

Flamboyant - Introducing the Fabulous World of Opera: Bea Yell

The stage door was flung and there stood, silhouetted against the light, the new soprano the producer had invited for an audition. Dressed in red and dripping with (possibly fake) jewellery, she was unmissable, with huge sunglasses and an unmistakable air of drama. The other singers rushed up to her with rapturous cries of 'Darling' and 'Dearest', accompanied with lots of extravagant air kisses and fuss. She looked through me and proceeded into the dressing room to sit at the largest vanity mirror to apply even more make-up which her blood-red fingernails made difficult.

When I first arrived in the hall, a nervous seventeen-year-old baritone looked me up and down and asked what I was doing there.

'I...I'm the new wardrobe mistress,' I stammered.

'Whacko for the wardrobe,' he announced which had me blushing bright red and moving as far away from him as possible.

After the new 'star' went off to her audition, I overheard the other sopranos discussing the new arrival. These comments were accompanied by smirks; 'How old was she actually, how did she get her 'big break', who's her agent, the quality of her voice, is that her real hair colour?' and 'Who does she think she is with her airs and graces, Dame Nellie Melba?'

We were all called into the hall to hear the producer announce that the Arts Council had organised a tour around NSW country towns by train. The singers would be billeted for the most part, with local opera lovers. However, I was disappointed as I had to get all the costumes ready for the trip, but there was no funding for me to go with them.

There were plenty of stories to hear about when they returned. Needless to say, the new soprano managed to irritate the other singers and ingratiate herself with the wealthy land-owners along the way. But whenever she was unhappy or wanted something, she'd just scream. Unfortunately her voice gave out towards the end of the tour. She arrived back in the capital with a distinct croak, and sank into oblivion, much to the delight of her rivals.