

**george gershwin's
blue monday blues**

score by **ferde grofé**
arranged by **kevin tam**

CONCERT BAND

GEORGE GERSHWIN



1898 - 1937



Blue Monday Blues

From Blue Monday (135th Street)

Of all of George Gershwin's major works, one of the least well known today is his one-act opera, Blue Monday. Written for the variety/revue production of George White's Scandals of 1922, it was one of the very first examples of Afro-American opera in a popular setting. The composition was a new challenge for Gershwin as well, his previous efforts having largely been songs and tunes written for musical theater.

Blue Monday can be looked upon through the prism of history as having a direct link or a bridge to the Rhapsody in Blue (1924) and to his monumental Porgy and Bess (1935), which most certainly drew upon some of the sentiments and settings of the earlier work, via a talent greatly matured through more than ten years of intervening experience and effort. Consider the emerging style of George Gershwin which burst forth in breakaway success at the premiere of the Rhapsody in Blue. His next symphonic work following Blue Monday, the Rhapsody was steeped in an adolescent version of symphonic jazz which had its genesis in the ragtime (in the classic sense) and blues which Gershwin first explored fully in the Blue Monday.

Ira Gershwin himself would later confirm this connection in a letter to a newspaper editor, "If Rhapsody in Blue owes anything to anything it is '135th Street', a one-act blues opera my brother wrote in 1922. It so impressed Paul Whiteman that two years later he asked my brother to write a piece for what turned out to be the (you'll pardon the expression) historic concert at Aeolian Hall, Feb. 12th, 1924." In an essay for the Merle Armitage book published to commemorate George Gershwin following his passing, Whiteman does not mention the Blue Monday by name but speaks to the style and feeling of Gershwin's composition which led him to commission the Rhapsody in Blue: "I felt that George could write the thing I needed. Something that would show that jazz had progressed. Something that would illustrate that it was a great deal more than savage rhythm from the jungle."

On his first impression of the Blue Monday, Ferde Grofé writes in an excerpt from the Armitage book: "I encountered George often at Buddy DeSylva's apartment, and there I first heard the former's one-act Negro opera, 135th Street or Blue Monday. It was played by the creator, and hummed by DeSylva. Even with such a crude performance, the work struck me as highly original and representing a new departure for American music."

The work never did enjoy the acclaim or success of his other creations. In Gershwin's own lifetime, the Blue Monday was only performed live on two occasions: the 1922 George White Scandals and the Carnegie Hall revival commissioned by Paul Whiteman in 1925 with a new score arranged by Ferde Grofé. The reasons for this lackluster response were somewhat unclear and remain so. Perhaps the length of the work did not fit the needs of large context opera companies. Unlike the suite 'Cattfish Row' from Porgy and Bess, no orchestral setting was ever arranged of Blue Monday to allow its presentation in other settings and so still today, exposure to audiences and the public remains low.

A further reason may be that many professional critics, as is their wont to do, opined at the time with contradictory declaratives that the tragic ending was too heavy and depressed the audience, it was incompatible in the context of the original Scandal's production, the libretto lacking, the music (with no contemporary context) was somehow immature or even "groping". Without question modern day critics, whom like their early counterparts seldom find solace in their abundance of humility, have been far kinder and more benevolent to the score. These lofty opinions aside, there were indeed certain aspects of the original which would not have sit well with today's audiences – specifically the vernacular of the libretto, and the use of black face in the George White Scandals production, something that would fall out of favor even with contemporary audiences shortly after Gershwin laid pencil to paper. Whiteman did not revisit this technique and no other revival has since.

In the productions staged since Gershwin's passing, alterations were made to address these concerns. Changes in the libretto emerged – most strikingly the dropping of racial terms now viewed as nothing short of epithetic. Other changes further softened the language of the original; with the most dramatic revisions occurring in the Prelude. The lyric referring to the locale of "Mike's colored saloon" became "Mike's Harlem Saloon", the reference to the Opera as a "colored tragedy" changed to a "lover's tragedy", the comparison to the "white man's opera" altered to the "grand opera". The character of Cokey Lou was renamed Sweet Pea as well, dropping the drug use reference along with some alterations in stage directions which diluted the street qualities of this character.

Most of these revisions are understandable in the context of shifting sensibilities but it could be argued that the renaming of characters and alteration of stage actions dulled the edge of social inequality that DeSylva and Gershwin intended for the work. Indeed, consider that the character of Cokey Lou provides a composite parallel to those of Jasbo Brown and the drug-using Sportin' Life in Porgy & Bess. An alteration of either of these characters would undoubtedly do much harm to the impact of both setting and story, and in the context of a much shorter 20-minute opera changes such as these, even minor, have a magnified impact on the message conveyed to the audience.

Through these changes and despite past critics, the course of history has proved out that the Blue Monday remains today a vivid and enduring example of a composer's emerging talent - a grand opera hinting at grand ideas yet to be.

Within the English language there are few words that have been crafted which can rise to a collective level adequate to convey the profound loss felt upon George Gershwin's passing, and still felt today by those who find pause to reflect upon what might else have been, had he lived beyond his 38 years of age. Ferde Grofé may have come closest to achieving success in closing his commemorative essay:

"The news of George's death came as a dreadful shock to me, and I received it with a sense of irreparable loss, for I was deprived of a dear friend, and America of a unique and grandly gifted composer. It is not over-estimating his music to say that it expressed something distinctly new, something typically of our land and people, and employed an unmistakable American idiom in melody, rhythm, and harmonization. George Gershwin left an indelible impression on our native music, and the proof is, that he had many imitators, but none who could successfully duplicate his genius.

...I set down these lines, therefore, as a tribute of love and thankfulness, and in the full realization that I may never again meet the like of George Gershwin, a rare and refined spirit, an innovator in American Music, and one who has left upon it a lasting imprint of new ideas voiced with bold originality."

BACKGROUND

The bound manuscript for the Ferde Grofé score of George Gershwin's Blue Monday (135th Street) is housed at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Dorothy and Lewis B. Cullman Center at the Lincoln Center annex of the New York Public Library. During a short layover trip to New York I stopped by and requested to look at the microfilm of the score and immediately was struck by the importance of this version of George Gershwin's Blue Monday. Not only was the work historical for George Gershwin, but it marked a special point in the career for Ferde Grofé as well – both in context of fame and his arranging/composition style as well.

The orchestration revealed itself to be layered with examples of music textures and harmonies not present in the later Bassman score. The arrangement of George Bassman is a thorough rethinking of the scoring for the Blue Monday and so the differences between each arranger's style and thought process is dramatic. Consider that Ferde Grofé was at the time Paul Whiteman's arranger, working with a very unique instrumentation that was more common not only to that era but the specific abilities of Whiteman's four lone woodwind players. Years later, George Bassman would be working with a more modern concept of the small orchestra, and more modern concepts of instrumentation and voicing.

THIS ARRANGEMENT

In approaching this work, there was more than a bit of trepidation at even attempting something rhyming with the name George Gershwin. As I delved into the Grofé score though, the worry faded and was replaced by what I can only describe within the context of metaphor. Exploring the score was like reading a good book, a very good book, wanting to get as quickly as possible to the next page, and the feeling of despair as you see the number of unread pages dwindling down to a zero. It is not often one can achieve this even with a good book.

Clearly, the intent of this paraphrasing of the title theme of Blue Monday was to be faithful to the Ferde Grofé score. Grofé's arranging for Whiteman's orchestra was a unique marrying of talent and instrumentation (Grofé would score to the musical abilities of Whiteman's woodwind players – sometimes saddling these four overworked gentlemen with changes to every instrument he knew that they were proficient on). It was not uncommon in some pieces for the first Alto sax player to have up to eight or more instrument changes. This meant that he scored many of these works very widely, with an intuitive style that would translate well, adapting his arrangements as he often later did to a large orchestra, or in some cases, even to a Concert Band setting.

From the beginning, there was definitely a 'do no harm' approach to paraphrasing this work. Certain sections including the oratorio at the end of the Prelude would not have carried over well into the concert band setting and of course other songs were not relative to the intent of featuring the title song in a stand-alone setting. In making this adaptation the goal was to take as light a touch as possible, preserving the content and intent and injecting no 'editorial opinion' into the arrangement. The resulting material was thusly pared down to approximately 9 minutes from the original 20.

One of the challenges in this adaptation was that several pages were missing from the 1925 score in the New York Public Library archives, requiring a reconstruction effort in those sections. In the process of adapting the score, one or two very short phrases were influenced by what George Bassman later reimagined – the clarinet rhythm and hand-off in bars 15-18 were simplified and rather than fitting all of this into two bars as a cadenza-like run, the line here has been expanded into four bars and made more easily playable. Additionally the descending eight notes were added leading into the first iteration of the Blue Monday in bar 62. Originally there were two pianos scored but these parts have been combined for a single player.

Also important to note, is the significant use of the Alto Clarinet in the original score. This voice was featured prominently by Grofé and here too, is retained as an important part which is doubled or cued as needed. In fact, bars 205 through 208 were originally a two-bar clarinet solo which handed off to an Alto Clarinet solo with other instruments entering and holding on the half note the last two beats of bar 208. With a strong Alto Clarinet player, this solo section could be restored if desired.

Besides standard Straight, Hat, and Wha-Wha mute markings, several vintage mute markings have been retained as well. In the trumpet duet under the vocal line at bar 97, Grofé indicated 'Special Jazz Mute' which indicates he was looking for a distinctive sound here. A 'Kazoo mute' is noted in bar 128-130 for the trumpets and trombones. This type of mute is exactly what it sounds like – a straight mute fitted with a kazoo and producing a distinctive buzzing sound. Humes & Berg still manufacture this type of mute under their "Buzz-wow" brand. In bar 170, a 'bottle mute' is indicated for trumpet 3 which was literally a glass bottle inserted in the bell. This technique actually was a precursor to the development of today's standard straight mute. Lastly, in bar 176 a megaphone is noted for trumpet player 3. This device is similar to a cheerleader's type megaphone and results in a large velvety tone. The effect from improvising a megaphone here is probably worth the effort.

-Kevin R. Tam
March 11, 2012

Suggested reading:

*Blue Monday, by George Gershwin, arranged by Ferde Grofé. New York Public Library Call # MN *ZZ-34485 (microform)/ ZB-3260 (original)*

The Gershwin Style: new looks at the music of George Gershwin, By Wayne Joseph Schneider

George Gershwin, edited by Merle Armitage

The Original Paul Whiteman Score
Blue Monday Blues

From Blue Monday (135th Street)

George Gershwin
Lyrics by George De Sylva
Score by Ferde Grofe
Arranged by Kevin R. Tam

Moderato

Play cues (1 player per part) in absence of specified instrumentation, or doubling as directed.

Flute 1 & 2 *mf*

Flute 3 *mf*

Clarinet in B \flat 1 & 2 *mf*

Clarinet in B \flat 3 *mf*

Alto Clarinet *mf*

Bass Clarinet *mf* *Soli*

Bassoon 1 & 2 *mf* *Soli*

Alto Sax 1 & 2 *mf*

Alto Sax *mf*

Tenor Sax *mf*

Baritone Sax *mf*

Trombone 1 & 2 *mf*

Trombone 3 *mf*

Tuba *mf*

Double Bass *mf*

Timpani *f* *Solo* *pizz.* *tr*

Banjo *mf* *Banjo*

Piano

f *Solo* *p* *Hat* *p* *Hat* *p*

Blue Monday Blues - Conductor's Score

6

Picc. *mf*

Fl. 1 & 2 *mf*

Fl. 3 *mf*

Ob. 1 & 2 *mf*

E. Hn. *mf*

B♭ Cl. 1 & 2 Solo *f*

A. Cl. *p*

B. Cl. *p*

Bsn. 1 & 2 *p*

T. Sx. *p*

B. Sx. *mf* *p*

Tbn. 1 & 2 *p*

Tbn. 3 *p*

Timp. *mf* Banjo *tr*

Bjo. *mf* *tr*

Pno. *f* *p*

11

Fl. 1 & 2

Fl. 3

B♭ Cl. 1 & 2

A. Cl.

B. Cl.

Bsn. 1 & 2

T. Sax.

B. Sax.

B♭ Tpt. 1 & 2

B♭ Tpt. 3

Pno.

mf

mf

mf

Mute (straight)

3 3 3 3

3 3 3 3

3 3 3 3

3 3 3 3

3 3 3 3

3 3 3 3

Blue Monday Blues - Conductor's Score

15 *accel.* *accel.*

Fl. 1 & 2

Fl. 3

B♭ Cl. 1 & 2 *Solo* *ff* 3 3 3 3 *tr*

A. Cl.

B. Cl.

Bsn. 1 & 2

C. Bn. *fp* *fz* *fp* *fz*

A. Sx. 1 & 2

A. Sx.

T. Sx.

B. Sx.

B♭ Tpt. 1 & 2 *Mute (straight)* *fp* *fz* *fp* *fz* *Open*

B♭ Tpt. 3 *fp* *fz* *fp* *fz* *Open*

Tbn. 1 & 2 *fp* *fz* *fp* *fz* *Open*

Tbn. 3 *fp* *fz* *fp* *fz* *Open*

Tuba *fp* *fz* *fp* *fz*

Timp. *tr* *tr*

Bjo. *p* *fz* *p* *fz*

Pno.

19 sub. **Faster**

This page of the conductor's score for "Blue Monday Blues" features 20 staves of music. The score is marked "sub. Faster" and includes the following parts:

- Picc.**: Piccolo, starting with a *ff* dynamic.
- Fl. 1 & 2**, **Fl. 3**, **Ob. 1 & 2**: Flutes and Oboes, all marked *ff*.
- E. Hn.**: English Horn, marked *ff*.
- Bb Cl. 1 & 2**, **Bb Cl. 3**, **A. Cl.**, **B. Cl.**: Clarinets, all marked *ff*.
- Bsn. 1 & 2**: Bassoon, marked *ff*.
- A. Sax. 1 & 2**, **A. Sax.**, **T. Sax.**, **B. Sax.**: Saxophones, all marked *ff*.
- Hn. 1 & 2**, **Hn. 3 & 4**: Horns, marked *ff*.
- Bb Tpt. 1 & 2**, **Bb Tpt. 3**: Trumpets, marked *ff*.
- Tbn. 1 & 2**, **Tbn. 3**: Trombones, marked *ff*.
- Euph.**: Euphonium, marked *ff*.
- Tuba**: Tuba, marked *ff*.
- Timp.**: Timpani, marked *tr* (trill).
- Bjo.**: Bongos, marked *ff*.
- Pno.**: Piano, marked *ff*.

The score is written in a key signature of two sharps (D major) and a common time signature. The music is characterized by a driving, rhythmic feel, consistent with the "Faster" marking. The woodwinds and brass sections play complex, syncopated patterns, while the strings provide a steady, rhythmic accompaniment.

Blue Monday Blues - Conductor's Score

6

L'istesso Tempo

24

This page of the conductor's score for "Blue Monday Blues" includes the following parts and markings:

- Picc.**: Piccolo part, starting at measure 24.
- Fl. 1 & 2**, **Fl. 3**, **Ob. 1 & 2**, **E. Hn.**, **B. Cl. 1 & 2**, **B. Cl. 3**, **A. Cl.**, **B. Cl.**: Woodwind parts with various articulations and dynamics.
- Bsn. 1 & 2**: Bassoon part with a **Solo** marking and **mp** dynamic.
- A. Sx. 1 & 2**, **A. Sx.**, **T. Sx.**, **B. Sx.**: Saxophone parts, with **Soli** and **mp** markings for the Baritone Saxophone.
- Hn. 1 & 2**, **Hn. 3 & 4**: Horn parts.
- B. Tpt. 1 & 2**, **B. Tpt. 3**: Trumpet parts.
- Tbn. 1 & 2**, **Tbn. 3**: Trombone parts.
- Euph.**: Euphonium part.
- Tuba**: Tuba part.
- Timp.**: Timpani part with **tr** (trill) markings.
- Bjo.**: Bongos part.
- Pno.**: Piano part.

Blue Monday Blues - Conductor's Score

This conductor's score page, numbered 8, contains the musical notation for measures 34 through 39 of the piece "Blue Monday Blues". The score is arranged in a standard orchestral layout with the following parts:

- Flutes:** Fl. 1 & 2, Fl. 3. Measures 34-35 feature a melodic line with triplets and slurs. Measure 36 has rests. Measures 37-38 continue the melodic line. Measure 39 has rests.
- Euphonium:** E. Hn. Part with a steady eighth-note accompaniment.
- Clarinets:** Bb Cl. 1 & 2, Bb Cl. 3, A. Cl., B. Cl. Bb Cl. 1 & 2 and Bb Cl. 3 play a triplet accompaniment starting in measure 36. A. Cl. and B. Cl. play a steady eighth-note accompaniment.
- Bassoon:** Bsn. 1 & 2 Part with a steady eighth-note accompaniment.
- Saxophones:** A. Sax. 1 & 2, A. Sax., T. Sax. A. Sax. 1 & 2 and A. Sax. play a triplet accompaniment starting in measure 36. T. Sax. plays a steady eighth-note accompaniment.
- Horns:** Hn. 1 & 2, Hn. 3 & 4. Hn. 1 & 2 play a steady eighth-note accompaniment. Hn. 3 & 4 play a melodic line with slurs.
- Trumpets:** Bb Tpt. 1 & 2, Bb Tpt. 3. Bb Tpt. 1 & 2 play a melodic line with slurs. Bb Tpt. 3 plays a steady eighth-note accompaniment.
- Trombones:** Tbn. 1 & 2, Tbn. 3, Tuba. Tbn. 1 & 2 and Tbn. 3 play a steady eighth-note accompaniment. Tuba plays a steady eighth-note accompaniment.
- Percussion:** Perc., Bjo. Perc. plays a steady eighth-note accompaniment. Bjo. plays a steady eighth-note accompaniment.
- Piano:** Pno. Part with a melodic line and accompaniment. Measure 34 starts with a triplet. Measure 35 has rests. Measure 36 has rests. Measure 37 has rests. Measure 38 has rests. Measure 39 has rests.

The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, triplets, and dynamic markings like *f* (forte). The key signature is three flats (Bb, Eb, Ab).

Blue Monday Blues - Conductor's Score

46

Fl. 1 & 2

Fl. 3

Ob. 1 & 2

E. Hn.

B \flat Cl. 1 & 2

B \flat Cl. 3

A. Cl.

B. Cl.

Bsn. 1 & 2

A. Sx. 1 & 2

A. Sx.

T. Sx.

Hn. 1 & 2

Hn. 3 & 4

B \flat Tpt. 1 & 2

B \flat Tpt. 3

Tbn. 1 & 2

Tbn. 3

Euph.

Tuba

Perc.

Bjo.

Pno.

Alto Clarinet

bring out

8va if possible

33

63 "Blue Monday Blues"

Ob. 1 & 2

E. Hn. Solo *f*

B♭ Cl. 1 & 2 Bass Clarinet 2 Slap tongue *mf*

A. Cl.

B. Cl. Slap tongue *mf*

Bsn. 1 & 2

A. Sx. 1 & 2 English Horn *mf*

T. Sx. *mf*

B. Sx. *mf*

Tbn. 1 & 2

Tuba > *p*

Double Bass

D.B. pizz. *mf*

Perc. *mf*

B.D. *mf*

Bjo. *mf*

Pno. *mp*

Vox. Mike

Sam!

Blue Monday Blues - Conductor's Score

68

Fl. 1 & 2

Fl. 3

Ob. 1 & 2

E. Hn.

B \flat Cl. 1 & 2

Bsn. 1 & 2

A. Sx. 1 & 2

T. Sx.

B. Sx.

Hn. 1 & 2

Hn. 3 & 4

Tuba

D.B.

Perc.

Bjo.

Pno.

Vox.

Soli

mf

English Horn

Slap tongue

mp

Mute

mp

Mute

mp

arco

pizz.

Muffled S.D.

S na

Mike

Sam

enter SAM

Sam! Yes - Sir Boss I'm Com - in'

73

Picc.

Fl. 1 & 2

Fl. 3

Ob. 1 & 2

E. Hn.

B♭ Cl. 1 & 2

B♭ Cl. 3

Bsn. 1 & 2

Hn. 1 & 2

Hn. 3 & 4

B♭ Tpt. 1 & 2

B♭ Tpt. 3

Tbn. 1 & 2

Tbn. 3

Tuba

D.B.

Perc.

Bjo.

Pno.

Vox.

Mike

Sam Sweeps floor

Well get a move on you la - zy good for noth - in

Yes sir yes sir boss

WHA WHA WHA

WHA WHA WHA

Hat

Hat

Soli

Soli

p

p

3

3

3

3

80 a la Blues

78

Picc.

Fl. 1 & 2

Fl. 3

Ob. 1 & 2

English Horn

E. Hn.

B♭ Cl. 1 & 2

B♭ Cl. 3

A. Cl.

B. Cl.

Bsn. 1 & 2

B. Sx.

Hn. 1 & 2

Hn. 3 & 4

B♭ Tpt. 1 & 2

B♭ Tpt. 3

Tbn. 1 & 2

Tbn. 3

Tuba

D.B.

Bjo.

Pno.

Vox.

Sam

I must ad - mit al - tho' I don't like Sun - day, I have a fit when I go

83

Fl. 1 & 2

Fl. 3

B♭ Cl. 1 & 2

B. Cl.

Bsn. 1 & 2

B. Sx.

Hn. 1 & 2

Hn. 3 & 4

B♭ Tpt. 1 & 2

B♭ Tpt. 3

Tbn. 1 & 2

Tbn. 3

Tuba

D.B.

Bjo.

Pno.

Vox.

thru Blue Mon - day, Mon day's the one ___ day that my dice lose. They just re - fuse.

Soli Mute

Soli

mf

Soli Mute

mf