

# The Filmography and Hollywood Career

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## PART FOUR

The Condos Brothers dance team included some of the finest rhythm dancers ever to perform on stage or screen. Sixteen different films forever document the extraordinary dancing abilities and sheer exuberance of these Greek-American brothers. It is equally astounding to realize that the Condos Brothers have been so completely forgotten by the Greek-American community from which they sprang.

In 1929, at the height of their fame, the 'King and King' dance team of Frank Condos and Mattie Olvera split up. Frank immediately teamed up with his brother Nick as the "Condos Brothers." The duo quickly joined "Vantages" a Broadway musical review. With Frank Condos as leader the four Condos Brothers danced as duos and trios in different combinations over the years in their seemingly endless stream of stage, nightclub, and movie appearances. In 1930, when "Vantages" opened at the London Palladium Frank and Nick Condos were so popular they performed there non-stop for the next two years.

While undoubtedly the duo tested and changed their choreography over time one dance sequence soon became a signature routine. It "started with a Soft-Shoe dance done to the song 'Tea for Two,' then a Clog dance to 'Three O'Clock in the Morning' and finally a fast paced Challenge dance done to 'June Night' ([www.streetswing.com](http://www.streetswing.com))." You can actually see elements of this routine in available films and on the Internet YouTube website which features three short clips of the Condos Brothers dancing, at the first two dances, of this routine.

From 1932 into the 1950s, the Condos Brothers performed live at theatres and on the screen. To cite but one example of the kind of stage productions the Condos Brothers took part in theatres we can note the May 19, 1937, opening of the Hollywood film, "Turn Off The Moon," at the Paramount Theatre in Times Square. The Condos Brothers were

part of this typical floor show. The theatre doors opened at 9:30AM. Don Baker provided an opening solo and other background music on the Paramount Theatre organ. The stage show included Ina Ray Hutton and Her Meló-Dears, Vic Hyde, the One Man Swing Band, Mary Small who was held over but with an all new song routine and the Condos Brothers. The dancing duo was noted as the "Dancing Stars of "Wake Up and Live." After the stage show finished the feature film was preceded by a new Popeye the Sailor cartoon. What the advertisement fails to note is how many of these stage shows took place in any given day. This advertisement also does not report which of the four brothers was performing.

The chronology of Condos Brothers films is as follows. Their first film was 'The Midshipmaid' (1932) with Nick and Steve credited as the Condos Brothers. In 'Dancing Feet' (1936) Nick Condos, performed solo. Then in the 1937 musical 'Wake Up and Live,' Nick and Steve team up once again. In 1938, Nick and Steve appear in 'Happy Landing.' Now should anyone think the Condos Brothers were appearing in films of little consequence we need only note that four of the other performers were none other than Sonja Henie, Don Ameche, Ethel Merman and Cesar Romero. In 1939, the Vitaphon studio issues the short 'The Broadway Buckaroo' with Frank, Nick and Steve, as the Condos Brothers. While a short feature film, 'The Broadway Buckaroo,' showcased Red Skelton and his wacky plan to open a night-club dude ranch on Broadway. The very first act Skelton hires is the Condos Brothers.

On May 30, 1941, 'In The Navy' is released with Frank and Harry as a pair of dancing sailors. This film is often, mistakenly called 'Abbott and Costello in the Navy,' since this comedy team headlines the film. Included in the roster of performers in this zany extravaganza are Dick Powell, Clara Dodd, Shemp Howard (of Three Stooges' fame) and the three Andrews Sisters: Patty, Maxene, and Laverne. This film is often credited as a lighted hearted wartime favorite by many film critics. The obvi-

ous question here, if you're a Greek American, is since we see the Andrews Sisters and the Condos Brothers perform together (or right after each other) in various music and dances scenes wouldn't they have also talked together off camera?

With the 1941 film, "Moon Over Miami," which was based on the play "three Blind Mice," was another film which included an impressive roster of Hollywood performers. Aside from the Condos Brothers this film included Don Ameche, Betty Grable, Robert Cummings, Carole Landis, and Jack Haley along with a host of other familiar character actors of the era. During this film Frank and Harry dance with Betty Grable in two numbers 'You Started Something' and 'Solitary Seminole.'

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In films and during stage performances the Condos Brothers some times appeared with the addition dance partner, in this case, it was female star Betty Grable. At the time (and for many viewers today) these two dances with Frank and Harry Condos and Betty Grable remain two of the most memorable ever filmed during the Golden Age of Hollywood musicals. Dance fanatics don't agree asserting that Grable's dancing skills were not up to the task and that "this only served to force the brothers to tone down there dancing skills, which is disappointing to tap enthusiast." Coincidentally, Hermes Pan in an uncredited role also danced with Betty Grable in this film during the 'Conga' dance. So that makes three of the most notable male dancers of the day trying to make Betty Grable look good were also all Greek-Americans.

"Song of An Open Road," released in 1944, includes among a long list of Hollywood stars, as well as Frank, Harry and Steve Condos. The reason to stress this point is to

# 's of the Condos Brothers Dancers

underline the fact that the Condos Brothers inevitably appeared on film with some of the greatest Hollywood performers. In this film, we find Edgar Bergen, W.C. Fields, Bonita Granville, Sammy Kaye, and other performers.

During World War II, Betty Grable was considered the number one pin-up girl by American service men. For those too young to recall this fact if they have seen the film "Stalag 17" much time is spent discussing this fact. At some point Hollywood promoters insured Ms. Grable's legs for a million dollars. Aptly enough Grable became known as 'the woman with the million dollar legs.' As part of all this war period propaganda and Hollywood hoopla Ms. Grable was also, for a brief period, Hollywood's number one box office star. Not unexpectedly, then, in 1944 Betty Grable's film was called "Pin-Up Girl" and it featured Grable as one of the hostesses at a military canteen. These canteens were the precursors to USO clubs. Grable appears as Lorry Jones one of the local girls who dances with off-duty servicemen about to go to war. Performers Martha Raye and Joe E. Brown offer additional musical numbers, a great deal of comedy and interact with those two dancers Frank and Harry Condos.

"Hey Rookie," a musical released in 1944 musical is included in various essays about the Condos Brothers as a film they performed in but I can find no corroborating evidence for their participation. With so many stories floating around about which films these dancers did or did not perform in it is best to be skeptical and base all of our attention to sources material we can trust.

Such was the notoriety of the Condos Brothers dance team (whatever the combination might be) that in the 1946 film, "The Time, the Place, and the Girl," that Frank and Harry Condos appear as themselves doing their routine in—of all places—a noisy nightclub. Steve Condos always asserted he performed in the 1948 short feature film, "Buddy Rich and His Orchestra" but, again, I can find collaborative evidence.

We have no problem judging this

in the 1950 film, "The Star Spangled Review," since Steve Condos performed as himself. As in other films in which the Condos Brothers performed in this production we find none other than Frank Sinatra, Bob Hope and Peggy Lee. This film has much in common with the next filmed production Steve Condos performed in as a dancer.

The television extravaganza, "Meet Me After the Show," released on October 15, 1951, includes Steve Condos teamed up with Jerry Brandow "as a pair of stage hoofers." This film's cast includes Betty Grable, Macdonald Carey, Rory Calhoun and Eddie Albert among others. What is striking about Steve Condos' three films in the 1950s is that his role is very self-consciously offered as nostalgic. Condos is always presented as simultaneously himself and as a noted 'hooper.' The intent here is clear. The Condos Brothers represent the quintessential stage dancers.

"She's Back on Broadway," musical released on March 14, 1953 headlines with Virginia Mayo who plays Catherine Terris a Hollywood actress who has 'hit the skids' and so heads back to Broadway to rekindle her career. Steve Condos and Jerry Brandow perform as noted Broadway dancers.

This nostalgia for a lost era of great performance is the very premise of the 1975 documentary "Hurray for Hollywood." Frank and Harry Condos appear as themselves doing several of their routines. The star studded cast of this film with persons such as Mickey Rooney, Fred Astaire, Jean Harlow, Shirley Temple, John Wayne, Carole Lombard and so many others once again clearly indicates that the Condos Brothers were ranked among the very elite of Hollywood performers of all time. For those who might still somehow doubt that the Condos Brothers were among the greatest rhythm tap dancers of all time we offer Steve Condos' master performance of the "Challenge Dance" in the widely acclaimed dance film "Taps" (1989).

Many will object to this survey of the Condos Brother's career. I have said nothing of their extensive stage work. I have offered nothing of their lives after they gave up dancing. Steve Condos never stopped dancing and in fact died after a performance in Europe. What is important to focus on here is not what I have omitted but that so much more can be said about Greek-Americans as dancers in North America than is now widely understood within our community.

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