

Observations: You can't keep a good diva down

By Jessica Duchen

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Poor Joyce DiDonato, leading an all-star line-up in Rossini's *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* at Covent Garden, ended up with her leg in plaster on the show's opening night last Saturday. The American mezzo slipped and fell during the performance, fracturing her fibula. Despite the agony she pressed on, first with the gallant support of her tenor Juan Diego Flórez, later with a crutch. But on her blog she declared: "From here on out, I declare that no one (please!) ever ever wish me again to: 'BREAK A LEG'."

Opera stars are better known for last-minute cancellations than against-all-odds persistence. So spare a thought for the brave souls whose dedication triumphs over scenarios that really shouldn't happen to a diva.

Two years ago, Sally Silver was singing *Lucia di Lammermoor* at Scottish Opera when she, too, fell over, then couldn't walk. Gamely, she borrowed a wheelchair from a member of the audience and sang in it to the end. Rinat Shaham, performing *Carmen* in Israel earlier this year, faced a nightmare when she developed an allergic reaction to the horses on stage. On opening night, her allergy worsened, then erupted into an asthma attack, just in time for the last act. She won through thanks to a cortisone injection and an inhaler.

Worse can await, especially in *Tosca*. Maria Callas once got carried away in the murder scene and managed to draw blood from her Scarpia, Tito Gobbi, with a plastic knife. And in 1995, the ammunition to execute Cavaradossi misfired and tenor Fabio Armiliato ended up with gunshot wounds in his leg..

And one tenor, Richard Versalle, died on stage at the Met during Janacek's *The Makropoulos Case* in 1996, suffering a heart attack at the top of a ladder. His last line? "Too bad you can live only so long."