

SALLY SOPRANO I



Confidential Instructions for Sally's Agent

You have just become a partner in a firm that manages and acts as agent for celebrities. Sally Soprano is certainly not a major client, but you want to do a good job with this first assignment as a partner, especially since you have an interest in expanding your firm's opera practice. This is the first time you have handled Ms. Soprano's account.

You met Ms. Soprano yesterday. She is an older soprano who still has a good voice, particularly for her age. During your discussions with her, you gathered the following information:

She has not had a prime role in more than two years, although she has had a number of secondary roles. Her popularity has declined somewhat in the past few years. Lyric Opera, with whom Sally has sung many times over the years, has a production of Bellini's *Norma* scheduled to open in three weeks. The challenging title role is generally acknowledged to be a prize for a young soprano. When the Lyric announced this season's schedule over a year ago, Renata Risingstar was listed in the title role for *Norma*. Ms. Risingstar is generally regarded as a first-rate performer, although she has not yet attained the popularity Sally enjoyed at the peak of her career. Three weeks ago, Ms. Risingstar's name was suddenly dropped from the opera's advertising, and rumors began circulating that she had either become ill or gotten into a dispute with the artistic director. Sally got in touch with the artistic director to ask if the title role was open. Sally knows the part well and has sung it successfully many times. Yesterday Sally was informed by the Lyric that they might be interested in signing her for the *Norma* role. A meeting has been scheduled for today between you, as Sally's agent, and the Lyric's business manager to discuss the situation.

The Lyric Opera is an established institution in a major metropolitan area. As with most opera companies, it is a not-for-profit entity that is financed by a combination of ticket sales, foundation and corporate grants, and income from a modest endowment. It usually breaks even over the course of the year, with fairly good attendance in its 2,000-seat hall. Ticket prices range from \$18 to \$55. This production of *Norma* is scheduled to run for six weeks, with three performances per week.

Sally desperately wants this role. It could signal a real comeback and would give her a good chance at an important role in a forthcoming television special on opera. The TV special would pay \$45,000 and would probably lead to many other singing engagements. Sally was overjoyed at Lyric's possible interest in her. Sally has told you that getting the part is what counts; the

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amount of compensation is secondary. She told you that, frankly, she would be willing to sing the part for nothing, except for reasons of professional pride, reputation, and the potential impact on future engagements, although the higher the price the better.

Sally's salary over the last two years for secondary roles in operas of this type has ranged from \$10,000 to \$18,000. Four years ago, when she was at the pinnacle of her career, she received \$22,000 for performing the title role in *Norma* at the Lyric. Since then, due to inflation and the increased popularity of opera, the amount paid to top opera singers has nearly doubled. Sally recognizes, however, that she cannot count on producing sold-out performances the way she could then.

Last year, the inexperienced young soprano who sang the title role of *Norma* for the Lyric was said to have been paid over \$24,000. The last time Sally sang for the Lyric was over a year ago, in the secondary soprano role of Adalgisa, also in *Norma*, for which she received \$12,500 and received reasonably good reviews. Although it is difficult to generalize, performers in lead opera roles of this type are usually paid at least twice the amount received by singers in secondary roles.

Sally believes that her experience and maturity make her particularly appropriate for the title role. Norma is the high priestess of the Temple of Esus. She is secretly married to the Roman Consul and has had two children with him. There are two other sopranos in the opera: Adalgisa, the virgin of the temple, and Clotilde, the attendant to Norma. Sally feels that, given her age, she would no longer be the best person to play the role of Adalgisa or Clotilde. However, she believes that at this stage of her life she relates well to the role of Norma. In fact, Sally's view is that she actually may have been too young when she performed the role of Norma in the past and that she would perform this role better today.

One of the Lyric's major concerns is the attendance Sally's performances would generate. The Lyric is said to average around an 85 percent house over the course of a year, but many performances are sold out. On the other hand, a bad house can be financially devastating for the annual budget. While her voice remains strong, she has had a few mediocre days, which wasn't true four years ago. That is one reason why you think Sally has been offered fewer roles recently. If Sally's performances generated a 50 percent or 60 percent house, this would almost surely be her last leading role. In fact, anything under 80 percent would probably finish her career. Sally is confident, however, that a 50 percent or 60 percent house would be extremely unlikely to occur as a result of her contribution.

Prepare for your meeting with the Lyric Opera's Business Manager.