

# Sales of Tin Pan Alley

By D.E. Wheeler

## FRED FISHER TELLS HOW HE DOES IT

Once the house had been a private brown-stone dwelling. Little the family that had lived there dreamed it would be one day a center of song publishing, which means hustle, bustle and tussle set to music. There I found Fred Fisher, on the top floor, going over a new song with a powerful-looking lady who reminded me of the Imperial Magic Cline in her day. After she left, at the close of an hour, I went to the office for the numerous numbers. Mr. Fisher was demonstrating for her, he looked me over.

"You are the discoverer of 'Handanella,'" I began, when he held up his hand like a traffic cop.

"I did more than discover it," he said, a twinkle in his eye, "but what else would you like to know?"

"What do you think of the musical appetite of the American public?" I ventured to ask.

Again the twinkle, this time accompanied by a rare smile. "That is a large order," he said. "But I do want to say that I think the American people prefer short songs—and shorter songs. As in everything else, brevity is the first word and the last. Our ancestors would relish the three-volume novel and an interminable song-lyric, or ballad, but today we want to finish our novel at a sitting, or, better still, see it on the screen; the same principle is active in popular songs—we want them short and simple, with a new twist or trick in 'em."

"The twist is the difficult part, isn't it?" I said.

Fred Fisher gave me a quizzical look. "You said something there," he replied. "It is easy to write a ballad. I can do one almost at a moment's notice, but to get one right—a 'natural,' as we call it—is an altogether different job."

"Would you rather pick a song or write one?"

"It's better picking them than writing them," answered Mr. Fisher. "I have been a song writer since I wrote 'If the Man in the Moon Were a Coon,' 'Peg o' My Heart' and 'I'm On My Way to Mandalay'—remember them?—but I naturally had no say in picking songs until I became my own publisher."

"Can you give me a sample of your 'picking,' Mr. Fisher?" I inquired.

"Well," he said, "you know that present hit, 'Daddy, You've Been a Mother to Me,' don't you? I picked that out of fifty lyrics, conceived the title—which is in the nature of a 'twist,' you see—and wrote the music. It is bringing home the financial bacon, all right. First, all my friends laughed when they heard this title, and thought it ridiculous, I imagine, for a sentimental song. One of them sent me a picture of a bearded lady, jokingly, and said: 'It's impossible!' But I was not affected by their josh. And I guess the laugh is now on them." I agreed with him, for I had heard his 'Daddy' song sung twice on the stage, each time bringing an outburst of applause. This I mentioned. Mr. Fisher was reminded of something. He handed

me the following letters, which speak for themselves:

"Mr. Fred Fisher

Dear Sir: At a performance this afternoon I heard a song called 'Daddy, You've Been a Mother to Me,' which I have been informed you are the composer of. In all my life I have never heard a number which I appreciated more. It struck home with me and made me feel very proud to think that I am one of those 'Daddies' that are referred to in your wonderful song, for I have been both mother and father to my boy for the past twelve years, his mother having passed away the year of 1906. The sentiment you express in your song is just the way my boy feels towards me.

I am not only proud of him, but proud to think that at last some credit is being given to those 'Daddies' who do the right thing for their motherless children.

Your song has given me a keen sense of satisfaction so keen that I have done the right thing. Good luck and success to you.

"Mr. Brown

Dear Sir: I saw your performance this afternoon and heard you sing a song about 'Father or Dad.' Will you kindly let me know what the name of the song is?

I lost my wife and have a baby, and sometimes I feel blue and lonely.

some, but your song has taught me something different.

Hoping to hear from you just the name of the song, as I know you are always busy.

"Fine tributes," I said, handing back the letters, but asking for copies of them. "And, by the way, Mr. Fisher, do you like to work in the sentimental vein or the comic?" I recalled he had done both types of song.

"Either—it does not matter," he answered. "It is the idea that counts, not its class; but the funny stuff, the comedy, is hard to get."

"How do you write?" I asked the time-word question.

"At any time, anywhere," he replied. "Ideas come most unexpectedly. You never can tell what is going to suggest a song. For instance, last night my children were playing around, fooling, and they asked their mother what she was going to leave them when she died! I pricked up my ears. In a little while an idea came for a song. I had been hunting for a 'mother' song, to follow up my 'Daddy' number, and I had written several, but here was the 'natural.'"

Mr. Fisher went over to the piano and played the new one, singing it *alto voce*.

"That is going to make a hit, or I'm a gooseberry!" he ejaculated. The song sounded good to me, too. I asked him if he always knew his "hits" beforehand.

"You bet," he answered. "I must. A man can't spend a lot of money boosting bubbles. And getting a song landed costs considerable cash."

We talked a lot more, and I learned that Mr. Fisher has seen most of the world, from Australia to China, he had tried out a number of businesses before settling into song-writing and publishing. He is battle-scarred, but the best thing he has developed, he thinks, is his critical faculty, which extends to his own work in particular.

"I write many, many things," he said, "but I reject most of them. It is hard not to fall for your own stuff, and I guard against that weakness continually."

His success proves this unusual creative-critical ability.



FRED FISHER

## The Aurora Observer

Thursday, June 16, 1921

Paul Robinson, Editor and Publisher

Entered as second class matter March 28, 1911, at the postoffice at Aurora, Oregon, under the Act of March 3, 1879.

We see no fair business scheme in giving advertising rates on application. The Observer rates are always: For Display ads 20c per inch, single col. measure each week. Readers 10c per line first insertion, 5c per line each following week they run. It is business to advertise where the home people read it. The world over—every town or city, you see the largest advertiser always does the largest business.

President Harding has announced that he will not play golf on Sundays. We know a lot of men who do not play golf on Sundays.

Every I. W. W., every red flag socialist who advocates force generally winds up his spiel by saying "As American's we claim the right of free speech and free assembly. It is too bad our laws are so good to such characters."

Prof. Macintosh of the Oregon Agricultural Farm and Journal departments made us a pleasant call Wednesday. Among many remarks, he told us that the Observer was undoubtedly one of the best country town weeklies in Oregon. And from our country news, etc. we would undoubtedly have taken a prize at the contest for state papers recently held at the college if we had had a copy of our paper entered.

New postmasters are now being appointed by the hundreds. Sort'er back to "the good old days" when every administration changes help. The country editors boosted many dollars Worth and his compensation was the glory of naming the village postmaster.

Direct mail advertising brings direct results. Let us prove it by getting out your advertising literature, circulars, cards postals, modern letter heads, blotters, catalogues, etc.

Since the Newberg Graphic has changed hands, the thriving city of "The Berrians" has received more publicity over the northwest than it has in the past 40 years. Newberg is getting on the map fast, and being heard of she will grow and grow fast.

The blacksmith shop had a near fire Wednesday. When Mr. Coon opened the shop in the morning he discovered a slow fire burning fire in the floor that had been burning slowly all night. Another close call.

Last Saturday the roof of the Ziegler ware house caught fire from sparks of a bonfire. The dry shingles were getting a pretty good start by the time the fire department arrived. Quick action and good work saved a fire and little damage was done.

Mr. and Mrs. Orin Pierce of Portland visited Mr. and Mrs. F. D. Elliott over the Fourth.

Hop spraying is the popular pastime for the growers these days.

Aurora auto camp grounds is a popular place these days. Wednesday night the machines and tents, with the fires and tables, resembled a camp meeting.

Aurora business men will, in a few days, announce their picnic day. Aurora will treat everybody to a big free dinner and big time.

Sam Harzig, of Portland, was calling on Aurora friends Tuesday. Mr. Harzig lived here for 35 years.

### CARD OF THANKS

We wish to thank the friends for their kindness, and for the lovely flowers brought to us, at the death of our loving father and grandfather, Mr. Irvin Carter.

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