# 2 Hearing Gershwin's New York

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In 1898 both George Gershwin and the modern city of New York were born. On January 1, Kings and Richmond counties, along with parts of Queens and Westchester counties, officially consolidated with the island of Manhattan to create the five boroughs of New York that we know today. George Gershwin (listed on his birth certificate as Jacob Gershwine) followed nine months later, entering the world at 242 Snedicker Avenue in Brooklyn on September 26. Gershwin grew to manhood in and with a burgeoning city full of noise, invention, and endless entertainments, whose disparate ethnic neighborhoods retained a character all their own even as they were being knit together in new ways.

Early twentieth-century New York City proved the perfect incubator for Gershwin's natural gifts. It was a distinctive moment in the city's history. Consolidation and unprecedented levels of immigration brought the city's population to 3.4 million by 1900, making it twice as large as any other American city. By 1910, New York's population had ballooned to nearly five million, 40 percent of whom were foreign born. New York's infrastructure and economic development boomed on a similar scale, as the city constructed subways, bridges, and roads that in turn spurred real-estate development and industrial and commercial growth. While Progressive-era reformers and urban planners struggled to bring order, the streets of New York's neighborhoods remained crowded and often unruly. They also remained segregated. The city's black population stood at 60,000 in 1900 and rose to 327,000 by 1930, an increase largely due to an influx of African Americans who fled the violence and economic oppression of the South. De facto segregation confined this growing group of New Yorkers to a handful of neighborhoods, most famously Harlem, which rose to national prominence in the 1920s as a cultural mecca.

A crucial part of New York's booming early twentieth-century economy was its leisure and commercial culture. In an era before radio or television, working- and middle-class people, young and old, flocked to amusements in the penny arcades, theaters, cabarets, and nickelodeons that flourished in many neighborhoods. Making and consuming music was a face-to-face endeavor in Gershwin's New York, which was filled with



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music created by amateurs and professionals who gathered in parlors, school auditoriums, concert halls, cabarets, theaters, and dance halls. And New York's commercial culture became American commercial culture, with the city serving as the originator of music and stage productions that toured the country, supplying the shared national cultural experience that radio and movies would eventually supplant. In Harlem, ragtime and jazz were part of a cultural flowering that also included literature, visual art, theater, dance, and political movements for self-determination, all of which influenced American identity for decades to come. In short, New York offered George Gershwin access to a panoply of musical and cultural expressions and a robust professional infrastructure of performance and distribution opportunities. In this city – freewheeling, bigger, and more culturally influential than any other – George Gershwin grew up listening to the music and soundscapes around him and seized the opportunities to make the sounds of modern America his own.

Gershwin's parents, Morris and Rose, emigrated from St. Petersburg, Russia to New York City as young people and married in 1895. They were an early part of the massive wave of Jewish immigrants to New York City during this era. The city's Jewish population more than doubled between 1900 and the beginning of World War I, and in many ways the family's experience paralleled that of other Jewish immigrants.[1] Many Russian Jewish immigrants came from urban areas, and as such possessed some industrial or artisan skills that could be adapted to suit the jobs available in New York's industrial and commercial economies. While Morris was working as a foreman in a shoe factory at the time of George's birth, his subsequent jobs (including a string of restaurants, Turkish baths, bakeries, a cigar store, pool parlor, and bookmaking stall at the Brighton Beach Race Track) were more entrepreneurial, and mostly short-lived.[2] The turn toward small business ownership was also not unusual for Jewish immigrants – historian Selma Berrol estimates that "as early as 1908 there was a pronounced shift from manual to white collar jobs in the East European Jewish community."[3] Morris Gershwin's tendency to go into business with his brothers was also a common immigrant strategy of using family and social connections to find jobs, housing, and other opportunities. Small business ownership tended to be the route out of the working class for Jewish immigrants, while it was not until their children's generation, born in America, that they began the move into professions such as law, medicine, education, and the arts.[4]

Although the Gershwins moved frequently, they always resided in one of the city's major Jewish neighborhoods on the Lower East Side, in East Harlem, or in Brownsville/East New York in Brooklyn. Ira estimated that the family lived in twenty-eight different residences between 1896 and

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1916. This kind of residential mobility was not uncommon among Jewish immigrant families, with landlords often offering a month's free rent to new tenants, and rental housing enabled greater financial flexibility and the capacity to ride out hard times.[5] In Brooklyn, the Gershwins were part of a swelling population of Jewish immigrants working in the factories that sprang up in Brownsville and East New York during the 1890s. The neighborhood grew even more when construction of the subway began in 1904, and bridges built across the East River (Williamsburg in 1903, Manhattan in 1909) rendered the borough less isolated from the rest of the city. These infrastructure developments spurred the growth of Jewish neighborhoods in other parts of the city, including East Harlem, where the Gershwins moved when George was still a child.[6] By 1910, the upper Manhattan area from Madison Avenue east to Third Avenue, from 100th to 125th streets, had become a largely Jewish neighborhood, which was home to the second largest concentration of East European Jews in the United States.[7]

If New York's early twentieth-century neighborhoods were ethnically distinct, one shared constant was noise, indoors and out. Regardless of social class, it was the very nature of apartment building life to hear your neighbors. Windows, thin walls and floors, shared hallways, airshafts – all provided avenues for the sounds of others to infiltrate domestic space. Duke Ellington captured the porous aural boundaries of apartment building life when he described the inspiration behind his composition *Harlem Air Shaft*: "You get the full essence of Harlem in an air shaft. You hear fights, you smell dinner, you hear people making love. You hear intimate gossip floating down. You hear the radio. An airshaft is one great big loudspeaker."[8] As phonographs and radios became more common household items in the early 1920s, New Yorkers began to hear those sounds through walls and windows and in hallways and stairwells. For example, in 1921, the neighbors of Mrs. Richard T. Wilson of 130 West 57th Street took her to court over the noise of her frequent late-night music parties. Part of the neighbors' complaint was that the music "was of a jazz character" and one described it as "Ragtime. I should say cacophony." Although Mrs. Wilson belonged to one of the city's rarefied social circles, a *New York Times* article on the case noted that her neighbors' plight was a common one: "Practically everybody in the city, rich, poor and those in between, must have felt what was or amounted to a personal interest in the case of Mrs. Richard T. Wilson ... The same quarrel has arisen innumerable times before."[9]

Outdoors, human and mechanical sources – shouting peddlers, recorded music, delivery wagons, trolleys, elevated trains, construction equipment, automobiles – combined to banish tranquility from the streets

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where George Gershwin grew to adulthood. More than one Gershwin chronicler has waxed nostalgic about the urban noises that shaped the composer's musical sensibilities. Isaac Goldberg (Gershwin's first biographer, and the only one to write his life story while he was still alive), for example, identified urban sounds as "the rhythms that sound not only from his first hits but from his most ambitious orchestral compositions," ambient urban noise such as:

> The clatter of rollers over asphalt . . . The din of the elevated overhead . . . The madness of the traffic below . . . the cracked tones of the hurdy-gurdy . . . The blare of the automatic orchestra as the merry-go-round traced its dizzy circles through Coney Island's penny paradises . . . The plaintive wail of the street singer across the obbligato of a scraping fiddle . . . These were the earliest rhythms to which young George awoke.[10]

In a 1927 interview, Gershwin himself, with some grandiosity, identified New York and New Yorkers as embodying "the soul of the American people." A soul that "spoke to me on the streets, in school, at the theater. In the chorus of city sounds I heard it."[11]

While the sounds of urban life served as inspiration for composers like Gershwin and Ellington, the nature and volume of noise brought by the modern age was at best a nuisance to many New Yorkers, and at worst a problem that threatened health and productivity. In 1896, novelist William Dean Howells described the noise of elevated trains in decidedly less romantic terms:

> No experience of noise can enable you to conceive of the furious din that bursts upon the sense, when at some corner two cars encounter on the parallel tracks below, while two trains roar and shriek and hiss on the rails overhead, and a turmoil of rattling express wagons, heavy drays and trucks, and carts, hacks, carriages, and huge vans rolls itself between and beneath the prime agents of the uproar.[12]

The first elevated trains were in place in Manhattan by 1880, and while an improvement over horse-drawn streetcars in speed and range, their bulk and noise were less than ideal. They also immediately proved inadequate to serve the city's exploding population, and in 1888 the city embarked on building an underground subway system. Brooklyn had its own transit system, in the form of streetcars that converged on downtown Brooklyn and over the Brooklyn Bridge to Park Row in lower Manhattan, but they went no further.[13] The first of what would become New York City's interlocking subway lines, the IRT, opened to great fanfare on October 27, 1904. It covered twenty-two route miles from lower Manhattan to 145th Street. When the first train emerged aboveground onto the elevated tracks at Manhattan Valley (between 122nd and 135th

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Streets) during its ceremonial run, it was greeted by cheering uptown crowds that could well have included Gershwin and his family, since they lived in East Harlem at the time. But the IRT could not keep up with the city's growth any better than the elevated trains had. Ridership doubled between 1905 and 1908, exceeding the system's planned maximum capacity by one-third.[14] Eventually, the subways became the physical manifestation of the consolidation that the city achieved politically in 1898. Public transportation enabled greater mobility for workers and opened up farther flung neighborhoods to residential and industrial development, all of which stimulated the city's already vigorous commercial amusement economy. Gershwin lived through this dramatic transformation in transportation – the demise of horse-drawn streetcars, the creation of the city's iconic underground subway, and the rise of automobiles on the streets.

Moving public transit largely underground (some elevated trains remained) did not immediately make the city's streets quieter. Reformers sought anti-noise legislation as a way to guarantee New Yorkers their right to an environment free of noise. A 1909 ordinance targeted peddlers and hucksters directly, an early salvo aimed toward a larger goal of clearing the streets of pushcart vendors altogether (which the city achieved by the 1930s). But the calls of street peddlers were hardly the city's greatest noise offenders. By the 1920s, the increased number of automobiles and trucks on New York's streets produced a greater volume of noise than the elevated trains. These new sounds posed a difficult adjustment for human ears. While the number of motorized vehicles had been growing during the first decades of the twentieth century, as early as 1922 New Yorkers were complaining about the noise made by electroacoustic loudspeakers. The worst offenders were radio retailers, who installed such speakers over their shop doors as a form of advertising.[15]

New York's streets also rang with the sounds of unsupervised children, in a way that is hard to imagine today. Many young people worked on city streets, calling out to passersby hawking newspapers, gum, or offering their services as bootblacks.[16] For those lucky enough to be in school, they still spent their non-school hours outdoors because there was a lack of indoor space for them, and because their parents were busy with work and housekeeping. As one observer put it, "the streets were the true homes of the [city's] small Italians, Irish, and Jews."[17] According to a 1914 study, 95 percent of New York City's children played in the streets, and the Gershwin boys were among them. Goldberg, presumably informed by George and Ira, noted that "Ma Gershwin, though very loving, never pestered her children with excessive surveillance."[18] The block was the basic unit of social organization for city kids, and they devised their own

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games that required little equipment. As long as they did not end up in the arms of the police, abandon younger siblings, or disgrace themselves or their families, they were largely left alone to govern themselves. But in one sense, the children were not completely unsupervised. As historian David Nasaw observes, urban streets were filled with adults – peddlers, prostitutes, policemen, delivery wagon drivers, stoop sitters, corner loungers – and "the presence of adults in the street – and the tenements overhead – protected the children at play."[19] Gershwin's childhood occurred during a singular era of urban freedom for the young; the children of earlier generations would have been put to work, and subsequent generations of middle-class children had their non-school hours increasingly structured by organized sports and other supervised activities and camps.[20]

George Gershwin was, by his own account, a leader of the pack on the streets of Manhattan and Brooklyn. He described himself as "the rough-and-ready, the muscular type and not one of your sad, contemplative children."[21] On the Lower East Side, "he reveled in games of 'cat' and hockey; here he achieved his first pre-eminence as the undisputed roller-skate champion of Seventh Street." But Goldberg also describes George as having been "a 'hard' kid" and recounts: "Certainly his parents held no high hopes for his future. He was, frankly, a bad child. He was guilty of petty pilfering; he ran the gamut of minor infractions. With a little less luck, he might have become a gangster."[22] Not surprisingly, this "hard kid" did not excel as a student at PS 20 and later PS 25. Unlike Ira, who was destined for the academically elite Townsend Harris High School and then City College of New York, George briefly attended Commerce High School before dropping out at age fifteen. This was not uncommon for a child of immigrants, including those from Jewish families, most of whom left school by eighth grade in order to contribute to the family economy.[23]

Both George and Ira, like all of early twentieth-century New York City's young people, partook of the city's low-cost public amusements, in the form of penny arcades and nickelodeons. A penny arcade is at the center of one of the most iconic and oft-repeated stories from George's childhood:

> One of my first definite memories goes back to the age of six. I stood outside a penny arcade listening to an automatic piano leaping through Rubinstein's *Melody in F*. The peculiar jumps in the music held me rooted. To this very day I can't hear the tune without picturing myself outside that arcade on One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street, standing there barefoot and in overalls, drinking it all in avidly.[24]

While George presented this story as one of musical awakening at a tender age, it is not difficult to see the appeal that such establishments held for all children. Located along commercial thoroughfares like 125th Street, 14th

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Street, and the Bowery, New York's penny arcades were invitingly decorated and brightly lit, ringing with the sounds generated by mechanical amusements and visitors engaging in sporting games. Arcades offered coin-operated machines where patrons could watch short films, learn their fortune or horoscope, hear music or comedy routines, or partake of a kinetoscope or "peep show." These "peep shows" explicitly targeted young men and boys, promising films with titles such as *How Girls Undress*. A key part of the penny arcades' appeal lay in the mechanical aspect of their entertainments (which for music included player pianos and phonographs), and in their democratic accessibility – conveniently located and inexpensive, no cultural sophistication (or even knowledge of English) was required to appreciate the entertainment on offer.[25]

From the penny arcade evolved the nickelodeon, a venue solely dedicated to showing moving pictures and so-named for the customary five cent entrance fee. For that nickel, audiences would see a selection of short films, usually accompanied by songs and vaudeville skits (often tailored to the ethnic makeup of a neighborhood audience).[26] Between 1900 and 1908, the number of nickelodeons in New York City jumped tenfold, from fifty to nearly 500. A theater operator's handbook from 1910 described the ideal location for a storefront nickelodeon as "a densely populated workingmen's residence section, with a frontage on a much-traveled business street."[27] Open from early morning to late at night, nickelodeons were extensions of the city's noisy and unruly street life. Describing the barkers who enticed audiences with the latest film fare, one contemporary observer described "their megaphones are barking before the milkman has made his rounds," and historian Kathy Peiss describes how working-class crowds "audibly interacted with the screen and each other, commenting on the action, explaining the plot, and vocally accompanying the piano player."[28] Ira recalled having "been a moviegoer since the time the shoe store on Grand Street became a nickelodeon."[29]

While some of the defining anecdotes of George Gershwin's childhood involved the streets and public amusements of New York City, another iconic story of his development as a musician centered on the family's acquisition of an upright piano. In George's own words: "No sooner had it come through the window and been backed up against the wall than I was at the keys. I must have crowded out Ira very soon, for the plan originally had been to start him on the instrument."[30] Many New Yorkers made and listened to music at home. Owning a piano had long been a marker of respectability, and sales of pianos in the United States rose steadily in the first decade of the twentieth century.[31] Pianos also connected New Yorkers to the popular music of the day, as they purchased sheet music for tunes propagated via the vaudeville stage.[32] Many of those early twentieth-

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century pianos were manufactured by German immigrant workers at the Steinway factory in Manhattan or at one of the more than forty piano manufacturers in the Mott Haven section of the Bronx, making the borough the capital of piano and player-piano manufacturing nationwide.[33] But learning to play the piano proficiently took time and skill, and in 1898 (the year of George's birth) the Aeolian Company put the first player piano, or pianola, on the market. Player pianos had a playing mechanism built into them and their owners purchased pre-recorded "rolls" for the piano to play. Popular in the years preceding radio and improved phonograph recording technologies, player pianos brought into the home music that was too difficult for most amateur players to master.[34]

In 1914, Gershwin left amateur musicianship behind and entered the world of professional working musicians when he quit school to take a job as a "song plugger" for the Jerome H. Remick music publishing company.[35] It was a job unlikely to have been available to fifteen-year-old piano prodigies anywhere else, and one that brought the teenaged Gershwin into contact with the city's best piano players, establishing professional connections that would expand his musical horizons and influence his own compositions. By 1910 New York was the undisputed capital of American popular music, host to many of the country's most profitable music publishing firms.[36] Music publishing was a core segment of New York City's cultural economy, and its center was Tin Pan Alley, a collection of publishing houses originally located on West 28th Street between Fifth and Sixth Avenues.

The sight-reading and improvisatory skills that served Gershwin well as a song plugger also opened up the professional avenue of recording piano rolls for the player-piano industry. Gershwin began this work in 1915, earning five dollars per roll. The makers of piano rolls, like the piano manufacturers, were part of New York's cultural economy, located in the Bronx and near Newark, New Jersey, both an easy commute for Manhattan piano players. Gershwin's early piano-roll recordings included ragtime and tunes from Broadway and Yiddish musical theater.[37] Gershwin's gifts as a piano player on daily display at Remick quickly came to the attention of other professional musicians, including several African Americans. Arranger Will Vodery was impressed enough with the young Gershwin to secure him an additional job as pianist at Fox's City Theater, a vaudeville house on 14th Street. Eubie Blake recalled hearing from James P. Johnson and Luckey Roberts about a white pianist at Remick who was "good enough to learn some of those terribly difficult tricks that only a few of us could master."[38] Gershwin, in his turn, greatly admired a group of black "stride" pianists (which included Blake, Johnson, Roberts, Willie

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"The Lion" Smith, and Fats Waller) for their style of embellishing and improvising around syncopated melodies.

Just as every other aspect of New York City life was expanding and creating new forms, so too was nightlife in the first decades of the twentieth century, and George Gershwin was a frequent visitor to the city's burgeoning array of cafes, restaurants, dance halls, vaudeville theaters, and cabarets. This expanding nightlife scene opened up many new spaces in which music was performed, heard, and danced to. It also created spaces where middle- and upper-class women were able to socialize in public in unprecedented ways. Restaurants began providing musical entertainment to their customers, and hotel roof gardens did the same. By 1911, cabarets and cafes with music and dancing began to multiply, and with them opportunities for audiences of all social classes to mingle in intimate social spaces that put them, in the words of one historian, "in handshaking proximity" to the performers.[39] The ratification of the 18th amendment to the US constitution in 1919 outlawed the sale and consumption of alcohol, which, paradoxically, accelerated the growth of New York's nightlife rather than curbed it. New Yorkers, like other urbanites across the United States, flouted Prohibition's strictures – by the end of the 1920s, New York's police commissioner estimated that the city contained 32,000 illegal drinking establishments.[40] Nightclubs flourished, and entrepreneurs opened clubs featuring black entertainers to draw white audiences newly fascinated with black music and dance. Widespread extra-legal drinking hastened existing trends toward social mixing in commercial entertainments and gave rise to increased social visibility and space for those considered "outside" polite society, namely gays and lesbians and African Americans.[41]

Gershwin was a celebrated composer by the 1920s, but his wide-ranging musical appetites drove him to seek out a variety of musical styles beyond the theaters and nightclubs of Times Square. He was a regular audience member in the Yiddish theaters that populated Second Avenue on the Lower East Side, particularly when a musical was playing. Gershwin's connection to the Yiddish theater stretched back to his childhood, when a Yiddish musical theater composer played cards with Morris Gershwin, and young George ran errands for Yiddish theater actors and even appeared onstage as an extra.[42] Located in the neighborhoods where Jewish immigrants settled (starting on the Bowery and Grand Street in the 1890s, then expanding to Second Avenue and into Brooklyn and the Bronx), Yiddish theaters provided portrayals of immigrant life and occasions to gather for entertainment and escape; some of the fare was translated from English, giving immigrants entrée to American culture. By the 1920s the Yiddish theater's operettas, melodramas with music, and musical

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comedies mixed jazz and ragtime with traditional Jewish musical styles, building bridges between the ethnic community and mainstream Broadway forms.[43]

Gershwin also sought out African American music in New York, an interest that took him to Harlem and the more established cultural precincts where black composers were slowly gaining a foothold during the 1920s. Verna Arvey, the wife of African American classical composer William Grant Still, noted that Gershwin "was certain to be present at any concert or show in which a Negro was doing something new in music . . . He admired Ethel Waters's singing very much and . . . attended the performance of William Grant Still's *Levee Land* at New York's Aeolian Hall."[44] African American artists also broke into the world of musical theater. In 1921 the musical *Shuffle Along*, with music by Noble Sissle and Eubie Blake, proved a surprise hit and helped white producers and critics see black performers and subjects as possessing economic viability and artistic merit. It paved the way for a wave of black musical revues during the 1920s and boosted the careers of performers like Ethel Waters and Florence Mills and composers like James P. Johnson.

By the time of Gershwin's adulthood, Harlem had become Manhattan's primary black neighborhood, although during his childhood most of the borough's African Americans lived in two West Side neighborhoods, known as the Tenderloin and San Juan Hill. By the early 1920s there were around 300,000 African Americans living in New York City and most were living in Harlem (though they still represented no more than 30 percent of the total Harlem population).[45] Harlem's music scene revved up in the wee hours of the morning, and Gershwin frequently made his way there to be part of the audience.[46] After black performers had finished their paying gigs with commercial bands downtown, they returned uptown to play at nightclubs and rent parties. The combos in most clubs and dance halls were small – a piano, drummer, and banjoist or harmonica player, or perhaps just a piano – and the style was lively and improvised.[47] Harlem also possessed larger clubs with more elaborate revues, and by the 1920s almost a dozen of these were segregated (allowing white patrons only), catering to the sensibilities of white New Yorkers who were fascinated by black culture but not interested in social contact with African Americans.

Gershwin was an inveterate party-goer; the sounds of his adult world included frequent evenings of tinkling glasses, swirling conversation, laughter, and piano playing (by himself and others) and his identity as a pianist was central to his experiences of New York parties. Reminiscences and biographies abound with stories of Gershwin attending a party only to sit down at the piano and play for hours. While Gershwin played gratis, as a guest, for African American pianists such parties could provide

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a welcome source of income. Famed stride pianist Willie "The Lion" Smith recalls how Gershwin opened the door for those paid opportunities by inviting him, Fats Waller, and James P. Johnson to a Park Avenue party being held in his honor to celebrate the debut of *Rhapsody in Blue*. Gershwin was, as usual, installed at the piano, and Smith worried that

> he was going to stay seated at the piano all night himself and hog all the playing. We three were standing at the bar getting up our courage and the more we imbibed the more anxious we became to get at those keys. I finally went over and said to Gershwin, "Get up off that piano stool and let the real players take over, you tomato." He was good-natured fellow and from then on the three of us took over the entertainment.[48]

For black pianists, these parties paid handsomely ("fifty dollars apiece and all the food and liquor we could consume") and sometimes prompted career breakthroughs, as when the head of the CBS radio network heard Waller play and immediately found an opening for him on the air.[49] But in an era of racial segregation, even the most talented African American musicians were still subject to sometimes insulting treatment from white hosts and guests.[50]

Gershwin also attended parties in Harlem, drawn by what he could learn from the black pianists playing at them. Waller recalled that Gershwin and other white composers

> were uptown incessantly, making the rounds and drinking in all there was to be seen and heard . . . penetrating even the lowest of the lowdown clubs. He invaded the rent-parties and socials and was often to be seen sitting on the floor, agape at the dazzling virtuosity and limitless improvisation that clamored around him.[51]

Harlem's rent parties charged admission and were designed to help the host pay that month's rent. They offered food and liquor, sometimes for an additional fee, and entertainment from some of Harlem's finest musicians. Smith remembered that he and other prominent stride pianists "never stopped and we were up and down Fifth, Seventh, and Lenox all night long hitting the keys," usually earning ten or twenty dollars per party (often booking as many as three a night) plus all the liquor they could drink. The parties were a proving ground for Harlem's pianists, a free-wheeling space for improvisation and competition where they sharpened their already formidable skills.[52]

Historical turning points are not always identifiable in the moment when they occur, but 1898 was surely one in the history of America's most prominent city and one of its foremost twentieth-century composers. The year gave birth to modern New York, which, over the next three decades nurtured George Gershwin as no other place on earth could have done. It was the center of American musical and theatrical production, with

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a growing, diverse population brought together via public space, public amusements, and public transit. As a child whose experiences were largely confined to the Jewish immigrant neighborhoods where his family lived, Gershwin had freedom to explore the streets, penny arcades, and nickelodeons of a city launching itself into the modern cultural age. Starting in his teenaged years, Gershwin was a working, endlessly curious musician whose professional passions took him across Manhattan into music publishing houses, nightclubs, theaters in Times Square and on Second Avenue, and parties for both the rich and the struggling. It was the professional regard of the city's African American pianists that gained him entry to Harlem's after-hours clubs and rent parties, and his admiration of their talent that enabled them to cross racial lines into the Park Avenue apartments of the rich and famous. Early twentieth-century New York possessed unmistakable cultural dynamism and social boundaries that were real but not irredeemably rigid. Gershwin embraced his native city's gifts, and from that pairing came the enduringly New York sound of his music.

## Notes

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