

La Traviata
(The Fallen Woman)

1995-1996

Saturday, September 16, 1995 8:00 PM
Wednesday, September 20, 1995 7:30 PM
Saturday, September 23, 1995 8:00 PM
Thursday, September 28, 1995 7:30 PM
Sunday, October 1, 1995 2:00 PM
Wednesday, October 4, 1995 8:00 PM
Saturday, October 7, 1995 8:00 PM
Tuesday, October 10, 1995 8:00 PM
Thursday, October 12, 1995 7:30 PM

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SAN FRANCISCO OPERA

1995 SEASON

LA TRAVIATA



Stagebill



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SAN FRANCISCO OPERA MAGAZINE

La Traviata

1995 Season
Vol. 73, No. 5

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L'Attesa (Waiting), 1894-96

Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna, Verona

Oil on canvas, 33½ x 33½ in.

Photography: Alinari/Giraudon

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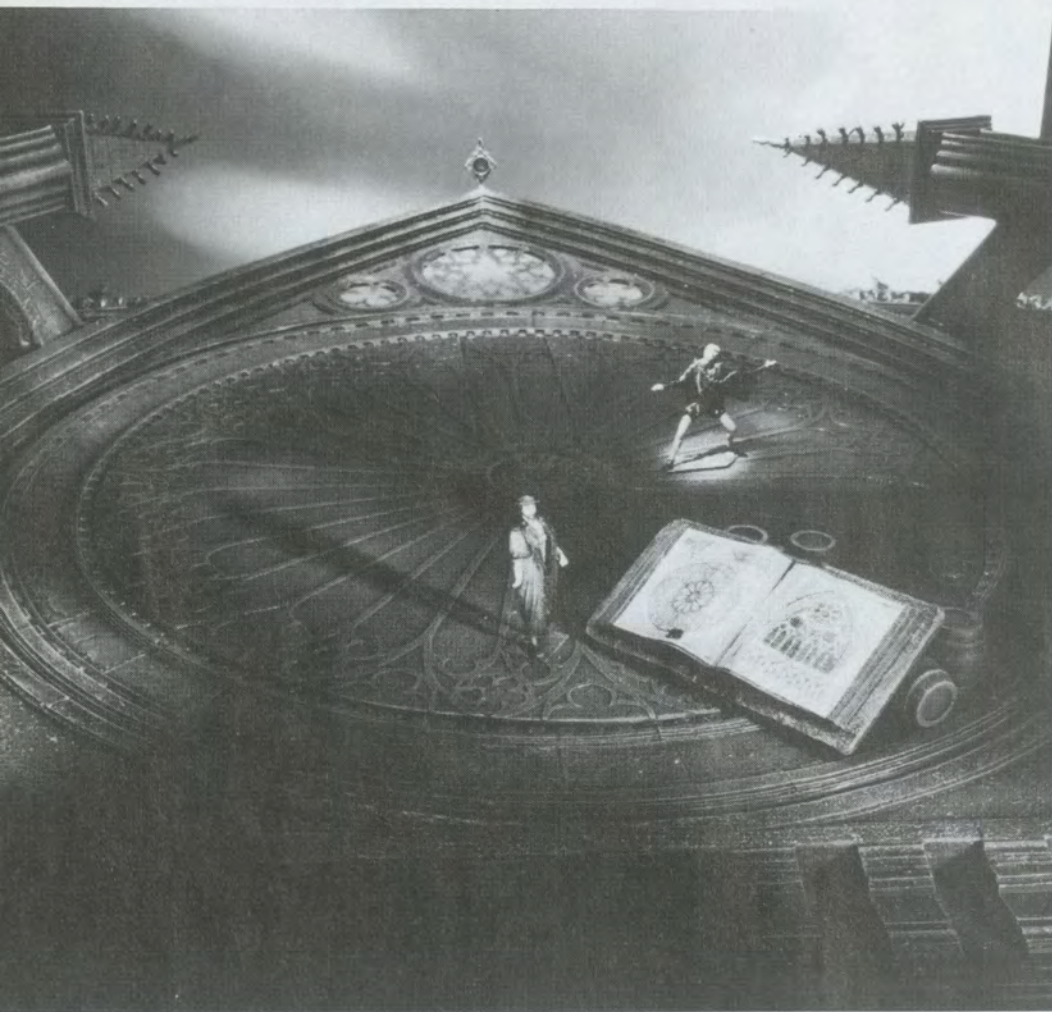


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Performance HIGHLIGHTS



Devilish design: A set model for San Francisco Opera's new production of *Faust*.

Tragedy, comedy, mystery—and transport: **The San Francisco Opera** has it all. First, get out your handkerchief for *Madama Butterfly*, which alights on the SFO stage October 3. Puccini's masterpiece about the ever-devoted Cio-Cio-San returns to the repertoire after a six-year absence. On October 13, *La Cenerentola*, Rossini's witty, glittering treatment of the Cinderella fairy tale, comes to the SFO in a magical production by director Jean-Pierre Ponnelle. Then on October 26, the tone shifts, as an unholy deal is made on the Opera House stage. The dark star of French Grand Opera, Charles Gounod's *Faust* is a classic tale of temptation and redemption, retold in a new production designed by Gerard Howland. Finally, on October 28, the SFO Guild holds its annual dinner and auction, **Opera Festiva**. Watch opera patrons lose their decorum as the bidding gets boisterous on such treasures as fabulous forays to Spain, Hawaii, and other lavish locations; your own private opera ball for fifty friends; his and hers Arabian horses; and a Harley-Davidson motorcycle—with sidecar!

* * * * *

The city by the bay scores another coup as Tom Stoppard's *Arcadia* makes its West Coast premiere October 18 at the American Conservatory Theater. Stoppard's whipsnap confab whirls the audience through a crash course in history, Newtonian physics, and landscape architecture, linking past and present, science and sex, history and love. Exhilarating as a thrill ride and mysterious as a monograph, *Arcadia* is set at an elegant English estate in the present day, where an academic is exploring a shadowy scandal involving the Romantic poet Lord Byron. In flashback we see what really happened at the estate in 1809, ultimately discovering that—in life's Big Picture—Chaos is bliss. The play was nominated for the 1995 Tony Award for Best Play and captured London's Olivier Award. A.C.T. artistic director Carey Perloff directs.

—Peter Cieply

Presented by CHRYSLER 

FROM THE PRESIDENT AND CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD



Welcome to the 1995 Fall Season and the beginning of a challenging three-year period. Following this season, the Company will need to vacate the War Memorial Opera House to clear the way for seismic work. Although we will miss our home while we are out for 18 months, we will be presented with an ideal opportunity to implement much needed improvements.

The Opera, Ballet and the War Memorial have formed the Committee to Restore the Opera House (CROH), with a goal of raising \$24 million for improvements not paid by the city. These will include: spot air conditioning and improved ventilation, upgraded electrical and lighting systems, and expanded storage and backstage facilities.

San Francisco Opera's own artistic plans include the use of two historic San Francisco venues: the Civic Auditorium and the Orpheum Theatre. Reconfiguring these theaters to make them suitable for opera, plus the new productions needed will result in extraordinary costs beyond our normal budget.

To do the job for 1995, 1996 and 1997—that is, to stay in the black operationally and fulfill our commitment to the Opera House renovation—San Francisco Opera has launched a single, three-year campaign to raise \$20 million above and beyond our annual fundraising goals. It is an ambitious program, but we feel optimistic because two years of successful Board fundraising efforts and cost reductions implemented by management have resulted in a greatly improved financial position for the Company. These goals and successes are made possible by you, the members of our generous family. And it is to you that we turn once again, to make it possible to carry forth the important legacy this Company has built over 73 years.

We want to extend a special thank you to Lexus for its ongoing support of San Francisco Opera. We also wish to acknowledge the invaluable contributions made by the San Francisco Opera Guild, as well as the efforts of the BRAVO! CLUB.

We also wish to thank our generous production sponsors for the 1995 Fall Season. The production of *Anna Bolena*, originated by the Canadian Opera Company, is made possible by a gift from The Gramma Fisher Foundation, through the auspices of the Lyric Opera of Chicago; *Ruslan and Lyudmila* is made possible by Mr. and Mrs. Reid W. Dennis and Mr. and Mrs. John R. Hamilton; *Madama Butterfly* by The Franklin/Templeton Group of Funds; *La Cenerentola* by The Herman J. Miller and Edward J. Clarke Foundation; the new production of *Don Giovanni* by gifts from Mr. George M. Bowles and the estate of Edith Bentley Bailey Cook; and *Rusalka* by The L.J. and Mary C. Skaggs Foundation and the Carol Franc Buck Foundation.

Additionally, we gratefully acknowledge government funding from the National Endowment for the Arts, the California Arts Council, and the Grants for the Arts program of the San Francisco Hotel Tax Fund. Our sincere gratitude also goes out to Mayor Frank Jordan and Chief Administrative Officer William Lee for their invaluable support; and to the War Memorial Board of Trustees for their ongoing support and assistance.

Reid W. Dennis
Chairman

William W. Godward
President

A MESSAGE FROM THE GENERAL DIRECTOR



San Francisco Opera's 73rd season is a time to cherish for all opera lovers. Not only is our 1995 Fall Season overflowing with the artistic elements that make opera the most exciting of art forms, but at the conclusion of this season, we will vacate the War Memorial Opera House for 18 months. This is the kickoff for a tremendous adventure outside of our beautiful home until we return in time for a gala 1997 Fall Season—San Francisco Opera's 75th anniversary.

During the 18-month closure of the Opera House our home will undergo major seismic upgrading. This period also presents a golden opportunity to perform restorations and improvements that will add significantly to your comfort and enjoyment. Bear in mind that this will be the first opportunity for any significant work to be performed on the Opera House since the building was opened in 1932—more than 60 years ago! It's time to give this, one of the finest opera houses in the world, the loving attention that it deserves.

While we're out of the Opera House, we will present a season of opera in a dynamic and unique way at Civic Auditorium and the Orpheum Theatre. There will be new productions, exciting stars and a variety of repertoire, including *Carmen*, *Aida* and the West Coast premiere of *Harvey Milk* (co-commissioned by San Francisco Opera). From September 19 through October 1 this season, members of the Opera's staff will present a series of informative pre-performance lectures about our plans for the Opera House and for the new venues. We have also created a special video to illustrate our plans for Civic Auditorium.

During the 1995 Fall Season, from September 8 to December 10, you will see a marvelous array of operas at the War Memorial Opera House, including two Company premieres and two new productions. We are pleased to present an artistic roster that boasts some of the world's finest singers, with outstanding directors, beautiful productions and internationally acclaimed conductors leading the San Francisco Opera Orchestra and Chorus. Our fine music director, Donald Runnicles, will lead three operas this fall, and we welcome back our principal guest conductor, Sir Charles Mackerras, who will lead two productions. We are also proud to honor Sir Charles on his 70th birthday with a special concert on November 17.

It is an exciting time, like no other in our Company's history. Stay with us, it's going to be an incredible adventure!

Lotfi Mansouri
General Director

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Vienna and Opera at Christmas

December 14th to 26th with Peter Bessol

... full day to Salzburg in the most beautiful Christmas town of Europe ... afternoon old town Bratislava with performance of Rigoletto at the historic Slovak Opera. In Vienna, special excursions to Vienna Woods and Danube Valley. At the Staatsopera: early Verdi Jerusalem, Wozzeck, Le Nozze di Figaro, Die Zauberflöte ... at the Volksopera: Pearl Fishers, Carmen, Hansel & Gretel.

Metropolitan Opera Debut of Cecilia Bartoli

February 25th to March 2nd

... lectures and private MMA tour with Dale Harris. The operas: La Forza del Destino (Domingo), Così fan Tutte (Carol Vaness, Susanne Metzger, Cecilia Bartoli, Jerry Hadley), Madama Butterfly, Aida.

Spring and Opera Extravaganza in New York at the Metropolitan Opera with Levine Gala

April 21st to 28th with Sherwin Sloan

... the final spectacular week at the Met. The Operas: Die Walküre (Domingo), La Bohème (Gheorghiu, Mattila), Andrea Chenier (Pavarotti), Romeo & Juliette (Swenson, Araiza). NY Philharmonic: Mendelssohn Violin Concerto & Bruckner Symphony No. 6. Private Lectures & tour of MMA with Dale Harris. Met Opera Gala with James Levine.

Der Ring des Nibelungen at the Lyric Opera of Chicago

March 10th to 17th with Sherwin Sloan

... Zubin Mehta conducts, Eva Marton, James Morris and Siegfried Jerusalem sing. Many Ring events, hotel with deluxe rooms with sitting areas, special functions and parties with Sherwin and artists. Private tours of the Art Institute.

The Arizona Ring in Flagstaff

June 2nd to 9th with Sherwin Sloan

... we went to Flagstaff to select the seating in orchestra center and the resort hotel. There will be private dinners and lunches and a wonderful atmosphere in this ponderosa pine covered mountainous setting. A wonderful vacation with the Ring and great optional sightseeing to the south Rim of the Grand Canyon and Sedona.

The Third Annual Grand Tour of Italian Opera Houses

May 2nd to 20th with Peter Bessol

... without a doubt the greatest program we have done with best seating at La Fenice in Venice, La Scala in Milan, Teatro Regio in Parma, La Comunale in Florence and Teatro dell'Opera in Rome. Includes two nights at beautiful Cernobbio on Lake Como, tours of Roman Verona and Bologna, trip to Siena, San Gimignano. Superb lunches and dinners. Walking tours in each town.

Spring in Renaissance & Baroque Prague

June 2nd to 14th with Herb Rowan

... join Herb for the magnificent old town of Prague with walking tours each day to the Loretto, the Hradcany Castle, the Sternberg Museum, the Wallenstein Palace, the Jewish quarter, the old town and guided tours of the museums. The operas: Rigoletto, Katya Kabanova, La Forza del Destino, Otello, Le Nozze di Figaro, Il Trovatore, Rusalka, Don Giovanni, Libuse (Smetana), Boris Godounov, Die Zauberflöte.

St. Petersburg, The Hermitage & the Savonlinna Summer Opera Festival on a Lake in a 14th Century Castle in Finland

July 15th to 29th with Sherwin Sloan

(May be combined with the Verona Festival & La Scala from July 4th to 16th)

... join Sherwin for 2 days touring the Hermitage, private tours and ballet and opera in St. Petersburg, then opera in a 14th century castle on a lake in Finland. The Operas at Olavinlinna Castle: Macbeth, Tannhäuser, The Palace (Sallinen). Also, Beethoven's Symphony No. 9. Carefully selected sightseeing. Private candlelight dinner in the great hall of the castle in a splendid lake setting.

A Private Walking Tour of Venice & Florence with Dale Harris May, 1996

... join a true Renaissance lecturer and art historian and focus on the museums, paintings, cathedrals, & architecture of these two Renaissance cities. Dale Harris, renowned lecturer of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Stops in Padua and Roman Verona. Some wonderful dining.

The Verona Festival and La Scala

July 4th to 16th, 1996 with Sherwin Sloan

(May be combined with St. Petersburg and Savonlinna Summer Opera Festival in Finland, July 16th to 29th).

... two wonderful days at lovely Cernobbio on Lake Como, a performance at La Scala and at the famed Verona Arena: Nabucco, Il Barbiere di Siviglia & Carmen in best seating. Walking tours and carefully selected sightseeing. Of course, wonderful dining.

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On November 4, at the San Francisco Ballet Building, *Wall Street Journal* music critic and lecturer Dale Harris will talk about Flagstad's life and career. The lecture, sponsored by PALM and the Wagner Society of Northern California, starts at 11 a.m.

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San Francisco

La Traviata— AGONIES, ECSTASIES

By MICHAEL STEINBERG



Taken between Acts III and IV of San Francisco Opera's 1932 *La Traviata*: Dino Borgioli (Alfredo), Claudia Muzio (Violetta) and Richard Bonelli (Giorgio Germont). *Opposite page*: The legendary Claudia Muzio was SF Opera's Violetta in three separate seasons: 1924, 1932 and 1933. This photo, taken in 1933 just before the curtain went up on Act I, shows her with the evening's Alfredo, Dino Borgioli, and members of the SF Opera Chorus.

peasant girl, was a sodden brute, a peddler by trade; her mother was what the English would call a "decayed gentlewoman," descended from minor nobility, but with a house-servant for a father. There was a slightly older sister, Delphine. The girls were abandoned by both parents: their father simply walked out, whereupon their mother found a position as companion to an English lady. For a time they were brought up by an aunt who, when she found the six-year-old Alphonsine unmanageable, persuaded her father to take her back.

Just what happened after that is unclear: legend keeps intruding on fact. We do know that by the time she was fourteen, sexually experienced even then, Alphonsine was in Paris, living with relatives above their mom-and-pop grocery store. Illiterate, with her sexual allure (and talents) and her burgeoning beauty as her only assets, she became a prostitute; from the beginning, however, she imagined something better than a career on street corners. She upgraded

her family name to Duplessis, changed her first name to that trusty evergreen, Marie, and

taught herself to read. By sixteen, she was one of the most hotly desired courtesans in Paris.

Marie's first big-time and much-noticed relationship was with a man called Agénor de Guiche who, some years after her death, became Foreign Minister under Napoleon III. Others who passed through her life or actually supported her, simultaneously or serially, included Comte de Stackelberg, an eighty-year-old Russian diplomat; Comte de Perregaux, her future husband; Franz Liszt, who described his feeling for her as "somber and elegiac"; the poet and dramatist Alfred de

On February 3rd, 1847, a Wednesday, the twenty-three-year-old and once beautiful Comtesse de Perregaux died of pulmonary tuberculosis in her apartment at 11 Boulevard de la Madeleine in Paris. The prescriptions of the many physicians and at least one quack she had consulted—drinking asses' milk, sleeping on a horse-hair mattress, and the like—had not helped. Her husband, Comte Édouard de Perregaux, whom she had married in London at the Kensington Register Office the year before but from whom she had separated immedi-

ately, was with her, and so was her maid, Clotilde. One of her lovers put her in a novel, and the play that the guilt-ridden and exploitative author made from his book deeply affected actors, choreographers, film directors, and particularly, one very great composer, and so, in death, she lives stubbornly on.

No one could have foreseen a future in the world's bookstores, theaters, opera houses, and movie palaces for Alphonsine Plessis when she was born at Nonant, a village in Normandy, on January 16th, 1824. Her father, the illegitimate son of a priest and an alcoholic

Michael Steinberg is program annotator of the San Francisco Symphony and the New York Philharmonic.

Musset; the novelist Eugène Sue; and, most significantly for her posthumous career, Alexandre Dumas fils, whose novel and play, *La Dame aux camélias*, made her into one of Western literature's endlessly fascinating creations. David Coward, an English literary historian and one of the novel's many translators, has remarked that Marguerite Gautier, as Dumas renames her, "does not properly belong with Emma Bovary or Anna Karenina on the high slopes of literature, but with Juliet, Frankenstein's monster, Madame Butterfly, Tarzan, and James Bond at the center of the collective unconscious....Emma Bovary is a luxury; Marguerite Gautier is a necessity."

Her contemporaries fall all over themselves in their attempts to do justice to her beauty. Here is Dumas, admittedly not unbiased: "She was tall [5'6" according to her passport, unusually tall for a Frenchwoman of that time], very slender, black-haired ["auburn," says the passport], and of white and rosy complexion. Her head was small and neat, with long, luminous, very vivacious and alert Japanese eyes. Her lips were as red as cherries, and her teeth were the most beautiful in the world." No less important, others speak of her "elegance and distinction," her "natural tact and instinctive refinement," even of "an indefinable but genuine air of chastity." She was reputed to be the best-dressed woman in Paris, she had learned to speak a perfectly refined French, and thanks to piano lessons provided by Guiche when she was in her teens, she could, according to Dumas, play Weber's *Invitation to the Dance*—and it takes a considerable pianist to manage that.

Of course she had a tiger by the tail. She could command immense sums of money from her lovers, but the more this was so, the more urgent her need to keep up appearances, the more extravagant her demands for clothes, jewelry, horses, carriages, furnishings, and lavish entertaining, not to forget her gambling debts, and the more dependent she became on a continuous flow of francs, écus, and livres. (One of the most interesting elements of Dumas's novels is the series of interpolated essays on the economics of being and keeping a mistress.) When illness jeopardized Marie's earning power, her situation became hopeless, although, as we can see from Dumas's portrait of Prudence Duvernay, there is nothing enviable in the situation of a physically healthy but aging courtesan either.

Marie's marriage in February of 1846 to Comte de Perregaux, who had been in and out of her life for about four years, seems to have taken everyone by surprise. Even though the couple did not establish a household together, the marriage was something of a lifesaver for Marie in every sense but the literal one. Perre-



gaux was truly devoted to her, and because of him, she had medical care and she did not die alone. He also saw to it that her apartment was not stripped and her possessions auctioned until after her death. La Comtesse du Plessis, as she called herself, alias Marie Duplessis, alias Alphonsine Plessis, is buried in the Montmartre Cemetery—but at a fair distance from Dumas.

The Dumas episode of Marie's life lasted from September 1844 to August 1845. In October of 1846, Dumas went on a long trip to Spain and North Africa with his father, the author of *The Three Musketeers* and *The Count of Monte Cristo*. Learning on that journey how ill she was, he wrote to her, asking to be forgiven for having left her and proposing a reunion, but there was no reply. He was back in France, in Marseille, when he heard that Marie had died. He hurried to Paris to attend the auction of her possessions, or at least the preview, an event that was virtually the sensation of the 1846-47 social season.

Four months later, in June of 1847, Dumas wrote *La Dame aux camélias*, titling his novel in honor of Marie's habit of always wearing a camellia, a white one twenty-five days of each month and a red one on the others. (Armand Duval, the Dumas character in the novel—he shares his creator's initials—disingenuously insists that neither he nor anyone else in Paris ever understood what was behind this color coding.) Dumas claimed to have invented Marie's sobriquet, but Coward suggests that he probably found it in George Sand's *Isidora* (1846), "the heroine of which is a courtesan with horticultural interests who is referred to as 'la dame aux camélias.'" Dumas admitted that he had written 'camélia' (and not 'camél-

lia') not because he wished to contest the accepted spelling but because he knew no better. If he continued to write the word with one 'l', it is that since Madame Sand spells the word as I do, I prefer to be incorrect with her than correct with others."

In 1849, again working at high speed, Dumas turned *La Dame aux camélias* into a play, though because of the dicey subject matter, its staging was delayed until February 1852. Verdi was spending that winter in Paris with Giuseppina Strepponi, retired from the opera stage since 1847 but his lover since at least that time and, from 1859, his wife. While there, he negotiated a contract with the Opéra for what would turn out to be *Les Vêpres Siciliennes* and, constantly on the lookout for material, he almost certainly saw Dumas's much talked about play. Likely enough, he already knew the novel.

Verdi had completed *Rigoletto* just a year before and was waiting for the libretto of *Il Trovatore* to be finished so that he could get going on that project. Shortly after his return to Busseto, he signed an agreement to deliver a new opera for the 1853 carnival season at the Teatro la Fenice in Venice and saw that *La Dame aux camélias* might be just the ticket. His first seventeen operas, from *Oberto* through *Rigoletto*, had all been set in some more or less remote past; they had also been peopled for the most part by monarchs, princes, warlords, and other such public figures, and they were full of the sound of clanking armor. The past, as the novelist L. P. Hartley would put it a century later, is a foreign country, and Verdi wanted to try something closer to home. Recently, in *Luisa Miller* (1849, after Schiller's *Kabale und Liebe*) and *Stiffelio* (1850), he had

ventured into a more domestic milieu. Both these beautiful works had equivocal success at best; however, Verdi was not ready to give up on this genre, and so he asked Francesco Maria Piave, who had already supplied Verdi with six librettos from *Ernani* (1844) through *Rigoletto*, to prepare one based on *La Dame aux camélias*. Alphonsine-Marie-Marguerite Plessis-Duplessis-Du Plessis-Gautier now went through one more name change, becoming Violetta Valéry.¹ It was not her last: in 1856, in the first American production of Dumas's play, she became Camille, a name made famous especially long afterwards in the 1936 film with Greta Garbo. And speaking of names, *La Traviata* and *Luisa Miller* must be two of the very first operas in which the characters have both first and family names, just like everybody out front.

The Venetian censor objected to the proposed title of *Amore e morto* (Love is dead), and so Verdi came up with the morally less objectionable *La Traviata* (*The Woman who Lost Her Way* or *The Woman who Strayed From the Straight and Narrow*). Verdi began working on the score while *Il Trovatore* was in rehearsal. Once that premiere was accomplished in January of 1853, he could concentrate entirely on *La Traviata*, completing it just in time for the first performance on March 6th. Once again, the success was mixed; Verdi several times described the premiere as a fiasco, but this was an exaggeration. At any rate, with his usual clear-sightedness, he distinguished precisely between what he had done wrong and what had gone wrong in the production; he had, for example, been right in his advance misgivings about the cast. A revised version, its relatively few but crucial changes gauged with pinpoint accuracy, was introduced at the Teatro San Benedetto in Venice on May 6th of 1854 and brought total triumph.

La Traviata is in fact the first opera set in what was the present at the time of its composition. This was too much for the management of La Fenice, who were perhaps not wrong in surmising that the audience would be dismayed to be deprived of the softening that distance can create; in any event, the singers at the premiere were costumed in full fig, Louis Quatorze style. It was in fact quite a few years before *Traviata* audiences were allowed to see people who dressed and moved as they themselves did.

Marie Duplessis had taken only five years to travel from her deathbed to the stage of the Théâtre du Vaudeville in Paris, a theater in one of whose boxes we sometimes encounter her in Dumas's novel, and it was just one more



year from the Vaudeville to the Fenice. In the operatic repertory, only John Adams's *The Death of Klinghoffer* offers an even speedier translation from event (October 1985) to stage (March 1991). And as in such recent operas—but only such recent ones—as *Klinghoffer* and Adams's earlier *Nixon in China*, Anthony Davis's *X*, and the ones about Marilyn Monroe and Harvey Milk, many of the "originals" of the characters were alive and at least theoretically in a position to buy tickets and see what they looked like on stage.² This in itself was a highly shocking notion to an audience in the 1850s; for a Parisian audience, of course, titillation would have been added to mere shock at the violation of theatrical convention.

If you successively read Dumas's novel and play, and Piave's libretto, you discover that the big difference occurs between the novel and the play. Adapting *La Dame aux camélias* for the stage, Dumas dropped his social commentary and his economics lectures, got rid of the narrator who stands so awk-

wardly between the tale and the reader, drastically shortcut the process of Armand and Marguerite becoming lovers, and spared us the long business, part grisly and part plain mawkish, of Marguerite's exhumation. We get only a hint of the tensions between Armand and Marguerite.

Beyond that, there are two changes of great importance. One is the addition of a scene in which Armand's father, a somewhat shadowy figure in the novel, confronts Marguerite and, through emotional blackmail, gets her to leave Armand: in Piave-Verdi, this becomes the event upon which the whole drama turns. The intervention of the father is one of the few totally fictional elements in *La Dame aux camélias*: Dumas père had no investment whatever in bourgeois family respectability, and in real life, Dumas fils had left Marie because he could not deal with her promiscuity.

The other change is the beginning of long-range process, continued in the opera and after that in most of the movie versions, of sweetening the character of Marguerite-Violetta-Camille. In the novel, Dumas never seems sure whether he means to portray her as a whore with a heart of gold whose warmth melts him as much as her beauty, or as a ruthless gold-digger. In the play, not much of the gold-digger is left, and it ends with the famous line: "Much will be forgiven you, for you loved much."

For that matter, Armand becomes nicer as well. In the novel, Dumas gives us a vividly nasty picture of just how meanly men can behave in the grip of sexual jealousy. He stops short of *Othello*, but still....Except for the scene in which he throws his winnings at the gambling table at his former lover's feet, there's not much of that left in the play or the opera either. The Armand of the novel is possessive, horny, and sentimental: it is a challenge to take seriously his claims of being in love. It is not so hard to believe it of Alfredo in *La Traviata*, and this of course is where the power of music comes in. To some extent it is the matter of the difference between a third-rate writer and a first-rate composer. In any event, nothing in Dumas speaks anywhere near as persuasively as the quiet amazement of "*Un di felice*," the

Photo: A view from the San Francisco Opera light tower in 1933: Lawrence Tibbett as the elder Germont and Claudia Muzio as Violetta during their Act II exchange.

¹ Armand Duval becomes a cross-lingual Alfredo Germont in the opera, losing the A. D. initials that identified him Dumas; Baron de Varville becomes Baron Douphol; the anonymous physician acquires the name of Grenvil; and Marie's faithful maid Clotilde, a rather forward Nanine in Dumas, becomes the demure Annina.

² David Coward reports that Clémence Prat, "an occasional actress among her other trades," once played Prudence Duvernay, whose "original" she was, in a revival of *La Dame aux camélias* and that, according to Dumas, she was "totally unconvincing" in the role.—Seeing living contemporaries portrayed by actors is something that movie and television audiences are of course quite accustomed to nowadays.



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Opera in four acts by GIUSEPPE VERDI
Libretto by FRANCESCO MARIA PIAVE
Based on the play *La Dame aux Camélias* by ALEXANDRE DUMAS fils

La Traviata

(in Italian)

Conductor
Steven Mercurio*

Production
John Copley

Set Designer
John Conklin

Costume Designer
David Walker

Lighting Designer
Thomas J. Munn

Chorus Director
Ian Robertson

Choreographer
Adela Clara

Musical Preparation
Joyce Fieldsend
Bryndon Hassman
Valery Ryvkin
Svetlana Gorzhevskaya
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Ian Robertson
Philip Eisenberg

Prompter
Philip Eisenberg

Assistant Stage Director
Laurie Feldman

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First performance:
Venice, March 6, 1853

First San Francisco Opera
performance:
October 4, 1924

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WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 20 AT 7:30
SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 23 AT 8:00
THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 28 AT 7:30
SUNDAY, OCTOBER 1 AT 2:00
WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 4 AT 8:00
SATURDAY, OCTOBER 7 AT 8:00
TUESDAY, OCTOBER 10 AT 8:00
THURSDAY, OCTOBER 12 AT 7:30

CAST

(in order of appearance)

<i>Violetta Valéry</i>	Verónica Villarroel
<i>Doctor Grenvil</i>	Scott Wilde
<i>Baron Douphol</i>	David Okerlund*+
<i>Flora Bervoix</i>	Elizabeth Bishop+
<i>Marquis d'Obigny</i>	Bojan Knežević*+
<i>Annina</i>	Donna Petersen
<i>Gastone</i>	Alfredo Portilla+
<i>Alfredo Germont</i>	Roberto Aronica
<i>Giuseppe</i>	Richard Walker
<i>Giorgio Germont</i>	Gregory Yurisich*
<i>A messenger</i>	Frederick Matthews
<i>A servant</i>	Jere Torkelsen
<i>Demimondaines, gentlemen, servants</i>	

Solo Dancers:

Carmen Granados, Suzanne Mendieta, Aldo Ruiz*

*San Francisco Opera debut
+1995 Adler Fellow

TIME AND PLACE: Mid-19th century Paris and environs

ACT I Violetta's house

INTERMISSION

ACT II A country house near Paris

INTERMISSION

ACT III Flora's house

INTERMISSION

ACT IV Violetta's house

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Supertitles by Jerry Sherk, San Francisco Opera.

Latecomers will not be seated during the performance after the lights have dimmed.
The use of cameras, cellular phones and any kind of recording equipment is strictly forbidden.
The performance will last approximately three hours and twenty-five minutes.

La Traviata

ACT I—A party is taking place at the home of Violetta Valéry, a beautiful Parisian demimondaine. Gastone arrives and presents his friend, Alfredo Germont, telling Violetta that Alfredo has long been a silent admirer and had even called daily during her illness to ask about her. Baron Douphol, one of Violetta's "protectors," is angered by the conversation and refuses to propose a toast when invited to by Gastone. Alfredo then accepts the invitation, and sings an impassioned tribute to beauty and love. Later, as the others go to another room to dance, Violetta is overcome by a fainting spell. Alfredo stays behind and confesses that he has been in love with her for a year. Violetta offers him friendship instead of love and gives him a flower, asking him to return when it has withered. Alfredo joyously accepts and bids her goodnight. When her guests have gone, Violetta thoughtfully muses on Alfredo's proffered love, but finally returns to her true character and declares that she must remain forever free to pass from pleasure to pleasure.

ACT II—Violetta is living with Alfredo in the country, having abandoned her life of ease and luxury in Paris. Annina, Violetta's maid and confidante, enters and tells Alfredo she has been sent to arrange the sale of Violetta's property, which must be sold to pay their debts. Alfredo suddenly understands the sacrifices which Violetta has made in order to live with him and leaves for Paris, determined not to be shamed by her sacrifice. Violetta enters. She receives an unexpected visitor, Giorgio Germont, Alfredo's father, who declares that Alfredo is ruining himself to keep her as his mistress. When Germont comments on the luxury of the country retreat, Violetta shows him the papers which have been prepared for the sale of all her possessions. He asks her to give up Alfredo, explaining that by continuing the liaison, Alfredo is endangering the impending marriage of his younger sister. Germont's insistence finally convinces Violetta, who agrees to leave Alfredo forever. She is preparing a letter as Alfredo returns. Germont has gone out into the garden. Alfredo, not realizing his father has already arrived, explains that Germont has written him a severe letter but that he feels sure he will approve of Violetta as soon as he sees her. Pretending to leave so as not to be present during the meeting

of father and son, Violetta goes out. A messenger returns with her letter of farewell. Alfredo is stricken with grief at the loss of Violetta, and when his father tries to persuade him to return to his family, Alfredo refuses. Finding on the table an invitation which Flora had sent Violetta, he resolves to go to Flora's in the hope of finding Violetta.

ACT III—Alfredo arrives at Flora's house as the guests are beginning to gamble. Then Violetta arrives, escorted by Baron Douphol. Alfredo is incredibly lucky at cards, and explains that he who is unlucky in love is lucky at cards. The Baron, incensed at Alfredo's insolence, challenges him to play. Alfredo accepts and beats the Baron repeatedly at high stakes. When all the others go to dinner, Violetta remains behind to entreat Alfredo to leave lest the Baron challenge him to a duel. Alfredo answers that he will leave, but only if she accompanies him. Unwilling to reveal that she had to break off with him because of his father, Violetta declares that she is in love with the Baron. Alfredo, in a frenzy of jealousy, calls all the guests into the room and announces that without knowing it he has been living with Violetta at great sacrifice on her part. In a rage, he throws money at her feet and calls upon all to witness that he has paid her in full. Germont has entered just in time to witness Alfredo's caddish behavior and joins the others in reviling him for his conduct. Alfredo, realizing the lengths to which his jealousy has carried him, is contrite, but realizes that he is helpless to make amends. The Baron assures Alfredo that he must answer for the insult on the field of honor.

ACT IV—Violetta's illness has brought her to the point of death. Her physician, Dr. Grenvil, calls at her home, examines her and tells Annina that she has but a few hours to live. Violetta reads a letter from the elder Germont, in which she learns that Alfredo has gone abroad after wounding the Baron in a duel. He knows now of the great sacrifice which Violetta has made and is returning to beg her forgiveness. Alfredo returns and the two are reunited at last. But it is too late. Violetta, comforted by the presence of the man whom she has so tragically loved, dies in his arms.

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La Traviata

Photos taken in rehearsal by Marty Sohl

Verónica Villarroel





(Standing) Scott Wilde, Bojan Knežević;
(Seated) Elizabeth Bishop, Verónica Villarroel, Alfredo Portilla



Verónica Villarroel

Elizabeth Bishop



Alfredo Portilla, Men of the San Francisco Opera Chorus

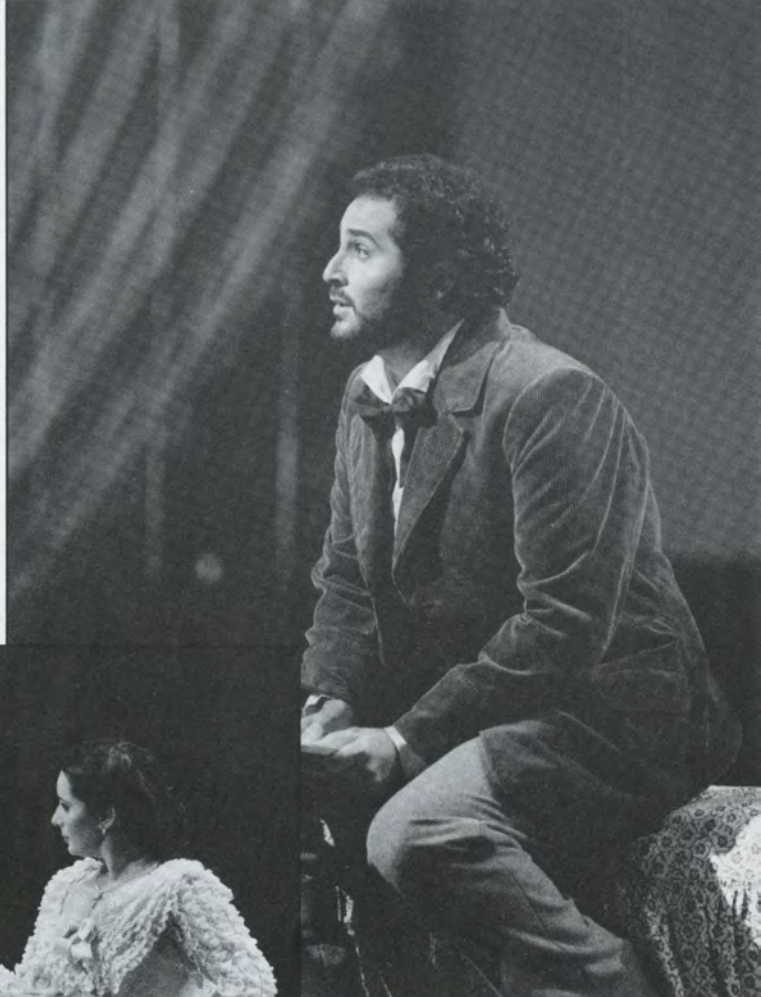


Women of the San Francisco Opera Chorus





Gregory Yurisich



Roberto Aronica



*Gregory Yurisich,
Verónica Villarroel*



Verónica Villarroel

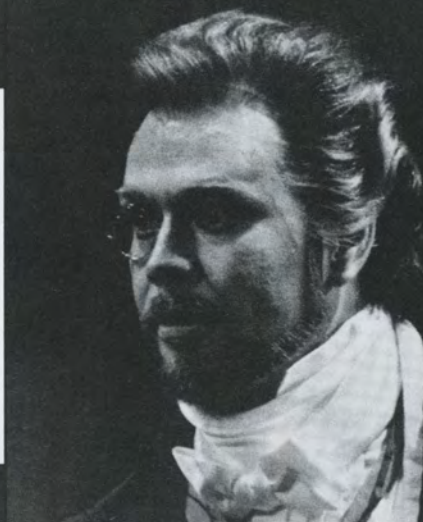


Roberto Aronica, Verónica Villarroel



Scene from Act III

David Okerlund



*Roberto Aronica,
Alfredo Portilla*

*(L. to r.) Suzanne Mendieta,
Aldo Ruiz, Carmen Granados*





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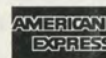
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Sept. 8, 12, 15, 21, 24, 27, 30

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San Francisco Opera Premiere

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Bezubenkov, Andrasy*, Gogin

Gergiev/Titov**; Mansouri/Golovin/
Korovin/Bosquet/Fokine/Shavrov**/
Munn

Sept. 9, 14, 17, 19, 22, 26, 29

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LA TRAVIATA Verdi

Villarroel, Bishop†, Petersen;
Aronica, Yurisich*, Portilla†,
Okerlund†*, Knežević†, Wilde

Mercurio*; Copley/Conklin/
Walker/Clara/Munn

Sept. 16, 20, 23, 28

Oct. 1, 4, 7, 12

MADAMA BUTTERFLY Puccini

Malfitano*/Watanabe*,
Keen/Bishop, Foland†*;
Leech/Margison/Portilla†,
Ledbetter/Baerg, Petersen/
Sénéchal, Barrett*, Skinner

Runnicles/Mackerras (Dec.);
Bernhard/Businger

Oct. 3, 6, 8, 11, 14, 17, 20, 22

Dec. 2, 4, 9

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LA CENERENTOLA

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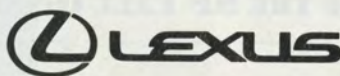
Borodina*, Claytont, Bishop†, Streit,
Alaimo, Gallo, Travis
Rizzi*, Ponnelle/Alden/
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Oct. 26, 29, 31

Nov. 3, 8, 11, 16

DIE WALKÜRE

Wagner

Schnaut, A. Evans, Lipovšek*,
Foland†, Waiter†, Claytont, Keen,
Cook, Bishop†, Cao†, Bean; Elming*,
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Runnicles; Lehnhoff/Feldman/
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Nov. 4, 7, 12, 15, 21, 25, 29

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Ainsley*/Olsen*, Antoniozzi,
Patriarco, Von Halem

Runnicles; Mansouri/Howland/
Bosquet/Whitfield

Nov. 14, 18, 20, 24, 28

Dec. 1, 3, 7

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San Francisco Opera Premiere

RUSALKA Dvořák

Fleming, Sundine, Palmer, Claytont,
Foland†, Dillard, Cao†; Larin,
Skinner, Sénéchal, Knežević†

Mackerras; Feldman/
Schneider-Siemssen/Solt*/Arhelger
Nov. 26, 30, Dec. 2, 6, 8, 10

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**U.S. opera debut

* San Francisco Opera debut
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*All performances are in the original
language with English Supertitles.*

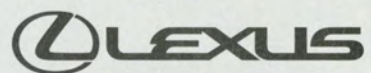
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Rebecca Evans*
Renée Fleming
Nicolle Foland*†
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** U.S. opera debut

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VERÓNICA VILLARROEL, who made her 1993 San Francisco Opera debut as Mimi in *La Bohème*, returns to portray Violetta in *La Traviata*, another signature role which she has sung to great acclaim at the Metropolitan Opera, in Mexico City, at Barcelona's Teatre del Liceu, the Los Angeles Music Center Opera, the Châtelet in Paris, as well as in Dallas and Houston. The Chilean-born soprano made her professional debut at Santiago's Teatro Municipal as Musetta in *La Bohème* opposite the Mimi of Renata Scotto, who was instrumental in bringing Miss Villarroel to

the U.S. where she completed her studies at Juilliard's American Opera Center. Since coming to international attention in 1990 when she bowed at the Liceu as Fiordiligi in *Così fan tutte*, she has successfully performed at many of the world's major theaters. Important engagements from recent seasons include her first Marguerite in *Faust* at the Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires; her bow as Liù in *Turandot* in Lyon; a debut with Houston Grand Opera as Antonia in *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*; her first appearance at Milan's La Scala in concert with Plácido Domingo; as well as *El Gato Montés* in Los Angeles and Gomes's *Il Guarany* in Bonn, both opposite Domingo. Highlights from last season include Marguerite in Los Angeles, Mimi in Dallas, Violetta in Hamburg and at the Met, in addition to her first Lina in Verdi's *Stiffelio* in Madrid. Among her future dates are her first assumption of the title role of *Luisa Miller* for the Washington Opera, her first Cio-Cio-San in *Madama Butterfly* in Toulouse, a bow as Desdemona in *Otello* in Santiago, as well as Micaëla in *Carmen* and Liù at the Met. Miss Villarroel's recordings include *El Gato Montés* and the forthcoming *Il Guarany*.



Mezzo-soprano **DONNA PETERSEN**, who appears as Annina in *La Traviata*, has performed over 30 roles in her 27 seasons with San Francisco Opera. Among them are the Hostess of the Inn in *The Fiery Angel*, Sister Mathilde in *Dialogues of the Carmelites*, Mother Goose in *The Rake's Progress*, Marcellina in *Le Nozze di Figaro*, Mrs. Sedley in *Peter Grimes*, Grimmerde in *Die Walküre* (a role she has performed in seven different Company stagings), Mary in *Der Fliegende Holländer*, Filipjevna in *Eugene Onegin*, the Sister Monitor in *Suor Angelica*, the Governess in *The Queen of*

Spades, and the Innkeeper in *Boris Godunov*. A veteran of numerous Western Opera Theater tours and seasons with Spring Opera Theater, she has also performed with the Lyric Opera of Chicago, San Diego Opera and the Guild Opera of Los Angeles. Concert engagements include appearances with the San Francisco Symphony, Oakland Symphony, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Honolulu Symphony, National Symphony Orchestra of Mexico City, and at Carnegie Hall (N.Y. premiere of Schnittke's *Requiem*). Miss Petersen, who has been head of the Voice Department at Mills College for 25 years, was honored as a Knight of the Royal Order of Dannebrog by Queen Margrethe II of Denmark in 1976.



ELIZABETH BISHOP, who most recently took part in San Francisco Opera's United Nations 50th Anniversary Concert, sings four roles for the Company: Flora in *La Traviata*, Suzuki in the December performances of *Madama Butterfly*, Tisbe in *La Cenerentola*, and Siegrune in *Die Walküre*. The mezzo-soprano, a 1994-95 Adler Fellow, was featured in four operas of the San Francisco Opera 1994 Fall Season, which included the role of Emilie in the world premiere production of *The Dangerous Liaisons*. She has numerous credits for the Opera Center, among them Helen in the 1994

Showcase production of Tippet's *King Priam*, Meg Page in *Falstaff* and Ida in *Die Fledermaus* for the 1993 Merola Opera Program, and Prince Orlofsky and Ida in Western Opera Theater's national tour of *Die Fledermaus*. She recently appeared in *The Ghosts of Versailles* at the Metropolitan Opera after having made her Met debut in the 1993 production of *Death in Venice*. A native of Greenville, South Carolina, the young artist earned a master of music degree from The Juilliard School in 1991 and completed a two-year apprenticeship program as a Juilliard Opera Center Young Artist. Since 1992, Miss Bishop has been annually featured in the San Francisco Symphony Pops Concerts.



ROBERTO ARONICA, who made his 1993 U.S. opera debut with the Company as Rodolfo in *La Bohème*, returns to portray Alfredo in *La Traviata*. A pupil of Carlo Bergonzi, he has emerged as one of the most promising singers of his generation. He made his debut as the Duke of Mantua in *Rigoletto* at the Teatro Municipal in Santiago, Chile, in 1992. Since then, he has won acclaim for his appearances as Rodolfo in Turin and Reggio Emilia; as Edgardo in *Lucia di Lammermoor* in Macerata and Treviso; as the Duke in Genoa and Treviso; as well as Ruggero in *La Rondine*

and Nemorino in *L'Elisir d'Amore* in Turin. Among the highlights of his 1994-95 season are *La Bohème* in Florence, Macerata and Mannheim; *La Traviata* in Cardiff; *Lucia di Lammermoor* in Paris; and *Der Rosenkavalier* in Bologna. In addition to his operatic performances, Aronica has also been in demand for concert appearances throughout his native Italy. The young tenor studied at the Accademia Chigiana in Siena, where he obtained both a scholarship and a diploma. He also won a scholarship in memory of Maria Mazzanzana Ziliani, an award which enabled him to study under Bergonzi.

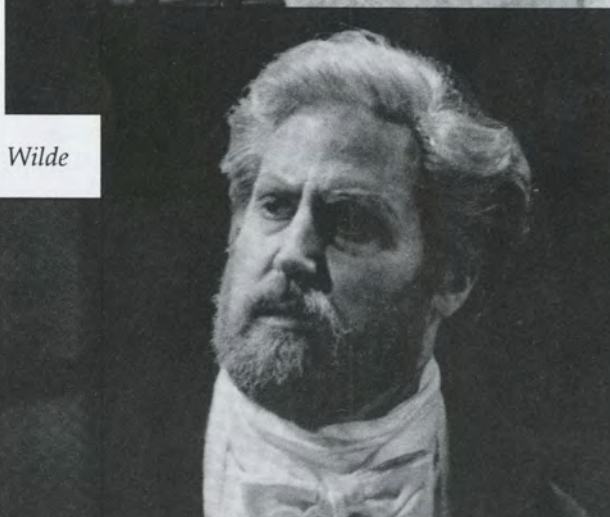


Verónica Villarroel



Gregory Yurisch, Verónica Villarroel

Scott Wilde



Donna Petersen, Verónica Villarroel





GREGORY YURISICH makes his debut with San Francisco Opera as Giorgio Germont in *La Traviata*. The Australian baritone made his debut as Paolo in *Simon Boccanegra* with the Australian Opera where he was a soloist until 1987. There, and at the Victoria State Opera, he sang most of the major baritone repertoire including Sharpless in *Madama Butterfly*, Yeltsky in *The Queen of Spades*, Escamillo in *Carmen*, the four villains in *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*, Pizarro in *Fidelio*, Alberich in *Siegfried*, and Germont. Internationally, he has sung at Covent Garden and the English National

Opera; the Bastille and the Châtelet in Paris; the Deutsche Oper in Berlin; in New York, Washington, Los Angeles, Boston, Nice, Lyon, Vancouver, Geneva, Frankfurt, Tel Aviv, and Athens; and at the Glyndebourne, Bregenz and Hong Kong Festivals. He has recently turned to the Verdi baritone repertory in which he has received great critical and public acclaim—Amonasro in *Aida*, Iago in *Otello*, the title roles of *Nabucco*, *Rigoletto* and *Simon Boccanegra*, as well as Scarpia in *Tosca* and the title part of *Guillaume Tell*. His recordings include *Don Giovanni* (Leporello), *Tosca* (Scarpia), and Walton's *The Bear* (Smirnov). He can also be seen on the videos of *Stiffelio* (Stankar), *Die Fledermaus* (Frank), *La Fille du Régiment* (Sulpice), and *The Mikado* (Pooh Bah). Future plans include Iago, Barak in *Die Frau ohne Schatten* and the title role of *Falstaff* in Australia, Balstrode in *Peter Grimes* in Vienna, the title role of *Nabucco* at Covent Garden, Amonasro and Escamillo in Munich, and *Otello* (with Plácido Domingo) in Washington.



In his debut season with San Francisco Opera, **DAVID OKERLUND** portrays Baron Douphol in *La Traviata* and Dandini in the student matinee presentation of *La Cenerentola*. A native of Kearney, Nebraska, the baritone earned a bachelor's degree in composition/conducting and a master's degree in vocal/opera performance from the Kansas City Conservatory of Music at the University of Missouri. While teaching at Longview College, he received apprenticeships from the Des Moines Metro Opera and the Lyric Opera of Kansas. With these companies, he sang

leading baritone roles in *Don Giovanni*, *Così fan tutte*, *La Bohème*, *Carmen*, *Falstaff*, *The Marriage of Figaro*, *The Magic Flute*, *Tosca* and *Aida*, among others. A member of the Merola Opera Program in 1993 and '94 and currently a 1995 Adler Fellow, Opera Center credits include Falke in *Die Fledermaus* and the title role of *Don Giovanni*, roles he performed both for the Merola Program and for Western Opera Theater's national tours. Recent appearances include Guglielmo in *Così fan tutte* for Opera Carolina and Piedmont Opera Theater, Britten's *War Requiem* and Orff's *Carmina Burana* with the San Mateo Masterworks Chorale, as well as two assignments he performed as part of this summer's United Nations 50th anniversary celebration: the role of the Bonze in the Opéra de Lyon's production of *Madama Butterfly*, and soloist in the Company's U.N. Concert which featured Marilyn Horne. Among his future engagements are the title role of *Don Giovanni* and Silvio in *Pagliacci* at the Lyric Opera of Kansas City.



In his second year as an Adler Fellow, **ALFREDO PORTILLA** appears as Gastone in *La Traviata* and Pinkerton in the final two October performances of *Madama Butterfly*. He made his San Francisco Opera debut last season in the world premiere of *The Dangerous Liaisons*, followed by appearances in *Il Trovatore*, *Otello*, *Hérodiade* and *Lucia di Lammermoor*. The tenor hails from Mexico City and since 1990 has been a member of the Bellas Artes company, where his roles included the Duke in *Rigoletto*, Edgardo in *Lucia di Lammermoor*, Nemorino in *L'Elisir d'Amore*, and Alfredo in *La Traviata*. He has also appeared with numerous Mexican symphony orchestras, and at the most important festivals in his native country. In 1992, Portilla was selected by the S.F. Opera Center from auditions around the Asia/Pacific region to participate in the first-ever Pacific Voices program. Opera Center credits include Paris in the Showcase production of Tippet's *King Priam*, and Alfred in *Die Fledermaus* for the Merola Opera Program and Western Opera Theater. Recent highlights include Edgardo with New Jersey Opera, Ismaele in *Nabucco* with New Israeli Opera, Rodolfo in *La Bohème* with New York City Opera, Pinkerton in *Madama Butterfly* with the Opéra de Lyon (in that company's first U.S. performances as part of the United Nations 50th Anniversary celebration), and soloist in the Company's U.N. Concert. Next year he is scheduled to make his Paris Opéra (Bastille) debut as Cavaradossi in *Tosca*, and reprise the role of Pinkerton for the Opéra de Lyon.



Bass-baritone **BOJAN KNEŽEVIĆ**, recently named an Adler Fellow with the Opera Center, appears in his first San Francisco Opera season as Marquis d'Obigny in *La Traviata*, Don Magnifico in the student matinee production of *La Cenerentola*, and is heard as the Voice of the Huntsman in *Rusalka*. A native of Belgrade, he received his bachelor's and master's degrees from the Academy of Music in Novi Sad, and has performed with the National Theatre in Novi Sad, as well as in Zagreb and Belgrade. Knežević returns to the Opera Center after completing his third year in the Merola Opera Program. Roles for Merola stagings include Schounard in *La Bohème* (1992), Pistola in *Falstaff* and Frosch in *Die Fledermaus* (1993), and Leporello in *Don Giovanni* (1994). He repeated the roles of Schounard, Frosch and Leporello for Western Opera Theater's national tours. The young artist's recent credits include Marcello in *La Bohème* and Leporello with Virginia Opera; Mozart's *Coronation Mass* and Great Mass in C Minor as well as the U.S. premiere of Mascagni's *Silvano* with the Manhattan Orchestra (all works performed at Carnegie Hall); and soloist in the Company's United Nations 50th Anniversary Concert. Next season he sings Leporello for the Minnesota Opera and Escamillo in *Carmen* to inaugurate the new opera house in Fort Worth.

ARTIST PROFILES



Bass **SCOTT WILDE**, in his fourth consecutive San Francisco Opera season, portrays Lord Rochefort in *Anna Bolena* and Dr. Grenvil in *La Traviata*. In his 1992 debut season with the Company, he sang roles in *Boris Godunov*, *La Forza del Destino*, *Andrea Chénier* and *Christophe Colomb*. After appearing here in 1993 as Roberto in *I Vespri Siciliani*, he returned last fall to portray Reinmar in *Tannhäuser* and a Peasant in *The Fiery Angel*. A native of Wisconsin and a graduate of the Manhattan School of Music, he continued his studies as a member of the Juilliard Opera

Center and several other prominent artists' programs. The young artist has been featured in *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*, *Un Ballo in Maschera* and *Madama Butterfly* at the Washington Opera; *Il Trovatore* at New Mexico's Opera Southwest; *Falstaff* at Long Beach Opera; *Die Zauberflöte* and *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* for Madison Opera; *Don Giovanni* at the Opera Theatre of St. Louis; and in numerous productions at the New York City Opera. Wilde made a successful European debut with Dublin Grand Opera earlier this season in *Don Giovanni*.



CARMEN GRANADOS made her San Francisco Opera debut dancing in the 1987 production of *La Traviata*. She began dancing at the Academy of Ballet in San Francisco where she studied with Carolyn Parks. Later she began studying Spanish dance with Adela Clara and joined the Theatre Flamenco of San Francisco at the age of 15. She has also studied in Spain with such renowned teachers as El Guito, Ciro, José Molina, Victoria Eugenia, Rosa Mercedes and José Galvan. Miss Granados has danced with Spring Opera Theater in *The Barber of Seville* and in the

Opera Theatre of St. Louis production of *Carmen*. She has also been a guest teacher in residence at the University of Utah and has toured throughout California and the Pacific Northwest with Theatre Flamenco. She has been a featured artist with Rosa Montoya's Bailes Flamenco and was a soloist for three years at the San Francisco Ethnic Dance Festival. In addition to her performing assignments, Miss Granados continues to teach the art of Spanish dance throughout the U.S. and Europe.



SUZANNE MENDIETA made her first San Francisco Opera appearance as a dancer in the 1991 presentation of *La Traviata*. She is a classically trained dancer in both ballet and flamenco, and has appeared with such groups as Rosa Montoya's Bailes Flamenco, Theatre Flamenco and Arabesque Dance Company, and has most recently been performing in Michael Smuin's *Dances With Songs*. Her Spanish dancing skills have also been showcased in the flamenco adaptation of *Beauty and the Beast*, in which she performed the title role. Additional appearances

include soloist in Santa Clara Ballet's production of *The Sleeping Beauty*; Pacific Dance Theater's *Nutcracker*; performances in St. Martin, Netherlands Antilles; and being a featured dancer at the "World Expo, 1992" in Seville. Miss Mendieta can currently be seen in the motion picture *A Walk in the Clouds*.



ALDO RUIZ makes his first San Francisco Opera appearance as a dancer in *La Traviata*. Born in Mexico and raised in Santa Cruz, California, he performed Mexican folk dances for five years with Janet Johns and her company, Esperanza del Valle. He began his flamenco training in 1992 with Patri Nader and danced with her troupe for two years, which included performances with the symphony orchestras of San Jose and Tulare. Last year, he toured the eastern United States with famed flamenco master Pablo Rodarte and his company. Ruiz joined San Francisco's

Theatre Flamenco earlier this year, and has been featured both with that company and at the S.F. Ethnic Dance Festival.



In his first San Francisco Opera assignment, **STEVEN MERCURIO** is on the podium for *La Traviata*. The conductor and composer is currently the music director of the Spoleto Festival in Italy, where he has led, among others, Menotti's *Goya*, Puccini's *Il Trittico*, Berg's *Wozzeck*, and Shostakovich's *The Nose*. He has conducted 12 productions at the Opera Company of Philadelphia (where he was principal conductor for five seasons), including *Rusalka*, *Cavalleria Rusticana*, *Pagliacci*, *Le Nozze di Figaro*, *Turandot* (with his own edition of the closing duet and finale), *Rigoletto*,

Eugene Onegin and Menotti's *The Saint of Bleeker Street*. Among other highlights are Zemlinsky's *The Birthday of the Infanta* at the Spoleto Festival USA (U.S. premiere) and the Rome Opera (Italian premiere); *I Puritani* at La Fenice in Venice; Barber's *Vanessa* for the Dallas Opera; *Ermione* in Brussels; Rossini's *Il Viaggio a Rheims* at Wolf Trap; *Tosca* with Michigan Opera Theatre; and a new staging of *La Traviata* for the Bonn Staatsoper. Additionally, he has led concerts with the Minnesota Orchestra, Monte Carlo Opera Orchestra, Stockholm Chamber Orchestra, the Royal Philharmonic of Flanders, Netherlands Radio Orchestra, Sacramento Symphony, and the Brooklyn Philharmonic, where he was associate conductor for three seasons under Lukas Foss. As a composer, his repertoire includes songs, chamber works, and pieces for large orchestra. Mercurio's most recent composition, *For Lost Loved Ones*, was given its 1991 world premiere by Zubin Mehta and the New York Philharmonic.



Long associated with San Francisco Opera, **JOHN COPLEY** returns to stage *Anna Bolena* and *La Traviata*. The internationally celebrated director made his Company debut in 1982 with Handel's *Julius Caesar* and the following year staged the U.S. premiere of Tippett's *The Midsummer Marriage*. Subsequent SFO assignments have been *Don Giovanni*, Handel's *Orlando*, *Eugene Onegin*, *Le Nozze di Figaro*, *La Traviata*, *Idomeneo*, *Suor Angelica*, *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Queen of Spades*, and last season's new production of *Il Trovatore*. In

addition, he directed the young artists of the Merola Opera Program in Villa Montalvo productions of *Die Fledermaus* in 1993 as well as last year's *Don Giovanni*. Copley began his career as stage manager for musicals in London's West End before becoming assistant and then principal resident director of the Royal Opera at Covent Garden. His work has been acclaimed at the major opera houses and festivals in Europe, and he has also directed over 30 productions at the Australian Opera. In North America, his credits include productions for the Metropolitan Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Dallas Opera, Los Angeles Music Center Opera, Washington Opera, Houston Grand Opera, Santa Fe Opera, San Diego Opera, Canadian Opera Company and the New York City Opera.

ARTIST PROFILES



JOHN CONKLIN designed the sets for *La Traviata* as well as the sets and costumes for *Die Walküre*. Spring Opera Theater audiences first saw his work in productions of *Orfeo* (1972), *Death in Venice* (1975 and '79), and *Julius Caesar*. His first Company assignment was the 1977 *Un Ballo in Maschera*, a production which was also mounted in 1982, 1985 and 1990. Additional SFO credits have been *Don Pasquale* (1980, '84), *La Traviata* (1987, 1991), *Idomeneo* (1989), and *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* (1992). He also created designs for the four operas of Wagner's *Ring of the*

Nibelung, which had been unveiled in 1983 (*Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre*), 1984 (*Siegfried*), and 1985 (*Götterdämmerung*). In addition, he served as production consultant for the Company's 1990 *Ring* presentation. Elsewhere in the U.S., his designs have been seen at the Metropolitan Opera, New York City Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Dallas Opera, Seattle Opera, Opera Theatre of St. Louis and Santa Fe Opera, among others. On the other side of the Atlantic, Conklin has been responsible for production designs for the Holland Festival, Scottish Opera, and the Munich Opera. Last season, his busy schedule included the Met's first presentation of *I Lombardi*, the Washington Opera's premiere of Argento's *The Dream of Valentino*, San Diego Opera's premiere of Daniel Catan's *Rappaccini's Daughter*, the Chicago Lyric's new production of *Die Walküre*, as well as *Tosca* for Seattle Opera and the English National Opera. Conklin's designs have also been seen in numerous ballet and legitimate theater productions.

British designer **DAVID WALKER** made his Company debut in 1987 with these costume designs for *La Traviata*. Born in Calcutta, he studied at the Central School of Arts and Crafts, and made his operatic design debut with *Così fan tutte* at the Dublin Festival. His designs have been seen at opera houses in Venice, Lisbon, Stockholm, and at the English National Opera, Welsh National Opera, Edinburgh Festival, Glyndebourne Festival, Royal Opera at Covent Garden, and the Metropolitan Opera. Operas designed for these companies include *Carmen*, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, *Werther*, *Don Giovanni*, *La Bohème*, *Guillaume Tell*, *Der Rosenkavalier*, *Semele* and *Die Meistersinger*. Last season, he designed and directed a new production of Donizetti's *Roberto Devereux* for the opera houses of Palermo and Genoa. Costume design credits for television include *Hamlet* (with Richard Chamberlain) and *The Corn is Green* (with Katharine Hepburn, directed by George Cukor). Among his film credits are *The Charge of the Light Brigade* for Tony Richardson, and *Lady Caroline Lamb* for Robert Bolt.



Choreographer **ADELA CLARA** made her 1987 San Francisco Opera debut with the dances for *La Traviata*, which she recreated for the Company's 1991 reprise of the production. She studied Spanish dance with some of the world's greatest masters, including Mariquita Flores, Roberto Ximenez and Manolo Vargas in this country, and Victoria Eugenia, Maria Rose Merced, Martin Vargas and José Galvan in Spain. Miss Clara founded Theatre Flamenco, the San Francisco Spanish dance company, and served as its artistic director until 1983. She has received

numerous awards and recognition from the National Endowment for the Arts and the California Arts Council, and has served as a panelist for the dance programs of both of those agencies. In 1985, she received the first choreographer's award given by the San Francisco Bay Area Dance Coalition Isadora Duncan Awards, and for several seasons acted as a judge for S.F.'s popular Ethnic Dance Festival. In 1990, Miss Clara was choreographer for the Berkeley Repertory Theatre's production of *Fuente Ovejuna* and received the Bay Area Theatre Critics Circle outstanding achievement award for choreography in a drama. In addition to her work as a choreographer, she teaches the art of Spanish dance throughout the U.S. and most recently was a guest instructor at the Institute for Spanish Arts in Santa Fe, New Mexico.



Lighting Director and Design Consultant for San Francisco Opera since 1976, **THOMAS J. MUNN** created the lighting and special effects for *Ruslan and Lyudmila*, in addition to the lighting for *La Traviata*, *Madama Butterfly*, *La Cenerentola*, *Faust* and *Die Walküre*. He has designed the lighting and special effects for over 155 productions for the Company, including the highly acclaimed presentations of Wagner's *Ring* cycle. As scenic adviser, he has designed scenery for SFO productions of *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, *Roberto Devereux*, *Pelléas et Mélisande*, *Billy Budd*, *Nabucco*, *Don*

Giovanni, and *Christophe Colomb*. In addition to his work for the San Francisco Opera, Munn has designed scenery and lighting for Broadway, Off-Broadway, regional theater, ballet, industrials and films. His television and video credits include San Francisco Opera's Emmy-winning telecast of *La Gioconda*, also *Samson et Dalila*, *Aida*, *L'Africaine*, *La Bohème*, *Orlando Furioso*, *Mefistofele*, *Capriccio*, *Turandot* and *The Dangerous Liaisons*. Credits for other companies include work for the Dallas Opera, Houston Grand Opera, Washington Opera, Chicago Lyric Opera and the Netherlands Opera, as well as scenery and lighting for Hartford Ballet's *Nutcracker*. Recent credits include lighting for the Dallas Opera's production of *La Cenerentola*, scenery and lighting for Ballet Arizona's staging of *Coppélia*, as well as art direction and lighting for the video "The Universe Story." In the future, Munn will design the lighting for Dallas Opera's production of *Il Trovatore*, and will also serve as consultant/designer of the War Memorial's new renovated and computerized lighting system.

La Traviata—Supernumeraries

Steve Bauman
Jim Bowes
Mark Fons
Frank Jorgensen
M.T. Kildow

Alfred Knoll
William F. Perasso
Jim Shea
Jim Shields
Raymond Sullivan

1995 OPERA PREVIEWS

The following list of lectures and previews includes those that are currently available to the public

PRE-OPERA TALKS

Our popular Pre-Opera Talks, which are held in the Orchestra section one hour prior to curtain, will include a special lecture describing SF Opera's plans for the 1996 performances out of the Opera House. These 1996 previews will run between Sept. 19 and Oct. 1. After Oct. 1, the traditional Pre-Opera Talks will continue throughout the 1995 Fall Season. Lectures are free with your ticket for the performance and are held on most performance dates. Watch for talk dates in S.F. Opera newspaper advertisements.

SAN FRANCISCO OPERA GUILD — INSIGHTS

Renowned artists and personalities from the world of opera in informal interviews. Held from 6 to 7 p.m. in Herbst Theatre, 401 Van Ness, in San Francisco. Complimentary to Guild members, \$5 at the door.

Information: (415) 565-6432

Oct. 11 *La Cenerentola*
Nov. 20 *Rusalka*

SAN FRANCISCO OPERA GUILD — PREVIEWS

Speakers: *Ruslan and Lyudmila*: Richard Taruskin; *Anna Bolena*: William Ashbrook; *Madama Butterfly*: James Keolker; *Faust*: Perry Lorenzo; *Don Giovanni*: Robert Glick; *Rusalka*: Michael Beckerman

MARIN

Held at 8 p.m. at Mt. Tamalpais United Methodist Church, 410 Sycamore Avenue, Mill Valley.

Information: (415) 388-6789

Oct. 23 *Faust*
Oct. 30 *Don Giovanni*
Nov. 13 *Rusalka*

SAN FRANCISCO

Held at 12:00 noon, The Unitarian Center, 1187 Franklin St., San Francisco.

Information: (415) 565-6432

Oct. 23 *Faust*
Nov. 1 *Don Giovanni*
Nov. 15 *Rusalka*

SAN JOSE

Held at 10:00 a.m. at the Los Gatos History Club, 123 Los Gatos Blvd., Los Gatos.

Information: (408) 741-1331, or (408) 354-7525

Oct. 24 *Faust*
Oct. 31 *Don Giovanni*
Nov. 14 *Rusalka*

SONOMA COUNTY

Held at various locations and times.

Information: (707) 938-2432

Oct. 25 *Faust*
Oct. 30 *Don Giovanni*
Nov. 13 *Rusalka*

SOUTH PENINSULA

Held at 8:00 p.m. at the Palo Alto Senior Center, 450 Bryant St., Palo Alto.

Information: (415) 941-3890

Oct. 24 *Faust*
Oct. 31 *Don Giovanni*
Nov. 14 *Rusalka*

EAST BAY

Held at 8:00 p.m. at different locations.

Information: (510) 527-1846
or (510) 838-9255

Nov. 15 *Rusalka*

SAN FRANCISCO CONSERVATORY OF MUSIC EXTENSION DIVISION

Oct. 16 - Nov. 6, 7:30-9:30 p.m.

Puccini: *Heir to the Verdian Tradition*

Series of four Monday classes, held by William Wellborn.

Information: (415) 759-3446

MERRITT COLLEGE OPERA LECTURE SERIES

Held on Tuesday evenings in Building R, Room 130, 7 to 10 p.m., *Introduction to Opera* (Music 13A) is based on the operas of the 1995 fall season. The College is at 12500 Campus Drive (off Redwood Road in the Oakland Hills).

Information: (510) 436-2430

OPERA EDUCATION INTERNATIONAL PREVIEW SERIES

Given by Michael Barclay, director of OEI. Lectures start at 7:15 p.m. at 400 Yale Ave. (at Vassar) in the Kensington part of the Berkeley hills. Series began on September 5; lectures are \$15 at the door.

Information: (510) 526-5244

Nov. 6 *Faust*
Nov. 13 *Don Giovanni*
Nov. 22 *Rusalka*
Dec. 11 *Season Review*

SAN FRANCISCO CITY COLLEGE PREVIEWS

A music course of opera previews will deal with all operas of the 1995 fall season. Taught by Marvin Tartak on Wednesday afternoons from 3 to 6 p.m., it takes place at the College, 50 Phelan Ave., Creative Arts Building, Room A-135 in San Francisco. Classes began August 23 and continue for 17 weeks.

Information: (415) 239-3641

ROBERT GOODHUE'S FALL OPERA COURSE

Held at the Holiday Inn, 480 Sutter St., San Francisco, mostly Monday evenings, 6:15-8:30 p.m. Remaining dates: Oct. 9, 23, 30; Nov. 6, 11.

Information: (415) 291-9126

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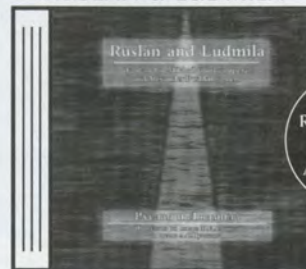
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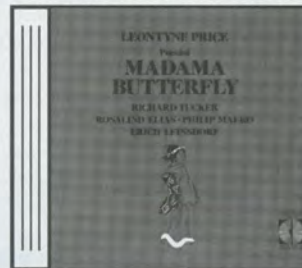


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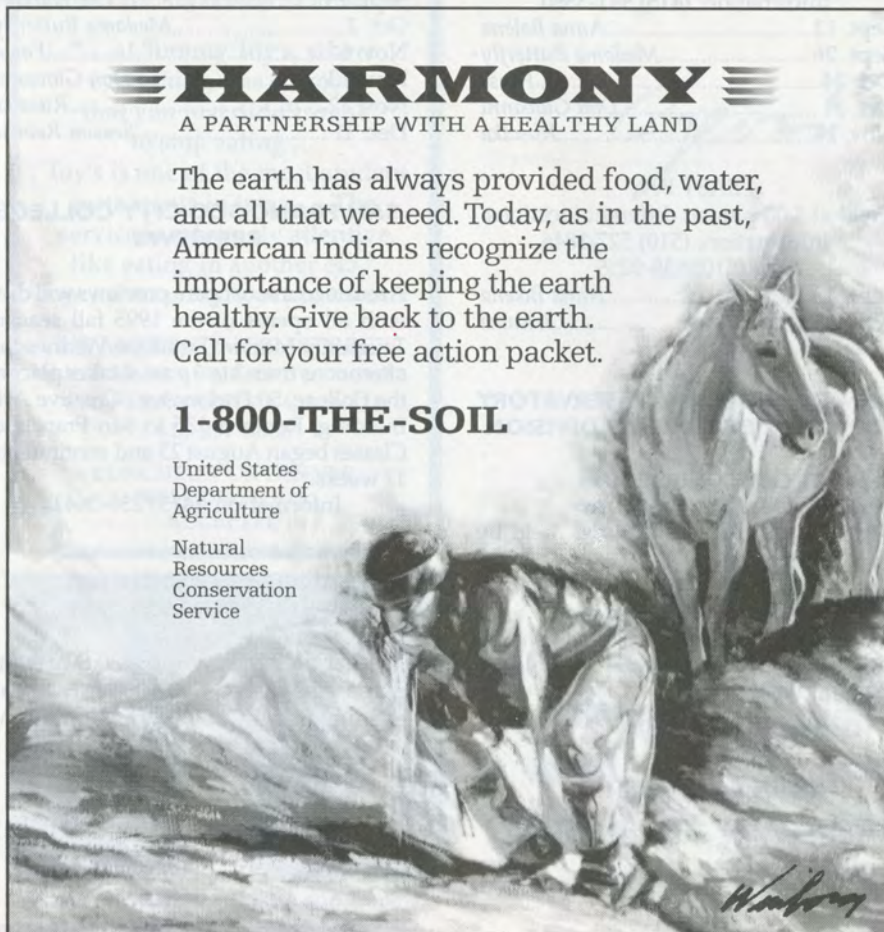
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exuberance of "*De' miei bollenti spiriti*," the tenderness of "*Parigi, o cara, noi lasceremo*."

As I type these titles, I am struck by how quiet most of this music is. (Or should be: there are tenors and tenors.) Yes, "*Un dì felice*" rises (*con espansione*) to the brimming climax of "*Di quell'amor*"—could Puccini ever have come up with the effulgent cresting on "*Talor dal mio forziere*" in Rodolfo's "*Che gelida manina*" without this model?—and "*De' miei bollenti spiriti*" has its *fortissimo* A-flat, but both pieces end quietly. So does "*Parigi, o cara*." *Dolce* and *dolcissimo* are key directives in *La Traviata*.

And how, I have sometimes wondered, did they ever get a Venetian audience to quiet down so that the *pianissimo* beginning of the Prelude to Act One—sixteen violins alone—could be heard? I wondered as well whether Verdi already knew *Lohengrin*, which also begins with high *pianissimo* violins (plus pairs of flutes and oboes). The answer is, he did not: *Lohengrin*, introduced at Weimar in 1850, came to Italy in 1871. Verdi went to Bologna for that performance, the first in Italy of any Wagner opera, and the notes he jotted into his score make it clear that the music was new to him.

La Traviata's ethereal and infinitely sad opening tells us unmistakably what lies ahead, and the glowing violin melody that follows, one we shall meet again at one of the most harrowing moments in the drama, adds passion to melancholia. The rise of the curtain brings a shock: boisterous party music. Verdi enjoyed these jolting juxtapositions. *Rigoletto*, whose grim Prelude is swept aside by giddy dance music for the off-stage *banda*, provides a famous example, but he had already worked the same effect in *Ernani*, whose Prelude is a direct ancestor of *Traviata's*.

A party is in progress, but, so far, in uneasy progress. The hostess is there, and a few friends, but it is late and most of the expected guests have not shown up. The lateness of the guests weighs more heavily than one might suppose. The hostess—she is of course Violetta—has been very ill for some months, and this party is supposed to be her comeback. It is crucial for her to know whether, after her long absence from the scene, she has retained her position as queen bee in the hierarchy of Parisian courtesans, and so anxiety reigns in this grand but nearly empty salon, wine glasses waiting to be filled and a dance band ready to play. Now, to everyone's relief, they

begin to arrive with a story of having lost track of time at another party. Anxiety is dispelled for the moment; nonetheless, a seed has been planted.

Gastone, a playboy who, we could learn from Dumas's novel, is remarkable for never having been one of Violetta's lovers, has brought along someone new, a young man from the country. The newcomer, Alfredo, is elected to propose a toast.³ We learn that he has had his scrutinous eye on Violetta for some time and that, during her illness, he had called daily at her apartment to inquire after her health. Violetta receives this information with a mixture of skepticism and pleasure. We see as well that she is far from completely recovered. Overcome by a sudden fit of shivering, she tells her guests to pay her no heed, to enjoy the dancing she has arranged for in the next room. Alfredo is the only one among the company to ignore her courteous—and painfully embarrassed—"Go on, go on, I'll be all right in a moment," and he stays behind to look after her.

Violetta does not know what to do with the young man's confession of love: after all, she has already said that it is useless to speak of love to someone who has never experienced it. No question, though, she is affected by Alfredo's words and—this is after all opera—by the shy grace of his melody with its little hesitations (*Un dì BREATH felice*, BREATH *eterea* BREATH—what a wonderful evocation of a heart that is beating too fast) and, a moment later, by the fervor of "*Di quell'amor*." She joins in to turn his song into a duet and, although her words are designed to discourage him ("We can only be friends, I don't know how to love"), her music harmonizes with his.

The party is over. The guests leave to the same hectic music that had brought them onto the scene at the beginning, only this time, as the bass line feverishly rises from F to G-flat to G-natural, and so by half-steps all the way to D-flat, there is madness as well—the madness in Violetta's head. The world is not what it was when the curtain first went up. Violetta is alone. In music whose hesitations (*Ah, BREATH fors' BREATH è BREATH lui*) echo those of Alfredo's "*Un dì felice*," she can look for a moment at the possibility that this could be love, that heightened sensation for which she is so utterly unprepared, unschooled, and the prospect of whose arrival strikes her with

as much terror as delight. She cannot face it: it's idiocy even to think of it. Her life is committed to a given path, to "*gioire*," to "*vortici*" of "*voluttà*," to "*folleggiare di gioia in gioia*." (In a mid-nineteenth-century opera libretto she could not very well say "to sex for money.") From some of *La Traviata's* most inward music ("Ah, *fors'è lui*"), she swings into its most virtuosically outward ("*Sempre libera*"). Alfredo's "*Di quell'amor*," so inviting, so terrifying, still haunts her, but in ever more frantic coloratura she shakes it off.

I don't intend to walk through all of *La Traviata* in this manner; I do, however, want to suggest that contrasts, collisions, conflicts of this kind are the motor that drive this drama—the differences between the feverish and the reflective, between public and private, between extraneous entertainments (the dance band *chez* Violetta, the pseudo-matadors *chez* Flora, the Procession of the Bull heard through the window as Violetta lies dying) and actions and confrontations that are written in blood, between delusive hope and the dark realities of a life like Violetta's, between champagne flutes and vials of useless medicine, between knowing and not knowing, even between life and death. Verdi sets up the idea of such contrast in the first minutes of the opera, in the Prelude itself, which gives us first the inward, foreboding, almost incorporeal music of the first sixteen measures and then the impassioned (though *piano*) declaration of the great string melody that follows.

We feel these frictions everywhere, most piercingly at three critical moments of Act Two. First, there is the long and masterfully worked scene in which Germont succeeds in prying Violetta loose from Alfredo so that the family of Alfredo's sister's fiancé will not be scandalized.⁴ Two irreconcilable principles are at war: the demands of the heart and the demands of social propriety. Germont, pompous, self-pleased, and sentimental, has the advantage: a woman ruled by her heart is always more vulnerable than a man buttressed by (preferably unexamined) principles. Violetta, furthermore, is the more vulnerable because learning to listen to her heart has taken such a radical redesign both of her psyche and her financial arrangements.

Second, after Violetta has agreed, in agony, to leave Alfredo and has decided to resume

continued on page 44

³ A drinking song of this kind, with everyone on stage repeating the words of the toast, is called a *brindisi*. It turns out, however, to have nothing to do with the Apulian port city; at least according to the Verdi scholar Julian Budden, writing in *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, the word comes from the Spanish *brindis* (a toast), which is in turn a corruption of the German *bring dir's* (to you!).—Does anyone remember the use of this music, "*Libiamo ne' lieti calici*," in Billy Wilder's film with Ray Milland, *The Lost Weekend*?

⁴ Is it, by the way, not odd that Alfredo, who has been living with Violetta for three months, has never mentioned that he has a sister? For that matter, Verdi's setting of Violetta's astonished "*Di due figli?*" is also odd in that the accent falls on "*figli*" rather than, as one would supposed, on "*due*." Altogether, with respect to the opening of Act Two of *La Traviata*, Piave's economical dramaturgy comes at a price. On the whole, he follows the shape of Dumas's play quite closely, but he does completely drop its second act. As a result, we see and hear Violetta at the end of Act One declare firmly that she will turn her back on what Alfredo has to offer; yet, in Act Two, there she suddenly is, barefoot in the country, as it were. You have to pay close attention to Alfredo's opening recitative, all fifty seconds of it, to understand what has happened.

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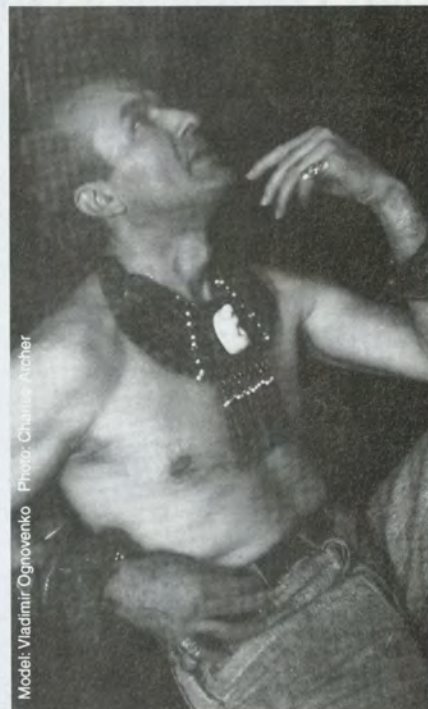
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ORPHEUS: from the Underworld.....

A narrative diary, written during one week in May of this year, when the San Francisco Opera traveled to Skywalker Ranch for the Company's first studio recording: Gluck's *Orphée et Eurydice*

By JAKE HEGGIE



JOHN O'HARA: COURTESY, SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE

THE OPERA: Gluck's *Orphée et Eurydice*.

THE SETTING: Paradise (also known as Skywalker Ranch in Marin County).

THE TIME: May 11-17, 1995.

IT WAS FAIRLY GRAY AND DRIZZLY when I left San Francisco that May morning on my quest for Orpheus. I had my map, a non-fat latte, a cranberry muffin and enormous anticipation for what lay ahead. References to the mythical settings from the famous tale of undying love kept popping into my head during my personal overture to the opera: a long car ride to Skywalker Ranch. I was on my way to hear the live sessions for San Francisco Opera's first studio recording—Gluck's masterpiece, *Orphée et Eurydice*, in the rarely-heard 1859 French edition by Berlioz, recorded by Teldec. (The Opera's first commercial recording had been made only last fall: live performances of Massenet's *Hérodiade*.) My taped serenade that morning was Kathleen Ferrier's performance of the mournful Orpheus as I crossed the Golden Gate Bridge—ah! the river Styx?—and I had no idea what to expect along the way.

At the end of my trek, I anticipated that I would hear some of the most elegant mu-

sic ever penned sung to perfection by three of the opera world's most admired young artists: mezzo-soprano Jennifer Larmore as Orphée, soprano Dawn Upshaw as Eurydice, and soprano Alison Hagley as Cupid. Each was working with San Francisco Opera for the first time, and they, with the Opera Orchestra and Chorus, would be led by the Opera's music director, Donald Runnicles. It would be his first recording with his own company. The singers had each worked with Maestro Runnicles on separate occasions, but never together. Miss Larmore, who had recorded *Hänsel und Gretel* with the maestro in 1994, later described him to me as "every singer's dream: a first-rate musician, sensitive, intelligent and never condescending." She also added that "if there was a way I could get a monopoly on him, I would!" Runnicles had enthusiastically described the three singers as "an absolute dream cast for this opera." I was among the privileged few who would be permitted to sit in on the sessions and interact with the artists. I was beside myself.

The fear of getting lost and missing the whole thing kept entering my mind as I drove down a long and winding country road in Marin County. It did not seem a

likely locale for opera, and I kept wondering if I'd made a wrong turn off of the freeway. A sudden thundershower—the furies and specters of Hades?—gave way to spotty sunshine and Olympian clouds. Thanks to the heavy rains of winter and spring, the hills were a luminous, bright green. If I was lost, at least it was beautiful. Miss Ferrier helped to keep my focus as I careened into yet another spectacular vista. A quick glance at my directions confirmed that I was on the right track—but it was just too ironic for words. Miles and miles of meadows, wildflowers, horses, cows, goats. It was when I passed by the llamas that I really had to shake my head. Llamas? Well, sure. Why not. These could be the Elysian Fields. Llamas in the Elysian Fields. OK. It had just never occurred to me.

The only reason this seemed so odd is that I'd been to several recording studios, attended many sessions, but they were always in the heart of a city. When I eventually found my way to Skywalker Ranch and passed through the gates, my mouth fell open. This, indeed, was paradise. I knew Orpheus would find Eurydice here, and love would triumph over all. I wondered if the singers had been thinking the same thing as they entered.

On the drive up to the studio, I continued to traverse emerald hills speckled with purple and orange flowers, and passed by a small lake as an eagle or a hawk circled overhead. I reiterated: llamas, eagles, hawks, Gluck, opera singers, great recording studio... uh-huh, just checking. Then, up the drive past a small vineyard to a beautiful building that looked like an enormous house. Finally, I saw the people I knew to be musicians of the San Francisco Opera Orchestra as they parked their cars and prepared for the first session. Whew! Friendly waves and nods from familiar faces were my first reality check of the day. It still looked like they were entering a magnificent resort facility, not a recording studio. And even after this long upbeat, I still was

Jake Heggie is a writer and public relations associate at San Francisco Opera. Also a composer, he was recently named a winner of G. Schirmer's national Art Song Competition and will be published by Schirmer in 1996. In November, countertenor Brian Asawa will sing the world premiere of his new song cycle *Encountertenor* (to texts by John Hall) with fortepianist Melvyn Tan at London's Wigmore Hall.

into the studio

not prepared for what I saw when I entered the building.

Picture a warmly lit room the size of a small airplane hangar. One end is dominated by a huge movie screen (wait, reality check number two: remember that this is George Lucas's private film-making domain and many famous movie scores have been recorded and edited here, including those for *Jurassic Park* and the *Star Wars* trilogy). The other end of the room looks into the huge glass booths that house the recording crew and controls. Now, add enough chairs for a full orchestra, risers for a chorus, Maestro Runnicles's podium and microphones strategically placed around the room. The ceiling is high and the natural acoustic is warm, full and lively. Just outside of the door is some of the most beautiful, pastoral countryside in the world, with gardens of jasmine, iris and roses at your feet. How could this setting not prove to be an inspiration to the artists? Miss Larmore later told me, "I will always remember Skywalker Ranch as the ultimate in recording venues. I definitely felt that the beauty, tranquility and the acoustics of the place enhanced our recording."

I had made it with only minutes to spare before the session. The air was charged as all forces scrambled to their places. The first piece to be recorded was "Objet de mon amour" from the first act. And there was Jennifer Larmore with smiling brown eyes, her long dark hair down her back, comfortably dressed in a denim shirt and slacks. Orpheus! She took her place *behind* the orchestra and Donald Runnicles took up his baton in front of the orchestra as I ducked into a listening booth near the studio. Next to me on the couch sat Cupid, a very friendly Alison Hagley with long blond hair and sparkling blue eyes. Eurydice was scheduled to appear later that day.

Looking through the glass into the booth next to us, we could see the sound engineers, Michael Brammann and Tobias Lehmann, and the producers from Teldec, Renate Kupfer and James Mallinson. Also in the booth were Maestro Runnicles's assistant, Peter Grunberg (who heads the music staff at the Opera), the Opera's artistic administrator Christina Scheppelmann, the French diction coach Patricia Kristof Moy, and the Opera's media administrator Kate Stephenson.

As I chatted with Miss Hagley, I discovered that her personality really is very much like that of her character: bright, positive, humorous and sensitive. Following a few words with the orchestra, Maestro Runni-

cles raised his arms and the orchestra began to play Gluck's sublime music. With Miss Larmore's first notes, Miss Hagley gasped and put her hand over her heart. "Her voice is *so beautiful*," she sighed. Indeed, the dark, rich, round sound that filled the room was inescapably beautiful. As the project continued, the mutual admiration among the artists was obvious. There was a great spirit of camaraderie throughout the project.

After the take, Miss Larmore, the maestro and the concertmaster, Kay Stern, headed into the booth to listen. This was to become the routine for the week, with a well-worn path from the studio to the booth. Following enthusiastic attempts by any number of people involved with the project to listen to each take, the door to the booth quickly became a barrier to a very private enclave. Only those who really needed to listen to the takes would be admitted.

After the morning sessions and lunch in the cafeteria, Dawn Upshaw and the chorus arrived for their session. Eurydice! As opposed to the long flowing locks worn by Orpheus and Cupid, Miss Upshaw's hair is short and wavy, and together, they made a remarkable trio. All are gifted artists in their mid-30s with the warm personalities and spirits needed to make this music spring to life: from the richness of Miss Larmore's plaintive Orpheus, the sweet clarity of Miss Upshaw's Eurydice, to the brightly spirited tones of Miss Hagley's Amour. It was fascinating to see how the artists listened carefully to each other, sharing ideas and thoughts about the music and their interpretations. There was also a good deal of joking and laughter, which is healthy under

any circumstance, especially the often nerve-wracking process of recording. One of the more memorable moments was at the beginning of an afternoon session when an Orchestra member donned a Darth Vader mask. (He had visited the gift shop during lunch.) Nobody laughed harder than Maestro Runnicles. The environment, the beautiful country that surrounded us, also served to relax any tensions, and each of the artists commented on this throughout the week.

The work schedule was intense, with a great deal of music to be recorded in a very short time. The atmosphere, however, remained celebratory. There was palpable excitement for the entire project, and tremendous love and respect for the music. All of this is clearly evident in the final product, which the audience at the War Memorial Opera House was able to hear on May 18th. It was the first of the Opera's concerts to celebrate the United Nations 50th anniversary, and an evening that none will soon forget.

The headline in the next day's *San Francisco Chronicle* read "Opera's 'Orphée' a Heavenly Experience." And it was so not only for the audience. "I still think about our terrific experience with *Orphée*," remarked Jennifer Larmore. "My overall feeling was one of pride and thankfulness. Pride in that we all worked so hard and at the highest professional level, and thankfulness that I was able to be a part of it all. We're lucky!"

And so we are. San Francisco Opera's recording of *Orphée et Eurydice* is scheduled for release by Teldec in the fall of 1996. ■



(Opposite page) Scene at the Skywalker Ranch recording session: (left to right, seated) Alison Hagley, Dawn Upshaw and Jennifer Larmore; (standing) Teldec producer James Mallinson and San Francisco Opera Music Director Donald Runnicles. (Above) The three principals and Maestro Runnicles after the Opera House *Orphée* concert.

her old life by rushing to Paris to a gathering at the house of her friend Flora, there to throw herself into the arms of a wealthy "protector," Alfredo appears and thus unwittingly frustrates her hope of leaving without a painful farewell. He of course has no idea of the conversation that has taken place between Violetta and the elder Germont. She leaves, but pretends it is only in order to give Alfredo a chance to be alone with his father. "Amami, Alfredo," she cries, "quant'io t'amo!" "Love me, Alfredo, love me as I love you!" The music is the great melody we first heard in the Prelude to Act One. Alfredo simply hears this as a flatteringly impassioned parting, but for Violetta this is the moment when the heart breaks. The verbs are in the imperative and the present indicative, but she knows that their relationship is already over.

Third, Alfredo finds Violetta at Flora's party. That night he is lucky at the gaming tables, and the old saw about "lucky at cards, unlucky in love" does not go unsaid. He tries to persuade Violetta to come back to him, but she says she cannot because of a promise she has made. We know that the promise was to Alfredo's father and that Violetta cannot tell Alfredo this; Alfredo understandably assumes that it was to the man who has supplanted him, and Violetta, protecting her commitment to the senior Germont, has to allow him to believe this, even though she knows how much this will wound and enrage him. In fury, he summons the guests and before their eyes throws his winnings at Violetta's feet as though in payment for services rendered.

This moment is any Violetta's greatest dramatic challenge—to lie to the man she has so painfully learned to love, then to be both witness and victim of his cruelty. Callas was unforgettable here: the tensing of shoulders and arms as she steeled herself for the lie, then the succession of expressions that passed across her face, wondering what Alfredo was about to say and do, beginning to imagine what it might be, and finally registering the engulfing horror of actually seeing conduct that surpassed her most terrible fears.⁵

Let me cite one final example. This hinges on the melody to which Alfredo sings "Di quell'amor" in his first duet with Violetta. This melody is cousin—and not by chance—to the one in the first Prelude, the one that will later carry Violetta's agonized and heart-breaking "Amami, Alfredo." After its first appearance in "Un dì felice," the "Di quell'amor" phrase reappears obsessively in "Sempere libera" as a voice

in Violetta's head as she desperately seeks to exorcise the disturbing irruption of Alfredo into her life. It returns in Act Three. This begins with a Prelude similar to that for Act One, but entirely tragic in tone. Moreover, this Prelude will not leave us: fragments of it keep ghosting through the quiet exchanges between Violetta, Annina, and Doctor Grenvil. Then Violetta is left alone and she pulls out, for the hundredth time, a letter from Father Germont, promising—in vain, it seems—that Alfredo will return to ask her pardon. As she reads it—she has long known it by heart—two violins in *pianissimo*, accompanied by just five other players, barely breathe the poignant and unforgettable phrases of that melody. It is a moment that all Violettas and many of us watching and listening live for.

Miraculously, Alfredo does return. For a moment, he and Violetta are nourished by the fantasy of leaving Paris, that "populous desert," and returning to their idyllic life in the country. Violetta wants to go to church to give thanks for their reunion. (It is an idea that must have made the skeptical Verdi gag, just like her previous words about the consolations of religion, but these were necessary gifts to the censor.) She is too weak to stand unaided, to dress: we are swept back to her moment of faintness at her long ago, brilliant party, to the moment that first propelled Alfredo into her life. She falls back on her bed. Suddenly she senses recovery. The pain leaves her, she must be returning to life. Incredulous and grateful, more in speech than in song, she seeks to describe this miraculous change, and again two violins—this time the marking is *pppp*—remind us of Alfredo's melody. As she soars to the word "gioia," death claims her, but the last music of her life was the song in which the one man she ever loved sang to her of "that love that is the very breath of the universe itself, mysterious, noble, bringing the heart both cross and ecstasy"—

*"Di quell'amor ch'è palpito
dell'universo intero,
misterioso, altero,
croce e delizia al cor."*

⁵ More than thirty years later, and with correspondingly richer musical resources, Verdi composed another scene in which a man, maddened by jealousy, begins suavely, then suddenly spins through 180° to attack the hapless woman who loves him. I mean the terrifying moment when Otello makes as though to apologize to Desdemona for his rough words to her: "I cry you mercy, I took you for that cunning whore of Venice, / That married with Othello" ("Vo' fare ammenda. / Vi credea (perdonate se il mio pensiero è fello) / quella vil cortigiana che è la sposa d'Otello.")

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- All privileges and benefits which follow:

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In order to increase the enjoyment of opera for hearing-impaired members of the audience, the War Memorial Opera House is equipped with a Sennheiser Listening System. Headphones and induction devices (adaptable to hearing aids) are available in the coat checkroom at the south end of the main lobby. There is no charge, but an ID deposit, such as a driver's license or major credit card, is required.

Opera House Tours

Sponsored by the San Francisco Opera Guild, house and backstage tours of the War Memorial Opera House will be conducted every half hour from 10 a.m. to 12 noon on weekdays and on Saturday; and every 15 minutes from 10 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. Sundays on the following dates:

Saturday, September 16
Thursday, October 5
Sunday, October 8
Saturday, October 14
Tuesday, October 24
Saturday, November 4
Saturday, November 25
Sunday, December 3
Wednesday, December 6

Tickets for Guild members, \$2; non-members, \$5. Reservations required. Information: (415) 565-6433.

If You Drive to the Opera ...

... and park in the Performing Arts Garage, remember that you can avoid some of the congestion by using the Gough Street entrance to the facility (between Fulton and Grove).

Performing Arts Center Tours

Tours of the San Francisco Performing Arts Center include the Opera House, Davies Symphony Hall and Herbst Theatre and take place as follows: Mondays, every half-hour between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. Special tours of Davies Hall only may be scheduled on Wednesdays and Saturdays by request. All tours leave from the Grove Street entrance of Davies Symphony Hall. There are no tours on holidays. General \$3; Seniors and students, \$2.

Information: (415) 552-8338.

OPERA HOUSE PATRON ENTRY/ EXIT:

During all 1995 San Francisco Opera performances, patron entry and exit will be via Van Ness and Grove Street doors ONLY. The door that opens one and one-half hours prior to curtain time will be on Grove Street. Three doors on the north (carriage) side of the Opera House will be available during performances for **EMERGENCY EXIT ONLY** via ramps over the basement excavation.

Special service for San Francisco Opera patrons: Many operagoers who live in the northern section of San Francisco are regular patrons of the Municipal Railway special "Opera Bus." This bus is added to Muni's north-bound 47 line following all evening performances of the Opera and all Sunday matinees. Look for the "47 Special" after each performance in the bus zone at Van Ness Avenue and Grove Street—across Van Ness from the Opera House. Its route is: North on Van Ness to Chestnut, left to Divisadero and left to Union. It continues on Union over Russian Hill to Columbus, then left to Powell—then right to the end of the line at North Point.

Food Service. The Opera House lower lounge is open one and one-half hours prior to curtain time for hot buffet service. Patrons arriving before the front doors open will be admitted at the taxi entrance on Grove Street. Refreshments are served in the box tier on the mezzanine floor, the grand tier and dress circle levels during all performances.

Emergency Telephone. The telephone number (415) 431-4370 may be used by patrons for emergencies only during performances. Before the performance, patrons anticipating possible emergencies should leave their seat number at the nurse's station in the lower lounge, where the emergency telephone is located.

Digital Watches. Patrons are reminded to please check that their digital watch alarms are switched to OFF before the performance begins.

For **Lost and Found** information, inquire at checkroom #3 or call (415) 621-6600, 8:30 to 11:30 a.m., Monday through Friday.

Ticket Information. San Francisco Opera's Ticket and Patron Services Center, 199 Grove at Van Ness, open 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., Monday through Saturday. Opera House Box Office: open 2 hours before each performance through the first intermission on performance days only. Phone charge: (415) 864-3330, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., Monday through Saturday (VISA, American Express, MasterCard). Tickets are also available on a limited basis through BASS and STBS outlets.

Make a valued contribution to San Francisco Opera. You can make an important contribution to San Francisco Opera by returning any tickets you cannot use to the Box Office for resale. These ticket returns are of great value to S.F. Opera and to other patrons who may be unable to obtain tickets to sold-out performances. If you are unable to use your tickets or exchange them for another performance of the same opera, you may make a full-value, tax-deductible contribution of your tickets. To make a donation, simply return your tickets to the Box Office or call (415) 864-3330, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. You may also call (415) 565-6485 from 6 p.m. to 10 minutes before curtain. Unfortunately, we are unable to apply the donations towards membership benefits.

Taxi Service. Patrons needing a cab at the end of the performance should reserve one with the doorman at the taxi entrance before the end of the last intermission.

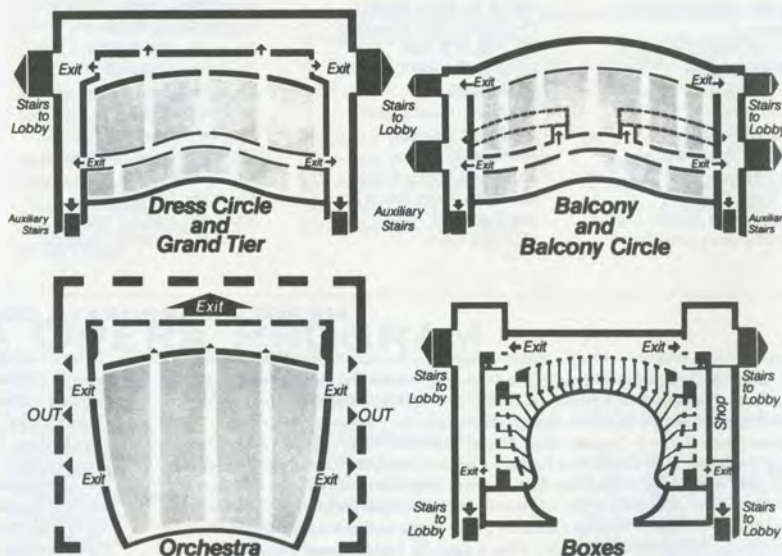
Wheelchair accessible restrooms are located in the lower lounge and on the dress circle level (north). Wheelchair accessible public telephones including "TDD" are located in the northeast corner of the lobby. Accessible drinking fountains are on orchestra and dress circle levels.

For the safety and comfort of our audience, all large parcels, backpacks, luggage, etc., must be checked at Opera House cloak-rooms.

Opera glasses are available in the lobby. No cameras, tape recorders or cellular phones are permitted in the Opera House. Children of any age attending a performance must have a ticket.

Management reserves the right to remove any patron creating a disturbance.

San Francisco War Memorial and Performing Arts Center War Memorial Opera House



Patrons, Attention Please! Fire Notice: There are sufficient exits in this building to accommodate the entire audience. The exit indicated by the lighted "EXIT" sign nearest your seat is the shortest route to the street. (Refer to Diagrams.) In case of fire please do not run—**walk** through that exit.

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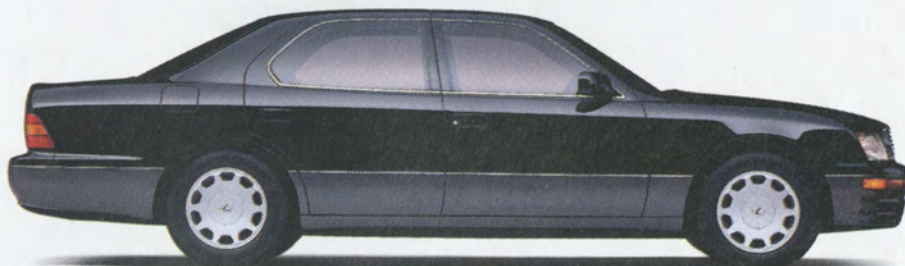
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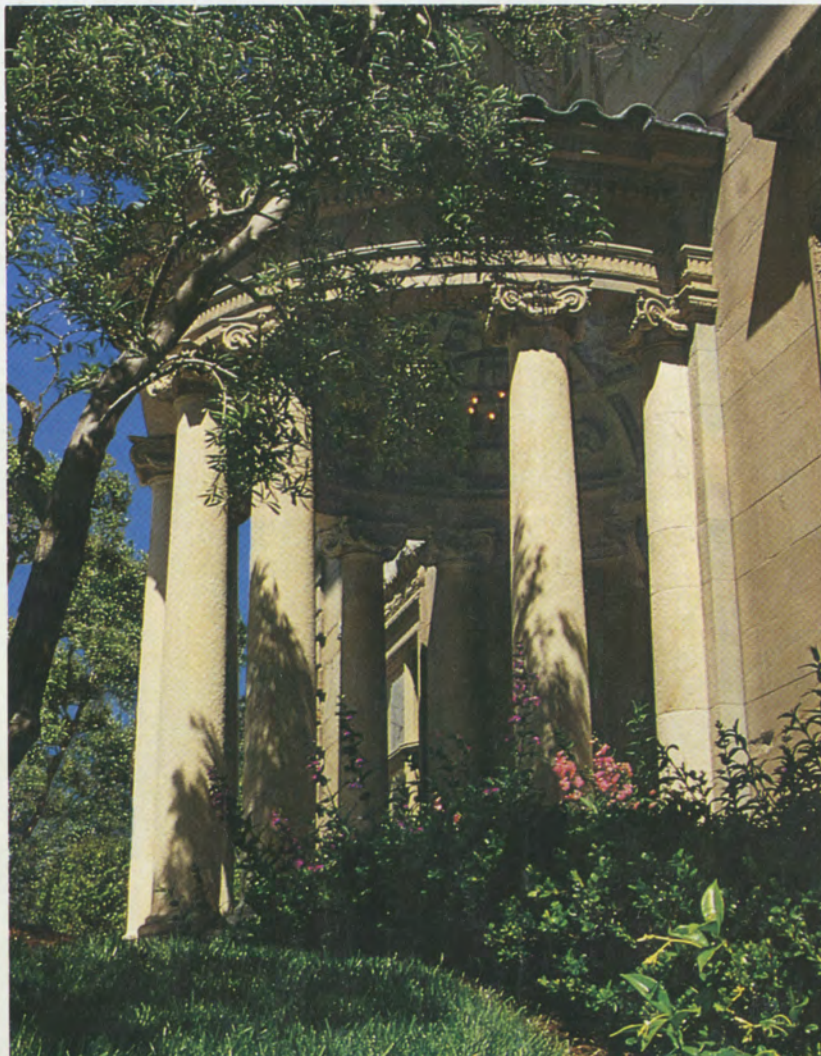
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