

# Rhapsody in Blue

By George Gershwin

Molto moderato (♩ = 80)

The musical score is presented in a grand staff format, consisting of a treble clef and a bass clef joined by a brace. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major or D minor), and the time signature is common time (C). The score is divided into five systems, each starting with a measure number in a box: 1, 3, 6, 10, and 13. Measure 1 features a dynamic marking of *mf* and a trill (tr) with a fermata. Measure 2 contains a complex fingering sequence (2, 1, 1, 1, 1) over a series of notes. Measure 3 includes a trill (tr) with a fermata and a fingering of 1. Measure 6 shows a trill (tr) with a fermata and a fingering of 1, 2. Measure 10 features a trill (tr) with a fermata and a fingering of 1, 2. Measure 13 includes a *poco rit.* marking, a trill (tr) with a fermata, and a fingering of 2, 1. The score is filled with various musical notations, including notes, rests, slurs, and dynamic markings.

**Grandioso** (grandly, imposing, not too slow)

430 <sup>d</sup>

*ff marcato*

433

436

439

*8va* ----- ]

<sup>d</sup> This editor suggests inserting these two measures, which appear in the piano-and-orchestra and two-piano scores.

*ff*



(continued from page 1)

## Performing Gershwin's Piano Music

Gershwin gave the following advice about playing popular music at the piano, including his own works:

*To play American popular music most effectively, one must guard against the natural tendency to make too frequent use of the sustaining [damper] pedal. Our study of the great Romantic composers has trained us in the method of the legato, whereas our popular music asks for staccato effects, for almost a stenciled style. The rhythms of American popular music are more or less brittle; they should be made to snap, and at times to crackle. The more sharply the music is played, the more effective it sounds.*

*Most pianists with a classical training fail lamentably in the playing of our ragtime or jazz because they use the pedaling of Chopin when interpreting the blues of Handy. The Romantic touch is very good in a sentimental ballad, but in a tune of strict rhythm, it is somewhat out of place.<sup>2</sup>*

## About This Edition

This edition is based on the piano solo version of *Rhapsody in Blue*, first published in 1924 by Warner Brothers Music Corporation. All parenthetical material is editorial, as well as pedal indications and fingerings. More or less pedal than indicated can be used when playing this work.

<sup>2</sup> *Gershwin at the Keyboard*. New York: no date. Introduction by George Gershwin. Inside front cover.

## About the Music

*Rhapsody in Blue* exhibits great freedom of form. The opening section (measures 1–243) begins with an ascending line, followed by the first motif, which sets a cheerful mood for the entire piece. A second motif appears at measure 11, and subsequently, other motifs continue to enter and combine freely. The second section (measures 244–323) features the central theme, containing some material from the opening. The third section (measures 324–445) leads to a brilliant but brief coda (measures 446–451).

Above all, this piece requires a strong sense of rhythm to project the music properly.

## Suggested Further Reading

Hinson, Maurice. *Guide to the Pianist's Repertoire*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 3rd ed., 2000.

Hitchcock, H. Wiley and Stanley Sadie, eds. *The New Grove Dictionary of American Music*, Vol. 2. London and New York, Macmillan Press, 1986.

Rimler, Walter. *A Gershwin Companion: A Critical Inventory and Discography 1916–1984*. Ann Arbor, MI: Popular Culture, Inc., 1991.

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