

Thank you for coming out today as we pay tribute to Meredith Willson's musical legacy. It was his inspiration of the festival that put Mason City on the map and his contributions to music that continues to bring people to our community.

Several of Willson's family members are buried here in the family lot, including his mother, wife, sister, and brother. His father, grandparents and great grandparents are also buried here in Elmwood Cemetery. The Willson Family Monument was renovated in 2018 thanks to contributions from the Iowa Questors and the Music Man Foundation.

I'd like to welcome this year's Mason City High School Drum Majors, Shaye Theobald and Baily Gunderson to share parts of Meredith's legacy.

We are here today to honor Mason City's native son, Meredith Willson.

Born in Mason City on May 18, 1902, Meredith held the record for the largest baby born in Iowa, weighing in at 14 pounds, 6 ounces. He is best remembered for his Broadway Musical "The Music Man" for which he wrote the script, lyrics, and music. Willson also wrote two other musicals, "The Unsinkable Molly Brown" and "Here's Love".

From a young age, Meredith Willson had an immensely successful career in the music and entertainment industry. He started playing the flute and piccolo in the Mason City High School Band, and went on to attend Damrosch Institute in New York, now known as Julliard. At age 19, he joined the John Philip Sousa Band playing first flute and went on to join the New York Philharmonic Orchestra in 1924.

After playing in the Philharmonic, he worked in radio and the film industry, where he created radio programs and composed many pieces of music, including film score for Charlie Chaplin's first "talkie" movie, *The Great Dictator*, in 1940. His song "You and I" was the number one song for 19 weeks in 1941. Meredith Willson won many awards for his works including the first ever Grammy, 8 Tony Awards, and an Academy Award. Following his death in 1984, he was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by President Ronald Reagan. His compositions included marches, pieces for flute, 2 full-length symphonies, and over 300 songs.

Today, on Meredith's birthday, we celebrate his legacy and take pride in our musical heritage.