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La Traviata – World Renowned Cast

LA Opera Season Opener Attended by Placido Domingo

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LOS ANGELES—Opening the 2006/07 Season of the LA Opera is the special presentation of Giuseppe Verdi's *La Traviata*, visually stunning, with the world renowned cast of Renée Fleming, Rolando Villazón, and Renato Bruson.

La Traviata marks LA Opera's first filming of the stage performance for DVD release by Decca. The sold-out Opening Night Gala on Saturday, September 9, 2006, at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, was marked by spectacular elegance. Fashionably dressed celebrities walked on the Pavilion's red carpet under the bright, reflecting chandeliers.

Receiving a warm welcome was the LA Opera's new music director, James Conlon, who was for over 25 years associated with the Metropolitan Opera, for 10 years as the Principal Conductor of the Paris Opera, and who appeared in many of the world's most important opera companies, such as La Scala, and the Royal Opera House Covent Garden, among others.

La Traviata is one of Verdi's most performed operas for its extraordinary arias filled with beautiful coloratura.

Early in the performance we see the American soprano Renée Fleming shining as the beautiful, charming, and very vulnerable Violetta Valéry, who bears her soul to her new admirer, Alfredo Germont.

In "Un di' felice eterea" Alfredo declares his love for Violetta with touching sincerity. However, Violetta engages our emotions and sympathy expressing, in "sempre libera" (Italian: forever free), her intent to live life commitment free.

Acknowledging that no man has ever stirred in her such overpowering feelings, Violetta finds it strange ("E' Strano") that maybe Alfredo would be the one for her ("Ah, fors'e' lui"). But in "Follia" (Italian: "Madness") she dismisses that possibility.

Fleming's moving performance effectively portrays Violetta's empty existence, eliciting in the audience her feelings of loneliness.



SOPRANO: Renée Fleming stars in *La Traviata* as Violetta. (Andrew Eccles/Decca)

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Contrasting high and low notes form the beautiful melodies that draw out Violetta's and Alfredo's emotional agony over their deeply shared love.

With a voice described as the "gold standard of soprano sound," Fleming's stylistic versatility continues to thrill us. Fleming's superb artistry earned her instatement as a Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur by the French government (2005). A two-time Grammy winner, Fleming has been an exclusive recording artist with Decca since 1995, and had film appearances in Phil Grabsky's 2006 documentary, *In Search of Mozart*, celebrating the 250th anniversary of the composer's birth, and in the 2006-07 release of the major motion picture, *Margaret*.

The internationally recognized lyric tenor, Mexican born Rolando Villazón, is exceptional as Alfredo, the role in which he made his Company debut in 2001. He has previously appeared with the LA Opera as Rinuccio in *Gianni Schicchi* and as Romeo in *Romeo et Juliette*.

He has been acclaimed for performances at leading theatres across the world including the Metropolitan Opera, Opera National de Paris, and the Royal Opera House.

Superbly directed by Marta Domingo, this LA Opera production of *La Traviata* is marked by a passionate open display of affection rarely seen on stage.

Villazón delivers an electrifying performance especially at one point where, although the music has stopped, there was no end to Villazón's long and passionate kissing of the irresistible Fleming, very long after the music ceased.

Less expressive, but firmly convincing, is the Italian baritone Renato Bruson's performance of Giorgio Germont. As Alfredo's authoritative father, Giorgio is driven by respect and family honor when he asks Violetta for the ultimate sacrifice. Bruson dramatically sings and performs his role with gentlemanly distinction.

Renato Bruson's prestigious career led to his appearance in the world's most important theatres and concert halls, earning himself a place as one of the most important baritones of our times. He was awarded the prestigious title of "Kammersänger" by the Wien Staatsoper, a title conferred to singers of outstanding merit.

Along with Kitty McNamee's eye-catching choreography, the beautiful sets and exuberant period costumes enhance the party scenes.

The evening was marked by exceptional performances by Ania Alkimova as Annina, mezzo-soprano Suzanna Guzmán as Flora Bervoix, tenor Daniel Montenegro as Gastone, baritone Lee Poulis as the Marquis D'Obigny, Philip Kraus as Baron Douphol, and bass James Creswell as Doctor Grenvil.

Following the annual Opening Night Gala Celebration was a dazzling evening of dining, and dancing to a live band, attended by LA Opera's General Director, Plácido Domingo. The extraordinary cast, especially Fleming, Villazón, and Bruson, brought the house down in a five minutes standing ovation. The entire orchestra was also invited to the stage to receive the rousing rounds of applause.

LA Opera's *La Traviata* radiates operatic artistry in its finest tradition, setting the tone for an exiting new season of opera in the City of the Angels.

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