

Sylvia Froos: A Fond Farewell



Singer and actress Sylvia Froos died in her native New York City March 28, 2004, after suffering a stroke. She was 89.

Froos, who was born April 19, 1913, began her stage career in 1920 at age 7. When she first acted with the Kiddie Cabaret vaudeville troupe in Washington, D.C., the Gerry Society (The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children) interfered with the performance. From her show business start in Baltimore, Froos joined the vaudeville circuit performing as "Baby Sylvia Froos."

At age 10, Baby Sylvia appeared at a series of Sunday night concerts at the Winter Garden and made her first radio appearance. A seasoned veteran by age 14, Froos appeared in the Schubert Theatre's production of "Gay Paree."

Although Al Jolson's "The Jazz Singer" is considered the first sound feature, Sylvia Froos appeared in two all-talking short films 6 months before the release of the Jolson Film. She was 14 at the time the Vitaphone shorts were released in April 1927. According to music historian Peter Mintun, Sylvia Froos became known as "The Little Princess of Song" during her teens and appeared under that title in the two shorts.

Froos' singing career flourished in the 1930s. She hosted her own show on NBC and made frequent guest appearances on other shows, appearing with such stars as Al Jolson, Paul Whiteman, and

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Fred Allen. In addition to frequent radio broadcasts, Froos became a popular recording star for the Crown and Victor labels. Her recordings include "Penthouse Serenade," "You Didn't Know the Music," and "Who's Your Little Who-Zis?"

Although she made only one feature film—"Stand Up and Cheer"—she received higher billing than Shirley Temple. Although she was originally cast as the sister of actress Maude Evans, her role was expanded to include two numbers—"This is Our Last Night Together" and "Broadway's Gone Hillbilly".

In addition to her two 1927 Vitaphone shorts, Sylvia Froos appeared in a number of other Vitaphone and Educational shorts in the 1930s. Perhaps her most memorable role was in the 1933 Vitaphone short featuring Eddy Duchin and His Orchestra. The short was filmed in a nightclub in which all of the waiters and waitresses were on roller skates. So too was Miss Froos. Her other shorts include "All For One" (1935), "Soft Drinks and Sweet Music" (1934), "School for Swing" (1937), and "Transatlantic Love" (1936).

During the 1940s, Miss Froos made a series of "Soundies," a forerunner of today's music videos (but with real music). They were played in Panoram machines, a type of video jukebox.

Froos' last phonograph recordings were made around 1950 on the Jubilee label. Among the songs she recorded on Jubilee was a parody of "A Bushel and A Peck" called "A Satchel and a Sack." The recording is most notable because Froos sang the duet with a young Alan Sherman. Ten years later, another novelty song—"Hello Mud-dah! Hello Fadduh!"—would lead to Sherman's emergence as a recording star.