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## THEATER

### Friends of Kenny

By [MATT KALKHOFF](#)  
Friday, December 03, 2004

Americans can be so egotistical sometimes. We tend to think that the world revolves around us, and that our celebrities are the most famous and talented creatures around. However, as we are once again reminded, it is actually a land far, far away that has spawned "the most popular and gifted woman in the world today." So put that patriotic pretension aside as the Great White Way yields to the Great Outback with the return of the original desperate housewife, Dame Edna Everage.

Since making her Tony-winning debut with "Dame Edna: The Royal Tour" five years ago, many in the theatre community have suffered from a condition known as EDS, or "Edna Deprivation Syndrome." "I'm really coming back not because it was my idea," Australia's self-proclaimed "gigastar" says. "I'm coming back on medical advice. People have begged me — doctors have pleaded with me for their patients."

Modesty is a foreign concept that has purposely never found its way into the multi-talented grand dame's uninhibited repertoire. In fact, her creator and alter-ego, Australian actor Barry Humphries, has diligently built the massive Everage empire on sheer chutzpah.

Far from her humble beginnings nearly half a century ago as a Melbourne housewife who yearned for stardom, Dame Edna has amassed a vast fortune and achieved a level of notoriety perhaps only Jesus could comprehend. ("There are spooky similarities," she admits.)

Despite the enormous responsibility bestowed upon her by her very own flock of devoted disciples — "possums," in Ednaese — she still considers herself "Edna from the Block." As she says, "Just a "woman [who] loiters on the stage, thinking aloud."

Accompanied by her musical arranger Wayne Barker and a four-member chorus (the Gorgeous Ednaettes and the Equally Gorgeous TestEdnarones), the witty yet "unscripted" show just didn't seem complete without her second banana, Madge Olsen. Also conspicuously missing were the celebrity guests and grand stage sets featured in her TV specials, like "An Audience with Dame Edna" and "The Dame Edna Experience."

But like Bea Arthur, Elaine Stritch and select other



Worship her, ye mortals! **Dame Edna** is back on Broadway. Resistance is futile.

#### MORE INFO

##### **Dame Edna: Back with a Vengeance**

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“women of a certain age” before her, this “bi-hemispheric” dowager proves that a razor sharp wit and lifetime of experience is all the ammunition one needs to storm the stage and hold an audience captive — that and the mundane details she discovers about various theatergoers.

Dame Edna didn't miss a beat cleverly exploiting whatever oddities she observed, like a woman in the second row with binoculars or the Pound Ridge chicken rancher who teaches at a local prison. (Fact can indeed prove stranger than fiction.) Our dazzling star also reveled in mocking her targets' fashion sense (or lack thereof), describing one patron's frock as “affordable” and inspecting the footwear retrieved from others for clues about their respective lives.

Not surprisingly, Edna seemed to find the best material in exposing her own family's dysfunction. Friend's of Kenny, her first born and “a practicing homeopath,” learned that he's been seeing local TV weatherman Sam Champion lately, while daughter Velmai remains an utter disappointment in her mother's bespectacled eyes.

Struggling at first to find the words to describe the “human monster” that is her daughter-in-law, Joyleen (wife of her rarely mentioned third child, Bruce), Edna finally offers, “Imagine an unattractive Donatella Versace,” as her weathered mug morphed into that trademark twisted sneer.

In front of a retro New York skyline backdrop that purportedly mimics the view from her fabulous penthouse apartment (a gift from Donald Trump, natch), Dame Edna leaves her fans with a rousing number that primes the audience for a pre-set standing ovation. But not before employing her chameleon-like prowess with a hysterical marriage counseling session wherein she wields a unique brand of radical therapy on an unsuspecting newlywed couple, and then casts and rehearses a scene from her forthcoming biopic, “The Girl From Oz,” featuring coerced volunteers playing the roles.

The song-and-dance numbers are gloriously cheesy, but this is no matter next to the brilliance of this gorgeous improvisational laugh fest. Just be sure to dress appropriately. If you find yourself seated in the first few rows, leave your shyness at home and come prepared for anything.

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