Rhapsody in Blue

GEORGE GERSHWIN®
Arranged by GORDON GOODWIN

INSTRUMENTATION

Conductor
1st Eb Alto Saxophone (Piccolo)
2nd Eb Alto Saxophone (Clarinet, Flute)
1st Bb Tenor Saxophone
2nd Bb Tenor Saxophone
Eb Baritone Saxophone (Bass Clarinet)
1st Bb Trumpet
2nd Bb Trumpet
3rd Bb Trumpet
4th Bb Trumpet
1st Trombone
2nd Trombone
3rd Trombone
Bass Trombone
Guitar Chords
Guitar
Piano
Bass
Drums
Auxiliary Percussion
(Vibraphone, Xylophone, Congas, Triangle, Timpani)
NOTES TO THE CONDUCTOR

It was with great respect that I took a shot at arranging one of the great pieces in American music. I did not want to distort George Gershwin's intent with any wacky concepts, yet I wanted to adapt his melodies to jazz ensemble in somewhat of a unique way.

Your band will need a good grasp of jazz and classical concepts to play this arrangement. Of course there’s no getting around the fact that you need a good clarinet player to play this piece, right? I guess the opening solo would kinda work on a soprano sax (except for that first low G) if you had to go there, but I don’t think that’s anybody's first preference. This piece also benefits greatly from having a percussionist that can play mallets and timpani. If your regular percussionist does not play those instruments, maybe you can borrow one from a concert band or orchestra.

The introduction is a mélange of some of the thematic fragments Gershwin used building to the familiar clarinet solo gliss. The tempo in the intro (measures 1–28) can be very fluid just like the orchestral version. When you get to measure 29, lock into a medium Basie swing feel, so play it nice and easy — not too loud, and not too fast. The tempo picks up at measure 44, where the horns play the solo piano part taken from the original Gershwin — make sure to keep those triplets nice and tight.

A fast swing tempo kicks in at measure 54, and the saxes get a workout, once again playing the original solo piano lick; it's tough, but don't blame me, I just arranged it! Saxes should practice 56-63 slowly and work it up to speed.

Your best soloists crank it up at measure 96, and I know the chart is in the key of A, but be brave, hang in there — the key of C is right around the corner at measure 112. After the solo(s), the chart transitions to one of the more beautiful melodies ever written, in my opinion. The trombone solo at 149 should be played with a warm tone, and I suggest some nice vibrato. Check out Tommy Dorsey for the definitive example of that lyrical, melodic style. Saxes, play nice and soft behind the soloist and give the bone player a nice cushion of support.

Things start to build at 167, where the lead trumpet gets a shot at this great melody. Don't worry about playing too loud, but save some air for the big climax at measure 176. What a thrilling moment this will be—go for it!

Saxes, be sure to lock in the rhythm at measure 180—listen to the hi-hat for the “time”. The final statement at measure 188 should be full out—it’s time to bring this medley home. At measure 204, the medley ends very much like Gershwin’s original, so that means straight eighths with an orchestral feel and sound. And when you hit that last chord, check out your audience as it rises up in tribute to one of the more enduring pieces of music ever written: George Gershwin’s Rhapsody in Blue.

Please enjoy!

—Gordon Goodwin

Gordon Goodwin is a three-time Emmy Award winner and GRAMMY® winner. His band’s debut album Swingin’ for the Fences (Silverline Records) received two GRAMMY® nominations and is the best-selling jazz item in the DVD® Audio 5.1 surround-sound format.
Conductor
Fastet (f = 112)

Alto 1
Alto 2
Tenor 1
Tenor 2
Bass

Tpt. 1
Tpt. 2
Tpt. 3

Tbn. 1
Tbn. 2
Tbn. 3

Bari Sax

Aux. Perc.

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