

JAZZ LINES PUBLICATIONS

Presents

THE BUZZARD SONG

AS RECORDED BY THE MILES DAVIS/GIL EVANS ORCHESTRA

ARRANGED BY GIL EVANS

PREPARED BY ROB DUBOFF, DYLAN CANTERBURY, AND JEFFREY SULTANOF

FULL SCORE

FROM THE ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPT

JLP-7551

MUSIC AND LYRICS BY GEORGE GERSHWIN, DUBOSE AND DOROTHY HEYWARD AND IRA GERSHWIN

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THE BUZZARD SONG (1958)

Background:

George Gershwin's folk opera *Porgy and Bess* has now achieved classic status as one of the finest operas ever composed, and one of the most ambitious theater works created by an American. Charleston, South Carolina native DuBose Heyward's novel *Porgy* was published in 1925 and told the story of Porgy, a crippled, impoverished African-American beggar, and Bess, the troubled woman who he falls in love with. It was such a success that Heyward and his wife Dorothy adapted the work for the stage in 1927. The resulting play *Porgy* was also a major success on Broadway, and Heyward was soon considering adapting it into a musical.

Gershwin read *Porgy* in 1926 and corresponded with Heyward suggesting that they collaborate on bringing a new operatic adaptation of the work to the stage. Gershwin's very heavy schedule did not allow this to happen for years; he had been considering writing an opera for some time, and during this period he received a commission from the Metropolitan Opera. *Porgy* was the story he wanted to use, but the racial situation at the time made using African-American actors impossible at the Metropolitan Opera. He considered other works, but ultimately decided that *Porgy* was the ideal vehicle for what he hoped to achieve. There was other interest in *Porgy*, as Jerome Kern proposed writing the score with Al Jolson playing the lead, but nothing ultimately came of this. Finally, an agreement was reached with the Theater Guild in 1933 for a folk opera based on *Porgy* with an all African-American cast.

George Gershwin spent time on an island near Heyward's hometown of Charleston (where the story was based) and he and Ira Gershwin began working with Heyward. Their collaboration was an amicable and fruitful one, but it took nearly two years for what was to become *Porgy and Bess* to be created. Heyward wrote the libretto and contributed lyrics, with Ira Gershwin ultimately finalizing many of them; Stephen Sondheim has written that the lyrics are the finest ever written for the American musical theater. The complete version of the opera is very long, and Gershwin was philosophical about much of his music being cut, believing that one day the full work would be presented in an opera house.

Porgy and Bess ultimately opened in the fall of 1935 at the Alvin Theater in New York and its initial run was something of a disappointment, with its 124 performances receiving decidedly mixed reviews and less-than-hoped-for financial success. Many loved the score and the production, while others such as composer/critic Virgil Thomson and Duke Ellington criticized the work (although there is some evidence that Ellington may not have actually written what was published under his name, as he praised Gershwin in his autobiography and eventually recorded some of the songs from *Porgy and Bess*).

Still, the work began to firmly root itself in the American consciousness, with *Summertime* soon becoming an American popular music and jazz standard, and other songs from the work were performed and recorded as well. But Gershwin did not live to see the work achieve ultimate success, tragically dying in 1937 from a brain tumor. There were revivals of the play in the early 1940s with more cuts, and these were much more successful. Over the next decade, there were performances literally all over the world, but by the mid-1950s, *Porgy and Bess* began to fall into a decline, surely due in part to the Civil Rights battles that were growing, and a planned production was ultimately unable to occur in its hometown of Charleston.

Later in the 1950s, a major Hollywood production of a movie based on the work was planned, and this resulted in a new revival of interest in *Porgy and Bess* in the musical community. The 1959 movie did win awards, but ultimately was neither a financial nor a critical success. The next decade and a half were not kind to *Porgy and Bess*, as it seemed out of step with the turbulent and rapidly-changing times. It was the 1976 Houston Grand Opera production which revived the work and ultimately was responsible for it eventually taking its rightful place in American cultural history.

The Houston production was the first professional performance of the entire opera, with all of the previous cuts restored, allowing the work to be seen and heard precisely in the form in which it was originally intended. The reception led to productions at Radio City Music Hall and even finally at the Metropolitan Opera House. There have since been many more productions of *Porgy and Bess*, as well as recordings of the score and its various songs.

The depictions of African-Americans led to much controversy over the decades, but today *Porgy and Bess* has reached a place of being a nearly universally beloved American Classic. It had a postage stamp issued in its honor and has been named the official opera of the state of South Carolina. Nearly everyone knows the song *Summertime*. It is performed all over the world, and its music - like so many other classic works - is timeless; it sounds as fresh, relevant, vibrant, and beautiful today as it must have sounded when George Gershwin first heard it in his head.

Gil Evans Biography:

Gil Evans spent his earliest years traveling around Canada with his family, as they were regularly forced to move in order to follow the availability of mining jobs for his stepfather. In 1922 the family settled in Berkeley, and it was shortly afterward that Gil first developed an interest in music, inspired by a Duke Ellington concert he had been brought to by a family friend. His training began with piano lessons, but he largely taught himself through listening to and transcribing from his record collection. While in high school he took jobs in hotels as a pianist, and after graduation he formed an ensemble that would serve as the house band for the Rendezvous Ballroom in Balboa Beach for two years; in 1937 the band relocated to Hollywood, where it provided music for Bob Hope's radio broadcasts. Through his work for Hope, Evans was hired as an arranger for Claude Thornhill's orchestra, whom he continued to work alongside until 1948 - although with an interruption of several years when World War II prompted Evans to enlist in the army.

After his discharge from the military in 1946 Evans settled in New York. His efforts with Thornhill had gained him a solid reputation in the jazz community, leading to his involvement in the Miles Davis nonet in 1948; with this group he recorded the landmark album *The Birth of Cool* between 1949 and 1950, the album being finally released in 1953. During the first half of the 1950s Evans remained largely inactive, focusing his attention on musical study while occasionally arranging for television and radio, and for singers such as Tony Bennett and Johnny Mathis. He resumed his collaboration with Miles Davis in 1956, contributing to the following year's *Miles Ahead* and continuing with several more notable recordings up through the early 1960s. His first recordings under his own name were also made during this period, which would see him established as one of the leading names in the jazz world.

In 1964 Evans had his first of two children with his second wife, and for the majority of the remainder of the 1960s he devoted himself to raising his family. When he became active again in 1969, his work reflected the emerging music of the time, integrating electric instruments into the jazz-ensemble framework. A strong interest in the music of Jimi Hendrix developed during this time, and a record of jazz arrangements of his songs would be released in 1974 after Hendrix's death brought an end to plans for an actual collaboration between the two. Regular touring of the States and Europe continued throughout the 70s and 80s, with most of his recorded output being culled from these performances; several ventures into film scoring were also made in the 1980s, including contributions to *Absolute Beginners* and *The Color of Money*. A residency at the New York club Sweet Basil was established in 1984, which continued until Evans's death in 1988.

The Music:

Miles Davis and Gil Evans, one of the greatest collaborative teams in jazz history, first teaming in 1949 on *Birth of the Cool*, a jazz landmark, began to show interest in *Porgy and Bess* in the late 1950s. Due to the success of Davis and Evans's 1957 *Miles Ahead* LP, Columbia Records, their label, allowed them more freedom in choosing material for future recording sessions. Davis had been delving deeply into modality and symphonic music and ultimately decided to take on *Porgy and Bess* in this context. Evans's unique and considerable orchestration skills and Davis's new dedication to experimentation with modality led their *Porgy and Bess* to become a landmark record in jazz history.

Joined by other like-minded collaborators such as Cannonball Adderley and Paul Chambers, Davis and Evans ultimately created what is considered a classic of orchestral jazz. Evans knew the material very well, and was able to use different musicians and instruments to ideally represent themes in the music. Davis's uniquely beautiful and evocative sound was truly an ideal vehicle to express the emotional impact the work conveys. They created something very new and different, while at the same time staying very faithful to the intentions of its creators.

In the story of *Porgy and Bess*, a buzzard flying overhead is considered to be a sign of bad things to come. Although *The Buzzard Song* starts out with the intention of serving as a warning, Porgy takes this opportunity to shoo the buzzard away, as he believes the buzzard's services as a bad omen are no longer necessary in his life.

Notes to the Conductor:

The arrangement begins with a swiftly paced and powerful blast from the ensemble, featuring a dramatic tapering off of volume before the melody enters in the solo trumpet at measure 13. Although the volume level should remain fairly low at this point, there should be a somewhat unnerving sense of urgency within the orchestra's underpinning figures.

A shift in time signature at measure 42 sets up an improvised trumpet solo with some appropriately ominous background figures in the woodwinds and low brass. The backgrounds eventually expand to the full orchestra at measure 64, where a gradual crescendo creates a sense of building tension before the final measures of the trumpet solo bring things back down to a more subdued nature.

The final ensemble figure beginning at measure 80 has an almost film noir quality to it at times. The woodwinds and low brass provide some dark and foreboding textures underneath a melody line carried out by a tuba and bass duet. The section is repeated three times, ending on a whisper-soft dissonant cluster in the low brass.

Dynamics in all of Evans's music is of prime importance. Minimal miking of the flutes is recommended so that they can be heard, but they must not be louder than the brass. As has been discussed in other Jazz Lines Publications, the original parts for the *Porgy and Bess* album are for four reed players, one of which is an alto sax, the remainder doubling on woodwinds of all sizes and types. Clearly Evans wanted the sound of a brass orchestra with woodwinds as color and acoustic support; he did not conceive these settings for live performance. In the studio, the instrumental balance was worked out so that the woodwinds sounded as Gil wished. For live performances, some amplification is needed so that the alto flutes and bass flute are heard. Please do not over amplify them; they are not meant to be as loud as the brass in ensemble passages.

Doug DuBoff, Dylan Canterbury, Rob DuBoff, and Jeffrey Sultanof

- June 2016

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RECORDED BY THE MILES DAVIS/GIL EVANS ORCHESTRA

SCORE

MUSIC AND LYRICS BY GEORGE GERSHWIN,
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PREPARED BY ROB DUBOFF, DYLAN CANTERBURY, AND JEFFREY SULTANOF

FAST, IN 2 $\text{♩} = 140$

The score is arranged in a standard orchestral format with the following parts from top to bottom:

- SOLO TRUMPET OR FLUGELHORN
- WOODWIND 1: ALTO SAX.
- WOODWIND 2: ALTO FLUTE
- WOODWIND 3: ALTO FLUTE
- WOODWIND 4: BASS FLUTE
- TRUMPET 1
- TRUMPET 2
- TRUMPET 3
- TRUMPET 4
- HORN IN F 1
- HORN IN F 2
- HORN IN F 3
- TROMBONE 1
- TROMBONE 2
- TROMBONE 3
- BASS TROMBONE
- TUBA
- BASS
- DRUM SET

The score includes dynamic markings such as *fff* and *f*, and articulation like accents and slurs. The drum set part is marked with *fff* and includes stick notation.

2 3 4 5 6

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RIT.

RUBATO

Musical score for 'The Buzzard Song' page 2. The score is arranged in a standard orchestral layout with 18 staves. The instruments are: Solo TPT., WA 1 (A. Sax.), WA 2 (A. FL.), WA 3 (A. FL.), WA 4 (BS. FL.), TPT. 1, TPT. 2, TPT. 3, TPT. 4, HN. 1, HN. 2, HN. 3, TBN. 1, TBN. 2, TBN. 3, BS. TBN., Tuba, BS., and D. S. The score is in 4/4 time and features a key signature of one sharp (F#). The tempo markings 'RIT.' and 'RUBATO' are placed above the first and second systems, respectively. The music consists of a series of chords and melodic lines, with some instruments playing sustained notes and others playing rhythmic patterns. The Solo TPT. part is a melodic line that begins in the second system. The woodwinds and brasses provide harmonic support with various textures. The drums play a steady, rhythmic pattern throughout the piece.

13 MEDIUM ♩ = 120

Musical score for 'The Buzzard Song' page 3, measures 13-20. The score is in 3/4 time with a tempo of MEDIUM (♩ = 120). The key signature has one sharp (F#). The instruments and their parts are:

- SOLO TRPT.:** Solo Trumpet part, starting at measure 13 with a dynamic of *mf*.
- W.W. 2 (A. FL.):** Woodwind 2 (Alto Flute) part, starting at measure 13 with a dynamic of *mp*.
- W.W. 3 (A. FL.):** Woodwind 3 (Alto Flute) part, starting at measure 13 with a dynamic of *mp*.
- W.W. 4 (BS. FL.):** Woodwind 4 (Bass Flute) part, starting at measure 13 with a dynamic of *mp*.
- TRPT. 1-4:** Trumpet parts 1 through 4. Each part has the instruction "TO CUP MUTE" above the staff. They enter at measure 19 with a dynamic of *p*.
- HN. 1-3:** Horn parts 1 through 3. They enter at measure 13 with a dynamic of *p*.
- BS. TRBN.:** Bass Trombone part, starting at measure 13 with a dynamic of *p*.
- TUBA:** Tuba part, starting at measure 13 with a dynamic of *pp*.
- BS.:** Bass part, starting at measure 13 with a dynamic of *p* and the instruction "PIZZ." (pizzicato).
- D. S.:** Drums part, starting at measure 13 with a dynamic of *pp* and the instruction "BRUSHES".

Measure numbers 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, and 20 are indicated at the bottom of the page.