

100 years ago it would have been impossible to guess that an independent, family owned publishing house would not only still be in business a century later, but that it would continue to be a thriving advocate of contemporary writers and represent over 120 songwriters inducted into the Songwriter Hall of Fame.

The sheet music that hangs on the walls of Shapiro Bernstein & Co.'s New York office tells a story, not only of one of the music industry's most legendary companies, but also of American music itself. It is a story that extends back more than 100 years to an age where ragtime, vaudeville and technological innovations in mass printing combined to create the first generation of music entrepreneurs.

Teaming with his brother-in-law, Louis Bernstein, and the industry's hottest songwriter at the time, Harry Von Tilzer, Maurice Shapiro formed Shapiro Bernstein & Von Tilzer in 1899, upon the heels of Von Tilzer's first big hit, "My Old New Hampshire Home". In Tin Pan Alley's hothouse atmosphere of relentless competition and ever-changing alliances, the names on the office door changed frequently, with Shapiro, Bernstein and Von Tilzer giving way to Shapiro, Bernstein & Co. in 1902 and Shapiro, Remick & Co. in 1904. Maurice Shapiro returned to the business in 1906, forming Shapiro Music Publisher.

When Maurice Shapiro passed away in 1911, it was Louis Bernstein, then a successful Manhattan real estate investor, who stepped back into show business and took over the company. He changed the name once again, restoring it to Shapiro Bernstein & Company. Incorporated in 1913, it would become one of the most respected and enduring names in music publishing.

Building on the foundations of his brother-in-law's success, Louis Bernstein soon established Shapiro Bernstein as a home for classic songs and legendary songwriters. With "Trail of the Lonesome Pine" Shapiro had its first hit in 1913. Cementing its position as a hit publishing house, "By The Beautiful Sea" was a huge seller, only being overshadowed in 1918 when "Beautiful Ohio" sold a still impressive, five million copies. By that time, the company had eight printing presses across the country, feeding the public's growing appetite for music with titles like "Yes We Have No Bananas" "Side By Side" "If You Knew Susie (Like I Know Susie)" and "The Prisoners Song" which was to become the biggest selling non-holiday song of the pre-rock era.

An early supporter of jazz and blues, Shapiro Bernstein had numerous hits with legendary New Orleans collaborators, Spencer and Clarence Williams (no relation). Their successes in 1917-1921 with "Ugly Chile (You're Some Pretty Doll)" "Royal Garden Blues" and "I Ain't Gonna Give Nobody None Of This Jelly Roll" funded Clarence's move to New York and the establishment of his own successful publishing company.

Dedicated to emerging talent, Louis was known for recognizing and often hiring young talent to help them with their careers. It is often noted that Ray Henderson ("Alabama Bound" The Dummy Song") was brought into the company and there introduced to his longtime collaborators Lew Brown and Bud Green. Jean Schwartz worked for Shapiro Bernstein, promoting the catalog as the in-house piano player at the first department store to have a

sheet music department, Siegel-Coopers. Sol Kahn introduced sheet music sing-alongs in movie houses for Shapiro before moving out west to start Columbia Pictures. Venerable industry stalwarts, Edgar Seldon, Al Gallico, Ivan Mogul all did extended stints at Shapiro. This tradition continues through the history of Shapiro Bernstein, where one time Nashville receptionist, Martha Sharp, wrote hits for the company (“Come Back When You Grow Up” “Born A Woman”) before becoming a female pioneer in A&R at Atlantic Records. Even today, SB’s former licensing coordinator, Deidre Muro, signed with Shapiro Bernstein while pursuing her dream as writer/artist of Savior Adore (Nettwerk Records). Shapiro has helped her and collaborator, Paul Hammer, secure numerous advertising and television placements in support of their talents.

When print music and vaudeville were overtaken by technological innovations and changing tastes in the 1930’s, Shapiro adapted quickly, using the favorite bands of the Swing Era, the newly emerging jazz stars, and the Hollywood movie musicals to popularize songs that are now American classics. Benny Goodman launched “The Glory of Love”; cowboy star Gene Autry performed “You’re The Only Star (In My Blue Heaven)” in not one, but three of his films; and Tommy Dorsey introduced “In the Blue of the Evening” sung by a young man named Frank Sinatra. And when Glenn Miller debuted “In The Mood” in 1940, it spent 12 weeks at Number One, becoming perhaps the best-known dance song in American history. It remains one of the most performed songs in the Shapiro catalog, was listed in NPR’s “The 100 most important American musical works of the 20th century” and was elected to the NARAS Hall of Fame.

In addition to building a rich and timeless song catalog, Louis Bernstein’s early stewardship of Shapiro Bernstein also established the company’s reputation as a music industry leader, and a champion of songs and songwriters. He was elected to ASCAP’s first Board of Directors in 1914, and served on the Board for 48 years until his death in 1962. During his tenure, he served as Vice President/Vice Chair from 1924-1942 and then again from 1953-1961, and Treasurer from 1947-1953. During those formative years of the modern music industry, Shapiro Bernstein was a consistently outspoken advocate for the rights of the creative community, engaging as a plaintiff in several landmark cases still cited by specialists in copyright law. Shapiro Bernstein & Co. v. H.L. Green was one of music publishing’s first battles with piracy, establishing the principle of vicarious liability, while Shapiro Bernstein & Co. v. Jerry Vogel Music Co., Inc. sought to clarify what constitutes a joint work, a matter not fully resolved until Congress passed the 1978 Copyright Law, validating the position that Shapiro had taken 23 years earlier.

In a career that would extend all the way into the early 1960’s, Louis Bernstein led Shapiro through the rapidly changing terrain of the music business, always seeking out the best of songs and songwriters in each new era. Hits like “Red Sails In the Sunset” “The Beer Barrel Polka” and “On The Sunny Side of the Street” raised spirits in the Great Depression and the War era, and “The White Cliffs of Dover” became an anthem for embattled Britain. At the close of the 1940’s, Shapiro ushered in the era of rock ‘n’ roll with the ground-breaking “Guitar Boogie” by Arthur Smith, and followed it with Fifties and Sixties pop standards like “Cry” and “Harlem Nocturne”. When Louis’ son-in-law Dick Voltter took the reins of the company in 1962, he continued to expand the diversity of Shapiro’s catalog, securing the purchase of the previously administered Columbia Pictures catalog, thereby acquiring movie

score classics like “The Guns of Navarone” “The Bridge on the River Kwai” and “Lawrence of Arabia” and developing artist relationships which fostered hits like “Papa Loves Mambo” and “Dreamers Holiday”.

Seeing an opportunity in the emerging country music market, the grandson-in-law of Louis Bernstein, Leon Brettler, formed Painted Desert Music and opened a Nashville office in the early 1960’s. It was a move that paid off quickly and continues to pay, yielding hits like “Wolverton Mountain,” “Sea Of Heartbreak” and the all-time country classic, “Ring of Fire.” One of the music industry’s most colorful characters, Leon Brettler also carried on Shapiro’s tradition of industry activism, serving on the Board of ASCAP and the National Music Publishers Association for more than forty years, until his passing in 2001.

In this 100th anniversary year, Shapiro Bernstein remains ready to adapt to whatever musical and technological changes the future brings. The New York office has moved from West 28th Street in Tin Pan Alley to the center of Manhattan’s midtown business district, but it remains a home for classic songs and legendary songwriters of every era. Under the leadership of Michael Brettler, who became president in 2000, Shapiro is committed to finding the best of contemporary music from Shannon’s “Let The Music Play” to Black Eyed Peas’ “I Gotta Feeling,” Corinne Bailey Rae’s “Put Your Records On” and David Guetta’s “Without You”. Exploring creative avenues for exposing new music to the public while preserving the legacy of the standards and introducing them to the next generation; protecting and defending the rights of songwriters, and continually embracing and challenging new business strategies have kept Shapiro Bernstein a prospering independent business. Shapiro Bernstein is not only a part of American music history, it is a company determined to play a continuing role in making history.

Shapiro Bernstein
Keeping Classics Current and Making Current Classics