

Lady in the Dark



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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 emigre 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 night, the saga of how this musical play came to be, and the string of events that saved the experimental show at every turn. Although America was turned upside down by Pearl Harbor after the production was on the boards, *Lady in the Dark* played an important role for the war effort and rang up 777 performances in 12 cities. In what may be the most illuminating study of a single Broadway musical, this biography brings *Lady in the Dark* back to the spotlight and puts readers in the front row.

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