

MICHAEL FEINSTEIN'S AMERICAN SONGBOOK



PBS

MICHAEL FEINSTEIN'S AMERICAN SONGBOOK PREMIERES THIS FALL ON PBS

**Three-Part Series Explores the History of American Popular Music
Through the Performances and Adventures of Its Most Passionate
Preservationist**

Airing October 6, 13, and 20, 2010 at 8 PM on PBS (Check local listings)

NEW YORK – Premiering Wednesday, October 6 on PBS, the three-part series ***MICHAEL FEINSTEIN'S AMERICAN SONGBOOK***, produced and directed by Amber Edwards of Hudson West Productions, embarks on a dynamic road trip through the glorious history of American song by the acclaimed musician and five-time Grammy®-nominated vocalist. Viewers accompany Feinstein on-stage and backstage, hear him interpret great standards, listen in on personal stories about the songwriters and entertainers he's known and worked with over three decades, and join him on his quest to find and preserve rare treasures of classic American music.

“When I first moved to Los Angeles,” Feinstein says in the show, “I discovered that movie studios would throw away archives, music publishers would get rid of old arrangements, manuscripts would be discarded, and complete orchestrations for shows would be tossed out. Our musical heritage was literally disappearing because people didn't understand it was valuable to save it.”

MICHAEL FEINSTEIN'S AMERICAN SONGBOOK chronicles Feinstein's lifelong mission to keep the Great American Songbook alive, as he preserves and passes along the lyrics and melodies of songwriters like George and Ira Gershwin, Cole Porter, Irving Berlin, and Rodgers and Hart, all while performing more than 150 shows a year across the country. The series follows the meticulous musician as he rummages through cluttered basements and dusty attics, sifts through piles in packed storage lockers, and unearths obscure items in flea markets. Simultaneously, Feinstein digs deep into the artistry of performers like Frank Sinatra, Rosemary Clooney, Nat King Cole, Ethel Waters, and Margaret Whiting, illuminating what makes them iconic and timeless. The series reveals that Feinstein is a historical sleuth, obsessively seeking out and saving priceless musical rarities from destruction.

“How better to understand 20th century American history and culture than through its popular music?” says producer/director Edwards. “Music that stands the test of time over generations, whether love songs, soundtracks, show tunes, or dance numbers. The songs Americans have loved for decades provide a musical snapshot of our shared culture – a ‘soundscape’ that reveals our hopes, fears, and dreams.”

“Michael has been called the Indiana Jones of popular music – he’s been collecting since he was five years old,” continues Edwards. “But for him it’s not about amassing and hoarding objects; it’s all part of his mission to keep this music alive for future generations.”

In addition to footage that documents Feinstein’s fabulous but exhausting life on the road, ***MICHAEL FEINSTEIN’S AMERICAN SONGBOOK*** uses prized archival audio and film footage to tell its story. The clips, narrated and contextualized by Feinstein, reveal the social and historical forces behind the music, which helped to shape the style, attitude and self-image of America for more than a century. Filled with generous portions of live performance past and present – including special appearances from some of today’s leading entertainers such as Cheyenne Jackson, currently on NBC’s *30 Rock*, music icon Marvin Hamlisch and Broadway and TV star David Hyde Pierce – the series offers both an intimate portrait of a unique entertainer and a history of 20th century popular culture.

“***AMERICAN SONGBOOK*** reflects PBS’s unique approach to presenting the arts,” said PBS President Paula A. Kerger. “It illuminates the creative process and what happens before the curtain rises, straight from a leading artist of our time. It is also a historical documentary in the best sense – contemplating and contextualizing culture, and showing the impact the arts have on our lives and how art benefits from public engagement.”

Episode Synopses

- Episode One, ***Putting on the Tailfins***, focuses on the 1950s and 1960s, when the Great American Songbook competed with new forms like rock ‘n’ roll, and rhythm & blues. As Feinstein crisscrosses the country performing with big bands, symphony orchestras and jazz combos, viewers learn how iconic singers like Frank Sinatra, Nat King Cole and Rosemary Clooney kept the Songbook alive by reinventing pop standards of the 1930s and 1940s.
- Episode Two, ***Best Band in the Land***, examines how popular songs provided emotional solace and patriotic inspiration during World War II. While preparing an original patriotic song, Michael weaves in the history of 1940s big bands, USO shows, V-disks, war bond rallies, and the powerful role popular music played in boosting morale.
- Episode Three, ***A New Step Every Day***, explores the fast and furious 1920s and 1930s, when jazz was hot, credit was loose, and illegal booze flowed freely in underground speakeasies. Between performances, Feinstein illustrates the impact of talking pictures, the dawn of radio, and the fledgling recording industry. Additionally, it introduces viewers to other collectors and musicians who keep the spirit of the Jazz Age alive today.

MICHAEL FEINSTEIN’S AMERICAN SONGBOOK is part of PBS’s expanded effort to bring the arts and the creative process to as wide an audience as possible -- on-air, online and in person.

Series Credits

Running time: 3 x 57 minutes

Producer/Director: Amber Edwards; Co-Producer/Director of Photography: Dave Davidson;

Executive Producer: Ken Bloom

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Format: High Definition, CC STEREO, widescreen.

Underwriters

Funded by: Sara P. Carruthers, The Blanche and Irving Laurie Foundation, The Lizzie and Jonathan M. Tisch Foundation, Peter O. Hanson, Irwin Helford, The Shelley and Donald Rubin Foundation, The Ted Snowdon Foundation, The Thomas and Agnes Carvel Foundation, The Scherer Foundation, The Ruder Bever Family, Diane P. Kranz, and the Jamie deRoy Charitable Trust.

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About PBS

With nearly 360 member stations, PBS offers all Americans — from every walk of life — the opportunity to explore new ideas and new worlds through television and online content. Each month, PBS reaches more than 120 million people through television and nearly 21 million people online, inviting them to experience the worlds of science, history, nature, and public affairs; to hear diverse viewpoints; and to take front-row seats to world-class drama and performances. PBS' broad array of programs has been consistently honored by the industry's most coveted awards. Teachers of children from pre-K through 12th grade turn to PBS for digital content and services that help bring classroom lessons to life. PBS' premier children's TV programming and its website, pbskids.org, are parents' and teachers' most trusted partners in inspiring and nurturing curiosity and love of learning in children. More information about PBS is available at www.pbs.org, one of the leading dot-org websites on the Internet.

About HudsonWest

Hudson West Productions makes socially meaningful documentary films about the arts, history, and education. Founded in 1985, its mission is to fill in gaps left by commercial media, by preserving, interpreting, and presenting unique, overlooked narratives to a wide audience. The non-profit company's recent film, *A Place Out of Time - The Bordentown School*, directed by Dave Davidson, premiered on PBS in May 2010 and told the story of the last publicly funded, co-ed, all-black boarding school north of the Mason-Dixon line. Hudson West has introduced viewers to gospel and rhythm & blues pioneer Cissy Houston (*Sweet Inspiration*, 1988), a legendary one-legged tap dancer (*The Dancing Man: Peg Leg Bates*, 1992), impresarios of the early motion picture industry (*Into the Light*, 1995); and the not-so-ordinary life of public schools (*Quicksand & Banana Peels*, 1998; *Brick City Lessons*, 1999; *No Place to Be Smart*, 2000.) All of Hudson West's documentaries have been broadcast on PBS stations and have also been seen in the U.K., Norway, and Australia. The company's awards include two Emmys, four CINE Golden Eagles, and acclaim from film festivals around the world.

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MEDIA NOTES

- Additional information about *MICHAEL FEINSTEIN'S AMERICAN SONGBOOK*, including photos, bios and more, is available at www.hudsonwest.org/feinstein and <http://pressroom.pbs.org/>.
- A preview screener disc is available with excerpts from all three episodes.
- Michael Feinstein and producer/director Amber Edwards are available for interviews.
- PBS President Paula Kerger is available to discuss the importance of expanding access to arts programming.

MEDIA CONTACT

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