

# JIMMY VAN HEUSEN

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Jimmy Van Heusen was inarguably one of the most accomplished songwriters in history. Claiming four “Oscars” and one Emmy award among his credits he also wrote more songs (85) recorded by Frank Sinatra, his long time friend, than any other composer. He also composed the songs for another good friend, Bing Crosby for six of the seven Crosby/Hope Road pictures. In spite of such accolades he personally felt one of his biggest honors was being elected by his peers as one of the original inductees to the Songwriters Hall of Fame in 1971. Most of his songs were written with two lyricist partners Johnny Burke (1940 to 1953) and then Sammy Cahn.

Jimmy was born Edward Chester Babcock on January 26, 1913 in Syracuse New York to Ida and Arthur Babcock. His close friends called him Chester or “Chet”. From early on he was always entertaining audiences with his wit and musical skill though not always gaining the support of all. He was once expelled from Central High in Syracuse after performing the satire song “My Canary Has Circles Under His Eyes.” The student body loved the song but the teachers thought otherwise.

During his early years he worked as a disc jockey for a local radio station and would invite people to send in lyrics. He felt every man and woman in the United States wanted to be a songwriter and for a trifling ten dollars he would compose a complete piano part to go along with the lyrics. This all coincided with birth and infancy of radio and as such he was able to also get airplay for some of his songs.

It was around 1928 when Chester Babcock was working as a DJ that his childhood friend helped him come up with his stage name. Ralph Harris was looking out the window of the 11th floor of the Hotel Syracuse and saw a billboard for Van Heusen collars. The last name was now solved. Chester then asked Ralph- well how about my first name? Ralph mentioned he had a favorite cousin named James and that is how the name James Van Heusen came about. But as hard as he worked to plug his own work he realized that to have a shot at real success he needed to go to New York City. Soon he was working in Tin Pan Alley, the Mecca of popular music in the early 20th century.

Through his friendship with Harold Arlen’s (Music for Wizard Of Oz) brother Jerry several of his songs were featured in one of the Cotton Club revues in Harlem. His first big hit came in 1939 with Darn That Dream, a song written for Benny Goodman. The following year they followed up with more hits: Polka Dots and Moonbeams, All This and Heaven Too, Imagination and Shake Down the Stars. In the year 1939-1940 Jimmy published 60 songs, nearly all of them receiving radio play.

In the same season he teamed up with lyricist Johnny Burke and began writing songs for Paramount Pictures. It was with Johnny at Paramount that he composed many songs for Bing Crosby movies. Together they wrote the scores for Road to Zanzibar, Road to Morocco, Dixie, and Going My Way, among others. Van Heusen and Burke were, in the words of Sammy Cahn, “The A Team”; writing hit after hit for Bing Crosby the most popular singer in the world at the time. It was with Johnny Burke that Jimmy received his first Oscar in 1944 for the song “Swinging on a Star” from the movie “Going My Way”, a Bing Crosby classic. All together Jimmy Van Heusen composed songs for 23 Crosby Movies.

One of the other accomplishments during this time era was Jimmy’s flying. He flew as a test pilot during WWII for Lockheed in California while at the same time composing songs.

Due to Johnny Burke’s poor health Van Heusen later joined forces with composer Sammy Cahn. In 1957 the Van Heusen/Cahn team won an Oscar for their song “All the Way,” from the movie “The Joker Is Wild”, the second for both Cahn and Van Heusen. After that the successes kept coming with another Oscar in 1959 for “High Hopes,” from the film “A Hole in the Head”, and again in 1963 for the song “Call Me Irresponsible,” from “Papa’s Delicate Condition”. They also received Academy Award nominations for their songs “To Love and Be Loved,” “Second Time Around,” “My Kind of Town,” “Where Love Has Gone,” “Thoroughly Modern Millie,” “A Pocketful of Miracles,” and “Star.” “Love and Marriage”, written for the 1955 television show “Our Town”, featuring Frank Sinatra, garnered the duo an Emmy Award. With other hits that year like “The Tender Trap” everyone wanted Van Heusen and Cahn. Riding on their numerous successes they later produced “The Frank Sinatra Show”, a series of four television spectaculars from 1959 to 1960, the first one winning the Sylvania TV Award as the outstanding variety program of the year.

They also wrote many of the songs for some of the most successful Frank Sinatra albums. Among them were “Come Fly With Me”, “Only the Lonely”, “Come Dance with Me”, “No One Cares”, “All the Way” and “Ring a Ding Ding”. And in 1960 “High Hopes” became John F. Kennedy’s theme song and was sung by Frank Sinatra at the convention center.

In 1961 a newspaper writer, seeking out Hollywood bachelors to write about, had the following to say: “Jimmy Van Heusen does not however, personify the image of the genius composer, temperamental, moody and tense, who shuts himself away from the world to “create”. He is, in fact, quite the opposite. He is charming, personable and witty, with laughing eyes and a great sense of humor. He could, as he says, “work in a boiler factory” and has more than once composed a new melody on a tablecloth in a crowded restaurant. Jimmy divides his time between his North Hollywood bachelor apartment, his home in Palm Desert and his Manhattan apartment. He owns and flies his own plane, and had been known to drop whatever he has been doing to fly a friend cross country for the sheer fun of piloting the plane. He genuinely likes people, parties, traveling, flying and last, but by no means least, women.”

In total Jimmy Van Heusen was nominated 14 times for Academy Awards. Of those 14 nominations he won 4 times. He was also nominated for an Emmy and won. He was also nominated for a Grammy Award, three Golden Globe Awards and two Tony awards.

Although Van Heusen wrote a great deal about love and marriage he remained a bachelor until 1969 when he finally got the marriage bug. He married Bobbe Brock, former wife of the late producer Bill Pearlburg. She sang in a musical revue in the early thirties as one of the Brox sisters. ( Irving Berlin renamed the revue to spice it up) She remained by his side to the day he passed away on February 6, 1990.

| ARTIST:         | TITLE:                  | ALBUM:                            | LABEL:          | CREDIT: | YEAR: |
|-----------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------|---------|-------|
| Duke Ellington  | It's The Dreamer In Me  | Duke Ellington At The Cotton Club | Unclear         | P,W     | 1938  |
| Frank Sinatra   | Nancy                   | Moonlight Becomes You             | Asv Living Era  | P,W     | 1944  |
| Frank Sinatra   | Come Fly With Me        | Duets                             | Capitol Records | P,W     | 1958  |
| Frank Sinatra   | Same Old Song And Dance | Come Dance With Me                | Capitol Records | P,W     | 1958  |
| Aretha Franklin | Only The Lonely         | Aretha Sings The Blues            | Columbia        | P,W     | 1958  |
| Barry Manilow   | My Kind Of Town         | Manilow Sings Sinatra             | Artista         | P,W     | 1964  |

| <b>ARTIST:</b>  | <b>TITLE:</b>                         | <b>ALBUM:</b>         | <b>LABEL:</b> | <b>CREDIT:</b> | <b>YEAR:</b> |
|-----------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------|----------------|--------------|
| Tony Bennett    | Ill Only Miss Her When I Think Of Her | A Time For Love       | Unclear       | P,W            | 1965         |
| Ella Fitzgerald | Shake Down The Stars                  | Big Hits & Highlights | Blue Orchid   | P,W            | 1968         |