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DONNA *Reed*

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ROBERT OSBORNE
on
Donna Reed



IOWA HAS GIVEN US MANY THINGS including Quaker Oats, Buffalo Bill, tall corn and John Wayne, but one of the nicest gifts from the Hawkeye State has been TCM's Star of the Month for May, the pride of Denison, Iowa, Donna Reed. With her farm-fresh personality and striking beauty, Donna won a beauty contest on her home turf at a young age, soon after went to Hollywood and quickly landed a long-term contract at the Rolls Royce of movie studios, MGM. With that, she was off and running, soon cast as the leading lady to one of the studio's top box-office champs, Mickey Rooney. It looked like clear sailing ahead, because in those early years MGM couldn't have been keener about Donna. She was being groomed to be the studio's No.1 "girl next door," the sky apparently the limit. Then came a hitch out of left field: along came an unknown blonde cutie from Broadway named June Allyson, and suddenly June took over the "girl next door" spot. MGM switched its gears and focus, giving June many of the roles originally announced for Donna, including the lead in 1944's *Music for Millions*, all the way to 1949's *The Stratton Story*. There was, however, one great role for Donna during that period, but it wasn't in an MGM project; she did it on loan-out to director Frank Capra in 1946. (You may have heard of it, a little number called *It's a Wonderful Life*.) Meanwhile, back at her home studio things were getting worse. Donna was primarily being assigned parts June Allyson had turned down. A case in point: the role of Lana Turner's sister in MGM's 1947 biggie, *Green Dolphin Street*. June was set to do it but said "no." Her reasoning, she said, was "The leading man in the story is supposed to prefer me over Lana Turner.

No one will believe that. They'd laugh me off the screen." (Lana in 1947 was at her peak as a glamour girl.) MGM let June vamoose but insisted Donna take over even though she was as hesitant as June about playing the part, and for the same reason. The writing was on the wall. It had been a glorious start for Donna at MGM, but clearly it was time to exit. She had made some memorable films at MGM, including the likes of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1945) and John Ford's *They Were Expendable* (1945). Later there would be others, although she'd have to switch to other studios for most of them. It was at Columbia Pictures where she hit the jackpot, cast against type in *From Here to Eternity* (1953) as a pay-for-play girl in Hawaii in the days just before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Viola! She won the Academy Award.[®] As time went on, that Iowa-bred determination and instinct for survival on her own terms continued to serve her well, and, five years after that Oscar[®] win, she reinvented herself yet again, that time as the star of the super successful TV series *The Donna Reed Show*, which made her one of the legendary ladies of television. We love Donna Reed at TCM, and this month we'll show you 30 reasons why. I hope you'll be able to join us often on Wednesdays throughout May. We promise you a wide spectrum of entertaining movies, all of them brightened considerably by the presence of one of the nicest, most underrated talents to brighten up Iowa, or Hollywood.

TCM

ROBERT O.

ROBERT OSBORNE
TCM Prime Time
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