

Mary Martin (Continued)

Husband Richard Halliday (below) says Mary's zest stems from love of work—a love her son, Larry (with Mary's granddaughter, Heidi), has inherited.



the night-club audience and the legend of Mary Martin was launched.

On the night in November, 1938, when Cole Porter's "Leave It to Me" hit Broadway, the unknown blue-eyed girl from Texas stopped the show with her electrifying rendition of "My Heart Belongs to Daddy." It was her only number and it lasted three minutes, but it catapulted her to fame. Hollywood now demanded her. In four years she starred in 11 films with Bing Crosby and Cary Grant, among others. It was there she met Richard Halliday, then a Paramount story editor.

Movie-making left the effervescent Mary Martin cold, and thereafter she was to make history on the stage and on television screens. In "One Touch of Venus," she triumphed for three years as the love goddess. "Lute Song" saw her as the haunting heroine of the Chinese fantasy. Then, as the adorable nurse in "South Pacific," Mary Martin provided enchanting evenings in a fabulous run.

It was her endearing never-grow-old characterization of Peter Pan that smashed records in television. On March 7, 1955, at a cost of \$500,000, Mary Martin's two-hour TV interpretation of Barrie's classic was viewed by more than 67,000,000 people. The acclaim was so great that her show was repeated a year later. Breathlessly awaiting it, in addition to millions of home viewers, were large gatherings throughout the nation in town halls, schools, hospitals, taverns, and other public places. In Chicago, 5,000 youngsters at parties in department stores watched her soaring Peter Pan in open-mouthed awe.

Each of her other TV specials has been an event of the year: the Ford Anniversary show with Ethel Merman, "The Skin of Our Teeth," "Annie Get Your Gun," and a gala duo with the British actor-playwright, Noel Coward.

Next Easter Sunday will be Mary Martin Day when she will appear in two NBC spectaculars, matinee and evening. They'll be one-woman shows based on her trouping program. And next Fall her name will once more light up a Broadway theater marquee in a new Rodgers and Hammerstein musical, "The Singing Heart"—a singularly appropriate title for its star.

Her present barnstorming of the nation is one of the most arduous and ambitious undertakings ever to take to the road. Why, I asked, is she doing it?

"For ten years I've wanted to go out to the people," she said. "And my motto is, 'Once you have dreamed it, never let it go.' I suppose it all goes back to when I was at school in Nashville. I saw Vilma Banky and Rod La Rocque, the first live actors I'd ever beheld on a stage. I was 16 and it opened another world to me. I want to repay for that experience, to give it to others. Understand?"

Meeting Mary Martin, you understand. Leaving her, I thought of a comment a friend of hers once made.

"It's impossible not to feel good around Mary. She has the same effect on me as an oxygen tent."

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