

Song Title: **THERE'S NO BUSINESS LIKE SHOW BUSINESS**

Rating: **YES: Note**

REVIEWERS' NOTE

Reevaluation: Nov 3, 2024 : change from YES to YES: Note

There's No Business Like Show Business remains **ADMISSIBLE** because it contains no racially problematic messages or lyrics. The 1946 Broadway musical [Annie Get Your Gun](#) from which it originates has been criticized for its portrayal of Native Americans. [Common Sense Media](#) notes that "the movie's depictions of Native Americans are extraordinarily dated at best and outright racist at worst -- Native Americans are depicted as ignorant savages who frivolously spend money on things like eclairs and speak broken English and make Annie an honorary Native American during a cringeworthy song called *I'm an Indian, Too*."

In [Singing Redface](#) Christina Giacona notes:

Annie Oakley goes through an 'Indian' ritual in order to become Indian. During the ritual she repeats back phrases in Hollywood Injun English, is given a feather, and then starts dancing as the music transitions into the song *I'm an Indian Too*.

They sit cross-legged with their arms folded across their chests, and they raise their right hand when then say 'how.' Their wide-open mouths quiver while they sing, they have huge, humped noses and strong angular chins, and exaggerated facial expressions.

Like many singing-redface songs, racial slurs are used to racially reference the characters in the story. I am not suggesting that the songwriters or performers viewed terms like 'Indian giver,' 'Injun,' and 'squaw' as slurs, but it is important to understand that language changes meaning and that many of these pejoratives have been protested against for generations."

Many modern productions address these issues via omission of *I'm an Indian Too* and changes to the portrayal of Native Americans. For example, regarding [Peter Stone's](#) 1999 Broadway revival (which won two Tonys, including Best Revival of a Musical), John Larr notes in [Show and Tell: New Yorker Profiles](#) that "*I'm an Indian Too* has been cut from the new version, and where the Native Americans were once the butt of the show's jokes, they're now the agents of them." And [Michael Phillips writes in the LA Times](#):

Among other tasks, Stone and his collaborators felt they really had to do something about all those "scalping" gags. They were typical of the free-floating, jokey patronization found in the Annie Oakley tuner. So were the Berlin lyrics referring to "very notable, cut-your-throatable Indians" or, in "*I'm an Indian Too*," the line about "Hatchet-Face" and "Eagle Nose."

[The 1491s](#), a Native American sketch comedy group, lambast *I'm and Indian Too* in their [satirical video](#) in which they are garbed in exaggerated, stereotypical "Indian" costumes, complete with feather headdresses, face paint, and fringed clothing.

Additional References:

[Annie Get Your Sensitivity Training](#)

[What to Say About ... Annie Get Your Gun](#)

GENERAL NOTE RE: Innocuous Songs from Problematic Movies/Musicals or Source Material/Author

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What year was this song written? 1946

Who wrote the lyrics? Irving Berlin

What did your research tell you about the lyricist?

Irving Berlin (1888-1989), a Russian-born American lyricist and composer, is widely considered the most successful songwriter of the twentieth century. During a career that spanned six decades he produced a catalogue of over 1,000 songs, including the scores for 17 Broadway musicals and revues and 15 Hollywood motion pictures. His music was uncomplicated, simple and direct. Mastering a wide range of musical styles, he played a significant role in the evolution of popular song from ragtime and jazz through the golden age of musicals.

Berlin's family immigrated to New York when he was five, and within a few years Berlin was hawking papers and busking for pennies to help support the family, obtaining only an intermittent public school education. He had no formal music education. Berlin left home after his father's death in 1901, working as a singing waiter and Tin Pan Alley song-plugger and lyricist. *Alexander's Ragtime Band*, his first international hit, was a "[c**n song](#)," one of many Berlin compositions considered problematic today. By 1912 Berlin had become a partner at a music publishing company and was also writing songs for Broadway. He became a charter member of ASCAP in 1914 and served on its first board of directors. As a private in the U.S. Army during World War I, he produced a Broadway revue about army life. He established Irving Berlin Music, Inc. in 1917 to publish his own music and co-built Broadway's Music Box Theatre in 1921. His reach broadened to include Hollywood beginning with the 1927 performance of *Blue Skies* by Al Jolson in *The Jazz Singer*, the first full-length sound film. During World War II he wrote a number of patriotic songs and produced another Broadway and touring show about the army, assigning all the profits to government agencies and nonprofit organizations.

Berlin received numerous accolades, including an Academy Award for Best Song of the Year for *White Christmas* (1942), Congressional Gold Medal as a composer of patriotic songs (1954), special Tony Award (1963), Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award (1968), and Presidential Medal of Freedom (1977). He was inducted into the American Songwriters Hall of Fame (1970), the American Theater Hall of Fame, and the Jewish-American Hall of Fame, and posthumously awarded a Star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame for Recording.

Research shows that a number of Berlin's songs reflect problematic racial DEI concerns. See the song list in Berlin's bio on the [Songwriter Biographies page](#).

What other material has been written by this lyricist?

Songs include: *Alexander's Ragtime Band* (1911), *God Bless America* (1918, 1938), *Oh! How I Hate To Get Up In The Morning* (1918), *A Pretty Girl Is Like a Melody* (1919), *Always* (1925), *Blue Skies* (1926),

Puttin' On The Ritz (1930), *How Deep Is The Ocean* (1932), *Easter Parade* (1933), *Heat Wave* (1933), *Cheek To Cheek* (1935), *Let's Face The Music And Dance* (1936), *White Christmas* (1940), *Anything You Can Do* (1946), and *There's No Business Like Show Business* (1946).

Broadway musicals include: *The Cocoanuts* (1925), *As Thousands Cheer* (1933), *Louisiana Purchase* (1940), *This Is The Army* (1942), *Miss Liberty* (1949), *Mr. President* (1962), *Call Me Madam* (1950), and *Annie Get Your Gun* (1946).

Hollywood movie musicals include: *Top Hat* (1935), *Follow The Fleet* (1936), *On The Avenue* (1937), *Alexander's Ragtime Band* (1938), *Holiday Inn* (1942), *Blue Skies* (1946), *Easter Parade* (1948), *White Christmas* (1954) and *There's No Business Like Show Business* (1954).

Who is the composer of this song? Irving Berlin

Who and what is this song about, as originally intended by the composer and earlier performers?

This song is a slightly tongue-in-cheek salute to the glamor and excitement of a life in show business. [There's No Business Like Show Business Lyrics](#)

It was written for the 1946 Broadway musical [Annie Get Your Gun](#), a fictionalized version of the life of [Annie Oakley](#) (1860–1926), a sharpshooter who starred in [Buffalo Bill's Wild West](#), and her romance with sharpshooter [Frank E. Butler](#) (1847–1926). It is sung in the musical by members of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show in an attempt to persuade Annie Oakley to join the production. It is reprised three times in the musical.

The original Broadway production was a hit, and the musical had long runs in both New York (1,147 performances) and London, spawning revivals, [a 1950 film version](#), and television versions.

Annie Get Your Gun has been criticized for its racist and sexist aspects. Native Americans protested their portrayal, rife with offensive stereotypes (see Reviewer's Note up top). In [Remaking Musical Theatre's Misogynist History](#) Alice Saville notes that the musical is "devoted to teaching a female sharpshooting champion to powder herself, preen, stop swearing, and most importantly to set herself below the man she fancies."

Other songs that became hits include [Anything You Can Do \(I Can Do Better\)](#), [Doin' What Comes Natur'lly](#), [You Can't Get a Man with a Gun](#), and [They Say It's Wonderful](#).

Share a link to the earliest performance of this song that you can find.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4lakGlwl9u0>

What historical or social events were happening at the time this song was written?

1940s- "The 1940s tower over every other decade of the 20th century as the most full of sorrow, patriotism, and ultimately, hope and the beginning of a new era of American dominance on the world stage. This decade, commonly called "the war years," is synonymous with World War II. This decade left an indelible mark on all but the youngest of Americans that lasted for the rest of their lives. Those who were young and in the military were dubbed "The Greatest Generation" by former NBC News anchor Tom Brokaw, and the moniker stuck."

Does any illustration or other characteristic of the original sheet music reflect an inappropriate theme?

There is an Native American man, Chief Sitting Bull, on the sheet music. I researched why, and found in the show's synopsis that the character "Annie" in the show, gets adopted into the Sioux tribe by Chief Sitting Bull. In my research, I found this to be a true story. Chief Sitting Bull, 1831-1890, occasionally performed with Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show and be-friended Annie Oakley. While I don't think the illustration is an inappropriate depiction, I thought it necessary to explain it.

Did this song, originally or subsequently, demean a marginalized racial/ethnic group (a group considered at a social disadvantage) through idiomatic expressions, metaphors, jargon, or message? And/or does the song present a sanitized/idyllic or false narrative regarding the American South and the life of the enslaved or newly freed OR of other marginalized racial/ethnic groups and their history? No

Please supply the links to any additional sources you used for this section of research.

[Google Search](#)

<https://www.irvingberlin.com/biography>

https://www.songhall.org/profile/Irving_Berlin

[Constructing Tin Pan Alley: From Minstrelsy to Mass Culture](#)

[Genre, Performance and Ideology in the Early Songs of Irving Berlin](#)

<https://forward.com/culture/471015/did-irving-berlin-appropriate-or-celebrate-black-music-or-both/>

<https://musicbrainz.org/work/b8726656-ee94-35e7-96d6-0ba383380642>

<https://www.thoughtco.com/1940s-timeline-1779951>

<https://www.history.com/topics/native-american-history/sitting-bull>

Additional Questions to Consider (do not pertain to Admissibility)

The remaining questions pertain to Diversity, Equity & Inclusion issues other than those of race. As such, **THESE QUESTIONS DO NOT AFFECT A SONG'S ADMISSIBILITY**. They are provided to encourage your group to consider factors that may affect members of your audience and/or your performers with regard to religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, and more. ***Please refer to the Music Choices section of Chapter Choices to Address Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion*** (in the ***Chorus Toolkit***) ***for details and strategies related to these factors.***

Could the message/lyrics of the song, original or subsequent, limit any singer or audience member's ability to engage, related to the following? A YES answer does not imply that the song is demeaning or exclusionary. [Please see instructions here.](#)

Age: No

Disability: No

Gender: No

Religion: No

Sexual Orientation: No

Visible Physical Difference: No

Other? No

Are there any adjustments to the lyrics that would make it more inclusive or current to our chorus culture or societal norms?

I did not identify any lyrics that might be addressed.

