

After the *Rhapsody*: George Gershwin in the Spring of 1924

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The year 1924 was a banner period in the early career of the young George Gershwin. The astonishingly successful premiere of the *Rhapsody in Blue* with Paul Whiteman's orchestra on 12 February 1924, in some ways made it the year of the *Rhapsody*. Thanks to the business acumen that prompted Whiteman to capitalize on a hit when he had one, many additional performances of the *Rhapsody* were given throughout the year, including a tour, and a commercial recording was released that summer. As a result, Gershwin would forever be known as the composer of the *Rhapsody in Blue*.

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The year 1924 also proved to be one of the most demanding years of Gershwin's career in terms of compositional output (table 1). In addition to the *Rhapsody* Gershwin wrote the music for three musicals that year: *The George White Scandals of 1924* (June 1924, 192 performances), *Primrose* (London, September 1924, 255 performances), and *Lady, Be Good!* (December 1924, 330 performances). *Sweet Little Devil*, a less successful show whose music had been completed in late 1923, opened in late January 1924 (120 performances) while Gershwin was writing the *Rhapsody*. Given the frantic pace these obligations suggest, it is not surprising to note that after 1925 Gershwin never again wrote music for more than two stage productions in a single year.

In the known manuscripts of the music Gershwin created during this busiest of years, one source stands out as a particular curiosity. A manuscript notebook dating from 5 March through 14 April 1924, it is of the type and size (approximately 6 x 9") Gershwin commonly used as a tune

The Journal of Musicology, Vol. 31, Issue 1, pp. 91–138, ISSN 0277-9269, electronic ISSN 1533-8347. © 2014 by the Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Rights and Permissions website, <http://www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintInfo.asp>. DOI: 10.1525/JM.2014.31.1.91

TABLE 1.
A brief Gershwin chronology for the year 1924.

January 7	Begins work on <i>Rhapsody in Blue</i>
January 21	<i>Sweet Little Devil</i> opens in New York. Conducted by Ivan Rudisill. 120 performances (approx. 15 weeks)*
January 29	Eva Gauthier's recital in Boston
February 12	Paul Whiteman's "Experiment in Modern Music" concert, Aeolian Hall, New York. <i>Rhapsody in Blue</i> is premiered
March 5	First entry in the <i>March–April 1924</i> notebook: 8-measure exercises in period construction and chromatic harmony
March 7	Encore performance of the Whiteman "Experiment in Modern Music." <i>Rhapsody in Blue</i> performed again
April 21	Plays <i>Rhapsody in Blue</i> with Whiteman in Carnegie Hall
April 24	Final dated entry in the <i>March–April 1924 notebook</i> —Lento—built on the B-A-C-H motive
May	<i>Rhapsody in Blue</i> tour, beginning in Rochester, NY, 15 May. Plays in Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Indianapolis, and St. Louis. Gershwin leaves the tour after the performance in St. Louis on 21 May
June 10	Records the <i>Rhapsody</i> with the Whiteman band, New York. The George White show is in rehearsal
June 30	George White's <i>Scandals of 1924</i> opens in New York. 192 performances (approx. 24 weeks) Conducted by William Daly. Biggest hit song: "Somebody Loves Me"
July 8	Goes to London to work on <i>Primrose</i>
September 11	<i>Primrose</i> opens in London. Conducted by John Ansell. Lyrics by Desmond Carter and Ira Gershwin. 255 performances (approx 31¾ weeks)
October	Works on <i>Lady, Be Good!</i>
November 15	Performs <i>Rhapsody in Blue</i> with Whiteman in Carnegie Hall, New York
November 17	<i>Lady, Be Good!</i> opens in Philadelphia
November 27	Performs <i>Rhapsody in Blue</i> with Whiteman in Academy of Music, Philadelphia
December 1	<i>Lady, Be Good!</i> opens in New York. Conducted by Paul Lannin. Lyrics by Ira Gershwin. 330 performances (approx. 41¼ weeks)

*Approximate number of weeks is calculated on the "typical Broadway schedule" of 8 performances per week. Note also that the "typical" Gershwin show featured an average of 12 new songs, plus overtures and incidental music.

book—a sketchbook for writing popular songs.¹ It has been recognized by Gershwin scholars as the earliest known manuscript source of “The Man I Love”—one of Gershwin’s best-loved popular songs.² Although this is indeed significant, “The Man I Love” is only one of nine sketched-out short pieces contained in the notebook, eight of which were never developed into polished works. At first glance “The Man I Love” seems to be an anomaly, particularly for a notebook of this type; the other eight pieces are most decidedly not popular tunes, but instead cover a diversity of styles associated more with the cultivated style of nineteenth-century European art music written for salon performances and recitals than with Gershwin’s jazz- and pop-infused concert music. Perhaps most significantly this notebook contains some of Gershwin’s earliest documented compositions after the premiere of the *Rhapsody*. Because its contents are framed by two encore performances of the work (see the chronology in table 1), a *Rhapsody*-related context cannot help but be inferred in its examination. The *Rhapsody* undoubtedly would have been in Gershwin’s mind during this time, simply by virtue of whatever practicing he might have done to keep it fresh in his hands. Therefore, the March–April notebook (as I shall call it here) provides a fascinating glimpse into additional musical issues that may have been important to him during this period.

Given that only one piece in the March–April notebook was ever developed into a finished work, one wonders what purpose the other pieces might have served. In 1989 Robert Wyatt mentioned the notebook in his groundbreaking study of the genesis of Gershwin’s preludes. Calling its contents “curiously ‘unGershwin-esque’—sounding rather like a combination of Anton Rubinstein, Rachmaninoff, and early Berg,” he posited that at least some of Gershwin’s closer associates knew of the pieces in the March–April notebook, supporting this conclusion by citing a letter written by Carl Van Vechten in which Van Vechten said he had heard that Gershwin had written some “jazz preludes.”³ Manuscript evidence, however, suggests that there are several other candidates to which Van Vechten may have been referring, including the pieces posthumously published as the *Novelette in Fourths*, *Short Story*, *Prelude (Rubato)* of 1923, and *Three-Quarter Blues*.⁴ If the March–April notebook pieces were as generally

¹ George Gershwin, *Notebook: March–April 1924*, Gershwin Collection Box 58, Folder 10, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

² Robert Wyatt, “The Seven Jazz Preludes of George Gershwin: A Historical Narrative,” *American Music* 7, no. 1 (Spring 1989): 71; Edward Jablonski, *Gershwin: A Biography* (New York: Doubleday, 1987; repr. with a new discography by New York: Da Capo Press, 1998), 79; Howard Pollack, *George Gershwin: His Life and Work* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006), 34.

³ Wyatt, “Jazz Preludes of George Gershwin,” 71.

⁴ *Novelette in Fourths*, *Melody No. 17*, and *Prelude (Rubato)* appear in the two different editions of short piano works published since 1996, edited by Alicia Zizzo and Maurice

familiar as Wyatt infers, it seems curious that Gershwin's brother, Ira, with whom he worked closely enough that Ira appears to have had a cursory knowledge of most of George's works, would have written the following in an introductory letter accompanying the Library of Congress's (LC) acquisition of the March–April notebook in 1969:

Since I do not recognize, with one exception [“The Man I Love”], any of the pieces in the notebook, I take it they were either exercises or, possibly, notions (unused) for the *Scandals* (June, 1924) or *Primrose* (London, Sept. 1924); certainly not for *Sweet Little Devil* (Jan. '24), *Rhapsody in Blue* (Feb., '24), or, with the one exception, *Lady Be Good* (Dec., '24).⁵

This statement suggests that the March–April notebook may not have been as well known among Gershwin's closest associates as one might be tempted to believe.

Ira's letter raises further questions. If these pieces were “unused notions” intended for the stage as he suggested, is it possible to determine the show for which an individual sketch might have been intended? If the pieces were exercises, does anything in the notebook or the music itself provide insights into what Gershwin was studying at the time? A third question also presents itself: might the pieces in this notebook have been, as both Robert Wyatt and Howard Pollack proposed, ideas intended for the set of piano preludes for the concert hall that Gershwin began but did not finish?⁶

This study will examine the March–April notebook through the lens of each of these questions, briefly comparing its contents with Gershwin's theater music of the period, his published piano works, and other manuscript materials the composer was known to have created during previous periods of formal studies in theory and composition. It will be shown that when the contents of the notebook are taken as a whole, the

Hinson, respectively. *Three-Quarter Blues* appears only in Hinson's edited collection. See Alicia Zizzo, ed., *The Piano Works of George Gershwin: Complete Preludes* (Van Nuys, CA: Alfred Publishing, 1996); Maurice Hinson, ed., *Gershwin: Complete Works for Solo Piano* (Van Nuys, CA: Alfred Publishing, 2008), originally published as *George Gershwin at the Piano* (Van Nuys, CA: Alfred Publishing, 2006).

⁵ Ira Gershwin, letter dated 16 May 1969, Gershwin Collection Box 58, Folder 10, Library of Congress, Washington, DC. That Ira would not recognize the music in the March–April notebook is significant. In addition to acknowledging him as a brilliant lyricist, those who knew and worked with him almost uniformly describe him as having had a very good musical ear and the ability to recognize musical ideas that had been under consideration for the shows he wrote with his brother. See, for example, Kay Swift's reminiscences in the filmed interview included in *Gershwin Remembered*, prod. and writ. Peter Adam, dir. Clark Peters, BBC-TV Program Development, Co, 1987, videocassette.

⁶ Wyatt, “Jazz Preludes of George Gershwin,” 71; Pollack, *George Gershwin: His Life and Work*, 34. Three of the intended set of twenty-four preludes were, of course, published during Gershwin's lifetime. Other short pieces that may have been intended for the set, such as the *Novelette in Fourths*, were published posthumously.

most likely purpose of this volume was pedagogical, more particularly a study of simple musical forms. The notebook's contents, however, suggest at least two additional matters of historical significance. Given the chronology of their creation, it appears that the astounding success of Gershwin's first major concert work may have placed him at an important crossroads, both in compositional technique and style. Moreover, the wide diversity of compositional styles found in the notebook suggests that the voice we accept as Gershwin's, particularly in his concert music, may not have been set in stone during this early period. Had he chosen to follow the stylistic path suggested in even one of these undeveloped pieces, the style we now accept as Gershwin's might have been perceived in a somewhat different light. When viewed through this lens, the March–April notebook provides a unique snapshot of Gershwin at work during what may have been a significant developmental period—one that in some way may have helped determine the direction his concert music would take for the remainder of his short career.

Gershwin's Trunk and Compositional Practices

Before discussing the contents of the March–April notebook in detail, a few words are necessary to delineate what the manuscript evidence suggests about how Gershwin worked and organized his sketch material. One of the draft sources of the *Rhapsody in Blue* illustrates Gershwin's methodology quite effectively. It is fairly well known that Gershwin composed the *Rhapsody* primarily during spare moments of the five weeks before its premiere, while preparing *Sweet Little Devil* for its New York opening. Until the early twenty-first century it was generally believed that because of time constraints, Gershwin did what any self-respecting Broadway composer would do: he adapted the *Rhapsody*'s themes from already composed material in his trunk—the Broadway songwriter's trade term for the backlog of pre-written music (or sketches) meant to be used at a moment's notice.⁷ Because Gershwin did not acknowledge the time-honored divide between high and low art, it was long supposed that everything in his trunk was composed with the intent of stage use or popular music publication. David Schiff's 1997 Cambridge Handbook on the *Rhapsody* took this notion to its most logical conclusion. Positing that the *Rhapsody*'s themes came from pre-existing popular songs in a now-lost tune book, Schiff, who is a skilled composer, constructed hypothetical tune book songs from which the work's themes might have been adapted.⁸

⁷ David Schiff, *Gershwin: "Rhapsody in Blue"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 13; Jablonski, *Gershwin*, 65.

⁸ While some readers might be tempted to interpret Schiff's hypothetical source tunes as prototypes, his assertion that the *Rhapsody*'s themes were adapted from pre-existing

More recent scholarship has challenged this assumption. For example, Larry Starr argued in 1999 that because the melodic material in Gershwin's concert music has strikingly different musical properties than his popular songs, the themes in his concert works could not have been adapted from pop music, even if pre-existing material had been used. Among other things Starr pointed out that Gershwin's popular tunes were "almost always . . . self-contained . . . , with a clear internal form (AABA is the most common pattern . . .) and a straightforward harmonic sense and direction," while his themes were always written to be open-ended to facilitate continuity and development. Starr further contends that Gershwin did not need to adapt themes from pre-existing tunes:

Gershwin, unlike composers such as Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninoff, Borodin, or Chopin, did not slip into the American hit parade through the back door of instrumental concert music; he entered confidently through the front door (redefining the door in the process). If Gershwin wanted to write a successful pop tune . . . he wrote one. He did not rely on his instrumental works as surrogates. When he wrote his concert music, Gershwin, an intelligent and practical musician, wrote in a manner quite different from that in his self-proclaimed tunes. Given Gershwin's talents and background, why did the melodies of *Rhapsody in Blue*, *Concerto in F*, and *An American in Paris* never become popular songs? The answer is disarmingly simple: these melodies never were, nor could they ever be, "nice Gershwin tunes." In fact, they make rather unsatisfactory pop tunes, which is why neither the composer nor anybody else has considered them pop-song material. Even if the definition of "tune" were loosened somewhat, clear, balanced, finished tunes are more common in the instrumental works of composers like Schubert, Mendelssohn, Tchaikovsky, and even Mozart and Haydn than they are in the concert music of Gershwin.⁹

Some of the thematic material in the *Rhapsody in Blue* is clearly instrumental in nature, simply by virtue of the wide range it covers, which in turn renders the melody difficult, if not impossible for an average popular singer to perform convincingly. For example, the opening theme of the

popular songs is quite explicit: "The lack of cadences and the modulating harmonies suggest that even before he began to weave the themes together Gershwin had *transformed them from ordinary pop-tune structures*." Schiff, *Gershwin: "Rhapsody in Blue"*, 15, italics added. Schiff's hypothetical tune reconstructions appear on pp. 15–19 of that volume.

⁹ Larry Starr, "Musings on 'Nice Gershwin Tunes,' Form, and Harmony in the Concert Music of Gershwin," in Wayne Schneider, ed., *The Gershwin Style: New Looks at the Music of George Gershwin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 97. For Starr's complete discussion of this issue, see pp. 97–99 of his essay.

EXAMPLE 1. *Southern Soil* fragment from Gershwin's *Themes* notebook (1924–1925), p. 2

work covers two-and-a half octaves— f to $b\flat^2$ —a range challenging to all but the best-trained operatic mezzo-sopranos.¹⁰

What little manuscript evidence exists of the *Rhapsody*'s origins bears out Starr's observations of the differences between the two styles quite convincingly. Although short snippets of two of the *Rhapsody*'s themes have been found in a sketchbook Gershwin titled *Themes*, neither one is in the discrete song form Schiff illustrates. Instead both theme sketches are as open-ended as Starr argued they should be, inviting the sort of development one would envision for a more serious concert work (ex. 1).¹¹ This notebook demonstrates that at least the opening material for the *Rhapsody* was drawn from a series of undated sketches of a piece Gershwin tentatively called *Southern Soil*. In addition to being fully written out more for piano (on two staves rather than in the lead sheet format more usual to Gershwin's earlier popular tune sketch books, which would make for easier orchestral adaptation), Gershwin also included articulations such as accents and staccato markings—neither of which are found in Gershwin's tune books from the period. In the very least, the open-ended nature of *Southern Soil*'s thematic sketches strongly

¹⁰ Even the hypothetical trunk tune proposed by Schiff, which narrows the range of the theme to an eleventh, might be considered too wide for most popular singers, and therefore impractical for commercial purposes. Schiff, *Gershwin: "Rhapsody in Blue,"* 15. For a more complete discussion of the inherently instrumental qualities of the themes in the *Rhapsody in Blue*, see chapter 4 of my Ph.D. dissertation. Susan Ethel Neimoyer, "Rhapsody in Blue: A Culmination of George Gershwin's Early Musical Education" (Ph.D. diss., University of Washington, 2003), 144–54.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 130, 141–44.

suggests Gershwin intended the work to be for the concert hall from its inception, rather than a popular song or incidental music for a theatrical production.¹²

The nature of the *Themes* notebook is consistent with other manuscript evidence from this period, suggesting that at least at the beginning of his career Gershwin may have been rather systematic in organizing his trunk. Although there are a few exceptions, Gershwin seems to have kept sketches meant for popular music separate from those intended for concert music, even recording pop tunes in smaller-sized manuscript notebooks than those he used for his concert music. Pop tune sketches from 1919 through 1922 more often appear in lead sheet form, with only a melody line and a few notes inserted here and there in the alto voice to clarify harmony when necessary. By contrast the concert music sketches tend to be more complete, being filled in with a proposed accompaniment and other details, such as phrase markings, articulations, and dynamics. Additionally, the more complete pencil sketches of Gershwin's concert works from 1924 to 1925 appear to affirm anecdotal accounts that claim that his concert pieces had been worked into more finished forms, either in his head or at the piano before they were written on paper.¹³

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Gershwin also seems to have had definite purposes in mind for most of the sketches created in the early to mid-1920s; at present his concert music does not appear to have been created from sketches meant to be popular music. Although Gershwin's internal genre-related boundaries seem to have softened in the 1930s sufficiently to create hybrid concert works, such as the *Variations on "I Got Rhythm,"* he seems less likely during the 1920s to have incorporated music originally meant for the stage into

¹² George Gershwin, *Themes* (notebook, 1924–25), holograph manuscript, Gershwin Collection, Box 59, Folder 5, Library of Congress, Washington, DC, 1–2, 9, 16. The *Rhapsody's* opening two themes (mm. 2–4 and 19–20) appear on page 2 of this notebook. The remaining material in the *Themes* notebook is primarily sketch work for the *Concerto in F*.

¹³ For example, Gershwin's close friend Kay Swift told Robert Wyatt in 1987 that Gershwin was able to write his first prelude "in one sitting; I scored it while he played and he made a finished copy from that. It was not just an improvisation; he already had it worked out in his head." Wyatt, "Jazz Preludes of George Gershwin," 73. Merle Armitage also recounted that at the end of Gershwin's life, he was mentally working on a string quartet, whose "dominant themes were so insistent he had not bothered to write them down. 'It's going through my head all the time,' George said, 'and as soon as I have finished scoring the next picture, I'm going to rent me a little cabin up in Coldwater Canyon, away from Hollywood, and get the damn thing on paper. It's about to drive me crazy, it's so damned full of ideas.'" Merle Armitage, *George Gershwin—Man and Legend* (New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, 1958), 77. The complete two-piano pencil manuscript of the *Rhapsody*, in Gershwin's hand, shows little to no evidence of erasures, which suggests Gershwin either copied it from another source or had it so thoroughly in his mind that he made few copying mistakes. A few more repetitive sections are crossed out, but if erasures were made in that manuscript, they were very thoroughly done. George Gershwin, *Rhapsody in Blue*, holograph two-piano manuscript, Gershwin Collection, Box 51, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

that written for the concert hall. Because these practices appear to have been in force during the time Gershwin wrote the pieces in the March–April notebook, it seems all the more unusual that the sketch now identified as “The Man I Love” became a popular song; the sketch of this tune, however, is written in a way that suggests Gershwin initially conceived it as a short work for piano. This also squares with a snippet in the *Themes* notebook that evolved into “The Half of It, Dearie, Blues”—a song that appeared in *Lady, Be Good!* later in 1924.¹⁴ That Gershwin appears to have done this at least twice suggests that his compositional practice may have in fact been the polar opposite of what it was long believed to be: instead of composing concert music out of sketches that began as popular tunes, he more likely composed popular tunes from sketches meant to be concert music.

Contents of the March–April Notebook

The March–April notebook contains four specific types of materials: 1) four two-phrase (or periodic) compositions for piano similar to exercises in free composition one might be assigned in a music theory course; 2) eight longer pieces in either binary or ternary form ranging stylistically from eighteenth-century dance to the highly chromatic language of the late nineteenth-century tone poem, one of which is the early, incomplete sketch of “The Man I Love”; 3) a series of three exercises in $\frac{3}{8}$ time, the first two of which are written in a style akin to that of composers from the classical period, and the final two of which appear to be incomplete; and 4) two charts summarizing basic rounded binary and ternary forms, both written in Gershwin’s hand (see table 2 for a more complete summary of the notebook’s contents).

The March–April notebook is also remarkable for what it does not contain. Because Gershwin played at least two performances of the *Rhapsody* during the period the notebook covers, one might reasonably expect that he could have succumbed to the obvious temptation to capitalize on the work’s success and write music that imitated the *Rhapsody* or some of his earlier hit songs. Because Gershwin’s concert-music voice during the 1920s was replete with jazz elements that included blue notes, rhythmic patterns native to ragtime, and allusions to eight-, twelve- and sixteen-bar blues forms, one might also realistically expect to find some of these devices in these sketches if they were intended for eventual concert use. Few if any of the short pieces in the March–April notebook, however, do more than hint at these stylistic elements. Gershwin instead appears to have been doing his utmost to avoid writing anything even

¹⁴ George Gershwin, *Themes*, 10.

TABLE 2.
Contents (in order) of the March–April Notebook and Description of Entries

Example number	Date	Key	Page	Meter	Total Measures	Entry Type	Labeling and Style Characteristics	Form	Form Specifics
	None	C minor	1	$\frac{2}{4}$	8	Type 1: 2-phrase composition	Numbered "3" in margin. Rhythm mm. 1-6 dotted quarter followed by 16 th -note triplet. All figures based on diminished chords	Period	4-measure antecedent, 4-measure consequent
	None	D minor	1	$\frac{2}{4}$	8, with 2 16 th -note pick-up	Type 1: 2-phrase composition	Numbered "4" in margin. Left hand: held, tied triads—4 measures D minor, 4 measures A7. Right hand: ascending-scalar melody on beats, alternating with acting pedal point (first, A, then G) on off beats	Period	4-measure antecedent, 4-measure consequent
	None	G minor	2	C	8, with 1/4 beat pick-up	Type 1: 2-phrase composition	Numbered "5" in margin. Right hand: sequential melody somewhat reminiscent of Brahms or R. Schumann. Left hand: "conversational" triadic accompaniment that moves when the RH melody's motion stops	Period	4-measure antecedent, 4-measure consequent
	None	G major	2	$\frac{3}{4}$	8, with 2 8 th -note pick-up	Type 1: 2-phrase composition	Numbered "6" in margin. Lilting waltz with sequential 8 th -note RH melody and chordal LH accompaniment in quarter notes	Period	4-measure antecedent, 4-measure consequent

	5 March 1924	E major	3	$\frac{3}{8}$	16	Type 2: longer composition	Tempo marking: Lively 18th century dance	Rounded binary	2 8-measure periods, hash marks (meant as repeats?) at mm. 8 and 12. A=8 measures, B=4 measures, A'=4 measures
	5 March 1924	F major	4	C	16	Type 2: longer composition	Tempo marking: "Modto" "A" sections: RH melody alternates a measure of quarter- note arpeggiated triads with a measure consisting of 4 triplets	AABA	Each section is 4 measures in length
ex. 3 (mm. 1-12)	5 March 1924	B \flat major	5	C	20	Type 2: longer composition	Tempo marking: none "oriental" - theatrical	ABA' with 2-measure intra	Hybrid between rounded binary and ternary forms. A is chain of phrases rather than period. 2-measure intra, A=8 measures, B=4 measures, A'=6 measures
ex. 10 (mm. 6-16)	none	G minor	6-7	$\frac{6}{8}$	24	Type 2: longer composition	Tempo marking: Moderato Turbulent, somewhat Schumannian; reminiscent of pieces in <i>Fantastische</i> . B section a common $\frac{3}{4}$ hemiola found in 8 meter	ABA	A=8-measure period, G min.; B=8-measure period, Eb maj., A=8-measure period. 2 nd "A" is a literal repeat of the first until the final measure
ex. 4a (mm. 1-8)	none	F major	8-9	C	18	Type 2: longer composition	Tempo marking: none Based on almost endless chains of triplets. Saucy, foppish, evocative of an English dance – perhaps an idea for <i>Primrose?</i>	ABA	A=8 measures, B= 8 measures, A= 2 measures. Obviously incomplete, with a whole note written at the end on an inexplicable E natural. As if Gershwin assumed A would be literally repeated

(continued)

TABLE 2. (continued)

Example number	Date	Key	Page	Meter	Total Measures	Entry Type	Labeling and Style Characteristics	Form	Form Specifics
exx. 9a, 9b, 9c (mm. 1-14)	none	D major	10-11	C	22	Type 2: longer composition	Tempo marking: Rubato "A" section based on triplets with wide intervals, quite chromatic (begins on V); B section the "jazziest" and most pop-music influenced of any in the notebook. Transition back to A' series of seemingly unrelated arpeggiated dominant 9th chords	ABA'	A=7-measure period; B=8-measure period; A'=7-measure period
ex. 5 (mm. 1-8)	4 April 1924	C major	13-15	$\frac{2}{4}$	59, including da capo	Type 2: longer composition	Tempo marking: Allegro Somewhat like eighteenth-century piano music, but also very "English" in nature, evocative of Hubert Parry's dance suites.	ABA (da capo)	A=21 measures, a ternary form within itself (a=8 measures b=6 measures, a'=8 measures); B=16-measure period (8-measure antecedent, 8-measure consequent), A is repeated da capo
exx. 14 (mm. 17-23) and 15a (mm. 1-4)	none	E \flat major	16-17	C	23	Type 2: longer composition	Tempo marking: none Original sketch of "The Man I Love"	Implied AABA	B section incomplete, no da capo indicated
exx. 8 (mm. 1-15) and 11 (mm. 18-25)	24 April 1924	F# minor	18-20	C	51, with da capo	Type 2: longer composition	Tempo marking: Lento Based on B-A-C-H motive	ABA (da capo)	A=17 measures (2 periods), B=17 measures (2 periods)

ex. 12	None	None	“21”	None	None	Type 4: Form chart	Label: Small Primary Forms (Lied form)		Outline of rounded binary and ternary forms. Formulae for 16- and 24-measure forms (ex. 12)
	None	A \flat major	“25” final page	$\frac{3}{8}$	8	Type 1: 2-phrase composition	Tempo marking: none Waltz, single-line melody (could be for the right hand alone or even another instrument like a violin or flute)	Period	4-measure antecedent, 4-measure consequent
	None	C major	“25”	$\frac{3}{8}$	8	Type 3: seemingly incomplete exercise	Tempo marking: none For piano, 8 th -note single-line melody in RH, triadic accompaniment in LH	Period	4-measure antecedent, 4-measure consequent, but without a real cadence. Final sonority is an A \flat chord in first inversion
	None	C major	“25”	$\frac{3}{8}$	6 + 2 beats	Type 3: incomplete exercise	Tempo marking: none No meter given, but this is obviously in $\frac{3}{8}$ time. Melody based on dotted quarters with 8 th -note counterpoint in alto voice	Period	Obvious 4-measure antecedent, but only two complete measures follow in RH
ex. 13	None	None	Inside back cover	None	None	Type 4: Form chart	Label: Primary Forms Summary and expansion of the chart on p. “21”		Adds a lower chart showing how rounded binary form can be expanded to a 32-measure form: 16 measures (A), 8 measures (B), 8 measures (A')

EXAMPLE 2. "The Man I Love" compared to one of the themes found in *Rhapsody in Blue*

remotely connected to the *Rhapsody* during this period.¹⁵ "The Man I Love" is the only piece in the March–April notebook that has any musical reference to the *Rhapsody* at all, and that reference is oblique—more visually than aurally evident when one observes the overall contour of the motivic material (ex. 2). When one compares the melody of the refrain to sections of the *Rhapsody*, it becomes clear that "The Man I Love" is based on the characteristic theme that weaves throughout the *Rhapsody*. Schiff points out that this motive had become a well-worn jazz cliché by 1923, which blurs a connection between the *Rhapsody* and "The Man I Love."¹⁶

Nevertheless, one could argue that "The Man I Love" may be an additional experiment in the working out of this idea—one that cleverly incorporated the cliché into what became a brilliantly written pop tune. As it is, "The Man I Love" is the only sketch in the March–April notebook

¹⁵ Aural references to the *Rhapsody* are also rather difficult to find in Gershwin's finished output during this era prior to the commission and composition of the *Concerto in F*. They do exist, but are surprisingly few in number, given the frequency with which Gershwin performed the *Rhapsody*. The most notable of these is found in the overture to *Lady, Be Good!*, but the reference there—a stylized but recognizable nod to the countermelody of the *Rhapsody*'s famous theme in E major—appears in a transition as an obvious signature motive, perhaps meant to draw applause from the audience while identifying the show's songwriter as the now-famous composer of the *Rhapsody in Blue*. For an excellent in-depth musical discussion of *Lady, Be Good!* see Larry Starr, *George Gershwin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 49–77.

¹⁶ Schiff, *George Gershwin*: "Rhapsody in Blue," 23.

that remotely resembles the compositional voice now recognized as Gershwin's. The other pieces found there are so stylistically foreign to Gershwin's that were they not written in his hand, one would be tempted to conclude they were the product of another, and at times a less gifted, composer.¹⁷

The March–April Notebook Pieces as Potential Stage Music

Ira Gershwin's hypothesis that the pieces in the March–April notebook might have been "unused notions" originally intended for theatrical use is both reasonable and intriguing, given George's hectic schedule during the period the notebook covers. Ira's emphatic exclusion of two of the four 1924 Gershwin shows ("certainly not for *Sweet Little Devil*. . . or, with the one exception, *Lady, Be Good*") is also notable. That Ira served as lyricist for all but one Gershwin show produced after mid-1924 (*Song of the Flame*, 1925) lends particular authority to his pinpointing of *The George White Scandals* and *Primrose* as the only possibilities for which the music in the March–April notebook might have been intended, if it was meant for the stage at all. Whereas Ira no doubt dismissed *Sweet Little Devil* because the pieces in the notebook were written more than a month after the show's opening, it seems certain that with the exception of "The Man I Love," *Lady, Be Good!* is excluded on the basis of the musical styles represented in the notebook. Because *Lady* is a celebration of the music and culture of the jazz age and all things modern, the score is replete with ragtime-, jazz-, and Charleston-inspired music.¹⁸ These musical styles are conspicuously absent from the March–April notebook.

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The diversity of musical styles represented in the notebook also make *The George White Scandals* and *Primrose* the best possible stage music candidates of the Gershwin shows produced in 1924. *The George White Scandals*, a yearly revue production patterned after the *Ziegfeld Follies*, called for a wide variety of musical styles that were designed, as Starr puts it, "to help performers seize a moment onstage and make an indelible impression with it. In effect, successful songs in both revues and musicals of this period provided their performers with distinctive roles

¹⁷ One might be tempted to make similar observations about the music Gershwin wrote for *Primrose*, which, however, still sounds like theatrical music, albeit music for the British theater. In contrast, most of the pieces in the *March–April Notebook* sound more like character pieces written by nineteenth-century European composers than show music.

¹⁸ In his commentary accompanying the reconstruction recording of the show's score, Tommy Krasker said, "More than any other Gershwin show of the period, *Lady, Be Good!* embraced the notion of non-stop merrymaking that has become a trademark of the Twenties." Tommy Krasker, "A Wonderful Party: *Lady, Be Good!*," program notes in George and Ira Gershwin, *Lady, Be Good!*, restored by Tommy Krasker, cond. Eric Stern, Roxbury Recordings, div. of Elektra/Nonesuch records, 79308–2, 1992, compact disc.

EXAMPLE 3. Opening measures of the “oriental” piece dated 5 March 1924, March–April notebook p. 7, mm. 1–12

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to fill and suggested appropriate accompanying actions for the duration of the number.”¹⁹ The 1924 *Scandals* was the fifth George White show for which Gershwin wrote most, if not all, of the music.

The March–April notebook contains only one piece that seems better suited for stage music than for any other purpose: its exotic character makes it a good candidate for a show like the *George White Scandals* in “[providing] performers with distinctive roles to fill.”²⁰ The last of three pieces dated 5 March 1924, this twenty-measure sketch has an overtly clichéd orientalist flavor, including the obligatory augmented second in the alto voice (ex. 3). The exotic, even mysterious air of this little piece is enhanced by the melodic interplay between the soprano and alto lines that provide heightened octatonic, and hence oriental, overtones by emphasizing two different tritone relationships. The melodic line seems better suited for an instrument such as a flute or clarinet than for voice, given the quickly repeated notes in what would be too high a vocal range for popular music. Aesthetically, the overall impression one derives from this little piece is that of having been suddenly dropped into the middle of a larger work or scene not present in the notebook. If it was

¹⁹ Starr, *George Gershwin*, 51.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

intended to be stage music, it might have been used as a dance break for a song such as “Night Time in Araby,” which was one of four exotic numbers featured in the *Scandals* that year.

Ira Gershwin’s introductory letter suggested *Primrose* as a second show for which some of the music in the March–April notebook might have been written. George considered the notebook important enough to take with him when he traveled to London in July 1924 to finish the show, reinforcing Ira’s supposition.²¹ *Primrose* was the second of three musicals Gershwin wrote for the London stage during his career. A conscious nod on his part toward then-current British musical theater as well as the comic operas of Gilbert and Sullivan, *Primrose* was so specifically tailored for British audiences that it was never staged in the United States during Gershwin’s lifetime. As Starr has noted, the score for this show “reveals a composer thoroughly familiar and remarkably at home with British show idioms.”²² Rhythmic devices and colorful jazz harmonies associated both with Americans and with Gershwin himself appear very rarely in the score, if at all.²³ Instead one finds strikingly less chromaticism and a preponderance of either rollicking $\frac{6}{8}$ or so-called boom-chick rhythms in duple meter much better suited to the W. S. Gilbert-inspired crisp, witty lyrics British audiences favored.²⁴ So convincing was Gershwin’s absorption of British idioms that the *London Times* reviewer mistook the music as having been written by an English composer.²⁵

There are two pieces in the March–April notebook that match the character of much of the music written for *Primrose*. The first of these pieces, found on pages 8 and 9 of the notebook, was written sometime between 5 March and 4 April 1924, and is quite similar to one of *Primrose*’s numbers, “When Toby is Out of Town.” Although this piece is in $\frac{4}{4}$ time, Gershwin uses triplets to realize the hocket and triplet rhythms inherent in $\frac{6}{8}$ meter. The overall sassy mood projected, as shown in the excerpt in example 4a, is similar to that of “Toby” (ex. 4b). The emphasis on triplet figures in the March–April notebook piece makes the two quarter notes at the end of measures 1, 3, and 6 stand out more than the dotted quarters in measure 5 of the refrain of “Toby” while sounding related to it. The two dotted quarters in the song emphasize the lyric

²¹ Jablonski, *Gershwin: A Biography*, 79.

²² Starr, *George Gershwin*, 51. See also Pollack’s discussion of the music for this show in Pollack, *Gershwin: His Life and Work*, 320–26.

²³ George Gershwin, *Primrose*, vocal score (London: Chappell – Harms, 1924).

²⁴ Howard Pollack quotes Gershwin as having told the *London Standard*: “I have inserted several numbers in $\frac{6}{8}$ time because the English are a $\frac{6}{8}$ nation. The Americans are a $\frac{4}{4}$ nation and their music is essentially the fox-trot. But the English, who are used to good lyrics, like the $\frac{6}{8}$ rhythm, which approaches most closely to ordinary speech, and makes it possible to hear all the words.” Pollack, *George Gershwin: His Life and Work*, 323.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

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EXAMPLE 4a. Undated entry, March–April notebook, p. 8.

Musical score for Example 4a, consisting of three systems of piano accompaniment. The first system (measures 1-3) features a treble clef with a key signature of two flats and a common time signature. The right hand contains eighth-note triplets and quarter notes, while the left hand has eighth-note triplets. The second system (measures 4-6) begins with a 4-measure rest in the right hand, followed by eighth-note triplets in both hands. The third system (measures 7-8) continues with eighth-note triplets in both hands.

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EXAMPLE 4b. “When Toby Is Out of Town” – Refrain

Musical score for Example 4b, including a vocal line and piano accompaniment for the refrain. The score is in 6/8 time with a key signature of two flats. The vocal line is marked "Refrain lively". The lyrics are: "Lon - don is a sor - row - ful place, You'll find a frown on ev - er - y face when To - by _____ is out of Town, _____". The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note bass line in the left hand and chords in the right hand.

EXAMPLE 5. "Allegro," March–April notebook, p. 13

statement of Toby's name. Likewise the two quarter notes in measures 1, 3, and 6 in the March–April notebook piece provide a rhythmic emphasis that, had it been used as an instrumental dance break in "Toby," would have alluded to those two dotted quarters while contributing to the song's overall foppish impudence. The almost relentless use of triplets in the March–April notebook piece—particularly in its B section—points more toward an instrumental application of the material. Even when realized at a moderate tempo, the triplets in the melodic line are so rapid that the piece would have worked only as a very difficult patter song. Had Gershwin intended this little piece for the stage, it might have been best realized as incidental or dance music.

The second of the two possible candidates for *Primrose* in the March–April notebook (pp. 13–15) is a bit less convincingly theatrical (ex. 5). The notebook's lengthiest entry—59 measures when the da capo and coda are taken into account—this piece features a melody comprised almost completely of sixteenth notes and an Alberti-style bass line. Its *allegro* tempo not only contributes to its overall dancelike, perpetual motion effect, but accented pitches and strategically placed quarter notes in the melodic line evoke a folkishness that calls to mind the English dance suites of C. Hubert Parry (1848–1918).²⁶ Like the pieces discussed earlier in this section, it appears to be more instrument- than

²⁶ This piece is comparable in character to Prelude I of Parry's *An English Suite*, particularly if the left hand of the Gershwin piece is played with a staccato articulation. Its rollicking rhythm and sixteenth-note melodic line, when played at a faster tempo as Gershwin's *allegro* marking suggests, almost mimics Parry's dance prelude. Whether Gershwin knew this piece cannot be determined at the time of this writing, but the stylistic similarity between the two pieces is quite striking.

voice-friendly, suggesting that it might have been best used as a dance number or incidental music. When compared to Gershwin's published music (whether written for the stage or the concert hall) it is uncharacteristically lacking in the beautifully crafted melodies for which his music is generally known. Given this deficit along with the idiomatic keyboard writing demonstrated throughout the piece, it seems doubtful that it was intended for the stage.

Because it is the only piece in the March–April notebook known to have been written for theater use, a few words must be said at this juncture about the refrain of “The Man I Love.” This song was first intended for *Lady, Be Good!*, but was cut during the off-Broadway production. The Gershwins subsequently tried to include it in two later shows: *Strike Up The Band* (1927) and *Rosalie* (1928). Nevertheless, the tune had been published and recorded shortly after *Lady, Be Good!* was staged. The song had become a big enough hit on its own that any attempt the Gershwins made to interpolate it into a later show was fruitless.²⁷ Ironically even if some or all of the music in this notebook might have been considered as potential stage music, not one piece—not even the single popular tune it contains—ended up in a Gershwin show. Because it is unique among the entries in the notebook, this tune will be addressed in more detail later.

The March–April Notebook Pieces as Unpublished Piano Preludes

The question of why the sketches in the March–April notebook were never developed into polished works is particularly relevant, given that Gershwin wrote several short works for piano throughout his career. Edward Jablonski's biography of Gershwin revealed that he had plans in the mid-1920s to compose a complete set of twenty-four preludes—one in every key. This set of preludes, tentatively called *The Melting Pot*, was meant to celebrate the musical and cultural diversity of America, and of New York City in particular.²⁸ Presumably toward this end, Gershwin performed a set of preludes in a series of contemporary music concerts given with the Peruvian singer Marguerite D'Alvarez in December 1926

²⁷ Pollack, *Gershwin: His Life and Work*, 329; Jablonski, *Gershwin: A Biography*, 379–80. Jablonski explains that “[by] late 1927 the Gershwins were quite tired of ‘The Man I Love,’ which had been doing fine on its own for the past three years, and they agreed it really was not a show song; for his part, Ira was ‘bored’ with it.” *Ibid.*, 148–49.

²⁸ A copy of the concert program from the first in this series, given 4 December 1926 has been reproduced in Wyatt's essay on the history of the Gershwin Preludes. D'Alvarez performed two sets of art songs by French and Spanish composers that would have been considered “contemporary” to musically conservative New York audiences: Debussy, Duparc, Moret, Tubayo, Alvarez, and Pedrell. Gershwin's part of the concert consisted of five preludes and the two-piano arrangement of the *Rhapsody in Blue*, in which he was assisted by Isidore Gorn. Wyatt, “The Seven Jazz Preludes of George Gershwin,” 79–81.

and early January 1927.²⁹ Although the three preludes Gershwin published in 1927 were among the short pieces performed in those concerts, recent research indicates that he added other short works to that set of pieces in performance, and that the set varied in content from concert to concert.³⁰ Alicia Zizzo's expanded edition of the Gershwin preludes, along with other short piano works published posthumously, provides a compendium of features to which the pieces in the March–April notebook may be compared. Gershwin's published short works for piano share a number of traits common to his longer concert works—attributes one might identify as being characteristic of the Gershwin concert music style. For the purposes of this study, I have condensed those traits into four major areas: relatively advanced piano technique; the presence of blues- and other jazz-related elements; the use of ragtime and novelty piano compositional elements; and asymmetrical form schemes.

1. More advanced piano technique. Since Gershwin's virtuoso pianistic abilities were widely acknowledged, it is not surprising that even the seemingly simpler published short piano works require a performer with intermediate to advanced technical skills.³¹ The three preludes call for the most advanced piano technique of any of the published short piano works—particularly *Prelude III*, which features intricate melodic figures and complex syncopated rhythms played at a blistering tempo (m.m. ♩ = 116).³² Even his early rags, such as the *Novellette in Fourths*, require pianistic skills on a par with those of Scott Joplin. Given this comparatively

²⁹ Edward Jablonski and Lawrence Stewart, *The Gershwin Years: George and Ira* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1996), 118–19, 346. For a detailed account of d'Alvarez's connection to Gershwin and the genesis of one of these concerts, see Wyatt, "Jazz Preludes of George Gershwin," 68–84.

³⁰ Alicia Zizzo drew this conclusion from Ira Gershwin's accounts of those performances in addition to reviews written by critics who attended the concerts. The three published preludes appear to have been performed in all the concerts, but the other content in Gershwin's set varied slightly with each performance. Alicia Zizzo, "Introduction to Performance Notes," in Zizzo, ed., *The Piano Works of George Gershwin: Complete Preludes*, 2.

³¹ Edward Jablonski quoted Gershwin as recounting that at the premiere of the *Concerto in F* he was complimented on his pianistic skills by fellow artists, such as Rachmaninoff, who went backstage after the performance to deliver their congratulations in person on Gershwin's fine playing. Jablonski, *Gershwin*, 105.

³² Whereas more current interpretations of this piece hold that the metronome markings on all three pieces were an editor's addition and not Gershwin's, recordings Gershwin made of the *Preludes* verify that he played them at the tempos indicated in the original published edition. Kay Swift also indicated that playing the preludes correctly is problematic in terms of tempo-related issues: "[George] loved to play the three preludes and included them, whenever he could, on programs that were just a little bit too short! They're easy to ruin, you know. Most people play the fast ones too fast and the slow one too slow." Kay Swift interview quoted in Wyatt, "Jazz Preludes of George Gershwin," 73–74. Also see the recordings of the three preludes made in 1928 by Gershwin in London in George Gershwin, *George Gershwin Plays His Greatest Hits: Original Recordings*, Mastersound Recordings, div. of Platinum Entertainment, Inc., 1998, CD.

advanced level, it is clear that, like other pianist-composers, Gershwin wrote to his own playing abilities.

Although they do not quite match the virtuosic level of the original three preludes, the pieces in the March–April notebook feature a number of passages that present intriguing challenges to the performer. These passages are tricky for a variety of reasons, ranging from tempo and intricate rhythms to performance logistics, such as hand crossing at fairly quick tempos (reportedly one of Gershwin’s favorite devices), or melodic lines placed in inner voices and passed back and forth between the right and left hands. One piece (pp. 10–11 of the notebook) has a melodic line based on sixteenth-note triplet figures that end on wide intervallic leaps between the second and third pitches, the smallest of which is a seventh—a configuration challenging even to performers with advanced piano skills (ex. 9a). The final completed piece, which is built on a transposition of the B-A-C-H motive, is quite fittingly the most chromatic and contrapuntal work found there. Since *lento* is the tempo designation, the piece requires expressive control similar to that needed to play the preludes from Bach’s *Well-Tempered Clavier*.

112 ——— 2. *The use of blues- and other jazz-related elements.* This trait, inspired by the rise of jazz during the 1920s, is generally accepted as one of the hallmarks of Gershwin’s concert music style. Although he did not often write in the classic twelve-bar blues form, one frequently finds complete or partial eight- or sixteen-bar blues patterns in his concert music, such as in his early one-act opera *Blue Monday* (1922), and in the bluesier mid-section of the *Rhapsody in Blue* (mm. 91–157).³³ *Prelude II (Blue Lullaby)*, which evokes the classic blues songs of W. C. Handy, is one of the few instances where Gershwin uses the twelve-bar blues form. Although the piece’s overall form is AABA, each section comprises a twelve-bar blues.

It was more common for Gershwin to use blue notes—flatted thirds, sevenths, altered ninths, or an occasional flatted fifth—whether or not a complete blues form was present. Drawing once again upon *Prelude II* as an example, the doubly inflected third in the tenor line of the introduction (E-E#-F#-E#) is a good example of the use of a blue third. Both the E# and E# are consonant in this context, just as they would be if the chord

³³ In both *Blue Monday* and the *Rhapsody in Blue*, the blues form is defined by the fact that the IV chord arrives where it should in a typical blues form. Robert Brown discussed the ways in which varied versions of the blues, which he called “blues variants,” have occurred in jazz from its earliest days. A blues variant is typically built on substitute and passing chords used as points of local-level harmonic color, but the form still remains a blues because its underlying harmonic pillars (I and IV) occur at structurally significant points. In the twelve-bar blues, the IV will arrive at the beginning of measure 5, and in the sixteen-bar blues at the beginning of measure 9. See Robert Brown, “Jazz Variants on the Blues (or: Article in F for Chord-Savvy Reader),” *Proceedings of NAJE Research 1982* (University Center, Michigan: NAJE Publications, 1982), 34–44.

were realized harmonically rather than melodically. The added B \sharp in the final measure of the prelude is a classic example of a blue seventh. As the final pitch sounded in the piece, it acts as a consonant resolution to what precedes it, flying in the face of the common-practice rule that classifies sevenths as dissonances. Suffice it to say that both accented and unaccented blue notes occur too frequently in Gershwin's piano works to be fully delineated here. Blue notes can be found in every one of the Gershwin short piano pieces in print, whether published during his lifetime or posthumously.

Consonant (i.e., unresolving) seventh and ninth chords, which for Gershwin reflects a direct influence of the blues, are a regular part of the harmonic language of his concert music. For example, these chords not only color the surface harmony of the *Rhapsody in Blue*, but they also serve as points of harmonic resolution at cadences. Consonant seventh and ninth chords can also be found in many of the shorter piano works, beginning with the very first B \flat ⁷ chords in the opening measures of *Prelude I (Spanish Prelude)*.³⁴ Although few if any of them resolve, the seventh and ninth chords in this piece are consonant to the ear because of their blues connection.³⁵

Gershwin's short piano pieces also contain other jazz-related elements. For example, the application of chromatic walking harmonies (some of which are seventh and ninth chords) in the left hand of the *Prelude (Rubato)* from 1923 evokes American jazz in general and the improvisational style of jazz pianist James P. Johnson in particular (ex. 6). This prelude is remarkably close in style to Johnson's recording of Lovie Austin's *Bleeding Hearted Blues*, recorded only twenty-six days before Gershwin wrote the prelude.³⁶ Johnson's tune features numerous passages of chromatic walking left-hand triads and cascades of descending figures in parallel tenths such as are found in measure 4 of this *Prelude*. Moreover, the melody Johnson plays in the first improvised

³⁴ *Prelude III* is designated as the "Spanish Prelude" in both the Zizzo and Hinson editions of the preludes. Wyatt, however, quotes Kay Swift as saying when speaking of *Prelude I*: "... the other two [preludes] came a little later—I can't remember when, but this one, the one he called his 'Spanish' prelude because of the rhythms, I think came first." Since Swift acted as Gershwin's "scribe" for *Prelude I*, I acknowledge her authority here. Wyatt, "Jazz Preludes of George Gershwin," 73.

³⁵ Unresolved seventh and ninth chords do not serve the same function in Gershwin's works as they do in works by Debussy or Ravel, although Gershwin acknowledged the influence of these composers. See Pollack, *George Gershwin: His Life and Work*, 28–29, 69.

³⁶ George Gershwin, *Prelude in G*, holograph manuscript, Gershwin Collection Box 51, Folder 14, Library of Congress, Washington, DC; James P. Johnson, *Bleeding Hearted Blues*, words and music by Lovie Austin, Victor 19123, 10" disc recorded 24 July 1923. This recording, which was made on 25 July 1923, may be accessed online via the University of California at Santa Barbara's *Encyclopedic Discography of Victor Recordings* website, <http://victor.library.ucsb.edu/index.php/matrix/detail/800002211/B-28197> (accessed November 23, 2011). The transcription in example 7 is my own.

EXAMPLE 6. Opening measures of “Rubato” dated August 30, 1923, unedited manuscript version, Gershwin Archive Box 51, Folder 1

The image shows the opening measures of the piece "Rubato" in G major, 3/4 time. The score is written for piano and includes the following markings: "Rubato" at the top left, "legato" in the bass staff, "rit." (ritardando) above the second measure, and "a tempo" above the third measure. The first system consists of three measures, each containing a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand and a corresponding bass line. The second system begins with a measure number "4" and continues with two more measures, also featuring triplets.

EXAMPLE 7. Melody line, the first chorus of James P. Johnson’s improvisation on Lovie Austin’s *Bleeding Hearted Blues*, recorded 25 July 1923 (Victor records, Matrix B-28197, Camden, NJ)

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The image displays the melody line of the first chorus of "Bleeding Hearted Blues" in G major, 4/4 time. The score is written on three staves, each starting with a measure number: 8, 3, and 6. The melody is characterized by a series of eighth-note runs and triplets, with a final triplet in the third measure of each staff. The notation includes various accidentals and rests, capturing the rhythmic and melodic essence of the improvisation.

chorus of the tune (approx. 1:07 minutes on the recording) is strikingly similar to the thematic material in measures 11–14 of the *Rhapsody in Blue*, further suggesting Gershwin may have known and been influenced by Johnson’s version of this tune (ex. 7).³⁷

³⁷ Gershwin may have heard Johnson play in after-hours clubs, Harlem rent parties, and/or cutting contests Gershwin was known to frequent. Although the performer is not specified in this particular account, a description of a Harlem rent party Gershwin attended may be found in Chip Deffaa, *Traditionalists and Revivalists in Jazz, Studies in Jazz*, in vol. 16

In sharp contrast to the original three preludes, there are surprisingly few blues-related musical elements in the March–April notebook pieces, including blue notes and unresolved seventh or ninth chords. Although the pieces in the notebook are no less chromatic than Gershwin’s other works, he handles the harmony here in a manner more consistent with European convention. One of the few instances of more bluesy harmonies in the notebook occurs in a short passage (mm.12–13) in the aforementioned piece based on the B-A-C-H motive (ex. 8). Here Gershwin heightens the drama of the upcoming cadence in measures 14–15 through the use of descending parallel seventh chords leading to the V^7 chord at the end of measure 13. This is the only overtly Gershwin-esque element found in the piece, yet the overall harmonic fabric is so far removed from Gershwin’s more typical blues-informed harmony that in context this gesture sounds closer to the style of Debussy than to the *Rhapsody in Blue*.

The piece marked “Rubato” on pages 10–11 of the March–April notebook is one of the few examples of the mixture of European and American elements recognized as a hallmark of Gershwin’s concert works. As example 9a shows, the A section is based on a sixteenth-note triplet figure where the first two pitches are a third apart, followed by the leap of at least a seventh for the final pitch in the triplet. The first two pitches in each triplet figure are held to sustain the harmony implied in the gesture. The A# in measure 1 is the flattened fifth of the E^7 chord that occurs in beat 3, but because the A# resolves upward to the B as it would in most classical works, it might be perceived as chromatic, but not necessarily blue. The C# in the alto voice at the cadence in measure 7 is a clearer example of a blue note. The C is the flattened seventh scale degree of the tonic D major chord on which the cadence occurs, but sounds modal, if not a little out of place here.

Features native to American popular music can be found in passages such as the descending alto line in measures 3–4 of this piece, which is not unlike such lines in countless Tin Pan Alley songs. The popular music allusion in this piece continues into the antecedent phrase of the B section (mm. 8–11, ex. 9b). Its plaintive melody, transposed down

(Metuchen, NJ, and London: Scarecrow Press and Institute of Jazz Studies at Rutgers University of New Jersey, 1993), 29–30. It also appears that Johnson knew of Gershwin’s playing. Eubie Blake recalled that Johnson and Luckey Roberts, referring to Gershwin, told Blake of “this very talented ‘ofay’ [white] piano player at Remick’s publishing house. They said he was good enough to learn some of those difficult tricks that only a few of us could master. They said this boy could play almost as well as they could, and if you ever heard James P. or Luckey play, you’ll know how good that is. They were tops.” Robert Kimball, liner notes in George Gershwin, Ira Gershwin and DuBose Heyward, *Porgy and Bess*, Houston Grand Opera, cond. Sherwin Goldman, prod. Thomas Z. Shepherd, RCA CD RCD3-2109, 1976, compact disc, 16–17.

EXAMPLE 8. Short piece written on the B-A-C-H motive dated 24 April 1924, mm. 1–16. March–April notebook, pp. 18–19

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The musical score is presented in five systems, each with a treble and bass clef. The key signature is G major (one sharp) and the time signature is 2/4. Measure numbers 5, 8, 11, and 14 are indicated at the start of their respective systems. The piece begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic. A triplet of eighth notes appears in measure 6. The final measure (16) is marked *rit.* (ritardando). The B-A-C-H motive is clearly visible in the right hand throughout the piece.

a whole step and repeated sequentially in measures 10–11, is one of the few in the notebook that would serve well as either the B phrase of a Gershwin pop tune or in an instrumental work. Another interesting harmonic feature in this little piece is found in the final measure of the B section (ex. 9c). Here, the arpeggiated figure introduced earlier in the

EXAMPLE ga. “Rubato,” mm. 1–7, undated, March–April notebook, p. 10

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section has become a consonant (unresolved) major-minor seventh chord. The consonant treatment here, however, is more evocative of Debussy than the blues: the root motion of the $B^{\flat}7-D^7-F^{\sharp}7-G^{\sharp}7$ harmonic sequence evokes an augmented triad and therefore alludes to the whole-tone scale.

3. *The presence of ragtime- and novelty-piano related rhythmic and melodic devices.* Gershwin's early compositional style was deeply influenced by ragtime, as seen in *Rialto Ripples* (1916, published by Remick in 1917) and *Novelette in Fourths* (ca. 1919, published posthumously). Both pieces are fully developed, multi-sectional rags that contain rhythmic figures now commonly associated with Scott Joplin (such as accented off-beats and intricate cross-rhythms) and a few of the later approaches used by white novelty/ragtime pianists such as Les Copeland, Mike Bernard, and Zez Confrey. In the preface to *George Gershwin's Song-Book*, a publication of solo piano arrangements of some of his most popular tunes, Gershwin singles out Bernard's habit of playing the melody in the left hand—an influence that surfaces in *Prelude II (Blue Lullaby)*.³⁸ In the same preface,

³⁸ George Gershwin, “Introduction by George Gershwin,” in George Gershwin, *George Gershwin's Song-Book*, special piano arrangements ed. and rev. by Herman Wasserman (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1941), 7–8.

EXAMPLE 9b. “B” section of “Rubato,” mm. 6–12, March–April notebook pp. 10–11

Musical score for Example 9b, showing the “B” section of “Rubato” (mm. 6–12). The score is in G major and 3/4 time. It consists of three systems of piano accompaniment. The first system (mm. 6–8) features a treble clef with a 3-measure triplet in the right hand and a bass clef with a steady accompaniment. The second system (mm. 9–11) continues the melodic line in the right hand with a similar accompaniment in the left. The third system (m. 12) shows the end of the section with a fermata over the final notes in both hands.

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EXAMPLE 9c. Rubato, transition back to “A” section, mm. 12–14, March–April notebook, p. 11

Musical score for Example 9c, showing the transition back to the “A” section (mm. 12–14). The score is in G major and 3/4 time. It consists of one system of piano accompaniment. The right hand features a melodic line with a 3-measure triplet in the first measure, followed by a fermata. The left hand provides a steady accompaniment with a fermata at the end of the section.

Gershwin cites the influence of Zez Confrey on his improvisational style, but gives no specifics, perhaps feeling they were so obvious that they needed no elaboration. Richard Dowling’s prefatory notes in his edition of *Rialto Ripples* fills in this gap somewhat, pointing out specific ragtime characteristics on which Confrey and other novelty pianists expanded:

“Novelty” piano works updated the basic ragtime format with jazzier harmonies, player piano roll “breaks” (idiomatic cascades of intricate passagework), and with tunes written in endless chains of triplets and/

or dotted rhythms and based on harmonic intervals of thirds and, especially, fourths.³⁹

These comments shed significant light on Gershwin's piano works, including the shorter pieces. In addition to the emphasis on offbeats inherent in *Rialto Ripples*, Dowling's commentary also describes parts of the *Novelette in Fourths*. Not only is the right hand in the A section built on fourths, but quick and moderately intricate triplet passages are interjected here and there at the ends of phrases in the B section, suggesting the piano roll breaks Dowling describes. The novelty piano influences are also evident in the three published piano preludes. *Prelude I* features short chains of triplet figures (mm. 20 and 29), and both *Prelude I* and *Prelude III* include longer "idiomatic cascades of intricate passagework" that either extend phrases or occur between them.

True to the pattern already observed in the discussion of other elements typical of Gershwin's style, few to none of these devices appear in the March–April notebook. In fact, the occurrence of syncopation of any kind is rare in the notebook. Only two entries contain musical elements related to ragtime or novelty piano, and in both cases the connection is tenuous at best. Almost the entire B section of the undated piece on pages 8–9 of the notebook comprises an endless chain of triplets, such as Dowling describes. As discussed earlier, the style of this piece is closer to British musical comedy than to ragtime, perhaps looking forward to *Primrose*. Similarly, the undated piece on pages 6–7 features the most intricate rhythm of any in the notebook, but it is in $\frac{6}{8}$ time (a meter not common to ragtime), and is syncopated only in its B section.⁴⁰ Here the syncopated rhythm in the first four measures is a fairly common hemiola figure that subdivides the measure into three quarter notes, as if the meter had been changed from $\frac{6}{8}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ (ex. 10). Then in the final four measures of the section, Gershwin superimposes the $\frac{6}{8}$ rhythmic pattern of the A section over the $\frac{3}{4}$ hemiola figure in the left hand. The cross-rhythms created by this superimposition of rhythmic figures comes the closest to achieving rag-related rhythms of any piece in the March–April notebook. Nonetheless, the $\frac{6}{8}$ meter almost completely obscures the stylistic connection; the piece sounds closer in style to the character pieces by Robert Schumann than the rags by Scott Joplin.⁴¹

³⁹ Richard Dowling, "Preface" in George Gershwin, *Rialto Ripples for Solo Piano, As Played by Gershwin on a 1916 Aeolian Piano Roll* (Boca Raton, FL: Master Music Publications, Inc., 2005), 3.

⁴⁰ $\frac{6}{8}$ time is uncommon in ragtime because it is derived from a type of dance music called a two-step, which was written in a simple duple meter, where the measure is not subdivided into accented groups of three notes such as a compound meter such as $\frac{6}{8}$ would be.

⁴¹ The intensity of the "A" section in this piece is a bit reminiscent of *In der Nacht* from Schumann's *Fantasiestücke*, op. 12. As one finds in *In der Nacht*, the ongoing rhythmic

EXAMPLE 10. "B" section of "Moderato," mm. 6–16, from March–April notebook, pp. 6–7

4. *Asymmetrical form schemes.* By the mid-1920s Gershwin, like all popular songwriters, was well accustomed to writing in standard Tin Pan Alley song forms. The most common of these was the standard sixteen- or thirty-two measure AABA or AABC form, where each phrase was either four or eight measures long. Starr observed that Gershwin often seems to have deliberately avoided this form and its implied symmetry in his concert music. For example, the first ninety measures of the *Rhapsody in Blue* feature phrases more typically five, seven, or some other odd number of measures in length.⁴² A similar avoidance of Tin Pan Alley-related phrase symmetry is also evident in some of Gershwin's short piano works. For example, the B section of *Prelude I* (mm. 32–41) is disproportionately short compared with the A sections, giving way to the return of A after only ten measures. This is also true of the *Impromptu in Two Keys* (1929): the B section is only seven measures long, which is less than half the length of the first A section. As is sometimes found in piano preludes from Chopin onward, some of the shortest works do not include a contrasting B section at all. *Melody No. 17*, for example, is more strophic in nature, but Gershwin adds one or two measures in an *allegretto* tempo for contrast rather than inserting a fully developed B section. In contrast, *Rialto Ripples*, *Novelette in Fourths*, and *Prelude II* are uncommon when

effect of overlapping phrase structures between the right and left hands, coupled with the harmonic motion that leads, without a hard cadence, toward the end of the section evokes a similar passionate effect that Schumann intended with his expressive indication "Mit Leidenschaft" (literally, "with passion").

⁴² Starr, "Musings on 'Nice Gershwin Tunes,'" 99–100.

EXAMPLE 11. Piece on B-A-C-H, “B” section, mm. 18–25, March–April notebook, pp. 18–19

formal issues in the shorter piano works are considered. Because these three pieces are either fully developed rags or related to ragtime via the blues songs of W. C. Handy, they are constructed with fully realized discrete sections—a feature not always present in Gershwin’s other published short works for piano.⁴³

The short pieces in the March–April notebook demonstrate a similar lack of symmetry in their formal construction. Most notably, although nearly all the pieces in the notebook are written either in rounded binary or ternary forms, the B sections are sometimes shorter and often conspicuously inferior in quality to the A sections (table 2). The most striking example of contrasting section quality can be found in the previously mentioned piece based on the B-A-C-H motive (ex. 8). Written in F# minor, the A section capitalizes on the motive’s inherent chromaticism by harmonically emphasizing the leading-tone function of the diminished chords implied in the motive, while exploring the more contrapuntal texture the motive suggests in all voices. The result is one of the best-crafted and musically interesting A sections of any in the notebook, owing to both its harmonic and contrapuntal content. The B section is disappointingly pedestrian by comparison (ex. 11). The right hand consists of a single repeating figure derived from the final three pitches of the B-A-C-H motive. This figure serves as an accompaniment to a melody line comprised of rising dyads in the left hand made up of two of the three members of the triad whose harmony underlies the passage, bringing the harmonic rhythm almost to a standstill. The fact that Gershwin repeats

⁴³ It is a well-established fact that W. C. Handy’s classic blues songs are hybrids of blues and ragtime. As such, he adopted the *march and trio* form commonly used in ragtime.

the material on which the section is based only emphasizes its inferior quality. Compared with the cleverness of the A section, B is remarkably anemic, as if it had been written by someone less skilled than Gershwin. Although this is one of the longer B sections of any piece in the March–April notebook, the markedly uneven quality between A and B sections is typical of nearly every piece in the notebook. Generally speaking, the A sections are clever and carefully crafted while the B sections are often shorter and more perfunctory. Had Gershwin chosen to develop any of these short pieces into something longer or more substantial, new B material would have had to be created to replace the filler written into the original sketches.

“The Man I Love” Sketch and the Solo Arrangement

Because the sketch of “The Man I Love” is the single familiar piece in the March–April notebook, it warrants deeper examination. Not only was the song published in sheet music format for professional and home use, but a more elaborate version was included in *George Gershwin’s Song-Book*, the posthumously published book of solo piano arrangements Gershwin began compiling shortly before his death.⁴⁴

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The incomplete sketch of this tune presents an intriguing question as to what Gershwin’s original intention for this song might have been. In the introductory letter to the March–April notebook, Ira Gershwin quotes his own memoir about the song’s genesis:

In the spring of 1924 when I finished the lyric to the body of a song—the words and tune of which I now cannot recall—a verse was in order. My brother composed a possibility we both liked, but I never got around to writing it up as a verse. It was a definite and insistent melody—so much so that we soon felt it wasn’t light and introductory enough, as it tended to overshadow the refrain and to demand individual attention. So this over-weight [*sic*] strain, not quiet in tone as a verse, was, with slight modification, upped in importance to the status of a refrain. I gave it a simple set of words, then it had to acquire its own verse; and “The Man I Love” resulted.

As an originally intended verse it appears, undated, in George’s early 1924 notebook between pieces dated April 4 and 24. It consists of the familiar eight bars there [*sic*] which repeats itself and is followed by a “vest” (songwriter jargon for the ending of a verse, usually two lines, leading to the refrain or chorus). This vest was somewhat expanded to become the “release”—or “middle” or “bridge”—and then the opening theme was repeated again for the last eight bars. Clear? Confusing? Anyway, that’s what was done.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Gershwin, *George Gershwin’s Song-Book*, 65–71.

⁴⁵ Ira Gershwin, introductory letter dated 16 May 1969, Box 58, Folder 10, Gershwin Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, DC. This section of the letter is obviously

Ira Gershwin is usually considered an unimpeachable source, and this instance is no exception. A survey of the fifty-two representative songs found in *The Great Songs of Gershwin* anthology reveals that with only a few divergences, most of the songs indeed follow the pattern he describes, no matter the length of the verse.⁴⁶ Somewhat analogous to operatic recitatives, verses in Gershwin songs tend to be free in form and have the lightness Ira depicts. Although most of the song verses in the anthology adhere to some variation of the AAB form Ira's letter implies, one can also find other forms, such as ABA, ABC, and ABAB. The sketch that became "The Man I Love" implies an AABA form, which may be one of the reasons the Gershwins decided it was inappropriate as a verse, in addition to the insistence of its melody. AABA verse forms in the songs surveyed appear to be relatively rare: there were only five in the anthology. These verses tend to be longer—at least twenty measures rather than the more common sixteen. Two are thirty-two measures long, and another two are twenty-four, making them almost complete songs. Further, vest phrases in the songs found in the anthology are not of a uniform length, and at times are based on a consequent phrase from the A idea.

Ira's letter mentions that this sketch was transformed from verse to refrain status "with a few modifications"—but those modifications are both intriguing and significant. Melodically, the only measure in the sketch that was omitted is the final one, which completes the vest idea and apparently leads to the opening pitch of the originally intended refrain. Formally, the sketch is twenty-three measures long, suggesting Gershwin was heading toward a 24-measure verse—a length that occurs in ten of the fifty-two songs in the anthology. The only modifications Gershwin made in melody and form were to change the direction of the melodic line at the end of the first phrase of the B section (the phrase in the sketch ends on a G instead of a B^b), and to replace the final measures with material that leads back to the A section (ex. 12). If one plays through this section, however, it becomes evident that a final measure would have been needed, even if this sketch were used as a verse. The music ends abruptly mid-phrase, calling for a resolution that either leads the ear forward to the intended refrain or back toward the A section.

The greater, more intriguing modifications between sketch and final product lie in the figures and overall style of the accompaniment. Although it does not follow the guidelines of either form chart in the back of the notebook, this sketch has several features that suggest Gershwin might have originally conceived it as a short piano piece. First, the

a quotation of the opening paragraphs of Ira's account of the creation of "The Man I Love" in Ira Gershwin *Lyrics on Several Occasions* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1959), 4.

⁴⁶ George and Ira Gershwin, *The Great Songs of Gershwin* (Secaucus, NJ: Warner Bros. Publications, Inc., 1995).

EXAMPLE 12. "The Man I Love" sketch – B section. mm. 17–23, as it appears on the manuscript. March–April notebook, pp. 16–17

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song is written out as a solo piano piece, not in the single-line lead sheet format so common to the tune books of this period. Second, although the A section features block chords in the accompaniment that one might expect in a lead sheet, the sighing obbligato Gershwin adds to the second A is written an octave higher in the sketch than in the sheet music or the solo piano version, suggesting he might have originally intended it as one of his characteristic left-hand crossover devices. That the block chords are an integral part of the overall conception of the piece is borne out by both the sheet music, where they are transferred directly without alteration (ex. 13a), and by the later solo piano version. In the solo version, Gershwin keeps the block chord construction but gives it a grandiose expansion. The chords are extended into two-handed voicings, which alternate in a call-and-response fashion with the melodic line, also realized in two-handed block chords (ex. 13b).⁴⁷ The overall effect of the solo piano version does not suggest a pop tune, but a more serious, light classical work.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Although the solo piano arrangements in *George Gershwin's Song-Book* were edited and revised by Louis B. Wasserman, recordings of Gershwin playing this arrangement affirm that this concerto-like treatment of the A section of "The Man I Love" was Gershwin's concept. Comparing Wasserman's edition to a radio broadcast recording Gershwin made of the work in February 1934, the revisions were simplifications rather than reconceptualizations. See George Gershwin, *Gershwin Performs Gershwin: Rare Recordings 1931–1935*, produced by Ronald L. Caplan (Ocean, NJ: Americo, Inc., and MusicMasters, 1991), compact disc, track 3.

⁴⁸ Hybrid light classical works such as this were popular during this era. This arrangement is similar in character to the solo piano arrangement of *Deep Purple* done by

EXAMPLE 13a. “The Man I Love” opening measures, manuscript sketch, March–April notebook, p. 16

EXAMPLE 13b. “The Man I Love” solo piano version, *George Gershwin’s Song-Book*, p. 69

Slow and in singing style

The incomplete B section of “The Man I Love” sketch is the most convincingly pianistic. The soprano line is voiced an octave higher, immediately affirming the instrumental intent by taking it out of practicable vocal range (ex.12). Gershwin adds an alto line to fill in harmony

Peter DeRose, as well as Richard Addinsell’s *Warsaw Concerto*, which came out the same year (1941) as *George Gershwin’s Song-Book*.

while the left hand provides an arpeggiated accompaniment more typical of a light classical piano piece than a pop tune of this period. The rhythmic change in the accompaniment from static to forward motion is preserved conceptually in the sheet music and solo piano arrangement, but is changed stylistically once the piece is transformed into a popular song. The sketch's arpeggiated eighth-note bass line is reduced rhythmically in the sheet music version to single quarter notes more reminiscent of a simplified stride bass.

That Gershwin had a stylistic change of intent for the B section from a classical- to a jazz-piano approach is further evident in his solo piano arrangement. The B section here is characterized by a full-blown stride accompaniment more reminiscent of James P. Johnson or Earl Hines, providing a much-needed rhythmic drive that contrasts beautifully with the more static, declamatory nature of the A section. In fact, Gershwin emphasized the stylistic switch to stride in the B section of this tune in live performances of the solo piano arrangement by accentuating the *marcato* articulation marked in the transition to the B section on beats 1 and 2 of measure 16. He also substantially increased the tempo of the B section, from roughly m.m. ♩ = 100 to ♩ = 130, which both highlights the stylistic change suggested in the sketch and affirms that Gershwin's overall concept of the B section included not only a change of style, but also at least the suggestion of a change of tempo.⁴⁹

Whatever Gershwin's original intent for this piece, because the layout of the sketch suggests it might have begun as yet another of the short piano works featured in the March–April notebook, the manuscript evidence suggests that his compositional process contradicts the notion that all of Gershwin's music was derived from sketches intended for stage or popular song use. At least in this instance, Gershwin seems instead to have developed a popular song from material originally intended as instrumental, if not concert, music. Hindsight now identifies the piece as the most Gershwinesque in the March–April notebook, and as such, almost glaringly out of place. Of course, given what became of this sketch, the question of original intent for this piece is moot in many respects. Still, the more complete sketching out of this tune compared with his more usual lead-sheet method, along with the way Gershwin played it as a solo piano work, suggests the piece might have begun its colorful life intended for something entirely different from what it became.

⁴⁹ See the live recording made during his "Music by Gershwin" radio broadcasts on February 19, 1934, on Gershwin, *Gershwin Performs Gershwin: Rare Recording 1931–1935*, track 3.

The March–April Notebook Pieces as Exercises

In his introductory letter to the March–April notebook, Ira Gershwin suggested its contents may have been exercises. There are many elements in the notebook that substantiate this idea more convincingly than other proposed purposes. First, pages 1 and 2 contain four two-phrase musical ideas, eight to nine measures long, numbered “3” through “6.” In addition to pointing out that at least one page of the notebook may be missing, the numbering suggests that these first entries were exercises written in fulfillment of an assignment of some sort. Second, the opening four pieces are followed by a sixteen-measure composition written in the style of a late eighteenth-century dance in rounded binary form. Not only are this style and form not usually attributed to Gershwin, but the specific elements of the form are highlighted with hash marks above and below the staff, marking the specific A and B sections. From this point on the short pieces gradually increase in complexity, whether in form, harmony, or both. Except for “The Man I Love,” however, most of the other entries emulate pre-twentieth-century European art music, exhibiting only very few of Gershwin’s own style characteristics. Third and perhaps most convincingly, the back of the notebook as well as the inside of the back cover show two charts, both in Gershwin’s hand, that summarize the basics of rounded binary and ternary forms; they are accompanied by three more eight-measure entries similar to the exercises on the first two pages.

In a 1928 interview with Hyman Sandow, Gershwin claimed never to have made a proper study of form.⁵⁰ Nonetheless, in addition to providing a pedagogical context, an examination of the contents of the March–April notebook as a whole not only gives a unifying context to the book, but refutes Gershwin’s claim, at least in part. The chart on page “21” of the notebook, shown in figure 1, is probably the earlier of the two, given that its focus and title—“Small Primary Forms (Lied Form)” —describes musical constructions no longer than twenty-four measures.⁵¹ The upper

⁵⁰ “I’ve never really studied musical form. That’s nothing, of course, to be proud of. But regardless of the kind of music a composer is writing, it must have a definite line of progression. It must have a beginning and an end and a suitable section combining the two, just as the human body, to be complete, must have arms, legs, and a head. In this sense of trying to make my musical compositions each a complete work, I suppose there is a certain form to them.” George Gershwin in Hyman Sandow, “George Gershwin to Write a New Rhapsody,” *Musical America*, 47 (February 1928): 5.

⁵¹ Gershwin, *Notebook, 1924 March–April*, 21, back cover. Note that the “page 21” reference matches the LC’s Gershwin Collection finder’s guide, which only assigns numbers to pages that have entries written on them. Forty-five blank pages lie between “page 20” and “page 21” in this notebook. Gershwin’s handwriting on these charts was verified via comparison with other manuscripts in the LC Gershwin Collection. The capital A, B, S and F are the same as in most of the manuscripts, as are the style in which numbers are written. The cursive capital P’s and L’s are similar to those found in the *Concerto in F*

FIGURE 1. Form chart, March–April notebook, p. “21”

Small Primary Forms (Lied form)			
ABA	2 part (16 bars)		
	A	B	A
	8	4	4

3 part	A	B	A
24 meas	8	8	8

part of the chart, labeled “2 part” in the far left column, illustrates a sixteen-measure rounded binary form, while the lower part of the chart, labeled “3 part, 24 meas,” shows a simple ternary form where each section is eight measures long. The second chart (fig. 2) summarizes the information from the previous chart in its upper section, adding illustrations below that demonstrate ways in which both the rounded binary and ternary forms may be expanded exponentially. The placement of this second chart seems particularly strategic: inside the back cover, easy to refer to no matter the page on which Gershwin may have been writing.

When one compares the pieces in the March–April notebook to the charts in the back, it becomes immediately obvious that this notebook documents a systematic study of the basics of writing in traditional forms, even suggesting a possible chronology as to when or why each component in the notebook was created. Under this scenario, Gershwin would have first written or copied the charts on page “21” and inside the back cover of the March–April notebook during a lesson or class. As one might expect, exercises or illustrations in writing eight-measure periods, which are the building blocks of most traditional homophonic forms, accompany these form charts. They appear in the back of the notebook, across the page from the summary chart inside the back cover. There are three entries here, written in classical period style and in $\frac{3}{8}$ time. All three are some manifestation of an eight-measure period. The first is an unaccompanied melody that consists of two four-measure phrases, with the first cadence point on the dominant at the end of the antecedent phrase in the fourth measure. The second exercise is another eight-measure

sketches (Box 48, Folder 6), specifically the manuscript sheaf in which Gershwin plans out the form of the first and third movements. During this time Gershwin also seems to have mixed his cursive and printed handwriting, which one finds in various manuscripts as well as in the form charts in back of the March–April notebook. The manner in which both charts are presented here is as close to the original as can be reproduced with a word processing program.

FIGURE 2. Form chart inside back cover, March–April notebook

Primary Forms				
Small				
2 part	A	B	A	= 16
	8	4	4	
3 part	A	B	A	= 24
	8	8	8	

Large				
16	8	8		
16	16	16		

period, this time written for piano in a style that could be attributed to Haydn or one of his contemporaries. The final exercise is incomplete, again in $\frac{3}{8}$ time and classical period style, but only the first phrase—an obvious antecedent—has been completed.

These three entries provide a context in which the exercises at the front of the notebook make the most sense. All four exercises (numbered 3 through 6) are eight- or nine-measure periods with obvious antecedent and consequent phrases. Unlike the three exercises in the back, the four exercises in the front of the book are more consistent with nineteenth-century stylistic and harmonic practices. The first (no. 3) could be called “Lisztian” in that its melodic line is built entirely on arpeggiated diminished seventh chords. “No. 4” is a study of pedal tones coupled with expanding melodic intervals, “No. 5” is in the style of a character piece for piano written by Schumann or Brahms, and “No. 6” is evocative of a Viennese waltz. The four exercises seem to lead up to the entry on page 3 dated 5 March 1924, which is the aforementioned eighteenth-century-style piece in rounded binary form.

With the exception of the sketch of “The Man I Love,” the remaining pieces in the notebook follow the general guidelines of the form charts in the back fairly closely. As table 2 illustrates, all three entries dated 5 March 1924 follow the two-part “small primary forms” configuration, although the “oriental” exercise adds two measures to the A’ section (creating symmetry for the overall form, since two introductory measures are added at the beginning of the piece). The ensuing three pieces (pp. 6–11) adhere to the simple three-part formula on both charts. The first two follow the twenty-four-measure pattern quite explicitly,

featuring eight-measure sections, while the musical gesture of the third shortens the length of both A sections to seven measures each.⁵²

The final two European-style pieces on pp. 13–15 and 18–20 follow the formats of the two large forms from the chart inside the back cover of the book.⁵³ It is evident by the time these pieces were written (April 1924) that Gershwin had enough command of writing in periodic structures to make them more complex. The first piece, dated 4 April 1924, previously described as being evocative of Prelude I from Parry's *An English Suite* (see fn. 26) follows the "16|8–8" large form at the bottom of the chart, but expands the A section from the recommended sixteen-measure length to twenty-one measures by adding a second consequent phrase to the first eight-measure period (single antecedent, double consequent). This second consequent is an inversion of the first, adding melodic variety to the piece. In contrast the B section follows the "16|8–8" formula quite literally. Here Gershwin expands the eight-measure period to sixteen, making the antecedent and consequent phrases each eight measures long. This is also one of the most viable (or least pedestrian) B sections in the notebook. The antecedent phrase features a melodic gesture played by the left hand crossing over the right, while the consequent phrase is based on scalar patterns.

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The final piece, based on the intervallic relationships in the B-A-C-H motive, follows the "16–16–16" format at the very bottom of the chart inside the back cover of the notebook, thus completing Gershwin's apparent aim to write at least one piece that followed every formula illustrated there. It is the most chromatic piece in the book, although the B-A-C-H motive is never stated on those specific pitches (B \flat , A, C and B \sharp). Each section consists of two nearly identical eight-measure periods. In the A section, Gershwin adds embellishment via the alto and tenor voices in the second eight-measure period, which serves as an imitative contrapuntal response to the melody in the soprano voice. As previously mentioned, the quality of the B section, although somewhat chromatic, is pale by comparison to the A section. It consists of a chain of two nearly identical eight-measure phrases built on the final three pitches of the B-A-C-H motive. As previously described, the first pitch of the motive is replaced with dyads in the left hand that ascend by a third every two beats, implying rising arpeggiated simple triads, beginning on A major. The material in the second nine-measure phrase is altered very little: the chordal harmony in the left hand is expanded from dyads to triads via an

⁵² The English dance on pp. 8–9 is incomplete, but Gershwin's placing of an inexplorable E \sharp whole note after writing out two measures of the repeated A section may imply that he intended to repeat A literally, and simply didn't want to take the time to write it out.

⁵³ The sketch of "The Man I Love" lies between these two pieces on pp. 16–17.

added pitch in the soprano voice, and a ninth measure is added at the end to provide a transition back to the A section.

A Connection with Gershwin's Formal Studies in Music Theory?

If the pieces in the March–April notebook are clearly exercises, for whom or what were they written? In his recent biography of Gershwin, Howard Pollack posited that they were most likely assignments written for Rubin Goldmark, since Gershwin is assumed to have been studying with Goldmark during this period.⁵⁴ The actual duration of those studies, however, is difficult to determine due to the lack of definitive documentary evidence and conflicting anecdotal accounts. Ira Gershwin mentioned in a letter written in early 1923 that his brother was studying with Goldmark, and Kay Swift recalled accompanying George to a few of his lessons with Goldmark in early 1925.⁵⁵ On the other hand, Edward Kilenyi, Sr. claimed in an unpublished memoir that Gershwin took only three lessons with Goldmark and quit when it became apparent that Goldmark would not take him seriously.⁵⁶ Unfortunately, the March–April notebook adds little to no definitive documentary evidence of Gershwin's lessons with Goldmark. Unlike the manuscripts of exercises from Gershwin's studies with Kilenyi, where annotations in Kilenyi's handwriting abound, the March–April notebook is almost completely devoid of comments or markings of any kind. There are only two: the first appears on the opening page: an almost illegible word that could be either “Sting” or “String,” most likely meaning *stringendo*, written in Gershwin's hand; the second is a note in an unknown hand on page 16, identifying the entry as “The Man I Love.”⁵⁷ Further, because some of the exercises in the March–April notebook appear to have been written on the same day,

⁵⁴ Pollack, *George Gershwin, His Life and Work*, 34.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ “When he actually apologized to me for his experiences with Goldmark he reminded me—not that I had forgotten it—that it was I who wanted him to study with Ernest Bloch who was out of the country whenever George wanted to meet him. Then he told me how Goldmark had put him into a class attended also by beginners. George emphasized to me that Goldmark had not (*sic*) asked him at all about his former studies, nor had he asked for any samples of his music written previously. Yet he did not protest to Goldmark. After three lessons—no more, no less—he showed Goldmark some of his earlier compositions with the purpose of giving a hint that he was very much ready for very advanced studies in the larger forms. Goldmark after looking them over, made the by now famous remark: ‘I am so glad to see my influence in your harmonies here.’ Yet and again George showed no indignation, no resentment at all. He simply, without any further excuse or explanation, just did not show up anymore.” Edward Kilenyi, Sr., “Gershwiniana: Remembrances and Reminiscences of Times Spent With My Student George Gershwin,” 1963, unpublished typescript, call number ML410.G288K54, Kilenyi Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, DC, 37–38.

⁵⁷ Gershwin, *Notebook: March–April 1924*, 1, 16. The capital “S” on the “Sting” or “String” annotation is identical to Gershwin's cursive S seen in other sources.

one might question whether Goldmark would assign more than one free composition exercise per lesson, or whether Gershwin wrote several on a single day, trying to come up with one he found acceptable for handing in. If any of the entries in the March–April notebook were written for Goldmark, they must have been copied and turned in on single sheets of manuscript paper, and have probably long since been lost.

Perhaps the most compelling links between the March–April notebook and Goldmark are the fairly strict correspondence between the pieces and the form charts, as well as the nature of the pieces themselves. As has been demonstrated, they are studies in form—a topic on which Carl Van Vechten credited Goldmark with having taught Gershwin a great deal.⁵⁸ A description Aaron Copland gave of Goldmark’s teaching philosophy gives further credence to this notion:

He was good—what he knew he knew very well indeed. *His* Stravinsky was Wagner: he had gone up and down the country giving lectures on Wagner’s operas. But he had very little sympathy with or understanding for contemporary music. . . . We went through regular harmony and counterpoint. His be-all and end-all was the sonata-form. You hadn’t finished your studies, he thought, until you could write a proper sonata in three movements with the first and second themes and developments all in the right places.⁵⁹

Although none of the pieces in the March–April notebook are written in sonata form, that they are largely based on periodic phrase structures suggests a logical progression that would lead to the study of that form. In his dissertation on Goldmark, David Tomatz uncovered the college catalog description of the composition curriculum at the Colorado College Conservatory of Music, assumed to have been written by Goldmark because it was published during his tenure as the conservatory’s composition teacher and director. The first year of the composition program is outlined as follows:

Part I. The construction of phrases and periods; the simple instrumental forms; the scherzo, rondo, adagio, variations and the sonata-form. The student does practical work in all these departments of composition; the work is criticized in detail in the classroom. Especial attention is devoted to the analysis of the classic masterworks.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Carl Van Vechten, “George Gershwin: An American Composer Who Is Writing Notable Music in the Jazz Idiom,” *Vanity Fair* 24, no. 1 (March 1925): 40.

⁵⁹ Edward T. Cone, “Conversation with Aaron Copland,” *Perspectives of New Music* 6, no. 2 (Spring-Summer 1968): 58.

⁶⁰ Catalogue, *Colorado College Conservatory of Music*, May 1896, quoted in David Tomatz, “Rubin Goldmark, Postromantic: Trial Balances in American Music” (Ph.D. diss., The Catholic University of America, 1966), 92.

It is notable that this curriculum begins with the construction of phrases and periods, then moves on to simple instrumental forms, which is exactly what the pieces in the March–April notebook do.

The fact that these pieces are, for Gershwin, conservatively written in styles found in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European art music speaks strongly in favor of the notion that they were written for Goldmark. The presence of a piece written on the B-A-C-H motive seems especially to point toward Goldmark. One would wonder what would inspire Gershwin to write a piece on this motive if not to fulfill an assignment. The more or less strict adherence to the forms outlined on the charts, as well as the methodical journeying through them as if ticking off one requirement after another, also squares with a description given to David Tomatz by Ulric Cole, another Goldmark student:

As a composer I learned from Goldmark how to guide and manipulate materials within given forms, i.e., dance forms, variations, sonata form, all of which, as he put it, were frameworks which best displayed the material best suited to them. He did not advocate form for its own sake, but until a composer could lead his own material—rather than the other way around—the rules were strict. After that they could be broken, consciously, and for good reasons.⁶¹

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Goldmark's insistence on strict adherence to form would also explain the rather pedestrian nature of so many of the B sections in the March–April notebook pieces. It may well have been that the compositional quality of the exercise was less important than manipulating the material to fit the prescribed form. This would also explain the motivic unity between so many of the “A” and “B” sections in these pieces. If the point was to teach the composer to manipulate the materials, the goal would have been achieved even in these seemingly obligatory “B” sections.

It is also possible, however, that these pieces were written during a period when Gershwin was studying form on his own. As Starr points out, Gershwin had exceptional autodidactic skills—extraordinary enough to be remembered by some of his closest associates. Ira Gershwin said there “was rarely a period in [George's] life when he was not studying.”⁶² To cite other examples, the Gershwins' younger sister, Frances, said her brother had “a great love of learning” despite his not having finished high school; his friend and colleague, Kay Swift, recalled that his focus when learning something new was intense until he became “terrific at it.”⁶³ Vernon Duke, another of Gershwin's associates who was educated in the

⁶¹ Ibid., 94.

⁶² Starr, *George Gershwin*, 9.

⁶³ Frances Gershwin Godowsky and Kay Swift in filmed interviews, *Gershwin Remembered*.

Russian conservatory system and wrote both popular and “serious” art music, described Gershwin’s delight at gaining new skills as equivalent to acquiring a new toy.⁶⁴ Starr posits that Gershwin was an autodidact for practical reasons; he had little choice but to teach himself a certain part of his skill set because “there was simply no preexisting model for the kind of American composer that Gershwin became; he had to invent himself each step of the way.”⁶⁵

The features suggesting that the notebook pieces may have been written during a period of individual study are, first, the previously noted lack of annotations, as well as the presence of three study pieces written on the same day. Moreover, if Kilenyi’s account that Gershwin stopped studying with Goldmark after only three lessons is accurate, it may well be that the source of the charts in the back of the notebook was either an unidentified textbook, or even Kilenyi himself. Since neither the charts nor the exercises in the front or back of the book are dated, it is not outside the realm of possibility that they could date back to the final days of Gershwin’s studies with Kilenyi in early 1923 and that self-study began with the pieces dated in March 1924.

A number of factors argue in favor of this scenario. Kilenyi claimed in a 1950 article written for *The Etude* magazine to have taught Gershwin the basics of “homophonic form.”⁶⁶ The charts in the March–April notebook outline only the bare basics of simpler forms, stopping at the brink of larger symphonic forms, such as sonata, rondo, or theme and variations. In addition, the layout and nomenclature of the charts are consistent with those in the manuscripts associated with Gershwin’s studies with Kilenyi.⁶⁷ True, one could argue that the chart layout may say more about how Gershwin took notes than about the source of the information the charts contain. Nevertheless, although the presence of the term “Lied Form,” written in parentheses on the first chart, could have been a term used by both Goldmark and Kilenyi, the term appears on at least one manuscript exercise known to date from Gershwin’s studies with Kilenyi. This exercise, dated 29 January 1923, bears two annotations in Kilenyi’s hand: “8-bar period” and “Small 2-part Lied form.”⁶⁸ The

⁶⁴ Vernon Duke, “Dukelsky, Gershwin, and Schillinger: Some Reminiscences,” *Musical Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (January 1947): 109.

⁶⁵ Starr, *George Gershwin*, 8; Merle Armitage, *George Gershwin* (New York: Longman, Green and Co., 1938), republished with a new introduction by Edward Jablonski (New York: Da Capo Press, 1995), 18.

⁶⁶ Edward Kilenyi, Sr., *George Gershwin . . . As I Knew Him*, *The Etude* 68, no. 10 (Oct. 1950): 12.

⁶⁷ For a more complete discussion of Gershwin’s studies with Kilenyi, see Susan Neimoyer, “George Gershwin and Edward Kilenyi, Sr.: A Reevaluation of Gershwin’s Early Musical Education,” *Musical Quarterly* 27, nos. 1–2 (Spring/Summer 2011): 9–62.

⁶⁸ George Gershwin, untitled exercise written 29 January 1923, Box 60, Folder 6, Gershwin Collection, Library of Congress. In my earlier study of Gershwin’s early

second annotation is significant here because the terminology Kilenyi uses is virtually identical to that on the chart on page “21” of the March–April notebook.

Given the overall methodical nature of the notebook’s contents when compared to the charts, there also seems to be a bit of a leap between the four exercises on pages 1–2 and the eighteenth-century dance on page 3, which is a perfect rounded binary form. One wonders if any interim steps were taken, in terms of writing exercises, between these two pages. The exercise dated 29 January 1923, which is based on the Tristan chord, seems to be a viable candidate.⁶⁹ Not only is its level of chromaticism similar to exercises 3 and 5 in the March–April notebook, but Kilenyi’s annotations on the exercise are very informative when taken in context with both the eight-measure exercises and the form charts in the back of the notebook. The 29 January exercise does indeed consist of two eight-measure periods but is written in simple binary form rather than the rounded binary or “Small Two-Part Lied Form” Kilenyi apparently assigned. Kilenyi’s annotations thus appear to be corrective in nature: the first annotation (“8-bar period”) acknowledges that Gershwin had complied with that part of the assignment, but had failed to round out the binary form by bringing back the “A” material in the consequent phrase of the second period. Kilenyi’s comment, “Small 2-part Lied form,” thus points out what Gershwin failed to do, and perhaps refers him back to the chart on page “21” of the March–April notebook. The exercise dated 1 February 1923, which is another sixteen-measure composition, shows that Gershwin corrected the error.⁷⁰ Since this exercise is dated the same day Gershwin sailed to England to work on a show, it is apparently a record of his final lesson with Kilenyi. Whatever the scenario, the piece on page 3 of the March–April notebook appears to take up where the 1 February 1923 exercise leaves off, and suggests a logical explanation of why Gershwin wrote this first rounded binary form exercise in the style of an eighteenth-century dance. It also provides a small clue that, for at least the brief period covered by the March–April notebook, Gershwin might have been studying form on his own.⁷¹

theoretical studies, I identified the annotations on this exercise as having been written by Kilenyi. See *ibid.*, 19.

⁶⁹ To see further commentary and excerpts of the exercises discussed here, see Neimoyer, “George Gershwin and Edward Kilenyi, Sr.,” 37–39.

⁷⁰ George Gershwin, Exercise dated 1 February 1923, holograph manuscript, Box 60, Folder 6, Gershwin Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

⁷¹ A form analysis of Gershwin’s *Concerto in F* also obliquely suggests that Gershwin either studied form on his own prior to its composition, or if he studied more advanced forms with Goldmark, sonata form was something he had not yet mastered. The opening movement is written in a quasi-sonata form, but the development section suggests a theme and variations form. Although this is something Haydn might have done, it sidesteps the issue of developing the material presented in the first and second themes. Additionally, the

Whether these pieces were written for Goldmark or during a period of individual study, they seem to follow Kilenyi's teaching about free composition exercises: that they were "not meant for public hearing," but were "as much needed for training to learn good voice leading [or, in this case, form] as finger exercises and scales are necessary in training a pianist."⁷² At any rate, because the two final exercises in the book (which flank the sketch of "The Man I Love") are more complex and follow the formats at the bottom of the chart inside the back cover, it appears Gershwin had mastered the primary concepts of organization and was ready to move on to larger forms.

Conclusion

The March–April notebook provides an intriguing glimpse of some of Gershwin's compositional activities within the first ten weeks after the premiere of the iconic *Rhapsody in Blue*. Whether the notebook's contents were created as a result of either formal or self-directed study, those pieces suggest that form-related issues were among Gershwin's primary concerns during this period. Although this cannot be documented at present, it is possible that the experience of composing the *Rhapsody* brought areas in which Gershwin needed to improve his compositional technique to his attention—weaknesses that writing the pieces in the March–April notebook sought in part to remedy. Thinking of these pieces as form studies explains why all but the ideas presented in the sketch of "The Man I Love" never surface in works written after the spring of 1924. As studies focused on organizational issues, Gershwin would have considered the March–April notebook pieces to be among items "not meant for public hearing." One might ask why Gershwin later said he never really studied form when the contents of this notebook strongly suggest the opposite. An observation made in 1950 by David Ewen offers what may be the most succinct explanation:

The truth is that Gershwin tended to underestimate himself greatly. He had the reverence of the unschooled for schoolbook learning, and exaggerated its importance. . . . He knew that his musical education had been spotty, and that there were some techniques he had never really mastered.⁷³

concerto's final movement demonstrates an expanded "textbook" rondo (ABACADAEA-BA), although not one typically found during the classical period.

⁷² Edward Kilenyi, Sr. "George Gershwin—As I Knew Him," 11.

⁷³ David Ewen, "The Stature of George Gershwin," *American Mercury* (June 1950): 716–24, in Ira Gershwin Scrapbook No. 8, 1946–51, Gershwin Collection, Box 79, Book 8, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

Other narratives such as Vernon Duke's 1947 account of his relationship with Gershwin verify David Ewen's observation that Gershwin both underestimated and underplayed the study he had undertaken. When Duke asked Gershwin where he had studied, Gershwin reportedly quipped, "Oh, I didn't study much. . . ." ⁷⁴ Perhaps when Gershwin told Hyman Sandow in 1928 that he had never really studied form, he was referring to the more advanced forms for which this notebook was obviously only a preparatory step. If that is the case, the March–April notebook pieces are significant because they demonstrate that during the interim period between the creation of the *Rhapsody in Blue* and the *Concerto in F* Gershwin undertook what appears to be a careful, even systematic approach to learning the basics of form on which later studies of more advanced formal techniques could build.

The pieces in the March–April notebook suggest another question that lies beyond the scope of this study: whether Gershwin's seemingly purposeful avoidance of the blues-inflected voice now accepted as his signature concert music style was wholly solidified in the spring of 1924. If it was not, these exercises may also represent a brief exploration of stylistic alternatives that he ultimately decided not to pursue. These questions, along with placing the contents of the March–April notebook within the larger context of Gershwin's overall compositional approach, must be the subject of further study and analysis.

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ABSTRACT

1924 was one of the most demanding years of George Gershwin's career. In addition to the wildly successful premiere of the *Rhapsody in Blue* that led to numerous additional performances of the work throughout the year, he wrote the music for three hit musicals, all of which opened during that year. Given this context, a manuscript notebook in the Gershwin Collection at the Library of Congress dating from March and April 1924 is particularly intriguing. Because this notebook contains the earliest known sketch of "The Man I Love" (one of Gershwin's best-loved popular songs), it has been acknowledged in passing by Gershwin scholars. "The Man I Love," however, is only one of nine short pieces in the notebook and is the only entry written in what is now defined as Gershwin's compositional style.

This article briefly addresses the entire contents of this "March–April 1924 notebook," exploring the possibilities of what Gershwin's

⁷⁴ Duke, "Gershwin, Schillinger, and Dukelsky: Some Reminiscences," 106.

purposes in writing these undeveloped works might have been. Were they unused stage music, ideas for the set of piano preludes he was writing off and on during this era, or were they exercises focused on correcting weaknesses in compositional technique uncovered while writing the *Rhapsody in Blue*? Whatever their purpose, the pieces in this notebook provide clues as to what Gershwin's creative priorities may have been, as well as further insights into how Gershwin honed his musical craft.

Keywords: George Gershwin, Gershwin sketches, "The Man I Love," popular song, prelude, *Rhapsody in Blue*