

Vignette Of Rod Taylor

. . . A Spectacular Career From TV To Pictures

A half-dozen years ago a young man from Sydney, Australia, by the name of Rod Taylor arrived in Hollywood with his sights on a movie acting career. The airplane ticket that brought him to the U. S. had been a prize honoring his performance in an Australian film, "Long John Silver."

For several years he languished in the frustrations of a bread-and-butter career that paid the rent but failed to soar into the stardom realm.

Then came television.

"I had turned down 19 offers to go into TV before the 'Hong Kong' series came along," Taylor says. "The character was my kind of guy and the idea of location work in Hong Kong flipped me."

"Hong Kong" flipped others, including the nation's TV viewers and quite a few film producers. All of a sudden, the doors that had been closed to Taylor at film studios were flung open wide. Alfred Hitchcock got him to star in "The Birds," the suspense master's latest onslaught on the nerves of movie thrillseekers. Universal followed quickly by signing him to co-star with Rock Hudson in a big-budget color view of life behind the bombers and missiles of the U. S. Strategic Air Command, "A Gathering of Eagles," currently at the.....Theatre.

At the present time Rod has more contracts than any other star in Hollywood—nine commitments for films at no less than four major studios. In Taylor's immediate future are assignments for Universal, Hitchcock, Paramount and 20th Century-Fox.

"Whoever said an actor who stars in a TV series writes his own obituary in motion pictures?" Rod wants to know. "Nobody can convince me that the public won't pay to watch someone they've been seeing for free at home on the electronic tube. And I'm certainly not the only example of this."

Among others whom Taylor points out are Vincent Edwards, TV's Ben Casey who is starring in "The Victors;" Steve McQueen, who parlayed the "Wanted: Dead or Alive" TV series into top roles in movies; and a notable quartet who bounce between TV and motion pictures without problem—Fred MacMurray, Edmund O'Brien, Shirley Booth and Lee J. Cobb.

And yet there are problems.

"For instance," Rod explains, "my own company, Rodlor, Inc. Quite a while ago we did a pilot titled 'Dateline—San Francisco.' If a TV network wants the series, we're obligated to go on with it. No matter how much I'd rather be making movies, I'm trapped.



"A GATHERING OF EAGLES" (I.D.)

Rod Taylor is Vice-Commander of a SAC Base in the color picture "A Gathering of Eagles," story of the fabulous underground command post at Omaha, Nebraska and its "Red Phone" that can alert America's global network to war. Rock Hudson is starred with co-stars Taylor, Mary Peach and Barry Sullivan.

I'm in a peculiar position. As producer Taylor, I can't make a movie with actor Taylor unless I get clearance from television and three other film studios."

But all this doesn't bother Rod as much as it sounds. He's a bachelor, as free as the breeze, and the second-best thing he enjoys is work.

And what's first best? Anita Ekberg, Rod admits, "but you can't hold hands with somebody who's in Rome or Paris or London.

Our problem is one of distance. The chaperone, the duenna, of our romance is the Atlantic Ocean. If and when our careers match so we can be together, we'll both know better how serious we really are about each other."

In the meantime, in Hollywood Rod is no recluse. He's a familiar sight at the cafes and the clubs, and there's usually a beautiful doll not too far away. However, he appears to seek larger groups than a table-for-two.

"I can't help it if I'm the devil-may-care type," he says. "Australia breeds our kind. Don't forget Errol Flynn."

Asked who influenced his career most, he named Sir Laurence Olivier and director George Stevens.

"Olivier never knew he influenced me," Taylor explains, "but I would still be painting backgrounds for department store window displays if it weren't for him. I watched him perform during an Australian tour by the Old Vic company and made up my mind then and there to become an actor."

And what about Stevens?

"That happened during an informal talk I had with him when I was playing the supporting role of Liz Taylor's fiance in 'Giant,'" Rod recalls. "He warned me never

to be impressed by the wrong values, never to compromise if I felt I was right, and to believe in what I do and be happy about it regardless of criticism. Just the thought that such a famous director would take the time to help me at that time was overwhelming. And I'll try to follow his advice until I die.

"I owe a great deal to TV," he said, "but I'd like to stay away from it at present. I don't really like to work at that wild, crazy pace. Movies are more rewarding, artistically and financially. An actor gets time to show his wares. His showcase is framed more carefully. It's not a series of 13-week sprints."

Does this mean he's getting out of TV entirely?

"'Hong Kong' is still on TV, even though we stopped making them ages ago," he pointed out. "It's on twice a week in many towns right now. An actor will never get out of TV until the film wears out from the re-runs."

That Rod Taylor Man Can Sing, Too!

For the first time in his career, TV and film star Rod Taylor is going to sing on the screen, and it took an action role in a hard-hitting adventure drama to give him his opportunity.

Rod, co-starring with Rock Hudson, Mary Peach and Barry Sullivan in Universal's "A Gathering of Eagles," at the..... Theatre, a movie backgrounded against the U. S. Strategic Air Command, plays an Air Force colonel. During an officers' club party, he entertains at the piano by singing a satirical song about SAC that was written by Tom Lehrer.

"There'll be no doubt that Taylor is doing the singing," director Delbert Mann points out. "We did the scene 'live,' recording the song as it is sung in front of the camera instead of lip-synchronizing the words to a pre-recorded sound track. We're seeking a true air of informality in the musical sequence, and this is the best way to accomplish our aim."

Although he has never sung publicly before, Taylor has a fine baritone voice and, as a member of Universal's music department put it, "a swinging style of his own."