

Mario Lanza

The world of opera has had several superstars but none have crossed over into mainstream entertainment as much as Mario Lanza. He has been described as the voice of the 20th century and was idolized by his fans. Contemporary singers such as Pavarotti, Domingo and Carreras have said that they were inspired to become opera singers because of him. He was a tenor with a very passionate delivery.

He was born in Philadelphia in 1921. His vocal skills were soon noticed and he performed in local operatic shows, debuting in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* at the young age of twenty one. World War II took Mario Lanza away for a while as he served in the US Army Air Corps. After the war had finished, he picked up his career doing radio shows and a long tour of America, Canada and Mexico. He took the coveted role of Pinkerton in *Madame Butterfly* in 1948.

The successful career of the young singer received a further boost, catapulting Mario Lanza into fame and fortune. Louis B. Mayer heard about Lanza and put him on contract at MGM studios for seven years. He became a Hollywood favorite and introduced moviegoers to a style of singing they might otherwise not have had access to. His greatest film triumph came when he played the legendary opera singer, Enrico Caruso in *The Great Caruso* in 1951. Caruso died in the same year that Lanza was born. Another famous role came in *The Student Prince*, a great romantic opera where he played opposite Ann Blyth. MGM fired him after a dispute in 1954 but he started making movies again a couple of years later.

He re-located in 1957 to his spiritual home, Rome in Italy. There, he filmed *Seven Hills of Rome*. He also toured across Europe and the UK. Unfortunately, he began to suffer from a number of health problems. He died in 1959, aged just thirty eight years old, from a pulmonary embolism. He left a wife and four children. Mario Lanza popularized opera but never compromised his singing style. The emotion in his voice is not to everyone's taste but it set a standard for others to follow him. Hollywood has not made stars of today's opera singers, but not many share an excellent voice, charisma and matinee idol looks. He had a short life but one which will never be forgotten.