September 7—October 21 at Murrell Library

Murrell Library was one of fifty-five sites selected to receive this exhibit.

“We must pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off, and begin again the work of remaking America.” When Barack Obama made this statement in his inaugural address of January 20, 2009, he was paraphrasing the lyric Dorothy Fields wrote for a Jerome Kern song that Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers joyously dance to in the 1936 movie Swing Time: “Pick yourself up, dust yourself off, start all over again.”

Americans have always responded to the optimism, no less than the wit and sophistication, passion and verve, of the jazz standards, ballads, torch songs, anthems, up-tempo dance numbers, and showstoppers that make up the American songbook. Like Hollywood movies, with which they have a symbiotic relationship, the songs beguiled multitudes and prove, in their enduring appeal, that the goals of popular culture and high artistic achievement can happily coincide.

The best songwriters combined a genius for melody, ingenuity at fitting the right words to it, and the ability to connect with a wide audience. A remarkably high percentage of them were Jewish by birth and heritage. Some (Jerome Kern, Richard Rodgers) came from relatively prosperous families with the foresight to immigrate in the 1860s or earlier. Others were children of refugees from Eastern Europe, who risked everything to escape pogroms and persecution in the years just before and after the turn of the century.

Following the assassination of a liberal Czar in 1881, cruel anti-Semitic decrees made life miserable for Russian Jews—just as depicted in the 1964 musical Fiddler on the Roof (music by Jerry Bock, lyrics by Sheldon Harnick). And so it happened that Israel Baline, Yakov Gershowitz, and Chaim Arluck became Irving Berlin, George Gershwin, and Harold Arlen, and together they made musical history in the country that gave them the chance.

The mission of the ALA Public Programs Office is to foster cultural programming as an integral part of library service.

For More Information Regarding these Events, Please Contact Brian Hampton @ Hamptonb@moval.edu