

MARTIN ŠRAJER / 22. 2. 2022

# Truda Grosslichtová

Anny Ondráková, Lída Baarová, Nataša Gollová, Adina Mandlová... film stars of the First Czechoslovak Republic whose names are known even to people who don't watch old films. Another very popular actor of this era was Truda Grosslichtová. Between 1931 and 1937, she featured in 29 films, mostly in the lead role. She was also successful in France, Germany and other countries.

After the war, however, the talented actress –who often portrayed young, soon-to-be-married, upper-class women – fell into oblivion, and current lists of the most-popular actresses of the 1930s usually don't include her. There may be several reasons for that.

Gertruda Marie Grosslichtová was born on 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1912 in Královské Vinohrady, Prague. Her father, the merchant Viktor Grosslicht, was of Jewish origin. Her mother Amálie inclined towards art and inspired her daughter to pursue acting. Together, they performed in several amateur theatre performances and later also in the films *The Affair of Colonel Redl* (Aféra plukovníka Redla, 1931) and *Wild Night* (Rozpustilá noc, 1934).

Another role model for Truda was the Swedish diva Greta Garbo, whom the young girl liked to watch in the cinema. After finishing school, her enchantment with the beaux arts led her to direct all her energy towards acting, despite her father's disapproval. To succeed in a tough competition, she honed her craft by watching theatre performances and films, and studying acting, along with languages and piano.

It was most likely Elektafilm's Josef Auerbach who discovered Truda for film. In the early 1930s, he happened to see her in an amateur performance at the Uranie Theatre in Prague. He subsequently offered the aspiring young artist the lead female role in the Czech and German versions of the spy drama *The Affair of Colonel Redl*, based on the work of Egon Erwin Kisch. Director Karel Anton was the first to utilise her

excellent language skills.

After her first film role, Truda gained additional experience in several theatres in Prague. She could fully manifest her singing talent in operettas, a genre with which her mother had extensive experience. During this time, she first met Vlasta Burian and Oldřich Nový, who later was her acting partner in many successful stage plays. In 1938, she also starred in the Parisian Théâtre des Bouffes-Parisiens. Towards the end of the 1930s, when she no longer appeared in films, she performed at the České Budějovice Theatre.

According to her own memories, Grosslichtová studied at the Berlin Conservatory in the early 1930s and appeared in the film *Scandal on Park Street* (*Skandal in der Parkstraße*, 1932). In Paris, she appeared in French versions of films *The "Ideal" Schoolmaster* (*Kantor Ideál*, 1932) and *Lelíček in the Services of Sherlock Holmes* (*Lelíček ve službách Sherlocka Holmesa*, 1932). Her counterparts in the original Czech versions of the films were Lída Baarová and Anny Ondráková.

Under the pseudonym Tania (or Tanja) Doll, she recorded several albums of French hits, and she had a small role in a Czech-French co-production *Golem* (1936) by Julien Duvivier, filmed in the Barrandov Studios (in the credits, she is also listed as Tania Doll).

In Czechoslovakia, Grosslichtová was often cast in light comedies and romantic melodramas. Her small parts in *The Last Bohemian* (*Poslední bohém*, 1931) and the adaptation of Jirásek's *The Dog-Heads* (*Psohlavci*, 1931) were followed by bigger roles in the detective slapstick comedy *Pink Petticoat* (*Růžové kombiné*, 1932), *The Right to Sin* (*Právo na hřích*, 1932) and Martin Frič's comedy *Public Not Admitted* (*S vyloučením veřejnosti*, 1933).

Most of her films offered a simple romantic plot, humorous misunderstandings and a few songs, which were subsequently sold on phonograph records. Film and theatre directors typecast Grosslichtová as a modern, slightly naïve and coquettish young woman from a good family whose sphere of activity is defined by her relations with older men. Only in their embrace does her heroine, however emancipated she may seem throughout the course of the film (see for instance *Lawyer Věra* [*Advokátka Věra*, 1937]), find happiness and harmony.

The rise of sound film increased the interest of Czech audiences in domestic productions. To distinguish individual titles (usually of tried and true genres such as melodramas, comedies, literary classics adaptation, etc.) and to increase their attractiveness, the studios cast film stars who rose to fame in the same period.

Thanks to the contribution of period press, Grosslichtová was among the stars whose name and face guaranteed good sales. When *Kino* magazine did a survey in 1932 asking readers to vote for their favourite film stars, the 20-year-old actress won by a landslide (she got 127 votes, Lída Baarová 63 and Anny Ondráková 32).

Frič later cast the first lady of Czech film in his films *The Inspector* (Revizor, 1933) and *Hero for a Night* (Hrdina jedné noci, 1935) where she played the dual role of a modest extra and a spoiled film star. In both successful comedies, she starred alongside Vlasta Burian. In Frič's comedy *The Eleventh Commandment* (Jednácet přikázání, 1935) her acting partner was Hugo Haas. Also the disguise comedy *Three Steps from the Body* (Tři kroky od těla, 1934) was successful.

The four abovementioned films represent the best in Grosslichtová's busy but rather short film career. After these films, she starred in a series of forgotten films of average or below-average quality, such as *Beyond the Monastery Door* (Za řádovými dveřmi, 1934), *From the Frying-Pan into the Fire* (Z bláta do louže, 1934) and *Irča's Romance* (Irčin románek, 1936). Grosslichtová was nevertheless still cast in leading roles, and she also sang the title songs of many films.

In addition to almost 30 feature films, she appeared in several short instructional films (for instance *How to Keep One's Health* [Jak si uchovám zdraví], about the importance of dental hygiene) and commercials. Among the companies that sought to use her fame to promote their products was Baťa. In *Did You Forget Something?* (Nezapomněli jste na něco) she promoted their women's shoes. Just like in the film *Round and Round* (Kolem dokola, 1937) directed by Elmar Klos.

Martin Frič offered Grosslichtová her most famous role of JUDr. Věra Donátová in a comedy about an ambitious young lawyer titled *Lawyer Věra* (Advokátka Věra, 1937). The actress herself ranked this film among her most favourite as her character differed from her usual typecast roles and more suited her intelligent style. Truda Grosslichtová ended her film career with the film *The Dragoons of Klatovy* (Klatovští

dragouni, 1937) which premiered in February 1938.

Her decision to end her film career, and in 1940 also her theatre career, was voluntary. Half-Jewish, she didn't want to perform in films whose production was controlled by German occupiers. Also her husband, the tenor and director Štefan Munk, was of Jewish origin. The couple didn't emigrate, and Grosslichtová did forced labour in a factory, and Munk spent several years in Nazi prisons.

In 1945, when the couple had already separated, Grosslichtová met a Dutch soldier and stockbroker name Hans de Vries, who came to Prague with the American army. Together, they moved to the Netherlands, where they got married in November 1946. They had two daughters together. Grosslichtová's new home became Amsterdam, and her new occupation raising children and taking care of the household. For a while, she was also a member of the Amsterdam Operetta Collective, and she also worked as a translator.

After her husband's death in the late 1980s, Grosslichtová moved to the town of Nieuw-Vennep, where she died in June 1995. As she had cut her film career in Czechoslovakia short and subsequently emigrated, she was all but forgotten in her homeland. Thanks to the YouTube channel Česká filmová klasika, you can admire her acting and singing talent and appreciate her charm in films that are rarely screened on television and which are otherwise hard to find.

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