

AMERICAN CONSERVATORY THEATER  
Carey Perloff, Artistic Director Heather Kitchen, Executive Director

PRESENTS

# WORDS <sup>on</sup> PLAYS

INSIGHT INTO THE PLAY, THE PLAYWRIGHT, AND THE PRODUCTION

## *Souvenir*

*A Fantasia on the Life of Florence Foster Jenkins*

BY STEPHEN TEMPERLEY  
DIRECTED BY VIVIAN MATALON  
AMERICAN CONSERVATORY THEATER  
FEBRUARY 13—MARCH 15, 2009

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A.C.T. is supported in part by the Grants for the Arts/San Francisco Hotel Tax Fund, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the donors of *The Next Generation Campaign*.

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## EXCERPTS FROM REVIEWS OF FLORENCE FOSTER JENKINS'S CARNEGIE HALL PERFORMANCE

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**NEW YORK POST, EARL WILSON**

Mrs. Florence Foster Jenkins, 76, a widow lady of our town, has a great voice. In fact, she can sing anything but notes. Lady Florence, or Madame Jenkins as she likes to be called, if you are thinking of her as an artiste, indulged last night in one of the weirdest mass jokes New York has ever seen.

She filled Carnegie Hall with 3,000 people with an acute sense of humor, who paid about \$6,000 for the privilege of snickering, squealing, and guffawing at her singing, which she took very seriously. I sat in row 11, and around me I heard people saying, "Shh, don't laugh so loud. . . . Stick something in your mouth. . . . We were jackasses for coming . . . she didn't hit three notes in that one. . . . Now *that* one wasn't bad at all."

**NEW YORK SUN, OSCAR THOMPSON**

It was largely a recital without voice. For the tones Madame Jenkins produced were tiny, to the point of disappearing. Much of her singing was hopelessly lacking in a semblance of pitch. But the further a note was from its proper elevation, the more the audience laughed, and applauded. And the upper notes, when they could be heard, had an infantile quality. But the audience always backed up its laughter with thunderous applause, and everybody had a pleasant evening.

**WORLD TELEGRAM, ROBERT BAGAR**

Of all the singers appearing in public today, only Madame Jenkins has perfected the art of giving added zest to a written phrase by improvising it in quarter tones, either above or below the original notes. Think of the difficulties involved in making this possible.

She was exceedingly happy in her work. It is a pity that so few artists are, and the happiness was communicated, as if by magic, to her hearers who were stimulated to the point of audible cheeriness, even joyous laughter and ecstasy by the inimitable singing. A night of nights in the musical annals of this fair city.