

Backstage at the Dean Martin Show

Lee Hale

Taylor Publishing (Feb 25, 2000)

\$24.95 (288pp)

978-0-87833-170-3

Frank Sinatra, Ethel Merman, Jimmy Stewart, Mickey Rooney, Goldie Hawn, and, of course, Dean Martin. These stars and others are included in this fond look behind the scenes of the successful variety show hosted by Dean Martin for a decade.

Hale, who was in charge of special music for the show, shares the real stories behind the stars who graced Martin's stage without ever coming across as snippy or envious. His memories aren't, however, flavored by the saccharine taste of some memoirs written of the Hollywood elite. Instead, he shares his impressions of the folks who worked the show with honesty, but an honesty bathed in the golden light of remembering a time when he truly enjoyed his work.

The book begins at the conception of the show and explains how Martin's strange schedule of only working one day a week came about. He later said that he didn't really want to do a TV variety show, so he came up with a list for NBC that he thought they'd never agree to, including an enormous budget and the clause that Martin would only work on Sunday. Surprisingly, they bought it, and it turned out to be the very thing that made the show successful. Martin would show up on Sunday just before the taping and wing it. The less he knew about the show, the more spontaneous and "live" it seemed to the audience. In the introduction Hale warns that it may seem as though considerable name dropping occurs in this book, but that's just the way it was on the show. The simple, straightforward way this story is told keeps the names from taking on more importance than they deserve. The focus remains tightly on the show overall.

The Dean Martin Show spanned the years from 1965 to 1975 and showcased a myriad of big name stars and unknown newcomers from many facets of the entertainment industry during that time. This story is interesting not only for its insights into those stars' true natures, but also for its backstage peek at how television shows were run. From the exciting newness and discovery of making a show work in the beginning to the slow decline at the end, *Backstage at the Dean Martin Show* is a warm and touching memoir.

CHRISTINE CANFIELD (January / February 2000)

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