

Case of the Haunted Show



Dorothy Collins almost followed others stars into limbo, but after marriage, motherhood, she's back on "Hit Parade."

One of the strangest stories in show business is the story of the hard luck that's dogged the footsteps of "Your Hit Parade" stars.

LAST SUMMER, the Parade got caught in another of its many shake-ups, possibly the most far reaching since it hit radio years ago. When it returns to the air over CBS Friday Oct. 3rd, at 7:30 p.m., Dorothy Collins will also return along with Johnny Desmond, to be the only two permanent members of the cast. Johnny, now starring in the hit musical, "Say Darling" is a newcomer to the program.

Previously, the permanent cast boasted four singers, but in the new format they may establish the policy of presenting one guest vocalist each week. As for the baton wielder, the network is negotiating with tried and true Harry Sosnik.

The return of Miss Collins to the show, brings up quite a problem. Long noted for her high necked blouse, black ribbon-bow tie and little-girl look, she startled viewers with appearances last year on other shows, and in night clubs togged out in slinky, cleavage-type gowns. After she guested recently on the Steve Allen TV'er in one of these stunning frocks, John P. Shanley of the Times itemed: "Miss Collins whose appearance and singing style have undergone a change toward sophistication since her honeysuckle and butter churn days on 'Your Hit Parade' looked and sounded fine." Will the network and the Parade let her continue this sultry policy that's been gaining her so many fans of late! Or will they send her back to the butter churn?

This calls for a review of this seemingly "haunted" show which began on radio in 1935, and featured the top vocalists of the day: Go-Go Delys, Johnny Hauser with Lennie Hayton's orchestra. Neither of the vocalists lasted too long, and to say they met with any measure of their past success after being separated from the Parade, is merely accenting the obvious.

In fact the whole program began to fold like a second-hand Arabian tent, until producers got the idea of featuring big names each week in guest shots. The first to grace the faltering show with her presence was actress Carole Lombard. Almost five years later she was dead in a plane crash. Next on the jinx parade was Frances Farmer, Hollywood's top actress. Five years after *her* guest shot she was arrested for drunken driving, then picked up as a parole violator and put in the Western State Hospital of Washington, her career ruined.

Before going any further, have you noted the pattern which was being set during this period? Lombard dead five years after her appearance, and Farmer finished in the same amount of time!

Then the five year plan of the fates clicked into gear again when tall and handsome Leslie Howard was signed as a guest in 1937. A little over five years later he, like Carole, was dead and as a result of a plane crash! Some said it was a sad happening of the war, when the Nazis shot down Howard's plane, but others in superstitious show biz, whispered "jinx!"

The airplane death pattern made still another appearance when America's favorite crooner Buddy Clark, a regular on the Hit parade, from 1935 to 1945, was killed in a plane crash about four and a half years after *his* parting from "Luckies."

Somewhere in between, the guest or should we say "ghost" shots, a rugged he-man of the movies, Richard Dix, was tabbed for an interview on the Parade. Known as a sportsman, tough and indestructible, he was seriously injured in a skiing accident shortly afterward. In a little over a decade he was no longer a star, reduced to Grade B thrillers, before his untimely death. Chalk up another to the "Thing," and as Al Jolson used to say "You ain't heard nuthin' yet!" Other H.P. stars who felt the power of the jinx were: Frank Crumit, half of the famous singing team of Crumit and Sanderson who died six years after he appeared on the show, of a heart attack. He was 64. Boake Carter the commentator, was hired for a few shows, died seven years later of a stroke at the age of 44.

When the Andrews sisters sang s their big song, "Apple Blossom Time" on the Parade, they didn't know it was to be their last hit. The girls headed for oblivion shortly afterward when they argued and split up. Later, "Maxine allegedly tried suicide.

And Judy Garland never dreamed after her appearance that she'd make headlines with several suicide attempts. However, the "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" gal is still in there punching, but the "Thing" keeps hitting back.

Recall Dick Todd, who fought valiantly and even came up with a hit disc, "Daddy's Little Girl," after his stint on the show? But where is he now? Robert Wacker, Andy Russell. Where *are* they all?

Dick Haymes felt the wrath of the jinx too, after he replace Andy Russell on the show. His career suffered; he had his salary attached by the government, was ordered jailed in contempt of court, order deported, married Rita Hayworth and was divorced. Today, Dick doesn't show any signs of regaining the popularity he enjoyed years ago.

It was in 1949 when Eileen Wilson took over the vocal chores from Beryl (where is she now) Davis, who stayed on a few years and left. Her popularity diminished fast. Then Jeff Clark, mentioned in *Variety* as "The nation's newest singing star," took over. Two years were all the time the hoodoo gave poor Jeff who quit because of a serious ailment. He spent a year in a hospital and came out hearing cries of, "Clark, who's he?"

June Vali and Sue Bennett are rarely heard of these days too, as is Snooky Lanson who left the Parade in a big shakeup a couple of years ago. Lawrence Tibbett could probably tell you about what the show did to him in the mid-forties when he faded away fast and then fate found him arrested in Van Nuys, California on a drunked driving charge. Where is he today?

When Lanson left, Dorothy Collins and Gisele Mackenzie found themselves out of work too. Dorothy did a few guest shots on TV shows, nothing sensational though. And Gisele snared her own program but

lost it after one season. Russell Arms, the third man of the trio is said to have ditched singing in favor of acting and is trying to pull a Sinatra in Hollywood. Frankie lost out vocally after his Hit Parade years, and made it big as an actor, finally managing to get a few hit recordings, on the strength of his emoting. He's done better than most, but can't be compared with the old Frankie who had a hit disc every time he let loose with his golden tonsils.

The latest to fall victim to the whims of fate are, Virginia Gibson, Jill Corey and Tommy Leonetti...plus the Hit Parade itself. After so very many years on N.B.C. it's currently been shifted to a new berth on C.B.S. Who knows, maybe the jinx will finally be broken...but we'll have to wait and see what happens to Gibson, Corey and Leonetti, before we know for sure! Meanwhile, we welcome their popular show back—with our fingers crossed.

From 1958