



# Irving Berlin

May 11, 1888 – September 22, 1989

Irving Berlin was an American composer known as one of the greatest songwriters in history. Much of the *Great American Songbook* is comprised of his music.

Irving was born in Imperial Russia in 1888, and in 1893, his family moved to the United States. At the age of eight, Berlin began to help support his large family by becoming a newspaper boy. His siblings did the same and found work in factories and sweatshops, however, the constant hard work brought little reward and no joy to his life.

When he was fourteen years old, Berlin left home, joining many other young immigrant boys, searching for better opportunities and living in

shelters. He began working as a singer and traveled to different saloons to sing to customers, hoping to catch a few donations. He taught himself how to play the piano and stayed at bars until closing to play.

In 1907, at the age of nineteen, he published his first song, "Marie from Sunny Italy." Just four years later, he had his first international hit, "Alexander's Ragtime Band." This tune influenced an international dance craze, making Berlin a well-known name in the music industry. He became an instant celebrity and began working hard at composing, introducing dozens of songs in the next few years.

Listeners loved the simplicity and directness within his lyrics, and his music was capable of reaching the typical American. In 1914, Berlin wrote a ragtime revue, "Watch Your Step," which became the first modified musical. Despite the success of his ragtime hits, Berlin took the next few years to focus on romance and ballads in regard to his musical style. His first ballad, "When I Lost You," was an immediate hit.

In 1912, Irving married Dorothy Goetz. Sadly, she died the same year after contracting typhoid fever on their honeymoon. His first ballad was written to express the grief of losing her. He threw himself into his work, and by 1918, Berlin had written hundreds of songs, many to accompany new popular dances such as the foxtrot. His song "A Pretty Girl is Like a Melody" became one of his most important hits, becoming the lead song for the musical *Follies* of 1919.

Berlin was living a life of luxury, finding much fame before the age of 30 thanks to his many works. In 1924, he met a young heiress, Ellin MacKay, and the two were married. Their wedding made the front page of the *New York Times*. Her father disapproved of the marriage, but it lasted. They remained together until her death in 1988. The couple had four children together during their 63 years of marriage.

Berlin passed away at the age of 101. During his 60-year career, Berlin wrote over 1,500 songs. This includes 20 original Broadway shows and 15 Hollywood films he created scores for. One of the most famous films was *Holiday Inn*, which popularized Irving's song "White Christmas." The song of the same name continues to be a Christmas classic, with the most famous version being sung by Bing Crosby. Ironically, Berlin never celebrated Christmas since his family was Jewish, however, his popular Christmas songs, much like his ragtime music, are still widely beloved to this day.

# Classical Pieces

Week 1 - Alexander's Ragtime Band

Week 2 - The International Rag

Week 3 - When I Lost You

Week 4 - Ragtime Soldier Man

Week 5 - Smile and Show Your Dimple

Week 6 - That Mysterious Rag



The image shows a page of handwritten musical notation for the piece "That Mysterious Rag". It consists of three systems of music, each with a treble and bass staff. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like *fz* (forzando). The paper is aged and yellowed. At the bottom of the page, there is a copyright notice: "Copyright 1921 by Irving Berlin 1607 B'way, N.Y. All Rights Reserved MADE in U.S.A. International Copyright Secured".

# Composer Study

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date of Birth:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Place of Birth:** \_\_\_\_\_

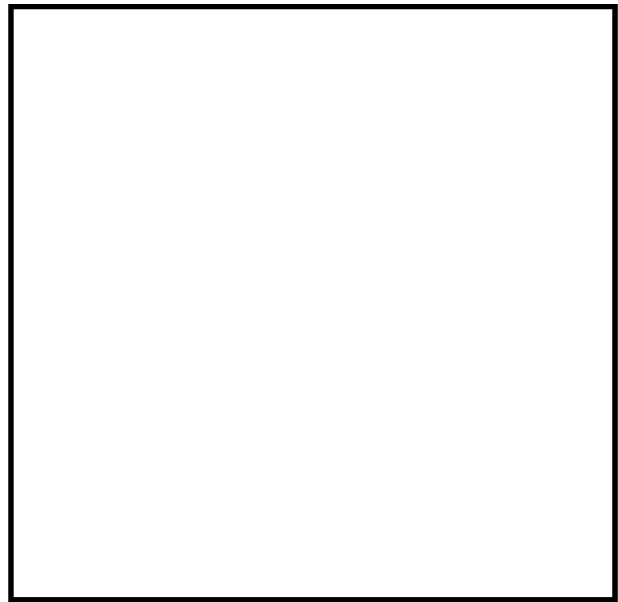
**Composer Fun Facts:**

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**Instruments Used:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Famous Compositions:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Further Study:**

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