

GERSHWIN

by

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"Music must reflect the thoughts
and aspirations of the people and
the time. My people are American.
My time is today."

--George Gershwin

SCREENWRITER'S NOTE: Gershwin is divided into nine "chapters." Each chapter focuses on a different chronological or thematic aspect of George Gershwin's life. Each chapter begins with a super-imposed title. Each chapter, eight to fifteen minutes in length, is black and white.

A color musical 4-5 minute "coda" concludes each chapter. Each coda is filmed in a different musical format (vaudeville, Broadway, concert hall, etc.) and corresponds to the preceeding chapter. The codas feature guest performers who may or may not portray characters in the Gershwin story itself.

CREDITS

Black and white. The cart-clogged streets of New York's Lower East Side circa 1900. A polyglot mix of European immigrants struggle to make money in the New World: Polish, Yiddish, German, Slav, Russian.

All the while, in slow motion, in the distance, a piano is incrementally hoisted to a third floor apartment. This piano represents the aspirations of every immigrant on the street: someday one of their sons will integrate the culture of the Old World with the unformed taste of this land of opportunity.

Throughout the scene one hears the Second Movement of George Gershwin's Concerto in F--an elegaic anthem of promise and possibility.

The piano reaches the window.

END CREDITS

1.

TIN PAN ALLEY

1 EXT. TIN PAN ALLEY DAY

"Tin Pan Alley" stretched along West 28th Street from Broadway to Sixth Avenue. For twenty years, America's leading music publishers inhabited these drab brownstones. Every day they cranked out pop tunes for a nation: love songs, novelty ditties, barroom ballads--whatever sold.

Remick & Co. is squeezed between Warner Music and Clipper Printing. A delivery boy exits with a two-wheeler stacked with sheet music. Discordant melodies echo from open windows.

CUT TO:

2 INT. REMICK'S DAY

We make our way up the three-story building. Every niche is alive with activity; every fixture functional.

The atmosphere is 100% Jewish. Heated arguments, half-English, half-Yiddish, ring from the accountants' cubbyholes.

The cubicles on the next floor are occupied by song pluggers, pianists and singers. Two musicians argue as we pass. Musician A: "It sinks." Musician B: "It's a hit." Musician A: "It sinks." Musician B: "It sinks." In the next room we glimpse FRED ASTAIRE, 16, and his sister ADELE, 17.

Two cubicles down, GEORGE GERSHWIN, 17, plays as an OVERDRESSED YOUNG SINGER haltingly makes her way through a song apparently titled, "Say a Prayer For the Boys Over There." A SONG PLUGGER stands across the room.

Gershwin--to compensate for his youth--wears a conservative suit and tie. His wavy black hair is greased back. "Conservative"--but dandy nonetheless. Gershwin is a "musical salesman"--i.e., a piano player. He auditions new material and plays current Remick tunes for potential clients.

CUT TO:

3 INT. GERSHWIN LIVING ROOM DAY

George changes into a fresh shirt. An upright piano dominates the room; the furnishings are otherwise undistinguished. A menorah provides decoration.

IRA GERSHWIN, 19, already dressed, stockier than his brother, makes notes at the table. ROSE GERSHWIN, 39, their mother, enters from the kitchen. She has the dress, bearing and peasant beauty of a first generation Russian Jewish immigrant.

CONTINUED

3 CONT'D.

George straightens his bow tie in the mirror, turns:

GERSHWIN

Whatja think? Ira, let's go.

He doesn't wait for an answer. Flexing his fingers, he heads toward the door. He's a young man on the go.

GERSHWIN

We won't be late.

Ira follows.

CUT TO:

4 INT. THOMASHEVSKY THEATER DAY

The Broken Violin, a folk operetta by Boris Thomashevsky, nears its finale. The Thomashevsky was one of a series of playhouses later known as the "Yiddish Theater." The accents are broad, the "lavish" production values of dimestore quality. The more exaggerated the acting, the louder the applause. Everything is designed to exploit the nostalgic yearnings of the audience: this is Old World Entertainment.

Yet, beneath all this shund (dreck), are the haunting Middle Eastern melodies which reappear fragmentally throughout Gershwin's work.

George and Ira rise as vendors descend on the audience.

CUT TO:

5 EXT. SECOND AVENUE DAY

George and Ira break free from the crowd and head downtown. They affect the foppish dress of the times: long coats, starched collars and homburgs. They walk the confident walk of youth: the new world is ripe and they are ready to pick it.

Ira jots a note as George hums. George carries the printed score. Ira joins in, then comments sarcastically:

IRA

It was like a wedding.

CONTINUED

5 CONT'D.

GERSHWIN

I liked it--loved it, in a way.
Thomashevsky's a genius--so handsome.
Now that I can't work with him I
don't mind.. Wasn't good enough.

IRA

That's not true.

GERSHWIN

Tin Pan Alley's wide open, Izzy--an
orchard guarded by schlemiels. They
just redo the same tunes over and over.
Phooey. Look around. Anything's
possible here. There's real money to
be made--and not like some goniff either.

IRA

You gonna see Cheer Up?

GERSHWIN

Yesterday. Lorlat's at the
Philharm next week.

IRA

Leave it to Jane?

GERSHWIN

Okay, sure.

IRA

Whatja think?

They speak spitfire Hester St. shorthand. George's
attention drifts but a second--he's lost. He turns to
Ira, confused. Ira refreshes his memory:

IRA

Cheer Up?

(George shrugs)

Trite story. Maybe I'm naive.

GERSHWIN

"Charming."

IRA

"Charming."

CONTINUED

5 CONT'D.

George reaches for Ira's notebook:

GERSHWIN
What did you write?

IRA
(pulls notebook back)
Something during the show.

GERSHWIN
So, read.

IRA
(hesitates; reads)
"You may throw all the rice you desire,
But, please, friends, throw no shoes."
(defensive)
I'm trying to place these one-liners.

GERSHWIN
(changing the subject)
I'm gonna leave Remick's. I haven't
told 'em yet--maybe they ain't told
me. They won't let me compose. I want
to get closer to the Jerome Kern kind of
stuff anyway. There's better things to
do. I'm concentrating on my lessons.

Ira corrects a line, slips his notebook in his pocket:
They reach the Lafayette Baths, a three-story hotel/sauna.
Ira stops; he works as a cashier here.

IRA
Time for work. Don't do
anything hasty.

GERSHWIN
(laughs)
You kidding?

CUT TO:

6 1917-1918 MONTAGE

The montage is accompanied by a medley of period piano
tunes played in the aggressive Gershwin style.

--George plays a stage piano for a VAUDEVILLE REHEARSAL.
A FEMALE PERFORMER abruptly stops, points an accusing
finger at him.

CONTINUED

6 CONT'D.

--Ext. HARMS. The major Tin Pan Alley publisher.

--NEW YORK STAGE. Gershwin plays for LOUISE DRESSER, 36.

--POSTER. The Dresser show has moved to Boston. George gets billing.

CUT TO:

7 INT. EMPIRE THEATER LOBBY NIGHT

LOBBY POSTER: the Syracuse theater announces the premiere of a variety show, Half Past Eight, music by George Gershwin, additional lyrics by Arthur Frances.

George and Ira, dressed for winter, pace the lobby with concerned backers: the show's not going well.

Ira glances at his watch, looks to the auditorium--not a laugh to be heard.

PERKINS, a young producer, enters, grabs George's arm:

PERKINS

George! Quick! The Springstone gals won't go on and the Chinese number ain't ready.

GERSHWIN

Why...?

PERKINS

Something about not being paid. Go out and play something. Quick!

GERSHWIN

I can't.

PERKINS

Play!

GERSHWIN

What?

PERKINS

Your hits!

GERSHWIN

I don't have any hits.

CONTINUED

7 CONT'D.

PERKINS
Do I care? Anything!

George hands his overcoat to Ira and dashes off. Ira opens the auditorium door, stands: waiting and watching.

There's an OFF SCREEN RUSTLE as George walks on stage. Soon the distinct notes of a Gershwin melody ring from the piano. And ring again.

Dead silence. No response. Ira closes the door, turns to the backers, shakes his head. No way.

CUT TO:

8 INT. DETROIT CLUB DAY (1920)

Gershwin, 22, a man of the world, enters an empty nightclub. The bar decor indicates Prohibition is now law.

GEORGE WHITE (nee Weitz), 30, auditions underdressed chorus girls at a table. White, a handsome ex-dancer, created the Scandals in direct competition to Ziegfeld's Follies. "Handsome" is inadequate--"heartthrob" is more precise. In many ways White is everything Gershwin aspires to be.

George is ushered to White's table:

GERSHWIN
Mr. White, I'm George Gershwin.

WHITE
(stands)
Of course. A pleasure.

GERSHWIN
We met...

WHITE
I remember.
(sings)
"A Dancing M.D." Congratulations
on getting Jolson for "Swanee."

GERSHWIN
It was a knock-off. "Hindustan."

CONTINUED

8 CONT'D.

WHITE

A damn good one. Also
congrad for La La Lucille...

GERSHWIN

(apologetic).
...and Half Past Eight.

WHITE

Please, don't try to con me with
humility. Why are you to Detroit?

GERSHWIN

It's not entirely coincidental.

WHITE

Sit down.
(they do)

GERSEWIN

They say you're not happy with
Scandals--with Whiting--and you're
looking for a new compcser. I want
to do a big show. You know my work.
You know I can do it.

WHITE

Ziegfeld turn you down?

GERSHWIN

He just overpays for old material.
There's new music to be made--
popular music. I want to do it.
(no response)
And do it cheap.

WHITE

George, I know everything you've done--
don't forget I'm a dancer. But now
we're talking cheap--how cheap?

GERSHWIN

Make an offer.

WHITE

\$40 a week.

GERSHWIN

\$50.

CONTINUED

8 CONT'D.

WHITE

It's a deal. I'm back in my office
in ten days.

(a beat)

I've been thinking about you. Now
we'll see.

White shakes George's hand and looks at one of his
assistants. White has gotten what he wants.

So has George.

CUT TO:

9 INT. GERSHWIN 144TH ST. APT. DAY

George plays a Steinway. His "Swanee" earnings have
bought a higher standard of living.

EDWARD KILENYI, 36, sits on the bench beside him. A worn
copy of Goetschius' System of Harmony rests on the piano
alongside music sheets and pencils. Kilenyi, a respected
Hungarian composer, oversees a lesson on Harmony. Even
though Gershwin has been playing for ten years, he does
not fully understand the theory behind his technique.

KILENYI

These are the little C Minor phrases?

George nods, plays a simple exercise. This is the first
time we've seen George's hands on the keyboard: they have
extraordinary span and dexterity. Gershwin's gifts are
both physiological and aesthetic. He demonstrates.

GERSHWIN

I start with the five going to
the six chord. I could also start
with the three, go to six, then to
five ending with a two-five in the
third bar.

The notes are struck precisely: George's passion makes the
lesson equally entertaining and instructive.

KILENYI

In the next exercise you may use
diatonic triads, but only triads.

CONTINUED

9 CONT'D.

GERSHWIN

Triads? I can, but--this is
hard like the devil. You know, I--

INTERRUPTED SCENE. Screenwriter's note: in the course of the script a number of scenes will start in one chapter, abruptly stop and resume in a later chapter. This is the first of several such interrupted scenes.

CUT TO:

10 INT. GLOBE THEATER BACKSTAGE DAY

Gershwin stands with White and WHITE'S ASSISTANT, a handsome "male companion." White, rummaging through wardrobe and prop crates, examines an odd mix of Polynesian appurtenances: grass skirts, leis, spears.

The SOUNDS of a rehearsal from the stage. An attractive trio of dancing girls squeeze past. George makes eye contact with the THIRD CHORUS GIRL.

WHITE

I bought a blind lot from Shenck--
\$100 for everything. Mostly Polynesian
shit: skirts, leis, some kind of grass
hut, I guess. We definately gotta have
a Polynesian specialty number. Something
with the girls. "Li-lana-lu-li." Like
that. I leave it to you--but check with me.

GERSHWIN

I've been working with Arthur Frances
on lyrics. You know him?

(White shrugs)

Terrific talent.

White dances a few steps toward the stage; George follows.

WHITE

How's the stairway number coming?
"Steps," "stairs," "climbing" in
the title.

On stage, W.C. FIELDS, 41, rehearses a skit titled "Family Ford." Fields, on an outing in a cardboard Model T, encounters a fickle traffic signal and PATROLMAN. White's attention turns to the waiting chorus girls:

CONTINUED

10 CONT'D.

WHITE

Can you believe how thin they are?
They must eat nothing. Thin is what
people want now--and we got thin.
Look at those legs. What you think,
George?

(Gershwin smiles)

Thank God that's not my problem.
Got enough as it is. Comedy--now
that's tough.

GERSHWIN

I'm working on a colored sketch.

WHITE

Already got two.

GERSHWIN

This would be a longer number.
With its own story. 10-15 minutes.

WHITE

Got this idea yesterday. Nothing
worked out. Just a phrase, "Patent
Leather Forest."

GERSHWIN

It's called "Blue Monday." About
a woman's intuition gone wrong.
It's all set in a basement cafe on
Lennox near 135th Street...

WHITE

This is the darkie sketch, right?

GERSHWIN

Well, really, it's longer than that,
more like a folk tale set to music.
An American folk tale.

WHITE

(trying to understand)

A long darkie sketch.

GERSHWIN

More like Gilbert and Sullivan.

WHITE

(catching on)

A prestige darkie sketch.

CONTINUED

10 CONT'D.

GERSHWIN

Yeah.

WHITE

Fabulous idea. I love it.
I got Paul Whiteman in the pit.
"King 'o Jazz." "Patent Leather
Forest." Starts with just shoes.
Think about it. I don't know. You
go out much?

GERSHWIN

(smiles)

When I can.

WHITE

Good. It's important to circulate.
That's the secret in this business.

CUT TO:

11 INT. GERSHWIN 144TH ST. APT. DAY

Knock on the door. George opens it for WIL VODERY,
37, a black arranger and composer. Vodery, in a 3-piece
suit, looks toward SOUNDS below. Gershwin's attitude
is respectful--Vodery's his superior in age and reputation--
but eager:

GERSHWIN

Wil! Come in.

(closes door)

Want anything? Take off your coat.
I got White to agree to the "Blue
Monday" operetta--it's all set. But
we got just a month to put it together--
orchestration, cast, rehearsals--everything.

VODERY

(removes coat)

We can make it.

Gershwin spreads sheet music across the table. Vodery
looks back again:

VODERY

What's going on down there?

GERSHWIN

Oh, my pop and his cronies and God
knows who else--I never go down that way.

CONTINUED

11 CONT'D.

George strikes the table like a keyboard. He pounds out several bars:

GERSHWIN
Okay, "Blue Monday"--

INTERRUPTED SCENE.

CUT TO:

12 EXT. GLOBE THEATER NIGHT

Broadway lights promote the opening of a new revue:
George White's Scandals of 1922--with Jack McGowan,
W.C. Fields and Paul Whiteman.

The audience exits. Cabs crowd the street.

CUT TO:

13 INT. GLOBE THEATER NIGHT

White, Gershwin, Ira and PAUL WHITEMAN, 31, and THREE OTHERS sit in the empty auditorium. Opening night post-mortems are under way:

WHITE
..."Blue Monday"--out. Sorry,
George. Death, gone. I don't
need reviews. Did you see the
audience? Should have killed it
in New Haven.

GERSHWIN
(protesting)
We could...

WHITE
The stairway number was terrific.

WHITEMAN
The show's a hit--your best yet.

WHITE
(to Gershwin)
Lyrics good. Better more I listen.
I want to meet this Arthur Frances
you're working with.

Gershwin stands, extends his hand toward Ira and says proudly:

GERSHWIN
Mr. White, I'd like you to
meet "Arthur Frances."

FADE OUT:

CODA"Stairway to Paradise"

--musical revue--

14 INT. GLOBE THEATER NIGHT

Color. The camera dollies through a forest of black patent leather shoes.

Gershwin describes the scene: "Two circular staircases surrounded the orchestra on the stage, leading high up into theatrical paradise or the flies, which in everyday language means the ceiling. Mr. White had draped fifty of his most beautiful girls in a black patent leather material which brilliantly reflected the spotlights. A dance was staged as a song, and those girls didn't need much coaxing to do their stuff to the accompaniment of Whiteman's music."

Whiteman leads his "orchestra" through a brassy version of "Stairway." Rotund with thinning hair and a groomed moustache, Whiteman is a born showman. He knows how to promote himself and please the public. Although in no way jazz's "King," Whiteman is its foremost popularizer.

The clorines strut their "stuff" as they sing:

CHORUS GIRLS

"All you preachers
Who delight in panning dancing teachers,
Let me tell you there are a lot of features
Of the dance that carry you through
The Gates of Heaven.

It's madness
To be always sitting around in sadness,
When you could be learning the steps of
Gladness.
(You'll be happy when you can do
Just six or seven.)

Begin today! You'll find it nice;
The quickest way to Paradise.
When you practice,
Here's the thing to know--
Simply say as you go:

CONTINUED

14 CONT'D.

Refrain

I'll build a Stairway to Paradise,
With a new step ev'ry day.
I'm going to get there at any price;
Stand aside, I'm on my way!
I got the blues
And up above it's so fair;
Shoes,
Go on and carry me there!
I'll build a Stairway to Paradise,
With a new step ev'ry day."

Only Ziegfeld could stage a musical revue as well as
George White. It's brash, extravagant, shameless--and,
in a word, fabulous.

CUT TO:

2.
IRA

15 EXT. GERSHWIN 103RD ST. HOUSE NIGHT (1923)

Black and white. The camera booms up an imposing five-story granite house on 103rd near Riverside Drive.

Each floor serves a separate purpose: the ground floor is a billiard hangout for whatever friends happen by, the second floor living and dining rooms (each with piano), where Gershwin's parents socialize; bedrooms fill the third and fourth floors. The fifth floor is George's sanctum.

INSIDE, George plays for Ira.

CUT TO:

16 INT. 103RD ST. MUSIC ROOM NIGHT

George at his Steinway. Behind him hang portraits of composers. Gershwin, stripped to the waist, sports tuxedo pants; Ira, on the sofa, wears wire-rim glasses, slacks and a bathrobe.

George puffs a cigar as he pounds the keyboard--the notes punctuate the room. "George's rhythm," Irving Caesar said, "had the impact of a sledge hammer."

Gershwin is quite literally "playing"--improvising on a number of in-progress melodies. The notes form "Fascinating Rhythm," improvise and return.

Ira looks away. George interpolates to a Beethoven sonata, stops, eyes his brother with a sly smile:

GERSHWIN
So, Israel?

IRA
Stop that.

Ira pulls himself up, trudges over to the piano. Their personalities are poles apart. George is all enthusiasm; Ira phlegmatic. Observing, commenting, they approach a common goal by opposite routes.

Ira taps out "Fascinating Rhythm" with one finger.

IRA
How are you feeling?

GERSHWIN
Better.

CONTINUED

16 CONT'D.

George plays again: a musical phrase anticipating "S'Wonderful," then back to "Fascinating Rhythm."

Ira hums. He leaves a rest on the fourth beat of the second bar, begins again on the third bar:

IRA
Boppa boppa boppa/boppǎ boppǒ boppǎ
(rest)
doopa da...

GERSHWIN
(interrupts)
No, it's like this.

George plays and sings. Ira hums along, repeating his earlier error. He's inclined to conventional rhythms--rhythms George has labored to play against in this tune.

GERSHWIN
(stops)
No. You're putting a rest where there isn't one.

IRA
But it seems pushed--off-balance.

GERSHWIN
That's the beauty of it! Watch.

Gershwin stands, places his hands on the piano shelf, taps out the accented beats with his left, the unaccented beats with his right.

GERSHWIN
Each measure has four beats, each line four measures, 16 beats with the accents on 1, 5, 9 and 13.
(uses left hand only)
But I cut the second measure after 3 beats, begin the third early...
(sly smile)
...so it becomes a 5-beat measure.
Here's what you expect...
(taps with right hand)
...here's what you get.
(taps with left)

CONTINUED

16 CONT'D.

Gershwin now taps with both hands, hums. His right hand demonstrates the conventional approach; his left the new one. The differences on beats 8 and 9 cause the finger patterns to crisscross. The effect, visually intriguing, demonstrates the ingenuity of what is truly a fascinating rhythm. On the printed page this appears academic; acted out, it's as mesmerizing as Three Card Monte.

GERSHWIN

(broad smile)

...boppa doopa doppa--just when the listener is ready to rest, the beat jumps ahead! Jump the gap! Don't give 'em a break!

George turns away. Ira thinks, changes the subject:

IRA

I'm serious about that "Israel" crack.

GERSHWIN

Sorry.

George walks to the bathroom.

IRA

You go through your whole life thinking you're "Ira" or "Izzy" then go to the Hall of Records and find out your name's "Israel."

GERSHWIN

Sorry, sorry. Said I'm sorry.

George lathers in the mirror. His beard requires two shaves per day. Ira taps the piano.

IRA

The Astaires set?

GERSHWIN

Your lips to God's ears.

IRA

Makes it easier. It's so hard to find singers who get the lyrics. Can you believe what's-her-name?

GERSHWIN

(shaving)

What's with Jerry Kern's show?

CONTINUED

16 CONT'D.

IRA
Stepping Stones. It's set for the
fall. At Dillingham's Globe.

GERSHWIN
And we're up against it?

IRA
Um-hm.

George dries his face, unfolds a pressed shirt. He
slips into the shirt as he exits the bathroom.

GERSHWIN
Thank God he's working again. It
pisses me when people make us rivals.
If I was religious I'd get on my
knees every day and thank God for
Jerry Kern. He paved the way. In fact,
I just may.

. George starts to kneel; Ira stops him.

IRA
Save it for the stage, George.

GERSHWIN
(straightens bow-tie)
Who's in it?

IRA
In what?

GERSHWIN
(competitive)
The Kern show, damn it.

IRA
Dunno.

George shrugs, removes his tux jacket from a chair.

GERSHWIN
I gotta go.

George pulls on his jacket as he exits. He doesn't bother
to look back; this doesn't faze Ira. It's the nature of
their relationship.

CUT TO:

17 INT. GLAENZER PARTY NIGHT

Throughout the Twenties and early Thirties, Jules Glaenzer's parties were the apogee of New York social striving. Here the cream of the arts, politics and sports mix in the free atmosphere of privilege.

GLAENZER, 40, a Cartier executive, cultivated his social set on the job. His penthouse looks like a movie set--dripping with paintings and antiques; his parties start late and continue late. There's no shortage of pretty girls.

Glaenzer leads Gershwin, wearing a tux, smoking a cigar, across the crowded room toward a beautiful PARTY GIRL. Two grand pianos in the background. George is a bumpkin at the ball.

The Party Girl makes small talk with her tribe. She turns to Glaenzer:

PARTY GIRL

Mr. Glaenzer.

GLAENZER

Dear, I'd like you to meet George Gershwin, the composer of "Swanee."

George sticks out his hand and says, cigar in mouth:

GERSHWIN

Hello. I'm George Gershwin.

Glaenzer pulls George aside, yanks the cigar out of his mouth.

GLAENZER

(reproving)

Never speak with a cigar in your mouth--

INTERRUPTED SCENE.

CUT TO:

18 INT. IRA'S STUDY NIGHT

Later that night. Ira's study reflects a writer's priorities: his desk is front and center, the piano to the side. Catalogued books line the shelves. A thesaurus and rhyming dictionary are stacked on the desk.

CONTINUED

18 CONT'D.

Ira, wrapped in his bathrobe, hums as he pecks at the typewriter. He stands, walks to the piano:

IRA

"Gotta a little rhythm, gotta
a little rhythm, boppa-dobop-pa."
Rhythm, heaven, leaven, seven.

He one-fingers the melody, returns to his desk:

IRA

Got a rhythm, a little rhythm in
my head. Brain. Rhythm pit-pats in
my brain. Insane, crane, refrain,
subterranean, down-the-lane.

(pause)

What-a-pain.

Ira stands over the desk, writes out a couplet.

PIANO NOTES grow louder off-screen.

CUT TO:

19 INT. REHEARSAL HALL DAY

Music bridges the cut. A YOUNG PIANIST plays "Fascinating Rhythm" in the rundown hall. Dusty light streams through large loft windows.

Fred and Adele Astaire, now 22 and 23, pace out dance steps to the additional accompaniment of CLIFF EDWARDS, better known as "Ukulele Ike." They sing:

ASTAIRES

"...long to be the man I used to be,
Fascinating Rhythm,
Oh, won't you stop picking on me?"

Ira and George huddle with the producers, ALEX AARONS, 31, and VINTON FREEDLEY, 32. George, in a "sprucy" suit, smoking a cigar, keeps one eye on the Astaires.

Fred stops, speaks to no one in particular:

ASTAIRE

Okay, Dick and Susie are out on the street. They're broke. Music, rhythm, picks up their spirits. They dance and sing, they dance off stage--they gotta get off stage--but the exit beat? I can't seem to...you know...

CONTINUED

19 CONT'D.

AARONS
(walks over)

Fred...

An idea strikes George. He dashes to the piano, plays the final bars over the pianist's shoulder:

GERSHWIN
(to Astaire)
So then, just do it! Travel with
it. Listen. It's in there. Watch.

Calling out the chords through his cigar, George dances a traveling step across the room:

GERSHWIN
E flat, A flat, C minor, E flat,
F minor, A flat, E flat.

Ira watches with admiration as Fred and Adele laugh--

INTERRUPTED SCENE.

CUT TO:

20 INT. THEATER DISTRICT RESTAURANT NIGHT

A double date. George and a BUSTY SHOW GIRL share a leather banquette with Ira and LEONORE STRUNSKY, 23.

Their dates are as different as George and Ira. The Show Girl--flashy, goyish, transitional--reflects Gershwin's reputation as a ladies' man. Leonore is beautiful in a different way. Although "outgoing and bustling," she's essentially serious--the daughter of well-to-do Greenwich Village intellectuals. She and Ira have dated for some time and are comfortable together.

The restaurant caters to the theater community. The velvet walls are hung cheek and jowl with celebrity photos. George wears a tuxedo, Ira a dark plaid suit.

Gershwin pushes his steak plate away, holds his stomach.

SHOW GIRL
Delicious. This is my favorite
restaurant. I love how the waiters
dress.

(notices someone)
Isn't that...?

CONTINUED

20 CONT'D.

GERSHWIN
(cuts her short)

No.

Conversation is not her strong point.

LEONORE
How's your stomach?

GERSHWIN
Okay.
(to Ira)
God, let's never get in that
situation again. "Blue Monday"
ruined my stomach.

He takes out a cigar, offers another to Ira.

LEONORE
(helpful)
Cigars don't help...

Ira censors her with a nudge. George's eyes dart to Leonore, then dart away. He feels threatened by her: will she supplant him in Ira's eyes? Is she "beautiful" enough for a Gershwin? Why can't he have a successful relationship?

George lights his cigar, acknowledges a passing compliment.

GERSHWIN
I guess I'm just stuck with "composer's stomach." Composing at the piano isn't good either--but I started that way and can't change.
(boastful)
Did you hear what Nadia Boulanger said when I asked to study with her when I was in Paris? She said she couldn't--there was nothing she could teach me.

The Show Girl, wide-eyed, hands on every word. George doesn't discourage her adulation. Ira and Leonore have heard this embellished anecdote before.

Gershwin, now antsy, glances at his watch. Ira gets the hint:

IRA
(referring to check)
I'll pick it up.

CONTINUED

20 CONT'D.

GERSHWIN

(to Girl as they rise)
He takes care of the business.
(to Ira)
You doing the second verse?

IRA
(sighs)

Um-hm.

LEONORE

Not if he can avoid it.

IRA

It's so-o hard to make a living.

George laughs as he escorts the Show Girl to the door.
Ira lights his cigar, turns to Leonore:

IRA

Where does he get his energy?

AT THE ENTRANCE, George picks up his top hat from a
BEAUTIFUL HAT CHECK GIRL. He gives her the 100% eye as
he tips her--

This is an INTERRUPTED SCENE for Gershwin. It continues for
Ira and Leonore in the banquette.

Ira leans toward Lee. He speaks softly, intensely; he
courts her in a writer's manner--with confidences about his
craft.

Yet, beneath the show, there's genius. Ira's every bit as
talented as his famous brother. He radiates a confidence
unseen in George's presence.

IRA

...people read poetry and they can
go back and study it, but a lyric is
thrown at them once or twice in an
evening and that's it--they can't go
back. Lyrics gotta be simple. Just
listen, Lee. Okay, quiet. Now listen:

CONTINUED

20 CONT'D.

Ira tunes into two passing waiters.

FIRST WAITER

...don't let it get your goat...

Ira directs his attention to women in the next booth.

FIRST WOMAN

...it just feels like I'm falling...

IRA

(to Leonore)

That's all lyrics are. Listening.
American music needs American lyrics--
not English poetry. Jazz's like slang.
Dressed-up slang. That's what George
does. All I do is follow. Without
him I couldn't do anything...

LEONORE

Well, that's not...

IRA

...It used to be different. Gilbert
wrote the lyrics, Sullivan scored them.
Now music's first--the lyrics follow.
That's why it's easier--faster, I mean--
for George: for him sounds just mean
sounds. It takes me so-o much longer.
He strikes a tune, then I have to find
words that have meaning and are sounds to
boot--and are about love. Always love.

(a beat)

I could never be as good as George.

CUT TO:

21 INT. IRA'S ROOM NIGHT

Late at night, a year later. Ira, in slacks and wrinkled
shirt, sits at his desk, smoking, thinking. His glasses
rest on scribbled notes.

He reads lyrics silently, then aloud in prose form:

IRA

"Don't mind telling you,
In my true fash-ion"

CONTINUED

21 CONT'D.

He emphasizes the broken word, cutting it with a phonetic stroke like tough meat:

IRA
 "That you thrill me through
 With a strong pash-ion
 When you said you care,
 'Magine my emosh-ion...
 (repeats)
 'Magine my emo-sh."

Ira drops the final syllable to suit George's rhythm.
 It feels better.

IRA
 "'Magine my emo-sh."
 (backs up)
 "That you thrill me through
 With a ten-der pash--
 When you said you care
 'Magine my emosh--
 I swore then and there,
 Permanent devosh--
 You made all the other boys seem blah;
 You just filled me with AAH!"

Ira releases "AAH!" like a repressed cry.

He stands as he hits the refrain, soft-shoes across the room. Ira dances alone, humming the melody. He pirouettes on the musical phrase, "S'Paradise."

Alone in his office in the dark hours of the morning, humming, dancing, Ira Gershwin is completely happy.

CUT TO:

22 INT. SOCIETY PARTY NIGHT

Ira's humming segues to a piano rendition.

Gershwin, dressed in suit and tie, plays for an assorted crowd around the piano. He attacks the keyboard, delighting in every musical progression. He too is completely happy.

It's as if George and Ira are telepathic, each half of a single musical consciousness.

FADE OUT:

CODA

"S'Wonderful"

--Broadway rehearsal--

23 INT. ALVIN THEATER STAGE DAY

Color. The blue and white painted set depicts a ritzy suite in the "Hotel Paymore." The suite boasts a garish array of pseudo-Parisian props. The actors stand out in inappropriate street clothes. It's a rehearsal.

Moving from chair to chair, "Frankie" (Adele Astaire) attempts to "inveigle" the object of her affections, "Peter," a famous aviator (ALLEN KEARNS). He responds affirmatively in song.

In the pit, a small orchestra--ludicrous in casual clothes--accompanies them.

The Coda begins on the first note of "S'Wonderful." Peter sings to Frankie:

ALLEN KEARNS

"Life has just begun:
Jack has just found his Jill.
Don't know what you've done,
But I'm all a-thrill.
How can words express
Your divine appeal?
You could never guess
All the love I feel.
From now on lady I insist,
For me no other girls exist."

This rendition bears little resemblance to the "Gershwin" songs beloved today. The 1927 Funny Face has its roots in vaudeville and the Scandals. Its plinky-plunky rhythms are those of Flapper Jazz. The embellished, bluesy interpretations of Nelson Riddle and Ella Fitzgerald are two decades away.

The period rendition makes the ingenuity of Ira's lyrics all the more apparent. Adele and Kearns join for the refrain:

ADELE AND KEARNS

"S'wonderful! S'marvelous--
That you should care for me!
'S awful nice! S'Paradise--
'S what I love to see!
You've made my life so glamorous,
You can't blame me for feeling amorous.
Oh, s'wonderful! S'marvelous--
That you should care for me!"

CONTINUED

23 CONT'D.

The DIRECTOR and his ASSISTANT follow the rehearsal from the lip of the stage. The Director moves to get a different angle; the Assistant follows.

Frankie sings to Peter:

ADELE ASTAIRE

"Don't mind telling you,
In my humble fash,
That you thrill me through
With a tender pash.
When you said you care,
'Magine my emosh;
I swore, then and there,
Permanent devosh.
You made all the other boys seem blah;
Just you alone filled me with AAH!"

They join for the refrain:

ADELE AND KEARNS

"S'wonderful! S'marvelous--
You should care for me!
'S awful nice! S'Paradise--
'S what I love to see!
My dear, it's four-leaf clover time;
From now on my heart's working overtime.
Oh, s'wonderful! S'marvelous--
That you should care for me!"

CUT TO:

3.

RHAPSODY IN BLUE

24 INT. GERSHWIN 144TH ST. APT. DAY (1920)

CONTINUED SCENE: the action overlaps scene 9.

Black and white. Edward Kilenyi sits beside George on the piano bench. We've backed up five years.

GERSHWIN

Only triads? I can, but--this is hard as the devil. You know, I--

KILENYI

What was given?

GERSHWIN

(playing)

The melody.

KILENYI

Restricted to?

GERSHWIN

(strikes each chord)

Tonic. Dominant. Subdominant.

KILENYI

And if I allowed you two additional chords, the three and the six?

Gershwin, speaking as he plays, alters the harmonic accompaniment, shifting the mood from one of anticipation to closure.

GERSHWIN

The third bar could run one-four-one but I was playing around this morning and...

George is visably pleased with the nuances of the alteration. Kilenyi cuts him short:

KILENYI

George, you're getting ahead...

Kilenyi takes the keyboard, replays the prosiac melody.

KILENYI

...The third and sixth. I didn't come here to watch you get around with a melody. It's a question of analyzing mathematics.

GERSHWIN

In Scandals I'm using ninths and elevenths....

CONTINUED

24 CONT'D.

KILENYI
But in music theory--

GERSHWIN
(interrupts)
I'm a fourth grader.

CUT TO:

25 INT. GLAENZER PARTY NIGHT (1922)

CONTINUED SCENE: the action overlaps scene 17.

Jules Glaenzer, holding Gershwin's cigar, reproves him:

GLAENZER
Never speak with a cigar in your
mouth. It's uncouth.

George retrieves his cigar, hides it. He turns to the
Party Girl all smiles:

PARTY GIRL
(awe-struck)
Mr. Gershwin.

GERSHWIN
I've seen your dancing. Very
impressive. Especially the timing.

PARTY GIRL
Mr. Gershwin, coming from you...

GERSHWIN
I'm working on something called
A Perfect Lady for Larry Schwab.
I'm playing it later. There's a
number in it for somebody just like you.

Before she can answer, George spots Fred Astaire with
OTTO KAHN, 55, an imposing financial patriarch:

GERSHWIN
Fred!

Gershwin whispers to Glaenzer as they walk over:

GERSHWIN
Who's that with Astaire?

INTERRUPTED SCENE.

CUT TO:

26 INT. GLOBE THEATER DAY (1923)

Chorus girls in skimpy costumes rehearse a Scandals routine: "Lo-La-Lo." A battered Polynesian hut stands stage right.

Gershwin, dressed to kill, sits in the rear of the empty theater. He makes a notation.

George White's VOICE rings from the wings. The pianist stops mid-phrase as White and his Assistant stride on stage. White singles out a CHORUS GIRL for criticism; the others look away.

Gershwin flashes a knowing smirk at a CHORUS CLORINE.

Paul Whiteman, wearing a tux, fresh from his radio show, slips into a seat beside George:

WHITEMAN

He's been trying to use that Polynesian junk for years.

GERSHWIN

Paul?

(they shake hands)

It's supposed to be Chinese. I thought you were on tour in Europe.

WHITEMAN

I've been back two months. Don't you read the papers?

(stands, motions)

Here, step back. I don't want that cheap twit to see me. He'll say I need a job.

GERSHWIN

He's not that dumb.

They stand in the shadows. Whiteman occupies the space of two normal men. He speaks rapidly:

WHITEMAN

Don't underestimate dumb. Look, let me fly something past you.

GERSHWIN

Slow down. You in a rush?

WHITEMAN

Me? You're the hard one to find. Look, I've been doing "Contemporary Music" concerts in Europe--they're crazy about it. But here I can't get out of the dance clubs--you know what

(MORE)

CONTINUED

26 CONT'D.

WHITEMAN contd
I'm talking about. Nobody takes
American composers seriously. We
gotta get into concert halls.

The tear-stained Chorus Girl dashes past. White prowls
for his next victim.

WHITEMAN
Why do you still work here?

GERSHWIN
It's got its advantages--

WHITEMAN
"An Evening of Experimental Music."
That's my idea. Like it? All performed
by Paul Whiteman and his Orchestra. Kern,
Berlin, Schoenberg, Herbert--all American,
all contemporary. Plus a new piece--
performed and composed by George Gershwin.

George smiles.

WHITEMAN
Not bad, huh? Compose and perform.
Rent a hall, pack the audience. All
highbrow. I want an original composition--
like "Blue Monday." Just some twelve-bar
blues. What do you think?

GERSHWIN
Terrific!

WHITEMAN
Yeah, I just thought it up.

GERSHWIN
Didn't we talk about this before?

WHITEMAN
Nah. That was something else anyway.
This is new. Jazz in a concert hall.
The first time!

GERSHWIN
Clef Club played Carnegie.

WHITEMAN
(dismissive)
Colored music. Ten years ago. I'm
talking about serious American jazz,
George. White music.

CUT TO:

27 INT. BILLIARD PARLOR NIGHT (1924)

11 p.m. The Ambassador Billiard Parlor on the corner of Broadway and 52nd--a songwriters' hangout. The theaters are closed, the regulars assembled. The air is thick with smoke, camaraderie and conspiracy.

One POOL SHOOTER to another: "I says to Wollcott, 'What do I gotta do to get some ink on this broad?' and he says, 'Shoot her?'"

At the next table: Gershwin carefully places his cigar on the rail and lines up a three-cushion shot. BUDDY DESYLVA, 30, billiard partner and lyricist, hums as he chalks his cue. Nearby, Ira reads the Tribune in a step chair.

George's concentration is absolute. He's competitive to the marrow--whether at play or work.

DESYLVA

...Maybe we should just dump the number. The show comes first.

GERSHWIN

Quiet. I'm thinking.

DESYLVA

I'm thinking. You're losing.

Gershwin shoots, misses. Ira reads aloud:

IRA

"Whiteman Judges Named." Listen to this, George.

DESYLVA

(lines up shot)

I think this is it.

GERSHWIN

(to Ira)

What?

DeSylva shoots a successful carom. Ira stands:

IRA

"Judges will pass on 'What is American Music?' at Paul Whiteman concert, Aeolian Hall." Feb 12. Judges include Rachmanioff, Heifetz, Zimalist, Gluck.

DESYLVA

What's that?

CONTINUED

27 CONT'D.

IRA

Tomorrow's Trib. "The question of 'What is American music?' has aroused tremendous interest in music circles. George Gershwin is at work on a jazz concerto, Irving Berlin a syncopated tone poem, Victor Herbert an American suite."

(voice rising)

What's all this about?

GERSHWIN

My God, he's really going to do it.

DESYLVA

Do what?

GERSHWIN

What date?

IRA

February 12. Six weeks.

DESYLVA

We go to Boston for tryouts.

IRA

Did you know about this? Are you working on it?

GERSHWIN

Well--yes and no. Who'da thought that bloated--oy vey!

IRA

You got to. It's your chance.

GERSHWIN

You got to help me, Izzy.

IRA

A concerto doesn't have lyrics.

GERSHWIN

When do we leave for Boston?
A concerto? I can't orchestrate that. What the hell does he think...?

George breaks into a grin. Ira moves to embrace him, but pulls back. Even in moments like these, their tacit reserve prohibits any outward display of emotion.

CUT TO:

28 EXT. N.Y.-BOSTON TRAIN NIGHT

Silhouetted against the landscape. It's "steely rhythms" echo in the New England night.

GERSHWIN (V.O.)

(conversationally).

I had a purpose, but no plan.
But then, on the train to Boston, I
could hear the music inside the noise,
even saw on paper, the construction
of the piece...

(MORE)

CUT TO:

29 INT. 103RD ST. MUSIC ROOM NIGHT

George, continuing, explains Rhapsody to Ira. Dressed in a bathrobe, he circles the sofa nonstop, comparing the composition to a car ride:

GERSHWIN

...You start with an ice-breaker, an ascending clarinet line to get attention, to start the engine. Just after the first theme, four bars in, I stress an unaccented beat. First bump in the road.

(gesture)

Same thing two bars later but fool with the harmony too. The second bump is also the first turn! With the second theme five bars later you're on your way with the scenery all blue and jazzy--but where are you headed? Keep changing keys, turn, detour seven times before hitting straightaway A Major, like the cycle of fifths rag players use...

George dashes to the keyboard, demonstrates:

GERSHWIN

...Meantime I'm pitting four notes against three so you feel like you're accelerating all the time. Add a few classical conventions and you think you're listening to Tchaikovsky or Liszt or something. It's a rhythm for our time, Iz. Not just pep. Our pulse.

(a beat)

And Grofé will orchestrate.

CUT TO:

30 EXT. AEOLIAN HALL AFTERNOON

An impressive array of cabs and luxury cars crowd the sidewalk. Posters advertise "An Experiment in Modern Music" by "Paul Whiteman and his Palais Royal Orchestra." Light snow falls.

The cream of the music community is in attendance: Kreisler, Rachmanioff, Heifetz, Sousa, Stokowski, Godosky, Stravinsky.

CUT TO:

31 INT. AEOLIAN HALL LOBBY AFTERNOON

George and Ira watch from a darkened alcove. The guests study Whiteman's lavish program with appropriate skepticism. Jules Glaenzer enters, followed by Vodery, Kilenyi, Fred and Adele Astaire.

Ira examines the program: Rhapsody in Blue is 22nd of 23 musical numbers. He checks his watch: 2:45.

CUT TO:

32 INT. AEOLIAN HALL AUDITORIUM AFTERNOON

Ira's watch: 5:05.

Ira scans the restless crowd. A few seats are empty. OFF SCREEN, Victor Herbert's "Oriental Serenade" concludes to polite applause.

George Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue is announced. A rustle of anticipation.

FADE OUT:

CODA"Rhapsody in Blue"

--concert--

33 INT. AEOLIAN HALL STAGE AFTERNOON

Color. Olin Downes of the Times described the stage thus: "Pianos in various stages of deshabille stood about amid a litter of every imaginable contraption of wind and percussion instruments. The golden sheen of brass instruments of lesser and greater dimensions was caught up by a gleaming gong and carried out by bright patches of an Oriental backdrop."

Down stage, Whiteman and his 23-piece orchestra are arrayed in formal dress. In front: a black Steinway.

Gershwin, dressed in tails, literally darts across stage. He sense the audience's impatience.

Sitting, he signals Whiteman, looks to the clarinet player.

Rhapsody's opening 17-note clarinet wail fills the hall. Music history is made.

George's pianism is as unrelenting as his earlier description of it to Ira. The phrasings, the rhythms, the combinations are aggressively original: taken separately, they are part Tin Pan Alley, part classical, part folk, part jazz; put together, they are uniquely Gershwin. And uniquely American.

Paul Whiteman, for his part, looks (in the words of his 1967 N.Y. Times obit) "like a Dutch miller, flicking a small baton, twitching his elbow--his only consistent movement being to wag his head to the band's rhythms."

But no matter. All eyes are on Gershwin, his handsome profile, his extraordinary keyboard dexterity.

The abbreviated rendition of Rhapsody in Blue ends with a subdued passage.

CUT TO:

4.

BROADWAY

34 INT. REHEARSAL HALL DAY (1924)

CONTINUED SCENE: the action overlaps scene 19.

Black and white. Gershwin dances a traveling step as he calls out the chords:

GERSHWIN

E flat, A flat, C minor, E flat,
F minor, A flat, E flat.

Ira watches with admiration as the Astaires laugh. Fred steps alongside George, mimics him. They dance out together.

CUT TO:

35 INT. WILMINGTON THEATER DAY (1926)

ON STAGE: the tacky Hotel Paymore set. "Peter" and "Frankie" conclude "S'Wonderful." (The same set as the second chapter coda--except in black and white.)

ADELE AND KEARNS

"...That you should care for me."

CUT TO PREVIEW AUDIENCE: not a single smile in the crowd. The audience consists primarily of pregnant women.

CUT TO:

36 INT. WILMINGTON HOTEL NIGHT

The suite's a battlefield of creative infighting: coffee cups, half-eaten hors d'oeuvres, uncapped scotch bottles, scribbled notes. Manuscript pages spread across the carpet.

The glum backers and creators of Funny Face include: Aarons, Freedley, Fred and Adele, Kearns, George and Ira, directors PINCUS and GOLDSTONE, writers THOMPSON and SMITH.

THOMPSON

A matinee full of pregnant women
in Wilmington--Jesus Christ, what
did you expect? Foot-stomping?

AARONS

How'd they get in?

FREEDLEY

You probably comp'd them.

CONTINUED

36 CONT'D.

SMITH

I think we're getting off
the subject.

PINCUS

What subject?

SMITH

The story.

AARONS

What story?

George and Ira stand against the wall.

FREEDLEY

Please. Let's just repeat the
storyline one more time.

THOMPSON

(sighs, recites)

Jimmy's 25th birthday. His wards
arrange a surprise party. Dugsie
arrives. D tells him she worships
Thurston. Dugs pleads with D. to
forget T. and marry him. F. goes
to Dugs. F. also loves T....

ASTAIRE

(interrupts)

That's not right. Frankie
doesn't love Thurston.

KEARNS

Of course she does. It's in
the script.

ASTAIRE

Where?

FREEDLEY

Jesus! And these are the actors!

Aarons breaks through the bullshit:

AARONS

Alright, you want to hear a story?
I'll tell you a story: Boy meets Girl.
Song. They break up. Song. Comic
sketch. Song. Danger. Song. Happy
ending. Song. Now there's a story.

CONTINUED

36 CONT'D.

SMITH
There should be another number
for Fred and Adele. George?

Gershwin nods.

CUT TO:

37 EXT. DOWNTOWN WILMINGTON NIGHT

George and Ira stroll through the deserted business district, smoking cigars. George wears an overcoat with a rich fur collar. For a while they say nothing.

GERSHWIN
(thinking)
I'm trying to recycle something.

IRA
No one knows what they're doing.
They just blame the songs--and
keep recasting.

GERSHWIN
Thank God for the Astaires.
(a beat)
You know how "What Am I Going to
Do?" goes? Like a cantor--parlando
and all?

Ira sings in dialect, emphasizing the davening
cadences:

IRA
"My one and on-ly,
What am I gonna do if you turn me down,
When I'm so cra-zy o-ver you?"

GERSHWIN
Yeah, maybe another tune like
that. You?

IRA
(disagrees)
It needs a talk routine. You
know, Fred and Adele back and forth.
Da-da-datta-da.

GERSHWIN
Hm.

CONTINUED

37 CONT'D.

IRA

And the title should be changed.

They walk step in step, deep in thought. Ira brings up something he's been meaning to say:

IRA

Lee and I are going to get married.

GERSHWIN

(smiles)

"Flash." I was wondering when.
Congratulations.

IRA

Don't tell anyone.

GERSHWIN

(concerned)

You going to move out?

IRA

No. Where would I go?

George is relieved. He looks at Ira, then away. This is as close as the brothers can come to admitting how much they need each other.

GERSHWIN

It's so stupid. Everybody talks about the "New American Musical"--blah, blah, blah. The only thing new is the music.

IRA

Whatever else, it ain't music theater--not like the Brits. Just songs and sketches. It could be like a national anthem.

GERSHWIN

We should do something political. Maybe we should do an opera something like The Dybbuk.

Ira points out two bums lying on the sidewalk:

IRA

Look, it's Gilbert and Sullivan. They've come to save our show--

INTERRUPTED SCENE.

CUT TO:

38 INT. 103RD ST. HOUSE DAY

The parlor has been cleared for a wedding. Ira and Lee stand under a chuppah held by four friends in yarmulkes.

The service is intimate, befitting Ira's personality. The Gershwin and Strunsky families stand side by side.

Gershwin, the Best Man, stands out in a tux and yarmulke. George looks uneasy in a supporting role. Beside him a SHIKSA GODDESS finds the proceedings exotic. Behind them, Rose and MORRIS GERSHWIN, 51, are every inch the proud parents. Also George's brother ARTHUR, 26, and sister FRANCES, 20.

Ira lifts Leonore's veil, kisses her. They sip the glass of wine. The RABBI addresses the wedding party:

RABBI

We pause to reflect on suffering
and a world in which redemption has
not yet come. Joy returns after the
breaking of the glass.

Ira crushes the wrapped glass. The guests respond:

GUESTS

Mazel-tov!

TIMECUT. George entertains at the piano. The Shiksa sits to one side, Rose the other. Gershwin is at ease, jovial. A social occasion invariably found George at the piano. As Oscar Levant said, "An evening with George Gershwin is a George Gershwin Evening."

Gershwin's father, feeling no pain, staggers to the piano:

MORRIS

Georgie, play that song about
the river.

George pretends not to hear. Across the room, Ira grins--he's seen this before.

MORRIS

So go on, play it. Rose, tell him.

GERSHWIN

Which one?

MORRIS

You know the one about "Fashion
on the River."

CONTINUED

38 CONT'D.

George shakes his head, more bemused than upset: one can't change one's parents. He glances at Ira as he segues into "Fascinating Rhythm." George and his mother sing together off-key:

GERSHWIN AND ROSE

"Fashion on the river,
You've got me on the go!
Fashion on the river,
I'm all a-quiver."

George and Rose laugh. He segues to "S'Wonderful."

CUT TO:

39 EXT. ALVIN THEATER NIGHT

Music bridges the cut. Opening night of Funny Face, the new Astaire/Gershwin musical. We hear the closing refrain of Adele and Kearns' "S'Wonderful."

CUT TO:

40 INT. ALVIN THEATER NIGHT

The audience is on its feet, applauding. Wilmington's flop is Broadway's hit.

CUT TO:

41 EXT. 33 RIVERSIDE DRIVE DAY (1930)

A 17-story apartment complex at Riverside and 75th.

CUT TO:

42 INT. RIVERSIDE DR. PENTHOUSE DAY

George Gershwin, international celebrity, man about town, gives a tour of his new penthouse to a NEWSPAPER REPORTER and PHOTOGRAPHER. His manner is that of a king in his court.

The 14-room penthouse is a showpiece. The au courant rooms are decorated in moderne mix of black, white and chrome. Every object reflects intelligence and aesthetics; the decor's composed as meticulously as a concerto.

Gershwin's art collection counterpoints the Bauhaus furniture: Kandinsky, Picasso, Rousseau, Gauguin, Rouault, Modigliani.

CONTINUED

42 CONT'D.

GERSHWIN

This is the dining area, and, over here, the living room. I just purchased this in Paris. "The Rabbi." It's by a Frenchman, Marc Chagall. C-h-a-g-a-l-l.

The Photographer snaps a flash.

REPORTER

Is that your piano? Is this where you compose?

GERSHWIN

Well, I have another. That painting's by Bellows and the bust of me was done by a Japanese, Noguchi.

REPORTER

Do you select your own art, Mr. Gershwin?

GERSHWIN

Actually, my cousin helps me out. He's a painter. He did scenes from my tone poem, "American in Paris." Come, look...

Gershwin leads the way. George's natural charm blunts his egotism. Harold Arlen explained George's appeal this way: "He was a very hamish man, nothing phony about him. He knew he had it and celebrated it."

GERSHWIN

We want to go to Palestine and the Orient and just study art.
(a dog BARKS)
That's Tony, my terrier.

REPORTER

Our readers are interested in your romantic life. You're seen with the most beautiful women in New York.

GERSHWIN

You'd have to ask them.

He escorts them into his exercise room. A punching bag hangs from the ceiling. The walls are covered with celebrity photos. Gershwin's Time cover is prominently featured.

CONTINUED

44.
GERSHWIN

I try to keep in shape. Of course,
I can't punch as hard as I'd like.
My hands, you know.

REPORTER

Do you plan to get married?

GERSHWIN

Of course--when I get time.
(laughs)

PHOTOGRAPHER

Punch the bag, Mr. Gershwin.

George poses; the Photographer snaps his "candid" shot.

REPORTER

When is that?

He leads them to the next room. An easel stands in the center; one wall is stacked with canvases. Out the window lies the Jersey shore.

GERSHWIN

I even try to paint myself. Just
to relax. I could have been a good
painter--but of course... There's
a portrait of Ira somewhere around
here. Don't look at this one.

George flips through the canvases, makes no effort to hide the self-portrait on the easel. It's of professional quality--and he's proud of it.

REPORTER

Where does your brother live now?

GERSHWIN

Right here. He's got the adjoining
penthouse.

Gershwin pulls a 11x14 photo from the canvases. It's a panoramic view of the Lewisohn outdoor concert.

GERSHWIN

Oh, look at this! Have you seen
this? It's from the Lewisohn Stadium
all-Gershwin concert. The first time
I conducted. 18,000 people. 5,000
turned away.

CONTINUED

42 CONT'D.

The camera closes in on the Lewisohn photo--the crowd is impressive even by today's rock concert standards.

REPORTER (O.S.)

Your brother, Ira, he's married,
isn't he?

GERSHWIN

Lucky fella.

REPORTER

Are you working on something together?

GERSHWIN

Um-hm.

REPORTER

For Broadway?

GERSHWIN

Um-hm.

REPORTER

Is this a scoop?

GERSHWIN

A political satire by George Kaufman.
It's like an anthem.

CUT TO:

43 EXT.

MUSIC BOX THEATER

NIGHT (1931)

Of Thee I Sing, the new Gershwin musical. Book by
George Kaufman and Morrie Ryskind.

FADE OUT:

CODA"Of Thee I Sing"

--Broadway production number--

44 INT. MUSIC BOX THEATER NIGHT

Color. A full-scale production of the title song of the Gershwins' most successful musical.

The stage is decked out in the regalia of a Madison Square Garden political rally. On the dais, John P. Wintergreen (WILLIAM GAXTON) campaigns for the Presidency. Above him a banner proclaims: "Vote for Prosperity, See What You Get."

Dressed in top hat and tails, Wintergreen is surrounded by a chorus of yes-men. Supporters wave placards reading, "A Vote for Wintergreen is A Vote for Wintergreen," "Even Your Dog Loves Wintergreen," and "Love." Wintergreen and the ensemble sing:

ENSEMBLE

"From the Island of Manhattan
to the Coast of Gold,
From the North to the South,
from the East to the West,
You are the love I love the best,
You're the dream girl of the
sweetest story every told;
A dream I've sought both night and day
For years through all the U.S.A.
The star I've hitched my wagon to
Is very obviously you."

The refrain begins like a ringing patriotic hymn, then doubles-back with the maudlin Tin Pan Alley rejoinder, "baby."

ENSEMBLE

"Of thee I sing, baby--
Summer, autumn, winter, spring, baby.
You're my silver lining,
You're my sky of blue;
There's a lovelight shining
Just because of you.

Of thee I sing, baby--
You have got that certain thing, baby!
Shining star and inspiration,
Worthy of a mighty nation--
Of thee I sing!"

CONTINUED

44 CONT'D.

The song is simultaneously grand and irreverant. It's
George and Ira's national anthem.

CUT TO:

5.

HIGH SOCIETY

45 INT. GLAENZER PARTY NIGHT (1922)

CONTINUED SCENE: the action overlaps scene 24.

Black and white. We've backed up nine years. Glaenzer and Gershwin walk away from the Party Girl. George whispers as they go:

GERSHWIN

Who's that with Astaire?

GLAENZER

Don't you know? Otto Kahn, Chairman of the Board, Metropolitan Opera.

GERSHWIN

Oh.

George discards his cigar as they approach Astaire and Kahn.

ASTAIRE

Hello, George.

GLAENZER

Otto, I'd like you to meet George Gershwin, enfant terrible of Tin Pan Alley, soon to be bright light of Broadway.

GERSHWIN

(extends hand)

George Gershwin. Glad to meet you. Would you like to hear some of my tunes?

Glaenzer and Astaire cringe at George's gaucherie.

KAHN

Actually, I'm waiting to hear the young colored singer from uptown.

George realizes his faux pas. Glaenzer moves to lead George away--Kahn stops him:

KAHN

Oh, don't be embarrassed. I've already heard Mr. Gershwin perform at several parties--he probably doesn't even remember--and I want to hear him again. In fact, I won't leave until he does.

CONTINUED

45 CONT'D.

George looks back at the Party Girl, winks, nods to the two vacant pianos.

GERSHWIN

I wish I had four hands so I could play them both.

KAHN

(bemused)

Jules, this boy's got a lot of talent. Take care of him.

GLAENZER

I'm trying.

CUT TO:

46 EXT. OSSINING RETREAT DAY (1927)

George, Ira, Leonore and KAY SWIFT, 22, dressed in sport clothes, bounce along a dirt road in an open second-hand Mercedes. Ira, an inexperienced driver, struggles to keep the car on the road. The others laugh.

The Gershwins have rented "Chumleigh Farms," a summer retreat fifty miles north of Manhattan.

George sits in back with Kay. She's different from the other girls we've seen with George; she has all three of the critical "B's": beauty, breeding and brains. Gershwin's demeanor indicates that he takes her more seriously than the others. Kay's brown hair is cut just above the neck.

TONY, George's terrier, barks as the Mercedes pulls in front of a two-story farmhouse. Ira turns to George:

IRA

Your turn to drive.

GERSHWIN

I drove once--that's enough.

IRA

But you bought it.

GERSHWIN

That's why I don't have to drive it. How about you, Kay?

She shakes her head. HARRY RUBY, 32, a houseguest, greets them with a baseball bat and glove.

CONTINUED

46 CONT'D.

RUBY

Ready?

GERSHWIN

Sorry, Harry.

(indicates hands)

Can't take any chances. With
you it doesn't make any difference.Ruby, stung by the implication, is crestfallen. George
climbs out of the Mercedes.

GERSHWIN

Besides, we came to work.

LEONORE

I thought it was for peace and quiet.

GERSHWIN

Peaceful and quiet work.

He embraces the jumping terrier.

CUT TO:

47 INT. OSSINING FARMHOUSE NIGHT

George and Ira paint side by side in the utility room.
Gershwin, wearing a V-neck sweater and tie, sketches Tony,
the sleeping terrier. Ira, working in oil, blocks out a
portrait of George. Lee sticks her head in:

LEONORE

How many for dinner?

GERSHWIN

Three. Harry left.

(touches midriff)

Be careful, my stomach.

LEONORE

I know, I know.

She closes the door behind her.

IRA

How is the stomach?

GERSHWIN

The same. But now the other
end doesn't work. My luck.

CONTINUED

47 CONT'D.

IRA
It's all in your head.

GERSHWIN
Thanks. I've heard people say it
was the other way around--but my ass
in my head?

IRA
(laughs)
Kay left already?

GERSHWIN
She want back to the City. After
all, she is married.

IRA
I know. I thought you forgot.

GERSHWIN
(reproving stare)
After dinner, I want to get back
to "Strike Up." The lyrics are
still out of whack.

IRA
(painting)
I'm trying to concentrate.

GERSHWIN
What does that mean?

IRA
Do you know how you hurt Harry today?

GERSHWIN
Huh?

IRA
Telling him it doesn't matter if
he hurts his hands. He's a pianist
too, George.

George realizes his unintended insult:

GERSHWIN
Oh, gees, I didn't mean to..
Should I call him and apologize?
It's just that I--well, it's the truth.

CONTINUED

47 CONT'D.

IRA

Let it be. You should be
concentrating on the Lewisohn
concert anyway.

GERSHWIN

That's what I'm trying not to
think about. The first time
Gershwin's conducted--the press is
just waiting to kill me.

IRA

(stops painting)

Just a second. I can't bear to
hear this again. Composers--forgive
me if I'm out of line--

Gershwin sets down his brush, picks up a cigar:

GERSHWIN

No, go ahead big brother.

IRA

Okay, forget it.

GERSHWIN

Sorry, please, go on.

IRA

You're the most praised person
I know. Composers are always
ignored: Moussorgsky, Shubert...

GERSHWIN

...I'm better melodist than Shubert...

IRA

...Bizet...

GERSHWIN

What about Beethoven? 20,000
went to his funeral? Chopin?

Ira motions for a cigar; George passes him one.

IRA

(sits across room)

I take it back. Dumb idea.
You just shouldn't be so hard
on yourself.

CONTINUED

47 CONT'D.

GERSHWIN

And you should go out more. Why
wouldn't you come to the party?
Prince of England not good enough?

IRA

That still bothering you?

GERSHWIN

Was it Lee?

IRA

No. She likes to go out.

GERSHWIN

So why? This is what we've
been working for, Izzy. These
are the fruits.

IRA

(cool)

How do they taste?

GERSHWIN

Delicious.

IRA

(looks away)

We're probably late for dinner.

GERSHWIN

No, let's just talk a little more.

(Ira puzzled)

We never talk.

George sinks into introspection. Ira doesn't know what
to make of it. This is a side of George he rarely sees.
Neither speaks. Cigar smoke drifts upward.

GERSHWIN

Did you see Nine-Fifteen?

IRA

(confused)

With Kay's lyric's and Arlen's?
The music--

GERSHWIN

That's not what I mean.

CONTINUED

47 CONT'D.

IRA
What then?
(pause)
Kay?
(pause)
But she's married--

INTERRUPTED SCENE.

CUT TO:

48 INT. ELSA MAXWELL PARTY NIGHT (1929)

ELSA MAXWELL, 46, short, dumpy, self-proclaimed hostess of New York society. Of her many parties, the most famous was the 1929 "Come as Your Opposite" extravaganza.

Two hundred notables, all in costume, crowd a penthouse atop the Ritz-Carlton. Champagne and caviar abound; a dance band plays. Wall Street crashed the month before; the party-goers act as if nothing's changed.

Each guest is dressed as his "opposite." Two bankers, one attired as a CIRCUS CLOWN, the other as an ORGAN GRINDER, exchange confidences. Clown: "It can't last." Grinder: "I'm holding on." Clown: "The market will be back in six months."

Elsa, dressed as Herbert Hoover, clicks a glass, calls out:

MAXWELL
Everyone, please! Before things get too out of hand, let me thank my special guests...

ANONYMOUS VOICE
Aren't we all special, Elsa?

MAXWELL
Quiet! I'm Herbert Hoover! If you don't watch out, I'll close some more banks.
(laughs, points)
And that means you too, Mr. You-know-who. Okay, okay, now please let us see you. My special guests: Miss Fannie Brice!

FANNIE BRICE, 38, as Tosca, acknowledges the applause.

CONTINUED

48 CONT'D.

MAXWELL

Mr. Otto Kahn!

(as a coolie)

Mr. Cole Porter!

(as a football player)

Mr. Richard Rodgers!

(as a matador)

And, of course, Mr. George
Gershwin--George! Why aren't
you at the piano?

Gershwin, dressed as Groucho Marx, laughs. He wears Groucho's trademark wire glasses, greasepaint moustache and cigar. Kay Swift, in a jockey's uniform, stands beside him.

The guests applaud, return to small talk. Jules Glaenzer, in hobo's clothes, elbows over with RICHARD RODGERS, 27. Jules extends his hand:

GLAENZER

What's the story, Mornin'-Glory?

GERSHWIN

Jules, this is Kay Swift Warburg.

Kay, Jules Glaenzer, Richard Rodgers.

GLAENZER

(kisses her hand)

A bum's rush.

RODGERS

I know Kay's work.

Kay smiles: she's sophistication personified. George beams. He's come a long way from Delancy Street.

KAY

(comments on costume)

Is this Cartier's fall line?

GLAENZER

Please, no business. I'm just
George's friend.

GERSHWIN

My professor.

A PARTY PHOTOGRAPHER calls out:

CONTINUED

48 CONT'D.

PARTY PHOTOGRAPHER
Mr. Gershwin!

George quickly arranges them for the camera. Flash. Gershwin is at home in the spotlight. "Fame," Robert Payne wrote, "which hurts many, helped him grow."

TIMECUT. PIANO ROOM. George, greasepaint moustache smeared, tie loose, entertains a fawning crowd with a version of "I Got Rhythm." For a moment it sounds like "Bidin' My Time." Kay stands beside the piano.

A guest starts to talk; Glaenzer silences him with a "shush!"

Gershwin eyeballs Kay. She joins him on the bench. They break the tune into two-part harmony. She takes the upper, he the lower. George presses; she struggles to keep up.

CUT TO:

49 INT. RIVERSIDE DR. PENTHOUSE NIGHT (1931)

A cheer goes up. The opening night party for Of Thee I Sing. The banner, "Vote for Prosperity, See What You Get," hands from the ceiling. The play's a hit.

The guests include old friends and new: DeSylva, the Astaires, Freedley, Aaron, Glaenzer, Rodgers, Kahn. All bona fide high society. George and Kay play host.

Otto Kahn, sonorous, is mid-speech:

KAHN

...Gershwin, like that other American pioneer, Charles Lindbergh and the noblest most beautiful figure of all history, Abraham Lincoln, and although I do not wish upon him tragedy, I do wish him an experience of that driving storm of emotions, that solitary wrestling of the soul, which deepens the artistic inner being and spiritual powers.

Polite applause, then back to merry-making. The high priest of high art has spoken--his words laced with subtle criticism of Gershwin's pop success.

CONTINUED

49 CONT'D.

George glances knowingly at Ira, whispers to Kay:

GERSHWIN

Not his suffering, mine. He
wants me to do Dybbuk as an opera.

KAY

Look at it this way: now
the Met's after you.

GERSHWIN

You really think my music'll
be played a hundred years from
now?

KAY

(kisses him)

If you're still around to play it.

Another "Hurrah" goes up.

FADE OUT:

CODA

"Who. Cares?"

--party song--

50 INT. RIVERSIDE DR. PENTHOUSE NIGHT

Color. Later that night. Guests crowd around the piano, singing a song from Of Thee I Sing.

Ira's lyrics touch on the Great Depression, now in its second year; but for these guests--"who cares?"

Two guest singers split the male and female verse lines; three others take the refrains:

PARTY GUESTS

Verse

(He) "Here's some information
I will gladly give the nation:
I am for the true love--
Here's the only girl I do love.

(She) I love him and he loves me
And that's how it will always be--
So what we care about Miss Deveraux?

(Both) Who cares what the public chatters?
Love is the only thing that matters.

Refrain I

Who cares
If the sky cares to fall into the sea?
Who cares what banks fail in Yonkers?
Long as you've got a kiss that conquers?
Why should I care?
Life is one long Jubilee
So long as I care for you--
And you care for me.

Refrain II

Who cares
If the sky cares to fall into the sea?
We two together can win out;
Just remember to stick your chin out.
Why should I care?
Life is one long Jubilee
So long as I care for you--
And you care for me.

CONTINUED

50 CONT'D.

PARTY GUESTS contd

Refrain III

Who cares

If the sky cares to fall into the sea?

Who cares how history rates me

Long as your kiss intoxicates me?

Why should I care?

Life is one long Jubilee

So long as I care for you--

And you care for me."

CUT TO:

6.

PORGY AND BESS

51 INT. GERSHWIN 144TH ST. APT. DAY (1921)

CONTINUED SCENE: the action overlaps scene 11.

Black and white. Ten years earlier. Sheet music spread across the table. Wil Vodery drapes his coat over a chair as Gershwin pounds musical bars on the table top.

GERSHWIN
Okay, "Blue Monday." Where's Buddy?
Buddy!

DeSylva, buttoning his trousers, returns from the john.

GERSHWIN
This is the aria. "Blue Monday."

DESYLVA
(correcting)
"Blue Monday Blues."

GERSHWIN
Whatever. Sam is singing.
Mike's Tavern. Wil's got the
orchestration.

VODERY
(sits at piano)
I got nothing on paper--no time.
(plays)
Here we back it up with strings
and muted brass--nice and bluesy.

DESYLVA
I still don't believe you sold White.

GERSHWIN
He loves it. Jazz tunes against
real-life Harlem.

VODERY
Who's singing Vi?

GERSHWIN
Colletta Ryan. Paul Whiteman's
Orchestra.

VODERY
Blackface?

CONTINUED

51 CONT'D.

 GERSHWIN
 She's got the voice. This'll
 be the best blackface number
 ever. It can't miss.

CUT TO:

52 EXT. DOWNTOWN WILMINGTON NIGHT (1927)

CONTINUED SCENE: the action overlaps scene 37.

George and Ira stroll through the deserted streets.

 GERSHWIN
 ...Maybe we should do an opera,
 something like The Dvbbuk--draw
 on all that Russian Jewish history.

Ira points out two bums on the sidewalk:

 IRA
 Look, it's Gilbert and Sullivan.
 They've come to save our show.

 GERSHWIN
 (laughs)
 Why don't you write lines like
 that for us?

 IRA
 I'm not Gilbert.

 GERSHWIN
 You're better.

 IRA
 I'm not even Hammerstein.

 GERSHWIN
 You're better.

 IRA
Show Boat?

 GERSHWIN
 (conceding the point)
 We talk about Gilbert and Sullivan--
 Kern and Hammerstein do it.

 IRA
 First ain't everything.

CONTINUED

52 CONT' D.

GERSHWIN

I saw Berg's Wozzeck in Berlin.
Brilliant.

IRA

I don't know about opera.

GERSHWIN

Met Berg. Condescending as hell.
He liked my work, though.

IRA

No American's done it.

GERSHWIN

Opera? Herbert. Natoma--red Indians.

IRA

A disaster.

GERSHWIN

You can't force Western scale and
harmony on Indian rhythms. No, the
Red Man is not for me.

IRA

Librettos are so florid--so
European--you just can't write that
kind of stuff in an American setting.

GERSHWIN

But opera lasts. A full-scale opera
would go down in history.

CUT TO:

53 INT. RIVERSIDE DR. STUDY NIGHT (1932)

Gershwin, in a silk polkadot bathrobe, writes alone at
his desk. His demeanor is serious, contemplative:

GERSHWIN (V.O.)

"My dear Mr. Heyward:

I am about to go abroad and
in thinking of ideas for new
compositions came back to Porgy--
and the thought of setting it to
music. It is still the most out-
standing play that I know about the
colored people..."

CUT TO:

54. INT. RIVERSIDE PENTHOUSE DAY (1933)

Gershwin reads a letter as Ira one-fingers the piano.
Both wear casual clothes.

GERSHWIN

"...having finished Act II, I am
at something of a deadlock"--this
is DuBose Heyward--"I must be honest.
The Depression has rather strained me
financially..."

IRA

(hums)

"...she had a most immoral eye,
They called her Lorel-ei."

GERSHWIN

"...The Theater Guild has asked permission
to allow Kern and Hammerstein to adapt
Porgy for Al Jolson. It seems Mr. Jolson
is very interested."

(Ira stops)

"I know you have many commitments, but
please tell me if you are going to write
this opera--and soon." It goes on.
Reiterates his refusal to leave the
South, etc.

Gershwin folds the letter as he crosses the room:

GERSHWIN

If he needs the money, I can't
stand in his way. But Jolson?

IRA

Kern and Hammerstein?

GERSHWIN

I had something much more serious
in mind.

IRA

Maybe you're putting it off for
a reason.

GERSHWIN

(angry)

What reason? I got the two things
it takes to write grand opera: a little
talent and a lot of chutzpah--I told
Kern just that.

CONTINUED

54 CONT'D.

IRA
Pardon My English is dying. We're
 supposed to be back on the boards
 by fall.

GERSHWIN
 I can knock that out in three
 weeks. But South Carolina with
 Heyward?

IRA
 I'm happy for a rest.

George is torn:

GERSHWIN
 Jolson as Porgy?
 (a beat)
 In blackface?

IRA
 (nods)
 Last I looked, Al was no shvahrtza.

CUT TO:

55 EXT. FOLLY ISLAND DAY (1933)

An isolated barrier island ten miles from Charleston.
 Mid-summer sun beats down on sand and salt-water reeds.
 A ramshackle cottage the only building in sight.

It seems like another planet, light years from Gershwin's
 Manhattan.

CUT TO:

56 INT. FOLLY ISLAND COTTAGE DAY

Gershwin, sweating, stripped to swimming trunks, sits at an
 old upright piano. The decor is primitive by any standard:
 iron cot, rusting washbasin, rickety chair. Wall hooks
 serve as a closet. Bottles of drinking water lined under
 the washbasin. George's easel and paint box against the wall.

His torso is bronzed, his face outlined by three-week growth.
 Handsome in an unexpected manner, Gershwin remains every inch
 New York's fabled "Jewish prince."

CONTINUED

56 CONT'D.

He pounds out triplets from "Ain't Necessarily So" as DUBOSE HEYWARD, 48, wearing a summer suit, enters. Heyward provides a sharp contrast. Introverted, thin, he walks with the bearing--limp and all--of Southern aristocracy.

HEYWARD

Am I botherin' you?

George scribbles as he plays. Handwritten sheets stand atop the piano. Harry Botkin, Gershwin's cousin, remarked George composed as quickly as someone writing a letter.

GERSHWIN

Well, Gershwin did say it was a labor of love.

Heyward turns to leave:

GERSHWIN

'Bose! Listen! Just listen to this! Can you hear it?

(plays)

Isn't this the greatest music composed in America? Nothing like this has been done--it'll have a sensational effect. The few whites will speak, but the Negroes, answering, will always sing. In comparison, whites are so unemotional, dull, drab.

Heyward limps out; George barely notices.

CUT TO:

57 EXT. JAMES ISLAND NIGHT

James Island, adjacent to Folly, populated by native Gullah Negroes. Gershwin and Heyward, wearing loose shirts and linen trousers, stroll down the dirt "main street"--a half-dozen dilapidated cabins alongside a country store. Three blacks exit the store, turn down a dark side street.

Heyward leads the way. NEGRO SPIRITUALS echo from a cabin. George stops, listens.

HEYWARD

It's the Gullahs--they've been cut o' the mainland a hun'ert years. More like Africa than America. Comin' here's like an expedition...

CONTINUED

57 CONT'D.

Gershwin measures the beats in his mind, says to himself:

GERSHWIN

I know this music. I've heard this.

He heads toward the cabin; Heyward follows.

CUT TO:

58 INT. GULLAH CABIN NIGHT

George and DuBose enter. A Holy Roller meeting is in progress. Up front, a dozen Gullahs are "shouting"--singing spirituals to complex rhythms beat by hands and feet. Each Gullah takes a turn as Lead Shouter.

Gershwin grabs Heyward's arm:

GERSHWIN

'Bose!

HEYWARD

I know, George, I live here all my life.

Gershwin listens, momentarily transfixed. He distinguishes each of six rhythms, taps his foot front to back, side to side.

George glances at DuBose, then joins the SHOUTERS. After several measures, he assumes the role of Lead Shouter, clapping and stomping to the beat. He swings to the body rhythms of the Negro South.

Several Shouters stop to look at him, then continue singing. Music is music, and a good beat is a good beat.

Gershwin, dripping sweat, shouts his heart out. Heyward, astounded, watches. George isn't slumming--he's simply singing. "I think," Heyward wrote, "he's probably the only white man in America who could have done that."

CUT TO:

59 INT. WJZ STUDIO EVENING (1934)

DON WILSON, 34, the announcer, stands poised in a double-breasted suit before an oversized radio mike. Behind him a studio orchestra and, at the piano, George Gershwin.

CONTINUED

59 CONT'D.

The studio clock hits 7:30; the PRODUCER cues the orchestra. After a musical flourish, Wilson intros in trademark monotone:

WILSON

"Music by Gershwin." Tonight's show comes to you headed by George Gershwin, America's leading modern composer. This program, sponsored by the makers of Feenamint, the delicious chewing gum laxative, will be heard twice weekly, Monday and Friday...

Gershwin waits his cue. His face is clean-shaven, his tan faded.

WILSON

...It is now the great privilege to introduce Mr. George Gershwin.

George leans into the piano mike. He speaks in uninflected tones, his ethnic cadences rehearsed away:

GERSHWIN

Good evening. Don Wilson said these programs were to be "intimate reviews of modern music." Personally, I would have felt safer if he would have said they were to be informal. I want you to feel as if you had dropped in at my house or I at yours. I'd like to start by telling you the inside story of the tune we're using as a radio signature. It's called "The Man I Love" and it was written ten years ago. At this time my brother Ira and I did a musical comedy, Lady Be Good, featuring those delightful performers, Fred and Adele Astaire...

CUT TO:

60 INT. IRA'S RIVERSIDE STUDY EVENING

Ira's study is functional. No showplace this. Ira and DuBose Heyward work at the piano. George's voice rings from the radio.

CONTINUED

60 CONT'D.

GERSHWIN (O.S.)

...Years later the song was song by the artist most responsible for its success. I refer to that remarkable personality, Helen Morgan. So now I will ask Mr. Katzman and the orchestra to play the tune and, if nobody minds, I will attempt the piano part myself.

The orchestra strikes up as Ira and Dubose twist a rhyme.

CUT TO:

61 INT. WJZ STUDIO EVENING

Mr. Katzman wraps up "The Man I Love."

WILSON

Tell us, George, what have you been doing?

GERSHWIN

I've just finished a concert tour in which we played 28 cities in 28 days. Traveled over 12,000 miles.

WILSON

I hear you're working a new show.

GERSHWIN

Actually, it's an opera--a folk opera about Charleston Negroes.

WILSON

Well, that certainly sounds interesting.

(turns into mike)

In just a moment we'll hear from Mr. Gershwin again. But first we have a scene from real life for you. Two traveling salesmen are chatting in a hotel lobby. One is an old-timer, the other a youngster on his first trip.

Wilson steps back; the Producer cues two actors. Reading scripts, they play the OLD and YOUNG SALESMAN. Both are the same age; they assume appropriate voices:

OLD SALESMAN

Well, well, Charlie, how'd you make out today?

CONTINUED

61 CONT'D.

YOUNG SALESMAN

Pretty good, I guess, but I don't think I was cut out for this traveling business, Mr. Jones.

OLD SALESMAN

You don't, eh? What's wrong?

YOUNG SALESMAN

With all this jumping from town to town, I've never been able to watch my diet.

OLD SALESMAN

Doesn't sound so good.

YOUNG SALESMAN

Yeah. You see my problem has always been constipation and I'm particularly anxious right now because I've never been able to find a laxative...

George looks to Wilson, lifts his eyes heavenward.

CUT TO:

62 INT. IRA'S STUDY EVENING

The Salesmen continue:

OLD SALESMAN (O.S.)

Well, well, it's about time you got wise. You take a tip from an old-timer...

IRA

(plays)

"Oh, I got plenty o' nuthin'"

HEYWARD

(turns down radio)

"An' nuthin's plenty fo' me."

IRA

Don't do that.

HEYWARD

I'm sorry.

IRA

(hurt)

I was listening. It was George.

CONTINUED

62 CONT'D.

Heyward raises the volume:

OLD SALESMAN (O.S.)
There's a drugstore right here in the
hotel. Why don't you go down and get
a pack of Feenamint right now?

CUT TO:

63 INT. RIVERSIDE DR. PENTHOUSE DAY

THREE BLACK OPERA SINGERS wait in the living room.

CUT TO:

64 INT. RIVERSIDE DR. EXERCISE ROOM DAY

George, Ira and DuBose in the middle of a discussion:

GERSHWIN
The Met just ain't gonna do it.

IRA
If Otto Kahn were still alive.
Remember that speech--

GERSHWIN
(interrupts)
He'd be no different than the
new bastards: blackface.

IRA
Really?

GERSHWIN
They're all the goddamn same, Iz.
Kahn woulda done Dybbuk, but Porgy
and Bess? They say they can't find
Negro cast. Ha!
(punches boxing bag)

HEYWARD
We can't...

GERSHWIN
Don't bother to say what I know
you're gonna say. I ain't doing
blackface--besides, what's four shows
a year anyway? The Theater Guild will
put it on as a regular show.

HEYWARD
Broadway?

IRA
We'll have to cut an hour.

Gershwin turns away.

IRA
George?

FADE OUT:

CODA

"Oh, de Lawd Shake de Heavens"

--opera--

65 INT. ALVIN THEATER NIGHT (1935)

Color. Act II, Scene 4: Porgy and Bess.

Seeking shelter from an impending storm, the inhabitants of Catfish Row huddle in "Serena's Room." Hurricane winds beat against the clapboard walls. Theater lights simulate lightning bolts.

The frightened mass whisper and pray. Their sounds form a spiritual: a musical number in which six separate lines move freely against each other (without measure bars) to a humming choral background. The resulting chant is not unlike that of the Gullahs on James Island.

ALTO SOLO

"Professor Jesus, teach Yo' ignorant chillen
how to combat de fires an' torments
of dat black visitation from below.
We leans on You Professor Jesus, what die
on Calbery.
Dispense Yo' blessings on Yo' needful an'
Yo' grateful followers,
Cast away dose black clouds an' de darkness
an' show we de golden sunshine gleaming once
again.
Professor Jesus, teach yo' ignorant chillen,
cast away dose black clouds an' show we de
golden sunshine shin' on de fields an' de
meadows
an' de mountains an' de plains, Amen.

FIRST BASS SOLO

Oh, Captain Jesus, find it in Yo' heart
to save us,
I's given You six chillen to add to Yo'
legions,
my po' wife is now wid You three year
dis October,
Oh, Captain Jesus, but we is seven left
to tell Satan man where he get off at.
We has all lived sweetly an' sweetly we is
willin' to die for You.
Oh, Captain Jesus, we knows how sweetly
You treats
Yo' soldiers, when You opens the gates
for dem.
Oh, Captain Jesus, find it in Yo' heart to
save us worshippers 'cause there is no
truer followers of de Lawd den what's
prayin' to You now

(MORE)

65 CONT'D.

FIRST BASS SOLO contd

Oh, Captain Jesus, we has all lived sweetly
 an' sweetly we is willin' to die for You,
 Amen.

SECOND BASS SOLO

Oh, Father, what die on Calbery, we's
 dependin' on You
 we's leanin' on You to ease the rocky way,
 we's been trabin' de straight an' narrow
 path dat ends in glory.
 Oh, Father, what die on Calbery, darkness
 has descended,
 we all knows it's temporary, Lawd.
 Oh, Father, what die on Calbery, maybe we
 is po' misable sinners,
 but we certainly tries all de live long day
 to follow Yo' teachings.
 Lawd, Oh, Father, if we ain't been doin'
 jus' what You is wishin' us to do,
 it ain't because we ain' been tryin',
 'cause we is been tryin' to follow Yo' sacred
 teachin's all de live long day, Amen.

CHORUS

Lawd, hab mercy.

ALL

Oh, de Lawd shake de Heavens an' de
 Lawd rock de groun'
 Ah--An' where you goin' stand, my
 brudder an' my sister,
 When de sky come atumblin' down? "

CUT TO:

7.

WOMEN

66 INT. THEATER DISTRICT RESTAURANT NIGHT (1923)

CONTINUED SCENE: the action overlaps the middle of scene 20.

Black and white. Twelve years earlier. George's Show Girl date waits as he gives the Beautiful Hat Check Girl the 100% eye, tips her.

The Hat Check Girl unfolds the collar tip as they leave. Tucked inside is George's card and phone number.

CUT TO:

67 INT. 103RD ST. APT. MUSIC ROOM NIGHT

Later that night. Gershwin, jacket off, tie loose, plays the Steinway. The Hat Check Girl sits beside him. Two champagne glasses stand on the piano.

George stops, turns to his companion:

GERSHWIN

Forgive me, this is just a little tune I was thinking about on the way home. Actually, I was thinking about you when it came to me. Let me try it again.

He plays a "waltzy" melody--melodramatic to the point of self-parody. The Hat Check Girl is more than impressed: she's in love.

CUT TO:

68 INT. RIVERSIDE DR. PENTHOUSE NIGHT (1927)

Four years later: the wee hours. The moderne decor lit for romance. George plays for a tipsy DEBUTANTE leaning on the piano.

GERSHWIN

When I saw you at the party, the first thing I heard was a melody. I knew then that I had to play it for you. Forgive me if it's a little rough.

Gershwin plays the same melodramatic tune as years before. It's his seduction "standard."

CUT TO:

69 INT. OSSINING FARMHOUSE NIGHT (1927)

CONTINUED SCENE: the action overlaps scene 47.

CONTINUED

69 CONT'D.

George and Ira sit across the utility room, smoking cigars. Their easels unattended. Tony sleeps at George's feet.

IRA

What then?

(pause)

Kay?

(pause)

But she's married.

GERSHWIN

What's it like with Lee?

IRA

You don't like her much, do you?

GERSHWIN

No, honest, just the opposite.
Really. But what's it like--to
be married? I got to get married.

IRA

You keep saying that.

GERSHWIN

I'm going to--this year.

IRA

You keep saying that.

GERSHWIN

Why should I settle for one woman?
How could I keep my schedule if I
got married?

IRA

Dickens had ten children--and
25 books.

GERSHWIN

What are you? Some encyclopedia?

IRA

Martin Luther? He had--

GERSHWIN

I must keep falling in love. How
else can I keep writing love songs?

IRA

You write the music.

CONTINUED

69 CONT'D.

GERSHWIN

(stung)

What does that mean? The "love"
in our songs is just lyrics--
"Mr. Words"?

IRA

No. I'm just stating a fact,
"Mr. Music."

George smiles: there's no real animosity between them.

GERSHWIN

How can you keep writing love lyrics
without being in love?

IRA

I am.

GERSHWIN

With Lee?

IRA

Mostly--and others. I'm in
love most the time, George.

GERSHWIN

And you do nothing about it?

IRA

Look at me. I know my limitations.
I make sure the others are unapproachable.

GERSHWIN

So do I--then I approach them anyway.
Every woman I've truly loved seems
to be married or otherwise totally
unavailable.

IRA

Like Kay.

GERSHWIN

Like Kay.

CUT TO:

70 INT. RIVERSIDE DR. PENTHOUSE NIGHT (1935)

George and Kay play a two piano version of Brahms' Piano Concerto #2 in B Flat. "George playing was George happy," Rouben Mamoulian said. And he was even happier playing with Kay.

CONTINUED

70 CONT'D.

Gershwin spreads his tunebook across the keyboard. His name's on the cover; his notes fill the first page. George flips the book over--Kay's name is on the reverse cover. Her tunes fill the back.

GERSHWIN

What next? Yours or mine? You always help me--my turn to help you.

KAY

So generous.

GERSHWIN

I'm learning humility.

KAY

'Cause of Porgy? It's a great piece. Don't get into self-pity again.

GERSHWIN

124 performances at the Alvin. Compared to six times a year at the Met, that's a run of twenty years. Virgil Thompson saying I had no right to write about Negroes!

(stands)

Did you see his idiot opera with Gertrude Stein?

He checks his receding hairline. A MANSERVANT waits in the next room.

GERSHWIN

Porgy's just the start of Gershwin's serious work, Kay. I'm bored of Broadway.

(paces)

I'm gonna continue music theory with Shillinger. All over Europe ideas are exploding: Brecht, Stravinsky, Picasso, Freud. But not here. I've got to develop my brains to match my emotional development.

KAY

Europe's also going to pieces.

George dismisses the Manservant with a glance.

GERSHWIN

I know.

(a beat)

So am I. I'm all mixed up. Remember Francie's wedding? That dimestore Rabbi? If I got married, it'd be like that--last minute. Why can't I get married?

CONTINUED

70 CONT'D.

KAY
(walks over)
You can.

GERSHWIN
I'm not afraid of it. Really.
The right wife would be an asset
to me. She could help me.

He welcomes Kay's embrace.

CUT TO:

71 EXT. WEYHE GALLERY DAY

A prestigious gallery on Lexington Ave.

CUT TO:

72 INT. WEYHE GALLERY DAY

George and Kay examine a Klee painting. The staff accords them celebrity status. Gershwin steps back from the painting, examines it from one angle, then another:

GERSHWIN
Hm.

George furrows his brow, shakes his head self-critically:

GERSHWIN
What am I doing? My music wouldn't
even hold up to this much examination.
(correcting himself)
It's a good painting.

They cross to the next Klee. Kay struggles with something she's been meaning to say:

KAY
I spoke with the lawyers again this
morning. My divorce will be final
in a month.

George studies the Klee: no comment. Digesting.

KAY
We just couldn't put it off
any longer. It'd gotten to be
quite a charade--Jim and I.

CONTINUED

72 CONT'D.

She waits for his reaction. A beat. He turns:

GERSHWIN
(false enthusiasm)
"S'wonderful." Mazel-tov.

KAY
I need my own life. My own
opportunities.

Kay's implication is clear: she's available for marriage.
Her availability catches George unprepared. He steps
back, as if retreating.

KAY
It's not...

GERSHWIN
(clutches abdomen)
Damn composer's stomach. I've had
just about as much as I can take.
I live on dry toast as it is.

KAY
(lets him off hook)
You should see a doctor.

GERSHWIN
I've seen a dozen doctors. It
must be psychosomatic.

KAY
That's what I mean. A psychiatrist.
Do you know Gregory Zilboorg?

GERSHWIN
By reputation.

KAY
Russian emigre. Authority on
Byzantine art...

GERSHWIN
Freud? Trained with Freud?

KAY
No--but he's the best.

GERSHWIN
I've heard about his client list.

CONTINUED

72 CONT'D.

KAY
 "Patients," George. Not "clients."
 I'll have somebody set up an
 appointment.

GERSHWIN
 Yes, please. Maybe that'll help my
 stomach. And the other problem.
 I've got to try something.

CUT TO:

73 EXT. LEXINGTON AVENUE DAY

George breaks the brim of his hat--a recent accessory to
 mask his balding hairline. They pass a boarded storefront.

GERSHWIN
 Ira and I have been talking about
 going back to Hollywood.

Kay's surprised. Is this a conscious--or unconscious--
 reaction to her impending divorce?

GERSHWIN
 The Depression has finally hit
 Broadway. There's no money here,
 Hollywood's flush. I need a change.
 Astaire's doing another picture.

KAY
 What about your studies with
 Shillinger?

GERSHWIN
 I didn't say we were going. Besides,
 Gershwin can write classical stuff out
 West. I wrote Second Rhapsody there.
 But get this: we were talking the same price
 as before, but now they say I'm too "highbrow"--
 'cause Porgy flopped--and cut the offer. So
 I wired RKO: "RUMORS ABOUT Highbrow Music
 RIDICULOUS STOP AM OUT TO WRITE HITS."

George laughs; Kay's silent. She watches, knows: the
 writing's on the wall.

CUT TO:

74 INT. TAXI DAY (1936)

George, dressed for travel, rides with Kay. They affect
 an upbeat mood.

CONTINUED

74 "CONT'D.

GERSHWIN

(forced levity)

...now I hear Ginger Rogers is
out of the Astaire picture and
a newcomer--Joan Fontaine--in.
And, of course, we're supposed to
be finished yesterday.

KAY

Don't worry, it'll be fun. This
way it'll be more "Gershwin."

Awkward pause.

KAY

Lee and I are going back to pack.
Your luggage'll be out by Friday.

GERSHWIN

I'll call when we--

Kay stops him with a tight smile:

KAY

We agreed not to communicate for
a year--see what happens. Let's
not chicken out now.

(laughs)

You'll have fun in sunny
Californie'. You need a change.

George turns away. Scenery reflects against the window.
His composure slips. He can't look at her.

CUT TO:

75

EXT.

NEWARK AIRPORT

DAY

George and Ira pose on the steps of a TWA prop plane.
George holds his Panama hat, Ira a brown fedora.

Leonore and Kay stand on the tarmac. Lee snaps a bon
voyage photo. Ira calls to her:

IRA

See you soon!

The girls wave as the brothers duck inside.

CUT TO:

76 INT. TWA PLANE DAY

Ira waves out the window as George takes the aisle seat.
SOUND of propellers. Ira turns to him:

GERSHWIN
God, I wish I were back in
New York--

INTERRUPTED SCENE.

FADE OUT:

CODA

"But Not For Me"

--torch song--

77 INT. JAZZ CLUB NIGHT (1936)

Color. An intimate Manhattan club.

A TORCH SINGER of the Helen Morgan/Libby Holman mold sings on a stool under a spotlight. She has a new style beauty. The Flapper days are long gone. She's lived through the Depression; her face reflects the reality of a world poised for war.

Even though the date is 1936, the Torch Singer sings in the dark haunting tones of the post-war era. The song stands in sharp contrast to the Adele Astaire/Kearns rendition of "S'Wonderful" in scene 23 (chapter two coda). It's a pained bluesy interpretation in the Carmen MacCrae style. Adele Astaire gives way to Kay Swift.

We may or may not see the club itself, its band, its well-heeled patrons crowded around small tables. The Torch Singer commands the spotlight:

TORCH SINGER

Verse

"Old Man Sunshine--listen, you!
Never tell me Dreams Come True!
Just try it--
Beatrice Fairfax--don't you dare
Ever tell me he will care;
I'm certain
It's the Final Curtain.
I never want to hear
From any cheer--
Ful Pollyannas,
Who tell you Fate
Supplies a Mate--
It's all bananas!

Refrain 1

They're writing songs of love,
But not for me;
A lucky star's above,
But not for me.

With Love to Lead the Way,
I've found more Clouds of Gray
Than any Russian play
Could guarantee.

CONTINUED

. 77 CONT'D.

TORCH SINGER contd.

I was a fool to fall
And Get That Way;
Heigh ho! Alas! and al-
So, Lackaday!

Although I can't dismiss
The mem'ry of his kiss--
I guess he's not for me.

Refrain 2

He's knocking on a door,
But not for me;
He'll plan a two by four,
But not for me.

I know Love's a Game;
I'm puzzled, just the same--
Was I the Moth or Flame...?
I'm all at sea.

It all began so well,
But what an end!
This is the time a Fell-
Er Needs a Friend!

When ev'ry happy plot
Ends with the marriage knot--
And there's no knot for me."

CUT TO:

8.

PSYCHOANALYSIS

78

INT.

ZILBOORG'S OFFICE

DAY (1935)

Black and white. Gershwin, in suit and tie, lies face-up on a worn fabric sofa.

George speaks to the camera in medium shot. The entire chapter is a single, uncut monologue.

Gregory Zilboorg, George's analyst, sits off-camera. His VOICE indicates his age, 45, and his Russian-Jewish background.

GERSHWIN

...the ceiling's yellowed here and there, not that it's really that old--just hasn't been cleaned. I mean, probably ever. The building seems to be about 1880 or so--though that's not my field. The two center beams--my eye always catches this--seem unevenly worn, as if from two different rooms--though that's impossible. They don't blend with the molding and--and this has always bothered me--unsymmetrical to the painting. And you're supposed to be an expert on Byzantine Art. Is that intentional? I don't suppose you see it much from this perspective. Every afternoon at this time, just at the beginning of the session, the sun falls an inch--a goddamn inch--just above the frame of that painting you know I don't like much anyway. And it gets worse as the days grow longer--closer but not actually touching the frame. I've often wondered if my thoughts would be different if I came at another time of day.

Gershwin waits for a response. None.

GERSHWIN

I feel this is the most important time in my career--a rusty hinge on which my whole life will swing. My serious work has just only begun. What I don't know about music could fill a normal man's lifetime. Sometimes I tell people I wish I'd gone to college--at least music school, but I'm not sure that's true. You know, it's incredible. On paper, it's all numbers and intersecting graphs. Vertical harmony, horizontal melody and rhythm--each containing elements of the other. It's like a mathematical emotional science. But that's on paper--when you hear it, it's invisible. In painting you capture a moment but music's an abstraction over time. It's in the wind and that you don't need a fancy college education to enjoy.

CONTINUED

78 CONT'D.

Gershwin pauses, waits for a reaction: none.

GERSHWIN

You should be paying me. I come here every day, give you music lessons and pay you \$35 an hour. I take that back-- I'd hate your job, being a human garbage can. Sitting there all day, letting people throw their crap in. Dump, dump. How can you stand it?

(no response)

I feel like I was meant for hard physical work, like chopping trees, using my muscles. This composing is indoor work and it takes a lot out of a fella like me. You know, if I cared for a ballad type song I could write reams of them full of sobs and languor--but it wouldn't be me. Later I'd play them through and feel like they were written by somebody else. When I'm in my normal mood tunes just come dripping off my fingers and they're always lively, full of pep--American pep. I feel like I'm destined to do something great, you know, by Fate, but there's always some obstacle in my way. Just like now, just when I'm virile and famous, I'm going bald--I know you can see it, my thinning hair. That's all you can see, in fact--is that why Freud set it up this way? To humiliate middle-aged balding Jews? Anyway, it's always some new obstacle. People say I'm arrogant, but I'm just honest. I've said this before--you know you can make an intervention anytime you want. Even Freud made interventions from time to time.

Zilboorg says nothing. Gershwin drifts into his own thoughts. Silence. His breathing grows slower; his eyelids close.

Gershwin, tired, slips into a dream state. Rapid Eye Movement begins. Zilboorg waits.

After a half-minute, Gershwin snaps awake:

GERSHWIN

Oh, I was just dreaming, I think. I mean I knew I was here with you--I could hear you breathing--but I was also half-dreaming. It's like when you hear music. You know where you are, you know there're people around, you hear talk--but you only listen to the music.

(MORE)

CONTINUED

GERSHWIN contd

(recollects dream)

We were in a wagon train--my brothers and sisters and I--like on the Oregon Trail. The sun had just come up. My mother was there too, but we were all grown up--Mamma and my sister were the same age. Poppa not there. There was some anxiety. Noises far away. Like Indians. But it was more like the old rag tunes in the nikelodeons at Coney Island. I was frightened--then a hand reached in the wagon and I woke up. Just a dream fragment. Amazing--wow! I was here and there at the same time. Couldn't be more than a minute or two--how long was I gone?

Zilboorg intervenes:

ZILBOORG (O.S.)

What are your associations?

GERSHWIN

(thinks)

The wagon train--the West. Conquering America, I guess. What else? An immigrant dream. More first generation than second, I suppose, though I don't care much for the West myself. It's a great subject for a major music piece--but not for me.

Gershwin falls silent.

ZILBOORG (O.S.)

The women in the wagon?

(Gershwin shrugs)

The hand?

(Gershwin blank)

What was the hand like?

GERSHWIN

(correcting)

The hands.

(thinks)

Just like hands.

ZILBOORG (O.S.)

Like mine?

GERSHWIN

No.

ZILBOORG (O.S.)

Whose?

CONTINUED

78 CONT'D.

GERSHWIN

Ira's--sort of.

(reluctant)

And yours. I can't see them now,
of course, but I seem them when I
come in.

ZILBOORG (O.S.)

What do my hands look like?

GERSHWIN

Common hands--old man's hands. Hands
that could never play the piano.
Don't get offended.

ZILBOORG (O.S.)

My hands are like Ira's? He has
an old man's hands?

GERSHWIN

No. Like my father's--now there was
a real Wandering Jew. Never held a
job more than a couple months. Women's
shoes, pawnbroking, restaurant. Always
something new, something new to conquer,
'cept he never did. Just restless.
No inner life. Try one thing, move on.
Who'd have thought his son'd be writing
fugues? Invited to the White House?

(a beat)

I understand what you're doing, of
course. I'm not really cooperating.
You realize that, too. I think Freud
puts altogether too much importance on
free association--though it's very helpful
in music. It's just so Jewish in a way,
maybe just 'cause you're Jewish. I know
you're trying to separate me from my creativity.

(pause: no response)

That's impossible, of course. When I
play no one else exists, not you or Ira,
Mom: just ideas, feelings. All alone on
a stream--like Lewis and Clark. "Surrounded
by Indians." In general I think psychoanalysis
is a waste of time, though I like you personally
very much. Every day I think about not
coming, but I'm not the sort that quits. Being
honest, I dread not coming more than coming--
I have plenty better uses for my time, as you
know. I could have written an opera in the time
spent here--well, at least a show or two.
Analysis certainly hasn't helped

(MORE)

CONTINUED

GERSHWIN contd

my stomach--or my asshole for that matter. I can talk to you like this. It's a favor--you like it. Constipation is, after all, a great musical tradition--even for goyim. Look at Luther. Composed on the john...

(sings)

..."A Mighty Fortress is Our God."
Turned the world upside down--five children to boot--

George catches himself, regroupes:

GERSHWIN

Okay, I heard it too. So there are some connections. I know that. I just don't think they make any difference--random, like jazz, not real music.

(corrects himself)

Jazz is real music, of course, I know, but now you'll try to connect jazz with Luther and his five goddamn Protestant children. I don't give a shit--a damn--what Freud says about "slips of the tongue." Some connections are just coincidence, not like music. I'd marry Kay if she were available--kids and all. I'm not afraid of marriage, though it bothers me that she's not at least half-Jewish--and I'm not religious, so why should it? You're not either...

(voice trails off)

ZILBOORG (O.S.)

Would it effect your music?

GERSHWIN

If I married Kay? No. I'd still be Gershwin. It might change someways, I suppose, but not really--not in pace. It's just...

Gershwin, frustrated, lets his voice drift off. Zilboorg says nothing: George is doing his work for him.

GERSHWIN

(defensive)

I have done something. I am Gershwin, after all. Who else in America--Kern, Berlin? They're great--give me a piano and I'll show you how great they are--but they're not Gershwin. This is terrible torture--I'm not introspective by nature--

(MORE)

CONTINUED

78 CONT'D.

GERSHWIN contd
making me talk without a piano.
Success ain't something that sits around
home like a faithful dog--you gotta
go out every day, earn it. Maybe I'm
not Schoenberg or Stravinsky, but I
am Gershwin. Why else would you agree
to take me as a patient?

ZILBOORG (O.S.)
That's a strange thing to say.

GERSHWIN
(sarcastic)
Oh, I love your false modesty. I'm
a lot of things, but I'm no phoney.
Ask anybody I've worked with.

ZILBOORG (O.S.)
Who are you talking to?

GERSHWIN
Oh, you know goddamn well.

Zilboorg waits.

FADE OUT:

CODA

"How Long Has This Been Going On?"

--Vorkapitch montage--

79 MONTAGE

Color. A multiple-exposure montage in the style of Slavko Vorkapitch, the Yugoslavian emigre whose editorial set-pieces were the hallmark of Hollywood Thirties' musicals and gangster films. Vorkapitch's overlapping montages characteristically featured a brew of rat-tat-tat action scenes, neon signs, symbols of passing time and close-up reactions.

The montage juxtaposes previous scenes from the script: a mix of repeated shots, out-takes, extensions of earlier action and pastiche period iconography.

The montage could include fragments in this order:

- Gershwin winks at the Young Singer at Remick's (scene 2)
- Gershwin gives tour of Riverside penthouse (scene 42)
- George plays with Kilenyi (scene 9)
- montage of club neon: El Morocco, Pavillion Room, Connie's Club, Stork Club
- Boris Thomashevsky in The Broken Violin (scene 4)
- Ira and Leonore kiss at their wedding (scene 38)
- George and Kay dance at Elsa Maxwell's party (scene 48)
- montage of Broadway marquees: Alvin, Music Box, Apollo, Imperial
- Gershwin plays for Party Girl at Glaenzer party (scene 45)
- the vaudeville Female Singer points an accusing finger at teenage Gerhwin (scene 6)
- George and Ira discuss rhythm (scene 16)
- New York-Boston train (scene 28)
- montage of music sheets: "Fascinating Rhythm," "Clap Yo' Hands," "Someone to Watch Over Me," Preludes for Piano, "Bidin' My Time," "I Got a Crush on You," American in Paris, etc.

CONTINUED

79

CONT'D.

- Gershwin takes a bow at Aeolian Hall (scene 32)
 - pool balls collide (scene 27)
 - George shouts with Gullah blacks (scene 58)
 - Kay and George embrace, kiss (scene 70)
 - Times Square overview
 - George and Ira in Wilmington (scene 37)
 - Rose Gershwin watches young George straighten his bow tie (scene 3)
 - cab ride to Newark with Kay: Gershwin stares out window (scene 74)
- Over the montage a Fifties Sinatra-like voice sings:

MALE VOICE

Refrain I

"I could cry salty tears;
Where have I been all these years?
Little wow,
Tell me now;
How long has this been going on?

There were chills up my spine,
And some thrills I can't define.
Listen, sweet,
I repeat:
How long has this been going on?

Oh, I feel I could melt;
Into heaven I'm hurled--
I know how Columbus felt
Finding another world.

Kiss me once, then once more.
What a dance I was before!
What a break--
For heaven's sake!
How long has this been going on?

Verse 2

'Neath the stars at bazaars I've had
to caress men.
Five or ten dollars then I'd collect
from all those yes-men.
Don't be sad, I must add that they meant
no more than chessmen.
Darling, can't you see 'twas for charity?
(MORE)

CONTINUED

79 CONT'D.

MALE VOICE contd

Though these lips have made slips, it was
never really serious.
Who'd a' thought I'd be brought to a state
that's so delirious?

Refrain 2

I could cry salty tears;
Where have I been all these years?
Listen, you--
Tell me, do--
How long has this been going on?

What a kick--how I buzz!
Boy, you click as no one does!
Hear me, sweet,
I repeat:
How long has this been going on?

Dear, when in your arms I creep--
That divine rendezvous--
Don't wake me, if I'm asleep,
Let me dream that it's true.

Kiss me twice, then once more--
That makes thrice, let's make it four!
What a break--
For heaven's sake!
How long has this been going on?"

CUT TO:

9.

HOLLYWOOD

80 INT. TWA PLANE DAY (1936)

CONTINUED SCENE: the action overlaps scene 76.

Black and white. Gershwin settles into the aisle seat.

GERSHWIN

God, I wish I were back in New York.

George leans back, closes his eyes. The airplane accelerates down the runway.

CUT TO:

81 EXT. GOLDWYN STUDIOS DAY

The Goldwyn lot on Formosa Avenue: a familiar sun-drenched stucco and palm tableau.

CUT TO:

82 INT. SAM GOLDWYN'S OFFICE DAY

SAM GOLDWYN, 51, stocky, bald, sits on an elevated platform before a wall of windows. After a visit to Mussolini, Goldwyn redecorated his office alla Il Duce. TWO STUDIO EXECUTIVES sit in overstuffed chairs; THREE SECRETARIES stand nervously against the wall.

Across the room, Gershwin plays "Our Love is Here to Stay" on a piano brought in for that purpose.

George stops, waits for a reaction. Goldwyn, whose proletarian tastes and malapropisms are Hollywood legend, doesn't know what to say. He turns to the others:

GOLDWYN

What do you think? Wonderful, huh?
Not too highbrow?

Goldwyn's yes-men echo his sentiments:

FIRST STUDIO EXEC

It's real catchy.

SECOND STUDIO EXEC

It's...wonderful.

The mogul, in need of additional reinforcement, walks to a side door and calls out:

CONTINUED

82 CONT'D.

GOLDWYN

Em', Johnny, get the others in here.

THREE MORE SECRETARIES and TWO MINOR EXECUTIVES file in. Soon they are assembled like an a capella choir.

GOLDWYN

Okay, George, play it again.

Gershwin, supressing his hurt, starts again. He has passed this stage of his career. He need not be judged by a chorus of stooges in the service of a vulgar showman. George concentrates on the keyboard.

CUT TO:

83 EXT. ROXBURY HOUSE DAY

1019 N. Roxbury Drive. A creamy-white Spanish-style house in Beverly Hills, two blocks north of Sunset.

IN THE BACKYARD, guests play tennis on an asphalt court. George and Ira sit beside a swimming pool lined with umbrella-covered tables and chaises.

Gershwin, in swim trunks, types at a poolside table. Ira, tan for the first time, rests on a chaise. He wears tennis clothes, his racquet on his lap.

Leonore collects empty glasses, heads inside.

GERSHWIN

(stops typing)

This obsession with big production numbers. Everything has to be gussied up in an elaborate fashion. Why can't they just accept something simple, original and smart? Dealing with these guys is like starting all over again. We're making more bucks than ever, but I can't wait to get back to serious work--

IRA

That's your letter?

GERSHWIN

Yeah--to Mabel.

IRA

I like it here. I like the pace.

(laughs)

I didn't see you complaining the other night.

CONTINUED

83 CONT'D.

GERSHWIN

No, everybody's very gemultich--
but, look around: they dig a hole,
plant a palm tree, dig another hole,
plant a composer.

IRA

The songs are good.

GERSHWIN

Yeah.

IRA

The life's good.

GERSHWIN

Yeah.

Harry Ruby, dressed for tennis, opens the gate, walks
toward the court. He calls across the pool:

RUBY

Afternoon, "Words and Music."

GERSHWIN

Welcome to "Gershwin Park."

Ruby waves as he disappears from sight.

IRA

Lee and I are thinking of buying a
place here--settle in. We'll build
a house out back for when you come...

GERSHWIN

Don't worry, I won't let you get
too far away.

IRA

And if you get married--

GERSHWIN

This year.

IRA

"If." Did you see the item about you
and Paulette in Winchell's column?

GERSHWIN

You should meet her, Iz. She's a
fabulous girl. Me likee very much.

CONTINUED

83 CONT'D.

IRA

I did--remember? A fork-stopper,
but couldn't you find someone a little
less unavailable? After all, she is
married to "Charlie Chaplin." Merle
says to me, "I don't know why George
fools around with lemon tea analysts
when he could have any girl he wants?"

GERSHWIN

(winks)

Shows what he knows. Besides, I
think things are going to turn around
for me this year.

RUBY (O.S.)

(calls)

Comm'on, Ira. Your turn!

Ira struggles to his feet.

IRA

It's so-o hard to make a living.

CUT TO:

84 EXT. THE TROCADERO NIGHT

Gershwin's new Cord pulls into the Sunset Strip club.

CUT TO:

85 INT. TROCADERO NIGHT

A virtual Who's Who of Hollywood high society. Waiters
glide deferentially from table to table.

The MAITRE'D ushers George, his mother Rose and LILLIAN
HELLMAN, 31, into a booth. Gershwin acknowledges the glances
of several celebrities. He's a prince in the palace of princes.

The PIANIST segues to "Let's Call the Whole Thing Off."
Rose is predictably impressed. Coiffed and costumed for the
occassion, Rose deports herself in the ingrained manner of
an immigrant. Her tuxedoed son, by comparison, is Assimilation
Personified. George gives his mother an affectionate hug
as she whispers:

ROSE

Isn't that...?

CONTINUED

85 CONT'D.

George, his mind elsewhere, searches the room:

GERSHWIN

Cary Grant.

George spots PAULETTE GODDARD, 25, with a MALE COMPANION. Their eyes meet.

Gershwin excuses himself as he orders a bottle of champagne. He walks toward Paulette's booth. En route, he passes Astaire, Groucho Marx, says hello.

Paulette's Male Companion stands and exits. It's a pre-arranged rendezvous.

Goddard is stunning. Beautiful in a society where beauty is the norm. Short-haired, brunette, intelligent: her look and manner resemble Kay Swift's. George slides beside her.

GERSHWIN

Paulette.

They move to kiss, think better of it.

PAULETTE

I wish I could meet your mother.

GERSHWIN

You will.

ACROSS THE ROOM, Rose studies the stars.

CUT TO:

86 INT./EXT. GERSHWIN'S CORD NIGHT

The streamlined car is parked on a deserted street. George and Paulette sit in the front seat. His bow tie's undone. Their posture indicates a degree of intimacy.

GERSHWIN

...I don't feel I've even scratched the surface. I've been thinking about a symphony--though I don't know how. But then I didn't know what a concerto was when I wrote one. A string quartet--that's for sure. Just get a little cabin in Coldwater Canyon, away from Hollywood. It's about to drive me crazy I'm so damned full of ideas. What do you think of the "Gettysburg Address" in an operatic setting?

CONTINUED

86 CONT'D.

Paulette's eyes never leave Gershwin. She loves him, but:
has a mind of her own. Her hand caresses his leg.

PAULETTE

(wry)

Why don't you, just once, write
something that will make people hiss?

GERSHWIN

(smiles in return)

I see why they say you're so dangerous.

PAULETTE

Me? Dangerous? I'm harmless. I
just like dangerous men.

GERSHWIN

That dramatic, eh?

(joking)

Maybe there's a "movie" in my life?

PAULETTE

I think so.

GERSHWIN

I was talking with Goldberg, the
fella that did my biography. He
wants to approach the studios. Huh?

PAULETTE

(flirty)

Who would do the music?

George, a boy in love, leans over and kisses her.

GERSHWIN

I want to get married, Paulie.
Let's get married.

PAULETTE

(touched)

I am.

GERSHWIN

Then get unmarried. You practically
are already. The hardest thing in a
love song is to say "I love you" without
using the words "I love you."

(a beat)

I love you.

CONTINUED

86 CONT'D.

They embrace.

PAULETTE

Me too.

(a beat)

But what then?

GERSHWIN

I'm ready to settle down.

I want to.

PAULETTE

Where? Where could you settle down?

GERSHWIN

Let's call the whole thing on.

She breaks the embrace.

PAULETTE

(firm)

No, George. Honest. I still love you, but, "no."

His expression turns defensive. He embraces her again-- this time to hide his feelings.

CUT TO:

87 EXT. PHILHARMONIC HALL NIGHT

Downtown Los Angeles. Concert-goers file into the art deco auditorium on Central Avenue.

The poster announces an "All Gershwin Concert. February 10-11, 1937," conducted by George Gershwin with Alexander Smallens. The featured musical pieces include An American in Paris, Rhapsody in Blue, Concerto in F, The Cuban Overture and selections from Porgy and Bess.

CUT TO:

88 INT. PHILHARMONIC HALL NIGHT

ON STAGE, Gershwin plays Concerto in F. ALEXANDER SMALLENS, 47, conducts the L.A. Philharmonic.

IN THE AUDIENCE, Ira and Leonore sit front and center. Behind them, Astaire and other celebrities listen intently.

CONTINUED

88 CONT'D.

At the keyboard, Gershwin, playing the Second Movement, hesitates--then freezes. His eyes go blank. He misses two bars, then, confused, snaps back to consciousness and continues.

Smallens shoots George a concerned look; Ira bolts upright. But Gershwin is quickly playing again. The orchestra has obscured Gershwin's lapse. Only Ira, the musicians and one or two others have noticed it.

CUT TO:

89 INT. ROXBURY DR. LIVING ROOM DAY

Gershwin, in silk robe and slacks, reclines on a chaise paging Life magazine. The spacious room is decorated "California causal"--not at all to George's taste. Paintings from his N.Y. collection provide the only relief.

Atop George's head sits an absurd contraption: the "Crosley Positive Hair Grower." A hose connects the vibrating metal skull cask to a motor pump the size of a refrigerator.

Ira, in tennis clothes, enters with Astaire. Fred does a double-take. George explains:

GERSHWIN

It's put out by the Crosley Radio Corp. Called the "Positive Hair Grower." You use it a half-hour a day. I'm sure they'd give you one, Fred.

Astaire frowns: hair loss is no laughing matter.

GERSHWIN

Oops, sorry. It's all based on new principles and you know me and new principles. Besides, it helps these goddamn headaches.

ASTAIRE

You saw Dr. Segall?

GERSHWIN

"Garbo's doctor."

IRA

Complete check-up--Cedars.

GERSHWIN

I'm fine.

CONTINUED

89 CONT'D.

Astaire, concerned, turns to Ira. Ira nods.

GERSHWIN

"100%."

ASTAIRE

Well, I don't have time to stand around watching you in a Viking outfit. I thought I'd run through "Can't Take That" before heading over--if it's alright.

GERSHWIN

(removing skull cap)

Of course.

Gershwin turns off the motor. They walk to the piano.

GERSHWIN

We're here at your behest,
Mr. Astaire.

ASTAIRE

Spare me, "Mr. Gershwin," I--

INTERRUPTED SCENE.

CUT TO:

90 INT. ROXBURY LIVING ROOM DAY

Close-up: George's hands on the keyboard.

ANOTHER DAY. Gershwin, in a suit, plays "They Can't Take That Away From Me." DR. GABRIELL SEGALL, 55, sits beside him.

Segall's medical bag rests ominously atop the piano. Ira watches from the corner; Leonore stands across the room.

George, pale; looks older. Segall's eyes examine Gershwin's hands and face. George's pianism is hesitant, unconfident.

CUT TO:

91 EXT. ROXBURY HOUSE DAY

Ira escorts Dr. Segall out the front door. A few steps down the path, Ira stops him:

IRA

I don't mean to sound stupid,
it's just that we're worried.

CONTINUED

91 CONT'D.

SEGALL

Ira, I personally went over every test. Electrocardiogram, no heart damage. Urinalysis, blood count, blood pressure 110/80. Comprehensive skull X-ray: nothing.

IRA

But...

SEGALL

We can do a spinal, but George is opposed--totally. Says it's too painful and time-consuming. Given the other results, how can I insist?

IRA

He blacked out again. At the Beverly Hills barber shop.

SEGALL

He told me.

IRA

We called Dr. Zilboorg, his New York analyst. He said it sounded physiological, not psychological--so did his analyst here.

SEGALL

I know. But remember, George also believes his stomach problem is physiological, when it's just nerves. His stomach's fine. Maybe the dizziness and headaches are just an extension of that. Besides, what can I prescribe when the tests tell me there's nothing wrong? More phenobarbital? Tell me.

CUT TO:

92 INT. ROXBURY DR. DINING ROOM NIGHT

A small dinner party. Leonore, Ira, Ruby, Hellman sit around a rectangular table. The guests are dressed casually; George wears his robe. He sits with SIMONE SIMON, 27, the French actress as he dabs at bland dietetic food.

Leonore signals the waiter.

CONTINUED

92 CONT'D.

HELLMAN

...Roosevelt and his gang pretend that Hitler is just going to disappear--like the flu. I was talking to Schoenberg. I know he plays tennis here, but have you really talked to him? Book burnings, stores confiscated...

LEONORE

George was at Mailamm, the Palestine Music Convention, and he came back full of horrible stories. Did you know--?

GERSHWIN

(wild)

Well, just screw all of 'em!

Gershwin, suddenly ill, abruptly stands. He stalks out the door.

An awkward silence. Ira motions for the others to continue as he rises to join George.

CUT TO:

93 EXT. ROXBURY HOUSE NIGHT

George sits on the curb, his head in his hands. Ira sits beside him. Not knowing what to say, Ira says nothing.

Crickets echo in the distance. The sound of a car, then nothing. The brothers sit in dead silence, like companion explorers in a vast vacant wilderness.

IRA

Was it the discussion?

GERSHWIN

No, I just got sick. I felt like I was gonna scream--now I'm embarrassed.. Did Simone say anything?

IRA

No.

GERSHWIN

These headaches--I get this odd smell, like burning rubber. It's like my head's gonna explode.

CONTINUED

93 CONT'D.

IRA

Don't let your spirits get down.
We're all trying to help you. You've
got a lot of friends. Everybody
loves you.

GERSHWIN

Not "everybody"--far from it.

IRA

A lot more than you think.

GERSHWIN

So figure? I'm 38, rich, famous--
and profoundly unhappy. I can't
shit, I can't sleep, I can't fall
in love. I've been out here ten
months--or has it been ten years? I
can't tell the difference. I've got
to get back to work. I'm doing a
screen ballet--absolutely new, very
American. With Balanchine. Have you
heard him? His English's worse than
Goldwyn's.

For a moment, George is George; Ira's happy. Then a
blank look falls over Gershwin's face.

CUT TO:

94 INT. GERSHWIN'S ROXBURY BEDROOM NIGHT

George, in pajamas, unshaven, sits on the edge of the bed. The
room is lit by a single bedstand lamp. Under the lamp
are prescription bottles and a travel clock: 2 a.m.

George can't sleep. He's been on the phone for some time:

GERSHWIN

...it would only be for a week or
two. I'll arrange everything.

Kay Swift's VOICE crackles across the trans-continental
connection:

KAY (O.S.)

Our "agreement" was the right decision.
Let's wait till you get back to New York.

GERSHWIN

I just thought...

CONTINUED

94 CONT'D.

KAY (O.S.)

I've made plans. I promised to take the children.

(changing the subject)

How are things out West?

GERSHWIN

The pay's great. Ira and Lee love it here. The weather's like a light switch--flip it on every day and it's the same. The studios just want hit songs. They never consult us. I hear Rodgers and Hart have pretty well taken over Broadway?

KAY (O.S.)

Not entirely. There are some of us still waiting for the Gershwins to return. Look, if you're really feeling bad, George, maybe I...

GERSHWIN

I'm fine, really.

KAY (O.S.)

(phone static)

What?

GERSHWIN

I'm fine. Sorry I woke you up.

KAY (O.S.)

(fighting static)

Take care of yourself.

GERSHWIN

Sleep tight.

Gershwin disconnects the line, dials the OPERATOR. He grimaces: his head's killing him.

GERSHWIN

Operator, I'd like Bedford Village, New York. Number 323.

OPERATOR (O.S.)

Just a moment, Mr. Gershwin.

George waits for the connection.

CONTINUED

94 CONT'D.

OPERATOR (O.S.)

Are you doing the next Astaire
picture?

Before George can answer, the phone rings on the other end.
Zilboorg's sleepy VOICE comes over the receiver:

ZILBOORG (O.S.)

Yes?

GERSHWIN

Dr. Zilboorg? Gregory?

ZILBOORG (O.S.)

Yes?

GERSHWIN

This is George Gershwin.

ZILBOORG (O.S.)

(waking up)

What time is it? What's wrong,
George?

GERSHWIN

Nothing. What time is it for you?

ZILBOORG (O.S.)

5 a.m.

GERSHWIN

Oh, damn, sorry, I always get these
time differences screwed up. I thought
it was 11 at night.

ZILBOORG (O.S.)

Are you alright?

GERSHWIN

I'm fine. I couldn't sleep. I'm
thinking of going back into analysis
when I get to New York. Our work's helped
me a lot--everything's clear--

ZILBOORG (O.S.)

You know that's impossible. I can't
have both a personal and professional
relationship with a patient. Our
professional relationship ended when
we went to Mexico. Can't we talk about
this tomorrow?

CONTINUED

94 CONT'D.

GERSHWIN

Let's take a trip. I need to get away. How about China? I'm fascinated--

ZILBOORG (O.S.)

How are the headaches?

GERSHWIN

Worse. I got every doctor in town helping me. I'm scared, Greg.

ZILBOORG (O.S.)

And you're exhausted. Do you have medication?

GERSHWIN

Yeah.

ZILBOORG (O.S.)

Try to sleep. I'll call you tomorrow.

GERSHWIN

Sorry for the time mix-up.

ZILBOORG (O.S.)

It's alright. Tomorrow.

Gershwin disconnects the line, thinks: who else can he call? He redials.

OPERATOR (O.S.)

Long distance.

GERSHWIN

I'd like New York again, ENdicot 2-9236.

OPERATOR (O.S.)

Just a moment.

(places call)

Is it true that Astaire refuses to talk to Rodgers off camera?

Gershwin swallows a pill from a bottle on the nightstand.

GERSHWIN

Of course not. They're good friends.

Gershwin represses the pain. The long distance phone rings.

CONTINUED

94 CONT'D.

OPERATOR (O.S.)

I just want to say that you and
Astaire are my favorite composers.

GERSHWIN

Thank you.

Rose's drowsy VOICE answers:

ROSE (O.S.)

Hello?

GERSHWIN

Momma, this is George.

ROSE (O.S.)

Huh?

GERSHWIN

Oh, sorry, I thought you might still
be up. It's only 11 o'clock.

ROSE (O.S.)

It's 5 in the morning. What's wrong?

GERSHWIN

Nothing. I got the time wrong. How
are you feeling?

ROSE (O.S.)

These calls are expensive.

GERSHWIN

We can afford it.

ROSE (O.S.)

If Poppa were alive, he'd be upset.

GERSHWIN

He's not--so don't worry. You
like the new apartment?

ROSE (O.S.)

It's takka fancy.

GERSHWIN

A lot different than the Lower East
Side, huh? A long way from Delancy
Street? This America's some country,
huh?

(no response)

Momma? Are you there?

CONTINUED

94 CONT'D.

ROSE (O.S.)
(re-awaking)

Yes?

GERSHWIN
How'd you like Hollywood? It's
really something, isn't it?

ROSE (O.S.)
When you getting married?

The phone static grows louder.

GERSHWIN
This year--next. Do you hear
from Kay?

ROSE (O.S.)
(raising voice)
Who?

GERSHWIN
(shouting)
Kay!

ROSE (O.S.)
(over static)
Kay? No. I can't hear you.
Why are you calling?

GERSHWIN
(full volume)
I just wanted to hear your voice!

The line is dead. Gershwin looks at the buzzing receiver.
The Operator comes on faintly:

OPERATOR (O.S.)
Mr. Gershwin?

CUT TO:

95 INT. ROXBURY KITCHEN NIGHT

George, Ira and Leonore eat at the table. George's MALE
NURSE stands in the doorway. The shades are drawn.

CONTINUED

95 CONT'D.

George's condition has deteriorated drastically. The composer, outwardly vibrant two weeks before, is deathly pale. Gershwin has lost control of his equilibrium: it comes and goes at will. The simplest tasks are increasingly difficult.

Concentrating, he raises his fork to his mouth and places the food inside. His robe is soiled from prior attempts. Ira cuts another piece of meat for him.

Lee's patience is strained to the breaking point. Ira only has eyes for his brother.

Gershwin's mental capacities are unimpaired. Fearful of dizzy spells, he speaks precisely:

GERSHWIN

Harold came by today.

LEONORE

Today?

GERSHWIN

Yesterday. I played some variations of "Stormy Weather" for him. It's a wonderful tune--there are so many things you can do with it. Right after dinner we got to get to the piano. We're real close on the rumba piece. I thought we had it, but there's still something more. Another run-through and it will be perfect.

IRA

Not long. You need to rest.

GERSHWIN

It'll go quick. You probably got it figured already. Fourth bar, first beat--a little twist.

IRA

Go on, eat, George.

Gershwin carefully forks a cube of tender meat, lifts it from the plate. Fighting dizziness, he raises the fork.

GERSHWIN

(weak)

Ira...

CONTINUED

95 CONT'D.

He grows increasingly disoriented; his eyes glaze over. He thrusts the fork toward his mouth. It misses, the fork clatters to the floor. George spins to look, knocking a glass of water across the table.

Gershwin hardly knows where he is. Reaching for his head, he starts to fall.

Ira and the Male Nurse rush to assist him. Leonore pulls Ira aside:

LEONORE

I can't take this anymore. I'm going crazy.

IRA

I could take him to Yip's house.

LEONORE

I'm turning into a madwoman. Even the doctor said the strain here was too much for George.

IRA

"Might be." "Might be," he said.

LEONORE

It was the doctor's suggestion--

IRA

Nothing more--a "suggestion."

LEONORE

It's better.

Ira makes an instant decision. He turns to the Male Nurse:

IRA

Pack a suitcase for George.

Ira lifts his brother in a loving embrace. Gershwin, dizzy and disoriented, rests his head on Ira's shoulder. Ira helps George into the living room.

CONTINUED

95 CONT'D.

Gershwin looks around the spining room:

GERSHWIN

Lee?

IRA

(holds him)

It's okay. You're alright now.

Ira reaches for the doorknob as the Male Nurse's STEPS come down the stairs.

CUT TO:

96 INT. HARBURG HALLWAY LATE AFTERNOON

An empty corridor in Yip Harburg's house, where George and Ira have been living.

COMMOTION, URGENT VOICES from an unseen room.

Ira dashes down the hall, lifts the phone, dials. Frightened, he looks toward the SOUNDS. A RECEPTIONIST answers:

RECEPTIONIST (O.S.)

Dr. Segall's office.

IRA

This is Ira Gershwin. Dr. Segall, please--it's urgent.

The Receptionist immediately switches the call.

SEGALL (O.S.)

Ira?

IRA

George collapsed in the bathroom. He had a fit. Send an ambulance.

SEGALL (O.S.)

Immediately. Is the Nurse there?

IRA

Yes--and Doctor?

SEGALL (O.S.)

What?

IRA

His head is swelling.

CUT TO:

97 EXT. HARBURG HOUSE DUSK

An ambulance waits in the driveway. Its dome signal is the only light source; each flash silhouettes the house. A few curious neighbors watch from the sidewalk.

Two AMBULANCE ATTENDANTS carry Gershwine, unconscious, out on a stretcher. Ira, Segall and the Male Nurse follow.

The Attendants slide the stretcher into the ambulance. Ira and Segall climb inside as the DRIVER engages the engine. The Nurse slams the door. The siren starts.

CUT TO:

98 INT. AMBULANCE NIGHT

Ira, Segall and the Attendant crowd around Gershwine. Segall feels George's distorted skull; the Attendant monitors his pulse. Ira holds his other hand.

The ambulance, lights flashing, crosses Sunset.

Segall's expression grows darker.

IRA
What is it?

SEGALL
We should've done the spinal anyway.
We'll do it now--though I know the
results already. It's very sudden,
but everything points one way.

IRA
A tumor.

SEGALL
(nods "yes")
Maybe not...

IRA
How bad?

SEGALL
No way to know till they operate.
We're already in touch with neurosurgeons
around the country.

IRA
When?

CONTINUED

98 CONT'D.

SEGALL

I can't speak for the surgical team--
right now, I'd guess as soon as possible.

IRA

But if they open up his brain...?

SEGALL

They'll locate the tumor, see how
extensive it is and remove it.

IRA

But his brain? Won't there be loss?

SEGALL

Some. How much, I have no idea.

IRA

Be honest.

SEGALL

I'm always optimistic.

IRA

But? Lie to me now and I'll
never forgive you.

SEGALL

I can't be sure.

Ira's eyes fix on Segall. The doctor swallows hard:

SEGALL

From every appearance, his condition's
critical and getting worse. Even if
the operation's successful, he'll never
be the George Gershwin you used to know.

IRA

This is crazy. He's 39--younger
than me.

SEGALL

We'll do everything we can.

Gershwin stirs, mumbles. Ira leans his ear to his
brother's mouth.

GERSHWIN
(faint)

Astaire...

CONTINUED

98 CONT'D.

IRA

Yes? George? I'm here. It's Ira.

George's mouth moves wordlessly.

IRA

It's Izzy, George. I'm here with you.

GERSHWIN

...so much...

IRA

Yes, so much.

GERSHWIN

...so much...

IRA

So much.

GERSHWIN

...to do...

George's voice grows weaker. Ira leans closer.

GERSHWIN

...Astaire...

George slips back into unconsciousness.

Ira leans against the ambulance. His face desolate.

Background score, if any: Concerto in F, Second Movement.

CUT TO:

99 EXT. N.Y. CITY HALL DAY

July, 1937. New York City Hall, a 19th Century building in the shadows of the Brooklyn Bridge. The city flag and Stars and Stripes are lowered half mast, side by side.

FADE OUT:

CODA

"They Can't Take That Away From Me"

--Hollywood musical--

100 INT. RKO STAGE DAY (1936)

Color. A film crew preps a musical number from Shall We Dance?

The unimpressive set depicts the lower deck of a Manhattan ferry in night fog. Astaire ("Petrov") and GINGER ROGERS, 25, ("Linda Keene") stand beside a double row of parked cars, waiting their cue. Astaire wears a black suit and fedora, Rogers a full-length mink and felt turban. Petrov and Linda are returning from a New Jersey marriage of convenience.

The bulky camera is positioned for a loose two-shot. The A.D. signals the fog machine operators; the crew falls abruptly silent. MARK SANDRICH, 36, the director, waits for the fog to build. He nods to sound and camera. "Speed." "Rolling." The slateboard claps.

SANDRICH

Action!

Astaire and Rogers walk to a post, hit their marks, turn on cue:

ASTAIRE

Well, tomorrow we'll be all straightened out. You'll be on your way and I'll--be on mine.

ROGERS

Where?

ASTAIRE

Well, I've got to get back to being a bachelor again. Sorta catch-up with my usual gay life. Forget all this.

ROGERS

I hope you enjoy your gaiety.

ASTAIRE

Thanks, I hope you enjoy your divorce.

ROGERS

Thanks. I didn't know getting married was so depressing. I'm sorry now I asked you.

CONTINUED

100 CONT'D.

ASTAIRE
Oh, that's alright. I'll get over it.

ROGERS
Oh, of course.

Music playback begins. Petrov segues into song:

ASTAIRE
"Our romance won't end on a sorrowful
note,
Though by tomorrow you're gone;
The song is ended, but as the songwriter
wrote,
'The melody lingers on.'
They may take you from me,
I'll miss your fond caress.
But though they take you from me,
I'll still possess:"

CUT TO:

101 INT. ROXBURY LIVING ROOM DAY

CONTINUED SCENE. the action picks up scene 89. Although scene 89 was black and white, the continuation is color.

Gershwin, Ira and Astaire crowd the Steinway, each in disparate dress: George wearing his robe, Ira a white tennis outfit, Fred a suit and tie.

Gershwin plays as they sing the refrain from "They Can't Take That Away From Me." George and Ira, in grand spirits, belt out the lyrics as Fred joins in, dancing to the beat.

It's a perfect moment, seemingly frozen in time. Three great talents, all smiling, all happy doing what they do best.

GERSHWIN, IRA AND ASTAIRE
"The way you wear your hat,
The way you sip your tea,
The mem'ry of all that--
No, no! They can't take that away
from me!"

They split the next verse. Ira takes the first line:

IRA
"The way your smile just beams,"

CONTINUED

101 CONT'D.

George, laughing, comes back with a voice he once described as "mild but disagreeable":

GERSHWIN

"The way you sing off key."

Astaire picks up the next line:

ASTAIRE

"The way you haunt my dreams--"

They join for the repeat:

GERSHWIN, IRA AND ASTAIRE

"No, no! They can't take that away
from me!"

Raising a finger, Ira solos the next verse, letting go as if he were alone in his room:

IRA

"We may never, never meet again
On the bumpy road to love,
Still I'll always, always keep
The mem'ry of--"

Astaire joins Ira for the final verse. The camera closes in on George as they sing:

IRA AND ASTAIRE

"The way you hold your knife,
The way we danced till three,
The way you've changed my life--
No! They can't take that away from me!
No, no! They can't take that away
from me!"

Tight on Gershwin smiling. What he has done, forging the first genuinely American orchestral music, merging jazz with classics and opera, defining the Broadway musical, writing songs that will never die--no, no! They can't take that away from me!

FADE OUT:

THE END

TAIL CREDITS

To a contemporary rendition of "I Got Rhythm" Variations
(for piano and orchestra).

END TAIL CREDITS