

14/10/2024



## Time Travellers Club

Dear Club Members,

Sarah Bernhardt, also known as "The Divine Sarah" was born on 22nd (or maybe the 23rd) of October 1844, one hundred and eighty years ago. A French stage actress, whose fame spread beyond her native country, touring the world performing. By the end of the 19th century she was the most publicised and renowned actress, her life-off-stage capturing headlines as much as her performances on the stage.

Her mother, Henriette-Rosine Bernard was a Dutch-Jewish courtesan, her father is unknown. Her mother sent her to convent school to be educated, and despite her Jewish background she clearly felt at home there, at one point expressing a desire to become a nun. Instead one of her mother's lovers, Charles Duc de Morny, the illegitimate half-brother of Napoleon III, pulled some strings and gained her a place at the Paris Conservatory. When she failed to impress her teachers, he again stepped in and obtained a place for her at Comedie-Francaise, France's prestigious national theatre company.

In 1862 she made her debut in the lead role of Racine's Iphigenie. It did not go well, after the curtain call she is supposedly to have asked her teacher for forgiveness for her poor performance, his reply "I can forgive you, and you'll eventually forgive yourself, but Racine in his grave never will." Her reputation as a diva was formed in these early years, she suffered hugely from stage fright, was prone to histrionics, and once famously slapped a senior actress in the company.

Despite all this she loved performing, worked on her craft and in 1868 starred in the revival of Alexandre Dumas's play Kean to great acclaim.

She performed at least 70 roles in 125 plays over the course of her career, both female and male. Renowned for her dramatic death scenes, she played 19-year-old Joan of Arc when she was 46. At 55, she signed a 25-year lease on a theatre in Paris, renaming it Théâtre Sarah Bernhardt. She continued to tour the world later in life, even giving a recital at San Quentin Prison. An accident on stage led to the amputation of her right leg but she continued to perform on stage as well as for the troops on the battlefield of World War I. She did not use a prosthetic limb, instead relying upon strategically placed set pieces as she moved across the stage or being carried about upon a satin sedan chair in the style of Louis XV.

Always on the cutting edge, she starred in several silent films. Outside of the theatre she was famous for sleeping in a coffin as a bed and her exotic pet collection, which was said to include a boa constrictor, a lion, a parrot, a puma, two horses, a monkey named Darwin and an alligator named Ali Goga whom she served milk and champagne, ultimately sending him to an early grave. Bernhardt also spent outrageous sums of money paying off the many gambling debts of her son, Maurice, who had been born illegitimately when Sarah was just 20.

She's arguably the world's first celebrity, using her famous name to not just earn money on the stage, but to license her name and image to real estate ventures in the Bronx, New York, and to endorse products. She was a muse to many including Oscar Wilde and Marcel Proust. She had an affair with Victor Hugo when he was 70, and she just 27, and it was him who gave her the nickname "The Golden Voice". Her image was used in paintings, sculptures, photographs and

graphic designs. One of the artists who captured her image was Alphonse Mucha who created beautiful Art Nouveau posters, it's the soft colour palette of these that has inspired your fibre this month. I've put a link below, I'm sure they're be a familiar image, even if you never knew the name of the woman depicted.

She died in 1923, aged 78, and a million people supposedly lined the streets of Paris as her coffin was taken through the streets to the cemetery where she is buried.

Happy Spinning

Katie

Fibre Content- In case your parcel is missing the label

25% Cormo,  
13% Mulberry Silk  
62% corriedale

Further Reading-

<https://nmwa.org/art/artists/sarah-bernhardt/>

<https://www.historytoday.com/archive/sarah-bernhardts-leg>

<https://iwa.org/encyclopedia/article/bernhardt-sarah>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jOmSl8AeNdE>

Sarah in Art Nouveau posters-

<https://www.parisology.net/sarah-bernhardt-patroness-of-art-nouveau>

Silent footage of Sarah performing-

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mp\\_v\\_dP8s-8&t=17s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mp_v_dP8s-8&t=17s)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hdbmDYlCyh8>