

The University Musical Society

of
The University of Michigan

Presents

Michigan Opera Theatre

DAVID DI CHERA, *General Director*

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 15, 1975, AT 8:00
POWER CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS
ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN

PROGRAM

Porgy and Bess

A folk opera in two acts by
GEORGE GERSHWIN

After the play *Porgy*, by DUBOSE and DOROTHY HEYWARD
Libretto by DUBOSE HEYWARD *Lyrics* by DUBOSE HEYWARD and IRA GERSHWIN

starring

IRENE OLIVER as *Bess* ROBERT MOSLEY as *Porgy*

Time: The mid 1920s *Place:* Charleston, South Carolina

Act One

- Scene 1.* Catfish Row. A summer evening.
- Scene 2.* Serena's Room. The following night.
- Scene 3.* Catfish Row. A month after.
- Scene 4.* Kittawah Island. Evening of the same day.

Act Two

- Scene 1.* Catfish Row. Before dawn, a week later.
- Scene 2.* Serena's Room. Dawn of the following day.
- Scene 3.* Catfish Row. The next night.
- Scene 4.* Catfish Row. The following morning.
- Scene 5.* Catfish Row Five days later, afternoon.

ELLA GERBER, *Director*

REMI GHILESPI, *Music Director-Conductor-Chorus Master*

Costumes by KAREN MCKEAN, OPAL HAIRSTON, BONNIE WHALEN

Sets by PAUL A. NORRENBROCK

CAST

(In order of appearance)

<i>Sporting Life</i>	Robert Monroe
<i>Lily</i>	Gerri Adams
<i>Annie</i>	Synthia Maddox Reese
<i>Clara</i>	Bernadine L. Oakley
<i>Lady with laundry bundle</i>	Bertha Mae Adams
<i>Man and wife</i>	George Franklin Williams, Dorothea A. Pullen
<i>Mingo</i>	Dennis Rowland
<i>Men in crap game</i>	Chester Carter, Billy L. Mack, James E. Parks, James G. St. Clair
<i>Boy in crap game</i>	Robert Brantley
<i>Fighting couple</i>	Augustus Williamson, Amina Rahaman
<i>Man on third floor</i>	Ulysses L. Wolf
<i>Serena</i>	Earnestine F. Nimmons
<i>Jake</i>	Sherman Patrick Garner
<i>Robbins</i>	Ned Wright
<i>Maria</i>	Marguerite Lenora Motley
<i>Jim</i>	Leroy Winston
<i>Jim's wife</i>	Anna C. Aycox
<i>Serena's children</i>	LaMon Griffin, Tracy Monique Hines
<i>Skip, Maria's helper</i>	Herbert L. Rawlings, Jr.
<i>Peter the Honeyman</i>	Melvyn Hardiman
<i>Scipio</i>	Johnny Johnson
<i>Porgy</i>	Robert Mosley
<i>Young man on breezeway</i>	Robert E. Helms
<i>Crown</i>	Leonard Parker
<i>Bess</i>	Irene Oliver
<i>Ruby</i>	Florence Pate Sampson
<i>Ruby's husband</i>	J. C. Blue
<i>Policeman</i>	Roman Terleckyj
<i>Burial Voices</i>	Patricia J. Lewis, Douglas C. Rowland, Augustus Williamson, Faye Blakely Washington, Herbert L. Rawlings, Jr., Bill Broyles, Doris J. Berry, Sherman Patrick Garner, James E. Parks
<i>Detective</i>	John O. Peters
<i>Undertaker</i>	Van Fore
<i>Frazier</i>	C. Cass Hudson
<i>Neighbor lady and her cronies</i>	Doris J. Berry, Edris L. Banks, Penelope Jones
<i>Strawberry woman</i>	Billie Joyce Bowden
<i>Crabman</i>	Marvin-earl
<i>Coroner</i>	Fred J. Bush
<i>Talkative couple</i>	Carl M. Temple, Penelope Jones
<i>Porgy's goat</i>	Arrowhead
<i>Other residents of Catfish Row:</i>	Mattye Gaither Anderson, Veda M. Bryant, Perry L. Brown, Tilis Butler, Billie Carter, Christopher A. Hall, Abu Bakr Hamilton, Gracie Hanks, Alice Harris, Larry L. Johnson, Sandi Johnson, Lewis H. Martin, Gloria L. McKee, Art Robinson, Charletter Sanders, Myles G. Savage, Monique Shelton, James S. Simmons, Josephine M. Smith, Silas N. Waldon, Charmaine Bailey Whitehead, Carolyn Williams, Renee Williams, Myrna J. Wilson.
<i>Other children of the community:</i>	Darah Arrington, Yvonne L. Butler, Jerrilyn Mack

Porgy and Bess

The Story

ACT I

A tranquil Saturday night in the lives of the hard-working residents of Catfish Row is interrupted by sudden violence, springing from a crap game squabble between the amiable Robbins and drunken Crown. Robbins is brutally killed within sight of his wife, Serena, and Crown escapes before the police arrive, leaving his woman Bess, behind. Porgy, a crippled beggar, sympathetically offers her refuge when the rest of the community refuses.

Robbins' funeral expenses are raised by the community during a wake. The proceedings are interrupted by the arrival of a detective, who takes the aging Peter off to jail as a material witness to the killing, and by the undertaker who promises to give Robbins a decent burial.

A month later, Crown has still not returned for Bess, who is living happily with Porgy. Frazier, a mock-lawyer, takes advantage of Porgy, selling him a "divorce" which Porgy believes will legally free Bess from Crown. The community, including Bess (still considered an outsider unacceptable to the self-righteous ladies of Catfish Row), leaves for the annual church picnic on Kittiwah Island. Porgy is left behind, unable to make the trip, but happy for Bess and blissfully content with the security of their love.

The festivities of the picnic, led by the worldly Sporting Life, are ended by the sound of a horn from the boat that will take them all back to the mainland, but Crown suddenly appears and detains Bess. Her initial resistance to his advances is weakened by his sexual dominance, and he carries her off into the thicket, his hiding place.

ACT II

At dawn a week later, Jake and the fisherman depart for the blackfish banks, although his wife, Clara, fears bad weather. Bess is heard from within Porgy's room, deliriously moaning with a fever contracted on the island. Serena leads a prayer in Bess' behalf, more confident of her own spiritual powers than trusting in the treatment Bess would receive in the white man's hospital. After a buzzard (considered an evil omen) has been sighted and driven off, Bess' delirium ceases just as Serena predicted. Porgy reconfirms his love for her, although he is fully aware of her rendezvous with Crown, and he promises to protect her from him when Crown comes for her. Suddenly, the hurricane bell is rung, a storm warning that causes the residents to take shelter.

They huddle in Serena's room during the storm. Crown bursts in, intending to take Bess with him, but is interrupted by the sighting of Jake's boat, upside-down in the river. Clara runs out into the storm to find him, and Crown follows, being the only able-bodied man brave enough to rescue her. He promises once again to return for Bess.

The following night, a spiritual is sung in behalf of Clara, Jake, and Crown, all presumed lost in the storm. Crown unexpectedly returns, intent on stealing Bess and killing Porgy, but Porgy surprises him with a knife, and succeeds in killing him.

A detective and coroner arrive the next day to investigate Crown's death. Porgy is taken off to jail to identify the body, superstitiously fearful of the thought of looking on the face of the man he killed. Sporting Life convinces Bess that Porgy will be convicted and subsequently jailed for a long time, and succeeds in luring her away from Catfish Row. They leave together, seeking a new, extravagant, amoral life in New York.

Porgy returns from jail a week later, only to discover that Bess has left him. Heartbroken, yet firmly resolved, he leaves on his goat cart, intending to travel alone, all the way to New York, to find her.

The History

The history of *Porgy and Bess* began in 1925 with a best-selling novel called *Porgy*, written by DuBose Heyward. The Catfish Row of Heyward's story had a real-life counterpart: Cabbage Row, a neighborhood of dilapidated buildings and a run-down mansion surrounding a courtyard. Heyward modeled his *Porgy* on an actual Charleston character, a local beggar named Goat Sammy, who made his way about the community in a little box on wheels drawn by a goat. What emerged from Heyward's transformation of Goat Sammy was the successful novel, followed two years later by the triumphant Broadway play, also called *Porgy*, which ran for 367 performances.

George Gershwin read Heyward's novel a year after it was published and was profoundly affected by it. Here was a warm yet powerful basic human story told with feeling and compassion by someone obviously familiar with the locale and the people he described. He immediately wrote to Heyward and proposed a collaboration on a musical version of the tale. Heyward was most interested and responded affirmatively. What resulted was eight years of negotiating and correspondence before Gershwin was able to interrupt his busy schedule and devote himself to creating the music. During this period Heyward reached an agreement with Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein II, who had aligned themselves with Al Jolson to set *Porgy* to music. The parties were unable to consummate the arrangement and the deal fell through.

Gershwin and Heyward were an unlikely alliance. Gershwin was the bumptious, quick-moving, quick-talking New Yorker of new immigrant background; Heyward was a Southern aristocrat of plantation-owner stock who could trace his lineage to Thomas Heyward, a signer of the Declaration of Independence. Yet, together they achieved a consistency of style that defies discernment of where the New Yorker begins and the Southerner leaves off. Much of this artistic partnership is attributable to Ira Gershwin, George's brother, who served as a creative middleman, offering refinements and original ideas in text, music, and lyrics.

Gershwin actually composed *Porgy and Bess* during a four-month hiatus at Folly Beach, a small island ten miles from Charleston. His residents of Catfish Row are based on the Gullahs who inhabited adjacent St. James Island. Physically and emotionally removed from the mainstream of American life, they had retained more of their African heritage in their customs and language than any black groups in America.

Ironically, *Porgy and Bess* was not an immediate success. It opened in New York in 1935 to mixed reviews and was a box-office flop, quietly closing after only 124 performances. Gershwin was never to see another production of his creation after the original closed.

A streamlined, faster-moving version of *Porgy and Bess* was revived on Broadway in 1942 and was a smash success, both critically and financially. The rest is history. *Porgy and Bess* has become a worldwide favorite, playing to millions. Ironically, Gershwin did not live to witness any of this belated success. He died in 1937 at the age of 38 of a brain tumor.

The University Musical Society is pleased to present these performances in recognition of our nation's Bicentennial Celebration.

UNIVERSITY MUSICAL SOCIETY

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