



Hershey Felder as Irving Berlin  
in theatre fundraiser

## Description

# Former Montrealer performs a special musical tribute to the legendary American songwriter

By **Byron Toben**

This past weekend began on Friday with the 75th anniversary of VE (Victory in Europe) day as celebrated in the songs performed by England's Vera Lynn (now 103 ) over the years. The weekend ended with a Mother's Day special musical tribute to legendary American songwriter **Irving Berlin** (who lived until 101). This was performed by Montreal-born **Hershey Felder** from his current home in Florence, Italy.

Proceeds from this digital event were donated to many theatres forced into silence during this pandemic period.

I was not able to find excerpts from this one-time streamed performance, but you can view this three-minute TV promo by Mr. Felder to a Chicago audience in 2016.

Short of waiting for Mr. Felder to bring this or others of his solo performances to Montreal, I heartedly suggest pulling up a chair and luxuriating in this wonderful **1988 tribute at Carnegie Hall** to Mr. Berlin on his 100th birthday at the end of this article. It lasts about an hour and 34 minutes which you can stop, backtrack or resume depending on your schedule.

But first, a word about Mr. Felder. After attending McGill University, he moved to the USA where he studied piano, acting and singing, becoming a scholar in residence at Harvard. He became interested in the career and music of **George Gershwin** which resulted in his creating a solo show telling Gershwin's story while playing and singing his music. This led to a unique niche as he undertook similar shows of other musical greats like **Chopin, Beethoven, Tchaikovsky** and others. This resulted in tours in Europe as well as the USA, with extended stays in California, Chicago and New York.



For the Berlin show, he was contacted by Berlin’s daughters, who requested that he embark on the project. Along the way, he met and married **Kim Campbell**, a former prime minister of Canada.

Berlin’s output included twenty Broadway plays and 18 Hollywood movies.

What a natural for a future gig at the Segal Centre!

Berlin’s first big hit was *Alexander’s Ragtime Band*. Toward the end of his career, what to go out with better than *There’s No Business Like Show Business*. In between, 1600 songs including classics like *Always*, *Blue Skies*, *Easter Parade*, *White Christmas*, *Putting on the Ritz*, *God Bless America*, etc. Berlin’s output included twenty Broadway plays and 18 Hollywood movies.

As promised above, here is the 1988 Carnegie tribute, featuring a ton of famous performers and some rare clips of Berlin himself.

**QUIZ →** *In which play, and by which great playwright, is Alexander’s Ragtime Band a key plot element?*

(This does not include the movie so titled.) You can answer our quiz by leaving your answer in a comment on our [Facebook page](#).

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**Byron Toben**, a past president of The Montreal Press Club, has been WestmountMag.ca’s theatre reviewer since July 2015. Previously, he wrote for since terminated web sites Rover Arts and Charlebois Post, print weekly The Downtowner and print monthly The Senior Times. He also is an expert consultant on U.S. work permits for Canadians.

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