



# Lady in the Dark: Biography of a Musical

*Bruce D. McClung*

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When *Lady in the Dark* opened on January 23, 1941, its many firsts immediately distinguished it as a new and unusual work. The curious directive to playwright Moss Hart to complete a play about psychoanalysis came from his own Freudian psychiatrist. For the first time since his brother George's death, Ira Gershwin returned to writing lyrics for the theater. And for émigré composer Kurt Weill, it was a crack at an opulent first-class production. Together Hart, Gershwin, and Weill (with a little help from the psychiatrist) produced one of the most innovative works in Broadway history. With a company of 101 and an astronomical budget, *Lady in the Dark* launched the career of a young nightclub performer named Danny Kaye and starred Gertrude Lawrence in the greatest triumph of her career. With standees at many performances, *Lady in the Dark* helped establish the practice of advance ticket sales on the Great White Way, while Paramount Pictures' bid for the film rights broke all records. New York Times drama critic Brooks Atkinson hailed the production as "splendid," anointed Kurt Weill 'the best writer of theatre music in the country,' and worshiped Gertrude Lawrence as "a goddess." Though *Lady in the Dark* was a smash-hit, it has never enjoyed a Broadway revival, and a certain mystique has grown up around its legendary original production. In this ground-breaking biography, Bruce McClung pieces together the musical's life story from sketches and drafts, production scripts, correspondence, photographs, costume and set designs, and thousands of clippings from the star's personal scrapbooks. He has interviewed eleven members of the original company to provide a one-of-a-kind glimpse into the backstage story. The result is a virtual ticket to opening n

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