



Fanny Brice: The Original Funny Girl

Herbert G. Goldman

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"I've done everything in the theatre except marry a property man," Fanny Brice once boasted. "I've acted for Belasco and I've laid 'em out in the rows at the Palace. I've doubled as an alligator; I've worked for the Shuberts; and I've been joined to Billy Rose in the holy bonds. I've painted the house boards and I've sold tickets and I've been fired by George M. Cohan. I've played in London before the king and in Oil City before miners with lanterns in their caps." Fanny Brice was indeed show business personified, and in this luminous volume, Herbert G. Goldman, acclaimed biographer of Al Jolson, illuminates the life of the woman who inspired the spectacularly successful Broadway show and movie *Funny Girl*, the vehicle that catapulted Barbra Streisand to super stardom.

In a work that is both glorious biography and captivating theatre history, Goldman illuminates both Fanny's remarkable career on stage and radio--ranging from her first triumph as "Sadie Salome" to her long run as radio's "Baby Snooks"--and her less-than-triumphant personal life. He reveals a woman who was a curious mix of elegance and earthiness, of high and low class, a lady who lived like a duchess but cursed like a sailor. She was probably the greatest comedienne the American stage has ever known as well as our first truly great torch singer, the star of some of the most memorable *Ziegfeld Follies* in the 1910s and 1920s, and Goldman covers her theatrical career and theatre world in vivid detail. But her personal life, as Goldman shows, was less successful. The great love of her life, the gangster Nick Arnstein, was dashing, handsome, sophisticated, but at bottom, a loser who failed at everything from running a shirt hospital to manufacturing fire extinguishers, and who spent a good part of their marriage either hiding out, awaiting trial, or in prison. Her first marriage was over almost as soon as it was consummated, and her third and last marriage, to Billy Rose, the "Bantam Barnum," ended acrimoniously when Rose left her for swimmer Eleanor Holm. As she herself remarked, "I never liked the men I loved, and I never loved the men I liked." Through it all, she remained unaffected, intelligent, independent, and, above all, honest.

Goldman's biography of Al Jolson has been hailed by critics, fellow biographers, and entertainers alike. Steve Allen called it "an amazing job of research" and added "Goldman's book brings Jolson back to life indeed." *The Philadelphia Inquirer* said it was "the most comprehensive biography to date," and Ronald J. Fields wrote that "Goldman has captured not only the wonderful feel of Al Jolson but the heartbeat of his time." Now, with *Fanny Brice*, Goldman provides an equally accomplished portrait of the greatest woman entertainer of that illustrious era, a volume that will delight every lover of the stage.

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