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The Cowboy and the Seorita: A Biography of Roy Rogers and Dale Evans

Chris Enss
Howard Kazanjian
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By the early 1940s, studio executives making B Westerns featuring entertainer Roy Rogers realized that they needed to jazz up their movies with a little romance. “Half of the viewers going to the movies were females and they wanted to see women involved in the stories. They also wanted to see the King of the Cowboys kiss someone besides Trigger.”

Enter Dale Evans, a thirty-two-year-old singer and struggling actress, who was initially reluctant to play Rogers’s female lead because she preferred to sing in nightclubs with dance bands. Their first movie together, 1944’s The Cowboy and the SeÃ±orita, marked the beginning of a relationship-personal and professional-that lasted more than fifty years.

The authors are familiar with the movie industry: Enss is a scriptwriter who has also written several books on women and the Old West, and Kazanjian has directed and produced films and television programs for more than twenty-five years.

The authors alternate tracing the couple’s paths. Evans, born Frances Smith in Texas in 1912, eloped with her high school boyfriend at fourteen, was a mother at fifteen, and divorced by sixteen. Rogers, born Leonard Slye, went back and forth between California and his home state of Ohio several times before he found success as a musician and actor. The country was in the midst of a depression and the couple’s early lives reflect that struggle.

While touring with one of his bands, Rogers met and married his first wife, with whom he had three children during a ten-year marriage. In one of the many trials Rogers was to endure, his wife passed away after the birth of their son.

The next year the co-stars, known as “The King of the Cowboys” and “The Queen of the West,” were married. Much of rest of the book focuses on this life together-the birth of their daughter Robin, who was a Down Syndrome baby; a legal battle with Rogers’ former studio; the debut of the Roy Rogers Show on television; the addition of several more children to their family; and how their faith kept them strong throughout.

Rogers passed away in 1998 and Evans in 2001. While other biographies on the couple present more detail, this book is a good introduction for those not likely familiar with the famous duo. Their real-life story is one the reader will recall long after the book’s cover is closed; it’s also a chance for a new generation of fans to rediscover this cowboy and his señorita.

ROBIN FARRELL EDMUNDS (May / June 2004)

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