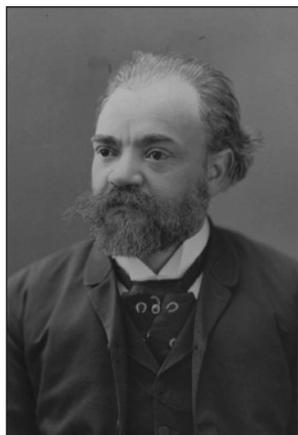


Over the last 175 seasons the New York Philharmonic has performed more than 1,000 World and United States Premieres. This Opening Gala program recognizes two of these works, Dvořák's Symphony No. 9, *From the New World*, and Gershwin's Concerto in F, which are being performed together for the first time in the Orchestra's history.

In both cases, the composers were on hand during rehearsals leading up to the World Premieres. In 1893 Dvořák collaborated with then Music Director Anton Seidl on changes — revisions



that would become critical to the symphony's DNA, and that survive today in the original manuscript parts preserved in the Philharmonic Archives. In 1925 Gershwin was involved in preparations not only as composer but as soloist for the first performance of his concerto. Over the next decade, he would perform as the soloist in nine of the Orchestra's ten performances of the work.

Only 30 years separate the premieres of the Dvořák and Gershwin works, although at first glance they seem worlds and eras apart. Yet, there is a thread that connects them, beyond their influence on expanding symphonic repertoire. Rubin Goldmark — who was a teacher of Aaron Copland, and, for a short time, George Gershwin — had studied with Dvořák at the National Conservatory of Music. The Czech composer had been enticed to New York City in 1892 to lead the conservatory that welcomed students of any race or gender to study music. His interest was to encourage the development of an American sound in classical music, which he believed would happen by including African American and Native American themes, as he did in his symphony *From the New World*.



Top: Antonín Dvořák in New York, 1893. Bottom: Gershwin the concert pianist

Is there a connection between the works to be heard? One can say that Gershwin felt the same about jazz as Dvořák felt about African American and Native American music. As he wrote in 1933,

Jazz I regard as an American folk music ... in the blood and feeling of the American people more than any other style of folk music. I believe that it can be made the basis of serious symphonic works of lasting value, in the hands of a composer with talent for both jazz and symphonic music.

— The Archives

Visit the **New York Philharmonic Leon Levy Digital Archives** ([archives.nyphil.org](https://archives.nyphil.org)) to explore this history further. Materials on the World Premiere of Dvořák's *New World* Symphony can be found here: [bit.ly/dvoraknws](https://bit.ly/dvoraknws). A performance history of the Concerto in F with Gershwin as soloist can be found here: [bit.ly/gershwinplaysgershin](https://bit.ly/gershwinplaysgershin)

# Concerto in F for Piano and Orchestra

## George Gershwin

On the afternoon of February 12, 1924, musical New York gathered at the city's Aeolian Hall on 42nd Street to witness a concert the bandleader Paul Whiteman was presenting under the intriguing rubric "An Experiment in Modern Music." Whiteman believed that the future of American concert music would involve a fusion of European symphonic traditions with the uniquely American style known as jazz. Most of the program he presented that day was far from what could honestly be described as "experimental" in 1924. But it did include the premiere of one work that perfectly exemplified his vision: George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* for Piano and Orchestra.

Among the musicians in the audience was the conductor Walter Damrosch, who had inherited the directorship of the New York Symphony Society when his father Leopold died in 1885, and would hold the post with only brief respite until that orchestra merged with the New York Philharmonic in 1928. Damrosch was so impressed with *Rhapsody in Blue* that he immediately commissioned a concerto he could introduce with his own orchestra. Gershwin happily accepted the commission and then — as the questionable legend goes — did a bit of study to find out just what a concerto was. In truth, the niceties of orchestral composition were still uncharted ground for Gershwin when he came to this commission. In his Broadway work Gershwin had always followed the customary practice of simply writing the tunes and leaving the orchestration to an arranger. Even the *Rhapsody in Blue* was not entirely his creation; the instrumentation had been carried out by Whiteman's staff orchestrator, Ferde Grofé, who worked from Gershwin's piano score. Gershwin therefore acquired a

copy of Cecil Forsyth's *Orchestration*, a standard textbook at that time, and learned enough from it to write the whole orchestral score of the Concerto in F on his own, possibly with some pointers from colleagues.

Broadway obligations prevented Gershwin from diving into his concerto immediately, and he didn't buckle down to serious work on it until May 1925, while he was in London updating material for the English production of his musical *Tell Me More*. On July 22, back in New York, he started turning his sketches into a manageable score, at the head of which he inscribed the title "New York Concerto." He worked on it every day during a stay at Chautauqua in August, and he appears to have let the movements flow "in order" from start to finish. Notations in the piano manuscript indicate that the first movement was written in July, the second in August and September, and the third later in September. After that he busied himself for another five or six weeks with the orchestration for full

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## IN SHORT

**Born:** September 26, 1898, in Brooklyn, New York

**Died:** July 11, 1937, in Hollywood, California

**Work composed:** May–November 10, 1925

**World premiere:** December 3, 1925, at Carnegie Hall, by the New York Symphony (which merged with the New York Philharmonic in 1928), Walter Damrosch, conductor, with the composer as soloist; commissioned by the New York Symphony

**Most recent New York Philharmonic performance:** March 25, 2014, with Jeffrey Kahane as conductor and soloist

**Estimated duration:** ca. 31 minutes

symphony orchestra. By the time Gershwin completed the project, the initial title had been replaced by simply Concerto in F — not F major or F minor (although the former would be accurate) — and it has been so identified ever since. Eliminating the referential title was an essential step toward the composer's goal. Gershwin later remarked:

Many persons had thought that the *Rhapsody* was only a happy accident. Well, I went out, for one thing, to show them that there was plenty more where that had come from. I made up my mind to do a piece of absolute music. The *Rhapsody*, as its title implies, was a blues impression. The concerto would be unrelated to any program. And that is exactly how I wrote it.

Gershwin wisely organized a run-through

of the concerto in November — he hired a 60-piece orchestra himself — and Damrosch wisely attended. Everybody was delighted with what they heard, but Damrosch, drawing on his years of orchestral experience, seems to have offered some well-chosen advice. As a result, Gershwin cut expanses from each of the movements (in addition to making a number of smaller changes), yielding a tighter work for the imminent premiere. The concert was completely sold out and the audience cheered rapturously at the conclusion of the Concerto in F.

**Instrumentation:** two flutes and piccolo, two oboes and English horn, two clarinets and bass clarinet, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, cymbals, bass drum, snare drum, and strings, in addition to the solo piano.

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## The Work at a Glance

In the *New York Herald Tribune*, in advance of the premiere, George Gershwin offered his own description of how the Concerto in F unfolds:



The first movement employs the Charleston rhythm. It is quick and pulsating, representing the young enthusiastic spirit of American life. It begins with a rhythmic motif given out by the kettledrums, supported by other percussion instruments, and with a Charleston motif introduced by ... horns, clarinets and violas. The principal theme is announced by the bassoon. Later, a second theme is introduced by the piano.

The second movement has a poetic nocturnal atmosphere which has come to be referred to as the American blues, but in a purer form than that in which they are usually treated.

The final movement reverts to the style of the first. It is an orgy of rhythms, starting violently and keeping to the same pace throughout.

Josephine Baker doing the Charleston, the dance craze with its “young enthusiastic spirit” that infused Gershwin’s concerto