



New World Records

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The Vintage Irving Berlin New World NW 238

The eminent composer Jerome Kern once said, "Irving Berlin has no *place* in American music. He *is* American music."

Apart from his music, Berlin symbolizes the American dream of rags to riches. He was born Israel Baline in Temun, a Jewish settlement in Siberia, in 1888. His father, Moses, was a cantor who, in order to escape the Cossack pogroms, brought his wife, Leah, and his eight children to the United States, to a hand-to-mouth existence on New York's Lower East Side. Almost a century later, Israel Baline, now Irving Berlin, is a household word and is married to the former Ellin Mackay, a prominent debutante of her day, with three daughters and a bevy of grandchildren.

After the death of his father, when Berlin was eight, he went to work selling newspapers. Even then, however, music was what attracted him most. Stanley Green in *The World of Musical Comedy*, one of the very best books on the musical theater, recounts Berlin's early break at the age of sixteen when he was taken on as song plugger by Harry Von Tilzer, music publisher and composer:

One of Von Tilzer's songs was then being introduced by Buster Keaton and his family at Tony Pastor's Music Hall. Berlin's job was simple. After the song was sung, he would rise from his seat in the balcony—as if spontaneously inspired—to reprise the refrain of the song. For this he received five dollars a week.

From there he went on to a job as a singing waiter at Pelham's Café, a dive in Chinatown. There Berlin discovered the piano and that he could make a semblance of a song by a hit-and-miss hitting of the keys. When a rival saloon came out with a song of its own, the Pelham's proprietor demanded that they too have a song. Berlin

dreamed up some lyrics, and, with their resident Nick Nicholson supplying the music, "Marie from Sunny Italy" was created. (Berlin received a royalty of thirty-seven cents.) The number reached print and made history for, because of a printer's error, Baline was given credit as I. Berlin. He fancied "Berlin" but felt that "Izzy" was not sufficiently high-toned, so he changed it to "Irving."

In 1911, Berlin wrote both the music (with the aid of a music secretary or arranger) and the lyrics of "Alexander's Ragtime Band." Emma Carus, a vaudeville entertainer of the time, heard it, liked it, and sang it. It caught hold. When Al Jolson, an end man in a minstrel show, sang it, it became firmly fixed.

Berlin had not only started his career but (according to some commentators) had also launched ragtime and, with it, the dance craze. According to Michael Freedland in his readable and informative biography *Irving Berlin* (1974),

Everyone was talking about "Irving Berlin, the Ragtime King." Not all the talk was kind, however. It was about this time that the rumor started making the rounds of Tin Pan Alley: "Berlin was paying a young Negro—'his little black boy,' the story went—to turn out tunes on his behalf and always under the Berlin name."

(There was no truth but some foundation to the rumor. To this day it is said that Berlin cannot read music. In addition, he can only play, badly, as he is the first to admit, in the key of F sharp. He uses a piano that, with the aid of a lever under the keyboard, can transpose. Yet he received and deserved honorary doctorates of music from two universities: Temple and Bucknell.)

Now Berlin was being discovered in earnest. Al

Jolson and banjo-eyed Eddie Cantor were singing his songs; "Everybody's Doing It Now" was a worthy follow-up to "Alexander's Ragtime Band," and Berlin was to make a discovery of his own—Dorothy Goetz, sister of E. Ray Goetz, a friend and occasional collaborator. They married in 1912, went to Cuba on their honeymoon, but Dorothy contracted typhoid fever and died. Berlin was inconsolable. Out of his grief came the first ballad, "When I Lost You," by the man whom Freedland in his book calls "America's Number One Balladeer."

Florenz Ziegfeld, who was "glorifying the American girl" in his lavish *Follies*, hired Berlin to provide some of his music. Another producer, C. B. Dillingham, induced him to write the entire score for a bright revue, *Watch Your Step*, in which Irene and Vernon Castle, the reigning dance team, danced to Berlin's "Syncopated Walk." A second revue, *Stop! Look! Listen!*, starred the French dazzler Gaby Deslys and introduced two of Berlin's most famous songs, "The Girl on the Magazine Cover" and "I Love a Piano." At twenty-five, Berlin had become the rage of the music world.

Then came World War I and the draft. Berlin reported to Fort Yaphank on Long Island and was asked to write a soldier musical to raise money for the army. *Yip, Yip, Yaphank* opened at New York's Century Theatre and became, in the words of the *New York Times*, "a rousing hit." At one point in it reveille sounded, and a scrawny, dark-haired soldier emerged from a tent and sang "Oh, How I Hate to Get Up in the Morning." It was Berlin himself, and he was the hit of this hit show.

After the war Ziegfeld again enlisted Berlin's services, and one of the results was "A Pretty Girl Is like a Melody," which became the *Follies* theme song and Ziegfeld's anthem. In the same *Follies* Berlin brought back "Mandy," which had originated in *Yip, Yip, Yaphank*.

By this time Berlin had formed his own music-publishing company. Now he was to build his own theater with his friend, producer Sam H. Harris, who had been George M. Cohan's partner. They opened their playhouse, the Music Box, in 1921 with the first *Music Box Revue*. The theater was lavish, the show a resounding hit that ran through four editions. In one of them, humorist Robert Benchley made his stage debut with his hilarious "Treasurer's Report." "Say It with Music" became the theme song of all four revues.

To quote Freedland's *Irving Berlin* once again:

Looking at the phenomenon that was Irving Berlin that year [1923], John Alden Carpenter, a composer of more serious music, decided, "I am strongly inclined to

believe that the musical historian of the year 2000 will find the birthday of American music and that of Irving Berlin to have been the same."

There now came into Berlin's life Ellin, daughter of Clarence Mackay, wealthy Catholic head of Postal Telegraph. But although Mackay was strongly opposed to their being married, love conquered, and on January 4, 1926, Ellin and Irving eloped and were wed at New York's Municipal Building.

Out of the romance came three of Berlin's greatest hits, "Always," "All Alone" (when he and Ellin were briefly separated), and "Remember." Out of his love for the country that had given him so much he wrote another song, "God Bless America." When the popular radio singer Kate Smith, who had asked him for a patriotic song, heard it for the first time, she told him, "You've written a new 'Star-Spangled Banner.'" Berlin donated the royalties to the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts of America.

He was to write a fourth theme song. Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II were producing a musical for which Jerome Kern was to write the music, but he took ill and died. They approached Berlin. The show was *Annie Get Your Gun*, and one of Berlin's many melodious songs was "There's No Business like Show Business." It became the show-business theme song, just as "A Pretty Girl Is Like a Melody" was Ziegfeld's theme song, "God Bless America" was America's, and "Say It with Music" was Berlin's.

You might include a fifth. "White Christmas" has almost become a theme song for Christmas. Berlin sold the title to Hollywood for an unprecedented sum (I believe it was \$50,000). The sale was being discussed with awe one evening when George S. Kaufman spoke up. "I think Irving was foolish," he said, and as everyone looked at him in amazement he added, "He could have got \$50,000 for 'White' and \$50,000 for 'Christmas.'"

Hollywood and Broadway vied for Berlin. For the former he wrote songs that were sung and danced to by Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, like "Cheek to Cheek," "Top Hat," "Change Partners"; he gave Bing Crosby "White Christmas," Harry Richman "Puttin' on the Ritz," and on and on. As for Broadway, there were such shows as *Call Me Madam* (with Ethel Merman as an ambassador), *As Thousands Cheer* (Berlin and Moss Hart turned out one of the best revues of all time), *Face the Music* (a book show with Hart), *Louisiana Purchase*, *Annie Get Your Gun*. And there was also *This Is the Army*, Berlin's World War II follow-up to *Yip, Yip, Yaphank*, in which he again came

out of that tent and sang “Oh, How I Hate to Get Up in the Morning.”

Joe Frisco, the stammering comic, said of Berlin’s singing, “You’ve got to h-h-hug him to h-h-hear him.” There is also the story of a man, hearing Berlin sing one of his own songs, remarking, “If the guy who wrote this song could hear the way *this* guy’s singing it, he’d turn over in his grave.

Voice or none, Berlin is *sui generis* and incredibly versatile, writing everything from songs for the Marx Brothers to songs to elect political candidates (“Keep Cool with Coolidge,” “They Like Ike,” “We’ll All Go Voting for Al [Smith]”).

In 1978 Berlin celebrates his ninetieth birthday. He no longer writes music, at least not for publication, but his songs live on healthily and will, I believe, continue to live until the world has gone deaf. To paraphrase one of his titles—“God Bless Irving Berlin.”

GEORGE OPPENHEIMER, *cofounder of the Viking Press and the weekly drama critic of Newsday, has written short stories, a book of memoirs (The View from the Sixties), several plays (including Here Today), and over thirty motion-picture scripts (including A Day at the Races). He edited The Passionate Player, There’s No Harm in Laughing, and The Best in the World (with John K. Hutchens).*

THE RECORDINGS

Side One

Band 1

Oh, How I Hate to Get Up in the Morning

(from *Yip, Yip, Yaphank*)

Irving Berlin, vocal; Milton Rosenstock conducting, with male chorus. Recorded July 28, 1942, in New York. Originally issued on Decca 18777.

With the bugle notes of reveille for his motif and inspired by his hatred of getting up early in the morning, Berlin wrote and performed this song when he was a soldier in World War I and reprised it in World War II in a second soldier show, *This Is the Army*. No soldier could fail to respond to the last lines of his chorus:

Some day I'm going to murder the bugler,
Some day they're going to find him dead.
I'll amputate his reveille
And step upon it heavily
And spend the rest of my life in bed.

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According to Freedland,

The show was supposed to have lasted for eight performances. At the end of six weeks, the press was still running advertisements for "Yip, Yip, Yaphank—Sergeant Irving Berlin and his Boys."

The army had wanted \$35,000. Sergeant Berlin presented them with a check for \$85,000.

Bands 2 and 3

Mandy

Van and Schenck, vocal. Recorded June 20, 1919, in New York. Originally issued on Columbia A-2780.

A Pretty Girl Is like a Melody

John Steele, vocal. Originally issued on Victor 18588.

(Both from *Ziegfeld Follies of 1919*)

In 1919 Ziegfeld decided to make his thirteenth edition of the *Follies* the most lavish and most expensive yet. Joseph Urban would do the decor. Marilyn Miller would be one

of its scintillating stars. Irving Berlin would be a contributing composer.

When Berlin got to work, he remembered "Mandy" (he would often forget a song of his, since he wrote something like three thousand). It had been performed originally as a minstrel show in *Yip, Yip, Yaphank* by the soldiers in black-face posing as small girls with white ribbons adorning their black wigs.

Now it was sung and played by the popular vaudeville team of Van and Schenck and became even more popular than before.

A second song for the *Follies* was "A Pretty Girl Is like a Melody," which was to become Ziegfeld's trademark. Ziegfeld's favorite balladeer, John Steele (called the John McCormack of the revue world), sang it as the lovely show girls paraded down the stairs. Each reprised a famous musical piece—"Barcarolle," "Humoresque," and so on. The song was a last-minute addition to the score, when Ziegfeld realized he had a lot of expensive costumes but no number in which to show them off. Berlin stayed up all night and obliged with "A Pretty Girl Is like a Melody."

Other Berlin songs in this show were the Prohibition parody "You Cannot Make Your Shimmy Shake on Tea," sung by the black comic Bert Williams, and "You'd Be Surprised," sung by blackface comic Eddie Cantor. With a bow to current events and international stress, Berlin also wrote "Look Out for the Bolsheviki Man."

Band 4

Rock-a-Bye Baby

Grace Moore, vocal; Rosario Bourdon conducting. Recorded January 30, 1925, in New York. Originally issued on Victor 19613.

(From *Music Box Revue*)

There were four *Music Box Revues*, each more resplendent than the last and giving Ziegfeld, Earl Carroll, George White, the Shuberts, and other revue producers, with their *Follies*, *Vanities*, *Scandals*, *Passing Shows*, *Green-*

wich Village Follies, and so on, some stiff competition. In addition to writing the scores and supervising every element of the *Music Box Revues*, Berlin saw that they had the best available stars. The second and third featured Grace Moore, star of stage, opera, movies, and radio.

In 1928 Miss Moore made her Metropolitan Opera debut. Four years later she was summoned to Hollywood, where she made two inferior pictures for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, then, for Columbia, *One Night of Love*, which was a great success, and *I'll Take Romance*, which wasn't (I can testify to this since I was one of the screenwriters).

In addition to "Rock-a-Bye Baby," one of Moore's memorable songs was "An Orange Grove in California," which she sang with John Steele. During this number orange-blossom perfume was sprayed through the playhouse so that the noses as well as the ears of the audience could be titillated.

In 1939 she created news by making a curtsy to the Duchess of Windsor, who, carping critics were quick to point out, was not royalty. She claimed that the Duke and Duchess should be treated as such and stuck to her guns.

In 1947 she died in an airplane crash.

Bands 5 and 6

Shaking the Blues Away

Ruth Etting, vocal. Recorded August 30, 1927, in New York. Originally issued on Columbia 1113D and ML-5050.

It All Belongs to Me

Ruth Etting, vocal. Recorded August 30, 1927, in New York. Originally issued on Columbia 1113D.

(Both from *Ziegfeld Follies of 1927*)

For this edition of the *Follies*, Berlin wrote the entire score. Two of his songs were given to Ruth Etting, a torch singer who was to make famous such songs as "Ten Cents a Dance" by Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart and "Love Me or

Leave Me” by Walter Donaldson and Gus Kahn, in addition to “Shaking the Blues Away” and “It All Belongs to Me.” In another *Follies* she impersonated singer Nora Bayes and sang “Shine On, Harvest Moon,” which Bayes and Jack Norworth had written and introduced in 1908.

Etting’s private life achieved notoriety when her husband, Martin Snyder, known in underworld circles as Moe the Gimp, shot and wounded her pianist, Myrl Alderman, in a fit of jealousy. Snyder went to jail for a year while Etting got a divorce and married Alderman. At the end of the year Snyder appealed and was released. (For more about Ruth Etting, see New World Records NW 279: *Yes Sir, That’s My Baby*.)

There was some criticism of “Shaking the Blues Away”—the line “shaking it all over God’s blue heaven” was felt to be irreverent. Gilbert Gabriel in the *New York Sun* said that the song “does cannibalistic things with the loveliest of Negro spirituals.” On the other hand, Brooks Atkinson in the *New York Times* called it “one of [Berlin’s] best numbers.”

Band 7

Where Is the Song of Songs for Me?

(from the film *Lady of the Pavements*)
Lupe Velez, vocal. Recorded March 30, 1929, in New York. Originally issued on Victor 2193 and LPV538.

Lupe Velez made her mark in pictures as a seductress (she was known as the “Mexican Spitfire”). In 1929 she appeared in *Lady of the Pavements*, a sentimental costume romance in which she played a Spanish dancer in love with a Prussian aristocrat played by, of all people, William Boyd, better known as Hopalong Cassidy. D. W. Griffith directed this silent picture, which was hastily converted into sound, and Berlin’s “Where Is the Song of Songs for Me?” and occasional dialogue were inserted.

Side Two

Band 1

Let Me Sing and I’m Happy

(from the film *Mammy*)

Al Jolson, vocal. Recorded February, 1930, in Los Angeles. Originally issued on Brunswick 4722.

It would have been illegal for anyone but Al Jolson to star in something called *Mammy*. Opposite him was Lois Moran, who played the daughter of a man who owned a minstrel show in which Jolson was an end man. Lowell Sherman, a well-known stage and motion-picture actor and director, was the lead man in the minstrel show and a rival for Moran’s affections.

The author of the original story, *Mr. Bones*, from which the screenplay was made was none other than Irving Berlin. “Let Me Sing and I’m Happy” was perfectly suited to Jolson but was not a success. Two verbal phrases in the middle of it survived, however: “How deep is the ocean...how high is the sky.”

Band 2

Puttin’ On the Ritz

(from the film *Puttin’ On the Ritz*)

Harry Richman, vocal; Earl Burtnett and His Los Angeles Biltmore Orchestra. Recorded February, 1930, in Los Angeles. Originally issued on Brunswick 4678.

Harry Richman made his movie debut in the backstage tearjerker *Puttin’ On the Ritz*, in which he played an egocentric nightclub singer who drinks so much that he goes blind. He regains his will to live, however, through the love of Joan Bennett. The song became Richman’s signature.

In addition to Berlin’s contribution two songs were interpolated into the picture—“Yes, We Have No Bananas” and an aria from the opera *Il Trovatore*. Show business makes strange bed-fellows.

Bands 3, 4, and 5

Not for All the Rice in China

Clifton Webb, vocal; Leo Reisman and His Orchestra. Recorded October 11, 1933, in New York. Originally issued on Victor 24428 and LPV565.

How’s Chances?

Clifton Webb, vocal; Leo Reisman and His Orchestra. Recorded October 3, 1933, in New York. Originally issued on Victor 24418.

Heat Wave

Ethel Waters, vocal; Ben Selvin conducting. Recorded October 10, 1933, in New York. Originally issued on Columbia 2826-D.

(All From *As Thousands Cheer*)

As Thousands Cheer was about as good a revue as you could find. Moss Hart conceived the general idea and wrote the sketches. The show revolved around newspaper headlines, followed by satirical sketches that were not only current but comical, starting with “Man Bites Dog.”

Clifton Webb played a series of characters, including John D. Rockefeller I, Mahatma Gandhi, and Noel Coward, and danced and sang with lovely Marilyn Miller in “Easter Parade.”

In the early twenties, during the dance craze, Leo Reisman and his orchestra played at a Boston hotel and were so popular with Harvard undergraduates and their girls that many of them claimed to have gotten their Bachelor of Arts degree under Leo Reisman. Now he and his men were in *As Thousands Cheer*.

Also present was the wonderful black singer Ethel Waters. The curtain revealed a headline, HEAT WAVE HITS NEW YORK, and drew aside as Waters, backed up by the Charles Weidman dancers, went into “Heat Wave,” one of Berlin’s sultriest and most exciting songs. (For more on Ethel Waters, see New World Records NW 279: *Yes Sir, That’s My Baby*.)

John Mason Brown in the *New York Evening Post* summed it up when he said, “This madly impertinent revue is a gloriously merry prank.”

Band 6***How Deep Is the Ocean?***

Ethel Merman, vocal; Nathaniel Shilkret and His Orchestra. *Recorded September 29, 1932, in New York. Originally issued on Victor 24146.*

This song was not in any show or film. It was one of many occasional songs turned out by Berlin for his and our delectation and then recorded.

Ethel Merman had a way with a song, and no one knew it better than Berlin. He wrote a whole show for her, *Call Me Madam*, a takeoff on ambassador Perle Mesta, with a book by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse. That way of Merman's is fully and wonderfully revealed in this earlier song, which grew out of the lyrics for "Let Me Sing and I'm Happy" (Side Two, Band 2).

Band 7***Cheek to Cheek***

(from the film *Top Hat*)

Ginger Rogers, vocal; Victor Young and His Orchestra. *Recorded August 25, 1935, in Los Angeles. Originally issued on Decca F-5747.*

When *Top Hat* was previewed in Santa Barbara, the audience didn't like it. According to Freedland in that helpful biography, "Halfway through the movie, one couple left, followed shortly by a dozen or more others." A second preview was a smash, and "Cheek to Cheek" went to the top of the Hit Parade. The team of Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire was unparalleled in style and popularity.

In *Top Hat* there was not only "Cheek to Cheek" but "Top Hat, White Tie and Tails," "Isn't This a Lovely Day to Be Caught in the Rain?," and "The Piccolino."

Hollywood, which called too many creators geniuses, was stuck when it came to giving Berlin a label. Even supergenius wasn't good enough.

Band 8***Louisiana Purchase***

(from *Louisiana Purchase*)

Carol Bruce, vocal. *Recorded 1940, in New York. Originally issued on Schirmer S-507.*

Berlin's old friend B. G. DeSylva talked him into doing a score on one of his return trips to New York from Hollywood. Morris Ryskind, who collaborated with George S. Kaufman on *Of Thee I Sing*, did the book for *Louisiana Purchase* (1940). It concerned a senator (Victor Moore) on an investigation of corruption who is framed by William Gaxton so that the investigation would cease. Three women—Vera Zorina, Irene Bordoni, and Carol Bruce—provided the frame.

Carol Bruce, making her auspicious Broadway debut, sang the title song and "The Lord Done Fixed Up My Soul." The *New York Post* called her "a zestful newcomer" and Walter Winchell in the *Daily Mirror* awarded her "four orchids."

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

- Annie Get Your Gun*. (Original cast.) Decca DL-8801.
Call Me Madam. (Original cast.) Decca DL-8035.
Easter Parade. (Original soundtrack.) MGM SES-40-ST.
Ella Fitzgerald Sings Irving Berlin. Verve MGV-4019-2.
Holiday Inn. (Original soundtrack.) Decca DL-4256.
Miss Liberty. (Original cast.) Columbia OL-4220.
There's No Business Like Show Business. (Original soundtrack.) Decca DL-8091.

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Side One Total time 21:21

- | | |
|---|------|
| 1 OH, HOW I HATE TO GET UP IN THE MORNING | 3:15 |
| Irving Berlin; Milton Rosenstock conducting, with male chorus | |
| 2 MANDY | 2:48 |
| Van and Schenck | |
| 3 A PRETTY GIRL IS LIKE A MELODY | 2:35 |
| John Steele | |
| 4 ROCK-A-BYE BABY | 3:26 |
| Grace Moore; Rosario Bourdon conducting | |
| 5 SHAKING THE BLUES AWAY | 3:10 |
| Ruth Etting | |
| 6 IT ALL BELONGS TO ME | 2:57 |
| Ruth Etting | |
| 7 WHERE IS THE SONG OF SONGS FOR ME? | 2:46 |
| Lupe Velez | |

Side Two Total time 25:09

- | | |
|--|------|
| 1 LET ME SING AND I'M HAPPY | 2:46 |
| Al Jolson | |
| 2 PUTTIN' ON THE RITZ | 2:31 |
| Harry Richman; with Earl Burtnett and His Los Angeles Biltmore Orchestra | |
| 3 NOT FOR ALL THE RICE IN CHINA | 3:30 |
| Clifton Webb; with Leo Reisman and His Orchestra | |
| 4 HOW'S CHANCES? | 3:19 |
| Clifton Webb; with Leo Reisman and His Orchestra | |
| 5 HEAT WAVE | 3:03 |
| Ethel Waters; Ben Selvin conducting | |
| 6 HOW DEEP IS THE OCEAN? | 3:29 |
| Ethel Merman; with Nathaniel Shilkret and His Orchestra | |
| 7 CHEEK TO CHEEK | 3:02 |
| Ginger Rogers; with Victor Young and His Orchestra | |
| 8 LOUISIANA PURCHASE | 3:01 |
| Carol Bruce | |

All selections published by Irving Berlin Music Corporation

Full discographic information and a complete list of the performers for each selection may be found within the individual discussions of the works in the liner notes.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Our thanks to CBS Records for “Mandy”; “Shaking the Blues Away”; “It All Belongs to Me”; “Let Me Sing and I’m Happy”; “Puttin’ On the Ritz”; and “Heat Wave” and to RCA Records for “A Pretty Girl Is Like a Melody”; “Rock-a-Bye Baby”; “Where Is the Song of Songs for Me?”; “Not for All the Rice in China” “How’s Chances”; and “How Deep Is the Ocean?”

Our thanks to Robert Altshuler for making his record collection available to us.

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Rerecording engineers: Frank Haber, Art Shifrin

Mastering: Lee Hulko, Sterling Sound

Cover art: William Auerbach-Levy, “Irving Berlin.” Pencil on paper. Theatre and Music Collection of The Museum of the City of New York

Cover design: Elaine Sherer Cox

Library of Congress Card No. 77-750354

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