



Valda Valkyrien

Also Known As:

Baroness Dewitz, Baroness Von Dewitz, Adele Frede, Mrs. Adele Stuart Otto, Mademoiselle Valkyrien

Lived:

September 30, 1894 - October 22, 1956

Worked as:

film actress, producer

Worked In:

Denmark, United States

by Jia Jia Liu

Named after the Valkyrie of Wagnerian lore, the martial warrior maiden who led warriors into battle, Valda Valkyrien herself emerges from the Hollywood press glowing with a mythical aura. Distinguishing between the real Valkyrien and Valkyrien the Hollywood myth is key to a profile of the star.

Repeated coverage portrays a talented actress and star dancer, even prima ballerina, of the Royal Danish Ballet, whose beauty so dazzled King Frederik VIII of Denmark in a nationwide beauty pageant in 1914 that he bestowed upon her the title of “Valkyrien—Year of 1914 A.D.—The Most Beautiful Woman of her Race!” (29) thereby making her “the toast of every café, club and home in Copenhagen,” as reported in the *Moving Picture World* (1246). The same issue reports that when Centaur Film Company producer David Horsley visited Denmark in the summer of 1913, he was so impressed by the Danish diva’s on-screen work that he made her an offer to star in his upcoming feature, an offer that she reportedly refused, for she had left the film world upon her recent marriage to Baron Hrolf von Dewitz, a naval officer and, according to *Moving Picture World*, an “expert of the first calibre in the finer points of photoplay construction” (624). Gathering war clouds in Europe obliged Valkyrien and Dewitz to relocate to the United States in 1914. While the Baron found himself consumed by his work as a military expert for the *New York Daily*, Baroness Dewitz was left languishing “alone in a strange land,” whereupon she reportedly resolved to return to motion pictures in order to stave off homesickness, and accepted Horsley’s offer (1246).

In a recent article, “The Strange Case of Valda Valkyrien,” Hans J. Wollstein gives a contradictory picture of Valkyrien’s background and pre-Hollywood film career. Born in Reykjavik, Iceland (and not Copenhagen), Adele Frede, later known as Valkyrien, may have been a student at the Royal Danish Ballet, but was neither a prima ballerina nor premiere danseuse, as she later claimed. A bit part player in at least four of Danish film industry giant Nordisk’s films in 1912, including *The New Shoeshine Boy* (1912) and *The Story of Mother* (1912), Adele Frede featured prominently as the hotel owner’s flirtatious daughter in the first film and as a domestic in the second, but was by no means a star in the flourishing Danish film industry.

The myth of Valkyrien, the great Danish star who deigned to favor Horsley while stranded away from her homeland, needs to be challenged. Wollstein argues that it was Horsley who made a star out of the little-known Valkyrien. He spotted her at the moment of budding fame when she won the title of “Valkyrien” in the 1914 beauty pageant, and transported her with her fiancé Dewitz to Hollywood, where he capitalized on the industry’s awestruck attitude towards Valkyrien’s exotic beauty and supposed aristocratic lineage by showcasing the Dane in a series of fifteen one-reeler “Baroness Films.” Dubbed “a special brand of refined comedy,” these films set her on a meteoric career path that had peaked by 1916, but she had sunk into oblivion by 1919, according to *Moving Picture World* (1246). Valkyrien starred in Vitagraph’s *Youth* (1915) and played the title role in Pluragraph’s *Diana* (1916). The Thanhouser Film Company even wrote a three-reeler for her: *The Valkyrie* (1915). Valkyrien’s other Thanhouser films include: *Silas Marner* (1916), *The Cruise of Fate* (1916), and *Hidden Valley* (1916). For these latter two productions, her husband, the Baron Dewitz, was signed on as “technical advisor.”

At the height of her career, there were reports of the Valda Valkyrien Production Company, but it is not clear if she was ever able to work as an independent. In 1916, Valkyrien left Thanhouser for the offer of a higher salary and top billing from the William Fox Film Corporation. Fox reneged on the second part of the offer, billing Valkyrien below both the title and her costar in *The Unwelcome Mother* (1916). The furious Valkyrien sued Fox for \$25,000 in damages, alleging that she had lost a two-year contract with Thanhouser. The outcome of the suit is unknown, but Valkyrien returned to Thanhouser, where she starred in the well-received *The Image Maker* (1917) as an actress who believes herself to be the reincarnation of an Egyptian princess. The Thanhouser company folded shortly thereafter, and Valkyrien turned to parts in low-quality independent productions. For awhile, she was under contract to the [Clara Kimball Young](#) Film Corporation. Her final film was the red-scare melodrama *Bolshevism on Trial* (1919).

It would seem that the problem of the lawsuit with Fox contributed to the reversal of Valkyrien’s fortunes by potentially marking her as a troublemaker. The question of Valda Valkyrien is also the question of the way faded European aristocracy played in Hollywood and the particular way immigrants were exoticized in the industry and in the public imagination.

Bibliography

“European Film Star Joins Centaur.” *Moving Picture World* (29 Aug. 1914): 1246

“Mrs. Albert K. Otto.” Obit. *New York Times* (25 Oct. 1956): 33

“Valda Valkyrien, Former Dancer, Film Star, Dies.” Obit. *Los Angeles Times* (24 Oct. 1956): C11.

“Valkyrien.” *Moving Picture World* (22 July 1916): 624

Wollstein, Hans J. “The Strange Case of Valda Valkyrien.” *Classic Images* (Jan. 1997): 28-30.

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Filmography

A. Archival Filmography: Extant Film Titles:

1. Valda Valkyrien as Actress

Dødspring til hest fra cirkuskuplen /The Great Circus Catastrophe. Dir.: Eduard Schnedler-Sorensen (Nordisk Film Denmark 1912) cas.: Valdemar Psilander, Aage Hertel, Frederik Jacobsen, Valda Valkyrien, si, b&w, 35mm. Archive: [Danske Filminstitut \[DKK\]](#).

De Heldige Friere /Unsuccessful Flirtation. (Nordisk Film Denmark 1912) cas.: Hilmar Clausen, Valda Valkyrien, si, b&w, 35mm. Archive: [Museum of Modern Art \[USM\]](#).

Den Stærkeste /Vanquished. Dir.: Eduard Schnedler-Sørensen. (Nordisk Film Denmark 1912). cas.: Else Frølich, Valda Valkyrien. si., b&w. Archive: [Danske Filminstitut \[DKK\]](#).

Youth. Dir.: Harry Handworth (Vitagraph Company US 1915) cas.: Antonio Moreno, Valda Valkyrien, si, b&w. Archive: [BFI National Archive \[GBB\]](#).

Silas Marner. Exec. prod. Gertrude Thanhouser, Edwin Thanhouser, dir.: Ernest C. Warde (Thanhouser Film Corp. US 1916) cas.: Frederick Warde, Louise E. Bates, Morgan Jones, Valda Valkyrien, si, b&w. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#).

Diana the Huntress. Dir.: Charles W. Allen and Francis T. Miller, sc., Francis T. Miller. (Pluragraoh Co., US 1916) cas.: Valda Valkyrien (as Baroness Von Dewitz), Paul Swan. si., b&w. 35mm & 16mm. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#), [Cineteca del Friuli \[ITG\]](#).

The Image Maker. Exec. Prod. Gertrude Thanhouser, Edwin Thanhouser, dir.: Eugene Moore (Thanhouser Film Corp. US 1917) cas.: Valda Valkyrien, Harris Gordon, si, b&w. Archive: Private Collection.

Bolshevism on Trial. Dir.: Harley Knoles, sc.: Harry Chandlee (Mayflower Photoplay Corp. US 1919) cas.: Henry Truesdell, Robert Frazer, Inez Nesbitt, Valda Valkyrien, si, b&w. Archive:

[Cineteca del Friuli \[ITG\]](#), [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#), [Academy Film Archive \[USF\]](#).

B. Filmography: Non-Extant Film Titles:

1. Valda Valkyrien as Actress

En moders kaerlighed/The Story of Mother, 1912; *Frederik Buch som skopudser/The New Shoeshine Boy*, 1912; *Baroness Film Series*, 1914; *The Valkyrie*, 1915; *The Cruise of Fate*, 1916; *Diana*, 1916; *Hidden Valley*, 1916; *The Unwelcome Mother*, 1916; *Magda*, 1917; *Huns Within Our Gates*, 1918; *T'other Dear Charmer*, 1918; *The Commercial Pirates*, 1919.

C. DVD Sources:

Bolshevism on Trial. DVD. (Grapevine US 2009)

Unseen Cinema: Early American Avant-Garde Film 1894-1941 (1910). DVD. (Image Entertainment, 2013)- contains *Diana the Huntress (1916)*.

Credit Report

Valda Valkyrien's filmography is based on the standard sources as well as Hans J. Wollstein's article in *Classic Images*. It is believed that she appeared in additional films in Denmark, but her involvement can't be confirmed. It is unclear if *Diana (1916)* is an alternative title for *Diana the Huntress (1916)* or a separate short (perhaps made before the latter). IMDb has two separate entries for the films, both produced by Pluragraph Co., and both directed by Charles W. Allen and Francis Trevelyan Miller. According to the Library of Congress, Valda Valkyrien appeared in *Diana the Huntress* as Baroness Von DeWitz. On IMDb, Valda Valkyrien is listed as the star of *Diana*. *Diana the Huntress* is extant, whereas there is no FIAF entry for *Diana*. Further research must be done to see if these titles are the same film or different versions of a similar topic/story.

Citation

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<<https://wfpp-test.cul.columbia.edu/pioneer/ccp-valda-valkyrien/>>