

Detailed Staging Notes

It should be stressed that these are just rough ideas and represent one possible way in which the thematic concepts of the production could be realised. No doubt with experimentation and the assistance and advice of conductor and singers, additional ways of realising the production will emerge.

A suggested cut would be to the Germont-Alfredo duet in Act 2, but any others would be considered with Maestro and the performers.

Act 1

We start with a blank stage, all black legs & borders in, a black back-cloth in to give the appearance of a black-box space with endless depth. The chorus basses are already in the space, dressed in black suits (with facial prosthetics) and facing upstage so that their costumes blend into the back-cloth.

Prelude The chorus basses raise their hands to create a walkway and Violetta starts from off-stage US-SL and slowly walks along the hands of the chorus. She is dressed very simply and as if she were in her private rooms at home. As the waltz music starts, the sign 'LA TRAVIATA' begins to descend, unlit, until it comes to rest above the space.

Once Violetta has reached the end of the hands of the chorus, she is lowered and carried into the space, where she dis-engages with the chorus and then dances slowly by herself, like a young girl might. This is Violetta's romantic fantasy.

The prelude ends with Violetta on the floor, enjoying the warmth of her own company and her own imagination. The male chorus are still facing upstage.

Act 1 At the sudden burst of new music, part of the sign will light up 'LA'. Violetta turns to look up at it in horror, as it lights up the remainder of the word 'TRAVIATA'. This announces that Violetta's daydreaming is over and she has to return to being a courtesan in society.

She flees off DS-SR for a quick change into her Act 1 dress.

As the music continues, doors are pushed in from both wings by some of the chorus tenors who have not been involved in the action in the prelude. They push the doors to mid-stage centre to make a 'wall' along centre stage, while the other chorus tenors enter the space downstage of the wall of doors and watch on as the female chorus ladies enter and populate the front of the stage. The ladies each have a champagne glass and are greeting one another. The chorus basses who have been involved in the prelude action push downstage to clamour upstage of the doors trying to look in at the ladies. The tenors are meanwhile watching the chorus ladies with the hormonal excitement of young men at a striptease.

The doors are pulled back to form 2 lines going straight down the space and the chorus basses fall into the room in time for the tenors to sing. The basses reply from the ground where they have fallen.

Violetta, meanwhile, has changed into her Act 1 dress and, using a wheeled staircase that is pushed into place, has climbed onto the 'TRAVIATA' part of the sign, from where she sings her first line to Flora and the Marchese, who flank her below the sign.

Dell'invito
trascorsa è
già l'ora

As the chorus sings, the wheeled staircase is brought around to the front of the sign and Violetta is carried down to the floor by the male chorus, who chairlift her to DS-CS where she is met by the Barone, who roughly picks her up and spins her around.

Gastone and Alfredo enter into the space down the CS corridor to meet Violetta on CS; she talks down to the two men while being held aloft by the Barone. The chorus meanwhile have separated into two groups, one on either side of the stage where the men are circling and threatening the women and the women are displaying themselves in a competition for attention.

The Marquis wins Flora from the SR circle and flings her roughly towards SL, pausing to say hello to Alfredo before he chases after Flora. Gastone explains the Marquis' abrupt departure with his line *'T'ho detto l'amista qui s'intreccia al diletto'*

Violetta is lifted in a chair to survey both groups of chorus for her line *'Pronto e il tutto?'* then she is returned to sit on CS

Servants and chorus enter from both sides with chairs, which are set down in a straight line. The gentlemen chorus sit on chairs, ladies of the chorus on their laps and those without chairs pass out bottles of champagne to those who are seated.

Ladies of the chorus who have missed out on a chair start to parade in front of the other chorus, like a catwalk or a fashion show. The chorus men leer at them even as they have a girl on their laps and are drinking champagne from the bottle.

Violetta sits in the middle of the stage, to her left are the Barone (with a girl on his lap), Gastone (with Flora on his lap); to her right are Alfredo, the Marchese (with a girl on his lap) and Dr Grenville (also with a girl)

Gastone and Violetta stand on their chairs to converse while the chorus goes into slow-motion – the principals are all in real-time.

After his line *'M'e increscioso quel giovin'*, the Barone turns from the conversation and busies himself with the girl on his lap, who relishes the attention.

The chorus come back to real time for *'Beviamo'* – after this, the Barone starts to leave with the girl on his lap when Gastone draws attention to his leaving, everyone laughs, Violetta is mortified.

Libiamo

After *"si attenti al cantor"* the chorus gents throw the girls from their laps and stand on their chairs with a glass raised towards Violetta; the ladies then stand and do likewise; everyone's full attention embarrasses Alfredo.

He steps downstage, looks back at Violetta who is now the only one sitting, then begins the Libiamo

During the interlude as nothing happens and Alfredo is summoning the courage, the gents chorus start to laugh at his inability to come up with something on the spot and lower their glasses and share sniggers with their friends standing next to them. The chorus repeat Alfredo's line with irony, thinking his words both clumsy and inappropriate.

Violetta, feeling sorry for Alfredo's reception, does a kind act and steps downstage to join Alfredo and adds her own voice to the toast. This is something no-one else would have done, and it renders the chorus momentarily silent as Violetta saves the speech. The chorus repeats Violetta's verse then return to their seats and to flirting with each other as Violetta and Alfredo go to the seats on CS that used to be occupied by Violetta and the Barone. They finish the brindisi standing on the chairs.

The lights change to create a square of light upstage of the chairs, which motivates the chorus *'che e cio'*. Violetta keeps her eyes on Alfredo for her lines.

The chorus begin to make their way to the square of light, through the doors that have remained in position. They are annoyed by Violetta's cries for help; they exclaim their '*Ancora*' with some venom at her.

Oh, qual
pallor!

Alfredo, swept up by some chorus ladies, has to force his way out of the light square. The chorus continue to dance a grotesque ballet objectifying the ladies of the chorus.

Alfredo and Violetta carry out their scene downstage, using the line of chairs to distance themselves from the chorus and from each other.

The chorus continue to dance during Violetta and Alfredo's duet, adjusting their movement speed to account for the change of tempo in the music. The women are slowly being undressed by the chorus men until they are in a state of dishabille. Several of the chorus with large headdresses and feathers have their garments taken away and tossed to the ground

During the duet, Gastone and Flora sneak downstage to watch.

When the chorus return to the action, each man is leading away a woman (or two) and it is clear that they are returning to their respective houses for sex. During their exit, the doors are arranged in a diagonal line across the space from DS-SL to US-SR.

E strano

Violetta stays in her half of the stage and begins picking up the various coats, feathers and headdresses that the guests have left there. Alfredo remains in his half of the stage, as though he is calling to her from the street below until she steps through one of the doors into his side of the stage and they kiss to end the act.

Act 2 scene 1

2 giant walls covered in an unfinished plans for a house – including indications for windows, doors and pictures, have been flown in to hem in the space giving it an enclosed feeling. The 'LA TRAVIATA' sign now hangs as a lighting fixture with the letters facing downwards – Violetta is attempting to hide her courtesan identity and subsume it into her domestic identity. 3 of the portable doors are US in between the 2 walls. 1 of the doors is in the DS-SR corner, leading off into a wing. On the SL side, there is a large pile of the chairs from Act 1 all heaped together as though they were a bonfire. They signify Violetta's half-attempt to leave Society – although she has left Paris and is living with Alfredo, we know from the novel that an old Duke is paying the rent in exchange for occasional visits.

During this act, the chorus will gather US of the 3 doors and plan their torment of Violetta and Alfredo. Germont pere is serious in his intention to deal with Alfredo, but the others are pawns in the game of the chorus and Giuseppe and the Messenger especially are encouraged into the house by the chorus who think the misery they are causing Violetta and Alfredo is very funny.

Lunge da lei
er me non
v'ha diletto!

Alfredo begins the act by drawing some of his own plans on to the SR wall – he is looking ahead to their future together and is planning the fine details of their happiness. He sings his aria and then catches coming in through one of the US doors. The chorus that are waiting there open all three doors slightly to watch the action and then howl with laughter when Alfredo discovers that Violetta is paying for everything. They quickly close the doors and Alfredo runs out through them on his way to Paris.

Violetta enters through the DS-SR door and talks with Violetta, while the chorus US of the doors prepare Giuseppe to go in and play his part in the drama. Giuseppe enters, and gives Violetta the invitation from Flora. He then returns to the chorus, who push him back into the room to announce Germont. Giuseppe then flees and everyone watches on as Germont talks with Violetta.

Pura siccome
un angelo

During the course of their duet, Violetta takes refuge in the pile of chairs, as if trying to hide from the weight of his words. Germont pulls her out of the pile and she cowers on the floor as he continues to tell her why she has to give up Alfredo. The chorus US of the doors love this and crowd in to listen more closely. Germont produces a paper and a pen with which he asks Violetta to write to Alfredo – she has no table and so she lays on the floor, completely overpowered by the force of Germont's demands. Germont feels obliged to say nice things to Violetta, but he regards her as a whore and therefore less than human – he is pleased only that Alfredo will never see her again.

Qui giunge
alcun! Partite!

Violetta notices the chorus laughing US beyond the 3 doors and then she and Germont say their goodbyes. He exits through the US door past the chorus.

Annina re-enters from DS-SR and Violetta continues to scribble a letter on the floor. She gives the letter to Annina who exits US but is stopped by the chorus, who steal the letter from her and read it themselves before tossing it back to her.

Alfredo re-enters past the chorus who are withholding the letter from Annina and enters the main space. Violetta says goodbye to him and exits through the US doors, where she is immediately set upon by howls and whistles from the chorus and has to run to escape them. The Messenger has stolen the letter from Violetta and re-enters the space to give it to Alfredo. Alfredo reads it and then turns to find his father in the US doorway.

Di Provenza
mar, il suol

Alfredo listens to the first part of Germont's aria and then goes to the il walls of the space, crossing and scribbling out all the plans that were drawn on the walls. Finally, he breaks free to the pile of chairs and starts hurling them around in his rage. His father tries to calm him down, but Alfredo is wild. Eventually, he sees the invitation to Flora's party and, picking it up, runs out of the house through the US doors followed by his father. The space is empty at the end of the act.

Act 2 scene 2

The 'La Traviata' sign is now a table and runs from US-SR to DS-SL. Around the table are chairs and gamblers. Other chairs lie scattered around the space where chorus ladies and gentlemen are engaged in various levels of sexual activity.

The Marchese and Flora are engaged in sexual activity over the back of a chair while Grenville sits near them with another girl. Flora talks to the Marchese and Grenville while the Marchese fools around with her. Several of the chorus gather around the Marchese – they've already told him about what happened in the country house and they laugh when he breaks the news to Flora and Grenville.

Gypsies

The gypsy ladies that run to surround the gentlemen at the table are dressed as call-girl gypsies and flirt with everyone they come across. One of the girls acts suggestively around the Marchese, and it is her behaviour that embarrasses the Marchese when his palm is 'read'.

The girls all move to dance DS and the gentlemen all gather their chairs to form a line DS. The girls perform a choreographed dance on the men seated on the chairs while the singing chorus performs US of the chairs.

Matadors Gastone jumps up on the table to start the Matador dance – gentlemen of the chorus run in and perform a short dance with the girls DS, and then one is chosen and thrown up on to the table. The Matador song is performed by the chorus who gather around the table and gradually strip and humiliate the gypsy girl whom they have thrown onto the table. Gastone joins in, playing the part of Piquillo and the ladies of the chorus join the men in humiliating the girl. She is eventually allowed to escape at the end of the song and runs out. Completely unperturbed, the chorus begin to play cards around the table.

Alfredo, voi! Alfredo enters, much to the amusement of the chorus, and despite his attempts at civility, he is clearly troubled. He joins the gamblers. Violetta and the Barone enter from the other side and are met by Flora. The Barone sits Violetta down in one of the chairs and warns her not to speak to Alfredo, before then joining the gamblers. When dinner is announced, everyone exits through the doors US and then waits in that area to peer around the doorframes to watch Violetta and Alfredo's argument. He calls the chorus back and they come quickly. At the height of Alfredo's rage '*che qui pagato io l'ho*', the lights on the table light up 'La Traviata'. Violetta cries out and tries to hide the letters, but she cannot – again she is trapped by the identity that people have created for her.

Germont Germont appears through one of the US doors and, ignoring Violetta, accuses Alfredo. The chorus gather around Germont and give him their condolences '*Oh, quanto peni!*'. Germont's text is in reference to the fact that he knows that Violetta loves Alfredo, but he cannot tell anyone about it for fear of ruining his reputation further. His '*misera*' is perjorative.

Violetta and Alfredo come together to sing, and the chorus looks on in horror and tries to console Germont '*Quanto peni! fa cor!*' as he watches his son disobey his orders and associate with a whore. The act ends with the chorus gathering around Germont in solidarity while come of the chorus drag Alfredo and Violetta away from each other.

Act 3

The space is empty apart from giant letters, some of which are upright, some laying on the ground, that together spell 'La Traviata'. We are in the ruins of Violetta's mind where all she can see are reminders of her past.

Prelude She moves from letter to letter, before finally dropping by a fallen 'A' on SR. Annina has been asleep during the prelude by a fallen 'I' and wakes when she is called. Grenville enters from one of the US wings and gives Violetta a cursory inspection before injecting her with something. He leaves and Annina fetches some money from the back of one of the letters. She exits and Violetta is left alone re-reading the letter.

Oh come son
mutate! Her aria takes her from letter to letter – she is dazed and drugged and in an unreal world. The carnivale starts outside, but turns out to be members of the chorus dressed in the more outrageous of the Act 1 costumes, with large hats and plumes making crazy shadows as they invade the space. Two of them still hold Alfredo, who is wearing a crumpled version of his Act 2.2 costume, as though he's been held prisoner since the end of the last act, and they parade him as though he were the King of the festival. Annina announces his arrival and he runs into the room to hold Violetta, who staggers into his arms. They are the picture of pathetic love, with much holding, touching, stroking and laying on each other. Germont arrives and sits near the couple. The chorus gather around closer to watch Violetta's death.

Finale At the end of the duet with Alfredo, he turns away from her in despair, as does Germont and Annina, and on the change of the music for '*E strano*', members of the chorus pick Violetta up, giving her the momentary feeling of being relieved of her pain. They carry her US to the base of a letter 'V' and then dump her there on the death chord. They remain around her, looking down at her with their grotesque faces, as the lights fade on everything else and the last image before the lights snap out is a pool of light around Violetta, huddled at the base of a giant V with faces looking down at her – even in death, she can't escape being associated with a title that others have given her.