

winning acclaim from esteemed critics like *The New Yorker's* Whitney Balliett. I read one of those reviews a few years ago, tried one of Charlap's albums, and was blown away by its concise, restrained yet swinging and original take on Tin Pan Alley classics. Charlap's father was a Broadway songwriter, so he was to the manner born, a suit-wearing throwback like the other neo-conservative jazzers who emerged in the last couple of decades, yet with a lightness of touch, economy of expression (think Ahmad Jamal or Wynton Kelly) and inventiveness that make his takes on standards sound fresh and singing rather than mannered or self-conscious — very different from other takes on standards by piano trios led by, say, Keith Jarrett or Brad Mehldau.

Charlap may be the hottest pianist in jazz

today, proven with guest stints by the likes of Tony Bennett and Shirley Horn on his recent Blue Note albums covering standards. Charlap's tight-as-a-drum trio will perform in

away," et al) easily place him in the pantheon of American songwriters.

A strong competitor for song of the century was the ubiquitous "Stardust," and

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three concerts accompanied by Hyman (OFAM's jazz advisor), Peplowski and Shirley Andress. On Thursday afternoon at the Shedd, August 14, they perform music of the incomparable Harold Arlen, whose "Over the Rainbow" (almost cut from *The Wizard of Oz*) was recently named song of the century by a panel of experts, and whose other classics ("Stormy Weather," "The Man That Got

Charlap devoted his last album to music by its composer, Hoagy Carmichael. Charlap's trio will play Carmichael's music in a Shedd concert that same evening, featuring evocative hits like "Skylark" and "Georgia on My Mind." The astonishingly prolific Irving Berlin is still considered the grandmaster of Tin Pan Alley; the list of classics he composed — from "White Christmas" on — is as

long as anyone's, and Charlap & Co. pay tribute to him on Friday afternoon, August 15. These Charlap showcases will probably be the best Eugene jazz shows of the summer.

A fair number of the great American songbook classics sport lyrics by the great Dorothy Fields, whose "The Way You Look Tonight" (set to Kern's music) and "I Can't Give You Anything but Love" were the early bookends on a long career that stretched to mid-century classics like "If My Friends Could See Me Now." Fields is one of the female songwriters celebrated in a concert by Steve Stone and the Emerald City Jazz Kings on Saturday, August 16. Another, Kay Swift, was known as much for being George Gershwin's girlfriend as for being an excellent songwriter in her own right, and eventually wound up living on a ranch in Oregon. The show also features music of Ann Ronell ("Willow Weep for Me") and Dana Suesse, who were featured with Swift and Fields in a recent PBS American Masters documentary.

OFAM closes with a Cuthbert concert featuring Rita Moreno accompanied by Hyman et al. From her Oscar-winning performance in *West Side Story* forty years ago to her recent turn in "Oz," Moreno has collected awards (Grammy, Emmies, Tony, Golden Globe) and acclaim for her acting and singing. Expect a cross between jazz singing and cabaret from a singer who puts a lot of personality into these immortal songs.

The festival also features informative chats by experts like author William Zinsser, who just wrote a book on the subject, Hyman, Whitcomb and Eugene's own music mavens Steve Stone and Carl Woideck. There'll also be free screenings of films that boast many of those great songs — *Easter Parade*, *High Society*, *Singin' in the Rain*.

By now we've heard so many schlocky versions of these standards (from lounge lizards to slumming classical divas) that your cheese alarm might be ringing, but OFAM bills these concerts as a "new way of hearing" these grand songwriters. In fact, Charlap and the others restore the old way of hearing — reviving the freshness these masterpieces had when they burst into public consciousness so many decades ago. OFAM's musicians and advisors understand this music and its context so well that this presentation of the Great American Songbook will amount to much more than just light summer reading. **ew**

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