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Florence Foster Jenkins



Synopsis

'People may say that I couldn't sing. But no one can say that I didn't sing.' Despite lacking pitch, rhythm or tone, Florence Foster Jenkins became one of America's best-known sopranos, celebrated for her unique recordings and her sell-out concert at Carnegie Hall. Born in 1868 to wealthy Pennsylvanian parents, Florence was a talented young pianist but her life was thrown into turmoil when she eloped with Frank Jenkins, a man twice her age. The marriage proved a disaster and, in order to survive, Florence was forced to abandon her dreams of a musical career and teach the piano. Then her father died in 1909 and, newly installed in New York, she used a considerable inheritance to fund her passion. She set up a prestigious amateur music club and began staging operas. Aided by her English common-law husband, St Clair Bayfield, she worked tirelessly to support the city's musical life. Many young singers owed their start to Florence, but she too yearned to perform and began giving regular recitals that quickly attracted a cult following. And yet nothing could prepare the world for the astonishing climax of her career when, at the age of seventy-six, she performed at the most hallowed concert hall in America. In *Florence Foster Jenkins*, Jasper Rees tells her extraordinary story, which inspired the film starring Meryl Streep and Hugh Grant, and directed by Stephen Frears. This remarkable book also includes Nicholas Martin's funny, moving and inspirational screenplay.

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Customer Reviews

Decca's CD Florece Foster Jenkins supposedly is the soundtrack for the new film of that name starring Meryl Streep as the American soprano (1868-1944) who was the talk of the operatic world during her era. Jenkins dreamed of being a famous opera star in spite of the fact she had no talent. To her ears, she was the best, totally deluding herself, to the dismay - and pleasure - of others. Married to a very wealthy man who would not permit her to sing publicly, when he died she could pursue her dream, giving private recitals as well as a sold-out concert in Carnegie Hall. Her accompanist[was Cosme (not "Cosmo") McMoon, who was able to keep a straight face as Mme. Jenkins was performing. She made a series of recordings for the private Melodram label. These were 78rpm recordings and I owned and treasured each one. Eventually they were issued on an RCA LP which is still available and has been reviewed on this site(REVIEW). Meryl Streep and pianist Simon Heilberg apparently spent many hours perfecting their realization of Mme. Jenkins' inadequate voice, with brilliant results. The Queen of the Night aria is a masterpiece, perhaps even funnier than the original (it only lacks innocence). There are some drawbacks. Valse Caressante is drastically cut, which omits the unbelievable cadenza. And four classic recordings have been omitted: Charmant Oiseau, The Musical Snuff Box), and Biassy, which is sung in fractured Russian. These classics surely should have been included. his disk says it is the soundtrack for the film, but it contains only music, all (except the Jenkins items) composed by Alesandre Desplat.

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