



September in the Rain: The Life of Nelson Riddle

By Peter J. Levinson

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

In this entertaining biography, Levinson (*Trumpet Blues: The Life of Harry James*) highlights Riddle's song-writing accomplishments that had singers topping the charts. By 1953, Levinson writes, "the only thing about Frank Sinatra that sparkled was the superb cap job done on his teeth ten years earlier" record sales plummeted, his TV show was canceled, and MGM dropped him. But his career took on new life and artistic depth after he recorded a series of albums with Riddle, whose intelligent, seductive arrangements have become American classics. Aside from Sinatra, Riddle worked with Nat "King" Cole (on almost all of his most famous singles) and Ella Fitzgerald (in her American Songbook collections), as well as with Judy Garland, Rosemary Clooney and Johnny Mathis. He scored such films as the original *Ocean's 11*, *Can-Can* and *The Great Gatsby*, for which he received an Oscar. Levinson, a longtime friend of Riddle and a respected jazz publicist, meticulously narrates Riddle's often strife-torn personal life and charts the importance and enormous breadth of the arranger's career. While the narrative covers salient aspects of Riddle's life (his relationship with his cold, autocratic mother, his affair with Rosemary Clooney, the disintegration of his once-happy marriage and an underlying depression throughout his life), Levinson's analysis of his work and the music industry give the book both its vitality and enormous value. Always lively and written with a deep understanding of the economic, political and emotional complexities of the music business, this is an important addition to the history of American popular culture.

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From Library Journal

Levinson (*Trumpet Blues: The Life of Harry James*) has written the first full-length biography of the man. The Encyclopedia of Popular Music calls "probably the finest arranger/leader of modern times." Well rounded and fascinating, the book charts Riddle's evolution from Big Band trombonist to premier arranger to film and TV composer. Much of Nat "King" Cole's and Frank Sinatra's best work was done in collaboration with Riddle. Since he worked with so many pop music icons, the book also serves as an important general history of popular music from the Big Band era to the mid-1980s, when Riddle worked with Linda Ronstadt. Riddle himself emerges as a sad, dour man who, while self-effacing in the main, was capable of viciousness in his relations with those nearest to him. The book is especially valuable for the light it sheds on the place of the arranger in pop music as well as the sometimes murky matter of credit (early in his career, Riddle ghostwrote several hit arrangements and later may have used ghostwriters himself). Recommended for all libraries with an interest in popular culture. Bruce R. Schueneman, Texas A&M Univ. Lib., Kingsville

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Review

"September in the Rain" is as much a work of art as were Riddle's splendid arrangements. -- *Steve Eddy, Orange County Register, October 1, 2001*

Great story well told. Impressive research. Really nice mix of the subjective and objective. -- *Mike Zwerin, jazz writer for International Herald Tribune*

Levinson's biography of Riddle is a history of an extraordinary musician and a sensitive, intelligent account of American popular culture. -- *Terence Ripmaster, Professor Emeritus Paterson U. and author, online*

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