

Dame Nellie Melba

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Dame Nellie Melba plays the starring role in the third 'Carly Mills, Pioneer Girl' book: *Superstar*.

Born Helen Porter Mitchell in Melbourne on 19 May 1861, Nellie went on to become one of the world's most famous opera singers.

She was a lively and mischievous child who showed a great talent for singing from a very young age. Sadly, her mother died when Nellie was only twenty. A little while later, Nellie moved with her father to Mackay, where she met Charlie Armstrong. They married and had a son – George – but Nellie and Charlie were unhappy together. Her husband did not

want her to have a life on the stage. Neither did Nellie's father, David Mitchell; like many people of his time, he thought it was not a respectable career for a woman.

But Nellie refused to give up. She persuaded her father to take her to Europe in 1886, where she had singing lessons with Mathilde Marchesi, one of the best teachers in the world. By the time she came back to Australia for a tour in 1902, she was a world-famous superstar who had performed for royalty and was mobbed by fans wherever she went.

During World War I, Nellie Melba held concerts to raise funds for charities to support the war effort. For this, in 1918 she was made Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire. In 1927 she was awarded an even higher honour: Dame Grand Cross of the Order of the British Empire.

Nellie's personal life was troubled; her husband divorced her and separated her from her son for many years, which caused her great sorrow. But she was loved and admired by many fans and friends, who knew her as a strong, lively, generous woman. By becoming such a big international success, Nellie showed the whole world that Australians were just as capable of making real art as anyone. And by showing the world that there was nothing wrong with a woman having a career on the stage, she made it easier for other women to do the same. She also helped to promote the musical careers of others by helping them to get work and by teaching singing at a conservatorium in Melbourne.

Nellie retired from the stage in 1930 and came back to Australia. She died in hospital in Sydney the next year, at the age of 69.

Fun facts

Nellie chose the stage name of 'Melba' after her home town,
Melbourne

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Dame Nellie Melba's face is pictured on Australia's \$100 note

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Dame Nellie Melba has two dishes named after her: Melba Toast and Peach Melba.

Timeline

- 1861, 19 May: Nellie is born in Melbourne
- 1867: Nellie Mitchell sings in a concert at a Richmond Hall to raise funds for the local school. She sang 'Shells of Ocean' and 'Comin thro the Rye'.
- 1881: Nellie's mother dies, and Nellie and her father move to Mackay, QLD
- 1882: Nellie marries Charlie Armstrong in Brisbane
- 1883: Nellie's son, George Nesbitt Armstrong is born
- 1886: Nellie goes to Europe; does a debut concert in London, then goes to Paris to study with famous teacher Mathilde Marchesi
- 1887: October 13: using the stage name of Melba for the first time, Nellie sings in the opera *Rigoletto* in Brussels.
- 1900: Nellie Melba and Charles Armstrong divorce.

- 1902: Nellie tours Australia and New Zealand. By this time she is a celebrity in Britain and the United States of America. She returns to Europe the following year.
- 1909: Nellie begins her 'sentimental tour' of Australia, visiting many country towns. She sets up a music school in Richmond.
- 1914: Nellie comes to Australia just before war breaks out
- 1914-1918: During the First World War, Nellie Melba raises £100,000 for war charities by doing concert tours in North America and Australia. In 1918, she is made a Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire for her war work.
- 1922: Dame Nellie Melba tours Australia again.
- 1927: Dame Nellie Melba is named Dame Grand Cross of the Order of the British Empire.
- 1928: Dame Nellie Melba has a series of 'farewell' concerts in Australia.
- 1930: Dame Nellie Melba returns to Australia for the last time.
- 1931 (23 Feb): Dame Nellie Melba dies of septicaemia in hospital in Sydney.

To learn more about Nellie Melba, follow these links:

[Kiddle's Nellie Melba facts for kids](#)
[Australian Dictionary of Biography](#)

A quote from Dame Nellie Melba

'Art is not national. It is international. Music is not written in red, white and blue.

It is written in the heart's blood of the composer.'

