

Astrid & Diana: Icons In Their Respective Kingdoms

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While the world has been focusing on the opening of the Mario Testino exhibition celebrating the beauty of Princess Diana at Kensington Palace, a similar exhibition celebrating the life of an equally tragic Princess has been unveiled in Brussels, Belgium by King Albert. The Royalist Correspondent Janice Seto examines the story of Queen Astrid whose life, like Diana, was prematurely wiped out in a terrible car crash.

She will always be young, beautiful, and compassionate towards children and the disadvantaged.

The youngest of three daughters, she and her younger brother Charles lived relatively simply in both the country and the city until her marriage at the age of 20. Killed in a car crash, her life is being celebrated in the capitol in an exhibition opening this month.

In the UK, she is Diana, Princess of Wales. Queen of Hearts, the People's Princess.

In Belgium, she is Astrid, la Reine des Neiges, the Snow Queen.

Unlike Diana, Astrid lived the fairytale.

Seventy years ago, aged just 29, the young Queen Astrid of the Belgians, consort of Leopold III, mother of two princes and a princess, died while her husband was behind the wheel of their car.

In her native Sweden, the exhibit there focused on the first part of her life, as the youngest daughter of Prince Carl of Sweden and Princess Ingeborg of Denmark.

{jumi [includes/jumies/rectanglew.php]}In 1925, at a court ball, the visiting Queen Elisabeth of the Belgians and her son, the Duke of Brabant, Crown Prince Leopold, met the young Princess Astrid.

The prince, smitten with the charming Astrid, began his courtship over several months of secretive visits. The only language they had in common was English so no one imagined the young suitor was the crown Prince.

One of Astrid's dresses, on display
at the new exhibition

Months later in the fall, at the engagement announcement in Brussels, the exotic Queen Elisabeth contrasted the restrained dignity of her husband, King Albert I, with a declaration this was a love match indeed.

A few days after the Protestant civil ceremony in Stockholm, Leopold was ashore in Belgium awaiting Astrid's arrival on a Swedish frigate. Dressed all in white, she made an impression as La princesse venue des neiges.

{jumi [includes/jumies/rectanglew.php]}In the same way Diana bounded on board the Royal Yacht Britannia in Toronto, Canada, to greet her boys, Leopold rushed aboard to greet his bride and the entire country witnessed the newlyweds in a heavy liplock!

The passionate royal kiss

that enchanted the world

'Welcome to Belgium, darling!'

It was a scene which enchanted everyone.

After the wedding in Brussels, the young Brabants performed royal duties, set up home, started a family and were wildly in love.

Even after the premature death of King Albert I in a climbing accident in 1934, Astrid and Leopold worked together and supported each other.

Unlike Prince Charles, who resented Diana's popularity, Leopold was hugely proud of his bride's appeal.

King Albert in front of a portrait of

Astrid at the opening of the exhibition

Recently, the descendants and relatives of Astrid proudly gathered at her former home in Brussels, now the Musee Bellvue, to honour the 100th anniversary of her birth at the exhibition.

Meanwhile, in London, Princes William and Harry paid what must have been a highly emotional, but private, visit to the Mario Testino exhibition at their former family home, Kensington Palace.

{jumi [includes/jumies/rectanglew.php]}Within their respective countries, neither young woman will ever be relegated to the history books, for they were both true royal stars who epitomised the image of royalty.

Although sadly not available in English, the official website offering further details about the Queen Astrid exhibition can be found [here](#).