An American In Paris

SFF Basic Translation 5-2015

NOTES: The page nos. below correspond to the PDF double spreads (14 total).

The numbered musical notes on the PDF correspond to the respective pieces of

symphony on the CD (as listed on the final page). The portions of the translation

which appear in italic are part of the original text; they explain to the reader how the music reflects the story of Gershwin’s Paris experience.

p. 1

Brief Foreword from the Author:

George Gershwin said about his An American in Paris

That he wasn’t telling a definite story, but wished to return an atmospheric Impression of the City of the Seine.

Title page:

An American In Paris

A Symphonic Poem by George Gershwin

p. 2 (double spread)

It is still very early, but the train station swarms with travelers meeting or leaving one another. The air is full of hissing steam from the arriving and departing trains. The young American composer, George Gershwin, arrives in Paris on this beautiful spring morning of 1928. George has packed everything, because he hopes to stay a few weeks in Paris. Even a musical work for the New York Philharmonic is stashed in his trunk. Since the recent debut of his “Rhapsody In Blue”, a jazz-style symphony, he is famous outside of America. Never before has there been music like his!

George hopes to meet many friends and famous colleagues in Paris, attend concerts,

and, of course, observe the city which has inspired so many artists.

p. 3 (double spread)

“It’s true that one can only wander around in the French capital city without luggage.

“I should leave it in the hotel room!” George decides. He stashes it in the alley

of a Paris street. The morning sun shines on the busy passage of pedestrians, cargo carts,

horse buggies, street vendors, traffic police and automobiles.

*Hear the autohorns?*

*In the same way, at the beginning of his composition, the violins enter. We recognize the pedestrians that quickly fill the sidewalks in the brash playing of xylophones.*

Our musician enjoys being in Paris. It so different than his hometown of New York.

*Suddenly the strings play with gusto, then even louder. It is called “crescendo.”*

Watch out, George!

“Rummm!” Too bad. George dashes into the street. The baker’s apprentice notices too late.

*They both bump into each other together with a drumbeat and the bass clarinets reveal the confusion.*

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Luckily nothing happens, and when both have recovered from the surprise, they continue

on their way.

Here is a sidewalk café with sights and sounds like a 1906 Spanish March of the grammaphone. *It sounds like “La Sorella” by Charles Borel-Clerc. Gerschwin expresses this melody with the trombone.*

Our musician sits in the pleasant café, orders a coffee, and has the feeling that many artists sit near him. On the boulevard outside, the traffic continues. While George enjoys his drink, his thoughts run freely and he feels peaceful. *We hear the flutes and strings play a short interlude.*

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Suddenly George has an idea! He jumps up, pays, and rushes off. He wants to visit

Montmarte, the highest hill in Paris. “From there, one must get the best view of the city,” George thinks, and rushes up the many stairs. *His quick steps resound with the strings and brass instruments.*

At the top, he must catch his breath. *The horns sound.* The noises of the city sound gentle, and George feels free and easy, high over Paris.

But…Oh la la…Who is this? And whose pretty eyes look at him? Is he falling in love?

*The oboe and English horn play a soft stanza.*

“Hello, mademoiselle,” George says shyly. Sadly he forgets how to speak any French.

And the girl doesn’t speak any English. She simply takes him by the hand and they stroll off together…

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…to a market on Montmarte, on a pretty square surrounded houses, cafes and trees.

A circle with colorful square, a swing set, and an old carousel. Here one meets street artists, musicians and many birds. Parents and their children, couples in love…

Everyone can have a little fun for a while and forget their daily cares.

*In the trombones and other brass we hear the bustle in the Square. The cymbals and also the xylophone play vigorously. It sounds like the old organ on the carousel.*

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The two soon feel giddy from riding the carousel, eating sweets, and other attractions.

They stroll further toward the Seine. Berlin has the Spree and London has the Thames.

But Paris has the Seine where so many lovers stroll.

The two slow their stride, the music quiets down, and they go through a park holding hands. It is the Tuileries Garden near the Seine. Once it was a royal garden with many sculptures, trees, fountains and pools where children sail little boats. It’s the perfect place to relax on a park bench. And the birds twitter *like flutes and string instruments.*

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The two friends stroll further along the banks of the Seine, lingering on the jetty.

*Together with snare drums, which are played with brushes, and the woodblocks, the pace slows down.* That’s exactly what they do too. *They are escorted by the trumpets and the saxophones.*

Above on the jetty are the famous bookstalls and flower stands. Actually they are only wooden boxes attached like huge birds nests to the jetty. Here one can browse through books, postcards, artprints and purchase some too, of course. *The Blues carry this part of the symphony. Blues is the foundation of all jazz. Its beginning goes back to the African slaves who expressed it in their songs. The music sounds very mellow but also has longing, yearning.* Perhaps George feels a bit sad because he can’t stay in Paris forever and perhaps he feels a bit homesick for New York?

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The two arrive at Pont Neuf, the oldest bridge in Paris. It is the Bridge of Love, famous in so many legends. A florist keeps her small stand on one corner. George buys a beautiful bouquet and gives it to the smiling girl. With beguiling eyes, she says a few lovely words which George can’t understand…but they sound like music to him, a beautiful melody. *In this spot, the Blues have a very sad tone and the strings sound very dreamlike.*  The two watch the boats pass below.

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Suddenly the lovers disturb an expected visitor. It is a small dog that George runs after and tries to grab. *One hears it in the horns*, like a scamper, running loose. and jumping up with joy on the girl.

“Oh!” she shrieks.

Our composer is amused. He pets the little dog and tries to calm the girl. The violins play

calmly, peacefully.

But she is still upset and doesn’t forgive easily. So often in life an argument starts from the smallest things. They quarrel loudly in English and French, *which one can hear in the horns and the snare drums.* In the end, the girl throws the bouquet with a flourish into the Seine and walks off. When she throws the flowers in the river, the other two feel puzzled and sad as they watch the beautiful bouquet float away. *The Blues play here again and sink with slow easy violins, like the bouquet floating in the Seine.*

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But luckily, their mood doesn’t last. “Life is too short to ruin a beautiful day with trouble” our musician believes. Soon, George and his new friend, the little dog, stroll happily again toward the Eiffel Tower, the highlight of Paris. From the top, one definitely has the best view of the city.

*At this point in his symphony, Gerschwin introduces Ragtime. Like the Blues, it forms the beginnings of jazz. We hear the Ragtime, lively and full of rhythm, in a Charleston variation. The Charleston is a favorite dance of the era.* *Trumpets, trombones, and all the horns trill and the clarinet laughs too.*

p. 12 (Eiffel Tower pullout)

*The rhythms grow faster and faster, supported by the violins, which now play glissando,*

*providing more melody*, until they finally arrive at the Eiffel Tower. *The Ragtime grows louder and more energetic*. They hurry up the steps, higher and higher. How many steps? George must help the dog up the last step, *and she is accompanied by the kettledrum. The violins play fast, brief notes. The rhythm grows heavier. The flutes accompany the pair up the final difficult steps …where*

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…there awaits the grand view of the entire city. The setting sun gives the city a golden shimmer. *It is also a highpoint in the music. The whole orchestra plays a Blues style again, but even louder and with more energy. The trumpets play clearly and the cymbals enter in.*

George and his little friend enjoy the outstanding view and and feel the emotion**.** *A solo violin plays softly and the tuba tones as slowly and as tenderly as possible, so as not to disturb a soul.*

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Our composer will easily turn all of these experiences into his beloved compositions. Now he must hurry to get back to his hotel; he retraces his steps across through the city and over the boulevards always followed by...you know who! George is in such a hurry that he never notices the traffic. Does he think there is a motorist behind him?

At the hotel, it is time to say goodbye to his little friend. They hope to meet again someday soon. In his room George works undisturbed until late at night, bringing all of the notes that remain in his memory to paper. In his mind, he is already back in New York, in Carnegie Hall, the famous music venue…as the New York Philharmonic plays his newest composition before a grand Audience…*An American In Paris.*

ON THE CD:

1. Strolling on the Boulevard
2. In the Streetcafe
3. At Montmartre
4. At the Market
5. In the Park
6. On the Banks of the Seine
7. On the Bridge of Love
8. Flowers in the Seine
9. A New Friend
10. The Eiffel Tower
11. View Over Paris
12. Back to the Hotel
13. Opening at Carnegie Hall