

# Baltimore Concert Opera presents: Massenet's *Werther*



## WHO?

Composer:  
Jules Massenet  
(1842– 1912)

Librettists: Édouard Blau,  
Paul Milliet and Georges  
Hartmann (who used the  
pseudonym Henri Grémont).  
It is loosely based on a novel  
by Johann Wolfgang von  
Goethe

## WHAT?

One of the most beautiful,  
popular, and tragic examples  
of French Romantic opera.

## WHEN?

World premiere: (in German)  
February 16, 1892  
French premiere:  
December 27, 1892  
Parisian premiere:  
January 16, 1893

## WHERE?

First performance at  
The Imperial Theater Hofoper  
in Vienna; later in Geneva  
and then at the Opéra  
Comique in Paris.

Baltimore Concert Opera  
11 W. Mount Vernon Pl.  
Baltimore, MD, 21201  
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## The Gist of the Story:

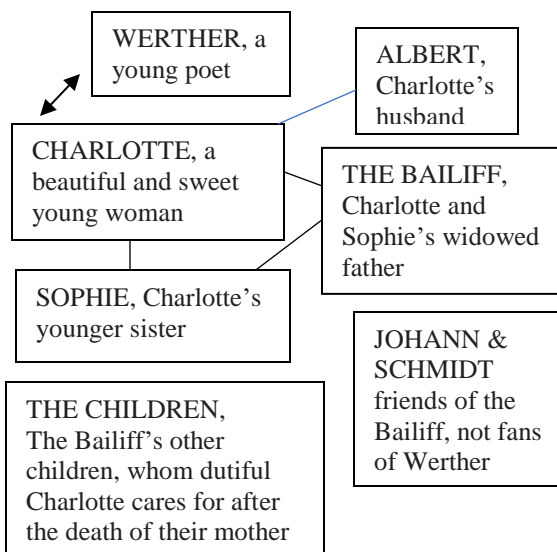
Setting: Germany in the early 1780s

It is July and Werther, a melancholy young man, falls in love with Charlotte although he knows she is promised to another man, Albert. Though they share a kinship, she turns him away and dutifully marries her betrothed. Several months later, Werther returns to the town to see her and is torn apart by the fact that she cannot requite his love. She sends him away for his own good, but promises he can return for a visit. Christmas Eve, he returns and they share a tender moment, but the torment is too much for Werther. Saying he is going on a journey, he requests to borrow Albert's pistols. In anguish, Charlotte sends them, but she then races to Werther's apartment. She is too late and finds him dying from his self-inflicted wounds. They profess their love in his last moments and he dies in her arms.

## Say it: "Werther" = "Vair-tair"

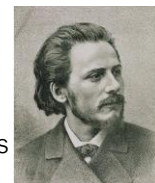
Confused about how to pronounce the title of this opera? You are not alone! Remember, this is not the popular candy with the same spelling! Rather, this is the French pronunciation of a German name! Both syllables rhyme with "bear" and the "w" is pronounced as a "v." If you want to get really fancy, try using a French guttural "r" for both syllables!

## The Characters



## About the composer: Jules Massenet

Massenet was one of the most popular French opera composers for over 20 years in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. He was quite prolific, but today his most well-known operatic works are *Manon* and *Werther*. Like many prominent French composers of the period, Massenet both attended and later became a professor at the Paris Conservatoire. He won the most prestigious musical prize in France, the Prix de Rome in 1863. He taught composition at the Conservatoire from 1878 until 1896, when he resigned after the death of the director, Ambroise Thomas. Among his students were Gustave Charpentier, Ernest Chausson, Reynaldo Hahn.



## Goethe and "Werther Fever"

Goethe wrote the semi-autobiographical *The Sorrows of Young Werther* when he was 24 and in love with an actual young beauty named Charlotte. The epitome of the *Sturm und Drang* literary movement, Goethe later tried to distance himself from the work. The English Touring Opera notes, "The book also triggered off a *Werther Fever* among the young Romantics of Europe (and you wouldn't be far wrong to imagine squealing fan girls and crazed fan-fiction writers at this point!). The young Romantics latched onto the work like teenagers do with the *Twilight Saga* today: thousands of poems, stories, sequels, prequels and plays were written in admiration of the work, and fans desperately requested Goethe to write another book in order to follow up the tale. Young men throughout Europe started dressing like Werther from the cover of the book, in his iconic blue jacket and yellow trousers... Sadly this devotion to the work also had terrible implications, as the work caused a considerable increase in the number of suicides – a development which became known as 'The Werther Effect.' Many young people tried to follow in Werther's footsteps, sometimes successfully, by wading into rivers and attempting to drown themselves, with copies of Goethe's novel tucked faithfully into their pockets."

<https://englishtouringopera.wordpress.com/2015/09/21/werther-fever/>

## Read more about *Werther* and Massenet

Finck, Henry (1910). [Massenet and His Operas](#). New York and London: John Lane.  
Fuller, Nick (2016-08-22). ["Jules Massenet: His Life and Works"](#) (PDF). MusicWeb International.  
Huebner, Steven (2006). [French Opera at the Fin de Siècle: Werther](#). Oxford Univ. Press