

Lili Darvas, Actress of Stage and Film, Dies at 72

Won Acclaim for Portrayal
of Bedridden Woman

By WOLFGANG SAXON

Lili Darvas, whose career as a leading Continental and American actress spanned more than 50 years, died Monday afternoon at her New York home. She was 72 years old and lived at 240 East 79th Street.

Miss Darvas most recently won critical acclaim for her portrayals of a bed-ridden 96-year-old woman whiling away the hours with her reminiscences and dreams in the Hungarian film "Love," shown here last year, and of the elderly Rache in Hans Werner Henze's "Rache, la Cubana," which was presented by "WNET" Opera Theater.

The widow of the playwright Ferenc Molnar, Miss Darvas succeeded with rare talent and beauty, along with the even rarer ability to age gracefully on the stage as she proceeded from Juliet to wife and mother and finally old age in her performances.

Before she reached Broadway as a refugee actress, she had made a name for herself in her native Budapest but especially as a leading member of Max Reinhardt's theater companies with which she first visited New York in 1927. Much later, having acquired English as a third-theater language, she appeared here in such productions as "A Far Country," "Waltz of the Toreadors," and the posthumous Lorraine Hansberry play "Les Blancs."

She also acted in radio soap operas in the nineteen-forties and was seen in scores of television plays in the fifties when they were part of the regular fare on the home screen. Thus, she appeared in productions of Playhouse 90, Goodyear Television Playhouse and the United States Steel Hour.

Miss Darvas—the name is pronounced Darvash—made her debut as Juliet in 1921, two years before she met Mr. Mol-



Alix Jeffry

Lili Darvas

nar. In an interview a few years ago, she recalled that the playwright dubbed her "Miss Meteor" because she had succeeded so quickly and he seemed to think that she would return to obscurity just as rapidly.

Instead, Max Reinhardt sent for her and Miss Darvas, who had acted exclusively in Hungarian until 1925, became exclusively a German actress for the 13 years that followed. Besides studying German, she married Mr. Molnar in 1926 and then played at Reinhardt's fabled theaters in Vienna, Berlin and Salzburg, touring Europe from Vilna to Rome besides.

Mr. Molnar wrote several of his plays for her, including "Olympia," "Still Life," and "Delilah." Their marriage lasted until his death in 1952.

Max Reinhardt's companies played the international repertory: Goethe and Schiller, Shakespeare and Shaw, Tolstoi and Goldoni, and of course Molnar. When the director came to New York with his awesome star ensemble, Miss Darvas appeared as a leading player in six of the seven plays he presented, starting as Titania in "A Midsummer Night's Dream."

Miss Darvas and her hus-

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Widow of Molnar Also Had Title Role in 'Rachel'

band left Europe in 1938. She was appearing in Vienna the day Hitler's troops marched in to effect the "Anschluss," and as legend has it, she simply packed her things, walked onto a train to Switzerland and departed, protected by her Hungarian passport.

After a brief stay in Britain, Miss Darvas arrived in New York and found herself in the company of similarly displaced actors, such as Oscar Homolka, Fritz Kortner and Walter Slezak, who sent her to an English tutor so she could set out on yet another career on the American stage.

Her first appearance was in Ferdinand Bruckner's "The Criminals" in 1941, followed by "Soldier's Wife," which ran for almost a year.

Many of her roles portrayed characters fitting her European background and gaining her approving reviews from Brooks Atkinson, Arthur Gelb, Howard Taubman and other New York Times reviewers.

Her part in "Bravo," by George S. Kaufman and Edna Ferber, was that of a celebrated European actress. In the Henry Denker drama "A Far Country" — a play about the life of Sigmund Freud — she played Freud's domineering mother in what Mr. Taubman termed a "thoroughly credible" performance.

Miss Darvas also played the grandmother in Lillian Hellman's "My Mother, My Father and Me," Mme. St. Pé in the 1958 revival of Anouilh's "The Waltz of the Toreadors," and the role of a French mother whose son was betrayed and killed in World War Two in the play "The Hidden River," by Ruth and Augustus Goetz.

Miss Darvas left no immediate survivors.

A funeral service will be held at 10 A.M. today in the chapel of Frank E. Campbell's, Madison Avenue at 81st Street.

DARVAS—Lill, on July 22, 1974, widow of Ferenc Molnar. Services at Frank E. Campbell, Madison Ave. at 81st St., Wednesday, 10 A.M. Contributions may be sent to the Actors Fund of America, 1501 Broadway, N. Y. C. 10036.

