

Gene Raymond

Kathy Hammel

Gene Raymond was born in New York City on August 13, 1908, and his given name was Raymond Guion. A genealogical search adds that his parents may have been named Leroy and Mary Guion. He grew up in New York City and was educated at the Professional Children's School. We don't know for sure if he had an innate leaning towards performing arts, but from the cradle he appears to have been well suited to acting. He first trod the boards at the tender age of five years, and by 12 was considered a Broadway veteran.

Raymond continued on Broadway through the 1920s but soon showed up in Hollywood, making his first movie in 1931. There they gave young Raymond Guion a new name, Gene Raymond, and put him in motion pictures. He continued to act in either leading man or second man roles on the big and small screen throughout his life. His bright blond hair, arresting blue eyes, and well-formed physique seemed a natural for visual mediums.

Yet, he wasn't just a pretty face. He had a pleasing voice which made him and his acting skills a good match for radio. He shows up in quite a few old radio shows made throughout the 1930s, '40s and '50s. He voiced a vast array of characters in well-known audio fare such as *Lux Radio Theater*, *Family Theater*, *Stars Over Hollywood* and *Screen Guild Theater*. Aside from acting, he was also an accomplished musician, composer, and writer and participated in variety shows that showed off his musical talents as well.

One of his better-known shows was *The Amazing Mr. Malone*. The title character was played by three actors during its run and Gene Raymond was the second of them. He voiced the character of John H. Malone for most of the season between September 1949 and September 1950. He does a creditable job as the tough Chicago criminal attorney. He was even asked to make a TV pilot for the show, but by the time the TV show finally came to fruition, someone else filled the lead role.

Even with his good looks and repertoire of talents, Gene Raymond never quite made it to mega-star status, though he did enjoy modest popularity throughout his career. Perhaps his too-forthright manner, as reported in *PhotoPlay Magazine* (May 1936) held him back. The article characterizes him as a "Lone Wolf" who was unrestrainedly opinionated about dealing with the pressures of Hollywood and the studio system that seemed to own the souls of those they had under contract. Perhaps he had good reason for those feelings.

In 1937 he married Jeanette MacDonald who had the mega-star status he lacked. From all appearances, this was a Hollywood marriage made by the studio. Studio executives felt a Jeanette MacDonald-Nelson Eddy marriage was an unprofitable idea and they also needed to cover for Raymond's affairs with other men. Imposed or not, the marriage seemed to work. The couple stayed together for 28 years, until the death of MacDonald. They are said to have been on mostly good terms, and each apparently had the freedom to continue their various affairs.

Raymond had strong opinions about what worked for his career and was equally passionate about his country. He felt the freedoms we all enjoy here were worth fighting for. In 1939 with a world war a certainty, he trained as a pilot at his own expense and soon joined the war effort as an Army Air Corps pilot. After the war, he continued serving in the Strategic Air Command reserves for decades after.

Unfortunately, after the war his movie career waned. He still worked regularly in films, TV, and radio, though he never became one of the more revered names. As hinted at in the *Photoplay* article, perhaps he really was a victim of his own outspokenness.

He was openly disdainful of Hollywood's studio system and was one of the first actors to go outside of the system and freelance. Eventually he founded his own production company. He

supported his chosen industry by serving as president of The Motion Picture and Television Fund as well as working as vice president of the Arthritis Foundation of Southern California. He was on the board of the Screen Actors Guild and the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences.

After Jeanette died in 1965 Raymond remarried in 1974. His second wife died in 1995 and Gene Raymond, at age 89, died less than three years later on May 3, 1998 of pneumonia. He is buried in the Forest Lawn Cemetery in Glendale, California, next to his first wife, Jeanette MacDonald. His memory is preserved in two stars on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. One at 7001 Hollywood Blvd for his movies and the other at 1708 Vine street for television.