

Lincoln Center presents

American Songbook

January 11–February 12, 2012

Friday Evening, February 3, 2012, at 8:30

Hello, Gorgeous! Leslie Kritzer Sings Jule Styne

with special guest Eliseo Roman

Matt Hinkley, *Guitar*

Jay Mack, *Drums*

Steve Smyth, *Trumpet*

D. Michael Heath, *Director*

Vadim Feichtner, *Musical Director and Piano*

This evening's program is approximately 75 minutes long and will be performed without intermission.

Major support for Lincoln Center's American Songbook is provided by Fisher Brothers, In Memory of Richard L. Fisher; and Amy & Joseph Perella.

Additional corporate support is provided by Bank of America Merrill Lynch.

Wine generously donated by William Hill Estate Winery, Official Wine of Lincoln Center.

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Steinway Piano

The Allen Room, Frederick P. Rose Hall
Home of Jazz at Lincoln Center

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The Big Songs of Jule Styne

by Barry Singer

In the eighth and final decade of Jule Styne's tenacious life in show business, a reporter arrived one afternoon for an interview at Styne's splendid Fifth Avenue apartment. From the front door, a stereo system could be heard blasting on all cylinders the unmistakable brass and sass of one of Styne's signature Broadway overtures. Moments later, in a wood-paneled office lined with framed memorabilia, the elfin, 87-year-old composer was discovered standing behind his desk, his back to the room, emphatically conducting the speakers blaring from his bookshelf wall.

The overture crescendoed. With a sweep of his hands, Styne milked the climax, Toscanini-like, then spun around in the sudden silence, as if taken by surprise. "Oh, hello," he declared. "I'm Jule Styne."

From *Gentleman Prefer Blondes* and *High Button Shoes*, right through *Gypsy* and *Funny Girl*, Jule Styne never wrote a shy musical. His compositional strokes were brash and broad and gloriously shameless, as were the stars he wrote for: Ethel Merman, Carol Channing, Judy Holliday, Barbra Streisand. He relished grand gestures and thrived in the Broadway vortex of the 11 o'clock number, devising "Rose's Turn"—the mother of all 11 o'clock numbers—with Stephen Sondheim for *Gypsy* in 1959. "I write big," he conceded to his visitor that day. "Not a lot of people know how to do that anymore. I always did."

Born Julius Stein in London on December 31, 1905, he'd grown up in Chicago, after immigrating to the U.S. with his Ukrainian-born parents at age eight. A piano prodigy and child soloist with symphony orchestras by the time he was 12, Styne also discovered jazz in Chicago, playing around town with various "hot" dance bands, including, in 1926, Ben Pollack's Californians, a group then featuring Glenn Miller, Charlie Spivak, Jack Teagarden, and a teenage Benny Goodman.

That same year, Styne wrote his first song—to impress a girl, he later claimed. With words and music credited by committee to Julius Stein and a trio of Tin Pan Alley industry vets (Styne maintained the lyric actually had been supplied pseudonymously by Irving Caesar, the lyricist behind "Tea for Two"), the song, "Sunday," went on to sell more than 500,000 copies of sheet music. Still, Styne was not yet persuaded he might be a songwriter by profession.

Moving to New York around 1934, he found steady work as a vocal coach. The coaching soon brought him out to Hollywood, where he helped train Alice Faye and Shirley Temple, among others, for 20th Century Fox. He arranged and composed background soundtrack music at Republic Studios, scribbled cowboy songs for Gene Autry and Roy Rogers, and finally broke through to the hit parade, writing "I Don't Want to Walk Without You" with Frank Loesser in 1941.

It was Styne's wartime teaming with the lyricist Sammy Cahn that secured his songwriting future. The two turned out so many hits, many of them for Frank Sinatra—"I'll Walk Alone," "I've Heard That Song Before," "I Fall in Love Too Easily," "Time After Time,"

"It's Magic"—that Sinatra virtually commandeered them as song suppliers for his personal use. Styne never was especially enamored of Hollywood, however, even after eight Academy Award nominations and one Oscar statuette (for "Three Coins in the Fountain"). In 1947 he returned to New York more or less for good, and took dead aim at Broadway.

His success there was virtually instantaneous and would play on for the next quarter century, in collaborations that again and again yielded memorable scores and hit tunes. *High Button Shoes* was first, in 1947, with "Papa, Won't You Dance with Me" as the hit, and Sammy Cahn the lyricist. *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* followed in 1949, written with Leo Robin; it yielded "Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend." Styne created eight shows with Betty Comden and Adolph Green as his lyric writers, commencing in 1951 with *Two on the Aisle*, continuing through *Bells Are Ringing* in 1956, and culminating with a Tony Award for *Hallelujah, Baby!* in 1967. In 1959 Styne stepped out spectacularly for a one-time partnering with a young Stephen Sondheim. The result was *Gypsy*—to this day treasured by many as the perfect Broadway musical. Styne also wrote a clutch of shows with the lyricist Bob Merrill, of which *Funny Girl* for Streisand in 1964 was by far the biggest hit.

Much as he loved *big*, Styne's gentler qualities as a composer were prodigious. His melodicism traversed an extraordinary spectrum of ballad styles, from the childlike delicacy of *Peter Pan*'s "Never Never Land" to the grownup rhapsodies of "All the Way." "I try not to compose at the piano," he explained, when asked about his kaleidoscopic range. "It limits your imagination; you're restricted by what you can play as a pianist. I prefer to write in my head."

On the far wall opposite Jule Styne's desk, a small, striking painting hung unobtrusively—a portrait of Streisand, it appeared, in costume as Fanny Brice for *Funny Girl*. Styne beamed when the painting was pointed out to him. In 1932, he recalled, just around the time he was formally changing his name from Julius to Jule, he'd formed his own dance band, Jule Stein and His Society Orchestra. For four weeks, he said, at the 225 Club in Chicago, a high-class gambling joint, Jule Stein and His Society Orchestra had backed Fanny Brice in a nightclub act. "She was great!" Styne enthused. "I never forgot her."

And the painting of Streisand?

"Irving Berlin painted that," replied Styne, with a cackle. "And it isn't Streisand. It's Fanny Brice. I think Irving painted her with Streisand's nose, though. But I could be wrong about that. Not that it matters, in the end. I figure I'm the only guy left who worked with both of them."