



Victorian
Opera

Giuseppe Verdi

LA TRAVIATA

Education Resource

Music



LA TRAVIATA - MUSIC RESOURCE

INTRODUCTION



Figure 1: La traviata - Fondazione Pergolesi Spontini © Foto Binci

“A breathtaking production, designed by one of the most influential stage designers of the 20th century whose work has never been seen live in Australia until now.” – Richard Mills

From legendary European designer Josef Svoboda, comes a towering vision of Verdi’s famous opera, dubbed the ‘Traviata of the mirrors’. Through the extraordinary window of a giant mirror, the audience gazes into the life of the ‘fallen woman’. Violetta Valéry is a celebrated courtesan who must choose between her desire for high society and her longing for love. Australian singing revelation Jessica Pratt brings to life the tragic figure of Violetta, a role often considered the pinnacle of soprano repertoire.

La traviata | Giuseppe Verdi
17 – 29 May 2014 | Her Majesty’s Theatre

Sung in Italian with English surtitles. 2 hours and 10 minutes with two intervals.



BACKGROUND

- Opera in three acts
- Libretto - Francesco Maria Piave
- Music- Giuseppe Verdi
- Setting – Paris and surrounding areas
- Based on the play - *La Dame aux Camelias* by Alexandre Dumas Fils

Performances

- Opening Performance – 6th March, 1853 in Venice at the Teatro La Fenice
- It is one of the most widely performed operas.

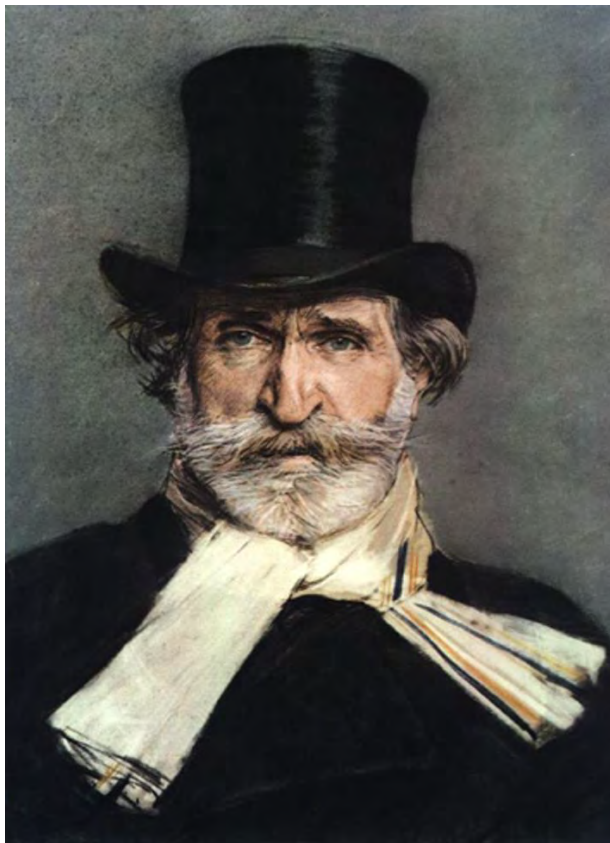


Figure 2: Giuseppe Verdi

Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901)

Giuseppe Verdi (which translates to Jo Green) was born in Roncole, near Busseto in Italy and died in Milan. He wrote over 30 operatic works, in which half are still performed and considered some of the finest repertoire. As a child, he was given lessons in composition and became interested in composing for local theatre. He fell in love with Margherita, the daughter of a town merchant. They married in 1836 and had two children, but unfortunately they both died in infancy, followed by the death of his wife in 1840 which devastated Verdi.

His first opera, *Oberto* was premiered in 1839 which then followed a period of intense hard work. His personal tragedies could be a contributing factor into the emotionally charged and dramatic compositional style. His inspiration was patriotic themes, romantic stories, and contemporary and classic literature including Victor Hugo, Byron and Shakespeare.

He is considered to have brought Italian Opera to its peak through his technique and musical style. Some of these well-known operas include *Macbeth* (1847), *Othello* (1877), *Falstaff* (1883), and *Nabucco* (1842). When Verdi died in 1901 he was admired, revered, and acknowledged as one of the greatest composers Italy had ever produced. His works had virtually monopolised the Italian operatic scene for most of the 19th century.

Definition

Bel Canto – literally means beautiful singing, an 18th Century European style which was in fashion until the 1840s. It is characterized by a legato production of sound, light tones in the upper registers, a flexible technique and graceful phrasing.



La traviata

La traviata is the eighteenth and one of the most famous and performed of Verdi's operas. During that period, he also wrote *Rigoletto* (1851) and *Il Trovatore* (1853).



Figure 3: *La traviata* opening night program

La traviata epitomises great romantic opera with a marriage of the arts - a musical drama full of passion, glorious song, soaring arias, rousing choruses, costumes, large orchestra, and spectacular sets. The opera is based on the play *La Dame aux Camelias* adapted from a novel by Alexander Dumas Fils. It was originally set in the 1770s. The first performance was deemed a failure. The end of the first act was met with applause, but during the second act, the audience began to turn against the performance. There was some scorn casting the 38 year old Fanny

Salcivini-Donateli in the lead role of Violetta. With a revision of the score and updated casting, it was subsequently performed in 1855 in Venice, London, New York as well as Paris in 1856. Here, it gained popularity to the standard operative repertoire. Today it is one of the most popular opera of all times.

The title *La traviata* can be translated as 'the Lost One', or 'the fallen woman'. The plot centres around Violetta's affair with Alfredo. Verdi adheres to the ideal of opera as human drama which he conveys by means of a direct vocal melody. He also utilises the operatic forces of recitatives, arias and choruses. There are solos, duets, ensembles and choruses.

His libretti are not only emotionally charged, they are melodramatic, exploring the strongest human emotions, that is, love and death.

These are manifested in his music through expressive melodies, virtuosic vocal melodies, rich harmonies, full orchestration and utilisation of the poetry into drama. Some of the arias are more intimate in nature with an expressive, flexible and semi-declamatory style. *La traviata* is in three acts, divided into scenes.

SYNOPSIS

In her Paris salon, the courtesan Violetta Valéry greets party guests, including a new admirer, Alfredo Germont. When they are alone, Alfredo confesses his love. At first Violetta protests that love means nothing to her but something about the young man's sincerity touches her, and they meet again. Some months later Alfredo and Violetta are living in a country house near Paris. Trouble intrudes with the appearance of Alfredo's father who demands she renounce his son: the scandal of Alfredo's affair with Violetta has threatened his daughter's engagement. Violetta reluctantly agrees to leave. Later Alfredo, believing Violetta has thrown him over for another lover, confronts her at the party and denounces her. Six months later, Violetta has tuberculosis and does not have long to live. Alfredo discovering the truth rushes to her bedside. The lovers plan to leave Paris forever but after a last resurgence of strength Violetta falls dead at her lover's feet.





Figure 5: Jessica Pratt (Violetta) © Martin Philbey



Figure 4: Richard Mills (Conductor) © Charlie Kinross

CAST LIST

Violetta Valéry <i>a courtesan</i>	soprano
Flora Bervoix <i>her friend</i>	mezzo-soprano
Baron Douphol <i>Violetta's protector</i>	baritone
Marquis D'Obigny <i>friend of Flora</i>	bass
Doctor Grenvil	bass
Gaston, Vicomte de Létorères	tenor
Alfredo Germont	tenor
Annina <i>Violetta's maid</i>	soprano
Giuseppe <i>Violetta's servant</i>	tenor
Giorgio Germont <i>Alfredo's father</i>	baritone
Servant of Flora	bass
Messenger	bass

Ladies and gentlemen, friends of Violetta and Flora, matadors, picadors, gypsies, servants of Violetta and Flora, masquers, dancers.

ORCHESTRA

Piccolo/flute
Flute
2 oboes
2 clarinets
2 bassoons
4 horns
2 trumpets
3 trombones
Cimbasso
Timpani
Cassa
Triangle
Tambourines
Pikes
Banda
Harp
Strings



PRE-VISIT EXPLORATION



Figure 6: La traviata - Fondazione Pergolesi Spontini © Foto Binci

What to expect before, during and after your opera experience.

To gain the most from your opera experience it is highly recommended to study the work, discover its inspiration, learn about the composers and explore the main themes. The following educational resources will provide you with information about the work, what to expect during your opera experience and post opera reflection. Most of the information is included here in the pre-visit exploration section which of course can be re-visited during and after the opera experience.

ACTIVITY 1

- What is an opera?
- What is an overture?
- What is a recitative?
- What is an aria?
- What is an operatic chorus?
- What is an overture?
- What is your voice type? E.g. soprano, alto, contralto, tenor, baritone, bass

- What are the purposes of scenery, costumes, lighting?

ACTIVITY 2

- Read the story of *La traviata*. Who are the main characters? How does the plot relate to modern day life and stories in the media?
- Find some pictures and read the history of opera theatres where Verdi's operas have been performed. Have a look at La Scala in Milan, Arena Verona in Verona, The Lincoln Centre in New York City, Opera National de Paris, the Sydney Opera House, Covent Garden in London, Winener Staatsoper, and the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow. Why are these theatres so decadent?
- There have been 460 performances at Convent Garden, 793 performances at the Metropolitan Opera in New York and 650 in Vienna at the Vienna Hof and Staatoper and 601 at the Berlin Hof. Why do you think it has been so immensely popular?
- In which Australian theatres has *La Traviata* been performed in?
- Dame Joan Sutherland (1926-2010) was one of Australia's opera singers who have sung the role of Violetta. Research her life and operatic accomplishments.
- Listen to some of the 'hits' from Verdi's operas. These include; 'Grand March' from *Aida*, 'Anvil Chorus' from *Il Trovatore* and 'Va Pensiro' from *Nabucco*. Verdi's operas continue to be performed around the world are immensely popular. Why do you think this is the case?



LISTEN



Figure 7: La Traviata - Fondazione Pergolesi Spontini © Foto Binci

Listen to the following three excerpts selected for study. These all occur in Act One as they are the most well-known and famous musical examples from the opera. Once this has enticed you, you are encouraged to listen through the entire opera.

A [Prelude](#) to an opera is usually designed to set up the mood and drama of the opera.

ACTIVITY 3

- What kind of mood does this Prelude convey? How is this achieved? Consider the choice of tempo, dynamic, instrumentation, the shape of the melodic line, and tonality.
- Which instruments feature in the prelude?
- How would you describe the melody?

Bars	Features
1 - 16	Key signature E major, Common time. Strings
Section A	Marked Adagio, ppp. Sets the mood for what is to come. Slow moving block chords in strings. Quite chromatic.
17 – 28	Horn and bass added. Marked 'with expression' Descending 8 bar melody in octaves in strings over rhythmic bass in quavers.
25 – 28	Link featuring tremolos in bass
29 – 50	Continuous semiquaver passages in octaves in upper strings marked staccato over chordal bass.



ACTIVITY 4

Follow the sections below (in English translation) as you listen to the recording.

Act One - [‘Libiamo ne’lieti calici’](#) (Brindisi) – Alfredo, Violetta, Guests

Introduction - Bars 1 – 21 – Allegretto. B flat major, 3/8 time.

Section A

Alfredo

Let's drink, - yes, let's drink to the glorious pleasure of life, of enchantment of beauty: I sing the passion, the thrill of youth – that can set the world a flame.

I drink to love's sweet ecstasy that fills the soul with wonder,
To eyes so brightly alluring, they set my heart on fire –

So join me, dear comrades, dear friends,
and drink – to the glory and power of love

Section B

Chorus

Ah- let's raise our cups to love, ah! Let us raise our cups to love

Section C

Violetta

Dear friends – dear friends, let us fill the night with the sound of carousing and laughter,
Life is but folly yes, folly and grief, so live for this moment of bliss.
Then drink and feast so joyously for life and youth are fleeting;
And love itself 's a flower that fades too soon and dies – So take what moments of Pleasure grant, let us find out hope in this.

Section D

Chorus

Ah we drink to the pleasure and joys of life,
to this night of carousing and laughter
We'll take, yes, we'll take what bliss will grant,
let us find all our hope in this

Section E Duet

Violetta

I ask for only pleasure

Alfredo

Yet love is more enduring

Violetta

My heart remains indifferent

Alfredo

And mine calls out for love

Final Chorus

We drink to the pleasures of wine and song –
to this night of carousing and laughter:
We'll take – we'll take what bliss will grant,
let us find all our hope in this,
Ah! Our hope's in this, ah! – ah! – our
hope's in this, yes we'll find all our hopes, all
our hope in this.

- What is the overall mood of this aria? Serious? Tragic? Happy?
- What type of dance does it suggest to you?
- How many times are the verse and chorus repeated?
- What kind of voices are singing?
- Going out for a drink with friends was a popular pastime in Europe during the nineteenth century. How much have our social lives changed?
- Listen to a recording and sing along with the chorus.





Figure 8: La Traviata - Fondazione Pergolesi Spontini © Foto Binci

ACTIVITY 5

Follow the sections below (in English translation) as you listen to the recording.

'È Strano è strano' – How curious! How curious!! – Violetta

This is sung by Violetta where she demonstrates the compositional operatic styles of Recitativo, Arias arioso, and embellished cadenzas.

Section A

È Strano è strano – How curious! How curious!!

Recitativo: C major, Common time marked allegro

Note the way the storyline is forwarded by unaccompanied speech-like singing with orchestra interjections between the sentences.

Section B

Ah forse lui quest'anima - Oh, can it be I dreamed of him

Aria - F minor, 3/8 time Andantino.
Concludes with 23 semi-quavers on the vowel ah!

Section C

Follie follie - What folly! what folly!

Arioso – accompanied recitative. Allegro F major common time concluding with more melismatic passages.

Section D

Sempre li be radegg'io – Let me live in fancy free and roam at will from pleasure to pleasure.

Aria – Allegro brillante – A flat major in 6/8 time

- What is a recitative and what is the role of the recitative? Is the storyline moved along here?
- What is an aria, arioso? How smooth and melodic is the aria?
- What is a cadenza? How is an operatic cadenza different to an orchestral cadenza?
- In the twenty first century, women can have successful work careers. What was the situation for women in eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe? Do you believe that Violetta is a victim of her circumstances?
- At the end of the opera, Violetta dies from consumption (tuberculosis). This was a common disease in the nineteenth century. Chopin, Keats and Boccherini were a few artists who suffered from it. Why was consumption such a tragic way to die? What is the cure?



DURING YOUR OPERA EXPERIENCE



Figure 9: *La traviata* - Fondazione Pergolesi Spontini © Foto Binci

During the performance, reflect on how the storyline is represented. Can you recognise the characters, or have they been modernised? Has this production followed the conventional costumes, lighting and scenery you viewed prior to attending? Listen to the music and how it blends with the singers. Take note of the audience's reaction around you, the emotion they are sharing with the performers, and how the performers respond to the audience. Most importantly, enjoy the performance and all it has to offer.

- What is the theatre like?
- Who attended the performance? How did the audience respond to the opera?
- Could you follow the storyline in Italian?
- Were the surtitles helpful?



POST VISIT REFLECTION

Visit the *La traviata* 'Wall' to explore the behind-the-scenes, read the blogs and watch the timelapse videos of the design online victorianopera.com.au/latraviata.


The Wall

COUNTDOWN


22 DAYS TIL OPENING NIGHT....
[BOOK NOW >](#)

DISCOVER LA TRAVIATA

Get up close and personal with the team from *La traviata*. Learn about the creative process, including a short performance and Q&A session. Monday 28 April, 6pm, The Wheeler Centre. [Find out more >](#)




LA TRAVIATA COMES TO LIFE!




WHEN RICHARD MET JESSICA

Richard Mills recently caught up with Australian soprano Jessica Pratt following her triumph in Lucia di Lammermoor at Milans' famous La Scala theatre. [Read the blog here >](#)



THE SITES OF JESI



Master of Music (Opera Performance) student blogpost

After the performance, reflect on what you have experienced. Also discuss this with your peers. What did you like best about the performance? Who was the most memorable performer? Who was your favourite character and was this different to your expectation? What surprised you? If you were a critic for a newspaper, what would you write? Do you think their responses would be different if it was premiered in 2014?

- Who was the most memorable character? Why?
- What type of scenery was used?
- What were the costumes like?

Read the reviews from the critics. An article is usually published in the newspapers a few days after opening night. There may also be reviews in other print media, radio, TV and online.

- What did the critics write about this performance?
- Do you agree with the critics? If you were a critic what would you write?



EXTEND YOUR OPERA EXPERIENCE

Visit our website to explore behind-the-scenes, sign up to workshops and browse through our resources online victorianopera.com.au/education.

The screenshot shows the 'Education' page on the Victorian Opera website. At the top, there's a video player for 'Victorian Opera - 2014 Education Program Trailer'. Below it, a navigation menu includes 'Overview', 'Opera for Schools', 'Youth Opera Program', 'Professional Development', and 'Online Learning'. The main content area is titled 'The Wall' and contains several promotional tiles:

- WEEKEND ARIAS**: Promoting a series of informal, non-auditioned weekends for young singers to explore choral repertoire.
- FOR MUSIC THEATRE LOVERS**: Offering workshops for planning music theatre productions and professional development for adults.
- THE RIDE OF YOUR LIFE**: Promoting a workshop for young people and their families.
- GO BEHIND THE SCENES**: Promoting a workshop for young people and their families.

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CONTACT US

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