

THE NEW YORK POPS

SKITCH HENDERSON FOUNDER

Notes on the Program

By: Marvin Hamlisch

Friday, March 16, 2007, 8:00PM, Carnegie Hall
The Sweetest Sounds: The Music of Richard Rodgers

I grew up listening to music that was based primarily on melody -- that subtle arrangement of notes that can capture one's attention and, when inspired, can make its way permanently into your heart.

Therefore, as a fledgling composer, I tried to write a good melody. It wasn't easy; that arrangement of notes can be quite elusive. Every once in a while the stars would align, and I would be able to say, "I think I've got it!"

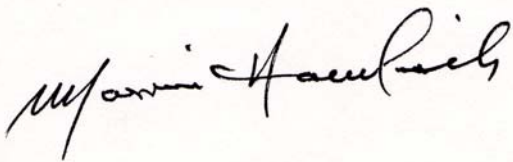
In my job as rehearsal pianist on the Bell Telephone Hour, a live television musical variety show, I would play Arlen, Porter, Berlin and Gershwin all the time. Arlen constructed jazzy blues; Porter dazzled with lyrics that dripped innuendo, with rhythms that were lean and sophisticated; Berlin could sound simple yet be deceptively sophisticated; and Gershwin, a musical hybrid, fused classical and jazz elements.

Then there was Richard Rodgers, the master of melody.

Whether he wrote it first and had Larry Hart add the lyrics, or vice versa with Oscar Hammerstein, God blessed Rodgers with the gift of melody.

Here was a man who revolutionized the American musical, making sure that songs grew out of the characters who sang them, expressing what they were experiencing and thinking, and pushing the drama forward. To think that after he had written most of the "Soliloquy", he would conjure up one of his most haunting melodies to capture: "What if he is a girl?"

The true criterion for a song, I believe, should not be whether you can hum it, but rather what it felt like when you heard it. For me, the melodies of Richard Rodgers remind me what the art of songwriting is all about, and why listening to music, at its best, can be so nourishing.



Marvin Hamlisch