

NUNDA HISTORICAL SOCIETY presents DENNIS JAMES with
“GERSHWIN CURIOSITIES: FROM RAGTIME TO HOLLYWOOD”

Dennis James is New York’s Finger Lakes area expert on historical music obscurities and enthusiast of historical musical puzzles and maintains a worldwide career exploring the fascinating world of forgotten musical instruments together with their forgotten repertoire, focusing on oddities generally mentioned today only as footnotes of the history of music.



The entertaining and educational ***“Gershwin’s Curiosities: From Ragtime to Hollywood,”*** will be James’ 8th performance for the Nunda Historical Society and will take place at **The Trinity Church of Nunda, 25 East Street, on Sunday, April 18, at 2:30 pm. Note that masks will be required and social distancing will be observed.**

James’ annual Musica Curiosa Informances series of rare music instrument and historical repertoire revival demonstrations have delighted New York’s upstate music and history fans for the past seven years. During the current Pandemic isolation period James has been bringing to life his lifelong fascination for the 20th c. American Salon piano stylings of George Gershwin as preserved in his rare audio recordings, radio programs and piano-roll personal performances. James will feature the intriguing solution to a longtime composition & performances mystery concerning Gershwin’s piano preludes that dates back to 1926 and will perform the now complete set of long-lost preludes. James also showcases Gershwin’s own solo piano party repertoire in selections ranging from Ragtime to Recital Compositions and obscure Hollywood film score segments. **For well known popular songs James will play the Theremin,** the pioneering electronic music instrument popular in the 1920’s-30’s, together with **Gershwin’s** own accompaniments.





George Gershwin (1898-1937) was a brilliant pianist and was the most outstanding interpreter of his own works ever to have been performed. Although he did not begin formal piano studies until the age of twelve, his progress as a student was phenomenal. Secured in the knowledge of the standard classical piano repertoire, from the very beginning Gershwin felt no conflict between classical and popular idioms and moved freely between them in his own compositions.

“Vanity Fair” magazine foretold, in 1925, “Some of Gershwin’s finest inspirations have not as yet been either published or publicly performed,” heralding Gershwin’s ambitious project designed for the composition of short piano works in all the musical keys, just as Bach and Chopin had famously done before. While this initial vision was for a modern cycle of twenty-four preludes, Gershwin—having floundered in his typical career misfortune of time constraints—was forced to narrow the project to a set of seven sketches, and then finally for the debut performance into just five of the short piano pieces, and finally only three were actually published.

The 1919 Soviet electronic instrument invention, the Theremin, was most famous for permitting close imitation of the human voice. Virtuoso thereminist Clara Rockmore, James’ teacher of the instrument, played for Gershwin in his personal visit to her New York City salon where he heard her play his famous songs interpreted with the unbelievable, almost magic hand gestures. According to Rockmore, one the most popular works played on the Theremin was the famous operatic-lullaby composition “Summertime” from “Porgy & Bess” and it is Rockmore’s interpretation that James will perform, along with a selection of Gershwin’s most popular song melodies in this wide-ranging program of historical curiosities.



This Free program is made possible with funds from the Decentralization Program, a re-grant program of the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew M. Cuomo and the New York State Legislature and administered by the Genesee Valley Council on the Arts. For additional information or questions, please contact Joan Schumaker at 585-490-330