

ALLAN JONES: from the Dark Coal-mine to the Silver Screen
How a crooner's good looks and golden voice led to stardom

An illustrated lecture presented by Dulais Rhys, Ph.D

Allan Jones was a gifted singer and accomplished performer, as seen in his superb portrayal of the good-looking hero and outstanding singer in 1930s movies such as *Show Boat* (1936) or *The Firefly*.

He also appeared in the limited role of a smooth crooner in the Marx Brothers' madcap movies, *A Night at the Opera* and *A Day at the Races*. These films remain highly popular, so today, Allan Jones is mostly remembered for his minor appearances in these movies.

Hollywood success did not happen overnight. Having decided from a young age that singing professionally was to be his future, as a high school student in Scranton, PA, Allan paid for singing lessons by working at a variety of part-time jobs – including in the coal mine, where his Welsh father (his first singing teacher) was the manager and where he survived many frightening accidents.

The proceeds of two benefit concerts held at Allan Jones's school then enabled him to study singing in France, where he learned dozens of operas and oratorios in several languages.

Back in the US, Allan Jones transferred his overseas experience to the stage which soon drew the attention of Broadway impresarios, the Shubert Brothers. Then an MGM talent scout saw Jones perform, wanted him for the silver screen in Hollywood and the singer found that his Shubert Brothers contract was difficult – and expensive – to break.

Allan Jones's eventual transition from stage to screen was not easy, primarily due to competition from MGM's stable of established singer/hero actors, such as Dick Powell and especially Nelson Eddy. Following a number of minor singing roles in insignificant movies, Jones's big break came in 1936 with winning the leading role of Gaylord Ravenal (over Nelson Eddy) in Paramount's extravagant film version of *Show Boat* (which also featured Paul Robeson). Greater success followed a year later as the leading man, Don Diego, in *The Firefly*, in which Jones starred opposite the legendary Jeanette MacDonald. It was in this movie that he sang 'The Donkey Serenade' for the first time, which – along with 'The Impossible Dream' from the musical, *Man of La Mancha* - became one of Allan Jones' signature songs.

During World War II, Allan Jones was among the first to 'sing for the troops', followed by a return to the stage, reprising his leading roles as Don Quixote in *Man of La Mancha* and Sky Masterson (written especially for him) in *Guys & Dolls* – two stage roles which are forever linked to his name. Allan Jones continued with singing tours and sporadic film or television appearances until his death in 1992.

Today, Allan's son, singer Jack Jones, continues his father's vocal legacy, singing the music that was so dear to his father and keeping Allan Jones's talents alive in the public eye and ear.

Presentation duration: c1 hour

Speaker Fee: \$250

Expenses: a contribution toward travel costs is appreciated.

Thank you for considering my proposal and please contact me for more information.

Sincerely,

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