

George Gershwin's

SONG BOOK

*18 of George Gershwin's most famous songs,
including his own special arrangements for the piano.*

EDITED AND REVISED BY HERMAN WASSERMAN



SWANEE

NOBODY BUT YOU

I'LL BUILD A STAIRWAY
TO PARADISE

DO IT AGAIN

FASCINATING RHYTHM

OH, LADY BE GOOD

SOMEBODY LOVES ME

SWEET AND LOW DOWN

THAT CERTAIN FEELING

THE MAN I LOVE

CLAP YO' HANDS

DO DO DO

MY ONE AND ONLY

'S WONDERFUL

STRIKE UP THE BAND

LIZA

I GOT RHYTHM

WHO CARES?

THIS volume contains eighteen George Gershwin songs which were his own favorites. In each case the words and music in their original form appear, and then the song is followed by special piano arrangements which Gershwin made for the purpose of playing for his friends.

This book was published originally in de luxe form in 1932. The edition was quickly sold out, but it was felt that during the depression the public would not wish to buy more copies of a high-priced volume of this sort. During the past years there has been an insistent demand that this book be reissued in a popular-price edition. It now appears in this form.

A special word about Mr. Gershwin's piano arrangements: ever since the original de luxe volume appeared these arrangements have become famous and many piano teachers have taught them to their pupils. Mr. Herman Wasserman, the renowned piano teacher of New York City (who was Mr. Gershwin's piano teacher), has for this special edition refingered the arrangements and eliminated a few typographical errors that appeared in the original edition. For these arrangements especially the book is recommended to piano teachers and students.



GEORGE GERSHWIN'S *Song-book*

Special Piano Arrangements Edited and Revised by
HERMAN WASSERMAN



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INTRODUCTION BY GEORGE GERSHWIN

AMERICA, in the last twenty years, has become a veritable hot-bed of popular music. During this same fruitful period it has mothered some of the best music to be found in the musical comedy of the time. The way had been prepared, of course, as long ago as the epoch before the Civil War, when the minstrel show was in its palmy days and we already had truly popular songs and popular composers, not to speak of the faint beginnings of jazz bands and Tin Pan Alley methods long before the pavement of Tin Pan Alley was laid.

American popular music, since its origin, has been steadily gaining in originality; today it may truly lay claim to being the most vital of contemporary popular music. Unfortunately, however, most songs die at an early age and are soon completely forgotten by the selfsame public that once sang them with such gusto. The reason for this is that they are sung and played too much when they are alive, and cannot stand the strain of their very popularity. This is especially true since the invention of the phonograph, and more so since the widespread conquest of the radio.

When the publishers asked me to gather a group of my songs for publication I took up the idea enthusiastically, because I thought that this might be a means of prolonging their life. It also occurred to me that the idea might be taken up by other composers of popular music.

Sheet music, as ordinarily printed for mass sales, is arranged with an eye to simplicity. The publishers cannot be blamed for getting out simplified versions of songs, since the majority of the purchasers of popular music are little girls with little hands, who have not progressed very far in their study of the piano.

At that, if you have the patience to compare the arrangements of our old-time popular music with those of our latter-day hits, the latter-day arrangements, simple as they are, will appear complicated by contrast.

Gradually, with the general increase of technical skill at the piano, there has arisen a demand for arrangements that shall consider that skill. Playing my songs as frequently as I do at private parties, I have naturally been led to compose numerous variations upon them, and to indulge the desire for complication and variety that every composer feels when he manipulates the same material over and over again. It was this habit of mine that led to the original suggestion to publish a group of songs not only in the simplified arrangements that the public knew, but also in the variations that I had devised.

Hence, in this book, the transcriptions for solo piano of each chorus, after its appearance in the regular sheet-music form. Some of these are very difficult; they have been put in for those good pianists, of whom there is a growing number, who enjoy popular music but who rebel at the too-simple arrangements issued by the publishers with the average pianist in view.

In a country that spends so much money on its dance music it was inevitable that there should be a radical development in the playing of its most important instrument—the piano. The evolution of our popular pianistic style really began with the introduction of ragtime, just before the Spanish-American War, and came to its culminating point in the jazz era that followed upon the Great War. A number of names come crowding into my memory: Mike Bernard, Les Copeland, Melville Ellis, Lucky

Roberts, Zez Confrey, Arden and Ohman, and others. Each of these was responsible for the popularization of a new technique, or a new wrinkle in playing. Some of my readers will recall various of these procedures, of which a number were really but stunts. There was the habit Les Copeland had of thumping his left hand onto a blurred group of notes, from which he would slide into a regular chord; it made a rather interesting pulse in the bass, a sort of happy-go-lucky *sforzando* effect. Then there was Bernard's habit of playing the melody in the left hand, while he wove a filigree of counterpoint with the right; for a time this was all the rage, as it sounded pretty well to ears that were not accustomed to the higher musical processes. Confrey's contribution has been of a more permanent nature, as some of his piano figures found their way into serious American composition.

To all of these predecessors I am indebted; some of the effects I use in my transcriptions derive from their style of playing the piano.

Now, the American piano player of popular songs has managed to keep pace with the progress of the song that he plays. As the American popular song has grown richer in harmony and rhythm, so has the player grown more subtle and incisive in his performance of it.

One chief hint as to the style best adapted to per-

formance of these pieces is in order. To play American popular music most effectively one must guard against the natural tendency to make too frequent use of the sustaining pedal. Our study of the great romantic composers has trained us in the method of the *legato*, whereas our popular music asks for *staccato* effects, for almost a stencilled style. The rhythms of American popular music are more or less brittle; they should be made to snap, and at times to cackle. The more sharply the music is played, the more effective it sounds.

Most pianists with a classical training fail lamentably in the playing of our ragtime or jazz because they use the pedaling of Chopin when interpreting the blues of Handy. The romantic touch is very good in a sentimental ballad, but in a tune of strict rhythm it is somewhat out of place.

I wish to thank B. G. De Sylva, Irving Caesar, Ballard MacDonald, Gus Kahn, and my brother, Ira Gershwin (Arthur Francis), for their permission to use their lyrics in this volume.

I also wish to thank Dr. Albert Sirmai for his assistance in helping me with the proofs and the preparation of this material in book form; and also Mr. Constantin Alajalov, whose splendid drawings have so well caught the spirit of the songs.

GEORGE GERSHWIN