

HOLM Was Ever Like



IRVING THALBERG, the late sage of Hollywood, once said in defense of type casting: "Versatility is only for acrobats." It was his notion that actors and actresses should welcome, for security's sake, the opportunity to specialize in their roles. Many a Broadway producer has agreed.

Celeste Holm has made a career of proving the theory wrong. In the eight hectic years since she scored a smash success in the musical *Oklahoma!* she has played a greater number of varied roles than an international spy, each preceded by a battle with the skeptics and each ending in a personal triumph.

She wasn't the type for *Oklahoma!* She had never sung, never appeared in a musical—but she stole the show as Ado Annie, the gal who couldn't say no. In Hollywood, they pegged her as a thrush and gave her the bird when she asked for an important dramatic part in *Gentlemen's Agreement*. She won an Academy Award in the film, and a new classification: "straight dramatic actress." Then they said she was "much too normal" for *The Snake Pit*, yet after she got the role critics applauded her portrayal of a demented patient.

And so it went. She was too zany to be a nun in *Come to the Stable*, too sweet to sing sour in *Everybody Does It*, too simple to be sophisticated in *All About Eve*. She played all of those parts; a measure of her success is the fact that she spent four years in Hollywood and was nominated for Academy Oscars three times.

To achieve this record, Celeste has had to wage a constant struggle against Hollywood tradition. In 1949, revolting against type casting, she decided to quit the 20th Century-Fox payroll to become a free lance. The decision puzzled the studio's president, Spyros Skouras. "Why don't you just unbend and enjoy my money?" he asked plaintively. "We're offering you big parts. Tell me, aren't they the right size?"

"I don't care about size," said Celeste. "But they all have the same shape."

By insistently following her own inclinations, Celeste has made dollars for Hollywood—and \$120,000 a year for herself—without ever making sense by studio standards. Instead of going dancing at the Mocambo, she went to UCLA for psychology courses. Instead of studying her fan mail, she studied drama under Kenneth Macgowan at the same university. She never haggled over money. She never bargained for favors.

Star roles meant nothing to her; she turned down several. But when she found a role she believed in, she actually offered to play it anonymously. She proved to her incredulous studio that she wasn't kidding by doing the narration in *A Letter to Three Wives*—without billing, without so much as screen credit. And this after she had received her Academy Award.

Today, the blond, blue-eyed Celeste is on Broadway, playing to Standing Room Only signs as the star of Louis Verneuil's comedy, *Affairs of State*. Once again she is confounding the Hollywood experts, who had predicted that she would be a pumpkin as a modern Cinderella, that she could never play the mousy little schoolteacher who becomes a lion in Washington politics.

Affairs of State is a great popular success, and a huge personal triumph for its star. As portrayed by Celeste, with faint mockery and pronounced affection, the schoolteacher could be any woman in the audience, or any man's wife or sister. It's a deft characterization, permitting the patrons to experience all the pleasures of self-identification. They love it.

Celeste is well equipped to bring a stirring femininity to the role. She is a superbly proportioned five feet six, with a size-35 bust and 35-inch hips—

Now appearing in the Broadway hit *Affairs of State*, Celeste scored her first smash success as a singing comedienne in musical *Oklahoma!*

PHOTOGRAPH FOR COLLIER'S BY GEORGE KARGER

Celeste Holm stubbornly defied type casting and made it stick. Today she sings, clowns and plays straight dramatic parts with equal ease—and the only sure thing about her next role is that she'll do it well

in other words, an eye-catcher. She has other natural attributes for the theater as well. For one thing, she has a near-photographic memory, often learning a 60-page part in a few nights (some of her more critical acquaintances, commenting on this talent, have complained that she can memorize an intellectual observation in one second, and pass it off as her own a year later). More important, Celeste has a gift for mimicry like an echo chamber. This is a great asset in learning dialects.

Sometimes, however, she employs it unconsciously, and then it can be embarrassing. When the Duke of Windsor visited her recently in her dressing room she suddenly found herself conversing with him in his own Oxonian accents. The Duke was less discomfited than Celeste. Later he reportedly told friends, "I see the vogue for English muf-fins is having considerable influence in America."

On meeting Celeste in person, one is surprised to find that off stage she is exactly as on stage—the same rising inflection of the voice, the same wide-eyed smile, the same exuberant gestures. So exuberant, in fact, that she upset a cup of coffee in greeting this reporter at her New York hotel.

"How awkward," she said. "But also how interesting. I suppose a psychiatrist would say I don't really want the coffee." She turned to her husband, Schuyler Dunning. "What do you say, Sky?"

"Get the mop," suggested Dunning. This bit of dialogue provides an interesting clue to the relationship between the couple. Celeste has an occasional penchant for the well-rounded phrase; Dunning, a husky air-line executive, takes it upon himself to bring his wife down to earth.

When Celeste exults that "the theater stirs the spirit as the church stirs the soul," Dunning translates: "She likes to act."

Her Husband Is Aviation-Minded

Dunning, who is in his early forties, is a member of a socially prominent Syracuse family. Most of his life has been devoted to aviation, first as a sportsman flying his own plane, later as an Air Force liaison officer and now as Hollywood chief of a big air line. He is Celeste's third husband; they have a four-year-old son, Daniel.

Because Dunning's work is on the West Coast and Celeste's current job is in the East, they spend less time together than he'd like. So she has promised him she will quit Affairs of State in June, when she will be replaced by June Havoc. "That's one promise I've got to keep," she says. "He's even more pigheaded than I am."

At another point, Celeste describes her husband as "wonderfully calm." Then she says: "He has even stabilized me. And he's definitely the boss; I like it that way. The only decisions I make are about my acting."

"And there she's like a stone wall," says Dunning. "Sometimes I think she's got rocks in her head. But she's always right. When it comes to acting, she's like radar: right on the beam."

Although in her professional life Celeste is a cool customer who knows exactly what she wants, in her private life she is typically feminine. She saves strings, pins and gaudy pieces of wrapping paper. And like every woman since Eve, she adores a bargain. Occasionally this instinct runs away with her. "Such as the time I bought three coats, each reduced from \$300 to \$150," she recounts. "It wasn't until I got home that it occurred to me all three were exactly alike."

She has no particular preference in clothes. Sporty, frilly, tailored or formal, Celeste wears them all, "provided they're a good buy. I like them to last at least eight years."

She's still paying with sweat and exasperation for one of her thrifty impulses, according to her secretary, Georgia Gilly, a slightly shorter, less blond and somewhat more mature image of Celeste. In 1949, Celeste went shopping for a hooked rug in Los Angeles. The price, \$2,000, outraged her; she vowed she'd make one herself, for less.

"She's been working on that rug ever since," says Georgia. "Celeste has carted it all over the country. She's laid out a small fortune for express charges. And with luck she'll have it done by 1978."

No Economizing on Phone Bills

Talking on the telephone is another of Celeste's female preoccupations. Her endurance would have made her Nordic ancestors proud. Georgia says, "Celeste talks to people in Hollywood as if they were in the room with her. Last month our phone bill here was \$288. She'll never save enough pins and wrapping paper to balance that."

Celeste and Georgia share a suite—two bedrooms, living room and kitchenette—in a hotel on Fifty-eighth Street, off Sixth Avenue. Rent, laundry and wood for the fireplace add up to \$525 a month. The rooms are furnished in what Celeste calls "Louis the Fourteenth Street" décor.

But Celeste is not too depressed by the atmosphere. She feels that it has helped curb her appetite. For Celeste adores food. Her enthusiasm sometimes shows itself conspicuously; and in Hollywood she has to diet.

Celeste and Dunning have an \$80,000 white colonial home in Brentwood, a plush suburb of Los Angeles.

"The house," says Celeste, "stands on an acre of ground and is covered with a trace of ivy and a disappearing mortgage. We have a garden, some fruit trees and a 40-foot swimming pool."

The Dunnings spend \$2,000 a month to run the place, plus \$50 a week for a gardener. The fruit they grow would cost about \$3 at a roadside stand, "but your own wormy apples," says Celeste, "give you a great sense of possession."

Two Swedish women—Frida Johnson and Elsie Neptune—do the cooking, clean the eight rooms and periodically wrestle Hokey-Pokey, the family mongrel, into his bath. The rooms are furnished in modern style, with gray the predominant color.

The projected move back to Hollywood will give Celeste a chance to spend more time with her son, an opportunity she is looking forward to.

"I try to be a good mother," she says. "I don't know how well I succeed. My being an actress doesn't impress Danny much. He's more interested in cops and firemen."

Celeste's secretary says she is extremely affectionate with the boy, has a great deal of patience and "treats him like a pal as well as a child."

"I try not to spoil him," says Celeste. "But I suppose I do. My mother spoiled me a little, and I'm kind of grateful."

Danny plays with the children of Eddie Bracken and Pat O'Brien, who are the Dunnings' neighbors.

"In California," says Celeste, "we live like the rest of Suburbia, U.S.A. We go to neighborhood movies, church picnics, flower shows and occasional concerts at the (Continued on page 82)



role in Gentlemen's Agreement won Celeste Academy Award. Film starred Gregory Peck



in Come to the Stable. Louis Jean Heydt and Dorothy Patrick are others in picture



in Everybody Does It, with Paul Douglas. Celeste had to sing sour in this movie

who fights for her husband—played by Hugh Marlowe—in the film All About Eve



Stairway to an EMPTY

Monica knew that some
sinister secret must be hidden
in Mrs. Lannon's house.

To find it, she might
have to risk her life—but
she had no choice



John Steckler