

TEATRO LIRICO D 'EUROPA
Presents
LA TRAVIATA
(THE STRAYED WOMAN)
By Giuseppe Verdi
Libretto by Francesco Maria Piave
Based on the play by Alexander Dumas LA DAME AUX CAMELIAS

Artistic Director/Stage Director
Conductor
Sets/Costumes
Super Titles

Giorgio Lalov
J. Ernest Green
Giorgio Lalov
Maestro Internationale

Artists are subject to change without notice

DISTRIBUTION

VIOLETTA VALERY
Soprano

Snejana Dramcheva
Marina Viskvorkina

FLORA BERVOIX
Mezzo-Soprano

Viara Zhelezova

ALFREDO GERMONT
Tenor

Israel Lozano

GIORGIO GERMONT
Baritone

Nelson Martinez

BARON DOUPHOL
Baritone

Hristo Sarafov

DOTTORE GRENVIL
Basso

Plamen Dimitrov

GASTONE
Tenor

Gueorgui Dinev

MARCHESE D'OBIGNY
Bass

Vladimir Hristov

GIUSEPPE
tenor

Yuri Nikolov

ANNINA
Soprano

Annie Gill

DANCERS

Members of Sofia National Ballet

Guests of Violetta Valery, Chorus of Gypsies and Gypsy Dancers

Place and Time: Paris and surroundings around 19th century

Artists Bios

SNEJANA DRAMCHEVA (Violetta Valery)

Born in Plovdiv, Bulgaria, Dramcheva graduated from the Dobrin Petkov Music School of Plovdiv where she studied voice with Ivanka Michaylova. She also graduated from Pancho Vladigerov Music Academy in Sofia where she studied Prof. Karnobatlova-Dobrevva. She made her artistic debut with the Plovdiv Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Dobrin Petkov. In 1990, she made her first appearance on the operatic stage in Mozart's DIE ENTFUHRUNG AUS DEM SERAIL (THE ABDUCTION FROM THE SERAGLIO) with the Sofia National Opera and Ballet's Opera Studio. During 1991- 1993 she completed several European tours with the German touring company "Schlotte" as Gilda in RIGOLETTO, Violetta in LA TRAVIATA and Musetta in LA BOHEME. Awards include the second place prize at the Francesco Vignas competition in Barcelona, Spain, the Grand-Prix in Pamplona, Spain, the first-prize in Pavia, Italy, and the Audience-Grand-Prix at the Giuseppe Verdi Competition in Parma, Italy. She was a finalist in the Belvedere International Opera Competition in Vienna, Austria and has participated in the program of a numerous international festivals and concerts. Snejana Dramtcheva has made recordings for the Bulgarian National Radio and for companies in other countries. Her repertoire includes soprano roles in operas by Verdi, Bellini, Donizetti, Mozart, Puccini and others. In recent years she has been a frequent guest artist at opera stages in Milan, Barcelona, Bilbao, Lille, Madrid, Amsterdam, Paris, Munich, Tokyo, Valencia, Zurich, and other major European cities. Recently, in the US, she performed the role of Valencienne in MERRY WIDOW with Czech Opera Prague and Violetta in LA TRAVIATA with Teatro Lirico. During season 2008-2009 she performed the role of Pamina in DIE ZAUBERFLOTE with Mozart Festival Opera as well as Musetta in LA BOHEME and Lola in Cavalleria Rusticana with Teatro Lirico.

MARINA VISKVORKINA (Violetta Valery)

The Ukrainian soprano is a principal soloist of the Prague State Opera, where she performs leading soprano roles in the lyric coloratura fach. She is also a frequent guest artist at major European opera houses and festivals located in Hamburg, Tokyo, Ludwigsburg, Odessa, Parma, Piacenza, Palermo, Busetto, Berlin, Karlsruhe, Essen, Catania, Wexford, and Bonn. In the United States, Ms. Viskvorkina has performed in operas presented at in Boston, Palm Beach, Naples and many other cities to outstanding critical acclaim

Ukrainian soprano Marina Viskvorkina gave an extraordinary performance as the consumptive courtesan Violetta Valery. Viskvorkina's got just about everything: she's a voluptuous blonde with a big, creamy voice of pinpoint accuracy, and she can act. She began by depicting a very flirtatious Violetta. Her performance became increasingly inward and moving, conveying real dignity as Violetta confronts Alfredo's father who wants her to give up his son. But it was in the last act that Viskvorkina ascended to tragic stature. She's one of the rare Violettas who sings the notes yet still convinces you that she physically failing and feverish. And she is heartbreaking. Her performance would satisfy the most demanding audience of any great opera house. BOSTON PHOENIX

ISRAEL LOZANO (Alfredo Germont)

The young tenor from Madrid, Spain, started his studies with soprano Emelina Lopez and tenor Alfredo Kraus. Studying at the Superior School of Music and Queen's Superior School of Music in Spain, Mr. Lozano made his operatic debut at the age of 22 as Il Conte di Almaviva in IL BARBIERE DI SIVIGLIA by Rossini, and at the National Symphony Auditorium of Madrid. Mr. Lozano holds a G.P.D in opera from the Peabody Conservatory of John Hopkins University with tenor Dr. Stanley Cornett. In 2004, he completed the Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist Program and prepared, covered and sang roles at the Washington National Opera under the artistic direction of Plácido Domingo. Mr. Lozano received support from la Fundación y Protección del Arte in Spain.

Mr. Lozano sang in a televised concert gala with tenor Plácido Domingo (Operalia Concert Winners) in the Isle of Mainau, Germany, after receiving the unprecedented three prizes in the Plácido Domingo International Operalia Competition 2003. The prizes included opera, zarzuela, and the prestigious Prize of the Audience.

Mr. Lozano's repertoire includes lyric tenor roles in LA TRAVIATA, MANON OF MASSENET, ELISIR D'AMORE, THE MAGIC FLUTE, LUCIA DI LAMMERMOOR, DIE FLEDERMAUS, DON GIOVANNI, LA BOHÈME, RIGOLETTO...in addition to roles in zarzuela, Spanish lyric-operatic music. In the United States he has sung principal roles at the Baltimore Opera, Washington National Opera, Los Angeles Opera, Palm Beach Opera, Carnegie Hall and with the National Symphony Orchestra. In Europe, 2004, he made his debut with the Teatro Real in Madrid singing the role of Belfiore in IL VIAGGIO A REIMS, and Alfredo in LA TRAVIATA at the Ludwigsburg Festival in Germany.

Performances include Paco in the Spanish opera LA VIDA BREVE with Opera Carolina, Sarasota Opera, Teatro Real of Madrid, Washington National Opera, Teatro Liceu of Barcelona and a concert gala with the baritone Joan Pons. Other engagements included his debut as Rodolfo in LA BOHÈME with Los Angeles Opera and Palm Beach Opera and concert tours in Spain and Mexico, the National Symphony Auditorium of Madrid, Duca di Mantova in RIGOLETTO and Edgardo in LUCIA DI LAMMERMOOR and the debut at the Theater an der Wien (Vienna). Others engagements included Duca di Mantova in RIGOLETTO (Concerlirica), LA BOHÈME

with Bangkok Opera, Edgardo in LUCIA DI LAMMERMOOR with Florida Grand Opera. Upcoming engagements include Alfredo in LA TRAVIATA with Gustavo Dudamel and the Young Orchestra Simon Bolivar, and the role of Mario in a new opera production by the composer Daniel Catan of IL POSTINO at the Theater an der Wien singing again with Plácido Domingo.

NELSON MARTÍNEZ (Giorgio Germont)

Young Verdi baritone Nelson Martínez began his professional career in Cuba as principal soloist with the Rodrigo Prats Lyric Theater, and later with Cuban National Opera. At Cuban National Opera, Mr. Nelson performed the main principal roles of the Italian repertoire, Figaro, Enrico, Germont, Rigoletto, Alfio, Tonio, Silvio and Marcello. In zarzuela, Mr. Martínez has performed the roles of Mario, Vidal, Germán, Joaquín, J. de Eguía, Juan Pedro, Juan en Los Gavilanes, Lázaro in EL CAFETAL, José Dolores Pimienta in CECILIA VALDÉS and José Inocente in MARÍA LA O. Abroad, Mr. Martínez has performed in opera and concert in Russia, Korea, China, France, Portugal and Spain on tour with the National Cuban Opera. He also appeared in Bogotá and Mexico City.

Mr. Martínez has been the recipient of many awards and prizes, among them the Grand Prize in the Ernesto Lecuona International Competition for Young Singers and the Grand Prize in the Fourth National Rodrigo Prats in Memoriam Competition in Havana. He was also a winner in the Belle Voci Competition in Eugene, Oregon in 2004.

In the United States, Mr. Martínez has been heard as Figaro and Rigoletto with Miami Lyric Opera and with Sociedad Pro Arte Grateli, the leading zarzuela company in the United States, as Juan Pedro in LA ROSA DEL AZAFRÁN. In the summer of 2008, he sang Escamillo with Metro Lyric conducted by Maestro Anton Coppola. In September, he appeared with Opera Company of North Carolina as Tonio in I PAGLIACCI. In December 2008, Mr. Martínez participated in a gala concert with the Miami Concert Association in the title role in RIGOLETTO, reprising the character with Knoxville Opera in February 2009. In April 2009, he appeared with Teatro Grattacielo at Lincoln Center's Avery Fisher Hall in the role of Il

Capitano in Mascagni's IL PICCOLO MARAT. Most recently Mr. Martínez performed the role of Enrico with Knoxville Opera, followed by RIGOLETTO in Baltimore to outstanding acclaim.

PLAMEN DIMITROV (Dottore Grenvil)

Bulgarian baritone, Plamen Dimitrov, has performed various roles with Teatro Lirico on tour in the United States during the last five seasons, including Schaunard in LA BOHÈME, Morales in CARMEN and Ping in TURANDOT, Sharpless in MADAMA BUTTERFLY, Giorgio Germont in LA TRAVIATA, The title role in RIGOLETTO and Escamillo in CARMEN. He also performs as a principal soloist in Bulgaria with Sofia National Opera and Opera Varna and has been a guest artist in other Eastern and Western European opera companies. Mr. Dimitrov studied at the National Academy of Music in Sofia, Bulgaria and is a laureate of several academic competitions. For five years, he worked in the Musical Theater-Sofia in the part of Charlie in CHARLIE'S AUNT and Cascada in DIE LUSTIGE WITWE.

VIARA ZHELEZOVA (Flora)

The young Bulgarian mezzo-soprano graduated from the National Conservatory of Music in 1985 and joined the roster of the Bulgarian National Opera, where she has performed leading mezzo-soprano roles alongside such singers as Ghena Dimitrova, Nicolai Giuselev, Anna Tomova Sintova and others. She has appeared as a guest artist with opera companies throughout Eastern Europe and has been a principal soloist with Teatro Lirico D'Europa since 1992, touring with the popular company throughout France, Belgium, Switzerland, Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, Italy, Germany and Denmark. In the United States, Ms. Zhelezova has performed the title role of CARMEN, Suzuki in MADAMA BUTTERFLY, Rosina in IL BARBIERE DI SIVIGLIA, Zerlina in DON GIOVANNI, Prince Orlofsky in DIE FLEDERMAUS and Feodor in BORIS GODOUNOV in performances of opera at major theatres to outstanding critical acclaim.

HRISTO SARAFOV (Baron Douphol)

Bulgarian baritone Hristo Sarafov has been active on the stage for his entire adult life as a soloist in operetta, opera and as an actor. Mr. Sarafov graduated from the National Academy of Music in Sofia and was immediately engaged by the Sofia National Opera for the role of Bartolo in Rossini's *IL BARBIERE DI SIVIGLIA*. He has performed numerous roles for Teatro Lirico D'Europa on tour in Europe and the United States since 1990.

J. Ernest GREEN (Conductor)

J. Ernest Green is a Cover Conductor with the National Symphony Orchestra at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, where he recently conducted a weekend of three Pops concerts. He has worked with such artists as Metropolitan Opera star Denyce Graves, Sir James Galway, Pinchas Zuckerman, Stanislaw Skrowaczewski. He regularly works with and conducts for Marvin Hamlisch, most recently with the Philadelphia Orchestra. He is also the Artistic Director of Live Arts Maryland and the Music Director of the Annapolis Chamber Orchestra and Annapolis Chorale. From 1995-98, he was the Principal Guest Conductor of the Boston Aria Guild and has served conductor for the Teatro Lirico D'Europa in France and Spain. Mr. Green was the Music Director for the Young Victorian Theatre Company from 1985-2008. He made his Carnegie Hall debut in 1993 and in 1986 made his international debut conducting performances with the Fundação Orquestra Sinfonica de Brazil, Associação Opera de Brasilia, and the

Orquestra Jovem de Brasilia. From 2004-2007, Mr. Green served as the Music Director of the Mozart Festival Opera in the USA where he lead productions of *DON GIOVANNI*, *LE NOZZE DI FIGARO*, and *THE MAGIC FLUTE*. Known for his adventurous and creative programming as he pushes the boundaries of the concert hall, Mr. Green has created several "fusion" programs combining standard concert repertoire with popular and contemporary which he has lead with orchestras both here and abroad. In addition, he has received acclaim for his concert productions of operas and other stage works, among them Verdi's *LA TRAVIATA*, *SWEENEY TODD*, and, most recently, Rodgers and Hammerstein's *SOUTH PACIFIC*. He has also been engaged to develop similar programs for other orchestras. Mr. Green recently premiered a new concert production of *DON GIOVANNI IN NOVEMBER* 2010 to outstanding critical acclaim. Referring to his creativity and innovation in and beyond the concert hall, *The Baltimore Sun* recently said, "Green should be commended for his downright prodigious amming." J. Ernest Green ~~propp~~ appeared with many orchestras including: The Philadelphia Orchestra with Marvin Hamlisch, The National Symphony Orchestra with Denyce Graves for the National Martin Luther King Day concert at the Kennedy Center, The Florida Orchestra, Cumberland Valley Chamber Orchestra, Annapolis Symphony, the Sophia Symphony and Varna Symphony (Bulgaria), Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra, Lincoln Symphony, Orquestra Sinfonica Nacional (Santo Domingo), Mesa Symphony, Cumberland Valley Chamber Players and the Trinity

Chamber Orchestra (Cleveland). He has toured with the Ballet Arabesque (Bulgaria) the Ballet Theatre of Maryland, Mozart Festival Opera and Teatro Lirico D'Europa. Mr. Green's opera credits include the Hawaii Opera Theatre, Teatro Lirico D'Europa, Boston Aria Guild, Indiana Opera North, Associação Opera de Brasilia, Boston Academy of Music and the Young Victorian Theatre Company. In addition to his musical activities, Mr. Green is an avid advocate for the arts. He is an active fundraiser for his own company as well as other community organizations. He has served as a music panelist for the Maryland State Arts Council and was recently appointed to serve on its Strategic Planning Committee. Mr. Green is married to Molly Moore Green. They have two children.

GIORGIO LALOV (Artistic Director/Stage Director)

After making his debut at La Scala at age 26, the young Bulgarian impresario met Yves Josse, a former ballet dancer turned impresario who was just beginning to book opera and ballet tours in Europe. They became business partners. Mr. Lalov had many resources: he spoke several languages, was able to organize the creation of sets and costumes in Bulgaria and put together an excellent orchestra and chorus. He also knew many fine opera singers in Bulgaria, central Europe and the United States.

By 1988, Messrs. Josse and Lalov were collaborating on what was to become the most successful opera touring company in Europe. At the time of Mr. Josse's death in 1995, Teatro Lirico had presented over 250 performances a season throughout Europe at 180 different venues. In addition to the many soloists from Russia, Bulgaria, Italy and Germany and South America that Teatro engaged for these performances, the company also engaged hundreds of American soloists for its performances in Europe. These included performances for Opera Dijon and at other major European theatres, such as Palais des Festivals, (Biarritz), Théâtre Alexandre Dumas and Pavillon Baltard, (Region Paris), Théâtre de Grenoble, Théâtre Molière, (Sete), Théâtre Municipal, (St. Maur des Fosses), Théâtre de Cognac, Théâtre Municipal Armand, (Salon de

Provence), Salle Pleyel, (Paris), Scene Nationale, (Cherbourg), Odysseus, (Blagnac), La Scene Municipale (Lyon) and Quartz, (Brest) in France.

Teatro Lirico performances also include those presented at l'Atrium Theatre in Martinique, Théâtre du Grand Casino (Geneve), Congresshaus, (Zurich) and Théâtre de BeauLiève (Lausanne) in Switzerland, Théâtre Municipal (Hasselt) and Le Cirque Royale (Brussels) in Belgium. City Hall (Gotingen) and Théâtre Carre (Amsterdam) in Holland hosted other performances. Teatro also performed at Theatre Margharita, (Trapani) in Sicily, at Italian Summer Festivals such as Festival Busetto, Festival San Giovanni Valdarn, and open-air festival in such cities in Italy as Spello, Montecatini Terme, Siena., Chianciano Terme, Cortona, Aenzzo, Padova and Aimini.

Shows were also presented for Okinawa Performing Arts Center in Japan, Tivoli Gardens (Copenhagen), in Denmark, Forum Cultural Do Seixal, (Lisboa) Academia Almadense, (Lisboa), and Theatre Trinitade, (Lisboa) in Portugal, Kuppelsaal, (Hanover), Gurzenith, (Koln), CCH-I, (Hamburg.), MUK, (Lubeck), Liederhalle, (Stuttgart), Schwarzwaldhalle (Karlsruhe), and Rosengarten, (Mannheim) in Germany.

In Spain, the venerable opera company also performed at Teatro Principal, (Alicante) Teatro Municipal Cervantes (Alicante), Teatro Del Carmen, (Malaga) Palacio de Congresos. (Granada), Teatro Municipal Enrique de la Cueva, (Seville), Teatro Atlantida VIC, (Barcelona) Salida de La Compania, (Madrid) Auditorio Ferai de Muestras (Valladolid), Gran Teatro de Burgos, Teatro Juan Bravo (Segovia), Auditorio Municipal Maestro Padillain (Almeria) Gran Teatro Galla (Cadiz), Teatro Monumental (Barcelona) Teatro Principal (Zaragoza) Teatro Cervantes, (Madrid), Teatro Victoria Eugeniain, (San Sebastian), Teatro Vicente Espinel, (Malaga), Teatro Bueno Vallejo (Madrid) Teatro Cervantes (Malaga) and Teatro "Lope de Vega" (Sevilla).

Winter 2000 marked Teatro's first major American tour. The popular company has completed 11 major U.S. tours covering over 500 performances at 107 different theatres as well as co-productions with a dozen different regional opera companies. Teatro Lirico is now in its twelfth consecutive season of U.S. tours. Despite the difficult economy, the company will have over 65 performances of four different full-scale opera productions in the United States this season. Teatro Lirico D'Europa will tour France and Spain again in season 2011 -12 in addition to its U.S. touring, has recently performed in South American and the Island of Martinique and will participate in a co-production of Verdi's RIGOLLETO with OPERA SIAM in July 2010. As Artistic Director of BALTIMORE OPERA THEATRE, Mr. Lalov dedicates his time and talents as artistic director and stage director salary free

Synopsis of the Opera

Act I. Violetta's house, August 1847, Paris. A party is being given at the house of the city's most beautiful and adored courtesan, Violetta Valéry. She greets her guests, among them Flora Bervoix, the Marquis D'Obigny, Baron Douphol and Doctor Grenvil. Gastone introduces Alfredo Germont to Violetta, and the young man tells Violetta that he admires her and thinks of her constantly. Gastone proposes a toast, and Alfredo responds with a drinking song. When the guests move into the ballroom to dance, Violetta feels indisposed and begs her guests to go on

without her. Alfredo remains behind and declares how much he loves her. She tells him she can only offer friendship. She gives him a flower, asking him to return when it has faded. Alone, she thinks about Alfredo, but resolves to enjoy herself and her whirlwind lifestyle.

Pause for Change of Scenery

Act II. Scene I. A country house near Paris the following November. Alfredo and Violetta have been living together in the country for three months, when Alfredo learns from Annina that Violetta has been selling her possessions to support them. Disgraced, he rushes off to Paris to get money. Alfredo's father, Giorgio Germont, surprises Violetta with a visit and requests that she leave Alfredo, because his sister may have trouble marrying if her brother is linked to a courtesan. Violetta confesses that Alfredo's love has redeemed her, and that she is very sick and might not live long. Germont is unmoved and insists on a definite separation. Violetta finally agrees to make the sacrifice and only begs that, after she dies, Alfredo should know the reason she left him. She writes a letter and, when Alfredo returns, says good-bye. He assumes she will only be gone for a short while, but a messenger delivers the letter announcing that she has returned to her former lover. Alfredo's father tries to comfort his son, but to no avail.

Twenty-Minute Intermission

Scene 2. A room in Flora's house, later that day. Violetta's friend Flora is hosting a party. Alfredo's arrival startles the guests, but his disinterest in Violetta garners approval. He joins a game of cards as Violetta and her lover, Baron Douphol, enter. The Baron challenges Alfredo and promptly loses. The guests disperse when dinner is announced. Violetta returns to warn Alfredo that his life is in danger and that he should leave the party. He agrees to go only if she follows him. Remembering her oath to his father, Violetta refuses and, furious, Alfredo calls the guests to witness that he has paid her back for their time together. His father arrives and denounces his son for such shameful behavior, and Douphol vows to avenge Violetta.

Pause for Change of Scenery

Act III. Violetta's bedroom. Violetta lies on her deathbed, knowing she will not live much longer. She reads a letter from Alfredo's father, relating how Alfredo fled the country after wounding Douphol in a duel, but promising that he will return to seek her pardon. When Alfredo enters the bedroom, the two reunite joyfully and dream of living in Paris, but Violetta collapses. Alfredo's father arrives and asks forgiveness for the pain he has caused the lovers. Violetta presses a miniature portrait of herself into Alfredo's hands, telling him to give it to the pure bride whom he will marry one day. Violetta suddenly feels that her pains have ceased and that she is coming back to life. But it is too late? she dies in Alfredo's arms.

PROGRAM NOTES VERDI AND LA TRAVIATA: A VERY PERSONAL STORY By Mary Jane Phillips -Matz

Giuseppe Verdi was born in 1813 in the living quarters over his parents' little village tavern in

Italy's Po River valley. In spite of their modest circumstances, his parents gave him a solid classical education, and, after realizing that he had a great gift for music, they added private lessons in that field as well. When Verdi was 18, he went to Milan for further study, but he later returned to Busseto, the market town near his birthplace. There he married his patron's daughter, but she and their two children soon died, leaving him a stricken young widower in 1840.

Verdi's first opera had been given in 1839 at La Scala, one of the world's greatest opera houses, and it was followed three years later by his *Nabucco*, a hit on the national and international scene. As Verdi said, "After *Nabucco* I never had to look for work again." In the course of a career that lasted more than 50 years, he wrote 28 operas, gained worldwide fame, and became rich.

He also had a sterling record as a patriot in the long struggle for the unification of Italy, so several of his early operas had Italian patriotic themes. His people elected him to public office twice, first in 1859 as a Deputy to the Parma Legislature and then two years later to the First Parliament of Italy. His other principal interests were philanthropy and his farm, a huge estate near the Po. Verdi lived to be almost 87 and died in 1901.

Many of his early works are set in long-ago eras. Their main characters are kings, queens, and powerful nobles, but after 1849, the composer changed course and wrote *Stiffelio* (1850) and *La Traviata* (1853), two intensely personal operas based on recent real events. Both are about "fallen women" of his time. Lina, the leading soprano in *Stiffelio*, is the adulterous wife of a German Protestant minister who, according to tradition, lived in the early 1800s. Violetta in *La Traviata* is based on the life of a real and notorious French courtesan who had died in the 1840s.

The "original" behind Violetta was Marguerite Gautier, whose story had been told by Alexandre Dumas fils, one of her lovers, in a novel and a play called *La Dame aux Camélias*. Living in Italy when he did, Verdi showed enormous courage in writing about a disgraced woman who was more or less his contemporary. And it was natural that when people learned about his plans for *La Traviata*, many considered it scandalous. Felice Varesi, a very famous baritone, was outraged because "the main character is a kept woman or common whore of our own time who died in Paris not very long ago." In another letter, Varesi called Violetta "this unhappy prostitute." Verdi, however, was not discouraged. In fact, he went right ahead, pouring compassion and humanity into his portrayal of her and showing how brutally and hypocritically "proper society" treated her.

As we look back on *La Traviata*, we may see it through the lens of Verdi's private life, for when he decided to write it, he had been living for about three years with someone whom many people considered a "fallen woman." This was the celebrated soprano Giuseppina Strepponi (1815-1897), who had a distinguished career but had lived a scandal-ridden personal life, having had three (or even four) illegitimate children by two or three different fathers. Hard up for cash, Strepponi sang right to the end of every pregnancy, with one of her children being born in Florence only a few hours after she finished a performance! Although she abandoned her children in orphanages or placed them with foster parents, everyone who knew about opera remembered these events.

Verdi originally met Strepponi in Milan, probably in 1839 at La Scala. Three years later, she sang the leading soprano role in *Nabucco* there and was partly responsible for getting it produced. In 1847, after she retired from the stage, she and Verdi began living together in Paris. There no one cared about their personal lives, but in 1849 they foolishly and recklessly returned to Busseto, the small town where Verdi had been educated on scholarships, had married his patron's daughter, and had worked as the municipal music teacher. The townspeople of Busseto honestly believed they had "made Verdi," and they were simply enraged at seeing him and his mistress living together in a mansion on the main street.

Nearly two years of uproar followed their return, with people throwing rocks at Verdi's windows and shouting obscenities at him and Strepponi from the sidewalk below. People also crossed the street to avoid her and moved away from her in church, and one neighbor even called the police, saying that a lot of noise was coming from Verdi's courtyard. Infuriated at such harassment, Verdi and Strepponi moved to a nearby farm that he owned; they lived there until their deaths.

Given these facts, many see a personal association between Verdi's life and his decision to write about Violetta and *La Traviata*. Others, though, see no connection, and the matter remains unresolved. What is certain is that Verdi once said that when he sat at his piano writing music, his heart pounded and his tears fell on the keyboard. Seeing how much passion he poured into *La Traviata*, we can easily believe him.