



Reading Lyrics

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A vast anthology bringing together more than one thousand of the best American and English lyrics of the twentieth century, this is an extraordinary celebration of a unique art form.

Reading Lyrics begins with the first masters of the colloquial phrase, including George M. Cohan (“Give My Regards to Broadway”), P. G. Wodehouse (“Till the Clouds Roll By”), and Irving Berlin, whose versatility and career span the period from “Alexander’s Ragtime Band” to “Annie Get Your Gun” and beyond. The Broadway musical emerges as a distinct dramatic form in the 1920s and 1930s, its evolution propelled by a trio of lyricists—Cole Porter, Ira Gershwin, and Lorenz Hart—whose explorations of the psychological and emotional nuances of falling in and out of love have lost none of their wit and sophistication. Their songs, including “Night and Day,” “The Man I Love,” and “Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered,” have become standards performed and recorded by generation after generation of singers. The lure of Broadway and Hollywood and the performing genius of such artists as Al Jolson, Fred Astaire, Ethel Waters, Judy Garland, Frank Sinatra, and Ethel Merman inspired a remarkable array of talented writers, including Dorothy Fields (“A Fine Romance,” “I Can’t Give You Anything but Love”), Frank Loesser (“Guys and Dolls”), Oscar Hammerstein II (from the groundbreaking “Show Boat” of 1927 through his extraordinary collaboration with Richard Rodgers), Johnny Mercer, Yip Harburg, Andy Razaf, Noël Coward, and Stephen Sondheim.

Reading Lyrics also celebrates the work of dozens of superb craftsmen whose songs remain known, but who today are themselves less known—writers like Haven Gillespie (whose “Santa Claus Is Coming to Town” may be the most widely recorded song of its era); Herman Hupfeld (not only the composer/lyricist of “As Time Goes By” but also of “Are You Makin’ Any Money?” and “When Yuba Plays the Rumba on the Tuba”); the great light versifier Ogden Nash (“Speak Low,” “I’m a Stranger Here Myself,” and, yes, “The Sea-Gull and the Ea-Gull”); Don Raye (“Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy,” “Mister Five by Five,” and, of course, “Milkman, Keep Those Bottles Quiet”); Bobby Troup (“Route 66”); Billy Strayhorn (not only for the omnipresent “Lush Life” but for “Something to Live For” and “A Lonely Coed”); Peggy Lee (not only a superb singer but also an original and appealing lyricist); and the unique Dave Frishberg (“I’m Hip,” “Peel Me a Grape,” “Van Lingo Mungo”).

Robert Gottlieb and Robert Kimball have created an indispensable reference work and history. The lyricists are presented chronologically, each introduced by a succinct biography and incisive commentary. *Reading Lyrics* is a magnificent gathering of words whose power to stir memories and evoke romance is akin to that of lyric poetry. Collected in one volume, it represents one of the twentieth century’s most enduring and cherished legacies.

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