

B A R B A R A L E E O W E N S



SONGS
you love
TO HEAR



Background

Before rearing four children and eventually becoming a grandmother, Regent Square native Barbara Stamy was presented by The Pittsburgh Concert Society and appeared in both Civic Light Opera and Pittsburgh Playhouse productions. Beyond appearing as soloist in several oratorio performances with major choirs and orchestras, Mrs. Stamy also sang with the Shadyside Presbyterian Church Chancel Choir, was the soprano soloist at the First Church of Christ, Scientist, alto soloist at Fox Chapel Presbyterian Church, and the contralto voice in the Solo Quartet at Temple Sinai. Her professional career spanned six decades—from the mid 1940s through the early 1990s, and her vast repertoire included virtually anything ever set to music.

However, the former Barbara Lee Owens is perhaps best remembered for her live weekly radio program on KDKA during the late 1940s entitled *Songs You Love to Hear*, often referred to as *The Breakfast Cheer Coffee Show*. The half hour program was broadcast live at 7:30 p.m. every Monday evening from KDKA's studio then located in the Grant Building, airing immediately before The Perry Como Show at 8 p.m. Because of its powerful signal (50,000 clear channel watts) and before the bandwidth later became increasingly crowded, the show could be heard east of the Mississippi and from New England to Florida. Moreover, because the majority of other AM stations had to sign-off at night, KDKA became a beacon of evening family entertainment prior to television. Produced by Stan Norman with KDKA's musical director Bernie Armstrong, the popular broadcast was sponsored by Wiltman & Callahan, an advertising agency representing the Campbell family's Breakfast Cheer Coffee, owned by Campbell & Woods Company. Agency President Bob Wiltman was the liaison between Breakfast Cheer and the show, which had begun its weekly broadcasts in 1944 featuring Johnny Kirby and Betty Ellen Morris.

Late in 1946, while taking nine graduate credits as a graduate teaching assistant in biology at the University of Pittsburgh during the day and singing with “dance bands” at night, Barbara was recruited to audition for the show. That “audition” was a live radio broadcast of the program on January 5, 1947. Among the six songs she performed for her debut appearance that evening was “Someday My Prince Will Come”, which is included among the fourteen tracks on this compact disk. Barbara was invited back to substitute for Betty Ellen again in March, and eventually replaced her permanently on May 5th.

Barbara became an overnight sensation, leading to unprecedented requests for public appearances throughout western Pennsylvania. Moreover, KDKA was inundated with telegrams from fans across the country requesting her autographed photo. As a result, producer Stan Norman immediately sent young 22-year-old Barbara to the legendary Murray Korman in New York City for a publicity shoot. A world renowned “photographer to the stars,” Korman’s efforts were spectacular, and the photos of Barbara accompanying these liner notes are from that session. Today, after more than a half century since his death in 1961, examples of Korman’s work with Hollywood celebrities and other famous clients can be found on the web.

The first of Barbara’s 112 consecutive weekly shows was simultaneously recorded and broadcast on Monday, May 5, 1947. Joined by tenor Tim “Johnny” Kirby, she was accompanied by Russell Merritt on piano and celesta (forerunner of today’s synthesizer), and organist Johnny Mitchell. Paul Shannon, who years later would be better known as the long-time host of many television programs for ABC affiliate WTAE, was the announcer. The show typically included two or three solos each by Barbara and Johnny, as well as several duets after the fashion of Nelson Eddy and Jeannette MacDonald. To provide the listener with a “feel” for the program, beyond the twelve solos by Barbara, two bonus tracks featuring Barbara and Johnny in duet (“Dancing in the Dark” and “Indian Love Call”) are included on this album.





Barbara remembers receiving \$79 per week (or more than \$900 in today's dollars) for the show plus an even greater ongoing income stream from personal appearances. She remained with the show until it went off the air following its final broadcast on Monday, June 27th, 1949. Later that year, on November 19th, 1949, she married Lloyd F. Stamy, a construction equipment dealer and real estate developer, and they settled in Fox Chapel, a Pittsburgh suburb.

Recording and Technical Specifications

Complete live transcriptions were made of the shows by cutting them on a 1-to-1 basis on 16-inch lacquered metal discs, which were subsequently mailed or couriered to other radio stations for syndication via playback as a phonograph record. Some years later, Russ Merritt learned that KDKA, which had moved from the Grant Building to One Gateway Center, was cleaning out its archives, then stored at the station's antenna facility in the North Hills area of Pittsburgh. Russ was able to find 12 of these master 16-inch broadcast discs, which he then kept in his garage for more than 30 years. Upon learning of their existence and expressing an interest in attempting to transcribe them onto tape, I asked to borrow them. Russ, who was then in retirement and living with his wife, Mid, in Connellsville, insisted I keep them and wished me luck.

After considerable research and failed attempts at finding a studio or facility that was equipped to play these discs, I engaged audio expert and radio consultant Chris Hood for the project in mid 1982.

As the son of former Pittsburgh Press music critic Samuel Stephens Hood, Chris was very enthusiastic, yet patient and deliberate in his preparation of the discs and assembly of the appropriate equipment for the playback and transcription. For example, he knew of the existence of only one 16-inch turntable in the tri-state area—a Gates CB-500 manufactured circa 1948 and removed from service in February, 1981, at radio station WEIR in Weirton, West Virginia. Fortunately, it was still among a heap of discarded equipment in the station's basement. In addition, a Burwen model #7000 Transient Noise Eliminator (designed specifically to reduce clicks and pops from old transcriptions) was located in Wisconsin.

Using a Gray #208 micro track tone arm with a Shure M-44 cartridge, and because of the wide grooves, a 78-rpm needle was chosen to preserve clarity of the voice, although tolerating a bit more music and noise. Selecting 3M's 1-1/2 mil Scotch #208 tape (1200 feet per 7-inch reel) because of its long shelf life, low print-through and low noise characteristics, the recording was made on a stereo Revox with half track heads at 7-1/2 inches per second. Other equipment used included a Garrard pre-amp with a music recovery module (pop filter) and a Sound Craftsman 12-channel graphic equalizer to eliminate the very high hiss and make corrections to the tonal frequency balance. The discs were prepared by first using lighter fluid to remove embedded paper and dirt, washed with Joy dishwashing liquid in cold water, and then immediately before playing were cleaned with Radio Shack disc cleaner.

In 1985, long-time family friend Steve Zelenko, who owns Pittsburgh's Image Recordings, transferred the ten reel-to-reel tapes to five cassettes, which were shared with my brother and sisters. This marked the very first time we had heard our mother's voice from a former era and singing that genre of popular compositions and torch songs. Like most kids, we had been only peripherally aware of her popularity on radio, and unless she was in the newspaper or on television, she was just our Mom.





However, others were, and not only those who remembered the radio broadcast, but especially the greater Pittsburgh arts community because of her more accomplished career thereafter singing oratorios, sacred and classical music.

Because newer generation technology had evolved, in May of 2012 Steve again transferred those ten 1982 reel-to-reel tapes to digital format, and I presented the five CD boxed set to my mother to celebrate the 65th anniversary of her first radio show. Later in 2012 when cleaning-out Barbara's home in conjunction with her move to a retirement community, we discovered not only the Murray Korman photos, but also an old sealed mailing box bearing the label *George Heid Productions & Radio Transcription Services* that contained a stack of 12-inch 78-rpm records. Program Manager at KDKA in the late 1940s, Heid was also a "record cutter", and had apparently made some "bootleg" recordings during the show's live broadcast for my mother, as the box was addressed to her parents' home. Coincidentally, in January of 2013, I met George Heid, Jr., who once worked with his father and now has a recording studio in Aspinwall. He told me that another of his father's ventures was the *George Heid School of Radio & Television Arts* and that many radio personalities, including the Breakfast Cheer Coffee Show's announcer, Paul Shannon, had taught at this school. As you might suspect, George Jr. was delighted when I asked him to transcribe (digitalize) the records his father had cut for my mother so many years ago. In fact, one of those recordings, "Kiss Me Again", is included on this release.

*Lloyd F. Stamy, Jr.*_____

P.S. Mom, thank you for the precious gift of song, as I will always be grateful to you for infusing our lives with your musicality. And though we don't have an early recording of your favorite song, always remember that each day is Valentine's Day, and you will always be "My Funny Valentine".

SONGS
you love
TO HEAR

B A R B A R A L E E O W E N S



BARBARA LEE OWENS

1. Because (1902)
2. Drink To Me Only
With Thine Eyes (1921)
3. Can't Help Lovin' That
Man Of Mine (1927)
4. Kiss Me Again (1905)
5. Remember (1925)
6. Night And Day (1932)
7. Over The Rainbow (1939)
8. More Than You Know (1929)
9. They Didn't Believe Me (1914)
10. Someday My Prince
Will Come (1937)
11. You Go To My Head (1938)
12. Italian Street Song (1910)
13. Dancing In The Dark (1931)
14. Indian Love Call (1924)

SONGS
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TO HEAR

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SONGS *you love* TO HEAR

BARBARA LEE OWENS

1. Because (1902) GUY d'ARDELOT/EDWARD TESCHEMACHER.....(2:40)
2. Drink To Me Only With Thine Eyes (1921) BEN JOHNSON/18TH CENTURY ENGLISH MELODY.....(1:48)
3. Can't Help Lovin' That Man Of Mine (1927) JEROME KERN/OSCAR HAMMERSTEIN II.....(1:50)
4. Kiss Me Again (1905) VICTOR HERBERT/HENRY BLOSSOM.....(2:38)
5. Remember (1925) IRVING BERLIN(2:54)
6. Night And Day (1932) COLE PORTER.....(2:07)
7. Over The Rainbow (1939) HAROLD ARLEN/E.Y. HARBURG.....(3:21)
8. More Than You Know (1929) VINCENT YOUMANS/BILLY ROSE/EDWARD ELISCU.....(3:02)
9. They Didn't Believe Me (1914) JEROME KERN/HERBERT REYNOLDS.....(2:43)
10. Someday My Prince Will Come (1937) LARRY MOREY/FRANK CHURCHILL.....(1:10)
11. You Go To My Head (1938) J. FRED COOTS/HAVEN GILLESPIE.....(3:36)
12. Italian Street Song (1910) VICTOR HERBERT/RIDA JOHNSON YOUNG.....(1:51)
13. Dancing In The Dark (1931) ARTHUR SCHWARTZ/HOWARD DIETZ.....(1:12)
14. Indian Love Call (1924) RUDOLF FRIML/HERBERT STOTHART.....(2:59)

This initial release of songs sung by Barbara Lee Owens-Stamy is the first of a multi-volume set of recordings that will soon be available for purchase from American Songbook Records in electronic format through iTunes, Amazon and other fine digital retailers.

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AMERICAN
SONGBOOK
RECORDS





Barbara Lee Owens