

# GERSHWIN

## An American in Paris



**An American In Paris by George Gershwin**  
Stage 5 & 6 Teaching Resource

Sydney Symphony Orchestra

# Acknowledgements

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*“Your life can be changed and enriched through all sorts of music; music from now, music from the past, music from the very distant past and music from as recently as yesterday.*

*Through intensive listening students become involved in one of the highest orders of thinking.*

*As a teacher, by bringing students to a concert and studying music in the classroom, you are providing your students with a special pathway to musical knowledge through direct experience of and contact with live music.”*

Richard Gill AO  
(1941 – 2018)

Conductor, notable educator, and advocate. Richard was the founding Artistic Director of Education at Sydney Symphony. He has inspired generations of musicians through his work and continues to inspire new generations through his legacy.

# Syllabus link

## NSW Curriculum

'*An American in Paris*' by George Gershwin covers a range of topics from the NSW syllabuses:

### Years 7-10 Elective:

Music for Large Ensembles

Art Music of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries

### Music 1 Preliminary and HSC:

Music for Large Ensembles

Music of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries

### Music 2 Preliminary:

Additional Topics: Music 1900 - 1945

### Music 2 HSC:

Additional Topics: Music 1900 - 1945

# Syllabus Outcomes

The activities included in this kit cover a range of outcomes across the NSW Music Syllabus stages, as mapped below:

## Stage 4 and Stage 5 - Elective Music

Activities	Syllabus Outcomes	Ideas for assessment
Activity 1: Performance and Musicology	4.1, 4.3, 4.9 5.1, 5.3, 5.9	Performs arrangement of An American in Paris in a small ensemble with dynamics and expressive techniques.
Activity 2: Listening and Musicology	4.7, 4.8, 4.9, 4.11 5.7, 5.8, 5.9, 5.11	Annotates and identifies the various motifs and musical features of An American Paris using the score, demonstrating score reading skills.
Activity 3: Composition and Musicology	4.4, 4.5, 4.6, 4.7, 4.9 5.4, 5.5, 5.6, 5.7, 5.9	Identifies the use of motivic development in the score of An American in Paris and uses motivic development in own composition.
Activity 4: Aural and Musicology	4.1, 4.3, 4.7, 4.8, 4.9 5.1, 5.3, 5.7, 5.8, 5.9	Listens and notates melody and bass line from the 'Blues Theme.'
Activity 5: Performance and Composition	4.2, 4.4, 4.5, 4.6 5.2, 5.4, 5.5, 5.6	Notates own soundscape composition using graphic notation.

## Stage 6 - Music 1

Activities	Syllabus Outcomes	Ideas for assessment
Activity 1: Performance and Musicology	P1, P2, P4, P5 H1, H2, H4, H5	Performs arrangement of An American in Paris in a small ensemble with dynamics and expressive techniques.
Activity 2: Listening and Musicology	P2, P4, P5, P6, P10 H2, H4, H5, H6, H10	Annotates and identifies the various motifs and musical features of An American Paris using the score, demonstrating score reading skills.
Activity 3: Composition and Musicology	P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P8 H2, H3, H4, H5, H6, H8	Identifies the use of motivic development in the score of An American in Paris and uses motivic development in own composition.
Activity 4: Aural and Musicology	P1, P2, P4, P6, P10 H1, H2, H4, H6, H10	Listens and notates melody and bass line from the 'Blues Theme.'
Activity 5: Performance and Composition	P1, P2, P3, P7, P8 H1, H2, H3, H7, H8	Notates own soundscape composition using graphic notation.

## Stage 6 - Music 2

Activities	Syllabus Outcomes	Ideas for assessment
Activity 1: Performance and Musicology	P1, P2, P5, P7 H1, H2, H5, H7	Performs arrangement of An American in Paris in a small ensemble with dynamics and expressive techniques.
Activity 2: Listening and Musicology	P2, P5, P6, P7, P11 H2, H5, H6, H7, H11	Annotates and identifies the various motifs and musical features of An American Paris using the score, demonstrating score reading skills.
Activity 3: Composition and Musicology	P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8 H2, H3, H4, H5, H6, H7, H8	Identifies the use of motivic development in the score of An American in Paris and uses motivic development in own composition.
Activity 4: Aural and Musicology	P1, P2, P5, P7, P11 H1, H2, H5, H7, H11	Listens and notates melody and bass line from the 'Blues Theme.'
Activity 5: Performance and Composition	P1, P2, P4, P8, P9 H1, H2, H4, H8, H9	Notates own soundscape composition using graphic notation.



## **Work:** *An American in Paris* by George Gershwin

### Composer Background

The story of George Gershwin is one of humble beginnings, but soon saw the son of Russian Jewish Immigrants become one of America's most prolific composers. Born in 1898, Gershwin, was born to parents who fled Russia and moved to New York, due to increasing antisemitic sentiments and the threat of enforced military service. At the age of 10, Gershwin took a keen interest in playing an upright piano that was bought for his brother and his natural talent for music became apparent. At the age of 15, Gershwin left school to become a 'song plugger,' a performer of sheet music in publishing stores, on Tin Pan Alley. After working as an accompanist and writing a range of songs, Gershwin composed his first orchestral work, *Rhapsody in Blue*, in 1924 which became his most famous composition, defining his signature style by seamlessly blending jazz and classical aesthetics together. Gershwin then spent a brief period in Paris, where he applied to study composition with Nadia Boulanger and piano under Maurice Ravel. He was rejected by both, with Ravel writing: "Why become a second-rate Ravel when you're already a first-rate Gershwin?" After being commissioned to write movie scores in Hollywood, he moved to the area, with his arrival being shortly followed by renowned Austrian composer Arnold Schoenberg. Though their composing style were vastly different, the two formed an unlikely friendship, sharing a love of music and regularly competing in tennis matches together. Tragically, on the 11th of July in 1937, Gershwin died at the age of 38 after suffering from a large brain tumour. Schoenberg went on radio the day after and shared: "What he has achieved was not only to the benefit of a national American music but also a contribution to the music of the whole world."

### Work Background

In his first visit to Paris in 1926, he stayed in the house of some friends and as a parting gift, left a thank you card with a short melodic theme inscribed at the bottom which he marked "Very Parisienne" and labelled it *An American in Paris*.

In the January of 1928, a whole two years later, Gershwin returned to this small theme and began composing a work which titled *An American in Paris*. He initially had difficulty developing the music, but reports indicate a stroke of inspiration as he looked out upon the Hudson River from his home in New York. Gershwin would later explain: "I love that river and I thought how often I had been homesick for a sight of it, and then the idea struck me - An American in Paris, homesickness, the blues."

On a second visit to Europe in 1928, Gershwin once again visited Paris and was inspired by the busy sounds and sights of the city, beginning serious work on the composition. Gershwin even purchased four taxi horns from Paris, each with a distinct pitch, that he brought back to America and prominently feature in the piece (see 0:27-56). In an interview, Gershwin wrote of the work: “My purpose here is to portray the impressions of an American visitor in Paris as he strolls about the city, listens to the various street noises, and absorbs the French atmosphere.” The composition was premiered by the New York Philharmonic Orchestra in the December of 1928, becoming an instant success. It was later developed into the score of a film of the same name in 1951.

### Instrumentation of work

Woodwind	Brass	Percussion	Strings
3 Flutes (3 <sup>rd</sup> doubles Piccolo)	Bb Soprano Sax	1 Tuba	Violin I
2 Oboes	Eb Alto Sax	Timpani	Violin II
1 English Horn	Bb Tenor Sax	4 Percussionists	Viola
2 Clarinets in Bb	Eb Baritone Sax	Snare Drum	Cello
1 Bass Clarinet in Bb	4 French Horn in F	Woodblock Suspended Cymbals	Double Bass
2 Bassoon	3 Trumpets in Bb	Taxi Horns [opt. Crash Cymbals]	
3 Saxophonists	3 Trombones	Woodblock	
		Tom-toms (small/large)	
		Ratchet	
		Bass Drum	
		Triangle	
		Glockenspiel	
		Xylophone [opt. Celesta]	
		Celesta	

# Listening guide

## Overview:

### Structure:

*An American in Paris* can be described as a tone poem, a symphonic work in a continuous movement that evokes the essence of a story, environment, or programme. Gershwin himself describes seven scenes that he used to loosely structure the work, which can be further grouped into three main sections: **A – B – A'**. However, it is critical not to overanalyse the work and attempt to extract every possible programmatic element from the music (Van Dyke, 2011). As Gershwin himself said: "As in my other orchestral compositions, I've not endeavoured to present any definite scenes in this music... The rhapsody [*An American in Paris*] is programmatic only in a general impressionistic way, so that the individual listener can read into the music such episodes as his imagination pictures for him."

Below is a table that describes a rough structure for the work, derived from programme notes written by Gershwin himself (Van Dyke, 2011).

Section	Division	Cue/Bar		Time
		Start	End	
<b>A</b>	<i>Walking along the Champs Elysées with honking taxis</i>	Start	Cue 23	0:00 - 3:20
	<i>Passing a Church</i>	Cue 23, bar 1	Cue 28	3:20 - 4:16
	Transition	Cue 28, bar 1	Cue 29	4:16 - 4:32
	<i>Episodes on the Left Bank</i>	Cue 29, bar 1	Cue 45, bar 5	4:32 - 7:27
<b>B</b>	<i>The Blues</i>	Cue 45, bar 5	Cue 56, bar 9	7:27 - 12:35
	Transition	Cue 56, bar 9	Cue 57	12:35 - 13:02
	<i>Meeting a Friend</i>	Cue 57, bar 1	2 before Cue 64	13:02 - 14:48
	Transition	2 before Cue 64	Cue 65	14:48 - 15:02
	<i>Second Blues</i>	Cue 65, bar 1	Cue 68	15:02 - 16:13
	Transition	Cue 68, bar 1	Cue 68, bar 10	16:13 - 16:30
<b>A'</b>	<i>Do as Parisians Do</i>	Cue 68, bar 10	End	16:30 - 18:22

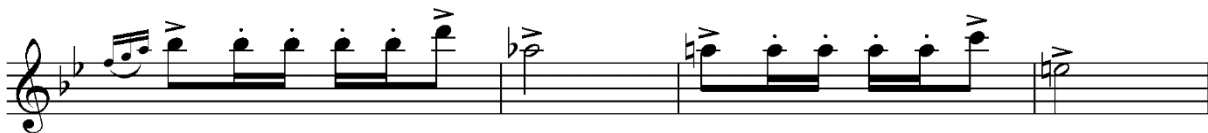
## Section A:

The work opens with the short motif that Gershwin inscribed on a thank you card in Paris. It's simple, repetitive but highly effective in setting the pace and tempo of the piece, hence why it is commonly known as the *Walking Theme*. First sounded by the violins and oboes, this motif is one of two main themes that frequently occurs throughout this first section.

### Main Theme 1 (*Walking Theme*): Cue 0, bar 1 - 4 (0:00 - 04)



The second major theme of this first section, after a modulation from F to Bb, is a more playful figure, first orchestrated on the clarinets, and is repeated heavily throughout the later sections of A and A'.



### Main Theme 2: Cue 13, bar 1 - 4 (1:58 - 2:02)

There are several key rhythmic ideas that feature prominently throughout the work. The first is the repetitive use of a fast flurry of semiquavers that descend and ascend through the orchestration of instruments as seen in Cue 3.

Musical notation for Cue 3, bar 1 - 4 (0:23 - 27) in 2/4 time, Bb major. The tempo is marked 'Vigoroso'. The notation shows a fast flurry of semiquavers in the upper strings and woodwinds, with a 'arco' marking in the lower strings. The melody consists of four measures: G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), Bb4 (quarter), C5 (quarter), D5 (quarter), C5 (quarter), Bb4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), F4 (quarter), Eb4 (quarter), D4 (quarter), C4 (quarter), Bb3 (quarter), Ab3 (quarter), Gb3 (quarter), F3 (quarter).

### Cue 3, bar 1 - 4 (0:23 - 27)

The second is the use of syncopation and accenting the offbeats of the bar, reminiscent of the Jazz style and reflected in Cue 6 in the string section, as the lower instruments pluck while the upper accent the offbeat with down bow markings.

Cue 6, bar 1 - 4 (0:45 - 49)

The third common rhythmic feature is the use of triplets, often playing against the regular division of the bar to create a 3:4 polyrhythm, first introduced at Cue 17 to create a lopsided feel.

Cue 17, bar 1 - 6 (2:28 - 34)

3

Similarly, there are a few arranging techniques that Gershwin commonly uses to flesh out the musical ideas in each section. One is the repeating of small fragments that are then orchestrated as a call and response between various instruments in the orchestra, as seen in Cue 2, the last phrase of the *Walking Theme* heard in the flutes, trumpets and violins and then descends in octaves to the trombone. A secondary technique is a use of repeated phrases that descend either chromatically or by another consistent interval, seen in *Main Theme 2*, Cue 3 and Cue 28

**Cue 2, bar 3 - 8 (0:18 - 0:23)**

Cue 23 (3:20-39) features a slow passage of lush strings and woodwinds with extended harmonies, very reminiscent of the opening to Ravel's *Quartet in F Major*, marked *calmato*, calming, signifying the passing by of a Church and again featuring a slower paced *Walking Theme*.

**Cue 23, bar 1 - 8 (3:20 - 40)**

23 Calmato

div.  
p espr.  
div.  
p espr.  
div.  
p espr.

*Episodes on the Left Bank* is ushered in with the introduction of a new motif, sounded on the bold and bombastic trombones and trumpets at Cue 29 (4:32-38), signifying the start of a new section but with echoes of Main Theme 2 to seamlessly link it to other parts of the work. Gershwin repeats this phrase directly after it, from Cue 30-31 (4:38-48), to legitimise the new melody before introducing yet another melodic idea with staccato quavers on the violins and trumpets at Cue 32.

**Sub Theme 1: Cue 29, bar 3 - 6 (4:33 - 37)**



**Sub Theme 2: Cue 32, bar 1 - 5 (4:48 - 52)**



With plenty of musical material already established, Gershwin highlights an effective use of contrast between phrases throughout the remainder of section A. The rhythmic features of syncopation and a soft 3:4 polyrhythm return from Cue 33-35 (4:53-5:15) with interjections of Main Theme 2 and Sub Theme 1 sounded at fortissimo. Cue 36-37 (5:15-34) sees a variation of Sub Theme 2, now in semi quavers, orchestrated as a call and response between the xylophone and flutes and later an exploration of very upper range of the violins and flutes, with fragments of Sub Theme 1 repeating in a descending fashion. Once again, the contrast between groups of 2-4 bars is evident with *Main Theme 2* being sounded on the brass, from Cue 38-39 (5:34-48), before it is juxtaposed with virtuosic scalic runs throughout the wild violins and flutes.

In a transition period from Cue 42-45, bar 4 (6:42-7:27), the *assai moderato* section exemplifies a harmonic development of *Sub Theme 1*, which can be seen in the bass movement of the figure, featuring a series of parallel triads spaced a tritone apart (e.g.: F# A# C# / C E G). This is commonly known as the *Petrushka Chord*, which became famous in Stravinsky's ballet *The Rite of Spring*, which premiered in Paris in 1911. However, it also shares significant similarities to Schoenberg's infamous hexachords. Regardless of his intention, this figure is evidence of the influence that both these composers had on Gershwin at the time, achieving an overarching sense of atonality.

**Cue 43, bar 1 - 4 (6:40 - 48)**

## Section B

The start of Cue 45, from bar 5 (7:27), signifies the start of *The Blues* of *An American in Paris*, with a new time feel of 4/4, common to Blues music, and a modulation to Bb, a popular key for blues improvisation. The section introduces a new motif often referred to as the *Blues Theme*, accompanied by a trio of saxophones heard for the first time. The long, sweeping twelve-bar melody uses a Bb major blues scale, structured in an AAB form, where the first two phrases are identical and the last provides the resolution, idiomatic of melodies from the twelve-bar blues style.

**Main Theme 3 (Blues Theme): Cue 45, bar 9 – Cue 47 (7:43 - 8:29)**



From Cue 47-56 (8:35-13:02), Gershwin features various orchestrations of the *Blues Theme*, rising through various modulations and gradually building in intensity, representative of the heightened longing for home. This is then contrasted with the *Meeting a Friend* section, introducing the fourth main melody of the work, a bright and cheerful tune with a lively Charleston feel and similarly structured in a twelve-bar blues pattern. Cue 65-68 (15:02-16:13) features one last bold statement of the *Blues Theme* with wild flutes flourishing over the top of the orchestra, gradually thinning in texture as fragments of the blues are echoed on a solo violin and tuba.

#### **Main Theme 4 (Meeting Friend Theme): Cue 57, bar 1 - 4 (13:02 - 07)**



## Section A'

Section A' is comparatively much shorter than the sections that came before it, aspiring not to introduce any new motifs or significant musical material, but instead feature the recapitulation of many of the themes from earlier in the work, masterfully crafted together in the orchestration. Cue 68, bar 10 returns to the duple meter of the opening and features the recognisable *Walking Theme* in the woodwinds, promptly followed by a sounding of *Sub Theme 1* at Cue 70 (16:50) accompanied by a rhythmic fragment of *Main Theme 2*, first heard in Cue 10, bar 1-8 (1:16-33).

While a repetition of previous themes would be arguably less interesting, Gershwin modulates to C Major at Cue 70 and subsequently composes the music over the dominant chord of G to create a heightened sense of tension and suspense. The music finally resolves to the tonic at Cue 73 (17:12) before turning into a C7 dominant chord at Cue 73, bar 3-6 (17:15-17), leading to a modulation of the original key of F. This provides the piece with a large-scale plagal cadence of the F – Bb – F key centres throughout the sections **A – B – A'**. The piece concludes with a majestic orchestration of the *Blues Theme*, marked *grandioso*, supported by the rhythmic motif of *Main Theme 2* at Cue 76, bar 2 (17:35), then slowly thinning out in texture before one last sounding of the *Blues Theme* in the saxophones underneath a tonic chord to conclude.

## Audio Excerpts

Access the Spotify playlist by visiting the following [link](#):

Excerpt No.	Movement	Bars or Cue	Time	Activity	Page
1	An American In Paris: Section A	Cue 0 - Cue 45, bar 5	0:00-7:27	Activity 2 Task 1	25
2	An American In Paris: Section B	Cue 45, bar 5 - Cue 68, bar 10	7:27-16:30	Activity 2	26
3	An American In Paris: Section A'	Cue 68, bar 10 - End	16:30-18:22	Activity 2	26
4	An American In Paris: Section B	Cue 45, bar 9 - Cue 47	7:43-8:29	Activity 4	34

## Score Excerpts

Score excerpts are from Public Domain, IMSLP: [Link](#)

Excerpt No.	Movement	Bars or Cue	Time	Activity	Page
1	An American In Paris: Section A	Cue 3, bar 1-4	0:23-0:27	Activity 3	31
2	An American In Paris: Section A	Cue 36, bar 1-3	5:15-5:17	Activity 3	31
3	An American In Paris: Section A'	Cue 73, bar 1-2	17:12-17:14	Activity 3	31

## Teaching Materials

Supplementary materials such as arrangements, reference audio and other documents for the resource can be accessed at the following link:

[An American In Paris by Gershwin Teaching Materials](#)

## Additional Resources

Score Reduction: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CROG4PxWyw4>

Brief Biography: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h7BUfHm-KgM>

Extra Analysis: [http://www.gkamusic.com/uploads/1/7/7/4/17742503/gershwin\\_-\\_an\\_american\\_in\\_paris\\_analysis.pdf](http://www.gkamusic.com/uploads/1/7/7/4/17742503/gershwin_-_an_american_in_paris_analysis.pdf)

Doctorate's Thesis on Two Piano Version:

[https://etd.ohiolink.edu/acprod/odb\\_etd/etd/r/1501/10?clear=10&p10\\_accession\\_num=osu1298660291](https://etd.ohiolink.edu/acprod/odb_etd/etd/r/1501/10?clear=10&p10_accession_num=osu1298660291)

Reference: Van Dyke, J. M. (2011). George Gershwin's An American in Paris for Two Pianos: A Critical Score Study and Performance Guide [Doctoral dissertation, Ohio State University]. Ohio LINK Electronic Theses and Dissertations Center.

[http://rave.ohiolink.edu/etdc/view?acc\\_num=osu1298660291](http://rave.ohiolink.edu/etdc/view?acc_num=osu1298660291).

Live Performance: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9HI62\\_udgEI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9HI62_udgEI)

# Learning Activities

## Activity 1: Performing and Musicology

Students perform a section from *An American in Paris* in order to explore and understand the musical features of the piece.

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### Task 1

1. Commence by forming groups of 3 or 4.
2. [Click this link](#) to access the sheet music and reference audio. Using the sheet music provided, decide who in the group will perform each part.
3. Then, individually, practice and learn the part without the dynamics or expressive techniques, focusing only on the notes and rhythms.
4. Practice putting the parts all together as a group from beginning to end, fixing any mistakes or issues along the way.

C FULL SCORE

# AN AMERICAN IN PARIS

WALKING THEME

GEORGE GERSHWIN

ALLEGRETTO GRAZIO. ♩=95

PART 1  
PART 2  
PART 3  
PART 4

7

PT. 1  
PT. 2  
PT. 3  
PT. 4

12

PT. 1  
PT. 2  
PT. 3  
PT. 4

2 C FULL SCORE

18

Pr. 1 *f*

Pr. 2 *f*

Pr. 3 *f*

Pr. 4 *f*

22

Pr. 1 *mp*

Pr. 2 *mp*

Pr. 3 *f*

Pr. 4 *mp*

1

EXTENSION:

26

Pr. 1 *f*

Pr. 2 *f*

Pr. 3 *mp*

Pr. 4 *mp*

C FULL SCORE

3

31

2.

Pt. 1 *mf*

Pt. 2 *ff*

Pt. 3 *mf*

Pt. 4 *mf*

35

Pt. 1 *p* *ff*

Pt. 2 *p* *ff*

Pt. 3 *p* *ff*

Pt. 4 *p* *ff*

39

Pt. 1 *mp*

Pt. 2 *mf* *p*

Pt. 3 *p*

Pt. 4 *p*

4

C FULL SCORE

43

PT. 1 *f*

PT. 2 *mp*

PT. 3 *mp*

PT. 4 *mp*

Detailed description: This system contains measures 43 through 46. It features four staves labeled PT. 1, PT. 2, PT. 3, and PT. 4. PT. 1 is in treble clef with a key signature of two flats and a dynamic marking of *f*. PT. 2 is in treble clef with a dynamic marking of *mp*. PT. 3 is in treble clef with a dynamic marking of *mp*. PT. 4 is in bass clef with a dynamic marking of *mp*. The music consists of rhythmic patterns and melodic lines across the four parts.

47

PT. 1 *ff* *p*

PT. 2 *f* *p*

PT. 3 *f* *p*

PT. 4 *f* *p*

Detailed description: This system contains measures 47 through 52. It features four staves labeled PT. 1, PT. 2, PT. 3, and PT. 4. PT. 1 starts with a dynamic marking of *ff* and changes to *p* in measure 52. PT. 2 starts with a dynamic marking of *f* and changes to *p* in measure 52. PT. 3 starts with a dynamic marking of *f* and changes to *p* in measure 52. PT. 4 starts with a dynamic marking of *f* and changes to *p* in measure 52. The music includes complex rhythmic patterns and melodic lines with dynamic shifts.

53

PT. 1 *f*

PT. 2 *f*

PT. 3 *f*

PT. 4 *f*

Detailed description: This system contains measures 53 through 56. It features four staves labeled PT. 1, PT. 2, PT. 3, and PT. 4. All parts (PT. 1, PT. 2, PT. 3, and PT. 4) maintain a dynamic marking of *f*. The music is characterized by complex rhythmic patterns and melodic lines with accents throughout.



## Task 2

As a group, discuss and answer the following questions on musical features derived from the score.

1. What is the key signature of the piece?
2. What does Allegretto Grazio mean?
3. What is the name for the rhythmic feature that Parts 2 and 3 play in bars 1-8?
4. What are the three different parts or roles used in the texture in bars 1-8?
5. What is the compositional technique used from bars 18-21?
6. What is the compositional feature used in Part 1 from bars 39-40?

## Task 3

1. Practice the parts again individually, this time adding in the various dynamics and expressive techniques featured on the score.
2. Practice putting the parts all together, with dynamics and expressive techniques, as a group from beginning to end, fixing any mistakes or issues along the way.
3. Perform the arrangement of *An American in Paris* for the class.

## Optional Extension task

1. In the same or different groups of 3 or 4, choose a different part to what was played in Tasks 1 and 3. You may even choose to perform it on a different instrument!
2. Practice the parts individually, then practice putting the parts all together as a group from beginning to end. Consider the dynamics and expressive techniques along the way.
3. Perform for the class.
4. Discuss the differences and similarities of performing as a new ensemble and/or on different instruments.

## Activity 2: Listening and Musicology

Students to explore and identify the key motifs and musical features in the score of *An American in Paris*.

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### Task 1

1. Start by studying at a printed score of *An American in Paris*. [Click this link](#) to access the score.
2. Look down the left-hand side of the stave to identify the various sections and instruments used in the orchestra.
3. Listen to Section A of *An American in Paris* (**Audio Excerpt** 0:00-7:27), while reading the score (**Score Excerpt** Cue 0 to Cue 45, bar 5).
4. Afterwards, discuss the following questions as a class:
  - a. What did you like about the work? Explain why.
  - b. Was there anything you disliked about the work? Explain why.
  - c. Does the music remind you of anything?
  - d. Did the music make you feel anything?
  - e. What are some of the repeating musical themes or features that make up the work?
  - f. What kind of images or scenes do you think the composer is trying to convey through the music?

### Task 2

1. Study the '*An American in Paris* - Summary Sheet' provided at the end of this activity.
2. [Click this link](#) to access audio examples of the motifs. Listen to the main musical motifs using the audio provided and read through the definitions of the key musical features.
3. Using several different coloured highlighters, textas or pencils, write next to each motif and feature on the sheet a colour to be associated with it.

### Task 3

1. Listen to section **A** of *An American in Paris* again.
2. As you listen, use the relevant coloured highlighters or pens you chose in Task 2 to annotate the score and identify the repeating motifs and musical features.

3. Afterwards, compare and discuss when, where and how each motif and musical feature were used throughout the composition.

## Optional Extension task

Repeat the exercise in Task 3 for both Section B – **Score Excerpt:** Cue 45, bar 5 – Cue 68, bar 10 (**Audio Excerpt:** 7:27-16:30) and Section A', **Score Excerpt:** Cue 68, bar 10 – End (**Audio Excerpt:** 16:30-18:22), annotating and identifying repeating motifs and musical features in the score and discussing their use in the overall composition.

# Summary Sheet: *An American in Paris* by George Gershwin

## Purpose:

The purpose of this document is to provide a summary of the key motifs and musical features utilised in Gershwin's *An American in Paris*. It is intended to be a supplementary resource to the Sydney Symphony Orchestra resource kit.

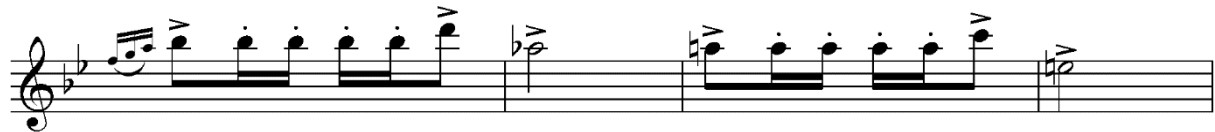
## Motifs:

A motif is a memorable passage of music within a piece. [Click this link](#) to access audio examples of the motifs

### Main Theme 1 ('Walking Theme'): Cue 0, bar 1-4 (0:00-04)



### Main Theme 2: Cue 13, bar 1-4 (1:58-2:02)



### Sub Theme 1: Cue 29, bar 3-6 (4:33-37)



### Sub Theme 2: Cue 32, bar 1-5 (4:38-52)



**Main Theme 3 ('Blues Theme'): Cue 45, bar 9 – Cue 47 (7:43-8:29)**



**Main Theme 4 ('Meeting Friend Theme'): Cue 57, bar 1-4 (13:02-07)**



**Musical Features:**

**Syncopation:** an emphasis on the offbeat of a bar (ie: 1 & 2 &)

**Cue 6, bar 1-4 (0:45-49)**











**Polyrhythms:** quaver or crochet triplets juxtaposing regular crochets or quavers (i.e.: 3:4).

Cue 17, bar 1-6 (2:28-34)

The image shows a musical score for Cue 17, bars 1-6, marked "Giocoso". The score is written for four staves: two treble clefs (top two) and two bass clefs (bottom two). The key signature is one flat (B-flat). The time signature is 3/4. The first staff (top) features a continuous eighth-note triplet pattern. The second staff (top) features a continuous eighth-note pattern. The third staff (middle) features a continuous eighth-note pattern with a "div." (divisi) marking and a "marcato" marking. The fourth staff (bottom) features a continuous eighth-note pattern. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

### Sample Answer Legend:

Motif / Musical Feature	Corresponding Colour
Main Theme 1 ('Walking Theme')	
Main Theme 2	
Sub Theme 1	
Sub Theme 2	
Main Theme 3 ('Blues Theme')	
Main Theme 4 ('Meeting Friend Theme')	
Syncopation	
3:4 Polyrhythm	

### Student Answer Legend:

Motif / Musical Feature	Corresponding Colour
Main Theme 1 ('Walking Theme')	
Main Theme 2	
Sub Theme 1	
Sub Theme 2	
Main Theme 3 ('Blues Theme')	
Main Theme 4 ('Meeting Friend Theme')	
Syncopation	
3:4 Polyrhythm	

## Activity 3: Composition and Musicology

Students explore various motivic development techniques and their use in *An American in Paris*.

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### Task 1

1. Discuss and define the term '*motif*' and '*motivic development*.'
2. Identify and discuss the use of motivic development in *An American in Paris* as a class, referring to the Summary Sheet and annotated scores from Activity 2.
3. For each of the following excerpts, discuss the following questions as a class:

**Score Excerpt 1:** Cue 3, bar 1-4

**Score Excerpt 2:** Cue 36, bar 1-3

**Score Excerpt 3:** Cue 73, bar 1-2

- a. What motif is being developed?
- b. What instrument/section is the motif being played by?
- c. What has been done to alter the motif from the original?

### Task 2

1. Compose two differing motifs, between 2 and 4 bars long, with the notes from a Bb Major Scale using some form of notation software on an instrument of your choice. Great motifs should have a clear melodic shape and a strong rhythmic idea.
2. Copy and paste your first motif into an empty section and use the following techniques to change it:
  - a. Fragmentation
  - b. Repetition
  - c. Rhythmic Augmentation
  - d. Rhythmic Diminution
3. Repeat this process to alter your second motif.

### Task 3

1. Compose a 16 to 24 bar composition that introduces your two motifs and utilises some of your motivic developments created in Task 2.
2. You may wish to add more one or two melodic or harmonic instruments to help fill out your composition.



## Optional Extension task

Add a piano part underneath the solo instrument to change the harmonic features of their motifs by imitating the styles of Ravel and Schoenberg.

### Option 1: Ravel

Compose a single note bass line in the bass staff that uses the notes of the Bb Major Scale, ascending or descending using steps, underneath one of the original motifs.

Copy and paste the bass line into the treble staff of the piano and move it up an octave.

Then, stack four lots of 3rds above one another, within the key of Bb major, creating a series of 9<sup>th</sup> chords moving in parallel motion.

Delete the bottom note of each chord in the treble staff.

Select the top two notes of each chord in the treble staff and move them down an octave.

The result is a series of extended chords in a dense voicing that matches the style of Ravel.

Below is an example:

Step 1:




Step 2:



Step 3:



Step 4:



Step 5:



## Option 2: Stravinsky ('The Petrushka Chord')

Copy one of your motifs into the bass line of the piano.

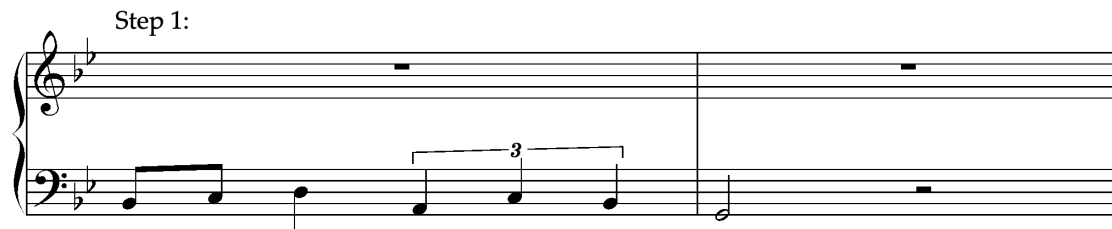
Build a major triad on top of the bass note stacked in 3rds.

Then, in the treble staff, build another major triad pitched a tritone away from the original bass note, matching the rhythm of the motif.

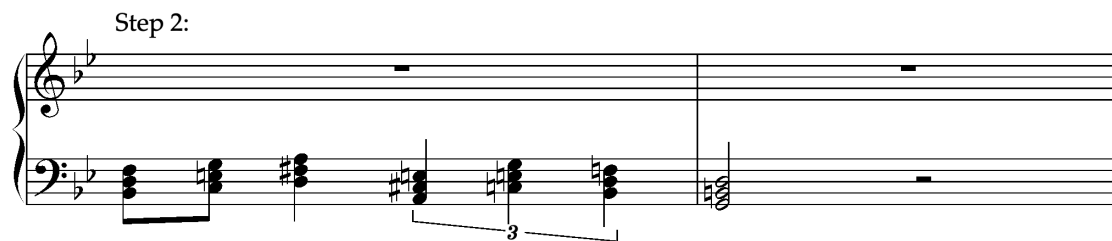
The result is a series of atonal chords that create a sound similar to that of Stravinsky.

Below is an example:

Step 1:



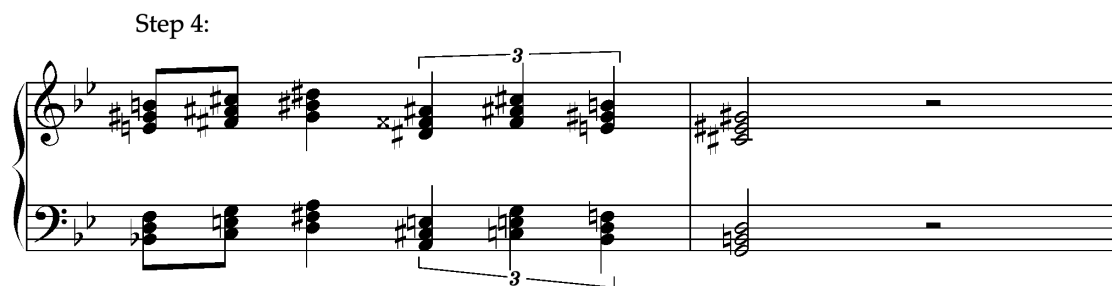
Step 2:



Step 3:



Step 4:



## Activity 4: Aural and Musicology

Students develop aural, melodic dictation and harmonic analysis skills with melodies and chord progressions from *An American in Paris*.

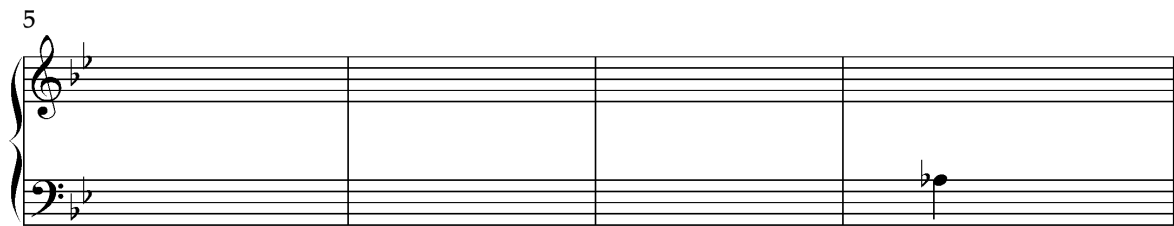
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### Task 1

1. Listen to **Audio Excerpt** 7:43-8:29 to complete the aural dictation and work out the melody on an instrument of your choice.
2. Notate the melody part in the treble clef using the template below. Some notes and rhythms have been given to assist you.



5



9



### Task 2

1. Similarly, listen to **Audio Excerpt** 7:43-8:29 again.
2. This time, notate the bass part in the bass clef provided. You may use your instrument to help you figure out the notes. Some notes and rhythms have already been given to assist you.
3. Then, mark on your answer where the bass part should be playing *pizzicato* or *arco*.

## Task 3

1. Look at the score excerpt from Cue 45, bar 9 – Cue 47.
2. Using only the string section, analyse the harmonic progression for the excerpt and write the corresponding chords above your own melodic dictation answer.
3. The bass note will be the foundation of your chord. Analyse the other notes in the string section in relation to its intervallic value to the bass note, looking particularly for 3rds and 5ths to help identify the chord.
4. Check your dictation against the answer provided and annotate any errors in a red pen.

## Optional Extension task

1. Pair up with another student. On instruments of your choice, have one person play the melody while the other plays the transcribed bass line. Then swap roles.
2. Then, individually on a chordal instrument of your choice, try and learn the chord progression analysed from Cue 45, bar 9 – Cue 47.
3. Afterwards, pair up again and have one person play the melody while the other plays the chordal accompaniment. Then swap roles.

## Activity 5: Composition and Performance

Students compose an original tone poem based on a specific environment and notate it using graphic notation.

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### Task 1

1. To commence, choose an environment that you regularly visit. This could be in your school yard at recess, a busy street near or a quiet park.
2. Stand in a central, but safe, location in your environment and record between a 30 to 60 second voice memo of all the sounds in your environment. Note: this section may be needed to be completed outside of class time.
3. Then, think of your own place or identity in that space and choose a noun that best summarises or represents that idea.
4. In the following tasks, you will turn this recording into a composed tone poem. Your composition can then be titled: A *\*insert noun\** in *\*insert environment\**. Eg: *A Student in the School Yard, A Honda in Traffic, An Athlete in Bondi Park.*

### Task 2

1. In class, listen back to your recording and make a list of all the different sound sources you hear. Be as specific and detailed as possible.
2. Then, choose between 4 and 6 instruments readily available to you in the classroom that could best represent the sound sources identified. Your instrument list should have a combination of pitched and unpitched, it may not even be conventional instrument at all (e.g.: leaves, water bottle, taxi horn etc...).
3. Experiment with those instruments on how you could play them to mimic / replicate the sounds heard in your recording.
4. On a large sheet of paper, down the left-hand side of the page list your chosen instruments and along the top of the page, break it up into 6 to 12 even columns of 5 second intervals. See the example below:

	0:00-05	0:06-10	0:11-15	0:16-20	0:21-25	0:26-30	0:31-35	0:36-40
Instrument 1:								
Instrument 2:								
Instrument 3:								
Instrument 4:								
Instrument 5:								
Instrument 6:								

- Using graphic notation, create a score that best represents the various sounds and textures heard in your environment, notating lines, pictures and shapes that reflect how you could perform such sounds on your chosen instruments.

## Task 3

- Once you have completed your own graphic score, combine with another student. Take turns in explaining your chosen environment, sounds sources and how to play each instrument to replicate each sound.
- Practice each graphic score with the various instruments. You may need to perform multiple instruments at once.
- Then, perform your compositions for the class. At the end of each performance, have students in the audience guess the environment in which each tone poem represents
- Suggested Answers & Teaching Notes

## Activity 1: Performing and Musicology

### Teaching Notes

- In Tasks 1 and 3, you may prefer to do small groups of 3 - 4 or perform the arrangement as a whole class. If in small groups, you may like to utilise different spaces of the room or send students to another area (like a practice room) to practice and have then come back into the main room to perform.
- In Task 2, students may have to research the definition or answer for some questions.

### Task 2

1. F Major.
2. Fast Paced / Lively and Peaceful / Gracious.
3. Syncopation: a rhythm on the offbeat of the bar.
4. Bass Line, Chordal Accompaniment and Melody.
5. Call and Response: where one instrument plays a phrase and is directly answered by another phrase on a different instrument.
6. Sequence: a pattern that repeats at a higher or lower pitch.

## Activity 2: Listening and Musicology

### Teaching Notes

- If possible, make sure to have a decent sound system to play the work from to hear the accurate details of the score.
- In Task 1, allow ample time for students to ask any questions they may have about reading or interpreting the score.
- In Task 2, the teacher or a capable student could perform each motif live on the piano or other instrument as an alternative to listening to the audio provided.
- In Task 3, repeat the listening component if students feel they need more time to thoroughly annotate the score. You may like to display the '*Activity 2 – Sample Answer*' when discussing where motifs and features are used.

[Click this link](#) to see sample answer for score analysis.

## Activity 3: Composition and Musicology

### Teaching Notes

- Encourage all students to try and use traditional Western notation, use supplementary materials, like note names written underneath all notes in both treble and bass staves, to assist students.
- In Task 1, display the score expert and listen to each audio sample.
- In Task 2, it may be helpful to do an example of how to alter a motif using one or two of the techniques together as a class.

### Task 1

**Excerpt 1:** Cue 3, bar 1-4 (0:23-27)

**Motif:** Main Theme 2

**Instrument/Section:** bass clarinet, bassoon, horns in F and string section

**Technique:**

- Fragmentation: a short section of the original motif.
- Repetition: using the motif or a section of it multiple times in a row.

The image shows a musical score for Excerpt 1, Cue 3, bars 1-4. The score is marked 'Vigorouso' and features a complex rhythmic pattern with many sixteenth notes. The notation includes treble and bass staves for multiple instruments, with a 'arco' marking in the bass line.

**Excerpt 2:** Cue 36, bar 1-3 (5:15-5:17)

**Motif:** Sub Theme 2

**Instrument/Section:** xylophone and violin I

**Technique:** Rhythmic Diminution: shortening the rhythm of the original motif.



The image shows a musical score for two instruments: Bells, Xyl. and 1st Viol. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The Bells, Xyl. part is marked with a dynamic of *mf* and a circled number 36. The 1st Viol. part is marked with *arco* and *mf*. Both parts play a rhythmic motif consisting of eighth notes. The 1st Viol. part shows a rhythmic augmentation where the eighth notes are stretched out over a longer duration compared to the Bells, Xyl. part.

**Excerpt 3:** Cue 73, bar 1-2 (17:12-17:14)

**Motif:** Main Theme 2

**Instrument/Section:** trombones and tuba

**Technique:**

- Rhythmic Augmentation: lengthening the rhythm of the original motif.

The image shows a musical score with three staves. The top staff has a treble clef and a dynamic of *ff*. The middle and bottom staves have bass clefs. The music consists of eighth notes and rests. The top staff shows a rhythmic motif that is then repeated in the middle and bottom staves, illustrating the concept of rhythmic augmentation.

## Activity 4: Aural and Musicology

### Teaching Notes

- In Task 1 and 2, students can start by notating the rhythm and then adding the pitch. If students struggle to read notation, use supplementary materials, like note names written underneath all notes in both treble and bass staves, to assist them.
- In Task 3, students may find it helpful to write out the letter names next to the notes on the score and then analyse the chord.
- There may also be some chords students are unfamiliar with (e.g.: Bb/D, B7#5 and Cm7b5). Have them do as much as the progression as they can and then clarify afterwards the naming functions of chords.

## Tasks 1 - 3

The musical score consists of three systems of piano accompaniment in 4/4 time, featuring a key signature of two flats (Bb and Eb).

**System 1 (Measures 1-4):** The right hand (RH) starts with a whole note chord of Bb, followed by a melodic line of eighth notes: Gm, Cm, Bb/D, Eb, F, Bb, Gm, Cm, Bb/D, Eb, F. The left hand (LH) plays a simple bass line with quarter notes: Bb, Eb, F, Bb, Gm, Cm, Bb/D, Eb, F. A "pizz." marking is present in the first measure of the RH.

**System 2 (Measures 5-8):** The RH continues with a melodic line of eighth notes: Bb, Gm, Cm, Bb/D, Eb, F, Bb, Gm<sup>7</sup>, Eb, Ebmaj<sup>7</sup>/G, Bb, Ab, Gm, Bb<sup>7</sup>(#5)/F. The LH continues with quarter notes: Bb, Eb, F, Bb, Gm, Cm, Bb/D, Eb, F. An "arco" marking is present in the third measure of the RH.

**System 3 (Measures 9-12):** The RH continues with a melodic line of eighth notes: Eb, Cm<sup>7</sup>(b5), Bb/F, C<sup>7</sup>/F, F<sup>7</sup>, Bb. The LH continues with quarter notes: Bb, Eb, F, Bb, Gm, Cm, Bb/D, Eb, F. The system ends with a double bar line.

## Activity 5: Composition and Performance

### Teaching Notes

- In Task 1, you may like to set this section for homework so that students bring in their voice memos ready for class.
- In Task 2, an A3 sheet of paper is recommended.