

# [PDF] Hollywood Enigma: Dana Andrews (Hollywood Legends)

Carl Rollyson - pdf download free book

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**Description:**

**Review** "With countless others, I have always admired Dana Andrews; now, Carl Rollyson has shown, in this scholarly and immensely readable book, why our admiration is not misplaced." -- Donald Spoto, author of biographies of Alfred Hitchcock, Laurence Olivier, Marilyn Monroe, Ingrid Bergman, Audrey Hepburn

"The fierce ambitions of Carver Dana Andrews, son of a Baptist preacher, might well have been imagined by Horatio Alger, Jr.-- or Samuel Goldwyn-- but not the hidden costs behind those achievements. Carl Rollyson compassionately captures the man behind the movie star." --Marion Meade, author of biographies of Buster Keaton and Woody Allen

### **From the Author** What's in a Title?

Like other university presses, the University of Press of Mississippi sends books and book proposals to readers who comment on the strengths and weaknesses of submitted manuscripts. Some readers supply general comments, while others provide quite detailed suggestions and corrections. My reader made several helpful remarks, including a proposed title change. My working title was Dana Andrews: Hollywood's Enigmatic Hero.

Like most writers, I felt very attached to my title. I wanted readers to know who the book was about right away, as well as to signal a mystery was at hand. Dana Andrews was a star and played the hero in his films many times. But certain critics noted that his heroes seemed conflicted. They were holding back something, as if they did not quite trust themselves in the heroic roles assigned to them. They exuded vulnerability. In his signature roles, such as the detective in the film noir classic, *Laura* (1944), he expresses reticence and a tightly-controlled temper that flashes momentarily when he punches Shelby Carpenter (Vincent Price) in the stomach.

If you read about Dana Andrews (his name comes up quite often on websites devoted to Hollywood film), you'll see references to his understated style, which is usually mentioned as a positive. But you will also read some accounts that claim he was a wooden actor and played all his roles the same way. Only someone unfamiliar with the range of his work can discount his versatility. Watch him play the handsome cad in *Daisy Kenyon* (1947), the cheerful, zesty reporter in *State Fair* (1945), the dedicated district attorney in *Boomerang* (1947), and a Russian peasant in *The North Star* (1943)-- just to name four very different films and performances out of more than sixty--and you will see what I mean. He was a consummate actor, a craftsman's craftsman, although, of course, he did go through some dreadful periods later in his career when the alcoholism that he eventually overcame got the better of him.

Initially, I wanted "hero" in the title because Dana Andrews perfected a certain kind of nobility better than any other actor of his generation. Norman Lloyd, who appeared in two films with Dana, called him "one of nature's noblemen" in a letter addressed to me, and in another referred to Dana as "a prince among men." You can see what Lloyd meant in two war pictures, *The Purple Heart* (1944) and *Wing and a Prayer* (1944). But even in *Where the Sidewalk Ends* (1950), in which Dana plays a cop corrupted by his penchant for violence, the basic decency of the man and the character he is portraying emerge.

When you watch Dana Andrews in his best, most complex performances, you wonder what he is thinking. The cerebral quality of his greatest work is striking. He is holding back something, and that quality is the enigma. Some part of him-- at least in some performances--seems not to want to emote. He became a star after *Laura*, but he never became quite the star that Bogart or Cooper or Gable were. They were Hollywood. Dana Andrews was only in Hollywood.

He was born Carver Dana Andrews in a small Mississippi town that thought it would be cute to call itself Don't. (Get it? Don't, Miss.) His father, an Elmer Gantry-type Baptist preacher, moved his large family (eventually consisting of seven boys and a girl) from one Texas town to another, mobilizing his congregations in anti-drinking campaigns and fulminating against the sinful influence of the movies. One result of this upbringing is that Dana became an alcoholic and a movie star.

Put that way, it sounds as though Dana repudiated his father's example. Well, not exactly. While it is true that by the age of ten he was sneaking away from home to go to the movies, his father's driving ambition and powerful hold on audiences were also on display in the prodigal son. Although Dana rejected his father's religion--indeed all religion--that Protestant call to examine one's conscience and to abide by a strict moral code never deserted the man who became a movie star.

Even after he hitchhiked to California in 1930 and started making the rounds of the studios, Dana had mixed feelings about his chosen profession. For nearly a decade he studied singing and thought of opera as a career, and it was a choice his family would have preferred. But lured back to the stage by community theater--first in Van Nuys and then Pasadena--he gradually realized it was to be acting or nothing at all.

Yet his diary reveals that he never quite acclimated to theater folk--or to Hollywood for that matter. Discovered in 1938 by one of Sam Goldwyn's scouts, Dana slowly made his way up the ranks of supporting roles to stardom with *Laura* in 1944. The decade of his greatness, with roles in *The Ox-bow Incident* (1943) and *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946), to name just two of his superb performances, still did not make acting entirely suitable to his temperament. He studiously avoided affairs with leading ladies--most notably Joan Crawford--and cultivated a homebody image. Devoted to his wife and four children, he went to Hollywood parties only when "the job" seemed to call for it. His closest friends tended to be character actors and directors.

Dana Andrews wanted to be a great actor, and to get the best roles he also needed to be a star. Sure, he enjoyed the limelight, but he did not grouse when the plum roles began to elude him in the early 1950s, and he had to settle for lesser parts. That Hollywood--for all it gave him--was not his final aim became clear when he quit drinking for good in 1970 and returned to the stage in dinner theater. He often co-starred with his wife, Mary Todd, a consummate comedienne who decided marriage to Dana Andrews and a family were more important than her career. Unlike a lot of husbands in his business, though, Dana never forgot what his wife sacrificed for him, and it gave him profound pleasure to reunite with her on the stage, where he first met her in a production at the Pasadena Playhouse.

How this wonderful human being made his way through the phoniness and glitz of Hollywood is quite a story. He was hard to grasp. Few of his fellow professionals ever got to know him. Read Gene Tierney's autobiography, and you will see what I mean. She starred with Dana in five pictures, and yet she has very little to say about the man who always showed up for work on time, always knew his lines, and was never less than a gentleman.

To Sam Goldwyn, Darryl Zanuck, and other producers Dana was an enigma. To many of his fellow actors, he was a hero. In the end, though, I thought my reader's title better than my own. He suggested: *Hollywood Enigma: Dana Andrews*. I like it, especially since I cannot count on readers knowing who Dana Andrews was. As the new title indicates, knowing about him has a lot to say about Hollywood in its golden age and decline. Here was a star who refused to be anything other than himself and paid rather a heavy price for his refusal, but still managed to remain his own man. What price, Hollywood, indeed.

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