

WOT! NO SOPRANO ?

Rome Opera makes headlines with a performance that didn't happen - or at least, soprano Maria Callas refused to carry on after the first act, arriving before the overture, here's Maria looking fine - and to listen to her singing Bellini's "Norma", a glittering audience had gathered. Stars of the Italian screen, like Anna Magnani (quite a fiery character herself, when she wants to be -) and Silvana Pampanini.

American society hostess Elsa Maxwell must be thinking that this almost equals one of her own fabulous parties - a fashion parade straight out of "Who's Who", with enough material to keep the glossy magazines happy for weeks. You don't know whether to look at dresses or faces - though some faces you can't miss, of course. Three thousand people, from artists to aristocrats, from dancers to diplomats; as brilliant a first-night audience as the Eternal City has ever seen - all here to listen to Maria Menighini Callas, soprano.

To crown the occasion, the President of the Italian Republic himself - Signor Giovanni Gronchi. But even the President has to be content with one act only; then Maria Callas says she doesn't feel well. So as not to disappoint you, too, our cameraman dropped in on a rehearsal. Perhaps he had premonition what would happen on the night.

As you can hear, Maria's voice was perfect.

Maria's been known to walk out before. So if you want to be sure of hearing her, don't get all dressed up. Just go to a rehearsal. She usually stays to the end of those.