

# Accentuate the Positive

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THE JOHNNY MERCER  
FOUNDATION



Johnny  
Mercer

AN ACTIVITY GUIDE TO LYRIC WRITING FOR KIDS



This material was prepared by **The Johnny Mercer Foundation** (JMF) for educational use. It was based, in part, on earlier work done by Camp Broadway at the direction of and with the financial support from JMF. It is hoped that teachers and students will use these materials to learn about the magic of being able to express one's thoughts and dreams through songwriting.

For more information on Johnny Mercer and The Great American Songbook, visit **The Johnny Mercer Foundation** at [www.johnnymercer.org](http://www.johnnymercer.org).

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# Accentuate the Positive

Imagine a boy from Savannah, Georgia, born at the first part of the last century, writing music and lyrics that we still listen to today. For example, that boy wrote the words to “Hooray for Hollywood” that is heard every year on the Academy Awards show and every night on a late night television show.

This activity booklet will introduce you to **Johnny Mercer** and the type of music often referred to, as “The Great American Songbook”, and it will show you how a song is written. Songs of this type try to tell a story. After you read this and learn about **Johnny**, we hope that you will try to write your own song to tell a story that you want others to hear. **Johnny** often wrote with another person and together the two of them would make beautiful music. You, too, may want to find someone to work with to create your own song.

**Johnny Mercer** grew up on the Georgia coast and was inspired by jazz, blues, ragtime, and African American gospel music. He wrote lyrics about simple things like birds and trains and complicated things like love, but he used language that was clever and colorful. Songs like “Accentuate the Positive”, “Too Marvelous for Words”, “Satin Doll”, “Skylark”, and “Moon River” are but a few of the over 1,400 songs that **Johnny Mercer** wrote. Johnny sang not only his own songs but those of others and was one of the most popular singers of his time. He started a record company, called Capitol Records, and used this company to launch the careers of many other great singers.

**The Johnny Mercer Foundation** was started by Johnny's wife after his death in order to honor his memory and encourage learning about the Great American Songbook. The Foundation's mission includes a number of educational programs for students of all ages from grade school to college and beyond. This booklet is but one example of the educational activities of the Foundation, and we hope that you will enjoy it, use it, and learn about the joy of writing a song.

John D. Marshall  
*Chairman of the Board & President*

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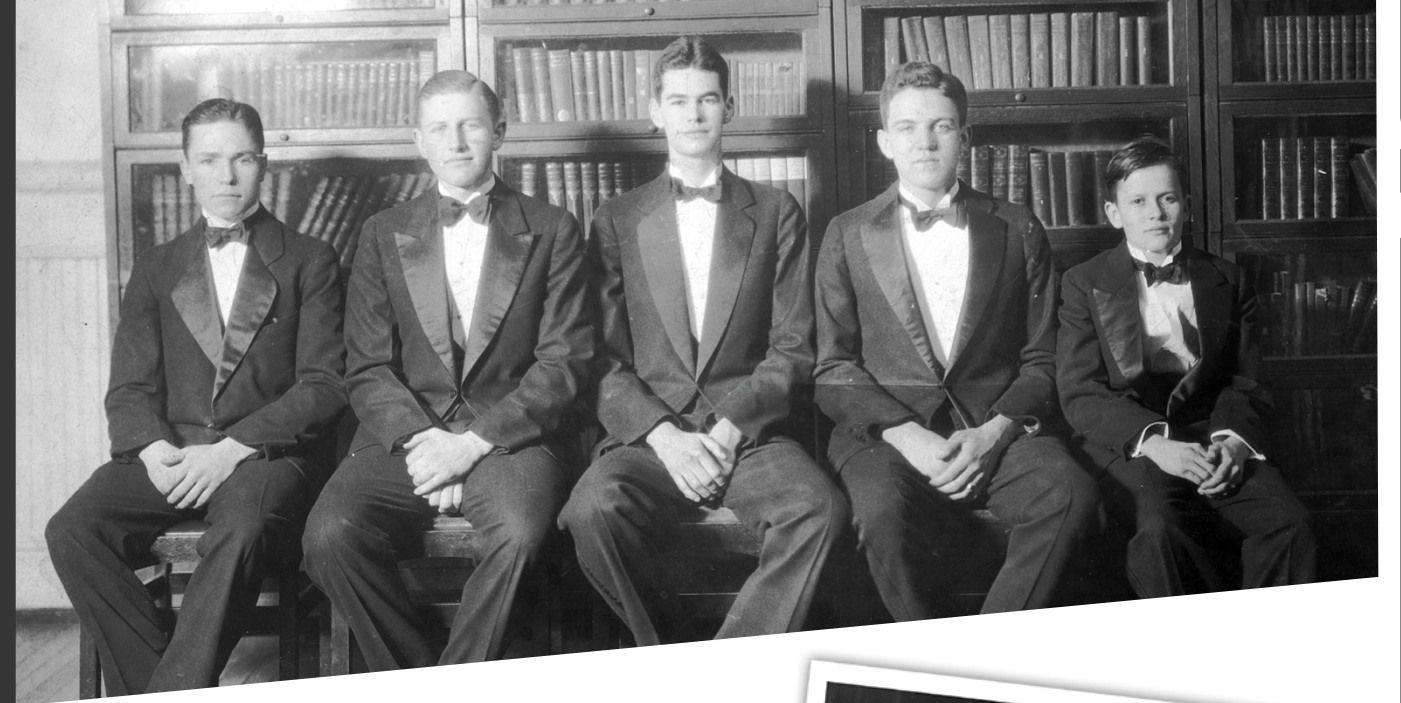




## Three Greatest Moments

"I think the three greatest moments in a songwriter's life are when he writes his first song, even when he's fifteen, in my case. The second time is when he gets his first song published. And then the third time is when he gets his first hit, a real hit song that you hear --- you go down the street and people are singing it that don't know who you are, they just love the song --- and that's really a thrill."

- Johnny Mercer



ABOVE: Johnny (far left) at Woodberry Forest School.  
RIGHT: Johnny with band leader Paul Whiteman

## Who is Johnny Mercer?

### Savannah, GA

Award winning lyricist **John Herndon Mercer** was born in Savannah, Georgia, November 18, 1909.

By the time he was three, Johnny already loved to sing. As a teenager, he fell in love with jazz and sang in the church choir. He was also drawn to gospel music and other African-American folk music he heard when he was growing up.

Johnny attended Woodberry Forest School in Virginia. When he was 15, he wrote his first song, "Sister Susie Strut Your Stuff."

When he was 17, his father's real estate business failed. The family couldn't afford to send Johnny to college, so he headed to New York City to try his luck in the theater.

ABOVE: A very young Johnny.  
RIGHT: Ginger, John Jefferson, Amanda, and Johnny.

### New York, NY

In New York, Johnny wrote songs and tried out for shows. He auditioned for *The Garrick Gaieties* a popular music and comedy revue.

The producers told him they didn't need any more actors, but they did need more songs. So, he wrote a tune called "Out of Breath."

Mine's a hopeless case,  
But there's one saving grace -  
Anyone would feel as I do;  
Out of breath and scared to death of you.



Johnny met a dancer in the show, Ginger Meehan, who became his wife. Later, they had two children, Amanda and John Jefferson. Johnny wrote a lyric about his little girl, nick-named "Mandy."

Mandy is Two.  
You ought to see her eyes  
of cornflower blue -  
They really look as if they  
actually knew  
That she's a big girl now.

Johnny won a singing contest, and was noticed by his idol Paul Whiteman, "The King of Jazz." Johnny was hired to write songs and sing with Whiteman's band, using his Southern drawl in songs like "Pardon My Southern Accent."



## WHO WROTE IT?

Pick your most FAVORITE song EVER! Do you know who wrote it? Who is the lyricist and who is the composer? Once you know for sure, bring a recording of your favorite song into your class and play it.

Now, you can quiz them! Do they realize that the artist who is singing or playing your favorite song may not be the same person who wrote the lyrics and the music? It's YOUR turn to teach them!

# WHY THIS



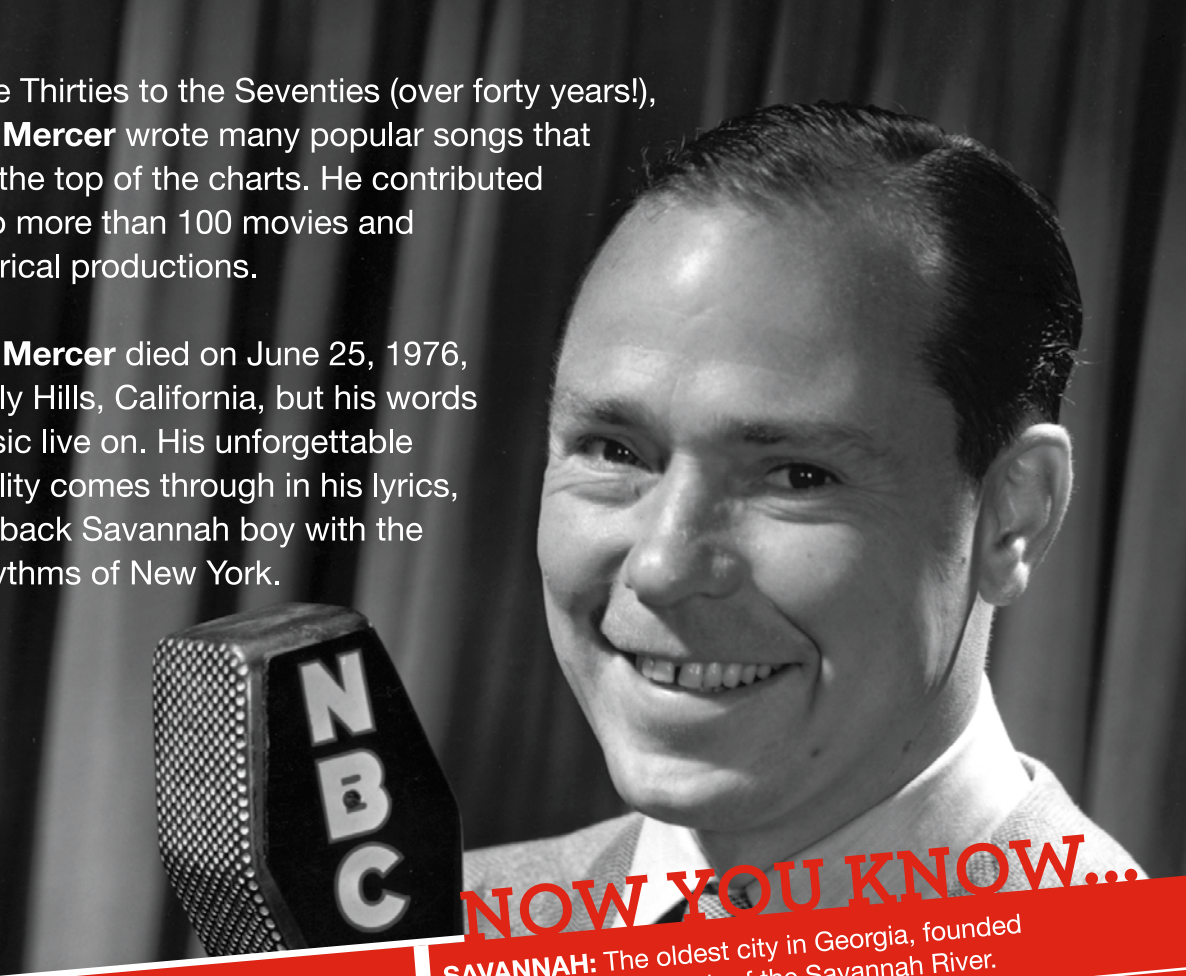
## My Huckleberry Friend

One of Johnny's most famous lines is in the song "Moon River": *my huckleberry friend*. Johnny wrote those words thinking of his cousin, Walter Rivers. When they were kids, on lazy summer days they would pick huckleberries together, facing brambles, briars and sometimes snakes to fill their buckets with berries. For people who knew **Johnny Mercer**, *my huckleberry friend* describes him perfectly.

Lyrics to "Moon River" on page 10

From the Thirties to the Seventies (over forty years!), **Johnny Mercer** wrote many popular songs that went to the top of the charts. He contributed songs to more than 100 movies and 23 theatrical productions.

**Johnny Mercer** died on June 25, 1976, in Beverly Hills, California, but his words and music live on. His unforgettable personality comes through in his lyrics, the laid-back Savannah boy with the jazzy rhythms of New York.



## NOW YOU KNOW...

**SAVANNAH:** The oldest city in Georgia, founded in 1773 near the mouth of the Savannah River.

**OSCAR®:** The award given by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences for achievement in movies.

**COMPOSER:** Someone who writes the music to a song.

**LYRICIST:** Someone who writes the words to a song.

**REVUE:** A variety show of humorous songs and sketches.

## Who is Johnny Mercer? [continued]

### Hollywood, CA

In 1935 Johnny headed to Hollywood to write songs for movie musicals (and even appear in a few!). His song "I'm An Old Cowhand from the Rio Grande" was a hit in the movie *Rhythm on the Range*. Four years later, his song "Jeepers Creepers" was nominated for an Academy Award®. He won an Oscar® on his ninth nomination, for the song "On The Atchison, Topeka and the Santa Fe," sung by Judy Garland in the movie *The Harvey Girls* in 1946.

He wrote lyrics with many different composers, but sometimes wrote his own music for his lyrics --- like the 1942 song "Dream."

Dream when you're feelin' blue,  
Dream, that's the thing to do.  
Just watch the smoke rings rise in the air;  
You'll find your share  
Of memories there.

Besides being a songwriter and singer, Johnny Mercer was also a businessman. He co-founded Capitol Records in 1942 (the name was suggested by his wife, Ginger) with Glenn Wallichs and Buddy De Sylva. Early on he mentored many new singing and writing talents.

ABOVE: Johnny (left) with Buddy De Sylva, co-founder of Capitol Records

## SNAPSHOT LYRIC

Just as Johnny wrote a song about his little girl, "Mandy," you can write a song about someone you love too, like a "snapshot" in words.

**1** Choose a family member or really close friend. Close your eyes and picture them as clearly as you can in your mind. Details are VERY important when writing lyrics. Do you see the color of his/her hair and eyes? Are they short or tall? Do they make you laugh? Can you picture them in a certain color shirt or pair of pants that they may wear often?

**2** Write all the details you can think of about this person down on a piece of paper.

**3** Now choose three interesting words that describe this person's personality.

**4** Next, take all the words you've written down so far, and use as many as you can in a short lyric about that person.

This is the way great lyricists begin to gather the best words they can find to describe what they're trying to write about! It involves a lot of thought and hard work, but once you've got it down, anyone who listens to your lyrics will be able to imagine just what you intended them to!



## Johnny Mercer's Collaborators

You hear songs every day on sound recordings, TV, and on the radio, but you don't always know who wrote them. Sometimes the same person writes both words and music --- **Johnny Mercer** wrote music for some of his lyrics. But most of the time, a composer and a lyricist collaborate to write a song.



## In the Cool, Cool, Cool of the Evening

Music by Hoagy Carmichael

In the cool, cool, cool of the evenin',  
Tell 'em I'll be there.  
In the cool, cool, cool of the evenin',  
Better save a chair. When the party's gettin' a glow on,  
'N singin' fills the air,  
In the shank o' the night,  
When the doin's are right,  
You can tell 'em I'll be there.

LEFT: Hoagy Carmichael poses with Johnny Mercer ca. 1952.

**Which Comes First, Words or Music?**  
Every songwriting team works differently, but **Johnny Mercer** liked to fit his words to a melody. The lyrics of his first big success, "Lazybones," were written to go with the tune of Hoagy Carmichael's "Washboard Blues."

### HAROLD ARLEN

(February 15, 1905 - April 23, 1986)

Born in Buffalo, Harold Arlen began performing ragtime piano at age 15. He moved to New York City in the mid-Twenties, and had a hit with the song "Get Happy" in 1930, around the same time that Johnny Mercer was becoming known. **Johnny Mercer** introduced Harold Arlen to E.Y. "Yip" Harburg, another lyricist. Together Arlen and Harburg wrote the songs for the 1939 movie *The Wizard of Oz*. Harold Arlen and **Johnny Mercer** began writing songs together in 1941, including "Blues in the Night."

### Johnny Mercer on What Makes a Good Collaborator

"First of all, great talent and integrity, that's what I like. I like a guy who writes his way and his way is so high that it starts where other guys leave off. They're all different. Every one is different."

### Why He Likes to Write Words to go with the Music

"I feel music like a composer... I understand the music. I know where the accents should come. I don't mean to sound conceited when I say this, but I've often had a lot of good lyrics loused up by writing them first because the guy doesn't understand the meter that I wrote. I'd rather try and catch the mood of his tune."

## HOAGY CARMICHAEL

(November 22, 1899 - December 28, 1981)

Hoagy Carmichael's mother played piano in silent movie theaters. Hoagy was playing piano at age six. In his twenties, he was playing and writing jazz. After getting his law degree from Indiana University, he moved to New York. He had a hit song, "Lazybones" with **Johnny Mercer** in 1933.

In 1936, he moved to Hollywood to write songs for the movies. He was very popular through the Forties, even appearing in films (usually as a piano player.) He won an Oscar with **Johnny Mercer** in 1951 for their song "In The Cool, Cool, Cool of the Evening."

## Blues in the Night

Music by Harold Arlen

- My mama done tol' me
- When I was in knee pants
- My mama done tol' me
- Son

- A woman'll sweet-talk
- And give ya the big eye,
- But when the sweet talkin's
- Done

- A woman's a two-face,
- A worrisome thing
- Who'll leave ya t'sing
- The blues in the night.

## NOW YOU KNOW...

**COLLABORATE:** To work together.

**INTEGRITY:** Keeping to a strong moral code of behavior, honesty.

**SHANK:** The main or early part. The shank of the evening.

**METER:** A rhythmic pattern.

**RAGTIME:** An early style of jazz music popular at the beginning of the 20th century.

## METER AND SYLLABLES

**Johnny Mercer fit his lyrics into composers' music. In order to feel the meter of Harold Arlen's music, count the syllables of each lyric line and enter it in the BLUE BOX provided to the left.**

Now put your lyrics into Harold Arlen's music from "Blues in the Night." Copy the numbers of the syllabic pattern onto a separate paper, and write your own lyrics using the same meter about something that makes you feel blue.

ABOVE: Johnny with Harold Arlen (left).



## HENRY MANCINI

(April 16, 1924 – June 14, 1994)

Born Enrico Nicola Mancini in Cleveland, Ohio, he was raised in the mill town of West Aliquippa, PA. He studied flute and piccolo, and went to the Juilliard School in New York. While in the Army during World War II, he played in military bands. After the war, he worked as a freelance musician, getting hired at Universal writing background music. He became known for writing jazz-inspired movie and TV themes, including the famous “Pink Panther” theme. The songs “Moon River” and “Days of Wine and Roses,” written with **Johnny Mercer**, won the Oscar® for Best Song in 1961 and 1962.

## HARRY WARREN

(December 24, 1893 – September 22, 1981)

Harry Warren was born Salvatore Guaragna, but his parents changed their last name (as most immigrants to America did then), and he chose the new first name “Harry.” He dropped out of school at 16 to become a drummer. He began working at a silent-movie studio in Brooklyn, playing “mood music” for the actors. Later, he moved to Hollywood to write for movie musicals. He wrote “Jeepers Creepers” with **Johnny Mercer**, which was nominated for an Oscar®. They won an Oscar® for “On The Atchison, Topeka and the Santa Fe” in 1946.



## Moon River

Music by Henry Mancini

Moon River,  
Wider than a mile,  
I'm crossin' you in style  
Someday.

Old dream maker,  
You heart breaker,  
Wherever you're goin',  
I'm goin' your way.

Two drifters  
Off to see the world -  
There's such a lot of world  
To see.

We're after the same  
Rainbow's end,  
Waitin' round the bend,  
My huckleberry friend,  
Moon River and me.

ABOVE LEFT: Johnny with Henry Mancini.

ABOVE CENTER: Harry Warren (at piano) with another collaborator, Al Dubin.



## Satin Doll

Music by Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn

Cigarette holder, which wigs me,  
over her shoulder, she digs me -  
out catin', that satin doll.

Baby, shall we go out skippin'?  
Careful, amigo, you're flippin'.  
Speaks latin, that satin doll.

LEFT: Johnny shows off the just pressed record of the Oscar® winning “On the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe.”

## DUKE ELLINGTON

(April 29, 1899 – May 24, 1974)

Edward Kennedy Ellington was born in Washington, D.C. He had piano lessons at age seven, but at that age was more interested in playing baseball. When he was in his teens, he was fascinated by ragtime music and took up the piano again, playing professionally by 17. Nicknamed “Duke,” he moved to New York in 1923.

Along with his band, The Washingtonians, Duke was heard “*Live from the Cotton Club*” on radio across the nation. He became one of the world's greatest jazz composers and performers, writing hundreds of songs, and playing with jazz greats all over the world. **Johnny Mercer** wrote words to a couple of Duke Ellington's jazz compositions, including “Satin Doll.”

## On the Atchison, Topeka and the Santa Fe

Music by Harry Warren

Do you hear that whistle down the line?  
I figure that it's engine number forty-nine  
She's the only one that'll sound that way  
On the Atchison, Topeka, and the Santa Fe

See the ol' smoke risin' round the bend?  
I reckon that she knows she's gonna meet a friend.  
Folks around these parts get the time o'day  
From the Atchison, Topeka and the Santa Fe.

## LYRICS IN MOTION

**Johnny Mercer wrote great lyrics about a train in “On the Atchison, Topeka and the Santa Fe.” Now you can pickup where he left off.**

Choose your favorite form of transportation. For example a car, a bike, even the subway. Choose three words that ‘sound like’ the item. Does it whirl, buzz or chugga? These words that ‘sound like’ the item you are describing are examples of **onomatopoeia**. The more specific your words are, the better!

Read your list of words to a friend — can they guess what kind of transportation you picked. Now use that list of words to write a lyric.

**A Panic**: exciting.

**Aimee Semple McPherson**: Glamorous Hollywood evangelist known for her theatrical personality.

**Coney Island**: New York resort district famous for its amusement park.

Hooray for Hollywood!  
Music by Richard A. Whiting

Hooray for Hollywood!  
That screwy, ballyhooley Hollywood,  
Where any office boy or young mechanic  
Can be a panic,  
With just a good looking pan,  
And any bar maid  
Can be a star maid  
If she dances with or without a fan.

Hooray for Hollywood!  
Where you're terrific if you're even good,  
Where anyone at all from Shirley Temple  
To Aimee Semple  
Is equally understood.  
Go out and try your luck -  
You might be Donald Duck!  
Hooray for Hollywood!

Hooray for Hollywood!  
That phony super-Coney Hollywood,  
They come from Chillicothes and Paducahs  
With their bazookas  
To get their names up in lights,  
All armed with photos from local rotos  
With their hair in ribbons and legs in tights.

Hooray for Hollywood!  
You may be homely in your neighborhood,  
But if you think that you can be an actor,  
See Mister Factor;  
He'd make a monkey look good -  
Within half an hour  
You'll look like Tyrone Power!  
Hooray for Hollywood!

## Johnny Mercer's Point of View

"Hooray for Hollywood," was written in 1938 with composer Richard A. Whiting, has become the unofficial theme song of Hollywood. To match the feel of this jazzy, energetic song, **Johnny Mercer** wrote a snappy, witty lyric. He mentions people and places that were in the headlines in the late 1930s. Read the lyric out loud. What is **Johnny Mercer** saying about Hollywood? Does Hollywood have the same kind of reputation today?

**Paducah**: City in western Kentucky near Illinois border.

**Max Factor**: Polish-born Hollywood makeup artist who started his own salon and line of cosmetics.

**Ballyhoo**: Noisy shouting, an uproar.

**Shirley Temple**: Child star of the 30s. Became a US Ambassador as an adult.

**Rotos**: Short for rotogravure, an early technique for printing newspaper photographs using an etched copper cylinder.

**Chillicothes**: City in southern Ohio. Formerly Ohio capital in early 1800s.

**Donald Duck**: Walt Disney character first introduced in 1934, voiced by Clarence Nash.

**Tyrone Power**: Dashing Hollywood leading man, most famous for *The Mark of Zorro* (1940).

## Johnny's Easiest Lyric to Write Took Only 9 Minutes

*The Days of Wine And Roses*  
Music by Henry Mancini

The days of wine and roses  
Laugh and run away  
Like a child at play  
Through a meadowland  
Toward a closing door,  
A door marked "Nevermore"  
That wasn't there before.

The lonely night discloses  
Just a passing breeze  
Filled with memories  
Of the golden smile that introduced me to  
The days of wine and roses and you.



## Johnny's Hardest Lyric to Write Took Over a Year

*Skylark*  
Music by Hoagy Carmichael

Skylark,  
Have you anything to say to me?  
Won't you tell me where my love can be?  
Is there a meadow in the mist  
Where someone's waiting to be kissed?

Skylark,  
Have you seen a valley green with Spring  
Where my heart can go a-journeying,  
Over the shadows and the rain  
To a blossom covered lane?

And in your lonely flight,  
Haven't you heard the music in the night?  
Wonderful music,  
Faint as a "will-o'-the-wisp",  
Crazy as a loon,  
Sad as a gypsy serenading the moon!

(Oh) Skylark,  
I don't know if you can find these things,  
But my heart is riding on your wings,  
So, if you see them anywhere,  
Won't you lead me there?

## NOW YOU KNOW...

**CHORUS**: A stanza that is repeated throughout a song. Usually the title of a song is in the chorus. In "Jingle Bells," the chorus is the part that begins "Jingle Bells, Jingle Bells, Jingle all the way..."

**STANZA**: A division or section of a lyric or poem. A stanza is usually four to eight lines long.

**VERSE**: Sometimes used as another word for stanza. A verse also means the stanzas that come in between the choruses. In "Jingle Bells," the verse begins "Dashing through the snow, in a one horse open sleigh..."

## WORD COLLAGE

Johnny wrote one of America's favorite songs of all time about Hollywood. Could you write a similar song about New York City?

1 Flip through the pages of magazines and newspapers and cut out words and images that you think represent New York City today. The pictures could be of buildings, people, fashion, culture, art, music, anything! Choose words to go along with the photos.

2 Now make a collage on a piece of heavy paper or cardboard with all of these images. There you have it! Your own view of New York City today, just like Johnny's word collage of 1936 Hollywood.

**An extra tip:** If you paste everything on an empty shoe box, you'll have a great container to put all your special things in or a cool gift to give to someone else!

The World According to Mercer  
Writing a song can be easy and quick  
or it can be difficult and take a very long time.

# TRY THIS



## Growing Up: A Timeline

### In the Life of Johnny...

**1909:** Johnny Mercer born in Savannah, GA on November 18th.

**1909:** Influenced by the scenic countryside, regional African-American music, concerts in the park, and local dances.

**1919:** Johnny Mercer turns 10.

**1920's:** Buys jazz recordings, including Paul Whiteman.

**1922-27:** Attends Woodberry Forest School in Orange, VA.

**1927:** Family business fails.

**Late 1920's:** Johnny moves to New York City.

**1930:** Writes "Out of Breath" with Everett Miller for *The Garrick Gaieties*.

**1931:** Marries Ginger Meehan, June 8th.

**1933:** Has first hit, "Lazybones" written with Hoagy Carmichael.

**1935:** Moves to Hollywood.

**1938:** First Oscar® nomination for Best Song, "Jeepers Creepers" written with Harry Warren.

**1939:** Johnny Mercer turns 30.

### In the U.S.A. . . .

**1911:** Irving Berlin writes "Alexander's Ragtime Band."

**1914:** World War I begins.

**1915:** New Orleans jazz thrives.

**1917:** First jazz recordings made.

**1918:** Armistice signed, ending World War I.

**1919:** The 18th Amendment outlaws the sale of alcohol (Prohibition).

**1920:** Paul Whiteman, "The King of Jazz" tours Europe.

**1921:** The radio era begins

**1924:** 2.5 million radios in U.S. homes

**1927:** First "talkie" (movie with sound), *The Jazz Singer*.

**1929:** Stock market crashes, Great Depression begins.

**1930:** U.S. population 122 million. 115 million attend movies weekly.

**1932:** Franklin D. Roosevelt elected President.

**1933:** Adolf Hitler comes to power in Germany.

### In the Life of Johnny...

**1942:** Co-founds Capitol Records, serves as the first president.

**1944:** Writes lyrics and music to "G.I. Jive."

**1945:** Has three records at #1.

**1946:** Wins first Oscar® on ninth nomination, for "On The Atchison, Topeka and the Santa Fe" written with Harry Warren.

**1949:** Johnny Mercer turns 40.

**1951:** Wins second Oscar® for "In the Cool, Cool, Cool of the Evening" written with Hoagy Carmichael.

**1956:** Writes lyrics to theatrical production *Li'l Abner* with Gene DePaul.

**1959:** Johnny Mercer turns 50.

**1961:** Wins third Oscar® for "Moon River" written with Henry Mancini.

**1962:** Back River in Savannah, GA renamed Moon River.

**1962:** Wins fourth Oscar® for "The Days of Wine and Roses" written with Henry Mancini.

**1969:** Establishes The Songwriters Hall of Fame with Abe Olman and Howie Richmond.

**1969:** Johnny Mercer turns 60.

**1976:** Dies June 25.

### In the U.S.A. . . .

**1939:** World War II begins.

**1942:** Magnetic recording tape invented.

**1945:** End of World War II.

**1946:** End of "Big Band Era" as many groups dissolve.

**1948:** Long-playing record (LP) invented.

**1950:** 1.5 million TV sets in U.S.

**1951:** 15 million TVs in U.S.

**1956:** Elvis Presley and rock-and-roll become popular.

**1961:** Alan Shepard makes first U.S. spaceflight.

**1963:** President John F. Kennedy assassinated.

**1966:** Color TV becomes popular; 78 million TV sets in U.S.

**1969:** U.S. astronauts land on moon.

**1976:** U.S. celebrates Bicentennial.

# Mercer's World and Ours

Johnny Mercer's career lasted for more than forty years. Fads and fashions change from year to year, but Johnny Mercer kept writing hit after hit, always staying up with the times.

Here is a sampling of what was "in" during the decades when Johnny Mercer was most popular.

## SLANG:

### 1930s

- Bee's Knees:** extraordinary person or thing
- Clam:** a dollar
- Hard Boiled:** tough
- Hep:** hip, in the know
- Horn:** a telephone
- Jeepers Creepers:** wow!
- A Panic:** exciting
- A Scream:** hilarious
- Shake a Leg:** hurry up
- Swell:** great

### 1940s

- Beat:** exhausted
- Bop:** dance wildly
- Canary:** a female jazz singer
- Cat:** a jazz musician
- Cut a Rug:** to dance or jitterbug
- Dig:** to understand
- Flip your Wig:** go crazy
- Jive:** nonsense
- Take a Gander:** to look at
- Whistle Dixie:** to be mistaken

### 1950s

- Blast:** good time
- Boss:** great
- Bread:** money
- Dibs:** a claim
- Gig:** a job
- Ginchiest:** coolest
- Go Ape:** very excited
- Kick:** a fun thing
- Made in the Shade:** success guaranteed
- No Sweat:** no problem

## GAMES:

### 1930s

- Sorry™
- Backgammon™
- Monopoly®
- Bingo™

### 1940s

- Candyland™
- Chutes and Ladders™
- Clue™

### 1950s

- Cootie™
- Risk™
- Yahtzee™
- Scrabble™

## FADS:

### 1930s

- Dance Marathons
- Goldfish Swallowing
- Roller Skating
- Jitterbug

### 1940s

- Slumber Parties
- Soda Shops
- Lindy Hop
- Roller Rinks

### 1950s

- Poodle Skirts
- Flat Top Haircuts
- TV Dinners
- Hula Hoops

**FILL IN YOUR OWN CHART:** Who are the stars you admire? What slang do you and your friends use? What games and fads are popular? Draw or paste in pictures.

Stars:

## STARS:

### 1930s

- Shirley Temple
- Clark Gable
- Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers

### 1940s

- Bing Crosby
- Betty Grable
- Humphrey Bogart

### 1950s

- Jimmy Stewart
- Marilyn Monroe
- John Wayne

Slang:

Fads and Games:

# TRY THESE

## TIME CAPSULE

Imagine you and your class were going to create a time capsule for this year.

Pick ten items that surround you that represent life as you know it today. Were these items around or available ten, twenty or even thirty years ago?

You'll be surprised how many things were created and developed not much more before you were born, if not after!

Compare today's slang with the slang of the past. Are there words you still use today?

What fads and games from the past are still around? What do you think makes some things last?

# Mercer Today

Johnny's songs "Too Marvelous for Words" and "Hit the Road to Dreamland" both had something called a patter section. In a patter section, the singer would riff on the lyrics of the song the way a rap artist does today. Check out these "raps."

## Too Marvelous for Words

Music by Richard A. Whiting

I search for phrases  
To sing your praises,  
But there aren't any magic adjectives  
To tell you all you are.

You're just too marvelous,  
Too marvelous for words,  
Like glorious, glamorous,  
And that old standby, amorous.

It's all too wonderful,  
I'll never find the words  
That say enough,  
Tell enough -  
I mean, they just aren't swell enough,  
You're much too much  
And just too very very!  
To ever be in Webster's Dictionary,

And so I'm borrowing  
A love song from the birds  
To tell you that you're marvelous,  
Too marvelous for words.

## Too Marvelous for Words **RAP**

Adorable  
And amorous  
And glorious  
And glamorous  
Are insufficient when applied to you.  
To be euphemistical.  
To be eulogistical,  
I have to originate a million words  
That no one ever knew.  
I try to be logical and sensible,  
But I'm incomprehensible  
Whenever I begin to find a phrase;  
For they never tell enough-  
I've already told you  
No vocabulary's swell enough.  
What'll I do to say  
The things I have in mind?  
It's really absurd  
There isn't a word to fit you.  
No matter where I look,  
I only seem to find  
Delectable,  
Delirious,  
Magnificently mysterious.  
You're simply too spectacular  
To be in my vernacular,  
And so you see  
I'm forced to go to the birds.  
The reason must be quite apparent,  
That you are just too  
Utterly, utterly wonderful  
And marvelous for words.



LEFT: Johnny in a recording session.

## Hit the Road to Dreamland

Music by Harold Arlen

Twinkle, twinkle, twinkle, twinkle goes the star.  
Twinkle, twinkle, twinkle, twinkle, there you are.  
Time for all good children to hit the hay.  
Cock-a-doodle, doodle, doodle,  
Brother, it's another day,  
We should be on our way!

Bye bye, baby  
Time to hit the road to dreamland,  
You're my baby  
Dig you in the land of Nod.  
Hold tight, baby,  
We'll be swinging up in dreamland,  
All night, baby,  
Where the little cherubs trod.  
Look at that knocked-out moon,  
Been a-blowin' his top in the blue,  
Never saw the likes of you;  
(What an angel)

Bye, bye, baby,  
Time to hit the road to dreamland,  
Don't cry, baby,  
It was divine  
But the rooster has finally crowed,  
Time to hit the road.

## Hit the Road to Dreamland **RAP**

King Solomon once in his wisdom said,  
"There's nothin' quite like a good feather bed!"  
That may not be just the written word,  
So don't quote me cause I only heard,  
And then, I coulda misunderstood,  
But if he didn't say that, then he certainly should,  
Cause in this world with its killin' pace  
A man's got to find a good restin' place.  
It's early to bed, early to rise  
Makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise!

YES, YES, GOOD CHILDREN,  
TIME TO HIT THE ROAD!

With everything electric and mechanized  
If you do get nervous I ain't surprised.  
But listen, good people, you can't cure ills  
With capsules, tablets, and vitamin pills,  
And the only thing to rest your head  
Is a good night's sleep in a quilted bed.  
So just resolve to be good and firm  
Cause the early bird is gonna catch the worm.

YES, YES, GOOD CHILDREN,  
TIME TO HIT THE ROAD!

# WHY NOT?

## COMMERCIAL BREAK

Pick one of your favorite songs. As you listen to the lyrics, try to think of a product (a favorite game, food or piece of clothing) that the lyrics of the song could also describe.

For example, Johnny Mercer's song, "Spring, Spring, Spring" is about the season, but the word 'spring' could remind you of jumping. The song could be used in a TV commercial about your favorite brand of sneakers.

Using that idea, write a commercial with members of your class or your friends.

# Nature Lyrics

**Johnny Mercer** was described as an "outdoor writer" because many of his lyrics use images from nature (places, plants, animals, etc.). He used these images to describe a particular mood or feeling in each song. Here are samples from lyrics **Johnny Mercer** wrote using two of the seasons:

## Spring, Spring, Spring

Music by Gene de Paul

Oh, the barnyard is busy,  
In a regular tizzy,  
And the obvious reason  
Is because of the season.  
Ma Nature's lyrical

With her yearly miracle-  
Spring, Spring, Spring!

All the henfolk are hatchin'  
While their menfolk are scratchin'  
To insure the survival  
Of each brand new arrival.  
Each nest is twittering,  
They're all baby sitting-  
Spring, Spring, Spring!

## Summer Wind

Music by Henry Mayer

The summer wind came blowing in across the sea;  
It lingered there to touch your hair and walk with me.  
All summer long we sang a song and strolled the golden sand.

Two sweethearts and the summer wind.  
Like painted kites, the days and nights went flying by.  
The world was new beneath a blue umbrella sky.  
Then, softer than a piper man.  
One day it called to you.

**Johnny Mercer paints "word pictures":**  
a blue umbrella sky, a dance pavilion in the rain all shuttered down.

**He also uses words that sound like the subject:** busy, tizzy, twittering, baby-sitting all have the sound of spring's energy and life.

"All summer long we sang a song and strolled the golden sand" --- all the "s" sounds make the sound of the summer wind.

BELOW: Johnny and Nat King Cole.



# A Lyrical Miracle

Why do so many song lyrics rhyme? Rhymes make lyrics easier to understand and remember when you hear them. Rhymes also give words a musical quality. Try reading "Spring, Spring, Spring!" out loud. Even if you don't know the melody of the song, you can hear how the words have a "tune" of their own.



There are **single rhymes** (sea/me, sky/by), **double rhymes** (busy/tizzy, reason/season) and **triple rhymes** (lyrical/miracle).

Some words that are spelled alike don't rhyme: Bough/enough, pant/want. Can you think of other examples?

Rhyming words don't need to be spelled alike: true/do/new. Can you add more rhymes to this list that spell the "oo" sound in a different way?

Johnny's lyrics are exact rhymes. But some songs today use near rhymes like "home/alone;" or "time/find." Notice how the "o" sound in "home" is the same sound as the "o" in "alone." But "home" ends with an "m" and "alone" ends with an "n" sound. These are not exact rhymes but are near rhymes. Can you tell why "time/find" are near rhymes?

# WHY WHITS

## OUTDOOR LYRICS

Imagine Johnny Mercer sitting outside, listening to his surroundings as he wrote lyrics about the seasons. You can do the same thing.

- 1 Sit outside for 3 minutes without saying a word.
- 2 Write down all the things you see. What do you hear? What do you smell? How do you feel?

- 3 Now try writing a lyric using all of the things you described in your three minute experience. If you're feeling brave, try singing a melody with the words you just wrote. Don't think about the notes, just what comes naturally to you. You may have just written a smash hit song!

# Character Lyrics

Some of **Johnny Mercer's** lyrics describe a particular character - a "photograph in words":

## I'm An Old Cowhand (From the Rio Grande)

Music by Johnny Mercer

I'm an old cowhand  
From the Rio Grande,  
But my legs ain't bowed  
And my cheeks ain't tanned.  
I'm a cowboy who never saw a cow.  
Never roped a steer 'cause I don't know  
how,  
And I sho' ain't fixin' to start in now.  
Yippy I O Ki Ay,  
Yippy I O Ki Ay.

## Laura

Music by David Raksin

Laura is the face in the misty light,  
Footsteps that you hear down the hall,  
The laugh that floats on a summer night  
That you can never quite recall.

## Lazybones

Music by Hoagy Carmichael

Long as there is chicken gravy on your rice  
Ev'rything is nice.  
Long as there's watermelon on the vine,  
Ev'rything is fine.  
You got no time to work,  
You got no time to play,  
Busy doin' nothin' all the live long day.  
You won't ever change no matter what I say,  
You're just made that way.

Lazybones, sleepin' in the sun  
How you 'spec' to get your day's work done?  
Never get your day's work done,  
Sleepin' in the noonday sun.

# WHY WHIS

## CHARACTER LYRICS

Write a lyric about your favorite character from a book, TV show or movie.

- 1 Make three word lists:**
  - Adjectives that describe the character.
  - Nouns that are connected with him or her (objects, places, pieces of clothing, etc.)
  - Verbs that describe what he or she likes to do.

- 2 Make a list of words that he or she uses all the time.** Does he or she have a favorite saying or phrase? Try to capture the way he or she speaks.

- 3 Write your lyric.** Some possible ideas to start with are:
  - A lyric that is in the person's own words, like "I'm An Old Cowhand." How does he or she describe him/herself?

- A lyric that describes the person using a list ("footsteps you hear down the hall"/"laugh that floats on a summer night")

- A lyric that gives that person advice, like "Accentuate the Positive."



ABOVE: Johnny in a recording session.

BELOW: Johnny with a group of students.



I'm an Old Cowhand

# Mercer Facts

Johnny Mercer wrote more than 1,400 songs. If you listened to a different Johnny Mercer song every day, it would take you more than four years to listen to them all.

## And the Academy Award Goes to...

Johnny was nominated for an Oscar® eighteen times for Best Song, and won four times.

- Jeepers, Creepers, 1938
- I'd Know You Anywhere, 1940
- Love Of My Life, 1940
- Blues In The Night, 1941
- Dearly Beloved, 1943
- My Shining Hour, 1943
- That Old Black Magic, 1943
- Accentuate the Positive, 1946

**On The Atchison, Topeka and the Santa Fe, 1946**

**In The Cool, Cool, Cool of the Evening, 1951**

Something's Gotta Give, 1955

The Facts of Life, 1960

**Moon River, 1961**

**Days of Wine and Roses, 1962**

Charade, 1963

The Sweetheart Tree, 1965

Whistling Away The Dark, 1970

Life Is What You Make It, 1971

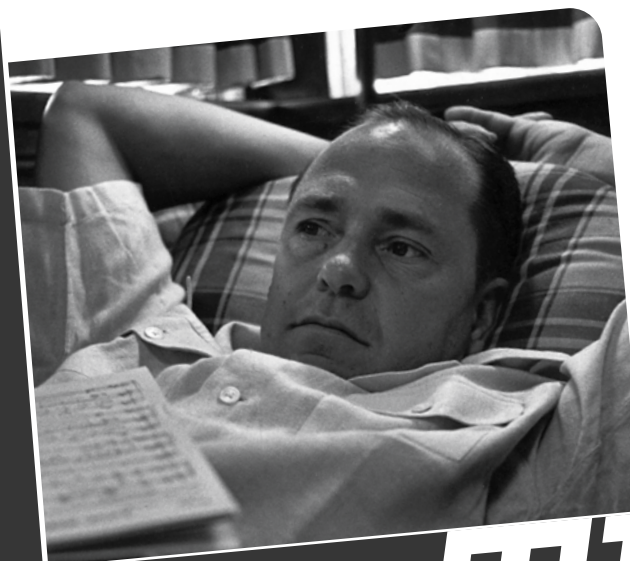
In the 1940s, he had his own radio show, **Johnny Mercer's Music Shop**.

**Johnny Mercer** liked to paint with watercolors to relax.

**Johnny Mercer** never learned to read or write music, and played the piano with one finger.

When he first moved to New York, **Johnny** worked as a messenger on Wall Street.

**Mercer** liked to tell the story that when his kids were young, Ginger would tell them to be quiet because "Daddy's working" -- and he would be lying down on the couch, with his eyes shut and a legal pad on his chest.



**Johnny Mercer** liked to write in the morning, after a good night's sleep

## Johnny Mercer on What It's Like to Write Lyrics

"There's something funny about songs --- it's like you're going out looking for something that you've never heard of. You don't know where it is, it's just up there somewhere and you can tune in on it. You get a little glimmer --- it's like you're tuning in to a musical instrument that's miles away, and you say, oh, there's something there, if I just dig hard enough, I know it'll come."

"Usually a title or simple idea comes first, and then the rest of the words just seem to fall into place."

## 20 of Johnny's Biggest Hits...

- Accentuate the Positive
- Blues in the Night
- Come Rain or Come Shine
- Days of Wine and Roses
- Dream
- Fools Rush In
- Goody Goody
- Hooray for Hollywood
- In the Cool, Cool, Cool of the Evening
- Jeepers Creepers
- Laura
- Moon River
- My Shining Hour
- On the Atchison, Topeka and the Santa Fe
- One For My Baby (And One More For the Road)
- Satin Doll
- Skylark
- Something's Gotta Give
- That Old Black Magic
- Too Marvelous For Words

## What is a Hit?

A GOLD RECORD is one that sells 500,000 copies.

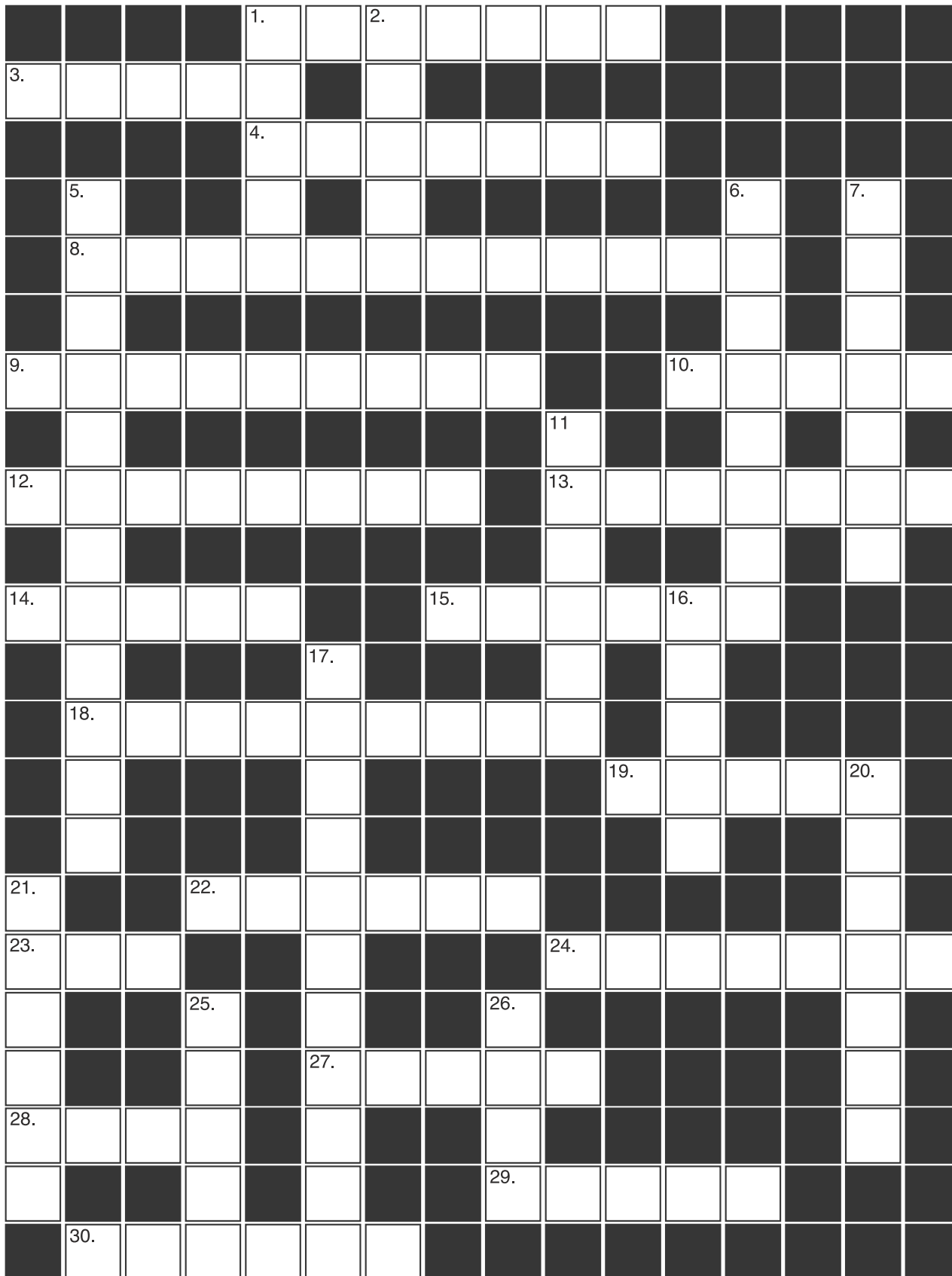
If it sells a million copies, it is PLATINUM. (Platinum is a silvery precious metal used in jewelry.)

# TRY THESE

### SAY "AH"

The doctor tells you to say "ah" when he or she wants to look down your throat because the "ah" vowel makes your throat open wide. Look in a mirror and make the following sounds: ah ee oh oo

Notice how your mouth is open wider when you say "ah" and "oh" than when you say "ee" or "oo." Most of the time, "open" vowels are easier to sing than "closed" vowels. Lyricists try to use as many open vowels as they can. This can be hard to do, because a lot of songs use the words "me" and "you" -- and "ee" and "oo" are "closed" vowels.



## Cross Lyric Puzzle

Now that you've had a chance to read through and participate in all of the exercises in the book, try to complete this puzzle! Have fun!

### ACROSS

1. An early style of jazz music, well known in the 1920s
3. When one word sounds the same as another because they share the same vowel sound
4. A building where you go to see great performances like plays, musicals and dance
8. Words that sound like the object they describe (ie, fizz, whirr, buzz)
9. Honesty. When you do the right thing you have \_\_\_\_\_.
10. Thirties slang for "exciting." Any "young mechanic can be a \_\_\_\_\_."
12. Someone who writes the words to a song
13. Johnny Mercer's middle name
14. Another word for stanza, or the part of a song that comes before the chorus
15. \_\_\_\_\_ for Hollywood (backwards)
18. Johnny Mercer worked with many different \_\_\_\_\_ (plural, people who write music)
19. The nickname for Johnny Mercer's daughter. "\_\_\_\_\_ Is Two."
22. Section of a lyric or poem, usually 4 to 8 lines long
23. "Just watch the smoke rings rise in the \_\_\_\_\_" (from "Dream")
24. Mercer collaborator \_\_\_\_\_ Whiting
27. A variety show
28. "A blossom covered \_\_\_\_\_" (from "Skylark") (backwards)
29. The main or early part. "The \_\_\_\_\_ o' the night" (backwards)
30. Mrs. Mercer

### DOWN

1. A rhythmic pattern (backwards)
2. "It's a \_\_\_\_\_ Big World"
5. The famous lyricist and composer who this book is about
6. Where 5 Down was born
7. Record company founded in 1942
11. A repeated section of a song
16. The nickname for the Academy Award
17. To work with someone else is to \_\_\_\_\_
20. Thirties star \_\_\_\_\_ Temple (backwards)
21. Composer Harry \_\_\_\_\_
25. Composer Harold \_\_\_\_\_
26. Donald \_\_\_\_\_

## You Must Have Been a Beautiful Baby

Music by Harry Warren

Does your mother realize  
The stork delivered quite a prize  
The day he left you on the fam'ly tree?

Does your dad appreciate  
That you are merely super-great,  
The miracle of any century?

If they don't, just send them both to me.

You must have been a beautiful baby,  
You must have been a wonderful child.

When you were only startin'  
To go to kindergarten,  
I bet you drove the little boys wild.

And when it came to winning blue ribbons,  
You must have shown the other kids how.  
I can see the judges' eyes  
As they handed you the prize -  
I bet you made the cutest bow!

Oh you must have been a beautiful baby,  
'Cause, baby, look at you now!

## Dream

Music by Johnny Mercer

Get in touch with that sundown fellow  
As he tiptoes across the sand.  
He's got a million kinds of stardust;  
Pick your favorite brand, and -  
Dream when you're feelin' blue,  
Dream, that's the thing to do.

Just watch the smoke rings rise in the air;  
You'll find your share  
Of memories there.

So dream when the day is through,  
Dream and they might come true.

Things never are as bad as they seem,  
So dream, dream, dream.



ABOVE: Little Johnny Mercer.

## That Old Black Magic

Music by Harold Arlen

That old black magic has me in its spell,  
That old black magic that you weave so well.  
Those icy fingers up and down my spine -  
The same old witchcraft when your eyes meet mine.

The same old tingle that I feel inside,  
And then that elevator starts its ride,  
And down and down I go,  
'Round and 'round I go,  
Like a leaf that's caught in the tide.

I should stay away,  
But what can I do?  
I hear your name  
And I'm aflame,  
Aflame with such a burning desire  
That only your kiss  
Can put out the fire.

For you're the lover I have waited for,  
The mate that fate had me created for,  
And ev'ry time your lips meet mine,  
Darling, down and down I go,  
'Round and 'round I go  
In a spin,  
Loving the spin I'm in  
Under that old black magic called love!

## I'm Old Fashioned

Music by Jerome Kern

I am not such a clever one  
About the latest fads.  
I admit I was never one  
Adored by local lads.  
Not that I ever try to be a saint,  
I'm the type that they classify as quaint.

I'm old fashioned,  
I love the moonlight,  
I love the old fashioned things:  
The sound of rain  
Upon a windowpane,  
The starry song that April sings.  
This year's fancies  
Are passing fancies,  
But sighing sighs, holding hands,  
These my heart understands.  
I'm old fashioned,  
But I don't mind it;  
That's how I want to be,  
As long as you agree  
To stay old fashioned with me.

## I Remember You

Music by Victor Schertzinger

Was it in Tahiti?  
Were we on the Nile?  
Long, long ago, say an hour or so,  
I recall that I saw your smile.

I remember you -  
You're the one who made my dream come true  
A few kisses ago. I remember you-  
You're the one who said, "I love you, too.  
I do, didn't you know?"

I remember, too, a distant bell  
And stars that fell like rain out of the blue.

When my life is through  
And the angels ask me to recall  
The thrill of them all,  
Then I shall tell them  
I remember you.

RIGHT: Johnny with Margaret Whiting

## Fools Rush In

Music by Rube Bloom

"Romance is a game for fools,"  
I used to say.  
A game I thought I'd never play.  
"Romance is a game for fools,"  
I said and grinned;  
Then you passed by,  
And here am I  
Throwing caution to the wind.

Fools rush in  
Where angels fear to tread,  
And so I come to you, my love,  
My heart above my head.  
Though I see  
The danger there,  
If there's a chance for me  
Then I don't care.  
Fools rush in  
Where wise men never go,  
But wise men never fall in  
love,  
So how are they to know?  
When we met,  
I felt my life begin;  
So open up your heart  
And let this fool rush in.





## AC-CENT-TCHU-ATE THE POSITIVE

WORDS BY JOHNNY MERCER

MUSIC BY HAROLD ARLEN

1 GATH-ER 'ROUND ME, EV-'RY-BOD-Y, GATH-ER  
 5 'ROUND ME WHILE I PREACH SOME FEEL A SER-MON COM-IN'  
 6 ON ME. THE TOP-IC WILL BE SIN AND THATS WHAT I'M "A-GIN" IF YOU  
 9 WAN-NA HEAR MY STO-RY THEN SET-TLE BACK AND JUST SIT TIGHT  
 12 WHILE I START RE-VIEW-IN' THE AT-TI-TUDE OF DO-IN'  
 15 RIGHT. YOU'VE GOT TO AC-CENT-  
 20 TCHU-ATE THE POS-I-TIVE, E-LIM MY-NATE THE NEG-A-TIVE LATCH ON

24 TO THE AF-FIRM-A-TIVE, DON'T MESS WITH MIS-TER IN-BE-TWEEN. YOU'VE GOT TO SPREAD JOY  
 28 UP TO THE MAX-I-MUM, BRING GLOOM DOWN TO THE MIN-I-MUM HAVE FAITH  
 32 OR PAN-DE-MO-NI-UM LI'-BLE TO WALK UP-ON THE SCENE. TO IL-LUS-TRATE MY LAST RE-  
 36 MARK JO-NAH IN THE WHALE, NO-AH IN THE ARK, WHAT DID THEY DO JUST WHEN  
 40 EV-'RY THING LOOKED SO DARK? "MAN" THEY SAID, "WE BET-TER AC-CENT-  
 44 TCHU-ATE THE POS-I-TIVE, E-LIM-MY-NATE THE NEG-A-TIVE, LATCH ON  
 48 TO THE AF-FIRM-A-TIVE, DON'T MESS WITH MIS-TER IN-BE-TWEEN!" NO!  
 51 DON'T MESS WITH MIS-TER IN-BE-TWEEN.



## Books:

Bach, Bob and Ginger Mercer. *Johnny Mercer: The Life, Times, and Song Lyrics of Our Huckleberry Friend*. Atlanta, Ga.: Cherokee Pub., 2009.

Kimball, Robert, et al. *The Complete Lyrics of Johnny Mercer*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009.

Eskew, Glenn T. *Johnny Mercer: Southern Songwriter for the World*. Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 2013.

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## Music Featuring Johnny Mercer:

*Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil: Music From and Inspired By the Motion Picture*, Various Artists - Warner Brothers, 1997.

*Ella Fitzgerald Sings the Johnny Mercer Songbook* - Verve, 1997 (original release date 1964).

*Blues in the Night: The Johnny Mercer Songbook*, Various Artists - Verve, 1997.

*Seven Brides for Seven Brothers: Original Motion Picture Soundtrack* - Rhino Movie Music, 1996.

*Two of a Kind*, Bobby Darin and Johnny Mercer - Atlantic, 1990 (original release date 1961).

*Too Marvelous For Words: Capitol Sings Johnny Mercer* - Capitol, 1989.

*Moon River: Johnny Mercer Sings the Johnny Mercer Songbook* - Sanctuary, 2009.

*Mercer Sings Mercer* - EMI, 2009. (original release date 1944).

## Films Featuring the Music of Johnny Mercer:

*Johnny Mercer: The Dream's On Me* produced by Clint Eastwood, 2009. Released by Turner Classic Movies.

*Blues in the Night* starring Priscilla Lane and Richard Whorf, 1941. Released by Warner Brothers.

*Breakfast At Tiffany's* starring Audrey Hepburn, 1961. Released by Paramount.

*Daddy Long Legs* starring Fred Astaire and Leslie Caron, 1955. Released by Twentieth Century Fox.

*The Harvey Girls* starring Judy Garland, 1946. Released by Warner Brothers.

*Hollywood Hotel* starring Dick Powell and directed by Busby Berkeley, 1937. Released by Warner Brothers.

*Li'l Abner* based on comic strip by Al Capp, 1959. Released by Paramount.

*Rhythm On the Range* starring Bing Crosby, 1936. Released by Universal Studios.

*Robin Hood* animated film starring Phil Harris, 1973. Released by Walt Disney Studios.

*Top Banana* starring Phil Silvers, 1954. Released by MGM Studios.

## Web Sites:

### The Johnny Mercer Foundation:

<http://www.johnnymercerfoundation.org>

<http://www.johnnymercer.org>

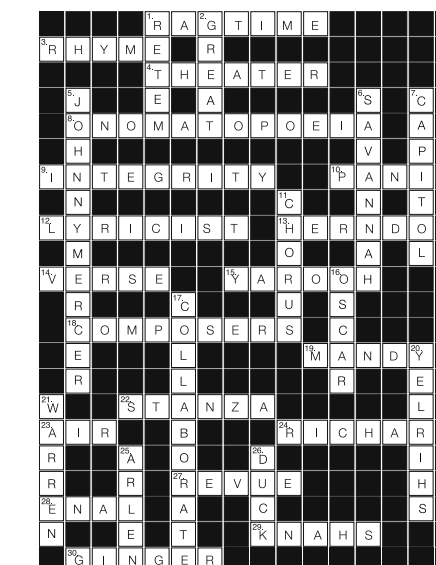
### Johnny Mercer Collections at Georgia State University:

<http://library.gsu.edu/mercerc100>

### Johnny Mercer Research Guide at Georgia State University:

<http://research.library.gsu.edu/mercerc>

Answers to the crossword on **page 26**



# Resources



THE JOHNNY MERCER  
FOUNDATION

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**JOHNNYMERCER.ORG**

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**JM**

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