

Just down the block from the cavernous Armory lies the intimate Kaye Playhouse at Hunter College. This 600-seat, acoustically friendly venue welcomed the young artists of the Martina Arroyo Foundation Prelude to Performance program Thursday night for a production of Verdi's *La Traviata* remarkable for its delicacy and charm.

Daniel Lipton's fleet conducting and Laura Alley's detailed, traditional production framed a performance of the leading role of Violetta that is among the loveliest I have witnessed on any stage. Cecilia Violetta Lopez's cool, shimmering soprano easily vaulted the coloratura hurdles of the first act, rocketing to a bright, pingy version of the traditionally interpolated high E-flat at the end of "Sempre libera." Even more impressive was her quiet legato singing in the second and third acts, unaffected and heartfelt.

And she acted even more naturally than she sang, suggesting the courtesan's hectic life of pleasure in the first act with delicate dancelike movements before "melting" into a softer, but still elegant, body language for the more demure second act. Even in the last act, when Violetta is slowly dying, Ms. Lopez maintained a measure of grace, as if she were enacting a romantic memory of death rather than the harsh Cecilia Violetta Lopez's cool, shimmering soprano easily vaulted the coloratura hurdles of the first act, rocketing to a bright, pingy version of the traditionally interpolated high E-flat at the end of "Sempre libera." Even more impressive was her quiet legato singing in the second and third acts, unaffected and heartfelt.

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The conventional wisdom is that high-concept opera like *The Passenger* is the future of musical theater, but Ms. Lopez's promising debut suggests that the old-fashioned virtues of a fine diva performance may be just as likely to keep the art alive in the 21st century.



Cecilia Violetta Lopez in 'La Traviata.'
(Photo by Jen Joyce Davis)