bennington college presents

A GERSHWIN
Centennial Celebration

FRIDAY SATURDAY SUNDAY
DECEMBER 11 - 13TH, 1998; 8:00PM
MATINEE SATURDAY, 2:00PM
I GOT RHYTHM
EXCEPTIONAL, YET LESSER-KNOWN PIECES
BY GEORGE GERSHWIN
SUSAN A. GREENWALL WORKSHOP

AMY WILLIAMS AND ALLEN SHAWN, PIANO

THAT SWEET AND LOW DOWN
TWO WALTZES IN C
IMPROPTU IN TWO KEYS
PRELUDE (MELODY #17)
I GOT RHYTHM VARIATIONS (1930)

THE WOODEN NICKEL CAFE
AN INTERMISSION IN NEWMAN COURT

WITH BRUCE WILLIAMSON
PLAYING GERSHWIN STANDARDS ON THE UPRIGHT

REFRESHMENTS AVAILABLE
BLUE MONDAY

BY GEORGE GERSHWIN

Music Director and Conductor: STAGE DIRECTOR AND COSTUME DESIGNER
DA FAELLA DANIEL MICHAELSON

SCENIC DESIGNER
PETER SEWARD

LIGHTING DESIGNER
MICHAEL GIANNITTI

ORCHESTRAL REALIZATION
PHILIP SALATHE

PRODUCTION STAGE MANAGER
STEVE ESPACH

CAST
(IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE)
Mike Matthew Pillischer
Sam Ryan Barolet-Fogarty
Joe Duffy Havens
Tom Matthew Follette
Vi Camille Hartman
Dancers Cayli Cavaco
Anna Zimmer
Kelley Bryant

ORCHESTRA
Piano Nathan Jew
Violin I Barry Finclair
Violin II Bronwen Davies-Mason
Viola Sara Cronan
Cello I Michael Close
Cello II Melissa Collins
Bass Philip Salathe
Tenor Sax Bruce Williamson
Alto Sax Jennifer Doyle-Beck
Trumpet Ronald Anderson
Percussion Jesse Olsen
At the centennial of his birth, Brooklyn-born composer George Gershwin remains one of America's most intriguing cultural figures. His best-known orchestral works, *Rhapsody in Blue*, *Concerto in F*, and *An American in Paris* are all mainstays of today's orchestral repertoire. *Porgy and Bess*, composed in collaboration with his brother, lyricist Ira Gershwin, has become one of the most popular operas of the twentieth century. Numerous songs by the Gershwin brothers have entered the American consciousness as popular and jazz standards.

It is our intention in this evening's program to celebrate the creative scope of this quintessential American composer. Was George Gershwin America's greatest composer? This is, in the end, a meaningless question. What can be said, however, is that Gershwin was the most American composer in the democracy of his idiom and the brash energy that boiled from the musical melting pot of operatic, Jewish and African-American thematic material.

The twenty-three-year-old Gershwin and lyricist B. G. De Sylva tried to persuade impresario George White to let them write a one-act opera on jazz idioms as part of his *Scandals of 1922*. When White finally agreed, the duo had only five days—and according to Gershwin, nights—to complete it. On opening night, one New York critic sensed the importance of what he had heard, calling *Blue Monday* "the first real American opera." Scott Joplin's pioneering opera *Treemonisha* had been composed in 1911, but sadly remained in total obscurity. But if Gershwin had not yet written "the great American opera," he did do so only thirteen years later with *Porgy and Bess*. Anyone listening with even one ear can hear the groundwork for that great opera in this small work.

The presentation of Gershwin's early work *Blue Monday* by Bennington College students is a sweet experience for me. In June of 1987, my "vocal cohort," Tom Bogdan, and I sang in the Lincoln Center premiere of this piece with the Alvin Ailey Dance Company and the Concordia Jazz Orchestra. At that time, this was considered a musical rarity, a "find." In fact, many musicians did not know of the existence of this piece. In true Bennington style, our young students are producing a work that many seasoned musicians have still not heard. This production has been greatly served by the creativity and dedication of director and costume designer Danny Michaelson, as well as by the skills of our composer intern Phil Salathe ('98) who created the orchestral scoring which is unique to this production; and Nathan Jew ('01), who put in countless (uncomplaining) hours at musical, staging and choreographic rehearsals. I think it's been worth it. I hope you will as well.

Ida Faiella
How does one begin? How did I begin? When I first listened to the tape that Ida Faiella gave me, I thought that Blue Monday would make a great vehicle for Ida as Vi. On the second or third listening I realized it was Ida on the tape. (Soon after I recognized Tom Bogdan as Joe.) The presentational “framing” of Blue Monday, built into the piece itself, supported my idea to make a costume reference of Ida the conductor as a former Vi.

My challenge with Blue Monday was to figure out a way to present in 1998 an opera that was performed originally in 1922 by white singers in blackface. I knew from the start that I wanted to make a clear separation between the audience and the stage, and I knew I wanted the orchestra to be integrated with the opera onstage, as opposed to being in a pit. I hoped for Blue Monday to be seen, not as corny, but as a period jewel, the work of a youthful composer, in which you can hear the seeds of his masterworks, Rhapsody in Blue and Porgy and Bess.

The more I researched the 1920’s, the less I was convinced that the 1920’s was the right time period for setting “Blue Monday.” After the other designers and I looked at painters of the Harlem Renaissance for color and mood, we aimed to create a non-specific, but stylized world in the recent past.

In different versions of the original prologue Mike, and sometimes Joe, announces that the audience will see a “colored tragedy.” Ida and I changed the words to “lover’s tragedy,” not out of Political Correctness, but because we felt that words such as “colored tragedy” might actually prevent the audience from hearing the music. We changed other words as well, such as “white man’s opera” to “grand opera.” Different versions of the libretto included an additional character, Sweetpea or Cookie, who plays the piano and delivers the telegram. Initially, I thought that Nathan Jew could play Sweetpea, leaving his grand piano in the orchestra to play the upright piano in Mike’s Saloon. I ended up cutting Sweetpea and giving his stage business to Sam, which helped make Sam a fuller character.

I had originally thought that there would be three male dancers in addition to the three women, and it was Michael Giannitti who suggested that the three women dance with the three male singers onstage.

Blue Monday marks my directing debut (and maybe, swan song). In the Bennington style of learning by doing I truly enjoyed discovering character, movement and form (spatial and stylistic) of Blue Monday during the rehearsal process. Some of the information is in the words, but most is in Gershwin’s music. I owe a lot of thanks to my collaborators—the singers, dancers, Ida, Steve, Sara, Pete, Michael, Terry T., tireless Nathan at the rehearsal piano, my student assistants, and other colleagues, who helped me with ideas, research, and images.

Daniel Michaelson
**Production Staff**

Assistant Musical Director
Nathan Jew
Sara Rudner

Special Choreographic Assistance
Cayli Cavaco (Directing, Costumes, Choreography)
Maggie Halstead (Directing, Costumes)
Meagan Mattingly (Costumes)
Alejandra Serrano (Costumes)
Terry Tettelbaum (Costumes)
Anna Zimer (Costumes, Choreography)

Assistant Lighting Designer
IAN GREENFIELD

Orchestra Manager
SARA CRONAN

Assistant Stage Manager for Blue Monday
CARMEN DEALMEIDA

Assistant Stage Manager for "Rhythm" and "Cafe"
Bennett Strauss

Technical Director
ALAN DEL VECCHIO

Set Construction Lab
KIM ANDROLOWICZ, MARIOS BARBERY,
RYAN BAROLET-TODARO, JENNIFER DOYLE-BECK,
MELIS BILGIN, KELLEY BRYANT, GENEVIEVE BURKE,
MATTHEW FOLLETTE, BILGE GUL TURK, KATE KING,
MA LEVITT, NICOLE MACAGNA, CLODAGH MCCLOSKY,
MARAH McGILL, RYAN NEALON,
GARTH SILBERSTEIN, MELISSA ST. PERRE,
TRAVIS TAYLOR, SARA TETEN, DANIEL WARREN,
ANA WILLIAMS

Scenic Artists Lab
FRED ALBEE, CHRIS D'AGOSTINO, SARA SCRIPPS,
MARCOS BARBERY, NICOLE TEHNYET, NISSA WILSON, LAURA WILSON,
SARAH WOLF

Properties Lab
CAMILLE HARTMAN

Costume Shop Supervisor
MARA TRIPOLI

Costume Shop Lab
TERRY TETTELBAUM

KATI BICKNELL, SUMMER BRENNAN, SARAH CLARKE,
NICOLE DONELLY, ELIZABETH GELLER,
NIWAS LAWOT, PRIANKA NAGPAL, KRISTY PHINNEY,
CHANDRA REBER, ALEJANDRA SERRANO,
HANNA STROM-MARTIN

**Production Run Crew**

Light Board Operator for the Celebration
Kathleen Conroy

Stagehands for Blue Monday
JAMES NYMAN
LUCA GREEN-WESKEL

Stagehand for "Rhythm" and "Cafe"
AMANDA B. GREVES

Follow Spot Operators for Blue Monday
ANNE HILL

WARDROBE FOR BLUE MONDAY
ROX LITTLE

SARAH KERENSHKY

COLLEEN LEONARDI

LAUREN REED
Workstudy Staff

Scene Shop
Stephen Howard
Dan Levitis
Sky Bender-deMoll (Masters)
Kaiti Carpenter, Jessamyn Harris, Marlon Hurt,
Frieda Kipar, Nathaniel Meer, Aisha Walls,
Elizabeth Ward, Shannon West
Katherine Carpenter, Sarah Courtney,
Tilke Elkins, Maggie Halstead,
Jeanna Harnden, Natasha Henes, Leah Walsh,
Anna Zimmer
Light Shop
Garin Marschall (Master)
Seher Aziz, Ryan Barolet-Fogarty,
James T. Earle, Jason Eksuzian, Elizabeth Esch,
Jasmine Hamed, Marlon Hurt
Make-Up
Terri Lewin (Supervisor)
Seher Aziz
Hannah Strom-Martín
Props
Margaret Eisenberg (Master)
Heather Beckett
Aadya Bedi
Production Management Assistant
Elizabeth Esch
Audio Recording Engineer
Larry Weland

Centennial Celebration
Production Coordinator
Ida Faella
Production Manager
Steven Esbach
Music Program Coordinator
Suzanne Jones
Dance/Drama Program Coordinator
Ann Resch
Music Librarian
Susan Reiss
House Manager
Margaret Eisenberg
House Staff/Reservations
Elizabeth Esch
Poster/Program Design
Amanda B. Greves
Director of Communications
Dan Mohr
Photographer
Mike Leary
Photographer
Cynthia Locklin
THANKS

Thanks to the Office of Student Life for the "Cafe" food and service; The Office of Development for poster printing; Deborah Brothers, Cosmo Catalano and Williams College Theatre Department for costumes and properties; Bob Comenole, Lang Crawford, Sara Scripps, Mike Leamer, Jeanna Hapnden and CAT-TV for video taping; Constance Kheel for the tables; Madison Brewing Company for the barware; Oldcastle Theatre Company for costumes; Paul Elijah, WAMC-FM, Albany, Marjore Roogen, Mount Anthony Union High School for music stand lights; Holly Marshall for staging assistance.

The audience will not be admitted to Greenwall until a convenient place in the program or into the Margot Tenney Theatre once the performance has begun.

The taking of flash photography, eating or drinking is not allowed in the theatre in courtesy to the performers on stage and your fellow audience members. Please do not bring your Intermission snacks and beverages into the theatre.

Restrooms and water fountains are located in Newman Court.

Guests wishing to greet the performers may meet them outside the dressing room. Please use the stairway at the glass end of Newman Court.