La Traviata
Nashville Opera
For over 125 years Regions has been proud to be a part of the Middle Tennessee community, growing and thriving as our area has. From the opening of our doors on September 1, 1883, we have committed to this community and our customers.

One area that we are strongly committed to is the education of our students. We are proud to support TPAC’s Humanities Outreach in Tennessee Program. What an important sponsorship this is – reaching over 25,000 students and teachers – some students would never see a performing arts production without this program. Regions continues to reinforce its commitment to the communities it serves and in addition to supporting programs such as HOT, we have close to 200 associates teaching financial literacy in classrooms this year.

Thank you, teachers, for giving your students this wonderful opportunity. They will certainly enjoy the experience. You are creating memories of a lifetime, and Regions is proud to be able to help make this opportunity possible.

Jim Schmitz
Executive Vice President
Area Executive
Middle Tennessee Area

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Dear Teachers~

We are so pleased to be able to partner with Nashville Opera to bring students to the invited dress rehearsal of La Traviata.

This guidebook includes Nashville Opera’s extensive study guide for adults with synopsis, background, and musical information. We have also included some additional material for you to use with students.

Please look particularly at the opera rehearsal information which will help students understand the special factors present in an invited dress rehearsal.

Enjoy!

TPAC Education.

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Nashville Opera Guidebook written by Stuart Holt
TPAC Guidebook compiled by Lattie Brown
Most final dress rehearsals are almost exactly like a performance. The director will stop the action if needed, but it is exceedingly rare and generally only for a technical malfunction on the stage. Like theatre, an opera dress rehearsal is the final chance before the performance to make a complicated collaboration come together seamlessly.

The Nashville Opera’s rehearsal schedule begins with two weeks at the opera rehearsal space in the new Noah Liff Opera Center. Stage action is mapped out, the performers experiment with their characters, and the director’s ideas for the flow of the opera are shared with the cast. The time period may seem short for such a large production. It only works because opera singers begin rehearsals knowing every bit of their music by heart and having rehearsed it themselves over a period of months, sometimes years. If they do not know the role on the first day, the director has the right to replace them immediately. The opera company will fly in a new singer to take over their part. Once opera singers learn a particular role, they keep it in their repertory and play the role many more times at different opera companies around the world.

Four to five days before the first performance, the set is “loaded in” to the theater, and the lights are hung and focused. Students will notice a table in the middle of the orchestra level seats for the stage manager, the director, and the designers. This serves as a central location for communicating with the singers and crew onstage, the conductor orchestra pit, and the technicians in the lighting booth. During the final dress rehearsal, students may notice lighting changes as the designer makes final adjustments.

Opera rehearsals use a skilled piano accompanist, but once the company moves into the theater, the performers will have a Sitzprobe rehearsal (a German word meaning to sit and try out.) The Sitzprobe is a “sing-thru” with the orchestra and conductor, concentrating on the nuances of the music only without staging. It is the first time that the orchestra and singers put together the work that they have been doing in separate orchestra rehearsals and staging rehearsals.

A piano tech rehearsal is held without costumes to let the singers get used to the set and give the set crew their first chance to practice scene changes. The next rehearsal is a piano dress rehearsal that adds costumes. Finally, the orchestra dress rehearsal puts all the elements together: lighting, set changes, costumes, the orchestra, and the supertitles (the English translations of the words to the opera, called the libretto.) The supertitles will also be in operation at the final invited dress rehearsal.

The final dress rehearsal allows the last polish before the performance, and invited dress rehearsals add the final important element to the opera, an audience. Because of the strenuous nature of the singing, a singer may choose to “mark” on the final dress rehearsal in order to preserve their voices for all the performances. “Marking” does not have the same meaning in opera as it does in theatre. In theatre, it means just going through the blocking and the words of the lines. In opera, it specifically means that the singer may choose not to sing at full volume, pushing their voice to the utmost. All of their acting will be at full power with all the passion and conviction that opera requires. You will be their first audience; they are ready and excited to give you the story and the music.
Step 1–Know the story!
In opera, it is important to know as much as possible about what is going on beforehand, including the ending. Once the music, the voices, the setting, the lights, and the dramatic staging come together at the performance, audience members will be able to fit all the elements seamlessly together into the plot which becomes the springboard for the real power of opera.

Step 2–Experience the music!
Composers use many tools to communicate with music. They create melodies that evoke a variety of emotions. They use tempos (how slow or fast) and dynamics (how loud or soft) and rhythms (the frequency and pattern of beat). They choose particular instruments to add color to the music they have written. Think of instrument choice as a type of painting for your ears! The term “soundscape” is often used in describing the music of an opera, and it can set the atmosphere and give information about character and plot. What is it telling you?

Step 3–Understand the singers!
Opera singers are vocal athletes. They practice every day to exercise their vocal chords and their extensive breath control. The combinations of notes that they have to sing are very difficult, and the things that they can do with their voices are extreme. You can easily compare a regular singing voice and an opera singing voice to a weekend jogger and a gold-medal-winning Olympic track champion! BUT, the reason that their voices are prized is that they can express so much emotion on a grand scale.

Step 4–Plunge in!
This is the most important step. Everything about opera is over-the-top, on the edge, enormous in every way. It’s an art form that thrives on its intensity and passion. Opera stories portray people at their most extreme, and the singers and the music communicate in ways that words alone cannot. You have to let go, allow yourself to stop thinking and analyzing and simply FEEL THE EMOTION!

(with acknowledgements to Opera 101 by Fred Plotkin for idea organization above)
Go Back in Time

Violetta Valéry is based on a character in La Dame Aux Camélias by Alexandre Dumas (son of the man who wrote The Three Musketeers) who is in turn based on a real woman that Dumas knew, Marie Duplessis. All three women lead salons, a French term meaning a social gathering for the main purpose of stimulating conversation. Read the excerpts below from the diaries of the Baron de Grim and Monsieur Marmontel about Julie Lespinasse, a woman in the late 1700’s, famous for her Paris salon.

“The circle was formed of persons who were not bound together. She had taken them here and there in society, but so well assorted were they that once there they fell into harmony like the strings of an instrument touched by an able hand. ... Nowhere was conversation more lively, more brilliant, or better regulated than at her house.”

“Her talent for casting out a thought and giving it for discussion to men of that class, her own talent in discussing it with precision, sometimes with eloquence, her talent for bringing forward new ideas and varying the topic-always with the facility and ease of a fairy, who, with one touch of her wand, can change the scene of her enchantment-these talents, I say, were not those of an ordinary woman. It was not with the follies of fashion and vanity that daily, during four hours of conversation, without languor and without vacuum, she knew how to make herself interesting to a wide circle of strong minds.”

Think about how people found out ideas in the 18th and 19th centuries. There were no telephones or internet, no texting, blogging, Facebook, or Twitter, although they did have books and newspapers. In particular, women were far more restricted in where they could go to meet friends.

Imagine a meeting weekly with a group to talk for up to four hours! How would you lead the conversation to keep it interesting? How would you include everyone and keep the discussions civil? What makes a great conversation?

Breathe like Singers

The power of opera singer’s breath control is formidable. They must be able to sing very complicated musical passages, to sustain long notes, and to project their voices without microphones. They work all the time on their abdominal muscles, particularly the diaphragm which runs along the bottom of the ribcage.

☞ Pay attention to your breathing. What part of your body is moving? Place your hands on your stomach just below your ribcage and try to push them out slightly as you breathe in.

☞ Keep your hands in place, take a breath in, and say “ha!” You should feel your diaphragm jump under you hands.

☞ Try to fill your lungs with the biggest breath you can and let it out as slowly as you can with a hissing sound.

☞ Try it again and while you are hissing have a partner count how long you can make the hissing sound or (harder) how long you can make the sound “ahhh.” If you were to practice this every day, you would build the muscle and be able to make sound for longer periods of time.

Every once in a while during the performance, try to pay attention to which passages would require the most breath control.
Nashville Opera presents

La Traviata
The Patricia & Rodes Hart Production

Music by Giuseppe Verdi
Libretto by Francesco Maria Piave
Based on the play La Dame aux camélias by Alexandre Dumas
First performance: La Fenice, Venice on March 6, 1853

Cast
John Hoomes, Stage Director
Christopher Larkin, Conductor

Violetta Valéry
Jennifer Black, soprano

Alfredo Germont
Joshua Kohl, tenor

Giorgio Germont
Grant Youngblood, baritone

Flora Bervoix
Jennifer Coleman, mezzo-soprano

Baron Duphol
Matthew Treviño, baritone

Gastone
Philippe Pierce, tenor

Marchese d’Obigny
James Harrington, bass-baritone

Annina
Sabrina Laney Warren, soprano

Dr. Grenvil
Billy Dodson, bass

Performances
Thursday, October 13, 2011, 7:00 PM
Saturday, October 15, 2011, 8:00 PM
Andrew Jackson Hall
Tennessee Performing Arts Center
Nashville, Tennessee

Opera Insights Preview
One hour prior to curtain
Sponsored by Hotel Indigo

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The Nashville Opera Offices
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Study Guide Contributors:
Stuart Holt, Director of Education and Outreach
The Story

Act I
The salon in Violetta’s house

Violetta Valéry, a famed courtesan, throws a lavish party at her Paris home to celebrate her recovery from an illness. Gastone, a count, has brought his friend, the young nobleman Alfredo Germont. Gastone tells Violetta that Alfredo loves her, and that while she was ill, he came to her house every day. Alfredo joins them and admits that Gastone is telling the truth. The Baron Duphol, Violetta’s current lover, is asked to give a toast, but he refuses. The crowd immediately asks Alfredo for the toast instead.

From the next room, an orchestra is heard and the guests move there to dance. Violetta begins to faint and feel dizzy. She worries that her illness may still be a problem and asks her guests to go ahead and give her a moment to rest. While the guests dance in the next room, Violetta looks at her pale face in the mirror. Alfredo enters expressing his concern for her health, and reminds her of his love. At first she rejects him because love has always meant nothing to her, but there is something about Alfredo that touches her heart. He is about to leave when she gives him a flower, a camellia, telling him to return it when it has wilted. She promises to meet him the next day.

After the guests leave, Violetta wonders if Alfredo could actually be her one true love, but realizes she needs freedom to live her life. As she sings of her love for freedom, Alfredo’s voice is heard outside the window singing about her.

Act 2
Scene 1: Violetta’s country house outside Paris

Three months later, Alfredo and Violetta are living together in a country house outside Paris. Violetta has fallen in love with Alfredo and she has completely abandoned her former life. Alfredo sings of their new happy life together. Annina, the maid, arrives from Paris where she had to sell Violetta’s belongings to support their country lifestyle. Alfredo is shocked to learn this and leaves for Paris immediately to settle matters himself.

Violetta returns to the country to find a party invitation from her friend Flora. She is hosting a party in Paris that evening. As she is reading the invitation, Giorgio Germont, Alfredo’s father arrives and demands that she break off her relationship with his son. It seems that Violetta’s reputation and her relationship with Alfredo have threatened his daughter’s engagement. Violetta tells him that she cannot end the relationship with Alfredo because she loves him so much. Giorgio pleads with her to end it for the sake of his family. With growing sadness, she finally agrees and is willing to say goodbye to Alfredo. Giorgio is impressed by Violetta’s nobility and in gratitude for her kindness and sacrifice; kisses her forehead before leaving her to cry alone.

Violetta gives a note to Annina accepting Flora’s invitation and, writes a farewell letter to Alfredo. He enters as she is wrapping up her letter. She can barely control her emotions; she tells him repeatedly of her unconditional love and runs out of the room. Before setting off for Paris, she asks her servant to deliver the farewell letter to Alfredo. The servant delivers it and as Alfredo reads it, Giorgio returns and attempts to comfort his son. He reminds Alfredo of his sister and his family in Provence. Alfredo suspects the Baron is behind this separation with Violetta as he discovers the party invitation on the desk. He decides that he must confront Violetta at the party. Giorgio tries to stop him, but Alfredo rushes out.
Scene 2: Party at Flora’s house

At the party, the Marquis tells Flora that Violetta and Alfredo have separated. She calls for the entertainers to perform for the guests. Violetta arrives with Baron Douphol and they notice Alfredo at the gambling table. When he sees them, Alfredo loudly proclaims that he will take Violetta home with him. Feeling annoyed, the Baron goes to the gambling table and joins the game. As they bet, Alfredo starts winning until Flora announces that dinner is served. Alfredo leaves with handfuls of money. As everyone is leaving the room, Violetta asks to speak with Alfredo. She fears that in a fit of anger, the Baron will challenge Alfredo to a duel. Not wishing to cause a scene, she gently asks Alfredo to leave. Alfredo misunderstands her worry and demands that she admit her love for the Baron. Knowing that she cannot reveal her real reasons for leaving she admits that she loves the Baron. Alfredo furiously calls the guests to witness what he has to say. He humiliates and denounces Violetta, saying he will pay back all the bills she paid for him. He then throws his recent winnings at her feet as she faints and falls to the floor. The guests and Giorgio Germont, who followed his son to the party, are appalled by this scene. He denounces his son’s actions and Alfredo is immediately remorseful for his heartless behavior. Flora and the ladies try to persuade Violetta to leave the dining room, but she stays to tell Alfredo that he can’t imagine the love she has in her heart for him. The scene ends as the Baron challenges Alfredo to a duel to avenge Violetta’s public humiliation.

Act 3
Violetta’s bedroom – A few months later

Dr. Grenvil tells Annina that Violetta will not live long as her illness has worsened. When she is alone, Violetta reads a letter from Alfredo’s father out loud. He explains that Alfredo only wounded the Baron in the duel and has learned of the sacrifice Violetta made for their family. Alfredo is returning as quickly as possible to ask for her forgiveness. Violetta senses it is too late as Annina rushes in to tell her of Alfredo’s arrival. The lovers are reunited and Alfredo suggests that they leave Paris. Unfortunately, Violetta knows it is too late and that her time is up. Giorgio enters with Dr. Grenvil, regretting that he tried to come between his son and Violetta. Suddenly, Violetta revives, but a moment later, she collapses and dies in Alfredo’s arms.
What to Listen For

Act I

Prelude – This dark and brooding melody opens the opera and then segues directly into the excitement of a party.

“Libiamo ne' lieti calici (Drinking song)” – This toast to love, happiness and wine is extremely well known and has been used in any number of commercials and films. Verdi’s paints the thrill and excitement of the party in both the vocal and orchestral line.

“Un dì, felice, eterea” – In this duet Alfredo declares that he has loved Violetta from the first day he saw her while she responds that love is something she can never give.

“E strano…Ah, fors’è lui…Sempre libera” – This scena (long scene) for Violetta is truly an emotional rollercoaster. It starts slowly and builds to a dramatic finish of vocal fireworks.

Act II

Scene One

“De miei bollenti spiriti” – Alfredo sings of the joys of love and how much he has learned from Violetta.

“Pura siccome un angelo…Dite alla giovine” – This is one of Verdi’s great baritone-soprano duets. Germont begs Violetta to end her relationship with his son. She is filled with conflict, yet in the end agrees.

“Amami Alfredo” – This brief musical moment is filled with dramatic intensity. The vocal and orchestral line show both Violetta’s love for Alfredo and her overwhelming desire to do the right thing for his family.

“Di Provenza il mar” – Germont pleads with Alfredo to forget Violetta and return to the family home in Provence.

Scene Two

“Di sprezzo degno, se stesso rendo” – The finale of the scene allows Violetta, Alfredo, Germont and the chorus to all express their thoughts and feelings. It begins softly and builds as the full company expresses, shame, regret, despair and sympathy.

Act III

“Addio del passato” – Violetta recalls the happy times that she and Alfredo shared
Recommended Recordings

**AUDIO**

La Scala (1980)  
EMI Classics  
Violetta – Renata Scotto  
Alfredo – Alfredo Kraus  
Germont – Renato Bruson  
Conducted by Riccardo Muti

Covent Garden (1995)  
Decca  
Violetta – Mario Del Monaco  
Alfredo – Frank Lopardo  
Germont – Leo Nucci  
Conducted by Sir George Solti

La Scala (1955)  
EMI Classics  
Violetta – Maria Callas  
Alfredo – Giuseppe Di Stefano  
Germont – Ettore Bastianini  
Conducted by Carlo Maria Giulini

**VIDEO**

Film Version (1982)  
Deutsche Gramophone  
Violetta – Teresa Stratas  
Alfredo – Placido Domingo  
Germont – Cornell MacNeil  
Conducted by James Levine

Salzburg Festival (2005)  
Deutsche Gramophone  
Violetta – Anna Netrebko  
Alfredo – Rolando Villazon  
Germont – Thomas Hampson  
Conducted by Carlo Rizzi
La Traviata was written in what we call Verdi’s “middle period”. He was already working feverishly on Il Trovatore but was searching for something different for his newest opera. He had already explored historical subjects and period dramas as well as the extremely convoluted plot of his current opera. A viewing of Dumas’ La Dame aux camélias in Paris in 1852 may have provided new subject material, in the form of romantic realism. It would not be until January 1853 that he would announce the Dumas play as his subject material. It was, surprisingly completed in less than two months. It would be the first opera to explore subject material that was based on contemporary characters.

Verdi worked with librettist Francesco Maria Piave, who would work on his Macbeth and Rigoletto. Verdi and Piave chose to place their focus on the three main characters in the play. The names were changed, but they retained the aspects and qualities that audiences most liked about the play. They wished to stay true to the subject material, so none of the characters are stereotypes and every effort was made to have them speak in a realistic manner. Piave went as far as to translate entire passages from the French into Italian Verse.

Both composer and librettist felt that the opera should be set in contemporary Paris. They would choose both ‘modern’ costumes and set designs. This would be the first time that audiences would come face to face with ordinary people, just like them. One would think that this would not only make the opera more ‘accessible’, but also draw in the audience. Unfortunately this was not the case and opening night was a fiasco.

The audience was decked out in all of their finest and yet when the curtain rose, there were Violetta and her courtesan friends, making their livelihood selling sex, wearing their finest, and in many cases, looking finer than the audience. The lead character did nothing to win over the audience either. Many of the women in the audience knew their husbands kept mistresses, but they certainly did not wish to see this played out as entertainment, nor did they wish to expose their young daughters to this behavior. To makes things even worse, the soprano singing Violetta looked a bit too ‘healthy’ and the tenor singing Alfredo was a bit past his prime for role. The audience was not pleased and responded with both dismay and laughter.

The day after, Verdi wrote to his friend Muzio in what has now become perhaps his most famous letter: "La Traviata last night a failure. My fault or the singers’? Time will tell." Following two evenings of failure, Verdi withdrew the work. After some revisions between 1853 and May 1854, mostly affecting Acts 2 and 3, the opera was presented again in Venice, this time at the Teatro San Benedetto. Verdi also gave his blessing to shift the time period to the 1700’s, making the production more of a historical costume drama. This time the opera was a smashing success!

It eventually became one of the top ten operas in Italy and even during Verdi’s life, became a regular in the repertoire of most international houses. According to Opera America, during the 2009-2010 opera season, La Traviata was the fourth most frequently produced opera in the United States.
The Real Traviata:

Alexandre Dumas, the younger’s *La Dame aux camélias* first appeared as a best-selling novel in 1848 and a successful stage play in 1852. The play featured a modern-day courtesan, as a sympathetic character and dealt with contemporary life. The story was based on facts and some members of the audience had even met the woman.

The title character was modeled after a young woman in Dumas’ life named Alphonsine Plessis. She was a country girl who arrived as a teenager in Paris. She lived with relatives who owned a grocery stall. They were able to get her work with a laundress and then a seamstress, but Alphonsine wanted to move up in the world. She was terribly poor and often hungry, but her looks and natural refinement enabled her to make friends above her current social status.

Alphonsine worked hard. She learned to read and write, took up horseback riding and also gained an appreciation of the arts. In a short time she was able to mingle and converse comfortably with educated people. To complete her transformation, she also changed her name from *Alphonsine* to *Marie* and added *Du* to *Plessis*.

During this transformation she began to garner attention from wealthy male admirers, who set her up in style. She soon was seen and admired in all the best places. She became a courtesan and established a salon. It catered to a very exclusive group of men who came to her home to enjoy intellectual conversation. It was a great honor to be invited as she chose the participants based on their brilliance and their wealth. No foreign aristocrat visiting Paris wanted to return without calling on la Duplessis and leaving a costly offering.

Much like Violetta Valéry in *La Traviata*, Marie had a gentleman who wanted her for himself. He bought a home in a lovely village outside the city where they could be alone and away from distractions. They even spoke of marriage, but his family was unhappy with his prolonged and exclusive relationship with a well known courtesan. When he had become hopelessly in debt from gambling and supporting Marie, his guardian offered to pay all his bills on the condition that his son end the relationship. He accepted the offer, but did not have the heart to break it to Marie. Thus it was the guardian who came to tell Marie that the affair was over.

Marie returned to Paris cured of her romantic illusions, and formed a new salon. She also realized that her persistent cough was the symptom of a serious illness. It would be during this time that she would earn the name “Lady of the Camellias”. A new admirer moved her to an exquisite residence with a room devoted to flowers. It featured gilded, vine-laden trellises mounted on the walls to which Marie added baskets of fresh flowers. From these baskets she would regularly pull a camellia to wear. This was the most expensive corsage to be had at that time.

As her illness grew worse, she met Alexandre Dumas, the younger. One evening, when they were attending a party, Marie had a dreadful coughing spell and retired to a bedroom. He followed her and, when she regained her composure, she explained to him that nothing could be done for her illness. Since it would not do any good to stay home and rest, she chose to be among interesting people who would distract her from her pain. Dumas continued his affair with her for about a year.

Her disease continued to worsen and became quite evident. One party guest wrote: “Her great eyes, dimmed and dark circled, were slowly burning themselves away under her eyelids. In her broken but still voluptuous grace she was like a flower that had been trodden underfoot at a ball.” Her ability to attend social functions only lasted a few more months. Finally, one night in December she attended the theater and fainted and had to leave early, leaning heavily on her coachman. After that she remained in bed except for a few hours on her 23rd birthday when she put on a ball gown and jewels but remained at home.

She had a faithful maid named Clothilde who cared for her in her final days and, of course, she was visited by several doctors, but they could offer no help. On her final day, she sat upright in bed for a moment and fell back dead.

After a lavish funeral at the church of La Madeleine, her innumerable possessions were auctioned off to a huge crowd leaving a substantial estate, even after all her debts were paid. Young Marie Duplessis could never have imagined that her death at 23 would spawn a novel, a play, one of the world’s favorite operas, and at least 23 films.
About the Composer

Quick Stats

Full Name: Giuseppe Fortunino Francesco Verdi
Dates: October 10, 1813 – January 27, 1901
Nationality: Italian

Life and Career

“I am and always will be a Roncole peasant,” Verdi said of himself on one occasion. Verdi was born into a family of small landowners and traders. His father, Carlo, was an innkeeper and his mother, Luigia Uttini, was a spinner. Verdi’s father was adamant about his son’s education, especially music education, starting when Verdi was four years old. He studied with priests at the church of St. Michele, and by age nine held a permanent position as the church’s organist. In 1823, Verdi moved to Busseto to study at the ginnasio (secondary school) there, and in 1825, he began lessons with the maestro di cappella at the church of St. Bartolommeo. In 1829, he applied for an organist position in nearby Soragna and was rejected. He then focused his work in Busseto and became very involved in the musical life there.

Verdi soon got tired of the small musical world in Busseto, so Verdi’s father, applied for a scholarship to send Verdi to study in Milan. At age 18, Verdi applied to study at the conservatory and was rejected partially because of his “unorthodox” piano technique. This rejection affected Verdi for the rest of his life. Verdi began to study with Vincenzo Lavigna, maestro concertatore at La Scala in Milan. Lavigna trained Verdi in strict counterpoint and encouraged him to attend the theater regularly. Lavigna also played a vital role in inducting Verdi into Milanese musical society.

Finally, after receiving word that a music director position had opened back in Busseto, Verdi was appointed the new maestro di musica at St. Bartolommeo. During this time, he also married Margherita Barezzi with whom he had two children. After a frustrating delay of his professional life, Verdi began pursuing ambitious plans. In 1837, he attempted to stage his opera Rostester at the Teatro Ducale in Parma but was unsuccessful. He revised the work and renamed it Oberto, conte di San Bonifacio which received its premiere nine months later at La Scala.

From Oberto on, Verdi’s musical career was centered on business: negotiations, contracts, composing, etc. After Oberto, Verdi was offered a contract to compose three more operas for La Scala. The first of these three operas, Un giorno di regno, was a disaster. Around this same time Verdi experienced the tragic loss of his young family with the death of his wife Margherita (his two children had died in the two previous years). The combination of his professional failures and the loss of his family caused him to go into an 18 month period in which he renounced composition altogether. However, after an 18 month hiatus, he came back strong with his next opera, Nabucco. The success of Nabucco was astounding, and was the impetus to Verdi’s unremitting composition. He produced 16 operas, an average of one every nine months between the years of 1842 and 1853. During these successful years, Verdi fell in love with soprano Guiseppina Strepponi who became his companion for the rest of his life. Verdi and Guiseppina moved to Paris where they remained for two years.

Verdi continued to compose operas forming a particular pattern of composition. He chose operatic subjects that fit the singers available and favored basing his works off spoken dramas by Hugo, Byron, or Schiller. Between Verdi’s middle to late years, he composed famous works such as La traviata, Rigoletto, Aida, Otello, and Falstaff. Rigoletto is said to be one of his greatest masterpieces. As Verdi’s health diminished, he composed his final piece, a setting of the religious text Stabat Mater. In 1901, while residing at the Grand Hotel et de Milan, Verdi suffered a stroke and six days later, on January 27, 1901, he died. A month after his death, a large crowd, said to be one of the largest public assemblies of any event in Italian history, gathered to process through Milan and mourn the death of their beloved patriot composer. In his lifetime Verdi composed 28 operatic works, 11 choral works, 22 songs/vocal trios, and six instrumental works.
Other Notable Works

_Nabucco_ (1842) – libretto by Temistocle Solera, based on the biblical story and the play by Anicet-Bourgeois and Francis Cornu

_Macbeth_ (1847) – libretto by Francesco Maria Piave and additions by Andrea Maffei, based on Shakespeare's play of the same name.

_Il trovatore_ (1853) – libretto by Leone Emanuele Bardare and Salvatore Cammarano, based on the play El Trovador by Antonio García Gutiérrez.

Of Further Interest

Verdi, the Italian Hero:

The Resurgence, or “Risorgimento,” was the period of time in 19th century Italy that began with the ending of the Napoleonic rule, and resulted in the unification of the Italian city states into one Italian state. This was a turbulent time in Italy's history marked by insurrection, revolution, and conflict. This was also a time, however, when a sense of Italian pride began to emerge from citizens all over the Italian peninsula.

During this time of Risorgimento, Verdi established himself amidst his fellow countrymen as an advocate for statehood. After a performance of his opera, _Nabucco_, audiences cheered for an encore of the “Va pensiero” chorus, the song of the Hebrew slaves. To the citizens of Italy, “Va pensiero” became a song of statehood and nationalism that made Verdi a fixture in the Italian resurgence. People would shout “Viva V.E.R.D.I.,” a secret slogan based off Verdi's name that meant “Vittorio Emanuele Re D'Italia.” (Victor Emmanuel King of Italy)

One month after Verdi died, hundreds of thousands of mourning Italian citizens gathered to follow Verdi’s remains to their final place of rest. As the procession progressed through Milan, the crowd sang the “Va pensiero” chorus. Verdi was seen as a hero to the Italian people.

Composers and Critics Say

“Never was sound more eloquent…the novelty of phrase and cadence…the originality of their general contours…” -Unknown critic of the Gazzettedi Venice, 1851

“Verdi, because of his vitality and his extraordinary response to all things human…the most rewarding as a man and a musician…” –From George Martin’s _Aspects of Verdi_

Verdi’s works were not always acclaimed by the critics:

“The conservative critics of his day...hardly saw past the new vigor of Verdi’s melody, which they wrote down as crude vulgarity.” –Dyneley Hussey, musicologist, 1940

“The ‘classicists’ considered Verdi’s early operas ‘noisy’ because of their abuse of the chorus and of martial rhythms.” - Giorgio Pestelli
On Operatic Voices

All classical singers fall into one of the categories listed below. A singer cannot choose his/her voice-type…it is something he/she is born with. Composers usually assign a voice type to a character based on his/her personality or age. Read these descriptions for specific examples.

Women

**Soprano:** The highest female voice, with a range similar to a violin. In opera, the soprano most often plays the young girl or the heroine (sometimes called the Prima Donna), since a high bright voice traditionally suggests femininity, virtue and innocence. The normal range of a soprano is from middle C through two octaves above middle C, sometimes with extra top notes. Most women are sopranos. In *Traviata*, Violetta is sung by a soprano.

**Mezzo-Soprano:** Also called a mezzo; the middle female voice similar to an oboe in range. A mezzo's sound is often darker and warmer than a soprano's. In opera, composers generally use a mezzo to portray older women, villainesses, seductive heroines, and sometimes even young boys. Mezzo-Sopranos also often serve as the friend or sidekick to the soprano. The mezzo-soprano's normal range is from the A below middle C to the A two octaves above it. In *Traviata*, Flora is sung by a mezzo-soprano.

**Contralto:** The lowest female voice, similar in range to a clarinet. Contraltos usually sing the roles of older females or special character parts such as witches and old gypsies. The range is two octaves from F below middle C to the top line of the treble clef. A true contralto is very rare – some believe they don't exist at all! There are no contraltos in *La traviata*.

Men

**Counter-tenor:** The highest male voice, which was mainly used in very early opera and oratorio (a genre of classical vocal music similar to opera but generally based on a religious topic and accompanied by a choir). The voice of a countertenor sounds very much like a mezzo-soprano's voice and they often sing the same repertoire. Like the contralto, true countertenors are very rare. There is no counter-tenor in *La traviata*.

**Tenor:** Usually the highest male voice in an opera. It is similar to a trumpet in range, tone, color, and acoustical ring. The tenor typically plays the hero or the love interest in an opera. His voice ranges from the C below middle C to the C above. The role of Alfredo in *La Traviata* is sung by a tenor.

**Baritone:** The middle male voice, close to a French horn in range and tone color. The baritone usually plays villainous roles or father-figures. The range is from the G that is an octave and a half below middle C to G above. In *Traviata* the role of Giorgio Germont is sung by a baritone.

**Bass-Baritone:** This male voice sits in the upper part of the bass voice. It is associated with a very "Wagnerian" style. The voice must be able to sing in the baritone's high tessitura, as well as resonate in the low bass range. In the lower bass register, the bass-baritone's color is lighter, whereas they can still achieve trumpeting sound in the upper baritone register. This voice enjoys incredible flexibility in various roles. There are no bass-baritone roles in *La traviata*.

**Bass:** The lowest male voice, it is similar to a trombone or bassoon in range and color. Low voices usually suggest age and wisdom in serious opera. The role of Dr. Grenvil in *Traviata* is a bass role. The range spans from roughly the F above middle C down to the F an octave and a fourth below.
The Nashville Opera is honored to present the following artists in this production of *La Traviata*.

### Director
**John Hoomes**, Artistic Director, Nashville Opera  
**Nashville Opera Credits:** *Elmer Gantry, Marriage of Figaro, Andrea Chénier, Romeo & Juliet, Salome, Tosca, The Fall of the House of Usher*  
**Other Appearances:** Florentine Opera, Opera Cleveland, Arizona Opera, Opera Columbus

### Conductor
**Christopher Larkin**  
**Nashville Opera Credits:** *Otello, Madama Butterfly and La bohème (2009 & 2003)*  
**Other Appearances:** Florentine Opera, Fort Worth Opera, Utah Opera, Brevard Music Center

### Violetta
**Jennifer Black,** soprano  
**Nashville Opera Credits:** *Carmen*  
**Other Appearances:** Metropolitan Opera, Los Angeles Opera, Santa Fe Opera, Opera Colorado, Arizona Opera

### Alfredo
**Joshua Kohl,** tenor  
**Nashville Opera Debut**  
**Other Appearances:** Dallas Opera, Lake George Opera, Sarasota Opera, Tulsa Opera

### Giorgio Germont
**Grant Youngblood,** baritone  
**Nashville Opera Debut**  
**Other Appearances:** San Francisco Opera, Central City Opera, New York City Opera, Washington Opera
Flora Bervoix
Jennifer Coleman, mezzo-soprano
Nashville Opera Credits: Andrea Chenier
Belmont University Faculty Member
Other Appearances: New York City Opera, Monterey County Symphony

Baron Duphol
Matthew Treviño, baritone
Nashville Opera credits: Tosca, Andrea Chénier
Other Appearances: Lyric Opera of Kansas City, Fresno Grand Opera, Fort Worth Opera, Sacramento Opera

Gastone
Philippe Pierce, tenor
Nashville Opera Debut
Other Appearances: Ash Lawn Opera, Central City Opera, Dayton Opera, Opera Cleveland

Marchese d’Obigny
James Harrington, baritone
Nashville Opera credits: Andrea Chénier
Other Appearances: Nashville Opera Ensemble, St. George’s Choir, Music City Baroque, Nashville Symphony Chorus

Annina
Sabrina Laney Warren, soprano
Nashville Opera credits: Rigoletto, Hansel and Gretel
Other Appearances:

Dr. Grenvil
Billy Dodson, bass
Nashville Opera credits: Andrea Chénier
Other Appearances: Nashville Opera Ensemble, St. George’s Choir, Miss Marple’s Mystery Dinner Theatre
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