

Lost in the desert of Paris, redeemed by love:

Verdi's La Traviata

Verdi's lush tale of forbidden love, despair, and death in mid-19th century Paris was inspired by real life – a torrid affair of the heart between Alexander Dumas *fils*, son of the famous author of *The Three Musketeers*, and a lovely young courtesan named Marie Duplessis, celebrated for her fragile beauty and advantageous liaisons. In 1848, Dumas immortalized their brief months of rapture in *La Dame aux camélias* (*The Lady of the Camellias*), his short novel that shocked even sophisticated Parisians by its sexual frankness and depiction of the glamorous underworld of the *demimondes* and their wealthy admirers. The novel appeared only a few months after Marie's death at age 23 from tuberculosis; Marie was renamed 'Marguerite Gautier' and Dumas signaled his deep personal attachment to the story by giving her lover, Armand Duval, his own initials (echoing Marie's romantic name for him, 'Adet'). Dumas subsequently adapted his novel for the stage, and Verdi may have seen a performance of the play when he visited Paris on business in February 1852.

In Verdi's opera, the 'fallen woman' (*la traviata*, literally, 'one who had strayed from the path') is named Violetta Valery, and her lover is called Alfredo Germont. Francesco Maria Piave's libretto for Verdi's opera follows Dumas' playscript quite closely; the slightly condensed action highlighting the intense emotions of the lovers as they meet, unite, and then are parted by death.

Everett McCorvey, Director of the UK Opera Theatre, is the Executive Producer, and John Nardolillo is the Musical Director for this production, conducting the University Symphony Orchestra. Cliff Jackson is Head Vocal Coach with Tedrin Blair Lindsay assisting. The costumes are by

Marie Henderson and Lexington Stage Costumes, and the lighting design is by Tanya Harper, with Marc Schlackman as Production Supervisor.

Jim Rodgers, recently retired from the UK Department of Theatre, is the Stage Director.

Rodgers joins a long line of distinguished theatrical directors (including Alfred Lunt, Tyrone Guthrie, and Franco Zeffirelli) who have directed Dumas' masterpiece in one form or another. An immediate challenge was the Italian libretto – unfamiliar with that language, Rodgers found himself at first frequently asking the singers "What did you just say?" However, this initial barrier soon yielded to his directorial skills as he taught the cast to express the emotional message of their sung lines through effective body language, particularly by carefully directed eye contact. Although Verdi set the opera in the mid-19th Century (the actual time of Dumas' story), the UKOT production is set in the late 1880s, for two reasons: the sets rented from Virginia Opera represented interior scenes from the later period, and the stage of the Lexington Opera House is too small to comfortably accommodate 16 female cast members wearing mid-19th Century hoop skirts.

Rodgers commented that the experience of directing *La Traviata* has taught him an essential difference between the composers Giacomo Puccini and Giuseppe Verdi: in his view, Puccini is 'a great storyteller', while Verdi focuses on the individual details of character of the men and women who people his operas. For example, Mimi in Puccini's *La Bohème* and Violetta in *La Traviata* share several obvious characteristics: they are young, essentially sweet-tempered girls who enjoy multiple romantic adventures before dying (gracefully) of 'consumption'. However, Mimi's character does not

La Traviata cont'd from page 1

change significantly in the course of her opera – she dies as she lived, still innocent of evil, while Violetta’s heedless hedonistic girl of Act I matures forcibly before our eyes in Act II into a strong woman capable of sacrificing her love and her life to the stern bourgeois morality of Alfredo’s father, Giorgio Germont. Alfredo, too, undergoes a transformation from adoring lover (Act I) to enraged, abusive accuser (Act III), who insults Violetta without seeing the reality of her love for him. The elder Germont, the third principal character in this agonized triad, appears “almost like a villain” (in Rodgers’ words) in Act II when he confronts Violetta in her own home, expecting to find a frivolous strumpet bent on ruining his son. He demands that she abandon Alfredo to save his family’s honor, but then, amazed by her dignity and the depth of her love, he rushes to protect her from his son’s rage in the following act and tenderly comforts her like a daughter in the final scene of the opera. These are strong transformations indeed, surprising and painful to witness and supported by music of the highest emotional impact.

The story unfolds in a headlong, naturalistic manner, moving easily from the brittle, sophisticated gaiety of Act I to the pathos of Violetta’s death in Act IV. But Rodgers points out that for one long moment in Act III, in the midst of the feverish hubbub of Flora’s party, the action stops abruptly as each of the main characters voices his or her innermost private thoughts: Violetta in mortal anguish, Alfredo insane with rage, his father embarrassed by his son’s violent outbursts, and Flora and the others aghast at this terrible turn of events. Verdi bares the soul of each individual with a wonderful economy of means, and “that”, says Rodgers, “is his genius”.

Thanks to the ‘deep bench’ of vocal talent in the UKOT program, almost all of the primary roles in this UKOT production are double-cast, singing on alternate nights. The role of Violetta Valery will be sung by sopranos Darla Diltz and Catherine Clarke, understudies by Adrianalia Moputz. Sopranos Anne Fuchs and Sarah Klopfenstein will share the role of Flora Bervoix, Violetta’s amiable fellow and mezzo sopranos Sarah Downs and Andrea Childress alternate as Violetta’s faithful maid, Annina. The dashing Alfredo Germont will be sung by tenor Jeremy Cady on October 6, 7, and 13 (understudied by Vincent Davis); on October 15, Gregory Turay takes this role in a special Benefit Performance to support the new UK Opera Orchestra Fund. Baritones Keith Dean and David Baker share *BRAVO!*

the role of Alfredo’s stern father, Giorgio Germont, tenors Mark Kano and Jason Vest will appear alternately as Alfredo’s friend Gastone de Letorières, and bass-baritones Dan O’Brien and Eric Brown will portray Violetta’s physician, Dottore Grenville. Baritone Bradley Williard appears as Alfredo’s rival in love, the sinister Baron Douphol, bass Christopher Baker sings the role of Flora’s friend, the Marchese D’Obigny, and tenor Brendon Marsh is Violetta’s servant Giuseppe.

The Chorus includes 34 UK vocal music students, joined by three members of the Lexington Singers, who appear in this production as guests at the lavish balls given by Violetta and Flora, Spanish entertainers (dancers, matadors, picadors, and gypsies), and servants. The set is from Virginia Opera.

The evening performances of *La Traviata* on October 6 (Friday), October 7 (Saturday), and October 13 (Friday) begin at 7:30 pm at the Lexington Opera House. On October 15 (Sunday), the special matinee Benefit Performance begins at 2 pm. Please call the UKOT Office (859-257-9331) for information about the alternating casts.

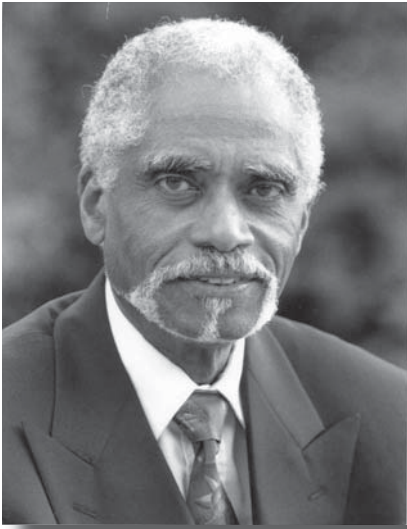
*Coming Up at UKOT!
Mark your calendars!*

Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions
Saturday, October 28, 2006 at
1:00 PM at Memorial Hall
MASTER CLASS: Sunday, October
29, 2006 at 2:00 PM
Both events **FREE** and open to the public!
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Giacomo Puccini’s *La Boheme*
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VSOP: Very Special Opera Performance
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Accompanied by Warren Jones,
Internationally Heralded Pianist
Monday, January 29, 2007 at 7:30

Acclaimed Tenor George Shirley to Conduct Master Class



Internationally acclaimed opera virtuoso, George Shirley, will preside as one of the judges for the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions to be held on October 28th. The following afternoon he will conduct a public master class for selected singers. One of America's most versatile tenors and enlightened musicians,

George Shirley is in demand nationally and internationally as performer, teacher, lecturer and most recently narrator.

He has won international acclaim for his performances with the Metropolitan Opera, Royal Opera (Covent Garden, London), Deutsche Oper (Berlin), Teatro Colón, (Buenos Aires), Netherlands Opera (Amsterdam), L'Opéra (Monte Carlo), New York City Opera, Scottish Opera (Glasgow), Chicago Lyric Opera, San Francisco Opera, Washington Opera, Michigan Opera Theater, Glyndebourne Festival, Spoleto Festival, and Santa Fe Opera, among others. Mr. Shirley has recorded for RCA, COLUMBIA, DECCA, ANGEL, VANGUARD, CRI, and PHILIPS; he received a GRAMMY AWARD in 1968 for his role (Ferrando) in the prize-winning RCA recording of Mozart's *Così fan Tutte*, which has been re-issued on compact disc. A recording on the Capriccio label, released in the fall of 1996, features George Shirley as narrator of two poems by James Forsyth, "Spirit of St. Louis" and "Ruth", set to the music of the late Franz Waxman. The Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester of Berlin is conducted by Lawrence Foster. His most recent narration was "Three Places in New England" by Charles Ives with the Chicago Symphony. George Shirley has performed more than 80 operatic roles over the span of his 40-year career, as well as oratorio and concert literature with some of the world's most renowned conductors (Solti, Klemperer, Stravinsky, Ormandy, von Karajan, Cohn Davis, Böhm, Ozawa, Haitink, Boult, Leinsdorf, Boulez, Muti, DePreist, Krips, Cleve, Dorati, Pritchard, Bernstein, Prevtali, Maazel, et al.). In New York, he produced a series of radio programs for WQXR-FM

called "Classical Music and the Afro-American". The City of Detroit and the State of Michigan have honored this Wayne State University graduate on numerous occasions. From his Alma Mater Professor Shirley has received both the Alumni Association and Arts Achievement Awards. In November, 1996 he was honored with the Wayne State University Organization of Black Alumni Achievement Award. He was the first African-American to be appointed to a high school teaching position in music in Detroit, and later became the first black member of the United States Army Chorus in Washington, DC. He was the first black tenor and second African--American male to sing leading roles with the Metropolitan Opera, where he remained for eleven years as leading artist. In June of 1996 he sang the role of Herod Antipas in Richard Strauss' opera *Salome* to close the inaugural season of The Michigan Opera Theatre's new Detroit Opera House. He performed the role of Sportin' Life in Gershwin's opera *Porgy and Bess* during the summer of 1998 at the Bregenz Festival in Austria. This was the first time in his lengthy career that Mr. Shirley had performed the role in a staged production of what is arguably America's most famous verismo opera. George Shirley was selected as one of the Distinguished Scholar-Teachers for the school year 1985-86 at the University of Maryland, College Park, where he served as Professor of Voice from 1980 to 1987. He was invited to join the faculty of the School of Music of the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, in September, 1987. At their July, 1992 meeting, the University of Michigan Board of Regents named George Shirley The Joseph Edgar Maddy Distinguished University Professor of Music. Professor Shirley holds honorary degrees from Wilberforce University, Montclair State College, Lake Forest College, and the University of Northern Iowa. He has served as a Senior Fellow in the University of Michigan Society of Fellows. He is a member of Alpha Phi Alpha, Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia, Pi Kappa Lambda, Phi Kappa Phi, and Omicron Delta Kappa. He is also a National Patron of Delta Omicron, a member of the American Academy of Teachers of Singing, a member of the Board of Directors of the University of Michigan Musical Society, the Board of Trustees of the Aspen Music Festival and School, the Santa Fe Opera and a former member of the Executive Board of the Horace H. Rackham Graduate School of the University of Michigan.

Information on Mr. Shirley provided by Ann Summers International

Metropolitan Opera

National Council Auditions set for October 28th

One of Lexington's most anticipated annual events, the Metropolitan Opera National Council District Auditions, hosted by the Lexington Opera Society, returns to Memorial Hall on October 28th. Serving as judges for this year's event are tenor George Shirley (see story on page 4); Peter Clark, associate press director of the Metropolitan Opera; and mezzo-soprano Katherine Ciesinski.

Peter Clark works with media writers, critics, editors, and producers to publicize the Met, its performances and its artists. His years of experience at the Met, added to his own musical education, have given him a deep knowledge of the art form, the artists, and the business of opera. He holds a Master of Music degree from New England Conservatory, where he majored in vocal performance. His undergraduate studies at the University of Georgia included a double major in music and European history. After graduate school he studied in programs with Boris Goldovsky, Phyllis Curtin, and, in Italy, Cesare Bardelli, and pursued voice lessons in new York with Joan Patenaude.

Turning to administrative work, he worked as an assistant to Leonard Bernstein and as an editor at Stagebill Magazine, before joining the Metropolitan Opera's marketing staff in 1981, where he was director of advertising and promotions until 1987. From 1987 to 1989 he served as marketing director of Pepsico Summerfare, an avant-garde performing arts

festival, then returned to the Met in 1989 in the press department. His work often includes writing about opera and singers, historical notes, and related subjects.

Miss Ciesinski, who will conduct a master class prior to the vocal competition (for those not competing in the auditions), has sung leading roles at the Metropolitan, Covent Garden, Paris, San Francisco, Santa Fe and Houston Grand Operas. A soloist with the Berlin, Vienna, London, Staatskapelle Dresden, Philadelphia, Chicago, and Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestras, among many others, she has served as artist-in-residence at major festivals in the United States, France, Taiwan, Austria, Finland and Italy. She is director of Close Encounters vocal chamber institute at the Texas Music Festival and is a regular clinician at the International Symposium on the Care of the Professional Voice. She was a Grammy nominee in 1992 and has recordings on the Decca, Erato, BMG, Music Masters, RCA, Columbia, Nonesuch, and CRI labels. Her television appearances have included four PBS Great Performances programs, as well as numerous National Public Radio World of Opera broadcasts. Ms. Ciesinski is in her thirteenth year as Professor of Voice at Moores School of Music, University of Houston.

While there is no charge to attend the auditions, a donation of \$5 is suggested to help defray the costs of the event. (See page 2 for times)



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in Giuseppe Verdi's
La Traviata

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Lexington Opera House

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Scholarship Endowment Fund
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Tedrin's Recording Corner #2

Hello, opera audiophiles! For this second installment of my recording column, I want to direct you to a few fabulous American opera offerings. My love of Beverly Sills is no secret, and *The Ballad of Baby Doe* (Deutsche Grammophon 289 465 148-2) is one of my main reasons why! This glorious 1956 opera by Douglas Moore and John LaTouche portrays the title character through six beautiful arias and a number of ensembles, and this 1959 New York City Opera recording features baritone Walter Cassel and mezzo Frances Bible in their primes as the other main characters in the story's love triangle. The unmistakably American flavor of the robust and tuneful music gives the opera sweeping pageantry and patriotism, especially as conducted by Emerson Buckley. And still, the single best aspect of this recording is Sills' gorgeous, heartfelt singing and acting of *Baby Doe*. Her final aria, "Always through the changing," is worth the price of the two-CD set alone – I always have to listen to it at least twice, with a tissue in hand!



I also have been listening frequently of late to two different sopranos' albums of American opera arias. One is Renée Fleming's *I Want Magic!* (London 289 460 567-2), superbly supported by James Levine and

the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, and sumptuously recorded. The diva's singing is simply thrilling on this recording. I also cannot recommend highly enough Dawn Upshaw's *The World So Wide* (Nonesuch 79458-2), magnificently partnered by David Zinman and the Orchestra of St. Luke's. Both singers have chosen their imaginative repertoire well for their unique talents, and together provide an excellent cross-section of the best of American opera. Between them, they offer nineteen selections, with only one duplication ("Ain't It a Pretty Night" from Carlisle Floyd's *Susannah*). Like me, you will listen to these wonderful CDs over and over again with deepening insight and appreciation!

Preparing for Alfredo - Turay style

It's by no accident that Gregory Turay is a successful tenor performing on the stages of the world's major opera houses and concert halls. He has, and continues to work hard at perfecting his craft. Take his approach to learning the role of Alfredo in the UKOT production of *La Traviata*. He began researching the opera back in May when Dr. McCorvey first approached him about singing it for UKOT. "There are so many levels that you work through," he said during our chat. These levels included reading the libretto and books and plays upon which the opera is based. "You get the background research and then you try to find some recordings that are noteworthy and speak with other singers on the subject. Then you start singing through it on the vowels and then add the consonants and then translate it all – the whole thing – you know, find out where the phrase is moving, the verb and what tense is the verb and that sort of thing. Basically, you try and sing one act per month. So it's a pretty complex process."

One of the singers to whom he has turned for advice about singing Italian operas is none other than Luciano Pavarotti who told him that *La Traviata* is one of the last Verdi operas that the Italian tenors learn. This, according to Turay, is because it is very dramatic and the

singer uses the middle voice. "You can really beat your voice up and then it gets too heavy and you basically shorten your career if you're singing too heavily," he explained. "The hardest thing about it," he continued, "is the passion associated with it and the fact that it sits lower in the register than say, the Duke in *Rigoletto*. That part sits higher and you can't necessarily have as much passion because there is no way you'd make the notes. Your voice will tell you that you are trying to push it and you are not able to hit the high notes the way you want to. In this (the role of Alfredo) you can kind of bark your way and scream your way through and then after a few days realize that wasn't really right either. A few months later you're asking yourself why your voice is so heavy and it's because this is a chestier role." Turay is pleased to have the opportunity to learn this difficult role in a more relaxed setting with his long-time coaches Cliff Jackson and Everett McCorvey. The beneficiaries of course, will be the those in the audience for this very special performance on October 15th.

A Visit with Gregory Turay.....part 1



In 1995, at the age of 21, UK vocal student Gregory Turay burst upon the opera scene, winning three prestigious competitions: the Young Concert Artists Competition, the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, and the Catherine E. Pope Foundation Award. As a result, he was invited to join the Lindemann Young Artist Program

were contracted to do small roles on stage and were covering the larger roles. Then you were encouraged to attend the performances.” The young tenor spent his spare time attending rehearsals, feeling that he would benefit more from the rehearsal experience than perhaps the performance itself. Gregory credits his ability to transition smoothly from the university community to the most prominent opera house in the world to his voice teacher and mentor, Dr. Everett McCorvey. He says of McCorvey, “He was my mentor in every facet, actually not just in singing, but in life.” McCorvey kept in touch with his gifted young student on an almost daily basis. The UK opera impresario drew upon his own experiences living in New York and performing in Europe to advise Turay. Gregory says, “I would phone him up and say, ‘You know this is happening,’ and he’d say, ‘Well, you should do this and this,’ and he’d just remind me of those basic concepts of singing that you get down then you forget. You need to be reminded.” He also is grateful for the support and coaching he received from James Levine, Marlena Mala, and Gail Robinson, who at the time was the director of the Lindemann Young Artist Program at the Metropolitan Opera. For the last several years his schedule has kept him on the road performing in the U.S., England, Europe, and Japan. When asked what a year in his life is

at the Metropolitan Opera. He has appeared at the Metropolitan Opera for the last ten seasons. In a couple of weeks, the talented young tenor, described by the *Times* of London as “one of the brightest natural talents to have emerged from the U.S. in recent years,” will sing the role of Alfredo in the UK Opera Theatre production of Verdi’s *La Traviata*. Gregory graciously took the time to chat about his career and the world of opera. After winning the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, Greg returned to the University of Kentucky to complete his undergraduate degree and begin work on his master’s degree. “They offered me an apprenticeship in their three year program,” he said, “but I didn’t feel I was really technically ready vocally and so I turned it down and came back here for a year to study. Fortunately for me, they kept an open invitation for the next season and I did return to the Met.” He remembers the early days at the Met as a whirlwind. “There was so much more work to do in the Met program in terms of study – we had the voice lessons outside the theatre and we had coaching non-stop inside the theatre. Also at that time, the young artists



like, he says, “If you’d asked me a few years ago, I would have said it was just about travel – from one gig to the next – but I’m settling in more in New York, accepting more things there, even if they are just covers, so I can be home with my family.”

The family includes wife Courtney, who directed the children's chorus for UKOT's production of *The Little Prince*; sons Benjamin, 5, Ethan, 2; and new daughter, Madeline, born this past May.

The Turays owned a home in Lexington until recently and hope to someday return as residents. "One of the main reasons we bought a home in Lexington," explained Turay, "was to be near Dr. McCorvey and to have voice lessons with him again – on a more consistent basis, because I wasn't getting that in New York – I tried a few teachers in New York and wasn't real happy. I thought I would be a great opportunity to be close to him, to be near the University – Courtney and I like the town and we made many friends here – unfortunately, we had to sell the house because we never were here – it never worked out – the family was here and I was in New York or traveling. I'm dropping little hints about coming back and teaching. I'd really like to be in a community like this where we can settle down and raise a family – so who knows?" Today his daily routine consists of work at the Metropolitan Opera and rehearsing for upcoming

productions for which he is covering or in which he is scheduled to perform. In addition, Turay practices at least three hours a day. This summer he spent a month in Madrid performing. Concerts provide a substantial infusion of performance pay, explains Turay. "Last season, in the fall, I had three or four concerts back-to-back and it ended up lasting about a month and I made five times as much as doing an opera." Greg acknowledges that it takes a creative manager to schedule such concert performances. Ten years ago, when Gregory first won the Metropolitan Opera competition, there was a lot of "buzz," as Greg calls it, about him. He then experienced a period where the "buzz" died down, but he feels that now it is back on the increase and thus he must pursue all opportunities for performing and put the thought of settling down in a place like Lexington on the back burner. "Dr. McCorvey tells me that I still have much ahead of me and it's not time to settle down as yet," says Greg.

Pat Trotter

Here's to Your Voice...



Acute vocal ailments are the most pressing for a singer and performer when they occur shortly before a performance. Most commonly due to vocal fatigue or a viral illness, the sudden onset of hoarseness evokes thoughts of a career-ending injury. Proper care of the professional voice usually helps to condition the vocal folds and avoid sudden injuries, yet even seasoned performers will have episodes where they will overdo their vocal use and cause some degree of fatigue and potential damage. Proper hydration, warming up and cooling down exercises around a performance, and proper care of your general health (allergies, reflux, etc.) are the best preventative measures.

Acute laryngitis is the diagnostic term for all short-term causes of hoarseness. If you experience an acute change in your voice while performing, vocal trauma is most likely and a period of vocal rest may be necessary. If a hemorrhage of the vocal fold is seen, the absolute vocal rest is mandate for a period of 5-7 days, and singing can resume only after you have been cleared by your voice physician. Fortunately, this is a rare occurrence. More commonly, the vocal fold edges become

swollen and prevent proper voicing, requiring a short period of reduced voice use and medical therapies which often include steroids. A viral syndrome can produce the same effect on the vocal folds and require similar treatment. Steam inhalation and increased hydration speed recovery in these instances. Most importantly, you should never force your voice when it is not working properly; otherwise, chronic changes can develop and a longer course of vocal inactivity may result.

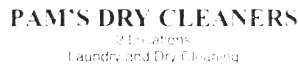
The most appropriate way to manage your vocal instrument is to take good care of it and to know when to rest it. A thorough examination by a voice professional (otolaryngologist) may be necessary if, after 5-7 days of limited use, your voice is not back to normal OR if you have a pressing engagement coming up quickly. Remember that poor care of the **speaking** voice can lead to problems with the singing voice. And, don't forget to "breathe." In the next article I will cover the topic of the aging voice. Until then, "Here's to your Voice..."

Dr. Sandford Archer

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La Traviata

Giuseppe Verdi

October 6, 7, 13, 2006
at 7:30 pm
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Tickets \$12 - \$32
(group rates available)

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