



*Basil Rathbone brings his voice and his technique to the Hollywood studios. Welcome to our talkies!*

# DON JUAN *from* BROADWAY

A 'Great Lover' of the Stage Succumbs to the Screen

*By Bradford Nelson*

**P**ERHAPS the talkie invasion has brought Hollywood no more interesting figure than the man who has been known for eight years as the 'Great Lover' of the stage.

Gilbert, Valentino, Novarro et al have all had their adherents among the followers of the screen. Stage devotees, however, have been unswervingly loyal to one man, Basil Rathbone.

Over six feet tall, with flashing black eyes and a real profile, Basil Rathbone has brought 'ohs' and 'ahs' from his audiences without stint during the runs of such romantic successes as "The Swan," "The Czarina," "The Captive," and "The Command to Love."

The silent pictures didn't intrigue Rathbone at all. Contracts from movie producers were sent back untouched. He continued to give his services as a great lover exclusively to the stage.

Talkies came, however, and the highly capable Basil, with many others, succumbed.

Where once he kissed before the footlights, today a microphone records his romantic interpretations. And already movie fans are showing great interest in his por-

trays. Unknown except to followers of the New York stage, his first picture, "The Last of Mrs. Cheyney," has given Basil Rathbone a picture following over night. The 'great lover of the stage' has 'clicked' on the screen!

Now he is playing his second talkie rôle, the lead opposite Kay Johnson in William C. De Mille's picture, "This Mad World." Day by day fan letters pour in asking, "Who is this Rathbone? Where did he come from?"

When I visited the gentleman in question he handed me a big batch of these letters and gave me that very delightful grin which is so much a Rathbone characteristic.

"This movie thing is certainly a great cure for any one with a tendency to egotism," he said. "After playing for years before big houses, I thought a few people knew me. Now, however, I realize how very few people the speaking actor really reaches. 'The Last of Mrs. Cheyney,' for instance, has only been out a few weeks, and yet I've received letters from every State in the Union. On the stage such communications were always confined to the states immediately around New York.

"I'm enjoying every minute of this movie experience, and I hope they'll like me well (Continued on page 109)



## Don Juan of Broadway

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enough to keep me! It's much harder work than the stage; for instance, these close-ups, medium shots, microphones and so on—it takes a day to photograph a kiss which is over in a minute in the theater! But it's a great thrill, particularly the contact with the vastly enlarged audience of the screen. I thought once there was nothing so gratifying as the hand applause of the theater. Now, however, I reach greedily for newspaper reviews from all parts of the world, and I can hardly wait for the next instalment of my fan letters. The tremendous penetration of the screen is the most exciting thing I have encountered in my long theatrical experience."

We've let Basil talk; now let's talk about him.

He has a perfect right to all the adulation he has received for his interpretations of great romantic rôles. You see he is that rare type of male who is equally well liked by both men and women.

Charming in every way a woman calls charming, courtly, physically graceful, gracious, in his speech, Rathbone is at the same time very much a man's man. Democratic, very much alive, he draws no class lines. He talks to anyone who interests him. This characteristic has won for him the most difficult accolade of the studios. The carpenters, laborers and electricians, all hard-boiled to the *nth*. degree, have unanimously voted Rathbone a 'great guy.'

A man of very wide experiences (we will tell you all about them later) he is an exceptionally remarkable conversationalist. As a result, in three months he has become one of the two or three most popular hosts in Hollywood. Folks like to go to the home of Basil Rathbone and his wife, Ouida Bergere, because they know that they won't be bored!

Rathbone's very charming nature is perhaps best described by telling of his personal reactions towards the talkies.

"I'm frankly scared stiff," he told me. "I've had a lot of stage experience, but it doesn't mean a thing out here. It's going to be a grand race for the 'survival of the fittest,' and I can see only one way to come out on top, and that is, work like the devil!"

With actors on both sides, stage and screen, issuing snorts of defiance at each other, such an open and frank acceptance of an obvious situation is decidedly refreshing.

Basil Rathbone is a South African, born in Johannesburg, the son of Edgar Phillips Rathbone, a British engineer so highly trusted that Paul Kruger, the Boer, made him government inspector of mines.

Mining engineers are 'floaters,' always—so when Basil was four the family moved to Liverpool and later to London where the boy attended school, first at Heedon Court, and later at Repton.

All during his formative years his father was dashing in and out of England from experiences in all parts of the world. He had amazing tales to tell his growing son; tales of lying on an Andes trail for three days with a broken leg; tales from his status as the second man to come into the Alaskan Klondike after the great gold rush.

In Repton young Basil took part in all athletics—cricket, football, track. He holds 12 cups in track, and for years held the Repton 440 yard record at 51 seconds.

All through school he wanted to be an actor. His wise father raised no objections, but insisted that his son have a try at business training. So for eighteen months the present-day master of the art of romance slaved at an accountant's desk in the Glove Insurance Co.

"My father was certainly very wise," said Rathbone, "as this training made it possible for me to handle my personal and contractual affairs on a business-like basis. This year and a half was quite the most valuable experience I ever had."

While he was with the insurance company he lunched daily at the Lion's Cafe, Piccadilly. There he would learn reams of poetry: "The Portrait," "Porphyra's Loves," and many others. Returning to the insurance company he would use the rest of his lunch hour declaiming these recitations in an empty room.

His apprenticeship to business ended, he joined the repertoire company of his distinguished cousin, Sir Frank Benson. With the Benson company he toured to every part of the British Isles, starting with bits and ending with leads and character leads. He has played parts in every play Shakespeare ever wrote. He played in tents, halls, even in the open air. *Romeo, Iago, Orlando* and *Shylock* indicate his wide range of rôles. He made his debut in Ipswich, but he does not remember the name of the play.

It was inevitable that such a striking young actor should be called to London, and almost overnight he became a star. Some of his great London successes include "Romeo and Juliet," "Peter Ibbetson," "The Jest," "He Who Gets Slapped," and "Sins of David." He also played in "George Sand" with Mrs. Patrick Campbell.

This carries him through 1921, when he came to America to play in "The Czarina."

During the war he had a brilliant record. He joined up in the first year with the Liverpool Scottish as lieutenant and served throughout. He is credited with having invented 'daylight raiding' in the British army, during his tour of duty as an intelligence officer.

Tragedy struck his family during the war as it did so many British homes. His twenty-year-old brother, John, was killed at the Somme, and his cousin, Guy, passed away at Gallipoli. His sister felt the call of South Africa and moved back to Cape Town where she has a home overlooking Table Bay.

In the eight years since he came to America Basil Rathbone has had an unbroken record of successes. He has the envy of all actors because of the great parts which have been his, including "The Czarina," "The Swan," "The Captive," and "The Command to Love."

Rathbone is amused that his reputation as a great lover has been built up despite the fact that in every one of these plays he fails to get the girl!

"There is far more sympathy for the man who gets left!" he says.

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