

Reading Lyrics



Synopsis

A comprehensive anthology bringing together more than one thousand of the best American and English song lyrics of the twentieth century; an extraordinary celebration of a unique art form and an indispensable reference work and history that celebrates one of the twentieth century's most enduring and cherished legacies. *Reading Lyrics* begins with the first masters of the colloquial phrase, including George M. Cohan ("Give My Regards to Broadway"), P. G. Wodehouse ("Till the Clouds Roll By"), and Irving Berlin, whose versatility and career span the period from "Alexander's Ragtime Band" to "Annie Get Your Gun" and beyond. The Broadway musical emerges as a distinct dramatic form in the 1920s and 1930s, its evolution propelled by a trio of lyricists—Cole Porter, Ira Gershwin, and Lorenz Hart—whose explorations of the psychological and emotional nuances of falling in and out of love have lost none of their wit and sophistication. Their songs, including "Night and Day," "The Man I Love," and "Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered," have become standards performed and recorded by generation after generation of singers. The lure of Broadway and Hollywood and the performing genius of such artists as Al Jolson, Fred Astaire, Ethel Waters, Judy Garland, Frank Sinatra, and Ethel Merman inspired a remarkable array of talented writers, including Dorothy Fields ("A Fine Romance," "Can't Give You Anything but Love"), Frank Loesser ("Guys and Dolls"), Oscar Hammerstein II (from the groundbreaking "Show Boat" of 1927 through his extraordinary collaboration with Richard Rodgers), Johnny Mercer, Yip Harburg, Andy Razaf, Noël Coward, and Stephen Sondheim. *Reading Lyrics* also celebrates the work of dozens of superb craftsmen whose songs remain known, but who today are themselves less known—writers like Haven Gillespie (whose "Santa Claus Is Coming to Town" may be the most widely recorded song of its era); Herman Hupfeld (not only the composer/lyricist of "As Time Goes By" but also of "Are You Making Any Money?" and "When Yuba Plays the Rumba on the Tuba"); the great light versifier Ogden Nash ("Speak Low," "I'm a Stranger Here Myself," and, yes, "The Sea-Gull and the Egg-Gull"); Don Raye ("Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy," "Mister Five by Five," and, of course, "Milkman, Keep Those Bottles Quiet"); Bobby Troup ("Route 66"); Billy Strayhorn (not only for the omnipresent "Lush Life" but for "Something to Live For" and "A Lonely Coed"); Peggy Lee (not only a superb singer but also an original and appealing lyricist); and the unique Dave Frishberg ("I'm Hip," "Peel Me a Grape," "Van Lingo Mungo"). The lyricists are presented chronologically, each introduced by a succinct biography and the incisive commentary of Robert Gottlieb and Robert Kimball.

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Customer Reviews

Gottlieb (editor, *Reading Jazz*) and Kimball (editor, *The Complete Lyrics of Ira Gershwin*) have assembled 1000 popular American and English song texts dating from 1900 to 1975 and arranged them chronologically by lyricist's birth date. Focusing solely on theater and film songs, the editors profile more than 100 songwriters, including Cole Porter, Oscar Hammerstein, Yip Harburg, and Stephen Sondheim. Each entry details their musical contributions and three or more lyrics with verse(s) and refrain. Country, rock, folk, and blues numbers go unmentioned, as they would not have fit in this single volume. "One-hit wonders" are also listed at the back along with an index of song titles. The inclusion of lesser-known songs by major figures such as Irving Berlin or by little-remembered writers such as Mann Holiner or Sam Coslow seems to pad the volume rather than enhance its usefulness. Unfortunately, the title, too, is misleading: *Reading Lyrics* is more of a compilation than an interpretative work. This book is recommended, however, as a sanctioned print alternative to various lyric web sites for libraries serving a clientele seeking popular song texts and information. DBarry Zaslow, Miami Univ. Libs., Oxford, OH Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Most people remember a song better than they remember a poem. During the 1900[^]-75 scope of this sterling anthology, remembering a song was remembering a poem. That span was the heyday of the classic American popular song, which re-expressed all the old emotions in language invigorated by the dialects of all the external and internal immigrants drawn to America's burgeoning

industrial centers. The typical classic American popular song--any of the 1,000-plus examples editors Gottlieb and Kimball have chosen--is rife with those mnemonic aids par excellence, rhyme and wordplay. Accordingly, you could use the book for a party game, the object of which would be seeing who recalls the most songs and, beyond that, can sing them. With lyricists including all the superstars, from Cohan to Sondheim, and plenty whose songs' fame have outlived that of their names, such as Haven Gillespie ("Santa Claus Is Comin' to Town") and Edward Eliscu ("Without a Song"), the party could take all of a grand night for singing. Oh!--get a copy for the reference desk, too. Ray Olson

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I write songs for fun and zero profit. For me, this book is pretty great. I didn't even know such a resource existed until I Googled "best book of song lyrics." It's hard to imagine a better one. Of course much is missing, as some reviewers note. But what's here is amazing--not in the sense of great poetry. It really is a little stark, how unimpressive some of these famous lyrics are, absent the supporting beat and melody. But after all, lyrics integrate with these, and we're not talking some Shakespeare song interlude. I only wish the book had a sewn binding, because after all, it is a musical reference. But few books do nowadays. The authors' brief introductions are worth reading. If the art of popular song interests you, by all means grab a copy.

This book is a must for anyone who loves lyrics. While it only has submissions up to the fifties, it contains the classic-popular song lyrics that have become part of our lives and culture. For each lyricist you are treated to some of their history and accomplishment. You will be very surprised as to how many very successful song writers there are out there that you never knew their names. Great book to just have out for people to peruse through.

This book pulls together something more than 1,000 sets of lyrics of the best known American popular songs from 1900 to 1975. It is a wide and well chosen selection that gives lots of coverage to well-known lyricists like Ira Gershwin, Lorenz Hart, Oscar Hammerstein, and Stephen Sondheim. It also provides lyrics for a lot of other well-known songs by less well-known lyricists. If you like American popular music, you will probably find yourself lost in this book, looking and finding your particular favorite songs and going off to listening to some great recordings of the songs from which the lyrics are taken. The book is laid out well with clear print and with a good index.

If you love lyrics (as I do) and really listen to the words a singer is putting out there, you will love

reading this book. The familiar lyrics will slip the melody into your mind and lyrics new to you will be an exquisite discovery. I bought the book for myself a year or so ago and just bought this copy as a gift for a friend.

A great collection of song lyrics. Wonderful for any lyricist looking for ideas and for anyone who wants to read the lyrics of some of the 20th century's greatest songs.

For old timers, like me, who remember the American Songbook, this is a great book. It takes one back over the years and as one reads the lyric, you can hear the music in your head.

If you want to know all of the verses and refrains of songs in the Great American Songbook, this is the book to have. It may not be exhaustive, but it comes close.

Reading Lyrics is a sensational survey of the masters of rhyme who created the great American Song Book. I've long believed our greatest poets are the creators of these three minute musical miracles. Read Mercer's "Blues in the Night" or "Come Rain or Come Shine" or Berlin's "Always." The wit of Cole Porter and Fats Waller is here along with under-appreciated giants like Frank Loesser and many others. Open this book to any page and you'll fall in love.

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