

British Theatre Guide

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La Traviata

Giuseppe Verdi

Welsh National Opera in a new production by Patrice Caurier & Moshe Leiser

Mayflower, Southampton, and Touring

(2005)

Would a production of *La Traviata* set in modern times at last provide a happy ending to the tale that for 150 years has reduced audiences around the world to tears?

Welsh National Opera raised that remarkable prospect with their new production of the Verdi masterpiece directed by Patrice Caurier and Moshe Leiser. In a tolerant 21st century society Violetta's misspent youth is surely overlooked, Father Germont accepts her union with his son while, best of all, modern medicine cures the consumption and the couple live happily

Alas for a full house at the Mayflower Southampton, the magnificently sung Violetta of fast-rising Ukrainian star Olga Mykytenko escapes the perils of 19th century only to perish through MRSA in a deceptively clinical private ward.

Not that she could escape the 19th century at all, of course. Despite the directors' best efforts Dumas's tale of *The Lady of the Camellias* clings to her in all its essentials - inseparable from the gloriously passionate score itself.

In fact it isn't until the final, harrowing Act 3 death scene that we see just how far Caurier and Leiser have tried to move one of the most famous tragedies in musical theatre. After all, a gathering of the *demi-monde* in a high-class brothel looks the same whatever the century - presumably that is! The splendid WNO chorus of characters sing and animate as colourfully as ever, though, admittedly, in this production it is the ladies who are revealing more than usually.

In any case, so hugely gripped are we by the fine performance of tenor Peter Wedd, a lithe, passionate Alfredo, and the warmth of Miss Mykytenko's very rich soprano that period is the last thing on our minds. Even the Act 2 developments in the country house music room could be taking place any time over 100 years by the same piano!

So the final curtain up on that hospital ward is a bit of a shaker. Not quite a scene from *Casualty* - not enough staff for that - but the lone doctor's prognosis is clearly pessimistic. To be frank, the sight drives out any old-fashioned indulgence in romantic music and replaces it with a chill sense of the presence of death.

From all this the reader may assume that both designer Christian Fenouillat and costume designer Agostino Cavalca do their jobs well while Christopher Forey's lighting is also for the most part sympathetic (I take issue with the flatness of that ward).

If I have a serious complaint about this most watchable production, it concerns its rare form of inconsistency. But then I remember that only Act 3 is shown after the 9 pm watershed.

This production can be seen at Birmingham Hippodrome (March 29, & 31), Liverpool Empire (April 6 & 9) and Bristol Hippodrome April 12 & 15).

Reviewer: [Kevin Catchpole](#)