



## Gala Reception at the Granada Verdi's *La Traviata*

By Robert F. Adams / Special to CASA

**T**WO SPECTACULAR PERFORMANCES OF GIUSEPPE VERDI'S POPULAR OPERA, *LA TRAVIATA*, were mounted by Opera Santa Barbara during the weekend of March 4th through the 6th, with gala festivities and receptions honoring participants and sponsors rounding out the events.

*La Traviata* denotes "the fallen woman" and tells a tale of tragic love between a Parisian courtesan, Violetta, and an earnest young suitor, Alfredo. The material originates from the 19th Century novel *La Dame aux Camélias* by Alexandre Dumas. Often performed on opera stages worldwide, noteworthy productions have featured Maria Callas, Dame Joan Sutherland, Plácido Domingo, and Kiri Te Kanawa.

The staging by Opera Santa Barbara's new Artistic Director José María Condemí was assured, integrating ballet, art, and acting at the same time. The festive party scenes worked particularly well. Costume Designer Elizabeth Poindexter and her astute creative team accomplished a great deal along with the scenic designer, evoking a long-gone Paris of the past. The visual theme revolved around the elegantly striking work of John Singer Sargent's fashionable paintings, especially *Madame X*, a sensational portrait from the Parisian art scene of the time. The two-level Eiffel Tower set was stunning, and indicated the era of "La Belle Époque" and the new materials that were reshaping the city. Even the window frame reverberated the architectural materials and fabrics of the period. Sparingly populated with set objects on the intimate stage, the



Duncan Mellichamp, Opera SB Board President; Suzanne Mellichamp; José María Condemí, Artistic Director; Franziska Faganello; and Honorable Nicola Faganello, Consul General of Italy in Los Angeles

production revealed the classic sensibility, almost film-like, of the interiors.

The look offered echoed dramatic novels and films from Europe such as *Madame Bovary*, *Camille Claudel*, and, more recently, Nicole Kidman's *Moulin Rouge*.

The singing from the cast and chorus, in the original Italian, was excellent throughout the four-act opera. Baritone Malcolm MacKenzie was stellar as Alfredo's overly protective father Giorgio, and it was a highlight to hear the rich authority he brought to the role. Tenor Ryan MacPherson, as Alfredo, had a transparent romantic quality, capturing the character's helplessness in the face of an impossible romance. Soprano Rebecca Davis, from the famed San Francisco Opera Merola Program, sang the tragic heroine, Violetta, with finessed coloratura, embracing the tragic trajectory of the character.

Haunting is merely one way to describe her powerful aria, *Addio del passato* (*So closes my sad story*) in the final act.

At the premiere, Maestro Valéry Ryvkin, conducted the live orchestra with flair. The rhythmic transitions were beautifully handled and the audience could feel tragic resonance emerge from the first sounds of the string passages of the overture. Singer Kristen Reed mentioned a story from the first rehearsal, when the conductor played the whole score on piano much to the surprise of the cast, indicating his special affinity for Verdi's music. When asked if conducting six *La Traviatas* previously made this production any easier, Ryvkin replied "It helps that I am familiar with *La Traviata*... but every production has a new set of challenges, with a different cast, and the changing dynamics are always at play. I strive to make it fresh every time I conduct this magnificent work."

After the performance, in the Founder's room at the Granada, Artistic Director José Marie Condemí paid tribute to the Opera Santa Barbara team that delivered such extraordinary results. Recognizing the contributions of the Opera's cast and orchestra, Condemí also credited General Director Steven Sharpe, the design team, the technical crew, and the ever-valued Board of Directors and Patrons including Duncan and Suzanne Mellichamp, among others. Opera Santa Barbara has



From Opera Santa Barbara's production of *La Traviata*



Valéry Ryvkin, Conductor; José María Condemí, Artistic Director; Ryan MacPherson (as Alfredo); Rebecca Davis (as Violetta); and Malcolm MacKenzie (as Giorgio)



Brooks Firestone; Kate Firestone; Gün Malmstrom Dukes; A.C. Moore; Dolly Granatelli; Ron Gallo; Andrea Gallo; and (front) Andy Granatelli



Deneen DeMarcos; Parker Montgomery; Carolina Montgomery; and John DeMarcos



(Back) Alberto Di Mauro, Director of the Italian Cultural Institute of Los Angeles; Honorable Nicola Faganello, Consul General of Italy in Los Angeles; Fred Sidon; T.J. Locker; and Bill Locker. (Front) Franziska Faganello; Diane Sidon; and Mahri Kerley



Craig Springer, Exec. Dir. of The Granada; Sarah Chrisman; and Roger Chrisman



Marsha Wolfe; Jim Wolfe; Rebecca Davis, *La Traviata's* Violetta; Jeff Wendorf; Sally Davis; and Tony Davis

made a mark on Santa Barbara's thriving cultural scene with this extraordinary production of *La Traviata*.

To learn more about upcoming performances and programs from Opera Santa Barbara, see them on the web at [www.OperaSB.org](http://www.OperaSB.org) or call (805) 898-3890 for more information.

Robert F. Adams, a Santa Barbara landscape architect, is a graduate of UCLA's School of Theatre and Film, as well as Cal Poly. He has served on the film selection committees for the Aspen Film Fest and the SB International Film Festival. Email him at [robert@earthknower.com](mailto:robert@earthknower.com).



Robert F. Adams

See more Photos by Priscilla at [santabarbaraseen.com](http://santabarbaraseen.com)  
Contact her at [priscilla@santabarbaraseen.com](mailto:priscilla@santabarbaraseen.com) • (805) 969-3301