

How the stars get their names

Rock, Tab, Kirk, and Kim are products of high-level Hollywood thinking aimed at creating a marquee moniker the moviegoer can't forget



Shirley Schrift
Shelley Winters



Art Gelien
Tab Hunter

by Peer J. Oppenheimer



Cecilia Parker
Suzy Parker

EVER HEARD OF Norma Jean Baker? Bernard Schwartz? Art Gelien? Frederick Bickel? Ella Geisman? Issur Danielovitch? Daniel Kaminsky?

Probably not. But you'd have no trouble recognizing them by their stage names—Marilyn Monroe, Tony Curtis, Tab Hunter, Fredric March, June Allyson, Kirk Douglas, and Danny Kaye.

Notwithstanding Shakespeare's "What's in a name? That which we call a rose, By any other name would smell as sweet," Hollywood producers, agents and publicists are convinced that it can spell the difference between success and oblivion. As a result, nearly 70 percent of today's stars don't use their own names professionally. This includes Hollywood's No. 1 box-office actor and actress—currently co-starred in Universal-International's "Pillow Talk"—Rock Hudson and Doris Day. Their real names are Roy Fitzgerald and Doris Kappelhoff! Rock also stars in his studio's most expensive production of the year, "This Earth Is Mine."

Changing names is nothing new. Gladys Smith was one of the first to recognize marquee value when she adopted the name Mary Pickford. Lucille Le Sueur was renamed in a fan-magazine contest. As Joan Crawford, she has been one of Hollywood's most durable stars. Even in Germany, a young woman named Maria Magdalene von Losch sensed the importance of a catchy name; she became Marlene Dietrich.

There is no sure-fire method for choosing a name that will click; but a top expert on the subject, agent Henry Willson, who discovered and named Rock Hudson, Tab Hunter, Rory Calhoun, and Rhonda Fleming, insists certain basic premises must be kept in mind.

"As with any commodity—and a star is a commodity—" says Mr. Willson, "the name must fit the product. It must be expressive, easy to remember, and, if possible, unusual. Particularly the first name." Mr. Willson points at Rock as his prime example. "When you hear his name for the first time, you visualize someone tall and strong as the Rock of Gibraltar. It's easy to pronounce, easy to remember." Mr. Willson is convinced many talented, good-looking actors hurt their careers because their names lacked excitement.

Producer Jerry Wald agrees only in part with this reasoning. "Who would have thought a guy could overcome a name like Humphrey Bogart and a lisp to boot! If the talent and personality are strong enough, a person can overcome anything. But there are few performers in the Bogart class."

He stresses a name should be distinctive, melodious, short enough to fit on a marquee, and express a player's personality.

"It was only a small change from Cecilia Parker to Suzy Parker, but the latter not only had a prettier sound, the 'z' in Suzy made it more dis-

(Continued)