

Gershwinicity

SOMMCD 0631

Songs by **GEORGE GERSHWIN** (1898-1937) arranged for
Clarinet, Saxophone and Piano by **Iain Farrington**

Art Deco Trio

Peter Sparks *clarinet*^a
Kyle Horch *alto*^b, *soprano*^c saxophones
Iain Farrington *piano*^d

1 I got rhythm ^{acd}	2:02	11 It ain't necessarily so ^{cd}	2:42
2 They all laughed ^{acd}	3:57	12 Someone to watch over me ^{ad}	4:52
3 The man I love ^{ad}	3:31	13 I've got a crush on you ^{bd}	3:45
4 Nice work if you can get it ^{abd}	3:46	14 But not for me ^{ad}	2:49
5 Summertime ^{cd}	7:56	15 Gershwinicity	14:18
6 They can't take that away from me ^{abd}	4:51	Let's call the whole thing off –	
7 Fidgety feet ^d	3:20	A foggy day in London town –	
8 Love is here to stay ^{bd}	5:06	Fascinating rhythm –	
9 I'll build a stairway to Paradise ^{abd}	4:07	Embraceable you –	
10 Do it again ^d	3:51	Lady be good ^{abcd}	
		Total duration:	71:00

All songs © Warner Chappell Music

All First Recordings

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ART DECO TRIO Gershwinicity

Gershwinicity

Born in 1898, George Gershwin was brought up amidst the noise, energy and opportunity that was the cultural melting pot of early 20th-century New York. As the son of two Russian Jewish immigrants, Gershwin was part of a new generation of American musicians with a similar background, such as Irving Berlin, Aaron Copland and Leonard Bernstein. This mixture of old European traditions and fast-paced young America would result in a dazzling musical output that crossed boundaries of 'popular' and 'serious'.

In that exciting era, New York was the heart of American popular song, where the music publishers plugged the songs on Tin Pan Alley, and the Broadway theatres entertained the public with their catchy tunes. George Gershwin worked mainly as a songwriter throughout his life, often with his brother Ira writing the lyrics. George's ambitions and talent also drew him into the concert hall and the world of orchestral music, starting with the wildly successful *Rhapsody in Blue* in 1924.

As one of the first and most successful 'cross-over' composers, Gershwin's music was – and still is – regularly performed across the musical spectrum, by classical orchestras, jazz ensembles, pop and opera singers. While classical musicians generally perform from the composer's notated music, pop and jazz musicians improvise, arrange and adapt the raw material of the songs to make them their own. This freedom of expression often leads to a much

wider degree of interpretation between performers, as a song becomes a fast-paced frenzy with one performer, or a slow, melancholic confession in another. While the basic melody and harmony of the song remains, an entirely new 'composition' is created by the performer.

This album features my own arrangements, combining jazz influences with the structures and textures of classical music. They were written between 2000 and 2019 for classical concerts of my own ensembles, often performed as a dessert after the main course of Brahms or Beethoven. As a composer and arranger, I enjoy putting different musical styles side by side, or mixing them up together to make a tasty sonic stew. Jazz in particular is a key ingredient in this recipe, with its harmonic flavour, its rhythmic vitality and its confident energy.

These new arrangements explore the coming together of jazz and classical without deliberately recreating the original sound-world, and avoiding any sentimental sweetness. Although clearly drawing on the spirit of improvisation, they allow a harmonic and structural complexity that comes with notated music. Numerous re-harmonisations and modulations abound, along with much newly composed material.

All three instruments – clarinet, saxophone and piano – have a shared heritage in classical and jazz, and a flexibility to embrace both genres. They possess the dynamic extremes from sublime tenderness to thrilling power and brilliance.

As a duo, the clarinet and saxophone are capable of blending with each other perfectly, while also displaying their own individual characteristics. The ensemble purposefully avoids the use of those quintessential jazz ensemble timbres: drum kit and double bass. Instead, the piano carries the rhythmic drive, giving a focus on the rich harmony, as well as the counterpoint between the instruments. The repertoire includes new versions of a wide range of music, including the Great American Songbook, familiar classical music as well as modern popular song. This recording of Gershwin songs is music of love, loss, loneliness and laughter.

A hit song from the 1930 show *Girl Crazy*, ***I got rhythm*** quickly turned into a jazz standard. Its harmonic structure was used by jazz musicians as a template for their own pieces, while Gershwin himself used it as the theme in his Variations for piano and orchestra in 1934. This arrangement is from 2000, and is essentially an elaborated version of Gershwin's own piano solo arrangement: rhythmically punchy and deliriously cheerful.

Gershwin's final years were spent in Hollywood composing the scores for Fred Astaire movies. ***They all laughed*** was written for the 1937 film *Shall We Dance* where it is initially sung by Ginger Rogers and then danced in a terrific tap duet with Astaire. Ira's lyrics describe how critics and naysayers foolishly denigrate great inventors, and should be laughed at. It's played in a no-nonsense swing style, brimming with determined confidence. The saxophone and clarinet have their own respective solo sections, in upbeat jazz style.

Originally intended for the 1924 show *Lady, Be Good*, ***The man I love*** was used instead in 1927's *Strike Up the Band*. It's about longing, uncertain hope, and dreaming that one day love will be found. The arrangement is intimate and somewhat sad, with perhaps a feeling that time is running out, reflected in the fragile tenderness of the clarinet tone.

Another song from the Hollywood years, ***Nice work if you can get it*** was written for the 1937 film *A Damsel in Distress*. In an extraordinary routine set to the song, Fred Astaire combines virtuoso tap dancing while playing complex rhythms on a drum kit. The lyrics have an almost cynical tone about the pursuit of fame and money, coupled with the difficulty of finding love. This is a driving version of the song, piling through up to eight chords in a bar with constantly changing keys. It is purposefully relentless, the positive mood battling through the knocks and shocks. The clarinet and alto saxophone solos are divided by a shortened main chorus, before both solos are combined in melodic counterpoint.

Gershwin's most ambitious work was his opera *Porgy and Bess*, composed in 1934-35. Its 'songs' are rightly praised and the score is a masterpiece of melodic and dramatic invention. Gershwin was intent on composing an opera for African-American singers, a bold move for the time, but much criticised due to perceptions of racial stereotyping. ***Summertime*** was originally the first song in the opera, a comforting lullaby to a child. This arrangement is an extended work exploring the journey of Gershwin's own

family and displacement. His parents had left Russia owing to the anti-Semitic mood of the time and the devastating pogroms against Jewish communities. Gershwin himself was drawn to the plight of African-Americans and their own dislocation in society, a reflection of his parent's experience. This arrangement explores the themes of memory, isolation and loss. The soprano saxophone gives a haunting and plangent quality to the melody, sometimes tender and mysterious, at other times wailing and mournful.

Featured in the 1937 film *Shall We Dance*, ***They can't take that away from me*** was originally sung by Fred Astaire. It is a farewell at the end of a relationship, a nostalgic look back at the good times, shot through with sadness. In this arrangement, the music moves into new territory after the initial chorus. It shifts and searches through recollections, finally ending with melancholy and regret. The 'memories' middle section sees the clarinet and alto saxophone in private conversation, with nostalgic and suppressed laughter.

Although sharing the title of a 1918 recording by the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, ***Fidgety feet*** is an original Gershwin brothers song from the 1926 show *Oh, Kay*. It's a song about dancing, and this arrangement conjures up an imaginary Astaire choreography: light and witty, in a toe-tapping tempo. The piano solo setting evokes Gershwin's own piano recordings.

The Goldwyn Follies was the last film that Gershwin worked on, before his tragic and untimely death in 1937 at the age of 38. ***Love is here to stay*** was

one of his last, his brother Ira completing the lyrics after George's death. As the words do not refer to any gender, it has been suggested that it is about brotherly love, and the enduring bond between the Gershwin brothers. Certainly, there is a sadness about the concept of eternal love when faced with death, and this arrangement has an intimate and pensive mood.

The *George White's Scandals* show of 1922 included Gershwin's first attempt at a mini opera, *Blue Monday*, a scene that was quickly removed from the show. The hit song, ***I'll build a stairway to Paradise*** was a comedy number suggesting that the best way to get into Heaven was by dancing. This version takes the blues element of the song and turns it into a dirty, lowdown, sleazy dance, with raunchy moves designed to shock. The alto saxophone and clarinet solos are appropriately shameless and loose.

Another early song, from the 1922 show *The French Doll*, the lyrics by Buddy DeSylva for ***Do it again*** are some of the most suggestive that Gershwin set. The overtly sensual and sexual combination of words and music led to a hit for Gershwin, while perhaps the ultimate erotic performance was by Marilyn Monroe in her 1953 recording. This arrangement for solo piano starts with a little *vorspiel* before indulging in the full coital experience, recalling the opening of *Der Rosenkavalier* by Richard Strauss.

It ain't necessarily so is a brilliantly irreverent song from *Porgy and Bess* featuring the drug dealer Sportin' Life subverting various Bible stories. The

arrangement is full of swagger and cocksure arrogance, with the soprano saxophone taking on the character of a nightclub singer.

Gershwin originally wrote ***Someone to watch over me*** as a fast up-tempo number and recorded it that way himself on the piano. By the time it was staged in the 1926 show *Oh, Kay* (with lyrics by Ira) the song had become a slow ballad. It is an expression of loneliness and insecurity, with a longing for reassurance, reflected in this arrangement for clarinet and piano.

First featured in the 1928 show *Treasure Girl* and then the 1930 show *Strike Up the Band*, ***I've got a crush on you*** is a lively and cheeky piece. The sheet music tempo marking is *Allegretto giocoso* (gayly), indicating a sprightly mood. It was slowed down by Lee Wiley in her 1939 recording, accompanied by Fats Waller, and since then has mostly been treated as a slow ballad, including here. The mood is one of private desire, mixed with uncertainty, in this arrangement for alto saxophone.

Written for the 1930 show *Girl Crazy*, ***But not for me*** expresses the feelings at the end of a failed relationship. The arrangement for subdued clarinet explores this theme to its core: disappointment, resignation and depression.

Gershwinicity is a fantasia based on five Gershwin songs – *Let's call the whole thing off*, *A foggy day in London town*, *Fascinating rhythm*, *Embraceable you* and *Lady, be good* – originally composed for five soloists and orchestra. It was

first performed in 2018 at the BBC Proms in the Royal Albert Hall, London, celebrating the 40th anniversary of the BBC Young Musician of the Year. This is an adaptation for the trio, retaining the improvisatory spirit of the original.

The first two songs are taken from 1937 films, with two more from the 1924 show *Lady, Be Good* and one from *Girl Crazy* from 1928. The piece opens with *Let's call the whole thing off*, a lively swing number of brash confidence for soprano saxophone. This is interrupted by a brief and noisy street scene that sets the mood for *A foggy day in London town*, a sassy blues for the clarinet. Starting at the very bottom of its register, each chorus is successively higher, bolder and more outspoken as the fog lifts. The pace picks up with a jazz-funk-style version of *Fascinating rhythm* for alto saxophone that recalls the grooves of the 1970s.

A sudden change of mood introduces *Embraceable you*, one of the classic Gershwin love songs. Scored for clarinet, initially the mood is positive but doubts soon begin to creep into the music. As the tension builds, the tone becomes dark, passionate and tragic, as love and hope are shattered. The music subsides into calm resignation, parting with such sweet sorrow. The final song, *Lady, be good*, is an energetic perpetual motion for soprano saxophone, and a final energy surge brings all the instruments together in joyous celebration.

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The Art Deco Trio

The Art Deco Trio performs classical music with a jazz influence. They combine the materials and textures of the classical and popular repertoire with the rhythms and harmonies of jazz. Like the Art Deco style, their music mixes elegance and clean lines with exuberance and bold colours. The trio is made up of three friends and colleagues who have performed together in numerous ensembles at many of the leading UK venues.

artdecotrio.com

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Peter Sparks *clarinet*

Peter Sparks read music at Cambridge University, studying clarinet with the late Dame Thea King. He subsequently studied at the Royal Academy of Music under Angela Malsbury and Nick Rodwell.

Peter is Co-Principal Clarinet at English National Opera, and has performed as guest Principal Clarinet with most of the leading symphony, chamber and opera orchestras in the UK with concerts, broadcasts and recordings at home and abroad.

A busy chamber musician, Peter performs with a number of different ensembles, including London Winds, with whom he frequently broadcasts on BBC Radio 3 and performs in UK venues such as Wigmore Hall, Queen

Elizabeth Hall and BBC Proms as well as at international festivals. Peter also records as a session musician for a variety of TV shows and films, including *The Crown*.

Peter is an accomplished soloist and has performed numerous concertos such as those by Mozart, Debussy, Adams, Finzi, Copland, Weber and both *Konzertstück* by Mendelssohn with Michael Collins.

He has premiered many new works and has an affinity for contemporary music. Some commissions include works by Nicola LeFanu and two pieces by Peter Wiegold (including a bass clarinet concerto, *New York*) which were premiered in the Park Lane Group series. Peter also teaches clarinet at the Royal College of Music, London.

The arrangement of *Someone to watch over me* on this disc is particularly memorable, as he performed it in his first concert after the birth of his daughter.

peter-sparks.com

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Kyle Horch *saxophone*

Kyle Horch studied in Chicago at Northwestern University (B.Mus, M.Mus), where he learned with Frederick Hemke, and postgraduate study at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London, with Stephen Trier. Since making his London debut in the Park Lane Group series, he has performed as soloist at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, Purcell Room, British and World Saxophone Congresses, and many other venues in Britain and abroad. Kyle maintains an active career as a freelance musician across a wide range of chamber, orchestral, contemporary and light music. Orchestral work has included concerts, tours, broadcasts and CD recordings with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Birmingham Contemporary Music Group, Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, Birmingham Royal Ballet, Rambert Dance Company, London Symphony Orchestra, London Philharmonic



Orchestra, Philharmonia Orchestra, Mariinsky Theatre Orchestra, Royal Opera House (Covent Garden), Music Theatre Wales, Garsington Opera, BBC National Orchestra of Wales and many others.

Kyle is lead saxophonist with Michael Law's Piccadilly Dance Orchestra, playing music from the American Songbook mixed with early jazz arrangements, as well as songs by British contemporaries. Kyle has made several critically acclaimed recordings as a featured solo artist exploring chamber repertoire for saxophone and other instruments, as well as music by contemporary composers, including Ian Stewart, Timothy Salter, John Carmichael and Roderick Elms. He is a member of the chamber ensemble Counterpoise which has commissioned and premiered numerous works, performing in venues and festivals across the UK.

Kyle is a saxophone professor at the Royal College of Music in London, Visiting Saxophone Consultant at Royal Birmingham Conservatoire, and saxophone teacher at Royal Holloway, University of London. In recognition of his many achievements as a performer and teacher, Kyle was appointed to the honorary position of Vice-President of the Clarinet and Saxophone Society of Great Britain in 2016.

kylehorch.co.uk

Iain Farrington

piano and arranger

Iain Farrington has a busy and diverse career as a pianist, organist, composer and arranger. He studied at the Royal Academy of Music, London and at Cambridge University. He has made numerous recordings, and has broadcast on BBC Television, Classic FM and BBC Radio 3. As a solo pianist, accompanist, chamber musician and organist, Iain has performed at all the major UK venues and abroad in the USA, Japan, Mexico, South Africa, Malaysia, Hong Kong and all across Europe. He has accompanied a number of the country's leading musicians, including Willard White, Bryn Terfel and Lesley Garrett. Iain played the piano at the opening ceremony of the London 2012 Olympics with Rowan Atkinson, the London Symphony Orchestra and Sir Simon Rattle, broadcast to a global audience of around a billion viewers. He has performed on numerous occasions at the BBC Proms, including acclaimed solo performances in 2007 on the Royal Albert Hall organ.



Iain has composed orchestral, choral and instrumental pieces and has arranged hundreds of works in many styles, including opera, orchestral, choral, African songs, cabaret, klezmer, jazz and pop. He has composed several orchestral works for the BBC Proms, including *Beethoveniana* in 2020, *Gershwinicity* in 2018, *A Shipshape Shindig* in 2017, and two pieces for the *Wallace and Gromit* Prom in 2012. With the poet, DJ and actor Craig Charles he has written three large-scale orchestral works based on traditional fairytales, titled *Scary Fairy*.

His chamber orchestrations of the symphonic repertoire are regularly performed around the world and his organ arrangement of Elgar's *Pomp and Circumstance March No. 5* was performed at the Royal Wedding in 2011. In 2018, Iain performed a Mahler Piano Series in London, which featured his own solo piano arrangements of Mahler's symphonies, alongside songs and piano music from the period.

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