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**IRWIN KOSTAL**

**BY**

**JOHN F. ALLEN**

HIGH PERFORMANCE STEREO™



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## HIGH PERFORMANCE STEREO

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# **IRWIN KOSTAL**

**Irwin Kostal, the Oscar, Emmy and Grammy winning orchestrator and conductor for such classic films as WEST SIDE STORY, THE SOUND OF MUSIC and MARY POPPINS, has died of a heart attack at his Studio City, California home. He was 83.**

**Kostal won his first Academy Award for orchestrating and supervising Leonard Bernstein's score for the 1961 film WEST SIDE STORY. His second Oscar followed for orchestrating and conducting Richard Rodgers' music for the 1965's THE SOUND OF MUSIC. He received two additional Academy Award nominations for his musical adaptations of Walt Disney's films: MARY POPPINS (1964) and BEDKNOBS AND BROOMSTICKS (1971).**

**Irwin Kostal was born on October 1, 1911 in Chicago. He began playing piano at the age of 11. By the time he was 12, he was giving piano lessons and playing in local dance bands. Lacking the means for a more formal training, he studied the symphonic scores of Wagner, Debussy and Beethoven at the local library. He gained such admiration for these great composers that he changed the pronunciation of his name to Irv. Noting that Wagner's name was pronounced with a "V", he said "If it's good enough for him, it's good enough for me." While earning money as a jazz pianist in Chicago nightclubs, he spent as much time studying in the library as he could. In doing so, he taught himself in the art of musical arranging and eventually became the staff arranger for DESIGN FOR LISTENING, an NBC radio show based in Chicago.**

**In 1946, Kostal moved to New York City. His big break came in 1950 when producer Max Liebman named him musical arranger for Sid Caesar's now-classic live comedy-variety showcase, YOUR SHOW OF SHOWS, a post Kostal held for five years.**

**He won an Emmy Award as arranger / conductor for THE GARRY MOORE SHOW which ran from 1958 to 1963. Kostal also won much acclaim for his work on such 1960's TV specials as JULIE AND CAROL AT CARNEGIE HALL and the HALLMARK HALL OF FAME adaptation of BRIGADOON. He received further Emmy nominations as**

conductor for **THE JULIE ANDREWS SHOW**, in 1966, and for his musical direction of the Kirk Douglas musical **DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE**, in 1973.

While working in live TV of the 1950's, Irwin also began to orchestrate for Broadway. In all he worked on 52 plays. His assignments included the original Broadway production of **WEST SIDE STORY**, collaborating with Sid Ramin and Leonard Bernstein, as well as **A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO THE FORUM**, also with Ramin. He won a Grammy for his work on **WEST SIDE STORY**.

Disney songwriters Richard and Robert Sherman had liked his orchestrations for **FIORIELLO** enough to recommend Irwin to Walt Disney. This led to the **MARY POPPINS** assignment and a move to Los Angeles. His other musical films included: **CHITTY CHITTY BANG BANG**, **HALF A SIXPENCE** (for which he also composed two songs), **CHARLOTTE'S WEB** and the 1982 digital scoring of **FANTASIA**.

During the 1960's and 1970's, Kostal often orchestrated and arranged for the Los Angeles Civic Light Opera Company. He collaborated again with Leonard Bernstein and Sid Ramin arranging the music for Bernstein's 1983 opera **A QUIET PLACE**.

Irwin Kostal served as friend and mentor to countless young arrangers and composers. At the time of his death he was the president of the American Society of Music Arrangers and Composers. In 1992, he was awarded the ASMAC Golden Score Award, their highest tribute, in recognition of his contributions to the world of music. He is survived by three children, five grandchildren and two great grandchildren. The Kostal family has said that donations may be made in Irwin's name to the Young Musician's Foundation, 195 South Beverly Drive, Beverly Hills, CA 90212.

No tribute to Irwin Kostal could seem complete without a word about the tremendous loss felt by his family and friends at his sudden death. Irwin was a consummate musician, but he was also one of the kindest and most charming men I have ever had the pleasure and honor to know. He had the greatest respect for his fellow musicians, a respect which was clearly mutual. He actively supported the effort to give arrangers and orchestrators proper acknowledgment of their work. We shall miss his endearing smile, his sense of humor as well as his countless stories of his days in New York and other places.

In 1987, I invited Irwin to speak at a program I was preparing on film sound for an audio convention. He generously took the time to fly across the country to be with us. His presence was a very special treat for the audience who sat captivated as he spoke about music for films and television. He talked about his admiration for the talents of so many

of the musicians whom he had been privileged to work with; of singers like Marni Nixon who was so prepared, she “completed her entire work on WEST SIDE STORY in *one* day.” His presentation became the highlight of the entire convention. Later, at one of his favorite restaurants, he entertained a group of us with reminiscences of his life, his career and the often hilarious times in the early days of network television. It was a most memorable evening on what was to be his last trip to New York City.

Irwin Kostal was a truly great talent and a wonderful human being. Though he worked primarily behind the scenes, as Disney’s Nelson Meacham said “he brought the joy of music to more than it is possible to count.”

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