



George Gershwin: Porgy & Bess

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George Gershwin's 'American folk opera' Porgy and Bess was first performed in New York in 1935 with a cast of classically trained African-American singers. With a libretto by DuBose Heyward (based on his novel Porgy) and lyrics by Ira Gershwin, it's set in fictitious Catfish Row in Charleston, South Carolina, in the early 1920s and tells the story of Porgy, a crippled black man, and his attempts to rescue Bess from the clutches of Crown, her pimp, and Sportin' Life, the drug dealer. The groundbreaking music incorporates blues and jazz elements into the classical art form of opera, though the work was not generally accepted as a legitimate opera until 1976, when the Houston Grand Opera staged a triumphant production of Gershwin's complete score. A 1952 revival by Blevins Davis and Robert Breen had previously restored much of the music cut from the original Broadway production, including many recitatives, and divided the opera into two acts, making a more operatic form. This double CD captures that legendary 1952 production and is the only official release remastered from the original master tapes in the DLR archives. The conductor is Alexander Smallens, who also conducted the original New York premiere, and the superb cast is headed by the young Leontyne Price as Bess and William Warfield as Porgy, with Cab Calloway (Sportin' Life), John McCurry (Crown) and Helen Colbert (Clara). This a sensational rediscovery of a recording that reveals the musical and dramatic intensity of a work that Gershwin considered his finest composition. 'There is singing, shouting, crying, arguing, fighting, intermittent praying, dancing, howling, stamping. Nobody seems to be acting but simply offering their unique temperament, vitality and sheer existence.' - Berliner Kurier, 1952. This atmospheric release is an indispensable addition to the discography of a thrilling masterpiece.