



(LYRCD 6006)

GEORGE GERSHWIN THAT CERTAIN FEELING

Jerry Willard, guitar

George Gershwin was only 18 when he had his first song published in 1916, a tune called “When You Want 'Em You Can't Get 'Em” (“When You've Got 'Em You Don't Want 'Em”). It earned the composer five dollars and marked the beginning of an output that achieved unprecedented sophistication and diversity in the realm of popular music in America.

Gershwin's introduction to professional music making took place at Jerome H. Remnick and Co. Music Publishers, at the time the foremost publisher of popular music. As a “song-plugger” Gershwin often worked ten-hour days playing Remnick's extensive catalogue of songs at sight, in any key, for a constant stream of would-be starlets, theatre managers, vaudeville artists and bandleaders. In these circumstances the teenaged composer received practical 'hands-on' experience and met some of his closest future collaborators, including Fred Astaire and the lyricist Irving Caesar.

It was with Caesar that Gershwin registered his first bona-fide hit: Swanee (track12) in 1919. Composed for the opening of a movie theatre, Swanee became Al Jolson's signature number after the megastar entertainer overheard Gershwin playing it at a party and inserted the number into his own revue Sinbad. Jolson's recording sold two million copies within a year and, aside from the obvious financial benefits, gave the ambitious young composer the confidence to set his sights on the Broadway musical, a genre in which he would make his most significant achievements.

The vehicle for some of his early Broadway success was George White's "Scandals," a variety show featuring lavish sets and provocatively dressed chorus girls strutting "scandal walks" like the catchy chromatic example from the 1920 production (track 2). The same year also featured the Jerome Kern inspired "Idle Dreams" (track 7). The 1922 Scandals included one of Gershwin's early show-stoppers, "I'll Build a Stairway to Paradise" (track 6). With lyrics contributed by his brother Ira (who wrote under the pseudonym Arthur Francis,) the song captures many of the mannerisms that made the "Gershwin sound:" carefully interwoven blues notes and the ability to clothe words with subtle key changes and harmonic surprises.

In addition to his Scandals work, Gershwin contributed songs to a variety of projects. "The beautiful Do It Again" (track 5) was written for a risqué 1922 comedy called "The French Doll" starring Irene Bordoni. Years later it remained one of Gershwin's own favorites.

In many ways 1924 was a breakthrough year for Gershwin. In February "Rhapsody in Blue" was premiered at Carnegie Hall and brought the composer attention in the world of classical music. In December the Gershwin Brothers scored their first major success with "Lady Be Good", a musical comedy about destitute siblings eager to sacrifice themselves to help the other. The show's classic numbers include "So Am I" (track 13) and the title song "Oh, Lady Be Good" (track 14).

Gershwin also split 1925 into work for the concert stage and the Broadway theatre appearing as soloist in his Concerto in F and Tip-Toes, a musical about penniless vaudeville brothers trying to pass their sister off as a wealthy heiress. The plaintive That Certain Feeling (track 1), the sentimental Looking For a Boy (track 15), and the infectious, dance-like Sweet and Lowdown (track 4) are among the show's most memorable numbers.

"Oh, Kay!," a prohibition story, was Gershwin's main musical effort in 1926. Its score is highlighted by a number of classic tunes including "Do, Do, Do" (track 3) and "Someone to Watch Over Me" (track 11), one of Gershwin's finest creations with a characteristic pentatonic opening.

As the Jazz Age was coming to an end in the late 20's, the Gershwin brothers continued producing successful Broadway musicals with stylish and polished hits like "Liza" (track 9) from "Show Girl," "S Wonderful" (track 16) from "Funny Face" and "I Got Rhythm" (track 17) from "Girl Crazy." Amid efforts in the theatre the composer looked for a more ambitious undertaking, in his own words: "a combination of the drama and romance of Carmen and the beauty of Meistersinger". In collaboration with DuBose Hayward, Porgy and Bess, the most successful American opera and Gershwin's masterpiece, premiered in 1935 using an all black cast. "My Man's Gone Now" (track 10) is a lament on the death of a husband while "Summertime" (track 8) is a lullaby from the opening scene of the opera written in the style of a Negro spiritual.

During Gershwin's own time the process of transcribing his songs into a purely instrumental setting began almost as soon as the song was available commercially in a piano/vocal format. Ensembles with colorful names like Eddy Duchin and his Central Park Casino Orchestra and Fred Rich and His "Hotel Astor Orchestra" were keen on stocking their repertoire with the latest Gershwin tune. Gershwin himself earned money during his early years by "recording" instrumental versions of hit songs onto piano rolls for use on player pianos in saloons, restaurants and private homes. In 1932, at the suggestion of his publisher Gershwin made piano arrangements that looked back at his eventful career. The pieces were collected under the title The Gershwin Songbook and reflect the scintillating energy and introspective wit that characterized his skills as a master improviser. Jerry Willard's transcriptions on this disc draw on all these available sources.

-- Notes by Paul Cesarczyk © 2006

TRACKS:

1. That Certain Feeling - 3:09
2. Scandal Walk - 2:23
3. Do, Do, Do - 3:13
4. Sweet And Low Down - 2:26
5. Do It Again - 2:10
6. I'll Build A Stairway To Paradise - 1:39
7. Idle Dreams - 2:35
8. Summertime - 3:13
9. Liza - 2:35
10. My Man's Gone Now - 4:47
11. Someone to Watch Over Me - 4:40
12. Swanee - 2:16
13. So Am I - 5:10
14. Lady Be Good - 3:12
15. Looking For A Boy - 3:20
16. 'S Wonderful - 1:34
17. I Got Rhythm - 2:18

ABOUT GERRY WILLARD

Jerry Willard was born in Cleveland, Ohio and began studying the guitar with his father, guitarist Jeff Willard. The guitar pedagogue Sophocles Papas, recognizing the younger Mr. Willard's talent, invited him to study with him in Washington, D.C. Subsequently Mr. Willard expanded his knowledge of musical interpretation when he worked with violinist Misha Mishakoff and cellist Warren Downs. Mr. Willard also studied with guitarists Richard Lurie and Alirio Diaz, both of whom influenced his musical and technical approach to the guitar. Mr. Willard's performances have taken him to Alice Tully Hall and Carnegie Hall in New York City, and he has concertized extensively throughout Europe and The United States. At Mr. Willard's New York debut, Raymond Ericson of the New York Times said:

"The recital was exemplary. Mr. Willard took lute in hand for some pieces by Adrian LeRoy and John Dowland and turned that normally palesounding predecessor of the guitar into a brilliant and vivid instrument. Back with the guitar, the performer played his own transcriptions of Bach's Lute Suite in E minor and five dances from Britten's 'Gloriana' plus Henze's attractive 'Drei Tentos'. It was again the clarity of Mr. Willard's playing that gave special pleasure."

Well known as an ensemble player, Mr. Willard has performed with the Cleveland Orchestra, The New York Opera Company, The New York Consort of Viols, The Queens Chamber Band, and the Long Island Baroque Ensemble. Mr. Willard resides in New York City and is on the faculty of the State University of New York at Stony Brook. He has published many transcriptions for guitar including "The Complete Lute Music of J.S. Bach" available through Music Sales Corp. and "Ten Sonatas of D. Scarlatti" available through AIG Publications. Jerry Willard's lute playing can also be heard on the Lyrichord Early Music Series, on "Passionate Pavans & Galliards" Music by John Dowland (LEMS 8046) with soprano Julianne Baird, countertenor Marshall Coid, and harpsichordist Elaine Comparone performing on virginal/muselar, and "Jerry Willard Plays-Four Centuries of Lute and Guitar" (LEMS 8051).

CREDITS:

Recorded July, August 2006
Editing and Mastering: Al Gorgoni
Mastering and EQ: Nick Fritsch
Graphic Design: Nick Fritsch
Cover photograph: Christine Willard
Back photograph: Nick Fritsch
Produced by Jerry Willard
Executive Producer: Nick Fritsch



LYRICHORD CLASSICAL

PO Box 1977 Old Chelsea Station
New York, NY 10011 Ph: 212 404 8290 Fax: 212 404 8291
email: nick@lyrichord.com Web: www.lyrichord.com

© and (P) Lyrichord Discs Inc. These texts (including images) are published under copyright by Lyrichord Discs Inc. All rights are reserved.
The texts, and the music associated, with them, may only be republished, duplicated or sold, with written permission from Lyrichord Discs Inc.