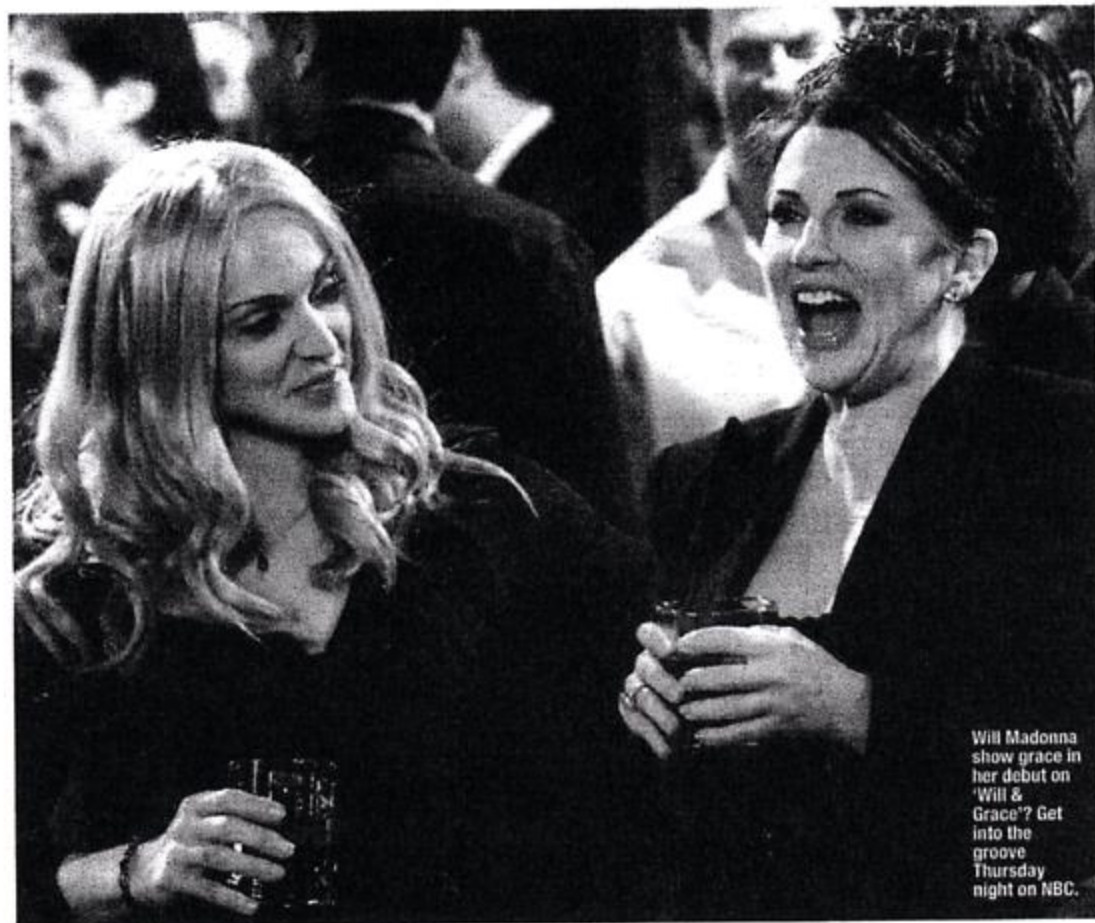


## ● REALLY BIG SHOW

## 'Will &amp; Grace'

And a sitcom-material girl



Will Madonna show grace in her debut on 'Will & Grace'? Get into the groove Thursday night on NBC.

By MICHAEL GILTZ

**M**adonna can act and she'll be doing it again Thursday for "Will & Grace" in which she agreed to appear under one condition: She didn't want to play herself. (Madonna is always smarter than everyone else about what's best for her career.)

She'll be playing Grace's assistant, Karen's new roommate: a boozing, man-hungry gal who gives Karen — herself an over-sexed-and-the-city character — a run for her money.

Those who prefer Madonna in the iconic role of Madonna can catch her Tuesday night on MTV for "On Stage & On The Record." Carson Daly hosts, John Norris asks some questions, the audience gets to chime in and Madonna performs songs from her new album "American Life" (which, in a lucky bit of timing, happens to come out Tuesday).

Don't be surprised when she's good — as a singer and a comic.

"Will & Grace" always uses its celebrity guests well and like we said, Madonna can act. She was very good early on in "Desperately Seeking Susan," a movie

that wouldn't work at all if she weren't compelling.

Madonna did it again in "Dick Tracy," despite being given enough double entendres to embarrass Mae West. Then-boyfriend Warren Beatty made her look great and even snagged an original Stephen Sondheim song Madonna could perform on the Oscars. Touchingly, you could see how nervous she was because her hand kept shaking throughout the entire number.

She reached a high point of sorts in '92 by appearing in a mediocre Woody Allen film "Shadows and Fog" (escaping relatively unscathed) and garnering her best reviews up to that point for "A League of Their Own" playing a gum-cracking ball player in the hit Tom Hanks comedy.

Then came "Evita." Madonna won the Golden Globe for Best Actress in a musical or comedy, and was good enough to be considered snubbed when she wasn't nominated for the Oscar. Still, she went two-for-two as a singer: Madonna performed "You Must Love Me," which snagged the Best Song statuette.

Of course, this doesn't even take into account her greatest performance: Ma-

donna as Madonna in the documentary "Truth or Dare." (If you don't think that's acting, you've never had cameras stalking your every move for months at a time.)

Indeed, Madonna isn't an actor in the sense of being terribly versatile. She's a star and she can shine — given the right vehicle — as she's proven repeatedly. "Will & Grace" may prove it again.

Someone stupidly suggested her time had passed because she hadn't sold as many albums as she did during her commercial peak when "Like a Virgin" sold 10 million copies in the U.S. alone.

But she received the best reviews of her career only two albums ago for "Ray of Light," which domestically sold 4 million copies. She hasn't had an album of original material ever sell less than 2 million copies throughout her 20 years of recording.

Bruce Springsteen should be so lucky: His latest studio album "The Rising" sold 2 million copies and that's the first time he's done that in 15 years.

Her movie career may be erratic, her ever-changing styles might be dizzying and her private life may very well be tabloid fodder, but Madonna's songs will endure.

**WILL & GRACE**  
Thursday, 9 p.m., NBC