

**MEDIA RELEASE**

**SING'THEATRE PRESENTS HILARIOUS AND HEARTWARMING  
TRUE STORY OF SINGER FLORENCE FOSTER JENKINS**

*Asian Premiere "SOUVENIR" set for Singapore!*



**Singapore, 13 June 2018** - The hilarious and heartwarming true story of singer **Florence Foster Jenkins**, who filled Carnegie Hall to capacity, despite lacking the capacity to actually sing is set to hit the stage in Singapore this September!

**"SOUVENIR": A FANTASIA ON THE LIFE OF FLORENCE FOSTER JENKINS**, will star, **British actress Leigh McDonald** as Jenkins and **Singapore's beloved thespian Hossan Leong** as her accompanist Cosme McMoon who, 20 years after Jenkins' death, narrates the story, fondly flashing back to his time with the singer.

In this play with music, McMoon accompanied Jenkins for 12 years and came to love his employer, no doubt inspired by her drive and zeal. Audiences will also be inspired by Jenkins' pursuit of her passion in this two-character period piece.

*"This play is more than just a play about singing opera. It's more than just a play about a woman who can't sing. It's a play about dreams; it's a play about passion. We see Florence fulfill her dream and that to me is quite inspiring," says the play's **award-winning Singaporean director Samantha Scott-Blackhall.***

Based on the same fascinating story brought to life by Meryl Streep and Hugh Grant in the acclaimed film "Florence Foster Jenkins," this Sing'theatre production chronicles the wealthy heiress' fervent foray into the world of opera, seemingly oblivious to her lack of singing talent.

*"I like to quote Jacques Brel: Talent, it doesn't exist. Talent is simply having the desire to do something," says **producer and Sing'theatre founder Nathalie Ribette.***

In today's YouTube era (where 5 billion videos are watched on the video sharing site every day!) there certainly is no shortage of people with the desire to put themselves out there "doing something", anything, and many have become very famous for it. One must wonder how the world would have reacted to Jenkins today after videos of her singing went viral.

*"With today's over mediatization, she would have realized very quickly that people were laughing at her. Especially with social media. Her dreams would have been broken very quickly," says Ribette.*

Some surmise that Jenkins was aware of her detractors and that she wasn't as oblivious as she seemed. The majority of her concerts were self-produced and private, thus, she had strict control over who could attend - no critics allowed! Her audience included friends who would cheer loudly to drown out the guffaws. Jenkins was suffering from an incurable illness and it may just be that her love of opera and the joy she derived from performing it, helped her cope.

Ribette truly understands the healing power of music. Sing'theatre regularly stages musical performances in Singapore hospitals uplifting the spirits of patients and improving their journey to recovery.

Want to improve your singing? Sing'theatre will be holding a daily lucky draw for a 60 minute vocal lesson with a professional vocal coach from Sing'theatre Academy during the run of the show. A great chance to find your inner rock star AND it's good for your health!

"Definitely, music is always a form of therapy for the performers and the audience. I think Florence's singing certainly must have been therapeutic for her" *says Ribette.*

### Practical information:

"Souvenir" will run from **September 19-29** at the KC Arts Centre – Home of SRT.

Tickets will be available through SISTIC **from 18 June 2018** onwards.

For more information, follow Sing'theatre on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/Singtheatre](http://www.facebook.com/Singtheatre)

Also follow Sing'theatre on:

[www.singtheatre.com](http://www.singtheatre.com)

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### Quotes

"SOUVENIR is downright hilarious...Temperley has brought to this his own sense of mirth as well as a sensibility that doesn't settle for mere mirth. — **Boston Globe.**

"...an unexpectedly gentle and affecting comedy." — **NY Times.**

"Tone-deaf but utterly pitch-perfect. What is extraordinary about SOUVENIR is that Temperley has made Jenkins, for all her foolishness, a remarkably sympathetic woman..." — **NY Daily News.**

### Notes to editors:

- Interviews are available upon request with the following:
  - Producer Nathalie Ribette
  - Performers Leigh McDonald and Hossan Leong
  - Director Samantha Scott-Blackhall
  - Voice coach TJ Taylor

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## About Florence Foster Jenkins

Florence Foster Jenkins, original name Nascina Florence Foster, (born July 19, 1868, Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, U.S.—died November 26, 1944, New York, New York, U.S.), American amateur soprano, music lover, philanthropist, and socialite who gained fame for her notoriously off-pitch voice. She became a word-of-mouth sensation in the 1940s through her self-funded performances in New York City.

Jenkins was born into a wealthy and cultured family. Her father, Charles Dorrance Foster, was a successful banker and lawyer, and her mother was a painter. Her parents supported her early interest in music with piano lessons but refused to pay for singing lessons when she showed no natural ability in that capacity. Undeterred, she set off to pursue a career as a soprano on her own. In 1883 she married Francis Thornton Jenkins, a physician from whom she contracted syphilis. She separated from Jenkins in 1902. She met the actor St. Clair Bayfield in about 1908, and he became Jenkins's manager and companion for the rest of her life. Upon her father's death in 1909, Jenkins inherited a great deal of money that she put toward voice lessons. Those lessons revealed clearly that she could not carry a tune or hit the high notes expected of a soprano, that she had no sense of rhythm, and that she was essentially tone deaf. Again, undeterred, and now with the necessary funds, she began to arrange her own performances for small club luncheons and teas and establish a career for herself. She also founded the Verdi Club in 1917, a society to support musicians.

The death of her mother in 1930 left Jenkins with a sizable inheritance and the freedom to expand her singing activities. She also used her money to become active within the cultural clubs and organizations in the city. By all accounts, Jenkins felt extremely confident in her singing abilities, loved to sing, and went to whatever lengths necessary to perform. She often performed in full costume of her own design, most of the time with her piano accompanist Cosmé McMoon. In the 1940s, then in her 70s, she financed five recordings of her singing arias, which were released by the Melotone record label. Her first recording (1941) featured the arias of the Queen of the Night from Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, and it sold very well—primarily, however, as a novelty item. The pinnacle of her career—a sold-out show (organized by Jenkins) at Carnegie Hall on October 25, 1944, came just one month before she died. Before a crowd of 3,000 devoted fans, critics, and those interested in witnessing the spectacle that Jenkins had become, she performed arias and songs accompanied by McMoon. The crowd erupted, and an onslaught of mocking newspaper reviews followed. She had a heart attack a few days later and died the next month.

When considering Jenkins's unusual persona and career, many questions arise regarding the roles Bayfield and McMoon played in encouraging what seemed to be a profound state of self-delusion. The fact that Jenkins lived with syphilis may have had an impact on her behaviour. It seems clear that without money (and the ability to laugh off criticism and disapproval), Jenkins likely would not have had a singing career. But according to personal accounts by those who knew her, she was entirely devoted to and greatly knowledgeable about music and found the utmost joy and satisfaction in performing.

She left her mark as evidenced by the re-release of her records: *A Florence! Foster!! Jenkins!!! Recital!!!!* (1954), *Florence Foster Jenkins: The Glory (????) of the Human Voice* (1962), *Florence Foster Jenkins and Friends: Murder on the High Cs* (2003), and *The Muse Surmounted: Florence Foster Jenkins and Eleven of Her Rivals* (2004). In 2015 a movie in French titled *Marguerite* was based on the story of Jenkins's life, and a biopic (based on the biography by Nicholas Martin and Jasper Rees) starring Meryl Streep in the title role was released in 2016.

Source: Encyclopaedia Britannica