

The Man Who Looks



Happy husband is no "act." Frank and the former Christina Randazzo were married early this year.

Say hello to Frank Gorshin.

Then don't turn your back for an instant! When next you look, he may be making like Karloff or Como

by PETER J. LEVINSON

THE SCENE was Las Vegas, early this year. The occasion: Bobby Darin's hit show at the Flamingo Hotel. The surprise: A young man named Frank Gorshin who took the stage before Darin's own performance. Few recognized the name. Some recognized the face—perhaps from a minor but hilarious role with Judy Holliday in the film version of "Bells Are Ringing."

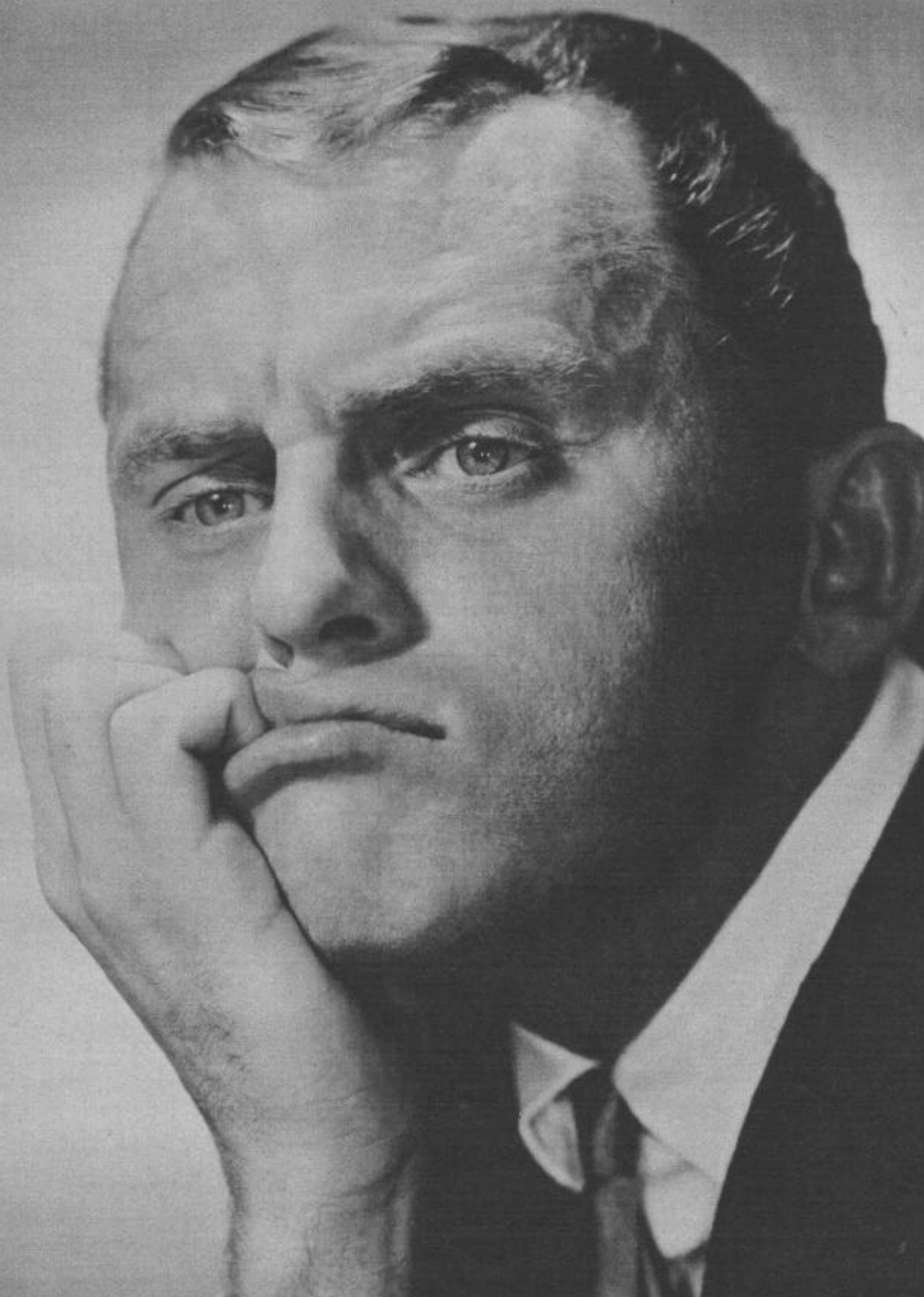
There was much more to recognize, in the next twenty-five minutes, as Gorshin held the audience spellbound with his mimicry. On stage, in the person of one small blond, were the looks, the voices and the mannerisms of a dozen vastly different personalities: Boris Karloff, Perry Como, Broderick Crawford, Steve McQueen, Burt Lancaster, Dean Martin, Robert Mitchum, Jeff Chandler, Kirk Douglas, Al Jolson, Richard Widmark, James Cagney! (Continued on page 71)



Comedian turns hoodlum, also serves time as a blabbermouth convict—on screen, that is. Above, Frank and David Janssen in fight scene from MGM's "Ring of Fire." Right, with Tony Curtis (at typewriter), in U-I's "The Great Impostor."



Like **EVERYONE**



The Man Who Looks Like Everyone

(Continued from page 40)

As Gene Tuttle phrased it, in the Las Vegas Review-Journal, "Frank Gorshin, who came in hardly known, left the stage a new 'Strip' star." And that success was soon repeated in New York, where Frank again worked with Bobby Darin at the Copacabana—and also did his deft impressions on *The Ed Sullivan Show*.

Twenty-eight-year-old Frank Gorshin is presently at the crossroads of a big career. "I don't know if I want to be a movie actor or a night-club performer," says Frank, who also sings and dances and has recorded several up-tempo numbers, backed by the Johnny Mann Singers, for a potential album.

Born in Pittsburgh—into a non-theatrical family of Yugoslav origin—Frank became interested in dramatics when he attended Peabody High School there. Then, after seeing "The Jolson Story," he developed a singing imitation of the fabulous Al which got him work at Elks' and Moose club parties.

Naturally, he wanted to attend Carnegie Tech, which has a renowned dramatics department. However, Frank enrolled in an engineering course because he wanted a secure background in case he didn't make good as an actor. His education ended just two years later, when he was drafted into the Army.

Sent to Chelveston, England, he took part in a talent contest there, won the European All U.S. Air Force Talent Contest, and was eventually assigned to Special Services duty—which sent him all over Europe to entertain in service clubs and as part of U.S.O. shows. "About a year before I was discharged," he recalls, "a civilian who'd been watching my act closely, at a U.S.O. show in Munich, came backstage to see me. He introduced himself as Maurice Bergman, a European representative of Universal-International Pictures."

Bergman told Frank to look up Alec Alexander, a movie agent in New York, when he got out of the service. Staff Sergeant Gorshin acted on the suggestion even sooner than that. Returned to Fort Hamilton in Brooklyn for final processing before his release, Frank looked up Alexander—who got him a small part in Paramount's "The Proud and the Profane." Frank managed to get a short leave so he could join the picture on location in the Virgin Islands, where he did just one scene, with Thelma Ritter.

Somewhat discouraged, Frank temporarily shelved his dramatic aspirations after leaving the service, took odd jobs working for the telephone company and in the post office. Then, after several layoffs—during which he found himself almost four hundred dollars in debt—he decided to go to California to

see, once and for all, whether he had any real chance in show business.

Of all the famous personalities Frank can do "to the life," he most closely resembles Richard Widmark and James Cagney in physical appearance. Perhaps that's why TV casting directors took one look and cast him as a heavy in such dramatic series as *Wire Service*, *Frontier Doctor*, *General Electric Theater*, *Navy Log* and *The Silent Service*.

Frank also did tough-guy roles in the movies—and some comic characters, too—but these were mostly in very minor "B" films. "I wasn't going very far," he says of those struggling days, "but at least I was working steadily. I got all my debts paid off."

Then disaster struck. In the summer of 1958, Frank went back home for a visit. As he was returning to Los Angeles, he fell asleep at the wheel—and went off the highway. His car turned over and was demolished. Four days later, Frank himself awakened in a hospital with a fractured skull. This was in Stroud, Oklahoma, where he remained for more than a month.

All told, it was seven long months before Frank could work again. During this time, he had to cancel out of an important movie assignment and, eventually, he and Alexander terminated their business relationship by mutual consent. When he had finally recovered, Frank became friendly with Len Kaplan of the William Schuler Agency, who signed him and set out to get Frank bigger roles in better shows.

On TV, Frank made dramatic appearances on *Climax!* and *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*. In movies, he got his biggest role to date in the 20th Century-Fox Western, "Warlock"—playing Richard Widmark's brother. But, during this new onward-and-upward period, his abilities as an impressionist were restricted to private parties—until Lenny Kaplan set up an audition with Steve Allen. The Gorshin impressions got off with a bang on Steve's big variety program, in March, 1959, and progressed from a \$500 debut tag to \$2500 per guest appearance before the Allen show went off the air.

Most important of all, the network program gave Frank the nationwide exposure he needed. He became a familiar and popular figure in West Coast night clubs. Director Vincente Minnelli, who had seen him on the TV show, gave him the antic role of a Brando-type method actor in "Bells Are Ringing." A "real fun part for me," says Frank. A best-supporting-actor-of-the-year performance, said critics. Career zooming, Frank bought himself a Thunderbird and began to enjoy bachelor life in a Hollywood apartment.

The chain reaction kept sparking



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along. Producer Joe Pasternak liked Frank's work in "Bells," cast him as the bass-player who was utterly lost without his thick-lensed glasses in "Where the Boys Are," was so pleased with his performance that he increased Frank's billing before the picture was released. Meanwhile, Frank got full movie-star billing for the first time in a straight acting role in "Studs Lonigan." And Universal-International cast him as a menacing convict in "The Great Impostor," inspiring The Film Daily critic to observe: "If it isn't too early, I would like to suggest Frank Gorshin for an Oscar."

Frank hasn't won his first Oscar yet, but the reviews have been uniformly good and his film career has been kept rolling with a fine performance as a hoodlum in MGM's "Ring of Fire," in which he co-stars with David Janssen and Joyce Taylor. It wasn't until after this movie was completed that co-producer Andrew Stone first saw Frank perform in a night club. "If we had known you did comedy," he said, "we wouldn't have put you in a drama!"

But there have been no complaints—particularly from Frank, who has also done very well on TV this past season, with guest appearances on both Perry Como's and Ed Sullivan's shows, as well as successful performances in night clubs. It was at the Cloister in Hollywood, last August, that Bobby Darin and his manager saw Frank on the same bill with Connie Francis. Darin was so impressed that he came on stage, did an impromptu routine imitating Frank which stopped the show—and subsequently asked if Frank would be available to work with him at the Flamingo and Copacabana.

Though he'd previously nixed all club offers in Vegas and New York, because of his movie commitments, Frank jumped at the chance. "I don't believe what I read in the paper," he asserts. "Bobby's been a wonderful help to me and I'm very grateful. I think he's a great talent."

Of his own career, Frank says, "I want to develop my dancing and continue doing better acting parts. I don't want to study acting any further, be-

cause I studied for two years and found out it's not a craft, like engineering. The feeling in acting must come from within. You develop acting talent by working and getting experience."

Frank writes all his own material for his night-club act, now says he only wants to play the clubs with a complete act in which he would be able to display his singing, dancing and impersonations as a headliner. "I'm tired of just doing impressions. I want them to be secondary. I've had to be everybody else to establish myself!"

And now "the man who looks like everyone" has found the one-and-only girl just for him. Shortly after closing at the Copacabana in mid-March, he hurried home to Pittsburgh to see his family, and then returned to Hollywood to prepare for his wedding to Christina Randazzo.

"Chris is the best critic I have," the new husband sighs happily. "She's been behind me all the way." And, this time, not only the words are Frank Gorshin's own. So are the expressions and the heartfelt sentiment!