



LA TRAVIATA

GUIDEBOOK



OPERA
COLORADO

WELCOME TO THE OPERA!

On behalf of everyone at Opera Colorado, we are so happy to have you join us for the final dress rehearsal of Verdi's *La traviata*. This final rehearsal is an opportunity for our singers and creative team to bring all the elements of the production and performance together one last time before presenting it to the public. These elements include sets, costumes, hair and makeup, lighting, staging, orchestra, chorus, and of course, our principal singers.

To preserve their voices for this weekend's performances, some of the singers may be "marking," which means that they may not sing with the full volume of their voice. The final dress rehearsal is often a complete run-through of the opera, but there is a chance that the director or conductor will ask to stop the performers so that they can work on a section of music or staging.

WHAT TO EXPECT

WHAT TO WEAR

You'll see a range of attire at any Opera Colorado performance—from cowboy boots to stiletto heels, and polo shirts to tuxedo jackets. Many of our patrons would say they like to dress "Colorado Fancy," which often means a comfortable dress with a cardigan, or slacks with a button-up shirt. Then again, we have other patrons who view a night at the opera as the perfect excuse to wear their most fabulous outfit.

A GUIDE TO THE OPERA

- The opera is sung in Italian with English supertitles that will be displayed on the back of the seat in front of you
- Before and after the dress rehearsal, taking photos in the lobby and inside the theatre is permitted and encouraged. However, during the dress rehearsal, photography, videos, and audio recordings are prohibited.
- Please do not eat, drink, or chew gum in the theatre.
- Please be sure to silence all phones and electronic devices.
- Please be respectful of your fellow audience members by avoiding distracting behavior during the rehearsal so that everyone can enjoy the opera. However, feel free to clap, react, and openly enjoy the performance in whichever way suits you best.
- Sit back, relax, and enjoy the show. Let the music draw you in to the story! As an audience member, you are an integral part of the performance. Without you, there is no show!



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OPERA WORDS TO KNOW

- **Opera**—a dramatic work in one or more acts set to music for singers and instrumentalists. The Italian word opera means “work,” like a work of art.
- **Aria**—a piece or song for one voice in an opera. It comes from the Greek and Latin word “aer” which means “air.”
- **Libretto**—literally translated from Italian to mean “little book.” This is the text of an opera. The person who writes the words for an opera is called a **librettist**.
- **Composer**—the person who writes the music for an opera.
- **Conductor**—the person who leads the singers and orchestra. Typically, the conductor stands in the orchestra pit below the stage and conducts the musicians with a baton.
- **Supertitles**—projections that appear above the stage of the opera’s text, very often translated into English.
- **Leitmotif**—a short, recurring musical theme throughout a musical or literary composition associated with a particular character, theme, emotion, idea, etc.
- **Vibrato**—the gentle vibration created by slight variations of pitch in the singing voice. Vibrato develops naturally with a healthy vocal technique and is used to support the voice, maintain pitch, and add stylistic effect.
- **Props**—Objects placed on the stage and used by the actors to help tell the story. The word “prop” is also an abbreviation for the word “properties”.
- **Overture**—the instrumental introduction to an opera. The overture frequently includes elements of the score that is to follow.
- **Soprano**—the highest and most common operatic voice predominantly sung by female-identifying singers. Sopranos often sing the role of the young romantic heroines.
- **Mezzo-Soprano**—the voice type that typically sings in a slightly lower range than sopranos. While mezzo-sopranos often sing just as high as some sopranos, they are usually categorized into this voice type because they have a richer, darker vocal tone than sopranos. Mezzo-sopranos often portray older characters, villains, or seductive anti-heroines.
- **Tenor**—the highest natural male singing voice. In 18th and 19th century opera, tenors almost always portray the romantic heroes.
- **Baritone**—the voice type between tenor and bass. Most often, baritones play either the tenor’s romantic rival or his best friend.
- **Bass**—the lowest male singing voice. In serious operas, basses often play authority figures such as fathers, kings, or priests, but sometimes they also portray incarnations of the devil. In contrast, basses found in comic operas are typically the comic relief.

CAST

IN ORDER OF VOCAL APPEARANCE

SARA GARTLAND

Role: **Violetta Valéry**

Beloved courtesan dying of tuberculosis

Voice Type: Soprano

JORDAN MCCREADY

Role: **Flora Bervoix**

Parisian socialite, friend of Violetta

Voice Type: Mezzo-Soprano

OLIVER POVEDA ZAVALA

Role: **Doctor Grenvil**

Violetta's doctor and friend

Voice Type: Bass-Baritone

KEVIN SPOONER

Role: **Marquis d'Obigny**

Friend of Violetta and Flora

Voice Type: Bass-Baritone

MASON O'BRIEN

Role: **Baron Douphol**

One of Violetta's patrons

Voice Type: Baritone

DANIEL MILLER

Role: **Gastone de Letorières**

Friend of Violetta and Flora

Voice Type: Tenor

BEN REISINGER

Role: **Alfredo Germont**

Violetta's lover

Voice Type: Tenor

BRIDGET RAVENSCRAFT

Role: **Annina**

Violetta's maid

Voice Type: Soprano

WESTON HURT

Role: **Giorgio Germont**

Alfredo's father

Voice Type: Baritone

CREATIVE TEAM

ARI PELTO

Conductor

LINDSAY WOODWARD

Répétiteur

MARCO NISTICÒ

Stage Director

JOE BEUMER

Lighting Designer

SAHAR NOURI

Chorus Master

RONELL OLIVERI

Wig & Make-Up Designer

RACHAEL HARDING

Choreographer





SYNOPSIS PART 1

ACT ONE

Paris, France in the mid-1800s, Violetta's salon.

Violetta's friends gather at a party, where she is introduced by Gastone to Alfredo Germont. Violetta learns that Alfredo has been visiting her while she was ill, she finds touching, since no one else had done the same. She and Alfredo lead the party in a toast, the famous Brindisi, "Libiamo ne' lieti calici." As the party continues, everyone begins to dance, but Violetta falters, reflecting the limitations of her condition. The guests leave, but Alfredo stays behind to express his feelings for her. She initially dismisses him, but after he leaves, she ponders what life would be like if she chose love in her dazzling arias that end the first act.



Set design for act one, captured here at Nashville Opera.



Alphonse Mucha's poster for an 1896 production of La dame aux Camélias, the play by Alexandre Dumas fils that inspired La traviata.

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

Months later, in a country house outside of Paris.

Violetta and Alfredo have moved in with each other in the countryside and spend each day in bliss. Given Alfredo's modest means, however, Violetta has had to sell her belongings to support their lifestyle. Alfredo learns this from Annina, and vows to fix the situation himself. After Alfredo departs for Paris, Violetta returns to the house and finds an invitation to one of Flora's parties. Alfredo's father, Giorgio Germont, arrives with difficult news. Germont is afraid that Alfredo's relationship will threaten his daughter's marriage, given that Violetta is a courtesan and has not married Alfredo. He asks Violetta to end the relationship for the sake of his family. Violetta pleads with Germont, but he won't give in and tells Violetta that she'll find someone else to love. Violetta eventually relents, asking Germont to tell his daughter about her sacrifice, as well as making sure that she'll be the one to break things off with Alfredo. She also asks Germont to only tell Alfredo the reason she left him after she passes away. As Violetta prepares to depart for Paris, Alfredo returns, and the two share a tearful moment. After Violetta leaves, Alfredo finds the invitation from Flora and—not knowing the reason why she left—angrily resolves to confront her at the party.



SYNOPSIS PART 2

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

Paris, Flora's salon.

Alfredo arrives at Flora's party and soon after, so does Violetta, on the arm of Baron Douphol. After a lucky streak gambling at the party, Alfredo obnoxiously bets against the Baron, saying if he won, he'd be able to take Violetta home. Violetta, afraid that the Baron will challenge Alfredo to a duel for his behavior, urges Alfredo to stop. He refuses, not realizing that she is trying to protect him.

Alfredo then calls the guests over to see him embarrass Violetta, throwing his winnings at her feet, signifying payment for her "services" while they were together. Everyone is upset, as Violetta faints, and the Baron challenges Alfredo to a duel.



Fanny Salvini-Donatelli (soprano), the first Violetta.



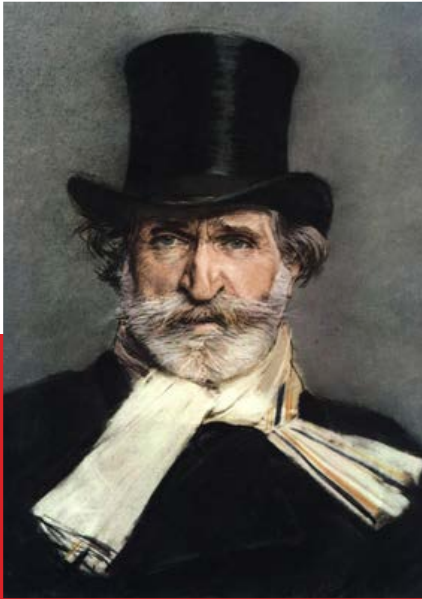
Set design for act three, captured here at Nashville Opera.

ACT THREE

Paris, in Violetta's bedroom.

Doctor Grenvil visits Violetta, whose condition has deteriorated drastically in the month since Flora's party. He lets Annina know that Violetta only has a few hours left to live. Violetta reads a letter from Germont, which recounts how Alfredo won his duel against the Baron and is now abroad. As promised, Germont revealed Violetta's sacrifice to his son, and now Alfredo is on his way to try to see

Violetta before she passes. Alfredo miraculously arrives, and the two embrace once more. They sing "Parigi, o cara," where they imagine their future life together away from Paris. Violetta is as happy as she is inconsolable, because her true love returned, but almost too late. Alfredo tries to comfort her, and suddenly, Germont appears. He has come to apologize to Violetta and tell her that he considers her like a daughter of his own. Violetta collapses in Alfredo's arms. The Doctor checks her pulse and confirms that Violetta is dead.



1886 portrait of Verdi by Giovanni Bol

COMPOSER

Giuseppe Verdi

October 10, 1813 – January 27, 1901

BIOGRAPHY

Giuseppe Verdi was born in Italy on October 10, 1813, before the country was unified. Verdi produced some of the most successful operas in the history of the artform, many of which are still frequently performed today such as *Aida*, *Rigoletto*, and *La traviata*.

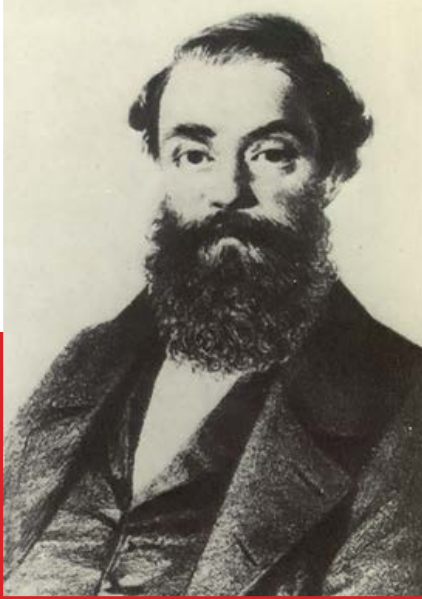
Verdi's early career was riddled with tragedies and disappointments. He was rejected by the music conservatory in Milan and he lost his wife and young children to illness. Then, his second opera was a flop. The general director of La Scala (famous opera house in Milan) urged Verdi to write a third opera, *Nabucco*, which was met with overwhelming acclaim, catapulting Verdi into stardom. For the next ten years, he roamed around Italy and Europe, writing about twenty more operas.

In his last twenty years, Verdi spent much of his time working on his farm. He also founded a retirement home for musicians in downtown Milan that is still in use today. Following his death in 1901, Verdi's funeral was attended by 300,000 people who processed through the streets of Milan following Verdi's coffin singing one of Verdi's most famous choruses, "Va, pensiero" from *Nabucco*.

Most of his operas have serious plots, based on literature by Hugo, Schiller, Byron, and more. Verdi wrote three operas based on Shakespeare's plays: *Macbeth*, *Otello*, and *Falstaff* (one of his only comic operas, based on *The Merry Wives of Windsor*). Verdi's music became the life and breath of a new Italian nation and he is still considered by many to be one of the greatest opera composers to have ever lived. His unique ability to communicate the emotions, drama, and empathy of the human condition through his music is unparalleled.

TAKE A LISTEN: Watch the video of "Va, pensiero" as sung by the chorus of Opera di Roma >>

[**VIDEO**](#)



Portrait of Piave by “Granger”

LIBRETTIST

Francesco Maria Piave

May 18, 1810 – March 5, 1876

BIOGRAPHY

Francesco Maria Piave was born in Murano, a series of islands just one mile north of Venice. When their family fell on hard times, Piave and his father moved to Rome to find work. Piave, who had studied at the seminary in Venice, found jobs writing and translating and became friends with poets and literati in Rome. After the death of his father, Piave returned to Venice in September 1838, where he worked as a proofreader and editor for a publisher.

In 1841, Piave turned his writing efforts to a libretto for composer Samuel Levi. The work was never performed, but the exercise gave Piave his first experience in writing for opera. In 1843, he agreed to write a libretto for an opera to be performed at Venice’s famed Teatro La Fenice—the composer for this opera was Giuseppe Verdi. Without having met, the two collaborated on the libretto for *Ernani*. Piave completed the libretto in less than two months, but Verdi feared the writer’s inexperience with staging an opera led him to overload the libretto with verbose passages—taxing singers and audiences alike. Traveling to Venice, Verdi met Piave for the first time. Piave and Verdi became close friends, often traveling so they could work together in person and corresponding regularly when collaborating across distances. Verdi was sometimes domineering, as when the production of *Rigoletto* was in jeopardy, but Piave remained loyal. Piave once described their friendship as “a faith, a religion, a cult.”

On December 5, 1867, Piave suffered a debilitating stroke, which robbed him of his ability to speak and move. Verdi, along with others in the music community, helped support the librettist and his family during his illness. During his lifetime, Piave wrote approximately seventy librettos, but today, he is primarily remembered for the ten he wrote for Verdi’s operas, including *Macbeth* (1847), *Rigoletto* (1851), and *La traviata* (1853).

MAKING CONNECTIONS PART 1



WHAT IS A COURTESAN?

A courtesan in nineteenth-century Paris was not the same as our understanding of a paid escort today. Courtesans offered their admirers more than just physical pleasure. They were refined, cultivated intellectuals who worked for the highest-ranking members of society, providing companionship in exchange for status and influence. Successful courtesans, having been compensated with jewels and money by their benefactors, often became exorbitantly wealthy.

DISCUSSION TOPIC:

As you watch this production of *La traviata*, consider the implications that Violetta's line of work has on her relationships. What does Alfredo's father and family think of her? Is she free to choose her own path, or are there barriers restricting her from fulfilling her dreams? Is she exploited by her benefactors, or are her relationships to her advantage?



Cecilia Violetta López as Violetta (in black) in act two, scene two of *La traviata*. Opera Colorado, 2018 / Matthew Staver.



Viva Verdi: Enthusiastic inscriptions for Verdi in Naples under the Austrian occupation in 1859, following the ban on his opera *Un Ballo in Maschera* by Unknown artist.

WHAT DOES “VIVA VERDI” MEAN?

Giuseppe Verdi was not only known for his work as a composer, but he was also a member of Parliament and a vocal advocate for Italian unification. After Napoleon's defeat in 1815, Italy was divided up into multiple regions and principalities, many of which were controlled by the Austrians. Verdi's music quickly became a soundtrack for Italian patriots who sought the unification of their country. In particular, the chorus of Jewish slaves from Verdi's opera *Nabucco* served as an anthem of this movement because the text depicted the Jews mourning the loss of their homeland, a relatable message for the Italians.

Even the composer's name had a double meaning. The slogan, “Viva Verdi!” was used by Italian nationalists to mean “Long live Vittorio Emmanuele Re D'Italia,” referring to Victor Emmanuel II, who was the King of Sardinia and finally took the throne of a unified Italy in 1861.

DISCUSSION TOPIC: Can you think of another time in history when a song or a musical artist became an important figure in politics or world events?

MAKING CONNECTIONS PART 2

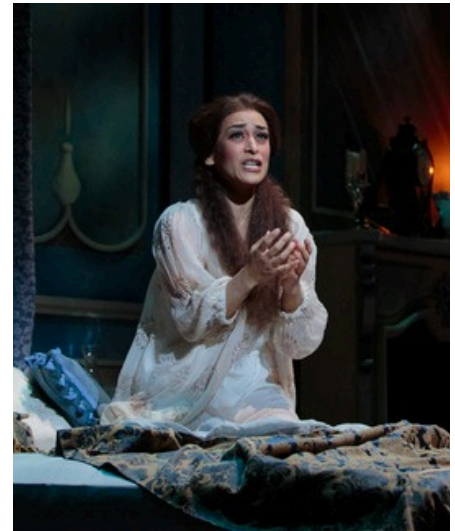


WHAT IS TUBERCULOSIS?

Tuberculosis, also referred to as “TB” or “consumption,” is an infectious disease that affects the lungs. TB has existed for ages, but it was rampant in the 1800s, especially in Europe. Since the 1900s, better hygiene practices and antibiotics helped decrease the prevalence of TB. Many well-known artists experienced the disease, such as John Keats, Edgar Allan Poe, Frédéric Chopin, the Brönte sisters, Claude Monet and more. Tuberculosis shows up in opera quite a bit as well, claiming the life of Violetta in *La traviata* and Mimì from Puccini’s *La bohème*.

DISCUSSION TOPIC:

Can you think of another instance when illness was depicted in either literature, visual art, music, film or television?



Cecilia Violetta López as Violetta in act three of *La traviata*. Opera Colorado, 2018 / Matthew Staver.

DID YOU KNOW? VIOLETTA’S REAL-LIFE INSPIRATION



Marie Duplessis, painted by Édouard Viénot

The character of Violetta is based on an actual person! Marie Duplessis (born Alphonsine Plessis) grew up in an abusive environment in Normandy. After being sold by her father to a man many years her senior, she worked as a shop girl until she eventually turned to prostitution to make ends meet. She invested in her education to become what we now regard as a “courtesan” (see above). She became very well known in Paris for her beauty, grace, and charm. Alexandre Dumas fils, an author and playwright (whose father wrote *The Three Musketeers* and *The Count of Monte Cristo*), fell for Marie’s charms and they entered into a relationship. As time passed, Dumas fils could not financially support her and grew quickly jealous of those who could provide what he could not.

This brought their relationship to an end, but Marie’s impact on the author’s life was not so short-lived. Marie fell ill and died of consumption (tuberculosis) when she was only in her early twenties. Within a year of her death, Dumas fils published *La Dame aux Camélias*, a semi-autobiographical novel telling the story of the author’s love affair with Marie (though all of the names and some details are different). The novel became a play, and then inspired Verdi’s *La traviata*. While the Dumas fils novel and play center the male love interest as the storyteller and main focus, *La traviata* instead tells the story from Violetta’s perspective and motivations.



LISTENING GUIDE

Below are audio and video links to some notable excerpts from Giuseppe Verdi's opera *La traviata*, along with some critical listening questions for each example. All clips taken from Opera Colorado's 2018 production of *La traviata*. These clips feature Cecilia Violetta López as Violetta, Eric Barry as Alfredo, and Malcolm MacKenzie as Germont. **Click the title of the piece or the VIDEO button to access the clips.**

ACT ONE: Libiamo ne' lieti calici

[VIDEO](#)

The clip is Alfredo's toast from the first act, "Libiamo ne' lieti calici," ("Let's drink from joyful cups") also known as "the brindisi" or "the drinking song." After Alfredo begins the toast, Violetta and her friends join too.

- What is the overall emotion of the piece and how does the music portray this?
- What instruments can you hear in the orchestra? Listen to the beat. Does it sound like a dance? What kind of dance?

ACT ONE: Sempre libera

[VIDEO](#)

The end of act one focuses on Violetta, who is debating whether she should follow her heart and be with Alfredo in "Ah! fors'è lui" ("Ah! Maybe it's him"), or devote her life to carefree living in "Sempre libera" ("Always free").

- Why do you think Verdi wrote so many high notes for Violetta to sing?
- How does Violetta react to Alfredo's voice from offstage? (He's singing "Un dì felice, eterea," their act one duet).

ACT TWO: Dite alla giovine

[VIDEO](#)

Before the act two duet "Dite alla giovine" ("Tell the young girl"), Germont tried to convince Violetta to abandon Alfredo for the sake of his family's reputation, and now Violetta expresses her sadness as she accepts Germont's request. The young girl in the title is Alfredo's sister, whose impending marriage is at risk because of Alfredo and Violetta's relationship.

- How is this music different from the first two excerpts? Why do you think Verdi chose to compose this music differently than the music of act one?
- Why do you think Violetta eventually gives in to Germont's terrible request?

Portions of this content were adapted from materials originally developed by Sara Litchfield/Seattle Opera.