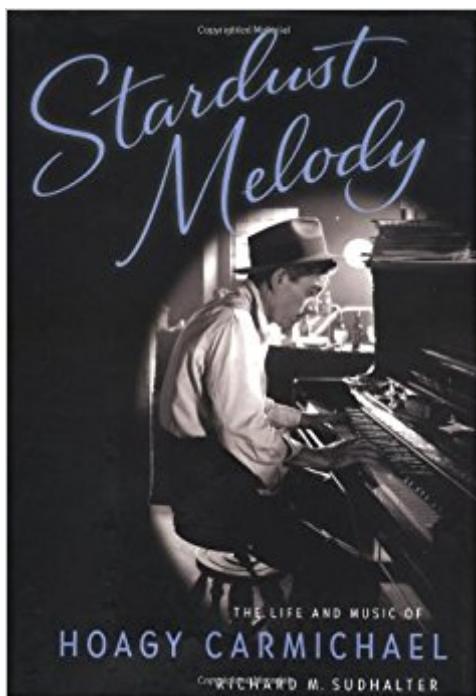


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Stardust Melody: The Life And Music Of Hoagy Carmichael



Synopsis

Georgia on My Mind, Rockin' Chair, Skylark, Lazybones, and of course the incomparable Star Dust--who else could have composed these classic American songs but Hoagy Carmichael? He remains, for millions, the voice of heartland America, eternal counterpoint to the urban sensibility of Cole Porter and George Gershwin. Now, trumpeter and historian Richard M. Sudhalter has penned the first book-length biography of the man Alec Wilder hailed as "the most talented, inventive, sophisticated and jazz-oriented of all the great songwriters--the greatest of the great craftsmen." Stardust Melody follows Carmichael from his roaring-twenties Indiana youth to bandstands and recording studios across the nation, playing piano and singing alongside jazz greats Jack Teagarden, Benny Goodman, Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey, and close friends Bix Beiderbecke and Louis Armstrong. It illuminates his peak Hollywood years, starring in such films as *To Have and Have Not* and *The Best Years of Our Lives*, and on radio, records and TV. With compassionate insight Sudhalter depicts Hoagy's triumphs and tragedies, and his mounting despair as rock-and-roll drowns out and lays waste to the last days of a brilliant career. With an insider's clarity Sudhalter explores the songs themselves, still fresh and appealing while reminding us of our innocent American yesterdays. Drawing on Carmichael's private papers and on interviews with family, friends and colleagues, he reveals that "The Old Music Master" was almost as gifted a wordsmith as a shaper of melodies. In all, *Stardust Melody* offers a richly textured portrait of one of our greatest musical figures, an inspiring American icon.

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Customer Reviews

This first full biography of Hoagy Carmichael (1899-1981), a major jazz singer/songwriter, is a dense labor of love. Sudhalter (*Lost Chords: White Musicians and Their Contributions to Jazz*) admits to being driven by thoughts of obsolescence: "How quick we are to discard, to expunge what's not immediately relevant to us," he laments. "Surely it wasn't all that long ago that Hoagy Carmichael wise, thoughtful, casual in a grown-up, seen-it-all way was a familiar, even reassuring, presence in our midst." Sudhalter skillfully blends cultural and personal history, demonstrating how growing up in Indiana, a racial and musical crossroads for myriad touring musicians and entertainers, profoundly influenced Carmichael. Sudhalter paints vivid pictures, trying to divine the biographical inspiration for such Carmichael hits as "Ole Buttermilk Sky," "Georgia on My Mind" and "Lazy River." At times, Sudhalter's detailed notes on composition weigh heavily on the narrative. It's hard to imagine that the new audience Sudhalter hopes to entice would derive much pleasure from his scholarly dissections. Thankfully, the stiff bits are drummed between long runs of imaginative exposition. Sudhalter draws from numerous interviews, archival material, recorded music and Carmichael's personal papers to show that the laid-back man at the piano, cigarette dangling from his lips, was, for the most part, image. Carmichael, far from being carefree, embodies the American myth hardworking, self-taught, recognized for his efforts and pushed aside by the next big thing: rock and roll. (Apr.) recordings *Stardust Melody*, featuring some of Carmichael's most famous songs along with rare and previously unreleased tracks (RCA/Victor, Mar.); *Stardust Melody Beloved and Rare Songs*, compiled by Sudhalter (Challenge Records, Feb.); and a five-CD set (JSP Records, Apr.). Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc.

Jazz trumpeter and author Sudhalter (*Lost Chords*) admirably fills a gap in the literature on American popular music with this biography of songwriter and performer Carmichael (1899-1981), whose own had been the only readily available sources of information. Chronicled here are Carmichael's personal life and musical development, from his early years at Indiana University through his time in Florida, New York City, Hollywood, and later Palm Springs, CA. Probably best remembered for writing popular songs (e.g., "Star Dust," "Heart and Soul"), he also played piano and sang, acted in movies, hosted television revues, composed serious music ("Johnny Appleseed Suite"), and painted with varying degrees of success. Sudhalter's entertaining yet straightforward style propels the narrative forward, and the musical examples are a plus. The exhaustive research, including interviews with Carmichael's relatives and colleagues, makes this essential for all popular music, American culture, or Indiana collections. (Photographs not seen.) Barry Zaslow, Miami Univ.

well written and very useful to me in my musicology research of pop tunes. I write, produce and perform 1-hour concerts based on lives of American composers and song themes. I have over 30 I have presented. I'm currently working on a Hoagy Carmichael "His Music, Life and Times." I have already presented Stephen Foster, Irving Berlin, Cole Porter, Rodgers and Hammerstein and George Gershwin. I was glad to find this definitive work on another unique writer who had his finger on the pulse of the American people.

Hoagy Carmichael grew up poor in Indiana, but he managed to get himself into Indiana University where his writing and playing piano made him many friends, many better off than he was. The book offers the reader a vivid picture of life in the American Midwest back when jazz musicians, both black and white, mixed, and when there was no prejudice. It is also a fascinating saga of a poor boy who became rich and famous in Hollywood, and along the way wrote some of America's most popular songs, many set in an imaginary Southland he never visited. Carmichael was one of the first white men to capture the spirit and soul of black music, a gift that Gershwin envied and Louis Armstrong, who recorded many of his songs, admired. As is the case of most rags to riches Hollywood stories, this one ends very sadly. His songs, however, will live on forever.

If you're a professional musician every time you play Stardust, Georgia, or Skylark you wonder at the mind of the man who wrote the music. H. Carmichael was an American original. Read R.S.'s book and you will know what shaped the mind of this man. Well written and insightful. A good read for any fan of classic American song.

Not being a musician, I found the details of how the songs were played to be somewhat tedious, but was able to skim those sections without losing the thread of the story. The author included many personal recollections of Hoagy from family members and friends, which was very interesting.

Just what I was looking for. Wonderful book to sit back and take your time reading. This was a great purchase.

This is a great book about one of America's greatest composers. Very nostalgic for older readers and informational for young readers. Would be enjoyed by any true musician.

A great book for Hoagy fans.

The print's too small for my octogenarian eyes, and the music criticism is over my head, but overall it's an impressive work.

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