

Preview

Opera Circle's *Traviata* — conversations with Violetta (Dorota Sobieska) & Alfredo (Matthew Miles)

by Mike Telin



After the premiere of *La traviata* in March of 1853, Verdi wrote to composer, conductor and friend Emanuele Muzio: “*La traviata* last night a failure. Was the fault mine or the singers'? Time will tell.”

Today Verdi’s opera has not only found a place in the standard operatic repertoire, but during the 2012/13 season it was ranked first on Operabase’s list of the most performed operas in the world.

On Friday February 29 at 7:30 pm and Sunday, March 2 at 3:00 pm, Opera Circle presents Verdi’s *La traviata* at the Bohemian National Hall. The cast includes Dorota Sobieska as the famed courtesan Violetta Valéry, Matthew Miles as her young love interest Alfredo Germont, and José Andrade as Giorgio Germont, Alfredo’s meddling father. Conductor Robert L. Cronquist leads the Cleveland Women’s Orchestra.

“What I love about Verdi is that there’s always a tune,” Matthew Miles said by telephone during a rehearsal break. “I’ve loved learning the part, it’s been so much fun.” “Musically it’s one of the best operas ever written,” Dorota Sobieska added during the conversation. “But it’s not just the great tunes but the emotional highlights as well.” Miles describes the opera as “heart-wrenching but at the same time there are moments of hope. Today we all know what is going to happen in the end but I think the audience lives for the hopeful moments.”

The opera opens during a lavish party given by Violetta. The scene includes 'Libiano ne' lieti calici' (Drink from the joyful cup), one of the most famous tunes in all of opera. But why does Alfredo jump at the chance to make the toast once the Baron refuses? “I think Alfredo is just doing anything that he can to get Violetta’s attention, Miles said. “I think it’s that simple. He sees it as an opportunity to show her just how wonderfully cool and collected he is. And he does come up with a toast off the cuff that’s actually quite poetic, romantic and flirty. The opera is heart-wrenching but at the same time there are moments of hope. You know what is going to happen throughout the entire opera but I think the audience lives for the hopeful moments.”

Yes, Violetta is a courtesan but why does Sobieska think audiences love her so much? “She knows how to really love to the point that she is willing to sacrifice everything for it. And people love that type of character. She goes through a very difficult time and dies in the end, and it’s all for love. There is something extraordinary about her.”

Miles thinks that Alfredo’s attraction to Violetta represents a way for him to go against his father. “He doesn’t choose the quiet church girl that his father would prefer, he chooses the exact opposite. Alfredo wants to become his own man and in many ways wants to rebel.”

Still, Sobieska says that it is Alfredo’s father who is the real cause of the couple's troubles. “He came to Violetta and told her to get out of his son's life. 'You are destroying the reputation of my son and my family, and if you love him you’ll leave'. It is this kind of [family drama] that is easy for audiences to identify with.’

Sobieska describes Violetta as a dream role, one she has wanted to perform for a long time. “It shows that eternal movement of a woman’s mind and heart. And people joke that you really need three sopranos to perform the role of Violetta: a coloratura in the first act, a lyric soprano in the second and a dramatic in the third. This is a lot of territory to cover, but I do like the variety.”

Dorota Sobieska and Matthew Miles agree that way the opera fits together makes it a complete experience for the audience. The drama, the myriad of emotions on stage and Verdi’s music are all qualities that make it a classic.

But what happens to Alfredo after the opera ends? Miles says in his epilogue there is a period of time when Alfredo heart remains broken, “but I think he eventually does move on. During one of Violetta’s last lines she gives him her picture and says that if he finds a girl who wants to marry him, do it — and tell her there is an angel in heaven blessing the marriage. And yes, I think he does eventually find that young girl.”

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