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Illinois State University

School of Music

Highlights from
La Traviata
(Sung in Italian)



by

Giuseppe Verdi

Center for the Performing Arts

Tuesday Evening

February 25, 2003

8:00 p.m.

This is the Ninetieth program of the 2002-2003 Season

Violetta Valery - Michelle Dought
 Alfredo Germont - Christopher Hollingsworth
 Giorgio Germont - Roger Sados
 Piano - Paul Borg

Synopsis

Setting: *In and near Paris, 1840's*

Act I: At Violetta's home in Paris, a glittery party is in progress. Her friend Gastone approaches the hostess and introduces Alfredo to her who, in turn, explains that he has admired her from afar for a long time. Violetta asks her guests to take their seats for dinner, and Alfredo is called upon to propose a toast, in which he is joined by the hostess and the guests in the famous "Libiamo."

Music is heard from the inner rooms and Violetta invites her friends to go in and dance. A sudden attack of weakness-her chronic ailment, she explains-forces her to remain behind for the moment. Regarding her pale face in the mirror, she suddenly notices that Alfredo has not left with the others. He tells her that he has loved her since the first time he saw her ("Un di felice") and that this love is still burning in his heart, but Violetta suggests that he forget her, for her own emotions follow a lighter pattern and she is not given to serious affection. Upon his departure, she offers him a camellia flower. She invites him to return to her when the flower has wilted the next day.

Violetta remains in deep thought. For the first time she is experiencing true love ("E strano...Ah, fors e lui...Sempre libera"). Alfredo has awakened a new feeling in her heart-love, the power that moves heaven and earth. But no, all this must be folly; for her there is only the unshackled life of never ending pleasure. Even Alfredo's pleading heard from the garden remains unheeded.

Intermission

Act II, Scene 1: At a country house near Paris, Alfredo happily reflects on the past three months which Violetta has been spending with him ("De' miei bollenti spiriti"). Quickly his happiness gives way to preoccupation when Violetta's maid, informs him that her mistress is selling all her possessions in town to pay for this house. He rushes off to prevent the sale.

Violetta enters and is given a letter in which her friend Flora invites her to a ball that evening. Enjoying her new life with Alfredo, Violetta has no interest in such invitations anymore.

Violetta demands to know how much money she has left. Informed by Annina that the amount is pitifully small, she nevertheless orders that half of it be distributed to the poor immediately. At the same time, she asks Annina to see whether there is any mail for her. Left alone, she draws a letter of Germont's from her bosom to reread it once again: Baron Douphol is recovering from wounds sustained in the duel. Alfredo has gone abroad, but, informed by Germont himself of Violetta's sacrifice, he is returning to ask for her pardon. Germont will also come.

"Too late," exclaims Violetta in despair. Gone are the rosy dreams of the past; all is over for Violetta ("Addio del passato"). As she breaks down in tears, the gay sounds of the Paris carnival penetrate from the street.

Unexpectedly Alfredo's father arrives accusing her of ruining his son. He is forced, however, to change his opinion of Violetta when he is shown on a sales contract that she is disposing of her Paris apartments. Giorgio Germont demands nevertheless that she leave Alfredo forever in order that the engagement of Alfredo's sister may be brought to a happy conclusion. Although Violetta swears that she has renounced her former life and that her only happiness lies in Alfredo's love, without which she would prefer to die, Germont convinces her that God and the world will not grant to women like herself the blessing of a permanent love. Sorrowfully acceding to Germont's demand, she asks in return only that Alfredo's sister be told about this sacrifice that surely will cause Violetta's death. Germont's consoling voice joins Violetta's heartrending farewell to love. Grateful and with a blessing, Germont leaves. With a superhuman effort Violetta gathers her strength to compose a letter promising a rendezvous to Baron Douphol-the only means of convincing Alfredo that she no longer loves him-and sends Annina to deliver it. Now for a farewell note to Alfredo: how to find words to cover up her grief? Just as she is signing the missive, Alfredo returns. Quickly she hides the note and, in a state of utter confusion, she hysterically assures him of her love and begs him to love her always.

Alfredo is left alone, and presently a messenger brings the farewell note from Violetta, who is already on her way to Paris. Trembling, Alfredo opens it and reads. As he turns in desperation, he is met by Germont, who has entered from the garden to console his son and to ask him to return to the family home in Provence ("Di Provenza"). But Alfredo finds Flora's invitation, and rushes off to look for Violetta at the ball.

Act II, Scene 2: (Deleted in tonight's performance) At Flora's house the festivities are about to begin. Masqueraders enter dressed as gypsy girls and bullfighters. Alfredo's entrance without Violetta causes general surprise, but soon all the guests sit down to gamble. Violetta appears on the arm of Baron Douphol and is greatly perturbed when she discovers Alfredo's presence. Provoked by Alfredo, the Baron challenges him but, thanks to Violetta's intervention, only to a game of cards in which the rich Baron hopes to ruin Alfredo. However, Alfredo wins consistently until the game is interrupted by the announcement of supper. As soon as all have left the room, Violetta returns in agitation and Alfredo, whom she has summoned to meet her, also returns. In great perturbation and anxiety, she asks him to leave. Under his ruthless questioning, Violetta, who has sworn to Germont not to reveal the truth, is forced to pretend that she loves Douphol. Thereupon in a rage, Alfredo calls back all the guests and, in repayment for her expenses, throws his winnings at Violetta's feet. The guests are shocked, and Giorgio Germont, who has just entered, sternly rebukes his son for his behavior. Alfredo is now overcome with remorse; and as the guests try to console Violetta, she declares, her voice soaring over theirs, that her love for Alfredo is greater than he can ever comprehend. As Alfredo is led away by his father, Douphol challenges him by throwing a glove at his feet.

Intermission

Act III: In her poor quarters, Violetta with her faithful maid Annina by her side is asleep. She awakens and, in a voice that betrays her condition, asks Annina for some water. Dr. Grenvil comes in on his daily visit. Although he talks encouragingly to Violetta, he tells Annina that her mistress has but a few hours to live.

Annina enters excitedly, followed by Alfredo. After a passionate embrace, Alfredo and Violetta ask each other's forgiveness and promise to remain together for the rest of their lives. They will go far away from Paris ("Parigi, o cara"), and Violetta's health will soon be restored. But, attempting to dress, Violetta collapses and realizes in desperation that her end is at hand just at the threshold of her love's fulfillment.

Annina, who has gone for the doctor, now returns with him and with the elder Germont, who has come to accept Violetta as a daughter. With a shock, he realizes that she is dying as a result of his interference. Violetta turns to Alfredo and, in a halting voice, gives him a medallion bearing her likeness, to remind him of the days when she still looked beautiful. "Someday," she says, as the helpless bystanders fight to repress their tears, "you will marry a pure maiden. Give her this portrait and tell her that I will be praying in heaven for you and her." Suddenly she feels all pain disappearing and new life surging through her body, and, with an expression of supreme happiness on her face, she falls dead in Alfredo's arms.

Biographies

J. Michelle Vought has earned an excellent reputation throughout the country both in the concert hall as a recitalist, and on the operatic stage bringing such roles to life as the Queen of the Night (*The Magic Flute*), Musetta (*La Bohème*), Micaela (*Carmen*), Violetta (*La Traviata*), Nannetta (*Falstaff*), and Gretel (*Hansel and Gretel*). In addition, she has appeared at international and national venues as soloist with symphony orchestras including the Slovakian Radio Orchestra, the Czech Janacek Academy of Music Orchestra, the Cincinnati Symphony, the Asheville Symphony, and the Pueblo Symphony among others. As a specialist in contemporary music, the soprano has been featured on 3 CD's for the international recording company, Vienna Modern Masters, one of which was a piece written for her. Currently, she is engaged to the record yet another world premiere for the company this spring.

Paul Borg, Professor of Music, has taught at Illinois State University since 1981. His teaching assignments have included music history and literature, music theory, piano accompanying, early music ensemble, as well as general education courses. He remains active as a pianist both as chamber musician and as accompanist and has participated on recital series at ISU, as well as at Indiana University, the University of Georgia, Bradley University, Western Illinois University, and Butler University. His musicological research interests include Spanish Renaissance Music, Music in the Spanish New World, and Guatemalan music.

Roger Sodsod is a graduate of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign where he received his Master of Music degree in Vocal Performance. While studying at the U of I under Nicholas Di Virgilio, he sang leading baritone roles with the UI opera program including Germont in *La Traviata*, Marcello in *La Bohème*, Sharpless in *Madama Butterfly*, Figaro in *The Barber of Seville*, and Papageno in *The Magic Flute*. Mr. Sodsod made his European debut as Escamillo in *Carmen* with the Theaterhof in Humbach, Germany in 1996 and was chosen as a Regional Finalist in the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions in 1998.

Mr. Hollingsworth has appeared with various regional opera companies in the United States such as Tri-Cities Opera, Opera Theatre of Connecticut, Natchez Opera Festival, and Illinois Opera Theatre. His operatic credits include leading and featured roles in *Don Giovanni*, *Così fan tutte*, *The Magic Flute*, *Le nozze di Figaro*, *Kismet*, *Madama Butterfly*, *Romeo et Juliette*, *Carmen*, *La traviata*, *Les contes d'Hoffman*, *Die Fledermaus*, *Street Scene*, *Amahl and the Night Visitors*.

Musical theatre credits include leading roles in *Joseph*, *Showboat*, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, and *Big River*. Mr. Hollingsworth has also appeared with several regional orchestras as Tenor soloist in the *Messiah*, *Elijah*, *Christmas Oratorio*, and the *Saint Nicholas Cantata*, *Mozart's Mass in C*. He has also appeared as the Tenor soloist in Brahms' *Neue Liebeslieder Walzer* and *Zigeunerlieder*. He holds a B.M. in Performance from DePauw University, an M.Mus in Opera/Voice from Binghamton University, and is currently finishing his D.M.A. in Performance and Literature at University of Illinois. Mr. Hollingsworth has served on the faculty at Syracuse University as Adjunct Professor of Voice and Opera and at Lycoming College as an Adjunct Lecturer in Voice. He joins the faculty as a full-time Lecturer in Voice and Co-director of the Opera Practicum.

Program Notes

Though it is generally forgotten, the story of *La Traviata* (before ending at the footlights) began life as a novel entitled "La Dame aux Camélias" in 1848. It was written by Alexandre Dumas the Younger, the son of the creator of "The Three Musketeers" and "The Count of Monte Cristo." For his novel, Dumas based "La Dame" on the life story of a young courtesan named Alphonsine Plessis, known more euphoniously as Marie Duplessis, whose death from consumption in 1847 at the age of twenty-three created quite a stir in Parisian society.

Verdi wrote *La Traviata* in 1853 while at work on another opera, *Il Trovatore*. Although he usually devoted approximately four months to his opera composition's, he completed *Traviata* in four weeks. Its first performance in Venice in 1853 was a complete failure which was due to several factors. The piece was performed in modern costume (an innovation which aroused audience distaste), but also the leading tenor was hoarse and the soprano cast was of large girth which made Dr. Grenvil's announcement that the heroine was dying of consumption unbelievable as the audience howled with laughter.

La Traviata is a prima donna's opera in that it stands by the performance of the singer who portrays the part of Violetta. Since Verdi created this role for a type of singer broadly equipped emotionally and vocally, some confusion exists today about the kind of voice best qualified to do it justice. There can be no clear-cut answer, since this opera, in its many faceted approach to Violetta, contains passages ideally suited in themselves to specialized lyric, dramatic or coloratura sopranos. Yet, when these passages are taken in context, it is obvious that a voice of exceptionally generous color and over-all flexibility is required. Many famous coloratura sopranos have been heard in concert performances of Violetta's brilliant "Sempre libera" the aria ending the first act, which is considered fioritura-the grafting of florid passages onto a body of music not for display purposes but for heightened expressivity. During the aria Violetta who is afraid to commit herself to the love of one man for fear of rejection, decides (only later to reverse her choice) that she will remain in the vortex of the Parisian demimonde from which she has been yearning to escape and enjoy life "sempre libera-forever free."

Special Thanks to...

Paul Borg
Kari Beth Rust
Julie Mack
City Consignments

Upcoming Events

February

28 KRH 8:00 p.m. Guest Artist Series, Frank Kowalsky, *clarinet*

March

01 CPA 8:00 a.m. Jr. High School Band Contest

01 CH212 1:00 p.m. Guest Artist Series, Frank Kowalsky, *clarinet* Masterclass

02 CPA 3:00 p.m. Illinois State University Symphonic Winds

02 KRH 6:00 p.m. Graduate Recital, Greg Delich, *trombone*

02 KRH 7:30 p.m. Junior Recital, Ryan Elliott, *trumpet*

03 CPA 8:30 a.m. Women in Music Symposium

03 CPA 7:30 p.m. Women in Music Concert

04 KRH 8:00 p.m. "Cabaret" Guest Artist, Martha Malone, *soprano*

05 CPA 8:00 p.m. Concerto-Aria Concert with Illinois State Symphony Orchestra

06 CPA 8:00 p.m. Symphonic Band

07 KRH 8:00 p.m. Senior Recital, Mona Seghatoleslami, *viola*

18 CH 212 3:00 p.m. Guest Artist, Roland Szentpáli, *tuba* masterclass

18 CPA 8:00 p.m. Le Nuove Musiche

19 CPA 8:00 p.m. Combined Trombone Choir & Tuba/Euphonium Ensemble

20 CPA 8:00 p.m. Guest Artist, Roland Szentpáli, *tuba*

21 KRH 6:30 p.m. Senior Vocal Recital, Kyle Merkle, *bass*

21 KRH 7:30 p.m. Graduate Recital, Christopher Render, *horn*

21 KRH 9:00 p.m. Graduate Recital, Sara Giovonelli, *horn*

22 CPA 2:00 p.m. Guest Artist, Stephen Lange, *trombone*

22 KRH 6:15 p.m. Junior Vocal Recital, Dennis Tobenski, *tenor*

22 CPA 8:00 p.m. Guest Artist, Fujimoto/Both, *piano duo*

CPA - Center for the Performing Arts
 KRH - Kemp Recital Hall
 CH212 - Cook Hall 212