

# A Royal Performance by Diana Dors

Our English Marilyn Monroe was born Diana Mary Fluck in Wiltshire, England on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of October in 1931 to Albert and Mary Fluck. The birth was an extremely difficult one and Diana was pronounced dead at birth. Miraculously, she was found by a nurse barely alive. Mary was jubilant.

From the age of 3, when her mother began taking her to the cinema, Diana was determined to become a famous film star. Her childhood dream was to have “a mansion, a big swimming pool and a cream telephone”. Against the odds she turned her dream into reality and went on to forge a glittering career spanning time and continents, living in Hollywood and working opposite Richard Attenborough amongst many others as part of her 75 film career in entertainment.

It was earlier this year that I heard a voice on the television that I recognized. I was tuned into the BBC's One Show program but was deeply engrossed in a reread of a Sidney Poitier autobiography. My grip on the book tightened and I switched my concentration to the screen where I saw a familiar looking man sitting on a half-moon couch, chatting. It took a brief moment for me to connect but realized it was a very old friend that I had come to know back in the 1980's, Jason Dors-Lake. I remember it wasn't a happy period of his life because he had lost both his parents, Diana Dors and Alan Lake but he had managed his grief with great courage. It was a short interview unfortunately, but I was able to scribble a few details of what he was saying which was primarily about how he had now opened his heart for the first time to collaborate in writing a book - as the son of the dynastic Dors family.

Instinct kicked in and I immediately started making some enquiries to the BBC as to how to reach Jason which weren't very fruitful but with the help of the internet, telephone and determination I did track him down to the coastal town of Broadstairs in Kent where he now lives. My first point of contact was with Niema Ash a Canadian born writer and author of their fantastic eye opening book, *Connecting Dors* who consequently put me in touch with Jason. A couple of weeks ago I asked them both if they would be willing to participate in an interview with The Royal Society of St George and as you have gathered from reading this the answer was a resounding yes.

## **Our 'Interview' took place on the 23<sup>rd</sup> October, Diana Dors' Birthday**

Q1 Can you tell us a little about Diana's 1955 film *A Kid for Two Farthings*?

“Following the screening of the film at the Cannes film festival in 1955 there was a charity premier in London attended by the Queen and Prince Phillip. Mum was presented to Her Majesty and as usual the Queen had done her homework and knew that Diana was in rehearsal for a new film called *Yield to the Night* based on the story of Ruth Ellis, the last woman to be hanged in England. The Queen wanted to know more about the film and commented “It's about something sinister isn't it?” This gave Diana a chance to chat about the film at its content. As it happened *Yield to the Night* was only British film chosen for the 1956 Cannes film festival and was additionally selected for the 1956 Royal Command performance. The Queen was able to see for herself just how sinister the film was and was

able to discuss with Diana her role in the film. I remember mum telling me how much she enjoyed talking to the Queen and how relaxed the sovereign made her feel and how Prince Phillip made her laugh”

In both films Diana won the leading role over fierce competition with the likes of Vivien Leigh and Ingrid Bergman.

Q2 Name some of the actors and directors Diana most enjoyed working with?

“Working with Sir Carol Reed, director of *A Kid for Two Farthings* one of Britain’s leading directors who also directed *The Third Man* was Diana’s big break. She learned a great deal from him and indeed this was the beginning of her success in her serious acting career, something she wanted above all else. J Lee Thompson director of *Yield to the Night* was another of her favourites.

Diana acted in 75 films and the actors she worked with and admired were too numerous to mention. In Hollywood she acted with Rod Steiger who she greatly admired as an actor and from whom she learned a great deal especially about ‘method acting’. She also had a torrid love affair with him”

Q3 Jason, can you try and paint a typical Christmas with the Dors?

“Everything was quiet and very usual the night before Christmas with no indication that anything special was about to happen. I remember waking up to a house full of decorations and gifts; a house filled with excitement. Christmas was always a wonderful day with a big Christmas spread and all the trimmings. I loved it. My mother always did her best to be home for Christmas. Boxing day was open house with people like Richard Burton, Freddie Starr, Richard Harris and lots of my parents’ friends visiting us”

Q4 The new book *Connecting Dors* for Jason must have taken much courage, can you tell us a little about its inception and birth? Niema would you care to elaborate?

“Jason wanted a book written about his mother to celebrate her 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. I live in close proximity to Jason and since I am an author he asked me to write it. At first I refused. Coming from Canada I didn’t know much about Diana Dors but Jason as always was very persuasive and in the end I agreed. The book took two years to write and required extensive research. I discovered things about Diana that even Jason knew nothing about. Jason’s collaboration was inspirational. He and I would sit chatting for hours about his parents and their lives together. Jason has an almost photographic memory and could recall incidents and even conversations that brought the book to life. He also put me in touch with some of his mum’s close friends who were willing to talk to me because of Jason. Almost everyone I spoke to of a certain generation knew and loved her. They had seen her films, read her newspaper columns, heard her on radio and seen her on TV. It was a heart-warming journey to discover how she had touched people’s lives. I found Diana’s story a fascinating one and I hope that the fascinating page-turning quality is reflected in the book”

Q5 May I ask you Jason, what was the celebrity Diana Dors like as a mother?

“She was a wonderful mother, warm, affectionate and very loving. When she was home she made sure to take me to school and to pick me up afterwards. She was never late. I loved her dearly. I loved my dad too. We spent a lot of time together. He was very funny and my favourite playmate. We were all very close”

Because Diana had such an extensive career spanning more than one genre over several decades we continue this article by selecting key career milestones in her life with a style of biopic using highlights:

At **14** Diana is the youngest ever student at top drama school **LAMDA** and in her first term is awarded a medal by **Peter Ustinov**

**1947** - Role in the film *Dancing with Crime* opposite Richard Attenborough

**1948** – Role in **David Lean's**, *Oliver Twist*

**1951** – Marries **Dennis Hamilton** at age 19

**1956** – Diana goes to Hollywood, meets **Bob Hope, Hedda Hopper, Lana Turner, Greer Garson, Doris Day, Eddie Fisher, Debbie Reynolds, Zsa Zsa Gabor, Frank Sinatra....** and moves into the villa previously owned by **Marlene Dietrich**

**1956** - **First** Hollywood movie *The Unholy Wife* opposite Rod Steiger

**1959** – Marries **Richard 'Dickie' Dawson**

**1960** – Releases *Swinging Dors* album and tours America. Performs at the famous Flamingo Hotel in Las Vegas and the Chi Chi Club in Palm Springs

**1962** – Tours Australia

**1963** – Returns to the UK and separates from 'Dickie'. Appears on the cover of the Beatles Sgt Pepper album

**1968** – Meets **Alan Lake** her co-star in *The Inquisitors* is engaged within 3 days and they are married in November of that year

**1969** – **Jason is born !**

**1973** – Diana gets a life threatening case of Meningitis

**1974** – **82** Career expands into cabaret, TV plays, chat shows, game shows, newspaper columns, agony aunt, writes 5 books and hosts two of her own shows *The Diana Dors Show* and *Open Dors*.

**1982** – Diagnosed with ovarian cancer and dies on the **4<sup>th</sup> May 1984**

**1984** – Husband Alan takes his own life with a shotgun in Jason's bedroom

I came to know Jason shortly after the loss of his parents and we hung out as friends and got to know each other quite well as teenagers. After a few months of our friendship he went west to Los Angeles and I flew east for Hong Kong. We are now back in touch after approximately 28 years and have a lot of catching up to do. I think Christmas and the New Year are always a good time to catch up.

Thank you Jason and Niema for taking the time to talk with us. They have both agreed to **personally sign** each copy of the book for our readers when ordered through the Niema Ash website as listed below, so please make it a gift this Christmas.

*Good health to you all in 2013 and the years that follow.*

### **Acknowledgments and Special Thanks**

Jason Dors-Lake

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*Connecting Dors* the book is available from [www.niemaash.com](http://www.niemaash.com) and at Amazon and on Kindle

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