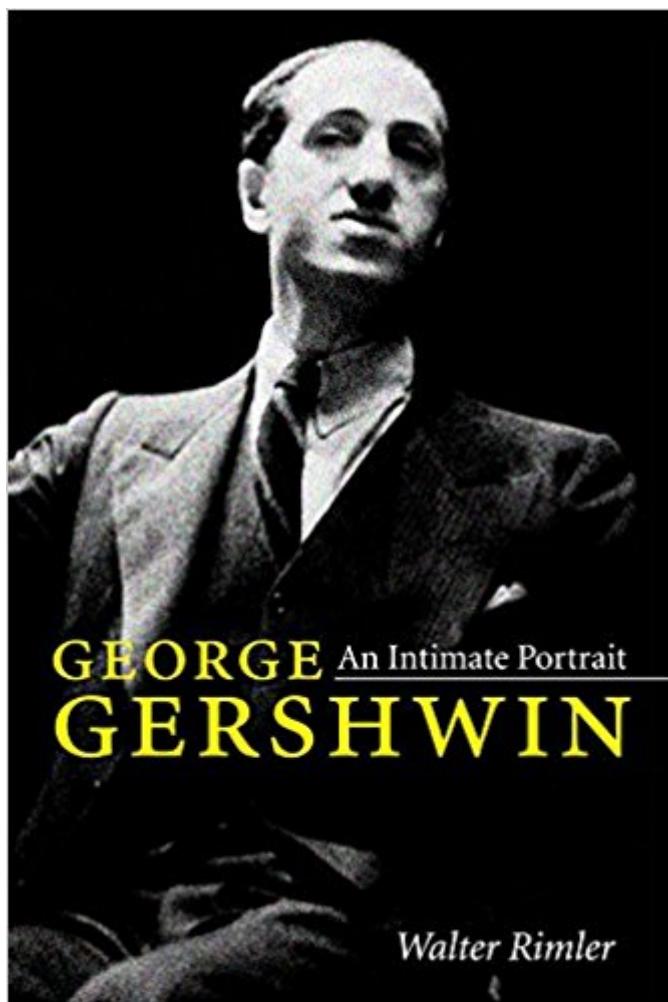


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# George Gershwin: An Intimate Portrait (Music In American Life)



## Synopsis

George Gershwin lived with purpose and gusto, but with melancholy as well, for he was unable to make a place for himself--no family of his own and no real home in music. He and his siblings received little love from their mother and no direction from their father. Older brother and lyricist Ira managed to create a home when he married Leonore Strunsky, a hard-edged woman who lived for wealth and status. The closest George came to domesticity was through his longtime relationship with Kay Swift. She was his lover, musical confidante, and fellow composer. But she remained married to another man while he went endlessly from woman to woman. Only in the final hours of his life, when they were separated by a continent, did he realize how much he needed her. Fatally ill, unprotected by (and perhaps estranged from) Ira, he was exiled by Leonore from the house she and the brothers shared, and he died horribly and alone at the age of thirty-eight. Nor was Gershwin able to find a satisfying musical harbor. For years his songwriting genius could be expressed only in the ephemeral world of show business, as his brilliance as a composer of large-scale works went unrecognized by highbrow music critics. When he resolved this quandary with his opera *Porgy and Bess*, the critics were unable to understand or validate it. Decades would pass before this, his most ambitious composition, was universally regarded as one of music's lasting treasures and before his stature as a great composer became secure. In *George Gershwin: An Intimate Portrait*, Walter Rimpler makes use of fresh sources, including newly discovered letters by Kay Swift as well as correspondence between and interviews with intimates of Ira and Leonore Gershwin. It is written with spirited prose and contains more than two dozen photographs.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"A dynamic, fast-paced biography of George Gershwin that has the verve and staccato drive of a book the composer himself might have written. Rimler gives us a fuller, more complex, more humorous, and more vulnerable picture of Gershwin than has yet appeared in print."--Philip Furia, coauthor of *The Poets of Tin Pan Alley: A History of America's Great Lyricists* "A hugely enjoyable read, this neat, polished package is a skillful condensation of the vast literature on Gershwin but also offers a new critical angle on the composer's achievement."--Stephen Banfield, author of *Jerome Kern* "An engrossing, well-written look at Gershwin, the composer and the man, with emphasis on the man."--Choice "Engagingly written, lavishly illustrated. . . . With this volume, we get a focused portrait of George Gershwin, a genius plagued by self-doubt and a wandering eye."--Opera News

The dramatic story of a legendary American composer

This book is a tightly written and excellent new short biography which uses the correspondence of Gershwin and Kay Swift to bring new insights to a crowded biographical subject. If you have read other works of the life of Mr. Gershwin, you still will learn some new details about his busy and incredibly musically inspired life. Like many great writers of music, it is like he was born to compose and perform. The newly emerged details regarding his last illness and untimely death are almost heart wrenching. If you want to learn about George Gershwin the man, this is a very fine biography to start your walk with George Gershwin.

This is an efficiently written biography that includes all the interesting details while excluding the minutia that biographies are so often prone to. Gershwin was a fascinating, if not tragic giant in the American musical fabric. Yet he didn't seem to understand the viability of his contribution. Sad. However, he led an exciting and productive life with enormous financial rewards. I wish I could've known him.

Rimler provides welcome detail on areas of Gershwin's life that have been glossed over by previous biographers, notably Gershwin's musical and romantic relationship with Kay Swift, and his harrowing final days. Also in contrast to earlier hagiographers, Rimler imbues Gershwin with an

undercurrent of melancholy that rings true. Unfortunately, Rimler lacks the requisite authority of a reliable biographer. Citations are absent for many of his more arresting details, and worse, the book is riddled with what appears to be pure speculation. Still, it's a good read.

The best biography I read. Not hagiographic, free, independent of the Gershwin trustees. A must.

I have long been convinced as a college professor, a choral director and a student of American music that George Gershwin ranks among the greatest if not THE greatest American composer. Mr. Rimler's book is a wonderful synthesis of his life and works and it was an unabated joy to read. I would recommend it to anyone who knows and loves Gershwin as I do or else wants to be introduced to this remarkable man. Thanks, Mr. Rimler for a wonderful read.

If you are a Gershwin fan or enjoy biographies it's an interesting book. I liked it.

The last few chapters of this book are really touching and well-written. There is much that is left out in terms of George's death but the author points to some possibilities. It left me wanting to know more about the cast of characters and what kind of (dysfunctional) relationships must have been going on for George's health to be so easily cast aside as emotional not physical. And, once some of these ideas were stoked by this book, it left me wishing the author could have been better at alluding to these strange dynamics throughout the book. I guess that's the real challenge with biography, you can't get too creative... and out of respect for the Gershwins... But, what a tragedy to lose George at such a young age!

A marvelous way to get to know George Gershwin.

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