

BANKY Vilma \* Jan 3 - 1903, *13 Feb*

*movie actress*

*(Daughter of John Kocsics, police sergeant)  
to US 1925 (Goldwyn) ("K. Rioda? Bp.)*

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Rod La Rocque Talks of His Wife, Vilma Banky, and Early Hollywood Days

By EZRA GOODMAN

HOLLYWOOD.

**R**OD LA ROCQUE and Vilma Banky! What memories those names conjure up of a bygone Hollywood! La Rocque was the gay, dashing leading man in a series of pictures with such evocative titles as "Captain Swagger," "The Love Pirate" and "Hold 'Em Yafe" — all made during the carefree Twenties. Vilma Banky was Samuel Goldwyn's blond, beautiful Hungarian siren, who appeared opposite Rudolph Valentino in a number of movies.

Their marriage in 1927 at the Church of the Good Shepherd has become something of a Hollywood legend. Samuel Goldwyn "produced" the fabulous event and there was a small army of cops on hand to keep the newsmen, fans and top-hatted, bejeweled movie-town elite under control.

Today, twenty-four years later, La Rocque and Miss Banky are still happily married. They live in an unostentatious, old-fashioned home, minus swimming pool, on genteel Foothill Road in Beverly Hills. La Rocque is a real-estate broker who specializes in handling ranch properties. He and his wife have left the motion-picture business far behind them although La Rocque has "quite a few dealings with the movie people" in his present profession.

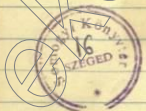
At the age of 52, La Rocque still gives evidence of the debonair charm that made him a Hollywood heartthrob. Today he wears spectacles and his black hair close-cropped, but he stands an erect six feet three inches, has a hearty voice and the urbane manner that once fluttered many a feminine heart.



### Kids to Cads

The son of a Chicago hotel man, La Rocque came to Hollywood via "kid parts" in Windy City dramas and playing "the cad sort of thing" on Broadway and in Fort Lee, N. J., movies. Cecil B. DeMille cast him as a heavy in "The Ten Commandments" and then made "a heavy with a heart of gold" out of him for the next seven years.

After the mid-Thirties, La Rocque gradually drifted away from the celluloid scene. He and his wife did a play together, although they never acted opposite each other on the screen. During the last war, La Rocque got into the real-estate business as a result of operating a thirty-five-acre lemon grove near Ventura. He became a licensed real-estate broker associated with the Lawrence Block company, for which he negotiated deals like selling John Huston's San Fernando home to "some



people from Texas" and conducting a ranch survey for Frank Capra.

His only contact with the screen today is through such friends as Conrad Nagel, Gary Cooper, Harold Lloyd, Ronald Colman and Gloria Swanson. La Rocque says that he and his wife, who "just concentrates on golf," don't miss the studio life in the least.

"As far as the mechanics of moviemaking are concerned, I can live without them very well," he says. "I rarely visit the studios. Not long ago, I went to the studio to see Frank Capra on business. When I saw all those old-timers playing extra and bit roles, I got sick. And all of them such good sports about it!

"We used to have so much fun making pictures. There was a half-fellow-well-met, a camaraderie, a gregariousness about it. Now it breaks my heart to hear the things they talk about. Vilma and I look

at each other and say, 'What has happened to the business?'"

La Rocque keeps up with the better movies and holds that "a good movie now is better than a good movie used to be." He thinks the current crop of leading men, such as William Holden, Gregory Peck, Richard Widmark and Burt Lancaster, "are mighty good, so natural, so human, so real."

Last year, he produced and directed a radio show for a business foundation featuring prominent industrialists and hopes to do it again on television. As for video, he finds that some of his old movies are now coming back to "haunt me." After a Dr. Christian picture, in which La Rocque played the heavy, was shown on television recently, Conrad Nagel called him up and said: "Oh, so that's the kind of rat you are!"

"With all these old movies being released for television," says La Rocque, "I suppose sometimes peo-

ple say: "I wonder what the devil happened to him?"

Actually, La Rocque's and Miss Banky's names keep popping up in print periodically as part of the plaster-city tradition, no doubt. There was a reference to them in "Sunset Boulevard." William Holden, in the picture, looks out at Gloria Swanson's deserted swimming pool and says: "Wilma Banky and Rod La Rocque must have swum in that pool a thousand midnights ago."

"The studio came to me for clearance to use our names," says La Rocque, "and I was glad to give them permission. But Wilma got a big laugh out of it. You see, she doesn't swim a stroke and never has."

La Rocque recalls how he wooed and won Miss Banky.

"I was with DeMille in 1927," he says, "and Wilma was a Goldwyn star when I met her and fell in love with her. She spoke very little English. We met through Victor Varconi, a Hungarian actor. He taught me to say 'I love you' in Hungarian.

"Wilma and I used to have dinner at Marcel's restaurant in Altadena. One night we drove out there through the orange groves. I ordered wine. The music was soft. I looked Wilma straight in the eye and said with all the ham and corn in me: 'I love you' in Hungarian. She almost collapsed. That Varconi had taught me to say: 'Go to hell' in Hungarian."

#### A Goldwyn Production

Miss Banky and La Rocque decided to have a simple wedding at the Santa Barbara Mission, but Samuel Goldwyn took over and the result at the Church of the Good Shepherd was far from simple. "DeMille was the best man," recollects La Rocque. "Goldwyn gave the bride away. The ushers included Ronald Colman, Harold Lloyd, Donald Crisp, George Fitzmaurice and Victor Varconi. Tom Mix drew up to the church in a coach and four. I just remember my collars kept writing.

"After the wedding, a reception was held at the Beverly Hills hotel—Sam just took over the hotel. There was a buffet, a magnificent spread. Some wag said it was composed partly of papier-mâché turkeys just for display. The reception was so gargantuan, I guess the thought suggested itself. There was no papier mâché, believe me. It was certainly memorable. It was so funny—we thought we'd be married quietly at Santa Barbara.

"That's twenty-four years ago. Gee whiz, it's a long time. A lot has happened," said La Rocque, the real-estate man, somewhat nostalgically, sitting there in his serene, old-fashioned living room on Foothill Road.

