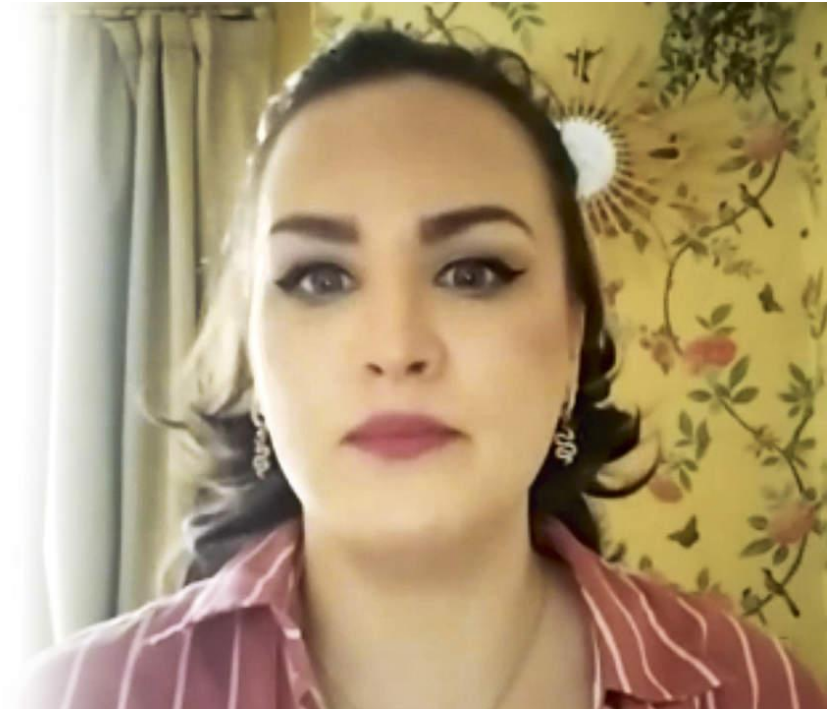


Maria Callas: A Greek Tragedy [C1]

Lyndsy Spence presenta una biografia della celebre soprano che rivela i desideri di una donna intrappolata dalle norme sociali, in costante lotta per la propria indipendenza.



Maria Callas is one of the most famous names in opera and many biographies have covered aspects of her life. In 2020, Lyndsy Spence began investigating Callas through recently available letters, many of which she found in archives in the US. In her biography [Cast](#) a Diva: The Hidden Life of Maria Callas, Spence [depicts](#) woman trapped in a restrictive society, constantly struggling to maintain her independence. To find out more, we contacted Spence. We began by asking her what her intentions were in writing the book. **Lyndsy Spence (Northern Irish accent):** My goal with Callas was not scandals and love affairs, it was to really just put everything to bed that people say about her. There's no great mystery surrounding Maria Callas. People get angry, they say: "Leave the myth alone, leave the artist alone, don't [probe](#) into her life!" and I think, "Well, why not? Because you're happy enough for the rumours to continue, but what's wrong with the truth?".

DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILY

Through Callas's letters, Spence discovered a troubled family relationship.

Lyndsy Spence: There were letters from her mother that were in Greek, and they were blackmailing Maria, they were saying: "We hope you get cancer of the throat. Give us 200 dollars." In 1964, her father invents this big story that he has cancer and he's going to die and he's in a pauper's hospital and could she pay his medical bills? And it turns out his second wife and her family just wanted money from Callas. And she cut him off after that.

LOVELESS MARRIAGE

Callas's marriage to Giovanni Battista Meneghini was not a happy one, says Spence. **Lyndsy Spence:** She met him in Verona. They were married in 1949. He became her manager and he was taking her fee in cash and investing it in bad business deals. He was very emotionally abusive, he'd say: "You're fat. You're a dog. You're nothing without me." She stopped taking care of herself and she became very dishevelled.

WEIGHT LOSS

Callas, who weighed over a hundred kilograms in early 1953, decided to lose weight. Divorce was impossible in Italy at that time, but this was something she thought she could take control of, says Spence. **Lyndsy Spence:** She became obsessed with it. She was taking iodine injections, which is very dangerous. I discovered her menus and everything is so controlled. "Cook bread and just breathe in the scent"; "One slice of a pear." She turned to Dr. Feelgood, who was medicating Marilyn Monroe and JFK, and she was taking speed, and it really took its toll on her. She was falling into a darker way of living.

SECRET ILLNESS

In 1968, Aristotle Onassis, with whom Callas was having a love affair, married Jackie Kennedy, the widow of the assassinated US president. However, recent

evidence suggests that Callas's heartbreak was [the least](#) of her worries: she may have been suffering from a serious illness. **Lyndsy Spence:** She writes of all of these symptoms: muscles going, spasms, headaches, she would lose her vision. In 1975 she mentions a neurologist, and I wrote to him through his academy and his daughter wrote back. And he treated her, and today we would think that she'd be on the MS [multiple sclerosis] spectrum. But of course, by 1975 you'd go over twenty years without treatment.

RAPID DECLINE

Towards end of her life, Callas became isolated. **Lyndsy Spence:** She had a pianist friend who kept her [stocked up](#) with Mandrax, which is drugs that sedate your nervous system. She became addicted. And Jackie Callas, her sister, was also sending her Mandrax in exchange for two hundred dollars every month. I think she knew she was staring death in the eye.

TRYING TO SURVIVE

After Callas died of a heart attack in 1977, her family and Meneghini fought for ownership of her possessions, and disputes still remain. But Callas was only a victim of circumstance, says Spence. **Lyndsy Spence:** In a way she is just like every other woman, she has to answer to her husband. She was always trying to be independent: she had her own career, her own money, but she is still being pulled back by society. Callas was always just trying to survive.

Glossary

- **took its toll** = avere un effetto negativo
- **the least** = la minore
- **stocked up** = fornire
- **depicts** = descrivere
- **dishevelled** = trasandata
- **slice** = fetta
- **scent** = aroma
- **probe** = esplorare
- **blackmailing** = ricattare
- **cut him off** = tagliare, interrompere
- **Cast** = assegnare un ruolo
- **throat** = gola
- **pauper** = indigente
- **fee** = tariffa