



God Bless America: The Songs of Irving Berlin

Irving Berlin wrote over 1200 songs and lived to be 101 years old. He was equally strong as a composer and as a lyricist — creating songs that expressed what the average person was feeling in phrases that the average person could easily sing. Berlin wrote more hits than any of his colleagues in the Golden Age of American Popular Song — beginning in 1911 with “Alexander’s Ragtime Band” and ending more than 50 years later with “Count Your Blessings (Instead of Sheep)” in 1954. He wrote songs for eighteen Broadway shows and nineteen Hollywood musicals, and he did all of this even though he had little formal education and could neither read nor write music. As his fellow songwriter Jerome Kern once said, “Irving Berlin has no *place* in American music — he *is* American music.” In this hour-long program, singer Will McMillan and pianist Molly Ruggles put their respectful spin on classics such as “What’ll I Do?” “Always,” “Cheek To Cheek,” “How Deep Is The Ocean?” “Blue Skies,” “Stepping Out with My Baby,” “Let’s Face the Music & Dance,” and “God Bless America.”

Will McMillan has performed at venues ranging from Scullers Jazz Club (Boston) to 54 Below (NYC) to Yin Par Le Garçon Chinois (Shanghai). For years McMillan hosted “Will & Company,” a series at the Blacksmith House in Harvard Square highlighting local performers and songwriters, which earned him an IRNE Award for Best Cabaret Show in a Small Venue. He has released five CDs — “Reel One” with the vocal ensemble *At The Movies*; “Sketchbook 1” and “Blame Those Gershwins” with pianist Steve Sweeting; “If I Loved You” with singer Bobbi Carrey and pianist Doug Hammer; and a recent eight-song release with singer/pianist Molly Ruggles and singer Carole Bundy. You are welcome to visit his web site, willsings.com, find his music on streaming platforms such as Pandora, Spotify, Amazon and Apple Music by searching for “**Will McMillan featuring Doug Hammer**,” watch him sing on YouTube by searching “**Timberlane Pops with Will McMillan**” or listen to music at his blog, AMusicalifeOnPlanetEarth.WordPress.com.

Molly Ruggles has played piano and conducted pit bands for Opryland USA in Nashville, the College Light Opera Company on Cape Cod, and Brown University. She led a house band at the Arboretum in Providence for five years. She also played with the band *Bougainvillea* and worked with singers Henrietta Robinson and Lisa Thorson. She taught a songwriting seminar at MIT for seven years and recently produced a workshop performance of her original musical *The Mis-Matched Pair*. You are welcome to visit her web site at MollyRuggles.com.