

## "Signed" sheet music

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If you are autograph collector you have probably wandered through your share of antique shops and paper shows. And, if you are like me, you are always searching for that overlooked 'bargain' that the dealer misidentified or under priced.

Autographed sheet music may be one of those items you 'discovered,' but here's the catch: almost all the sheet music signed in facsimile and not genuine.

In the early-to-mid-twentieth century, sheet music publishers discovered that if they added the facsimile signature of the composer or famous singer to the cover of the piece, it increased sales. So, you will find many sheet music items with facsimile signatures.

Irving Berlin's Always is a classic example. We see approximately 35 copies of this item per year. People usually find them in grandma's piano bench and ask us how much it is worth.

Irving Berlin, composer, author, and musician, was born in Temun Russia in 1888. He began his music career as a singing waiter in Chinatown. He became a staff lyricist at Ted Snyder Company in 1909 and soon became a partner in the firm. After serving as a Sargent in the U.S. Army in World War I, he began his own publishing company. In 1921 Berlin built the Music Box Theatre with Sam Harris. The American Society of Composers Authors and Publishers Biographical Directory lists over 100 Berlin songs.

The illustration is copyright 1925 by Irving Berlin Inc. It will help you identify this common non-genuine autograph, if you see one. The central white box contains the inscription and signature. Other common examples include the printed signatures of Bing Crosby and Al Jolson.

Close inspection under a magnifying glass will reveal the breaks in ink and that "flat look" of a printed signature. The real clue should be the fact that it is on the sheet music. The authentication challenge comes when someone cuts out the signature and frames it with a print or picture. Keep your eyes open for this deception.

### ILLUSTRATION

This "Always, Irving Berlin." autograph is a facsimile signature on sheet music.