

Ginger Rogers

Ginger Rogers! If you're not old enough to have seen her films, you missed something! She was a very famous actress, singer, and dancer. Her dancing career started when she won a Charleston dance contest. She performed in vaudeville, went on to Broadway, was a Ziegfeld chorus girl, and then on to Hollywood. Her career began during the Great Depression, continued through World War II, and went on to 1969, when she starred in her last Broadway show, *Mame*. She made 73 films and starred in five Broadway shows during her lifetime.

She was born Vi Catherine McMath on July 16th, 1911, in Independence, MO. Almost 84 years later, on April 25th, 1995, she died. During the space of those years, she had married and divorced five times but never had any children. One of her husbands was Lew Ayers, who just recently passed away. "Ginger" came about because one of her little cousins pronounced "Virginia" as "Ginga," and "Rogers" came from her stepfather, who had legally adopted her. She was a devout Christian Scientist. She owned, and lived on, a ranch along the Rogue River in Oregon. She was tall and had chestnut brown hair, though in most of her movies she appeared as a blonde.

Though she did many other things in her lifetime, she remains best known for her wonderful films with Fred Astaire. When the two first met in *Flying Down to Rio*, in 1933, no one could have foreseen the string of nine other films to follow: *The Gay Divorcee*, *Shall We Dance*, *Top Hat*, *Swing Time*, *Carefree*, *Follow the Fleet*, *The Story of Vernon and Irene Castle*, *Roberta*, and their last film to together, *The Barkley's of Broadway*, all of which, I believe, were made for R.K.O. Radio Pictures. Many of the songs she sang in their appearances together were actually originally intended for Astaire, but he declined and gave them to her. These films were very popular; they were made during the Depression; audiences wanted to forget their troubles, and what better way than with such magical fantasies. Though they clicked on screen, there was never any romance. In fact, Astaire never even liked to kiss her in the movies because he said it made his wife uncomfortable.

Ginger Rogers loved musical comedy, but she always wanted to be a great dramatic actress. She achieved that goal in 1940, when she received an Academy Award for *Kitty Foyle*, a drama about a young woman struggling with two suitors. When called to accept her award, she stood at the podium for a minute, looked straight at her mother, and said, "This is the greatest moment of my life." The place erupted in applause and cheering that drowned out whatever else she might have said. She always regretted that she didn't have the opportunity to do more dramatic acting.

Always true to her beliefs, she fought for performers' rights. She was one of the founders, for example, of the Screen Actors' Guild, a group of performers who joined together to improve working conditions for actors and actresses. She was very vocal in her efforts to help her fellow workers. In later years, she appeared before Congress as part of the effort to bring a halt to the studios' "colorizing" older black and white films, since she and many others in the industry were adamantly against the process.

Ginger Rogers...captured forever on film...and on matchcovers!

