



Olga Petrova

As an Artist and as a Woman, and Sidelight on Her Rise to Fame in the World of the "Movies"

By BEULAH LIVINGSTONE

THERE is a fascination in chronicles of achievement. There is within each of us just enough hero-worship to inspire admiration of a figure in the public eye who has risen from the ranks, who has tasted of success. Stories of HOW THEY DID IT generally suggest the idea SO CAN I. All of which is one of the reasons we occasionally present such sketches as this one of Mme. Petrova.

—THE EDITORS.

to bill her name in electric lights before seeing how she might please the American public. But after the first performance there could be no doubt

that the Polish actress had more than fulfilled the expectations of those who brought her to this country. Then after an extensive tour in vaudeville, she further added to her laurels and versatility by starring in "Panthea" and "The Exile," under the management of the Shuberts.

While Petrova was playing in "Panthea" in Chicago, she received a telegram from the Popular Plays and Players Co., asking her terms to make a picture. She wired back—"Regret proposition is impossible at any terms," as her dramatic career then engrossed her whole attention. But her refusal to come to the company, only brought the company to her, and the second wire read that their special representative was already on the 20th Century Limited, on his way to the Windy City, to interview Madame. After a long session, Mme. Petrova agreed to make "The Tigress" for this company, at a figure not equalled before in the annals of picture making. Having once entered the film world, her interest

so that the readers of EVERYWOMAN'S WORLD might get a brief acquaintance with her, first hand, rather than from hearsay. "I'm not what you might call a gregarious animal—though I really like some people, but my working hours are long, and my resting hours are few, almost nil, in fact, because most of my evenings and even my Sundays, are largely devoted to reading scenarios, titling my pictures, or dictating answers to my letters."

Mme. Petrova gets on an average of three hundred letters per day, and makes it a rule to personally dictate an answer to practically all of them. "So," she continued, "you mustn't be too severe on me, if I don't find time, or inclination to spend my all too few leisure hours in receiving the girl who asks me to grant her an interview in order that she may find out 'if a girl with blonde hair and a short upper lip photographs well?' or

if I will read the first literary attempt of Bub Hicks, 'who got honorable mention in the High School English test at Squantumville.'"

Mme. Petrova is an early riser. She thinks nothing of getting up at seven o'clock each morning, breakfasting at eight, and then motoring to town, from Great Neck,

a trip of thirty miles, to her studio on 175th Street. There she poses from ten to six daily, usually stopping off before returning to Long Island, at her charming studio-office on 59th Street, overlooking Central Park, to keep a dozen appointments with modistes, lawyers, players, authors, and so on, for another hour or so.

Mme. Petrova finds little interest in active social life—nor has the Great and Glittering White Way the slightest attraction for her. She is never seen at restaurants, and seldom goes to parties, preferring to entertain a few close friends in her own home, or to spend her evenings at "the piano."

"The tragedy of being successful," she says, "is

that if one wants to keep a footing on the slippery ladder, one must devote oneself entirely to work or art, and there is no time left for cultivating acquaintances or making new friends. We are slaves, as it were, to our own success. Our time is not our own, and our inclinations must be guided in the direction of our contracts, which bind us down to hard work, definite hours and certain obligations to our backers, and those who have faith in us. It's a sort of case of 'the poor little rich girl,' you see."

Madame Petrova finishes a five reel picture in from four to five weeks, that would take the average player two months at least. She works very rapidly, never rehearses a scene herself, although of course the members of the company do. Punctuality at the studio is one of the things she insists upon. The player who shows up an hour late will never find himself in the cast of a second Petrova Picture. Neither will the property man who forgets to remove his hat, for good manners play quite as big a role in Petrova's estimation as talent and capability. She is herself one of nature's aristocrats, and cannot tolerate people around her who are not gentlewomen and gentlemen. Yet she is not snobbish, and like most true-born aristocrats, is democratic at heart, and thoroughly lives up to the best definition ever given of a gentlewoman:—"One who never fails to show consideration for others."

Much has been written about the cheap and tawdry atmosphere of life behind the films, but the same does not apply to the Biograph Studios, where the eight Petrova pictures are being made. Here, there is very little idle sitting around and wasting of time, for everyone from the director down to the merest errand boy takes a tincture, chameleon-like from this dynamic star.

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MME. OLGA PETROVA, the Polish star, who, as head of her own company and the highest salaried of all the woman motion picture players, occupies just now the most interesting place in the world of the "movies," is having what journalists frequently refer to, with subtle observation, as a meteoric career. In the short space of only two years, Mme. Petrova has forged to the very top of the picture profession. In the brief period of ten years, her salary has risen from seven dollars to ten thousand dollars per week. No wonder that the poor reporters are hard put to it to find any more original expressions than "meteoric career," or "rapid rise which beggars description," when they write about Madame's marathon to fame.

Olga Petrova, early in life set out to have a career; the stage had ever been her ambition almost from the time she was a child, and in Belgium, where she received most of her education after leaving school at Warsaw, the little Polish girl showed marked talent in the school dramatic clubs. When she was only eighteen, she appeared in important Shakespearian roles with Lord Anglesey, in many of his amateur theatricals given at his Castle in Anglesey, England. At twenty, Petrova went on the professional stage and played in all the more famous Shakespearian comedies and tragedies. Then after a year in Shakespearian repertoire, came a dull season, and during this interim Petrova returned to the study of voice and piano. This training stood her in good stead later on, as it will be remembered that she composed many of her songs, writing the words as well as the music, when she afterwards went into vaudeville.

For a time Petrova became deeply interested in journalism. She served her apprenticeship as a reporter and was then promoted to special interviewer, and had experience in practically every branch of newspaper work. It was because of her knowledge of the theatre that one bright morning her editor transferred the young feature writer to the dramatic department. Here it became her pleasant duty to attend first nights and review new plays. Very probably much of the technical knowledge of the drama, gleaned in those days from seeing and studying three or four plays each week, has proven most helpful to Petrova in writing many of her own scenarios for pictures. But Petrova's interest in the newspaper field, was, after all, second to her enthusiasm for a stage career, and despite her success on the London Tribune, as soon as she was able to secure a good engagement, she returned to the footlights. This time she entered musical comedy. Later she went into vaudeville, and achieved a great success at the Pavillion Theatre, in London.

Olga Petrova is nothing, if not versatile. She has met with equal success on the musical comedy stage, and in the difficult leading rôles of such profound dramas as those of Henri Bernstein and Strindberg. Whether comedy or tragedy, as queen or soubrette, in problem plays, classical drama, or vaudeville, the "legitimate" or the "movies"—she has made a name for herself in them all!

It was while she was headlining at the Pavillion Theatre in London, that Jesse Lasky prevailed upon her to come to the United States. Mr. Lasky reasoned that anyone who could play to capacity audiences at the Pavillion in opposition to Anna Pavlowa, who was then at the height of her fame at the Palace, was worth gambling on, in America.

Mme. Petrova's first appearance in New York was at the "Folies Bergeres," but she soon discovered that a restaurant where people ate and drank, while watching the performance, was not the type of place for her scenes and excerpts from big plays. Petrova's personality is of the compelling kind. She demands your undivided attention. She is not a cabaret artiste, consequently her first appearance in America was not a tremendous success, but a few weeks later, the identical "act" which she used at the "Folies Bergeres" proved a veritable furore in vaudeville. When Petrova first went on at the Fifth Avenue Theatre, despite the fact that she had been brought to the States as a headliner, she requested Edward Darling, the booking-manager, not



An Attractive Pose.



Scenes from the Second Petrova Picture—"The Lights Within."

in her new field of endeavor increased daily, and from the very beginning she was keenly alive to its tremendous possibilities.

BUT though so much has been written of Mme. Petrova's early struggles and later triumphs, very little is known of her intimate self—her home life, her tastes, her ideals and aims. She has sometimes been called "the misogynist of the screen," because she shuns having the innermost details of her personal life made the topic of casual conversation. Not that Mme. Petrova lacks the cleverness to be cognizant of the value of a certain amount of dignified publicity, which makes for the sale of her pictures—for one of her most striking characteristics is that she combines a very unusual executive ability, with her sensitive and artistic temperament. She is perfectly willing that "he who runs may read" of how the title of her new picture is to be selected, or who is to be her next leading man, or anything else in connection with her working hours. Her screen personality, her pictures, she admits, belong to the public—but her few remaining hours at the end of a long day, belong to herself and her intimate friends. That is why the erstwhile cub reporter tucks away his note book in his pocket if he is fortunate enough to get an interview with Madame, at her beautiful estate on the Sound, at Great Neck, L.I., and smoke his cigarette as her guest, instead of chewing his pencil as her interlocutor.

"Don't you see," explained Madame, when she graciously invited me to tea,



One of Mme. Petrova's favorite portraits.