

Selections from Cole Porter's Musicals

Cole Porter

Cole Porter was the most urbane, the most intellectual, the most highbrow of the Golden-Age American lyricist-songwriters, and he was practically born into the part. His Hoosier family enjoyed considerable wealth, and his mother, an accomplished pianist as well as a coal and timber heiress, determined that he should receive adept musical instruction, which included violin lessons beginning at age six and piano lessons two years later. Young Cole headed east to continue his education at the Worcester Academy in Massachusetts and then at Yale, where he was a member of the Whiffenpoofs and leader of the Glee Club.

In 1915 two of Porter's songs made their way into Broadway shows, and the next year he earned a credit as composer of an entire Broadway musical. When these first steps on the Great White Way met with little success, he moved to France. He joined the French Foreign Legion during World War I. After three years of service he picked up the social whirl in Paris, Venice, and the Riviera, proving popular among the smart set by accompanying himself in his own clever, sometimes risqué songs at parties. He was serious about his craft, however, and at the end of his stint in the Foreign Legion he also enrolled for

instruction in harmony, counterpoint, composition, and orchestration with Vincent d'Indy, the most eminent of the conservative French musical pedagogues at the time, and steeped himself in the art-song tradition of Schubert and Schumann.

Porter's career was centered entirely on musical theater. While many of his contemporaries cast their songs to sink or swim on the fashions of Tin Pan Alley, Porter's works were typically introduced by big-name stars in big-budget Broadway productions — hardly a guarantee of success, but at least assurance that his songs would be unveiled under the most flattering circumstances possible.

Porter hit his stride in the 1930s with a string of Broadway successes, including *The New Yorkers* in 1930; *Gay Divorce*, with its showstopping number "Night and Day," in 1932 (turned into the film *The Gay Divorcée* in 1934); *Anything Goes* in 1934; *Jubilee*, with its imaginative "Begin the Beguine," in 1935; and *Red, Hot and Blue* in 1936. The following

In Short

Born: June 9, 1891, in Peru, Indiana

Died: October 15, 1964, in Santa Monica, California

Works composed: "Who Said Gay Paree?" in 1953, "In the Still of the Night" in 1937, "Where Is the Life that Late I Led" in 1948, "Night and Day" in 1932, "Begin the Beguine" in 1935

World premieres: (in most cases following try-out runs) "Who Said Gay Paree?" unknown, as it was cut from *Can-Can* for the play's premiere; "In the Still of the Night" at the opening of the MGM film *Rosalie* on December 24, 1937, sung by Nelson Eddy; "Where Is the Life that Late I Led?" at the premiere of *Kiss Me, Kate* on December 30, 1948, at the New Century Theatre in New York, sung by Alfred Drake; "Night and Day" at the premiere of *Gay Divorce* on November 29, 1932, at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre in New York, sung by Fred Astaire; "Begin the Beguine" at the premiere of *Jubilee* on October 12, 1935, at the Imperial Theatre in New York, sung by June Knight

New York Philharmonic premieres and most recent performances: "In the Still of the Night" was performed on December 30, 1995, Leonard Slatkin, conductor, Julia Migenes, soloist; this is the first time any of the other songs have been performed.

Estimated duration: ca. 15 minutes

year he sustained a serious accident while horseback riding in Locust Valley, on Long Island. Both his legs were crushed and rendered useless — the right one was eventually amputated — and he spent the remainder of his life in chronic pain. His morale and his productivity took a plunge, but he was not out of the game. Quite a few superb songs emerged from even these dark years, and in 1948 he achieved the show that many consider his masterpiece: *Kiss Me, Kate* (after Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*), a major hit that ran for 1,007 performances on Broadway and was transformed into a 1953 film.

The five Porter songs performed this evening sample famous and not-so-famous moments from the composer's extraordinary career, beginning with "Night and Day," a testament to Porter's radical expansion of the songwriter's art. Its verse is audaciously based almost entirely on repeated notes, which Porter claimed — seriously? — were inspired by a chant he heard coming from a minaret in Morocco. *Can-Can* doesn't enjoy much of a reputation among musical-theater aficionados due to what many consider its weak book, but it did run for a very respectable 892 performances on Broadway following its opening on May 7, 1953, making

it Porter's second longest-running show. "Who Said Gay Paree?" was composed for this belle époque fantasy but was dropped before the opening. It lives on, however, as a useful, wistfully nostalgic cabaret number.

From *Kiss Me, Kate* we hear "Where Is the Life that Late I Led?"; Petruchio in his newly married state hungers after the romantic flames of his bachelorhood, with grin-inducing rhymes. "In the Still of the Night," from the MGM film *Rosalie*, conveys Porter's touchstone emotional subtlety as the singer wonders about the fate of the love he feels. "Begin the Beguine" spins out to an unprecedented length for a popular song, its essential structure of 108 measures bursting the standard 32-bar song form many times over. Porter himself admitted of this brilliant tour de force: "I can never remember it — if I want to play, I need to see the music in front of me!"

Instrumentation: two flutes (one doubling alto flute and piccolo), two oboes (one doubling English horn), two clarinets plus one bass clarinet, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, orchestra bells, suspended cymbal, drum set, bongos, maracas, harp, piano (doubling celesta) in addition to the solo baritone.

Making Louis Cry

A high point of Cole Porter's career arrived in 1937 when he first sang and played his song "In the Still of the Night" for the movie mogul Louis B. Mayer. MGM Studios was producing the film *Rosalie*, in which Nelson Eddy would introduce the song, and Mayer, the studio's head, had a rough-and-tumble reputation. Nonetheless, at first hearing he was reduced to tears. "Imagine making L.B. Mayer cry," Porter exclaimed triumphantly. "What could possibly top that?"

Mayer, however, was not going permanently soft, and before the film was finished he made Porter write no fewer than seven versions of the title song, "Rosalie." Porter was rather proud of the sixth try, but Mayer dismissed it as "too highbrow" and selected No. 7 instead. Porter later told his friend Paul Whiteman, the bandleader:

Louis B. Mayer was delighted with it [No. 7], but I still resented my No. 6 having been thrown out, which to me seemed so much better. Six months later when the song became a hit, I saw Irving Berlin, and he congratulated me on it. I said to him, "Thanks a lot, but I wrote that song in hate and I still hate it." To which Irving replied, "Listen, kid, take my advice, never hate a song that has sold a half million copies."



Nelson Eddy and Eleanor Powell in the 1937 film *Rosalie*

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1. Night and Day

Like the beat, beat, beat of the tom-tom,
When the jungle shadows fall.
Like the tick, tick, tock of the stately clock,
As it stands against the wall.
Like the drip, drip, drip of the raindrop
When the summer show'r is through,
So a voice within me keeps repeating
"You, you, you!"

Night and day you are the one,
Only you beneath the moon and under
the sun.

Whether near to me or far
It's no matter, darling, where you are,
I think of you, night and day.

Day and night, why is it so
That this longing for you follows
wherever I go?

In the roaring traffic's boom,
In the silence of my lonely room,
I think of you, night and day.

Night and day under the hide of me
There's an oh such a hungry yearning,
burning inside of me,

And its torment won't be through
Till you let me spend my life making love
to you,

Day and night, night and day!

2. Who Said Gay Paree?

Who spread the rumor Paris was fun?
Who had such fantasy?
Who never knew
Paris minus you?
Who said Gay Paree?
Who said, of all towns under the sun,
All lovers here should be?
Who failed to add
Paris could be sad?
Who said Gay Paree?
I thought our love, so brightly begun,
Would burn through eternity.
Who told the lie,
Love can never die?
Who said Gay Paree?
Who said Gay Paree?

(Please turn the page quietly.)

3. Where Is the Life that Late I Led?

When at first aware of masculinity,
I began to finger feminine curls
I became the toast of my vicinity
For I always had a multitude of girls.
But now that a married man, at last, am I,
How aware of my dear, departed past am I.

Where is the life that late I led?
Where is it now? Totally dead.
Where is the fun I used to find?
Where has it gone? Gone with the wind.
A married life may all be well,
But raising an heir
Could never compare
With raising a bit of hell!
So I repeat what first I said,
Where is the life that late I ...

In dear Milano, where are you, Momo?
Still selling those pictures of the scriptures
in the Duomo?
And Carolina, where are you, Lina?
Still peddling your pizza in the streets o'
Taormina?
And in Firenze, where are you, Alice?
Still there in your pretty itty-bitty Pitti
Palace?
And sweet Lucretia, so young and gay,
What scandalous doin's in the ruins of
Pompeii!

Where is the life that late I led?
Where is it now? Totally dead.
Where is the fun I used to find?
Where has it gone? Gone with the wind.
The marriage game is quite all right,
Yes, during the day
It's easy to play,
But, oh, what a bore at night!
So I repeat what first I said,
Where is the life that late I ...

Where is Rebecca? My Becki-weckio,
Could still she be cruising that amusing
Ponte Vecchio?
Where is Fedora, the wild virago?
It's lucky I missed her gangster sister from
Chicago.
Where is Venetia, who loved to chat so,
Could still she be drinkin' in her stinkin' pink
palazzo?
And lovely Lisa, where are you, Lisa?
You gave a new meaning to the leaning
tow'r of Pisa.

Where is the life that late I led?
Where is it now? Totally dead.
Where is the fun I used to find?
Where has it gone? Gone with the wind.
I've oft been told of nuptial bliss,
But what do you do,
A quarter to two,
With only a shrew to kiss?
So I repeat what first I said,
Where is the life that late I led?

4. In the Still of the Night

In the still of the night
As I gaze from my window
At the moon in its flight
My thoughts all turn to you.
In the still of the night,
While the world is in slumber,
Oh, the times without number,
Darling, when I say to you,
"Do you love me, as I love you?
Are you my life-to-be, my dream come true?"
Or will this dream of mine
Fade out of sight
Like the moon
Growing dim
On the rim
Of the hill
In the chill,
Still
Of the night?

5. Begin the Beguine

When they begin the beguine
It brings back the sound of music so tender,
It brings back a night of tropical splendor,
It brings back a memory ever green.
I'm with you once more under the stars
And down by the shore an orchestra's playing,
And even the palms seem to be swaying
When they begin the beguine.
To live it again is past all endeavor
Except when that tune clutches my heart.
And there we are, swearing to love forever,
And promising never, never to part.
What moments divine, what rapture serene,
'Til clouds came along to disperse the joys
we had tasted,
And now when I hear people curse the
chance that was wasted,
I know but too well what they mean,
So don't let them begin the beguine!
Let the love that was once a fire remain an
ember.
Let it sleep like the dead desire I only
remember
When they begin the beguine.
Oh, yes, let them begin the beguine, make
them play!
'Til the stars that were there before return
above you,
'Til you whisper to me once more, "Darling, I
love you!"
And we suddenly know what heaven we're in
When they begin the beguine.