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Which reminds me, I've also been to see an entertainment naughtily called *Opera Naked*, which turned out to be a sort of cabaret delivered fully clothed from start to finish. Nakedness here, was entirely metaphorical: a stripping bare of souls rather than bodies as a group of singers used to hiding who they are behind the characters they play, stepped out of role and told us stories of their own, real lives – in speech and song.

Essentially a guide to how the world of opera works, it was all there: the sometimes glamour, the persistent hard graft, the bizarrely roundabout routes people take into careers, the hazards of auditions, dodgy singing teachers, predatory conductors. Put together by Lynn Binstock, a long-time staff director at ENO who interviewed dozens of young (and not so young) singers by way of research, it featured the words of these people, verbatim, alongside the experiences of singers in the cast.

There was a tenor, Paul Hopwood, who began life teaching English at Eton, got injured in a road accident, feared he'd never walk again, but ended up singing *The Magic Flute* on stilts. A bass-baritone, Philip Spendley, who was working in a zoo at 18, joined a bank, but then discovered Wagner. A mezzo, Ciara Hendrick, who spent years struggling to sing soprano before she realised she was pursuing the wrong voice-type. And a soprano, Nadine Mortimer-Smith, who was brought up on reggae, left school at 16, worked her way from secretary to trader in the City, and then with extraordinary tenacity wrote herself a business plan to get into opera.

To hear these stories was to be reminded that the tiaras-and-champagne image of opera is not the reality. Go backstage and you find a very different world of people from all backgrounds, mostly modest people often brought up in a household without music, who discovered it by accident, and then worked night and day to turn the natural talent in their throat into a technically sophisticated instrument.

Opera Naked was a touching, moving, humbling and enlightening little show that told home truths about the offstage lives of ordinary performers. Not the stars like Gheorghiu, but the rank-and-file who sweat and struggle and commendably give all they have in small-scale touring Tosca or provincial butterflies. I don't remember any reference to knitting, but I doubt if there was anybody there too proud to run you up a jumper, had you asked.