



'Unsung Hero' comes home

Don Murray's alma mater celebrates his movie career

BY DANIEL BUBBEO
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It's been nearly 70 years since Don Murray graduated with the Class of 1947 from East Rockaway High School, and the prescient senior yearbook hinted at his future success with a few notations by his picture: *Hangout* — *On stage; Lowdown* — *Acting ability; Last stop* — *Broadway.*

Within a decade he'd be an Oscar contender for playing a roughhewn cowboy wooing saloon singer Marilyn Monroe in "Bus Stop" (1956) and a few years later would earn accolades as a senator destroyed by scandal in Otto Preminger's "Advise and Consent" (1962). Less publicized but equally rewarding has been his role as a social activist who worked with refugees in Italy and Germany.

When Murray, 87, arguably the school's most illustrious alumnus, was invited by his alma mater to return for a celebration of his work as actor and activist, he couldn't refuse.

"I'm not crazy about traveling these days, but East Rockaway High School was so important in starting my career," says Murray, who lives in Los Angeles, of the shows he penned every year for the school. "It was my first training in theater. That's how I could write the movies I did."

The film star is being honored at the school on Thursday with a screening of a new documentary, "Unsung Hero," which delves into his career and philanthropic work, and features interviews with Murray, family members and colleagues, including actors Eva Marie Saint and "Knots Landing" co-star Michele Lee. The event

See **MURRAY** on E26

Murray and his son Mick appear onscreen via Skype at a sneak preview of "Don Murray — Unsung Hero" at Cinema Arts Centre in Huntington.



Actor, activist, alumnus

MURRAY from E25

is being hosted by the East Rockaway Education Foundation and the East Rockaway Alumni Association, and proceeds are being used to create scholarships.

"I'm 36 and I know Marilyn Monroe, but not Don Murray, other than that he went to our school," says Dan Carraciolo, president of the two organizations. "It's really going to be interesting to have someone with such an illustrious Hollywood career come home and talk about what he's done."

"Unsung Hero" came about after the director Don Malcolm met Murray in 2009 at a screening of the 1957 drama "A Hatful of Rain," in which Murray played a drug addict. "Don was this fabulous, wonderful person. I didn't know a lot about him and after doing some research I realized there was a real story that was missed by everyone," Malcolm says.

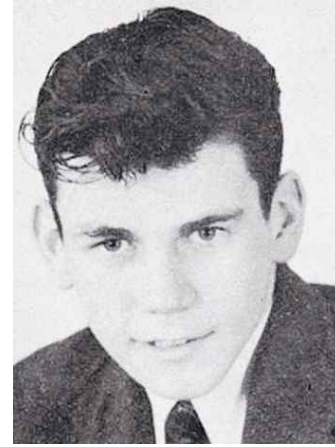
The documentary covers Murray's early years in East Rockaway, growing up in a showbiz roots family (his

mother had been a Ziegfeld girl, his dad a dance director) and his love of athletics (he played semipro basketball) and acting (after high school, he studied at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts). In 1951, Murray made his Broadway debut in Tennessee Williams' "The Rose Tattoo," but his career got put on hold when he was called to report for duty during the Korean War. Murray, who was strongly opposed to the war, was arrested after listing himself

as a conscientious objector. He ultimately volunteered to work with displaced refugees in Germany and Italy, most of whom were living in caves and barbed-wire camps.

"That was the most important work of my life," says Murray, who continued aiding refugees and frequently returned to Italy even after finding fame in Hollywood, using his success to further his cause. He worked with Italian government officials to get subsidies for parcels of land that were used to create housing, farms and small industries in Sardinia.

"When I got into 'Bus Stop,' the fame of Marilyn



EAST ROCKAWAY HIGH SCHOOL

Murray's high school senior yearbook photo, Class of 1947.

Monroe was so amazing in Italy, that her name opened doors for me to politicians," he says. "I would ask them where's the best place to buy land, and then they would ask me what was it like to kiss Marilyn Monroe. We wouldn't have gotten anywhere if it wasn't for her. The people

there ended up thanking us because we brought modern plumbing methods into Sardinia and rejuvenated the whole area."

Murray was even made an honorary citizen of Sardinia.

HOLLYWOOD CALLS

Murray returned from Italy, at his mother's urging, in 1955, and was able to resume his acting career. A Broadway role opposite venerated actress Mary Martin in "The Skin of Our Teeth" led to director Joshua Logan casting him in "Bus Stop."

Working with Monroe, who often showed up on the set hours late, had its share of difficulties, Murray says. "She had a short concentration span," he adds. "We'd start a scene and just as we were getting into it, she would forget what she was doing. It was a real stop-and-go thing. It wasn't until I saw the film cut together that I appreciated how brilliant she was."

Murray also expected Monroe to get an Oscar nomination, rather than him. He had no illusions about winning.

"I didn't take any ads in the trade publications," says Murray, who lost to Anthony Quinn for "Lust for Life." "I felt it was an honor given to you by your peers and to commercialize it displaced the artistic enterprise of making films."

Though Murray romanced Monroe in the movie, it was another co-star, Hope Lange, also making her film debut, who



Don Murray with Marilyn Monroe in "Bus Stop," the 1956 drama that earned him an Oscar nomination for best supporting actor.



Murray reunited with an East Rockaway classmate during filming.

caught Murray's eye, and they were married in April 1956. They had two children but divorced after five years. (He's been married to his wife, Betty, since 1962 and they have three children.)

After "Bus Stop," Murray was offered similar cowboy and action roles, but he feared being typecast. Instead he accepted the role of a struggling accountant grappling with marital issues in "The Bachelor Party" (1957), and followed that with "A Hatful of Rain." (1957).

"I turned down 'Cat on a Hot Tin Roof' because I didn't want to follow the dope addict in 'A Hatful of Rain' with another introverted, repressed kind of a character," he says.

"Unsung Hero" spotlights the diverse cast of characters played by Murray, including an Irish rebel in "Shake Hands With the Devil" (1959) opposite James Cagney. "He had no conceit about him. On the set I would relax by lifting weights and his exercise was dancing," Murray says. "He would do 'Yankee Doodle Dandy' in Yiddish."

"Advise and Consent" (1962), filmed on location in Washington, D.C., not only offered Murray a choice role as a senator alleged to be homosexual, but the chance to indulge his political appetite. "I got invited to have lunch with the President and Jackie Kennedy, and Jackie gave me a private showing of the White House. I also got to go on the presidential yacht with Bobby [Kennedy]. It was just an incredible experience," Murray says.

The previous year he co-wrote and starred in his favorite film, "The Hoodlum Priest," based on the life of Father Charles Clark, a minister to street gangs. The modestly made drama earned solid reviews and United Artists studio offered Murray

A star is celebrated

"Unsung Hero"

Don Murray will be at the screening of the documentary about his acting career and social activism.

WHEN | WHERE 8 p.m. Thursday, East Rockaway High School, 443 Ocean Ave.

INFO \$10; nwsdy.li/murray

a deal to produce, write and star in 10 films over a five-year period.

"They wanted to start with a Western and a cop-and-robbers film, but those two stories were not unique," Murray says. Instead, he wanted to make two socially conscious dramas, neither of which the studio saw as having strong box-office potential. "They rejected my two and I rejected their two, and that was that," he says.

FORGOTTEN FILMS

During the 1960s and onward, Murray focused on fewer big-studio productions and instead chose projects that meshed with his personal beliefs. Among these was the rarely shown "Call Me by My Rightful Name" (1972), about the relationship between two roommates — one black and one white, and the ABC series "The Outcasts," a 1968-69 Western about a white bounty hunter who teams with a former slave in the 1860s.

Murray says his favorite part of "Unsung Hero" is the segment spotlighting those racially themed works. "Those films just tie in with



Top, "The Hoodlum Priest" (1961) was Murray's first independent production and his favorite among his many films. In Otto Preminger's "Advise and Consent" (1962), bottom, which was filmed on location in Washington, Murray played a Utah senator under threat of blackmail.

his activism and his compassion," Malcolm says.

Unfortunately, they never found an audience. Murray did have a major comeback when he nabbed a leading role in the long-running CBS prime-time soap "Knots Landing" in 1979. Though Murray enjoyed doing the series, he decided to leave after two seasons to develop a family-oriented musical drama series about a country-western star who falls for a Broadway dancer. CBS bought the pilot,

then decided not to do the series.

In "Unsung Hero," Murray is quoted that he left "Knots Landing" to see if he could find more than fame and fortune. "And I did," he jokes. "There was obscurity, poverty . . ."

Now with the documentary, which Malcolm is pegging for a DVD release and possibly packaging it with some of Murray's rare films like "Call Me by My Rightful Name," Murray's work may reach a

new generation.

"I hope people get an appreciation for the variety of things that I did so that I would never become typecast and never make a career from a personality," he says. "And I hope that they would appreciate the themes of so many of these pictures, such as 'The Hoodlum Priest,' which dealt with capital punishment. Perhaps it will make people curious and see some of these films."