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MARTIN, MARY VIRGINIA (1913-1990). Mary Martin, musical theater star, the younger daughter of Preston and Juanita (Presley) Martin, was born on December 11, 1913, in Weatherford, Texas. Her father was an attorney, and her mother was a violin teacher. Family and friends encouraged Mary to perform in local theater as a child, and she began taking voice lessons at age twelve. At sixteen she attended Ward Belmont Finishing School in Nashville for a few months. She married Benjamin J. Hagman, a Weatherford accountant, on November 3, 1930, and soon left school. The couple went back to Weatherford, where their son, Larry, who later became an actor, was born in September 1931. Mary Hagman subsequently opened a dance school in the town. She obtained a divorce from Hagman in 1935 and left Weatherford to try a performing career, billed as Mary Martin. She gained singing spots on national radio broadcasts in Dallas and at Los Angeles nightclubs but could not break into the feature film industry. However, her performance at a California club impressed a theatrical producer enough to cast her in a play in New York. Though that production never opened, she got a role in Cole Porter's production *Leave It To Me*. Martin's rendition of "My Heart Belongs to Daddy" soon endeared her to Broadway audiences.

The resulting national media attention provided her the entrée she had sought in Hollywood. Paramount Pictures signed her to appear in *The Great Victor Herbert* in 1939. During the next three years she starred in ten films on contract with that company. Between films she performed frequently on NBC and CBS radio programs, including "Good News of 1940" and "Kraft Music Hall." Martin met Richard Halliday, an editor and producer, at Paramount. They were married on May 5, 1940, and two years later, Halliday became Mary Martin's manager. The couple had one daughter. Martin returned to New York in 1943, cast as Venus in *One Touch of Venus*, for which she won the New York Drama Critics Poll. In 1946, after touring with *Venus*, she appeared in *Lute Song*, a Chinese story adapted to showcase her talents. The following year she had the lead role in a touring production of Irving Berlin's musical *Annie Get Your Gun*.

Returning to Broadway in 1949, Martin appeared with opera star Ezio Pinza in the Rodgers and Hammerstein hit *South Pacific*. She not only suggested material for songs in the show, but helped develop the choreography as well. The critics' poll favored her portrayal of Ensign Nellie Forbush, a plucky role that exploited her comedic talents. In 1951 she moved to London for a two-year run of *South Pacific*. For the rest of the 1950s she divided her time between stage and television performances. In *The Skin of our Teeth* and *Annie Get Your Gun*, she offered televised portrayals built on her stage experience in the same roles. Likewise, she took the youthful character of Peter Pan, in

the play of the same name, from a brief Broadway run to repeated NBC-TV presentations. Martin as Peter Pan was "an exact meeting of actress and character," a New York *Times* writer commented. Indeed, the actress called the sprite's role her favorite, perhaps because it featured her own optimism and love of physical adventure.

Martin won Tony Awards for performances in *Peter Pan* and *The Sound of Music*. In the latter she played the leading character of Mary Rainer from 1959 to 1961. She also starred in a 1965-66 production of the musical *Hello, Dolly!* on a challenging tour for military audiences stationed in Asia. Later in 1966 she was back on Broadway, appearing with Robert Preston in *I Do, I Do*. She continued in this two-person musical for a 1968-69 North American tour as well. Martin's stage career slowed during the 1970s, as she and her husband spent longer periods on their ranch in Brazil. He died there on March 3, 1973. She made a Broadway comeback in 1978 in the comedy *Do You Turn Somersaults?* In 1981 she hosted a public television series on aging, "Over Easy." After a debilitating automobile accident, she joined the musical actress Carol Channing in a 1986 touring production of *Legends*, portraying an aging actress. Her lifetime achievements brought Martin a coveted award from the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C., in 1989. She is credited with having advanced the significance of the performer in musical theater. On November 3, 1990, she died of cancer at her home in Rancho Mirage, California. Her cremated remains were buried in Weatherford, Texas.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: Mary Martin, *My Heart Belongs* (New York: Morrow, 1976). New York *Times*, November 5, 1990. Alice M. Robinson et al., *Notable Women in the American Theatre: A Biographical Dictionary* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989).

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