

LA TRAVIATA



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Have questions about Verdi or *La Traviata*
for our Director of Education and Outreach?
Contact Megan Thompson at
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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 designed for young opera novices, not adults. We aimed to create something a bit more mature for you to use as you watch our production.

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 to focus on the beauty of the music and exciting visuals rather than trying to follow the plot. You may even want to pause the recording and go back-and-forth from the packet to the screen, but however you decide to experience *La Traviata*, we hope you have fun and take joy in the beauty of Verdi's vision come to life!

Happy listening,

Megan Thompson
Director of Education and Outreach
Cleveland Opera Theater

Stephanie Ruozzo
Education and Outreach Associate
Cleveland Opera Theater

About Verdi

Giuseppe Fortunino Francesco Verdi (1813-1901) was born in Le Roncole, near the larger town of Busseto, in Northern Italy's Duchy of Parma. Despite his claims in later life of being born to illiterate peasants, Verdi was born to a comfortably middle-class innkeeper father and spinner mother. His formal education began at the early age of four with local Jesuit priests, and the young Verdi acquired a spinet at the age of seven. By his ninth year, Verdi became the full-time organist for his neighborhood church of San Michele, even composing some pieces for liturgical use. He held this post for only a brief time, however, as he moved to Busseto to begin studying at the *ginnasio*, where he learned composition from Ferdinando Provesi. Again, the evidence of this youthful training is at odds with Verdi's later self-mythologizing as a natural genius who excelled at music largely untutored. While in Busseto, Verdi attracted the attention of a wealthy patron Antonio Barezzi, who welcomed the young composer into his home as a music tutor for his daughter, Margherita. Verdi and Margherita developed an instant rapport, and married within a few years; Verdi's professional life advanced at the same time, and he gave his first public performance in Antonio Barezzi's home.

Recognizing the need for travel and establishment in the intellectual and cultural capital of Milan, Verdi and his young bride transferred there so that he could begin composing full-scale operas. In Milan, Verdi studied with another composer,



Vincenzo Lavigna, whose job involved arranging orchestrations for *La Scala* Opera House. In his maturity, Verdi lamented that Lavigna's tutelage did not provide sufficient scope for creativity because Lavigna focused strictly on exercises in counterpoint (i.e. the combining of multiple melodic lines in such a way that consonant sounds are the only acceptable ones, and dissonances must resolve in very specific ways). Success was not immediate, and the tragic period of 1838-1839 spelled disaster for the family as Verdi suffered the deaths of his two small children.

His fortunes revived in November of 1839 with the premiere at Milan's most prestigious opera house, *La Scala*, of his first opera, *Oberto*. This first venture was a moderate success, and gained him a commission for three more operas to be staged at the same house. In the following year, Verdi's second opera, *Un Giorno di Regno*, failed so spectacularly that it almost ruined his entire career. *Un Giorno di Regno* was a comic opera, an unusual feat for Verdi, and - despite his prolific output over several decades - the composer did not write another comic opera (*Falstaff*, 1893) until the last decade of his life. In a corresponding blow to Verdi's personal life, Margherita died in June 1840. Disheartened, the young composer considered giving up his career at this point.

Fortunately, eighteen months after the failure of *Un Giorno di Regno*, Verdi's *Nabucco* cemented his reputation as the voice of the Italian people. This opera tells the story of ancient Israelites during the Babylonian exile longing for freedom in their homeland. The Chorus of Hebrew Slaves, or "Va, pensiero," has since become an patriotic anthem for Italians. Verdi's advocacy of Italian independence during the decades of the Risorgimento (or Resurgence) led to cries of "Viva Verdi!" as a political rallying slogan during the nation's three wars against foreign occupation. Government censors did not recognize Verdi's name as an acronym representing Vittorio Emanuele, Re d'Italia (Victor Emmanuel II, the first king of a unified Italy), but the composer did, and actively encouraged the association. Revolutionary undertones were a common theme of Verdi's operas, and his nonpareil choral features signified a society bound together in purpose and will, united in their desire to reclaim their homeland.

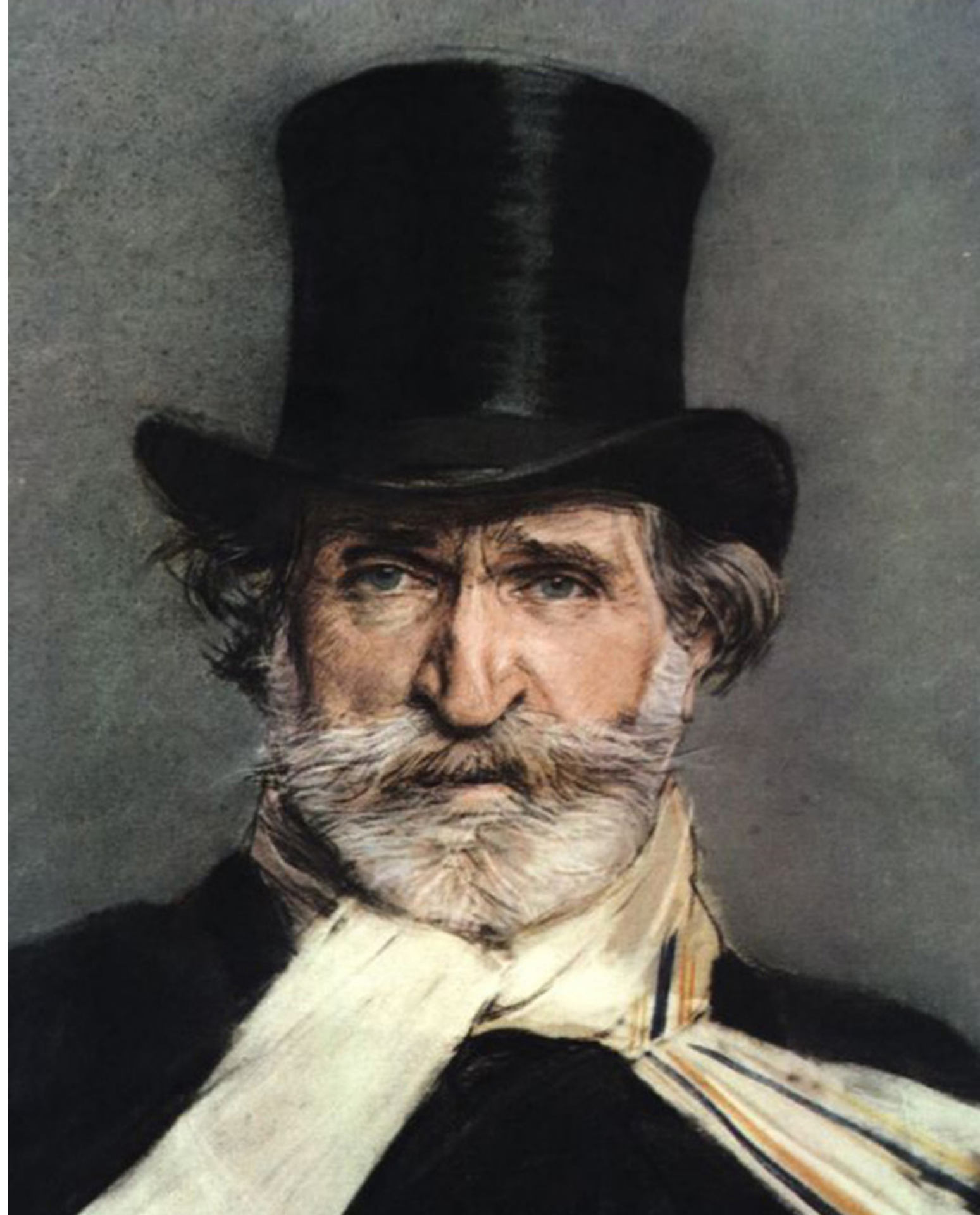
Verdi called his early period of success, from 1839 until 1853, his "galley years" because they were a time of constant, numerous contractual obligations. During this time, Verdi composed and oversaw the production of a total of sixteen



complete operas. This is not to mention the considerable number of revivals of earlier operas that he oversaw. He collaborated with various librettists, such as Temistocle Solera and Salvatore Cammarano, but it was with Francesco Maria Piave (librettist of *La Traviata*) that Verdi felt most comfortable to alter text and shape the drama according to musical concerns, rather than vice versa. His experimentation with the musical forms and scene structures established by the previous generation of bel canto composers (Rossini, Bellini, and Donizetti most prominent among them) allowed for innovative dramatic representations. Verdi felt free to cut arias or scenes short, omit sections, or add extra sections to reflect the emotions of characters in certain situations. The massive success of *La Traviata* upon its premiere at Venice's *Teatro La Fenice* in 1853 permitted Verdi to relax the pace of his compositions and be more judicious about commissions to accept, thus ending the galley years.

The next period of Verdi's life was a cosmopolitan one, giving rise to two opera premieres in Paris, two in Russia, and travels to London and Madrid. He also became more politically active at this time, accepting a post as a deputy (what we may recognize as a senator or representative) in the First Italian Parliament in 1861. Because of his renowned status, Verdi was also freer to exert influence over his subject matter, libretti, larger orchestras and choruses, and formal experimentation. We see in these middle period works a rejection of the *melodramma* genre conventions and the emergence of less-defined structures where the distinction between individual "numbers" in the opera disappears. This period of composition culminated in the premiere of *Aida* in 1871, after which Verdi would not compose another opera for sixteen years. We now know these sixteen years as the "interregnum," and though he produced no new operas in this era, Verdi occupied himself by overseeing new stagings of previous operas, composing chamber music, and completing his Requiem for the celebrated Risorgimento author, Alessandro Manzoni. These professional duties coincided with his charitable work, contributions to curricula for the newly established national conservatories, and political career.

The last period of Verdi's career - and life - was dominated by Shakespeare (a lifelong fascination for the composer) and revisions of earlier works with the help of librettist Arrigo Boito. His final two operas, *Otello* (1887) and *Falstaff* (1893) were both adaptations of Shakespeare plays, the latter being a combination of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and parts of *Henry IV*. Verdi devoted significant time and money to his charitable projects, most notably the Casa di Riposo, a retirement home for musicians in his beloved home of Sant'Agata. Verdi died in January of 1901, and his legacy celebrated by the illustrious conductor, Arturo Toscanini, who led a tribute of "Va, pensiero."

A stylized, handwritten signature of Giuseppe Verdi in black ink. The signature is enclosed within a large, horizontal, oval-shaped flourish that loops around the text.

Timeline of Events

1810

1813
Guiseppe Fortunino Francesco Verdi is born in Le Rencole, Italy

1815
Underground Railroad is established in Indiana by Levi Coffin

1817
Francis Johnson becomes the first black bandleader and composer to publish sheet music

1818
Mary Shelley publishes Frankenstein

1820

1821
First black acting company, The Africa Grove Theatre Group, is founded in New York

1827
Ludwig van Beethoven dies

1828
The United States first public railroad is constructed between Baltimore and Ohio

1828
Noah Webster publishes the American Dictionary

1830

1832
First African American women's abolitionist group, The Female Anti-Slavery Society, is founded in Salem, Massachusetts

1833
British Empire abolishes slavery

1837
Queen Victoria takes the British throne

1837
Francis Johnson, an African American, is the first American to perform for Queen Victoria

1838
Trail of Tears - Andrew Jackson forces Native Americans to leave their lands

1840

1845
Potato famine begins in Ireland, lasting until 1849

1848
California Gold Rush - many Americans move out west to California to mine for gold

1848
First Women's right convention (Seneca Falls Convention) in the United States, launching the women's suffrage movement

1850

1851
Sojourner Truth delivers her famous *Aren't I a Woman Too* speech at a Women's Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio

1851
***Rigoletto*, an opera by Verdi, premiers in Venice**

1853
***La Traviata*, by Verdi, premiers in Venice**

1853
Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield (the Black Swan), a former slave, debuts at the Metropolitan Opera in New York City

1859
Charles Darwin publishes *The Origin of Species*

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

1863
Gettysburg address is delivered by Abraham Lincoln



1860

1865
Civil War ends and slavery is abolished in America

1866
Ku Klux Klan is formed

1866
Dynamite is invented by Swede Alfred Nobel

1870

1872
Yellowstone Park becomes the first established national park in the United States

1874
First Impressionist art exhibit is curated, featuring such artists as Claude Monet, Edgar Degas, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Camille Pissarro & Berthe Morisot



1880

1876
Great Famine occurs in Southern India after an intense drought leads to crop failure, killing at least 5 million

1878
Salvation Army is founded by Reverend William Booth

1878
Thomas Edison develops electric light

1882
U.S adopts standard time (Ex. Eastern Time)

1885
Automobile is invented

1880

1886
Statue of Liberty gifted to the United States by France

1886
All American Indians are forced onto reservations

1888
Kodak box camera is created by George Eastman

1889
Eiffel Tower is completed in Paris, France

1890

1890
The London Underground opens

1890
Lumiere brothers develop motion pictures

1892
Tchaikovsky composes
The Nutcracker

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
The loop-de-loop 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 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 naïve 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 dì 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.

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.





Characters

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 de Letorières - 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

Commissioner
bass



Voice Type

Operatic voices can be classified by a variety of means. At base we define singers by the vocal range of their voice (basically what notes they can sing), but opera has also determined other ways to classify singing voices based on other qualities of the voice. Here, we take a look at the voice types Verdi utilized in *La Traviata*:

Soprano: the highest female voice, sopranos often take the leading roles in operas.

Lyric Soprano: lyric sopranos are the most common in opera. Annina is usually sung by a lyric soprano.

Dramatic Coloratura Soprano: these ladies have more powerful, rich, emotive voices that can sing over a large orchestra while still being agile. Usually, Violetta is cast as a dramatic coloratura soprano.

Mezzo-Soprano: Singing slightly lower than the soprano, mezzos very often sing supporting roles in opera, particularly older women and pants roles. Flora Bervoix is usually cast as a mezzo-soprano in *La Traviata*.

Tenor: the highest male voice, tenors are often the leading role. Gastone de Letorières and Giuseppe are both tenors.

Lyric Tenor: Usually, this is the character that “gets the girl.” Lyrics have warm voices with full, bright timbres that are strong, but nowhere near as heavy as dramatic tenors. In this opera, Alfredo Germont is a lyric tenor.

Lyric Baritone: Singing in a range between tenor and bass, the lyric baritone is a light, mid-range male voice. In *La Traviata*, Verdi wrote two roles for lyric baritone - Baron Douphol and Giorgio Germont.

Lyric Bass: This is the lowest male voice type of all. Rarely do these singers get the girl, but they often portray supporting characters. Doctor Grenvil is a lyric bass role as are Marchese d'Obigny and the Commissioner.



Cast

Violetta Valéry - **Angela Mortellaro**
Alfredo Germont - **Benjamin Werley**
Giorgio Germont - **Grant Youngblood**
Flora Bervoix - **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 Ksiezzyk-DeCrane
Andrea Soncina
Nicole Futoran

Mezzo

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

Tenors

Robert Bordon
Brian Skoog
Cory Svette
Joshua Sanchez Muniz
Christian Thomas

Bass

Bryant Bush
Michael Borden
James Eder
Daewon Seo
Jonathan Stuckey

Supernumeraries - Sue Hundermark and Beshoy Hanna



Artistic and Production 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**



English	Italian
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)	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
PRELUDE ACT ONE <i>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</i>	PRELUDIO ATTO PRIMO <i>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</i>

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.)

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.

specchio. Nel mezzo c'è una tavola riccamente imbandita. (Violetta seduta su un divano sta scorrendo col Dottore e con alcuni amici, mentre altri vanno ad incontrare 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

MARQUIS
My dear Alfredo

ALFREDO
Marquis -
(They shake hands.)

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.

tal dono.

MARCHESE
Caro Alfredo -

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

GASTONE
I do not deceive you.

VIOLETTA
It is true then? But why?
I don't understand.

ALFREDO
Yes, it is true.

VIOLETTA
I thank you.
You, Baron, were less attentive.

BARON
I have only known you for a year.

VIOLETTA
And he for just a few minutes.

FLORA *(in a low voice, to the Baron)*
It would have been better to say
nothing.

BARON *(softly, to Flora)*
I don't like this young man.

FLORA
Why not? I think he's very pleasant.

GASTONE *(to Alfredo)*
And you have nothing more to say?

MARQUIS *(to Violetta)*
It's up to you to make him talk.

VIOLETTA
Cessate. Nulla son io per lui.

GASTONE
Non v'inganno.

VIOLETTA
Vero è dunque? Onde ciò?
No! comprendo.

ALFREDO
Sì, egli è ver.

VIOLETTA
Le mie grazie vi rendo.
Voi, barone, non faceste altrettanto.

BARONE
Vi conosco da un anno soltanto.

VIOLETTA
Ed ei solo da qualche minuto.

FLORA *(sottovoce al Barone)*
Meglio fora se aveste taciuto.

BARONE *(piano a Flora)*
M'è increscioso quel giovin.

FLORA
Perché? A me invece simpatico
egli è.

GASTONE *(ad Alfredo)*
E tu dunque non apri più bocca?

MARCHESE *(a Violetta)*
È a madama che scuoterlo tocca.

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

Things to Listen For

La Traviata – Musical Structure

With *Rigoletto*, *Il Trovatore*, and *La Traviata*, Verdi began to break the mold of formula and predictability by merging recitative, aria, and ensemble. He wanted clear dramatic continuity. During this phase, his works were characterized by:

- Reliance on human emotions and psychological insights for the essential story line
- Increasing deemphasis on Belcanto divisions in favor of continuous music
- Carefully composed and highly integrated musical entities
- The orchestra plays a much more important role than in a typical Belcanto opera
- Use of good libretti, often based on genuine Romantic literature
- He began to use the new *Parlante* technique by which recitative-like vocal parts are accompanied by a tuneful orchestration

Lyricism is the key to Verdi's art. His melodies never lost direct and popular touch, even in this phase.

This opera is Verdi's only second attempt at setting to music a contemporary subject (*Stiffelio* was the first one) as opposed to the grand public events and gestures, and historical figures. Verdi was accepting something more intimate (we can see a bit of this in *Luisa Miller* as well). This unheroic, bourgeois world required a new style, which can be heard in the fact that the score for *La Traviata* is more flexible and the vocal writing is more delicate than in his earlier operas.

What is extraordinary about the musical structure in *La Traviata* is how well Verdi uses various figures in the instrumentation and vocal writing to signal the wildly shifting moods inside the characters. I will proceed by spelling out these various musical figures, and will highlight in bold font all the references to these devices.

Prelude

- The prelude **begins with a somber theme** which represents the tragedy of Violetta's illness and early death. It is a sad and elegant encapsulation of the heroine herself. **The melody is first stated by violins and cellos, then repeated by the cellos with a violin obbligato (countermelody) above it.**
- **The music is melancholic, longing**, showing her empty life and hopelessness. It makes attempts at happiness, when she tries to counteract her sadness by engaging in easy partying and drinking and the quest for pleasure. **The violin obbligato in the last third of the piece gives away this dichotomy between melancholy and gayness, but the cello background doesn't let us forget that she may seem superficially joyful, but underneath it she is sick and sad.**
- **The Leitmotifs in the Prelude proceed in reverse order** – Verdi takes us musically from what we'll hear later in her deathbed to our first encounter with her. It is interesting to notice that while in his opera Verdi goes from the partying lifestyle to her death, in Alexandre Dumas, Fils source material *La Dame aux Camélias*, the novel, the story line goes in retrospect from her death to the happier times. In Verdi's prelude, he recovers the sequence found in his source material (although the play has the same timeline of the opera).

Act I – Scene 1

- It opens with a **lively theme, a true party music**. There is a chorus that speaks as one character throughout the opera, responding as one to the progressing action.
- Violetta hosts friends at home, and in spite of being ill, throws a party
- Violetta's second line already gives away her strategy: *Al piacere m'affido, ed io soglio con tal farmaco I mali sopir*. (I give myself to pleasure, since pleasure is the best medicine for my ills).

Brindisi...

- This philosophy is celebrated by everybody in the famous drinking song *Brindisi: Libiamo, ne' lieti calice, che la bellezza infiora, e la fuggevol ora, s'inebria a voluttà* (Let's drink from the joyful glass, resplendent with beauty, drink to the spirit of pleasure, which enchants the fleeting moment).
- Violetta says that "everything in life is madness (*follià, follià!*) except for pleasure. Let us be joyful, for love is a fleeting and short-lived joy."
- In this song, in-between the joyful refrain, Violetta and Alfredo dialogue, **showing opposite views (which Verdi highlights by not letting them sing in unison)**: she says "life is only pleasure;" he, who is in love with her, replies that it is so "only for

those who don't know love." Violetta underlines her loveless life, saying "speak not of love to one who knows not what it is." He adds, "such is my destiny." (*La vita è nel tripudio... quando non s'ami ancora... nol dite a chi l'ignora... è il mio destin così*)

Alfredo's declaration of love

- Skipping ahead, soon enough we get to *Un dì felice, eterea*, the moment when Alfredo declares his love at first sight for Violetta, telling her about the day when he saw her passing by for the first time. In this aria, **his halting, self-conscious phrases expand after 40 seconds into a lush melody that comes to represent their love and which reappears through the opera**. He says that his love is mysterious and noble (*misterioso, altero* – **the love Leitmotif**) while she replies that she offers only friendship, she cannot love, nor can she accept so heroic a love from him.

The spinning Parisian lifestyle

- The party ends and everybody leaves, still singing. **The music here is fast and halting, relentlessly repeating short lines like a whirlpool**, showing the exhausting pleasure-seekers' lifestyle.

Violetta's dilemma

- Alone, she muses on Alfredo's love. This begins a scene (remember, Verdi made of the scene the unit in his operas, rather than isolated arias) lasting 12 and a half minutes, a real tour de force for the solo soprano on stage, spanning four arias.
- Violetta is lost in contemplation, her heart perhaps touched for the first time. In the first aria (*È strano*) she wonders if she could have a real love. "His words are burned upon my heart. Would a real love be a tragedy for me?" Then she starts a masterfully constructed aria (*Ah, fors' è lui* – perhaps he's the one) with **halting phrases in a minor key – which signals the fact that the moment is truly internal, of interior reflection, different from the major key arias that she was extrovertly singing up to this point** (as in all of classical music, upbeat arias are in major keys, and introspective ones in minor keys). At the end of the aria, her mood changes from introspection and **she bursts into what is musically a celebration of dawning love at the same time as the words she sings deny any such possibility**. This is a powerful scene and we can feel through the musical development Violetta's burgeoning love.

Then, a sudden change of heart

- The third aria of this set has Violetta suddenly shaking away her doubts – *Follie!*

Follie! Delirio vano è questo – Folly! All is folly! This is mad delirium! – she says she is alone, abandoned in this crowded desert known as Paris, and should rather revel and die in the whirlpool of enjoyment – "*ne'vortici perir, gioir, gioir*." the word used, *gioir*, has a connotation of sexual pleasure, **especially given the way the word is underlined by a very suggestive coloratura**.

She rebels against the ties of love, and screams "Forever free!"

- In this most famous and difficult aria *Sempre libera*, **Verdi adopted the style of a cabaletta**, a word derived from the Italian for grasshopper, since the music jumps along, again symbolizing how Violetta wants to extract herself at all costs from being stopped in her compensatory quest for pleasure. In an interesting dramatic effect, Alfredo's voice is heard from the outside, declaring again his love for her – she is shaken, becomes melancholic again and says "Oh, amore" – but she will not be swayed. **She rapidly insists again on the power of enjoyment in a rapid succession of coloraturas that almost suggest a masturbatory orgasm. Her declaration of independence brings the act to a close with a stunning penultimate E-flat above a high C.**

Act II

- The introduction to the second act has **vigorous strings, describing the joy of the young lovers** in their new life together three months later, in their house in the countryside.
- The aria *De' miei bollenti spiriti* has **energetic pizzicato (plucked) strings showing how Alfredo pours out his youthful, ardent euphoria and impetuosity**. The musical and dramatic climax of this aria comes in its last two lines. In a **soaring vocal cadenza, the tenor can portray Alfredo's rapture** at forgetting the world to live "in heaven" with his love (*io vivo quasi in ciel*)
- A couple of arias later, when Alfredo's father enters the scene, there is an **ominous theme in the low strings**. Thus begins the long confrontation between Germont and Violetta, and **the music will shift at several points** as the two negotiate their various claims

The long scene between Germont and Violetta – the pivotal moment of the opera

- In Verdi's day, duets were often lengthy musical structures that allowed for lengthy and profound dramatic interaction between characters. Generally constructed **of four contrasting movements separated by transition passages**, these duets begin with a *scena*, a short section in which characters initiate a conversation. The *scena* then continues into the following:

- *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

The changing mood in the scene comes from the fact that Germont starts by being harsh, but he softens his tone when it becomes apparent that she is not the gold-digger he had assumed he would find. Here is how Verdi does it:

- In this first movement, Germont and Violetta **have been singing “at” each other, with no real harmony of voices** or thoughts. However, after the transition into the second movement, the *cantabile*, “Ditte alla giovine - si’ bella e pura,” **Verdi begins to bring them slowly together**. When Germont understands the sacrifice Violetta agrees to make for his daughter (and the joy she feels at making it), **the composer recognizes this moment by allowing them to share a cadenza**. The third movement, *Tra breve ei vi fia reso*, brings them even closer as Violetta asks Germont to embrace her as if she were his daughter.
- The *cabaletta* is all that remains. **Note that Germont and Violetta no longer spar with different music; Verdi gives them the same melody and allows them to harmonize for they have reached an accord** - all this through one of the most psychologically rich portrayals Verdi ever composed.
- Germont **begins lyrically** as he tries to coax Violetta into pitying the difficult position of his lovely and innocent daughter – *Pura siccome un angelo*
- Violetta’s phrases **become breathy** as she begins to realize the exorbitant price of Germont’s request – *Ah no, giammai, no, no*
- **The music becomes sinister and manipulative** as Germont changes his strategy, focusing on the fickle nature of men and playing on Violetta’s fear of aging – *Un dì, quando le veneri*
- Violetta’s response is in **hushed phrases in the haunting key of E flat, suggesting someone who is physically stunned**. Germont’s interjections are sympathetic yet still stern and not consoling – *Ditte alla giovine sì bella e pura*
- **A very quiet tone pervades** as Violetta and Germont agree that she must tell Alfredo that she doesn’t love him. **The tension and emotion build up in the orchestra rather than in the vocal lines**. *Imponete*
- **Emotions finally burst forth as Germont tries to encourage Violetta. The music is reminiscent of people preparing for war**. They exchange sympathetic farewells. *Morrò! La mia memoria non fia ch’ei*

- The listener is compelled to condemn Germont for his heartless destruction of a vulnerable woman’s life, while at the same time getting some understanding of what compelled him to act like this. **The ability to portray musically these conflicting emotions** is a striking example of the power and beauty of Verdi’s music.

Second Act, continued

- Violetta says little while writing to Alfredo, and a **plaintiff clarinet** gives voice to her sighs – *Dammi tu forza, o cielo!*
- Alfredo enters, and over an **agitated orchestration**, he questions Violetta about the letter. At the piece’s climax, **we hear the expansive theme we heard in the prelude over tremolo strings**. Here, **the theme is raw emotion** and a great demand on the lyric soprano, but is crucial for the convincing expression of her love. *Che fai?*
- Next there is *Di Provenza il mar il suol*, one of the most outstanding baritone arias in the repertoire. The opening theme, **played by woodwinds, has a folk-like quality which describes the rural setting of Alfredo’s childhood home**.
- The aria **has the structure of music written a generation before Verdi, and therefore is appropriate to represent the point of view of the older generation**.

Structure of this superb aria

- Germont has spent the first part of Act 2 convincing Violetta to abandon his son; successful at that endeavor, he appeals to him by calling up vivid memories of their home in Provence. **Although the text is rich in imagery and certainly “paternal,” it is Verdi’s setting of it that makes this aria noteworthy. Verdi “lengthens” the lines by setting each as they are written but then repeating them again, this time placing the second phrase first**. For example, the aria’s first line is sung as follows:
 - *Di Provence il mar, il suol—chi dal cor ti cancello?*
Chi dal cor ti cancello, di Provence il mar, il suol?
- **This setting effectively makes the poetic lines sound longer. It also gives the aria a particularly “stable” or “square” sound**—each line, composed of half phrases, perfectly balances the other. Dramatically, Germont is the father who attempts to re-establish a balance in his son’s life, persuading his child by repeating his arguments with the slightest of variations.

Second II, Scene 2

- Let’s skip the cabaletta that ends Scene 1. In scene 2, we get to Flora’s house where

Verdi treats us to the **same type of party music** we heard at the beginning of the opera.

- Verdi then interrupts the action with a choral ballet with gypsies, conceived as an **important relief to the dramatic tension**. Spanish matadors and picadors enter. These two choruses talk first of infidelity, then of true love. In the end, all agree that, although this story of fidelity is nice, they prefer their frivolous lifestyle.
- **Tension resumes later** as the card game begins, and **the vocal lines take on a static quality with the exception of Violetta's asides, which soar out over the texture, expressing her distress**. *Alfredo, voi!*
- Violetta and Alfredo confront one another over a **taut musical accompaniment which reflects his insanely jealous bravado**. *Invitato a qui seguirme*
- In *Ogni suo aver tal femmina*, Alfredo curses Violetta in a brief aria over a **cabaletta-style figure. The guests respond wildly, their incredulity underlined by an unresolved closing chord**.
- Germont responds in *Di sprezzo degno sé stesso rende* in **expansive fatherly phrases**, while Alfredo, realizing what he has done, responds in **halting phrases** as he tries to excuse his actions.

Second II, Finale

- This large ensemble *Alfredo Alfredo di questo core*, in which everyone expresses their various thoughts at once, brings the act to a stunning conclusion. **Large ensembles are perfect for portraying the reaction of a community**. Respecting convention of 19th century opera, this ensemble doesn't advance the drama in real time, but allows us to dissect a climactic moment into its various components. Violetta begins **in a distant voice, yet is always at the center of the vocal tableau, and builds to an emotional climax while audibly affecting those around her**.
- Every member of the *demimonde* turns on Alfredo. In communion with all of the main characters, the chorus condemns him for his shameful behavior. **Virtually every voice in the cast merges to create one of the most thrilling and dramatic ensembles in opera**.

Prelude to Act III

- We hear the **same sorrowful music** we heard in the Prelude to Act I. This is followed by an **extended lament which seems to express the alternating hope and despair of Violetta's situation**. The slow, sad prelude echoes that of the first

act, but the difference here is the fact that there is **nothing this time to contrast with the tragedy. The attempt to break free of the doom is no longer there, so, there is no uplifting violin pizzicato this time around**.

- Then, **the orchestra is muted and Violetta's lines are likewise quiet in the next passage, showing that she is barely alive**. *Annina? Commandate?*
- Next, Violetta takes a letter from her bosom and speaks the words **over a solo violin echoing the love theme from Act I** – this technique has since been abused in many movies, but remains striking in its original context here. *Teneste la promessa*
- The next important aria, *Addio del passato*, is a masterpiece of construction Introduced by a **melancholic solo oboe**, Violetta's farewells are accompanied by **halting figures in the orchestra that call to mind her shortness of breath**. As she recalls Alfredo's love **her lines begin to soar**, and as she prays for redemption **the orchestra presses forward in the ascending harmonic progression. Having expended all her energies, her line descends, punctuated by isolated chords in the strings, and she ends on an unaccompanied high A**.
- After we hear revelers outside in marked contrast between Violetta's former life and her near death, **the excitement moves inside** as Annina enters. **The harmonies remain unstable – their direction uncertain** – until we hear the news of Alfredo's imminent return, and **all resolves in an optimistic major key**. *Signora*
- *Parigi, o cara* is a famous duet in which the lovers describe an idyllic future together. **The music is perfectly symmetrical and marvelously intertwined between the two lovers**. They are finally together in every sense, but it is too late for them.

A word about duets

- Librettists write duets to depict such scenes as a lovers' tryst, a meeting between friends or foes, and, in comedies, a wily servant's manipulation of a gullible master. Once composers have the duet's text, they can use a variety of musical strategies to underscore the emotion or tension in these encounters. One character generally begins the duet by "speaking" to the other who responds either alone or by joining in. If the words are considered particularly important - for example, if two characters are expressing precisely the same thought - the composer might have them join to sing in unison or in harmony. Various other dramatic possibilities exist, though. The two might alternate solo sections with the second singer either :
 - **echoing precisely what the first has performed**
 - **singing different words to the same melody, or**

- performing entirely new music and text.
- This last strategy is generally employed if the characters are in conflict; if they cannot agree, the composer portrays that in their music – like in Alfredo and Violetta’s first duet of his declaration of love, when she only offers him friendship. Here, however, it’s different: Verdi wants to show their togetherness in love, therefore, it’s the two former strategies that are employed.
- Then we hear Violetta’s heart beat faster as she tries to take up her life again, but the low strings repeatedly interject short descending phrases which punctuate her failures. *Ah, non più, a un tempo*
- Violetta realizes the seriousness of her condition, and **her music takes on a martial tone, as if she is rebelling against fate.** *Ma se tornando non m’hai salvato*
- Germont’s return cheers her slightly but only briefly. *Ah Violetta! Voi, signor!*
- Resigned to her fate, Violetta gives her medallion to Alfredo **over a funeral march which becomes more insistent as Alfredo and his father pour out their despair.** As Violetta slips away, **the key becomes major, but it is still punctuated by the funereal figure – we hear both heaven and earth. Over shimmering strings, a solo violin once again announces the love theme. It grows in intensity** as she rallies one last time, and at the peak of her ecstasy, she falls dead and **the orchestra hurdles toward its final tragic D-Flat minor chord.** *Più a me t’appressa*

Two medical curiosities

- Why does Violetta, weak and languishing on her death bed, suddenly rallies and lets forth a powerful high B-flat? It depicts “spes phthisica” — a momentary sensation just before death when the consumptive supposedly felt as though he or she were recovering. Medically, it’s the surge of adrenal hormones that often precedes death.
- In 1853, Alfredo and Germont rush to Violetta’s side with no hesitation; in 1896, in Puccini’s *La Bohème* where the heroine also dies of consumption, Rodolfo expressed serious concerns to Marcello about the possibility of catching Mimì’s illness. Why this different reaction? In 1882, the tuberculosis bacillus was discovered!

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:

- The 1990 blockbuster *Pretty Woman*, starring Julia Roberts and Richard Gere featured *La Traviata* prominently. This opera was chosen specifically because of the parallels between the movie’s storyline and that of the opera. Not only do the characters attend a performance of *La Traviata*, but the music is brought back at the end of the film.
- 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.
- [Heineken](#) beer created an ad featuring a couple at the opera enjoying the show and their drinks, but as the soprano ascends to the high note, the man grabs his beer glass to chug his beer before the glass breaks.
- 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](#).

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.

ASIDE: A comment from an actor directly to the audience that the other characters cannot hear.

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.

BEL CANTO: An Italian phrase literally meaning "beautiful singing." A traditional Italian style of singing that emphasizes tone, phrasing, coloratura passages and technique. Also refers to opera written in this style.

BUFFO: From the Italian for "buffoon." A singer of comic roles (basso-buffo) or a comic opera (opera-buffa).

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

BOW, BOWING: The bow is the wand used to play string instruments. The concertmaster determines when the bows should rise or fall, and this bowing is noted in the score so that all move in the same direction.

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

CABALETTA (cah-bah-LEHT-tah): Second part of a two-part aria, always in a faster tempo than the first part.

CADENZA (kuh-DEN-zuh): A passage of singing, often at the end of an aria, which shows off the singer's vocal ability.

CANZONE, CANZONETTA (Cahn-TSOH-neh, cahn-tsoh-NEHT-tah): A folk-like song commonly used in opera buffa.

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.

CAVATINA (cah-vah-TEE-nah): The meaning of this term has changed over the years. It now usually refers to the opening, slow section of a two part aria. In Rossini's time it referred to the entrance, or first aria sung by a certain character. Norma's "Casta diva" is an example of a cavatina in both senses. See also SCENA

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.

CLAUQUE (klak): A group of people hired to sit in the audience and either applaud enthusiastically to ensure success or whistle and boo to create a disaster. In past years, leading singers were sometimes blackmailed to pay a claque to insure that claqueurs would not create a disturbance. Even now, a claque is sometimes used but rarely acknowledged.

COMMEDIA DELL'ARTE (cohm-MEH-dee-ah dehl-AHR-teh): A type of comic opera popular in Italy in the 16th to 18th centuries that involved improvisation using stock characters and gestures. The characters were often masked to represent certain archetypes.

COMPOSER: A person who writes music.

COMPRIMARIO (cohm-pree-MAH-ree-oh): A secondary or supporting role or a person singing such a role.

CONCERTATO (cohn-chehr-TAH-toh): A large ensemble of soloists and chorus generally found in the second movement of a central finale, to which it forms the lyrical climax.

CONCERTMASTER: The first-chair violinist who plays occasional solos and is responsible for coordinating all of the stringed instruments. The concertmaster decides on the bowing so that all of the string players' bows move in unison.

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.

CONTINUO (cohn-TEE-noo-oh): An extemporized chordal accompaniment for recitativo secco, usually by a harpsichord, cello or double bass. Opera seria continuo often used an ensemble of harpsichord and theorbo (member of the lute family). Opera buffa continuo used a single keyboard and string bass.

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

DA CAPO ARIA (DAH CAH-poh): An aria in the form ABA. A first section is followed by a shorter second section. Then the first is repeated, usually with added ornamentation.

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*.

DRAMATIC (Voice type): The heaviest voice, capable of sustained declamation and a great deal of power, even over the largest operatic orchestra of about 80 instruments. This description applies to all voice ranges from soprano to bass.

DRAMATURG: One who suggests repertory, advises on the suitability of competing editions of operas and writes

or edits material for program books and supertitles.

DRESS (a wig): To prepare a wig for use.

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.

DUET: An extended musical passage performed by two singers. They may or may not sing simultaneously or on the same musical line.

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.

FLY, FLY TOWER: A high space above the stage where pieces of the set are often raised up or flown out of sight when not in use.

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

HELDEN: Prefix meaning "heroic." Applicable to other voices but usually used in Heldentenor.

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

IMPRESARIO: A person who sponsors entertainment. In opera, the general director of an opera company.

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

LEITMOTIV (LEIT-moh-tif) or MOTIF: A short, recurring musical phrase associated with a particular character or event.

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.

MAGIC OPERA: An opera in which there are many magical effects and often animals appearing on stage. Often the plot of a magic opera involves the rescue of one of the major characters.

MAKEUP DESIGNER: One who designs and applies makeup to actors in order to appear properly under stage lighting, or to appear older, younger, as a creature, etc.

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.

N

NUMBER OPERA: An opera composed of individual numbers, such as recitative, arias, duets, ensembles, etc. Between the numbers there is often a chance for applause. Most of the operas of Mozart, Rossini and Bellini can be called number operas.

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.

OPERA TEXT: See *SUPERTITLES*.

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).

PARLANDO (pah-RAHN-doh): A style of singing like ordinary speech. It can occur in the middle of an aria.

PATTER SONG: A song or aria in which the character sings as many words as possible in a short amount of time.

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.

PIZZICATO (pit-tsee-CAH-toh): Playing a string instrument by plucking the strings instead of using the bow.

PRELUDE: Usually a short introduction that leads into an act without a break, as opposed to an overture which is longer and can be played as a separate piece. Wagner called his introductions preludes even though some are quite long.

PRIMA DONNA: Literally "first lady;" the leading woman singer in an opera. Because of the way some have behaved in the past, it often refers to someone who acts in a superior and demanding fashion. The term for the leading man is primo uomo.

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

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

PRODUCTION CARPENTER: Carpenter in charge of organizing and handling all aspects of the sets and equipment.

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.

PROMPT: To help a singer remember lines, some opera houses will place a person (prompter) in a box below and at the very front of the stage.

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.

Q

QUARTET: An extended musical passage performed by four singers.

QUINTET: An extended musical passage performed by five singers.

R

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

REDUCTION: In a piano reduction, the orchestra parts are condensed into music which can be played by one person on the piano.

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

RÉPÉTITEUR (reh-peh-ti-TEUR): A member of the music staff who plays the piano for rehearsals and, if necessary, the piano or harpsichord during

performances. They frequently coach singers in their roles and assist with orchestra rehearsals.

RIGGER: One who works on ropes, booms, lifts and other aspects of a production.

ROULADE or RUN: A quick succession of notes sung on one syllable.

S

SCENA (SCHAY-nah): Literally "a scene;" a dramatic episode which consists of a variety of numbers with a common theme. A typical scena might consist of a recitative, a cavatina and a cabaletta. An example is the "Mad Scene" from Lucia di Lammermoor.

SCENIC CHARGE: One who is responsible for painting by reproducing color, texture, preparation and aging of stage surfaces.

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.

SERENADE: A piece of music honoring someone or something.

SEXTET: A piece for six singers.

SINGSPIEL (ZING-shpeel): German opera with spoken dialogue and usually, but not necessarily, a comic or sentimental plot. Examples include The Abduction from the Seraglio and Der Freischütz.

SITZPROBE (ZITS-proh-bah): Literally, "seated rehearsal," it is the first rehearsal of the singers with the orchestra and no acting.

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

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.

STROPHIC: Describes an aria in which the same music repeats for all stanzas of a text.

SUPERNUMERARY: Someone who is part of a group on stage but doesn't sing. It is usually shortened to Super.

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.

TESSITURA: Literally "texture," it defines the average pitch level of a role. Two roles may have the same range from the lowest to the highest note, but the one with a greater proportion of high notes has the higher tessitura.

THROUGH-SUNG: An opera in which the music is continuous, without divisions into recitative and aria.

TRAGÉDIE LYRIQUE: Early form of French opera that recognized a distinction between the main scenes and divertissements consisting of choruses, dances, etc.

TREMOLO: The quick, continuous reiteration of a pitch.

TRILL: Very quick alternation of pitch between two adjacent notes. See coloratura.

TRIO: An ensemble of three singers or the music that is written for three singers.

V
VERISMO: Describes the realistic style of opera that started in Italy at the end of the nineteenth century. Although the peak of the movement was past by the time of Puccini, his operas are a modified form of verismo.

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."

W
WIG DESIGNER: Designs and oversees the creation of the wigs used in a production.

*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

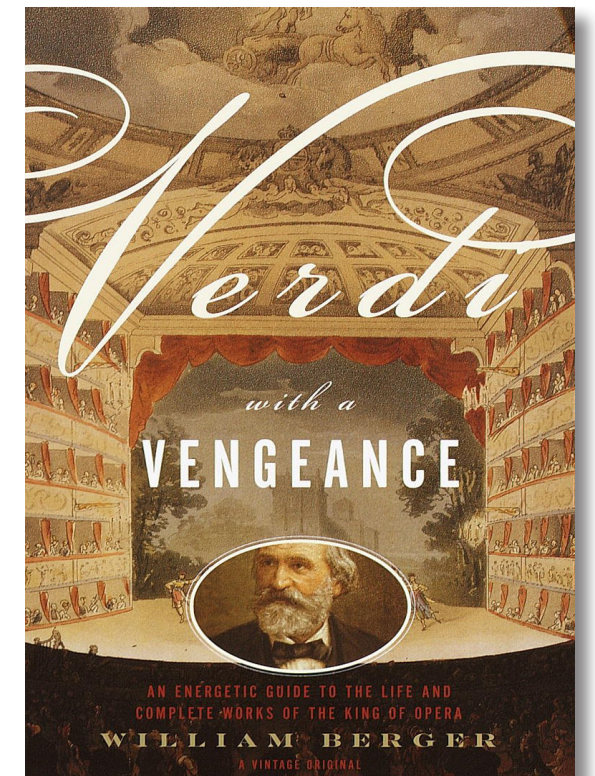
If you have enjoyed our production of Verdi's *La Traviata* and would like to learn more about the composer and the opera, please check out these resources we've compiled!

[La Traviata in Pop Culture](#)

[The Real Traviata: The Life of Giuseppina Strepponi, Wife of Giuseppe Verdi](#)

[The Verdi-Boito Correspondence](#)

[Verdi With a Vengeance: An Energetic Guide to the Life and Complete Works of the King of Opera](#)



Recommendations for videos and recordings

Bibliography

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 \(LA Opera, 2007\)](#)
[“Di Provenza il mar” - Giorgio Zancanaro \(pre 2007\)](#)

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