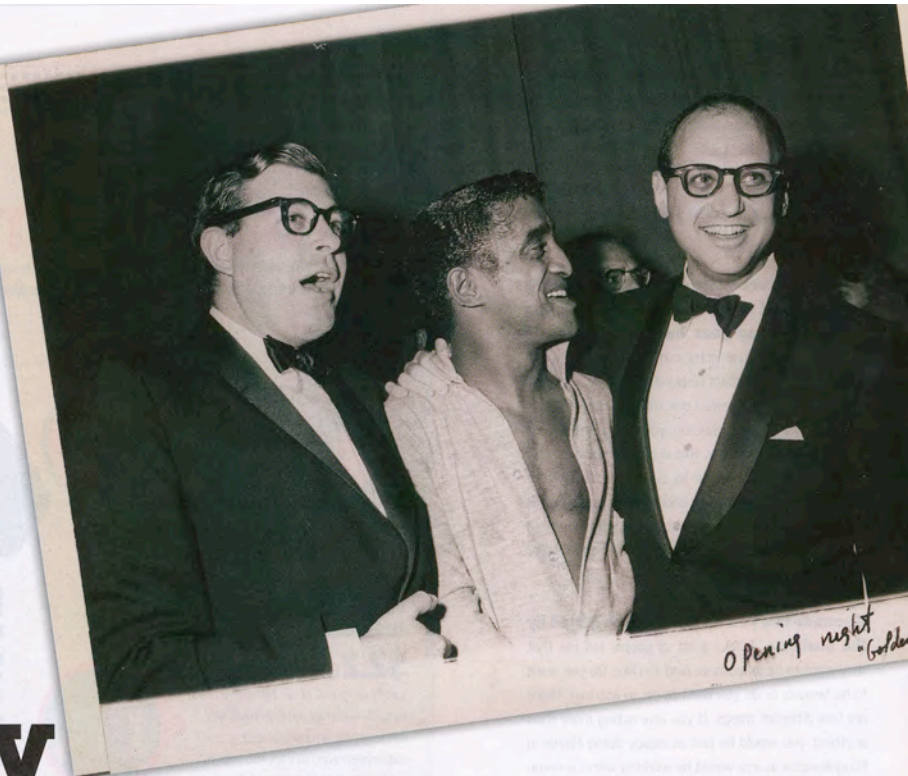


# AMERICANWAY

TRENDS FOR THE MODERN TRAVELER

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## Easy Street



In a new memoir, Charles Strouse, the composer of *Annie* and *Bye Bye Birdie*, offers a behind-the-curtain look at life on the Great White Way.

By Kristin Baird Rattini

Charles Strouse may have written the music to accompany the lyrics "The sun'll come out / tomorrow / bet your bottom dollar / that tomorrow / there'll be sun!" but he's never quite shared Annie's famous optimism. In fact, Strouse, 80, says he has been plagued by overwhelming self-doubt throughout his long, successful career. That's despite the fact that he has won three Tonys, two Emmys, and two Grammys; has composed beloved musicals like *Annie* and *Bye Bye Birdie*; has scored big-screen productions like *Bonnie and Clyde*; and has cowritten one of the most famous TV themes, *All in the Family*'s "Those Were the Days."

"With this success I've had," Strouse explains, "I still feel that I'm getting away with something, because I like what I do so much."

Clearly, theater fans like what he does as well.

Strouse's 80th birthday is being celebrated throughout this year in tributes and performances at the Library of Congress, the Juilliard School, and the Palladium in London, among others. Strouse, too, is marking the occasion. He's penned the book *Put On a Happy Face: A Broadway Memoir* (\$20, Sterling), which recounts his doubts and triumphs during his years on Broadway.

But don't think of all this fanfare as a send-off. Strouse is hardly done. He lives in Manhattan, just a few blocks away from the Great White Way, and he's still working. Drop in on him during the week and

you're almost certain to find him tickling the ivories on his Yamaha upright. Currently, Strouse is composing the score for a stage version of *The Night They Raided Minsky's*. The musical is based on the 1968 William Friedkin film of the same name. Strouse and his longtime writing partner, Lee Adams, wrote the score for that movie, and the musical version has been a decade in the making. Not that Strouse minds, really — the more work, the better. "What makes my day is if I write six good measures," he says.

Here, Strouse offers seven measures of his life and work.

### SING ALONG

Since Charles Strouse's songs are among those tunes you just can't get out of your head, we asked him to name a few songs that get frequent play on his mental jukebox.

**"The Way You Look Tonight" by Jerome Kern and Dorothy Fields**

**"They Can't Take That Away from Me" by George Gershwin and Ira Gershwin**

"When I hear these songs, there are moments I can remember of my wife or of an old girlfriend looking like that, or of my mother being all dressed up to go out. I'm not that sentimental of a man in many respects. And today, sentiment is very unfashionable in music. It's more about loss. But there is a sentimental streak in me, and I go to these songs a lot."

**"Every Time We Say Goodbye" by Cole Porter**

"There's one line — 'There's no love song finer / but how strange the change / from major to minor.' Of course, the chords change from major to minor at the same time. That's genius. Each word and note is crystal. I don't think he sat down and thought about it, but Porter changed the form and face of regular music."

**"I'll Be Seeing You" by Sammy Fain and Irving Kahal**

"Sammy Fain was a friend of my father's. I can remember to this day how he sang it. Memories of my family go along with that song."

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Based on Jay-Z's recording of "Hard Knock Life (Ghetto Anthem)," which samples tracks from Annie's "It's the Hard-Knock Life," Jay-Z might have a second career on Broadway ahead of him.

*"I was thrilled. It's the largest-selling record I've ever had. It's already gone platinum four times. The most positive part is that Jay-Z wrote in the liner notes that when he first heard the song, he recognized the terror of the ghetto — the terror of kids who are put upon and lead lonely, dark existences."*

Art sometimes imitates other art.

*"The theme song for the TV show All in the Family is very typical of the kind of works lyricist Lee Adams and I wrote. Norman Lear [the show's director] wanted a chorus and all that. It was my idea that the song was filmed with everyone sitting around the piano, because that is what we used to do at home. Those sing-alongs are among my happiest family memories."*

Those neon lights on Broadway are brighter than you think.

*"Broadway brings with it a kind of glamour that is almost indescribable. It brings international fame unlike anything else. When Applause opened, it was in the Hong Kong newspaper the next day. When Bye Bye Birdie performed in London, I met the prince. So Broadway success transcends that piece of real estate."*

Annie has something in common with the finest of hops and grains.

*"The first four measures of the song 'Maybe' in Annie were from a Pabst Blue Ribbon beer commercial jingle I wrote that never aired. I always thought there was a certain kind of wistfulness to it. We added it to Annie during previews in Washington, D.C., and it stayed in."*

But does Vanessa Hudgens have a Broadway future? Maybe not so much.

*"I think it's getting tiring, High School Musical and such. It seems to have caught a profit-making, commercial aspect of the theater that's a bit away from the pure entertainment of it."*

Strouse has a cast in mind for a movie based on his memoir, should one ever be made.

*"While I was working on the memoir, I thought, Gee, I wouldn't mind making a movie of this. I recently saw a movie called Run Fatboy Run. It's fantastic. It's a story of coming up and winning against yourself, which I feel. So that actor, Simon Pegg, comes to mind to play me. Because when I got married, I said, 'I cannot do this.' Suddenly, I was where I was supposed to be, and I heard 'Here Comes the Bride,' and I fainted. That's the way that picture starts. So I immediately connected with it."*

Warren Beatty once put a hard knock on Strouse.

*"Warren Beatty is one of the most brilliant guys I've ever worked with. You'd think he's too good-looking to be that smart, but he really is. I thought I wrote a very good score for his movie Bonnie and Clyde. I remember there was a tune I particularly liked. He came up and asked, 'Can I hear that with a piccolo and a tuba?' He had the right to say that as a producer, but he did it after telling me how much he liked this trumpet solo [that we had already decided to go with], a very lonely sound that I particularly liked. So we came to blows. It's funny because I'm no fighter, and he was at least four inches taller than me. But we actually came to blows."*

