

IN MANY OPERAS, THE FOCUS OF ATTENTION IS DIRECTED ON women who love too much, love wantonly or foolishly, love their way straight to a tragic end. Jules Massenet's *Werther* is different: it is a study of the seething emotions that can overwhelm a young man. When the poet Werther falls in love with a woman who can never be his, he believes his fate has been sealed. But what ultimately drives the story of this opera is a decision, not fate—the shocking decision of a romantic youth facing the strongest feelings he has ever known.

Massenet based his 1892 work on a best-selling book from a century earlier, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, first published in 1774. The 24-year-old Goethe wrote this semi-autobiographical novel as a series of letters in which his protagonist recounts his love for Charlotte, a young woman who is betrothed to another man. This impossible, ever-intensifying love leads the self-absorbed Werther to suicide. But where Goethe brought his readers into Werther's feverish mind, Massenet and his librettists, Édouard Blau, Paul Milliet, and Georges Hartmann, open out into the community, offering rich, full characterizations of Charlotte, her husband, Albert, and a society in which the protagonists' passions collide with convention and honor.

Werther targets feelings your students will find familiar—if not from their own lives, then from stories they have seen in movies and on TV. Emotionally raw and immediately affecting, this work perfectly demonstrates the unique power of opera to reveal characters and their inner lives through the unity of words of music. The activities in this guide are designed not only to acquaint your students with the sounds and story of *Werther*, but to also prompt them to consider correspondences with their own emotional growth. Above all, the guide offers opportunities to expand students' understanding—and enrich their enjoyment—of the Met's *Live in HD* production.

Production a gift of Elizabeth M. and Jean-Marie Eveillard

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THE WORK *WERTHER*

An opera in four acts, sung in French

Music by Jules Massenet (1842–1912)

Libretto by Édouard Blau, Paul Milliet, and Georges Hartmann, based on the novel *Die Leiden des Jungen Werther* by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

First performed on February 16, 1892 at the Court Opera, Vienna, Austria

PRODUCTION

Alain Altinoglu, Conductor

Richard Eyre, Production

Rob Howell, Set and Costume Designer

Peter Mumford, Lighting Designer

Wendall Harrington, Video Designer

Sara Erde, Choreographer

STARRING

(in order of vocal appearance)

Jonathan Summers

THE BAILIFF (bass)

Philip Cokorinos

JOHANN (baritone)

Tony Stevenson

SCHMIDT (tenor)

Lisette Oropesa

SOPHIE (soprano)

Sophie Koch

CHARLOTTE (mezzo-soprano)

Jonas Kaufmann

WERTHER (tenor)

David Bižić

ALBERT (baritone)



KOCH



KAUFMANN



BIŽIĆ



OROPESA

The guide includes four types of activities. Reproducible student resources for the activities are available at the back of this guide.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY:

a full-length activity, designed to support your ongoing curriculum

MUSICAL HIGHLIGHTS:

opportunities to focus on notable moments in *Werther* to enhance familiarity with the work

PERFORMANCE ACTIVITIES:

to be used during *The Met: Live in HD* transmission, calling attention to specific aspects of this production

POST-SHOW DISCUSSION:

a wrap-up activity, integrating the *Live in HD* experience into students' views of the performing arts and humanities

The activities in this guide address several aspects of *Werther*:

- the challenge many young people face in managing strong romantic feelings
- the rich psychological textures emerging from the interplay of music and text in Massenet's opera
- the translation of Goethe's epistolary novel into a musical portrait of a community
- contemporary resonances of a classic story ending in suicide through the use of a gun
- the production as a unified work of art, involving creative decisions by the artists of the Metropolitan Opera

The guide is intended to cultivate students' interest in *Werther* whether or not they have any prior acquaintance with opera. It includes activities for students with a wide range of musical backgrounds, seeking to encourage them to think about opera—and the performing arts in general—as a medium of entertainment and as creative expression.



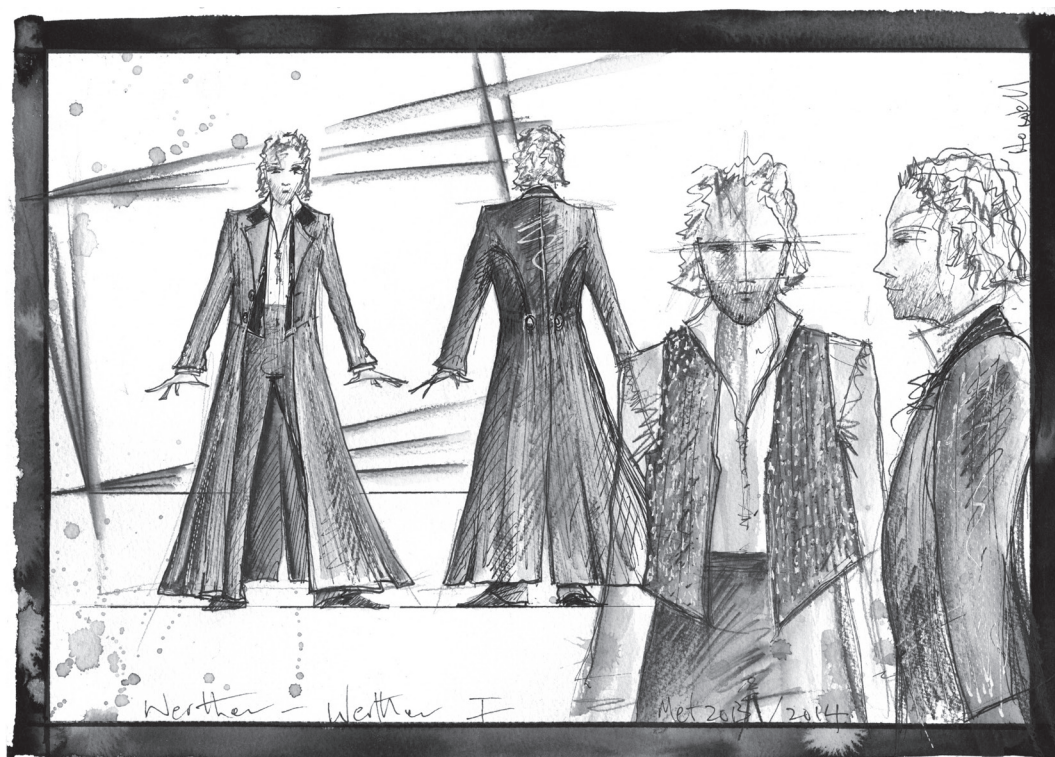
Rob Howell's set design for Act I

Wetzlar, a town near Frankfurt, Germany, in the 1890s

ACT I *A midsummer's day outside the home of the Bailiff.* It's only July, but the Bailiff, a widower, is teaching his six youngest children a carol they'll be performing at Christmas. A pair of neighbors, Schmidt and Johann, watch and gossip about that night's village ball. The Bailiff says his oldest daughter, Charlotte, whose fiancé is out of town, will be attending the ball with a visiting poet named Werther.

As the sun sets, Werther arrives. Watching her care for her siblings, he is smitten by the beautiful Charlotte. They leave for the ball, and shortly thereafter Charlotte's fiancé, Albert, returns unexpectedly from his trip. He tells her sister Sophie that he will surprise Charlotte in the morning. Charlotte and Werther arrive home from the ball in the moonlight and, inspired by the romantic mood, Werther declares his love to her. When the Bailiff calls out from the house that Albert has returned and Charlotte explains he is her fiancé, Werther's hope is shattered. He insists she keep her vow, yet he cannot imagine she will marry someone else.

ACT II *One Sunday, the following September.* Charlotte and Albert, married for three months, are walking to church, where the pastor's golden wedding anniversary is being celebrated. Werther, who has tried to maintain a friendship with them both but still feels tormented, appears. After the service, Albert tells Werther that he understands how he must feel, having met Charlotte when she was still free, and



Costume sketch
by Rob Howell for
Werther

VOICE TYPE

Since the early 19th century, singing voices have usually been classified in six basic types, three male and three female, according to their range:

SOPRANO

the highest-pitched type of human voice, normally possessed only by women and boys

MEZZO-SOPRANO

the female voice whose range lies between the soprano and the contralto (Italian “mezzo” = middle, medium)

CONTRALTO

the lowest female voice, also called an alto

COUNTERTENOR

a male singing voice whose vocal range is equivalent to that of a contralto, mezzo-soprano, or (less frequently) a soprano, usually through use of falsetto

TENOR

the highest naturally occurring voice type in adult males

BARITONE

the male voice lying below the tenor and above the bass

BASS

the lowest male voice

that he sympathizes with him. Werther replies that he feels only friendship for Charlotte. Sophie invites him to dance but he refuses. Finally Charlotte emerges from the chapel and tries to engage Werther in polite conversation, but he keeps talking about their first meeting and his love for her. In an attempt to soften his pain, she suggests he leave town, then relents, asking him to come visit for Christmas. Left alone, Werther for the first time contemplates the idea of suicide. When Sophie appears, he tells her he is leaving town and rushes off. Sophie bursts into tears and tells Charlotte that Werther was acting like a crazy man. Albert, looking on, knows better: Werther is still in love with his wife.

ACT III *Christmas Eve, Charlotte and Albert's home.* Charlotte is home alone, sadly re-reading Werther's letters. Sophie unsuccessfully tries to cheer her up, then heads off to spend the holiday with their father and siblings. Suddenly Werther appears, distraught and bitter. Charlotte seeks to distract him with a favorite book of classical poetry, but Werther chooses a particularly morbid verse, reading aloud. He presses Charlotte to declare her love for him. She momentarily loses her composure and falls into his arms, but then recovers and runs from the room, saying they will never meet again. Werther declares that Charlotte's refusal has condemned him to death and leaves.

Albert, returning home, immediately discerns that Charlotte has had a visitor but she denies it. A messenger arrives, bearing a note from Werther: He is leaving on a long trip and wants to borrow Albert's pistols. Albert forces his wife to hand the guns to the messenger. She understands his intentions only too well and, the moment Albert leaves the room, rushes out, praying to reach Werther in time.

A dramatic orchestral interlude.

ACT IV *Werther's lodgings.* Charlotte finds Werther mortally wounded. Barely able to register her presence, he declares his love once more, insisting he is happy to die in her arms. Charlotte admits she has loved him from the day they met, though bound by her vow to Albert. As Werther dies, the children are heard singing their Christmas hymn.

WHO'S WHO IN WERTHER

CHARACTER		PRONUNCIATION	VOICE TYPE	THE LOWDOWN
Werther	A poet	vair-TAIR	tenor	A romantic and sensitive young man.
Charlotte	A young woman	shar-LOT	mezzo-soprano	Pure, kind, honest, and beautiful, she is devoted to her family.
Albert	Charlotte's fiancé	al-BEAR	baritone	Solid, a bit conventional, but a perceptive, decent fellow
Sophie	Charlotte's teenage sister	so-FEE	soprano	Young and carefree, she only knows the world as a happy place.
Le Bailli (The Bailiff)	Charlotte's widowed father	luh bah-YEE	bass	An upright leader in his town, dedicated to the welfare of his children.
Johann and Schmidt	Friends of the Bailiff	jo-HAHN; Shmit	bass; tenor	Quick with a joke, more likely found at a pub than in church, they are the town gossips.
Brühlmann	A young man	brool-MAHN	baritone	In their brief appearance, Brühlmann and Käthchen present a conventional but troubled couple, providing social context for the triangle of Werther, Charlotte, and Albert.
Käthchen	Brühlmann's fiancée	ket-SHEN	mezzo-soprano	Käthchen's absence and Brühlmann's consequent despair, mentioned early in Act II, prefigure the troubles of Werther and Charlotte.
The children	Charlotte's young brothers and sisters		children's chorus	Representatives of innocence, their Christmas hymn bookends the opera.

A Life in Letters: Unrequited Love in *Werther*

IN PREPARATION

For this activity, students will need the reproducible resources available at the back of this guide as well as the audio selections from *Werther* available online or on the accompanying CD.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Language Arts (character arcs and motivation; story structure; genre)

Social Sciences (interpersonal communications; managing romantic relationships; coping and resilience)

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- To become acquainted with the romantic crisis at the heart of *Werther*
- To gather insight by observing a young couple negotiating their relationship
- To consider characters' views and behavior from multiple perspectives
- To explore the relationship of psychological reality to conditions in the real world
- To appreciate the interplay of music and text in Massenet's characterizations
- To explore the genre of epistolary fiction

Goethe presented his life of young Werther as a set of letters, with "editor's notes" filling in bits about Charlotte and Albert that Werther himself could not have known. In this Classroom Activity, students will try their own hand at epistolary fiction, listening to sections of *Werther*, then advancing the opera's narrative by writing letters in the voice of its characters.

Note that Goethe's novel and Massenet's opera both end with Werther's suicide. This activity makes no reference to that climax, in order to keep impassioned discussion of suicide from overwhelming the subtler objective of examining Werther and Charlotte as young people negotiating their relationship. (If you are interested in facilitating a discussion on either suicide or the keeping of guns in one's home, please refer to the sidebar "Current Controversies.")

Students will:

- listen to scenes following the development of Werther and Charlotte's relationship
- gather evidence of the characters' meanings and motivations
- discuss what characters say, what they mean, and how they respond to one another
- adopt character personas to write fictional letters
- write and self-edit to convey shades of attitude and meaning
- predict *Werther's* climax based on their understanding of the dramatic situation established by Massenet and his librettists

STEPS

While Goethe's readers see Werther's world almost exclusively from the protagonist's perspective, operagoers watch the unfolding of his and Charlotte's relationship from the outside and can thereby form their own understandings. This activity provides an opportunity to look especially closely at key interactions. Students will dissect scenes, collecting evidence in order to predict characters' reactions, *before* listening to the reactions. They will progressively construct their own interpretations of the main characters in *Werther*.

STEP 1: BOY MEETS GIRL

COMMON CORE CONNECTION

READING: Key Ideas and Details

Students will analyze how lines of dialogue or incidents propel the action or reveal aspects of a character.

Introduce your students to the main characters of *Werther*: the young poet, Charlotte, and her fiancé Albert. Point out that neither Charlotte nor Albert has met Werther when the opera opens. Charlotte meets him in Act I when, with Albert out of town, her father invites Werther to escort her to a village dance. The starting point for this activity is the scene in which Werther and Charlotte return home from the dance.

Students may find this scene familiar: two young people negotiating the end of a romantic evening. If you and your students are comfortable discussing their personal experiences or associations, such a discussion can help students appreciate the effect that Massenet and his librettists hope to achieve with this scene—and students can decide whether the creators were successful.

The scene has been divided into several tracks, enabling students to consider each of the character's statements independently. Feel free to go track by track, to combine tracks, or to listen to the entire scene, uninterrupted (**Track 4**). The reproducible *A Life in Letters: Boy Meets Girl* is designed to help students analyze and interpret the text and music in each track. A listening guide for your own use follows.

GUIDE TO TRACKS 1–3/TRACK 4

Track 1: Charlotte attempts to bring the evening to a polite close. The libretto describes her tone with Werther as “simple,” but what do students hear? Is she just tired? What is her attitude toward Werther? (Note that this is wholly a matter of students’ interpretation.)

Track 2: Werther begins his reply in a similar musical mood, but his words are far less matter-of-fact than Charlotte’s: he calls her eyes “my own horizon.” As he sings, the music gathers power. What do your students make of such intensity? What might they imagine causes it? (Note that, at this point, operagoers have no information about what might have happened at the ball, so your students’ guesses are as good as anyone’s.) Having heard Charlotte before, how do they think she will respond? How do they think she *should* respond?

Track 3: Students can compare their predictions to Charlotte’s reaction, heard in this track. She protests that Werther doesn’t really know her. (Students of French may notice that she makes the point with two different verbs: *savoir*, to know, and *connaître*, to be acquainted with.) Werther becomes ever more insistent. But note the dissonant harmonies at the end of his “*la plus belle des créatures*” (“the most beautiful of creatures”). When Charlotte says, softly, simply, and without accompaniment, “No,” how would your students characterize the state of the relationship between these two people? (For instance, they might guess Werther is head over heels for Charlotte, but she is not interested in him.)

WRITING THE FIRST LETTER: After collecting the evidence in Tracks 1–3, students can begin the first of this activity’s three brief writing exercises. If students don’t already know, explain to them that the original novel, *The Sorrows of Young Werther* by Goethe, was written as a collection of Werther’s letters to an unseen friend. Many novelists have used letters to advance their plots and provide insight into their characters. Now it’s your students’ turn.



COMMON CORE STANDARDS AND WERTHER

This activity will help your students meet English Language Arts Common Core Standards for Reading, Writing, and Speaking and Listening. Your students will focus on **KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS**. They will practice skills related to **TEXT TYPES AND PURPOSES**, particularly in writing narratives and conveying ideas. Students will develop abilities in **COMPREHENSION AND COLLABORATION**, examining how this tragic story is told through words, music, and performance.

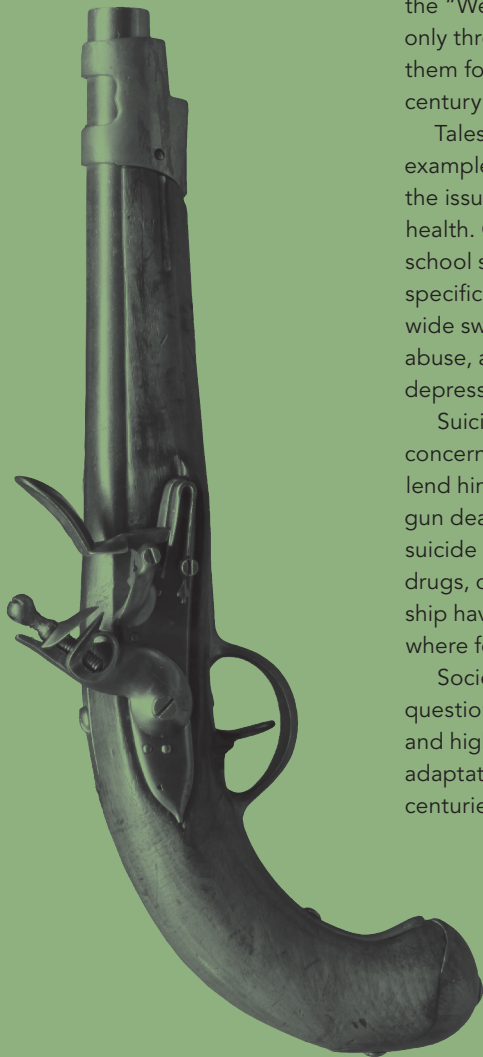
Current Controversies

When Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther* was first published in 1774, it caused a sensation across Europe. From Sweden to Italy, the best-selling book captured imaginations. Young men dressed in Werther's characteristic blue jacket and yellow pants. On a darker note, religious leaders, writers, and even Goethe himself came to fear that readers caught in unhappy love affairs might follow Werther's fatal example. Nervous public officials banned the book in Copenhagen, Denmark, and Leipzig, Germany. Stories of Werther-inspired suicides spread and have persisted through the years, to the point where contemporary sociologists have dubbed the phenomenon the "Werther Effect." Yet an academic study in 2003 was able to find only three documented cases of suicide related to the novel—one of them four years after its publication, the other two more than half a century later.

Tales of a "suicide epidemic" in Werther's wake seem like an early example of overestimating the influence of media on its audience. But the issue is grounded in very real concerns about adolescent mental health. Current national studies indicate that around 14% of U.S. high school students contemplate suicide in any given year. About 11% have a specific plan, but only 6% actually attempt suicide. Their reasons cover a wide swath of adolescent problems: eating disorders, anxiety, substance abuse, and other mental and physical health troubles, including depression.

Suicidal thoughts can mix dangerously with another contemporary concern related to the story of Werther—namely, Albert's decision to lend him his pistols. Suicides account for almost two thirds of the 30,000 gun deaths in the U.S. every year. When guns are involved, 85% of suicide attempts end in death. By contrast, in suicide attempts involving drugs, only two percent succeed. States with higher rates of gun ownership have statistically higher rates of completed suicide than states where fewer guns are found in homes.

Society's continuous struggle to understand and grapple with the questions and concerns surrounding adolescent suicide is a complicated and highly emotional subject. Goethe's novel and Massenet's operatic adaptation provide insight into the topic from the perspective of past centuries.



Each student should choose a character—either Charlotte or Werther—and write a brief note thanking the other for a lovely evening. The note should comment on the conversation in Tracks 1–3 in a way this character hopes will direct the future of this relationship. Notes should be no longer than three paragraphs—a template is provided on the reproducible *A Life in Letters: First Letter*.

Please note that in most cases, students writing as Werther will be enthusiastic and hopeful, while those writing as Charlotte will express caution or gentle rejection. However, students are free to invent whatever viewpoints strike them as true.

STEP 2: A MAJOR MISUNDERSTANDING

COMMON CORE CONNECTION

WRITING: Text Type and Purposes

Students will write narratives to develop imagined experiences or events using effective technique.

The musical excerpt students will listen to next appears only moments after the events described in Step 1. But before they hear it (or receive the accompanying reproducible), allow them a few minutes to compare notes on their interpretations of Charlotte and Werther. Students may enjoy exchanging letters and reading another classmate's interpretation as a prelude to this conversation.

Step 2 follows the same pattern as Step 1. Students should use the reproducible *A Life in Letters: A Major Misunderstanding* to gather evidence as they listen to Tracks 5 and 6. A listening guide for your own use follows.

GUIDE TO TRACKS 5–6/TRACK 7

Track 5 introduces an important bit of new information when Charlotte's father mentions Charlotte's fiancé, Albert. Charlotte says that, in Werther's presence, she momentarily forgot her engagement—a comment that students may want to consider within the context of the characterizations of Charlotte given in the letters they wrote for Step 1.

Students should note the mounting excitement in the string instruments as Charlotte responds to her father, as well as the ominous timpani that accompanies her utterance of the word “*serment*” (“vow”). What do they think Massenet intends to communicate? Danger? Shame? Regret?

Werther promptly assures Charlotte that she must be faithful to her vow. But what do students think he really feels? What might be passing through Charlotte's mind? What does either make of Charlotte's comment that she briefly forgot her vow?

Track 6, which comes instantly after Track 5 and brings Act I to a close, casts a whole new light on Werther's attitude. Your students will immediately realize that he was not fully expressing his feelings at the end of Track 5. His heart has been broken. But was he prevaricating before? Where have his feelings really taken him? When

FUN FACT *Werther* was written between 1885 and 1887. The director of the Opéra Comique in Paris turned it down because of its gloomy subject and the score remained in the composer's drawer for several years. After the successful premiere of Massenet's *Manon* in Vienna in 1890, *Werther* had its first performance there in 1892, sung in German. It finally reached Paris the following year.

he sings, “*je mourrai*” (“I will die”), should he be taken literally? Are the feelings expressed here “operatic” and exaggerated, or do students hear them as perfectly normal under the circumstances? Why?

(This scene can be heard without interruption in **Track 7**.)

Students can express their views in the next writing exercise, *Revising the Letter*. Taking the same role they took in Step 1, they should write a revised version of their “thank you for a lovely evening” notes, incorporating the information from this scene into the character’s response.

STEP 3: DEALING WITH IT

COMMON CORE CONNECTION

WRITING: Production and Distribution of Writing

Students will develop and strengthen writing as needed by editing and rewriting.

Again allow students a few minutes to exchange and compare their notes. What sorts of revisions did they make? Did the information in Step 2 change anyone’s viewpoint? Why? Encourage students to use specific evidence in explaining their perspectives.

The third set of tracks comes from the beginning of Act II. Charlotte and Albert have now been married for three months. Werther remains in Wetzlar. Students will learn what, three months later, has become of his broken heart, as they listen to the music and fill out the reproducible *A Life in Letters: Dealing With It*. A listening guide for your own use follows.

GUIDE TO TRACKS 8–10/TRACK 11 AND TRACKS 11–13/TRACK 14

Track 8 provides an early indication of Werther’s mood. On a lovely autumn Sunday at a church celebration, Charlotte’s teen sister Sophie invites him to dance—then notices his telltale expression. Students should consider why they think Werther has a “*sombre visage*” (“serious face”). Do they think Sophie knows about Werther’s feelings for Charlotte? What would they do, in the face of this reaction, if they were Sophie?

In **Track 9**, Sophie tries to cheer Werther up. Students will notice the descending melody line, echoing Werther’s own mood, as she begins: “*Mais aujourd’hui, monsieur Werther*” (“but today, Mr. Werther”). This is quickly supplanted by a rising, babbling flute motif, which alternates with Sophie’s own merry strains, “*Tout le monde est joyeux! Le bonheur est dans l’air!*” (“Everyone is joyful! Happiness is in the air!”).

Do students find Sophie’s happiness infectious? How successful might she be in raising Werther’s spirits? Have they ever had a similar experience—either trying to

cheer up a very sad person or having someone else try to jolly them out of glumness? Do they find that Massenet and his librettists have captured psychological truth in this scene?

Werther replies to Sophie in **Track 10**, quite dramatically: he says he can never be happy again. What do your students make of this strong assertion? Does it affect their understanding of Werther? (This scene can be heard without interruption in **Track 11**.)

Shortly after this scene, Werther encounters Charlotte herself, leading to the dialogue heard in **Track 12**. Students will hear the solemn strains of an organ as Charlotte recalls her wedding. Werther fiercely refuses to accept this reality. She begins to respond (“Werther!”), but what will she say? As if she were at a loss for words, the orchestra intervenes. Ask students what they make of this instrumental passage. Might it indicate Charlotte’s unspoken thoughts? Do they hear compassion? Anger? Incomprehension?

Charlotte does find words in **Track 13**, but they are without effect. The music builds as Charlotte gathers the strength to insist he leave Wetzlar. The words burst from her suddenly, and are followed by three descending notes—Massenet is depicting the calm that follows a storm. (This scene can be heard without interruption in **Track 14**.)

At this point, near the end of Act II, lines have been drawn. Werther must leave (although, as things turn out, he will be away only three months). It’s reasonable to imagine that he would write to Charlotte soon after their parting, and she to him, to reflect on this encounter and their futures. What might they say? What might they feel—and be willing to commit to words? Students can decide as they take up either Werther’s or Charlotte’s quill in this third writing exercise—the *Goodbye Letter*.

STEP 4: THE OPERA’S OWN LETTERS

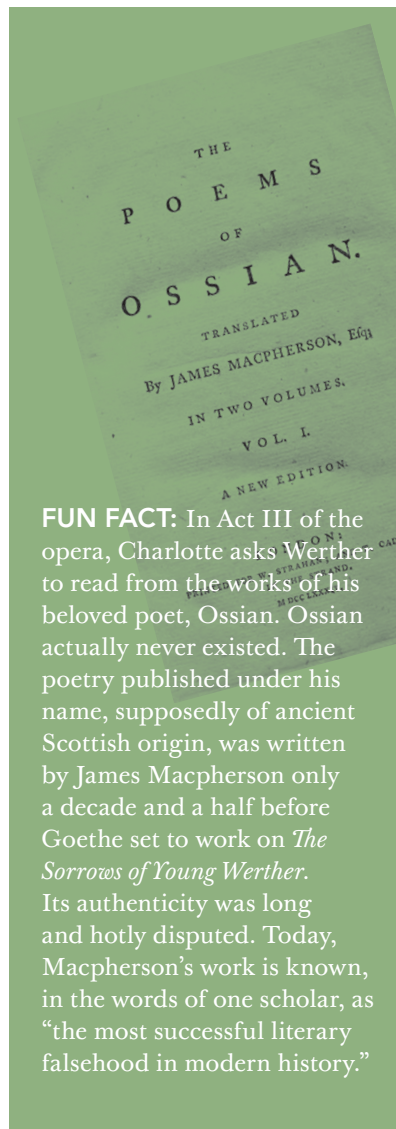
COMMON CORE CONNECTION

SPEAKING AND LISTENING: Comprehension and Collaboration

Students will analyze the purpose of information presented in diverse media and formats.

Before moving on, students can once more exchange and compare their letters. What do they think their character would do or feel at this critical moment? What evidence supports that inference?

We can’t know what Charlotte “really” would have written to Werther, but as Act III opens, Massenet does offer a glimpse at Werther’s letters. Though Goethe in his novel never reveals who young Werther is writing to, Massenet for this scene imagines his correspondent to be Charlotte herself. The aria in which she reads from



FUN FACT: In Act III of the opera, Charlotte asks Werther to read from the works of his beloved poet, Ossian. Ossian actually never existed. The poetry published under his name, supposedly of ancient Scottish origin, was written by James Macpherson only a decade and a half before Goethe set to work on *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. Its authenticity was long and hotly disputed. Today, Macpherson’s work is known, in the words of one scholar, as “the most successful literary falsehood in modern history.”

the letters is discussed below, in the Musical Highlight *Love Letters*. Here, students will consider the preceding moments when, alone on Christmas Eve, she decides to reread the correspondence.

As students prepare to listen to **Track 15**, probe whether they have noticed any mixed feelings on Charlotte's part at any point so far. Attentive students may recall Track 5, in which she sang, "*Dieux m'est témoin qu'un instant près de vous... j'avais oublié le serment*" ("as God is my witness, for a moment, near you, I forgot my vow"). This provides a context for completing the reproducible on Track 15. A listening guide follows for your use.

GUIDE TO TRACK 15

Singing her thoughts alone, Charlotte reveals here that Werther does hold a place in her heart. But then why, students might wonder, might she feel a need to destroy his letters? If they represent Werther's feelings, not her own, how could they embarrass her? On the other hand, Charlotte doesn't seem able to destroy the letters. Why not? Do your students find Charlotte's dilemma believable—even familiar?

This passage introduces a new twist: the love story of Charlotte and Werther no longer seems so one-sided. But why do your students think Massenet might introduce so important a twist with two full acts to go? Rather than answer the question—and reveal *Werther's* shocking climax—invite them to explore the new frontier of narrative possibilities opened up by the revelation of Charlotte's true feelings.

FOLLOW-UP: Invite students to "complete" the story of Charlotte and Werther. They can begin with Charlotte, home alone on Christmas Eve. Where is Albert? Where is Werther? Might they all meet again? Two at a time? Under what circumstances? Could Christmas itself play a role in the story, or will seasons pass before your students' version of *Werther* concludes? Students may enjoy experimenting with literary genres in presenting their plots: a retrospective magazine feature; a rhyming ballad of this classic love story; a letter to Massenet or Goethe himself, proposing an end to the tale. They can exchange and discuss their endings in the classroom ahead of the *Live in HD* transmission. After the transmission, they might discuss whether they prefer the ending of Massenet and his librettists or one of their own.



“Dear Reader:” The Epistolary Form in Fiction

As early as the 15th century, writers recognized that they could bring readers directly into the minds of their characters by composing stories as a series of letters—known in literature as the epistolary form (from “epistle,” or letter). In some cases, writers take an epistolary approach simply to have events described by someone who was present. But a letter’s first-person nature also introduces the possibility of unreliable narrators—letter-writers more interested in influencing or persuading their readers, or in protecting themselves, than in truth-telling. As letters travel back and forth between characters, multiple viewpoints enable an author to layer incidents, perceptions, motivation, and emotion in rich, complex combinations—all with the ring of first-person conviction.

Goethe’s *The Sorrows of Young Werther* is a different example of an epistolary novel: all letters represent a single character’s point of view. This approach engages the reader’s sympathy, but it can also force us to fill in gaps in the storytelling. It can challenge us to assess the accuracy of the narrator’s claims.

In a third category, authors may pretend to have collected the letters of people observing events from the outside. These can be explorers or travelers, recounting things they have heard about or witnessed. Often, such outsiders find themselves increasingly at the center of the action. This mechanism helps to draw the reader, who also begins as an outside observer, into the action. Two of the most famous non-human characters of the 19th century first appeared in such epistolary fiction—the creature in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and the title character of Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*. More recent examples that students might enjoy include Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* and Stephen King’s *Carrie*.

Love Letter: A Close Look at Charlotte's Letter Aria

MUSICAL HIGHLIGHTS ARE BRIEF OPPORTUNITIES TO

- help students make sense of opera
- whet their interest in upcoming *Live in HD* transmissions

Each one focuses on audio selections from *Werther* available online at metopera.org/education or on the accompanying CD. Where noted, certain activities also involve reproducibles, available in the back of this guide. Texts and translations are available at the back of this guide.

These “mini-lessons” will in practice take up no more than a few minutes of class time. They’re designed to help you bring opera into your classroom while minimizing interruption of your ongoing curriculum. Feel free to use as many as you like.

Many listeners have noted how little Charlotte reveals of herself during the first two acts of *Werther*. The third act, however, opens with an outpouring of emotion that may surprise the unprepared operagoer. This dramatic turning point is but one of the factors that makes the Charlotte's Letter Aria a remarkable piece of music.

The second is Massenet's use of Werther's letters. Goethe, of course, made letters his primary vehicle in *The Sorrows of Young Werther* and, by so doing, led readers to share Werther's perspective. Using the devices of opera, Massenet gave the letters quite a different meaning. Though their words are still Werther's, he made their music Charlotte's—turning this scene into a moment-by-moment recording of *her* reactions, *her* musings, *her* thoughts about the poet and their shared past.

Charlotte's Letter Aria is particularly interesting because it leaps back and forth across a broad span of mood, recollection, reflection, and anticipation, all the while presenting the views of two different characters at once. It's worth listening to the entire, tumultuous piece without interruption in **Track 16**, then returning to analyze each of Massenet's turns with this listening guide to Tracks 17 through 28.

LISTENING GUIDE

Track 17: Charlotte begins reading simply, sadly, in a falling melodic arc. She feels the bleak tone of Werther's words and environs.

Track 18: By setting the text “*et je suis seul! seul! toujours seul!*” (“And I am alone! Always alone!”) on the same repeated note, then allowing the phrase to drift into silence, Massenet gives expression to Werther's sense of endless loneliness—and to Charlotte's empathy.

Track 19: Charlotte's exclamation, without orchestral accompaniment, sounds like a true, spontaneous outburst of emotion.

Track 20: Charlotte continues to sing about Werther's finding himself alone and friendless. As if to express her feelings of guilt and pain, anxious strings join in, rising quickly in volume.

Track 21: Once again, a descending melody line underscores despair. Here, the sadness is Charlotte's, not Werther's, as she reflects on the “*triste courage*” (“sad courage”) with which she felt forced to act, rejecting him, three months earlier.

Track 22: After a moment of silence, the music turns briskly cheerful. Violins paint a playful picture of falling snow. Charlotte has picked up a different letter whose words have changed her mood.

Track 23: Reading aloud again, Charlotte reveals the words that pleased her—they describe a scene outside Werther's window. The sounds of children playing cheer the poet and, now, much later, they cheer Charlotte too. The children remind

Werther of Charlotte's siblings—a recollection that promptly turns bittersweet, his words suffused with self-pity: *"Ils m'oublieront peut-être?"* ("Perhaps they will have forgotten me?"). Werther's sense of unending sorrow is echoed again in a setting to one repeated note.

Track 24: Another change of musical mood: Charlotte responds to Werther's melancholy with encouragement and hope. Note, however, that her hope springs from thoughts of Werther playing with her siblings. As soon as her thoughts light on what Werther's return would mean for her, joy turns to anxiety—as expressed in the music, shifting from the reassuring *"quand vous reviendrez"* ("when you come back") to the distressed *"Mais doit-il revenir?"* ("But must he come back?").

Track 25: In this state of high ambivalence, Charlotte quickly turns to a third letter, though she knows full well that its contents are frightening. The turbulent orchestral accompaniment foreshadows impending crisis.

Track 26: Channeled through Charlotte's own voice, Werther poses an eerie challenge: when Charlotte said they would meet again at Christmas, Werther cried *"jamais!"* ("never")—he asks who will be proven right. Charlotte reads on. At first Werther's words sound like threats, then turn into a heart-rending plea for pity, set to a trembling string accompaniment. As Charlotte repeats the plea, *"ne m'accuse pas, pleure-moi"* ("don't accuse me, cry for me"), Massenet's orchestral writing leaves no doubt that she will indeed weep, and never accuse.

Track 27: Mollified, to a romantic melody, Charlotte sings Werther's loving description of her beautiful eyes, a compliment expressed with the confidence that she will read his letters again and again.

Track 28: Then all at once, Werther's compassionate words prove only to have set up a prediction that he intended to frighten her: *"et tu frémiras"* ("and you will tremble"). Massenet brings the scene to a close with a fascinating—and particularly chilling—alignment of word and voice. "You will tremble," sings Charlotte twice more, each time with more sorrowful acceptance, and again accompanied by tremolos in the orchestra. But she and all Massenet's listeners know that the "you" in question is Charlotte herself. It's a premonition of self-injury as wretchedly romantic as the fate Werther sees for himself.



FUN FACT The character of Werther is based on two real people—Goethe himself, and his friend Karl Wilhelm Jerusalem. Both young men worked at the courthouse in Wetzlar in 1772. Goethe fell in love with Charlotte Buff, the daughter of a local official who was engaged to another man. Their relationships remained platonic, but Goethe later left Wetzlar to escape the situation. Jerusalem's love for a married woman ended tragically in suicide.

Werther!

Men About Town: A Close Look at Werther's Social Setting

The passions explored in *Werther* are heightened through the contrasting setting of the daily doings of Charlotte's neighbors in Wetzlar. In brief scenes sprinkled across Acts I and II, two minor characters, Johann and Schmidt, comment on the central drama, at times directly, at times through reference to an entirely separate event. None of these exchanges affect either the main plot of the opera or its symbolic arc (see the Musical Highlight *Christmas in July*, below), but it's worth considering why Massenet and his librettists felt it important to hint at the other concerns in this little country town.

The first of these scenes comes within moments of the curtain's rising. It's a late summer afternoon, just before Werther and Charlotte's first fateful evening together. In the music heard in **Track 29**, Sophie and her father, the Bailiff, chat with friends. The Bailiff mentions that a young man is taking Charlotte to the ball that night. Neither the content of the conversation nor Massenet's brisk scoring gives any hint that this date might have dire consequences. Indeed, in **Track 30**, the only news that seems to register with Schmidt is the event of the ball itself, since this explains the unusual behavior of some other neighbors—including, as he continues in **Track 31**, that strange character, Werther. Notice the grave change in mood from Track 30 to Track 31. The flourish in Track 31 musically alienates Werther from the rest of the young men Schmidt mentions, establishing Werther as an outsider in Wetzlar. Schmidt fills out the characterization with a backward compliment: "*Enfin, Monsieur Werther m'a paru moins rêveur!*" ("Why, even Mr. Werther seems less of a dreamer!").

The Bailiff may be glad by now that he didn't mention the name of Charlotte's escort. In **Track 32**, he dispassionately calls Werther "*ce jeune homme*" ("that young



man).” But Johann points to an outrageous oddity: Werther doesn’t care about eating! When the Bailiff parries, citing Werther’s learning and distinction, Schmidt in turn calls Werther gloomy. Johann affirms his friend’s observation: “*Certes! Jamais gai!*” (“For sure! He’s never happy!”). The Bailiff doesn’t give up, talking in **Track 33** about Werther’s connections at court and dazzling future. None of this concerns Johann or Schmidt, as long as Werther is useless at enjoying food and drink.

What may matter most in this entire exchange comes, by implication, in **Track 34**. Johann’s friendly “*à tout à l’heure*” (“See you soon!”) conveys that, for all the judgments just passed, the preceding exchange was mere chatter. Werther may be a little strange, but the good people of Wetzlar don’t waste much attention on him. What matters to Johann and Schmidt is reminding the Bailiff that he owes them a drink. (This conversation can be heard without interruption on **Track 35**.)

Johann and Schmidt next appear at the start of Act II, enjoying another drink on a bright Sunday morning (**Track 36**). Of course, as **Track 37** reveals, these good burghers have chosen the tavern over the parish church, a decision they celebrate by singing, to the strains of the church organ, their own parody hymn. Massenet and his librettists created this scene as an oasis of comic calm before the storm of the encounter between Charlotte and Werther. But they also convey that towns like Wetzlar are not uniformly as upstanding as the Bailiff, as honorable as Albert. Massenet is depicting a community that is more nuanced than it first appears. (Johann and Schmidt’s Sunday revels can be heard without interruption on **Track 38**.)

Johann and Schmidt enter once more later in Act II, this time offering advice to the lovelorn, silent Brühlmann. It emerges that Brühlmann’s fiancée, Käthchen, left town sometime after her brief Act I appearance. In **Track 39**, Johann and Schmidt gravely assure the jilted lover that she will return. In **Track 40**, Johann assures Brühlmann that their happy seven years engagement will be no easy thing for Käthchen to forget. The moment passes quickly, and it’s easy to miss its resonance. But in context of Charlotte, Werther and Albert’s secrets, who can say what took place across those years? Who knows what other stories lurk in Wetzlar?

The excerpt in **Track 41** shows the two typical townfolk as blissfully oblivious. Done with their counsel to Brühlmann, Schmidt and Johann are off to the after-church dance—the same dance that, moments later, a despondent Werther will decline to attend. Schmidt and Johann prove as apt as any characters since the clowns of Shakespeare at revealing social truth through their buffoonery. (This scene can be heard without interruption on **Track 42**.)



Christmas in July: A Close Look at “Noël!” As a Framing Device

Note: This Musical Highlight involves the last scene of the opera, including Werther’s death. If you have chosen not to reveal Werther’s ending to your students in advance, you may want to wait until after the transmission to address this aspect of the work.

One of *Werther*’s strangest surprises comes right at the beginning: The opera opens with a group of children learning a Christmas carol. As unexpected as this might be to an audience, it probably seems odd to those children as well, since *Werther* begins in the middle of summer. The introduction is a framing device, a way for Massenet to build the symbolic arc of innocence and passion that unifies the opera. When *Werther* ends, six months later, the same children will be heard singing the same carol, lending retrospective meaning to the opening scene.

Track 43 establishes this device. The Bailiff’s younger children are heard running wild as he struggles to teach them a Christmas song—well in advance of the holiday because he knows how slow progress might be. The track ends with the Bailiff in frustration. He chastises the children on **Track 44**, reminding them that they will be singing for their devoted sister Charlotte. And so, on **Track 45**, their wildness gives way to a harmony that pleases the Bailiff. The carol evidently stands for his vision of an ordered, respectable world. (The scene can be heard without interruption on **Track 46**).

Skipping forward to *Werther*’s last moments, it is Christmas eve. Charlotte is at the poet’s side as he lies dying from a self-inflicted gunshot wound. She has just kissed him for the first and only time, and, in **Track 47**, the pair vow to forget all the pain that has passed between them. As their words fade, a familiar chord splits the air on **Track 48**. Young voices pour through the window of Werther’s room: “Noël! Noël!”

What can be the effect of such joyous sounds at such a terrible moment? How will the couple react? **Track 49** depicts Charlotte’s frantic dismay. For her, the singing is a mean cosmic joke. But as the children continue in **Track 50**, Werther takes a different view. He hears angels and the sound of redemption: his and Charlotte’s true innocence has led heaven to pardon their transgressive love.

Perhaps realizing that Werther’s death—and indeed, all the suffering both of them have known—is self-inflicted, Charlotte manages only a single word in response, heard in **Track 51**: “*Werther!*” But Werther is confident, even ecstatic, at the moment of his death. Ever the poet, in **Track 52**, he insists his life is just beginning. With the children’s singing, the opera comes full circle. True, the curtain does not fall yet. Werther has a few more minutes more to live (and to sing). But with this elegant maneuver, Massenet closes his frame—leaving it to the audience to interpret the symbols of children and Christmas, innocence and redemption, true sin and mere obsessive guilt—and to decide for themselves whether Werther has died nobly or in vain. (The scene can be heard without interruption on **Track 53**.)



Top: Centre rue des Boulangers à Paris

Abies Nordmanniana

Supporting students during *The Met: Live in HD Transmission*

Thanks to print and audio recording, much about opera can be enjoyed long before a performance. But performance itself brings vital layers of sound and color, pageantry and technology, drama, skill, and craft. Performance activities are designed to help students tease apart different aspects of the experience, consider creative choices that have been made, and sharpen their own critical faculties.

Each Performance Activity incorporates a reproducible activity sheet. Students bring the activity sheet to the transmission to fill out during intermission and/or after the final curtain. The activities direct attention to characteristics of the production that might otherwise go unnoticed. Ratings matrices invite students to express their critique: use these ratings to spark discussions that call upon careful, critical thinking.

The basic activity sheet is called *My Highs & Lows*. Meant to be collected, opera by opera, over the course of the season, this sheet points students toward a consistent set of objects of observation. Its purposes are not only to help students articulate and express their opinions, but to support comparison and contrast, enriching understanding of the art form as a whole.

For *Werther*, the other activity sheet, *Framing the Romance*, directs attention to the use of set design as part of director Richard Eyre's vision of presenting an intimate chamber opera on the vast Met stage.

The Performance Activity reproducibles can be found in the back of this guide. Either activity can provide the basis for class discussion after the transmission. On the next page, you'll find an activity created specifically for follow-up after the *Live in HD* transmission.

Drawing the Line: *Werther*, Love, and Respect

IN PREPARATION

This activity requires no preparation other than attendance at the *Live in HD* transmission of *Werther*.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Social Studies (interpersonal communications; managing romantic relationships; coping and resilience)

Media Studies (effects on viewer behavior)

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- To understand characters by examining their behaviors and speech
- To identify moments of choice in the development of a relationship
- To assess behavioral decisions from multiple perspectives and character viewpoints
- To consider the effects of media on their audiences
- To recognize continuity and change in human behavior across time and place

COMMON CORE CONNECTION

SPEAKING AND LISTENING: Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas

Students will integrate multimedia and visual displays into presentations to clarify information and add interest.

Students will enjoy starting the class with an open discussion of the Met performance. What did they like? What didn't they? Did anything surprise them? What would they like to see or hear again? What would they have done differently? This discussion will offer students an opportunity to review the notes on their *My Highs & Lows* sheet, as well as their thoughts about this Met production—in short, to see themselves as *Werther* experts.

Over the course of the discussion, probe students' assessment of *Werther* as a realistic story. Can they imagine such events in real life? Do people really persist in pursuing unavailable partners? Charlotte was engaged to marry, but what else might make a partner unavailable to a suitor, male or female? What should someone do when they learn their partner is unavailable?

In particular:

- What should Werther have done when he learned Charlotte was engaged? Why might he have acted as he did?



- Could he have moved on, as Charlotte proposed in Act II? Why or why not?
- Did Werther truly love Charlotte? Did he respect her? Are the two ever in conflict? What behaviors in the opera support this viewpoint?

Invite students to imagine Charlotte’s reflections a week, a month, a year after Werther’s suicide. Does she have any regrets? Is she proud? Does Charlotte believe Werther really knew her at all? Is she angry at him? Angry at herself? Why? How might she have drawn a line to protect herself, Werther, and Albert?

To organize and articulate their views, students will take on Charlotte’s persona (as some may have done in the Classroom Activity, but with a different purpose). Invite them to imagine that the Wetzlar Department of Public Health wants to help young people caught up in complicated relationships. The citizens of Wetzlar want to ensure that this sort of incident doesn’t happen again. They ask Charlotte, the celebrity “survivor” of misbegotten love, to advise them. The public health department wants Charlotte to design a program that will

- catch teens’ attention,
- help them understand their romantic feelings,
- propose behaviors that show respect for the people they love, and
- help teens take care of themselves and their partners.

In the form of a poster, a handout, a website, a blog, or a proposal for a new TV show, students can present “Charlotte’s” advice on love, respect, and relationships. They may choose to create a list of dos and don’ts, a “tell-all” narrative, or any other form they believe would be effective with members of their own generation. Encourage them to provide serious advice, in light of the hard lessons Charlotte has learned. Students can work in small groups to discuss their advice, plan and create their media. If possible, post or distribute their creations, so other young people can benefit from their *The Met: Live in HD* experience.

FUN FACT A historic recording of Belgian tenor Ernest Van Dyck, the first Werther, singing the aria “Pourquoi me réveiller” from Act III, can be found on YouTube.



CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

A Life in Letters: Boy Meets Girl

TRACK 1

CHARLOTTE: Il faut nous séparer. Voici notre maison,
c'est l'heure du sommeil.

We must part. Here's our house.
It's time to go to sleep.

Clues:

Charlotte's Tone of Voice

Tempo and Rhythm

Interplay of Charlotte's Voice and Orchestra

Literal Meaning of Charlotte's Words

Inferences:

About Charlotte

About Charlotte's attitude toward Werther

WERTHER

.....

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

A Life in Letters: Boy Meets Girl (CONTINUED)

TRACK 2

WERTHER Ah! pourvu que je voie ces yeux toujours ouverts,
ces yeux mon horizon, ces doux yeux: mon espoir et
mon unique joie. Que m'importe à moi le sommeil?

Les étoiles et le soleil peuvent bien dans le ciel
tour à tour reparaître, j'ignore s'il est jour... j'ignore s'il est nuit!
Mon être demeure indifférent à ce qui n'est pas toi!

Ah, if I could only see those eyes open always,
those eyes that are my horizon, those sweet eyes, my hope and
my only joy. What do I care about sleep?

The stars and the sun can, as they will, reappear in the sky—
I won't notice that it's daytime... I won't notice that it's night!
My whole being remains indifferent to anything that isn't you!

Clues:

Werther's Tone of Voice

Tempo and Rhythm

Interplay of Werther's Voice and Orchestra

Literal Meaning of Werther's Words

Inferences:

About Werther

About Werther's attitude toward Charlotte

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

A Life in Letters: Boy Meets Girl (CONTINUED)

TRACK 3

CHARLOTTE: Mais, vous ne savez rien de moi.

WERTHER: Mon âme a reconnu votre âme, Charlotte,
et je vous ai vue assez pour savoir quelle femme vous êtes!

CHARLOTTE: Vous me connaissez?

WERTHER: Vous êtes la meilleure ainsi
que la plus belle des créatures!

CHARLOTTE: Non!

But you don't know anything about me.

My soul has recognized your soul, Charlotte, and
I have seen enough of you to know what sort of woman you are!

You know me?

You are the best and
the most beautiful of creatures!

No!

Clues:

Charlotte's Tone of Voice

Tempo and Rhythm

Interplay of Charlotte's Voice and Orchestra

Literal Meaning of Charlotte's Words

Werther's Tone of Voice

Tempo and Rhythm

Interplay of Werther's Voice and Orchestra

Literal Meaning of Werther's Words

Inferences:

About Charlotte

About Charlotte's attitude toward Werther

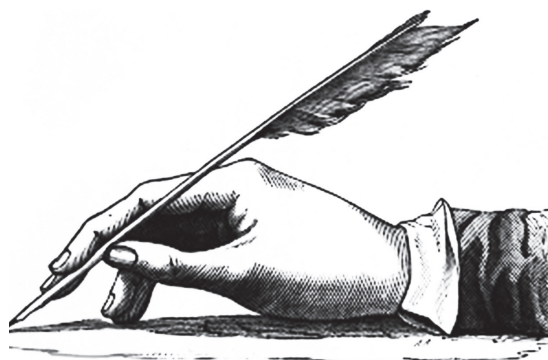
About Werther

About Werther's attitude toward Charlotte

WERTHER

A Life in Letters: The First Letter

[illegible]



CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

A Life in Letters: A Major Misunderstanding

TRACK 5

LE BAILLI: Charlotte! Charlotte! Albert est de retour!

CHARLOTTE: Albert?

WERTHER: Albert?

CHARLOTTE: Oui, celui que ma mère m'a fait jurer
d'accepter pour époux...
Dieu m'est témoin qu'un instant près de vous...
j'avais oublié le serment qu'on me rappelle!

WERTHER: A ce serment... restez fidèle!

Charlotte! Charlotte! Albert has returned!

Albert?

Albert?

Yes, the man my mother made me swear
to accept as my husband.

God is my witness for a moment, near you,
I forgot my vow!

Be faithful to that vow!

Clues:

Charlotte's Tone of Voice

Tempo and Rhythm

Interplay of Charlotte's Voice and Orchestra

Literal Meaning of Charlotte's Words

Werther's Tone of Voice

Tempo and Rhythm

Interplay of Werther's Voice and Orchestra

Literal Meaning of Werther's Words

Inferences:

About Charlotte

About Charlotte's attitude toward Werther

About Werther

About Werther's attitude toward Charlotte

WERTHER

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CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

A Life in Letters: A Major Misunderstanding (CONTINUED)

TRACK 6

WERTHER: Moi... j'en mourrai! Charlotte! Un autre! Son époux!

Me...I will die from this! Charlotte! Another man! Her husband!

Clues:

Werther's Tone of Voice

Tempo and Rhythm

Interplay of Werther's Voice and Orchestra

Literal Meaning of Werther's Words

Inferences:

About Werther

About Werther's attitude toward Charlotte

[The scene on Tracks 5 and 6 can be heard without interruption on Track 7.]

WERTHER

A Life in Letters: Revising the Letter

[illegible]

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

A Life in Letters: Dealing With It

TRACK 8

SOPHIE: Voyez le beau bouquet!
J'ai mis, pour le Pasteur,
le jardin au pillage!
Et puis, l'on va danser!
Pour le premier menuet
c'est sur vous je compte...
Ah! le sombre visage!

Look at these beautiful flowers!
I've been stealing from
the garden—for the pastor!
And then, we're going to dance!
I count on you
for the first minuet.
Ah! such a serious face!

Clues:

Sophie's Tone of Voice

Tempo and Rhythm

Interplay of Sophie's Voice and Orchestra

Literal Meaning of Sophie's Words

Inferences:

About Sophie

About Sophie's attitude toward Werther

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

A Life in Letters: Dealing With It (CONTINUED)

TRACK 9

SOPHIE: Mais aujourd'hui,
monsieur Werther,
tout le monde est joyeux!
Le bonheur est dans l'air!
Du gai soleil plein de flamme
dans l'azur resplendissant
la pure clarté descend
de nos fronts jusqu'à notre âme!
Tout le monde est joyeux!
le bonheur est dans l'air!
Et l'oiseau qui monte aux cieux
dans la brise qui soupire...
est revenu pour nous dire
que Dieu permet d'être heureux!
Tout le monde est joyeux!
Le bonheur est dans l'air!
Tout le monde est heureux!

But today,
Mr. Werther,
everyone is joyful!
Happiness is in the air!
From the merry sun, burning
in the resplendent blue sky,
pure light goes from our
faces straight to our souls!
Everyone is joyful!
Happiness is in the air!
And the bird who rises into the sky
on the sighing breeze
has come back to tell us
that God allows us to be happy!
Everyone is joyful!
Happiness is in the air!
Everyone is joyful!

Clues:

Sophie's Tone of Voice

Tempo and Rhythm

Interplay of Sophie's Voice and Orchestra

Literal Meaning of Sophie's Words

Inferences:

About Sophie

About Sophie's attitude toward Werther

WERTHER

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CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

A Life in Letters: Dealing With It (CONTINUED)

TRACK 10

WERTHER: Heureux! Pourrai-je l'être encore?

Happy! Can I ever be happy again?

Clues:

Werther's Tone of Voice

Tempo and Rhythm

Interplay of Werther's Voice and Orchestra

Literal Meaning of Werther's Words

Inferences:

About Werther

About Werther's attitude toward Charlotte

[The scene on Tracks 8, 9, and 10 can be heard without interruption on Track 11.]



WERTHER

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CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

A Life in Letters: Dealing With It (CONTINUED)

TRACK 12

CHARLOTTE: Albert m'aime, et je suis sa femme!

Albert loves me, and I am his wife!

WERTHER: Albert vous aime! Qui ne vous aimerait?

Albert loves you! Who wouldn't love you?

CHARLOTTE: Werther!

Werther!

Clues:

Charlotte's Tone of Voice

Tempo and Rhythm

Interplay of Charlotte's Voice and Orchestra

Literal Meaning of Charlotte's Words

Werther's Tone of Voice

Tempo and Rhythm

Interplay of Werther's Voice and Orchestra

Literal Meaning of Werther's Words

Inferences:

About Charlotte

About Charlotte's attitude toward Werther

About Werther

About Werther's attitude toward Charlotte

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

A Life in Letters: Dealing With It (CONTINUED)

TRACK 13

CHARLOTTE: N'est-il donc pas d'autre femme
ici-bas digne de votre amour... et libre d'elle-même?
Je ne m'appartiens plus...
pourquoi donc m'aimez-vous?

WERTHER: Eh! demandez aux fous
d'où vient que leur raison s'égare?

CHARLOTTE: Eh bien! puisqu'à jamais le destin nous sépare...
éloignez-vous! Partez! Partez!

WERTHER: Ah! quel mot ai-je entendu?

Is there not another woman around here
worthy of your love...and free?
I am no longer available...
why do you still love me?

Eh! Ask the insane what took away
their power of reason?

Fine—then since destiny requires that we separate,
go away! Leave! Leave!

Ah! what word have I heard?

Clues:

Charlotte's Tone of Voice

Tempo and Rhythm

Interplay of Charlotte's Voice and Orchestra

Literal Meaning of Charlotte's Words

Werther's Tone of Voice

Tempo and Rhythm

Interplay of Werther's Voice and Orchestra

Literal Meaning of Werther's Words

Inferences:

About Charlotte

About Charlotte's attitude toward Werther

About Werther

About Werther's attitude toward Charlotte

[The scene on Tracks 12 and 13 can be heard without interruption on Track 14.]

WERTHER

A Life in Letters: The Goodbye Letter

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

A Life in Letters: The Opera's Own Letters

TRACK 15

CHARLOTTE: Werther... Werther...

Qui m'aurait dit la place que dans mon cœur
il occupe aujourd'hui?

Depuis qu'il est parti, malgré moi, tout me lasse!
Et mon âme est pleine de lui!

*(She rises slowly as if drawn toward
the desk, which she opens.)*

Ces lettres! ces lettres! Ah! je les relis sans cesse...
Avec quel charme... mais aussi quelle tristesse!
Je devrais les détruire... je ne puis!

Werther...Werther...

Who could have told me the place he would
hold in my heart today?

Since he left, despite myself, everything bores me!
And my heart is filled with him!

These letters! these letters! Ah! I read them over endlessly.
With such charm, but also with such sadness!
I should destroy them... I can't!

Clues:

Charlotte's Tone of Voice

Tempo and Rhythm

Interplay of Charlotte's Voice and Orchestra

Literal Meaning of Charlotte's Words

Inferences:

About Charlotte

About Charlotte's attitude toward Werther

MUSICAL HIGHLIGHT

Love Letter

(Track 16 presents the performances on Tracks 17–28, below, without interruption.)

TRACK 17

CHARLOTTE: (*reading*) "Je vous écris de ma petite chambre:
au ciel gris et lourd de Décembre
pèse sur moi comme un linceul..."

"I'm writing you from my little room.
The grey, heavy sky of December
weighs upon me like a shroud..."

TRACK 18

"Et je suis seul! seul! toujours seul!"

"And I am alone! Alone! Always alone!"

TRACK 19

Ah! Personne auprès de lui!...

Ah! Nobody near him...

TRACK 20

...pas un seul témoignage de tendresse ou même de pitié!

...no sign at all of tenderness or even pity!

TRACK 21

Dieu! Comment m'est venu ce triste courage,
d'ordonner cet exil et cet isolement?

God! How did I find that sad courage,
to order this exile and this isolation?

TRACK 22

Track 22 is entirely orchestral.

TRACK 23

(*reading*) "Des cris joyeux d'enfants montent sous ma fenêtre.
Des cris d'enfants! Et je pense à ce temps si doux.
Où tous vos chers petits jouaient autour de nous!
Ils m'oublieront peut-être?"

"The joyful cries of children rises beneath my window.
The cries of children! And I think of that sweet time.
Where all your precious little ones played around us.
Perhaps they will have forgotten me?"

Werther!

WERTHER

MUSICAL HIGHLIGHT

Love Letter (CONTINUED)

TRACK 24

Non, Werther, dans leur souvenir votre image reste vivante...
et quand vous reviendrez...
...mais doit-il revenir?

No, Werther, your image stays alive in their memory, and when
you come back...
but must he come back?

TRACK 25

(frightened) Ah! ce dernier billet me glace et m'épouvante!

Ah, this last letter chills and frightens me!

TRACK 26

(reading) "Tu m'as dit: à Noël, et j'ai crié: jamais!
On va bientôt connaître qui de nous disait vrai!
Mais si je ne dois reparaître au jour fixé, devant toi,
ne m'accuse pas, pleure-moi!"
(repeating fearfully, afraid to understand)
Ne m'accuse pas, pleure-moi!

"You said to me: until Christmas, and I cried: Never!
We will soon know which of us spoke the truth.
But if I should not appear on that day, in front of you,
don't accuse me, cry for me!"

"Don't accuse me, cry for me!"

TRACK 27

(reading) "Oui, de ces yeux si pleins de charmes,
ces lignes, tu les reliras, tu les mouilleras de tes larmes..."

"Yes, with those eyes so full of charm,
you will reread these lines, you will wet them with your tears..."

TRACK 28

"O Charlotte, et tu frémiras!"
(repeating without reading) Tu frémiras! Tu frémiras!

"Oh Charlotte, and you will tremble with fear!"
You will tremble! You will tremble!

MUSICAL HIGHLIGHT

Men About Town

TRACK 29

SOPHIE: Ma sœur s'habille pour le bal...

My sister is getting dressed for the ball.

THE BAILIFF: Oui, ce bal d'amis et de parents que l'on donne à Wetzlar. On vient prendre Charlotte.

Yes, this ball for friends and relatives, that is taking place in Wetzlar. Someone will bring Charlotte.

TRACK 30

JOHANN: C'est donc cela! Koffel a mis sa redingote, Steiner a retenu le cheval du brasseur, Hoffmann a sa calèche et Goulden sa berline.

That's it! Koffel has put on his fancycote, Steiner has brought his horse back from the brewery, Hoffman has his coach and Goulden his carriage.

TRACK 31

JOHANN: Enfin, monsieur Werther m'a paru moins rêveur!

Why, even Mr. Werther seems less of a dreamer!

TRACK 32

THE BAILIFF: Fort bien, ce jeune homme.

He's quite good, that young man.

JOHANN: Oui; mais pas fort en cuisine...

Yes, but not when it comes to food.

THE BAILIFF: Il est instruit... très distingué...

He is learned... very distinguished.

SCHMIDT: Un peu mélancolique...

A little melancholy...

JOHANN: Ah! Certes! Jamais gai!

Ah, for sure—he's never happy!

TRACK 33

THE BAILIFF: Le Prince lui promet, dit-on, une ambassade, Il l'estime et lui veut du bien...

I'm told that the Prince has promised him an ambassadorship. He thinks highly of him and wants to do well by him.

JOHANN: Un diplomate! Bah! Ça ne vaut rien à table!

A diplomat! Bah! That's not worth a thing at the dinner table!

SCHMIDT: Ça ne sait pas boire une rasade!

That doesn't mean he knows how to drink a glass!

TRACK 34

JOHANN: A tout à l'heure au Raisin d'Or.

See you soon at the Golden Grape.

SCHMIDT: Oui, tu nous dois une revanche!

Yes, you owe us a drink!

THE BAILIFF: Encore!

Again!

[The scene on Tracks 29–34 can be heard without interruption on Track 35.]

THE MET: LIVE IN HD
WERTHER

MUSICAL HIGHLIGHT

Men About Town (CONTINUED)

TRACK 36

JOHANN: Vivat Bacchus! Semper vivat! C'est dimanche!

SCHMIDT: Vivat Bacchus! Semper vivat! C'est dimanche!

JOHANN ET SCHMIDT: Vivat! Vivat Bacchus! Semper vivat!
Vivat Bacchus! Semper vivat! Vivat Bacchus! Semper vivat!
Vivat Bacchus! Semper vivat!

Long live Bacchus! May he live forever! It's Sunday!

Long live Bacchus! May he live forever! It's Sunday!

Long live, long live Bacchus! May he live forever!
Long live Bacchus! May he live forever! Long live Bacchus!
May he live forever! Long live Bacchus! May he live forever!

TRACK 37

SCHMIDT: Allez! Chantez l'office et que l'orgue résonne!
De bénir le Seigneur il est bien des façons,
moi, je le glorifie en exaltant ses dons!
Gloire à celui qui nous donne
d'aussi bon vin et fait l'existence si bonne!
Bénéissons le Seigneur!

JOHANN: De bénir le Seigneur il est bien des façons,
moi, je le glorifie en exaltant ses dons!
Bénéissons le Seigneur! Bénéissons le Seigneur!

Go! Recite prayers and let the organ sound!
There are many ways to bless the Lord—
me, I glorify him in praising his gifts!
Glory to he who gives us
such good wine and makes living so good!
Bless the Lord!

There are many ways to bless the Lord—
me, I glorify him in praising his gifts!
Bless the Lord! Bless the Lord!



MUSICAL HIGHLIGHT

Men About Town (CONTINUED)

TRACK 38

(This track includes the scene on Tracks 36 and 37, as well as a brief intermediate passage.)

JOHANN: Vivat Bacchus! Semper vivat! C'est dimanche!

SCHMIDT: Vivat Bacchus! Semper vivat! c'est dimanche!

JOHANN: Ah! l'admirable journée!
De ce joyeux soleil j'ai l'âme illuminée!

SCHMIDT: Qu'il est doux vivre quand l'air est si léger,
le ciel si bleu... le vin si clair!

JOHANN, PUIS SCHMIDT: C'est dimanche!

SCHMIDT: Allez! Chantez l'office et que l'orgue résonne!
De bénir le Seigneur il est bien des façons,
moi, je le glorifie en exaltant ses dons!
Gloire à celui qui nous donne
d'aussi bon vin et fait l'existence si bonne!
Bénéissons le Seigneur!

JOHANN: De bénir le Seigneur il est bien des façons,
moi, je le glorifie en exaltant ses dons!
Bénéissons le Seigneur! Bénéissons le Seigneur!

TRACK 39

SCHMIDT: Si! Kätschen reviendra, je vous dis!

JOHANN: A quelle heure et quel jour, aura lieu ce retour,
qu'importe! puisqu'elle reviendra!

SCHMIDT: Puisqu'elle reviendra!

TRACK 40

JOHANN: Sept ans de fiançailles, ça ne peut s'oublier
de la sorte!

TRACK 41

SCHMIDT: Dépêchons-nous! car j'entends le signal,
si nous manquons l'office, au moins, ouvrons le bal!

[The scene on Tracks 39–41 can be heard without interruption
on Track 42]

Long live Bacchus! May he live forever! It's Sunday!

Long live Bacchus! May he live forever! It's Sunday!

Ah! What an admirable day!
My soul has been illuminated by this joyous sun!

It's so sweet to live when the air is so light, the sky so
blue, the wine so clear!

It's Sunday!

Go! Recite prayers and let the organ sound!
There are many ways to bless the Lord—
me, I glorify him in praising his gifts!
Glory to he who gives us
such good wine and makes living so good!
Bless the Lord!

There are many ways to bless the Lord—
me, I glorify him in praising his gifts!
Bless the Lord! Bless the Lord!

Sure! Kätschen will come back, I tell you!

It doesn't matter what time and what day this return will be—
since she'll come back!

Since she'll come back!

Engaged for seven years, one can't forget that sort of thing!

Let's hurry, because I hear the signal—
if we miss the prayers, at least let's start the party!

THE MET: LIVE IN HD
WERTHER

MUSICAL HIGHLIGHT

Christmas in July: “Noël” as a Framing Device

TRACK 43

THE BAILIFF: Assez! Assez!
M'écouterà-t-on cette fois?
Recommençons! Recommençons!
Surtout pas trop de voix! pas trop de voix!

CHILDREN: Noël! Noël! Noël!
Jésus vient de naître,
Voici notre divin maître...

THE BAILIFF: Mais non! Ce n'est pas ça!

Enough! Enough!
Will anyone listen to me this time?
Let's start again! Let's start again!
Above all not too loud! Not too loud!

Noël! Noël! Noël!
Jesus has been born,
here is our divine master...

No! Not like that!

TRACK 44

THE BAILIFF: Osez-vous chanter de la sorte
quand votre sœur Charlotte est là?
Elle doit tout entendre à travers de la porte!

So you dare sing this way
when your sister Charlotte is there?
She must be able to hear all this right through the door!

TRACK 45

CHILDREN: Noël! Noël!

THE BAILIFF: C'est bien! C'est bien!

CHILDREN: Jésus vient de naître
Voici notre divin maître
Rois et bergers d'Israël! Dans le firmament
Des anges gardiens fidèles
Ont ouvert grandes leurs ailes
Et s'en vont partout chantant: Noël!

THE CHILDREN AND THE BAILIFF: Noël!

CHILDREN: Jésus vient de naître!
Voici notre divin maître,
Rois et bergers d'Israël!
Noël! Noël! Noël! Noël! Noël!

THE BAILIFF: C'est bien cela!
Noël! Noël! Noël! Noël! Noël!

Noël! Noël!

That's good! That's good!

Jesus has been born,
here is our divine master
Kings and shepherds of Israel!
In the heavens faithful guardian angels
have opened their wings wide
and gone off singing everywhere: Noël!

Noël!

Jesus has been born,
here is our divine master
Kings and shepherds of Israel!
Noël! Noël! Noël! Noël! Noël!

That's it!
Noël! Noël! Noël! Noël! Noël!

[The scene on Tracks 43-45 can be heard without interruption
on Track 46.]



Abies Nordmanniana
H. H. H. H.

MUSICAL HIGHLIGHT

Christmas in July: “Noël” as a Framing Device (CONTINUED)

TRACK 47

WERTHER AND CHARLOTTE: Tout... oublions tout!

Everything...we'll forget everything!

TRACK 48

CHILDREN'S VOICES: Noël! Noël! Noël! Noël! Noël! Noël! Noël!

Noël! Noël! Noël! Noël! Noël! Noël! Noël!

TRACK 49

CHARLOTTE: Dieu! Ces cris joyeux! Ce rire en ce moment cruel!

God! These joyous cries! This laughter in this cruel moment!

TRACK 50

CHILDREN'S VOICES: Jésus vient de naître,
Voici notre divin maître,
Rois et bergers d'Israël!

Jesus has been born,
here is our divine master
Kings and shepherds of Israel!

WERTHER: (*Rising a bit, with a kind of hallucination*)
Ah! les enfants... les anges!

Ah! Children...angels!

CHILDREN'S VOICES: Noël! Noël! Noël! Noël!

Noël! Noël! Noël! Noël! Noël!

WERTHER: Oui, Noël! c'est le chant de la délivrance...

Yes, Noël! That's the song of salvation...

CHILDREN'S VOICES: Noël! Noël! Noël! Noël! Noël!

Noël! Noël! Noël! Noël! Noël!

WERTHER: C'est l'hymne du pardon redit par l'innocence!

It's the hymn of pardon, renewed by innocence!

TRACK 51

CHARLOTTE: Werther!

Werther!

TRACK 52

WERTHER: Pourquoi ces larmes? Crois-tu donc qu'en cet instant
ma vie est achevée? (*With ecstasy, rising completely*)
Elle commence, vois-tu bien!

Why these tears? Don't you see how in this moment,
my life is fulfilled.
It's beginning, you see!

CHILDREN'S VOICES: Noël!

Noël!

[The scene on Tracks 47-52 can be heard without interruption
on Track 53.]

At the Met: Framing the Romance

Richard Eyre, director of this *Met: Live in HD* presentation, describes *Werther* as an intimate work. But the stage in the Metropolitan Opera House is 54 feet wide, 54 feet high and 89 feet deep—hardly an intimate space. So Eyre worked with Rob Howell, the production’s set and costume designer, to trick the eye of the audience and create a close-up personal feeling by building a kind of stage within the grand Met stage.

What aspects of the set conjure up this intimacy? Materials? Proportions? The relationships of the singers to their environment? Make a scale drawing or, if you prefer, create a list in the spaces below, explaining the methods these artists have devised.

Werther: My Highs & Lows

MARCH 15, 2014

CONDUCTED BY ALAIN ALTINOGLU

REVIEWED BY _____

THE STARS	STAR POWER	MY COMMENTS
JONAS KAUFMANN AS WERTHER	* * * * *	
SOPHIE KOCH AS CHARLOTTE	* * * * *	
DAVID BIŽIĆ AS ALBERT	* * * * *	
LISETTE OROPESA AS SOPHIE	* * * * *	
JONATHAN SUMMERS AS THE BAILIFF	* * * * *	

THE SHOW, SCENE BY SCENE	ACTION	MUSIC	SET DESIGN/STAGING
THE CHILDREN'S REHEARSAL MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
THE BAILIFF CHATS WITH JOHANN AND SCHMIDT MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
WERTHER'S ARRIVAL MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
ALBERT'S RETURN MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
WERTHER AND CHARLOTTE COME HOME MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
WERTHER LEARNS OF CHARLOTTE'S ENGAGEMENT TO ALBERT MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
JOHANN AND SCHMIDT'S SUNDAY DRINK MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
WERTHER'S LAMENT MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
ALBERT AND WERTHER HAVE A TALK MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5

Werther: My Highs & Lows

(CONTINUED)

THE SHOW, SCENE BY SCENE	ACTION	MUSIC	SET DESIGN/STAGING
SOPHIE SPREADS CHEER MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
CHARLOTTE TAKES A STAND MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
WERTHER LEAVES WETZLAR MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
SOPHIE AND CHARLOTTE DISCUSS WERTHER'S DEPARTURE MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
CHARLOTTE READS WERTHER'S LETTERS MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
WERTHER ARRIVES, CHRISTMAS EVE MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
CHARLOTTE RESPONDS TO WERTHER MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
ALBERT COMES HOME MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
THE MESSENGER COMES FOR ALBERT'S PISTOLS MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
CHARLOTTE ARRIVES AT WERTHER'S ROOMS MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
THE KISS MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
WERTHER'S END MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
CHARLOTTE MOURNS MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5