



la Traviata

Study Guide

**Prepared by Manitoba Opera
Spring, 2008**

*"The opera is the only refuge for poetry and fantasy...
one is in an enchanted world.*

*The word is sung, the steps are pirouettes...
an evening at the opera rests you from real life..."*

- Thèophile Gautier, La Presse

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WELCOME TO MANITOBA OPERA

This Study Guide has been created to assist you in preparing your students for their visit to the opera. It is our hope that you will be able to add this to your existing curriculum in order to expand your students' understanding of opera, literature, history, and the fine arts. Materials in the Study Guide may be copied and distributed to students. Some students may wish to go over the information at home if there is insufficient time to discuss in class. Make the opera experience more meaningful and enjoyable by sharing with them knowledge and background on opera and *La Traviata* before they attend.



Singing in Full Voice at the Dress Rehearsal

Please Note: The Dress Rehearsal is the last opportunity the singers will have on stage to work with the orchestra before Opening Night. Since vocal demands are so great on opera singers, some singers choose not to sing in full voice during the Dress Rehearsal in order to preserve their vocal chords and avoid unnecessary strain.

Study Guide compiled from sources including the San Diego, Tulsa, and Metropolitan Opera Companies.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A Short Introduction to Opera	5
Audience Etiquette.....	6
Cast & Crew.....	7
Pronunciation Guide	7
About the Composer – Giuseppe Verdi.....	8
Verdi, Politics, and <i>La Traviata</i>	9
Censors and <i>La Traviata</i>	9
Et Cetera, Et Cetera, Et Cetera.....	9
About the Librettist – Francesco Maria Piave	10
<i>La Traviata</i> – Background and Story Outline.....	10
The Real Violetta and Alfredo.....	11
Synopsis	12
What To Listen For.....	13
The Operatic Voice.....	14
Tuberculosis.....	16
Recordings and Books	167
Glossary: Important Words in Opera.....	18
Student Activities.....	212
Workshop 1: Write a New Opera.....	22
Workshop 2– Stage Business.....	23
Workshop 3 – Understanding <i>La Traviata</i>	24
Workshop 4 - Writing a Review of <i>La Traviata</i>	26
Workshop 5 – Historical Research Opportunities	29
Opera Comprehension Test.....	30
Teacher’s Evaluation Sheet.....	32

A SHORT INTRODUCTION TO OPERA

An opera, like a play, is a dramatic form of theatre that includes scenery, props, and costumes. In opera, however, the actors are trained singers who sing their lines instead of speaking them. An orchestra accompanies the singers. A conductor coordinates both the singers on stage and the musicians in the orchestra pit.

Opera consists of many dimensions: the human voice, orchestral music, the visual arts (scenery, costumes and special effects), drama (tragedy or comedy), and occasionally dance. The melding of these elements can make you cry tears of joy or sadness, produce laughter or anger, but most importantly transport you to a magical land of music and song.

Opera has its roots in Greek drama and originated in Florence, Italy, in the late 1500's, with a small group of men who were members of a Camerata (Italian for society). The intellectuals, poets and musicians of the Camerata decided they wanted words to be a featured aspect of music. They used ancient Greek drama as their inspiration, including the use of a chorus to comment on the action. The Camerata laid down three principles for their new art form:

- ◆ The text must be understood; the accompaniment must be very simple and should not distract from the words.
- ◆ The words must be sung with correct and natural declamation, as if they were spoken, and must avoid the rhythms of songs.
- ◆ The melody must interpret the feeling of the text.

The first significant composer to fully develop the ideas of the Camerata was Jacopo Peri (1561-1633), whose opera *Dafne*, based on a Greek myth, was performed in 1594 and is regarded as the first opera. Operas continue to be composed today.

Operas are divided into scenes and acts that contain different types of vocal pieces for one or many singers. An aria is a vocal solo that focuses on a character's emotions rather than actions. A recitative is sung dialogue or speech that occurs between arias and ensembles.

Composers write the score or the music for the opera. Sometimes the composer will also write the text of the opera, but most often they work with a librettist. The story of the opera is written as a libretto, a text that is easily set to music. In the past, the libretto was also bound and sold to the audience. Today, the audience can easily follow the plot with the use of surtitles. Surtitles are the English translation of the libretto, which are projected onto a screen above the stage.

There are several differences between opera and musicals like *Phantom of the Opera*. One significant difference is the 'partnership' found between the music and the drama in an opera. While musicals use songs to help tell a story, in an opera, the music contributes to the drama, it does not only accompany it. The musical style is another important difference between the two art forms; opera is usually classical and complex, while musicals feature pop songs and sometimes rock and roll. Also, singers in musicals have microphones hidden in their costumes or wigs to amplify their voices. The voices of opera singers are so strong, no amplification is needed, even in a large venue. Furthermore, operas are almost completely sung, while the use of spoken words are more common to musicals. There are some operas with spoken words and these are called singspiels (German) and opera-comique (French). Examples are Mozart's *The Magic Flute* and Bizet's *Carmen*, respectively.

AUDIENCE ETIQUETTE

The following list will help you (and those around you) enjoy the experience of a night at the opera:

- ◆ Dress to be comfortable. Many people enjoy dressing up in formal attire.
- ◆ Arrive on time. Latecomers disturb the singers and others in the audience. Latecomers will only be seated at suitable breaks - often not until intermission.
- ◆ Find your seat with the help of your teacher or an usher.
- ◆ Remove your hat. This is customary and is respectful to the artists and to people sitting behind you.
- ◆ Turn off cell phones, pagers, digital watch alarms and all electronic devices.
- ◆ Leave your camera at home. A flash can be very disturbing to the artists and audience members alike.
- ◆ Save all conversations, eating and drinking, and chewing gum, for the intermission. Talking and eating can be disruptive to other audience members and distracts from your ability to be absorbed by the show. The audience is critical to the success of the show – without you, there can be no performance.
- ◆ Settle in and get comfortable before the performance begins. Read your program before the performance – rustling through the program during the show can disrupt everyone.
- ◆ Clap as the lights are dimmed and the conductor appears and bows to the audience. Watch as the conductor then turns to the orchestra and takes up his or her baton to signal the beginning of the opera.
- ◆ Listen to the prelude or overture before the curtain rises. It is part of the performance. It is an opportunity to identify common musical themes that may reoccur during the opera.
- ◆ Sit still during the performance. Only whisper when it is absolutely necessary, as a whisper is heard all over the theatre, and NEVER (except in an emergency) stand during the performance.
- ◆ Applaud (or shout Bravo!) at the end of an aria or chorus piece to show your enjoyment. The end of a piece can be identified by a pause in the music.
- ◆ Laugh when something is funny – this is a performance and you are expected to respond!
- ◆ Read the English surtitles projected above the stage.
- ◆ Listen for subtleties in the music. The tempo, volume and complexity of the music and singing often depict the “feeling” or “sense” of the action or character
- ◆ Notice repeated words or phrases; they are usually significant.

Finally, have fun and enjoy the show!!!

la Traviata

An Opera in Three Acts

April 19, 22, 25 2008
(Dress Rehearsal, April 17)

Centennial Concert Hall

Music by Giuseppe Verdi
Libretto by Francesco Maria Piave

Based on the play *La dame aux Camélias* by Alexandre Dumas
First performance at Teatro la Fenice, Venice, Italy, March 6, 1853

APPROXIMATELY 2 HOURS, 45 MINUTES WITH 2 INTERMISSIONS

Sung in Italian with English Surtitles

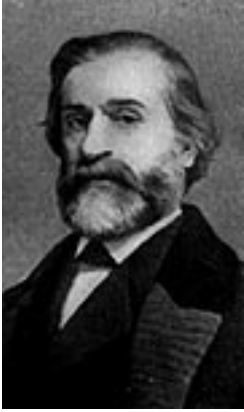
Cast & Crew

Violetta Valery, a courtesan	Soprano	Yali-Marie Williams
Dr. Grenvil, Violetta's physician	Bass	Gregory Atkinson
Flora Bervoix, Violetta's friend	Mezzo-soprano	Colleen Skull
Alfredo Germont, Violetta's lover	Tenor	Kurt Lehmann
Giorgio Germont, Alfredo's father	Baritone	Theodore Baerg
Baron Douphol	Bass	Mark Booden
Gastone	Tenor	Benoit Boutet
Annina	Soprano	Donnalynn Grills
Conductor	Tyrone Paterson	
Director	Tom Diamond	
Set and Costume Designer	Set Provided by Opera Co. of Philadelphia	
	Wardrobe provided by Utah Opera	
Lighting Designer	Scott Henderson	
Stage Manager	Robert Pel	

Pronunciation Guide

Giuseppe Verdi	Jew-ZEHP-peh VEHR-dee
Violetta	vee-oh-LET-tah
Giorgio Germont	GEORGE-ee-oh gayr-MOHN
Gastone	gas-TOHN
Douphol	doo-FOLL
Marchese d'Obigny	mar-KAY-zay doh-bee-NYEE
Wolfgang Weber	VOOLF-gahng VAY-ber
Riedel	REE-del
Fenice	fen-EE-cheh

ABOUT THE COMPOSER – GIUSEPPI VERDI



Born in October, 1813, in northern Italy during its Napoleonic occupation, Giuseppe Verdi displayed an early interest in music. At age nine, he was playing the church organ in the small town of Busseto. Over the next nine years, the townspeople became sufficiently impressed with Verdi's musical abilities to raise the money to send him to the Conservatory in Milan. At age 18, however, Verdi was considered too old (14 was the average age of the students) and not talented enough for the Conservatory.

Fortunately for Verdi, a merchant and music lover in Busseto, Antonio Barezzi, paid for Verdi to study privately in Milan. After completing his studies, Verdi returned to Busseto to work as a conductor and music instructor. In 1836, he married Barezzi's daughter, Margherita. They moved to Milan and had two children. Sadly, their children died very young and Margherita died in 1839 from encephalitis.

Verdi's first opera, *Oberto*, was performed at La Scala (in Milan) in November, 1839. *Oberto* was well received but Verdi's second opera, a comedy, was a failure. Coinciding with the loss of his family, Verdi contemplated giving up opera composition. The impresario (manager/producer) of La Scala virtually 'forced' a libretto upon him, inspiring him to continue composing. The result was Verdi's third and highly successful opera, *Nabucco*, first performed in 1842. It also was an opportunity to Verdi to re-connect with the soprano, Giuseppina Strepponi, whom he ultimately married in 1859.

Nabucco was the start of Verdi's ever-growing popularity. Its theme of freedom for enslaved people caught the imaginations of the Italian people who, at that time, wanted a united, free Italy. Verdi became the symbol of that freedom movement. "Viva Verdi" was the independence cry heard during the fight for Italian independence. It was an anagram of his name to mean Vittorio Emmanuel King of Italy – Vittoria Emanuele Re d'Italia. In 1871, when Italy became united, Verdi's most famous opera, *Aida*, was produced.

Despite his great success as an opera composer, Verdi had many other interests. In 1849, Verdi and his partner (and ultimately wife), Giuseppini Strepponi, moved to a rural estate near his home town. There, he planted a tree for every opera he wrote. His employees were paid well and he extended his humanitarianism to others in society, including founding a hospital near his estate and establishing a home for aging musicians in Milan. He referred to this latter, the Casa di Riposo, as "my last and best work."

In 1852, Verdi composed *La Traviata*, based on the novel and play by Alexandre Dumas (the younger). Verdi wrote the music very quickly; he was under contract to write an opera and had started a different opera then changed his mind and decided to write an opera based on Dumas' work. He had signed a contract for a new opera, *Il Trovatore* and started work on *La Dame aux Camelias*. His librettist, Francesco Maria Piave had almost completed the libretto for the first opera when he had to stop and write the libretto for *La Traviata* instead.

Two decades of tremendous creativity, from 1851 to 1871, culminated with *Aida*. Commissioned by the Khedive of Egypt as part of the celebration of the opening of the Suez Canal, *Aida* was produced with no expense spared. Props included a shield and helmet made of solid silver, a crown of pure gold, and a cast of 300 in the second act triumphal march.

From 1872 to 1883, Verdi temporarily ‘retired’ from opera writing. He continued to compose music, including the *Manzoni Requiem*, considered his most important non-operatic work. Much of this time period, however, was devoted to his farm. Then, in 1884, he began work on his second-last opera, *Otello*. It premiered in 1887 to great anticipation and then to great acclaim. At age 80, Verdi wrote one last opera, *Falstaff*, based on another Shakespearian play.

Verdi died in January, 1901. Italy mourned his death, closing schools and holding a special session of the Senate where eulogies were read. Thousands jammed the streets to see his funeral procession.

Verdi, Politics, and *La Traviata*

Verdi did a brief stint as a politician, serving in 1863 as (elected) deputy to the newly formed Italian Parliament. Although he was a passionate Italian patriot, Verdi hated politics and did not remain long in the parliament. He was made a lifetime senator by King Victor Emmanuel in 1874, but Verdi only showed up once and that was to take his oath.

Verdi was a great disciple of the Italian patriotic movement known as the Italian Risorgimento (ca 1750 – 1879). It strove for Italian unification and a new social order. As a believer in the movement, Verdi wanted the staging, sets and costumes for his opera *La Traviata* to be ‘modern’ in keeping with the contemporary issues of his times. He saw his artistic role as an opportunity to shape the Risorgimento and to help unite Italy, with a common language and no internal boundaries. Verdi was a diplomat who sought to contribute to the Risorgimento through peaceful means.”

Censors and *La Traviata*

Contemporary morals affected how Verdi could tell the story based on Dumas’s novel and play. Fortunately, the story was well known at the time and Verdi was able to leave out story parts that would offend the censors. The audience could fill in the gaps. Venice, where the opera was first performed in 1853, was one of the few cities where *La Traviata* could be produced without extensive changes. The original title, *Amore e morte*, however, had to be changed and the time set back to about 1700. Verdi strongly objected, but the censors did not want the ‘lascivious’ goings-on in the story to be seen as a reflection of ‘modern’ life.

Censors continued to influence the artistic freedom of the composer and librettist. When *La Traviata* finally played in Naples, Violetta and Alfredo could not be portrayed as living together in Act II. Instead, she was shown as a recluse whom Alfredo had come to visit. Germot considered her unworthy for her son, not because she was a courtesan but because she was of low birth. In Rome, Alfredo was already engaged. When he returned in the last act, he was a widower.

Et Cetera, Et Cetera, Et Cetera

A biographer of Giuseppe Verdi’s, Carlo Gatti, kept a prized copy of the original *La Traviata* manuscript. It amused him no end to note that, in the first draft of Violetta’s “Sempre libera,” Verdi had simply written *alle fine et cetera* after the first few bars.

“One of the greatest melodies ever composed,” Gatti said, “and Verdi just writes ‘to the end, *et cetera*,’ as though everyone knew it already. *Et cetera* for whom, I ask you? Not for anyone except a genius like Verdi. Fortunately, in a later draft, he took time to write out the whole melody.”

ABOUT THE LIBRETTIST – FRANCESCO MARIA PIAVE



Francesco Maria Piave was born in 1810 on Murano, an island in the Venetian Lagoon in Italy. His father was a glassmaker on Murano, which to this day, remains an island of glass makers. Piave studied for the Church but became the librettist for many of Verdi's most popular operas.

Piave collaborated with Verdi for 18 years. While Verdi often addressed him with shocking rudeness, Piave bore it patiently. With Verdi's help, he developed a keen sense of the theatre and the ability to write with the brevity on which Verdi insisted. He had a wide vocabulary and was a facile writer, able to produce the striking phrases which add so much to the stories. None of the works he wrote for other composers achieved greatness. Piave died in 1876.

LA TRAVIATA – BACKGROUND AND STORY OUTLINE

La Traviata is an opera favourite and one of the most frequently performed, recorded, and filmed of all operas. It tells a tragic love story that has melted hearts for over 150 years.

La Traviata features one of opera's best-loved soprano roles and one of the most psychologically complex characters in opera, the role of Violetta. It has become one of opera's most coveted and challenging roles. In each act, Violetta must use a different type of voice: Coloratura, Lyric Dramatic and Lyric soprano. Violetta is based on Marie Duplessis, the real-life courtesan whose lover, Alexandre Dumas, wrote the novel and the play on which Verdi based his opera.

During the so-called Golden Age of Courtesans, the most successful, such as Madame de Pompadour, mistress of King Louis XV, occupied the highest level of society, *le grand monde* (the great world). Through their elegance and grace they developed an extravagant lifestyle during Second Empire France (1852-1870). The courtesans in *le demi-monde* or half-world occupied a place apart from the aristocracy. They included the inner circle, women like Violetta who lived in luxury, to the working girls. The most successful were supported by aristocratic men. For these aristocrats, the courtesans were status symbols, an index of their wealth.

La Traviata is set in the elegant but shadowy Parisian demi-monde of the mid-1800s. Violetta, a beautiful but fragile courtesan, gives up the pursuit of meaningless pleasure in high society for the love of a younger man, Alfredo.

Together they begin life anew in the country, but their happiness is shattered by Alfredo's father, who learns of Violetta's unsuitable past and pressures her to break off the relationship for the sake of the family's reputation. She does so with great misgiving and Alfredo believes she has merely thrown him over. Much later he learns of her sacrifice and forgives her, but it is too late. Poverty stricken and desperately ill, Violetta dies in his arms.

THE REAL VIOLETTA AND ALFREDO

Violetta Valery and Alfredo Germont were, in reality, the beautiful Parisienne prostitute, Marie Duplessis and Alexandre Dumas *filis*, son of the famous novelist Alexandre Dumas (author of *The Three Musketeers* and many similar books). Marie and Alexandre first met at the opera in 1844 when both were 20 years old; they were lovers for 11 months. A year after Marie died in 1847, Dumas *filis* published a novel describing their affair, *La dame aux Camélias*. (The misspelling of the word, Caméllias, was inherited from a George Sands' 1846 novel *Isidora*.)

In the book, Dumas *filis* explained the origin of Marie's nickname, "The lady of the camellias" in a passage discussing her penchant for the theatre:

Marguerite was present at all first nights and spent each evening in the theatre or at a ball....she always had with her a bunch of camellias. For twenty-five days in every month the camellias were white, and for five they were red. No one ever knew the reason for this variation in color which I mention but cannot explain.

The author's "inability" to explain is, of course, an example of nineteenth century delicacy.

In the opera, Violetta is persuaded to end the affair because it threatens the marriage of Alfredo's sister. In real life, this never happened; the lover separated for another reason. During the first several months of their affair in 1844, Marie had continued to work as a prostitute. This made her lover insanely jealous, but, business was business. However, in 1845, the two rented a summer home in the Paris suburb of Bougival and Marie abandoned her profession. Then after four months, the lovers ran out of money and they split up so that Marie could return to her old work (one of her new lovers was Franz Liszt). However, tuberculosis was to kill her a year and a half later in 1847 at the age of just 23. There was no final reunion with Alexandre as described in both the play and opera; Alexandre was travelling abroad.

Marie was born in Normandy as Alphonsine Plessis. Her mother died when she was young and her brutal father put her to work as a prostitute at age 12. At age 16, after having escaped to Paris, she began working the streets as a *grisette* (a working girl who augmented her income was called this because they work grey clothes). Her beauty enabled her to soon advance to the *demi-monde* (salons instead of the streets and a world that fell between polite society and the underworld) and it was then that she changed her name to the "more elegant" Marie Duplessis.

Alexandre Dumas *filis* was a respected member of the French literary establishment, but none of his other works ever achieved the lasting fame of *La dame aux Camélias*. He took several mistresses after Marie, and was married twice. He was made a *Chevalier de la Légion d'honneur* in 1857 and in 1875 was elected to the French Academy before dying in 1895.

SYNOPSIS

Place: In and near Paris

Time: About 1700

ACT I

In her Paris salon, the courtesan, Violetta Valery, greets party guests, including Flora Bervoix, the Marquis d'Obigny, Baron Douphol, and Gastone, who introduces a new admirer, Alfredo Germont. This young man, having adored Violetta from afar, joins her in a drinking song (Brindisi: "Libiamo"). An orchestra is heard in the next room but as guests move there to dance, Violetta suffers a fainting spell, sends the guests on ahead, and goes to her parlour to recover. Alfredo comes in, and since they are alone, confesses his love ("Un di felice"). At first Violetta protests that love means nothing to her. Something about the young man's sincerity touches her, however, and she promises to meet him the next day. After the guests have gone, Violetta wonders if Alfredo could actually be the man she could love ("Ah, fors'è lui"). But she decides she wants freedom ("Sempre libera"), though Alfredo's voice, heard outside, argues in favour of romance.

ACT II

Some months later, Alfredo and Violetta are living in a country house near Paris, where he praises their contentment ("De' miei bollenti spiriti"). But when the maid, Annina, reveals that Violetta has pawned her jewels to keep the house, Alfredo leaves for the city to settle matters at his own cost. Violetta comes looking for him and finds an invitation from Flora to a party that night. Violetta has no intention of going back to her old life but trouble intrudes with the appearance of Alfredo's father. Though impressed by Violetta's ladylike manners, he demands she renounce his son; the scandal of Alfredo's affair with her has threatened his daughter's engagement ("Pura siccome un angelo"). Violetta says she cannot, but Germont eventually convinces her ("Dite alla giovine"). Alone, the desolate woman sends a message of acceptance to Flora and begins a farewell note to Alfredo. He enters suddenly, surprising her, and she can barely control herself as she reminds him of how deeply she loves him ("Amami, Alfredo") before rushing out. Now a servant hands Alfredo her farewell note as Germont returns to console his son with reminders of family life in Provence ("Di Provenza"). But Alfredo, seeing Flora's invitation, suspects Violetta has thrown him over for another lover. Furious, he determines to confront her at the party.

At her soiree that evening, Flora learns from the Marquis that Violetta and Alfredo have parted. She then clears the floor for hired entertainers, a band of fortune-telling Gypsies and some matadors who sing of Piquillo and his coy sweetheart ("E Piquillo un bel gagliardo"). Soon Alfredo strides in making bitter comments about love, and gambling recklessly at cards. Violetta has arrived with Baron Douphol, who challenges Alfredo to a game and loses a small fortune to him. Everyone goes in to supper, but Violetta has asked Alfredo to see her. Fearful of the Baron's anger, she wants Alfredo to leave, but he misunderstands her apprehension and demands that she admit she loves Douphol. Crushed, she pretends she does. Now Alfredo calls in the others, denounces his former love and hurls his winnings at her feet ("Questa donna conoscete?"). Germont enters in time to see this and denounces his son's behaviour. The guests rebuke Alfredo, and Douphol challenges him to a duel.

ACT III

In Violetta's bedroom six months later, Dr. Grenvil tells Annina her mistress has not long to live: tuberculosis has claimed her. Alone, Violetta rereads a letter from Germont saying the Baron was only wounded in his duel with Alfredo, who knows all and is on his way to beg her pardon. But Violetta senses it is too late ("Addio del passato"). Paris is celebrating Mardi Gras and, after revelers pass outside, Annina rushes in to announce Alfredo. The lovers ecstatically plan to leave Paris forever ("Parigi, o cara"). Germont enters with the doctor before Violetta is seized with a last resurgence of strength. Feeling life return, she staggers and falls dead at her lover's feet.

Courtesy of *Opera News*

What To Listen For

- *Un dì felice* - Alfredo's singing of his love: "I loved you from the first day... Mysterious power of love," and Violetta's reply.
- *Sempre libera degg'io* - Violetta's irresistible pledge to pleasure
- The great baritone-soprano duet between the senior Germont and Violetta, which some call the quintessential Verdi duet.

Listen as well for recurring themes associated with specific characters and moods in *La Traviata*; for example, the opening of the Prelude, played only by the violins. This represents the frailty of the heroine, Violetta. It returns again at the beginning of the last act when it connotes her impending death due to consumption.

Listen to each major character's arias and duets and hear how their words and mood are reflected in changes from major to minor keys.

There was a well-established pattern in Italian opera of Verdi's time for the structure of an aria and even a duet. It followed this pattern:

- 1) an introductory recitative to establish the dramatic and emotional situation;
- 2) an aria in a slow or moderate tempo, known as a cavatina;
- 3) an episode in which the situation changes--either a messenger brings important news or a decision is made;
- 4) a fast and vigorous aria, known as a cabaletta, usually repeated after a brief intervening segment for chorus or secondary singer.

THE OPERATIC VOICE

Operatic singing developed in Europe during the 17th century. The vocal demands are far greater on an opera singer than on any other singer. Opera singers rarely use microphones, and therefore must develop their voices to make a sound that will project and be heard above an orchestra and be heard throughout a large theatre.

After years of practice and study, an opera singer learns to use his or her body as an amplification device. By controlling the muscles of the diaphragm (a muscle beneath the lungs and above the stomach) the singer can regulate the amount of breath used. By tightening the diaphragm, the singer can push out the right amount of air to make the vocal cords vibrate. The speed at which the cords vibrate determines the pitch. As the sound passes through the mouth it resonates in the upper chest cavities and the sinus cavities of the face and head. These cavities act as small echo chambers and help amplify the sound. The shape of the mouth and the placement of the tongue near the lips contribute to the tone and sound of the words.

Many singers begin their operatic training in university. Opera students study singing, music history, composition and vocal pedagogy (voice teaching). In addition to music classes, they study diction and often study at least one foreign language. After university, singers begin to work in the professional world. Their first roles are usually small parts, but if they continue to study and train, they may move on to the bigger principal roles.

Professional singers develop a number of roles in their repertoire. Since the principal artists are required to have their parts memorized before rehearsals begin, singers must prepare well in advance of each contract. Singers have voice teachers who help them refine their singing techniques and many will also have an acting coach. Even a well-established singer will have a vocal coach to teach singing and acting techniques for specific roles.

Each person's vocal tract is constructed differently. The roles that a singer performs are dependent mostly upon their vocal range, but within the vocal ranges, there are many colours and weights of voice that further determine which roles he or she can sing safely. Vocal colour refers to the richness of the sound and vocal weight refers to how powerful a voice sounds.

After the role has been studied intensely and the singer is hired to perform, they arrive at the opera company for the rehearsals. This time is spent refining the music with the conductor and staging the action with the stage director. Each director has a different idea of how the character should be played, and each conductor has a different idea of how the character should sound, therefore the singer must modify his or her techniques to reach the desired result.

Physical health is a major priority to a singer. Contrary to popular belief, most opera singers are overweight. Conventional wisdom used to state that excessive weight gave added volume and richness to the voice however, in recent years people have discovered that physical fitness can give similar benefits to a voice. Plus, the overall health benefits of being in shape overshadow any loss of vocal power. Most singers, like professional athletes, try to avoid such substances as tobacco, alcohol and caffeine.

There are six basic vocal categories:

WOMEN

Soprano: The highest female voice, similar to a flute in range and tone colour. Usually plays the heroine in the opera since a high, bright sound can easily suggest youth and innocence.

Mezzo-Soprano: The middle-range female voice, similar to an oboe in range and tone colour. Called an alto in choral arrangements, a mezzo can play a wide variety of characters including gypsies, mothers and even the part of a young man (trouser role).

Contralto: The lowest female voice, similar to an English horn in range and tone colour. A contralto usually plays unique roles including fortune-tellers, witches and older women. It is not very common.

MEN

Tenor: The highest male voice, similar to a trumpet in range, tone color and acoustical “ring.” Usually plays the hero or the romantic lead in the opera.

Baritone: The middle-range male voice, similar to a French horn in tone color. Often plays the leader of mischief in comic opera or the villain in tragic opera, sometimes even the hero.

Bass: The lowest male voice, similar to a trombone or bassoon in tone color. Usually portrays old, wise men, or foolish, comic men.

The vocal parts overlap each other. The notes that are high for a baritone to sing are low for a tenor. The notes that are low for a baritone to sing are high for a bass. For this reason you may see a high-range mezzo-soprano singing a soprano’s role or a low-range baritone singing a bass’ role.

The following terms can be used to describe special characteristics in a vocal range:

Coloratura: a light, bright voice that has the ability to sing many notes quickly, usually with an extended upper range.

Lyric: A light to medium weight voice, often singing beautiful sweeping melodies.

Dramatic: Dark, heavy and powerful voice, capable of sustained and forceful singing.

Compiled from Opera Columbus Study Guide



TUBERCULOSIS

In the past, tuberculosis (TB) was called **consumption** because it seemed to consume people from within with a bloody cough, fever, pallor, and long relentless wasting. It has been present in humans since antiquity. Skeletal remains show prehistoric humans (4000 BC) had TB and tubercular decay has been found in the spines of mummies from 3000-240 BC. In 460 BC, Hippocrates identified TB – phthisis was the Greek term for it – as the most widespread disease of the times involving coughing up blood and fever which was almost always fatal.

TB is spread when a person with active TB breathes out, for example by coughing, sneezing or talking. The TB germs go from their lungs into the air. Other people then become infected by breathing in the air that is carrying the TB germ. It is most often spread to people who spend a lot of time with a person with active TB, especially those who live in the same house.

It's estimated that TB has killed over one billion people in the last two centuries. It's also estimated that two million people die from tuberculosis each year and more than eight million people develop active TB each year. The disease has reached alarming proportions in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

In Canada, TB is not very common, but it still exists. About 70% of the cases in Canada originate from outside the country. To control this disease locally, it needs to be fought globally. It is more cost effective to fight tuberculosis in high burden countries than to control it within Canada. Those most at risk of catching TB include people who have lived or worked in countries where TB is common; aboriginal Canadians; people with HIV or AIDS; the elderly; homeless people; people living in crowded housing and unhygienic conditions; and health professionals.

TB was romanticized in the nineteenth century. Many at the time believed TB produced feelings of euphoria referred to as “Spec phthisica” or “hope of the consumptive.” It was believed that TB sufferers who were artists had bursts of creativity as the disease progressed and that sufferers had a final burst of energy just before they died which made women more beautiful and men more creative.

For more information on Tuberculosis visit the Manitoba Lung Association website:
www.mb.lung.ca

RECORDINGS AND BOOKS

For a comprehensive list of recordings of *La Traviata*, visit:
<http://www.verdisdisco.de/showopera2.php3?oper=traviata>

SUGGESTED BOOKS

General

- Boyden, Matthew. *Opera, The Rough Guide*, The Rough Guides Ltd, 1997.
Brenner, Milton. *Opera Offstage*, Walker & Co., 1996.
Cross, Milton. *The Complete Stories of the Great Operas*, Doubleday, 1952.
Earl of Harewood, ed. *The New Kobbe's Complete Opera Book*, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1976.
Forman, Sir Denis. *A Night at the Opera*, Random House Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1994.
Jellinek, George. *History Through the Opera Glass*, Pro. Am Music Resources, 1994.
Orrey, Leslie (Rodney Milnes ed.). *A Concise History of Opera*, Thames and Hudson, 1987.
Plotkin, Fred. *Opera 101: A Complete Guide to Learning & Loving Opera*, Hyperion, 1994.
Pogue, David Speck, Scott. *Opera for Dummies*, John Wiley & Sons, 1997.
Sadie, Stanley, ed. *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, Macmillan Press Ltd., 1992.
Simon, Henry. *One Hundred Great Operas and Their Stories*, Doubleday, 1989.
Walsh, Michael. *Who's Afraid of Opera?* Fireside, 1994.

Verdi With a Vengeance: An Energetic Guide to the Life and Complete Works of the King of Opera by William Berger, Vintage Books 2000.

GLOSSARY: IMPORTANT WORDS IN OPERA

Act - a section of the opera that is then divided into scenes.

Aria - means “air” in Italian. This is a piece of music written for a one singer (soloist), usually with instrumental accompaniment.

Aside - a secret comment from an actor directly to the audience that the other characters cannot hear.

Baritone - the middle singing range of the male voice. Theodore Baerg (Germont) is an example of this vocal range.

Bass - the lowest singing range of the male voice. Gregory Atkinson (Dr. Grenvil) is an example of this singing voice.

Basso buffo (Italian) - a bass singer who specializes in comic characters.

Basso profondo (Italian) - the most serious bass voice.

Baton - short stick that the conductor uses to lead the orchestra.

Bel Canto - Italian phrase literally meaning “beautiful singing.” A traditional Italian style of singing emphasizing tone, phrasing, coloratura passages, and technique. Also refers to the operas written in this style.

Blocking - directions given to the performers for movement on stage.

Bravo (Italian) - a form of appreciation shouted by audience members at the end of a particularly pleasing performance. Technically, Bravo refers to a male performer, Brava refers to a female performer and Bravi refers to many performers.

Buffo - from the Italian for “buffoon.” A singer of comic roles (basso-buffo) or a comic opera (opera-buffa).

Cadenza - a passage of singing, often at the end of an aria, which shows off the singer's vocal ability.

Castrato (Italian) - a castrated male prized for his high singing voice.

Choreographer - the person who designs the steps of a dance.

Chorus - a group of singers of all vocal ranges, singing together to support the vocal leads.

Classical - the period in music which comes after the Baroque and before the Romantic, roughly from the birth of Mozart to shortly after the death of Beethoven. It represents the greatest standardization in orchestral form and tonality.

Coloratura - elaborate ornamentation of music written for a singer using many fast notes and trills. Also used to describe a singer who sings this type of music.

Composer - the individual who writes all the music for both voice and instrument. Giuseppe Verdi is the composer of *La Traviata*.

Comprimario (Italian) - a nineteenth century term referring to secondary or supporting roles such as confidantes, messengers, and matchmakers.

Contralto - the lowest female voice range.

Conductor - the person responsible for the musical interpretation and coordination of the performance. The conductor controls the tempo, the dynamic level and the balance between singers and orchestra. You will see this person standing in the orchestra pit conducting the musicians and the singers. The conductor for *La Traviata* is Tyrone Paterson.

Countertenor - a male singer with the highest male voice range, generally singing within the female contralto or mezzo soprano range.

Crescendo - a build in the volume or dynamic of the music.

Cue - a signal to enter or exit from the stage, to move or to change lighting or scenery; or a signal given by the conductor to the musicians.

Curtain Call - occurs at the end of the performance when all the cast members and the conductor take bows. This can occur in front of the curtain or on the open stage.

Designer - a production can have two or three designers: a lighting designer, a costume designer, a set designer, or someone who is both costume and set designer. They work closely with the stage director to give the production a distinctive look.

Director - guides the production from rehearsal through to stage performances and is involved in every word, structure, and how the opera will 'live' on the stage. Tom Diamond is the director of *La Traviata*.

Diva - literally, "goddess" in Italian. An important female opera star. The masculine form is divo.

Dramaturge - acts as a sounding board or story editor for the writer and helps maintain the dramatic structure.

Dress Rehearsal - the final rehearsal before opening night, includes costumes, lights, makeup, etc. Sometimes it is necessary to stop for adjustments, but an attempt is made to make it as much like a regular performance as possible.

Duet - music that is written for two people to sing together.

Encore - a piece that is performed after the last scheduled piece of a concert. An encore is usually performed because the audience wants to hear more music even though the concert is over.

Ensemble - a part of the opera written for a group of two or more singers. This may or may not include the chorus.

Falsetto - the upper part of a voice in which the vocal cords do not vibrate completely. Usually used by males to imitate a female voice.

Finale - the last musical number of an opera or an act.

Grand Opera - spectacular French opera of the Romantic period, lavishly staged, with a historically based plot, a huge cast, an unusually large orchestra, and ballet. It also refers to opera without spoken dialogue.

Helden - German prefix meaning "heroic." Can also apply to other voices, but usually used in "heldentenor."

House - the auditorium and front of the theatre excluding the stage and backstage areas.

Impresario - the proprietor, manager, or conductor of an opera or concert company; one who puts on or sponsors an entertainment; manager, producer.

Interlude - a short piece of instrumental music played between scenes and acts.

Intermission - a break between acts of an opera. The lights go on and the audience is free to move around.

Librettist - the writer of the opera's text. The librettist for *La Traviata* is Francesco Maria Piave.

Libretto - Italian for "little book." It is the text or story of the opera.

Lyric - used to describe a light to medium weight voice with an innocent quality, capable of both sustained, forceful singing and delicate effects.

Maestro - means "master" in Italian. Used as a courtesy title for the conductor (male or female).

Mark - to sing, but not at full voice. A full-length opera is very hard on a singer's voice so most performers mark during rehearsals.

Mezzo-soprano - the middle singing range for a female voice. Colleen Skull (Flora) is an example of this singing voice.

Motif or Leitmotif - a recurring musical theme used to identify an emotion, person, place, or object.

Opera - a dramatic presentation which is set to music. Almost all of it is sung, and the orchestra is an equal partner with the singers. Like a play, an opera is acted on stage with costumes, scenery, makeup, etc. Opera is the plural form of the Latin word opus, which means "work."

Opera buffa (Italian)- an opera about ordinary people, usually, but not always comic. First developed in the eighteenth century.

Opera seria (Italian) - a serious style of opera. The usual characters are gods and goddesses, or ancient heroes.

Opera-comique (French) or Singspiel (German) - a form of opera which contains spoken dialogue.

Operetta - lighthearted opera with spoken dialogue, such as a musical.

Orchestra - an ensemble, led by a conductor, that is comprised of string, woodwind, brass and percussion instruments.

Orchestra pit - sunken area in front of the stage where the orchestra sits.

Overture - an orchestral introduction to the opera played before the curtain rises. Usually longer than a prelude and can be played as a separate piece.

Pitch - how high or low a note sounds.

Prelude - a short introduction that leads into an act without pause.

Prima Donna - literally, "first lady" in Italian. The leading woman in an opera. Because of the way some of them behaved in the past, it often refers to someone who is acting in a superior and demanding fashion. The term for a leading man is primo uomo.

Principal - a major singing role or the singer who performs such a role.

Production - the combination of sets, costumes, props, and lights, etc.

Props - objects carried or used on stage by the performers.

Proscenium - the front opening of the stage which frames the action.

Quartet - four singers or the music that is written for four singers. Also quintet, sextet, etc.

Raked Stage - a stage that slants downwards towards the audience.

Recitative - lines of dialogue that are sung, usually with no recognizable melody. It is used to advance the plot.

Rehearsal - a working session in which the singers prepare for public performance.

Score - the written music of an opera or other musical work.

Serenade - a piece of music honouring someone or something, an extension of the traditional performance of a lover beneath the window of his mistress.

Soprano - the highest range of the female singing voice. Yali-Marie Williams (Violetta) is an example of this vocal range.

Soubrette (French) – pert young female character with a light soprano voice.

Spinto (Italian) - a lyric voice that has the power and incisiveness for dramatic climaxes.

Stage Areas - refers to the various sections of the stage as seen by those on stage. See diagram in Workshop #1.

Stage Director - the person in charge of the action on stage. He or she shows the singers, chorus and cast where and when to move and helps them create their characters. The stage director develops a concept for how the entire performance should look and feel. He or she works closely with the stage managers, lighting designer, set designers, costume designer and wig and make-up artists to make his or her vision into reality.

Stage Manager - the person who coordinates and manages elements of the performance.

Supernumeraries (Supers) - appear on stage in costume in non-singing and usually, non-speaking roles.

Surtitles - the English translations of the opera's language, in this production Italian, that are projected above the stage during a performance to help the audience follow the story. Much like subtitles in a foreign film.

Synopsis - a short summary of the story of the opera.

Tableau - occurs at the end of a scene or act, when all cast members on stage freeze in position and remain that way until the curtain closes. It looks as though that moment has been captured in a photograph.

Tempo - speed of the music.

Tenor- the highest natural adult male voice. Kurt Lehmann (Alfredo) is an example of this kind of singing voice.

Trill - very quick alternation between two adjacent notes. See coloratura.

Trio - an ensemble of three singers or the music that is written for three singers.

Trouser role -the role of an adolescent boy or young man, written for and sung by a woman, often a mezzo-soprano. Also known as a pants role.

Verismo - describes a realistic style of opera that started in Italy at the end of the nineteenth century.

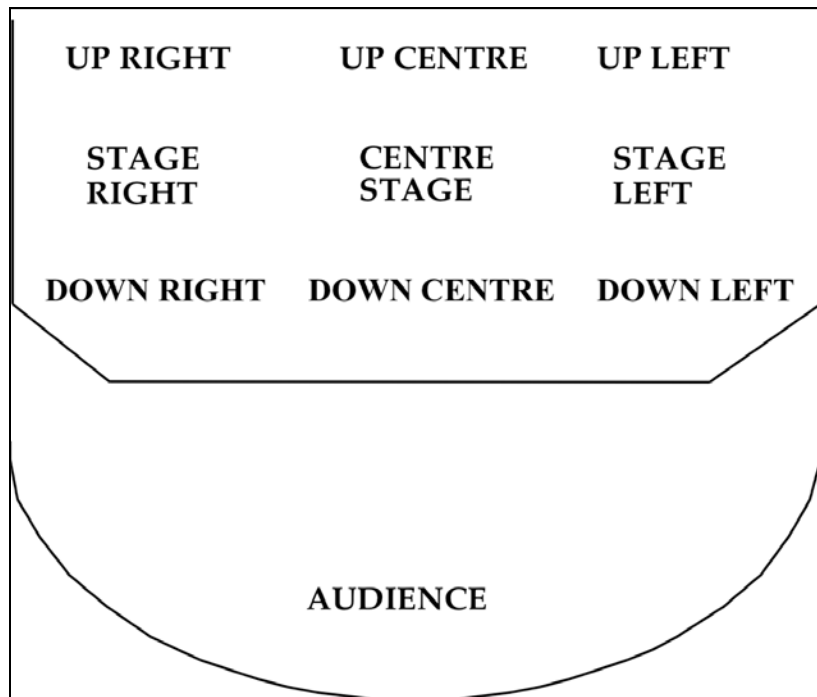
STUDENT ACTIVITIES

Workshop 1: Write a New Opera

1. You have been asked to create and produce a new opera. Think of stories you know – from books, plays, movies – that you think would make a good opera and write down the names of one or two:

Name of book/play/movie _____

2. Think of the people you will need to help you complete your opera. Name the different tasks you will need to include.
3. Take the role of the composer and write the type of music you think will work best to tell the story; for example, plenty of bass or soprano voices to help express certain characters and their emotions.
4. Take the role of the librettist and write the words for one song for your opera; work with the composer to think about the character and how the character fits into the story.
5. Write down the historical setting for your opera and find out what kind of costumes you think you will need for your singers to match the time period.



Workshop 2– Stage Business

Objectives: Students will be able to express and apply their knowledge of the areas of the stage through writing and movement. Students will investigate the historical background of stage positioning.

Pre-class: Tape a massive grid to the floor of the space you are working in. This can be used to physically point out the areas of the stage as well as be used for the game (“Director Says”).

Activity #1: Group Discussion

Have a group discussion with your class regarding why individuals might need to assign names for the different areas of the theatre, questioning the purpose that it serves.

Activity #2: Historical Significance of the Stage

Explain briefly the historical significance for the set-up of the theatre. Include such points as how the stage was originally raked so that the back portion of the stage was higher than the front portion. This was done because the audience’s seats were not raised as they usually are today. It enabled those individuals sitting in the back row of the theatre to see the players clearly. As a result the back of the stage is called up stage and the front of the stage is referred to as down stage.

You may also choose to discuss which areas of the stage are most important. For example, the strongest entrance is from stage left.

Distribute the “Stage Facts” on the next page, so that students can refer to it as you physically go to the taped area that you are explaining. You may choose to have them draw and copy the areas of the stage for themselves.

Activity #3: “Director Says” Game

The teacher designates one of the students as the director, or for the first round you can be the director. The remaining students are the performers.

The director gives out the directions: “Move upstage”, “Move stage right,” “Move to up centre,” etc. The director may give out directions to the entire group at once, small groups, or individuals e.g.: “All performers with red socks go to stage left.”

Students are out if they move in any direction other than the one the director gives. The director gives out directions more rapidly, and any performer who moves in the wrong direction or hesitates is out. You may need to have a judge.

Stage Facts

Opera singers are required to act as well as sing and therefore they must understand the stage set-up. In rehearsals, the director will indicate to the singers what they should be doing and where they should do it. To do this they use a special vocabulary. Take a look at the diagram below in order to understand the different areas of the stage.

Workshop 3 – Understanding *La Traviata*

Objectives:

Student will be able to express their knowledge of the storyline of *La Traviata* through verbal and written expression. Students will be able to express their knowledge of character through writing a character sketch.

Activity 1: Story of *La Traviata*

Have the students read a play version of *La Traviata* or use the synopsis found in the Study Guide. Read it aloud to the students or have them read it silently. Have the students discuss what happens to the characters and why they think each character behaved the way they did. Do they think a similar story could be told in modern times or can they think of contemporary stories with a similar theme?

Another approach is to convert the synopsis into an improvised play. Have students create the dialogue between characters at key points in the story.

Activity 2: Sharing with a group

After viewing the Dress Rehearsal, have the students discuss what they saw. To help focus conversations, get the students to create a list of qualities that they feel are important to understanding *La Traviata* and its characters.

Activity 3: Creating a journal from point of view of a character

Allow students to pick a specific moment in the opera, preferably a point of conflict for the character. Have the students write a journal of those events from the point of view of their character. Explain to the students that they are to take on the persona of that character and should refer to the character through personal pronouns. Also, remind students that they are only to express information that their character would know.

Character Profile

Name and role

Physical Characteristics (their style and physical attributes)

Psychological Characteristics (mental aspects of character, how do they think about things?)

Emotional Characteristics (are they generally cheerful, sad, snobby, “off-balance,” etc.?)

Family

Career/Income (if applicable)

Interests and Hobbies

Other interesting facts

Workshop 4 - Writing a Review of La Traviata

Objectives: Students will be able to write clear and well-supported expository essays. Students will utilize observation and critical thinking skills based on real-life, real-time experiences. Students can submit their writing for publication (school newspaper) or you can send the reviews to Manitoba Opera. We would love to hear what the students thought.

Activity 1- Think-Group-Share

Individually students will write, in point form, the answers to the following questions:

1. What did you like about the opera? What did you dislike?
2. What did you think about the sets, props and costumes?
3. Would you have done something differently? Why?
4. What were you expecting? Did it live up to your expectations?
5. What did you think of the singers' portrayal of their characters?

Break the students into groups to discuss their feelings and reactions to the production. Have the students write on poster papers their answers or important points of their discussion. Encourage the students to go beyond the questions posed. Place their poster papers on the walls.

Activity 2- Gallery Walk

Have the groups travel around the room to examine the discussion poster papers. During the walk, students must write down one thing that surprised them, one thing that they didn't think of, and one thing that they would like explained. Once this is done, have a large group discussion about the different ideas that they encountered on their walk.

Activity 3- Outlining your review

Go over the essential aspects of a review including:

- a clearly stated purpose
- a coherent comparison/contrast organizational pattern
- a summary paragraph
- capturing the interest of the reader
- precise nouns
- revision for consistency of ideas

You might give your students a few samples of reviews for arts events from the newspaper as examples – or ask them to bring in some reviews they find themselves. Have the students fill out the “Review Outline” worksheet. Once this has been completed, students may write their rough draft.

Activity 4- Peer Conferencing

Students will exchange reviews to critique and edit. Have the students use the “Peer Evaluation” worksheet to help guide them. Encourage the students to focus on effective coordination of ideas in sentences and the correct use of grammar and punctuation.

Activity 5- Creating the final draft

Have students make the appropriate adjustments to their reviews. You could also have the students type the pieces up and organize them into a newspaper. Also have the students complete the “Self-evaluation” worksheet. Include this in the total mark.

Review Outline

Purpose (why are you writing this and who is your audience?)

Plot Synopsis (including who sang what role, etc.)

Paragraph #1 (compare and contrast, things you liked or didn't like)

Paragraph #2 (compare and contrast, things you liked or didn't like)

Paragraph #3 (compare and contrast, things you liked or didn't like)

Summary/Closing Paragraph

Peer Evaluation *La Traviata*

Date: _____ Name of peer evaluator: _____

Scale: 5-Outstanding 4-Above Average 3-Average 2-Needs improvement 1-Unclear
0-Has not been done

- _____ Purpose of review was clear
- _____ Reader clearly taken into account (background, word choice)
- _____ Engaging to the reader (was it interesting to read?)
- _____ Complete sentence structure (grammar, spelling and punctuation)
- _____ Varied length and types of sentences used
- _____ Strong word choices (adjectives, adverbs and nouns)
- _____ Originality and creativity
- _____ Attention to detail and support of beliefs with examples

Total: _____ /40

Comments and Questions:

Self-Evaluation *La Traviata*

Date: _____ Name of Reviewer: _____

Scale: 5-Outstanding 4-Above Average 3-Average 2-Needs improvement 1-Unclear
0-Has not been done

- _____ Purpose of review was clear
- _____ Reader clearly taken into account (background, word choice)
- _____ Engaging to the reader (was it interesting to read?)
- _____ Complete sentence structure (grammar, spelling and punctuation)
- _____ Varied length and types of sentences used
- _____ Strong word choices (adjectives, adverbs and nouns)
- _____ Originality and creativity
- _____ Attention to detail and support of beliefs with examples

Total: _____ /40

Comments:

Workshop 5 – Historical Research Opportunities

Students can pick one of the following topics – or create their own – to research and report back to the class on their findings:

- When *La Traviata* was first performed in 1853, what was happening in Canada, in Europe, in the world?
- Morals of different societies sometimes are reflected in censorship, as Verdi experienced when composing and producing *La Traviata*. When and where else in history (or modern day) has censorship affected artistic freedom and what happened?
- Italy was an occupied country when Verdi was born. How did Italy become a united nation and what did that mean to the language and politics of the country?

OPERA COMPREHENSION TEST

General Opera

1. _____ A theatrical production incorporating both vocal and instrumental music, drama, and sometimes dance.
2. _____ The lowest male vocal range.
3. _____ An instrumental introduction to an opera.
4. _____ The area where the orchestra is seated.
5. _____ The female vocal range lying between soprano and contralto.
6. _____ A song for solo voice in an opera.
7. _____ The highest female vocal range.
8. _____ A song for two voices.
9. _____ The lowest female vocal range.
10. _____ The Italian word meaning "little book."
11. _____ The middle male vocal range.
12. _____ He/she has the artistic view for the performance of the opera.

La Traviata

1. The opera *La Traviata* takes place in _____ (give the location and approximate date).
2. Violetta is a _____ (name her profession).
3. In the second act, Alfredo thinks Violetta is leaving him because _____ (give the reason Alfredo believes for her leaving him).
4. In the second act, Baron Douphol challenges _____ (name the character) to a duel.
5. *La Traviata* was composed by _____ (name the composer).
6. The libretto for *La Traviata* was written by _____ (name the librettist).
7. The role of Germont is sung by a _____ (name the singing voice).

ANSWERS

General Opera

1. opera
2. bass
3. overture
4. pit
5. mezzo-soprano
6. aria
7. soprano
8. duet
9. contralto
10. libretto
11. baritone
12. director

La Traviata

1. Paris, 1700
2. Courtesan
3. She loves another man
4. Alfredo
5. Giuseppe Verdi
6. Francesco Maria Piave
7. Baritone

TEACHER'S EVALUATION SHEET

Your comments and suggestions are greatly appreciated. Please take a few minutes to fill out this questionnaire and return it to the address below. Thank you for your comments and suggestions.

Name: _____

School: _____

Address: _____

Phone Number: _____

Fax: _____

Email: _____

Grade(s) you teach: _____

Subjects: _____

Have you attended other performing arts events with your students in the past year?

Yes No

If yes, what were they? _____

How did you find out about Manitoba Opera's Student Dress Rehearsal?

Were you able to apply the Teacher's Study Guide in your classroom activities prior to coming to the opera?

Yes No

Which sections of the Study Guide did you find most useful?

If not, please explain _____

How appropriate was the information provided in the Study Guide?

What would you add/delete?

Did you spend classroom time discussing the performance after your students attended the opera? Yes No

Do you have any comments about the performance itself?

Would you like to receive information on our future Student Dress Rehearsals?

Yes No

How would you like to receive information:

Fax Email Letters Other _____

Further comments and suggestions _____

Please return this form to:

Sally Sweatman, Education & Outreach Coordinator,

Manitoba Opera, 105-555 Main Street, Winnipeg, MB R3B 1C3;

T: (204) 942-7470, F: (204) 949-0377, E: ssweatman@manitobaopera.mb.ca