

The Life and Work of Pauline Viardot Garcia

The Life and Work of Pauline Viardot Garcia:
The Years of Grace, Volume 2, 1863-1910

By

Barbara Kendall-Davies

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P U B L I S H I N G

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In memory of Maria Callas and with grateful thanks to Dr. Alexandre Zviguilsky, Jillian Skerry, Christine Holohan and Christopher and Giles Davies.



Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, the genius who inspired all the Garcias.
BKD Collection

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Alina	Alina	Donizetti
Alceste	Alceste	Gluck
Alice	Robert le Diable	Meyerbeer
Amina	La Sonnambula	Bellini
Angiolina	La Cenerentola	Rossini
Arsace	Semiramide	Rossini
Azucena	Il Trovatore	Verdi
Bianca	Bianca e Gualtiero	Lvov
Desdemona	Otello	Rossini
Donna Anna	Don Giovanni	Mozart
Fidalma	Il Matrimonio Segreto	Cimarosa
Fidès	Le Prophète	Meyerbeer
Isabelle	Robert le Diable	Meyerbeer
Lady Macbeth	Macbeth	Verdi
Leonora	La Favorita	Donizetti
Leonora	Fidelio	Beethoven
Lucia	Lucia di Lammermoor	Donizetti
Maria	Maria di Rohan	Donizetti
Marie Madeleine	Marie Madeleine	Jules Massenet
Norina	Don Pasquale	Donizetti
Norma	Norma	Bellini
Ninetta	La Gazza Ladra	Rossini
Orazio	Gli Orazi	Cimarosa
Orféo	Orféo	Gluck
Orsini	Lucrezia Borgia	Donizetti
Romeo	I Capuletti e Montecchi	Bellini
Rosina	Il Barbiere di Siviglia	Rossini
Prima Donna	La Prova d'una Seria	Gnecco
Sapho	Sapho	Gounod
The Maid	The Maid of Artois	Balfe
Vielka	Der Feldlage	Meyerbeer
Zerlina	Don Giovanni	Mozart

FOREWORD

What has proved to be my two volumes of biography of Pauline Viardot Garcia began in the mid 1990s when on a journey from Chapet to Paris, my pianist, Jillian Skerry and I passed through a western suburb of Paris named Bougival. I had always been interested in operatic history and singers, especially those who lived before the invention of the gramophone, and the name Bougival rang a bell concerning Pauline Viardot Garcia. We stopped the car at a little turning just off the main road, past the house where, I later discovered, the composer of *Carmen*, Georges Bizet had died in 1875.

As we got out of the car, a young woman came out of the back of a house leading a little crocodile of kindergarten children. I asked her if she had heard of a singer by the name of Viardot and she exclaimed, "Oh, yes, Madame Viardot; she had a house just a little way back on the other side of the road. It stands on a wooded hill beyond a garage and a block of flats". We turned the car around and drove up a winding track behind the garage as far as we could go then walked up the steep incline until we came to two metal gates a few yards apart. Behind the one on the left was an elegant, white stucco Palladian style house surrounded by a large expanse of lawn. It looked neglected and the whole area was cordoned off by a wire fence. On the right was a sign indicating a museum. We rang the bell on the left hand gate and eventually a young man with a large dog appeared. We politely asked if we could go in but he brusquely replied that it was a private house. Instead he pointed to the other gate and said that the museum was in the house on rising ground which had formerly belonged to the Russian writer, Ivan Tourgueniev. It is now administered by the Association des Amis d'Ivan Tourgueniev, Pauline Viardot et Maria Malibran, but only open on Sundays. As it was Wednesday and we were just passing through Paris on our way to Druyes les Belles Fontaines in the Yonne, we had to admit defeat.

However, the following year, my husband and I were in Paris on a Sunday so took the 258 bus from La Defense and went to the Museum. Although the main road is busy, once on the estate among the mass of trees, it is like being in another age. Turgenev's house is a cross between a Swiss chalet and a Russian dacha and the visitors' entrance is at the rear, leading into an ante-room where tickets and books are sold. There were

few people in the house so we had plenty of space and time to look around. In the salon with its long windows opening onto balconies we looked across the garden towards the Viardot's house as Turgenev must often have done. He brought his square piano from Baden-Baden and it now has pride of place in the middle of the room. What a tale it could tell of the pianistic giants who played on it, including Anton Rubinstein, Franz Liszt, Johannes Brahms, Hans von Bülow and Clara Schumann to name but a few.¹

From late spring through summer, concerts are given in this salon on Saturdays or Sundays, but when the weather is dull or misty the whole place takes on a melancholic air and despite the closeness of the modern world, the visitor seems to be suspended in time. As there were few visitors, my husband and I chatted with Dr. Alexandre Zviguilsky, the President of the Association des Amis d'Ivan Tourgueniev, Pauline Viardot et Maria Malibran. We told him that we were singers from England who are particularly interested in 19th century singers. He expressed regret that the Amis had no access to the Viardot house, and was upset that a wire fence separates both properties. The white house is now empty and becoming more neglected but there is little the Amis can do because it is owned by the Council who would like to sell it to a developer. It would be a sacrilege if this happened because the ambition of the Amis is for both houses to become an international study centre. Many of us have signed petitions to stop a sale taking place but the future is uncertain.

As Chris and I were in Paris again the following year, we went back to Bougival. Alexandre was on duty and told us a great deal about Pauline Viardot and her family, the Garcias, as well as Ivan Turgenev. When he asked me if I would write a monograph on Viardot's English career for the next edition of their Cahiers, I accepted. He gave me the telephone number of April Fitzlyon, the author of *The Price of Genius*, the first biography in English. However, she said that there was not much material about Viardot's work in England. She implied that having written about Viardot and her sister, Maria Malibran, she had no further interest in the Garcias. Apparently at that time she was in the process of writing a book about Russian Opera. I later gathered that she was elderly and perhaps not in the best of health when I spoke to her because she died shortly afterwards. I regret that I never had the chance to meet her because she was a fine scholar.

¹ The author gave a recital in the salon on May 29th, 2010, as part of the events to mark the centenary of Pauline Viardot's death, and was accompanied on Turgenev's piano by the composer, pianist and singer, Charles Robin Broad.

In 1989, on my first visit to Nohant, the country home of the writer, George Sand, I bought a book containing letters written in French between 1839 and 1849 by Sand and Pauline Viardot. Later I bought several Cahiers, also in French, at Bougival. However, apart from Mrs. Fitzlyon's biography I found nothing in English so began my research by going to the Covent Garden archive. There was very little on Viardot as the theatre burned down in 1856 and by the time it re-opened in 1858, she was singing at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane for the Mapleson Company. My next port of call was the Mander/Michinson theatrical collection in Kent and the Theatre Museum in London. Again I only picked up a few clues and it became apparent that I would have to turn detective.

I decided to research the life of Ivan Turgenev as he was a life-long friend of the Viardots so went to the Slavonic Department of the University of London. The Westminster Library at Victoria was a rich source of material, particularly the diaries of Clara Schumann, the journals of Queen Victoria, and letters and diaries of English musicians; some of whom had worked with Viardot. I went frequently to the British Library; and to the Newspaper department in Colindale where reviews of Viardot's performances gave me places and times.

The book collector, Stanley Henig, sold me a quantity of out of print volumes on musical subjects, and gradually research material began to pile up. Letters and diaries, not necessarily of well-known people, gave me many valuable insights, particularly regarding theatrical and operatic life in the 19th century.

My monograph for the Amis at Bougival appeared in Cahiers No. 22, dated 1998, though it actually appeared about two years later. It was beautifully translated into French by Floriane Seroussi, and I chose some appropriate illustrations to accompany it.

When it was published, I received letters from the eminent Turgenev scholars, Professor Nicolas Zekulin, in Canada, and Emeritus Professor Patrick Waddington in New Zealand, who together with Dr. Alexandre Zviguilsky, encouraged me to write a biography of Pauline Viardot, as Mrs. Fitzlyon's book had been published in 1964 and was out of print. At the end of her life, Pauline Viardot was asked why she had not written her autobiography and she said that she couldn't because there was too much. As she lived just two months short of her ninetieth birthday, I soon realized that I would need to write it in two volumes.

It was difficult to find a publisher though I approached many firms, all of whom said the same thing; "good subject, well written, but too specialized for us". I told Alexandre that I would bequeath the manuscript to Bougival but he said it had to be published. Suddenly fate took a hand

and I was put in touch with Dr. Robert Letellier, the Meyerbeer scholar, through whose good offices Cambridge Scholars' Press, as it then was, agreed to publish the first volume of my biography. The second edition of *The Years of Fame* appeared in 2004, together with a CD of six of Viardot's songs sung by me, accompanied by Jillian Skerry.

I am grateful to the American researcher and editor of songs by members of the Garcia family, Carol Russell Law, who supplied me with several Viardot songs. I obtained photo copies of further songs in the British Library and while in Paris I spotted an album of ten Viardot songs in Ary Scheffer's house, now the Musée de la Vie Romantique at 16, rue Chaptal. On request, the museum authorities kindly sent me photocopies of all the songs in the album.

I am also grateful to Dr. Céline Peslerbes for allowing me to read her unpublished doctoral thesis, *La Musique française Londres sous le règne de la reine Victoria Ière*.

While writing my first volume, I was keen to discover the castle where Pauline and her husband lived in Scotland in 1851/2. The only reference I came across was in a French book which mentioned Dunse. I looked at a map of Scotland and finally tracked down a place named Duns in the Borders. I wrote to the Tourist Office and they replied to say that there was a castle on the edge of the town. Assuming it was a National Trust property I wrote to the custodian and was surprised to receive a reply from Mr. Alexander Hay, who said that his family had lived at the property for six hundred years and that Pauline had been there. He invited me to visit.

At that time my son, Giles, was singing with Scottish Opera and as my husband and I wanted to see the production, I asked him if there would be performances in the Borders. He confirmed that they were going to Galashiels, so once more I got out the map and discovered that Duns was only about an hour's bus ride from there. I was thus able to kill two birds with one stone. Mr. Hay was away when we arrived but his charming wife, Alice, showed us around the castle and we sat in the delightful morning room overlooking the park and looked through a photograph album containing pictures of Pauline, Louis and their ten year old daughter, Louise. Mrs. Hay also showed us the billiard room where Pauline used to play and I was able to take photographs and learn about life there. Mrs. Hay said that Pauline had sung a recital for the family and their guests before she left and they still had the programme.

I am most grateful to Mr. and Mrs. Hay because they gave me the opportunity to fill in a gap in Pauline's life and when I was writing the

chapter concerning her Scottish sojourn I was completely immersed in the atmosphere of the castle and its surroundings. ²

Several years have passed since my first volume, not only because I had many other commitments but due to the fact that I assumed that the second part of her life would not be as interesting as the first. Nevertheless, I continued with my research and discovered that, if anything, it was even more fascinating.

As a singer, I have visited many places Pauline would have known and this has helped tremendously in building up a composite picture of her life.

I have called the second volume the *Years of Grace* and I hope that Pauline would be pleased with my “labour of love”.

Barbara Kendall-Davies
Jersey, May, 2012

² Duns Castle was used as a substitute for Balmoral in the film *Mrs. Brown* with Judy Dench and Billy Connolly.

PREFACE

BY GILES DAVIES

Beginning in 1863, some four years after the composer Hector Berlioz revived Gluck's *Orfeo* for the operatic legend, Pauline Viardot Garcia; *The Years of Grace* continues the life story of the opera diva, composer and teacher. The first volume, *The Years of Fame*, by the same author covered Viardot's singing career from 1836 until 1863.

Those closest to Viardot, including her husband, Louis, and the Russian writer, Ivan Turgenev, continue to play an important role in her life, alongside the contemporary artists, composers, singers and writers who became close friends over her life-time.

It is somewhat timely, that in Charles Dickens's celebratory year, the Victorian writer features in the Viardot Garcia life story, as he was a life-long friend and visited Paris to hear her in the title role of *Orfeo*, taking the twenty-year old English composer, Arthur Sullivan with him. Dickens introduced him to Viardot and she in turn introduced Sullivan to the famous Italian opera composer, Gioacchino Rossini.

Place, locations and illustrations are crucial to this second volume, as are the monumental composers Brahms, Liszt, and Wagner, to name only a few. Throughout this book, the political climate in Europe, Russia and England remains a strong back ground to the various travels, professional and social, of Viardot Garcia and her family.

In particular, 1865 was a busy year for her with concerts and performances of *Le Prophète*; *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* and *Otello* (Rossini). Johannes Brahms and Clara Schumann were regular guests at her home in Baden-Baden, where a garden theatre was built alongside Villa Viardot.

This was a rich period of creativity for Brahms, whose compositions included songs, instrumental music, *A German Requiem*, *Liebeslieder Waltzes*, and the *Alto Rhapsody*. The memorable moment when the writers Turgenev and Dostoyevsky met at a railway station, and pointedly ignored each other, will undoubtedly amuse.

On visiting London Viardot made friends with Clara Novello and other notable performers, and gave her support to the younger British composers Charles Villiers Stanford, Arthur Sullivan and Arthur Goring Thomas. The

artist Frederick Leighton, world famous today for his painting *Flaming June* and his own highly individual and exotic London address at Leighton House in Holland Park, was a friend of many years standing. (This location was used relatively recently in the TV film of Agatha Christie's *Cards on the Table*, featuring the Belgian detective, Hercule Poirot).

Although the composer Georges Bizet didn't survive to a ripe old age, partly due to a somewhat traumatic private life, the premiere of his opera *Carmen* in 1875 also features here.

Viardot Garcia enjoyed many privileges, including access to the score of Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin* four months before the opera's Moscow première. The reader is also made aware, as with the first volume, of the influence of the Garcias' vocal teaching, much of which still resonates around the world today in the 21st century.

The book includes a list of Viardot Garcia's stage roles, colour and black and white illustrations, a full bibliography, and a new CD of a group of Viardot's songs in French and German. Over the last decade or so, many of these have been returning to the recital platform and on various romantic song compilations on CD and the Internet, particularly, of course, sung by mezzo sopranos.

Viardot Garcia's songs are delicate and detailed "salon water-colours" rather than "operatic oils", a fact that all singers and their accompanists do well to remember.

I sincerely hope that *The Years of Grace*, 1863-1910, a carefully researched and beautifully published volume, will be of considerable interest to all 19th century scholars, musicians, musicologists, and those with a passion for the history of the theatre and the human voice, as well as the general reader.

Giles Davies,
London, May 2012

CHAPTER ONE

TIME FOR CHANGE, 1863

Now that the decision was taken, Pauline Viardot, though relieved, was beset by the thousand and one things she had to do. Her husband, Louis,¹ had long wanted to leave France but Pauline's career as a celebrated opera singer, had kept them based in Paris. The rot had set in in 1851 when Prince Louis Napoleon² staged a coup d'état and the Viardots fled to Scotland to escape being proscribed or imprisoned after their house was searched. Louis's republican sympathies were well known³ and incriminating documents from noted dissidents were found at their home in the rue de Douai, making it imperative for them to get away as soon as possible. They stayed at Duns Castle in Scotland for three months but when an amnesty was declared they returned to Paris where Claudie, Pauline's second child was born in May 1852. The coup d'état was serious enough but when Louis Napoleon proclaimed himself Emperor Napoleon III in December, 1852, and assumed absolute power, the noose was drawn ever tighter.

Under the new regime, *liberté, fraternité* and *égalité* were put on hold for the foreseeable future and many people known to the Viardots were proscribed, imprisoned, or even executed. Their staunch friend, George Sand,⁴ was nothing if not courageous and she sought an interview with Napoleon. She had known him from his youth and she implored him to be merciful to prisoners and to rescind notices of execution. It appears that her pleading was effective because some executions were cancelled and the condemned men were imprisoned instead.

¹ Louis Claude Viardot, 1800-1883, Lawyer, journalist, art critic, historian, translator and political philosopher.

² Charles Louis Napoleon Bonaparte, 1808-1873, son of Louis, King of Holland and Hortense de Beauharnais; nephew of Napoleon I; Prince President of France, 1848, Emperor Napoleon III 1852-70.

³ At Duns Castle, Scotland, as guests of William Hay and his family.

⁴ The pseudonym of Amandine Aurore Lucie, née Dupin, Baronne Dudevant; 1804-1876. French woman novelist; a life long friend of the Viardots.

The Press was gagged which made life very difficult for journalists, writers and printers and Victor Hugo⁵, (who referred to Napoleon as “Le Petit”), and Victor Schölcher⁶ took refuge in the Channel Islands⁷ while hundreds of others went to England or Belgium. George Sand remained at Nohant, her country chateau but did not find life easy as there were factions at La Châtre, her nearest town, who disapproved of her socialist principles. She had always been a prolific novelist but she now worked even harder in order to give financial aid to the families of those who were taken away.

Despite Napoleon’s various measures to overcome wide-spread unemployment, Louis Viardot was very unhappy with the draconian nature of political life. Some of Napoleon’s schemes failed⁸ but others prospered, such as the huge building project he inaugurated, with Baron Hausmann as architect and town planner. This vast development provided thousands of jobs but many people were appalled at the speedy demolition of whole streets of ancient buildings, which totally changed the face of Paris, though eventually transforming it into one of the grandest cities in Europe.

Pauline concentrated on forwarding her career, returning to London shortly after the birth of her second daughter, Claudie, where she continued to take part in the opera and concert seasons and undertook provincial tours. Her third daughter, Marianne, was born in 1854 but Pauline returned to work soon after the birth, creating the role of Azucena in London; guest performances throughout Germany as well as another Russian season in 1856. She also created the role of Lady Macbeth in the British première of Verdi’s opera in Dublin in 1858.

In 1859, her old friend, Hector Berlioz,⁹ was engaged to mount a production of Gluck’s *Orfeo* for the Paris Opera and asked Pauline to sing the title role. Both musicians revered Gluck’s music but as his operas had long been out of fashion, it was more a labour of love than the expectation of a huge commercial success. In the event, to everybody’s amazement, it was phenomenally successful and proved to be the crowning glory of Pauline’s singing career. During the course of just over three years, she sang more than 150 performances of the role.

At that time Berlioz¹⁰ was not a well man. He was morose and miserable mainly due to the fact that his marriage to his second wife¹¹ was

⁵ Victor Marie Hugo, 1802-1885, celebrated French novelist and man of letters.

⁶ Victor Schölcher, political activist and writer, friend of Louis Viardot.

⁷ Victor Hugo spent several years in Jersey and Guernsey.

⁸ Such as the project to drain mosquito infected marshes in the Sologne.

⁹ Louis Hector Berlioz, French composer and critic, 1803-1869.

¹⁰ Pauline first met Berlioz in 1839.

a disaster, and he felt neglected and overlooked as a composer. Because of his emotional turmoil, his health had given cause for concern for several years but the success of *Orf eo* now brought a new lease of life. Despite the fact that he had known Pauline for twenty years, her performance as the grieving youth so affected him that he fell in love with her. She was naturally fond of her old friend and gave him loyal support but she left him in no doubt that his love was unrequited.

For years he had striven for the staging of his opera “The Trojans” at the Paris Op era and Pauline had assisted him in the preparation of this work, even making a vocal reduction of the full score as she was an excellent pianist. Berlioz allowed her to assume that when the opera finally reached the stage, she would sing one of the leading female roles but, to her utter grief and consternation, when the time came he passed her over for a younger, less celebrated singer.

Pauline had often suffered at the hands of the Parisian press¹² and those who did not wish her well crowed at the humiliating rejection Berlioz had inflicted. In order to save face, she declared that she was retiring from opera in France and would be taking up residence in Baden-Baden, a fashionable spa town in the Black Forest region of Germany. As the town is close to the French border and within easy reach of Paris by rail via Strasbourg, she was not entirely cutting herself off from the city and her friends.

Although Louis had not previously succeeded in persuading Pauline to leave France; what she saw as Berlioz’s betrayal was the catalyst, and she was now ready to uproot the family and move to the Black Forest. Fortunately, the Viardots knew Baden-Baden very well because Pauline had sung there many times. For years an international musical festival was held each summer, attended by notables from all over Europe, and the town was particularly popular with the Prussian and Russian royal families, as well as the aristocracy and nobility of many countries because it was a good meeting place for far flung relatives and friends. Baden owed its success to its Casino where, as well as gambling, various entertainments took place so that during the summer months the town teemed with eminent musicians, performers, artists, gamblers, adventurers, and the  elite of many nations.

Pauline had no intention of giving up singing because she was only forty-two and hopefully had many years of professional life ahead of her.

¹¹ Marie Rezio, an unsuccessful singer.

¹² This was due to the political affiliations of her husband and close friends, such as George Sand.

Since 1838, she had constantly been on the move, and she looked forward to being settled in one place for longer periods. She was a keen composer and intended to write songs and chamber music in her leisure moments. Though some years earlier she had said that she found teaching boring, she now felt that it was her duty to pass on the fruits of her experience and what she had learned from her illustrious family, the Garcias.¹³ She also believed that in Baden she would have her pick of the best students from Europe, the British Isles, Russia and America.

Although the Viardots had no intention of living in France while Napoleon III was in power, they retained their house in the rue de Douai and let it to Charles Crosnier de Varigny. It is clear that they did not intend to burn their bridges but left themselves with the choice of returning to Paris should there be a regime change at any time. At least they would be assured of a regular income from a substantial rent during their absence.

In 1844 they bought the Chateau de Courtavenel, an ancient stone edifice¹⁴ within a large estate where they installed a theatre in the attic and enjoyed summer holidays, entertaining family and friends. However, it was now closed up and left in the care of their old friend, Dr. Frisson, who had brought Paul Viardot, their youngest child, into the world in 1857.

¹³ Her father Manuel del Popolo 1775-1832, was a famous Spanish tenor, composer and teacher; her mother Joaquina Sitchès, was a soprano who taught Pauline; her brother, Manuel Patrizio, 1805-1906, was an eminent teacher and her sister Maria Malibran, 1808-1836, was a famous prima donna.

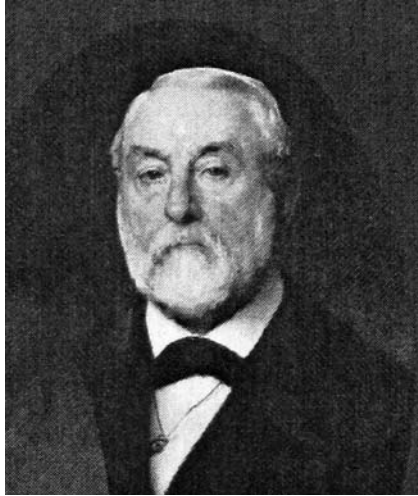
¹⁴ The estate was about 30 miles south east of Paris, in the Seine et Marne region.



Pauline Viardot as Orfeo, ATVM



The writer, George Sand, ATVM



Louis Viardot in middle age, ATVM



The French Emperor, Napoleon III, Google