

AN AMERICAN IN PARIS - GEORGE GERSHWIN

While we are so grateful for the wonderful music that George Gershwin has left us, we can only speculate as to what he might have written had he lived beyond his 38 short years.

The American in Paris has an energy and character which resonates with the listener in a very special way, as we experience Gershwin's melodic, rhythmic, and harmonic gifts in a language that is truly his own. The score is rich in detail, and I find something new every time I perform it.

A nice brisk tempo of about quarter note = 120, and our wide-eyed tourist is on his way.

Tutti - measure 1: The marking *mp* can be taken with several grains of salt, (i.e. can be louder) especially for the violins.

Violins - measure 3-4: The parts have a slur between the last note of measure 3 to the first note of measure 4, while the score does not. Either interpretation is valid, but the slur supplies a bit more energy.

Violins - measure 5: Note that the violin dynamic is a bit softer than at the beginning, which may enable the clarinets to be heard. I encourage the clarinets to play out for their 4 measure phrase.

Violin 2 – measure 5: - the *p* dynamic is missing in the part

Violin 1 - 2nd measure of #1: G string

Violin 2 solo and viola solo - 5 measures after #1: They will instinctively play louder than *p* or *pp*.

Violins - #3: G string

Violins - 5 measures after #3: I have the violins slur on an up bow into the G 2 measures before #4. This sequence happens several times.

It seems like there is always one "sick" taxi horn; if it's possible, I'd suggest making sure that all the taxi horns are at fully operable.

Cello, bass, bassoons - #4: It's interesting to point out that the accompaniment is an augmentation of the xylophone/flute theme.

Violins and violas – 4 measures after #4: it's possible to add slurs to last eighth, to match the horns (also 4 measures after #6)

Violin 2 – 2 measures before #5: check to make sure the parts have A's (not A flats)

Flutes – 3 measures before #7: possible to add crescendo as in similar passages found earlier

Tutti - 4 measures before #8: At Vivo, I increase the tempo to about quarter note = 128.

Horns and trombones - #8: I suggest starting quietly, and then crescendo

Violin 1, 2, and viola - #8: perhaps rehearse slowly once or twice, especially for high violin 1 part

Cello - #8: interesting jump up to the high C!

Tutti - 2 measures before #9: Grouping these 2 measures as a 3/4 measure may be helpful. Also, I do the rit. on the 2/8 measure only, not before.

Violins - 2 measures before #10: If the length half note is unclear, and the violins don't stop in a uniform way, they can play quarter note, quarter rest, or dotted quarter, eighth rest.

Trumpets - #10: Theme is from Concerto in F!

Violins - 5 measures before #11: The eighth note on the "and of 2" (pizzicato) can be played by the section players minus the solo players.

Trombones - 3 measures after #11: I have the players do a glissando between the pickup D sharp and the F sharp, reminiscent of a French Can Can.

Violins - #12: I cross out the mf dynamic in the 3rd measure, and write forte at the end of the 4th measure.

Bass trombone - 5 measures after #12: I prefer a slow, slightly vulgar glissando.

Violin 2 and violas - 5 measures after #12: all down bow

Tutti - 5 measures after #12: The orchestra needs to be aware of the extra measure in the first phrase, so as not to miscount.

Tutti - 5 measures after #12: I take this passage slower, and then go to tempo primo at #13

Violas and horns - second measure of #13, beat 2: strong

Violin 2 - 4 and 5 measures after #14: all down bow

Violin 1 - 3 measures before #15: an awkward place, for sure

Trumpets - #15: senza sordino, according to the part

Trumpets - #15: start quietly, and crescendo all the way to the last note

Tuba - 3 measures before #16: should not cover the bass clarinet and bassoons

Violins and cellos - 3 measures after #16: down bow, then slur 2 measures up bow; second violins can also play one measure per bow 2 measures before #17

Tutti - 4 measures after #16: violas and clarinets play out, violas can play one bow per measure, starting down bow

Violins - #17: possible to bow first, second, and fourth eighth note of the measure starting down bow for staccato and energy

Violins - #18: G string

Inside second violins - #19: Make sure the pizzicatos are heard clearly.

Violas - 1 measure before #20: It's possible to omit last the pizzicato if needed.

Violins - #20: parts have a slur between measures 1 and 2 and measures 3 and 4

Violas, cellos, clarinets, bass clarinet - #20: lots of energy; I'd suggest forte

First violins - #21: I have them play the first note as is, and then 8va

Snare drum - 5 measures before #23: I suggest mf crescendo.

Tutti - #23: I proceed without a pause.

Tutti - #23: I minimize the crescendos in order to avoid covering the solo English horn and solo oboe. I have the string crescendos on down bows, to counteract the tendency to overdo the crescendo on up bows.

Tutti - #25: pp for all accompaniment; when the tempo is suddenly faster, it's easy to play louder.

Bassoon and Bass – second measure of #26: parts have A# for the third note, same as 6 measures after #26

Piccolo and Oboe – 4 and 8 measures after #26: A sharp in the ascending scale seems to fit the implied chord

Bass clarinet - #28: Make sure that the ascending chromatic scale lines up with the solo flutes.

Flutes, and later clarinets - #28: grouped in 3 notes. Note that the flute 1 passage that doubles the first clarinet 4 measures before #29 is not in the part.

Tutti - #29: secco

First violins and cellos - 3 measures after #29: all down bows, including last eighth note of the measure

Oboe and Clarinet - #31: add slur as at #30

Snare drum (wire brushes) - 4 measures after #31: play one more measure, like previous sequence

Violins - #32: all down bows starting on the second eighth note of the second measure

Violins, second trumpet - 4 measures after #32: diminuendo one measure later than written to p; same 4 measures after 33, but start swell in the next measure softer than p

Flutes and clarinets - 4 measures before #34, 5 measures after #35 - very prominent

Trumpets - #34: marked open in parts

All strings - #34: all down bows, violins and violas, last eighth before #34 can be up bow

Violas - #34: I have them play arco for 5 measures

Horns - 4 measures before #35: diminuendo subito; same 6 measures after #35

Violins - #36 to #38: spiccato

Horns - 5 measures after #37, rearticulate clearly, 1 measure before #38, first and second horns may omit third beat

Violins - 3 measures after #38 to #40, accent all bow changes

Timpani, non pitched percussion - #39: not too loud

Cello, bass clarinet - #40: be sure that the attack is clear, and not late

Flutes - 6 measures after #40: difficult run up to high C, then connect with bassoon

Violins – 2 and 3 measures after #41: possible to play all down bow on triplets to match #20

Tutti - 5 measures after #41: If needed, rehearse violins slowly, everyone else start softly.

Snare drum - 8 measures after #41: 16th notes I believe are still rim shots.

Tutti - 4 measures before #42: I start the rallentando here.

Violas and clarinet, starting with the pickup to #42: espressivo on each 16th note group

Violin solo - 7 measures before #43, a variety of interpretations are possible; I suggest scherzando, with a playful portamento to the A harmonic

English horn solo before #43: take a little time and stretch the 16th notes a little; same for the viola solo before #44

Horn solo before #44: take a tiny bit of time into #44

Flutes - #44: can take a little time at the end of the second measure

Solo violins - 3 measures after #44: This passage can move; be sure that the bassoon is rhythmically accurate; violins can take a little time into #45.

Bass trombone - solo after #45: I like the bass trombone player to take his time, and play a glissando before the F and the E flat, sort of like the teacher in Charlie Brown.

Bassoon - 5 measures after #45: I have the bassoon play a slow glissando from the E to the F before the beat. It's a little radical, but when played well, quite charming.

All strings, horns 3, 4 – 5 measures after #45: play same crescendo and diminuendo

Strings - 5 measures after #45: I like exaggerated dynamics for the pizzicato.

Wire brushes - 5 measures after #45: 16th notes can be played instead as dotted 16th, 32nd.

Saxophones - 9 measures after #45: They can play with a nice full sound, but not to interfere with the trumpet solo. I have performed the piece when saxophones were not available, and this is the only passage that their parts are absolutely indispensable. I use 3 horns to cover their chorale. Please note that this entrance is their first appearance in the piece. I once stopped rehearsing the piece at this point, when I realized that the saxophones were about to be dismissed without playing a note! I saved face by continuing rehearsing the piece, thus including the saxophones.

The famous trumpet solo requires a warm, rich sound with, I would say, some vibrato added. Trumpeters often tie a purple Giardinelli mouthpiece bag over their bell; for one of the most unique and successful versions with which I've been involved, the player played into a hat. A "bend" into the written E flat in the second measure can be a tasty gesture, as is a nice glissando into the written F 5 measures after #46.

Trombone - third measure of #47: A substantial glissando into the 4th beat is very nice!

Tutti – 2 measures before #48: autograph score is clearer; six beats are *piu mosso*, next two beats are *meno*

Clarinet - pickup into #48: as loud as needed to project; *pp* seems insufficient

First violins - second measure of #48 and 1 measure before #49: I suggest a same finger glissando from the grace note to the D flat.

Xylophone - 5 measures after #48: not too loud; needs to support melody, not dominate it

Violins and violas - 3 measures after #49: portamento to the quarter note and portamento to the last eighth note in the next measure

Tutti - 1 measure before #50: I stretch the last beat and add a diminuendo.

First violins - #50: crescendo on the long B flat and a same finger glissando from the C sharp to the D in the next measure. In the 4th measure, I suggest a same finger glissando to the last note, as well as the grace note in the next measure, this time on the D string.

Woodblock - 1 measure before # 51: make sure to line up with the violas and other instruments playing that rhythm, and not to be ahead of them.

Violins and violas - 2 measures before # 52: portamento to the D quarter note; first violins, portamento to the last note in the following measure.

Tutti - 3 measures after #52: start softly enough for the English horn and clarinets to be heard; same in the sequence 4 measures later

Violins - #53: I'm afraid that this has always been a prime rushing place for pizzicato.....

Cellos - 3 measures after #53: Careful to stay together during the rit.

Timpani and Tom Toms – one measure before #54: possible to add dynamics to match the rest of the orchestra (p crescendo would work well)

Strings - 3 measures after #54: Be sure that the eighth notes are grouped well according the slurs.

Tutti - 5 and 6 measures after #54: Be sure to bring out the accents in these two measures.

Tutti - 7 measures after #54 (Grandioso): This passage has always caused problems of ensemble for me. It seems that the strings have a tendency to rush - the strings are together and the winds and brass are together, but neither are together with each other. I found that if I can keep the strings from rushing, that the ensemble is generally better. I do a minimal ritard where written, and just a little more where it says molto ritard. For the string players, I suggest that, if needed, to think of the third measure of Grandioso enharmonically, in sharps, which makes reading the double flats, the F flat and the C flat easier to deal with.

Violins - #55: the two crescendi are missing in the parts

Brass and percussion - Second measure of #55: I think it's possible to start a little less and crescendo to #56. #56 can be single forte, rather than ff.

Solo violin, flute, and clarinet - 4 measures after #56: Be sure that the 4th beat in the winds lines up with the solo violin

Violin solo - calmato: A portamento from the last B sharp to the C sharp whole note and a glissando to the high C sharp adds a nice expression. I recently suggested to the concertmaster to play the high C sharp on the A string, but he politely declined. He did play it very expressively on the E string.

Bassoons - pickup to 5 measures before #57: I have them play the triplet staccato.

Flutes - 5 measures before #57: A hairpin to the middle of the measure is a nice expressive gesture.

Horns - 5 measures before #57: Playing this passage muted or stopped with good intonation is difficult. Make sure that the D flat and D chords on the dotted half notes are well in tune.

Clarinets - 3 measures before #57: Clarinets can play a glissando or quick chromatic notes to the third beat.

Solo trumpet - #57: I have the trumpet play a short fermata on the pickup note, starting softly with a crescendo, and with a flutter tongue. Radical perhaps, but very effective!

Tutti - #57: I have the whole orchestra swing the eighth notes, with a few exceptions, as noted below. An interpretation of straight eighth notes is also fine; it depends on the conductor's preference. Percussionist can play quarter, dotted 8th note, 16th note with wire brushes. I do quarter note = about 144-150.

Horns - 4 measures after #57: A short quarter note sounds jazzier.

Flutes, English horn, cello, bass - #58: swung, but the next measure straight eighth notes.

Clarinets and saxophones - 3 measures after #58: not sure about the glissando markings between the eighth notes. I think that they might distort the rhythm, so perhaps should be ignored.

Violas - 3 measures after #58: I have this passage played with all down bows, swung, for a jazzy percussive effect.

Percussion - 3 measures after #58: swung, same as clarinets, saxophones, and violas

Violins - 3 measures after #58: I start the pickup up bow, slurring into the first beat, and then slur groups of 2 notes, with the last D and the Ds in the next measure played down bow. This bowing lends itself to a jazz oriented style. I use similar bowings for the subsequent passages. For 1 measure before #59, I have the violins play all down bow, with the clarinets and first trumpet also playing short, matching the percussion rhythm and adding a nice bounce.

Cellos and horns – 3 measures after #58, and subsequent identical rhythms: A short quarter note on the 4th beat is more stylistically "cool".

Solo viola and cellos - #59: not too loud for the clarinet, nor for the flute and oboe in the next

phrase.

Violins - #60: same bowing and style as the violas 3 measures after #58

Violas and cellos - 4 measures before #61: straight eighth notes.

Cellos and bassoons - 1 measure before #61: well together

Oboes, clarinets - #61: The passage here is really exciting, but can rarely be heard. For my last performance, I had the first oboe double the second oboe part, but for my next performance, if I have saxophones, I plan to have the clarinets play the part as well.

Clarinets and saxophones - second bar of #61: short quarter note (two tied eighth notes), also at #62 for horns, also for first bassoon, baritone saxophone, trombones, violas at #63

Violins and violas - #61: I have them do 2 bows on the long notes at #61, down bow on the pickup to the third measure with a free change, followed by a slur on the triplets, played down bow. In the fifth measure, I have an up bow on the first half note, down bow on the second half note, then changing to an up bow in the seventh measure after #61.

Violins and violas, xylophone - 9 measures after #61: straight eighth notes

Tutti - 7 measures after #62: rather than subito ff, perhaps a gradual crescendo to ff at #63 would be more effective

Timpani - 4 measures before #63: start softer than forte

Tutti - ritard before #63: I don't start the ritard until one measure before #63, the last 2 beats.

First violin - #63: The part has a scale pickup which is not in my score.

Tutti - 9 measures after #63: straight eighth notes

Tutti - 4 measures after #64: I do a meno mosso 4 measures after #64, and continue the rallentando to #65.

Horns - 4 measures after #64: Horns dynamics and articulations can be changed to match the strings.

Trumpet 2 and 3, trombones, bassoons, basses - #65: I have them play long-short, rather than short-long to match the snare drum, which I think adds energy.

Brass - #66: It's possible to do a forte-piano on the downbeat and then crescendo to the next measure if the brass covers the melody in the strings and woodwinds.

Trombones - second measure of #66: glissando from the E to the B flat

Clarinet - #67: if possible, glissando from the grace note to the note after

Tuba - 4 measures after #67: big expression! I have the player play a lip glissando or a slide down about a half step on the long G.

Violins: 2 measures before #68: If it seems that the tuba player is running out of air, I cut off the violins a little early.

Bass clarinet - 7 measures after #68: big expression - take your time!

Tutti – 5 measures before #69: I like to start this passage slowly, and then, starting in the third measure, do an accelerando to #69.

Tutti - 6 measures after #69: A subito piano to the C dominant 7th chord makes for a nice change of color.

Violas - 8 measures after #69: very soft for flute and clarinet; both these instruments need to play out, especially the clarinet in the lower register

Trumpets - 4 measures after #71: I suggest clear articulations for the eighth notes.

Bass trombone – third measure after #72: A on the downbeat, not G

Bass trombone – passage starting at #72: glissando where possible

Second trombone and bass trombone - second measure of #73, last note: change to a quarter note, and play a glissando to the next downbeat

Horns - 2 measures before #74: diminuendo, then crescendo to #74

Violins and violas - 2 measures before #76: octaves only as 16th notes; leave out last note of each triplet

Violin 1 - #77: part is marked forte

Bass – 6 measures after #77: these 16th notes are not in the part

Tutti - Largo 7 measures from the end: can be twice as slow as the preceding tempo, omitting the fermata. The fermata is not in the autograph score.

Tutti - 5 measures from the end: everyone piano, except for English horn, clarinets, and alto saxophone, who are forte; crescendo starting 3 from the end. Snare drum can enter in time, but then stretch the last eighth note enough for the roll, which can start softer and then crescendo, to take effect.