



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

*Walter Rimler*

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George Gershwin lived his life with delight and vitality, 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. The closest George came to domesticity was his longtime affair with fellow composer Kay Swift. But she remained married to another man while he went endlessly from woman to woman. Only in the final hours of his life did he realize how much he needed her. Fatally ill, unprotected by (and perhaps estranged from) his older brother Ira, he was exiled by Ira's hard-edged wife Leonore from the house that she and the brothers shared, and he died horribly and alone at the age of thirty-eight. Nor did Gershwin find a satisfying musical harbor. For years his 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*, critics were unable to understand or validate it. Decades would pass before 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 this book, Walter Rimler 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.

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