

CHAN 3023(2)

CHANDOS
OPERA IN
ENGLISH

Sir Charles Mackerras



Verdi
La traviata

PETER MOORES FOUNDATION



Giuseppe Verdi

AKG

Giuseppe Verdi (1813–1901)

La traviata (The Fallen Woman)

Libretto by Francesco Maria Piave after Alexandre Dumas's *La dame aux camélias*

English translation by Edmund Tracey

Violetta Valéry	Valerie Masterson <i>soprano</i>
Alfredo Germont	John Brecknock <i>tenor</i>
Giorgio Germont	Christian du Plessis <i>baritone</i>
Flora Bervoix	Della Jones <i>mezzo-soprano</i>
Baron Douphol.....	John Gibbs <i>baritone</i>
Doctor Grenvil	Roderick Earle <i>bass</i>
Marquis d'Obigny	Denis Dowling <i>baritone</i>
Viscount Gaston de Letorières.....	Geoffrey Pogson <i>tenor</i>
Annina	Shelagh Squires <i>mezzo-soprano</i>
Joseph.....	Edward Byles <i>tenor</i>
A Passer-by	John Kitchiner <i>baritone</i>

English National Opera Orchestra and Chorus

Victor Morris musical assistant

Sir Charles Mackerras

COMPACT DISC ONE

[1]	Prelude	4:03 [p. 68]
	Act I	
[2]	'What a time to arrive at a party!' <i>Chorus, Violetta, Flora, Marquis, Gaston, Alfredo, Baron</i>	4:53 [p. 68]
[3]	'Be happy, be happy and raise your glass with me' <i>Alfredo, Chorus, Violetta</i>	3:02 [p. 70]
[4]	'What's that?'	2:18 [p. 70]
[5]	'I saw a vision ethereal' <i>Alfredo, Violetta</i>	3:10 [p. 72]
[6]	'Ha, ha! What are you doing?' <i>Gaston, Violetta, Alfredo</i>	1:19 [p. 72]
[7]	'We present ourselves before you' <i>Chorus</i>	1:43 [p. 73]
[8]	'I wonder! I wonder!' <i>Violetta</i>	1:05 [p. 73]
[9]	'Is he the one I dream about?'	2:48 [p. 73]
[10]	'It can't be! It can't be!'	0:57 [p. 73]
[11]	'Give me freedom to be happy' <i>Violetta, Alfredo</i>	3:30 [p. 74]
	Act II	
	Scene 1	
[12]	'I'm never happy if she is not beside me' <i>Alfredo</i>	1:53 [p. 74]
[13]	'My life was too impetuous'	2:02 [p. 74]

[14]	'Annina, where have you been?' <i>Alfredo, Annina</i>	0:45 [p. 75]
[15]	'I hate myself! I'm so ashamed!' <i>Alfredo</i>	1:38 [p. 75]
[16]	'Alfredo?' 'He has just set out for Paris' <i>Violetta, Annina, Joseph, Germont</i>	3:46 [p. 75]
[17]	'I have a daughter sent from Heav'n' <i>Germont, Violetta</i>	1:42 [p. 77]
[18]	'Do you realise I adore him'	2:15 [p. 78]
[19]	'A day will come when making love...'	2:52 [p. 78]
[20]	'Ah! Comfort your daughter so pure and lovely'	4:23 [p. 79]
[21]	'Then command me!'	1:20 [p. 79]
[22]	'I'll die! But you must promise me...'	3:43 [p. 80]
[23]	'God give me strength to bear it!' <i>Violetta, Annina</i>	1:46 [p. 81]
[24]	'What's that?' 'Nothing' <i>Alfredo, Violetta</i>	2:17 [p. 81]
[25]	'Ah, she is mine forever' <i>Alfredo, Joseph, A Passer-by, Germont</i>	2:18 [p. 82]
[26]	'In Provence, your native land' <i>Germont</i>	4:03 [p. 83]
[27]	'Won't you answer your father, Alfredo?' <i>Germont, Alfredo</i>	0:47 [p. 83]
[28]	'No, no, I cannot preach at you'	1:54 [p. 84]

TT 68:15

COMPACT DISC TWO

Scene 2

- | | | |
|-----|---|--------------|
| [1] | ‘The surprise is a band of dancing gipsies’
<i>Flora, Marquis, Doctor, Chorus</i> | 1:04 [p. 84] |
| [2] | ‘We’re gipsy fortune tellers’
<i>Gipsies, Flora, Marquis, Chorus</i> | 2:51 [p. 84] |
| [3] | ‘We are heroes, in Spain they adore us’
<i>Gaston, Matadors, Chorus</i> | 2:40 [p. 85] |
| [4] | ‘Alfredo! You!’
<i>Chorus, Alfredo, Flora, Violetta, Baron, Gaston, Servant</i> | 4:08 [p. 86] |
| [5] | ‘I have asked him here to meet me’
<i>Violetta, Alfredo, Chorus</i> | 2:29 [p. 88] |
| [6] | ‘All that she had she spent on me’
<i>Alfredo, Chorus</i> | 1:31 [p. 90] |
| [7] | ‘Disgraceful conduct! How I despise you!’
<i>Germont, Alfredo, Baron, Chorus</i> | 1:49 [p. 90] |
| [8] | ‘Alfredo, Alfredo, you hate and scorn me’
<i>Violetta, Alfredo, Germont, Baron, Chorus</i> | 4:10 [p. 90] |

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|----------------|---|--------------|
| [9] | Prelude | 3:41 [p. 91] |
| Act III | | |
| [10] | ‘Annina?’ ‘Did you call me?’
<i>Violetta, Annina, Doctor</i> | 5:04 [p. 91] |
| [11] | ‘You have kept your promise...’
<i>Violetta</i> | 1:50 [p. 92] |
| [12] | ‘Forever I must leave thee...’ | 2:53 [p. 93] |
| [13] | ‘Hail to the carnival’s four-footed master!’
<i>Chorus of Revellers</i> | 0:51 [p. 93] |
| [14] | ‘Dear Madam –’
<i>Annina, Violetta, Alfredo</i> | 1:45 [p. 93] |
| [15] | ‘Come, bid farewell to Paris forever’
<i>Alfredo, Violetta</i> | 4:12 [p. 94] |
| [16] | ‘Ah, no more, Alfredo, let’s go to the church now’ | 1:21 [p. 95] |
| [17] | ‘But if my loved one cannot revive me’ | 2:18 [p. 96] |
| [18] | ‘Ah, Violetta!’
<i>Germont, Violetta, Alfredo</i> | 1:38 [p. 96] |
| [19] | ‘Listen! I have a picture here’ | 0:51 [p. 97] |
| [20] | ‘I see a pure and lovely girl’
<i>Violetta, Germont, Doctor, Annina, Alfredo</i> | 3:06 [p. 97] |

TT 50:17

Verdi: *La traviata*

From *La dame aux camélias* to *La traviata*

Verdi had been fortunate with those of his operas commissioned by and first performed at the Teatro la Fenice in Venice: *Ernani* in 1844, *Attila* in 1846 and *Rigoletto* in 1851. In 1852, the thirty-nine-year-old composer was approached again by the management of the Fenice and asked to compose an opera for the following season. Francesco Maria Piave, who had been Verdi's collaborator on two of those earlier three Fenice operas, was engaged as librettist, and the search for a suitable subject was begun while Verdi was still composing *Il trovatore* (for the Teatro Apollo, Rome, where it was given its premiere in January, 1853).

At the beginning of 1852, Verdi and his mistress, Giuseppina Strepponi, were in Paris. The stage adaption of *La dame aux camélias*, which Alexandre Dumas *fils* had made from his own novel, was first produced there on 2 February, and Verdi attended a performance. He had probably already read the novel, for the previous year he had mentioned to his *Trovatore* librettist 'another subject, simple and passionate, which can be said to be almost

complete as it is'; this is generally taken to refer to *La dame aux camélias*. When Verdi suggested the Dumas play to the Fenice authorities, they approved it, merely suggesting that he change his proposed title, 'Amore e morte' (Love and death).

Verdi agreed to have the new opera ready for performance at the Fenice on 6 March 1853, and began to compose it while he was in Rome in December, 1852, rehearsing *Il trovatore*. Only a few weeks separate the premieres of *Il trovatore* in Rome and *La traviata* in Venice. After the first three highly successful performances of *Il trovatore* in January, Verdi returned to his villa at Sant'Agata, near Busseto, and completed the new opera. Piave had been busily re-writing his libretto in the light of the composer's unkind criticism that some sections of it would send the audience to sleep! A large amount of the music had been written while he was adding the finishing touches to *Il trovatore*, which demonstrates how completely Verdi was able to immerse himself in the characters and atmosphere of his subjects. The worlds of *Il trovatore* and *La traviata* could hardly be more

different, but, having found his way into them both, Verdi was apparently able to turn from one to the other with ease. He was the most objective of composers, which goes some way towards explaining why he is one of the greatest composers of opera. However, within the context of this objectivity, he contrived to lay bare his own feelings. It is rare for Verdi to identify himself with any one character in his operas, but when he does lavish his compassion upon a particular character, the occasion is sure to be a very revealing one, as is the case with *La traviata*.

Most of the music was written while Verdi was *en route* to Rome, while he was in Rome producing *Il trovatore*, or at Sant'Agata immediately afterwards. The final act was composed at Sant'Agata in an atmosphere of pessimistic gloom highly suitable to the content of the drama, not only because both Verdi and Giuseppina were unwell, but also because Verdi was convinced that the cast engaged by the Fenice Theatre would not be able to do justice to his opera. Piave stayed at Sant'Agata so as to be on call when alterations to his libretto were needed. 'When it rains' he wrote to the Fenice's Secretary, 'I assure you it's a case of looking at oneself in the mirror to see if one is still in human form, or whether one hasn't been turned into a toad or a frog.' Verdi

instructed Piave to convey to the Fenice the composer's conviction that, unless different singers were engaged, the opera was sure to fail. When an anonymous letter warned Verdi that, unless the soprano and baritone at least were replaced, the performance would be a disaster, Verdi gloomily passed the letter on to Piave, adding, 'I know, I know'.

When he arrived in Venice on 21 February to orchestrate the opera and supervise the rehearsals, Verdi had good reason to fear the worst, for the soprano was unsatisfactory and the tenor not in good voice. Even the baritone, Felice Varesi, who was used to working with Verdi and had scored a huge success as the first Rigoletto, felt unhappy in so unusual an opera with a purely domestic background, no intrigues, no battles, none of the trappings of high romance. The first performance was given on 6 March, and in letters to various friends the following day Verdi reported disaster. 'Dear Emanuele', he wrote to Emanuele Muzio, his ex-pupil and amanuensis, '*Traviata* last night – a fiasco. Was it my fault or the singers? Time will tell.'

The first-night audience had laughed at the thought of the soprano, Fanny Salvini-Donatelli, an extremely stout lady, dying of consumption, though she was the only singer whom the critics praised. Writers on Verdi

have been known to suggest that another reason for the initial failure of *La traviata* was that Venetian audiences were not used to seeing contemporary dress on the operatic stage. But at those first performances at the Fenice, they did not see modern dress. It is true that, in choosing the Dumas play for his opera, Verdi had hoped to grapple with a contemporary subject. No one had ever attempted to do this in a serious opera, though he himself had come close to it in *Stiffelio* which is set at the beginning of the nineteenth century. While he was composing *La traviata*, Verdi had written to a friend: 'For Venice I'm writing *La dame aux camélias* which will probably be called *La traviata*. It's a contemporary subject. Another composer would perhaps not have done it because of the costumes, the period, or a thousand other foolish scruples, but I am delighted with the idea. Everyone complained when I proposed putting a hunchback on the stage. Well, I enjoyed composing *Rigoletto*.' However, someone at the Teatro la Fenice had got cold feet and, when *La traviata* reached the stage in Venice, the period and costumes were those of Louis XIV, early eighteenth century. Verdi had fought hard for the right to retain in his opera the contemporary setting of the play. A memorandum in the archives of the Fenice

notes that 'the Signor Maestro Verdi desires, demands and begs that the costumes for his opera *La traviata* should remain those of the present day'. A little later, however, Piave wrote from Sant'Agata to confirm that 'Verdi agrees very much against his will that the period should be put back in time'.

Verdi's gloomy letters about the 'fiasco' were written before he had seen the newspaper reviews of the first performance, which, though mixed, were by no means entirely unfavourable. Ten performances were given during the season, after which Verdi instructed his publisher not to allow any further productions, unless he, Verdi, could be in charge of them. He toyed with the idea of producing the opera in Rome, but was forestalled by a request for it from Venice, not from the Fenice but from a smaller theatre, the Teatro San Benedetto. The impresario offered to engage a first-rate cast, with Piave to direct rehearsals, and to allow unlimited rehearsal time. The Louis XIV period was to be adhered to, however, for apparently it would have been tempting providence to show the audience people exactly like themselves on stage.

After an initial hesitation, Verdi agreed to the proposal from the Teatro San Benedetto, and the Venetians heard *La traviata* again on 6 May, 1854, with a new cast. This time, the

opera was an overwhelming success. Soon, it was being produced elsewhere throughout Italy and abroad, though always in the 1700 costumes, and before long it had become the most discussed opera of its day. Verdi was delighted, though he could not refrain from remarking to a friend that, with the exception of minor alterations made to adjust the score to the capabilities of the new singers, it was the same opera which had been heard at the Fenice: 'Then it was a fiasco; now it has created a furore. Draw your own conclusions!'

Alexandre Dumas's novel *La dame aux camélias* had been published in Paris in 1848, only a few months after the death of Alphonsine Plessis (or Marie Duplessis, as she was generally called), on whom the author had based his lady of the camélias. Marie Duplessis was a famous Parisian courtesan of great beauty and wit, who at various times had liaisons with such eminent men as Alfred de Musset, Liszt and Dumas himself. She was only twenty-three when she died of consumption. There are very strong autobiographic elements in both the novel and the play which Dumas fashioned from it the following year, and it is quite reasonable to assume that the character of Armand Duval, who shares his author's initials, was intended as a self-portrait. (In the opera he is called Alfredo Germont.) Marie Duplessis

was described by Dumas as 'tall, very thin, dark-haired and with a pink and white complexion... she was like a Saxe figurine'. Born in the country, the daughter of a merchant, she made her way to Paris at the age of fifteen where she soon became what the Parisians used to call a *grisette*, a girl who was to be found in the cafes of the artists' and students' quarters by night: a Parisian equivalent of the Viennese *süsse Mädel*. It is doubtful if Marie Duplessis was ever a common prostitute. Within a year she had become part of the Parisian *demi-monde* of the kept woman, a social step or two above the prostitute, though beyond the pale of respectable society. The kept woman, or courtesan, usually indulged in successive rather than simultaneous liaisons, and Marie Duplessis was kept successively by the Duc de Guise and by Count Stackelberg. It was when she was nineteen, and the mistress of the Count, that Dumas met her, in circumstances similar to those portrayed in Act I of both play and opera.

In transforming her into his Marguerite Gautier, Dumas romanticised Marie, for she had not left him in order to protect his family's name: he had left her, because she was unwilling to renounce the luxury with which he was unable to provide her, and he was

unwilling to share her with other lovers. Their affair had lasted less than a year. The following year, Marie Duplessis travelled to London with the Vicomte de Pérrigaux, whom she married at the Kensington Registry Office. After a few months, the marriage failed, and Marie returned to the continent, visiting various spas in an attempt to regain her health. She died in her apartment in Paris in February, 1847, and is buried in the Père Lachaise cemetery.

Dumas was in his early twenties when he wrote his novel which, though widely admired at the time, has today fallen into obscurity. His play, however, written the year after the novel and only two years after the death of Marie Duplessis, but kept from performance for three years because of censorship difficulties, remains obstinately alive, not only because of its suitability as a vehicle for great romantic actresses such as Sarah Bernhardt, Greta Garbo and Edwige Feuillère, but also because of its formal simplicity and emotional honesty, qualities which triumph over the fact that it has long ago lost its power to *épater les bourgeois*.

The *bourgeois* of the days of Dumas *fil*s and Verdi were, however, very easily shocked. Society then, as now, was based to a large extent on organised hypocrisy, but the rules were stricter and more harshly enforced. As the illegitimate son of a famous father, the young

Dumas reacted violently against the *demi-monde* in which he was brought up. Though his treatment of the courtesan, a social outcast, is highly sympathetic in *La dame aux camélias* and firmly within the romantic literary tradition of rebellion against conventional morality, in later life Dumas was to attack the courtesan as the curse of society.

Parisian society, at least the liberal artistic society which Verdi frequented on his many sojourns in Paris, would not have regarded the composer's mistress, Giuseppina Strepponi, as a courtesan. But provincial Italian society was not Paris. Verdi's first wife and their two children had been dead for more than ten years, and he and Giuseppina Strepponi had been lovers for five years. It was only three years since he had brought Giuseppina to live with him in his home town of Busseto, an act which outraged local society and estranged him from many of his old friends. At that time Verdi had bought the Villa Sant'Agata, two or three miles outside Busseto, which was to be his and Giuseppina's home for the rest of their lives. When Antonio Barezzi, his ex-father-in-law and old benefactor, took him to task for not legalising his union with Giuseppina, Verdi replied: 'There lives in my house a lady, free and independent, who, like myself, prefers a solitary life, and in possession of a fortune that

caters for all her needs. Neither I nor she is obliged to account to anyone for our actions. But who knows what our relations are? What affairs? What ties? What rights I have over her or she over me? Who knows whether she is my wife or not? And if she is, who knows what the reasons may be for not announcing the fact? Who knows whether that is a bad thing, who has the right to ostracise us? I will say this, however: in my house she is entitled to as much respect as myself, more even. And no one is allowed to forget that for any reason. And finally she has every right, both because of her conduct and her character, to that consideration she habitually shows to others'.

It is hardly surprising, at a time when Verdi's relationship with Giuseppina (whom he was not to marry until seven years later) was scandalising the citizens of Busseto, that the composer should respond with such sympathy to Dumas's play. It is probable that Verdi saw in the play something of the emotional truth of his own situation, and that, at least in a corner of his mind, he identified Giuseppina with Marie Duplessis/Marguerite Gautier/Violetta Valéry, with himself as Alexandre Dumas/Armand Duval/Alfredo Germont, and Antonio Barezzi as Dumas *père*(?)/Georges Duval/Giorgio Germont. Certainly it is true that *La traviata* occupied a special place in Verdi's

affections and that, in style, it is a much more intimate and personal work than anything else he had written up to that time.

Piave's libretto for the opera follows the Dumas play fairly closely. The play is in five acts, reduced in the opera to four scenes, for Piave omits the second act in which Marguerite decides to live with Armand in the country and dismisses her current lover, Count de Giray. Piave thus improved the form of the drama at the expense of its content for, at the end of Act I, Marguerite, or Violetta as she becomes in the opera, has apparently determined to continue her life as a courtesan, yet she is next seen at the beginning of the opera's Act II (the play's Act III) living in domestic bliss in the country with Armand/Alfredo. However, the four scenes of the opera add up to a satisfying musical and dramatic shape, and Dumas's Act II is not really necessary either to the plot or to the boldly sketched characterisation. The libretto is, in fact, one of Piave's most successful, and in some respects it even improves upon the play from which it is taken.

La traviata is not only one of Verdi's best-loved operas: it is also one of the world's great music-dramas. That it was not immediately recognised as such can only have been because of its melodic wealth, for it seems hardly fair

that a superb music-dramatist should also be able to invent such a prodigality of tunes. Unfair but, in the case of Verdi, indisputable. In *La traviata*, more completely than in such earlier works as *Luisa Miller* or *Stiffelio*, whose plots still retain elements of romantic melodrama, Verdi brought a new domestic milieu into opera and, despite the Louis XIV costumes of those early performances, wrote about the *bourgeois* world of his own day. *La traviata* is an opera in which all of Verdi's finest qualities are to be perceived: his technical mastery, his clarity, his humanity, his psychological penetration, his unerring taste, and his genius for creating warm, singable melody.

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(This article incorporates material from Charles Osborne's *The Complete Operas of Verdi*.)

Synopsis

Act I

Violetta Valéry is giving a party at her house in Paris, where she is kept in luxury by her current lover, the Baron Douphol. Among her guests are Flora Bervoix with her lover the Marquis d'Obigny, Dr Grenvil and the Viscount Gaston de Letorières. Gaston introduces his friend Alfredo Germont who, he says, is an ardent admirer of hers, even though

he has never met her. Violetta asks Alfredo to propose a toast, and he drinks to her eyes. The band strikes up. Violetta, who has tuberculosis (in those days an incurable disease), feels faint and asks her guests to dance without her. Alfredo stays behind to make sure she is all right and confesses his love for her. Violetta lightly discourages him, but she offers him a flower and says he may bring it back to her when it fades. The guests leave.

The idea of true love given and returned attracts but frightens her. It is more than a woman like her can hope for, and she cannot accept it or trust it. She must be free to enjoy herself.

Act II

Scene 1

Violetta has given up her life with the Baron and she and Alfredo have been lovers for three months. They have set up house together in a village outside the city. Alfredo is mortified to discover from the maid that Violetta is selling all her possessions to pay the bills and is keeping them both. He leaves to raise money in Paris. Violetta is surprised to hear that he has gone out and tells the servants that she is expecting a visit from her attorney. She is momentarily distracted by a letter from Flora inviting her to a party in Paris that evening.

The gentleman who then arrives is not her lawyer, but Alfredo's father. He accuses her of ruining his son. She tells him in confidence that it is his son who is ruining her and that, far from being a kept woman, she is keeping Alfredo. Undeterred, Mr Germont goes on to say that the scandal of their affair is threatening his daughter's intended marriage. Violetta must give Alfredo up. She is young and will find another lover. Violetta answers that she could never love anyone else. But when Mr Germont persists, saying that heaven will never bless the affair, and that it is God's will that she should sacrifice herself, she gives in. She will leave Alfredo, provided that one day Mr Germont will tell him the truth.

Mr Germont leaves, and Violetta writes a note to the Baron Douphol asking him if he will be free that evening to escort her to Flora's party. She sends the maid to deliver it, and sits down to write a farewell note to Alfredo. He returns just as she is finishing it, but she manages to hide it from him. He tells her that he is expecting his father who has left him an angry letter. As Violetta leaves the room she says simply that she will wait for him outside, and then with sudden passion begs him to love her always.

The manservant reports a few minutes later that she has left for Paris. Alfredo, although

puzzled, imagines she has gone to settle the financial problems which he has in fact just resolved himself. A passer-by brings a letter to the house. 'Here's a note from a lady for you...'. Alfredo opens it.

'By the time you have read this letter I will have left to rejoin the Baron. Our weeks together have been very pleasant, but it would not have lasted...'. Mr Germont, who has been watching from the garden, comes in to console him and takes the opportunity of telling him how much his sister misses him. Will he not come home to Provence? Alfredo can only think of revenge. Then Flora's invitation catches his eye, and he realizes where he will find Violetta.

Scene 2

Alfredo arrives alone at Flora's house, where she has enlivened the party with gambling and a band of gipsies who tell fortunes and sing of bull fights. He sits down to gamble. When Violetta arrives, she is with the Baron Douphol, who forbids her to speak to Alfredo. He challenges the young man to a game of cards. Alfredo wins, doubles and wins until it is time for everyone to go in to supper. Violetta slips back to speak to Alfredo privately. She begs him to leave the house as she does not want him killed in a duel with the Baron.

Alfredo replies that he will only leave if she comes with him; but she tells him that she has sworn to give him up, and allows him to believe that she has made this promise to the Baron.

Alfredo calls the company together and informs them that as he has been kept by her, he will now clear his honour and pay her off – with his winnings. Mr Germont, who has arrived in time to hear this, turns on his son for behaving so dishonourably to a woman. He disowns him – but without revealing the part that he himself has played in events. The Baron challenges Alfredo to a duel.

Act III

It is Carnival season, the following year. Violetta is at the end of her finances and mortally ill. The doctor tries to comfort her, but tells the maid she will be dead within a few hours. When Violetta is alone she reads for the hundredth time the letter she has had from Mr Germont. Alfredo was forced to go abroad, after wounding the Baron in a duel, but his father has written to him revealing the true facts. He is returning, and should soon be there with her to ask her forgiveness. She knows it is too late. Alfredo does return, to take her away from Paris forever – with him beside her she will grow well. But even the

exertion of dressing brings on a paroxysm of coughing and the doctor is called. Mr Germont also arrives. She is glad to have her friends with her as she is dying. She gives Alfredo a picture of herself to give to the girl he will one day marry, and dies in his arms.

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Valerie Masterson was born in Birkenhead and studied in London and Milan. She sang at Salzburg for a season and then joined the D'Oyly Carte Opera Company as principal soprano. She has sung with all the major opera companies in the UK as well as extensively abroad including appearances at Aix-en-Provence, Nancy, Montpellier, the Paris Opéra, Toulouse, Bordeaux, Geneva, Rouen, Prague, Dublin, Munich, Marseilles, the Piccola Scala Milan, Barcelona, Chicago, Philadelphia, Santiago, San Francisco, New York and Houston. Her wide-ranging repertoire includes the title roles in *La traviata*, *Manon*, *Louise*, *Mireille*, *Die lustige Witwe* and *Semele*, Madame Lidoine (*Dialogues des carmélites*), Micaëla, Susanna and Countess Almaviva, Sophie and the Marschallin, Mimì, Marguerite (*Faust*), Antonia (*Les contes d'Hoffmann*) and she also sang in *The King Goes Forth to France* with The Royal Opera. Valerie Masterson appears

regularly on radio and television and her recordings include Rossini's *Elisabetta*, *Regina d'Inghilterra*, *Das Rheingold*, *Götterdämmerung*, several Gilbert and Sullivan operettas, and *Julius Caesar* (for Chandos/Peter Moores Foundation).

John Brecknock comes from Nottinghamshire. He joined Sadler's Wells (later English National) Opera. Major roles included Don Ottavio, Belmonte, Ferrando, Count Ory, Almaviva (*The Barber of Seville*), Alfredo, des Grieux (*Manon*), Tamino, the Duke (*A Night in Venice*) and Werther. His roles for The Royal Opera have included Fenton (*Falstaff*) and Rinuccio (*Gianni Schicchi*), and he also has sung Gennaro (*Lucrezia Borgia*) with Dame Joan Sutherland. John Brecknock has performed frequently throughout Europe, including at the Vienna Staatsoper, and in the Americas. His roles abroad include Don Ottavio at the Metropolitan Opera, New York, Ernesto (*Don Pasquale*) and Fenton in Miami, the Duke (*Rigoletto*) in Houston, Count Ory in Ottawa, Werther in Rouen and San Diego, Ramiro in Buenos Aires, and Idomeneo and Ramiro in Paris.

Christian du Plessis studied in his native South Africa and made his debut with the

Performing Arts Council of the Transvaal Opera in Johannesburg as Yamadori (*Madama Butterfly*). He joined English National Opera, where his roles included Rodrigo, Germont, Cecil, Valentin, Marcello and Posa. His other appearances include Enrico and Marcello in Hong Kong, Zurga in Fort Worth and Orlando, Valentin in Barcelona and concert performances with Dame Joan Sutherland of *Rodelinda*. Christian du Plessis is especially known for his performances of lesser-known operas by Bellini and Donizetti for the London Opera Society and Opera Rara. His recordings include Donizetti's *Maria Stuarda*, and *Maria Padilla*, *L'assedio di Calais*, *Gabriella di Vergy* and *Ugo, conte di Parigi*, Meyerbeer's *Dinorah* and Offenbach's *Christopher Columbus* for Opera Rara.

Della Jones was born in Neath and studied at the Royal College of Music where she won many prizes, including the Kathleen Ferrier Memorial Scholarship. She has appeared with all the major British opera companies, and abroad throughout Europe, in the United States, Canada, Russia and Japan. She has sung title roles in *Ariodante*, *La Cenerentola* and *Carmen*, and other roles include Rosina, Herodias, Baba the Turk, Marcellina and the Hostess (*Boris Godunov*). Della Jones

broadcasts regularly on radio and television and her many recordings include *Alcina*, *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, *La clemenza di Tito*, and Korngold's *Die Kathrin*; *Gabriella di Vergy*, *Maria Padilla*, *Il crociato in Egitto*, *Riccardo e Zoraïde* and *Dinorah* for Opera Rara, and *The Barber of Seville* and *Julius Caesar* (for Chandos/Peter Moores Foundation).

John Gibbs studied at the Royal Academy of Music and in Paris and Rome. He has appeared with major British companies including The Royal Opera, English National Opera and Welsh National Opera and Glyndebourne Festival Opera in *Le nozze di Figaro* (Figaro), *Tosca* (Sacristan), *Billy Budd*, *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (Alberich), *Les contes d'Hoffmann*, *Der Rosenkavalier* (Faninal) and *King Priam* (Patroclus). John Gibbs has also appeared in *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* at the Wexford Festival, *L'esule di Roma* on the South Bank, and major BBC Radio 3 broadcasts including *Der Zwingburg* and *Faust*. His recordings include *Les huguenots* and *Tosca*.

Roderick Earle studied at St John's College, Cambridge and the Royal College of Music. He was a member of English National Opera from 1978–81 and has appeared with The

Royal Opera, Opera North and Welsh National Opera. He has also appeared at the Edinburgh, Israel and Athens festivals and the BBC Proms. Roderick Earle's roles include Schaunard, Orestes, Harasta (*The Cunning Little Vixen*), King Fisher (*The Midsummer Marriage*) and Alberich (*Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung*) for The Royal Opera, Figaro for Scottish Opera, Mephistopheles (*La damnation de Faust*) in Israel, and Kothner and Rangoni in Turin. Recordings include Meyerbeer's *Dinorah*, Donizetti's *Maria Padilla* and *Il trovatore*.

Denis Dowling was born in New Zealand, won the Melbourne Sun Aria Prize and then came to study in England. He made his debut with Sadler's Wells Opera as Faninal (*Der Rosenkavalier*) and has since appeared at English National Opera, at Glyndebourne (*The Rape of Lucretia* and *Albert Herring*) and with numerous European companies. Denis Dowling has performed all of Mozart's baritone roles and is highly regarded for his interpretation of Rossini and Puccini. Figaro, Papageno, Bartolo, Gianni Schicchi and Malatesta are among his favourite roles. Other roles include Commandant (*From the House of the Dead*), Prince Bolkonsky (*War and Peace*) and d'Armagnac (*The Devils of Loudon*).

Geoffrey Pogson was a Cambridge choral scholar and graduate and made his debut at the Edinburgh Festival as Remendado (*Carmen*). He has since appeared with major British opera companies including English National Opera, where he created the role of Vronsky (Iain Hamilton's *Anna Karenina*), Opera North and Scottish Opera. His other roles have included Don José, Cavaradossi, des Grieux (*Manon*), Quint (*Turn of the Screw*), Paris (*La belle Hélène*), Nero (*L'incoronazione di Poppea*), Danilo (*The Merry Widow*), Eisenstein (*Die Fledermaus*), Pinkerton (*Madama Butterfly*), Frank Crawley (*Rebecca*) and the Duke (*Rigoletto*). Geoffrey Pogson has made a number of recordings, and has appeared regularly on Radio 3.

Shelagh Squires studied at the Guildhall. She has appeared with the English National Opera as principal mezzo-soprano, Glyndebourne Festival and Touring Operas, the Metropolitan Opera, New York and Phoenix Opera amongst others, at the Bergen International Music Festival, and in Vienna and Japan. Her wide repertoire includes Herodias (*Salome*), Margret (*Wozzeck*), Magdalena (*Der Meistersinger*), Marcellina (*Le nozze di Figaro*), Adelaide (*Arabella*), Ulrica (*Un ballo in maschera*), Ottavia (*L'incoronazione di Poppea*), Marthe

(*Faust*), the Witch (*Rusalka*), Princess Maria (*War and Peace*), Grandmother Buryja (*Jenůfa*), Annina (*Der Rosenkavalier*), Filippjevna (*Eugene Onegin*), the Dryad (*Ariadne auf Naxos*) and the Governess (*The Queen of Spades*).

Sir Charles Mackerras was born in 1925 of Australian parents in the United States and studied in Sydney and Prague. He made his debut as an opera conductor at Sadler's Wells, where he was instrumental in producing the sensational first British performance of Janáček's *Káťa Kabanová*, which led to Janáček becoming standard repertoire in the UK. He was First Conductor of the Hamburg Opera (1966–9) and Musical Director of both Sadler's Wells (later English National) Opera (1970–7), and of Welsh National Opera (1987–92), where his notable Janáček productions, amongst many others, won great acclaim. The production and recording of *Osud* were sponsored by the Peter Moores Foundation, who also sponsored the recording of *The Cunning Little Vixen*. He is Conductor Laureate of the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Conductor Emeritus of Welsh National Opera, Principal Guest Conductor of the San Francisco Opera, and from the 1998/99 season he is Music Director of the Orchestra of St Luke's New York.

Sir Charles Mackerras has undertaken much research into performance practice of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which has profoundly affected today's interpretations. His vast discography includes an award-winning cycle of Janáček operas with the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, Britten's *Gloriana* (which won a *Gramophone* Award), Beethoven, Brahms and Mahler Symphonies,

and with English National Opera Handel's *Julius Caesar* and Donizetti's *Mary Stuart* (for Chandos/Peter Moores Foundation).

Sir Charles Mackerras received a CBE in 1974 and was knighted for his services to music in 1979. He has also received The Medal of Merit from the Czech Republic and has been made a Companion of the Order of Australia.



Andrew March

PETER MOORES, CBE, DL

Peter Moores was born in Lancashire in 1932, son of Sir John Moores, founder of the giant Littlewoods mail order, chain store and football pools group. He was educated at Eton and Christ Church, Oxford, where he read Modern Languages. He was already fluent in German and Italian. It was opera which was his great love, however. He had worked at Glyndebourne before going up to university, and at the end of his second year he left Oxford to become a production student at the Vienna State Opera. He was required to attend morning rehearsals and evening performances, but the afternoons were free, so he enrolled as well for a four-year course at the Viennese Academy of Music and Dramatic Art.

By the end of his third year Moores had produced the Viennese premiere of Britten's *The Rape of Lucretia*, had worked as Assistant Producer at the San Carlo Opera House, Naples, the Geneva Festival and the Rome Opera, and seemed set for a successful operatic career. At this point he received a letter from his father asking him to come home as he was needed in the firm. Family loyalty was paramount and he returned to Liverpool immediately.

By 1977 he was Chairman of Littlewoods. Three years later he stepped down from the post, although still remaining on the Board, and was director of a merchant bank. From 1981 to 1983 he was a Governor of the BBC, and a Trustee of the Tate Gallery from 1978 until 1985. In May 1992 he became a Deputy Lieutenant of Lancashire. And in the New Year's Honours List for 1991 he was made a CBE for his charitable services to the Arts.

He had started his early twenties giving financial support



Christina Burton/PMF

Peter Moores, CBE, DL

to various young artists, several of whom – such as Geraint Evans, Joan Sutherland and Colin Davis – have since become world-famous. Moores has always been astute in his recognition of potential quality. In 1964 he set aside a large slice of his inheritance to found the Peter Moores Foundation, a charity designed to support those causes dear to his heart: to make music and the arts more accessible to more people; to give encouragement to the young; to fight discrimination and to improve race relations. 99% of the Foundation's money has come from Peter Moores's own pocket – so far about £33 million in today's money.

PETER MOORES FOUNDATION

In the field of music, the Peter Moores Foundation awards scholarships to promising young opera singers through the Royal Northern College of Music. Financial help may be given also to enable a singer to study abroad, or to work on a new role with an acknowledged expert in the repertoire.

In the last twenty years the Foundation has supported the recording of forty operas. Many are sung in English, in translation, because Moores believes that in the popular repertoire, 'what people want is to be able to follow the plot of an opera and understand what is going on'. Others are of interesting but unperformed Italian operas from the early nineteenth century (the age of *bel canto*), which are otherwise only accessible to scholars. Accessibility is the key word.

The same criterion holds where live opera is concerned. So the Foundation may sponsor Welsh National Opera, performing for a week at the Liverpool Empire and charging only £2.50 per ticket – the provision being that each ticket holder must be a first-time opera visitor – or it may fund the production at Glyndebourne of *Ermione*, a *bel canto* opera never before performed in England.

The aim is always the same: availability. 'Share and enjoy' is his philosophy.



Valerie Masterson
as Violetta Valéry

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John Brecknock as
Alfredo Germont

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Verdi: La traviata

Von *La dame aux camélias* zu *La traviata*

Verdi hatte besondere Erfolge mit den Opern gefeiert, die das venezianische Teatro La Fenice bei ihm in Auftrag gegeben hatte und die auch dort uraufgeführt wurden – *Ernani* (1844), *Attila* (1846) und *Rigoletto* (1851). 1852 wandte sich die Leitung von La Fenice erneut an den damals 39jährigen Komponisten und bat um eine Oper für die kommende Spielzeit.

Francesco Maria Piave, der mit Verdi bei zwei dieser drei früheren Fenice-Opern zusammengearbeitet hatte, wurde auch jetzt wieder als Librettist verpflichtet, und während Verdi noch an *Il trovatore* schrieb (für das römische Teatro Apollo, wo die Oper im Januar 1853 uraufgeführt wurde), begann man bereits, nach einem passenden Sujet zu suchen.

Anfang des Jahres 1852 befanden sich Verdi und seine Geliebte Giuseppina Strepponi in Paris. Verdi wohnte hier einer Aufführung der am 2. Februar uraufgeführten Bühnenumfassung von *La dame aux camélias* bei, die der jüngere Alexandre Dumas nach seinem gleichnamigen Roman angefertigt hatte. Verdi hatte den Roman wahrscheinlich bereits gelesen, denn ein Jahr zuvor hatte er seinem *Trovatore*-Librettist

gegenüber erwähnt: “Ein weiteres Sujet, einfach und leidenschaftlich, das, so wie es jetzt existiert, bereits nahezu perfekt ist”; diese Bemerkung wird allgemein mit *La dame aux camélias* in Verbindung gebracht. Verdi schlug Dumas’ Stück der Leitung von La Fenice vor, und es wurde angenommen; man bat ihn nur, den von ihm vorgeschlagenen Titel “Amore e morte” (Liebe und Tod) zu ändern.

Verdi versprach, die neue Oper für eine Uraufführung am 6. März 1853 fertig zu haben und begann mit der Komposition, noch während er im Dezember 1852 in Rom *Il trovatore* probte. Zwischen den Premieren von *Il trovatore* in Rom und *La traviata* in Venedig vergingen nur wenige Wochen. Nach den ersten drei überaus erfolgreichen Aufführungen von *Il trovatore* im Januar kehrte Verdi in seine Villa in Sant’Agata bei Busseto zurück und vollendete die neue Oper. Piave hatte eiligst sein Libretto überarbeitet, nachdem der Komponist die harsche Kritik geäußert hatte, daß das Publikum bei einigen Passagen einschlafen würde. Einen Großteil der Musik hatte Verdi geschrieben, während er gleichzeitig *Il trovatore* den letzten Schliff gab; dies zeigt, wie sehr er fähig war, sich

in die Charaktere und Atmosphäre seiner Sujets zu vertiefen. Die Welten von *Il trovatore* und *La traviata* könnten verschiedener kaum sein – nachdem er sich eingearbeitet hatte, war Verdi jedoch anscheinend in der Lage, beliebig von der einen in die andere zu wechseln. Als Komponist war er überaus objektiv, woraus sich in gewissem Maße erklärt, warum er einer der größten Opernkomponisten war. Im Rahmen dieser Objektivität versuchte er jedoch, seine eigenen Gefühle bloßzulegen. Selten identifizierte Verdi sich in seinen Opern mit einer bestimmten Rolle; kam es jedoch vor, daß er sein Mitgefühl auf eine bestimmte Figur übertrug, so sagt das meist sehr viel über ihn selbst aus; dies ist auch in *La traviata* der Fall.

Der größte Teil der Musik wurde komponiert, während Verdi sich auf dem Weg nach Rom befand, während er dort *Il trovatore* produzierte und unmittelbar anschließend in Sant’Agata. Der letzte Akt entstand in Sant’Agata in einer dem Drama nicht unangemessenen Atmosphäre voll düsterem Pessimismus – zum einen, weil Verdi und Giuseppina nicht wohl auf waren, zum anderen, weil der Komponist überzeugt war, daß das vom Teatro La Fenice engagierte Ensemble seiner Oper nicht gerecht werden würde. Piave hielt sich ebenfalls in Sant’Agata auf, um zur Stelle zu sein, falls Änderungen an seinem Libretto

erforderlich würden. “Wenn es regnet”, schrieb er dem Sekretär von La Fenice, “möchte man in den Spiegel schauen, um zu sehen, ob man noch menschliche Züge trägt, oder ob man sich bereits in eine Kröte oder einen Frosch verwandelt hat.” Piave wurde von Verdi angewiesen, der Theaterleitung dessen Überzeugung mitzuteilen, daß die Oper mit Sicherheit durchfallen würde, wenn man nicht andere Sänger engagierte. Als Verdi in einem anonymen Brief gewarnt wurde, die Aufführung würde ein Fiasko, falls man nicht wenigstens Sopran und Bariton ersetzte, gab er den Brief an Piave weiter mit den Worten, “Ich weiß, ich weiß”.

Als er am 21. Februar in Venedig eintraf, um die Oper zu orchestrieren und den Proben beizuwohnen, hatte Verdi allen Grund, das Schlimmste zu befürchten, da die Sopranistin nicht akzeptabel und der Tenor schlecht bei Stimme war. Selbst der Bariton, Felice Varesi, der bereits in der Vergangenheit mit Verdi zusammengearbeitet hatte und als der erste *Rigoletto* überaus erfolgreich gewesen war, war nicht glücklich mit einer solch ungewöhnlichen Oper, die ausschließlich in einer häuslichen Umgebung spielte und weder Intrigen noch Schlachten noch die üblichen romantischen Paraphernalien enthielt. Die Uraufführung fand am 6. März statt, und am folgenden Tag

berichtete Verdi verschiedenen Freunden brieflich von einem Desaster. "Lieber Emanuele", schrieb er seinem ehemaligen Schüler und Amanuensis Emanuele Muzio, "Traviata gestern abend – ein Fiasko. War es mein Fehler, oder lag es an den Sängern? Die Zukunft wird es zeigen."

Das Premierenpublikum hatte gelacht bei dem Gedanken, daß die äußerst korpulente Sopranistin, Fanny Salvini-Donatelli, an der Schwindsucht dahinsiechen solle, die Kritiker hatten sie jedoch als einzige Sängerin gepriesen. Verdi-Spezialisten vermuten, daß ein weiterer Grund für den anfänglichen Mißerfolg von *La traviata* darin liegt, daß das venezianische Publikum nicht gewohnt war, auf der Opernbühne zeitgenössische Kostüme zu sehen. Doch in diesen ersten Aufführungen in La Fenice wurden gar keine modernen Kleider getragen. Es trifft zwar zu, daß Verdi hoffte, sich mit seiner Wahl des Stücks von Dumas einem zeitgenössischen Thema zuzuwenden. Dergleichen war noch nie in einer ernsten Oper versucht worden, obwohl Verdi selbst in seiner Oper *Stiffelio*, die zu Beginn des 19. Jahrhunderts spielt, der Gegenwart recht nahe gekommen war. Während er *La traviata* komponierte, hatte Verdi an einen Freund geschrieben: "Für Venedig vertone ich gerade *La dame aux camélias*, die wahrscheinlich den Titel

La traviata tragen wird. Es handelt sich um ein zeitgenössisches Thema. Ein anderer Komponist hätte sich wahrscheinlich nicht darauf eingelassen wegen der Kostüme, der Epoche oder tausend anderer dummer Einwände, doch mir gefällt die Idee. Alle protestierten, als ich vorhatte, einen Buckligen auf die Bühne zu stellen. Nun, mir hat es Spaß gemacht, *Rigoletto* zu komponieren." Doch am Teatro La Fenice hatte man kalte Füße bekommen, und als *La traviata* schließlich aufgeführt wurde, waren Zeit und Kostüme die von Louis XIV, also frühes 18. Jahrhundert. Verdi hatte hart darum gekämpft, in seiner Oper die zeitgenössische Handlung des Schauspiels beizubehalten. Ein Memorandum im Archiv von La Fenice besagt, daß "der Signor Maestro Verdi wünscht, fordert und erbittet, daß die Kostüme für seine Oper *La traviata* zeitgenössisch bleiben sollen". Wenig später jedoch schrieb Piave aus Sant'Agata, daß "Verdi sehr gegen seinen Willen einer Zurückversetzung der Handlung in die Vergangenheit" zustimme.

Verdis düstere Briefe über das "Fiasko" wurden geschrieben, bevor er die Zeitungskritiken der Erstaufführung gesehen hatte – diese waren zwar gemischt, doch keinesfalls völlig ablehnend. Es kam in dieser Saison zu insgesamt zehn Aufführungen; danach instruierte Verdi seinen Verleger, keine weiteren

Inszenierungen zu erlauben, es sei denn, Verdi selbst habe die künstlerische Leitung. Während Verdi noch mit dem Gedanken spielte, die Oper in Rom zu produzieren, erhielt er ein Angebot aus Venedig, jedoch nicht von La Fenice, sondern von einem kleineren Theater, dem Teatro San Benedetto. Der Impresario versprach, eine erstklassige Truppe zu engagieren, die Proben von Piave leiten zu lassen und unbegrenzte Probenzeit zu erlauben. Die Louis-XIV-Szenerie jedoch wurde beibehalten, da man es weiterhin für zu gewagt hielt, das Publikum von der Bühne herab mit seinesgleichen zu konfrontieren.

Nach kurzem Zögern ging Verdi auf das Angebot des Teatro San Benedetto ein, und am 6. Mai 1854 konnten die Venezianer *La traviata* in anderer Besetzung erneut hören. Diesmal war die Oper ein überwältigender Erfolg. Bald wurde das Stück auch anderswo in Italien und im Ausland gegeben, stets jedoch in der Szenerie von 1700, und schon bald war *La traviata* zur meistbeachteten Oper der Zeit geworden. Verdi war hocherfreut, konnte sich jedoch nicht enthalten, einem Freund gegenüber zu bemerken, daß – einige kleinere Änderungen ausgenommen, die aus Rücksicht auf die neuen Sänger notwendig geworden waren – die Oper die gleiche war, wie man sie an La Fenice gehört hatte: "Dort war sie ein

Fiasko; jetzt hat sie Furore gemacht. Ziehe deine eigenen Schlüsse!"

Alexandre Dumas' Roman *La dame aux camélias* war 1848 in Paris erschienen, nur wenige Monate nach dem Tod von Alphonsine Plessis (oder Marie Duplessis, wie sie allgemein genannt wurde), auf deren Schicksal der Autor seine Kameliendame hatte basieren lassen. Marie Duplessis war eine berühmte Pariser Kurtisane von großer Schönheit und sprühendem Esprit, die zu verschiedenen Zeiten Verhältnisse mit solch bedeutenden Persönlichkeiten wie Alfred de Musset, Liszt und Dumas selbst hatte. Sie war erst 23 Jahre alt, als sie an der Schwindsucht starb. Sowohl der Roman als auch das im folgenden Jahr von Dumas verfaßte Theaterstück enthalten starke autobiographische Züge, und es liegt nahe anzunehmen, daß die Figur des Armand Duval, der zudem die Initialen des Autors trägt, als Selbstporträt intendiert war. (In der Oper trägt diese Figur den Namen Alfredo Germont.) Dumas beschrieb Marie Duplessis als "hochgewachsen, sehr schlank, dunkelhaarig und von einer rosa-weißen Gesichtsfarbe... sie glich einer Figurine aus Meißner Porzellan". Die auf dem Lande geborene Tochter eines Kaufmanns kam als Fünfzehnjährige nach Paris, wo sie schon bald das Leben einer typischen Pariser "grisette" führte – ein Mädchen, das sich

abends in den Cafés der Künstler- und Studentenviertel die Zeit vertrieb, also eine Art Pariser Äquivalent des Wiener "süßen Mädels". Ob Marie Duplessis jemals eine einfache Prostituierte war, ist zu bezweifeln. Innerhalb eines Jahres nach ihrer Ankunft in Paris hatte sie sich in der Pariser *demi-monde* der ausgehaltenen Frauen etabliert, ein oder zwei Stufen über der Prostitution, zugleich jedoch eindeutig außerhalb der respektablen Gesellschaft. Die ausgehaltene Frau oder Kurtisane hatte gewöhnlich aufeinanderfolgende und nicht gleichzeitige Beziehungen, und Marie Duplessis war zunächst mit dem Duc de Guise und sodann mit Graf Stackelberg liiert. Dumas lernte die Neuzehnjährige in der Zeit ihrer Liaison mit dem Grafen kennen – in einer Situation, die der im I. Akt von Theaterstück und Oper geschilderten gleicht.

Indem er sie in seine Marguerite Gautier verwandelte, romantisierte Dumas Marie, denn in Wirklichkeit hatte sie ihn nicht verlassen, um den Namen seiner Familie zu schützen; vielmehr hatte er sich von ihr getrennt, weil sie nicht bereit war, auf den Luxus zu verzichten, den er ihr nicht bieten konnte, wohingegen er sie nicht mit anderen Liebhabern teilen wollte. Ihr Verhältnis hatte weniger als ein Jahr gedauert. Im folgenden Jahr reiste Marie Duplessis mit dem Vicomte de Pérrigaux nach London, wo sie

im Standesamt von Kensington heirateten. Die Ehe ging bereits nach wenigen Monaten in die Brüche, und Marie kehrte auf den Kontinent zurück, wo sie verschiedene Kurorte aufsuchte in der Hoffnung, ihre Gesundheit zurückzugewinnen. Sie starb im Februar 1847 in ihrem Pariser Apartment und ist auf dem Friedhof Père Lachaise begraben.

Dumas war Anfang zwanzig, als er seinen Roman schrieb, der seinerzeit weithin bewundert wurde, heute jedoch in Vergessenheit geraten ist. Sein Theaterstück hingegen, das ein Jahr nach dem Roman und nur zwei Jahre nach dem Tod von Marie Duplessis entstand, wegen Schwierigkeiten mit der Zensur jedoch drei Jahre lang nicht aufgeführt werden konnte, erfreut sich beständiger Beliebtheit; dies liegt nicht nur an seiner Eignung für große romantische Schauspielerinnen wie Sarah Bernhardt, Greta Garbo und Edwige Feuillère, sondern auch an seiner formalen Einfachheit und emotionalen Aufrichtigkeit – Qualitäten, die sich weiterhin durchsetzen, obwohl das Stück längst seine Macht verloren hat, die Bourgeoisie aufzurütteln.

Diese Bourgeoisie war zur Zeit des jüngeren Dumas und Verdis jedoch sehr leicht zu schockieren. Genau wie heute funktionierte die Gesellschaft damals weitgehend nach dem Prinzip der organisierten Scheinheiligkeit, nur

waren die Regeln strikter und wurden mit größerer Schärfe durchgesetzt. Als illegitimer Sohn eines berühmten Vaters attackierte Dumas mit großer Vehemenz die *demi-monde*, in der er aufgewachsen war. Obwohl seine Behandlung der von der Gesellschaft geächteten Kurtisane in *La dame aux camélias* von Sympathie erfüllt ist und sich eindeutig innerhalb der romantischen literarischen Tradition der Rebellion gegen die konventionelle Moral bewegt, sollte er später in seinem Leben die Kurtisane als den Fluch der Gesellschaft bekämpfen.

Die Pariser Gesellschaft, zumindest aber die liberalen Künstlerkreise, in denen Verdi sich auf seinen vielen Besuchen in Paris bewegte, wird Giuseppina Strepponi, die Geliebte des Komponisten, kaum als Kurtisane betrachtet haben. Doch das provinzielle Italien war nicht Paris. Verdis erste Ehefrau und ihre beiden Kinder waren seit mehr als zehn Jahren tot, und Giuseppina Strepponi war seit fünf Jahren seine Geliebte. Erst drei Jahre zuvor hatte er Giuseppina in seine Heimatstadt Busseto gebracht, wo sie nun mit ihm lebte – dies empörte seine Umgebung und entfremdete ihn von vielen seiner alten Freunde. Zu der Zeit hatte Verdi die zwei oder drei Meilen außerhalb von Busseto gelegene Villa Sant'Agata gekauft, die für den Rest ihres Lebens sein und Giuseppinas Zuhause sein sollte. Als sein

vormaliger Schwiegervater und früherer Wohltäter Antonio Barezzi ihn dafür angriff, daß er seine Beziehung mit Giuseppina nicht legalisierte, antwortete Verdi: "In meinem Haus lebt eine Dame, frei und unabhängig, die wie ich ein alleinstehendes Leben vorzieht und ein unabhängiges Vermögen besitzt, das ihren Lebensunterhalt sichert. Weder sie noch ich sind verpflichtet, uns gegenüber irgend jemandem für unser Handeln zu rechtfertigen. Doch wer weiß eigentlich, wie sich unsere Beziehung zueinander gestaltet, unsere Affäre, unsere Verbindung? Welche Rechte ich ihr einräume oder sie mir? Wer weiß, ob sie meine Frau ist oder nicht? Und wenn sie es ist, wer weiß, was die Gründe sein mögen, diese Tatsache zu verschweigen? Wer weiß, ob das etwas Schlechtes ist, und wer hat das Recht, uns zu ächten? Dies will ich allerdings feststellen: In meinem Haus hat sie ein Anrecht auf ebensoviel Respekt wie ich selbst, wenn nicht gar auf mehr. Und niemandem ist es erlaubt, dies aus irgendeinem Grund zu vergessen. Und zuletzt: Sie hat jedes Recht, sowohl wegen ihres Benehmens als auch wegen ihres Charakters, das Zutvorkommen zu erwarten, das sie stets anderen gegenüber zeigt."

Es ist kaum überraschend, daß Verdi zu einer Zeit, als seine Beziehung mit Giuseppina (die er erst sieben Jahre später heiraten sollte) die

Einwohner von Busseto brüskierte, mit solch großer Sympathie auf Dumas' Theaterstück reagierte. Wahrscheinlich sah er in dem Schauspiel eine Art emotionalen Spiegel seiner eigenen Situation und nahm vielleicht unbewußt eine Identifizierung von Giuseppina mit Marie Duplessis/Marguerite Gautier/Violetta Valéry vor, wobei er sich selbst mit Alexandre Dumas/Armand Duval/Alfredo Germont und Antonio Barezzi mit dem älteren Dumas(?)/Georges Duval/Giorgio Germont verglich. Sicher ist jedenfalls, daß ihm *La traviata* besonders am Herzen lag und daß diese Oper auch stilistisch ein weitaus intimeres und persönlicheres Werk ist als alles, was er bis dahin komponiert hatte.

Piaves Libretto lehnt sich eng an das Theaterstück von Dumas an. Das fünftaktige Schauspiel ist in der Oper auf vier Szenen reduziert, da Piave auf den II. Akt verzichtet, in dem Marguerite beschließt, mit Armand auf dem Lande zu leben, und sich von ihrem gegenwärtigen Liebhaber, dem Grafen de Giray, trennt. Auf diese Weise verbesserte Piave die formale Anlage des Dramas auf Kosten seiner inhaltlichen Kohärenz, denn am Ende des I. Akts hat Marguerite – oder Violetta, wie sie in der Oper heißt –, anscheinend beschlossen, weiterhin ihr Kurtisanendasein zu führen, zu Beginn von Akt II der Oper (Akt III des

Schauspiels) jedoch sieht man sie in häuslichem Frieden mit Armand/Alfredo auf dem Lande leben. Trotzdem jedoch finden sich die vier Szenen der Oper zu einem musikalisch und dramatisch befriedigenden Ganzen zusammen, und Dumas' II. Akt ist weder für den Handlungsverlauf noch für die in kräftigen Strichen gezeichnete Charakterisierung wirklich notwendig. In der Tat ist dies eines der erfolgreichsten Libretti Piaves, das in mancher Hinsicht sogar eine Verbesserung seiner Vorlage darstellt.

La traviata ist nicht nur eine der beliebtesten Opern Verdis, sondern auch eines der großen Musikdramen der Welt. Daß diese Qualitäten nicht unmittelbar erkannt wurden, kann nur an dem immensen melodischen Reichtum der Komposition liegen, denn es scheint kaum vorstellbar, daß ein solch hervorragender Musikdramatiker zusätzlich auch noch in der Lage sein sollte, eine solche Fülle von Melodien zu erfinden. Kaum vorstellbar, doch in Verdis Fall unbestreitbar. Im Gegensatz zu frühen Werken wie *Luisa Miller* und *Stiffelio*, deren Handlungen noch Elemente des romantischen Melodrams enthalten, führte Verdi in *La traviata* ein neues häusliches Milieu in die Oper ein und schrieb – trotz der Louis-XIV-Kostüme der ersten Aufführungen – über die bourgeoise Welt seiner eigenen Zeit. In *La*

traviata finden sich sämtliche hervorragende Qualitäten des Komponisten: Seine technische Meisterschaft, seine Klarheit, seine Menschlichkeit, sein psychologischer Tiefblick, sein unfehlbarer Geschmack und seine Gabe, anrührende und eingängige Melodien zu schaffen.

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(Dieser Text enthält Material aus Charles Osborne,
The Complete Operas of Verdi)
Übersetzung: Stephanie Wollny

Inhaltsangabe

I. Akt

Violetta Valéry gibt in ihrem Haus in Paris, wo sie von ihrem derzeitigen Liebhaber Baron Douphol im Luxus ausgehalten wird, ein großes Fest. Unter ihren Gästen befinden sich Flora Bervoio mit ihrem Liebhaber, dem Marquis d'Obigny, Doktor Grenvil und der Vicomte Gaston de Letorières. Gaston stellt seinen Freund Alfredo Germont vor, der ihm zufolge ein glühender Bewunderer Violettas ist, obwohl er sie noch gar nicht kennengelernt hat. Violetta fordert Alfredo auf, einen Trinkspruch auszubringen, und er rühmt ihre Augen. Die Kapelle spielt auf. Violetta, die Tuberkulose hat (zu jener Zeit eine unheilbare Krankheit), erleidet einen Schwächeanfall und bittet ihre

Gäste, ohne sie zu tanzen. Alfredo bleibt zurück, um sich zu vergewissern, daß es ihr gut geht. Er gesteht ihr seine Liebe. Violetta schlägt sein Ansinnen leichthin ab, schenkt ihm jedoch eine Blume und sagt, er solle sie ihr zurückbringen, wenn sie verwelkt. Die Gäste verabschieden sich.

Das Prinzip der wahren Liebe, des Gebens und Nehmens, fasziniert und ängstigt sie zugleich. Es ist mehr, als eine Frau wie sie erhoffen darf, und sie kann sie weder annehmen noch auf sie vertrauen. Sie muß frei sein, um zu genießen.

II. Akt

1. Bild

Violetta hat ihr Leben mit dem Baron aufgegeben, und sie und Alfredo sind seit drei Monaten ein Liebespaar. Sie sind zusammen in ein Dorf vor der Stadt gezogen. Alfredo ist entsetzt, als er von der Dienerin erfährt, daß Violetta ihr Hab und Gut verkauft, um die Rechnungen zu bezahlen und ihnen beiden ein Auskommen zu verschaffen. Er geht fort, um in Paris Geld zu beschaffen. Violetta ist überrascht, zu hören, daß er ausgegangen ist, und unterrichtet die Dienerschaft, daß sie den Besuch ihres Advokaten erwarte. Sie wird kurze Zeit durch einen Brief von Flora abgelenkt, die sie für den Abend zu einem Fest nach Paris einlädt. Der Mann, der daraufhin ankommt, ist

nicht ihr Advokat, sondern Alfredos Vater. Er beschuldigt sie, seinen Sohn in den Ruin zu treiben. Sie vertraut ihm an, daß es sein Sohn sei, der sie in den Ruin treibe, und daß sie keine ausgehaltene Frau sei, sondern Alfredo aushalte. Der alte Germont läßt sich nicht beirren und sagt, daß der Skandal, den die Affäre ausgelöst habe, die geplante Heirat seiner Tochter gefährde. Violetta müsse Alfredo aufgeben. Sie sei jung und werde einen anderen Liebhaber finden. Violetta entgegnet, daß sie nie wieder einen anderen lieben könne. Germont gibt nicht auf. Er behauptet, der Himmel werde ihre Beziehung niemals segnen und es sei Gottes Wille, daß sie sich opfert. Daraufhin gibt sie auf. Sie erklärt sich bereit, Alfredo zu verlassen, unter der Bedingung, daß Germont ihm eines Tages die Wahrheit sagt.

Alfredos Vater geht und Violetta schreibt an Baron Douphol. Sie fragt, ob er am Abend frei sei, sie zu Floras Fest zu begleiten, und veranlaßt die Dienerin, das Schreiben zu überbringen. Derweil läßt sie sich nieder, um einen Abschiedsbrief an Alfredo zu schreiben. Er kehrt zurück, als sie soeben damit fertig wird, doch gelingt es ihr, den Brief vor Alfredo zu verbergen. Er erzählt ihr, daß er mit einem Besuch seines Vaters rechne, der ihm einen bösen Brief hinterlassen habe. Als Violetta das Zimmer verläßt, sagt sie nur, daß sie draußen

auf ihn warten werde, und fleht ihn dann mit jähem Leidenschaft an, sie immer zu lieben.

Wenige Minuten später meldet der Diener ihren Aufbruch nach Paris. Alfredo ist verwirrt, denkt sich jedoch, daß sie hingefahren ist, um die finanziellen Schwierigkeiten zu beseitigen, die er selbst soeben aus dem Weg geräumt hat. Ein Passant gibt einen Brief im Haus ab – eine Dame habe ihm aufgetragen, ihn abzuliefern. Alfredo reißt ihn auf.

Wenn er diesen Brief erhalte, schreibt Violetta, werde sie schon fort und wieder mit dem Baron zusammen sein. Die Wochen mit ihm seien sehr schön gewesen, hätten jedoch nicht von Dauer sein können. Der alte Germont, der vom Garten aus zugehört hat, kommt herein, um Alfredo zu trösten. Er nimmt die Gelegenheit wahr, ihm zu erzählen, wie sehr seine Schwester ihn vermisse. Ob er nicht nach Hause kommen wolle, in die Provence? Alfredo kann jedoch nur an Rache denken. Als er auf einmal Floras Einladung entdeckt, weiß er, wo er Violetta finden wird.

2. Bild

Alfredo erscheint allein in Floras Haus, die das Fest mit Glücksspielen und einer Zigeunertruppe in Schwung gebracht hat, die die Zukunft voraussagt und von Stierkämpfen singt. Er nimmt am Spieltisch Platz. Violetta

kommt in Begleitung von Baron Douphol, der ihr verbietet, mit Alfredo zu sprechen. Er fordert den jungen Mann zu einem Kartenspiel heraus. Alfredo gewinnt, verdoppelt seinen Einsatz und gewinnt weiter, bis es für alle an der Zeit ist, zum Bankett zu schreiten. Violetta kehrt heimlich zurück, um sich unter vier Augen mit Alfredo zu unterhalten. Sie bittet ihn, das Haus zu verlassen, da sie nicht möchte, daß er bei einem Duell mit dem Baron umkomme. Alfredo antwortet, daß er nur gehen wird, wenn sie mit ihm kommt. Sie dagegen gesteht ihm, daß sie geschworen habe, ihn aufzugeben, und läßt ihn in dem Glauben, daß sie dieses Versprechen dem Baron gegeben habe.

Alfredo ruft die Gäste zusammen und setzt sie davon in Kenntnis, daß er, nachdem er von ihr ausgehalten worden sei, nun seine Ehre retten und sie auszahlen wolle – mit dem gewonnenen Geld. Der alte Germont, der rechtzeitig eingetroffen ist, um seine Worte zu hören, wendet sich gegen seinen Sohn, weil dieser sich gegenüber einer Frau unehrenhaft benommen habe. Er enterbt ihn – ohne jedoch die Rolle zu offenbaren, die er bei den Ereignissen gespielt hat. Der Baron fordert Alfredo zum Duell.

III. Akt

Ein Jahr später zur Karnevalszeit hat Violetta ihr Vermögen durchgebracht und ist und totkrank.

Der Arzt versucht sie zu trösten, verrät jedoch der Dienerin, daß sie binnen weniger Stunden tot sein werde. Als Violetta wieder allein ist, liest sie zum hundertsten Mal den Brief, den sie vom alten Germont erhalten hat. Alfredo hat das Land verlassen müssen, nachdem er den Baron beim Duell verletzt hat, doch sein Vater hat ihm geschrieben und ihm den wahren Tatbestand mitgeteilt. Nun hat er den Heimweg angetreten und müßte bald eintreffen, um sie um Verzeihung zu bitten. Sie weiß, daß es zu spät ist. Alfredo erscheint auch tatsächlich und will mit ihr für immer aus Paris fortgehen – mit ihm an ihrer Seite werde sie genesen. Doch schon die Anstrengung, sich anzuziehen, löst einen krampfhaften Husten aus, und der Arzt wird herbeigerufen. Der alte Germont eilt ebenfalls herbei. Violetta ist froh, ihre Freunde um sich zu haben, während sie im Sterben liegt. Sie überreicht Alfredo ein Bild von sich mit der Anweisung, es dem Mädchen zu geben, das er eines Tages heiraten wird. Dann stirbt sie in seinen Armen.

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Übersetzung: Anne Steeb/Bernd Müller

Valerie Masterson wurde in Birkenhead geboren und studierte in London und Mailand. Nach einer Spielzeit in Salzburg

wurde sie Erste Sopranistin des D'Oyly Carte Opernensembles. Sie ist an allen großen Opernhäusern Großbritanniens aufgetreten; ihre zahlreichen Auslandsverpflichtungen umfassen Engagements in Aix-en-Provence, Nancy, Montpellier, an der Pariser Oper, in Toulouse, Bordeaux, Genf, Rouen, Prag, Dublin, München, Marseilles, an der Mailänder Piccola Scala, in Barcelona, Chicago, Philadelphia, Santiago, San Francisco, New York und Houston. Ihr breitgefächertes Repertoire umfaßt die Titelrollen in *La traviata*, *Manon*, *Louise*, *Mireille*, *Die lustige Witwe* und *Semele*, *Madame Lidoine* (*Dialogues des carmélites*), *Micaëla*, *Susanna* und *Gräfin Almaviva*, *Sophie* und die *Marschallin*, *Mimi*, *Marguerite* (*Faust*), *Antonia* (*Hoffmanns Erzählungen*) und *The King Goes Forth to France* mit der Royal Opera. Valerie Masterson ist regelmäßig im Radio und im Fernsehen zu hören. Ihre Einspielungen umfassen *Elisabetta* von Rossini, *Regina d'Inghilterra*, *Das Rheingold*, *Götterdämmerung*, verschiedene Operetten von Gilbert und Sullivan sowie *Julius Caesar* (für Chandos/Peter Moores Foundation).

John Brecknock stammt aus der englischen Grafschaft Nottinghamshire. Er war an der Sadler's Wells (später: English National) Opera

engagiert. Er hat an bedeutenden Partien unter anderem Don Ottavio, Belmonte, Ferrando, den Grafen Ory, Almaviva (*The Barber of Seville*), Alfredo, des Grieux (*Manon*), Tamino, den Herzog (*Eine Nacht in Venedig*) und Werther gesungen. Zu seinen Rollen an der Royal Opera zählen Fenton (*Falstaff*) und Rinuccio (*Gianni Schicchi*); außerdem hat er an der Seite von Dame Joan Sutherland die Rolle des Gennaro in *Lucrezia Borgia* gegeben. John Brecknock ist in ganz Europa aufgetreten, unter anderem auch an der Wiener Staatsoper sowie in Nord- und Südamerika. So hat er an der Metropolitan Opera in New York Don Ottavio gegeben, Ernesto (*Don Pasquale*) und Fenton in Miami, den Herzog (*Rigoletto*) in Houston, den Grafen Ory in Ottawa, Werther in Rouen und San Diego, Ramiro in Buenos Aires sowie Idomeneo und Ramiro in Paris.

Christian du Plessis wurde in seiner Heimat Südafrika ausgebildet und hat mit dem Ensemble des Performing Arts Council an der Transvaal Opera in Johannesburg als Yamadori (*Madama Butterfly*) debütiert. Im Ensemble der English National Opera hat er unter anderem Rodrigo, Germont, Cecil, Valentin, Marcello und Posa gegeben. Er ist als Enrico und Marcello in Hongkong, als Zurga in Fort Worth und Orlando und als Valentin in

Barcelona aufgetreten, sowie in konzertanten Aufführungen von *Rodelinda* mit Dame Joan Sutherland. Christian du Plessis ist insbesondere für seine Interpretationen wenig bekannter Opern von Bellini und Donizetti für die London Opera Society und Opera Rara bekannt. Zu seinen Aufzeichnungen auf Tonträger zählen Donizettis *Maria Stuarda*, und *Maria Padilla*, *L'assedio di Calais*, *Gabriella di Vergy* und *Ugo, conte di Parigi*, Meyerbeers *Dinorah* und Offenbachs *Christopher Columbus* für Opera Rara.

Della Jones wurde in Neath in Südwest Wales geboren und hat am Royal College of Music studiert, wo sie zahlreiche Preise gewann, darunter auch das Kathleen-Ferrier-Gedächtnisstipendium. Sie ist mit allen führenden britischen Operntruppen, in ganz Europa, den USA, Kanada, Rußland und Japan aufgetreten. Sie hat die Titelrollen von *Ariodante*, *La Cenerentola* und *Carmen* gesungen sowie Rosina, Herodias, Baba the Turk (*The Rake's Progress*), Marcellina und die Schenkwirtin (*Boris Godunow*). Della Jones tritt regelmäßig in Rundfunk und Fernsehen auf und hat unter anderem *Alcina*, *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, *La clemenza di Tito* und Korngolds *Die Kathrin* auf Tonträger aufgenommen, *Gabriella di Vergy*, *Maria*

Padilla, *Il crociato in Egitto*, *Riccardo e Zoraide* und *Dinorah* für Opera Rara sowie *The Barber of Seville* und *Julius Caesar* (für Chandos/Peter Moores Foundation).

John Gibbs hat an der Royal Academy of Music und in Paris und Rom studiert. Er hat bei bedeutenden britischen Operntruppen gastiert, beispielsweise an der Royal Opera, der English National Opera, der Welsh National Opera und der Glyndebourne Festival Opera, in Inszenierungen von *Le nozze di Figaro* (Figaro), *Tosca* (der Mesner), *Billy Budd*, *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (Alberich), *Les contes d'Hoffmann*, *Der Rosenkavalier* (Faninal) und *King Priam* (Patroclus). John Gibbs ist außerdem in *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* beim Wexford Festival aufgetreten, in *L'esule di Roma* an der Londoner South Bank sowie in bedeutenden Produktionen des britischen Senders BBC-Radio 3 wie *Der Zwingburg* und *Faust*. Zu seinen Aufnahmen auf Tonträger zählen *Les huguenots* und *Tosca*.

Roderick Earle hat am St. John's College in Cambridge und am Royal College of Music studiert. Er gehörte von 1978 bis 1981 der English National Opera an und ist außerdem an der Royal Opera, der Opera North und der Welsh National Opera aufgetreten. Er hat bei

den Festspielen von Edinburgh, Israel und Athen sowie bei den Promenadenkonzerten der BBC gastiert. Zu Roderick Earles Partien gehören Schaunard, Orestes, Harašta (*Das schlaue Füchlein*), King Fisher (*The Midsummer Marriage*) und Alberich (*Siegfried und Götterdämmerung*) für die Royal Opera, Figaro für die Scottish Opera, Mephistopheles (*La damnation de Faust*) in Israel sowie Hothner (*Die Meistersinger*) und Rangoni (*Boris Godunow*) in Turin. Er hat unter anderem Meyerbeers *Dinorah*, Donizettis *Maria Padilla* und *Il trovatore* auf Tonträger aufgenommen.

Denis Dowling wurde in Neuseeland geboren, hat in Melbourne den Sun-Aria-Preis gewonnen und ist dann zum Studium nach England gekommen. Er hat an der Sadler's Wells Opera als Faninal (*Der Rosenkavalier*) debütiert und ist seither an der English National Opera, in Glyndebourne (in *The Rape of Lucretia* und *Albert Herring*) und an zahlreichen europäischen Häusern aufgetreten. Denis Dowling hat sämtliche Baritonpartien Mozarts gesungen und genießt hohes Ansehen für seine Interpretationen der Werke von Rossini und Puccini. Figaro, Papageno, Bartolo, Gianni Schicchi und Malatesta zählen zu seinen Lieblingsrollen. Davon abgesehen

hat den Platzkommandanten (*Aus einem Totenhaus*), Bolkonski (*Krieg und Frieden*) und D'Armagnac (*Die Teufel von Loudon*) gegeben.

Geoffrey Pogson war während seines Studiums in Cambridge Chorstipendiat und hat beim Edinburgh Festival als Remendado (*Carmen*) debütiert. Seither war er bei führenden britischen Operntruppen engagiert, beispielsweise an der English National Opera, wo er (in der Uraufführung von Iain Hamiltons *Anna Karinina*) die Rolle des Vronsky kreiert hat, sowie an der Opera North und an der Scottish Opera. Zu seinen partien zählen Don José, Cavaradossi, des Grieux (*Manon*), Quint (*Turn of the Screw*), Paris (*La belle Hélène*), Nero (*L'incoronazione di Poppea*), Danilo (*Die lustige Witwe*), Eisenstein (*Die Fledermaus*), Pinkerton (*Madama Butterfly*), Frank Crawley (*Rebecca*) und der Herzog (*Rigoletto*). Geoffrey Pogson hat eine Reihe von Aufnahmen auf Tonträger vorgenommen und ist regelmäßig im Rundfunk aufgetreten.

Shelagh Squires hat an der Guildhall School of Music studiert. Sie ist als Mezzosopransolistin unter anderem an der English National Opera aufgetreten, beim Glyndebourne Festival und mit der Glyndebourne Touring Opera, an der

Metropolitan Opera in New York und der Phoenix Opera, bei den Musikfestspielen in Bergen, in Wien und Japan. Ihr breit gefächertes Repertoire umfaßt Herodias (*Salome*), Margret (*Wozzeck*), Magdalena (*Die Meistersinger*), Marcellina (*Le nozze di Figaro*), Adelaide (*Arabella*), Ulrica (*Un ballo in maschera*), Ottavia (*L'incoronazione di Poppea*), Marthe (*Faust*), die Hexe (*Rusalka*), die Fürstin Maria (*Krieg und Frieden*), die alte Buryjovká (*Jenůfa*), Annina (*Der Rosenkavalier*), Filipjewna (*Eugen Onegin*), die Dryade (*Ariadne auf Naxos*) und die Gouvernante (*Pique Dame*).

Sir Charles Mackerras wurde 1925 als Kind australischer Eltern in den USA geboren und studierte in Sydney und Prag. Sein Debüt als Operndirigent feierte er in Sadler's Wells, wo er wesentlichen Anteil an der Produktion der sensationellen britischen Erstaufführung von Janáčeks *Kár'a Kabanová* hatte, die dazu führte, daß Janáčeks Werke ihren Weg ins britische Standardrepertoire fanden. Er war Chefdirigent an der Hamburger Oper (1966–9) und Musikdirektor an der Oper von Sadler's Wells, der nachmaligen English National Opera (1970–7) sowie der Welsh National Opera (1987–92), wo unter anderem seine bemerkenswerten Janáček-Inszenierungen große Beachtung fanden. Die

Inszenierung und Einspielung von *Osud* wurden von der Peter Moores Foundation gefördert, die auch die Einspielung von *The Cunning Little Vixen* unterstützte. Sir Charles Mackerras ist Ehrendirigent des Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Emeritus-Dirigent der Welsh National Opera, erster Gastdirigent der San Francisco Opera und seit der Spielzeit 1998/99 Musikdirektor des Orchestra of St. Luke's in New York.

Sir Charles Mackerras hat sich intensiv mit der Aufführungspraxis des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts befaßt, was seine musikalischen Interpretationen wesentlich beeinflusste. Seine beeindruckende Diskographie umfaßt den preisgekrönten Zyklus der Opern Janáčeks mit den Wiener Philharmonikern, Britten's *Gloriana* (ausgezeichnet mit dem *Gramophone Award*), die Sinfonien von Beethoven, Brahms und Mahler sowie Handels *Julius Caesar* und Donizettis *Mary Stuart* mit der English National Opera (für Chandos/Peter Moores Foundation).

Sir Charles Mackerras wurde 1974 mit dem CBE ausgezeichnet und 1979 für seine Verdienste um die Musik geadelt. Außerdem erhielt er die Verdienstmedaille der Tschechischen Republik und wurde zum Mitglied des "Order of Australia" ernannt.

Verdi: La traviata

De *La dame aux camélias* à *La traviata*

Verdi a eu de la chance avec les opéras que lui a commandés le Théâtre de la Fenice de Venise, où ils ont été créés: *Ernani* en 1844, *Attila* en 1846 et *Rigoletto* en 1851. En 1852, le compositeur alors âgé de trente-neuf ans a été à nouveau contacté par la direction de la Fenice, qui lui a demandé de composer un opéra pour la saison suivante. Francesco Maria Piave, qui avait collaboré avec Verdi à deux de ces trois opéras précédents pour la Fenice, a été engagé comme librettiste, et la recherche d'un sujet approprié a commencé pendant que Verdi était encore en train de composer *Le trouvère* (pour le Théâtre Apollo de Rome, où il allait être créé en janvier 1853).

Au début de l'année 1852, Verdi et sa maîtresse Giuseppina Strepponi étaient à Paris. L'adaptation scénique de *La dame aux camélias*, qu'Alexandre Dumas fils avait tirée de son propre roman, y était présentée pour la première fois le 2 février, et Verdi assistait à une représentation. Il avait probablement déjà lu le roman, car, l'année précédente, il avait parlé au librettiste du *Trouvère* d'«un autre sujet, simple et plein de passion, dont on peut dire qu'il est

presque parfait tel quel»; on s'accorde en général à reconnaître qu'il se référait à *La dame aux camélias*. Lorsque Verdi soumit l'idée de la pièce de Dumas à la direction de la Fenice, elle l'approuva et lui demanda juste de changer le titre qu'il proposait, «Amore e morte» (Amour et mort).

Verdi s'est engagé à ce que le nouvel opéra soit prêt à être représenté à la Fenice le 6 mars 1853; il en a commencé la composition pendant qu'il était à Rome en décembre 1852, pour les répétitions du *Trouvère*. Quelques semaines seulement séparent la création du *Trouvère* à Rome et celle de *La traviata* à Venise. Après l'immense succès des trois premières représentations du *Trouvère* en janvier, Verdi est retourné dans sa villa de Sant'Agata, près de Busseto, pour achever le nouvel ouvrage. Piave avait soigneusement réécrit son livret à la lumière des critiques peu aimables du compositeur, qui trouvait que certaines sections allaient endormir le public! Verdi avait composé une grande partie de la musique pendant qu'il ajoutait les touches finales au *Trouvère*, ce qui prouve à quel point il était capable de s'immerger dans les

personnages et dans l'atmosphère de ses sujets. Il serait difficile d'imaginer deux univers plus différents que ceux du *Trouvère* et de *La traviata*, mais comme il avait trouvé sa voie dans chacun des deux, Verdi était apparemment capable de passer aisément de l'un à l'autre. Verdi était un compositeur très objectif, ce qui explique en partie pourquoi il est l'un des plus grands compositeurs d'opéras. Toutefois, dans le contexte de cette objectivité, il s'est efforcé d'exposer ses propres sentiments. Il est rare que Verdi s'identifie à l'un des personnages de ses opéras, mais lorsqu'il fait preuve de compassion envers un personnage spécifique, cette circonstance est toujours révélatrice, comme cela est le cas dans *La traviata*.

Verdi a écrit la majeure partie de la musique pendant son voyage et son séjour à Rome pour la création du *Trouvère*, et juste après, à Sant'Agata. L'acte final a été composé à Sant'Agata dans une atmosphère mélancolique et pessimiste qui convenait parfaitement au contenu du drame, non seulement parce que Verdi et Giuseppina étaient souffrants, mais aussi parce que Verdi croyait sincèrement que la distribution engagée par le Théâtre de la Fenice serait incapable de rendre justice à son opéra. Piave était resté à Sant'Agata pour apporter sur place les modifications nécessaires

à son livret. «Lorsqu'il pleut», écrivait-t-il au secrétaire de la Fenice, «je peux vous assurer qu'il vaut mieux se regarder dans un miroir pour vérifier si l'on a toujours forme humaine ou si l'on n'a pas été transformé en crapaud ou en grenouille.» Verdi avait chargé Piave de faire connaître à la Fenice sa conviction profonde: à moins d'engager d'autres chanteurs, l'opéra serait sûrement un échec. Et le jour où Verdi fut averti par une lettre anonyme qu'à moins de remplacer la soprano et le baryton, la représentation serait un désastre, il donna la lettre à Piave d'un air sombre, en ajoutant: «Je sais, je sais».

En arrivant à Venise le 21 février pour orchestrer l'opéra et superviser les répétitions, Verdi avait de bonnes raisons de redouter le pire, car la soprano était médiocre et le ténor n'était pas en voix. Même le baryton, Felice Varesi, qui avait l'habitude de travailler avec Verdi et avait remporté un immense succès à la création de *Rigoletto* dans le rôle titre, se sentait mal à l'aise dans un ouvrage tellement inhabituel, dans un cadre purement domestique, sans intrigues ni batailles, sans aucun des atouts de la grande romance. La première représentation eut lieu le 6 mars et, le lendemain, Verdi envoya des lettres à divers amis pour leur raconter le désastre. «Cher Emanuele», écrivait-il à Emanuele Muzio, son

ancien élève et secrétaire, “*Traviata*, hier soir: un fiasco. Est-ce ma faute ou celle des chanteurs? L’avenir le dira.”

Le public de la première avait simplement ri à l’idée de voir la soprano, Fanny Salvini-Donatelli, une dame extrêmement corpulente, mourir de la tuberculose; elle est pourtant la seule dont la critique ait chanté les louanges. On sait, par ailleurs, que les musicographes qui ont écrit sur Verdi ont attribué une autre raison à l’échec initial de *La traviata*: le public vénitien n’était pas habitué à voir des costumes contemporains sur la scène lyrique. Mais, lors de ces premières représentations à la Fenice, le public n’a pas vu de costumes modernes sur scène. Il est vrai qu’en choisissant la pièce de Dumas pour son opéra, Verdi voulait s’attaquer à un sujet contemporain. Personne n’avait jamais tenté de le faire dans un *opera seria*, même si Verdi lui-même s’en était rapproché dans *Stiffelio*, qui se déroule au début du XIXe siècle. Pendant qu’il composait *La traviata*, Verdi écrivait à un ami: “Pour Venise, je suis en train d’écrire *La dame aux camélias*, qui s’appellera probablement *La traviata*. C’est un sujet contemporain. Un autre compositeur ne l’aurait peut-être pas fait en raison des costumes, de l’époque ou d’un millier d’autres scrupules absurdes, mais je suis ravi de l’idée. Tout le monde s’est plaint lorsque j’ai proposé

de mettre un bossu sur scène. Eh bien, j’ai eu beaucoup de plaisir à composer *Rigoletto*.” Pourtant, au Théâtre de la Fenice quelqu’un a eu peur et, lorsque *La traviata* a été présentée sur la scène vénitienne, l’action était transposée au début du XVIIIe siècle, les costumes étaient ceux de l’époque de Louis XIV. Verdi s’était battu dur et ferme pour avoir le droit de conserver à son opéra le décor contemporain de la pièce de théâtre. Dans les archives de la Fenice, un memorandum indique que “le Signor Maestro Verdi désire, demande et supplie que les costumes de son opéra *La traviata* restent ceux de l’époque actuelle”. Un peu plus tard, toutefois, Piave écrivait de Sant’Agata pour confirmer que “Verdi accepte, tout à fait contre son gré, que la période soit reculée dans le temps”.

Verdi a écrit ses lettres pessimistes sur le “fiasco” avant d’avoir lu les comptes rendus des journaux qui ont suivi la première représentation: tout en étant mitigés, ils n’étaient pas entièrement défavorables. Dix représentations ont été données au cours de la saison, à la suite desquelles Verdi a demandé à son éditeur de ne plus autoriser d’autres productions, sauf si lui-même, Verdi, en était responsable. Il a envisagé de produire l’ouvrage à Rome, mais a été devancé par une demande émanant de Venise, non pas de la Fenice mais

d’un plus petit théâtre, le Teatro San Benedetto. L’impresario proposait d’engager une distribution de premier ordre, avec Piave pour diriger les répétitions, et d’accorder un temps de préparation illimité. Il fallait toutefois conserver l’époque de Louis XIV, car il aurait été apparemment trop dangereux de montrer sur scène aux spectateurs des gens qui leur ressemblaient exactement.

Après avoir tout d’abord hésité, Verdi accepta la proposition du Teatro San Benedetto, et les Vénitiens entendirent à nouveau *La traviata* le 6 mai 1854, dans une nouvelle distribution. Cette fois, l’opéra remporta un succès écrasant. Il fut très vite produit dans toute l’Italie et à l’étranger, mais toujours dans les costumes de 1700, et ne tarda pas à devenir l’opéra dont on parlait le plus à l’époque. Verdi fut ravi, mais il ne put pas s’empêcher de faire remarquer à un ami qu’à l’exception de quelques changements mineurs destinés à adapter la partition aux possibilités des nouveaux chanteurs, c’était le même opéra que l’on avait entendu à la Fenice: “Ce fut alors un fiasco; maintenant, il fait fureur. Tirez-en vos propres conclusions!”

Le roman d’Alexandre Dumas *La dame aux camélias* avait été publié à Paris en 1848, quelques mois seulement après la mort d’Alphonsine Plessis (ou Marie Duplessis

comme on l’appelait généralement), qui avait inspiré à l’auteur sa dame aux camélias. Marie Duplessis était une célèbre courtisane parisienne d’une grande beauté et pleine d’esprit, qui, à diverses époques, avait eu des liaisons avec des hommes aussi éminents qu’Alfred de Musset, Liszt et Dumas lui-même. Elle n’avait que vingt-trois ans, lorsque la tuberculose l’emporta. Le roman, comme la pièce que Dumas en tira l’année suivante, comportent d’importants éléments autobiographiques et il n’y a rien de déraisonnable à supposer que le personnage d’Armand Duval, dont les initiales sont celles de l’auteur, fut conçu comme un autoportrait (dans l’opéra, il s’appelle Alfredo Germont). Dumas a décrit Marie Duplessis comme une femme “grande, très mince, brune, au teint rose et blanc... elle ressemblait à une figurine de Saxe”. Née à la campagne, fille de marchand, elle était arrivée à Paris à l’âge de quinze ans et y était vite devenue ce que les Parisiens appelaient une grisette, une fille que l’on trouvait le soir dans les cafés des quartiers des artistes et des étudiants: l’équivalent parisien de la *süsse Mädel* viennoise. Il est douteux que Marie Duplessis ait jamais été une vulgaire prostituée. En l’espace d’un an, elle s’était intégrée au demi-monde parisien de la femme entretenue, un statut se situant un ou

deux échelons au-dessus de la prostituée, mais hors du giron de la société respectable. La femme entretenue, ou courtisane, s'abandonnait à des liaisons successives plutôt que simultanées, et Marie Duplessis fut successivement entretenue par le duc de Guise et le comte Stackelberg. Elle avait dix-neuf ans et était la maîtresse du comte Stackelberg lorsque Dumas fit sa connaissance, dans des circonstances analogues à celles dépeintes à l'Acte I de la pièce comme de l'opéra.

En la transformant en Marguerite Gautier, Dumas a donné un caractère romanesque à Marie, car elle ne le quitta pas pour protéger son nom de famille à lui: c'est lui qui la quitta parce qu'elle refusait de renoncer au luxe qu'il était incapable de lui fournir, et qu'il ne voulait pas la partager avec d'autres amants. Leur liaison dura moins d'un an. L'année suivante, Marie Duplessis partit pour Londres avec le vicomte de Pérrigaux, qu'elle épousa au Bureau de l'état civil de Kensington. Quelques mois plus tard, ce mariage tourna à l'échec et Marie revint sur le continent; elle se rendit dans diverses stations thermales pour essayer de recouvrer la santé. Elle mourut dans son appartement parisien en février 1847 et fut enterrée au cimetière du Père Lachaise.

Dumas avait vingt-trois ans lorsqu'il écrivit son roman qui, après avoir connu un grand

succès à l'époque, est aujourd'hui tombé dans l'oubli. Toutefois, sa pièce écrite l'année suivante et seulement deux ans après la mort de Marie Duplessis, mais qui n'a pu être jouée pendant trois ans en raison de difficultés avec la censure, s'est maintenue dans la durée, non seulement parce qu'elle convient merveilleusement au jeu de grandes actrices romantiques comme Sarah Bernhardt, Greta Garbo et Edwige Feuillère, mais également grâce à sa simplicité formelle et à son honnêteté émotionnelle, qualités qui compensent le fait qu'elle a perdu depuis longtemps le pouvoir d'épater les bourgeois.

Par contre, les bourgeois de l'époque d'Alexandre Dumas fils et de Verdi étaient très facilement choqués. Comme aujourd'hui, la société reposait alors, dans une large mesure, sur une hypocrisie organisée, mais les règles étaient plus strictes et plus rudement appliquées. Fils illégitime d'un père célèbre, le jeune Dumas réagit violemment contre le demi-monde dans lequel il fut élevé. La façon dont il traite la courtisane, réprouvée par la société, est extrêmement sympathique dans *La dame aux camélias* et entre tout à fait dans la tradition littéraire romantique de rébellion contre la moralité conventionnelle. Mais il allait par la suite s'attaquer à cette même courtisane comme à la malédiction de la société.

La société parisienne, tout au moins la société artistique libérale que Verdi fréquentait au cours de ses nombreux séjours à Paris, n'aurait pas considéré la maîtresse du compositeur, Giuseppina Strepponi, comme une courtisane. Mais la société provinciale italienne n'était pas celle de Paris. La première femme de Verdi et leurs deux enfants étaient morts depuis plus de dix ans et il était l'amant de Giuseppina Strepponi depuis cinq ans. Giuseppina ne vivait avec lui dans sa ville natale de Busseto que depuis trois ans; sa présence avait outragé la société locale et avait séparé Verdi d'un grand nombre de ses vieux amis. A cette époque, Verdi avait acheté la Villa Sant'Agata, à quatre ou cinq kilomètres de Busseto, où il allait vivre avec Giuseppina jusqu'à la fin de leur vie. Lorsque Antonio Barezzi, son ex-beau-père et bienfaiteur, lui reprocha de ne pas légaliser son union avec Giuseppina, Verdi lui répondit: "Il vit dans ma maison une dame libre et indépendante, qui, comme moi-même, préfère une vie solitaire, et est dotée d'une fortune qui pourvoit à tous ses besoins. Nous ne sommes ni l'un ni l'autre obligés de rendre compte de nos actes. Mais qui connaît la nature de nos relations? Quelles affaires? Quels liens? Quels droits ai-je sur elle et elle sur moi? Qui sait si elle est ou non ma femme? Et si elle l'est, qui connaît les raisons

pour lesquelles ce fait n'est pas proclamé? Qui sait si c'est une mauvaise chose, qui a le droit de nous frapper d'ostracisme? Je dirai toutefois ceci: chez moi, elle a autant le droit au respect que moi-même, plus encore. Et personne n'est autorisé à l'oublier pour quelque raison que ce soit. Et finalement, de par sa conduite et son caractère, elle a totalement droit à la considération qu'elle témoigne habituellement aux autres."

A une époque où les relations de Verdi avec Giuseppina (qu'il n'allait épouser que sept ans plus tard) scandalisaient les habitants de Busseto, il n'est guère surprenant que le compositeur ait manifesté tant de sympathie à l'égard de la pièce de Dumas. Verdi a sans doute vu dans cette pièce une parcelle de la vérité émotionnelle de sa propre situation et, au moins dans un petit coin de son esprit, il a peut-être identifié Giuseppina à Marie Duplessis/Marguerite Gautier/Violetta Valéry, lui-même se représentant dans Alexandre Dumas/Armand Duval/Alfredo Germont, et Antonio Barezzi dans Dumas père(?)/Georges Duval/Giorgio Germont. *La traviata* a certainement occupé une place spéciale dans le cœur de Verdi et, en ce qui concerne le style, c'est une œuvre beaucoup plus intime et personnelle que tout ce qu'il avait écrit jusqu'alors.

Le livret de Piave pour cet opéra suit d'assez près la pièce de Dumas. Celle-ci comporte cinq actes, réduits dans l'opéra à quatre tableaux, car Piave omet le Deuxième acte où Marguerite décide de vivre à la campagne avec Armand et renvoie son amant du moment, le comte de Giray. Piave a ainsi amélioré la forme du drame aux dépens de son contenu, car, à la fin de l'Acte I, Marguerite, ou Violetta comme elle se nomme dans l'opéra, a apparemment décidé de poursuivre sa vie de courtisane; mais on la voit ensuite, au début de l'Acte II de l'opéra (l'Acte III de la pièce), vivre très simplement à la campagne avec Armand/Alfredo dans une félicité apparente. Toutefois, les quatre tableaux de l'opéra apportent une forme musicale et dramatique satisfaisante et l'Acte II de Dumas n'est réellement nécessaire ni à l'intrigue, ni à la caractérisation audacieusement esquissée. Le livret est, en fait, l'un des plus grands succès de Piave et, à certains égards, il est même meilleur que la pièce dont il est tiré.

La traviata est non seulement l'un des opéras de Verdi les plus appréciés, mais également l'un des grands drames musicaux du monde. S'il n'a pas immédiatement été reconnu comme tel, ce ne peut être qu'à cause de sa richesse mélodique, car le fait qu'un extraordinaire dramaturge musical soit également capable d'inventer une telle prodigalité d'airs semble presque injuste.

Injuste mais, dans le cas de Verdi, incontestable. Dans *La traviata*, plus encore que dans des ouvrages antérieurs comme *Luisa Miller* ou *Stiffelio*, dont les intrigues conservent des éléments du mélodrame romantique, Verdi a transposé l'opéra dans un nouveau milieu social et, malgré les costumes Louis XIV des premières représentations, il a traité du monde bourgeois de sa propre époque. *La traviata* est un opéra dans lequel toutes les plus belles qualités de Verdi sont perceptibles: sa maîtrise technique, sa clarté, son humanité, sa finesse psychologique, son goût infallible et son génie pour créer une mélodie chaleureuse et chantable.

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(Cet article reprend certains éléments de l'ouvrage de Charles Osborne, *The Complete Operas of Verdi*.)

Traduction: Marie-Stella Pâris

Argument

Acte I

Violetta Valéry donne une réception dans sa demeure parisienne où elle vit dans le luxe, entretenue par son amant du moment, le baron Douphol. Parmi ses invités se trouvent Flora Bervoix et son amant le marquis d'Obigny, Dr Grenvil et le vicomte Gaston de Letorières. Gaston présente à Violetta son ami Alfredo Germont qui, dit-il, est l'un des plus

fervents admirateurs de leur hôtesse, bien qu'il ne l'ait encore jamais rencontrée. Violetta demande à Alfredo de porter un toast et il boit à ses yeux. L'orchestre commence à jouer. Violetta, qui est atteinte de tuberculose (un mal incurable à cette époque), se sent défaillir et demande à ses invités de danser sans elle. Alfredo, resté à ses côtés pour s'occuper d'elle, lui avoue qu'il l'aime. Violetta, d'un air badin, lui conseille de l'oublier, mais elle lui offre une fleur qu'elle lui demande de lui rapporter lorsqu'elle se fanera. Les invités partent.

L'idée d'aimer et d'être aimée en retour l'attire mais l'effraie aussi. Une femme comme elle ne peut espérer un tel amour, elle ne peut ni l'accepter, ni s'y fier. Ce n'est qu'en restant libre qu'elle pourra profiter des plaisirs de la vie.

Acte II

Scène 1

Violetta a abandonné sa vie de courtisane auprès du baron et Alfredo est son amant depuis trois mois. Ils vivent ensemble dans un village près de Paris. Alfredo est mortifié lorsque la servante de Violetta lui révèle que sa maîtresse est en train de vendre tous ses biens pour payer ses dettes et subvenir aux besoins du couple. Il décide d'aller se procurer de l'argent à Paris. Surprise d'apprendre qu'Alfredo est sorti, Violetta annonce à ses serveurs qu'elle attend

la visite de son avoué. Son attention se porte momentanément sur une lettre de Flora l'invitant à une réception à Paris le soir même. C'est alors qu'arrive un visiteur, non pas le notaire qu'elle attendait, mais le père d'Alfredo. Il l'accuse de ruiner son fils. Elle lui confie qu'en réalité c'est son fils à lui qui est en train de la ruiner, et que loin d'être une femme entretenue, c'est elle qui entretient Alfredo. Continuant sur sa lancée, Monsieur Germont ajoute que leur affaire scandaleuse risque de compromettre le mariage prochain de sa fille. Violetta doit renoncer à Alfredo. Elle est jeune, elle trouvera un autre amant. Violetta lui répond qu'elle n'en aimera jamais un autre. Mais comme Monsieur Germont insiste, lui déclarant que leur liaison ne sera jamais bénie des dieux, qu'elle doit se sacrifier par la volonté de Dieu, elle finit par lui céder. Elle quittera Alfredo, à condition que Monsieur Germont lui apprenne un jour la vérité.

Monsieur Germont parti, Violetta écrit un mot au baron Douphol, lui demandant s'il est libre pour l'accompagner ce soir-là chez Flora. Elle envoie sa servante porter le billet au baron puis se met à écrire une lettre d'adieu à Alfredo. Ce dernier réapparaît alors qu'elle la termine mais elle réussit à la lui cacher. Il lui annonce qu'il attend la visite de son père qui lui a laissé une lettre sévère. Violetta sort, lui disant

simplement qu'elle va l'attendre dehors, et dans un subit accès de passion, elle le supplie de ne jamais cesser de l'aimer.

Un valet annonce quelques minutes plus tard que Violetta est en route pour Paris. Alfredo est perplexe mais il se dit qu'elle est partie résoudre ces questions financières que lui-même vient tout juste de régler. Un passant apporte une lettre: "Here's a note from a lady for you..." (Voici un mot pour vous de la part d'une dame). Alfredo l'ouvre. "By the time you have read this letter, I will have left to join the Baron. Our weeks together have been very pleasant, but it would not have lasted..." (Quand vous recevrez cette lettre, je serai partie rejoindre le baron. Nos quelques semaines ensemble ont été très agréables, mais ça n'aurait pas duré...) Monsieur Germont, qui l'observait depuis le jardin, entre le consoler et en profite pour lui dire combien sa sœur se languit de lui. Il l'invite à retrouver la maison familiale en Provence. Mais Alfredo ne pense qu'à se venger. C'est alors qu'il aperçoit l'invitation de Flora, et il sait maintenant où trouver Violetta.

Scène 2

Alfredo arrive seul chez Flora, où la fête bat son plein: certains jouent aux cartes tandis que des bohémiens disent la bonne aventure et

chantent des chansons de matadors. Il s'installe et commence à jouer. Violetta entre au bras du baron Douphol qui lui interdit de parler à Alfredo. Il invite le jeune homme à jouer aux cartes avec lui. Alfredo gagne, double la mise et gagne encore, mais la partie est interrompue par l'annonce du dîner. Violetta revient sur ses pas pour parler à Alfredo en privé. Elle le supplie de partir car elle ne veut pas que le baron le tue en duel. Alfredo réplique qu'il ne partira que si elle accepte de l'accompagner; mais elle lui apprend qu'elle a juré de l'oublier et lui laisse croire que c'est au baron qu'elle a fait ce serment.

Alfredo réunit tous les convives et leur déclare que comme il a été entretenu par Violetta, il veut maintenant blanchir son honneur et payer ses dettes – avec ce qu'il vient de gagner. Monsieur Germont, arrivé sur ces entrefaites, s'en prend à son fils de s'abaisser à une telle ignominie envers une femme. Il le renie sur-le-champ – mais se garde bien d'admettre le rôle que lui-même a joué dans cette histoire. Le baron provoque Alfredo en duel.

Acte III

C'est le Carnaval, un an plus tard. Violetta est sans le sou et son mal est incurable. Le médecin tente de la réconforter mais il avoue à

sa servante que sa maîtresse n'a que quelques heures à vivre. Seule, Violetta relit pour la centième fois la lettre qu'elle a reçue de Monsieur Germont. Alfredo a dû s'enfuir à l'étranger après avoir blessé le baron en duel, mais son père lui a écrit pour lui apprendre la vérité. Alfredo est en route pour Paris et devrait bientôt être auprès d'elle pour obtenir son pardon. Elle sait qu'il est trop tard. Alfredo entre, il veut l'emmener pour toujours loin de Paris – à ses côtés, sa santé refleurira. Mais lorsqu'elle tente de s'habiller elle est saisie par une affreuse quinte de toux et on envoie chercher le médecin. Monsieur Germont arrive à son tour. Elle est contente d'avoir ses amis à ses côtés pour mourir. Elle remet à Alfredo son portrait pour qu'il l'offre à celle qu'un jour il épousera, puis elle meurt dans ses bras.

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Traduction: Nicole Valencia

Valerie Masterson est née à Birkenhead et a étudié à Londres et Milan. Elle a chanté une saison à Salzbourg avant d'entrer dans la D'Oyly Carte Opera Company comme principale soprano. Elle a chanté avec toutes les plus grandes troupes lyriques du Royaume-Uni et sa riche carrière internationale l'a conduite entre autres à Aix-en-Provence, Nancy,

Montpellier, Paris (à l'Opéra), Toulouse, Bordeaux, Genève, Rouen, Prague, Dublin, Munich, Marseille, Milan (la Piccola Scala), Barcelone, Chicago, Philadelphie, Santiago, San Francisco, New York et Houston. Son vaste répertoire comprend les rôles-titres de *La traviata*, *Manon*, *Louise*, *Mireille*, *La veuve joyeuse* et *Sémélé*; elle a également été Madame Lidoine (*Dialogues des carmélites*), Micaëla, Susanne et la Comtesse Almaviva, Sophie et la Maréchale, Mimì, Marguerite (*Faust*), Antonia (*Les contes d'Hoffmann*) et elle a chanté dans *The King Goes Forth to France* avec le Royal Opera. Valerie Masterson travaille régulièrement pour la radio et la télévision et elle a enregistré entre autres *Elisabetta* de Rossini, *Regina d'Inghilterra*, *L'or du Rhin*, *Le crépuscule des Dieux*, plusieurs opérettes de Gilbert et Sullivan et *Jules César* (pour Chandos/Peter Moores Foundation).

John Brecknock est originaire du Nottinghamshire. Il était membre du Sadler's Wells Opera (qui devint par la suite l'English National Opera). Il chanta plusieurs rôles majeurs dont ceux de Don Ottavio, Belmonte, Ferrando, du comte Ory, d'Almaviva (*Le barbier de Séville*), d'Alfredo, de des Grieux (*Manon*), Tamino, du duc (*A Night in Venice*) et de Werther. Pour le Royal Opera il a été

Fenton (*Falstaff*) et Rinuccio (*Gianni Schicchi*) et il a également interprété le rôle de Gennaro (*Lucrèce Borgia*) aux côtés de Dame Joan Sutherland. John Brecknock s'est produit fréquemment en Europe, entre autres au Staatsoper de Vienne, et sur le continent américain. Sur la scène internationale, il a été Don Ottavio (au Metropolitan Opera de New York), Ernesto dans *Don Pasquale* et Fenton (Miami), le duc de Mantoue dans *Rigoletto* (Houston), le comte Ory (Ottawa), Werther (Rouen et San Diego), Ramiro (Buenos Aires et Paris) et Idoménée (Paris).

Christian du Plessis a étudié dans son Afrique du sud natale et fait ses débuts avec le Performing Arts Council du Transvaal Opera à Johannesburg dans le rôle de Yamadori (*Madame Butterfly*). En tant que membre de l'English National Opera, il a tenu les rôles de Rodrigo, Germont, Cecil, Valentin, Marcello et Posa. Il a aussi été Enrico et Marcello à Hong Kong, Zurga à Fort Worth et Orlando, Valentin à Barcelone et il a chanté en concert aux côtés de Dame Joan Sutherland dans *Rodelinda*. Christian du Plessis est réputé pour ses interprétations d'opéras peu connus de Bellini et de Donizetti pour la London Opera Society et Opera Rara. Il a enregistré entre autres *Marie Stuart*, et *Maria Padilla*, *L'assedio*

di Calais, *Gabriella di Vergy* et *Ugo, comte de Paris* de Donizetti ainsi que *Dinorah* de Meyerbeer et *Christopher Columbus* d'après Offenbach pour Opera Rara.

Della Jones est née à Neath et a fait ses études au Royal College of Music où elle a remporté de nombreux prix dont la Kathleen Ferrier Memorial Scholarship. Elle s'est produite avec les plus grandes troupes lyriques britanniques et sa carrière internationale l'a conduite en Europe, aux Etats-Unis, au Canada, en Russie et au Japon. Elle a tenu le rôle-titre d'*Ariodante*, de *Cendrillon* et de *Carmen* et a été Rosine, Hérodiade, Baba the Turk, Marcelline et l'hôtesse (*Boris Godounov*). Della Jones participe régulièrement à des programmes de radio et de télévision et a gravé de nombreuses œuvres dont *Alcina*, *Le couronnement de Poppée*, *La clémence de Titus* ainsi que *Die Kathrin* de Korngold; elle a réalisé de nombreux enregistrements, gravant entre autres *Gabriella di Vergy*, *Maria Padilla*, *Il crociato in Egitto*, *Riccardo e Zoraida* et *Dinorah* pour Opera Rara ainsi que *Le barbier de Séville* et *Jules César* (pour Chandos/Peter Moores Foundation).

John Gibbs a étudié à la Royal Academy of Music à Londres ainsi qu'à Paris et Rome. Il

s'est produit avec quelques-unes des plus grandes troupes lyriques britanniques comme le Royal Opera, l'English National Opera et le Welsh National Opera ainsi qu'avec le Glyndebourne Festival Opera; il a chanté dans *Les noces de Figaro* (Figaro), *Tosca* (le sacristan), *Billy Budd*, *L'anneau du Nibelung* (Alberich), *Les contes d'Hoffmann*, *Le chevalier à la rose* (Faninal) et *Le roi Priam* (Patroclus). John Gibbs a aussi chanté dans *Grandeur et décadence de la ville de Mahagonny* dans le cadre du Festival de Wexford, dans *L'esule di Roma* à Londres (South Bank) et il a participé à plusieurs grandes productions de BBC Radio 3, dont *Der Zwingburg* et *Faust*. Il a gravé entre autres *Les huguenots* et *Tosca*.

Roderick Earle a étudié à St John's College à Cambridge et au Royal College of Music à Londres. Membre de l'English National Opera de 1978 à 1981, il s'est également produit avec le Royal Opera, Opera North et le Welsh National Opera. Il a participé aux festivals d'Edimbourg, d'Israël et d'Athènes et aux Promenade Concerts de la BBC. Roderick Earle a été entre autres Schaunard, Orestes, Haraseta (*La petite renarde rusée*), King Fisher (*The Midsummer Marriage*) et Alberich (*Siegfried* et *Le crépuscule des Dieux*) pour le

Royal Opera, Mephistopheles (*La damnation de Faust*) en Israël et Kothner et Rangoni à Turin. Il a gravé entre autres *Dinorah* de Meyerbeer, *Maria Padilla* de Donizetti et *Le trouvère*.

Denis Dowling est né en Nouvelle-Zélande et après avoir remporté le Prix Sun Aria à Melbourne, il est venu étudier en Angleterre. Depuis ses débuts avec le Sadler's Wells Opera dans le rôle de Faninal (*Le chevalier à la rose*), il s'est produit avec l'English National Opera, à Glyndebourne (*Le viol de Lucrèce* et *Albert Herring*) et avec plusieurs troupes lyriques européennes. Denis Dowling a chanté tous les rôles de baryton de Mozart et il est particulièrement apprécié pour son interprétation de Rossini et de Puccini. Figaro, Papageno, Bartolo, Gianni Schicchi et Malatesta font partie de ses rôles de prédilection. Il a aussi été le Commandant (*De la maison des morts*), le prince Bolconsky (*Guerre et paix*) et d'Armagnac (*Les possédées de Loudun*).

Après de brillantes études de chant à Cambridge, **Geoffrey Pogson** a fait ses débuts au Festival d'Edimbourg dans le rôle de Remendado (*Carmen*). Il s'est produit depuis avec certaines de principales troupes lyriques

britanniques dont l'English National Opera pour qui il a créé le rôle de Vronsky (*Anna Karénine* de Iain Hamilton), Opera North et le Scottish Opera. Il a aussi été Don José, Cavaradossi, des Grieux (*Manon*), Quint (*Le tour d'écrout*), Pâris (*La belle Hélène*), Néron (*Le couronnement de Poppée*), Danilo (*La veuve joyeuse*), Eisenstein (*La chauve-souris*), Pinkerton (*Madame Butterfly*), Frank Crawley (*Rebecca*) et le duc de mantoue (*Rigoletto*). Geoffrey Pogson a fait plusieurs enregistrements et se produit régulièrement à BBC Radio 3.

Shelagh Squires a étudié à la Guildhall School of Music à Londres. Elle s'est produite avec l'English National Opera comme principale mezzo-soprano ainsi qu'avec le Glyndebourne Festival Opera et le Glyndebourne Touring Opera, le Metropolitan Opera de New York et l'Opera de Phoenix entre autres; elle a également chanté au Festival international de musique de Bergen, à Vienne et au Japon. Son vaste répertoire comprend entre autres Hérodiade (*Salomé*), Margret (*Wozzeck*), Magdalena (*Les maîtres chanteurs*), Marcelline (*Les noces de Figaro*), Adelaïde (*Arabella*), Ulrica (*Un bal masqué*), Ottavia (*Le couronnement de Poppée*), Marthe (*Faust*), la sorcière (*Rusalka*), princesse Maria (*Guerre et paix*), la grand-mère

Buryjá (*Jenůfa*), Annina (*Le chevalier à la rose*), Filipjevna (*Eugène Onéguine*), une nymphe (*Ariane à Naxos*) et la gouvernante (*La dame de pique*).

Sir Charles Mackerras naquit en 1925 aux Etats-Unis de parents australiens et fit ses études à Sydney et Prague. Il fit ses débuts de chef lyrique au Sadler's Wells, où il contribua à la première britannique de *Kát'a Kabanová* de Janáček, une création sensationnelle qui assura à Janáček de figurer au répertoire des troupes britanniques. Il fut Chef d'orchestre principal de l'Opéra de Hambourg (1966–1969) et directeur musical du Sadler's Wells Opera (qui deviendrait l'English National Opera) entre 1970 et 1977 et du Welsh National Opera entre 1987 et 1992, où ses productions remarquables de Janáček furent accueillies avec enthousiasme. La production et l'enregistrement d'*Osud* ont été financés par la Peter Moores Foundation, qui finança aussi l'enregistrement de *La petite renarde rusée*. Il est chef d'orchestre honoraire du Scottish Chamber Orchestra et du Welsh National Opera, l'un des chefs réguliers de l'Opéra de San Francisco et, depuis la saison 1998–1999, directeur du St Luke's Orchestra à New York.

Sir Charles Mackerras a fait des recherches

poussées sur l'interprétation aux XVIIIe et XIXe siècles qui ont profondément influencé la façon dont il aborde le répertoire aujourd'hui. Sa vaste discographie comprend un cycle primé des opéras de Janáček avec la Philharmonie de Vienne, *Gloriana* de Britten (primé par la revue *Gramophone*), des Symphonies de Beethoven, Brahms et Mahler, et avec l'English National Opera *Julius Caesar* de Handel et *Mary Stuart* de

Donizetti (pour Chandos/Peter Moores Foundation).

Sir Charles Mackerras est Commander of the British Empire (CBE) depuis 1974 et a été anobli en 1979 pour services rendus à la musique. Il s'est vu également décerner la Médaille du mérite de la République tchèque et le titre de Companion of the Order of Australia.

Verdi: La traviata

Da *La dame aux camélias* a *La traviata*

Verdi era stato fortunato con quelle sue opere commissionate e date in prima esecuzione al Teatro la Fenice a Venezia. *Ernani* nel 1844, *Attila* nel 1846 e *Rigoletto* nel 1851. Nel 1852 il trentanovenne compositore venne nuovamente interpellato dalla direzione della Fenice e incaricato di comporre un'opera per la stagione successiva. A Francesco Maria Piave, che aveva collaborato con Verdi in due di quelle precedenti opere rappresentate alla Fenice, venne affidato il libretto, e la ricerca di un soggetto appropriato ebbe inizio mentre Verdi stava ancora scrivendo *Il trovatore* (per il Teatro Apollo a Roma, dove la sua prima rappresentazione ebbe luogo nel gennaio del 1853).

Al principio del 1852 Verdi e la sua amante, Giuseppina Strepponi, si trovavano a Parigi. L'adattamento scenico de *La dame aux camélias*, che Alexandre Dumas fils aveva scritto dal suo romanzo, ebbe la sua premiere parigina il 2 febbraio, e Verdi fu presente ad una delle recite. Probabilmente aveva già letto il romanzo, giacché l'anno prima aveva menzionato al librettista del suo *Trovatore* "un

altro soggetto, semplice e appassionato, che si può dire è quasi completo così com'è". Si presume generalmente che Verdi si riferisse a *La dame aux camélias*. Quando Verdi suggerì il dramma di Dumas alle autorità della Fenice queste lo approvarono, semplicemente proponendo che egli cambiasse il titolo da lui proposto, "Amore e morte".

Verdi concordò di aver pronta la nuova opera per essere rappresentata alla Fenice il 6 marzo 1853 e cominciò a comporla mentre era a Roma, nel dicembre del 1852, durante le prove de *Il trovatore*. Solo poche settimane separano le premieres de *Il trovatore* a Roma e de *La traviata* a Venezia. In gennaio, dopo le prime tre recite de *Il trovatore*, che ebbero grande successo, Verdi tornò alla sua Villa di Sant'Agata, vicino a Busseto, e completò la nuova opera. Piave stava attivamente riscrivendo il libretto a seguito dell'acido commento del compositore che alcune delle sue parti avrebbero fatto addormentare il pubblico! Gran parte della musica era stata scritta mentre Verdi stava facendo gli ultimi ritocchi a *Il trovatore*, il che dimostra quanto completamente Verdi sapesse immergersi nei

personaggi e nell'atmosfera dei suoi soggetti. I mondi de *Il trovatore* e de *La traviata* non avrebbero potuto essere più diversi, ma, essendo penetrato in ambedue, Verdi era, a quanto pare, capace di passare dall'uno all'altro con facilità. Egli era il più obbiettivo dei compositori, il che vale non poco a spiegare perché sia uno dei maggiori operisti. Peraltro, entro il contesto della sua obbiettività, egli riuscì ad esternare i propri sentimenti. Raramente Verdi si identifica con uno dei personaggi nelle sue opere, ma quando riversa la sua compassione su uno di essi in particolare l'occasione non manca di essere ampiamente rivelante, com'è il caso de *La traviata*.

Gran parte della musica venne scritta mentre Verdi era *en route* per Roma, mentre era a Roma ad inscenare *Il trovatore*, o a Sant'Agata immediatamente dopo. L'ultimo atto fu composto a Sant'Agata in un'atmosfera di cupo pessimismo, altamente appropriata al contenuto del dramma, non solo perché tanto Verdi quanto Giuseppina erano malandati in salute ma anche perché Verdi era convinto che gli interpreti ingaggiati dalla Fenice non sarebbero stati in grado di rendere giustizia alla sua opera. Piave rimase a Sant'Agata per essere disponibile qualora occorresse apportare cambiamenti al libretto. "Quando piove"

scrisse al segretario della Fenice, "vi assicuro che è il caso di guardarsi allo specchio per vedere se uno è ancora in forma umana o se non si è tramutato in un rospo o in una rana." Verdi diede istruzioni a Piave di far presente alla Fenice la convinzione del compositore che l'opera avrebbe fatto sicuramente fiasco se non venivano ingaggiati altri cantanti. Quando una lettera anonima avvisò Verdi che se non venivano rimpiazzati almeno il soprano e il baritono la rappresentazione sarebbe stata un disastro, Verdi passò lugubramente la lettera a Piave, aggiungendo, "Lo so, lo so!".

Quando arrivò a Venezia il 21 febbraio per strumentare l'opera e per soprintendere alle prove Verdi aveva buone ragioni per temere il peggio, giacché il soprano era insoddisfatto e il tenore non era in buona voce. Persino il baritono, Felice Varesi, che era abituato a lavorare con Verdi e che aveva avuto un immenso successo come il primo Rigoletto, non si sentiva a suo agio in un'opera così fuori del comune, con uno sfondo puramente domestico, senza intrighi, senza battaglie, senza alcune delle guarnizioni del romanzesco di rito. La prima rappresentazione ebbe luogo il 6 marzo, ed in lettere a vari amici il giorno dopo Verdi comunicò il disastro. "Caro Emanuele", scrisse ad Emanuele Muzio, suo ex-allievo ed amanuense, "*Traviata* ieri sera –

un fiasco. Colpa mia o dei cantanti? Si vedrà col tempo.”

Il pubblico della premiere aveva riso alla vista del soprano, Fanny Salvini-Donatelli, una donna estremamente corpulenta, che moriva di tisi, eppure lei fu l'unica dei cantanti che venne lodata dalla critica. Sappiamo che alcuni studiosi di Verdi hanno suggerito che un'altra ragione del fiasco iniziale de *La traviata* fu che il pubblico veneziano non era abituato a vedere costumi contemporanei sulla scena lirica. Ma a quelle prime recite alla Fenice il pubblico non vide costumi moderni in scena. E' vero che, scegliendo per la sua opera il dramma di Dumas, Verdi aveva sperato di venire alle prese con un soggetto contemporaneo. Nessuno aveva mai tentato di fare altrettanto in un'opera seria, sebbene lo stesso Verdi vi si fosse avvicinato con *Stiffelio* che è ambientato all'inizio dell'Ottocento. Mentre stava componendo *La traviata* Verdi aveva scritto ad un amico: “Per Venezia sto scrivendo *La dame aux camélias*, che probabilmente verrà chiamata *La traviata*. E' un soggetto contemporaneo. Un altro compositore forse non l'avrebbe fatto a causa dei costumi, il periodo o altri mille scicchi scrupoli, ma io sono incantato dall'idea. Tutti si sono lamentati quando ho proposto di mettere un gobbo in scena. Ebbene, mi ha fatto piacere comporre

Rigoletto.” Comunque, qualcuno alla Fenice si prese paura e quando *La traviata* fu messa in scena alla Fenice il periodo ed i costumi furono quelli di Luigi XIV, primo Settecento. Verdi si era battuto vigorosamente per il diritto di mantenere l'opera nell'ambientazione contemporanea del drama. Un memorandum negli archivi della Fenice nota che “il signor Maestro Verdi desidera, esige e prega che i costumi per la sua opera *La traviata* rimangano quelli del tempo presente”. Poco dopo, però, Piave scrisse da Sant'Agata per confermare che “Verdi è d'accordo, molto suo malgrado, che il periodo venga anticipato nel tempo”.

Le avvilite lettere di Verdi riguardo al “fiasco” furono scritte prima di aver visto le recensioni della prima esecuzione, le quali, sebbene discordanti, non erano certamente del tutto sfavorevoli. Durante la stagione vennero date dieci repliche, dopo di che Verdi diede istruzioni al suo editore di non permettere ulteriori allestimenti a meno che lui stesso, Verdi, non ne fosse incaricato. Intrattenne l'idea di produrre l'opera a Roma, ma fu prevenuto da una richiesta pervenutagli da Venezia, non dalla Fenice ma da un teatro più piccolo, il Teatro San Benedetto. L'impresario si offrì d'ingaggiare una compagnia di primo rango, con Piave a dirigere le prove, promettendo un illimitato numero di prove. Sarebbe stato

comunque mantenuto il periodo di Luigi XIV, giacché sarebbe sembrato di voler tentare la provvidenza se il pubblico avesse visto i cantanti esattamente nei suoi panni sulla scena.

Dopo qualche esitazione iniziale Verdi accettò la proposta del Teatro San Benedetto e i veneziani ebbero un'altra occasione di sentire *La traviata*, il 6 maggio 1854, con una nuova compagnia. Questa volta l'opera ebbe un successo incondizionato. Venne presto rappresentata ovunque in Italia e all'estero, seppure ancora in costume settecentesco, ed in breve divenne l'opera più discussa del suo tempo. Verdi ne fu felice sebbene non abbia potuto trattenersi dal far notare ad un amico che, eccetto minori cambiamenti, fatti per adattare la partitura alle capacità dei nuovi cantanti, era la medesima opera che era stata data alla Felice: “Allora fu un fiasco; ora ha fatto furore. Traetene le vostre conclusioni!”

Il romanzo di Alexandre Dumas, *La dame aux camélias*, era stato pubblicato a Parigi nel 1848, solo pochi mesi dopo la morte di Alphonsine Plessis (o Marie Duplessis, come era generalmente chiamata), sulla quale l'autore aveva basato la sua storia della signora delle camelie. Marie Duplessis era una famosa cortigiana parigina di grande beltà e spirito, che in diversi tempi ebbe relazioni con personaggi illustri quali Alfred de Musset, Liszt

e lo stesso Dumas. Aveva solo ventitre anni quando morì tifica. Vi sono fortissimi elementi autobiografici sia nel romanzo sia nel dramma adattato da Dumas stesso l'anno successivo, ed è più che ragionevole presumere che il personaggio di Armand Duval, che ha le medesime iniziali dell'autore, sia stato inteso come un autoritratto. (Nell'opera il suo nome è Alfredo Germont.) Marie Duplessis è descritta da Dumas come “alta, molto esile, scura di capelli, e con una carnagione rosa e bianca... era come una statuina di Sassonia”. Nata in campagna, figlia di un mercante, se ne andò a Parigi all'età di quindici anni, divenendo subito una *grisette* – tale era il nome dato dai parigini ad una ragazza che frequentava i locali degli artisti e degli studenti nelle ore notturne: un equivalente parigino della viennese *süsse Mädel*. E' da dubitare che Marie Duplessis sia mai stata una comune prostituta. Entro un anno era divenuta parte del *demi-monde* parigino, occupando il rango di mantenuta, socialmente un paio di gradini sopra a quello della prostituta, ma tuttora al di fuori della rispettabilità. La mantenuta, o cortigiana, di solito stringeva relazioni successive piuttosto che simultanee, e Marie Duplessis venne mantenuta successivamente dal Duca di Guisa e dal Conte Stackelberg. Fu all'età di diciannove anni, quando era l'amante di

Stackelberg, che incontrò Dumas in circostanze simili a quelle descritte nell'Atto I, tanto nel dramma quanto nell'opera.

Trasformandola nella sua Marguerite Gautier Dumas romanticizzò Marie, giacché lei non lasciò lui per proteggere il nome della sua famiglia: fu lui a lasciare lei perché non poteva provvedere a mantenerla nel lusso a cui lei non voleva rinunciare, e non se la sentiva di spartirla con altri amanti. La relazione durò meno di un anno. L'anno dopo Marie Duplessis venne a Londra con il Visconte di Périgaux, che sposò nell'Ufficio del Registro di Kensington. Dopo pochi mesi il matrimonio fallì e Marie tornò nel continente, visitando varie stazioni termali nella speranza di rimettersi in salute. Morì nel suo appartamento parigino nel febbraio del 1847 ed è sepolta nel cimitero del Père Lachaise.

Dumas aveva poco più di vent'anni quando scrisse il suo romanzo, che a suo tempo destò molta ammirazione ma che ora è piombato nell'oscurità. Il suo dramma, peraltro, scritto un anno dopo il romanzo e solo due anni dopo la morte di Marie Duplessis, ma non rappresentato per tre anni per problemi di censura, resta ostinatamente vivo, non solo perché si presta come strumento di grandi attrici romantiche quali Sarah Bernhardt, Greta Garbo ed Edwige Feuillère, ma anche

per la sua semplicità formale ed onestà di sentimenti: qualità che trionfano sul fatto che ha da tempo perso il suo potere di *épater le bourgeois*.

I *bourgeois* ai tempi di Dumas *filis* e di Verdi si scandalizzavano comunque molto facilmente. La società allora – come adesso – era basata largamente su un'organizzazione ipocrisia, ma le regole erano imposte con maggior severità e ferocia. Figlio illegittimo di un padre famoso, il giovane Dumas reagì violentemente contro il *demi-monde* nel quale era cresciuto. Anche se il suo trattamento della cortigiana, socialmente reietta, è altamente comprensivo ne *La dame aux camélias* e rientra fermamente nella tradizione romantica e letteraria della rivolta contro la moralità tradizionale, Dumas, in età più avanzata, finì per attaccare la cortigiana come la maledizione della società.

Il mondo parigino, o almeno la società artistica e liberale che Verdi frequentava durante i suoi numerosi soggiorni a Parigi, non avrebbe considerato l'amante del compositore, Giuseppina Strepponi, come una cortigiana. Ma la società provinciale italiana non era Parigi. La prima moglie di Verdi e i loro due figli erano morti da oltre dieci anni, Verdi e la Strepponi erano stati amanti per cinque anni. Erano passati solo tre anni da quando egli

aveva portato Giuseppina ad abitare con lui nella sua città natale di Busseto, un fatto che aveva dato offesa alla locale società e che gli aveva alienato non pochi dei suoi vecchi amici. A quel tempo Verdi aveva comprato la Villa Sant'Agata, alcuni chilometri fuori Busseto, che sarebbe stata la sua casa, e quella di Giuseppina, per il resto della loro vita. Quando Antonio Barezzi, suo ex-suocero e vecchio benefattore, lo rimproverò per non aver legalizzato la sua relazione con Giuseppina, Verdi replicò: "Nella mia casa abita una signora, libera ed indipendente, che, come me, preferisce una vita solitaria, ed è in possesso di un patrimonio che basta a tutti i suoi bisogni. Né io né lei siamo obbligati a rendere conto a nessuno delle nostre azioni. Ma chi conosce quali sono le nostre relazioni? Quali affari? Quali legami? Che diritti ha ella su di me o io su di lei? Chi sa se ella è o non è mia moglie? E se lo è, chi sa quali possano essere le ragioni di non annunciare il fatto? Chi sa se questa sia una cattiva cosa, chi ha il diritto di ostracizzarci? Io dico, comunque: che in casa mia ella ha diritto al rispetto quanto me, anzi, di più. Ed a nessuno è permesso di dimenticarlo per qualsiasi ragione. Ed infine, ella ha ogni diritto, sia per la sua condotta sia per il suo carattere, a quella considerazione che d'abitudine ella dimostra verso gli altri."

Non c'è da sorprendersi, al tempo in cui la relazione di Verdi con Giuseppina (che avrebbe sposato solo sette anni dopo) stava scandalizzando i cittadini di Busseto, che il compositore reagisse con tanta simpatia al dramma di Dumas. E' probabile che Verdi abbia visto nel dramma una scintilla di quella sincerità di sentimenti della propria situazione, e che – almeno in un angolo della sua mente – egli abbia identificato Giuseppina in Marie Duplessis/Marguerite Gautier/Violetta Valéry, e visto se stesso come Alexandre Dumas/Armand Duval/Alfredo Germont, con Antonio Barezzi come Dumas *père*(?)/Georges Duval/Giorgio Germont. E' certamente vero che *La traviata* ha occupato un posto speciale nell'affetto di Verdi e che, nello stile, è un'opera assai più intima e personale di qualsiasi altro lavoro che egli abbia scritto in precedenza.

Il libretto che Piave scrisse per l'opera segue il testo di Dumas abbastanza fedelmente. Il dramma è in cinque atti, ridotti nell'opera a quattro scene, giacché Piave omette il secondo atto in cui Marguerite decide di andare a vivere con Armand in campagna, e congeda il suo amante corrente, il Conte de Giray. Con ciò Piave arricchì la forma del dramma a spese del suo contenuto, poiché, alla fine dell'Atto I Marguerite, o Violetta (come è divenuta

nell'opera) pare esser decisa a continuare la sua vita di cortigiana, eppure, nella prossima scena, all'inizio dell'Atto II dell'opera (Atto III nel dramma) sta vivendo una vita di felicità domestica in campagna con Armand/Alfredo. Peraltro, le quattro scene dell'opera si risolvono in una forma musicale e drammatica soddisfacenti, e l'Atto II di Dumas non è realmente necessario, né alla trama né all'incisiva caratterizzazione. Il libretto è, in effetti, uno dei meglio riusciti di Piave e, sotto molti aspetti, è persino migliore del dramma da cui è tratto.

La traviata non è soltanto una delle più amate fra le opere verdiane: è anche uno dei più eccelsi melodrammi che il mondo conosca. Il fatto che non sia stata immediatamente riconosciuta come tale può essere ascrivito solamente alla sua ricchezza melodica, giacché non sembra proprio giusto che un tale superbo compositore-drammaturgo abbia potuto inventare anche una tale prodigalità di melodie. Ingiusto, ma nel caso di Verdi, indiscutibile. In *La traviata*, più completamente che in tali lavori precedenti quali *Luisa Miller* o *Stiffelio*, le cui trame mantengono ancora elementi del melodramma romantico, Verdi portò un nuovo ambiente domestico nell'opera e, malgrado i costumi settecenteschi di quelle prime a

rappresentazioni, descrisse il mondo borghese del suo tempo. *La traviata* è un'opera in cui tutte le migliori qualità di Verdi vengono alla luce: la sua maestria tecnica, la sua chiarezza, la sua umanità, la sua penetrazione psicologica, il suo infallibile buon gusto e il genio di creare melodie calde e cantabili.

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(Questo articolo contiene materiale da Charles Osborne: *The Complete Operas of Verdi*.)

La trama

Atto I

Violetta Valery sta dando una festa nella sua casa a Parigi, dove è lussuosamente mantenuta dal suo presente amante, il Barone Douphol. Fra i suoi ospiti ci sono Flora Bervoix con il suo amante, il Marchese d'Obigny, il Dott. Grenvil e il Visconte Gaston de Letorières. Gaston presenta a Violetta il suo amico, Alfredo Germont, il quale è – le dice – un suo ardente ammiratore sebbene non l'abbia mai incontrata. Violetta chiede ad Alfredo di fare un brindisi ed egli beve ai suoi occhi. L'orchestra attacca a suonare. Violetta, che è malata di tisi (in quel tempo un male incurabile), si sente svenire e chiede ai suoi ospiti di ballare senza di lei. Alfredo resta con lei per assicurarsi che si sia ristabilita e le

confessa il suo amore per lei. Violetta volubilmente lo scoraggia, ma gli offre un fiore dicendogli che gli è permesso riportarglielo quando sarà appassito. Gli ospiti se ne vanno.

L'idea del vero amore, concesso e corrisposto, l'attrae e allo stesso tempo la spaventa. È più di quanto una donna come lei può sperare, e Violetta non può accettarlo né farci assegnamento. Deve esser libera di godersi la vita.

Atto II

Scena I

Violetta ha rinunciato alla sua vita con il Barone ed Alfredo e lei sono amanti da tre mesi. Hanno messo su casa insieme in un piccolo paese fuori città. Alfredo è avvilito quando apprende dalla cameriera che Violetta sta vendendo tutto ciò che possiede per pagare i conti e mantenere ambedue. Parte per andare a raccogliere denaro a Parigi. Violetta si sorprende della sua partenza e dice ai suoi servitori che sta aspettando una visita del suo notaio. È temporaneamente distratta da una lettera di Flora che l'invita ad una festa a Parigi quella sera stessa. Il signore che giunge subito dopo non è il suo notaio ma il padre di Alfredo che l'accusa di rovinare suo figlio. Violetta gli dice in confidenza che è suo figlio a rovinare lei e che, lungi dall'essere una mantenuta, è lei che

mantiene Alfredo. Imperturbato, il Signor Germont continua dicendo che lo scandalo della loro relazione sta mettendo a rischio il previsto matrimonio di sua figlia. Violetta deve rinunciare ad Alfredo. È giovane e troverà un altro amante. Violetta risponde che non potrà amare nessun altro. Ma quando Germont insiste, dicendo che il cielo non benedirà mai la loro relazione e che Dio impone il suo sacrificio, Violetta cede: abbandonerà Alfredo purché un giorno suo padre gli riveli la verità.

Il Signor Germont se ne va e Violetta scrive un biglietto al Barone Douphol chiedendogli se sarà disponibile quella sera per accompagnarla alla festa di Flora. Manda la cameriera a consegnarlo e si siede allo scrittoio per scrivere una lettera d'addio ad Alfredo, il quale ritorna mentre ella è sul punto di finire la lettera che Violetta riesce a nascondergli. Alfredo le dice che sta aspettando suo padre che gli ha lasciato un messaggio adirato. Uscendo dalla stanza Violetta dice semplicemente che lo aspetterà fuori, poi, d'improvviso ed appassionatamente, lo implora di amarla sempre.

Pochi minuti dopo il servitore annuncia che Violetta è partita per Parigi. Alfredo, sebbene stupito, pensa che sia andata a sistemare problemi finanziari che però ha già risolto lui stesso. Un passante viene alla casa portando

una lettera: “Here’s a note from a lady for you...” (Eccole un biglietto da parte di una signora) Alfredo l’apre. “By the time you have read this letter, I will have left to rejoin the Baron. Our weeks together have been very pleasant, but it would not have lasted...” (Quando leggerete questa lettera io sarò andata a raggiungere il Barone. Le nostre settimane insieme sono state molto piacevoli, ma non poteva durare...) Il Signor Germont che è rimasto in osservazione dal giardino entra a consolare suo figlio e approfitta dell’occasione per dirgli che sua sorella sente molto la sua mancanza. Perché non ritorna a casa in Provenza? Alfredo pensa solo a vendicarsi. Quando scorge l’invito di Flora capisce subito dove troverà Violetta.

Scena 2

Alfredo arriva solo alla casa di Flora, dove la festa è stata resa più vivace dai giochi d’azzardo e da un gruppo di zingare che indovinano la sorte e cantano storie di corride. Alfredo si siede al tavolo di gioco. Quando Violetta arriva è accompagnata dal Barone Douphol che le proibisce di parlare ad Alfredo. Douphol sfida quest’ultimo ad un gioco a carte; Alfredo vince, raddoppia e vince fin quando non viene l’ora di andare a cena. Violetta torna di nascosto per parlare ad Alfredo in privato. Lo prega di

andarsene giacché non vuole che venga ucciso in duello dal Barone. Alfredo risponde che se ne andrà solo se lei verrà con lui, ma Violetta gli dice che ha giurato di lasciarlo e gli permette di credere che la promessa è stata fatta al Barone.

Alfredo richiama i invitati e li informa che, essendo stato mantenuto da Violetta, è giunto il momento di riabilitarsi e di ripagarla – con le sue vincite al gioco. Il Signor Germont, che è arrivato in tempo per sentire le sue parole, si rivolta contro suo figlio, acerbamente rimproverandolo per la sua disonorevole condotta verso una donna, ma senza rivelare la parte che lui stesso ha avuto negli eventi. Il Barone sfida Alfredo a duello.

Atto III

È Carnevale, l’anno seguente. Violetta ha esaurito il suo patrimonio ed è mortalmente malata. Il dottore cerca di confortarla, ma dice alla cameriera che ormai non le restano che poche ore di vita. Rimasta sola Violetta legge per la centesima volta la lettera che ha ricevuto dal Signor Germont. Alfredo è stato costretto a fuggire all’estero dopo aver ferito il Barone a duello, ma suo padre gli ha scritto rivelandogli come sono andate le cose. Alfredo è sulla via del ritorno e presto sarà da lei ad implorare il suo perdono. Violetta sa che è troppo tardi. Alfredo ritorna per portarla via da Parigi per

sempre – al suo fianco la sua salute rifiorirà. Ma persino lo sforzo di vestirsi suscita un violento attacco di tosse e viene chiamato il dottore. Arriva anche il Signor Germont. Violetta è felice di avere i suoi amici intorno a lei mentre sta morendo. Dona ad Alfredo un suo ritratto perché lo dia alla fanciulla che egli un giorno sposerà, e muore fra le sue braccia.

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Traduzione: Marcella Barzetti

Valerie Masterson è nata a Birkenhead ed ha studiato a Londra e a Milano. Ha cantato a Salisburgo per una stagione e poi è entrata a far parte della compagnia D’Oly Carte Opera come soprano principale. Ha cantato con tutte le maggiori compagnie liriche britanniche e all’estero la sua carriera si è estesa su un vasto raggio che include Aix-en-Provence, Nancy, Montpellier, l’Opéra a Parigi, Toulouse, Bordeaux, Ginevra, Rouen, Praga, Dublino, Monaco di Baviera, Marsiglia, la Piccola Scala a Milano, Barcellona, Chicago, Philadelphia, Santiago, San Francisco, New York e Houston.

Il suo eclettico repertorio comprende le parti principali in *La traviata*, *Manon*, *Louise*, *Mireille*, *Die lustige Witwe* e *Semele*, Madame Lidoine (*Dialogues des carmélites*), Micaëla,

Susanna e la Contessa Almaviva, Sophie e la Marescialla, Mimì, Marguerite (*Faust*), Antonia (*I racconti di Hoffmann*) e *The King Goes Forth to France* con la Royal Opera. Valerie Masterson appare regolarmente in televisione e nei programmi radiofonici; la sua discografia include *Elisabetta* di Rossini, *Regina d’Inghilterra*, *Das Rheingold*, *Götterdämmerung*, svariate operette di Gilbert e Sullivan e *Giulio Cesare* per la Chandos/Peter Moores Foundation.

John Brecknock proviene dal Nottinghamshire. Ha fatto parte della compagnia della Sadler’s Wells Opera (divenuta in seguito la English National Opera). Ruoli principali includono Don Ottavio, Belmonte, Ferrando, il Conte Ory, Almaviva (*Il barbiere di Siviglia*), Alfredo, des Grieux (*Manon*), Tamino, il Duca (*A Night in Venice*) e Werther. I suoi ruoli per la Royal Opera hanno incluso Fenton (*Falstaff*) e Rinuccio (*Gianni Schicchi*). Ha inoltre cantato Gennaro (*Lucrezia Borgia*) con Joan Sutherland. John Brecknock ha cantato di frequente in tutta l’Europa, incluse la Staatsoper di Vienna, e nelle Americhe. I suoi ruoli all’estero comprendono Don Ottavio al Metropolitan di New York, Ernesto (*Don Pasquale*) e Fenton a Miami, il Duca (*Rigoletto*) a Houston, Conte Ory a Ottawa, Werther a

Rouen e San Diego, Ramiro a Buenos Aires, e Idomeno e Ramiro a Parigi.

Christian du Plessis ha studiato nel nativo Sud Africa e ha debuttato con il Performing Arts Council della Transvaal Opera a Johannesburg nel ruolo di Yamadori (*Madama Butterfly*). E' poi entrato nella compagnia della English National Opera dove i suoi ruoli hanno incluso Rodrigo, Germont, Cecil, Valentin, Marcello e Posa. Ha inoltre cantato Enrico e Marcello a Hong Kong, Zurga a Fort Worth e a Orlando, Valentin a Barcellona e in *Rodelinda* con Joan Sutherland in esecuzioni in forma d'oratorio. Christian du Plessis è particolarmente noto per le sue interpretazioni di opere meno note di Bellini e Donizetti per la London Opera Society e per Opera Rara. I suoi dischi includono le opere Donizetti *Maria Stuarda*, e *Maria Padilla*, *L'assedio di Calais*, *Gabriella di Vergy* e *Ugo, conte di Parigi*, *Dinorah* di Meyerbeer e *Christopher Columbus* di Offenbach per Opera Rara.

Della Jones è nata a Neath ed ha studiato al Royal College of Music dove ha vinto numerosi premi, fra i quali la Kathleen Ferrier Memorial Scholarship. Ha cantato per tutte le principali compagnie liriche britanniche e all'estero in tutta l'Europa, negli Stati Uniti, in

Canada, Russia e Giappone. Ha cantato in ruoli di protagonista in *Ariodante*, *La Cenerentola* e *Carmen*. Fra gli altri suoi ruoli vi sono Rosina, Herodias, Baba the Turk, Marcellina e l'Ostessa (*Boris Godunov*). Della Jones appare regolarmente in programmi televisivi e radiofonici e la sua discografia include *Alcina*, *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, *La clemenza di Tito*, *Die Katrin* di Korngold, *Gabriella di Vergy*, *Maria Padilla*, *Il crociato in Egitto*, *Riccardo e Zoraida* e *Dinorah* per Opera Rara, *Il barbiere di Siviglia* e *Giulio Cesare* per la Chandos/Peter Moores Foundation.

John Gibbs ha studiato alla Royal Academy of Music, a Parigi e a Roma. Ha cantato per le principali compagnie liriche britanniche, fra le quali la Royal Opera, l'English National Opera, la Welsh National Opera, la Glyndebourne Festival Opera ne *Le nozze di Figaro* (Figaro), *Tosca* (Sagrestano), *Billy Budd*, *L'anello del Nibelungo* (Alberich), *I racconti di Hoffmann*, *Il cavaliere della rosa* (Faninal) e *King Priam* (Patrolo). John Gibbs ca inoltre partecipato al Festival di Wexford ne *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*, ne *Lesule di Roma* alla South Bank ed in varie importanti trasmissioni del Terzo Programma della BBC, fra le quali *Der Zwingburg* e *Faust*. La sua discografia include *Les huguenots* e *Tosca*.

Roderick Earle ha studiato al St. John's College di Cambridge e al Royal College of Music. Ha fatto parte della compagnia dell'English National Opera dal 1978 al 1981 ed ha cantato per la Royal Opera, Opera North e Welsh National Opera. E' inoltre apparso ai festival di Edimburgo, Israele e Atene e nella serie dei Promenade Concerts della BBC. I suoi ruoli includono Schaunard, Oreste, Harasta (*La volpe astuta*), King Fisher (*The Midsummer Marriage*), Alberich (*Sigfrido e Il crepuscolo degli Dei*) per la Royal Opera, Figaro per la Scottish Opera, Mephistopheles (*La damnation de Faust*) in Israele, Kothner e Rangoni a Torino. I suoi dischi includono *Dinorah* di Meyerbeer, *Maria Padilla* di Donizetti e *Il trovatore*.

Denis Dowling è nato in Nuova Zelanda. Ha vinto il Premio Melbourne Sun Aria ed è poi venuto a studiare in Inghilterra. Ha debuttato con la Sadler's Wells Opera nella parte di Faninal (*Il cavaliere della rosa*) e da allora ha cantato con la compagnia dell'English National Opera, a Glyndebourne (*The Rape of Lucretia* e *Albert Herring*) e per numerose compagnie europee. Denis Dowling ha in repertorio tutti i principali ruoli mozartiani ed è tenuto in alta considerazione per le sue interpretazioni di Rossini e Puccini. Figaro, Papageno, Bartolo, Gianni Schicchi e Malatesta sono fra i suoi

ruoli preferiti. Altri ruoli includono: il Comandante (*Dalla casa dei morti*), il Principe Bolkonsky (*Guerra e pace*) e D'Armagnac (*The Devils of Loudon*).

Geoffrey Pogson si è laureato all'Università di Cambridge e ha debuttato al Festival di Edimburgo nella parte di Remendado (*Carmen*). Ha poi cantato con le principali compagnie liriche britanniche, fra queste l'English National Opera per la quale creò il ruolo di Vronsky (*Anna Karenina* di Iain Hamilton), e per Opera North e Scottish Opera. Altri suoi ruoli includono Don José, Cavaradossi, des Grieux (*Manon*), Quint (*The Turn of the Screw*), Paride (*La belle Hélène*), Nerone (*L'incoronazione di Poppea*), Danilo (*La vedova allergrä*), Eisenstein (*Die Fledermaus*), Pinkerton (*Madama Butterfly*), Frank Crawley (*Rebecca*) e il Duca (*Rigoletto*). Geoffrey Pogson ha inciso numerosi dischi e trasmette regolarmente per i programmi radiofonici della BBC (Radio 3).

Shelagh Squires ha studiato alla Guildhall. Ha cantato per l'English National Opera come mezzosoprano principale, al Glyndebourne Festival e per la Touring Opera, Metropolitan Opera di New York e Phoenix Opera, all'International Music Festival di Bergen, a

Vienna e in Giappone. Il suo vasto repertorio include Herodias (*Salome*), Margret (*Wozzeck*), Magdalena (*I maestri cantori*), Marcellina (*Le nozze di Figaro*), Adelaide (*Arabella*), Ulrica (*Un ballo in maschera*), Ottavia (*L'incoronazione di Poppea*), Marthe (*Faust*), la Strega (*Rusalka*), la Principessa Maria (*Guerra e pace*), Nonna Buryja (*Jenufa*), Annina (*Il cavaliere della rosa*), Filippyena (*Eugene Onegin*), la Oriade (*Arianna a Nasso*) e la Governante (*La dama di picche*).

Sir Charles Mackerras è nato nel 1925 negli Stati Uniti da genitori australiani ed ha studiato a Sydney e a Praga. In opera ha debuttato come direttore al Sadler's Wells Theatre dove diresse la sensazionale prima esecuzione britannica della *Káťa Kabanová* di Janáček, rappresentazione che inserì Janáček nel corrente repertorio britannico. È stato direttore stabile dell'opera di Amburgo dal 1966 al 1969 e direttore artistico del Sadler's Wells (poi English National Opera) dal 1970 al 1977 e della Welsh National Opera dal 1987 al 1992 per la quale diresse, fra l'altro, di nuovo Janáček con grande successo. L'allestimento e la registrazione di

Osud vennero sponsorizzati dalla Peter Moores Foundation così come il disco de *La volpe astuta*. Sir Charles Mackerras è direttore ad honoris della Scottish Chamber Orchestra, direttore emeritus della Welsh National Opera, direttore principali della San Francisco Opera e dalla stagione 1998/99 direttore artistico dell'Orchestra of St. Luke's di New York.

Sir Charles Mackerras ha intrapreso estese ricerche nella pratica esecutiva della musica del Settecento e Ottocento esercitando profonda influenza nell'interpretazione dei nostri giorni. La sua vasta discografia include un assai premiato ciclo di opere di Janáček con l'Orchestra Filarmonica di Vienna, *Gloriana* di Britten (che ha vinto un premio *Gramophone*) e con la English National Opera il *Julius Caesar* di Handel e *Mary Stuart* di Donizetti (per la Chandos/Peter Moores Foundation).

Sir Charles Mackerras ha ricevuto l'onorificenza di Commendatore (CBE) nel 1974 e il titolo di Sir per la sua attività di musicista nel 1979. Gli è stata inoltre conferita la medaglia al merito della Repubblica Ceca ed è stato nominato Companion of the Order in Australia.



Andrew March

COMPACT DISC ONE

1 Prelude

Act I

Drawing room in the house of Violetta.

(Violetta is conversing with her Doctor and several friends, whilst others receive the arriving guests, amongst whom are the Marquis, with Flora on his arm, and the Baron.)

Chorus *(tenors)*

- 2** What a time to arrive at a party!
What delayed you?

Chorus *(basses)*

We looked in on Flora.

We played cards; no one noticed the time.

Violetta *(going forward to receive them)*

Flora, and you, friends, the night lies before us,
laughing, joking, now you make it shine...
And a glass of champagne is still better...

Flora and Marquis

Dare you really enjoy it?

Violetta

I want to!

All these parties and wine are a drug that I need:
I try to forget what I feel.

All

Yes, enjoy life and then you'll be well.

Gaston *(entering with Alfredo)*

Here's Alfredo Germont, dearest lady;

another who honours you greatly.
There is no friend I value so highly.

Violetta *(giving her hand to Alfredo, who kisses it)*

Then I'm sure I will value him as you do.

Marquis

Dear Alfredo!

Alfredo *(they shake hands)*

Marchese...

Gaston *(to Alfredo)*

I told you;
entertainment united with friendship.

Violetta *(to the servants)*

Are you ready?

(a servant makes an affirmative sign)

Come, sit down to supper:

all hearts are opened when friends are at ease.

All

With a glass of champagne we forget our troubles.
Here we can do as we please.

(All seat themselves; Violetta between Alfredo and Gaston, and Flora between the Baron and the Marquis.)

All hearts are opened when friends are at ease.

Gaston *(in an undertone to Violetta)*

Young Alfredo adores you.

Violetta

You're joking?

Gaston

Ev'ry day you were ill

he was so upset
he came here for news of ...

Violetta

You're teasing.

Why should he care for me?

Gaston

I'm not lying.

Violetta *(to Alfredo)*

Did you really? Tell me why?

I don't follow.

Alfredo *(sighing)*

Yes, it is true.

Violetta *(to Alfredo)*

I am grateful, believe me.

(to the Baron)

You, dear Baron, are far less attentive.

Baron

After only a few months' acquaintance?

Violetta

But Alfredo has only just met me. *(She laughs.)*

Flora *(in an undertone to the Baron)*

You would surely do better not to argue.

Baron *(in an undertone to Flora)*

He's an insolent puppy.

Flora

But why?

I'm quite sure he's a charming young man.

Gaston *(to Alfredo)*

Are you going to be silent all evening?

Marquis *(to Violetta)*

Only our hostess can force him to answer.

Violetta *(fills Alfredo's glass)*

I'll be Hebe and charm you.

Alfredo *(with gallantry)*

Ah, I pray that, like her, you're immortal.

All

Violetta! Violetta! We all drink to you!

Gaston

To continue the mood of the party,
what we need is a toast from the Baron.
(The Baron makes a gesture of refusal. To Alfredo.)
Or from you!

All

You're right, we drink to you!

Alfredo

Will the muse inspire me?

Gaston

Oh, he's just like a poet!

Alfredo *(to Violetta)*

Would it please you?

Violetta

Yes.

Alfredo *(rises)*

Yes? I'm inspired!

Marquis

Hear the singer.

All

We attend to his song!

Alfredo

- [3] Be happy, be happy and raise your glass with me,
here in the palace of beauty;
Each hour that passes we feel a duty
to drink and to taste every joy.
We yield to every ecstasy,
for love alone can fire us.
(pointing to Violetta)
Let those bright eyes inspire us.
She rules and we obey.
Be happy, be happy and raise your glass with me.
Kisses and love never cloy.

All

Ah, be happy and raise your glass.
Ah, for kisses and love never cloy.

Violetta *(rises)*

With you, yes, with you, my dear friends,
I laughingly
burn out my life in a fever.
Pleasure on pleasure is all I crave for.
No time for tears or sighs.
Enjoy the moment recklessly.
For love has no true power:
it blossoms like a flower,
then withers, fades and dies.
Enjoy, yes, enjoy life in feverish ecstasy.
What else can we prize?

All

Ah, we taste all the joys, all the joys of night
in our drinking and singing and laughter.
The dawn, yes, the dawn of the morning after
will find us in heaven here.

Violetta *(to Alfredo)*

The point of life is excitement...

Alfredo *(to Violetta)*

For one who has no true lover.

Violetta *(to Alfredo)*

Too late for me to discover.

Alfredo *(to Violetta)*

My destiny is clear...

All

Ah, we taste all the joys, all the joys of night
in our drinking and singing and laughter.
The dawn, yes, the dawn of the morning after
will find us in heaven here.
(Music is heard in the further room.)

- [4] What's that?

Violetta

There is the music, shall we have dancing?

All

What a good idea! We will enjoy a dance.

Violetta

Let us go in then...
*(They approach the centre door when Violetta
suddenly falters.)*
Oh God...

All

What is it?

Violetta

Nothing, nothing.

All

What is the matter?

Violetta *(She attempts to walk a few steps.)*

I'm better...

(She is forced to stop and take a seat.)

Oh Heavens!

All

Violetta!

Alfredo

Let me help you.

All

What is the matter?

Violetta

I thought that I was fainting!
(points to the other room)
Please start the dancing...
I will be there very soon.

All

Rest for a moment.

(All go into the further room except Alfredo.)

Violetta *(looking at herself in a mirror)*

I look so pale!
(turns, and sees Alfredo)
It's you!

Alfredo

I came to see if you were alright.

Violetta

I'm better.

Alfredo

You must be careful, you are so fragile.
Take care. I beg you.
This sort of life will kill you.

Violetta

I know no other.

Alfredo

If you could love me,
how closely I would guard you
and keep you safe from harm.

Violetta

You'd guard me?
I know of no one who would do that.

Alfredo *(ardently)*

Only because you have no lover.

Violetta

Not one?

Alfredo

Only Alfredo.

Violetta

Alfredo?

Now you remind me of your secret passion.

Alfredo

You're laughing!
Your heart is beating?

Violetta

My heart... Yes, beating...
but why, why do you ask me?

Alfredo

It can't be beating...
or you'd never make fun of love.

Violetta

Are you so serious?

Alfredo

I don't deceive you.

Violetta

And so, how long have you loved me?

Alfredo

For just a year now.

- [5] I saw a vision ethereal
glittering there before me
and from that day of glory
I was in love from afar.
Ah, it is love, it is love awakes in us.
Love universal, the love that brings us together.
Mystery rules us, mystery rules for ever.
Cruel and blissful beat of the heart!

Violetta

This is all far too serious...
Friendship is all I offer.
The destiny you proffer
is greater than I aspire to.
I must be frank and tell you now:
I am a simple woman:
so try to forget me
and find another for your love.

Alfredo

I love you!
Mystery rules us, mystery rules for ever:
cruel and blissful beat of the heart!

Violetta

You really must try to forget me
and find another for your love.

Gaston (*at the door*)

- [6] Ha, ha! What are you doing?

Violetta

Just talking nonsense...

Gaston

Just as you please. I'll leave you...
(*goes back*)

Violetta (*to Alfredo*)

And so we are agreed...
Love is forbidden?

Alfredo

I shall obey you. I'll leave you.

Violetta

You're really going?
(*takes a flower from her breast*)
Then take one of these flowers.

Alfredo

But why?

Violetta

You could return it.

Alfredo

When though?

Violetta

When it is nearly faded.

Alfredo

You mean... tomorrow.

Violetta

I mean... tomorrow.

Alfredo (*takes the flower with rapture*)

I've never been so happy!

Violetta

You say you really love me?

Alfredo (*going*)

I love you – how I love you.
I love you with all my heart.

Violetta

How lovely!
You're leaving.

Alfredo (*returns and kisses her hand*)

I'm leaving.

Violetta

Tomorrow.

Alfredo

I am so happy.

Alfredo and Violetta

Tomorrow!

(*The others return; all are beaten with dancing.*)

All

- [7] We present ourselves before you;
what a splendid night of feasting!

Dearest lady we adore you,
but the dawn is in the east.
Paris is a round of pleasure
and the season's just begun;
we must sleep and take our leisure
so that we enjoy the fun.

(*They leave.*)

Violetta

- [8] I wonder! I wonder!
I'll never forget the things he told me!
Perhaps to love sincerely would bring misfortune?
Ah, my spirit is full of doubt and anguish!
No man has ever made me love him.
Oh joy I never knew of,
to be in love and be loved!
Dare I spurn what he offers,
to choose these empty follies
and waste my life?
- [9] Is he the one I dream about?
Hiding my tears in laughter
I have so often pictured him,
everything that I longed for.
Fancy his simple constancy
when I was sick with fever!
I feel a strange new shiver –
can it be I'm in love?
Ah, it is love, it is love awakes in us:
love universal, this love that brings us together!
Mystery rules us, mystery rules for ever:
cruel and blissful beat of the heart!

(*She stands pensively and then rouses herself.*)

- [10] It can't be! It can't be!

These dreams are hopeless nonsense.
Wretched Violetta!
Lonely, entirely friendless,
with no one to protect me
in this crowded desert they call Paris!
What must I do?
What can I hope for?
Enjoy life and drown myself
in every wild excess.

Joy!

- ¹¹ Give me freedom to be happy,
all my life enjoying, enjoying:
let me drink at every party,
let me dance at every ball!
Never weeping and never sighing,
always laughing, always singing,
oh, I'm only just beginning new excitements;
I'll try them all.

Alfredo (*from beneath the window*)
Ah, it is love, it is love that awakes in us.

Violetta
Ah!

Alfredo
Love universal, the love that brings us
together!

Violetta
Alfredo!

Alfredo
Mystery rules us, mystery rules for ever.
Cruel and blissful beat of the heart!

Violetta

It can't be! It can't be! Ah no!
Joy!
Give me freedom to be happy, *etc.*
I'll try them all.

Alfredo
Love is our destiny!
Love universal.

Act Two

Scene 1

*A room on the ground floor of a house in the
country near Paris, three months later.*

Alfredo

- ¹² I'm never happy if she is not beside me.
Three months ago Violetta
for my sake fled from Paris:
she left it all behind,
her riches, her lovers,
and all the brilliant parties
where she had always conquered the heart of
every man
with all her beauty.
And now contented in quiet country pastimes,
she lives only for me.
Here at her side I renew my ambitions,
all my dreams of a true and lasting passion,
and in its tender joys past grief is forgotten.
- ¹³ My life was too impetuous,
thoughtless, entirely selfish.
She taught me how to realise
the sweet and tender love of the heart!

One day she whispered: 'Live with me!
I love you, you are my only love!
That is my only memory,
I live in Heaven above.'
One day she whispered: 'Live with me!
You are my only love! Ah yes!
That's my only memory,
I live as if I were in Heaven above.'
(*Enter Annina, the maid, in travelling clothes.*)

- ¹⁴ Annina, where have you been?

Annina
Up to Paris.

Alfredo
Some special reason?

Annina
Yes, my mistress sent me.

Alfredo
But why?

Annina
To sell her horses and her carriage,
all her furs and jewels.

Alfredo
Are you serious?

Annina
The life you're leading has cost a lot of money...

Alfredo
Why not tell me?

Annina
I promised to keep silent.

Alfredo
Keep silent? What sum is needed?

Annina
Ten thousand louis.

Alfredo
I'll pay it... I'll go to Paris...
And yet your mistress must never know you told
me.

I still have time to put it all in order.
Go! Go!
(*Exit Annina.*)

- ¹⁵ I hate myself! I'm so ashamed!
How could I be so selfish!
But now at last I know the truth,
I'll make amends today!
Be still a while and wait, my heart,
I swear I shall restore your honour,
I give my word to make amends
and wash this shame away.
I hate myself! How shameful!
How could I be so selfish!
I hate myself! How shameful!
I swear I'll wash the shame away,
Forever more, yes forever more!
(*exits*)

(*Enter Violetta and Annina.*)

- Violetta**
¹⁶ Alfredo?

Annina
He has just set out for Paris.

Violetta

To stay for long?

Annina

No, only till this evening...

I said I'd tell you.

Violetta

How curious!

(Joseph, the servant, enters and presents a letter to Violetta.)

Joseph

For you.

Violetta *(She takes it.)*

Thank you. A gentleman is calling here on business. You may admit him.

(Exeunt Annina and Joseph.)

Violetta *(opens the letter)*

Ha, ha! So clever Flora knows our secret: we are asked to a party there this evening! *(throws the letter on a table)*

It's like another world...

(Joseph re-enters.)

Joseph

The gentleman is here, ma'am!

Violetta

It will be my lawyer.

(She signs that Joseph is to admit him. Enter Giorgio Germont.)

Germont

Mademoiselle Valéry?

Violetta

I am, sir.

Germont

I am the father of Alfredo.

Violetta *(surprised, motions him to be seated)*

You?

Germont *(seating himself)*

Yes, of that madman:

how did you bewitch him?

Why choose *my* son to ruin?

Violetta *(rising with resentment)*

Sir, you address a woman, and this is *my* house.

I'm afraid I must leave you, more for your sake than mine.

Germont

How gracious!

Wait, though...

Violetta

Someone has misinformed you.

(returns and seats herself)

Germont

He is planning to give you his fortune.

Violetta

He would never dare to...

I would refuse.

Germont *(looking round)*

You live in style here.

Violetta *(gives him a paper)*

This contract has so far been secret...

but you may see it...

Germont *(reads the contract)*

Heavens! What does this mean?

Are you really selling

all your worldly possessions?

What a pity your past must always shame you!

Violetta *(with ardour)*

All that is over... I love Alfredo

and God has heard my prayer

and granted me his pardon!

Germont

Noble and generous feelings.

Violetta

Ah, how delightful to hear you speak so kindly!

Germont *(rising)*

Now I must ask you to sacrifice those feelings.

Violetta *(rising)*

Ah, no, you must not.

You want to ask for something that would hurt me.

I foresaw it, I knew it...

Ah, I was far too happy.

Germont

Alfredo's father implores you

to have pity

on the fate of both his children.

Violetta

Both your children?

Germont

Yes.

[17] I have a daughter sent from Heav'n, innocent and appealing; Alfredo now disowns us both and scorns all family feeling. She has a lover young and true, they are engaged to marry; now they will have to break the tie that made them both so fond and happy. Ah, do not turn to bitter thorns roses so sweet and fair!

Ah, do not turn to bitter thorns the roses of their love!

Ah, don't deny your sympathy; no, no, you cannot close your heart to me!

Violetta

Ah, I follow!

I ought to spend a short while

away from my Alfredo!

I will suffer, suffer so much... Still...

Germont

That's not what I'm asking.

Violetta

Heavens! There's something further?

I've tried to help you!

Germont

Try still harder!

Violetta

You're asking me to give him up forever?

Germont

It must be.

Violetta

Ah no! Ah no!
Never!

- [18] Do you realise I adore him,
and I live only for him?
There is no one, friend or family,
none to guide or to help me;
and Alfredo has given me
his word to live for me.
Do you realise I am dying?
Yes, I swear it, I am dying.
And too little time is remaining
for me now to leave Alfredo!
Such a torment would be horrible
and I could never bear it.
I would prefer to die.

Germont

The sacrifice is bitter,
but hear me out, I beg of you.
You are so lovely and still so young...
Some other...

Violetta

Ah no, don't say it...
You mean well...
but I cannot change:
I never could love another.

Germont

You think so,
yet you know how fickle men can be.

Violetta

Oh heaven!

Germont

- [19] A day will come when making love
no longer will excite you:
an empty stale monotony,
what else is left? Consider!
For you no future happiness
of sweet and true affection,
for this affair will never,
never gain the grace of Heaven.

Violetta

I know it! I know it!

Germont

Ah, do not now deceive yourself
by trusting in delusion.

Violetta

I cannot! It's true!

Germont

Say you will be, for my sake,
an angel of consolation...
Violetta won't you pity me?
We still may be in time...
The voice of God inspires me,
His voice inspires a father's words.

Violetta (*in an agony of grief*)

So I have sinned and my life is committed:

no hope of pardon for me is permitted.

God may be merciful, He may forgive me;
man has no pity, he has no heart.

Germont

Be my consoling angel,
you must console us all.

Violetta

Man is implacable,
he has no heart.

Germont

Have pity on me, have pity on me.
I beg you console us, console us all.

Violetta

He has no pity,
he has no heart.
(*weeping*)

- [20] Ah! Comfort your daughter so pure and lovely,
tell how a victim once suffered so lonely:
she who had a single ray,
just one single ray of happiness,
she shut it out of her life
and she died, yes she died.

Germont

Anguish, anguish breaks your heart, my poor
child.
Anguish, anguish breaks your heart, Violetta!
I am demanding so great a sacrifice,
asking you now to give up Alfredo.
I feel your suffering deep in my spirit.
You must have courage and your noble nature
will win in the end.

Violetta

Comfort your daughter, *etc.*
One single ray
shut it out and then she died.

Germont

What I ask is bitter,
yes, the sacrifice I am asking will grieve you.
I feel your suffering, *etc.*
Anguish, anguish *etc.*
Have courage,
you must be brave, oh yes!

Violetta

- [21] Then command me!

Germont

Tell him you don't love him.

Violetta

He won't believe me.

Germont

Then leave him.

Violetta

He will follow.

Germont

Well then...

Violetta

Embrace me as your daughter...
Then I'll have strength again.
(*They embrace.*)
I'll give you back Alfredo,
but he'll be broken-hearted.
He'll need your comfort...

Be ready to console him.
(*pointing to the garden*)

Germont
What to tell him?

Violetta
I fear that if I told you,
you might oppose it.

Germont
How unselfish!
How can I repay your noble kindness?
Your noble kindness!

Violetta (*turning to him*)
[22] I'll die! But you must promise me
you won't ever let him curse me;
you tell him of my sacrifice
and how you had to force me!

Germont
No, generous girl, you shall not die:
a sweet path lies before you.
Your tears will be rewarded
and the angels will smile upon you!

Violetta
Now promise me that one day
you'll tell him all that happened...
I will be true until the end.
I'm his until I die.

Germont
Your tears will be rewarded,
Your tears will be rewarded
and you'll be proud, you noble girl

of all that you have done.
Ah yes, yes!

Violetta
Now promise me *etc.*

Germont
All you have suffered
he will know.
I know that you, you noble girl
will have no cause to sigh.
Your tears will be rewarded *etc.*
Violetta, you are noble *etc.*

Violetta
There's someone here. Please leave me.

Germont
With all my heart I thank you...

Violetta
Ah, leave me.
This may be our last meeting.
(*They embrace.*)

Violetta and Germont
May you be happy.

Violetta
Farewell.

Germont
Farewell.

Violetta
Now promise me that one day...

Germont
Yes!

Violetta
...you'll tell him all that happened.

Germont
Yes!

Violetta
I shall be true until the end...
Farewell!

Germont
Farewell!

Germont and Violetta
May you be happy. God bless you!
(*Exit Germont by the garden door.*)

Violetta
[23] God give me strength to bear it!
(*Violetta breaks down and sobs. She rings the bell,
then seats herself and writes.*)

Annina
You rang for me, ma'am?

Violetta
Yes, go straight to Paris with this letter.

Annina (*sees the address, surprised*)
Oh!

Violetta
Say nothing... Go this moment.
(*Exit Annina.*)
Now I must tell Alfredo...
(*seats herself again to write, distraught*)

Violetta
What shall I say?
Ah, who will give me courage?
(*Sobbing, Violetta writes the letter. Enter
Alfredo.*)

Alfredo
[24] What's that?

Violetta (*hiding her letter*)
Nothing.

Alfredo
You're writing?

Violetta (*with embarrassment*)
Yes... No...

Alfredo
You're pale and trembling!
You wrote a letter?

Violetta
To you.

Alfredo
Show me the letter.

Violetta
Read it later.

Alfredo
Ah, forgive me...
I'm feeling rather nervous.

Violetta (*rising*)
Ah, why?

Alfredo
Well, it's my father...

Violetta

Have you seen him?

Alfredo

Ah no,
he called and left an angry letter.
I still expect him.
When he sees you he'll love you.

Violetta (*with agitation*)

Oh no, he mustn't see me.
It's best if you're alone here...
Try to calm him...
Then I will beg him to be kind.
(*scarcely suppressing her tears*)
He will not try to make us part...
We will be happy
because you love me.
Alfredo, you love me...
won't you say it?

Alfredo

I love you! Why this crying?

Violetta (*in tears*)

I had to cry. I couldn't help it.
But now I'm calmer...
(*making an effort*)
Alfredo, see I'm smiling...
Alfredo, see I'm calmer.
I am smiling.
I'll be there, just outside,
yes, I'll be near you, in the garden, always near.
Love me, Alfredo,
love me as much as I love you...

Alfredo, always love me...

And now farewell!

(*exits hastily*)

Alfredo

[25] Ah, she is mine forever,
and how I love her!
(*He seats himself and opens a book.*)
It's very unlike my father
to visit me at this hour.

Joseph (*enters hastily*)

The young lady has left us...
in a coach that was waiting;
I saw them go at a gallop off to Paris...
Annina too: she set out before the mistress.

Alfredo

I know, don't worry.

Joseph (*to himself*)

What can it mean?
(*exits*)

Alfredo

Perhaps she's gone to hasten
the sale of all her property...
Annina will get there first.
There's someone in the garden.
Who's there?

A Passer-by (*at the door*)

You're Monsieur Germont?

Alfredo

I am, yes.

A Passer-by

Here's a note from a lady for you...
I said I'd bring it.
Her coach drove off for Paris.

(*He gives a letter to Alfredo and exits.*)

Alfredo

From Violetta! But why am I so nervous?
Does she want me to join her in Paris?
I'm trembling! Oh God! Have courage!
(*opens the letter*)
'Alfredo, as soon as you have read this letter...'
Ah!
(*turns and finds himself in the arms of his father*)
Father, father!

Germont

Alfredo!...
I know you're suffering...
Come, no more sorrow...
Return and cheer your father,
beloved Alfredo!
(*Alfredo seats himself by the table in despair, his face buried in his hands.*)

[26] In Provence, your native land,
we still long for your return.
Who has stolen you away
from our blue and sunny skies?
Oh how happy you once were –
not a trace of grief nor pain.
For you know that only there
peace will shine on you again...
God hear my prayer!

How we missed you, dearest boy,
you will never, never know;
how we hung our heads in shame
when you left without a word!
But I've found you once again
and I will not let you go,
if your honour can still claim
to instruct you what to do.
Now I've seen you once again
I will never let you go.
God led me here.
Yes, I found you once again,
God led me here.
(*He embraces Alfredo.*)

[27] Won't you answer your father, Alfredo?

Alfredo

I'm tormented by jealousy and fury.
(*repulsing his father*)
Father, leave me!

Germont

Alfredo!

Alfredo (*resolved, to himself*)
I'll have vengeance!

Germont

We'll be starting,
Alfredo... now hurry.

Alfredo

It was Douphe!

Germont

So shall we go?

Alfredo

No!

Germont

All my love and my pleading in vain?

[28] No, no, I cannot preach at you;
we'll bury what has happened;
my love for you has guided me
and I can understand.

Come home and greet your family,
embrace your loving sister;
to know that you have missed her
will fill her heart with joy.

A father and a sister implore
your consolation, dearest boy.

No, no, I cannot preach at you, *etc.*

Alfredo, Alfredo

We implore you, dearest boy

Come home, Alfredo, come home.

A father and loving sister:

we both implore you, dearest boy.

Alfredo (*rousing himself, sees Flora's invitation still
on the table, reads it again, and exclaims*)

Ah! She's gone to Flora's!

I will go and I will have revenge.

(*rushes off distractedly, followed by Germont*)

Germont

Alfredo!

COMPACT DISC TWO

Scene 2

*A richly furnished apartment in Flora's mansion,
with gaming tables.*

(*Flora, the Marquis, the Doctor, and other guests
enter in conversation.*)

Flora

[1] The surprise is a band of dancing gipsies,
with Gaston as their leader.
Will Violetta and Alfredo join us tonight?

Marquis

Surely you've heard the story?

Violetta will come here with the Baron.

Doctor and Flora

Not really!

Marquis

She has left Alfredo for ever.

Doctor

I saw them yesterday,
they both seemed so happy.

(*A noise is heard.*)

Flora

But listen, you hear them?

(*The gipsies advance.*)

All

All our friends are ready!

Gipsies

[2] We're gipsy fortune tellers:

permit us to salute you.

We see into the future,

we read it in your hand.

When we consult the stars they tell us what we

want to know,

no mystery too dark for us to shed a ray of light!

We make the future bright

and we make you understand.

Watch closely!

(*scanning Flora's hand*)

Fairest lady,

you must beware of rivals.

(*reading the hand of the Marquis*)

This nobleman betrays you,

he has a roving eye.

Flora (*to the Marquis*)

So you have been unfaithful?

I'll pay you out, I promise.

Marquis (*to Flora*)

You don't believe this rubbish?

It's all a pack of lies.

Flora

A snake will shed his colour,

but not his evil nature,

so you, my dear, be grateful

I don't scratch out your eyes.

All

Enough, let's draw a cover

on jealousy and sorrow.

What matters is tomorrow,

the past is dead and gone.

(*The Marquis presses Flora's hand. Gaston and
others, disguised as Spanish matadors and picadors,
rush in.*)

Gaston with Matadors

[3] We are heroes, in Spain they adore us;
in the bullring we all are victorious.
We are here to enjoy life in Paris,
we are ready for wine and for feasting.
Shall we tell you a wonderful story,
full of passionate love and of glory?

The Others

Bravo, bravo, come tell us a story.

Full of passion and glory.

Gaston with Matadors

Listen closely.

Here's Piquillo, strong and handsome,
Biscay's leading matador.

By his skill he won a King's ransom,

in the ring so brave and sure.

Then he lost his heart completely;

poor young hero, brought to his knees,

by a proud capricious beauty:

she was fair but hard to please.

'Vanquish five young bulls for me',

she said, 'and all within a day:

if you win, then come to see me

and I'll let you have your way!'

He accepted her commission;

next day he was in the ring.

He achieved a life's ambition:

five went down, Piquillo was King.

The Others

Bravo, bravo, young Piquillo,
what a glorious prize to gain!
Did your lady come to hail you
as the bravest hero in Spain?

Gaston with Matadors

Cheered by all the smiling faces,
young Piquillo claimed his bride;
he was met with sweet embraces,
he subdued her maiden pride.

The Others

That's why matadors are famous,
they can win a woman's heart.

Gaston with Matadors

Here in Paris you will tame us,
teach us laughter for a start.
*(The gipsies strike their tambourines and the
picadors their pikes on the ground.)*
Yes, yes, we will teach you laughter
and the fickle smiles of chance;
now the cards are dealt, but, after,
we'll have half the night to dance.

*(The men take off their masks; some disperse, and
some begin to play at the gaming tables. Enter
Alfredo.)*

All

⁴ Alfredo! You!

Alfredo

Yes. I'm back, friends.

Flora

Violetta?

Alfredo

I don't know.

All

That's how to take it! Splendid!
You'll join us in a game?

*(Gaston goes to the table. Alfredo and others stake
money. Enter Violetta leaning on the Baron's arm.
Flora goes forward to meet them.)*

Flora

I wasn't sure you'd join us...

Violetta

After your charming letter?

Flora

Baron, you're very welcome.
I am so pleased to see you.

Baron *(in an undertone to Violetta)*

Germont is here!
Do you see him?

Violetta *(aside)*

God, what will happen?
(in an undertone to the Baron)
I see him!

Baron

Ignore him absolutely!
You must not even greet him!
You say nothing.
Do you hear me?

Violetta *(aside)*

It was madness to come here!
Dear God I beg, do not forsake me now.

*(Flora invites Violetta to sit on the sofa beside her,
the Doctor stands beside them; the Marquis
converses apart with the Baron; Gaston cuts;
Alfredo and others stake; some saunter about.)*

Flora

Sit here beside me, talk to me,
why have you left Alfredo?

(Flora and Violetta converse aside.)

Alfredo

A seven!

Gaston

You're still the winner.

Alfredo *(stakes and wins)*

The poor unlucky lover
has all the luck at gambling.

All

You have had all the winners.

Alfredo

Yes, I will win this evening,
I'll beat whoever offers;
then I'll enjoy my gold
in the country, where I'm happy.

Flora

Alone?

Alfredo

Ah, no! I'll be with a woman who adored me,
then threw me over.

Violetta

Alfredo!

Gaston *(to Alfredo, pointing to Violetta)*
Be kind to her.

Baron *(to Alfredo, with ill-suppressed anger)*
Germont!

Violetta *(in an undertone to the Baron)*
I'll leave if you make trouble.

Alfredo *(carelessly)*

I think I heard the baron?

Baron *(ironically)*

Since you have been so lucky,
I'd like to take you on, sir.

Alfredo *(ironically)*

Yes! I accept your challenge.

Violetta *(aside)*

I long for the earth to open!
Dear God, I beg, do not forsake me now!

Baron *(stakes)*

I bet one hundred louis.

Alfredo *(stakes)*

I bet a hundred also.

Gaston

An ace... a knave...
(to Alfredo)
the winner!

Baron

Two hundred?

Alfredo

The stake is doubled.

Gaston (*cutting*)

A four... a seven.

All

Alfredo!

Alfredo

My run of luck continues!

All

Luck is like that! This evening
it smiles upon Alfredo!

Flora

Country expenses settled:
the Baron will be paying.

Alfredo (*to the Baron*)

You'll play again?

Servant (*enters*)

The supper's ready.

Flora

I'm hungry!

Guests

We'll go then!

Flora

To supper.

Guests

Let's go.

Violetta

I long for the earth to open.

Dear God, I beg, do not forsake me now!

(*They go out, leaving Alfredo and the Baron behind.*)

Alfredo (*to the Baron*)

Shall we continue playing?

Baron

We must go in to supper:
I'd like another round with you.

Alfredo

You choose the game, I'm ready.

Baron

We'll join the others... Later!

Alfredo

I'm always at your service.

(*They go out.*)

Lead on!

Baron (*off-stage*)

Monsieur.

(*Violetta re-enters in great agitation; afterwards Alfredo.*)

Violetta

⁵ I have asked him here to meet me.

Will he follow? And will he listen?

He will come... And yet there's nothing

I can say to quell his loathing!

Alfredo

I must ask why you called me!

Violetta

You must go away this moment...

If you stay here you're in danger.

Alfredo

Ah, I follow! You are trembling...

So you think that I'm a coward?

Violetta

Ah no, no, never!

Alfredo

But you are frightened?

Violetta

I am frightened that the Baron...

Alfredo

He and I will fight a duel.
We will fight and if I kill him,
with one single blow I'd rob you
of your lover and protector...
You're afraid that you'll be ruined!

Violetta

What if you should be the victim?
That's the thing I am afraid of
and for me it would be fatal.

Alfredo

If he kills me – does it matter?

Violetta

Leave, I beg you... no more delaying!

Alfredo

I will go if you will give your word
to come with me this moment
and to stay with me forever.

Violetta

I cannot do it.

Alfredo

What – you cannot?

Violetta

You must forget me!
Poor Alfredo, if you stay here
my dishonour will torment you...
I have sworn an oath
to give you up forever!

Alfredo

To whom? Tell me, who could force you?

Violetta

One who had the right to ask me.

Alfredo

Old Douphol?

Violetta

Yes.

Alfredo

So you love him?

Violetta

Yes, I... love him.

Alfredo (*furiously rushing to the door*)

Come here, come here.

(*All re-enter hurriedly.*)

All

Why this shouting?
What has happened?

Alfredo (*pointing to Violetta, who is overwhelmed with grief*)

Do you recognize this woman?

All

Who?... Violetta?

Alfredo

Have you heard her noble story?

Violetta

Be silent.

All

No.

Alfredo

- [6] All that she had she spent on me,
only because she loved me...
A selfish coward, kept by her,
I grasped at all she gave me.
Now I can pay the debt I owe,
now I can clear my honour...
I call you here to witness
that I have paid my debt.

*(With furious disdain Alfredo throws his winnings
at the feet of Violetta, who faints in the arms of
Flora. Giorgio Germont enters at the same
moment.)*

All

You have destroyed her, our senses are reeling,
are you devoid of all pity and feeling?
He who is brutally rude to a woman
must take society's curse evermore.
Leave us, leave us for evermore!

Germont *(dignified, but angry)*

- [7] Disgraceful conduct! How I despise you!

You shout in anger, you shame a woman.
My son, Alfredo is lost forever.
My only son, Alfredo, is lost forever more.
Where is Alfredo, where shall I find him?
I've lost Alfredo, my son, forever more.

Alfredo *(aside)*

Oh God forgive me! I'm like a madman!
In my jealous frenzy I shame a woman!
My heart is breaking, I've lost my reason,
all hope of pardon is over now.
I thought of leaving but when I tried it
my anger spurred me, I couldn't hide it!
I poured my heart out with all its venom.
All hope of pardon is over now.

Baron *(in an undertone to Alfredo)*

You dare insult a woman,
your odious cruelty fills us with loathing.
But I shall punish this dreadful outrage;
I want to show you
that I can humble
your cursed pride.

The Others

Oh poor Violetta, come, dry your eyes.
We suffer with you and sympathize.
Ah, how you suffer!
Try to forget it!
Dearest Violetta,
we are your friends.

Violetta *(returned to consciousness, with a faint
voice, but impassioned manner)*

- [8] Alfredo, Alfredo, you hate and scorn me,

you do not realise the bitter story...

I cannot tell you how much I love you.

You may despise me, but I gave my word.

The time is coming when you'll discover
how I was truly your faithful lover,
and then may God in his wisdom help you,
show you mercy, may he save you from
remorse!

Ah, my love for you will never die.

Germont

I know she loves him!
Her heart is faithful.
I must be cruel!
I must be silent,
no one must know.

Baron

I want to show you *etc.*

The Others

Oh poor Violetta, come, dry your tears, *etc.*

Alfredo

Oh God forgive me! *etc.*

*(Germont leads Alfredo off; the Baron follows. Flora
and the Doctor help Violetta; the rest disperse.)*

- [9] **Prelude**

Act III

Violetta's bedroom, a few months later.

*(Violetta is asleep in bed. Annina is seated by the
fireplace, also asleep.)*

Violetta *(waking)*

- [10] Annina?

Annina *(rousing herself)*

Did you call me?

Violetta

Poor creature, were you sleeping?

Annina

Yes, please forgive me.

Violetta

May I have some water.
(She coughs. Annina obeys.)
The window... it must be morning?

Annina

Nearly seven.

Violetta

Let me have the curtains open.

*(Annina opens the window and looks out on the
street.)*

Annina

Doctor Grenvil is here.

Violetta

Ah, he's so loyal!
I must get up... please help me!

*(She tries to rise, but fails; then supported by
Annina goes slowly to the sofa. The Doctor enters in
time to help her sit down.)*

You're very kind –
thinking of me so early!

Doctor (*feeling her pulse*)
Well, are you feeling better?

Violetta
I feel exhausted,
but my mind is calmer.
A priest came here last evening
and brought me comfort.
Ah, religion is the only
balm to those who suffer.

Doctor
Your night was peaceful?

Violetta
Thank you, I slept calmly.

Doctor
Why, that is splendid...
That's a certain sign that you're getting better.

Violetta
Ah, doctors are forgiven
for lying out of kindness!

Doctor (*presses her hand*)
Goodbye now, till this evening!

Violetta
You won't forget me?
(*He takes his leave of her; Annina draws him aside.*)

Annina
Is she really better?

Doctor
Her pulse is very feeble.

I fear she's dying.
(*exits*)

Annina
Now come, take heart.

Violetta
Is not today a feast day?

Annina
Carnival Day has started... they're all rejoicing.

Violetta
Ah, but behind the laughter, God looks
down on many who weep and suffer.
How much money is left, Annina?

Annina (*opens and counts*)
Just twenty louis.

Violetta
Go and give ten to the poor folk who need it.

Annina
That leaves you hardly any...

Violetta
Oh, I've enough to last me...
Go and see if a letter's come.

Annina
But you!

Violetta
I'll be alright, but hurry back, Annina.
(*Exit Annina. Violetta draws a letter from her bosom and reads.*)

[11] 'You have kept your promise...

the duel took place,
the Baron was wounded,
but he is recovering...
Alfredo has gone abroad;
I have written to tell him of the sacrifice you
made.
He is coming back to beg your forgiveness.
I shall come too...
take care of yourself.
You deserve a better future.
Georges Germont.'
(*in a sepulchral voice*)
Too late...
(*rises*)
I've waited and waited... they will never come
now!
(*looking at herself in the mirror*)
How altered they will find me!
Still the doctor seemed to think I would
recover!
Ah, I am dying!
With this disease it's hopeless!
[12] Forever I must leave thee, thou lone world of
sorrow.
The rose of my young days have faded for
ever.
I've lost my Alfredo, I've lost my only treasure.
The one who sustained me has left me for
ever.
All comfort is gone.
Ah! Smile on the poor creature
whose life has lost its savour.
Dear God, I now implore thee

to grant me this favour.
Ah, now all my life is done!

Chorus of Revellers (*outside*)
[13] Hail to the carnival's
four-footed master!
Round him the vine leaves
and bright flowers cluster!
No need to fear his horns,
he wouldn't eat you,
so play your pipes and drums!
Ox we all greet you.
So, citizens of Paris
step aside and own him master,
the great fat Ox is master,
yes the great fat Ox is master.
Asia and Africa
bow down and serve him:
everywhere butchers
are vying to carve him.
Maskers, apprentices
cheer him with singing,
every one pay his due
till the streets are ringing.
So, citizens of Paris,
step aside and own him master,
the great fat Ox is master,
yes, the great fat Ox is master.
Hail to the carnival, etc.

Annina (*re-enters in haste*)

[14] Dear Madam –

Violetta
What has happened?

Annina

Now tell me... this morning,
are you feeling stronger?

Violetta

Yes, but why?

Annina

And you won't get too excited?

Violetta

No, why do you ask me?

Annina

Only to prepare you
for a joy you'd ceased to hope for...

Violetta

Ceased to hope for? You mean it?

Annina

God didn't fail us...

Violetta

Alfredo! You mean you've seen him?
He's here! He's here! Oh hurry!
(Alfredo appears.)
Alfredo!
(They embrace.)

Oh my Alfredo, my beloved,
oh Alfredo, oh my joy!

Alfredo

Oh, my Violetta my beloved,
oh Violetta, oh my joy!
My father told me that dreadful meeting...

Violetta

But you are back now, you're here beside me.

Alfredo

I'm so in love with you my heart is beating,
and life is misery when you're not with me.

Violetta

If I am living and you are with me,
no grief in all the world can kill me now.

Alfredo

Forget your sorrow, my own beloved,
can you forgive my broken vow?

Violetta

Can I forgive you? I too am guilty,
it was for love I made my choice.

Alfredo and Violetta

Ah, neither man nor devil now
will dare divide us forever more.

Alfredo

^[15] Come, bid farewell to Paris forever,
we will be happy living together.
Your grief will vanish now I'm beside you,
new life will blossom, you will be well.
Your light and spirit glow here inside me:
trust in the future, all will be well.

Violetta

I'll bid farewell to Paris forever,
we will be happy living together.

Alfredo

Yes.

Violetta

My grief will vanish now you're beside me,
new life will blossom, I shall be well.
Your light and spirit glow here inside me.
Trust in the future, all will be well.

Alfredo

All will be well.
Come, bid farewell to Paris forever.
Yes, farewell for ever.
We shall be happy living together,
Yes, we will be happy.
Your/All grief will vanish now I'm beside you,
New life will blossom; you will be well! *etc.*
My darling, all is well.

Violetta

All grief will vanish now you're beside me,
New life will blossom; I shall be well! *etc.*
My darling, all is well.

Violetta

^[16] Ah, no more Alfredo, let's go to church now,
give thanks to heaven that we're together.
(faltering)

Alfredo

You're pale and trembling!

Violetta

No, no, it's nothing;
I'm so excited... I've been so wretched,
but now you're with me... give me a
moment.

(Violetta sinks exhausted on a couch.)

Alfredo *(with horror, raising her)*

What is it, Violetta?

Violetta

A touch of fainting after my illness...
Now I feel stronger...
See I am smiling.

Alfredo

I cannot bear it!

Violetta

It's nothing!
Annina, help me to dress now.

Alfredo

Violetta... have patience...

Violetta *(rising)*

No! No! I must go!
(Annina gives her a garment, she begins to put it on, but faintness prevents her; she lets it fall and exclaims despairingly.)
Oh, God! I cannot!
(falls back on the seat, coughing)

Alfredo

Dearest Violetta!
(to Annina)
Go find the doctor.

Violetta *(to Annina)*

Yes, fetch him, tell him Alfredo
has not forgotten and that he loves me.
Tell him I need to be well,
I want to live again, yes, live.

(Exit Annina.)

Violetta (*to Alfredo*)

- [17] But if my loved one cannot revive me,
no power on earth can prevent my dying.
(*rising impetuously*)
Ah! Oh God, to die when I'm so young
and after so much sorrow!
And now that I have come so near
the comfort I have longed for!
My hope of future happiness
was nothing but delusion!
My strength and my devotion all
a vain and empty dream.

Alfredo

You are the breath of life to me
Violetta, my beloved.
I cannot help but weep to see
your tears of anguish falling.
Believe me, I have need of you,
your faith and your devotion,
so trust in your emotion,
we still can hope and dream.

Violetta darling, calm yourself!
Your grieving breaks my heart.
Ah, Violetta!

Violetta

Alfredo dearest,
oh cruel destiny reserved for all our love!
Ah, Alfredo!

(*Violetta sinks onto the couch. Enter Annina,
Giorgio Germont and the Doctor.*)

Germont

- [18] Ah, Violetta!

Violetta

You, monsieur!

Alfredo

Oh father!

Violetta

You've not forgotten?

Germont

I have not forgotten...

You see I keep my promise
and accept you as a daughter!

Violetta

Too late! You cannot help me.

(*embracing him*)

But I thank you for coming...

You see, dear Doctor, even though I'm dying
my dearest friends are with me.

Germont (*gazing at Violetta*)

No, it can't be!

(*to himself*)

Oh Heaven! It's true!

Alfredo

Oh father, do you see her?

Germont

My son, do not torment me.
I now reproach myself for what has happened...
Every word that she utters
scorches like lightning...
I should never have spoken!

I understand now
how I destroyed her!

(*Violetta opens a casket and takes a locket out of it.*)

Violetta

Come close beside me,
beloved, my dear Alfredo...

- [19] Listen! I have a picture here
of me when I was younger:
by this you will remember
how much I was in love.

Alfredo

No, do not die, don't talk like that,
for you must live, my darling.
God wouldn't be so cruel.

To bring me here to suffer, God wouldn't be so
cruel.

Germont

Beloved daughter,
your noble sacrifice
has covered you with glory.
Forgive me for the torment I caused your noble
heart.

Violetta

- [20] I see a pure and lovely girl,
fair as a flower in springtime,
offering her devotion...
And you will marry, yes, you will make her your
wife.
Give her this little portrait,
tell her it is a gift

from someone in eternity,
praying for her and you.

Germont

As long as eyes have tears to weep, I'll weep for
you.
You go to join the spirits, for God is calling
you.

Alfredo

You cannot leave me now.
Death cannot take you now away from me.

Doctor and Annina

Alas, as long as eyes have tears to weep,
I weep, I weep for you.

Violetta

Give her this little portrait *etc.*

Germont, Doctor and Annina

You go to join the spirits,
for God is calling you.

Alfredo

You go to join the spirits,
I want to die with you.

Violetta (*re-awakening*)

Alfredo!...

All

Ah!

Violetta

The pain has gone... the pain has gone...

I can breathe now.
My pulse is beating.
I feel it. Look at me.
My strength is coming back!
Ah! Why yes, ah, I feel my life returning...
What joy!

(Violetta falls back on the sofa.)

All
Violetta. No!

Alfredo
Violetta!

Annina and Germont
Oh God, receive her soul.

Doctor *(after feeling her pulse)*
It's over!

All
Oh, grant her rest!

English translation by Edmund Tracey, 1973
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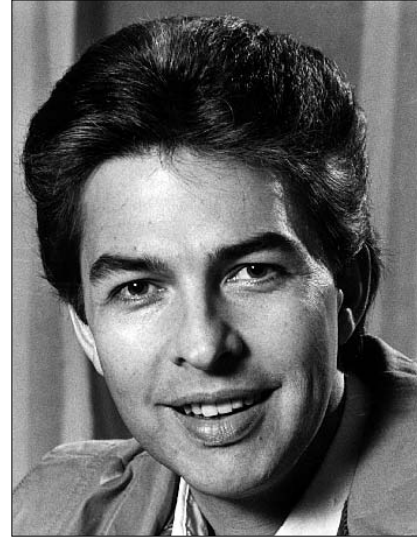
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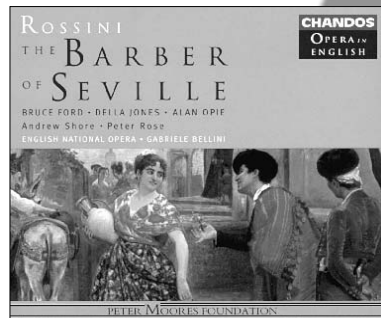


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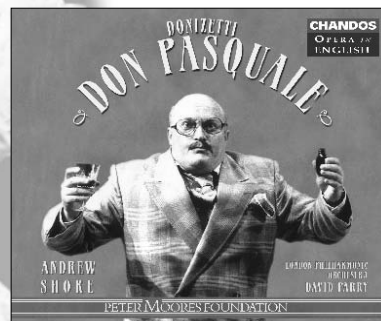
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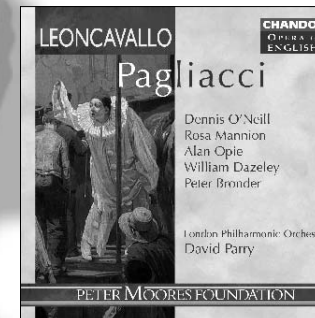


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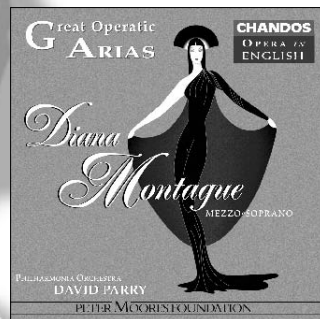


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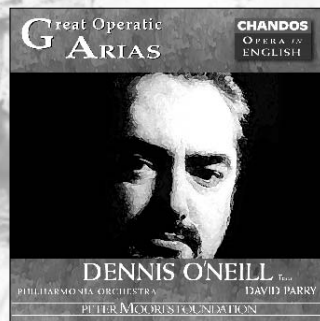
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Giuseppe Verdi (1813–1901)

La traviata (The Fallen Woman)

Libretto by Francesco Maria Piave after Alexandre Dumas's *La dame aux camélias*
English translation by Edmund Tracey

Violetta Valéry Valerie Masterson *soprano*
Alfredo Germont John Brecknock *tenor*
Giorgio Germont Christian du Plessis *baritone*
Flora Bervoix Della Jones *mezzo-soprano*
Baron Douphol John Gibbs *baritone*
Doctor Grenvil Roderick Earle *bass*
Marquis d'Obigny Denis Dowling *baritone*
Viscount Gaston de Letorières Geoffrey Pogson *tenor*
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