

REMEMBERING DICK HAYMES



Dick Haymes in the 1940s.

One of the finest singers of the Big Band era and a popular movie actor in the 1940s and early 1950s, Dick Haymes is undeservedly forgotten today and more than worthy of a reappraisal. In his heyday, he was often compared to Frank Sinatra, and while Haymes never possessed Sinatra's interpretive skills, he was blessed with a beautiful baritone voice, a gift for conveying the emotion in a song lyric, and a handsome face that made him a great favorite of his many female fans. Above all, Haymes excelled in ballads like "You'll Never Know" and "The More I See You."

Richard Benjamin Haymes was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina in 1918 to a Scottish father and an Irish mother who sang and taught singing. Following a peripatetic childhood spent in France, Switzerland, and Montreal,



Bill Curtis

he moved to New York City when he was 19, intending to be a songwriter, and wound up as a vocalist with the Harry James orchestra. Following the same path as Sinatra, Haymes left Harry James to join the Tommy Dorsey band after Sinatra decided to go solo. In 1944, Haymes signed a seven-year contract with 20th Century-Fox where he was featured in the movie musical,

State Fair (1945), the only musical that the team of Rodgers and Hammerstein wrote directly for film. While none of his later movies, with the possible exception of *One Touch of Venus* (1948) with Ava Gardner, were

especially memorable, his recordings and boy-next-door good looks made him a draw at the box office.

His six marriages—including to movie stars like Rita Hayworth and Joanne Dru—his struggles with alcoholism, and financial problems in later life contributed to a career decline. But mostly, the waning

interest in Haymes resulted from the shift in popular music tastes from Big Bands and romantic standards (in which Haymes excelled) to rock and roll. Haymes stopped drinking in 1965 and went to Europe for ten years to sort out his life. When he returned to the States, he enjoyed a comeback of sorts with occasional appearances on TV series such as *Adam-12* and *McCloud* and well-received shows at the Coconut Grove in Los Angeles. As with many trained singers, his voice darkened with age and his interpretations grew deeper. Sadly, Haymes died of lung cancer in 1980 in Los Angeles. He was 61.

The astute Canadian music critic, Gene Lees, wrote in an essay on Dick Haymes in his book, *Singers & The Song*, "I have had uncountable conversations with singers about singers, and Dick Haymes' name would be on the most-admired list of almost every one of them." Readers who would like an introduction to the artistry of Dick Haymes in the 50s are referred to the two-disc *Complete Capitol Collection*. To hear what he sounded like in the 70s, I recommend *Keep It Simple*, which features Haymes in a small group setting singing the standards he loved most.



DICK HAYMES

Signed photo of Dick Haymes in the 1970s



Dick Haymes with June Haver and Monty Wooley in the 1944 movie, *Irish Eyes Are Smiling*.