

Alan Jay Lerner Revisited

It's high time to revisit the Ben Bagley's Revisited series, beginning with this wonderful example – *Alan Jay Lerner Revisited*. Bagley's revues were kicky fun and these albums were a natural offshoot of them. He always assembled an interesting group of singers for his albums and had a variety of different musical directors/arrangers over the years. When CDs arrived he issued his albums in the new medium, but unfortunately Bagley's strengths did not extend to sound, mixing, or mastering. So, some of them are decent, some are less than decent, but they're all important albums and part of his legacy and deserve to be treated as well as they can. We have put in that work, with our wonderful mastering engineer, James Nelson, doing his customary great work to spruce and shine these up so that they sound better than they ever have before. And of course it's wonderful to have all those incredible Harvey Schmidt covers.

Alan Jay Lerner was born in New York on August 31, 1918. While attending Harvard, Lerner made what would be his first contributions to musical theatre with Harvard's Hasty Pudding shows. His first professional work was writing radio scripts until the fateful day he was introduced to composer Frederick Loewe, who was looking for a writing partner. Their first collaboration was based on Barry Conners' *The Patsy*, called *Life of the Party*. The show's original lyricist had departed the project and Lerner completed it. That was followed by *What's Up*, his first Broadway show, and that was followed by *The Day Before Spring*. In 1947, the team finally had a hit – *Brigadoon* and fol-

lowed that with another hit, *Paint Your Wagon* (although Lerner would say, "it was success but not a hit.").

Lerner also worked with other composers, notably Kurt Weill on the musical *Love Life*, and Burton Lane for the MGM film, *Royal Wedding*. The same year as *Royal Wedding*, Lerner also wrote the screenplay for the MGM film, *An American in Paris*, for which he won an Academy Award. Then he was back with Loewe and together they created what would be Lerner's biggest hit and his masterpiece, and one of the glories of the American musical theater, *My Fair Lady*. It ran a then-record-breaking 2,717 performances.

Lerner and Loewe followed that with the smash hit MGM musical film, *Gigi*, adapted from the stories of Collette. The film was nominated for nine Oscars and won every single one of them. Then in 1960 came *Camelot*, a troubled production that went through many trials and tribulations during its tryout. The show received mixed reviews but eked out a run of 873 performances – it was hard to fail with the star power of Richard Burton, Julie Andrews, and Robert Goulet.

Loewe retired, and Lerner teamed with his old writing partner Burton Lane on the 1965 musical, *On A Clear Day You Can See Forever*. After that, he began working with other collaborators: Andre Previn on *Coco*, film composer John Barry on the infamous *Lolita*, My Love, Leonard Bernstein on *1600 Pennsylvania Avenue*, a reunion with Burton Lane on *Carmelina*, and Charles Strouse on *Dance A Little Closer*. There was

one more collaboration with Loewe – the 1973 film musical of Antoine de Saint-Exupery's *The Little Prince*. In 1978, he wrote his autobiography, *The Street Where I Live*. Lerner passed away at the age of sixty-seven in 1986.

The point of the Revisited series was doing the lesser-known material of its subjects. So, you won't find any of Lerner's hits on this CD. What you will find is a treasure trove of rarities (especially at the time of the recording) from *Love Life*, *The Day Before Spring*, a few songs from the film *Royal Wedding*, and in the bonus section, *What's Up*, *Lolita*, *My Love* (with the show's star, Dorothy Loudon), and a cut song from *Gigi*.

On a personal note, I would later pick up the mantle begun by Ben when I began producing albums in 1993, most especially in my series of recordings called *Lost in Boston* and *Unsung Musicals*, with the main difference being that we were mostly trying to have the songs sound like they actually would have sounded in the shows for which they were written. I spoke to Ben several times in the late 1980s and then just a few weeks before he passed away. I was about to issue *The Grass Harp* on CD. And one of the things he said to me was that he would love for me to distribute his CDs, as that was always difficult going for him. At that time it wasn't possible, but here we are now and I'm honoring his wishes.

Bruce Kimmel