

FRANK LOESSER (1910-1969) has been called the most versatile of all Broadway composers. Each of his five Broadway musicals is a unique contribution to the art of musical theater: *Where's Charley?*, *Guys And Dolls*, *The Most Happy Fella*, *Greenwillow* and *How To Succeed In Business Without Really Trying*, each endowed with its own sound and style.

Long before *Where's Charley?*, Loesser was known for the dozens of song hits from his days in Hollywood. He had supplied lyrics to the music of such greats as Jule Styne, Burton Lane, Hoagy Carmichael, Arthur Schwartz, and Jimmy McHugh, among others, penning such as "I Don't Want to Walk Without You," "Two Sleepy People," "Heart and Soul," "They're Either Too Young or Too Old" and "Let's Get Lost;" and finally as composer/lyricist, "Spring Will Be a Little Late this Year," "On a Slow Boat to China," and his 1948 Academy Award winner, "Baby, It's Cold Outside."

Born June 29, 1910, in New York City, Frank Henry Loesser never studied music formally, although he couldn't help coming under its influence. His father was a distinguished German-born teacher of classical piano and his older brother, Arthur, a renowned concert pianist, musicologist and music critic. Frank wrote his first song at the age of 4, in 1914 ("The May Party"), but he refused to study classical music. His interest was in pop music, which his father disdained. So he taught himself, first the harmonica, then the piano in his early teens. He attended Townsend Harris High School and New York's City College, which he dropped out of during the Depression, and began supporting himself with an array of jobs that included selling newspaper advertising, working as a process server and his favorite, city editor of a short-lived newspaper in New Rochelle. Intrigued by word play, Frank began to write songs, sketches and radio scripts. Among others, he teamed with William Schuman, who later became a serious composer and President of Juilliard. In 1931, they wrote "In Love with a Memory of You," Frank's first published lyric. Of this, Schuman later said "Frank Loesser has written hits with Hoagy Carmichael, Burton Lane, Jule Styne and other Hollywood grand dukes, but I have the distinction of having written a flop with him."

By the mid-1930's, he tried his hand at singing and playing piano in nightclubs, and began writing lyrics to music by Irving Actman. They contributed five songs to *The Illustrator's Show*, which opened January 22, 1936, and closed five performances later, a swift Broadway casualty. But it was enough to land him a Hollywood contract, first with Universal, then Paramount, where he wrote his first hit song, "The Moon of Manakoora," with Alfred Newman, for the Dorothy Lamour film, *Hurricane*. He would go on to write lyrics for over sixty films, including *Destry Rides Again*, *College Swing*, and *Thank Your Lucky Stars*.

In 1940, Frank made his official composing debut with the music (and lyric) for the title song of the Paramount film, *Seventeen*. World War II intervened and PFC Frank Loesser was assigned to Special Services, providing lyrics for army camp shows with such composers as Harold Rome and Alex North. Later, suddenly finding himself without a collaborator, Frank resumed his composing career with the wartime hit, "Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition." He told Jule Styne, "You boys showed me how it goes."

He returned to Hollywood after the war, but struggling young producers Cy Feuer and Ernest Martin convinced him to come back east and create a score for their projected Broadway musical version of *Charley's Aunt*. *Where's Charley?* opened October 11, 1948, and became Frank's first

hit show, giving star Ray Bolger his greatest stage success. With a score that included "Once in Love with Amy," "My Darling, My Darling" and "Make a Miracle," Where's Charley? proved that Frank was more than just another pop tune writer from Hollywood.

He followed that show with one of the great masterworks of American theater, Guys and Dolls, which opened to rave reviews November 24, 1950, winning the Tony Award for Best Musical. and quickly becoming a theater landmark. His score was lush with hits, including "A Bushel and a Peck," "I've Never Been in Love Before," "Luck Be a Lady," "I'll Know" and "Sit Down, You're Rocking the Boat."

Frank then took four years to write not only the score, but also the book for his next show, which he called an "extended musical comedy," The Most Happy Fella. Whereas such opera-like musicals as Porgy and Bess and Street Scene were unsuccessful in their time, Frank's Napa Valley show with the hit songs "Standing on the Corner" and "Big D" opened May 3, 1956, and ran two years. It was the first show recorded in its entirety, released as a 3-disc set by Columbia Records, who also issued a single disc of highlights.

Reluctant to repeat himself, he decided on a simple, country musical fable, Greenwillow, for his next project. In spite of seven Tony nominations, it faltered and ran only 95 performances in 1960. Years later, Barbra Streisand had success with Greenwillow's "Never Will I Marry."

On October 14, 1961, Frank bounced back with How To Succeed In Business Without Really Trying, which won the Pulitzer Prize and seven Tony Awards, including Best Musical. It ran four years on Broadway, with "I Believe in You" and "Brotherhood of Man" becoming enormous hits from the score.

In the midst of all of this stage work, Frank returned to Hollywood and created one of his best loved scores for the film Hans Christian Andersen (1952), which featured such songs as "Wonderful Copenhagen," "Anywhere I Wander," "The Inch Worm" and "Thumbelina," which was nominated for an Academy Award. In 1974, Loesser's widow, Jo Sullivan, oversaw a long-running stage version called Hans Andersen, starring Tommy Steele, at the Palladium in London.

The Loesser work pattern was directly related to the Loesser metabolism, which was extraordinary. He worked at a pace of unrelenting dynamism, rarely sleeping more than four hours in a row. In the late 1940's, he formed his own music publishing company, Frank Music Corp., with the primary purpose of discovering and developing new and young popular composers and lyricists. He was instrumental in furthering the careers of three of the most successful songwriters of the theater to emerge during the 1950's: Richard Adler, Jerry Ross and Meredith Willson. The company became a major force in music publishing, licensing of secondary theatrical rights and production of printed music editions. Today Frank Music Corp. is part of Paul McCartney's music publishing company, MPL Communications. All Loesser shows are licensed by Music Theater International, which Loesser developed as a subsidiary of Frank Music Corp., and is now a separate and individually owned company.

Frank was married twice, first to actress Lynn Loesser, with whom he had two children, Susan and John, then to his Most Happy Fella leading lady, Jo Sullivan, who gave him two daughters,

Hannah and Emily. An incessant smoker, Loesser died of lung cancer at the age of 59 on July 26, 1969, in his beloved New York City.

In a few short years, Frank Loesser forged only five Broadway musicals, but the Loesser impact continues. Perfectly Frank, a review of the Loesser song catalogue, co-created and starring Jo Sullivan Loesser, opened on Broadway in 1980. There have been major revivals of The Most Happy Fella, both on Broadway and at the New York City Opera (added to their permanent repertory); Guys and Dolls won the 1992 Tony Award for Best Revival and was a smash hit on Broadway all over again, running three years and becoming the longest running revival ever on Broadway; and was revived on Broadway again in 2008. A revival of How To Succeed in Business Without Really Trying opened on Broadway in 1995, with Matthew Broderick starring, and became another long running hit. And it was a smash again when Daniel Radcliffe starred in a 2011 production.

DRG has issued "An Evening with Frank Loesser," a collection of previously unreleased demo recordings that Frank made for Guys and Dolls, The Most Happy Fella and How To Succeed... Koch Recordings followed this with "Frank Sings Loesser," a collection of additional Loesser rarities.

DRG has also issued "Loesser Sings Loesser," a collection of both familiar and obscure Loesser songs performed by Jo Sullivan Loesser, Emily Loesser and Don Stephenson with Colin Romoff. Jay Records in London has produced all new CD versions of the complete scores of Guys and Dolls, with the original orchestrations and starring Frank's daughter, Emily, as Sarah Brown, and The Most Happy Fella, also with Emily Loesser, this time re-creating her mother's most famous role of Rosabella, and co-starring with Louis Quilico.

In 1999, Frank Loesser was honored by the U.S. Postal Service with a postage stamp bearing his likeness. A major biography written by Frank's daughter, Susan Loesser, "A Most Remarkable Fella," was published in hardcover by Donald I. Fine in 1993 and issued in a revised soft-cover edition by Hal Leonard Corporation. "The Complete Lyrics of Frank Loesser" published by Knopf in 2003 has become a collector's item. In 2008, Yale University Press published an extensive examination of Loesser's work by Thomas L. Riis as part of its Yale Broadway Masters series. The video documentary Heart and Soul: The Life and Music of Frank Loesser, produced by Walter Gottlieb in 2008, was seen on PBS stations throughout the country and released on DVD.