

THE GEORGE AND IRA GERSHWIN CRITICAL EDITION
Series II, Volume 1AA

RHAPSODY IN BLUE

for Solo Piano and Jazz Band
1924

music by
GEORGE GERSHWIN

orchestrated by
FERDE GROFÉ

FULL SCORE

edited by
RYAN RAUL BAÑAGALE



SCHOOL OF MUSIC, THEATRE & DANCE
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The Paul Whiteman Orchestra, February 1924.

Photo courtesy of the Whiteman Collection, Williams College Archives and Special Collections.

CREATING RHAPSODY IN BLUE

Rhapsody in Blue has always been a collaborative endeavor. Paul Whiteman—the self-proclaimed “King of Jazz”—commissioned the work sometime in the fall or early winter of 1923 for his *Experiment in Modern Music* concert, to take place the following February on Abraham Lincoln’s birthday. As the story goes, George Gershwin forgot about this commission until his older brother Ira spotted a brief news item about Whiteman’s concert in the *New York Tribune*, announcing that “George Gershwin is at work on a Jazz Concerto.”¹ That was on January 4, 1924. Three days later—as gleaned from the date given at the top of his manuscript (see **PLATE III**, p. xxi)—Gershwin began writing *Rhapsody in Blue*. Five weeks later the work had its triumphant premiere on February 12, 1924 at Aeolian Hall in New York City.

However, as the archival materials document, the creative history of the piece is a bit more complicated and collaborative than typically understood. One conclusion indicates that Gershwin may have only dedicated about ten days total to its creation. Another conclusion suggests that performers have more freedom in realizing the score than is generally assumed. The manuscript (**Sh**), dated January 7, is notated in pencil by Gershwin. But it is just one of three central documents needed to tell the full origin of the piece. The other manuscripts include a fair-copy score in ink (**Sm**), prepared by various copyists, and Ferde Grofé’s full arrangement for the Whiteman Orchestra (**Fh**). For the purposes of this edition, Grofé’s score (**Fh**) is the primary source—though the information contained within this document only can be understood fully when triangulated with the other pencil and ink manuscripts.

Gershwin may or may not have forgotten about his commission from Whiteman. By early 1924, his status as a musical theatre composer was on the rise. He had recently completed the score for *George White’s Scandals of 1923* and was in the midst of completing and revising the stage show *Sweet Little Devil*. It is likely that the first two pages of the *Rhapsody* represent work begun in late 1923 and not continued until at least January 7—possibly later. They are the cleanest of the 56-page pencil manuscript (**Sh**), with clear accents and other articulation, dynamic markings for individual parts, and suggestions for instrumentation (see **PLATE III**). Such careful outlay ends as the manuscript transitions into the full orchestral statement of the Ritornello theme that begins in measure 21 (for each musical theme mentioned in this essay, see **IDENTIFYING THE THEMES**, p. xv). The first piano cadenza commences soon thereafter, providing the first hint of what would become a central compositional motivation for the piece: the race against time. The continual return to solo piano passages, one of the hallmarks of the *Rhapsody*, appears to be a practical decision rather than an aesthetic one. It seems that whenever Gershwin felt pressure to quickly compose additional sections of the *Rhapsody*, he defaulted to piano solo.

But such moments only emerge from a comparison of the pencil manuscript (**Sh**) with the ink fair copy (**Sm**). This latter manuscript was used by arranger Ferde Grofé to prepare the full instrumental score for the Paul Whiteman Orchestra (**Fh**). The ink manuscript captures the *Rhapsody* in the midst of composition, recording a layer of the process otherwise obscured by the additional changes Gershwin made to his pencil score both before and after the premiere performance. Furthermore, the individual pages of the ink manuscript fall into seven distinct gatherings—groups of individual folded sheets of music paper, often nested within each other, that demarcate a particular portion of the larger manuscript. These groupings reveal not only how much of the *Rhapsody* Grofé received from Gershwin at any given point in the process, but also where Gershwin took breaks from composing.² Such is the case at the outset of the second gathering, the start of the first piano cadenza—where Gershwin returned to the *Rhapsody* after working on *Sweet Little Devil*. While waiting for this next section of the *Rhapsody*, Grofé had readied page 6 of his full score with staff systems and barlines in preparation for the continued presence of the full ensemble. However, as documented by erasures in Grofé’s score,

he later had to re-bar his manuscript to account for Gershwin’s ensuing piano solo, which required grouping only two staves at a time instead of the full band.

Another example of a re-barring due to an unexpected change between gatherings appears on page 25 of Grofé’s score, which correlates to the shift from the third to the fourth gathering. Here, too, Gershwin suddenly introduces a piano cadenza, marking the onset of 142 consecutive measures of piano solo with little instrumental accompaniment for Grofé to score. Only thirty total measures in this passage required any active scoring, saving Grofé a significant amount of time in the preparation of his arrangement for the Whiteman Orchestra. As indicated by Gershwin in his pencil manuscript, a single horn line accompanies the piano for fifteen bars in the middle of a presentation of the Stride theme (Rehearsal 17). The next instrumental entrance, the sixteen-bar Ritornello theme at Rehearsal 19—given as a single melody played by the clarinet with bass drum and cymbal accompaniment—provides a stable background for Gershwin’s filigree piano extemporization. An additional sixty measures of piano solo begin at measure 257 (Rehearsal 20), representing another instance of Gershwin turning to piano solo to fill out the piece.

Moments of revision also emerge from the ink fair-copy manuscript (**Sm**), which result in rediscovered musical moments in the present edition. Three copyists (one known—Fred Combattente—and two anonymous) prepared a majority of the ink fair copy. However, in the middle of the third gathering, Gershwin’s handwriting suddenly and unexpectedly appears. The three other copyists did not introduce any revisions—but Gershwin did, at least in this section. In addition to providing slurs and accents for the upper orchestral line, he added a lower-octave doubling of the top voice in the chords that appear in measures 123–126 (resulting in the Trombone 2 line in Grofé’s orchestration). He also introduced a change that shows that Grofé depended on the ink score rather than the pencil score. This modification occurs at measure 145, one bar before Rehearsal 13, and links the A and B sections of the Shuffle theme. In the pencil manuscript, the transition consists only of an eighth-note, D⁷ dominant chord in the treble clef on the first beat, followed by an ascending eighth-note scale in the bass clef. In the ink score, however, Gershwin added three ascending quarter-note dyads to the treble clef. Although these notes subsequently became brief trumpet soli in Grofé’s full score, they have long been omitted from published versions of the *Rhapsody* that relied on Gershwin’s pencil manuscript as the sole authority. Indeed, if Grofé had been working from the pencil manuscript at this point, no such soli would have appeared. But that was clearly not the case. Accordingly, the brief trumpet soli accompanying the ascending baritone saxophone line have been restored here.

This pairing of the trumpets with the baritone saxophone in measure 145 represents just one of the important timbral decisions made by Grofé as he scored his way through the piece. Only thirteen instrumental indications appear in Gershwin’s pencil manuscript, and Grofé chose to ignore more than half of them. Without Grofé’s inventive treatment of Gershwin’s recurring themes, several passages in the *Rhapsody* might have simply fallen flat. Such choices become particularly important in the multiple repetitions of the Ritornello theme, so named because it returns seven times in total. The choices made in three such instances demonstrate the importance of his varied scoring: the subtle orchestral interjections encountered in the first full statement of the theme (mm. 41–47); the strong contrasts between the A and B portions of the theme’s second full statement (mm. 72–90); and the Orientalist pairing of the soprano and baritone saxophones over a pizzicato violin, cymbal, and bass drum combination, reminiscent of a Mozartian Turkish band (mm. 242–256). Here and throughout the piece, Grofé’s (largely unrecognized) responsibility for the variety of timbres and textures found throughout the premiere version of the *Rhapsody* emerges.³

¹ “Whiteman Judges Named: Committee Will Decide ‘What Is American Music,’” *New York Tribune*, January 4, 1924, 11. Reprinted in Robert Wyatt and John Andrew Johnson, eds., *The George Gershwin Reader* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 44–45.

² For details on these gatherings, see Ryan Raul Bañagale, *Arranging Gershwin: Rhapsody in Blue and the Creation of an American Icon* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 25. See also **SOURCE DESCRIPTIONS** at p. 54.

³ A detailed consideration of how Grofé’s arranging choices made the *Rhapsody* a coherent composition can be found in Bañagale, *Arranging Gershwin*, 34–46.

In addition to the aforementioned instrumental passages, the primary material in this edition that will strike performers and listeners as new includes:

1. The restoration of forty-four bars of piano solo, including some percussive and dissonant passages that lend the piece a modernist feel. These bars are present in the manuscript sources but not in Gershwin's 1925 piano roll recording (**R3**) or the first two-piano publication (**Pe1**, 1924). As discussed in *RECREATING RHAPSODY IN BLUE* (at pp. xiii-xv), they comprise the addition of measures 227-236, 407-422, and 455-462, and the expansion of ten bars into twenty in measures 361-380 (see also **SOURCES** at pp. 54-55).
2. The addition of four bars of ensemble at the beginning of Rehearsal 14 (mm. 154-157), extending the Shuffle theme slightly before it modulates. These bars are likewise present in the manuscript sources, but not in **R3** or **Pe1** (see also **SOURCES** at pp. 54-55).
3. The restoration of Ferde Grofé's original instrumentation for Whiteman's "jazz orchestra," including not only instruments currently associated with jazz—such as trumpets, trombones, and standard saxophones—but also some that have largely fallen out of use in the jazz idiom, including the oboe, soprano saxophone, tuba, and banjo.
4. The unexpected pairings of instruments that highlight the novelty of Grofé's scoring, including the juxtaposition of the soprano and baritone saxophones with pizzicato strings at Rehearsal 19 (mm. 241-256) to create an Orientalist effect.
5. The original ending, which feels more like the closing of a musical theatre piece than the grand romanticism of the now conventional, revised conclusion. See **CRITICAL NOTES** (mm. 559-560) for more information.

Tempo and Style

This volume includes only those tempo designations that appear in the original manuscripts. As encountered in the original 1924 (**R1**) and 1927 (**R2**) recordings with the Paul Whiteman Orchestra, as well as in the piano roll prepared by Gershwin in 1925 (**R3**), the overall tempo of the piece was initially much quicker than in symphonic recordings by conductors such as Leonard Bernstein.²⁶ Over the course of the twentieth century, the average tempo of the *Rhapsody* became increasingly slowed as interpreters angled towards the symphonic side of its "Symphonic Jazz" designation. Although the tempos on these early recordings tend to be quicker, they are by no means consistent. The following chart provides a passage-by-passage summary of average beats per minute (BPM) in the opening thirty measures of the piece:

Measures	Beats Per Minute		
	1924 (R1)	1927 (R2)	Piano Roll (R3)
2-10	♩ = 88	♩ = 92	♩ = 112
11-14	♩ = 152	♩ = 160	♩ = 132
16-18	♩ = 98	♩ = 112	♩ = 94
19-20	♩ = 78	♩ = 96	♩ = 96
21-23	♩ = 98	♩ = 98	♩ = 132
24-30	♩ = 90	♩ = 114	♩ = 114

Furthermore, the tempos found at the outset of statements of major melodic themes are as follows:

Theme	Measure	Beats Per Minute		
		1924 (R1)	1927 (R2)	Piano Roll (R3)
Ritornello	72	♩ = 85	♩ = 86	♩ = 94
Train	91	♩ = 80	♩ = 84	♩ = 97
Stride	115	♩ = 89	♩ = 94	♩ = 111
Shuffle	138	omitted	omitted	♩ = 114
Love	317	♩ = 120	♩ = 142	♩ = 104

Note that these are average tempos and the recordings sometimes fluctuate the speed of performance within a given passage. The Love theme is the one with perhaps the greatest pliability: both the 1924 (**R1**) and 1927 (**R2**) recordings hold fairly steady during its first iteration (mm. 317-338), then begin the second iteration of the theme (mm. 339-360) slightly faster, with the 1927 recording increasing steadily—particularly at the onset of the countermelody (mm. 341-346 and 349-352). Conversely, Gershwin's piano roll recording (**R3**) begins this section slower than either of the ensemble recordings, but immediately increases the tempo about 20 BPM from the first instance of the melody forward (beginning as early as m. 318). During the 1940s and 1950s, it became common to perform the countermelody phrases in double-time by comparison to the tempo taken for the Love theme—a practice that continues into the twenty-first century. Even though tempo variations occur in the earliest recordings, these sources remain more consistent than has become standard, with a subtler application of rubato throughout.

How fast or slow individual passages should proceed is still uncertain. Unlike the 78 RPM recordings, the piano rolls were not restricted with respect to duration. They include fewer cuts and better suggest Gershwin's tempo preferences. However, pianist Artis Wodehouse cautions that editorial and production decisions undertaken in the preparation of the rolls "compromised the data's resolution."²⁷ The tempos, dynamics, and expressive choices heard on the rolls offer a non-definitive performance. Finally, Gershwin and Whiteman disagreed on the tempos, a fact that may have contributed to the 1927 recording being conducted by Victor Records' music chief, Nathaniel Shilkret, instead of Whiteman.²⁸

Instrumentation and String Count

This arrangement of *Rhapsody in Blue* is for a modified 1920s dance band—specifically the performance forces of the Paul Whiteman Orchestra. At the premiere, two horns and eight violins were added to the standing members of Whiteman's ensemble (see **FRONTISPIECE**, p. viii). As initially performed, only three musicians covered all woodwind parts—Ross Gorman (**WIND 1**), Donald Clark (**WIND 2**), and Hale Byers (**WIND 3**); each played multiple instruments. This edition does not require the same "doubling" of parts (alternate distributions are included in the edition's accompanying parts), although replicating this particular aspect of the original arrangement of the *Rhapsody* instills an additional level of visual excitement as the players quickly switch from one instrument to the next.

With the exception of the contrabass, violins are the only strings used in this score. The original manuscript divides these into two staves of two stands each, designated in this edition as Violin 1 and Violin 2. The tuba and contrabass were originally performed by a single musician, Al Armer. The accompanying performance materials for this edition include both a combined part and separate parts for each instrument.

²⁶ Recorded by Gershwin for the Aeolian Company in the spring of 1925, the piece was released as two separate rolls: Part 2 in May 1925 (Duo-Art 1006) and Part 1 in January 1927 (Duo-Art 7094). The complete recording was reissued as George Gershwin, *Gershwin Plays Gershwin*, Elektra Nonesuch 9-79287-2, 1993, Compact Disc. Bernstein's recording was originally released as George Gershwin, *Rhapsody in Blue*, Columbia Symphony Orchestra [New York Philharmonic] with Leonard Bernstein, Columbia MS 6091, 1959, LP.

²⁷ Gershwin's two-piano performance on the Part 1 roll—the solo and accompaniment parts concurrently—resulted in a vast number of holes punched into the paper, an incredible density of information. To save money, the Aeolian Company compressed the spacing of these holes and specified that the roll be run at a slower speed than normal, reducing the length of the roll by about fourteen feet overall. This decision, according to Wodehouse, creates a "rhythmic distortion" or "jerkiness" not encountered on Gershwin's other recordings of the *Rhapsody*. Additionally, neither Part 1 nor Part 2 fully encodes the expressive or dynamic choices made by Gershwin at the time of its recording. Artis Wodehouse, "Tracing Gershwin's Piano Rolls," in Wayne Schneider, ed., *The Gershwin Style: New Looks at the Music of George Gershwin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999): 209-223, here 221.

²⁸ Pollack, *George Gershwin*, 304.

17.

The image shows a page of handwritten musical notation for 'Rhapsody in Blue'. It consists of four systems of staves. The first system has a treble clef staff with a 'Piano solo' marking and a bass clef staff with a large 'R' marking. The second system has a treble clef staff with a 'P. Solo' marking and a bass clef staff with a large 'R' marking. The third system shows complex chordal textures in both staves. The fourth system has a treble clef staff with 'JB.' and 'P.' markings, and a bass clef staff. A circled '16' is written above the fourth system. In the bottom left corner, there is a logo with the letters 'T.B.H.' and 'No. 2' below it.

PLATE V: Page 17 (mm. 165-175) of the fair-copy manuscript of *Rhapsody in Blue* (Sm). Ferde Grofé Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress. Image courtesy of the Ferde Grofé Family. Note the piano fill in mm. 165 and 169, added into the staves for the jazz band in a passage notated by Gershwin. See *CREATING RHAPSODY IN BLUE* at p. xii.

INSTRUMENTATION

ORIGINAL PART DISTRIBUTION

Wind Book 1

Oboe
 Clarinet in B \flat
 Bass Clarinet in B \flat
 Sopranino Saxophone in E \flat
 Alto Saxophone in E \flat

Wind Book 2

Soprano Saxophone in B \flat
 Alto Saxophone in E \flat
 Baritone Saxophone in E \flat

Wind Book 3

Soprano Saxophone in B \flat
 Tenor Saxophone in B \flat

2 Horns in F
 2 Trumpets in B \flat
 2 Trombones
 Tuba/Contrabass (i.e., String Bass)¹

Timpani
 Percussion (Drum Kit)²
 Bass Drum, Snare Drum, Crash Cymbal,
 Turkish Cymbal, Gong, Triangle, Glockenspiel

Banjo
 Celesta
 Piano (Orchestral)

Solo Piano

Violin 1 (2 stands)³
 Violin 2 (2 stands)³

EXTRACTED PARTS FOR ALTERNATE DISTRIBUTIONS

Oboe
 Clarinet in B \flat
 Bass Clarinet in B \flat
 Clarinet in B \flat / Bass Clarinet in B \flat
 Alto Saxophone in E \flat / Sopranino Saxophone in E \flat (*ossia S. Sax in B \flat*)⁴

Alternate Saxophone Distribution for Wind Books 1 and 2⁵

Player 1

Sopranino Saxophone in E \flat (*ossia S. Sax in B \flat*)
 Alto Saxophone in E \flat

Player 2

Soprano Saxophone in B \flat
 Baritone Saxophone in E \flat

Tuba
 Contrabass

¹ The Tuba and Contrabass parts were played by one performer at the premiere (the Tuba presumably on sousaphone; see *FRONTISPIECE*, p. viii).

² The Percussion can be performed by one player on kit. In the first performance, George Marsh played both the Timpani and Percussion parts.

³ In the 1924 recording with George Gershwin at the piano (R1), only two Violins were used on each line.

⁴ This part has the material for Saxophones from Wind Book 1, with an *ossia* Soprano Saxophone line for the passages with Sopranino Saxophone.

⁵ In addition to the Soprano Saxophone *ossia* for Sopranino Saxophone, Alternate Saxophone parts provide Soprano Saxophone cues from Wind Book 2 for Player 1 in mm. 154–175 to obviate a quick switch of instrument for Player 2. Alternate Saxophone parts also entirely remove Alto Saxophone material from Wind Book 2 and assign it to Player 1 to reduce doubling. The Player 2 part also cues Oboe and Bass Clarinet.

RHAPSODY IN BLUE

for Solo Piano and Jazz Band (1924)

Composed by George Gershwin
Orchestrated by Ferde Grofé

Edited by Ryan Raul Bañagale

Slowly
Clarinet in B \flat solo
tr

WIND 1
(Oboe, Clarinet in B \flat , Bass Clarinet in B \flat , Soprano Saxophone in E \flat , Alto Saxophone in E \flat)
p *mf*

WIND 2
(Soprano Saxophone in B \flat , Alto Saxophone in E \flat , Baritone Saxophone in E \flat)
(Alto Saxophone in E \flat)

WIND 3
(Soprano Saxophone in B \flat , Tenor Saxophone in B \flat)
(Tenor Saxophone in B \flat)

Horn in F 1/2
pp

Trumpet in B \flat 1/2

Trombone 1
pp

Trombone 2
pp

Tuba
(Contrabass)
pp

Timpani
B \flat , E
pp

Percussion
(Drum Kit: Bass Drum, Snare Drum, Crash Cymbal, Turkish Cymbal, Gong, Triangle, Glockenspiel)

Celesta

Banjo

Orchestral Piano
p

Solo Piano

Slowly

Violin 1

Violin 2