

RHAPSODY IN BLUE, by George Gershwin

Gershwin lists his influences as:

- Claude Debussy
- Igor Stravinsky
- Piotr Tchaikovsky
- Jewish chant
- Blues & jazz

The Environment

The environment for the composition of *Rhapsody in Blue* was the 1920s in USA. Jazz rhythms were starting to effect songwriters and classical music composers. Debussy composed *Golliwog's Cakewalk* with a rag feel, and then we have Gershwin with his *Rhapsody in Blue*.

About *Rhapsody in Blue*...

1923. Bandleader Paul Whiteman asked Gershwin to write a jazz piece for his band. Gershwin came up with what he described as a "jazz concerto". It was to be premiered at the Aeolian Hall in New York on February 12th, 1924. The concert was to be called *An Experiment in Modern Music*. In the audience on Feb 12th was composer Rachmaninov!!

In the performance, Gershwin himself played the piano. From 1924-1934, he made \$250,000 from this piece of music – a huge fortune in those days! George Gershwin was only 25 years old when he wrote *Rhapsody in Blue*. The rhythms of the piece were said to be inspired by the rattle of the Boston train that Gershwin traveled on. A painting by James McNeill Whistler called *Nocturne in Black and Gold* is said to be the inspiration for the title *Rhapsody in Blue*.

It was actually while playing piano for a performance of his *Concerto in F* in 1937 that George Gershwin had a blackout and then later died!

To see what was happening in the environment around George Gershwin in USA in the 1920s, go to www.ffaire.com/gershwin/timelinez.html and use the timeline there to fill in the gaps in this worksheet.

From Broadway _____ to Serious _____

1920-4 – Gershwin works with dancer-producer _____ on vaudeville productions

1920 – first _____ radio station begins broadcasting, _____ gives women the right to vote, _____ begins – the banning of liquor sales in public places

1922- _____ is founded in England

1923 – The _____ opens in Harlem, a famous jazz nightclub, and the _____ is the new dance craze

1924 – Gershwin composes his first truly symphonic piece called _____, and has his first collaboration with brother _____ with the musical *Lady be Good* which includes the hits _____ and _____

NOW! Copy the paragraph that starts 1926-31: *George and Ira produce more musicals...*

AND find out the year these pieces were written:

Second Rhapsody _____, *Cuban Overture* _____
and Porgy & Bess _____

WEBSITE RESOURCES – GERSHWIN

www.gershwin.com – this site has HEAPS of info!

MSN *Entertainment Spotlight* – search for George Gershwin here from “home” and it’s the first listed hit! A good overview – very readable

www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRI d=389

This resource shows a picture of Gershwin’s grave (!) with bio and picture of GG

www.classical.net/music/comp.lst/gershwin.html
-bio

www.angelfire.com/co/pscst/gershwin.html

Here is a list of reasons for GG’s success, and you can also play a recording of *Rhapsody in Blue*

www.pastperfect.com/cgi-bin/enet.pl?action=products::shownotes::11

This site has cool details about the premiere of *Rhapsody in Blue*

www.amuseum.org/cgi-bin/quiz.cgi

This site has a quiz on Gershwin – good for students to do as revision!

www.radio.cbc.ca./gershwin/clips.html

At this site you can download recordings of Gershwin playing his own pieces

<http://w3.rz-berlin.mpg.de/cmp/gershwin.html>

This is a summary done by famous historian Grove

www.gershwinfan.com/index.html

fan Club GG

www.cnn.com/SHOWBIZ/music/9809/25/Gershwin

An article celebrating the 100th year anniversary of Gershwin

Web.azstarnet.com/public/packages/reelbook/contents.html

Bio on GG and Handel and Beethoven, and many others!

The influences of Blues & Jazz

Here is a list of styles that influenced or developed from Blues & Jazz. See if you can fill them into the chart below:

Dixieland (New Orleans), rap storytelling, work songs, minstrel shows, big bands, Creole music, gospel, jazz-rock, soul, boogie-woogie, drums, ragtime (Scott Joplin), "cool" jazz, funk, swing, brass bands, stomp, Latin church hymns, be-bop, rock'n'roll, sentimental piano (silent movies), voices (a capella), slave songs, "hot" jazz, Latin jazz

AFRICA



1700s-1800s Slave traders

USA



BLUES

1920



JAZZ

1940
1950
1960
1970



BLUES COMPOSITION

DI, PK

Using the blues scale, and the given 12-bar Blues chord chart, write a Blues piece for 4 of you to play.

- Roles:**
- one of you should write a **melody** for the words
 - one of you should write the **fillers** to go between the lines of lyrics
 - one of you should create a **rhythm** for the 12-bar Blues **chords**
 - one of you should write a **bassline** to go with the 12-bar Blues chords format, and using the Blues scale

Use the C Blues scale: C, Eb, F, Gb, G, Bb, (C)

Use the 12-bar Blues in C:

4/4 C---/ C---/ C---/ C---/ F---/ F---/
C---/ C---/ G---/ F---/ C---/ C---://

Lyrics

Think of the one thing in all the world that is most **sacred** or dear to you. Write those things down. Then imagine that these things were taken away from you! That was what happened when the Black people were taken from their homes in Africa by the traders and brought to the USA to work as slaves. They lost their homes, their daily routine and way of life, their freedom, often their families and friends. Write down how you feel about this.

Write 4 verses, each having 3 lines in the format AAB where A is one line repeated and B is a different rhyming line:

e. g. *I woke up this morning, feel 'round for my shoes
I woke up this morning, feel 'round for my shoes
Oh yeah, I got those walking shoes blues*
(Eric Clapton)

The 4 verses should tell a story, with the 4th verse "ending" the story. Notice the use of **slang** – Blues uses a lot of slang in its lyrics (why, do you think?) A good story to listen to as a clear example is *Give Me One Reason* by Tracey Chapman