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Runner-up entry for 2018

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Research Statement
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Describe how you came to choose your topic, specifically noting any pre-research that you did. What sources did you use in this pre-research? To what extent did you consult with librarians, faculty, or others? How did this pre-research lead you to your topic?

My initial interest in pursuing this field of study came from my disappointment in the lack of diverse composers within the Western musical canon. As we continue to teach and learn about foundations of music, we reference mostly white men and the rules they created under subjective understandings of musical excellence. Professor Mark Seto introduced me to Susan McClary's "Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality" where she explores sexism within these canonical works, focusing on operas and the depiction of women as the femme fatale. Her work was certainly enlightening, but I felt a desire further to focus on how women of color are treated in opera, varying from white women's treatment on account of race and class. I consulted with Professor Mark Seto, the Greer Music Library, as well as my mother who is the Music Librarian for the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra to find examples of women of color in opera specifically for the use of musical and plot narrative representation. Through these consultations and note taking, I focused in on Madame Butterfly by Giocomo Puccini and found this pervasive narrative of East Asian submission to Western dominance within artistic mediums both before and after Puccini's time.

Describe your process of finding information for your project. Note specifically the tools you used to undertake your research, as well as the specific search strategies you used within these tools. (Note: "Ebsco," being an umbrella vendor, is not a specific enough response when identifying tools; listing the "library database" is also an unacceptably vague answer. Specific tools include JSTOR, America: History & Life, Web of Science, etc., along with OneSearch, the new library system.)

Through this process, I used Classical Scores Library, Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online, and RILM Abstracts of Music Literature for research on Puccini, his influences to write Madame Butterfly, and the full score of Madame Butterfly. These databases also led me to Ralph P. Locke who has done extensive musicological research on Orientalism within opera and J. Parakilas who examines the alien-resident exoticized relationship between characters in opera, also through a musicological lens. I used JSTOR for pieces that focused more on the social repercussions of Puccini's Orientalist approach, most notably relying on Arthur Groos, whose research extends to the storyline itself of Madame Butterfly, the representation of Pinkerton as a white savior, Japanese reception of the opera, and the impact the role of Butterfly had on her own performers. The Cambridge Opera Journal, The Musical Quarterly, American Quarterly, Opera Quarterly, and Cultural Critique, all bridged musicological and social research on Madame Butterfly as well as operas of the time with similar femme fatale narratives.

Describe your process of evaluating the resources you found. How did you make decisions about which resources you would use, and which you wouldn't? What kinds of questions did you ask yourself about resources in order to determine whether they were worthy of inclusion?

Because I made my research through an intersectional lens, I tried to find a variety of sources that covered music theory, gender representations, inherent sexism, racism, and classism within foundational music, and racial passing and assimilation within a purely social context. Madame Butterfly is still an opera that is widely produced today, so I decided not to include certain sources that were perhaps too dated as it would favor the opera and neglect to delve into the musical and social aspects of the narrative. I decided to include reviews of widely popularized works so as to gain a perspective on the discussions within the field of scholarship. For example, when first reading McClary's "Feminine Endings," I also looked at reviews that critiqued her work, offering different perspectives to the matter at hand. Overall, my thesis became about assimilation, which allowed me to take in all of my research and find the evidence myself for what I believed was present in the opera, taking other's opinions and research in as well.