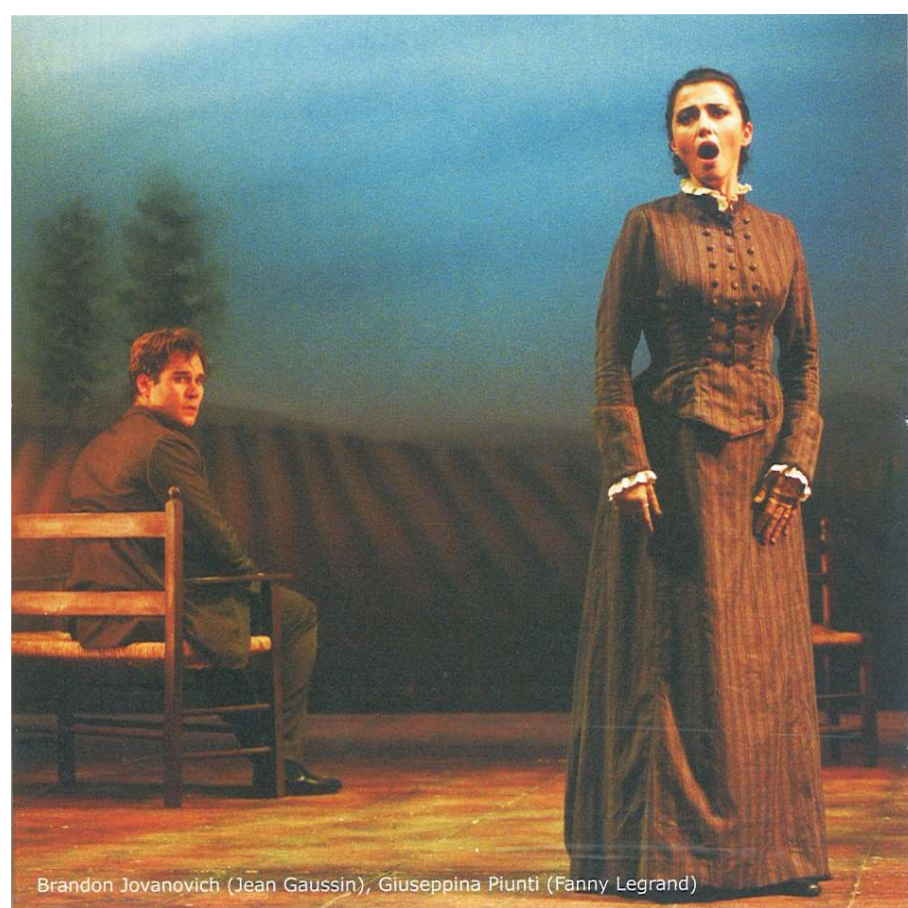




Brandon Jovanovich (Jean Gaussin), Giuseppina Piunti (Fanny Legrand)

WEXFORD FESTIVAL OPERA

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The New York Times

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The European

Wexford Festival Opera

Luigi Ferrari, Artistic Director Jerome Hynes, Chief Executive

Jules Massenet (1842 - 1912)

Sapho

Pièce lyrique in five acts to a libretto by Henri Cain and Arthur Bernède
after the novel by Alphonse Daudet

First performance: Opéra Comique, Paris November 27, 1897

Wexford Festival Opera 2001 performances: October 20, 23, 26, 29, November 1, 4
By arrangement with Editions Heugel, Paris / United Music Publishers Ltd, London
Sung in French

<i>Fanny Legrand</i>	Giuseppina Piunti
<i>Jean Gaussin</i>	Brandon Jovanovich
<i>Divonne</i>	Agata Bienkowska
<i>Césaire</i>	Massimiliano Gagliardo
<i>Irène</i>	Ermonela Jaho
<i>Caoudal</i>	Luca Salsi
<i>La Borderie</i>	Angel Pazos
<i>Le patron du restaurant</i>	Nicolas Courjal

Wexford Festival Opera Chorus

National Philharmonic Orchestra of Belarus

Jean-Luc Tingaud *conductor*

Lubomir Mátl *chorus master*

Sapho

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ACT I

In Paris, at the studio of the sculptor Caoudal, a costume ball is in progress. Jean Gaussin, young and recently arrived from Provence, feels homesick and out of place amongst the Bohemian crowd. He is struck by the arrival of Fanny Legrand referred to by the artists as 'Sapho' after a famous sculpture fashioned by Caoudal in her likeness. Fanny notices the good-looking young man and talks the impressionable Jean into leaving the party with her.

ACT II

Jean's parents, Divonne and Césaire, visit him in Paris. They have come to collect his cousin Irène who they are adopting as their daughter. After they leave Fanny comes in; she has stayed away, knowing that his parents were visiting, not because she has forgotten him. "When I love it is for a long time" she assures him.

ACT III (i)

It is a year later and the two lovers have been living quietly outside Paris. They set out for lunch at a local restaurant. Caoudal and a group of friends arrive and when they spot Jean they ask him if he is still with Sapho. Jean is puzzled, and then taken aback as it sinks in that Fanny and Sapho are the same person. The artists launch into the woes of loving Sapho and Jean flees the restaurant. Fanny appears and realising what has been going on, turns on the artists accusing them of ruining her only chance of happiness. Furious she calls them all scum.

ACT III (ii)

Back at Ville-d'Avray Jean is packing and amongst their belongings he finds a box that he assumes contains the dreadful souvenirs of Fanny's past. She flies in the door and begs him to stay. He forces open the box and reads her letters, appalled and disgusted by what they reveal. As he reads them, Fanny burns them and having attempted to defend herself she becomes quiet. He would be better off returning to his nice family in the country, she goads, since he is incapable of understanding or accepting her past. They exchange bitter insults and he leaves.

ACT IV

Back at the family home in Avignon, Jean is moved by his family's attempts to raise his spirits. Césaire announces that 'Sapho' is there to see him and urges Jean to be strong in resisting her demands. Fanny tells Jean that since they parted she has been miserable and she wants him to return. Divonne and Césaire interrupt them and order Jean inside.

ACT V

Back at Ville-d'Avray Fanny is discouraged and desperately unhappy. Jean appears, he can't live without her. They fall into each other's arms and Jean, exhausted by the fatigue of the journey, falls asleep. Fanny, knowing that he will never truly be able to put aside her past, tiptoes away, leaving him forever.



Compact disc 1

1.04.13

ACT I

1	"Eh, jeunesse" (Caoudal, La Borderie, les invités)	04.48
2	"Et pourtant, à votre âge" (Caoudal, La Borderie, Jean, Fanny)	02.37
3	"Ce monde que je vois - Ah, qu'il est loin, mon pays" (Jean)	03.43
4	"Un baiser!" (Fanny, la Borderie, Caoudal, Jean, les invités)	03.05
5	"Le couvert est mis!" (Fanny, Caoudal, la Borderie, Jean, les invités)	01.39

ACT II

6	"O Magali, ma tant amado" (Jean, Césaire)	03.16
7	"C'est nous" (Divonne, Césaire, Jean)	01.44
8	"Chers parents" (Jean)	01.08
9	"C'était bien gentil, autrefois" (Irène, Jean)	03.26
10	"Il faut nous dire adieu - Petit, voici ta lampe" (Divonne)	05.43
11	"Ils s'en vont" (Jean)	02.44
12	"A l'ouvrage" (Jean, Fanny)	03.18
13	"De jolis meubles" (Fanny, Jean)	01.37
14	"Ce que j'appelle beau" (Fanny)	02.17

10		<i>Sapho</i>	
15	"Est-ce un rêve mensonger? - O Magali" (Fanny)	01.58	
16	"O ma Fanny que j'aime" (Jean, Fanny)	01.42	
17	"Pendant que tu travaillerais - Ah laisse-moi t'aimer" (Jean, Fanny)	03.00	

ACT III

18	"Et le dimanche nous irions" (Fanny, Jean)	03.24	
19	"Par ici" (Caoudal, la Borderie, le Patron, clients)	02.05	
20	"Si nous ne trouvons pas" (Caoudal, la Borderie, le Patron, clients)	02.26	
21	"Tiens, vous voilà" (Caoudal, Jean, la Borderie, Fanny)	05.19	
22	"Mais maintenant - Cet enfant dont l'amour" (Fanny)	03.14	

Compact disc 2

1.00.04

ACT III

1	"Ah oui, partir, très loin" (Jean, Fanny)	03.24	
2	"Eh bien, oui, là, c'est vrai" (Fanny, Jean)	04.08	
3	"Pour animer le marbre" (Jean, Fanny)	05.30	
4	"Quel est donc ce dernier paquet" (Jean, Fanny)	03.35	

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ACT IV

5	"O Magali" (Jean, Divonne)	04.08	
6	"Et mon coeur, pour le tien" (Divonne, Jean)	02.49	
7	"Courons prévenir ton père" (Divonne, Jean, Irène)	01.06	
8	"Si j'avais un jour quelque peine" (Irène)	02.43	
9	"Jean! Mon père!" (Césaire, Jean, Irène)	01.42	
10	"Ne m'en veux pas d'être venue" (Fanny, Jean)	02.59	
11	"Ces gens que je connais - Pendant un an je fus ta femme" (Fanny)	03.31	
12	"Non, je ne puis" (Jean, Fanny, Césaire, Divonne)	04.58	

ACT V

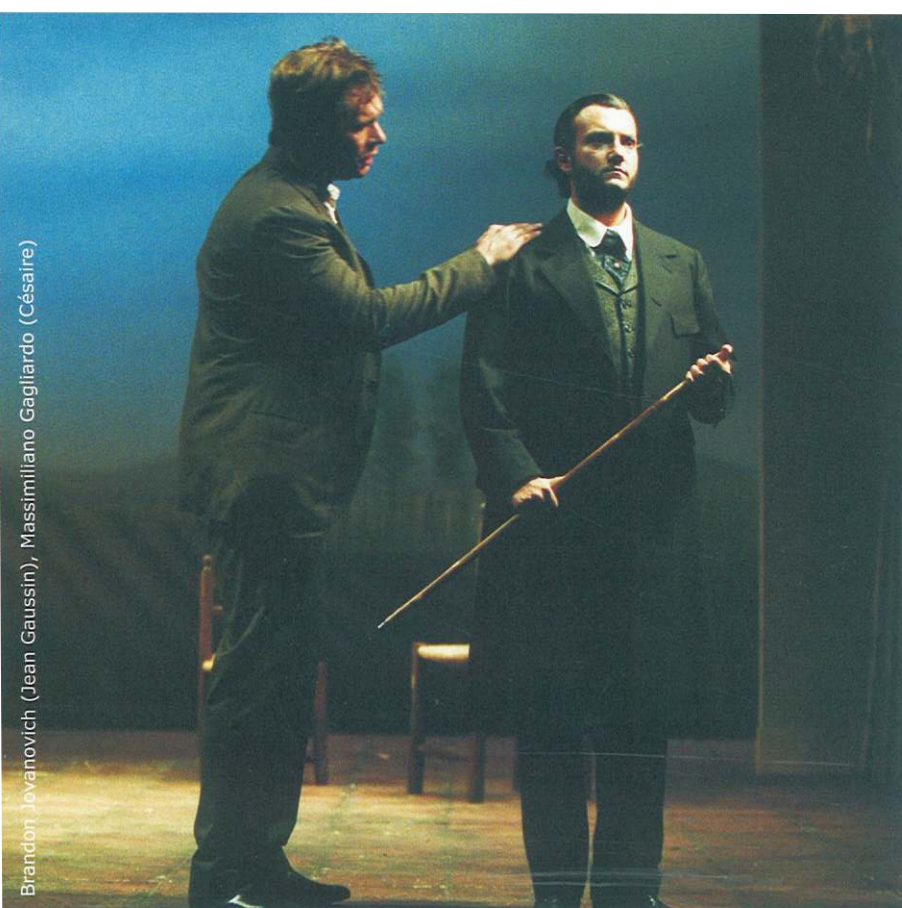
13	Solitude - "Demain, je partirai" (Fanny)	07.09	
14	"Là-bas, un tout petit être" (Fanny)	01.55	
15	"Fanny! C'est vous" (Jean, Fanny)	00.50	
16	"J'ai tout brisé" (Jean, Fanny)	01.31	
17	"Mais tu pâlis" (Jean, Fanny)	02.51	
18	"Vais-je rester ici?" (Fanny)	01.12	
19	"Adieu, m'ami, je pars à tout jamais" (Fanny, Jean)	03.39	

A Dame aux camélias for realists

The story of Jules Massenet's *Sapho*, premiered in 1897, was by that time already more than familiar to Parisians. An ill-starred liaison between a young man from a good Provençal family and a Parisian woman who is basically a prostitute, eruptions of unreasoning jealousy, inevitable parting, redemption through sacrifice: these are the essential ingredients of one of the most famous of all nineteenth-century dramas, *La Dame aux camélias* by Alexandre Dumas fils. In his play (first put on in 1852, developed from his own novel published four years earlier, and rarely absent from the stage since) Dumas established the model of such relationships and their degrading consequences. Aside from satisfying an eternal lust for the representation of grand passions, *La Dame aux camélias* brought before the public an important social phenomenon: the unhealthy mixture of economic exploitation, class transgression and moral hypocrisy that Dumas believed was poisoning Paris.

Today's audiences are hardly less conversant with a plot that has inspired a hundred different homages, in various media, over the intervening century-and-a-half. There have been other plays (e.g. *Romance*, 1915), ballets (e.g. *Marguerite and Armand*, 1963), television serials (e.g. Robert Knights's for the BBC in 1976), and most of all films: starting with Viggo Larsen's *Kameliadamen*, made in Denmark as early as 1907, *La Dame aux camélias* has been a particular cinematic favourite. *Camille* (starring Greta Garbo in 1937) and *La vera storia della Donna delle camelie* (with Isabelle Huppert, 1980) are highlights in a large and still-growing collection, the latest addition to which is Luhrmann's spectacular *Moulin Rouge*.

And those are only the ones that acknowledge, more or less explicitly, their family resemblance to Dumas's work. After so many different re-tellings,



versions cannot avoid referring not only back to their source, but also to each other and to more general parables of the commerce of desire. Even the original seems to claim provenance in, or at least invite comparison with, another text: *L'Histoire du chevalier des Grieux et de Manon Lescaut* (1731) by the Abbé Prévost (also of course set by Massenet, as *Manon*, in 1884). The narrator in Dumas's novel sees a copy of Prévost's book among the possessions of the courtesan, Marguerite Gautier, when they are auctioned after her death. He buys it for himself, as if to emphasise that the story he is telling is merely the latest reincarnation of an abiding truth; that good boys have always had a weakness for bad girls—in literature, but also in real life. A well known example of this sort of promiscuous intertextuality, showing the emblematic status of Dumas's tale, is that classic expression of 1980s corporate values, Garry Marshall's *Pretty Woman*. Richard Gere (playing the socially elite but somewhat dysfunctional mogul) takes Julia Roberts (the tart-with-a-heart) to the opera, as the climax in a series of crass displays of money and privilege. Though the narrative of the film is not directly related to the *Dame aux camélias* story, it is nonetheless entirely fitting that the work being performed should be one of the first, and easily the greatest, refashionings of Dumas's play, Verdi's opera *La traviata*.

Sapho vs. La traviata

By family tradition Verdi was present at the very first performance of *La Dame aux camélias*; whether this is true or not, he certainly saw the play early on in its initial run, and the opera was produced (in Venice) barely a year later. Since that time its fame has, of course, equalled or outstripped that of its model. Other operas on similar subjects are much less well known: neither Ponchielli's *Marion Delorme* (1885, based on Hugo's play), which is about a demi-mondaine whose

partner repudiates her when he learns of her past, nor Puccini's *La rondine* (1917), whose heroine, rather than make the hero suffer his family's disapproval, sacrifices her love and goes back to her wealthy protector, have much of a place in the repertory, though they are hardly the work of unknown composers. Similarly, Massenet's *Sapho*, though it has some great music in it and tells very much the same story, has not been thought in the same league as Verdi's *Traviata*. It would be inappropriate to compare the music, so different is Massenet's idiom, almost half a century later, but perhaps there is something to be said about the libretti.

Of course, one obvious failure on Massenet's part (and one shared by Ponchielli and Puccini) is not killing the soprano at the end, an oversight avoided by Verdi (following Dumas's example) by means of a stock nineteenth-century device: consumption. Depressing as it sounds, there is no doubt that in opera, sacrifice without death is on the whole unpopular. The death in question is an especially satisfying metaphor—a double metaphor, indeed: tuberculosis, like all disease, is literal corruption of the body, and it grows in unclean surroundings; it is also only ever in remission, never completely cured, just as corrupted beginnings are disguised, never effaced. Thus Violetta's suffering is presented both as the price she pays for her hedonistic lifestyle and as the mark of her difference from the aristocratic milieu she inhabits. Sapho, on the other hand, seems in good health throughout, though her past too proves impossible to wash away, and her miserable family origins (which we learn of in the second tableau of Act III) are unlikely ever to square with Jean's social position.

Leaving aside the lack of a corpse, there are other apparently unfavourable comparisons to be made, above all in the first halves of the two works. In the opening tableau of *La traviata*, Verdi's librettist Piave gives us a scene to put the lovers into some kind of relationship: Violetta confident—bullish, even—after a brief fit of dizziness and only reflecting on these strange new feelings after Alfredo has left the room; he having adored her from afar for more than a year and therefore fully conscious of her place in the world, caring only about the

strain it puts on her precarious health. Massenet and *his* librettists (Cain and Bernède) expect a lot more imaginative effort of us: not only do we have to accept the love-at-first-sight conceit (the meeting of Fanny and Jean in Act I consists of her asking his name, where he's from, whether he's an artist, and of him complaining vaguely of vertigo—then they leave together), but also his dumb lack of curiosity about her, which at times strains credulity. Later on in *La traviata*, at the beginning of Act II, we realise that Alfredo, in addition to being a devoted lover, has the capacity for dignified honesty and for self-reproach—even if those qualities will subsequently be swamped by jealousy. Though Jean, when aroused, is just as passionate about Fanny, he is otherwise rather dull: for the first half of the opera he does little but moon about, regretting his beautiful Provence, singing in Provençal: 'O Magali, ma tant amado, / Mete la testo au fenestroun: / Escouto un pau a questo aubado / De tambourin e de viouloun' ('Magali, my beloved, put your head out of the window and listen to this aubade of violin and tambourine'). Until, that is, in the first tableau of Act III, bumping squarely into the fact that his mistress has been everybody else's mistress first. Fanny is just as straightforward a character as Violetta: she tells Jean no lies. He has been burying his head in the sand, and at this point we can't help wondering why we are being asked to feel sorry for him—he deserves his unhappiness.

Characterisation in novel and opera

Piave could hardly have failed to come up with something worthy of Verdi's best music, given the quality of his source. Yet for all the inadequacies of the libretto of *Sapho*, the text on which it is based, Alphonse Daudet's short novel of the same name (published in 1884), is also an insightful and often moving study of nineteenth-century social and sexual mores. It too centres on the squalor that

threatens to infect domestic life. And, again like *La Dame aux camélias*, its author later made it into a play. It does, however, differ from the libretto (and at the same time depart from the *Dame aux camélias* myth) in several important respects, most obviously in the characterisation of Jean. He is not the moron we meet in Massenet, but rather an alert, if still incurious, young man with realistic attitudes to relationships. He recognises that he is not in love with his mistress, but his affection and attachment grow quite naturally over the course of the liaison: 'in love? no, but grateful for the love enveloping him', as Daudet puts it. He does love his family, on the other hand, who are not the genial simpletons of the opera: Césaire, in the novel, is actually his reprobate uncle and not his father (whom we learn very little about, but who seems much more in the Germont mould). Thus Jean, when he finally realises that Fanny is the notorious model, Sapho, is in a very believable position: when she points out that his family history, while nothing like hers, is not exactly squeaky-clean, he has to wrestle with his own hypocrisy. Yes, but that's different, he wants to say. The fact that Jean is not passionately (we might even say operatically) in love with Fanny means that in Daudet's *Sapho* there can be none of the poignancy of Armand's powerlessness to save Marguerite. There can be none of those aching moments such as the one where she says that because she will not live as long as other people, she must live faster. Yet Dumas's portrait of jealousy is in the end perhaps not as complex as Daudet's. In one of his most lucid moments, the Jean of the novel admits to himself that there is a part of him that is proud to have shared a mistress with such famous men as the sculptor Caoudal. And in any case, it's not the existence of past loves that disgusts him, but paradoxically Fanny's total renunciation of them: when one of them returns to plead with her, he finds her reaction cruel. After his initial rage, what bothers Jean is not the ethics of promiscuity but that of domestic life. In one significant passage, he tries to reassure himself that setting up house with Fanny, though not the respectable *ménage* he still ultimately hopes for, is in the meantime a much better way of life than going from girl to girl, risking his health. But one of the

novel's main points is that even in relationships unsanctioned by polite society there is the fatal taste for domesticity—a trap, Daudet warns, into which even the best of us fall.

Most striking of all the differences between novel and libretto is the end: in Daudet there is no grand sacrifice on Fanny's part, no quasi-religious redemption in the style of Dumas. When she gives up her future with Jean it is not so much because she thinks he will be unable to forget her past life but because she is tired of making new starts. She will go back to living with the forger (in the novel called Flamant) and his son. Far from throwing her life at the feet of her lover, she decides that what she needs, in order to be able to carry on, is to have someone else throw their life at hers; she acts not out of self-negation, but self-preservation. She is a realist—in fact, you might call the whole of Daudet's *Sapho* a *Dame aux camélias* for realists.

Veristic and realistic

Perhaps this is the main reason why a comparison of *La traviata* and *Sapho* ends up being beside the point: the former is melodramatic, the latter veristic. *La traviata* gains much of its pathos from a misunderstanding that could never happen in *Sapho*; it is melodramatic in that all the characters know their place and all act accordingly, and in that the audience's emotional investment lies in regretting the tragic constellation of people and events that will result in Violetta's death. *Sapho* is veristic in that the characters don't have generic roles—don't seem to be any more than what they say and do—and in that we are kept guessing right up until the final curtain. In *La traviata*, of course, Violetta is ostentatiously marked for an early death from the beginning. *Sapho*, in which the characters speak the language of the streets and end up leaving prosaically rather than dying poetically, certainly has the ring of truth

about it. Perhaps from bitter experience: Daudet, who knew Massenet and was present at the opera's first performance, was reported as saying that the composer must have buried in the work a lot of personal experience, 'all the wounds and anguish of his youth'. And though there is no consumption in either novel or opera, disease lurks nonetheless: Daudet's model, in every sense, for the eponymous anti-heroine of his novel was one Marie Rieu, who gave him the syphilis from which he eventually died, two weeks after the premiere of the opera—revenge of the *traviata*, the woman led astray! No wonder that in his book Daudet talks of love as if of venereal disease: 'What she knew, that depravation of pleasure with which she had been inoculated, Jean would learn in his turn and pass on to others. That's how the poison goes'.

But *La Dame aux camélias* is also famously based on the real-life experience of its author, the Armand Duval of novel and play a thinly disguised Alexandre Dumas, who had an affair with the original Marguerite Gautier, Marie Duplessis. What's more (many commentators have pointed out), a deeper, more real authorial investment is to be located in that fact that Dumas, the illegitimate son of a philandering father and abandoned mother, was living proof of the hypocrisy of the society he portrayed. How can this genuine slice of life not count as veristic? The answer is that 'true-to-life', 'veristic' and above all 'realistic' are rather problematic terms in opera, where music conspires to render everything at once ridiculous and profoundly true.

Irony

There is one scene in Massenet's opera, not ready at the premiere but included in the 1907 revival (and in this year's production at Wexford), which is far more convincing—let's tentatively call it more 'real'—than its equivalent in Daudet: when Jean obsessively reads through Fanny's love-letters from other men.

Learning that she has been with a convicted criminal is for Jean the last straw, but what generates the riveting confrontation that follows is her refusal to allow her son (in the opera she is the mother of the forger's child) to be insulted by Jean's contempt. At the end of the act, glorious in her incandescent rage, she sends him packing, mocking his family and bourgeois values. She is glad, she says, that now she won't have him boring her with his precious Provence—'escoute oun tambourin', she sneers. Apart from the impressively strong characterisation of Fanny, what is wonderful about this moment is that she expresses just what the audience may secretly have begun to feel: Jean has sung some lovely solos in the first three acts, but, just as he is dull as a lover, his musical personality is also rather one-dimensional. And, as if to emphasise the point, when the curtain of Act IV rises to reveal Jean back in Avignon and restored to the bosom of his family, what do we hear but that irritating folksong and offstage tambourines... Jean, perhaps because he is starting to get some perspective on matters, does nothing but sit there; in the words of the score, pensive.

For us as much as for Jean, this is a glimpse of something beyond the veristic. But not exactly reality, because it is strictly confined to the back-and-forth between words and music that is the special territory of great opera composers; rather a kind of theatrical super-reality. In one sense, Massenet is sharing a joke with us, inviting us to laugh at Jean and what an idiot he's been. In another (just in case we've been allowing ourselves to be lulled not only by Jean's incurious nature but by the lush melodies he has been singing), this change in register is a wakeup call: by injecting a dose of irony into the musical flow, the tambourines force us to re-examine what has been going on, to look out for clichés, to be more wordly and more suspicious as the opera goes on. Refreshed, as it were, our ears cleansed of sentimental kitsch (when the tambourines return at the end of Act IV, they will jar) we are ready to follow Jean into the much more hostile world of the final two acts. We realise that his family will no longer be able to comfort him (and certainly not Irène, that sub-Micaëla washout) and

shield him from the pain of adult relationships; we see that when Fanny comes to plead with him he will already know, despite his stern refusals, he is bound to her and will follow her back to their house. Above all we are ready to hear the most powerful music in the opera, Fanny's long soliloquy in the final act, where the slow, sobbing ostinato barely supports her broken line, and the limping chromaticism moves haltingly towards the inevitable and definitive leaving. If anything in opera is like real life, says Massenet (his music if not the libretto now completely in tune with Daudet's head-shakingly honest observations), this is: not the delirium of love re-interpreted as an aesthetic death, but a long and incremental self-destruction, the slow compulsiveness of irresolution.

Cormac Newark



Wexford Festival Opera Chorus 2001

CHORUS MASTER
Lubomir Mátl

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Ruti Halvani
Anna Kroftová
Barbara Kubátová
Alessandra Panaro
Hana Petzeltová
Vlasta Prudičová
Rebecca Sharp
Anna Sollerman
Michaela Šrůmová
Rachel Stonehouse
Lenka Švehlíková
Elena Traversi
Olga Velická
Ivana Vlášáková
Věra Žemberi
Sylvie Zemková
Jarmila Žilková

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Davide Cicchetti
Nicolas Courjal
Kevin Ferguson
John Fletcher
Petr Frýbert
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Stewart Kempster
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Ivan Kozumplík
Petr Málek
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Lubomír Moravec
Jaroslav Patočka
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Jiří Prudič
Jaroslav Šefrna

The National Philharmonic Orchestra of Belarus

DIRECTOR

Josif Turko

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Sergei Belozertsav
Aliaksei Maskalenka
Ala Dzianisava
Maryna Liaudanskaya
Natalia Dziahel
Alena Sturnitskaya
Aliaksandr Kudrevich
Liudmila Krasouskaya

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Leanid Trusevich
Anatoliy Narushyn
Iryna Knauer
Volha Kryvakhizha
Inga Suvorova
Aryna Aliaksandrova
Ourhia Abdoussadykova
Aliaksandr Babchonak
Tatsiana Sasnouskaya

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Zinaida Kazartsava
Iryna Kazarsava
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Alena Drabysheuskaya
Shyrshyna
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Cellos

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Yauhen Mikiayeu
Natalia Merzliakova
Liudmila Baradzina
Alexandre Kozyrev

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Victor Bondar
Yauhen Kuzhounik

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Dzmitry Benko
Arsen Arutsyunau

Trombones

Ihar Tsviatkou
Aliaksandr Rubanets
Mikhail Arkhipchuk

Tuba

Yauheni Melnichuk

Flute

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Vladimir Derychev

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Alexei Avramenko
Piotr Lukyanenak
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Mechyslau Chubin
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Vladimir Filiuk

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Leu Hure
Aliaksandr Novikau
Vladimir Kurennau
Mark Ratner
Aleksandre Roudnitski

Harp

Ala Shukhman

Piano

Yuri Hildziuk



Jules Massenet

Sapho

023 2SACD

Ideato e prodotto da - *Conceived and produced by*
Giulio Cesare Ricci

Registrato da - *Recorded by*
Hein Dekker (Philips International B.V.), Carl Schuurbiers (Polyhymnia)

Registrato a - *Recorded at*
Theatre Royal, Wexford

Data di registrazione - *Recording date*
Ottobre, October 26, 29 / Novembre, November 1 2001

Attrezzatura - *Equipment*
canali sinistro/destro anteriori, *left/right front channels*: Schoeps MK21, Schoeps BLM03
canale centrale, *central channel*: Schoeps MK21, Schoeps BLM03
canali sinistro/destro posteriori, *left/right back channels*: Schoeps MK21
preamplificatori microfonici, *microphone pre-amplifiers*: Polyhymnia Custom Built
cavi di linea, digitali, microfonici e di alimentazione: van den Hul
line, digital, microphone, and supply cables: van den Hul
registrato in 5 canali e stereo Direct Stream Digital (DSD™)
su registratore Pyramix usando convertitori dCS A/D e D/A
recorded in 5-channel and stereo Direct Stream Digital (DSD™)
on the Pyramix Recorder using dCS A/D and D/A converters

fonè would like to thank Philips International B.V., and in particular Paul Reynolds and Hermine Sterringa, for their support

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Wexford Festival Opera

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