



VERDI

La

TRAVIATA

STUDENT & FAMILY GUIDE



TOC

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Get There

Visiting Center City doesn't have to be a tough trip.

Blumenthal
Performing Arts
Center
130 N. Tryon St
Charlotte, NC 28202

Ride. Hop on the
Lynx Lightrail.
Check out the
options [here](#).

Drive. Directions
from door to door
[here](#).

Park. Participating
garages are just \$5.
Find details [here](#).

The Belk Theater

Make any seat in the house the best one.

Attending an opera in the Belk Theater is an experience not to be forgotten. The performance you are attending is the **final dress rehearsal** in which the cast performs one last full run through of the opera before opening night. Just like a regular performance, there will be an intermission(s) between acts.

Upon entering the theater, notice the production crew's station in the orchestra level seating (the lowest level of seating). The crew is set up with computers and headsets to allow them to communicate with people backstage to ensure that the performance runs smoothly. During this final rehearsal they will be making sure all cues and technical features of the performance are in place. Also notice the supertitles (English translations of the lyrics being sung) that are

projected onto a screen above the stage.

Please remember that this is a **working performance** and the performers on stage are very aware of their audience, especially a distracting audience. The polite audience member should always refrain from talking and stay seated during a performance. Nothing shows more respect and appreciation for the performers on stage than giving them your full attention.

Shout it Out

Give a shout out to the cast after a beautiful aria or at the end of the evening - literally! Shout **"Bravi!"** for a job well done to the whole cast, **"Brava!"** to the diva who aced it, or **"Bravo!"** to the guy who left it all on the stage.

Opera Carolina

Invested in our community and its life.



Then, now, & years from now

Let's take a journey back to 1948: the Charlotte Music Club is formed by a handful of arts enthusiasts who realize that Charlotte's artistic landscape –and more importantly, its cultural community– would be enhanced by opera performances. Fast forward to today: Opera Carolina is a 67 year-old company that's still blossoming, hitting new highs with each season of glorious music, drama, and all that encompasses the operatic art form. Your resident Opera company continues to bring high-quality standards of the operatic repertoire to stages near you, but is also continually striving to perform lesser-known gems.

What does our future hold? A rich commitment to our community –which we take seriously– to continue enriching the lives of citizens from all walks of life; a continual quest to produce excellent opera from all eras on our stage; and, most importantly, to connect our community.

The people

In the early days of Opera Carolina, volunteers designed the sets, built costumes, sang in the chorus, filled leading roles and, of course, sold tickets and held fundraisers to support the company.

Now a fully professional company that not only produces Opera performances on a big scale but also travels programs into local schools and community venues. We never forget the legacy of the original volunteers who made this company the what it is today. Opera

Carolina is rooted in the Carolinas; 90% of our company live and work right here in our region, complimenting the international artists who join the resident company to perform on our mainstage. We guess you can say we've got Carolina on our mind.

The House

If the paragraphs before didn't sell you on our commitment to our community, maybe information on the Opera Center will. We may be 67 years old, but we've just moved out on our own. Opera Carolina now resides in the historic Biberstein house, in the Elizabeth neighborhood. The last remaining historic home in the Uptown radius, Opera Carolina's new digs are as much a part of the community as is the company.

Built in 1906, the Biberstein House was designed and lived in by R. C. Biberstein, one of the noted mill architects of the Southeast. Mr. Biberstein is credited with building many of the mills in the Charlotte region, including the Highland Park #3 mill. Mr. Biberstein eventually moved his business into this house, his talents and self-designed home playing a role in the New South Industrial movement. Today, the home is registered as a Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmark.

The house has since been adapted into offices and is now the proud home of Opera Carolina. The Opera Center hosts the company's administrative offices but also serves as space for auditions, recitals, and more. **Our doors are always open.**



28

operas written

Verdi's operas
La traviata,
Rigoletto, & *Aida*
are among the
most performed
operas in the
world to this day!



Giuseppi Verdi (1813 - 1901)

Man of the Music

(5 minutes)

One of opera's most famous names, Verdi was a monumental crafter of the operatic artform. Read on about how he began his musical journey, which dominated the scene for nearly 50 years.

The great Italian composer Giuseppe Fortunino Francesco Verdi was born in the town of La Roncole, Italy on October 10, 1813. When he was still a child, Verdi's parents moved to Busseto, where the future composer's education was greatly facilitated by visits to the large library belonging to the local Jesuit school. He also began his first lessons in musical composition.

Displaying big talent from a very early age, Verdi was assistant organist at the small local church by the time he was 10. Not long after, he became an assistant conductor of the Busseto orchestra and an organist at the town church. At age 19, Verdi tried to enter the Milan Conservatory but was rejected - "Lacking in musical talent" said the admissions people! Despite the bad news, he continued to study privately while attending operatic performances and

concerts among high society. This helped convince young Giuseppe that writing for theater was the path for him.

His first opera, *Oberto*, opened at La Scala - one of the world's most renowned opera houses - in 1839 and was a success. His next opera, the comedy *Un Giorno di Regno* (*King for a Day*), was a complete failure and, on top of that, he lost his wife and two young children to illness within the same year. Verdi nearly gave up until he was convinced to persevere. His next opera, *Nabucco* (1842), was another success and secured Verdi's reputation as a major figure in the music world - one of the architects of the operatic artform.

Verdi retired to Sant'Agata, and wrote his great *Requiem Mass* (an oratorio). He died on January 27, 1901 - he was nearly twice Mozart's age.

Pre-Performance **INTRODUCING THE OPERA**

Introductory Discussion

Discuss, think or write about the following questions before you go see the opera:

- Do you prefer happy or sad endings to stories (books, tv shows, movies, plays, operas, etc.)? Explain why.
- Describe a time you tried to get away from something in your past but it came back to haunt you.
- Think of an example in popular culture about a story of tragic love. Why do you think tragic love is such compelling subject matter for stories?

Setting the Scene Before You Go

In the world of Paris's rich and powerful in the mid-19th century, social conventions bound everyone to a lifestyle that, on the surface, was proper. But beneath the surface existed another world – a half world, or *demi-monde*, in French – where the upper class could enjoy every excess their wealth offered, including the company of courtesans.

Courtesans were women who made money by entertaining wealthy patrons. She would be expected to accompany her patron to social events, hold engaging and intelligent conversation with him, and perform other services within the boundaries of the conventions of the *demi-monde*. In exchange, the patron would fund the courtesan's lavish lifestyle.

SYNOPSIS OF THE OPERA

Use the “Who’s Who in *La Traviata*” worksheet (pg.16) to help you keep track of the major characters you will see in the performance.

THE STORY IN SHORT

Violetta, a beautiful and engaging courtesan, falls in love with Alfredo, giving up her extravagant lifestyle for him. Alfredo’s father tries to break them apart because of Violetta’s negative influence on Alfredo’s reputation. Just when it looks like they could live happily ever after, the story ends in tragedy.



ACT I

A toast to love
&
a song to life

Violetta’s friend introduces her to Alfredo Germont. He explains that Alfredo came every day during her recent illness to inquire about her health. No one realizes Violetta has tuberculosis, also known as consumption.

In the famous Brindisi, or drinking song, Alfredo sings a toast to love, to which Violetta replies. As guests go off to dance, Violetta collapses in a fit of coughing. Quickly recovering, she tells them to proceed to the ballroom, but Alfredo lingers and declares his love for her.

She laughs at his ardor, but is touched by his sincerity. She dismisses him, but says he may return when the camellia she’s given him has faded. The guests leave, and she remains alone to consider Alfredo’s overture. Violetta realizes the social conventions that bind her life make true love impossible, and she resolves to continue her life of wealth and leisure in the thrilling aria, *Sempre Libera* (Always Free).

Scene One. Alfredo has won Violetta’s love. For several months, they have been living happily together in Violetta’s country house. Violetta’s maid tells Alfredo that Violetta has been selling off her property since she no longer has income from being a courtesan. Alfredo leaves for Paris immediately to stop this. In his absence, Violetta gets a visit from Alfredo’s father, Giorgio Germont, a well-off businessman who believes Violetta is ruining his son’s reputation. And, he tells her their illicit love affair is the reason he can’t marry off his daughter.

At first, Violetta assumes Germont wants her to leave Alfredo for a short time, but that alone won’t satisfy the old man. He reminds her that her past will always haunt them, and that true love can never be hers. In despair, Violetta tells him Alfredo is all she lives for, and such a sacrifice would kill her.



ACT II

True love
vs.
manipulation

In the months she's been in the country with Alfredo, her health has improved substantially and she believes she has escaped her past – and her illness. Giorgio cruelly tells her that her beauty will fade eventually and that Alfredo, like all men, will grow tired of her. Succumbing to his cruelty, Violetta agrees to Germont's demands, asking only to be embraced as a daughter and to allow her to break the news to Alfredo.

Having won, Germont leaves Violetta to decide how to break it off with Alfredo. She writes him a letter and plans to leave before he returns. Just then, Alfredo surprises her. She says she's leaving for a short while but vows to return. Then, turning to leave, she frantically confesses her love.

Alfredo reads the letter and is crushed. His father reappears to offer consolation and to ask him to come home to his family. Angrily rejecting this suggestion, Alfredo notices an invitation for that evening from Flora, one of Violetta's friends, and he concludes this is where he will find her.

Scene Two. A magnificent party, with gambling, dancing, entertainment and gypsy fortune-tellers, is underway. Violetta has returned to her former lover, Baron Duphol, and arrives with him. Alfredo enters, to everyone's surprise. He gambles with the Baron and wins a substantial amount.

Violetta begs Alfredo to leave, but he forces her to explain her behavior. In desperation, and to protect Alfredo's father, she says she no longer loves him. At this, Alfredo calls the guests to witness that he pays his debts in full and throws his winnings at Violetta.

Flora's guests are outraged at his cruel behavior, and the Baron challenges Alfredo to a duel.



**A party where
all bets are off.**



ACT III
**Forgiveness is
granted,
but time is not**

It's winter, and the scene is Violetta's bedroom. Her health has declined. The Baron has left her and her money is almost gone. She tells her maid to give half of what little remains to the poor.

She has gotten a letter from Alfredo's father explaining that the Baron was wounded in his duel with Alfredo, and that Alfredo has left Paris. He tells her his son now knows the truth of her sacrifice and that they will both soon return to ask her forgiveness. Too late, she cries, and in a magnificent aria, *Addio del passato*, she realizes her life will soon be over.

Alfredo arrives and for a moment, he convinces her she will recover and again be happy. She asks him to be happy, and remember her. For a moment she thinks she feels well again, but as she exclaims that she will live, she falls senseless to the floor.

Art Imitates Life & Art Imitates Art:

Read about the real woman who inspired the main character of *La Traviata* and about the art created in her image.

The Real Violetta

"People emulated her fashion sense; anything she was doing, really. So we see her very much as a kind of pop star. A Lady Gaga figure." – Sheridan Harbridge, actress

Citation <http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/theatre/pop-goes-the-waif-gaga-of-old-paris-20130307-2fp4k.html>



The character of Violetta is based on real life courtesan, Marie Duplessis, a peasant girl from Normandy, France who rose out of a tragic childhood to become one of the most well-known and admired courtesans in Paris. As a very young girl, Duplessis' abusive father sold her to 70-year-old man. She was eventually able to break free of that entanglement, and worked for a brief time in a dress shop in Paris before quickly learning that she could have a lavish lifestyle working as a courtesan. She started as a mistress to men on the lower rungs of high society and kept working her way up to more and more illustrious patrons.

Marie taught herself to read and write, and educated herself on world events so as to be able to carry on interesting and compelling conversation with the very educated men with whom she was consorting. She became a popular hostess of salons, which were events in which writers, politicians, artists, and interesting people would gather to socialize and have stimulating conversation. Her patrons included some of the most powerful and influential people of her day, and she remained friends with many of them even after their arrangements had ended.

At the young age of 23, Marie died of tuberculosis, often referred to as consumption at that time. Paris mourned her death, and hundreds of people supposedly attended her funeral.

Those are the facts, but the words of those who knew her give a truer picture of who she really was:

The novelist and son of a famous author, **Alexandre Dumas, fils**, who immortalized her in a famous novel following her death, described her as "tall, very slim with long, black, lustrous hair, Japanese eyes, very quick and alert, with lips as red as cherries and the most beautiful teeth in the world."

The literary critic **Jules Janin** remembered "her young and supple waist, the beautiful oval of her face and the grace which radiated like an indescribable fragrance."

Franz Liszt, the famous composer and pianist, wrote that "hers was a truly enchanting nature, and practices generally thought to be corrupting — perhaps rightly so — never touched her soul." He called her the "most absolute incarnation of woman who has ever existed." Upon her death, he wrote, "This poor Mariette Duplessis has died. She was the first woman I fell in love with, and now, she has been laid to rest in an unknown cemetery, where worms will eat her body. I do not know what strange, mournful note vibrates in my heart at the memory of her."

And **Marie** in her own words: "I have loved sincerely, but no one ever returned my love. That is the real horror of my life."

Citation: <http://www.interlude.hk/front/redemption-through-consumptionliszt-and-marie-duplessis/>

Response Questions: The Real Violetta

1. Use three facts from the information above to **support the following statement**: Marie Duplessis was one of the most well-known and popular courtesan in 19th century Paris.
2. Marie Duplessis captured the imaginations of many of the great artists of her day – she has been immortalized in a novel, a play, and one of the most widely performed operas in history. Why do you think Marie Duplessis so captured people's imaginations? Use quotes from the above text to **support your opinion**.

Art Imitates Life & Art Imitates Art

Art Imitates Life: The Novel that Inspired the Opera

"From this tale, I do not draw the conclusion that all women of Marguerite's sort are capable of behaving as she did. Far from it. But I have learned that one such woman, once in her life, experienced deep love, that she suffered for it & that she died of it. I have told the reader what I learned. It was a duty." - narrator in *La Dame aux Camelias* (*The Lady of the Camellias*)

La Dame aux Camelias was a novel written by the son of famous author Alexandre Dumas, fils. Dumas, fils based the story on his 11-month relationship with Duplessis, and is believed to have written it in three days. It was published within a year of her death, and within five years of her death, it had been made into a play. Some criticized the novel for portraying the immoral life of a courtesan with such sympathy, but readers – and much of the public – were drawn to the story of a “fallen” woman who loves someone enough to give up everything, even the one she loves.

The real life love between Dumas and Duplessis, however, does not seem to have ended in quite the same way. At the end of their relationship, Dumas left Marie the following note:

My dear Marie, I am neither rich enough to love you as I should like, nor poor enough to be loved by you as you would like. There is nothing for us to do but forget – you a name which must mean very little to you; I a happiness which is no longer possible for me. Needless to tell you how miserable I am, since you know how I love you. So, this is goodbye. You are too tenderhearted not to understand the reason for this letter, too intelligent not to forgive me. A thousand souvenirs, – A.D.

Citation: <http://www.sdopera.com/Content/Operapaedia/Operas/Latraviata/LibrettoSource.htm>

Response Question: Art Imitates Life

1. The language in Dumas' farewell note to Duplessis is somewhat cryptic. What do you think he means when he says he's not rich enough to love her as he should like, nor poor enough to be loved by her as she would like? Read between the lines, what do you think transpired between the lovers to result in their split?

Art Imitates Art

Within a few years of the novel being published, it was made into a play. The famous composer Giuseppe Verdi, who had read the novel, was visiting Paris and went to see the play. Immediately afterwards he began composing the opera.

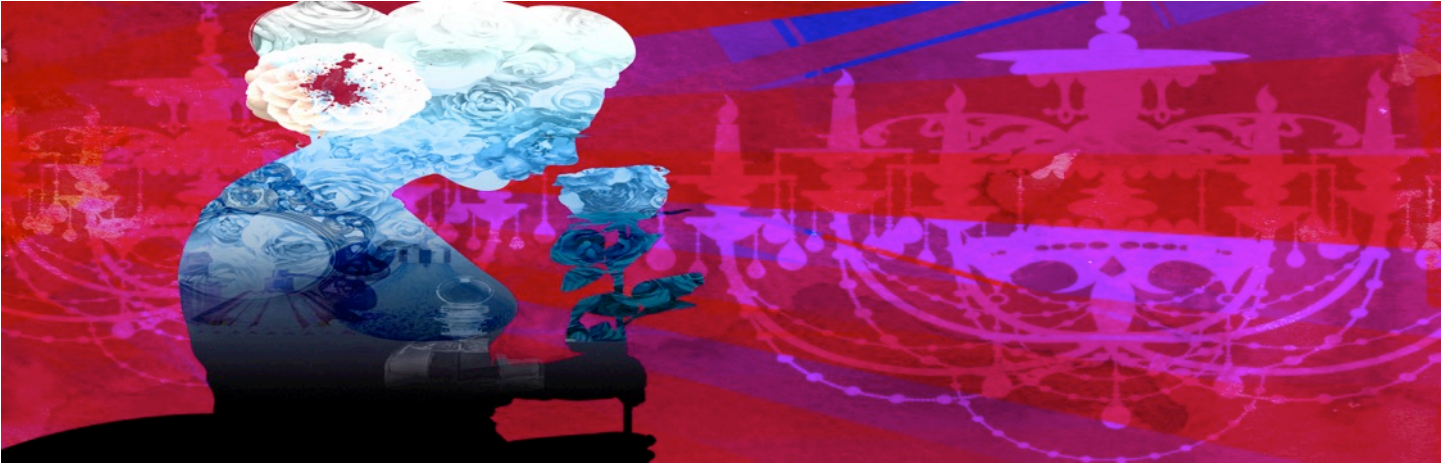
The story and the opera have inspired a number of movie adaptations: a black and white movie in 1936 entitled *Camille* starring Greta Garbo, 1967 and 1983 film versions of the opera, and an adaptation of the story almost 100 years later entitled, *Moulin Rouge!* starring Nichole Kidman and Ewen McGregor. Additionally, the opera that Julia Roberts and Richard Gere go to see in the movie *Pretty Woman* is *La traviata*, which is appropriate since the movie's characters loosely align with the opera's.

Response Question: Art Imitates Art

Artists often gather inspiration from other artists. Sometimes a piece of art inspires a new or different piece of art, but often artists choose to replicate existing art, putting their own spin on it. Think, for example, of how many movies started out as books! Or how many covers there are of the song *Somewhere Over the Rainbow*.

Is there a piece of art/music/film/literature that you would like to see replicated (or maybe one that you would like to replicate)? If not, think of a replicated piece of art/music/film/literature that you think is better than the original and explain what you like better about the adaptation.

BIG HITS TO LISTEN FOR



Brindisi

One of the most famous and recognizable songs from the opera, this type of “drinking song” is not uncommon in opera. Drinking songs usually start with a soloist singing to a group, or **ensemble**, who respond by joining in with the song. Alfredo begins this song as a toast to Violetta in Act 1.

Sempre Libera

This piece is an **aria**, or opera solo, written for a **soprano** singer, or a female singer with a very high voice. Violetta sings this song at the end of Act 1 as she struggles between letting herself love someone or staying “forever free” passing “madly from joy to joy.” Alfredo’s voice can be heard in the background, reminding her of his sentiments.

De’ miei bollenti spiriti

This is an **aria** for a **tenor** singer. A tenor is a male singer with a high voice. Alfredo sings this song in Act 2 as he describes the happy life he and Violetta have found in the country.

Di provenza il mar

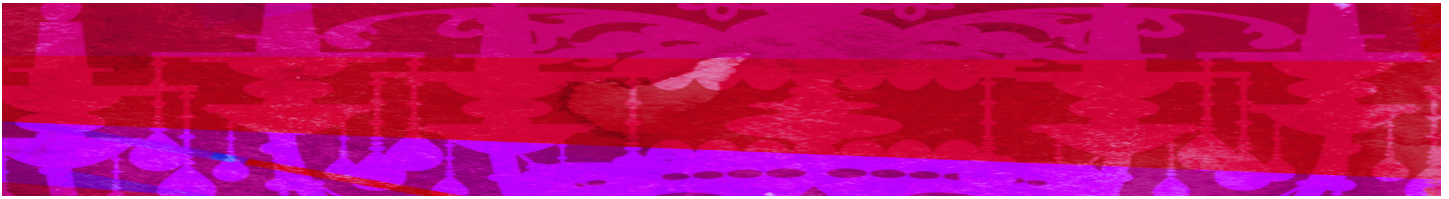
This is an **aria** for a **baritone** singer. A baritone is a male singer with a very low voice. Giorgio Garmonit sings this song in Act 2 to try to convince Alfredo to forget Violetta.

Parigi, o cara

This is a **duet** for a soprano and a tenor. A duet is a song in which two characters sing together. Alfredo and Violetta sing this song in Act 3 as they dream of their new life together.

WAYS TO GET READY TO ENJOY THE SHOW

Opera is a drama (play) that is sung! Opera uses many different art forms to tell



Consider This

How could each of these art forms help to tell the story in an opera?

Music

Lyrics

Dialogue

Costumes

Sets

Look out for each of the above elements in the performance!



Take a look at the “Big Hits to Listen For” section to review the following opera terms:

Aria, duet, baritone, soprano, ensemble.

Remember to read up on Verdi on page 4 and on the real life Violetta, Marie Duplessis, on page 8.

Performance Expectations

What does being a respectful and engaged audience member look like?

Writing Reflection & Literary Analysis

Explore these two activities to take your operatic evening from the stage to your home, building personal meaning in the story you experienced.

Reflection Questions

- Violetta, who is at the end of her short life, struggles throughout the opera to choose how she will be remembered. Will she be remembered as a desired object, as someone's true love, as a "poor and wretched woman", or as a "consoling angel"? Have you ever thought about *how you would like to be remembered* by people? *What do you want to be known for?*
- Was the tragedy of the story emotionally moving to you when you watched the opera? *Why or why not?*

Literary Analysis: Germont's Masterful Manipulation

On the next pages are an excerpt of the *libretto*, or opera song lyrics, in which Alfredo's father convinces Violetta to leave Alfredo.

Read the following passage, and underline sections in which Germont, Alfredo's father, is persuading Violetta to leave Alfredo. Then, **examine** each persuasive passage and describe the tactics Germont uses to manipulate her. Use quotes from the text to **support** your descriptions.

For example, at the beginning of the scene, Germont introduces himself as the "father of this reckless lad, who is rushing to his ruin because of you," implying that Violetta is ruining Alfredo's life.

Integrate your answers into a 1-2 paragraph literary analysis of the text.

Germont's Masterful Manipulation

Below is an excerpt of the **libretto**, or opera lyrics, in which Alfredo's father convinces Violetta to leave Alfredo.

1. **Read** the following passage, and underline sections in which Germont, Alfredo's father, is persuading Violetta to leave Alfredo. Then, **examine** each persuasive passage and describe the tactics Germont uses to manipulate her. Use quotes from the text to **support** your descriptions.

For example, at the beginning of the scene, Germont introduces himself as the, "father of this reckless lad, who is rushing to his ruin because of you," implying that Violetta is ruining Alfredo's life. This tactic could be described as using guilt to convince her to leave Alfredo.

2. **Integrate** your answers into a 1-2 paragraph literary analysis of the text.

GERMONT
I am Alfredo's father!

VIOLETTA
(Surprised, she offers him a chair.)
You!

GERMONT
Yes, father of this reckless lad, who is rushing to his ruin because of you.

VIOLETTA *(rising, with resentment)*
I, sir, am a woman and in my own home.
Now please excuse me,
more for your sake than for mine.
(She is on the point of going out.)

GERMONT
(What spirit!) And yet -

VIOLETTA
You have been badly advised.

GERMONT
He wants to give you all his possessions.

VIOLETTA
So far, he hasn't dared - I should refuse.

GERMONT *(looking about him)*
Such luxury -

VIOLETTA
This paper is a secret from everyone.
But it shall not be from you.
(She gives him the paper.)

GERMONT *(after looking at them briefly)*
Heavens! What is this!
You wish to sell
everything you own?
Ah, why does your past accuse you so?

VIOLETTA
The past does not exist - I love Alfredo now;
God wiped out my past with my repentance.

GERMONT
These are truly noble sentiments!

VIOLETTA
Ah, how good to hear these words from you!

GERMONT
And in the name

Germont's Masterful Manipulation

of these sentiments, I ask a sacrifice -

VIOLETTA (*arising*)

Ah, no, do not say it.

Certainly you would ask some frightening thing.

I knew it - I expected you - I was too happy.

GERMONT

Alfredo's father
asks you to decide the fate
of his two children.

VIOLETTA

His two children!

GERMONT

Yes.

God blessed me with a daughter,
like an angel in her purity;
if Alfredo refuses to return
to the bosom of his family,
the young man in love and beloved in turn,
who was soon to marry my daughter,
would reject this bond
on which our happiness depends.
Ah, do not be the cause of love's roses
changing into thorns.
Do not let your heart refuse
what I so fervently ask of you. No! No!

VIOLETTA

Ah, I understand - I must leave Alfredo
for a time. It will be painful
for me - yet -

GERMONT

That is not what I ask.

VIOLETTA

Heaven, what more can you ask!
I offered much!

GERMONT

But not enough.

VIOLETTA

You want me to give him up forever?

GERMONT

You must!

VIOLETTA

No - never! No, no!

Can you not see what tremendous,
burning love I feel for him,

I, who have no friends or family
among the living?

Don't you know that Alfredo swore
that I should find everything in him?

Don't you know that my life
is endangered by a terrible disease,
that I have but a short time to live?

To leave Alfredo forever?

Ah, the anguish would be so cruel
that I should prefer to die.

GERMONT

The sacrifice is great,
but hear me out patiently.
You are still young and beautiful -
in time -

VIOLETTA

Ah, say nothing more.

I understand - I cannot -

I shall never love anyone but him.

GERMONT

That may well be - but men are often fickle.

VIOLETTA

Oh God!

GERMONT

Once time has staled
the delights of love,
tedium will follow quickly.
Then what? Think -
Even the deepest feelings
can bring you no balm,
since this bond was never
blessed by heaven.

Germont's Masterful Manipulation

VIOLETTA

It's true! It's true!

GERMONT

Ah, then lay aside this beguiling dream.

VIOLETTA

It's true! It's true!

GERMONT

Be rather the consoling angel
of my family.

Violetta. Think -

You still have time.

Young lady, it is God who inspires
these words on a father's lips.

VIOLETTA

All hope of rising again is forever gone.
For the wretched woman who erred one day!
Even if God grants her mercy charitably
Man will always be implacable.

GERMONT

Be rather the consoling angel of my family.

VIOLETTA (*then, to Germont as she weeps*)

Oh, tell your daughter, so lovely and pure,
that a poor and wretched woman,
who has but one precious thing in life -
will sacrifice it for her - and then will die!

GERMONT

Weep, weep, poor girl. I see now
that the sacrifice I asked could not be greater.
Within my heart I feel what you must suffer;
be brave, your noble heart will conquer all.

VIOLETTA

Tell your daughter, so lovely and pure,
that a poor and wretched woman,
who has but one precious thing in life -
will sacrifice it for her - and then will die!

GERMONT

I see now that the sacrifice
I asked could not be greater,
within my heart I feel what you must suffer,
be brave, your noble heart will conquer all.
Weep, poor girl.

VIOLETTA

Tell me what I must do.

GERMONT

Tell him you don't love him.

VIOLETTA

He won't believe me.

GERMONT

Go away, then.

VIOLETTA

He will follow me.

GERMONT

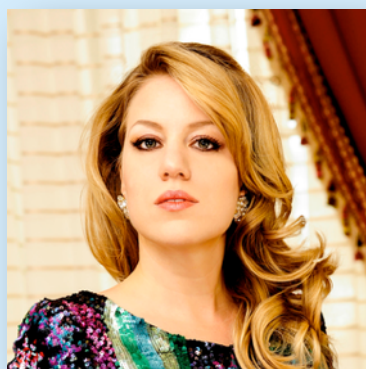
Then -

VIOLETTA

Embrace me as if I were your daughter -
it will give me strength.
(*They embrace.*)

Who's Who in *La Traviata*

While reading the Synopsis, use the worksheet below to chart the characteristics and relationships of the main characters in the opera. (Ex. Draw a line between Alfredo and Giorgio Germont and write father/son to indicate their relationship.)



Violetta Valéry



Alfredo Germont



Giorgio Germont

