



“HAPPY HOOKER”,
THEATRE IMPRESARIO
AND LONG-TIME
MARBELLA RESIDENT
XAVIERA HOLLANDER
BARES ALL TO
ANNABEL MILNES-SMITH

PHOTOS **JOHNNY GATES**

Xaviera Hollander

Keeper of a house of theatrical repute

It is not often that a journalist is given the opportunity to learn the secrets of success within the rather murky underworld of prostitution and the “madam” mentality, so when I was asked to interview the great New York madam Xaviera Hollander – author of *The Happy Hooker*, which has sold over 16 million copies worldwide – I, being a rather curious character, positively not only jumped but leapt at the chance.



It was at her magnificent villa, located in the hills of Marbella, that I met the madam extraordinaire and began my education into an area that, prior to this time, I had not and never will experience.

■ *First and foremost, are you proud to be constantly labelled as “The Happy Hooker”?*

“It’s not pride I have for it, nor is it a chip on my shoulder, but I never liked the title, as the label “hooker” defined a street hooker. There is a certain Hooker hierarchy, but the fact that producers are making a musical about my life and have already made countless documentaries is very flattering because on most occasions these are made about people who are dead. I am still one of the liveliest hookers and very happy, although not as rich as I was.”

■ *You entered into the world of prostitution and then invested \$10,000 to buy a list of clients from a New York madam. How did you gain her trust or were you already “helping” her?*

“Madeleine Reynolds was her name and I was one of the hookers who did not lose my money to pimps or drugs, but managed to save it. I am Dutch/Jewish! At the age of 40 Madeleine became pregnant and wanted to sell her business, which was humorously called ‘Erection and Demolition Services’. If any woman discovered a card in their partner’s pocket, they would be none the wiser. It was a great name and a great business. That is how it all started.”



■ *How did you gain your skills on sexual issues? Was it purely down to personal experience or just passion?*

"I would just say I had the gift of the gab and was the best secretary, good with my hands and with a few other attributes. I just learnt how to adapt these to a different set of circumstances. Also I love sex, although I was a virgin up until the age of 17. Since then, I have made up for lost time! I actually started off in a lesbian relationship; as syphilis was ripe at the time, it seemed the best way to go. I taught her how to kiss. That was all! Then I discovered that I was in fact a closet heterosexual and aimed for men most of my life."

■ *You are an accomplished writer on sexual issues and your book *The Happy Hooker* has sold millions of copies worldwide. What inspired you to write it?*

"It was purely accidental. I called some of the names on the list I had bought; one of them was Robin Moore. I asked him if he was the one who wrote *The Green Berets* and *French Connection*. At that time he did not know what I did. I said I was holding an art exhibition and asked him if he wanted to see my etchings. He soon got the picture. After that he visited me every two weeks and paid \$50. I became suspicious about him as he constantly asked me all these questions about my life. I contacted my lawyer and soon discovered he had secretly been taping me and was compiling a book about my life, titled *The Happy Hooker*. I got a measly percentage out of it and he didn't even write it himself. Since then, however, I have written 18 books which have sold very well."

■ *Actress Lynn Redgrave portrayed you in the film *The Happy Hooker*. What did you think of her performance?*

"I like her a lot and she had my accent absolutely right. However, Lynn had about as much sex appeal as a toothpick. She did one scene where she did the reverse of a striptease: she gets dressed in front of a stockbroker. It was just so boring that you could even take your grandmother or grandchild to watch it. I would have loved Julie Christie to play the part."

■ *You were engaged to the Belgian ambassador, for whom you also worked. He broke it off. Is that why you became involved in the call girl agency business?*

"More or less, yes. Following the split I lost my job and that is when I learnt the expression, 'Never dip your pen into the company's ink!'"

■ *You have appeared on many television programmes, including one with the great Larry King. Did you manage to survive his scrutiny?*

"He was very protective over me. I then explained that I love controversy. He went to town. However, my favourite programme was appearing on BBC2's *Hard Talk*. This is how I understood the art of interviewing. They asked

me superficial questions at the start and then went for the jugular. I burst into tears; the camera then zoomed in.”

■ *Can you tell us about the time you spent in a Japanese concentration camp?*

“It is why I am a fighter and survivor. My parents were separated during three years. Dad was a medical doctor and my mother was severely beaten up for smuggling a diamond in to pay for sugar to give to me while I suffered from a severe dysentery attack. She was put in a death house for two weeks. I was told my mother was dead. I was only three and half years old. Since that time, I have never wanted to be alone.”

■ *You had a lucrative theatre business but decided to fold it in 2005. Why was that?*

“I loved The Edinburgh Festival Fringe so much that I brought the best one-man or one-woman acts back to Holland. I always loved to combine food, pleasure and theatre in my Amsterdam house. Following six years of this, I received calls from various authorities asking if I had paid my music licence fee; this was followed by the police enquiring if I had a permit for my hotel and restaurant. This was the last straw. I closed the business but kept on producing plays in official theatres and took my shows on the road to Ireland, Mexico and just now even to Dubrovnik.”

■ *Back to your biography The Happy Hooker... For our magazine readers who have not read the book, where did you meet your clients?*

“When I started out, I had a small apartment where clients would wait their turn in the kitchen. Being typically Jewish I came to the conclusion, why not just get another girl to do the job for me? I hand-picked the crème de la crème of girls I liked and started to expand initially from a one-bedroom flat to two bedrooms and then to a fancy and spacious penthouse.”

■ *What also astounded me was that Xaviera gained her notorious, but highly successful, reputation, after only being in the business for two years...*

“You may call it a blitz career.”

■ *How many men did you see during the average working week?*

“About four or five a day.”

■ *Was it all about sex or did you build relationships?*

“Yes, I also did build relationships. Once I fell in love with a client and subsequently could not take money from him. He said, ‘What’s a nice girl like you doing in a place like this?’”

■ *How do you differentiate between having sex with a client or sex for fun?*

“I often didn’t. I learnt how to separate the two. I will admit that one thing I could not do was be a good swinger. If I would attend an orgy with someone I dearly loved I suffered



pangs of jealousy; mind you, I was a better ‘orgyniser’, good at setting the scenes.”

■ *You were one of the most infamous and famous madams and have slept with many “names”. Can you mention a few?*

“Sinatra was one of my clients but I did not sleep with him. Alfred Hitchcock was another one. Then, of course, there was Harry Belafonte. I met him in the elevator of the renowned Waldorf Astoria Hotel. I had a couple of *Happy Hooker* books with me. He asked if he could buy one and I could come to his room. I did and wrote in the book, ‘the bigger, the blacker, the better?’ Harry replied, ‘for me to know and for you to find out’. He was terrific; a real gentleman and what rhythm!”

■ *Any others?*

“Many sportsmen and famous racing drivers.”

■ *If you had your life to live again, would you walk down that same road?*

“No; not with all the awful diseases you can catch these days.”

■ *Back to the present day... You have a magnificent villa in the hills above Marbella and rent it out for the summer months. You are also rekindling your theatre productions here on the Coast. One is *Starstuck* and the other is *Mourning Glory: The Funeral of the Century Revisited*. They both star comic actor David Benson. What has re-ignited your passion for theatre and why specifically here in Marbella? You also say you will even bring some fun cabaret act in mid-December?*

“First and foremost I have always had a passion for theatre. My aunt was a well-known actress in California and my father was a writer. The spoken words have always meant the world to me. I have been going to the Edinburgh Festival for the past 32 years.

“Why Marbella? This was down to presenting the play *Nijinsky’s Last Dance*. It was a beautiful performance, which shortly after won the award as best play of the year. We ran it two nights in a



row. Many of my friends attended. As soon as they had seen it, they remarked, 'Why don't you bring English theatre to Marbella?' So I have, in conjunction with Sherry Midas, whom I met two years ago. She had asked me, having seen my website, if I would like to co-produce a play with her. So we did the Nijinsky play together. Her next play is another top act called *Slaves of Starbuck*, which will be performed in November. We are planning in future to each bring our own choice of different productions and intend to coordinate our plays with Lorraine Powell, the president of the Asociación de Arte y Cultura Marbella. I secured David Benson, a comic actor with a great voice, for both plays. He has class, brings his own inimitable style to the stage and is a most professional performer. He has been patronising the Edinburgh Festival for the past 32 years.

"The first serious play after *Nijinsky* that I am presenting is *Mourning Glory: The Funeral of*

the Century Revisited. It is about the last days of Diana, Princess of Wales – how she died and the public reaction. It is a tragic comedy.

"The second one is *Starstruck*, based on the following... Imagine having a party at which all your heroes are invited. How many of them would live up to your expectations? And how many would turn out to be a complete nightmare? In this magical, brilliantly performed show, David Benson meets Quentin Crisp, Frank Sinatra, Fred Astaire, Judy Garland, Groucho Marx, Noel Coward and many others – and finds out that hero-worship is not all that it seems.

"The third is *Continental Carousel*. In fact this will appear before the David Benson plays, 12 and 13 December, just before Christmas when people need a bit of cheering up. It is a fun, upbeat international cabaret act. I will also probably star in it myself, together with my dear friends Fifi L'Amour and her partner, Rodolpho Ravissant. He is an excellent classical pianist and gypsy virtuoso. This duo have worked together for 14 years, presenting cabaret throughout Europe, Britain and Australia.

"The ticket prices are only €25 each. We want to make theatre affordable and, therefore, more accessible."

■ *What else have you got in the pipeline?*

"I am always reinventing myself. From Happy Hooker and Happy Sleeper (Xavier's bed and breakfast in Amsterdam and her villa for rent in Marbella) to Happy Cooker dinner events... A queen in the kitchen – with the help of some good cooks, mind you. I do not cook, but regard myself as a bit of a slave owner. Put it



this way: I never have to crack the whip. People who love me just help me when it is needed; you don't have to be in a sado-masochist relationship for that. It's a matter of give and take. In fact, my greatest help in life for the last three years has been my husband Philip: caring and considerate and loving. My most important characteristic, which has kept me alive, is a sense of humour and an enormous love for people combined with an incredible stamina. I can make do with four to five hours sleep a night and still not get moody.

On a final note, Xavier incidentally means "the keeper of the house". Need I say more? Toodle Pip!



■ For theatre tickets: Telephone Xavier on (00 31) 20 6733934 in Amsterdam until 6 December, and then back in Marbella on 952 858 575; or xie@xavierahollander.com