

LOLA MONTEZ.

1819-1861.

In 1848 Lola Montez was the most famous and recognized woman in the world after Queen Victoria.

She had many lovers and a bigamous marriage as well as being the mistress of the King of Bavaria.

She wrote in *The Times* in April 1847 that she had been born in Seville and that her father was a Spanish Officer and her mother was an Irish Lady.

None of this was true but in 1847 Lola Montez was a household name across Europe and America and the Australian colonial Press was full of her doings as she lurched from scandal to scandal across the World.

By the time that she came to Sydney in 1855 she was the most notorious woman in the World.

However - she was the daughter of Lieutenant Edward Gilbert, a member of the 25th. Foot Regiment of the British East India Company's Troops and Elizabeth Oliver an Irish milliner's assistant

She was baptized Maria Delores Gilbert in Limerick in 1819 and her family went to India in 1823 where Edward died of cholera.

Elizabeth then married another Officer, Lieutenant Patrick Craigie and because Maria was "a wild girl" she was sent back to Scotland to live with her stepfather's family. She was sent to Miss Aldridge's Academy in Bath to learn the graces and accomplishments of a young lady.

Maria was still "wild" and at aged 19 eloped with another Officer, Lieutenant Thomas James and went back to India with his Regiment.

The marriage did not last and Maria, now Betty James went back to England and was to go to the *Fran Kelly Dance Academy* to learn to dance. She then went to Spain to learn Spanish Dancing.

In June 1843. As Lola Montez, she made her debut at Her Majesty's Theatre in London performing what would become *The Spider Dance*.

With her long, raven black hair, intense blue eyes, her perfect complexion and superb figure she was an immediate success with the male audience.

She went on a tour of Germany, Poland and Russia where she was also a great success. In 1844 she met the Hungarian Piano master, Franz Liszt and had a relationship which scandalized the people who worshiped him.

She then left for Paris where she was a huge success with audiences as only men attended the theatre in those days.

Lola had several affairs in Paris including one with Alexander Dumas the famous author.

She left Paris with Robert Peel, the son of the British Prime Minister and went to Munich where she was introduced to King Ludwig of Bavaria who was immediately smitten by her beauty. After seeing her perform her *Spider Dance* at a private function, he made her his Mistress.

His generosity was boundless and he gave her a big house that he had renovated and refurnished for her and there were horses, carriages, clothes, jewellery, servants and an income.

Within a few months he had lavished upon her millions of dollars in today's currency. In 1847 he made her a Bavarian citizen and elevated her to the Peerage. She was now The Countess Marie von Landsfeld.

This did not appeal to the King's advisors as these years in the late 1840's were very volatile in Europe with challenges to traditional Monarchies and demands for more representative government.

In 1848 there were demands from leading citizens of Bavaria that the King must stop these extravagances and they forced Ludwig to revoke Lola's citizenship. On the 10 March 1848 King Ludwig was to abdicate and Lola left for Paris.

Ludwig also departed for Paris taking a large amount of Bavaria's wealth with him. He wrote to Lola saying that he hoped that she would join him in his exile. He also continued to give her an annual income and she rented a grand house in Mayfair, London

At The Theatre Royal in London the big play to be seen was, *Lola Montez, the Countess for an Hour*

On 19 July 1849 Lola married a wealthy Guards Officer, 21 year old George Trafford-Heald. She said that she was a Spanish Noblewoman, Maria de los Delores de Landsfeld. Widow. Birthplace Seville.

George's family made their own investigations into the beautiful widow and found that Lola was still married when she married their son. A warrant was issued for Lola's arrest on the charge of bigamy.

She was released on bail of £1,000, which she did not pay and she departed for Paris with George. There she wrote to King Ludwig and professed her undying devotion and he once again came to the party with lots of money.

However- her shows in Europe were no longer drawing big audiences and there were demands that she return to England and face the Courts. It was time to head for the USA.

Lola arrived in New York in late 1851 to a blaze of publicity from the *New York Herald*. America was to give a huge welcome to the glamorous Countess who had been having an affair with the King of Bavaria.

Lola embarked on an extensive theatrical tour entitled *Lola Montez in Bavaria*. The all male audiences were fascinated by this European Aristocrat who had a fine figure and was very beautiful.

In *The Maid of Saragossa*, she was dressed in a male soldiers uniform which caused The New York Times to remark that, “she looked very fetching” and it wrote;

A good looking, bold woman with bad eyes. Dressed in perfect male clothing. She had in her hand a handsome riding whip. An impertinent American who laid hold jestingly, on her long coat-tails, received a cut across his face that marked him for some time.

This was reported in *The Maitland Mercury* in far away Australia.

In 1853 Lola went to San Francisco as she believed that the Gold Fields of California were where the big money was. She was to meet the owner of the *San Francisco Whig*, Patrick Hull, who was smitten by her beauty and within a few weeks they were married.

At this time Lola already had two other husbands in Europe. Ex-King Ludwig was still writing to her and saying that he wanted her in exile with him.

Her new husband used his newspaper to further her career and she was now giving performances of *School for Scandal* as *Lady Teazle*. The miners loved the culture and paid \$5 a ticket to see her. She often engaged in dialogue with the audience during these performances and the wealthy miners loved it.

She gave them *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet* and a very different *Whose Got the Countess* which was played to capacity crowds.

Her marriage ended within a few months and she decided to go on a tour of Australia as she had heard that the local newspapers were reporting all of her activities in Europe and America.

Lola Montez and her company arrived in Sydney Australia on the 17 August 1855 and at her first engagement at *The Victoria Theatre* in Pitt Street she starred in- *Lola Montez in Bavaria*.

In Melbourne, Lola gave her show about her adventures in Bavaria and danced her *Spider Dance* which was well received by the all male audiences. By today's standards it was all very tame but at that time the display of a woman's legs was considered to be very immoral.

Melbourne was a very new city and there was a move towards high culture and music such as *The Messiah* was popular and there was a great demand for *Grand Opera*.

In September *The Argus wrote* that her performances were;

Utterly subversive to all ideas of public morality.

The Reverend John Milton said that she should be arrested.

In Adelaide her shows were much more appreciated and the locals loved to hear all about;

Lola Montez, Countess of Landsfelt, Princess of Bavaria.

Lola then moved to the Goldfields of Victoria and received a bad article by Henry Seekamp, the Editor of the *Ballarat Times*. Lola went to his office and chased him into the street where she horsewhipped him with her riding crop. He punched her and pulled her hair. On the 28 February

1856 *The Age* reported this as *The Battle of Ballarat* and poems were written about it.

This was reported all around The World as *Henry Seekamp* was one of the great heroes of the *Eureka Stockade*.

After performing at Bendigo and Castlemaine, where she was to play to large audiences of Gold miners who liked to pay with gold nuggets, the troupe caught a boat and headed for the USA.

Lola had several disputes with her manager, Frank Follard and these were solved when he fell overboard between Fiji and Honolulu and was never seen again. Lola was very upset at this event and would sell much of her jewellery to benefit his children.

She would seek comfort in Spiritualism and Mysticism for the rest of her life. She developed a relationship with The Reverend Charles Burr who helped her with giving lectures about *Aids to Beauty* and *People of Paris*.

In November 1858 they went to Ireland and she gave lectures on *American Values and Society*. These were well reported in The Times.

She next decided to return to America where she joined the Methodist Church and became a repentant Sinner and ardent reformer. Her last two years were spent in poverty and reflection and she died on the 17th.
January 1861 .

Her tombstone reads;

Mrs. Eliza Gilbert. Died 17th. January 1861 aged 42.

Lola Montez is fondly remembered in Australia. *The Sovereign Hill Museum* in Ballarat features posters of all her performances and tells the history of her time in the Goldfields.

The Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust in Sydney was established in the Post WW2 era to promote high culture and on 22 October 1958 it debuted an Australian Musical about Lola Montez.

It was written by Alan Burke and Peter Benjamin with music by Peter Stannard.

It went on a National Tour and was well received by the many Australian audiences.

It was written up by all Australia's leading newspapers giving it good reviews and saying that;

The musical sought to inspire Australian creative talents to engage with Australian Culture.

I have no doubts that Lola would have been amused to learn that, a century after her sad and lonely death, her life story was venerated as a ***vehicle of High Culture.***

I have seen ***Lola Montez, the Musical***, several times and found it to be a great Australian show.

I was, at that time, working at the retail firm of ***A.J. Benjamin*** of ***Chatswood***, as ***Sales Supervisor*** of a team of Salesmen. ***The Sales Manager*** of the firm was ***Peter Benjamin***.

Peter was a woeful Sales Manager but he wrote a wonderful Musical.