

A Calling Card

From time to time I order a DVD directly from the USA, mainly through the Turner Classic Movies shop. There I ran across a film titled

100 Men And A Girl

starring Deanna Durbin, Adolphe Menjou, Leopold Stokowski, directed by Henry Koster, produced by Joe Pasternak for the Universal Studios in 1937¹. “Durbin, Durbin...”, where did I see that name I wondered. Anyway, I ordered the film and I didn’t regret it. It’s a great musical, naive and sentimental, Durbin has the main part, Patsy is she called, only 16 years old is she at that point of her career... But “Durbin, Durbin...”, where did I see the name before? Finally it dawned on me: among the few things my father left behind, there was a tiny photograph about an inch by two inches:

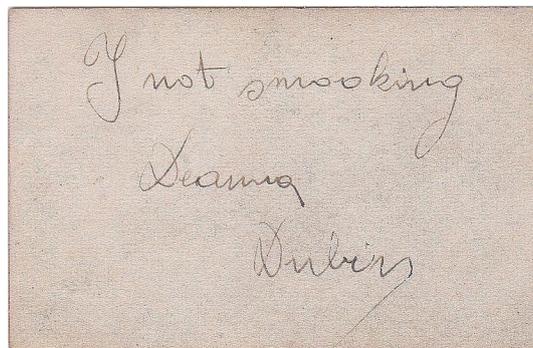


My father worked closely with Barrandov Studios in Prague, he was an insurance expert for the movie business with the company “Slavia”. Well, he worked in his profession only as long as 1948, then the communists turned people like him into manual laborers. But sometimes in those years between the end of WWII and around the communist putsch in 1948, Dianne Durbin must had visited Prague. The photograph is actually a Durbin’s calling card; what is the meaning of the imprint “Ross” to the left of her name I have no idea.

I picture the scene outdoors, on the terrace of the café attached to the Barrandov Studios; the terrace built in the architecture style of Bauhaus,

spreads along the rocks above the Moldau river. It is a sunny afternoon, the orchestra plays a slow foxtrot, a few couples dance, other people talk relaxed over their “Schlagober”-café. There my father, perfectly dressed, spots the attractive Dianne Durbin, maybe two tables apart from him, a star left alone for a blink of an eye. Probably not recognizing her, my father gestures offering her a cigarette. The famous actress is known for visiting Europe frequently, later she married the film director Charles David, and together they settled down in France². She is known for travelling extensively all over Europe, attending performances of opera singers she admired; apparently she attended an opera performance in Prague as well.

Deanna Durbin must have beckoned a waiter, and direct him to bring the calling card to my father. On the back of it she noted: “I not smoking, Deanna Durbin”.



I love to picture this scene. In these days my father must have been happy. He was not yet commanded to work in a factory, it was no sin to dress elegantly and to wear a hat was no crime against the working class.



I cannot but to add yet this “reference” to Deanna Durbin, it comes from wikipedia: “... in [Richard Brautigan](#)'s novel [Trout Fishing in America](#) (1967), the narrator claims to have seen one of her movies seven times, but can't recall which one.”

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¹ Her films were tailored to fit both her personality, which made the word "vivacious" seem like an understatement, and her singing voice, which was feminine, sweet, mature beyond her years and extraordinarily powerful. The Guardian, Mai 1, 2013

² The light comedy *For the Love of Mary* (1948) was her swansong. The Universal producer Joe Pasternak constantly tried to change her mind, but Durbin told him: "I can't run around being a Little Miss Fix-It who bursts into song – the highest-paid star with the poorest material." Guardian, Mai 1, 2013