

Ann-Margret:

WHEN I MET Ann-Margret for lunch at a crowded Hollywood restaurant, she sat quietly and unnoticed in a far corner.

Her voice was so low I could barely make out what she was saying, and it revealed an insecure, little-girl quality that would be more befitting for a homely, ill-at-ease teen-ager than for a girl who has all Hollywood at her feet.

By her own admission, Ann-Margret gets so nervous before she faces an audience that she can't keep her food down. And for courage she relies on charms, such as the tiny, hand-carved Swedish horse she has carried with her since high school.

But the moment the beautiful redhead faces a microphone or camera, a transformation takes place. She becomes a human dynamo who can belt out a song like a youthful Ethel Merman—a performer who teases, wiggles, and squeezes the last nuance out of a rendition until she has her audience enthralled.

In three years, Ann-Margret has worked herself up from being a member of a comparatively unknown combo called the Sutteltones to the hottest property in Hollywood.

Her capable managers, Bobby Roberts and Pierre Cossette, have received much of the credit for her meteoric rise. Certainly their careful handling has assured Ann-Margret the proper opportunities and exposure—not too much and not too little. For instance, they got her into three films, and each has provided her with a more rewarding part. In "Pocketful of Miracles," she had little more than a supporting role. In "State Fair," her salary was \$300 a week, and she costarred with Bobby Darin. In "Bye Bye Birdie," she was paid \$35,000 and stole the show from such established performers as Janet Leigh and Dick Van Dyke.

Recently she signed with MGM for two more films—at a total price of \$275,000. She also has commitments with Columbia and Frank Sinatra's Essex Productions.

Obviously, Ann-Margret's managers deserve a lot of credit. But I doubt if any force on earth could have deterred her from becoming a star. When she faces a camera, she has an indefatigable quality that cries out to be recognized.

In her own mind, Ann-Margret has a compelling reason to get ahead. "I want to make up to my parents for all the sacrifices they made for me," she said. "I want everything that I can possibly get for them—their own house, their own gardener, their own car. Why, we still don't even have a washing machine. My mother has to go to the laundromat twice a week!"

Considering Ann-Margret's present income, this statement can be explained only by the Swedish frugality of the Olsons (Ann-Margret does not use her last name professionally).

She vividly remembers the toughest time the family faced, when a series of accidents caused her father to be without a job for months. "Even after he was released from the hospital, he still was unable to work and, to make ends meet, we



Hollywood's Hottest New-comer

Off stage, this stunning redhead is surprisingly shy and insecure; but on stage, she's a spectacularly assured performer who spellbinds audiences

By PEER J. OPPENHEIMER

moved from Fox Lake, Ill., to Wilmette, Ill., where Mother was offered a job as receptionist at a funeral home. Our living quarters were included as part of her pay. That's why she decided to take the job."

Their living room was actually part of the funeral parlor. "Some nights they would use the front room for wakes until one o'clock in the morning," Ann-Margret recalled. "After everybody left, Mother would tidy things up, then close the sliding door that led from our side of the living room to the part of the funeral parlor where they kept the casket. It really didn't bother me until the kids at school began to heckle me about sleeping next to a dead body!"

Nevertheless, the Olsons stayed at the funeral parlor until Ann-Margret's father was well enough to return to work.

Ann-Margret was born in Stockholm, Sweden, on April 28, 1941. Her father had immigrated to the United States at 19 and settled in Fox Lake, near Chicago. He returned to Sweden in the 1930s, met and married the former Anna Aronson, then came back to the United States in 1942—by himself.

Because of the war, Ann-Margret and her mother were not able to join him until 1946, and neither of them spoke a word of English when they arrived. Because of the language barrier, the first months in the new country turned the vivacious child into a shy, lonely, and rather frightened youngster.

Mrs. Olson, who suffered from shyness herself, made up her mind that her daughter wasn't going to be burdened with the same handicap. The best cure, she decided, would be for Ann-Margret to perform in front of other people. So she enrolled her in a dancing school.

FROM THE TIME Ann-Margret was seven, she danced and sang at neighborhood social functions. At 17, she got her first big chance when a Kansas City hotel hired her as a last-minute replacement for a singer. This and subsequent engagements provided her with enough money to pay her tuition at Northwestern University. There, she and three young musicians formed the Sutteltones jazz combo.

The combo split up after an appearance in Las Vegas. But a few weeks later, Ann-Margret was back in the desert resort—as George Burns' protégée. Ten days after she closed at the Sahara, she was signed by 20th Century-Fox.

Ann-Margret frankly admits going steady with three people: Lou Adler, a music publisher; Jack Gilardi, a good-looking agent; and Eddie Fisher, her most constant companion when he is in town.

She was close to marriage once, when she was engaged briefly to Hollywood businessman Burt Sugarman. One day she decided she didn't want to be engaged any more and broke off their relationship. "I dig motherhood," she insists, "but I'm just not ready for it."

But from all indications, Hollywood and the world are ready for Ann-Margret, whose rush to stardom is played with the gusto of a child shouting, "Here I come—ready or not!"