

It's been a long time since the good old-fashioned intimate revue reigned supreme in venues ranging from small theaters to Broadway houses to supper clubs. There was Gower Champion's first stage success as a director, *Lend an Ear*. New York had the long-running series of Julius Monk revues, which were witty and sophisticated and filled with wonderful performers and songs. Leonard Sillman had *New Faces*. And LA had Billy Barnes.

Billy was an LA native – he went to school at UCLA, where he met a whole slew of talented people he'd later work with. While there he wrote a show called *Footprints on the Ceiling*, which starred a young and talented Nancy Olson, who soon thereafter went on to co-star in Billy Wilder's film, *Sunset Boulevard*. While at UCLA he also took a music appreciation class, where he met someone who he would become very close with, personally and professionally – the wonderful Joyce Jameson. Soon after graduating, Billy wrote a show called *Babyface O'Flynn*, which he and Joyce did at one of the little theaters that dotted Santa Monica Boulevard in West Hollywood.

Back while he was at UCLA, Billy had written a little song for a class assignment. It was called "Something Cool" and one night Billy and Joyce were performing in a piano bar and Joyce sang it – in the audience was a producer from Capitol Records. He got the song to June Christy and suddenly Billy had his first big success, as the song was not only included on a Christy album, but was the title of the album, as well.

One night in the late 1950s, he and friend and writing partner Bob Rodgers went to a club called Cabaret Concerttheatre on Sunset Boulevard, where he saw the Hi-Los. After seeing the show and the space they both looked at each other and said, "We've got to do a show here." And because Billy does what he says he's going to do, do a show they did. It was the precursor to what would become his first full-fledged professional revue, *The Billy Barnes Revue*. The show started out as a fifteen-minute diversion. Audiences reacted well, and the show grew. Soon word got out and the buzz was all over town, so much so that one night Jack Benny showed up – as he told them, he'd heard so much about it he had to come down and see for himself.

And so, *The Billy Barnes Revue* opened in 1958 at the Las Palmas Theater in Hollywood – an intimate little jewel-box of a theater, where, thanks to rave reviews, it settled in for a yearlong run. The cast included Joyce Jameson, Patti Regan, Ann Guilbert, Jackie Joseph, Bert Convy, Ken Berry, Bob Rodgers, and Len Weinrib.

The show was, in fact, so successful that it spawned several companies that played New York, Florida, and London. In New York, the show opened off-Broadway at the York Playhouse, and it was such a hit there that it was moved to the John Golden Theater on Broadway. The show featured a song that would go on to become a big success for Billy when Barbra Streisand included it on her debut album – "Have I Stayed Too Long at the Fair."

Given the success of *The Billy Barnes Revue*, a follow up show was inevitable. *The Billy Barnes People* opened in LA and again garnered great reviews and settled in for a nice long run. It, too, was taken to New York, this time going straight to Broadway, where it opened at the Royale Theatre with a cast that included Joyce Jameson, Patti Regan, Ken Berry, Jack Grinnage, Dick Patterson, Dave Ketchum, Jackie Joseph, and Jo Anne Worley. It opened during a blackout, which proved to be prophetic, as the show closed eight performances later. Billy didn't pause to reflect because Billy has always been about the future, not the past. He and Bob Rodgers proceeded to write their third show, the cast album of which you now hold in your hands. *Billy Barnes L.A.* opened at the Coronet on October 10, 1962, and, as always, the LA critics and audiences ate it up. Obviously an LA-centric show was not going to be spawning other companies, but Billy was LA and LA loved Billy's shows (even though Billy's name was in the show's title, Bob Rodgers was an equal partner as both sketch writer and director and sometimes cast member). The show skewered all things LA back then – some of the references probably won't make sense now, but they're still a lot of fun and, as always, the songs are melodic, infectious, and reflect Billy's impish personality and wit. "The Akron," for example, was a classic budget LA store – sort of an LA version of Target. And to prove that Billy was not always about impish and sly, the show features a wonderful Billy ballad, "Does Anybody Here Love Me?"

The show received the usual critical love letters – "Madly funny" said the LA Times. "Uproarious ... Delightful funsters" said the Herald-Examiner. "Billy Barnes is Hollywood's most talented revue commentator" said the Hollywood Reporter. "Genuinely entertaining ... Bright, fast-paced, replete with clever lyrics" said Variety. Even Louella Parsons chimed in with "Something no one should miss."

On a personal note, *Billy Barnes L.A.* was the first revue I ever saw. I was there at the Coronet and I fell in love with the show, the sketches, the cast, and especially Billy's songs. I was truly enamored of their wit and style and also the

sound of the two pianos playing them. It had a profound influence on me. From then on, I never missed a Billy Barnes show. I saw *L.A.* about ten times, and then I was a regular attendee for *Billy Barnes Hollywood* (back at the Las Palmas) and even more of a regular for the compendium show, *The Best of Billy Barnes*.

Billy went on to have an incredibly varied career, doing *Laugh-In*, writing special material for performers, writing for a huge number of television specials and shows and, in the 1980s making a revue comeback with the hit, *Movie Star*.

There was a previous CD release of *Billy Barnes L.A.* back in 1994 – we've cleaned up the sound and added several bonus tracks from a live show at the Studio One Backlot club in West Hollywood, where Billy and Marvin Laird were at the twin pianos singing some wonderful Billy songs, including an updated (to then) "L.A. Is," with lyrics reflecting the quite different LA of the 1970s – massage parlors, Mr. Chow's, drugs, and even Studio One.

They simply don't know how to write this sort of revue anymore – revues must be "themed" or song-driven. I miss the style and fun of the classic musical revue (I even did my part in reviving it with my musical revue *What If*, which had a healthy run at the Hudson Theater in Hollywood and which was a deliberate throwback to Billy's shows – and I'm happy to say even used two of Billy's classic songs – and Billy was in attendance opening night). So, let's all get in our LA time machine and travel back to a more innocent time, a time when Los Angeles was fun and weird and wonderful, a time that Billy (and Bob Rodgers) capture perfectly in their perfectly perfect time capsule called *Billy Barnes L.A.*

— Bruce Kimmel