

Hollywood Hostess

By Leon Surmelian

Mrs. Basil Rathbone, famous for her parties, reluctantly gives a report of the heartaches, worries and precautions in arranging an affair in Hollywood

T IS generally admitted that the No. 1 Hollywood hostess is Mrs. Basil Rathbone. This brilliant rife of a brilliant actor has a genius or spectacular and original parties. Vhether it's a formal dinner-dance, a redding or a garden fete, a party by er is well nigh a work of art by the heer beauty of its conception and etting. She was a writer on the Paranount scenario staff for seven years, nd has worked in New York as a cenic designer and interior decorator, nd her flair for the dramatic has tood her in good stead as a hostess. She is a little titian-haired woman ith high cheekbones, and is vital, lectric and straightfoward, like her usband. An attractive lady of wide ympathies and an admirable wife, she as the energy and personality of ten lamour girls rolled into one. And she nows movie society inside out. But hen I called upon her in her charmig Bel Air estate to find out how he feels about it all as a Hollywood ostess, she threw her hands excitdly in the air and vehemently exressed her annoyance at being given uch a title. She said: "I don't like ne sound of 'Hollywood hostess.' I ssure you that Basil and I entertain ess than almost anyone in the film olony. We love our home and spend lost of our evenings together. We ine quietly, in the summer on the errace with our dogs about us, and the winter on a small table before ae fire, in my bedroom. After dinner e play records of symphonic music, ead for a while and retire before welve o'clock. When Basil isn't workig in a film we take all the dogs and o for long walks in the hills, or on ie golf course in the afternoon. On ur return, if it is summer we have a wim in the pool and afterwards teander the trees. We rarely ever ask nyone in for dinner as Basil does not eturn from the studio until around :30 or 8 o'clock when he is workig and he is much too tired for any ind of social activity. "Consequently, we have got into the

"Consequently, we have got into the abit of giving one or two big parties the year. As we entertain so little tese parties are naturally rather tge, but as it has been our only arm of entertainment I have always alt the party must be outstanding originality, beauty and festiveness. The erason why our arties have received more publicity an most parties in Hollywood, but assure you it was not for that rea-

"But, Mrs. Rathbone," I interpted, "don't you see, you have ven me the best reason in the world or your having received the title hich you [Continued on page 74]





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Secrets of a Hollywood Hostess

[Continued from page 25]

so detest. Your parties are definitely the most outstanding parties which have ever been given in Hollywood. That is an acknowledged fact by every person who has ever been privileged to receive an invitation from you. No one else in Hollywood seems to have the imagination or genius for creating such beauty and splendor and at the same time real enjoyment."

"But I think," said Mrs. Rathbone, "the reason why stars entertain so rarely is that most of them spend their days on studio sets, in make-up, under those terrifying lights from nine o'clock in the morning until seven and eight o'clock at night, so is it any wonder that they prefer the more informal kind of entertainment, and slacks to an evening gown, or flannels and a sweater to a stiff shirt front and hard collar. They prefer their relaxation in the form of parlor games which do not require much mental effort on their part, and they rarely allow themselves to indulge in anything more strenuous, except perhaps on Saturday nights, when some of them who can afford it play poker or bridge where huge sums of money exchange hands. As I'm not engaged in any kind of work out here I naturally have more time to devote to arranging a party. Having been active for many years as a writer and decorator, I now find it very difficult to relax and just be a housewife. That is one reason why I go to so much trouble and pains over my parties. My imagination is stimulated and my decorative talents are given full scope. In other words, I get the same thrill out of it that a director would get out of producing a film. The only pity of it all is that it is not so renumerative."

As this juncture the butler appeared with the tea and Mrs. Rathbone became busy with the china. I could not help admiring the arrangement of the tea table with its dainty lace cloth, bowl of tea roses, and the beautiful old silver service gleaming in the sunlight. Mrs. Rathbone was delighted. She proudly displayed the beautiful Georgian design of the kettle and other appointments, confiding to me that it was her husband's 13th Wedding Anniversary present. This reminded me that this year they had failed to give their usual Wedding Anniversary party. When I asked her the reason she curled up in the corner of the sofa, and fed bits of cake to her West Highland terrier, as she explained that in the future all her big parties were to be for charities.

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"I feel," she said, "that the great unhappiness and injustice that is being imposed upon the people in certain parts of Europe have made us here in Hollywood lose sight of the distress and poverty within our own doors. I think it is time that we did something about the unfortunate in Hollywood. So I have decided to use my talents for creating beautiful parties, and my ability for organization, towards helping the less fortunate in our profession. Each year I am going to sponsor a benefit for the Actors Relief Fund and another for the Hollywood Guild. I

organized one recently, and as you know it was a great financial success."

Hollywood will never forget that benefit party. And I doubt very much if ever before so many stars have gathered under one roof—or rather tent—as at the garden fete she recently gave for the benefit of the Hollywood Guild. Imagine eight or nine hundred Hollywood celebritied dining and dancing and having the time of their lives under one tent, until sever o'clock in the morning, with Eddie Robin son, cigar in mouth, conducting the or chestra, and a magnificent, spontaneou floor show.

I found myself at my particular corne (the power of the press, you know), in the company of Gary Cooper, Marlen Dietrich, Hedy Lamarr, Rudy Vallee Tyrone Power, and Annabella, Rosaling Russell, Errol Flynn, Dolores Del Ric Myrna Loy, Jimmy Cagney, Pat O'Brien Joe Schenck, Mary Pickford, Brian Aherne, Allan Jones and Irene Hervey Dick Arlen and Virginia Grey, Otto Kruger and his lovely wife, Lana Turner Ernet Lubitsch, Mirjam Hopkins, Loretta Ernst Lubitsch, Miriam Hopkins, Lorett-Young, Cary Grant, Joan Bennett—well why go on? There were clusters of stars executives, directors, and society belles no matter in what direction you looked Every one of them had been greeted and placed by Mrs. Rathbone. Her face wa beaming, but her voice was husky. Ther are a thousand and one details to b attended to before giving such a colossa party in one's own garden, and she had attended to every one of them. Ter women would have collapsed under th strain of the work she did to make it success and set a new record in the social annals of movieland.

"I am curious, Mrs. Rathbone, to finout how you went about organizing sucl a gigantic undertaking," I asked her. "Well, first I had to find a place wher

I could give the party. I first thought o Earl Carroll's. I wanted Mr. Carroll t put on a new show so that I could ad vertise it as such and be able to get great many people who would otherwis not come to see the same show. Thi could not be arranged so I abandoned th idea and started on another plan. thought a skating party at one of th popular rinks might be amusing-build ing a Bavarian Village, with snow an icicles. But after weeks of trying to carr out this plan, I found that no rink would co-operate and so I had to start all ove again. The Trocadero and Clover Clui only seat about 400 people and I wante twice that many, so I had to think o something else. In desperation I finally went to the Administration offices of Be Air and asked permission to use two acre adjoining our property. They graciously consented.

"After the grass and weeds had been cleared, I found to my dismay that the ground was so uneven I had to get bulldozer to level it off. Men worked on the grounds for days preparing it befor the tents could be set up. My next step was to put up the tent. One end of the

ent was completely of glass, so that the eautiful golf course and lights of Los ingeles could be seen, and glass doors brough which the guests could wander into a grass terrace bordered with flowering plants and garden furniture and an rtificial moon.

"Then I contracted with a caterer who las done all my catering for many years. Ve agreed on a price per plate and deided on the menu. I arranged with Somrset and Barclay for wines, and conceived he idea of wine discs in denominations f 25¢, 50¢, \$1 and \$5. I had little red, white and blue silk aprons made especially or the wine girls to wear, with pockets o take care of the four kinds of discs, nd the money for change. We needed o many things for decorations and other quipment and I didn't want to spend ny more than was absolutely necessary, o I had to call upon all the studios for lonations, and they generously complied also conceived the idea of having two lance floors so that more people could be right on the floor and not feel that

ny preference was being shown.

"Then I designed the invitations, orlered one thousand and sent them out. I irst took my own mailing list, then added he names of hundreds of others supplied by the studios and friends. I next selected committee which was composed of the ollowing names: Joan Bennett, Marlene Dietrich, Janet Gaynor, Dolores Del Rio, Mary Pickford, Myrna Loy, Mrs. Hal Roach, Mrs. Spencer Tracy, Mrs. Edw. G. Robinson, Rosalind Russell, Claudette Colbert, Hedy Lamarr, Kay Francis Mrs. Jules Stein, Mrs. Jesse Lasky, etc. When he tickets were printed and distributed among the committee, the sale began, and every studio was canvassed. Then I needed cigarette, check and wine girls. I made out a list of prominent names, called a meeting and coached them in their duties

for the evening.
"Publicity was very important, so a committee meeting was called at my house for publicity pictures. The night before the party, Harriet Parsons, of Columbia Studios, came with her movie camera and took pictures for a short, of some of the glamour girls helping me decorate and fix up the tent. Hedy Lamarr was shown arranging flowers, Rosalind Russell counting chairs, Dolores Del Rio and Claire Trevor arranging china, etc. Then the movie photographers took some pictures of me instructing the girls in what they were supposed to do the night of the party. This part of the procedure rather terrified me. Photographers always scare me to death. I had been working all day in the tent in slacks. My hair was a bit windblown and I was not made up. They made me sit with all those beautiful glamour girls, made up and dressed for the occasion. It was a cruel trick and I shall never forgive them.

"After all the girls left I intended to stay with my two secretaries and seat every one of the 600 reservations we had received, when Rosalind Russell, who was about to go, suddenly turned around and asked me what I was going to do. When I told her, she said, 'Well, I never heard of such a thing. You can't do all that alone. I am going to stay and help you.' She carried chairs, helped to place tables, and worked with us until four in the



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morning, for which I was grateful. "Phil Ohman and eighteen men supplied the music for the party. There was telephone service and a telephone connection at the Bel Air Country Club, where they allowed us to park 125 cars. We were prepared for 600 guests; 850 or

more came. We managed to take care of all of them but it took a bit of ingenuity. The party lasted until 6 a.m. but it was 8:30 before I went to bed. I had to wait for all the money to be checked and turned over to me. As I sat waiting in the gray dawn, a private patrolman who had been on duty for the party entertained me by reciting poetry. When I asked him how he could remember such long poems at that time of morning, he answered that I had inspired him. And when he deposited me on my doorstep with the money bags, he gallantly kissed

my hand and thanked me for the most thrilling and beautiful evening of his life. That compliment meant more to me than all the other compliments I received from the celebrities who were my guests.
"The following week, Monday, Tues-

day, Wednesday and Thursday we worked checking money, reservations, bills, etcetera. Even on my Wedding Anniversary, I worked until nine o'clock at night, and arrived in the dining room only in time to have a toast drunk to our happiness at the end of dinner. The receipts for the party were over \$11,000 with a profit of

\$5,270 for the Guild."

Frankly I was astonished and amazed at the amount of work which went into that party, but the results of that magnificent evening must have been very gratifying to Mrs. Rathbone, and more than repaid her for her tireless efforts in making it an outstanding success. But the thing that amazed me more than anything else about the party was the fact that almost every man in the room wore tails and a white tie. When I mentioned this to Mrs. Rathbone, she smiled, as she answered, "I am afraid I am almost military in my social life. I want men and women to dress when they come to my parties. Many people don't see any reason why a man should put on evening dress just to dine with his wife. To me it is the greatest compliment he can pay her.

"One should insist upon beauty, for-mality and discipline in one's life. Order is the most important thing of all. If you are a disorderly person you can never retain the respect of your friends. I admire my husband for the order in his life. His desk, letters and papers are always in perfect order, as well as his ties, his shirts, his collars and clothes. There is order in the way Basil plays a part, in the way he wears his clothes; there is order in his mind and general behavior. He is always gracious to me. He pays me pretty compliments and notices everything I say, everything I wear. He is never too tired to address the servants pleasantly at night when he comes in from the studio. It is the little things in life that count, consideration for the other person and respect for their privacy. Someone once asked Basil why our marriage was a success. He replied, 'I think it is because we respect each other's point of view."
"Mrs. Rathbone," I asked, "you've

spent several years in Hollywood at dif-

ferent times in your life; tell me, do you? find that it has changed very much?

"Yes, decidedly. Hollywood has grown up. Fifteen or twenty years ago when Hollywood gained its undying reputation for wild parties I regretted missing them."
She smiled, "I have been told they went to parties in bathing suits. Certainly women in those days were very bizarre in their style of dressing, while the men-attended formal affairs in sweat shirts: and open collars. Los Angeles society shunned the movie set. Actors couldn't get. into any respectable club. I know-because I came out here for six months, and my husband and I were embarrassed to find that his name had been rejected at one of the important clubs out here because he was associated with the film industry.

On her second visit, she noticed some improvement. The women dressed better but the attire of the men still left much to be desired. "I buried myself in my garden. Nobody liked me, and I didn't worry about it. They considered me a snob. They called me Mrs. Ritzmaurice. I was then married to Director Fitzmaurice and was writing scenarios for Pola Negri's and Valentino's pictures. The European invasion had started. I gave the first party in honor of Ernst Lubitsch the day after he arrived in Hollywood.

Mrs. Rathbone has noticed the changes that have taken place in Hollywood society toward respectability, conventionality, ideals, appreciation of the finer things in life. "I have lived in Paris and London and New York. I have given parties elsewhere, but never anywhere have I been able to collect so many interesting and celebrated people from all over the world, at my parties. Where can you group around a dinner table such famous people as Arthur Rubenstein, Heifetz. Kreisler, Grand Duchess Marie of Russia, Thomas Mann, Dorothy Thompson, Sinclair Lewis, Hugh Walpole, James Hilton, Lawrence Tibbett, Richard Hilton, Lawrence Tibbett, Richard Tauber, Duchess of Sutherland, Iturbi, the Baroness Ravensdale, Katherine Cornell, Alexander Woollcott, Sidney Howard. Somerset Maugham, H. G. Wells, Jeritza, Stokowski, Max Reinhardt, etc. All these exciting personalities have been our guests in Hollywood, many of them at the same party. Rubenstein has played hours at parties in my house; Richard Tauber has given a full concert for my guests; and a celebrated orchestra has played all night for us. I challenge any hostess anywhere else in the world to surpass the above list of celebrated guests at any one party.

"And this is the way society in Hollywood nowadays enjoys itself. Today you will find important actors at the Philharmonic Concerts, as well as all the other important concerts which include Kreisler, Tibbett, Tauber, Rubenstein. Rachmaninoff, Elman, Iturbi, Anderson, Lotte Lehman, Kirsten Flagstad, etc. And where is there a finer private collection of paintings to be found anywhere in the world than those of Eddie Robinson? On the walls of most of the stars' homes today you will find fine etchings and paintings, you will see splendid sculpture and artistically appointed homes in every detail. Even the architecture has advanced from the bastardized Spanish or



Judith Barrett, of Paramount, takes a morning dip with her faithful wired-haired terrier, Pat. Following the swim, they play ball together.

Italian to the classic Georgian lines." And so the conversation drifted away from parties to the more personal side of Ouida and Basil's life.

"You know, Mrs. Rathbone, I am amazed! With your personality, why have you never become an actress?" She laughed as she shook her head, "I thank God I am not an actress. I would not change places with the most beautiful star in Hollywood. I feel many of them miss a great deal of the charming and real things in life. The profession itself is such that it is impossible for them to be altogether natural. In a way it is not their fault. I blame the studio experts who have spent years making them glamorous and publicizing them as if they were gods and goddesses with no faults and feelings of any kind. I feel sure most of them would like to be less in the limelight and have more freedom to go out in public without feeling they are constantly being observed.

"How about those famous Hollywood bachelors who are so much in demand

at parties," I asked her.

I am afraid a great many of them are as spoiled as women, for they receive as much adulation, if not more. A bachelor does not have to entertain but once or twice a year. He can spend a few dollars and send a hostess, whose hospitality he has repeatedly enjoyed, a box of flowers, or he can write her a note of thanks, which is usual in any well reg-ulated society. But in Hollywood many of the bachelors take it for granted that his presence is quite sufficient. Of course, there are exceptions. Doug Fairbanks, Jr., has never been to my house without sending flowers, and Brian Aherne always

writes the most gracious notes.
"Walter Pidgeon is another thoughtful bachelor who never misses the opportunity of expressing his appreciation in flowers or some other charming gesture, and there are a few others, but the majority are too busy to think about what is to them an unimportant gesture. Some of the Hollywood bachelors will only be seen at a preview with a glamorous fem-inine star because they are certain to be photographed together, and it is such good publicity. I feel that this phase of the business is destructive to genuine friend-ships, and such a pity, too," she lamented.

This brought us to the question of friendships in Hollywood. "Friendship is

a very rare thing," said Mrs. Rathbone. "It should not be given freely to every person who comes into one's life. Fritz Kreisler once said to me that the only way to find complete happiness was by elimination. 'Eliminate from your life every person and thing that is not an important part of your life. Friends must give something, either artistically, mentally or spiritually. One's friendships should be few. Many friends only clutter up one's life, making it impossible for one to give as much of one's self as friendship demands.' Most of my close friends are scattered. They are not in any one place. One lives in Vienna, two in London, two or three in New York.

"I don't know why it is," Mrs. Rathbone continued, "but there are hardly any intimate friendships in Hollywood. Basil once said to me, 'Isn't it odd, Ouida, that we have no close friendships here?'
There are few people here that one can tell one's troubles to. Hollywood people seem to be so completely absorbed in themselves, in their careers. They are charming, yes, very gracious on the surface, but that is all that one can expect of them. If someone should ask me, 'Do you know Miss So-and-so who was at your party?' I am afraid I would have to say, I don't know her at all. I don't really know anything about her. She comes to my house, she is very decorative and charming, but when she has gone it is as

though a lovely perfume had invaded the

atmosphere of the room for a little while.

You open a window, and the scent is gone. "The stars don't go to their friends with their troubles. They go to lawyers and managers whom they pay to listen to them. And so friendship in Hollywood is a very impersonal thing. Flowers are sent, and the florist usually writes the card to go with them. I am always pleased and surprised when I receive flowers with a card written by the sender. For me, these little attentions are important, but I am afraid I am rather old-fashioned and out of date, because I place so much value upon real friendship and the importance of a gracious gesture. But, personally, I don't see how it can be otherwise in Hollywood. There is so much competition and the demands made upon everybody connected with the moving picture industry are so overwhelming that the relaxation and other conditions necessary for genuine friendship do not exist."



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