

**ENTER MADAME; A
PLAY IN
THREE ACTS**

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Enter madame; a play in three acts by Gilda Varesi & Dolly Bryne

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GILDA VARESI & DOLLY BRYNE

**ENTER MADAME; A
PLAY IN
THREE ACTS**



Enter Madame

A Play in Three Acts

By

Gilda Varesi and Dolly Byrne

Introduction by
Alexander Woollcott

Frontispiece by
W. T. Benda

G. P. Putnam's Sons
New York and London
The Knickerbocker Press

1921

Produced by
Brock Pemberton
with the following cast

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e

GERALD FITZGERALD	
Madame's husband . . .	<i>Mr. Norman Trevor</i>
MRS. FLORA PRESTON	
A widow	<i>Miss Jane Meredith</i>
TAMAMOTO	
Mr. Fitzgerald's servant .	<i>Mr. George Moto</i>
JOHN FITZGERALD	
His son	<i>Mr. Gavin Muir</i>
ALINE CHALMERS	
John's fiancée	<i>Miss Sheila Hayes</i>
BICE	
Madame's maid	<i>Miss Michele Burani</i>
THE DOCTOR	
Her personal physician. .	<i>Mr. Francis M. Verdi</i>
MISS SMITH	
Her secretary	<i>Miss Minnie Milne</i>
ARCHIMEDE	
Her chef	<i>Mr. William E. Hallman</i>
MADAME LISA DELLA	
ROBBIA	<i>Miss Gilda Varesi</i>

Albert Bannister, Stage Manager.

FOREWORD

On a sweltering evening in mid-August, 1920—a night of rumbling thunder and wilted collars and ruined dispositions—this comedy called *Enter Madame* slipped quietly into New York by way of the then idle Garrick Theatre and immediately established itself as one of those happy plays which cause stampedes at the box office. The fame of it spread with unusual rapidity. Pilgrims to the great city always arrive with one hand guarding their luggage and the other extending a slip of paper, on which they have jotted down the names of the pieces they intend (or rather hope) to see during their visit. Long before the aforesaid hot spell had entirely abated, it was noted by the sensitive ticket agents that one play was recurring persist-

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ently in all those aspiring lists. That play was *Enter Madame*.

Whereat there was rejoicing among all those who like to see whatever is fine-grained and creditable to the theatre greeted with that kind of overwhelming popular support which the pessimists insist is always reserved for what is gross and cheap and tawdry—great rejoicing, indeed, among those who knew, or came to know, something of the story that lay behind the writing and the acting of it. Such back-stage snooping as this implies is often disillusionizing and almost always unwarrantably intrusive. But some glance into what might be called the personal history of *Enter Madame* is justified because it involves not only the manner but the matter of the play.

It is a motley story, one that pokes back a hundred years among the dusty laurels of Italian opera, makes such ambitious leaps as a journey from Rome to Chicago involves, and sketches, in shadowy outline, the tragic

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figure of one for whom the brilliant and satisfying première of *Enter Madame* came just too late.

This play was written by Gilda Varesi and Dolly Byrne, though, in its earliest days, the identity of Varesi herself as one of its authors was discreetly hidden behind the *nom de plume* of Giulia Conti. The Madame who enters (and exits) like a dazzling and somewhat disturbing comet is a world-famous prima donna, a spoiled, petted, whimsical, stormy lady whose alternating tenderness and tantrums make up what is most easily described and dismissed as a comedy of temperament—just as if that loose description did not fit nearly every comedy which survives in the theatre.

This Madame Della Robbia is just such another first lady of Italian opera as was Elena Varesi, whose sweet voice and unforgettable charm made her welcome every season in all the citadels of opera from Berlin to London. Elena Varesi reigned in the

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eighties, herself the daughter of the great Felice Varesi for whom the baritone rôle in *Rigoletto* was written and the granddaughter of that enchanting Luigia Boccabadotti who was such a favourite in Rome in the days when Chateaubriand was writing enthusiastically about her to Madame Récamier in Paris. It was of such glory that Gilda Varesi, Elena Varesi's older daughter, trailed the clouds when she came into the world.

Now, her most vivid memories of her mother are of a radiant lady, who, when her tours permitted and she happened to feel that way, used occasionally to sweep down on startled Milan where her two daughters had been installed under the wing of a formidable nurse. There would be a shower of gracious gifts and endearments and maternal solicitude crowded into a few exciting days and then the prima donna would go whirling on in her course, perhaps to take the baths at Aix, perhaps to burst on London for a dazzling, fondly cherished engagement at Covent Garden.