

LOS ANGELES DANCER KING OF WILD RUSSIAN TATAR TRIBES

Theodore Kosloff Summoned to Rule Tartar Tribes

Theodore Kosloff Summoned From Movie Studio to Go Back to the Nomad Horsemen of the Volga, Whose Hereditary Ruler He Is

BY H. B. K. WILLIS

Theodore Kosloff, king of the ballet and star of the silver screen though he is, like the meekest of extras is awaiting a call. The call when it comes will not be one of "Action! Camera!" Nor will it follow the final curtain on a spectacular ballet Russe. Instead, he awaits his call to the throne of the kingdom of Little Tartary.

Already the Lasky star has received warning from Kazan, ancient capital of the Tatar nomads of the valley of the Volga, to be prepared to succeed to the throne on which his great-grandmother, Princess Tatima Wolzok, met her death under the knives of the troopers of the White general, Gen. Skwobloff, almost 150 years ago.

Clad like a Tatar prince, with a silver-incrusted dirk, an ancestral bequest, which he says has drunk deep of the blood of fifteen foemen, thrust in his belt, the dancer-actor yesterday told The Times of his expected return to the mysterious land of his forebears.

He recently signed what he says will be his last Lasky contract. It calls for one more year of pictures instead of the three Jesse L. Lasky requested. Kosloff says he must answer the call when it comes. Delay on his part will cost him his life.

His story of his impending accession to the Tatar crown gives birth to suspicion. It reads like the ravings of a paranoiac present or fiction from the quill of an impressionistic playwright. City editors look not lovingly upon tales of thrones and kingdoms when they are the asserted heritage of motion picture folk. Kosloff's story is a strange one. It harks back to the ninth century. It is rich with romance and colorful. As he tells it the tale seems veracious. At any rate it is well worth repetition.

In the ninth century a Tatar tribe of Mongols of unknown origin conquered and occupied a district in what was later called Chinese Tartary. Neighboring Mongols, as warlike and fierce as themselves, waged war upon them and soon dispersed them. The tribe in its consequent nomadic existence carried the terror of the arms of the wild Tatar horsemen everywhere.

They formed part of the horde of Genghis Khan when by force of arms he conquered all the lands lying between Chinese Tartary and Europe.

THE TERRIBLE TATARS

Through some accidental circumstances the name of Tatar, or less correctly Tartar, came to be applied to the districts from which they came or in which they settled after the Mongol invasion of Europe was checked. Hence the names of Chinese Tartary, Independent Tartary and European Tartary or Little Tartary comprising most of the Russian governments of Orenburg, Astrakhan, Ekaterinodar, the Cossack provinces and the Crimea.

Kosloff says the Kazan Tatar chiefs are his forebears. They were the descendants of the Kipshaks, a Tartar tribe who settled on the Volga in the thirteenth century and mingled with the survivors of the old Bulgarians. Uta Makhmet, khan of the Golden Horde of Mongols, founded the Kingdom of Kazan on the ruins of the Bulgarian state in 1438. Ivan the Terrible destroyed Kazan and its capital of the same name in 1552, annexing the territory to Russia.

HIS GRANDMOTHER'S DAY

For the next two centuries the Kazan Tatars, hemmed in by a natural fortress of mountains, waged war on the Russians. The wild horsemen of the Volga valley would know no king save their own. Their poisoned arrows and valiant blades kept them subjects of the Russian Czar in name only until Kosloff's great-grandmother's army was defeated by the forces of General Skwobloff toward the end of the eighteenth century.

Kosloff says defeat came because Princess Tatima's horsemen believed Skwobloff, clad in white and

THE PRINCESS MIRA

Tatar history veils Princess Tatima's origin in mystery. Legend says she was of great culture and beauty and mother of Mira, whom Kosloff asserts was his grandmother. His great-grandfather's name has been forgotten.

The Princess Mira became infatuated with a strolling player, a troubador named Abdul. Together they fled from Kazan to Moscow for Abdul was not of royal blood and the lovers feared the long knives of the Tatars.

In 1840 the Kazan Tatars threw off the irksome Russian yoke and endeavored to establish a republic. Abdul reigned for three days as a sort of president.

JOINED AN ORCHESTRA

When Abdul and the Princess Mira reached Moscow Abdul fared forth and followed his calling of troubador. His playing caught the fancy of a Russian nobleman and he was placed in the orchestra of the Imperial Theater of Moscow, becoming a violinist of note. There he played for sixty years. His son, Abdurakman, Kosloff's father, succeeded him and his violin for forty years. He died in 1906. Kosloff followed his father's and grandfather's calling for six years until the hungry mouths of the sixteen younger Kosloffs forced him to enter the ballet.

But though far from Kazan when the family of Kosloff was enduring hardships and privations, mysterious purses of Tatar gold would find their way to Moscow and the Princess Mira, Kosloff says.

THE ANCESTRAL NAME

The Tatar name of Kosloff's ancestors was Wolzok. When the Princess Mira and her musician husband fled to Moscow they changed it to Kosloff. The change consisted of reading the letters in the reverse order and substituting "ff" for the w in Wolzok. Kosloff asserts his tribal name is Feodor Wolzok and under the title of prince he expects to once more rule the kingdom of Kazan. The kingdom, according to information received from his sister Nadia in Moscow, has been granted its pristine sovereignty by the Russian soviet.

Kosloff was born in Moscow in 1890. At the age of 8 he entered the Imperial Russian Ballet School. During his last four years there he played in the orchestra of the Imperial Russian Theater. In his ballet classes were Pavlova, Mordkin, Nijinski and other Russian dancers of note.

BECAME A WANDERER

Preferring the violin to the ballet Kosloff declares the needs of his family forced him to accept the 500 rubles paid yearly by the Imperial Russian government to artists of the ballet. He danced in the ballet for three years, ceasing the year before he left Russia in 1912, because a muscular trouble, brought on by his exposure to Siberian snows, during a hunting expedition, made ballet dancing impossible.

From Moscow Kosloff went to Paris, where for a short while he was director of the ballet of the Grand Opera.

From Paris he was taken to London by Sir Oswald Stahl to become ballet director at the Coliseum. While there he became acquainted with Morris Gest, also a Tatar, who secured his signature to a contract which resulted in Kosloff's producing his first Russian ballet in New York in 1914.

JOINED THE MOVIES

Five years ago Cecil B. De Mille signed him to a contract for the film, "The Woman God Forgot," with Geraldine Farrar. The picture was made in ten weeks, and for the next three years Kosloff was in vaudeville with his ballet of twenty-eight persons. For the last two years he has been on the Lasky lot.

He expects to hear soon from his sister Nadia, now in the ballet at Moscow, summoning him back to the kingdom of Kazan.

"Kazan is as big as half of the United States. It lies in the Valley of the Volga," Kosloff says.

THE STRANGE COUNTRY

"It is a strange land. One of beautiful women and swarthy, fighting horsemen. A country of intoxicating art, ancient customs and learning. We come from the Mongols and the Slavs. We breed horses and till the soil. Our valley has a desert of gold never looked upon by a white man, for poisoned arrows from the mountain passes have never failed to check invaders.

"Our country is rich in minerals, platinum and pitchblende from which radium is secured. There is one strange valley where no living thing can exist because of the radium rays which come through the soil. Nothing is known of our country. Why, some of our very plants stop inquisitive ones of our tribe in the Valley of Death, the bushes which fill it close to upon the wayfarer and he is never seen again.

We are all horsemen, even as my fathers were in the days of

Genghis Khan. I can remember when I was a lad in Moscow how my father would fling his purse to the drozhka driver who could lead his fellows in a mad race through the city streets, though there were seventeen children at home in need of food.

"I can remember in the days of our poverty how we used to receive mysterious gifts—sent from our Tatar people—sometimes a jewel or money, or even food. They never ceased to watch over us.

"I have often been to Kazan, although it is difficult to get there. I yearn to be once more among my countrymen. My country is beautiful. A land of the sweetest of loves and the most violent temper. It is the land of art and art is all I know. The art of the ballet and the art of the brush.

"When the call comes I shall go. They will kill me if I do not return," he concluded.

Though costumes of the fur-

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The descendants of savage old Genghis Khan, whose call has come to Theodore Kosloff, the dancer, from the wild steppes of Russia.

KOSLOFF TO BE A KING

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thernmost ends of the earth pass unchallenged in Hollywood, Kosloff in his Tatar garments looks that which he says he is.

From the fur-banded kachuk on his head to the sapogi on his feet he appears the Tatar Prince. The kachuk is kin to the stocking-cap though leather supplants the knitted fabric of the latter. The sapogi of green leather imbossed in red are very similar to the Russian boots lately affected by super-flappers.

Under the kachuk and close upon his bobbed hair sits a green and red kachukik or skull cap such as all his countrymen wear. A collarless greatcoat of gray homespun, the kachubelka, tightly fitting the trunk but falling in flowing folds to his ankles, is girt in by a narrow black belt through which his kingal or two-edged and razor-sharp dagger is thrust. The cabla, or scimitar-like saber, is slung from his right shoulder and is caught up on the left hip.

The skirt of the kachubelka, looped back by the belt, reveals gaudy, bellying pantaloons of robin's egg blue. Kosloff explains the fullness of his Tatar trousers. His forebears on their desert forays, wore even baggier ones of leather. The legs tightly tied at the ankles they filled with water, sort of emergency water tanks for man and beast, he says.

But the crowning glory of his habiliments is his podderka, which as can be surmised, covered his abdomen. The glorified tunic of many colors, bold and blatant enough to cause a futuristic painter to writhe in delight, tightly buttoned at the throat, falls to his thighs. It is an orgy of color. A genuine Tatar garment, Kosloff says. He secured it from a Russian woman living in Pasadena. It irks him that his gray greatcoat must hide but glimpses of the cuffs and collar.

LIVES IN HOLLYWOOD

Kosloff lives in Hollywood with his wife, who was Alexandra Baldina of the Imperial Russian Ballet. Morris Gest billed her as Maria Baldina, and under that name she is known to American lovers of the ballet. One daughter, Mira, 8 years of age, shares the parental hope of returning to Kazan.

Feodor Wolzok is a consummate actor. Under the spell of his art and the magic of his garments he carries his auditors far from civilization. He fairly makes one visualize the ancient streets of age-old Kazan.

The dingy walls of the Lasky publicity lair become mountain-rimmed green vistas darkly flecked with wandering herds of horses and cattle.

The smoke of camp-fires twists upward. The maddening music of a whirling Tatar dance is conjured up by a distant phonograph. One can fairly see the bearded horsemen of the hills as they sweep by bound for the markets of Kazan, driving their herds before them. The laughter of women. The flash of steel. The whistle of a whip-lash.

"I love Kazan. They will kill me if I do not go," Kosloff murmurs as he caresses the barbaric hand-carved silver mountings of his saber scabbard with a forefinger. It is a kingly weapon. A heavy blade with the clefting force of a cleaver.

It's a far cry from Hollywood to Tartary. Kosloff is an actor, an artist. He is also a raconteur of note. Even if he is only "handing out a heavy line," he does it well. But he makes one believe that he is to be Prince Feodor, King of the Tartars. While no one believes or can be made to believe a press agent.



Kazan, the home of the Tatar tribe of wildest Russia. This is a motion-picture set built in exact representation of this almost unknown city. Its making was supervised by Theodore Kosloff, who has been summoned back of Russia by the Tatars as their hereditary ruler.