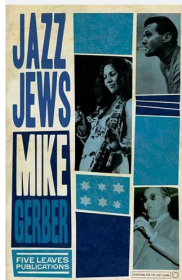


Kurt Weill (March 2, 1900 – April 3, 1950) was born in Germany to Albert Weill and Emma Weill. He grew up in a religious Jewish family in the “Sandvorstadt”, the Jewish quarter in Dessau in Saxony, where his father was a cantor. At the age of twelve, Weill started taking piano lessons and made his first attempts at writing music; his earliest preserved composition was written in 1913 and is titled “Mi Addir: Jewish Wedding Song”. Weill fled Nazi Germany in March 1933. He moved to New York City on September 10, 1935 where he became a United States citizen in 1943. A leading composer for the stage, he is best known for his fruitful collaborations with Bertolt Brecht with whom he developed “The Threepenny Opera”, which included the ballad “Mack the Knife”.

Victor Young (August 8, 1899 – November 10, 1956) was born in Chicago, into a very musical Jewish family. His father was a tenor with Joseph Sheehan’s touring opera company. After his mother died, his father abandoned the family. The young Victor, who had begun playing violin at the age of six, was sent to Poland when he was ten to stay with his grandfather and study at Warsaw Imperial Conservatory. He returned to Chicago in 1920 to join the orchestra at Central Park Casino. In the mid-1930s, he moved to Hollywood where he concentrated on films, recordings of light music and providing backing for popular singers.

About Richie Zellon / Extracted from “Jazz Jews” by Mike Gerber



Peruvian-Jewish guitarist Richie Zellon is a pivotal figure in Latin jazz. Saxophonist Jimmy Heath, during a tour of Peru, was so taken with his guitar style in performance that he wrote the liner notes to Zellon’s 1982 debut album (*Landologia*). Zellon merits a full chapter in Nat Chediak’s “El Diccionario de Latin Jazz” which tells us his first influence was Jimi Hendrix, inspiring him to take up guitar in a school rock band. Then he heard Wes Montgomery and became more interested in jazz improvisation. He studied at Berklee and further developed his jazz knowledge with private instruction from Pat Martino, Red Rodney and Charles Banacos. Zellon’s eclecticism can be gauged by his third album, *The Nazca Lines*, a homage to Hendrix, but which includes merenbop (a bebop/merengue fusion) versions of Sonny Rollins and Dizzy Gillespie, a samba in memory of John Coltrane, and a tango-take on Duke Ellington’s ‘In a Sentimental Mood’.

His output also includes three Jewish jazz compositions. One is ‘Rabbi Vallenatowitz’, featured on Oscar Stagnaro’s album *Mariella’s Dream*, where Zellon guests with Paquito D’Rivera’s clarinet supplying the main Jewish feel on what is essentially a Latin jazz number. Zellon’s other Jewish themed compositions, ‘Rabbi Merenguewitz’ and ‘Tel Aviv Blue’ are on his album *Metal Caribe*. The sleeve tells us, “Both...were written in Israel and radiate the strong spiritual sentiments Richie experienced on his first tour to the Jewish homeland and an opportunity to explore first hand the Russian Hebrew heritage of his parents.” ‘Tel Aviv Blue’ is a slow-tempo moody piece with nothing Latin about it, on which the main soloists, Zellon and, on soprano sax, Dave Leibman, attempt to “call forth both beauty and tension of the Israeli metropolis”; while the upbeat ‘Rabbi Merenguewitz’, the sleeve says, “underscores an apparent connection between traditional Jewish forms like *klezmer* and the Dominican national style” — that is merengue.

www.richiezellon.com



“A Jazz Tribute to the Jewish Composers of the Great American Songbook”



by **Richie Zellon Trio**

with **Michael Parker (bass) & Kevin Korschgen (drums)**

Congregation Beth Israel - Greenville, S.C. (10/20/2024)

Jewish background of featured Composers

Harold Arlen (February 15, 1905 – April 23, 1986) was born as Hyman Arluck in Buffalo, New York, the child of a Jewish cantor. He learned to play the piano as a youth, and formed a band as a young man. He achieved some local success as a pianist and singer before moving to New York City in his early twenties, where he worked as an accompanist in vaudeville and changed his name to Harold Arlen. In the mid-1930s, Arlen began working with lyricist E. Y. “Yip” Harburg. In 1938, the team was hired by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer to compose songs for *The Wizard of Oz*, the most famous of which is “Over the Rainbow”.

Irving Berlin (May 11, 1888 – September 22, 1989) was born Israel Beilin in Imperial Russia. Berlin arrived in the United States at the age of five. Although his family came from the shtetl of Tolochin (today Talachyn in Belarus), Berlin later learned that he was probably born in Tyumen, Siberia, where his father, an itinerant cantor, had taken his family. In New York his father, unable to find comparable work as a cantor, took a job at a kosher meat market and gave Hebrew lessons on the side to support his family. He died a few years later when Irving was thirteen years old. George Gershwin called Berlin “the best American song writer that ever lived”. He was inducted into the Jewish-American Hall of Fame in 1988.

Leonard Bernstein (August 25, 1918 – October 14, 1990) was born in Lawrence, Massachusetts, to Russian Jewish/Ukrainian Jewish parents, Jennie Resnick and Samuel Joseph Bernstein, both of whom immigrated to the United States from Rivne, Russian Empire (now in Ukraine). In Bernstein’s early youth, his only exposure to music was the household radio and music on Friday nights at Congregation Mishkan Tefila in Roxbury, Massachusetts. When Bernstein was ten years old, Samuel’s sister Clara deposited her upright piano at her brother’s house. His father, Sam, was initially opposed to young Leonard’s interest in music and attempted to discourage his son’s interest by refusing to pay for his piano lessons, but eventually supported his music education and took his son to orchestral concerts in his teenage years. The 1950s comprised the most active years of Bernstein’s career. He created works for the Broadway stage, composed several symphonic works, an iconic film score (*West Side Story*), and was appointed music director of the New York Philharmonic.

Sammy Cahn (June 18, 1913 – January 15, 1993) was born Samuel Cohen in the Lower East Side of New York City, the only son (he had four sisters) of Abraham and Elka Reiss Cohen, who were Jewish immigrants from Galicia, then ruled by Austria-Hungary. His mother did not approve of Sammy studying the piano feeling that it was a woman’s instrument, so he took violin lessons. After three lessons and following his bar mitzvah, he joined a small dixieland band which toured the Catskill Mountains in the summer. Over the course of his

career, Cahn became best known for his romantic lyrics to films and Broadway songs, as well as stand-alone songs premiered by recording companies in the Greater Los Angeles Area.

George Gershwin (September 26, 1898 – July 11, 1937) was born at 242 Snediker Avenue in the East New York neighborhood of Brooklyn. His birth certificate identifies him as Jacob Gershwine, with the surname pronounced ‘Gersh-vin’ in the Russian and Yiddish immigrant community. Gershwin’s parents were both Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe. Moishe, George Gershwin’s father, worked as a leather cutter for women’s shoes. Moishe’s wife-to-be, George’s mother-to-be, Roza Bruskina, was born in Saint Petersburg, Russia. In 1913, Gershwin left school at the age of 15 to work as a “song plugger” on New York City’s Tin Pan Alley. In 1919, Gershwin scored his first big national hit with his song “Swanee”, and composed his first major work, *Rhapsody in Blue*, for orchestra and piano in 1924.

Ira Gershwin (December 6, 1896 – August 17, 1983) was born at 60 Eldridge Street in Manhattan, the oldest of four children of Morris (Moishe) and Rose Gershovitz, who were Russian Jews from Saint Petersburg and who had immigrated to the United States in 1891. Ira’s siblings were George (Jacob, b. 1898), Arthur (b. 1900), and Frances (b. 1906). Morris changed the family name to “Gershwine” well before their children rose to fame. In 1924 Ira teamed up with his brother George to write the music for what became their first Broadway hit *Lady, Be Good*. Once the brothers joined forces, their combined talents became one of the most influential forces in the history of American Musical Theatre.

Johnny Green (October 10, 1908 – May 15, 1989) was born in New York City, the son of musical Jewish parents Vivian Isidor Green and Irina Etelka Jellenik. John attended Horace Mann School and the New York Military Academy, and was accepted by Harvard at the age of 15, entering the university in 1924. Between semesters, bandleader Guy Lombardo heard Green’s Gold Coast Orchestra and hired him to create dance arrangements for his nationally famous orchestra. During the early 1930s, Green also wrote music for numerous films and was the music director at MGM from 1949 to 1959. He was nominated for 13 Oscars.

Oscar Hammerstein II (July 12, 1895 – August 23, 1960) was born on West 125th Street in New York City, the son of Alice Hammerstein and theatrical manager William Hammerstein. His grandfather was the German theater impresario Oscar Hammerstein I. His father was from a Jewish family, and his mother was the daughter of British parents. He is best known for his collaborations with composer Richard Rodgers, as the duo Rodgers and Hammerstein. He co-wrote 850 songs and won eight Tony Awards and two Academy Awards.

Lorenz Hart (May 2, 1895 – November 22, 1943) was born in Harlem, New York City, the elder of two sons, to Jewish immigrant parents, Max M. and Frieda Hart, of German background. Through his mother, he was a great-grandnephew of the German poet Heinrich Heine. Hart received his early education from Columbia Grammar School and entered Columbia College in 1913, before switching to Columbia University School of Journalism. In 1919 a friend introduced him to Richard Rodgers, with whom he subsequently wrote the music and lyrics for 26 Broadway musicals during a partnership of more than 20 years.

Jerome Kern (January 27, 1885 – November 11, 1945) was born in New York City, on Sutton Place, in what was then the city’s brewery district. His parents were Henry Kern (1842–1908), a Jewish German immigrant, and Fannie Kern (1852–1907), who was an American Jew of Bohemian parentage. Kern grew up on East 56th Street in Manhattan, where he attended public schools. He showed an early aptitude for music and was taught to play the piano and or-

gan by his mother, a professional player and teacher. Kern went on to compose 16 Broadway scores between 1915 and 1920. 1925 was a major turning point in Kern’s career when he met Oscar Hammerstein II, with whom he would entertain a lifelong friendship and collaboration.

Johnny Mandel (November 23, 1925 – June 29, 2020) was born in the borough of Manhattan in New York City to Jewish parents. His father, Alfred, was a garment manufacturer who ran Mandel & Cash; his mother, Hannah (Hart-Rubin), had aimed to be an opera singer and discovered her son had perfect pitch at the age of five. His family moved to Los Angeles in 1934, after his father’s business collapsed during the Great Depression. Mandel was given piano lessons, but switched to the trumpet and later the trombone. He went on to study at the Manhattan School of Music and the Juilliard School. Mandel composed, conducted and arranged the music for numerous movie sound tracks and won five Grammy Awards.

Richard Rodgers (June 28, 1902 – December 30, 1979) was born into a Jewish family in Queens, New York, the son of Mamie (Levy) and Dr. William Abrahams Rodgers, a prominent physician who had changed the family name from Rogazinsky. He began playing the piano at the age of six. Throughout his career, he became known for his songwriting partnerships, first with lyricist Lorenz Hart and then with Oscar Hammerstein II. With Hart he wrote musicals throughout the 1920s and 1930s and later with Hammerstein through the 1940s and 1950s. With 43 Broadway musicals and over 900 songs to his credit, Rodgers was the first person to win all four of the top American entertainment awards in theater, film, recording, and television – an Emmy, a Grammy, an Oscar, and a Tony – now known collectively as an EGOT.

Sigmund Romberg (July 29, 1887 – November 9, 1951) was born in Hungary as Siegmund Rosenberg to a Jewish family, Adam and Clara Rosenberg, in Gross-Kanizsa, Hungary during the Austro-Hungarian monarchy period. In 1889 Romberg and his family moved to Belišće, which was then in Hungary, where he attended a primary school. Influenced by his father, Romberg learned to play the violin at six, and piano at eight years of age. He enrolled at Osijek gymnasium in 1897, where he was a member of the high school orchestra. In June 1909, he boarded the SS Oceanic as a second-class cabin passenger, sailing from the Port of Southampton, England, to the Port of New York. He eventually founded his own orchestra and in 1914 began writing music for Broadway theatre shows. In the 40’s and 50’s, Romberg also wrote a number of film scores and adapted his own work for film.

Arthur Schwartz (November 25, 1900 – September 3, 1984) was born to a Jewish family in Brooklyn, New York City. He taught himself to play the harmonica and piano as a child, and began playing for silent films at age 14. Forced by his father, an attorney, to study law, Schwartz graduated from NYU Law School with a Juris Doctor and was admitted to the bar in 1924. While studying law, he supported himself by teaching English in the New York school system. He also worked on songwriting concurrently with his studies. Acquaintances such as Lorenz Hart and George Gershwin encouraged him to stick with composing.

Jule Styne (December 31, 1905 – September 20, 1994) was born Julius Kerwin Stein to a Jewish family in London, England. His parents, Anna Kertman and Isadore Stein, were emigrants from Ukraine, the Russian Empire, and ran a small grocery. At the age of eight, he moved with his family to Chicago, where he began taking piano lessons. He proved to be a prodigy and performed with the Chicago, St. Louis, and Detroit symphonies before he was ten years old. Styne composed and published 1,500 songs in his career, 10 of which were Oscar nominated.