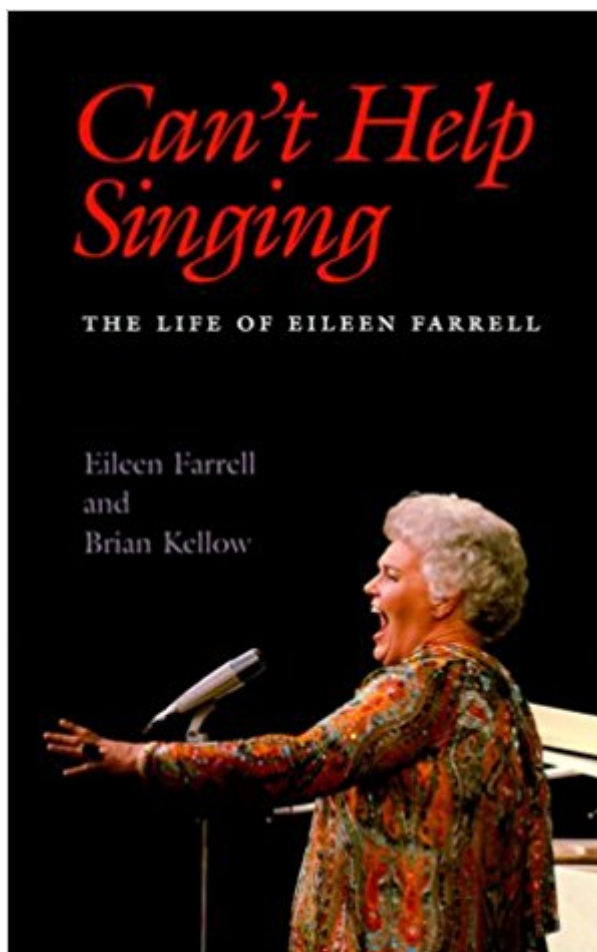


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# Can't Help Singing: The Life Of Eileen Farrell



## Synopsis

Eileen Farrell is blessed with two voices. A classically-trained dramatic soprano who also loves to belt pop songs and torch the blues, she successfully conquered the worlds of opera and popular music over the course of her whirlwind career. Now, Farrell shares reminiscences about her remarkable professional and personal life. With candor, humor, and affection, she recalls her New England childhood, her overnight success at age twenty as star of her own CBS radio show, her big break dubbing vocals for Eleanor Parker in the MGM movie *Interrupted Melody*, and her many guest appearances on television shows. Farrell discusses her rise to fame as an opera star, from her highly acclaimed performance in *Medea* in 1955, to her historic debut at the Metropolitan Opera in *Alceste* in 1960. She also fondly recollects her marriage of forty years to New York police officer Robert Reagan and her life outside the limelight, including her frustrating tenure as a faculty member at Indiana University. Farrell speaks frankly about her tumultuous years at the Met, where her head-to-head confrontations with Sir Rudolph Bing brought her promising operatic career to an abrupt close after five seasons. While she loved singing the music of Verdi, Mascagni, and Giordano, Farrell reveals that she never reconciled herself to the life of a diva, preferring the friendliness of show business to the aloofness of the opera world. Populated with such figures as Leonard Bernstein, Arturo Toscanini, Maria Callas, Ethel Merman, Mabel Mercer, and Carol Burnett, this engaging memoir takes the reader from backstage at the Met to behind-the-scenes of the Ed Sullivan Show, providing a fascinating view of opera and the entertainment industry. Eileen Farrell's legion of fans will delight in her inviting story of a career that was like no other singer's.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

If the test of an autobiography is whether the reader comes to know (and like) the subject, then Farrell succeeds admirably with this frank and charming account of her extraordinary career. She doesn't gloss over mistakes or weaknesses; nor does she quote endlessly from her reviews. In short, she appears genuinely modest while being honest about her abilities and successes. Her singing career was unique, with enormous success both in classical music and jazz. She worked with many famous singers and conductors of her time and doesn't hold back her blunt opinions of them. She explains the brevity of her career at the Metropolitan Opera, her controversial teaching career at Indiana University, and her rewarding experience with the Bach Aria Group. Many of her recordings have recently been reissued on compact disc, making this a perfect time for the first book about her career to appear. Recommended for academic and public library collections. AKate McCaffrey, Onondaga Cty. P.L., Syracuse, NY Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Music buffs will love this spirited memoir from a world-renowned dramatic soprano who combined opera and pop in her controversial repertoire and shunned the role of prima donna in favor of Staten Island housewife. Born to a musical Irish Catholic family, Farrell had her own program on WCBS by the time she was 20. Her radio repertoire was largely arias and art songs, but she was also experimenting with popular music. After marriage to a New York City policeman a pairing that triggered her image as a blue collar housewife with a voice and the birth of her son, Farrell set out on the concert and recital circuit. She performed with most of the major conductors, and pulls no punches in commenting on her colleagues. Arthur Fiedler, for instance, was "one of the world's worst. Thomas Schippers and Leonard Bernstein, on the other hand, were "the two best singers' conductors I ever worked with." A stint in Hollywood to provide the voice in a film bio of Metropolitan opera star Margery Lawrence, and frequent radio and television appearances (Ed Sullivan, Carol Burnett), kept her name before the general public, as did a blues album and two concurrent classical recordings. Once Farrell entered the classical pantheon with a concert version of Medea, her first full-length opera performance, the call finally came from Metropolitan Opera general manager Rudolph Bing. But after only five seasons at the Met, her relationship with Bing, wary to begin with, "worked [its] way up to intense dislike." Post-Met, she taught, continued to concertize, and, after her husband died in 1986, cut a series of popular albums, the last issued in 1995. Now 79, Farrell no longer performs publicly but has some cogent comments on the current musical

scene. An unpretentious story of carving out a memorable singing career sans substance abuse and tantrum though it certainly helps to have a magnificent voice. (b&w photos) -- Copyright ©1999, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.

Short and sweet...From scat in the classroom to Opera at the Met. If you think Opera is boring I dare you to read Eileen Farrell's own words. She loved music. All music. You will be surprised at what she taught. Delightful, easy to read. Eileen becomes alive. You will see the woman behind the stage. By the time you close the book you will agree with Mr. Bernstein that the human voice is the most exciting musical instrument there is. See for yourself. jal

THIS IS AN EXCELLENT BOOK AND A WONDERFUL FIND FOR ANY LOVER OF EILEEN FARRELL! I RECOMMEND IT HEARTILY. THE SERVICE WAS WONDERFUL. THIS IS THE SECOND COPY I HAVE ORDERED, AND I AM VERY PLEASED. DINA WINTER

Thank you, Eileen Farrell, for a wonderful career and for your candor in telling your very personal and inspiring story. I couldn't put the book down! As a professional singer myself, I found your experiences from your innocence at the first audition to your regular radio show moving and encouraging. Your book is as honest and refreshing as your performances and a must-read for even those with no interest in opera.

Actually it's an autobiog with the skilled assistance of Brian Kellow! A must for every opera fan! Even if the reader only knows Mme Farrell by her recorded legacy!

legendary singer great reading

Eileen Farrell is one of the most gifted and celebrated American singers of the twentieth century. She is both a classically trained dramatic soprano and a talented songstress of pop songs and the blues. *Can't Help Singing: The Life Of Eileen Farrell* is a superbly crafted memoir in which she shares candid reminiscences about her professional career and her personal life. With humor and affection she surveys her New England childhood, her sudden success at the age of twenty starring in her own CBS radio show, dubbing for Eleanor Parker in the MGM movie "Interrupted Melody", her many guest appearances on television, and her operatic work, including an historic debut at the Metropolitan Opera in *Alceste* in 1960. Eileen also recollects her sometimes troubled marriage of

forty years to New York police officer Robert Reagan and her frustrating tenure as a faculty member at Indiana University. In this wonderful memoir we meet the famous figures of music who were her contemporaries, fellow performers, and associates from Leonard Bernstein to Maria Callas, from Ethel Merman to Carol Burnett. *Can't Help Singing* is a marvelous biography that will hold great interest and appeal for her many fans and for students of 20th Century American music.

Eileen Farrell is the only opera star to date who can sing pop songs and not sound like an opera singer. Just listen to her dazzling CD *THE EILEEN FARRELL ALBUM* where she sounds like a red hot mama. Her biography is well done. She tells it like it was. She never starved along the way for quite soon after arriving in New York she had her own radio show. The book is delightful throughout as she talks about TV, the Met and her family. She grinds no axes nor does not paint the world through rose colored glasses. It is a great read by a delightful lady.

This book is tremendously fun to read. I am a fan of the pop singer Eileen Farrell -- but I'm not an opera fan -- so I was thrilled to discover it reads more like a romp through the history of entertainment in America than a libretto. I'm not sure how Brian Kellow did it, but the writing makes me feel as if Eileen Farrel was calling me up to dish about anything and everything. Her sense of humor and (delicious!) candor are a treat!

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