

PHILIP HENSHER
POWDER HER FACE

AN OPERA IN TWO ACTS
AND EIGHT SCENES

SET TO MUSIC BY
THOMAS ADÈS

FABER *ff* MUSIC

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Powder Her Face was commissioned by Almeida Opera
and first performed by Valdine Anderson, Roger Bryson,
Jill Gomez and Niall Morris with the Almeida Opera,
conducted by Brad Cohen and directed by David Farr,
in the Everyman Theatre, Cheltenham on 1 July 1995,
as part of the 1995 Cheltenham International Festival of Music.
Further performances took place at the Almeida Theatre, London
on 5, 9, 14, 17 and 22 July 1995

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For Thomas Blaikie

CAST

Duchess
Hotel Manager
Electrician
Maid

(Maid laughs immoderately – shrill, horrible laugh – and Electrician as Duchess back to Statue of Liberty abruptly.)

I had my life, and it was good.

I was beautiful, and it was good.

Let me tell you about me. Let me tell you about my life as a famous beauty.

They wrote operas about me.

(laugh)

They wrote novels about me.

(laugh. Song starts in the orchestra about now)

They painted portraits of me that won every prize in London.

(grand gesture to spotlight blank wall)

They wrote songs about me.

You know that song. Everyone knows that song –

Love me

Why don't you suck me off until you can't take more

I'll really ram it in your jaw*

Because you practise every night fellatio

It's the most delightful art you know. . .

*(*Enter Duchess, behind. Tiny, terrifying, dressed in another fur coat, even more grotesquely enormous. Maid still laughing and laughing. Electrician drops out of pose, pulls wig off.)*

DUCHESS: I see. This is what it has come to.
Take off my coat. *(He takes off the coat he is wearing)*
Who are you, boy?

ELECTRICIAN: Your grace, I came to mend your teasmade.

DUCHESS: My – teasmade. Have you mended it?

ELECTRICIAN: Your grace, I couldn't mend it.

DUCHESS: Why cannot you mend it?

ELECTRICIAN: Your grace. It's just too old. They stopped making teasmades like this, you know; you want to buy a new one.

MAID: I brought you tea, madam. *(Indicates a tray)*