



GERSHWIN SONGBOOK

ENRICO
FAGNONI

PIANO
CLASSICS

GEORGE GERSHWIN 1898-1937

SONGBOOK

Originals

1. Do it Again	1'34	19. Do It Again	2'15
2. Fascinating Rhythm	0'48	20. Fascinating Rhythm	0'53
3. Do Do Do	1'01	21. Do Do Do	2'28
4. My One and Only	0'41	22. My One and Only	1'52
5. Clap yo' Hands	0'44	23. Clap yo' Hands	0'49
6. Somebody Loves Me	1'08	24. Somebody Loves Me	2'26
7. I'll Build a Stairway to Paradise	0'36	25. I'll Build a Stairway to Paradise	2'17
8. That Certain Feeling	1'32	26. That Certain Feeling	1'47
9. Liza	2'23	27. Liza	3'09
10. Strike up the Band	0'54	28. Strike up the Band	2'08
11. Sweet and Low Down	0'52	29. Sweet and Low Down	2'33
12. Nobody But You	1'01	30. Nobody But You	1'54
13. 'S Wonderful	1'05	31. 'S Wonderful	2'05
14. Who Cares	1'10	32. Who Cares	1'53
15. Swanee	0'42	33. Swanee	1'20
16. Oh, Lady Be Good	1'12	34. Oh, Lady Be Good	3'51
17. I Got Rhythm	1'09	35. I Got Rhythm	1'36
18. The Man I Love	2'23	36. The Man I Love	3'46

Enrico Fagnoni *piano*

ARTIST'S INTRODUCTION

Gershwin spent his childhood in Brooklyn, one of the poorest neighborhoods of New York, where the sufferings of black people were expressed through the rhythm and music, especially jazz, blues, ragtime and popular rhythm which shows influences of different musical genres. The young Gershwin poured these influences into his own music, later enriched by piano and composition studies (even if his studies were not strictly academic).

From a very young age, as little more than a boy, Gershwin wrote his first songs, working as a song plugger for Tin Pan Alley and for showbiz celebrities. He won success with 'Swanee' and Broadway opened its doors to him, and later Hollywood. His popularity boomed, and his journey from Brooklyn to Broadway to Carnegie Hall and the Metropolitan Opera, in his classical compositions, represents and embodiment of the American dream. His great talent was recognised by other landmark composers of his era including Ravel, Stravinsky and Schoenberg. Classical masters of the piano such as Ravel, Debussy, Schumann and Rachmaninov also seem to leave a faint imprint on these transcriptions.

The idea to make this recording took me back to my own childhood, and my first musical experiences of the US. I left Italy with scores of Bach, Mozart, Chopin and Rachmaninov, but found myself listening to the best jazz and ragtime musicians. I was astonished by the rhythm of their music, the acoustics, the spontaneity of their jam sessions. The time I spent there seemed to pass in a dream.

And so, it is in a spirit of honouring Gershwin's genius that I made this recording.

While playing these pieces, I conceived the wish to make arrangements of my own, often quite different in character, as a personal tribute to Gershwin.

My arrangements sometimes venture far from the original transcriptions, while staying faithful to his superb melodies. I hope that the Great Gershwin would appreciate my little homage, which I offer with all my love.

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Translated by Maria Russo

NEW WRINKLES: THE SONG BOOK OF GERSHWIN

In 1929 the publishing house Simon and Schuster asked Gershwin to write down some of his improvisations and variations on paper. Between 1931 and 1932, Gershwin composed solo piano arrangements of 18 songs. In May 1932, Bennet Cerfs Random House prepared a deluxe limited edition of 300 copies of *George Gershwin's Song-book*, which were illustrated by a New York artist Constantin Alajalov, and were signed by Gershwin and Alajalov.

The song book contained 18 of Gershwin's most famous songs from musicals that he wrote between the 1920s and the early 1930s. They were arranged chronologically by date of composition from the 1919 'Swanee' to the 1932 'Who Cares?', and printed first in their regular piano/vocal sheet music form, followed in each case by Gershwin's instrumental variations, or as he called them, 'transcriptions' for solo piano. These printed transcriptions are the only published form of his improvisations. As documents of Gershwin's own pianistic style they become more valuable still for the insights afforded by his preface, which directly addresses his work in the context of his most significant forebears.

'The evolution of our popular pianistic style,' wrote Gershwin, 'really began with the introduction of ragtime, just before the Spanish-American war, and came to its culminating point in the jazz era that followed upon the Great War. A number of names come crowding into my memory: Mike Bernard. Les Copeland. Melville Ellis, Lucky Roberts. Zez Confrey, Arden and Ohman, and others. Each of these was responsible for the popularization of a new technique, or a new wrinkle in playing... To all of these predecessors I am indebted; some of the effects I use in my transcriptions derive from their style of playing the piano.... There was the habit Les Copeland had of thumping his left hand onto a blurred group of notes, from which he would

slide into a regular chord; it made a rather interesting pulse in the bass: a sort of happy-go-lucky sforzando effect. Then there was Bernard's habit of playing the melody in the left hand, while he wove a filigree of counterpoint with the right; for a time, this was all the rage... Confrey's contribution has been of a more permanent nature, as some of his piano figures found their way into serious American compositions.'

Gershwin discussed the main reason for publishing the *Song Book*: 'Most songs die at an early age and are soon completely forgotten by the self-same public that once sang them with gusto. The reason for this is that they are sung and played too much when they are alive, and cannot stand the strain of their very popularity... When the publishers asked me to gather a group of my songs for publication I took up the idea enthusiastically, because I thought that this might be a means of prolonging their life.'

Concerning the transcriptions in the book, he continued: 'Playing my songs as frequently as I do at private parties. I have naturally been led to compose numerous variations upon them, and to indulge the desire for complication and variety that every composer feels when he manipulates the same material over and over again. It was this habit of mine that led to the original suggestion to publish a group of songs not only in the simplified arrangements that the public knew, but also in the variations that I had devised.'

Gershwin well understood the commercial imperatives behind the *Song Book*: the publishers printed simplified versions because 'the majority of the purchasers of popular music are little girls with little hands, who have not progressed very far in their study of the piano'. But these versions, refined through constant performances by the composer himself, are aimed at more serious players.

We can break down the influences on his song and piano styles into three categories. There is jazz, in the 'blue' flattened thirds and sevenths; in the syncopated rhythms and the walking bass lines of parallel sixths and tenths. There is ragtime, in the left-hand broken chord patterns ('stride bass') and the right-hand syncopations, most commonly arranged as three-note figures, the second of them twice as long as the first and third. Finally there is the influence of Jewish and specifically klezmer music, in the minor-third inflections to the melodies and the kind of declamation that derives ultimately from Synagogue chants.

The transcriptions are all arranged in major keys, and they omit the original verses of the songs, being based solely on the refrain or chorus material. The AABA and ABAB are two most common forms with only one transcription, 'Who cares?' in ABAC form. The tempo markings are written in English, instead of the Italian markings for his songs. Their origins vary, but most of them share the spontaneity of 'Do It Again' which premiered in the 1922 Broadway show *The French Doll*, performed by actress Irène Bordoni. Gershwin later remembered: 'I was in the office of Max Dreyfus, my publisher, one day when Buddy DeSylva walked in. DeSylva said jokingly to me, "George, let's write a hit!" I matched him by saying, "OK!" I sat down at the piano, and began playing a theme which I was composing on the spot... Buddy listened for a few minutes and then began chanting this title - "Oh, Do It Again!", which he had just fitted to my theme.'

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ENRICO FAGNONI

Enrico Fagnoni studied piano from an early age and first appeared on Eurovision at the age of four. At the age of ten, he performed at the Teatro San Carlo in Naples, where he won the praise of Nino Rota. While in the US he also came to the attention of Benny Goodman. He also played the boy Verdi in a film for RAI Uno. He studied piano with Vincenzo Vitale and later pursued further studies in composition and conducting. Since then he has



published piano studies and arrangements, produced opera and concert works, made many TV appearances as a pianist and worked with several universities. His work also encompasses artistic partnerships with actors, soloists, chamber ensembles, symphony orchestras and jazz bands.

Currently he is a professor of piano at “San Pietro a Majella” Conservatory in Naples.



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