

# This Day in History... November 16, 1896

## Birth of Lawrence Tibbett

Lawrence Mervil Tibbett was born on November 16, 1896, in Bakersfield, California. Tibbett was the lead baritone at the Metropolitan Opera for 27 years – totaling more than 600 performances – and also appeared in plays and films.

Tibbett was the son of a deputy sheriff who was killed in a shootout with an outlaw in 1903. Tibbett realized his talent for singing at an early age and supported his family by singing in church choirs and at funerals. He attended Manual Arts High School and served with the Merchant Marines during World War I. After the war, he earned money by singing before silent movies at the Million Dollar Theater in Los Angeles.



Tibbett's first film was *The Rogue Song* with Laurel and Hardy.

During his career at the Met, Tibbett sang in the premiere performances of many American operas such as Louis Gruenberg's *The Emperor Jones* – the first world premier to be broadcast live from the Metropolitan, Deems Taylor's *The King's Henchman* and *Peter Ibbetson*, and Howard Hanson's *Merry Mount*.

Tibbett performed throughout Europe and Australia in the 1930s, giving recitals in London, Paris, Prague, Vienna, Sydney, and Melbourne. He also began his brief film career in the 1930s. Tibbett earned an Academy Award nomination for his first film, *The Rogue Song* (1930). Tibbett's other films included *New Moon* (1930), *The Southerner* (1931), *The Cuban Love Song* (1931), *Metropolitan* (1935), and *Under Your Spell* (1936).

In addition to film and stage, Tibbett produced recording for the Victor Talking Machine Company and had his own radio show, sponsored by the Packard Motor Car Company. He also appeared on *Your Hit Parade* and helped found the American Guild of Musical Artists, which became the primary union for solo performers. He served as the guild's president for 17 years.



Tibbett portrayed Hook in a stage production of *Peter Pan*, which included music by Leonard Bernstein.



The background image shows Tibbett as the Toreador in *Carmen*.

After studying under noteworthy teachers Basil Ruysdael and Frank La Forge, Tibbett signed his first contract with the Metropolitan Opera for \$60 per week. Tibbett made his first operatic appearance in *Boris Godunoff* at the Metropolitan Opera in 1923, where he continued singing a variety of small roles for two years. In 1925 his performance in the opera *Falstaff* was so dazzling it completely overshadowed the opera's lead role and provoked a response from the crowd that was "not exceeded in many years." He then went on to become the lead baritone at the Metropolitan, where he performed for the next 27 seasons.



Tibbett sang in leading roles at the New York Metropolitan Opera more than 600 times between 1923 and 1950.

After leaving the Metropolitan Opera, Tibbett appeared in musicals and plays, appearing in *Rain* and *Fanny*, and playing Captain Hook in a stage performance of *Peter Pan*. In his later years, Tibbett hosted a radio show that featured older operatic recordings.

Tibbett suffered from arthritis and died on July 15, 1960, after falling and hitting his head. One obituary read, "Tibbett had a big, bronze like, dramatically eloquent voice that combined ringing power with remarkable agility... he left behind not only the echoes of a great voice but the memory of a performer who could feel equally at home with high art and popular entertainment, suggesting that there is a magical link between the two." Tibbett was made a posthumous member of the first group of honorees on the Hollywood Walk of Fame shortly after his death.

Mystic Stamp Company • Camden, NY 13316

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