



The Other Side of the Rainbow: Behind the Scenes on the Judy Garland Television Series

Mel Tormé

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
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"The Judy Garland Show," which aired Sunday nights at nine on CBS twenty-six times between June 1963 and March 1964, was the last glimmer of a fading star. As Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz* Judy Garland had charmed the world, singing and dancing down a golden path to fame; now she was middle-aged and wracked with personal problems, habitually late for rehearsals, often not showing up at all. When she made what proved to be her final appearance on Stage 43 in Television City (dressed, rather ironically, as a clown), one stagehand, assessing her thin and haggard figure, sighed "no more yellow-brick road."

In *The Other Side of the Rainbow*--now reissued with a new preface--Mel Tormé takes us on a Hollywood roller-coaster ride through the triumphs and disasters of this short-lived show, at the same time revealing a personal side of Judy Garland rarely glimpsed. While she was notoriously hard to work with, and her affection for "the Blue Lady" (Blue Nun leibfraumilch), vodka, and pills was well-known even at this time, Tormé shows that Judy was still capable of breathtaking performances, that she could still earn the sobriquet "High Priestess of the entertainment world."

Tormé signed on to "The Judy Garland Show" as its musical director, writing special tunes, putting together medleys, at times even coaching Judy from an off-camera position. He was there from the start, survived an almost total purge of show staff, and left just before the final telecast. Consequently, we see it all from center stage: Mickey Rooney saving a virtually unrehearsed early show from failure, Lena Horne storming over Judy's lack of professionalism, Cary Grant refusing to do his oft-imitated "JU-dy, JU-dy, JU-dy" (insisting he had never said it), daughter Liza Minelli singing a duet with her beaming mother, and Judy herself, alone on the set, belting out a powerfully moving rendition of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" only weeks after the assassination of JFK. (Her desire to do a special program dedicated to Kennedy's memory was nixed by CBS: this was her unexpected and defiant response.) Behind the scenes we witness Judy at her best (Tormé remembers of feeling "chills of delight" as Garland sang "Mama's Gone, Goodbye" during their first session together), her funniest (telling dirty stories to the production crew), and her worst, drunk and hysterical, waking her colleagues with early morning telephone calls. Known as The Dawn Patrol, Tormé and others would leave their beds and rush to Garland's Brentwood home to offer whatever assistance they could. Brimming with anecdotes, illustrated with rare photographs of Judy on the television stage, and informed by the insights of a fellow performer who saw it all, *The Other Side of the Rainbow* offers a rare and compassionate look at one of America's most beloved and misunderstood entertainment icons.

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