

Donald O'Connor

Titles: 12 Sources: 4 Stills: 1

Born: Chicago, Illinois; August 30th 1925 [elsewhere given as 28th August]

Vaudeville trooper who had nothing special to offer as a supporting boy-player for Paramount, but later was able to strut his stuff with a vengeance in a barrage of dumb teen dance movies. Later he had to contend with leading lights in the shape of Gene Kelly and Frank Sinatra, so that - doubtless to his annoyance - he was often best remembered as the human stooge to Francis the Talking Mule. In "**BEAU GESTE**" he was the one eavesdropping in the suit of armour, before metamorphosing into Gary Cooper.



*As a pranksome orphan adopted by child-hating Charles Ruggles in "**BOY TROUBLE**"*

Source: NFT Bulletin

Halliwell's Filmgoer's Companion entry:

"Snappy American light comedian, singer and dancer, a teenage star of the forties whose film career suffered with the decline of musicals."

"..Another child who went on to musical stardom was vaudeville-bred Donald O'Connor, first seen in "**SING, YOU SINNERS**".."

Sunday Times "Milestones of the Cinema" entry:

"He was born into a circus family and made his debut in vaudeville before making "**MELODY FOR TWO**" (37) at the age of 11. Paramount films such as "**SING YOU SINNERS**" and "**TOM SAWYER - DETECTIVE**" (both 38) and "**BOY TROUBLE**" (39) preceded notable performances in a string of indifferent Universal musicals including "**MR BIG**" (43), "**CHIP OFF THE OLD BLOCK**" (44) and "**FEUDIN' FUSSIN' AND A-FIGHTIN'**" (48). He achieved fame with a talking mule in the surprise comedy hit "**FRANCIS**" (50).

His greatest film was "**SINGIN' IN THE RAIN**" (52) with Gene Kelly, in which he performed "Make 'em Laugh". It was followed by "**WALKIN MY BABY BACK HOME**" (53) and "**THERE'S NO BUSINESS LIKE SHOW BUSINESS**" (54). After playing the lead in "**THE BUSTER KEATON STORY**" (57) he made only a handful more films, including "**THAT'S ENTERTAINMENT!**" (74), "**RAGTIME**" (81) and "**TOYS**" (92)."

Source unknown:

"Song and dance comedian, in show business since three, when he joined the family circus act. Brown hair, blue eyes. Hobbies: piano,

drum-playing, ice-skating, songwriting, archery.”

The Moving Picture Boy entry:

“His parents were originally circus performers: father an acrobat, mother a bareback rider and tightrope walker. Later they turned to the theatre, with a family act of song, dance and acrobatics which earned them the title of "The Royal Family of Vaudeville". Donald used to be carried on to the stage to wave and gurggle at the audience from his infant wrappings until he was old enough to squeak a song and totter through a tiny dance. It can't have taken long, since at the age of one he is said to have danced a Black Bottom, and been tap-dancing at three. In the end he became one of the finest hoofers in the business. With his pale, elfin eyes and saucy air, Donald was a natural for the movies. In **"MELODY FOR TWO"** he and two of his brothers did a vaudeville number, and he was then signed up by Paramount. (In **"TOM SAWYER, DETECTIVE"** he played Huck to the Tom of Billy Cook, a boy who wasn't to rival O'Connor's subsequent career.)

A series of Universal musicals in the Forties (notably opposite Peggy Ryan) kept O'Connor in the popular eye, and in the Fifties he was six times partnered - rather less engagingly - by Francis, the Talking Mule. In the same decade, though, came some of his great dance-and-comedy performances: in **"SINGIN' IN THE RAIN"** (52), **"CALL ME MADAM"** and **"WALKING MY BABY BACK HOME"** (53), **"THERE'S NO BUSINESS LIKE SHOW BUSINESS"** (54) and **"ANYTHING GOES"** (56). Finally he made his sporting but not quite adequate stab at portraying genius in **"THE BUSTER KEATON STORY"** (57). In a sense it demonstrated his limitations to O'Connor himself. After **"THAT FUNNY FEELING"** (65) he returned to vaudeville, and for years the cinema saw little of this admirable entertainer. Then he turned up in **"RAGTIME"** (81) - as Evelyn Nesbit's dance teacher - and in **"PANDEMONIUM"** (82).”

FILMOGRAPHY

Year	Age	Title	Role
deb 37	12	MELODY FOR TWO	
38	13	MEN WITH WINGS	
		with <i>Billy Cook, Gene Reynolds, Virginia Weidler</i>	
38		SING, YOU SINNERS	
38		SONS OF THE LEGION	
		with <i>Wally Albright, Bennie Bartlett, George Billings, Billy Cook, David Holt, Billy Lee</i>	
38		TOM SAWYER, DETECTIVE	as Huck Finn
		with <i>Billy Cook</i>	
39	14	BEAU GESTE	in lead role Beau as a boy
		with <i>Billy Cook, Martin Spellman, Ann Gillis, David Holt</i>	
39		BOY TROUBLE	
		with <i>Billy Lee, Wally Albright, George Billings, Sonny Bupp, Tommy Tucker</i>	
39		DEATH OF A CHAMPION	
39		MILLION DOLLAR LEGS	(not his)
39		NIGHT WORK	
		with <i>Billy Lee</i>	
39		ON YOUR TOES	
		with <i>Tommy Bupp</i>	
39		UNMARRIED	
42	17	PRIVATE BUCKAROO	
42		GIVE OUT SISTERS	
42		GET HEP TO LOVE / SHE'S MY LOVELY	
42		WHAT'S COOKIN'?	
42		WHEN JOHNNY COMES MARCHING HOME	
43	18	STRICTLY IN THE GROOVE	eh?
43		IT COMES UP BIG	eh ??
43		MISTER BIG	eh ???
43		TOP MAN	
44	19	CHIP OFF THE OLD BLOCK	
44		THIS IS THE LIFE	
		with <i>Richard Nichols</i>	
44		FOLLOW THE BOYS	EH ??
44		THE MERRY MONAHANS	
44		BOWERY TO BROADWAY	
45	20	PATRICK THE GREAT	