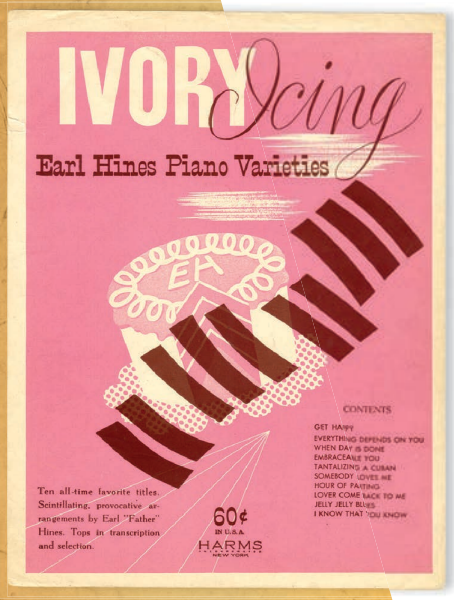
OSCAR-WINNING Songwriters OF WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA

By Patricia Finkel and Paul Roth

Words and Music by
JAY LIVINGSTON and RAY EVANS
Paramount Presents
JAMES STEWART
DORIS DAY
in
Alfred Hitchcock's
THE MAN WHO KNEW TOO MUCH
VISTAVISION
"CHARAD
Music by HENRY MANCINI • Lyrics by JOHNNY
Buttons and
Words and Music by JAY LIVINGSTON and RAY
SCORE
BUTTONS AND BOWS
MEETCHA 'ROUND THE CORNER
THE CONTINENTAL
(YOU KISS WHILE YOU'RE DANCING)
MUSIC BY
CON CONRAD
LYRICS BY
HERBERT MAGIDSON
FOR THE DANCE
INTRODUCED BY
PRISONER OF
Words and Music By
LEO ROBIN, CLARENCE GASKILL and RUSS COLU
HENRY MANCI
From the Paramo
AUD
HEPB
as Holly
BREAKF
TIFFAN

Silent films were never truly "silent," nor were they meant to be.

FROM THE GENESIS OF FILM IN AMERICA, PRODUCTION COMPANIES AND EXHIBITORS LOOKED FOR WAYS TO ADD SOUND TO MOVIES.



Though Pittsburgh's African Americans were not writing songs for Hollywood, arrangers like Earl "Father" AKA "Fatha" Hines were advertising on the back of Oscar-winning sheet music, this one on the flip side of "A Gal in Calico."

All sheet music from Paul Roth collection.

Early techniques, such as the phonograph, proved too cumbersome to synchronize with the scenes. For two decades, the most common way to accompany a silent film was by employing live piano, improvised to the action. One of the pianists was the grandmother of co-author Pat Finkel — Alice Evans earned her living playing piano accompaniment at nickelodeons and silent film theaters.

Many pianists made a living as resident movie accompanists, so the switch to "talkies" was a devastating blow and left many unemployed.[1] Warner Brothers was the first studio to release musical movies with sound: *The Jazz Singer* in 1927 and *The Singing Fool* in 1928. Both featured Al Jolson, the most popular stage performer of his day, and both were overwhelming hits. By 1929, all of the major Hollywood studios were hustling to produce musicals. They created their own staff of composers and lyricists, mostly by inducing veteran songwriters of New York City's Tin Pan Alley to "Go West."[2]

Pittsburgh's many immigrants had mostly come for mill jobs but some of their children were drawn to musical careers. Many creative artists who made the leap from Pittsburgh to Hollywood were young men from Jewish, Irish, and Italian working class families. Many of the top songsmiths were first generation Jews: in Pittsburgh there was Stept, Mysels, and others who we'll discuss; famous names from New York City include Rodgers, Berlin, and both Gershwins.

Though women were often pianists, like Pat's grandmother, they rarely made the move to Hollywood. African Americans were likewise prominent in Pittsburgh's music scene but the closest connection to the Oscars comes from the 1962 nomination for scoring the movie, *Paris Blues*, done by Duke Ellington — its most famous number, "Take the A Train," was composed back in 1939 by Pittsburgher Billy Strayhorn.[3]

With the Depression deepening and musicals all the rage, songwriters began moving to Hollywood. Two of the first-generation recruits were Braddock's Herb Magidson and the Hill District's Leo Robin, both lyricists.

Alvin Theatre, Pittsburgh, 1906.
LoC 4a13522

Alice Evans,

grandmother of co-author Pat Finkel, who played piano to accompany silent movies.
Pat Finkel.

"The Continental"

Magidson, "The Continental"

won the first Academy Award Oscar for best original song in a movie.

Magidson was born in Braddock in 1906. His family owned a second-hand furniture store on Braddock Avenue. Though his family was poor, Herb managed to earn a degree in Journalism from the University of Pittsburgh. While in school, he wrote lyrics for local musical revues and vaudeville performers.[4] After graduating, this musical poet put journalism aside and moved to New York City to write for Tin Pan Alley, where the highlight of his year there was penning lyrics for stage performer Sophie Tucker. In 1929, he was lured by Hollywood to write lyrics for the movies.[5]

His claim to fame came in 1934 for writing the song "The Continental" (along with composer Con Conrad), from the hit movie *The Gay Divorcee* starring Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. "The Continental" won the first Academy Award Oscar for best

Magidson, "Conchita"

Magidson, "Enjoy Yourself"

original song in a movie.[6] In 1942, Magidson wrote the lyrics for *Priorities on Parade*, a patriotic-themed musical that included the song "Conchita, Marquita, Lolita, Pepita, Rosita, Juanita Lopez," describing a love affair between a "handsome young Irish lad" and a "Mexican beauty." It was recorded by the Glenn Miller Orchestra; Bing Crosby; Dinah Shore; The Four King Sisters; Tommy Tucker; and the Royal Air Force Dance Orchestra.

Herb had two other nominated songs, but not winners: "Say a Prayer for The Boys Over There," made famous by singer/actress Deanna Durbin in 1944, and "I'll Buy That Dream" in 1946. Besides Con Conrad, he collaborated with other composers too, including Pittsburgh's Sam Stept on the song, "And So I Married the Girl." After writing the hit "Enjoy Yourself (It's Later Than You Think)" made famous by Guy Lombardo and the Royal Canadians orchestra in 1949, nothing more was heard from Herb Magidson, though he was inducted into the Song Writers Hall of Fame in 1980.

Magidson, "I'll Buy That Dream"

Leo Robin.
From Warren Craig, *The Great Songwriters of Hollywood*, 1980.

Leo Robin, born in the Hill District, became known as "the dean of Lyric writers."

Leo Robin, born in the Hill District, became known as "the dean of Lyric writers." Others remembered him as one of the wittiest and most literate of Hollywood and Broadway lyricists. He was the oldest of a family of six children. His dad, Max, an insurance salesman and amateur poet, wanted him to become a lawyer and a judge, so in 1915, to please his dad, he attended law school at Pitt. The law wasn't for Leo: he left after one year.

A variety of careers followed. He claimed he got ideas for writing love songs from writing an "advice to the lovelorn" column for the *Pittsburgh Chronicle-Telegram* in 1916. This job was followed by stints as a social worker, then as a publicity writer for Blaw-Knox Steel. None of these suited him.

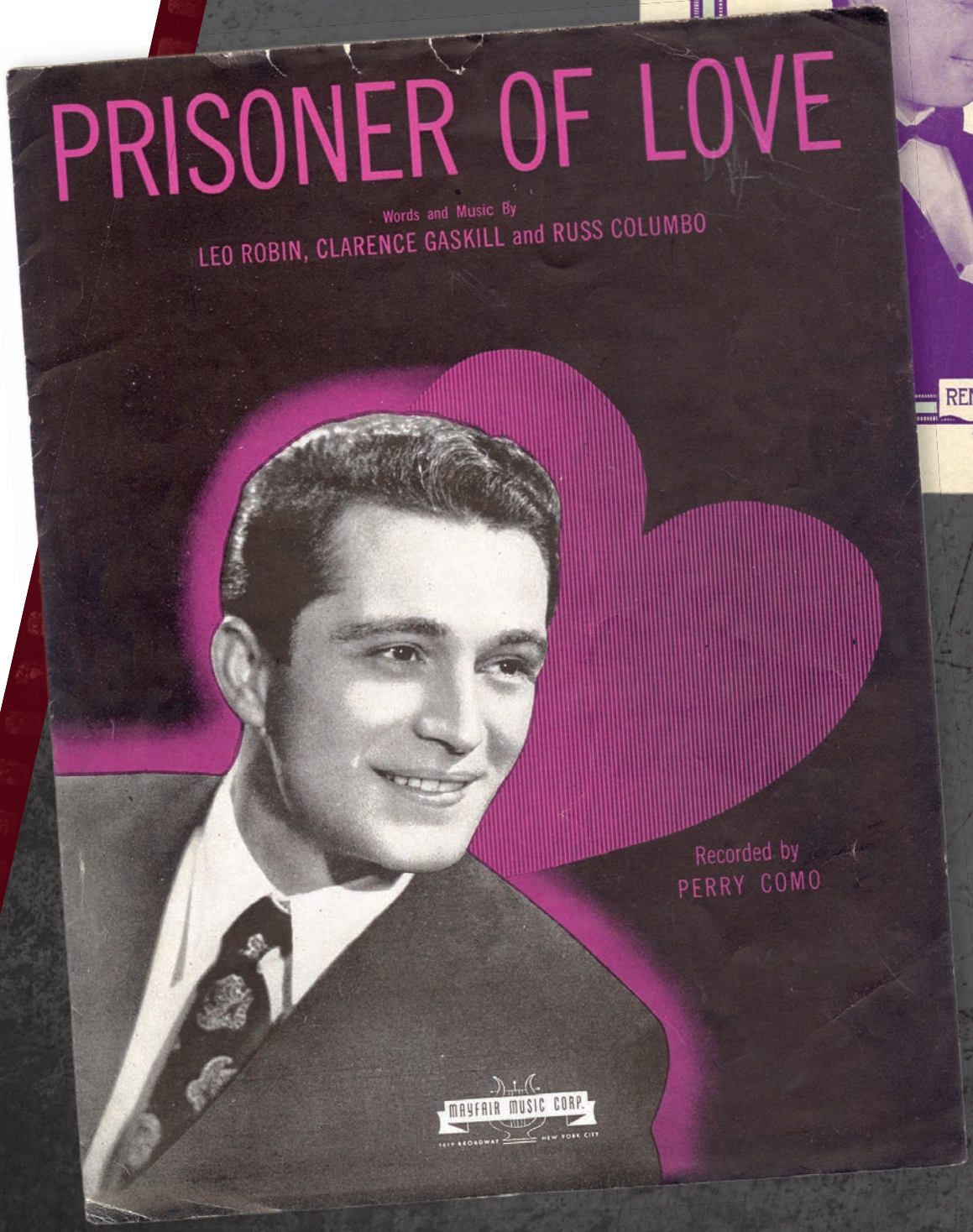
After attending a theatrical production in Pittsburgh, he had a new ambition: the theater. He enrolled at Carnegie Tech to study drama at night. By 1920, Leo was in New York to pursue his goal of becoming a playwright. He had a letter of introduction to famous playwright, and fellow-Pittsburgher George S. Kaufman. He told Kaufman that besides writing "little plays" for a group home of orphan boys in Pittsburgh, he wrote poetry. Kaufman sent him to songwriter Lou Gensler who encouraged him to pursue his career as a lyricist.[7]

His first major song, written with composer Vincent Youmans for the Broadway musical *Hit The Deck*, was the rousing tune "Hallelujah." Another major song was "Prisoner of Love," co-written with the singer Russ Columbo, and made famous years later by crooner Perry Como.

In 1929, he went to Hollywood and teamed up with composer Richard Whiting to write such film hits as "Louise" (sung in the film by Maurice Chevalier) and "Beyond the Blue Horizon," both in 1930, and "My Ideal," in 1931.[8]

In 1930, Robin was partnered by Paramount Studios with composer Ralph

Robin, "Louise"



Robin, "Prisoner of Love"

Robin, "Thanks for the Memory"

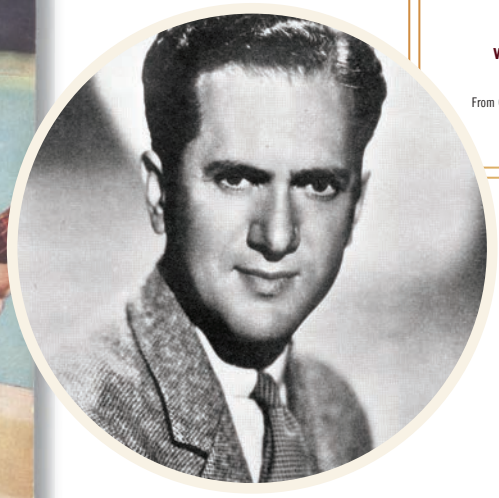
During his 30 years of writing songs for movies, Leo Robin had 10 nominations for Best Song.

Rainger, making one of the most successful Hollywood songwriting teams of all time with over 50 hit songs. From 1930 to the early 1940s, they wrote songs for movies featuring rising stars from Bing Crosby to Shirley Temple. In 1938, the duo won the Best Film Song Oscar for "Thanks For The Memory" from the movie *The Big Broadcast of 1938*. It was sung by Bob Hope, who adopted it as his theme song for the rest of his career.[9]

After their association with Paramount, Leo and Ralph moved to 20th Century Fox where they wrote songs for Betty Grable and Rita Hayworth films. In 1942, Rainger was killed in a plane crash; Leo then began freelancing for every Hollywood studio, producing musicals and working with such famous composers as Jerome Kern and David Rose.[10]

During his 30 years of writing songs for movies, Leo Robin had 10 nominations for Best Song, one of which was "Love in Bloom," written for a 1934 Bing Crosby movie. This was the song that was played on radio and TV

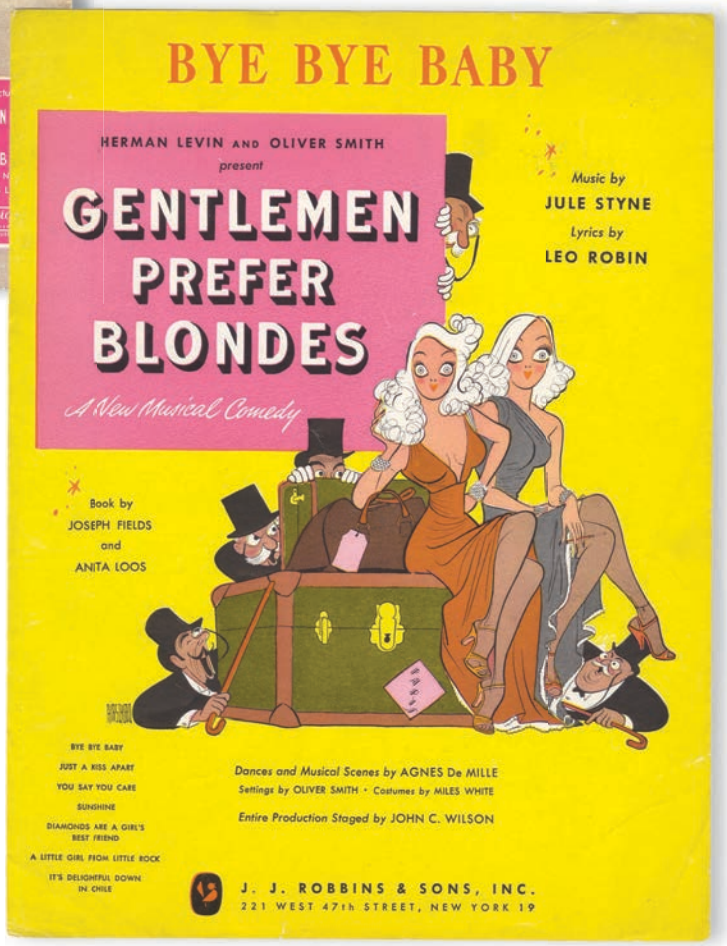
Robin, "Love in Bloom"



Ralph Rainger

writing partner of Leo Robin

From Craig, The Great Songwriters.



Robin, "Bye Bye Baby"

by Jack Benny on his screechy violin. Other nominations were for "A Gal in Calico" and "For Every Man There's a Woman."

In 1949, he returned to Broadway to write the lyrics for the show *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*. The hit song of the show was "Diamonds are a Girl's Best Friend," sung by Carol Channing, and later by Marilyn Monroe in the movie version.

Leo Robin's final film work was in 1955 with composer Jule Stein for the movie, *My Sister Eileen*. He officially retired from the movie industry the same year. He was inducted into the Songwriter's Hall of Fame in 1972.[11]

Jay Livingston & Ray Evans
From Craig, The Great Songwriters.

Jay Livingston & Ray Evans

When future lyricist Jay Livingston met future composer Ray Evans at the University of Pennsylvania in the mid-1930s, they never dreamed they would someday receive three Oscars for best movie song. While in school, the musically-trained duo wrote songs for campus musicals, the start of a collaboration which lasted 63 years.[12]

Livingston grew up southwest of the city in McDonald, Pa., studying piano and listening to big bands on his shortwave radio. During spring and summer vacations from college, Livingston, on piano, and Evans, on saxophone, performed with a band for a series of Cunard Line cruises.[13] After graduating in 1937, they moved to New York to write music. A big break came in 1941 when they were hired as part of a team of songwriters for comedians Olsen and Johnson's Broadway review, *Sons of Fun*, a sequel to their very popular review, *Hellzapoppin*. After singer-composer Johnny Mercer began singing their song, "G'Bye Now" from *Sons of Fun* on the radio, they got the attention of a minor Hollywood studio, where they wrote forgettable music.[14]

Their big break came when Paramount studios signed them to a 10-year contract, where they wrote mostly minor songs for over 100 films. But 1948 was different: they were awarded an Oscar for Best Song, "Buttons and Bows." Livingston recalled, "We wrote 'Buttons and Bows' for a Bob Hope picture, *The Paleface*. Although he sang it in the picture with Jane Russell, Dinah Shore had the hit recording with it."

One of their Oscar-nominated songs, "To Each His Own," had five different recordings that made Billboard's Top 10 list in 1946. Not only that, but all five were in the Top 10 "Most Played" chart at the same time. Even more incredibly, this occurred four times (August 24, September 7, September 14, and October 5).[15] Though such a coincidence was more probable at a time when multiple artists were recording professionally written songs, Livingston was nonetheless proud of that: "I think it should be in the Guinness Book of World Records."[16]

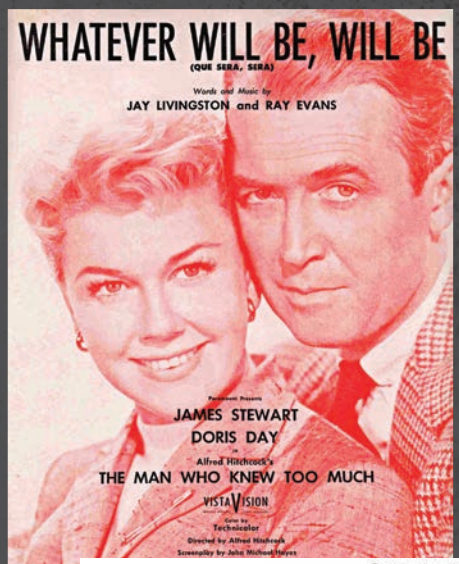
Their second Oscar was in 1950 for "Mona Lisa," a Nat "King" Cole recording classic. Livingston and Evans wrote it as a background song for the movie, *Captain Carey, USA* starring Alan Ladd.

Oscar number three was for the song, "Que Sera, Sera," sung by Doris Day in the 1956 movie, *The Man Who Knew Too Much*. Other Oscar-nominated songs of Livingston and Evans were "Dear Heart," "Golden Earrings, "Silver Bells," and "Tammy." "Silver Bells," written for Bob Hope's film, *The Lemon Drop Kid* in 1951, was one of a dozen Hope films which featured Livingston and Evans' songs. Livingston and Evans also wrote the TV themes for *Mr. Ed* and *Bonanza*. The duo was inducted into the Song Writers Hall of Fame in 1977.[17]

Livingston, "Mona Lisa"

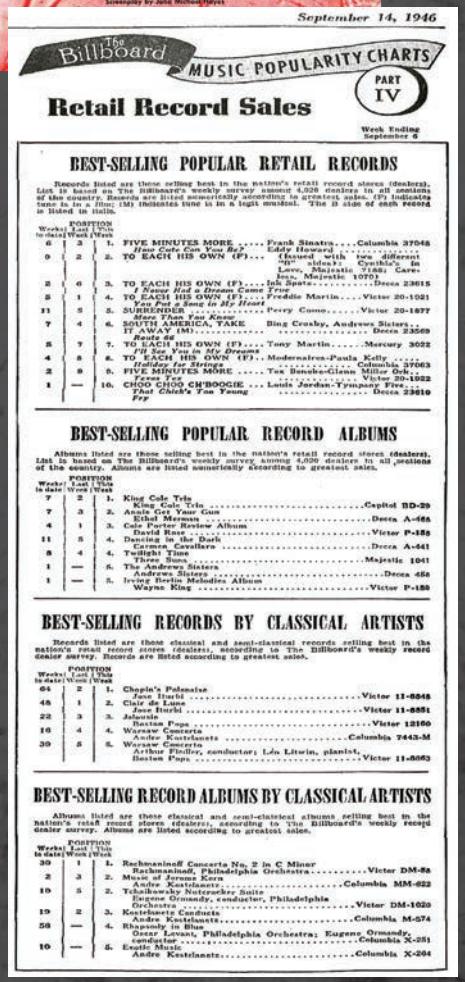
Livingston, "Golden Earrings"

Livingston, "Que Sera, Sera"



Livingston, "To Each His Own"

Livingston, "Buttons and Bows"



September 14, 1946

The Billboard MUSIC POPULARITY CHARTS PART IV

Retail Record Sales

Week Ending September 6

BEST-SELLING POPULAR RETAIL RECORDS

Records listed are those selling best in the nation's retail record stores (dealers). List is based on The Billboard's weekly survey among 4,026 dealers in all sections of the country. Records are listed numerically according to greatest sales. (P) indicates tune is in a film; (M) indicates tune is in a legit musical. The B side of each record is listed in italics.

Weeks to date	Position Last Week	Position This Week			
6	3	1.	FIVE MINUTES MORE ..... *How Cute Can You Be?*	Frank Sinatra	Columbia 37048
9	2	2.	TO EACH HIS OWN (P)...	Eddy Howard (focused with two different "B" sides): Cynthia's in Love, Majestic 1040; Carelessness, Majestic 1070)	.....
2	6	3.	TO EACH HIS OWN (P)..... *I Never Had a Dream Come True*	Ink Spots	Decca 23615
5	1	4.	TO EACH HIS OWN (P)... *You Are My Song in My Heart*	Freddie Martin	Victor 20-1021
11	5	5.	SURRENDER ..... *More Than You Know*	Perry Como	Victor 20-1877
7	4	6.	SOUTH AMERICA, TAKE IT AWAY (M)..... *Route 66*	Bing Crosby, Andrews Sisters	Decca 23569
5	7	7.	TO EACH HIS OWN (P)... *I'll See You in My Dreams*	Tony Martin	Mercury 3022
4	8	8.	TO EACH HIS OWN (P)... *Holiday for Strings*	Modernaires-Paula Kelly	Columbia 37063
2	9	9.	FIVE MINUTES MORE ..... *Texas Tea*	Tex Beneke-Glenn Miller Orch.	Victor 20-1522
1	—	10.	CHOO CHOO CH'BOOGIE ... *That Chick's Too Young Fry*	Louis Jordan-Tympany Five	Decca 23610

BEST-SELLING POPULAR RECORD ALBUMS

Albums listed are those selling best in the nation's retail record stores (dealers). List is based on The Billboard's weekly survey among 4,026 dealers in all sections of the country. Albums are listed numerically according to greatest sales.

Weeks to date	Position Last Week	Position This Week			
7	2	1.	King Cole Trio ..... King Cole Trio		Capitol BD-29
7	3	2.	Annie Get Your Gun ..... Ethel Merman		Decca A-466
4	1	3.	Cole Porter Review Album ..... David Rose		Victor P-188
11	5	4.	Dancing in the Dark ..... Carmen Cavallaro		Decca A-441
8	4	4.	Twilight Time ..... Three Suns		Majestic 1041
1	—	5.	The Andrews Sisters ..... Andrews Sisters		Decca 48a
1	—	5.	Irving Berlin Melodies Album ..... Wayne King		Victor P-188

BEST-SELLING RECORDS BY CLASSICAL ARTISTS

Records listed are those classical and semi-classical records selling best in the nation's retail record stores (dealers), according to The Billboard's weekly record dealer survey. Records are listed according to greatest sales.

Weeks to date	Position Last Week	Position This Week			
64	2	1.	Chopin's Polonaise ..... Jan Ekiebi		Victor 11-8848
48	1	2.	Clair de Lune ..... Jan Ekiebi		Victor 11-8851
22	3	3.	Jubilee ..... Boston Pops		Victor 12100
16	4	4.	Warsaw Concerto ..... Andre Kostelanetz		Columbia 7443-M
30	5	5.	Warsaw Concerto ..... Arthur Fiedler, conductor; Leo Litwin, pianist, Boston Pops		Victor 11-8863

BEST-SELLING RECORD ALBUMS BY CLASSICAL ARTISTS

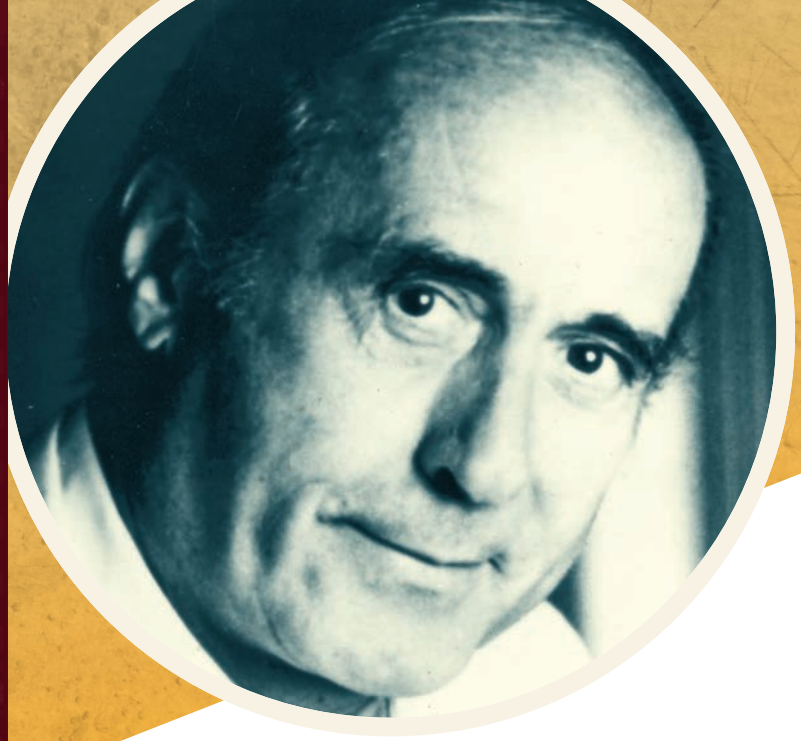
Albums listed are those classical and semi-classical albums selling best in the nation's retail record stores (dealers), according to The Billboard's weekly record dealer survey. Albums are listed according to greatest sales.

Weeks to date	Position Last Week	Position This Week			
30	1	1.	Rachmaninoff Concerto No. 2 in C Minor ..... Rachmaninoff, Philadelphia Orchestra		Victor DM-82
2	3	2.	Music of Jerome Kern ..... Andre Kostelanetz		Columbia MM-622
19	5	2.	Tchaikowsky Nutcracker Suite ..... Eugene Ormandy, conductor, Philadelphia Orchestra		Victor DM-1020
19	2	3.	Kostelanetz Concerts ..... Andre Kostelanetz		Columbia M-574
58	—	4.	Rhapsody in Blue ..... Oscar Levant, Philadelphia Orchestra; Eugene Ormandy, conductor		Columbia X-251
16	—	5.	Exotic Music ..... Andre Kostelanetz		Columbia X-204

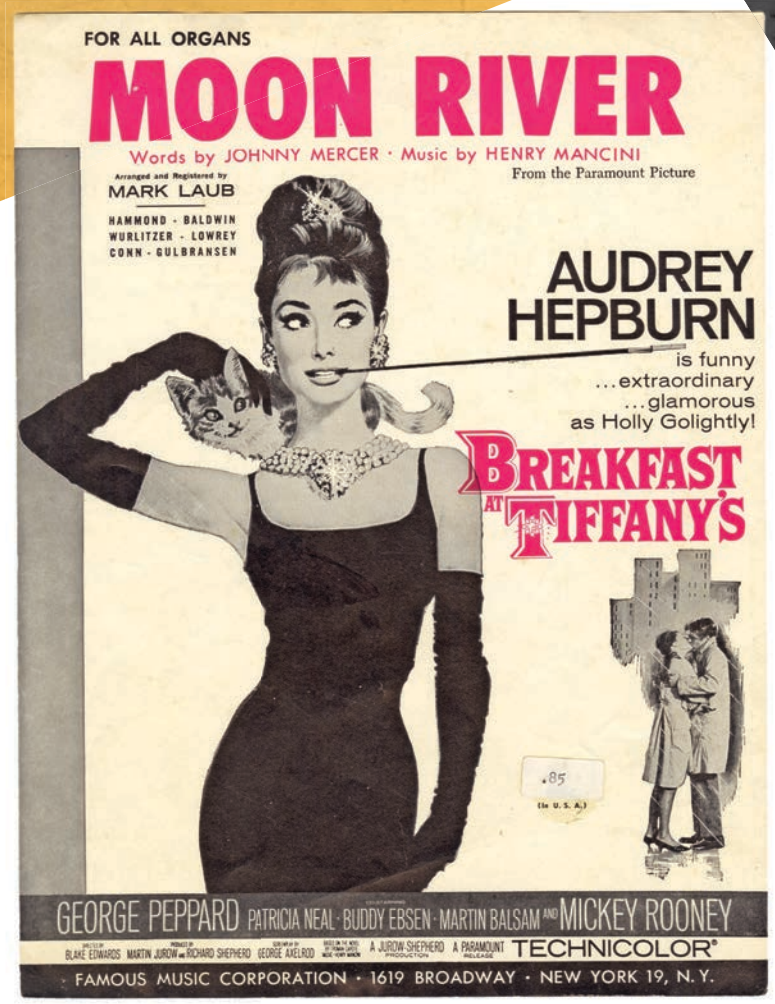
When future lyricist Jay Livingston met future composer Ray Evans at the University of Pennsylvania in the mid-1930s, they never dreamed they would someday receive three Oscars for best movie song.

This Billboard Radio Popularity chart for the first week of September 1946 shows "To Each His Own" in 5 of the top 10 spots. For Radio Popularity and Retail Record Sales, and 5 in the Top 15 in Juke Box Plays. In the same issue, an Honor Roll shows "To Each His Own" at number one and lists the many recordings being offered: Eddy Howard Orchestra, Freddie Martin, Ink Spots, Tony Martin, and the Modernaires with Paula Kelly. Other recording artists not even listed included The Siesta Four and Marie Greene.

Billboard, September 14, 1946, p. 26.



Henry Mancini



Mancini, "Moon River"

In 1987, Henry Mancini, by then a world-famous composer at 63, returned to his Western Pennsylvania roots to conduct four performances with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra at Heinz Hall. That venue had opened in 1927 as the Loew's Penn Theatre and was to play an important role in forming Mancini's future.

Although he had been born in Cleveland, by age 4, Mancini called West Aliquippa home after his Dad got an offer to work in one of the area's steel mills. When Henry was 9, his father took him the Loew's Penn to see a movie, *The Crusades*. The stirring background musical score so impressed young Henry, who by this time was taking flute and piano lessons, that it became a goal of his to compose music for the movies.[18]

Max Adkins, musical director of the Stanley (now Benedum) Theatre pit orchestra,[19] mentored him on piano and music arrangement. Mancini said of Adkins, "He was the most important influence of my life!"[20] At age 17 Henry was accepted at Julliard School of Music in New York. Disappointed with the academic program there, he joined the Army a year later and was accepted into the Army Air Force Band as a flutist.[21] At war's end, he landed a job as pianist and sometime arranger for the Glenn Miller Orchestra Conducted by Tex Beneke (Miller had died in a war-time plane crash.)

At age 30, he left to work as a staff arranger for Universal Studios in Hollywood, writing background music in the mid-1950s for Abbott and Costello movies and such "B" films as *It Came From Outer Space* and *The Creature From The Black Lagoon*. His big break came when he was hired to write the background scores for the hit TV series *Mr. Lucky* and *Peter Gunn*.

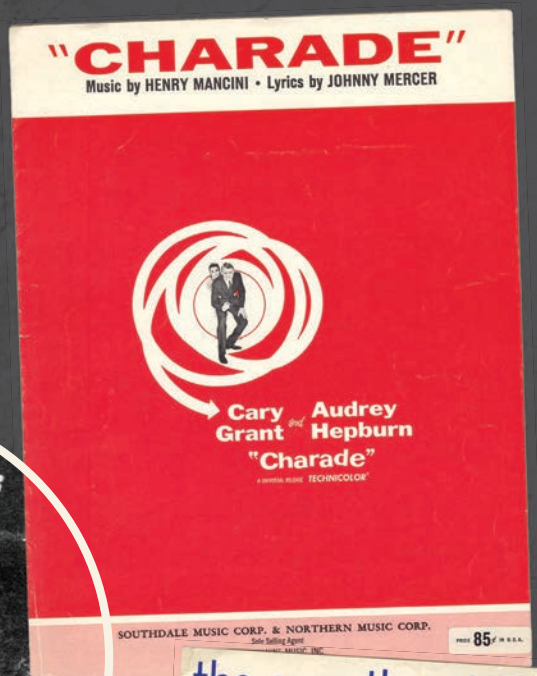
One of Mancini's best-known compositions, and one of the most poignant melodies ever composed, was "Moon River" from the movie *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. This collaboration of Mancini with lyricist Johnny Mercer won an Oscar for Best Song of 1961. He also won an Oscar for Best Musical Score for the same film. The following year, the Mancini/Mercer team won another Best Song Oscar for "The Days of Wine and Roses" from the film of the same name.[22]

Mancini was nominated for many more Academy Awards for Best Song, among which were "The Sweetheart Tree," a love ballad from the 1965 slapstick comedy *The Great Race*,

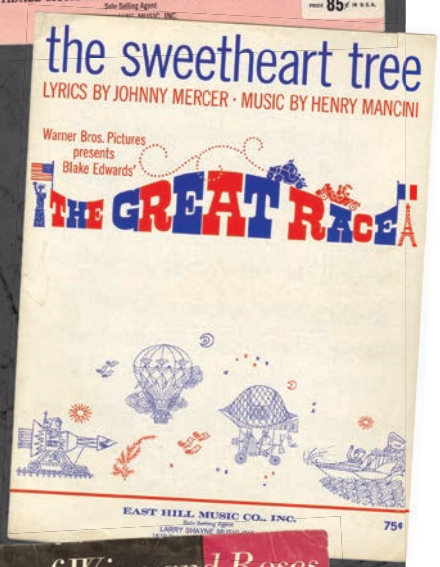
Johnny Mercer

collaborator with
Henri Mancini

From Craig, The Great Songwriters.



Mancini, "Charade"



Mancini, "The Sweetheart Tree"

Mancini, "Days of Wine and Roses"

and title songs of the films *Charade* and *Man's Favorite Sport*. Mancini later won an Oscar for best musical score for the film *Victor/Victoria* in 1982. He also won numerous nominations for the scoring of film background music, most notably for *The Pink Panther* series, all of this gaining him induction to the Songwriter's Hall of Fame in 1984.[23]

Pittsburgh has had less of an influence in Hollywood in recent years, as productions have shifted to background orchestration and/or the use of pop hits. However, the region's Academy Award-winning songsmiths comprise an integral part of Western Pennsylvania's illustrious contributions to America's musical heritage.

Patricia Finkel and Paul Roth are regular contributors to Western Pennsylvania History.

1 Marks, Martin Miller, *Music and the Silent Film Contexts and Case Studies, 1895-1924* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

2 Jansen, David A., *Tin Pan Alley* (New York: Donald I. Fine, 1988). Tin Pan Alley was the nickname given to the New York neighborhood which housed major music publishing houses.

3 See www.songhall.org/profile/Billy_Strayhorn. Ellington said of him, "Billy Strayhorn was my right arm, my left arm, all the eyes in the back of my head, my brainwaves in his head, and his in mine."

4 Obituary, *The New York Times*, January 4, 1986, online at www.nytimes.com/1986/01/04/obituaries/herbert-magidson.html. Also see https://sites.google.com/site/pittsburghmusichistory.

5 Songwriters Hall of Fame, www.songhall.org/profile/Herb_Magidson.

6 The Oscar statuette has been around since 1929. Although formerly known as THE Academy Award of Merit, it was officially named "Oscar" in 1929.

7 Great American Songbook, http://leorobin.com/biography.

8 Gardner, Edward Foote, *Popular Songs of the Twentieth Century* (St. Paul: Paragon House, 2000).

9 https://sites.google.com/site/pittsburghmusichistory.

10 Great American Songbook, http://leorobin.com/biography.

11 Songwriters Hall of Fame, https://www.songhall.org/profile/Leo_Robin.

12 Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania Alumni, https://alumni.wharton.upenn.edu/alumni-directory.

13 *Variety*, October 18, 2001.

14 *Billboard*, August 26, 2000.

15 "Records Most Played on the Air," *Billboard*, August 24, p. 28 and 112; September 7, p. 28 and 116; September 14, p. 26; and October 5, 1946, p. 24.

16 Mike Kalina, "String of hit songs brings Livingston back for gala," *Pittsburgh Post Gazette*, September 23, 1987, p. 18.

17 For more, see https://www.songhall.org/#1977 for profiles of both, who were the only inductees that year, and http://livingstonandevans.com.

18 Caps, John, *Reinventing Film Music* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012).

19 A "pit" orchestra, located in a depression in front of the stage, was used to accompany stage performers and to provide musical interludes before or between movies.

20 https://sites.google.com/site/pittsburghmusichistory.

21 Mancini, Henry with Gene Lees, *Did They Mention the Music?* (Chicago: Contemporary Books, 1989).

22 See http://acousticmusic.org/research/history/list-of-academy-awards-for-songs and http://awardsdatabase.oscars.org.

23 See www.songhall.org/profile/Henry_Mancini.