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## THE PROGRAM

**July 11, 2016, Hillside Theater at Taliesin, 7:30 pm**

### **Glorious Gershwin**

This evening Dan Barker, Rob Shepherd and Cleo Ware will revisit some of George Gershwin's most beloved and enduring music: melodies at once catchy and beautiful, accentuated by wonderfully complex rhythmic patterns.

There may or may not be an intermission.

## ABOUT THE PERFORMERS

This evening's concert features noted jazz pianist, Dan Barker, saxophone wizard Rob Shepherd, and the popular vocalist Cleo Ware.

An accomplished pianist, record producer, arranger and songwriter, **Dan Barker** worked with Christian music companies such as Manna Music and Word Music. For more than two decades, Dan was accompanist for Manuel Bonilla, a leading singer in the Spanish-speaking world and accompanied such entertainers as Pat Boone, Jimmy Roberts (of the Lawrence Welk Show), and gospel songwriter Audrey Meier.

Barker has appeared on Phil Donahue, Oprah Winfrey, Hannity & Colmes, Maury Povich, Good Morning America, The Daily Show, Sally Jessy Raphael, and Tom Leykis radio and/or television programs. These days, Barker is known best as a popular jazz pianist and as a major spokesman for free-thought and the separation of church and state.

## ABOUT THE PERFORMERS (cont.)

Joining Barker for "Glorious Gershwin" will be **Rob Shepherd** who has played the saxophone in just about every conceivable context over the years: in orchestras and bands, as recitalist and soloist with bands and orchestras, and a host of small group combinations.

He was a student of the great classical saxophonist, Sigurd Rascher with whom he performed and recorded as first alto saxophonist with the Rascher Saxophone Ensemble. His jazz teachers include Johnny Hodges, Paul Desmond, Phil Woods and Art Pepper (their recordings that is!)

Rob is currently Lecturer in the Department of Visual and Performing Arts at the UW-Platteville, where he teaches courses in piano technique, serves as accompanist for instrumental and vocal recitalists and coaches a jazz combo.

From gospel to blues from Broadway to Big Band from jazz to country, **Cleo Ware** has sung it all. Cleo first began to sing out when she was growing up on a farm in Wisconsin performing from a "pretend" stage on an outside fireplace for an adoring audience of her dolls, cats and dogs. Cleo knew then that singing was what she wanted to do.

For over 30 years, Cleo has been delighting audiences with smooth ballads, belt 'em out show tunes and Big Band standards. She's appeared in musical theater, concerts, outdoor venues, ballrooms, senior centers, weddings and parties. Currently, Cleo is the "leading lady" with the Larry Busch Big Band as well as various other size combos playing Southwestern Wisconsin and throughout the Tri-State area.

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## ABOUT THE COMPOSER

George Gershwin (named Jacob Gershovitz at his birth September 26, 1898) was the second of four children born to Morris and Rose Gershovitz, Russians who had immigrated to New York and married in America. George's older (by two years) brother Ira was expected to be the musician in the family but George, who had discovered music at six listening to a piano roll of Rubinstein's *Melodie in F* and was overwhelmed at nine hearing a friend playing the violin, appropriated the piano his mother purchased when he was twelve and he, too, was given piano lessons. In 1912 he began studying with Charles Hambitzer, undoubtedly the strongest influence on the young student, who introduced him to the music of Debussy and Ravel, the early works of Arnold Schoenberg, and the classical piano literature. Gershwin admired Irving Berlin, and among his earliest musical heroes were Liszt and the great pianists then playing in New York, artists such as Josef Lhevinne, Josef Hoffmann, and composer-pianist Ferruccio Busoni.

George left school at fifteen to join music publisher Jerome K. Remick as Tin Pan Alley's youngest-ever song-plugger for \$15.00 a week, all the while trying his hand at composition, traveled the vaudeville circuit as a pianist for a while before he was hired to write songs for Max Dreyfus, head of the publishing house T.B. Harms, and toured as accompanist for Nora Bayes.

Gershwin's first Broadway show, *La, La, Lucille*, ran for one hundred performances in 1919, the same year that Al Jolson heard "Swanee" (written in 1917) and added it to his touring show. "Swanee" was a tremendous hit which sold over two million records its first year. George was well on his way to fame and fortune.

Joined by his brother Ira, George wrote successful musicals during the 20's for performers such as Fred and Adele Astaire, Gertrude Lawrence, W.C. Fields, Jeanette MacDonald, Ruby Keeler, Jimmy Durante, Fannie Brice, Bob Hope, and other notable figures of the American musical stage. Most of these musicals were characterized by inane plots which served only as vehicles for spectacular singing and dancing, but by 1930 both George and Ira had become interested in using satire in their musicals. "Strike Up the Band," in that year, was a success. 1930 was also the year of "Girl Crazy," which contains some of the Gershwins' most infectious melodies, and in

## ABOUT THE COMPOSER (cont.)

which Ethel Merman introduced "I Got Rhythm." (The cast included Ginger Rogers, and Benny Goodman, Gene Krupa, Glenn Miller, and Red Nichols were in the orchestra.) Gershwin first went to Hollywood in 1930 to write his film score "Delicious," and during the same year he made his conducting debut in a Lewisholn Stadium concert of his own music.

"Of Thee I Sing," a brilliant political satire by the Gershwin brothers, George S. Kaufman, and Morrie Ryskind, became in 1932 the first musical to win the Pulitzer Prize (for drama - there was no category for music at that time). This was, interestingly, Gershwin's last big success: two musicals premiéred in 1933 ran for less than a hundred performances each. However, by this time Gershwin's interest in serious music had increased and he wanted to write the full-length opera he had been contemplating for years. He had written several serious compositions before 1935, when his opera "Porgy and Bess" was first performed, all to mixed reviews. Among these, however, are some of his best known works, the orchestral compositions "Rhapsody in Blue" (1924) and "An American in Paris" (1928),

In 1935, after "Porgy and Bess," Gershwin turned his attention to films. He moved to California and wrote "Shall We Dance" for Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, and "A Damsel in Distress" for Astaire, Joan Fontaine, and Gracie Allen. Early in 1937 he began to experience headaches, dizzy spells, and blackouts. Examinations revealed no apparent cause, but his headaches increased in frequency and severity until July 9 when Gershwin collapsed into a coma, and a brain tumor was diagnosed. The White House sent two destroyers to bring one of the country's most prominent brain specialists from his yacht on Chesapeake Bay where he was vacationing. By the time Dr. Dandy reached Newark Airport on his way to Hollywood, however, local surgeons had found it necessary to operate and discovered the situation hopeless. George Gershwin never woke from his coma and died on July 11, 1937, two-and-one-half months short of his 39th birthday, silencing prematurely one of America's freshest, most creative musical voices.

Novelist John O'Hara summarized the attitude of many Americans who refused to believe Gershwin was dead when he said, "I don't have to believe it if I don't want to."

(adapted from ClassicalNet)