

## Harry Warren (Salvatore Antonio Guaragna, 1893-1981)

### The most successful composer of songs for American films

Many people have heard of great composers of classic American popular music such as George Gershwin, Duke Ellington, Cole Porter, and Hoagy Carmichael. But **if you ask them about Harry Warren**, their reply is usually “Harry **who?**”. Yet Harry Warren was solidly in the same tier as Gershwin, Ellington, Porter, and Carmichael.

After permanently relocating from New York to Hollywood in the early 1930s, Warren became **the most successful composer of songs for American films**. He composed songs for more than 75 films that starred singers such as Carmen Miranda, Fred Astaire, Judy Garland, and Bing Crosby. At Warner Bros., Warren joined the choreographer Busby Berkeley and the lyricist Al Dubin to create the lavish musical films of the Depression era. Between 1932 and 1947, 42 of his songs reached the Top Ten on popularity charts. Over 500 of Warren’s songs were published and performed. In addition to the over 75 films that Warren directly wrote the music for, his songs eventually appeared in over 300 films and 112 of Warner Bros. Looney Tunes and Merrie Melodies cartoons.

A few of his great songs are “I Only Have Eyes For You” for the 1934 film *Dames*, “September in the Rain” for *Melody for Two* (1937), “I Had the Craziest Dream” for *Springtime in the Rockies* (1942), “The More I See You” for Billy Rose’s *Diamond Horseshoe* (1945), and “That’s Amore” for *The*

*Caddy* with Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis. The latter tune undoubtedly reflects Warren's Italian background (his birthname was Salvatore Antonio Guaragna); he said that his family imbued him with a love for Italian opera, especially Puccini.

Salvatore Antonio Guaragna was one of eleven children of Italian immigrants Antonio (a bootmaker) and Rachel De Luca Guaragna and grew up in Brooklyn, New York. His father changed the family name from Guaragna to Warren and Salvatore's name to Harry when Salvatore was a child.

Harry Warren had an early interest in music, but his parents could not afford music lessons. So, Harry taught himself to play his father's accordion and to play the drums. He began to play the drums professionally by age 14 and dropped out of high school at 16 to play drums with his godfather's band in a traveling carnival. Soon Harry taught himself to play the piano and by 1915 was working as a pianist. The piano became Harry's vehicle to compose music, and the rest is history.

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