

“Let’s drink a toast to a life divine!”

A portrait of Alex Steinweiss, internationally-acclaimed artist living in Sarasota

By Beverly R. Newman, Ed.D.

Was it a “life divine” or a “fairy tale?” The father proclaims the first in a beautiful love poem to his adored wife, and the daughter declares the second, admiring her parents’ marriage of 72 years, which ended only when dear Blanche passed away in November 2010.

In a small Sarasota studio/bedroom combo lives a man of enormous global stature, but of very slight physical size. Looking around the room, every wall is covered with original paintings larger than the man himself, Alex Steinweiss, artist par excellence for such entertainment immortals as Louis Armstrong, Eddie Fisher, Bing Crosby and Eddie Duchin. Says Alex of superstar band-leader Duchin, “He liked me the best” and would not let anyone else do his album covers.

Alex is a 93-year-old giant and genius, reaching the top of his profession, in fact, inventing his own career of designing and painting album covers. Before Alex’s creative venture, records came inside a book, plain and boring, but Alex brought brilliant artistry to the record industry. Says Alex in his characteristic modesty, “I knocked my brains out doing covers.”

Loving daughter, Hazel Steinweiss, at Alex’s side, sighs proudly, “You’ve lived so much history, Daddy.” Hazel is a Bradenton social worker, who dutifully dotes on her father and recites Kaddish for her recently-deceased mother. What a wonderful family Hazel chose to be born into, innocently pictured by Alex on his album cover for the *Children’s Corner Suite*.

How did Alex bring visual beauty together with the greatest music ever written? He replies, “I have music in my head already,” and the music magically becomes a painting, acrylic on canvas, robust with striking colors and lines full of movement.

Amazingly, every one of Alex’s art treasures, including some 600 album covers, is hand-painted with absolute precision and minute detail. His studio reflects his sense of organization and artistic dedication, neatly storing gorgeous works of art spanning over 70 years in stacks of huge metal drawers. The culmination of Alex’s career is a 420-page full-color coffee table book, nearly too heavy to lift, published by TASCHEN in three languages, *Alex Steinweiss: The Inventor of the Modern Album Cover*.

With his wife always supporting him in the background, Alex became Columbia Record’s first Art Director in 1940 and shortly thereafter worked as a civilian in the U.S. Navy, creating training posters. When Blanche and Alex met at age 13, the scope of their simple Jewish lives could never have been predicted. They traveled the world together, socialized with celebrities, and received accolades from across the globe; but Alex did not even learn how to fill in a check, as Blanche managed every aspect of their business.

Their partnership produced a vast treasure of art, two children, five grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren. Their Jewish legacy lives in their artistry and in their generations of involvement at Temple Beth Sholom, where their oldest grandson will become a Bar Mitzvah later this year on Israel’s birthday.

Alex Steinweiss, youthful gymnast, artist, poet, adoring father, and inventor, is perhaps best portrayed in the words he wrote and painted for his wife:

And now that we are happily wed for 63 ...

Through very nice and very bad weather

and as we age, sweet girl of mine,

Like a good bottle of red wine

Let’s drink a toast to a life divine! ☺



Alex Steinweiss photographed at his home studio in 1947; Credit: © William P. Gottlieb; jazzphotos.com/Courtesy TASCHEN