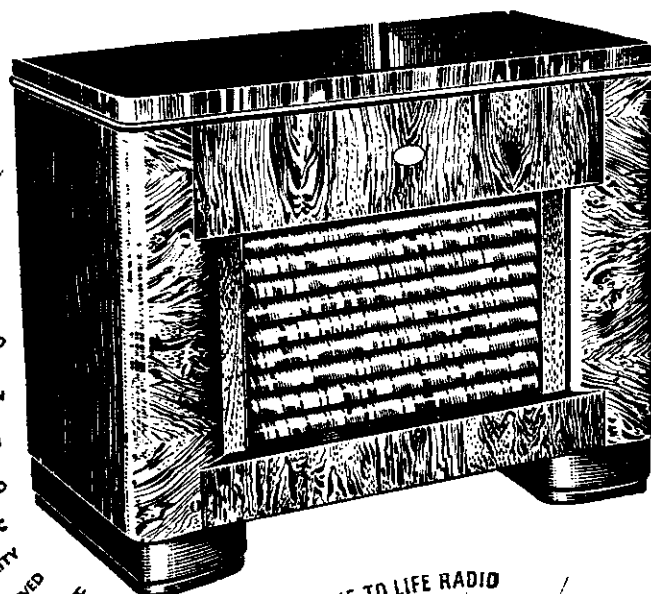




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Gershwin Wrote For Him

TODD DUNCAN, the eminent Negro baritone who is now touring New Zealand, has had an influence in the field of American music greater than that usually exercised by an operatic singer. A particular instance of this was his friendship with the late George Gershwin whom he first met some time before the production of Gershwin's Negro folk opera *Porgy and Bess*.

"Gershwin was a wonderfully simple fellow," he told *The Listener*, "and his death at the age of 38 was a serious loss to American music. He had all America at his feet, for he wrote in a musical idiom that was all his own, yet was at the same time wholly American. That idiom has not since been recaptured."

For the last few years of his life, however, Gershwin was an exceedingly unhappy man, Mr. Duncan went on. Hollywood wanted him, and he went—at a fabulous fee, for he simply named his own price. But he was then past the stage at which he could grind out song to order, and he could not cope with the demand for a set quota of production. He was the kind of man who played hard and worked hard, and if he was moved to write he would work hour after hour—night or day—until the task was done or the idea had faded.

"Is it true that you were the inspiration for 'Porgy'?"

"Well, this at least is the story. Gershwin had almost finished *Porgy and Bess* when he met me. He then had in mind what he needed to complete the opera—about five more pages of music. But instead he went to work again and wrote 38 consecutive pages for me to sing in the part of Porgy—and, of course, the opera became far too long. Argument about the cutting went on for days. Gershwin was most emphatic. 'This Porgy is going to live. You can cut what you like, but you can't touch a line of that part.'"

"I can remember Gershwin and the directors pacing up and down all night in the Boston Commons, opposite the Opera House. Alexander Smallens and Rouben Mamoulian were arguing desperately, but Gershwin was adamant. When the matter was referred to me I told Gershwin that if he wanted *Porgy* to live, and me to live too, the part would have to be cut. Eventually I sang about 17 pages. *Porgy and Bess* was a tremendous success. It could still be running. Gershwin, you know, wanted me to stay in opera. He had an ambition to write a comic opera with me as leading soloist, but I was not willing and the work was never written."

Another musician whom Mr. Duncan classes among the great is Artur Rodzinski, formerly conductor of the New York Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra, under whom he has sung as a soloist. Rodzinski was a man who would let no-one dictate to him, he said, and when he went over from New York to take charge of the Chicago Symphony he became embroiled in a controversy with the Board of Management, and stayed only one year there.

(continued on next page)