

CBS Sunday Movie

A DREAM IS A WISH YOUR HEART MAKES: THE ANNETTE FUNICELLO STORY

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Annette Funicello's story proves pleasantly persuasive, with people's ages blurred, TV programs unexplained, events played out easily and the sugar refined. Eva LaRue of "All My Children" limning Annette from 1958 till the present, is a delight, and Funicello fans from the '50s and beyond probably will latch on to the memories - hers and theirs.

Telefilm, directed with unflinching good taste by Bill Corcoran, early on introduces Funicello lying on a divan. She meets shy little Heather (Alexandra Purvis), who'd like to hear Annette's Cinderella story.

It's a slick way of introducing the autobio, and Funicello is poised, charming, and lovely. (A neat juxtaposition under Corcoran's hand occurs late in the TV movie when LaRue passes the camera in a wheelchair and, when she runs around, she becomes Funicello.)

As Annette tells it, her younger self was egged on by her mother (Linda Lavin, playing with insistent gladness), was spotted by Walt Disney at a recital and forged ahead into the Mousketeers. She works with Frankie Avalon (Avalon himself plays the role with effectiveness), Dick Clark enters (played by Karan Smith before Clark appears) and Paul Anka passes through her life to further his career.

Mom sticks like mustard plaster, but Annette meets her first husband, settles into domesticity and loses him. Marrying again, suffers one problem: She's developed multiple sclerosis and doesn't want anybody to know.

Len Cariou plays an avuncular Disney, and Rob Stewart brings off an insinuating turn as first husband Jack. **David Lipper's top flight as an eager Anka**, and Justin Louis is OK as Avalon until the real thing comes along. Anrea Nemeth is a spirited delight as the discovered Annette. Frank Crudele does a sure job as Annette's dad, and Don S. Davis as Glen Holt, Annette's second husband, is fine.

Designers Linda Del Rosario and Richard Paris catch the era's spirit, and helmer Corcoran does commendable work. Tech credits are good.

TV movie doesn't try to cover the Disney sweetheart's complete pro career, focusing instead on Annette, the girl and the woman, and how she has coped with her illness. Program is flooded with sunshine, and it's wholesome, helpful, and entertaining, like its subject. Just the thing for youngsters to watch with their parents and grandparents - who may have Mousketeer hats squirreled away somewhere.

- Tony Scott