

The Untold Story About the "Easy Living" Lyricist's Rendezvous with Billie During The United States vs. Billie Holiday; This Lyricist Is Embattled with Hollywood Chamber Over Installing the Star on Hollywood Walk of Fame Awarded to Him 30 Years Ago

SHERMAN OAKS, CA / ACCESSWIRE / April 13, 2021 / The ongoing controversy carries on during the 2021 awards season between Leo Robin Music and the Hollywood Chamber of Commerce over the star awarded to Oscar-winning lyricist Leo Robin on the Hollywood Walk of Fame more than 30 years ago but never installed. The Hollywood Chamber abandoned its obligation to install the star awarded to Leo Robin by the 1990 Walk of Fame Committee. With the upcoming Oscars ceremony on April 25, 2021, Leo Robin Music is going to share a fascinating story by Leo's niece never told before about how Leo Robin stood by the side of his dear friend Billie Holiday while the elites abandoned her. This back story was not covered by the film *The United States vs. Billie Holiday*, which is up for an Academy Award - Best Actress.

Billie Holiday sings Havin Myself a Time



In the independent spirit of the way she would lead her life, here is a recording in 1938, accompanied by a collage of photos, of Billie Holiday singing "Havin' Myself a Time," composed by Ralph Rainger with lyrics by Leo Robin

More than 30 years ago, in 1988, both Cherie Robin, and actor, Bob Hope, wanted to see to it that Leo would be acknowledged for the legacy that Roy Trakin reported on in his *Variety* article, "[Thanks for the Memory: How Leo Robin Helped Usher In the Golden Age of Song in Film.](#)" To this end, Cherie Robin and Bob Hope sponsored Leo for a posthumous star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. Sadly, Cherie Robin never received the good news about Leo's star because she passed away on May 28, 1989, slightly more than one year before the letter from the Hollywood Chamber was sent out on June 18, 1990 announcing that her husband had been awarded the star. As a result of these ill-fated circumstances, Leo's star was never installed.

On July 6, 2017, Leo's grandson discovered Leo's long-lost star when he stumbled upon it on the internet. When, later that day, the grandson called the Hollywood Chamber and spoke to Ann Martinez, Producer of the Walk of Fame, he told her about his discovery of Leo's long-lost star; she officially confirmed it was true and said, "Nothing like this has ever happened before."

Almost two years later on May 23, 2019, Ashley Lee from the Los Angeles Times first broke the grandson's serendipitous discovery in her story, "[Leo Robin never got his Walk of Fame star. Now his grandson is fighting for it.](#)" When, more than

30 years ago, the acceptance letter was mailed to Mrs. Robin (deceased) and subsequently returned to sender, Ms. Lee reported what happened, "The envelope was returned to its sender and has since remained in the Chamber of Commerce's records." She also tweeted, "at first I didn't believe that Leo Robin's star had really slipped through the cracks" with a photo of that acceptance letter and the envelope stamped "RETURN TO SENDER." The Hollywood Chamber made no attempt to notify the co-sponsor, Bob Hope, who has four stars on the Walk.

In contrast to the Hollywood Chamber abandoning its obligation to install the star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame awarded to Leo Robin more than 30 years ago, Leo Robin stood by Billie Holiday while the elites abandoned her. Here is Leo's niece's untold story:

The "Easy Living" Lyricist's Rendezvous with Billie Holiday when she was Banned from NYC A Memoir on March 26, 2021 by Ann Rower

The first time I heard about the movie *The United States vs. Billie Holiday* was on *The View* back in February, my favorite daytime talk show. The guest that day was Andra Day, the wonderful singer who played Billie, her very first acting role ever. Since then she's gotten a Golden Globe for her performance and was just nominated for best actress at the Oscars. I wondered if my Uncle Leo's song "Easy Living," one of Billie's signature songs was in the movie.

But the real reason the movie struck such a deep chord in me was that I too had a Leo-Billie Holiday story that took place in the same period as the film, one I'd never really shared or even investigated but one which elevated my Uncle Leo even higher in my mind and heart. It made him a hero and a beautiful soul. But the mystery always was how did I know about this story of how Leo and another couple drove out to the end of Long Island to hear Billie Holiday sing one night. In 1947, I wasn't even 10 years old and this is not the kind of story the family would talk about. Their Leo was not an outlaw. He didn't do wild impulsive things in the dark of night to show support for another outlaw, no matter how great a singer. It was a puzzlement!

I solved the mystery when I was researching my Uncle Leo for my book, which I was going to call *Thanks for the Memory*, and trying to interview any living people who knew Leo Robin. There weren't that many of them left. The most exciting gets were Leo's dear friend Ira Gershwin's wife Lee, Broadway legend Carol Channing, legendary musician Michael Feinstein and then there were his friends the Justins, the last people I spoke with. It was Sydney Justin who headed

up the legal department at Paramount where Leo knew him when he worked for the studio back in the 30's and the two became fast friends.

The new film takes place in 1947 when Billie got arrested for possession of heroin and her punishment was that she was forbidden to play in NYC anywhere that served alcohol, which meant everywhere she'd normally perform. At this time, Leo who rarely left California was in NYC beginning work on *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, which everyone nicknamed "Gentlemen," though by the time the movie with Marilyn Monroe came out in 1952, it was known simply as "Blondes." Show-biz!

The Justins and the Robins were best friends and the wives were just as close as their husbands when they lived near one another in Beverly Hills. By the time I met them in 1989, they had retired to Newport Beach. I hung out with Sydney's wife, Bunty. She shared with me that when Leo found out about Billie's arrest he also found out that although she couldn't play in the city, she was performing somewhere all the way out at the end of Long Island, where the law couldn't reach her. Leo wanted to be there for her, his dear friend, to show support when NYC abandoned her.

So it turned out that the Justins were, in fact, "the other couple" in the story. Bunty told me about the adventure they all had when Leo and his wife Fran and the Justins drove all the way out under cover of darkness to Southampton to see Billie Holiday perform. Billie was thrilled to discover Leo in the audience and she worked his song "Easy Living" right into the set. Leo was beaming at her the whole time and Billie visited his table afterwards during her break and told them all about her troubles. I always thought this story, as I said before, was kind of moving and heroic in a way, and sweet. Leo being there that night during this terrible time for Billie might have made living just a little bit easier.

Leo Robin Music will be sharing more wonderful stories like this by Leo's niece Ann. We are sorry to disappoint Leo's niece as well as jazz aficionados but the film missed the mark by not including her Uncle's jazz classic "Easy Living." The film didn't do justice to the portrayal of Holiday by not doing a more in-depth character of her and leaving "Easy Living" out -- it's not the authentic Billie. One can tell that Billie and Leo had a special bond, and if she were around today, she would be championing the effort to make certain that the Hollywood Chamber lives up to its obligation to install the star of her friend Leo.

In 1935, Billie Holiday got her big break, recording four sides that went on to be hits including "What a Little Moonlight Can Do" and "Miss Brown to You,"

composed by Ralph Rainger with lyrics by Leo Robin, starting her on a journey, and establishing her as one of the important building blocks of American jazz music. Soon after, she recorded a couple of more songs composed by Ralph Rainger with lyrics by Leo Robin including "Easy Living" and "Havin' Myself a Time." "Easy Living" is one of those songs that was definitive in cementing Billie as a jazz legend.

There are many biopic films that cover the larger than life figure Billie Holiday. Perhaps one of the best was *Lady Day at Emerson's Bar and Grill* that was a smash hit on Broadway where it opened at Circle in the Square in 2014. The play takes place in March 1959 in South Philadelphia where Billie is performing in a run-down bar, recounting some events in her life, during one of her last performances before her passing in July 1959. The production featured "Easy Living" in the score and starred Audra McDonald as Billie and she was awarded a Tony Award. She reprised her role as Lady Day in the West End at the Wyndham's Theatre in 2017. This show also appeared at non-Broadway playhouses throughout the country where some included her early hit "Miss Brown to You."

Throughout the past sixty years, the Hollywood Chamber has successfully kept track of 2,694 honorees and has seen to it that each and every one of them received a star, which was then successfully installed on the Hollywood Walk of Fame -- except for Leo Robin. One can't help but conclude that Leo Robin has been treated unjustly by the Hollywood Chamber. The Lady Day Angel is looking down overseeing the mission to make certain that the Hollywood Chamber upholds its obligation to install the star of her friend Leo Robin. It's about time for the Hollywood Chamber to honor the decision made by the 1990 Walk of Fame Committee and honor its vow to put Leo's long-lost star in its rightful place on the Hollywood Walk of Fame.

About Ann Rower

Ann Rower has written a variety of books including *If You're a Girl, Armed Response, Lee and Elaine*. She has many reading and theater credits from around the world including the Nuyorican Poets Café; Pyramid; Women's Interart Center; Literaturhaus in Berlin, Frankfurt, Hamburg, Cologne; The Kitchen; The Wooster Group; The Poetry Project; The Kennedy Center.

Ann has received many prestigious awards and honors including the Woodrow Wilson Fellowship; Jules and Avery Hopwood Award, National Endowment for the Arts; New York Foundation for the Arts; Phi Beta Kappa; Gary Carey Award, Humanities and Sciences Department, School of Visual Arts.

She graduated magna cum laude with a BA at University of Michigan, Ann Arbor; MA, Harvard University; PhD, Columbia University. She taught at the School of Visual Arts for over 30 years.

About Leo Robin Music

Leo Robin Music manages the copyrights of songs written by Leo Robin, who was known as the "Dean of Lyric Writers." He created lyrics that have inspired popular music and become part of the fabric of our culture. Considered to be one of the most influential songwriters of the 20th Century, he wrote many of the country's most popular jazz standards including "Blue Hawaii," "Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend," "Easy Living," "If I Should Lose You," "My Ideal," "Prisoner of Love" and "Thanks for the Memory."

For more information, visit the Newsroom at the official website of Leo Robin at <http://leorobin.com/>.

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