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# Opera Review: Karen Slack radiant in



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Karen Slack sings the role of Violetta in the Sacramento Opera's "La Traviata."

## More Information

- La Traviata  
**A Sacramento Opera production**

**WHEN:** 7:30 p.m. Tuesday

**WHERE:** Community Center Theater, 1301 L St., Sacramento

**TICKETS:** \$15-\$130

**INFORMATION:** (916) 808-5181 or [www.sacopera.org](http://www.sacopera.org)

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# Sacramento Opera's 'La Traviata'

By Edward Ortiz

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For a soprano, tackling the role of Violetta in Verdi's "La Traviata" is being comfortable singing coloratura in one act and connecting with limpid lyricism the next.

That fact was not lost on soprano Karen Slack, who turned her Violetta into a showpiece for her powerful and emotional soprano Friday evening at the Community Center Theater.

Her tour de force performance was the high point of this solid and tasteful production of "La Traviata," directed by James Marvel and conducted by Timm Rolek.

In "La Traviata," Violetta, a sought-after courtesan, falls in love with the young and ardent Alfredo, performed here with radiant singing and a deep sense of tragic innocence by tenor Alexander Boyer. Social conventions darken the couple's eventual marital bliss after Alfredo's father arrives to implore Violetta to give up the marriage in order to save his family's honor. Violetta's heart of gold and impending consumption seal her fate.

For some sopranos, the transit from happiness to tragedy that is mandated by Francesco Maria Piave's libretto, adapted from Alexander Dumas Jr.'s play "The Lady of the Camellias," can be a feast for bathos.

Slack avoided such pitfalls. She sang her Violetta with an endearing vulnerability. If anything, this was a performance that revealed how a woman's steely inner resolve is extinguished by the dual demons of self-doubt and remorse.

Throughout, Slack's soprano grandly filled the hall. Her singing on "Ah, fors'e lui" and "Sempre libera" in the first act showed her range as singer and draw as actor. Slack navigated the tricky coloratura moments of the first act with accuracy, and did so powerfully.

This was not always a fluid or effortless affair. The roundness of Slack's voice is more suited to the lyric singing of the last two acts.

Under Marvel's direction, Slack was conscripted to a fair share of "park and bark" singing. Luckily, her impressive voice made the static approach irrelevant.

As Alfredo, Boyer's tenor sounded fluid and youthful. He proved a worthy match for Slack, and his singing on the "Drinking Song" established his vivid tone.

Much gravitas is hurled at the audience in the second act when baritone Kenneth Overton appears as Alfredo's father. Overton owns an accurate baritone. Mostly, he sang his role dryly and with the

severity of a brigadier general. And while his youthfulness was an issue in selling the father role, he managed to sell the parental goods with a rigid presence that became prone to self-doubt in the second act.

The supporting roles were also well performed in this production, with the strongest mezzo-soprano Erin Neff as Flora and Alina Ilchuk as Annina.

The standout singing was greatly enhanced by Rolek's conducting. In this production, Rolek steered the orchestra towards musical moments of subtlety and finery. It was an example of how less is more in the large hall when voices are on stage.

Also noteworthy was the performance of the excellent chorus, which did much to set the plate for this tragic story.

The direction by Marvel was not always dynamic. It had an Old World feel. Here the production could have benefited from a dash of physicality. But given that this is a story where the societal conventions of 1853 sink a fallen woman, it almost felt organic.

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Call Bee arts critic Edward Ortiz at (916) 321-1071.

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**Badge42** wrote on 03/01/2010 01:39:20 PM:

Thank you Ed for the terrific review you gave to La Triviata as sung by Karen Slack! Outsatanding singer she is; not to slight her supporting cast, especially Alfredo's father. I enjoyed your review (although I had to look up several words)!Alfredo's rendition of the "drinking song" sat me on the edge of my seat.Timm Rolek lead the orchestra to an outstanding musical performance! John and Mary LaHiff (season ticket holder for 24 years now).

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