

"Mr. B's" Son In Films



WALTER BURRELL

Hollywood Happenings

ONE LOOK at the family of the inimitable singer Billy Eckstine is enough to convince you that talent is, indeed, hereditary. Eckstine and his actress-wife, Carol Drake (she appeared with Poitier and Gable in "Band of Angels"), have seven children and virtually all of them are either involved in or studying some phase of show business.

Twenty-four-year-old Kenny is a singer, writer and composer; 20-year-old Billy, Jr., currently in Viet Nam, will study music when his tour of duty is up; 13-year-old Eddie ("Buggs") plays guitar, piano, sings and has his own rock-and-roll group called The Ends; ten-year-old Guy plays the drums and has his own group, The Secret Agents; nine-year-old Cece is studying dancing and piano, but she leans toward singing; and seven-year-old Gina is an excellent dancer.

However, the seventh Eckstine is the most probably destined to equal his famous father's stature in show business. He's 22-year-old Ronnie Eckstine, the most exciting and inately talented young actor to grace Hollywood's tinsel halls in many years.

He's currently in his first movie, MGM's "The Love-In," in which he has the featured role of a young college student who becomes a disciple of a professor who advocates the use of LSD. Studio brass are genuinely impressed with his work and another role is already in the making.

THE GREEN-EYED, curly-haired young actor brings an entirely new image of the American Negro to the screen, one free of the heaviness and anger personified by most Negroes in films.

"I don't come across as an angry person on the screen," says Ronnie, "because I'm not that kind of person in real life. I haven't had a life of continually being kept down or made to feel inferior. I had the advantage of having spent the past five years in Europe (he returned to the States in Dec. of '66), where I was able to enjoy life as a human being--not simply as an American Negro. I have no personal justification to portray the 'angry young man' type of role."

Indeed, Ronnie's experiences in Europe helped greatly in shaping his way of thinking. He was 17 when he first went to Germany with his parents on a vacation. He returned to the States, went into the Army and was sent back to Germany. When his hitch was up he still hadn't had enough and he again returned.

NOT ONE to let language be a barrier, Ronnie learned to speak French, German, Italian, Turkish and Spanish fluently. He put this mastery of tongues to good use in the Army as a translator and interpreter at NATO meetings in France and Germany.

It was also in Europe that he developed the fastidious tastes of a gourmet. He traveled throughout the continent sampling wines and cheeses and became so expert he could tell the types of grapes a wine was made of, the region it came from and even the year it was made.

Ronnie still remains partial to European dishes and is an excellent cook, one of his favorite dishes being an Italian creation called Cotletta a 'la Bolonese--veal cutlet with a slice of ham, a slice of cheese, plus tomato paste and mushrooms.

However, though cooking exotic dishes is a pastime close to the young actor's heart, dishes of another sort occupy an even closer spot--those measuring 36-24-38. Understandably, Ronnie manages to attract a string of beautiful admirers no matter what country he's in. What he looks for in girls is simple; brains, beauty, charm and, most important, tenderness.

WHEN IT comes to his father, Ronnie is unequivocal: "We have a great relationship. Dad's



Ronnie Eckstine takes time out from his featured role in MGM's "The Love-In" to visit with Phyllis Diller on the set of her new movie, Universal's "Did You Hear The One About The Traveling Saleslady?"

(See Hollywood Happenings)

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often taken all five of us boys on tour with him. I admire him, aside from the fact that he's my father, because he's a professional person in every sense of the word; he's a great human being.

"I don't regard him as competition in the entertainment world because he's undisputedly ahead of me, but I'm competing with him in another way--all the girls I know are crazy about him!"

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