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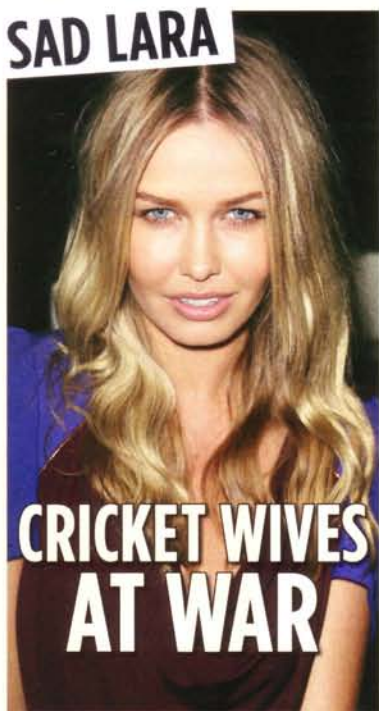
New Idea

IDOL'S COSIMA



I've been to hell and back

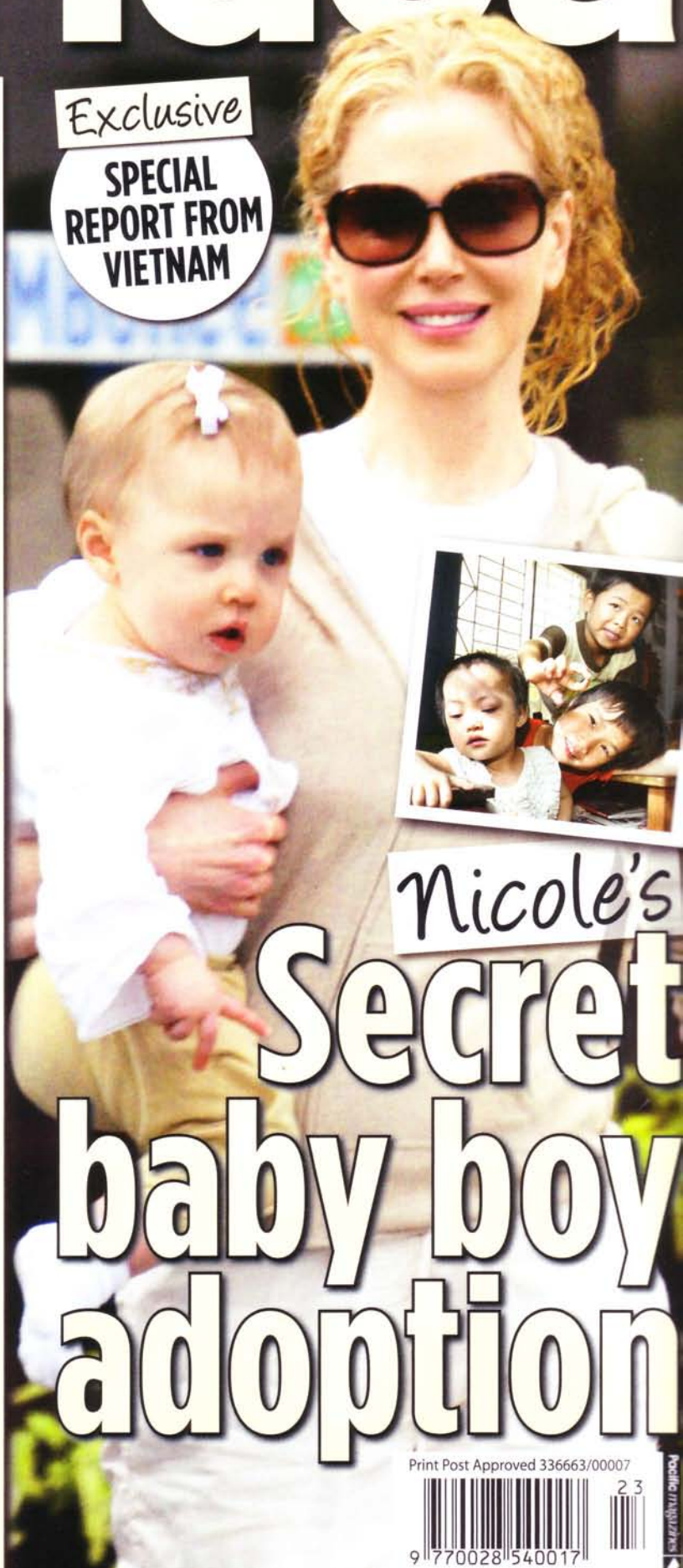
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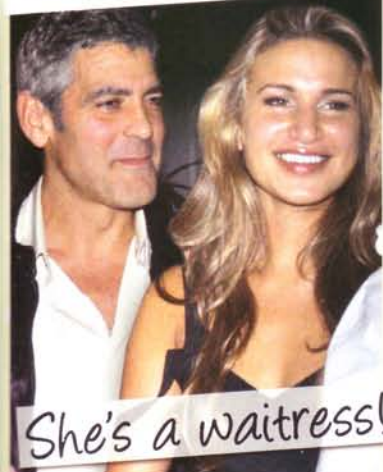
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PHOTO: JEFFREY MAYER

Cosima's war of words

The *Idol* star bounces back after a bad spell that nearly cost her big time

After four years of stress, guilt and stomach-churning fear, the war is finally over for *Australian Idol* favourite Cosima De Vito.

She may be about \$300,000 in debt, but at least she's not bankrupt. And, better still, her loving parents – who staked everything to raise \$1 million backing for her first hit album – have been able to hang on to their modest family home.

PITFALLS OF FAME

She's not singing the blues, but Cosima readily admits a bitter legal battle with her ex-managers, who sued her for \$500,000, has pushed her to the brink.

'It's been a huge challenge, emotionally and financially,' says the unlucky songstress, who tearfully bowed out of *Idol*'s top three in 2003, suffering from nodules on her vocal cords.

Since then, winner Guy Sebastian and runner-up Shannon Noll have prospered. Yet talented Cosima has struggled to stay on track, despite having a No.1 single – *When The War Is Over* – and best-selling album.

BURDEN OF GUILT

Today, the 'stubborn' 32-year-old is battling to make a comeback in the wake of her courtroom woes.

'It's tough trying to rebuild your career with no money, and a lawsuit hanging over your head,' she sadly confides.

'A lot of cruel things have been said about me – that I'm difficult and impossible to work with – but I wasn't able to speak out and defend myself until the legal action was over.

'I was contemplating bankruptcy if the verdict went against me; that ran through my mind so many times. Whenever I tried to move forward, there was a roadblock in front of me. But the worst thing was that my parents' hard-earned money was involved.

'We're a very strong, very close family – everyone was in on the decision to put money behind my album – but it's been hard. We've had to endure this together.

'My parents aren't wealthy people so I feel terribly responsible for putting my family through so much trauma. I'll always carry that burden of guilt as a daughter.'

IDOL JUDGED

It's been four years of hell since Cosima's acrimonious split



Cosima's *Idol* fortunes were mixed compared to runner-up Shannon's.





With Dicko, Shannon and Guy on *Idol*.

from her managers Ted Gardner and Constantine Nellis, who had signed her as an *Idol* sensation.

The feud grew increasingly bitter and personal. Suing in the NSW Supreme Court for a \$500,000 share of record royalties, the managers alleged that their 'difficult' star was impossible to handle.

Feisty Cosima counter-sued, claiming they mismanaged marketing and financing of her debut album, which reached No.2 in the charts.

In the end Justice Nigel Rein recently ordered her to pay just \$30,000, plus \$7000 in expenses owed.

The manager promptly proclaimed a win. But as far as Cosima is concerned the award, so much less than the money

“People hear I’m difficult. But I’m not at all”

claimed, has effectively cleared her good name at last.

‘A lot of people in the industry have heard that I’m difficult, but I’m not at all,’ the Perth-born powerhouse maintains.

‘The judge has backed me up. He found that everything I did was warranted.

‘There was \$1 million of my family’s money at stake and that made me very nervous. I was very green. I had no idea how to put an album together, so I relied on my ▶





Cosima's taking steps to kickstart her career after taking on Ted Gardner and Constantine Nellis in court (below).

managers. I should have trusted my own instincts,' she adds.

Her voice, so strong and clear when she belts out power ballads, trails off quietly. 'The record ended up costing \$1.3 million – and when the money ran out, a lot of people disappeared,' she says.

JOY TO DESPAIR

Proud parents Carlo and Maria had nurtured Cosima's musical gift since she won her first school talent quest, aged nine, with a compelling version of Whitney Houston's hit *The Greatest Love Of All*.

They sobbed when she was forced to withdraw from *Idol*, and ruefully shared in her heartfelt

struggle – but you know what? I love to sing and that kicked me through... together with my family and my new manager, Dorry Korhadi.

'He spent a lot of time and money just trying to inspire me, to get me out of the hole I was in.'

CHILDHOOD DREAM

Cosima's second album *This Is Now* was made on a shoestring. But she has remained doggedly in the spotlight – headlining at clubs; performing at gay events; appearing in *Hair*; touring with Roachford and Demis Roussos.

Finally, she even achieved her childhood dream of singing at Sydney Opera House, a chance

'Everything happens for a reason and someone watches over us'

disappointment when the major record labels passed her by.

Whatever the risks, funding Cosima's first, self-titled album seemed a natural decision. When it charted in the No.2 slot, the De Vito clan – including brother Modesto and sister Sarina, now 29 and 24 – went wild with joy.

But events soon hit a sour note and, after the management split, the lawsuits began.

'I was tempted to give up more than once, but I'm very stubborn,' Cosima smiles.

'It's been collective pain and

denied her when she pulled out of *Australian Idol*.

HEART WILL GO ON

Too busy for romance she's been single for the past five years, concentrating on a career that keeps falling flat.

'No, I don't think I'm jinxed,' laughs Cosima, who is soon to go on the road in a new solo show celebrating the great pop divas from Barbra Streisand to Shirley Bassey and Celine Dion.

'I believe everything happens for a reason and we all have someone watching over us,' Cosima says.

'It's been a steep learning curve, but today I know more about the industry – and about myself. I'm stronger than I thought. I'm not bitter and it's not in my nature to hate...'

'I've learnt to accept myself. I'm never going to win a beauty pageant or a fashion parade, that's for sure! I'm here because I want people to respect and enjoy my voice, and that's enough,' she adds.

'I'm happy and at peace. You're better off not thinking: "What if?" At the end of the day, like my dad says, I have my family and friends. I'm still alive and doing what I love.' **[X]**

By Jenny Brown

Pictures: Nigel Wright

