

BARBARA LEE OWENS



with JOHNNY KIRBY

A Grand Night
FOR SINGING
45 GREAT AMERICAN DUETS



A Grand Night for Singing

For those unacquainted with Barbara Stamy (or Barbara Lee Owens, as she was once known by her stage and maiden name), reading the liner notes to Volumes 1, 2 & 3 of her collection, entitled *Songs You Love to Hear*, *Falling in Love with Love*, and *Say It With Music* will provide a meaningful introduction. With such background, the listener will be better prepared to enjoy these long-lost tracks from my mother's live weekly radio program broadcast on KDKA during the late 1940s. If you don't own the first three albums, those notes can be found on her website at www.barbaraleeowens.com.

Live transcriptions were made of the shows by simultaneously "cutting" them on 16-inch acetate discs that were subsequently couriered to other radio stations for syndication via playback as a phonograph record. Twelve of these master broadcast discs survived for nearly 70 years, and digitized tracks from those recordings now enable us to share some of her music with you.

Though recognized later in her career for singing oratorios, cantatas, sacred, and classical music, Barbara is best remembered as a songstress of Broadway show tunes. It was singing music of that genre which first propelled her into the national spotlight by winning the *Wilkins Amateur Hour* contest at age 21, immediately after which she was signed by the Breakfast Cheer Coffee Company, which sponsored the *Songs You Love to Hear* radio show. Barbara's professional career spanned six decades—from the mid-1940s through the early 1990s, though even today she will break into song if requested.

On this triple album (double CD) of duets, Barbara is joined by tenor Johnny Kirby and accompanied by Russell Merritt on piano and celesta, and Johnny Mitchell on the organ; Paul Shannon is the announcer. Also included are two bonus tracks which feature Mom and me singing in duet at a congregational dinner in the mid-1980s.

Because so much has already been written about Barbara in the first three solo albums, it is altogether fitting to pay tribute to the memory of her radio colleagues in this final release of her 6-volume series, and appropriate to begin with her co-star, **Johnny Kirby**

Born in Pittsburgh's Highland Park neighborhood in 1920, at age three, John Tarn Kirby III and his family relocated to Lebanon, Pennsylvania, where they remained until after his high school graduation. At age ten, Johnny launched his career as a boy soprano in a church choir, and never stopped singing, even long after his meteoric rise in the entertainment business took him to the very top. Upon returning home to Pittsburgh, Johnny began singing in Harvey Gaul's choir at Calvary Episcopal Church, and later was tenor soloist at Church of the Ascension and East Liberty Presbyterian Church. He also appeared regularly with the *Pittsburgh Savoyards*, which today, as then, stage Gilbert & Sullivan operettas. Drafted by the Army in 1942, Private Kirby served 14 months in the Ninth Infantry's training regiment at Camp Croft, South Carolina. But Uncle Sam quickly learned of the singing soldier's talent, and sent him on a national tour as the lead in an all-G.I. musical.

Following his discharge, Johnny again returned home to resume singing, both on stage and on various radio programs, including *Singing Strings*, *Familiar Music* and, of course, *Songs You Love to Hear*. Like my mother, Johnny starred in many Pittsburgh Playhouse productions, including four in one season! After their long-running radio show ended in 1949, John headed to Los Angeles, where he became an instant celebrity by starring in the musical *Little Boy Blue* along with a supporting cast of well known luminaries from the stage, screen and television (including Margaret Hamilton, the wicked witch from the *Wizard of Oz*).





Johnny's big break came when RCA Victor, calling him their "newest singing rage," signed him to a 4-1/2 year exclusive contract in June of 1955 (five months before signing Elvis Presley). RCA also changed his stage name to "Tim," as there was another artist using the name Johnny Kirby. By this time, the red-haired tenor's voice had matured into the baritone range, and it was with RCA that Johnny (now Tim) recorded his best work, with at least four releases arranged and accompanied by the iconic Hugo Winterhalter & his 30-piece Grammy Award-winning orchestra. Later, and backed by the NBC Orchestra under Robert Armbruster, he recorded other outstanding songs. In 1959, Tim signed with Warner Brothers, scoring one hit record on that label before teaming with MCA.

Like most entertainers and balladeers of the 1950s, he constantly traveled the country promoting his records by singing at all the top nightclubs, appearing with Jimmy Durante, Sammy Davis Jr. and Mae West, among others. Tim also landed feature roles in two 1955 Hollywood movies alongside Richard Denning and John Derek. In 1956 he toured the east coast in the *Ziegfeld Follies*, during which the immortal Tallulah Bankhead described him as a "singer's singer." Beyond appearing regularly on local television in New York, Chicago, Pittsburgh and Los Angeles (where he hosted his own show on KABC-TV), Tim's nationally televised appearances included *The Arthur Godfrey Show*, *NBC Bandstand*, and *The Jack Paar Show* (forerunner of *The Tonight Show*).

Pittsburghers missed sharing in the celebrity of their native son, as evidenced by the accompanying photo showing Kirby examining a 130-yard long petition signed by more than 15,000 of his adoring fans (including Pittsburgh Mayor David Lawrence) to ABC-TV requesting that Kirby's regular appearances on *The Al Jarvis Show* in Los Angeles be seen on their Pittsburgh affiliate. Given the multitude of his fan base, ABC agreed to have one show kinescoped and sent to Pittsburgh. Due in part to his irrepressible hometown fans and strong family ties, Tim eventually returned to live permanently in Pittsburgh, where he and my mother re-connected and occasionally performed at KDKA radio reunions.

During the 1960s and 1970s, he appeared regularly on WIIC-TV's *Luncheon at the Ones*, continued to play the national nightclub circuit, and sang in regional dinner theatre venues.

I didn't get to know Tim well until the early 1980s, and after coming into possession of the broadcast discs from Russ. By then, he was no longer singing professionally, but a church choir director and successful insurance agent for Aetna with an office in Chatham Center. Then in his 60s, Tim was handsome, charming, and continued to flash that perpetual boyish grin that he was long famous for. Always impeccably dressed in custom-tailored suits and rumored to have upwards of a thousand ties, it was not surprising to learn that he also owned a vintage 1956 Thunderbird that won national first place. His untimely death, in August of 1997, just shy of his 78th birthday, was the result of an aneurysm.

As I wrote previously in the liner notes to Volume I, if it hadn't been for **Russ Merritt**, the entire project of discovering and sharing my mother's music would never have happened. When KDKA purged its radio archives during its relocation from the Grant Building to One Gateway Center in the early 1950s, it was he who rescued what remained of the show's broadcast discs from the scrap heap. A masterful keyboardist, Russ could play anything at the drop of a hat...and would do so. A colorful character and good storyteller, I enjoyed visiting him and his wife, Mid, at their Scottsdale, Pennsylvania home after he retired. I would not be surprised if Russ has been accompanying the Heavenly Choir since arriving there in 1987.

I have no recollection of ever meeting **Johnny Mitchell**, but have read some newspaper clippings about and correspondence from him in my mother's trove of memorabilia.





Paul Shannon

Barbara Lee Owens

*Musically Yours
Johnny Mitchell*

Russ Merritt (1972)

Born in 1902 and a native of Connecticut, Mitchell came to Pittsburgh at age 12, and by 16 had become a theatre organist, accompanying silent movies of that era for several chains, including Loews. When “talkies” came along and theatre organists quickly found themselves out of work, Johnny moved on to radio and eventually television while playing in nightclubs, hotels and churches in Pittsburgh until his premature death in 1967.

My memories of **Paul Shannon** are good ones. Of all Moms’ circles of friends from the music world who would visit our home, I remember Paul best. No doubt this was because the veteran radio announcer also hosted a late afternoon television program called “Adventure Time” when I was a youngster and TV was a novel phenomenon. In fact, the program was very successful and ran from 1959 until 1975. To his singular credit, Paul revived the popularity of “The Three Stooges”, and when they appeared on his program, he invited my brother and me to visit the WTAE studio and meet them, which at the time was like being introduced to royalty. Paul was a soft-spoken and kind man who always had a twinkle in his eyes. My mother visited Paul on a few occasions in south Florida, where he retired and later died in 1990.

As a final reflection, there are rare moments in life when we realize we are part of something truly special. Preserving my mother’s performances of songs that are part of the public consciousness (in some cases, more than 100 years after originally introduced) has been one of them. The process has been challenging, requiring meticulous effort by everyone involved to maximize the impact of these terrific songs—all enduring staples of the Great American Songbook. You may hear occasional imperfections, which is not a disclaimer, but rather the acknowledged reality of restoring 68-year-old deteriorated audio while retaining its authenticity. This is a wonderful moment in the history of music and radio in Pittsburgh, and I am delighted with what we have achieved. Moreover, it has been both a joy and privilege.

A Bittersweet Postlude

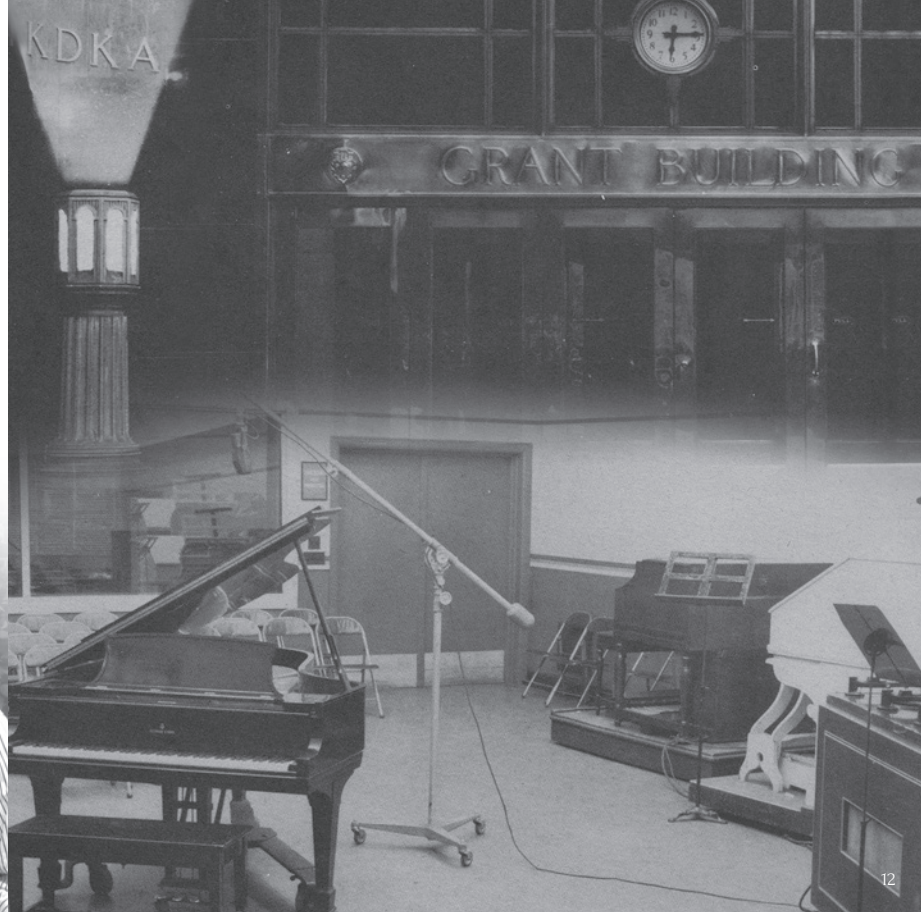
Pernicious thief that it is, Alzheimer's is claiming more of my mother's memory, and I suspect that in some ways, losing a piece of her every day has been harder than if losing her all at once. Fortunately, Mom has her treasured music, which has been a marvelous and restorative therapy and constant companion. She often struggles to remember her friends' names and whereabouts, but sings along with any song she knows and rarely misses a single lyric. However, as is often the case with dementia, her earliest memories, including the periods when she performed, remain intact and vivid. Therefore, enjoying the surviving remnants of her radio career assembled to create this 6-volume series has been an incredibly effective tonic in combating the cognitive impairment.

Barbara's music, family and faith continue to be the inspirational bedrock of her days now, serving to ignite what spirited conversations she is capable of. Although she was God's before she was ours, it will nevertheless be difficult returning her to him when the music stops.

Though silenced for a generation, much like the accompanying 1947 photo of an empty Studio A at KDKA where the show was recorded, I hope that Mom's musical legacy will touch others in need through the powerful motivation of song.

Lloyd F. Stamy, Jr.

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www.barbaraleeowens.com



Disc One

1. *Songs You Love To Hear* (Opening)
2. *It's A Grand Night For Singing* RICHARD RODGERS/OSCAR HAMMERSTEIN II (1945)
3. *Just One Of Those Things* COLE PORTER (1935)
4. *What Is This Thing Called Love?* COLE PORTER (1929)
5. *All The Things You Are* JEROME KERN/OSCAR HAMMERSTEIN II (1939)
6. *Cheek to Cheek* IRVING BERLIN (1935)
7. *If I Could Be With You (One Hour Tonight)* JAMES P. JOHNSON/HARRY CREAMER (1926)
8. *I'm Wishing* FRANK CHURCHILL/LARRY MOREY (1937)
9. *If You Were The Only Girl (In The World)* NAT D. AYER/CLIFFORD GREY (1916)
10. *April Showers* B.G. DESYLVA/LOUIS SILVERS (1921)
11. *In My Merry Oldsmobile* GUS EDWARDS/VINCENT P. BRYAN (1905)
12. *Merry Widow Waltz* FRANZ LEHAR (1905)
13. *I'll See You in my Dreams* ISHAM JONES/GUS KAHN (1924)
14. *Make Believe* JEROME KERN/OSCAR HAMMERSTEIN II (1927)
15. *Jealous* TOMMIE MALIE/DICK FINCH/JACK LITTLE (1924)
16. *Dancing In The Dark* ARTHUR SCHWARTZ/HOWARD DIETZ (1931)
17. *Wabash Moon* MORTON DOWNEY/DAVE DREYER (1931)
18. *Why Shouldn't I?* COLE PORTER (1935)
19. *Someday* RUDOLF FRIML/BRIAN HOOKER (1925)
20. *Hey Babe* COLE PORTER (1936)
21. *Have You Got Any Castles Baby?* RICHARD WHITING/JOHNNY MERCER (1937)
22. *I Found A Million Dollar Baby (In a Five & Ten Cent Store)* HARRY WARREN/MORT DIXON/BILLY ROSE (1931)
23. *When Day Is Done* B.G. DESYLVA/ROBERT KATSCHER (1927)
24. *You Are Love* JEROME KERN/OSCAR HAMMERSTEIN II (1927)

Disc Two

1. *In The Still of the Night* COLE PORTER (1937)
2. *Indian Love Call* RUDOLF FRIML/HERBERT STOTHART/OTTO HARBACH/OSCAR HAMMERSTEIN II (1924)
3. *Why Do I love You* JEROME KERN/OSCAR HAMMERSTEIN II (1927)
4. *The Best Things In Life Are Free* BUDDY DESYLVA/LEW BROWN/RAY HENDERSON (1927)
5. *Always* IRVING BERLIN (1925)
6. *I'm Looking Over A Four-Leaf Clover* MORT DIXON/HARRY M. WOODS (1927)
7. *Song Of The Islands (Na lei o Hawaii)* CHAS E. KING (1929)
8. *Strange Music* EDVARD GRIEG/ROBERT WRIGHT/GEORGE FORREST (1944)
9. *For Me And My Gal* GEORGE W. MEYER/EDGAR LESLIE/E. RAY GOETZ (1917)
10. *Shine On, Harvest Moon* NORA BAYES/JACK NORWORTH (1908)
11. *Little Dutch Mill* HARRY BARRIS/RALPH FREED (1934)
12. *The Waltz You Saved For Me* GUS KAHN/WAYNE KING/EMIL FLINDT (1930)
13. *Because You're You* VICTOR HERBERT/HENRY BLOSSOM (1906)
14. *Sweethearts* ROBERT B. SMITH/VICTOR HERBERT (1913)
15. *Let It Snow! Let It Snow! Let It Snow!* SAMMY CAHN/JULE STYNE (1945)
16. *(I'll Be With You) In Apple Blossom Time* ALBERT VON TILZER/NEVILLE FLEESON (1920)
17. *Home On The Range* DR. BREWSTER HIGLEY/DANIEL E. KELLEY/JOHN A. LOMAX (1910)
18. *Yesterdays* JEROME KERN/OTTO HARBACH (1933)
19. *Seems Like Old Times* CARMEN LOMBARDO/JOHN JACOB LOEB (1945)
20. *Will You Remember?* SIGMUND ROMBERG/RIDA JOHNSON YOUNG (1917)
21. *Songs You Love To Hear* (Closing)
22. *My Hero* OSCAR STRAUS (1908)
23. *The Fireman's Bride* HERBERT FIELDS/DOROTHY FIELDS/SIGMUND ROMBERG (1945)

A Grand Night
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SONGS YOU LOVE TO HEAR, VOLUMES IV, V & VI

BARBARA LEE OWENS

with Johnny Kirby

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Opening
2. It's A Grand Night For Singing
3. Just One Of Those Things
4. What Is This Thing Called Love?
5. All The Things You Are
6. Cheek to Cheek
7. If I Could Be With You
(One Hour Tonight)
8. I'm Wishing
9. If You Were The Only Girl
(In The World)
10. April Showers
11. In My Merry Oldsmobile
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23. When Day Is Done
24. You Are Love

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

with Johnny Kirby

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5. Always
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(Na lei o Hawaii)
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21. *Songs You Love To Hear* Closing
22. My Hero
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Disc Two

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This collection of duets sung by Barbara Lee Owens Stamy featuring 43 tracks with Johnny (aka Tim) Kirby from the late 1940s, and 2 with her son, Lloyd Stamy, from the mid 1980s, is the last of a multi-volume series of recordings called *Songs You Love to Hear*. This special edition hard copy double CD includes all 45 tracks that were released digitally as three albums, representing Volumes 4, 5 & 6 of the series. All six CDs are available for purchase in hard copy from her website or in electronic format through iTunes, Amazon and other fine digital retailers. To order Barbara's other recordings and learn more about *Songs You Love to Hear* from the golden age of radio, please visit her website at www.barbaraleeowens.com or follow her on Facebook.

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RESTORED, ENGINEERED & MASTERED BY STEPHEN WILDE
DESIGNED BY JENNIFER DELMONACO

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