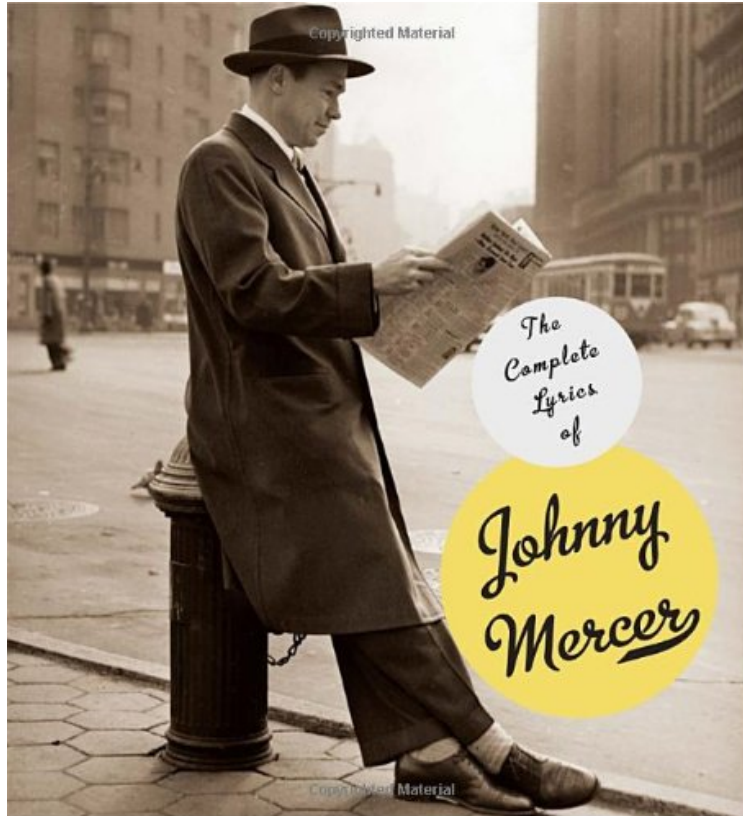


The Complete Lyrics of Johnny Mercer

Johnny Mercer, Robert Kimball, Barry Day, Miles Kreuger, Eric Davis
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Johnny Mercer, Robert Kimball, Barry Day, Miles Kreuger, Eric Davis : The Complete Lyrics of Johnny Mercer before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Complete Lyrics of Johnny Mercer:

48 of 48 people found the following review helpful. Ira Gershwin was wrong: Johnny Mercer was a poet. By Samuel C. Ira Gershwin has the oft-quoted line: "Any resemblance between popular song lyrics and actual poetry is purely coincidental." He must not have been very familiar with Johnny Mercer's work. Mercer doesn't display the cosmopolitan wit, mordant ironies, and dazzling word play of Cole Porter. Nor does he exhibit the finely honed literary skills and heart-breaking personal vulnerability (thinly disguised by ironic, verbal defense mechanisms) of Lorenz Hart. But Johnny Mercer is said to have more #1 songs than any other lyricist, and he's clearly the favorite of the great American singers. When Ella Fitzgerald did her landmark Great American Songbook series for Verve records beginning in the 1950s, each of the fourteen albums was devoted to a composer--with one exception: The Johnny Mercer Songbook (Verve, 1964). Numerous similar recordings devoted exclusively to Mercer have followed. What's the attraction of Johnny Mercer? First, and maybe foremost, he's a Southern American writer. He knows "Southern Gothic," Southern vernacular and black dialect, story-telling and the oral tradition. In favor of going to college, he absorbed the indigenous culture around Savannah, combing record stores for every "race record" (recordings targeted at African-American audiences) he could find. His story is similar to that of a writer like

Faulkner, whose formal education is spotty and who learned from the books in his immediate surroundings in Oxford, Mississippi. The result is a poet who is more direct and plain-spoken than most, a story-teller whose range exceeds that of practically every other lyricist, an authentic and very "American" artist whose lyrics record the sights and sounds with which all Americans can resonate, and finally the most "Romantic" lyricist of them all, dwelling not simply on love and its obsessions, rewards and punishments, but on the "natural world" and the mind's intersection with it. In song after song, he celebrates nature and the life force, or he draws upon nature for his metaphoric language about the the experience--more precisely, the "memory"--of being in love. Wordsworth insisted that poetry is the "overflow of powerful emotions recollected in tranquillity." At the end of "I Remember You," Mercer's version takes him to death's door: "When my life is through / And the Angels ask me to recall / The Thrill of it all, / I Shall tell them I REMEMBER you." They say he may have been manic-depressive, an alcoholic, a disappointed perfectionist (so what's new? the same can be said about Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Faulkner). But it's true that some of his music is light and even flippant--Goody Goody, Jeepers Creepers, Accentuate the Positive. But read the lyrics again, and more closely this time. More often than not, Mercer is subversive, radical, counter-cultural (like all great artists)--even in his novelty songs. "G. I. Jive" was a big World War II hit that he wrote and performed. But notice that he does it in black dialect and that the language, moreover, is "coded." The song is, in effect, a complete send-up of the military--the food, the inadequate equipment, the mechanical routines. One wonders if listeners were more tolerant back then or whether, like many listeners today, they simply weren't paying attention. But if you need proof of Mercer's greatness, all you need to do is sample one portion of his lyric for Hoagy Carmichael's "Skylark." Anyone who has read the Romantic poets--Wordsworth ("poetry is emotion recollected in tranquillity"), Shelley ("To a Skylark"), Keats ("To a Nightingale"), and Coleridge ("Kubla Khan")--will recognize in Mercer the same reaching for the transcendent, the sublime, and the enduring. First, some examples from the Romantics, beginning with Shelley's "To a Skylark": "What is most like thee? From rainbow clouds there flow not / Drops so bright to see, As from thy presence showers a rain of melody:" And, a bit later in the same poem, "Like a glow-worm golden" (a gratuitous reminder for most readers, no doubt, but Mercer wrote a song called "Glow Worm"). And from Coleridge's "Kubla Khan": "A savage place! / As holy and enchanted / As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted / By woman wailing for her demon-lover!" Kipling called the aforementioned Coleridge verse the greatest poetic line ever written. Perhaps so, but I'm not ashamed to put alongside it the one written by Mercer: "And in your lonely flight, haven't you heard the music in the night? Wonderful music! Faint as a will o' wisp, crazy as a loon, Sad as a gypsy serenading the moon." Like the aforementioned poets (regarding the bird's song, Keats in "To a Nightingale," finally asks, "Was it a vision or a waking dream?"), Mercer most likely never found a conclusive, definitive answer. But concerning the search for elusive, ineffable beauty, no lyricist has phrased the question more poignantly, and none has come closer to capturing that essential truth, or beauty--even if the questioner himself was all too keenly aware that the object of his search was doomed, that it was simply "Too Marvelous for Words." But as great as he was, it's his ability to touch (not merely impress or entertain) people that matters most. I know of few readers, let alone listeners, who have the intestinal fortitude to make it through these posthumous lines by Mercer (who was born in November): "And when October goes, The snow begins to fly. Above the smoky roofs I watch the planes go by. The children running home Beneath a twilight sky. Oh for the fun of them! When I was one of them! And when October goes, The same old dream appears, And you are in my arms To share the happy years. I turn my head away To hide the helpless tears. Oh how I hate to see October go." [Be prepared for a month's worth of Wednesdays devoted to Johnny Mercer, the man and his music, on TMC (Turner Movie Classics) throughout the month of November (the month of Johnny's birth one hundred years ago). Having previewed at least a part of the series, I can attest that, although Mercer's music is not always performed by America's most "high-power" singers, the liberal use of clips of Johnny Mercer himself--both in performance and in interviews--is well worth the time of anyone who admires Mercer and/or the Great American Songbook and/or American musical theater and jazz. The series is produced, incidentally, by Clint Eastwood, the jazz lover (who happens to be a film star and director) responsible for two of the art form's most noteworthy (and admittedly few) films: "Straight, No Chaser" (the definitive video profile of Thelonious Sphere Monk) and "Bird" (the feature-length docudrama about the alto saxophonist who singlehandedly (with lots of help from Dizzy Gillespie and Bud Powell) revolutionized and expanded the horizons of American music in the mid-1940s. Finally, any viewer with sensitive ears must have noticed on the soundtrack of the Clint Eastwood-Meryl Streep soaper, "The Bridges of Madison County," the music of Johnny Hartman, Dinah Washington, John Coltrane and other American jazz greats. Eastwood, to boot, is father to a talented bassist son, Kyle. The American icon is indeed Dirty Harry--but with "big ears."] [Finally, lest there be lingering suspicions that Mercer was a light-weight, this volume will surely dispel them. It's the heaviest book I've ever received from . In itself, a persuasive argument on behalf of Prime or the Kindle, take your pick.] 11 of 11 people found the following review helpful. Worthy of Johnny Mercer By G. Ware Cornell Jr. In 1967 when Bob Dylan described Smoky Robinson as "America's Greatest Living Poet", he overlooked Johnny Mercer who would live and write lyrics for another nine years. Additionally, there were others deserving of consideration. But the fundamental truth in Dylan's assessment is that good lyrics are poetry whether they be penned by Robinson, Bob Dylan, Paul McCartney, Irving Berlin, Woody Guthrie, Paul Simon or Jimmy Buffett. Determining who should be acclaimed the

greatest in such a field is impossible. But Johnny Mercer, a son of Savannah and lyricist of the American continent surely resides in that pantheon of poet songwriters. Twelve hundred songs represented his life's work. The breath and depth of this undertaking cannot be ignored. His opus ranges from anthems like "Hooray for Hollywood", complex conversational ballads like "P.S. I Love You" ("Was it dusty on the train"), lyrical lines of seeming infinite proportions in "Days of Wine and Roses", jazz standards like "That Old Black Magic", and the magical and eternal "Moon River". But this is not just a book of lyrics. The recollections of Mercer, his friends and collaborators are often included. Did you know that "Moon River" was originally supposed to be "Blue River" but a songwriter friend of Mercer's had just released a song by that name. In changing it to "Moon River" he overlooked changing one blue descriptive word. That word "huckleberry" changed the song from being merely good to a modern classic. This is not a book to read cover to cover. It is a book to take up when you have just heard "The Summer Wind" and want to read the lyrics and see if there is a story there (not really for this one). And it is perfect for the Kindle since it can never be farther from you than your Kindle. And above all this is a book for lazing by your huckleberry friend.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Superb collection
By bellczar
This is a superbly edited volume. Two friends of mine wrote biographies of Johnny Mercer, so I suppose I have more of an ax to grind than most. These "complete lyrics" volumes are truly a treasure. Too many of the sheet music collections at the music store these days merely reproduce the same narrow body of songs in repetitive volumes. The editors of Mercer's complete lyrics truly went to a lot of trouble to find unpublished songs, songs deleted from scores, drafts of songs, and the like. They mention that some of Mercer's already-published lyrics were set to new music by a well-known popular composer in the 1980s, but they don't explain how this snafu happened. Too bad that composer didn't have this book when he did it, or he would have known better.

The seventh volume in Knopfs critically acclaimed Complete Lyrics series, published in Johnny Mercers centennial year, contains the texts to more than 1,200 of his lyrics, several hundred of them published here for the first time. Johnny Mercers early songs became staples of the big band era and were regularly featured in the musicals of early Hollywood. With his collaborators, who included Richard A. Whiting, Harry Warren, Hoagy Carmichael, Jerome Kern, and Harold Arlen, he wrote the lyrics to some of the most famous standards, among them, Too Marvelous for Words, Jeepers Creepers, Skylark, Im Old-Fashioned, and That Old Black Magic. During a career of more than four decades, Mercer was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Song an astonishing eighteen times, and won four: for his lyrics to On the Atchison, Topeka, and the Santa Fe (music by Warren), In the Cool, Cool, Cool of the Evening (music by Carmichael), and Moon River and Days of Wine and Roses (music for both by Henry Mancini). Youve probably fallen in love with more than a few of Mercers songshis words have never gone out of fashionand with this superb collection, its easy to see that his lyrics elevated popular song into art.

This is the seventh volume in one of the most worthwhile scholarly enterprises of our time, the effort to collect all the lyrics of the great pop songwriters of the 20th century. . . . The scholarship is impressive . . . a labor of love . . . Amazingly prolific . . . Mercer tended to think of each lyric as complete in itself, a little poem . . . He seemed comfortable across the entirety of America, and said as much in song: Any place I hang my hat is home. But he always kept up his connection to the South, which provided him with the inspiration for much of his best work. . . . The other great lyricists had many ear-bending adjectives in their quivers. But none of them ever came up with a more perfect word for a song than Johnny Mercer did when his Southern unconscious gave him the gift of huckleberry. Barry Gewen, The New York Times Book [Mercer] could be considered the best lyricist of the last five-score years. . . . one of the most evocative writers about the American South whos ever put pen to paper. . . . Enjoying a book such as this is akin to turning on an internal iPod. . . . Mercer wrote That Old Black Magic and infused itand everything else he copiously imaginedwith that old knack magic. David Finkle, The Huffington Post
About the Author
Robert Kimball was educated at Yale College and Yale Law School. He has been the music critic of the New York Post and is the co-author or editor of many books on musical theater, including Cole, the celebrated book about Cole Porter that he edited with Brendan Gill. He also edited for the Complete Lyrics series the volumes of Cole Porter, Lorenz Hart, Ira Gershwin, Irving Berlin, and Frank Loesser. He is co-editor, with Robert Gottlieb, of Reading Lyrics. He lives in New York.
Barry Day was born in England and is an MA from Balliol College, Oxford. He has written or edited some twenty books as well as plays and musical revues showcasing the work of Dorothy Parker, P. G. Wodehouse, the Lunts, Oscar Wilde, and Sherlock Holmes. His eight books on Nol Coward include Noel Coward: The Complete Lyrics. He has also edited P. G. Wodehouse: The Complete Lyrics. He is a Trustee of the Nol Coward Foundation, a board member of Shakespeares Globe Theatre, and winner of an ASCAP Deems Taylor Award. He was awarded the Order of the British Empire for service to British Culture in the United States.
Miles Kreuger is a native New Yorker and a graduate of Columbia Grammar School and Bard College. He has been writing about musical theater and film since 1958, including the definitive study of Show Boat. In 1965, he created the worlds first academic course on the American musical, at New York University, and has since taught at Columbia, the University of Southern California, and UCLA. He is president of The Institute of the American Musical and lives in Los Angeles.
Eric Davis is an avid

student of nineteenth- and twentieth-century American popular music. He received his BA from Indiana University and is currently pursuing graduate studies in musicology at the University of Southern California.