

GIUSEPPE VERDI

LA TRAVIATA

CONDUCTOR
Nicola Luisotti

PRODUCTION
Willy Decker

SET AND COSTUME DESIGNER
Wolfgang Gussmann

ASSOCIATE COSTUME DESIGNER
Susana Mendoza

LIGHTING DESIGNER
Hans Toelstede

CHOREOGRAPHER
Athol Farmer

GENERAL MANAGER
Peter Gelb

MUSIC DIRECTOR EMERITUS
James Levine

PRINCIPAL CONDUCTOR
Fabio Luisi

Opera in three acts

Libretto by Francesco Maria Piave,
after the play *La Dame aux Camélias*
by Alexandre Dumas fils

Saturday, April 1, 2017
8:00–10:35 PM

The production of *La Traviata* was
made possible by a generous gift from
Karen and Kevin Kennedy, and
Mr. and Mrs. Paul M. Montrone

The revival of this production is made possible by
a gift from Rolex, and Stanley and Dr. Marion
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Original production of the Salzburger Festspiele;
with thanks to Dutch National Opera, Amsterdam

The Metropolitan Opera

2016-17 SEASON

The 1,007th Metropolitan Opera performance of
GIUSEPPE VERDI'S

LA TRAVIATA

CONDUCTOR
Nicola Luisotti

IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE

DOCTOR GRENVIL
James Courtney

VIOLETTA VALÉRY
Carmen Giannattasio

MARQUIS D'OBIGNY
Jeff Mattsey

FLORA BERVOIX
Maya Lahyani

BARON DOUPHOL
Dwayne Croft*

GASTONE, VICOMTE
DE LETORIÈRES
Aaron Blake

A GENTLEMAN
Jeongcheol Cha

ALFREDO GERMONT
Atalla Ayan*

ANNINA, VIOLETTA'S
COMPANION
Maria Zifchak

GIORGIO GERMONT,
ALFREDO'S FATHER
George Petean

GIUSEPPE, VIOLETTA'S SERVANT
Juhwan Lee

A MESSENGER
Brandon Mayberry

A GUEST
Sam Meredith

Saturday, April 1, 2017, 8:00-10:35PM



Carmen Giannattasio
as Violetta Valéry in
Verdi's *La Traviata*

Chorus Master **Donald Palumbo**
Assistant to the Set Designer **Thomas Bruner**
Musical Preparation **John Keenan, Dan Saunders,
Liora Maurer, and Jonathan C. Kelly**
Assistant Stage Directors **Gina Lapinski and Jonathon Loy**
Stage Band Conductor **Gregory Buchalter**
Italian Coach **Loretta Di Franco**
Prompter **Jonathan C. Kelly**
Met Titles **Sonya Friedman**
Scenery, properties, and electrical props constructed and
painted in **Metropolitan Opera Shops**
Costumes executed by **Das Gewand, Düsseldorf and
Metropolitan Opera Costume Department**
Wigs and Makeup executed by **Metropolitan Opera
Wig and Makeup Department**

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PHOTO: KRISTIAN SCHULLER/MET OPERA

STRAUSS

DER ROSENKAVALIER

APR 13, 17, 21, 24, 28 **MAY** 1, 5, 9, 13mat

The great Renée Fleming delivers her final performances of one of her signature roles, the Marschallin, opposite the extraordinary Elīna Garanča as Octavian. Günther Groissböck plays the outlandish Baron Ochs alongside Erin Morley as Sophie. Sebastian Weigle conducts.

Tickets from \$32 | metopera.org

Synopsis

Act I

Violetta Valéry knows that she will die soon, exhausted by her restless life as a courtesan. At a party, she is introduced to Alfredo Germont, who has been fascinated by her for a long time. Rumor has it that he has been inquiring after her health every day. The guests are amused by this seemingly naïve and emotional attitude, and they ask Alfredo to propose a toast. He celebrates true love, and Violetta responds in praise of free love. She is touched by his candid manner and honesty. Suddenly she feels faint, and the guests withdraw. Only Alfredo remains behind and declares his love. There is no place for such feelings in her life, Violetta replies. But she gives him a camellia, asking him to return when the flower has faded. He realizes this means he will see her again the following day. Alone, Violetta is torn by conflicting emotions—she doesn't want to give up her way of life, but at the same time she feels that Alfredo has awakened her desire to be truly loved.

Intermission (AT APPROXIMATELY 8:30 PM)

Act II

Violetta has chosen a life with Alfredo, and they enjoy their love in the country, far from society. When Alfredo finds out that this is only possible because Violetta has been selling her property, he immediately leaves for Paris to procure money. Violetta has received an invitation to a masked ball, but she no longer cares for such distractions. In Alfredo's absence, his father, Giorgio Germont, pays her a visit. He demands that she separate from his son, as their relationship threatens his daughter's impending marriage. But over the course of their conversation, Germont comes to realize that Violetta is not after his son's money—she is a woman who loves unselfishly. He appeals to Violetta's generosity of spirit and explains that, from a bourgeois point of view, her liaison with Alfredo has no future. Violetta's resistance dwindles and she finally agrees to leave Alfredo forever. Only after her death shall he learn the truth about why she returned to her old life. She accepts the invitation to the ball and writes a goodbye letter to her lover. Alfredo returns, and while he is reading the letter, his father appears to console him. But all the memories of home and a happy family can't prevent the furious and jealous Alfredo from seeking revenge for Violetta's apparent betrayal.

At the masked ball, news has spread of Violetta and Alfredo's separation. There are grotesque dance entertainments, ridiculing the duped lover. Meanwhile, Violetta and her new lover, Baron Douphol, have arrived. Alfredo and the baron battle at the gaming table, and Alfredo wins a fortune: lucky at cards, unlucky in love. When everybody has withdrawn, Alfredo confronts Violetta, who claims to be truly in love with the baron. In his rage, Alfredo calls the guests as witnesses

and declares that he doesn't owe Violetta anything. He throws his winnings at her. Giorgio Germont, who has witnessed the scene, rebukes his son for his behavior. The baron challenges his rival to a duel.

Act III

Violetta is dying. Her last remaining friend, Doctor Grenvil, knows that she has only a few more hours to live. Alfredo's father has written to Violetta, informing her that his son was not injured in the duel. Full of remorse, Germont has told his son about Violetta's sacrifice. Alfredo wants to rejoin her as soon as possible. Violetta is afraid that he might be too late. The sound of rampant celebrations are heard outside while she is in mortal agony. But Alfredo does arrive, and the reunion fills Violetta with a final euphoria. Her energy and exuberant joy of life return. All sorrow and suffering seem to have left her—a final illusion, before death claims her.

Giuseppe Verdi

La Traviata

Premiere: Venice, Teatro la Fenice, 1853

Verdi's *La Traviata* survived a notoriously unsuccessful opening night to become one of the best-loved operas in the repertoire. Following the larger-scale dramas of *Rigoletto* and *Il Trovatore*, its intimate scope and subject matter inspired the composer to create some of his most profound and heartfelt music. The title role of the "fallen woman" has captured the imaginations of audiences and performers alike with its inexhaustible vocal and dramatic possibilities—and challenges. Violetta is considered a pinnacle of the soprano repertoire.

The Creators

In a remarkable career spanning six decades in the theater, Giuseppe Verdi (1813–1901) composed 28 operas, at least half of which are at the core of today's repertoire. His role in Italy's cultural and political development has made him an icon in his native country. Francesco Maria Piave (1810–1876), his librettist for *La Traviata*, collaborated with him on ten works, including *Rigoletto*, *La Forza del Destino*, and *Macbeth*. Alexandre Dumas fils (1824–1895) was the son of the author of *The Three Musketeers*. The play *La Dame aux Camélias* is based on his own novel of the same name.

The Setting

With *La Traviata*, Verdi and Piave fashioned an opera from a play set in contemporary times—an anomaly in the composer's long career. Dumas's *La Dame aux Camélias* was a meditation on (and reinterpretation of) the author's youthful affair with the celebrated prostitute Marie Duplessis, known as a sophisticated and well-read woman whose charms and tact far surpassed her station. The Met's production by Willy Decker moves the action to an unspecified 21st-century setting.

The Music

Verdi's musical-dramatic ability to portray the individual in a marginalized relationship to society keeps this work on the world's stages. The vocal and emotional scope of the title character is enormous: compare the defiant fireworks in the Act I show-stopper aria "Sempre libera" to the haunting regret of Act III's "Addio, del passato." The dramatic demands continue in Violetta's interactions with others, most notably in the extended Act II confrontation with her lover's father, Germont. Often cited as the emotional core of *La Traviata*, it

is one of the most resoundingly truthful scenes in opera. Germont embodies the double-faced morality of the bourgeoisie, and Violetta's interactions with him parallel her precarious dealings with society in general. She begins with defiance ("Donna son io"), becomes desperate ("Non sapete"), and finishes defeated ("Dite alla giovine"). It is a vast journey within a single scene.

Met History

La Traviata was performed within a month of the Met's opening in 1883, but then was retired during a subsequent all-German period. After returning to the schedule in 1894, the opera has appeared in all but 16 seasons since. Notable productions were introduced in 1921, designed by architectural legend Joseph Urban; 1935, choreographed by George Balanchine; 1957, directed by Tyrone Guthrie; and 1966, directed by Alfred Lunt. The two most recent stagings (1989 and 1998) were both directed by Franco Zeffirelli. The roster of Violettas at the Met reads like a who's who of the art of the soprano: the great Licia Albanese holds the record for most performances of the role at the Met (87), followed by American beauty Anna Moffo (80) and Spanish femme fatale Lucrezia Bori (58). Renée Fleming and Angela Gheorghiu have been among the notable recent interpreters of this timeless role. The current production had its premiere on New Year's Eve 2010 with Marina Poplavskaya as Violetta, Matthew Polenzani as Alfredo, Andrzej Dobber as Germont, and Gianandrea Noseda on the podium.

Program Note

“**F**or Venice I’m doing *La Dame aux Camélias*, which will probably be called *La Traviata* (*The Fallen Woman*),” wrote Giuseppe Verdi to his friend Cesare de Sanctis on January 1, 1853. “A subject for our own age. Another composer wouldn’t have done it because of the costumes, the period, and a thousand other silly scruples. But I’m writing it with the greatest of pleasure.”

Despite the palpable conviction in these words, the subject matter of his 18th opera was—typically for Verdi—decided with difficulty. In April 1852, he had accepted his fourth commission from Venice’s La Fenice for an opera to be presented during carnival season the following year. The librettist would be Francesco Maria Piave, whose collaboration with Verdi had begun with *Ernani* (1844), blossomed in *Macbeth* (1847) and *Rigoletto* (1851), and would later yield such fruits as *Simon Boccanegra* (1857) and *La Forza del Destino* (1862). As the search for a scenario dragged on well into autumn of 1852, and as Verdi rejected suggestion after suggestion from friends and associates, the nervous theater management dispatched Piave to visit Verdi at his new home in Sant’Agata to speed up the process. “It was the same story as *Ernani* all over again,” Piave reported to La Fenice’s secretary in November about an unknown subject he had been working on. “I had got the libretto almost finished when Verdi suddenly got carried away by another idea and I had to throw away what I’d done and start all over again. I think that Verdi will write a fine opera now that I’ve seen him so worked up.”

The “other idea,” of course, was *The Lady of the Camellias* by Alexandre Dumas fils. Verdi had been in Paris in February 1852, the time of the play’s long-delayed premiere. Only the intervention of Dumas père (of *Three Musketeers* fame) had finally convinced the authorities to unveil this drama, based on the son’s scandalous affair with a notorious Parisian courtesan who had recently succumbed to tuberculosis at the age of 23. After her death, the younger Dumas had gone abroad to forget her—obviously without success, since within a year he had immortalized Marie Duplessis in a novel that became such a sensation that he soon adapted it into a play.

Ten years before embarking on *La Traviata*, Verdi had hoped to create an operatic version of *Marion de Lorme*, Victor Hugo’s play about a cultured 17th-century Parisian courtesan. Loath to tangle with the censors over the controversial subject matter, he eventually dropped the idea. But much had changed in the subsequent decade—including Verdi’s personal situation. In 1847, he had begun what was to become a lifelong liaison (and later, marriage) with the noted soprano Giuseppina Strepponi. A gifted artist and gracious person, she was saddled with the sort of checkered past then common among women of the theater, and her relationship with Verdi caused raised eyebrows in certain circles.



PHOTO: KEN HOWARD/MET OPERA

VERDI

RIGOLETTO

APR 19, 22 eve, 27

Michael Mayer's hit production places the action in a neon-bedecked Las Vegas in 1960. Joseph Calleja is the womanizing Duke, Olga Peretyatko is the innocent Gilda, and Željko Lučić reprises his heartbreaking take on the title role. Pier Giorgio Morandi conducts.

Tickets from \$25

metopera.org

Indeed, *La Traviata* marks the culmination of what musicologists like to call Verdi's "domestic" period. In his fledgling years, the composer had put the goals of the Risorgimento—the movement to unite Italy's divided regions under one flag—front and center, producing a series of operas which were thinly disguised, and often inflammatory, political manifestos. But by 1849, established as both musician and patriot and ensconced in a nurturing relationship, Verdi was ready to inflame in a new way. His operas of this period—*Luisa Miller* (1849), *Stiffelio* (1850), and *Rigoletto* (1851)—focus on increasingly vivid and complex outsider characters who challenge the limits of society.

Given *Traviata's* controversial plot, Verdi braced himself for a go-round with the Venetian censors similar to the one he had weathered over *Rigoletto*. But this time, they made only two demands: that Verdi change the opera's original title, *Amore e Morte* ("Love and Death"), and its contemporary setting.

To Verdi, the latter request was the more troubling. The Venetian authorities evidently felt that moving the action back to the 18th century would cushion the opera's shock value—which was exactly what Verdi did not wish to do. "The Signor Maestro Verdi desires, demands, and begs that the costumes for his opera *La Traviata* should remain those of the present day," asserted a memorandum from the Fenice's impresario. In the end, however, Verdi was forced to comply (although he insisted that no wigs be worn). Until 1914, all printed scores of *La Traviata* bore the rubric "Paris and its environs, circa 1700." It was not until 1866 that soprano Gemma Bellincioni donned crinoline for the first 1850s-set *Traviata*—ironically, by that time no longer "contemporary." But the opera endured, even as itinerant divas began toting their own personal wardrobes from theater to theater. George Bernard Shaw, in his capacity as music critic, described as a common sight a London production "with Violetta in the latest Parisian confections and Alfredo in full Louis XIV fig."

All of this begs the question: What was Verdi talking about when he called *La Traviata* "a subject for our times"? Did he mean, as the orthodox would read it, that it is particular to its era, the mid-19th century? Or was he implying (and hoping) that it would be a subject for every age? It is interesting that for the rest of his long and copiously documented life, Verdi never attempted to restore the opera to its original milieu. Perhaps he came to feel that the story was, as the late Verdi scholar Julian Budden put it, "essentially a myth, none the less universal for being modern ... and having had its roots in personal experience ... It is one of those simple classical tales which permit as many variations as the legends on which the Greek tragedians built their plays." Countless revisionist productions have by now clearly demonstrated that *La Traviata* can thrive in any setting that can support Pavesi's Ottocento Italian and Verdi's noble music.

Much has been made of *La Traviata's* less-than-triumphant premiere at the Fenice on March 6, 1853. The performance was supposedly scuttled by a lukewarm press and public, a laryngitic tenor, over-the-hill baritone, and, worst of

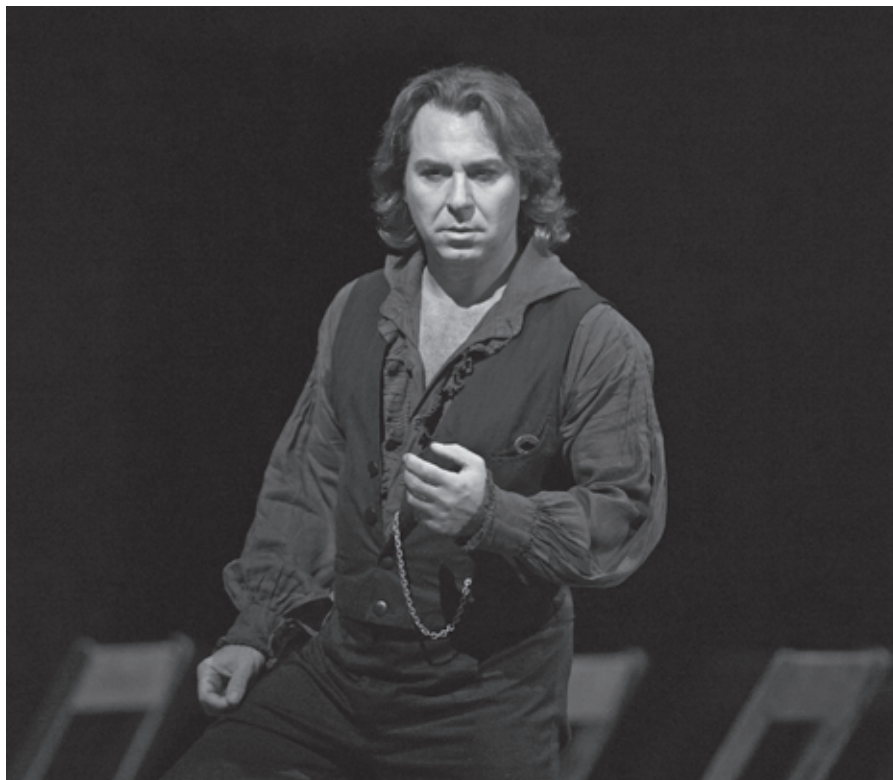


PHOTO: MARTY SOHL / MET OPERA

ALFANO

CYRANO DE BERGERAC

MAY 2, 6 mat, 10, 13 eve

In this rediscovered verismo gem, the classic story of Cyrano de Bergerac receives an electrifying operatic setting with the charismatic tenor Roberto Alagna as the swashbuckling title poet. Met favorite Patricia Racette plays his beloved Roxane, with Marco Armiliato conducting.

Tickets from \$27 | metopera.org

all, a pasta-padded soprano who failed to convince as the consumptive heroine. “*La Traviata* has been an utter fiasco, and what is worse, they laughed,” lamented Verdi to his conductor friend Angelo Mariani the day after the premiere. But he added, “I’m not worried. I personally don’t think that last night’s verdict will have been the last word.”

How right he was. Since its first revival, in slightly revised form, at Venice’s Teatro San Benedetto on May 6, 1854, there has been no stopping *La Traviata*, in whatever language, garb, or deconstruction. Whether in crinoline or designer fashion, Violetta never fails to move us, for she is clad first and foremost in humanity.

—Cori Ellison

Cori Ellison is dramaturg at Glyndebourne Festival Opera and serves on the vocal arts faculty at the Juilliard School.

The Cast



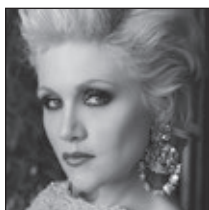
Nicola Luisotti

CONDUCTOR (VIAREGGIO, ITALY)

THIS SEASON *La Traviata* and the National Council Grand Finals Concert at the Met; *Andrea Chénier*, *Aida*, and *Rigoletto* at San Francisco Opera; and *Pagliacci* at Teatro Regio Torino.

MET APPEARANCES *La Fanciulla del West*, *Tosca* (debut, 2006), and *La Bohème*.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS He has been music director of San Francisco Opera since 2009 and has conducted more than 40 operas and concerts there since his company debut in 2005. Recent performances in San Francisco have included *Don Carlo*, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, and *Luisa Miller*. Recent performances elsewhere have included *Il Trittico* and *La Traviata* at Covent Garden and *Rigoletto* at La Scala and the Paris Opera. He was music director of the Teatro di San Carlo in Naples from 2012 to 2014 and principal guest conductor of the Tokyo Symphony Orchestra from 2009 to 2012. He has also led performances at the Vienna State Opera, Genoa's Teatro Carlo Felice, La Fenice in Venice, Bologna's Teatro Comunale, the Bavarian State Opera, LA Opera, Seattle Opera, and in Frankfurt, Stuttgart, Dresden, Hamburg, Valencia, and Tokyo.



Carmen Giannattasio

SOPRANO (AVELLINO, ITALY)

THIS SEASON Violetta in *La Traviata* at the Met, Amelia Grimaldi in *Simon Boccanegra* at the Bolshoi Theatre, Alice Ford in *Falstaff* at the Vienna State Opera and La Scala, Mimi in *La Bohème* at Deutsche Oper Berlin, Nedda in *Pagliacci* in Dresden and at Covent Garden, and Verdi's Requiem in Florence.

MET APPEARANCES Leonora in *Il Trovatore* (debut, 2012).

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS Recent performances include Amelia Grimaldi at La Scala, the title role in *Norma* at the Bavarian State Opera and in Beijing, Nedda at Deutsche Oper Berlin, Madama Cortese in *Il Viaggio a Reims* and Leonora in Amsterdam, Elizabeth in *Maria Stuarda* in Paris, and Liù in *Turandot* in Naples. She has also sung Violetta at Deutsche Oper Berlin, the Berlin Staatsoper, and in Naples, Hong Kong, and Stockholm; Leonora in Venice, Vienna, and Toulouse; Liù in Verona and Turin; Elizabeth at Covent Garden and Deutsche Oper Berlin; Mimi at Covent Garden and in Venice; Desdemona in *Otello* in Buenos Aires; Vitellia in *La Clemenza di Tito* in Marseille and at the Aix-en-Provence Festival; Salomé in *Hérodiade* in Antwerp; and Rossini's *Stabat Mater* at the Edinburgh Festival.



Atalla Ayan

TENOR (BELÉM, BRAZIL)

THIS SEASON Alfredo in *La Traviata* for his debut and Christian in *Cyrano de Bergerac* at the Met, the title role of *Faust* and Lenski in *Eugene Onegin* in Stuttgart, Nemorino in *L'Elisir d'Amore* at the Bavarian State Opera, Rodolfo in *La Bohème* in Cologne, and Alfredo at Covent Garden and the Glyndebourne Festival.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS In 2012, he joined the ensemble at the Stuttgart Opera, where his roles have included the Duke in *Rigoletto*, Rodolfo, Alfredo, Don Ottavio in *Don Giovanni*, Fenton in *Falstaff*, Tamino in *Die Zauberflöte*, and Alfred in *Die Fledermaus*, among others. Other recent performances include Edgardo in *Lucia di Lammermoor* in Cologne; Alfredo in Oslo and Baden-Baden; Ruggero in *La Rondine* at Covent Garden and Deutsche Oper Berlin; Nemorino at La Scala; and Rodolfo in Stockholm, Budapest, and with Deutsche Oper Berlin and the Glyndebourne Festival. He has also sung Alfredo in Bari and Genova, Rodolfo in Amsterdam and São Paulo, the Italian Singer in *Der Rosenkavalier* in Dresden, and Rinuccio in *Gianni Schicchi* in Trieste. He is a graduate of the of the Met's Lindemann Young Artist Development Program.



George Petean

BARITONE (CLUJ-NAPOCA, ROMANIA)

THIS SEASON Germont in *La Traviata* at the Met and Covent Garden, Iago in *Otello* in Madrid and Dresden, Count di Luna in *Il Trovatore* in Parma and Barcelona, the title role of *Macbeth* in Salerno, Riccardo in *I Puritani* in Zurich, the title role of *Rigoletto* in Naples, and Renato in *Un Ballo in Maschera* at the Vienna State Opera and in Zurich.

MET APPEARANCES Valentin in *Faust* and Marcello in *La Bohème* (debut, 2010).

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS Recent performances include the title role of *Simon Boccanegra* with Opera Australia and in Avignon, Riccardo in Madrid, Ezio in *Attilia* in Monte Carlo, Renato at the Bavarian State Opera and in Brussels, Enrico in *Lucia di Lammermoor* in Muscat, Germont in Zurich and Wiesbaden, Macbeth at the Vienna State Opera, Figaro in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* at the Avenches Opera Festival, and Rigoletto in Rome. He has also sung Count di Luna at the Romanian National Opera, Israeli Opera, and in Orange; Miller in *Luisa Miller*, Rodrigo in *Don Carlo*, Rigoletto, and Germont in Hamburg; Simon Boccanegra in Tokyo and Rome; Silvio in *Pagliacci* at Covent Garden; and David in *L'Amico Fritz* with Deutsche Oper Berlin.

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