

## Document Citation

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By Josephine Hart Phelps

**M**ME. PETROVA hit on a smashing title for her play "Hurricane," at the Geary playhouse, although as Ilka, her heroine, had so little in her squalid life, in the beginning, the title seems to suggest a greater devastation than was really wrought. However, the rehabilitation of her life, that she accomplished is in line with the instinctive energy with which the human victims of cataclysms always start to repairing damages.

In this play Olga Petrova has recurred to a theme that is never very popular: the rehabilitation of the life of the lowest class of "filles de joie." Poor things, what a misnomer!

However, Mme. Petrova does make Ilka persistently joyful, even after her fall, although we are to understand that she has lived through troublous times. But Olga Petrova is an optimist. She refrains from dwelling on the awfulness of Ilka's experiences, which are mentioned but once; when an honest and devoted lover proposes marriage. The play is really a picture of a courageous woman's escape from hopeless slavery to a sordid and tyrannical father, her entrapment, by one of those fearful creatures who fatten upon the earnings of ignorant and inexperienced girls, and her subsequent regeneration.

But upon such a theme there is always left the stain of compliance even if only temporary. The question is, could a woman of Olga's courage, energy, determination, hopefulness and generally fine character have endured that life for eight months? One always thinks of temporary kitchen work for a stepping stone. There is always that escape for a girl of determination. However, Olga Petrova, in her speech, rather intimated that this story is one of many told her by street waifs in London when the actress was engaged in journalistic work in the English capital.

Olga Petrova has certainly written an interesting play, and she is the kind of actress that holds the interested attention. She is not all artist. She is too frankly enjoying herself on the stage to be capable of that entirely impersonal detachment from self by which the real artist submerges self. She looks at the audience too often, instead of at the imaginary wall which should stand between her and her audience. She even smiles with unaffected pleasure, at times, when the audience is amused, showing its enjoyment openly.

But she holds you, and so does her play. She is evidently an energetic, capable woman; not only does she act and write, but she can address an audience. I note that she is billed to speak before a big woman's organization, and her curtain speech was interesting, fluent and entertaining. Also, she designs her own scenes; and each set was noticeably appropriate. Nor does she make the mistake of putting up with poor support. She is presented by the Selwyns, but I do not doubt that she had some say in the selection of the players, all of whom fitted satisfactorily in their roles.

Ilka cordially hated her tyrant father, for whose brutal despotism the crushed and submissive mother, most appropriately represented by Ludmilla Toretzka, prepared us in advance. And when the actor, George Pelzer, entered on the scene, he certainly filled the bill. The first act represents the filthy kitchen of the dejected and practically dying-in-her-boots wife of a man who is a slave-driver; the second, a room in a gaudy Kansas City lodging house; the third, the balcony of a gorgeous Florida hotel, and the fourth the artistic living-room in Ilka's dream home realized. Thus we see the gradual rise of the girl that destiny could not keep down.

In this last act, when happiness is awaiting Ilka, destiny smites her cruelly. But it seems that when the curtain falls it is not altogether on unmitigated tragedy. The spectator is permitted to hope for another ending than seems indicated. For so Mme. Petrova has said. The sorrows in Ilka's

life may have the effect of driving away those sensitive spirits who can only face hilarity in the theater. But, as a matter of fact, Mme. Petrova has supplied quite a rattling volley of lively dialogues and he who must laugh has plenty of opportunity.

Mme. Petrova, however, has the histrion's love of romance and she lets herself go in the last act. I suppose she introduced that final flagellation of Ilka, partly because it happens, and partly because, possibly, it was meant as a warning to run-away girls who think they can run life to suit themselves. It does not leave an agreeable impression, certainly. Neither did Brieux's "Damaged Goods," which, nevertheless, has accomplished some good in the world. And I shouldn't wonder if "Hurricane" might exercise a restraining influence on giddy-headed youngsters who do not know that such lurking hyenas as Joe Jennings exist.

This role was played with considerable fidelity by Joseph Granby. The romantic lover was played with due conventionality by Lewis Willoughby, while Percy Carr represented the disappointed doctor. For here spoke Mme. Petrova's exuberant romanticism. In spite of her half year of horror, two fine men who were aware of it wanted to marry Ilka.

Olga Petrova, as I have indicated, has her faults as an actress. But among her virtues are humor, a considerable gift of personality and an ability to absorb and hold the attention of her audience. Her voice lacks music, but she uses it ruthlessly in her comedy scenes, which go on skates. She is a blonde, and her reddish fair hair is an asset. So why did she wear white hair in the third act? Perhaps it and the red handkerchief were indications of Ilka's love of the bizarre. Mme. Petrova's face and features are narrow and pointed, her eyes very large. She is not a beauty, but decidedly has looks, and, it may be added, individuality to them. She is, perhaps over-exuberant, as an actress, but an intelligent, expressive actress, nevertheless, with plenty of detail to her work. And over-exuberance must be a great aid in the profession of acting.