

Kitty Crashes Fame

Mr. Opportunity had to rap hard and loud before Miss Carlisle listened to his Hollywood offer

By Julius Irwin

NO, I won't sign the contract, until I've seen my test."
"But why?" protested the perplexed Paramount executive engaged in signing up practically unknown Kitty Carlisle for a movie career. "It's our gamble—not yours."
"I might be terrible, and I'd feel like such a fool!" was the explanation that didn't explain a thing.

It's just such unorthodox, upside down things about this amazing and amusing Carlisle person of New Orleans, Paris, Rome, London, New York and points cosmopolitan which have just about convinced Hollywood that Kitty is one of the most interesting, completely captivating and unusually destined things that has happened to it for a long, long time.

For one thing, it's hardly cricket for a girl to be in Hollywood only six months and, with no particular stage prestige, to leap right up to co-stardom with that secret passion of the nation's femininity, Bing Crosby. Kitty shares the headlines in the picture she has just finished, "Here Is My Heart."

Then again, for a girl who *has* to make something of herself to click professionally is admirable, but understandable; however, for a girl like Kitty, who was cradled on a velvet cushion, tutored by royalty, polished and finished abroad, introduced into Continental society, and tossed about in the soft lap of luxury to suddenly say, "Oh, rats, I'm tired of being worthless. I'll just have myself a career—" and get it—well, it's like the Hollywood climate—unusual.

Of course, to most of us the career of Kitty, whose name rhymes quite nicely with "ditty," starts with a

tune which perhaps you have heard once or twice, called "Love in Bloom" (and if you haven't heard it, you'd better drag out your ear trumpet because you're going stone deaf as sure as the world—it fills the air these days). Which is to say, that Kitty Carlisle first made the general public sit erect and focus attention when she did the hitherto unheard of; namely, splitting singing honors with Bing Crosby in "She Loves Me Not."

Naturally that wasn't the first time she had ever tried out her voice, nor the first time she had put on greasepaint. In fact, the strange business noted above of an unknown girl's refusing to autograph a movie contract which she really did want very badly, took place in the artistic setting of Westport, Connecticut, where Kitty, having successfully completed her first professional engagement, a tour with a condensed company of "Rio Rita," was busily engaged in trying out the musical "Champagne Sec," an American adaptation of Johann Strauss' operetta "Die Fledermaus" (the flying mouse; i.e., bat). Although just what champagne has *to do* with bats and flying mice is a little vague. Maybe you see them after you drink it. Kitty wasn't sure. Anyway, she played the part of "Prince Orlofsky" and they say she was really something in tights.

Possibly the Paramount talent scout was attracted clear down to Westport by the tights or the tasty, tangy title of the show, but finding Kitty twice
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Kitty soared to the top and is comfortably settled there for a nice long stay. In her third movie she's co-starred with Bing Crosby



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as bubblingly refreshing as Dry Monopole, he set about the baffling business of trying to convince a career-minded rich girl that she should hearken to the tap of opportunity, when she wanted to but was still afraid to.

Well, Kitty finally gave in, and when the show closed its run on Broadway, she made her first trip to California for a part in "Murder At The Vanities." But Hollywood dates her from the time she went to town with Bing in "Love in Bloom."

"THAT song seems like a child of mine or something," Kitty confessed in the privacy of her brand new and very fancy blue dressing-room, which still reeked of turpentine and white lead. "I mean, it keeps following me around." She nodded across the studio to the music department where Bing Crosby's recorded split-larynx was crooning: "Can it be the spring—"

A passing bicycle messenger joined in whistling the chorus, and the carpenters on a nearby set kept time tapping home nails.

But the strangest thing about Kitty's success and her songs, is that she has clicked rendering popular numbers, after devoting years to a study of classical music abroad.

After childhood schooling in Switzerland and her society debut in Rome, she deserted the gaiety of the Continental social whirl to devote herself seriously to becoming an opera singer. Cunnelli of Paris and Mme. Kaszowska of London groomed her for an European operatic career, and practically disowned her when she decided to come to America and get a job in a show.

Though Kitty was born in New Orleans, Catharine Carlisle ("there were fifteen 'Catharines' in the first school I ever attended, so

they had to call somebody 'Kitty',") grew up abroad, learned to speak French, Italian and German like a native, and probably would today be singing arias from "Rigoletto" in London if England hadn't gone off the gold standard.

"I don't know that that had anything to do with it," giggled Kitty, "but in order to sing in London, I had to get a labor permit. I asked for it the day England went off the gold standard, and they turned me down—said I'd be taking the money away from English singers—so I've always blamed it on the gold standard." That amazing, paralyzing, hypnotizing laugh again.

America, even for an expatriate, was still the land of opportunity—especially Hollywood, although at first Kitty was a bit wary of how she and the movies would hit it off.

"You know, I'm not beautiful," she insisted, "and I wasn't so sure I could act very well. At first my face twitched—every time I came anywhere near a camera it twitched. It's a little disconcerting trying to act with a twitching face. And when I finally got over that I started worrying about singing with Bing."

Doesn't she like Bing?

"I'm mad about him—I mean about working with him. But you know he simply won't rehearse songs. Not even *once*. Says he gets stale—and I'm just no good at all, at impromptu singing. So when we sing together, I start worrying. About everything. I worry about the harmony. I worry about the tempo. I worry about the key. I ask Bing if such and such a key is all right and he says, 'Oh, sure,' just like he isn't giving it a thought—so I *know* we'll be singing in entirely different keys when we start.

"Of course, everything comes out all right,

but at first it made me nervous just to walk right up to the camera and start singing without any rehearsals at all. The first few times I'm afraid we went goggling off in entirely different directions. But I've got used to it—I've had to, because Bing just won't rehearse."

Just at this point Bayard Veiller, the playwright, looked in on the elegant blue dressing room and after recovering from its splendor, the turpentine and white lead, and Kitty's electric charm, he wanted to know when "the beau" was coming out. "Soon," said Kitty, "any day now."

The beau?

"Don't tell a soul," said Kitty, *sotto voce*, after he had left, "but there *isn't* any beau! You know, everyone here at the studio believes I have a mysterious sweetheart in New York. He's always 'coming out.' Really it's a grand idea; it makes me very intriguing, and exciting. But really, I haven't any sweetheart."

What, no sweetheart?

"OH, I *have* had," admitted Kitty, dimpling her pretty brown eyes with a tremendous grin. "In Rome I fell in love with the son of the Brazilian ambassador, but 'Mummy' stopped that. He wasn't the right man.

"But right now I think I'm in love with my work. Honestly, I'm crazy about it. I get up at six in the morning and just can't wait to get started. I love every minute of it."

"Here Is Your Heart?" I asked.

"Here Is My Heart," smiled Pretty Kitty. "Perfect—but honestly, nobody's in love with me."

Of course, that's where Miss Kitty Carlisle is wrong.

Because everyone in Hollywood, including me, is simply crazy about her.

Tom Meighan Is Restless

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delineator of character. But it is also more. It is an indication of the thoroughness of Thomas Meighan. Nothing but the best will do.

You see, first, Meighan has picked himself an original character. (This writer, when the name was whispered to him, breathed his amazement that it had been overlooked. It's what is called a natural.) Then, secondly, Thomas wants that character at his best advantage.

Thus the importance of the writer.

TOMMY MEIGHAN, above all, insists on his characters being themselves, natural.

And he has his reasons for all this.

"I can't," he said, "play anything unless it is believable. It causes me actual agony. I know. I've tried to do it. In addition, let me add, a part must not be merely believable, it's got to be interesting."

So much for the story Tom has in mind. For the success of the screen version, he rates a director as top man there. "I would rather," he said, "work on a second rate story with a first rate director, than on a first rate story with a second rate director. And yet," he quali-

fied, "no individual is wholly responsible for any particular picture."

Now, during all this discussion, there was nothing said by Thomas Meighan about Thomas Meighan's ability. Getting self-praise out of this man is like trying to turn a well inside out. It may be possible, but I have my doubts. Whoever coined the word "modesty" must have used Thomas Meighan for his model.

And Tommy will *like* that, should he read it, because he insists he's the most boring gabber on the subject of Meighan that ever came along the pike.

But it isn't necessary for Tommy to talk about himself. Others have done that very nicely, and with enjoyment.

For instance, here's one writer on Tommy's acting ability: "... as true in his depiction of emotion as Tellegen used to be when he played on the stage with Bernhardt." For good measure, here are a couple of other remarks culled at random from volumes of comment about him: "... second to no man in popularity," and "... career unparalleled in his profession."

Just to heap up that good measure on this

"boring" person, here are some of the names of producers, writers, actors and actresses, with whom he's been closely associated on and off-stage. This is not a full list, mind you, merely a few plucked here and there from the records: David Warfield, George M. Cohan, Henry W. Savage, William H. Crane, William Collier, Sr., Booth Tarkington, George Ade, Grace George, Pauline Frederick, Blanche Sweet, Billie Burke, Valeska Suratt, Laura Hope Crews, Lois Wilson, Lila Lee, Norma Talmadge, Elsie Ferguson, Betty Compson, Gloria Swanson, Mary Pickford—Enough? One more. Frances Ring.

TO Miss Ring goes top billing, because she is still *the* leading lady. In fact, she has been since she and Mr. Meighan met in George Ade's first play, the first of a number the noted humorist has written for Tommy. The play was the well-known, three-seasons success, "The College Widow." It was during the run of that play Miss Ring became Mrs. Meighan, and theirs is still one of the few stage and screen romances with any permanence.

But, some more about the interview with Mr. Meighan. Naturally, I spoke of "Peck's