

**IRVING BERLIN**

(Continued)

grabbers are common, he has always personified the quiet, dedicated, generous, decent man of success.

"Don't make me sound pompous," he is fond of saying on rare occasions when he grants interviews. "I am not a composer. I'm a song writer. That's all I ever was. It's all I ever wanted to be."

Everlastingly modest, Berlin seems perennially doubtful he will ever again write a good song. "Irving looks worried," a friend will say. "He must have another hit!"

Trim, always natty, with a thin, raspy voice called "tar-paper tenor," Irving Berlin is a man you can't help liking on sight. His shy smile, brown eyes, black hair slightly streaked with gray, his seamed face—all make up a man with virtually no detractors in the high-voltage currents of show business.

His second-floor office, next to New York's Winter Garden Theater, says this and more. There are photos and autographed tributes from Generals MacArthur, Eisenhower, and Marshall; honorary music degrees from Bucknell and Temple Universities.

There is a photo of President Eisenhower presenting Berlin a special Congressional Gold Medal in 1955 for his patriotic songs, an honor only George M. Cohan had won before. The President, who inscribed the picture "with warm personal regards from his friend," is a long-time Berlin admirer who especially likes his "Count Your Blessings Instead of Sheep."

There also is a spinet piano, with a special gear-shift that automatically switches to any key to compensate for Berlin's inability to play in anything but F sharp. He has two other "easy-shift" pianos, one in his five-story home on Beekman Place in New York, the other in his country home in the Catskills.

**B**ERLIN'S METHOD of composing has changed little through the years. Neither music nor lyrics necessarily comes first. He begins writing either music or words.

Sometimes, if repeating an intriguing melody makes a lyric occur to him, he'll peck out the tune on the piano. More often, because he can't read or transcribe music anyway, he'll compose the song in his head, then retain it until an arranger can write it down.

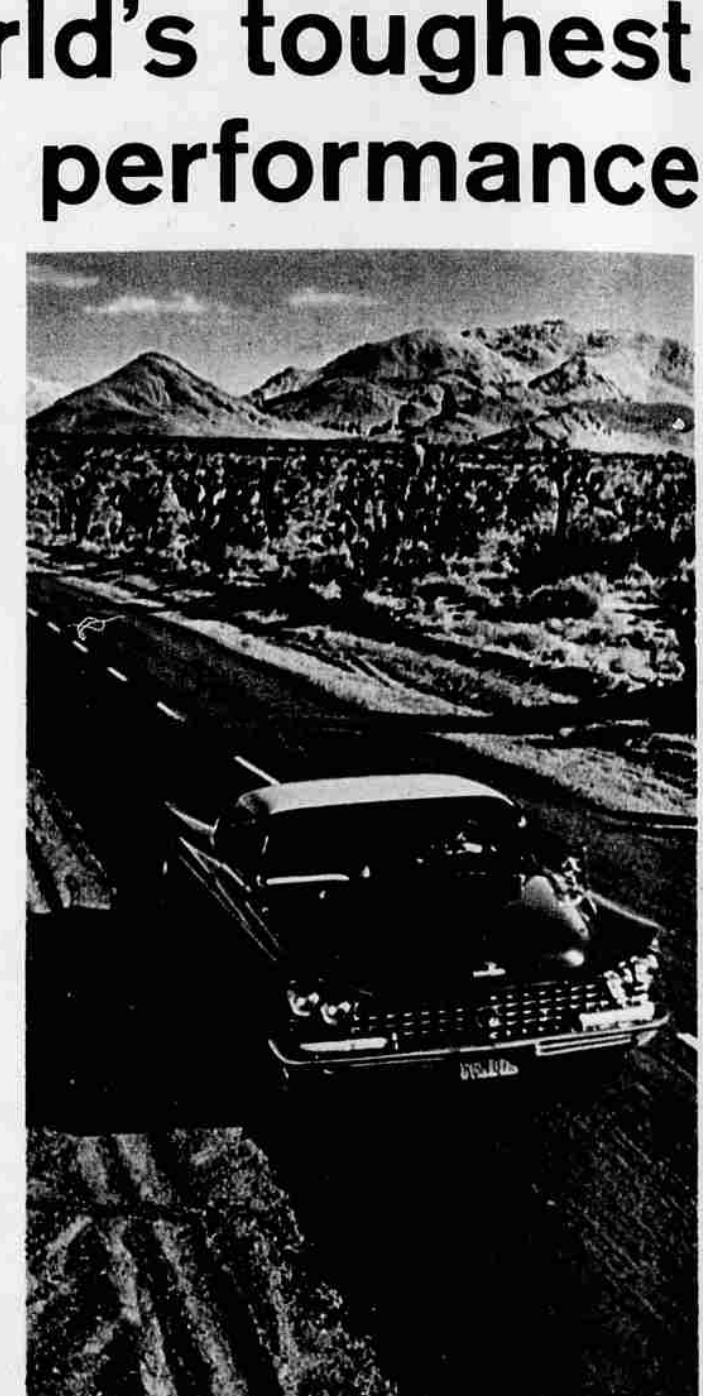
"His memory is fantastic," says Helmy Kresa, a former Milwaukeean who joined Berlin as an arranger 33 years ago and now also is his professional manager. "He can sing any song he has ever written, both verse and chorus."

Berlin has phoned Kresa at midnight with songs to be transcribed. Because he's not bound to a piano, he composes anywhere. Much of his 1946 Ethel Merman musical, "Annie Get Your Gun," was conceived as he strolled the Atlantic City Boardwalk!

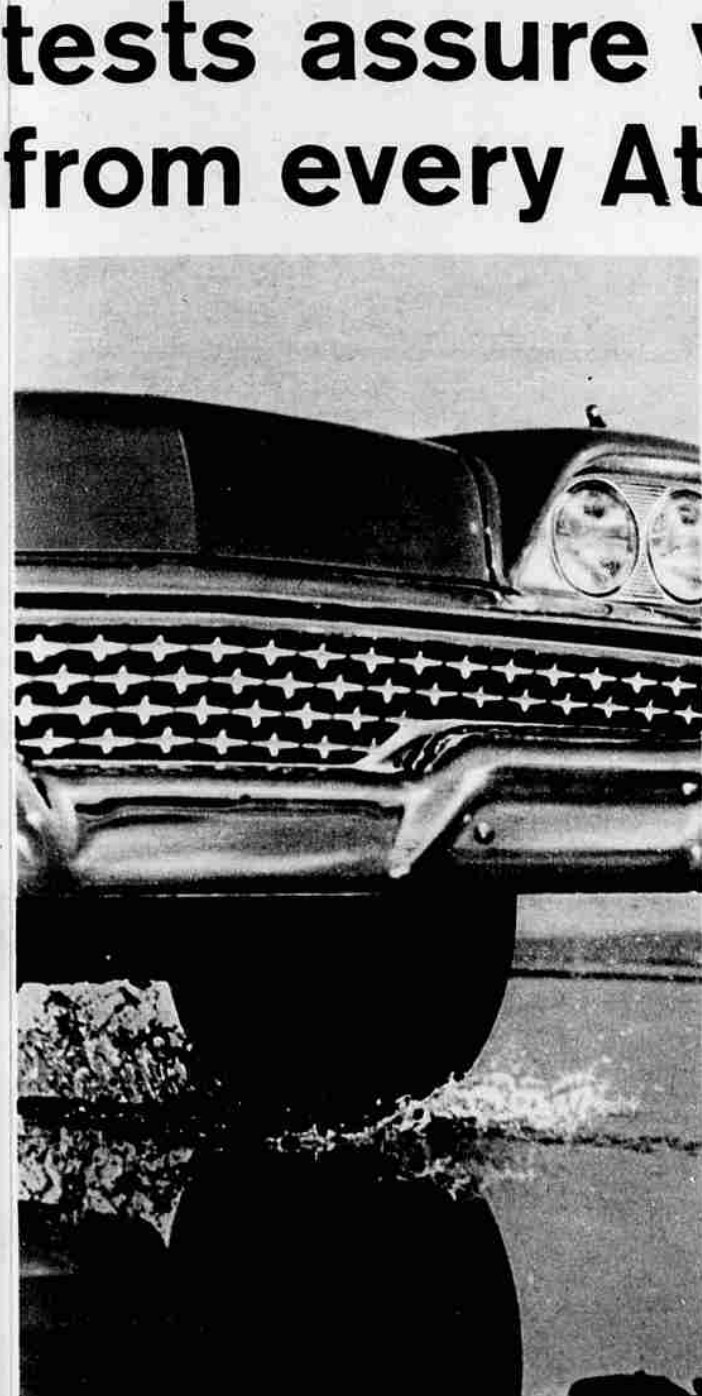
That song, one of Broadway's longest runners, probably was Berlin's greatest demonstration of versatility. It included "They Are So Wonderful," "Anything



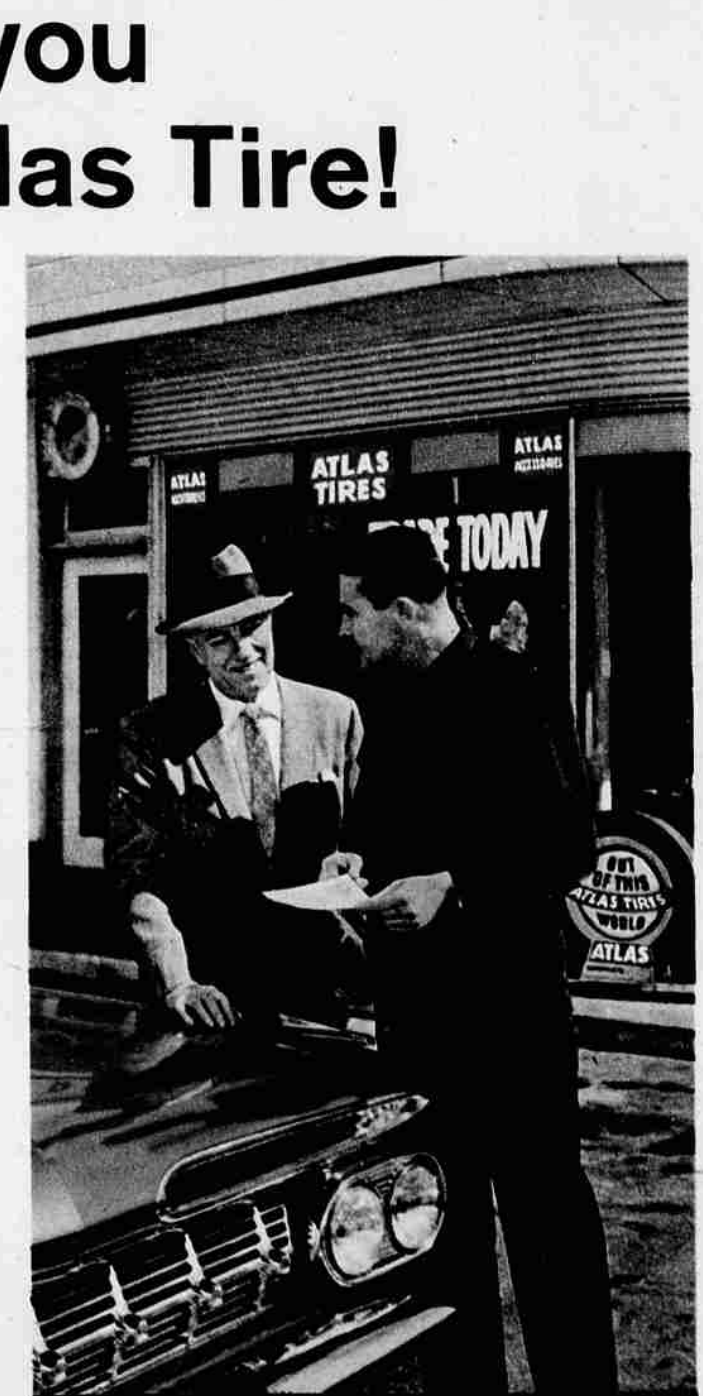
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You Can Do," "Doin' What Comes Natur'lly," "The Girl That I Marry," "I Got the Sun in the Morning," "Who Do You Love, I Hope," and "There's No Business Like Show Business."

Today word is out that Berlin is reading and discussing ideas for another musical. "Ideas come easiest from situations," he says. "I hate to get up in the morning—in an Army show, what could

be more logical than a song about it?" Berlin draws ideas from anywhere, and his genius, according to Oscar Hammerstein, is in "saying exactly what he means." When he co-founded the

Music Box Theater in the '20s, as house theme he wrote, "Say It with Music." Four of his finest love songs were inspired by his wife, Ellin Mackay: "All Alone," "What'll I Do," "Remember,"

and her wedding present, "Always." His own severest critic, Berlin painstakingly polishes and revises music and lyrics, shifting phrases, sometimes pigeonholing a number for years. "Go

Bless America," written in 1919 was put aside for 21 years. "There's No Business Like Show Business" first was tabled, but he restored it on Richard Rodgers' insistence. "How Deep Is the Ocean"

was published only after Rudy Vallee introduced a companion piece about which Berlin was equally dubious, "Say It Isn't So."

Almost from the start, Berlin has not only been composer and lyricist, but also his own publisher. Through Irving Berlin Music Corp., he collects maximum royalties from every broadcast of his songs, every record, and all sheet music. His firm, with four offices and 20 employees, is the only one thriving on the work of just one song writer!

Berlin spends little time at the office. An avid reader, an authority on vintage wines, and an occasional fisherman, he bursts in long enough to handle correspondence or other routine items, then adjourns to Lindy's for a long lunch and the latest Broadway gossip from producers and song writers. His abiding loves are this and seeing the latest plays and top movies.

**D**ESPITE HIS ZEST for the company of show people, Berlin is a devoted, publicity-shy family man—and doting grandfather. Occasionally, he even turns out a meal for the family. Never in the lavish party set, the Berlins always have been close. Even when their youngest daughters are away at school, Berlin and his wife see them frequently.

Berlin's first wife, Dorothy Goetz, died of typhoid five months after their marriage in 1912. In 1926, he married former Postal Telegraph heiress Ellin Mackay in a marriage that brought banner headlines. They have three daughters, Linda, Elizabeth, and Mrs. Marvin (Mary Ellin) Barrett. A son, Irving, Jr., died as an infant in 1928.

A successful novelist in her own right, attractive Mrs. Berlin has written several books, most recently "Silver Platter," a moderate best seller about her indomitable Grandmother Mackay in the days when the family fortune was founded in Nevada's Silver Rush.

Berlin somewhat laments the recent evolution in popular music. "Records are rulers now," he says. "You don't publish a song without a record. People don't sing songs anymore; they listen to them. Years ago, people sat around a piano and sang."

Rock 'n' roll puzzles him slightly. "It's definitely going to die," he believes. "Ragtime, jazz, and swing all had their day, then passed. But this has taken an awfully long time. I wonder what coming generations will think of us. You know, a song should at least make sense!"

That, and more, Irving Berlin's songs do. Regularly, into his office pour letters of gratitude, either for one song or for all he has written.

There are fan letters from whole classes in schools and cards of all types. Recently, one was sent to "Irving Berlin, Song Writer to the World."

This 50-year flow of admiration may be the supreme tribute. Or perhaps such as this from the late Jerome Kern: "Irving Berlin has no peer in American music—no American music."