

Title: *La Traviata*  
Composer: Giuseppe Verdi  
Librettist: Francesco Maria Piave  
Premiere: March 6, 1853  
Production: Production from San Francisco Opera  
Estimated run time: 3:00  
Intermissions: 2

Plot summary:

**ACT I:** A party is taking place at the home of Violetta Valéry, the most famous courtesan in all of Paris. Gastone arrives and presents his friend, Alfredo Germont, telling Violetta that Alfredo has long been a silent admirer, calling every day during her illness to ask about her. Violetta's lover Baron Douphol is angered by the conversation and refuses to propose a toast when invited to by Gastone. Alfredo accepts the invitation and sings an impassioned tribute to beauty and love. Later, as the others go to another room to dance, Violetta is overcome by a fainting spell. Alfredo stays behind and confesses that he has been in love with her for a year. Violetta tells him his love won't last but gives him a flower, bidding him return when it has withered. Alfredo joyously accepts and bids her goodnight. When her guests have gone, Violetta imagines Alfredo's proffered love—the one forbidden thing for any courtesan—but finally rejects love, declaring that she must remain forever free to pass from pleasure to pleasure.

**ACT II, Scene 1:** Violetta is living with Alfredo in the country, having abandoned her life as the most desired woman in Paris. Annina, Violetta's maid and confidante, enters and tells Alfredo she has been sent to arrange the sale of Violetta's property, which must be sold to pay their debts. Alfredo suddenly understands the sacrifices that Violetta has made in order to live with him and leaves for Paris, determined not to be shamed by her monetary support. Violetta receives an unexpected visitor, Giorgio Germont. When Germont comments on the luxury of the country retreat, Violetta shows him the papers that have been prepared for the sale of her possessions. He asks her to give up Alfredo, explaining that their relationship is endangering the impending marriage of Alfredo's younger sister. Germont tells Violetta that from his POV, their bond is not blessed by the church, nor would produce a legitimate family and in fact, would ruin any social standing Alfredo's middle-class family has. Germont finally convinces Violetta, who agrees to leave Alfredo forever, and is writing to Alfredo as he returns. Alfredo, not realizing his father has already arrived, explains that Germont has written him a severe letter but he feels sure his father will approve of Violetta as soon as he sees her. Pretending to leave so as not to be present during the meeting of father and son, Violetta goes out. A messenger returns with Violetta's letter of farewell. Alfredo is stricken with grief at the loss of Violetta, and when his father tries to persuade him to return to his family, Alfredo refuses. Finding an invitation that Flora had sent Violetta, Alfredo's worst nightmare that Violetta would go back to the Baron has come true.

**Scene 2:** Flora and her lover, the Marquis, are throwing a party full of adult entertainment for the most important aristocracy in Paris. Alfredo arrives as the guests are beginning to gamble, followed by Violetta, escorted by Baron Douphol. Alfredo, victorious in gambling explains that he who is unlucky in love is lucky at cards. The Baron, incensed at Alfredo's insolence, challenges him to play. Alfredo accepts and beats the Baron repeatedly at high stakes. When all the others go to dinner, Violetta remains behind to entreat Alfredo to leave lest the Baron challenge him to a duel. Alfredo answers that he will leave, but only if she accompanies him. Unable to reveal her true feelings, Violetta declares that she is in love with the Baron. Alfredo, in a frenzy of jealousy, calls all the guests into the room and in a rage, throws money at Violetta's feet, proclaiming that he has paid her in full. Germont enters just in time to see Alfredo's violent behavior and joins the others in condemning him for his conduct. Alfredo, realizing

the lengths to which his jealousy has carried him, is contrite but realizes that he is helpless to make amends. The Baron assures Alfredo that he must answer for the insult on the field of honor.

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

Director's notes: The director, Shawna Lucey, subtly restores women's agency and autonomy to a work that reinscribes women's financial and emotional dependence on men

Areas of sensitivity: Violetta's health worsens over the course of the story, and at the end she dies onstage. Some singers choose to depict this health condition through onstage coughing.

Dancers of multiple genders wear costumes where half of the costume is a traditional male-presenting look and half is a traditional female-presenting look.

An irreverent portrayal of a clergy member is the character or the "Naughty Cardinal."

Nomenclature: Violetta Valery is a paid companion of her clients. While a courtesan often is associated with sex work, that Violetta is a sex worker is not made explicit in this production, and we should avoid discussing the character in a way that identifies her as a sex worker.