

LEISURE

*At Ease at Kerr***A Rose By Any Other Name is Gershwin****DAVID M. BROWN**

Nice work if you can get it.

Entertainer Glen Rose has it year round, and he's bringing his "Gershwin Brothers" song-and-dance concert to the Kerr Cultural Center in Scottsdale Feb. 8 and to the Sun Dome in Sun City Feb. 11.

Rose's got rhythm: His one-man revue of tap-dancing, singing, story-telling, and piano- and ukulele-playing honors the continuing centennial of America's great songwriting team, Ira (1886-1972) and George Gershwin (1898-1937).

This is Rose's fourth time in the Valley doing his "American Songwriters of the 1920s and 1930s" shows, which honor the great artists of New York's Tin Pan Alley. Last February, he played to a sellout at the Kerr Center. He's also done shows throughout the West spotlighting Cole Porter, Irving Berlin, and Rodgers and Hart.

"George and Ira were two halves of a whole who fused together," says Rose from California, where's he preparing Gershwin shows in Sacramento and Capitol. He does about 50 performances a year.

"It's a visceral, catchy, emotional sound. The Gershwins took music from the street and put it into the theater and music hall," says Rose, who will also perform George's great concerto, "Rhapsody in Blue," during the Kerr and Sun Dome shows.

Rose: A Yankee Doodle but not a dandy

Born in Hollywood on the Fourth of July (why not a George C. Cohan revue?), Rose met the shy, intellectual Ira when he was 5. Rose's dad was an orchestrator for Twentieth-Century Fox, where he worked with such artists as Quincy Jones, Nelson Riddle, Henry Mancini, and Judy Garland.

Rose, then, never had a problem getting started: The excitement of Hollywood music has never left him. He combined this musical training with his mother's terpsichorean talents — she was a West-coast swing champion.

He has variously worked on musical scores (including John Williams' legendary "Star Wars"), taught music in college, served as musical director for theater productions, toured throughout western Europe playing cabarets, written a Williams-endorsed musical-notation textbook, and toured his American Songwriters series.

He's got fascinating rhythm: Rose has even taken time to write 100 on-air jingles for television and radio: He's helped stop leaks for Thompson Water Seal

and sold pizzas and children's birthday parties for Chuckee Cheese.

Rose's love is Here to stay, however: He's spent the last three years working on his "American Songwriters" program and hopes to expand it, concentrating on putting on larger shows.

"I've had an overwhelming response to the programs," he says, adding that although mostly seniors attend them, there's a surging interest on the part of the babyboomers, who besides taking up swing dancing also like the swing of the music. "They like the unabashed romanticism, the clear lyrics, the sentimental, melodic music, and that 'je ne sais quoi' that makes the music special."

How long has this been going on?

They can't take that away from the Gershwins: The melody and blues lines combine with clean, dramatic lyrics for songs that are as intense as they are understandable. Music lovers will be singing "Summertime" in Martian winters and playing "An American in Paris" when earthans are flying to the stars.

The brothers were the oldest of four children — all products of the famous lower east side of Manhattan. George dropped out of high school when he was 15, having started playing the piano two years earlier. From a poor Jewish family, who had emigrated from Russia in the 1890s, he had plenty of nothing but lots of talent: He soon became the youngest songwriter in New York's Tin Pan Alley.

Six years later, at the precocious age of 21, he produced "Swanee" for Al Jolson — a song that was to become that singer's trademark. Ira had been writing poetry since his childhood; he began

his Broadway career in the '20s, adopting a pseudonym so as not to ride his brother's coattails.

The two were soon successful enough to acquire adjoining Manhattan penthouses. A famous story has it that, despite his fame, Gershwin wrote to Igor Stravinsky asking the great Russian composer if he could take lessons from him. Although he had had some formal training (he studied with Arnold Schoenberg, the Austrian composer), Gershwin was mostly self taught.

The two met over dinner — a meeting of two extraordinarily different geniuses. Stravinsky asked him how much money he made annually. Gershwin: "\$125,000." Stravinsky shook his head, replying, "I should be taking lessons from you!"

George and Ira's apartments became focal points for Manhattan creative and social life: Often, George would write music during the parties. Ira, in contrast, was always deliberating, molding lyrics until they were just right. Often he incorporated slang and solecism into the songs — so well they seemed, well, just right.

By the time George died at 38 from an undiagnosed brain tumor, the brothers had composed 754 songs for Broadway. After his brother died, Ira continued working successfully with composers such as Kurt Weill, Vernon Duke, and Harold Arlen, with whom he produced his last hit in 1954: "The Man That Got Away," which Judy Garland sang in "A Star is Born."

And that's about when the young Rose met the elder Gershwin.

Who could ask for anything more?



Glen Rose brings back the music of George, above, and Ira Gershwin in two appearances in the Valley in February.

