



International  
Presentations of  
Music & Dance

THE UNIVERSITY MUSICAL SOCIETY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

*The Jim Cullum Jazz Band*  
and

WILLIAM WARFIELD, *Narrator*

SATURDAY EVENING, APRIL 7, 1990, AT 8:00  
POWER CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS  
ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN

George Gershwin's

**Porgy & Bess**

*Transcribed and Performed by*  
The Jim Cullum Jazz Band  
with  
William Warfield

John Sheridan, *Piano*

Jack Wyatt, *Bass*

Howard Elkins, *Guitar/Banjo*

Mike Pittsley, *Trombone*

Ed Torres, *Drums*

Allan Vaché, *Clarinet*

Jim Cullum, *Cornet*

**Setting the Scene**

Set in the Charleston area known as Catfish Row, *Porgy and Bess* has a cast of seven main characters. Porgy, a crippled beggar with dauntless spirit, goes about in a small cart drawn by a goat. Bess, an attractive young woman of easy virtue, is at first the girlfriend of Crown, a burly stevedore — crude, demanding, and a heavy drinker. Sportin' Life, a pimp and dope peddler, is a charming, if satanic, scoundrel. Other key roles are taken by Serena, devoted wife of the fisherman Robbins, and Clara, a young mother who is married to Jake, another fisherman.

The Jim Cullum Jazz Band arrangement of *Porgy and Bess* is available on CBS Records.

*The Jim Cullum Jazz Band is represented by Donna Zajonc Management.*

*John Sheridan plays the Steinway piano available through Hammell Music, Inc.*

Cameras and recording devices are not allowed in the auditorium.



## PROGRAM NOTES

by JIM CULLUM

The Jim Cullum Jazz Band was started in 1962 as a cooperative venture between my father, the late Jim Cullum, Sr., and me. Over the years, I have sought to utilize our music — traditional jazz, which is basically a simple folk music — in a variety of ways. This philosophy has led us to such endeavors as our Jazz Mass, which has now been performed in many cities; support for jazz colleagues such as Turk Murphy in our 1987 Carnegie Hall concert and tribute to Turk; and this, the most ambitious of all, *Porgy and Bess*.

Work on *Porgy and Bess* began in late 1984, and most of the arranging was done by our pianist, John Sheridan, with assistance from Randy Reinhart, who wrote three of the charts, and Allan Vaché, who collaborated with John on “My Man’s Gone Now.” Often I acted as editor, and the band’s rehearsals provided the testing ground.

By April 1985, we had completed four songs and performed them for Margaret Tobin and her son, Robert Tobin. The Tobins are well-known patrons of the arts with a long-standing interest in *Porgy and Bess*. Mrs. Tobin first met George Gershwin in the 1920s, and the Tobins were instrumental in bringing about the full opera production of *Porgy and Bess* at the Metropolitan Opera in 1985. They provided much encouragement and pushed us to an early completion of the work, which was premièred, under Tobin sponsorship, at the McNay Art Museum in San Antonio on October 20, 1985. Reviews have been highly favorable, with selected performances including the 92nd Street “Y” in New York, Washington’s Kennedy Center, Pasadena’s Civic Auditorium, University of California–Los Angeles, the San Antonio Festival, and in Charleston, South Carolina, “home” of *Porgy and Bess*.

### History of “Porgy and Bess”

In the mid-1920s, DuBose Heyward, a native of Charleston, South Carolina, wrote his greatest success, the novel *Porgy*. He drew upon his childhood familiarity with the Charleston waterfront and painted a fascinating and colorful story deep with insight about the black experience of that region.

In 1926, a year after the novel was published, George Gershwin read *Porgy* and immediately wrote to Heyward about his wish to write an opera based on it. Gershwin’s desire to write an opera that involved Negro life went back many years. The jazz inflection that permeates and accents much of Gershwin’s work clearly demonstrates his long fascination with black music. It follows that Gershwin was irresistibly drawn to the themes and characters of *Porgy* and their potential for extended musical expression.

After being delayed for seven years because of Heyward’s desire to dramatize the book for a New York Theater Guild production, Gershwin began work in late 1933. He visited Carolina churches, homes, nightclubs, and prayer meetings, soaking up everything. Meanwhile, Heyward and George’s brother, Ira, collaborated as co-lyricists. The resulting *Porgy and Bess* opened at New York’s Alvin Theater on October 10, 1935, to mixed reviews and ran for 124 performances.

Gershwin died on July 11, 1937, at the age of 38. Full recognition of his achievement came later, as the intervening years have seen hundreds of revivals, and critics have gradually reversed themselves. Today, *Porgy and Bess* is universally praised as one of the greatest artistic accomplishments to spring from American culture.

**Jasbo Brown Blues; Summertime** — The opera opens with a piano solo. In this jazz band interpretation, the accompanying operatic chorus parts are played by the band in full ensemble. The famous “Summertime” theme, which is sung by Clara in the original opera, is stated by the clarinet, followed by guitar, then trombone with a clarinet obbligato, and, lastly, by cornet with full ensemble.

**A Woman Is a Sometime Thing** — While “Summertime” is Clara’s lullaby to her baby, “A Woman Is a Sometime Thing” is her husband Jake’s song to the child. The muted cornet sets a jaunty mood reflecting Jake’s subtle sarcasm.

**They Pass By Singin’** — As a crap game develops, Porgy makes his first appearance with this melancholy song. He sings “When Gawd make cripple, he mean him to be lonely.” Here, Allan Vaché’s clarinet closely follows Porgy’s sentimental song.

**Oh, Little Stars** — The crap game continues, and the “stars” indicate the numbers on the dice during the game. The cornet takes the voice of Porgy.

**Gone, Gone, Gone** — An argument and fight result in the killing of Robbins by Crown, who quickly escapes, abandoning Bess. Fearing discovery by police, she takes refuge with Porgy. The Catfish Row neighbors gather in Serena’s room, and the group sings of Robbins’ death. All voices, including choruses and the dialogues, are in a moving, interpretative piano solo by John Sheridan.

**My Man’s Gone Now** — Serena passionately grieves at the loss of her husband, Robbins. Here Allan Vaché takes the role of Serena and reflects her agony in an emotional clarinet solo.

**Leavin’ For The Promised Land** — Bess is accepted in the Catfish Row community, and this is her first lead song. The voice of Bess is alternated between Cullum, then Vaché. The rest is predominantly ensemble.



**It Takes a Long Pull To Get There** — A month later, Jake and other fishermen are working on the nets, preparing to take their boats out. The theme is stated by trombone, followed by clarinet, then cornet.

**I Got Plenty Of Nuttin'** — A happy Porgy comes out of his room singing this famous theme and expressing his optimism because, with the arrival of Bess, his life has taken a new turn, and he is no longer lonely. After a banjo introduction, a muted cornet carries the voice of Porgy, making the opening statement. The clarinet joins in obbligato. The arrangement then goes into a "hot five session" (clarinet, trumpet, trombone, banjo, and piano), a style reminiscent of Louis Armstrong's recordings from 1925-27. Improvised jazz solos by trombone, cornet, and clarinet follow, and the arrangement concludes with a cornet and banjo duet.

**Buzzard Song** — A dark cloud covers Catfish Row, as a buzzard — a symbol of death and bad luck to the community — circles and hovers low overhead. Porgy, undaunted, sings of his new life and implores the buzzard, and the trouble it signifies, to fly away. He sings, "Porgy who you used to feed on don't live here no mo'." The arrangement makes a passionate statement by the full ensemble, with jazz solos by clarinet and trombone.

**Bess, You Is My Woman Now** — This is one of the opera's great love duets. In it, Porgy and Bess vow to be true to each other and pledge their oneness. It is mainly treated by the full ensemble, with solo passages by each instrument picking up the voices of Porgy and Bess.

**Oh, I Can't Sit Down** — A picnic is planned for nearby Kittewah Island. The Catfish Row community is excited and ready to celebrate. Porgy remains at home, but persuades Bess to go along and have a good time. This chorus song is replicated as a full ensemble number with brief solo selections.

**I Ain't Got No Shame** — With the picnic in full sway, the Catfish community dances and frolics joyfully. The full band swings with a rhythmic interpretation, with instrumental highlights by clarinet and banjo and an extended drum passage by Ed Torres that depicts the dancing mood of the outing.

**It Ain't Necessarily So** — Sportin' Life jumps into the middle of the group and sings this worldly-wise number, which philosophizes that what you read in the Bible "ain't necessarily so." The cornet takes the part of Sportin' Life. This is answered by clarinet, and the theme is passed back and forth. The famous "wa-doo" section is started by cornet, answered by clarinet.

**What You Want Wid Bess?** — As the picnic ends and most of the group has boarded the boat for the journey back to Catfish Row, Crown suddenly appears and confronts Bess, who protests that she is now living with Porgy. She sings anxiously, "What you want wid Bess?" and is joined by Crown in what develops into an intense duet. Bess struggles to be free, but Crown overpowers and seduces her. Allan Vaché on clarinet takes the voice of Bess.

## INTERMISSION

**Oh, Dr. Jesus** — Back from Kittewah Island, Bess, delirious, returns to Porgy's room. Serena, who touts her recuperative powers, calls on "Dr. Jesus" and prays for Bess to recover. The double bass represents Serena and her prayer. The eerie, mysterious method of Serena's folk healing is emphasized by the strumming banjo monotone and percussion accents.

**Strawberry Woman, Honey Man, Crab Man** — During the time that Bess is ill, three street vendors appear. Each states an individual theme that is heard increasingly louder as each character comes nearer. "Strawberry Woman" is played by the clarinet. The trombone is "Honey Man," and the cornet-with-plunger is the "Crab Man."

**I Loves You Porgy** — This is the second great love duet of the opera. The clarinet plays the part of the now-recovered Bess, and a slightly rough cornet-with-plunger plays Porgy.

**Oh, De Lawd Shake De Heavens** — A great storm begins to rage. The people huddle with fear. They worry that "de Lawd shake de heavens an' de Lawd rock de groun'." The lead voices include Serena, Porgy, and Sportin' Life. The melody is carried by Howard Elkins on guitar in a trio with bass and piano. The piano performs the counter melody. In the opera, Clara, who is the most apprehensive because her fisherman husband, Jake, is out in the storm, clutches her baby and reprises a part of "Summertime."

**Oh, Dere's Somebody Knocking At De Do** — As the storm continues to roar and howl, some are convinced that Death is knocking at the door. The band presents an open-ended jazz improvisation highlighting the rhythm section.

**A Red-Headed Woman** — Crown knocks violently at the door, and despite attempts to hold it shut, he bursts through and moves to seize Bess. Serena admonishes Crown to behave himself 'less God strike him dead, but he defiantly begins to sing. The band offers an extended improvisation that reflects Crown's laughter at the others and the God they fear.

**Clara, Clara** — Clara learns that her husband's boat is upside down in the river and rushes out into the storm, leaving her baby with Bess. With a change of scene and the end of the storm, we learn that Clara was killed, and the people mourn her loss. The resulting lament, "Clara, Clara," begins with the cornet presenting the first statement. A trio of clarinet, guitar, and bass then leads into the full ensemble. In another reprise of "Summertime," the cornet plays Bess, who is singing to Clara's baby.

Crown reappears and, after a long struggle, Porgy kills him. Triumphant, he calls out "Bess, you got a man now, you got Porgy." After a scene change, a detective and coroner arrive to investigate the death of Crown. They question Porgy and drag him off to identify Crown's body.



**There's a Boat Dat's Leavin' Soon For New York** — Sportin' Life has quietly been observing the scene. He tells Bess that Porgy will undoubtedly be put in jail for one or two years and that he might even hang. He entices Bess with "happy dust" and persuades her to go to New York with him. This is a full ensemble interpretation with solo parts played by clarinet, cornet, and trombone.

**Oh, Bess, Oh Where's My Bess?** — Having survived the police investigation, Porgy returns triumphantly to Catfish Row. He calls repeatedly for Bess and, fearing she may be dead, sings a poignant song. The jazz band follows this mood, which is highlighted by a clarinet and cornet duet.

**Oh, Lawd, I'm On My Way** — Porgy, still confused, at first thinking that Bess is dead, is ecstatic upon hearing that she is alive. Determined to find her, he calls for his goat cart and asks: "I hear you say Noo York, where dat?" "A thousand mile from here." Porgy again questions: "Which way Noo York?" "It's way up north, pas' de custom house." Porgy sets out: "Oh, Lawd, I'm on my way."

### About the Artists

With Texas as home base, the **Jim Cullum Jazz Band** has made successful tours all over the United States, Europe, and Latin America, with highlights including concerts at New York's Carnegie Hall and the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. Since the release of *Porgy and Bess* — the crown jewel in its over-40-album record collection — the live performances of this work have received high national praise, such as the New York Times' "marvelous traditional jazz . . . capturing the mood in a genuine, delightfully laid-back way." Many of these appearances have featured noted baritone William Warfield as narrator. In addition to *Porgy and Bess*, the band tours with programs called "Super Satch: A Fond Reflection on Louis Armstrong" and "It Ain't Over 'Til the Fat Man Swings," featuring the music of Fats Waller with composer/arranger/pianist Dick Hyman as guest.

The Jim Cullum Jazz Band has established high musical and creative standards of excellence while realizing the goal of having its own club called The Landing, located on the Riverwalk in San Antonio. In the spring of 1989, the band initiated a new series on American Public Radio called "Riverwalk," a live-to-air radio broadcast from The Landing. These programs feature the music of the jazz age and champion players with national reputations as guests. "Super-Satch" and "Fat Man" are the backbone for two of these productions.

**William Warfield** was born in Arkansas in 1920, but moved to Rochester, New York, with his family while still a small child. During his senior year in high school, he entered competitions that resulted in a scholarship to the Eastman School of Music, where he earned his undergraduate degree and studied for his master's degree. After military service, Warfield was engaged for the singing lead in the touring company of the Broadway hit *Call Me Mister*. (Three other members of that same "second company" went on to ultimate success and fame in the entertainment world: comedian Buddy Hackett, the romantic comedy lead Carl Reiner, and the choreographer-dancer-director Robert Fosse.) The intervening years have seen the Warfield career expand without interruption — countless concerts, recitals, and solo appearances with symphony orchestras. Among his frequent performances abroad are six separate tours for the U.S. Department of State, more than any other American solo artist.

William Warfield's unusual ability as an actor has been evident in recitals, in his singing roles, and even his non-singing performances. He is remembered for his performances in the late 1950s on television's Hallmark Hall of Fame in his starring role as "De Lawd" in *The Green Pastures*, and, of course, for his most famous portrayal ever, as Porgy in Gershwin's opera *Porgy and Bess*. Of the 1952 revival of the opera, one critic wrote: "It is a tragedy that Gershwin couldn't have lived to see and hear Warfield's Porgy." In 1965, and annually for several succeeding years, the Vienna Volksoper presented *Porgy and Bess* starring Warfield and later presented *Showboat* in order to showcase Warfield in his famous role as Joe.

The numerous honors and awards William Warfield has received include an honorary Doctor of Laws from the University of Arkansas, an honorary doctorate from Lafayette University (Easton, PA) for his Contributions in the Arts, and similar honorary degrees from Boston University, Augustana College, Illinois, and James Millikin University, also in Illinois. For many years, the artist has dedicated time and devotion to the National Association of Negro Musicians (NANM). In March 1984, Mr. Warfield was the winner of a Grammy Award in "the spoken word" category for his outstanding narration of Aaron Copland's *A Lincoln Portrait* with the Eastman Philharmonia Orchestra, currently in release under the Mercury/Philips label. Eight years earlier, the artist had received praise for his performances as narrator of the same work with the New York Philharmonic conducted by Leonard Bernstein for a special Bicentennial tour of American and European cities. In 1985, Mr. Warfield participated in the 150th anniversary celebration of the founding of his native city, Rochester, with several performances as soloist with the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra.

William Warfield now makes his fifth Ann Arbor appearance, after singing with The Philadelphia Orchestra in the May Festivals of 1954, '55, and '61, and in recital in 1957.



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