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PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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Editor: Please do not delete sponsorship credits in paragraph five.

Modesto Library to host traveling exhibit "A Fine Romance: Jewish Songwriters, American Songs – 1910-1965"

Americans have always responded to the wit, the passion, and the sophistication of the ballads, dance tunes, jazz numbers, and showstoppers that make up the great "American Songbook." Songs such as "As Time Goes By," "It Had to Be You," and "Over the Rainbow" have captivated generations of audiences and remain beloved musical icons of American popular culture.

A colorful new exhibit, on display at the Modesto Library now through Oct. 20, celebrates American popular song during the period 1910-1965. The best musical artists of the time combined a genius for melody, a talent for pairing melody with the perfect words, and an ability to connect with a wide audience. A remarkably high percentage of them were Jewish, from families that had immigrated to America in the 1800s or fled pogroms and persecution in Europe at the turn of the century. "A Fine Romance: Jewish Songwriters, American Songs, 1910-1965" tells their story, using lively and striking images from Broadway musicals, classic films, posters, and personal collections.

The first half of the twentieth century saw the invention of the radio receiver, the broadcasting microphone, the talking movie, and the long-playing record, devices that helped artists and performers reach mass audiences. During their heyday between 1910 and 1965, songs from the great American songbook were essential to the success of Broadway musicals, Hollywood films, the jazz scene, Big Bands, popular vocalists, and night clubs. Songwriters who could craft tunes that appealed to the masses were able to make musical history in a country that offered them that chance. The sky was the limit for talented young people with big imaginations—young people such as Irving Berlin, Jerome Kern, Richard Rodgers, Oscar Hammerstein, and George Gershwin.

Irving Berlin, a cantor's son, had no formal music training and could play piano in only one key, but

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he was one of the few composers talented at writing both music and lyrics. Berlin's "God Bless America," "White Christmas" and "Easter Parade" have become American anthems. Jerome Kern composed the melodies for some of the world's most revered love songs—"Smoke Gets in Your Eyes," "The Way You Look Tonight," and the saucy "A Fine Romance." "The King and I," "Oklahoma," and "South Pacific" are only a few of the enduring American musicals created by Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein. George Gershwin wrote jazz-inflected orchestral pieces that bridged the gap between classical and popular music. His "Rhapsody in Blue" and "An American in Paris" are still breathtaking to hear.

"A Fine Romance" is visiting 55 sites throughout the U.S. in 2011-2012. It was curated by David Lehman and developed by Nextbook, Inc., a nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting Jewish literature, culture, and ideas, and the American Library Association Public Programs Office. The national tour of the exhibit has been made possible by the Charles H. Revson Foundation, the Righteous Persons Foundation, the David Berg Foundation, an anonymous donor, and *Tablet: A New Read on Jewish Life*. *A Fine Romance: Jewish Songwriters, American Songs* is also a book by David Lehman, published by Nextbook/Schocken.

"We are pleased that the Modesto Library was chosen as a site for this exhibit about a fascinating period of American popular music history," said Amy Taylor, director of the Modesto Library. "The many Jewish composers who helped to create the great American Songbook will never be forgotten. Their compositions are a chronicle of American culture and history and their musical genius has made them immortal. We hope the whole community will be able to see the exhibit and attend some of the programs we have planned to celebrate and enjoy their lives and their songs."

The Modesto Library is offering a number of free programs for the public in connection with the exhibit:

- A discussion on George Gershwin's life and works will be held, Sept. 21, at 7 p.m., led by local band leader and musician Richard Squires.
- On Saturday, Oct. 1, at 1 p.m., the hills will come alive with a free screening of the classic 1965 film, set in World War II Austria, starring Julie Andrews and Christopher Plummer. Guests are invited to sing along to beloved music of Rodgers and Hammerstein.
- A free screening of a 1956 classic, starring Yul Brenner, Deborah Kerr and Rita Moreno, will be offered Monday, Oct. 10, at 6 p.m. This musical, about a widow who accepts a job as a live-in governess of the King of Siam's children, also features the music of Rodgers and Hammerstein.

"A Fine Romance: Jewish Songwriters, American Songs" will be on display until Oct. 20. For more information, or to reserve a seat at one of the events, please call the Modesto Library Reference Desk at 209-558-7814.

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