## The Nearness of You

*Romance in the Dark* is a 1938 film directed by H. C. Potter and starring Gladys Swarthout, John Boles, John Barrymore, and Claire Dodd.  Swarthout , a very popular Metropolitan Opera mezzo-soprano, stars as a Hungarian peasant girl who is stuck in the middle of a rivalry between tenor Boles and his manager, Barrymore. Both men are trying to prove their manliness to countess Dodd. Boles's plan is to turn Swarthout into a star ("the Persian Nightingale") so that Barrymore will be attracted to her. Boles will then be free to move in on Dodds, the girl he is really after.

## The Nearness of You

Swarthout with her costars warbled five songs. The best is **The Nearness of You.** Hoagy Carmichael wrote music with lyrics by Ned Washington.

**Romance in th Dark, poster, 1938**

**Hoagland Howard Carmichael** was born in 1899 in Bloomington, Indiana. His father was an itinerant labourer, and his mother helped to support the family by playing piano at the local movie house and for university dances. *"Ragtime was my lullaby,"* Hoagy said, but his mother warned him against a musical career. He studied law at Indiana University but already had his own band, The Carmichael Syringe Orchestra, inspired by a Dadaist poet named Monk, who advised him,
*"There are other things in this world besides hot music....I forget what they are, but they're around."*
Another early influence was the playing of legendary cornetist Bix Beiderbecke. When Hoagy played an improvised tune for him, Beiderbecke asked,
*"Whyn't you write music, Hoagy?'*

**Gladys Swarthout**

Carmichael's career in the movies began in 1937. He performed his own material in many films. Carmichael's biographer Richard Sudhalter has credited him with fostering the growth of the singer-songwriter profession in American music; certainly he was in the minority among songwriters of his time in becoming well known for his own renditions of his songs.

**Hoagy Carmichael**

12-time Oscar nominated lyricist **Ned Washington** was born in Scranton, Pennsylvania on August 15, 1901. He began his career as a vaudeville Master of Ceremonies, where he not only introduced acts, but also acted as agent for some of them.

**Ned Washington**

One of the most prolific of the Tin Pan Alley writers, Washington collaborated on several scores for Broadway.  In 1934, he moved to Hollywood under contract with MGM for whom he wrote complete scores for many films. Subsequently, he also contributed songs to the Paramount Pictures and Walt Disney films. Washington collaborated with many composers including Victor Young, Dimitri Tiomkin, Lester Lee, Michael Cleary, Allie Wrubel, George Duning, Max Steiner, Jimmy McHugh, Bronsilaw Kaper, Walter Jurmann, Leigh Harline and Sam Stept.

## Ned Washington

*The Nearness of You is a flowing ballad with a well-constructed melody. Intervals are small, for the most part; only three leaps (sixths and seventh) occur in the entire song. Harmonic progression is an interesting variation of I– I7 – IV – iv with the I – VI7 – II – V7 turnaround used to end many tunes. Here it is the primary one used. A v7 (functioning as a II7 of IV) is inserted before the I7, and the IV is turned into a diminished chord resolving to III. From there it's a simple matter of cycling through the fifths (using minor substitutions) in order to return to the tonic. Many contemporary performers use a chromatically descending progression here. For example, in the present key of F major, the traditional changes would be Am –D7 – Gm, whereas contemporary performers might use Am – Ab – Gm instead. Either is acceptable; however, the former reflects Carmichael's original.*

## Nearness of You

Several tender versions of "Glenn Miller Orchestra" stand out as particularly noteworthy. The first big-selling version was recorded on April 28, 1940 by the Glenn Miller Orchestra, with a vocal by Ray Eberle. This recording first reached the Billboard magazine Best Seller chart on July 20, 1940 and lasted 8 weeks on the chart, peaking at number 5.

**Glenn Miller Orchestra - The Nearness of You, 1940**

Sarah Vaughan recorded the tune on several occasions beginning with her classic 1949 performance. Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong collaborated in 1956 on an utterly charming version of the tune. The sound of Fitzgerald's gentle singing on this tune alongside Armstrong's brilliant trumpet and the sensitive accompaniment of Oscar Peterson and his group comes mighty close to perfection.

**Ella & Louis - The Nearness of You, 1956**

Among instrumental versions, Gerry Mulligan's lyrical reading featuring the trumpet of Chet Baker is very significant both musically and historically. A 1951 concert in St. Louis featured alto saxophone giant Charlie Parker with Woody Herman's Orchestra, and the event was broadcast and recorded for posterity.

**Mulligan & Baker - The Nearness of You**

The song was performed by Norah Jones on her album *Come Away With Me,* and (partially) in the film *Two Weeks Notice,* released in December 2002. It was also performed by Diana Krall on a Geoff Keezer album, *Turn Up the Quiet.*

**Diana Krall sings The Nearness of You**

Out of all of Carmichael's hits, "The Nearness of You" is his most straightforward love song, with both the music and lyrics conveying an unguarded sentimental tone. Alec Wilder in *American Popular Song: The Great Innovators, 1900-1950*
calls it
*"simple and unclever," "tender,"*
and
*"a forthright expression of the romantic world in which boys and girls once were wont to dream and dance and gaze and hold hands."*
Wilder also comments that it is
*"the sort of song that an academic musical mind would sneer at."*

**Hoagy Carmichael**

As if to refute Wilder's latter comment, Allen Forte, Battell Professor of the Theory of Music at

Yale University, devotes over five pages in his book *Listening to Classic American Popular Songs* to discussion of “The Nearness of You” terming certain aspects of the song
*“unusual,” “remarkable,”*
and
*“striking,”*
and even offering a
*“Congratulations, Hoagy!”*
for Carmichael’s slightly concealed replication of the refrain’s opening phrase in the verse.

**Charlie Parker & Woody Herman - The Nearness of You**

**The Nearness Of You, lyrics**

*It's not the pale moon that excites me  That thrills and delights me  Oh no  It's just the nearness of you  It isn't your sweet conversation  That brings this sensation  Oh no  It's just the nearness of you  When you're in my arms and I feel you so close to me  All my wildest dreams came true  I need no soft lights to enchant me  If you would only grant me the right  to hold you ever so tight  And to feel in the night  The nearness of you*

## Nearness of You