

SAN JUAN, OLGA (1927–2009)

Known as the Puerto Rican Pepper Pot, San Juan was born in Brooklyn, New York, on March 16, 1927. In 1942 at the age of fifteen she landed a contract with Paramount Pictures, but her career took flight on Broadway in the musical *Paint Your Wagon*. Recognized for her excellent performance in this play, she won a Donaldson Award, and the Tony Award. A versatile musical entertainer, San Juan found her Hollywood niche in musicals appearing in supporting roles with other stars of her generation, like Carmen Miranda, Betty Grable, Dorothy Lamour, Fred Astaire, and Bing Crosby. Among her most memorable performances was her dance interpretation of "Heat Wave" partnered by Fred Astaire in Irving Berlin's *Blue Skies*. In films such as *The Beautiful Blonde from Bashful Bend* (1949), with Betty Grable and Cesar Romero, and *One Touch of Venus* with Ava Gardner, San Juan graduated into comedic roles, usually as the sidekick to the lead actress. Despite her light skin and American born background, San Juan provided comic relief as a stereotypical Latina speaking accented English. San Juan's pioneering work set an important precedent for other Latina performers who later excelled in music, dance, and acting on the screen and the stage. She married the movie actor, Edmond O'Brien. Their offspring, Brigitte, María, and Brandon O'Brien, all followed their parent's lead into the world of entertainment.