

**LA
TRAVIATA**
BY GIUSEPPE VERDI
APRIL 22 & 24, 2022

 TOLEDO OPERA

Audience Preview Guide

Wednesday, April 20, 2022 -

Student Night at the Opera

Friday, April 22, 2022

Sunday, April 24, 2022

Valentine Theatre

 TOLEDO OPERA

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The Setting

The opera takes place in Paris, France, mid 19th Century.

Act I

Violetta’s Salon

Act II

Scene 1: Country House near Paris

Scene 2: Gallery in Flora’s Palace

Act III

Violetta’s Bedroom

Characters

La Traviata

by Giuseppe Verdi

Libretto by Francesco Maria Pave

Violetta Valery, a celebrated courtesan

Alfredo Germont, a young man in love with Violetta

Giorgio Germont, Alfredo’s father

Annina, Violetta’s maid and confidante

Flora Bervoix, a courtesan and Violetta’s friend

Dr. Grenvil, Violetta’s physician

Baron Douphol, one of Violetta’s admirers

Gastone, Visconte di Letorières, Alfredo’s friend

Marchese d’Obigny, Flora’s protector

Giuseppe, Violetta’s servant

A Messenger

Synopsis

Act I

Violetta Valéry, a young courtesan, famous in the Parisian high society, throws a party in her home. She is introduced to an admirer, Alfredo Germont. He confesses that the moment he saw her, he was fascinated by her beauty and intelligence, though he has never had the courage to tell her. He toasts in her honor before the whole crowd. Suddenly, she almost faints and everyone jumps in to help, but she asks them to go away. However, Alfredo remains and sincerely declares his love for her. At first she treats him with indifference, trying to reject him, but then realizes that she has never known true love and wonders whether this provincial, honest young man will be able to convince her to love him. He whispers words of love, warning her that her adventurous life will ruin her health. Violetta knows this, because she is suffering from tuberculosis, but she does not accept the truth and prefers to continue living in luxury and endless parties. To have the chance to talk to him again, she gives him a flower telling him to return it when it has faded, in hope that they will meet soon.

INTERMISSION

Act II

Scene 1

Violetta and Alfredo have been together for three months and have withdrawn to a country house to escape their previous life. Alfredo discovers, however, that Violetta is selling all her belongings to secure their livelihood. Upset that he had not thought of this aspect of their relationship, he decides to go to Paris to raise money. Meanwhile, Violetta receives an invitation to a ball organized by her friend Flora. But she has abandoned that lifestyle, gave up all parties for Alfredo’s sake, and no longer wishes to assume the role of a courtesan. While Alfredo is away, his father, Giorgio Germont, arrives at the house. Alfredo had hoped that Violetta’s promise to give up her life as a courtesan would persuade Germont to bless their relationship. Even though he discovers that Violetta is a kind and selfless woman, Germont asks her the impossible: to break up with his son because Alfredo has a sister who is getting married and her fiancé would never accept to form an alliance with a family in disgrace. Violetta understands that her status as a courtesan and her relationship with Alfredo could compromise the young girl’s future. Grieved, she decides to give up Alfredo and asks Germont to promise her that after she dies, he will explain to his son the reason why she leaves him now. Alfredo returns and receives a letter of separation from Violetta. Then, Germont reappears to speak privately with his son. He pleads with him to return home. Unmoved by his father’s request, Alfredo sees Flora’s invitation to the ball and angrily decides to go there to ask her for some explanations.

5 MINUTE PAUSE

Scene 2

At Flora’s ball, people are talking about Violetta’s break up with Alfredo. Violetta arrives accompanied by Baron Douphol. Blinded by jealousy, Alfredo appears. Thinking that the Baron is Violetta’s new lover, Alfredo challenges him to play and rebukes him repeatedly. Alfredo is followed by his father, who tries to temper him. Extremely troubled by the encounter with Alfredo, Violetta asks to speak to him privately. When everyone else retires, Alfredo secretly asks Violetta to run away with him. She refuses, hiding the promise she had made to his father. She lies to him that her new lover is Baron Douphol. In anger, Alfredo publicly humiliates Violetta, throwing money at her feet and saying he has repaid her. Giorgio Germont, who witnessed the scene, along with everyone else, violently rebukes him and the Baron challenges him to a duel.

INTERMISSION

Act III

Violetta, having spent all of her money, lives her last moments in a modest Paris apartment. The only ones who stay by her side are Annina and Dr. Grenvil, who tells Annina that Violetta has merely a few hours to live. The carnival is underway in the streets of Paris and the cheers of the masqueraders can be heard. Violetta sends Annina to give the last bit of money she has to the poor, so that she may be alone to read a letter from Giorgio Germont. Full of remorse, he confesses that he had written to his son about her sacrifice and that they will soon come to visit her. Their return occurs too late, because Violetta is going through the final stages of her illness. Alfredo confesses once more his love for Violetta, who dies comforted by the thought that she has received the forgiveness of the man she loved.

Synopsis courtesy of the Metropolitan Opera. All rights reserved. metopera.org

Giuseppe Verdi 1813-1901

Born October 9 or 10, 1813, in northern Italy during its Napoleonic occupation, Giuseppe Verdi displayed an early interest in music. At age nine, he was playing the church organ in the small town of Busseto. Over the next nine years, the townspeople became sufficiently impressed with Verdi's musical abilities to raise the money to send him to the Conservatory in Milan. At age 18, however, Verdi was considered too old (14 was the average age of the students) and not talented enough for the Conservatory.



Giuseppe Verdi
1813 - 1901

Fortunately for Verdi, a merchant and music lover in Busseto, Antonio Barezzi, paid for Verdi to study privately in Milan. After completing his studies, Verdi returned to Busseto to work as a conductor and music instructor. In 1836, he married Barezzi's daughter, Margherita. They moved to Milan and had two children. Sadly, their children died very young and Margherita died in 1839 from encephalitis.

Verdi's first opera, *Oberto*, was performed at La Scala (in Milan) in 1839. *Oberto* was well received but Verdi's second opera, a comedy, was a failure. Coinciding with the loss of his family, Verdi contemplated giving up opera composition. The impresario (manager producer) of La Scala virtually 'forced' a libretto upon him, inspiring him to continue composing. The result was Verdi's third and highly successful opera, *Nabucco*, first performed in 1842. It also was an opportunity to Verdi to reconnect with the soprano, Giuseppina Strepponi, whom he ultimately married in 1859.

Nabucco was the start of Verdi's ever-growing popularity. Its theme of freedom for enslaved people caught the imaginations of the Italian people who, at that time, wanted a united, free Italy. Verdi became the symbol of that freedom movement. "Viva Verdi" was the independence

cry heard during the fight for Italian independence. It was an anagram of his name to mean Vittorio Emmanuel King of Italy - Vittoria Emanuele Re d'Italia. In 1871, when Italy became united, Verdi's most famous opera, *Aida*, was produced.

Despite his great success as an opera composer, Verdi had many other interests. In 1849, Verdi and his partner (and ultimately wife), Giuseppina Strepponi, moved to a rural estate near his home town. There, he planted a tree for every opera he wrote. His employees were paid well and he extended his humanitarianism to others in society, including founding a hospital near his estate and establishing a home for aging musicians in Milan. He referred to this latter, the Casa di Riposo, as "my last and best work."

In 1852, Verdi composed *La Traviata*, based on the novel and play by Alexandre Dumas (the younger). Verdi wrote the music very quickly; he was under contract to write an opera and had started a different opera then changed his mind and decided to write an opera based on Dumas' work. He had signed a contract for a new opera, *Il Trovatore* and started work on *La Dame aux Camélias*. His librettist, Francesco Maria Piave had almost completed the libretto for the first opera when he had to stop and write the libretto for *La Traviata* instead.

Two decades of tremendous creativity, from 1851 to 1871, culminated with *Aida*. Commissioned by the Khedive of Egypt as part of the celebration of the opening of the Suez Canal, *Aida* was produced with no expense spared. Props included a shield and helmet made of solid silver, a crown of pure gold, and a cast of 300 in the second act triumphal march.

From 1872 to 1883, Verdi temporarily 'retired' from opera writing. He continued to compose music, including the *Manzoni Requiem*, considered his most important non-operatic work. Much of this time period, however, was devoted to his farm. Then, in 1884, he began work on his second-last opera, *Otello*. It premiered in 1887 to great anticipation and then to great acclaim. At age 80, Verdi wrote one last opera, *Falstaff*, based on another Shakespearean character.

Verdi died January 27, 1901. Italy mourned his death, closing schools and holding a special session of the Senate where eulogies were read. Thousands jammed the streets to see his funeral procession.

Defining Verdi's Middle Period

During what is recognized as his middle period (1849-1859), Giuseppe Verdi wrote eight new operas and extensively revised one of them. In the process, he provided seven works that are still in the operatic repertory today: *Luisa Miller*, *Rigoletto*, *Il Trovatore*, *La Traviata*, *I Vespri Siciliani*, *Simon Boccanegra*, and *Un Ballo in Maschera*. In comparison, with Verdi's first 14 operas (1839-1849), only *Macbeth* may be considered a repertory piece, and, like *Simon Boccanegra*, it was usually performed with a later revision. By 1849, Verdi was enormously successful and his operas dominated Italian stages. With the death of Gaetano Donizetti in 1848, Verdi was acknowledged as the leading Italian composer of his day. Why did Verdi alter an approach that had achieved such remarkable success? One factor seems to have been both personal and artistic. Verdi became increasingly dissatisfied with the older, familiar conventions of his predecessors that he adopted at the outset of his career.

Verdi now took more time to work with his librettists. He also had additional time to find the *tinta* (coloring) or individual character for the music of each opera before setting pen to paper. A crucial factor that influenced Verdi's middle-period stage works was the failure of the revolutions of 1848-1849. Despite some remarkable early successes in Italian cities, one by one, each of the revolutions was crushed. Furthermore, a strong reaction set in and the *la censura* (the police and other censors) scrutinized all librettos before an opera could be staged in an Italian city. This circumstance caused serious problems for Verdi both before and after the staging of *Stiffelio* and *Rigoletto*, as well as for *La Traviata* and *I Vespri Siciliani* after their premieres. *Un Ballo in Maschera's* depictions of its assassination of a ruler also created a large amount of scrutiny from the censors.

More than anything else, the failure of the revolutions of 1848-1849 led Verdi to abandon what the important early commentator Abramo Basevi called the composer's first or "grandiose" manner, the *risorgimentale* style of composition that caused the witty Rossini to characterize Verdi as the "composer with the helmet." The plots of almost every opera Verdi wrote, from *Nabucco* to *Battaglia*, had a subtext of suppression. Italian audiences were quick to identify with the oppressed people in the operas.

Since subjects even remotely suggesting the *Risorgimento* moment or liberty were sure to be rejected by the censors, what types of themes did Verdi turn to? For the most part, the plots of his middle-period operas focused on stories of individuals and their conflicts, and they emphasized personal motives such as love, jealousy, greed and revenge. In these works, the social issues were no longer clear-cut: both hero and villain could have plebians. In other works of this period, socially induced conflicts became less important than those individuals.

Verdi's early heroines neither provoked people nor displayed tender love. As Julian Budden had suggested with regard to the early duets, "the standard love duet evoked less of a response from Verdi than from his contemporaries... It is not until the masterpieces of the middle years that Verdi realizes all the simple poetry of romantic love." One of the most effective means by which 19th century composers related different sections of

(continued on page 6)



their operas was through recurring music. Verdi did it infrequently in his early works, and when the recurring themes did return they were so little altered, they sounded mechanical and made little emotional impact. However, by 1850, he had gained mastery of the technique. One of the most evocative uses of the recurring themes in Verdi's middle period relate to romance. The music in which Alfredo declares his love for Violetta in the Introduzione of *La Traviata* (to the text "Di quell'amor") is heard later in Act I and then again Act III. Verdi's flexibility in treating recurring themes is demonstrated at the climactic moment in Act II when Violetta sings her unforgettable "Amami Alfredo." The key (F major) and the long sustained stepwise descent from the tonic recall the initial statements of "Di quell'amor" in Act I. But here the meter is duple rather than triple and the melody creates its own phrase logic and climax. This is the theme Verdi introduced in the celebrated Prelude to Act I. One of the more noteworthy results of Verdi's new dramatic orientation at mid-century was to avoid politics and minimize religious implications, while focusing on the conflicts and emotions of the individual characters. There are fewer choruses or other numbers in which the chorus participates in a supporting role. Verdi was known as the "Father of the Choruses" in the mid-1840s. In his first 14 operas, choruses are heard on the average in more than nine individual numbers per opera. By way of contrast, in the nine operas completed between 1849 and 1859, there are some 40% fewer numbers with choruses. Verdi had become impatient with what he felt to be old, conventional approaches, and he was especially impatient of openings, choral or otherwise, that delayed the onset of the drama. A crucial component of Verdi's style, the cabalettas of the 1850s frequently show more imagination than earlier and they are better justified dramatically. A case in point is "Sempre libera" from Violetta's aria-finale to Act I of *La Traviata*.



Here her conflict between accepting a new, serious romance or continuing with her frivolous, if independent, life is brilliantly portrayed in the opposition of the tender cantabile (slow or moderate lyrical section) "Ah fors'è lui" and the almost hysterical gaiety of the cabaletta "Sempre libera." Furthermore, the conventional repeat of the main section of the cabaletta is well justified dramatically by the unexpected sound of Alfredo singing a fragment of his love music ("Di quell'amor") beneath her window. Violetta pauses momentarily, and is then forced to reassert her independence and at least momentarily defend her old life-style.

Despite some wonderful exceptions, during the years from 1849 to 1859 Verdi generally employed the traditional structures of his earlier operas. But he did so with far greater skill and imagination than before. The composer, Luciano Berio, attributes the great success of the *Rigoletto*, *Il Trovatore*, and *La Traviata* trilogy to a "melodramatic conception that was basically simple...musical gestures that tended to simplify the psychology of the characters and the dynamics of their conflicts."

They were, therefore, less vulnerable than more complex and sophisticated operas. For a century and a half opera-goers throughout the world have been repeatedly enthralled by Verdi's operas of the 1850s. He made his characters transcend temporal and geographical limits. He made them universal.

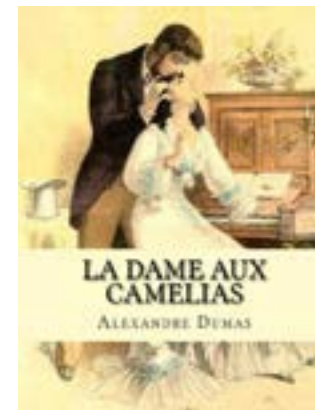
Verdi's Middle Period Operas (1849-1859)

- Luisa Miller*
- Stiffelio*
- Rigoletto*
- Il Trovatore*
- La Traviata*
- I Vespri Siciliani*
- Simon Boccanegra*
- Aroldo* (a major revision of *Stiffelio*)
- Un Ballo in Maschera*

Courtesy of Florida Grand Opera

The Source of the Story

THE SOURCE: LA DAME AUX CAMÉLIAS BY ALEXANDRE DUMAS, FILS



The story of Verdi's *La Traviata* can ultimately be traced to the life of a historical figure, the courtesan Marie Duplessis, who died from consumption in 1847. Not long before her death, Duplessis had a brief affair with Alexandre Dumas, fils, who then transformed this personal history into a semi-autobiographical novel, *La Dame aux Camélias* (*The Lady of the Camellias*), in 1848. Dumas later adapted his work as a play, and this stage version premiered at the Théâtre du Vaudeville in Paris on February 2, 1852. Giuseppe Verdi often turned to the French theater for inspiration—his *Ernani* and *Rigoletto* were both based on plays by Victor Hugo—and within a few months of the premiere of *La Dame aux Camélias*, he had chosen it as the subject of the new opera he was contracted to write for the Teatro La Fenice in Venice. Together with his librettist Francesco Maria Piave, he created one of his most realistic dramas, not shying away from the moral and medical tensions of his source material, calling it "a subject of the times."

Courtesy of the Metropolitan Opera.

FROM NOVEL TO INSPIRED GIUSEPPE VERDI'S LA DAME AUX CAMÉLIAS

Rigoletto and *Il Trovatore* were both modern plays, written and premiered within 20 years before they both became operas. Both had identifiable historical backgrounds (18th century France and 15th century Spain, respectively). *La Traviata*, however, was far more contemporary. It was scarcely four years old on paper and when it first reached the stage, just 13 months before its official premiere towards the opera on March 6, 1853. *La Traviata* was inspired by a remarkable novel-turned-play called *La Dame aux caméllias*; the novel was originally written by Alexandre Dumas. When Giuseppe Verdi saw the play, he decided to put the story to music. In many ways *La Dame aux caméllias* is an effective example of how romantic love was presented in realistic manner. With Dumas' decision to introduce death early on in the plot and to emphasize the gloom that hangs over all the events, he sets the tone of the book from the beginning, so that the cloud of failure and futility hangs over even the otherwise idyllic days.



The author's stylistic decorum describes the passionate love affair and he manages to suggest a decidedly human desire which played a major role in their relationship. However, there are no such passages in the play derived from the novel. Reading it more than a century and a half after its delayed premier in 1852, one may wonder why the censors kept it from the stage for two and a half years. Courtesans had been represented earlier in the French theatre, but the realistic and sympathetic presentation of a courtesan in a contemporary setting was another matter entirely.

Marie Duplessis and her flesh and blood lovers were the news of yesterday's gossip columns - and more shocking because of it. The opera that Verdi made from the play displayed a strong hold on cultural aspects of society, and he was able to present it in a masterpiece of musical drama.

Courtesy of Florida Grand Opera.

What to Listen For

In addition to a Victorian love story, *La Traviata* is well known for its glorious, infectious, toe-tapping, passionate, bubbling music that gushes out from scene after scene to make this one of Giuseppe Verdi's great masterpieces. *La Traviata* is the only one of Verdi's many operas to be set entirely indoors. Unlike *Il Trovatore*, which was composed simultaneously, *La Traviata* is an intimate piece, full of tender lyricism. The character of Violetta dominates the work and her music changes as she develops through the drama, from the hectic, almost hysterical coloratura of the first act, to the more dramatic passages of the second, and the spiritual quality of her music as she departs life in Act III.

Act I: *Sempre libera* (Violetta)

Violetta (Albina Shagimuratova), a courtesan in Paris, gives a party where she's wooed by Alfredo (Giorgio Berrugi). Once she's alone, she laughs off the idea of true love and vows to live for pleasure, even when she hears the voice of Alfredo outside her window in this production from The Lyric Opera of Chicago.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6t1dpjqsKws&t=6s>

Act I: *Brindisi* (Violetta, Alfredo, and Chorus)

The famous "drinking song" at Violetta's party. A brindisi (pronounced [brindizi]; Italian for "toast") is a song in which a company is exhorted to drink, a drinking song. The word is Italian, but it derives from an old German phrase, (ich) bringe dir's - "(I) offer it to you", which at one time was used to introduce a toast. Venera Gimadieva sings Violetta and Michael Fabiano as Alfredo in this production recorded live at Glyndebourne Opera House, July 2014.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UZvgmpiqCcl>

Act II, Scene 1: *De' miei bollenti spiriti* (Alfredo)

Violetta and Alfredo have moved away from Paris and into the country. Alfredo sings of the beautiful life together with Violetta. Sung by tenor Scott Piper.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JY6oyHikahQ&t=53s>

Act II, Scene 1: *Di provenza il mar il soul* (Giorgio Germont)

Alfredo's father, Giorgio Germont, implores his son to leave Violetta and return home where peace can shine down on him once again. Germont explains that without his son to comfort him, he suffers and his home is desolate. Sung by the brilliant baritone Dmitri Hvorostovsky.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9TIMHmocJtY>

Act III: *Addio del passato* (Violetta)

Violetta sings this heartbreaking aria in the third act, after she receives a letter from Giorgio, telling her that his son has discovered the true reason for her departure and is traveling to her home to be with her. Knowing she has lost her battle with tuberculosis, she sings this aria as a farewell to her happiness and future with Alfredo. Lissette Oropessa portrays Violetta in this production from Teatro Real, July 28, 2020.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ldOBsonOvw>

In Verdi's Time

1813 Giuseppe Fortunino Francesco Verdi born

1814 Napoleon abdicates and is exiled

1816 Rossini's *Barber of Seville* premieres in Rome



Fanny Salvini-Donatelli, the first Violetta

1818 Handel's *Messiah* premieres in the U.S. in Boston, MA

1820 Charles Macintosh of Scotland begins selling raincoats (Macs)

1822 Frederick Law Olmsted (Central park landscape architect) is born

1824 Beethoven's 9th Symphony premieres in Vienna

1826 3rd U.S. President Thomas Jefferson dies

1828 American dictionary patented by Webster

1829 1st typewriter is patented by William Austin Burt

1830 Donizetti's opera, *Anna Bolena*, premieres in Milan

1832 Louisa May Alcott (American author) is born

1833 Oberlin College, the first truly coeducational college opens

1835 Vincenzo Bellini, Italian composer of *Norma*, dies at age 33

1836 Battle of the Alamo ends after 13 days of fighting killing 257 including Davy Crockett

1837 Queen Victoria ascends the British throne at the age of 18. She rules for 63 years

1839 Georges Bizet, French composer of *Carmen*, is born in Paris

1842 Felix Mendelssohn's 3rd *Scottish* Symphony premieres

1843 *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens is published

1844 Verdi's opera, *Hernani*, premieres in Venice

1847 Giuseppe Verdi's *Macbeth* premieres in Florence

1849 Harriet Tubman first escapes slavery in Maryland

1851 *Rigoletto* premieres in Venice

1853 *La Traviata* and *Il Trovatore* premiere in Venice

1855 Charlotte Brontë, (*Jane Eyre*), dies at 38

1857 Verdi's *Simon Boccanegra* premieres in Venice

1860 Russian playwright Anton Chekhov is born



Brindisi

1864 President Lincoln establishes Thanksgiving as a national holiday

1867 Johann Strauss' *Blue Danube* waltz premieres in Vienna

1869 Mahatma Gandhi born in Porbandar, Kathiawar Agency of British India

1871 Verdi's *Aida* premieres at Teatro alla Scala

1876 Alexander Graham Bell patents the telephone

1879 Gilbert & Sullivan's *Pirates of Penzance* premieres

1881 American Red Cross founded by Clara Barton

1884 Statue of Liberty is presented to the U.S. in Paris

1886 Chief Geronimo surrenders ending last major U.S. - Indian war

1888 Vincent van Gogh cuts off his left ear in argument with Paul Gauguin

1891 Henrik Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* premieres in Oslo

1895 Tchaikovsky's ballet *Swan Lake* premieres in St. Petersburg

1899 Scott Joplin granted copyright for *Maple Leaf Rag*

1901 Verdi dies on July 25



Violetta's costume designed by Giuseppe Bertoja for the premiere of *La Traviata*

Post-Opera Activities

Personal Response

1. What surprised you the most about Verdi's opera, La Traviata?

2. What struck you as the most important theme in the opera?

Post-Opera Activities

Critical Response

Create Your Own Review of *La Traviata*

Write a review of *La Traviata*. Use the following chart to organize your thoughts. You can be critical, describing what you liked and what you thought needed improvement. In your review mention the plot, the music, the singing and acting, and visual elements such as the scenery and costumes.

Notes for review of La Traviata	
Music	
Plot	
Vocal Artists (quality of voice and acting)	
Scenery and Costumes	
Overall Rating from 1 (low) to 5 (high)	