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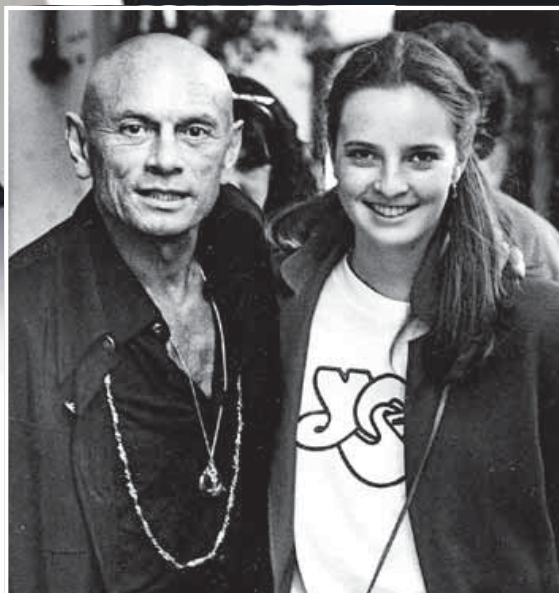
# ● SUNDAY EXPRESS

# Review

## Getting to know Yul – my father

Yul Brynner is known for his roles in the King And I and The Magnificent Seven but he was also a talented photographer. As an exhibition of his work opens **Jane Clinton** meets its curator, his daughter Victoria

PICTURE PERFECT: Anita Ekberg strikes a pose in 1956; and Yul Brynner with his daughter Victoria in 1979



**H**E IS best known for his commanding presence on both stage and screen but Yul Brynner was also a master photographer who happily whiled away the hours on set documenting stars, stage hands and still life with one of the three Leica cameras that would hang around his neck.

Brynner delighted audiences as King Mongkut of Siam in *The King And I* and starred in *The Magnificent Seven* and now, an exhibition of some of his archive will reveal his other side.

There is a candid shot of Grace Kelly whose unstinting stare shows at once a strength and a vulnerability. Another is of Ingrid Bergman as, half out of shot, she coyly hides behind a door, revealing a lighter and more playful side to her character. There is Audrey Hepburn,

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# Photography

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# Portrait of movie icon Brynner



STRIKING INSIGHT: Grace Kelly, pictured by Brynner in 1956

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Victoria's godmother and her mother's closest friend, living the life as she relaxes on a gondola with the requisite film star shades.

Sifting through the archive of more than 8,000 pictures shed new light on Victoria's father. "It was very moving when I first went through the archive in the Eighties and we did a book of some of them about 12 years ago," says Victoria, 49, who lives in Los Angeles with her husband and two children and has a photography production company.

"When you go through someone's entire archive you get to know them in a different way. It was almost like reading someone's diary."

It was also a visual voyage of discovery for Victoria, the daughter of Brynner's marriage to Chilean model Doris Kleiner, and a chance to reconnect with her father who died of lung cancer aged 65 in October 1985. "I only knew of 15 of his images before I looked into the archive and I had no clue of the scale of it," says Victoria, who was given her first camera by her father and caught the photography bug from him.

One person who features heavily in Brynner's archive, which he stored in his French home, is Ingrid Bergman with whom he starred in the 1956 film *Anastasia*. "They had this great friendship and she was so incredible looking," says Victoria. "He loved her and she loved him back and you can really feel it."

Brynner, who was married four times, fathered three children and adopted two, was also a methodical man. "He was very thorough and precise," she says of her father who was interested in philosophy and became a Buddhist later in his life.

Brynner was born in 1920 in Vladivostok in Russia. His father was an engineer and his mother had trained to be an actress and singer. His father abandoned the family and after a period in China Brynner went to Paris where he played guitar in nightclubs, met Jean Cocteau and was said to have performed as a trapeze artist in a circus troupe.

He left for the US in 1940 and directed television productions in New York but it was his role as the King of Siam in *The King And I* (for which

he won an Oscar and a Tony in the film and stage version respectively) that brought him fame.

Photography was, says Victoria, a way for him to fill time during the endless lulls on film sets and, more importantly, for him to be creative.

Brynner counted Frank Sinatra and Dean Martin as friends and they would spend lively weekends in Palm Springs. There was also socialising with Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton. She says: "People socialised in a very different way back then. There were also fewer celebrities and celebrities then were talented and not just famous for being famous."

As a consequence Brynner's circle included more than those from the world of showbusiness. He was great friends with the poet, playwright and filmmaker Jean Cocteau; he rubbed shoulders with Salvador Dali and Charlie Chaplin and won respect from the master of photography, Henri Cartier-Bresson.

He made lasting friends with the Magnum photographers Ernst Haas and Inge Morath. Their interest and respect proved Brynner's photography was no mere hobby but a serious pursuit.

As a special consultant to the UN High Commissioner for refugees, Brynner collaborated with Morath on the 1960 book *Bring Forth The Children*, where they visited Eastern European refugee camps. Hass, on the other hand would go to the Brynner household and take the family photos. When Victoria's parents split up in 1967, holidays with her father were punctuated with photo sessions.

**O**NE OF THE most striking images is a self-portrait of Brynner taken during his run of *The King And I* at the London Palladium. "He did his own make-up," she says. "The photograph is of him in the mirror and he has his shirt off. It's just a great picture."

The image also reminds her of her visits from Switzerland and the father-daughter breakfasts and lunches she shared at his favourite London hotel, The Connaught. "My dad had a great Anglo-Saxon side to him. He had this huge admiration for the Queen and I remember his excitement getting ready for the Royal Command Performance when he was able to present a small scene from *The King And I*. Despite his sociable nature Brynner's favourite photograph was a still life of a cognac glass with water and sky reflected in it. "It looks as though it is cut in four. It is an amazing and very technical photograph," says Victoria.

With the demands of *The King And I* stage show the pictures began to peter out but Victoria hopes his photographs, some of which are collected in the recently published book *Yul Brynner: A Photographic Journey* which coincides with the exhibition, will continue to bring to life a golden age of Hollywood.

"I think it will be a reference book for people for many years," she says. "I think my father should be very proud of that."

● *Yul Brynner: A Photographic Journey* opens at *The Little Black Gallery*, 13A Park Walk, London SW10 0AJ on Wednesday and runs until February 11 ([thelittleblackgallery.com](http://thelittleblackgallery.com))



CANDID: Bergman filming *Goodbye Again* (1961) and Heston in *The Ten Commandments* (1956)

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