

# 50 years a music man

Here is an intimate profile of this modest, dedicated, generous composer whose songs have thrilled Americans for over half a century.

them all—words as well as music. In fact, some 900 Berlin songs, nearly half of them hits, have set America humming, whistling, dreaming, and dancing for half a century.

In 50 amazing years, his popularity has never waned. He has scored 19 musical revues and 18 movies. For several decades, as measured by royalties paid through ASCAP (American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers), he has been the nation's highest-paid and most-listened-to song writer.

So expressive of our country has the work of this composer been that one song is seriously recommended by some as a new national anthem: "God Bless America." Another, "Always," has become a wedding favorite. And a 1942 Academy Award winner, "White Christmas," has become an all-time holiday best seller—23 million records and 4 million pieces of sheet music to date!

Berlin's songs seem timeless. "Alexander's Ragtime Band," published when William Howard Taft was President, is still a standard. "What'll I Do?" "Blue Skies," and "All By Myself" date back to the '20s. "A Pretty Girl Is Like a Melody" is even older.

How has Berlin achieved all this?

A real zeal for work, for one thing. Age, wealth, and decades of success didn't deter him from tackling "Call Me Madam," his latest stage hit, seven years ago, or furnishing the title song for the movie "Sayonara" in 1957. He's still as restless as the time he lost a \$50 bet that he could sit still for five minutes!

**N**OTHING WAS HANDED to Irving Berlin on a silver platter. His struggle upward was as difficult as any in America.

The youngest of eight children, Berlin was born in 1888 in Russia, and was brought to this country when he was four. Four years later, his father, Moses Baline, died. That left the family in poverty and near-hopelessness in the "melting pot" that was New York's Lower East Side.

At 12, Irving ran a paper route for 50 cents a week. Then, forced to quit school, he led a blind man about the Bowery, collecting tips for songs; became a singing waiter for \$7 a week; and learned piano well enough to pick out tunes as a song plugger.

Soon the teen-ager tentatively tried composing songs himself. He couldn't read music—and still can't—but one, "Dorando," impressed a publisher enough to put Berlin on his payroll as a \$25-a-week lyricist.

His first published song, a 1907 col-

laboration, "Marie from Sunny Italy," brought him less than \$1 in royalties. But four years later he turned out "Alexander's Ragtime Band" and not only was established nationally, but won a job with the Ziegfeld Follies—at \$100,000 a year.

When World War I came, the young man from Tin Pan Alley turned over his talents to the Government. As a sergeant at Camp Upton, he wrote "Yip Yip Yaphank," famed soldier show with its "Oh, How I Hate to Get Up in the Morning" and other hits. The show raised \$83,000 for Army causes.

In World War II, that mark was topped with ease. "This Is the Army," the greatest service show ever produced, smashed records on Broadway and on

tour both here and abroad, even venturing into battle zones. "I Left My Heart at the Stage Door Canteen," "American Eagles," "This Is The Army, Mr. Jones," and other songs stopped the show wherever it played—and Berlin went along, as a singer.

All proceeds—\$9,500,000—Berlin turned over to Army Emergency Relief. Generously, he also has assigned royalties from "God Bless America"—nearly \$300,000 thus far—to the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts of America.

"Irving has given away more than many people earn in a long lifetime," said one of his friends.

This, however, is no less than his colleagues would expect of Berlin. In a business where sharpies and dollar-



He writes his own lyrics but has to hand his tunes to someone else.



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