

Gone But Not Forgotten Lew Spence Centennial Tribute

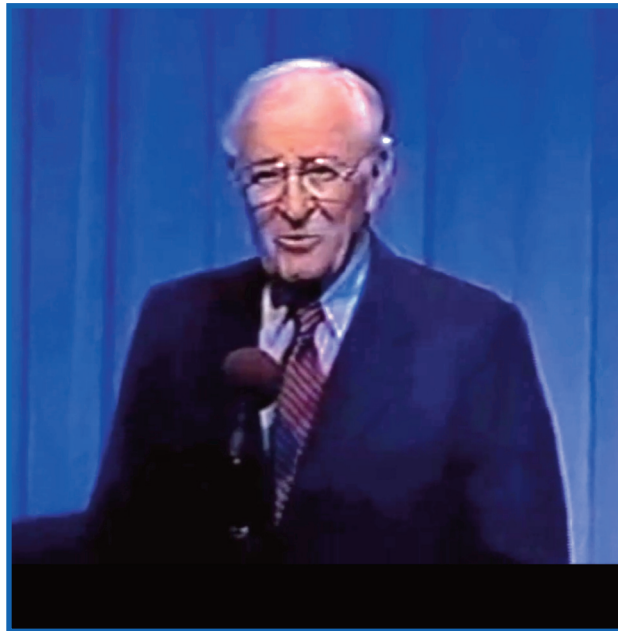
By Jerry Osterberg

Both Michael Lavine and Tom Toce had known Lew Spence for quite some time. Indeed, Toce wrote two songs with Spence: “Out of Fashion” and “Because I Can,” while Michael knows him through his sheet music collecting. Spence, who died in 2008, would have celebrated his centennial this year. Members with good memories may recall that the songwriter did a program for us in 1994, prior to a version he presented at Danny’s Skylight Palace sometime later: *Lew and the Night and the Music*.

Spence never believed he could write songs, although he did write some songs for girls. Apparently, there was music in the house, especially that of Gershwin and Kern. In spite of the lack of encouragement from his family, Spence taught himself piano and lead a nine-piece dance band when he was a teenager. Ultimately, he found work as a singer and pianist, earning \$125 per week, respectable for the time. His father, not at all pleased that his son had chosen to make a career in music, pressed Spence to work for him for \$25 per week. Perhaps Spence managed both jobs or mollified his father by suspending the music for a time, but when his son came home with an \$800 per week gig, he had to be impressed. The singer was Frances Maddox, the venue the St. Regis in Manhattan. Spence had changed his surname from “Slifka” for the engagement. On the opening night he was introduced by a heavily accented

maître d’ as “Loose Pants.”

It wasn’t until Spence was 30 that his first song was published: “About That



Girl.” He had attended a show which featured the singer Portia Nelson at a nightclub in the San Fernando Valley. Spence met several songwriters that evening, one of them Bobby Troup, who invited him over to his home. They



Alan and Lew Spence

became fast friends, and Troup was instrumental in getting Spence’s song published. For the first 20 years of his life

in the music business, his sole interest was writing only the music. After that, he primarily wrote the lyrics. While Spence collaborated with several composers and other lyricists, his most successful pairing was with Alan and Marilyn Bergman. Before they became successful partners in both marriage and in the field of songwriting, they each worked with Spence in the same building. Alan Bergman wrote with Spence in the morning, and Marilyn (nee Keith) in the afternoon. Despite their specific schedule preferences, the Bergmans eventually met, introduced by Spence. They were married within a few years, and Spence’s record as a matchmaker remains solid.

Although much of their output is inspired, “Sleep Warm” for example, the most successful have been “Nice ‘N’ Easy” and “That Face,” the first associated with Frank Sinatra, the second with Fred Astaire. Neither of them provoked an automatic “Yes!” when first submitted, but the stories of how they met with approval and eventually recorded is interesting. Before “Nice ‘N’ Easy” became the iconic song that we’ve come to know, the melody laid dormant among other of Spence’s trunk songs. One sunny day, either the creative juices weren’t flowing, or the appropriate muse had yet to visit the trio of songwriters. After hours of unproductive labor, Alan Bergman asked Spence if he had anything else to show them. While Spence was reluctant at first, the

Continued on page 3



President's Message...

Linda Amiel Burns, President

Warm Greetings to our Members, Friends, Fans, and Guests:

Many thanks to Board Members Michael Lavine and Tom Toce for producing their delightful and enlightening Program on the late and great composer Lew Spence last month, celebrating his centennial. It was wonderful to hear the many artists relate their memories and sing Lew's songs, but for me the best were the clips of the master himself, telling his stories and displaying his sense of humor, charm, and wit. If you missed the November Zoom meeting, you can read all about it in this issue of the APSS Newsletter. Additionally, you can watch the recording of the entire Program on our website.

We have all had to make a lot of adjustments during these trying times, and I am grateful to our many APSS members and fans for sticking with us. Our goal is to continue to keep this remarkable organization thriving in this new medium during the pandemic. I know that many of you are getting used to our monthly virtual meetings, and they are now running technically better due to our new "Zoom Director" Jamie Maletz.

We understand that many people are having financial challenges these days, so we have reduced the Membership Fees. Many thanks to those who have helped us this season with donations and by paying their dues. We hope that our loyal members will rejoin, spread the word, and introduce APSS to their friends and family. As we have always said, "This is the best bargain in town" and nowhere else can you see such amazing Programs, and receive an informative monthly Newsletter put together by our crack team headed by our Editor-in-Chief Jerry Osterberg, Associate Editor Joan Adams, Designer Glen Charlow, and contributing writer Marilyn Lester along with those who send us valuable articles.

Don't miss our next meeting, brought to you by Producer Jerry Osterberg on Saturday, December 12th from 12-2, hosted by the brilliant and talented pianist Jon Weber with singer Nicolas King along with a few surprises! You will find the Zoom link to the December meeting in this mailing.

I hope you are all staying cozy and safe. I am sending you my best wishes for a happy holiday season, good health, happy times, and lots of music in your life!

Linda



The Two Jacks with their daughters. Linda's father and Jack Dempsey were partners in the famed Broadway Restaurant in the Brill Building. Here is Jack Dempsey with his daughter Barbara, and Jack Amiel with Linda at the Restaurant.

Our programs during the 2020 pandemic are being brought to you by...

zoom
Video Communications

www.zoom.us

*American
Popular Song
Society*

President:
Linda Amiel Burns
(212) 315-3500

Vice Presidents:
Joan Adams
Sandi Durell

Treasurer & Membership:
Glen Charlow

Secretary:
Marilyn Lester

Board of Directors:

Elliott Ames
Danny Bacher
Bill Boggs
Will Friedwald
Michael Lavine
Sandy Marrone
Jerry Osterberg
Andrew Poretz
Judy Stewart
Tom Toce
Mark William

NEWSLETTER

Editor/Publisher: Jerry Osterberg
osterbergg@aol.com
Contributing Editor: Marilyn Lester
mlester@marilynlester.com
Associate Editor: Joan Adams
joan.adams@corcoran.com
Graphic Designer: Glen Charlow
APSSinc.org@gmail.com
Photographer: Rose Billings
rosephoto18@gmail.com

Membership Mailing Address:

American Popular Song Society
P.O. Box 5856

Pikesville, MD 21282

Why is that the mailing address?

Because the treasurer lives in Baltimore, Maryland.

APSSinc.org@gmail.com

This email address goes to Glen Charlow

Memberships can be paid with:



via Paypal

at www.APSSinc.org

G GLEN CHARLOW
DESKTOP PUBLISHING
DTP *Creative Graphics
and Web Design*

Bergmans coaxed him to play a melody which Spence himself didn't think much of. After the first few bars, Alan Bergman quickly responded with "nice and easy," and the three went to work immediately.

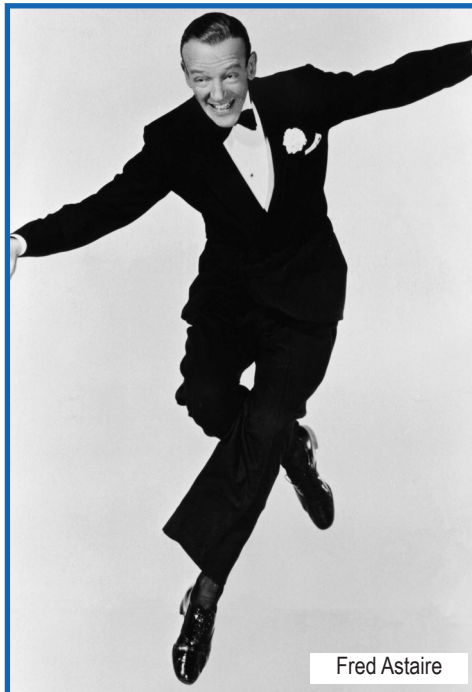
Now entitled "Nice 'N' Easy," their first thought was Sinatra. They managed to wrangle an appointment to meet with the star on the set of a film then in production: *Ocean's 11*. Three hours later, an associate of Sinatra's went up to him and whispered something in his ear. Sinatra, stone faced, strolled over and waited for the pitch. While Spence played the song, Sinatra glanced at the sheet music, no expression on his face. As soon as the music ended, Sinatra held the sheet music in the air with two fingers, and let it drop to the floor. Having made no comment, Sinatra simply turned on his heel and briskly walked away.



Frank Sinatra

Several weeks later, there was a call from one of Sinatra's "people," to announce to the suddenly no longer disappointed songsmiths that The Voice, who had been looking for a song tailored especially for him, wanted to record "Nice 'N' Easy". It seems that there were a number-of people in Sinatra's circle who liked the song and went around humming it within his hearing range. By the time he heard Nelson Riddle play a few bars, he was hooked. It was one of Frank Sinatra's biggest hits, announcing to the world that he still had the magic. When Capitol released an album under the same name, "Nice 'N' Easy" became Sinatra's best-selling recording ever.

The other song which helped



Fred Astaire

launch the hugely successful career of the Bergmans while reaching the pinnacle of Spence's own success, was "That Face." Spence was able to negotiate a meeting with Fred Astaire, who was always agreeable to listening to young songwriters. Astaire cautioned that he never recorded a song unless it was connected to one of his movies. Nevertheless, he was willing to listen.

Astaire liked the song immediately. Diverging from his normal practice, Astaire recorded "That Face" for his own label, Ava Records, named for his daughter. Spence has said that the title of the song was inspired by Phyllis Kirk, a film actress whom he was smitten with. It was introduced on an Astaire television special and was heard in a movie *Paris When It Sizzles*, starring Audrey Hepburn and William Holden, who approximated some of his earlier sexy dance number with Kim Novak in *Picnic*.

Thanks to an amazing collection of clips found by Lavine and Toce, the membership not only got to see Fred Astaire perform "That Face," but Sinatra's magnetic performance of "Nice 'N' Easy." There was also a scene of Peggy Lee's performance of "I've Never Left Your Arms" on the Jo Stafford show,

and a view from Spence's appearance at Danny's Skylight Palace. He sang "He's With AA," written with Lehman Engel as a challenge to write a comedic song based on the story line of the movie *Come Back Little Sheba*, and a clip of Lew Spence introducing the late composer pianist Tex Arnold for "Such A Wonderful Town." Lavine played the song live.

In addition to the engaging narrative by Lavine and Toce, there were many sparkling performances by singers well known in the cabaret community and to APSS members. Prior to these was a welcome presentation by a fantastic young singer, Oliviana Halus-Griep, who happens to be the goddaughter of Lew Spence. With an exquisite voice, perhaps reminiscent of a young Maude Maggart, she performed "That's Him Over There" and "Love Looks So Well On You." Not surprising, Oliviana's mother, Evelyn Halus, is a professional singer. Glamorously attired, she sang "Too Much In Love," a recording for a supper club appearance.



Audrey Hepburn

Roger Schore, who may have known Spence the best of everyone assembled, and accompanied by Nancy Winston, contributed "Life Goes On," written with Ray Jessel and Cynthia Thompson. Schore also set the stage for

Those “Rascally” Lyricists— from W.S. Gilbert to Randy Rainbow

By Marilyn Lester

In this column and in our programs, we’ve recently been intersecting with comedy and novelty songs. What’s noteworthy and newsworthy is that recently, Tom Lehrer, master satirist, has made all of the music and lyrics he’s written free, as if they were in the public domain. Interested parties who want to download his work (from tomlehrersongs.com) have until December 31, 2024 when the website is scheduled to shut down.

Lehrer was born in Manhattan in 1928, and as a child studied piano. He also became interested in, and fascinated, by musical theater. Considered a prodigy, he entered Harvard at age 15 and



Tom Lehrer

graduated *magna cum laude* with a degree in mathematics. He began writing comic songs while an undergrad, and for most of his life had a dual career as a professor and performer. He stopped writing music in the 1970s because, he says, he just lost interest. Lehrer’s body of work is prodigious and encompasses his own music as well as lyrics to the music of others (technically considered parody). One of his most famous tunes is “The Elements,” the periodic table set to the music of Arthur Sullivan’s “The Major General’s Song.” Sullivan’s other half, Sir William S. Gilbert (1836-1911) was himself a sharp lyricist-satirist who also wrote prose pieces applying his keen wit to the socio-political issues he observed in his day.

Political satirist Mark Russell (born in 1932) offered routines that were a mix of standup and musical parodies in which he accompanied himself on the piano. After a stint in the Marines, he became an entertainer, based in Washington, DC. His lyrics were topical and news-based,

to which he commented that they have a “shelf life shorter than cottage cheese.” When asked if he had writers, he replied “Oh, yes... 100 in the Senate and 435 in the House of Representatives.” Also



Mark Russell

politically inspired are the Washington, DC-based group, Capitol Steps, whose collective of writers have produced musical parodies over several decades. And we will not soon forget Randy Rainbow (his real name), who’d been producing comic videos for over a decade before exploding into musical parodies with the 2016 election and beyond.

Stan Freberg (1926-2015), was a polymath who was an author actor, puppeteer, voice artist, recording artist, comedian, radio personality and advertising agency creative director. Professionally active for most of his life, Freberg’s many parodies included both social and political satire. He was most associated as a recording artist with Capitol Records, where he frequently worked with noted musician/arranger Billy May. His 1958 “Green Chri\$tna\$” is one of his best-known works. Contemporaneous with Freberg, Allan Sherman (1924-1973) was a television producer, comedy writer, singer and actor who became famous as a parodist in 1963 with “Hello Muddah, Hello Fadduh” to the tune of “Dance of the Hours.” His 1962 debut album, *My Son, the Folk Singer* contained parodies that had been written by Sherman beginning more than a decade earlier. Sherman also wrote satire in conjunction with Lou Busch, father of Debbi Busch Whiting, with the two setting lyrics to original music.

Alfred Matthew “Weird Al”

Yankovic (born in 1959) paid tribute to Sherman on his self-titled first album in 1983, although he’d been performing musical comedy songs since the 1970s. Yankovic is an actor and music video director beside being a singer, songwriter and musician, known for his trademark accordion. His topics are generally social commentary, such as “First World Problems,” a statement about monied privilege. Yankovic also writes original songs, such as “You Don’t Love Me Anymore.” Over four decades his creative output, which encompasses a wide range of genres and media, has been massive. He’s been a prolific touring artist as well, with most recent last being



Allan Sherman

the Strings Attached Tour, which ended in September 2019. Finally, Randy Newman (born 1943) is the product of a large musical family. He’s an arranger and composer of film scores and popular songs, having begun as a professional songwriter at the age of 17. Among all of this “serious” work is a hefty body of satire of a social-political nature, such as “Rednecks” and “Putin.” His best-known satiric song is probably “Short People.”

Musical comedy, novelty and parody songs can be just plain fun, such as Sheldon Harnick’s “Boston Beguine.” But Harnick also wrote the acid “Merry Minuet,” a commentary on hatred generated by nationalism. What’s clear is that these songs are ways to communicate information about important issues (political or otherwise), injustices and other topics of social significance. Their creation is a powerful means to make a statement in a way that’s easily acceptable and which may just have a long-lasting impact.

a performance of “Outta my Mind” by the late Wesla Whitfield. The song, which appeared on the B side of Dean Martin’s “Volare,” was thought to never have been recorded. Schore’s research proves otherwise. Cynthia Crane once asked Tom Toce to write a song for her next album. Toce wrote a lyric “Out of Fashion” and invited Spence to write the music. Crane liked it so much that she made it the opening track of her album. As she performed it here, one could see why. Janie Smulyan sang two songs written for a play by Lucille Hauser, *Daisy and the Ark*, a bible story told through the point of view of Noah’s wife Daisy. “Mud” and “God Only Knows” were both delivered with an authentic New York City Jewish

accent. When the play was presented at an industry event, it attracted the attention of Stephen Sondheim, who recommended Spence as a lyricist to the composer Burton Lane. They did work on a show together, but had trouble finding a book writer. Although the show was never produced, at least one excellent song emerged. Steve Ross sang “A Rainy Afternoon.”



Portia Nelson

Lavine introduced Eric Comstock and Barbara Fasano as among the most loyal keepers of the Lew Spence flame, singing his songs wherever they appear. Comstock performed “What’s Your

Name?” Anticipating Barbara Fasano,



Lew Spence

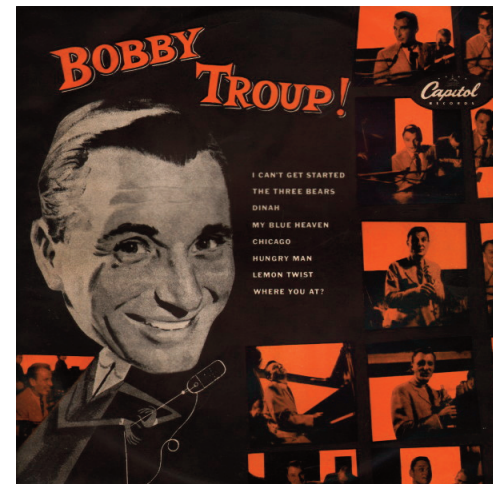
Toce remarked: “Lew was charming, fun, and funny. He was also the shyest songwriter I’ve ever met.” Lavine added: “There was one aspect to Lew’s personality where he overcame his shyness. He used to write songs for girls he liked.” This was a perfect opening for Fasano to sing “Sleep Warm.” Spence made friends with a number-of New York singers, among them Daryl Sherman and Stacy Sullivan. Sherman performed “Lazy in Love” and Sullivan sang “It’s a Small Town.”

There was an occasion when Toce and his future wife Liz were having a pre-show dinner and the conversation drifted to the subject of Harold Arlen. There may have been a discussion as to whether the team of Arlen and Mercer produced better songs than Arlen and Harburg. After listening for a while, Liz, who wasn’t necessarily an aficionado of the Great American Songbook, asked “So, who was Harold Arlen?” Toce continues: “Lew looked me in the eye, deadpan, and said: Tom, how can you go with a girl who doesn’t know who Harold Arlen was?”

It took courage to follow that

anecdote, but Lavine and Toce endeavored nevertheless by performing the last song Lew Spence ever wrote, as it happens with Toce: “Because I Can.” This was not the ending, however. There was one additional performance to be heard, and a perfect encore to a spectacular afternoon and celebration of a brilliant songwriter who should have been better known. For the finale, Michael Lavine and Tom Toce, who clearly invested incredible effort to create a superb program, re-introduced the late singer Wesla Whitfield, whose performance of “That’s Him Over There,” a song heard from Oliviana Halus-Griep, the first singer of the afternoon, was a reminder that there are songs deserving of continued life, and a newer generation of singers to keep them before us.

An obituary posted by Liz and Tom



Toce in the New York Times, read in part: “Funny, gentle, urbane, and wise. Lew, you were one of a kind. We mourn the passing of a dear friend. And we don’t have to believe it if we don’t want to.” Toce added: “Lew would have liked that.”

Coming up on December 12th
On Zoom at Noon.
JON WEBER:
NICE TO HAVE HIM BACK



Member News...

If you have any member news, or other items you would like to have considered for this newsletter, please send it by e-mail to the Editor, Jerry Osterberg: osterbergg@AOL.com. It will be subject to editing, depending on size and content, and please remember that we try to go to press two weeks before each monthly meeting. We often get very good items that get to us after the newsletter has been finalized and made available to the membership.

Linda Amiel Burns, APSS President, is celebrating four decades of The Singing Experience. Several APSS members have taken this workshop, some more than once. For those of us who have, we can assure you that you'll feel like a pro by the night of the performance. Although many students have never sung in public before, the supportive environment has prepared them well for their debut. Call Linda at 212-315-3500 to sign up. The Singing Experience Cable TV show continues MNN Time Warner: Channel 56 or RCN: Channel 111. The program broadcasts are every Sunday at 5:00 PM. You can also see your fellow NYSMS members on YouTube at any time.

Member David Tane is available to play the piano at your next party or other event. David specializes in classic American standards. Rates are reasonable. Call or text 914-714-2489 for more information.

Steve Ross reports that the classic radio interview show *New York Cabaret Nights*, which was broadcast on WNYC, can be accessed anew by going to <https://www.wnyc.org/series/new-york-cabaret-nights>.

Sandi Durell, Publisher-Editor of TheaterPizzazz.com, a vital website that presents up-to-date theater reviews, news, interviews and previews, along with cabaret reviews and video. There is a large contributing group of writers who offer discerning and professional reviews and information. Sandi is a Drama Desk and Outer Critics Circle Awards Voter, member of the American Theatre Critics Association, League of Professional Theatre Women, The Lambs, and The Dutch Treat Club. Visit: www.theaterpizzazz.com.

Do you seek an elusive song? If you do, write APSS Board member Sandy Marrone @ smusandy@aol.com or call 856-829-6104. You can also visit Sandy in New Jersey to see thousands and thousands of sheets of music, most of which can be yours very reasonably. She is a marvelous resource and a super-great lady! Having heard from only a few of our members over the past year or so, Sandy wants to remind you that she's still at it, adding to her collection every day, and always willing to part with sheet music at especially fair prices

for us. Sheet music was the reason we were founded thirty plus years ago, after all, and she's only a phone call or e-mail away. Sandy continues to be willing to offer free appraisals with no expectation of having right of first refusal and can provide unbiased advice as to how and where to sell music. It's not a secret, pass it on please.

In November 2009, to celebrate the centennial of songwriter/singer Johnny Mercer, Minneapolis radio personalities David Cummings and Les Block produced and broadcast a 100th birthday tribute to Mr. Mercer. The show features original interviews with a distinguished roster of Mercer-connected performers and writers, showcasing recordings of Mercer songs sung by the guests and presenting valuable comments on the songs and on the man. Among the more than twenty celebrities interviewed were Tony Bennett, Johnny Mathis, Andy Williams, Kay Starr, Nancy Wilson, Robert Kimball, Barry Manilow and Margaret Whiting. Sadly, our interview with Miss Whiting was her last. The show is being archived by the Library of Congress which acknowledged that "...it would be impossible to produce a work of this quality on Johnny Mercer today." The entire show can be heard online at the following URL/web address: <https://archive.org/details/mercer100/ksav-mercer-1.mp3> OR <johnnymercer100:davidcummingsandlesblock>

Dues are due at this time as always.
 Reduced price special due to the pandemic-
\$50 individual or **\$70** for couples.
 You can submit them via Paypal at
 the "membership" tab on the
 website **www.apssinc.org**
 or send a check to
American Popular Song Society
P.O. Box 5856
Pikesville, MD 21282