

STAMP news & notes

There's No Business Like Stamp Business

(NAPSA)—You can't get a man with a gun, but you can get his face on a stamp.

Irving Berlin, the accomplished songwriter who helped change the direction of American popular music—with more than 1,000 songs to his credit—is being honored by the U.S. Postal Service with a commemorative 37 cent stamp.

Born Israel Beilin on May 11, 1888, in Russia, he came to the U.S. with his family at the age of 5. Berlin left home in his early teens and moved to the Bowery, where he sang for coins tossed by saloon patrons and eventually became a singing waiter. In 1906, he wrote the lyrics for his first published song, "Marie from Sunny Italy."

Berlin became a staff lyricist at a music publishing firm in 1909 and wrote the lyrics to two songs that were hits that year: "My Wife's Gone to the Country" and "That Mesmerizing Mendelssohn Tune." Around this time he also began to compose music for his lyrics. The success of "Alexander's Ragtime Band," with sales of one million copies of sheet music in 1911, cemented Berlin's fame.

Many of Berlin's most popular songs originated from his work on Broadway. In 1933, Berlin's score for the musical *As Thousands Cheer* featured the song "Easter Parade." *Annie Get Your Gun*, first staged in 1946, produced more hits than any previous Broadway show. Included in this production were "You Can't Get a Man with a Gun" and "There's No Business Like Show Business."

Berlin's songs also found their way to the silver screen. Songs from his first major screen success, *Top Hat*, were extremely popular. Another film, *Holiday Inn* (1942), featured "Happy Holiday" and "White Christmas." The latter earned Berlin an Academy Award.

In 1938, Kate Smith performed Berlin's "God Bless America" on her Armistice Day radio broadcast, and the song became an immediate hit. Ironically, when Berlin wrote it in 1918, shortly



Writer of "God Bless America" and many other beloved tunes, Irving Berlin is now being honored by the U.S. Postal Service with a commemorative stamp.

after becoming an American citizen, he dismissed the song as too solemn and packed it away.

During his lifetime, Berlin garnered many honors, including the Presidential Medal for Merit, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, and the congressional Gold Medal. He died at the age of 101 on Sept. 22, 1989 in New York City. His classic songs continue to be performed on Broadway, in movies and by vocal artists from opera to country, cabaret and jazz.

The portrait of Irving Berlin was taken from a 1932 black-and-white photograph by Edward Steichen. The photograph, which was colorized for the stamp art, is superimposed over Berlin's handwritten score of "God Bless America." His signature from that score appears at the bottom of the stamp. The stamp was designed by Greg Berger of Bethesda, Md.

To see the Irving Berlin stamp, visit the Postal Service Web site at www.usps.com. Other current U.S. stamps, as well as a free comprehensive catalog, are available toll free by calling 1-800-STAMP-24.