

Dolly Dawn 1916-2002



Dolly Dawn, sometimes referred to as "The Champagne of Big Band Singers," died December 11, 2002. Born Theresa Anna Maria Stabile in Newark, New Jersey, February 3, 1919, Dolly Dawn was inducted into the Big Band Hall of Fame in 1999. Her work influenced many other singers, most notably Ella Fitzgerald who recalled skipping school in order to listen to Dolly Dawn perform live from New York's Taft Hotel.

Theresa Stabile began her professional career singing at Newark's Meadowbrook Lounge with Frank Dailey's orchestra. She also made occasional appearances on Newark radio station WAAT. She sang under the stage name Billie Starr.

Stabile's big break came when Loretta Lee decided to leave George Hall's Taft Hotel Orchestra. Hall's orchestra performed live over the CBS network and also had a recording contract with Bluebird, a Victor subsidiary. Although CBS offered Hall several established female vocalists, including Betty Bartell, Gertrude Niesen, and Vera Van, Hall instead sought out a teenager—Theresa Stabile—he had heard by chance a year earlier.

Hall hired the 16-year old Stabile and set out to turn her into a star, albeit a Starr with a different name. He hired pianist Ticker Freeman, who would later play an important role in building the career of

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another talented young female vocalist—Dinah Shore—to coach Stabile and teach her 10 of the band's arrangements.

Following her debut with Hall's orchestra, May 25, 1935, newspaper columnist Harriet Menken supplied the new stage name George Hall had been seeking for his new vocalist—Dolly Dawn.

Not satisfied to merely follow the Hall orchestra's arrangements, Dolly Dawn, in her own words, "wanted to sing the songs my own way, and, after a while I did. I liked to be able to do whatever came into my mind, and arrangements held me back."

Dolly Dawn was an instant sensation and drew nationwide acclaim through her radio appearances with George Hall's Orchestra over the CBS radio network. Her free-wheeling style, however, created a problem for the more sedate orchestrations of George Hall.

By 1935, Benny Goodman was drawing a strong following with his swing style. To take advantage of this emerging trend, George Hall created a small combo of jazz-oriented musicians from within his orchestra to accompany Dolly Dawn, naming them the Dawn Patrol.

Among the early hits Dolly Dawn and the Dawn Patrol recorded were *Robins and Roses* and *Shine*. Although remembered primarily for her up-tempo rhythm numbers, Dolly also recorded such ballads as *It's a Sin to Tell a Lie* and *If We Never Meet Again*.

By 1937, Dolly's following was so strong that she received top billing over George Hall. Recognizing her immense popularity, Hall turned the band over to Dolly Dawn, becoming her manager.

Between 1937 and 1940, the band switched from RCA Victor's Bluebird label to Irving Mill's Master and Variety labels. It was during this period that Dolly Dawn recorded her biggest hit—*You're a Sweetheart* which hit of top of the hit parade for several weeks in early 1938. Follow-up tunes like *Who Blew Out the Flame* and *Goody Goodbye* also hit the top ten.

Returning to Bluebird in 1941 with a larger, more swing-oriented band, Dolly Dawn and the Dawn Patrol were drawing large crowds in live performances at theatres across the country.

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That all ended suddenly following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Ten members of the band were drafted in one day. Unable to find replacements, the band was forced to break up.

Dolly Dawn set out as a solo artist, appearing in nightclubs and theaters, and on radio and television during the 1940s and 1950s. She temporarily stopped performing during the 1960s and 1970s, but resumed performing in New York night spots following the 1975 re-issuance of many of her early songs on the two-record set *George Hall and His Taft Hotel Orchestra (1933-1937)*. An excellent LP that, to the best of my knowledge, has not been reissued on CD, *George Hall and His Hotel Taft Orchestra* also features two other excellent vocalists from the early to mid-1930s—Loretta Lee and Sonny Schuyler.

Those wishing to hear more of Dolly should also check out “You’re a Sweetheart—The Best of Dolly” and “Ina Ray Hutton and Dolly

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Dawn—"Girls' Night Out" available from Collector's Choice Music.



Dolly Dawn's later recordings—*Smooth as Silk* and *Memories of You* are available from Jazzology.

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