

MELBA — THE

● Nellie Melba, the world-famous Australian soprano who reigned as queen of opera in England, Europe, and America for almost 40 years in the glittering Edwardian and Victorian eras, has been brought to life by a splendid TV documentary, to be shown by the ABC, called "Melba — the Voice."



MELBA as Aida (above) in a Paris production, 1888. Two years earlier Arthur Sullivan said she'd have to go away and study before he could offer her a small part in "The Mikado."

THE documentary on Melba is to be telecast in every city in Australia at 9 p.m. on February 23, 1971, the fortieth anniversary of her death.

It brings her vividly to life, and will make her known to thousands of Australians to whom she is little more than a name.

Melba is revealed as a fascinating character: proud, arrogant, shrewd, a consummate artist, and a woman whose passions made her the talk of Europe and banished her temporarily from Queen Victoria's Court.

Her extraordinary voice, her personality, and her aggressive nationalism should have made her a greater Australian legend than Ned Kelly. But to some her

name now conjures up a dessert — "peche Melba."

Today "peche Melba"—generally half a tinned peach, a scoop of ice-cream, and raspberry flavoring—would make the world's best-known chef, Auguste Escoffier, turn in his grave, for it was one of his creations.

He served it to Melba one

By NAN MUSGROVE

night at a sumptuous supper party at the Savoy Hotel, London, when her lover, the French Duke of Orleans, was present.

The first "peche Melba" was described as "a light peach confection," and although it has long stopped being such a confection, and has lost the aura of Escoffier's name, it has kept Melba's

name alive for millions who never heard her voice.

Melba's voice is heard in the documentary from her recordings. It surprised me. I had never heard it, and I don't know what I expected, but it is a voice like a delicate miniature, quite perfect in pitch and tone.

The experts who talk about her voice in the documentary all describe it as "silver."

Ivor Newton, who was accompanist for many great performers, including Tetrazzini, Chaliapin, Gigli, and Melba, says her singing voice had a unique quality, never to be forgotten.

"It was above sex and passion. It had the limpid perfection of a boy soprano, as chaste and bright as glittering silver."

Beverly Nichols, for years her private secretary, says that when he first heard Melba sing he was



MELBA at first had trouble establishing herself as a singer in London, the city she most longed to conquer. She finally did so in 1889 as a bride-like Juliet (above), opposite Jean de Reszke's Romeo, in Gounod's opera at Covent Garden — a triumph.



WHEN Melba was 59, in 1920, she made the first advertised broadcast in England (right), from Marconi's works at Chelmsford, Essex. (Earlier broadcasts were experimental.) She took her name Melba from Melbourne, where she was born.