Beat: Entertainment

Iconic Varconi

From Kisvárda to Hollywood Over 60 Years

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USPA NEWS - With his career spanning more than 60 years and having played in over a 120 movies on two continents, Victor Varconi is the debonair Hungarian film star who was always proud of where he came from. As the famous quote goes, “It is not enough to be Hungarian, you must have talent as well.” Varconi certainly showed everyone how far Hungarian talent can go when your dreams are as big as your imagination.

Born on March 31, 1891 as Mihály Várkonyi in the small Eastern Hungarian city of Kisvárda, he was the seventh child of a cattle trader. Victor Varconi is said to be the first Hungarian actor to play in a film in the New World. Born on March 31, 1891 as Mihály Várkonyi in the small Eastern Hungarian city of Kisvárda, he was the seventh child of a cattle trader. His parents ensured he received a proper education and his acting skills became apparent in no time. After having found success first in Hungarian, then Transylvanian theaters and motion pictures, he decided to leave Europe behind. He quickly became an iconic figure of American silent movies as well as a result of his charm, talent and hard work. Some of the most notable films he played in were ”Triumph” (1924), ”Changing Husbands” (1924), ”The King of Kings” (1927), ”The Plainsman” (1936), ”The Hitler Gang” (1944) and ”Samson and Delilah” (1949).

Many European actors’ careers ended abruptly during the transition from silent movies to talkies due to their heavy accents and inability to successfully adapt to linguistic challenges. Varconi, however, was able to pivot in this crucial moment in history despite his supposedly thick Hungarian accent. Instead of continuing to stick with the romantic heartthrob characters he previously played in silents, he perfected the art of portraying ethnic characters as seen in ”Captain Thunder” (1930), ”Men in Exile” (1937), or ”For Whom the Bells Toll” (1943) to name a few. Nothing could stop him and he unanimously became the favorite of critics and moviegoers alike.

Over time, Varconi left the film world behind and switched back to theater. He started writing for radio and doing occasional TV work, as well as teaching drama to young aspiring actors. He died of a heart attack at the age of 85 in Santa Barbara, California.

The idea of writing a biography came to him during a birthday celebration in Hollywood, and soon he co-authored ”It is Not Enough to Be Hungarian” with Ed Honeck. Today, celebrating the anniversary of his birthday, the Hungarian Hollywood Council and the Municipality of Kisvárda ceremoniously placed a wreath around his memorial plaque in his birth town and revealed the freshly published Hungarian translation of his biography in the local Cinemaqua Film Amusement Park.

“In my days people had to look up to see a star. Now, we step on them. I personally preferred the other, older times, when the sidewalks were narrower and the dreams much larger,” Varconi wrote in his book. His life, with all its successes and difficulties, is certainly an inspiration for us all and a reminder to dare to dream big. The sky is the limit after all.

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By Brigitta Bokor

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