

LA TRAVIATA



**CLEVELAND
OPERA THEATER**

GRADES
4-8

CLEVELAND OPERA THEATER

Have questions about Verdi or *La Traviata*
for our Director of Education and Outreach?
Contact Megan Thompson at
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Follow us on social media!

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Booklet by Nicole Veigas

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Welcome!

We are excited to bring you this opportunity to explore Cleveland Opera Theater's production of Giuseppe Verdi's masterpiece, *La Traviata*. **Cleveland Opera Theater's mission is to produce vibrant, accessible, innovative, and engaging opera in Greater Cleveland.** When we embarked on this project, the first thing we did was explore what resources exist for families to **experience, explore, and engage** in this opera. What we discovered is that most of the resources that are easily accessible are actually designed for a traditional classroom space. We wanted to create something for the home. The contents of this packet are designed to enhance your family's enjoyment of the opera through discussion prompts and activities, so it's still quite educational, but we designed the questions to create a connection between you and the young opera-viewers in your life.

Unlike most media, we in the opera world believe "spoilers" actually enhance your enjoyment of the opera, so we suggest reviewing the synopsis and the characters before watching our production. Knowing what is about to happen on stage makes it easier, particularly for younger viewers, to focus on the beauty of the music and exciting visuals rather than trying to follow the plot. We also suggest breaking up your experience. Try watching a scene or two, then taking a break to discuss it with your opera novice. The best part of using this video and these materials is that you can stretch out the fun over a day or two!

Happy listening,

Megan Thompson
Director of Education and Outreach
Cleveland Opera Theater

Stephanie Ruozzo
Education and Outreach Associate
Cleveland Opera Theater

About Verdi

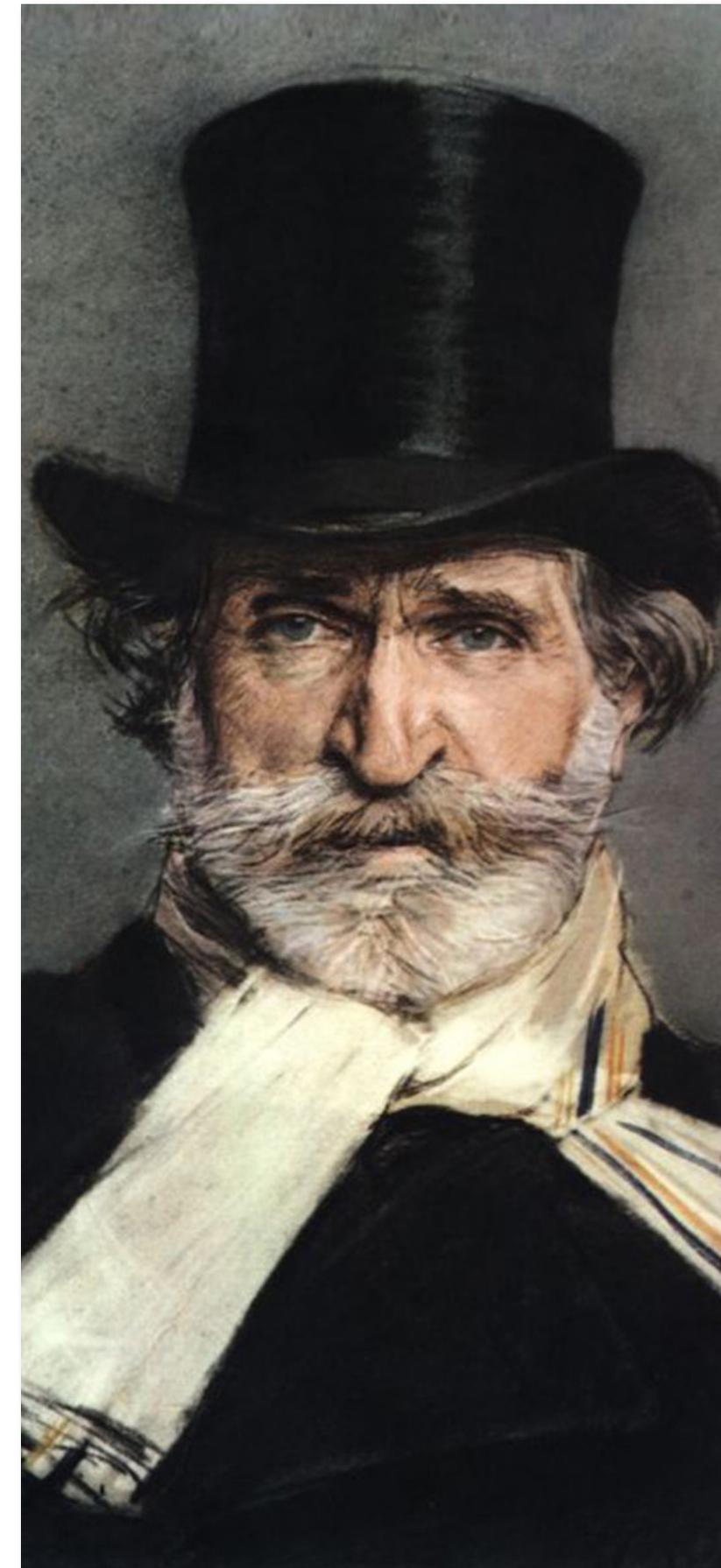
Giuseppe Verdi was a composer from Northern Italy in the 19th century famous for his operas. He was born to a middle-class family and began studying music at age four; by age nine, he was the organist for a local church. During his childhood, Verdi received a rigorous education from the local Jesuit priests. As he grew, a wealthy man named Antonio Barezzi took Verdi into his home as a music teacher for his daughter and to sponsor Verdi's private musical studies with composers. Eventually, Verdi married Barezzi's daughter, Margherita, and moved to Milan to further his musical career. Sadly, Verdi's wife and two small children died before he could complete his first opera.

Finally, in 1840, Verdi's first opera, *Oberto*, premiered at *La Scala* Opera House. It found favor with audiences, though his second opera, this time a comic one, failed so spectacularly that it almost derailed his career. Fortunately for all musicians, Verdi scored his first mega-hit with 1842's *Nabucco*. This opera was such a success that Verdi began an eleven-year period of composing at a furious pace. Verdi called these his "galley years" because he felt like a slave constantly forced to create and rushed for time with each project. He composed operas that drew on the Italian "bel canto" (beautiful singing) tradition while inventing new ways to structure his scenes. Between 1851 and 1853, Verdi achieved international fame with three of his best-known operas: *Rigoletto*, *Il Trovatore*, *La Traviata*. After these operas, Verdi was able to compose at a slower pace, producing fewer operas but spending more time crafting each one.



The stories he told were usually political, lamenting the unjust oppression of a defeated nation; by telling stories, Verdi could voice his support for a new, unified Italy, which did not become a country until 1870. Verdi's political operas usually relied on strong choruses rather than soloists, because the composer wanted to demonstrate the unity of the oppressed people and their collective identity. These operas, advocating for the freedom of all people from foreign occupation, became known as "Risorgimento operas" since they promoted the values of the Italian Risorgimento (or Resurgence). This Resurgence was a period in which Italian soldiers banded together to fight foreign governments that occupied the Italian peninsula, and it required a series of three wars to unite the entire nation of Italy. Because he was a strong supporter of the Italian wars for independence, Verdi became as involved in politics as he was in music. He even held the post of senator at the local and national levels later in life.

By the end of his life, Verdi was the definitive composer of Italian opera and represented the art form internationally. Today, we recognize Verdi as an important link between the "bel canto" (beautiful singing) operas of the early 19th century, where the focus is on the melodic quality of the human voice, and the "verismo" operas of the late 19th century/early 20th century, where the focus is on telling tragic stories in as much detail as possible.



Timeline of Events

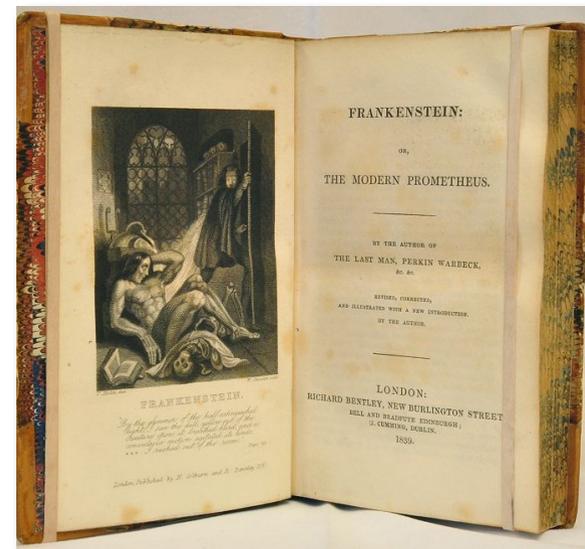
1810

1813

Guiseppe Fortunino Francesco Verdi is born in Le Rencole, Italy

1818

Mary Shelley publishes *Frankenstein*



1828

The United States first public railroad is constructed between Baltimore and Ohio

1828

Noah Webster publishes the American Dictionary

1830

1833

British Empire abolishes slavery

1840

1848

California Gold Rush - many Americans move out west to California to mine for gold

1840

1848

First Women's right convention (Seneca Falls Convention) in the United States, launching the women's suffrage movement

1850



1853

La Traviata, by Verdi, premiers in Venice

1860

1860

Abraham Lincoln is elected

1861

The Confederate States are formed

1861

The Civil War between the North and South takes place over the expansion of slavery

1863

Emancipation Proclamation frees slaves

1880

1882

U.S adopts standard time (Ex. Eastern Time)

1885

Automobile is invented

1886

Statue of Liberty gifted to the United States by France

1889

Eiffel Tower is completed in Paris, France

1890



1892

Tchaikovsky composes *The Nutcracker*



1890



1896

First Olympic Games take place in Athens, Greece

1897

The electron is discovered by Sir J.J Thompson

1898

Spanish-American War ends Spanish rule in the Americas

1898

Rollercoaster is invented by Edwin Prescott in Coney Island, New York

1900

1901

Verdi dies on January 27, a few days after having a stroke

Opera Synopsis

Act I:

Violetta is throwing a party in Paris for her friends who want to introduce her to Alfredo. Alfredo immediately falls in love with Violetta, but she swears does not want to have a boyfriend. By the end of the party, they both realize how much happier they would be together and promise to remain with each other.



Act II:

Violetta and Alfredo live happily in the country away from parties and crowds, but Alfredo's family does not like Violetta. Alfredo's father, Mr. Germont, visits Violetta and makes her promise to break up with his son for the good of the Germont family. Violetta sees how much pain Mr. Germont is in and selflessly agrees to lie to Alfredo by saying that she no longer loves him.

Act III:

Violetta has returned to Paris and resumed her former life, so Alfredo is mad and jealous because he believes that she really does not love him. He has a fight with Violetta, but soon after Mr. Germont explains the truth and Alfredo learns that Violetta only tried to protect him. In the meantime, Violetta realizes she is very sick with tuberculosis. Alfredo arrives to reconcile with her, and they have a brief moment of happiness together just before she succumbs to her illness and dies.

Characters

Violetta - *soprano*

A popular girl with many rich friends who becomes sick with tuberculosis

Alfredo - *tenor*

A rich but shy young man who falls in love with Violetta and convinces her to leave her luxurious life in the city for a simple life with him in the country

Mr. Germont - *baritone*

Alfredo's father who does not think Violetta is good enough for the Germont family and forces her to break up with Alfredo

Flora - *mezzo-soprano*

Violetta's friend in Paris who tries to keep Violetta with the crowds of admirers there

Annina - *soprano*

Violetta's faithful maid who helps Violetta during Alfredo's absence and as her tuberculosis gets worse

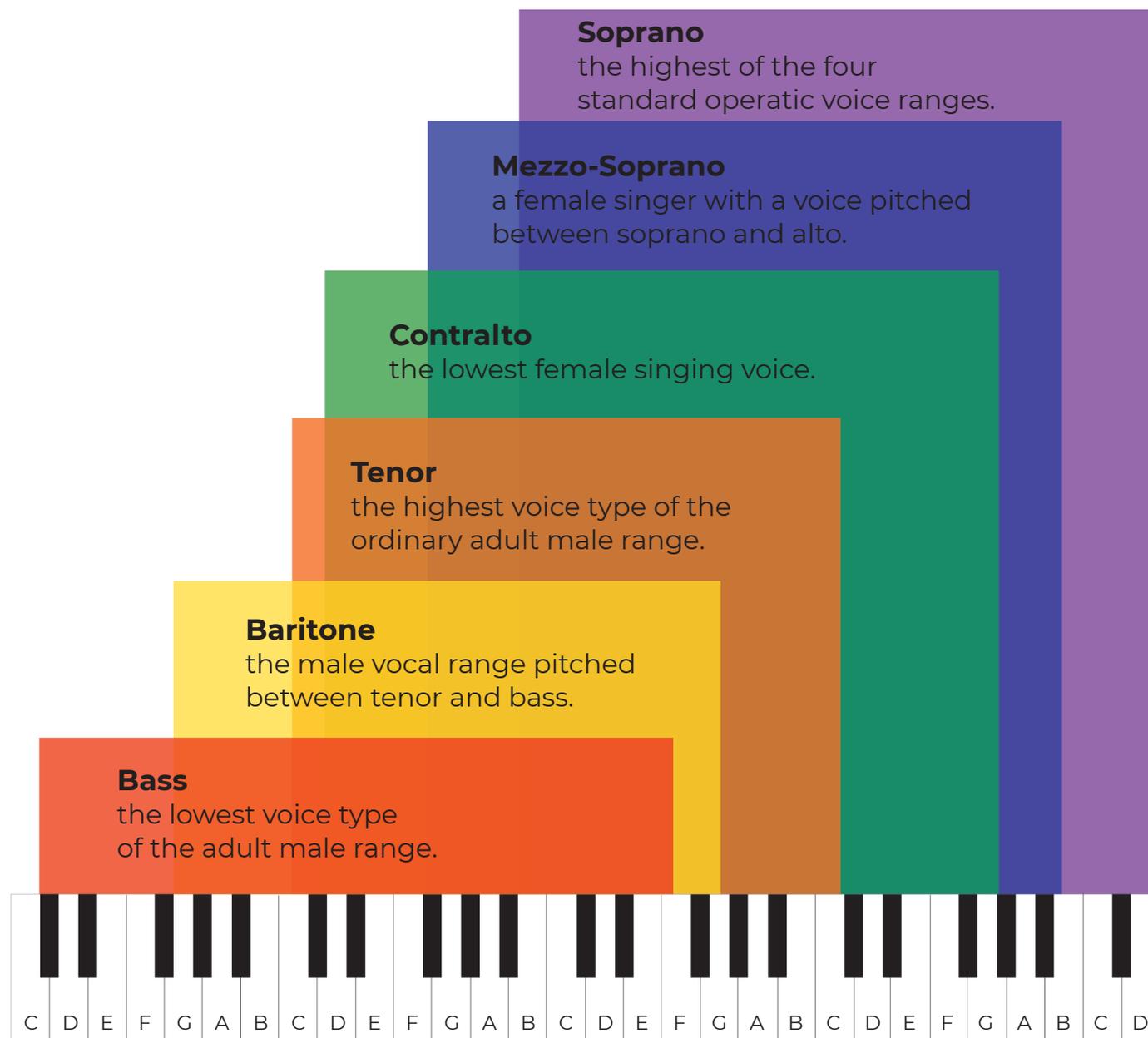
Dr. Grenvil - *bass*

The doctor called to help Violetta as her tuberculosis gets worse



Voice Type

Operatic voices can be classified by a variety of means. Here, we take a look at the voice types Verdi utilized in *La Traviata*:



Cast

Violetta - **Angela Mortellaro**
Alfredo - **Benjamin Werley**
Mr. Germont - **Grant Youngblood**
Flora - **Elizabeth Frey**
Dr. Grenvil - **James Eder**
Annina - **Alexis Reed**

Gastone de Letorières - **Brian Skoog**
Barone Douphol - **Daewon Seo**
Marchese d'Obigny - **Bryant Bush**
Giuseppe - **Joshua Sanchez Muniz**
Commissioner - **Johathan Stuckey**



Chorus

Sopranos

Julia Mihalich
Samantha Ksiezyk-DeCrane
Andrea Soncina
Nicole Futoran

Tenors

Robert Bordon
Brian Skoog
Cory Svette
Joshua Sanchez Muniz
Christian Thomas

Mezzo

Amanda Krohne-Fargo
Elizabeth Frey
London Long-Wheeler
Jennifer Woda

Bass

Bryant Bush
Michael Borden
James Eder
Daewon Seo
Jonathan Stuckey

Supernumeraries - Sue Hundermark and Beshoy Hanna

Artistic & Productions Staff

Conductor - **Domenico Boyagian**

Assistant Conductor & Chorus Master - **Dean Buck**

Rehearsal Pianist - **Tatiana Loisha**

Stage Director - **Scott Skiba**

Scenic Design and Technical Direction - **Matthew D. McCarren**

Lighting Design - **Steve Shack**

Costume Coordinator - **Esther Haberlen**

Costume / Wardrobe / Props - **Vanessa Cook: Cook Theatre Designs LLC.**

Production Stage Manager - **Robert Pierce**

Assistant Stage Manager - **Jenna Fink**

Makeup and Wigs - **Francine Grassi**

Makeup and Wigs Assistant - **Danielle Tapp**

Follow Spot Operators - **Hayley Baran and Julia Aylward**

Supertitle Operator - **Dawna Warren**

Production Assistant - **Rocco Grassi**

Supertitles by - **Chadwick Creative Arts**

Maltz Performing Arts Center staff:

Executive Director - **Randall Barnes**

Director of Operations - **Jason Cohen**

Production Manager - **Joe Piccolo**

House Manager - **Jordan Davis**



Libretto

English

Cast

Violetta Valéry, a courtesan (soprano)

Alfredo Germont, a young bourgeois from a provincial family (tenor)

Giorgio Germont, Alfredo's father (baritone)

Flora Bervoix, Violetta's friend (mezzo-soprano)

Annina, Violetta's maid (soprano)

Gastone, Alfredo's friend (tenor)

Barone Douphol, Violetta's lover, a rival of Alfredo (baritone)

Marchese d'Obigny (bass)

Dottore Grenvil (bass)

Giuseppe, Violetta's servant (tenor)

Flora's servant (bass G. Tona)

Commissioner (bass)

PRELUDE

ACT ONE

A drawing room in Violetta's home. In the background a door, opening to another room. There are two other lateral doors; to the left, a fireplace with a mirror over the mantel. In the centre of the room, a huge table richly laden. (Violetta is seated on a sofa, talking with Dr Grenvil and other friends. Some of her friends go to greet various guests as they arrive. Among them, the Baron and Flora, escorted by the Marquis.)

Italian

Personaggi

Violetta Valéry (soprano)

Flora Bervoix, sua amica (mezzosoprano)

Annina, serva di Violetta, (soprano)

Alfredo Germont (tenore)

Giorgio Germont, suo padre (baritono)

Gastone, Visconte di Létorières (tenore)

Il barone Douphol (baritono)

Il marchese d'Obigny (basso)

Il dottor Grenvil (basso)

Giuseppe, servo di Violetta (tenore)

Un domestico di Flora (basso)

Un commissionario (basso)

Servi e signori amici di Violetta e Flora, Piccadori e mattadori, zingare, servi di Violetta e Flora, maschere

PRELUDIO

ATTO PRIMO

Salotto in casa di Violetta. Nel fondo c'è la porta che immette in un'altra sala; ve ne sono altre due laterali: a sinistra un caminetto con sopra uno specchio. Nel mezzo c'è una tavola riccamente imbandita. (Violetta seduta su un divano sta discorrendo col Dottore e con alcuni amici, mentre altri vanno ad incontrare

CHORUS I
You were invited for an earlier hour.
You have come late.

CHORUS II
We were playing cards at Flora's,
and the time passed quickly.

VIOLETTA (*going to greet them*)
Flora, my friends, the rest of the
evening will be gayer because you
are here. Surely the evening is livelier
with good food and drink?

FLORA, MARQUIS
And can you be lively?

VIOLETTA
I must be. I give myself to pleasure,
since pleasure is the best medicine
for my ills.

ALL
Indeed, life is doubly heightened by
pleasure. (*The Viscount Gastone de
Letorières enters with Alfredo
Germont. Servants are busily
engaged at the table.*)

GASTONE
My dear Madam, in Alfredo Germont
I present a man who greatly admires
you; few friends are so fine as he.

VIOLETTA
(*She offers her hand to Alfredo, who
kisses it.*) My dear Viscount, thank you
for this gift.

MARQUIS
My dear Alfredo

ALFREDO
Marquis -
(*They shake hands.*)

*quelli che sopraggiungono, tra i quali
il Barone e Flora al braccio del
Marchese.) misurando l'impiantito.
Susanna allo specchio si sta
mettendo un cappellino.)*

CORO I
Dell'invito trascorsa è già l'ora.
Voi tardaste.

CORO II
Giocammo da Flora, e giocando
quell'ore volar.

VIOLETTA (*va loro incontro*)
Flora, amici, la notte che resta d'altre
gioie qui fate brillar. Fra le tazze più
viva è la festa.

FLORA, MARCHESE
E goder voi potrete?

VIOLETTA
Lo voglio; al piacere m'affido, ed io
soglio con tal farmaco i mali sopir.

TUTTI
Sì, la vita s'addoppia al gioir. (*Il
Visconte Gastone de Letorières entra
con Alfredo Germont. I servi frattanto
avranno imbandite le vivande.*)

GASTONE
In Alfredo Germont, o signora, ecco
un altro che molto v'onora; pochi
amici a lui simili sono.

VIOLETTA
(*Violetta dà la mano ad Alfredo, che
gliela bacia.*) Mio Visconte, mercé di
tal dono.

MARCHESE
Caro Alfredo -

GASTONE (*to Alfredo*)
As I told you, here friendship joins
with pleasure. (*Meanwhile the
servants have finished setting the
table.*)

VIOLETTA
Is everything ready?
(*A servant nods in affirmation.*)

Please be seated:
it is at table that the heart is gayest.

ALL
Well spoken - secret cares
fly before that great friend, wine.
(*They take their places at the table.
Violetta is seated between Alfredo
and Gastone. Facing her Flora takes
her place between the Marquis and
the Baron. The remaining guests take
their various places around the table.
A moment of silence as the food is
served. Violetta and Gastone are
whispering to each other.*)
It is at table that the heart is gayest.

GASTONE
Alfredo thinks of you always.

VIOLETTA
You are joking?

GASTONE
While you were ill, every day he called
to ask about you.

VIOLETTA
Don't talk like that. I am nothing to
him.

ALFREDO
Marchese -
(*Si stringono la mano.*)

GASTONE (*ad Alfredo*)
T'ho detto: l'amistà qui s'intreccia al
diletto. (*Nel frattempo i servi hanno
finito di preparare la tavola.*)

VIOLETTA
Pronto è il tutto?
(*Un servo fa cenno di sì.*)

Miei cari, sedete:
è al convito che s'apre ogni cor.

TUTTI
Ben diceste - le cure segrete
fuga sempre l'amico licor.
(*Siedono in modo che Violetta resti
tra Alfredo e Gastone; di fronte
vi sarà Flora tra il Marchese ed il
Barone; gli altri siedono a piacere.
C'è un attimo di silenzio mentre
vengono servite le portate. Violetta e
Gastone si
sussurrano.*) È al convito che s'apre
ogni cor.

GASTONE
Sempre Alfredo a voi pensa.

VIOLETTA
Scherzate?

GASTONE
Egra foste, e ogni dì con affanno
qui volò, di voi chiese.

VIOLETTA
Cessate. Nulla son io per lui.

To continue reading the libretto, click [here!](#)

Things to Listen For

- The tradition in opera at this time was to use duets to move the action forward between two characters. Most often, these duets would be constructed for four distinct sections:
 - **Tempo d'attacco** - a fast movement performed by one or both singers
 - **Cantabile** - a slower, more lyrical section than the first
 - **Tempo di mezzo** - a short, quick transition section
 - **Cabaletta** - a rapid, energetic conclusion

Can you find a place in the opera where this happens?
(Hint: There's a great example in Act III!)



- In Act II while Violetta is writing to Alfredo, she doesn't say much, but there is a specific instrument in the orchestra that is very prominent - can you hear it? Do you know which one it is? (**Hint:** It is a woodwind!)
- How does Violetta's music, or even the music of the whole opera, change from beginning to end to reflect the change in Violetta's feelings/situation?
- A lot of arias in *La Traviata* are in "triple meter" (when musicians count the beats in patterns of ONE-two-three, ONE-two-three). How many times can you recognize triple meter when listening to *La Traviata*? Do you notice any patterns for who sings in triple meter and when he, she, or they sing that way?
- Violetta dies of consumption (tuberculosis), which is a respiratory disease. Can we hear her breathing affected in any way while listening to her sing? Are her melodies/voice the same at the end of *La Traviata* as they are at the beginning?

La Traviata in Pop Culture

Due to its popularity, *La Traviata* has made its way into pop culture. Here are just a few of the instances:

- As the camera dollies by the traffic jam at the start of *La La Land* (2016), each car radio is tuned to a different station, showcasing a wide variety of genres, and we hear a very brief snippet of the final Act I chorus of Verdi's *La Traviata*. Unlike *Pretty Woman*, the theme of the opera doesn't really relate to that of the movie other than the fact that both stories center on the relationships between a young man and a young woman, and neither features a classically happy ending.



ScreenWeek TV. "https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xVVqlm8Fq3Y." www.youtube.com, 25 Apr. 2017, www.youtube.com/watch?v=xVVqlm8Fq3Y. Accessed 16 Sept. 2020.

- Often, operatic music is utilized in marketing vehicles because of the subliminal message that opera is high class, so this vehicle must be, too. Kia has featured Puccini, Volvo utilized Mozart, but Nissan chose "Sempre Libera" from *La Traviata* to advertise the [Nissan Qashqai](#).

Discussion Questions

- What was your first exposure to opera? What do you remember about it? What do you think about opera now?
- Define what opera is, and what it is not. How does it differ from other musical and or theatrical forms? Pick your favorite TV show, movie, book, and song. Compare how each is like an opera and how each is different.
- What did you expect to experience with this opera? Were your predictions correct? In what ways were your expectations met or not met?
- Did you identify with any characters in this opera? Why or why not?
- How did the technical elements (sets, costumes, lighting, sound effects, special effects) support the story? What do the sets and costumes tell us about the characters, and how do they help to tell the story? Did anything in particular stand out?
- Are there any props that play a role in driving the plot of the story? Are props more important to the actors/singers and/or to the audience?
- How did the music reinforce the action on stage? What musical changes did you note throughout that marked the change of setting or atmosphere? Were there any times when the music did not match the text/lyrics? The action onstage? The feelings of the character(s) singing? What was your reaction if you noticed the music did not match some other part of the production?
- How does Verdi's music add to your understanding of the characters?
- Do you think the authors of *La Traviata* want us to forgive Alfredo and Mr. Germont or not? Why? Do you hear anything in the music that Mr. Germont sings that makes you want to forgive him?
- What aspects of Violetta's life in Paris do you think Verdi's audiences identified with? Do you think there were any aspects of her life that they would have felt distant from?

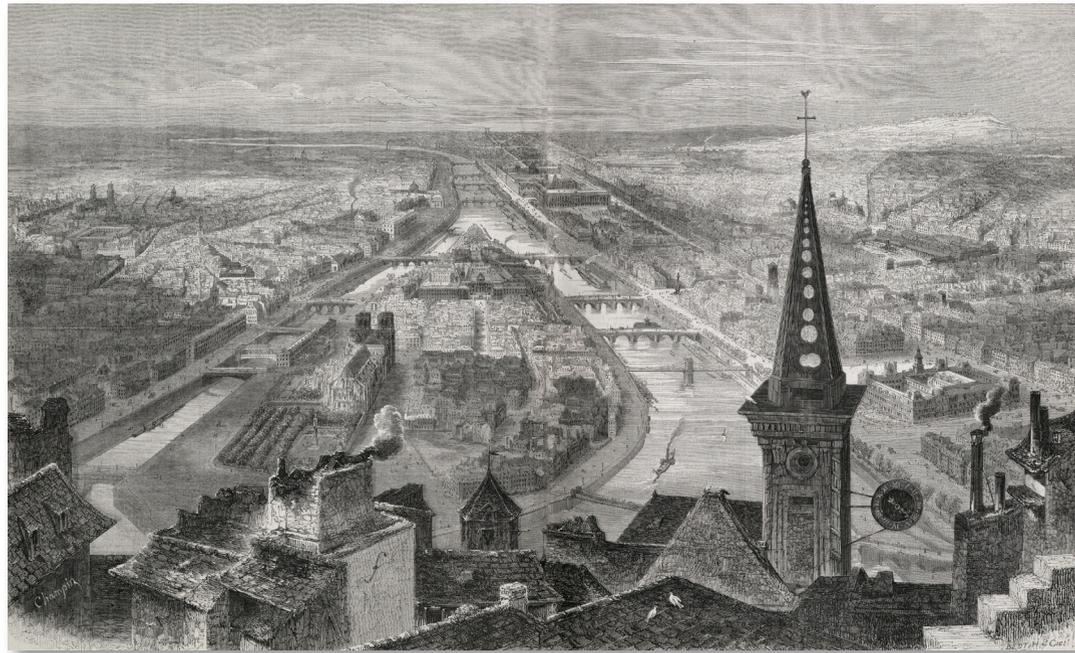
- Why does Mr. Germont want Violetta to break up with Alfredo? Does Mr. Germont hate Violetta?
- Why does Alfredo get mad at Violetta? What do you think he is feeling when he ruins her party? Do you think he was right to be that angry?
- In the last act of *La Traviata*, Violetta dies in Alfredo's arms. Can you think of any other movies, plays, books, or songs where this happens? What else do these pieces of art have in common with *La Traviata*?
- Is Violetta good or bad, and why? What does she do that you agree or disagree with? What about Alfredo? Mr. Germont? What do you think the authors are trying to tell us about good and evil?
- Does Alfredo deserve Violetta's forgiveness, and why or why not? Why do you think she forgives him in the end? Would you forgive him if you were Violetta? Do you think Violetta is still mad at Mr. Germont by the end of the opera, and why or why not?



Activities

Social Studies:

Violetta and Alfredo meet in the urban center of Paris but move to the rural countryside for rest and relaxation together. What are the differences between an urban community and a rural community? Make a list of some urban and rural communities near you. Once you have time to consider that list, make a list of the activities, industries, and opportunities you would expect to find in each community, then compare and contrast those lists.



ELA:

Towards the end of *La Traviata*, Alfredo's father, Mr. Germont sends Violetta a letter apologizing to her and telling her that Alfredo loves her. This is one of the rare moments in opera when a character speaks over the orchestra music instead of singing with it. Listen to the music during that scene again, and write a letter that fits the emotion of that music. Be creative and make up any scenario in the world! Just make sure to address and sign the letter properly so that it's sure to reach the intended destination!

Math:

When Alfredo gets mad at Violetta, he throws a stack of money at her. In Paris during the 19th century, they would have used a form of currency known as the franc. Use the tables at the website below to convert U.S. dollar amounts into French francs. Try to exchange as many dollar amounts as possible. Try 10 dollars, then \$20, \$50, \$100, and \$1,000. Once you've mastered the process, reverse it by converting francs to dollars (again, try 10, 20, 50, 100, and 1,000). **HINT:** If you had to divide to go from dollars to francs, you'll have to multiply to go from francs to dollars.

[1 FRF to USD | Convert French Francs to Dollars | French Franc to Dollar Conversion](#)



Science:

Violetta is sick with a respiratory illness (a sickness of the lungs that affects the patient's ability to breathe) known during the 19th century as consumption. Today we call this same illness tuberculosis, or TB. Try doing some preliminary research on public medical databases (something like WebMD) about tuberculosis. What causes it? How is it treated? Was tuberculosis a prevalent disease at any point in time? Why isn't tuberculosis prevalent today? How does tuberculosis compare to severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) - the disease causing the 2020 pandemic?

Art:

Alfredo offers Violetta flowers as a sign of his love, but Violetta maintains that they will wither soon. Do you have any flowers near your home? Gather a bouquet of flowers (with permission!) and dry them by hanging them upside down. You can use the directions provided by FTD By Design to help you:

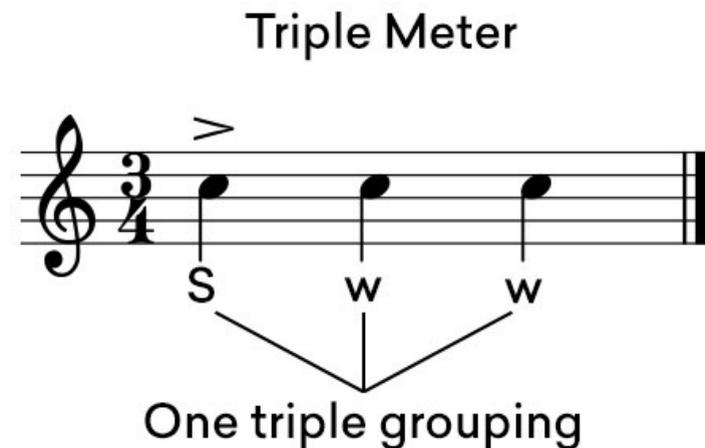
<https://www.ftd.com/blog/create/how-to-dry-flowers>

No flowers nearby? Try making these flowers out of paper!

<https://theartofsimple.net/crepe-paper-flowers-for-mothers-day/>

Physical Education:

Most of the songs in *La Traviata* are in what musicians call “triple meter” (when the rhythms are all based on a pattern of one strong beat followed by two weak beats). Musicians count the beats in their heads as ONE-two-three, ONE-two-three. Conductors have a very specific way of keeping performers together on each beat by moving their arm down on the strong, first beat, then out to the side on the second beat, and back up to the top again on the third beat. Practice moving your arms down/out/up while listening to “Libiamo nei lieti calici” (9:08 in our recording), “Sempre libera” (25:54), and “Parigi, o cara” (1:43:15). Notice how each song moves at a different speed (or “tempo”) and how your arms have to adjust to match them.



Music:

La Traviata is a story that has been adapted many times in the 19th, 20th, and even 21st century. In the current age of streaming, put together a playlist of at least five songs that, when strung together, would tell Violetta’s story to an audience today. Try to represent as many characters as possible, and search for songs that fit the situation and/or feelings throughout the story. Can’t find the perfect song? Try asking a grown-up for suggestions from when they were your age, or try your hand at writing your own! If you’re really proud of your playlist-opera, post it on social media and tag Cleveland Opera Theater!



Global Languages:

“Addio del passato” (1:37:10 in Cleveland Opera Theater’s recording), Violetta’s farewell aria from Act III, is a slow-moving one where listeners have the ability to catch each word. Listen again to this aria while looking at the Italian text on the page. Highlight, circle, or underline any words that you think look familiar or similar to English words you know. Try to guess the meanings of these similar words (called “cognates”), then look at the English translation AFTER you’ve listened and marked your copy to see how many words you recognized.

Italian

*Addio, del passato bei sogni ridenti,
Le rose del volto già son pallenti;
L'amore d'Alfredo pur esso mi manca,
Conforto, sostegno dell'anima stanca
Ah, della traviata sorridi al desio;
A lei, deh, perdona; tu accoglila, o Dio,
Or tutto finì.*

*Le gioie, i dolori tra poco avran fine,
La tomba ai mortali di tutto è confine!
Non lagrima o fiore avrà la mia fossa,
Non croce col nome che copra quest'ossa!
Ah, della traviata sorridi al desio;
A lei, deh, perdona; tu accoglila, o Dio,
Or tutto finì.*

English

*Farewell past, happy dreams of days gone bye;
The roses in my cheeks already are faded.
Even Alfredo's love is lacking,
To comfort and uphold my weary spirit.
Oh, comfort, sustain a tired soul,
And may God pardon and make her his own!
Ah, all is finished*

*The joys, the sorrows will be soon over,
The tomb confines all mortals!
Neither tears or flowers will my grave have,
No cross with a name that covers my bones!
Oh, comfort, sustain a tired soul,
And may God pardon and make her his own!
Ah, all is finished.*



Glossary

A

ACT: A portion of an opera designated by the composer, which has a dramatic structure of its own.

ARIA: A solo piece written for a main character, which focuses on the character's emotion.

ARTIST MANAGER OR ARTIST REPRESENTATIVE:

An agent who represents artists by publicizing their talents, finding roles for them, negotiating their contracts and handling other business matters for them.

B

BATON: A short stick that the conductor uses to lead the orchestra.

BLOCKING: Directions given to actors for on-stage movements and actions.

BRAVO (BRAH-voh): Literally, a form of applause when shouted by members of the audience at the end of an especially pleasing performance. Strictly speaking, "bravo" is for a single man, "brava" for a woman, and "bravi" for a group of performers.

C

CARPENTER: The carpenter works on the construction of the sets. Production Carpenter is the title given to the one in charge of the backstage crew, even though working with wood may not be involved.

CHOREOGRAPHER: The person who designs the motions of a dance.

CHOREOGRAPHY: The act of setting movement to create a dance.

CHORUS: A group of singers, singing together, who sometimes portray servants, party guests or other unnamed characters; also the music written for them.

CHORUS MASTER: The one in charge of choosing chorus members and rehearsing

them for performance. If there is a backstage chorus, it is usually conducted by the chorus master who is in communication with the conductor of the orchestra.

COMPOSER: A person who writes music.

CONDUCTOR: The leader of the orchestra, sometimes called Maestro. This person leads all the musicians (instrumentalists and vocalists) in the performance of an opera; an accomplished musician with a strong sense of rhythm and an in-depth understanding of the voice and each orchestral instrument, he or she must also be able to communicate nuances of phrasing and inspire great performances from all players.

CORD, VOCAL: The wishbone-shaped edges of muscles in the lower part of the throat whose movements creates variations in pitch as air passes between them. Often spelled incorrectly as "chord."

COSTUME DESIGNER: Works with the set designer to prepare costumes that are appropriate for the rest of the production. Often oversees the preparation of the costumes.

COSTUME SHOP: A special area set aside for the making of the costumes or for adjusting those that are rented.

COVER: The name given to an understudy in opera; someone who replaces a singer in case of illness or other misfortune.

CRESCENDO (kri-SHEN-doh): A gradual increase in volume. Orchestral crescendos were one of Rossini's trademarks.

CUE: In opera, a signal to a singer or orchestra member to begin singing or playing.

CURTAIN CALL: At the end of a performance, all of the members of the cast and the conductor take bows. Sometimes this is done in front of the main curtain, hence the name curtain call. Often, however, the bows are taken on the full stage with the curtain open.

CUT: To omit some of the original material from the score.

D

DESIGNER: A person who creates the lighting, costumes and/or sets.

DIAPHRAGM: A muscle beneath the lungs and above the stomach which acts as a trampoline does, pushing the air from the lungs at a desired rate.

DIRECTOR (STAGE DIRECTOR): One who prepares an opera or play for production by arranging the details of the stage settings and stage effects, and by instructing the performers in the interpretation of their roles.

DIVA: Literally "goddess," it refers to an important female opera star. The masculine form is divo.

DOUBLE ARIA: An aria which consists of two parts. The first part, or cavatina, is usually slow and the second, or cabaletta is faster. There is often recitative between the two sections.

DOWNSTAGE: See *STAGE AREAS*.

DRESSER: A member of the backstage staff who helps the artists change their costumes. The principal singers usually have their own dresser. Supers and chorus members share dressers.

DRESS REHEARSAL: A final rehearsal that uses all of the costumes, lights, etc. While sometimes it is necessary to stop for corrections, an attempt is made to make it as much like a final performance as possible.

DYNAMIC: The degree of loudness and quietness in music. See *PIANO* and *FORTE*.

E

ELECTRICIAN: One who is charged with executing the lighting design according to the specifications of the lighting designer.

ENCORE: Literally means "again." It used to be the custom for a singer to repeat a popular aria if the audience called "encore" loudly enough. This is still done in the middle of an opera in countries such as Italy, but it is rare elsewhere. Soloists frequently give encores at the end of a concert but not an opera.

ENSEMBLE: Two or more people singing at the same time, or the music written for such a group.

F

FALSETTO: A method of singing above the natural range of the male voice. Often used in opera for comic effects such as a man imitating a woman.

FINALE: The last musical number of an opera or the last number of an act.

FULL PRODUCTION: A performance that includes all the elements of live theater: lights, costumes, props, makeup, design and audience. In opera, this includes music provided by an orchestra or piano along with the characters' singing.

G

GENERAL DIRECTOR: The head of an opera company. The one ultimately responsible for all artistic and financial aspects of everything in which the company is involved.

GRAND OPERA: Specifically, a serious opera of epic proportions with no spoken dialogue, composed in 19th-century France (such as *Les Huguenots* by Meyerbeer); more broadly, an opera sung and produced in the "grand manner."

H

HOUSE MANAGER: For performances, the person who is responsible for the audience and all that happens from the entry to the theater, to the box office, to the seating and audience behavior in the hall.

I

INTERLUDE: A short piece of instrumental music played between scenes or acts.

INTERMISSION: A long break, usually about 20 minutes, between the acts of an opera, during which the audience is free to move around.

L

LIBRARIAN: In charge of preparing the music for the orchestra. Scores are usually rented and have to be annotated to reflect cuts and other changes for a given production.

LIBRETTO: The text or words of an opera.

LIGHTING DESIGNER: One who designs and coordinates the light changes that help create opera's overall effect. Much of this is now computerized.

LYRICS: The sung words or text of a musical comedy or operetta song.

M

MAESTRO (mah-EHS-troh): Literally "master;" used as a courtesy title for the conductor. The masculine ending is used for both men and women.

MARK: To sing very softly or not at full voice. A full-length opera is very hard on a singer's voice so most mark during rehearsals. During dress rehearsals singers try to sing at full voice for at least some of the time.

MELODRAMA: In a technique which originated with the French; short passages of music alternating with spoken words.

O

OPERA: Simply stated, a play that is sung. In opera, singing is the way characters express feeling; as it often takes longer to say something in music than it would in speech, the action may seem delayed or even interrupted. Opera (the Latin plural for opus, meaning "work") can involve many different art forms (singing, acting, orchestral playing, scenic artistry, costume design, lighting and dance). Like a play, an opera is acted out on a stage with performers in costumes, wigs and makeup; virtually all operatic characters sing their lines, although there are exceptions for a role that is spoken or performed in pantomime.

OPERA BUFFA (BOOF-fah): An opera about ordinary people, usually, but not always comic, which first developed in the 18th century. Don Pasquale is an example of opera buffa.

OPERA SERIA (SEH-ree-ah): A "serious" opera. The usual characters are gods, goddesses or ancient heroes. Rossini was one of the last to write true opera serie, such as his last opera, Guillaume Tell.

OPERETTA or MUSICAL COMEDY:

A play, some of which is spoken but with many musical numbers. See also *SINGSPIEL*.

ORCHESTRA: The group of instrumentalists or musicians who, led by the conductor, accompany the singers.

ORCHESTRATION: The art of applying orchestral color to written music by assigning various instruments different parts of the music. This requires a complete knowledge of instrumentals and their timbre, range, etc.

OVERTURE: An orchestral introduction to an opera. (French: ouverture; German: ouverture; Italian: sinfonia).

P

PANTS ROLE or TROUSER ROLE: A role depicting a young man or boy but sung by a woman (can be a soprano or mezzo).

PIANO-VOCAL SCORE: Usually a reduction of an opera's orchestral score. See *SCORE*.

PIT: A sunken area in front of the stage where the members of the orchestra play.

PRINCIPAL: A major singing role, or the singer who performs such a role.

PRODUCTION: The combination of sets, costumes, props, lights, etc.

PRODUCTION MANAGER: The administrator responsible for coordinating the sets, costumes, rehearsal facilities and all physical aspects of a production. Often, the person who negotiates with the various unions representing stage hands, musicians, etc.

PROPS (PROPERTIES): Small items carried or used by performers on stage.

PROPERTY MASTER: One who is responsible for purchasing, acquiring and/or manufacturing any props needed for a production.

R

RECITATIVE: Words sung in a conversational style, usually to advance the plot. Not to be confused with aria.

RÉPERTOIRE (REP-er-twahr): Stock pieces that a singer or company has ready to present. Often refers to a company's current season.

S

SCORE: The written music of an opera or other musical work.

SET, SET DESIGNER: The background and furnishings on the stage and the person who designs them.

STAGEHAND: One who works behind-the-scenes setting up lighting, props, rigging, scenery and special effects for a production.

STAGE AREAS: The various sections of the stage. Left and right are as seen by those on stage, not in the audience. Since many stages are raked, that is higher in back than in front, upstage is at the back and downstage at the front. If an actor stays upstage, all the others have to turn their backs to the audience when speaking to him. This is the origin of the phrase "to upstage someone."

STAGE DIRECTOR: The one responsible for deciding the interpretation of each character, the movements of the singers on stage, and other things affecting the singers. Is in charge at rehearsals.

STAGE MANAGER: The person in charge of the technical aspects of the entire opera, including light changes, sound effects, entrances (even of the conductor) and everything else that happens.

SUPERTITLES: Translations of the words being sung, or the actual words if the libretto is in the native language, that are projected on a screen above the stage.

SYNOPSIS: A written description of an opera's plot.

T

TECHNICAL DIRECTOR: Supervisor of those who implement the concepts of the designers. He or she works with carpenters, painters, electricians, sound designers and stagehands and oversee the building of sets, props and hanging of lights.

V

VIBRATO: A natural wavering of frequency (pitch) while singing a note. It is usually inadvertent as opposed to a trill.

VOCAL COACH: A member of an opera company who coaches singers, helping them with the pronunciation, singing and interpretation of a role.

VOCAL CORDS: Wishbone-shaped edges of muscles in the lower part of the throat whose movements creates variations in pitch as air passes between them. Often spelled incorrectly as "chord."

*Based on National Opera Teacher and Educator Source (NOTES), "Glossary of Terms," Opera America, Accessed April 11, 2020, <https://www.operaamerica.org/Applications/Notes/glossary.aspx>.

Recommendations for books and resources

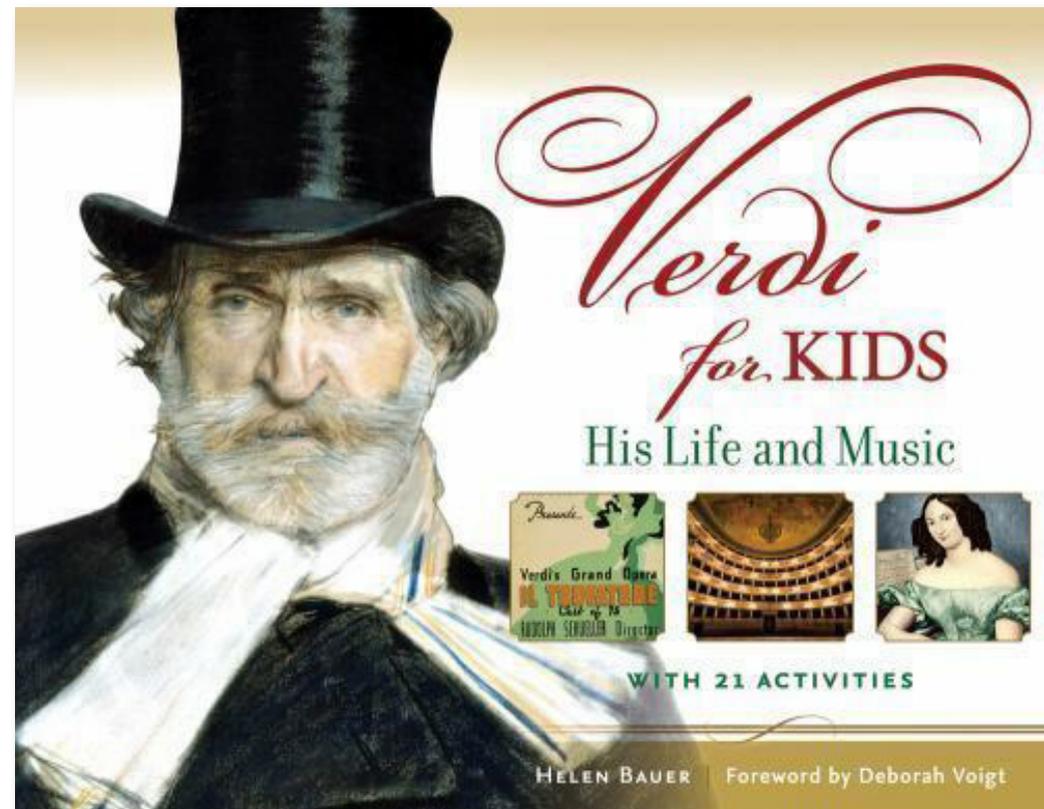
If you have enjoyed our production of Verdi's *La Traviata* and would like to learn more about the composer and the opera, please check out these resources we've compiled!

[Indy at the Opera: A Kitty Traviata \(The Indy Stories\) \(Volume 1\)](#)

[La Traviata - Giuseppe Verdi \(Paramica\)](#)

[La Traviata in Pop Culture](#)

[Verdi for Kids: His Life and Music with 21 Activities \(For Kids series\)](#)



Recommendations for videos and recordings

About the Opera:

[AriaCode Podcast: Verdi's La Traviata: Opera's Original 'Pretty Woman'](#)

[Opera Cheats: La Traviata](#)

[Opera in Brief: La Traviata](#)

Full Productions:

[Cleveland Opera Theater's 2019 Production](#)

[La Traviata - Teatro Real \(2015\)](#)

“Libiamo ne' lieti calici” Alfredo and Violetta Duet

[“Libiamo ne' lieti calici” - Anna Netrebko & Rolando Villazón \(Anna Netrebko - A Decade on Stage\)](#)

[“Libiamo ne' lieti calici” - Michael Fabiano & Venera Gimadieva \(Glyndebourne, 2014\)](#)

[“Libiamo ne' lieti calici” - Saimir Pirgu & Venera Gimadieva \(Royal Opera House, 2016\)](#)

“Sempre libera” Violetta's Aria

[“Sempre libera” - Joan Sutherland](#)

[“Sempre libera” - Angela Gheorghiu \(Royal Opera House, 1995\)](#)

[“Sempre libera” - Anna Netrebko \(Salzburg Festival, 2005\)](#)

“De' miei bollenti spiriti” Alfredo's Aria

[“De' miei bollenti spiriti” - Giuseppe Filianoti \(Tokyo, 2006\)](#)

[“De' miei bollenti spiriti” - Roberto Alagna \(Teatro alla Scala, 1992\)](#)

[“De' miei bollenti spiriti” - Piotr Beczala \(pre 2012\)](#)

“Di Provenza il mar” Giorgio Germont's Aria

[“Di Provenza il mar” - Dmitri Hvorostovsky \(Vienna State Opera, 2016\)](#)

[“Di Provenza il mar” - Renato Bruson \(LA Opera, 2007\)](#)

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