

# 'La Traviata'

by Harry Trebilcock  
The Community Concert Association presented the Goldovsky Grand Opera Theater production of Verdi's "La Traviata" last Wednesday. If I had to summarize the evening quickly it would be with a stunned murmuring of "Wot the Hell! Wot the Hell!" (hereafter referred to simply as "wthwth"), the classic comment from "Archy and Mehitabel." If you saw Garbo in "Camille," you know the plot. If you didn't see Garbo, the heroine is, to use the language of a more polite era, a Parisian courtesan, a lady who is available but strictly deluxe. She has the mandatory heart-of-gold and dies of consumption in the arms of her one true love. The cast was headed by Janice Marcoux, soprano, Robert Johnson, tenor, and Jake Gardner baritone. The conductor was Benton Hess.

The first shock came when the curtains parted several pages before Verdi indicated and on a set I found hard to comprehend, not having looked at the program. Verdi's stage directions specify that the scene opens in an elegant salon, following the Prelude. Instead, we were treated to some meaningless pantomime between the heroine and her maid during the Prelude. Considering the orchestral playing, this may have been intended to distract the listener, but I have a churlish liking for Verdi as written by Verdi (wthwth). Only when the houselights went on did I discover we were on the terrace of an elegant salon. I'd hate to see the set designer's concept of a slum.

The title role can be, and has been, sung by just about every type of soprano voice; light, heavy, or anywhere in between. Light voices get into trouble after Act One and heavier voices have problems singing all the rapid passages in Act One. Ms. Marcoux showed no favoritism; she was in trouble all evening. Her acting was confined to two movements. To show happiness, she thrust her pelvis forward and threw her left arm back over her head, much like a basketball player sinking a tricky shot. To show all other emotions, she lurched. Sometimes she lurched slow, sometimes fast, sometimes east, sometimes west; occasionally she coughed to remind the audience she was dying of TB, not acute vertigo.

Her singing had some lovely moments when the voice was reined in and the music was in the low or middle part of the voice. Unfortunately, much of her music involves the higher reaches of the voice, particularly at the most dramatic moments, and here the tone was either pinched, breathy or, when the voice was opened up, developed an alarming wobble. I would suggest Ms. Marcoux rethink her vocal method and take some lessons in rudimentary acting before she either loses her voice or dislocates a hip.

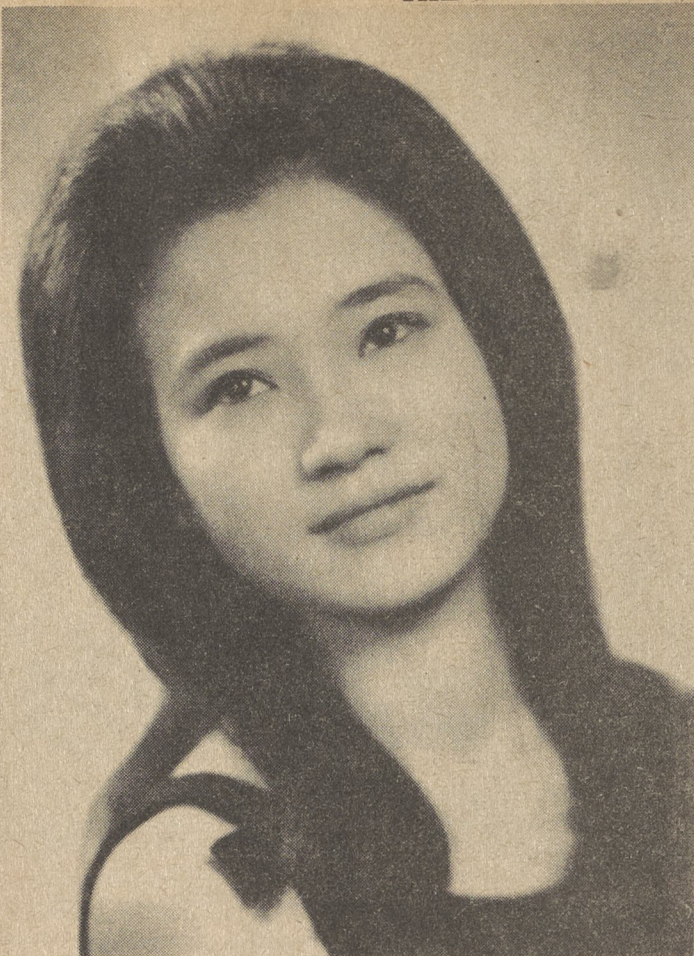
Mr. Johnson (her one true love) displayed a handsome

tenor voice, slightly short at the top. He looked like all Alfredo's should, young and slender, and he acted the part as well as anyone could, mainly by looking sad, happy, angry, or love-stricken when required. He moved like a human being, not like someone being manipulated by wires, and he had the good sense not to force his voice when singing with the soprano at full throttle. It created a vocal imbalance, but I have a feeling it is good for vocal longevity.

It was the baritone, Mr. Gardner, who stopped the show with his Act Two aria. He has a splendid, big voice and uses it skillfully and musically. His acting was dignified and restrained (about all the part calls for) and I couldn't help wondering how he managed it with Ms. Marcoux lurching at full speed all around him. His was the genuine success of the evening, and it was rewarding to hear the applause he received. Granted it was earned, but the true reward was in discovering once again that you can't really fool the public. Here was the genuine article and the audience recognized and acknowledged it. It made a hash of Verdi's drama, with the empathy one should feel with the soprano directed toward the baritone, but Verdi did not seem of much concern to anyone in this performance. ("wthwth")

The Act Two set was adequate, although I seriously doubt that redwood planter tubs with brass casings or ballpoint pens were part of nineteenth century decor. The Act Three set, a gambling salon (a ballroom in the original) was cramped and tacky. The Act Four set, the heroine's bedroom, was bigger than the gambling salon. Perhaps they order these things differently in France. The staging was incomprehensible at times (why did the guests keep turning around in Act Three?) and stiff at other points. Verdi gave the costume designer two choices, either 1700 or 1850. It was in keeping with the arbitrary nature of the production that the costumes were of the post-Civil War period. I suppose this was to avoid hoopskirts on the crowded stage. Ms. Marcoux in a hoopskirt would have been a serious hazard to anyone within a radius of 30 feet. The opera was sung in English, with improvised vowels. I don't like translations, but most of it was comprehensible and avoided archaisms. The less said of the orchestra the better.

I have gone on at this length because this is a great opera, one of my favorites, and it was distressing to see it dished up in this fashion. I never expected to see the day when the fourth act of "La Traviata" left me totally unmoved. Now I've seen the day. I should have stayed with Archy and Mehitabel. I can sympathize with a cockroach who has typing problems and, when you get right down to it, there is a good bit of the courtesan in Mehitabel. ("wthwth!")



Kinenko Okumura

## Kinenko Okumura, Guest Soloist at Misericordia

Ferdinand Liva, director of the Sinfonia da Camera, has announced Kinenko Okumura as the guest soloist for the chamber orchestra's concert at College Misericordia, Nov. 22. A concert violinist, Miss Okumura has just returned from a highly successful recital tour of her native Japan. In Tokyo, she performed in the Asahi-seimei Recital Hall and

then presented recitals in nearby cities, including Matsumoto. Miss Okumura began her career in Tokyo and later traveled to the U.S. under the auspices of a Fulbright scholarship. Her American debut was a recital in the Museum of the City of New York and was rapidly followed by appearances with major orchestras.

Following performances in this country, she studied in Italy, toured Europe, and returned to study at Juilliard, again under full scholarship. Earlier this year, she performed at the Tiffany Falls Performing Workshop.

With the Sinfonia da Camera, Miss Okumura will present Vivaldi's "The Seasons." The concert will be held in Walsh Auditorium at Misericordia and is scheduled to begin at 8:30 p.m. Tickets will be available at the door. The final concert of the season for the Sinfonia da Camera is scheduled for April 8.

## Retired State Workers Plan Meeting, Nov. 20

The Luzerne-Columbia Chapter of the Pennsylvania Association of Retired State Employees will meet at 7:30 p.m., Nov. 20, in the UGI Community Room, 270 Wyoming Ave., Kingston. Delegates to the State Conclave held at Hershey will report on projects for 1975. All retired state employees are invited to attend.

## Dallas UM Church Plans Film, Nov. 23

On Nov. 23 at 2 p.m., at Dallas United Methodist Church, the film "Run Wild, Run Free" will be shown. This award winning film is a full length feature film based on the book "The White Colt." First shown in theatres across the country in 1970, it was acclaimed by Parent's Magazine as one of the 10 best family films of the year.

The story concerns a confused and troubled young boy, his struggle with life and his victory over adversity through his love for a white horse.

The Council on Ministries of the Dallas United Methodist Church invites all children of the community to see this outstanding film. A donation of 50 cents is asked to defray the cost. This film is the first in a series of children's films to be shown during the winter months. Others in the series include "Proud Rebel" and "Pollyanna."



Photo by Alex Rebar

St. Therese's Altar & Rosary Society, Shavertown, will hold the annual Christmas Dinner Dec. 5 at the Castle Inn, Dallas. Pictured are members of the committee in charge of this event. Left to right are: Mrs. George Kapral, reservations; Mrs. Louis Sledziewski, Mrs.

Michael Olinatz, punch table; Mrs. Alfred Hudak, chairman; Mrs. John J. Carey, publicity; and Mrs. Thomas Ochman, decorations and program. Punch will be served at 6:30 with dinner following by reservations only. The Girls Folk Singing Group of King's College will entertain.

## Wilkes College will Hold Piano-Flute Recital, Nov. 24

The Wilkes College Music Department will present a joint junior recital, featuring Darice Sabalesky, pianist, and Richard Schwartz, flutist, Nov. 24, at 3:30 p.m. in the recital room of the Dorothy Dickson Darte Hall.

Daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Leonard Sabalesky, 210 East Dorrance St., Kingston, Miss Sabalesky is a 1972 graduate of Hanover High School.

While in high school she was a member of the honor society, the recipient of the Gold Cup Award from the Junior Mozart Club and won a first place speaking award sponsored by the Kiwanis Club. Currently Miss Sabalesky is the organist for St. George Maronite Church, Wilkes-Barre.

Mr. Schwartz is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Sam Schwartz, 611 Harrison Ave., Scranton, and a

graduate of Scranton Central High School.

The duo will perform selections from many artists including, J.S. Bach's "Sonata I in B Minor," B. Molique's "Andante," and Robert Starer's "Three Israeli Sketches."

The recital is open to the public without admission fee.

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