



Marlene Dietrich Collection Berlin is a division of Filmmuseum Berlin - Deutsche Kinemathek

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This is a summer special double edition which allows us to take a break and to enjoy the pleasures of reading a good book at the beach. Alas, the weather in Germany is so dreadful at the moment that you rather sit at the fire with a glass of wine instead of freezing yourself to death at the beach– but the good book is always there.

Although one of us is taking a holiday the other one is still there keeping an eye on the e-mails and the news.

For this time we skip all news and just have to thank you for your wonderful encouraging words. Here are some of the letters we received:

George Vladar from Canada wrote:  
Diese "Marlene" newsletters (ich bekomme sie ueber einen Bekannten aus Australien) muessen ein wahres Musterbeispiel sein wie man so etwas macht ! AUSGEZEICHNET !

Marnuse Els from Republic of Southafrica wrote:

I'd also like to take this oppertunity to thank you for the wonderful newsletter produced by your foundation - not only is the information and news useful, but it's also nice to see a fan community starting to grow around Dietrich's legend.



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The answer to our last trivia contest is Max Colpet – or Colby or Kolpe. These were the three names he used beside Kurt Gerhardt

which he used as lyricist for Marlene Dietrich in Paris 1933. We will go into more detail of Max Colpets biography in one of our next numbers.

Unless you have a good friend in Germany you should not have been able yet to get the book " Filmmuseum Berlin – Katalog". At present it is not available through amazon.com but you may try amazon.de. Especially for those of you which are living somewhere in New Zealand, Australia or South Africa we print the piece of biography on Marlene Dietrich which keeps tracking along the various items displayed in the new museum. For those who where lucky to get already hold of the book there are some new photos in this Newsletter which are not in the book. The reason is simple: we just could not print all the good photos of Marlene in the "Katalog"-book because there are way too many in our collection.

By making this number a double issue we continue with number 14. Are we superspicious? Not at all – but why take a risk?

### **Marlene Dietrich From Head to Toe by Werner Sudendorf**

From the birth of her first grandchild in 1948 and up into the seventies, Marlene Dietrich was seen less frequently in film studios, having established herself internationally as a show star and diseuse. It was at this time that critics first gave her that designation which she professed to hate so much: the "world's most glamorous grandmother". It evoked associations of old age and retirement, dignity and wisdom, but also of waning erotic attractiveness, the transition to a phase of sexual indifference, wrinkles and exhaustion. In a blend of derision and admiration, the critics dearly loved this epithet because it so openly contradicted the luster of seductive beauty which Marlene Dietrich had once epitomized; and she probably detested it for the very same reason. "Old age", she for her part had concluded "is ugly". And of course she concealed or altered her date of birth like so

many other show stars, thus constantly nourishing speculation about her actual age. In 1983, when the biographer Renate Seydel found her birth certificate dated December 27, 1901 in an East Berlin registry office, it turned out that the facts did not play a role for Marlene Dietrich, her fame or glory. She had countered those keeping the books of history with legend, youth's transience with the icon of ageless beauty, slowly fading sex appeal with the aura of erotic charisma. Her first American films had catapulted her into the arena of world stars and with them she had found the image which she wanted to present to the world. In the following fifties years, she varied this image without altering it fundamentally.

The prerequisites for her career, as she revealed in her memoirs "Nehmt nur mein Leben..." (Just Take My Life - Reflections) were: discipline, loyalty, self-control, duty and work. "And: a love of duty. A love of work while doing it. And a love of the constant responsibility." Her rigorous Prussian upbringing, and the resolute and immutable virtues of the Wilhelmine era influenced her character; and so she steered, staged and manipulated her career, acquiring many admirers and few friends, a devoted audience and fierce enemies.

### The early years

"I am now keeping a *very tight rein* on myself", Marlene Dietrich confided to her diary on January 30, 1914. Admonishment to do so became her maxim for both private and professional life. "I had to learn very early to have a firm hold on things", she later wrote in her memoirs with a clearly different emphasis.



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Marlene as pupil of the Auguste-Victoria-School, about 1913 (see the arrow)

Albeit playfully, she first fashioned her own identity, stylizing herself into a new being, in 1912 and 1913. On the covers of her school notebooks she contracted her first names -

Marie Magdalene - into "Marlene", at the time a rather unique name, indeed. She had perhaps taken it from one of the Brothers Grimm's fairy tales about the mermaid Maleen or Marleenken. Outwardly, Marlene Dietrich's childhood took a quite normal upper-middle-class course. Through her step-father Eduard von Losch, she encountered relatives who were staunchly conservative earls and princesses. They left their mark on Marlene Dietrich's values. She took violin lessons, performed at school events and participated in evenings of music at home. She was infatuated by her elegant Aunt Vally and by her occasional young male acquaintances at the skating rink. And she confided her hopes and doubts, flirtations and yearnings to her diary.

As an adolescent, she experienced the First World War primarily as a personal drama. She longed for her step-father, wounded for the first time in September 1914 and sent to a military hospital in Brunswick. She compensated for his absence with revengeful taunts in the schoolyard: "Hiddekk" (An exclamation resulting from the first letters of the words in German meaning: 'Foremost the English must be beat.) After her step-father's death, her mother moved with the two daughters to relatives in Dessau. Trips to Berlin were increasingly regarded as enjoyable interludes in an entertaining metropolis. Over the Christmas holidays in 1916/17, Marlene Dietrich attended theater and ballet performances at Berlin's Schiller Theater, the Großes Schauspielhaus and the Wintergarten, but also a screening of a film at the Union-Theater on the Kurfürstendamm. In spring 1917, the family of three moved back to Berlin. An entry in her diary on April 13, 1917 reveals that the sixteen-year-old's moods fluctuated between private concerns, school and the impact of the war; "I don't have a crush on anyone right now, but maybe I'll meet Harry Tarnowski through Heinz Gottwaldt. My violin lessons are very difficult, I have to practice like mad. (...) Yesterday a picture of Uncle Max arrived. Dear, dear Uncle Max. We never really spent time together, but now that he's dead, I realize how dear he was. (...) I don't think the war will ever stop. Now against America, too! Well, I'd better stop writing and wait till I can write something more interesting, like about the new love I'm waiting for."

From autumn 1917, the object of her adoration was the German movie star, actress Henny Porten. In wartime kitchen dramas, Porten played women whose lives were harsh, often misused by men who appeared noble but were in fact morally base. Henny Porten was considered the personification of all romantic torment inflicted by men on women.



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Henny Porten playing the lute in the Film „Monica Vogelsang“, 1919. A postcard handcoloured by Marlene Dietrich

Her indignation at the humiliation she experienced was always genuine. With a lofty gesture she expelled the sinners from her paradise. She suffered without complaining, silently, breathing hard, her chest trembling, hands wringing. At moments of extreme despair she threw herself on the ottoman. Marlene Dietrich was elated to be able to worship Henny Porten. She sent home-made cream cakes to the actress' box at the theater, visited her at her home, serenaded her on her birthday, and gave her cards of the star that she had painted in herself. But for Marlene, the greatest joy was yet to come. "My mother was quick to note my great passion, and so one day, for a Porten film premiere, she took the large box next to Henny's for the whole family. Without having expected it, this day turned out to be an exhilarating triumph for me. Namely, some months before, I had made a gobelin cushion for Henny and sent it to her. And what did I suddenly see on the screen? Where did Henny Porten let herself fall when she passionately swooned? Right onto my cushion! I pinched my mother's arm and trumpeted out into the Mozart Hall: 'Mother, look! She has fallen on my cushion.' What bliss!"(1) Other actresses and actors also received cards with their pictures and requests for autographs; Marlene presented their replies to her circle of friends like trophies or exchanged them for others. Yet the young girl and her infatuations were not spared some disappointments. On October 27, 1917, she noted in her diary: "Bruno Decarli's card is now available. I thought he was so beautiful in 'Furcht', and in 'Das wandernde Licht' he is shown with Henny Porten. His hair was always thick, black and parted. So I went over to Joachimsthalerstraße, into the card shop, opened the 'German Theater Album' to Bruno Decarli and found a man who was... bald (...)."

(1) Marlene Dietrich: Meine erste Liebe. In: Tempo, no. 79, April 4, 1931.



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Marlene playing the lute to her sister Elisabeth

Henny Porten remained her heartthrob, the fixed star of her youth. She wrote three film treatments for this Messter Production star; they were all kindly rejected. She gained experience on the stage in school performances, established amorous contacts with actors and actresses, and revealed to her diary: "I will definitely go on the stage. Something in me is afire, so to speak, for Henny Porten." (Oct. 19, 1917). Politically, on the other hand, she was naive, if not ignorant. On November 9, 1918, the day on which Emperor Wilhelm II abdicated the throne and the Republic of Germany was proclaimed, Marlene Dietrich had other concerns: "Why do I have to live through these dreadful times. After all, I had wanted a golden, happy childhood. And now it has turned into this. I feel so sorry for the Emperor and everybody else. Terrible things are supposed to happen tonight. We'd invited a few ladies over for tea, not a one could get through. Except Countess Gersdorff. Although on the Kurfürstendamm, armed soldiers tore off her husband's cockade. Wherever one looks - red flags. What do the people want. (...) That nothing happens (to Henny), they are especially out for those who are finely dressed." It would still take some time for Marlene Dietrich to liberate herself from the gilded cage of her childhood.

End of Newsletter

In the next issue:

**„Blue Boy“ in Vienna  
Blue Angel  
Lessons**