

Tot Seymour 1889 - 1966

Vee Lawnhurst 1905 – 1992

“Hers and Hits”

When lyricist Tot Seymour paired up with pianist/composer Vee Lawnhurst, they must have known it was a dream partnership. How else to explain the long stream of hit tunes that poured out of them? Their publishing company, Famous Music, touted them as “the first successful team of girl song writers in popular music history.” Individually and together Tot Seymour and Vee Lawnhurst were pioneers in the new medium of radio, and their songs, though perhaps not as well known today, were ubiquitous with the popular music landscape of the 1930’s.

Born Grace Mann in New York City, Tot Seymour was already in demand as a very good lyricist in the 1920’s. A staff lyricist at Irving Berlin’s publishing Company (Waterson, Berlin and Snyder), she wrote special material for headliners Fannie Brice, Sophie Tucker and Mae West, as well as contributing to many of the Ziegfeld Follies revues. Soon she was collaborating with tunesmiths Sigmund Romberg and J. Fred Coots (with whom she wrote “**I Miss a Little Miss**”). Other hits included “**Swingin’ on a Hammock**” and “**I’m Makin’ Hay in the Moonlight (In My Baby’s Arms)**”.

Vee Lawnhurst (born Laura Lowenhurz of New York City), had been busy wowing audiences with her really superb piano playing. As half of a duo with fellow pianist Muriel Pollack, she cut numerous records and piano rolls. Appearances on the nascent form of radio put her squarely on the path of success as a performer, where sometimes she would sing as well. She naturally fell into writing songs, and penned a few early hits “**I’m Keepin’ Company**” (with Lucy Bender Sokole and Dave Dreyer) and the plaintive “**I Couldn’t Tell Them What to Do**” (with Roy Turk).

Yet the partnership of Seymour and Lawnhurst, formed in early 1935, brought forth song after song that perched on the Hit Parade. Vee’s bouncy, catchy ragtime-influenced writing style fit wonderfully with Tot’s clever, easy to sing lyrics filled with phrases of the day. “**And Then Some**”, recorded by Ozzie Nelson, Bob Crosby and Joe Reichman, was #1 on the *Hit Parade* and stayed there for 11 weeks. “**Cross Patch**” was a big hit for Louis Prima (6 weeks on the *Hit Parade*), and Fats Waller did very well with the jaunty “**Us on a Bus**”, as did Rudy Vallee. Mr. Vallee also scored with “**What’s the Name of That Song?**”. The sprightly “**No Other One**” was recorded by Bob Crosby, Putney Dandridge and Little Jack Little, and stayed on the Hit Parade for 11 weeks. “**Accent on Youth**”, the title song of a film featuring Herbert Marshall, was recorded by a number of Big Bands, including the Duke Ellington Orchestra, featuring Johnny Hodges. “**Please Keep Me in Your Dreams**” was recorded in 1936 by Billie Holliday.

Sources:

The Unsung Songwriters” by **Warren W. Vache** pp. 255-256 and 444-446.

Vee Lownhurst, IMDb Mini Biography by mintunmusic.com

New York Times, Obituary September 1, 1966.

Songwriters Hall of Fame, www.songwritershalloffame.org, Tot Seymour

Suggested Listening:

“**Cross Patch**”- Louis Prima & His New Orleans Gang

“**Accent on Youth**” – Dinah Washington (*The Complete Dinah Washington*). When she turns the title phrase, I get goosebumps. Duke Ellington has a really lovely version featuring Johnny Hodges on saxophone.

“**Us on a Bus**” – Fats Waller