

***An American in Paris*, by George Gershwin**

George Gershwin started his musical career at age 15, working as a song plugger for a music publishing company in Tin Pan Alley. He spent hours at a keyboard playing, singing songs, and trying to entice customers to buy sheet music. The experience helped Gershwin to early success as a songwriter: Before turning 21, he already had published-songs and a Broadway show to his credit.

Despite his commercial success, Gershwin sought lessons and guidance from a variety of classical composers, including Maurice Ravel, Arnold Schoenberg, Igor Stravinsky, and the French teacher and pedagogue Nadia Boulanger. All turned him down, suggesting by turns that his musical style was distinct, his craftsmanship secure, and his reputation as a composer already eclipsing their own. Schoenberg and Gershwin maintained a lively friendship and played tennis weekly at Gershwin's home in Beverly Hills.

Gershwin first achieved notoriety as a concert-hall composer with his 1924 *Rhapsody in Blue*, which surprised its critics with its fusion of symphonic music and jazz. In 1928 he sketched his symphonic poem, *An American in Paris*, while visiting the French capital. The work's buoyant rhythms and brassy orchestration capture the bustle of city life in a manner more reminiscent of New York City than Paris. If it also evokes the promise and optimism of urban American culture in the 1920s, and it does so with glitter and noise, blissfully unaware of the economic catastrophe that awaited in 1929. In 2008, *An American in Paris* became a cultural ambassador when Lorin Maazel programmed the work for the New York Philharmonic's concert in Pyongyang, North Korea.

– Jessie Fillerup