

# The Enigmatic Polly Adler: A Jazz Age Icon Unraveled



## Madam: The Biography of Polly Adler, Icon of the Jazz

**Age** by Debby Applegate

★★★★☆ 4.3 out of 5

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Polly Adler, also known as "The Queen of the Speakeasies," was an enigmatic figure who epitomized the hedonistic era of the Jazz Age. Her name became synonymous with New York City's underworld, where she operated a string of popular speakeasies frequented by flappers, celebrities, and gangsters.

## Early Life and Origins

Polly Adler was born Pearl Polishuk in 1890 in the Russian Empire. She immigrated to the United States as a young woman and settled in New York City's Lower East Side. Little is known about her early life, but it is believed that she began working as a prostitute to support herself.

## Rise to Notoriety

In the early 1920s, during the Prohibition era, Adler opened her first speakeasy on 49th Street. The establishment quickly became a popular haunt for celebrities and New York's elite. Adler's savvy business sense and connections with gangsters like Arnold Rothstein and Owney Madden allowed her to operate her businesses with relative impunity.

Adler's speakeasies were known for their lavish décor, live music, and atmosphere of decadence. They became gathering places for the city's vibrant bohemian and underworld scenes. Adler herself became a celebrity, known for her beauty, charisma, and flamboyant lifestyle.

## **Madame Polly's**

In 1923, Adler opened her most famous establishment, Madame Polly's, at 219 West 48th Street. Madame Polly's became the epicenter of New York's nightlife, drawing a clientele that included F. Scott Fitzgerald, Charlie Chaplin, and Al Capone.

Adler's speakeasy was more than just a drinking establishment. It was a meeting place for intellectuals, artists, and gangsters. It was a place where societal norms were challenged and the lines between the upper and lower classes blurred.

## **Connections to the Harlem Renaissance**

Polly Adler also played a role in the Harlem Renaissance. Her speakeasies provided a space for African American musicians and artists to perform and socialize. She was known for her support of black entertainers and her opposition to racial discrimination.

Adler's connections to the Harlem Renaissance brought her into contact with some of the most prominent black figures of the era, including Duke Ellington, Cab Calloway, and Josephine Baker.

## **Decline and Downfall**

The end of Prohibition in 1933 marked the beginning of Polly Adler's decline. With the legalization of alcohol, her speakeasies lost their allure.

Adler also faced increasing pressure from the authorities, who were cracking down on organized crime.

In 1936, Adler was convicted of tax evasion and sentenced to prison. She served two years in prison and was deported to Europe upon her release. She returned to the United States in 1940, but her days as the "Queen of the Speakeasies" were over.

## **Legacy and Impact**

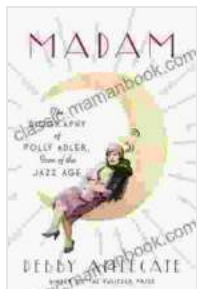
Polly Adler's legacy as a Jazz Age icon remains intact. She was a trailblazer who challenged social norms and created a space for decadence and entertainment during a tumultuous period in American history.

Her speakeasies were melting pots of different cultures and classes, where artists, gangsters, and celebrities rubbed shoulders. Adler herself was a complex and enigmatic figure, embodying both the glamour and the contradictions of the Jazz Age.

Polly Adler was a true original, a woman who left an indelible mark on New York City nightlife and the American imagination. Her life story is a fascinating tale of ambition, hedonism, and the search for a place to belong.

Through her speakeasies, Adler created a world where anything was possible, a world where the boundaries of society melted away. She was a symbol of the Jazz Age, a time of liberation and excess, but also a time of great social and economic upheaval.

Today, Polly Adler remains a reminder of the transformative power of the human spirit. Her story is a testament to the indomitable will and the enduring fascination with the enigmatic and glamorous.



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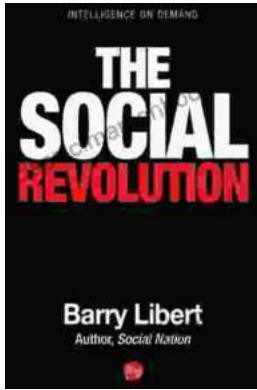
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