

## Summertime

(Janis Joplin)

Summertime, time, time,  
Child, the living's easy.  
Fish are jumping out  
And the cotton, Lord,  
Cotton's high, Lord, so high.

Your daddy's rich  
And your ma is so good-looking, baby.  
She's looking good now,  
Hush, baby, baby, baby, baby, baby,  
No, no, no, no, don't you cry.  
Don't you cry!

One of these mornings  
You're gonna rise, rise up singing,  
You're gonna spread your wings,  
Child, and take, take to the sky,  
Lord, the sky.

But until that morning  
Honey, n-n-nothing's going to harm you now,  
No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no,  
No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no,  
No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no,  
Don't you cry,  
Cry.

"Summertime" is an aria composed in 1934 by George Gershwin for the 1935 opera *Porgy and Bess*. The lyrics are by DuBose Heyward, the author of the novel *Porgy* on which the opera was based, although the song is also co-credited to Ira Gershwin by ASCAP.

The song soon became a popular and much recorded jazz standard, described as "without doubt ... one of the finest songs the composer ever wrote ... Gershwin's highly evocative writing brilliantly mixes elements of jazz and the song styles of blacks in the southeast United States from the early twentieth century". Composer and lyricist Stephen Sondheim has characterized Heyward's lyrics for "Summertime" and "My Man's Gone Now" as "the best lyrics in the musical theater". The song is recognized as among the most covered songs in the history of recorded music, with more than 33,000 covers by groups and solo performers.

Gershwin began composing the song in December 1933, attempting to create his own spiritual in the style of the African American folk music of the period. Gershwin had completed setting DuBose Heyward's poem to music by February 1934, and spent the next 20 months completing and orchestrating the score of the opera.

The song is sung several times throughout *Porgy and Bess*. Its lyrics are the first words heard in act 1 of the opera, following the communal "wa-do-wa". It is sung by Clara as a lullaby. The song theme is reprised soon after as counterpoint to the craps game scene, in act 2 in a reprise by Clara, and in act 3 by Bess, singing to Clara's now-orphaned baby after both its parents died in the storm.

Heyward's inspiration for the lyrics was the southern folk spiritual-lullaby "All My Trials", of which he had Clara sing a snippet in his play *Porgy*.

Gershwin was remarkably successful in his intent to have this sound like a folk song. This is reinforced by his extensive use of the pentatonic scale (C–D–E–G–A) in the context of the A minor tonality and a slow-moving harmonic progression that suggests a "blues". Because of these factors, this tune has been a favorite of jazz performers for decades and can be done in a variety of tempos and styles.

There are over 25,000 recordings of "Summertime". In September 1936, a recording by Billie Holiday was the first to hit the US pop charts, reaching no. 12. Other versions to make the pop charts include those by Sam Cooke (US no. 81, 1957), Al Martino (UK no. 49, 1960), The Marcells (US no. 78, 1961), Ricky Nelson (US no. 89, 1962), and the Chris Columbo Quintet (US no. 93, 1963). The most commercially successful version was by Billy Stewart, who reached no. 10 on the Billboard Hot 100, and no. 7 on the R&B chart in 1966; his version reached no. 39 in the UK and no. 13 in Canada. Janis Joplin's 1968 version with Big Brother and the Holding Company has been highly praised. David Starkey in his article "Summertime" says that Joplin sings the song "with the authority of a very old spirit".