

AMICA International

Automatic Musical Instrument Collectors' Association

Honor Roll

Edwin Lester

Edwin Lester gained extensive fame as a producer of Broadway style musicals and light operas. One of his claims to fame was his 1938 production of "Blossom Time" with the Los Angeles Civic Light Opera. His producing career spanned more than forty years. During that time, he maintained his opulent style of production even when the popular type of stage entertainment was going through radical changes.

**IN MEMORIAM
AMICA HONORARY**

EDWIN LESTER

1895-1990

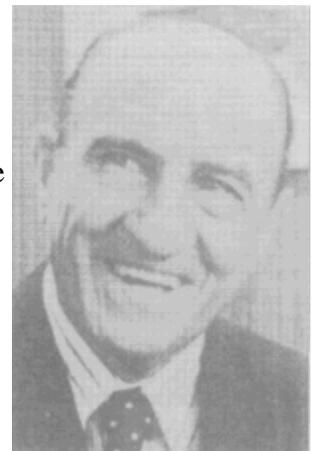
Edwin Lester, founder of the San Francisco and Los Angeles Civic Light Opera, was a producer-entrepreneur of impeccable taste.

The theatre lost an eloquent visionary when he died on December 13, 1990 at age 95 of cardiac arrest. He was as charming and well-mannered as the more than 160 musicals he brought to the American stage in more than four decades; 90 of them he produced himself.

They were some shows: Mary Martin in "Peter Pan," Paul Robeson in "Show Boat," Ethel Merman in "Gypsy" and Katharine Hepburn in "Coco."

In 1943 he even lured Rudolf Friml to appear as himself at the piano in a staging of the composer's "Firefly."

Between 1938 and 1977, when he retired, he proffered a minimum of four musical a year in setting ranging from a church stage to the Music Center, where Mr. Lester's productions helped ensure the financial stability of the then-infant cultural arena.



At his retirement he had compiled one of the most sophisticated and successful subscription lists in the history of American theater. Ninety five percent of Civic Light Opera seats were sold in advance to subscribers, many of those parents and grandparents were in the 1938 opening-night audience.

Edwin Lester made rolls for several piano roll companies including three for Ampico. Only one of the Ampico rolls was released. "Romberg Waltzes No. 1" (69761). Lehar's "Gypsy Love" and one other roll were not released. The Lehar selections were later released as a recut from the master. Frank Milne reportedly made

a number of rolls including "A Waltz Medley," and "Popular Melodies," using the pseudonym "Edwin Lester." According to AMICAN Bill Knorp, "Mr. Lester was emphatic that he did not record those."

AMICAN Alf Werolin reminisced, "When Edwin Lester attended an AMICA Convention in San Francisco a number of years ago I recall him saying there wasn't much money to be made in recording player piano rolls and he did not aspire to become a concert pianist. Instead he contributed his musical talents and entrepreneurial skills to bringing lovely, high quality musical shows to the theatre-going public."

A San Francisco newspapers account of Lester's passing concluded with the sentence, "Edwin Lester represented a sweeter era, an attitude that permeated all his business dealings and left those of us who worked with him with a sense of fair play, good humor and decency."