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JOHN E. LONGHURST  
*A Romp with Big Sister*

Miss Dinah Shore used to be one of my favorite female singers. She had the kind of voice which made a man's pulse beat a little faster and stirred up in the imagination of the armchair Lothario dreams of romantic places with waving palms and sloe-eyed native girls who thought *I Surrender Dear* was a loyalty oath.

But that was long ago. In recent years, with the matriculation of Miss Shore into Television, I have come to classify her offerings as an essential element in the limbo of things to be avoided in favor of the commercials on another channel. I had never considered how this had come about, so I decided to look in on the hour long spectacle which appears every Sunday under the title "The Dinah Shore Chevy Show." (Miss Shore, it seems, shares top billing with the sponsor.)

Wholesome is the word for the New Dinah Shore. She drove into view (in a Chevy, of course) singing *I Love Everybody I See*, and we were off to a good, clean hour of mindless amiability. Miss Shore is still a very handsome woman, but she has managed to offset her natural attractions by becoming elfin and girlish, in the bland well-scrubbed manner which I suppose they call "naturalness" in the trade. She trips about the stage

wide-eyed and chaste, conversing with her guests in a homey, neighborly way, and displaying a brand of humor which reminds me of the scriptural gaiety with which my maiden aunt used to regale her Sunday school classes. All this is interspersed with little folksy monologues to the audience salted by such philosophical observation as "Gee Whiz," "Oh, golly," and "Isn't that just wonderful?"

In between the guest performances, commercials, and occasional bits of dialogue, Miss Shore sang a few numbers herself: *My Momma Done Told Me*, and *It Had To Be You*. I can remember the time when I would have listened with a small thrill to the old Dinah belting out such stuff as this with a husky romantic air which transported me to the burning sands of Araby. But the new Dinah evoked only the image of a synthetic Middle West, with a rose-covered cottage and white picket fence. *My Momma Done Told Me* was so anesthetized as to be completely void of even the vaguest hint of romantic suffering. It was more a paean to the virtue and wisdom of momma than an ode to lost love. So too with *It Had To Be You*. The muted tone, the soft-boiled egg look, gave it the quality of a lullaby rather

than a love song. This last number, incidentally, was followed by a sedate soft-shoe song and dance routine, featuring Miss Shore, a lady guest, and two men guests dehydrated for the evening's performance. The two ladies (or more properly, girls) sang *Me And My Gal*, twirling parasols as they tripped through a winsome dance routine. The boys, in high hats and canes, frolicked with them in a manner reminiscent of the games of musical chairs that we used to play during the Sabbath evening Bacchanalia at the YMCA.

My worst suspicions were confirmed when a lady guest mentioned the *Gypsy Love Song*.

"Oh, that's a beautiful lullaby," breathed Dinah.

"Why, Dinah, that's a love song," said the guest.

"I'll always think of it as a lullaby," sighed Dinah, "because my mother used to sing me to sleep with it."

So then Dinah and her guest, both looking a little dyspeptic—the standard expression for subdued spiritual emotion—sang *Gypsy Love Song* together. And sure enough, it did

sound like a lullaby, just like the other love songs.

The last number on the show was a novelty piece about two scarecrows singing and dancing like happy, lovable clowns, and philosophizing about birds. My happy faculty for blotting out traumatic experiences prevents me from recalling more of the details of this *tour de force*.

The show mercifully ended with Dinah and her guests perched atop a new Chevy, singing the sponsor's doxology, "See the USA in a Chevrolet." This was the only time Miss Shore's singing showed much enthusiasm, but even so the old hint of wantonness was still missing. Who can feel wanton about a car anyway?

After the show was over, I staggered into my den, dug out a couple of beat-up 78 records of the old Dinah Shore, sat back and listened in therapeutic bliss, while I sighed for the good old days before Dinah had become homogenized.

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*Dr. Longhurst, who teaches at the University of New Mexico, specializes in European History.*