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Martha Keller

She is a young woman of 28, hailing from the German-speaking part of Switzerland, an actress who lives in Paris.

She was born in Basle where, as was her mother's wish, she took lessons in ballet dancing. She made her *début* with the *corps de ballet* at the Basle Opera, though with little enthusiasm. She was destined for a different career. At the first opportunity, she changed over to acting.

After Basle, she went to the «Schiller Theater» in East Berlin, the counterpart to the «Comédie Française». In Berlin she had her training as an actress and played in all classical dramas: Molière, Shakespeare, Marivaux, Schiller etc.

One day Martha Keller received a telegram requesting her to go to Paris for tests for a film. Without any hesitation she proceeded to the French capital, though without much hope seeing that she could hardly speak two words of French. Two days later, back in Berlin, she received a second telegram telling her that she had been engaged. Imagine her surprise! Convinced that she must not oppose fate, she finished with Berlin completely and even gave notice to the «Schiller Theater» and terminated her contract. She left for Paris to make the film «Le diable par la queue». She was so successful that she could keep her place next to such famous artists as Yves Montand, Madeleine Renaud and Maria Schell. She had phonetically learnt by heart her complete part. All the risks were rewarded: the film was a success, but it hardly impressed Martha Keller, for she was used to trusting her lucky star. After this initial success, she made a second film produced by Philippe

de Broce and played on the stage with Jean Rochefort in «Le jour de la mort de Joe Egg». She performed this part over 300 times in front of thousands of spectators who were surprised to discover a true actress in her. The acting tuition at the «Schiller Theater» had not been in vain: Martha Keller was awarded the Acting Prize 1970 as best actress of the year. Together with Annie Girardot, she played in Jean-Pierre Blanc's film «La vieille fille», and subsequently with Ray-



mond Devos in François Reichenbach's film «La raison du plus fou». Next came the film «Elle court, elle court la banlieue» by Gérard Pirès — a great popular success, and «La chute d'un corps» by Michel Polac. After that, Martha Keller had her great triumph in «La demoiselle d'Avignon», a serie of six films of an hour each, in which she portrayed the young Nordic princess Koba-Lee who was supposed to subject her fate to the good of the state.

That is how it came about; France discovered «La demoiselle» one evening, and for six weeks, Martha Keller played the part every Thursday with great success. The cinemas remained empty, for the viewers sat spellbound in front of their television screens. Yet for Martha Keller, this kind of fame was practically a hindrance. She did not intend to be prisoner inside a part and to play «La demoiselle d'Avignon» for the rest of her life. She therefore refused to have the sequel of the «demoiselle's» adventures filmed. She had higher ambitions. And her wish to play a part in a great picture was granted: Claude Lelouche engaged her for the super-film «Toute une vie», a film which tells the story of a family between 1900 and the year 2000. Martha Keller played the parts of the grandmother, the mother and granddaughter, the three heroines of this family saga. Three top parts in which she could demonstrate her great and versatile art; three parts for which every young actress would make a bid.

Leaving Martha Keller's career aside, we look at her private life. The actress gave up her flat at «Marais» and has moved to the «Parc Monceau». At the moment, she searches antique shops for Victorian furniture, for she dislikes modern interiors. As she gets bored at big social functions, she does not like to go out, but prefers to spend the evenings with her little son Alexander, three years old. To try and be happy and thus to find real fulfillment is the most important thing in life for Martha Keller.

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