Anna: Hello, I'm Anna Jones, and this is Entertainment. In the programme today we find out about Florence Foster Jenkins who became very famous for being one of the worst singers in history. Sixty years after she died a play based on her life has just opened in London. In her report BBC arts correspondent Rebecca Jones tells us that Florence was an American socialite. She was from America and had a lot of money which she used to pay for her own career as a singer. Florence was also a “socialite” - she attended many fashionable social events and was well known by others who were also rich and attended the same kinds of events. Rebecca uses several adjectives to describe Florence and her voice. Listen out for them.

Rebecca Jones

Florence Foster Jenkins was an American socialite who financed her own professional singing career. Eccentric, enthusiastic but tone deaf, she’s been described as the “dire diva of din,” the worst singer who ever drew breath, with a voice so awful, so excruciating. Well frankly, you run out of adjectives to describe it.

Anna: Florence was considered to be “eccentric, enthusiastic but tone deaf.” If you describe someone as “eccentric” then it means that a person has habits or opinions that other people think are strange. She was also “enthusiastic”, she was very keen and excited about her singing career but unfortunately, she was “tone deaf.” She could not sing in tune or recognise different tunes. She has been described as the “dire diva of din”. A diva is a well known and respected singer, usually of opera, but a “dire diva of din” is the opposite – it’s someone who sings very badly. The word “din” means a very loud, unpleasant noise. So she sings very badly and makes a loud, unpleasant noise. It doesn’t stop there, she is also described as “the worst singer who ever drew breath.” - she is the
worst singer ever to have breathed, ever to have lived. Other adjectives used to describe her voice are “awful” - very bad, and - “excruciating” extremely painful and difficult to listen to. This first part of the report ends by saying, “Well, frankly, you run out of adjectives to describe it.” If “you run out of something” it means that you have no more of it left – in this case there are no more adjectives to describe how awful Florence’s voice was. Rebecca Jones went to meet the actress Maurenn Lipman who plays Florence Foster Jenkins in the play. Rebecca asked Maureen how Florence had reacted to audiences when they started to laugh at her voice. Was she angry?

**Maureen Lipman**

She was aware of that but she kind of rationalised that by saying you know every great soprano has listened to the voices of solitary dissent in the audience, you know. And they are planted there by rival divas. I myself have no professional jealousy whatsoever. So she made it work for her.

**Anna:** Well according to Maureen Lipman, Florence “rationalised” the audience’s response to her awful voice. She was not angry if they laughed at her. If you “rationalise” something that you are unhappy or unsure about then you think of reasons to justify it or to explain it. In this case, Florence believed that every great soprano – a woman, girl or boy singer with a very high voice, has had experience of a similar thing. They have “listened to the voices of solitary dissent” - they have heard a few voices in the audience expressing a dislike of their voices. Florence believed the people in the audience who did not like *her* voice had been “planted” or put there by “rival divas” – other famous opera singers who were jealous of her. Florence said that she did not have any “professional jealousy” she did not feel any anger or bitterness towards other singers. So Florence was able to “rationalise” other people laughing at her voice – she made it work for her. Rebecca Jones asks Maureen Lipman to sing something in her normal voice and then sing like Florence. Does she think that...
the listeners would like her voice or would prefer the Florence version of her voice?

Maureen Lipman

sings). OK, and then I’m going to do what Florence does, which is ……(sings!). Right OK, your listeners may think mmmm, well that was a bit better than she sounded, I don’t know. But that’s a fair approximation of the difference.

Anna: Well Maureen wonders if the listeners might prefer Florence’s voice! She says that it gave them “a fair approximation of the difference” - an idea of difference between the two voices. Now just before we go here’s a recap of today’s language:

   eccentric
   diva
   Soprano
   rationalise

That’s all for now. Goodbye.