

City University of New York (CUNY)

## CUNY Academic Works

---

Publications and Research

Lehman College

---

2006

### Liberace

Janet Butler Munch  
*CUNY Lehman College*

[How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!](#)

More information about this work at: [https://academicworks.cuny.edu/le\\_pubs/378](https://academicworks.cuny.edu/le_pubs/378)

Discover additional works at: <https://academicworks.cuny.edu>

---

This work is made publicly available by the City University of New York (CUNY).  
Contact: [AcademicWorks@cuny.edu](mailto:AcademicWorks@cuny.edu)

**LIBERACE** (May 16, 1919–February 4, 1987), pianist and popular entertainer. Wladziu Valentino Liberace was born in West Allis, Wisconsin, the son of a Polish-American mother and an Italian immigrant father who was a professional musician. Liberace's musical talent was recognized early and he made his concert debut at age eleven. He studied on scholarship at the Wisconsin College of Music and performed widely in community concert series throughout the Midwest. These early tours prepared him for a 1940 solo performance with the respected Chicago Symphony. The Liberaces always struggled financially and Walter, as he was then called, supplemented the family income by playing show tunes, popular songs, jazz melodies, and boogie-woogie in movie houses, fashion shows, ice cream parlors, and weddings. He enjoyed an easy rapport with audiences who were amused and delighted by his impulsive playing of informal encores, with arpeggios from classical works. This shtick separated him from other performers. His likable, chatty style and folksy asides also completely charmed audiences. He quickly realized that playing popular music was more financially rewarding than being a concert pianist. Moving to New York City, Liberace worked at various clubs. He became an intermission pianist at the Plaza Hotel's Persian Room. As a gimmick, he started to use his last name only. Another trick was adding of the phonetic spelling of his name—"Liber-AH-chee"—in advertising and publicity releases. His formal eveningwear, custom-made Bluthner grand piano, and ever-present candelabra on the piano projected old-world elegance; indeed, he set the tone for showmanship in the postwar era. The glamour and opulence that Liberace projected in his performances appealed to Americans who had endured wartime rationing. Liberace gained national exposure through his performance contracts with the Statler and Radisson hotel chains. He also appeared on the Texaco Star CBS radio program and cut records under the Daytone and Signature labels. His re-location to California, the heart of the entertainment industry, and his work in Las Vegas further solidified his reputation and eased his forays into film. These moves positioned him for entry into the newly emerging medium of television with *The Liberace Show*. He died in Palm Springs, California.

**Further Reading:** Jocelyn Faris, *Liberace: A Bio-Bibliography*, 1995; *Liberace, An Autobiography*, 1973; Darden Asbury Pyron, *Liberace: An American Boy*, 2000.

JANET BUTLER MUNCH

Full Text: COPYRIGHT 2006 M.E. Sharpe, Inc.