

**George Gershwin**  
**1898-1937**  
**American**  
**20th Century**

“True music must repeat the thought and inspirations of the people and the time. My people are Americans and my time is today.”



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**Specialist Genres: Popular songs, musicals**

- His father was a Russian-Jewish immigrant.
- He studied piano, theory and harmony as a child with several distinguished musicians, but he was never good at reading music.
- At age 16, he began to write songs for the shows at a Tin Pan Alley music publisher.
- His brother, Ira Gershwin (1896-1983) was talented at writing the words for George's songs and their collaboration produced many great musicals such as *Lady Be Good*, *Fascinating Rhythm*, and *The Man I Love*.
- He still took private piano lessons even after he became a famous composer.
- *Rhapsody in Blue* (1924) is a milestone of his career. It is written for piano and jazz orchestra in which he applied jazz rhythms and harmonies to a classical form.
- “*Porgy and Bess*” is the only American opera to be performed internationally on a regular basis.
- He started to write film scores such as “*They Can't Take That Away From Me*,” “*Let's Call The Whole Thing Off*,” and “*Shall We Dance?*” from 1931
- He died from brain tumor at the age of only 39.

**Hit Makers of America**

**George Gershwin**, **Irving Berlin** (1888-1989), **Cole Porter** (1891-1964), and **Jerome Kern** (1885-1945) are great American songwriters in the 20th century.



 Link up to learn more about Gershwin!  
<http://www.gershwin.com/>

## **“Cuban Overture” by George Gershwin (1932)**

In early 1932, Gershwin went to **Havana** for a holiday. There, he was intrigued by the **native percussion instruments** and **Cuban rhythms**.

Gershwin titled the piece “*Rhumba*” at first, but changed it after the first performance. He explained that “Cuban Overture” gives a more clear idea of the character and intent of the music.

### **Standards Addressed:**

- Standard 1 Creating, Performing, and Participating in the Arts
- Standard 2 Knowing and using Arts Materials and Resources
- Standard 3 Responding to and Analyzing Works of Art
- Standard 4 Understanding the Cultural Dimensions and Contributions of the Arts

### **Performance Indicators:**

- 1b. Students sing songs and play instruments, maintaining tone quality, pitch, rhythm, tempo, and dynamics; perform the music expressively; and sing or play simple repeated patterns with familiar songs, rounds, partner songs, and harmonizing parts.
- 1e. Students identify and use, in individual and group experiences, some of the roles, processes, and action used in performing and composing music of their own and others.
- 2a. Students use classroom and nontraditional instruments in performing and creating music.
- 3b. Students describe the music in terms related to basic elements such as melody, rhythm, harmony, dynamics, timbre, form, style, etc.
- 4b. Students identify the titles and composers of well-known examples of classical concert music and blues/jazz selections.
- 4c. Students identify the primary cultural, geographical, and historical settings for the music they listen to and perform.

**Objectives:** The student will identify four Latin instruments added to the orchestra by George Gershwin.  
The student will perform in a rhythm ensemble using those instruments.

**Materials:** Latin Rhythm instruments as used in the score (xylophone/ bells or piano, Cuban sticks or claves, gourd, maracas and bongos).

**Vocabulary:** Cuba  
Overture  
Latin Music

**Listening Repertoire:** Recording of “Cuban Overture” by Gershwin

**Procedure:**

1. Teacher plays main theme on an instrument for the students (both f and f# are needed on an Orff instrument). If an Orff instrument is chosen, teacher should tremolo on the first note.
2. Teach Latin rhythms inspired by the score using the following words:  
*Cuban Music, Cuban Music, Cuban Music, Cuban Music*  
*Play on the gourd, Play in rhythm*  
*George Gershwin, Olé!*  
*Play the bongos, Play the bongos, Play them now!*
3. Layer in rhythmic parts and practice percussion section.
4. When students can play independently, teacher adds the melody.
5. Listen to Cuban Overture (RPO will cut from 4:25 to 7:40 in the recording) focusing on the percussion instruments and the main theme.

**Extensions:**

Show students excerpts of orchestral scores to show how the percussion parts are written and how they expand the score.

# Cuban Overture

Gershwin

Percussion 1  
maracas  
Cub - an mu - sic Cu - ban mu - sic Cu - ban mu - sic Cu - ban mu - sic

Percussion 2  
gourd  
Play on the gourd play in rhy - thm

Percussion 3  
Cuban sticks  
George Gersh - win o - lé

Percussion 4  
bongos  
Play the bon - gos Play the bon - gos Play them now.

Mallets

Perc. 1  
Cu - ban mu - sic Cu - ban mu - sic Cu - ban mu - sic Cu - ban mu - sic

Perc. 2  
Play on the gourd Play in rhy - thm

Perc. 3  
George Gersh - win o - lé

Perc. 4  
Play the bon - gos Play the bon - gos Play them now.

Mal.  
Musical notation for Mal. (Mallets) in G major, featuring a triplet of eighth notes in the first measure and a half note in the second measure.

Perc. 1  
Cu - ban mu - sic Cu - ban mu - sic Cu - ban mu - sic Cu - ban mu - sic

Perc. 2  
Play on the gourd Play in rhy - thm

Perc. 3  
George Gersh - win o - lé

Perc. 4  
Play the bon - gos Play the bon - gos Play them now.

Mal.  
Musical notation for Mal. (Mallets) in G major, featuring a half note in the first measure and a half note in the second measure.

Perc. 1  
Cu - ban mu - sic Cu - ban mu - sic Cu - ban mu - sic Cu - ban mu - sic

Perc. 2  
Play on the gourd Play in rhy - thm

Perc. 3  
George Gersh - - win o - lé

Perc. 4  
Play the bon - gos Play the bon - gos Play them now

Mal.

Perc. 1  
Cu - ban mu - sic Cu - ban mu - sic Cu - ban mu - sic Cu - ban mu - sic

Perc. 2  
Play on the gourd Play in rhy - thm

Perc. 3  
George Gersh - win o - lé

Perc. 4  
Play the bon - gos Play the bon - gos Play 'em now.

Mal.