

Farewell to Molly Picon

A TRIBUTE TO A GREAT JEWISH ARTIST



MOLLY PICON came to Johannesburg for a brief return visit on Tuesday and Wednesday last, before leaving the Union for Paris, where she is booked for starring performances during the forthcoming International Exhibition.

Again, with little advance publicity, she packed the Standard Theatre on the two evenings and the matinee of her farewell appearance. The crowded houses that flocked to see her bore testimony to the esteem she has won. And this is significant: for Johannesburg is not a city of high cultural standard, is not a theatre-loving city, nor did Molly Picon storm it with lurid publicity blurbs beforehand. She came quietly, with the dignity and reserve which befits a great artist; and the crowded houses which have consistently flocked to see her are a tribute to the greatness and universality of her art. She wins the hearts of her audiences everywhere. She makes them feel with her and through her. If it weren't so banal, I would say she makes them love her.

She has been to all the leading towns of South Africa, and people everywhere have flocked to see her. In places like Kroonstad they came from afar in the surrounding district, drove in from farms and villages 50 and 60 miles away, in order to sit in a little hall and see a slice of the great world, with its teeming joys and hopes and disillusion, presented on the stage through the person of a little woman who becomes a symbol of Man. It was not the life they knew by every day; it was the life of great cities, New York and Warsaw; the life of the struggling poor and the racially strange; but the underlying human element was universal and made artist and audience

kin: they and the characters the artist became were bound together in a bond of brotherhood such as they never knew in daily life. If only that supreme triumph of art could soak into their minds and souls, and become a living memory with them day after day—long after the artist is gone—how different our chafing human relations would be in this great land! Even the Grey-Shirts would go out of business, because men would learn the wisdom of brotherhood and pay no heed to their lunatic racial cries.

In her own quiet way, without sensational pother, Molly Picon has had a triumphal South African tour. Turn to any criticism in any paper, and you will see nothing but superlatives. And she came back to Johannesburg with the same quiet dignity, essentially human and approachable, without any of the fuss and flurry, the smug self-importance with which so many visiting artists like to clothe themselves. She has the simplicity of greatness.

On Tuesday evening I sat in a packed hall and heard and saw her for the third time. Included in her programme were several items I had seen twice before; yet—so fine was her artistry—they had lost none of their appeal. Indeed, my absorption in them had deepened: I found myself paying attention to many of the subtle lights and shadows I had not noticed before. This was particularly true of the artist's movements: arms, hands, and feet, and in fact, her whole form, no less than the varying intonations of voice and expressions of face, played an important part in her performance. Her arms became sad or joyful, flippant or serious as the occasion might demand: she actually

conveyed the mood of the item through the expressiveness of her arms. Noting these details, it was borne in upon me—actually for the first time—what immense craftsmanship goes into Molly Picon's performance, quite apart from the brilliant artistry, amounting to genius, which inspires it.

She began her performance on Tuesday night with the old favourite "Yiddish is a Shprach," and among other favourites were "Yankele," "Ich beink aheim," "Mendele's Klein Menschele," and "Liebe in Verschiedene Shprachen."

There were also many new pieces, among them an exquisite and typically Yiddish item, "Svelt ir der Rosinke"; and "Temperamental Tilly, the Queen of Hollywood," a pungent satire on some of the movie stars. She performed in English "Five Episodes in a Woman's Life," a costume characterisation taking a woman from childhood through youth and marriage into old age. And among the many encores she gave in response to the vociferous applause was her brilliant "New York Symphony," one of the most striking items in her repertoire, a penetrating comment on modern life in big cities, its frantic rush and scurry, its hysteria and its discord.

Her husband, Mr. Jacob Kalisch, again appeared with her and contributed many delightful anecdotes to

the evening's performance. He told the audience that at every concert they liked to give some items in memory of some great figure in Yiddish art: on the present occasion he and his wife delightfully rendered a number of songs by Warschawsky, the father of the Yiddish folk song; notable among them the well-known piece "Meyerke mein Zun," in which Molly Picon was Meyerke and Mr. Kalisch the father.

Again there appeared with Molly Picon, Mr. A. Ellstein, the talented musician who composes the music for her songs and accompanies her in her items. Mr. Ellstein added to the evening's performance by a couple of piano solos of his own composition.

The star was feted at the close of the evening by floral tributes and by the prolonged applause of the audience.

On Thursday she left Johannesburg: to-day she sails from Capetown. And the hearty good wishes of all who saw her will go with her, together with the warm human thought that she will win new friends wherever she goes. E.B.

Johannesburg Women's Zionist League DOORNFONTEIN BRANCH.

A COMMITTEE meeting in arrangement for the general meeting was held at the residence of Mrs. Saffer, 96 Van Beek Street, Doornfontein. Mrs. Kirson presided. Mrs. Patley and Mrs. Segal, of the Central Committee, were also present.

The general meeting of members of this Branch was held at the residence of Mrs. Rubin, 124, Van Beek Street, Doornfontein, on Monday, 19th April.

Mrs. Patley, Mrs. Segal and Mrs. Kirson were present from the Central Committee.

The report on the year's work of the Branch showed that £502 16s. 10d. had been collected.

The election of officers for the ensuing year was as follows:—Hon. Chairwoman, Mrs. A. Kirson; Chairwoman, Mrs. M. Chaskalson (Melrose); Treasurer, Mrs. S. Morris; Secretary, Miss E. Solomon; Committee: Mesdames Blank, Abrahamson,

Badnitsky, Brown, Freinkel, Flaks, Fisher, Jacobson, Katzew, Linde, Maltz, Rom, Saffer, Schubitz, Shadchan, Teeger, Taitz, Treisman, Vigushin, Zadikoff.

Mrs. Patley announced that the Executive Committee had decided to inscribe Mrs. Kirson, who is retiring on account of ill-health, in the Golden Book.

Mrs. R. Segal presented Mrs. M. Brown, a past secretary of this branch, with six trees, on the occasion of her marriage.

Women's Zionist Council of South Africa

Parys.—Mrs. B. Patley and Mrs. Davidoff addressed a meeting of the women of Parys on the 15th ult., at the residence of Mrs. Freedman. The object of the meeting was to organise a cultural group, and the addresses of Mesdames Patley and Davidoff were enthusiastically received.

At a subsequent meeting, held at the residence of Mrs. C. Sacks, on the 21st ult., at which there was an excellent attendance, the group was

finally formed, and Mrs. M. Freedman was appointed the correspondent.

Nigel.—A very successful afternoon took place at the residence of Mrs. Heilbronn on the 22nd ult. The chairman, Mrs. Bonner, welcomed several new members. A paper, written by Mrs. Behrmann, on her impressions of Palestine, was read by Mrs. Kershon and much appreciated. This group intends sending a parcel of clothing to the "Baby Home," Palestine, shortly. The next meeting of the group will take place at the residence of Mrs. Jodaiken, Glenvarloch, on the 19th inst.

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