

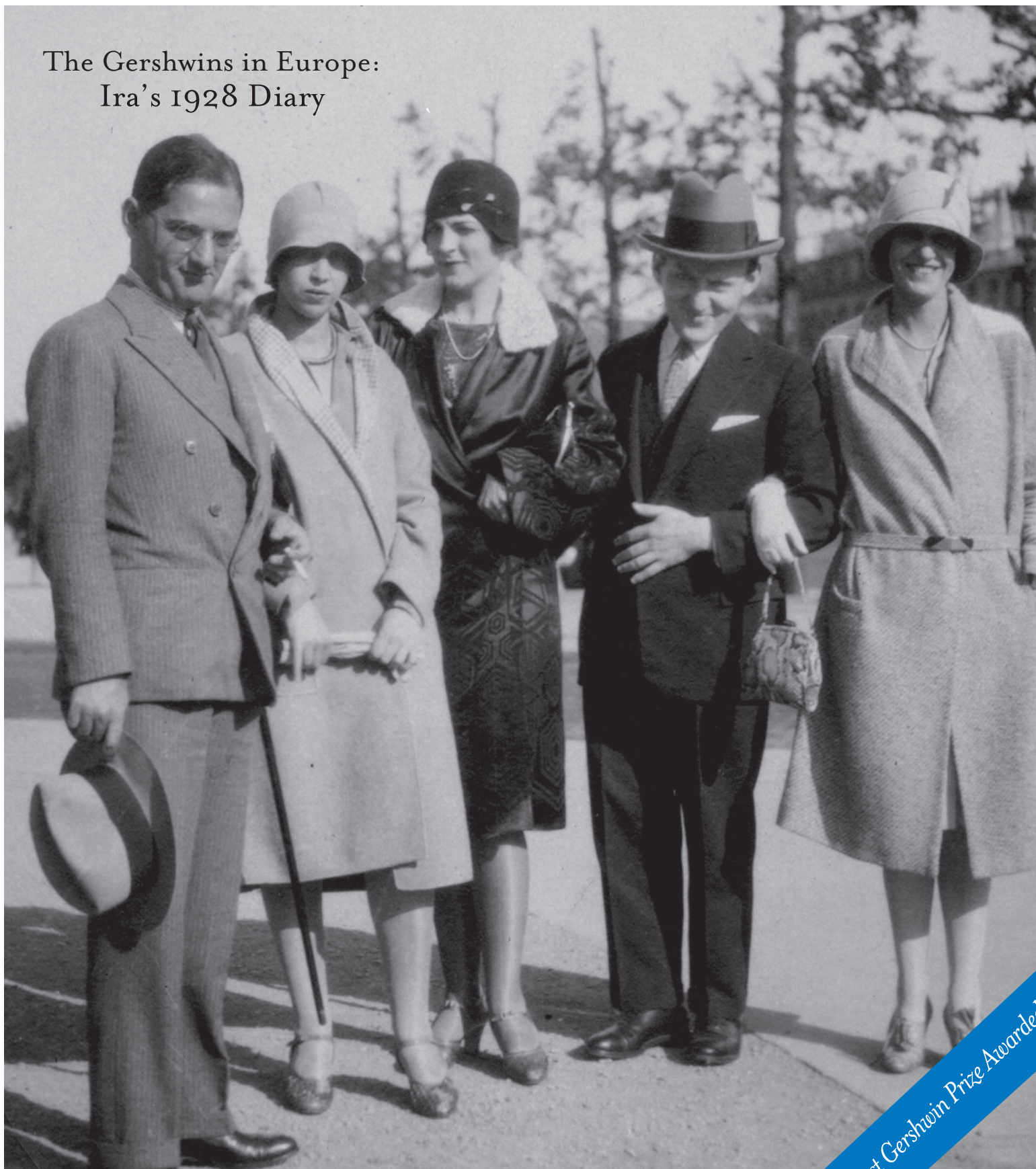
WORDS WITHOUT MUSIC

The Ira Gershwin Newsletter



No. 2, 2007

The Gershwins in Europe: Ira's 1928 Diary



First Gershwin Prize Awarded

KITTY CARLISLE HART REMEMBERED

Kitty Carlisle Hart died this spring. She was 96. We were long-time friends, but our friendship grew as we joined in efforts to encourage new productions of *Lady in the Dark*, the 1941 Broadway musical written by Kurt Weill, Ira Gershwin, and her husband, Moss Hart. Our acquaintance began in 1964 when I was an “imposter” on the television program, *To Tell the Truth*, where Kitty was a regular panel member. Over the years that followed I had great fun teasing Kitty that I had successfully fooled her into believing I was an American who had joined the French Foreign Legion. My favorite adjective to describe Kitty was “wise.” She was a role model in so many ways. At the age of 95 she called asking if I could get her a “cabaret gig” in San Francisco. Her five nights at the Plush Room rocked the City! Kitty never looked back – it was always “tomorrow,” “who’s coming?” , “where are we going?” Kitty, we will see *Lady in the Dark* again You betcha!

—Michael Strunsky

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

It was with surprise and joy that I discovered **Words Without Music** in the mail last night. Ira certainly deserves his own newsletter. That it is handsome, informative and rather elegant makes for a very happy occasion indeed. The first issue also serves as a warm and fitting tribute to Mark [Trent Goldberg].

I’m a great fan of Ira’s work. I consider him to be a key step in the development of the American musical comedy; specifically, he forged a method – in *Strike Up the Band*, *Of Thee I Sing*, *Lady in the Dark* and others – of using words (set to music) to propel [the] story, which was simply not happening elsewhere on Broadway. For all the unquestioned brilliance of George’s work, my theory is that Ira guided him from all those wonderful, early stand-alone songs to the stronger and more developed work of the later years. So anything we can do to keep his sterling work in the public ear is all to the good.

—Steven Suskin

Steven Suskin is a New York-based writer on musical theater. His most-recent books are *Second Act Trouble: Behind the Scenes at Broadway’s Big Musical Bombs* (Applause Books, 2006) and *A Must See! Brilliant Broadway Artwork* (Chronicle Books, 2004). He’s currently completing a book on Broadway orchestrators, *The Sound of Broadway Music*.

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ON THE COVER (LEFT TO RIGHT): IRA GERSHWIN, HENRIETTA MALKIEL, BARONESS FRANZEL POLNAR, HERMAN WASSERMAN & LEONORE GERSHWIN — PARIS 1928.

DESIGN BY PINWHEEL (WWW.PINWHEEL.TV)

MUSICAL SALUTE HONORS FIRST GERSHWIN PRIZE RECIPIENT PAUL SIMON

A star-studded cast and an enthusiastic audience gathered at the Warner Theatre in Washington, D.C. on May 23 to honor 12-time Grammy-Award winner Paul Simon as the first recipient of the Library of Congress Gershwin Prize for Popular Song.

In his program remarks, Librarian of Congress James H. Billington wrote, “The Prize is named after one of America’s most beloved songwriting teams, George and Ira Gershwin. It will be awarded annually to a composer or interpreter of popular song whose life’s work has had a significant and uplifting influence on the world of music and on our society as a whole. The Prize is part of the Library’s renewed effort to recognize, celebrate, and encourage musical creativity, the wellspring of the vast music collections housed in the Library of Congress.”

The performers participating in the tribute to Simon – many with long-standing ties to the 66-year-old singer-songwriter – came from across the pop music spectrum. Among the concert’s highlights were James Taylor’s relaxed account of “Still Crazy After All These Years,” a folk-influenced version of “The Boxer” by contemporary bluegrass artist Alison Krauss and singer-songwriter Shawn Colvin, Lyle Lovett letting the words speak for themselves in “50 Ways to Leave Your Lover,” Marc Anthony’s Latin-infused “Late in the Evening,” reggae singer Stephen Marley’s “Mother and Child Reunion,” and gospel’s Yolanda Adams and Jessie Dixon cutting loose on “Gone at Last.” Ladysmith Black Mambazo from South Africa, whose association with Simon dates back to his *Graceland* album, charmed the audience with their performances of “Homeless,” sung a cappella, and, accompanied later by Simon, of “Diamonds on the Soles of Her Shoes.” Stevie Wonder was on hand for a duet with Simon of “Me and Julio Down by the Schoolyard.” In recognition of the namesakes of the prize, jazz stylist Dianne Reeves sang George and Ira Gershwin’s “Love Is Here to Stay.” Among the presenters in the evening’s lineup was sportscaster Bob Costas, who introduced a film clip of Yankee fan Simon singing “Mrs. Robinson” during the dedication of a Joe

DiMaggio plaque at Yankee Stadium.

For many, the high point of the evening occurred when Simon was joined by his former partner, Art Garfunkel, for a performance of “Bridge Over Troubled Water.”

Librarian of Congress Billington acknowledged “the friendship and generosity of the Gershwin families” for allowing their name to be used for the Prize. The Library of Congress’s close, long-standing relationship with the Gershwins began almost 70 years ago; in 1939, two years after his brother died, Ira and their mother, Rose, gave the library a musical sketch by George from *Porgy and Bess*. Over the years Ira and his wife, Leonore, as well as other family members and friends, continued to donate material to the Library’s George and Ira Gershwin Collection. Today the collection is a wide-ranging repository of Gershwin music, manuscripts, correspondence, scrapbooks, posters, photographs and other memorabilia, overseen by the library’s Music Division. The Ira and Leonore Gershwin Trusts have provided generous ongoing support for the Music Division’s programs and acquisitions since the death of Ira’s widow, Leonore, in 1991. The May 22 dinner in the Great Hall of the Library, when the Gershwin Prize for Popular Song was officially presented to Paul Simon, was underwritten by the Trusts.

The broadcast version of the concert aired nationally June 27 on PBS.



A RECORD OF ACHIEVEMENT

“Paul Simon’s songs have been musical milestones in America over the past 50 years. ... [H]e has given us a profusion of beautiful lyrics, melodies, and harmonies that cover the full scope of human expression. He has a gift for synthesizing different musical styles – folk, gospel, reggae, salsa, Brazilian, and Cajun – to make new sounds in new ways. Perhaps most important, his music has created bridges between different peoples and musical traditions, which is why *Graceland*, his 1986 album that brought together American and African musical idioms, was added this year to the Library’s National Recording Registry: a list of sound recordings that are culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant. ... Since [1956], the Library has been collecting and preserving his works – hundreds of copyright deposits, printed music, and all of his published sound recordings.”

—From the Librarian of Congress James H. Billington’s letter to the audience in the May 23 concert program

Excerpts from Ira Gershwin's 1928 Diary

On March 10, 1928, George and Ira Gershwin, their younger sister Frances, ("Frankie"), and Ira's wife, Leonore ("Lee"), boarded the S.S. *Majestic* in New York harbor for a three-month trip through Europe. George was an experienced traveller, having made four previous European journeys between 1923 and 1926, while Ira, Lee and Frankie would be heading overseas for the first time. Ostensibly, George was planning to continue work on what would become *An American in Paris*, though renewing acquaintances he had made on his prior trips was, as always, of equal importance to him. Ira, feeling at a loss while his brother was busy with his concert piece and partygoing, decided to keep a diary of the journey, reviving a habit he had begun in 1916.

In Merle Armitage's 1938 book-length memorial tribute to George, Ira described the journey this way: "In the Spring of 1928 George took his fifth and last trip to Europe. With Funny Face and Rosalie running in New York and Oh, Kay in London, a vacation was in order and my sister, my wife and myself accompanied him. I did little other than see sights and drink beer, but George, despite all his social activities, his meetings with many of Europe's important composers, the hours spent with various interviewers and musical critics, still found time to work on *An American in Paris* in the hotels we stayed at. The entire 'blues' section was written at the Hotel *Majestic* in Paris."

In the following excerpts from Ira's diary, you'll find the Gershwins in London and Paris, entertaining and being entertained. As you'll discover, an extraordinary range of people crossed the brothers' paths, from the famous to the obscure, and notes are provided to give a glimpse into their relationship with George and Ira.

Thursday, 3/22/28 (London)

Up at 12. To the Embassy Club with Lee to meet Guy Bolton for lunch. My lunch very nice, too – smoked salmon (everybody eats smoked salmon here), filet of sole marguery, curried veal with chutney, coffee, wine, cake (cocktail & beer). The club was crowded with a lot of important looking men, mostly over 40 and a lot of young women. At the next table to us sat Arnold Bennett, Frederick Lonsdale & 3 other men. After lunch walked Guy down Piccadilly to the theatre where his "Blue Eyes" is rehearsing. Dropped in for a minute, saw John Harwood. Then to Anderson & Sheppard for fittings. Visited some other shops. Evening we were too tired to go to the Kit-Cat Club where a "George Gershwin Night" was on, so stayed in hotel & played 21 with Phil [Berman] & Leo [Robin], losing about £4. Frankie came in about 3 & told us both "This Year of Grace," the Noël Coward

revue opening to-night, & the Kit-Cat affair were great successes. The weather was lovely again to-day & it's too bad we don't get up earlier in the morning to do some sight-seeing. Changed \$200 worth more of American Express checks to-day making 5 in all.

Saturday, 3/31/28 (Paris)

(Rain most of day.) Up at 8 (don't know what wakes me so early and suddenly). Found no papers so to bed again.

Woke at 9. Found papers. Sinclair Oil 29. Breakfast. At 2 Adolph Block came up. Lunch at 4. Then at 5 with George to the Saturday Concerts Padeloup at the Théâtre Mogador ("Rose-Marie" is in its 2nd year here). The theatre smelt beery and the air was close. We got a box in the middle of the orchestra floor.

There were several women musicians in the orchestra. Rhene-Baton, a large, bearded man with a ring on his left hand, conducted. 1st they played César Franck Symphonie en ré mineur 2. Mikhail (1st performance although written in 1909) by R. Brunel, wishy washy Oriental moving picture music 3. Le Chant de Nigamon – Honegger (1917) based on American Indian themes. Good. Intermission 4. Concerto en ut mineur – J.S. Bach pour deux pianos et orchestra (3 short movements – charming – the soloists Messieurs Wiener et Doucet) 5. "Rhapsodie [sic] in Blue" – George Gershwin. I alternately giggled & squirmed during this performance. It was at times almost unbelievably bad. The solo part had evidently proved too hard for M. Wiener, the premier soloist, so he got an assistant to oompah. Some of the fast tempi were taken at a funereal pace, and the rhythms were terrible in spots. A banjo played the same chord almost all thru the piece. The middle theme couldn't be spoiled of course and came like a violet ray on a bald spot. And yet I realized that since probably 95% of the audience had never heard it before they might take the occasional sour notes as a true reading and find it all interesting. Sure enough at its conclusion there was real spontaneous applause all over the house & lots of cheers & bravos. George had left quickly for the bar to wait for us but when I saw Wiener on the platform looking anxiously over the audience & then gesticulating to the conductor I knew they wanted George.



Ira and Leonore Gershwin's 1928 passport photo

So I called him & he rushed backstage – and on his appearance the house gave him another big hand. So the 2 pianists played for an encore "Do! Do! Do!" a verse & 3 choruses they had evidently arranged and practiced, for it went with great éclat and the house wanted more.

It was the 1st time I had heard of an encore by soloists to a symphony program. In the lobby George told us Baton had apologized for the performance saying they had only rehearsed the piece ½ hour, and he had only the piano score etc. At any rate despite the almost laughable performance George was thrilled by the reception. In the lobby met Deems Taylor & Mary Kennedy; then Fekerte, Salabert & Yvain, a tall and hicky looking Frenchman. Adolph left us and George, Frankie, Lee, Mabel & myself drove to Mabel's apartment to get Bob, who had been golfing, and all of us to Lapérouse, a restaurant on the Left Bank where we had a good dinner for about 550 francs. Then to hotel, where we spent a wild hour in Paris playing "Ghost." And to bed about 2. Finished "transition" about 4.

Notes

3/22/28

Described by a friend of the Gershwins' as "the most fashionable nightclub of London," the **Embassy Club** was located on New Bond Street. The 1928 house orchestra was Jack Harris and His Band.

Born in England to American parents, **Guy Bolton** (1882-1979) was best known for his musical comedy librettos, including the Gershwin shows *Lady, Be Good* (1924), *Tip-Toes* (1925), *Oh, Kay!* (1926) and *Girl Crazy* (1930). With Jerome Kern and P.G. Wodehouse, he helped launch the intimate musicals presented at the 299-seat Princess Theatre in New York during the 1910s.

Arnold Bennett (1867-1931) was an English novelist whose most famous works include *The Old Wives' Tale* (1908) and the Clayhanger books (published 1910-1916), all set in the English West Midlands. He was in London working on a play, *The Return Journey*, which opened in September at the St. James's Theatre, with Gerald du Maurier. The play received harsh reviews and closed in November.

English author **Frederick Lonsdale** (1881-1954) is remembered for his popular stage comedies *Aren't We All?* (1923), *The Last of Mrs. Cheney* (1925) and *On Approval* (1927). He wrote the book for the London musical *Lady Mary* with John Hastings Turner, which had opened on February 23, 1928 at Daly's Theatre; music by Albert Sirmay and Phil Charig, both of whom were friends and colleagues of the Gershwins – Sirmay as the editor of their music, and Charig as the composer of *That's a Good Girl*, with lyrics by Ira, which opened while George and Ira were in London.

Blue Eyes opened at London's Piccadilly Theatre on April 27, 1928, with music by Jerome Kern, lyrics by Graham John, and a book by Guy Bolton and John. The show ran for 276 performances, starring Evelyn Laye. This was Kern and Bolton's final collaboration after 13 years working together.

John Harwood was the director of the Gershwin musicals *Tell Me More* (1925), *Tip-Toes* (1925) and *Oh, Kay!* (1926). He was also an actor

and played Voltaire in the original Broadway cast of Peter Weiss' *The Persecution and Assassination of Marat as Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum of Charenton Under the Direction of the Marquis de Sade* (1965).

London tailors at 52 Old Burlington Street, **Anderson & Sheppard** opened in 1906.

Located in the Haymarket, the **Kit-Cat Club** (also spelled "Kit-Kat") opened in 1925 as a private club and became a restaurant in 1927. It took its name from a famed 18th century gentlemen's club allegedly run by a Christopher Catt. The house band in 1928 was Arthur Rosebery and His Kit-Cat Dance Band.

According to a March 24, 1928 report in the London Daily Herald, "**George Gershwin Night**" included a performance by Gertrude Lawrence, who sang two numbers from *Oh, Kay!* accompanied by George (though the Herald noted that she appeared to be accompanying him). George's friend, the stockbroker Emil Mosbacher, believed that George never understood why Ira preferred to stay home rather than attend these parties, but Mosbacher knew that Ira "had a wife he loved, and didn't need the limelight or all that lionizing" (Robert Kimball & Alfred Simon, *The Gershwins*, page 86).

Phil Berman (c. 1897-1988) later ran Louis Berman & Co., a Chicago furrier founded by his father, Louis, in 1891. In 1940, he married the actress Helen Ericson (1915-1985), who had been in the cast of the Irving Berlin/Moss Hart revue *As Thousands Cheer* on Broadway and had spent the last half of the 1930s working in Hollywood films.

Best-known for his work with Ralph Rainger ("Thanks for the Memory," 1938) and Jule Styne (*Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, 1949), **Leo Robin** (1900-1984), like Ira, was between shows in Spring 1928. *Hit the Deck*, for which he had written the lyrics with Clifford Grey, to the music of Vincent Youmans, had closed in February 1928. Robin later became the "vice president" of the Sweet Fellows Club, a non-existent society "founded" by composer Harry Warren, of which Ira was "president."

Noël Coward's revue ***This Year of Grace!*** opened at the London Pavilion on March 22, 1928. Starring Sonnie Hale, Maisie Gay and Jessie Matthews, it ran for 316 performances, transferring to New York's Selwyn Theatre on November 7, 1928, with Coward and Bea Lillie in the starring roles (157 performances). The show included two classic Coward songs, "Dance, Little Lady" and "A Room with a View."

3/31/28

After winning two scholarships at the Beaux Arts Institute of Design in New York, American sculptor **Adolph Block** (1906-1978) sailed for France in June 1927 and spent 15 months studying there.

The **Saturday Concerts Padeloup** were a feature of this Parisian concert society created by Jules Padeloup in 1861.

Théâtre Mogador was at 25 rue de Mogador (9th arrondissement) on the Right Bank.

With music by Rudolf Friml and Herbert Stothart, libretto and lyrics by Otto Harbach and Oscar Hammerstein II, ***Rose-Marie*** opened in New York on September 24, 1924 at the Imperial Theatre (557 performances).

Born René Baton (1879-1940), **Rhene-Baton** was the principal conductor of the Concerts Padeloup from the late 1910s to 1932.

The **Symphony in D minor** by the Belgian-born, French composer César Franck (1822-1890) was premiered in Paris in 1889.

The Song of Nigamon had its first performance in Paris in 1920, by the Padeloup Orchestra, under Rhene-Baton, who was also the dedicatee. Based on an episode from Gustave Aimard's novel, *Le Souriquet*, the ten-minute symphonic poem quotes three Native American themes Honegger (1892-1955) found in *Notes d'ethnographie musicale* by the French ethnomusicologist Julien Tiersot.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 06

Jean Wiéner (1896-1982) and **Clément Doucet** (1895-1950) were a team of French (Wiéner) and Belgian (Doucet) cocktail pianists, who were said to have “played like angels and looked like Mutt and Jeff.” Wiéner was also a composer and concert promoter, Doucet a composer and broadcaster. Their partnership lasted until 1939. Wiéner published his autobiography, *Allegro Appassionato*, in Paris in 1978.

Deems Taylor (1885-1966) was a composer, critic, writer on music, President of ASCAP and the author of the program description for George’s *An American in Paris*. Taylor met George Gershwin in 1921 at the Harms office in New York. His name became a household word as intermission commentator for the popular Sunday radio broadcasts of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra from 1936 to 1943 and as the on-screen narrator of the classic Disney film *Fantasia* (1940). He and his wife were on a European vacation.

Mary Kennedy (1896-1987), the actress and poet, was Deems Taylor’s second wife. She was in the cast of the Irving Berlin/Moss Hart musical, *Face the Music*, in 1932.

Fekerte was General Manager of Éditions Salabert.

Francis Salabert (1884-1946) was head of the French music publishing house Éditions Salabert and ran the Moulin Rouge nightclub after World War I. Salabert died in a plane crash at Shannon Airport in Ireland in December 1946.

Maurice Yvain (1891-1965) was the composer of “Mon Homme” (“My Man”), 1920, made famous by Fanny Brice. His best known shows were *Ta Bouche* (1922) and *Pas sur la Bouche* (1925), which George Gershwin saw on his summer 1926 Paris trip (he walked out during the second act). Yvain published his memoirs, *La Belle Opérette*, in 1962.

Mabel Pleshette Schirmer (1897-1994) was a niece of Lou Paley, who was a friend of the Gershwins and Ira’s brother-in-law (he was married to Leonore Gershwin’s sister Emily). Mabel, a longtime friend of the Gershwins, married Robert Schirmer in the 1920s, divorcing him in the early 1930s. The Schirmers were living in Paris at the time of the diary.

Bob [Robert] Schirmer (c. 1899-1947) was an archeologist, composer, writer and director of the New York publishing firm G. Schirmer, Inc., founded by his great-grandfather Gustave.

The renowned restaurant **Lapérouse** was at 51 quai des Grands-Augustins, in the 6th arrondissement.

Ghost is a word game where players take turns adding a letter to a growing word, with the loser being the person who spells a complete valid word.

Probably **transition**, a Paris-based, English-language literary magazine (1927-1938), founded by Eugene Jolas (1894-1952), whose “Revolution of the Word” manifesto in the first issue declared that “the plain reader be damned.” Contributors included James Joyce, Gertrude Stein and Ernest Hemingway.

– Diary edited, with introduction and notes, by Michael Owen

AN AMERICAN IN PARIS TO BOW IN HOUSTON

The world premiere of *The Gershwins’ An American in Paris*, a new musical with a book by Tony-award winner Ken Ludwig (*Crazy for You*), will cap the 2007-2008 season at Houston’s Alley Theatre. Scheduled to open in May 2008, it is a funny, fictionalized account of the making of the classic 1951 MGM film.

A second reading of the script took place at the Alley’s rehearsal space this past May, with Harry Groener, who had starred in *Crazy for You* on Broadway, and singer-dancer Jeffry Denman both resuming their roles from a 2006 New York reading. *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*’s Erin Dilly played the female lead.

Gregory Boyd, the Alley’s long-time artistic director, will direct the Houston production. The



Ken Ludwig (courtesy Alley Theatre)

creative team includes Rob Berman (the new music director of New York City Center’s Encores!) as musical director, choreographer Randy Skinner, scenic designer Douglas Schmidt, and lighting designer Paul Gallo, a veteran of *Crazy for You*. Final casting is in the works.

THE BOOK REPORT

THE HOUSE THAT GEORGE BUILT

Wilfred Sheed’s wonderful new book, *The House That George Built: With a Little Help From Irving, Cole and a Crew of About Fifty* (Random House, \$29.95, 335 pages) is a flowing, rhapsodic ode to many of the leading practitioners of the halcyon years of the Great American Song Book. A collection of New Yorker-style essays, it salutes the swinging jazz songs that George (Gershwin), Irving (Berlin), Cole (Porter) and others created, although it downplays, unfairly in my opinion, the importance of lyricists including such greats as Ira Gershwin and Lorenz Hart, with Johnny Mercer the sole exception. Despite a number of factual errors (Fred Ebb’s last name is Ebb, not Ebbs; Harold Arlen was a rehearsal pianist for Vincent Youmans’ 1929 show *Great Day*, not for the 1927 *Hit the Deck*; “Benny Southgate,” the character in *Guys and Dolls*, should be Benny Southstreet; DeSylva, Brown and Henderson’s song was titled “If I Had a Talking Picture of You,” not “You Ought to Be in Pictures,” et al.), *The House That George Built* is, much like a gorgeous piano recital with some wrong notes, one of the finest books ever written on American popular music.

It has received hosannas from such luminaries and experts as Garrison Keillor, Robert Gottlieb, Stephen Holden, Will Friedwald, Jonathan Schwartz, Adam Gopnik and Gary Giddins. Sales of *The House That George Built* have been deservedly brisk; an exquisitely written book, it has become an instant classic.

PREMINGER BIO REVISITS PORGY AND BESS FILM

Foster Hirsch’s impressive new biography of Otto Preminger, *The Man Who Would Be King* (Knopf, \$35.00, 592 pages), calls attention to the director’s 1959 screen version of *Porgy and Bess*. The movie was “one of [Preminger’s] most commanding performances and an overlooked masterpiece ... one of the most misunderstood, underrated and unfairly treated works in the history of American film,” writes Hirsch.

Among the notables (some with dubbed singing voices) in Preminger’s *Porgy and Bess* were Sidney Poitier (Porgy), Dorothy Dandridge (Bess), Sammy Davis, Jr. (Sportin’ Life), Pearl Bailey (Maria), Brock Peters (Crown) and a young Diahann Carroll (Clara). Special showings of the movie were held on September 26 and 27 at New York City’s Ziegfeld Theater in connection with the publication of Hirsch’s book. Viewing it on the huge Ziegfeld screen helped reinforce Hirsch’s view that the movie “deserves, indeed demands, to be seen again in its original road-show version.”

ETHEL MERMAN CENTENARY

January 16, 2008 marks the one hundredth birthday of the incomparable Ethel Merman (1908-1984). From her spectacular Broadway debut on October 14, 1930 as Kate Fothergill in George and Ira Gershwin’s smash *Girl Crazy* to her final Main Stem performances in 1970 as Dolly Levi in *Hello Dolly*, she was widely regarded as Broadway’s greatest musical comedy star. (Although she was the seventh to play the role of Dolly during the show’s long run, *Hello Dolly*’s composer-lyricist Jerry Herman wrote the part originally with Merman in mind.) Every one of the 14 Broadway shows Merman appeared in was a success.

I am happy to report that Merman, whom I knew and liked very much and who gave the best performance I have ever seen on the musical stage as Mama Rose in *Gypsy*, is the subject of two splendid biographies slated for November publication. *Ethel Merman: A Life* by Opera News’ esteemed features editor Brian Kellow (Viking, \$25.95, 336 pages) is an elegantly written and immensely entertaining tribute. University of Arizona professor Caryl Flinn offers a comprehensive, diligently researched account of an unparalleled career in *Brass Diva: The Life and Legends of Ethel Merman* (University of California Press, \$34.95, 540 pages). If you are a Merman fan,



buy them both; each allows the reader to savor memories of the amazing Ethel, the likes of whom we may never see again. And if you can find it, I also highly recommend George B. Bryan’s chronologically organized *Ethel Merman: A Bio-Bibliography*, which was published in 1992 (Greenwood Press, 298 pages).

—Robert Kimball

TIP-TOES @ WHITEFIRE:
A SELDOM-SEEN GERSHWIN MUSICAL
IS STAGED IN CALIFORNIA

The neglected 1925 George and Ira Gershwin musical *Tip-Toes* received a warm welcome this past spring from audiences at the small Whitefire Theatre in Sherman Oaks, California. Other than a 1978 production at the Goodspeed Opera House in East Haddam, Connecticut – which incorporated songs from other Gershwin shows and was also seen in 1979 at the Brooklyn Academy of Music – *Tip-Toes* has not been fully staged since its original run on Broadway at the Liberty Theatre. In 2001, New World Records released a CD of the show, conducted by Rob Fisher, who had restored the score using material found in 1982 at the Warner Brothers Music warehouse in Secaucus, New Jersey. Whitefire producers William Mead, who directed and choreographed the show, and Brian O’Halloran, the musical director, based their version on Fisher’s restoration. Reviews of the Whitefire staging were uniformly positive. Variety’s critic wrote, “Mead permits no trace of campiness or condescension, and it would take a hard-hearted cynic indeed to resist show’s appeal.” Backstage West called the show “a nostalgic and melodic bonbon recalling the simple charms of old-fashioned tuners.” Cynthia Citron, critic for ReviewPlays.com, noted that “Like Stephen Sondheim’s, Ira’s lyrics are sophisticated, with intelligent and unexpected rhyming patterns.”



Matthew Reis And Kelly Stables in Whitefire’s Tip-Toes
Photo: Michael Lamont

LADY, BE GOOD! @ REGENT’S PARK

As part of its 75th anniversary season this past summer, London’s Regent’s Park Open Air Theatre presented a revival of George and Ira Gershwin’s 1924 musical *Lady, Be Good!* During the production’s six-week, sold-out run, audiences were treated to such Gershwin classics as “Fascinating Rhythm” and “Oh, Lady, Be Good!” as well as the charming “Little Jazz Bird” and “The Half of It, Dearie, Blues.” A typical 1920s musical romp with a book by Guy Bolton and Fred Thompson about suddenly homeless and penniless socialite siblings, *Lady, Be Good!* was staged by Ian Talbot in his final season as the Open Air’s artistic director. Most reviewers responded positively to what Clive Davis of The Times called “this exuberant Gershwin revival.” “I can’t think of a more infallible cheerer-upper,” wrote Charles Spencer in the Telegraph. The Financial Times’ Sarah Hemming commented, “This jazz-age musical comedy, driven by George Gershwin’s restless rhythms

and Ira Gershwin’s nimble lyrics, has an irresistible energy, and Ian Talbot’s production delivers it with style.” Paul Grunert’s comic portrayal of the lawyer Watty Watkins and Bill Deamer’s adept choreography came in for particular praise from the critics. The original production of *Lady, Be Good!* – the first complete Broadway collaboration of George and Ira Gershwin – starred Fred and Adele Astaire as the siblings Dick and Susie Trevor and ran for 330 performances at the Liberty Theatre in New York. After its U.S. tour, the show began an equally successful stay at London’s Empire Theatre in 1926.

LOVEMUSIK

Four lesser-known Ira Gershwin lyrics were heard on Broadway this past spring in *LoveMusik*, the Harold Prince-directed musical about Kurt Weill and Lotte Lenya. Starring Michael Cerveris as the composer and Donna Murphy as the singer-actress, the show explored the couple’s fraught, complex relationship, from their courtship and marriage in Germany to their “second act” in the United States.

The score, drawn from songs composed by Weill, used Ira’s “Song of the Rhineland” from the 1945 movie *Where Do We Go From Here?* (sung by Lenya’s family during the courtship sequence — right after Weill’s family chants the Kiddush), “Come to Paris” from the 1945 musical *The Firebrand of Florence*, and two Ira lyrics from the 1941 show *Lady in the Dark*, “Girl of the Moment” and, as Weill and Lenya marry one another for the second time after their arrival in the U.S., “It’s Never Too Late to Mendelssohn.” *Where Do We Go From Here?* was a World War II musical fantasy with Fred MacMurray, Joan Leslie and June Havoc. *Lady in the Dark*, Ira and Weill’s hit musical about psychoanalysis, with a book by Moss Hart and starring Gertrude Law-

rence, ran for 467 performances; interestingly, it was Ira’s most successful Broadway show. *The Firebrand of Florence*, Ira and Weill’s second Broadway undertaking, closed after 43 performances.

Other lyricists whose work was represented in *LoveMusik* included Ogden Nash, Maxwell Anderson and Bertolt Brecht. The score featured such well-known Weill songs as “Speak Low” (lyrics by Nash), “September Song” (lyrics by Anderson), and his famous Brecht collaboration, “Mack the Knife.” Jonathan Tunick received a Tony nomination for his period-perfect, often haunting orchestrations.

The book for *LoveMusik*, by Alfred Uhry, was “suggested by the letters of Kurt Weill and Lotte Lenya,” published by the University of California Press in 1996 as *Speak Low (When You Speak Love)*. Despite Tony-nominated performances by Cerveris, Murphy, and David Pittu as Brecht, *LoveMusik* closed after 24 previews and 60 performances.

DEDICATION OF MARK TRENT GOLDBERG COLLECTION



Gene & Mary Goldberg with Library Dean Ruth Kifer (center)
Photo: Skip Light (courtesy Ruth Kifer)

The large performing arts collection of Mark Trent Goldberg, the Gershwin Trusts’ late Executive Director, was donated this past April by his parents, Gene and Mary Goldberg, to the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library in downtown San Jose, California. The library, which serves both San Jose State University and the general public, acknowledged the gift of more than 2,000 books and audio recordings at a moving dedication ceremony attended by Mark’s family, friends and colleagues. Mr. and Mrs. Goldberg decided to place the collection at SJSU because of their personal connection to the university – they were married in the school chapel in 1955 – and the warm relationship they developed with the library’s staff. For further information on the named endowment created to allow for additions to the collection, visit the SJSU library web site at www.sjlibrary.org/support.



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