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Kiri Te Kanawa as Countess Rosina in the *Marriage of Figaro*

Kiri Te Kanawa: A diva

One of our most successful and recognised international performers is the opera singer Kiri Te Kanawa. Her fame mostly came from performing music that is not New Zealand made, but she also gained international exposure for traditional and contemporary Maori songs through recordings such as 'Pokarekare ana'.

After winning the prestigious Mobil Song Quest in 1965 Kiri left for the London Opera Study Centre. Her tutor felt that she lacked singing technique but that she had a gift for captivating audiences.

She rose to international prominence after performing at Covent Garden, and she went on to appear in major roles at the world's great opera houses, including London's Royal Opera House, the New York Metropolitan, Milan's La Scala and the Paris Opera. By the time she won the role of the Countess in *The Marriage of Figaro* in 1969, the conductor, Colin Davis, declared that he couldn't believe his ears: 'I've taken thousands of auditions, but it was such a fantastically beautiful voice.'

It is for her performance at the 1981 wedding of Prince Charles and Lady Diana Spencer in St Paul's Cathedral that Kiri Te Kanawa is best remembered by many New Zealanders. An estimated television audience of 600 million people saw her perform Handel's 'Let the bright seraphim'. The following year she was made a Dame of the British Empire by Queen Elizabeth

Despite being based overseas since 1965, Kiri Te Kanawa performed regularly at home. As part of New Zealand's sesquicentenary celebrations in 1990 she gave a series of homecoming concerts, and her Millennium Concert in Gisborne in January 2000 was broadcast live to over 80 countries.

Kiri Te Kanawa retired from the opera stage in 2004. In response to the many accolades she received throughout her career, she described singing as 'the reason why I was born'.

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