

MUSIC

An American songbook supplement

Englewood's Gelb records his work

Why should the Great American Songbook be a closed book? "Night and Day," "My Funny Valentine," "The Way You Look Tonight,"



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NEW JERSEY ARTS

are great to be sure, says Englewood songwriter Larry Gelb. But they've been recorded and recorded and recorded.

Why not include some new Great American Songs? Songs like "I'm Not Supposed to Fall in Love," "Forever Today," and "It Didn't Happen." Songs, in short, by Larry Gelb.

"I'm hoping the Great American Songbook tradition can continue with some of this music, not to sound too presumptuous," Gelb says. "Everybody who records the old kind of music right now records the old tunes, which are great. But there's nothing new like that around."

Times have forced Gelb to be proactive.

In the past, Broadway tunesmiths wrote hits, the hits became standards and the standards were collected into albums: "The Cole Porter Songbook," "The George Gershwin Songbook," "The Rodgers and Hart Songbook."

Gelb, of necessity, is doing the whole process in reverse.

"I'll Remember Love: The Larry Gelb Songbook - Volume 1," a CD of 26 songs called from the more than 800 that Gelb has written over 40 years, is for him a first step.

The hits and the standards, hopefully, will follow. "If you write songs, you want people to hear them," Gelb says. "But the music business today is so crazy and controlled, I finally said, 'Let's do it ourselves.'"

The new album, recorded at Englewood's Bennett studios in September and released on Gelb's IAM label, is out just in time for Christmas. And Gelb has carefully picked five of his songs, including "Some Other Christmas," to create a stocking stuffer for the troops in Iraq.

*"Some other Christmas when peace is near
I'll come and sing you this song I hear
But I'm still listenin' and learnin'
And some other Christmas our love will last."*

This and four other songs from the new album are part of a special CD that Gelb is sending to the 101st Airborne Division.

"This is a Christmas they unfortunately won't be here for," Gelb says. "Gelb, though a do-it-yourselfer, is no



BETH DALITZ/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Songwriter Larry Gelb, at his piano in Englewood, has recorded the first of 10 songbooks, "I'll Remember Love: The Larry Gelb Songbook - Volume 1."

dilettante. He's written scores for films ("Dances Sacred and Profane," 1987; "Brain Twisters," 1991), musicals that have run off-Broadway, and — as an accomplished jazz pianist — released five albums. He's taught jazz at the University of California and toured with Buddy DeFranco and the Glenn Miller Orchestra.

He's hoping that his new album, which features six Broadway pros as vocalists and a four-piece band led by Gelb himself, will attract singers to his songs and producers to the original musicals that many of them came from.

"The Caterpillar Song," "Shidach" and "The Definition of Love" are among the Gelb shows that had a brief off-Broadway runs in the 1970s, '80s and '90s, but have yet to become the next "Lion King."

That's no surprise with Broadway the way it is.

"Disney owns half of Broadway now, and they're recycling their old movies," he says. "There's nobody who nurtures

[a show] from beginning to end. It's all just, 'Let's make a musical out of "Rocky." There's nobody there, just a corporation.'"

Many of the tunes on "I'll Remember Love: The Larry Gelb Songbook - Volume 1" (there are plans for 10 more volumes), with titles like "As Near to

You As Love," "Waiting for My Rosebuds," and "Love So Dear," is a sound like they could have been sung in a smoky '40s nightclub by a chanteuse in a buckles dress. And not by accident.

Gelb, though born on the cusp of the rock era (1952, Scranton, Pa.), is spiritually descended from an easier, breezier age of songwriting. His melodies are lush, his sentiments civilized, his rhyme schemes often sophisticated: "New York is contagious, in this outrageous age."

He's not the only modern songwriter who wishes he was pointing the Broadway pavement in 1925, when Jerome Kern, Irving Berlin and the Gershwin brothers were in full flower.

"That kind of music hasn't happened in a long time," he says. "I want to keep it going and hope it comes back." Gelb does have one leg up on some of the other would-be Gershwins out there: his jazz background.

One reason certain Tin Pan Alley songs have endured is that their "changes" appealed to jazz musicians, who recorded them over and over and kept them in the public ear. Gelb has a jazzman's instincts about what musicians like to play.

"The people who keep these songs alive are jazz musicians," he says. "I think like a songwriter, but I have a very strong jazz background. These songs are already all set up for jazz musicians to play."

Clara won't be in a two-piece bathing suit, and her "Nutcracker" prince won't be wearing a snorkel. But the very idea of staging "The Nutcracker" in Araba — even a traditional version with Victorian costumes, Christmas trees and dancing snowflakes — is intriguing enough.

"They've never had a traditional 'Nutcracker' there at all," says Adriana Kozlov, assistant director of Leonid Kozlov Dance International, the 16-year-

old Ridgewood-based dance company. In January, 20 dancers from the company, along with another 11 "extras," will be traveling to the Caribbean island for four performances of the Christmas classic. Another 45 dancers from three Araba dance schools will complete the ensemble.

"We're interested to see the reaction of the local people," Kozlov says. "It's such a tradition in the U.S., and there they don't have it at all."

She and her husband, Leonid Kozlov — the Bolshoi dancer who defected to the United States in 1979 — had been taking winter vacations in Araba for years. It occurred to them that it might be fun to bring their annual production of "The Nutcracker" to warmer climes. If it works this year, it could become an annual event.

There is a scene in the musical "The King and I" in which the Siamese children express their wonder and disbelief at the idea of snow. The Kozlovs are bracing themselves for something similar.

"Over there, they decorate their palm trees," she says.

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