

The Price of Perfection [C1]

Il film “Maria” di Pablo Larraín, interpretato da Angelina Jolie, esplora la vita della leggendaria soprano, la sua disciplina implacabile e il dolore che si cela dietro il suo personaggio di diva.

Maria Callas had a reputation for being difficult to work with, throwing tantrums, cancelling performances and storming out of rehearsals. While it was rumoured that she was spoilt, melodramatic and oversensitive, perhaps this is the price an artist must pay for perfection. Angelina Jolie plays Callas in Pablo Larraín’s film Maria. Jolie spoke about the opera star and what the word ‘diva’ might mean. **Angelina Jolie:** It’s often come with a lot of negative connotations. I think it is often other people’s perception of a woman that defines sometimes too much who she is and who she was or what she intended. And I actually think she was one of the hardest-working people.

EXTREME DISCIPLINE

The director talks more about extreme discipline, entirely necessary to stay ahead in creative professions. **Pablo Larraín:** A diva would never exist if there’s not excellence in what she does. And in opera, like in cinema, if you don’t have discipline, you’re out. And, being a perfectionist, being someone really tough and disciplined, can create the sensation in others that... you know, Maria Callas would go to a rehearsal and if any of the other singers missed one word, she would leave.

IMMENSE PRESSURE

The movie uses around 95 per cent of Callas’ original recordings. However, Larraín insisted that Jolie herself sing too. This was extremely stressful, admits Jolie. **Angelina Jolie:** I was terribly nervous. I spent almost seven months training. There are audio recordings of her teaching. So I got to be taught by Maria, who said when she approaches her work, she said, the first

thing you do — and she calls it “[straightjacketing](#)” —; you don’t think about how you feel or what you want, you just try to understand the music and the intention of the composer and you are disciplined, you do the work exactly as intended and you practise and practise. And then, the final thing, you let your personal emotion come in. Only then, and only when you’re ready. But my first time singing, I remember being so nervous. My sons were there and they helped to block the door [so] that nobody else was coming in, and I was [shaky](#). And Pablo, in his decency, started me in a small room and ended me in La Scala!

SOLITARY STATE

For Callas, the shock of losing her voice, something that she had worked so hard to perfect, was [compounded](#) by the [mockery](#) of critics who believed her talent to have been [squandered](#). Jolie talks more about this. **Angelina Jolie:** I sat with her glasses on and her Greek hair and her [robe](#) and thought of her alone in her kitchen with Bruna and Ferruccio and who that person was. I wish she was here today to see this kindness to her life, because when she [passed](#), the last experience she had... she went out and she tried, and the critics were so cruel. I think she may have died with a lot of loneliness and pain.

MIRROR TO EMOTIONS

While her incredible life ended tragically young, says actor Pierfrancesco Favino, La Divina’s legacy [lives on](#). **Pierfrancesco Favino:** Artists at that level are the ones who are able [to mirror](#) our emotions. And they are extremely alone because nobody understands the sacrifice and the effort that they make to get to that level. But in the end, the [gift](#) we’re given is our possibility of feeling what we feel thanks to those people.

Glossary

- **to mirror** = rispecchiare
- **spoilt** = maleducata
- **tough** = dura
- **mockery** = beffa
- **lives on** = perdurare
- **squandered** = sperperare
- **passed** = morire
- **gift** = regalo
- **throwing tantrums** = fare i capricci
- **rehearsals** = prova
- **missed** = sbagliare
- **compounded** = aggravare
- **storming out** = uscire furiosa
- **robe** = vestaglia, toga
- **performances** = attuazioni
- **to stay ahead** = mantenersi al vertice
- **straightjacketing** = camicia di forza
- **shaky** = tremante