Gloria DeHaven, the Fantasy Sweetheart In Many a Movie Musical, Is Dead at 91

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VIA PHOTOFEST



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Ms. DeHaven in the 1950s, left, and in Los Angeles in 2006.

Gloria DeHaven, the perky daughter of vaudeville stars who grew up to sing, dance and play vulnerable, pouty-lipped ingénues in movie musicals of the 1940s and '50s, died on Saturday in Las Vegas. She was 91.

Her publicist, Scott Stander, confirmed her death.

Ms. DeHaven never became a major movie star, but she was the fantasy hometown sweetheart of many a wartime serviceman. She first won attention in "Best Foot Forward" (1943), a musical comedy with Lucille Ball. In "Two Girls and a Sailor" (1944), she and June Allyson were young women determined to start a canteen for military men. She starred opposite a hot young newcomer, Frank Sinatra, in "Step Lively" (1944), a musical about producing a musical, and with George Murphy and Lena Horne in "Broadway Rhythm" (1944).

After the war, her films included "Yes, Sir, That's My Baby," a 1949 campus romp, with Donald O'Connor; and "Summer Stock" (1950), in which she played Judy Garland's stage-struck sister and Gene Kelly's love interest.

That year she also had the distinction of playing her own mother. Doing a cameo (as Mrs. Carter DeHaven) in "Three Little Words," a musical-comedy biography of a turn-of-the-century songwriting team, she sang "Who's Sorry Now?" as her mother had decades before. In "The Girl Rush" (1955), a musical comedy starring Rosalind Russell, she sang "An Occasional Man," well before the song became associated with Julie London.

Although Ms. DeHaven had a real singer's voice and was a vocalist for the Bob Crosby and Jan Savitt bands in the Big Band era, she made relatively few recordings. Her biggest musical hit was "Stanley Steamer" in 1946.

Gloria Mildred DeHaven was born on July 23, 1925, in Los Angeles to Carter DeHaven and the former Flora Parker, headliners on the vaudeville circuit. Gloria often accompanied her parents on tour.

Gloria made her first screen appearance as a child, playing Paulette Goddard's little sister in Charlie Chaplin's "Modern Times" (1936). Her father by then had gone on to work as a film writer, director and producer; he was an assistant director on the Chaplin film.

In 1942, Ms. DeHaven graduated from the Mar-Ken School, a professional high school in Los Angeles, where her nickname was Glo. She was already working professionally, having made her official film debut in "Susan and God" (1940), a comic drama starring Joan Crawford as a socialite who gets religion.

Ms. DeHaven made her Broadway debut in 1955, almost 40 years after her parents had last appeared there. Alongside Ricardo Montalbán, she starred in "Seventh Heaven," a musical set in World War I-era France. Writing in The New York Times, the critic Lewis Funke declared Ms. DeHaven "as lovely as a cameo, dainty and affecting," but found the production "too much of a mélange to retain the old mood." The show ran only five weeks.

She did try the New York stage again, in "Have I Got One for You," a fairy-tale musical that opened Off Broadway in 1968. The Times critic Clive Barnes praised Ms. DeHaven, confessing he had loved her "since she was a movie starlet and I was a schoolboy," but found the show "so labored and so unfunny."

A vivacious screen presence in films of the 1940s and '50s.

Gradually, television became the major part of her screen career. In addition to her guest acting appearances on prime-time series and her brief daytime TV host jobs, she appeared on at least three daytime dramas: "As the World Turns," "Ryan's Hope" and "All My Children." In the mid-1970s, she played the sexy other woman in several episodes of the campy nighttime soap "Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman."

In later years, Ms. DeHaven put her singing talents to use on the nightclub circuit, appearing in one well-received instance at the Rainbow and Stars cabaret at Rockefeller Center in 1989.

Her film comeback was in "Won Ton Ton, the Dog Who Saved Hollywood" (1976), a badly reviewed comedy whose cast included dozens of stars of yesteryear. Her next two films were undistinguished: "Bog" (1983), a horror film in which she played a biologist dealing with a mutant gill monster and "Outlaw: The Legend of O. B. Taggart" (1994), a western written by Mickey Rooney.

Her last film, "Out to Sea" (1997), was a more fitting farewell. She was paired with Jack Lemmon in a comedy about reluctant dance hosts on a cruise ship full of lonely women. Her final screen appearance was on a 2000 episode of "Touched by an Angel."

Ms. DeHaven had three husbands. In 1944 she married the young actor John Payne, a leading man, and they had two children. They divorced in 1950. Three years later she married Martin Kimmel, a New York real estate investor; they divorced after only a year.

Her third husband was Richard Fincher, a Miami auto dealer who became a Florida state representative. They were married in 1957 and had two children. They, too, divorced, in 1963, but reconciled and remarried in 1965. Four years later they divorced again.

Other people's memoirs have recounted her affairs with Bob Hope and Jerry Lewis, among others.

Ms. DeHaven's survivors include two sons, Thomas Payne and Harry Fincher (who has acted under the name Richard DeHaven); two daughters, Kathleen Hope Payne and Faith Fincher-Finkelstein; and a nephew, Carter DeHaven, a producer.

In 1993, she confided to a Times reporter that she couldn't believe she was turning 68 that year. "I don't feel it, don't look it and don't understand it," she said cheerfully. "Something just snuck up on me."