



SAPPHO GOES TO HOLLYWOOD

The Girls

"I used to think I knew a thing or two about Hollywood's backstage secrets, but Diana McLellan's *The Girls* has blown my mind with some of her revelations about my favorite movie stars." — DOMINICK DUNNE

DIANA MCLELLAN

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The Girls: Sappho Goes to Hollywood Diana McLellan

Diana McLellan reveals the complex and intimate connections that roiled behind the public personae of Greta Garbo, Marlene Dietrich, Tallulah Bankhead, and the women who loved them. Private correspondence, long-secret FBI files, and troves of unpublished documents reveal a chain of lesbian affairs that moved from the theater world of New York, through the heights of chic society, to embed itself in the power structure of the movie business. *The Girls* serves up a rich stew of film, politics, sexuality, psychology, and stardom.

The Girls: Sappho Goes to Hollywood Details

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From Reader Review The Girls: Sappho Goes to Hollywood for online ebook

SergioMar says

Un libro que pretende dar respuesta a muchos enigmas, que al final se quedan en eso: enigmas. Una basura sensacionalista escrita por una periodista de tabloides, que se vende como evangelio y se queda en menos que apócrifo. Un libro que parte de simples rumores y en el que finalmente solo queda clara una cosa: que la autora tiene mucha imaginación, opiniones sesgadas, y una montaña de teorías chismosas a las que no aporta ningún tipo de prueba concluyente. Todo cae por su propio peso desde el primer capítulo. Si fuera un libro de ficción, sería hasta entretenido, pero el libro se vende como un trabajo de investigación, y como tal, es infumable.

Melanie says

I'm not even half way through this gem and I can't put it down!! The 'sewing circle' which includes Marlene Dietrich, Greta Garbo, Tallulah Bankhead, and other Hollywood starlets, is incestuous! These women have insatiable appetites for sex, stardom, and glamor. I love this book, go and read it!

Rama says

The sewing circle in 1920s Hollywood

This is a highly readable book and the author has way with words when she describes feminists of 1920s Hollywood who were redefining sexuality and marriage. The so called sewing circle consisted of a significant number of Hollywood elite who chose and practiced their sexuality openly and lavender marriages, supported by studios, were accepted with grace. It was a daring practice of post-WWI feminism.

The author focusses on three major stars who were notorious bisexuals with large preference for women, namely, Greta Garbo, Marlene Dietrich and Tallulah Bankhead. The greatest “conqueror” of sewing circle was probably poet and playwright Mercedes De Acosta who had numerous gorgeous ladies in her count, from Europe to California. Her affairs with some of the well-known ladies like; Great Garbo, Marlene Dietrich, Alla Nazimova, Eva Le Gallienne, Ona Munson, Natacha Rambova, and Lilyan Tashman. She was an obscure writer but rose to prominence to enjoy the brightness of life for 40 years. She used creative methods to conquer ladies. Sometimes Mercedes would use her husband's art studio, get models into the studio for painting and then would seduce them. In this manner she managed to make love to Helen Menken, Charlotte Monterey, Greta Cooper, Valentina Schlee, and Katherine Cornell. Alla's marriage with actor Charles Bryant; Mercedes De Acosta with Abram Poole; Lilyan Tashman with Edmond Lowe, and Rudolph Valentino with Jean Acker and later with Natacha Rambova were well-known examples of lavender marriages.

In the vanguard of lesbian/bisexual chic included Libby Holman, DuPont heiress Louisa Carpenter, Joan Crawford, Estelle Winwood, Blythe Daly, Barbara Stanwyck, Marjorie Maine, Jean Acker, singer Libby Holman, comedienne Bea Lillie, Isabell Hill, Louise Brooks, Gladys Calthrop, Mimsey Duggett, Katharine

Hepburn, Salka Viertel, Dorothy Azner, Natacha Rambova, Patsy Kelly, Kay Frances, Dolores Del Rio, Ona Munson, Jazz singer Billie Holiday, Josephine Baker and many more.

Lesbian love walked into New York stage when Edouard Bourdet's play, "The Captive" premiered on Broadway in 1927 and Helen Menken (wife of Humphrey Bogart) plays lesbian woman who receives amour nosegays of violet, used as a symbol of lesbian love, from her lover. Menken received many warm missives from deans of several women's colleges across United States. Radclyffe Hall's 1928 lesbian novel, "The Well of Loneliness" had torn the veil of silence and Mary Casals autobiography, "The Stone Wall" about lesbian love were adding substance to the myth.

The author reveals a well-known secret about Garbo and Dietrich who claimed to be lifelong strangers, but actually they had met in Berlin and Vienna at lesbian hangouts in 1920s. In the movie, "Joyless Street" produced in 1925 casted both women. The book shows still photographs from the movie to prove this point. Garbo was well known for being secretive and went to extraordinary length to protect her privacy.

Lilyan Tashman was a highly skilled missionary for the joy of lesbian sex. Women were warned of avoiding trip to the powder room with Lilyan because she would corner any attractive woman and plunge her to highly skilled lovemaking. She boasted that she can steal any woman from any man. Her bathroom advances were so overt that Irene Selznick said that she hasn't seen anything like her overtures. Ann Warner, wife of Jack Warner seduced by Marlene Dietrich when she was in Paris and she showed the lesbian hangouts and private rooms at the famous Sphinx Club. Later Ann Warner becomes a full pledged member of sewing circle. When Marlene did the movie "A Foreign Affair" costarring Jean Arthur and directed by Billy Wilder, Marlene reportedly had affairs with everyone from the set from stand-ins and secretaries to stuntmen and didn't give a damn about the gossip. Tallulah Bankhead sought sex of every variety constantly, hungrily, loudly, candidly and without reservation. Once she told Joan Crawford that she had sex with her husband Douglas Fairbanks Jr. and she will be next. Tallulah adored Marlene Dietrich even though they preyed on same women and men.

Not everything is sex; the last few chapters discuss the work done by the leading ladies of Hollywood on USO tour and other wartime services for the troops both in United States and Europe. Notable work was done Marlene Dietrich who was awarded the Medal of Freedom, the civilian equivalent of Congressional Medal of Honor.

Kate says

Super fascinating research. The best line is a quote from Noel Coward to Tallulah Bankhead. "Stop stuffing reefers up your jacksie, Talullah!"

Corrie says

Having read both **The Sewing Circle** by Axel Madsen and this one, I have to say I favor **Diana McLellan's** version. It's meatier (twice as long), more detailed and has a lot of humor.

If you love to read about lesbians (and gays) in classic Hollywood and the stage, it can't get any better than this.

5 stars

Lord Beardsley says

This book simply blew me away. I was held captive from page one all the way through until the end. The writing is wonderfully vivid and well-researched. The crass warblings of *The L Word* is nothing compared to the complex, stylish, heady world of lesbians, gays, and various other sexual outlaws during the pre and post-code years of Hollywood. This has everything: silent film divas with a commune for deviants, 1920s Weimar Debauchery, bitchy mayhem, lesbian Duh-raaammmaaa and revenge that makes the mafia look like characters from a Disney movie...oh yeah...and Greta Garbo up a tree yelling: "Go away Rumba!" to the poor guy who was forced to give her rumba lessons for a role in a film. If you're interested in old Hollywood, Weimar, deviants and other juicy tales of rebellion...go grab this book!

Imc says

Good read - writing sufficient, but there were major players and basic information missing. What was in the book was good, writing and flow sufficient - just lacking slightly on certain, key players and giving very little new insight on the people noted. For those unaware of the lavender side of Hollywood, this would be a great primer.

ERIN SCHMIDT says

How was I supposed to resist a title like that?

This is the allegedly true, research-based story of Hollywood's two most famous LGBTQIA actresses of the 1930s, Ms. Greta Garbo and Ms. Marlene Dietrich. Neither woman self-identified as lesbian, bisexual, or pansexual during her lifetime, so I have to state for the record that it's a bit unfair of me to label them after their deaths, when they lived in a very different world than we do now. However, there is ample evidence to support that both women had ongoing romantic relationships with women and men.

Dietrich's affairs seem to fit the bi/pan label more closely - she didn't seem to have much of a preference either way - while Garbo seems to have had a preference for women over men.

I found this book absolutely fascinating. You'll probably enjoy it if you're interested in Old Hollywood history, women's history, and/or LGBTQIA history. Some of McLellan's sources are a bit dubious, but that's the nature of the beast when you're trying to uncover the history of something that was deliberately kept hidden. As the World War II era gave way to the 1950s, people in Hollywood had to worry about being associated with Communism. That gave them another reason to obscure and hide some of their past relationships, as well as the cultural swing that was becoming even more repressive of gay, lesbian, and bisexual sexuality. The 1950s were the golden age of the closet.

Rachel Jones says

According to this book, it's amazing that Marlene Dietrich was ever vertical long enough to make a movie. Some juicy bits, but overall just an okay read.

Shari says

According to this book, Hollywood used to be full of gorgeous, talented, and wildly promiscuous commie lesbians. Oh, would that my life were half so interesting--! But alas, it is not to be.

Suzanne Stroh says

A rollicking read if ever there was one. Garbo, Weimar Germany, old movies, international spycraft, stolen jewels and gorgeous, Jet Setting women with supercharged libidos: What's not to like? This is the most fun I've ever had between the covers of a book about Hollywood.

It's great to see that nearly one-fifth of the ratings here on Goodreads are from people who have read *The Girls* this year. That shows the staying power of a book I first read more than a decade ago. It's even better to learn that it's about to be reissued in paper and for eReaders. I see it on the to-read lists of some of my friends. You're in for a treat. And for those of you browsing my bookshelves, let me just give you a couple more reasons to run (don't walk) to buy this book.

(1) Marlene Dietrich was way cooler than Lara Croft. Learn why. And why didn't Tarantino imagine HER assassinating Hitler in INGLORIOUS BASTERDS? That, I cannot answer for you. But it's a pity. Because she was fully prepared to do it. Hard core.

(2) Garbo was once the highest paid woman in America. And the hardest worker you ever met. Plus with great frontage as you will see. Then she went bust after the Crash. Then she made it all back again. See, it really DOESN'T come naturally (except for the décolletage), and you will gain respect for this woman page after page, even as you cringe at her neuroses and narcissism. But this book really is about Hollywood, so you should never be too surprised on that score....

(3) Finally, a true story where the screenwriter holds all the cards for once. Meet Salka Viertel, a nasty piece of work you'll love to hate. Watch how she manipulates the famous power players you've learned to respect, possibly for the wrong reasons. McLellan will definitely open your eyes and challenge some of your assumptions about Hollywood history.

(4) What ties it all together? A Park Avenue vampire. Mercedes de Acosta is one of the most interesting characters you'll ever read about. But what's with the white face powder?

(5) What fun, what pleasure, to be in the hands of a writer who plays every role to perfection. Biographer, historian, sleuth, page-turning storyteller.... This is the *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* of Golden Age tell-alls.

There's more, but I'll sign off here. I think it's time to go read *The Girls* again.

Sy Snootles says

It's a history book, in that it's nonfiction and written about the past, but McLellan's writing is just as titillating and gossipy as you want it to be when reading about such a delicious subject. However, the level of detail can be confusing and tedious, since so many names come in and out of the picture you'll have to re-read some parts just to keep everybody straight (no pun intended). In fact, it's SO detailed that it made me doubt the veracity of the material; could McLellan really know this much about what went on in the daily lives of these women without being there herself? Add to that some laughable conclusions she draws (like that Garbo and Dietrich were once in a movie together and lied about it, therefore they were lovers!!) and you'll realize that the "nonfiction" categorization only loosely applies here. If you take it all with a grain of salt it's an enjoyable read, though it does go on for perhaps a bit longer than one would like it to.

Bonnie says

Solidly a great read full of tidbits, horizons filled with lust and multiple lesbian affairs. Bisexuality was the norm, and frequent bedding of multiple partners. Greta has multiple female and male lovers and lives in a strange private world. Marlene Dietrich hops in and out of beds as does Greta. A must read.

Mimi Herrmann says

Things I never knew

I'd never been an old film buff, but maybe I would have been if I'd known how many of these actresses were lesbian by preference. A fabulous and fascinating book which I highly recommend.

Thirstyicon says

I learned that "Dyke Drama" transcends class (whether rich or poor), and sexuality (homo or bi). This was a great read an EXTREMELY informative. The book deserves 4 stars just for the amount of research she has done. Granted, even the author states a lot of information has to be taken with caution; but most of it seems plausible.
