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Thank Heaven: A Memoir



Synopsis

One of the best-loved stars of classic American cinema tells all in this wry, funny, and poignant memoir. Leslie Caron is one of the most cherished and admired international film stars of our time. She made her film debut with Gene Kelly in the classic MGM musical *An American in Paris*, created one of the most enduring roles in American musicals as Gigi, danced with Fred Astaire in *Daddy Long Legs*, and starred with Cary Grant in *Father Goose*. In *Thank Heaven* (an homage to "Thank Heaven for Little Girls," the song Maurice Chevalier sings about her in *Gigi*) Caron shares her remarkable life story. From her childhood with her American mother and French father in occupied France to her early success as a young ballerina; to her meeting Gene Kelly and her years in Hollywood; to her love affairs (including a very funny and very public one with Warren Beatty) and motherhood; to her alcoholism and depression; and finally her recovery and continuing success in film and television, Caron offers an illuminating account of her career. *Thank Heaven* is filled with reminiscences of MGM at the end of its Golden Era, of the great stars with whom Caron worked, and of her own struggles as an actress. This is a sharp, unsentimental, and moving memoir for everyone who loves classic American movies.

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Customer Reviews

It's hard to believe that Leslie Caron is 78 now, even if her star-making turn as Lise Bouvier, Gene Kelly's unattainable object of desire in *An American in Paris* was nearly six decades ago. There was a lilting quality to her wide Cheshire grin and gamine screen presence that begged comparison with her most comparable contemporary, Audrey Hepburn. According to Caron, their professional paths

only crossed in the casting of the title role of Gigi, which Hepburn coveted but lost to Caron (Hepburn rebounded by getting cast opposite Fred Astaire in another classic musical, Funny Face). Regardless, neither actress led the charmed life that their screen counterparts would lead you to believe, and the French-American actress corroborates this with her sophisticated, reflective autobiography. Caron represents one of the last remaining bridges to the golden era of MGM musicals, and as such, her eminently readable albeit often cursory book is sprinkled with legendary names beginning with Gene Kelly, who saw her in the Ballet des Champs-Élysées' 1948 production of "La Recontre", a performance he remembered vividly two years later when he returned to Paris in search of a dancing unknown to introduce in

Like many celebrity memoirs, Leslie Caron's vacillates between chapters of personal revelation and chapters of name-dropping and giving intimate parties "for 200 of my dearest friends." How Caron transitioned from a shy, withdrawn fledgling to an in-the-know, well-connected Hollywood player is uncharted in the book, so there are many unanswered questions raised in the reader's mind. The blame for this would appear to lie with Caron's editor. In her opening chapter, she admits that she regretted delving too deeply and that her editor forced her hand in this regard. Not hard enough, perhaps. That said, the book finally reveals a warmth and humor to the lady that Caron has hidden in interviews during the past 40 years. She has often gone on the record rather bitterly, describing MGM as a brutal factory that allowed no artistic invention on the part of actors, so her sweet, nostalgic recollections of old Hollywood were a pleasant surprise. In particular, Caron sheds new light on Fred Astaire -- beginning with a rather shocking rehearsal photograph that shows Astaire without his hairpiece, a first I believe. As DADDY LONG LEGS was made during a period of intense grief in Astaire's life, Caron was poised to see a side of him not many were privy to, and she reports on it with tremendous, if unexpansive, sensitivity. Again, editors of celebrity memoirs would do well to guide their authors regarding how much or little to reveal. Along with LILI, DADDY LONG LEGS was arguably Caron's finest hour on film, revealing an unbelievably natural, genuine "not even acting" quality missing from her later, more assured performances.

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