

## **Ray Evans 1915-2007**

Ray Evans was born on February 4, 1915 in Salamanca, New York. As Ray was growing up his heroes were the big New York show writers, especially Cole Porter. He got first hand experience watching the movie musicals that came to the theatre in Salamanca. His home town honored him with the renaming of the restored Seneca Theatre in his honor and the first block on the Cattaraugus County living Arts Association Walk of Dreams.

Evans met Ray Livingston in 1934 at the University of Pennsylvania's Beta Sigma Rho fraternity. They broke into the music business playing dance tunes with a college band on cruise ships that traveled the waters from the Caribbean to Curacao. At the end of their last cruise, in 1937, Ray suggested that they stay in New York City and become songwriters. And, thus, the team was born.

The team's first break came from a music publisher, Jack Mills, or rather from his secretary. By winning her confidence she arranged for them to see Mr. Mills, who agreed to publish the song, "Monday Mourning On Saturday Night".

After a stint writing special material for the comedy team of Olsen and Johnson, Livingston and Evans landed in Hollywood where they lived off World War II ration coupons while ensconced in an office at Universal Studios. During this time, they wrote the score for the movie called "Swing Hostess" featuring Capitol recording star, Martha Tilton. That led to a meeting with lyricist Johnny Mercer, president of Capitol Records.

Through Mercer's intercession, Evans and Livingston were buttonholed to come up with a novelty song suited to the boisterous style of Betty Hutton. They found a tune they had written seven years before called "Stuff Like That There." It became a smash hit for Hutton and almost 50 years later Better Midler reprised it successfully in the film, "For The Boys". Another Hutton song, "I'm Just a Square in the Social Circle," led to Paramount Studios signing Evans and Livingston to a long-term contract for \$200 a week.

Evans and Livingston's first assignment was to write a song to the title "To Each His Own." The song cemented the team's relationship with Paramount. It became one of the top 10 selling songs of 1946 and was recorded by The Ink Spots, The Modernaires, Tony Martin, Eddie Howard and Freddie Martin. For several weeks 5 of the top selling records were versions of "To Each His Own."

The team won their first Academy Award for "Buttons and Bows," from the Bob Hope comedy "The Paleface." Another Evans and Livingston tune that Bob Hope introduced, didn't win an Oscar, but achieves immortality every Christmas season – "Silver Bells." Sitting on Evans' desk at the time was a small silver bell that provided inspiration for the song. They stared at the bell and wrote a song they entitled "Tinkle Bell." If they had kept that title, the song would surely have been doomed to fail. Livingston's wife questioned the choice of the title as she pointed out tinkle has a bathroom connotation. They focused again on the silver bell on the desk and changed the title to "Silver Bells."

Two songs, perhaps, best exemplify the solid underpinnings of Livingston and Evans' lifelong collaboration. From the sublime to the ridiculous, they are "Mona Lisa" and the TV theme song "Mr. Ed."

The team tells the story how they chased Nat King Cole around for a year before he recorded "Mona Lisa." Paramount finally pulled some strings and they got to see him at his house. While Livingston was trying to sing the song for Mr. Cole, a little girl was running around the room bugging him – that was Natalie. They couldn't have known then that the song would have a rebirth on her "unforgettable" album a quarter century later.

As freelancers in the 1960's, Evans and Livingston could write a survival guide on how they rolled with the knockout punch that rock music delivered to the traditional songwriting business.

Although the "Mr. Ed" theme was just another assignment designed to pout groceries on the table during the lean times, the song has lived on in parody as one of many disposable pop-culture anthems viewed fondly by a generation of baby-boomers raised on the tube.

Evans and Livingston received their star on the Hollywood Boulevard Walk of Fame in 1995. In 1996, the Motion Picture Academy honored them with an evening of their songs and accomplishments. Also in 1996, Columbia Records released two CD's containing twenty-three Evans and Livingston songs in their Great American Composers series.

Mr. Evans, who is a Wharton School graduate and handy with numbers, keeps meticulous books on the sales of their songs, and has come up with the following statistics: Evans and Livingston have had twenty-six songs that have sold over a million records or more, and the total record sales of their songs has exceeded 400 million.

In 1998, Evans was the second recipient of Saint Bonaventure University's Arts Award. The award honors a person from the region who has achieved distinction in the visual or performing arts. In 2000, Evans was named as a honorary member of the Saint Bonaventure University's Arts Council.

Evans and Livingston have received three Academy Awards for their film songs "Button and Bows" from the 1948's *The Paleface*, "Mona Lisa" from 1950's *Captain Carey*, and "Que Sera, Sera," from *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1956). The duo received Oscar nominations for "The Cat and the Canary" from *Why Girls Leave Home* (1945), "Tammy" from *Tammy and the Bachelor* (1957), "Almost in Your Arms," the love song from *Houseboat* (1958) and "Dear Heart" from *Dear Hear* (1964).

Mr. Evans currently resides in California.