

FACULTY RESEARCH EDITION

14A
F5

SAVANNAH STATE COLLEGE LIBRARY
STATE COLLEGE BRANCH
SAVANNAH, GEORGIA

Volume 9, No. 2

October, 1955

Published by
SAVANNAH STATE COLLEGE
State College Branch
SAVANNAH, GEORGIA

FACULTY RESEARCH EDITION

published by

THE SAVANNAH STATE COLLEGE

Volume 9, No. 2

Savannah, Georgia

October, 1955

William K. Payne, President

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

Joan L. Gordon

Calvin L. Kiah

Madeline G. Harrison

Elson K. Williams

R. Grann Lloyd, Chairman

Articles are presented on the authority of their writers, and neither the Editorial Committee nor Savannah State College assumes responsibility for the views expressed by contributors.

Contributors

Blanton E. Black, Assistant Professor of Social Sciences

Sylvia E. Bowen, Assistant Professor of Mathematics

William H. M. Bowens, Director of Audio-Visual Center

Madeline G. Harrison, Assistant Librarian

Althea M. Williams, Assistant Librarian

Luella Hawkins, Librarian

William J. Holloway, Associate Professor of Social Sciences

L. Allen Pyke, Assistant Professor of Music

Maurice S. Stokes, Associate Professor of Education

Elson K. Williams, Professor of Social Sciences

The Savannah State College Bulletin is published in October, December, February, March, April, and May by Savannah State College. Entered as second-class matter, December 16, 1947, at the Post Office at Savannah, Georgia, under the Act of August 24, 1912.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| The Gang Phenomenon and Juvenile Delinquency Among Adolescent Boys, <i>By William Jimmerson Holloway</i> | 5 |
| The Status of Audio-Visual Education Programs In Accredited Negro High Schools in Georgia, <i>By William H. M. Bowens</i> | 17 |
| A Study of the Community Services of the Libraries in the State-Supported Negro Colleges and Universities Approved by the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, <i>By M. G. Harrison, L. Hawkins, and A. M. Williams</i> | 37 |
| Concepts of Chinese Culture (From Selected Works of Pearl Buck), <i>By Blanton E. Black</i> | 52 |
| The Relationship Between Mathematics and Communicative Skills As Shown by Classes in Functional Mathematics at Savannah State College During 1954-55, <i>By Sylvia E. Bowen</i> | 61 |
| The Soviet Foreign Policy and the German Soviet Non-Aggression Pact, <i>By Elson K. Williams</i> | 72 |
| George Gershwin: A study of his Style, <i>By L. Allen Pyke</i> | 82 |
| Some Reflections on the Contributions of the Negro to Education, <i>By Maurice S. Stokes</i> | 88 |

GEORGE GERSHWIN:

A Study of His Style

By L. Allen Pyke

This study is designed to evaluate the jazz idiom in George Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue" in so far as the form, tonalities and scales, harmonic sonorities, contrapuntal devices and metrical and rhythmic devices are concerned, and to compare the results with the normal usage of the fore-mentioned devices.

The reasons for this study are two-fold: the first, to appease the personal curiosity of the author, and the second, to satisfy a need for a study of the jazz idiom in the larger forms of composition.

There has been a controversy among people of discernment as to the suitability of the jazz idiom for the larger forms of composition. This controversy has centered itself around Gershwin's music since he was the first composer to attempt to use the jazz idiom in serious music.

One school of thought maintained that the jazz idiom was not a suitable idiom for the larger forms. They firmly believed that the American composer should not attempt to express himself through a national idiom; that is, they felt that a national idiom characteristic of American music had either nothing new to offer the realm of serious music, or did not lend itself to manipulation in larger forms.

Another school of thought maintained that jazz was a suitable idiom for serious music and the adherents of this school of thought felt that Gershwin had created a link between the jazz camp and the intellectuals.

Walter Damrosch says, "Gershwin's 'Rhapsody in Blue' showed such originality of melodic invention and harmonic progressions that I strongly felt that he had in him the possibility of development on more serious lines."¹

As a result of this controversy several questions must be answered. Specifically these questions are: To what extent was Gershwin's style of writing different from the classicists in structure, content, and style? How does he employ the techniques of the jazz idiom in the larger forms of composition? What is new and unusual in his music? What did he borrow from his predecessors? By answering these questions, a definite conclusion can be reached as to the suitability of the jazz idiom for the more serious forms

¹Charles Buchanan, "The Natural Music Fallacy," *Arts And Decorations*. February, 1924.

and furnish a basis for refuting the opinion that jazz is not a suitable idiom for serious music.

The scope of this problem is limited to George Gershwin's style in a serious form in comparison to the normal classical idioms used in larger orchestral forms. The basis for the comparison will be George Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue." By making this comparison a clear-cut picture of differentiation will be obtained.

Insofar as the form is concerned, Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue" is in the category of a binary design due to the fact that there is a definite line of demarkation between the first and second sections.

The first section is composed of themes which are lively and vibrant while the second section is predominantly made up of a warm romantic type theme. The scoring of the second section is characteristic of Tschaiakowsky's technique of scoring, that is, using the low strings and woodwinds in slow romantic passages.

The difference between the two sections is also clearly marked by the difference in mood and tempo. Also, at the end of the first section there is a decided halt before the second section begins. These two factors place the composition on a while in a two-part design, notwithstanding the fact that there is a transference of themes from one section to another.

However, the main concern is with the forms used within the sections. Jazz itself is not a musical form; it is a style of treatment. It is a style in which forms are developed. In Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue" we find that the variation form is used by the classicists. Even though there is some resemblance between the two schools, Gershwin's usage resembles a form of repetitions.

Another characteristic of Gershwin's style of writing in so far as the form is concerned is that his phrases are short and they tend to end abruptly. They do not join one another as the phrases of the classical idioms of eighteenth-century writing.

The elasticity of Gershwin's form was primarily due to the fact that when he composed the "Rhapsody in Blue" he was not conscious of all of the aspects of a formal design. Just as the English composer wrote unconscious of form, so did Gershwin. He did not bind himself down to traditionalism simply because he did not know how. Olin Downes sum the whole idea up. He says, "Gershwin displayed the immense virtues of his defects as a craftsman, his lack of musical background, his youthful ignorance of symphonic usage and tradition and the environment which fortunately was not that of a standardized institution of

musical learning.”² Gershwin composed the music as he heard it and not as as any stereotyped design directed him.

Gershwin thinks and composes in fragments. His larger works are, therefore, hardly more than patches of gorgeous music. The preceding statement sums up the difference in conception of Gershwin and the classicists. One thinks or rather he conceived a composition as a whole, the classicist, while the other conceived a composition in sections. “Contrasted with composed and more formal music, jazz treats form as something fluid and living, with an undeterminate length and content.”³

The scalar structure of jazz, especially in so far as it is a product of the harmonic system, shows much European influence. Gershwin utilizes the techniques of the harmonic scalar structure of the jazz idiom much more than the scalar structure of the classicists. Panassie says that the “Rhapsody in Blue” is not jazz and does not use jazz melodies. Accordingly his conception of this composition is that, “it is music which dimly resembles jazz only because of the instrumentation used and still more dimly by reason of certain bastard tunes distantly related to hot music.”⁴

In the opposite camp, H. H. Haggin, “the first American work to make an impression in the serious form using the jazz idiom was Gershwin’s ‘Rhapsody in Blue’ because of the excellence of the jazz melodies of which it is composed.”⁵

Here we have two conflicting ideas on the same subject. Haggin voices the opinion of the modern commercial jazz musician of the east. The layman today is more familiar with the refined jazz of the modern dance band which partly accounts for the tremendous ovation the “Rhapsody in Blue” receives whenever it is played.⁶

On the whole Gershwin’s materials are same as those of the classicists. The main difference between the two methods used is the technique of the usage of the materials at hand.

One characteristic of jazz which here-to-fore had not been common in musical forms is that of ending phrases with a seventh or ninth chord. The true significance of

²Merle Armitage, *George Gershwin* (Longmans, Green and Co., London, 1938), p. 221.

³Frederic Ramsey, Charles Rogers, Charles P. Smith and Russel William, *The Jazz Record Book* (New York: Smith and Durrell. 1944.) p. 31.

⁴It might be remembered that the analysis of jazz made by Panassie is based on Chicago and Kansas City styles and his definitions are in terms of these styles which to him characterize true jazz.

⁵Haggin, B. H., “Gershwin and our Music” *Nation*, vol. 135.

⁶Armitage, *Merle, op., cit.*

this is that we are losing, in part at least, our sense of the classical modes; our majors and minors become ambiguous; our tonic and octaves lose their predominance as notes on which to begin and end tunes. Dissonance, which has crept into the body of our music, now usurps the one place that seemed forever secure against it.

The element of dissonance in music is not a new aspect in music. William Byrd of the English Madrigal school was an innovator as far as dissonances are concerned. Other composers of later periods used the same sonority as found in Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue," Bach's "Toccatina in A minor," Chopin's "Etude No. 2," and Brahms's "Clarinet Quintet," second movement, to mention a few. The sonority in question was the simultaneous employment of the major and minor third. The harmonic sonorities of Gershwin and Cesar Franck are distinctly similar, but they differ in their usage.

It is plain to see that Gershwin did not develop the sonorities that he used in the "Rhapsody in Blue." "Jazz, on an everlasting lookout for novelties, has not hesitated to appropriate the chords and even the progressions of the latest modernists."⁷ Gershwin did not adhere to the classical rules for harmonic progressions, although, as fore-stated, the basic difference is only in the usage.

It has been said that the beauty of the orchestral sonorities and colors was due to Ferde Grofe's proficiency as an arranger.⁸ It is true that when the "Rhapsody in Blue" was orchestrated for the first time it was done by Ferde Grofe due to the fact that Gershwin was not capable of orchestrating the composition himself.

Albert Heink Sendry says, "Gershwin did not realize that the basis for all good music is counterpoint."⁹ A controversy arises at this point as to the validity of the preceding statement. In the time of Palestrina the preceding statement would be true, since the basis of the polyphonic music of the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is concerned, the statement is not true. The basis of the style during these periods up to the present day is the harmonic system. However, the usage of the contrapuntal devices is prevalent in much music.

Gershwin takes advantage of the classical techniques involving contrapuntal devices even though he does not adhere to the strict contrapuntal rules and methods of the classicists. His contrapuntal sonorities are not the result of the contrapuntal lines. They are more or less incidental

⁷Isaac Goldberg. *Tin Pan Alley* (New York: John Day and Company, 1930.) p., 265.

⁸*Loc. cit.*

⁹Merle Armitage. *op. cit.*, p. 105.

in the voice movement connecting the vertical sonorities. Gershwin did not have any formal training in the mechanics of counterpoint; therefore, any sonority resulting from his contrapuntal lines was accidental.

Gershwin does not write conventional counterpoint. He does use contrapuntal devices to create interest and variety in his music. In this respect the jazz musicians and the classicists concur with one another. Rhythm incorporated with the various contrapuntal devices creates an interest and variety which is distinctly Gershwin. However, in the more serious music this characteristic is not stressed as much as it is in Gershwin's music.

One essential characteristic of jazz music is the employment of rhythmic device. "The most common platitudes concerning the rhythm of jazz are, the development of the music is almost exclusively rhythmic, the rhythm is complex or it is simple and monotonous."¹⁰ Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue" becomes more complex rhythmically as it is heard. The beginning is relatively clear and easy to follow, metrically, but as the composition progresses the rhythms become more and more complex.

Gershwin's rhythms are somewhat different from those of the classicist but there is also a similarity between his techniques and those of the classicists. The main feature of the isorhythmic motet is prevalent in Gershwin's music, that is, the employment of a reiterated scheme of time-values. The idea was originally used for the presentation of liturgical cantus firmus. It was the logical development of the modal rhythm of the thirteenth century. Another characteristic of jazz rhythm, polyrhythms—contrasting rhythms within the same scheme of accents, was utilized by the classicist.

The crux of the matter goes back to a statement made on the preceding page, Gershwin was a jazz craftsman. He used the jazz techniques for creating interest—varied rhythms above, under and around melodic lines. It is true that the classicist did use rhythmic patterns to create interest; but, rhythm in their compositions was not usually the prime factor used to create variety in their music. The classicist built his music upon beautiful melodic lines for the most part.

In Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue" there are sections where very difficulty pianistic passages containing complex rhythmic patterns are evident. These patterns appear to have no bearing upon the composition on the whole. They give the appearance of having been interjected into the composition for the purpose of building a climax in pure

¹⁰*Jazz Record Book. op. cit., p. 26.*

rhythmic complexity, where as the classicist used rhythm in conjunction with the melody.

On the whole, rhythm is the chief characteristic of the "Rhapsody in Blue." Interest is maintained throughout the entire composition principally by the variation of the rhythmic patterns and unity is obtained by the repetition of the melodic lines.

It is difficult to determine what enduring values, aesthetically, jazz has contributed, because jazz is a conglomeration of many things. This has been true of Gershwin's music. His music is composed of many styles and adheres to the concepts of both schools—jazz and classical.

The fragmentary design of the "Rhapsody in Blue" does not adhere to the classical concept of form; but this does not prove that this composition is not good music. Using the nine tone scale of the jazz idiom Gershwin does not concur with the classical concepts of the tonalities used in larger forms. However, he utilizes the same eight notes of a major scale that Bach, Beethoven and Brahms used, but his methods of usage are quite different. His rhythmic patterns reflect the characteristics of the rhythmic patters used by the composer in "Tin Pan Alley."

According to the classical concept, all serious music must first of all adhere to a formal design. Gershwin's serious music did not do this. The "Rhapsody in Blue" itself can and does refute this classical concept. In fact it refutes all of the classical concepts concerning serious music and yet **it is serious music**. Since its premiere in 1924 it has been played by practically every major symphony orchestra in the United States. It has been acclaimed in the concert halls from Maine to Florida.

Gershwin was an innovator. What he did with melody, rhythm and harmony in the larger forms of composition had not been done before his time. His melodies were not the result of mechanical units, nor of a stereotyped rule, they reflect the concepts of a composer who lived in music and expressed everything, serious or not, sound or superficial, by means of music. As Paul Whiteman says, "He led the way. He has given the finer jazz a firm root—so firm that others who come after him may carry on his fine tradition. The 'Gershwin theme' has been inculcated in the minds of the younger composers, and it is for them to take it and go forward."¹¹

¹¹Merle Armitage, *op.*, *cit.*