

# Dinah Shore: FIRST LADY OF TELEVISION

by Peer J. Oppenheimer



SO FAR THIS YEAR Dinah Shore has won two Emmies, *Radio-TV Daily's* Award as "Woman of the Year and Top Vocalist on TV," the Sylvania Award, the Peabody Award, and the *Downbeat* Award; and she placed No. 1 on more than a dozen fan-magazine polls.

No one will deny that she is television's First Lady. It's a lot harder to answer the question why?

Here are the explanations most offered for Dinah's success:

"It's her voice." Yet Frank Sinatra's records outsell Dinah's two-to-one—and his show was one of last season's biggest flops.

"It's her appearance." She has pleasing features, but she's no beauty queen although she once had a fair chance of winning the title, "Miss Centennial Park Pool," in Nashville, Tenn. When her father found out that a picture of his daughter, clad only in a bathing suit, would appear in the daily paper he made her withdraw from the contest!

"She's a shrewd business woman and has a knack for getting the best available talent on her show." The talent available to Dinah consists of the same people available to Steve Allen, Ed Sullivan, and anybody else willing to pay the price.

As for being a financial wizard, we found only one person who was thoroughly convinced of this. And he was from the Internal Revenue Service which—as a matter of habit—considers every citizen shrewd at trying to save on his taxes!

His experience with Dinah occurred a few years ago when she charged off her television wardrobe as "a necessary business deduction," claiming that her gowns, which cost between \$300 to \$700 each, were not suitable for personal use.

"Why can't you wear them to private parties?" the Internal Revenue man argued when he called on her at the NBC studio.

"You come to my house this evening and I'll show you!" Dinah insisted.

A few hours later she gave one of the most unusual fashion shows in history—proving that her television clothes were so tight she couldn't possibly sit down in them. She succeeded in winning her deduction.

"But that," insists Dinah, "is more female reasoning than business sense. You just ask George."

She was, of course, referring to her husband, actor-rancher-furniture builder George Montgomery, who is also financial head of the household.

"Dinah is right," George declared. "She knows nothing about money. I put her on a weekly allowance long ago, but she can't keep track of that."

A few months ago Dinah went to Texas on a personal-appearance tour. Finding herself without money after a couple of days, she tried to cash her allowance check at the hotel. The cashier's mouth dropped open when he saw the date on it—April 23, 1951!

So what's the real reason for Dinah's success?

The answer was given by Bill Powers, advertising manager for the automobile company that sponsors her show. "Dinah is our No. 1 salesman," he insists, "I'm convinced she could sell anything to anyone."

She could, and she did. Without this ability, she would never have been able to overcome her father's opposition to show business.

**D**INAH'S FATHER, Sam Shore, owned a small department store in Winchester, Tenn., where his daughters Elizabeth—nicknamed Bessie—and Frances Rose—now better

known to fans as Dinah—were born.

Dinah seems to have inherited her talent from her mother, Anna Shore. While her father was proud of his wife's voice, he called it "nonessential" and "frivolous" when he found she was taking singing lessons.

When Anna Shore died at 45, Dinah lost her staunchest supporter. That she finally talked her father into giving not only his approval, but also financial support, proved she had already mastered salesmanship.

The first hints that Dinah was a little extrovert who needed an audience were upsetting to her older sister Bessie.

Bessie, now the wife of Dr. Maurice Seligman of Los Angeles, remembers a typical Saturday evening when she was on the front porch with a boy friend, looking at the moonlight and feeling romantic. Suddenly, Dinah's bedroom window flew open, and the younger sister bellowed several verses of "My Old Kentucky Home."

"I was so mad I could have kicked her," Bessie recalls with a grin. "I settled for her promise that she would never do it again."

She kept the promise. The next time Bessie entertained one of her beaux, Dinah played the ukulele!

Dinah first began thinking of a singing career while attending Hume Fogg High School, after her family had moved to Nashville. She even took a few vocal lessons, but her extracurricular activity as cheer leader did not improve her voice.

Two weeks after her first lesson, Dinah and her singing teacher came to an amicable parting. "That was the sum total of my formal voice instruction," she says. "My original lyric soprano had changed to a contralto."

Then she turned to dramatics for a spell. Long before she became a member of the high school's dramatic society, she had demonstrated her capabilities with Saturday afternoon recitations in her father's store.

Dinah appeared in a number of high-school plays and during her sophomore year at Vanderbilt University sang herself into a quarter-hour program of her own at a local radio station, WSM. For this she earned \$2.50 per show. True to form, she often left the checks in her purse or between the pages of a book for months, upsetting the composure of the station accountant.

The initial showdown with her father came when Dinah wanted to appear with a local Summer stock

company. In addition to his objections to show business in general, he felt she was too young to travel alone for performances in nearby cities.

The best way to get him to change his mind, Dinah reasoned, was through her older sister. Although already married to Dr. Seligman, Bessie offered to accompany Dinah on all out-of-town engagements. Her father gave his consent.

It was during her senior year in college that Dinah really became anxious about her career. As president of her sorority, she was sent to Vermont for a convention. On the way back, she visited a friend in New York City where she managed an audition at radio station WNEW.

She had no trouble selling the manager on giving her a job—particularly on a sustaining show, which meant she worked for nothing. However, Dinah gained some valuable experience and, what proved to be more important, an even more valuable friend. Martin "Ticker" Freeman, an accompanist who was working at a music publishing house at the time, played for her audition. He is still her accompanist, friend, critic, and idea man.

Her New York sojourn ended abruptly when her father made her come home to Nashville to finish college. Before she did, Dinah had won at least a limited victory—his promise that once she got her degree he'd allow her to return to New York.

**T**WELVE MONTHS later, with a degree in sociology, she was back in New York, comfortably settled in a medium-priced hotel with \$250 she realized from selling some of her camera equipment.

Dinah was in a number of sustaining shows which gave her experience, but no money. As her funds dwindled, she kept moving to cheaper quarters until she finally shared a one-room apartment with four other girls. She was literally down to her last dime when she called her father for help. Only this time she used reverse psychology—telling him she was ready to quit and come home.

There is no record of exactly what was said during the phone conversation, but before it was over Bessie had gotten into the act; and by the time Dinah hung up, Mr. Shore had promised to send Dinah enough money to keep her going as a singer until she got a paying job.

She did before long, and a short

time later got her big break in the form of a two-week engagement at the Strand Theater.

On opening night, she not only sold herself to one of the country's toughest audiences, but to her father as well. When the show was over, he was so outspokenly proud of his daughter, one would have thought show business had been his idea!

Dinah's next big sales job was almost Machiavellian. But then, the bait was more elusive, the stakes higher, Dinah more determined.

The subject was matrimony. The victim was tall, handsome, romantic actor George Montgomery.

Her campaign started on a hot Sunday afternoon in Atlantic City, N. J., where Dinah was a featured singer with the Milton Berle show.

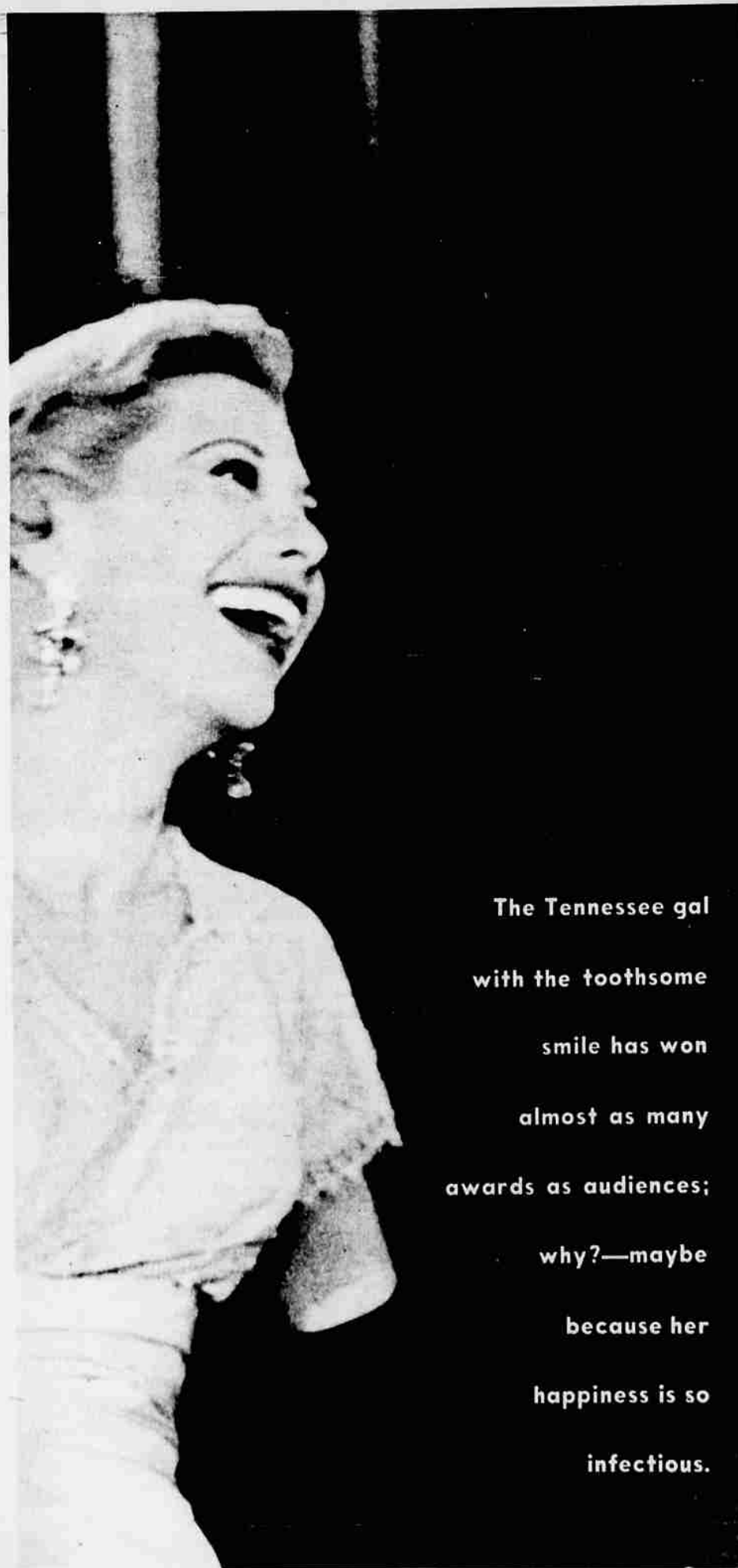
As she strolled along the boardwalk on the way to the Steel Pier, she was fascinated by the "Coming Attractions" poster at the Boardwalk Theater—more specifically, the star of the next feature, "The Cowboy and the Blonde." She insists that one look at George's picture made her decide she was going to marry him.

Dinah's more immediate desire was to get the picture. Since the poster was the only one available, she talked the theater manager into giving it to her. By the time she met "Corporal Montgomery" at the Hollywood Canteen—where she worked as a hostess twice a week during World War II—it had become the most widely traveled advertisement in the world.

They became a steady twosome who saw eye-to-eye on everything but matrimony. Dinah wanted to get married; George didn't, particularly not after he received orders to proceed to Alaska to test equipment under Arctic conditions. George helped prove that GIs could survive—but in his case, not too well. He caught bronchial pneumonia and came down from his normal 185 pounds to 165.

Meantime, Dinah pursued several methods in her matrimonial campaign. She started with emotion-packed love letters, switched to no letters at all, and finally, in a last desperate attempt to make him jealous, treated him as "one of the boys in the service" but slipped into her notes to him references to imaginary boy friends who took her out night after night and asked to marry her.

George finally caught the bait, and proposed by mail. But the letter arrived two months after they were married on Dec. 5, 1943.



The Tennessee gal with the toothsome smile has won almost as many awards as audiences; why?—maybe because her happiness is so infectious.

1. Jimmy Durante says he has never been treated as tenderly as he was by Dinah.
2. Even high-stepping dancers like Shirley MacLaine can't exhaust Dinah's pep.
3. Inhibitions?—Dinah never met one, as these vaudeville-like high jinks prove.

