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Hello, and welcome back to Busy Kids Love Music! I'm Carly, the creator of Busy Kids Do Piano, and I'm so glad you're here as we continue our series on the incredible George Gershwin. In our first episode, we learned about Gershwin's life and his unique ability to blend classical music with jazz. Today, we're focusing on one of his most famous works, "Rhapsody in Blue." This piece has become an icon of American music and a symbol of the Roaring Twenties. We'll explore why Gershwin wrote it, what makes it so special, and how audiences responded when it premiered. Let's jump in!

The story of "Rhapsody in Blue" begins with a train ride and a last-minute deadline. In 1924, Gershwin was approached by Paul Whiteman, a popular bandleader who wanted to show that jazz could be taken as seriously as classical music. Whiteman asked Gershwin to write a piece for an upcoming concert called An Experiment in Modern Music. Gershwin initially declined because he thought he didn't have enough time. But a few weeks later, he learned that Whiteman had already announced the concert—and listed Gershwin as a featured composer! With only five weeks until the concert, Gershwin scrambled to write the piece. During a train ride to Boston, the idea for "Rhapsody in Blue" came to him. He later said that the rhythm of the train wheels inspired the music, which he described as "a sort of musical kaleidoscope of America."

Before we dive into the music, let's talk about the title. The word rhapsody comes from ancient Greece, where it referred to epic poems recited aloud. In music, a rhapsody is a free-flowing piece that doesn't stick to strict rules or structure. Instead, it moves through different moods and ideas, like telling a story. Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue" does exactly that—it takes listeners on a journey through lively jazz rhythms, sweeping melodies, and moments of quiet reflection.

The "blue" in the title reflects both the jazzy, blues-inspired harmonies and the melancholy undertones woven throughout the

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piece. It's as if Gershwin captured the bustling energy of New York City and the deep emotions of its people all in one composition.

One of the most famous moments in "Rhapsody in Blue" happens right at the beginning: a soaring clarinet glissando that slides up the scale and launches the piece into its jazzy world. Let's listen to it again:

Gershwin's use of jazz instruments—like the clarinet, saxophone, and brass—gives the piece its unique sound. The piano plays a starring role, with Gershwin himself performing the solo part at the premiere.

Throughout the piece, you'll hear a mix of styles. Some sections are upbeat and playful, capturing the excitement of city life, while others are dreamy and lyrical, as if Gershwin is pausing to reflect. This balance of energy and emotion is part of what makes "Rhapsody in Blue" so captivating.

When "Rhapsody in Blue" premiered on February 12, 1924, it was an instant hit. The audience loved its mix of jazz and classical styles, and critics praised it as a bold new direction for American music. Gershwin's performance received a standing ovation, and the piece quickly became a staple of concert halls around the world.

"Rhapsody in Blue" not only made Gershwin a star but also changed the way people thought about jazz. It proved that jazz wasn't just for dance halls—it could also be a serious art form. Today, the piece is considered one of the greatest American compositions of all time, and its opening clarinet glissando remains one of the most recognizable sounds in music.

If you'd like to listen to Rhapsody in Blue in its entirety, I've linked to a performance of it in the show notes at [busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/142](https://www.busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/142). In our next episode, the final one of our series on George Gershwin, we'll explore another one of his masterpieces, "Porgy and Bess." This opera tells a powerful story

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through unforgettable music and includes the famous song “Summertime.” I can’t wait to share it with you!

Thanks for tuning in to Busy Kids Love Music! If you enjoyed learning about “Rhapsody in Blue,” be sure to subscribe so you don’t miss the next episode in our George Gershwin series. For fun activities and more podcast episodes about your favorite composers, visit [busykidsdopiano.com/busykidslovemusic](https://www.busykidsdopiano.com/busykidslovemusic). Until next time, keep listening and keep learning. I look forward to connecting with you again in two weeks for another brand new episode. Bye for now!

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I've created a playlist of some of Gershwin's most famous works, including ones you heard in today's episode, in the show notes at busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/141.

Thanks so much for joining me today on Busy Kids Love Music. If you enjoyed this episode, be sure to subscribe so you don't miss the rest of our George Gershwin series. You can also find more resources, including listening guides and fun activities, on our website at busykidsdopiano.com.

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