

## George Gershwin



George Gershwin was born in Brooklyn in 1898. He started his musical career in the streets of New York as a song plugger on Tin Pan Alley. Tin Pan Alley was a street in New York where all the music publishing houses opened their doors and had piano players play songs to the passers-by. They also put pianos on the back of carts and hung tin pans from their sides so that they would clatter and bang while the cart was hauled down the street. George Gershwin learned what songs would sell, and began to write his own. His first hit song was a song that is still well known "Swanee," it sold over one million copies.

During the next four years he worked with several partners, wrote his first musical, and 45 more songs, that earned him great success.

When he was 25 years old, his jazz-influenced "Rhapsody in Blue" premiered in New York's Aeolian Hall. This piece of music was jazz, but in concert form. Gershwin tried to blend his love of the new American music with the respectability of the concert stage. Some of the world's most famous musicians were in the audience that night to hear the new music, but the audience had mixed reactions. This 'jazz' music was new to the American ear. Soon after, he wrote the

orchestral piece, "An American in Paris," and his "Piano Concerto in F," both became much loved and performed musical pieces. In 1924 he began a partnership with his brother Ira and wrote many successful songs and musicals including; *Of Thee I Sing* (a musical that won a Pulitzer prize,) "Fascinating Rhythm" and "The Man I Love." It was the beginning of a partnership that would continue for the rest of the composer's life. Together they wrote many more successful musicals for Hollywood movies starring Fred Astaire and his sister Adele. In 1935 he presented a folk opera "Porgy and Bess" in Boston. This is now recognized as one of the best American operas, it included the famous song "Summertime."

In 1937, after many successes on Broadway, the brothers decided to go back to Hollywood. Again they teamed up with Fred Astaire, who was now paired with Ginger Rogers. They made the musical film, "Shall We Dance", which included such hits as "Let's Call the Whole Thing Off" and "They Can't Take That Away From Me." After becoming ill while working on a film, he had plans to return to New York to work on writing serious music. He planned a string quartet, a ballet and another opera, but these pieces were never written. At the age of 38, he died of a brain tumor. Today he remains one of America's most beloved popular musicians.

*Answer in complete sentences.*

1. *Who was George Gershwin?*
2. *What was Tin Pan Alley?*
3. *Which musical won him a Pulitzer prize?*
4. *Who was his long-time music writing partner?*
5. *George Gershwin tried to combine what two kinds of music? How? Give at least two examples.*