



Irving Berlin born Israel Isidore Baline

Irving Berlin was born in Tyumen, Russia, on May 11, 1888, and immigrated to New York as a child. He would become one of the most popular songwriters in the United States, with hits like "Alexander's Ragtime Band," "God Bless America," "Blue Skies," "What'll I Do" and "White Christmas." Berlin's film and Broadway musical work included *Puttin' on the Ritz*, *Easter Parade* and *Annie Get Your Gun*. He died in New York City on September 22, 1989, at age 101.

Irving Berlin was born Israel Baline on May 11, 1888, in the village of Tyumen, Russia. His family fled to escape the region's persecution of the Jewish community and settled in New York City in the mid-1890s. As a teen, Baline worked as a street singer, and by 1906 he had become a singing waiter in Chinatown. His first published tune was 1907's "Marie From Sunny Italy," with Nick Nicholson penning the music. As the lyricist, Baline's name was misspelled as "I. Berlin" on the sheet music. He decided to keep the name, becoming Irving Berlin

- He grew up in a home in lower Manhattan where Yiddish was the primary language spoken in the home
- Most of his compositions were written using the 32-bar American Song Form

Having a similar cultural background and upbringing, he served as a role model to both Ira and George Gershwin

Musical Example: – Cheek to Cheek

YIDDISH THEATRE & TIN PAN ALLEY INFLUENCES

- George grew up around the Yiddish Theater District
- They frequented the local Yiddish theaters, with George occasionally appearing onstage as an extra
- At the age of 15, Gershwin found his first job as a "song plugger" for Jerome H. Remick and Company
- George Gershwin attempted to make a career writing for Yiddish Theatre, he was rejected due to his music sounding too Americanized
- In 1919 he scored his first big national hit with his song, "Swanee" which was recorded by Al Jolson
- In the early 1920s, Gershwin frequently worked with the lyricist Buddy DeSylva
- Together they created the experimental one-act jazz opera *Blue Monday*, set in Harlem
- In 1924, George and Ira Gershwin collaborated on a stage musical comedy *Lady Be Good*
- Gershwin wrote two operas, *Blue Monday* and *Porgy and Bess*. Both written primarily in the African-American vernacular *Blue Monday* was set in Harlem and *Porgy and Bess* was set in Catfish Row, South Carolina. Critics argue that it wasn't "real" opera, however, George Gershwin call it folk opera
- *Porgy & Bess* is widely regarded as one of the most important American operas of the twentieth century



Eddie Cantor born Edward Israel Itzkowitz

Born: September 21, 1892 in New York City, NY

Death: October 10, 1964, Beverly Hills, CA

Musical Example: Makin' Whoopee – 1929



Al Jolson born Asa Yoelson

Born: May 26, 1886 in Seredzius Kovno Governorate, Russian Empire, Lithuania

Death: October 23, 1950, San Francisco, CA

Musical Example: Mammy – 1927



Enrico Caruso

Born: February 25, 1873 in Naples, Campania, Kingdom of Italy

Death: August 2, 1921 in Naples, Campania, Kingdom of Italy

Musical Example: Mamma Mia Chevo' Sape

GERSHWIN'S CLASSICAL INFLUENCES

- In the mid-1920s, Gershwin stayed in Paris for a short period of time
- He applied to study composition with the noted Nadia Boulanger, who, along with several other prospective tutors such as Maurice Ravel, however, Maurice Ravel's rejection letter to Gershwin told him, "Why become a second-rate Ravel when you're already a first-rate Gershwin?"
- Gershwin was influenced by French composers of the early twentieth century. Erik Satie, Claude Debussy and Maurice Ravel
- The Les Six, members were Georges Auric, Louis Durey, Arthur Honegger, Darius Milhaud, Francis Poulenc, and Germaine Tailleferre
- Aside from the French influence, Gershwin was intrigued by the works of Alban Berg, Dmitri Shostakovich, Igor Stravinsky, and Arnold Schoenberg
- Russian Joseph Schillinger's influence as Gershwin's teacher of composition (1932–1936)

GERSHWIN'S CLASSICAL INFLUENCES



Erik Satie born Eric Alfred Leslie Satie

Born: May 17, 1866 in Honfleur, France

Death: July 1, 1925 in Paris, France

French composer Erik Satie was lauded as a forerunner of modern music.

Musical Example: Gymnopédie No. 1



Claude Debussy born Achille-Claude Debussy

Born: August 22, 1862 in Saint-Germain-en-Laye, France

Death: March 25, 1918 in Paris, France

Embracing nontraditional scales and tonal structures, Claude Debussy is one of the most highly regarded composers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries and is seen as the founder of musical impressionism. At age 22, he won the Prix de Rome.

GERSHWIN'S CLASSICAL INFLUENCES-CONT'D



Maurice Ravel born Joseph-Maurice Ravel

Born: March 7, 1875 in Ciboure, France

Death: December 28, 1937 in Paris, France

Ravel was admitted to the Paris Conservatoire at age 14, and later studied with Gabriel Fauré. Ravel remains the most widely popular and studied of all French composers.

Musical Example: Violin Sonata in G Major, 2. Blues Moderato

KLEZMER

- Klezmer (Yiddish: (*klezmer*), pl.: (*klezmerim*), from Hebrew— instruments of music) is a musical tradition of the Ashkenazi Jews of Eastern Europe
- Played by professional musicians called *klezmerim*, the genre originally consisted largely of dance tunes and instrumental display pieces for weddings and other celebrations
- The term klezmer comes from a combination of Hebrew words: *kli*, meaning "tool, or utensil" and *zemer*, meaning "to make music"; leading to *k'li zemer*, literally "vessels of song" = "musical instrument"
- Klezmer is easily identifiable by its characteristic expressive melodies, reminiscent of the human voice, complete with laughing and weeping
- Gershwin was influenced by the Yiddish of his youth, and that the opening of "Rhapsody in Blue" was a nod to Klezmer clarinetting
- Notable Klezmer clarinetists who went on to be famous jazz musicians Benny Goodman and Artie Shaw

Musical Example: Air du Folklore Yiddish/Claude Aylestock
Hava Nagila/Yoselmyer and his Jewish
Orchestra



Ferde Grofe

Born: March 27, 1892 in New York, NY

Death: April 3, 1972 in Santa Monica, CA

Musical Example: Happy Feet

JAZZ INFLUENCES

- George Gershwin's early influence was James Reese Europe (The Clef Club and The Castles Dance Band)
- Four Harlem stride giants, Luckey Roberts, James P. Johnson, Willie "The Lion" Smith and Fats Waller.
- Noble Sissel and Eubie Blake were the first African-Americans to produce stage shows in New York. They had a profound influence on George Gershwin.
- George was mentored by Ferde Grofe and Harry Nesbitt who were both accomplished arrangers.
- Encouraged by Ferde Grofe, Paul Whiteman commissioned George to arrange his two piano piece Rhapsody in Blue for his jazz band.
- Duke Ellington, Fletcher Henderson, Benny Goodman and most jazz composers and arrangers cite George Gershwin as a major influence



James Reese Europe

Born: February 22, 1881 in Mobile Alabama

Moved: 1891 - Washington D.C. - began musical training

Moved: 1904 - New York to continue his musical training

Founded: 1910 - The Clef Club

Europe was the Clef Club's first elected president as well as the conductor of its symphony orchestra

Appeared: May 2, 1912 at Carnegie Hall

First Recorded: 1913

Joined: 1917 - World War I -At the beginning of the US involvement, Reese joined New York Army National Guard as a private but shortly after passing the officer's exam was commissioned as a Lieutenant. He was appointed head of an all black military band. His band became known as the 396th U.S. Infantry "Hell Fighters" Band

Returned to US: February 12, 1919

Soon after, they began a tour of American cities and started recording their songs in the studio

Death: May 9, 1919, performed for the last time

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wpFCuZ-B4j0>

- His "Society Orchestra" became nationally famous in 1912, accompanying theater headliner dancers Vernon and Irene Castle. The Castles introduced and popularized the foxtrot—"America learned to dance from the waist down.
- In 1910 Europe organized the Clef Club, a society for African Americans in the music industry. In 1912, the club made history when it played a concert at Carnegie Hall for the benefit of the Colored Music Settlement School. The Clef Club Orchestra, while not a jazz band, was the first band to play proto-jazz at Carnegie Hall. It is difficult to overstate the importance of that event in the history of jazz in the United States—it was 12 years before the Paul Whiteman and George Gershwin concert at Aeolian Hall, and 26 years before Benny Goodman's famed concert at Carnegie Hall. The Clef Club's performances played music written solely by black composers, including Harry T. Burleigh and Samuel Coleridge-Taylor.^[2] Europe's orchestra also included Will Marion Cook who was a student of Antonín Dvořák and an early teacher of Duke Ellington

Musical Example: Castle House Rag – 1914

On Patrol In No Man's Land - 1919

The Castles



Vernon Castle born William Vernon Blyth

Born: May 2, 1887 in Norwich, Norfolk, England

Death: February 15, 1918 in Benbrook, TX

Musical Example: Russian Rag
Castle Perfect Trot



Irene Castle born Irene Foote

Born: April 17, 1893 in New Rochelle, NY

Death: January 25, 1969 in Eureka Springs, AR



Jean Goldkette born John Jean Goldkette

Born: March 18, 1893 in Valenciennes

Death: March 24, 1962 in Los Angeles, CA

Musical Example: I'm Looking Over A Four Leaf Clover



W.C. Handy born William Christopher Handy

Born: November 16, 1873 in Florence, AL

Death: March 28, 1958 in New York, NY

Musical Example: Jada



Eubie Blake born James Hubert Blake

Born: February 7, 1883 in Baltimore, Maryland

Moved: 1905 New York where he performed rag-time music in brothels

Returned: 1910, Baltimore, Maryland where he joined Joe Porter's Serenaders and met his songwriting partner, Noble Sissle.

Enlisted: 1917 - U.S. Army - was assigned to the 369th Infantry Regiment (The Harlem Hellfighters) and formed a military band

Post-War: Sissle and Blake formed "The Dixie Duo" performing on stage without blackface. Among their hit songs in vaudeville was Gee; I'm Glad I'm From Dixie

Death: February 12, 1983 (100 years later)

Musical Example: Russian Rag



Noble Sissle

Born: July 10, 1889 in Indianapolis, Indiana

Moved: 1906 Cleveland where young Sissle sang on a vaudeville circuit

Moved: 1915 Baltimore, Maryland where he joined Joe Porter's Serenaders and met his songwriting partner, Eubie Blake

Enlisted: 1917 - U.S. Army - was assigned to the 369th Infantry Regiment (The Harlem Hellfighters) and formed a military band

Post-War: Sissle and Blake formed "The Dixie Duo" performing on stage without blackface. Among their hit songs in vaudeville was Gee; I'm Glad I'm From Dixie

Death: December 17, 1975



Luckey Roberts born Charles Luckeyth Roberts

Born: August 7, 1887 in Philadelphia, PA

Moved: 1910 New York, NY where he performed with James P. Johnson, Willie “The Lion” Smith and Fats Waller (all became known as Harlem’s “Stride Players”). Roberts toured France and the UK with James Reese Europe during World War I, then returned to New York where he wrote music for various shows and recorded piano rolls.

Death: February 5, 1968 in New York, NY

Musical Example: Junk Man Rag – 1913



James P. Johnson

Born: February 1, 1894 in New Brunswick, NJ

Moved: 1910 New York, NY where he performed with Luckey Roberts, Willie “The Lion” Smith and Fats Waller (all became known as Harlem’s “Stride Players”). He was considered to be the father of stride piano.

Death: November 17, 1955 in Jamaica, Queens, NY

11/17/1955 - James P. Johnson - 1904



Willie "The Lion" Smith

Born: November 25, 1897 in Goshen, NY

Moved: 1914 Newark, New Jersey where he performed with James P. Johnson and Lucky Roberts (all three became known as Harlem's "Stride Players")

Enlisted: 1916 - U.S. Army - for his bravery in battle won him the nickname "the Lion."

Post-War: Soon after Smith returned from France in 1919, he became one of the most influential piano players in New York, mentoring great musicians such as Duke Ellington and Thelonious Monk

Death: April 18, 1973

Musical Example: Echoes of Spring - 1935



Fats Waller born Thomas Wright Waller

Born: May 21, 1904 in New York, NY

Death: December 15, 1943, Kansas City, MO

Musical Example: Ain't Misbehavin'



Duke Ellington born Edward Kennedy Ellington

Born: April 29, 1899 in Washington, DC

Death: May 24, 1974 in New York, NY

Musical Example: Harlem



Art Tatum born Arthur Tatum, Jr.

Born: October 13, 1909 in Toledo, OH

Death: November 5, 1956 in Los Angeles, CA

Musical Example: Willow Weep for Me



George Gershwin born Jacob Gershowitz

George Gershwin was one of the most significant American composers of the 20th century, known for popular stage and screen numbers as well as classical compositions.

George Gershwin was born Jacob Gershowitz on September 26, 1898, in Brooklyn, New York. The son of Russian-Jewish immigrants, George began his foray into music at age 11 when his family bought a secondhand piano for George's older sibling, Ira.

A natural talent, it was George who took it up and eventually sought out mentors who could enhance his abilities. He eventually began studying with the noted piano teacher Charles Hambitzer, and apparently impressed him; in a letter to his sister, Hambitzer wrote, "I have a new pupil who will make his mark if anybody will. The boy is a genius."

Throughout his 23-year career, Gerswhin would continually seek to expand the breadth of his influences, studying under an incredibly disparate array of teachers, including Henry Cowell, Wallingford Riegger, Edward Kilenyi and Joseph Schillinger.

After dropping out of school at age 15, Gershwin played in several New York nightclubs and began his stint as a "song-plugger" in New York's Tin Pan Alley. After three years of pounding out tunes on the piano for demanding customers, he had transformed into a highly skilled and dexterous composer. To earn extra cash, he also worked as a rehearsal pianist for Broadway singers. In 1916, he composed his first published song, "When You Want 'Em, You Can't Get 'Em; When You Have 'Em, You Don't Want 'Em."

From 1920 to 1924, Gershwin composed for an annual production put on by George White. After a show titled "Blue Monday," the bandleader in the pit, Paul Whiteman, asked Gershwin to create a jazz number that would heighten the genre's respectability.

Legend has it that Gershwin forgot about the request until he read a newspaper article announcing the fact that Whiteman's latest concert would feature a new Gershwin composition. Writing at a manic pace in order to meet the deadline, Gershwin composed what is perhaps his best-known work, "Rhapsody in Blue."

During this time, and in the years that followed, Gershwin wrote numerous songs for stage and screen that quickly became standards, including “Oh, Lady Be Good!” “Someone to Watch over Me,” “Strike Up the Band,” “Embraceable You,” “Let’s Call the Whole Thing Off” and “They Can’t Take That Away from Me.” His lyricist for nearly all of these tunes was his older brother, Ira, whose witty lyrics and inventive wordplay received nearly as much acclaim as George’s compositions.

In 1935, a decade after composing “Rhapsody in Blue,” Gershwin debuted his most ambitious composition, “Porgy and Bess.” The composition, which was based on the novel “Porgy” by Dubose Heyward, drew from both popular and classical influences. Gershwin called it his “folk opera,” and it is considered to not only be Gershwin’s most complex and best-known works, but also among the most important American musical compositions of the 20th century.

Following his success with “Porgy and Bess,” Gershwin moved to Hollywood and was hired to compose the music for a film titled “Shall We Dance,” starring Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. It was while working on a follow-up film with Astaire that Gershwin’s life would come to an abrupt end.

In the beginning of 1937, Gershwin began to experience troubling symptoms such as severe headaches and noticing strange smells. Doctors would eventually discover that he had developed a malignant brain tumor. On July 11, 1937, Gershwin died during surgery to remove the tumor. He was only 38.

Musical Example: Embraceable You-Charlie Parker’s Quintet
They Can’t Take That Away-Sarah Vaughn Trio



Ira Gershwin born Israel Gershowitz

Lyricist Ira Gershwin was born as Israel Gershowitz in New York, New York, on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, on December 6, 1896. The oldest of four children born to Russian Jewish immigrants Rosa Bruskin and Morris Gershowitz, the future lyricist was always a bookish child. Unlike his brother George, whose interests were primarily musical, young Ira's ran more along literary lines. The family moved frequently throughout Gershwin's childhood due to his father's ever-changing job status. In 1914, the word-loving Gershwin enrolled as an English

Gershwin spent the next several years taking after his father, moving from job to job. He worked at various times as a steam room attendant, a photographer's assistant and a business manager for a carnival. Occasionally, Gershwin would write theater reviews, but otherwise he did not show much promise as a writer. Meanwhile, his brother George was making a name for himself in the music business, composing and arranging, as well as making a brief foray into vaudeville.

At his brother's prompting, Gershwin took a shot writing lyrics for one of his songs. Their first collaboration came in 1918 with "The Real American Folk Song," which appeared in *Ladies First*. Ira Gershwin once said, "I always felt that if George hadn't been my brother and pushed me, I'd have been contented to be a bookkeeper." He continued writing lyrics, but often under the pen name Arthur Francis, a playful combination of the names of his younger brother and sister.

Still using his pen name, Ira wrote his first published song, "You May Throw All the Rice You Desire but Please Friends, Throw No Shoes." He followed up in 1921 with his first stage success, providing lyrics for the show *Two Little Girls in Blue*. The critically acclaimed show was produced by Abraham Erlanger and co-composed by Vincent Youmans and Paul Lannin.

In 1922, the Gershwin brothers came together again creatively to write the first major hit of their career, *I'll Build a Stairway to Paradise*. In 1924, they followed up with the hit show *Lady, Be Good!* The next decade of collaboration would cement the brothers firmly in American musical history; combining their talents, they wrote for Broadway musicals, operettas and even vaudeville. In the 1920s, their big hits included *Tip Toes* (1925), *Oh, Kay* (1926) and *Funny Face* (1927).

On September 14, 1926, Ira Gershwin married Leonore Strunsky. Around the same time, the Gershwin brothers decided to combine their personal lives as well as their professional careers, moving both families into one five-story house in Manhattan. During this time, the house served as a creative nerve center for the brothers; artists, musicians and friends could be seen coming and going at all hours of the day and night.

Soon, however, the frantic pace became too much and Ira Gershwin retreated to spend some time on a farm north of the city. His brother would join him in the spring and summer to work and collaborate. It was there that the two wrote and re-wrote *Funny Face* and *Smarty*.

Biographers and music historians note that the brothers' huge popularity was due, in part, to their innovative new style and combinations. Ira Gershwin in particular was adept at implementing new lyrical styles, playing with timing and unusual word combinations. Charles Schwartz once said that the brothers had "the uncanny knack for coming up with the fresh and the novel ballads appropriate for their time and genre with wonderfully creative lyrics, songs of chivalric love and gallantry."

In 1928, the Gershwins went on a trip to Europe that included stops in Vienna, London and Paris. Their journey across the Atlantic ended up becoming the inspiration for the iconic orchestral, "An American in Paris." Four years later, Ira Gershwin shared the honor of a Pulitzer Prize with writers George S. Kaufman and Morrie Ryskind for the score of the musical comedy, "Of Thee I Sing." The award gave the men the distinction of the first ever Pulitzer Prize for songwriting.

The Gershwin brothers' biggest triumph came in 1935 with their famous "folk opera," *Porgy and Bess*. The characters in the musical are almost exclusively African-Americans hailing from Charleston, South Carolina. The Gershwins insisted on hiring only black singers to play the parts, a progressive move at a time when blackface entertainment was still common. Musically, the composition was the brothers' most ambitious and successful, and it remains a popular production even today.

After *Porgy and Bess*, Ira Gershwin began working almost exclusively on motion pictures, spending much of his time in Hollywood. For his work on "They Can't Take That Away From Me" (1937), "Long Ago and Far Away" (1944) and "The Man That Got Away" (1954), the lyricist was nominated for three Academy Awards.

In 1937, Ira Gershwin's beloved brother and partner, George Gershwin, died of a brain tumor. Throughout their lives, Ira had functioned as his brother's business manager and always looked after his finances. After George's death, Ira devoted himself to organizing his brother's legacy in the hopes of preserving it for future generations. His work paid off and the Library of Congress now has an extensive Gershwin Collection dedicated to that end.

1940, Ira Gershwin began writing and collaborating again with the likes of Jerome Kern, Kurt Weill and Harold Arlen. The famed lyricist said his goodbye to Broadway in 1946 with his last work for the stage, *Park Avenue*. He spent the rest of his life working on the family archive with historian Michael Feinstein.

Though he died on August 17, 1983 in Beverly Hills, California, symbols of his legacy and contribution continue to live on. In the Gershwin Room of the Library of Congress, curious visitors can see George's piano and Ira's typewriter on display. Despite his more bookish nature, the older brother and lyricist of the famed pair was just as invested in the joy of music, once saying, "Life is one long jubilee.

Musical Example: It's Wonderful-Sarah Vaughn/Clifford Brown
Bess You Is My Woman Now-Dinah Washington/Clifford Brown