



Happy Birthday Irving Berlin

**LYRIC
FEST**

With
Suzanne DuPlantis
Randall Scarlata
and Harold Evans,
at the piano

Thursday, May 11th, 2017 at 6:00 PM at The Academy of Vocal Arts
Wednesday, May 17th, 2017 at 7:00 PM at Moorestown Community House, NJ

The song is ended, but the melody lingers on... – Irving Berlin –

“Irving Berlin,” is how we know him, though his given name was Israel Isidore Baline. Born on May 11, 1888 in a pogrom in the Russian Empire, his family fled persecution and landed on American shores in 1893. Israel Isidore, son of a Jewish cantor, would live for over a hundred years. In America, he would become our Irving Berlin.

Israel Isidore Baline was a child who, realizing he was a burden to his widowed mother and siblings, left off schooling and hawked his songs for coins on the streets of Chinatown and New York City’s Theater District. He lived on the streets and in the slums, singing parodies of popular songs of the day, until this penchant landed him a job writing lyrics on Tin Pan Alley in 1909. By night in the wee hours he taught himself piano at Vaudeville houses, long after the patrons had all gone home.

“Everybody ought to have a lower East Side in their life,” he would one day say.

With a little help from a typo that appeared on his first published song (“*Marie from Sunny Italy*”) Israel Isidore Baline renamed himself “Irving Berlin.” He thought this sounded very American. He wrote songs in his own nocturnal rhythms – nightly, from after dinner until dawn and said: “The song writer must look upon his work as a business, that is, to make a success of it, he must work and work, and then WORK.”

And work, he did. Berlin would go on to compose over 1200 songs, despite barely playing piano, and only in one key at that. But because he heard his music in many keys and played only in F-Sharp, he acquired a transposing piano to compose his songs. You can see it on display in its permanent home, at The National Museum of American Jewish History on Market Street, right here in Philadelphia.

Like so many immigrants, Berlin was a fierce lover of America, one who gave voice to our own love of country.

He was inspired to become a citizen in 1918 shortly after US entered the First World War – and was immediately drafted. He was 30 at the time, and in fact, was recruited not to fight, but to write songs. He wrote a musical review for the American cause and raised money for the Army. Lots of money. It was for this review, “*Yip Yip Yaphank*,” that Berlin originally composed “*God Bless America*,” but he sensed the time was not right for this song, so he pulled it. It lay in wait until the Second World War when he re-wrote the lyric for Kate Smith, who sang it on the radio for Armistice Day, November 11, 1938.

“*God Bless America*” outsold “*Alexander’s Ragtime Band*,” but Berlin chose not to profit from his “prayer.” Instead, he established *The God Bless America Fund* to benefit the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts in New York City. With other royalties he founded “*This is The Army Inc.*” and also donated millions to *Army Emergency Relief*.

Irving Berlin at 24 co-founded of ASCAP (American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers); founded his own music publishing company, and built and co-owned, The Music Box, his own Broadway theater. As a songwriter, he wanted his music to be direct and accessible and made no apologies for being popular.

*“Born to live for a short space of time,
Often without any reason or rhyme,
Hated by highbrows who call it a crime,
Loved by the masses who buy it.
Still though you die after having your sway,
To be forgotten the very next day,
A rose lives and dies the very same way,
Let that be your consolation.”*

Berlin, who was described in the Washinton Post on the eve of his 90th birthday as “small, natty, painfully shy and intensely romantic,” stopped composing in the late 60’s. By the 70’s he had mostly removed himself from the public eye, but could be seen walking his dog on Beekman Place in NYC’s Turtle Bay neighborhood. Berlin lived a well-deserved quiet and comfortable retirement with his wife of 62 years, Ellin Mackay Berlin.

He died in his sleep at the age of 101 on September 22, 1989.

PROGRAM

Harold Evans, piano

You're Just In Love (1950, *Call Me Madam*)

Suzanne DuPlantis & Randall Scarlata

Russian Lullaby (1927)

Suzanne DuPlantis

Alexander's Ragtime Band (1911)

Randall Scarlata

Top Hat, White Tie and Tails (1935, *Top Hat*)

Suzanne DuPlantis

When I Lost You (1912)

Randall Scarlata

Play a Simple Melody (1914, *Watch Your Step*)

Suzanne DuPlantis & Randall Scarlata

Oh, How I Hate to Get Up in the Morning (1918)

Randall Scarlata

You'd be surprised (1919)

Suzanne DuPlantis

Lazy (1924)

Randall Scarlata

What'll I do (1924)

Suzanne DuPlantis

Always (1925)

Suzanne DuPlantis & Randall Scarlata

Putting on the Ritz (1927, *Puttin' on the Ritz*)

Suzanne DuPlantis

They Say It's Wonderful (1946, *Annie Get Your Gun*)

Randall Scarlata

Let's Face the Music and Dance (1936)

Suzanne DuPlantis

Give Me Your Tired, Your Poor (1949, *Miss Liberty*)

Randall Scarlata

God Bless America (1918, 1938)

Suzanne DuPlantis, Randall Scarlata & You

"Popular music is popular because a lot of people like it." - Irving Berlin