



Johnny Green

JOHNNY GREEN

Clifford McCarty

Johnny Green is a vital, candid, immensely knowledgeable man, who has won a series of successes in nearly every field of contemporary American music. For almost thirty years he has been outstanding as a song writer, pianist, band leader, recording artist, radio personality, arranger, conductor and film composer.

He was born John W. Green in New York City on October 10th, 1908. Both of his parents, though not professional musicians, played the piano well, and he was brought up in an environment filled with interest in music, the theatre and the arts. He was educated at Horace Mann School and New York Military Academy, and he studied piano and theory with Herman Wasserman, Ignace Hilsberg and Walter Raymond Spalding.

He entered Harvard University and throughout his college career was one of the most prominent collegiate musicians of his day. He played saxophone in and was the arranger for the Harvard University Band, and with Charles Henderson (also now active in film music) he organized and was the principal arranger for the Harvard Gold Coast Orchestra, one of the top collegiate dance bands. During the summer of his junior year he went to Cleveland as an arranger for the then relatively unknown Guy Lombardo band, and during this time he collaborated with Carmen Lombardo and Gus Kahn on his first hit song, "Coquette".

He graduated from Harvard in 1928, at the age of nineteen, with a degree in Economics. As he says, "This may have had practical advantages, but it didn't give me much of a line on how to write for contra-bassoon." He worked as a clerk in a Wall Street banking house for six months, but renounced a career in finance to be a professional musician, in spite of paternal objections. He became piano accompanist for Bobbe Arnst, and later for Gertrude Lawrence. Together with lyricist Edward Heyman he wrote, as a piece of special material for Miss Lawrence, "Body and Soul", which became one of the all-time greats among popular songs.

Late in 1929 Green took a job as a rehearsal pianist at Paramount's Astoria, Long Island studio. He soon became staff orchestrator for composer Adolph Deutsch and was later promoted to composer-conductor. While under contract to Paramount, he also acted as house conductor and master of ceremonies at the New York and Brooklyn Paramount Theaters and at the State Theater in Minneapolis. From 1930 to 1933 he also served from time as piano accompanist and arranger for Ethel Merman, James Melton and the Buddy Rogers Orchestra, and turned out several of his best-known songs, including "I'm Yours", "Out of Nowhere", "Rain, Rain, Go Away", "You're Mine, You", "I Wanna Be Loved", "Easy Come, Easy Go" and "I Cover the Waterfront".

In 1932, on commission from Paul Whiteman, he composed "The Night Club Suite", in which he appeared as soloist with the Whiteman orchestra in a series of concerts and broadcasts. In 1933 he went to London to compose the score for Jack Buchanan's stage show, *Mr. Whittington*, which ran for over a year at the London Hippodrome.

On his return from London, Green began his broadcasting career as the first conductor-arranger-M.C. of the CBS "In the Modern Manner" concerts. Within five weeks after this series started, he was signed by General Motors to conduct the Oldsmobile program with Ruth Etting. Then followed the organization of his own dance band, which made its first appearance on the Socony "Sketch Book" on CBS. Next came his one-year stint on the Jello program with Jack Benny as musical director-actor-pianist. Meanwhile, he and his band played a record-breaking year at the St. Regis Roof in New York City, and he also made a now famous series of phonograph recordings with Fred Astaire. Following the Jello program, he was costarred with Astaire on the Packard Hour for a year.

Turning again to composition, Green wrote "Music for Elizabeth", a Fantasia for piano and orchestra, which was premiered on the CBS Symphony Hour with the composer conducting. In 1938 he reorganized his band and entered into two years as the star of three weekly Philip Morris programs. Since 1933, in addition to personal and radio appearances, he and his band made a large number of film short subjects, and one feature, *Start Cheering*.

Green gave up his band in 1940 to compose the score for the musical comedy, *Hi'ya, Gentlemen*, but the ill-fated show closed in Boston without reaching Broadway. In 1942 he wrote the score for George Abbott's musical play, *Beat the Band*. His next chore, that of musical director and conductor of Richard Rodgers' musical, *By Jupiter*, was directly responsible for his being asked to join Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer as a composer-conductor.

Since his arrival in Hollywood in 1942, Green has built up an imposing list of credits and awards. He received his first nomination for an Academy Award in 1947 for *Fiesta*, for which he adapted Aaron Copland's "El Salon Mexico" for piano and orchestra as "Fantasia Mexicana". From 1947 to 1949 he composed and conducted "The Man Called X", for which he received Down Beat magazine's award for the best dramatic music written for radio.

He left MGM at the end of 1946 for Universal-International, where he served as musical director on two Deanna Durbin pictures. He returned to Metro in 1948

to be musical director of Irving Berlin's *Easter Parade*, for his work on which, in collaboration with Roger Edens, he won the Academy Award for the best scoring of a musical picture. 1948 also saw the composition of "Materia Medica", a concert suite of three pieces for piano commissioned by the Abbott Laboratories. The following year he worked at Warner Bros. on Danny Kaye's *The Inspector General*. For this picture he won the Hollywood Foreign Correspondents' Golden Globe Award for the best film score of 1949. In August of 1949 he returned to MGM under long-term contract as General Musical Director of the studio.

His activities, however, extend beyond studio walls. Since 1945 he has conducted programs in the Hollywood Bowl, including many of the annual Gershwin and Rodgers & Hammerstein concerts. He has four times conducted the Academy Awards program, he has served several times as Chairman of the Music Branch of the Academy, and he was the first musician to be elected a vice president of the Academy. In 1953 he initiated the first televised broadcast of the Academy Awards, and following this event he was elected to Life Membership in the Academy. He was a charter member of the Screen Composers' Association, and his other memberships include the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers, the American Federation of Musicians, and the American Federation of Radio Artists.

In 1951 Green won his second Oscar, this time in collaboration with Saul Chaplin, for *An American in Paris*, and in 1955 he was presented the National Federation of Music Clubs Award for service to American music through the medium of motion pictures. He began producing and was featured in MGM's Concert Hall shorts in 1953, and the same year won his third Academy Award as producer of the best one-reel short subject, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

In 1954 Johnny Green was made Executive in Charge of Music for MGM Studios. In addition to his administrative duties he continues to function as a practicing musician, the most recent and most important evidence of which is his musical score for *Raintree County*.

CREDITS

- 1930—Paramount: Orchestrations for *The Big Pond*, *Queen High*, *Animal Crackers*, *Heads Up*, *Office Blues* (short), *Follow the Leader*, *The Sap from Syracuse* (orchestration and part score).
- 1931—Paramount: Orchestrations for *Two's Company* (short), *Laugh It Off* (short), *Honor Among Lovers*, *The Night Angel*, *New Religion* (short), *The Smiling Lieutenant*; orchestrations and part scores for *Leave it to Lester*, *Secrets of a Secretary*, *My Sin*.
- 1932—Paramount: Orchestrations and part scores for *Wayward*, *The Wisser Sex*, *Sensation*.
- 1938—Columbia: Orchestration for *Start Cheering*.
- 1944—MGM: Musical direction and incidental score for *Broadway Rhythm*, *Bathing Beauty*.
- 1945—MGM: Musical score and direction for *Weekend at the Waldorf*, *The Sailor Takes a Wife*.
- 1946—MGM: Musical score and direction for *Easy to Wed*.
- 1947—MGM: Musical direction and incidental score for *It Happened in Brooklyn*, *Fiesta*.
- 1947—U-I: Musical direction and incidental score for *Something in the Wind*.
- 1948—U-I: Musical direction and incidental score for *Up in Central Park*.
- 1948—MGM: Musical direction and incidental score with Roger Edens for *Easter Parade*.
- 1949—WB: Musical direction and incidental score for *The Inspector General*.
- 1950—MGM: Musical direction with Saul Chaplin and incidental score for *Summer Stock*.
- 1951—MGM: Musical direction and incidental score for *Royal Wedding*; musical direction with Peter Herman Adler and incidental score for *The Great Caruso*; musical direction with Saul Chaplin and incidental score for *An American in Paris*; musical direction for *Too Young to Kiss*.
- 1952—MGM: Musical direction and incidental score for *Because You're Mine*.
- 1954—MGM: Musical direction and incidental score with Conrad Salinger for *Brigadoon*.
- 1956—MGM: Musical adaptation of "Frankie and Johnny" ballet for *Meet Me in Las Vegas*; musical direction with Saul Chaplin and incidental score for *High Society*.
- 1957—MGM: Musical score and direction for *Raintree County*.

This is the fourth in a series of biographical sketches of film composers by Clifford McCarty. Previous biographies: William Walton (Fall 1956), Leith Stevens (Winter 1956), Victor Young (Late Summer 1957).