



STATE OPERA
SOUTH AUSTRALIA

La Traviata

Information Pack



Australian Government

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INFORMATION PACK

LA TRAVIATA

By Giuseppe Verdi

What is Opera?

Opera is a type of theatre which combines drama, music and elements of dance with exciting costumes and innovative set design

However, in opera, the actors are trained to sing their lines instead of speaking them!

An easy way to think of opera is that it is a story told with music. In a lot of operas, the people on stage sing all the way through. Imagine having all your conversations by singing them!



About La Traviata

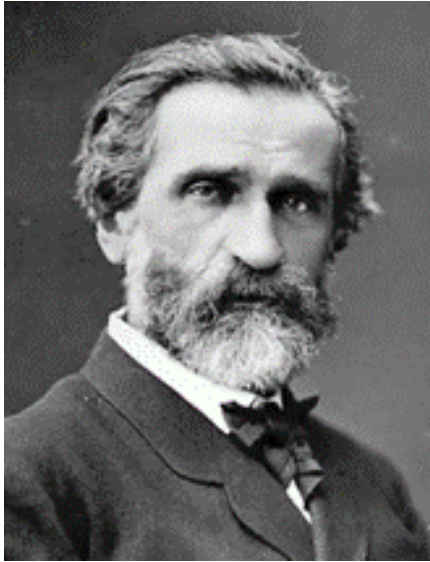
La Traviata translates into English as 'The Fallen Woman', and refers to the lead character of the opera - Violetta. The opera was premiered in 1953 at Teatro La Fenice in Venice.

It was based on the play & novel entitled *La Dame Aux Camellias* (*The Lady of the Camellias*) by Alexandre Dumas Fils, which tells the tale of the authors brief love affair with a courtesan by the name of Marie Duplessis.

Since it was written, La Traviata has become one of the most widely performed operas of all time. The production is traditionally in 3 acts with an interval between the 2nd and 3rd. It runs for approximately 2 hours and 20 minutes.

The Creators

The Composer



Giuseppe Verdi

Giuseppe Fortunino Francesco Verdi (1813 - 1901) was an Italian composer who was considered one of the best operatic composers of all time. Heavily influenced by the likes of Rossini and Bellini, Verdi contributed many great works to the Italian opera canon including Nabucco, Aida, Rigoletto, Il Trovatore and perhaps most famous of all, La Traviata.

The Librettist



Francesco Maria Piave

Francesco Maria Piave (18 May 1810 – 5 March 1876) was an Italian opera librettist who was born in Murano in the lagoon of Venice. His career spanned over 20 years, throughout which he worked with many prolific composers, but most notably the great Giuseppe Verdi. Piave wrote 10 librettos for Verdi, including Macbeth, Rigoletto and La Traviata.



The Characters

Violetta (Soprano)– Violetta is a high-class courtesan, suffering from an illness she knows will take her life. Despite this, she continues to live day to day for pleasure alone. Rarely absent from the stage, she dominates a drama in which men come and go. Vocally, this is one of the more demanding soprano roles, requiring a very specific voice type capable of producing the music's high-lying runs, but also its raw power.

Alfredo (Tenor) – Alfredo stands out from the opera's fashionable city crowd, lacking their superficial polish and confidence. His country manners come with an emotional directness and sincerity that brings out a new side to his beloved Violetta. This role is sung by a tenor, contrasting the other male roles sung by baritones or basses. The juxtaposition of the tenor against the lower voice types helps capture the innocent optimism of the character.



Germont (Baritone) – Alfredo's father, an old-fashioned man whose views on morality and public perception compel him to deny his son's love for a courtesan. Germont is a complicated man (character) who only wants what is best for his family but realises later that his actions do more harm than good for his son.

Baron Douphol (Baritone) – Violetta's previous lover before Alfredo, who she brings along to a party at Flora's house. Alfredo bests the baron in a game of cards and confronts Violetta about why she left him, to which she replies that she is in love with the Baron.

Other Supporting Characters:

Marquis (Bass)

Gastone (Tenor)

Doctor (Bass)

Flora (Mezzo-soprano)

Annina (Soprano)

Synopsis

Beware of Spoilers!

ACT I

Violetta Valéry knows that she will die soon, exhausted by her restless life as a courtesan. At a party she is introduced to Alfredo Germont, who has been fascinated by her for a long time. Rumor has it that he has been enquiring after her health every day. The guests are amused by this seemingly naive and emotional attitude, and they ask Alfredo to propose a toast. He celebrates true love, and Violetta responds in praise of free love (Ensemble: "Libiamo ne' lieti calici"). She is touched by his candid manner and honesty. Suddenly she feels faint, and the guests withdraw. Only Alfredo remains behind and declares his love (Duet: "Un di felice"). There is no place for such feelings in her life, Violetta replies. But she gives him a camellia, asking him to return when the flower has faded. He realizes this means he will see her again the following day. Alone, Violetta is torn by conflicting emotions—she doesn't want to give up her way of life, but at the same time she feels that Alfredo has awakened her desire to be truly loved ("Ah, fors'è lui... Sempre libera").



ACT II

Violetta has chosen a life with Alfredo, and they enjoy their love in the country, far from society ("De' miei bollenti spiriti"). When Alfredo discovers that this is only possible because Violetta has been selling her property, he immediately leaves for Paris to procure money. Violetta has received an invitation to a masked ball, but she no longer cares for such distractions. In Alfredo's absence, his father, Giorgio Germont, pays her a visit. He demands that she separate from his son, as their relationship threatens his daughter's impending marriage (Duet: "Pura siccome un angelo"). But over the course of their conversation, Germont comes to realize that Violetta is not after his son's money—she is a woman who loves unselfishly. He appeals to Violetta's generosity of spirit and explains that, from a bourgeois point of view, her liaison with Alfredo has no future. Violetta's resistance dwindles and she finally agrees to leave Alfredo forever. Only after her death shall he learn the truth about why she returned to her old life. She accepts the invitation to the ball and writes a goodbye letter to her lover. Alfredo returns, and while he is reading the letter, his father appears to console him ("Di Provenza"). But all the memories of home and a happy family can't prevent the furious and jealous Alfredo from seeking revenge for Violetta's apparent betrayal.

At the masked ball, news has spread of Violetta and Alfredo's separation. There are grotesque dance entertainments, ridiculing the duped lover. Meanwhile, Violetta and her new lover, Baron Douphol, have arrived. Alfredo and the baron battle at the gaming table and Alfredo wins a fortune: lucky at cards, unlucky in love. When everybody has withdrawn, Alfredo confronts Violetta, who claims to be truly in love with the Baron. In his rage Alfredo calls the guests as witnesses and declares that he doesn't owe Violetta anything. He throws his winnings at her. Giorgio Germont, who has witnessed the scene, rebukes his son for his behavior. The baron challenges his rival to a duel.



Synopsis

ACT III

Violetta is dying. Her last remaining friend, Doctor Grenvil, knows that she has only a few more hours to live. Alfredo's father has written to Violetta, informing her that his son was not injured in the duel. Full of remorse, he has told him about Violetta's sacrifice. Alfredo wants to rejoin her as soon as possible. Violetta is afraid that he might be too late ("Addio, del passato"). The sound of rampant celebrations are heard from outside while Violetta is in mortal agony. But Alfredo does arrive and the reunion fills Violetta with a final euphoria (Duet: "Parigi, o cara"). Her energy and exuberant joy of life return. All sorrow and suffering seems to have left her—a final illusion, before death claims her.



Opera Glossary

The below terms may be helpful in understanding opera better:

ACT — a major section (like a chapter of a novel) of a dramatic production. Each act may consist of a number of scenes. An opera has one or more acts.

ACCOMPANIMENT — the music that supports or plays a secondary role to the melody. The accompaniment can be sung or played.

ARIA — a solo song.

COMPOSER — the musician who writes the music of the operatic piece.

CHORD — more than one note sounded at the same time (simultaneously).

ENSEMBLE — a group of musicians. In opera an ensemble can refer to any music written for two or more voices.

HARMONY — any combination of notes that are sung or played simultaneously. Usually the word harmony refers to a pleasing combination of those sounds (but not always).

KEY — the presence of tonality.

LIBRETTO — the text of the opera.

LYRICIST (LIBRETTIST) — a writer who transforms prose into something suitable for a song setting. This writer has the skills of a poet to structure the text into verses.

MAJOR/MINOR — the modality in harmony. These can be demonstrated by simple triads or coloured by extra notes.

OPERA — A work for the stage that combines music with dramatic and theatrical elements. An opera can be of any length, combined with instrumental forces of any size, and can be based on stories of any type. An opera in the 16th century can be very different from those created in the 20th century.

TEXTURE — the layers of sound. Different combination of pitches and of instruments can create interesting sound that can be described as heavy or light, thick or thin.

THEME — a melody belonging to a passage of music or assigned to a dramatic character.

TIMBRE — the character or quality of a musical sound or voice.

