

THE LEGACY OF IRVING BERLIN

“Irving Berlin has no place in American music—he is American music.”—Jerome Kern

Irving Berlin was born Israel Beilin on May 11, 1888. One of eight children, his exact place of birth is unknown, although his family had been living in Tolochin, Bylorussia, when they immigrated to New York in 1893. When his father died, Berlin, age thirteen, took to the streets in various odd jobs, working as a busker singing for pennies, then as a singing waiter in a Chinatown café. In 1907, he published his first song, “Marie From Sunny Italy,” and by 1911 he had his first major international hit—“Alexander’s Ragtime Band.”

Over the next five decades, Irving Berlin produced an outpouring of ballads, dance numbers, novelty tunes and love songs that defined American popular music for much of the century. A sampling of just some of Berlin’s standards include: “How Deep Is the Ocean,” “Blue Skies,” “White Christmas” (for which he won the Academy Award for Best Song in 1942), “Always,” “Cheek to Cheek,” “Puttin’ on the Ritz,” “Heat Wave,” “Oh! How I Hate To Get Up in the Morning,” “Easter Parade,” and “Let’s Face the Music and Dance.” In a class by itself is his beloved paean to his country, “God Bless America.”

Equally at home writing for Broadway and Hollywood, Berlin wrote seventeen complete scores for Broadway musicals and revues, and contributed material to six more. Among the shows featuring all-Berlin scores were: *The Cocoanuts*, *As Thousands Cheer*, *Louisiana Purchase*, *Miss Liberty*, *Mister President*, *Call Me Madam*, and *Annie Get Your Gun*. Among the Hollywood movie musical classics with scores by Irving Berlin are: *Top Hat*, *Follow the Fleet*, *On the Avenue*, *Alexander’s Ragtime Band*, *Holiday Inn*, *This Is the Army*, *Blue Skies*, *Easter Parade*, *White Christmas* and *There’s No Business Like Show Business*. His songs have provided memorable moments in dozens of other films, from *The Jazz Singer* (1927) to *Home Alone* (1991).

A businessman, theatrical entrepreneur and generous supporter of patriotic institutions such as the God Bless America Fund and This Is the Army, Inc., Berlin celebrated his centennial in 1988. A year later, on September 22, 1989, at the age of 101, Irving Berlin died in his sleep in his town house in New York City, remembered as the founding father of American Popular Music.



Ethel Merman and Irving Berlin
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THE SISTER/BROTHER TEAM OF DOROTHY AND HERBERT FIELDS

The Fields were part of a vibrant New York theatrical family that included their brother Joseph, a prolific librettist and playwright, and their father, Lew, the famous producer, actor, and director. Together, Herbert and Dorothy wrote the books for eight Broadway musicals including three with scores by Cole Porter—*Something For the Boys* (starring Ethel Merman), *Let’s Face It*, and *Mexican Hayride*; *By the Beautiful Sea* (music by Herbert Schwartz); *Up In Central Park* (music by Sigmund Romberg); *Arms and the Girl* (music by Morton Gould); *Redhead* (music by Albert Hague); and the classic *Annie Get Your Gun* with Irving Berlin.

In a career spanning more than 45 years, Dorothy Fields (1904-1974) wrote the lyrics to standards such as: “I Can’t Give You Anything But Love,” the Academy Award-winning “The Way You Look Tonight” (music by Jerome Kern), “On the Sunny Side of the Street,” “Exactly Like You,” “Don’t Blame Me,” “I’m In the Mood For Love,” “I Won’t Dance,” “I Feel a Song Coming On,” “Lovely to Look At,” “Big Spender,” and “If My Friends Could See Me Now.” In March 1971, Dorothy Fields became an inaugural inductee of the Songwriter’s Hall of Fame.



Dorothy Fields
Corbis-Bettmann

Prior to collaborating with his sister, Herbert Fields (1897-1958) wrote the books for musical comedies featuring scores by some of the greatest talents of his day. He wrote seven musicals with Rodgers and Hart, including *Dearest Enemy*, *Peggy-Ann* and *A Connecticut Yankee*, and seven with Cole Porter, including *Fifty Million Frenchmen*, *DuBarry Was a Lady*, and *Panama Hattie*, as well as the three cited earlier. Among his other collaborators were Vincent Youmans (*Hit the Deck*), George and Ira Gershwin, Sigmund Romberg, and Arthur Schwartz.

The Fields were great friends with Ethel Merman and wrote the book for *Annie Get Your Gun* with her in mind for the role of Annie Oakley.

