to which Gershwin replied: "so was *Carmen*").

Enter the piano transcriptions of Earl Wild. While "Rhapsody In Blue" may be a favorite at "pops" concerts, and you are just as likely to hear the music from *Porgy and Bess* at a night club as an opera house, the concert transcriptions that Wild wrote are intended for just that — a concert. By transforming the songs of Gershwin into "virtuoso etudes", Wild is consciously fusing the traditions of nineteenth century piano composition with the diverse approaches of the twentieth century. While the jazz roots of the songs remain apparent, the Etudes often draw upon "serious" music for their inspiration. "Embraceable You" is

evocative of Debussy. "The Man I Love" was originally conceived for left hand alone, in the manner of Brahms' transcription of the Bach Chaconne. In the style of the avant-garde, "Fascinating Rhythm" is poly-metric, and "I Got Rhythm" is poly-tonal.

The "Fantasy On Porgy and Bess" follows in the tradition of the Liszt concert paraphrases on popular operas of the time. Wild's work has much in common with that of Liszt, including enormous technical difficulties (to which this pianist will happily attest!). There is also a strong element of humor in both. In the Liszt paraphrases, this is primarily evident in the interplay of themes, and unexpected turns of phrasing or harmony. In the "Fantasy On Porgy and Bess" these are combined with a much more self-conscious eclecticism. This can be seen in the co-mingling of themes which are completely unrelated to the music (such as the delectable entrance of the Prelude from *Tristan Und Isolde* before the final song, "Oh Lawd, I'm On My Way"). It can also be seen in the mixing of space within a few measures, from a jazz style reminiscent of, among others, Art Tatum, to avant-garde tone clusters played by slamming the pianist's forearm down on the black keys while playing the melody note with the elbow. No wonder those jazz pianists loved flat keys!

Along with the many elements of humor and irony, there is also a seriousness of design. The songs are fully fleshed out, both in the Etudes and in the Fantasy, with all their verses intact. Far from being a medley, the "Fantasy On Porgy and Bess" is almost half an hour long! Also, as with the Liszt transcriptions, there is an effort made to represent the various contrapuntal lines, in the orchestra and voices. The superimposition of "I Loves You Porgy" on "Bess, You Is My Woman" reveals a deep probing of the internal structure of these melodies.

By placing these songs so clearly in the context of the concert hall, while at the same time retaining the jazz flavor true to the music's origins, Earl Wild has made an enormous contribution to Gershwin's own efforts to be recognized as a "serious" composer. Even in the increasingly sober atmosphere of the piano recital, Gershwin's songs will continue to be appreciated by future generations as one of the most inspired contributions of the twentieth century to concert life. Was there ever any doubt . . . ?

— Hyperion Knight

HYPERION KNIGHT

Hyperion Knight was born in Berkeley, California and began musical studies at the age of four. He made his performing debut at the age of fourteen with the Beethoven G Major concerto.

Hyperion's advanced musical training began at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, where he studied piano with Paul Hersh and Nathan Schwartz, graduating at the age of nineteen. Further studies took him to the Cleveland Institute of Music and lessons with Eunice Podis and Paul Schenly. He won the Arthur Loesser Award upon graduation, receiving a Master's and Doctor of Musical Arts degree at the age of twenty-two.

Hyperion has been a finalist in several major competitions, including the Dealey awards and Buffalo Philharmonic competitions. He was also the winner of the Stravinsky Prize at the 1986 International Stravinsky Awards. He is a frequent performer in recital and with orchestras throughout the United States.

An enthusiast for the great performers of the past, Hyperion has joined the critical staff of *The Absolute Sound* magazine, and writes a column devoted to historical recordings and the recognition of the great artists of this country.

Hyperion has recorded several solo albums, including works by Beethoven, Stravinsky, Ginastera, Moussorgsky, Chopin, and Gershwin.

TECHNICAL NOTES

This recording took place in December 1992 at Symphony Hall in Salt Lake City, Utah. The hall is noted for its clean acoustics, linear reverberation, and mid-range focus. As in most other Wilson Audio chamber and solo piano recordings, the perspective is close . . . as though the instruments are performing in your listening room.

The piano is a nine-foot Falcone — an instrument of unusual beauty in its harmonic richness as well as its left hand power.

A spaced pair of omni-directional Schoeps microphones were used. This configuration yields a superbly accurate presentation of harmonics, timbres, and dynamics.

The microphone preamps, designed and built by John Curl, are sophisticated, fully class A, direct-coupled units.

The master tape was recorded on the Ultramaster™, Wilson Audio's exclusive 30 ips analog recorder. This instrument, designed and built by John Curl, is fully direct-coupled, and exhibits a record/playback frequency bandwidth of over 45 KHz. 3M 996 mastering tape was used. Location monitoring was on Wilson WATT III/Puppy II precision loudspeakers powered by a Spectral DMA-80 amplifier. At Wilson Audio, master tapes, and refs were evaluated on both the WATT/Puppy and on the WAMM series VII, powered by a variety of amplifiers including Mark Levinson, Audio Research, Krell, Spectral, Jadis, Rowland and Audio Note. Excellent compatibility was realized with all of these designs.

This recording was made and mastered using the multi-patented CVT (Constant Velocity Transmission) technologies provided under license to Wilson Audio Specialties by MIT. The use of these technologies preserves details in the recording and mastering process that result in a record or CD with increased clarity and transparency. This ensures a more natural and lifelike representation of the original event. CVT and MIT are registered trademarks of Music Interface Technologies of Auburn, California.

Both analog and digital mastering were performed at Wilson Audio's mastering facilities in Provo, Utah.

The Wilson Audio Disk Mastering facility combines a superbly crafted and carefully modified German (Neumann) lathe and cutterhead with totally custom designed electronics. The signal path scrupulously adheres to the audiophile maxim that "less is more." Starting with a Studer A-80 mastering playbackdeck with Ultramaster TM electronics — and MIT CVT Proline Terminator Series cabling throughout, the Neuman SX-74 cutter head is driven by Audio Research V-140 hybrid triode vacuum tube amplifiers.

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TECHNICAL NOTES:

Description of equipment and processes used for Master Tape transfers in
Dave Wilson's Music Room:

BRUCE BROWN FLEW FROM SEATTLE TO PROVO TO WORK HAND-IN-HAND WITH DAVE AND DARYL WILSON. EACH MASTER TAPE WAS INSPECTED, CLEANED, AND TREATED WITH LAST #9 AND #10 PRESERVATIVES. ALL OF THE MASTER TAPES WERE BAKED TO REFORMULATE THE BINDING. THIS WAS DONE IN AN INCUBATOR AT 135 DEGREES AND THEN THEY WERE LEFT TO COOL BACK DOWN TO ROOM TEMPERATURE. ALL SPLICES WERE INSPECTED AND REPAIRED, IF NECESSARY.

EACH TRANSFER WAS EXECUTED ON THE ULTRAMASTER, A ONE-OF-A-KIND STUDER A80 DESIGNED AND BUILT BY JOHN CURL WITH CUSTOM ELECTRONICS.

EACH MASTER TAPE WAS STORED BY WILSON AUDIOPHILE "TAILS-OUT" IN WHICH PUGET SOUND STUDIOS DID A LIBRARY WIND TO THE TAKE-UP

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Description of the Equipment used in the Provo, Utah "Wilson Music Room" that Wilson Audiophile Recordings, LLC put to use for Sonic Evaluation:

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