

Pappano Conducts Verdi's *La traviata* in Concert

Saturday, May 29, 2027 · 19:00 · Barbican

Antonio Pappano, conductor · Slávka Zámečnicková, Violetta Valéry · Piotr Buszewski, Alfredo Germont · Stéphane Degout, Giorgio Germont · Marine Chagnon, Flora Bervoix · Julie Pasturaud, Annina · Carlo Bosi, Gastone · Xiaomeng Zhang, Barone Douphol · Maurizio Muraro, Doctor Grenvil · London Symphony Chorus, choir

approximately 135 minutes

Giuseppe Verdi

1813–1901

135 minutes

La traviata (complete opera, concert performance)

THE COMPOSER

Giuseppe Verdi, born near Busseto in 1813, is the towering figure of Italian opera and, in his lifetime, a symbol of the Italian nation itself. The son of an innkeeper, he was famously rejected by the Milan Conservatory, yet he rose through grinding early labour, and a private tragedy (the deaths of his first wife and both children), to international fame with *Nabucco* (1842), whose chorus of Hebrew slaves became an unofficial anthem of the Risorgimento. The ‘galley years’ that followed produced a torrent of operas; the trio of *Rigoletto*, *Il trovatore*, and *La traviata* (1851–53) secured his immortality. In maturity he deepened and refined his art in *Aida*, *Don Carlos*, and the *Requiem*. Then, after a long near-retirement, he crowned his career in old age with two Shakespearean masterpieces on librettos by Arrigo Boito: the tragedy *Otello* (1887) and, at nearly eighty, the comedy *Falstaff* (1893). He died in Milan in 1901, mourned as a national hero.

ABOUT THE WORK

In February 1852 Verdi, in Paris with Giuseppina Strepponi, saw a new play by the younger Alexandre Dumas: *La Dame aux camélias*, adapted from the novel Dumas had published four years earlier. Its heroine was drawn from life. Marie Duplessis, a celebrated Parisian courtesan whom Dumas had known, had died of tuberculosis at the age of 23. Within a year Verdi had turned the play into an opera for La Fenice in Venice, with a libretto by Francesco Maria Piave. The title means, roughly, ‘the woman who strayed’.

What Verdi wanted was something unusual for Italian opera of the time: a tragedy about contemporary people, in contemporary dress, in rooms the audience might have recognised. The Venetian authorities

would not allow it. A courtesan as heroine was bad enough, and the theatre insisted that the action be moved back to around 1700. Verdi gave way on the costumes and on nothing else.

The first night, 6 March 1853, has become a legend of operatic failure. The audience grew restive, some of its mockery was aimed at the soprano, Fanny Salvini-Donatelli, whom they found implausible as a young woman wasting away, and Verdi wrote to a friend the next day that the opera had been a fiasco and that time would tell whose fault it was. Time did. He withheld the score until he could cast it properly, made some revisions to the second and third acts, and on 6 May 1854 it was given again in Venice, at the Teatro San Benedetto, with complete success. It has been among the most performed of all operas ever since.

The story is simple and moves fast. Violetta Valéry, admired, kept and already ill, is surprised at one of her own parties by a young man, Alfredo Germont, who loves her and says so. She gives up Paris to live with him in the country. His father, Giorgio Germont, comes to her in secret: the scandal is ruining his daughter's marriage prospects, and he asks Violetta to give Alfredo up. She agrees, lets Alfredo believe she has tired of him, and returns to her old protector. Alfredo insults her in public. By the time father and son understand what she did, and come to her, she is dying.

These are concert performances, sung with surtitles: no sets, no costumes, the orchestra on the platform and not in a pit. For an opera in which so much happens in the orchestra and in quiet conversation, that is less of a loss than it sounds.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The Prelude tells the story backwards. It opens with violins alone, divided, very soft and high, in the frail music that will return when Violetta is dying in Act III. Only then comes the warm, wide melody of her love for Alfredo, which will reach its full height in Act II when she cries 'Amami, Alfredo'.

Act I is one continuous party, most of it in waltz time. The drinking song 'Libiamo ne' lieti calici' (the Brindisi) is the tune everyone knows. Alfredo's declaration, 'Un dì, felice, eterea', introduces a soaring phrase about love as the heartbeat of the universe, and when Violetta is left alone that phrase haunts her. Her great scene moves from the hesitant 'Ah, fors'è lui' to the glittering defiance of 'Sempre libera', with Alfredo's voice heard from outside, pulling against her.

The centre of the opera is the long duet between Violetta and Germont in Act II. It is not an aria with interruptions but a negotiation in several stages, and the music shows her resistance giving way phrase by phrase, until 'Dite alla giovine' accepts the sacrifice in a broken, almost whispered line. Germont's own aria, 'Di Provenza il mar, il suol', follows when he tries to console his son. The act ends at Flora's party with a big ensemble after Alfredo throws his gambling winnings at Violetta's feet.

Act III is spare. The Prelude's opening returns, on few instruments. Violetta reads Germont's letter aloud, speaking over a solo violin that recalls Alfredo's love theme, and sings her farewell to the past, 'Addio del passato', its vocal line broken by rests as if she cannot find the breath. The lovers' reunion duet, 'Parigi, o cara', is a gentle waltz of plans that both know are impossible. In the last moments the pain leaves her, she rises, says she feels life returning, and falls.

Tonight's artists

Slávka Zámečnicková *Violetta Valéry*

Violetta is three roles in one: the brilliant coloratura of Act I, the long lyric lines of the scene with Germont, and the fragile, almost spoken music of the last act. Slávka Zámečnicková comes to it from Mozart and from lighter Italian parts such as Norina, which she has sung in Vienna. These two concert performances, on 29 and 31 May 2027, close Sir Antonio Pappano's Barbican season with the LSO; he ended the previous one with Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*, and the orchestra describes a summer opera as a tradition in the making.

Slávka Zámečnicková is a Slovak soprano, born in 1991. She studied at the Bratislava Conservatory and at the Hochschule für Musik Hanns Eisler in Berlin, and was a member of the International Opera Studio of the Berlin State Opera from 2017 to 2019. She made her debut at the Vienna State Opera in 2020 as Norina in *Don Pasquale* and came to wide notice there as Poppea in Monteverdi's *L'incoronazione di Poppea*. Her roles include Pamina in *Die Zauberflöte*, Donna Anna in *Don Giovanni* and Musetta in *La bohème*, and she has also sung at the Paris Opéra and the Berlin State Opera. She is a prizewinner of several international singing competitions, among them the Hans Gabor Belvedere Competition.

Piotr Buszewski *Alfredo Germont*

Alfredo is a part Piotr Buszewski has sung at the Metropolitan Opera and in Dresden. The part asks for ardour and an easy top in the first two acts, and in the last for a tenor who can match a dying soprano at her own quiet level.

Piotr Buszewski is a Polish tenor. He is a graduate of the Academy of Vocal Arts in Philadelphia, and studied before that at the Juilliard School. He sings at the Metropolitan Opera in New York, the Royal Ballet and Opera in London, Zurich Opera, the Semperoper in Dresden and the Polish National Opera in Warsaw, in a repertoire that includes Alfredo in La traviata, Edgardo in Lucia di Lammermoor and Rodolfo in La bohème. He won first prize in the 2019 Loren Zachary Competition and three prizes at the Moniuszko Competition, and was a finalist in Operalia in 2019.

Stéphane Degout *Giorgio Germont*

Stéphane Degout, heard earlier in the month in the Foccroulle premiere under Pappano, sings Alfredo's father. Germont can be played as a villain or as a decent man doing a cruel thing; the scene with Violetta works best when he is the second, and it rewards a baritone who is at home in song and attentive to words.

Stéphane Degout, born in Bourg-en-Bresse in 1975, is one of the foremost French baritones of his generation. A graduate of the Lyon Conservatoire, he came to international attention as Papageno at the Aix-en-Provence Festival and has since sung at the world's leading houses, admired for the beauty of his voice, his refined musicianship and his command of the French repertoire in particular. He has recorded with Raphaël Pichon and Pygmalion, which makes him an ideal partner in this French Baroque and Classical programme.

Marine Chagnon *Flora Bervoix*

Flora, Violetta's friend and fellow hostess, gives the party in Act II at which Alfredo publicly humiliates her.

Julie Pasturaud *Annina*

Annina is Violetta's maid, the one person who stays with her to the end.

Carlo Bosi *Gastone*

Gastone, a man about town, is the friend who brings Alfredo to Violetta's party and introduces them.

Xiaomeng Zhang *Barone Douphol*

Baron Douphol is Violetta's protector and Alfredo's rival, who challenges him after the scene at Flora's party.

Maurizio Muraro *Doctor Grenvil*

Doctor Grenvil attends Violetta in the last act and tells Annina, out of her hearing, that she has only hours left.

London Symphony Chorus *choir*

The chorus are the guests at Violetta's and Flora's parties, and the carnival crowd heard passing in the street beneath Violetta's window in Act III.

The London Symphony Chorus was founded in 1966 as the chorus of the London Symphony Orchestra. Now an independent, self-governing choir, it keeps a close association with the LSO, performing and recording the great choral-orchestral repertoire with the orchestra at the Barbican and elsewhere, and also working with other orchestras.

FURTHER READING

ACCESSIBLE **The Life of Verdi**

John Rosselli, Cambridge University Press 2000

A short, unsentimental life that is particularly good on the working conditions behind La traviata: the Venetian contract, the censors, and Verdi's own irregular household with Giuseppina Strepponi.

ACCESSIBLE **A History of Opera: The Last Four Hundred Years**

Carolyn Abbate, Roger Parker, W. W. Norton 2015

Abbate and Parker set Verdi's middle-period operas in the long story of the art form, and are sharp on why a contemporary subject sung in a drawing room was such a break with what came before.

DEEPER **Verdi**

Julian Budden, Oxford University Press 2008

Budden's life-and-works volume gives a compact critical account of every opera; the pages on La traviata cover the failed first night, the 1854 revisions and what they changed in the score.

SOURCES

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2. Verdi: La traviata, Sir Antonio Pappano, 31 May 2027, London Symphony Orchestra. <https://www.lso.co.uk/whats-on/verdi-la-traviata-31-may-27/>
3. London Symphony Orchestra/Sir Antonio Pappano: Wagner's Tristan and Isolde, Barbican. <https://www.barbican.org.uk/whats-on/2026/event/london-symphony-orchestrasir-antonio-pappano>

Giuseppe Verdi · La traviata (complete opera, concert performance)

4. Press Release: The LSO announces its 2026/27 season, London Symphony Orchestra. <https://www.lso.co.uk/press-release-the-lso-announces-its-2026-27-season/>
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6. La traviata in a nutshell, Opera North. <https://www.operanorth.co.uk/news/la-traviata-in-a-nutshell/>
7. A guide to La traviata, Welsh National Opera. <https://wno.org.uk/news/a-guide-to-la-traviata>
8. La traviata, English National Opera. <https://www.eno.org/operas/la-traviata/>
9. La traviata, Royal Ballet and Opera. <https://www.rbo.org.uk/tickets-and-events/la-traviata-richard-eyre-details>
10. Slávka Zámečnicková, Teatr Wielki, Polish National Opera. <https://teatr Wielki.pl/en/people/slavka-zamecnikova/>
11. Slávka Zámečnicková, National Theatre, Prague. <https://www.narodni-divadlo.cz/en/artist/slavka-zamecnikova>
12. Slávka Zámečnicková, Opéra national de Paris. <https://www.operadeparis.fr/en/artists/slavka-zamecnikova>
13. Piotr Buszewski, Askonas Holt. <https://www.askonasholt.com/artists/piotr-buszewski/>
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15. Piotr Buszewski, Odyssey Opera. <https://archive.odysseyopera.org/artists/piotr-buszewski/>
16. Piotr Buszewski Joins Askonas Holt for Worldwide Management, OperaWire. <https://operawire.com/?p=86092>
17. The Life of Verdi, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780521669573>
18. A History of Opera: The Last Four Hundred Years, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780393348958>
19. Verdi, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780195323429>



CONCERT PROGRAMS

<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/lso-2027-05-29-pappano>

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