

DeSYLVA, BROWN AND HENDERSON



From left, Buddy DeSylva, Lew Brown and Ray Henderson

As the most successful songwriting team of the late 1920s and early 1930s, the trio of **Buddy DeSylva** (1895-1950), **Lew Brown** (1893-1958) and **Ray Henderson** (1896-1970) has been described as “the Beatles of the Jazz Age.” Together for only five years, they were so acclaimed in their own time that George Gershwin’s mother once said to her composer son, “George, why can’t you write hits like DeSylva, Brown and Henderson?”

George Gard DeSylva, who came to be known as Buddy, was born in New York and was only two years old when his family moved to California. As a young singer and ukulele player, he was hired as a member of the original Hawaiian Orchestra for a Los Angeles hotel. One night Al Jolson heard DeSylva sing a number of his own, “N’ Everything.” Jolson bought the piece for his current show, *Sinbad*, and DeSylva’s career was launched. Some of his first hits as a lyricist were “April Showers,” “Avalon” and “When Day Is Done.” His most important early collaborator was George Gershwin; together they wrote songs for several of the *George White Scandals*.

When Gershwin left the *Scandals* in 1924 to begin his notable collaboration with his brother Ira, producer White linked DeSylva up with lyricist Lew Brown and composer Ray Henderson.

Brown, originally Braunstein, was born in Odessa, Russia, and was said to have been related to Leon Trotsky. Brown’s family arrived in America in 1898, settled in New Haven (CT), and then moved to New York. Brown wrote verse for his school paper and worked as a lifeguard at Rockaway Beach. His beginning efforts as a songwriter were with the Von Tilzers (Albert, Harry and Will).

He met and soon teamed with Henderson, a classically trained musician from Buffalo (NY), who had worked as a church organist and later as a pianist and arranger for various music publishers.

The duo became a trio in 1925. Their first hit was “It All Depends on You,” and their first show score

was for the *George White Scandals of 1925*, which was quickly followed by the *George White Scandals of 1926* and *1928*, *Manhattan Mary* and *Good News*, both from 1927, *Hold Everything* (1928), *Follow Thru* (1929), *Flying High* (1930) and several film scores including *Sunny Side Up*, *Just Imagine* and *The Singing Fool*.

When the trio dissolved, DeSylva, after working briefly with Richard Whiting and Vincent Youmans, went back to California, where he achieved fame and fortune as a film producer. Brown and Henderson continued as a Broadway team for a few more years but with less success than in their halcyon days with DeSylva when their songs celebrated the present and the leisure pursuits of their time. To paraphrase one of their song lyrics, it was beautiful while it lasted—and ended much too soon.



Sheet music for the 1929 film, *Sunny Side Up*, starring Janet Gaynor and Charles Farrell



Program for *Good News*, playing 1927-29 at the Chanin 46th Street Theater, now the Richard Rodgers Theater



Victrola record label of “Button Up Your Overcoat,” recorded March 11, 1929, by Ruth Etting