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■George Gershwin (1898–1937)

■Concerto in F (31')

The sound of the works by the early twentieth-century American composer and pianist George Gershwin is unique. It is different from that of the compositions of the well-known composers of the time. Some European musicians like Maurice Ravel and Claude Debussy incorporated into their music Jazz elements, but they never reached Gershwin's level of integrating extremely different types of music.

George Gershwin was born in Brooklyn, New York, on September 26, 1898. He did not receive music lessons until he was thirteen years old but was already working as a pianist two years later. Around this time, he started to write songs. In the 1920s, together with his older brother Ira (lyricist), Gershwin composed a considerable amount of music for Broadway theaters. He also had strong interests in writing serious music, of which his first major work was *Rhapsody in Blue* for orchestra and piano, composed in 1924.

Gershwin began to compose Concerto in F for solo piano and orchestra in May 1925 and completed it on November 10 that year. The piece was commissioned by Walter Damrosch, a conductor/composer who directed the New York Symphony Orchestra. The first performance took place on December 3, 1925, with Gershwin playing the solo piano. Gershwin mixed elements of jazz, Broadway songs and dances, and late-romantic sonority and harmony to create the Concerto, which comprises three movements. It begins with four timpani notes in a descending arpeggio-like manner (F, C, F, and F). Throughout the movement, the syncopated rhythm typical of jazz, can be heard. The solo trumpet opens the slow second movement with a melancholic blues-like melody. The mood as well as tempo lightens up when the piano enters. The finale is initiated by the orchestra playing fast notes. Here the jazz influence seems minimal, but jazz-

related sounds and rhythms soon become apparent.

[Akira Ishii]