La traviata

An opera in three acts, sung in Italian

Music by Giuseppe Verdi (1813–1901) | Libretto by Francesco Maria Piave (1810–76)
Premiere: Venice, Teatro La Fenice, 1853
At Houston Grand Opera, we define opera simply as *storytelling through words and music*.

**WHAT ARE KEY COMPONENTS NEEDED TO MAKE OPERA?**

**A compelling story set to inspiring music**
- The story is called a libretto
- The music is often referred to as a score

**Singers**
- These musicians train for years to learn vocal technique, multiple languages, and musical styles required to sing opera. Opera singers do not sing with a microphone, as their technique allows them to project their voices even when singing quietly.

**Orchestra**
- Singers are accompanied by an orchestra, which is led by a conductor. Sizes of opera orchestras vary based on the time period in which a piece was written and the number and type of instruments needed to achieve the composer’s musical vision.
- The sections of the orchestra include strings, woodwinds, brass, and percussion.

**Production**
- Scenery—the physical setting for a particular show or scene
- Costumes—clothes in a style typical of a particular country or historical period in which the story is set
- Lighting—helps to set the mood, location, time of day, etc.
- Designers—the artists who plan what the set, costumes, lighting, and video or projections will look like and how they will function.

**What Should I Wear to the Opera?**

There is no dress code for attending an opera; however, we encourage students to dress for success.
What would you sacrifice for love?

A party is taking place at the home of Violetta Valéry, a famous and adored courtesan. She is ill but tries to keep this to herself. A friend introduces her to Alfredo Germont, who has admired her from afar. Once they are alone at the party, Alfredo tells Violetta he is in love with her, but she offers him only friendship. However, after he leaves, Violetta can’t get him out of her mind; she dreams of the joyful life she could have if she allowed herself to fall in love.

Violetta decides to give up her extravagant lifestyle and move to the country with Alfredo. One day while Alfredo is away, his father, Giorgio Germont, arrives unannounced. He asks Violetta to give up Alfredo, explaining that their scandalous relationship is threatening his daughter’s chances for a good marriage. Violetta finally agrees to sacrifice her own happiness. She leaves Alfredo and returns to her old life without explanation. A distraught Alfredo seeks revenge for her apparent betrayal.

Violetta’s illness brings her to the point of death alone in her bed. After hearing about her selfless act from his father, Alfredo returns to beg forgiveness. Their dream of a happy life together is not to be, as she dies in his arms.

Arin Arbus returns to HGO to direct this production with lavish costumes and the world-renowned HGO Chorus. Verdi’s famous score, conducted by Associate Music Director Bradley Moore, is sure to provide an unforgettable experience in HGO Resilience Theater at the George R. Brown Convention Center.

Rendering by costume designer Cait O’Connor for original production at Lyric Opera of Chicago, 2013
Mané Galoyan, soprano
Violetta Valéry
Vee-oh-LET-tah va-LAY-ree
A courtesan in 19th-century Paris, Violetta lives her life as a woman on the fringe of society, often adored but never fully accepted.

Yongzhao Yu, tenor
Alfredo Germont
al-FRAY-doe djare-MON
A young man from a well-respected but not significantly wealthy family. Alfredo loves Violetta and wishes to spend his life with her.

Sol Jin, baritone
Giorgio Germont
DJOR-djyo djare-MON
Alfredo’s father. Germont pressures Violetta to leave Alfredo to preserve the family’s reputation.

Richard Trey Smagur, tenor
Gastone de Letorières
Gah-STOHNE duh luh-tohr-ee-YEH
A friend of Alfredo; he introduces Alfredo to Violetta.

Zoie Reams, mezzo-soprano
Flora Bervoix
FLOH-rah behr-VWAH
Violetta’s friend. A courtesan like Violetta, Flora throws lavish parties at her home.

Thomas Glass, baritone
Baron Douphol
doo-FOHLE
A wealthy gentleman who supports Violetta in her lavish lifestyle.

Ben Edquist, baritone
Marchese d’Obigny
mar-KAZE doh-been-YEE
A friend of Violetta and Flora

Anthony Robin Schneider, bass
Doctor Grenvil
grahn-VEEL
Violetta’s physician

Yelena Dyachek, soprano
Annina
ahn-NEE-nah
Violetta’s maid

Creative Team

Bradley Moore
Conductor
Arin Arbus
Director
Riccardo Hernández
Set Designer
Adapted for HGO Resilience Theater by the HGO Technical Department
Cait O’Connor
Costume and Puppet Designer
Marcus Doshi
Lighting Designer
Austin McCormick
Choreographer
Richard Bado
Chorus Master
Giuseppe Verdi was born on October 10, 1813, in Le Roncole, Italy. A pragmatist at heart, Verdi never considered himself an intellectual or even a learned musician, an opinion shared by the conservatory in Milan, which deemed Verdi’s skills insufficient for admission. Nonetheless, after years of private tutoring, Verdi had his first opera, *Oberto*, staged at La Scala in 1839, mostly because the theater’s impresario, Bartolomeo Merelli, was a major champion of the young composer. Merelli’s faith in Verdi was rewarded in 1842 when *Nabucco* triumphed at La Scala. Verdi underwent an artistic transformation in the middle and late 1840s, inspired by his investigations into dramatic literature, which led to his so-called “popular trilogy”— *Rigoletto*, *Il trovatore*, and *La traviata*. Verdi wrote some 28 operas in all, nearly a dozen of which have become repertoire standards. A living legend and political hero in Italy during his later years, Verdi died in 1901; his funeral reportedly drew nearly 30,000 mourners.

**OPERAS BY VERDI IN THREE PERIODS**

**PERIOD ONE: “Gallery years” (anni di galera) 1839–47**

During this time, Verdi wrote at least one opera nearly every year. These works are characterized by an earlier style of opera, influenced by composers like Donizetti, Bellini, and Rossini, masters of the bel canto era. Verdi continued to develop his own unique style through experimentation with harmonies and orchestration.

- 1839 *Oberto*
- 1840 *Un giorno di regno*
- 1842 *Nabucco*
- 1843 *I Lombardi*
- 1844 *Ernani; I due Foscari*
- 1845 *Giovanna d’Arco; Alzira;*
- 1846 *Attila*
- 1847 *Macbeth; I masnadieri; Jérusalem*

**PERIOD TWO: “Middle Period” 1848–55**

This period produced some of Verdi’s best-known works, with marvelously tuneful melodies that are well known today. He began using motifs (music associated with a character or feeling) and his music became just as important to character development as the libretto. He introduced dramatic mezzo-soprano and baritone roles and began dealing with socially sensitive issues in his work.

- 1848 *Il corsaro*
- 1849 *La battaglia di Legnano; Luisa Miller*
- 1850 *Stiffelio*
- 1851 *Rigoletto*
- 1853 *Il trovatore; La traviata*
- 1855 *Les vêpres siciliennes*

**PERIOD THREE: “Later years”**

Verdi’s previous years in Paris began to influence his writing, as many of his later works were composed on a much grander scale, similar in scope to some of the famous French grand operas he witnessed while living there. His final opera, *Falstaff*, is the only comedy he composed, aside from his early (and unsuccessful *Un giorno di regno*) and was considered by many to be one of his most brilliant works.

- 1857 *Simon Boccanegra; Aroldo*
- 1859 *Un ballo in maschera*
- 1862 *La forza del destino*
- 1867 *Don Carlos*
- 1871 *Aida*
- 1887 *Otello*
- 1893 *Falstaff*
SOCIAL STUDIES

La traviata focuses a great deal on society and social classes. Do these social classes still exist today? Discuss the similarities and differences in social classes between Violetta’s time and today.

SCIENCE

Violetta dies of tuberculosis, called “consumption” at the time the opera was written. An extremely common disease of that period, it is much less common today. Research the scientific and medical advances that have almost eradicated tuberculosis.

LITERATURE

Students will read the novel La dame aux camélias (The Lady of the Camellias) by Alexandre Dumas fils. Lead students in a discussion about art imitating life in the context of the author’s relationship with Marie Duplessis. Find other examples in literature with characters based on real people.

WORLD HISTORY

How do world events shape societal norms? How do these events influence human behavior? Compare the social norms and challenges facing Violetta in the mid-19th century versus those of women in 2017. What has changed? What is similar?

The Librettist: Francesco Maria Piave (1810–76)

Although he enjoyed a successful career as stage director and poet for major Italian theaters such as La Fenice in Venice (1844–60), and La Scala in Milan (1861–67), Francesco Maria Piave is best known for his collaborations with Verdi. Piave wrote the librettos for ten of Verdi’s operas, including Ernani (1844), Macbeth (1847), Rigoletto (1851), La traviata (1853), Simon Boccanegra (1857), and La forza del destino (1862). In 1867, Piave suffered a stroke that left him completely paralyzed. Verdi helped support him for the rest of his life and even paid for his funeral.

The Woman, the Book, and the Play

The extravagant lifestyle led by Violetta and those we meet in La traviata seems rather unrealistic by today’s standards. Her story and complex relationships seem to be created solely for the stage; however, this tragic tale came from the real-life story of the courtesan Marie Duplessis (1824–47), who died of consumption (tuberculosis) in Paris. One of her last affairs was with Alexandre Dumas fils, a French playwright and novelist. (Dumas was named for his father, also a well-known author. To distinguish them from each other, the French words fils [son] and père [father] are used.) Dumas fils turned his experience with Duplessis into the novel La dame aux camélias (The Lady of the Camellias) in 1848, and a few years later, he adapted the novel into a play that premiered in 1852 at Paris’s Théâtre du Vaudeville. It was this play that inspired Giuseppe Verdi to compose La traviata, which premiered at Teatro La Fenice in Venice in 1853. Thus, within six short years of Marie Duplessis’s death, her story was turned into a book, a play, and then an opera. It also inspired several ballets and dozens of films, most recently the 2001 Baz Luhrmann film Moulin Rouge!
World Events in 1853
- Franklin Pierce inaugurated as 14th president of the United States.
- India’s first railway opens, linking Bombay to Thana.
- Exploration in the Arctic led to John Le Mesurier McClure’s discovery of the Northwest Passage (c. 1853)
- The Gadsden Purchase, land that is now part of southern Arizona and New Mexico, was acquired by the United States from Mexico, completing the present boundary of the continental United States.
- Russia proposes to Britain that the two countries share what remains of the Ottoman Empire. Attempts to resolve religious matters with the Ottoman Empire fail, leading to the Crimean War. Turkey declares war on Russia; Crimean War continues to 1856.

TECHNOLOGY AND MEDIA
Ask students to create a playlist on YouTube to tell Violetta or Alfredo’s side of the story from La traviata using contemporary songs. Limit the song choices to no more than eight tracks and ask them to present the story on PowerPoint or Prezi.

More Opera For Students
This season, HGO is proud to present two world premiere operas perfect for young audiences.

THE HOUSE WITHOUT A CHRISTMAS TREE
World Premiere
Music by Ricky Ian Gordon • Libretto by Royce Vavrek
Based on The House without a Christmas Tree, a book by Gail Rock

Special Student Matinee
Grades: 4–8
Date: December 5, 2017
Time: 10 a.m.
Price: All tickets $10
Location: HGO Resilience Theater at the George R. Brown Convention Center

Addie Mills is smart and energetic, just like the mother she never knew. Addie has no idea why her father resents the holidays so intensely, refusing even to allow a Christmas tree in the house. But when she brings home a tree she won in a school contest, it paves the way for a miracle of sorts—her father’s broken soul is transformed.

Opéra to Go!
Recommended for Grades 2–8
Experience high-energy opera, presented at your school, library, or community center in a fully staged, 45-minute performance. Performances are sung in English and are designed for today’s young audiences. Teachers receive a study guide in advance.

Monkey & Francine in the City of Tigers
World Premiere
Music by Kamala Sankaram
Libretto by David Johnston

Monkey & Francine in the City of Tigers is a world premiere opera inspired by Indian, Chinese, and West African mythology and the Bollywood style. This hilarious fable demonstrates the power of teamwork as a monkey prince and his brainy sister outwit a hungry crocodile and escape from the City of Tigers.

Dates: January 29–May 18, 2018
Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays only

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Houston Grand Opera (HGO) is one of the largest, most innovative, and most highly acclaimed opera companies in the United States. HGO was the only American finalist for Opera Company of the Year at the 2017 International Opera Awards. In fulfilling its mission to advance the operatic art to serve an ever-evolving audience, HGO has led the field in commissioning new works (63 world premieres to date) and in training and nurturing promising young artists and administrators.

HGOco is Houston Grand Opera’s unique initiative that explores making opera relevant to its changing audiences by connecting the company with our community through collaboration. HGOco creates opportunities for Houstonians of all ages and backgrounds to create, participate in, and observe art.

Houston Grand Opera offers a wide variety of school and community programs. To learn more, visit our website at HGO.org/HGOco Or contact us:
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