

- The Company
  - Mission Statement
  - Ballet Master in Chief
  - Dancers
  - Orchestra
  - Personnel
  - Volunteers
  - NYCB Alumni
  - Repertory Index
  - The Viewing Room
  - Brief History
  - NYCB Lyre
  - Annual Reports
  - Job Postings

Home > The Company > Repertory Index  
**An American in Paris**



Photo © Paul Kolnik

**Music** An American in Paris by George Gershwin

**Choreography** Choreography by Christopher Wheeldon

**Premiere** May 4, 2005, New York City Ballet, New York State Theater

**Original Cast** Carla Körbes, Jenifer Ringer, Damian Woetzel

**Average Length** 21 min.

"NEW YORK IS THE ONLY PLACE IN THE WORLD WHERE WE COULD HAVE BUILT THIS COMPANY."

— George Balanchine

**Find Tickets**

Event Calendar

Performance Search

**2008 Season**

Rep Seating & Pricing

Special Events

Sponsors

Group Tickets

Snow Policy

Accessibility

Christopher Wheeldon presents his own take of the romantic encounter between a brash American painter and a lovely young Parisienne in this ballet. A large ensemble ballet interspersed with pas de deux; this sweeping panoramic piece is filled with the vibrant sounds, rhythms, and colors of urban Paris life. The cast of 31 includes beatniks, fashion models, tourists, schoolgirls, gendarmes, and even a Tour de France bicyclist in a yellow jersey. Set designer Adrienne Lobel has created backdrops inspired by Picasso and Braque that provide a skewed Cubist perspective of a "postcard" City of Lights, including stone bridges and picturesque streets, the banks of the Seine and the Eiffel Tower. George Gershwin, born in Brooklyn, New York on September 26, 1898, began his musical training at 13. At 15 he left high school to work as a Tin Pan Alley "song plugger" and within three years he had seen his first song published. Although "When You Want 'Em You Can't Get 'Em, When You've Got 'Em You Don't Want 'Em" created little interest, George's "Swanee," popularized by Al Jolson in 1919, brought Gershwin his first real fame. In 1924, when George teamed up with this older brother Ira, "the Gershwins" became the dominant Broadway songwriters, creating brisk, infectious rhythm numbers and affectingly poignant ballads, invariably fashioning the words to fit the melodies with a "glove-like" fidelity. This extraordinary collaboration to a succession of musical comedies, among them "Lady, Be

Good!" (1924), "Oh, Kay!" (1926), "Funny Face" (1927), "Strike Up the Band" (1927 and 1930), "Girl Crazy" (1930), and "Of Thee I Sing" (1931), the first musical comedy to win a Pulitzer Prize. Over the years, Gershwin songs have also been used in numerous films including *Shall We Dance* (1937), *A Damsel in Distress* (1937) and *An American in Paris* (1951). Later years produced the award-winning stage musicals *My One and Only* (1983) and *Crazy for You* (1992) which ran four years on Broadway. Starting with his early days as a composer of songs, Gershwin had ambitions to compose serious music. Asked by Paul Whiteman to write an original work for a special concert of modern music to be presented at Aeolian Hall in New York on February 12, 1924, Gershwin, who was hard at work on a musical comedy, *Sweet Little Devil*, barely completed his composition in time. Commencing with the first low trill of the solo clarinet and its spin-tingling run up the scale, "Rhapsody in Blue" caught the public's fancy and opened a new era in American music. In 1925, the eminent conductor Walter Damrosch commissioned Gershwin to compose a piano concerto for the New York Symphony Society. Many feel that the Concerto in F is Gershwin's finest orchestral work. Others opt for his *An American in Paris* (1928) or his *Second Rhapsody* for piano and orchestra, which he introduced with himself as pianist with the Boston Symphony under Serge Koussevitzky in 1932. In 1926 Gershwin came across DuBose Heyward's novel *Porgy*, and immediately recognized it as a perfect vehicle for a "folk opera" using blues and jazz idioms. *Porgy and Bess* (co-written with DuBose and Dorothy Heyward and Ira Gershwin) was the Gershwin brothers' most ambitious undertaking, tightly integrating unforgettable songs with dramatic incident. *Porgy and Bess* previewed in Boston beginning September 30, 1935, and opened its Broadway run on October 10th. The opera had major revivals in 1942, 1952, 1976 and 1983 and toured the world. It was made into a major motion picture by Samuel Godwyn in 1959. Trevor Nunn's landmark Glyndebourne Opera production was taped for television in 1993. In 1937, George Gershwin was at the height of his career. His symphonic works and three "Preludes for Piano" were becoming part of the standard repertoire for concerts and recitals, and his show songs had brought him ever-increasing fame and fortune. It was in Hollywood, while he was working on the score of *The Goldwyn Follies*, that George Gershwin collapsed and died of a brain tumor; he was now quite 39 years old. Countless people throughout the world, who knew Gershwin only through his work, were stunned by the news as if they had suffered a personal loss. Some years later, John O'Hara summed up the feelings that abide: "George Gershwin died July 11, 1937, but I don't have to believe it if I don't want to." Today Gershwin's works are performed with greater frequency than they were during his brief lifetime. The songs and concert pieces are not in the least ephemeral, as a glance at the pages of any record catalogue will quickly make evident. Certainly the Trustees of Columbia University must have recognized this when they awarded George Gershwin a special posthumous Pulitzer Prize in 1998, the centennial of his birth.