

Valley Times
SCREEN · MUSIC · DRAMA
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New Film Tot Careers Bridge Awkward Period

Is there a jinx on child stars?

It's a Hollywood tradition that there is, for so few of them achieve adult careers. When Shirley Temple reportedly refused to pact her two-year-old Susan for a David Selznick-sponsored career in films, it could easily have been the voice of experience. Shirley's adult career hasn't been running too smoothly. A repeat of child-star status in the family might damage an adult career for Susan, in turn.

Today, Diana Lynn, now appearing on screens in "Paid in Full" and "My Friend Irma Goes West," Hal Wallis productions for Paramount, is one of only three other former child stars still working before the cameras steadily as adult players. Mickey Rooney, Judy Garland and Elizabeth Taylor are the only ones who with Diana have made the grade. Bonita Granville works occasionally in films for her husband, Millionaire Producer Jack Wrather.

Sole Survivors

These names represent the sole survivors of a long list of talented, pretty and or cute youngsters, going back as far as Baby Peggy Montgomery, Madge Evans, the Our Gang outfit, Mitzi Green, Wesley Barry, Jackie Coogan, Jackie Cooper, Cora Sue Collins, Edith Fellows, Bobby Breen, Sybil Jason, Jane Withers, Sterling Holloway, George Breakstone, Deanna Durbin, Susanna Foster and Freddy Bartholomew.

There were many others, now forgotten.

In some instances, it was a case of the adage, "What's cute in a kitten isn't cute in a cat." With others, even real talent didn't assure a screen career as an adult. Some, like Mitzi Green, Holloway and Bartholomew, made places for themselves in theater work. Wesley Barry worked recently as an assistant director at Monogram. George Breakstone, onetime winner of the Mussolini's award for film work, as the one-shot child star in "No Greater Glory," has produced and directed a couple of independent jungle adventure films in far places since the war.

Deanna Durbin, once considered the solid property that could be counted on to keep the old Universal studio going, during her girlhood stardom in musicals, lost out on what had been a promising adult career due to poundage. A recent newspaper item quoted her agents as saying she had not had an offer in eighteen months, and was going to Europe to enjoy some of the fortune she had piled up as a child star, rather than continue the struggle against weight.

In the case of Diana Lynn, she ascribes her survival to a couple of elements. One is her established versatility. She's adept with light comedy, as in the "Irma" series, and has proved herself equally capable in straight dramatic roles as the plum one in "Paid in Full." She also considers it a break that she was held under contract when she hit the awkward age, and got the excellent part in "Our Hearts Were Young and Gay," which was perfect for her at the time.

Teens Difficult

Lacking the right parts, youthful stars find the teens the most difficult period to hurdle. If they can't hang on through that, they're usually out for good, for experience confirms Diana's opinion that it's harder to get re-established than to make the grade for the first time.

The fact that Diana was not actually a child star, with the full spotlight treatment, is another thing that she considers worked in her favor. Beginning as a clever child pianist, she wasn't too strongly in the public consciousness in her film work. Today, under contract to Hal Wallis, she is considered a valuable property.