

By Hillary Hauser  
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**K**IRI TE Kanawa answered the phone in her Long Island home, in a voice that could only belong to one of the world's greatest operatic sopranos — clear, bright and melodic.

Also unspoiled.

It was 1 p.m. New York time, and she had started the day with an aerobics workout, had put in a 2½-hour practice session for an upcoming recital with Placido Domingo at the New York Metropolitan Opera, had played golf.

"...and now I'm talking to you," she said.

I was made to feel we had all the time in the world to discuss anything we wanted. Afterward, she thought she might "play a little tennis."

Te Kanawa, famous for her earthiness, unusual charm and (she is probably tired of hearing it) Maori and English heritage, is coming to Santa Barbara for a May 12 recital at the Arlington.

The program, which closes this year's Masterseries season, may be the city's musical event of the year.

Te Kanawa has become known as THE superstar from New Zealand — a songbird with a voice like a bell, which is what "Kiri" means in Maori.

She was relatively unknown in the music world until 1971, when she burst brilliantly onto the stage of Covent Garden, singing the role of the countess in "The Marriage of Figaro," by Mozart.

She was then 27 years old.

But even with this success, her name (pronounced TayKANawah) had not yet become a household word among opera fans.

That was to happen in 1974, when — on a few hours' notice — she appeared as Desdemona in Verdi's "Otello" in a New York Metropolitan Opera production that was broadcast live throughout the United States.

As for those who know nothing about opera, Te Kanawa captured their hearts, too — when she sang at the Royal Wedding in 1981.

As Charles, the Prince of Wales, and his bride, Lady Diana Spencer, signed their wedding register, the songbird from New Zealand sang "Let the bright seraphim," from Handel's oratorio, "Samson."

The piece is included in Te Kanawa's Santa Barbara program.

Dame Te Kanawa (she was made a Dame Commander of the British Empire by Queen Elizabeth in 1982) said she enjoys the glamour and excitement that has come from her successes, but that she tries not to get carried away with it all.

"These things are wonderful to carry around on your back," she said. "The thing is, they don't make you sing any better."

There is a lot of hard work in doing what she does, she said — as well as a lot of sacrifice.

"Sacrifice is not such a terrible thing," Te Kanawa said. "But you can't just be where you'd like to be all the time. You don't get to be in the sun, you have to devote yourself to the job at hand. I try to balance it out."

**F**OR HER, the biggest sacrifice is being separated for any length of time from her family — husband Desmond Park, an Australian mining engineer she married in 1967, their daughter Toni, 9, and son Tom, 6.

Even as she remembered one of her luckiest breaks — substituting for Teresa Stratas in the 1974 Metropolitan Opera production of "Otello" on three hours' notice — she remembered first the sacrifice involved.



Opera diva Kiri Te Kanawa will perform 8 p.m. May 12 at the Arlington Theater.

## Kiri Te Kanawa grand finale to Masterseries

"My first and only thought was how dreadfully lonely I was," Te Kanawa said. "The people around me made me feel so welcome, helped me get through it. Still, I was lonely. I had nobody of my very own with me. When something exciting is happening, you want to share it, don't you? I was sharing with thousands of people, but not the right ones."

But that particular sacrifice, she said, was part of the "lucky stream" she finds herself in.

"I think it's a wonderful world we live in, as long as you don't happen to be in the wrong channel," Te Kanawa said. "I've happened to have found the right channel for me, not everyone is as lucky. I like to make life as troublefree as possible."

Part of making life a little simpler, so that she can spend more time with her family, is limiting the number of appearances she makes. For many years during her upward climb, she kept a schedule that would have exhausted a weightlifter.

"I want to play with my children, have fun, and mix it with

working very hard," Te Kanawa said.

Although the family has a permanent home in London, a decision was made to lease a house on Long Island, N.Y. for a time — so that the children could have the experience of living and learning in America.

Te Kanawa's unaffected approach to life is obvious when she addresses critics of her "cross over" into modern music.

Opera purists have raised their eyebrows at classical singers who have "gone pop," and among Te Kanawa's many recordings are "Blue Skies," with the late Nelson Riddle, and "Bernstein Conducts West Side Story."

Such purist attitudes don't get far with Te Kanawa.

"I can only speak for myself," she said. "Doing the Nelson Riddle album didn't wreck my voice and it didn't wreck my reputation. The only 'cross-over' was to a lot of people who wouldn't normally listen to Nelson Riddle. They can play it in the background — that's great."

And working with Bernstein "was wonderful," she added. Furthermore, Te Kanawa said, "it's very nice to be a versatile person — just when someone thinks they've got you, you're slipping away."

Sophisticated, scholarly talk about music is, for Te Kanawa, a phony affair she has no use for.

Reportedly, she once described herself as a "mutt."

**H**ER NATURAL father and mother, whom she never knew, were Maori and European respectively, and her adoptive parents, Tom and Nell Te Kanawa, were also Maori and European respectively. Her childhood was spent romping around the family home in Gisborne, on the North Island of New Zealand, and a favorite activity was family sing-songs organized by Te Kanawa's mother, Nell.

Impressed by the way her daughter sang "Daisy, Daisy," Mrs. Te Kanawa had encouraged — even pushed — Kiri to pursue a singing career.

This non-sophisticated, no-nonsense entry into a career that led to international operatic stardom has apparently stayed with Te Kanawa all her life.

"I was talking with a singer and a group of people the other day," she said. "I said, you don't find people like us — singers — coming from high-bred situations. We come from very ordinary backgrounds. The person who's very highly educated becomes a doctor or lawyer but not an artist. It takes root instinct, earthiness — being close to earth — to enter a fantasy land, a fantasy brain."

Her favorite operatic role is quite often the opera she is performing in at the moment.

However, she said she identifies with the role of the Marschallin in "Der Rosenkavalier," an opera by Richard Strauss.

"What she says about loneliness is the truth in life today," Te Kanawa said. "She says growing old is very well, but it's how you cope with it — how you cope with the first wrinkle, the first gray hair. You don't wake up and say, 'I'll face it today,' it's growing old gracefully — like Katherine Hepburn, look how wonderful she is. It's how you cope with life that matters."

Her advice to young artists is to develop staying power.

"Looking back, I realize when you get your first success, you haven't won the lottery," Te Kanawa said. "You're right down at the bottom of the ladder. You have to always keep bettering yourself, not in relation to the next person, but yourself, and you never stop. The rewards are great and the satisfaction immense. There is sheer satisfaction in producing a couple of notes you never thought you had."

I applaud her — for her singing, her approach to life, and I tell her that interviewing is often a key that allows a writer to look into people's wonderful lives, like her own.

"We all need each other, don't we?" she replied.