

Announcing a deluxe limited edition of the libretto for the opera

PORGY & BESS

Libretto by DuBose Heyward,
with lyrics by DuBose Heyward and Ira Gershwin,
for music composed by George Gershwin,
with sixteen lithographs by Kara Walker,
and with four additional lithographs in portfolio,
published by the Arion Press in the fall of 2013.

PROSPECTUS

Porgy & Bess is considered the most important original American opera. It premiered on October 10, 1935, at the Alvin Theatre in New York City, in the production by the Theatre Guild directed by Rouben Mamoulian. The music was composed by George Gershwin; the libretto was by DuBose Heyward, with lyrics by DuBose Heyward and Ira Gershwin.

The opera was based on the play *Porgy* by Dorothy Heyward and DuBose Heyward, first produced in 1927 by the Theatre Guild and also directed by Rouben Mamoulian. The play was in turn based on the novel *Porgy* by DuBose Heyward, published by the George H. Doran Company, New York, in 1925. The play (and the opera) differs from the novel significantly. At the end of the novel, Bess has gone off to New York with Sporting Life, and Porgy returns from jail, disillusioned, and continues his life as a beggar. But in the play and the opera he goes off in the direction of New York, hoping to find Bess and return with her. All three works are set in Charleston, South Carolina, in the early 1920s, in "Catfish Row", an actual area of the city known as Cabbage Row.

Dorothy Heyward had studied playwriting at Harvard University and met DuBose Heyward during a summer residency at the MacDowell Colony in New Hampshire. They married in 1923. Dorothy urged her husband to make a theatrical adaptation of his novel *Porgy*. When he declined, she secretly began writing the play herself, telling him she was

writing a mystery. As she was about to finish her script, George Gershwin sent a letter to DuBose, asking if he would collaborate on an opera based on the novel, which he had just read at one sitting. Dorothy then confessed that her script was underway and showed it to DuBose, who was impressed and told Gershwin about it. The composer said they should go ahead with the play, as its production could be of help to the opera. With the husband and wife collaborating, the play was finished in 1926 and opened the next year for a very successful run, of 367 performances, at what is now the August Wilson Theatre in New York City. The play *Porgy*, with its authors listed as Dorothy Heyward and DuBose Heyward, was published in 1927 by Doubleday, Page & Co., New York, as a Theatre Guild Edition. One has to wonder at Dorothy's not having been acknowledged for her significant contribution to the libretto that follows the play very closely.

Meanwhile, Al Jolson, the famous blackface singer and actor, proposed a musical with libretto by Oscar Hammerstein II and music by Jerome Kern, with Jolson in a starring role, and the potential financial rewards tempted the Heywards. However, George Gershwin wrote to them: "The sort of thing I have in mind is a much more serious thing than Jolson can ever do." And he urged them to stick with him and the principle of having an all-black cast. The Great Depression and the other successful projects of Hammerstein, Kern, and Gershwin combined to delay the start of work on the opera by either team. In 1933 Gershwin committed to the project and *Porgy*, with the addition of *Bess* in the title for the opera, was underway. While George Gershwin was composing the music, his brother Ira Gershwin and DuBose Heyward wrote the words for the songs.

Heyward was responsible for nearly half of the lyrics, including "Summertime", "A Woman Is a Sometime Thing", "Bazzard Song", "It Take a Long Pull to Get There", and "My Man's Gone Now". He and Ira Gershwin collaborated on "I Got Plenty of Nuttin'", "Bess, You Is My Woman Now", and "I Loves You Porgy". Ira was responsible for "It Ain't Necessarily So", "Oh, I Can't Sit Down", "There's a Boat Dat's Leavin' Soon for New York", "A Red Headed Woman", and "Oh, Where's My Bess".

The success of *Porgy & Bess* was not immediate but has been resounding and long-lasting. The "American folk opera", as George Gershwin called it, was not considered legitimate opera until the Houston Grand Opera production of 1976. The Metropolitan Opera mounted its first production in 1985. The Glyndebourne Festival Opera production, directed by Trevor Nunn and conducted by Simon Rattle, recorded in 1989 and available

Porgy & Bess

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ACT 2 Scene 2

Kittiwah Island, evening, some day.

[Moonlight revealing a narrow strip of sand backed by a tangled palmetto thicket. In the distance (right) the band is playing "Ain't It Hard to be a Rigger". John, Mingo, and several others troop across stage from left to right, carrying apparently empty baskets.]

[Off on dancing, some play mouth organs, tamb, boms. One plays a saxophone, another a wash-tub. Everyone is full of gusto.]

Chorus

I ain' got no shame doin' what I like to do! I ain' got no shame doin' what I like to do! I ain' got no shame, zooooo ain' got no shame; so I ain' got no shame, doin' what I like to do! Ha-da-da, ha-da-da, (etc.).

Sporting Life

It ain't necessarily so.

Sporting Life & Chorus

It ain't necessarily so.

Sporting Life

De t'ings dat yo' il'ble to read in de Bible, it ain't necessarily so. Li'l David was small, but oh my!

Sporting Life & Chorus

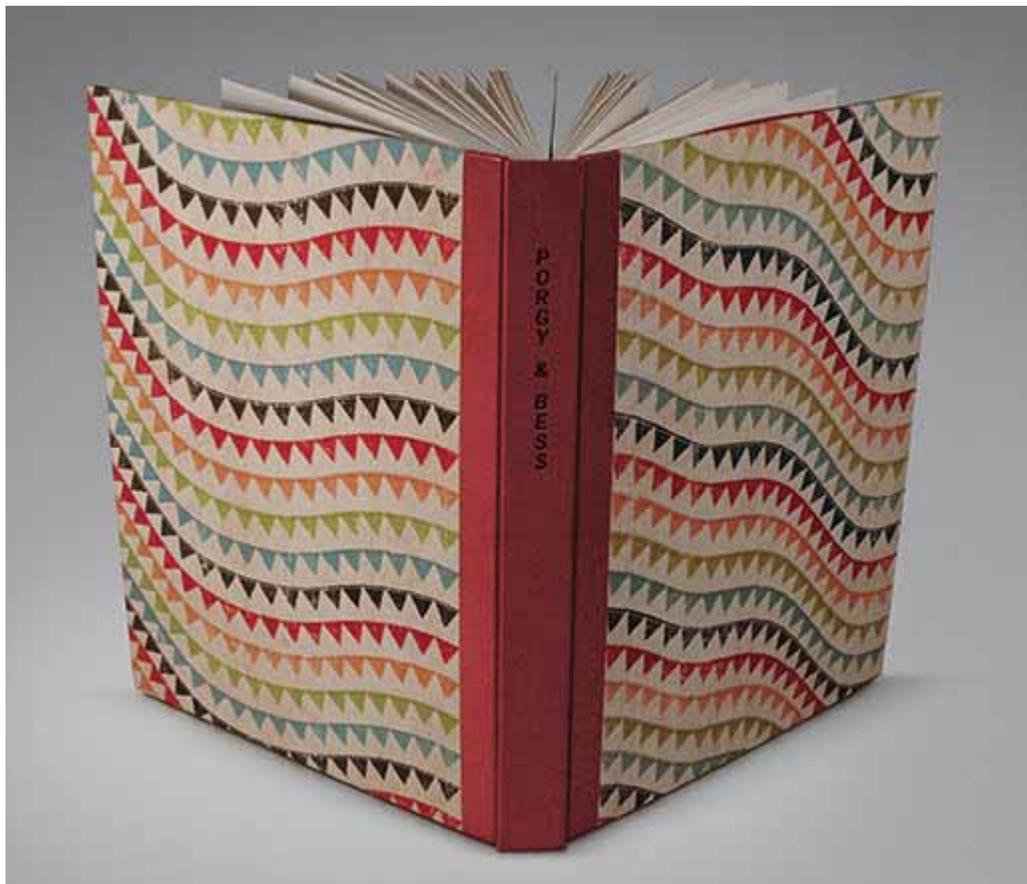
Li'l David was small, but oh my!

Sporting Life

He fought big Goliath who lay down an' dieth. Li'l David was small, but oh my!

Sporting Life & Chorus

Wa-doo, stus hoo hoo-oo, hoo hoo ah da wa da, seatty wah.





Clara and baby



Crapshooters



Crown kills Robbins



Porgy and moon



Porgy and Bess embrace



The dance



Crown and Bess on the island



Crown seduces Bess

in a two-DVD set, is a good alternative to experiencing a live performance. In 2011, it was adapted as a Broadway musical, entitled *The Gershwins' Porgy and Bess*, revised by playwright Suzan-Lori Parks, directed by Diane Paulus, with Audra McDonald as Bess.

The libretto is offered here as an attempt to show the literary and dramatic qualities of the original text. There is no fixed text for the libretto. We used the first edition of the vocal score, published by the Gershwin Publishing Corporation, New York, 1935, as the basis of the libretto, while comparing it with other published versions, such as that in the booklet accompanying the Glyndebourne recordings and those pirated on the Internet. And we have augmented the rather spare stage directions in the vocal score with the more generous stage directions in the play, where appropriate. These additions are set off in brackets and the type has serifs. The stage directions from the vocal score are set off in parentheses and the type is sans serif.

AN AMERICAN CLASSIC

Porgy & Bess is often called the most widely-known and enjoyed work of musical theater that America has produced, an evaluation that recognizes not only the composer and its authors, but the generations of great performers who have taken the roles of Porgy, Bess, Crown, and Sporting Life in the opera, the musical versions, film adaptations, and concert performances.

Although written in the United States in the early twentieth century, its story is compared to classical myth and medieval morality plays, with its hero Porgy as the Good Man buffeted by adversity and redeemed by love. In the tightly knit community of Catfish Row, the crippled beggar Porgy is admired for his kind and dignified nature. He is present at the crap game where the neighborhood bully, Crown, kills a rival who has won the roll of the dice. Crown flees the white police, leaving his mistress Bess homeless. No one but Porgy will take Bess in and the two fall in love. Both Porgy and Bess are made whole by love, but their happiness is short-lived. Crown returns to claim Bess, while the pimp and pusher Sporting Life is a continual source of worldly temptation. Porgy manages to kill Crown, and is celebrated for his courage. But when he returns from jail, he finds that Bess has left for New York with Sporting Life. Porgy resolves to follow them and bring Bess home.

Perhaps because of its enduring popularity as an American work, *Porgy & Bess*

has never been free of charges of racism and superficiality. Early on, composer George Gershwin was criticized for intertwining jazz and classical music elements, casting some untrained black singers, and daring to call it opera. Whether its white creators erred in their depiction of Southern black life is a perennial question.

DUBOSE HEYWARD

DuBose Heyward (1885–1940). He was the son of a Charleston, South Carolina, family that traced its ancestry to a signer of the Declaration of Independence. As an aspiring writer he was fascinated by the African-American community in Charleston. After two summers at the MacDowell Colony, in 1925 Heyward published his first novel, *Porgy*, whose title character is a crippled beggar inspired by the Charleston figure Sammy Smalls. It was a commercial and critical success, as was the 1927 dramatic adaptation he wrote with his wife Dorothy. While adapting their play as a libretto for the opera, the Heywards hosted the composer George Gershwin in Charleston and introduced him to the Gullah community. Heyward published other novels, poetry, and screenplays including *Emperor Jones* and *The Good Earth*. In the view of Stephen Sondheim: “DuBose Heyward has gone largely unrecognized as the author of the finest set of lyrics in the history of the American musical theater — namely, those of *Porgy & Bess*.”

DOROTHY HEYWARD

Dorothy Heyward (1890–1961). Born Dorothy Kuhns in Ohio, she studied playwriting at Harvard and Columbia and at the MacDowell Colony, where she met and married fellow resident DuBose Heyward. When her husband demurred at her suggestion of adapting his novel *Porgy* as a play, she began writing the play herself. She is credited as coauthor in the stage version of 1927. After the early deaths of both DuBose Heyward and George Gershwin, she worked to promote the opera *Porgy & Bess* and was instrumental in arranging its 1952 revival. Her other theater credits include *South Pacific* and *Set My People Free*.

GEORGE GERSHWIN

George Gershwin (1898–1937). The second son of Russian Jewish immigrants in New York, Gershwin was one of the most ambitious, prolific, and successful composers



Bess, delirious, remembers



Fisherman



Clara, Bess, and baby



Bess and baby



Porgy kills Crown



Porgy taken to jail



Sporting Life and Bess



Porgy, departing, remembers

of the Golden Age of American musical theater, producing nearly 700 songs before his death at age 38. Without early musical training, he rose from being a teenage song plugger in a Tin Pan Alley music shop to compose *An American in Paris* and *Rhapsody in Blue*, groundbreaking as orchestral works that incorporate jazz, as well as such musicals as *Lady, Be Good!* and *Strike Up the Band*. His contemporary admirers included P. G. Wodehouse and Arnold Schoenberg. Gershwin was determined to write an opera. During the two years of composing the music for *Porgy & Bess*, he spent two months on Folly Island, off the South Carolina coast, listening and participating in prayer meeting singing in the Gullah churches on nearby James Island. He called his last major work, *Porgy & Bess*, though a financial failure, “a labor of love” adding, “I think the music is so marvelous, I really can’t believe I wrote it.”

IRA GERSHWIN

Ira Gershwin (1896–1983). The bookish older brother of the dynamic pianist and songwriter George Gershwin, Ira Gershwin came of age during New York’s heyday of comic versifying and satiric writing in the teens and twenties. In his nearly fifty years as a lyricist for Broadway and Hollywood, his most notable numbers were with his brother George, such as “Someone to Watch Over Me” for Gertrude Lawrence and “Shall We Dance” for Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. He began work for *Porgy & Bess* late in the development of the opera. After George’s death in 1937, Ira Gershwin wrote *Lady in the Dark* with Kurt Weill and other musicals, continuing to live in Beverly Hills, where his role as keeper of the Gershwin legacy was invaluable.

THE ARTIST

Arion Press was intrigued by the challenge of having this classic interpreted by a contemporary artist, Kara Walker. As one of the most highly regarded African-American artists working today, and one who has made race and American history her subject, Walker seemed like a natural choice. Yet her reputation for unsettling, difficult, and often shocking work meant that the outcome could not be predicted. We had been talking together about an Arion Press project since 2007, but failed to hit upon the right text. Then, during discussions in 2011, Kara Walker was enthusiastic about taking on *Porgy & Bess* for a book and series of prints. She explains why in her own words.

ARTIST'S STATEMENT

My mother is a reserved individual with a strong undertow. My first introduction to *Porgy & Bess* was through her, although I learned nothing about the opera from her at the time. I must have been quite young, still living in Stockton, California, when she picked up from the library an album of the 1952 William Warfield and Leontyne Price version of the Gershwin opera. My memory is a little dark around the edges, but it seemed to me at the time there was something important about this music and Mom had a particularly private conversation happening with it. Her people came from South Carolina, and, while she never lived there herself, or talked to me about family in those days....

I have often felt that the appreciation I have for this work is partly owed to the air of personal mystery surrounding it. When I hear the opening of "Summertime", no matter who is singing, "Daddy's rich, and your mam is good looking", I *always* see my mother nodding conspiratorially at the record, and hear her say "you know what THAT means" ... well, I didn't, at the time. And truly I am still not sure — was she suggesting that Daddy was some rich white man? That Ma some attractive such and such? That the baby of address is not who she thinks she is? I could ask her today, what she meant, but I like that there was nothing straightforward about my earliest knowledge of the music. I just felt all caught up in the piece. Mom's close reading and clipped silences sort of transforming the whole long and interesting legacy of *Porgy & Bess* as a work of art. For me, like so many listeners, *Porgy & Bess* belongs to "The Past", not a balmy southern thing, but a past that is mine.

Unable to break free, seems appropriate as a way to describe my images for this edition. Its hard to claim ownership of these characters, and impossible to wrest them away from their archetypal status. They are archetypes beyond the grand opera theme of "star crossed lovers"; they've become archetypes of another no less grand drama, that of: "American Negroes drawn up by white authors, and retooled by individual actors, amid charges of racism, and counter charges of high-art on stage and screen, in the face of social and political upheaval, over generations." Because they are fraught, I chose to simply let them be paper cut-out caricatures whose full dimensions are alluded to by rubbing. In a sense I wanted to subject those paper figures to pressure, satisfying some implied demand that the artist perform with due diligence, an unpacking of the signifiers "Porgy" and "Bess". But haven't they been through enough heartbreak?

Unlike the bulk of my work, in which I plumb erratically and sometimes dangerously



Porgy and Crown, superimposed



Porgy and Bess, embracing

Prints in the suite



Strawberry Woman



Sailboat in storm

Prints in the suite

through American history using narrative forms and mis-readings of racist texts as the basis, the *Porgy & Bess* series of images is quite straightforward, more an homage to the feeling of the music. And to that feeling I had as a child of a heavy atmosphere hanging around a timeless act of love.

KARA WALKER

Kara Walker was born in Stockton, California, on November 26, 1969, and grew up in Atlanta, Georgia. She graduated from the Atlanta College of Art in 1991 and received her MFA from the Rhode Island School of Design in 1994. She is known for her candid investigation of race, gender, sexuality, and violence through silhouetted figures that have appeared in numerous exhibitions worldwide. Her major survey show, *Kara Walker: My Complement, My Enemy, My Oppressor, My Love*, premiered at The Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota, in February 2007 before traveling to ARC/Musée d'art moderne de la ville de Paris, France; The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; and elsewhere. Other recent solo exhibitions have taken place at the Art Institute of Chicago (2013) and Camden Arts Centre, London (2013). She participated in the Venice International Biennale in 2007 and was the United States representative to the São Paulo Biennial in 2002. She is represented by Sikkema-Jenkins & Co. in New York City.

Walker is the recipient of many awards including the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Achievement Award in 1997, the Deutsche Bank Prize in 2000, and United States Artists Eileen Harris Norton Fellowship in 2008. In 2012, she was elected a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Her work is included in numerous museums and public collections including The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; The Tate Gallery, London; the Centro Nazionale per le Arti Contemporanee, Rome; Deutsche Bank, Frankfurt; and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. She lives and works in New York City.

THE PRINTS

Kara Walker has made her first series of lithographs for this project. The *Porgy & Bess* series includes sixteen lithographs that are bound into the book and four more lithographs that are offered as an extra suite of prints with the book. This is an artist

book, in that the original prints are a significant graphic contribution to the work and an integral part of the object, their individual pages having been hand-sewn into each volume.

Walker illustrates the libretto with recognizable figures and scenes from the opera. Adjacent to the song "Summertime", Clara holds her baby as she sings. During the dice game the crapshooters are shown and then Crown kills Robbins. The cripple Porgy ruminates under the moon. Porgy and Bess embrace as they confess their love. Crown confronts Bess on the island after the picnic and seduces her. Back at Catfish Row, a delirious Bess remembers what has happened to her at the hands of Crown. A fisherman rides a sailboat through the hurricane. Clara and Bess run with the baby when its father dies in the storm, and Bess cares for the child. Porgy kills Crown and is taken to jail. Sporting Life lures Bess to New York and Porgy goes off in search of her, remembering their life together.

To make the lithographs, Kara Walker drew on frosted Mylar with lithographic crayon and inks. The drawings were made into plates for printing on a large lithographic proofing press at Derrière L'Etoile Studio NYC, under the supervision of Maurice Sanchez.

THE BOOK

The book is large quarto in format, 12-½ by 9-¾ inches, 108 numbered pages for the text, plus 16 leaves for the lithographs, for a total of 140 pages. The prints are attached to hinges of thin Japanese paper, which are pasted to folded three-page signatures within sewing sections. The paper is French mouldmade Johannot, thinner for the text, heavier for the prints. The types are Craw Clarendon, Craw Clarendon Modern Bold, Lining Gothic, News Gothic, and Gloria, printed by letterpress. The title and headings are in red ink. The binding has a red goatskin spine, with stamped title, and calico cloth over the boards, reminiscent of fabric used by the black women of Charleston, South Carolina, in the period, a pattern of triangles that recalls hurricane flags. The book is housed in a slipcase covered with dark grey cloth, with titling on the spine, stamped in red. The publisher Andrew Hoyem says that he has never used so many different typefaces in a book design. The members of the staff, who all collaborated on this project, are listed in the colophon at the end of the book.

THE EXTRA SUITE OF PRINTS

The four additional prints in the extra suite show Porgy and Crown, their profiles superimposed; Bess and Porgy, embracing; the Strawberry Woman with fruit basket on her head; and the fishermen's sailboat in the storm. The images are of similar sizes to those in the book, but are printed on a heavier sheet, torn to 18 by 15 inches, Somerset, a British mouldmade paper. The prints are presented in a portfolio, covered in dark grey cloth, with titling on the front stamped in red. A printed title page gives the pertinent information about the edition.

THE EDITION, PRICE, AND ORDERING

This is the ninety-eighth publication of the Arion Press. The book edition is limited to 400 numbered copies for sale and 26 lettered copies for complimentary distribution to participants in the project. Of these, 50 copies are accompanied by the extra suite of four prints, of which 40 are for sale, numbered 1/40 – 40/40; 5 are artist's proofs, numbered AP 1/5 – AP 5/5; and 5 are printer's/publisher's proofs, numbered PP 1/5 – PP 5/5. All of the books and the prints in the suites are signed by the artist.

The price of the book is \$1,750. The price of the book with the extra suite of prints is \$11,750. A portion of the edition has been reserved for subscribers to Arion Press, individuals and institutions committed to purchasing the annual series of publications.

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