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IWU Emeritus Theatre Professor Pens Bio of Broadway Legend Moss Hart

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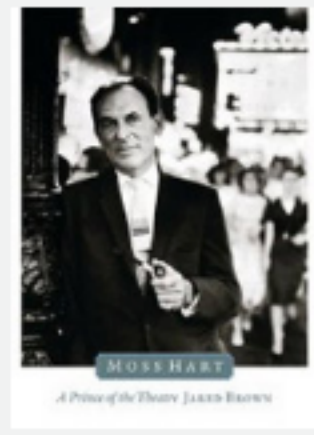
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BLOOMINGTON, Ill. — Illinois Wesleyan University Emeritus Professor of Theatre Arts Jared Brown has written a biography of legendary director and Pulitzer Prize-winning author Moss Hart.

The book, "Moss Hart: A Prince of the Theater: A biography in three Acts", published by Back Stage Books, is the first Hart biography written with the full cooperation and consent of Hart's widow, Kitty Carlisle Hart, and his children. Brown is also the first person outside the family to have access to Hart's diary and the book includes dozens of never-before-published photos, many from the Hart family.



"I view Moss Hart as an underappreciated artist, just the sort of person I am most interested in writing about," said Brown, who has been working on the Hart biography since 2000. "Hart was one of the giants during the 'Golden Age of Broadway' achieving success both as a playwright and as a director."

Brown said the cooperation of the Hart family was "essential" to his book and cited a relationship with the family dating back to 1991, when Kitty Carlisle Hart was a visiting lecturer on the Illinois Wesleyan campus.

The book, which is a meticulously-researched, sensitive look at the life and work of a major American artist, features interviews with many of Hart's colleagues, including Gregory Peck, Julie Andrews and Robert Goulet. More than merely an assessment of Hart's career, Brown's book is a personal portrait with frank discussions of Hart's rumored bisexuality, his battles with anxiety and depression, and his marriage.

Brown examines Hart's early days writing with George S. Kaufman; his collaborations with Irving Berlin, Cole Porter, Kurt Weill and Ira Gershwin; his career as a movie director; and his final act as director of the Broadway hits "My Fair Lady" and "Camelot."

The former chair of Illinois Wesleyan's School of Theatre Arts, Brown received the DuPont Award for Teaching Excellence in 1997. The author of 15 plays and director of more than 90 stage productions, Brown's previous books include "Alan J. Pakula: His Films and His Life" (September 2005), "The Theatre in America During the Revolution" (1995), "Zero Mostel" (1989), and "The Fabulous Lunts: A Biography of Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne" (1986).

Brown did a reading, a question-and-answer session with Kitty Carlisle Hart and book signing at the Drama Book Shop in New York City on June 22 and indicated he will be doing signings for his latest biography at bookstores in Bloomington and Peoria this fall, with dates yet to be determined.

Publishers Weekly Review: *Brown regards Hart's "Act One" (1959) as "the finest theatrical memoir ever written." Even so, he examines some "peculiar inconsistencies," spotlighting Hart's insecurities as well as his creative breakthroughs. Born in 1904, Hart hoped to escape "the dark brown sameness" of the Bronx, and the stage "became Moss's refuge, his escape from unpopularity and from poverty, his ticket to romance." He gained self-confidence in the borscht belt as his reputation for polished productions spread throughout the Catskills, catapulting him into the glitter of the Great White Way, where he collaborated with George S. Kaufman, Cole Porter and Irving Berlin, and had such theatrical triumphs as "You Can't Take It with You" and "My Fair Lady." With exhaustive research (indicated by 40 pages of bibliographic notes) and access to Hart's diary and letters, plus interviews with family and friends, the book is bursting with backstage anecdotes. Theater buffs will applaud this penetrating portrait of the stylish, incandescent Broadway legend.*

Booklist Review (by Jack Helbig): *Brown reveals nothing particularly shocking in his new biography of playwright and director Hart. Others before have dealt, however gingerly, with Hart's possible bisexuality and the constant confusion over whether he was Jewish. (He was.) Instead, Brown offers a thick, well-researched, no-nonsense traditional biography that examines its subject's life in great detail without getting lost in a forest of facts. Brown, for example, analyzes Hart's autobiography, "Act One" (1959), revealing that Hart wasn't immune to the temptation to rewrite his life to make a better story, or to protect close family members. Brown makes a convincing case that the person who wrote Hart threatening letters and set mysterious backstage fires early in Hart's career may have been his mentally unstable mother, not the equally unstable, theater-loving aunt [Steven Bach, the author of "Dazzler"] fingers. Not that Brown's book is packed with gossip. It is much more devoted to charting Hart's artistic development and professional accomplishments. Hart fans, in particular, will appreciate the wealth of new information about this theatrical giant that Brown has unearthed.*