

1956

Don't get Edith Adams wrong—  
in spite of her lush figure and  
uninhibited impersonations . . .



Fans love her no-holds-barred mimicry of Theda Bara, The Flapper and Marilyn Monroe.

Photograph by Friedman-Abeles



# EDIE IS A LADY

By WILLIAM A. COLEMAN

Seven years ago, Edith Enke, a demure young operatic student at New York City's Juilliard School of Music, went out and bought herself a sleek, shimmering satin swimsuit, eased her well-proportioned, five-foot, six-inch frame into it, and entered a local video station's beauty contest. She emerged as Miss New York TV and several months later in Chicago—to the accompaniment of a chorus of male wolf-whistles—she was named winner of the national title, Miss U. S. Television.

Thus was "created" Edie Adams, a blonde, blue-eyed beauty and one of the prettiest paradoxes in show business. On stage, in TV, night clubs and the legitimate theater, she is an unabashedly sexy vocalist-actress-comedienne. In private life, married to video comic Ernie Kovacs, she is a quiet, modest proper wife and an affectionate, almost old-fashioned mother to his two children by a former marriage.

Miss Adams currently has forsaken TV to star in *Li'l Abner*, a lusty new musical comedy which is due to open next Thursday night, November 15, in New York. When the show was previewed out of town, critics described Edie as "curvaceous, sexy—with a strong singing voice," and "properly charming and oversexed in her role."

In contrast to her provocatively physical footlight personality is Edie's simplicity and down-to-earth naturalness in rehearsals and behind the scenes. Director-choreographer Michael Kidd, one of *Li'l Abner's* co-producers, told me recently, "Edie strikes me as a very unassuming girl—and also very moral. She's not by any means a prude, of course, but if anyone tells an off-color joke or story, Edie gets occupied with something else."

The explanation for this seeming contradiction lies in Edie's background and upbringing. Her parents are sincere, religious folk who originally wanted their daughter to be a serious vocalist, preferably in opera. At least, they hoped, she might become a teacher of music like her mother Ada, whose maiden name, Adams, Edie took when she began singing professionally.

Graduated from Tenafly, New Jersey, High School in 1945, Edie took some courses in drama at Columbia University and then enrolled for a music degree at Juilliard. At Edie's mother's request, operatic star Helen Jepson, who lived near the Enkes, took the promising teen-age singer on as a pupil.

For a while it looked as though opera had won out. But the Enkes had a summer home at Lily Lake in Nuangola, Pennsylvania, and, happily for Edie, there was a stock company at the Grove Theater there. She haunted the place until she landed a part. "My big break came," she relates, "in that rowdy, revealing Turkish-bath comedy, *Good Night, Ladies*. My costume

changes were mostly towels and, to put it mildly, Ma and Dad were shocked!" But the audience's appreciation led Edie to enter "every talent contest in sight" and within a year she was Miss U. S. Television of 1950.

At this point, Edie had to choose her future career. She decided on TV and the theater—and left Juilliard. In 1951 she went on Godfrey's *Talent Scouts*—and lost. A TV director had seen her on the air, however, and asked her to come down to Philadelphia where Ernie Kovacs was looking for a girl vocalist.

She got the job and worked with Kovacs in Philadelphia. In 1952, she returned to New York with him to do a zany morning program *Kovacs Unlimited* and, later, the hour-long evening *Ernie Kovacs Show*.

Late in 1952—thanks in part to another form-fitting bathing suit she wore to the audition—she landed the role of Rosalind Russell's unconsciously sexy sister in the Broadway musical, *Wonderful Town*. The show was a smash hit—and so was Edie.

Edie had been going with Ernie Kovacs for three years when, suddenly, in September of 1954, they flew to Mexico City and were married by former Ambassador Bill O'Dwyer. After that, she went into TV and night clubs, wowing folks with her songs and comedy impressions—particularly of Marilyn Monroe.

At home, however, she gets her kicks quietly, with Ernie and his two daughters, Betty, nine, and Kippy, seven. Understandably, Kovacs is tickled pink that she is such a wonderful mother to them.

"Edie has a high sense of right and wrong," he told me, "and the children are very conscious of it. They listen to her. They try to imitate Edie's mannerisms, her looks and her talk. They practice ballet and singing with Edie, too. They'd each like to grow up to be a star like her, but I'll be happy if they just turn out to be the kind of person she is—nice and good!"



Who's the prim and proper blonde? Why, it's the real Edie reading to husband Ernie Kovacs' two daughters.

Edie as Daisy Mae in the upcoming musical, *Li'l Abner*. Opera's loss is obviously Broadway's gain.