

The Most Interesting

From among her famous friends—and ex-friends—this noted hostess selects the people who fascinate her most

By ELSA MAXWELL

■ I COUNT PEOPLE interesting

when they are intelligent and stimulating and have some

element of surprise in their make-up. They need not be loyal

or kind (and, alas, they often are not). As a result, a list

of the most interesting people

I know includes persons I do not approve of, as well as

some I am very fond of.



MARIA CALLAS

■ In my opinion, Maria Callas is the greatest vocal artist of our century. But I also find her, as a woman, bereft of the human qualities that animate her on-stage. It's as if she has given her total thought and energy to her art and has nothing left for day-to-day living.

Last year, when it was reported she was losing her voice, I went to Greece to hear her sing "Medea." I went fearfully. But she sang like an angel—which she is not—and I gave reverent thanks. For although I am no longer her friend, I shudder to think what would happen if her voice were to go. Without it, she would have no existence at all.

It was said she married Giovanni Battista Meneghini (20 years her senior and not at all attractive) because he was rich. But I am sure the real reason was that he promised to devote his life to her career.

As it turned out, he commandeered her finances and told her nothing of her affairs. During her marriage to him, she never had more than a few francs in her purse at a time. When they separated in 1959, she learned he had not even paid for jewelry he had given her.

In worldly matters, Maria is like a child. Consider her last-moment refusals to appear at the great opera houses of Europe and America—or her temperamental exits before the final curtain. Certainly, her romantic friendship with Aristotle Onassis and their now-famous Mediterranean cruise showed a complete lack of good public relations and discretion on her part.

To remain friends with a woman like Maria Callas is impossible. But I also find it impossible not to be fascinated by her superhuman dedication to her art.



W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM

■ At the end of the 19th century, there was a young intern in a London hospital, William Maugham, who kept tempting himself with the idea of quitting the medical profession, going to Paris, and becoming a writer.

This is usually a preface to a lackluster future, if not down-and-out failure. But the story of William Maugham has a different ending. He went on to become the famous W. Somerset Maugham, author of 25 plays, 20 novels, and countless other works, which have earned him well over \$4,000,000, set him up in a handsome flat in Paris and an elegant villa on the Riviera, and won him the sobriquet, "The Grand Old Man of English Letters."

I have known Willie Maugham for years. Unquestionably, he is one of the most compelling men I have ever met. I have spent countless evenings watching his sardonic eyes follow some man or woman around a room. And often, I thought I've recognized that man or woman slightly disguised in a subsequent Maugham story. I've been stimulated by his observations about people and places and the little dramas and comedies that are seen everywhere but which are especially abundant on the Riviera. I've also been challenged by Willie's excellent bridge and poker.

As he and I grow older, however, I see him less and less. I no longer care for him very much. In his venerable years, he is neither human nor kind. And when he put up for auction his fine collection of paintings instead of willing them to his daughter, it was the end so far as I was concerned. Since he had no need of the money, it showed he had no feeling for his child.

It may be that Willie became so preoccupied with his literary dissections that he killed his capacity for friendship and compassion.

But even as I write these words, I can imagine the wry smile that would twist Willie's mouth were he reading over my shoulder.

People I Know



CLARE BOOTHE LUCE

■ I admire Clare Boothe Luce for many reasons. She has written Broadway hits. She has served in Congress. She was successful as our ambassador to Italy—after many "experts" stated flatly that no woman could ever succeed as a diplomat in a male-dominated Latin country.

But there also is a less well-known reason why I rank Clare high on my list. I will never forget the way she rallied her forces after her daughter Ann was killed in an automobile accident. For in addition to her grief at losing her only child, she suffered remorse over the fact that she and Ann had come to enjoy a close relationship only a pitiful few years before the girl's death. Until then, Clare had been so busy earning a living and following her intellectual interests that they had had little opportunity to know each other.

"Ann's death will be the end of Clare," many friends said.

It was the end of the old Clare. But today, at 59, she is a more beautiful and brilliant woman than ever before. There is a difference, however. She now has a warm faith in the world and her fellow men. Her new outlook came with her conversion to Catholicism.

Often, when I haven't seen Clare for months, I'll get a telegram that will read: "Hear you have been ill. Take care. We need you very much" or "All the joys of the Easter season to you, dear friend."

I find it fun—and heartening, too—to receive such thoughtful, loving messages from one who is supposed to be a hardheaded intellectual.



COLE PORTER

■ If you fell in love during the last three or four decades, Cole Porter probably contributed in some measure to your emotion. Cole's songs—like "Night and Day," "I Get a Kick Out of You," and "What Is This Thing Called Love?"—were made for lovers.

Cole and I have been friends for more than 40 years. Still, when anyone speaks of him, my heart gives a little jump. To me, he was the mainspring of Paris glamour in the '20s.

Everything that was amusing took place at the Porters. His wife Linda was so beautiful that Cole never looked at anybody else. But, at their house, no one ever was bored. There the new dance steps either went into limbo or became a vogue. Games which are still being played were invented there, for Cole has the liveliest imagination of anyone I've known.

In those days, I was much more social than Cole. He didn't care enough for parties to risk the bores among the guests. He would wait for me outside the house or hotel where I was being entertained, and as soon as I could decently escape, I would join him for a tour of the town. Few people knew Paris as we did. Instead of going where it was fashionable to go, we visited places that amused and interested us.

All the love and gaiety Cole and Linda Porter knew and spread around them were too good to last. In 1937 Cole was riding on a friend's estate when a horse stumbled and fell on him. Both his legs were broken. He was operated on 20 times or more. Off and on for years, his legs were in painful casts. When he was composing the music for "Du Barry Was a Lady," his piano was raised on blocks so that he, his wheel chair, and his casts could fit under it.

Through it all, Cole managed to be Cole. But in 1954 Linda died; and with her gone he loved life less. When his right leg was amputated in 1958, his love of life diminished still more.

I keep hoping that one day enough spirit will return for Cole to prove he still can write the greatest lyrics and melodies of them all. For anyone else, this would be a foolish dream. But with my dear Cole Porter, it could happen.



QUEEN FREDERIKA

■ One of my favorite people is Queen Frederika of Greece—and it's not because I'm a snob or a name dropper and she is a queen. The reason is that Freddy, as she's known to her friends and relatives, is the "genuine article" both as a woman and as a queen.

Gen. James A. Van Fleet told me that the Communists surely would have taken over Greece after World War II if it had not been for Frederika. Accompanied by only one servant, she went into the hills countless times and talked to the wives of the miners and farmers. Her discussions of communism alerted them to its dangers. Her ardent patriotism shamed them. And their devotion was won by her considerable bravery—for they knew she risked being killed at this time.

Frederika is so wonderfully alive, so vivid, and so democratic it would be impossible for her to subscribe to any archaic concept of royal conduct. Somehow, without losing one whit of dignity, she manages to be exceedingly frank about almost everything.

For instance, she told me about her unpleasant experience with Farouk when she was on an official visit to Egypt. While a ball was in progress, he led her to a private balcony and tried to take her into his arms. His desire, if not his conduct, was understandable; the Queen is very lovely with her blue eyes, her dimples, and her young and symmetrical five-foot, three-inch figure. Farouk turned out to be less a fool than I have always thought him, however. He knew she meant it when she said: "Release me at once before I scream the palace down!" He let go of her immediately.

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