

N.Y. to L.A.

Fame

THEATER COMPOSER MAKES TRANSITION TO SCREEN ACTOR

While much of the world recognizes Albert Hague as the beloved gray-haired music professor from the popular TV series "Fame," only a few know him as the composer whom he really is.

Albert stumbled into acting in 1980, after a long and successful career as a musician and composer. And one of his greatest claims to fame comes as the composer on perhaps the definitive Christmas special of all-time, "How the Grinch Stole Christmas."

Today, at age 76, the actor/composer/musician lives in Marina Del Rey, Calif., with his wife of 45 years, Renée, who had a successful career on the stage herself. The picture of health, Albert (CCM '42) has slowed the pace of his work, but doesn't talk about retirement. He and Renée recently performed their autobiographical musical comedy, "Hague and Hague: His Hits and His Missus," at a major L.A. nightspot. And his most recent screen appearance was a small role as a psychiatrist in the movie "Space Jam."

It has been a long road from winning a Tony in 1959 as the composer for "Redhead" to appearing in a movie with a bunch of cartoon characters and Michael Jordan. His story starts at the ripe old age of 4, when he began playing piano in his native Germany. In the late '30s, faced with fleeing the Nazis, a distant relative living in Cincinnati arranged for him to become a German exchange student at CCM's predecessor school, the College of Music, which offered him a scholarship.

His college career was everything he had hoped for and more, including being selected to play with Rachmaninoff, on tour in Cincinnati from the Moscow Conservatory. "I was 19 and played Chopin," Albert remembers

distinctly. "You want to know about nervous? Let me tell you, playing the piano for Rachmaninoff — that's nervous."

By graduation, he was ready to repay Uncle Sam's generosity by joining the U.S. Air Force and becoming a U.S. citizen — albeit, one with a very heavy German accent.

After the war, he moved to New York City, expecting to find the big bucks, yet nearly starved on \$20 a week. The next year, he wrote his first full-length musical. The show never made it to Broadway, but it holds a special place in Albert's heart. The leading lady was Renée Orin, who later became his wife.

Renée's successful career basically supported the couple for the next three years, during which time he wrote incidental music for two Broadway shows; for a motion picture short that won top awards at two international film festivals; and for a Hallmark Hall of Fame television production. "You call it networking today, but we called it hustling," Albert says of those years. "It was very hard."

His big break came with an audition to be the composer of "Plain and Fancy," a story set among the Amish of Pennsylvania. He got the job, and his first full-length Broadway musical became a smash hit after opening in '55. Somewhere in the country, it is still performed every year.

Albert's next hit musical, "Redhead," won nine Tony awards in '59, including one for his score. "Ever since then, we have lived lavishly from hand-to-mouth," he jokes, with

traces of a German accent remaining.

He periodically composed small things for the film industry, but his big television debut came from working with Dr. Seuss in '66.

In the mid-'70s, he and Renée first put on their "Hague and Hague" show. Numerous rave reviews, including a three-page photo spread in "The New York Times," led a major casting director to ask him to audition for the film "Fame."

The film led to the TV series, which resulted in the family moving to the West Coast. The move was a good one. Nearly seven years later, Albert had appeared in 100 episodes, which aired in 72 countries.

Albert's career has been highly diversified and quite successful on all levels. He is happy with his career choices, which have led him down a much more varied path than others tried to show him. He feels he made the right decision.

"Success is if you get what you want," he adds. "Happiness is if you want what you get." Ultimately, Albert got both.

Albert Hague often played piano on the TV show "Fame," but his favorite place to play is in his own living room with his wife, Renée, singing his original compositions.



photo/Deborah Rieselman
Grinch art/Turner Entertainment