

This Day in History... February 15, 1905

Happy Birthday Harold Arlen

Composer Harold Arlen was born Hyman Arluck on February 15, 1905, in Buffalo, New York. He composed over 500 songs during his lifetime, including “Over the Rainbow” from *The Wizard of Oz*.

Harold Arlen showed great musical promise early in life, learning to play the piano as a child. However, he rejected formal training in favor of playing nightclubs. Arlen found some success singing and playing piano in his hometown and then moved to New York City in the 1920s. It was during this time he changed his name to Harold Arlen and began providing piano accompaniment for vaudeville shows. Arlen wrote his first song, “My Gal, May Pal” in 1924. He soon began singing some of his original songs on recordings with bands and other artists.



Arlen and Harburg wrote a number of songs together, most notably, “Over the Rainbow.”

Bloomer Girl, St. Louis Woman, and Saratoga.

By the mid-1930s, Arlen began spending more time in California, writing songs for musical films. He soon began partnering with lyricist “Yip” Harburg on a number of songs. In 1938, the pair were hired to compose the songs for *The Wizard of Oz*. The most famous song from the film, “Over the Rainbow,” earned the pair an Academy Award for Best Original Song.



Arlen collaborated with Mercer on several songs, including “One for My Baby” and “Come Rain or Shine.”

Arlen died on April 23, 1986. After his death, Irving Berlin said, “He wasn’t as well-known as some of us, but he was a better songwriter than most of us and he will be missed by all of us.”



From the 1996 Songwriters issue

In 1929, a composer convinced Arlen to write music for one of his piano pieces, which with the lyrics of Ted Koehler became the song “Get Happy.” It was his first well-known song. He also started writing shows the popular Harlem night club, the Cotton Club.

Arlen began working for a music publishing company and produced the songs “Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea” and “I’ve Got the World on a String.” Arlen produced scores for the Broadway musicals *You Said It, Life Begins at 8:40, Hooray for What?,*



“Over the Rainbow” was voted the #1 song of the 20th century.

Arlen wrote a number of other songs for Hollywood films including, “It’s Only a Paper Moon,” “Let’s Fall in Love,” “That Old Black Magic,” and Groucho Marx’s theme song, “Lydia the Tattoo’d Lady.” Other popular Arlen songs include: “Blues in the Night,” “Come Rain or Come Shine,” “One for my Baby,” “I Love a Parade,” and “Stormy Weather.”

In 1950s, Arlen composed Judy Garland’s other famous song, “The Man that Got Away,” with lyrics by Ira Gershwin, for the movie *A Star is Born*. At her notable Carnegie Hall concert in 1961 Garland thanked Arlen personally for the song and he received a standing ovation.



*Arlen collaborated with Dorothy Fields on *The Farmer Takes a Wife*.*

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