



# Ann-Margret Has Had an Amazing Career, But Won't Boast About It

THE TIMELESS PERFORMER EARNS THE LA PRESS CLUB'S LEGEND AWARD

BY ALEX BEN  
BLOCK

**I**f Ann-Margret's half century of accomplishments as an actress, singer, dancer, sex symbol, wife, friend, stepmom and inspiration to U.S. service members has made her a global icon, you won't hear the lady brag about her accomplishments.

Sitting in the grand living room of her Los Angeles estate, Hedgerow, in a Cape Cod-style house, surrounded by 10 acres nestled into Benedict Canyon, Ann-Margret (Olsson Smith) recently shared a few memories.

Ann-Margret, 78, retains a timeless beauty—as well as her natural shyness. "Like all Swedes I was raised to be intensely modest," she explained in her 1994 autobiography *Ann-Margret, My Story*.

She may be a Hollywood star, but she doesn't act like one. During her 50-year marriage to Roger

Smith, until his death in 2017, the couple rarely attended Hollywood parties and premieres, unless they were promoting a new project or favorite charity. She has been that way her entire career. Years ago, columnist Hedda Hopper dubbed her "Hollywood's New Garbo."

"She's not boastful," says her friend of over 25 years, and fellow Swedish-born movie star, Maud Adams. "She's had this amazing career and yet she wouldn't talk about it. She's very respectful to the people she has worked with. She is very private."

"I knew all about the Ann-Margret mystique," Ann-Margret herself wrote. "I was said to be a recluse, a fragile woman consumed by fear, a tragic heroine controlled by a strong husband. I was an enigma to many people, including those closest to me and sometimes even to myself."



She was glad to let Smith handle the business side while she focused on her art. But how could a shy woman could go on camera or the stage and perform brilliantly over many decades?

"I just become a different person on stage," she says. "Before I perform, I'm like this," she growls as she shows that her heart is beating wildly. "And then I go on and maybe by 10 minutes in I'm alright and I'm having a great time. I'm having a ball."

Audiences all over the world have been having a ball as well thanks to her movies, such as *Viva Las Vegas* with Elvis Presley, *Carnal Knowledge* and *Grumpy Old Men*, or her TV specials, legendary Las Vegas shows and more than 50 albums. That is why the Los Angeles Press Club tonight is pre-



Clockwise from above: Ann-Margret's singing, acting and dancing skills made her an international star; she and Elvis Presley made a striking pair in *Viva Las Vegas*; appearing with Alan Arkin in "The Kominsky Method."



Whether performing on a ship or traveling with her bandmates Johnny Rivers, Mickey Jones and Chuck Day, through Vietnam for 15 days in 1966, Ann-Margret feels a responsibility to perform for American soldiers. In 1968 she was asked to join Bob Hope's tour to Vietnam.

senting her with the Legend Award for Lifetime Achievement and Contributions to Society.

"Since she first blew fans away with her singing and dancing in *Bye Bye Birdie* to her more recent work on 'Ray Donovan' and 'The Kominsky Method,' Ann-Margret has defined Hollywood glamour and stardom for generations of fans," said Press Club President Chris Palmeri.

She has been nominated for and won many awards, including three Golden Globes, two Emmys and two Oscar nominations. Still, one of the most meaningful came last month in Washington, D.C.

She received the inaugural Bob Hope Legacy Award presented by the late comic's daughter, Linda Hope, for her longtime support of service members, and her USO tours.

Through her six decades of entertaining service members no matter the location or distance, Ann-Margret has demonstrated a deep appreciation for our troops," said Dr. JD Couch, USO President & CEO. "That is why we were honored to present the first-ever USO Bob Hope Legacy Award to Ann-Margret at last week's "Backstage at the USO" event in Washington, D.C. The award pays homage to Bob's incomparable legacy and recognizes an individual who shares in his spirit of patriotism."

Ann-Margret calls the service members who



have become part of the fabric of her career and life "my gentleman."

"I've been to a couple of her events in Las Vegas and she was always calling out the veterans and they cheer her on in the audience," says Adams. "Many of them show up for her. She has tremendous respect among the veterans for her devotion to them."

While Ann-Margret has remained the epitome of class, her life has not always been easy. She has dealt with alcoholism, infertility and the loss of her beloved parents. She also suffered a number of injuries over the years, the worst in 1972 when she fell 22 feet off a platform during an elaborate nightclub show in Lake Tahoe. She fell into a coma, her jaw was broken in two places, her left arm was broken, and she suffered a gash on her knee so severe doctors worried she wouldn't dance again—if she survived.

Showing her determination not just to live but to regain her life, only five months later Ann-Margret was back on stage in Las Vegas performing again, only this time without opening on a 22-foot-high platform.

Another daunting challenge was a devastating illness that struck her husband, who was also her manager and best friend, beginning in 1980. Once the handsome hero of the '50s TV hit "77 Sunset Strip," Smith suffered from a neuromuscular disease, myasthenia gravis, for four decades. He later also contracted Parkinson's disease. Through it all his wife was at his side.

*Congratulations  
to a True Legend ~  
Ann-Margret!*

*You are Loved,*

*Susan & Dan Gottlieb*

*Maud Adams & Charles Rubin*



Ann-Margret's marriage to Roger Smith, the star of "77 Sunset Strip," lasted 50 years.

Far, right: Ann-Margret with her parents.



In his final years, Ann-Margret turned down career opportunities to be with her husband, even passing on a chance to star in a TV series, said her manager Alan Margulies.

In 2017, their children (she was stepmom to Smith's three kids) and grandchildren threw a 50th anniversary party at Hedgerow. As the song "Got a Lot of Livin' to Do" from *Bye Bye Birdie* played, a flash mob led by their daughter, granddaughters, family and friends, and about 50 other revelers, entered singing and dancing.

"Roger was smiling," recalls Ann-Margret. "He had tears coming down his face. It was unbeliev-



able, a wonderful, lovely, warm, happy experience. That was May 8th, and then on June 4th he passed away."

She endured, she says, because of the love for her husband, and her deep spirituality and belief in an afterlife.

"I've said this many times," says Ann-Margret. "If I thought that I would never see my mother or father or Roger again, that would be it. I couldn't handle it. But I do know that I'm going to see them."

What we know is that this legend's legacy will live on in movies, TV shows and music for generations to come.

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