

A TRIBUTE TO DORIS DAY

by RICHARD HINDLEY

Why oh why, oh why-o did Doris Kappelhoff ever leave Cincinnati, Ohio? When she was just a little girl, did she wonder what lay ahead? Like a child in wild anticipation, did she ask her mother what she would be? Would she be pretty, rich, with rainbows day after day? The answer turned out to be just about all of these, and we can tell ourselves the things that happened are all really true. But when she turned into Doris Day it wasn't magic. It happened day by day because of her talent, a success story without a golden wand or mystic charms. Now we have children of our own, and it is their children who are delighted when they first view 'Calamity Jane'.

By the time Doris made that picture, she had already been one of the top ten box office attractions, a position she would hold for a further eleven years - a truly amazing achievement, in fact the longest running period for any female star in the history of motion pictures. From the viewpoint of the new millennium, show-business life is quite a few years away! Perhaps, perhaps, perhaps we should take a sentimental journey, set our hearts at ease and renew some memories. All aboard! - and let that whip crack away!

Today's newspaper, which happens to be 'The Age' published in Melbourne, has the weekly television and video guide, including reviews of DVD releases. Outstanding is a glowing one - a package of Universal comedies from the 60s, starring Doris with Rock Hudson, plus a photo of them both with a big smile. So our image of Doris tends to be is one that is frozen in time, for since her retirement from the world of show-business in the mid 70s, she has not appeared in the public's gaze, except for well-chosen appearances.

Explore any Doris Day website, or buy any of the countless CDs or home videos of her reissued work, and Doris is still there, but with photographs for the most part spanning the 1940s to the 1970s. From that point the showbiz image stops still. Since then she has moved to Carmel By The Sea, in Northern California, to concentrate on other responsibilities and interests, many of them associated with her two Animal Foundations, the Doris Day Animal League and the Doris Day Animal Foundation. Her subsequent television appearances and interviews have been on her own terms, but with one reluctant acceptance in 1989 on stage at the Golden Globes for the presentation



of a Cecil B. DeMille Award. So we have to be more than delighted that Doris now reappears as an Honorary Member of our Robert Farnon Society. Doris's achievements, to put them mildly, are amazing and they've already been catalogued in detail many times. More recent publications are 'Doris Day' by Eric Braun (reissued in 1998 by Orion paperbacks) and 'Doris Day, Her Own Story' by A. E. Hotchner, written in collaboration with Doris, who was coerced by her friend, the late novelist Jacqueline Sussan. So rather than covering too much ground that's been written about elsewhere, let's make this is an opportunity to look at a selection of her recordings and movies. After all, there are countless examples of Doris's work that have been re-issued onto CD and home video, but if you'd like something different from such obvious choices as a CD compilation headed by 'Que Sera Sera' or another viewing of 'Calamity Jane', these recommendations illustrate not only the strength and tenderness in that voice, but her acting

talents as well, plus an acknowledgment of some of her co-workers, those brilliant arrangers and movie directors who usually remain in the background.

If you know the Golden Era of dance bands, you will recognise that by 1940 Doris was already performing with one of the best, that of Les Brown and his Band of Renown. Les, who had formed his band in 1938, was not only a talented performer and arranger himself, but had the knack of recognising and promoting talent: his players and arrangers included Frank Comstock and Skip Martin, both of whom continued to develop their craft with the band. And just like Doris's destiny, they would also wind up in Hollywood, as top arrangers for movie musicals at Warner Bros and MGM respectively. In the case of Frank, this would mean many of the musicals of Doris herself. She actually left the Les Brown band for marriage, but was soon back again, singing such hits as 'You Won't Be Satisfied', 'My Dreams Are Getting Better All the Time', and in 1944 the biggest and most famous the million seller 'Sentimental Journey'.

The transition from band singer to a radio and then recording star was an automatic one, with Doris embarking on a contract with Columbia records in 1947 that would continue until 1967. Several singles went gold: 'It's Magic' (1948), 'A Guy is a Guy' (1951), 'Secret Love' (1954) and 'Que Sera, Sera' (1956). During these Columbia years, she recorded with virtually all the most talented musical directors in USA - the list must surely be greater than for any other singer from this period. An indication can be found in the British Memoir CD 'I'll Be Around' (CDMOIR 569), a varied compilation of Columbia singles from 1949 to 1951, issued in UK in 2002. It includes the orchestras of Frank Comstock, Paul Weston, Percy Faith, Axel Stordhal, Harry James, Leith Stevens, Ray Noble, George Siravo and even David Rose, a truly remarkable line-up.

Moving on to CD reissues of LPs, Doris re-recorded a selection of many of her Les Brown hits and other songs from the 40s in the romantic 1965 Columbia album 'Doris Day's Sentimental Journey' (Columbia Redhot CD 471145 2). The arrangements are by Mort Garson who tastefully directs a large string section filled out here and there with woodwinds, French horns and the occasional bass clarinet line.

'Show Time' is a selection of bright up-tempo and romantic songs from classic Broadway musicals by Irving Berlin, Lerner and Loewe, Comden and Green with Leonard Bernstein, Cole Porter, Harburg and Lane, and Rodgers and Hammerstein. The album gets off to a rousing start with fanfares and choir ushering in Doris's delivery of 'Show Time on Broadway' a quintessential curtain raiser, specially written by Joe Lubin. Berlin's 'I Got the Sun in the Morning' and 'People will Say We're in Love' are particularly toe tapping tracks and Doris acknowledges her origins in 'Ohio'. The arrangements for big band with strings are in the more than capable hands of Axel Stordhal, a name associated with the early Columbia singles of Frank Sinatra, but one not found as accompanist on quite as many LPs as there should have been. The Japanese pressing of this album (CBS/Sony 25DP 5309) may be a disadvantage when it comes to deciphering the copious sleeve notes, but it does have all the lyrics printed in English. It's more recently become available in the UK in the 'Two on One' series (Columbia 475750 2).

Frank de Vol was associated with Doris on several albums; he even arranged one track in the aforementioned 'Show Time'. The album 'Cuttin' Capers' is distinguished by a great collection of his bright and breezy arrangements, a theme which continues with a companion album, 'Bright and Shiny' (arranged by Neil Hefti). This delightful bargain is to be found on a 'Two on One' UK CD - Columbia 477593 2. Also in the same series is 'Latin for Lovers' an album with several tracks in the bossa nova beat. This time the sumptuous Mort Garson Orchestra features strings, piano, Spanish guitar and woodwind - a perfect backdrop for Doris, who adds a more noticeable touch of vibrato to her voice in many of the tracks. Included in the album is 'Perhaps, Perhaps, Perhaps', which was given a new lease of life in the 1992 Australian movie musical 'Strictly Ballroom' and the beautiful song 'Summer Has Gone' written by Comstock/DiNovi. (There's a bit of a mystery here, because Frank Comstock asserts he has

no recollection of having written this song, and in any case was not involved with Doris's commercial recordings at the time. So who is the 'Comstock' in the credits? Alan Moore, President of the Australian Doris Day Society has the answer: it's Bill Comstock! Further research suggests he must be one of The Four Freshmen, who performed in that group in the 50s and 60s). If you purchase the USA pressing of 'Latin for Lovers', you'll get it coupled with the 'Sentimental Journey' album mentioned above.

My final recommendation has no orchestral accompaniment, nor on some tracks any rhythm section. 'Duet', recorded in 1961, simply has Doris accompanied by André Previn on piano, with the occasional addition of bass and drums. This is unquestionably one of Doris's best albums, although it would be unfair to label it 'the best', since her career as a vocalist spanned three decades. What distinguishes it is not only the maturity of the voice, but the careful selection of material tailored for that maturity. The lyrics of Dorothy Fields for 'Remind Me', Johnny Mercer's 'Fools Rush In' and two Previn compositions 'Yes' and 'Daydreaming' come to mind. Previn's phrasing and tempi often push Doris's voice far beyond what was required from her many more commercial recordings, but it's a challenge she accepts effortlessly, and that's ultimately what makes it a great album. 'Duet' is on the Australian Pickwick CD PWKS 583, and there is a separate USA release that is a 2 on 1 CD containing two previously unreleased tracks.

For many performers, the above recommendations, a tiny selection from a vast number of albums, would comprise a satisfying tribute, but what happened at the start of her recording contract puts Doris apart from every other vocal performer. She became not only a movie star, but America's top favourite as well. Her first film was in 1948, the Warner Bros musical 'Romance on the High Seas', but renamed 'It's Magic' for all Commonwealth countries. The explanation was that the song had become such a hit that it would effectively promote the film. (The change certainly dispelled any misconstruing of its original title as a swashbuckling extravaganza). Her last movie, again for Warners, was the comedy 'With Six You Get Eggroll' (1969) in which she starred with one of her favourite actors, and a good friend, Brian Keith, and incidentally it was one of Doris's favourite films to shoot. She had a great time doing it. Between these she appeared in 39 films, including the boisterous comedy of

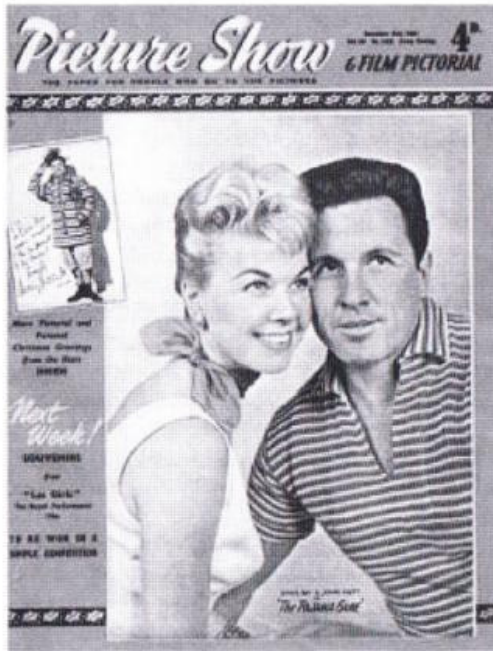


The famous publicity photo of Doris Day as 'Calamity Jane'

'Calamity Jane' to the more sophisticated Universal ones, between 1959 and 1964, such as those three with Rock Hudson, and two with James Garner, and has been quoted as saying that they were absolute fun pictures to do, especially with those two great actors.

Again, here are some personal favourites, including some not so well known. It's worth considering that musical performers have always been called to Hollywood. Al Jolson was in the first talkie, and of course Bing Crosby followed, but if we exclude performers like Judy Garland and Frank Sinatra, there are very few singers of popular songs whose Hollywood careers cover the range of performance that Doris's movies offered.

Doris made several light musical comedies during her Warner Bros years, and an early one 'It's a Great Feeling' (1949) is noteworthy as a spoof on Hollywood and filmmaking. Most of the plot is set within the Warner studios, providing guest appearances by many of its roster of stars and even its famous directors. Doris plays a movie-struck ingenue whose many attempts by co-star Jack



DORIS DAY AND JOHN RAITT
'PICTURE SHOW' 21 December 1957

melodrama involving the clash of three characters somewhat inspired by the play 'A Streetcar Named Desire', which Warners was about to film. Doris, cast opposite Ginger Rogers as her visiting sister, plays a thoroughly decent but naïve waitress working at the local diner who gradually admits the shocking reality about her husband: he's a Klu Klux Klan killer. This concept of trust betrayed by a hidden truth fits well into similar fears bred by McCarthyism in the early fifties. The casting of Doris, who gives a strong performance, ensured that audiences knew exactly where their sympathies were to lie. This is the only film in which Doris not only plays a victim, but one who dies in the last reel, a role to which she would never return in subsequent pictures.

'Love Me or Leave Me' was made by MGM in 1955. This movie followed the rise to fame of Ruth Etting, played by Doris, and pulled no punches in its depiction of her tough ambitious nature, which both complimented and clashed with the personality of her crooked husband, played by James Cagney. The plot, one of rags-to-riches earned at a price, unfolded against a backdrop that graduated from seedy nightclubs to the glamour of the Ziegfeld Follies. MGM stalwart George Stoll was assigned the project as studio musical director, but Percy Faith was specially hired as co-musical director. Faith turned in a brilliant score with a set of arrangements that reflected the style of the jazz age, yet with no trace of the MGM hallmark sound. No wonder that both he and Stoll were nominated for an Academy Award. The name of George Feltenstein appears again in the credits of the soundtrack album on the Columbia label (CK47503), so quality is ensured with bonus tracks adding to its value. The sleeve notes, however, give no recognition of Faith or Stoll's achievements, and although there is a credit given for Faith, there is no mention of Stoll at all. This is an omission that would not have occurred had the album been a Rhino release with Feltenstein at the helm.

'The Pajama Game' (1957) gets my highest rating. It's been underrated as a movie musical and as a piece of filmmaking. For a start, it's a perfect record of the talents of an entire Broadway cast brought to the screen, with the exclusion of the original leading role that had been played by Janis Paige. She had appeared in Warner's musicals of the 40s, including the

Carson to get her discovered and cast in the plum role of Mademoiselle Fifi go disastrously wrong, often with slapstick consequences. Doris cut studio recordings of her songs from this and her other early movies, because it wasn't until 1953 that Warners started issuing soundtrack recordings, the first happening to be 'Calamity Jane' (arranged by Frank Comstock), and released on Doris's Columbia contract label. In 1998 soundtrack highlights from 'It's a Great Feeling' were at last issued on Rhino Records. Producer George Feltenstein compiled a selection that included two other movies from the period, 'Romance on the High Seas' and 'My Dream is Yours' (1949) for the CD 'Doris Day, It's Magic: Her Early Years at Warner Bros' (Rhino R2 75543). The album includes two Main Titles, the one for 'It's a Great Feeling' being preceded by the famous Max Steiner fanfare so often played over the Warner trademark.

Rather than keeping her typecast in the image of the reliable and cute girl-next-door, the studio was quick to develop her acting range. 'Storm Warning' (1950) was a black and white

starring role in 'Romance on the High Seas' with Doris in support - but it was now Doris who was assigned the lead. (Janis's consequent availability allowed her to accept a co-starring part in MGM's 'Silk Stockings').

One wonders how Doris felt in rehearsals, suddenly working with an entire group of performers who had already bonded into a team. Did she feel intimidated? Whatever she might have dealt with at the start, there is no hint of it from the moment the cameras rolled. Not only is Doris perfectly cast as the tough yet vulnerable trade union boss, but also she is the perfect foil to leading man John Raitt. In this movie you get the wonderful score by Richard Adler and Jerry Ross, plus choreography by Bob Fosse in the outstanding 'Once a Year Day' and 'Steam Heat' numbers, the latter featuring dancer Carol Haney.

Director Stanley Donen was allowed to shoot the film on location, and that gives it an immediacy and punch, something MGM could not afford for his 1954 effort 'Seven Brides for Seven Brothers', which suffered from an uneasy mix of location photography and painted backdrops. There was an irony at work here, because that movie had been MGM's answer to Warner's 'Calamity Jane', so it was not until 'The Pajama Game' with Doris as his star, that Donen's vision of an all-location musical was realised to the full. It is available both on CD and DVD, the latter including one of Doris's numbers 'The Man Who Invented Love' that was dropped from the release version of the film.

A movie that was often dismissed, even ridiculed on its release, is the melodrama 'Julie' (1956) produced for MGM. The production, in modestly budgeted black and white, has aged well, testified by the fact that it's been reissued in colourised form. Right from the start, we feel sympathy for Doris who's in a very distressed state. She plays the part of an air hostess, and again she gradually admits the shocking reality about her husband: he's a psychopath! The whole thing works to a thrilling climax in which Doris has to land a jet plane full of passengers, prompting a detailed talk down from air traffic control. Some of that 50s ridicule was disbelief that a woman could actually fly and land a jet plane. In retrospect, the capable Doris, certainly no victim and with her hands firmly on the controls, was 20 years ahead of the feminist cause. Writer-director Andrew Stone never achieved the fame of the 'Master of Suspense' Alfred Hitchcock, who had directed Doris in the remake of 'The Man Who Knew Too Much' (1956). But Stone was perfectly at ease with the suspense genre and, like Hitchcock, had learnt his craft back in the silent era, so he knew how to tell a story in precise visual terms. He makes the whole thing totally entertaining by moving the plot along at a cracking pace, and even has the confidence to keep Leith Stevens' scoring to a minimum. 'Julie' is great fun if you can accept it on its own terms, so don't listen to what the critics say. It's become a perfect saga for the post-feminist age!



By the late fifties Hollywood was turning away from musicals, with the exception of versions of Broadway shows. In 1962 MGM got round to filming 'Billy Rose's Jumbo' (aka 'Jumbo'), after many years of legal negotiations concerning the acceptability of their adaptation. This musical, Doris's first since 'The Pajama Game', was also to be her last. Despite her huge popularity, it failed to do well at the box office, even with a Rodgers and Hart score, some spectacular staging by veteran Busby Berkeley and the characteristic light touch of director Charles Waters. Unfortunately, the early 60s were too late for an up-dated revival of a 30s musical set in 1910.

One big plus is that it contains superb arrangements by Conrad Salinger in what was to be his last film, as well as the last with that definable MGM sound. Salinger's arrangement of 'Little Girl Blue', performed by Doris late one night in an empty circus ring is almost heart stopping. An ethereal mood introduces her rendition of Hart's wistful lyrics that are enhanced by imperceptible changes of tempi. The verse, in waltztime, makes a surprise appearance as a central section, the lyrics conveying all the optimism of youth. Then the melody and original tempo reappear, as hope transforms to yearning. The orchestra takes the last bars, featuring viola d'amoré, then French horn, then woodwinds... Fade to black... It's magic! This may not be Doris's greatest musical, but 'Jumbo' has many delights. It's available on both videotape and CD, although the CD contains the same material as the original soundtrack LP with judicial editing of some of the numbers. Again it's unfortunate that it's not a Rhino album, because these missing sections would surely have been restored.

Doris continued her Hollywood career throughout the sixties with mainly light hearted comedies, and garnered no less than three Golden Globe Awards for her efforts. She then embarked on a television career, her 'Doris Day Show' for CBS becoming so popular that it ran for five seasons. Although she then retired from show-business, she eventually emerged in another role - one that reflected her concern for all aspects of animal welfare. As she put it herself: "I see myself as being privileged to be able to speak for those who cannot speak for themselves, and I get joy from helping the animals and the people who love them." In 1987 she set up a non-profit organisation, the Doris Day Animal League, and then the Doris Day Pet Foundation, known since 1998 as the Doris Day Animal Foundation. This is another success story, a venture that was unquestioningly embraced by the USA, because after all, Doris had been their all time favourite star, one of great integrity, someone whose image and values were trustworthy. The venture also prompted a further television series, one on animal welfare with guest stars, many of whom had worked in her films. In addition, in 1993 she hosted a charity event for animals in her home town of Carmel, California and subsequently granted two further television interviews.

It is interesting to compare Doris's almost instant welfare achievements with those in France of Brigitte Bardot, who attempted to set up a similar venture that eventually became 'La Fondation Brigitte Bardot'. In the second of her autobiographical works 'Le Carré de Platon' (published in 1999 by Grasset), Bardot records how for many years the media refused to take her aims seriously. Despite the generosity she showed to promote her beliefs, it took her many years, hampered further by legal problems, to set up her Foundation. The key to this surely has to be her former screen image, one that the media found incompatible with her objectives, and totally at odds with that of Doris Day across the Atlantic.

Looking back over the achievements of Doris Kappelhoff in 2004 is quite a daunting task. She's done more than most of us could possibly hope to achieve in one lifetime, but in so doing she confirms 'the power of one'. Her largesse, determination, values and talents are all qualities her admirers recognise. It's worth here considering what songwriter Jerome Kern said in 1925 when, during a visit to London, he was asked to give the chief characteristics of the American nation: 'I replied that the United States citizen was epitomised in Irving Berlin's music. He doesn't attempt to stuff the public's ears with pseudo-original ultra modernism, but he honestly absorbs the vibrations emanating from the people, manners and life of his time, and in turn gives these impressions back to the world - simplified, clarified, glorified. In short, what I really want to say is that Irving Berlin has no place in American music: he is American music'.

So let's continue this line of thinking and apply it to Doris herself, for not only is she American music..... she is America! And on 3rd April let's all shout it from the highest hills, and even tell the golden daffodils: Happy Birthday, and Many Happy Returns of Doris's day!

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