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## Frontiers, Borders, Boundaries: Cross-Cultural Encounters in the New York City Reception of La fanciulla del West

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Doctor of Philosophy

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FRONTIERS, BORDERS, BOUNDARIES: CROSS-CULTURAL ENCOUNTERS  
IN THE NEW YORK CITY RECEPTION OF *LA FANCIULLA DEL WEST*

(Spine title: The New York City Reception of *La fanciulla del West*)

(Thesis format: Monograph)

by

Kathryn Marie Fenton

Graduate Program in Music

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies  
The University of Western Ontario  
London, Ontario, Canada

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THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO  
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The thesis by

**Kathryn Marie Fenton**

entitled:

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City Reception of *La fanciulla del West***

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation maps the responses to the world premiere of Puccini's *La fanciulla del West* (10 December 1910, Metropolitan Opera House, New York City). It seeks to arrive at a deeper understanding of the opera's ambivalent reception in the New York City musical press. From the vantage point of national musical identity, it analyzes the argumentation of the reviews and articles in the New York City newspapers from 1905 to 1911 and determines the themes and patterns that connect them. It then places the critical commentary into the larger contexts of both the New York City opera field of 1910 and the discourse of the American Frontier Myth. Critics carefully negotiated conflicting views of personal, national, and musical identities in their assessments of this work. The early twentieth-century concern over the development of an American musical identity motivates much of the negative criticism about *La fanciulla del West*, while cosmopolitanism drives much of the positive criticism. The reviews offer a window into nativism and cosmopolitan nationalism in New York City musical life during the first decade of the twentieth century.

Keywords: Giacomo Puccini, Metropolitan Opera Company, David Belasco, Frontier Myth in Opera, California Gold Rush in Opera, Italian Opera, reception history, Cosmopolitanism, American musical identity, opera criticism, Nativism, Transatlantic, world premiere, *La fanciulla del West*, New York City, Italian-American relations.

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Many librarians and technicians at several libraries, museums, and archives have been of invaluable assistance. The staff at the University of Iowa Media Library, the British Library's Collindale Newspaper Library, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, and the Metropolitan Opera Company Archives helped me negotiate boxes and boxes of microfilms. Mia Pia Ferraris of the Archivio Storico Ricordi and the staff at the Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense helped me in my search to find out exactly what American materials Puccini owned and accessed. In the name of that quest Gabriele Dotto pointed me in the direction of two supportive individuals: Simonetta Puccini and Gabriella Biagi Ravenni. Gabriella Biagi Ravenni made vital suggestions for further avenues of research and allowed me access to materials at the Centro Studi Giacomo Puccini. Signora Puccini kindly answered my questions and consulted the developing catalogue of the material collection housed by the Museo Villa Puccini. Through her, I learned of the name Alice Warder. The curator of Evergreen House in Baltimore, MD, Jacqueline O'Regan, and later Kelly Spring in the Special Collections Reading Room at the Eisenhower Library of Johns Hopkins University, were helpful in locating correspondence between the composer and Alice Warder Garrett. The library staff at the

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

On 10 December 1910, Giacomo Puccini's seventh opera, *La fanciulla del West*, had its premiere before a sold-out audience at New York City's Metropolitan Opera House. The performance was the Metropolitan Opera Company's first world premiere by any composer. By all accounts, the premiere was an unambiguous success and the event itself recognized as a major moment in New York cultural history. Reports in *The New York Times* claimed that there were fourteen curtain calls after the first act alone, nineteen after the second and endless cheers and applause following the conclusion of the final act.<sup>1</sup> The management bestowed countless wreaths and flowers upon the performers as the audience applauded and cheered long after the final curtain fell. Hundreds of people attended a reception given in Puccini's honour following the performance. Puccini's publisher Giulio Ricordi sent the composer a telegram with a single word: "Giubilante."<sup>2</sup> Giulio Ricordi also wrote letters on two separate occasions to George Maxwell, Casa Ricordi's New York City agent, stating that he considered the premiere a triumph and felt that Puccini had raised the operatic art to new heights.<sup>3</sup> Ricordi believed that the success in New York City would repeat itself in Italy and across Europe.<sup>4</sup> The initial public opinion matched Puccini's own

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Aldrich, "Melodrama Set to Music," *New York Times*, 11 December 1910.

<sup>2</sup> The telegram was dated 9 December 1910, the day before the opera's premiere. See the Casa Ricordi "Copialettere, 1910-1911," vol. 7, 225. On 11 December Ricordi sent a second telegram, "Commosso teneramente abbraccio. Doge. Alleluja." [I embrace you tenderly. Doge. Alleluia.] See "Copialettere, 1910-1911," vol. 7, 294. I wish to thank Maria Pia Ferraris, the archivist for Archivio Storico Ricordi, for suggesting that I examine these documents.

<sup>3</sup> Ricordi, "Copialettere," 13 December 1910, vol. 7: 353.

<sup>4</sup> From a letter 3 January 1911 found in the Ricordi "Copialettere, 1910-1911," vol. 8: 322.

evaluation of his opera. He called it “the best he had ever written” and expected it to become as popular as *La Bohème*.<sup>5</sup>

In light of this popular response, *La fanciulla del West*'s premiere could be considered an unequivocal success. Yet the music reviews tell a different story. Marked by ambivalence, the reviews expose the New York City critics' struggle to reconcile the opera they expected to see with the one they actually saw. Their view of the opera's place in Puccini's repertoire and in the early-twentieth century operatic canon differed—in some cases drastically—from the composer's own assessment.

One of the strongest objections made to the opera concerned its local colour, its attempt to portray a Californian mining camp during the 1849 Gold Rush through characters, dialect, body language, clothing, buildings, landscape, customs, situations, and music considered stereotypical of the region. Critics found the manner in which Puccini attempted to musically depict the American locale problematic. Arthur Farwell identified the broader concerns of the issue in his *Musical America* review:

To sum up in a single sentence the peculiar musical phenomenon witnessed at the première of Puccini's *Girl of the Golden West*, it may be said that it was an attempt to put the American West into music by one to whom the task was impossible, and to present it to the American audience least capable of receiving it even if he had been able to do so. To get from the soul of Puccini to the soul of the audience on this occasion, the best in his music had to pass through two masks: the artificial mask of Americanism with which he overlaid much of his natural musical inspiration, and the mask of social artificiality with which an operatic audience—especially a first night audience—in New York surrounds itself. That Puccini proved as effective with his music as he did on Saturday night, against these overwhelming odds, is vastly to his credit. Fortunately for the composer, America will not judge him in the present case according to the standard by which it would appear from his own words he would wish to be judged: namely, according to the degree in which

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<sup>5</sup> Eugenio Gara, ed., *Carteggi Pucciniani* (Milan: Ricordi, 1958), 353; Vincent Seligman, *Puccini among Friends* (New York: MacMillan, 1938), 192. For the first quotation see the letter of 15 August 1910 to Sybil Seligman and for the second see the letter of 7 December 1910 to Elvira.

he has succeeded in imbuing his music with the spirit of America, or of the West.<sup>6</sup>

Farwell's comments represent just one of the voices in the controversy surrounding the subject matter of Puccini's opera. Others, like Richard Aldrich, music critic for *The New York Times*, also wrote about Puccini's seeming inability to capture the atmosphere of the West:

There seem to be few who heard *La fanciulla del West* who think that Mr. Puccini succeeded in injecting into it any "American local colour." He did succeed in getting into *Madama Butterfly* what at least impresses the Occidental as Japanese local colour, and in doing it, by the use of Japanese melodies and Japanese instruments, not only skillfully, but also artistically. It may be true, as we have been told, that the Japan of *Madama Butterfly* is a wholly imaginary country, as unreal as the Japan of Gilbert and Sullivan's *Mikado*; but the music at least gives an impression and envelops the stage with an atmosphere. Such an impression and such an atmosphere are lacking in *La fanciulla del West*.<sup>7</sup>

Comments about Puccini's innate ability to write "American" music, the musical materials with which he chose to do so, and method of incorporating them into the fabric of modern Italian opera appeared many times in the New York City musical press. Critics and reporters repeatedly focused on Puccini's decision to make the United States the musical and dramatic topic of his next opera, and used the concepts of local colour, realism, and authenticity as some of their primary musico-dramatic criteria for judging the overall value of his work.

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<sup>6</sup> "The Music of Puccini's Opera," *Musical America* 13, no. 6 (17 Dec. 1910): 4-5. At this point in American cultural history, the phrase "The West" generally indicated the American region from the Western side of the Mississippi river to the Pacific Ocean, while the expression "Far West" generally indicated the region west of the Rocky Mountain range. The New York City music critics quite often referred to the setting of *La fanciulla del West* as being in the "West," in addition to referring to it as California. The term "Frontier" was used interchangeably with the term "West." For an excellent history of the American West see John Mack Faragher and Robert V. Hine, *The American West: A New Interpretive History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

<sup>7</sup> *New York Times*, 18 December 1910, 10. Punctuation in all quotations of the periodical literature has been changed to reflect modern usage and Canadian spelling conventions.

In their final judgments, a few of the critics even subordinated other equally important components of an operatic work—such as dramatic power, beauty, melody, harmony, and orchestration—to atmosphere. For these critics, despite the fact that they recognized the work as a masterful and technically brilliant composition, the opera ultimately failed because it did not fulfil their expectations of how an opera should or could evoke the spirit of the Far West. Yet the libretto derived from an extremely successful American play, *The Girl of the Golden West* by David Belasco (1853-1931), which was praised for its local colour and realism,<sup>8</sup> while the music followed the common practices of exoticist opera.<sup>9</sup> Adhering to these practices, Puccini incorporated into the musical fabric of the work several references to American musical sources, some of which recur throughout the opera. Moreover a few of these sources were popular and well-known in New York City and were used as both incidental and entr'acte music for Belasco's *Girl of the Golden West*, a fact of which some critics were aware. So, if Puccini failed here, it was not for lack of trying or indifference to the exigencies of local taste.

This dissertation seeks to account for the differences between Puccini's own assessments of the opera and those of its first audience.<sup>10</sup> That audience can be divided into

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<sup>8</sup> For a standard edition of the play, consult David Belasco, *Six Plays*. "Madame Butterfly," "Du Barry," "The Darling of the Gods," "Adrea," "The Girl of the Golden West," "The Return of Peter Grimm," (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1928). For a study of the play in its cultural context and a brief discussion of its early reception, see Rosemarie Katherine Bank, "Rhetorical, Dramatic, Theatrical, and Social Contexts of Selected Frontier Plays, 1871 to 1906" (Ph.D. diss., University of Iowa, 1972).

<sup>9</sup> For a recent examination of exoticism in opera as well as an extensive bibliography on the subject, see Ralph Locke's *Musical Exoticism: Images and Reflections* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). For a broader discussion of musical exoticism, see the collection of essays edited by Jonathan Bellman in *The Exotic in Western Music* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998). For an early twentieth century analysis of exoticism in Puccini's operas, see Mosco Carner, "The Exotic Element in Puccini," *Musical Quarterly* 22 (1936): 45-67.

<sup>10</sup> In this dissertation, I shall use the term audience to refer to the group of people who attended the premiere. Since the critics attended the premiere, they are part of that group, and consequently form a subset of that group. When I mean specifically the people who wrote about the premiere and reviewed the opera for newspapers or magazines, I shall refer to them as critics. When

the general public and the music critics, and it is the latter that leaves behind a wealth of documented reactions to the opera in the form of newspaper reviews. Their reactions are particularly significant because they were recorded in newspapers and music journals that had national and even international circulations in some cases. Thus these critics played a significant role in establishing a context for the opera's reception in other American cities and those abroad. Furthermore, the reviews would serve as the first and possibly only encounter with opera many readers would have and consequently would shape their understanding of the work.

The opera's American features, seemingly obvious and logical choices for a musical depiction of the United States, generated much negative criticism. Since the opera's source was a melodrama famous and popular for its vivid local colour, and a renowned expert crafted the opera using proven strategies for evoking musical local colour, the common view that it failed upon these grounds seems somewhat surprising. It suggests that Puccini's understanding of Americanism may have differed from that of his critics. The opera and its ensuing reception serve as a site of an exchange for ideas about the nature of musical identity, particularly with respect to national identities. These evaluations of *La fanciulla del West* offer an opportunity to get to a sharper understanding of Americanism in music among a certain community at a certain time and place.

Puccini scholarship has not explored these questions very deeply. Until recently, Puccini scholars have paid only cursory attention to the reception history of *La fanciulla del West*. Most discussions occur during the course of a larger project, commonly within a chapter dedicated to the opera within the context of a life and works book. Thus the

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mean anyone who attended the premiere, including the critics, I shall use the term audience. When I mean people who attended the premiere who were not critics, I shall refer to them as the public.



literature contains several brief synopses of *La fanciulla del West*'s New York City reception but few in-depth studies of it.

These brief summaries typically draw on only three sample reviews as evidence, and most refer to the same three reviews, using them as representative and illustrative of the New York City critical response. For example, six discussions refer to *The New York Times*,<sup>11</sup> four to *The Nation*,<sup>12</sup> three to *Harper's*, two to *The New York Sun*, one to *The New York Tribune*, and one to *The Musical Courier*. Since most of these discussions fall within larger projects aimed at offering a big picture of Puccini's life or of opera in the United States, and thus serve as brief summaries of the reception not analyses of it, consulting three reviews seems like a fairly reasonable approach. However, in 1910 New York City boasted numerous daily papers, ten of which offered substantial reviews of the premiere. Furthermore, three current-events journals, two music magazines, and one literary magazine also published extensive articles and reviews about the premiere. Considering all of the reviews published in New York City would allow for a deeper engagement with the critics' positions. A more comprehensive study could reveal nuances and lines of reasoning not evident in the current summaries and degree of consensus among the critics. As a result a comprehensive study would offer a more sophisticated understanding of New York City's reception and thereby more reliably explain why the critics rejected the American features of the opera.

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<sup>11</sup> Eugenio Gara, ed., *Carteggi Pucciniani* (Milan: Ricordi, 1958), 380-82; Annie J. Randall and Rosalind Grey Davis, *Puccini and The Girl: History and Reception of "The Girl of the Golden West"* (University of Chicago Press, 2005); Michele Girardi, *Puccini: His International Art*, trans. Laura Bisani (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 259-327; Mary Jane Phillips-Matz, "Puccini's America," in *The Puccini Companion*, ed. William Weaver and Simonetta Puccini (New York: Norton, 1994), 202-27; Phillips-Matz, *Puccini: A Biography* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2002), 202-15; Julian Budden, *Puccini: His Life and Works*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 303-05; Mosco Carner, *Puccini: A Critical Biography* (London: Gerald Duckwork, 1958), 149-54, 78.

<sup>12</sup> Budden, *Puccini*; Phillips-Matz, *Puccini*; Phillips-Matz, "Puccini's America;" Girardi, *Puccini*; Gara, ed., *Carteggi*.

Of the larger studies, one focuses on the history and reception of the work, the other on the reception of the composer in Europe. Yet, for different reasons, neither one fully explains why New York City critics in particular came to reject Puccini's attempt at musically depicting Americans and the West. Annie Randall and Rosalind Gray Davis currently offer the most in-depth study on *La fanciulla del West*'s reception in *Puccini and The Girl: A History and Reception of "The Girl of the Golden West"* (2005).<sup>13</sup> They claim that the larger debate over the search for a distinct American voice in conjunction with the pre-premier publicity that capitalized on this debate motivated the rejection of the work, though they offer few examples from the press documenting the publicity. This is perhaps because the scope of their project goes beyond the early reception of *La fanciulla del West* in New York City. Randall and Davis begin their project examining how a newly discovered set of letters between Puccini and the opera's initial librettist Carlo Zangarini alters current understanding of this particular composer-librettist relationship.

In the two chapters where Randall and Davis turn their attention to how the work was treated in the New York City press, they cite more examples than previous scholarship, but in the first of these chapters "Puccini, Publicity, and the Premiere," they focus primarily on demonstrating how the headlines mislead readers from the content of some of the reviews.<sup>14</sup> Many of the reviews are thoughtful essays about the work and deserve consideration in their own right. Instead of further analyzing the New York City newspaper criticism in the following chapter, "Operatizing America," they look more broadly at the reception of the work in the musicological literature and less to the subtle lines of reasoning and modes of argumentation within and among the New York City reviews.<sup>15</sup> While

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<sup>13</sup> Randall and Davis, *Puccini and The Girl*.

<sup>14</sup> Randall and Davis, 96-125.

<sup>15</sup> Randall and Davis, 129-147.

Randall and Davis connect the opera's reception to the search for an American musical identity, they do so only in general terms, explaining that question of what constituted "American" deeply preoccupied intellectuals, musicians, artists, and writers of the time.<sup>16</sup> They tie articles from the initial and subsequent criticism to their own critical interpretation of the works, using them to frame their discussion about the work's exoticism. Based on their own comparison between the plots of the opera and the play, Randall and Davis conclude that subtle changes in the libretto downplay the Us/Other dichotomy between the Anglo-Saxon characters and the Native American or Mexican characters established in the play. As result the New York City audience viewed it as a work that places all of the characters in the subordinate position of exotic objects. While this conclusion seems logical, given Ralph Locke's work on exoticism, they offer no direct evidence from the reviews to confirm their point.

This is a surprising omission for a reception history. The reviews demonstrate a range of positions about the opera, and the critics had insightful things to say about the effectiveness of the music and the degree to which it supported or diminished the opera's Americaness and exoticism. It seems a shame that only few of these ideas were documented in Randall and Davis's book. Moreover, while the work's representation of the American nation certainly dominated the opera's critical reception, this was only one thread of the controversy. Critics also wrote as much about the opera's modernism and the degree to which Puccini broke with his established musical style in the name of pursuing the modernist approach to opera composition, an approach identified at the time with Claude Debussy's *Pelléas and Mélisande* (1901) and Richard Strauss's *Salomé* (1905) and *Elektra* (1909). Their comments about the opera's modernism were influenced by expectations about music

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<sup>16</sup> Randall and Davis, 130-131.

and national identity as well. Musical modernism and nationhood form the main theme of the second major study devoted to Puccini's reception in the early twentieth century.

Alexandra Wilson's award-winning study *The Puccini Problem: Opera, Nationalism, and Modernity* (2007) examines the changing perception of Puccini in Italy during the first quarter of the twentieth century.<sup>17</sup> Wilson's project demonstrates how music critics of the early-twentieth century collectively crafted an image of Puccini as an internationalist competing against nationalist agendas within his own country. While this research provides a case study valuable for a comparative study between the reception in New York City and abroad, it also does not fully explain why the American critics rejected the American elements of Puccini's opera or discuss individual American reviews.

There is still more to say about the controversy following the New York City premiere and its relationship to the complicated American musical identity debate. The reviews are rich with interesting ideas about the opera's relative Americanness and they document how critics negotiated their expectations about the work with the one they received.

#### Methodology

The ultimate goal of this dissertation is to establish a solid foundation for the reception history of *La fanciulla del West*. Since this dissertation focuses mainly on the relationship between the opera and its New York City critics, and the nature of any work's reception will vary according to the audience, time, and place, this project marks a first step in tracing the history of *La fanciulla del West*'s reception. Its immediate concern will be an exploration and analysis of the main themes in the controversy sparked in New York City

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<sup>17</sup> Alexandra Wilson, *The Puccini Problem: Opera, Nationalism and Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

by world premiere. The primary source materials for my study include: the reviews and articles about the opera from the newspapers and periodicals of New York City in 1910; other reviews and discussions by the New York music critics about Puccini, opera in general, and Americanism; and, Puccini's words on these topics as the primary sources. My secondary sources include research on the musical and cultural life in turn-of-the-century America that focuses on New York City, the state of the American opera tradition, the history of the Metropolitan Opera Company, the history of Italian-American relations, immigration history, the history of the frontier myth and its role in shaping the American cultural identity, and, of course, Puccini's life and works. The possible contemporary meanings of "American" as an aesthetic criterion for evaluating Puccini's opera come into fullest view only against the broader cultural context of turn-of-the-century New York City. Understanding what the critics expected from a work labelled "American" is an important step in understanding why the opera did not successfully connote "American" for the critics, even though it did for Puccini.

This basic process of outlining the cultural context has the advantage of allowing for the discovery of the set of expectations that critics may have brought to the work, and is in keeping with the reception theory of Hans Robert Jauss and the Konstanz school of literary criticism.<sup>18</sup> The Konstanz school's methodological model of *Rezeptionästhetik* [aesthetics

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<sup>18</sup> Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti, vol. 2, *Theory and History of Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982). For a recent exploration of the relevancy of Jauss' theory to musicological research, see Mark Everist, "Reception Theories, Canonic Discourses, and Musical Value," *Rethinking Music* edited by Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist (Oxford University Press, 2001), 378-402. For an earlier discussion of the importance of reception history to musicology, see James Hepokoski, "The Dahlhaus Project and its Extra-musical Sources," *Nineteenth Century Music* 14, no. 3 (1991): 221-246.

of reception] offers valuable insights concerning the problem of how to investigate the aesthetic value of a piece of music at a particular point in time. Essentially Jauss argues that the focus needs to include the audience's construal of the work and of the composer, not just on the analyst's perceptions of the work or assessment of composer's implicit and explicit intentions.

In Jauss's conceptualization, an artwork is examined against the possible expectations that its artist and intended audience may have held. Jauss argues that a system of expectations arises for each artwork and can be objectified historically by studying the pre-understanding of the genre and the form and themes of already familiar works. For every artwork there exists a "horizon of expectations" against which the artwork itself stands out, a general background against which the specific silhouette of the work appears. Every artwork in turn alters the horizon of expectations for those following it. To a certain degree, Jauss suggests that the task of literary history is to study the passage from the individual to the collective or social aspects of the work because the production and reception of art involves a common language shared between the individual and society.

Jauss is interested in studying the disparity between the artwork and the given horizon of expectations, the space he calls the aesthetic distance. He claims that it can be objectified historically only along the spectrum of the audience's reaction and the critic's judgment. The aesthetic distance enables one to pose questions that the text gave an answer to and thereby discover how the contemporary reader could have viewed and understood the work. For Jauss, the meaning and the form of a work arise in the historical unfolding of its understanding. Therefore, one must insert the individual work into its artistic series to

recognize its historical position and significance in the context of the experience of literature.<sup>19</sup> In other words, the work needs to be compared and contrasted with other works of a similar type that came before it and that come after it in order to determine the conventions and expectations that belong to that particular class of works.

The basic reception problem that my dissertation addresses, the critics' refusal to accept Puccini's opera as adequately "American" in atmosphere, can be solved in part by applying Jauss's theory, since it is essentially a case of how an artwork failed to meet the expectations of a particular audience. Jauss's methodological model therefore has much to offer my project. I find Jauss's concept of inserting the work into its literary series to determine the "horizon of expectations" quite practical and concrete. It suggests a very specific way to delineate what a given audience may have expected of an artwork which claimed to have specific qualities, either explicitly, such as through generic designations, or implicitly, such as by the composer's name. *La fanciulla del West's* New York City critics clearly registered disappointment in the opera primarily as an "American" opera. Measuring the opera against the different standards set by the various series to which it belonged allows us to specifically name some of the elements that the critics could reasonably have expected from an opera by a famous Italian composer about the American Frontier produced by the Metropolitan Opera Company.

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<sup>19</sup> Two musicological studies come to mind as examples of how to apply Jauss's theory to opera. See Anselm Gerhard's *The Urbanization of Opera: Music Theater in Paris in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), in which he identifies and examines recurring conventions of grand opera, both in terms of form and content against what he calls the urban space of experience and the theory of reflection. See also Mark Everist, "Lindoro in Lyon: Rossini's *Barbier De Séville*," *Acta musicologica* 64 (1992): 50-85.

*La fanciulla del West* offers a rare case in which to examine what an audience thought about a work that depicted it. Since some of the most vehement responses to the opera addressed Puccini's attempts to establish a Western local colour, I will begin examining the factors that motivated these responses. To accomplish this, it will be necessary first to determine the range of comments made about the opera's local colour as well as the relationship of these comments to ones made about other elements of the opera. Therefore, the first step of this project will be to re-construct the controversy sparked by the first performance of *La fanciulla del West*. The study will examine newspaper reviews, articles, editorials, and letters-to-the-editor published in editions of the major English-language newspapers, magazines, journals, and music periodicals circulating in New York City. It will then determine the various positions in the debate and trace out the lines of reasoning in the controversy sparked by the premiere. The following list provides the titles of newspapers and periodicals to be cited in the dissertation: *New York Age, New York American, New York Herald, New York Press, New York Post, New York Sun, New York Telegraph, New York Times, New York Tribune, New York World, The Independent, The Nation, Harpers, Current Literature, Musical America, Musical Courier*.<sup>20</sup>

The newspaper titles listed above can be found in the *Union List* of periodicals, which names all of the newspapers ever published in the United States.<sup>21</sup> However, I found that two other sources proved more manageable than the *Union List*, which is cumbersome because of its breadth. To determine the exact names of papers published in New York City

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<sup>20</sup> The original range of newspapers for this study included newspapers written in languages other than English that were published in New York City. However gaining access to enough microfilms of these papers from the year 1910 to make this part of the study viable proved too difficult logistically, and regretfully this portion of my project had to be set aside for future consideration.

<sup>21</sup> Winifred Gregory, ed., *American Newspapers, 1821-1936: A Union List of Files Available in the United States and Canada* (New York: H.W. Wilson and Co., 1937).



in 1910, in addition to the *Union List*, I consulted Daniel Haskell's *Checklist of Newspapers and Official Gazettes in The New York Public Library* and N. W. Ayer and Son's *American Newspaper Annual and Directory*.<sup>22</sup> Haskell's *Checklist* offers insight into the tastes of the New York City reading public and Ayer's *Directory* provides invaluable details about each newspaper including the name of the editor, publisher and address, frequency, focus of the news coverage, average page number, size, price and circulation figure for the year 1910. The *New Grove Dictionary of American Music* article on periodicals lists the music ones published in the United States.<sup>23</sup>

The newspapers and periodicals selected for this study have the largest circulations among papers published in New York City, were highly regarded or very popular in 1910, and contained at least one substantial review of the opera. Many of the papers with smaller circulations and also some of the general interest magazines printed notices of the opera's premiere, but not reviews, and so they are not listed in this study. In general, specialized music magazines like *The Etude*, which was aimed at amateur pianists, make little or no mention of the opera at all. If they did, it was only in the capacity of a small notice of the premiere, and so while they were consulted in the development of this study, they will not be referred to in the dissertation.

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<sup>22</sup> Ayer and Son Newspaper Advertising Agents, *American Newspaper Annual and Directory, 1910* (Philadelphia: N.W. Ayer & Son, 1910); Daniel C Haskell, *Checklist of Newspapers and Official Gazettes in the New York Public Library* (New York: New York Public Library, 1915).

<sup>23</sup> *Grove Music Online*, s.v. "Periodicals, II, 2(ii): United States of America," (by Imogen Fellingner and Julie Woodward), <http://www.grovemusic.com> (Accessed 24 March 2007). Also useful was W. J. Weichlein, *A Checklist of American Musical Periodicals, 1850-1900* (Detroit: 1970). Several dissertations were also helpful in creating a picture of the field of American music criticism between 1890 and 1914, in particular: Sister Mary Veronica Davison, "American Music Periodicals" (Ph.D. diss. University of Minnesota, 1974) and Mary Herron Du Pree, "The Art Music of the United States during the 1920s" (Ph.D. diss, University of Colorado at Boulder, 1980). Mark N. Grant, *Maestros of the Pen: A History of Classical Music in America* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998) provides a general overview.

Both a paper and an on-line index exist for the *New York Times*. The on-line index can be accessed through *ProQuest Historical Newspapers Online* and includes PDF files of individual articles from the newspaper. Other indexes consulted in the study include: *19<sup>th</sup> Century Masterfile*, published by Paratext Electronic Reference and Publishing; *Periodical Contents Index*, now renamed as *Periodicals Index Online* and published by Proquest; *American Periodical Series I and II Online*; and the *Making of America* digital archives, supported by the University of Michigan and Cornell University. One can access these two digital archives via *The Nineteenth Century in Print: The Making of America in Books and Periodicals* and *American Memory* digital archives found at the Library of Congress. No indexes exist for individual newspapers in the study except for the *New York Times*. Microfilms of the newspapers from the years 1910 and 1911 were examined for articles concerning Puccini and the Metropolitan Opera Company. The Metropolitan archives hold a newspaper clippings book from the period, although it has been damaged by fire and water.<sup>24</sup> The section containing the reviews of *La fanciulla del West* is one of the most badly damaged sections of the book. Many of the reviews in the book are partially missing or the ink has faded leaving the clipping without a source, title, or date. This made the source unreliable from a bibliographic perspective. Therefore, I intend to use the text of the reviews printed in the newspapers rather than as they stand in the clippings book. I will consult the clippings book to learn what articles the Metropolitan Opera Company administration collected and preserved after the premiere and to verify that my own list is comprehensive in comparison.

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<sup>24</sup> I am grateful to the Metropolitan Opera Archives for allowing me to read and make copies of the clippings book and to John Penino and Jeff McAuley for their help and patience during my visits to the archives. Excerpts from newspaper reviews of the 10 and 17 December 1910 performances of *La fanciulla del West*, "Press Clippings," *Metropolitan Opera Archives*.

This dissertation considers newspaper and magazine articles about Puccini and the genesis of *La fanciulla del West* from both before and after the premiere. The majority of articles consist of reviews and these constitute the main primary sources for the project. Some critics wrote more than one review, publishing in both their paper's 11 December edition as well as in the following weekend's Saturday or Sunday edition. As a result, the opera received a great deal of coverage during its first week playing at the Metropolitan Opera House. Many of the New York City papers covered the opera's premiere with both feature stories describing the event and reviews of the opera ranging in length from 2,000 to 5,000 words. Both the feature articles and the reviews included photos of the sets and singers, as well as photos of Puccini, Toscanini, Belasco, and Gatti-Casazza.<sup>25</sup> In some cases the reviews also included musical examples that illustrated a critic's point or references to measure numbers in the piano-vocal score. The length and the depth of many of the reviews suggest that the New York City critics regarded the work seriously and were genuinely interested in attempting to understand the new work.

A typical review opened with a discussion of the significance of the event, noting that it was the Metropolitan Opera Company's first world premiere by a famous European composer. Then critic would mention that Puccini based the opera on David Belasco's *The Girl of the Golden West*, and offer his impression (typically a very good one) of David Belasco's talents as a playwright and stage director. Many reviews included a cast list near the beginning and typically concluded with a critique of the singers' performances. Many reviews contained a synopsis of the opera's plot and indicated changes from the play. A few reviews and articles included an overview of who attended the premiere, often describing

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<sup>25</sup> Some of the production photos by White Studios can be found in the online database for the Metropolitan Opera Company Archives. See, *La fanciulla del West* World Premiere *Metopera Database*, <http://archives.metoperafamily.org/Imgs/Fanciulla191011.htm> as well as in the plates of Randall and Davis, *Puccini and the Girl*.

the companions, jewels, and finery of the female attendees. Reviewers and reporters also mentioned where and with whom certain audience members sat during the performance and interacted with during the intermissions and following reception. Some papers assigned different authors to cover different types of coverage for premiere, one to evaluate the work, one to describe the event and its participants. This assignation suggests a layered kind of thinking about the premiere where on one level the critics thought of it as an artistic act or product while on another level they considered it an historical event in need of chronicling, and yet on another level still—a social event.

At its most basic level, then, this dissertation will offer a comprehensive analysis of the opera's reception among New-York-City critics. It will include an appendix with the text of the reviews transcribed from the major New York City newspapers. This will provide a full record of the criticism and document how the opera's first audience heard and interpreted it.<sup>26</sup> However, this step alone only describes what the critics said, albeit in more detail than previous studies. Some of the more problematic comments about the opera need further investigation in order for them to make sense to a twenty-first century audience.

The critics writing for the papers can be roughly divided into two groups, one consisting of the critics commonly referred to at the time as "The Old Guard," and the other of the younger generation of critics as well as those critics who were less authoritative.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Each review documents an individual critic's response and each critic was a member of the first opera audience. Moreover, critics described the behaviour and attitude of other members of the audience who attended the premiere. Therefore, the reviews preserve evidence of both a general audience (everyone who attended the premiere) and a special subset of that general audience (professional critics who reviewed operas for a living). Although it is beyond the scope of this study, the individual attitudes of audience members who were not critics and did not write publicly about their views could be documented by consulting letters, diaries, and memoirs housed at the New York Public Library, the New York Historical society, and individual collections. This is one such project I intend to undertake at a future date.

<sup>27</sup> In some situations, the opera reviews were anonymous. In these cases I have determined authorship by checking a reviewer's other writings, his biography and autobiography (where relevant), but most importantly the cross-references in the other reviews and in the following article which quotes from various newspapers and credits the opera critic from that paper: "What the

Circa 1910, a distinct group of five music critics dominated the newspaper discussions of musical activities in New York City. Known in New York City as “The Old Guard,” their influence was so strong that other newspapers and magazines reprinted excerpts of their reviews. This group of critics consisted of Richard Aldrich (1863-1937) writing for the *New York Times*, Henry T. Finck (1854-1926) for the *New York Evening Post*, James Gibbons Huneker (1857-1921) who had just retired from the *New York Sun*, William J. Henderson (1855-1937) for the *New York Sun*, and Henry Krehbiel (1854-1923) *New York Tribune*. They formed the main choir of critical voices in New York City from last quarter of the nineteenth through the first quarter of the twentieth century.<sup>28</sup> They were the most authoritative and respected critics in New York City and their writing circulated not only locally, but nationally. More than just newspaper critics, they published extensively on music history, taught at local institutions, guest lectured at musical societies and institutions, wrote program notes. Some were professional musicians or composers themselves. Musicologists studying the American music criticism of the period have argued that these five critics shaped and guided the state of classical music for the entire country

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Critics Said about It,” *Musical America*, 17 December 1910. When I could not verify authorship for certain, I have left it blank.

<sup>28</sup>Mueser, 88-89. See also the H. Paul Shurtz dissertation “William James Henderson: His Views on the New York Musical World, 1887-1937” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Colorado at Boulder, 1980). For a discussion of these critics by their contemporaries, see Oscar Thompson, “An American School of Criticism: The Legacy Left by W. J. Henderson, Richard Aldrich, and Their Colleagues of the Old Guard,” *Musical Quarterly* 23 (1937): 428-39; For a theory of music criticism, see William J. Henderson “The Function of Musical Criticism,” *Musical Quarterly* 1 (January 1915): 69-82. Henderson (1855-1937) wrote for several New York papers throughout the course of his career: *The New York Tribune*, *The New York Times*, *The Sun*, *The New York Herald*, *The Evening Post*. Henderson also published over ten books on music and singing. Huneker was the music critic for *The New York Sun*, then moved to the drama critic’s desk for the same paper. He also wrote for the *New York Evening World* from 1919 to 1921. He wrote over seventeen books, including *Mezzotints in Modern Music* (New York: Scribner’s, 1899) and *Ivory, Apes, and Peacocks* (New York: Scribner’s, 1915). Henry Krehbiel was music editor of the *New York Tribune*. He wrote over ten books on music, including *Chapters of Opera* (New York: Holt, 1911).

during their tenure and that their writings defined a classical age of American music criticism.<sup>29</sup>

Several other critics also wrote music reviews for New York City papers and national music magazines. These included Marc A. Blumenberg (1851-1913), Reginald De Koven (1859-1920), Arthur Farwell (1872-1952), John C. Freund (1848-1924), Lawrence Gilman (1878-1939), Charles Meltzer (1852-1936), Albert Mildenberg (1878-1918), (Thomas) Max Smith (1874-1935), Algernon St. John Brenon (1875-1915), Gustave Kobbé (1857-1918), Olin Downes (1886-1955), Lester A. Walton (1882-1965). A few critics from the younger generation continued the tradition of writing books about composers, opera, and music-history surveys in a manner similar to those of the Old Guard, such as Lawrence Gilman. Some of these writers were composers in their own right, such as Arthur Farwell, Reginald De Koven and Albert Mildenberg, and while as critics may have lacked the power and influence of an Aldrich or a Henderson, they wrote their reviews from the position of a modern composer, of a colleague to Puccini. Others, such as Marc Blumenberg and Arthur Farwell, founded musical presses, which published music, music trade magazines, and music literature.

The second step in the dissertation involves a study of the relationship between the comments and their broader musico-historical context. Several factors will set the scope of the context, of which the most important include: 1) the set of discussion topics in the reviews discovered in step 1 of this project, 2) the critics' collective knowledge of previous operas produced in New York City, 3) critics' knowledge of sources used to depict American people and places, and 4) Puccini's experiences with the same. Explained in

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<sup>29</sup>McKnight, 14. Mueser, 30-100.

more detail below, these areas will give the relevant documents for understanding what Americanism meant to these critics and to Puccini in terms of opera, theatre, and literature.

To determine the critics' collective knowledge it is necessary to consider the repertoire of the Metropolitan Opera Company in New York City and that of competing opera companies. Part of that consideration will include an examination of the differences between *La fanciulla del West* and previous operas performed in New York City, with attention given to the ways in which the music depicts specific locations and people. At the same time, this dissertation will study operas that musically depict people and places which Puccini knew were previously successful in New York City and the reception of those operas in Europe. The differences between the findings of these two investigations will offer some of the historical evidence necessary to explain the critics' disappointment with Puccini's musical portrait of the Sierra Nevada mining camp and its inhabitants.

Since critics' expectations for how to create the West may have come from their experiences with stagings of Frontier plays and spectacles, I will also closely compare *La fanciulla del West* and its reception to that of its theatrical source, *The Girl of the Golden West*, which belonged to a tradition of American frontier melodramas. *The Girl of the Golden West* in turn will be compared to other representations of the American West in American arts and letters. Those representations form part of the late-nineteenth century American discourse about how the Frontier distinguished the United States and its citizens from the rest of the world. Preliminary research on this topic suggests a certain amount of tension would have arisen between the logos of the opera and the ethos of composer. On the one hand, the opera participated in the generally accepted ideology of the period, which held that through the frontier experience, Americans shed their European past. On the other hand the composer (and many others participating in the creation of the work and the event of the premiere for that matter) was viewed as distinctly European. From this perspective,

the work has the potential to be interpreted as a European reading of the American Frontier. This tension may be part of what drove the negative reaction to Puccini's musical characterization of the West.

An opera is as much an event as it is a text. As an event, it has a place both in the production history of an opera house and in the history of the community supporting the opera house. Therefore understanding *La fanciulla del West's* place in the New York City opera field plays a part in understanding its reception in New York City. One of the main goals in this part of the study was to determine the relationship between the opera's producers (Puccini, Zangarini, Ricordi, Toscanini, the singers, and musicians) and the main institutions and members of New York's opera community. Several relevant primary and secondary sources offered information about the state of the New York City opera field in 1910. Newspapers and periodical articles of the period as well as memoirs, such as Richard Aldrich's *Concert Life in New York* and Henry Krehbiel's *Chapters of Opera* and *More Chapters of Opera* offer lively accounts of daily activities in New York City musical circles.<sup>30</sup> Secondary sources such as Irving Kolodin's *The Metropolitan Opera Company: A Candid History* provide a framework for the details gathered from the memoirs and newspaper articles.<sup>31</sup> Joseph Horowitz's *Wagner Nights* and *Understanding Toscanini* help to draw a bigger picture of the opera field as they provide important details about the attitudes, values, and customs of opera audiences in New York City at the turn of the

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<sup>30</sup> Richard Aldrich, Harold Edgar Johnson, and James Huneker, *Concert Life in New York, 1902-1923* (New York: G.P. Putnam's sons, 1941); Henry Edward Krehbiel, *Chapters of Opera: Being Historical and Critical Observations and Records Concerning the Lyric Drama in New York from its Earliest Days Down to the Present Time*, 3d ed. (New York: Holt, 1911); Henry Edward Krehbiel, *More Chapters of Opera; Being Historical and Critical Observations and Records Concerning the Lyric Drama in New York from 1908 to 1918* (New York, : H. Holt and Company, 1919).

<sup>31</sup> Irving Kolodin, *The Metropolitan Opera, 1883-1966: A Candid History* (New York: Knopf, 1966). This is still one of the most thorough histories of the Metropolitan Opera Company.



century as well as bibliography for musical life in New York City.<sup>32</sup> Both Elise K. Kirk and Karen Ahlquist's books on opera provide a broader background of opera production in the United States, although Ahlquist's book covers a much earlier period, 1850s and '60s, and Kirk's offers more of a general history of opera-making in the United States over the course of the last three centuries.<sup>33</sup> Katherine K. Preston's *Opera on the Road* also explains the history of the touring opera company in the United States before the American civil war.<sup>34</sup> These sources attest to the rich and vibrant musical life of New York City in 1910. As such, it goes well beyond the scope of this dissertation to reconstruct all aspects of it for the reader. Instead, only a brief summary of the issues most relevant to debate over *La fanciulla del West* will be presented in the body of the dissertation.

Part of the musical life of New York City includes its intellectual life. American critics and composers published essays about music and position papers in various types of periodicals. Since opera criticism belongs to part of New York City's musical life, an important part of the research project will be to compare the reviews to earlier discussions about opera and American music. Since the initial problem of the reception centres on the question of how a composer should write music that evokes or expresses American locations and people, studying earlier discussions of this issue may help elucidate the *La fanciulla del West* criticism. In turn, finding evidence of Puccini's knowledge of this issue,

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<sup>32</sup> Joseph Horowitz, *Understanding Toscanini: How He Became an American Culture-God and Helped Create a New Audience for Old Music* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987); Joseph Horowitz, *Wagner Nights: An American History*, ed. Joseph Kerman, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

<sup>33</sup> Karen Ahlquist, *Democracy at the Opera: Music, Theatre, and Culture in New York City, 1815-60* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997); Elise K. Kirk, *American Opera* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001). Much older, but still useful was E. E. Hipsher, *American Opera and its Composers* (Philadelphia: 1927; reprint, 1978).

<sup>34</sup> Katherine K. Preston, *Opera on the Road: Travelling Opera Troupes in the United States, 1825-60* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

or lack thereof, may work toward explaining why the composer and his publisher found his approach suitable for an American-themed opera, while many of the critics did not.

### Dissertation Overview

The early twentieth-century concern over the development of an American identity motivates much of the negative criticism about *La fanciulla del West* and explains, in part, the discrepancies between Puccini's assessment of the opera and that of the critics. Puccini's view of the work considered only the structure of the work in relation to that of his other works. The critics viewed the work against older debates about the nature of American music, American opera, the role of Europeans in American musical life, and the future of New York City as a leading center of opera production, equal to or better than Paris, London, and Milan. The opera's cultural work contradicted the message of American artistic maturity and independence that the Metropolitan Opera Company and the critical community hoped the premiere would cultivate. Puccini appears to have violated certain conventions of opera production in New York City. The critics responded to the opera as if it were part of the larger American debate about the accepted ways to write music depicting American people and places, a debate about which the evidence suggests Puccini was either ignorant or indifferent.

Each chapter of the dissertation explores different themes taken from the reviews and places them in the context of discussions in New York City musical press both prior to and following the premiere. The second chapter, "Arrivals," examines how New York City music critics viewed the role of *La fanciulla del West*'s premiere in the development of New York City's opera scene. It also examines Puccini's relative foreignness in New York City and places that within the context of other European composers and musicians who visited New York City. It compares Puccini's situation and position in the New York City musical field to Antonín Dvořák's position and identifies some of the central issues in the

debate over how to write America-sounding music. It also shows that discussions about American opera printed in the 1910 daily newspapers returned to the some of the same problems encountered in the Dvořák debate. As a way of initiating the discussion, it begins with a case study examining the issues and concerns raised in the musical press when Dvořák went to New York City to assume directorship of the National Conservatory of Music. It then connects the Dvořák debate, at which orchestral and chamber music was at the centre, first to the debate over the genre of American opera and the tradition of opera in the United States, and finally to that of *La fanciulla del West*.

The third chapter, “Cross-Cultural Encounters” places *La fanciulla del West* within the context of other theatrical works depicting the American frontier. It begins first with a discussion of Puccini’s interest in the West and the materials he pursued or received depicting the West. Then it will offer a comparison between the features of the opera and its dramatic source *The Girl of the Golden West* by looking at conventions of authorship, staging, scenery, lighting, dramaturgy, character type, acting, dialogue, and incidental music. During the course of the comparison, it will connect both *The Girl of the Golden West* and *La fanciulla del West* to the genre of frontier melodramas, Wild West shows, and other western genres popular and well known at the turn of the century. The comparison reveals the degree to which Puccini’s opera upheld and deviated from the established conventions of the frontier melodrama and extended the limits for the types of frontier genres staged in New York City to include opera. The most significant difference between the play and the opera lies in the ethos of the authors. Writers of frontier melodramas cultivated the mystique of the author transformed by his encounter with the West, and the public expected their works to be versions of “the real thing.” Puccini, an Italian who had never visited the States beyond the Eastern seaboard, publicly dismissed this expectation

and in so doing undermined his authority to create a work about the American West for his New York City audience.

Together the fourth (“How to Sound American”) and fifth (“Departures”) chapters analyze the various points raised in discussions of the opera’s music. They are organized by issue, and compare and contextualize the representative views for each point; chapter 4 presents the comments about the American qualities of the opera, chapter 5 those about the musical style and structure. This presentation reveals the complexity of the response to the operas and the multiple lines of reasoning supporting the range of praise and criticism conferred upon the opera. It also illustrates how Puccini’s national identity influenced the critics’ expectations for how the music should sound. It ends with a discussion of how the music criticism of Puccini’s opera as presented in the New York papers was the only way in which many Americans interested in opera would ever gain access to a performance of the work. In that sense, this opera participated in the development of the American musical identity, not only for the New York City critics, but also for anyone who chose to read about the opera in the press.

CHAPTER TWO: ARRIVALS: PUCCINI “THE WORLD’S GREATEST  
OPERA COMPOSER” IN NEW YORK CITY

Puccini’s arrival in New York City on 17 November 1910 initiated a month-long visit to the city to participate in the remaining rehearsals and first performances of *La fanciulla del West*. This chapter examines the types of images and metaphors the musical press used to describe Puccini and his participation in the premiere and argues that the majority of newspapers presented him as a venerable foreign guest whose visit served the purpose of ensuring the Metropolitan Opera House patrons a performance of the highest possible quality. In this era of development for an American musical identity, journalists promoted Puccini’s visit and his choice of the Metropolitan Opera Company for the opera’s world premiere as proof that New York City had arrived on the international opera scene. Varying images of the composer emerge in the fall 1910 coverage. In the pre-premiere publicity, writers positioned him as a celebrated Italian composer who subsequently played a vital part in confirming New York City’s image as a thriving cosmopolitan musical metropolis. In the post-premiere discussions he becomes painted as the genius and outsider who could not quite capture the American musical identity.

“Puccini Here”

Puccini’s visit made for exciting news. Short articles with titles like “Puccini Here” in the daily newspapers documented Puccini’s presence aboard the *George Washington* when it docked in New York City.<sup>1</sup> As the first pieces printed in the newspapers from the period of his stay, they initiate the public narrative of Puccini’s visit and begin to construct the image of Puccini that identifies his character and position within this particular story. By

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<sup>1</sup> “Puccini Here,” *New York Times*, 18 November 1910.

announcing that Puccini had arrived aboard a foreign vessel, these articles emphasized his status as an outsider, as someone who had travelled a great distance and crossed a significant physical boundary to come to New York.<sup>2</sup> Typically, the shipping news indicated the comings and goings of ocean liners, naming a few notable passengers.<sup>3</sup> Sometimes, short feature articles in other sections of the newspaper listed the arrivals and departures of foreign opera singers or other famous artists. Subheadings like “Big Cargo of Talent,” underscored the point that foreign musicians were not only guests, but also imported cultural commodities. Fully developed articles devoted to a single person’s arrival were a little less common, and tended to be reserved for the most fashionable stars, such as Enrico Caruso. The chronicling of Puccini’s arrival paired with several paragraphs explaining the purpose of his visit and printing his responses to interview questions emphasizes his distinction from other passengers while underscoring his geographical difference from the readers of the papers.

Subsequent coverage of his visit and the premiere consistently maintained an image of Puccini as a foreign composer. Writers frequently mentioned his Italian identity. They often did this in a straightforward way, simply referring to him in passing either as an Italian opera composer, or connecting him to the line of opera composers from Italy beginning with Verdi, or by indicating that his compositions were Italian in genre or nature. The continued national identity qualification suggests that Puccini’s Italian-ness mattered on some level. It differentiated him from the presumably American readers and from his European contemporaries, like Richard Strauss and Claude Debussy. The habitual reference to national

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<sup>2</sup> See for example, “\$70,000 Customs from Passengers of a Single Liner. Big Cargo of Talent Comes into Country Free. Boat Laden with Talent,” *New York World*, 18 November 1910.

<sup>3</sup> See for example, “Singers and Players Arrive from Europe for Season Here,” *New York Herald*, 12 December 1910.

identity reinforces the idea that New York City journalists, critics, and their readers viewed opera and its composers as imported cultural products with intrinsic national qualities.

While the reports may have characterized Puccini as an outsider, they did not position him as a complete stranger. Articles in the *Times*, the *Sun*, and the *Tribune*, for example, each connected Puccini to previous interactions with the local community. The *Sun* mentioned, “he had put into operatic form the American play *The Girl of the Golden West*,” which was a famous New York City melodrama that the critics knew Puccini had attended during a previous visit to the city.<sup>4</sup> These articles not only reported on his current visit to New York City, they recalled his earlier visit to the city, reminding their readers that he attended various theatres around the city. The *Times* and *Tribune* both referred to his 1907 visit explicitly, with the *Tribune* pointing out that his last visit had been when he came to supervise the Italian-language American premiere of *Madama Butterfly* by the Metropolitan Opera Company on 11 February 1907.<sup>5</sup> Reminders that Puccini had composed *Madama Butterfly* as well as *Tosca* and *La Bohème* depict him as a familiar person to the readers. The enthusiastic American reception of *Madama Butterfly*—having over two hundred performances in six weeks, more than four times the original number of scheduled performances—indicates the degree to which American audiences embraced this work.<sup>6</sup> *Madama Butterfly*’s 1906

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<sup>4</sup> “Puccini. Composer. Arrives,” *New York Sun*, 18 November 1910.

<sup>5</sup> “Puccini Seeks New Text,” *New York Tribune*, 18 November 1910. “Puccini Here,” *New York Times*, 18 November 1910. For a description of the visit, see Mary Jane Philips-Matz, “The International Celebrity at Home and Abroad,” in *Puccini*, 170-176. The 1907 production of *Butterfly* was its Italian-language premiere in the United States.

<sup>6</sup> For more on the American tour of *Butterfly*, see Phillips-Matz, *Puccini*, 168. For more on the opera’s reception, see Arthur Groos, “Return of the Native: Japan in *Madama Butterfly*/ *Madama Butterfly* in Japan,” *Cambridge Opera Journal* 1 (1989): 167-94. For a survey of some of the reviews from the period, see “An Italian Opera with a Japanese-American Theme,” *Current Literature* 39, no. 3 (1905): 316.

American tour by Henry Savage's opera company, which had performed the work in English, was also very successful.<sup>7</sup> The American reception of the opera contrasted with the disastrous Milanese reception, at which the audience had booed and jeered the work.<sup>8</sup> In response, Puccini never again premiered a work in Italy.

Newspaper articles frequently underscored Puccini's close relationship with the Metropolitan Opera Company, even though other companies like Savage's or Oscar Hammerstein's had produced his works in the past.<sup>9</sup> They mention his association with the Metropolitan when explaining the purpose of his visit, and bring the connection alive by reporting on his meeting with its general manager Giulio Gatti-Casazza at the opera house on the afternoon of his arrival. The *Times* explained that after the meeting Puccini "called in the newspaper reporters, many of whom are old friends of his." Puccini's image emerges as a familiar and collegial visitor, rather than a stranger.

Several of these arrival reports identified Puccini as "the most successful of living Italian opera composers:"<sup>10</sup> indeed, his success and popularity were common epithets in both

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<sup>7</sup> "The Theatre," *Town and Country* 3158 (1906): 36.

<sup>8</sup> For more on the negative reception of the Teatro alla Scala production of *Madama Butterfly*, see, Phillips-Matz, 143.

<sup>9</sup> Hammerstein's company was in an intense competition with the Metropolitan Opera Company, which had gained exclusive rights to produce Ricordi Operas in New York City. Hammerstein produced *La bohème* illegally (1 March 1907) and thereafter produced French opera with Mary Garden. For a general overview of the competition, see John Dizikes "Oscar and Goliath," *Opera in America: A Cultural History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993). See also Martin Mayer, *The Met: One Hundred Years of Grand Opera* (New York: The Metropolitan Opera Guild and Simon and Schuster, 1984), 81-117. For a deeper history of Hammerstein and the Manhattan Opera Company, see John Frederick Cone, *Oscar Hammerstein's Manhattan Opera Company* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966).

<sup>10</sup> This phrase was also common in articles throughout Puccini's stay in New York. See for example, Reginald De Koven, "The Puccini Premiere Comes to Dissipate Our Operatic Tedium," *The New York World*, 4 December 1910; *New York Times*, 4 December 1910; and "The Metropolitan," *The New York Tribune*, 4 December 1910.



pre-premiere and post-premiere coverage, and superlatives often accompanied reviews of his accomplishments. For instance, to William Henderson of the *New York Sun* he was “the most famous opera composer of his time;”<sup>11</sup> to Lawrence Gilman of *Harpers* he was “the most widely popular of living composers of music-drama;”<sup>12</sup> while to Max Smith of the *New York Press* he was the “most popular living composer.”<sup>13</sup> To the *New York American’s* Charles Henry Meltzer he was a “modern composer of world-wide renown.”<sup>14</sup> Richard Aldrich of the *New York Times* claimed he stood “indisputably at the head of Italian composers.”<sup>15</sup> In the *Morning Telegraph* Algernon Saint-John Brenon also compared him to other composers, describing Puccini as “a living European master of opera.”<sup>16</sup> Yet comments concerning Puccini’s specific skills were less common than those addressing his popularity, and were usually more reserved. For example, Henry Krehbiel simply remarked that he had “done notable things in music.”<sup>17</sup> These comments reflect Puccini’s established credibility as an opera composer and his value as an imported product. By presenting him as an accomplished and praise-worthy composer, they set the expectation that *La fanciulla del West* should be a popular and successful work because the composer who wrote it was equal to the task.

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<sup>11</sup> William J. Henderson, “Mr. Puccini’s Latest Opera,” *New York Sun*, 11 December 1910.

<sup>12</sup> Lawrence Gilman, “Puccini’s American Opera,” *Harper’s Weekly*, 17 December 1910.

<sup>13</sup> Max Smith, “Puccini’s New Opera of the Golden West a Triumph,” *New York Press*, 11 December 1910.

<sup>14</sup> Henry Meltzer, “*Girl of the Golden West* Sets a New Standard for Lyric Drama,” *New York American*, 11 December 1910.

<sup>15</sup> Richard Aldrich, “Melodrama Set to Music,” *New York Times*, 11 December 1910.

<sup>16</sup> Algernon St. John-Brenon, “*Girl of the Golden West* in Opera Storms Metropolitan Throngs,” *New York Morning Telegraph*, 11 December 1910.

<sup>17</sup> Krehbiel, “A Sensational Production at the Opera,” *New York Tribune* 11 December 1910.

The above comments illustrate how New York City musicians, music critics, and music patrons viewed the experience as one that offered them distinction in the international musical world. Part of that line of thinking included the notion that New York City's apparent cultural worth in general increased through Puccini's engagement with the Metropolitan Opera Company. As the producer and performer of the opera, the company shared authorship of *La fanciulla del West* with the composer and playwright, and so Puccini's success or failure would become their success or failure, Puccini's acclaim their own.

The critics were aware that they were writing for posterity. For example, William Henderson notes in his second review of the opera,

When the future historian of opera in this country comes to pen the story of the season of 1910-1911 he will doubtless search the files of the daily newspapers. . . . Without question that historian will ponder deeply on the nature of the accounts of that production and on the summary of critical views thrust upon an innocent and quiescent world.<sup>18</sup>

The critics believed they shared an active role in the future of the work; their judgments of it could seal its fate.<sup>19</sup> As the first official judges of the opera's merit, they found themselves in a precarious position of power. They could control its fate, but they did so as Europe looked

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<sup>18</sup> William J. Henderson, "Mr. Puccini and His Golden Girl," *New York Sun*, 18 December 1910.

<sup>19</sup> See William J. Henderson "The Function of Music Criticism," *Musical Quarterly* 1 (1915): 69-82. To see how the New York City critics compared to opera critics from other places, though in an earlier time, see for example Mary Ann Smart and Roger Parker, editors, *Critics Reading Critics: Opera and Ballet Criticism in France from the Revolution to 1848* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). See also Thomas Forrest Kelley *First Nights at the Opera* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004). Benjamin Walton's dissertation illustrates the relationship between a group of music critics and a composer, and the ways in which writings in the musical press could shape the reception of a composer and the futures of his works. *Rossini in Restoration Paris: Sound of Modern Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). Ora Frishberg Saloman has extensively studied the music criticism in New York City and the reception of European composers in nineteenth-century United States. For her most recent work, see *Listening Well: On Beethoven, Berlioz, and Other Music Criticism in Paris, Boston, and New York, 1764-1890* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009).

on.<sup>20</sup> As Henderson pointed out, “first performances in America have hitherto been preceded by first performances in Europe, but this time Europe is waiting for news from New York.”<sup>21</sup> Should they misjudge the work, they would do so before a slightly hostile European audience, particularly the Italians, who were reportedly indignant over Puccini’s choice of the American city for the premiere.<sup>22</sup>

The arrival reports not only shared similar facts with their readers about Puccini’s status as a visitor from a foreign country and his status as an important opera composer. They usually described his involvement in the preparations of the work for performance. The language they used to convey this information clouds his exact function at the rehearsals. In the case of the *New York Sun*, *New York Times*, and *New York Tribune*, for example, each newspaper chose the word “supervise” to describe his role in the production. On the one hand, the concept of supervisor indicates Puccini’s authority. Yet, at the same time, the choice of the word “supervise” suggests a certain degree of detachment. Rather than actively participating in the rehearsals by interacting with performers, the articles imply that Puccini simply witnessed the preparations. In descriptions of rehearsals, the composer typically deferred to Toscanini and Belasco. In one, the author explained how Puccini

looks over [Toscanini’s] shoulder but does not interfere . . . while he is gone Puccini digs a pencil out of his pocket and scrawls a few words on the score, regards it, nods his head with satisfaction and goes back to a seat in the middle of the auditorium . . . and at this stage of the

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<sup>20</sup> European newspapers had correspondents in the audience. The *Tribune* explained “Many of the European newspapers had representatives in the opera house, and a constant stream of boys was kept running from the theatre to the cable offices,” Henry T. Krehbiel, “Puccini’s Latest Opera Sung Here,” *New York Daily Tribune*, 11 December 1910.

<sup>21</sup> William J. Henderson “Mr. Puccini’s Latest Opera,” *New York Sun*, 11 December 1910.

<sup>22</sup> See for example “Puccini’s New Opera,” *Nation*, 15 December 1910, or “*Girl of the Golden West* in Opera Storms Metropolitan Throngs,” *Morning Telegraph*, 11 December 1910,” which explained that Puccini had passed “over the jealous and insulted communities of his native land.”

game Puccini makes his one and only trip to the conductor's desk and apparently offers some suggestion about the score. He has an unlighted cigarette between his lips.<sup>23</sup>

In contrast to the "quiet" Puccini of this report, the author presented New York City residents David Belasco and Arturo Toscanini as highly animated and deeply involved with the rehearsal process. Belasco is given the moniker "Vesuvius," and Toscanini is described as having talked and sung "explanatory phrases till he can scarcely croak."<sup>24</sup>

As the stories covering Puccini's arrival in New York City developed, subtle nuances differentiate the portraits of the composer among the newspapers. In addition to informing readers of Puccini's physical presence in New York City, the first few paragraphs of reports about his arrival also work toward establishing his credibility as an opera composer. Some reports concentrate on enforcing his image as an accomplished composer. For example, both the *Times* and *Tribune* continue with partial transcriptions of interviews with Puccini about the nature of the new opera, appealing to the image of Puccini as a serious opera composer, but one open and ready to discuss his work with the public. Others connect him to non-musical images.

Some newspapers concentrated on creating an image of the composer as a masculine outdoorsman, appealing to American values of masculinity as defined by Rooseveltian ideology.<sup>25</sup> The *Sun* for example informed its readers of Puccini's interest in hunting and photography.<sup>26</sup> Another article printed two weeks later in the *New York Tribune* also referred

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<sup>23</sup> "Rehearsing Puccini's Opera," *New York Sun*, 11 December 1910.

<sup>24</sup> "Rehearsing Puccini's Opera."

<sup>25</sup> For discussions of Rooseveltian masculinity, see Gail Bederman "Theodore Roosevelt: Manhood, Nation, and "Civilization," in *Manliness and Civilization: Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), Sarah Lyons Watts *Roughrider in the White House: Theodore Roosevelt and Politics of Desire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), and Daniel Worden *Masculine Style: The American West and Literary Modernism* (New York: Palgrave, 2011).

<sup>26</sup> "Rehearsing Puccini's Opera."

to Puccini's love of hunting.<sup>27</sup> In fact, "Puccini Would Rather Talk Duck Shooting than Grand Opera. His Love of Open Air Sport Attracted Him Toward Belasco's *Girl of the Golden West*" is one of the most substantial interviews with Puccini printed in the New York City dailies during the time of his visit.<sup>28</sup> Although the heart of the newspaper article rests on a discussion with the composer about the American atmosphere in *La fanciulla del West*, the opening paragraph concentrates on his masculine appearance:

A broad shouldered, ruddy cheeked man of something over six feet in height, with closely cut hair and a stubby mustache, with an air that is pleasingly aggressive—such is Giacomo Puccini, most popular of modern operatic composers. There is nothing in this athlete—it is impossible to believe that he is more than forty—that suggests the musician as the musician has too often appeared to the every-day Philistine. In short, he is every one of his seventy-odd inches distinctly a man.<sup>29</sup>

The theme of Puccini the sportsman continues with Puccini's first words, in which he tells the interviewer: "You know that I would really rather talk about duck shooting. It is my hobby in Italy, and I should like to do some of it here. The open air, the open country—that is what I love." Toward the end of the interview, he later explains how he hunts ducks in the morning and that he has one of "the finest gun collections in all Italy."

Elsewhere Puccini mentions his homesickness for the lakeside setting of his home in Torre del Lago, complete with a private harbor that holds his three motorboats and two row boats. The image of the motorboat further supports his image as a sportsman, and suggests both his love of mechanical things and speed, three common "masculine" features in

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<sup>27</sup> "Puccini Would Rather Talk Duck Shooting than Grand Opera," *New York Daily Tribune*, 4 December 1910.

<sup>28</sup> "Puccini Would Rather Talk Duck Shooting." I include the first and second sentences of the article's headline and since every word in the second sentence of the original headline is capitalized, I repeat this convention here.

<sup>29</sup> "Puccini Would Rather Talk Duck Shooting."

American culture of the period. Alongside the article, placed between the columns discussing his composing and hunting activities, the newspaper placed two small sketches, one portraying his composition life, the other his sporting life. In the first, Puccini bends over his desk deep in thought, head resting on one hand, crumpled manuscript paper on the floor around him, and the curtains drawn. In the second, a figure sits not in a boat on a lake but rather upon a galloping horse with a Western saddle presumably out in the American West. The figure clad in a cowboy hat at first appears to be Puccini. However, closer examination shows that the figure is wearing not chaps, but rather a split skirt and blouse, and the face appears more feminine than masculine. In between these two sketches is a photograph of Puccini taken by Mishkin Photo Studio. Presenting the stereotypical picture of a dapper and formal Puccini, the photo is framed by the sketches of Puccini at work and of the Girl in the open air.<sup>30</sup>

### The Metropolitan Opera House and American Musical

#### Maturity

The fact that Puccini had allowed the Metropolitan Opera Company to present *La fanciulla del West*'s first performance appeared to many music journalists as the first official recognition of company's international significance. The directors of the Metropolitan Opera Company, performers, music critics, journalists, and interested members of the public expected that this event would draw the world's attention to New York and the Metropolitan Opera Company.<sup>31</sup> Transcriptions of interviews and speeches given by opera conductors and

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<sup>30</sup> "Puccini's New Opera to be Seen" reprints part of a newly released Puccini biography by Wakeling Dry that also emphasizes the image of Puccini as sportsman. For the complete biography, see Wakeling Dry, *Giacomo Puccini*, edited by Rosa Newmarch, Living Masters of Music (London, New York: John Lane, 1906).

<sup>31</sup> Incidentally, as early as 1850 many Americans came to view New York City as the leading city in the United States, taking the position as a financial, commercial, intellectual, and cultural leader. D.W. Meinig, *Continental America 1800-1869*, vol. 2, *The Shaping of America: A*

administrators connected to the Metropolitan Opera Company reveal the company's attempt to foster its reputation as a company capable of producing the highest possible quality of opera performance. The premiere played—at the very least—a symbolic role in the company's attempts to establish itself not only nationally as the leading opera company in the United States but also internationally as one of the most important opera companies of the period. The following comment by John C. Freund, editor of *Musical America*, illustrates these perspectives:

It is not merely that New York is to have the first production of an opera, founded on an American subject, by a world renowned and popular composer, an event of itself; it is not merely that it is to be a great social night; it is not alone that the attention of artistic circles in foreign countries is centred on the great metropolis of the new world, it is that there is a subconscious feeling that this night marks an epoch in American life, for this night will give New York, and through her, the United States, a place by the side of Paris, London, Berlin, Vienna and Milan as a centre of music and art, and perhaps, in the not distant future lead the way so that the great composers will learn to make their first appeal for a verdict here, and so show the world that we have taken the lead in presenting the works of the masters, as other great cities of the old world have done hitherto.<sup>32</sup>

This idea that New York had reached equal status with the major centres of opera production in Europe surfaces frequently in the New York papers. Before the premiere, comments such as the following appeared frequently in the dailies and music journals: “all Europe is envying the patrons of the Metropolitan Opera House for the privilege accorded them of being the first to hear two great novelties of the year, before they are heard abroad—Puccini's *The Girl*

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*Geographical Perspective of Five Hundred Years of History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 421. For more on the development of New York City, see: Edwin G. Burrows, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); and Keith D Revell, *Building Gotham: Civic Culture and Public Policy in New York City, 1898-1938* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002).

<sup>32</sup> John C. Freund, “First Production of Puccini's Opera. A Triumph for All Concerned and a Notable Popular Success,” *Musical America*, December 17 1910.

of the *Golden West* and Humperdinck's *The Children of Kings*.”<sup>33</sup> More specifically, some writers suggested that “the natives of Italy are jealous over the fact that Mascagni's new opera *Ysobel* and Puccini's *Girl of the Golden West* are to be given in America before they have been heard in Italy. That the Americans should be given the opportunity to pronounce critical judgment upon two of their latest creations is said to have roused their ire.”<sup>34</sup> *La fanciulla del West* seems to have tipped the balance.

Even before the coverage of the premiere gained momentum in the fall of 1910, the view that New York City had finally arrived as the leading opera-producing city in the world surfaced in the American musical press. Opinion pieces and articles connected the city's rise in cultural status to the efforts of the Metropolitan Opera Company throughout the year before the premiere. In 1910, the *New York Times* printed an interview with Metropolitan Opera Company's chairman of the board, Otto H. Kahn (1867-1934).<sup>35</sup> In that interview, the reporter first described Kahn as a gifted amateur musician deeply interested in all areas of culture and then questioned him about the nature of American musicality, the American attitude toward art and music, and the future of music in the United States.<sup>36</sup> Kahn cast his

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<sup>33</sup> Henry T. Finck, “Grand Opera Notes,” *New York Evening Post*, 24 October 1910, 23. *The Children of Kings* refers to *Königskinder*.

<sup>34</sup> “Italians Jealous of America,” *Musical Courier*, 17 August 1910. See also, Richard Aldrich “Puccini's New Opera *The Girl of the Golden West* an Event in the Metropolitan Season Opera,” *New York Times*, 4 December 1910. “Italy has been heard to protest against one of her favourite sons giving to a foreign city the privilege of a first hearing of his latest work.” *Ysobel* refers to *Isabeau*.

<sup>35</sup> For biographical information on Otto Kahn, see the comprehensive biography by Mary Jane Philips-Matz, *The Many Lives of Otto Kahn* (New York: Macmillan, 1963) and the important cultural study by Theresa Collins, *Otto Khan: Art, Money, and Time* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002). See also John Kobler, *Otto The Magnificent: The Life of Otto Kahn* (New York: Schribner, 1988).

<sup>36</sup> *An Interview with Otto H. Khan on Operatic and Dramatic Art in America and Other Art Topics* (New York: Publishers Press, 1911).



answer in terms of a historical narrative, invoking manifest destiny imagery. He replied that the United States had finally reached a point in its history where the arts could flourish:

America had a continent to conquer—by sword and by industries—and to make its position among the great nations of the world. The best brains, the fullest energy, the intensest activity of the Nation had to be devoted to that stern task for many years. When it was primarily accomplished, though of course not finished, art and culture started to come into their own, and they will, I believe, hold an ever-increasing place in our civilization.<sup>37</sup>

This sense that the United States had finally reached parity with the leading European nations was a common belief among many Americans of the period, as was the feeling that it lagged behind those nations culturally. In the wave of nationalism that swept across late-nineteenth-century Europe, many countries had made an effort to promote their unique contributions to the arts, both within and beyond national borders. Kahn's rhetoric reflects this type of European cultural nationalism while at the same time maintains a distinctly American identity with its appeal to the concept of American manifest destiny.<sup>38</sup>

Kahn determined there was a reciprocal relationship between the progress of Metropolitan Opera Company and the rising expectations of its audience and critics:

Without boasting, and without self-complacency, (for much yet remains to be done) it may be said that the Metropolitan Opera is now

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<sup>37</sup> As quoted in *Interview with Otto H. Kahn*, 5.

<sup>38</sup> For more on American musical nationalism in general, see Alan Howard Levy *Musical Nationalism: American Composer's Search for Identity*, Westport: Greenwood Press, 1983 and Barbara Tischler, *An American Music: The Search for an American Musical Identity*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1984. For more on the influence of cultural nationalism on the development of American orchestras, see Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht, *Sound Diplomacy: Music and Emotions in Transatlantic Relations, 1850-1920*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009. The first explicit use of the term Manifest Destiny in print is attributed to John L. O'Sullivan, editor of the widely circulated *Dramatic Review* 1845. He wrote "our manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions," as quoted in Thomas R. Hietala *Manifest Design: Anxious Aggrandizement in Late Jacksonian America*, rev ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, [1985] 2003, 255). See also Reginald Horsman *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981.) Implicit in the term are the dual concepts of American expansionism and American exceptionalism.

acknowledged to hold the championship ribbon of the operatic world. This result is at least as much, if not more, due to the public and the press as to the management, because of their insistence upon the maintenance of a high standard, and because of their respect which the intelligence, accuracy, and impartiality of their collective judgment imposes upon the artists and the management.<sup>39</sup>

In so doing, he counters the general European bias toward Americans as musically unsophisticated and in need of guidance from Europe. Kahn had used nationalist appeals and the same imagery before. In the course of a press conference at the Metropolitan Opera House following the announcement of Giulio Gatti-Casazza's (1869-1940) appointment to the position of general manager, Kahn referred to the opera house as "what it is universally conceded to be—the 'Blue Ribbon' of the operatic world."<sup>40</sup> Indeed, a passing comment in the Casa Ricordi copialettere suggests that even Giulio Ricordi recognized the growing importance of the United States in music world and that New York was an important city.<sup>41</sup>

The dailies cultivated the image that American opera had arrived, just as Puccini had arrived on American soil. For example, during the summer leading into the 1910 opera season the *New York Evening Post* characterized the situation in terms of conquest:

The Metropolitan Opera House forces under the command of Signor Gatti-Casazza, are steadily pursuing their peaceful conquest of the world. After the establishment of the Philadelphia and Chicago seasons came the alliance with Boston. After Boston came the triumphant season of American opera in Paris. After Paris comes the announcement of an alliance with the Beecham management in London. Only two years ago the number of people willing to do reverence to the Metropolitan Opera House was limited, even in New York. Unkind comparisons between the Metropolitan and a certain operatic house on West Thirty-fourth Street were in order. Financially, the seasons went from bad to worse. Something of a débâcle seemed impending. Within a year a great change has come over the aspect of the dream. The Metropolitan Opera House today stands at the head of

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<sup>39</sup> As quoted in *Interview with Otto H. Kahn*, 4.

<sup>40</sup> As quoted in Kolodin, *The Metropolitan Opera, 1883-1966: A Candid History* (New York: Knopf, 196), 13.

<sup>41</sup> Giulio Ricordi, *Copialettera di Casa Ricordi* 7 (1906/07): 118.

an entente cordiale that spans the Atlantic, and on its horizon no clouds are visible.<sup>42</sup>

That “certain operatic house on West Thirty-fourth Street” referred to the Manhattan Opera House, built in 1906 by Oscar Hammerstein I (1847-1919). For several years The Manhattan Opera Company competed with the Metropolitan for supremacy in the local opera market, with the result that singers were commanding salaries so high that tickets sales could not cover the cost of production and both institutions suffered serious financial setbacks. The Metropolitan Opera Company bought out Hammerstein for a substantial sum with condition that he could not produce opera in the United States for ten years.<sup>43</sup> This resulted in what the newspapers dubbed an “opera trust,” a non-compete agreement between opera theaters in New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Washington, Chicago and San Francisco.<sup>44</sup> At least one reviewer recognized Kahn and Gatti-Cazza’s efforts. *The New York Herald* explained that

The evening was a climax so far in that which the directors of the Metropolitan Opera House [have] done for grand opera in this city. To procure a new opera for the repertoire is in itself a great achievement. To have that novelty performed here for the first time on any stage means even more; and when the opera is the work of the composer of *La Bohème*, *Tosca*, and *Madama Butterfly*, and is the first Italian grand opera based on an American subject, the even assumes great significance. As has been said, New York is indebted for all this to the directors of the Metropolitan Opera House, most active among whom in bringing about the consummation of this most interesting project were Mr. Clarence MacKay and Mr. Otto H. Kahn.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> *New York Evening Post*, 28 July 1910, 4.

<sup>43</sup> The controversial arrangement was followed closely by the New York City Press. See for example, “Hammerstein Quits Opera,” *New York Times*, 28 April 1910. For a general history of Hammerstein’s Opera Company, see John Frederick Cone, *Hammerstein’s Manhattan Opera Company*, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966.

<sup>44</sup> “Opera Amalgamation,” *Musical Courier*, 9 January 1910, 22.

<sup>45</sup> “Puccini’s New American Opera Has Brilliant Premiere,” *New York Herald*, 11 December 1910

Cosmopolitan nationalism drives the rhetoric in the public discussions about the Metropolitan Opera Company's development as a local, national, and international institution. At this period in the history of United States, cosmopolitan nationalism was both the idea that what made the United States a unique and exceptional nation was that it forged a purified unity out of many different types of people and culture, and also the idea of worldliness and citizenship beyond the nation-state.<sup>46</sup> It directly opposes the nativism and cultural nationalism found in the debates over the development of American opera, and it did not go unchallenged. One particular cause of disagreement lay in the nationality of the performers, another in the supposed preference of Italian opera over that of all other nations. The employment of Italian musicians and promotion of Italian music at by the Metropolitan Opera Company provoked resentment from some parties because they viewed the Metropolitan Opera House to be a national institution. They reasoned that as such, the company should reflect and promote the national identity of the United States, not Italy. A range of comments containing both subtle and direct accusations and defenses appear in articles about opera. John Freund, for example, addressed the issue head on in an article defending the Metropolitan Opera Company against charges of yielding to an apparent Italian conspiracy.<sup>47</sup> Marc Blumenberg complained rather consistently in his *Musical*

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<sup>46</sup> For the former, see John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism 1860-1925* (New York: Atheneum, 1970), 19-23. For the latter, see Fojas Camilla *Cosmopolitanism in the Americas* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press), 2005. The concept of cosmopolitanism is as complex as that of nationalism and the two are often presented in juxtaposition. Eric Kaufmann's "The Rise of Cosmopolitanism in the 20<sup>th</sup>-Century West: A Comparative-Historical Perspective on the United States and European Union," *Global Society* 17/4 (2003): 359-383, offers a succinct summary of the relationship between the concepts cosmopolitanism, cultural cosmopolitanism, and nationalism in Western thought. He deals in particular with the kind of cosmopolitan nationalism to which I refer, in particular from 369-372. Craig Calhoun's recent *Nations and Nationalism* article "Cosmopolitanism and Nationalism" 14/3 (2008): 427-448, also explores the apparent tension between concepts of cosmopolitanism and nationalism but does so by considering current scholarly approaches across the various disciplines of sociology, political science, history, literary criticism, and cultural studies, and how these disciplines have understood the relationship in their own research.

<sup>47</sup> Freund, "That Italian Conspiracy," *Musical America*, 31 December 1910, 20.

*Courier* editorials and columns, on the other hand, about the state of American opera and how the Metropolitan Opera Company, its investors, Casa Ricordi, and critics from the daily newspapers created a system in New York City where it was impossible for an Italian opera to fail, even if it deserved to.<sup>48</sup> In contrast, Reginald De Koven responded to the problem in the following manner:

I am a great believer myself in America for the Americans, and see no good and sufficient reason why foreigners should be called in to direct affairs, which we are entirely competent to manage for ourselves. But if a foreigner at all, M. Gatti is probably the best that could be found. He is an able man and a gentleman, a man of experience and ability in his particular field, and now that he is afforded unrestricted liberty to show his prowess as a manager of his own bat, he should in all fairness and justice be given every opportunity by both [the] press and public to show what he can do. If M. Gatti will remember that he is in America, a land whose distinctive feeling of nationality is growing day by day, and whose pride, taste and prejudices as a director of what is to all intents and purposes a national institution he is in duty bound to study and respect, I for one feel confident that he will make a record of which he himself and this country for him may be proud.<sup>49</sup>

A resistance to foreign influence at the Metropolitan further surfaces in reviews and descriptions of Italian opera performances with the occasional reference to “the Italian contingent;” a vaguely identified group of people whom descriptions in the newspapers seem to suggest functioned essentially as a clique. At times, they appear to be immigrant Italians sitting in the cheap seats who applauded any opera in Italian and any opera singer of Italian extraction, regardless of merit. At other times, “the Italian contingent” described the group of performers hired to sing Italian opera with the Metropolitan Opera Company. This suspicious and even negative attitude toward Italians needs to be placed in the more general context of American nativism as well. As John Higham’s classic study *Strangers in the Land* has

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<sup>48</sup> See for example, “Opera Amalgamation,” *Musical Courier*, 9 January 1910, and especially his 7 December 1910 editorial, “Reflections by the Editor,” *Musical Courier*, 7 December 1910.

<sup>49</sup> Reginald De Koven, “Grand Opera Reigns,” *New York World*, 18 November 1910.

shown, a rise in nativism—the favouring of established citizens over immigrants—occurred in the North Eastern United States between 1906 and the First World War.<sup>50</sup> With the increase of immigrants at the turn of the century came an increase fear of the loss of Anglo-Saxon culture. Shortly before the First World War, hostility toward Italians living in New York City reached a peak, and the local legislature passed discriminatory laws designed to exclude Italian immigrants from certain jobs.<sup>51</sup>

The historical record shows that Otto Kahn and Gatti-Casazza developed the 1910-1911 season as a kind of coming-out into international opera society. Like any debutante, the Metropolitan Opera Company made sure to put its best foot forward, securing not one, but two world premieres of works by internationally important opera composers, and also two United States premieres, one of a classic opera and the other of a French opera.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism 1860-1925* (New York: Atheneum, 1970). Higham sees the concept of nativism as ethnocentrism blended with nationalism and as a result approaches it as a complex of ideas and attitudes. His book aims to “show how nativism evolved its own distinctive patterns, how it changed in successive historical contexts, how it fared at every social level and in every section where it left a mark, and how it passed into action,” i. Although directed toward a non-scholarly audience Peter Schrag’s *Not Fit for Our Society: Immigration and Nativism in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010) offers a more recent study of American nativism. See also Ali Behdad *Forgetful Nation: On Immigration and Cultural Identity in the United States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005) and Dale T. Knobel “America for the Americans”: *The Nativist Movement in the United States* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996).

<sup>51</sup> Higham, *Strangers in the Land*. Higham demonstrates the complexity of the period leading from 1906 until the First World War as nativism grew in tandem with progressivism. He argues that the rise of nativism during this period was influenced by changes in immigration patterns, ideas passed down from earlier periods, and certain changes in the progressivist spirit itself. He addresses the treatment of Italians in particular on pages 159-165. For more on the specific case of Italians in New York City and the negative attitude taken toward them between 1900 and 1914, see Samuel L. Baily, *Immigrants in the Lands of Promise: Italians in Buenos Aires and New York City, 1870-1914*, *Cornell Studies in Comparative History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 80-88.

<sup>52</sup> Gerald Fitzgerald, *The Annals of the Metropolitan Opera: The Complete Chronicle of Performances and Artists: Chronology 1883-1985* (New York: Metropolitan Opera Guild, 1989), 194. The U.S. premieres included Gluck’s *Armide* which began the opera season on November 14 and Dukas’ *Ariane et Barbe-bleue* on March 29. The second world premiere was Humperdinck’s *Königskinder*.

Furthermore, *La fanciulla del West* became the second in what would become a continuous series of American-themed operas at the Metropolitan opera house during the years Gatti-Casazza's directorship.<sup>53</sup> The Metropolitan Opera Company used its financial resources not just to secure these world premieres, but also to bring the composers to New York to supervise rehearsals and first performances, paying the composers a substantial amount of money to do so. In return, the Metropolitan Opera Company received exclusive rights to the composers' schedules for the four weeks they were in residence.<sup>54</sup>

The newspapers claimed that the Metropolitan Opera Company had never spent so much effort and money on the production of one opera as it had for the occasion of *La fanciulla del West*'s premiere. Whether or not this is actually true, Puccini's contract does show that the Metropolitan Opera Company paid him 20,000 lire to attend the premiere of *La fanciulla del West*.<sup>55</sup> In addition, the Metropolitan Opera Company covered the cost of Puccini's transatlantic voyage (including his lodgings in the *George Washington*'s Imperial Suite), transportation around New York, and his room and board at the Knickerbocker Hotel. In return, Puccini had to be in the United States for four weeks and in New York City for the two weeks before the premiere to oversee rehearsals. He had to attend every performance of his opera by the Metropolitan Opera Company and could not be present at any other

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<sup>53</sup> For an overview of American-themed opera written by Americans at the Metropolitan Opera House, see Elise K. Kirk, *American Opera*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001. For an in-depth study and further bibliography, see Carolyn Guzski, "American Opera at the Metropolitan: 1910-1935, A Contextual History and Critical Survey of Selected Works" (Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 2001).

<sup>54</sup> Mary Jane Phillips-Matz, "Puccini's America," in *The Puccini Companion*, ed. William Weaver and Simonetta Puccini (New York: Norton, 1994), 200; Annie J. Randall and Rosalind Gray Davis, *Puccini and the Girl: History and Reception of The Girl of the Golden West* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 87-91. The Metropolitan Opera Archives have the original contract on file.

<sup>55</sup> See also Mary-Jane Phillips-Matz and Randall and Davis.

company's production of his works, in staged or concert format, in part or in whole. The conditions of Puccini's contract demonstrate the tight control the Metropolitan Opera Company exercised over the opera in New York City. They indicate the vast financial resources at the company's disposal and exemplify the Metropolitan's willingness to spend large amounts of money in order to dominate the American operatic market.<sup>56</sup> Readers who followed the news stories about the Metropolitan would have been well aware of the money at stake. Newspapers printed the box office totals of opera performances and the amount of singers' salaries. The theme of how much money the whole enterprise would cost was of interest to some newspapers. For example, Krehbiel wrote that:

It cannot be said that either the composer of the work or his publishers presented this interesting chance to the Metropolitan Opera House because that institution had earned so much for them in the past with the composer's other operas or because there could be gathered nowhere else in the world such a number of gifted singers to interpret the new work. Both these causes for the selection of the New York opera house exist, but in this particular case, there was a more urgent and palatable reason why the opera was given to the Metropolitan Opera House. The directors of that theatre, in addition to the large sums expended in preparing the work for production, gave the composer a substantial bonus for this privilege of first performance here.<sup>57</sup>

A report in the *Nation* confirmed the rumour:

the possibility of having his new work produced with such a cast, and under the magnetic direction of Toscanini, would itself explain why Puccini preferred New York to Milan, which has no singers or conductor to match them. But there were other reasons. The

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<sup>56</sup> Subscriptions for the 1910-11 seasons passed the million-dollar mark, Kolodin, 13 and 222. Kolodin wrote that the Gatti period was one of "financial and musical well-being which has had no parallel in opera production elsewhere." Kolodin, 12. During the 1910-11 season income exceeded expenses by \$34,915. The prices for seats between 1908 and 1911 were: \$5 orchestra, \$3 dress-circle, \$2-\$2.50 balcony, \$1-\$1.50 family-tier. Private owners of grand-tier boxes typically rented them for \$6,000 for all the performances of a season, \$1,200 for one performance a week, or \$60 for a single performance. Kolodin, 200-201.

<sup>57</sup> Henry T. Krehbiel, "Puccini's Latest Opera Sung Here," *New York Daily Tribune*, 11 December 1910.



management of the Metropolitan paid \$5,000 extra for the privilege of being first to stage this opera.<sup>58</sup>

Puccini and Casa Ricordi stood to gain a great deal of money from a successful American run, especially if the work toured the United States as had his others, and he had every reason to expect such a result given his previous successes in the United States in general, and with the Metropolitan Opera Company specifically.<sup>59</sup>

As the coverage of Puccini's arrival indicates, the Metropolitan Opera Company had already established a good working relationship with the composer by the time he officially committed to the premiere. In fact, Puccini once explained to the *New York Times* that he chose New York City out of "a sentiment of gratitude for the kindness that I have received there."<sup>60</sup> Yet, an examination of the company's administrative and artistic members suggests that there may be more to the story than gratitude. The Metropolitan Opera Company could offer Puccini several things important for successful opera production: administration and musical directors who shared his vision, excellent performers, and enough money to cover the costs of the production.

The previously established positive relationship between Puccini and the Metropolitan Opera Company management promised that that the negotiations, pre-production period, and rehearsals would run well.<sup>61</sup> Not only had Puccini successfully worked with the Metropolitan Opera Company in the past, three administrators on staff in 1910 had worked with Puccini at Teatro alla Scala in Milan before accepting their positions

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<sup>58</sup> "Puccini's New Opera," *The Nation* 15 December, 1910.

<sup>59</sup> "Puccini's Latest Opera Sung Here."

<sup>60</sup> "New American Opera Plans," *New York Times*, 9 February 1908.

<sup>61</sup> Michele Girardi, *Puccini: His International Art*, trans. Laura Bisani (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 279. Kirk, *American Opera*, 163.

at the Met: general manager Giulio Gatti-Casazza (1869-1940),<sup>62</sup> conductor Arturo Toscanini (1867-1957), and chorus master, Giulio Setti (1869-1938). All three left Teatro alla Scala in 1908 for New York City.<sup>63</sup> Of the three, Toscanini had the largest reputation and deepest connection with Puccini. Toscanini was one of the leading opera conductors of the twentieth century, and he was the principal conductor at *La Scala* from 1898-1908.<sup>64</sup> *La Bohème* numbers among a long list of operas whose world premieres he had conducted. The depth of the trusting artistic relationship between Puccini and Toscanini can be seen in Puccini's willingness to allow Toscanini to revise the score based on his knowledge of the opera house's acoustics.<sup>65</sup>

Puccini had worked with the Metropolitan Opera Company on two occasions prior to his 1910 visit. The terms of his prior engagements were similar to those of his *La fanciulla del West* contract. In both these cases, the Metropolitan paid Puccini to oversee the rehearsals and attend the performances of his operas for a short period, and newspaper reports documented the visit. Both performances were national premieres of his operas. The first encounter with the company had been during their first production of *Madama Butterfly* in 1907. The second occurred in the spring of 1910, for the French premiere of *Manon*

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<sup>62</sup> Toscanini worked at Teatro alla Scala from 1898-1908, with an interruption in 1904, and then from 1921 to 1929. He conducted the world premiere of *La Bohème* in Turin 1 February 1896.

<sup>63</sup> For more on Gatti-Casazza in New York City, see his autobiographical *Memories of the Opera*, New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1941.

<sup>64</sup> For a detailed study of Toscanini's relationship with the Metropolitan Opera Company and the field of music in the United States, see: Joseph Horowitz, *Understanding Toscanini: How He Became an American Culture-God and Helped Create a New Audience for Old Music* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987).

<sup>65</sup> For more on the working relationship between Puccini and Toscanini, see Gabriele Dotto's work on Toscanini's revisions to *La fanciulla del West*: Gabriele Dotto, "Four Hands: Collaborative Alterations in Puccini's *Fanciulla*," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 42 (1986): 604-24. See also Phillips-Matz, 92, who dates Puccini and Toscanini's first meeting to the spring of 1894.

*Lescaut*.<sup>66</sup> Parisian Opera impresarios had traditionally refused to produce *Manon Lescaut* out of loyalty toward Jules Massenet's French opera *Manon* (1884). And so, this opera, which had made its world premiere in 1893, and had its first American performance at the Metropolitan Opera House in 1895, made its Parisian debut in the late spring of 1910 under the care of the American opera company, quite possibly to an American audience.

The situation provided an excellent international staging for the signing of Puccini's *La fanciulla del West* contract with the Metropolitan Opera Company.<sup>67</sup> According to one American report, Paris had a custom of producing Italian opera during the summer months to accommodate American tourists:

the neo-Italian repertory is offered chiefly during the time when the Americans are in Paris and when the French are absent at their country residences and seaside resorts, and that if the Americans were not in Paris during that period the Italian operas would not even represent the sum which they disclose above. The Opéra Comique is closed in August and September, when the Americans are going home; but when the high tide of Americanism is in Paris, in May, June and July, the operas of the neo-Italian school, which are also given in America, are given in Paris. This is also attributable to the fact that the many Americans who go to Paris do not live in New York, Boston, Chicago, and Philadelphia, where Italian opera is given, but live in smaller cities, where they never hear Italian opera, and they, therefore, go to Paris to hear it because it is not given here during the vacation period.<sup>68</sup>

The Metropolitan Opera Company was on tour that spring in order to present a late-spring season of Italian opera at Théâtre du Châtelet.<sup>69</sup> The above report reinforces the point that

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<sup>66</sup> Julian Budden, *Puccini: His Life and Works, The Master Musicians* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 288; Phillips-Matz, *Puccini*, 168-76.

<sup>67</sup> "Our Opera Again Triumphs in Paris," *New York Times*, 10 June 1910.

<sup>68</sup> "Paris vs. Italy," *Musical Courier*, 30 November 1910, 24.

<sup>69</sup> For more on the Metropolitan Opera Company's Paris 1910 season, see: Budden, *Puccini*, 301. Phillips-Matz, *Puccini*, 168-76, 98-200; Phillips-Matz, "Puccini's America," 205, 13-14. For newspaper accounts of the tour, see Blumenberg, "American Indian Subject," 23; "New York in Paris. The Italian Season of the Metropolitan Opera. (Impressions of a Parisian)," *Musical Courier*, 22 June 1910; "Our Opera Again Triumphs in Paris," *New York Times*, 10 June 1910; "Puccini

American opera audiences of the period loved Italian opera in general and suggests that Puccini and the Metropolitan Opera Company had in them an already receptive audience, one generally open to Puccini's type of opera composition.<sup>70</sup> This signing of the contract overseas in such a public way surely also served as publicity for the upcoming premiere and highlighted the emerging power of the Metropolitan Opera Company in the international opera scene.

The ability to obtain the leading conductor and Italian opera composer in the international opera market extended to the leading opera singers as well. The company had invested a lot of money in the salaries of some of the highest-ranking Italian opera singers, as well as the leading Italian opera conductor, and so an association with the Metropolitan offered Puccini the singers he needed for the best performance of his opera. The Metropolitan's claim that singers of the highest caliber performed its operas was not groundless. For example, the 1910-1911 roster included renowned performers like Emmy Destinn, Geraldine Farrar, Olive Fremstad, Nelly Melba, Amato Pasquale, John McCormack, Riccardo Martin, Maurice Renaud, Léon Rothier, and Leo Slezak, most of whom had performed many times with the opera company.<sup>71</sup> The company also had an exclusive contract with Enrico Caruso. Moreover, several of the company's performers, such as Caruso, Pasquale, and Destinn, had worked with Puccini frequently and successfully at

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Always Nervous. Is Wrought Up at a First Performance—Interview at Theatre," *New York Times* 1910, 3.

<sup>70</sup> For research concerning the composition of the New York City opera audience, consult Jay Robert S. Teran, "The New York Opera Audience: 1825-1974" (Ph.D. diss, New York University, 1974).

<sup>71</sup> For the full roster of the 1910-1911 season, consult Fitzgerald, *The Annals of the Metropolitan Opera: The Complete Chronicle of Performances and Artists: Chronology 1883-1985*, 194-95. The Metropolitan Opera Company now maintains an online database of all performances that supersedes Fitzgerald. See Metropolitan Opera Company, "Metopera Database" <http://archives.metoperafamily.org/archives/frame.htm>, Internet, accessed 2012 March 5.

important European opera houses. Puccini thought so highly of Caruso in fact, that he composed the role of Johnson for him. Therefore, a natural lure of the Metropolitan Opera Company for Puccini would have been Caruso's employment, at the very least. The orchestra and the chorus were also of the highest calibre, better than many in Europe, not in the least because the Metropolitan had raided the European market for musicians just as it had for singers.

In addition to securing many of the leading international opera stars, the company also hired a national theatre star to stage-manage the opera. David Belasco had both written and directed the dramatic source of *La fanciulla del West*, a hugely successful New York City frontier melodrama. This perhaps not only ensured as spectacular a production for the opera as for the play, since Belasco had a well-earned reputation as "the wizard of Broadway," but likely added to the reliability of the portrayal of Californian people, since his plays were considered authentic portrayals of Western life. Belasco's presence may have compensated for any perceived lack of credibility toward Puccini as a composer of an American opera. To ensure visual continuity with the play, which had been praised for its visual realism, the Metropolitan Opera Company commissioned new sets, costumes, and scenic effects for the opera, almost all of which were reproductions from the original play, scaled to fit the stage of the Metropolitan Opera House.

It is clear from the above that the Metropolitan Opera Company invested a great deal of money on the opera's production. It also raised the cost of tickets, doubling the price of a single ticket for the first two performances of the work which it presented in addition to the regular subscription performances. Daily reports of scalpers' activities, and the high prices they succeeded in charging for tickets to this opera, also circulated in the papers. Such

reports reinforced the message that the premiere was a desirable event which people were willing to pay a lot of money to attend.<sup>72</sup>

The Metropolitan Opera Company's choice to aggressively promote a new work by Puccini over one by an American composer may seem almost counter-productive from the viewpoint of a cultural nationalist or nativist perspective.<sup>73</sup> However, for the Metropolitan Opera Company to gain international recognition it needed to play by the rules of the European opera field. The composer's authority and trust in the opera house to make the work a success could constitute a stamp of approval that Europeans would respect. The apparent hyperbole of the arrival reports concerning Puccini's fame and importance in the opera world was not unfounded. He was internationally recognized, and many considered him the heir to Verdi and consequently the leader of the Italian opera school.<sup>74</sup>

Puccini was not the only famous European composer the Metropolitan Opera Company could have chosen. Mascagni, Debussy, and Strauss all had ties to the Metropolitan Opera Company and all were important composers at the time. Any one of them could have caught Europe's attention. However, the possibility that the Metropolitan Opera Company would have promoted a French composer, such as Debussy, was slim. Debussy had not fared well in New York City, and new French opera, although not completely overlooked by the

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<sup>72</sup> The *Musical Courier* reported that the first performance earned \$24,000 and the second \$18,000. To earn this much, the Metropolitan had doubled the subscription rate for the first two performances, which were offered as special performances. "The *Girl of the Golden West*, December 17," *Musical Courier*, 21 December 1910, 23.

<sup>73</sup> Carolyn Guzski has pointed out that during this period the Metropolitan Opera Company pursued American works and may have produced one before *La fanciulla del West* had they found an appropriate work. For more details, see Guzski, "Opera and Nation: *Fanciulla* in Context," *fanciulla100.org*, [http://fanciulla100.org/fan\\_readmore\\_guzski.html](http://fanciulla100.org/fan_readmore_guzski.html) (accessed 27 April 2012).

<sup>74</sup> For a discussion of Puccini as the leading opera composer and a comparison to the reputation of Debussy and Richard Strauss, see Girardi, 262. For an excellent study of Puccini's negative reception during the period following *La fanciulla del West*, see Alexandra Wilson, *Puccini Problem: Opera, Nationalism and Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

Metropolitan Opera Company, had failed to capture the musical imaginations of New York audiences in the same way that Puccini's operas had. Nevertheless, the Metropolitan did pay Debussy for the rights to perform two operas he was working on, but he never finished them. As for German composers, Strauss could have been another possibility, but Americans had great difficulty accepting his opera *Salome*, finding it risqué and immoral.<sup>75</sup> Moreover, the New York audiences and the Metropolitan opera company had known since 1907 that Puccini was composing an opera about the United States, and that he had found his inspiration for the opera during his last engagement with the Metropolitan Opera Company. Producing an opera about Americans in the United States' leading city would lend a certain degree of veracity to the performance, an opportunity for Americans to offer their endorsement of Puccini's work and to legitimize his reception of American local color as manifest in the play. They were flattered that a leading Italian opera composer could be inspired by the United States' culture in this way.

The choice of Puccini served practical needs as well. For a number of years, the Metropolitan Opera Company had divided their main opera season, which began in the early fall and ended in the spring, into smaller seasons, including both an Italian and a German opera season. Having both a living Italian and German opera composer to premiere works during their respective seasons would balance the significance of both. For the German season, the Metropolitan Opera Company had hired Engelbert Humperdinck. His new opera

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<sup>75</sup> The *Salome* premiere has been widely researched. Consult the following studies for further discussion and bibliography. Lawrence Gilman, *Aspects of Modern Opera: Estimates and Inquires* (New York: John Lane, 1908); John Pennino, "Mary Garden and the American Press," *The Opera Quarterly* 6, no. 4 (1989): 61-76; Anne L. Seshadri, "Richard Strauss's *Salome* and the Vienna debate," *Music Research Forum* 15 (2000): 1-17; Nadine Sine, "Selling *Salome* in America," in *Opera and the Golden West: The Past, Present, and Future of Opera in the U S A* (London: Associated University Presses, 1994), 181-19; "Strauss's *Salome* The First Time Here," *New York Times*, 23 January 1907; John Gordon Williamson, "Critical Reception," in *Richard Strauss: Salome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1989), 131-44; John Yohalem, "The *Salome* Scandals of 1907," *Opera News* 68, no. 9 (2004): 34-36.

*Königskinder* premiered on 28 December 1910 and was the highlight of the German opera season. While Humperdinck received comparatively little attention in the press from September to early December, newspapers turned their focus toward him shortly after the premiere of *La fanciulla del West*. Although the Metropolitan still presented a German season, German opera had lost its status as the preferred opera of the Metropolitan Opera Company several years before, and German music in general faced increasing opposition in the United States.<sup>76</sup> Italian opera, however, was the luxury item that the New York elite sought.

Nothing in the newspapers indicates that The Metropolitan Opera Company saw any kind of conflict of interest or inconsistency in the fact that they felt they needed foreign composers rather than Americans to solidify their position in the international opera world. The press and the opera company viewed the world premieres of Puccini and Humperdinck as evidence of the company's ascendancy. One of the things this suggests is that the need to appease American nativists who were pushing for American opera companies to produce works that were by, for, and about Americans, concerned the directors of the Metropolitan less than the need to appeal to values of the international opera community and to turn a profit. In later seasons, however, Gatti-Casazza would attempt to remedy the apparent exclusion of American opera from the Metropolitan Opera House's repertoire by soliciting works by American opera composers, and championing the cause of American opera at the Metropolitan Opera House for the duration of his tenure with the company. He staged fourteen American operas between 1910 and 1934.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> See Gienow-Hecht, *Sound Diplomacy*.

<sup>77</sup> For more on Gatti-Casazza and American opera at the Metropolitan Opera House, see: Kirk, *American Opera*, 160-83, and Guzski, "American Opera at the Metropolitan." The first American opera production by the Metropolitan Opera Company was Converse's *The Pipe of Desire*, which premiered in March 1910, nine months prior to *La fanciulla del West*'s premiere. Horatio



While the pre-premiere newspaper descriptions present Puccini variously as a friendly foreigner, a masculine artist, a great master, or as a commodity to be bought and sold, the post-premiere accounts present him as hero. Indeed, the detailed descriptions of the premiere show the Metropolitan Opera Company appearing to treat Puccini in a manner typically reserved for national heroes. The company decorated the opera house for the occasion, draping the auditorium with Italian and American flags and adorning it with streamers in the colors of Italy and America and filling the foyer with potted plants and bouquets of flowers. Lengthy intermissions saw numerous curtain calls, during which Gatti-Casazza presented Puccini with ceremonial gifts, such as bouquets and wreaths of flowers. In the intermission between the second and third acts, he presented Puccini with a solid silver wreath fluttering with American and Italian colors. Some of the newspapers described the special reception attended by foreign diplomats, dignitaries, and notable members of the New York City artistic community. A few even listed the names of the attendees, complete with details about the fabric of the women's evening gowns.<sup>78</sup>

Newspapers of local, national, and international circulation invited the entire country to watch the event unfold before its eyes. The detailed descriptions of the premiere allowed the public to participate vicariously in the premiere, an event that the newspapers and music journals had shaped into defining moment in the history of music and the United States. As detailed as many of the newspaper articles were, few described the event as vividly as John Freund's story in *Musical America*.<sup>79</sup> Freund viewed the premiere in the same way that the

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Parker's opera *Mona* won the Metropolitan Opera Company's American opera competition which was announced two years before *La fanciulla del West* premiered. *Mona* was first produced in 1912.

<sup>78</sup> For a description of the reception in the Puccini literature, see Phillips-Matz, *Puccini*, 205.

<sup>79</sup> John C. Freund, "First Production of Puccini's Opera. A Triumph for All Concerned and a Notable Popular Success," *Musical America*, 17 December 1910, 1-4.

Metropolitan seemed to view it: as a turning point in American musical identity. In a remarkable narrative of the event, he offers his readers what amounts to an historical chronicle or even a personal diary, allowing those who were not able to attend the premiere an opportunity to experience the premiere as it unfolded, moment by moment. That he should do so suggests that the event was as significant as the work itself. Freund's story began by situating the reader in New York City, an hour before the curtain. It goes on to describe the audience members, where and with whom they sat, and in some cases, even what they said, in an attempt to recreate the atmosphere. Freund provided vivid details about the sets, the stage action, and in lesser detail, the sound of the music as the opera progressed, paying particular attention to what he believed were the salient dramatic moments in the plot. He described the audience's response at intermissions, and the performers and artistic staff's behavior during the numerous curtain calls. Freund also offered the reader snatches of overheard assessments of the opera as the premiere progressed. Freund concluded his account of the evening with the following remark: "And so a great event, not merely a great night in opera, but an event destined to have a large influence not merely on the careers of all concerned, but upon opera itself, passes into history."

Freund's words circulated widely, literally around the nation. His journal, *Musical America*, had a large circulation and served as a monthly periodical, informing the public of musical activities and topics of interest to music students, and amateur and professional musicians in the major American cities and abroad, often reprinting reviews and articles published in the daily press. Many of its articles addressed the issue of American musical identity, dividing clearly the issue of American composition from American performers, and it generally served as an advocate for American music and musical life. Freund's view of the premiere circulated across the United States to thousands of subscribers who would then be able to imagine the event for themselves in the context Freund's assertion that this was a

defining moment in American life, one that would shape the reputation of America abroad in the years to come. There were several articles addressing the premiere in the 17 December 1910 issue.

The circumstances around the premiere suggest that the Metropolitan engineered an historical moment for the United States, intending to take the credit for advancing the nation culturally. The financial backers of the Metropolitan, consisting of the nouveau riche, WASPS, capitalists, industrialists, bankers, steel and railroad millionaires of America, were the same people who were concerned with industrializing the nation and entering it into global economy and politics. Thus for them, such a night was particularly important because it offered the necessary proof of American cultural maturity and sophistication that they assumed was required for European nations to take the United States seriously. That they used a European art form and composer to gain that recognition did not trouble the opera company in the least. Rather, comments in the newspapers seemed to suggest they viewed it as beating the Europeans at their own game. The fact that the Metropolitan Opera Company had secured a famous European composer would appeal to the values of Europeans, who like Americans, had trouble accepting American musical products as equal to and valid as European ones. By premiering the work of an Italian opera composer, the Metropolitan Opera Company could guarantee international exposure for itself since the event would be covered in foreign papers, something not likely to happen had they chosen an American composer. In so doing, it could reasonably expect that its ambition to become one of the most important opera companies in the world would begin to take hold of the imaginations of people in countries beyond the borders of the United States.<sup>80</sup> In the end, despite the foreign

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<sup>80</sup> For example, one journalist explained that “part of the press of London seems to feel that New York is becoming too important as a musical centre,” says a special cable dispatch to the Herald this morning, referring to the comments of the metropolitan journals on the production of *The Girl of the Golden West*. This is too bad. However, with a well-developed taste for what is best in opera and the cash necessary to pay for it, New York will continue to get the best. Our English friends may not

nature of the composer, they could still claim a certain degree of Americanism for opera by pointing to its story.

The Metropolitan Opera Company took steps to ensure the first night audience would be in a position to receive the opera favourably by priming the press with publicity appealing to as many different values as possible. The publicity campaign included interviews with the performers, accounts of rehearsals, reports on the antics of the performers outside the opera house and forecasts that the opera would be a complete success. Newspaper articles appealed to the public's sense of patriotism, nationalism, europhilism, hybridity, authenticity, the cult of the star performer, prestige, and the historicity of the event. *La fanciulla del West*'s premiere served as both an indication of New York City's arrival as a major opera centre in the Western world and at the same time re-inforced the point that Americans had no opera tradition of their own and that in many ways the New York opera field was still a musical colony of Europe.

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like this, but what are they going to do about it?" "New York as a Music Centre," *New York Herald*, 13 December 1910. In "London Joins in Paean to Puccini. Press is Almost Unanimous in Its Praise for *The Girl of the Golden West*," *New York Herald*, 13 December 1910, another journalist wrote: "The London press is almost unanimous in praising the music and singing of *The Girl of the Golden West*, but there is a mild undercurrent of resentment at New York having been selected as the place for the first performances of Herr Humperdinck's *Königskinder* and Signor Mascagni's *Ysobel*. Part of the London press seems to feel that New York is becoming too important as a musical centre."

CHAPTER THREE: PUCCINI, BELASCO, AND CROSS-CULTURAL  
ENCOUNTERS IN *LA FANCIULLA DEL WEST*

The very title of *La fanciulla del West* emphasizes its cultural duality. In the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, Italian operas produced in New York City typically depicted stories and places located in Western Europe. Those set beyond European borders portrayed imaginary locales situated in the illusive Far East, which on the opera stage included nearly anywhere beyond the borders of Western Europe.<sup>1</sup> In the broadest sense *La fanciulla del West* falls into this category of exotic operas whose stories and music depict cross-cultural encounters in far off places, as Annie J. Randall and Rosalind Grey Davis have previously noted.<sup>2</sup> Yet through its Western setting, the opera also belongs to a rich tradition of art, literature, and drama that depicts and responds to the nineteenth-century Anglo-American settlement of North America, but which rarely finds expression on the operatic stage—even in the United States.

The fusion of these two traditions—one Italian, the other American; one imported, the other domestic; one highbrow, the other lowbrow; one colonial, the other post-colonial; one sung, the other spoken—brought two sets of generic conventions into a single work. The critics had to come to terms with a work for which there were no well-known precedents to guide their evaluations.<sup>3</sup> Comments in Puccini's personal correspondence and

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<sup>1</sup> See Gilles de Van "Fin de siècle Exoticism and the Meaning of the Far Away," *Opera Quarterly* 11 (1995): 77-94.

<sup>2</sup> Annie J. Randall and Rosalind Gray Davis, *Puccini and the Girl: A History and Reception of The Girl of the Golden West* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2005), 131.

<sup>3</sup> While there is at least one other Italian frontier opera from this period, there is no evidence in the New York City reviews that the critics had seen it or were familiar with it. The opera, Pietro Floridia's *La colonia libera* (Rome, 1899; rev. ed. Turin, 1900), was based on a libretto by one of Puccini's librettists, Luigi Illica, and is based on a short story by Bret Harte. See Senici, "A New Landscape," note 35, 322. There was, however, a review of the opera published in the *New York Times* by an overseas correspondent. One of the comments explained, "we feel something of the incongruous in the representation of a scene from comparatively modern American

in the press show that the composer and the critics constantly negotiated these competing demands of Italian opera and Frontier melodrama.

While the generic requirements of Italian opera at the turn of the century are well known in the musicological literature, as are those of exotic opera, those of American Frontier melodramas are less so. In the first scholarly discussions of the early American reception, the critics' experience with other frontier works and the bearing this had on their reception of the opera has been infrequently considered. Yet placing the opera into the context of the dramatic conventions, typical themes, standard character-types, paradigms of authorship, and the attending ideology specific to Frontier melodramas illustrates the ways in which it met and diverged from the expectations for a staging of the frontier in New York City. This illuminates the ensuing commentary and helps to determine the relative significance of the different critical remarks about them.

The critics approached the opera as both Puccini's reception of their West and an "operatization" of a play, and they were very interested in whether or not he "got it right." Some, like Lawrence Gilman concluded that "the vitality and veraciousness of the original play have suffered in being passed through the sentimentalizing Latin imagination . . ."<sup>4</sup> while others suggested that

The Italian composer has actually made his best opera on the subject he chose . . . he has caught with astonishing success the spirit, colour, and feeling of Belasco's story. Let those who believe better results could have been achieved with the same material come forward with proofs. As an opera, *The Girl of the Golden West* will probably be delighting audiences long after the play has been forgotten. And it will outlast *Tosca* and *Madame Butterfly*.<sup>5</sup>

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life." They found the costumes "picturesque." See, F. M. P. "Bret Harte in Opera." *New York Times*, 11 June 1899.

<sup>4</sup> Lawrence Gilman, "Puccini's American Opera," *Harper's Weekly*, 17 December 1910.

<sup>5</sup> Max Smith, "Puccini's New Opera of Golden West a Triumph," *New York Press*, 11 December 1910.

They measured the sets, the acting, the dramatic structure, the language, and character depictions against the original play and its dramatic lineage as much as they did for its Italian opera lineage. Recent Puccini scholarship has begun to address this part of *La fanciulla del West*'s cultural context and early American reception.

The work done so far connects the opera to the period in United States history that it depicts, and to the literature, drama, and art that this era inspired. Mary Jane Phillips-Matz was one of the first to summarize the historical background of the 1849 Gold Rush in California, and Annie Randall and Rosalind Gray Davis enrich this background information further with discussions about the social displacement caused by the Mexican-American War (1846-48).<sup>6</sup> Both Phillips-Matz and the team of Randall and Davis argue that Puccini and his librettists drew as much on their knowledge of the actual historical events and people as they did on the opera's dramatic source. Phillips-Matz explains how the mid-nineteenth century image of California as place of hope drew thousands of settlers to the region. She suggests that Minnie was created "not out of fable, but reality," and argues that "Minnie descends from real, historic women," and uses backing from the letters and diaries of female pioneers from the period and research from women's history to illustrate her point.<sup>7</sup> Emanuel Senici agrees with this approach insofar as "invoking the real, historic women of the American frontier as Minnie's prototypes makes sense" for the American reception of *La fanciulla del West*.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Mary Jane Phillips-Matz, "Puccini's America," in *The Puccini Companion*, ed. William Weaver and Simonetta Puccini (New York: Norton, 1994), 202-227, Annie J. Randall and Rosalind Gray Davis, "The Opera's Story: Texts and Subtexts," in *Puccini and the Girl: A History and Reception of the Girl of the Golden West* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 10-11.

<sup>7</sup> Phillips-Matz, "Puccini's America," 211.

<sup>8</sup> Emanuel Senici, "*La fanciulla del West*: A New Landscape for a New Virgin," in *Landscape and Gender in Italian Opera* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 250.

Randall and Davis describe how following the American-Mexican War, many people lost their homes and lands to incoming Anglo-American settlers. This displacement changed the lives of many indigenous Mexicans and Euro-Mexicans, in particular the group people known as Californios. They interpret the character of Dick Johnson/Don Ramerrez as a symbol of the resulting unease.<sup>9</sup> Randall and Davis are interested in the ways in which the play's mixture of Anglo-American settlers, European immigrants, Californios, indigenous Mexicans, and Native Americans reflect the complexity of the Californian society. They rely on this background information as they question the New York City press' quick acceptance of Puccini's statement that his opera was about redemption. The opera's historical background is important to both Philips-Matz and Randall and Davis because they argue Belasco and consequently Puccini "shared a passion for the authenticity of their story and went to great lengths to create the illusion of reality in their productions."<sup>10</sup>

Most discussions of the literary context for the opera include references to David Belasco's play *The Girl of the Golden West* (1905), Bret Harte's characters and stories, and *Buffalo Bill's Wild West* shows; all three of which find mention in either Puccini's private correspondence or his public statements to the New York City press. It comes as no surprise that the opera's source *The Girl of the Golden West* finds mention in discussions of the opera in its American context. Philips-Matz links the opera even further back to the Gold Rush plays of the mid-nineteenth century, though her discussion of them never goes beyond the mention of title and consequently leaves little sense of what these plays were like. Randall and Davis refer to the work of theatre historian Roger Hall, who has extensively studied the U.S. reception of frontier plays until the genre transferred from the stage to

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<sup>9</sup> Randall and Davis, "The Opera's Story," 11.

<sup>10</sup> Randall and Davis, "The Opera's Story," 11.



screen and became obsolete, but they do not summarize his important findings about the relationship between Belasco's play and previous frontier melodramas or its reception in New York City.<sup>11</sup> Nor do they refer to findings of other studies in theatre history that consider the play. Yet, projects like Hall's help to explain the vitality of Belasco's play in its time and to document its place as a significant theatrical work in New York City.

The most sophisticated study about the relationship between the opera and its dramatic source lies in Helen Greenwald's work on the music and lighting in the opera.<sup>12</sup> Greenwald examines Belasco's reputation for brilliantly complex lighting schemes that worked toward creating the atmosphere of his plays, and not just the mood of the plays, but also the natural lighting of an outdoor sky. She looks at the transfer of the Belasco lighting aesthetic into the opera theatre and shows how it coordinated with Puccini's score, underpinning certain structural ideas in the music and libretto.

Philips-Matz was one of the first Puccini scholars to connect the opera to the stories of Bret Harte. She initially states that Minnie's prototype seems to be the saloonkeeper Miggles, a character from Bret Harte's *Outcasts of Poker Flat*, but then turns to argue that Minnie's prototypes came from the real-life women who went to California, and she then drops any further discussion of Bret Harte.<sup>13</sup> Randall and Davis also tie Minnie to Harte's Miggles. Emanuel Senici (2005) begins his contextualization of the opera with reference to the stories of Bret Harte as well, drawing on the work of film scholar Lee Clark Mitchell,

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<sup>11</sup> Randall and Davis, "Redemptions and Other Orthodoxies," in *Puccini and the Girl: A History and Reception of the Girl of the Golden West* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), n. 24, 154. Roger A. Hall, *Performing the American Frontier* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>12</sup> Helen Greenwald, "Realism on the Opera Stage: Belasco, Puccini, and the California Sunset," in *Opera in Context: Essays on Historical Staging from the Late Renaissance to the Time of Puccini*, ed. Mark A. Radice (Portland, Ore.: Amadeus Press, 1998).

<sup>13</sup> Philips-Matz, "Puccini's America," 210.

and takes his contextualization further than Phillips-Matz by explaining the significance of dime novelist Bret Harte's stories in the development of American frontier fiction.<sup>14</sup> Senici's main concern, however, is for the Italian contexts for the opera and "the coupling of virginity and mountains," and he soon leaves his examination of the literary representations of Frontier Girls and Western mountain landscapes for an exploration of Italian operas associating mountains with female virginity.<sup>15</sup> For Senici, who sees in the opera a new conception of "sonic space," the sharpness of *La fanciulla del West's* difference is better seen against the horizon of Italian operas.<sup>16</sup>

This chapter further explores some of the ways in which Puccini's opera both followed and diverged from the path of conventions established by previous frontier works, in particular the opera's dramatic source *The Girl of the Golden West*, and the reactions of the New York City music critics to these Western features. An examination of primary sources such as letters, interviews, newspaper articles, reviews of both the play and the opera, and prefaces to novels and books, against the current research on Frontier discourse, shows that one of the central expectations Puccini violated was that of authenticity, which was one of this discourse's conceits. Discussions about Puccini's interest in the West as an opera subject as well as those about the opera's sets, staging, dialogue, characterization, and acting frequently turned to the question of whether or not Puccini's West was authentic. The claims to authenticity, present in the genre of the frontier melodrama and in the public discussions of the opera prior its premiere became one of criteria the critics used to evaluate it.

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<sup>14</sup> Senici, "A New Landscape," 249. Lee Clark Mitchell, *Westerns: Making the Man in Fiction and Film* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

<sup>15</sup> Senici, "A New Landscape," 250.

<sup>16</sup> Senici, "A New Landscape," 250.

The meaning of the term shifted variably depending on the context. The critics considered whether the work was authoritative, a worthy representation of the Far West in 1849, a convincing replication of Belasco's play, and whether or not the composer had been true to his own identity in composing the opera. Some of the discussions also show how easily the critics slipped from asking whether the opera credibly depicted Old California to asking if it depicted the current United States, and from judging whether the characters in the opera served as persuasive representatives of that past time and place, to considering their effectiveness American representatives in general. Their questions boiled down to this: did the transformation to Italian opera damage the authenticity of Belasco's play. Neither purely Italian opera, nor purely American melodrama, *La fanciulla del West* sits in the borderlands between both genres. Many critics ultimately concluded that the opera unsuccessfully bridged the competing demands of both traditions.

“There is Great Scope in Your Western Life  
for Operatic Treatment”

The development of Puccini's interest in the American Far West as an opera subject can be traced from his letters and a survey of interviews and articles published in the New York City newspapers. These document that Puccini encountered visual, textual, and theatrical depictions of Frontier, even before he visited the United States. They also indicate that it took him several months, even years to fully commit to the idea of setting his next opera in Belasco's California. The first documented indication of Puccini's general interest in the American West comes in the form a letter he wrote to his brother Michele on 24 April 1891:

Buffalo Bill has been here, and I liked it. Buffalo Bill is a company of North Americans, with a number of Redskins and buffaloes, who

do splendid shooting tricks and reproduce for real scenes that went on at the frontier.<sup>17</sup>

The first documented indication of Puccini's specific interest in the American West as an opera subject dates from 1907 when he announced his interest in the subject to the American public during his first visit to New York City January and February of that year.<sup>18</sup> In a statement given upon his arrival in New York Puccini told the press:

I am glad to be in America . . . and I have some thought of writing an opera with Western America as a background. I want to get in touch with David Belasco who did such clever things for *Madama Butterfly*. I have read Bret Harte's novels and I think there is great scope in your Western life for operatic treatment.<sup>19</sup>

The next day Puccini gave another interview, restating his interest in the American West as an opera subject:

If I could get a good Western American libretto . . . I would undoubtedly write the music for it. The Indian does not appeal to me, however. Real Americans mean much more, and there are costume effects to think of. I should think that something stunning could be made of the '49 period.<sup>20</sup>

A month later, still in New York City, Puccini privately admitted his reservation about composing an opera set in the West to his friend and publisher Tito Ricordi:

I've tried to find new subjects even here [in New York], but there's nothing suitable, or rather nothing complete. I've found some good

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<sup>17</sup> Eugenio Gara, ed., *Carteggi Pucciniani* (Milan: Ricordi, 1958), 38. C'è stato qui Buffalo Bill che mi piacque. Buffalo Bill è una compagnia di americani del Nord, con una quantità di indiani pellirosse e di bufali, che fanno dei giuochi di tiro splendidi e riproducono al vero delle scene successe alla frontiera. In undici giorni hanno incassato << 120 mila lire!>>. English translation from: Michele Girardi, *Puccini: His International Art*, trans. Laura Bisani (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 326. For more on a Buffalo Bill European tour from 1890, particularly its performances in Italy (28 January to 16 April 1890) see Paul Reddin, *Wild West Shows* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 103-110.

<sup>18</sup> "Puccini Got an Idea Here," *New York Times*, 7 July 1907, 3; "Puccini Wants a Book for an American Opera," *New York Times*, 20 Jan 1907, 7; "Puccini's Opera Plans," *New York Times*, 22 September 1907, 9.

<sup>19</sup> "Puccini's *Manon Lescaut* at the Metropolitan," *New York Times*, 19 January 1907, 7.

<sup>20</sup> "Puccini Wants a Book for an American Opera," 7.

things in Belasco, but nothing particular, firm, or complete. I like the West as a setting, but in all the plays I have seen I've found only a few scenes here and there that would do. Never a simple story, all a jumble, and, at times in bad taste and old-fashioned . . . Before leaving, I shall have a meeting with Belasco, but I don't have much hope . . . I'll go to see a powerful Belasco play, *The Music Master*, and another by Hauptmann that they tell me is good, and then I'm done.<sup>21</sup>

When he first announced this interest in the West to the New York press Puccini was already struggling to develop two other opera subjects that were completely different in tone and heroine type from his final choice of *La fanciulla del West* and its frontier girl Minnie. The first was based on the real-life figure of Marie Antoinette, and the second on a fictional character, Conchita, a Carmen-like *femme fatale* drawn from French erotic writer Pierre Louÿs's novel *La femme et le pantin*.<sup>22</sup> By the winter of 1907, however, neither of these ideas had materialized into a complete libretto.<sup>23</sup> In the case of the *Marie Antoinette* project, the librettist Luigi Illica had failed to produce a scenario and libretto Puccini found suitable for setting to music.<sup>24</sup> In the case of *Conchita* both Giulio and Tito Ricordi feared

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<sup>21</sup> Cited in Gara, ed., *Carteggi*, 339-40; Girardi, *Puccini*, 260. The only drama by Gerhart Robert Hauptmann (1862-1946) playing in New York City on public record during Puccini's visit was *The Sunken Bell*. Hauptmann was a leader in the German literary naturalism movement, and he won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1912. *Die versunkene Glocke* (1896) was the most popular German play between 1896 and 1914. It was also very popular in New York City. For a review of the performances at the Lyric Theatre in February 1907 see "Lyric—*The Sunken Bell*," *The New York Dramatic Mirror*, 16 February 1907, 3. For a study of the American reception of the play, see John J. Weisert, "The Critical Reception of Gerhart Hauptmann's *The Sunken Bell* on the American Stage," *Monatshefte für Deutschen Unterricht* 43 (1951): 221-34. For a study of the play in its German cultural context see Marc Weiner, "Gerhart Hauptmann's *Die versunkene Glocke* and the Cultural Vocabulary of Pre-Fascist Germany," *German Studies Review* 11, no. 3 (1988): 447-61. For the English edition of the play see Gerhart Hauptmann, *The Sunken Bell; A Fairy Play in Five Acts*, trans. Charles Henry Meltzer (New York: Double Day, Page and Co., 1899). During this period, American composer Carl Ruggles was developing an opera based on the play. See Robert Young McMahon, "The Sunken Bell' by Carl Ruggles" (Ph.D. diss, Peabody Institute, Johns Hopkins University, 1991).

<sup>22</sup> Girardi, *Puccini*, 276; Pierre Louÿs, *La Femme et le pantin, roman espagnol* (Paris: Société du "Mercure de France," 1898).

<sup>23</sup> "Puccini to Write a New Opera," *New York Times*, 27 May 1907, 7.

<sup>24</sup> According to New York City newspapers, *Marie Antoinette* was scheduled for a performance at the Metropolitan Opera House at one point. See "New Puccini Opera to Be Given

that the novel's erotic content might provoke the kind of violently negative reaction Richard Strauss's *Salome* had inspired among British and American audiences; they therefore ardently discouraged Puccini from pursuing that subject any further.<sup>25</sup>

Between January and July of 1907 Puccini focused more intently on developing the Western idea, and in the summer of 1907 he began negotiations with David Belasco for the rights to *The Girl of the Golden West*.<sup>26</sup> On 22 September 1907, *The New York Times* documented the official signing of the Puccini-Belasco contract agreement:

It was announced yesterday that a contract has just been signed between Giacomo Puccini and David Belasco, whereby the eminent Italian composer is to use *The Girl of the Golden West*, the Belasco play in which Blanche Bates is starring, as the libretto for his long-

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Here," *New York Times*, 16 July 1907; "Puccini to Write a New Opera." Marcello Conti offers a detailed account of *Marie Antoinette*'s development in "*Maria Antoinetta ovvero L'Austriaca: Un soggetto abbandonato di Puccini*," *Rivista italiana di musicologia* 33 (1998): 89-181.

<sup>25</sup> In an unpublished letter dated 6 April 1907, Giulio Ricordi implores Puccini to abandon *La femme et le pantin*. "Un artista quale Giacomo Puccini, quando ha afferrato un'idea ch'io vidi in Lei, da Lei accolta col più vivo entusiasmo deve in questa idea persistere perchè quando la prima impressione è grande e tenace è quella la buona. Che vuole? per questo abbandono di *La femme et le pantin* io penso a mille cose, a mille cause ad arrivo perfino a credere ch'Ella a New York ha assorbito il veleno dalla pruderie americana che si scandalizza alla *Salomé*, come gli inglesi si scandalizzano a certe innocue parole, non solo abolite in teatro, ma anche nel frasario comune. Io penso, caro Puccini, che Lei fu influenzato e ha ditto tra di sè: Perbacco! rischio di scrivere un'opera la quale non sarà accettata per le rappresentazioni nell'America del Nord, probabilmente anche in Inghilterra ed infine ovunque regna quella gesuitica pruderie tutta esterna che si sfoga poi, usum *La femme et le pantin* nella confidenza della casa privata! Quest'idea è stata una doccia d'acqua fredda sul calore artistico da cui Ella era invaso, ma io mi domando se questa è una ragione per trattenere un artista dal creare ciò che aveva nel cuore, nella mente, nell'anima e che lo portava a convinti entusiasmi!" Ricordi Copialettere, 1906/07, vol. 14, 290. Richard Strauss, *Salome. Musikdrama in einem Aufzug nach Oscar Wildes gleichnamiger Dichtung, in deutscher Übersetzung von Hedwig Lachmann* (Berlin: Fürstner, 1905).

<sup>26</sup> For more on the genesis of *La fanciulla del West*, see: Girardi, *Puccini*, 260; Annie J. Randall and Rosalind Gray Davis, "Puccini and *La fanciulla*" and "Minnie Returns," in *Puccini and the Girl: History and Reception of The Girl of the Golden West* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 41-95. Henry Krehbiel claimed that following the success of *Madama Butterfly*, Puccini and Belasco had an arrangement where Belasco would send Puccini a copy of every play Belasco felt suitable for operatic adaptation. See: Henry Edward Krehbiel, *More Chapters of Opera: Being Historical and Critical Observations and Records Concerning the Lyric Drama in New York from 1908 to 1918* (New York: H. Holt and Company, 1919), 207. Giacomo Puccini, Giuseppe Giacosa, and Luigi Illica, *Madama Butterfly, Japanese Tragedy in Two Acts* (Milan: Ricordi, 1907).

promised American grand opera. The contract was made through Puccini's agents, The Ricordi Brothers.

When Puccini was in New York last winter he visited every theatre where an American play was on view for the purpose of selecting one as the theme of a new grand opera. He said before his return to Italy that he considered *The Girl of the Golden West* the most representative and striking play, both as to subject and treatment, that he had seen. His requirements, as stated in an earlier interview, were that the play he wanted should be absolutely American in scene, character, and subject, and that at the same time it must express the strongest dramatic elements in a poetic way. All these essentials, he said, he had found in David Belasco's play, and yesterday's contract is the result of negotiations which have continued through the past three months.

This is the second Belasco play selected by Puccini as inspiration for grand opera. The other was *Madam Butterfly*, the rights of which he obtained from Mr. Belasco in London in the summer of 1900, which has been played in all the great musical centres of the world. It is understood that the text of Belasco's *The Girl of the Golden West* will be used practically without change as the libretto of the new grand opera, the straight translation to be done by the same writer who made the Italian version of *Madam Butterfly*.<sup>27</sup>

This newspaper report paints a picture of "the Italian composer" scouring the theatres of New York in search of an American source, one he could define as "absolutely American in scene, character, and subject," before finally settling on *Girl of the Golden West*. The report also demonstrates how easy it was for some members the New York press to conflate individual elements that could be separately identified as American, but which in and of themselves did not necessarily make the opera American: the place of performance, the subject matter, the genre, the national identity of the composer, and the national identity of the performers. The opera's American subject matter often led people to referring to it as an "American grand opera" or Puccini's "American opera." In some cases, this occurred with little concern for the subtle but significant shift in meaning for the generic designation of the opera. Originally, the phrase "American grand opera," when used in discussions about

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<sup>27</sup> "Puccini's Opera Plans." Puccini, Giacosa, and Illica, *Madama Butterfly, Japanese Tragedy in Two Acts*.

Puccini's work for New York City, seemed to suggest simply the opera Puccini intended for the Metropolitan Opera Company, which was in the United States. By 1910, when used in discussions about the opera for the Metropolitan Opera Company, the phrase appeared to indicate an opera that would fill the generic expectations of a national grand opera, conflating three different understandings—American themed, in the genre of American opera, and operas by American composers.

In an interview conducted by an unidentified reporter less than a month before *La fanciulla del West*'s premiere, Puccini recounted his new opera's story for the readers of *The New York Times*.<sup>28</sup> This is an interesting decision, since according to *La fanciulla del West*'s reviewers David Belasco's play was "so well-known to New Yorkers that its story need not be repeated."<sup>29</sup> Indeed, the *Girl of the Golden West* premiered on 3 October 1905 in Pittsburgh and in New York City on 14 November 1905, where it ran for 224 performances at the Belasco Theatre. The Belasco Theatre presented it 22 times in the 1906-1907 season, and it also ran for four weeks at the Academy of Music in Brooklyn in January of 1907. During the 1907-1908 season, the play had 24 more performances at The Academy of Music.<sup>30</sup> The story's popularity continued well after the opera's premiere and its eventual fading from the Metropolitan's central repertory. Belasco published a novelized version of *The Girl of the Golden West* in 1911, and between 1915 and 1931 four filmed versions of the play appeared, including one musical with Nelson Eddy and Jeanette

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<sup>28</sup> "Puccini here; His Opera Views. Composer Believes that the Modern Music Drama Is to Be Simpler. Sees Reversion to Gluck. Tells How He Has Set to Music Comedy and Dramatic Episodes of *The Girl of the Golden West*," *New York Times*, 18 November 1910.

<sup>29</sup> See for example, Henderson "Mr. Puccini's Latest Opera," *New York Sun*, 11 December 1910, "*The Girl of the Golden West*. Premiere of Puccini's New Opera December 10," *Musical Courier* 14 December 1910, "Mr. Puccini's New American Opera has Brilliant Premiere," *New York Herald* 11 December 1910.

<sup>30</sup> See the *New York Dramatic Mirror* for the various dates of performances, tours, and revivals.



MacDonald.<sup>31</sup> The *Dramatic Mirror* indicated that there was even a burlesque of the play staged by members of the Belasco Theatre's technical department.<sup>32</sup>

A substantial commercial success in New York, Belasco's play also succeeded critically. The drama critic for the *New York Times*, for example, compared Belasco's accomplishment to "a wizard's magic trick."<sup>33</sup> Praising the play's fresh take on an old story, its worth as a melodrama, the strength of its comic relief, staging, lighting, scenic design, and atmosphere, this critic predicted that the play would "stimulate public curiosity, occasion discussion, and bring a popular success,"—predictions that proved true.<sup>34</sup> The *New York Times* drama critic explained that, "For two acts, *The Girl of the Golden West* is melodrama—but it is tense, moving, absorbing melodrama. Then for a while, its serious interest merges into scenes not so very far from burlesque. But it is most agreeable burlesque."<sup>35</sup> The critic also identified the play's realism as one of the qualities that made it so gripping, not only realism of place, but realism of character and emotion. At the same

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<sup>31</sup> David Belasco, *The Girl of the Golden West, Novelized from the Play by David Belasco* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1911); *The Girl of the Golden West*, 35 mm, 121 min., directed by Robert Z Leonard (U.S.A.: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Loews, 1938); *The Girl of the Golden West*, 35 mm, n.t., directed by Cecil B. DeMille (U.S.A.: Jesse L. Laskey Feature Play Company, 1915); *The Girl of the Golden West*, 35 mm, 70 min., directed by Edwin Carawe (U.S.A.: Associated First National Pictures, 1923); *The Girl of the Golden West*, 35 mm, 81 min., directed by John Francis Dillon (U.S.A.: First National Pictures, 1930).

<sup>32</sup> Matinee Girl, *New York Dramatic Mirror*, 12 January 1907. The cast was as follows: The Girl, a "beaut," Louis Hartmann; Jack Ass, the constable, Edward Wentworth; Jackson, the sign painter, Wayne Arey; Snorting Slim, John W. Cope; A. Sideny Cove, Downing Clarke; B.T. Babbitt, an Indian, J. Herry Benrimo; Bawkle, a squaw, Wilfred Bluckland; Nina Migueltoarena (her first appearance on any stage), James Lynch.

<sup>33</sup> "Girl from West' Wins at the Belasco." "In this newest effort he has once again demonstrated his ability to accomplish the impossible. There was not a soul in that audience last night who did not know that the girl would win—there never was the least shadow of doubt about it. But Mr. Belasco, with his amazing faculty for creating illusions, for getting a very great deal out of a very little, once again performed his wizard trick—and the illusion held us."

<sup>34</sup> "Girl from West' Wins at the Belasco."

<sup>35</sup> "*Girl from West Wins at the Belasco.*"

time, he conceded that a New York City audience had very little first hand knowledge of Californian life, and that anything it knew about that time and place came from works like those of celebrated novelist Bret Harte.<sup>36</sup> He explained:

Throughout it has one very manifest excellence; its characters seem true to life—not a life that most of us have known, for the California of “’49” is not the California of our experience, and we must take these people of Cloudy Mountain largely on faith, take them in the spirit in which they have been revealed to us, for instance, by Bret Harte.<sup>37</sup>

According to New York City’s drama critics, the play’s compelling realism resulted from its visual elements as well. The *New York Times* critic suggested Belasco had achieved such a state of verity in his evocation of the emotional and physical climate, that the people sitting in the audience could join the characters onstage in physically experiencing the scene,

In respect to the staging, David Belasco has done nothing better than this latest play. Atmospherically suggestive throughout, there are occasional moments—as in the blizzard scene in the second act—where the sensitive and imaginative spectator is forced in spite of himself to share in the discomforts. The cabin interior of the second act is a masterpiece of scenic realism, full of correct minutiae.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Realism was an important aesthetic value in American literature and drama. Scholars designate different starting and ending dates, but generally it flourished from about 1865 to 1914. Mark Twain and Henry James both wrote novels heavily influenced by realism. Naturalism and regionalism both grew out of realism. Realism valued the vernacular language, details describing everyday life and situations, and the problems of the middle class. For more on realism, consult: Richard Chase, *The American Novel and Its Tradition* (Garden City: Double Day Anchor, 1957). Literature and drama scholars frequently refer to Chase's definition of realism as the foundation for their own discussions of American novels and plays.

<sup>37</sup> “‘Girl from West’ Wins at the Belasco.”

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. For more reviews of Belasco's play, see for example: “Belasco—*The Girl of the Golden West*,” *The New York Dramatic Mirror*, 25 November 1905, and W.W., “*The Girl of the Golden West*,” *New York Tribune*, 15 November, 1905.

The audiences loved the main characters from *Girl of the Golden West* as well as the actors and actress who played them. Blanche Bates, in particular was a star actress during the first decade of the twentieth century, and was closely associated with Belasco's plays.<sup>39</sup>

Given the substantial popularity and long theatrical run in New York City of the *Girl of the Golden West*, the amount of plot and musical detail Puccini offered is surprising. Not only does he present nearly a detailed and systematic account of the drama for each act, he explains where there will be major musical events, even describing the types of set pieces and what the music will sound like:

The opera opens . . . with a few emphatic phrases, rather violent and robust. Among them, one hears some of the most striking motives of the opera. Then in silence the curtain rises, revealing Minnie's tavern, the Polka barroom. The first half of this act is full of characteristic scenes, which give the colour of the environment and introduce the persons--Mexican miners, Indians, the Sheriff, and others. Two cowboys, dance singing a queer song:

Dooda Dooda, Day . . .

In a corner a man sits silent and absorbed. All of a sudden from without comes a wailing song, accompanied by the tinkling sound of a banjo. It is a sad, disconsolate song, evoking home. The voice of the minstrel is at first heard alone; then the miners get hold of the air and the orchestra joins with a pizzacato. The singer appears on the scene and stops, but all ask him to continue. So he begins again all alone. When finally he goes away, the miners sing it again. But, the feeling of homesickness is swallowed up in the ensuing gaiety until Minnie enters.

The Sheriff offends Minnie and she repulses him, but Johnson, who is sitting in a corner, she recognizes as a man she has met once on the trail. After a short duet, they waltz together, and this waltz furnishes one of the motives of the opera.

Now Castro, one of Johnson's band of highway robbers, is dragged into the tavern. He does not betray Johnson, however, but sends the Sheriff on a false scent. Minnie asks Johnson to her cabin in the mountains as the act ends.

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<sup>39</sup> For more on David Belasco's relationship with his actresses, see Kim Marra, *Strange Duets: Impresarios and Actresses in the American Theatre; 1865-1914, Studies in Theatre History and Culture Series* (Iowa City: University of Iowa, 2006), 143-214.

The second act, in Minnie's cabin, opens with a duet of Indian servants, a short page of staccato music with a rhythm which has a strain of the grotesque. Minnie returns and prepares for Johnson's arrival. He comes, and between the two young people begins a scene extremely varied in movement and expression, which gradually passes into the love duet which is the centre of the opera. It is an episode to which I have become singularly attached, because it seems to me different from the usual love duet. While Minnie sings, the notes of the first act waltz slip in.

Rest of Act Dramatic.

The rest of the act is dramatic. Outside a blizzard is raging and Minnie asks Johnson to stay. She will sleep on a bearskin. The sheriff enters to look for Johnson, but Johnson is hidden in the alcove. However, Minnie learns who he really is and when the sheriff has gone she puts him out. He is seen by two deputies and wounded. Bleeding he comes back and falls over the threshold of the door. She runs to him, raises him and conceals him. The man she kissed cannot die. The sheriff also returns and vainly seeks for the fugitive, whom he finally discovers by a drop of blood which falls on his hand.

Minnie, to save her lover, proposes to the sheriff a game of cards. If you win, I am yours; if I win, you will leave me this man. The game of poker begins and Minnie wins by means of some concealed cards. The act ends with the girl alone with her wounded lover.

Here we have the finale of an act of opera based upon a game of poker. It was quite embarrassing to set to music in such a dramatic scene a game of cards which offers so little suggestive of melody. And so I have not written music descriptive of a game of cards—it is a game of lives and I hope . . .

The third act is the shortest. The first one lasts an hour and a few minutes; the second an hour; the third thirty-five minutes. Johnson is under arrest and is to be hung in a few minutes. At this moment Minnie arrives on horseback with a pistol in her teeth. She pleads with the miners to spare the man she loves and they finally bid her farewell and leave her with him.<sup>40</sup>

While this detailed description of the opera may have just have been a sensationalist attempt to lure readers into buying papers or a blatant plugging of the opera, with it Puccini accomplished a number of other things. For an audience well versed in Western stories and

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<sup>40</sup> “Puccini here; His Opera Views. Composer Believes that the Modern Music Drama Is to Be Simpler. Sees Reversion to Gluck. Tells How He Has Set to Music Comedy and Dramatic Episodes of *The Girl of the Golden West*,” *New York Times*, 18 November 1910.

Belasco's in particular, this description affirms the opera's place in the theatrical and literary context. It promises that opera closely follows the play: Puccini's synopsis sketches out the significant character-defining and dramatic moments of each act and two of the opera's three settings—the saloon and a log cabin—and names both the opera's principal and secondary characters and revealing their relationships to one another. It assures readers that everything they loved about the play remained in the opera, while previewing some of the opera's innovations, including some information about the musical numbers. This gave critics a starting point from which to develop their criteria for the opera. This public telling of the story confirms Puccini's identity as a "Western" author.

"For I myself am Californian"

Puccini may have damaged his credibility as a "Western" author for his New York City audiences when he first described his interest in it to the American press. In one of the interviews given during his 1907 visit to the United States Puccini told reporters that his primary means of learning about the American West had been through the frontier fiction of Bret Harte. Puccini also stated that he felt no need to visit the western frontier in order to gain an understanding of the location:

I only know the West through Bret Harte's novels, but I admire them very much, as I have read them in translation. If I undertake a work with a Western subject I shall not necessarily visit the locality. Human nature is very much the same everywhere, and while I shall endeavor to indicate the color, it is not essential that I should visit the place to do that.<sup>41</sup>

Indeed Bret Harte's novels and the like served as the main source for what many New Yorkers and Eastern Americans knew about the West.<sup>42</sup> Reading rather than travelling had

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<sup>41</sup> "Puccini Wants a Book for an American Opera."

<sup>42</sup> See Richard Slotkin's trilogy: *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860*, (Middleton, Conn: Wesleyan University Press, 1973); *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800-1890* (New York:

been the process Puccini used to learn about Japan as he developed *Madama Butterfly*.<sup>43</sup> For that opera Puccini sought out people living or visiting in Italy who were from Japan, asking them for music, books and information about the country's culture and daily life.<sup>44</sup> This was not the process, however, that most Americans who worked with a western subject publicly claimed to have taken in the creation of their own works. Puccini's critics took issue with his process. For example, the week before the premiere, a columnist for *Musical America* concluded his reflections on Puccini's approach to working with Native American musical sources with a passage that summarizes the prevailing attitude that a composer needed to be from the place in order to write music intended to convey a sense of that place:

My curiosity is really quite up concerning the forthcoming premiere. I must confess that I balked somewhat at Puccini's confidence in thinking that he has succeeded in reflecting the spirit of the American people, and the "strong, vigorous nature of the West."

Dvořák came to us and wrote American music which was Bohemian. I fancy that Puccini will write American music which is Italian. I do not mean by this that he will not put something into his music, through his study of American music and character, but after all is said and done I fancy the spirit of it all will be the spirit of the Italian musical art, just as we all feel that Turner's rich and colourful pictures of Venice belong to the spirit of English art. It is always possible for a composer to go to any country and put down his impressions of it in tone, whether he gains those impressions from characteristic melodies, from landscapes, or from the temperament of

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Atheneum, 1985); and *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Atheneum, 1992).

<sup>43</sup> For that process, Puccini had sought out music and stories from Japan and turned to Mrs. Oyama, the wife of the Japanese ambassador to Rome and attempted to contact Sada Yacco, a Japanese actress on tour in Europe in 1902. Girardi, *Puccini*, 207-20.

<sup>44</sup> The genesis of *Madama Butterfly* is treated in several places, including the relevant chapters in Budden, Girardi and Phillips-Matz's surveys of Puccini's life and works. Budden offers a very good bibliography of the musicological scholarship on the opera. Julian Budden, *Puccini: His Life and Works, The Master Musicians* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Girardi, *Puccini*; Mary Jane Phillips-Matz, *Puccini: A Biography* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2002).

the people. But what he does will never, under those considerations, be an actual expression of the reality of that particular place—it can at best be but a picturesque impression from without.

I doubt if the soul of a place ever gets expressed in music except by somebody who was born there, and who spent his boyhood there, so that the poetry and spirit of that place has identified itself with every separate molecule of his soul.

However, long live the *Girl of the Golden West!*<sup>45</sup>

Like Puccini, many writers and artists famous and popular for their western topics lived most of their lives somewhere outside of the American West, many of them in east-coast cities such as New York. In contrast to Puccini, however, most people working with a frontier subject cultivated the image that they had personally gone west at some point in their lives and consequently gained an accurate understanding of the region. The most influential of them, such as Bret Harte, William F. Cody, Theodore Roosevelt, Owen Wister, Frederick Remington, and Charles Russell, typically emphasized a deep connection between their personal experiences in the West and their work. For example, novelist Bret Harte, who for almost forty years wrote extensively about California's Gold Rush days, left his childhood home of New York City for the frontier when he was a teenager. Harte spent most of his eighteen Western years living in the settled and developed San Francisco Bay area, and not in or around the rustic mining camps featured in most of his stories, and he lived the other forty years of his life in the New York area and abroad.<sup>46</sup> Yet in the introduction to a 1902 edition of his stories Harte emphasized the veracity of his tales:

The author has been frequently asked if such and such incidents were real—if he had ever met such and such characters. To this he must return the one answer, that in only a single instance was he conscious of drawing purely from his imagination and fancy for a character and a logical succession of incidents drawn therefrom. A few weeks after

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<sup>45</sup> Mephisto, "Mephisto's Musings," *Musical America*, 3 December 1910, 7.

<sup>46</sup> Patrick D. Morrow, "Bret Harte, Mark Twain, and the San Francisco Circle," in *A Literary History of the American West*, ed. J. Golden Taylor (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1987), 339-58.

his story was published, he received a letter, authentically signed, *correcting some of the minor details of his facts (!)*, and enclosing as corroborative evidence a slip from an old newspaper, wherein the main incident of his supposed fanciful creation was recorded with a largeness of statement that far transcended his powers of imagination.<sup>47</sup>

This stands in sharp contrasts to how Puccini presented his personal relationship to his subject matter.

The strong emphasis on personal experience can also be seen in the way humourist Mark Twain, one of Harte's San Francisco colleagues, writes about his authorship and subject matter. Born in Hannibal, Missouri, Twain left his mid-West birthplace first for Nevada, working there for a short time as a miner. Twain then moved to San Francisco where he lived for only for a few years before departing the West altogether in favor of different towns and cities. Twain initially lived in upstate New York but ultimately took up permanent residence in Connecticut. Like Harte, Twain also spent time abroad in Europe. In the preface to Twain's classic memoir *Roughing It* (1872) the author, also like Harte, emphasized his role as an eyewitness recounting his experiences on the frontier:

This book is merely a personal narrative, and not a pretentious history or a philosophical dissertation. It is a record of several years of variegated vagabondizing, and its object is rather to help the resting reader while away an idle hour than afflict him with metaphysics, or goad him with science. Still, there is information in the volume; information concerning an interesting episode in the history of the Far West, about which no books have been written by persons who were on the ground in person, and saw the happenings of the time with their own eyes. I allude to the rise, growth and culmination of the silver-mining fever in Nevada—a curious episode, in some respects; the only one, of its peculiar kind, that has occurred in the land; and the only one, indeed, that is likely to occur in it.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Bret Harte, *The Writings of Bret Harte: The Luck of Roaring Camp and Other Tales with Condensed Novels, Spanish and American Legends, and Earlier Papers, by Bret Harte with an Introduction by the Author*. (Boston: Riverside, 1897; reprint, 1902), 5.

<sup>48</sup> Mark Twain, *Roughing It* (Hartford: American Publishing, 1872; reprint, 1891), iv.



Non-fiction writers also cultivated the image of the writer as first-hand participant in the American Western experience, though their actual time spent there was often minimal. For example, New York City native Theodore Roosevelt and president of the United States (1901-1909) wrote a series of articles about his experiences in North Dakota for *Century* magazine, which were republished immediately as a book under the title of *Ranch Life and the Hunting Trail*.<sup>49</sup> At the same time Roosevelt began writing his history of the frontier, which culminated in a four-volume work published between 1889 and 1896 as *The Winning of the West*.<sup>50</sup> Roosevelt first ventured west as young man to “strengthen his weak heart.” He moved back to the east but in 1883 he returned to the Dakota Territory for a hunting trip and bought into a ranching partnership. Following the loss of his mother and wife in 1884 Roosevelt retreated again to Dakota this time remaining there for an entire year. He then returned east and continued his political career.

Despite his temporary residencies in the west, Roosevelt cultivated the image of his full participation in frontier life. For example, in a letter to the editor of *Century* magazine Roosevelt wrote:

I have been a part of all that I describe; I have seen the things and lived them; I have herded my own cattle, I have killed my own food; I have shot bears, captured horse-thieves and “stood off” Indians. The descriptions are literally exact; few Eastern men have seen the wild life for themselves.<sup>51</sup>

Roosevelt also recalled his frontier experiences during his political career. In a speech given in 1910 Roosevelt told his audience:

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<sup>49</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, *Ranch Life and the Hunting-trail* (New York: Century, 1888).

<sup>50</sup>Theodore Roosevelt, *The Winning of the West: An Account of the Exploration and Settlement of Our Country from the Alleghenies to the Pacific*, 4 vols. (New York: Putnam's, 1889-96).

<sup>51</sup> As cited in David H. Murdoch, *The American West: Invention of a Myth* (Cardiff: Welsh Academic Press, 2001), 69.

I regard my experience during those years, when I lived and worked with my own fellow-ranchmen on what was then the frontier, as the most important educational asset of my life . . . I know how the man that works with his hands and the man on the ranch are thinking, because I have been there, and am thinking that way myself.<sup>52</sup>

In addition to writing and speaking about his personal experiences with the frontier, he also engaged in a little “Western” showmanship during his political campaigns. For instance, when Roosevelt first ran for the office of Vice-President he hired fake cowboys to pursue his campaign train and shoot pistols.<sup>53</sup> During the 1904 presidential race he shared platforms with Buck Taylor, and in the 1912 campaign he presented Frank James as his bodyguard.<sup>54</sup> One of his critics even reportedly called him “that damned cowboy in the White House,” a nickname that remains to this day.<sup>55</sup>

David Belasco, like Bret Harte, Mark Twain, and Theodore Roosevelt, also cultivated the mystique of a deep connection to California and the far West. Puccini’s declaration that he had only experienced the West vicariously stands in sharp contrast to David Belasco’s references to his Californian childhood, its influence upon his work, and the way he used the fact of his personal experience with the West to endorse the authenticity of *The Girl of the Golden West* fit the standard formula writers followed to

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<sup>52</sup> Murdoch, *The American West*, 70-71.

<sup>53</sup> Murdoch, *The American West*, 71.

<sup>54</sup> They also performed in a pageant at his presidential inauguration. “Biggest Parade for Roosevelt,” *New York Times*, 4 March 1905, 1.

<sup>55</sup> Most reference sources point to Mark Hanna as the source of the comment. Hanna was reportedly angered first by Roosevelt's appointment as vice president, and then by his assumption of office upon the assassination of President McKinley. Roosevelt figures prominently in Slotkin's research on the mythology of the west. See in particular Richard Slotkin, “Nostalgia and Progress: Theodore Roosevelt's Myth of the Frontier,” *American Quarterly* 33, no. 5 (1981). See also John A. Barsness, “Theodore Roosevelt as Cowboy: The Virginian as Jacksonian Man,” *American Quarterly* 21, no. 3 (1969): 609-19; Michael L Collins, *The Damned Cowboy: Theodore Roosevelt and the American West, 1883-1898* (New York: Lang, 1989); G. Edward White, *The Eastern Establishment and the Western Experience: The West of Frederick Remington, Theodore Roosevelt, and Owen Wister* (New Haven: 1968).

establish credibility of authorship. Belasco's Californian background lent the playwright an authority to write plays about the West. Belasco's recollections of life on the mining frontier supported the illusion that despite the fictions onstage, real-life events inspired the drama. The emphasis that his play grew out of memories and experiences from his past, from the tall stories and adventure yarns of the crude fleeting mining centres in California that he remembered, served as a common trope for the New Yorker's discussions of his frontier plays.<sup>56</sup> Although many of his works drew on frontier themes, most were written in New York City. Belasco, an internationally famous and prolific New York City producer, director, and playwright, had lived there since 1882, and by the end of his career he had been involved in 123 Broadway productions and 200 plays.<sup>57</sup> Belasco directed ninety-five plays and produced seventy-two, and thirty-four of his plays or adaptations were performed in New York City.<sup>58</sup> Belasco's repertory consisted mainly of sentimental plays and melodramas, which can be grouped into local color plays (particularly those set on the Western frontier), exotic or historical romances and extravaganzas, and domestic milieu dramas. Belasco focused his dramas around swiftly moving action and the presentation of wide ranging emotions, attitudes, and passions.<sup>59</sup> As Lise-Lone Marker has shown in *David Belasco: Naturalism in the Theatre*, Belasco established a national reputation for his realistic staging and naturalistic approach to the theatre. He was particularly innovative in

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<sup>56</sup> See for example his introduction to *Girl of the Golden West* in David Belasco, "The Girl of the Golden West: A Play, in Four Acts," in *Six Plays. Madame Butterfly, Du Barry, The Darling of the Gods, Adrea, The Girl of the Golden West, The Return of Peter Grimm*, ed. Montrose J. Moses (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1928), 307-403.

<sup>57</sup> Lise-Lone Marker, "American Frontier Drama: *The Girl of the Golden West*," in *David Belasco: Naturalism in the American Theatre* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 6-7.

<sup>58</sup> Marker, "American Frontier Drama," 6.

<sup>59</sup> Marker, "American Frontier Drama," 47.

theatrical lighting techniques and achieved striking visual affects onstage by means of lighting.<sup>60</sup>

Belasco often promoted the idea that *The Girl of the Golden West* “pictures, with perfect fidelity, the characters, life, and manners of my own dearly loved California, in the golden days of ’49.”<sup>61</sup> When reflecting on the compositional process of the melodrama, the playwright once reminisced, “My youth surged upon me while I worked.”<sup>62</sup> Belasco claimed that his father, who had moved to California during the Gold Rush, told him stories of life in the mining camps and that one of these stories inspired *The Girl of the Golden West*. Even after Puccini acquired the rights to his melodrama, Belasco continued to promote the realism of *The Girl of the Golden West*. For example, during a discussion about his contribution to the opera, Belasco praised its authenticity by comparing it to his own early Western experiences:

It was the child of my brain—a child begotten of a thousand memories of tales heard at the fireside, and born of years of experience amid the scenes and the people depicted in the drama. For I myself am Californian, and my own father was a forty-niner. My earliest recollections are the stories my father and mother told of those perilous days.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Marker's study of David Belasco's staging and lighting remains the principal work on this topic. She connected his approach to Emile Zola's theories of drama, which aimed to reduce the barrier between the imaginary theatrical world and the real one by making the theatrical world an objective exploration of the real one. In Zola's view a play presented the individual's encounter and response to the environment. By making the stage setting as true to life as possible, playwrights could make the characters appear more real to the audience. For more on the David Belasco and theory of theatrical naturalism, see “Beginnings,” in Marker *Naturalism*, 7-33. David Belasco's lighting director Louis Hartmann also provides details concerning the playwright's methods and innovations in his *Theatre Lighting: A Manual of the Stage Switchboard* (New York: D. Appelton, 1930).

<sup>61</sup> David Belasco, *Six Plays*, iv.

<sup>62</sup> Belasco, “*The Girl of the Golden West: A Play, in Four Acts*,” 307. Marker's study of David Belasco's staging and lighting remains the principal work on this topic.

<sup>63</sup> David Belasco, “The First Operatic Performance Described for the Sunday American by David Belasco, Author of the Story,” *American*, 11 December 1910, 2.

Belasco's declaration of his Californian birthright and authenticity stands in sharp contrast to Puccini's insistence that he did not need to visit the West in order to write an opera about it.

Since so many of the most successful Western authors from the period invoked the "I have been there myself" trope as a means to legitimizing their work, it seems likely that for many people, the more personal one's experience was with the West, the more convincing an author's representation appeared. To never have "gone west" would have resulted in a negative bias towards an author's ability to recreate a convincingly realistic Western atmosphere. Some of Puccini's reviewers explicitly criticized the composer on these grounds. For example, William Henderson complained "It was not in mortal man to conceive that which lay wholly outside his experience. Mr. Puccini might perhaps have lived six months in the Klondike in order to get a hint of California in '49, but even then the modernity of the gold field people of to-day [sic] might have misled him."<sup>64</sup>

In the case of Puccini, who publicly acknowledged he had never been there, this absence would have at the very least cast doubt on his capacity to fully understand his subject and thus compose effective music for it. Comments from the reviews suggest that Puccini's critics probably held this view. For example, Reginald De Koven believed that one of the reasons why Puccini's opera did not match its dramatic source was because "the composer's heart was not in a theme naturally strange and foreign to his imagination from lack of any previous association and with which he had no sympathy, national or otherwise."<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Henderson, "Mr. Puccini's Latest Opera."

<sup>65</sup> De Koven, "New Opera from Critic's Viewpoint."

“Good Old Melodrama of the Kind That Has Been  
Familiar from Third Avenue to Eight ever since Bret Harte  
Popularized the Wild Wild West”

While Puccini may have flouted convention by declaring he had never been West, *La fanciulla del West*'s producers took every opportunity to reinforce the connection between the opera and its source. For instance, the libretto distributed at the opera's world premiere explicitly connected the opera to *The Girl of the Golden West* and the tradition of plays and stories about the Californian frontier of the mid-nineteenth century. In an obvious attempt to further legitimize and authenticate the action onstage, the introduction not only presented the moral of the story, it placed the opera into its historical context:

*The Girl of the Golden West*—a drama of love and of moral redemption against a dark and vast background of primitive characters and untrammelled nature—is an episode in this original period of American history.

The action takes place in that period of California history which follows immediately upon the discovery made by the miner Marshall of the first nugget of gold, at Coloma, in January, 1848. An unbridled greed, an upheaval of all social order, a restless anarchy followed upon the news of this discovery. The United States, which in the same year, 1848, had annexed California, were engaged in internal wars; and, as yet undisturbed by the abnormal state of things, they were practically outside everything that occurred in the period of this work; the presence of their sheriff indicates a mere show of supremacy and political control. An early history of California, quoted by Belasco, says of this period: “In those strange days, people coming from God knows where joined forces in that far Western land, and, according to the rude custom of the camp, their very names were soon lost and unrecorded, and here they struggled, laughed, gambled, cursed, killed, loved, and worked out their strange destinies in a manner incredible to us of today. Of one thing only we are sure—they lived!” And here we have the atmosphere in which is evolved the drama of the three leading characters. The camp of the gold-seekers in the valley, and the Sierra Mountains; the inhabitants of the spot coming down from the mountains, joining the gold-seekers who come from every part of America, making common cause with them, sharing the same passions; round this mixed and lawless fold a conglomeration of thieving and murderous gangs has sprung up as a natural outcome of this same lust of gold, and infests the highways, robbing the foreign gold-seekers as well as those from

the mountains; from the strenuous conflict between these two parties arises the application of a primitive justice of cruelty and rapacity.<sup>66</sup>

Both Puccini's synopsis of the opera mentioned above and this preface to the Metropolitan's 10 December libretto emphasized how closely Puccini's opera followed the pivotal moments of the opera's dramatic source. They also show how important claims of authenticity were to the discussions concerning the opera, both before and after the premiere.

*The Girl of the Golden West*—with its 1849 Sierra Mountain mining-camp setting, rustic frontier characters, and melodramatic theatrical devices—employs some of the quintessential images and situations familiar to audiences of early-twentieth century frontier plays. One of Puccini's reviewers quoted a New York City drama critic once characterizing the play as “good old melodrama of the kind that has been familiar from Third Avenue to Eighth ever since Bret Harte popularized the Wild Wild West.”<sup>67</sup> Another reviewer described the play as having held its audiences “spellbound” by its “theatrical effectiveness.”<sup>68</sup> Ultimately, familiarity with these plays and their conventions would have shaped Puccini's audiences expectations for the opera.<sup>69</sup> Frontier plays were a very popular sub-genre of American melodrama, with issues, stories, events, people, and places connected to the nineteenth-century Anglo-American westward migration, produced throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. and performed largely in non-

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<sup>66</sup> Giacomo Puccini et al., *La fanciulla del West (The Girl of the Golden West). Founded on the Drama by David Belasco*, trans. R. H. Elkin (New York: Boosey; Ricordi; Rullman, 1910), 5. The libretto presented parallel English and Italian texts. The original libretto is housed at the Metropolitan Opera Company archives. I am grateful to the archives for allowing me to see a copy.

<sup>67</sup> Gilman, “Puccini's American Opera.”

<sup>68</sup> Aldrich, “Melodrama.”

<sup>69</sup> For more on reception theory, see Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, Timothy Bahti translator, (Mineapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982).

frontier areas of the United States.<sup>70</sup> The earliest frontier dramas took the shape of Indian plays,<sup>71</sup> such as Robert Roger's *Ponteach; or, The Savages of America* (1766) or James Nelson Barker's *The Indian Princess; or, La Belle Sauvage* (1808).<sup>72</sup> An important transition occurred in 1831 with *The Lion of the West; or, The Kentuckian* of which the white, Congressman Davy-Crockett-like hero Nimrod Wildfire saves his over-civilized relations from the corruption of New York City.<sup>73</sup> The charismatic lead actor of the play, James H. Hackett, created an audience for the play and a number of imitations with white frontier characters in the principal roles followed suit.<sup>74</sup> Stories about Anglo-Americans soon supplanted those about Native Americans.

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<sup>70</sup> Rosemarie Katherine Bank, "Frontier Melodrama," in *Theatre West: Image and Impact*, ed. Dunbar H. Ogden, Douglas McDermott, and Robert K. Sarlós (Amsterdam, Atlanta: Rodopi, 1990), 151. Bank's dissertation presents a critical study of the dramatic form of representative frontier plays from the early nineteenth century through to the early twentieth century. Banks has classified patterns of dramatic structure tied to character types and themes. See Rosemarie Katherine Bank, "Rhetorical, Dramatic, Theatrical, and Social Contexts of Selected Frontier Plays, 1871 to 1906" (Ph.D. diss, University of Iowa, 1972). Her article from *Theatre West* offers a brief synthesis of the findings in her dissertation. For more on frontier plays within the context of American melodrama, see Daniel C. Gerould, "The Americanization of Melodrama," in *American Melodrama* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1983); Jeffrey D. Mason, *Melodrama and the Myth of America* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993); Bruce McConachie, *Melodramatic Formations: American Theatre and Society, 1820-1870* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992); and Gary A. Richardson, "The World of Melodrama," in *American Drama from the Colonial Period through World War I: A Critical History* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993).

<sup>71</sup> Bank, "Frontier Melodrama," 150.

<sup>72</sup> James Nelson Barker, *The Indian Princess; Or, La Belle Sauvage. An Operatic Melodrama in Three Acts*. (Philadelphia: Blake, 1808); Robert Rogers, *Ponteach; Or, The Savages of America. A Tragedy*. (London: n.p., 1766).

<sup>73</sup> James Kirke Paulding, *The Lion of the West*, ed. James N. Tidwell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1954); John J. Sommers, "James H. Hackett: the Profile of a Player" (Ph.D. diss, University of Iowa, 1966).

<sup>74</sup> Bank, "Frontier Melodrama," 152.



In the 1870s Frontier plays underwent a second transformation initiated by James J. McCloskey's play *Across the Continent*.<sup>75</sup> This play, and a second equally popular play *Horizon* by Augustin Daly, established the conventions of the frontier melodrama that would hold as the medium changed from stage to motion pictures and ultimately television.<sup>76</sup> In *Across the Continent* a man of the east travels west and becomes a western hero. As he changes location so does his appearance; his attire shifts from business suits to the trappings of a mountaineer. The play also established the device of American soldiers arriving at the last minute to defeat the natives and save the innocent, eastern whites.

About the time Puccini began considering the West as a possible opera subject—the first decade of the twentieth century—hundreds of these frontier plays had appeared on New York stages.<sup>77</sup> Frontier plays most typically opened in New York, and if successful, theatre companies took them on regional, national, and even international tours. The

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<sup>75</sup> James J. McCloskey, "*Across the Continent; or, Scenes from New York Life and the Pacific Railroad*," in *Davy Crockett and Other Plays, America's Lost Plays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1940), 65-144. See Kenneth Cerniglia's dissertation for a brief discussion of how *Across the Continent* evoked common ethnic stereotypes of the period. This dissertation also has a brief bibliography of ethnicity in American drama. Kenneth James Cerniglia, "Becoming American: A Critical History of Ethnicity in Popular Theatre, 1849-1924" (Ph.D. Diss., University of Washington, 2001).

<sup>76</sup> For a list of the conventions, see Roger A. Hall, *Performing the American Frontier, 1870-1906* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 42-25.

<sup>77</sup> Stuart Hyde found evidence in theatre sources of over 1,200 Frontier plays produced in the United States between 1831-1906, and hundreds more scripts intended for amateur performances. Rosemarie Bank cautions that Hyde's figure may be generous since Hyde only referred to titles and not scripts and it was not uncommon in the nineteenth century to re-title plays. She also points out that Hyde's figures combine amateur and professional productions. Bank offers a more conservative number of plays, somewhere between 500 and 700. See Bank, "Frontier Melodrama," 151-52. Some of the most influential plays prior to 1900 included: *Across the Continent* (1870); Oliver Doud Byron, *Horizon* (1871); Augustin Daly, *Davy Crockett: or, Be Sure You're Right, Then Go Ahead* (1873); Frank Murdoch, *The Danties: or, The Heart of the Sierras* (1877); Joaquin Miller, *M'liss*; Bartely Campbell *My Partner* (1879); David Belasco and Franklin Fyles, *The Girl I Left Behind Me* (1893). For more information on the professionally produced plays, see Rosemarie Bank's dissertation, Bank, "Rhetorical, Dramatic, Theatrical, and Social Contexts of Selected Frontier Plays, 1871 to 1906".

following plays constitute a list of some of New York City's most successful frontier melodramas dating from the genre's peak years: *Arizona* (1900) and *Colorado* (1901) by August Thomas; *The Western Girl* (1902) by Langdon McCormick and starring Annie Oakley of *Buffalo Bill's Wild West* fame; *John Ermine of the Yellowstone* (1903), Louis Shipman's dramatization of Frederic Remington's novel; *Ranson's Folly* (1904) by Richard Harding Davis; *The Squaw Man* (1905) by Edwin Milton Royale; *Strongheart* (1905) by William C. DeMille; *The Rose of the Rancho* (1906) by David Belasco; *The Great Divide* (1906) by William Vaughn Moody; *The Three of Us* (1906) by Rachel Crothers; and *The Ranger* (1907).<sup>78</sup> Many frontier plays, as in the case of Owen Wister's *Virginian*, first appeared as novels (Wister's in 1902) and later as movies (Wister's in 1917).<sup>79</sup> From the late 1870s on, there was an interchange of characters, settings, and plots between serialized novels, dime novels, Wild West shows, the visual arts, and the theatre.<sup>80</sup> *The Girl of the Golden West* marked the peak of this national vogue for the frontier plays.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> David Belasco and Richard Walton Tully, *The Rose of the Rancho* (New York: Samuel French, 1936); Rachel Crothers, *The Three of Us* (New York: Samuel French, 1916); William C. De Mille, *Strongheart* (1905), *Americana series* (New York: Feedback Theatrebooks & Prospero Press, 1998); Langdon McCormick, *The Western Girl; A Drama of the Old West* (1975); William Vaughn Moody, *The Great Divide; A Play in Three Acts, by William Vaughn Moody* (New York: Samuel French, 1906); Edwin Milton Royle, *The Squaw Man. A Comedy in Four Acts.* (New York: n.p., 1906); Louis Evan Shipman and Frederic Remington, *John Ermine; A Play in a Prologue and Four Acts* (Windsor: n.p., 1900); Augustus Thomas, *Arizona* (New York: R. H. Russell, 1899); Augustus Thomas and William Wallace Furst, *Colorado; A Drama in Four Acts* (New York: Rosenfield, 1901). See also, "Musical News and Notes," *New York Times*, 24 July 1910.

<sup>79</sup> Wister, *The Virginian* (New York and London: MacMillan, 1902); *The Virginian*, 35mm, 50 min., directed by Cecil B. DeMille (U.S.A.: Paramount Pictures Jesse L. Lasky Feature Play Company, 1914).

<sup>80</sup> The most illustrative example of this interchange lies in the figure of Buffalo Bill. William F. Cody, a scout who sometimes helped out the U.S. army, quickly rose to legendary fame for his abilities. In the spirit of oral history, Cody first recounted his exploits as way of entertaining the troops, and then he began to re-enact his tales. The hero in his stories inspired a fictional character in the earliest dime novels published by the house of Beadle and Adams. A play dramatizing one of the novels was performed in New York City and Cody was asked to play the lead character, himself. Cody transformed his fireside re-enactments into a travelling combination show and extravaganza. The show travelled under the name of Buffalo Bill's Wild West. The travelling show included re-enactments of historical events, such as the Battle of Little Big Horn.

These plays were so popular in the United States that during the first six years of the twentieth century the frontier had become the dominant subject of American drama. Roger Hall's research on the reception of frontier melodramas has shown they were also the most popular type of American plays in New York City.<sup>82</sup> When Puccini attended a New York production of *The Girl of the Golden West* at The Academy of Music in the winter of 1907, that play was one of only five in the United States ever to have more than two hundred performances in a single year.<sup>83</sup> Indeed, all five plays were frontier themed, and David Belasco had written and produced two of them: *The Girl of the Golden West* and *The Rose of the Rancho* (New York, 1906). Although the number of theatrical productions of frontier plays began to decline after 1906, dramatizations of frontier stories have never disappeared from the American cultural imagination. Instead, the preferred medium of presentation for frontier dramas simply transferred from stage to film in the early part of the twentieth century.

*The Girl of the Golden West* illustrates the conventions of the typical, early-twentieth century frontier melodrama: swift action, a compelling heroine, and beautiful and

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This event was a favourite subject of painters in the late nineteenth century. For discussions of Buffalo Bill, see Joy S. Kasson, *Buffalo Bill's Wild West: Celebrity, Memory, and Popular History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000).

<sup>81</sup> Hall, *Performing the American Frontier*, 164. Wister, *The Virginian*. The novel itself was put together from a series of short stories. It sold 300,000 copies in its first year. The play ran for ten years in New York City.

<sup>82</sup> Hall, *Performing the American Frontier*, 233.

<sup>83</sup> Hall lists *The Squaw Man* (222), *The Girl of the Golden West* (224), *The Great Divide* (238), *The Three of Us* (227) and *The Rose of the Rancho* (240). Hall, *Performing the American Frontier*, 233. The play ran for four weeks, with thirty-three performances, in January of 1907 at the Academy of Music. Blanche Bates played the role of Minnie. Belasco's *Rose of the Rancho* was in the middle of a seven-month run at the Belasco Theatre when Puccini attended the play in February of 1907. "Current Amusements. Week ending January 26," *New York Dramatic Mirror*, 26 January 1907, 10.

natural scenery, all situated in a seemingly unambiguous moral universe.<sup>84</sup> *The Girl of the Golden West*'s plot focused on the revelation and development of its heroine's character, actions, and relationships, which was typical for its type of frontier melodrama.<sup>85</sup> Theatre historians have explored different themes addressed in the play. Richard Wattenberg shows how the plot and the relationships between the characters reflect the larger narrative of the frontier myth—the process of Americanization through a struggle with the wilderness—but do so in a fresh manner by placing the heroine at the centre of the story, rather than the hero.<sup>86</sup> One of the themes embedded in the frontier myth is that of progressivism, and S.E. Crawford has shown the ways in which that theme emerges in the play.<sup>87</sup> Ben Lawton has discussed how the play narrates the full cycle of immigrant experiences.<sup>88</sup> In this way, the *The Girl of the Golden West* was indeed both representative and striking.

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<sup>84</sup> Richardson, "The World of Melodrama," 149.

<sup>85</sup> Rosemarie Bank classifies *The Girl of the Golden West* as a frontier play with a type-character focus. Bank defines type-characters as stage frontiersmen, stage Indians, stage Irishmen, stage Yankees. She differentiates these characters from character types such as old man, soubrette, or villain. In Bank's view, a type-character (frontiersman) could also be a character type (old man). Other plays she classifies as having a type-character focus: *Davy Crockett*, *My Partner*, *Forty-Nine*, *Main Line*, and *The Virginian*. These plays come from a sample of twelve plays Bank selected on the basis of representativeness, popularity, prominence of the author, and date. See: Bank, "Rhetorical, Dramatic, Theatrical, and Social Contexts of Selected Frontier Plays, 1871 to 1906," 41.

<sup>86</sup> Richard Wattenberg, "'The Frontier Myth' on Stage: From the Nineteenth Century to Sam Shepard's *True West*," *Western American Literature* 24, no. 3 (1989): 85-97; Richard Wattenberg, "'Local Colour' plus 'Frontier Myth': The Belasco Formula in *The Girl of the Golden West*," *Essays in Theatre/Études théâtrales* 11, no. 1 (1992): 225-42.

<sup>87</sup> S. E. Crawford, "The Spirit of Progressivism in Puccini's *The Girl of the Golden West*," in *Change in the American West: Exploring the Human Dimension*, ed. Stephen Tchudi (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1996), 46-53.

<sup>88</sup> Ben Lawton, "Giuseppe Giacosa (1847-1906) and Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924)," in *Abroad in America: Visitors to the New Nation, 1776-1914*, ed. Marc Pachter and Frances Wein (Washington, D.C.: National Portrait Gallery, 1976), 247-59.

Puccini selected a dramatic source that greatly appealed to the theatre-going public in New York City by a playwright whose works were very successful with that particular audience. Many opera critics attributed the success of *La fanciulla del West*'s premiere to the hand of Belasco, not Puccini. For example, Richard Aldrich commented:

Not so many operas have owed so much of their immediate success to the dramatic significance of their librettos as *La fanciulla del West*. It is hardly too much to say that its success is due more to Mr. Belasco than to the musician who has attempted to heighten and intensify the effect of his melodrama by the power of music. *The Girl of the Golden West* held audiences spellbound at the Belasco Theatre five years ago by its theatrical effectiveness, the skill with which its tense and absorbing melodramatic situations were wrought, the picturesqueness of the characters, and the glamour of the period and surroundings in which they were placed. That spell has not lost its power in Mr. Puccini's opera and it was a potent factor in the deep impression undoubtedly made upon last night's audience.<sup>89</sup>

The elements traceable to Belasco, the setting, scenery, costumes, drama, characterization, and acting were all highly praised by nearly every opera critic, and as the following discussion will illustrate, each of these varied little from their theatrical lineage. Conversely, those elements altered in the transformation process, such as the dialogue and musical accompaniment, consistently drew negative criticism.

#### "The Golden West in Opera"

Puccini's choice of a play with a Californian setting differs from his earlier choices of Europe and Japan, but as Emmanuel Senici has shown, the plight of heroines in mountain settings had a firm tradition in nineteenth-century Italian opera.<sup>90</sup> Although immediately popular during the 1849 Gold Rush, Californian settings were also very common in the late nineteenth century and had developed their own set of visual

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<sup>89</sup> Aldrich, "Melodrama;" Finck "Puccini's New Opera," *The Evening Post*, 12 December 1910.

<sup>90</sup> Emmanuel Senici, "New Landscape."

conventions by the early twentieth century. As Hall and Bank each have shown, frontier plays typically emphasized the significance of the land, either through descriptive language from the characters or scenically with panoramas and staging.<sup>91</sup> The Californian landscape captured the imaginations of playwrights following the discovery of gold near the Pacific coast in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>92</sup> In its original performances *The Girl of the Golden West* opened with two exquisite panoramas. This appearance of the Californian mountain landscape before any action or dialogue, thereby functions as a visual introduction to the play reflects the central importance of place in American melodrama, and particularly in Frontier melodramas.<sup>93</sup> As one theatre critic explained, these evoked the mood of a silent Californian night and depicted many of the visually striking features of the Sierra Mountain landscape: steep, snow-tipped mountains, deep ravines, winding trails, cabins nestled among the manzanitas and pines.<sup>94</sup> “In fact,” the critic wrote, “the scene represents a little world by itself, drawn in a few crude strokes, to explain more than the author could tell in a thousand pages.”<sup>95</sup> *The Girl of the Golden West* illustrates an interest in the mining camps of the 1849 California Gold Rush.<sup>96</sup> Other common Californian settings included the desert

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<sup>91</sup> Hall, *Performing the American Frontier*, 43.

<sup>92</sup> For an edition of plays depicting the California Gold Rush, see Glenn Loney, ed., *California Gold-Rush Plays, American Drama Library Seires* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1983).

<sup>93</sup> Gerould, “Americanization,” 25.

<sup>94</sup> Belasco, “*The Girl of the Golden West: A Play, in Four Acts*,” 317.

<sup>95</sup> Belasco, “*The Girl of the Golden West: A Play, in Four Acts*,” 317.

<sup>96</sup> Hall, *Performing the American Frontier*, 4. From the late-eighteenth-century to the mid-nineteenth, the settings of the frontier plays had reflected the ever westward moving frontier of the early nineteenth-century. First, they were set in the backwoods of Virginia, then Kentucky and later Missouri. By the early twentieth century, plays depicted all regions of the American West as well as Alaska and the Yukon. Playwrights depicted the lives and concerns of settlers as they established farming communities in these regions of the United States (Hall, 25). Jeffrey Mason contextualizes Californian settings within the broader context of memoirs, diaries, and travelogues, in his chapter on Bartely Campbell's *My Partner* (1879). For a book-length study that illustrates how the discourse

or ranches, as in David Belasco's *Rose of the Rancho* (New York, 1906).<sup>97</sup> Sometimes plays set in mines took place in states other than California, such Colorado, Utah, Alaska, or even the Canadian territory of the Yukon, as in Scott Marble's *The Heart of the Klondike* (New York, 1897).<sup>98</sup> A few frontier melodramas set in California became extremely popular and well known. In fact, the following plays, all set in California, comprised three of the most successful touring productions of the last quarter of the nineteenth century: *The Danites; or, The Heart of the Sierras* (New York, 1877) credited to Joaquin Miller, *M'liss* (New York, 1878) by Richard H. Cox, Clay M. Greene, and A.S. Thompson, and *My Partner* (New York, 1879) by Bartley Campbell.<sup>99</sup>

Plays set in California, as Hall has shown, were rich in specific local-colour details and frequently evoked a romantic and sentimental mood.<sup>100</sup> *Girl of the Golden West* was

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of California reflected the changing perceptions of the writers, see Ann Farrar Hyde's work *American Vision: Far Western Landscape and National Culture, 1820-1920*, ed. James Kirby Martin, *The American Social Experience* (New York: New York University Press, 1990). Her study encompasses memoirs, diaries, and travelogues, paintings, photographs, maps, and also land surveys sponsored by both the American government and private companies, such as mining firms and railway companies. *West was Fast Folks* (1858) produced by the Wallacks in San Francisco. Then in the late 1870s New York Theatres presented three plays set in California: Bret Harte's *Two Men of Sandy Bar* (1876), Joaquin Miller's *Dainties in the Sierras* (1877), and *Ah Sin* (1877) by Bret Harte and Mark Twain. Jeffrey D. Mason, "My Partner and the West," in *Melodrama and the Myth of America, Drama and Performance Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 127.

<sup>97</sup> Belasco and Tully, *The Rose of the Rancho*.

<sup>98</sup> As cited in Hall, *Performing the American Frontier*, 182.

<sup>99</sup> Hall, *Performing the American Frontier*, 88. Bartley Campbell, "My Partner," in *The White Slave and Other Plays*, ed. Napier Wilt, *America's Lost Plays, Vol. 19* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941); Richard H. Cox, *M'liss, Child of the Sierras* (Manuscript, Library of Congress); Joaquin Miller, *The Danites in the Sierras*, 2 ed. (Chicago: Jansen, McClurg, & Co., 1881). The textual and performance history of *The Danites* is quite complex. For a summary, see Hall, "Performing the Frontier," 92-104. For recent research on the play, see Levi Damon Phillips, "Arthur McKee Rankin's Touring Production of Joaquin Miller's *The Danites*" (Ph. D., University of California, 1981).

<sup>100</sup> Some of the more well-known California plays include: Bartley Campbell, *My Partner* (1879), Wallacks, *Fast Folks* (1858), Bret Harte *Two Men of Sandy Bar* (1876) Joaquin Miller *The Dainties in the Sierras* (1877) *Ah Sin* (1877) by Bret Harte and Mark Twain. My Partner was the

no exception. Through image and word, playwrights conveyed the perceived majesty and danger of California's mountains, the barrenness of its deserts, the grandeur of its canyons and mesas, and the splendour of its giant trees.<sup>101</sup> Frontier plays often linked California to the Garden of Eden, and the mining camp surroundings to the image of an unspoiled utopia.<sup>102</sup> In soliloquies and conversations, characters referred to the "glorious climate of California," or described the mining camp setting as "the edge of God-land," as in *The Danites of the Sierras*.<sup>103</sup> In Bartley Campbell's *My Partner*, the story of two gold miners who fall in love with the same woman, one character exclaims "California, where the trees are larger, and men's hearts bigger than anywhere else in all creation."<sup>104</sup> When another character comments that no other place compares to California, a third replies, "Except heaven, and California up here in the mountains is so close to it that none of us want to leave it."<sup>105</sup> Like those in Miller's and Campbell's plays, Belasco's characters associated the Californian landscape with God in *The Girl of the Golden West*. For example Minnie exclaims: "Oh, my mountains! My beautiful peaks! My Sierras! God's in the air here, sure. You can see Him layin' peaceful hands on the mountaintops. He seems so near, you want to

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most popular. He tried to recreate an actual Californian experience, but he did so in terms of what his predominantly eastern audience believed about that experience, in both specific and general terms. For a more thorough discussion of *My Partner*, see Mason, "My Partner (1879) and the West," *Melodrama and the Myth of America*, 127-54.

<sup>101</sup> Hall, *Performing the American Frontier*, 25, 231-2. For more on the development of the image of California and the Far West in American culture, see Anne Farrar Hyde, *American Vision*.

<sup>102</sup> Hall, *Performing the American Frontier*, 98.

<sup>103</sup> Hall, *Performing the American Frontier*, 98.

<sup>104</sup> As quoted in Mason, "My Partner and the West," 139.

<sup>105</sup> As quoted in Mason, "My Partner and the West," 139.



let your soul go right on up.”<sup>106</sup> When Minnie departs from the mountains at the end of the play, she refers to them as “the promised land.”<sup>107</sup>

Although *The Girl of the Golden West* takes place in a mining camp, Belasco never set any of the action in or around an actual mine and this was no different from other frontier plays with miners. Jeffery Mason has shown that when playwrights depicted mining, they typically maintained a romanticized image of the lone prospector panning for gold in a riverbed, pairs of miners operating a cradle, as in *My Partner*, or small groups of men operating a Long Tom.<sup>108</sup> Mason has pointed out that this contradicts the reality. In fact the more aggressive means of hydraulic mining and corporate hard-rock mining were the primary means of extracting gold, and these techniques had quickly displaced the earlier forms of mining. Social critics of the later nineteenth-century characterized hard-rock mining as a dehumanizing and exploitive enterprise. Despite the reality of this more invasive form of mining, plays, novels, and paintings continued to trade on its earlier pastoral images.<sup>109</sup>

The far-western setting of California was also common in American literature, dime novels and landscape paintings of the later nineteenth-century.<sup>110</sup> So much so that the

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<sup>106</sup> Belasco, “*The Girl of the Golden West: A Play, in Four Acts*,” 357; Hall, *Performing the American Frontier*, 209.

<sup>107</sup> Belasco, “*The Girl of the Golden West: A Play, in Four Acts*,” 403.

<sup>108</sup> Mason, “*My Partner and the West*,” 145. A Long Tom was a device used to remove gold deposits from rivers. Made of wood with a metal bottom and a sieve at the end, it resembles a trough or a sluice. Wooden slats called riffles caught gold nuggets, separating them from the dirt, as water rushed down. Miners separated the gold nuggets from the stones. Wastewater dropped down to a lower trough and passed through a sieve, which caught gold flakes and dust. It was about three and a half to four meters long and about a half a meter wide and took eight men to operate.

<sup>109</sup> Mason, “*My Partner and the West*,” 145.

<sup>110</sup> David Wyatt has studied the development of mythology of California as presented in the works of John Muir, Clarence King, Mary Austin, as Frank Norris as well as four other writers working later on in the twentieth century in David Wyatt, *The Fall into Eden: Landscape and*

American West and the frontier experience inspired thousands of dime novels and serialized stories.<sup>111</sup> When nineteenth-century historian Frederick Jackson Turner famously argued that the frontier experience engendered the true American identity and was the chief distinguishing feature between Americans and Europeans, he codified and legitimized the narrative of the Euro-American encounter with the North American wilderness that novelists, writers, and painters had been telling in their works throughout the nineteenth century. In his 1893 paper “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” Turner argued that the frontier and the West dominated American development, and the American engagement with it explained the difference between Americans and Europeans.<sup>112</sup> Turner’s “Frontier Thesis,” as it has come to be called, helped to shape the field of American history and was widely accepted well into the twentieth century.<sup>113</sup> In some ways Turner’s work represents the beginning of the intellectual response to the frontier as a

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*Imagination in California, Cambridge Studies in American Literature and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

<sup>111</sup> For recent and thorough overviews of the representation of the American West and the frontier experience in American literature and visual arts see the relevant chapters in *The Oxford History of the American Literature*. Each chapter concludes with an excellent bibliography of the central research in the field. Brian Dippie, “Chapter Nineteen: The Visual West,” in *The Oxford History of the American West*, ed. Clyde A. II Milner, Carol A. O’Connor, and Martha A. Sandweiss (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 675-705; Thomas J. Lyon, “Chapter Twenty: The Literary West,” in *The Oxford History of the American West*, ed. Clyde A. II Milner, Carol A. O’Connor, and Martha A. Sandweiss (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 707-41.

<sup>112</sup> Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” in *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1893* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1894; reprint, Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1966.).

<sup>113</sup> Responses to and critiques of Turner’s thesis have engendered an entire subfield in Western American history. For some of the more recent considerations of Turner, see: Donald R. Anderson, “The West of Frederick Jackson Turner,” *Journal of American Culture* 23, no. 3 (2000); William Cronon, George Miles, and Jay Gitlin, “Becoming West: Toward a New Meaning for Western History,” in *Under an Open Sky*, ed. William Cronon, George Miles, and Jay Gitlin (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1992); John Mack Faragher, ed., *Rereading Frederick Jackson Turner: 'The Significance of the Frontier in American History' and Other Essays* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

thing of the past, given that the government had officially declared the close of the frontier in 1890.

American literary historian Henry Nash Smith's important study of frontier fiction, *Virgin Land: American West as Symbol and Myth* traced the impact of the image of the frontier and its cultural significance in American literature.<sup>114</sup> Smith uncovered patterns of plot-development, character-types, and settings common to American frontier novels. He found that the central narrative in nearly every nineteenth-century frontier stories was the westward migration of Euro-Americans situated within a dialectic of civilization and savagery. Anglo-Americans were typically portrayed as the true and rightful citizens of the land and Native Americans as the savage and vicious enemy, who prevented the Euro-Americans from fulfilling their manifest destiny.<sup>115</sup> Participants in the encounter with the American wilderness lost their European decadence and corruption and became true democratic Americans. Thus, Puccini chose to work with subject matter that was a significant part of American popular culture, heavy with American ideology, and served as a freshly minted origins myth for an emerging nation.

“A Delight to the Eyes”

The reception of the opera's appearance began even before the premiere. The press began discussing the opera's sets and staging well before the actual premiere, with reports published as early as 19 July 1910 when the New York Times printed an article explaining

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<sup>114</sup> Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950).

<sup>115</sup> Richard Slotkin's seminal three-volume study on the mythos of the frontier in American fiction and non-fiction superseded Smith's. It remains one of the most important contributions to research on the American frontier myth. Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan University Press, 1973); *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800-1890* (1985); *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (1992).

that Metropolitan Opera Company had officially engaged David Belasco to supervise the production. That article revealed that the sets and costumes of Belasco's original stage play would serve as the model for the opera. It claimed that in doing so the company hoped to make *La fanciulla del West* as "American as possible." The article also emphasized that the sets and costumes would be made in New York City.

There was a conference in Paris . . . between the composer, Mr. Gatti-Casazza, and the representative of the Ricordis, who publish Mr. Puccini's works, at which it was decided that this production, which is to receive its first hearing on the Metropolitan stage, should be as American as possible. James Fox, the scenic artist of this house, will, therefore, paint the scenery, and the costumes are also to be made in New York shops . . . Of course, the production will be modeled to some extent upon that of Mr. Belasco's. He has studied the locale carefully from every point of view, and his production should be authoritative. However, there will have to be many changes to fit the size of the Metropolitan stage, and to suit the changes which the librettists have made in the play.<sup>116</sup>

A week before the premiere, American opera composer and music critic Reginald De Koven predicted that this scrupulous attention to the visual components would make the music of the opera more accessible:

But as Mr. Belasco is supervising every detail of the production in regard to both the scenic equipment and picturesque stage business we can be assured that the satisfaction of the eye with the outward semblance of the work will aid the ear and the understanding, should any such aid be necessary, to grasp and appreciate the inner emotional meaning which, if I mistake not, Puccini's music will be found to invent in the story.<sup>117</sup>

While the music turned out to have a complex reception, on this aspect of the opera the critics were nearly unanimous in their praise.

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<sup>116</sup> "American Setting for Puccini Opera," *New York Times*, 19 July 1910; "Musical News and Notes."

<sup>117</sup> Reginald De Koven, "The Puccini Premiere Comes to Dissipate Our Operatic Tedium," *World*, 4 December 1910.

*La fanciulla del West*'s sets and props were almost identical to those of Belasco's play, and they drew many compliments from the opera critics. The team included Jules Speck and Edward Siedle, the opera's stage manager and set designer, respectively, both of whom had worked with David Belasco on the play. James Fox looked after the opera's *mise en scène*, Louise Musaeus designed the costumes, and Frederick G. Gaus designed the lighting. Only in the setting of the final act did the opera change significantly. In the play, Belasco had set Minnie and Johnson's final scene in front of a tepee pitched on the Western plains. In the opera, Puccini set their final scene on a forest's edge, the pair crowded by the lynch mob from Cloudy Mountain mining camp, and in so doing combining and streamlining the action from the play's third and fourth acts.<sup>118</sup> The lighting for the opera's opening was very different as well, as Helen Greenwald has demonstrated,<sup>119</sup> depicting the changing light of a sunset and nightfall, rather than the light of the moon.<sup>120</sup> One minor set change occurred in the opera. The dancehall from the play's third act, is only alluded to in the opera, by way of a door and sign in the opera's first act.

Three of the four acts in *The Girl of the Golden West* take place inside various buildings around Cloudy Mountain mining camp: the first in the saloon, the second in Minnie's cabin, and the third in the camp's dance hall which also serves as a makeshift classroom for the miners.<sup>121</sup> In the original production, the sets for each of these acts

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<sup>118</sup> Please see Act III, rehearsal 44 (p. 434) to the end of the opera in the full score.

<sup>119</sup> Helen M. Greenwald, "Realism on the Opera Stage: Belasco, Puccini, and the Californian Sunset," in *Opera in Context: Essays on Historical Staging from the Late Renaissance to the Time of Puccini*, ed. Mark A. Radice (Portland, OR: Amadeus, 1998), 279-96.

<sup>120</sup> Greenwald compares the lighting in the play with the lighting in the opera, demonstrating how it affects not only the general time, mood, and atmosphere, but also how it articulated the drama in both the play and the opera. Greenwald, "Realism on the Opera Stage," 279-96.

<sup>121</sup> For photos of the set, see White Studios, (Photographer) *La fanciulla del West World Premiere* December 10, 1910 [Photographs on the Internet], Metopera Database, Metropolitan

displayed meticulous attention down to the smallest detail in an attempt to capture the local colour. The length and detail of the Act II stage directions in the script, for example, illustrate the degree of precision Belasco wanted for the set of Minnie's cabin:

The interior of the cabin has but one room, square, and made of logs. It is half papered as though the owner had bought wall-paper in camp and the supply had given out.

There is but one door, and that leads to the trail. This door, in the center at back, is double boarded and fastened by a heavy bar. It opens on a rough vestibule, built to keep out the storms and cold.

The windows, at which are calico curtains, are provided with heavy wooden shutters and bars. The barred door and windows give an air of security to the room as though it could be made into a little fortress.<sup>122</sup>

Belasco included specific details about how Minnie had decorated her home:

A box is nailed on the wall to form a bookshelf for a few well-worn old books. A wolf skin and moccasins are in front of the bureau, a large bearskin is on the floor opposite the fireplace. A few pictures taken from *Godey's Lady's Book*, one or two old prints, and a large sombrero hat hang on the wall. A horseshoe over the door and the head of a small antelope, an old pair of snowshoes over the window and a lady's night-dress on a peg, complete the decorations in the lower part of the room.<sup>123</sup>

The details included not only the furnishings and décor, but also the numerous household and personal items scattered around the cabin:

The furniture is rather primitive. A bed, screened off by calico curtains, stands at the right side of the room. Below the bed is a bureau covered by a Navajo blanket on which a few crude toilet articles are set about. A cheap black framed mirror, decorated with strings of Indian beads and white cambric roses, hangs over the bureau. A wash-stand, backed by a "splasher" of white oil-cloth, is near the bed. On the opposite side of the room, a pine wardrobe, rudely painted by a miner, contains most of The Girl's clothing. A

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Opera Company Archives, available:  
<http://archives.metoperafamily.org/Imgs/Fanciulla191011.htm>, Internet, accessed March 2, 2012.

<sup>122</sup> Belasco, "*The Girl of the Golden West: A Play, in Four Acts*," 349-50.

<sup>123</sup> Belasco, "*The Girl of the Golden West*."

sunbonnet and shawl hang on a peg driven into the side of the wardrobe. A gay hat-box from Monterey and a small basket grace the top of the wardrobe. A calico curtain covers a few garments hanging on pegs. In an angle, formed by a fireplace, is a row of shelves, holding tin cups, Indian baskets, two plates, a tin can, knives, forks and spoons. A rocking-chair, made of a barrel, set on rockers and dyed with blueing, is embellished with calico cushions and an antimacassar. There are four other chairs in the room. A pine table is almost in the centre of the room. It is covered with a red cloth and over this is a white tablecloth.<sup>124</sup>

The directions even specify the kinds of food Belasco wanted placed in the dishes on the kitchen table and around the fireplace:

Three dishes are on the table; one contains the charlotte “rusks,” one the “lemming” turnover, and the other holds biscuit and chipped beef. A sugar bowl with brown sugar is placed in the centre of the table. A fire burns in a fireplace which has an iron hood, a big back log and a smaller log in front. A pile of wood lies on the floor close at hand. A kettle hangs over the fire and a coffee pot is set on a log. A few china ornaments, a bunch of winterberries stuck in a glass jar, and a bottle of whiskey with two glasses are on the mantel.<sup>125</sup>

In the last portion of this set’s description, Belasco provided details about the cabin’s loft, Johnson’s hiding place in the middle of Act II, and then moved to back to the main floor of the cabin, ending with a description of the moon shining through the frosted windows:

The winter is now beginning, and, although there is no evidence of snow in the early part of the act, the cabin windows are heavily frosted. When the curtain rises, the scene is lighted by the lamps and the glow from the fireplace. The moon is shining brightly through the window.<sup>126</sup>

The stage directions in the promptbook provide even more details than those offered in the script.<sup>127</sup> These details tie the set to its specific frontier location in a concrete, objective manner. “Lemming turnovers,” for instance, place Minnie’s home in the mountains and

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<sup>124</sup> Belasco, “*The Girl of the Golden West*,” 350.

<sup>125</sup> Belasco, “*The Girl of the Golden West*,” 350.

<sup>126</sup> Belasco, “*The Girl of the Golden West*,” 349-50.

<sup>127</sup> Marker, “*American Frontier Drama*.” 151.

emphasize the distance between the cook stove of Minnie's cabin and the kitchens and restaurants of New York City. The Native-American beads hanging from a mirror and the Navajo blankets situate the location in the Southwest. A chair made out of a barrel underlines the makeshift and temporary nature of a mining camp and the rough environs.<sup>128</sup>

Belasco's efforts at providing naturalistic details in the play's set design garnered much praise:

With the same master-artist touch that dressed *The Darling of the Gods* and *Du Barry*, Mr. Belasco has realized the picturesque possibilities of the Western mining camp. At the rise of the curtain the home of the Girl is shown, perched on a mountainside. The canvas moves upward, exhibiting the steep, dangerous path that leads down to the Polka Saloon at the foot of the hill. Then the interior of the saloon is seen, with the types of men and their way of living. The second act shows the interior of the Girl's cabin, where infinite care in details is evident. The blizzard in this act is completely realistic in the impression of wind and cold it gives.<sup>129</sup>

Belasco's lighting for *The Girl of the Golden West* received even more praise than his set design. Lise-Lone Marker has provided a thorough study of Belasco's lighting techniques, emphasizing the application of lighting beyond mere spectacle and imaginative illusions; and arguing that Belasco used it as a psychological tool which drew out authentic emotional performances from the actors.<sup>130</sup> Belasco also intended the lighting to enhance the structure of the drama itself. He conducted lighting experiments from 1900 to 1930 with his electrician Louis Hartman. In Marker's estimation, "it was the pattern of realistically observed local colour, in human behaviour as well as milieu, which, rhythmically blending

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<sup>128</sup> It is not clear from the context whether the word lemming refers to the small alpine rodent or lemons. Either way, it establishes a distance from New York City.

<sup>129</sup> "Belasco—*The Girl of the Golden West*," review of 14 November 1905 performance of *The Girl of the Golden West* by David Belasco, Belasco Theatre, Blanche Bates, Robert Hilliard, Frank Keenan, *The New York Dramatic Mirror*, 25 November 1905, 3.

<sup>130</sup> Marker, "American Frontier Drama," 139-60.



details together in an atmospheric unity, lent Belasco's production its distinct character and tone."<sup>131</sup> Belasco's fastidiousness extended even to the decorations of the theatre. One critic noted that

as an added touch of naturalness or colourful 'atmosphere,' Mr. Belasco has removed the huge baskets of roses which have always stood to right and left of the proscenium, close to the boxes, and has had substituted a growth of cacti on either side. This detail, and the preceding tableaux and the epilogue, (which by the way is beautiful to the eye but most unnecessary), and the new descriptive curtain, are evidences of the thorough and artistic manner in which Mr. Belasco puts on a play.<sup>132</sup>

Attention to details of all kinds, from the tiniest parts of the set, to the auditorium decorations aimed to create a believable reproduction of life in a mining camp, and to blur the lines between fact and fiction, much in the same way that *Buffalo Bill's Wild West* shows cultivated the mystique that they were "the real thing."<sup>133</sup>

Even the set for the opera's third act, a setting completely invented by Puccini, drew much admiration.<sup>134</sup> Evidently the trees were important to Puccini who spent a great deal of time seeking out pictures of American redwood trees.<sup>135</sup> His set designers invented a

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<sup>131</sup> Marker, "American Frontier Drama," 146.

<sup>132</sup> "Girl from West' Wins at the Belasco," review of 14 November 1910 performance of *The Girl of the Golden West* by David Belasco, Belasco Theatre, New York, Blanche Bates, Robert Hilliard, Frank Keenan, *New York Times*, 15 November 1905, 11.

<sup>133</sup> Paul Reddin, *Wild West Shows* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 66. Reddin offers a fascinating account of these shows in their rise and decline, considering not only the private papers of William F. Cody, but the advertisements and publicity announcing the shows, the programs from them, and the press coverage both prior to and following specific performances and tours. He places these shows within the context of other Americans who toured with their artistic products that they marketed as replications of life on the American frontier, specifically the plains. These others include painter George Catlin, the Miller Brothers of 101 Ranch, and Tom Mix.

<sup>134</sup> See Randall and Davis for a detailed discussion of the genesis of the opera's final act, *Puccini and the Girl*, 41-95.

<sup>135</sup> See for example his letter to Alice Warder Garrett in which he asks her to send him books of the Californian forest. Giacomo Puccini, Letter, 10 November 1907, Appendix 2.

new kind of stage tree for the opera's last act, a tree that would appear life-like to the audience, as one September article explained:

The scene represents the edge of a redwood forest overlooking a plain. Ordinarily the trees in the forest would have been painted on a series of drops and then cut out. Lowered at intervals on the stage they would give the impression of a forest. Such a scene is the first act setting of Orfeo at the Metropolitan . . . In this instance, however, all the trees will be real. In other words, Mr. Fox has built a series of redwood trunks fashioned out of canvas made to represent bark, stretched on wooden frames. As only the front of the trees will show, they are semi-cylinders only, of course.<sup>136</sup>

While Puccini never indicated why he made the change from prairie to forest, the forest setting visually emphasized the difference in geographical space between the wilderness setting of the play and the urban surroundings of the opera house. The wilderness played a significant role in American arts and culture, and, as Roderick Nash has argued, at the turn of the century it represented a state of mind or a condition as much as it did a general, tangible location.<sup>137</sup> Moreover, much of the European pulp fiction and literature with frontier settings located its stories in a forest, and Wild West shows sometimes had scenes that depicted the "Primeval Forest".<sup>138</sup>

Belasco's contribution to the opera was frequently recognized by the press, with reviewers frequently taking the same position as Lawrence Gilman, who wrote in *The*

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<sup>136</sup> "Puccini's New Opera to Be Seen First in New York," *New York Times*, 25 September 1910.

<sup>137</sup> Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 3rd ed. (New Haven: 1982).

<sup>138</sup> Ray Billington has studied images of the frontier in European and American print culture of the nineteenth century. For his discussion of images of the forest see chapter four. Ray Allen Billington, *Land of Savagery, Land of Promise: The European Image of the American Frontier in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Norton, 1981), 79-104. For a thorough study of the image of the sequoia in American culture, see Lori Vermaas, *Sequoia: The Heralded Tree in American Art and Culture* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Books, 2003). For a more general discussion of image of the wilderness in American culture, see Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*. Cody's *Wild West's* "The Drama of Civilization" begins with a scene called "The Primeval Forest," intended to show the wilderness prior to the arrival of Anglo-Americans, Reddin, *Wild West Shows*, 83.

*Nation* that “the production at the Metropolitan is of memorable excellence. Scenically and in details of stage management it will bear comparison with the superlatively artistic production of the play at the Belasco Theatre.”<sup>139</sup> Critics like De Koven found it in “atmosphere and light effects, a stage picture of really unusual beauty...In the third act, the beautiful stage picture and spirited and well ordered business, with galloping horses and furious rushing miners, count for much.”<sup>140</sup>

In Richard Aldrich’s opinion, “much of the effect of this opera, as of the play, depends upon picturesque stage settings. . . with the help of Mr. Belasco the performance has been made one of extraordinary excellence in these respects.”<sup>141</sup> He goes on to explain in great detail how this was achieved, yet qualifies the realism when he points out that “he would be rash [sic] who should imagine that the scene could bear any photographic resemblance to the realities of that far-off time and place.”<sup>142</sup> Like Gilman, Aldrich compares the opera to the play and describes some of the similarities, for instance: “There is the same realistic depiction of the blizzard raging outside Minnie’s cottage in the second act as there was in the play—the blasts of wind and gusts of snow blowing in whenever the door is opened are enough to make the audience shiver.”<sup>143</sup> He had high compliments for the third act as well, writing “this scene, exhibiting the primeval forest of redwoods, with distant mountain peaks lightened by the rising sun seen through the trees, is a fine stage

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<sup>139</sup> Gilman, “Puccini’s American Opera.”

<sup>140</sup> De Koven, “New Opera.”

<sup>141</sup> Aldrich, “Melodrama Set to Music,” *New York Times*, 11 December 1910.

<sup>142</sup> Aldrich, “Melodrama Set to Music.”

<sup>143</sup> Aldrich, “Melodrama Set to Music.”

picture. So are the settings of the saloon and of Minnie's cottage, with their innumerable realistic details."<sup>144</sup> Aldrich's comments were fairly conservative compared other critics.

If Aldrich's assessment of the sets were the most reserved, Henry Finck's were the most laudatory. Finck marvelled that "the setting of this last act is a delight to the eyes."<sup>145</sup> His description focused not only on the beauty of the setting, but also the way in the performers brought the sets to life and created a convincing atmosphere:

The great redwoods of true California girth look real, and the Sierras, their snow peaks changing opalescently under the growing light, from pinks and purples to sunlit yellows and grays made a wonderful stage picture, full of atmosphere—atmosphere which was still further created by the real Western riding and real Western ponies of some of the 'boys' who raced madly up the hills in search of the bandit. This was the most beautiful of the settings, although the others were as true to nature, the first a large log-cabin, made almost cozy by plenty of lights, and a big open fireplace, with its generous blaze, while animal skins hung as ornaments on the walls, and as ortieres over the doors. Minnie's room had its feminine attempts at daintiness, a bureau and glass, a bed modestly concealed in yellow curtains, rugs, and pillows, and Navajo rugs, supplemented by a fancy bed-quilt to hide the ugliness of the loft and its contents of boxes and bundles. The storm was superb; the blinding snow, the terrible wind, which, whipped curtains, made the lights flicker, blew doors open and shut with blizzard violence. In all these things, the theatrical skill of Mr. Belasco was evident. Would that the Wagner operas could be presented with such minute attention to detail. What a revelation they would be!<sup>146</sup>

These views represent those of most of the New York City music critics who wrote about this aspect of the opera. The critics generally attributed a large portion of the opera's success to its visual elements. The magnitude of the praise confirmed that the producers had met an important goal, which they had voiced the summer before the opera's premiere:

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<sup>144</sup> Aldrich, "Melodrama Set to Music."

<sup>145</sup> Finck, "Puccini's New Opera."

<sup>146</sup> Finck, "Puccini's New Opera."

theatrical authenticity. Authenticity—in terms of not only the set design, costuming, and stage effects, but also the bodily movements and facial expressions—found a central place in the discussions of the visual aspects of the production. It was part of the aesthetic of frontier melodramas, particularly those written and or produced by Belasco. The reviewers credited David Belasco with the success of the opera’s stagecraft and generally agreed that he had successfully transferred the visual magic of his theatre productions to the opera house.<sup>147</sup> Some critics argued that the opera stage had never before seen a presentation equal in veracity and beauty. Many cited the last act as the most visually impressive, a “delight to the eyes,” like Henry Finck.<sup>148</sup> Even reviewers less satisfied with the musical and dramatic aspects of the work found the stagecraft admirable. For example, the critic of the *Musical Courier* wrote: “Nothing further could have been done by the management to give the production every chance of success. The cast, scenic accessories, lighting, mechanical effects, costuming—all were on a plane of excellence which the Metropolitan never has excelled.”<sup>149</sup> Reginald De Koven, who also wrote a negative review of the music, praised the opera’s visual features, describing the general atmosphere and lighting effects as, “a stage picture of really unusual beauty,” concluding:

The consummate art of Mr. Belasco in stagecraft has provided an operatic representation, which from the dramatic standpoint, in completeness and finish of convincing and realistic detail and pictorial quality, has rarely if ever been seen on the lyric stage.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> See Gilman for an example. He wrote, “the production at the Metropolitan is of memorable excellence. Scenically and in detail of stage management it will bear comparison with the superlatively artistic production of the play at the Belasco Theatre,” “Puccini’s American Opera.”

<sup>148</sup> Finck, “Puccini’s New Opera.”

<sup>149</sup> “Premiere of Puccini’s New Opera.”

<sup>150</sup> De Koven, “Puccini’s New Opera.”

Still, not every critic viewed the beautiful scenery as a positive quality of the opera. William Henderson wondered whether or not the visual elements would override what should be central in opera, the emotional elements.<sup>151</sup>

“It Was not Possible for the Poor Librettists to Get Hold of  
that Belasco Talk”

Frontier fiction and plays used a stylized idiomatic speech to express the Western identity of their characters, and *The Girl of the Golden West* followed in that tradition.<sup>152</sup> Following the lead of Bret Harte and Mark Twain, many writers practised the convention of writing dialogue and speeches that appeared to be closer in tone, syntax, and cadences to regional American speech than to standard American dramatic speech of the period. Frontiersmen and women not of Anglo-Saxon descent, such as Chinese or Native-American characters, spoke in stereotypical broken English.<sup>153</sup> Such speech sounded reasonably life-like to Eastern audiences and readers, within the framework of the theatre or paperback covers. The transformation from this type of English to operatic Italian raised more than a few eyebrows among the critics, and became one of the most contested features of the opera.

In *The Girl of the Golden West* David Belasco manipulated the speech patterns of standard American dramatic English of the time in other ways as well. He further differentiated the individual speech patterns of his Western characters, most notably Minnie

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<sup>151</sup> William Henderson, “Mr. Puccini and His Golden Girl. The Tenacity of the Spectacular Element in Opera—where Mr. Sardou and Mr. Puccini Cooperated Successfully—the Difference in the New Opera,” *New York Sun*, 18 December 1910. Henderson raised the issue of the “spectacular” in opera a week before the premiere as well. See his “Spectacular Lyric Dramas of Early Days,” *New York Sun*, 4 December 1910.

<sup>152</sup> Gerould, “Americanization,” 23.

<sup>153</sup> Hall, *Performing the American Frontier*, 42.

and Johnson. Minnie's diction and syntax position her as an uncultivated woman, whereas Johnson's draw him as more sophisticated and worldly. For instance, in Act I, when Minnie tells Johnson how much she admires him and he deflects her compliment, she replies:

Go on! What are you giving me? . . . Ha! Before I went on that trip to Monterey, I thought Rance here was the *genuine* thing in a gent—but the minute I kind o' glanced over you on the road—I—I seen he wasn't. Say—take your whiskey—and water.<sup>154</sup>

As the above passage illustrates, Minnie speaks with many colloquialisms and mispronunciations as well as irregular English grammar and syntax. For example, she places the accent on the last rather than first syllable the word *genuine*, she uses the expression “giving” to mean saying, and she unnecessarily uses the demonstrative pronoun *here*, and abbreviates the word *gentleman*. Johnson, on the other hand, speaks far more eloquently, with fewer contractions and in full, grammatically correct sentences. For example, during Act II, in a discussion about Dante's single hour with Beatrice, Johnson replies to Minnie in a tightly formed, grammatically correct sentence: “Yes? Well, I'm like Dante: I want the world in that hour, because I'm afraid the door of this little paradise may be shut to me afterwards. Let's say that this is my one hour—the hour that gives me that kiss.”<sup>155</sup> Belasco's dialogue was also considered very natural, and imitated how everyday people spoke to each other, or might speak to each other in moments of intensity, rather than how stage characters traditionally spoke to one another.

Puccini's librettists Guelfo Civinini and Carlo Zangarini had to transform the language on two levels: first, translate it from English in to Italian, and second, to change spoken, unmetred dialogue into a versification scheme suitable for singing, while trying to

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<sup>154</sup> Belasco, *Six Plays*, 344-5. The italics on the second syllable of *genuine* are from the source.

<sup>155</sup> Belasco, *Six Plays*, 360.

meet the expressed goal of staying as close to the original play as possible.<sup>156</sup> A few of the opera's critics addressed the difficulties of such a transformation in their reviews. As William Henderson of the *New York Sun* explained, "the problems to be solved by the librettists were neither few nor formidable . . . those who recall Mr. Belasco's stirring melodrama will not need to be told that its dialogue is anything but lyric. One of the artistic achievements of the playwright was the penning of dialogue expressive by reason of its very awkwardness. . . ." <sup>157</sup> Henry Finck suggested that the "language of play would have made any composer other than Puccini hesitate."<sup>158</sup>

Although not addressed by very many critics, the opera's dialogue received extremely negative criticism. Those who mentioned the dialogue typically did so in their discussions of the melody, pointing out that in trying to preserve the action and swift dialogue of the play, the lyric expression of the opera suffered. Henry Krehbiel explained that "because it is a translation (or, rather a paraphrase as an Italian, knowing nothing of American conditions, might be expected to make), it is frequently ridiculous."<sup>159</sup> Henderson acknowledged that the librettists faced a difficult challenge in translating the "free and easy conversation of the Forty-niners," and he found that "some of the results are amusing to Americans."<sup>160</sup>

Henderson offered one of best supported criticisms of the libretto, who found it more than just amusing. In short, he found the language of the opera ludicrous and cited

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<sup>156</sup> Randall and Davis present the most thorough discussion of the libretto and its genesis in the Anglo-American Puccini scholarship. Randall and Davis, *Puccini and the Girl: History and Reception of The Girl of the Golden West*. See in particular chapters three and four.

<sup>157</sup> Henderson, "Mr. Puccini's Latest Opera."

<sup>158</sup> Henry Finck, "Puccini's New Opera."

<sup>159</sup> Krehbiel, "A Sensational Production at the Opera."

<sup>160</sup> Henderson, "Mr. Puccini's Latest Opera."



three passages that he found particularly problematic. For one of them, he provided an extended example, comparing a passage from the play, the Italian libretto, and its English translation distributed in the premiere's libretto. He chose Minnie's description of her mountain life from in the second act, offered in response to Johnson's suggestion that she might find her secluded mountain home isolating, a passage which he felt was the most poetic speech in the original play:

Lonely? Mountains lonely? Ha! Besides I got a little pinto an I'm all over the country on him . . . finest little horse you ever throwed a leg over. If I want to I can ride right down into the summer at the foothills with miles of Injun pinks just laffin, an' tiger lilies as mad as blazes. There's a river there, too; the Injuns call it "Water road," an' I can get on that an' drift an' drift, an' I smell the wild syringa on the banks . . . Mm! . . . An' if I git tired o' that I can turn my horse up grade an' gallop right into the winter an' the lonely pines an first a-whisperin' an' a-singing.' Oh, my mountains! My beautiful peaks! My Sierras! God's in the air here, sure. You can see him layin' peaceful hands on the mountaintops. He seems so near you want to let your soul go right on up.

He then provided the Italian version followed by the Elkin's English translation of the libretto:

Oh, se sapeste	Oh, you've no notion
Come il vivere e allegro!	How exciting my life is
Ho un piccolo polledro	You should see my little pinto
che mi porta a galoppo	See him carry me at a gallop
laggiu per la carupagna	Right down the beyond the foothills
per prati di giunchiglie	Thro' meadows full of lilies
di garofani ardenti,	All ablaze with golden jonquils
per rivere profonde	Then I drift down the river,

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<sup>161</sup> Henderson, "Mr. Puccini's Latest Opera."

chi profuman le sponde	Scented all along its banks
gelsomini e vainiglie!	With jessamine and wild syringe
Poi ritorno ai miei pini	When I'm tired I go back
ai monti alla Sierra	To my mountains, my Sierras . . . <sup>162</sup>
Così al cielo vicini	
che Iddio passando pare	
La sua mano vincini, &c <sup>161</sup>	

In Henderson's view, the Italian translation destroyed the original character of Minnie's regional dialect. Furthermore, the high tone of the operatic language clashed with the rustic nature of Minnie's character. Henderson concluded, "it was not possible for the poor librettists to get hold of that Belasco talk, and if they had done so it would have been buried by a musical setting."<sup>163</sup>

The changes in language fundamentally challenged the aesthetic of regionalism and realism present in artistic products depicting the Far West. For an American audience who knew the play in its original language, the Italian translation changed this domestic work into a foreign product and distanced the opera from its American melodrama roots. For Henderson, and others like him, "such dialogue" was "not for music."<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Henderson, "Mr. Puccini's Latest Opera."

<sup>163</sup> Henderson, "Mr. Puccini's Latest Opera." The librettists struggled with translating and versifying the play and clashed with Puccini over word choices. See Randall and Davis, 157.

<sup>164</sup> Henderson, "Mr. Puccini's Latest Opera."

“Characters Seemed American”

Remarks in the press about *La fanciulla del West*'s character depictions suggest that most reviewers accepted them as faithful enough to those in *The Girl of the Golden West* and other stories about the California Gold Rush. Critics generally evaluated Puccini's characters along the lines of whether or not they worked well within the accepted fictions of the theatre. For example, William Henderson wrote

And throughout it has one very manifest excellence: its characters seem true to life—not a life that most of us have known, for the California of '49 is not the California of our experience, and we must take these people of Cloudy Mountain largely on faith, take them in the spirit in which they have been revealed to us, for instance, by Bret Harte.<sup>165</sup>

Henderson's comment illustrates the pull between different understandings of the word “real” that appears from time to time in these opera reviews. His need to stipulate that he means real in terms of how they had been presented to New Yorkers, rather than real in terms of historical fact or personal experience suggests that he worried about possible misunderstandings.

The following comment from the *New York Herald* shows how the lines between fact and fiction could blur in the expectations of character depictions, and this potential for blurring explains Henderson's need to clarify. In this next passage, it is not entirely clear that the reviewer is evaluating the characters in their theatrical context. It almost seems like he is comparing Puccini's depictions against what he thinks is an accurate understanding of the people and the period: “for the composer is dealing with crude people living in a crucial time—the miners and gamblers that infested the gold fields of California in 1849.”<sup>166</sup> Even so, the very next sentence implies a sense of understanding that Puccini's characters fall

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<sup>165</sup> “‘Girl from West’ Wins at the Belasco,” 11.

<sup>166</sup> “Mr. Puccini's New American Opera,” *New York Herald*.

within the tradition of theatrically stylized versions of the people, not recreations of them: “Life there was a serious matter, and even the wooer’s sigh must be charged with dramatic expression, for while his one hand was on his heart the other was never out of reach of his revolver.”<sup>167</sup>

Surprisingly few reviews contain explicit critiques of *La fanciulla del West*’s characterizations, quite possibly because reviewers implicitly addressed this issue in the course of other discussions about the libretto, the acting, or in the music assigned to each character. In the reviews that did comment on the characterization, many summarized the operatic characters in a way that matched the descriptions of their melodramatic counterparts. This suggests that most critics found them to be unremarkably faithful to Belasco’s, and like Richard Aldrich, “drawn in their characteristic outlines” even if the details differed somewhat.<sup>168</sup>

Frontier girls, bad sheriffs, noble bandits, sophisticated outsiders, miners, Mexicans, and Native Americans frequently drove the drama plays like *Davy Crockett*, *My Partner*, *Forty-Nine*, *Main Line*, and *The Virginian*.<sup>169</sup> Roger Hall has observed that in frontier plays post-1870, the main characters generally show a combination of naiveté and bravery, a good heart, and strong sense of independence. That sense of independence sometimes leads the characters into a violation of established Eastern social norms.<sup>170</sup> Characters dressed in frontier attire, displaying long hair, coonskin or ten-gallon hats, fringed jackets,

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<sup>167</sup> “Mr. Puccini’s New American Opera,” *New York Herald*.

<sup>168</sup> Richard Aldrich, “Melodrama.”

<sup>169</sup> Bartley Campbell, “My Partner,” in *The White Slave and Other Plays*, ed. Napier Wilt (New York: 1879); Bartley Campbell, *The Virginian*, ed. Napier Wilt, vol. 19, *America’s Lost Plays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941); Joaquin Miller, *Forty-Nine: An Idyl Drama of the Sierras* (San Francisco: California, 1882).

<sup>170</sup> Hall, *Performing the American Frontier*, 42.

high boots, miners' red shirts, or native influences such as feathers, beadwork, or moccasins.<sup>171</sup> They also usually participated in frontier activities, such as hunting, trapping, lumbering, ranching, trading, stagecoach driving and gambling.<sup>172</sup> Characters also carried weapons, most commonly guns, such as the Buntline Special, six-shooters, and Bowie knives. Native-American characters, even in the post-frontier period, often used bows and arrows or lances.<sup>173</sup>

In Rosemarie Bank's estimation, playwrights used these stereotypical characters, as well as ranchers and cowboys, first to insure that the audience recognized the time and place of the drama, and then altered them in some way to bring a freshness to the story and make the play entertaining.<sup>174</sup> Some of these character-types served no dramatic purpose other than to reveal the attitudes and behaviours of the inhabitants of a frontier region, from the viewpoint of the playwright. Beyond the common plots of love triangles and revenge, Hall adds that their concerns centred on minerals, cattle, and horses.<sup>175</sup>

Rosemarie Bank's early research on frontier melodramas found a group of character-driven plays in which the drama centred on exposing the nature and deeds of frontier-type characters: *Davy Crockett*, *My Partner*, *Forty-Nine*, *Main Line*, *The Virginian*.<sup>176</sup> At the same time that the characters' appearance and location figured them as frontier inhabitants, their relationships, emotions and actions fell within the expectations for

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<sup>171</sup> Hall, *Performing the American Frontier*, 42.

<sup>172</sup> Hall, *Performing the American Frontier*, 42.

<sup>173</sup> Hall, *Performing the American Frontier*, 42.

<sup>174</sup> Bank, "Rhetorical, Dramatic, Theatrical, and Social Contexts of Selected Frontier Plays, 1871 to 1906", 41.

<sup>175</sup> Hall, *Performing the American Frontier*, 25.

<sup>176</sup> Bank, "Rhetorical, Dramatic, Theatrical, and Social Contexts of Selected Frontier Plays, 1871 to 1906", 41.

romantic drama. As one drama critic explained, Belasco had “taken characters that have been a part of romantic fiction and the romance of the theatre from time immemorial . . .” and placed them in a frontier setting.<sup>177</sup>

Opera critics questioned how successfully Belasco’s characters transferred into the operatic idiom. Minnie’s transformation received the most detailed assessments, with qualified praise. The Native Americans and the miners suffered the worst criticisms. There were very few examinations of Johnson and Rance. Most of the opera critics assumed their readers shared a certain degree of familiarity with these characters because of the popularity of Belasco’s play and of the fiction about the American West, especially stories by Bret Harte. Yet there is little sense in the musicological literature as to what those similarities and differences might be. While Randall and Davis have done a great deal toward describing Puccini’s characters, theatre historians have offered an even clearer picture. Placing the critical commentary within the context of recent research on frontier melodramas further illustrates the ways in which Puccini met and challenged his New York City critics’ expectations.

### Minnie

Opera critics considered it a challenge to transform Minnie from a spoken drama heroine to lyric drama heroine, and generally concluded that certain differences between the two Minnies owed something to that process. When considering the characters of *La fanciulla del West*, Henry Finck mused about the operatic potential of the Belasco source:

To be sure, the central figure of the play he selected—Minnie, the beautiful, chaste, Bible-teaching girl who keeps the Polka barroom, with a dance-hall annex, for a camp of California ’49 miners, turns a barrel into a savings bank for their gold dust, rides wild horses, lives alone in a distant hut in the mountains, is courted by every man in sight, but still has her first kiss to bestow—taxes one’s credulity as

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<sup>177</sup> “‘Girl from West’ Wins at the Belasco,” 11.

much as the most fanciful story every devised by Bret Harte; but the conception, whatever else it may be, is romantic, and romance is what the opera composer wants, be he Gluck, Wagner, Verdi Debussy, or Puccini.<sup>178</sup>

The *New York Press*'s opera critic, Max Smith observed that "it was inevitable, for instance, that the character of the title heroine should undergo a certain change in the process of adapting it to the proportions of an operatic figure." He argued, "The Minnie of Puccini's opera is not the merry girl of Belasco's drama. Minnie has at once lovability, strength, and elemental pathos," and St. John-Brenon described Belasco's Minnie as "a character of sweetness and simplicity of the wild flowers on some mountainside."<sup>179</sup> Both critics explained that the changes had to do with making her more suitable for opera. For example, Smith claimed that "Pathos and tragedy had to be accentuated in order to give the part more musical potency"<sup>180</sup> St. John-Brenon concluded that "in his musical delineation of this character Mr. Puccini has been more than successful and it is to him as a Minnie-singer the mind will inevitably occur, whenever the amateur of music, as distinct from the amateur of the opera, shall reflect upon the merits of this work."<sup>181</sup>

In the words of Charles Meltzer of the *New York American*, the "types similar to [Minnie], in suggestion, may be found in the wild Western tales of the alluring if not always plausible Bret Harte." Richard Wattenberg's research demonstrates that Minnie specifically shares traits with two basic female frontier characters commonly found in novels and plays: the rough, sharp-shooting frontier girl, and the Madonna of the prairies or schoolmarm.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> Finck, "Puccini's New Opera," *New York Post* 12 December 1910.

<sup>179</sup> Smith, "Puccini's New Opera," St. John-Brenon "*Girl of the Golden West*."

<sup>180</sup> Smith, "Puccini's New Opera."

<sup>181</sup> St. John-Brenon, "*Girl of the Golden West*."

<sup>182</sup> For a study of general nineteenth century feminine attributes, see Elaine Showalter *The Female Malady* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985). For a study of femininity in the United States see Martha H. Patterson *Beyond the Gibson Girl: Reimagining the American New Woman* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005).

These traits intersected with the more general nineteenth-century feminine attributes.<sup>183</sup>

Famous frontier girls included characters like Hurricane Nell, Calamity Jane, or Annie Oakley.<sup>184</sup> Minnie behaves like many of these characters. For example, like Hurricane Nell, Minnie rides in on horseback to rescue her love interest in the nick of time. Like Calamity Jane, she falls for a man trying to escape his criminal past, and like Annie Oakley she inspires the protective love and admiration of the male community she inhabits.

Wattenberg has drawn a parallel between Minnie and one of the most beloved frontier heroines from Bret Harte's *Tales of Roaring Camp*: M'liss.<sup>185</sup> Other scholars have also drawn this connection, such as Stuart Hyde and Roger Hall.<sup>186</sup> M'liss, the central character of Bret Harte's short story "The Work on Red Mountain," was a feisty,

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<sup>183</sup> Catherine Clément has suggested that Minnie is a feminist, and Annie Randall and Rosalind Gray Davis have argued that she's a True women character type. Clément, *Opera, or, The Undoing of Women*; Randall and Davis, *Puccini and the Girl: History and Reception of The Girl of the Golden West*, 137, 58-60.

<sup>184</sup> Hurricane Nell first appeared as a character in 1878 in Edward L. Wheeler's dime novels. Nell, swearing to avenge her parents' murders, adopts the dress of a man and eventually surpasses all the men around her in riding, shooting, running, lassoing, and yelling. She rescues the hero, a handsome Philadelphia lawyer, from a group of Native Americans. At different places in the story, Nell enacts feats of Western prowess: she lifts the hero up onto a wild horse, and at another point she kills three men with three single shots, and she wins one hundred dollars in a shooting contest with the lawyer, (116). Calamity Jane appeared in Deadwood Dick stories, such as *Blonde Bill; or, Deadwood Dick's Home Base. A Romance of the "Silent Tongues,"* and *Deadwood Dick on Deck; or, Calamity Jane, The Heroine of Whoop-Up. A Story of Dakota*, both by Edward L. Wheeler. In one story, Calamity Jane, who dresses in buckskin trousers, beaded leggings, and a boiled shirt, trick rides through town, smokes cigars, fist fights, and is prone to war-cries. She falls in love with Sandy, a handsome Easterner who has come West to escape what he believes is his criminal past. Calamity Jane was also a real person, born as Martha Jane Canary. See Smith, 117-118. She also appeared in plays such as *Calamity Jane* (Hall, 138) and in *Colonel Frederic T. Cummins' Wild West and Indian Congress*, which toured England and the continent in 1907 (Hall, 151). For a recent study of Calamity Jane, see: James D. McLaird, *Calamity Jane: The Woman and The Legend* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005).

<sup>185</sup> Wattenberg, "Local Color' plus 'Frontier Myth': The Belasco Formula in *The Girl of the Golden West*," 86.

<sup>186</sup> Stuart W. Hyde, "Representations of the West in American Drama from 1848-1917" (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1954), 276-77.



unschooled mountain orphan who lived in a small village in the Sierra Mountains.<sup>187</sup> Harte's short story traces the growing relationship between the neglected little girl Melissa Smith and the educated village schoolmaster Mr. Gray, who saves her from the peril of joining a travelling drama troupe, and concludes with the schoolmaster's departure from the mountain, taking M'liss with him.<sup>188</sup>

Hall has argued that this story reversed the typical genteel Eastern woman-rough frontiersman relationship found in many frontier plays from the post-1900 period, and in that reversal lies M'Liss' charm.<sup>189</sup> Richard Wattenberg has argued that M'liss provided "the predominantly Eastern audiences with both a vicarious release from rigid Victorian sensibility and the pleasure of a complacent superiority as they witnessed the heroine, symbolizing the West as a whole, become more civilized."<sup>190</sup> M'liss' popularity led actresses and impresarios to transform the short story into plays based on the character M'liss.<sup>191</sup> The M'liss type character recurs in several short stories and plays from the

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<sup>187</sup> See, Hall, p103-119. The story was first published in the *Golden Era*, a San Francisco literary magazine in 1860. In "Puccini's America," 10-13, Mary Jane Phillips-Matz see Harte's character Miggles as the prototype for Minnie, not M'liss.

<sup>188</sup> The story became so popular, that the original publisher asked Harte to expand the story. Harte wrote ten more serialized chapters to the story, with the intention then to end the story for good. Even more popular ten years later, Harte's publisher, literary magazine *The Golden Era*, commissioned another writer to augment Harte's material. A book publisher then allowed two printings of the later version before Harte won a court case to stop the publishing of material based on his story and characters. M'liss engendered another controversy in subsequent years. Around the time of the first court case, several dramatizations of the Harte-G.S. Densmore story emerged. One in particular, a script entitled *The Waif of Smith's Pocket* by Richard H. Cox, initiated a complicated battle over the dramatic rights to Harte's M'liss story, a battle Harte ultimately lost.

<sup>189</sup> Hall, *Performing the American Frontier*, 104.

<sup>190</sup> Wattenberg, "Local Color' plus 'Frontier Myth': The Belasco Formula in *The Girl of the Golden West*," 86.

<sup>191</sup> Hall, *Performing the American Frontier*, 104-19. For a history of the origins, development and late-nineteenth century American reception of M'liss plays, see Hall's discussion in the "Annie Pixley, Kate Mayhew and M'liss" section of his chapter "Prominence: 1877-1883."

1870s-1910s, including Joaquin Miller's gold-field play *Forty-Nine* (1881) and Henry C. DeMille's and Charles Barnard's *The Main Line* (1886).<sup>192</sup>

The character traits of M'liss match those of Minnie quite closely, particularly her desire to improve herself, despite her lack of finesse and education, her impulsiveness, and fearlessness tempered with common sense and morality, and her proficiency in the skills and practices necessary to survive on the frontier.<sup>193</sup> Richard Wattenberg has interpreted Belasco's combination of frontier girl traits and the more traditional feminine traits as a characterization of Minnie as both frontier savage and frontier civilizer. Belasco's pistol wielding, horseback riding, whiskey drinking, crude talking Minnie owns and operates a saloon and not only gambles, but also cheats while gambling in a poker game to win her man. Her motives and values are pure, however she loves the miners in a platonic way; she cares for them as her children, educating, feeding, and nurturing them with love and attention. She scorns Rance's proposed adulterous relationship, saves her first kiss for her one true love, rejects Johnson when she learns he has lied to and betrayed her, remembers her own parents with loving devotion, and teaches the miners the moral lesson at the end of the play.

Minnie's purity and responsibility for maintaining the moral lessons of the play were typical of frontier heroines in general. In fact, both heroes and heroines usually displayed character traits of outstanding moral strength, even if they sometimes also had vices such as drinking, swearing, lying, sexual promiscuity, or in Minnie's case, cheating while gambling.<sup>194</sup> A few playwrights pushed the boundaries of acceptability even further,

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<sup>192</sup> Hyde, "Representations of the West in American Drama from 1848-1917", 86; Wattenberg, "'Local Color' plus 'Frontier Myth': The Belasco Formula in *The Girl of the Golden West*," 86. For the history and reception of *Forty Nine* (49'), see Hall, *Performing the American Frontier*, 99-103.

<sup>193</sup> Hyde, "Representations of the West in American Drama from 1848-1917", 276-77.

<sup>194</sup> Hall, *Performing the American Frontier*, 5.

allowing a fallen woman to marry and live happily-ever-after or even permitting interracial marriages.<sup>195</sup>

Puccini's changes to Minnie did little to weaken her status as frontier girl for most critics. Although a few commented that her general outline being softened somewhat, for example by using the Bible to teach the miners to read, rather than "Joe's Joke Book," most saw this as an acceptable change. Of those who did not, the most detailed critique came from Lawrence Gilman. He cited the end of act one as most emblematic of the changes and their impact:

It will be recalled by those who saw the play, that Mr. Belasco brought the first act to a close with the Girl, left alone in the darkened barroom, ruminating tenderly upon the words of Johnson: "He said (I quote from memory) I had the face of an angel . . . ." Then, in a quick and delicious return to her usual direct and manner-of-fact habit of thought and her breezy manner of utterance, she exclaims, "O, Hell!" and the curtain falls. Nothing could have surpassed that touch for the luminous and revealing denotement—it showed us the stroke of character of the Girl; her blend of tenderness and drollery, romantic feeling and honest, good-humoured bluntness, quick sensitiveness and primitive directness. Puccini and his librettists have chosen to omit the final and revealing exclamation, and brought the act to a close with the Girl sighing rapturously to a passage of long-drawn sweetness in the orchestra. The effect is excellent in its way, but it is attained at a regrettable sacrifice of dramatic point and savour."<sup>196</sup>

These subtle changes make a difference for Gilman, but they do not necessarily ruin the opera for him. Indeed, a few sentences later he began a substantial discussion praising the overall transformation, viewing it in general as accomplishment.

### Johnson/Ramerrez

The opera critics had very few specific criticisms of Puccini's version of Johnson/Ramerrez. In the most general sense, he appeared very close to his character of

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<sup>195</sup> Hall, *Performing the American Frontier*, 6.

<sup>196</sup> Gilman, "Puccini's American Opera," *Harpers* 17 December 1910.

origins, while some saw in him elements of Hernani. The “disguised bandit” Dick Johnson/Don Ramerrez, hero of *Girl of the Golden West*, exhibits many of the traits typical of frontier heroes, as the opera’s critics noticed, and fits into expected images from the period. An outsider, like many fictional frontier heroes from the 1890s and later, Johnson comes from a city (in his case Sacramento) and his name suggests an Anglo-American heritage. He arrives alone in the camp, a stranger with a mysterious past. His speech and customs distinguish him from the other men around him, since he does not speak in Western dialect. His request for whiskey with water marks him as an outsider to the residents of the camp, and he appears unaccustomed to and unprepared for the harshness of frontier life.

Johnson/Ramerrez has assumed his Anglo identity, like Rahl Mendoza under the alias of Dell McWade in *Nobody’s Claim* as Hall has pointed out.<sup>197</sup> In the second act, Johnson/Ramerrez reveals to Minnie his natural identity, that of notorious highway bandit and leader of a band of “greasers,” Don Ramerrez. Even in his dual identity, Johnson/Ramerrez exhibits the characteristics of a typical frontier hero. Californios, an ethnic group whose entry into the United States occurred with the accession of California from Mexico, were the wealthy and noble descendants of early Spanish explorers and settlers. As such, they still would have appeared as people of European origins to a New York City audience in comparison to Native Mexicans and Native Americans.<sup>198</sup> Hall has noted that Johnson/Ramerrez lacks any specific Mexican or Spanish cultural identity in Belasco’s play,<sup>199</sup> however, Johnson/Ramerrez’s outlaw status reinforces the tradition in

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<sup>197</sup> Hall, *Performing the American Frontier*, 208.

<sup>198</sup> Belasco dealt with California and the plight of Californios following the Mexican-Spanish War in *The Rose of the Rancho*.

<sup>199</sup> Hall, *Performing the American Frontier*, 208.

frontier plays of negatively portrayed Hispanic characters like Vasquez in *Si Slocum*, and others who preceded him.<sup>200</sup> Johnson/Ramerrez ultimately discards this portion of his identity; first by distancing himself from his Mexican associates (Castro and Nina Micheltorrena), later by renouncing his outlaw ways, and finally by moving East with Minnie. The catalyst for Minnie's transformation in turn undergoes a transformation.

Johnson/Ramerrez's process of transformation (or redemption as Puccini publically claimed to view it) is perhaps the most important trait of a frontiersman in the larger discourse about the West. Like the nameless protagonists of Frederick Jackson Turner's narrative, Johnson's encounter with the uncivilized wilderness ultimately Americanizes him. At first, Johnson/Ramerrez succumbs to banditry out of a necessity to survive, thus adapting to the Wild West by becoming an outlaw. His experience as a bandit forces him to face violent struggles with other people living in the lawless west; the miners hunt him down with guns and attempt to hang him, Minnie turns him out into a raging blizzard, and the sheriff shoots him the moment he steps into the blizzard. Johnson's encounter with the harshness of the frontier climate, the blizzard, occurs simultaneously with moment he suffers his mortal gunshot wound.

These encounters purify Johnson of his corruption. Minnie heals his wounds and hides him from further harm. He adopts Minnie's sense of morality and justice and rejects his dishonest ways. His love for Minnie, and the love he inspires in her, saves him from a vigilante-style execution, one nearly administered by the posse of miners at the end of the play. Following the miners' acceptance of Johnson's conversion and consequent rejection of his evil ways, Johnson leaves the frontier, heading to the east to become a member of the eastern establishment. He does so as a man transformed by his struggles with frontier

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<sup>200</sup> Hall, *Performing the American Frontier*, 208.

experience into a noble hero emblematic of American values. A reformed villain, Dick Johnson in *The Girl of the Golden West*, could even wind up with girl at the end of the play.

### Jack Rance

The opera critics made even fewer comments about the differences between Puccini's Rance and Belasco's. In many respects, Jack Rance fulfills perfectly the stereotype of the bad sheriff interested in neither upholding the law, nor in preserving justice. Dressed in black from head to toe, cynically smoking a cigar with a sneer across his face, Rance looked the part of the villain. Several instances in the play illustrate Rance's questionable morality and enforcement of the law. For example in his first scene in the play, the married Rance proposes marriage to Minnie. Rance also allows the known criminal Johnson/Ramerrez to escape from the law on two separate occasions. Vigilantism runs rampant in his jurisdiction. Rance permits the miners to pursue and attempt to hang Johnson on the spot, rather than preserving law and order in the camp by means of a trial. Hall has shown that in some cases, however, even villains developed redeeming qualities, displaying honour among thieves or willingness to reform.<sup>201</sup> Such is the case with Rance. Rance demonstrates a sense of honour in *The Girl of the Golden West*. For example, when the miners discover someone cheating at cards, Rance stops the miners from killing him, but then forces the gambler to wear a card pinned to his lapel, in Scarlet-Letter fashion. The first time Rance allows Johnson to escape punishment was a result of his attempt to honour a bet he made with Minnie. The second time was a result of his acceptance of Johnson's repentance and reformation upon Minnie's word.

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<sup>201</sup> Hall, *Performing the American Frontier*, 208.

Billy Jackrabbit and Wowkle

Opera critics had very little to say about the dramatic conception of Billy and Wowkle, although as the next chapter will illustrate, they had quite a bit to say about the musical depiction of these characters. Puccini made few changes to these characters who play only an ornamental role in *The Girl of the Golden West*, serving very little purpose beyond a means by which to locate the play in the American west. Hall has noted that playwrights often juxtaposed the Euro-American main characters with minor characters, bit-part characters, and walk-on characters of other ethnicities, most typically Native American, Spanish, Mexican, and Chinese, and they often cast these characters of non-Euro-American identity in a comic or highly negative light.<sup>202</sup> This generalization holds true for both the play and the opera. Puccini's Native-American characters fit neither the noble savage, nor heathen savage stereotypes of Indianist operas, but rather reflect a newer post-frontier character-type of the drunken reservation Indian.<sup>203</sup> Billy and Wowkle serve as comic relief and speak in stereotypical Native-American English pidgin dialect. In Act I, Billy steals cigars from behind the bar, sits cross-legged on the floor playing solitaire, and emptying unattended glasses of whiskey. Minnie addresses Billy, asking him about his relationship with Wowkle with whom he has had a child:

Girl: Here, you Billy Jackrabbit: what are you doing? Did you marry my squaw yet?

Billy Jackrabbit: Not so much married squaw yet.

Girl: No so much married? Come here, you thieving redskin—( Billy Jackrabbit goes up to the bar) with a pocketful of my best cigars! (She takes the cigar from him.) You git up to my cabin and marry my

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<sup>202</sup> Hall, *Performing the American Frontier*, 42.

<sup>203</sup> Pisani has noted that while early nineteenth-century musical plays and operas featured Native Americans of the noble savage, heathen savage, or brutal savage character type, by the mid-nineteenth-century this Native American character type had stopped appearing in American musical theatre and instrumental music. Pisani, "I'm an Indian too," 233.

squaw before I get there. Git! (Billy Jackrabbit goes out.) With a papoose six months old—it's awful...<sup>204</sup>

Minnie, who refers to him as a “thieving redskin,” presumes to tell him how to conduct his life, and openly criticizes him in front of the whole crowd of people at the Polka and this name-calling and subordinating of Billy goes unchallenged by Billy and others around them during this exchange. By 1907 this depiction may have appeared out-dated. Early in the twentieth century, with the closing of the frontier and progressivism’s social critiques, novelists began to depict Native Americans in a more thoughtful and serious manner and had them play more complex roles in the narrative.<sup>205</sup>

### Miners

Issues of authenticity emerge in the discussions about Puccini’s depiction of the miners as well. One opera critic’s observation sums up the general consensus of everyone reviewing the opera: “the throngs of miners are recognizable, though considerably metamorphosed figures.”<sup>206</sup> In particular some critics found the miners’ emotional outpourings incongruous with their image of tough American frontiersmen. For example, Lawrence Gilman wrote:

They are doubtless necessarily, Latinized Americans whom Puccini exhibits to us; but it is none the less disconcerting to the stickler for dramatic verity to see a stageful of red-shirted miners posed in attitudes of lachrymose abandonment under the redwoods or weeping upon each other’s shoulders. . .<sup>207</sup>

Puccini’s small changes to the characters’ traits bothered few if any of the opera critics. As Richard Aldrich explained Puccini, and in particular his librettists, made these changes

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<sup>204</sup> Belasco, *Six Plays*, 328.

<sup>205</sup> Lyon, “Chapter Twenty: The Literary West,” 721.

<sup>206</sup> Aldrich “Melodrama Set to Music.”

<sup>207</sup> Lawrence Gilman, “Puccini’s American Opera,” *Harpers*, 17 December 1910.



mostly in the name of music. “They have kept the really essential features that distinguished Mr. Belasco’s work and have made them count as far as they could in operatic form.”<sup>208</sup> What some critics struggled with was the apparent mismatch of Western characters singing opera. For example, Reginald De Koven argued that the music was “too elaborate and modern in harmonic structure to suggest the primitive elemental types whose thought and action it is intended to illustrate”<sup>209</sup> Henderson was equally critical, writing that there was “no page in his score” that painted “the elemental man who hewed and blasted his way into [the West].”<sup>210</sup> The root of the problem lay in Puccini’s modern musical style, with its rich orchestration and its harmonies coloured with extended chords, non-harmonic tones, and whole-tone scales. Henderson, for example, explained:

We do not believe that such subjects can be delineated by the sophisticated methods of the Italian school of today. At any rate, Mr. Puccini appears to have accepted Mr. Belasco’s story and its deep breathing personages much as if they were the cramped creatures of the world of *Cavalleria* and *A Basso Proto*. Taking them thus he has written for them with profound sincerity, but in the end his music is too aristocratic, too much of the haute mode.<sup>211</sup>

Although some critics were willing to overlook the fact that Minnie and the miners were singing modern opera, others could not. From their perspective the juxtaposition of characters who represented the lowest forms of American civilization with music that corresponded to its highest, was too much. The closeness to which Puccini’s characters followed their models’ rough in behaviour and culture precluded them from singing opera. The generic roots may very well play into this particular resistance. The stock characters

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<sup>208</sup> Aldrich, “Melodrama Set to Music.”

<sup>209</sup> Reginald De Koven, “New Opera from Critic’s Viewpoint,” *New York World*, 11 December 1910.

<sup>210</sup> Henderson, “Mr. Puccini’s Latest Opera.”

<sup>211</sup> Henderson, “Mr. Puccini’s Latest Opera.”

traded in *The Girl of the Golden West* frequently populated lowbrow popular fiction and melodramas rather than serious dramas. There was a tendency to view these as forms of entertainment rather than art. Conversely, Italian opera was viewed as highbrow and one of the highest forms of art.<sup>212</sup>

“He is the Stage Director to Whom Everybody Comes”

When the opera critics discussed the believability of Puccini’s characters, sometimes they were addressing how Puccini presented them in comparison to Belasco’s presentation. Others times they were addressing the performance of the characters; how the singers brought the characters to life. The performances drew some of the highest praise. Critics credited Belasco as the source of that achievement more than the individual talents of the singers. While much of David Belasco’s fame came from the standards of naturalism he brought to the theatre, he was also renowned for bringing riveting performances out of his actors, particularly his leading ladies.<sup>213</sup> Blanche Bates, Leslie Francis and others became important theatrical stars as a result of their work in Belasco’s frontier plays. It comes as no surprise then, that Belasco’s work developing the acting skills of opera singers Minnie Destinn, Enrico Caruso, Pasquale Amato and the chorus of miners was followed with great curiosity by the New York City press. Moreover, as the Herald critic put it: “Naturally there also was curiosity as to . . . how a company of foreign artists, singing in Italian would succeed in ‘getting it over.’”<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> Cultural historian Lawrence Levine addresses the transformation of European opera into a symbol of high culture using newspaper articles and reviews written by some of the same critics who wrote reviews for *La fanciulla del West*. See Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 85-104.

<sup>213</sup> Kim Marra, *Strange Duets: Impresarios and Actresses in the American Theatre: 1865-1914* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2006).

<sup>214</sup> “Mr. Puccini’s New American Opera,” *New York Herald*.

Newspaper reports from before the premiere of *La fanciulla del West* illustrate the perception that cultural differences between the performers and the characters they would play could serve as an impediment to the opera's success. For example, a *New York Sun* article pointed out what many perceived as Belasco's chief directorial challenge: to train non-Americans how to move and behave physically like Western Americans:<sup>215</sup>

Mr. Belasco's desire is to impart an American atmosphere to the proceedings of the singers who have never seen any such characters as those they are called upon to represent. Among all the actors, there is only one American. The distinctive American types in the play are to be represented by ten Italians, a Bohemian, a Pole, a Spaniard, a Frenchman, two Germans and one American. So Mr. Belasco has been called in to devote this week to making this polyglot crew act as much as possible like Americans of the '49 period.<sup>216</sup>

The task of training these opera singers proved an arduous one, at least according to the newspapers. Stories covering the rehearsals shared their descriptions of Belasco paying attention to every level of movement, demonstrating himself what he wanted the singers to do.

Roy L. McCardell, writing for the *New York World*, used the success of the director's lengthy demonstration of how Johnson would have kissed Minnie as evidence that the singers needed help bringing their roles to life. For McCardell, teaching and explaining the intimate details of American interpersonal exchanges required a face-to-face encounter with an American, and of all Americans only Belasco "knows how. George can't do it. Only a Native Son has the knack of it. Belasco is a Native Son . . . David Belasco is a Californian. The *Girl of the Golden West* is Californian."<sup>217</sup> The article vividly describes

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<sup>215</sup> "Belasco at Rehearsals. Drilling Singers for *The Girl of the Golden West* in American Ways," *Sun*, 4 December 1910.

<sup>216</sup> "Drilling Singers."

<sup>217</sup> McCardell, "How Belasco Showed Caruso How to Make Love to Puccini's *Girl of the Golden West*."

how Belasco demonstrated Western movements and prop handling to the singers, and points out their success “Mr. Belasco has been very much impressed with the quickness with which Signor Caruso has acquired an American manner of that place and period.”<sup>218</sup>

The reporter further emphasized the cultural barriers between the cast, the producers, and ultimately the intended audience, by referring to the cast’s interpreter. Other reports also emphasized the linguistic difference between the singers and their New York City audience. Another account of the atmosphere of the rehearsals reported that “above the surging clamour of the instruments one gets snatches of conversation. It sounds like a modern Tower of Babel—or a school of languages. ‘Ah, c’est vous! Comment ça va?’ ‘Buon giorno!’ ‘Danke schon!’ ‘Hello! You here!’”<sup>219</sup>

By all accounts, Belasco was the hero of the rehearsals. He not only took an active role in *La fanciulla del West*’s rehearsals, moving around on stage, imitating the movements he desired. Singers, crewmen, conductor, and composer all purportedly deferred to Belasco:

Somewhere in the darkened hall sits the man who is really responsible for every movement, every situation in the play. He is the stage director to whom everybody comes—Toscanini, Speck, Caruso, Amato, Destinn, even Puccini. This man, dressed in black, with flowing white hair, has given up every other duty for the time being. You may find David Belasco only at the Metropolitan Opera House these days. “What does the Sheriff do while Johnson sings?” asks Maestro Puccini of the author of the play. Mr. Belasco goes through the dumb show of smoking a cigar in slight scorn. This leads

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<sup>218</sup> For example, he writes “Mr. Belasco has Signor Viviani at his elbow as an interpreter and he moves among the singers showing one a gesture, another the way to walk across the stage in Western fashion and then a third singer asks his advice as to the most correct Western fashion of drawing a gun. Sometimes Mr. Belasco will let all his class stand at attention while he steps to the side of the stage and goes through some gesture which he thinks they should all know. Mr. Belasco has been very much impressed with the quickness with which Signor Caruso has acquired an American manner of that place and period,” Ibid.

<sup>219</sup> “Rehearsing Puccini’s Opera. *Girl of the Golden West* a Serious Proposition. Has Made Toscanini Hoarse and Provoked Eruptions From Belasco—Drilling Wild West Ways into the Stars and Others of the Act,” *Sun*, 11 December 1910.

to further questions about the action going on at present, and to suggestions by Mr. Belasco about certain points in the action of previous acts, which have just occurred to him.<sup>220</sup>

From the descriptions of the rehearsals and the keen interest Belasco took in the details of gesture, it appears that Belasco, Puccini, and the Metropolitan Opera Company believed that the singers could learn to appear American, with the right guidance. More importantly, these discussions suggest an assumption among those involved that bodily movement could convey national identity and local colour as much as costumes and stage design. One reporter described the diligence with which the company pursued their goal:

The rehearsal goes on and on. The act is finished and there is half an hour to rest. Belasco goes on the stage, sits down at the table and distributes embroidered advice on assorted subjects; on how to “pull a gun”—a quite different affair, if you please, messieurs and signori, from drawing a sword or a stiletto; on how to shut a door in the teeth of the wind; on how to kick one’s legs against each other after fighting one’s way through a blizzard; and O ye cowering stage hands! on how to work lights which are supposed to be flaring in a mighty draught.<sup>221</sup>

The same article also described the movements of the singers as “curious European versions of a cowboy’s stride,” suggesting that the singers had not quite mastered their physical portraits of Westerners.<sup>222</sup> In another, the reporter pointed out that the Italians were having difficulty handling some of the American props, and indicated that someone other than an Italian might need to step in on opening night for one scene.<sup>223</sup> This journalist described how Belasco trained the singers to connect with one another and with their imaginary Western surroundings down to the smallest details, such as the use of their eyes:

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<sup>220</sup> “Teaching the West to Singers of It. David Belasco Showing the Opera Folk How Life Did Go on out There. Rehearsing *The Girl*. No Pains Being Spared on the First American Opera by an International Composer to be Brought out Here,” *New York Times*, 5 December 1910.

<sup>221</sup> “Teaching the West to Singers of It.”

<sup>222</sup> “Teaching the West to Singers of It.”

<sup>223</sup> “Teaching the West to Singers of It.”

Time and time again they go over the scene, while he [Belasco] makes suggestions. He shows Mr. Amato how to strike Johnson/Caruso across the face, and then he sets them to glare at each other. He shows Caruso/Johnson how to take in with one last departing glance the whole range of mountains and forest as far as his eye can reach; one thing he cannot show to anybody, and that is how to throw a lasso so that it will knot on a tree limb. It is probable that this will not be done by an Italian on the opening night.<sup>224</sup>

Belasco's efforts with the acting paid off. Algernon St. John-Brenon pointed out that "the first question that rises in the mind with regard to this is the natural one: How did the Italians treat this melodrama of Western life? When you read upon your programme that the character of Larkens was to be played by a gentleman of the name of Menotti Franscona the tendency to smile was irresistible."<sup>225</sup> Most critics would have agreed with *New York World's* 12 December headline "By Stage Magic '49 Miners were made of 1910 Europeans."<sup>226</sup> Henry Meltzer's *American* article claimed that the "characters seemed American." He explained that

. . . in *The Girl of the Golden West* we saw and heard a work which, in a very large extent, gave us the illusion of sincerity. The characters who sang and moved upon the stage were not thinly disguised Neapolitans or improbable Florentines, with American names. The principals, at least, and many of the minor figures who took part in the performances, seemed American and the invention of the music-drama was itself a compliment to America. <sup>227</sup>

Max Smith of the *New York Press* concurred, "Caruso. . . never has acted so realistically and so convincingly. The master hand of David Belasco showed itself in [Destinn] and in the work of the other singers."<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> "Teaching the West to Singers of It."

<sup>225</sup> Algernon St. John-Brenon, "Girl of the Golden West Storms Metropolitan Opera Throgs" *New York Morning Telegraph* 11 December 1910.

<sup>226</sup> "By Stage Magic '49 Miners Were Made of 1910 Europeans," *New York World*, 12 December 1910.

<sup>227</sup> Meltzer, "Opera Founded on an American Drama Is Critically Reviewed."

<sup>228</sup> Smith, "Puccini's New Opera."

The critics worried about the transferability of the staging and the convincing acting when opera houses abroad began to mount their own productions of the work. For instance, the critic of the *Nation* wrote:

The significance of the situation lies in this, that the Metropolitan Opera House, had been made for the time being into something similar to what Wagner wanted his Bayreuth theatre to be: a place for the creation of traditions. With both Puccini and his high priest presiding over the rehearsals, the musical side was sure to be correctly presented, while the presence of Belasco insured realism in scenery, costumes, and action. All this made the Metropolitan performance of great interest, without regard to the intrinsic value of the opera. But as for traditions—apart from those which relate to the orchestra and the singing—it is to be feared that when *The Girl of the Golden West* is produced in Italian cities, the California miners will be converted, in the absence of Belasco, into the traditional Sicilian brigands so familiar to opera-goers.<sup>229</sup>

Henderson's *Sun* article reveals awareness that the opera would travel and be produced not only by companies in the United States but throughout Europe as well. The idea that the realism the singers achieved was a result of Belasco's involvement, suggested to reviewers that when removing Belasco from the equation, the production values would suffer. Take for example, St. John-Brenon who wrote:

Even now we shiver at the very thought of what will happen when *The Girl of the Golden West* is produced at say, Paris, or Messina, or Warsaw. But the remarkable and undisputed quality of the New York production remains that a company almost entirely foreign and preponderantly Italian had been so trained, so instructed, so diligently and skillfully rehearsed that the characters in the Belasco-Puccini opera resembled human beings far more closely than the characters of *La traviata* or *Lucia* resemble anything.

We have, of course, to reconcile ourselves to the fact that the singing Westerners sing in Italian. But a similar strain is put upon our imaginations in two-thirds of the operas that we accept without question. The Spaniards of *Carmen* sing in French, the Egyptians in *Aida* sing in the language of Victor Emmanuel, the gods of the *Ring*—this is the strangest of all—list the mellifluous accents of

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<sup>229</sup> "Puccini's New Opera," *The Nation* 15 December 1910.

Goethe and the delicatessen. The theatre is a mass of conventions; the opera is a greater mass, after all.<sup>230</sup>

The comments about the acting readily illustrate how the critics praised the action and credited the power of the performances to the tutelage of Belasco. Moreover, they show how most critics believed that without Belasco only Americans would be able to convincingly portray these characters. For the New York City critics, the consensus seems to be that without Belasco the acting would suffer. Performers of Puccini's opera needed not simply a linguistic interpreter like Vivani, but rather a master cultural interpreter like Belasco.

Crossing Borders and Pushing Boundaries: Puccini,  
Authorship, and Violations of Generic Expectations

While composing *La fanciulla del West* Puccini violated one of the conceits of authorship for American frontier plays: he openly admitted that he had never been to the West, and had no intention of going. According to the conventions of frontier authorship, the composer should have at least visited the West in order to establish his credibility as a reliable narrator of Western stories. Furthermore, most of the authors of frontier plays produced in New York City, though rarely Westerners themselves, typically held American citizenship. Puccini, an Italian national, was an outsider. This difference further violated the expectations of authorship for an American audience, though it would have mattered little to a European audience.

When Puccini chose *The Girl of the Golden West* as the dramatic source for his opera, he chose a popular, well-loved play belonging to a genre with strongly established conventions, both the conventions of melodramatic development and structure, and the

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<sup>230</sup> St. John-Brenon, "*Girl of the Golden West*."



conventions of frontier-type characters, plots, settings, musical accompaniment, and ideological messages. He expanded the generic boundaries of New York City frontier theatre by contributing the first operatic version of a frontier play.<sup>231</sup> In this process of “operatizing” the West, Puccini altered the language and register of the text, softened the rough edges of the frontier characters, made structural changes to the acts, and substituted highbrow music for lowbrow. The New York City critics met some of these changes with disapproval. Though subtle, these changes weakened the opera’s basic sense of authenticity for the American critics, and that weakening influenced the assessments of the opera’s effectiveness.

Puccini underestimated the degree to which presenting the opera in Italian rather than English would influence the reception of his opera in New York City. Although Europeans read frontier novels from the United States in translation, Americans did not. The invented Western speak of fictional frontiersmen and women contributed significantly to the identity of the genre. The frontier novels and plays, wild-west shows, and movies that New Yorkers read and attended were always presented in English. More than that, in a genre that emphasized regional dialects, Puccini’s Italian-language vocal music also violated the conventions of linguistic realism which characterized Frontier works.

Critics were expecting an opera that would be as convincingly “real” in every way that Belasco’s play had been and held *La fanciulla del West* to that standard. Despite the careful replication of Belasco’s sets and costumes, the general adherence to the story’s plot and characters, and the life-like portrayals coaxed out of the singers by Belasco, the subtle

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<sup>231</sup> The one other known pre-1910 frontier opera performed in Italy. A report in the New York Times dating from 1907 describes a performance of *La colona libera* by Pietro Floridia and librettist Luigi Illica, based on Bret Harte’s *M’liss*. For more on this work, see the following newspaper article about the opera: F. M. P., “Bret Harte in Opera,” *New York Times*, 11 June 1899. Emanuele Senici suggests that Puccini may have known this opera and argues that the two libretti share many similarities. See Senici, “A New Landscape for a New Virgin,” n35.

changes in characterization, linguistic differences, and the juxtaposition of lowbrow characters singing highbrow music was too much for some of critics to overcome. Although some critics concluded that the best parts of the opera were those attributable to Belasco, the perceived weakening of those parts by the elements attributable to Puccini led others to conclude that the opera lacked the same sort of authenticity found in Frontier melodramas.

CHAPTER FOUR: MUSIC “OF THE SOIL,” OR, HOW TO  
SOUND AMERICAN

The question of how Puccini would musically capture the spirit of the American frontier loomed large in the coverage of *La fanciulla del West* and its premiere, both before and after the tenth of December. For example, on 4 December Reginald De Koven wrote in the *New York World*: “there are I understand, certain fleeting and perhaps anachronistic reminiscences of ragtime and also a banjo in the score and a certain proportion of the music is what might be termed, characteristic, if there be any American music definitely characteristic as such.”<sup>1</sup> Annie Randall and Rosalind Gray Davis have explained that this was, in part, a result of the Metropolitan Opera Company’s extensive amount of advance publicity for the opera.<sup>2</sup> Randall and Davis argue that the opera company’s publicists shaped the reception by capitalizing on its distinctly American features and consequently raised expectations that Puccini never intended to create.<sup>3</sup>

An examination of the points of discussion found in New York City newspaper and music magazine articles, editorials, and interviews about the genesis of the opera suggests that there was certainly a great deal of interest in the opera’s apparent

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<sup>1</sup> Reginald De Koven, “The Puccini Premiere Comes to Dissipate Our Operatic Tedium,” *World*, 4 December 1910.

<sup>2</sup> Annie J. Randall and Rosalind Gray Davis, *Puccini and the Girl: History and Reception of the Girl of the Golden West* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 132-3.

<sup>3</sup> Randall and Davis, 97. While Randall and Davis refer to the Metropolitan Opera Company’s publicists, they do not offer any examples of the press releases pertaining to the opera. The Metropolitan Opera Company Archives have no documentation of the press releases for pertaining to this opera available in the spring of 2005. It did however, have a press clippings book that contains excerpts from newspaper articles about the company and its productions over the years. While the book is somewhat damaged by fire and the ink indicating the source of the articles has faded, there are many nearly complete, full text clippings of articles and reviews pertaining to *La fanciulla del West*.

American features in the pre-premiere period.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, Puccini himself may have fanned the flames of speculation. For not only did these writings stress the Italian nationality of the authors and performers, the prestige an authentic Italian opera premiere brought to the Metropolitan Opera Company, and Belasco's significant participation in the rehearsal process, as Randall and Davis have rightly pointed out, but several articles prior to the opera's first performance also present the composer's responses to direct questions about the use of American music in the opera. Far from definitive, his answers left room for interested critics to wonder exactly how much American source material shaped the music of the opera, in what way did it do so, and by what other means could Puccini have achieved an American tone for the piece.

Three articles in particular illustrate a subtle progression from a denial that any American source material existed in the opera to a concession that some had been used, if only sparingly. For example, four and half months before the premiere, George Maxwell who represented Puccini's publisher Casa Ricordi in New York City, told American reporters on behalf of the composer that Puccini would not include any American musical sources in the opera:

I am frequently asked if Puccini has infused any American musical themes or characteristics into his score. The prevailing idea seems to be that he has done so, but such is not the case. There may exist Indian legends and folksongs for the musical students to examine, but the story of the new opera is based on Western life among the white pioneers, and the Indian plays but a small part in the plot. When Signor Puccini saw *The Girl of the Golden West* in New York he heard, of course, all the Western music, so-called, played between the acts. Yet he has made no use of this inspiration in the score. In fact, there is no distinctly

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<sup>4</sup> Opera historian Hervé Lacombe uses the term "pre-reception" to explain the phenomena of discussing an opera and developing preliminary judgments about it prior to its first hearing in his study on nineteenth-century opera in Paris. See *The Keys to French Opera in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Edward Schneider (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 68-9.

Western music. Moreover, the music of this opera may be said to be that of a European composer written for an American play.<sup>5</sup>

While Maxwell may or may not have seen the score by the time these questions had been asked, Puccini knew the answer—he was in the final stages of completing the opera. Maxwell’s statement did nothing to quell speculations. The day after Puccini arrived in New York City, *The New York Times* printed an article in which the composer described the opera and its thematic motives scene by scene to the press. At the end of the article comes an exchange between the composer and a reporter, during which the reporter asked about the character of the music and its place in Puccini’s body of works. Puccini’s response contained no information about the opera’s musical sources or an explanation about the music’s national or regional character:

It has no special character . . . I have tried to write music and music must have only one character, spontaneity and sincerity. This time I have worked hard over the form. The instrumentation differs from that of my other operas.

Reporter: Something new?

Puccini: New or better. It is not for me to say. It is logical after all, to try always to be better.<sup>6</sup>

Yet the question of whether or not he had included American music in the score continued to circulate. However, two and half weeks later, *The New York Daily Tribune* published an article in which Puccini somewhat qualified his earlier statements:

In the opera I have striven to obtain an atmosphere that is essentially American, and I hope that I have succeeded. I have included in the score a few bars of Indian music, and also some

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<sup>5</sup> "Musical News and Notes," *New York Times*, 24 July 1910. This quote clearly ties the discussions of *La fanciulla del West* to the Indianist craze.

<sup>6</sup> "Puccini here; His Opera Views. Composer Believes that the Modern Music Drama Is to Be Simpler. Sees Reversion to Gluck. Tells How He Has Set to Music Comedy and Dramatic Episodes of *The Girl of the Golden West*," *New York Times*, 18 November 1910.

of your ragtime, but otherwise, I have not attempted to use any essentially American themes.<sup>7</sup>

Puccini explains that his interests lay not so much in quotation, as in “atmosphere.”

What this meant for Puccini was not entirely clear to the critics and they interpreted his success in varying degrees, as this chapter shall demonstrate.

Discussions in the early reviews about the opera’s musical Americanism seem to be attempts to arrive at a final answer to the question of whether or not Puccini included any American music and the degree to which that music was responsible for the “atmosphere” of the work. Critics closely examined Puccini’s “attempt to gain American local colour and American feeling both spontaneously and by the use of various kinds of American themes.”<sup>8</sup> Their discussions indicate that many scoured the score for the presence of American musical material and had very strong reactions when they found them. They challenged not only the propriety of Puccini’s choice of sources and his methods of incorporating those sources into the score, but also the effectiveness of their musico-dramatic placement. At the heart of the critics’ concern lay the social identity of the communities whose musical materials Puccini had studied and interwoven into the opera’s musical fabric.

The question of how to sound American had of course been raised many years prior to Puccini’s opera, and would be asked many years following. Many American composers and musicians were interested in the problem of how to express American national identity through music.<sup>9</sup> One of the more famous iterations of the debate

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<sup>7</sup> “Puccini Would Rather Talk Duck Shooting than Grand Opera,” *New York Daily Tribune*, December 4 1910.

<sup>8</sup> Farwell, “Music of Puccini's Opera.”

<sup>9</sup> Many scholars have explored this issue. For example, in the Puccini scholarship see Randall and Davis, 131. For recent research in the field of American music, see Charles Hiroshi Garrett *Struggling to Define a Nation: American Music and the Twentieth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008). See also Barbara Tischler *An American Music: The Search for an American Musical Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) and Alan Howard Levy *Musical Nationalism: American Composers’ Search for Identity* (Westport:

occurred when Antonín Dvořák advocated for the use of Native American and African American music as the foundation of a uniquely American musical language.<sup>10</sup> Yet the connection between that debate and the reception of *La fanciulla del West* goes even deeper than Randall and Davis suggest. Several of the critics reviewing *La fanciulla del West* had participated in the Dvořák debate of the early 1890s, including William J. Henderson, Henry E. Krehbiel, and Henry T. Finck. Other critics, like Richard Aldrich, Reginald De Koven, Arthur Farwell, or Albert Miltenberg for example, had responded to these issues as composers and critics alike revisited the issue frequently in late 1890s and early 1900s, particularly within discussions about the future of the American musical identity.

Indeed, many of the criticisms of *La fanciulla del West* echo those made twenty years earlier concerning Dvořák's Symphony in E minor, "From the New World" (1893). William J. Henderson not only repeated some of his arguments from the previous controversy, he explicitly referred to them in his review of *La fanciulla del West*, writing that Puccini "hit upon a strain which recalls some of the American music of Dvořák, and which will therefore give pain to Boston, because in this case it will be difficult to prove that it is Bohemian instead of imitation dinky."<sup>11</sup> In Boston,

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Greenwood Press, 1983). Both Tischler and Levy offer overviews of the central issues driving the debate and bibliographies pointing to useful primary sources. Tischler connects what was happening in music to trends in politics.

<sup>10</sup> Randall and Davis, 132. According to Randall and Davis, *La fanciulla del West*'s "reception was coloured by this larger debate, which for many decades preceding the premiere, found some artists arguing for the use of Native American and even African American cultures as touchstones for Americanness and others arguing against it," 132. The scholarship on Dvořák in the United States is extensive. The collection of essays in *Dvořák and His World* edited by Michael Beckerman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993) offer excellent insights into the specific issues raised during Dvořák's American tenure. The collection also includes reviews by American critics and a selection of primary sources. Also useful was the collection of essays in John C. Tibbets, editor, *Dvořák in America, 1892-1895* (Portland: Amadeus Press, 1993).

<sup>11</sup> William J. Henderson, "Mr. Puccini's Latest Opera. *Girl of the Golden West* Sung. Performed at the Metropolitan Opera House for the First Time on Any Stage. Belasco's Stirring

influential music critic Philip Hale (1854-1934) had publicly debated the issue of folk music as the musical basis for an American school of composition with Henderson and another one of Puccini's *La fanciulla del West* critics, Henry E. Krehbiel (1854-1923), in the 1890s.<sup>12</sup> Taking a line of reasoning based on ethnicity and nationality, Hale argued that since the majority of Americans were neither Native American nor African American, music from those groups of people could not contribute a convincing American quality to music. Both Henderson and Krehbiel had opposed this view, claiming that those types of music could offer an American quality to the music since it came from the place where Americans now live, thus basing their position on the grounds that shared living space rather than on shared culture, ethnicity or nationality shaped the identity of groups of people. Yet, Henderson and Krehbiel both criticized Puccini for using American source materials.

The impact on music of these two features of national identity—race and place—was at the heart of the American music debate at the turn of the twentieth century, just as it was in the debates over the question of national music in European countries.<sup>13</sup> This chapter will explore the complex reaction to *La fanciulla del West*'s Americanisms, as they were sometimes referred to at the time, and the relationship between the comments made about Puccini's opera and Dvořák's symphony. It will also

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Melodrama Set to Italian Music—A New Thing in the World of Opera—Performance Interesting and Effective," *New York Sun*, 11 December 1910.

<sup>12</sup> Horowitz, "Dvořák and Boston Horowitz, "Dvořák and Boston"; Joseph Horowitz, "Dvořák and the New World: A Concentrated Moment," in *Dvořák and his World* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1993). See also Adrienne Fried Block, "Boston Talks Back to Dvořák," *ISAM Newsletter* 18, no. 2 (1989): 10-15.

<sup>13</sup> For recent research on nineteenth-century musical nationalism, see Philip V. Bohlman, *Focus: Music, Nationalism, and the Making of New Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2011); Benjamin W. Curtis, *Music Makes the Nation: Nationalist Composers and Nation Building in Nineteenth Century Europe* (Amherst, N.Y.: Cambria Press, 2008); Harry White and Michael Murphy, editors, *Musical Constructions of Nationalism: Essays on the History and Ideology of European Musical Culture 1800-1945* (Cork, Ireland: Cork University Press, 2001).



situate *La fanciulla del West*'s criticisms into the discussion that New York City's music critics were having about how to create a viable American opera tradition, even before coverage of *La fanciulla del West* began to gain momentum. This contextualization will demonstrate that the critics saw in Puccini's opera some of the features that they thought would define the first great American opera, and that these led them to evaluate the work in much the same way they would have assessed any potential national opera candidate, instead of evaluating it as a stereotypically exotic or local colour opera. The lack of consensus among critics in general about the way to sound American explains why the critics struggled to evaluate the sound of America in this opera. The reviews demonstrate a range of positions on the matter, sometimes within a review. In the end, many questioned the value of the opera, despite its beauty and compelling drama.

#### "Of the Soil"

Despite its acknowledged identity as a foreign opera by a foreign composer, *La fanciulla del West* became directly tied to the Dvořák debate and the problem of how to establish a uniquely American school of composition. Much has been written about Dvořák's comments, the New World symphony (as it has come to be called), and their reception in the United States. An examination of some of the newspaper articles from the period yields an understanding of why any composer presenting music based on American folk song at the turn of the twentieth century to a New York City audience risked having his or her music interpreted as a position within that debate.

The conditions of reception for both *La fanciulla del West* and Symphony in E minor "From the New World" share many similarities and as such it is easy to understand how Puccini's New York City critics could have viewed his opera as a potential exemplar for an American opera. An internationally famous European

composer composed both, each had its world premiere in New York City, and both composers were present for their work's first performance. Each composer had a substantial contract with an important musical institution in New York City: The National Conservatory of Music in the case of Dvořák and the Metropolitan Opera Company in the case of Puccini.<sup>14</sup> These institutions viewed themselves as nationally significant, even internationally so in the case of the Metropolitan Opera Company, and were generally referred to that way in the press.<sup>15</sup> The New York City music critics wrote substantial reviews for both pieces. The press generally presented both composers as respected leaders, even geniuses, in their particular fields of music. Newspaper reports often mentioned the European origins of the composers, emphasizing their identities as foreign visitors, and the prestige they brought to their New York

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<sup>14</sup> Many European composers came to New York City in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century: Johann Strauss II (1872), Anton Rubinstein (1872-3), Jacques Offenbach (1876), Piotr Illyich Tchaikovsky (1891) Antonín Dvořák (1893), Pietro Mascagni (1902), Richard Strauss (1904), Vincent D'Indy (1905), Camille Saint-Saëns/Ruggiero Leoncavallo/Aleksandr Skryabin/Reynaldo Hahn (1906), Puccini/Edward Elgar (1907), Gustav Mahler (1908), Sergei Rachmaninoff (1909), Puccini/Englebert Humperdinck (1910), Sibelius (1914), Prokofiev (1918), to name only a few. For an exploration of European musicians in nineteenth-century New York City, see the following collection of essays on the subject: John Graziano, ed., *European Music and Musicians in New York City, 1840-1900*, Eastman Studies in Music (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2006). Also particularly relevant is Alan Mallach, "The Mascagni Tour of 1902," *Opera Quarterly* 7, no. 4 (1990): 13-37.

<sup>15</sup> John Clapham has written on Dvořák's directorship of the National Conservatory of Music. See John Clapham, "Dvořák's Musical Directorship in New York," *Music & Letters* 48, no. 1 (1967): 40-51; John Clapham, "Dvořák's Musical Directorship in New York: A Postscript," *Music and Letters* 59, no. 1 (1978): 19-27; Hamm, "Dvořák, Nationalism, Myth, and Racism in the United States." For more recent research on the foundation and development of the National Conservatory of Music, see: Emanuel Rubin, "Dvořák at the National Conservatory," in *Dvořák in America*, ed. John C. Tibbetts (Portland: Amadeus, 1993), 53-81; Emanuel Rubin, "Jeannette Meyer Thurber (1850-1946): Music for a Democracy," in *Cultivating Music in America: Women Patrons and Activists Since 1860* (Berkeley: University of California, 1997), 134-63; Emanuel Rubin, "Jeannette Meyers Thurber and the National Conservatory of Music," *American Music* 8, no. 3 (1990): 294-395. For more on the Metropolitan Opera Company's rise in status from a local opera company, to an national opera company, to an international opera company, see: Irving Kolodin, *The Metropolitan Opera, 1883-1966: A Candid History* (New York: Knopf, 1966).

endeavours. A certain amount of irony resonates in the wide assumption that a non-American composer would write the first great American opera, just as a non-American composer had written the first great American symphony. In most countries such an idea would make no sense at all. This also indicates that in the twenty-year span between the two visits, Americans maintained a cultural inferiority complex.

The main difference between the two cases lies in the purpose of their visits. Dvořák had been invited specifically to help American composers develop their own musical voice, whereas Puccini was invited to ensure the proper preparation of his opera's world premiere. On the other hand, while the press quickly lost interest in *La fanciulla del West*'s premiere, quickly shifting its focus to the world premiere of Engelbert Humperdinck's *Koenigskinder*, remembrances of Dvořák's time in the United States occurred in the New York City press for many years after he had left the country. In 1904, for example, *New York Times* music critic Richard Aldrich recalled the occasion of Dvořák's visit and his theories about American music in an article reporting the Czech composer's death:

In 1892 Dvořák came to America at the invitation of Mrs. Jeannette Thurber as principal of her National Conservatory of Music. He made his first appearance at a concert at Carnegie Hall, when he conducted a triple overture, "Nature, Life, and Love," and a "Te Deum," the latter composed for the occasion. He remained in this country three years, in the course of which he took up seriously the study of the possibility of founding a National American style of music.

His theory was that, as the people as a whole had no folk music, the composer must take that which most nearly supplied the conditions. This he found in the negro melodies and the Indian chants, both of which he regarded as having certain essentially American characteristics, as indigenous to the soil, and as peculiarly sympathetic to the people.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> "Antonin Dvořák is Dead," *New York Times*, 2 May 1904, 9.

The concept “of the soil” runs through much of the discussion about crafting an American music, particularly during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. For example, in the early 1890s a number of articles about Dvořák, his music, and his ideas about national music were published in American newspapers and magazines. A few of these articles appeared in New York City daily papers, including “Real Value of Negro Melodies” and “An Interesting Talk about ‘From the New World’ Symphony.”<sup>17</sup> Dvořák’s theories rested on the cultural nationalist assumption that developing a national school of music was necessary and desirable for Americans. He saw the United States as a country

. . . full of melody, original, sympathetic and varying in mood, colour and character to suit every phase of composition. It is a rich field. America can have great and noble music of her own, growing out of the very soil and partaking of its nature—the natural voice of a free and vigorous race.<sup>18</sup>

Dvořák explained to a reporter from the *New York Herald* “. . . these beautiful and varied themes are the product of the soil. They are American.”<sup>19</sup> Elsewhere Dvořák asserted, “the new American school of music must strike its roots deeply into its own soil.”<sup>20</sup> The question of which soil would generate American music proved to be controversial. The heterogeneous mix of ethnicities and nationalities brought with it a

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<sup>17</sup> Antonin Dvořák, “An Interesting Talk about ‘From the New World’ Symphony,” *New York Herald*, 15 December 1893, 28; Antonin Dvořák, “Music in America,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* (1895): 32-34; James Creelman (attributed), “Real Value of Negro Melodies,” *New York Herald*, 21 May 1893, 11. Michael Beckerman addresses the issue of authorship surrounding “Real Value of Negro Melodies,” and other unsigned articles appearing in the New York City press during the time that present Dvořák’s ideas. See “Real Value of Yellow Journalism: James Creelman and Antonín Dvořák” *Musical Quarterly* 77, No. 4 (1993): 749-768. Richard Crawford, “Dvořák and the Historiography of American Music,” in *Rethinking Dvořák: Views from Five Countries* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

<sup>18</sup> Antonin Dvořák, “Letter to the Editor,” *New York Herald*, 28 May 1893.

<sup>19</sup> “Real Value of Negro Melodies.”

<sup>20</sup> Dvořák, “Letter to the Editor.”

heterogeneous mix of folksong.<sup>21</sup> Choosing from among the possibilities was fraught with problems concerning authenticity, race, ethnicity, and citizenship. Members of certain ethnic communities, immigrants, Native Americans, and African Americans all had fragile identities as “authentic” Americans. For example, during the late 1880s, Native Americans—the only indigenous group of people living in the United States—could only hold American citizenship if they relinquished their tribal affiliations.<sup>22</sup> Despite the fact that African-American men were granted citizenship and the right to vote shortly after the Civil War, many individual states developed laws to prevent them from actually voting.<sup>23</sup>

Evidence that the memory of the Dvořák debate persisted in New York of the 1910s rests in musical commentary even beyond Henderson’s snide remark in his review of *La fanciulla del West*. For example, on the very day of *La fanciulla del West*’s premiere the Boston Symphony Orchestra performed the symphony at Carnegie Hall in New York City in the afternoon. Two weeks later they performed it in Boston.<sup>24</sup> In the program notes for the performances, Philip Hale took aim at both Henderson and quite

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<sup>21</sup> For a recent study on the culture of immigrant folk song culture, see Victor Greene, *A Singing Ambivalence: American Immigrants between Old World and New, 1830-1930* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 2004).

<sup>22</sup> In 1887 some Native Americans became citizens of the United States, if they gave up their tribal affiliations. Native Americans, along with Asian Americans and Latinos, were not granted United States citizenship until 1924.

<sup>23</sup> For a history of African American voting rights and disfranchisement see Xi Wang, *The Trial of Democracy: Black Suffrage and Northern Republicans, 1860-1910* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997). A recent collection of essays examines the issues of race and suffrage between the Fifteenth Amendment and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Richard Valelly, ed., *The Voting Rights Act: Securing the Ballot* (Washington D.C.: QC Press, 2006).

<sup>24</sup> Evidence for this performance comes from a notice printed in the *New York Times* which read: “On Saturday afternoon the programme will begin with Dvořák’s “From the New World” symphony, which has not been played here by the Boston Symphony Orchestra in seven years.” “Boston Symphony Orchestra,” *New York Times*, 4 December 1910, 7.

possibly Puccini:<sup>25</sup> “Yet some will undoubtedly continue to insist that . . . the future of American music rests on the use of congo, North American Indian, Creole, Greaser and Cowboy ditties, whinings, yawps, and whoopings.”<sup>26</sup>

“Puccini’s American Opera”

*La fanciulla del West*’s New York City audience had no access to serious operas depicting Anglo-American cowboys, ranchers, miners, scouts, or woodsmen living in the American western wilderness.<sup>27</sup> While presentations of frontier melodramas like *Across the Continent*, *The Virginian*, or *The Danites of the Sierras* were bountiful in New York City theatres, stagings of their operatic equivalents were scarce. At the height of frontier play production and the emergence of the western film genre, the repertory of New York City’s opera houses consisted primarily of works based on sources from the European literary and dramatic traditions, sources which usually dealt with topics emerging from the experience of European life and culture.<sup>28</sup> Buffalo Bill

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<sup>25</sup> Joseph Horowitz provides the entire text of the program notes in an appendix to his American Music article “Dvořák and Boston,” 12-17. Many of Philip Hale’s program notes for the Boston Symphony were published in 1935. See Philip Hale, *Philip Hale’s Boston Symphony Programme Notes; Historical, Critical, and Descriptive Comment on Music and Composers*, edited by John N. Burk, with an Introduction by Lawrence Gilman (Garden City: Doubleday, Doran, & Company, 1935). For recent research and bibliography on Hale, consult Jean Ann Boyd, “Philip Hale, American Music Critic, Boston, 1889-1933” (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas, 1985).

<sup>26</sup> Hale as cited in Joseph Horowitz, “Dvořák and Boston,” *American Music* 19, no. 1 (2001): 8.

<sup>27</sup> There was a performance of an Italian opera based on Harte’s *M’liss* produced in Italy. See: Emanuele Senici, “*La fanciulla del West*: A New Landscape for a New Virgin,” in *Landscape and Gender in Italian Opera* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 332, n. 35.

<sup>28</sup> For more on the repertory of the Metropolitan Opera Company, consult: Gerald Fitzgerald, *The Annals of the Metropolitan Opera: The Complete Chronicle of Performances and Artists: Chronology 1883-1985* (New York: Metropolitan Opera Guild, 1989); John Pennino, Robert Tuggle, and Jeff McMillian, *MetOpera Database* [Online Database] (Metropolitan Opera Archives, daily updates 2007 [accessed 1 August 2007]); available from <http://www.metoperafamily.org/metopera/history/index.aspx>.

may have performed at Madison Square Garden, but he never graced the stage of the Metropolitan Opera House.<sup>29</sup> Not only were there no Frontier operas of which to speak, many critics questioned whether there were even any American operas, despite a century of opera composition in the United States. *La fanciulla del West*, with its American subject matter and source materials, slipped easily into the larger debate over what constituted American opera.

In the coverage of *La fanciulla del West*—from the announcements in 1908 that Puccini had chosen to set Belasco’s *Girl of the Golden West*, to the reviews of the 1910 premiere—headlines frequently referred to it as an American opera.<sup>30</sup> It is not clear from the headlines what exactly is meant by “American opera.” While this could be explained away as a simple synecdoche resulting from sensationalism or sophistry, it also suggests that some critics, or at least their editors, concluded that something in the opera’s identity justified the name. Conversely, in the body of some reviews critics directly addressed the issue of whether the opera should be called American or Italian, and of those who did several concluded that it was an Italian opera on an American

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<sup>29</sup> Theatre impresario Harold Steele MacKaye transformed Cody's outdoor Wild West show into an indoor pageant for the 1886 winter season of *Buffalo Bill's Wild West* at Madison Square Garden. The combination show became a four-act spectacle presenting the history of the American frontier called “The Dawn of Civilization.” The indoor arena was transformed into the windswept plains of the American West. The performers enacted events from the history of the Euro-American settlement of North America, sometimes with the original participants recreating the event the Madison Square Garden audience, such as Pawnee Bill, Texas Jack, Sitting Bull, Indian Horse, and Rocking Bear. MacKaye used life-sized objects, including buffaloes and horses, in the production and staged life-like, large-scale illusions of prairie fires, tornados, and the Battle of Little Big Horn. For an account of the production from the press see “Buffalo Bill in Drama Four Wild West Epochs at Madison-Square Garden,” *New York Times* 1886, 5. For recent scholarship on MacKaye and Buffalo Bill at Madison Square Garden, see Joseph Anton Sokalski, “Civil War Cycloramic Oratory and *The Drama of Civilization*,” in *Pictorial Illusion: The Theatre of Steele MacKaye* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), 131-78.

<sup>30</sup> The examples are numerous. For an early one, see “New American Opera Plans” *New York Times* 9 February 1908. For a later one, see “Mr. Puccini’s New American Opera Has Brilliant Premiere” *New York Herald* 11 December 1910.

subject—despite headlines to the contrary. This contradiction between the headlines and the content of some the reviews demonstrates the complexity of the American opera problem at the time. That an Italian opera by a famously Italian composer could even be considered American illustrates the pliability of the term “American opera.” On the one hand, it speaks to the weakness of the American opera tradition in the New York City of 1910, while on the other to the strength of *La fanciulla del West* as a potential candidate for the great American opera. It raises the question of what it meant for a work to be an American opera.

The turn-of-the-century quest for national opera mirrors the quest for American national symphonic music and many of the positions regarding its development were the same. As many scholars have shown, the terms of debate matched those in European countries also attempting establish musical traditions independent of Germany, France, and Italy. In the late nineteenth century, many European nationalists considered opera an excellent genre for developing a national musical identity. Dvořák once told the *Chicago Tribune* that

the symphony is the least desirable of vehicles for the display of this work, in that the form will allow only of a suggestion of the colour of that nationalism to be given. Liberty in this is never allowable. Opera is by far the best mode of expression for the undertaking, allowing as it does of freedom of treatment. My plan of work in this line is simple, the attainment is subtle and difficult because of the minute and conscientious study demanded and the necessity to grasp the essence and vitality of the subject.<sup>31</sup>

Yet, despite his position as a composer invited to the United States to help develop a national music tradition and his relative success as an opera composer in Bohemia, Dvořák never presented an American opera to the public.<sup>32</sup> Michael Beckerman has

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<sup>31</sup> Dvořák, “For National Music,” 361.

<sup>32</sup> For more on Dvořák as an opera composer, see Marketa Hallova, Zuzana Petraskova, and Jarmila Tauerova-Veverkova, eds., *Musical Dramatic Works by Antonin Dvořák: Papers from An International Conference, Conferences on the History and Theory of Music at the International Music Festival Prague* (Praha: Ceska Hudebni Spolecnost, 1989).



recently demonstrated that Dvořák did work on developing an American opera project, one based on Longfellow's poem *Hiawatha*.<sup>33</sup> According to Beckerman, Dvořák intended for the slow movement of the *New World Symphony* to serve as sketch for this *Hiawatha* opera.<sup>34</sup> Dvořák submitted a libretto to a committee at the National Conservatory several times in an attempt to receive permission to work on the opera. They denied the application each time, and he ultimately abandoned the project.<sup>35</sup>

Articles about the need for American opera in the New York City papers frequently proposed different solutions to the national musical identity problem, from those mirroring Dvořák's ideas about developing an American absolute music tradition, to those focusing on language issues. A survey of New York City newspaper and periodical articles, editorials, and letters-to-the-editor about opera reveals that one of the issues that intrigued *La fanciulla del West*'s critics in 1910 concerned the definition of American opera. The necessary and sufficient conditions had yet to be determined. While a few defined "American" opera as only that written by, for, and about Americans as well as performed by Americans in the language of Americans, which in their view meant English, others resisted this "fully" American approach. At the same

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For more on the reception of Dvořák's operas in the United States, see David Beveridge, "The Reception of Dvořák's Operas in America," in *Dvořák in America: 1892-1895*, ed. John C. Tibbetts (Portland: Amadeus, 1993), 297-319. See also Jaromir Paclt, "Czech Opera's First Successes in the International Context," *Music News from Prague* 5-6 (1993): 8-10; Barbara Hampton Renton, "Dvořák's Operas in the United States: A Preliminary Survey of Performances and Their Reception," in *Musical Dramatic Works by Antonin Dvořák: Papers from an International Conference*, ed. Marketa Hallova, Zuzana Petraskova, and Jarmila Tauerova-Veverkova, *Conferences on the History and Theory of Music at the International Music Festival Prague* (Praha: Ceska Hudebni Spolecnast, 1989), 143-53.

<sup>33</sup> Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *The Song of Hiawatha* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1855).

<sup>34</sup> Michael Beckerman, "Dvořák's *New World* Largo and *The Song of Hiawatha*," *19th-Century Music* 16 (1992): 35-48.

<sup>35</sup> Beckerman, "Dvořák's *New World* Largo," and Michael Beckerman, *New Worlds of Dvořák: Searching in America for the Composer's Inner Life* (New York: Norton, 2003).

time that one group argued that there could be no such thing as American opera, another argued that American opera composers had not yet reached the artistic standards established by the recognized masterpieces of the early twentieth century operatic canon; in other words, a standard set by European opera composers such as Verdi, Wagner, and Puccini. As the *Musical Courier* explained:

We may as well accept the situation by recognizing it, and we also must candidly admit that there is no American opera that deserves a place next to the Puccini group, no matter what the relative standing of these operas may be; in fact there is no American opera at all, practically speaking.<sup>36</sup>

This unresolved question about the nature of American opera explains how some of the critics could have considered *La fanciulla del West* as a national opera rather than an exotic or local colour opera set in the United States, while others soundly rejected the notion.

A kind of inferiority complex, if not an outright negative attitude toward home-grown American operas, performers, and culture motivated some of the arguments about how to develop a national opera tradition and about the value of operas already composed by Americans.<sup>37</sup> For example, in February of 1910 the *New York Times* printed an article about the German view of American culture in which a German reportedly declared, “what American theatrical art chiefly has to offer is cakewalks, ragtime, and Buffalo Bill Wild West Shows. We have already made the acquaintance of these dramatic treats in the past. Or do the Yankees, perhaps, intend to regale us with an

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<sup>36</sup> *Musical Courier*, 4 December 1910.

<sup>37</sup> A. J. Goodrich, “Notes by an American Pilgrim in Paris,” *Musical Courier*, 2 November 1910, 44. Goodrich argues that despite the fact that Americans no longer needed to depend upon Europe for quality products and culture, and the fact that Europeans acknowledged this, in the United States, a preference for imported European goods remained.

Americanized edition of Wagner?"<sup>38</sup> *The New York Sun's* music critic William Henderson shared this pessimistic assessment of American musical culture:

Americans have no authority in the realm of musical art. We have created nothing. We have no history and no school. All that we know and all that we teach we have learned from Europe. The authoritative countries in opera are Italy, France, and Germany. The first two are the more important because they have possessed their authority for 300 years . . . they are our teachers and it would be more becoming in us to accept modestly the instruction which they offer us.<sup>39</sup>

This bias against American-born composers and culture also explains how the New York City critics could have considered an opera by a foreign composer as a possible candidate for an American opera, certainly something that seems to contradict the nationalist ideology inherent in the idea that a country needed to create its own opera tradition.

In contrast, another of Puccini's critics, Richard Aldrich, fought the perception that there were no American operas. In a response to an American composer's letter-to-the-editor claiming that the opera *Sarrona* by Legrand Howland would be the first American grand opera ever to be produced in the United States, Aldrich summarized the history of American opera, tracing a school of American opera back to Henry Fry and George F. Bristow.<sup>40</sup> Of Bristow, Aldrich wrote that he was "a fierce and somewhat voluble advocate of the 'American School' of music at a time when it was a little difficult to discern an American school."<sup>41</sup> Aldrich cited operas not only by Fry and by Bristow, but also by Walter Damrosch, Frederic Converse, and Arthur Nevin as

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<sup>38</sup> "Germans Ridicule American Taste," *New York Times*, 20 February 1910, 2.

<sup>39</sup> William J. Henderson, "The Character of Gluck's Declamation," *New York Sun*, 20 November 1910, 8.

<sup>40</sup> Richard Aldrich, "This Week in the World of Opera and Drama," *New York Times*, 9 January 1910.

<sup>41</sup> Aldrich, "This Week in the World of Opera." 41

evidence of an American opera tradition and of non-comic American operas produced in New York City. Another viewpoint maintained that the domination of the New York City repertory by the works of older, European composers resulted in a resistance to newer works, which in turn led to an unfair, disparaging view of American operas.<sup>42</sup> Together Henderson's dismissive view of American opera and Aldrich's affirmative demonstrate the tension American opera composers faced in getting their works received and accepted on their own terms and the charged situation in which Puccini's opera premiered.<sup>43</sup>

As Aldrich rightly pointed out, by 1910 several Americans had composed relatively successful operas. Living opera composers at the time included Walter Damrosch, Arthur Nevin, and of course Reginald De Koven, who was also music critic at the *New York World*. None of these composers wrote operas "based on Western life among the white pioneers."<sup>44</sup> Instead of writing the operatic versions of *The Virginian* or *Buffalo Bill's Wild West*, nineteenth and early-twentieth century composers who looked to the American west for musical inspiration chose to focus their works on Native American characters and stories.<sup>45</sup> Composers writing these types of operas

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<sup>42</sup> See, for example, a letter to the editor and Blumenberg's response in the 16 November issue of the *Musical Courier*. Blumenberg, "American Indian Subject."

<sup>43</sup> See also a letter to the editor and the response in the 16 November 1910 issue of *Musical Courier*. Blumenberg, "American Opera."

<sup>44</sup> "Musical News and Notes," *New York Times*, 24 July 1910.

<sup>45</sup> Michael V. Pisani has undertaken extensive research on so-called Indianist operas. Pisani's most recent publication is *Imagining Native America in Music* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), a revised version of his dissertation. For his dissertation, see: Michael V. Pisani, "Exotic Sounds in the Native Land: Portrayals of North American Indians in Western Music" (Ph.D., Eastman School of Music, University of Rochester, 1996). See also "From Hiawatha to Wa-Wan: Musical Boston and the Uses of Native American Lore," *American Music* 19, no. 1 (2001), and "I'm an Indian too: Creating Native American Identities in Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Music," in *The Exotic in Western Music*, ed. Jonathan Bellman (Boston: Northeastern University, 1998).

tended to place the figure of the Native American at the centre of the opera. The tales of Montezuma, Hiawatha, and Pocahontas all inspired operas by American and European composers.<sup>46</sup> Set in the forests and plains of the ever-westward-moving frontier, and usually told from the perspective of a Native American character, these operas constitute an identifiable set of operas linked to the frontier, although they differed considerably from the frontier melodramas and wild west shows of the early-twentieth century.<sup>47</sup> Theatrical precedents lie in the European exotic operas of the late eighteenth century and the rich tradition of early nineteenth-century American musical theater genres.<sup>48</sup> In fact the border-line between opera and melodrama was not clearly established. Some of these earlier melodramas were sometimes called operas and vice versa, such as Barker and Bray's *The Indian Princess; Or, La Belle Sauvage. An Operatic Melo-drame in Three Acts* (1808).<sup>49</sup>

*La fanciulla del West* differs significantly from these early Indian operas as well as from Indian operas contemporary to it. First, in contrast to operas like Arthur Nevin's *Poia* or Victor Herbert's *Natoma*, *La fanciulla del West* did not focus on a female Native American character.<sup>50</sup> Puccini's Native American characters do not serve any

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<sup>46</sup> See Pisani *Imagining Native America* (2005) for an extensive list of operas with Native American characters.

<sup>47</sup> Pisani has inventoried the musical gestures that composers associated with Native Americans. See *Imagining Native America* (2005).

<sup>48</sup> As Thomas Riis has pointed out, early-nineteenth century American theatre was very musical and displayed a rich variety of genres. Barker and Bray's play is claimed as both an example of an early American frontier melodrama and an early American opera by scholars in the respective fields of theatre history and music history. Riis, "Opera and the Operatic, Drama and the Melodramatic: What was the State of Things in Nineteenth-Century America" *Nineteenth-Century Theatre* 23, no. 1-2 (1995): 76-89. See Hall and Pisani for examples of early frontier melodramas and operas.

<sup>49</sup> John Bray, *The Indian Princess; or, La Belle Sauvage. An Operatic Melo-drame in Three Acts. Text by John Nelson Barker* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1972).

<sup>50</sup> Victor Herbert, *Natoma* (New York: Schirmer, 1911); Arthur Finaly Nevin and R Hartley, *Poia* (Berlin: Adolph Fürstner, 1905).

structural, dramatic function in the opera. Secondly, although Puccini gathered and studied Native American musical sources, his manner of using them differed in subtle ways from how other composers at the time were using Native American musical materials in their own compositions. Namely, when Puccini followed the convention of composing an accompaniment for a transcribed Native American melody, one of the two main practices in the early-twentieth century that Pisani has identified, he did not label the material in a way that identified its Native American identity, either by means of linguistic signifiers such as a distinctive title or lyrics that connected the melody to Native Americans, or by having a Native American character sing that music.<sup>51</sup>

The opera shows little trace of the second main practice contemporaneous composers followed in their attempts to create a musical space for Native Americans: the use of idiomatic devices signalling Native Americans that developed on the musical theatre stages during the course of the nineteenth century.<sup>52</sup> As Michael V. Pisani has shown, devices such as the war dance, tom-tom music, the lament and the scale-degree 6-5-6-5 ostinato accompaniment pattern signalled the presence of Native Americans on stage to American musical-theatre audiences and became “virtually synonymous with musical expressions of the ‘frontier.’”<sup>53</sup> Pisani demonstrated that some of the musical devices used to indicate Native Americans belong to other non-“Indian” exotic pieces or repertoires,<sup>54</sup> and Wowkle’s 13-measure lullaby that opens the second act belongs to this more generic type of exotica, but it does so within the framework of the whole-tone scale. The orchestra presents an ostinato accompaniment consisting of open octaves

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<sup>51</sup> See for example “*Che faranno i miei vecchi*” in Act 1.

<sup>52</sup> Pisani, “*I’m an Indian too*,” 231.

<sup>53</sup> Pisani, “*I’m an Indian too*,” 240.

<sup>54</sup> Pisani summarizes the exotic features of “war dances” composed by Euro-American composers between 1890 and 1920. See Pisani, “*I’m an Indian too*,” 229-30.

oscillating between F-sharp and C in the lower voices that support two chords, B-flat-D-B-flat and B-flat-D-A-flat, in the upper voices. Limited in range and contour, Wowkle's melody centres on D and consists mainly of an oscillation between D and the lower neighbour C, with the occasional escape to the upper G (See musical example one, below).<sup>55</sup>

1 WOWKLE (cullando il bambino con voce piana e dolce)

Il mio bimbo è grande e pic - ci - no, è pic - ci - no, sta dentro la

(Violini) *pp*

7 2

cu - na, è grande e tocca la lu - na, tocca la lu - na col suo di - ti - no. Hao, wa - ri! Hao, wa - ri!

*pp*

Musical Example 1: Puccini, *La fanciulla del West*, Act II rehearsal 1.

<sup>55</sup> See Act II, rehearsal numbers 1-2.

“It Contributes Nothing Whatsoever of Indian or  
American Character to the Opera”

As the premiere drew close, critics and music journalists gave consideration to the upcoming work, particularly its Native American influences. For example, on 3 December the anonymous columnist “Mephisto” of *Musical America* wrote a lengthy reflection in which he connected the issue of Americans producing European art, the Frontier, and Native American musical sources by means of a reference to an American poem. The columnist reminded his readers how incongruous the sound of Italian music seemed to the narrator of Walt Whitman’s *Italian Music in Dakota* when he heard it in the barren wilderness of the American West:

How the tables turn with the succeeding years! It was not so very long ago that old Walt Whitman wrote a poem—so called by poetic license—called *Italian Music in Dakota*.

Somewhere out in the West he had heard a coronet solo play the *Miserere*, or some other familiar Italian work, and the thought of Italian civilization finding a place for itself among the Bad Lands was too much to resist.

Things are different now. The Italian composer of the day comes to America and brings us what? Not one of the old world stories re-told, but a tale of that far West in which it so astonished old Walt to find an encroachment of Italian opera.<sup>56</sup>

In the next section Mephisto addresses a few bars of music Puccini included with his autograph in a New York City newspaper article. Mephisto explains that the music comes from Jake Wallace’s aria—the “homesickness” theme—and then explains in an

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<sup>56</sup> Mephisto [pseud.], “Mephisto’s Musings,” *Musical America*, 3 December 1910, 7. “Mephisto’s Musings” is the name of a weekly opinion column in *Musical America* and was possibly written by John C. Freund, the magazine’s editor. Subsequent references will include the date of the column, to avoid any confusion.



authoritative tone that this motive was “nothing more than a Zuñi sun dance.”<sup>57</sup>

Making a further stipulation about the source, he explains:

It is not, as the writer of the article in your paper says, a Zuñi Indian tune used by Carlos Troyer in his *Festive Sun Dance of the Zunis*,—it *is* the actual festive sun dance of the Zuñi which was transcribed by Troyer on one of his visits to the people of that tribe.

It appears that Puccini has used at least one other Indian theme in his opera, a theme which has been treated by Harvey Worthington Loomis.<sup>58</sup>

This passage connects the cultural outsider Puccini not only with those advocating for the use of Native American music as the foundation for a national music, but also with the growing movement toward collecting folksong and the composers associated with Arthur Farwell’s Wa-Wan Press.

The following passage suggests that Mephisto’s main point, however, was to question the wisdom of using Native American material in the opera, a path that many had opposed. He raised the question of how Puccini could succeed where others like Troyer or Loomis, who had studied with Dvořák, had failed.

Here is the composer in America, much cursed by the chorus of critics for his use of Indian themes, contributing directly through this very work with Indian music to what is undoubtedly the greatest operatic sensation of the day.

Will the critics condemn Puccini on the same grounds, do you think? I am afraid that, however successful he may be, he will never lead the American critic around to giving the American composer credit for his work in unearthing this Indian material, and putting it, so to speak, into play. I am afraid that we are not through with this Indian question yet, much as our friends the critics would like to down it. I hear it rumoured that a number of

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<sup>57</sup> “Mephisto’s Musings,” *Musical America*, 3 December 1910, 7.

<sup>58</sup> “Mephisto’s Musings,” *Musical America*, 3 December 1910, 7.

the very best works submitted in a current prize competition have an Indian origin and character.<sup>59</sup>

Mephisto's prediction that Puccini would face steep criticism for his use of Native American music came true, as the following will demonstrate. Like Mephisto, the "chorus of critics" were deeply concerned with Puccini's treatment of Native American source materials, attempting to identify which particular melodies Puccini had used. The music magazines *Musical America* and *Musical Courier* published articles, editorials, and letters to the editor as well as reviews that scrutinized the Native American influences in *La fanciulla del West*. These discussions revisited the issues of quotation, imitation, and invention raised in the Dvořák debate as well as recognition, representation and authenticity.

Puccini remained fairly quiet in public about his Native American source materials. Regardless of Maxwell's 24 July claims to the contrary, critics knew that Puccini had inserted these, because for three years their own papers reported that Puccini had studied Native American music and that he had included some of that music in his score. During the period 1907-1909, papers occasionally printed small articles documenting Puccini's compositional process, sometimes with claims such as this from the *New York Times* in 1908: "Puccini has spent considerable time this summer studying Indian music, and some of this will be incorporated in the score . . ." <sup>60</sup> Journalists and critics seemed to have viewed this as a challenge to determine the

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<sup>59</sup> "Mephisto's Musings," *Musical America*, 3 December 1910, 7.

<sup>60</sup> "Farrar to be *Girl of the Golden West*," *New York Times*, 18 October 1908. For examples of other articles documenting the compositional process, see the following taken from the *New York Times*: "Puccini Halts Work on American Opera," *New York Times*, Oct 27, 1907; "Caruso a Demi-God to Italian Urchins," *New York Times*, 12 June 1910; "Herbert Opera for Hammerstein," *New York Times*, 5 April 1907; "New American Opera Plans," *New York Times*, 9 February 1908; "Puccini Got an Idea Here," *New York Times*, 7 July 1907; "Puccini Just in Time," *New York Times*, 19 January 1907; "Puccini Receives Libretto," *New York Times*, 3 February 1908; "Puccini Wants a Book for an American Opera," *New York Times*, 20 Jan 1907; "Puccini's Opera Plans," *New York Times*, 22 September 1907.

specific sources. The music critics thought they recognized three Native American melodies in the opera: “Festive Sun Dance,” “Lullaby,” and “Chattering Squaw.”<sup>61</sup> The critics traced the first two of these to Carlos Troyer’s collection of transcribed and harmonized Zuñi Indian melodies, which was published by Farwell’s press.<sup>62</sup> They believed that source of the third was Harvey Worthington Loomis’ collection of piano pieces *Lyrics of the Red Man: Sketches on American Indian Melodies*, Book II.<sup>63</sup>

Although Puccini’s biographers tend to point to Alice Fletcher’s book *Indian Story and Song* (1900) as one of his sources,<sup>64</sup> it is quite likely that Puccini also used the Zuñi music found in his copy of Natalie Curtis’s *The Indian’s Book* (1907), probably given to him by Alice Garrett, née Warder.<sup>65</sup> Extremely influential, Curtis’ work followed in the footsteps of Alice Fletcher, one of the first U.S. citizens to live

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<sup>61</sup> Carlos Troyer, *The Festive Sun Dance of the Zuñis, Traditional Songs of the Zuni Indians* (Philadelphia: Theo Presser, 1904); Carlos Troyer, *Invocation to the Sun-God (Zuñian Lullaby), Traditional Songs of the Zuni Indians* (Philadelphia: Theo Presser, 1904). Harvey Worthington Loomis, “The Chattering Squaw,” in *Lyrics of the Red Man: Sketches on American Indian Melodies, Book II, The Publications of the Wa-Wan Press* (New York: Schirmer, 1904).

<sup>62</sup> Carlos Troyer, *Traditional Songs of the Zuñis* (Newton Centre, Mass: Wa-Wan Press, 1904). Both “Festive Sun Dance of the Zuñis” and “Zuñi Lullaby” are included in this book.

<sup>63</sup> Harvey Worthington Loomis, *Lyrics of the Red Man: Sketches on American Indian Melodies, Book II, The Publications of the Wa-Wan Press* (New York: Schirmer, 1904).

<sup>64</sup> Alice Fletcher, *Indian Story and Song from North America* (Boston: Small Maynard and Company, 1900).

<sup>65</sup> Natalie Curtis, ed., *The Indian's Book: An Offering by the American Indians of Indian Lore, Musical Narrative, to Form a Record of the Songs and Legends of Their Race*, First ed. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1907). The book remains in the material collection of Villa Puccini in Torre del Lago, with an inscription inside “For Signor Puccini, from Alice Warder.” I am grateful to Simonetta Puccini, director of Casa Puccini and Istituto di Studi Pucciniani, for allowing me to examine this book. Puccini appears to have loaned this book to Zangarini sometime before June 12 1908. Letters dated 12 June 1908, 4 September 1908, 9 September 1908 from Giulio Ricordi to Zangarini ask the librettist to return the book to Puccini. See Giulio Ricordi to Carlo Zangari, “I copialettere di Casa Ricordi,” (Milan: L’Archivio Storico Ricordi Copia Letterea, 1907/08): vol. 17, 54, and (1908/09): vol. 1, 54, 127.

among the remaining Native American tribes at the end of the nineteenth-century. Curtis was well recognized as an authority on Native American music, and composers such as Federico Busoni used her transcriptions as the basis for their own original compositions. She was also well known as an accomplished pianist, having studied at the National Conservatory in New York City as well as in Europe. Her book was highly praised and consulted even today as a witness to the cultural life of the Native Americans tribes she visited.

In using music from Curtis's book, Puccini chose a source some Americans would have associated with a social justice agenda.<sup>66</sup> Curtis's work extends beyond a purely ethnographic study toward an act of advocacy on the behalf of Native Americans. She takes pains to present a sympathetic picture of the Native American situation, following the Indian Removal Act of 1830, and the later Dawes Act of 1887, in which Native Americans were first forced off their ancestral lands onto U.S. government-designated reservations, and then forced to watch without recourse as parts of the reservations were gradually sold off. She also explains how the United States government banned Native Americans from singing in government schools and on reservations.<sup>67</sup> Just prior to the book's introduction, Curtis includes a letter from President Theodore Roosevelt, a family friend whom she persuaded to lift the governmental ban on the performance of Native American music.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> It is unclear whether Puccini ever considered the extra-musical associations of this book. At present no evidence exists that suggest whether or not he wanted to personally join Curtis in pursuing a more fair treatment of Native American people by the American Government.

<sup>67</sup> Curtis, ed., *Indians' Book*, xxxii.

<sup>68</sup> "These songs cast a wholly new light on the depth and dignity of Indian thought, the simple beauty and strange charm—the charm of a vanished elder world—of Indian poetry." See Curtis, ed, *Indians' Book*, xx.

*The Indian's Book* offers a very different impression of the West from what was sold as authentic in the *Buffalo Bill* shows. However, like Cody and his promotion team, Curtis also appealed to the then-current standards of ethnographic authenticity for the field, which in her case was folk-music collecting and ethnography. In addition to Roosevelt's endorsement, she had a Native American leader validate her work. Hiamovi (High Chief), Chief among the Cheyennes and the Dakotas wrote the forward and addressed it "To the Great Chief at Washington, and to the Chiefs of Peoples across the Great Water." He stressed the authority of the text, claiming that the people performing the songs and telling the stories were "the best men of their tribes" and that the "Indians are the authors of this volume. The songs and stories are theirs; the drawings and title-pages were made by them. The work of the recorder has been but the collecting, editing, and arranging of the Indians' contribution."<sup>69</sup> Curtis further validated her work by following the leading scholarly or "scientific" methods of the period. She documented her field work with photos and adjusted western notation as much as that system would allow in an attempt to reflect as accurately as possible the pitches and rhythms of the original music.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Curtis, ed., *Indians' Book*, ix-x.

<sup>70</sup> The Curtis book presents over 200 transcriptions of the melodies and lyrics for songs, poems and tales performed in the communities of twenty-one different Native American tribes. In each of the sections, organized by geographical region and then by tribe, Curtis briefly explains the context of the song and its significance to the tribe. Before the discussion and music for each tribe, Curtis included a coloured title page illustrated by someone from the tribe with figures symbolic to the culture of the tribe and stylized letterings by a Native American artist. Interspersed throughout the book are photographic portraits of tribal chiefs and other tribe members captured in various aspects of tribal life often with a background that suggests the specific part of the country in which the tribe had settled. Also scattered through out the book are drawings and sketches of musical instruments and other objects typical or unique to different tribes. The first edition books were beautifully bound, with cloth covers decorated to evoke the image of a Native American sand painting.

The critics who discussed the Native American melodies considered the appropriateness of the Zuñi and Cree sources and evaluated the methods by which Puccini integrated those sources into the music. Most of these critics assumed that Puccini chose the melodies to add a touch of local colour to the opera. Each of the critics who chose to discuss this aspect of the opera found Puccini's use of Zuñi and Cree melodies problematic in some way. Six basic claims emerge from the reviews: 1) the original melodies were transformed beyond recognition; 2) the original melodies were unfamiliar to New York Metropolitan audience, and therefore unrecognizable; 3) the melodies were not used in the appropriate dramatic situations; 4) the Zuñi and Cree sources were not real music; 5) the use of Native American sources overpowered Puccini's original melodic voice and explained the lack of melody in the opera 6) Puccini subtly infused his musical vocabulary with the Zuñi and Cree music in the same manner as Dvořák in the *New World Symphony*. These claims were supported in varying depth. Three places in particular drew attention as sites of possible Native American music quotations: Jake Wallace's aria "Che Lontanno e faranno" in Act I, Wowkle's lullaby at the opening of Act II, and Johnson's Act II admission of love to Minnie, "Io no ti lascio più."

In Jake Wallace's aria, Puccini used a quotation of Native American music, but for a non-Native character and transformed it so that only those who knew the music well would recognize it.<sup>71</sup> This quotation received the most attention and the question of its effectiveness produced a wide range of answers, many of which were tinged with racism. Not surprisingly, Arthur Farwell's discussions of the Native American music were the most substantive of all the reviews. An important figure in the movement to

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<sup>71</sup> Musicologist Allan Atlas has persuasively demonstrated that the melody of Jake Wallace's aria "Che Lontanno e faranno" from of Act I of *La fanciulla del West* closely matches Troyer's adaptation of a Zuñi song. See Allan W. Atlas, "Belasco and Puccini: 'Old Dog Tray' and the Zuni Indians," *Musical Quarterly* 75 (1991): 362-97.

preserve Native American music, Farwell had founded the Wa-Wan Press (1901-1911) in order to promote American compositions drawing on Native American songs and dances.<sup>72</sup> In his own compositions, he approached the incorporation of Native American sources by using the melodies in their entirety and in a way that related them to their original context.<sup>73</sup> *La fanciulla del West* did exactly the opposite, and he criticized it accordingly. Farwell judged the presence of this music as an empty gesture, completely failing to establish a Native American or a generic American character in the opera. In the case of the Zuñi dance music, he explained:

This is used as the 'homesick song' of the first act, and is sung by Jake Wallace, the minstrel. It is the first theme heard in the opera, and the last, and is variously employed in Acts I and III, usually as expressive of yearning, of purer emotions, and of love. But instead of being retained in its original rigidly rhythmic character, as a ceremonial dance, it is converted into a melody of 'linked sweetness, long drawn out,' and while it makes good music, it contributes nothing whatsoever of Indian or American character to the opera.<sup>74</sup>

Farwell almost sounds as if he thought Puccini had dislocated the original music.

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<sup>72</sup> Evelyn Davis Culbertson, "Arthur Farwell's Early Efforts on Behalf of American Music, 1889-1921," *American Music* 5, no. 2 (1987): 156-75. Beth Levy's dissertation presents a thoughtful discussion of Farwell's activities with the Wa-Wan in relation to nationalism. See Beth E. Levy, "Frontier Figures: American Music and the Mythology of the American West, 1895-1945" (Ph.D. diss., University of California at Berkeley, 2002), 45-58. See Levy for bibliography on Farwell. For an extensive bibliography of Farwell's own writings about American music, see Pisani, "Exotic Sounds." The whole collection of pieces published by the press can be found in Vera Brodsky Lawrence, ed., *The Wa-Wan Press, 1900-1911*, 5 vols (New York: Arno Press and The New York Times, 1970). For a discussion on Farwell's writings about Native American music, see for example Pisani, "From Hiawatha to Wa-Wan."

<sup>73</sup> Tara Browner, "Breathing the Indian Spirit': Thoughts on Musical Borrowing and the 'Indianist' Movement in American Music," *American Music* 15 (1997): 275.

<sup>74</sup> Arthur Farwell, "Giacomo Puccini and His Work," *Musical America*, 17 December 1910. See rehearsal number 20 through to the end of rehearsal number 26 of the orchestral score. Giacomo Puccini, *La fanciulla del West in Full Score* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 1997).

The theme of recognition and the role it played in contributing to the music's local colour returns in many of the discussions about the presence or absence of Native American music in *La fanciulla del West*'s score. This was especially the case for the Jake Wallace aria. For example, Farwell implied that Puccini should have directly quoted the Native American song, rather than using it as raw musical material, so that listeners could hear it. He argued that the rhythmic transformations of the original melody and the subsequent drastic change in style prevented the quotation from conveying a sense of local colour. This passage also demonstrates that Farwell saw a difference between the question of good music and the ability of the sources to establish an American character, suggesting that for Farwell the failure of the opera to convey a sense of local colour would not necessarily affect the overall musical quality of the opera.<sup>75</sup> Henry T. Finck, on the other hand, took the opposite position. Although he found the music of Act I generally underwhelming, he praised Puccini's application of Native American music in Act I. For Finck, the only interesting part of the first act was Wallace's aria "Che Lontano e faranno" because of the fact that it had been derived from a Zuñi folksong.<sup>76</sup>

Farwell, Krehbiel, and Aldrich found Puccini's transformation of the Native American music perplexing since they doubted the average member of the Metropolitan Opera House audience would be acquainted well enough with actual Native American music to recognize it if they heard it. Krehbiel for instance asked, "Why an Indian tune when it has no significance and where no one can recognize it?"<sup>77</sup> Aldrich's position was even more negative:

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<sup>75</sup> For musical examples, see Atlas, "Belasco and Puccini."

<sup>76</sup> Finck, "Puccini's New Opera." Finck wrote: "The minstrel's song owes its chief interest to the fact that it is a Zuñi Indian tune."

<sup>77</sup> Krehbiel, "Sensational Production."



. . . Mr. Puccini has tried to introduce some “American” themes in the shape of Indian tunes or phrases. But his attempt is a complete failure, and probably does not even enter into the ken of most of his listeners. . . Even if it were ten times more striking than it is, it would convey no meaning to the audience at the Metropolitan, which knows probably less about North American Indian music than it does about Japanese, and upon those ears it falls with quite as strange and foreign a cadence. “American local colour” is not to be gained by anybody through the use of Indian melodies, if melodies they can be said to be, simply because they are nothing and mean nothing to the present occupants of American soil.<sup>78</sup>

Aldrich’s comments are striking, and appear on the verge of racism. He seems to reject the idea that Native Americans qualified as “real” Americans and concluded that therefore their music could not serve as a musical symbols or signifiers of Americans. Moreover, since Native American music does not sound “American” to Metropolitan Opera House audiences, it is not really “American” and cannot contribute to the atmosphere or local colour, even if it is present in the score. Finally, he seems to take an extreme position by dismissing Native American music as music altogether.

Farwell shared Aldrich’s complaint that this music was so foreign to the audience at the Metropolitan Opera House that it could not possibly have any symbolic value in the opera and was questionable on musical grounds. He focused mainly on the point that for the music to work as a symbol of Americans or Native Americans, the opera’s audience needs to be capable of making a direct connection between the music and the people it signified. Farwell argued that since the majority of the Metropolitan Opera House’s audience would not recognize Native American music for what it was, that music consequently would have no value as a symbol to that particular audience.

The interesting and curious phenomenon in connection with Puccini’s use of Indian themes is that these melodies *are not yet familiar to Americans*, and that such of his music as is based

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<sup>78</sup> Aldrich, “Critics Find Little American Colour.”

upon them is foredoomed to fall upon deaf ears so far as American sympathies are concerned.

Beyond this, in all his use of American melodies, anachronism and anachronism run riot, so that even the elusive tints of Americanism to be discerned by the student of this music fail of any local or historical suggestiveness.<sup>79</sup>

Like Aldrich, Farwell sees Puccini's sense of American colour as highly esoteric. He is also effectively saying that only musical Americanisms that Metropolitan Opera House audiences can understand are truly American or worth incorporating to evoke Americanness in works intended for them. Finally, considering the Native American characters Puccini did include in the opera, Henderson mused:

On the other hand was it to be supposed that Mr. Puccini would immerse himself in the study of Indian chants only to be severely rebuked by Boston? No, the Indian appears to better advantage in *The Girl of the Golden West* as a poor whiskey thief, a creature without moral sense and a rather pitiable provider of comedy<sup>80</sup>

In addition to Jake Wallace's aria, some critics detected the presence of a Native American song: Wowkle's short lullaby in the opening of Act II. This lullaby raised the issue of authenticity from a different angle. While some critics thought that it was a quotation of Native American music, others believed it was simply Puccini's imitation of stereotypical Native American music, and identified this as a moment in the opera where Puccini should have worked in authentic Native American music.<sup>81</sup> The critics who tried to name the musical source of the passage were divided in their ideas about how Puccini had used that source. Most of them thought that Puccini used only the text from the lullaby and not the actual music. Farwell, for instance, connected the words only to Charles Troyer's edition:

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<sup>79</sup> Farwell, "Music of Puccini's Opera."

<sup>80</sup> Farwell, "Music of Puccini's Opera."

<sup>81</sup> See Act II, from rehearsal 1 to twelve measures after rehearsal 6, p. 189-194.

The music for the Indian woman's lullaby at the beginning of Act II is apparently wholly original with Puccini. At least it is intensely un-Indian. The words of this passage, however, "Grant, O Sun god," etc. are from Carlos Troyer's "Zuñian Lullaby," and are Prof. Troyer's translation of the original Indian text. They are in quotation marks in the piano-vocal score.<sup>82</sup>

Aldrich thought that Puccini had used some of the melody and his assessment of the passage's effect was similar to Farwell's.

At the opening of the second act, Wowkle croons to her papoose a fragment of a tune that is derived from the folksong of the Zuñi Indians. It might almost as well not be there for all the effect it makes, or for all the suggestion it conveys that here is something come out of the American soil. Even if it were ten times more striking than it is, it would convey no meaning to the audience.<sup>83</sup>

Other critics discussed this passage, observing that Wowkle's music did not sound how they expected it should. Henderson, for instance, dismissed the arietta outright, calling it the "second act droning Sun god song of the squaw Wowkle," and arguing that the "Indian music is not very Indian."<sup>84</sup> He remarked that Puccini had evidently not been "acquainted with the chants of American aboriginals," and, like Aldrich and Farwell, Henderson claimed that this passage "contributes nothing of Indian or American character." The anonymous critic of the *Musical Courier* also mentioned this scene, both the lullaby and following exchange between Wowkle and Billy, as the most obvious place in the opera for Puccini to use a Native American melody and complained that he had not. This critic also found the scene harmonically weak, writing, "here Puccini could justifiably have practiced his harmonic and

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<sup>82</sup> Farwell, "Music of Puccini's Opera."

<sup>83</sup> Richard Aldrich, "Critics Find Little American Colour in Puccini's Opera *The Girl of the Golden West*," *New York Times*, 18 December 1910.

<sup>84</sup> Henderson, "Puccini's Latest Opera;" Smith, "Puccini's New Opera of Golden West a Triumph;" Troyer, "Invocation to the Sun-God (Zuñian Lullaby)."

contrapuntal skill upon a tune or two of authentic Indian origin.”<sup>85</sup> Finck also wondered why Puccini “neglected the opportunity to introduce some Indian strains at least in the orchestra, where they most belonged—at the beginning of this act, where there is a scene for Billy and his squaw.”<sup>86</sup> For these three critics, Henderson, the *Musical Courier* critic and Finck, the absence of convincing Native music at this moment was a missed opportunity.<sup>87</sup> Several critics objected to apparent absence of authentic Native American music for Native American characters. Doing so would have directly paralleled frontier plays and fiction that had characters speak in regional dialect, and his critics clearly expected that he would do this. For example, Farwell wrote:

The music for the Indian characters is distinguishingly Indian in almost no respect, a curious circumstance in view of the fact that Puccini examined many Indian melodies during the early stages of his work. Nor does this music, in itself, bear any possible psychological relation to the Indian. The Indians in the opera are impossible caricatures, physically, mentally, and morally.<sup>88</sup>

Farwell’s comment suggests sympathy with the Native American characters in terms of how Puccini’s opera depicted them as an ethnic group. He was one of the only critics to object to their depiction on both musical and non-musical grounds. Smith described Billy’s music in an unfavourable way. He explained that Puccini used a “peculiar distorted figure in sixteenth notes, built on the whole-tone scale,” which made “its

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<sup>85</sup> “Premiere of Puccini’s New Opera.”

<sup>86</sup> Finck, “Puccini’s New Opera.”

<sup>87</sup> Allan Atlas has persuasively demonstrated that Puccini probably had access to Troyer’s scores, since the melody of Jake Wallace’s aria “Che Lontanno e faranno” from of Act I of *La fanciulla del West* closely matches Troyer’s adaptation of a Zuñi song. See Allan W. Atlas, “Belasco and Puccini: ‘Old Dog Tray’ and the Zuni Indians,” *Musical Quarterly* 75 (1991): 362-97. Allan W. Atlas, “Belasco and Puccini: ‘Old Dog Tray’ and the Zuni Indians,” *Musical Quarterly* 75 (1991).

<sup>88</sup> Atlas, “Belasco and Puccini.”

appearance when attention is centred on Billy, an Indian. This figure, and others associated with it, which are used to advantage in the introduction to the second act, suggest inevitably Strauss's *Salome*.”<sup>89</sup> When Billy's “distorted” figure returned in the second act, Smith noted that the “peculiar theme associated with the Indian, Billy, in the first act, now suggests the shrieking of the wind.”<sup>90</sup> Smith's observation connects Puccini characters to the tradition in exotic opera of altering the music of the non-European characters in a way that suggests their difference.<sup>91</sup>

Johnson's admission of love to Minnie, “Io no ti lascio più,” drew the attention of three critics for its possible Native American connection.<sup>92</sup> Two of these critics, Finck and Farwell, thought that Puccini took a passage from the piano piece the “Chattering Squaw,” found in *Lyrics of the Red Man*, Bk. II, by Harvey Worthington Loomis.<sup>93</sup> Finck claimed that it was “the best vocal number in the act.”<sup>94</sup> The third critic, William Henderson, claimed only that the passage consisted of music inflected with a Native American style. Worthington's *Lyrics of the Red Man* was a collection of

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<sup>89</sup> Smith, “Puccini's New Opera of Golden West a Triumph.”

<sup>90</sup> Smith, “Puccini's New Opera.” The first scene Smith describes only appears in the 1910 editions of the score. The textual history of *La fanciulla del West* has not been thoroughly compiled, so a fully documented explanation for this scene's removal remains unclear at this time. Its omission in subsequent editions suggests that Puccini, Toscanini, or someone at Casa Ricordi requested its excision. It is in Act I and follows the schoolroom scene, coming just before the arrival of the pony express. See the 1910 Ricordi piano-vocal score, from Andante calmo, six measures before r. 53 to r. 58, 73-78. Giacomo Puccini, Guelfo Civinini, and Carlo Zangarini, *La fanciulla del West* (Milano: Ricordi, 1910).

<sup>91</sup> See Ralph Locke *Musical Exoticism: Images and Reflections* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) for an examination of the ways in which European composers altered standard musical gestures in order to indicate a character's status as a non-European.

<sup>92</sup> See Andante Mosso, three measures after rehearsal 30, through to the end of rehearsal 31. Puccini, *La fanciulla del West in Full Score*.

<sup>93</sup> Loomis, “The Chattering Squaw.”

<sup>94</sup> Finck, “Puccini's New Opera.”

piano pieces inspired by specific Native American songs and dances, not a collection of transcriptions designed to preserve and transmit Native American music, such as found in the work of Fletcher or Curtis.<sup>95</sup> Accordingly, the nature of the source material differed from the two other cases discussed above. In a rare example of critics directly referring to each other's reviews, Farwell's discussion of "Io no ti lascio più," contains a direct quote from Henderson's 11 December review—a passage asserting that Puccini had composed music imitative of Native American music. Farwell argued that Puccini had not only imitated Native American music, he had in fact adapted a piece called "Chattering Squaw," and had significantly changed the rhythm in the process.<sup>96</sup>

Of the melody of which Puccini makes much in the love music of the second act, and which is sung by Johnson at "I'll never give you up" ("Io non ti lascio più"), the critic of the *New York Sun* writes:

He has hit upon a strain which recalls some of the American music of Dvôrák, and which will therefore give pain to Boston, because in this case it will be difficult to prove that it is Bohemian instead of imitation darky.

The melody in question is an adaptation, in a rhythmic metamorphosis, of an Indian song, "The Chattering Squaw," used by Harvey Worthington Loomis in his composition of that name in Book II of his *Lyrics of the Red Man*.<sup>97</sup>

Farwell's identification of the musical source for this passage confirms Finck's 12 December suggestion that Puccini had used "The Chattering Squaw" as his source.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Natalie Curtis, ed., *The Indian's Book: An Offering by the American Indians of Indian Lore, Musical Narrative, to Form a Record of the Songs and Legends of their Race*, First ed. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1907).

<sup>96</sup> Loomis, "The Chattering Squaw."

<sup>97</sup> Farwell, "Music of Puccini's Opera;" Henderson, "Puccini's Latest Opera."

<sup>98</sup> Finck, "Puccini's New Opera."

Farwell connected Puccini to another composer, Loomis (an American Indianist composer), who had used the same source material.<sup>99</sup> Farwell's quotation of Henderson's review, and its discussion of the provocative nature of Puccini's musical source material, recalls the on-going debate over the problem of American music, particularly the debate over whether or not Native American musical materials could sufficiently endow music in the European art music tradition with American musical qualities. Farwell's quote also underlines the vulnerable position in which a European composer placed himself when he or she chose to compose music based on an American subject and/or using musical materials from the African-American and Native American communities.

Henderson suggested that Puccini knew of the dangers of writing an opera with a significant Native American influence. Part of Henderson's second review of the opera includes a discussion of the spectacular element of opera. In that section, Henderson speculated that Puccini had deliberately avoided writing an Indianist opera, such as *Hiawatha*. Henderson reasoned that Caruso and Destinn were not physically suitable singers for the characters of Hiawatha and Laughing Water, remarking, “. . . and think of the vast and disconcerting incongruity of permitting these two creatures of aboriginal fable to stand in the centre of the stage with baby lenses playing glorifying light upon their brown countenances while they sang out their souls in music like that of Rodolpho and Mimi!”<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> This passage contains one of the few instances of a direct quotation of another review in a critic's own review. The connection is important for at least two reasons. First, it suggests that the critics knew each other's views, had possibly discussed them before they had officially seen the work. However, this review was published on 18 December, while Henderson's was on 11 December.

<sup>100</sup> Henderson, “Puccini and his *Golden Girl*.”

Three days following the premiere, *The Telegraph* published a story, possibly a joke, claiming that Henry Savage had recommended to Puccini that he remove the Native American melody supporting Wallace's aria from the opera altogether and replace it with *Dixie*. The story placed Puccini, Ricordi, Maxwell, and Henry Savage together over a spaghetti dinner discussing the American elements in the opera.

"There is one part of your score, my good Puccini," said Mr. Savage in choice Italian, "which needs rewriting with a strong infusion of American ragtime as the [leit] motif."

The Man who wrote *La Bohème*, *Tosca*, and *Butterfly*, ruffled his hair in disapproval. "What part of the score do you refer to?" he asked.

George Maxwell looked like a horrified devotee who has listened to an awful blasphemy, and Signor Ricordi dropped his eyeglass into the spaghetti a la Cova, with which he was fortifying his musical constitution.

"When you introduce a blackface minstrel act into *The Girl of the Golden West*," said Mr. Savage, "you have the gentleman of colour twang his banjo to a weird Indian melody instead of a thrum of ragtime. That is not right, and it is not American. You ought to have him pick the banjo to the tune of *Suwanee Ribber* or *Dixie*, you know, to be strictly true to life.

"Si, si, e ever," muttered Ricordi, rescuing his vision from billows of spaghetti.

"Very good," assented the composer; "how does it sing itself, that *Dixie*?"

And while a trio of voices interpreted the ideas of Mr. Savage to Mr. Maxwell and the erudite Ricordi as to how "Dixie" should be sung Puccini took copious notes on the margin of a menu card.

"But that Indian melody makes a motif that runs through the rest of the score," he said.

"Never mind, cut it out," cried the American impresario. "You know what a hit the *Star Spangled Banner* motif made in



*Butterfly*. Give the American public a chance to applaud *Dixie* in *The Girl of the Golden West* and you have made yourself immortal.”

There was a thoughtful expression in the eye of Puccini as he stowed the memorandum away in his inner pocket, and when he took his overcoat from the checkroom boy outside the door he was softly humming the refrain of *Dixie*.<sup>101</sup>

The above passage summarizes the problems of authenticity many critics suggested weakened the opera. In making fun of the idea of using popular tunes in an opera for the sake of pleasing the audience, it highlights the tension between Puccini’s esoteric approach to Americanism and one more populist in tone. Savage’s “suggestion” to rewrite the opera by replacing Jake Wallace’s theme with *Dixie* went unheeded. However, Puccini and Belasco did reconsider the blackface costuming of Jake Wallace and they changed it for the second performance.<sup>102</sup> The following day, the *Sun* commented: “The performance presented no new features of grave importance unless it be significant that M. De Segurola as Jake Wallace, the minstrel, abandoned the guise of a wandering Ethiopian and assumed a dress somewhere between that of a miner and that of a Sicilian bravo.”<sup>103</sup> The idea of an Italian playing an American pretending to be an African American while singing Native American music transgressed too many ethnic boundaries.

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<sup>101</sup> “Puccini Hears that Dixie Tune. Advised by Henry W. Savage to Put Southern Song into His Latest Opera. At a Spaghetti Conference,” *The New York Telegraph*, December 13 1910..

<sup>102</sup> Max Smith, “*Girl of the Golden West* Gains with Repetition,” *New York Press*, 18 December 1910.

<sup>103</sup> “Yesterday at the Opera,” *New York Sun*, 18 December 1910. Editions of Stephen Foster's songs, which were published by the Baltimore Company F.D. Benteen, often included the phrase “A Favourite Ethiopian Song” on their cover pages. For example, see their 1857 printing of “Camptown Races.”

“In All His Use of American Melodies, Anachronism  
and Anapopism Run Riot”

Critics scrutinized the presence of other musical Americanisms in the opera, such as the music of Stephen Foster, ragtime, and instrumental music based on American themes. They questioned the relative value of this music as a musical marker of the United States, in particular of the Western frontier of the mid-nineteenth century. Few critics were satisfied with the results. As one critic put it, “Our Western America has no ‘folk melodies,’ and California never knew any music redolent of its soil except perhaps the songs brought there by the Spanish settlers and corrupted Iberian chants received by way of Mexico and South America.”<sup>104</sup> The concern over which folk music would serve the purposes of those wanting to write American sounding music surfaces in both the Dvořák debate and the spring of 1910 when critics raised concerns about what American opera should sound like.

Although a great deal of emphasis in the Dvořák debate centred on Native American music’s potential function as source material for an American national music, Dvořák considered other sources as well. With regards to African American music, he explained that “I am now satisfied...that the future music of this country must be founded upon what are called the Negro melodies. This must be the foundation of any serious and original school of composition to be developed in the United States.”<sup>105</sup> Later, he added

Since I have been in this country I have been deeply interested in the national music of the negroes and the Indians. Their character, the very nature of a race is contained in its national music. For that reason my attention was at once turned in the direction of these native melodies. I found that the music of the

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<sup>104</sup> “*The Girl of the Golden West.*” Premiere of Puccini’s New Opera December 10, 1910,” *Musical Courier* 14 December 1910, 22-23.

<sup>105</sup> “Real Value of Negro Melodies.”

two races bore a remarkable similarity to the national music of Scotland. In both cases there is a peculiar scale, caused by the absence of the fourth and the seventh, or leading tone. In both the minor scale has the seventh invariably a minor seventh, the fourth included and the sixth omitted.<sup>106</sup>

Though Dvořák's writings and pieces demonstrate a strong connection to "plantation" or "negro" songs and "Indian chants," Charles Hamm has emphasized that Dvořák ultimately claimed that the seed for American music could be found in the all the different types of music co-existing in the United States.<sup>107</sup>

For Dvořák, nationality in music existed "in the sense that it may take on the character of its locality," and "every nation has its music."<sup>108</sup> Dvořák took the view that American composers needed to immerse themselves in the everyday life and music of the nation.<sup>109</sup> When a composer "walks down the street, he should listen to every whistling boy, every street singer, or blind organ grinder." Such an approach could allow the composer to "catch a strain or hear the fragments of a recurring melodic theme that sounds like the voice of the people." This music had significance and was

. . . worth preserving, and no one should be above making a lavish use of all such suggestions. It is a sign of barrenness,

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<sup>106</sup> As quoted in Michael Beckerman, "Henry Krehbiel, Antonin Dvořák, and the Symphony 'From the New World,'" *Notes* 49 (1992): 447-74. For discussion on Dvořák's use of the pentatonic scale in the music of his "American" period see David Beveridge, "Sophisticated Primitivism: The Significance of Pentatonicism in Dvořák's American Quartet," *Current Musicology* 24 (1977): 25-36.

<sup>107</sup> Hamm argues that Dvořák advocated for a national school of music that would develop out the music of the culturally diverse American public, rather than simply drawing on quotes from different samples of folksong. See Hamm, "Dvořák, Nationalism, Myth, and Racism in the United States," 278-80.

<sup>108</sup> Michael Beckerman, "The Dance of Pua-Puk-Keewis, the Song of Chibiabos, and the Story of Iagoo: Reflections on Dvořák's 'New World' Scherzo," in *Dvořák in America, 1892-1895*, ed. John C. Tibbetts (Portland: Amadeus Press, 1993), 137; Dvořák, "Letter to the Editor;" Antonín Dvořák, "For National Music," *Chicago Tribune*, 13 August 1893.

<sup>109</sup> Beckerman, "Dance of Pua-Puk-Keewis," 337.

indeed, when such characteristic bits of music exist and are not heeded by the learned musicians of the age.<sup>110</sup>

The question remained: which music did Americans hear as they walked down the street?

Although fellow critic William Henderson joined Krehbiel in endorsing Dvořák's theories about using the music of the people, others did not.<sup>111</sup> Krehbiel blamed this resistance on a lack of understanding about Dvořák's compositional techniques and on an erroneous assumption that Dvořák

. . . meant the songs of Stephen C. Foster and other contributors to old time negro minstrelsy, and that the school of which he dreamed was to devote itself to the writing of variations on "The Old Folks at Home" and tunes of its class. Such a blunder, pardonable enough in the popular mind, was yet scarcely venial on the part of composers and newspaper reviewers, who had the opportunities to study the methods of Dr. Dvořák in his published compositions. Neither is it creditable to them, though perhaps not quite so blameworthy, that they have so long remained indifferent to the treasures of folk-song which America contains.<sup>112</sup>

Henderson also commented upon the public's misconception of how Dvořák would treat folk music in the symphony:

The composers, the critics, and the musical public all laboured under the delusion that Dvořák was going to take a pinch of *Bell da Ring*, *Marching Through Georgia*, and *Way Down Upon the Suwannee Ribber* and try to make a symphony with unsymphonic and inflexible melodies. The American composer had tried such tunes and—if we may be pardoned the word—they would not symphonise. The gentlemen might have known that they were dealing with a man to the symphonic manner born. They should have remembered what he had already done with the folk tunes of his own people. Rubinstein and Brahms and Hanslick and a few other Europeans made no silly predictions, but said they would await the result of Dr. Dvořák's experiment with much interest.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Richard Aldrich, "Antonin Dvořák and His Music," *New York Times*, 8 May 1904.

<sup>111</sup> Henderson, "Dr. Dvorak's Latest Work."

<sup>112</sup> Beckerman, "Henry Krehbiel," 458.

<sup>113</sup> Henderson, "Dr. Dvorak's Latest Work,"

Henderson found that both the identity of the source material and Dvořák's manner of deriving orchestral music from his source materials led to this accomplishment. Dvořák had "shown his thorough mastership of symphonic writing by avoiding the pitfall which has invariably entrapped the American composer." He had "not made any use whatever—except in one instance—of extant melodies."<sup>114</sup> Richard Aldrich, writing ten years later, agreed with Henderson's view:

Like other great champions of this element of strength and invigoration in artistic music he has used actual existing tunes with the utmost rarity; the form and spirit are what have given the characteristic colour to his work, and some of its most penetrating charm.<sup>115</sup>

Henderson, Krehbiel, and Aldrich all supported the use of folk music to generate an American sound, but not the direct quotation of it. In particular, the four-square phrasing of Stephen Foster-type melodies was incompatible with phrase structure of late-nineteenth-century music. Proponents advocated for Dvořák's more subtle approach of synthesizing the material into a composer's own compositional voice. This is the position Puccini seems to advocate in his pre-premiere interviews with New York City reporters.

"As Purely American as the Heart-Throbbing Songs of  
Stephen Foster"

Puccini may not have included the iconic tune "Dixie" in *La fanciulla del West*, but he did weave in musical or textual fragments from several other popular American songs or idioms.<sup>116</sup> Critics identified and discussed the treatment of two of them, "The

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<sup>114</sup> Henderson, "Dr. Dvořák's Latest Work."

<sup>115</sup> Aldrich, "Antonin Dvořák and His Music."<sup>115</sup>

<sup>116</sup> For background on the growth popular music at the turn of the twentieth-century, see Derek B. Scott, *Sounds of the Metropolis: The Nineteenth-century Popular Music Revolution in London, New York, Paris, and Vienna* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

Belle of the Barber's Ball" by George M. Cohan (1878-942) and "Camp Town Races" by Stephen C. Foster.<sup>117</sup> Cohan, a leading figure in New York City vaudeville and musical comedy, wrote eleven successful musical comedies by 1910 and owned several theatres in New York City.<sup>118</sup> Cohan's vaudeville sketches and musical comedies were known for their patriotic and morale-boosting songs such as "Yankee Doodle Boy," and "You're a Grand Old Rag," later known as "You're a Grand Old Flag."<sup>119</sup> In collaboration with Sam H. Harris, Cohan had formed a very successful minstrel company whose performances included "coon songs."<sup>120</sup> "Coon songs," which Edward A. Berlin defines as "negro dialect songs of the minstrel, vaudeville, and other

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<sup>117</sup> George M. Cohan, *The Belle of the Barber's Ball* (New York: Cohan and Harris Publishing, 1908); Stephen C. Foster, "Gwine to Run all Night, or De Camptown Races," in *Foster's Plantation Melodies as Sung by Christy and Campbell Minstrels and New Orleans Serenaders* (Baltimore; New Orleans: F.D. Benteen; W. T. Mayo, 1850).

<sup>118</sup> "Cohan and Harris Theatres and Attractions," *The Morning Telegraph*, 11 December 1910. The theatres included the George M. Cohan Theatre, The Gaiety Theatre, The New Amsterdam Theatre Building, The Astor Theatre, and The Grand Opera House. During the 1910 theatrical season, Cohan and Harris theatres produced two of Cohan's comedies *Get Rich Quick Wallingford* and *The Man Who Owns Broadway*. A coincidental connection between La fanciulla and Cohan occurred two days after the opera's premiere. An article describing a dinner given in Cohan's honor by the Society of American Dramatists appeared in the *New York Times* alongside an article about Emmy Destinn. See "Dramatists Dine Cohan," *New York Times*, 12 December 1910; "Emmy Destinn Sang under a Handicap," *New York Times*, 12 December 1910.

<sup>119</sup> For a brief discussion of Cohan in the context of Tin Pan Alley songwriters and publishers see Charles Hamm, *Yesterdays: Popular Song in America* (New York: Norton, 1979), 311-16. For recent research on Cohan's productions in the context of other vaudeville, musical, and operetta composers of the period, see Gabriel M. Brady, "George M. Cohan: The Original 'Yankee Doodle Dandy.'" *Manuscripts* 54, no. 3 (2002): 197-215; Gabriel M. Brady, "George M. Cohan: The Original 'Yankee Doodle Dandy.' Part 2," *Manuscripts* 54, no. 4 (2002): 309-28. For an older study and bibliography, consult Frank Warren Glann, "An Historical and Critical Evaluation of the Plays of George M. Cohan, 1901-1920" (Ph.D. diss., Bowling Green State University, 1976). For bibliography, see also William E. Studwell, "Foreigners and Patriots: The American Musical, 1890-1927—An Essay and Bibliography," *Music Reference Services Quarterly* 3, no. 1 (1994): 1-10. For Cohan's autobiography, see George M. Cohan, *Twenty Years on Broadway and the Years it Took to Get There: The True Story of a Trouper's Life from the Cradle to the "Closed Shop"* (New York and London: Harper & Brothers, 1925).

<sup>120</sup> "Puccini Hears Coon Songs," *New York Times*, 25 February 1907.

musical stages that usually depicted blacks in a flagrantly disparaging (and supposedly humorous) manner,”<sup>121</sup> were extremely popular between 1890 and 1910.<sup>122</sup>

Farwell used Puccini’s treatment of “The Belle of the Barber’s Ball” as further evidence for the ineffective construction of local colour and lack of distinct American qualities in the opera. “Something is made of this, thematically, in the orchestra, in a smaller number of places, but its treatment and harmonic setting are such as to cause it to pass by the audience without conveying the slightest impression of its relation to American popular music.”<sup>123</sup> Once again, Puccini’s touch had rendered the musical source un-recognizable to his New York audience.

Farwell made no comment about Puccini’s reference to Stephen Foster’s “Camptown Races,” but Richard Aldrich reacted very negatively to the reference.<sup>124</sup> His argument about the reference was inconsistent, on the one hand taking Puccini to

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<sup>121</sup> Edward A. Berlin, “Ragtime Songs,” in *Ragtime: Its History, Composers and Music*, ed. John Edward Hasse (New York: Schirmer, 1985), 71.

<sup>122</sup> For a discussion of the “coon song” craze, see James H. Dorman, “Shaping the Popular Image of Post-Reconstruction American Blacks: The ‘Coon Song’ Phenomenon of the Gilded Age,” *American Quarterly* 40, no. 4 (1988): 450-71. Dorman investigates the cultural messages embedded in these songs, arguing that they were “ultimately a manifestation of a complex code of signification central to the entire racial discourse of late nineteenth-century America,” (466). Also insightful is Sam Dennison *Scandalize My Name: Black Imagery in American Popular Music* (New York: Garland, 1982). John G. Blair, “Blackface Minstrels and *Buffalo Bill’s Wild West* Nineteenth-Century Entertainment Forms as Cultural Exports,” in *European Readings of American Popular Culture*, John Dean and Jean-Paul Gabillet, eds. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996).

<sup>123</sup> Farwell, “Music of Puccini’s Opera.” Finck also mentioned it in passing: “But stay—there is another American vocal fragment (see page 6 of the vocal score)—a distinct allusion to George M. Cohan’s “The Bell of the Barber’s Ball,” Finck, “Puccini’s New Opera.” See Allegro Vivo at rehearsal number 5. Finck’s article also serves as a reminder that some of the critics wrote their reviews with a score on hand. “Musicus” informed his readers that the score was available a week before the premiere, “*The Girl of the Golden West*,” *The Daily Telegraph*, 10 December 1910.

<sup>124</sup> See p. 14 of the full score, two measures after rehearsal 6 until rehearsal 7 for the first time Puccini presents this material.

task for not including more references to Foster's music (and offering suggestions as to where) and on the other hand complaining about the Foster references that did appear:

Thus the miners in the Polka saloon, at the very beginning, join in what the Italian stage directions of the opera call "un ritornello Americano"—"Dooda, dooda, day." Mr. Puccini might have looked up the music of Stephen C. Foster to this jingle, which is in his song, "De Camptown Races," and used it. When the minstrel, Jake Wallace, comes in, he sings a song of Mr. Puccini's own devising—not free, however, from a haunting reminiscence—that sets the assembled miners to weeping from homesickness. Allusions in the text point to "The Old Folks at Home" and "Old Dog Tray," and there would be nothing more natural or appropriate than for the negro minstrel to sing precisely these songs, or for the miners to join in them.<sup>125</sup>

Aldrich's complaint about "Dooda, dooda, day" refers to the music at rehearsal 6, where Puccini used the text from Foster's song and inverted the melody. Aldrich's argument rests on the assumption that the melody needed to accompany the text and be quoted in full in order for the reference to be meaningful. In the case of "Dooda, dooda, day" Aldrich either missed the inversion altogether or refused to acknowledge it. Aldrich's second example of Puccini's misuse of Foster's songs refers to Jake Wallace's Act I aria, "Che faranno i vecchi miei." As other critics pointed out, the melody came from a Zuñi Indian song found in Carlos Troyer's publication, but the text derived from either Stephen Foster's popular song, "My Dog Tray" or from William Wallace Furst's vocal quartet of the song included the original Belasco melodrama *The Girl of the Golden West*.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Aldrich, "Critics Find Little American Colour." See Act I, rehearsal number 6

<sup>126</sup> See the Allan Atlas article on this piece for a discussion of the relationship between Puccini's setting of the text and the William Wallace Furst, the musical director of the original Belasco stage play, setting of the text. Atlas, "Belasco and Puccini." For an interesting study on the transmission of variations to Foster's "Oh! Susanna," see John Spitzer, "Oh! Susanna": Oral Transmission and Tune Transformation," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 47, no. 1 (1994): 90-136.



On the other hand, Mildenberg supported Puccini's treatment of Foster's music, which he viewed as unconditionally American. Mildenberg suggested a third place where Foster's music may have influenced the score of *La fanciulla del West*:

If Puccini has sought to suggest in any way a melody smacking of the cotton fields as purely American as the heart-throbbing songs of Stephen Foster, he has found one in the motif of Johnson's song in Act II, and its treatment as it develops into the duet with Minnie. This melody is as characteristically Southern as the *Suwanee River*. Even in the restrictions of its modulations, its whole lilt suggests Foster.<sup>127</sup>

Mildenberg stressed the depth to which the source material influenced the score. Instead of a direct quotation, he believed Puccini constructed Johnson's music in Act II in the style of Stephen Foster, and he began the next paragraph reinforcing this point: "upon this theme is built the longest part of the second act."<sup>128</sup> This method follows the suggestions of many in the Dvořák debate who argued for immersion in the source materials, but not the direct quotation of them. Continuing, he further supported Foster and his relevance as emblematic composer:

I say this with the full belief that someday, not far distant, our American composers will give Foster the honour he deserves, and it matters little whether the American composer consents to honour his countryman to that extent, for seventy millions of the people of the United States know and can sing a Foster melody now even if they do not know the themes of our composers' symphonic works, as yet.<sup>129</sup>

He then explicitly tied Puccini and Foster to the development of American national music:

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<sup>127</sup> Mildenberg, "True Americanisms in Puccini's Score?" See the Andante Mosso, three measures after Act II rehearsal 30 in the full score. Mildenberg's comments about the "heart throbbing songs of Stephen Foster" can be better understood in the context of the role nostalgia played in nineteenth-century parlour songs. See Susan Key, "Sound and Sentimentality: Nostalgia in the Songs of Stephen Foster," *American Music* 13, no. 2 (1995): 145-66.

<sup>128</sup> Mildenberg, "True Americanisms."

<sup>129</sup> Mildenberg, "True Americanisms."

The composer who is far-sighted enough to see that Suwannee River, Old Folks at Home, Kentucky Home, etc., have an element of sympathy and accurate descriptive quality which represents a [sic] something purely American and is able to cull from them a colour in building his own melodies and produce the result that Puccini has produced in this score of the *The Girl of the Golden West* is the composer that he will do well to emulate.<sup>130</sup>

Mildenberg goes beyond arguing that Puccini succeeded in creating an American opera, he comes very close to suggesting *La fanciulla del West* as a model for American music in this passage, and he was one of the few critics to expressly do so. Although his review may not have held as much weight as ones by leading New York City music critics such as Aldrich, Henderson, Krehbeil or Finck, it may have reached more readers than theirs. As an item in *Musical America's* 10 December issue his article would have been one of the first reviews published, likely based on the Thursday 8 December dress rehearsal, and it potentially had a wider circulation than some of the New York dailies—particularly outside of New York City—since it was a national publication.

“Ragtime in a Tragic-Dramatic Sense Is Something

Which Never Entered the Heads of the American People“

The first reference to American music in *La fanciulla del West* occurs in the form of a ragtime refrain which appears first as post-cadential material at the end of the prelude, and then again at Johnson's first entrance. Although nobody tied it to a specific piece, most recognized these few measures as being in the style of ragtime music, some referring to it as a cakewalk. Farwell and Aldrich questioned the capacity of ragtime to infuse the opera with an American feel, dismissing it on the grounds of anachronism, a transformation too far from the original, and a lack of musicality. These arguments were similar to the ones reviewers had used to criticize the inclusion of Native American melodies in the opera. Although Farwell argued that the ragtime music was well suited

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<sup>130</sup> Mildenberg, “True Americanisms.”

to the emotional situation and character of Johnson—his main point was to praise Puccini—he also claimed that it did not reflect the historical situation:

His motive, a fortissimo dramatic adaptation of ragtime rhythm, is well chosen from the psychological, if not from the historic, standpoint. . . It is expressive of daring and fierce strength . . . 131

Later in the review Farwell returned to his discussion of the dramatic purposes of the ragtime motive.

The fine burst of ragtime used as the motive of Johnson as Ramerrez the robber, and which has already been referred to, is as follows . . . This would lend an American tang to the music were it not for the striking fact that ragtime in a tragic-dramatic sense is something which never entered the heads of the American people, and this therefore passes as a sort of Wagnerian leitmotif, without ever so much as suggesting to the audience that it is their own familiar ragtime, and it therefore has in this sense nothing to contribute to any atmosphere in which an American would feel at home.<sup>132</sup>

Farwell allowed for the possibility of ragtime as an abstract musical signifier of America, but then negated its use on this occasion because the audience would never recognize it as ragtime in this context.<sup>133</sup> For Farwell it therefore severed only as a theoretical abstraction, one devoid of any content or meaning for this New York City audience for whom ragtime was a very well known and popular genre. His central concern rested on recognition and affective appropriateness.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Farwell, “Music of Puccini's Opera.”

<sup>132</sup> Farwell, “Music of Puccini's Opera.” See p. 1, the last six measures of the prelude to Act I.

<sup>133</sup> Farwell played a role in the debates during the first decade of the twentieth century over the value of ragtime music. Composers, musicians, and the musical public debated the issue in the pages of *Musical America*, *Musical Courier*, and other music magazines of the period. For a survey of the debate with a good bibliography of primary sources, consult Edward A. Berlin, “The Ragtime Debate,” in *Ragtime: A Musical and Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 32-60.

<sup>134</sup> Two years after *La fanciulla del West*, Farwell wrote several articles appearing in July, August, and September issues of *Musical America* critiquing contemporary views of ragtime. His articles sparked strong responses. See Berlin, “Ragtime Debate,” note 27, p. 58 for relevant bibliography.

Both of Richard Aldrich's 11 and 18 December reviews criticized the use of a ragtime motive as to convey the American setting of the opera. He directed his comments more at the musical nature of ragtime itself, than at its relative dramatic realism. In Aldrich's view, ragtime contributed to the local colour only in the faintest sense because it was mainly a rhythmic gesture, not a melodic or thematic one, and therefore could not sufficiently serve as a motive.

There are various snatches of that syncopated rhythm known as "rag time" now supposed to be typically "American," that are used repeatedly, but they are of astonishingly little melodic value, and indeed, seem intended to have only a rhythmic one.<sup>135</sup>

Moreover, as a rhythmic motive, syncopation was fairly universal and not unique to ragtime.

The only other trace of "Americanism" in the music is to be found in the several snatches of "rag time" rhythm that occur in the opera, not often very prominently, but still quite recognizably. "Rag time," it seems to be generally agreed everywhere nowadays, is American; though it is a rhythmic peculiarity that occurs in the music of many nations. It is more the rhythm than any tune, apparently, that Mr. Puccini has found useful in these passages; and they do not go a long way toward colouring the score with any local tinge.<sup>136</sup>

The universality of certain musical gestures was also an issue in the Dvořák debates. If a musical gesture was found in several different types of folk music, some critics argued that it could not represent a particular location or group of people. This reflected the larger tensions present in discussions about American diversity and national identity. James Huneker, for example, told the readers of the *Musical Courier*:

When the smoke of criticism has cleared away it will be noticed, first, that Dr. Dvořák has written an exceedingly beautiful symphony; secondly, that it is not necessarily American, unless to be American you must be composite. The new work,

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<sup>135</sup> Aldrich, "Melodrama Set to Music."

<sup>136</sup> Aldrich, "Critics Find Little American Colour."

thematically considered, is composite, sounding Irish, Slavic, Scandinavian, Scotch, negro, and German”<sup>137</sup>

Critics had pointed out that the musical gestures that Dvořák had suggested were quintessentially American could easily evoke several different nationalities: Czech, German, or Scottish. They heard it as a jumble of foreign elements.

Aldrich’s comments also speak to a general hostility from music critics at the time toward ragtime music. For example, Mildenberg took an aggressively negative view of ragtime music in his 10 December *Musical America* review, not even referring to it by its name.

The prelude to Act I is very short and contains little more than his two themes with a suggestion, during the last eight bars, of a syncopated motif that is used throughout the score in connection with Johnson’s entrance and his concerted work later on. By some this motif has been already accredited to Puccini’s desire to suggest a type of musical slang that he had been led to believe existed in the music of America. This is not so. Puccini denies any such intentions and well he can, for who does not know that the miserable syncopated slang that has been forced upon the American public in recent years is but a degeneracy of the present day and never existed during the “*days of '49*.”<sup>138</sup>

Aldrich himself practically refused to accept it as legitimate music, and resisted the view that it was distinctly American. The conflicted attitude about the ragtime and the reluctance to admit it into the genres of acceptable music was not particular to these critics. At the turn of the twentieth century, ragtime was a controversial musical genre and risqué in terms of race and class. As Edward Berlin has demonstrated, it sparked a debate among critics and composers over its legitimacy as an American genre of music, though the public generally supported it.<sup>139</sup> Those who supported ragtime viewed it as “a positive, innovative force and a long-awaited symbol of American cultural

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<sup>137</sup> James Huneker, “Dvorak’s New World Symphony: The Second Philharmonic Concert,” *Musical Courier* 1893.

<sup>138</sup> Mildenberg, “True Americanisms in Puccini’s Score?” 36.

<sup>139</sup> Berlin, “The Ragtime Debate,” 32-60.

independence,” while those in opposition viewed it as an “intrusion of a music that stemmed not from Europe but Africa, a music that represented to them not the civilization and spiritual nobility of European art but its very antithesis—the sensual depravity of African savagery, embodied in the despised American Negro.”<sup>140</sup> Still very much in fashion by 1910, ragtime surfaced in musical commentaries found in the periodical literature. The *Musical Courier*, for example, reprinted a 20 July 1910 article by Acton Davies from the New York Evening Sun in which he questioned the future of ragtime, arguing that had fallen out of style.

Ragtime is a back number; even the hand organs are discarding it in favour of more meritorious tunes. This, at least, is the decision of the members of the Musical Publishers' Union, which recently brought its yearly convention to a close. That these publishers are speaking by the card—or perhaps by the score would be the better phrase—it is only necessary to take a trip on one of the Coney Island excursion boats, those last courts of appeal of a popular song...Ragtime has degenerated into a nuisance, and no one will regret it less than the musical publishers themselves—provided, of course, that they can only find another and more ambitious line of music which will sell well . . . . At all events, no matter what the reason is, ragtime is dead.<sup>141</sup>

As Berlin and other musicologists have noted, ragtime did not become a “back number” and flourished well into the twentieth century, experiencing a “renaissance” in the 1970s.

Some parties opposed any music associated with African Americans. As such, in addition to ragtime, Stephen Foster’s music—and minstrelsy in general—faced some

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<sup>140</sup> Berlin, “Ragtime Debate,” 32. Berlin presented the debate over ragtime as it was carried out in American periodical literature from the 1890s to the 1920s and beyond. He noted that its detractors typically used five main lines of attack: ridicule, appeals to racial bias, prophecies of doom, attempts at repression, and suggestions of moral, intellectual, and physical dangers. Supporters argued that it was liked by most people, its rhythms were distinctive, unique, and innovative, it was the only music characteristically American, and it had the potential of further development in classical music and as such should form the basis of a national school of composition.

<sup>141</sup> Acton Davies, “Requiescat, Ragtime!” *Musical Courier*, 26 July 1910.

resistance at the turn of the twentieth century. Yet Henderson reminded his readers of the reasons why Dvořák found this type of music ideal:

Dr. Dvořák within the last year attracted to himself the attention of musicians the world over by a declaration of his belief that there was folk music in America—if not that of the whole people, yet expressive of certain distinct phase of American life, climate and domestic conditions, and historical events.<sup>142</sup>

Although Henderson and Krehbiel supported the use of music tied to African American culture to develop an American sound, many critics and composers did not. Some of the negative responses to Dvořák's symphony illustrate the types of responses people often made about the connection. For Boston composer John Knowles Paine, it was “a preposterous idea to say that in future American music will rest upon such a shaky foundation as the melodies of a yet largely undeveloped race.”<sup>143</sup> Fellow composer George Whitefield Chadwick concurred: “such negro melodies as I have heard . . . I should be sorry to see become the basis of an American school of composition.”<sup>144</sup> Amy Beach questioned the appropriateness of choosing musical sources to which a composer had no direct biographical connection:

. . . to those of us of the North and West there can be little if any “association” connected with Negro melodies. . . We of the North should be far more likely to be influenced by old English, Scotch or Irish songs . . . than by the songs of a portion of our people who were kept so long in bondage . . . It seems to me that, in order to make the best use of folk songs . . . the writer should be one of the people whose songs he chooses . . . If a Negro, the possessor of talent for musical composition, should perfect himself in its expression, then we might have the melodies which are his folk-songs employed with fullest sympathy, for he would be working with the inherited feelings of his race.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Henderson, “Dr. Dvořák's Latest Work.”

<sup>143</sup> Cited in Horowitz, “Dvořák and Boston,” 3-17.

<sup>144</sup> Horowitz, “Dvořák and Boston.”

<sup>145</sup> Block, “Boston Talks Back to Dvořák,” 11; Adrienne Fried Block, “Dvořák, Beach, and American Music,” in *A Celebration of American Music: Words and Music in Honor*

The reception of the ragtime gesture which became a motive for Sacramento sophisticate Dick Johnson was not very positive. Many critics based their arguments on the grounds of historical realism: ragtime did not exist in 1849 so it could not evoke that time period. The rejection of the ragtime elements also falls within period where some music critics disliked the genre, seeing it as the latest fad and musically weak. The criticisms also paralleled some of the divided opinions concerning the idea of African American music as signifier of the United States that emerged in response to Dvořák's comments in 1890s. On the one hand it came from the United States so it was a viable option, on the other hand it was not part of Anglo-American music culture and was therefore insufficient as a musical marker for white Americans. And then there were aesthetic, compositional concerns—rhythm over melody, motive vs. tune, and so forth.

“One Phrase of it is Strongly Reminiscent of a Clearly  
Cut Phrase in Ethelbert Nevin’s Once Popular Narcisse.”

In addition to pseudo ragtime and allusions to Stephen Foster songs, a couple of critics identified a third American musical influence in the score of *La fanciulla del West*: Ethelbert Nevin's piano piece “Narcissus” from *Water Scenes*.<sup>146</sup> William Henderson was one of few critics who drew the comparison, pointing to the orchestral accompaniment at the point in Act I where Minnie and Rance find themselves alone at the bar. The only critic to mention this specific musical connection, Henderson also heavily qualified his identification, writing that

The arrival of the pony express brings a bit of scenic music, and a reference to the road agent causes a return of the Johnson ragtime theme in the strings. Presently, when the “boys” have left Minnie

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*of H. Wiley Hitchcock*, ed. Richard Crawford, R. Allen Lott, and Carol Oja (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990), 256-80.

<sup>146</sup> Ethelbert Nevin, “Narcissus,” in *Water Scenes: Five Pieces for the Piano* (Boston: The Boston Music Company, 1891).



and Rance alone in the bar, we hear a new melody, which we afterward find is closely related to the true love theme of the opera. Rance's is the false love. This has a touch of flavour which the composer intended to be American. Curiously enough one phrase of it is strongly reminiscent of a clearly cut phrase in Ethelbert Nevin's once popular *Narcisse*.<sup>147</sup>

Henderson's comment reveals the exacting closeness to which some critics listened for American musical influences in Puccini's opera. This passage in Henderson serves as the lone example of a case where a critic heard pre-existing nature music quoted in the opera.

"Puccini Has Used The Same Scale That The Wind Is  
Tuned To"

Nature played an explicit dramatic role in two places: the snowstorm scene in Act II and the forest setting of Act III. Most critics focused their discussions of these scenes on the visual aspects of these two scenes. Only a few focused on the sonic aspects, and they did so specifically in their discussions of the forest setting. One critic suggested that the music of entire opera captured essence of the natural world:

Some will say that Puccini has blazed a new trail—no, not a new trail—for that trail is as old as the world. It is nature's trail. . . It is as if Puccini had transferred to every page of this beautiful work the smell of the pine, and like the huge wild [moose]—forcing his head and shoulders through the thick underbrush—stands alert with twigs, leaves, damp moss and cobwebs hanging from his sinewy body.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Henderson, "Puccini's Latest Opera." Henderson refers to the passage at Act 1, rehearsal 53-59 for the arrival of the pony express, and insertions of the syncopated motif from the end of the prelude at rehearsal numbers 59 and again two measures before rehearsal 60. Slightly later on that passage, rehearsal 63 the barcarolle music from the opening of Act I returns until Rance begins to sing at the Andante Sostenuto six measures after rehearsal number 64. When Rance sings, "Minnie, dalla mia casa" the strings play a melody that seems to have grown out of the barcarolle music, but its contour and triple meter also bear similarities to the waltz theme. The contour and phrasing of the barcarolle melody and the accompanying string music supporting Rance's solo share a faint resemblance to "Narcissus," but do not appear to be an exact quotation.

<sup>148</sup> Mildenberg, "True Americanisms in Puccini's Score?"

Puccini's musical construction of the Sierra mountain redwood forest consistently drew praise. Smith called it a "poetic musical picture of the deep California forest," and pointed to the "low A and E-flat, played over again to create the illusion of depth and darkness."<sup>149</sup> Henderson praised its orchestration, claiming that the "opening measures, in which stopped horns play the most prominent parts, are well planned to paint the gloomy spaces of the primeval woods and the somber mood which rests upon the spirits of the personages upon the stage."<sup>150</sup> Smith mentioned the skillful way the score contributed to establishing the space of the forest in the final scene

An admirable impression of distance is conveyed when on rising and falling chord triplets one hears voices of the miners in the background—the basses on one side first, then the answering tenors on the other. Nearer and nearer the voices come until the stage is filled with a throng. Among other things we hear the jolly "Dooda, dooda" theme of the first act.<sup>151</sup>

Albert Mildenberg's view of the musical depiction of nature in the opera is interesting for how it contrasts how the other critics discussed the work. Mildenberg, a composer and critic writing for *Musical America*, heard nature's presence in the entire score, even before the curtain even rose. He connected the very first sounds of the opera, the augmented chords whose combination spell out whole-tone scales, to the mountain landscape of the Californian Frontier, specifically to the sounds of an alpine waterfall.<sup>152</sup> He associated the second set of sounds in the opera to the imagined, stereotypical sounds of hard rock mining:<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Smith, "Puccini's New Opera of Golden West a Triumph."

<sup>150</sup> Henderson, "Puccini's Latest Opera."

<sup>151</sup> Smith, "Puccini's New Opera of Golden West a Triumph."

<sup>152</sup> See ms. 1-9 and then from rehearsal 1 to 7 measures after.

<sup>153</sup> See 8 measures after rehearsal 1 to 13 measures after rehearsal 1.

As in *Tosca* Puccini leaps into the atmosphere of the work in the very first phrase. The harp with a fortissimo arpeggio leads the way up to a succession of crashing chords that might easily represent the roar of the tumbling waters of the cataract. This is followed by a short theme in which the motif of a shovel and pick clanking against rock and gravel.<sup>154</sup>

Mildenberg's review stands out from the others for its metaphorical language and unusual interpretation of the relationship between nature and music in the opera, a relationship which in his view went beyond mimesis. Mildenberg linked the abstract sounds of the elements to Puccini's modernist musical vocabulary.

Puccini has used the same scale that the wind is tuned to, when it screams and howls over the chilled peaks of Alaska's icy mountains. His intervals are the bounding, thumping bass notes of falling boulders from lofty jagged crags down into bottomless gorges cleft by angry nature, and yet that order of things, of all things, is present here.<sup>155</sup>

Mildenberg's interpretation rested on the premise that the land itself could produce music. Through the rhetorical device of nature imagery, Mildenberg established the idea that Puccini's musical material came from the natural world. His attempt to persuade his readers that Puccini had taken the musical sounds of the American landscape and used them as part of his fundamental musical materials recalls the kind of approach late nineteenth-century musical nationalists suggested composers take when incorporating folk song into their pieces.

Only one other person came close to Mildenberg's position. In the course of an article describing the opera company's rehearsal process reporter Roy McCardell connected the opera's music to the American geography, but he expanded his imagery to include the social associations with the land:

The *Girl of the Golden West* is Californian. Puccini's music is redolent of giant redwood trees, earthquakes, the Socialist ticket, Abe Rueff, Shooting Prosecutor Heney, the Great Fire, the

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<sup>154</sup> Mildenberg, "True Americanisms in Puccini's Score?"

<sup>155</sup> Mildenberg, "True Americanisms in Puccini's Score?"

Southern Pacific Railway, the Purple Mother at Point Loma,  
 Jefferies before he became the white man's burden, anti-Japanese  
 agitation, Yosemite Valley, Mike De Young—it is of the Sierras,  
 of the soil!<sup>156</sup>

Nevertheless, while McCardell's view concentrated on the music's ability to express these things, it does not suggest that they offered Puccini musical building blocks for the score in the way that Mildenberg's did.

Whether or not *La fanciulla del West* sounded American was one of the central questions Puccini's critics addressed in their reviews. More critics concluded that it did not than those who did, despite Puccini's use of "music of the soil," and they did so on the grounds of authenticity. For several critics, the source music belonged to ethnic groups who had questionable status as Americans and therefore was unsuitable as a musically marker for "real" Americans. Most critics found Puccini's decision to not use actual Native American music for the Native American characters deeply perplexing. Among the critics who did not object to Native- or African-American music as means to gain an American sound, the means by which Puccini incorporated that music rendered it unrecognisable and therefore a useless gesture. Their objections illustrate how little things had changed since Dvořák's visit and the controversy his symphony stirred when it premiered. The words of Arthur Farwell perhaps best summarize the prevailing, but not unanimous, attitude of the New York City critics toward the inclusion of Native American, popular, and ragtime music into the score as geographic and cultural locators:

. . . In all his use of American melodies, anachronism and anachronism run riot, so that even the elusive tints of Americanism to be discerned by the student of this music fail of any local or historical suggestiveness.

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<sup>156</sup> Roy L. McCardell, "How Belasco Showed Caruso How to Make Love to Puccini's Girl of the Golden West," *World*, 4 December 1910.

It is not to be imagined . . . that Puccini's score is in any extensive way an attempt to gain a predominating local colour by the use of American tunes. He relies for the most part on his own imagination, and one must search the score carefully to locate the various essays in Americanism.<sup>157</sup>

The opera may have looked American, but for many it certainly did not sound so.

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<sup>157</sup> Farwell, "Music of Puccini's Opera."

## CHAPTER FIVE: DEPARTURES

Charles Meltzer, opera critic for the *New York American* exclaimed that *La fanciulla del West* “marked a new advance in the bright record of Italian opera.”<sup>1</sup> This was a common overall assessment of the opera. According to the current scholarship, American critics in general concluded Puccini had taken his work in a new stylistic direction.<sup>2</sup> While this change may have been “well within the parameters of contemporaneous European opera,” as musicologists Annie Randall and Rosalind Gray Davis have argued,<sup>3</sup> opera scholar Michele Girardi writes that New York City’s critics praised the “boldness with which Puccini surpassed the traditional parameters of Italian opera.”<sup>4</sup> Indeed, a survey of the 11 and 18 December reviews reveals that many critics saw *La fanciulla del West* as stepping outside the stylistic boundaries of Puccini’s previous operas, and the majority of these critics interpreted this as musical progress. In his *Musical America* review, music critic, composer and publisher Arthur Farwell specified three main differences:<sup>5</sup>

To begin with, the composer has departed from the character of the scores of *Bohème*, *Tosca*, and *Butterfly*. He has departed in three significant ways: first, by the suppression of his characteristic long-drawn-out, broad and biting melodies, in favour of the rapid-fire music necessary in following the action of this play; second,

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Meltzer, “The Girl of the Golden West Sets New Standard for Lyric Drama,” *New York American*, 11 December 1910.

<sup>2</sup> Julian Budden (2002), 304; Michele Girardi (2000), 280; Mary Jane Phillips-Matz (2002), 206; Annie J. Randall and Rosalind Gray Davis (2005), 113-4.

<sup>3</sup> Randall and Davis (2005), 147.

<sup>4</sup> Girardi (2000), 280.

<sup>5</sup>For more on Farwell's musical activities, see for example Evelyn Davis Culbertson, “Arthur Farwell's Early Efforts on Behalf of American Music,” *American Music* 5 (1987): 157-75. For more of Farwell’s writings, consult: Arthur Farwell, *Wanderjaher of a Revolutionist' and Other Essays on American Music* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1995).

by a very pronounced adoption of Debussy's contribution to harmonic and structural progress; and third, by an attempt to gain American local colour and American feeling both spontaneously and by the use of various kinds of American themes.<sup>6</sup>

These three points of departure—melody, harmony and the inclusion of American themes—summarize the principle points of musical discussion raised by the majority of critics who reviewed the opera. The current Puccini scholarship gives a general sense of the response to these changes in melody, harmony, as well as orchestration.

Puccini's biographers know that one of the most significant changes critics of the time noticed in *La fanciulla del West* was a shift in melodic treatment. In particular, critics thought that the opera's melodies were either markedly different in conception from those of its predecessors or absent altogether. This transformation perplexed many, and Phillips-Matz and Girardi both point to Richard Aldrich's 11 December *New York Times* review as an example of one such reaction.<sup>7</sup> Phillips-Matz also uses passages from Aldrich's review to describe the changes in melodic conception.<sup>8</sup> She quotes from Aldrich's description of the melody as a "rapid and staccato vocal utterance" where at expressive moments the voices "find a broad arioso, in phrases that at least have melodic outline and shapeliness."<sup>9</sup> Girardi additionally cites from the critic at the *Nation* who complained that none of *La fanciulla del West*'s melodies equalled any of the famous ones from Puccini's previous operas.<sup>10</sup> Julian Budden also used the *Nation* review to illustrate that some of the critics maliciously suggested the lack of melody was a result of

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<sup>6</sup> Arthur Farwell, "The Music of Puccini's Opera. Arthur Farwell Discusses Results of Composer's Efforts to Create a Score Which Truly Reflects Western Life in America," *Musical America*, 17 December 1910.

<sup>7</sup> Phillips-Matz (2002), 205-6 and Girardi (2000), 280-1.

<sup>8</sup> Phillips-Matz (2002), 206.

<sup>9</sup> Phillips-Matz (2002), 205-6.

<sup>10</sup> Girardi (2000), 281.

a lack of invention.<sup>11</sup> Randall and Davis argue that the critics' surprise at the absence of memorable arias and melody influenced how future critics and musicologists would approach the melody and that later critics like Mosco Carner see *La fanciulla del West* not just as tuneless, but also as a failure to “deploy leitmotivic material with Wagnerian consistency.”<sup>12</sup>

Another striking change concerned harmony. The current scholarship shows that the critics dwelt on *La fanciulla del West*'s indebtedness to Debussy.<sup>13</sup> Randall and Davis, Budden, and Girardi, Phillips-Matz all use Aldrich's 11 December review as an example of how New York City's opera critics addressed the harmony. Aldrich noted the similarities between *La fanciulla del West* and Debussy's music but did not find this problematic; other critics did. For example, Girardi refers to Lawrence Gilman, a passionate advocate of Debussy, who voiced concern over the similarities,<sup>14</sup> and Budden's reference to the *Musical Courier* review—quite possibly the most negative of the New York City reviews—shows how disparaging some of the critics could be.<sup>15</sup> Yet no single account really captures the range of responses to the issues that Puccini's new harmony raised among the New York City critics.

Phillips-Matz explains that few critics assessed the orchestration or wrote about it. Despite this paucity, Girardi and Randall and Davis include passages that praised Puccini's orchestration.<sup>16</sup> These excerpts do little to show the degree to which the critics

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<sup>11</sup> Budden (2002), 304

<sup>12</sup> Randall and Davis (2005), 162-3.

<sup>13</sup> Julian Budden (2002), 304; Michele Girardi (2000), 280; Mary Jane Phillips-Matz (2002), 206; Annie J. Randall and Rosalind Gray Davis (2005), 113-4.

<sup>14</sup> Girardi (2000), 280.

<sup>15</sup> Budden (2002), 304.

<sup>16</sup> Phillips-Matz (2002), 206; Girardi (2000), 280-1; Randall and Davis (2005), 113.



admired the orchestration, at least those critics who addressed the subject. The amount of praise they tendered to the orchestration matched the extent of criticism many had for the work's realism and Americanisms. These descriptions of the critical reactions toward the orchestration are the most extreme examples of how the current scholarship barely captures the range of comments and responses to the stylistic features of the opera.

In general it is difficult to gain a vivid picture of how the critics worked to describe and make sense of the new musical style they heard in *La fanciulla del West* from the existing scholarship. Scholars tend to quote from Richard Aldrich's first review, despite the fact that there were at least ten other people who reviewed the opera, sometimes twice, with varying viewpoints. Faced with music that pushed the limits of their conceptions for what to expect from Puccini, the body of reviews documents how critics negotiated the questions *La fanciulla del West* raised about the borderlines between both personal and national styles within the context of broader stylistic trends.

As in the observations and critiques of Puccini's musical Americanisms (or lack thereof), the evaluations of melody, harmony, and even orchestration reveal a particular concern with the music's ability to convey an identity, both personal and national. Many critics, like Gilman, believed that by the time of *La fanciulla del West* Puccini had solidified "a style of his own—a style that is distinctive and unmistakable" that "he demonstrated up to the hilt in *Tosca*, in *Bohème*, in *Madama Butterfly*."<sup>17</sup> So the apparent changes in *La fanciulla del West* surprised them. The fact that the new approach made his writing more complex challenged them even more. Critics struggled with the problem of how to evaluate a work that seemed to cross personal as well as national boundaries, hearing not only questionable American musical styles, but also French and German ones in an opera written by the leader of the Italian opera school. The critics

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<sup>17</sup> Gilman, "Puccini's American Opera," *Harper's Weekly* 17 December 1910.

seemed to expect that the plurality of styles should blend seamlessly into Puccini's established musical voice.

A wider survey of reviews also shows that some of the critics, like Farwell in the above passage, related the shift in musical style to dramatic exigency, suggesting that the character and pacing of the drama required a new musical style. This suggests they credited Puccini with a much deeper approach to composition than simply keeping up with trends. The discussions of melody, harmony, and orchestration illustrate a tension between an expectation of artistic growth or development—that a composer should expand the boundaries of the genre and bring his or her music to a better level with each new work—and an expectation that a composer uphold the distinguishing features of the genre, sometimes within a single review. New York City critics generally expected that in each successive opera Puccini would develop his musico-dramatic style in an organic and original manner, and in so doing mature as a composer. At the same time they wanted him to preserve those hallmarks of his style that they enjoyed. These conflicting expectations produced complicated reactions to the opera.

*La fanciulla del West*'s complex reception in New York can also be understood in the broader context of the 1910 debates over the future of opera in this city. Only Randall and Davis link the early metropolitan reception to the debate over American musical identity, but they pay little attention to the particular issues of the debate that surfaced within the framework of opera production and criticism in the New York City of 1910. Nor do they link the reception very clearly to specific discussions in the New York City musical press about Puccini and his previous operas. Therefore, this chapter examines the range of claims about how *La fanciulla del West* crossed apparent stylistic boundaries and investigates the assumptions supporting the critics' evaluations of the melody, harmony, orchestration, and even genre. Many of the assessments of the stylistic difference between *La fanciulla* and its predecessors simply echo comments the same

critics had made about the future of opera in general. This suggests a certain amount of bias against some of the compositional techniques Puccini used.

The chapter concludes with a brief discussion of the opera's reception outside of New York City. It compares some of the main themes of the New York City reception of *La fanciulla del West* to those of the work's reception in London, the first European city to produce the opera. This comparison reveals some of the differences between American and British perceptions of the opera, which in turn helps to determine which comments were unique to American critics. This helps to differentiate the nature of the opera's reception in the United States from its reception in other countries. It also gives some insight into the uniquely American conceptions of identity within the United States, rather than conception of that identity outside it.

“Above All Things is Melody”

William Henderson offered one of the clearest summaries of the music for *La fanciulla del West*:

Mr. Puccini's musical plan is both comprehensive and complex, but no more intricate than that of his *Tosca*. He confides to the orchestra the duty of painting a panoramic tone picture, while the actors carry on a dialogue constructed chiefly on the lines of that melodious recitative familiar to us in the other works of this maestro. There are no set musical pieces, except one in the first act, where a song is used in the original drama, and the finale of the opera. When occasion offers for a long speech the composer writes an extended melody, but such melodies are not numerous, nor are they forced into undue prominence in the general plan.<sup>18</sup>

Many critics reacted negatively to this radically different approach. Indeed, their complaints about the melodic treatment in *La fanciulla del West* were among the

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<sup>18</sup> William Henderson, “Mr. Puccini's Latest Opera,” *New York Sun* 11 December 1910.

strongest objections to the opera.<sup>19</sup> Critics often praised the melody of Puccini's previous operas with sensuous language. For example, William Henderson reminded his readers that in *Madama Butterfly* and *La Bohème* in particular, the composer had "proved that in his melodic invention he [was] bountifully gifted. He [had] a fund of voluptuous song. He [made] an irresistible appeal to the voracious appetite for sensuous allurements in music."<sup>20</sup> In contrast, critics found very little music with the "sustained sensuous or exalted emotion . . . especially such as finds its expression in the familiar Puccini melodic type" in *La fanciulla del West*.<sup>21</sup>

The turn from sensuous melodies to drier declamatory or subtler arioso passages had a damaging effect. For example, in the above passage, Henderson explained that the singers in *La fanciulla del West* carried "on a dialogue constructed chiefly on the lines of that melodious recitative familiar to us in the other works of this maestro . . ." but when the occasion offered "for a long speech the composer writes an extended melody, but such melodies are not numerous, nor are they forced into undue prominence in the general plan."<sup>22</sup> Richard Aldrich observed that "there is certainly far less of the clearly defined melodic luster, outline, point and fluency, far less of what is tangibly thematic than there is in his earlier works."<sup>23</sup> The lack of Puccini's "characteristic individual

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<sup>19</sup> Randall and Davis's summary of what late twentieth-century musicologists and critics have said about the melody shows that the perception that *La fanciulla del West* lacks melody and memorable arias persists. Randall and Davis, *Puccini and the Girl*, 162-166.

<sup>20</sup> William J. Henderson, "Mr. Puccini's Latest Opera. *Girl of the Golden West* Sung. Performed at the Metropolitan Opera House for the First Time on Any Stage. David Belasco's Stirring Melodrama Set to Italian Music—a New Thing in the World of Opera—Performance Interesting and Effective," *New York Sun*, 11 December 1910.

<sup>21</sup> Farwell, "Music of Puccini's Opera."

<sup>22</sup> Henderson, "Puccini's Latest Opera."

<sup>23</sup> Richard Aldrich, "Melodrama Set to Music," *New York Times*, 11 December 1910.

melody which has earned him renown,” as Reginald De Koven explained, caused the opera to “fall short” of its predecessors in “the luscious, lingering, insinuating melody which characterized the success of these works.”<sup>24</sup> Krehbiel made similar claims, complaining, “instead of upholding melody as the essential of opera, he no sooner reaches a dramatic moment (in the sense of original melodrama) than he drops it altogether.”<sup>25</sup> Most negative of all, the critic at *The Nation* concluded that Puccini’s “melodic fountain seems to have run dry.”<sup>26</sup>

Comments in the pre-premiere publicity suggest that Puccini attempted to prepare his critics for this stylistic change, perhaps in anticipation of resistance. Less than a month before the premiere, he explicitly connected eighteenth-century opera to modern opera in a *New York Times* interview. He told reporters that he foresaw a return to Gluck and that operatic music would become progressively simpler, although he did not specify whether this would be in the works of others or just his own.<sup>27</sup> In another interview, printed on 4 December 1910, Puccini again told reporters that opera would return to simpler things, that Wagner was not the music of the future.<sup>28</sup> Puccini was not the only one to make these kinds of observations. In New York City, discussions about the development of opera surfaced throughout 1910.

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<sup>24</sup> Reginald De Koven, “New Opera from Critic’s Viewpoint. Author, Not Composer, Principle Factor in the Success of Puccini Work,” *New York World*, 11 December 1910.

<sup>25</sup> Henry Edward Krehbiel, “A Sensational Production at the Opera. *The Girl of the Golden West* and Its Music,” *New York Daily Tribune*, 11 December 1910.

<sup>26</sup> “Puccini’s New Opera,” *The Nation*, 15 December 1910.

<sup>27</sup> “Puccini Here; His Opera Views,” *New York Times* 18 November 1910.

<sup>28</sup> “Puccini Would Rather Talk Duck Shooting than Grand Opera,” *New York Daily Tribune*, 4 December 1910.

In the spring of that year, two important events precipitated a widespread discussion about a change in opera composition: the production of *The Pipe of Desire* and Hammerstein's agreement to stop producing opera in New York City.<sup>29</sup> In the course of discussions about these and other events, critics and composers alike began to speculate that opera would turn back to "simpler" style of earlier eras, though they rarely named particular operas or explained exactly how early. For example, in a speech printed in the *New York Times*, Walter Damrosch told his audience that they would see a reversal to older forms of opera, enriched by modern harmony and orchestration.<sup>30</sup> William Henderson called upon American opera composers to study the works of early opera composers to learn how to write opera.<sup>31</sup> In the fall, considerations about the future of opera coincided not only with the preparations of *La fanciulla del West*, but also with Puccini's subsequent arrival in New York City, and with the North American premiere of Gluck's *Armide* on 14 November 1910, which initiated the Metropolitan Opera Company's 1910-1911 season.<sup>32</sup> In this context Henry Finck's sarcastic comment about the melody in *La fanciulla del West* comes as no surprise. Finck noted that "the vocal parts are not quite as dry and unmelodious as those in Claude Debussy's *Pelléas and*

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<sup>29</sup> For more on these, see chapter two.

<sup>30</sup> "Damrosch Pleads for American Opera," *New York Times* 13 March 1910. For more on Damrosch's views about American opera and music in general, see also Edward Marshall "'We Have No Distinctive American Music'—Damrosch" *New York Times* 18 June 1911.

<sup>31</sup> See William Henderson, "Opera American and Not," *New York Sun*, 20 March 1910, and "Spectacular Lyric Dramas of Early Days" *New York Sun*, 4 December 1910. Henderson was writing a book on the history of Italian opera, which was published in the year following the premiere of *La fanciulla del West*. See his *Some Forerunners of Italian* (Opera New York, H. Holt, 1911).

<sup>32</sup> Gerald Fitzgerald, *Annals of the Metropolitan Opera* (Boston: Hall, 1989), 1: 195.

*Mélisande*, yet Puccini seems to have had in mind the ‘noble contempt for melody’ of which Caccini and the other Florentines early in the seventeenth century boasted.”<sup>33</sup>.

Other attempts to explain why the melodies sounded so different in *La fanciulla del West* are also present in the reviews. Most of these account for the difference as part of Puccini’s attempts to realize a quality of the dramatic source by either: 1) keeping the action moving throughout the course of each act, resulting in few opportunities for the characters to reflect on their situations and thus sing a full aria; 2) capturing the local colour dialect of the characters and the original dialogue structure of the play—which was based on principles of naturalism and realism—in the melodic lines; or 3) creating a rich, colourful tone-poem-like background for the drama, thus de-emphasizing melody in favour of bringing out the various colours of the orchestral sounds. This suggests that the critics, when confronted with a style not to their expectations, tried to understand what the composer meant, instead of immediately condemning him.

Their hypotheses varied in interesting ways. In the case of the first explanation, an adherence to the action of the drama, Richard Aldrich, for example, told the *Times* readers that the music had to

. . . hurry along after the action and try to keep pace with the spoken word. This is interrupted now and again, however, by pages in a broader style; lyric movements, when the music is given more opportunity to rise to its true task of expressing emotion or passion or sentiment, of psychologizing [sic]. Here the voices may likewise sing in a broad arioso, in phrases that at least have melodic outline and shapeliness.<sup>34</sup>

Many concluded, like Henderson, that Belasco’s dialogue, full of awkward, local-colour dialect, rapid exchanges, and short speeches all designed to artistically express the nature of the characters, was

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<sup>33</sup> Finck, “Puccini’s New Opera.”

<sup>34</sup> Finck, “Puccini’s New Opera.”

. . . not for music. The composer needs the deep breathing of the long poetic phrase to bear up the burden of his melodic structure. Deprive him of this and you force him to resort to fragmentary recitative with the sustained and significant melodic thought relegated to the orchestra. That Mr. Puccini was driven to this method of operatic composition is seen at the very outset in the bustling scene in the Polka. Even in the love episode of the second act, when Johnson and the Girl are shut up in the latter's hut in the blizzard, the emotional expression of the action is ill suited to the music because the dramatic situation hangs so heavily upon breathless anxiety, vague dread and the broken utterance of tense minutes.<sup>35</sup>

Many other critics also blamed the source. For most a central part of the problem lay in the structure of the libretto. Instead of one based on traditional verse form, as Richard Aldrich explained, this libretto consisted of a “more or less detached and formless paragraphic . . .” and that it sometimes yielded “. . . a rapid and staccato vocal utterance, projected against an equally expeditious and hastily sketched orchestral background . . .”<sup>36</sup> An undue emphasis on orchestral background music formed part of several objections to the music. As for the orchestral melodies, Aldrich explained that the “music seems as if designed more for its colour, its pictorial effect, as a background, than as an immediate interpreter of the incidents, emotions, passions and psychological moments of the drama, even in those passages where the orchestra and the voices are allowed opportunity for eloquent musical speech.”<sup>37</sup> The critics who blamed the literary source as the main reason for the shift in approach to melody seem to be taking away some of the responsibility for the change from Puccini. It appears as if they were trying to protect his reputation, lest too many of his detractors claimed it resulted from a lack of originality, melodic creativity, or simply a weakly composed work. Richard Aldrich concluded that it seemed “almost irresistible that all this is intentional; a part of the composer's scheme for

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<sup>35</sup> Henderson, “Puccini's Latest Opera.”

<sup>37</sup> Aldrich, “Melodrama Set to Music.”



the representation in music of this Western drama. It is not to be supposed that Mr. Puccini is at the present time unable to write more distinguished melody, to conduct more convincing thematic development, than he has put into this work. He seems to have another conception, another view of his task.”<sup>38</sup>

A few of the explanations for the change in melodic structures appealed to the value of national identity and the idea that only members of a particular nation could fully understand its people and culture—that only nationals can create works of art about the country. Of these, Reginald De Koven’s stands out for its overt essentialist reasoning. He began by facetiously speculating that “. . . it cannot be that the fount of melody of a composer of Puccini’s age, with only four operas of note to his credit, should have run dry this early; or, that his constructive invention and ingenuity or facility of appropriate dramatic expression should have waned in the prime of life.”<sup>39</sup> Rather, explained De Koven, the new melodic style “must be attributed to other causes. The principal one I think is that the composer’s heart was not in a theme naturally strange and foreign to his imagination from lack of any previous association and with which he had no sympathy, national or otherwise.”<sup>40</sup> This is interesting for its argument that because of his Italian identity and lack of a personal connection with the United States, Puccini was essentially incapable of writing any music for the opera, not just music that was intended to add local colour. Most critics only made this argument when critiquing the music they supposed was intended to create an American atmosphere.

Only a few critics heartily approved of the new melodic treatment. Instead, many amongst this group had reservations. One such critic, Lawrence Gilman viewed the

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<sup>38</sup> Aldrich, “Melodrama Set to Music.”

<sup>39</sup> De Koven, “New Opera.”

<sup>40</sup> De Koven, “New Opera.”

perceived lack of melody as an improvement, although he made this compliment in a backhanded way.

Puccini's besetting sin is his frequent melodic banality in passages of emotional exaltation, and this trait is responsible for some commonplace writing, as in the expression of Minnie's phrase (in her narrative in the first act), "S'amavan tanto," and in the love scene of the second act at the words, "Dolce vivere e morir e non lasciarci più!" But there is less of this facilely sentimentalized speech than in Puccini's earlier operas, and there is a corresponding gain in dignity and true eloquence.<sup>41</sup>

Gilman also serves as an example those critics who disapproved of Puccini's "melodic type." At least two other critics defended Puccini, reminding readers about the difference between melody and "tunes" or "themes." Charles Meltzer argued that "melody, much melody will be heard by those broad minded and intelligent enough not to confound that term with tunes" and that "the chief purpose of the composer has been to express feelings, passion, nature, love and hate in fitting tones,"<sup>42</sup> while Max Smith also claimed that "there is more real music . . . than one would superficially suppose."<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, the majority of critics viewed Puccini's decision to remain close to the dramatic action and dialogue of the original melodrama as a serious misstep on his part. While their speculations suggest that on one level they appreciated the artistic reasons for why he made the changes, on another level they imply that the critics preferred Puccini's style remained more or less the same.

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<sup>41</sup> Lawrence Gilman, "Puccini's American Opera," *Harper's Weekly* 17 December 1910.

<sup>42</sup> Charles Henry Meltzer, "The *Girl of the Golden West* Sets a New Standard for Lyric Drama. Opera Founded Upon an American Drama Is Critically Reviewed. First Production on Any Stage of *the Girl of the Golden West (La Fanciulla del West)*. Opera in Three Acts. Founded on the Drama of David Belasco. Book by Guelfo Civinini and Carol Zangarini. Music by Puccini," *New York American*, 11 December 1910.

<sup>43</sup> Max Smith, "Puccini's New Opera of Golden West a Triumph. Brilliant First Night Audience in Metropolitan Runs Whole Gamut of Emotions at Singing Version of Belasco's Play—Composer's Work far above His Earlier Efforts. Caruso and Destinn Win Fresh Laurels. Grows to Point of Turmoil as Powerful Story Unfolds under Master Hands Society and Music Lovers Join in Giving Opera Unprecedented Welcome," *New York Press*, 11 December 1910.

The reviews suggest that melody was the single most important feature of an opera for New York City's critics, and that Puccini's previous approach to melody had distinguished him from his contemporaries. To change risked jeopardizing the potential acceptance and future value of his opera. Critics predicted that the opera's audiences would not appreciate the new approach to melody. For example, Henderson explained that audiences "expected a string of long phrased, luscious, sensuous melodies calling for utterance by the most opulent tones of the most gifted singers. They went to the opera with their minds full of 'Che gelida manina,' the duet in the first act of *Butterfly* and the solo of Cavaradossi in the last scene of *Tosca*."<sup>44</sup> Farwell claimed that this "mode of departure" would be

deplored by the public which, jealous of either retrogression or growth, would have its favourites stay forever in the place in which it first discovered them, neither falling back from it nor progressing beyond it. And indeed, in view of the peculiar validity and authoritative personality of that same broad and biting melody of Puccini's, even one who reflects on the matter, and who would encourage growth and change, must doubt if Puccini can remove it and put something better in its place. At least he must have more proof of the composer's capacity to do so than was afforded on Saturday night.<sup>45</sup>

Henry Finck agreed, writing that

What the public has always wanted, wants now, and always will want in an opera, above all things is melody—not necessarily such melody as Rossini, Donizetti, or Verdi wrote, but such as is to be found in Wagner's works, or in the Puccini operas just named. There is surprising little of this in *The Girl of the Golden West*.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> William J. Henderson, "Mr. Puccini and His *Golden Girl*. The Tenacity of the Spectacular Element in Opera—Where Mr. Sardou and Mr. Puccini Cooperated Successfully—the Difference in the New Opera," *New York Sun*, 18 December 1910.

<sup>45</sup> Farwell, "Music of Puccini's Opera."

<sup>46</sup> Henry T. Finck, "Puccini's New Opera," *The Evening Post*, 12 December 1910.

In De Koven's estimation, "the lack of definite, salient melody which the average auditor can readily grasp" would "ultimately prevent *The Girl of the Golden West* from securing a permanent place as a repertoire opera."<sup>47</sup>

"Widening the Boundaries of Tonality"

The harmonic style of the opera, like Puccini's approach to melody, drew a range of reactions from the critics. In this case, however, the commentary was more supportive. Of the critics who attempted to describe the harmony, most heard it as a significant change from Puccini's previous operas<sup>48</sup> and identified it as a place where Puccini had "made his steps."<sup>49</sup> The following is a survey of their views:

. . . The composer has gone further in this work than any of its predecessors in the employment of what are called modern harmonies. But, Mr. Puccini has a musical plan of his own. His themes are in themselves mostly as frankly diatonic as the tunes of Verdi. But the harmonization is such that the musical background is crowded with the tonalities so dear to the advanced school of composition. The chord of the diminished seventh sinks into the state of a bald and shopworn commonplace. The ear feeds upon clashing seconds, upon ninths, augmented fifths, upon whole tone progressions, and occasionally upon groups which sound as if they might best be played upon a piano with the flat of the hand.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Reginald De Koven, "Lingering Echoes of the Puccini Premiere—the Prize Opera Jury," *World*, 18 December 1910.

<sup>48</sup> The following reviews contain descriptions of the harmony and in some cases assessments of it: Henderson, "Puccini's Latest Opera;" Aldrich, "Melodrama Set to Music;" Gilman, "Puccini's American Opera;" Krehbiel, "Sensational Production;" Smith, "Puccini's New Opera of Golden West a Triumph;" De Koven, "New Opera;" Finck, "Puccini's New Opera;" Algernon St. John-Brenon, "*Girl of the Golden West* in Opera Storms Metropolitan Throngs;" *New York Morning Telegraph*, 11 December 1910, "*The Girl of the Golden West*. Premiere of Puccini's New Opera December 10, 1910," *Musical Courier*, 14 December 1910, Albert Mildenberg, "True Americanisms in Puccini's Score?" *Musical America*, 10 December 1910, Farwell, "Music of Puccini's Opera;" Meltzer, "Opera Founded on an American Drama Is Critically Reviewed."

<sup>49</sup> Henderson, "Puccini's Latest Opera."

<sup>50</sup> Henderson, "Puccini's Latest Opera."

. . . It shows, apparently, a new step in Puccini's development. In *Madama Butterfly* it was observed that that he had ventured far into a region of new and adventurous harmonies. He has now gone still further into this field of augmented intervals and chords of the higher dissonances. He has made much use of the so-called "whole tone" scale and the harmonies that associate themselves with it.<sup>51</sup>

. . . Signor Puccini has achieved surprising; let us say even amazing, effects with his harmonies.<sup>52</sup>

. . . Puccini has a positive genius for keeping to the middle ground of modernity. He finds and puts in the particular dissonant note which bites, but does not bark. He taxes the ear with just enough modernism to keep it guessing, but without enough to annoy it. He resolves his dissonances just in the nick of time for the semi-trained modern ear.<sup>53</sup>

. . . One of the most conspicuous features of Puccini's new work is the skill he has shown in devising effective harmonic modulations appropriate to dramatic situations.<sup>54</sup>

As the above examples suggest, although many critics found positive qualities in the opera's harmonic style, a few had some reservations based on one or both of the following two grounds: firstly, too much influence from other composers; and secondly, too advanced to represent the primitive characters and rustic setting of the American West.

Critics taking issue with the harmony typically noted an affinity between the harmonic syntax and progressions in recent operas by Claude Debussy and Richard Strauss and those that they heard in *La fanciulla del West*. At a time when many modernist composers were exploring alternatives to functional harmony, it seems surprising that several of Puccini's New York City critics still argued that certain progressions, scales, or chords were idiomatic to any one composer. For instance,

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<sup>51</sup> Aldrich, "Melodrama Set to Music."

<sup>52</sup> Krehbiel, "Sensational Production."

<sup>53</sup> Farwell, "Music of Puccini's Opera."

<sup>54</sup> Smith, "Puccini's New Opera of Golden West a Triumph."

Lawrence Gilman who presented the most thorough discussion of the Debussy connection, reprimanded Puccini in his *Harper's* review for using specific materials that he identified as quintessentially Debussyian. He began the section first by stating his premise “to be quite frank, there is altogether too much of Debussy in it for those who are aware of Puccini's gift of authentically personal utterance.” After his introduction to the topic, Gilman went on to question Puccini’s approach:

Why should he have thought it necessary—or, to view the matter in the most charitable light, why he should have permitted himself—not only to ape Debussy's harmonic and melodic manner, but to approximate certain well-known passages from the music of the unique Frenchman, passes comprehension. It is quite true that Debussy holds no copyright upon augmented intervals, whole-tone melodic progressions, and certain sequences of “ninth” chords; but it is nevertheless a fact, unfortunate for Puccini, that certain harmonic combinations, certain ways of grouping particular chords, certain ways of threading a melodic line, have become unalterably associated in the minds of experienced observers with the original and exquisite genius who gave the world a new order of music. That Puccini has been powerfully affected by the composer of *Pelléas et Mélisande* will be plain even to those whose knowledge of Debussy is based upon a limited acquaintance with his works; to those who best know the music of the Frenchman the evidence of his effect upon Puccini [is] plain upon page after page of *The Girl of the Golden West* . . . If the resemblance were merely a matter of occasional thematic similarity it would not be worth mentioning; but it is more than that. We are reminded of Debussy time and again, chiefly by the harmonic treatment, though his influence is felt even in the design of certain melodic phrases and in tricks of instrumentation . . . The pity of it is that he [Puccini] needed to draw upon no treasury save his own for ideas and for style. He possesses, in his own right, eloquence and beauty of a potent kind, a style of singular emotional fervor, vital, tense, nervous, and flexible—a style that consorts unhappily with the wholly different and unassimilable manner of Debussy.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Gilman, “Puccini's American Opera.” Gilman noted the following passages as examples: 1) the setting of Nick's words in the first act: “Se ho ben capito vio siete il preferito;” 2) the theme heard soon after Johnson's entrance in the same act, as an accompaniment to the words: “E all caso, tentare un baccarat;” 3) to the passage in the love scene of the second act beginning: “Sognavo . . . si stava toto bene!” For “se ho ben compresso voi” see seven measures after rehearsal nineteen, p.32. For “e all caso,” see six measures after rehearsal seventy-five, p.124. For “Sognavo...si stava toto bene,” see rehearsal thirty-two, p. 253.

Gilman noted several passages in particular that sounded like Debussy's music to him. For example, he mentioned the setting of Nick's words in the first act: "Se ho ben capito vio siete il preferito," (see musical example one below).

NICK

Se ho ben ca - pi - to voi sie - teil pre - fe - ri - to!...

Musical Example 2: Puccini *La fanciulla del West*, Act I, rehearsal 19 + 7mm.

Gilman also cited the theme heard soon after Johnson's entrance in the same act, as an accompaniment to the words: "E al caso, tentare un baccarat," (see musical example two below):

JOHNSON

e al caso, ten-tare un bacca - rat.

*dolce, cantando*

*p*

Musical Example 3: Puccini, *La fanciulla del West* Act I, rehearsal 75 + 6mm.

The passage in the love scene of the second act beginning: “Sognavo . . . si stava toto bene!” also sounded clearly like Debussy to Gilman, (see musical example 3 below).

(riscotendosi, senza ripulsa)

MINNIE *dolcemente*

So-gna vo:... si sta-va tan-to be - ne!..O-ra con - vie - ne dar-ci la buona not - te...

Musical Example 4: Puccini, *La fanciulla del West* Act II, rehearsal 32 + 1 m.

Gilman objected to Puccini’s new harmonic language, not because of a negative bias against augmented chords, or chromatic, whole tone, pentatonic, and modal scales, but because he viewed this “modern” harmonic language as so closely associated with Claude Debussy that to use them was to risk accusations of imitation. Even a composer as strong and musically individual as Puccini could not escape the association.<sup>56</sup> These materials were such an intrinsic part of Debussy’s style that, to use them—in Gilman’s

<sup>56</sup> Puccini biographers who discuss the reception generally cite from Gilman to illustrate the ways in which New York City critics discussed the Puccini-Debussy connection. In “Puccini’s America” Phillips-Matz explains that Gilman claimed Puccini had ill absorbed whatever lessons he had learned, *The Puccini Companion*, edited by William Weaver and Simonetta Puccini (New York: Norton, 1994), 233. In her book-length biography of Puccini, Phillips-Matz simply notes that some critics mentioned a debt to Debussy. See *Puccini: A Biography* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2002), 206. Michele Girardi also points to Gilman’s review to document that the American critics heard Debussy’s influence in the music. See *Puccini: His International Art*, translated by Laura Bisani (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2000), 280. In his biography, Julian Budden chooses to cite instead from Aldrich, quoting the critic as claiming he had “repudiated the notion of him as an imitator of Debussy. See *Puccini: His Life and Works* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 304.



opinion—was to imitate Debussy. As such, Puccini violated the expectation of originality and authenticity. Gilman’s reservations must be considered in light of his advocacy for Debussy as demonstrated in his 1907 book on *Pelléas et Mélisande*.<sup>57</sup> That opera had premiered at the Paris Opéra-Comique 1902 in Paris, and had its first American performance in New York City on 10 February 1908.<sup>58</sup>

Other critics considered the apparent influence of Debussy to be less problematic. Farwell, for example, found it a natural and progressive step on Puccini’s part, and praised the composer for this:

As to Puccini’s very evident leaning toward Debussyism in the opera, it is only necessary to say that Debussy has made contributions to modern harmonic and thematic usage which is well for any modern composer not to overlook. It is a sign of alertness to present realities for a composer to be quick to seize upon contemporary advances in the general musical scheme.<sup>59</sup>

His description of how the “Debussyian” harmonies manifested in *La fanciulla del West* nicely illustrates how Puccini used the new materials:

. . . the Debussy tendency reveals itself frequently in unresolved secondary harmonies, surmounted by melodic phrases with poignant effects, with which we have been made familiar by Debussy, produced by skips to and from dissonant notes. At other

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<sup>57</sup> Lawrence Gilman, *Debussy's Pelléas et Mélisande: A Guide to the Opera with Musical Examples from the Score* (New York: Schirmer, 1907).

<sup>58</sup> For a description of the controversial Paris reception of *Pelléas*, see Jan Pasler, “*Pelléas* and Power: Forces Behind the Reception of Debussy's Opera,” *Nineteenth-Century Music* 10, no. 3 (1987): 243-64. For more on the reception of *Pelléas et Mélisande* in the United States, see John Dizikes, *Opera in America: A Cultural History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 327-30. For more on the reception of Debussy in the United States, see Virginia Raad, “L'influence de Debussy: Amérique (Etats-Unis),” in *Debussy et l'évolution de la musique Au Xxième Siècle* (Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique [CNRS], 1965), 215-32 and Charles Timbrell, “Performances of Debussy's Piano Music in the United States (1904-1918),” *Cahiers Debussy*, no. 21 (1997): 63-79.

<sup>59</sup> Farwell, “Music of Puccini's Opera.” Debussyism was an expression appearing after the premiere of *Pelléas* that was used both as a compliment and a pejorative, depending on the context. See *Grove Music Online* s.v. “Debussy, Claude,” (by François Lesure and Roy Howat), <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com>, (accessed March 4, 2012).

times the tendency is observed in velvety harmonic effects  
such as that assigned to Rance in his narrative in the first act . . . <sup>60</sup>

Like Farwell, Max Smith defended Puccini on this issue as well, at least to a certain extent. After noting that Puccini seemed “to have adopted a good deal” harmonically from “the treasure of novel effects discovered by Claude Debussy,” Smith continued on with the argument that “of course, Debussy has no exclusive right to the augmented intervals of which he and his disciples are so fond; nor can he prevent others from using his beloved successions of ninth chords.”<sup>61</sup> Ultimately though, Smith conceded that Puccini may have gone too far, pointing out that “Puccini often comes so near [to] duplicating effects already produced by Debussy in *Pelléas et Mélisande* that the source of his inspiration seems too apparent.”<sup>62</sup>

Two critics approached the Puccini-Debussy connection from unique perspectives, and, in both cases, they felt they understood and respected Puccini’s reasons for following in the harmonic footsteps of Debussy. Henry T. Finck of the *New York Post* interpreted the “Debussyan” harmonies as a symbolic means to capture the frontier atmosphere of the setting, though he did so somewhat facetiously.

That he [Puccini] is a great admirer also of Debussy is evident from the frequent use of the augmented chord successions that were brought into fashion by that composer. No doubt, some persons will ask: “What have the latest Parisian harmonies in common with the lawless California miners?” The obvious answer is: “Are not the critics daily denouncing the Debussy harmonies as lawless?” Some people are *so* obtuse!<sup>63</sup>

Charles Meltzer claimed that Puccini had shown him the score of *Pelléas* at the composer’s home in Torre del Lago, Tuscany, and that the composer told him he admired

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<sup>60</sup> Farwell, “Music of Puccini's Opera.” See rehearsal 67, p.108 in the full score.

<sup>61</sup> Smith, “Puccini's New Opera of Golden West a Triumph.”

<sup>62</sup> Smith, “Puccini's New Opera of Golden West a Triumph.”

<sup>63</sup> Finck, “Puccini's New Opera.”

it. In this anecdote about this encounter, Meltzer explained, “from Debussy, either consciously or unconsciously, he has taken some of the strange musical progressions and harmonies (with lovely discords) which give a freshness, and what can properly, perhaps, be called a tang to his orchestration.”<sup>64</sup> Puccini’s private letters substantiate this anecdote. After hearing *Pelléas and Mélisande* in the theatre for the first time,<sup>65</sup> Puccini wrote to Giulio Ricordi about the opera, saying “Debussy’s *Pelléas et Mélisande* has extraordinary harmonic qualities and the most delicate instrumental effect. It’s really very interesting, but it never carries you away, lifts you; it is always somber in colour, as

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<sup>64</sup> Meltzer, “Opera Founded on an American Drama Is Critically Reviewed.”

<sup>65</sup> Puccini visited Paris in the fall of 1906 to hear the first performance of *Madama Butterfly* in France. According to Mary Jane Phillips-Matz, Puccini heard *Pelléas and Mélisande* during that visit. Mary Jane Phillips-Matz, *Puccini: A Biography* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2002), 155.

uniform as a Franciscan's habit."<sup>66</sup> Meltzer was one of the only critics who made arguments based on a personal connection with the composer.<sup>67</sup>

A few critics detected the influence of Richard Strauss in the harmonies of *La fanciulla del West*. In almost every one of the discussions of Puccini and Strauss, the critics pointed to *Salome* as the primary inspiration.<sup>68</sup> New York City opera audiences first saw *Salome* performed at the Metropolitan Opera House on 22 January 1907 with Olive Fremstad in the title role and Alfred Hertz conducting. The opera caused a scandal in the United States, much as it had elsewhere.<sup>69</sup> Reginald De Koven even characterized Puccini as succumbing to the *Salome* craze:

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<sup>66</sup> As quoted in Michele Girardi, *Puccini: His International Art*, trans. Laura Bisani (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 265. For the original see Eugenio Gara, ed., *Carteggi Pucciniani* (Milan: Ricordi, 1958), 334. Girardi points out that "harmonic procedures very typical of Debussy—from the use of ninth chords on secondary scale degrees to the utilization of the whole tone scale, the pentatonic scale, and Gregorian modes—can be seen in Puccini's very first works, from the Mass to Elgar." For more on the relationship between the two composers, see Mosco Carner, "Debussy and Puccini," in *Major and Minor* (London: Duckworth, 1980), 139-47. See also Saffle's discussion of Puccini's use of quasi-exotic harmonies. Saffle argues that the harmonies in *La fanciulla del West* were "syntheses of oriental, American, and impressionistic devices and sonorities familiar to every sophisticated fin-de-siècle opera-goer." Saffle revises Carner's 1936's thesis that the "exotic and impressionistic elements are so closely knit together in Puccini's music that a clear separation is impossible." Michael Saffle, "'Exotic Harmony' in *La Fanciulla del West*," in *Esotismo e coloure locale nell'opera di Puccini: atti del I° Convegno Internazionale sull'opera di Giacomo Puccini*, ed. Jürgen Maehder, *Collezione di Ricerche e Studi Pucciniani I* (Pisa: Giardini, 1985), 119-29, Mosco Carner, "The Exotic Element in Puccini," *Musical Quarterly* 22, no. 1 (1936). See also Hirsbrunner's argument that both Puccini and Debussy used so-called exotic musical materials in contexts that were not intended to be exotic and therefore those materials do not necessarily carry the semantic weight of exoticism with them. Theo Hirsbrunner, "L'exotisme chez Debussy et Puccini: Un faux problème?" in *Esotismo e coloure locale nell'opera di Puccini: atti del I° Convegno Internazionale sull'opera di Giacomo Puccini*, ed. Jürgen Maehder (Pisa: Giardini, 1985).

<sup>67</sup> Meltzer, "Opera Founded on an American Drama Is Critically Reviewed." Mildenberg also referred to a previous connection with Puccini in his review. "Two years ago, while living in Milan, I enjoyed the privilege of listening to the first motif of the Girl. . ." Mildenberg, "True Americanisms in Puccini's Score?"

<sup>68</sup> Although Strauss' *Elektra* premiered in 1909, it did not appear at the Metropolitan Opera House until 1932.

<sup>69</sup> For an American review of *Salome* see Richard Aldrich, Harold Edgar Johnson, and James Huneker, *Concert Life in New York, 1902-1923* (New York: G.P. Putnam's sons, 1941),

It may be, too, as his perverse and even brutal dissonances might suggest, Puccini has been bitten with the Richard Strauss mania and is aiming to apotheosize the orchestra as a means of assault on the sensory nerve centres. If this be true, nothing more regrettable on the part of the composer with a genuine lyric gift can be imagined.<sup>70</sup>

De Koven argued that the influence of Strauss had caused Puccini's change in harmonic texture. The critic for the *Musical Courier* offered a more charitable view of the situation, accusing Puccini only of unoriginality:

There is, of course, the same deft and clever instrumentation, now heightened several degrees through the added harmonies daring with which all the modern orchestra writers feel that they may move since Strauss widened the boundaries of tonality and Debussy performed the same service for our former rigorous scale, with its hide-bound intervals and arbitrary tone successions.<sup>71</sup>

Arthur Farwell, writing a week after most of the reviews had appeared in the major papers, rejected the notion that Strauss's music had any influence on *La fanciulla del West*: "Little or nothing of the influence of Wagner and Strauss is felt in *The Girl of the Golden West*. It is strongly un-Teutonic, and essentially Latin."<sup>72</sup> This statement contains remarkable implications about the relationship between personal and national style. In this line of reasoning, one cannot reflect the influence of Wagner or Strauss without sounding "Teutonic." Yet Debussy, very much influenced by Wagner, sounds in no way German. Moreover, it raises the question of whether the more adventurous tonal language can be traced to Strauss, as opposed to Debussy. This passage suggests that critics were at

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172-79. Incidentally, Gilman also wrote a book on *Salome*. Lawrence Gilman, *Strauss' Salome* (London and New York: 1907). For more on *Salome* in the United States, see Nadine Sine, "Selling *Salome* in America," in *Opera and the Golden West: The Past, Present, and Future of Opera in the U S A* (London: Associated University Presses, 1994), John Pennino, "Mary Garden and the American Press," *Opera Quarterly* 6, no. 4 (1989).

<sup>70</sup> De Koven, "New Opera."

<sup>71</sup> "Premiere of Puccini's New Opera." *Musical Courier* 14 December 1910.

<sup>72</sup> Farwell, "Music of Puccini's Opera."

least interested in determining whether the opera followed “Teutonism,” and if it did, there is an implication that this would negatively affect its overall value.

It is clear from the reviews that while a few critics noticed and objected to the harmonic language in *La fanciulla del West*, principally because those harmonies were too closely associated with the personal styles of Debussy and Strauss, this was not the case with all New York City critics. Many critics approved of the harmonic language in *La fanciulla del West*, viewing it as sign that Puccini was participating in the natural progress of modern music. It seems likely that critics basically supported this move if they approved of modern music, and did not if they disapproved. Few critics took the position of Max Smith, who wrote “if all words in a language are open to writers, why should not all musical expressions, whether harmonic, rhythmic or instrumental, be open to composers?”<sup>73</sup> And many concluded, like Farwell in the following passage, that *La fanciulla del West* seemed “to mark a transition for Puccini. He has apparently been studiously and laudably receptive to outside influences since his last operatic essay. It is thus that one broadens and grows.”<sup>74</sup> Few, however, developed their position like Farwell, who continued, “But it is likely he will make a more authentic and unified use of the new material in his next opera than he has succeeded in doing in this.”<sup>75</sup> Farwell seems to have viewed *La fanciulla del West* as an experiment on the path to something better. His comments and the others discussed above reveal a tension between the originality mandate and the idea of a common musical language and practice. In an era in which compositional styles were becoming ever more idiosyncratic and distinct, associated with not just certain countries but specific composers, these comments

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<sup>73</sup> Smith, “Puccini's New Opera of Golden West a Triumph.”

<sup>74</sup> Farwell, “Music of Puccini's Opera.”

<sup>75</sup> Farwell, “Music of Puccini's Opera.”

illustrate how complex the question of individual stylistic development had become in the New York City opera field.

“Aiming to Apotheosize the Orchestra”

While the melodic and harmonic structures in *La fanciulla del West* generated a fair amount of controversy among the New York City critics, relatively speaking the orchestration did not. In fact, the orchestration received the highest praise of all the musical features of the opera. In an interview printed on 18 November in both the *Christian Science Monitor* and the *New York Times*, Puccini explained that the instrumentation differed from his other operas. When asked if it was new, he replied, “New or better, it is not for me to say. It is logical after all, to always try to be better.”<sup>76</sup> A week later, De Koven told his readers that Puccini considered the orchestration the best he had ever done.<sup>77</sup> Many critics agreed. Finck called the score a “masterpiece” of orchestration, and even De Koven, saw in it the “master hand,” a surprising compliment given his often negative appraisals of the opera’s other features.<sup>78</sup> Comments like “richly coloured, ingenious and sonorous as is usual in Puccini,” “same deft clever instrumentation,” and “admirable . . . as a musical colourist,” permeated the reviews and suggest that for these critics *La fanciulla del West* delivered exactly what they had been expecting, if not more, from the composer with “unsurpassed resource in orchestration.”<sup>79</sup> Most of them viewed the orchestration of *La fanciulla del West* as more

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<sup>76</sup> “Puccini Comes to See Opera Rehearsal,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 18 November 1910; “Puccini Here,” *New York Times*.

<sup>77</sup> Reginald De Koven, “Wanted: Music Event to Arouse Public from its Present Apathy,” *New York World*, 27 November 1910.

<sup>78</sup> Finck, “Puccini’s New Opera,” *New York Evening Post*, 12 December 1910, De Koven, “Golden West in Opera Draws Gold from the East” *New York World*, 11 December 1910.

<sup>79</sup> Henderson, “Puccini’s Latest Opera,” *New York Sun*.

sophisticated compared to Puccini's previous operas. For instance, the critic at the *Herald* wrote "in orchestration this is doubtless the most complicated and effective writing that Mr. Puccini has done. There are a thousand touches of cleverness of characterization strewn throughout the score."<sup>80</sup>

Critics were amazed by the size of the orchestra and the variety of its instruments. William Henderson was one of a few critics who offered detailed descriptions of its instruments present in the orchestra. At one point in the review, he listed the instrumentation in full:

The score calls for a piccolo, three flutes, three oboes, English horn, three clarinets, bass clarinet, three bassoons, contra bassoon, four horns, three trumpets, four trombones, two harps, glockenspiel, celeste, bass drum, cymbals, tambourine, triangle. . . and the usual body of strings. The instruments are here named as they stand on the page of Mr. Puccini's score . . .<sup>81</sup>

One of the particular innovations Henderson discussed was the fonica, which he explained was "an arrangement of bells in B, F, and B, the first B being that below the treble clef."<sup>82</sup> Other critics mentioned the "new and improved celesta," which "punctuates certain phrases with points of light,"<sup>83</sup> and Finck noted that there was "a harp with paper interlaced between the strings," though he found Puccini's justifications for this innovation "inscrutable."<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> "Mr. Puccini's New American Opera Has Brilliant Premiere," *New York Herald*, 11 December 1910.

<sup>81</sup> Henderson, "Puccini's Latest Opera."

<sup>82</sup> Ibid. See also Spike Hughes who describes it as an instrument with "six metal strips mounted on a wooden frame, each with a brass resonator beneath. Six felt hammers, set in motion by a handle, strike the strips simultaneously and very rapidly to produce the tremolo shown in the score." Spike Hughes, *Famous Puccini Operas* (London: Robert Hale, 1959), 55. See the last three measures of Act I for the fonica.

<sup>83</sup> Aldrich, "Melodrama Set to Music."

<sup>84</sup> Finck, "Puccini's New Opera."



Puccini's treatment of the enlarged and subdivided instrument families impressed many critics, including Finck, Henderson, and Aldrich. Henderson, for example, described the ways in which how Puccini achieved variety in the string texture: "The composer divides his strings into small bodies very frequently, in some places arranging both firsts and seconds in groups of three. Solo violins, sometimes one and sometimes two, are also required,"<sup>85</sup> and Aldrich noted the divisions created "searching effects" and allowed for "new and striking instrumental combinations."<sup>86</sup> Mildenberg expected all this would "prove most interesting to the listener."<sup>87</sup>

Many critics argued that these new instrumental combinations created a new sound for the opera orchestra, increasing the range of possible sound colours. For example, Henderson claimed the new scoring allowed for a "great use of instrumental tints," and for Finck it created an "exceptional richness of orchestral colour." Even the generally negative De Koven acknowledged the new colours found in the opera.<sup>88</sup> Moreover, several critics thought that the colours and sounds served dramatic purposes. For example, Aldrich found them constantly responding to the drama and emotional situation, "now strong and vivid, now subtle and subdued," commenting that there was "rarely lacking a distinctive and characteristic scheme of colour."<sup>89</sup> Some heard a connection between the new orchestration and the drama. For example, Aldrich argued

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<sup>85</sup> Henderson, "Puccini's Latest Opera."

<sup>86</sup> Aldrich, "Melodrama Set to Music," *New York Times*.

<sup>87</sup> Mildenberg, "True Americanisms?" *Musical America*.

<sup>88</sup> De Koven, "Golden West in Opera Draws Gold from the East" *New York World* 11 December 1910.

<sup>89</sup> Aldrich, "Melodrama Set to Music," *New York Times*.

that “points or broad strokes” of colour accentuated, emphasized, and intensified “the significance of the dialogue.”<sup>90</sup>

Some critics felt that Puccini had used colour for colour’s sake. For example, Farwell insisted that the “colour exists independent of the any consideration of deeper dramatic significance.”<sup>91</sup> Henderson saw this to be a negative feature. He pointed to the scene at the end of Act II to illustrate what he heard as “peculiar” percussive effects.

For example, in the stress of the exciting second act he utilizes his sonorous bells merely to increase the complexity of the orchestral tints and to add a deep poignancy to the accents. There is nothing in the situation that refers to bells, and they are not employed as they usually are in opera, namely to provide a sound heard in the play. They are here introduced solely as an orchestral factor, and with no small dramatic effect.<sup>92</sup>

Several critics noted a similar abstract use of orchestral colour in Debussy’s opera music and attributed Puccini’s attitude toward colour in *La fanciulla del West* to the influence of the French composer. For example, Smith speculated that Puccini had “adopted a good deal . . . in orchestral colour from the treasure of novel effects of Claude Debussy,” and Gilman heard “tricks of instrumentation” that reminded him of Debussy.<sup>93</sup>

Several critics shared Mildenberg’s view that the score was “glittering with brilliant effects.”<sup>94</sup> Aldrich explained that the score was “full of novel or more or less successful effects” and that these attested “to the acre with which Mr. Puccini has developed his work.” The second act’s snowstorm and the poker game scenes, both

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<sup>90</sup> Aldrich, “Melodrama Set to Music,” *New York Times*.

<sup>91</sup> Farwell, “The Music of Puccini’s Opera,” *Musical America*.

<sup>92</sup> Henderson, “Mr. Puccini’s Latest Opera,” *New York Sun*.

<sup>93</sup> Smith, “Puccini’s New Opera,” *New York Press*, Gilman, “Puccini’s American Opera,” *Nation*.

<sup>94</sup> Mildenberg, “True Americanisms?” *Musical America*.

frequently cited, exemplified how the effects contributed to the drama and the atmosphere. Finck, for example, argued that the snowstorm scene was “as superb musically” as it was “scenically,” and this was a common assessment. In contrast De Koven complained that “the descriptive storm music is effective but developed nothing new,” and the critic from the *Musical Courier* agreed.<sup>95</sup>

Comments about the poker game’s orchestration were much more descriptive and far more critical than those about the snowstorm scene. Puccini may have invited criticisms, explaining his reticence about setting the poker scene to music: “It was quite embarrassing to set to music in such a dramatic scene as the game of cards which offers so little suggestive of melody. And so I have not written music descriptive of a game of cards—it is a game of lives . . . .”<sup>96</sup> Critics accused Puccini of imitation in this scene as well. This time it was of Richard Strauss’s *Salome*.<sup>97</sup> Smith noted that Puccini drew upon Strauss “occasionally,” while Finck explained that “. . . during the game of poker the only sound heard is the reiterated plucking of the double basses. Puccini has evidently been studying the Strauss scores.”<sup>98</sup> Aldrich explained that “in the suspense of the poker game there is no sound from the orchestra but a mysterious pizzicato from divided double basses, pianissimo—an effect of uncanny suggestiveness like that which Strauss [used] at a terrible moment in *Salome*.”<sup>99</sup> The *Musical Courier* viewed it as the opera’s “most

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<sup>95</sup> “Premiere of Puccini’s New Opera,” *Musical Courier*.

<sup>96</sup> “Puccini Here,” *New York Times*.

<sup>97</sup> For a discussion of how harmonies in the music of Strauss, Puccini, and other turn-of-the-century composers evoked a sense of the uncanny, see Richard Cohn’s discussion “Uncanny Resemblances: Tonal Signification in the Freudian Age,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 57, no. 2 (2004): 285-323.

<sup>98</sup> Finck, “Puccini’s New Opera.”

<sup>99</sup> Aldrich, “Melodrama Set to Music.”

striking pictorial effect.”<sup>100</sup> That critic, however, went on to complain that “the indistinct and solitary rambling of the double basses in the famous poker scene of Act II,” was “practically a duplicate of the thrilling device employed by Strauss to depict the breathless suspense of *Salome*, while Jochanaan [sic] is being decapitated in the fatal cistern.”<sup>101</sup> The “rumbling tympani and sullen double basses” struck De Koven as “vastly ineffective and unimportant,” while Krehbiel attacked the scene outright:

He uses music as mere colour—as a creator of mere atmosphere—as frankly (and much less ingeniously) as does Richard Strauss in *Salome*. He could not compose music for the scene of the card game for the life of the girl’s lover, so he makes noises in the bass voices of his orchestra while it progresses; but, Strauss froze the blood of his listeners with his uncanny noises while the tragedy was enacting in the cistern, and Puccini only piques curiosity—when will the basses stop their iteration?<sup>102</sup>

This passage is interesting not only as an example of just how negative and sarcastic some of the critics could be toward certain features of *La fanciulla del West*, but also because it appears to directly respond to Puccini’s comments about the challenge of composing music for the card scene.

Krehbiel’s repetition of the word “mere” raises another concern not explicitly addressed in the reviews, but present in many nonetheless. It suggests an assumption that orchestral music in opera needed to function in a structural way, perhaps bearing significant motives or themes and support the action and emotions onstage by supplying the harmonic support. The voices needed to dominate the musical texture. To supply “mere atmosphere” would liken it to other genres, for example the tone poem or even to incidental music for plays, melodramas, and even silent film. The music for all these was

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<sup>100</sup> “The Girl of the Golden West,” *Musical Courier*.

<sup>101</sup> “Premiere of Puccini’s New Opera,” *Musical Courier*

<sup>102</sup> Krehbiel, “Sensational Production.”

generally not viewed as equal in artistic status to symphonic or operatic music, in part because its purpose was to entertain music rather than art music or because it was secondary to the drama.<sup>103</sup> More than that, Puccini's attempts to expand the possibilities of the role the orchestra could play in operas appeared derivative of Strauss rather part of a larger stylistic trend or as something distinctly Puccinian.

A reading of reviews by both New York City's "Old Guard" and critics of lesser renown suggests that rather than simply rejecting what Puccini offered, many critics found both beautiful and objectionable qualities in Puccini's new musical style. Krehbiel's sarcastic comment illustrates how brutal some of the critics could be when they disapproved of a work or certain aspects of it. It also shows how widely the comments about *La fanciulla del West* ranged. The reviews nevertheless demonstrate a thoughtful consideration of the style and an attempt to gain a deeper understanding of what they heard as difficult but beautiful music.

#### Beyond New York City

Puccini left the United States on 28 December 1910, and shortly thereafter his opera appeared in several American and European cities. His departure received far less coverage than his arrival.<sup>104</sup> By the time he left New York City, his opera had had four

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<sup>103</sup> For more on the hierarchy of music in New York City, see for instance Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988). For more on the role of music in silent film presentations, see Rick Altman's article "Silence of the Silents," *Musical Quarterly* 80, no. 4 (1996): 648-718 and his more recent and extensive book *Silent Film Sound* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

<sup>104</sup> For examples of reports on his departure, see: "Kiss Composer Puccini Farewell," *New York Times*, 29 December 1910, and "Puccini Smacked by Forty Men with Farewell Kisses." *New York World*, 28 December 1910.

performances at the Metropolitan Opera House: each performance was sold out and well received.<sup>105</sup> Reviews of the local premieres in Chicago, Boston, Philadelphia, and St. Louis were generally positive, although the performance typically received higher praise than the work itself.<sup>106</sup> In the late spring of 1911 the opera began its tour of Europe, beginning with its British premiere at Covent Garden Opera House in London on 29 May. Although a few New York City critics predicted a poor reception in Europe,<sup>107</sup> the reception in London was very similar to that in New York City.<sup>108</sup> Covent Garden audiences were enthusiastic and positive. The London critics raised many of the same concerns as their counterparts in New York City; they were puzzled by what many considered was an undue reliance on harmonic techniques and procedures associated with Debussy and Strauss and the consequential loss of Puccini's own compositional voice. Several thought the opera bore too much a resemblance to his earlier works, leading one critic to compare Puccini to Handel and the charges of self-plagiarism which the latter often faced.<sup>109</sup> Many interpreted the weakened distinction between arioso and aria passages as a decrease in melody and judged it as a surprising loss.<sup>110</sup> Some viewed it as a work inferior to its predecessors,<sup>111</sup> some as no different in style or scope, while others

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<sup>105</sup> Performances were held on the following days: 10, 17, 20, and 26 December 1910.

<sup>106</sup> For a review of the Chicago performance, see "Carolina White as Minnie," *New York Times*, 28 December 1910.

<sup>107</sup> Aldrich, De Koven, Henderson.

<sup>108</sup> Randall and Davis indicate that the London critics said there was no progress.

<sup>109</sup> *The Stage* 1 June 1911.

<sup>110</sup> *Musical Standard* 3 June 1911.

<sup>111</sup> See for example, *London Illustrated News*, "save in purely technical matters, the composer shows no advance in his art," or *The People* "not his best but destined to be popular" *The People* 4 June 1911.

still viewed it as positive step forward, and in keeping with the compositional advances made by the most significant opera composers of the time.<sup>112</sup> Many, like the opera's New York City critics, also raised concerns that the play overshadowed the music.<sup>113</sup> A few London critics divided the issue of the work's craftsmanship from the issue of public success, allowing that a work could be well composed, but not ultimately successful.<sup>114</sup> In the end, the overwhelming majority of London critics concluded that at the very least the performance was great success, though many questioned *La fanciulla del West*'s future in the operatic canon. As the critic of the *Daily Telegraph* explained: "for emphatically it is not an opera that is destined for more than a limited age; certainly it is not for all time."<sup>115</sup> In many respects, London opera critics reacted to the opera no differently than those in New York City.

Where some of the London reviews did differ was in the reaction to the opera's local colour and realism.<sup>116</sup> These British critics were generally far less concerned with this feature of the opera than those in America, though like the American critics they were not unanimous in their judgements. One of the things this lack of concern might suggest is that the New York City critics had higher expectations of "authenticity" for this opera than critics from abroad. It also indicates that the London critics may have

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<sup>112</sup> *Manchester Guardian*.

<sup>113</sup> *Telegraph, Guardian, Daily Chronicle* 30 May, *The Globe* 30 May 1911, *The Academy* 10 June 1911.

<sup>114</sup> *Truth* 31 May 1911.

<sup>115</sup> *Daily Telegraph* 30 May 1911. See also *Manchester Guardian* 31 May 1911.

<sup>116</sup> Randall and Davis have indicated that critics beyond New York City "did not comment on issues of 'authenticity' or Americanness in their reviews," *Puccini and the Girl*, 147. A survey of over twenty London reviews suggests that some critics did consider at least the persuasiveness of the opera's Americanness.

invested less of the opera's success in an accurate portrayal of the American West and a persuasively American musical sound—or that it took far less to sound convincingly American—than the Americans themselves. Richard Aldrich had predicted that European producers would have trouble recreating it without Belasco to facilitate and that European critics would object to the American local colour.<sup>117</sup> Yet as one British critic observed after seeing a May 1911 performance of *La fanciulla del West*,

The Americans also did not like the Italianised Westerns. But we in England need not let that bias our judgement, for the question of local colour in music does not excite us greatly when our own people is not concerned—though things like the “English” atmosphere in Saint-Saëns's *Henry VIII* did annoy us a little at the time.<sup>118</sup>

Indeed many critics praised *La fanciulla del West*'s local colour and production quality.<sup>119</sup> They had very little to say about the original musical sources, though one critic guessed that Jake Wallace's ballad was “based upon a negro melody.”<sup>120</sup> A couple of critics even connected Puccini's attempts to create “a distinctive musical phraseology for the New World” to Dvořák's.<sup>121</sup> This association illustrates the fuzzy line between

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<sup>117</sup> See for example, Aldrich *New York Times*, *Musical Courier*, *Henderson Sun*, and the *Nation* 15 December 1910, 589. Girardi 2000, 281 refers to the *Nation* article.

<sup>118</sup> “Puccini's New Opera” *Manchester Guardian*, 31 May 1911.

<sup>119</sup> For examples of praise, see *The London Musical Courier* 8 July 1911. For examples of objections see, for instance, the *Illustrated London News* “he makes his men absurd creatures even Bret Harte would have disowned . . . They cry like babies with little or no provocation, their sentimentality suggests one of the phases of inebriety. They are Italian all the time—no drop of Anglo-Saxon blood flows in their veins. The composer handles them with skill, but little vigour,” or, “Puccini has failed just where one would expect, in trying to reproduce the atmosphere of a mining camp, and the reek of a beer saloon. There was homely sentiment undoubtedly behind the rough hearts of the boys, and their reverential respect for Minnie is quite right, but they have been given by the music a suggestion of sickly sentimentalism, of weeping on each other's shoulders, and turning pale at the mere mention of home, which colours the whole of David Belasco's story with artificiality.”

<sup>120</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 30 May 1910.

<sup>121</sup> “Where the opera is not altogether satisfying is in its lack of genuine local colour and definite characterization and the fewness of those entrainment melodies which have been so



the attempt to create music that depicts a place and music that links composers from a place. London critics typically claimed *La fanciulla del West* was one of the most beautiful and realistic productions ever to be mounted at the Royal Opera House.<sup>122</sup> Many, though not all, also thought that it faithfully captured the atmosphere of Bret Harte's stories. London's critics commented far more frequently upon the lynching scene than New York City's and they were more impressed by the presence and use of horses onstage than their American counterparts. British critics, like the Americans, did sometimes point out that the slang in the original play did not translate well into Italian operatic language.

In conclusion, William Henderson's second review, published 18 December 1910, sums up the response to *La fanciulla del West* by the New York City opera critics:

In earnestly endeavouring to approach his subject from a new point of departure Mr. Puccini unquestionably sacrificed himself in no small measure to the demands of the drama and it was not long before his audience perceived this. The admirers of Mr. Puccini were hurt because he refused to repeat himself. His disinterested critics were disappointed because he left his old methods and found [less striking] substitute for them.<sup>123</sup>

Nevertheless, there were supporters. Max Smith, one of Puccini's strongest advocates among the New York City critics, defended *La fanciulla del West* thus:

As the work is repeated during the present and subsequent season, opera goers no doubt will come to recognize more and more clearly that *The Girl of the Golden West* is the best musical effort the Italian composer has thus far put forth. It is a far more subtle, far more elaborate score than any of his earlier ones. Consequently it requires more than one hearing before perfect comprehension,

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distinctive a feature of his work in the past. Puccini, no more than Dvořák has been able to find a distinctive musical phraseology for the New World, and though his miners wear the garb of the Golden West, they speak within the idiom as well as the tongue of Italy" *Sunday Times* 4 June 1911.

<sup>122</sup> *The Graphic* June 4 1911, *The Queen* 3 June 1911, *Punch* 14 June 1911.

<sup>123</sup> Henderson, "Mr. Puccini and His Golden Girl."

perfect application can be obtained. There are many persons now who feel called upon, for one reason or another to denounce *The Girl of the Golden West* arbitrarily after a single hearing. This chorus of croakers, one may prophesy confidently, will grow smaller and smaller with every repetition of the opera, and in the end the very men and women who cried loudest against it will give it the noisiest approval.<sup>124</sup>

Two main patterns emerge from the attempts to identify and evaluate the melody, harmony, and orchestration. One, that Puccini rightfully responded to the demands of setting a melodrama that depended upon action and dialogue, the building and dissipation of suspense rather than histrionics, and subsequently achieved results as well as, if not better, than anyone who would have attempted the same. However, while appreciative of the compositional challenge, these critics were sceptical of the results because it seemed to some that Puccini's musical voice had changed beyond recognition. Two, that Puccini was lured into the trap of emulating or imitating modern opera composers for the sake of progress and wound up writing music that sounded derivative of either particular composers, specifically Debussy and Strauss, or of national styles, specifically French and German. While conceding that a fine line between personal or national and universal musical styles existed, some felt that Puccini had crossed that line.

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<sup>124</sup> Smith, "*Girl of the Golden West* Gains with Repetition."

## CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS

The evidence from this study's systematic comparison of opera reviews suggests that the reception of *La fanciulla del West* was tied directly to the issue of opera development in the United States, both in terms of developing a new school of American opera composition and improving the practice of opera production in the United States. That Puccini's opera raised concerns about the problem of how to compose distinctly American-sounding music and about New York City's status in the musical world illustrates how little had changed since Dvořák's visit in the 1890s. The evidence also indicates that the opera's reception was linked to the issue of musical modernism. Critics questioned the relationship not only between *La fanciulla del West* and Puccini's previous operas, but also between it and those of his contemporaries Claude Debussy and Richard Strauss. The apparent similarities and differences raised concerns about the place of individuality, originality, and continuity in early-twentieth-century opera composition. These two issues—the one nationalist, the other seemingly universal—yielded complex responses to the work. While the first generated many negative responses, the second generated more balanced assessments. Together they account for the range of commendations and condemnations of *La fanciulla del West*.

Mary-Jane Phillips-Matz once characterized the reception of *La fanciulla del West* in New York City as one of appreciation and misunderstanding.<sup>1</sup> This assessment describes the critical responses accurately, but reveals very little about the nature of the appreciation and misunderstanding or reasons for the diverging opinions. The work of Randall and Davis serves to

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<sup>1</sup> Phillips-Matz, "Puccini's America," 222.

illuminate some of the broader reasons for the mixed reception of the work.<sup>2</sup> This dissertation offers the most comprehensive analysis to date of all the major points raised in the New York City reviews of the opera and the deepest historical contextualization of the commentary. It therefore paints a far richer picture of the reception and the place of the opera in New York City musical life than previous studies.

Ultimately, this dissertation confirms the accuracy of Randall and Davis' argument that *La fanciulla del West*'s reception was coloured by the larger debate over the ways to express American national identity in music.<sup>3</sup> My assessment differs from theirs, however, in that it attempts to probe these issues more deeply. Nationalism and identity formation are complex issues and fraught with tensions and subtle inconsistencies of viewpoint in any country, particularly in the years leading up to the First World War.<sup>4</sup> The situation was no different in the New York City of 1910. I show how specific comments about national identity in the New York City reception of *La fanciulla del West* tied explicitly to those made in earlier discussions about opera in the musical press of that city and to an earlier case of a European attempting to write American music for an American audience. I also explain how contrasting approaches to nationalism and the variable meaning of the word "Americanism" can account for the variety of assessments concerning the opera's "American" identity in New York City.

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<sup>2</sup> Randall and Davis, *Puccini and the Girl*.

<sup>3</sup> Randall and Davis, 132.

<sup>4</sup> The wide variety of theories of nationalism attests to this complexity. For a review article considering the most influential of these theories, see Lloyd Kramer, "Historical Narratives and the Meaning of Nationalism," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 58, no. 3 (1997): 525-45.

It would be easy to draw the conclusion that the opera's debatable American features were the primary points of discussion from the current research on the opera's reception. In examining all the major points of debate in the controversy surrounding *La fanciulla del West*, this dissertation shows that critics carefully considered the relative effectiveness of all the musico-dramatic features of the opera and their comments testify to the difficulty people in New York City had in understanding the emerging aesthetics of musical modernism. They also offer insight into the aesthetics of realism or naturalism, the question of authenticity in music, the significance of artistic style, and the process of canon formation.

This dissertation's focus is therefore both wider and tighter than previous scholarship. On the one hand it considers many more topics of debate within the early reception of the work than previous scholarship, which has relied primarily on representative comments about the opera's Americanness, weak libretto, perceived lack of melody, and the influence of Debussy to define the main points of reception. On the other hand, it focuses primarily on the December reviews of the work in the New York City musical press, whereas the first full-length reception history of the work attempts to trace the influence of the initial reception of the work in the popular press on the later reception in the academic press.

#### Staging the Frontier

*La fanciulla del West* failed as an operatic version of a New York City frontier play for its initial audience. As some of the critics predicted, it stayed in the Metropolitan Opera Company's repertoire for only a few seasons after its premiere and was not performed by the

company in the 1930s (with one exception in 1931), 40s, or 50s.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, it never set a compositional precedent. Subsequent opera composers by and large overlooked the theme of settlers from the east, of “cowboys,” and focused instead on “Indians.” *Natoma* and *Shanewis* proved more suitable subjects in New York City for frontier operas than the difficulties Europeans encountered on the frontier.

The perception that *La fanciulla del West* lacked the musical colour of the frontier illustrates a paradox in the critics’ expectations. This was the case even though Puccini chose pieces very similar to those performed during the intermissions of the play to further the Western ambiance. On the one hand, they expected him to use actual music from mid-nineteenth century California, knowing full well that few such sources existed. On the other hand, they begrudged Puccini his use of Native American music and American popular music. In the comments about the music’s failure to evoke a sense of place, it appears that some critics had hoped Puccini would invent music that could successfully evoke the Far West without resorting to any source materials at all. These expectations show how the critics were deeply influenced by prior arguments like Dvořák’s, Amy Beach’s, Edward McDowell’s or participants in the Indianist movement, about the proper way to create American sounding music. In many cases their positions in the reviews were restatements of arguments—their own or others’—about the risks of using certain sources and not the particular effect of using the sources in this opera.

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<sup>5</sup> The opera was performed each season from 1910 to 1914. Thereafter, the Metropolitan Opera Company had no full performances of the opera between 1915 and 1929. There was a revival of the opera in the 1929-30 season, and one performance in the 1931-32 season. Its next performance by the Metropolitan Opera Company was in 1963, with its fiftieth performance by the company in 1962. Its one hundredth performance was on 22 December 2010. In contrast, *Madama Butterfly*’s one-hundredth performance by the Metropolitan Opera Company took place on 5 March 1915, and it will see its eight-hundredth and forty-second performance on 8 March 2012.

Having no previous frontier operas with which to compare *La fanciulla del West* or from which to form expectations, each critic needed to develop his set of criteria of any established generic conventions. Critics typically looked to Puccini's most recent local colour opera, *Madama Butterfly*. Although they compared *La fanciulla del West* to this quintessentially exotic opera, they could not evaluate it using the same standards. Puccini's sources were too controversial among the critics to successfully blend seamlessly into the musical fabric of the opera. Instead the musical references rang out to the critics and several of them identified specific sources they heard in their reviews.

For many critics it would have been challenging to consider *La fanciulla del West* as simply an Italian exotic opera belonging to the same genre as *Madama Butterfly*, *Iris*, or *Carmen* since it was set in their own country and the central dramatic conflict did not depend upon racial and cultural tensions. Ralph Locke's research has shown that by the end of the nineteenth century, exotic operas typically exploited a racial/cultural difference in two significant ways.<sup>6</sup> First, the leading female character was generally an exotic Other, markedly so in several ways, including her skin colour, her religious affiliation, and her perceived primitivism. Though arguably "uncivilized," Minnie was a white Christian. Second, the romantic male hero was usually a Christian European and often a soldier: Johnson, however, was a Californio bandit disguised as an Anglo-Saxon American male. Like Minnie, Johnson too was white and Christian.

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<sup>6</sup> Ralph Locke, *Musical Exoticism: Images and Reflections* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). Locke, and others studying exoticism or (post)colonialism, use the idea of "Orientalism" as presented in the work of Edward W. Said as part of their theoretical framework. At the heart of Said's theory is the argument that "Orientalist" works participate in a discourse of stark racial and cultural opposition. See Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

Furthermore, the obviously exotic Other characters in this opera, Wowkle and Billy, played minor roles and mainly served to situate the opera in the American west. Though Native American they never sing authentic Native American music, much to the chagrin of several critics.<sup>7</sup> Minnie sings in typical Puccini-heroine musical language, while another supporting character, Jake Wallace—also a white character, but in blackface—sings the only aria fully constructed out of American source material. Johnson sings music influenced by ragtime, music initially associated with African Americans, and to have Johnson sing such music would be to mark his racial, cultural, and political differences.

While the sound of Puccini's frontier failed to garner much praise from the critics, the sight of it brought their unqualified admiration. Many critics credited the visual rather than the musical appeal of the opera as the main source of the premiere's success. Credit for this success, however, was not granted to Puccini, since the press considered the sets, staging, and acting to be entirely under the control of David Belasco. In the pre-premiere publicity, Belasco is portrayed as animated and fully engaged in the rehearsal process, Puccini as coolly detached and quietly observant. In several papers, Belasco figured almost as prominently in reviews as Puccini. Critics claimed that the Wizard of Broadway's magic transformed the European opera singers into convincing Westerners. The emphasis on Belasco's contribution sends the message that any American qualities in the production came from Belasco influence, not Puccini's. In comparison to Belasco, a New York City resident with a childhood linked to the Far West, Puccini appears as a cultural outsider in need of an interpreter and guide to fully understand the essence of the land.

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<sup>7</sup> See Aldrich, "Critics find Little American Colour in Puccini's Opera *the Girl of the Golden West*" *New York Times*, 18 December 1910.



Belasco, with his carefully crafted public image of an eyewitness who had personally survived the frontier and lived to tell his tale to those back east, proved a reliable storyteller to New York City audiences. Belasco's vision of the Far West was approved as authentic, but this was because his construction appealed both to the audience's familiarity with the images, plots, characters, and themes of other frontier works and to its sense of authorial credibility. Indeed, his frontier melodrama *The Girl of the Golden West* was presented as quasi-autobiographical. Puccini, on the other hand, violated those expectations by appealing to a more European view of authority in admitting he had never been west and did not intend to travel there. For the critics, his research into the subject by reading books, examining pictures, and listening to music he had been led to believe was "authentic" Western music paled in comparison with Belasco's lived experience. Puccini cast himself as an outsider, one not fully in touch with his subject and his critics picked up on that and some explicitly used it against him.

Staging a frontier opera in an American opera house clearly left Puccini vulnerable to essentialist lines of reasoning. Critics assumed their national identity made them more appropriate judges of what constituted an authentic musical portrayal of the West than Puccini, despite the fact that many of them had no more personal experience with California than he. While the New York critics by and large rejected the musical representations of Americans and the United States onstage, critics from other cities made no such objections. A British critic summed the situation up, writing: "The Americans also did not like the Italianised Westerns. But we in England need not let that bias our judgement, for the question of local colour in music does

not excite us greatly when our own people is not concerned—though things like the “English” atmosphere in Saint-Saëns's *Henry VIII* did annoy us a little at the time.”<sup>8</sup>

### Crossing Borders

Newspaper stories covering international border crossings surface in the discussions surrounding the opera and its performance. These reports illustrate an interest in determining the degree to which foreign influences played a role in the different levels of the opera’s composition, production, and reception. Puccini, Civinini, Zangarini, Toscanini, Caruso, and the other European stars of the opera were typically depicted as foreign visitors to New York. The press frequently emphasized their Italianness through news of their oceanic arrivals and departures. The word often qualified the musical tradition to which they belonged as well as their national identity. The very foundation of *La fanciulla del West* was seen as an act of border crossing, as the distinction that the libretto drew from an “American” source but supported “Italian” music was commonly noted. So was the notion that Europe would have to look to America for immediate answers about the nature and value of the opera, and that the so-called “American” opera—if successful—would travel to Europe and receive performances there.

Collectively, the reviews imply self-consciousness on the part of American critics who pointed out that their assessments would come under the scrutiny of a jealous Europe,<sup>9</sup> and allude to a belief that they would so rise to the level of international figures. The critics viewed

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<sup>8</sup> A.K. “Puccini's New Opera. *The Girl of the Golden West*.” *The Manchester Guardian*, 31 May 1911, 6.

<sup>9</sup> See for example, Algernon St. John-Brenon, who wrote: “It was the first time in the crowded and picturesque annals of artistic New York that a living European master of opera, passing over the jealous and insulted communities of his native land, had elected this city for the introduction of his latest work.” “*Girl of the Golden West* in Opera Storms Metropolitan Throns.” *New York Morning Telegraph*, 11 December 1910.

themselves as in control over what works could gain admission into not only a developing American musical canon, but also the established international opera canon. Analysis of the tone of the reviews suggest that the critics were self-conscious about the fact that they were not just writing for their local and national readers, but for an international audience, and for posterity.<sup>10</sup>

Reports in the newspapers indicate that the administration of the Metropolitan Opera Company viewed their premiere as a symbol of a significant international collaboration; the interaction between two ostensibly independent and distinct political and cultural entities suggested by the intertwining flags and banners decorating the auditorium and foyer. Both the company, and in turn the press, commemorated the event in the same way as other major public celebrations like national holidays, presidential visits, and the unveiling of monuments.

Newspaper reports described the reception following the opera as one attended by the city's leading cultural, social, and political figures—including both Americans and Europeans living in or visiting New York. Ceremonial gifts were exchanged, toasts were made, and speeches were given. The accounts described the people that attended the reception, what they wore, and even recounted conversations overheard. The vivid descriptions offered those who could not attend enough images to experience the premiere vicariously, an effort that makes apparent the significance of the event.

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<sup>10</sup> See for example, William Henderson's *New York Sun*, 18 December review, in which he states: "When the future historian of opera in this country comes to pen the story of the season of 1910-1911 he will doubtless search the files of the daily newspapers with some idea of the amount of public excitement aroused by the first performance on a New York stage of an opera prepared by a famous European master especially for the American trade. Without question that historian will ponder deeply on the nature of the accounts of that production and on the summary of critical views thrust upon an innocent and quiescent world." Henderson, "Mr. Puccini and His *Golden Girl*." *New York Sun*, 18 December 1910, 5.

While most papers patriotically described the pomp and circumstance surrounding Puccini's transatlantic crossing, participation in the premiere, and departure, the pride was not unanimous. Some critics took a more cynical view of the culturally hybrid event, particularly Mark Blumenberg of the *Musical Courier*, who in general disliked the attention given to opera by the New York City opera critics and resented the disproportionate number of European professional musicians in New York City. As John Graziano has shown, many European musicians thrived in New York City, and some Americans with protectionist views resented their presence. Blumenberg's sentiments were in keeping with the waves of nativism motivating certain labour movements and political parties of the early 1900s and on the edge of the One Hundred Percent Americanism movement that would rise in the 1910s. It seems probable that some of the criticism about Puccini's inability to capture the essence of the West was motivated by nativist thinking.

Many of the people identified with Puccini's staging of the frontier belonged to what Blumenberg, for example, snidely referred to as "The Italian Contingent." Some New Yorkers resented the significant role people like Gatti-Casazza, Toscanini, Campanini, Giulio and Tito Ricordi, Caruso, Adami and other Italians appeared to be playing in what was supposed to be an American institution. Whether this was pure protectionism on their account, or a preference for the former administration and dominance of the German opera repertoire cannot be determined from the *La fanciulla del West* reviews alone. While reviewers typically described Puccini as an Italian composer or the head of the Italian school of composition, Toscanini was rarely figured that way. With an Italian administrator, conductor, composer and Italian librettists, signers, and stars, there were very few American nationals participating in the production and that was indicated from time to time, particularly in the articles that followed the opera's genesis and

rehearsal period. Some writers felt that Mary Garden should have been cast as Minnie, and the *New York Times* once erroneously announced that Puccini had chosen Geraldine Farrar to play the part. American soprano Caroline White would sing the role in the Chicago production that followed soon after the New York premiere. These kinds of tensions between U.S. and European citizens parallel those in the orchestral music circles of New York City and the rest of the country in the years leading into the First World War.<sup>11</sup>

With frequent references to the opera as an “American” opera, it comes as no surprise that addressing the relative “American-ness” and “Italian-ness” of the opera seems to be one of the tasks critics believed they needed to undertake. Early in the opera’s development, Puccini had publicly referred to it as his American opera. New York City headlines soon after referred to it in the same manner. Although Puccini subsequently went on to stress that he would focus on what was universal in the work, rather than regional, the reference seemed to stick. Reviewers usually drew the conclusion that it was an Italian opera on an American subject. Some even questioned the purity of its Italian-ness, recognizing musical gestures they associated with composers from France and Germany. No critic identified it as an international opera and no critic drew the conclusion that the mixing of musical styles represented the mixing of cultures in the United States. Instead, Puccini was taken to task for writing an Italian opera with too much foreign influence and with much that failed to sufficiently evoke California.

At the same time that critics emphasized Puccini’s national identity and position as a representative of the Italian school of composition, they also explained that part of his previous success lay in the individuality of his compositional approach. The reviews demonstrate that

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<sup>11</sup> See Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht, *Sound Diplomacy: Music and Emotions in Transatlantic Relations, 1850-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 151-176.

nearly all of the critics acknowledged and even valued Puccini's "unique" and "personal" style. The explanations of how he sacrificed his musical individuality in the name of keeping abreast with modern compositional techniques reveal the critics' disappointment with the changes and a sense of loss. Instead of objectively observing that he had used progressive techniques, most viewed this as "apeing" (to use Gilman's expression) that of a specific composer, lamenting the fact that he had done so. The negative response to using approaches associated with composers from France and Germany suggests the critics viewed this stylistic border crossing as a transgressive act, violating the principals of individualism and originality. They expected Puccini to compose within the borders of his established style and that of the "Young Italian school." Though few defended him on this point, those who did noted either that Puccini had already used the whole-tone scale and parallel chords associated with Debussy in his previous operas with success, or that such materials could not be fairly considered the property of one person or one country. They interpreted the changes as part of Puccini's natural growth as a composer.

The problem of defining opera along national lines, particularly with respect to American opera, plagued the critics of *La fanciulla del West* as much as it had those of earlier operas. Americans had been staging European opera, particularly those from German, French, and Italian repertoires in American opera houses for over a century by the time *La fanciulla del West* premiered, and in the view of some, they did so at the expense of American repertoire. The inconsistencies in the reviews suggest that by 1910 critics still could not agree about what could make an opera distinctly American. Critics evaluated *La fanciulla del West* along the lines of a wide variety of features that could be considered American: its composer's nationality, the language of the libretto, the place of composition, the subject matter, the musical style. They also

addressed, as they had in the past with other works that drew on these sources, the value of Native American, Stephen Foster, folk, and popular music as potential sources for the Americanization of European music.

It should come as no surprise that critics explicitly recalled the Dvořák controversy of the 1890s in their analysis of *La fanciulla del West*. One of the central points of that debate had been that folk music quotations could transform symphonies from absolute to program music. The idea that direct quotations would somehow debase the music also surfaced in discussions about national opera, with Russian national opera serving as an example. Some feared that an opera quoting folk music would not be perceived as musically sophisticated. The local music Puccini alluded to and quoted in *La fanciulla del West* carried with its extra-musical associations, ones that went far beyond those that would be commonly implied in national or exotic operas.

#### Blurring Boundaries, Pushing Boundaries

*La fanciulla del West* seems to walk in the borderland between the realms of exotic and national opera, filling the generic expectations of neither one for its American audience. At the same time, critics struggled with the tension between expecting both artistic progress and stylistic stasis. *La fanciulla del West* raised questions about the new direction contemporary composers seemed to be taking with regard to melody, harmony, and texture. Although several American critics resisted Puccini's integration of modernist compositional techniques, they recognized and seemed to appreciate the new level of musical sophistication those approaches lent to the score. Indeed, certain appraisals give the impression that many critics were torn between amazement at the compositional proficiency demonstrated by the music and their dislike of the modernist idiom. By criticising the application of newer scales and dissonant or non-functional harmonies while at the same time praising the craftsmanship, the critics were clearly

attempting to set a stylistic boundary for the genre while maintaining an appropriately respectful stance toward the composer. The preference for the musical style of Puccini's earlier works further suggests a fairly traditionalist stance toward opera composition. Their comments also indicate a far more cautious, even reserved, approach to evaluating the style and structure of the opera compared to that which they took in assessing opera's American-ness. They do not appear to invest the presence of newer compositional trends with the quality of decadence or view them a symbol of modern society's decay, as Alexandra Wilson has shown the Italian critics would do.<sup>12</sup>

From the surprising range of explanations critics offered for the blurred boundaries between aria and recitative and the role of the voice and the orchestra it becomes clear that there was an array of positions about the function and nature of melody in opera amongst this group of critics. The competing interpretations—that it was part of a general return to the style of early Baroque opera, that it was analogous to the everyday dialogue found in the realist or naturalist literary sources composers had been turning to for their libretti, that it was part of the modernist move away from arching melodies, or that it was a symptom of a personal compositional crisis—connect the reception of this opera to a larger debate in New York City's musical circles over the future of opera composition. The level of importance to which the New York City critics attached their responses suggests that they believed their reviews of *La fanciulla del West* would play a significant role in that conversation. Their interest in the melody should not be surprising since the construction of beautiful vocal melodies was largely perceived to be the main event of an Italian opera. It is also consistent with the style of operas that was being written by American

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<sup>12</sup> Wilson, 9.



composers, such as Reginald De Koven and Walter Damrosch who were influenced by the British light opera tradition.

From the critical commentary in the New York City papers, it becomes clear that the opera blurred more than just the lines dividing the genres of historical, national, opera, or local colour opera. The critics used a variety of classification terms—lyric drama, grand opera, melodrama, Italian opera—to describe *La fanciulla del West*, which suggests that either the critics found the opera difficult to classify, or the terms no longer held the same meanings that they did in the late nineteenth century. With each of these terms encompassing a slightly different set of expectations, the chances of each critic choosing the same set of criteria would be slim. This can account for part of the varied response in assessing the success of the opera's individual numbers and the musico-dramatic relationship

The opera also blurred the boundaries between highbrow and lowbrow art. Opera, though lower in value than the symphony or absolute music, held the status of an exotic, highbrow art form in New York City, while frontier melodramas and Wild West shows were typically viewed as popular, lowbrow works. By setting an opera to a sensational play, Puccini set up an opposition between the tone of the subject matter, the tone of music, and the venue. In so doing, he risked compromising the inherent artistic value of his piece for his New York City opera critics, though perhaps not the public. Puccini furthered this drastic contrast by alluding to Stephen Foster songs, ragtime, and other types of popular American music from the period. The reviews suggest that most of the opera critics resented such music in general and references to it were extremely noticeable and furthered the improbable connection between the opera house and Tin Pan Alley, Broadway, and the “Coney Island Riverboats.”

The New York City reception of *La fanciulla del West* offers a unique chance to see a group's reaction to the artwork that depicts them. American critics, for the most part, rejected the musical depiction of Californian miners. Their objection rested on the grounds that the music was far too sophisticated for the primitive time and place that it needed to evoke. The pieces of music from the United States that Puccini quoted, alluded to, or imitated in the score lacked the necessary qualities to sufficiently represent Americans in general. They also carried with them extra-musical associations that went well beyond a simple mapping of sound to place, and plunged the opera into a decades-old debate over the proper constitution of an American musical style. Critics fell into rehearsed arguments about the unsolved question of how to write American-sounding music, and these arguments were grounded in larger concerns about national identity. It seems that young men could "Go West" to seek their fortunes, but not if they were Italian opera composers.

When addressing the musical features of the opera, American critics observed that Puccini had taken his style in a new direction that they struggled to fully understand. Many critics—often those who were composers themselves—favoured a more traditional compositional style and predictably found fault with Puccini's changes. Their rejections tended to draw on national identity lines of reasoning as well, either claiming that as an Italian Puccini was blocked from understanding his American subject matter and thus failed to be able to write music for it, or that he had been too influenced by non-Italian composers and as result he was unable to write the type of music his audiences loved. Those who praised his changes viewed them as advances that resulted in a beautifully crafted, sophisticated musical score. Max Smith offered an interesting take on the issue:

The interesting fact this morning is that the Italian composer has actually made his best opera on the subject he chose; that he has caught with astonishing success the spirit, colour and feeling of Belasco's story. Let those who believe better results could have been achieved with the same material come forward with proofs. As an opera, *The Girl of the Golden West* will probably be delighting audiences long after the play has been forgotten. And it will outlast *Tosca* and *Madama Butterfly*.<sup>13</sup>

The question of whether or not this opera constitutes Puccini's best deserves greater attention than musicologists have paid, although "best" is really a context dependant term. Recently musicologists have begun to examine the work more seriously and consequently many advocate for a more central place in the current international opera canon. Julian Budden has rejected many of the criticisms levied against the work over the past century and Mary-Jane Philips-Matz has gone so far as to argue that it is his best work.<sup>14</sup> The growing interest in the work by musicologists toward the end of the twentieth century is matched by an increase in performances at the Metropolitan during the same time period. *La fanciulla del West* saw two recent revivals in New York City: a 2005 production by the New York City Opera Company, and, most significantly, a 2010 production by the Metropolitan Opera Company that celebrated both the opera's centenary and its one hundredth performance.<sup>15</sup>

In the final chapter of *Puccini and the Girl*, Annie Randall and Rosalind Gray Davis ponder how critics would respond to the opera during its centenary.<sup>16</sup> In particular they wonder how a century of exposure to Westerns on film and in television would influence the reception of

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<sup>13</sup> Smith, "Puccini's New Opera of Golden West as Triumph," *New York Press*, 11 December 1910.

<sup>14</sup> Budden, *Puccini*, 305 and 330-1; Philips-Matz *Puccini*, 207. For more on the responses to the work by critics and musicologists during the twentieth century, and See Randall and Davis, *Puccini and the Girl*, 148-175.

<sup>15</sup> The opera's first performance in this season took place on 6 December 2010. Its one hundredth performance by the Metropolitan Opera Company took place on 22 December 2010. See "*La fanciulla del West*," *MetOpera Database* [Online Database] Metropolitan Opera Archives <http://archives.metoperafamily.org/archives/frame.htm>, accessed 29 April 2010.

<sup>16</sup> Randall and Davis, "Staging *La fanciulla del West* in 2010," *Puccini and the Girl*, 170-175.

these features of the opera. It seems only fitting, then, to conclude by considering how at least one New York City treated the 2010 revival by the Metropolitan Opera Company. Two articles from the *New York Times* stand out for their similarities to the 1910 coverage, particularly in their length and tongue-in-cheek titles: “When Puccini Rode Tall in the Saddle,” (5 December 2010) by Cori Ellison, and “Puccini’s Western, in Search of Lyrical Gold,” (8 December 2010) by Anthony Tommasini.<sup>17</sup> Both recount the conditions of the premiere and the first audience’s positive reaction to the performance. While Ellison also summarizes the main points of criticism given to the work, Tommasini reviews the 6 December 2010 performance. Tommasini contextualizes the performance with brief discussions of the 1910 premiere and the Metropolitan Opera Company’s 1993 production, which the 2010 production revives.<sup>18</sup> He argues that *La fanciulla del West* is “still too little known and misunderstood to warrant a reconsidered production by a director with a novel interpretative stance,” pointing out that opera is typically dismissed as implausible. He takes no stand on the realism or authenticity of the opera’s portrayal of the American West, nor does he speculate on the work’s status as an “American” opera. His assessment of the libretto also differs from that of most reviewers in 1910, describing it as effective and “often psychologically astute.” These concerns appear largely irrelevant to Tommasini’s estimation of the opera.

Tommasini’s assessment shares many similarities with those written in 1910. For example, like many of his earlier counterparts, Tommasini considers the skilful conducting as well as the superior musicianship and technique of the singers vital to this “distinguished” production’s success. In general he views the “ingenious” score as Puccini’s most subtly written and boldly modern, and describes it as folding “lyrical strands into a nearly through composed

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<sup>17</sup> Cori Ellison, “When Puccini Rode Tall in the Saddle,” *New York Times*, 5 December 2010. Anthony Tommasini, “Puccini’s Western, in Search of Lyrical Gold,” *New York Times*, 8 December 2010.

<sup>18</sup> This production sets the last act in the mining camp rather than deep in the “primeval forest” as the Jules Speck *mise-en-scène* specifies: *La Fille du West: Opera en trois actes* (Paris: Ricordi, n.d.).

musical fabric,” with “textural richness and piercing harmonic complexities.” Tommasini also draws on a comparison to Debussy, writing that “the orchestra swells with undercurrents as harmonically murky and plush-textured” as anything written by that composer. Turns of phrase like the above suggest a deep appreciation for the opera on the part of the reviewer. Finally, like several of the 1910 critics, Tommasini ends his review with a discussion of horses. He speculates that Puccini’s only complaint would have been about the lack of horses in the final act. More than likely, though, Puccini would also have lamented the absence of the visually striking and innovative forest setting for which he wrote music intended to bring it to life and to capture the varying distances of the miners on horseback as they pursued Johnson through the forest. With increasingly deeper considerations and higher appraisals of the opera’s music presented in both the musicological literature and the popular press, *La fanciulla del West* seems poised to find a more significant place in the repertory.

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APPENDIX ONE: THE NEW YORK CITY REVIEWS OF *LA  
FANCIULLA DEL WEST* WORLD PREMIERE 10 DECEMBER 1910  
METROPOLITAN OPERA COMPANY, NEW YORK CITY, USA

Introduction

The reviews for *La fanciulla del West* from New York City document how a group of individuals responded to a piece of music on the occasion of its first performance. Their comprehensive discussions touch on questions of musical style, musico-dramatic form, genre, and canon development. Through the course of these musical discussions, the critics reveal their attitudes toward national identity formation and the emerging aesthetic of musical modernism. They are of value to both Puccini scholars and American music scholars. Since this dissertation presents the main themes that emerge from the criticism and by necessity extracts comments from the reviews to illustrate those themes, the original context of the quote cannot always be seen. While some of the reviews are now accessible online through services like Proquest Historical Newspapers, others must still be consulted in microfilm form. Given the revolving university-library associations and consequently inter-library-loan protocols, it may be difficult to gain access to the microfilms for all of the newspapers consulted in this study, even from an excellent research library and particularly for readers located outside of the United States. For various practical reasons it is impossible to offer images of each review in this appendix. Therefore I present the reviews—transcribed in their entirety—here, so that readers may consult the whole review with ease, and see for themselves the original context of the quotes.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In some cases a critic did not sign his review. Where the critic was commonly assumed to have written the review by his contemporaries, I have ascribed the critic in question to the review. Where I could not satisfactorily identify identity of the critics, I indicate it as “unknown author.” To verify identities, I consulted biographies, cross-references in other reviews, the history of authorship for a particular column, and short articles in various magazines and newspapers that compiled quotes from the reviews. For an example one such article, see, “What the Critics Said About it,” *Musical America* 17 December 1910, 5.

New York Age

11 December 1910

“America and the Mob Spirit.”

By Lester A. Walton

Is lynching symbolic of America? I have been asking myself this question ever since I had the honour of attending the premiere of Giacomo Puccini's *The Girl of the Golden West* at the Metropolitan Opera House, on the evening of December 10.

The day after the first performance, the opera was the principal topic of conversation. Critics used up a large quantity of ink in giving their respective views on the first grand opera to be composed by a foreigner and produced in America before getting a presentation abroad. The lovers of grand opera—those who had been fortunate to witness the opening—also exchanged opinions in animated fashion.

The occasion was truly a memorable one. Puccini had come all the way from Italy to here his new piece sung for the first time, David Belasco, who wrote the drama on which the opera was founded and staged the production, was on hand; Arturo Toscanini, whose fame as a director is world-wide, wielded the baton. Then there were Caruso, Destinn, Amato and a score of prominent singers who had been selected to sing the various roles.

That the audience was a large and brilliant one, four thousand persons being present, and that the management realized something like \$20,000 from the sale of tickets, were notes of interest graphically told by the reporters. Of the musical value of the piece, its harmonic structure, the effectiveness of the score and the richness of the melody, they were features intelligently and admirably discussed by sure enough critics of music.

“Real American Plays” Deal with Lynching

While I was struck by the operatic side—the music of *The Girl of the Golden West*, I must admit that I was impressed more with the dramatic incident that went to make up the piece. In the third act especially was my attention attracted by the dramatic force which seemed to overshadow the operatic effects, and which occasioned me to ask the question—Is lynching symbolic of America?



In recent years the productions advertised extensively as bearing the brand of “the American play,” have dealt with lynchings. Last season Edward Sheldon’s *The Nigger* was produced at the New Theatre and the drama was heralded as the great American play. During the presentation of the play a Negro is pursued by an infuriated mob, captured and lynched. Thanks to Mr. Sheldon, the gruesome work of the mob is committed off stage and the playgoer is not treated to the sickening spectacle of a human being put to death by a band of men who insult the statute books and defy the authorities.

While the critics unanimously agreed that *the Nigger* was very realistic—in fact too much so—in the new opera *The Girl of the Golden West* the producers go Mr. Sheldon and his colleagues one better, by presenting a lynching scene on the stage for the ocular “edification” of the audience. Happily, Johnson does not meet death at the hands of mob law, but many a prisoner in a similar plight would die of fright rather than strangulation, as Johnson dangles uncomfortably from the limb of a tree for several minutes with a rope around his neck that shows sufficient familiarity to breed contempt.

#### How Did Puccini Become Inspired?

There are other plays not worthy of giving public mention on the boards today which lay claim to public favor because of the true American spirit they represent, a lynching scene invariably being one of the dramatic incidents.

What would probably be a piece of interesting reading would be a published interview by Puccini on the subject of “How I became inspired to write the opera—*The Girl of the Golden West*.” He would likely tell you that he selected the drama written by Mr. Belasco because the piece was strictly American, and that it contained a lynching scene which was the embodiment of the American spirit.

In the so-called American productions presented to date all geographical boundaries have been obliterated. Some of the lynchings take place in the South, others in the West, and so on. In several of the plays coloured men are victims of mob law, and a white man will be lynched now and then in another piece. So, as the authors do not make any difference as to race or section, I cannot be charged with writing this article to raise the cry of colour prejudice. There seems to be no drawing of the colour line (or rope) in the writing of plays involving lynching scenes, as for instance, Johnson in *The Girl of the Golden West*.

This country may not be as closely associated with lynchings as some of us think, but I cannot help but asking the question over and over—Is lynching symbolic of America?

New York American

11 December 1910

“Puccini’s *Girl Of The Golden West* Wakes Furore At  
Metropolitan. Greatest Operatic First Night.”

Excited, Eager Audience Hears for the First Time Italian Composer’s Opera Founded on David Belasco’s Play.

Emmy Destinn and Caruso in Principal Roles Set a New Standard for Realism by Their Wonderful Acting and Singing.

Opera Founded Upon an American Drama Is Critically Reviewed.

First Production on Any Stage of *The Girl of the Golden West*. (*La fanciulla del West*). Opera in Three Acts. (Founded on the Drama of David Belasco.) Book By Guelfo Civinini and Carlo Zangarini. Music by Giacomo Puccini.

By Charles Henry Meltzer

For the first time in the history of music an opera founded on an American play, inspired by an American subject and created by a modern composer of world-wide renown, was produced—for the first time on any stage—last night at the Metropolitan Opera House.

The opera was the much-talked-of *Girl of the Golden West* (*La fanciulla del West*) of Giacomo Puccini. The play to which it owed its inspiration was by David Belasco. And the American author himself helped to put the opera—or, as it might more fittingly be called, the music-drama—on the boards.

One early work, *I Puritani* by Bellini dealt in a peculiarly unnatural way with an American story. It be added that the scenes in Verdi’s opera *Un Ballo in Maschera* were supposed to be laid in American, though the whole treatment of the action, the characters and music, was distinctly Italian.

Characters Seemed American

But in this *Girl of the Golden West* we saw and heard a work which, to a very large extent, gave us the illusion of sincerity. The characters who sang and moved upon the stage were

not thinly disguised Neapolitans or improbable Florentines, with American names. The principals, at least, and many of the minor figures who took part in the performance, seemed American and the invention of the music-drama was in itself a compliment to America.

Time can only decide whether *The Girl of the Golden West* will prove a fleeting triumph or live, like the great operas of the masters, indefinitely.

This much is sure. The first performance of Puccini's most recent creation was received last night, by an excited, eager, brilliant, and attentive audience, with enthusiasm.

#### New Standards for Realism

It marked a new advance in the bright record of Italian opera. It set new standards, of a realistic kind, for lyric drama. It was a triumph—despite certain flaws and sins—for the composer, for David Belasco, the American author, for Mr. Gatti-Casazza, the manager of the Metropolitan, for the conductor, Maestro Toscanini, for the technical director, the stage manager and the chorus master, who co-operated in the production.

Lastly, it revealed Emmy Destinn, who interpreted the heroine, and Pasquale Amato, as the not quite unsympathetic villain of the opera, not only as great singers, but also as unusually good actors. It is but just to say that the fine acting of the singers in the cast was largely due to the efforts of Mr. Belasco.

#### The Airs One Carries Away

After the first half hour or so, from time to time, a deeper note is struck. But what one remembers with most clearness in the opening Act is that minstrel song, the graceful, languorous waltz (used somewhat oddly in the serious circumstances, as the theme of the first amorous duo) and declamatory solo, of great power, sung by Jack Rance. Such local colour as there is occurs in the "Dooda, dooda, day"-ing of the miners, in a ragtime episode, and in what Puccini says is not a Southern melody, slightly modified, although to most of us that was just what it seemed.

Regarded from the music-drama standpoint, by far the most admirable episode is the second act, which has vigor, tenseness and dramatic spirit with fine climaxes to commend it to the critical. That "Poker" scene compels and thrills and holds one. The love-music which follows has sincerity. The way in which Puccini has handled the exciting incidents in this Act is mastery.

The third Act is tremendously effective. It is full of movement, storm and stress and passion. In the lynching episode, which is wonderfully managed by the composer, we come near to tragedy.

The musical features of the final Act are a distant chorus (which recalls the “Sailor’s Chorus” in the *Pélléas et Mélisande* of Debussy), the beautiful solo of Johnson, as he awaits death, and the “Addio, California,” sung by the lovers as they depart in peace.

Objection was taken (as I believe unjustly) to the firing of guns in the last Act of *Tosca*. In *The Girl* guns were drawn and fired at frequent intervals. Nobody seemed to mind them last night.

### The Performance

Unstinted praise must be given to the performance of *The Girl*. The commanding influence of Toscanini, who had labored devotedly to do justice to Puccini’s work, assured the music result attained. Every shade, every intention, in the score was rendered eloquently, discreetly, beautifully.

On the other hand, the experience of David Belasco aided by the zeal of the regular stage manager, Jules Speck, and the resourceful skill of the technical director, Edward Siedle, left few loopholes for shortcomings in the acting and the important scenic details.

Destinn, electrified by the inspiration of Toscanini and Belasco, gave an admirable interpretation of the heroine, singing her difficult music—much of which could hardly have been sung by any other soprano in the Metropolitan company. She was tender and brave and passionate.

Equally remarkable was the Johnson of Caruso, who so far as his physique allowed, made an excellent road agent. The favorite tenor sang his role with taste and fervor. His acting was at times amazing in its realism. And this, of course, was due to the instructions of Belasco.

Another splendid achievement was the Jack Rance of that rare baritone Amato. It was almost if quite as true to the intention of the author as the original impersonator of the part. I need only add that Amato was in glorious voice and sang with spirit.

The crowd of miners in the various scenes had life and truth. They gesticulated, maybe, rather more than Californian miners might have done. But they came nearer to reality than any other mobs I have seen in opera.

The scenery throughout aided the illusion. The interiors were enlargements of the scenes used at the Belasco Theatre. For the third Act we had a marvelous forest, with mountains in the background, and wild rugged paths across which mountain miners rode with recklessness.

After each Act the composer, the conductor, the chief singers, and Belasco were regularly called on to acknowledge the applause audience.

Wreaths and floral tributes of enormous size were handed to them.

Altogether the production of *The Girl* was a successful event.

One man alone, to whom was owed the production, [seemed amazed] that man was the [wise and] intelligent manager of the opera house, Mr. Gatti-Casazzi.

### The Birth of the Girl

It was four years ago, on the occasion of his first visit to New York, he suggested that the idea of doing Belasco's *Girl* as the basis of an opera came to Puccini. During his visit I saw much of him. I stood with him in the wings of the opera house and sat with him in many divine places. He confided to me that he was seeing the New York theatre in the hope of finding a theme more suited to his music than the *Marie Antoinette* on which he had been working and which he had put aside.

*The Girl* was running at the Belasco Theatre. It attracted him by its novelty. Its seeming realism, its ruggedness, its sentiment.

The elemental nature of the characters in the drama appealed strongly to him. For, like some others of the modern Italian school, the composer above all, loves humanity. So, in a way his latest work was actually conceived, although not born, near Broadway.

The creation of *The Girl*, however, occurred in Italy, amid surroundings as marvelously suggestive of the Far Western scenes which it reveals that they appear like parts of Southern California.

While he was working on his score, I visited Puccini at his country house, a very simple villa in a hamlet nearby Pisa, called Torre del Lago.

On one side the wild pine woods, extending to the blue waters of the Ligurian sea. Beyond the villa stretches a small lonely lake, which the composer leases. Some miles beyond the lake, again, one sees the ramparts of the opalescent Appenines, and to the east, the leaning Tower of Pisa, with the white front of the Duomo looming near.

The house itself is very primitive. The living room, which is also a music room, is bare and plain. In one corner stands a piano, and on the piano Puccini showed me the score of Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*, which he likes greatly. There the composer doubtless wrote much of the *The Girl*. And there he played me parts of his first act.

Outside of the windows of the room I speak is an orchard, filled with the most luscious plums and pears; while in this orchard is a gnarled old tree, in which Puccini has built an arbor, looking down upon the lake. He uses it in summer as a study and a belvedere. Parts of *The Girl* were born there, as the composer watched the lovely scene spread out before him. The [rest was] written in Milan.

“Arrivederci, on the first night in New York!” cried Puccini as he waved goodbye to me at the local railroad station.

Upheavals and calamities of many kinds delayed the completion of the work.

But now at last, after four years, it has been ushered into life, with pomp and state.

### The Plot

What was the story which so famous a musician as Puccini chose to illustrate? It dealt with Western life. With its rude manners, passionate loves and deadly hates of primitive men and simple women in the strange days of the first Californian gold-madness.

The plot of the original drama (or melodrama) is well known. The ‘girl’ is Minnie, an unspotted maiden, brave to a fault, who is a kind of guardian angel to miners, rogues or honest, who frequent her barroom.

Types similar to her, in suggestion, may be found in the wild Western tales of the alluring if not always plausible Bret Harte.

The hero, a sad dog, is a bold ‘road agent.’ His real name is Ramerrez. But to evade the attention of Jack Rance, the local sheriff, who is on the lookout for him, he has adopted the name of Johnson.

The villain of the tale Jack Rance, is just as bold as the bad hero, and has good spots in him.

About these central characters are grouped a mob; out of which emerge the figures of a degenerate Indian, Billy; Wowkle, his unmarried squaw; Nick, the bartender of the Polka Barroom, and some others, supposed to be representative of the wild settlers of the time on the foothills of the Sierras.

### Both Love The Girl

The play, like the music-drama into which Puccini, with his two librettists, Guelfo Civinini and Carlo Zangarini, have converted it, revolves about the three striking characters of Minnie, Johnson (or Ramerrez) and Jack Rance.

The two men love the girl. Rance (though already married) makes proposals to her. In Ramerrez, whom Minnie has met and grown fond of as Dick Johnson, he finds a rival. In the second act, after the road agent hero has come to the barroom under his assumed name and renewed his acquaintance with the girl. Rance discovers his rival’s identity. While a storm rages on the hills, with a posse he follows Johnson to the heroine’s hut, impassioned. They show, with savage force, the capture and sentence of the [hero from the place] in which he has taken shelter. Johnson, who has been wounded, is dragged from a loft and likely to be lynched. But Minnie, who still loves [Johnson], though she now knows her lover’s unworthiness, proposes a game of poker to Rance. The stake (for which she plays,

and cheating, wins) is Johnson's life. Rance goes away. So, after a long love scene with the girl, does Johnson.

#### Recaptured in Last Act

Only, however, in the Puccini music-drama, to be recaptured in the third and last act, which is a condensation and idealization of the third and fourth acts of the Belasco play.

The final episodes, laid in a great redwood forest, are stirring, turbulent and road agent. The noose is round his neck—he is close to death—when Minnie rushes in, appeals for mercy and rescues her sweetheart.

So virtue (or rude justice) in the persons of the lynching party is defeated; while evil, in the form of the bold road agent, is give the chance at least of working out an unmerited redemption.

The miners take a last farewell of Minnie, and the girl, with Johnson, leave the woods forever, intoning a "goodbye to California."

#### The Music

First, let me say once more, with emphasis, that *The Girl of the Golden West* is not an opera in the old Puccinist sense, but a moving music-drama.

Those who went to the Metropolitan last night expecting to hear set airs as in *Le Villi* and in *Manon Lescaut*: those who expected the whole action to stand still while the heroine poured out her love to the bad hero, or to hear duos, quators and deliberately formed choruses, as in *La Bohème*, may have been puzzled.

For, in his latest work, Puccini has allowed drama to rule even music. Melody, much melody, will be heard by those who are broad-minded and intelligent enough not to confound that term with tunes. But the chief purpose of the composer has been to express feeling, passion, nature, love and hate in fitting tones.

His music is so closely and sometimes—not always—so eloquently expressive of real life, of nature, of emotion, that it defies the rules by which we used to judge even such once revolutionary operas as *Faust*, *Carmen*, and *Pagliacci*.

#### Colour is Deepened

Much that at an earlier mood the composer would have treated sentimentally, and almost effeminately, he has handled with virility. He has deepened his colour; he has broadened and varied his style; he has subordinated his melody to his harmony.

It is the colour—the variety and quality of his tone-painting—that first strikes those who have trained and sensitive ears in *The Girl*.

I will not say that I regard *The Girl* as a great masterpiece. To me it seems rather a link between the old Puccini, who may give us even more unusual works than he has yet produced.

Like Verdi, the composer of *The Girl* has studied his contemporaries and his forerunners. From Wagner he has, with discretion, borrowed the device of employing what the Germans call *leit-motifs*—musical phrases or themes—to suggest certain episodes and certain characters. From Strauss he has learned to enrich his tones. From Debussy, either consciously or unconsciously, he has taken some of the strange musical progressions and harmonies (with lovely discords) which give a freshness, and what can properly, perhaps, be called a tang, to his orchestration.

### Symphony is Recalled

Nor has he neglected Tchaikowsky. Only a few days ago, after attending the dress rehearsal of *The Girl*, I heard the Fifth Symphony of the great Russian. In the second part of the second movement of that symphony a theme occurs which is, to say the least analogous to the melody sung by the negro minstrel in the first Act of *The Girl*.

Unconscious cerebration? Very possibly.

Chiefly, however, Puccini has gone to his own works for inspiration. Admirable though he may be as a musical colourist, an interpreter of emotion, his melodic ideas are limited.

You may convince yourself of this playing by going over the piano scores of *La Bohème* and *Madama Butterfly*. Frequently during the performance of *The Girl*, one was reminded of marked phrases, and lovely melodies, which had been heard in both those operas and in *Tosca*. That Puccini knew and very possibly deplored his tendency to repeat herself seems evident to me from the very pains which he has taken, after using the phrases of which I speak, to break away from them or to develop them in new, ingenious ways.

Next let me touch upon a point which may seem vital to some readers.

Has Puccini created anything distinctly American in his new music-drama?

To that, I answer no. Or very little—if by American, we mean local. But Beethoven was not Spanish in his *Fidelio*. While Mozart was very Italian in his *Don Giovanni* and his *Nozze di Figaro*.

### Little Local Colour in Music

As he himself told me at Torre del Lago, Puccini has as not attempted to put much 'local colour' into his music. He hinted here and there at something at "rag-time," which is an anachronism. But chiefly he has aimed at being human.



The opening of his score, though very charming, is—from the realistic stand-point—often marred by its improbable musical sentimentality.

Of this the best example is, perhaps, the song sung by the Minstrel Jake Wallace and the chorus, with its sweet and haunting suggestion of “Home Sickness.” Yet this, I quite believe, will help to assure the success of *The Girl*. So will the dainty waltz, sung in the first Act by the Miners, with the three principals. So will the love scenes of the hero and the heroine and the enchanting music sung by Johnson with rope around his neck, in the last act.

One other point—for to go into everything in a first article about *The Girl* would be impossible. In this music-drama the composer has mastered what to him is a new art—the art of creating suspense. He is more eloquent at times when his orchestra is almost silent; when, for instance, by fainting tappings of the drums and plucking at the strings he suggests heartbeats, the anguish of delayed hope, the fear of death. A splendid evidence of this occurs in the poker scene.

#### Incidents of the Night

During the evening there were rather noisy episodes at the doors and in the lobbies of the Metropolitan. The speculators were even noisier and more vexatious than usual. At 7 o'clock they were holding up innocent would-be opera goers to the tune of \$150 for a \$10 seat. By 8 o'clock, finding that they had tickets to burn at the outrageous prices they were demanding, they contended themselves with \$15 or \$20. After the curtain had gone up they accepted \$5 and even \$3 for a \$10 ticket.

The regulation with regard to personal application at the doors for a seat which had been bought and paid for worked, on the whole, fairly well, though there were many wrangles at the box office, caused by the inability of the purchasers to find the coupons which had been reserved for them.

One of the most amusing incidents of the evening was the refusal of the door keeper to admit Otto Kahn, the head of the Metropolitan executive. Mr. Kahn refused to be ruffled by the action of his subordinate.

“He did right,” said Mr. Kahn. It was quite proper for him to refuse me permission if he did not know me. I think his salary should be raised!”

New York Herald

11 December 1910

“Mr. Puccini’s New American Opera Has Brilliant Premiere.”

*The Girl of the Golden West* Produced in Italian Form in the Metropolitan Opera House Before a Fashionable Throng.

Dramatic Qualities of Story of Western Life Heightened by the Music

All Roles Played Well

Principals Seem True to Life and Whole Performance is Given with Realistic Affect.

Great Welcome For Composer And Author

For the first time in the history of opera an Italian grand opera with an American theme for the subject of its libretto had its initial production last night, and in the Metropolitan Opera House. The opera was Mr. Giacomo Puccini’s *The Girl of the Golden West* (*La fanciulla del West*). Its libretto, in three acts, based on Mr. David Belasco’s well known play of the same name.

The event had been looked forward to as socially one of the most brilliant in the history of the house, and the result justified expectation. An audience as large and as brilliant as that which is wont to assemble for the opening night of the season followed the performance with ever growing interest.

The opera was presented at double prices, ranging from \$10 for orchestra seats down to \$3 for admittance. Unusual precautions had been taken to outwit speculators, but a few choice seats fell into their hands, and some of them reaped a harvest before the hour of the performance. One sale of four seats for \$200 for a single ticket was obtained.

Taking their usual chances, the speculators—those bad men of the Broadway plains—lost heavily in the game of “hold-up” for the management of the Metropolitan caught them in ambush. The evening was young when good tickets were held at extortionate figure and it was not old before ten dollar tickets were going begging at \$3, and then there were few of the public who would take chances on these bits of pasteboard. One man, half an hour before the curtain went up, laid a ticket on the bar of the Hotel Knickerbocker, remarking that it had cost him \$120, and he was glad of it. Several paid \$100 a [brace] for subscribers tickets which admitted them to the orchestra circle.

The speculators were quite willing to sell “puts and calls” on tickets at any prices. On payment of \$10 they were willing to permit anybody to call for tickets in the name of Mr. and Mrs. “Jones” or “Smith” and take the chance of being put out as they called. Held in line by the police under the guard of Inspector McClusky, they flourished a slim handful of tickets and sold only a few. They were selling them at regular prices before a quarter to eight o’clock, and every minute the value of the tickets down until they finally cost less in box office prices.

The losses of the speculators were estimated at \$1,500 for the night.

### Climax in Operatic Week

The evening was a climax so far in that the directors of the Metropolitan Opera House have done for grand opera in this city. To procure a new opera for the repertoire is in itself an achievement. To have that novelty performed here for the first time on any stage means even more; and when the opera is the work of the composer of *La Boheme*, *Tosca*, and *Madama Butterfly*, and is the first Italian grand opera based on an American subject, the event assumes great significance. As has been said, New York is indebted for all this to the directors of the Metropolitan Opera House, most active among whom in bringing about the consummation of this most interesting artistic project were Mr. Clarence Mackay and Mr. Otto H. Kahn.

Moreover, Mr. Giulio Gatti-Casazza, the general manager, as an Italian, must have taken peculiar pleasure in doing everything that he could to contribute to the success of his distinguished countryman’s work; and the same is true of Mr. Arturo Toscanini, who, although the opera is a novelty, had so thoroughly imbued himself with its form and spirit that he was not obliged to depart from his custom conducting from memory, which in the circumstances was a feat.

The applause that greeted the conductor when he took his seat was the first chance of expression of suppressed excitement that pervaded the house. This suppression was due to the expectation aroused by the importance of the event. Mr. Puccini’s operas have been among the most popular in the repertoire. Here was another, the first performance of it, too, and the in the Metropolitan Opera House. The title piqued curiosity. It was one of Mr. Belasco’s most popular plays done into opera, a thoroughly American play honoured by the most popular living composer of Italian opera by being chosen by him as the basis of his most mature score.

### Curiosity as to Opera

Naturally there also was curiosity as to how the play would lend itself to opera and how a company of foreign artists, singing in Italian, would succeed in “getting it over.” But could there be any real doubt when the principal rôles were sung by Miss Emmy Destinn, Mr. Enrico Caruso and Mr. Pasquale Amato, and the others also were in excellent hands?

Moreover, Mr. Belasco himself had assisted materially in the production, having directed the “business” of the play at many of the rehearsals.

Nor was the result long in doubt. From the first the great audiences felt the double grip of potent music and drama. After the first act there was a great outburst of enthusiasm. First the three principal artists were called out several times. Then they appeared with Mr. Toscanini. He too had to be led out more than once. Then the applause rose again, and burst out anew as Mr. Puccini appeared before the curtain with artists and conductor. Finally he was obliged to walk out alone. Meantime, however, there had been calls “Belasco! Belasco!” and at last playwright and composer appeared together amid cheers. Perhaps it was the first time in the history of opera that any one who had had anything to do with the [joy] shared in the ovation to the composer.

#### More Applause for All

First it seemed as if the climax of enthusiasm might have been reached too early in the evening, because coming after the first act, such was not the case. It was not the climax: for the scenes after the curtain went down on the next act were even more exciting. Not the three principal singers but some of those in the lesser roles were made to appear before the curtain and share in the success. Before the performance began Mr. Belasco was stopped in the lobby by Mr. George Maxwell, representing Mr. Puccini and Mr. Tito Ricordi, and a magnificent vellum bound copy of the score of the opera was presented to him. It bore the autographs of the composer, conductor, and every member of the cast, as well as that of the publisher of the score.

At the end of the second act everyone of the soloists received large bouquets and wreaths, and when Mr. Puccini stepped to the footlights Mr. Caruso presented to him a huge wreath of solid silver designed by Tiffany and sent to the composer by the directors of the Metropolitan Opera Company. Mr. Toscanini and Mr. Belasco also received large wreaths from the directorate, and Mr. Puccini was again called before the curtain to accept a floral horseshoe which surrounded a large photograph of himself.

Mr. Caruso furnished much amusement at the final curtain calls. Once the tenor appeared drawing his revolver out of its holster. The next time he was rubbing his neck where the rope had passed around it. Then he assumed a heavy vigorous stride and finally he pulled his associates out after him. Altogether he appeared to enjoy being a cowboy, and, incidentally, it may be said he never has looked so well as in the costume of the Western plains.

Attention should be called to the fact that *La fanciulla del West* has no feminine chorus. During the entire opera only two female voices are heard. For Minnie and Wowkle, an Indian—a minor character—are the only women in the opera. In these circumstances the variety of tone color produced by the composer in the score is all the more remarkable.

### Story of the Opera Intensified by Music

Metropolitan Opera House—*The Girl of the Golden West (La fanciulla del West)*, opera by Mr. Giacomo Puccini, libretto by Messrs. G. Zangarini and C. Civinini, founded on drama by Mr. David Belasco.

Almost every theatregoer has seen Mr. Belasco's play so the story was familiar. The libretto is by Messrs. G. Zangarini and Civinini, and in it the dramatic action has been condensed from four acts to three.

The dramatic story is no less tense in opera than as a drama. In fact, some of the big moments are considerably intensified by the music.

The production is the most realistic feat ever attempted at the Metropolitan. Mr. Belasco spent from eight to ten hours a day rehearsing the "business" and succeeded in getting action that at times is startling in its effectiveness. In the forest scene mounted cowboys dashed across the stage and the rush of the mob was charged with excitement. In the saloon the gambling incidents were illustrated by constant action.

In scenic effects, too, the production was remarkable and the lighting was admirably done. In fact, no stone had been left unturned to please and startle the eye both by detail and mass.

Into this scenic frame, aided by a cast of great singers, Mr. Puccini's music fitted wonderfully. It is a tremendous bit of writing and is full of difficulties for both singers and orchestra, but last night's performance was letter perfect.

The cast was almost flawless. Miss Destinn in the title role earned new laurels, both as singer and actress. She portrayed the simple charm of the girl and also showed that tremendous depths of the first love that had come into her life. She sang as she never had here before, particularly in the second act, when her vocal art was taxed to its utmost.

### Good Role for Mr. Caruso

Mr. Caruso, as Johnson, had one of the best roles that ever has fallen to his lot. Despite his nationality he looked the part, and he acted it with naturalness. Vocally he was glorious, especially in the last act, in the solo preceding the threatened lynching. In the final duet his voice and Miss Destinn's had appealing qualities that brought tears to many eyes.

No less impressive was Mr. Amato in the finely portrayed character of Sheriff Rance. IN make-up and deliberate action he vividly suggested Mr. Frank Keenan, who was the Sheriff in the original play. He wore frilled shirt, turnover cuffs and a plug hat of unknown age, and every gesture was weighted with deliberateness and coolness. He sang admirably, pleading when begging for Minnie's heart in the first act and making the dramatic moments ring with convincing force.

As a swaggering cowboy, Mons. Gily was picturesque. He strode about as though he had lived in the saddle all his life, Miss Matfeld, as the Indian woman, Wowkle, was good. So was Mr. Reiss as Nick, a barkeeper. Mr. Didur was most commendable as an express agent. In fact, all were “in the picture,” both dramatically and musically. Seldom has such “team work” among great artists been seen and heard.

Mr. Toscanini seemed to pour all his artistic self into the conducting. he had every effect at his fingers’ ends—or at the end of his baton—and the orchestra followed him implicitly. His dramatic climaxes sent the chills down the listener’s spine, while his tender moments melted the mood of even prosaic operagoers.

It was a notable night in the history of opera in America. In a word, it was the kind of a premiere of which older Europe would have been very proud and of which New York would have been envious.

#### Musician’s View of New Music

Dramatic to the very backbone of the score probably best describes the music of Mr. Puccini’s new opera from the musician’s point of view. It is in no sense “lovely music” such as fills *La Bohème*, or *Madama Butterfly*, but in *The Girl of the Golden West* the score is made of sterner stuff.

And rightly so, for the composer is dealing with crude people living in a crucial time—the miners and gamblers that infested the gold fields of California in 1849. Life there was a serious matter, and even the wooer’s sigh must be charged with dramatic expression, for while his one hand was on his heart the other was never out of reach of his revolver.

What wonder that the composer laid on his musical colours with a wide brush and a bold stroke! What wonder he wrote for a big modern orchestra, employing batteries of brass, drums and bells to limn the life and action of these men. And yet, at the close, when love has ensnared the heart of Minnie and Johnson and they face eastward to begin life anew, Mr. Puccini has written music that will stir any listener.

Nor is the score devoid of flowing melody—whenever the action permits of it. There is the waltz in the first act, which is of a character to invite some write of popular Broadway lyrics to fit it with words and have the multitude whistle, sing, and hum it. It is a melody that everybody will take home with him.

As a violent contrast is the episode of the card game at the close of the second act, when Minnie is gambling with Rance for the life of her vagabond, Johnson. It is the crucial moment of the opera, eye and ear hang on the outcome. Instead of attempting some violent burst of orchestral emotion, the composer has simply entrusted the double bases with a dull, steady rhythmic beat that pounds its way inot the brain. It might be intended to describe the pulsations of Minnie’s heart as fate waits on the turn of the card. And after she has won there is a terrific burst of sound from singer and orchestra.

Except in spots, however, the music can hardly be called American. There is a clever bit of syncopation—"ragtime" as it is called which the composer uses as his theme to typify the road agent. This travels through the entire work and gives it a native touch. At other times the composer has strayed freely among his own idioms, save for a moment here and there when he seems to reflect a slight suggestion of Mons. Debussy and his musical vagueness.

For sentiment alone the first act minstrel song is probably the most marked example of the work. This singer of sentimental songs strays into the "Polka," and there stirs the rough cowboys by his song, accompanied by a banjo. That and the end of the opera are the only real sentimental bits, for even in the love scenes there is an undercurrent of the tragic and dramatic.

In orchestration this is doubtless the most complicated and effective writing Mr. Puccini has done. There are a thousand touches of cleverness of characterization strewn through the score. Repeated hearings and time alone will decide whether or not it is the greatest work Mr. Puccini has written. It certainly is the most ambitious one.

#### Authors and Artists Express Delight

Every one who had anything to do with the production was in fine spirits after the premiere. Mr. Puccini said "I am more than pleased. It has been a great night and I am deeply indebted to Mr. Belasco, Mr. Toscanini and all the members of this cast for the success we have won."

Mr. Belasco said "All I can say is that I am as happy as a child. Mr. Puccini has composed what I consider beautiful music. Miss Destinn, Mr. Caruso, Mr. Amato and every member of the cast, even to the chorus, has done almost the impossible in giving a wonderful performance, both vocally and dramatically. It has been a joy to rehearse such wonderful artists, all of whom were ever ready to listen to the slightest suggestion."

Mr. Toscanini said that he was pleased with everything and that his orchestra had been untiring in its work, while the artists had worked long and conscientiously in rehearsal.

Mr. Gatti-Casazza said: "Everything was magnificent. We are now in a new operatic era, and everyone who has participated in tonight's premiere must feel that he has assisted in making operatic history."

Mr. Caruso danced around the stage like a boy at the last day of school. "It has been a pleasure to sing in Mr. Puccini's new opera. I sang as well as I could and am glad the public seemed delighted," said he.

Miss Destinn said "It was all so grand and overpowering that I hardly know what to say. I sang every note the very best I could. I only hope the audience was as pleased as it seemed."

Mr. Amato's comment was: "This is a night I shall never forget. Bravo for Puccini, Toscanini, and Belasco! All the artists feel as I do."

### Reception Given For Mr. Puccini

An interesting feature of the night was the reception to Mr. Puccini given by the Metropolitan's Board of Directors following the performance. In the foyer, which was specially decorated for the occasion, Palms and plants in bloom were in the corners and the walls were hung with vines of Southern simulax. It was in a measure of informal refreshments being served by Sherry from a buffet.

It brought together those who were in every way representative of New York. Society, art, drama, and music were all included in the hundred who went to congratulate the composer and those who were concerned in the presentation of this grand opera founded on an American theme.

Mr. Puccini lingered back of the scenes after the last note was heard, conversing with some of the singers. Meanwhile the foyer was being filled. Mr. Puccini speaks no English, and French and German were the medium of the rapid words of congratulations and praise.

Compared with many operas which have their place in the classic repertory, *The Girl of the Golden West* has a cheerful ending and the guests were in a joyous mood as they discussed it with the composer. He conversed with social leaders of this and other cities, singers, actors, critics, long-haired and bald; painters, sculptors and theatrical menagerie.

Mr. Belasco remained longer on stage than did Puccini, and it was not until he had been informed by an official delegation that he was missed that he appeared with the others.

Amongst the first to greet Mr. Puccini was Mr. Walter Damrosch, who spoke all his compliments in French. Mme. Nordica greeted the composer in Italian. An enthusiast addressed him in German, informing him with deep voiced enthusiasm that as Schiller, who had never seen Switzerland had written the best version of Wilhem Tell, so an Italian who had never seen the West was the first to do justice to the life of the people beyond the Rockies. Others spoke English or smiled in Italian. Taken all in all, the composer was able to understand and appreciate all the expressions of goodwill which were showered upon him.

The assemblage invited to meet the composer was representative of society, the worlds of arts, sciences, and music. Among those accepting the invitations and who, with but few exceptions, had been in the audience were. . .



New York Evening Post

12 December 1910

## “Puccini’s New Opera.”

By Henry T. Finck

Scene: Milan, Scalar Theatre, February 17, 1904. First performance anywhere of Giacomo Puccini’s latest opera, *Madama Butterfly*. “The audience simply howled with derision. The storm of disapproval began after the first few bars of the opening act. Puccini, very quietly, took matters into his own hands, and at the end of the performance thanked the conductor for his trouble and march off with the score. The second or any subsequent performance was therefore impossibility.” Three months later the same opera was a brilliant success at Breccias, and it is now the most popular of all Italian operas, Puccini’s acknowledged masterpiece.

Scene: New York, Metropolitan Opera House, December 10 1910. First performance anywhere of Giacomo Puccini’s latest opera, *The Girl of the Golden West*. The audience simply went wild with enthusiasm. There were fully fifty tumultuous recalls after the three curtains, for Puccini, Belasco, Toscanini, Gatti-Casazza, Destinn, Caruso, Amato. Cartloads of flowers and wreaths. After the performance grand reception in the foyer, attended by several hundred of the most distinguished men and women in America. Three months later...?

What those three dots stand for no one can foretell, though there were some in Saturday’s audience who knew absolutely that *La fanciulla del West*, is the greatest operatic masterpiece since Verdi, while others, equally confident, characterized it as a failure—“un fiasco magnifico,” said one (not an Italian), while another flippant American declared he preferred a fiasco of Chianti. Let us briefly consider those things in the new opera which make for success, and those which make for failure.

Among the factors in its favor, the most important one is the play of which the opera is a musical setting. When Puccini was in New York to supervise the production of his *Madama Butterfly* he attended a performance of Belasco’s *Girl of the Golden West*, and though he knew hardly a word of English, he was so deeply impressed by his action and scenery that he decided then and there to have it made into a libretto for his next opera. He not only liked the play, but he saw that it was a big success (Blanche Bates alone has appeared in it more than three hundred times), and as it has long been his policy to ally his music with plays that have won special favor, here was his chance. He had been praised for his

treatment of the Japanese and American elements in *Madama Butterfly*; why should he not try an entirely American subject? It could not have taken him long to discover that our East does not differ sufficiently from Europe to make it worth while to place the scene of an opera on the Atlantic Coast; but the Pacific Coast, with its miners and cowboys, and bandits with pursuing express agents, and Mexicans and Indians—*there* was fresh field for an Italian composer.

To be sure, the central figure of the play he selected—Minnie, the beautiful, chaste, Bible-teaching girl who keeps the “Polka” barroom, with a dance-hall annex, for a camp of California ’49 miners, turns a barrel into a savings bank for their gold dust, rides wild horses, lives alone in a distant hut in the mountains, is courted by every man in sight, but still has her first kiss to bestow—taxes one’s credulity as much as the most fanciful story ever devised by Bret Harte; but the conception, whatever else it may be, is romantic, and romance is what the opera composer wants, be he Gluck, Wagner, Verdi, Debussy, or Puccini.

There is romance in every act. In the first we have the drinking and card-playing miners suddenly afflicted with home-sickness, as they hear a coloured minstrel’s song. Realistic episodes follow, culminating in the capture of Castro, one of a band of Mexican bandits headed by Dick Johnson, known as Ramerrez. Castro declares he has deserted Ramerrez, and sends the miners, together with the Wells Fargo Company express agent, after him on a wrong trail, thus leaving the field clear for Johnson, who reenters the saloon and is recognized by Minnie. She had met him once before, on the road, and love had been mutual. She invites him to call on her in her cabin.

An Indian and his squaw, with the musical names of Billy Jackrabbit and Wowkle, occupy the stage as the second curtain parts to reveal Minnie’s cabin. She appears presently and prinks to receive her lover. He arrives, he makes ardent love, he gets her first kiss. A violent snowstorm has suddenly descended on the camp, and Minnie begs him to remain, occupying the bed, while she goes to sleep wrapped up in her bearskin before the fireplace. Suddenly there is a knocking at the door. The miners have discovered that the outlaw Ramerrez had been in the saloon, and now they have come, fearing her safety. Among them is the sheriff John Rance, a married man, who had made love to Minnie in the saloon and been repulsed by her. From his lips she now learns that Johnson (whom she has hidden behind a curtain) is the dread bandit, and, what is worse, that he is the lover of the notorious Nina Micheltorena. Sending the miners back to their tents she calls out Johnson from behind his curtain, and, after bitterly reproaching him, shows him the door. Hardly has he left, when a shot is heard, and he crawls back, hardly able to climb up the ladder she lets down so he can hid in the loft. A violent knock. The sheriff is back looking for Johnson. Drops of his blood betray him, and faints away while Minnie and Rance play a game of cards, at her suggestion, to decided whether she is to belong to Rance or Johnson to her. She wins, by cheating, and he snatches up his coat and leaves the lovers alone.

The redwood forest on a ridge of the Sierra Nevada is the scene of the last act. The sheriff has “acted like a gentleman” refusing to betray the “road agent”; but the express agent has

found him, and the miners come rushing on to the scene “like dogs on the track of a wild animal.” Some of them jump on horses to bring the culprit to the place where he is to be hanged. The rope is already around the branch of a tree at one end and his neck at the other, when a horse is heard galloping up and Minnie rushes in, removes the noose, and, pistol in hand, defies the miners. She appeals to their hearts, begs them, one after the other, to remember what she has done for them, and, finally, they allow her to leave with her regenerate lover, the last words being their adieu to California and its gold mountains.

The changes from this Belasco plot made by Puccini’s librettists an, C. Zangarini and G. Civinini, are too unimportant to call for comment. For operatic purposes they are improvements; on the other hand, there is much in this libretto that any one but Puccini would have hesitated to set to music, particularly in the first act. Such expressions as “You fellows, as game of faro,” “Got any supper left?” “Not much oysters in vinegar,” “Cigars all round,” and slang of the card-table—what composer could set so much dialogue to music worth listening to? Puccini did not succeed. The opening scene, with all its bustle, is decidedly dull. It is, *sucrabrer*, a scene which it is surprising a composer with Puccini theatrical experience should have retained, for it gives tenor, baritone, and bass parts—which, though brief, are difficult—to eight miners, thus making it necessary for every manager who wishes to produce this opera to supply a cast of not fewer than seventeen singing actors. This is not a difficult thing for an opera house with the vast resources of the Metropolitan, and with a master like Toscanini to whip the ensemble into shape; but one shudders to think of the chaos likely to result at ordinary opera houses that may attempt to produce this opera. If anything were gained by having this scene, one would commend Puccini for writing it regardless of the consequences; but, as just intimated, even he, with his rare skill in handling dialogue and declamation could not make it interesting.

It must be confessed that, from a musical point of view, the whole of the first act is disappointing. The minstrel’s song owes its chief interest to the fact that it is a Zuñi Indian tune. It is supposed to be accompanied on a banjo, but for some inscrutable reason the composer employs instead, a harp with paper interlaced between the strings. The ensemble numbers sung by the miners is infinitely more like a German Liedertafel part song than anything California miners could ever sing, and the waltz that is played as they go into the dance hall falls far below the level of the average Viennese operetta.

Unfortunately, it is not only the first act that is a musical disappointment. The whole opera is musically far inferior to *La Bohème*, *Tosca*, and *Madama Butterfly*. What the public has always wanted, wants now, and always will want in an opera, above all things is melody—not necessarily such melody as Rossini, Donizetti, or Verdi wrote, but such as it to be found in Wagner’s works, or in the Puccini operas just named. There is surprising little of this in *The Girl of the Golden West*. The vocal parts are not quite as dry and unmelodious as those in Debussy’s *Pelléas et Mélésande*, yet Puccini seems to have had in mind the “noble contempt for melody” of which Caccini and the other Florentines early in the seventeenth century boasted.

The second act is so exciting as a play that one forgets the lack of melodic originality in the music. The best vocal number in this act is sung as Minnie and the outlaw sit at the table. It is an Indian squaw song, transcribed by Harvey Worthington Loomis for voice and piano, but shorn of its savage quality in the opera. Why the composer neglected the opportunity to introduce some Indian strains at least in the orchestra, where they most belonged—at the beginning of this act, where there is a scene for Billy and his squaw—is as incomprehensible as why the example of Belasco was not followed of having the miners sing real American popular part-songs, such as they would sing in actual life. That would have been realistic and would have provided the local colour as much wanting in this score, with the few exceptions referred to. But stay—there is another American vocal fragment (see page 6 of the vocal score)—a distinct allusion to Geroge M. Cohan’s “The Bell of the Barber’s Ball.”

Of atmosphere there is much more than of melodic local colour. Atmosphere is created with the orchestra and of orchestration the new score is a masterpiece. The storm in the second act is as superb musically as it is scenically, and Puccini showed dramatic genius of the highest order in making its sudden violent onset happen the moment Minnie passionately falls into her lover’s arms and grants him her maiden kiss. If this opera proves a success it will be owing (next to the play) to this magnificent climax.

Other fine “atmospheric” effects may be pointed out on a future occasion. An exceptional richness of orchestral colouring is obtained by enlarging the different families and subdividing the instruments in each family—violin, woodwind, and brass. A new and improved kind of celesta is used and during the game of poker the only sound heard is the reiterated plucking of double basses. Puccini has evidently been studying the Strauss scores. That he is a great admirer also of Debussy is evident from the frequent use of the augmented chord successions that were brought into fashion by that composer. No doubt, some persons will ask: “What have the latest Parisian harmonies in common with the lawless California miners?” The obvious answer is: “Are not the critics daily denouncing the Debussy harmonies as lawless?” some people are *so* obtuse!

The performance was one worthy so important a novelty. Mr. Amato was very successful in his make-up and looked as if he had walked out of the pages of Bret Harte. He was dressed in the funeral black frock coat of the gentlemen of the day, with a white shirt well displayed, a voluminous watch-chain adorning a fancy waistcoat, and a silk hat, which, while showing much wear, still added elegance to his appearance, as contrasted with red-shirted, sombrero topped miners—a cold, repressed figure in the turbulent crowd. He had the pallor of the night-living professional gambler, which will be remembered by the admirers of Jack Hamlin, and he also showed that gentleman’s imperturbable calm, his invariable repose under trying and exciting circumstances, but he failed to convey the idea of volcanic fire under a snow-covered crater, and his violent attack on Minnie in her own cabin seemed a momentary spasm of passion rather than the underlying motive which controlled all his actions. Mr. Amato’s face does no change. That is his misfortune rather than his fault. Was it his idea or that of the stage manager that he should strike the bound Johnson with his fist in the last act? It seemed a false note in the character. Rance would

kill his enemy like a dog, and for now reason but jealousy, but the men of California in the early mining camps were no cowards, and the miners who were ready to hang Johnson for his crimes were judges who meted out deserved punishment, not torturers who abused a victim, and they would have been the first to present such as set on the part of their “sheriff.”

The informal costume of the Western road agent was very becoming to Caruso who made a manly figure of Johnson-Ramerrez. He, too, however, made a mistake in his conception of the outlaw, by letting him give way to abject fear in the last act. The men who crossed the plains in '49 fought hunger and Indians on their way, fought fortune and such other on their arrival, were stoics inured to every hardship and death to them was taken as a grim joke, to be met with a laugh. They had seen it in every form, and so often that they had become fatalists, prepared to meet it when their hour had come, but always with the idea that the luck might change, that they would “call its bluff.” In other respects, Mr. Caruso was simply admirable; he looked the part in perfection, and his acting, with the exception noted, was the best thing he has done here.

Miss Destinn also acted and looked the part of the *Girl* better than anything she has done, except the *Bartered Bride*. Her clothes were of rather modern cut, and did not look at all as if they had been made in a Western camp, but they were well chosen, to make her look her best, and the braids of dark hair, the bows of ribbon at her throat and in her hair made her look surprisingly young. She is a robust “girl” but robustness seemed necessary in her hand-to-hand conflict with the men who were determined to kill her lover. Her appeal to their better feelings was the most emotion piece of acting she has ever shown.

The setting of this last act is a delight to the eyes. The great redwoods of true California girth look real, and the Sierras, their snow peaks changing opalescently under the growing light, from pinks and purples to sunlit yellows and grays made a wonderful stage picture, full of atmosphere—atmosphere which was till further created by the real Western riding and real Western ponies of some of the ‘boys’ who raced madly up the hills in search of the bandit. This was the most beautiful of the settings, although the others were as true to nature, the first a large log-cabin, made almost cosy by plenty of lights, and a big open fireplace, with its generous blaze, while animal skins hung as ornaments on the walls, and as portières over the doors. Minnie’s room had its feminine attempts at daintiness, a bureau and glass, a bed modestly concealed in yellow curtains, rugs, and pillows, and Navajo rugs, supplemented by a fancy bed-quilt to hide the ugliness of the loft and its contents of boxes and bundles. The storm was superb; the blinding snow, the terrible wind, which, whipped curtains, made the lights flicker, blew doors open and shut with blizzard violence. In all these things, the theatrical skill of Mr. Belasco was evident. Would that the Wagner operas could be presented with such minute attention to detail. What a revelation they would be! Mr. Belasco succeeded in making real miners in aspect and action, not only of Caruso, but of the nine other men in the cast, (mention of the minor performers must be deferred); but his greatest achievement was the transformation of Mme. Destinn, whose facial expression heretofore have been of two kinds only; suggesting Bernard Shaw’s division of his productions into “Play’s Pleasant and Plays Unpleasant.”

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“Puccini’s New Opera of Golden West a Triumph.”

Brilliant First Night Audience in Metropolitan Runs Whole Gamut of Emotions at Singing Version of Belasco’s Play—Composer’s Work Far Above His Earlier Efforts.

Caruso and Destinn Win Fresh Laurels

Tide of Enthusiasm Grows to Point of Turmoil as Powerful Story Unfolds Under Master Hands Society and Music Lovers Join in Giving Opera Unprecedented Welcome.

By Max Smith

Giacomo Puccini, the most popular living composer, launched last night, in the Metropolitan Opera House the strongest opera his fertile mind has yet to put forth—*The Girl of the Golden West*, or as it is called in the language in which it was sung, *La fanciulla del West*. In this important undertaking he had the invaluable services of the dramatist, David Belasco; the musical director, Arturo Toscanini; the general manager of the theatre, Giulio Gatti-Casazza, and a company of artists it would be impossible to duplicate. With such extraordinary forces success was practically insured, though time for rehearsing seemed all too short for a work extremely difficult to prepare. But the fortunes of last night’s venture rested only in part on the brilliant production itself. The glory, after all, was Puccini’s, whose work, as gradually unfolded, loomed far above the composer’s earlier efforts, a masterpiece of its kind.

The evening was a triumph as well, though, for producer, dramatist and conductor. It was a triumph for Enrico Caruso, who gave one of the most eloquent performances of his career, and Emmy Destinn, who dumfounded the skeptical listeners; for Pasquale Amato who added another superb operatic portrait to his gallery. And it was a triumph for participants who were not in evidence: for Francesco Romei, an invaluable assistant to Toscanini on the stage, for Giulio Setti, the Metropolitan’s great chorus master, and for many others. Scenes such as followed every act are rare even the Metropolitan Opera House.

Second Act Stirs Audience

The audience was not composed of operatic fanatics, it must be remembered it was a representative gathering of a cultivated men and women who had spent twice the price

usually asked for seats at the Metropolitan Opera House in order to attend a noteworthy premier. All the more remarkable was the tide of enthusiasm. In the second act, which, admirers of Belasco's dramas will recall, is pitched at high tension, excitement throbbed in the auditorium. Women became almost hysterical; men clutched the arms of the chairs tightly and at the fall of the curtain the turmoil was indescribable. It seemed, indeed, as if the walls of the high lyric theatre shook with the roar of the approving crowd.

Different was the demonstration at the end of the performance, but quite as eloquent. Less noise, less feverish excitement, but deeper tributes of approval for composer, playwright and artists. Only harden listeners, indeed, had dry eyes when Caruso and Destinn, the hero and heroine of Belasco's drama, sang their farewell to the golden West, "Addio, m' California, addio, addio," while the chorus of rough miners intoned softly, on a long sustained chord in the orchestra, the song of homesickness. And this conclusion, and sweetly pathetic, on the heels of a lynching scene—the first ever presented on the operatic stage—with Caruso as the hunted man saved by the love and devotion of the woman!

Imagine the stage of the Metropolitan Opera House converted into a forest of California redwood giants, primeval monsters outline against dimly luminous hill. Imagine a pack of miners, roughly clad, wild, some on foot, others mounted on fiery broncos—ten horses in all—surging upon the scene, singing and shouting, hot on the trail of their fugitive victim. Imagine this horde of avengers dragging their prisoner—none other than Caruso—to the foot of a tree. Imagine the frantic figure of a woman—Destinn in real life breaking her way through the raging crowd, pistol in hand, defying the execution at the point of her revolver, pleading for the life of the man, she loves.

#### Great Work by Emmy Destinn

That is what staid opera goers witnessed in New York's oldest home of lyric drama. They saw, too, the rough inferior of a resort, where California fortune seekers, men of 1849, spent their leisure hours gambling, drinking, dancing. They saw a girl, stocky of frame, powerful of fist, serving these hardy men with beverages, dancing with them, laughing with them and teaching them lessons from the book of books. They watch her later, this girl of the West, receiving the man of her heart in her own mountain cabin, then driving him into the howling blizzard horrified to find that she has kissed an outlaw.

And after a pistol shot had broken the sounding silence of the orchestra and the helpless girl drew her wounded lover into the shelter of her home, gasping, "I love you, I love you," as she helped him into hiding aloft, every person in that gathering felt ripples of excitement running down his spine. More and more tense grew the suspense when the villain of the drama, the Sheriff, Rance, discovered his victim and compelled him under pain of death to leave his place of refuge. And during the poker game for the life of the prisoner or the honour of the woman, the strain, accentuated by nerve-racking music, became almost unbearable. No wonder many a witness of this grueling spectacle could not suppress a sigh of relief when the tortured girl of the West, delivered by a ruse from her persecutor, swooned on the limp body of the man she loved and the curtain fell.

Think of clothing a drama of such rapid action in appropriate music, a form of artistic expression which is better adapted by far for psychological than external delineation. Yet that is what Giacomo Puccini has accomplished, and with amazing success. In the process, of course, certain dramatic points had to be sacrificed, other altered, and so it is well for the opera-goer who has a vivid memory of the play to make an effort not to compare constantly the spoken with the lyric drama, the notion of the players with those of the opera singers. After all the two works must be examined from different points of view.

It was inevitable, for instance, that the character of the title heroine should undergo a certain change in the process of adapting it to the proportions of an operatic figure. The Minnie of Puccini's opera is not the merry girl of Belasco's drama. Pathos and tragedy had to be accentuated in order to give the part more musical potency. So also a modicum of sentimentality had to be infused into the character of Johnson, the outlaw, and the villainy of Jack Rance somewhat softened, though that character most nearly has preserved its original flavor.

#### Composer Reaches High Plane

Whether Puccini, an Italian, has made an American opera out of an American play is a question of small importance, though some persons, it would seem, like to burden their minds with such thoughts. Music is a universal language. To be sure it has its national traits, but there are no symbols, as there are in spoken verse, which fail to make some impression on the intelligent musical mind.

The interesting fact this morning is that the Italian composer has actually made his best opera on the subject he chose; that he has caught with astonishing success the spirit, colour and feeling of Belasco's story. Let those who believe better results could have been achieved with the same material come forward with proofs. As an opera, *The Girl of the Golden West* will probably be delighting audiences long after the play has been forgotten. And it will outlast *Tosca* and *Madama Butterfly*.

*The Girl of the Golden West* differs from Puccini's earlier works chiefly in the variety of its musical content, the skill with which the material is manipulated and the composer's greater resource and dexterity in orchestration. He reveals no new melodic vein, to be sure; for many of the tunes the composer uses are modelled on subjects that impressed him during his former visit to America—on popular songs heard in New York on Indian strains, such as Harvey Worthington Loomis and Arthur Farwell have collected. According to Puccini's own statement, he has made no direct quotations, being influenced in his choice of themes by his ear and imagination. There are few melodies in the opera, however, which seem to be born of spontaneous inspiration.

One of the most conspicuous features of Puccini's new work is the skill he has shown in devising effective harmonic modulations appropriate to dramatic situations. It must be acknowledged, however, that he seems to have adopted a good deal, not only harmonically, but in orchestral colour, from the treasure of novel effects discovered by Claude Debussy.



Of course, Debussy has no exclusive right to the augmented intervals of which he and his disciples are so fond; nor can he prevent others from using his beloved successions of ninth chords. Somehow, though, Puccini often comes so near duplicating effects already produced by Debussy in *Pelléas et Melisande* that the source of his inspiration seems too apparent. So also Richard Strauss is drawn upon occasionally, and one or two other masters, though not so noticeably.

### Catches the Spirit of the West

However, Puccini has made exceedingly felicitous use of whatever he may have appropriated from others, adapting this material absolutely to his own style. And after all, if all words in a language are opera to writers, why should not all musical expressions, whether harmonic, rhythmic or instrumental, be open to composers? Puccini's style in the *The Girl of the Golden West* certainly is not Debussy's nor Strauss's, nor Wagner's. It is his own, brought to a poignancy that he had failed to obtain in his earlier works.

The score of *The Girl of the Golden West* is far more complex than any of Puccini's [sic] former operas. It represents a meshwork of themes, used with extraordinary deftness in various modifications, permutations, transformations and modulations. The brief introduction contains several important motives: the vigorous opening arpeggio of augmented intervals, followed by a succession of Debussy-an chords which play a significant part in the opera; the more characteristically Puccinian "Redemption by Love" motive, in octaves, and the final "rag-time" burst, which is intimately associated with the character of Johnson.

Though Puccini has done some clever writing in the first scene of the opera, creating a musical accompaniment full of vitality and contrast to the rapid talk, action and movement of the gambling miners, he is least successful here in holding the interest of the listener. The average person has no idea what all these person on the stage are saying and grows weary of listening to unintelligible sounds. Music here not only seems superfluous but an obstruction. An effective lyric interlude, though, is the pretty Homesick song, with the chorus joining in mournful refrain, sung by Jake Wallace, the minstrel to a banjo accompaniment.

Things grow more spirited when the Sheriff, Rance, and one of the miners have a squabble. Puccini works up a feverish crescendo of excitement to the point when Minnie, preceded by a sharply timed pistol shot, bursts upon the scene. The orchestra playing full force, takes up on her entrance the principal motive of the heroine—hardly a distinguished theme, but full of melodic exuberance. In the lesson scene that follows, when Minnie teaches a group of miners a Bible lesson, the composer uses an ascending figure intended to give a religious touch to the music. This scene, which might have been omitted to prevent the act from dragging, was introduced into the first act by Puccini's librettists, Guelfo Civinini and Carlo Zangarini. In the play it occupies a more important position as tragic relief, after the second act.

### Suggestion of Indian Music

A peculiar distorted figure in sixteenth notes, built on the whole-tone scale, makes its appearance when attention is centered on Billy, an Indian. This figure, and other associated with it, which are used to advantage in the introduction to the second act, suggest inevitably Strauss's *Salome*.

Minnie and Rance now are left alone. The sheriff makes advances and the orchestra, in octaves, proclaims his theme, which has a characteristically American turn. There are effective modulations in the accompaniment to Rance's "Racconto," "Minnie, dalla mia casa son partito," which marks one of the best pages in the first act. There is dainty music, written expressly, it would seem for Destinn's voice, in Minnie's account of her childhood. A solo violin gives the pathetic touch Puccini knows so well how to administer (sic), and there are suggestions of Indian music in the accompaniment.

Minnie sings of the love of her parents, "S'Amavan Tanto," and has an opportunity of landing on a high C. There is a sudden burst of the syncopated theme, first presented in the introduction, and Johnson enters. On this figure, reiterated softly, we now hear a new motive of yearning, sung poignantly by the violins. Soon it makes way for a merry ascending and descending motive of two measures. The syncopated theme jumps again into momentary prominence, and suddenly we are launched into a typical Spanish dance-rhythm. All this material is descriptive of Johnson, whose real name is Ramerrez, and it plays an important part in the musical development of the music drama.

A slow, rising and falling figure, peaceful and soothing as a cradle song, is heard now, suggesting the feelings Johnson and Minnie have in contemplating each other. In the following pages of the score this idea is developed at considerable length. Shortly after Minnie's and Johnson's meeting a waltz tune in E major is introduced, the miners singing it softly as they dance out through the door of the barroom into the dance hall beyond. Absolutely commonplace and banal this tune will probably be heard in every restaurant soon. Yet Puccini was justified in putting it into his opera as a touch of realism.

There is another outburst of excitement when one of Johnson's accomplices, Castro, is brought into the room, a prisoner. The scene between Minnie and Johnson that follows makes use of the waltz theme, but introduces several new ideas, including a short and trenchant motif which suggests fear. There is here again some excellent music for Destinn and the instrumental accompaniment reveals remarkable fertility of ideas.

Soaring up to B flat on the waltz theme, Caruso also has a fine opportunity for vocal display. A short cut is made in the score, from No. 109 to No. 112. Muted horns in a haunting harmonic progression remind us of Strauss. The composer becomes more and more resourceful in his manipulations of leading themes, which now are proclaimed with great pathos. Finally the motive of Minnie reigns supreme, and, unresolved, it dies out on a strangely vibrating combination of instrumental tints as the girl of the West stands alone, her face lit up with a new expression of joy.

### Dramatic Action Uppermost

The second act is full of shivers. As the dramatic action is uppermost, the composer has to content himself often with successions of melodramatic phrases. Yet there is more real music in this act than one would superficially suppose. The Indian cradle song at the opening sung by Wowkle is charming. The peculiar theme associated with the Indian, Billy, in the first act, now suggests the shrieking of the wind. Many peculiar effects of instrumentation are obtained. The waltz theme sounds softly as Johnson takes Minnie's hand. There is a reminder of *Tosca*. Minnie sings a merry song, Indian in character, giving Destinn a fine opportunity to reveal her soft head tones on A high and B. We hear the short figure of fear. There comes a melody new at this point, but used often subsequently. It is the melody in C major, beginning at No. 22 in the score, which a few pages further on Johnson and Minnie sing on the words, "Io non ti lascia piu."

Rance's announcement that Johnson is Rammerez, the outlaw, brings one of the most uncanny and haunting instrumental effects. No. 46 marks the place in the score. Above a sustained G in the basses and a reiterated phrase played by the strings, clarinets, oboes and flutes in unison sing with weirdly penetrating tone, dynamically varied, a theme that is evolved apparently from the motive of fear. The impression is one of awe and pain combined.

There is a great deal of atmosphere in Puccini's musical delineation of the scene in which Minnie and Johnson bid each other good night. The composer has succeeded in combining a feeling of peacefulness with the horror of suspense. The scene that follows Minnie's discovery of Johnson's identity is powerful. The theme attached to Johnson in the first act are here proclaimed again, and Caruso has an opportunity to display some of his finest work. On the Redemption by Love theme he reaches a high B flat, sung full voice, and the orchestra intones fortissimo the tune, "Io non ti lascio piu."

### Some Hair-Raising Music

After Johnson has departed into the storm and the shot is fired the orchestra denotes realistically the horror of the situation by short reiterations of staccato chords, played by muted brass. Extreme nervous tension is maintained musically in the gruesome episode that follows. Hair-raising music this is! Rance's theme announces his coming as he knocks at the door. The orchestra reaches a point of great eloquence during the enforced descent of Johnson from his hiding place. During the card game a peculiarly uncanny effect, like the nervous pulsing of the heart, is created by the insistent reiteration of a two-note figure, produced by plucking the strings of divided bass viols. The close of the act with loud blaring of brass is impressive.

Puccini has created a poetic musical picture of the deep California forest at the opening of the last act, though he shows here the influence of Wagner's *Siegfried*. The low A and E flat, played over and over again, create an illusion of depth and darkness. An admirable impression of distance is conveyed when on rising and falling chord triplets one hears

voices of the miners in the background—the basses on one side first, then the answering tenors on the other. Nearer and nearer the voices come until the stage is filled with a throng. Among other things we hear the jolly “Dooda, dooda” theme of the first act.

Overpowering is the ferocious fortissimo proclamation of the chorus in “A morte, A morte.” Johnson now sings andante sostenuto, “Risparmiate lo scherno.” His assertion that he loves Minnie sits up great excitement. Caruso’s best opportunity comes, however, with the song “Ch’ella mi Crede,” which unquestionably will create demands for encore, like Mario’s last song in *Tosca*. The orchestral interlude, beginning moderato sostenuto with fortissimo trombone blasts (the call to judgment) is impressive. When Minnie enters the orchestra takes up her theme. She now pleads for Johnson’s life, and the orchestra sings a plaintive motive pregnant with expression. There is a momentary return of the “homesick” song.

The first three themes of the introduction to the first act, the waltz song and the “homesick” song bring the opera to close.

Future performances of *La fanciulla del West* will offer better opportunities to give a fair description of the works of the artist who created new roles last night. A brief survey hardly can do them justice.

#### Belasco’s Master Hand Seen

It is impossible to speak of the principal singers except in the highest terms. As already suggested. Caruso found in Johnson one of his finest parts. He seldom has sung as eloquently as he did last night, and certainly never has acted so realistically and so convincingly. The master hand of David Belasco showed itself here and in the work of the other singers.

He taught Emmy Destinn, for instance, to smile instead of keeping the serious countenance which she habitually displays. Indeed her portrayal throughout was influenced by the great preceptor, else surely it would have been less convincing. Amato, too, showed the influence of Belasco. Admirable in makeup he gave as Jack Rance the most perfect histrionic impersonation he has yet put to his credit. And what was true of these singing players also was applicable to the others, Gilly, who gave a capital characterization of Sonora; to Reiss, who devoted his talents to the role of Nick; to Didur, who, as Ashby, had the ordeal of singing from horseback in the last act, not to mention the whole cast.

But Belasco’s genius was observed not only in the actions of individual singers and the lifelike movements of the chorus. It was apparent in every other department of the production not strictly musical. All the details of stage-business in the second act—the snowstorm, the flapping of drapery and flickering of lamps whenever gusts of wind blew through the opera door, the intermittent glowing of the fire in the hearth—these and many other things quite new to the Metropolitan Opera House were of Belasco’s doing. Without him, too, what would have been the effect of the last act, in which he solved many puzzling difficulties.

Lucky Puccini, to have the co-operation of David Belasco in the two capacities of author and producer. Lucky the Metropolitan Opera Company to enlist the interest of such a man for its important premier, Giulio Gatti-Casazza, after the performance, said the production of *The Girl of the Golden West* would leave a landmark in the history of the Metropolitan Opera House. Could he have been thinking of David Belasco? Is it possible that the Metropolitan Opera Company may have his co-operation in future performances?

#### Laurel Wreath for Composer

On the musical side the genius of Toscanini loomed high above everything else. What a sacrifice of energy the preparation of this work, which he conducted by heart from beginning to end, cost him, the conductor alone can know. How much the artistic success of the evening was due to his searching mind, his poetic imagination, his masterful will, many others found out before the end of the evening. That was why the cries for Toscanini were as loud and as insistent at the closer of the performance as the calls for Puccini and others.

The crowd which filled the huge auditorium to overflowing, had ample opportunity to shower all persons concerned with vociferous compliments. After the second act there were fifteen recalls after the final curtain even more. Puccini appeared alone. He appeared with Belasco. He appeared with Giulio Gatti-Casazza, when breaking for the first time his rule of never stepping before the curtain, presented the composer solemnly with a beautiful silver laurel wreath. He also appeared with Toscanini, and with Caruso. There were more wreaths than flowers. Amato got a large and handsome one. The one Puccini received was so gigantic it absolutely hid from view not only the composer, but Amato, who stood beside him.

Though the attention of the audience last night was focused on the stage, any one interested in the social aspect of the evening would have found much to hold his attention. The golden horseshoe, decorated for the occasion with American and Italian flags interlaced; was filled to its capacity with men and women who have won the highest social honours. Society's lions and lionesses were not confined, however, to that tier of the big theatre. They were upstairs and downstairs—everywhere, almost, where places were to be had.

The musical, artistic and literary world also was represented in the audience. Every unemployed opera singer—"stars" too, of former days—who could afford to buy an expensive ticket came to see and hear the production of Puccini's new work. And many persons not in the habit of attending opera were attracted by the name of the opera and the fame of the play upon which it was built. Never, probably, has the Metropolitan Opera House harbored at one time so many actors and actresses as last night.

In the foyer of the opera house, prettily decorated for the occasion with greens, a midnight reception was given by the directors of the Metropolitan Opera Company in honour of Puccini. The guests were men and women prominent in the social, artistic, literary and musical life of this city.

Rare Display of Gems Worn in Opera House

*The Girl of the Golden West* attracted a golden audience last night, one fairly glittering with gems, for most of the fortunate possessors of boxes were on hand to hear the new opera.

Mrs. Vanderbilt, resplendent in white satin with crystal embroidery and wearing diamond hair ornaments and necklace, was in her accustomed place, and Mrs. William K. Vanderbilt occupied a box, entertaining Mrs. Frederick C. Havemeyer. Mrs. William K. Vanderbilt Jr., was present as the guest of Mrs. James A. Bordon Jr. She wore a gown of black velvet and diamonds, while Mrs. Burden was in white satin lace.

Mrs. August Belmont, in silver gray satin and with diamond ornaments, and Mrs. John Innes Kane with her. Mrs. Kane was in grey satin with trimmings of black velvet and lace, and wore diamonds.

Lady Johnstone, wife of the British Ambassador to Denmark, Sir Allen Johnstone, was a guest in the box of J. Pierpont Morgan, where also were Mrs. Walter Burns of London and Miss Anne Morgan. Lady Johnstone was in black velvet with diamond ornaments, and Mrs. Burns in deep violet velvet, Miss Morgan wore black lace and jets.

Mrs. William Douglas Sloane wore jewels to match her gown. They included wonderful emeralds on a dress of green velvet embroidered with gold. Mrs. Sloane wore diamonds and emeralds in her hair and a diamond necklace with emerald pendants.

Mrs. H.A.C. Taylor was in black satin with silver embroidery and wore jewels. She had Mrs. Lloyd Bryce with her. Mrs. Bryce wearing purple chiffon and silver. Mrs. Henry Rogers Winthrop entertained Mrs. K. R. Thomas. Mrs. Winthrop wore black satin with a bodice of silver, and Mrs. Thomas also wore black satin and silver.

Mrs. Phillip M. Lydig was with Mrs. Egerton I. Winthrop Jr. She work black velvet and Mrs. Winthrop was in white satin and lace.

Mrs. Clarence H. Mackay wore a gown of silver cloth with train of black chiffon velvet. She had on a crown of diamonds and a diamond necklace. Mrs. Stephen H. P. Pell wore blue satin and chiffon with silver, and a diamond tiara. Mrs. Henry Clews was in white satin lace.

Mrs. William Jay, who was with Mrs. Oliver H.P. Belmont and Mrs. James W. Gerard, in the Ogden Goelet box, was in white satin and silver with diamonds. Mrs. Belmont wore black velvet and Mrs. Gerard white satin with orange chiffon. Mrs. H. B. Duryes was in grass green satin and had diamond ornaments.

New York Press

18 December 1910

“*Girl of the Golden West* Gains with Repetition.”

Emmy Destinn Sings with Power She Never Equaled.

Caruso Excels in Love Scene.

More Praise for Toscanini—Double Prices Continue—Receipts \$17,000 Despite Some Vacant Seats

By Max Smith

Puccini's newest and greatest opera, *The Girl of the Golden West*, had its second performance anywhere last night in the Metropolitan Opera House. As at the premier on the previous Saturday night prices were doubled; but the rush for seats this time was not nearly so great, owing partly, no doubt, to the proximity of Christmas. Street speculators offered tickets for sale at regular box-office prices early in the afternoon and there were more than a few empty chairs in the parquet during the performance. Nevertheless, the evening's receipts amounted to almost \$17,000, which proves that double-price opera may pay even when the theatre is not packed.

It would be superfluous at this time to put Puccini's score once more under close critical scrutiny. That duty was performed only a week ago. As the work is repeated during the present and subsequent season, operagoers no doubt will come to recognize more and more clearly that *The Girl of the Golden West* is the best musical effort the Italian composer has thus far put forth. It is a far more subtle, far more elaborate score than any of his earlier ones. Consequently it requires more than one hearing before perfect comprehension, perfect application can be obtained. There are many persons now who feel called upon, for one reason or another to denounce *The Girl of the Golden West* arbitrarily after a single hearing. This chorus of croakers, one may prophesy confidently, will grow smaller and smaller with ever repetition of the opera, and in the end the very men and women who cried loudest against it will give it the noisiest approval.

The performance last night was far more eloquent than the first production, and the improvement came in part, no doubt, from the greater freedom and ease of every person

concerned. After all, the strain of a premier is something that grips and holds even the most experienced artists.

Another reason for the increased effectiveness of *The Girl of the Golden West* was the excellent vocal condition of the artists, particularly of Emmy Destinn, who sang with a clear beauty of voice, an intensity of expression and a dramatic power she has never before equaled in New York. In the scene with Rance in the first act she gave Minnie's "Raccanto" with fascinating delicacy and led up to the "S'amava tanto" and its culminating high C with irresistible dramatic effect. In the following love scene with Caruso, as in the more turbulent episode of the second act, she was also at her best. Histrionically, she reached a high level of effectiveness, too, but the glory of her voice overshadowed every other phase of her impersonation.

In speaking of Caruso, also, superlatives only can be used. He sang Johnson with an intensity of feeling, with a concentration of emotional expression that he does not always succeed in infusing into his voice. There was hardly a moment of his portrayal without absorbing interest. Nothing he did, however, was more powerful, more tense, more moving than the plea to Minnie in the second act just before she sends him out into the roaring blizzard to be shot down by the sheriff.

Amato impersonated Jack Rance in a way that must serve all subsequent singers of the role as a model. He sang superbly and he acted with a power of characterization that surprised even many of his admirers.

Dinh Gilly gave once more an extremely picturesque portrayal of Sonora. Albert Reiss devoted his talents with excellent results to Nick, the bartender. Adamo Didur made a robust and lifelike Ashby, appearing on horseback in the last act as if he had always been accustomed to a saddle.

As Jake Wallace, the minstrel, Andrea de Segurola this time did not have his face blackened. Marie Mattfeld sang the music of Wowkle effectively. Georges Bourgeois made a good Indian. The miners fared well in the car of Bada, Rossi, Reschiglian, Aduisio, Hall, Pini-Corsi and Begue. Missiano appeared as Jose Castro and Belleri as the pony express driver.

When all is said, however, the greatest achievement of the evening was Toscanini's, who, conducting by heart as usual, injected his interpretive genius into every measure of the score. His two faithful musical assistants, Giulio Setti and Francesco Romei, were on stage during the first and last acts, disguised as miners, helping to carry out among the chorus singers the will of their master.

There were many recalls after each act, Puccini and Toscanini joining the singers before the curtain in acknowledging the applause. Belasco was not present.



New York Sun

11 December 1910

“Mr. Puccini’s Latest Opera. *The Girl of the Golden West*  
Sung.”

Performed at the Metropolitan Opera House for the First Time on Any Stage

David Belasco’s Stirring Melodrama Set to Italian Music

A New Thing of the World of Opera

Performance Interesting and Effective.

By William J. Henderson

*La fanciulla del West (The Girl of the Golden West)*, opera in three acts by Giacomo Puccini, from the drama by David Belasco, was performed at the Metropolitan Opera House last night for the first time on any stage. The production was made on an extra night, not in the subscription series, at special prices, and the house was packed to its capacity by an audience representative of the operatic and musical public of this city.

It was evident that no one underestimated the importance of the occasion or failed to feel that something had been gained by the determination of the most famous opera composer of this time to write an opera on an American subject and permit it to be heard first in an American theatre. The musician was accorded a popular triumph, and the master technician of stage craft, Mr. Belasco, was not forgotten. Everything had been done by Mr. Giulio Gatti-Casazza to insure a good presentation of the opera. Numerous rehearsals had been held. Mr. Belasco had generously consented to give his personal supervision to all the full stage rehearsals, and his skill was seen in the makeup and action of the various characters in the drama. The best artist of the company had the significant roles. The scenery was admirable.

The event demands more extended record than operatic productions here customarily receive. First performances in America have hitherto been preceded by first performances in Europe, but this time Europe is waiting for the news from New York.

David Belasco's play is so well known to New Yorkers that its story need not be repeated here. The first topic which confronts us is its treatment by the makers of the opera libretto, G. Zangarini and C. Civinini. The problems to be solved by the Italian librettists were neither few nor formidable. How successfully they have been met will have to be determined by the public when it has found its settled view of this singular experiment in the realm of lyric drama. Those who recall Mr. Belasco's stirring melodrama will not need to be told that its dialogue is anything but lyric. One of the artistic achievements of the playwright was the penning of dialogue expressive by reason of its very awkwardness. It was the speech of people who lived intensely within themselves, but were not given to the cultivation of literary symbols. Nearly all their speeches are short swift, keen, like the flash of a sword blade. They stab the air, and they make marks upon the sensibilities.

Such dialogue is not for music. The composer needs the deep breathing o (sic) the long poetic phrase to bear up the burden of his melodic structure. Deprive him of this and you force him to resort to fragmentary recitative with the sustained and significant melodic thought relegated to the orchestra. That Mr. Puccini was driven to this method of operatic composition is seen at the very outset in the bustling scene in the Polka. Even in the love episode of the second act, when Johnson and the Girl are shut up in the latter's hut in the blizzard, the emotional expression of the action is ill suited to the music because the dramatic situation hangs so heavily upon breathless anxiety, vague dread and the broken utterance of tense minutes.

To refresh memories it may be noted that the first act of the drama rests upon a single episode, namely, the arrival of Johnson and his recognition by the Girl as the man she saw one wonderful day on the road to Monterey. The unformed suspicions about this stranger and the passion of Rance are but embellishments of the dramatic motive. The second act is the drama. In the opera as in the play, Johnson goes with the Girl, the Sheriff and his friends find out that this is Ramerrez, the outlaw, they search for him, and although he is there, hidden in a bed, they do not find him but they reveal that he is the outlaw. Minnie afterward shows her [?], Johnson goes out, is shot, is brought back by Minnie and concealed in a loft, and his hiding place is disclosed by the dripping of his blood on the Sheriff's hand. Then follows the poker game and Minnie "stacks" the cards and wins.

The last act is much changed and is played in the forest instead of in the Polka. The Academy scene is lifted from this act and put into the first where it is very well indeed. The chase of Ramerrez is carried on in the woods off stage, while Rance (who cannot be in it) smokes cigars and waits. When Johnson-Ramerrez is caught and they are about to string him up Minnie rides in on her pony with a "gun" in her hand and "stands off" all the boys till she makes them understand that she is going to take Johnson away and turn him into a good man.

This episode is very melodramatic and [?].<sup>2</sup> It is the most radical change from Mr. Belasco's play, but one readily sees why it is made. The scene in the play in which the "boys" are melted into forgiveness just by seeing how much Minnie loves the worthless Johnson would have been too subtle and theatrical? For the finale of the opera.

[So] then, we have a sketch of the [subject] matter of the book. As to the [way(?)] in which the Italian librettists have [added to] the story a few details should be [enlightening]. When they were con[fronted] with the free and easy con[versation of the] Forty-niners, they found them[selves] in deep water. They did the best they could, but some of the results are amusing to Americans. For example Jake Wallace the camp minstrel, in the [melancholy] [ditty] with which he makes [miners] homesick and causes Larkens to break down asks, "Would old dog Tray remember me?" What can be done with old dog Tray? Nothing, of course. "I mio case mi reavissera?" That is the libretto equivalent. Presently comes the hysterical outburst of Larkens. "Say boys, I'm homesick and I'm broke and I don't give a damn who knows it. I want to go home again. . . I want old Pennsylvania. I want my folks, I'm done!" Now here is the Italian:

Non reggo piu,

Non reggo piu ragazzi! Son malato.

No so di che. Mandatemi!

Ah, mandatemi via! Son rovinato.

Son stanco do piccone e di miniera.

Voglio l'aratro, vo'la mamma mia.

That is as close as an Italian can come to it. "Son rovinato"—"I'm ruined." Then the excellent English gentleman who made the translation from the Italian for the libretto reads that "I'm stony!" and "I'm sick. I don't know of what." It is a lame attempt at the true Belasco thing. Sonora gives the Girl dust and says: "Here, Girl, clean the slate out o' that." The Italian reads "Tira una riga sul mio conto"—"Make a mark on my account." What were the poor librettists to do? In the second act Johnson hints that Minnie might become lonely up in her mountain home, and she has the most poetic speech in Mr. Belasco's play. Here is the Belasco version:

Minnie—Lonely? Mountains lonely? Ha! Besides I got a little pinto an I'm all over the country on him. . . finest little horse you ever throwed a leg over. If I want to I can ride

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<sup>2</sup> Square brackets around a letter, word or passage indicate that the text in the microfilm of the newspaper was illegible or an obvious misprint and that the word in the transcription is my best estimate. A question mark indicates that I could offer a reasonable suggestion for the word.

right down into the summer at the foothills with miles of Injun pinks just laffin, an' tiger lilies as mad as blazes. There's a river there, too; the Injuns call it "Water road", an' I can get on that an' drift an' drift, an' I smell the wild syringa on the banks. . . Mm! . . . An' if I git tired o' that I can turn my horse up grade an' gallop right into the winter an' the lonely pines an' first a-whisperin' an' a-singing.' Oh, my mountains! My beautiful peaks! My Sierras! God's in the air here, sure. You can see him layin' peaceful hands on the mountaintops. He seems so near you want to let your soul go right on up.

Now here is the Italian version

Oh, se sapeste  
 Come il vivere e allegro!  
 Ho un piccolo polledro  
 che mi porta a galoppo  
 laggiu per la carupagna  
 per prati di giunchiglie  
 di garofani ardenti,  
 per rivere profonde  
 chi profuman le sponde  
 gelsomini e vainiglie!  
 Poi ritorno ai miei pini  
 ai monti alla Sierra  
 Così al cielo vicini  
 che Iddio passando pare  
 La sua mano vincini, &c

Which is, being translated:

Oh, you've no notion  
 How exciting my life is  
 You should see my little pinto

See him carry me at a gallop  
 Right down the beyond the foothills  
 Thro' meadows full of lilies  
 All ablaze with golden jonquils  
 Then I drift down the river,  
 Scented all along its banks  
 With Jessamine and wild syringe  
 When I'm tired I go back  
 To my mountains, my Sierras, &c.

It was not possible for the poor librettists to get hold of that Belasco talk, and if they had done so it would have been buried by a musical setting.

Of course there are devices to give the musician opportunities to write solos. The scene between Rance and Minnie in the first act is padded so as to give the former a solo beginning "Minnie, dalla mia casa son partito" In the second act a hymn to the Sun God is introduced and is sung to the squaw. But it is unnecessary to enter into an account of every detail of this kind. The second act remains substantially the same as it is in the drama. The third act, as already indicated, is wholly rearranged, and the short fourth act of Mr. Belasco is omitted.

The main objectives of the librettists in the final act appear to have been *Rance's* solo, "Minnie, ora piangi tu," Johnson's "Ch' ella mi creada libero" (beautifully set in Mr. Puccini's finest melodic vein), and the pleading of Minnie which ushers to the finale, the most ambitious concerted music of the entire opera.

Mr. Puccini's musical plan is both comprehensive and complex, but no more intricate than that of his *Tosca*. He confides to the orchestra the duty painting a panoramic tone picture, while the actors carry on a dialogue constructed chiefly on the lines of that melodious recitative familiar to us in the other works of this maestro. There are no set musical pieces, except one in the first act, where a song is used in the original drama, and the finale of the opera. When occasion offers for a long speech the composer writes an extended melody, but such melodies are not numerous, nor are they forced into undue prominence in the general plan.

There is some employment of the solo voices in the formal harmony of ensemble or concerted number, but only in the one or two passing fragments which develop naturally in the action of the play and in the conclusion. In other places, the illusion of general

conversation is designed to furnish a large background of shifting colour, and to this end the composer employs a formidable array of instruments.

The score calls for a piccolo, three flutes, three oboes, English horn, three clarinets, bass clarinet, three bassoons, contra bassoon, four horns, three trumpets, four trombones, two harps, glockenspiel, celeste, bass drum, cymbals, tambourine, triangle, fonica (an arrangement of bells in B, F, and B, the first B being that below the treble clef) and the usual body of strings. The instruments are here named as they stand on the page of Mr. Puccini's score. The composer divides his strings into small bodies very frequently, in some places arranging both firsts and seconds in groups of three. Solo violins, sometimes one and sometimes two, are also required.

In addition to this great use of instrumental tints Mr. Puccini has enriched the orchestral tone painting by the employment of extended compound rhythms by many unexpected and even startling changes of rhythm, and by some peculiar treatment of percussive effects. For example, in the stress of the exciting second act he utilizes his sonorous bells merely to increase the complexity of the orchestral tints and to add a deep poignancy to the accents. There is nothing in the situation that refers to bells, and they are not employed as they usually are in opera, namely to provide a sound heard in the play. They are here introduced solely as an orchestral factor, and with no small dramatic effect.

The composer has gone further in this work than in any of its predecessors in the employment of what are called modern harmonies. But, Mr. Puccini has a musical plan of his own. His themes are in themselves mostly as frankly diatonic as the tunes of Verdi. But the harmonization is such that the musical background is crowded with the tonalities so dear to the advanced school of composition. The chord of the diminished seventh sinks into the state of a bald and shopworn commonplace. The ear feeds upon clashing seconds, upon ninths, augmented fifths, upon whole tone progressions, and occasionally upon groups which sound as if they might best be played upon a piano with the flat of the hand.

Intense point and incisiveness is thus given to some themes which might otherwise appear to be tawdry. The building of the plan is most skillful. Everything is done with a certain distinguished individuality which belongs to Mr. Puccini. Novel to the ear as his latest manner seems, it is still Italian. Nor should it be understood that there is in his fundamental ideas anything far forward of *Tosca* or *Butterfly*. It is in his harmonic and instrumental treatment that he has made his steps, and these steps he undoubtedly regarded as called for by the nature of his new undertaking.

The composer has made use of representative themes in much the same manner as he did in his *Tosca*, though in this work the themes are somewhat more elaborate and some attempt has been made to give some of them a local or racial colour. He has themes for everyone, even the Indian, Billy Jackrabbit. These themes are iterated and reiterated throughout the score in the familiar manner, but there is no attempt at those extraordinary polyphonic blends which Wagner uses when two thoughts work together or in opposition, nor is there any thematic development in the symphonic style which the Bayreuth master adapted to the

purpose of dramatic delineation. It is not important that all these themes should be enumerated and named. It is sufficient for the present purpose to note the principal motives as they appear.

The opera opens with a brief introduction in C major, four-four time, allegro non troppo: 34 measures. It is built chiefly on the "Redemption" theme, which is used throughout the drama to typify the salvation of the renegade Johnson. This theme is rapidly worked up to a fortissimo, and the prelude comes to a crashing end with four measures of 'ragtime' pealed out by the brass. This is the Johnson motive, and it is used significantly in one or two places in the play. Why Mr. Johnson of Sacramento should live in ragtime is a matter which need not be discussed now.

After a pause, during which the curtains open, the opera begins in E major, six-eighth time, moderato. The "boys" are heard shouting outside, and at the ending of the fourth measure the oboe sings a theme, which may be called that of Minnie's pleading. After the beginning of Act I, it rests in silence till Minnie in the last scene goes from 'boy' to 'boy' pleading for Johnson's life, and then it is allotted to her voice. Certain episodic themes are heard in the development of a brisk orchestral movement while men of the camp boisterously enter. They sing a quaint minor refrain to the ancient words "Dooda day." This is heard again in the last scene when the boys learn that Johnson has been caught.

The first elaborated lyric moment in the drama is reached when Jake Wallace, the camp minstrel, is heard singing in the distance. Then begins the homesickness melody already referred to. This is worked up after Wallace's entrance, with solos for several minor characters and an ensemble, accented by a rhythmic hammering of fists on tables.

The number is interrupted by the hysterical outburst of Larkens, and brought to its end after his exit with a clever employment of the old device of singing with closed mouths. This homesickness theme is rather subtly introduced again just at the end of the school scene, and still again in the closing measures of the opera when Minnie and Johnson are going away.

A quarrel between Sonora and Rance is worked up with much orchestral bustle and the entrance of Minnie, who interrupts it, brings with it a very poignantly harmonized theme which may be called the Minnie motive. It recurs frequently in more or less modified forms. After this the next new music is heard in the school scene. Here Minnie has a good solo.

The arrival of the pony express brings a bit of scenic music, and a reference to the road agent causes a return of the Johnson ragtime theme in the strings. Presently, when the "boys" have left Minnie and Rance alone in the bar, we hear a new melody, which we afterward find is closely related to the true love theme of the opera. Rance's is the false love. This has a touch of flavor which the composer intended to be American. Curiously enough one phase of it is strongly reminiscent of a clearly cut phrase in Ethelbert Nevin's once popular "Narcisse."

The ensuing duo between Minnie and Rance contains some pieces of extended melody in Puccini's characteristic manner and is one of the effective passages of the opera. Johnson enters abruptly to his own theme. When he is leaning on the bar talking to Minnie the composer gives us a replica of some *Tosca* music, which is here very apropos in spirit.

A little later the two dance off into the dance hall to the melody of a waltz sung by all the boys. We subsequently learn that this waltz melody has much to do with the expression of love in the drama. In the duet between Minnie and Johnson, which ends just before the close of the act, the waltz theme is repeated as the melody of Johnson's sentiment. At the appearance of the first food thought in his mind, the thought that he is too bad a man to stay there, the redemption theme is repeated with genuine and highly dramatic significance. The act ends with a pianissimo after Minnie's repetition of Johnson's praise of her beauty.

The second act opens with the droning sun god song of the squaw Wowkle by the hearth of Minnie's home. Mr. Puccini's Indian music is not very Indian. In the first act when there is some talk about a Mexican girl, he has the right musical idea, but he is evidently not acquainted with the chants of the American aborigines. The thematic materials of the opera having been exposed in the first act, there remains now only dramatic employment; of them, some of this has already been indicated. The love theme recurs when Johnson takes off his [coat] and prepares to make himself at home in Minnie's hut. The story about the gallops in the mountains on the little pinto is told charmingly and even with a tripping suggestion of colourature (sic) in the description of the action of the pony, while the orchestra gently murmurs again the waltz movement of Act I. There is a kiss theme when Johnson asks for one, but when the real embrace comes the orchestra bursts into a long and triumphant proclamation of the redemption motive.

After the pistol shots outside in Act II, Johnson at the words, "I'll never give you up" ("Io non ti lascio piu") sings a new melody, to which the composer has endeavored to give an American flavor. He has hit upon a strain which recalls some of the American music of Dvorak and which will therefore give pain to Boston, because in this case it will be difficult to prove that it is Bohemian instead of imitation darcy. The redemption theme appears once more with poignant pathos when Minnie calls the betrayed Johnson from his hiding place and orders him out of her home. And of course it is intoned again when Minnie brings him back wounded and says, "Stay, I love you." The theme of Rance's love, heard in Act I, is repeated when he returns to Minnie's hut to seek Johnson. Scenic music of excellent character accompanies the poker game, and when the climax of suspense is reached the composer leaves the voices to speak in suppressed accents over a long, low rapid pizzicato on two alternating notes in the double basses. This is one more of the instances in which the double bass is called upon for the expression of dread in the modern lyric drama. One thinks of *Otello* and of *Salome* but the dramatic effect is undeniable.

The musical content of the last act has already been sufficiently indicated. It may be added that the opening measures, in which stopped horns play the most prominent parts, are well planned to paint the gloomy spaces of the primeval woods and the somber mood which rests upon the spirits of the personages upon the stage. The action of the chase is



accompanied by music more or less conventional, for here of course the interest of the movement must claim the attention of the audience. The finale, already outlined, is effective without containing any burning musical idea. The musical summit of the act is reached Johnson's solo, "Ch'ella mi creda libero," already mentioned. This is the best lyric inspiration in the whole work, and reminds the hearer of the popular soliloquy of Cavaradossi in the last act of *Tosca*. Mr. Caruso, a handsome and interesting figure in Western costume, with his arms pinioned, surrounded by the enraged miners clamoring for his life sang this solo superbly. Critical estimate of the new work need not be searching nor final this morning. The basic theme of the drama is as old as humanity. It is the redemption of man by the sacrificial love of woman. This theme will occupy the Metropolitan stage again next Saturday in Wagner's *Tannhauser* and the same master has treated it in his *Flying Dutchman*. In the *Ring* series a world is saved by the love and death of Brunnhilde.

In *La fanciulla del West* we have the old story as told by Mr. Belasco in a new local setting. It makes Americans sit up to see this play turned into an opera and to hear the miners and road agent and sheriff singing out their emotions in la bella lingua Toscana. But if it gives us a start, what will it do to Europe? The opera of rapid physical and orchestral depiction is not new to transatlantic countries, but the Polka, the sheriff, the Wells-Fargo agent, the poker games, the heavy whiskey drinking and the ready 'gun' will be gratifying novelties. Europe will find all this—especially lynching—typically American. Yet it can readily be understood that the Italian composer would less readily discern than any average American the length and hazard of the step he was taking in transforming all these into operatic materials. As a background for the emotional struggle and the episode of agonizing suspense in the poker game Mr. Belasco was quite able to render everything in this picture gallery intensely realistic, even despite his one daring touch of acutely human comedy in making Minnie win her life and death game by the gambling trick of a stacked band. But when it came to the problem of utilizing all these matters as material for composition in music Mr. Puccini found himself face to face with the difficulties which the early opera writers never experienced. When opera stories were stripped of action as far as possible and reduced to emotional crescendo and diminuendos, at the apex of which pauses in the movement were always made for the introduction of set musical pieces, the duty of the composer was comparatively direct.

In the more recent lyric drama there has been a return to the form outlined by the fathers of opera, that in which the body of the work was carried on in a recitative designed to imitate the speech of a drama. When the situations of a drama are few and purely psychologic, and when they are shorn of any bewildering variety of pictorial action, as in the case of such a work as *Tristan und Isolde*, the composer is free to focus on his invention on the expression of the emotions and to prepare for them an extended poetic and musically elaborate investiture. Mr. Puccini has found lovely opportunities to do this in his *Madama Butterfly* and his *La Bohème*. He has proved that in melodic invention he is bountifully gifted. He has a fund of voluptuous song. He makes an irresistible appeal to the voracious appetite for sensuous, allurements in music. He has shown himself to be also a consummate master of stagecraft. He may properly be called the Belasco of opera. No other operatic master of any

period has known better than Mr. Puccini what will successfully cross the chasm between the footlights and an audience. Together with this skill he has an exquisite appreciation of vocal possibilities. Indeed, in this province of the musical realm he reigns an absolute monarch.

It follows, then, that in this new work he has seen with unerring judgment that many pages of the libretto would have to sway the public as pure drama rather than as opera, and he has fashioned the music for these pages rather as a melodramatic accompaniment than as a complete lyric garb. That he has done this cleverly goes without saying. Whether the public will be pleased at finding in this opera a much smaller measure of the lush melody of its favorite master than it has hitherto enjoyed in another question which cannot be settled this morning. There are many pages of interesting music in the new score. These have been indicated in the foregoing account. They spring from the general level of the work whenever an emotional situation is coincident with a halt in the rapid pictorial action of the play. If disappointment is felt that what looks like the beginning of a Puccini duet between Minnie and Johnson in the second act turns out to be only a beginning (because interrupted by the action of the drama), the thoughtful observer should consider the music of the act as a whole and ask himself whether it does not marry itself successfully to the incidents and surround them with the needful musical atmosphere. It is altogether probable that in the end the answer will be favorable, and while some may complain that Mr. Puccini has not given them more melody, the majority will agree that he has sacrificed mere popularity to a genuine and generally felicitous effort to write an expressive melodramatic score. Certainly those who give thought to the curious third act will admit that while the first part of it seems to aim at confusion of the mind through assaults upon both eye and ear, the musical point is made with great craft and the last half of the act built by one who has justly gauged the public taste and weighed the public heart. The higher critical consideration of this score may be touched by lightly to-day. The opera is lacking in what the painters call "quality." The Puccini quality is there, but it is restrained. One feels that the composer's line wants its accustomed freedom of sweep. Puccini is at home in stories which permit his characters to sing out their thought in long drawn phrases of succulent sweetness. This is not such a story. It is too swift in its changes of tempo, too sudden in the shifting of its lights. Is it American? Not in the least. It is an Italian opera on an American story. All that is American in the opera, is the work of Belasco. The thematic bases of the musical score belong to the plains of Lombardy, not of the wild West, to the slopes of the maritime Alps, not of the Sierras. It was not in mortal man to conceive that which lay wholly outside his experience. Mr. Puccini might perhaps have lived six months in the Klondike in order to get a hind of California in '49, but even then the modernity of the gold field people of to-day might have misled him. There is no page in his score that paints the primeval West nor the elemental man who hewed and blasted his way into it. We do not believe that such subjects can be delineated by the sophisticated methods of the Italian school of today. At any rate Mr. Puccini appears to have accepted Mr. Belasco's story and its deep breathing personages much as if they wore the cramped creatures of the world of "Cavalleria" and "A Basso Proto." Taking them thus he has written for them with profound sincerity, but in the end his music is too aristocratic, too much of the haut monde. Perhaps it is as a result of all this that

we gain the impression that the opera is what the Germans call "gemacht." It is manufactured. The composer has lived outside his subject and has tried to probe it. If he could have lived inside it he would have made his spirit a part of that which surrounded it. He could have sung "quorum pars magna fui." The production, as already intimated, was highly creditable to the Metropolitan Opera House. Mme. Destinn fully justified the judgment of the composer in selecting her for the role of Minnie. She interpreted it vocally and histrionically with the highest skill. Details must be avoided at present, but there need be no hesitation about asserting that this is the finest impersonation she has offered to the public. Mr. Amato made a striking figure of Rance, the Sheriff, perhaps not perfectly American, but powerfully dramatic. He denoted with admirable skill the nature of the man rigidly austere on the surface, burning with terrible passions within. Mr. Caruso's Johnson is the best piece of operatic acting he has ever done. He was manly, picturesque, interesting and vocally admirable. It would be too much to describe all the excellence of the secondary performers, but a word must be given to Dinh Gilly for his capital assumption of the role of Sonora. In the variety of makeup, action and character among the minor personages, as well as in the pictorial excellence of the mass movements in the first and last acts, the skill of Mr. Belasco's stage management was in evidence. Mr. Toscanini conducted and read the score according to the desires of the composer. The orchestra played with splendid flexibility and opulence of colour. The full cast was as follows: (lists the cast).

At the end of the first act there were repeated curtain calls, and the audience refused to be satisfied until David Belasco and Puccini appeared together before the curtain. Among those in the boxes were Mme. Sembrich and Mme. Nordica. After the performance there was a reception in the foyer to Puccini. Among those who accepted invitations to be present at the reception to Puccini after the opera were John Jacob Astor, Jules S. Bache, Mrs. J. S. Barney, Mr. and Mrs. Edmund L. Baylies, T. Sandford Beaty, David Belasco, Mr. and Mrs. August Belmont, President Butler of Columbia and Mrs. Butler, Mrs. Lloyd S. Bryce, Miss Choate Henry Clews, Walter Damrosch, Consul-General G. Faraorni, Edwin Gould, Daniel Guggenheim, Mrs. Ben Ali Haggin, A.D. Julliard, Magistrate Kernochan, Otto H. Kahn, Mrs. Lauterbach, Mr. and Mrs. Martin Littleton, Chancellor and Mrs. MacCracken, Mr. and Mrs. Clarence H. MacKay, J.P. Morgan, Miss Anne T. Morgan, Charles H. Munn, Mr. and Mrs. Herbert Parsons, Stephen Pell, Mr. and Mrs. George W. Perkins, Gen. Charles F. Roe, John E. Roosevelt, Joseph Rumsey, Henry W. Savage, Mr. and Mrs. Mortimer L. Schiff, Mr. and Mrs. W. D. Sloane, Alfred E. Steers. Prof. and Mrs. Stengle-Sembrich, James Stillman, H.A.C. Taylor, Mrs. E. R. Thomas, Prince Troubetzkoy, Charlemagne Tower, Cavaliere Roberto Tentaro, Mrs. Vanderbilt, Mr. and Mrs. William K. Vanderbilt, Mrs. Elsie French Vanderbilt, George Peabody Wetmore, and Mr. and Mrs. George W. Young.

New York Sun

18 December 1910

“Mr. Puccini and his *Golden Girl*.”

The Tenacity of the Spectacular Element in Opera

Where Mr. Sardou and Mr. Puccini Cooperated Successfully

The Difference in the New Opera.”

By William J. Henderson

When the future historian of opera in this country comes to pen the story of the season of 1910-1911 he will doubtless search the files of the daily newspapers with (for) some idea of the amount of public excitement aroused by the first performance on a New York stage of an opera prepared by a famous European [master] especially for the American trade. Without question that historian will [ponder] deeply on the nature of the accounts of that production and on the summary of critical views thrust upon an innocent and quiescent world.

He will refer to other dates in the files of the newspapers and will surely ask himself, “Why did not these journals make as much to-do about the production of Mr. Puccini’s American opera as they did about the ‘Salome’ of Richard Strauss or the same composer’s *Elektra*?”

The probabilities are that he will find only one answer to his question, that the commotion raised first in Europe about the two Strauss operas cause here an excitement which was wholly missing when it came to the disclosure of an opera unknown to transatlantic publics.

Again this historian will turn to the records and look for some further exposition of the ideas of American scribes on the singular essay of Mr. Puccini’s genius. The likelihood is that the historian will be disappointed. He may find other rambling comments like these, and he may find some pointed comment on Puccini’s art in general, but it is doubtful whether he will find any real additions to the critical summaries published on the morning after the production. The great question which confronts the commentators at the time of this writing is whether there is anything more to say.

The *Sun*’s chronicler frankly confesses that he cannot say anything more. He might easily expand and decorate the opinions released last Sunday, but there would be no news in the

later edition. The truth seems to be that the story has been told, and in saying this the *Sun's* chronicler is thinking of certain able and pointed comments made by his admirable confreres. This writer does not believe that they can add substance to what they have already said.

The attitude of the public toward the work was interesting. There was no real excitement. There was much curiosity but the first night audience did not appear to be in a confident mood. Nothing had been printed that could have inspired distrust, yet the public seemed to be in doubt as to whether Mr. Puccini had found a congenial subject in Mr. Belasco's stirring melodrama. The first act closed with little enthusiasm in the house. The first four or five calls were answered by the principal singers and the applause was about that which might be expected at a regular performance of *Aida*.

Then Mr. Puccini appeared, and he got a warm reception. From that moment the temper of the audience grew warmer and after Mr. Puccini had come down before the curtain several times he led forward Mr. Belasco, who was received with a ringing cheer. Without doubt the spectacle of the distinguished American playwright bowing hand in hand with the celebrated Italian composer was one to call for much demonstration.

To Mr. Belasco went the thanks of the typical operatic public which was delighted with the spectacle. It is a historical fact that operagoers have always demanded a plentiful provision of spectacular elements in their shows. Of Mr. Puccini they expected a string of long phrased, luscious, sensuous melodies calling for utterance by the most opulent tones of the most gifted singers. They went to the opera with their minds full of "Che gelida manino," the duet in the first act of *Butterfly* and the solo of Cavaradossi in the last scene of *Tosca*.

They found themselves in the presence of a new essay on the part of the composer, Mr. Puccini, as was noted in this newspaper last Sunday, tried to push himself into the atmosphere of Mr. Belasco's play and plainly realized this much, that he must construct a melodramatic score to furnish a background to vivid and rapid action.

In seeking to do this he was compelled to reserve his characteristic style of melody for a few episodes and could not make it the central feature of his musical scheme. Furthermore, he felt that he ought to try to impart to his melody a colour different from that of *Bohème* and *Butterfly*, to tint it some way that might be regarded as American.

In earnestly endeavoring to approach his subject from a new point of departure Mr. Puccini unquestionably sacrificed himself in no small measure to the demands of the drama and it was not long before his audience perceived this. The admirers of Mr. Puccini were hurt because he refused to repeat himself. His disinterested critics were disappointed because he left his old methods and found [less striking] substitute for them.

But the question still remained as to [whether] the combination of his new [music] with the melodrama of Mr. Belasco [will] not make an opera entirely acceptable to the public. That question can be answered only by the record of the [repetition of ] the work. Meanwhile let

us repeat [the] opinion that the opera going public [will bend] not a little to its taste in the purely spectacular features of the drama. [Even] when the public most in love [with itself] because of its lofty artistic [?] is still hungry for the theatrical [?] book. This was never more so [true] of the present day. One need only [?] [?] little in Europe to learn that the [?] there are exactly the same [in] atmosphere.

[For exa]mple when Mr. Klein con[?] his interesting drama. "The –s" he undoubtedly did not expect [?] he undoubtedly did not expect [?] was going to rely fro any part [?] success on hardwood wainscots [?] doors with carved ornamentations. Yet one of the images which re[?] to leave the mind after attendance of the performance of this drama is that [?] insignia of wealth graven on the [?] the wonders what would be [the effect] of the play if it were performed [without] scenery at all. And in the next [instance] one realizes that this would be [?] and that the same thing is [?] almost every play of recent times. [The spectacular] element has become [an integral] part of the drama.

[?] true of all the lyrical creations of Richard Wagner. The fact that Wagner's music pleases in concert form does not destroy the argument that the [?] would fail were the spectacular [?] removed from them. The least [spectacular] of them all is *Tristan und Isolde*, and yet even in this there might be some doubt as to the complete success of the music in the first part of the third act were there no picture of the desolate and ruined castle and the suggestion of the empty and almost hopeless sea beyond.

When it comes to the more pretentious tetralogy, what would befall it if it were stripped of its shows? Where would *Das Rheingold* finish without the shimmering waters, the little fish maidens, the glittering Nibelungen hoard, the crumpled dwarfs, the winnowing serpent, the shifting Loge, the lightening of Donner, and the rainbow bridge to the shadowy Wallhall?

In *Die Walküre* what do not the musician and the poet owe to the wavering fire, the mists, the flying horses and the moonlight? Is it necessary to continue? Think of the dragon and the flitting little birdie in *Siegfried*, the changing anvil and the steamed prima donna, who is rescued from her uncomfortable position by a kiss which we can see actually lasting for thirty seconds by a watch.

Think of the pomp and circumstance of *Die Meistersinger*. Did tricky old Meyerbeer ever do anything more spectacular? Oh, yes, is the answer, he did, because he made shows for their own sakes and did not endeavor to mould them into the structure of the drama itself. Well, to a certain extent that is true. But Meyerbeer was doing only that which all the opera composers before him had done, even some of those who were as full of reformatory notions as preaching Richard himself.

We have lately observed a revival of Gluck's *Armide*. Could any opera depend more on spectacular features than that one does? Yet it is admitted on all sides that it is a work of lyric art and that the composer made serious and highly successful effort to embody a tragedy in tones. Yet how much of the purely spectacular is demanded by the inclusion in the score of so many ballet episodes. The ballet is for the eye, even when it ultimately

appeals to the understanding, and the dances in *Armide* succeed precisely in proportion to their mimetic significance. The picture is drawn for the real old fashioned operatic public, which always liked this kind of toy. Now suppose that Mr. Puccini had elected to compose an opera on some such subject as *The Scarlet Letter*, which Walter Damrosch once tried to transform into a lyric play. What might have been the result? The spectacular element would have become so drab and fey that the entire audience would have rushed madly from the opera house to the Tenderloin restaurants and have plunged its sorrows into large bowls of something.

Suppose that he had selected some episode of the Hiawatha legend. Then would have arisen formidable difficulties. How could Caruso be made to look and act like a great Indian? Did the dainty Laughing Water have a sleek and well fed exterior or was she slender as a reed shaken in the rushing waters of a shining river?

It is not a thing to be taken lightly. And then think of the vast and disconcerting incongruity of permitting these two creatures of aboriginal fable to stand in the centre of the stage with baby lenses playing glorifying light upon their brown countenances while they sang out their souls in music like that of Rodolpho and Mimi!

On the other hand was it to be supposed that Mr. Puccini would immerse himself in the study of Indian chants only to be severely rebuked by Boston? No, the Indian appears to better advantage in *The Girl of the Golden West* as a poor whiskey thief, a creature without moral sense and a rather pitiable provider of comedy.

He is one of the minor spectacular features of a play in which graphics are extremely important. Here again we find ourselves confronted with a consideration which has often faced us before. The combination of spectacular elements with the essentially dramatic in an opera is not the easiest achievement in the world of art. The spectacular, as we have noted, the public must have. But those operas which have maintained their hold on the largest number of music lovers throughout the world are those in which the spectacular elements are subordinated to the emotional.

This is true in Mr. Puccini's own works. Even in *Tosca* it is the case. The second act at first sight seems to have no spectacular element in it, but to rely entirely on its dramatic intensity. The music however, is almost wholly melodramatic. The only lyric point of repose is the complaint of *Tosca*.

All this is undeniably true. But on the other hand let us not forget that the action of this act is based on tumult of flaming passion, and that the drama here comes to the front. It is Sardou, not Puccini, who carries this act. Mr. Puccini subordinated himself as a composer with consummate skill, and provided for the play a perfect musical background.

He has plainly tried to do the same thing in *The Girl of the Golden West*, but the materials furnished him by the dramatist are not the same. The climax of the second act of Mr. Belasco's play is quite as intense as that of Mr. Sardou's, but it is intensity which is derived

from the impression of dread and suspense skillfully created by the dramatist in the mind of the spectator.

It was not so easy to make a potent musical scheme out of this as out of surging passion. Here the spectacular element is certain to thrust itself in front of the music, and the composer must be at some loss as to what to do to prevent himself from becoming a mere accompanist.

The public may in the long run elect to like this scene for its own dramatic sake. It is to be hoped that it will. The last act is sheer opera, and yet here again the spectacle of rushing men and horses is permitted to rise to great importance. However, the solo of Johnson and the last scene of Minnie are interesting and conceptions.

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It is worth remembering that in a few days another opera will be performed at the Metropolitan for the first time on any stage. This is the *Königskinder* of Englbart Humperdinck. Those who are familiar with the captivating *Hansel und Gretel*—and who is not?—will look for new and rare delights. It will be a proud record for the Metropolitan to have produced in one season two entirely new works, one by the most famous of Italian masters and another by a celebrated German.<sup>3</sup>

But this is not the end. It is confidently expected that Victor Herbert's opera *Natoma* will also be performed at the Metropolitan, though not for the first time on any stage. Its first hearing is to be accorded to Philadelphia. However, the production of three new operas in the United States in one season seems to show that the projectors of operatic entertainment and the constructors of operas have come to regard this country as a field worthy of larger cultivation than it has received in the past.

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<sup>3</sup> These two paragraphs were on the same page as the *La fanciulla del West* review, but were not part of the review. I include them because of the context they provide for the ideas presented in this particular review.



*The New York Morning Telegraph*

11 December 1910

“*Girl of Golden West* in Opera Storms Metropolitan  
Throng.”

Night of Puccini and Belasco Production of American Offering a Hurricane of Applause,  
With Tumult of Enthusiasm as Celebrities in Song Bow Before Curtain of Gold.

Destinn Charms as Minnie

Long Heralded Triumph of Great Composer and Great Playwright Witnessed by  
Fashionable and Distinguished Audience of International Degree. Its Perfection.

By Algernon St. John-Brenon

It will be very long before the exciting scenes which attended the production of *The Girl of the Golden West* in musical form last night at the Metropolitan Opera House will be forgotten by those privileged to witness it. The occasion will in a sense become historic. It was the first time in the crowded and picturesque annals of artistic New York that a living European master of opera, passing over the jealous and insulted communities of his native land, had elected this city for the introduction of his latest work.

Moreover, the most popular composer of the day had made in the matter of his libretto a most astute and farseeing selection. The Writer of *La Bohème* and of *Madama Butterfly* had based his music up on an American drama of vivid and native incidents, of general, most favorable and accepted reputation, while the name of the author of that drama had become in his own country a household word and happily known wherever English is the language of a theatre.

Although these unusual circumstances, as well as the undoubted promise of the new opera, were in themselves sufficient to key the vast audience to the last tension of nervous expectancy, curiosity was rendered the more curious and observation the more observing because of the presence of its two authors. The fine features of David Belasco and the quiet, absorbed, if somewhat prosaic and unassuming figure of Signor Puccini himself were a cynosure for all neighboring and steadily gazing eyes. Near M. Puccini was the acute and stern-faced young emperor of Italian opera, Titus of the Ricordis, that renowned family at

the sides of whose golden and triumphal chariots the great composers of Italy for five generations have marched in pious docility, sometimes grateful, always tranquil.

And as contrast to the Milanese, as a reminder that Puccini and Ricordi did not bestride all of the world like colossi, one noticed the inobtrusive [sic], professional and kindly face of Englebert Humperdinck, the composer of *Hansel and Gretel*, the unobsessed follower of Richard Wagner, and the one rival in point of a wholesome and unchallenged popularity of the more productive Puccini.

### Array of Fashion

In the boxes sat that glittering array of wealth and fashion, that lends the last touch of pomp and ceremony to the great occasions of our Opera House, which still remains the most illustrious and most important of our national artistic institutions. Here and there were seen the mobile and poetic features many actresses delighted to see a familiar comedy translated into the haughty terms and angelic dialect of the music drama, and wondering at the exotic processes and austere conventions of a theatrical art, after all maternal and ancestral to their own.

In the stalls, in the galleries, and in the corridors, the theatre confronted music, the actor jostled against the symphonist, the manager consorted with the impresario, and Ben Roeder, of New York, was a striking contrast to Mr. Gatti-Casazza, of Milan, to Andreas Dippel, of Chicago and Milwaukee, and to the illegible and diplomatic Henry Russel of London, and the city which is greater than London.

Nor was this to be wondered at. *The Girl of the Golden West* is a most carefully, sagely and ingeniously premeditated appeal to every American instinct and insceptibility [sic], whether theatrical, musical or purely relative to our self-esteem.

### To Hear the Masters

These astute and artful creatures, Mr. Belasco, M. Puccini and M. Gatti-Casazza had done all in their power to flatter our hearts and stimulate our imaginations. What wonder then if last night the whole of the theatrical world seemed to have stood still, laid its finger upon its lips and pleaded mutely for the favor of silent tongues, so that it might hear the new thing and know what had come of the Galilee of music?

The actual interpretants added to the fervor of the audience and to an enjoyment that had predetermined to enjoy itself.

Mme. Emmy Destinn, a woman of consummate gifts and unchallenged beauty of lyric utterance, portrayed the heroine, a role that had already been created in all its womanly sweetness by the graceful accomplishment and tender womanliness of Miss Blanch Bates.

The greatest tenor of the age, the spoiled darling of the muse of song, sang the music of Ramerrez, the hero. At the conductor's desk sat the conductor of the age, that wiry bundle

of artist fibers and intellectual sinews, that master among musicians, that musician among masters—Arturo Toscanini. The dullest imagination can figure the scene in all its eager flurry, its anxiety, its discussions, its movement. Can you not hear the buzz of operatic insects in the lobbies, and the grave of booming of directorial guns in the boxes and the offices? Can you not see the delight on the face of the Italians, on the features of the comely Roman from the embassy in Washington, in the bright eyes of Franco Marcaccio, the musical barber, all, of [pauper], prince, and proletariat alike, inebriated with the heady wine of their native music?

Can you not see the query and the doubt on the grave faces of the Germans?

Even Gatti-Casazza was startled out of his pontifical reserve.

### The Production

The first question that rises in the mind with regard to this is the natural one: How did the Italians treat this melodrama of Western life? When you read upon your programme that the character of Larkens was to be played by a gentleman of the name of Menotti Frasncona the tendency to smile was irresistible. Even now we shiver at the very thought of what will happen when the *The Girl of the Golden West* is produced at say, Paris, or Messina, or Warsaw. But the remarkable and undisputed quality of the New York production remains that a company almost entirely foreign and preponderatingly Italian had been so trained, so instructed, so diligently and skillfully rehearsed that the characters in the Belasco-Puccini opera resembled human beings far more closely than the characters if *La traviata* or *Lucia* resemble anything.

We have, of course, to reconcile ourselves to the fact that the singing Westerners sing in Italian. But a similar strain is put on our imaginations in two-thirds of the operas that we accept without question. The Spaniards of *Carmen* sing French, the Egyptians in *Aida* sing the language of Victor Emmanuel, the gods of *Ring*—and this is the strangest of all—list the mellifluous accents of Goethe and the delicatessen. The theatre is a mass of conventions; the opera is a greater mass, that is all.

### Great Stage Directions

Indeed stage direction was so admirable, hearing traces, as it did of great knowledge and an inexhaustible patience, that the success of *The Girl* was the one theme of general conversation. M. Caruso challenged favorable comparison with Mr. Robert Hillard and Mr. Milward, the original exponents of Johnson, while even the Indian, Billy Jackrabbit, of M. Bourgeois differed in no sense from the Indian of Mr. J. H. Benrimo.

The librettists of the Italian version, Signor Guelfo Civinini and Carlo Zangarini, have indeed made alterations and developments of Mr. Belasco's plot. The schoolroom scene is made an episode in an act and the lynching of Johnson is spun out into an act by itself. This was done for the benefit of European audiences that are destined to hear the work. M. Puccini will have then done his share in emphasizing two immortal legends—the legend

that the chief national product of American is the millionaire and the chief national amusement is a lynching. Yet again the lynching bee was dramatically handled with a realism and vivacity demonstrative of the fact that a master's hands have had much to do with the staging of a piece of bristling with difficulties and interwoven with complexities. The sets were much the same as those with which we are already familiar, though lynching and the beautiful farewell to California that formed so touching a conclusion to Mr. Belasco's play take place in a forest of giant redwoods.

### The Music

As the writer of these lines was wandering about the corridor between the actors one enthusiast rushed up to him and said, "At last an American opera! At last an American music!" The reader will do well to clear his mind of such can. The opera is no more American than *Aida* is Egyptian. This music is the music of M. Puccini. No one could hear twenty bars of it without recognizing the style, the very mannerism, the melodic trend of the man who wrote *Tosca* and *La Bohème*. It has been indicated above that it was written for the American public, for American success, for exploitation in America. By all means. The Americans had enjoyed *La Bohème*, *Tosca*, *Madama Butterfly* and even *Manon Lescaut*. Another opera in the same musical vein would surely be acceptable. Such was the reasoning of M. Puccini and his friends. The idea that there is a type of opera music which is American is fantastic. The idea that M. Puccini had discovered such a type and composed in a fount of it is more fantastic still. The story of *The Girl of the Golden West* is American enough, but the music is again—yet again—the music of Puccini.

The status of Puccini as a composer is fairly well fixed. Nor will his latest work do much to disturb the fixation. His gift of a sort of pungent, passionate, picturesque and strongly individualized melody is a matter of common knowledge. In addition to this he understand the stage, and he understands how make music and scenic effect supplement each other. Probably no other living writer has the genius for musico-theatrics. It was noticed that in *The Girl of the Golden West* last night the curtain came down in each instance upon a dramatic situation—that was Mr. Belasco. It also came down upon a distinct musical situation—that was M. Puccini.

### Theatrical Insight

The cleverness, the theatrical insight of this sort of thing is undeniable, and it is most distinctly the result of sophisticated design. But it has this effect. After each curtain the audience was left charmed and fascinated. And that is Mr. Puccini's happy and amiable skill. He writes lucid, living, effective and always dramatic music. It appeals to an audience of cultivation and refinement. He does not pretend to the depths of a *Fidelio* or of a *Goetterdaemmerung*, but on the other hand he avoids the noisome marshes of the verists and the electric Salomaniacs. He has shown a tendency in *La fanciulla del West* (to give it its Italian name) to broaden his harmonic resources and speak now and then in euphuist and pate-de-fois-gras dialect of M. Debussy. Yet it was the real Puccini that was most enjoyed

by yesterday's auditory. The handling of the chorus in the lynching scene revealed all his old skill in the use of this most valuable musical device.

We do not think that the actual score of this opera is richer or more solid than that of *Madama Butterfly*, and refuse also to say that it surpasses the musical web and volubility of musical idea that masterpiece, *La Bohème*. There is, as a matter of fact, no great musical moment in *La fanciulla del West*; nothing that will stir the spirit on its purely musical side as deeply as the Racconto in *La Bohème* or that exquisite song "E Lucevan le Stelle," in *Tosca*. The last, dying words and speech of Johnson before he is to be hanged gave indication at times of working up to a musical and vocal climax of great warmth and persuasiveness, or at least of some such intention. But it failed to achieve it, splendidly as M. Caruso sang.

The music of Minnie, however, was exquisite in its picturesqueness and its tenderness.

In Minnie Mr. Belasco has drawn a character of sweetness and simplicity of the wild flowers on some mountainside. Minnie has at once lovability, strength, and elemental pathos. In his musical delineation of this character Mr. Puccini has been more than successful and it is to him as a Minnie-singer the mind will inevitably occur, whenever the amateur of music, as distinct from the amateur of the opera, shall reflect upon the merits of this work.

#### The Artists

The honours of the performance fall to Mme. Emmy Destinn. In any part the issues and passions of which are straightforward, primary, obvious and derived logically from the instinct and natural bent of womanhood. Madame Destinn is always more than satisfactory. She is splendid as a peasant. She is insufferable as a duchess. She was delightful as Minnie. With her wonderful musical powers she caught the very essence of Puccini's music. She sang with a liquid beauty of tone, a fine-spun delicacy of phrasing, poetry of vocal interpretation that must go far toward the making of the opera. It was a complete, an irresistible, and a personal triumph.

Mr. Caruso's interpretation of Johnson, apart from its vocal distinctions and qualifications, upon which is hardly necessary to harp, was clean cut, proper as to costumes properly worn, manly, vigorous, and not un-Western.

The splendid voice and large, generous, boyish utterance of Mr. Amato may have seemed out of place in so deliberate, so icy, so harsh a character as that of Jack Rance, but we cannot find it in us to blame for having so fine and so warm-hearted a voice.

The smaller parts will be dealt with in a future notice, though it should be now stated in justice to Mr. Gilly that he might have lived in the Sierras all his life.

Applause! The whole night was a hurricane of applause. Who can describe that wonderous tumult as celebrity after celebrity, familiar or new, made his bow before the majestic curtain of old gold?

Success! The whole opera was a popular success before it was written. It was never intended that it should be anything else.

New York Times

11 December 1910

“Great Welcome for New Opera.”

Brilliant Audience Wildly Applauds Puccini’s *Girl of the Golden West*.

Nineteen Curtain Calls

Composer, Playwright, and Conductor Have a Triumph After Each Act

The Opera House Thronged

Ticket Speculators Got Some Seats, but Had to Sell Out at Less Than Cost-Estimate of the Opera.

By Cholly Knickerbocker

One of the most brilliant audiences ever seen in the Metropolitan Opera House filled it last night for the first performance in any country of Puccini’s latest opera, *Girl of the Golden West*. At 8 o’clock the house was not full but when Arturo Toscanini went to his desk at 8:20 practically every seat was taken.

All applause attempted during the first act was hissed down. There were many present who evidently wished to hear all the music, but at the end of the act the applause burst out with fury. First Miss Destinn and Messrs. Caruso and Amato were called out. At the fourth call Puccini appeared and was cheered. Mr. Toscanini was dragged out at the sixth call. The seventh Puccini took alone. The eighth was a group again, and then Puccini appeared alone twice. At the eleventh call David Belasco appeared. there were fourteen calls altogether.

After the sensational poker game which ends the second act there were nineteen curtain calls. The first of these , was taken by Miss Destinn and Messrs. Caruso and Amato: the second by Puccini alone in the third David Belasco appeared with the group. At the fifth call Signor Gatti-Casazza, Director of the Opera House appeared and presented to Puccini a silver wreath on behalf of the Board of Directors. Fourteen calls, taken variously, followed. Wreaths and flowers of all descriptions were presented to different members of the group while women split their gloves applauding. One woman threw a bunch of violets from a box to Puccini.

When the curtain was finally lowered there was a scene of indescribable confusion behind it. Puccini said:

“My heart is beating like the double basses in the card scene: I am tremendously pleased with this reception. I couldn’t have better [interpreters] for my work.”

Signor Gatti-Casazza said: “The time will come when we shall produce many new works here. Before the end of this month we shall produce Humperdinck’s *Königskinder* for the first time on any stage.

“I am very proud to have the privilege of presenting the new work of Puccini’s and I am more than pleased with all the singers.”

He stopped to call “Bravo” to Mr. Amato, who was preparing for the next act with his dressing room door open, in the corridor.

David Belasco said: “They understand one and they are marvelously facile those Italians. They have done marvels in the short time we have been working together.”

The auditorium had been specially decorated with Italian and American flags. The programmes were souvenirs, the covers containing pictures of Messrs. Gatti-Casazza, Puccini, David Belasco, and Toscanini. Outside the auditorium there was every indication of the excitement within. And, on the whole, the ticket speculators came off pretty badly.

John Brown, the controller of the Opera House, had gone to much trouble to thwart the ticket dealers—trouble which he said he would not take again as there were many complaints. The names of those who had bought tickets were held at the Thirty-ninth Street and Fortieth Street entrances, and the tickets were given out to those who called for them as they came in. The men at the doors handled this matter with dispatch and little confusion.

A good many seats had fallen into the hands of speculators, but they did not, however, reap the harvest they had expected. They held the seats at very high rates, as high as \$75 apiece, until yesterday. In the afternoon the price fell to \$18, and a few minutes after 8 o’clock it was possible to buy seats on the sidewalk for less than the box office price; at state of affairs which was quickly taken advantage of by those who could get no more standing room at \$3 each.

Inside the house there was a double force of ushers. Each door was guarded by a Cerberus who would let nobody through without a ticket. Even Otto Kahn failed to get through to his seat because he did not have his check with him until he was properly introduced by the head usher.

The theatre contained a great many celebrities. Sprinkled about on the first floor were Miss Marie Tempest, Antonio Scotti, Mr. and Mrs. Homer, Henry Russell, who will shortly produce the opera in Boston; Mrs. Andreas Dippel, Josef Hofmann, Mr. and Mrs. Farrar, Manuel Klein, Herr Gadaki-Tauscher. E.W. Sutphen, and Engelbert Humperdinck.



New York Times

11 December 1910

“Melodrama Set To Music.”

A Fine Performance of Puccini’s Work Arouses Great Enthusiasm.

By Richard Aldrich

Giacomo Puccini’s latest opera, *La fanciulla del West*, was performed for the first time on any stage at the Metropolitan Opera House last evening with all the circumstances denoting great success. It was a special performance outside the subscription series and the prices had been doubled but the house was filled to its utmost capacity and the audience was repeatedly wrought to a high pitch of enthusiasm and, as it seemed, could hardly give sufficient acclaim to those who were responsible for the production and those who participated in it.

Every effort had been made not only to achieve this success, but as well to make the performance a notable one in the history of the house. The composer had come from Italy to superintend the rehearsals and to assure the realization of his intentions in the music; David Belasco, the master of stagecraft, upon whose drama *The Girl of the Golden West* the opera is founded, had spent days and nights in direction the stage management and searching the perfect co-operation and interplay of all the factors that count for a perfect ensemble—such an ensemble as New York has often had occasion to admire in his own theatre and such as the authorities of the Opera House, with all their resources, have not often been able to equal. And the Opera House had itself provided the finest talent it has in its service to interpret the work—Mr. Toscanini to conduct it, Mme. Destinn and Messrs Caruso and Amato and a host of its lesser and many of its most excellent singers in the minor parts. It was the first time that a new work by one of most distinguished and popular of European composers had had its first representation in New York and it is not likely that any finer or more authoritative representation of this most difficult opera will be given on the other side of the water.

Belasco’s Part In It

Not many operas have owed so much of their immediate success to the dramatic significance of their librettos as *La fanciulla del West*. It is hardly too much to say that its success is due more to Mr. Belasco than to the musician who has attempted to heighten and

intensify the effect of his melodrama by the power of music. *The Girl of the Golden West* held audiences spellbound at the Belasco Theatre five years ago by its theatrical effectiveness, the skill with which its tense and absorbing melodramatic situations were wrought, the picturesqueness of the characters, and the glamour of the period and surroundings in which they were placed. That spell has not lost its power in Mr. Puccini's opera and it was a potent factor in the deep impression undoubtedly made upon last night's audience. The play has been skillfully arranged for the use of the musician-the librettists' names are C. Zangarini and C. Civini. They have kept the really essential features that distinguished Mr. Belasco's work and have made them count as far as they could in its operatic form. The Girl, Minnie the gentlemanly and cynical Sheriff, the disguised bandit, are drawn in their characteristic outlines: the throng of miners are recognizable, though considerably metamorphosed figures. Two of the three "strong" situations, toward which the lines of the drama converged, stand as they did-the Sheriff's discovery of the wounded Johnson hidden above him in the loft of Minnie's cabin by the dropping of the blood upon his linen, and the game of poker in which the Sheriff and Minnie contest for the outlaw's life. The third, that moment of suspense in the last act is elaborated in the opera into the visible capture of Johnson by the express company's men under circumstances of wild excitement and his rescue by his sweetheart at the point of her pistol, with the noose around his neck. This is Bowery style. Mr. Belasco's was subtler, but the more obvious method fitted better into Mr. Puccini's scheme.

All this does not fail to keep the audience in tension and suspense, as such scenes in skillful melodrama should. As for the rest, the drama has necessarily been pruned somewhat to allow for the slower development of music, even in the most expeditious Italian hands. But the loss of what is gone is surprisingly little felt, and the dramatic action as it is presented in the opera has no inexplicable gaps for the imagination to bridge. On the other hand, there has been amplification, as some of the love scenes and of the scene of Minnie's first entrance, under circumstances more exciting, though perfectly conventional. The episode of her lesson scene with the miners, too, has been transferred to the first act from the last, in order to enable this last act to be set out of doors. This scene has been joined to a number of other more or less desultory happenings which are crowded into the first act, and which do not advance the action, but are intended obviously to create atmosphere, to fix an impression of local colour, of characteristic surroundings of the place, and the people of the drama. Whatever their value may be for this purpose, they have the disadvantage of lengthening the act unduly: so that when its real business begins, with the meeting of Minnie and Dick Johnson, their speedily kindled love and the flaring jealousy of Rance, the Sheriff, the attention and receptivity of the audience have already been submitted to heavy draughts. The two following acts are much shorter, more compressed, more intense to their effect.

### The Musical Treatment

The place of music in such a drama as this a drama of rapid movement of sharply focused realistic situation, of a few tensely theatrical climaxes, in which the emotional and psychological elements rise only rarely to influential or commanding place, is not easy to

find. In setting this drama to music, Mr. Puccini undertook a task that not so many years ago would have been deemed impossible, almost a contradistinction in terms of all conceptions of what the lyric drama could or should be. But the Italian composers of whom he stands indisputably at the head, have evolved a technique, a treatment to which [this] drama and others like it can be subjected. In *Tosca* he achieved something that foreshadows the methods he has applied in *La fanciulla*. Giordano attempted the similar thing in *Fedora*, Cilea in *Adriana Lecouvreur*, even Massenet tried his hand at it in *Sapho*, to mention a few that have recently come within the ken of this public. This treatment involves a more or less detached and formless paragraphic, sometimes a rapid and staccato vocal utterance, projected against an equally expeditious and hastily sketched orchestral background, to which is given the task of accentuating, emphasizing, and intensifying -if it can-the significance of the dialogue with points or broad stretches of colour, thematic fragments, quickly shifting kaleidoscopic harmonies. There is no weaving of a broad tapestry of thematic development in the orchestral fabric: the music has no time to wait for that—it must hurry along after the action and try to keep pace with the spoken word. This is interrupted now and again, however, by pages in a broader style; lyric movements, when the music is given more opportunity to rise to its true task of expressing emotion or passion or sentiment, of psychologizing. Here the voices may likewise sing in a broad arioso, in phrases that at least have melodic outline and shapeliness. The music of *La fanciulla del West* in its style is broader and more convincing than that of some of the operas just mentioned, but it is a characteristic exemplar of this evolution of the modern Italian style.

As to the specific quality of Mr. Puccini's music, there is much that is significant and interesting to be noted in the score. It shows, apparently, a new step in Puccini's development. In *Madama Butterfly* it was observed that he had ventured far into a region of new and adventurous harmonies. He has now gone still further into this field of augmented intervals and chords of the higher dissonances. He has made much use of the so-called "whole tone" scale and the harmonies that associate themselves with it. In a word, there is a marked predilection for the idiom that is coupled particularly with the name of Debussy. Mr. Puccini has himself avowed it. It was one of the first things he said to the reporters when he reached these shores.

He seemed then, to be forestalling criticism, but why should there be criticism of such a course on the part of a modern composer? It has often enough been said that Debussy has added a new form of harmony and of melodic outline, a new idiom to the available means of musical expression. As other composers have done before him as far back as the dim twilight of the beginnings of the art. So far as this new idiom has value and competency for the expression of new ideas in music it will be appropriated by his contemporaries and successors and if it deserves to endure it will do so. Hence Mr. Puccini has but taken rightfully what is his to take, if it suits him to take and use it. But he has used it in his own way and filled it with the contents of his own ideas. There is plenty of the personal note in what he has written, and nobody would suspect it of being Debussy's. Yet it may be doubted whether any who know the composers only through *La Bohème* would recognize him in this, so far has he travelled in thirteen years.

### In Comparison with *Tosca*

There is reminder in this music, however, of *Tosca*, and it shows many points of contact with *Madama Butterfly* in the outline of certain of its more sustained melodic passages. The long air that Dick Johnson sings in the third act after his capture, for instance, is of the very stuff and fibre of that opera. It will have occurred to many who heard *La fanciulla del West*, last evening that the new work shows considerably less fecundity of melodic inspiration, or even call it invention, than Puccini's earlier ones. There is certainly far less of the clearly defined melodic lustre, outline, point and fluency, far less of what is tangibly thematic than there is in his earlier works. There is, in fact, little of it: and what there is has not more distinction than the tune to which the miners set themselves to waltzing in the first act and which soon develops into the [?] love-theme of the opera-the voicing of Johnson's first words to the Girl, recurring again repeatedly in the opera for the same purpose. It is a tune of very common place character for the important roll it has to play

There are various snatches of that syncopated rhythm known as "rag time" now supposed to be typically "American," that are used repeatedly, but they are of astonishingly little melodic value, and indeed, seem intended to have only a rhythmic one. There are a few other themes that have some sort of representative function and that might be tagged with names. The song of the minstrel in the first act, phrase in which Johnson speaks nobly of love and tenderly to his inamorata, have rhetorical effectiveness and breadth as phrases, but their melodic value seems vague, inconclusive.

The conclusion seems almost irresistible that all this is intentional; a part of the composer's scheme for the representation in music of this Western drama. It is not to be supposed that Mr. Puccini is at the present time unable to write more distinguished melody, to conduct more convincing thematic development, than he has put into this work. He seems to have another conception, another view of his task. His music seems as if designed more for its colour, its pictorial effect, as a background, than as an immediate interpreter of the incidents, emotions, passions and psychological moments of the drama, even in those passages where the orchestra and the voices are allowed opportunity for eloquent musical speech. Any salient quality seems deliberately avoided that should even for a moment engross the listener's attention. This music seems almost like an adjunct of the scenery, a kind of heightening of the scenic setting rather than interpretation or a voicing of the significance of the drama.

### Striking Instrumental Combinations

This impression is enhanced by Puccini's use of the orchestra, in which he shows even greater skill than he did in *Madama Butterfly* hitherto his most accomplished work in this respect. He obtains innumerable effects with remarkable certainty of touch. There are new colours, now strong and vivid, now subtle and subdued. There are new and striking instrumental combinations. The orchestration is finely transparent and homogeneous even in his most powerful climaxes. He has gained searching effects by his use of multiple division of the strings and other choirs of instruments. He has not overloaded his score even

to obtain his highest sonorities, and there is rarely lacking a distinctive and characteristic scheme of colour. Mr. Puccini has used his orchestral skill in mollifying and toning down the harshness and biting acid of the modern discords to which he has turned so often in this work, and what looks forbidding on paper is often translated to the ear into expressive, and even ingratiating, sound. There are special effects of more or less novelty, thus, Mr. Puccini has added to his orchestra an instrument of the “[...]lesta” type that punctuates certain phrases with points of light. In the suspense of the poker game there is no sound from the orchestra but a mysterious pizzicato from divided double basses, pianissimo—an effect of uncanny suggestiveness like that which Strauss uses at a terrible moment in *Salome*. And of the many curious instrumental combinations there is nothing more curious than the ascending and descending scale passages of two flutes playing together in seconds when Minnie reproves Johnson for his attempted embrace in the beginning of the second act. The score is full of novel and more or less successful effects of this sort; and they attest the care with which Mr. Puccini has developed this part of his work.

#### The Setting Excellent

A keen-edged realism, in intention at least, is one of the chief characteristics of Mr. Belasco's drama and music cannot heighten or intensify this. With all the effort that has been made to gain vividness of effect in the stage pictures we are a long way in the Opera House from any real impression of the time, the place, the characters of this uncivilized American life. The colour that Mr. Puccini has superimposed upon a sharply etched picture has not enhanced its value.

As for anything really suggestive of American local colour in the music, supposing that were possible, there is practically nothing. The music is personal, it is Mr. Puccini's, and it would, in truth be difficult to see how he could have suggested the Forty Niners and their camp in the Sierras by any valid musical resources.

Much of the effect of this opera, as of the play, depends upon picturesque stage settings and precise stage management. With the help of Mr. Belasco the performance has been made one of extraordinary excellence in these respects. The varied doings in the Polka Saloon in the first act are enacted with much care, with an exactly calculated effect—though he would be rash who should imagine that the scene could bear any photographic resemblance to the realities of that far -off time and place. There is the same realistic depiction of the blizzard raging outside Minnie's cottage in the second act as there was in the play—the blasts of wind and gusts of snow blowing in whenever the door is opened are enough to make the audience shiver. The excitement of the capture in the last act is admirably represented, with galloping horses and running crowds; and the sotto voce imprecations of the assembled throngs as they are confronted with the disappointment of their vengeance are an admirable theatrical touch. This scene, exhibiting the primeval forest of redwoods, with distant mountain peaks lighten by the rising sun seen through the trees, is a fine stage picture. So are the settings of the saloon and of Minnie's cottage, with their innumerable realistic details.

### A Toscanini Masterpiece

The presentation of the opera was one of Mr. Toscanini's masterpieces, so vitalized, so full of detail, so broad in its outlines, so finished. The orchestral performance was a superb one of a very difficult score. There was the highest excellence also in the interpretation of the principal and most of the minor characters. Mme. Destinn was singularly felicitous as Minnie, the *Girl of the Golden West*. She acted the part with great energy and sincerity, and her singing of the music, which is very well adapted to her, was of splendid power and expressiveness. Dick Johnson is a part in which Mr. Caruso appears upon the stage to better advantage than he does in many others. He was successful in representing the rough energy, the daredevil audacity of the outlaw and his stoicism in the presence of death. And his singing was of his best; such phrases of expression as he had to deliver were given with beautiful voice and art, and he refrained from the over-accentuation that must be accepted with the better things he does in other parts.

Mr. Amato showed his versatility in his impersonation of Jack Rance, the Sheriff, whom he made a living figure. It had conventional traits, this darkly ruminating plotter, with his puffing cigar, his frequent pull at his cuffs, and his lowering gaze, but he was a potent force in the drama.

The choruses of the miners were admirably sung: the ensemble in the first act was especially good; and these choruses are an important contribution to the musical whole.

### Society throng adds lustre

#### All the Boxes Filled, and the Reception a Brilliant Scene

The premiere of *The Girl of the Golden West* brought out an unusually large and fashionable audience last night at the Metropolitan Opera House, especially in view of the fact that so many house parties are being given over the weekend. The gathering was remarkable for the number of married people and the comparative absence of the younger set.

In the parterre row notably were many who could formerly be seen there week after week during the operatic season, but who, during the last two or three years, since the advent of the younger set, have practically betaken themselves to the background.

The large reception which followed the opera, complimentary to the composer, Giacomo Puccini, really placed the producing on the basis of a social function, and the foyer for more than an hour after the final curtain had been rung down presented a brilliant scene. The idea of the Metropolitan Directors to make this reception one of representative art, literature, and science added distinction to the whole affair.

The amphitheatre during entr'acts presented a scene of brilliance and animations. This event, unique in musical history, drew as large, if not a larger representative body of New York

society than ever before. The gowns worn by those in the parterre row soft in tones, brought out the lustre of the many jewels worn.

Everybody seemed to come at once, and before the opera had been on fifteen minutes the house was holding its capacity. When the electroliers were turned on at the end of the first act, the scene to many was a revelation. After the enthusiasm had spent itself following the repeated bows from the stage, the assembly began to take an interest in those about them.

Among those seen in the parterre row were Mrs. O.H.P. Belmont Phoenix Ingraham, Col. and Mrs. Jay, Mr. and Mrs. Oliver Harriman, Mrs. William B. Leeds, Mr. and Mrs. H.A. C. Taylor, Mr. and Mrs. Lloyd Brice, Mrs. Harry Lehr, Miss Catharine L. Hamersley, Mr. and Mrs. Peter Goelet Gerry, Mr. and Mrs. William D. Sloane, Mme. Sembrich, Mrs. Richard Gambriel, Mr. and Mrs. James B. Haggin.

Also Mr. and Mrs. A. D. Julliard, Mr. and Mrs. Frederic W. Rhineland, Mr. and Mrs. William K. Vanderbilt, Sr., and Miss Rutherford; Mr. and Mrs. George Balker, Mr. and Mrs. William Goadby Loew, Mr. and Mrs. Henry Clews, Mr. and Mrs. Edmund Baylies, Mr. and Mrs. Stuyvesant Fish, and William Hude Neilson.

#### The Reception

Those who attended the reception after the opera were Col. John Jacob Astor, Mr. and Mrs. Jules S. Bache, A.M. Bagby, Mr. and Mrs. George F. Baker and George F. Baker, Jr., Mr. and Mrs. J Stewart Barney, Mr. and Mrs. Edmund L. Bayliess, T. Sanford Beatty, David Belasco, Harry S. Black, Mr. and Mrs. August Belmont, Sr., Mr. and Mrs. Cornelius N. Bliss, Mr. and Mrs. George S. Bowdoin, Mr. and Mrs. Frederick G. Bourne, Mrs. Harold Brown, Dr. and Mrs. Nicholas Murray Butler, Blanche Bates, Mrs. Lloyd S. Brice and the Misses Brice.

Mr. and Mrs. Henry Clews, Miss Choate, Mr. and Mrs. James Blanchard Clews, Mrs. C.H. Coster, Mr. and Mrs. Walter Damrosch, Carl A. de Gersdorf, Mr. and Mrs. Healy Ditson, Benjamin Duke, Wilbur Ellis Dixon, Signor Faraorni, the Italian consul, and Signora Faraorni, Mr. and Mrs. Giraud Foster, Mr. and Mrs. Willilam W. Fuller, Mr. and Mrs. Eldert H. Gary, Mr. and Mrs. Edwin Gould, Robert Graves, Mr. and Mrs. F. Gray Griswold, Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Guggenheim, and S. R. Guggenheim.

Mrs. Ben H. Ali Haggin, Mr. and Mrs. James B. Haggin, Mrs. W. Pierson Hamilton, Harry Flagler Harkness, G. G. Haven, Jr., Charles Hayden, Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Curtiss James, Mrs. George W. Jenkins, Eben D. Jordan, Mr. and Mrs. August D. Juilliard, Mr. and Mrs. Frederic Kernochan, Mr. and Mrs. Theodore Knoedler, Mr. and Mrs. Otto H. Kahn, Charles Lanier, Mrs. Edward Lauterbach, William H. L. Lee, Maurice Leon, Mr. and Mrs. Martin W. Littleton, Charles M. Loeffler, Mr. and Mrs. Robert S. Lovett, Mr. and Mrs. Phillip M. Lydig, and E. E. Lyons.

Chancellor and Mrs. H. M. Maccracken, Mr. and Mrs. Mackay, Paul Myere, Miss Anne T. Morgan, J. Pierpont Morgan, Dr. Willy Meyer, Frederic Potts Moore, Charles A. Munn, Willis L. Odgen, Mr. and Mrs. Herbert Parsons, Mrs. Frederick Parons, Mr. and Mrs. Stephen H. P. Pell, Mr. and Mrs. Frederic Courtland Pentfield, Mr. and Mrs. George W. Perkins, Mr. and Mrs. Herbert L. Pratt, and Mr. and Mrs. John T. Pratt.

Gen. Charles F. Roe, Mr. and Mrs. John Ellis Roosevelt, Mr. and Mrs. George Rose, Joseph Rumsey, Henry W. Savage, Mr. and Mrs. Mortimer L. Schiff, Mr. and Mrs. Lester Scott, Mr. and Mrs. William F. Sheehan, Lee Shubert, Mr. and Mrs. William Douglas Sloane, Mr. and Mrs. James Speyer, Alfred E. Steers, Rene A. Sichel, Prof. and Mrs. Stengel-Sembrich, Martin F. Steiner, Mr. and Mrs. James Stillman, Guaglia Rinaldo Stroppa, Mr. and Mrs. Henry A.C. Taylor, Nelson Taylor, Mrs. E.R. Thomas, Prince and Princess Troubetzkoy, Mr. and Mrs. Charlemagne Tower, and Cavallere Roberto Tentaro.

Mrs. Vanderbilt, Mr. and Mrs. William K. Vanderbilt, Mrs. Elsie French Vanderbilt, Robert B. Van Cortlandt, George Von Shal, Mrs. Vimacarti and Miss Vimacarti, Mr. and Mrs. George Henry Warren, Lloyd Warren, Creighton Webb, Mr. and Mrs. George Peabody Wetmore, and the Misses Wetmore, Mr. and Mrs. Egerton L. Winthrop, Hunter Wykes, Miss Julia Chester Wells, and Mr. and Mrs. George W. Young.

#### In Orchestra Seats

Among those in the orchestra seats last night were Mr. and Mrs. August B. Field, Mrs. Mary Field Payne, Mrs. Pearsall Field, Fred Edy, J.P. Sheffield, Jerome Siegel, Mrs. Samuel Untermyer, G.G. Haven, Elias Summerfield, Murry Gugenheim, Mr. and Mrs. Henry L. Einstein, William H. McIntyre, Mrs. Henry B. Hyde, MR. and Mrs. Edward B. Steinmann, Mrs. Earl Lewis, Martin Erdman, Mr. and Mrs. Otto H. Kahn, Henry Rogers Winthrop, Mr. and Mrs. James Speyer, Miss Ida B. Carlton, Morton F. Plant, Mr. and Mrs. Charles F. Swan, Montgomery Hallowell, Edmund Scheider.

Mr. and Mrs. E. Masters McDonald, Mr. and Mrs. Leo von Raven, Mr. and Mrs. W. F. Stafford, Miss A. B. Jennings, Mr. and Mrs. Edgar Frank, Miss Mary Carey, Mrs. R. S. Baldwin, MR. and Mrs. W. J. Watt, J.A. McGuire, Mr. and Mrs. James C. Dayton, Mrs. Benjamin J. Greenhut, Dr. Home Gibney, Mr. and Mrs. Henry Seigel, Mr. and Mrs. J.P. Lee, MR. and Mrs. Arthur Williams, George W. Meacham, Mrs. John Brown, Mr. and Mrs. A. M. Powell.



New York Times

18 December 1910

“Critics Find Little American Colour in Puccini’s Opera *The  
Girl of the Golden West.*”

By Richard Aldrich

There seem to be few who heard *La fanciulla del West* who think that Mr. Puccini has succeeded in injecting into it any “American local colour.” He did succeed in getting into *Madam Butterfly* what at least impresses the Occidental as Japanese local colour, and in doing it, by the use of Japanese melodies and Japanese instruments, not only skillfully, but also artistically. It may be true, as we have been told, that the Japan of *Madama Butterfly* is a wholly imaginary country, as unreal as the Japan of Gilbert and Sullivan’s *Mikado*; but the music at least gives an impression and envelops the stage with an atmosphere. Such an impression and such an atmosphere are lacking in *La fanciulla del West*.

The question naturally arises what means Mr. Puccini could have resorted to obtain his American local colour supposing that he wished to apply this line to the new opera that has just been produced here. It is rather singular that he did not take the trouble to use the tunes that most naturally occur to American listeners, because they are referred to by the characters themselves, and in Mr. Belasco’s play were really sung. Thus the miners in the Polka saloon, at the very beginning, join in what the Italian stage directions of the opera call “un ritornello Americano”—“Dooda, dooda, day.” Mr. Puccini might have looked up the music of Stephen C. Foster to this jingle, which is in his song, “De Camptown Races,” and used it. When the minstrel, Jake Wallace, some in, he sings a song of Mr. Puccini’s own devising—not free, however, from a haunting reminiscence—that sets the assembled miners to weeping from homesickness. Allusions in the text point to “The Old Folks at Home” and “Old Dog Tray”; and there would be nothing more natural or appropriate than for the negro minstrel to sing precisely these songs, or for the miners to join in them.

On the other hand, Mr. Puccini has tried to introduce some “American” themes in the shape of Indian tunes or phrases. But his attempt is a complete failure, and probably does not even enter into the ken of most of his listeners. At the opening of the second act Wowkle, the squaw, croons to her papoose a fragment of a tune that is derived from the folk song of the Zuni Indians. It might almost as well not be there for all the effect it makes, or for all the suggestion it conveys that here is something come out of American soil. Even if it were ten times more striking than it is, it would convey no meaning to the audience at the Metropolitan, which knows probably less about North American Indian music than it does

about Japanese, and upon those ears it falls with quite as strange and foreign a cadence. "American local colour" is not to be gained by anybody through the use of Indian melodies, if melodies they can be said to be, simply because they are nothing and mean nothing to the present occupants of American soil.

The only other trace of "Americanism" in the music is to be found in the several snatches of "rag time" rhythm that occur in the opera, not often very prominently, but still quite recognizably. "Rag time," it seems to be generally agreed everywhere nowadays, is American; though it is a rhythmic peculiarity that occurs in the music of many nations. It is more the rhythm than any tune, apparently, that Mr. Puccini has found useful in these passages; and they do not go a long way toward colouring the score with any local tinge.

But even if Mr. Puccini had drawn copiously from the fount of Foster's melodies; even if he had made in Indians sing their own music with many times the effect they succeeded in giving it, it seems very doubtful if thereby he would have succeeded in giving much more of a real and recognizable American character to his opera than he has actually done. These things are at best only a few decorative odds and ends, passages purely episodic in character; and they would not measurably have affected the real substance of the work. They could not have injected American blood into veins where now courses Italian from the beginning to the end of the score. Mr. Puccini is said to lay special stress on the fact that (apart from the inconsequential Zuni theme) the entire thematic material of the opera is his own. Nor do we believe, on the whole, that he, is really subject to much censure for doing as he has done. He would undoubtedly have pleased his American audiences, perhaps even aroused them to enthusiasm, by making the quotations suggested; but they would hardly have accomplished much for the work in other parts of the world. It is open to question if it is possible for any other nationality, to produce an opera that shall be "American" in anything like the sense, for instance, that *Der Freischütz* is in German; for the reason that there do not exist the elements out of which it could be made suitable for treatment in the lyric drama.

In truth, the elements out of which Mr. Puccini has endeavored to make an opera from Mr. Belasco's drama have failed him in his specifically musical task, the more characteristic they were of Mr. Belasco's own work. The two most important scenes of the spoken drama, the ones that most deeply impressed the spectators of it, and that really made its success, are the two tensely thrilling scenes of the discovery of the hidden bandit, by the dropping of blood upon the Sheriff's linen, standing beneath him in Minnie's cabin; and the poker game played for the stake of his life in the same cabin. Of these the first is almost ineffective in the opera and goes for little. The thrill of the original melodrama is lost. This is partly because of the lack of the close contact between audience and players in the Metropolitan Opera House, that prohibits the concentration of effect gained at the theatre where the play was produced. But it is due even more to the inability of music to deal with such a purely realistic and quickly progressing scene, which addresses itself to the eye and the intelligence of the listeners, and not to their emotions, their sentiments. The whole point of the situation is blunted, rather than sharpened, by the music with which it is invested. Its swiftness is retarded, its concentration is diffused.

The other scene is longer and more psychological, and might lend itself somewhat better, for this very reason, to musical illustration. But here, Mr. Puccini confessed his embarrassment at “setting a game of poker to music,” even such an unusual game. He gave up trying to find a really musical interpretation or illustration of the situation, and resorted to a frankly illustrative or pictorial method. Had he heard *Salome*, and did he remember Strauss’s extraordinary vivid device to indicate Salome’s impatience and suspense as she peers into the cistern where the executioner is fulfilling his task? Puccini, too, chose the double basses to suggest the breathless suspense of the players as they contest for the stake of a man’s life—but there is a world of difference in the result. Mr. Puccini’s attempt is distinctly unsuccessful and ineffectual. The measure of its unsuccess may be found in the whispered question of one of the audience members at the first performance: “What’s that sound?” The anxious inquirer was informed, and thereupon responded with a sigh of relief, “Oh, I thought it was a steam pipe snapping somewhere behind the stage!”

New York Daily Tribune

11 December 1910

“Puccini’s Latest Opera Sung Here.”

*Girl of the Golden West* Heard at the Metropolitan for First Time Anywhere

Composer in the Audience

Great Confusion as Result of Effort to Bar Speculators

Ticket Brokers Sacrifice Holdings.

By Unknown Author

*The Girl of the Golden West*, Giacomo Puccini’s latest opera, based on the drama which won great success here as a production of David Belasco, was sung for the first time on any stage last night at the Metropolitan Opera House before a large and brilliant audience that had paid double prices for its seats.

The occasion was one without exact parallel here, and much was made of the fact that the latest opera of one of the most popular of modern operatic composers was to be heard for the first time by an American audience.

Signor Puccini and David Belasco, author of the play, were both in the audience. Enrico Caruso, Emmy Destinn, Pasquale Amato, Dinah Gilly and Adamo Didur were the interpreters of the leading parts, and Arturo Toscanini was the conductor.

Entirely apart from the opera was another entertainment. This last was the first and it was free. The night was twice noticeable because for the first time in many, many years there was put in operation a plan to make sidewalk speculators first weep and then starve to death. The sins of the speculators were borne by the opera loving populace, anxious to pay double rates for the seats.

Speculators Fare Badly

The speculators were an unhappy lot. They wished that all the elaborate precautions taken had been successful. They had plenty of pasteboards before the opera began—and they still had them when it was over. They simply couldn’t sell them. Long before the curtain went up box office prices prevailed on the sidewalk, and soon cut rates were quoted. Ten dollar seats went for \$5, and even less, and there was no balm in Gilead for the adventurers.

Seats for *The Girl of the Golden West* were reserved since last Wednesday in the names of applicants who deposited \$10 for each reservation in the orchestra and in proportion for other parts of the house. The applicant was compelled to leave the cash along with his name and address. No receipt was issued by the management. After standing in line a couple of hours earlier in the week to accomplish these details the next duty of the purchaser was to apply at the window for them last night, and trust that the man at the window would not forget his name.

If all went well the lucky man was a prisoner. He must go within the walls. The sidewalk was infested with bad spirits ready to buy all seats offered. These things led to complications. The dispositions of some operagoers will have further to be moulded.

### Otto H. Kahn Held Up

Otto H. Kahn, a director of the Metropolitan Opera Company, was stopped at the brass gate by a servant in evening dress.

“You can’t come in without a ticket,” said the gateman.

“But I am Mr. Kahn,” said Mr. Kahn, making a move forward. He was detained.

“I say I am Mr. Otto H. Kahn,” repeated that widely known gentleman, unknown, however, to the man in his way.

“I can’t help it if your name is, Kahn, sir” explained the gateman.  
“You ain’t got a ticket and you can’t go through here without you got one.”

And the gateman at the time meant what he said, but relented when one of Mr. Kahn’s friends interceded in hi behalf.

By 5:30pm a Line formed in Broadway, starting at the \$3 admission window. Soon thereafter another stood shivering whose head held tight to the rail outside the window of the \$10 reservations. The way from all ticket windows to the entrance door was as clearly defined as at any circus. Ropes divided the ticket obtainers from the rest of mankind and by trying to get outside the ropes they quickly learned that all such hopes must be smothered. Five or six men did get away by making uncovered retreats, but whether they sold their holding could not be ascertained.

A young man who expertly handled a cane, not in defence, but through a sense of pleasure in its companionship, stood in line one hour, got his \$10 ticket and started jauntily for Broadway. A house detective complained that that was not playing the game fairly, as the ticket was reserved for him for two days and now delivered, and the seat it called for was empty. He should go right in and fill it, said the detective.

“I am going to my dinner,” said the young man.

“It is against the rules of the house,” said the detective.

“Bother the rules,” replied the other, with a glittering smile. I tell you, my dear fellow, that I am going to my dinner. I stood here two hours on Wednesday. Then I paid your man \$10, and got nothing for it except instructions to call early to-night.” I did so. For an hour I have again stood in line in a draft to get my ticket. Now that I have my seat you tell me I shall not dine. It is absurd. No man can keep me from dinner. You and Caruso together cannot keep me from my dinner.”

He seemed so amiable, withal, and so drawn by the verbal opportunities of the subject that the detective showed concern lest the young man might say it all over again. So the detective injected: It’s against the rules of the house, I tell you. But, if you give me your ticket you can eat.”

“Where will you be?” inquired the hungry one.

“Right where I am now,” promised the detective fervently.

“Done,” said the other and departed the calmly disposed person that he had been throughout.

### Some Didn’t Get Their Tickets

Mr. Gross was never calm. His case was different. He could not get in and was made to stay out. He had paid \$12 for two seats on Wednesday. Yes, his name was on the treasurer’s book. S. Gross, dress circle, D 62 and 64 and yet there were no tickets when, after waiting in line at 30<sup>th</sup> street and 40<sup>th</sup> street, he did the same at the Broadway entrance and again applied for help.

“Some one has called for your seats, Mr. Gross,” said a gentlemanly assistant behind the brass railing. “Your seats are occupied.”

Mr. Gross struggled with himself so as to be able to annunciate. He said:

“Excuse me; where do I come in?”

“It’s very strange,” purred the gentlemanly assistant. “The book says you paid the \$12 all right.”

“Maybe if I wait here whoever’s got my two seats will tell me how good it was when it’s over.” Suggested Mr. Gross. His voice indicated that he was labouring to be happy.

“We will send upstairs and try to find out the mistake,” said the other. Thirty minutes later Mr. Gross was still waiting for the latest advices from the front.

In 40<sup>th</sup> street the men and women who had chosen the family circle crowded around the ticket window as early as 6 o’clock. At 6:45 business started.

“What is your name?” asked the ticket man.

“Arona Prairo Grisco,” said an Italian.

“What’s you’re last name?” pleaded the ticket man.

“Arona Prairo Grisco,” replied the hopeful applicant appealingly.

By a process of elimination, and after much gesticulation by the man on the outside, his envelope was discovered. Bowing and smiling, Mr. Grisco gripped Mrs. Grisco to his side and hurried within. Samuel S. Cox, special policeman, formerly of the Manhattan Opera House, did much to assist the crowds that patiently spelled its numerous last names for the benefit of the man with the precious coupons.

#### Curtain Calls Frequent/Belasco and Puccini Respond to Brilliant Audience.

The audience within the house was one of exceeding brilliance; fully as brilliant as that of the opening night of the season. There was in addition something in the atmosphere, a sense of expectation that a first night audience rarely possesses. It was an unusual occasion, this production of a grand opera on an American theme, for the first time on any stage, and each individual present seemed to be impressed with the fact that he was assisting at an even such as few Americans have witnessed.

The audience was late in arriving, and as Mr. Toscanini evidently did not wish to begin until the major portion was in the house, the curtain did not rise until 8:22, though it had been announced for 8.

When Mr. Toscanini followed the action in the first act intently, but with only two slight bursts of applause, after Amato’s first semi-aria, and at Caruso’s entrance, but at the curtain a spontaneous burst of applause swept the house, and Miss Destinn and Caruso, Amato, Gilly, and Toscanini were called repeatedly before the curtain. The applause continued until Mr. Puccini and Mr. Belasco were finally brought out.

Mr. Belasco’s appearance was greeted with loud cheers, and he and Mr. Puccini were forced to bow their acknowledgments (sic) fourteen times.

During the second act, too, there was little applause, but again at the curtain a demonstration broke out that quite eclipsed that at the end of the opening act. The singers, Mr. Toscanini, Mr. Puccini and Mr. Belasco were brought repeatedly before the curtain, and were completely buried in the mass of floral tributes that were passed over the

footlights. The largest of these was a huge silver oak wreath, eight feet high, that Mr. Puccini received. There were, after this act, in all nineteen curtain calls, there having been fourteen after the first act.

Puccini after the performance expressed himself as thoroughly happy and satisfied over the reception of the opera.

“My heart is going like a contra-bass, said the composer, “but I am unutterably happy. The performance has been perfect. I have no doubt now of its success.”

Mr. Gatti-Casazza was equally enthusiastic.

“The performance is a great event in the history of the Metropolitan Opera House,” said Mr. Gatti. “It is a great success. The acting of Miss Destinn, of Mr. Caruso, of Mr. Amato, of Mr. Gilly is a revelation.”

Mr. Belasco was all smiles.

“I am divinely happy,” was all that he would say.

Many of the European newspapers had representatives in the opera house, and a constant stream of boys was kept running from the theatre to the cable offices.

#### Society at the Opera/Performance Fills House with the Leaders in the World of Fashion

Society turned out in force last night at the opera, and nearly every box in the parterre row and in the grand tier was occupied, while many of the regular subscribers were noticed scattered about in the orchestra.

Unlike the opening night, the boxholders and their guests arrived early and were in their seats shortly after the performance began.

Among those present was J. Pierpont Morgan, who had as his guests his sister, Mrs. Walter Burns; Lady Johnstone, wife of Sir Alan Johnstone, and Miss Anne Morgan. Mrs. Burns was in amethyst velvet with diamonds, and Miss Morgan wore black velvet.

Mr. and Mrs. Henry Clews were in their box, No. 12.

Mrs. W. K. Vanderbilt, jr. was with Mrs. James A. Burden, jr., who wore white satin and lace. Mrs. Vanderbilt being in black velvet.

With Mr. and Mrs. H. B. Hollins were Miss Marion Hollins and Miss Herman B. Duryea, who was in grass green satin and chiffon. Mrs. Hollins was in white satin brocaded with silver, and her daughter wore white chiffon satin.



Mr. and Mrs. W. Goadby Loew were the guests of Mr. and Mrs. George F. Baker, in Box 10. Mrs. Baker was in yellow satin and Mrs. Loew wore black jetted net.

Mrs. Stuyvesant Fish was with Miss Constance Warren, who also had Mrs. Edmund L. Baylies with her.

Mrs. Elbridge T. Gerry had with her Miss Mabel Gerry and Mrs. Peter Goelet Gerry.

Colonel and Mrs. William Jay were in Mrs. Ogden Goelet's box , No. 1 and had with them Mrs. James W. Gerard and Mrs. O. H. P. Belmont.

With General and Mrs. Lloyd S. Bryce were Mr. and Mrs. Henry A. C. Taylor, the latter in black satin and diamonds. Mrs. Bryce was in amethyst satin and chiffon.

Mrs. Vanderbilt occupied her box, and was attired in white satin, with crystal embroidery and diamonds.

Mrs. W. K. Vanderbilt, sr., was in her box, and had as her guest her sister, Mrs. Frederick C. Havemeyer.

Mrs. Harry S. Lehr had Miss Catherine L. Hamersley as her guest, and Mrs. Oliver Harriman had Mrs. William B. Leeds with her. Mrs. Leeds was in white satin brocade and Mrs. Harriman was in black satin.

Mrs. E. J. Berwind was with Mrs. James B. Haggin who was in white satin and diamonds, while Mrs. Berwind wore rose brocade.

With Mr. and Mrs. J. Nelson Borland were Mr. and Mrs. Forsyth Wickes, the latter in white satin and a wrap of silver brocade with ermine. Mrs. Borland wore white chiffon over satin embroidered in dull steel Mr. and Mrs. A. D. Julliard had as their guests in Box 1 Mrs. George Eggleston Dodge.

Mr. and Mrs. William Douglas Sloane occupied their box. Mrs. Sloan was in green velvet heavily embroidered with gold, with a low crown of diamonds and pearls and a necklace of diamonds.

Mrs. Phillip and M. Lydig had with her Mrs. F. Egerton Winthrop, in white satin and an Oriental cloak. Mrs. Lydig was in black velvet.

Others seen were Mrs. Charles A. Childs, who was in black satin and chiffon; Miss Helen and Miss Kate Brice, both in black satin; Mr. and Mrs. Frederick Edey, the latter in pink satin and pearls; Mrs. Eben Wright, in purple chiffon, spangled with crystals; Mr. and Mrs. H. Van Rensselaer Kennedy and Miss Marian Kennedy, the latter in white satin and her mother in black velvet; Mrs. E. C. Potter, in black satin; Mrs. Charles A. Childs in black satin and chiffon; Mrs. O.H.P. Belmont, in black velvet, with diamond ornaments and pearls; Mrs. James W. Gerard, in white satin, with a long overdress of orange chiffon

embroidered with dull silver; Mr. and Mrs. Clarence H. Mackay, the latter in cloth of silver brocade, trimmed with black velvet, and wearing Russian coronet of diamonds and a diamond necklace. (Unsigned)

“A Sensational Production at the Opera.”

*The Girl of the Golden West* and its Music

By Henry E. Krehbiel

Ever since Signor Puccini visited New York to witness the production of his opera *Madama Butterfly* at the Metropolitan Opera House the operatic waters have been kept in a ferment. It would, we fear, be rather ingenuous to say that an angel had come down periodically to stir the pool, unless we were all willing to accept the designation “angel” in the meaning which exists in theatrical parlance to-day; and Signor Puccini does not need such a helper. He has done notable things in music—he and his father, and grandfather and his great-grandfather and his great-great-grandfather before him have all made their mark, and we can conceive no more amiable and creditable expression of good will toward him than that he should continue to deserve the admiration which he has already won in England and America by the operas which have maintained their places in the current list—*Tosca*, *La Bohème*, and *Madama Butterfly*. But while art, in order to remain art, ought to live in the realm of the ideal, Signor Puccini has shown a willingness to sophisticate idealism with realism—no doubt following the fashion of the hour, and consequently has erected a new platform from which his works must be critically observed. Let no one think when he began this new opera it gave serious concern for a moment to him, his publishers or the producers of his works; the time is long past since such matters were expected to occupy the minds of reviewers; and if not them, why the minds of the others? What were the elements to be considered? The newspapers exploit them every day, and they are an essential element in what is called success—which in cases like the present, is dependent on the social fad of the moment opera (meaning the possession of money and a desire to make that fact known), the presence of a popular man singer (in this case—Caruso—a woman would never do), and, as chances now (but in a small degree), a popular subject.

Yet it was in his relationship to the dramatic type exemplified by this new work which, until this opera came, challenged the most cordial admiration for Signor Puccini. *La fanciulla del West* is a polyglot title, but quite as necessary to our understanding of its essence as *Maestri Cantori di Norimberga* was years ago to the Italian representations of Wagner’s lyric comedy. To come at once to Hecuba in this matter, Signor Puccini has been

recreant in *La fanciulla del West* to the trust which he had invited in *Madama Butterfly*. The latter opera, it may be admitted, in spite of all the praise that this journal has bestowed upon it, proclaims very little that well read (not to mention well traveled) persons did not know to be wholly fictitious about the customs, fashions, habits and ethics of Japan; what made, still makes and will continue to make the charm of the opera is its music, and to a great extent that part of it which is based on a use of folk melody. There is so little charm in Japanese music, quâ music, that it is only fair to Signor Puccini to reiterate here an admiration expressed over and over again in this journal for the success with which he handled and imitated Japanese tunes in *Madama Butterfly*. But, if he could make so much of the square toed, unemotional music of the Japanese, and blend it so ingeniously with the music which is native to him, why was it that he did not put one poor, solitary jab of American pigment on the musical canvas of *La fanciulla del West*? He planned the work for America and it was therefore doubly necessary; he did not plan *Madama Butterfly* for the Japanese. If he had produced *La fanciulla del West* for Italian consumption, all would have been explained—all but that which we have yet to expect, namely, its energetic rejection by every Italian community; for if Milan could not stomach *Madama Butterfly* on its first production, there is no need to speculate about the fate of *La fanciulla*. It is already sealed; by which remark we do not mean to intimate that Milan's public taste is either better or worse than that of New York in respect of opera.

But, frankly, the absence of all local musical colour in the score of *La Fanciulla del West* is a disappointment. Signor Puccini's librettist has followed the text of Mr. Belasco's melodrama so closely (until the last act) that his libretto might be called a translation of the original book. Because it is a translation (or, rather such a paraphrase as an Italian, knowing nothing of American conditions, might be expected to make), it is frequently ridiculous. There is less to suggest America in it than there is Japan in *Madama Butterfly*. And yet there was music in the old play appealing to Americans, and which cried out for admission to opera. We doubt very much if Mr. Belasco is in any sense musical, but he knew what kind of music would help along the atmosphere of his melodrama; and he introduced it—so adroitly, indeed, that some experts must have marveled at him. But if we could not have "Camptown Races" and "Old dog Tray" and the rest of the old songs, which made more music in the first act of his opera, why should we have textual references to them and musical quotations which become intelligible (if at all) only to one standing on his head?

Why hear Stephen C. Foster's "Dooda, dooda, da" upside down? Why an Indian tune when it has no significance and where no one can recognize it? The musical structure of the opera is erected on the modern German notion (against which Signor Puccini has often protested, but never so effectively as in his *Bohème*) that the words are to float on the orchestral flood and that vocal melody is, therefore, of secondary importance, and yet hear nine-tenths of the time that his vocal melody is nothing and his instrumental nothing better when it is striving to be "national." Instead of upholding melody as the first essential of opera, he no sooner reaches a dramatic moment (in the sense of the original melodrama) than he drops it altogether, and resorts to harmonic and instrumental effects to keep up the emotional

excitement which in the first instance was created by the play itself. He uses music as mere colour—as a creator of mere atmosphere—as frankly (and much less ingeniously) as does Richard Strauss in “Salome.” He could not compose music for the scene of the card game for the life of the girl’s lover, so he makes noises in the bass voices of his orchestra while it progresses; but, Strauss froze the blood of his listeners with his uncanny noises while the tragedy was enacting in the cistern, and Puccini only piques curiosity—when will the basses stop their iteration?

Signor Puccini and his book makers have followed Mr. Belasco (who shared their transient story last night) up to the last act. Then he introduces a lynching scene amid the redwood trees, and gives the tenor another chances to appeal for his life. Also more song—Italian song, like all that which both soprano and tenor have been singing from the beginning of the opera. But by this time the manner has become so familiar that the audience cares little for it, and there is interest only in the excited dramatic scene, which Mr. Belasco has succeeded in creating by his training of the Italian chorus and the galloping back and forth of horses. There are many horses in *La Fanciulla*, because the resources of the Metropolitan Opera House are not small. They never have been small, and in the matter of horses they long ago discounted last night’s show. When Spontini’s *Fernando Cortes* was produced on the same stage in the long agone German period a curious critic writing for The Tribune figured out that there were more horses on the stage than Cortes ever brought into Mexico. So the opera patrons of the Metropolitan Opera House today ought not to be surprised to witness a bit of rivalry with the Hippodrome.

But horses do not make up for the lack of music with the tang which is native of the soil and which must go with this play if it is to become a popular opera. One of Belasco’s miners might well be supposed to get homesick on hearing a tune which had lived in his ears and heart since boyhood; no miner would ever be stricken with nostalgia (except by dramatic license) by hearing such a tune as the minstrel sang last night. Signor Puccini has achieved surprising, let us say even amazing, effects with his harmonies and his orchestration; he has failed utterly to suggest the feeling which is native to Mr. Belasco’s play. And that circumstance will have a great influence on its future. The opera was as finely and truthfully mounted as anybody could have expected. Its music was superbly sung under the sympathetic direction of Signor Toscanini, and it was as convincingly acted as foreigners, trying hard to obey Mr. Belasco, could possibly act it, but it was as little American as would have been a play dealing with the moral reclamation of a Sicilian bandit.

To come at once to Hecuba in this matter,<sup>4</sup> Signor Puccini has been recreant in *La fanciulla del West* to the trust which he had invited in *Madama Butterfly*...But, if he could make so

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<sup>4</sup> Could be a reference to Hamlet—Act II, Scene II where he’s with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Polonius, and they are acting out plays and Hamlet has already pretended to be mad. “Say on: come to Hecuba.” Hecuba sees Pyrrus chop off the limbs of her husband.

much of the square-toed, unemotional music of the Japanese, and blend it so ingeniously with the music which is native to him, why was it that he did not put one poor, solitary jab of American pigment on the musical canvas of *La fanciulla del West* West?—

New York Daily Tribune

18 December 1910

“A Note on the American Opera.”

By Henry E. Krehbiel

There was an invitation to an interesting discussion on many lines in the first repetition of *La Fanciulla del West* at the Metropolitan Opera House last night, but to accept it in its totality would not be discreet if the present pleasant relationship between the opera company and the public is to remain undisturbed. The size and character of the audience brought a lesson as to the wisdom of withholding the opera from the regular subscribers, which will no doubt be understood by the administration of the Metropolitan. The attitude of the public to the opera also carried a lesson into which it is unnecessary to go again after the discussion of a week ago. Stress on the creation of the opera and its production in New York having been laid heavily on its American character, there does not seem to be much need to discuss its other elements, which remain more or less unessential even when they have beauties which attract the passing fancy. There was much preliminary gossip touching the wisdom of placing the principal characters in the hands of people who, it was thought, were physically and temperamentally incapable of realizing such American types as Mr. Belasco presented in his melodrama of which the opera is so singular a perversion; but the results have justified the composer, manager and conductor in their creation. They knew, what the gossips could not know, that despite its environment and subject, the opera would be Italian and that Italian opera singers of a high order would be required to do justice to its score. *La fanciulla del West* is Italian, not in the old sense, nor even in the sense which Signor Puccini tried to create by the works which preceded *La fanciulla del West* or by his printed works since, in which he contended that the emotional centre of gravity should lie in melody; it is Italian or Puccini in the mixed style in which the orchestra seeks to sustain the interest by music unmeaning itself, but made to give atmosphere and mood to the dramatic action. Some might call this German. Puccini's quasi-dramatic declamation taxes the voices and skill of his singers severely, and it is fortunate that he has such excellent exponents as Signor Caruso, Signor Amato and Mlle. Destinn. It will be an unfortunate day for the opera when singers of less skill attempt the principal parts; for appearance and action will help them but little. The music is and must remain Italian in the Puccini sense; and it is the music which has made *La Fanciulla del West* out of *The Girl of the Golden West*.

New York World

11 December 1910

“Golden West in Opera Draws Gold of East.”

Puccini’s “Girl” Brings to the Metropolitan a Crowd Unparalleled in Its Size and In the Amount of Money it Had Spent for Seats, Though Prices on the Sidewalk Slump.

First Time Foreigner has Modern American Theme.

Caruso, Destinn and Amato Leading Aids

Enthusiasm Shown by Eighteen Curtain Calls After Second Act

Wild Applause for Composer

Silver Wreaths for Him and Belasco.

By Reginald De Koven

The long-looked for production of Giacomo Puccini’s opera *The Girl of the Golden West*, founded on the drama of David Belasco, took place in the Metropolitan Opera-House last night. As an event of importance in the musical world it took precedence over anything produced anywhere this season.

Regardless of the musical value of the opera the performance roused the audience to frequent demonstrations of enthusiasm. After the first act there were cries for Puccini and for Belasco, and both were dragged before the footlights to listen to the clamor of the 4,000 fortunate ones who were packed in the big auditorium.

At the ends of the second and the last acts there was tremendous enthusiasm. The clamour after the final curtain lasted fifteen minutes, and was largely for Puccini.

At the double prices charged the value of the house to the box office was \$24,000. Only twelve seats remained unsold. The receipts were the biggest since the “Prince Henry Night,” when \$51,000 was taken in.

But the sidewalk speculators were routed. Their expected harvest, owing to the methods employed by Business Comptroller (sic) John Brown and Treasurer Earle R. Lewis and to the sudden cessation in demand for seats, which took place Friday—the day following the dress rehearsal—vanished into thin air.

#### Down Went Seat Prices

At 8 P.M. subscription orchestra seats which had cost their purchasers \$10 apiece were selling for \$8. A quarter of an hour afterward, they went for \$5, and at 9 o'clock the frantic speculators were glad to get \$3 for each bit of pasteboard held.

The scenes on the sidewalk of the opening night of the opera. Nov [14] [24], when the price of a fine gown often went for an orchestra chair were missing last night.

The prices of \$100 an orchestra seat went down to \$50, which prevailed Wednesday and Thursday, dropped like the mercury in a thermometer when placed on a cake of ice. *The Girl of the Golden West* tickets were white elephants to the speculators from 7 P.M. to the moment they finally turned away in disgust to figure profits, which were large despite the fact that many were “stuck.”

#### Society's interest Deep.

Within the auditorium proper the diamond horseshoe blazed forth with its accustomed luster. Below, in the orchestra-chairs, one of the most ‘select’ audiences ever assembled on such an occasion listened to Puccini’s music with pent, nervous interest. With the second intermission there came wild handclapping. Puccini came from his flag-decorated box and a silver wreath, the gift of the opera house directors, was handed to him by Gatti-Casazza.

Belasco, too, stood before the applause that swept out to him from the great gathering and raised his hands in evident satisfaction at the appreciation bestowed. He also got a silver wreath, but the presentation was made in private.

Eighteen curtain calls were given at the end of the second act and the final dropping of the curtain brought almost as many more.

#### “New Opera from Critic’s Viewpoint”

Author, Not Composer, Principal Factor in the Success of the Puccini Work.

By Reginald De Koven

*The Girl of the Golden West (La fanciulla del West)*, an opera in three acts, founded on the drama by David Belasco, the music by Giacomo Puccini, Italian libretto by C. Zangarini and G. Civinini, English version by R. H. Elkin, was produced for the first time on any



stage at the Metropolitan last night, under the musical direction of Arturo Toscanini, and the stage management of Mr. Belasco himself, with the following notable cast: (lists the cast).

Allowing for the enthusiasm naturally [incident] to an occasion so unique, as the first production on any stage, and in America, of an opera by a composer of world-wide celebrity like Puccini, the interest and applause with which the opera was received by the brilliant audience present were sincere and hearty enough to justify the prediction of success for the opera from a popular stand-point. And this because to an audience thoroughly familiar with it the dramatic story still makes a strong emotional appeal. And further, in case the consummate art of Mr. Belasco in stagecraft has provided an operatic representation which from the dramatic standpoint, in completeness and finish of convincing realistic detail and pictorial quality, has rarely if ever been seen on the lyric stage. For the eye, convincing realism is never absent from the picture for the moment. The reproduction of the original drama in scenery, costumes and accessories and the thousand and one minor details of action and stage business, in which Mr. Belasco is past master, is accurate and complete. But close the eye, and one hears little more of the Golden West than the pistol shots.

#### Has He Caught the Spirit?

That Puccini has written an interesting, forcible, and of-times effective score, which in orchestration and thematic development shows the master hand on nearly every page, cannot be denied, that he has been successful in reproducing in music the colour, spirit and atmosphere in character or situation of the original drama is, I think, open to grave question. The music, generally speaking, strikes one as sought for and constrained, too elaborate and modern in harmonic structure to suggest the primitive elemental types whose thought and action it is intended to illustrate; music is written with too much brain and cunning craftsmanship, with too little heart and genuinely spontaneous inspiration.

As a musician of an originality, invention and constructive ability, so marked that he may be almost said to have created a new school of opera, or at least devised novel operatic formulas, it is only fair that Puccini should be judged by his own standards. Compared with either *Bohème*, *Madama Butterfly*, or *Tosca*, it must be admitted that this, his latest work, falls short in the dramatic appropriateness, the convincing pictorial qualities and the luscious, lingering, insinuating melody which characterized and the success of these works. Yet palpable reminiscences of all of them peep out at us continually from the score of *La fanciulla del West*. I use the Italian title advisedly, because the music of this opera bears about the same relation in atmosphere and colour to the original drama that the Italian translation does to the original text.

#### Heart Not in His Theme

It cannot be that the font of melody of a composer of Puccini's age, with only four operas of note to his credit, should have run dry thus early; or that his constructive invention and

ingenuity or facility of appropriate dramatic expression should have waned in the prime of life. It must therefore follow that the lack of connection and cohesion between the drama and its musical realization, which is certainly evident, and the lack of that characteristic individual melody which has earned him renown, must be attributed to other causes. The principal one I think is that the composer's heart was not in a theme naturally strange and foreign to his imagination from lack of any previous association and with which he had no sympathy, national or otherwise.

It may be, too, as his perverse and even brutal dissonances might suggest, Puccini has been bitten with the Richard Strauss mania and is aiming to apotheosize the orchestra as a means of assault on the sensory nerve centres. If this be true, nothing more regrettable on the part of the composer with a genuine lyric gift can be imagined.

With the familiar story one need have little to do, beyond saying that the first two acts in scenery and situation, incident and action are faithful reproductions of the Belasco drama. The Bible lesson which the Girl gives to the miners, originally a part of the school room scene, cut out of the third act, has been introduced as an incident in the first. The scene of the third act, which treats only of the capture of Johnson by the miners and his rescue by the Girl, has been changed from the desert of the Belasco play to the great California forest with a ridge of the Sierras in the background. In atmosphere and light effects, a stage picture of really unusual beauty. One might comment on the strange, unnatural and unrealistic effect of the smooth vocals of the Italian language in the mouths of the rugged and uncouth miners, but this, as unavoidable, one had to make allowance for.

#### How the Score Opens

To take up the music in greater detail, the opera opens with a short prelude, whose opening bars recall *Tosca* pointedly, in which a theme typifying the redemption and good impulses of Johnson, and a short and more personal one in syncopated rhythm also used in connection with this character, are forcibly set forth. This is followed as the curtain rises by a pretty theme sung by the oboe, evidently representing the Girl.

With the entrance of the miners the music becomes suggestively rough and rude; descriptive, yet not convincingly so. Absolute local colour I had hardly expected in this score, although the text affords opportunities which any composer in sympathy with the subject could hardly have neglected, but I did look for a realism significant and complete within itself, and this I did not find.

The distant banjo serenade of the camp minstrel and the following "Homesickness" song, while pretty enough, seemed inadequate and unsatisfactory as entirely lacking in real local colour. The somewhat heavy orchestration suggests anything rather than a banjo, and the musical incident falls short through its evident lack of appropriateness. Two brief musical illustrations in the act, the music referring to Nina and the cachuca and the arrival of the pony post prove the keenness and felicity of the composer in apt musical description when he is sure of his ground.

### Sense of Humour Lacking.

The quarrel between Sonora and Rance develops a strong theme in the brasses, which might be called the 'Miners' theme,' which recurs later in the third act. The treatment of the Bible lesson incident showed a lack of the sense of humour on the part of the composer, and though the orchestra laughed once in highly realistic fashion one felt again the lack of appropriateness in the musical description. The first lyric moments of the act are Rance's confession to Minnie, and her reply, where Puccini feels at home, is himself, and writes effectively with true lyric feeling. This is also true of the duet between Johnson and Minnie over the bar, which is suave, tender and gracefully melodious.

Then comes the number, the love theme in waltz tempo, which if I mistake not, will make a popular success of the opera—a number so obviously melodic, rather Celtic in style, that everybody can and will whistle it, and one that some one will shortly steal for a popular song. Then follows the far too long love duet between Johnson and Minnie, which ends the act, and which, while containing some gracefully lyric passages which Caruso made the most of, did no impress me mightily. The curtain, where Minnie is reflecting musically on the fact that Johnson said she had the face of an angel, is to my thinking tame and musically unsuggestive to a degree.

### Two Arts in Conflict

In the second act, the fact that Opera is Opera and Drama is Drama; that in intense moments the two war rather than combine in producing an emotional impression, and that we music have either one or the other, confronts us. The music does not help the drama—the famous poker game struck me as more effective without it—and the dramatic incidents constantly interrupt the flow of the music. The opening of the act, where Minnie puts on her finery, and the scene with Wowkle, which surely afforded an opportunity for something musically characteristic, struck me as uneventful. The song of the Sierras seemed hardly good enough to make it worth while expanding unimportant portions of the dialogue to make room for it.

The descriptive storm music is certainly effective, but developed nothing new, and the first real musical interest of the act—although the love music, which is a varied elaboration of the love theme of the first act, is lyrical in the true Puccini manner—came with the strongly marked rhythms of Rance's entrance, and his following apology for his life, which was broad and fine and dramatic declamation, perhaps the most inspired lyric outburst in the entire opera; but after this, the rapid, vivid movement of the drama puts the music comparatively in the background. Minnie's appeal to Rance musically goes for little in the hurried intensity of the action, while the musical accompaniment to the card game, largely composed of rumbling tympani and sullen double basses, struck me as vastly ineffective and unimportant.

### Some Effective Episodes.

In the third act, the beautiful stage picture and spirited and well ordered business, with galloping horses and furious rushing miners, count for much. The chorus of miners, where

the previously heard miners' theme recurs, was broad and stirring. Johnson's address to his captors was another of the effective lyric passages which sounded genuinely inspired and which Caruso sang superbly.

To miss fire and was like a lost opportunity for striking effect on the composer's part. The farewell on an oft reiterated note for the rather tame ending, with its "mai piu," was quite as suggestive of Rhadames's prison as of the Golden West. A curious dirgelike orchestral effect, evidently referring to the impending fate of Johnson, which was persistent in the opening of this act, was obtained by tuning down the fourth string of the double basses to a low D flat; but on the whole, the orchestration, though richly coloured, ingenious and sonorous as is usual with Puccini, contained nothing new or that he has not said before, and with even more striking effect, in other works, and particularly in *Madame Butterfly*.

#### Destinn Sincere and Forceful.

A few words must now suffice for the presentation, which was practically unexceptionable. If Belasco labored earnestly, the artists responded nobly, and all in all were remarkably successful in creating and maintaining the atmosphere and dramatic illusion necessary to the proper realization of the drama. Destinn as Minnie looked well, acted with sincerity and dramatic force and sang delightfully, but somehow seemed to miss the gayety and sparkle of the Girl.

Caruso was a stalwart and virile Johnson and sang superbly; but the romantic charm and magnetic bravado of the road agent were not strikingly in evidence. Amato, as the Sheriff, in appearance and action was wholly picturesque and typical, and both vocally and dramatically his characterization stood out prominently.

Al (sic) the smaller parts were well taken and aided notably in the general effect.

New York World

11 December 1910

“Opera or Lyric Drama? *La fanciulla del West* Marks  
Dividing Line”

By Reginald De Koven

*The Girl of the Golden West*, a critical review of which opera will be found in another column, has been successfully launched amid plaudits which would seem to indicate a popular success, the permanent and artistic qualities of which time alone can determine. Clever Mr. Belasco, to give a new lease of life to a former success by presenting it in musical dress! Fortunate Mr. Puccini, who, associating himself with a man with a positive genius for dramatic effect and the thousand and one details which lend artistic verisimilitude and convincing force to any stage picture he conceives, was provided with an operatic success practically read made to his hand!

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Most people will, I think, be ready to admit that this *The Girl of the Golden West* is not. A proper subject for musical treatment, should be one which would afford the opportunity for the music to amplify, embellish and uplift the original theme, and I am frank to say that *The Girl of the Golden West* as an artistic product and art form was a better drama without the music than with it. Does not this fact, which I think was felt unconsciously if not consciously by many who saw the performance last night, indicate that in this drama, as musically realized by M. Puccini, a boundary has been set, a line of demarcation drawn, a parting of the ways reached, to limit and define the possible union of music and drama in a stage production? In this work there are lyric moments and dramatic moments of great beauty and power; but the drama seemingly interferes with the one, while the music does not appreciably aid the other. Two opposing currents of thought, with radical differences in their varying methods of expression, seem to me (sic) without uniting, and in this disunion fail to create a concrete, organic, artistic whole.

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The most powerful dramas are those which are the most essentially realistic in their simulation of fundamental human nature and its actual surroundings. The realism possible to music as an emotional art is merely relative, and approaches the absolute only in so far and at such times as we are enabled to place ourselves in entire sympathy with the composer's thought and expression of it by an entire understanding of his particular point of view. This is absolutely true of programme (sic) music for the orchestra. When we come to music for the stage the eye naturally does much to assist the ear to intelligent understanding

of the situation; but when these two avenues of approach to the brain centres do not reach the same destination as intended the result must be confusing, perplexing and artistically unsatisfactory. It is perhaps perfectly proper that music should be the handmaid of the drama if increased artistic results are to be obtained thereby. But if not, why the music at all? Both *Pelléas and Melisande* and now again *The Girl of the Golden West* have demonstrated positively that a dramatic story and its accompanying action may be so strong and absorbing in interest as to relegate the accompanying music or even any thought of it entirely to the background. In this connection I recall as pertinent a remark made by a musical friend of mine after witnessing a performance of Debussy's *Pelléas*. He came back full of the romance, the atmosphere, the symbolic mysticism of the drama. "But what of the music?" I asked "Oh," he replied, "that did not annoy me."

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As the function of stage performances, dramatic or musical, at their best is to afford intellectual enjoyment, this is all very well, but the question arises, imminent and insistent, is this opera at all? If we want opera do we want this? Can the writers of opera in their search for the novel afford in their own interests to disregard accepted and preconceived opinions of what opera is and must of necessity be to remain opera, and provide us with a somewhat heterogeneous mixture which is neither opera nor drama, and in which the distinguishing and determining characteristics of each seem of variance and to war with rather than help one another in their simultaneous production of emotional impression? The degree of success attained by the new Puccini opera may answer this question from a popular standpoint, although the dramatic conditions attending the production are so remarkable as to render the case in regard to this particular work wholly exceptional, but the answer to the question from an artistic standpoint is one which requires a broader field of thought and observation involving as it does, the collateral question as to whether opera in the future is to remain opera or become something as entirely different as to necessitate entirely new standards of judgment and appreciation.

. . . I am told that no less a person than Puccini has expressed himself of the opinion that all operas ought to be sung in English in this country, and I am certain that the realistic atmosphere of his own latest work would have been vastly assisted had it been so sung.

Harpers Weekly

17 December 1910.

“Puccini’s American Opera.”

By Gilman, Lawrence.

What are amiably called “historic occasions” are not infrequent nowadays in the opera-houses of the world. There was one of extraordinary significance at the Paris Opéra-Comique in April, 1902, with which the name of Claude Debussy is bound up; there have been several of large importance since then at Dresden associated with the name of Richard Strauss. There have been few of later years in America; but last week the Metropolitan Opera House indulged itself in an occasion which perhaps fairly deserves the swelling epithet. This was nothing less than the first production on any stage of a new opera by the most widely popular of living composers of music-drama; moreover, it was an opera derived from a play by an American, on an American subject: in other words, it was the first performance anywhere of Giacomo Puccini's opera *La fanciulla del West*, based upon David Belasco's *Girl of the Golden West*, the libretto arranged by Guelfo Civinini and Carlo Zangarini. Since we are choosing to regard the event as a not unimpressive one, the cast be given in full. Here it is: (lists the cast). Mr. Toscanini conducted. The production, as to its details, was prepared under the vigilant and experienced eye of Mr. Belasco. The date was December 10th.

Of the *The Girl of the Golden West* as a drama it is somewhat late in the day to speak at any length. Mr. Belasco's famous play was seen for the first time in New York at the Belasco Theatre on November 14, 1905, and it enjoyed thereafter wide currency and enormous popular favor. Mr. John Corbin then characterized it, with a precision which cannot be bettered, as, in the main, “good old melodrama of the kind that has been familiar from Third Avenue to Eight ever since Bret Harte popularized the Wild West,”—though he rightly excepted the first act because of its veracious character-drawing and its sincere humanity. Melodrama the play is, of course—melodrama flagrant and unmasked; but it is uncommonly good melodrama; and there is no difficulty in understanding why it should have appealed to the composer who found in Sardou's *Tosca* a perfect vehicle for his remarkable gift of musico-theatric expression--a gift which, in its sort, is unsurpassed.

Let it be said at once that Puccini has produced what is in many ways an admirable score. In the main, it is a faithful and graphic embodiment of the drama on which it is based--it is difficult to see how the emotions and the events of Mr. Belasco's play could have found a more generally appropriate setting. The music has all of the play's melodramatic power, all of its stir and movement, and in sentiment it goes Mr. Belasco one better--indeed, Puccini's

gold-hunters effuse emotion with a copiousness and exuberance that are a little disturbing to one's notion of the character and habits of the Forty-niners. They are, doubtless necessarily, Latinized Americans whom Puccini exhibits to us; but it is none the less disconcerting to the stickler for dramatic verity to see a stage full of red-shirted miners posed in attitudes of lachrymose adornment under the redwoods or weeping upon each other's shoulders. A single detail will indicate in what manner the vitality and veraciousness [sic] of the original play have suffered in being passed through the sentimentalizing Latin imagination. It will be recalled by those who saw the play that Mr. Belasco brought the first act to a close with the Girl, left alone in the darkened barroom, ruminating tenderly upon the words of Johnson: "He said [I quote from memory] I had the face of an angel..." Then, in a quick and delicious return to her usual direct and matter-of-fact habit of thought and her breezy manner of utterance, she exclaims, "O Hell!" and the curtain falls. Nothing could have surpassed that touch for the luminous and revealing denouement--it showed us at a stroke the character of the girl; her blend of tenderness and drollery, romantic feeling and honest, good-humoured bluntness, quick sensitiveness and primitive directness. Puccini and his librettists have chosen to omit the final and revealing exclamation, and brought the act to a close with the Girl sighing rapturously to a passage of long-drawn sweetness in the orchestra. The effect is excellent in its way, but it is attained at a regrettable sacrifice of dramatic point and savour. A composer with a larger and richer sense of human character and a more plastic and resourceful power of expression would have seized with delight the opportunity given him by the dramatist for a moment of truthful and illuminating *delineatino*. But on the whole Puccini has accomplished with remarkable success what he set out to do. He has achieved not the inconsiderable feat of writing eloquent and generally fitting music for a drama which, whatever its value *quã* drama, is indisputably American in impulse and effect. A good deal of the humour and raciness of the original play have evaporated; but in the main he has caught, with singular tact and deftness, the particular tone of the play: its mixture of rough humour and bravado, turbulence and passion, gayety [sic] and sentiment, its hectic colour and ceaseless stir. The is little psychological differentiation, and the emotional quality of the music does not drive very deep; but then the drama of Mr. Belasco is not remarkable for its probing of the human soul or for fathomless depths of emotion and poetry. Puccini has gone no farther than Belasco invited him to go—save in that occasional excess of sentiment which I have remarked: but he has taken the fullest advantage of every expressional opportunity. He has always been a master in his handling of dialogue, in his quick and vivid strokes of characterization and denotement. He has lost none of his cunning in this difficult art. His setting of the speech of the characters has point, aptness, contrast, variety, a notable justness in the choice of accent, rhythm, and tempo. His orchestral commentary is continually flexible and sensitive, as responsive as it is resourceful. In no other of his scores has Puccini attained such amplitude and variety of expression, such precision and felicity of definition. Whether he is delineating the sinister villainies and wicked triumphs of the malignant Rance, the gallantry and romantic ardor of the bandit-lover, the tenderness, jealousy, and *camaraderie* of the Girl, the boisterous pranks or the vengeful ferocity of the "boys," he is equally apt and veracious. In fertility of expressional detail, as in sheer dramatic power, this score is a noteworthy accomplishment. Its hold on the nerves, its interest for the intelligence, are



unabating. It has scarcely a dull or unvitalized page, scarcely a perfunctory or ineffective measure. Puccini has by it definitely established himself as an excelling master of expression upon a plane which, to be sure, is seldom concerned with drama of the finer sort, but which, within its limits, is productive of indisputable satisfaction to the artistic sense.

Of the music in itself, apart from its quality as a dramatic agent, it is not possible to speak with so unqualified an enthusiasm. There is a great deal of writing in the score that is beautiful and moving, and much of it one can honestly delight in and honestly praise. But, to be quite frank, there is altogether too much of Debussy in it for those who are aware of Puccini's gift of authentically personal utterance. That he has a style of his own—a style that is distinctive and unmistakable—he demonstrated up to the hilt in *Tosca*, in *Bohème*, in *Madama Butterfly*. Why should he have thought it necessary—or, to view the matter in the most charitable light, why he should have permitted himself—not only to ape Debussy's harmonic and melodic manner, but to approximate certain well-known passages from the music of the unique Frenchman, passes comprehension. It is quite true that Debussy holds no copyright upon augmented intervals, whole-tone melodic progressions, and certain sequences of “ninth” chords; but it is nevertheless a fact, unfortunate for Puccini, that certain harmonic combinations, certain ways of grouping particular chords, certain ways of threading a melodic line, have become unalterably associated in the minds of experienced observers with the original and exquisite genius who gave the world a new order of music. That Puccini has been powerfully affected by the composer of *Pelléas et Mélésande* will be plain even to those whose knowledge of Debussy is based upon a limited acquaintance with his works; to those who best know the music of the Frenchman the evidence of his effect upon Puccini plain upon page after page of *The Girl of the Golden West*. It is unnecessary to adduce particular instances; but the curious might be directed, for example, to the setting of Nick's words in the first act: “Se ho ben capito vio siete il preferito;” to the theme which is heard, soon after Johnson's entrance in the same act, as an accompaniment to the words: “E all caso, tentare un baccarat;” to the passage in the love scene of the second act beginning: “Sognavo...si stava toto bene!” If the resemblance were merely a matter of occasional thematic similarity it would not be worth mentioning; but it is more than that. We are reminded of Debussy time and again, chiefly by the harmonic treatment, though his influence is felt even in the design of certain melodic phrases and in tricks of instrumentation. The score betrays an allegiance which was discernible in Puccini's music some years ago, and which was pointed out in these pages in a review of *Madama Butterfly* published October 26, 1907. It was remarked then that, since writing *Tosca*, Puccini had, in a spiritual sense, visited contemporary Paris. The pity of it is that he needed to draw upon no treasury save his own for ideas and for style. He possesses, in his own right, eloquence and beauty of a potent kind, a style of singular emotional fervor, vital, tense, nervous, and flexible—a style that consorts unhappily with the wholly different and inassimilable manner of Debussy.

It is pleasanter to speak of those qualities of the score—and they are many—for which there can be only hearty admiration. The music is less personal and less direct than the music of

what seems still to be Puccini's most individual score, *Tosca*; but it has a richness and variety, an inventive fertility, a subtlety and complexity and finish of texture, which surpass anything in his previous writing. I have said that it is often both beautiful and moving. Some of this beauty and this emotional puissance must be credited to another heart and hand, but a great deal of it is incontrovertibly Puccini's. How striking, how unforgettable, is the entrance of the Girl in the first act: how lovely and touching is the music which brings the act to a close (even though I have wished that its dramatic implications might have been different): how brilliantly, with what skill and resource, with what colour and dash and plasticity, this entire act is handled! The setting of the famous and thrilling card game, with the Girl throwing cold hands with the dastardly Rance for the life of her lover, is a triumph of melodramatic intensity and suspense; and in the third act there are superb pages. Puccini's besetting sin is his frequent melodic banality in passages of emotional exaltation, and this trait is responsible for some commonplace writing, as in the expression of Minnie's phrase (in her narrative in the first act), "S'amavan tanto," and in the love scene of the second act at the words, "Dolce vivere e morir e non lasciarci piu!" But there is less of this facilely sentimentalized speech than in Puccini's earlier operas, and there is a corresponding gain in dignity and true eloquence.

It is doubtful if this music-drama, for all its charm and vividness, is as absorbing in its effect as the play of Belasco in its original state: it is doubtful if the music, admirable and fitting as it is, enhances the effect of the drama. Is this because music, as Blake said, "exults in immortal thoughts," and that no composer, however filled with genius, could make it take kindly to the task of adding anything to the effect of a play in which there is so much that is trivial, sordid, and external? The time has gone by, with most of us, for academic dogmatizing as to what music should and should not attempt to express; but even the most liberal music admit that Puccini's music is more effectually allied with the melodrama of Belasco when it is uttering the passion and anguish of the Girl than when it is uttering the desire of Harry and Joe and Dick for whiskey and cigars.

The production at the Metropolitan is of memorable excellence. Scenically and in details of stage management it will bear comparison with the superlatively artistic production of the play at the Belasco Theatre. Historically, it will not bear this comparison. Miss Destinn, an admirable singer and actress of intelligence and skill, endues the rôle of the Girl with little of the humour and charm that were infused into it by Miss Blanche Bates, though she is abundantly conscientious and sincere. But her impersonation is quite without illusion; and that is true, also, of Mr. Caruso's Dick Johnson. Destiny did not intend Mr. Caruso for the embodiment of romantic or gallant characters, and it is through no fault of his that he prevails in this part chiefly through his singing. Mr. Amato's Jack Rance is, likewise, deficient in subtlety and force, especially when it has to take its place in the memory beside the matchless portrayal of Frank Keenan in the original play. In spite of these defects however, the production of the opera is surprisingly effective from many points of view. The difficulties in the way of an illusive and communicative performance were many and formidable. (column is called the World of Music)

Musical America

10 December 1910

“Puccini’s Americanism.”

By John C. Freund

America will watch with interest to see how nearly Puccini succeeds in achieving what he believes that he has achieved in “reflecting the spirit of the American people, and particularly the strong, vigorous nature of the West” in his new opera, *The Girl of the Golden West*.

Puccini declares that he has never been West, but that he has read so much about it and knows it so thoroughly--he has lived the feelings of his characters so intensely--that he believes that he has hit upon the correct portrayal of them.

Americans have long since accepted with avidity Puccini's expression of the feelings and passions of his characters. There is precisely no doubt but that they will find the music which he allots to the characters in his new opera equally congenial.

The question is--will they feel that there is anything particularly American, or particularly expressive of the American West, in his latest music?

Everyone knows what happens when an English author sets out to put American slang into the mouths of his characters. It is quite probable that Puccini will make an appeal to Americans by the scenes of the new opera, but it is equally probably that, however much Americans like his music for this piece, they will smile at it as an accurate, or even fairly accurate, portrayal in music of the American character. It is well nigh inconceivable that his music can be anything other than fundamentally Italian, with an occasional idiomatic American touch.

This is probably as it should be, as an artist cannot denationalize himself without grave danger to the foundations of his art, however clever he may be in reflecting this or that alien idiom.

His experiment, in connection with his remarks, however, is of great interest, and will probably prove illuminating in some respects on the moot question of nationality in art.

Musical America

17 December 1910

“The Music of Puccini’s Opera.”

Arthur Farwell Discusses Results of Composer’s Efforts to Create a Score which Truly Reflects Western Life in America

By Arthur Farwell

To sum it up in a single sentence the peculiar musical phenomenon witnessed at the première of Puccini’s *Girl of the Golden West*, it may be said that it was an attempt to put the American West into music by one to whom the task was impossible, and to present it to the American audience least capable of receiving it even if he had been able to do so.

To get from the soul of Puccini to the soul of the audience on this occasion, the best in his music had to pass through two masks—the artificial mask of Americanism with which he overlaid much of his natural musical inspiration, and the mask of social artificiality with which an operatic audience—especially a first night audience—in New York surrounds itself.

That Puccini proved as effective with his music as he did on Saturday night, against these overwhelming odds, is vastly to his credit.

Fortunately for the composer, America will not judge him in the present case according to the standard by which, as would appear from his own words, he would wish to be judged; namely, according to the degree in which he has succeeded in imbuing his music with the spirit of America, or of the West.

The public likes Puccini’s music. If he has this time written music in which the public recognizes its beloved Puccini, there will be no objection raised, save by students and critics, on the grounds of its lack of Westernism.

What Puccini Has Done

That *The Girl of the Golden West* present features of accomplishment, even of novel accomplishment, scarcely anyone who heard the *première* can have the temerity to deny. But what is it, in this opera, that Puccini has done? And what has he not done?

To begin with, the composer has departed from the character of the scores of *Bohème*, *Tosca*, and *Butterfly*. He has departed in three significant ways: first, by the suppression of his characteristic long-drawn-out, broad and biting melodies, in favor of the rapid-fire music necessary in following the action of this play; second, by a very pronounced adoption of Debussy's contribution to harmonic and structural progress; and third, by an attempt to gain American local colour and American feeling both spontaneously and by the use of various kinds of American themes.

The first mode of departure will be deplored by the public which, jealous of either retrogression or growth, would have its favourites stay forever in the place in which it first discovered them, neither falling back from it nor progressing beyond it. And indeed, in view of the peculiar validity and authoritative personality of that same broad and biting melody of Puccini's, even one who reflects on the matter, and who would encourage growth and change, must doubt if Puccini can remove it and put something better in its place. At least he must have more proof of the composer's capacity to do so than was afforded on Saturday night. Fertile as Puccini's imagination has been in suggesting to him innumerable clever, charming, and effective ways of following in his music the rapidly changing action, it scarcely compensates for the absence of the sustained emotional melodic periods which have so greatly delighted his hearers in the past. This is not to say that there is a lack of emotional resource in the music of the *Girl of the Golden West*. There are superb outbursts; notably, the entrance of Minnie in Act I (where the one brief example of broad old-style Puccini melody is first introduced); the embrace of Johnson and Minnie, Minnie's dismissal of Johnson, and her exultation after her victory in the poker game, Act II. Act III has considerable sustained *vigor*, especially during the pursuit of Ramerrez. But of sustained sensuous or exalted emotion there is almost none in the opera, especially such as finds its expression in the familiar Puccini melodic type.

#### The Composer's Task a Difficult One

This would matter little if the music, in its sinuous following of the action and story, were at every point dramatically or psychologically convincing. At many point it is so, but by no means at all points. There is so much in the text which ought not to appear in any operatic text, *i.e.*, language which does not call for *musical* expression, that all that the composer can do at such moments is to write some amiable or clever music which is in no discernible respect a running musical commentary on the drama, and which exists only that there may be no cessation of the music. What necessary or appropriate music can a composer invent for "Will you have some cream pastry?" or "I'll send you up some books?"

Let no one think that this continuous dramatic music of Puccini's, however delightful and engaging it may be in itself, is based upon the principles of Wagner. These required at the outset that the text should contain nothing for which there was not a conceivable corresponding musical expression.

The text of *The Girl of the Golden West* thus sets the composer an impossible psychological task, of frequently expressing the unexpressible in music. This leads to a frequent severing

of the connection between music and drama, which detracts, through the shattering of the interest in this aspect of the work, from value of those moments of psychological verity to which the composer does so signally attain at times.

#### Employment of the Leit-Motif

In this continuous music the *leit-motif* is freely employed. It is often psychologically ineffective, however, for the reason just given. The musical web throughout, except for wholly independent sections here and there, is produced not so much by thematic development as by thematic variation and adaptation. It is not a weighty fabric. The scheme is simple, and there is no polyphonic complexity. Puccini's music is always fluent, and always a certain validity of conception, as music, which gives it a greater weight with those who do not insist on dramatic and psychological truth than with those who do.

For a composer to fail psychologically where success is impossible, by reason of the nature of the text, is nothing against him, except in his willingness to accept such a text. It is more serious, however, to fall short of dramatic musical effectiveness when success is in sight. This happens at the entrance of Ramerrez the robber (Johnson), in Act I. His motive, a fortissimo dramatic adaptation of ragtime rhythm, is well chosen from the psychological, if not from the historic, standpoint (see example 4). It is expressive of daring and fierce strength. Neither the entrance of Johnson himself upon the stage, however, nor of this theme in the music, is sufficiently prepared. Johnson, it is true, has been announced as outside the Polka, but before he enters, a meltingly Debussyish love scene and other matters have intervened, so that when he does burst in, it is only after the mind has been wholly diverted from him, and his entrance is merely casual, and entirely without dramatic force. Still more so, however, the Ramerrez theme. It had appeared but once before entirely meaninglessly, so far as the audience was concerned, at the end of the brief prelude to the opera, and had passed wholly unremarked. Now, at Ramerrez's entrance, it blares out and is over before the ear knows what happened. As employed, it has no force. There are no previous significant whisperings of it at earlier references to the robber, to give the hearers the familiarity with it necessary for its ultimate effectiveness when Ramerrez appears. It is but necessary to remember the entrance of Hunding, in the first act of *Die Walküre*, to know how this kind of thing should be done. It is for such reasons as this, and they could easily be multiplied, that the music of *The Girl of the Golden West* cannot be accepted seriously, as a whole, in the dramatic sense.

#### Dramatic Moments in the Score

The score is not, however, without moments of subtle dramatic penetration. One of these is when Johnson, a moment after Minnie has banished him from her cabin, is shot. The *ppp staccatissimo* chords of the orchestra, here, in curiously broken rhythm, produce a magical effect of tragic suspense. Also the reiterated chord in the lowest register of the basses, which is continued throughout the fateful poker game which shall decide the destinies of Minnie, Rance and Johnson, is potent in its expression of deep agitation, suppressed yet irresistible. Hans Pfitzner may lay claim to the invention of this effect, however, which he

has used with infinitely greater dramatic force in his opera *Die Rose vom Liebesgarten*, where Minneleide about to be led by Siegnot into the Liebestgarten, is terrified by the light which emanates from it, and failing of courage at the last moment, precipitates the tragedy.

From the standpoint of those who do not require a deeper dramatic insight there are many scenes which are emotionally very effective, in a melodramatic way, which, while they owe much to the book, owe a great deal to the music as well.

#### Puccini's Leaning Toward Debussy

As to Puccini's very evident leaning toward Debussyism in the opera, it is only necessary to say that Debussy has made contribution to modern harmonic and thematic usage which is well for any modern composer not to overlook. It is a sign of alertness to present realities for a composer to be quick to seize upon contemporary advances in the general musical scheme. In the new opera the Debussy tendency reveals itself frequently in unresolved secondary harmonies, surmounted by melodic phrases with poignant effects, with which we have been made familiar by Debussy, produced by skips to and from dissonant notes. At other times the tendency is observed in velvety harmonic effects such as that assigned to Rance in his narrative in the first act. The following fragment (ex. 1) is the basis of this passage: (musical ex)

Puccini has a positive genius for keeping to the middle ground of modernity. He find and puts in the particular dissonant note which bites, but does not bark. He taxes the ear with just enough modernism to keep it guessing, but without enough to annoy it. He resolves his dissonances just in the nick of time for the semi-trained modern ear. No one will damn him for repeating the sins of Strauss.

#### Not Really American

In regard to the American character which Puccini feels himself to have achieved in *The Girl of the Golden West*, it music be emphatically affirmed that it does not exist. This may be said without derogation to the art of Puccini. American character and spirit in music, various in its manifestations, and still vague to Americans themselves, must remain to an Italian a greater mystery, even, than American slang to an English author.

Puccini has in the new opera employed a number of melodies and melodic types peculiar to America. But from first to last they are swallowed up and dissolved in his Italianism, or perhaps in his Puccinism, like snowflakes in the sea.

The first of the "American" themes which he has employed is Indian and is the melody of the "Festive Sun Dance of the Zunis." This ceremonial song was recorded by Carlos Troyer, of San Francisco, and is one of the series of Indian works given out by the Wa-Wan Press. The proportion of the melody employed by Puccini, and used extensively in creating the mood of the first scene of the opera, is as follows: (musical example)

This is used as the ‘homesick song’ of the first act, and is sung by Jake Wallace, the minstrel. It is the first theme heard in the opera, and the last, and is variously employed in Acts I and III, usually as expressive of yearning, of purer emotions, and of love. But instead of being retained in its original rigidly rhythmic character, as a ceremonial dance, it is converted into a melody of ‘linked sweetness, long drawn out,’ and while it makes good music, it contributes nothing whatsoever of Indian or American character to the opera.

The second American theme, used for the entrance of the miners, Act I, is George Cohen’s song “Belle of the Barber’s Ball.” A fragment of it is as follows (gives a musical example of the syncopated refrain)

Something is made of this, thematically, in the orchestra, in a smaller number of places, but its treatment and harmonic setting are such as to cause it to pass by the audience without conveying the slightest impression of its relation to American popular music.

The fine burst of ragtime used as the motive of Johnson as Ramerrez the robber, and which has already been referred to, is as follows: (musical example)

This would lend an American tang to the music were it not for the striking fact that ragtime in a tragic-dramatic sense is something which never entered the heads of the American people, and this therefore passes as a sort of Wagnerian *leit-motif*, without ever so much as suggesting to the audience that it is their own familiar ragtime, and it therefore has in this sense nothing to contribute to any atmosphere in which an American would feel at home.

The scene of the miners humming the waltz tune “gets” the audience through its drollery, but still more amusing is the quickness with which Americans repudiate the proprietorship of the tune itself.

Of the melody of which Puccini makes much in the love music of the second act, and which is sung by Johnson at “I’ll never give you up” (“Io non ti lascio piu’), the critic of *the New York Sun* writes:

He has hit upon a strain which recalls some of the American music of Dvôrák, and which will therefore give pain to Boston, because in this case it will be difficult to prove that it is Bohemian instead of imitation dinky.

The melody in question is an adaptation, in a rhythmic metamorphosis, of an Indian song, “The Chattering Squaw,” used by Harvey Worthington Loomis in his composition of that name in Book II of his “Lyrics of the Red Man.”

### Indian Themes Not Known to Americans

The interesting and curious phenomenon in connection with Puccini’s use of Indian themes is that these melodies *are not yet familiar to Americans*, and that such of his music as is



based upon them is foredoomed to fall upon deaf ear, so far as American sympathies are concerned.

Beyond this, in all his use of American melodies, anachronism and anachronism run riot, so that even the elusive tints of Americanism to be discerned by the student of this music fail of any local or historical suggestiveness.

It is not to be imagined from the foregoing that Puccini's score is in any extensive way an attempt to gain a predominating local colour by the use of American tunes. He relies for the most part on his own imagination, and one must search the score carefully to locate the various essays in Americanism.

The music for the Indian woman's lullaby at the beginning of Act II is apparently wholly original with Puccini. At least it is intensely un-Indian. The words of this passage, however, "Grant, O Sun-god," etc. are from Carlos Troyer's "Zunian Lullaby," and are Prof. Troyer's translation of the original Indian text. They are in quotation marks in the piano-vocal score.

### Impossible Indians

The music for the Indian characters is distinguishingly Indian almost no respect, a curious circumstance in view of the fact that Puccini examined many Indian melodies during the early stages of his work? Nor does this music, in itself, bear any possible psychological relation to the Indian. The Indians in the opera are impossible caricatures, physically, mentally, and morally.

From the standpoint of sheer musical uplifts and beauty, among the best moments in the opera are in Act I, Rance's narrative ("Minnie, *dalla mia casa*"): the scene between Minnie and Johnson over the bar, which is of much tenderness; and certain portions of the love scene in which the act closes. Act II, Johnson's plea after Minnie discovers him to be Ramerrez. Act III, Minnie's pleading with the miners, and the close of the act. Johnson's song, just before the intended hanging, is effective on the stage because of the broad orchestral unisons which support the voice, but it has little intrinsic merit.

### Music Picturesque Throughout

The music throughout is picturesque. It has a pronounced stage of effectiveness, which it owes to its qualities of orchestral and harmonic colour, and which exists quite independently of any consideration of deeper dramatic significance. It is everywhere molded by a hand sensitive to the elements of beauty, though ready to make many sacrifices to theatrical effect.

Broadly speaking, the music of Act I loses intensity and continuity by reason of its too great dramatic variety. The music of Act II, is more direct and forceful, though poignant in its details; and Act III, molded on a broader plan, sweeps through with considerable power.

The orchestration is always spicy and appetizing, and often serves to cover up what must be regarded as the thinness of much of the music.

Little or nothing of the influence of Wagner and Strauss is felt in *The Girl of the Golden West*. It is strongly un-Teutonic, and essentially Latin. It seems to mark a transition for Puccini. He has apparently been studiously and laudably receptive to outside influences since his last operatic essay. It is thus that one broadens and grows. But it is likely he will make a more authentic and unified use of the new material in his next opera that he has succeeded in doing in this. It is certain, after he shall tire of corralling wild Western musical ideas, that the world will remain grateful to him in proportion as he remains true to the genius of his race.

Musical America

17 December 1910

“True Americanisms in Puccini's Score?”

By Albert Mildenberg

Two years ago, while living in Milan, I enjoyed the privilege of listening to the first motif of the *Girl of the Golden West* that was put to paper and now as the complete score lies before me I find this motif unchanged and in reality the basis of the most passionate outburst of the entire score and surrounded by wonder upon wonder of tonal beauty.

I fear that many of the reviewers of this masterpiece will resort to the usual technical terms to clothe their descriptions of the work or attempt to classify the composition in some way or another. If they do they will fail, for Puccini did not write this work like any thing that he has ever written before, for because any other composer has written any other composition in any particular way or according to any set form.

To Belasco, the creator of this beautiful succession of pictures and the gripping story, it must be double joy; to feel that like Boito when sitting at the right hand of Verdi, whose brain conceived those works by which we have judged all grand opera for over fifty years, Belasco now at the right hand of Puccini has created the epoch that marks the birth of grand opera on an American subject. A greater combination of talents can not be imagined and no more perfect realization of the result could be demanded by the most exacting of critics.

Art, knowing no country, clime nor race and having no creed but truth and the reflection of God and nature in man--whether his life was ushered in to the music of the crashing cataracts and the soft ozone of the mighty pines on our Sierras--or that he breathed first the perfumed winds from the olive depths, the nespoli, magnolia, or fig trees of sunny Tuscany--to music perhaps not so fierce but to music.

Puccini has reached across from his shack nestled in the olive groves of the Tuscan hills, across the vast ocean and over the Rockies down into the valley of the Yuba river and in his flight has not missed the scream of the eagle, the trembling, crashing roar of the old river that cut a six-mile gorge through the granite backbone of the American continent, nor has the plaintive little song of the blue jay escaped him as she sits aloft on some rocking mast of a mighty pine of the Redwood, as it rises aloft digging jagged holes into the clouds.

Some will say that Puccini has blazed a new trail--no, not a new trail--for that trail is as old as the world. It is nature's trail--let us follow upon it, get the rhythms and march on and tune

our ears and souls to the same note. It is as if Puccini had transferred to every page of this beautiful work the smell of the pine, and like the huge wild moose—forcing his head and shoulders through the thick underbrush—stands alert with twigs, leaves, damp moss and cobwebs hanging from his sinewy body.

Who will question Puccini's form of writing? We know he is a studied man—a master of all that has gone before in the art of composition, and those who will try to trace the form of his work by the measure and rule of textbook will be disappointed. Heresy is not the word to express his contempt for the conventionalities of so-called rules.

Puccini has used the same scale that the wind is tuned to, when it screams and howls over the chilled peaks of Alaska's icy mountains. His intervals are the bounding, thumping bass notes of falling boulders from lofty jagged crags down into bottomless gorges cleft by angry nature, and yet that order of things, of all things, is present here. He gives us also the sob of the homesick boy, and when those tones rise up from the orchestra your tear ducts will open and will fall a quivering drop that will say to you as tender a message as a mother's prayer ever carried to her boy in the mines. Chopin's tenderest mood has not reached such depths. The melancholy of that sobbing melody as it floats out over the muted strings with the figure of short staccato chords at odd and unlooked for periods of the phase it carries it over mountain valleys to the soul yearning and waiting; will swell every breast of the audience to tears and make the past a painful memory.

As in *Tosca* Puccini leaps into the atmosphere of the work in the very first phrase. The harp with a fortissimo arpeggio leads the way up to a succession of crashing chords that might easily represent the roar of the tumbling waters of the cataract. This is followed by a short theme in which the motif of a shovel and pick clanking against rock and gravel. In the building of motifs Puccini has not sought to show how well he can imitate the sounds of material things, nor has he entirely clothed each person in the cast or thing in the story with a motif, but no composer up to the present time has so well shown by suggestion the meaning of things from their psychological standpoint as Puccini has in this brilliant score.

The prelude to act I is very short and contains little more than his two themes with a suggestion, during the last eight bars, of a syncopated motif that is used throughout the score in connection with Johnson's entrance and his concerted work later on—By some this motif has been already accredited to Puccini's desire to suggest a type of musical slang that he had been led to believe existed in the music of America. This is not so. Puccini denies any such intentions and well he can, for who does not know that the miserable syncopated slang that has been forced upon the American public of recent years is but a degeneracy of the present day and never existed during the “days of '49.”

If Puccini has sought to suggest in any way a melody smacking of the cotton fields as purely American as the heart throbbing songs of Stephen Foster, he has found one in the motif of Johnson's song in act II, and its treatment as it develops into the duet with Minnie. This melody is as characteristically Southern as the “Suwanee River.” Even in the restrictions of its modulations, its whole lilt suggests Foster.

Upon this theme is built the longest part of the second act. I say this with the full belief that someday, not far distant, our American composers will give Foster the honour he deserves, and it matters little whether the American composer consents to honour his countryman to that extent, for seventy millions of the people of the United States know and can sing a Foster melody now even if they do not know the themes of our composers' symphonic works, as yet.

The composer who is far-sighted enough to see that "Suwannee River," "Old Folks at Home," "Kentucky Home," etc., have an element of sympathy and accurate descriptive quality which represents a something purely American and is able to cull from them a colour in building his own melodies and procure the result that Puccini has produced in this score of the *The Girl of the Golden West* is the composer that he will do well to emulate.

The score is glittering with brilliant effects and is more fully worked out than any previous score from this man's pen.

Zangarini, his librettist, told me last Summer in Milan that the score was as strange to him so far as Puccini's general characteristics were concerned as it has proved to me, he knowing that I was quite familiar with all of Puccini's works, and that it has proved just as strange to all his Italian colleagues.

Many of my colleagues have ventured the opinion that the play would not admit of a satisfactory musical setting; that it was too pure a form of melodrama. Well, what form of play would you call *Aida*, *Carmen*, *Rigoletto*? Through the courtesy of Mr. Maxwell, who is Mr. Ricordi's representative, I was permitted to examine the orchestral score, but not for a long enough interval to give it the careful study I should have liked to. But in the short time it was in my hands I found many new combinations that will prove most interesting to the listener.

For example, in act one, a very excellent reproduction of the banjo effect is produced by interlacing the strings of the harp with paper—not a bad idea—the song of the act is one of the most beautiful harmonic creations of all Puccini's work. It is a deep, melancholy, homesick tune, accompanied as I have stated above, and in structure melodically, is not unlike what an Indian motif might be written over a regular harmonic accompaniment--Indian motifs such as Farwell and Loomis have shown us in their research. This melody beginning as a solo is developed then in duet form as is used as a finale for act I in choral form. The real closing bars of the act will show an original treatment from two standpoints, an underlying tonal effect produced by a very soft murmuring tremolo on the metalyphone against an unresolved chord on C. This use of the metal xylophone is most fascinating, vague and atmospheric.

In Act II a very startling effect is produced by two flutes progressing in dissonant whole tone intervals up and down the chromatic scale and a vivid picture of the screaming windstorm is heard. The score abounds in Indian tonal suggestion, from the low grunt of the blanketed squat sphinx to the high, shrill falsetto voice of the squaw.

The Ball music of the “Polka Tavern” is as genuine a piece of musical comicality as has appeared and usually when a serious composer attempts to inject humour into his work he has chosen the most difficult of all colours to present without taking chances of becoming bizarre, or ridiculous, neither of which Puccini has even approached. The depths of pathos—sinister moving human passions, the ecstasy of a boundless love—and wild flights into a carnival of reckless abandon are all here. The American of that type not wholly denationalized by his accumulations of foreign custom, colour and sympathies, and we have many of these—to many, will find that Puccini has written an American opera on an American subject as surely as Mark Twain and Bret Harte have furnished the world with American literature. But why, I ask has it become necessary to grant this honour to one in whom no drop of American blood flows? Let those who answered ask them WHEN will one theatre of the many Italy can boast produce and mount a work by an American composer.

The Musical Courier

10 December 1910

“*The Girl of the Golden West*. Premiere of Puccini’s New  
Opera.”

By Unknown Author, possibly Marc Blumenberg

With tickets selling on Broadway for as much as \$200 per pair, at the Metropolitan Opera house last Saturday evening before a vast and representative audience Giacomo Puccini’s latest work, *The Girl of the Golden West*, had its first performance on any stage. As all the world knows, the libretto is founded on David Belasco’s familiar drama of the same name, and was prepared for operatic use by C. Zangarini and G. Civinini.

The expectancy and excitement of New York’s artistic and social elite had been stimulated for weeks by the self-breeding reclame incident to such an important event as a real premiere, and a semipublic dress rehearsal last Thursday morning sent the thousand listeners broadcast with opinions so conflicting that the general curiosity was aroused more piquantly than ever, rather than allayed or given any definite dicta to feed upon. Composer Puccini, conductor Toscanini, and stage-managers Gatti-Casazza and Belasco—the last named a special assistant for the new opera only—superintended the numerous and exacting rehearsals which prepared the following cast for the premiere.

All the public scenes and demonstrations, as well as the critical and fashionable phenomena predicted in the “Reflections” of last week’s *Musical Courier*, took place exactly as outlined, and the praises as well as the strictures were issued from the very sources with which that editorial column had associated them in prophetic and unfailing clairvoyancy. The Italian contingent, with all its principals and camp followers, claims a triumphant victory; the elements opposed to Milanese rule at our Opera speak to of a tremendous disappointment and even a downright fiasco. As a matter of fact, the Saturday performance gave no final decision regarding the ultimate fate of *The Girl of the Golden West*, for no reviewer could possibly assay the applause correctly and separate it into its correct proportionate parts of well established admiration for Puccini, habitual honour for Belasco, and renewed tribute for last popularity of a drama which lies close to the hearts of the theatre-going American public. It will be Europe after all, to which Puccini must look for a final verdict so far as the box office success is concerned, because the exigencies of the Metropolitan season and repertory would hardly permit of a dozen performances here in a Winter even if the demand for the new opera warranted a score or more of repetitions. On the other hand, the most decisive failure would hardly mean a diminution of auditors at succeeding performances following the premiere for subscribers have obligated themselves since last Spring to reserve certain seats on certain nights irrespective of the bill offered on

those occasions and therefore the numerical test could be no criterion regarding the real drawing power of *The Girl of the Golden West*. The one thing that an expert listener is able to estimate after two hearings (the dress rehearsal and the official “first performance”) is the artistic and musical value of Puccini’s newest opera, and such an appraisal is herewith presented in purely analytical sense and spirit. The composer of *Tosca* is the Puccini who looks out at us from the vocal and orchestral score of *The Girl of the Golden West* for, with the exception of some sophisticated bits reminiscent of the third act in *Bohème*, and two melodic sequences that represent unconscious borrowings from effective *Butterfly* measures nothing less appears in this new work to identify the composer very strongly with his two earlier and most popular operas. There is, of course, the same deft and clever instrumentation, now heightened several degrees through the added harmonies daring with which all the modern orchestra writers feel that they may move since Strauss widened the boundaries of tonality and Debussy performed the same service for our former rigorous scale, with its hide-bound intervals and arbitrary tone successions. No absolutely novel tone colourings or instrumental innovations appear in the score of the *Girl*, its most striking pictorial effect, the indistinct and solitary rambling of the double basses in the famous poker scene of Act II, is practically a duplicate of the thrilling device employed by Strauss to depict the breathless suspense of *Salome*, while Jochanaan is being decapitated in the fatal cistern. A raging storm which occurs outside Minnie’s hut during the avowal of Dick Johnson’s love for the frontier girl is worked up in the orchestra much as similar episodes have been treated in other operas and symphonic stories, with suggestive use of rapid and crescendoed string passages, percussive detonations in the brass and animated, shrill voices in the woodwind, Minnie’s description of her picturesque pinto gallops calls forth a realistic and rollicking echo in the orchestra, although hoof beats in partitur portraiture are as old as the well written “Lutzow’s Wilde Jagd” Really impressive moments in the Puccini instrumentation are the purely lyrical phrases, the scenes between Minnie and her outlaw sweetheart, in which the composer has written music fluent, refined and of eloquent sentiment without striving for any set melodic appeal, as he did in the love strophes of *Bohème*, *Butterfly*, and his much earlier *Manon Lescaut*.

Of “atmosphere” indigenous to the West and of “national” American traits the only examples are in the libretto. From the very rise of the curtain Puccini makes it apparent that he has not tried to get outside of himself or of his native and personal musical idiom for the sake of making *The Girl of the Golden West*. American as he made *Butterfly* Japanese here and there by bizarre modulations and Eastern rhythmic inflections built on the Nippon conception of tonal science. Puccini has been reproached for his Latinized musical version of the typically Wild West story in the *Girl*, but his detractors, with the usual destructiveness of critics, fail to point out to him any constructive process whereby he could have made his tonal speech fit the plot and the dialogue more convincingly.

What is “American” music? Who writes “American” music? Where should the foreign or even the native Yankee composer go for study of the models that exemplify “American” music? Do Chadwick, Foote, Loeffler, Kelley, Klein, Kaun, Huss, Mildenberg, Mrs. Beach, Brockway, Busch, Converse, Sousa, Harris and their gifted colleagues among this country’s



composers—do they write “American” music? The answer is that they write good music, just as MacDowell and Pain and Nevin wrote good music, but there is absolutely nothing “American” about it except here and there an Indian tune set to harmonies long ago sanctioned and applied in Croatia, Westphalia, Styria, Gallia, Italia, and Germania. Our Western America has no “folk melodies,” and California never knew any music redolent of its soil except perhaps the songs brought there by the Spanish settlers and corrupted Iberian chants received by way of Mexico and South America. It is a matter for devoted thanks that Puccini did not make use of the “The Mockingbird,” “The Arkansaw Traveler” and similar enervating “American” ditties that held sway from end to end of the United States in the middle of the nineteenth century and for some time thereafter to the great detriment of this country’s musical advancement. The composer of *The Girl of the Golden West* declared upon arrival in New York several weeks ago that the question of locale or nationality did not concern him in the selection of his libretto, and he added that he was attracted to the story only because of its elemental strength, its rugged types, crass contrasts and furious conflict of passions. That is the talk of a good dramatist and a conscientious opera composer, who writes in the dramatic vein of Young Italy—almost Middle Aged Italy now—but the Puccini music to *The Girl of the Golden West* shows many of the gilded refinements of the most polite and polished school of opera writing and might as easily have been set to one of the innocuous texts of Massenet or Saint-Saëns. Mascagni’s *Cavaliere* is real Italian music and yet—paradoxical as it may seem—if Puccini had written in that robustness, hot-blooded manner: he would have come infinitely nearer to expressing the native humanity and unbridled play of emotion that live in the persons and happenings of the Belasco drama.

Nearly half of the first act is given over to a series of trifling incidents which in the spoken drama do service for the fixing of “atmosphere,” such as the entrance of the miners into the gambling-saloon and their snatchy conversation; games of faro and poker; the plaint of a discouraged gold seeker, ending in a monetary contribution made by the “boys”; the entrance of a wandering minstrel with a banjo, who sets the rough men thinking of home and weeping, with a song whose intervals are far too “eddicated” and whose accompaniment suggests too little banjo vamp to lend semblance of reality to the lachrymose response of the rough and ready auditors in the “Polka” saloon; then there were also the entrance of a Wells-Fargo agent; the discovery of a blackleg among the players; various conversations referring to drinks, chip chips, “two spots,” jacks, queens, and cigars; a pistol pulling affray between Sonora and Rance over jealousy concerning Minnie; and finally the entrance of that young woman, who separates the combatants, gets them into good humour, and then gives a dozen or so of the “boys” a primitive Bible lesson. It will be seen from the foregoing summary what sort of material Puccini set himself to describe in music and no one need wonder that he did not succeed in making his contribution so rapidly that all sustained characterization and development were impossible.

Operatically speaking, only three good opportunities for a composer, present themselves in Act I, and they are Rance’s declaration of his passion for Minnie and the girl’s refusal of him, her short sentimental bit with the stranger Dick Johnson whom she recognizes as a

romantic chance acquaintance encountered during a trip to Monterey, and the jealousy of Rance and his obvious suspicion that the intruder may be other than the unimportant traveler for whom he seeks to pass. That trio of incidents was seized upon by Puccini to manipulate some of his characteristic motifs (there are a “Redemption by Love” motif, and one for Johnson, one for Minnie, etc) at some length and with good operatic effect even if the resultant music is not of high distinction. A waltz refrain to which the miners exit toward the dance hall is playful and pleasing.

In the second act, after the utterly unmeaning scene between the Indian squaw Wowkle and her partner Billy (here Puccini could justifiably have practiced his harmonic and contrapuntal skill upon a tune or two of authentic Indian origin) Johnson and Minnie indulge in a musical love passage that quickens the pulse for a few moments and finds its climax in an impressive vocal and orchestral outburst as the door swings open—and contrary to the precedent set in the *Walküre* when Siegmund sings of his love for Sieglinde—a blasting snowstorm is seen raging outside which suddenly cools the ardor of the lovers and cools the Puccini inspiration also, for after Minnie closes the door music of the ensuing episode at once becomes inconsequential while the couple coquets until the unexpected arrival of Rance. Thereupon Dick hides in the girl’s bed, while the visitor denounces him and reveals the fact that the man she loves is Ramerrez, the bandit who had gone to the saloon for the purpose of robbing her.

The horror of this discovery, the struggle in Minnie’s mind, and her heroic resolve to shield the outcast are reflected convincingly and even grippingly in the music, and this same tenseness and power hold through the scene of denunciation after Rance’s departure, when the girl sends the fugitive forth into the storm. From this point forward in the act, it is the drama alone that keeps the audience in thrall, and Puccini’s vocal declamation and orchestral comment do not enhance by one iota the palpitating fascination of watching the wounded Johnson crawl into the loft aided by his repentant Minnie, and seeing the implacable Rance reappear only to discover his rival’s presence the latter’s dripping blood, and then sit down to a gruesome game of poker with the girl for her honour and the life of the unconscious Ramerrez. A thunder of applause rewarded the close of the second act, but any keen observer could note that the melodrama and not the music stirred the multitude, unless possibly it was the sonorous blare which accompanies Minnie’s half maniacal laughter as Rance goes out to her shout “E mio” (“He’s mine”) when she turns and sees the motionless Johnson.

In the third act, after a lugubrious opening scene in the forest, where Rance, Nick (the bartender) and Ashby (the Wells Fargo agent) lament their inability to capture Ramerrez, cowboys gallop on astride of real horses, and instead of emitting their characteristic yells, sing in chorus of the finding of the outlaw, and forthwith he is dragged on an a noose put around his neck for lynching purposes. Dick, proud and defiant, melts only at the thought of Minnie, and sings a very touching song of farewell. In fact, from the moment of Dick’s entrance when the other figures about him form only a background for then ensuing action, Puccini’s music rises again to poignant expression, and the appeal which Minnie makes soon after for the life of her sweetheart is almost as moving a piece of lyric writing as the

finale of *Butterfly*. They boys pardon Johnson-Ramerez after his promise to reform, and he and Minnie bid farewell to the miners and disappear up the slope of the Sierra Nevadas to the strains of a profoundly affecting song, ending in the words “Addio, mia California, addio!” to which the men reply weepingly, “Mai pi’u ritornerai . . . mai piu, mai piu” (“You’ll never come again,” etc.)

There was a distinct feeling of disappointment after the cheers for Puccini, Belasco, Toscanini, and Gatti-Casazza had died down, and all through the lobbies and foyers during the reception to the composer which followed the performance, unprejudiced music sharps and mere lay opera goers got together in groups and whispered their opinion that the first attempt of a famous European composer to operatize American people and customs had been a prodigious even if polite failure. “Fiasco d’estime” would be the European way of putting it.

Nothing further could have been done by the management to give the production every chance of success. The cast, scenic accessories, lighting, mechanical effects, costuming—all were on a plane of excellence which the Metropolitan never has excelled. Toscanini conducted with scrupulous care, and one may feel assured that with the composer present at most of the rehearsals, the score revealed its full significance in every tiny detail.

Caruso sang superbly as Johnson and acted the role with such earnestness and fire as to surprise even his warmest admirers. Emmy Destinn, although unsuited in appearance to the lithe mountain girl, put much vim into her impersonation and sang with better vocal control and more sympathetic delivery than Metropolitan patrons usually are blessed with from the Bohemian soprano. Pasquale Amato as Sheriff Rance won a well deserved individual triumph. His glorious voice rang true and resonant, even though he had to smoke a countless number of cigars, and the sinister intensity of his make up and manner carried out the idea of the role to the letter. Dinah Gilly did the comparatively small Sonora part with quiet artistic dignity and pathos. Andrea de Segurola’s minstrel song was a refined and intelligently conceived piece of vocal art. There is no female chorus in *The Girl of the Golden West*, and only one other woman besides Minnie. Truly an ideal opera for the prima donna!

Will the great Puccini retire his work at the end of the present season and give it a thorough revision, not to say rewriting, as he did with *Butterfly* after the historic catastrophe that marked its Italian premiere?

As *The Girl of the Golden West* stands at present it is a mistake, and one that, if not mended, may harm the very high standing of the deservedly popular creator of *Tosca*, *Butterfly* and *Bohème*. Friend Ricordi should have advised Puccini that in its present shape the music of *The Girl of the Golden West* has no selling chances whatsoever. But what will Europe say when it gets its first taste of American melodrama via an Italian score by the best liked of modern opera composers?

In this country, the Puccini mishap will be regarded with sadness by those who have at heart the best interests of American musical development for the pessimists now are provided with another argument against the feasibility of ever having a really “American” opera uttered in a musical idiom that grows directly out of the subject and shall differ from the German, the French and the Italian manner of operatic expression. The *Musical Courier* enrols itself gladly on the side of the optimists, and will even hope with some of its enthusiastic friends that the queer committee chosen by the Metropolitan Opera House to decide its opera contest will find the really representative “American” opera among the thirty scores said to have been submitted in the effort to gain the \$10,000 prize.

There were not as many folks at Madame Sembrich’s recent folk recital as there should have been.

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New York’s editorial offices are beginning to understand the true economic relation between music and money as pointed out long ago by *The Musical Courier*. The *Sun* of last Sunday says:<sup>5</sup>

Last night for the first time a work by a world famous composer was produced here for the first time before being performed in any other city. As evidence of the importance as a musical centre to which this town has advanced it may be mentioned that two more operas as yet unsung are to be heard later in the present season.

This is a curious reversal of the usual condition of affairs, and it is brought about by the enterprise of impresarios and the eagerness of European composers and publishers to get all the available American money.

It is of course the wealth of New York that makes such brilliant moments possible in our operatic season. The receipts of *The Girl of the Golden West* at its first two performances would probably be impossible in any other city. Once they are known abroad, the music publishers, and the composers will doubtless come to the Metropolitan Opera House in such shoals that there might be a whole season of operas that had never been sung before on any stage.

It is well for music and well for the New York newspapers that *The Girl of the Golden West* premiere is recognized in its financial as well as in its artistic aspects. The Metropolitan management was influenced solely by the ethical and patriotic motives when it secured the production for our city, but that is no reason why the business possibilities of the venture should not be exploited to the full by those interested in its commercial outcome. It is a good sign that so much money may be made out of music, and the facts in the present case

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<sup>5</sup> The group of paragraphs between these two bold lines do not appear as part of the review. However, they were printed with the review and offer interesting context for the ideas in the review.

serve again to emphasize strikingly the adage now accepted in nearly all quarters, that it pays to advertise.

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Signor Puccini is said to have asked for a piece with plenty of action. Well, if the composers of *La Bohème*, *La Tosca*, and *Madama Butterfly* were to bring actions of damage for plagiarism against the composer of *The Girl of the Golden West* we believe Signor Puccini would lose (sic) all taste for action.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> This paragraph was not part of the *La fanciulla del West* review, however, it offers interesting insight into some of the comments in the review and I therefore include here.

The Nation

15 December 1910

## “Puccini’s New Opera.”

By Unknown Author

When Giacomo Puccini, who is undoubtedly the most popular of living opera composers (his income from royalties is said to approximate \$50,000 a year), visited this country a few years ago, he attended a performance of *The Girl of the Golden West*, by David Belasco, whose dramatic version of Luther Long's story, *Madame Butterfly*, had served him as libretto for his last opera, the first American performance of which he had crossed the ocean to superintend. Although he could not understand the dialogue, he was so much impressed by the picturesque Western scenery and costumes and the romantic incidents that he decided then and there that this was the popular play he had been looking for to serve as basis for his next opera. He allowed his librettists abundant time to make their version—not an altogether easy task, in view of idioms and Western slang—and then devoted eighteen months to writing the music. Long before it was done the announcement that it would have its first performance in New York aroused great indignation among the Italians, who seemed to have forgotten that they had behaved so rudely toward *Madama Butterfly*, when it was first produced in Milan, that Puccini made an immediate repetition impossible by taking away the score.

It would be difficult to imagine a more striking contrast to this fiasco of what is now the most popular of all operas than the enthusiastic reception of *The Girl of the Golden West* at its Metropolitan production last Saturday. At double the usual prices the house was crowded, and there were at least fifty recalls for Puccini, Belasco, Toscanini, and the principal singers, Caruso, Destinn, Amato, all of whom had far surpassed their previous achievements, at least from the histrionic side. The possibility of having his new work produced with such a scat, and under the magnetic direction of Toscanini, would itself explain why Puccini preferred New York to Milan, which has no singers or conductor to match them. But there were other reasons. The management of the Metropolitan paid \$5,000 extra for the privilege of being first to stage this opera. Moreover, Belasco himself had not only allowed Gatti-Casazza to copy his scenery and costumes, but had promised to cooperate as stage manager. For several weeks, while orchestral rehearsals were going on, he drilled the cast—seventeen persons in all—for hours every day until Caruso looked and acted like a real California bandit, Didur like a Wells, Fargo & Co. express agent in pursuit of him, Destinn like a genuine girl of Western romance, serving whiskey in her bar, while teaching the Bible and softening the hearts of the miners. Amato like a gambler and sheriff of Bret Harte's, Reiss like a bartender to the counter born, Bourgeois and Mattfeld like a real Indian and his squaw, De Segurola like a coloured minstrel, and Missiano like a

Mexican bandit, while the eight miners named Sonora, Trio, Sid, Bello, Happy, Joe, Hopper, and Larkens were impersonated with the same realism in costume and action.

The significance of the situation lies in this, that the Metropolitan Opera House, had been made for the time being into something similar to what Wagner wanted his Bayreuth theatre to be place for the creation of traditions. With both Puccini and his high priest presiding over the rehearsals, the musical side was sure to be correctly, presented, while the presence of Belasco insured realism in scenery, costumes, and action. All this made the Metropolitan performance of great interest, without regard to the intrinsic value of the opera. But as for traditions—apart from those which relate to the orchestra and the singing—it is to be feared that when *The Girl of the Golden West* is produced in Italian cities, the California miners will be converted, in the absence of Belasco, into the traditional Sicilian brigands so familiar to opera-goers.

Paradoxical as it seems to say it, this may prove the salvation of Puccini's work. To be a real work of art, an opera must have music suited to action. The action and local colour in *The Girl of the Golden West* are intensely American and Californian. The music is not; it is thoroughly Italian—that is, in the modern sense of the word—and would seem less out of place around the sulphur mines of Sicily than the gold mines of the Pacific coast. Brahms was no opera composer, yet when he wrote his *Academic Overture* at the time when he was made an honorary doctor, he instinctively did the right thing by making several popular student songs the melodic themes of his composition. When Belasco produced his Californian play he had a quartet singing “Old Dog Tray,” “Camptown Races,” “I Bet my Money on a Bob-Tailed Nag,” and similar ditties of the day. Puccini should have woven into his score some tunes of this sort for the miners to sing. He did introduce Foster's “Dooda, Dooda Day,” but so altered in the melodic curve that no one but an expert would recognize it. The few Indian tunes he introduced are also Indian to those only who know about them. In a word, there is in this opera hardly a trace of what can be called American from any point of view; and those who had hoped that just as Gluck and Meyerbeer, though Germans, had written real French operas, so Puccini, though an Italian, would give us a real American opera are grievously disappointed.

Besides the desirability of local colour there was a further reason why he should have adopted American melodies in the fact that his own melodic fountain seems to have run dry. In the whole opera there is not one of those stirring, broad, sensuous melodies which have made *La Bohème*, *Tosca*, and *Madama Butterfly* famous.

The orchestration is rich and varied and betrays great technical skill; but in this direction—the direction taken by Berlioz and Richard Strauss—operatic success does not lie. We shall be very much surprised if *La fanciulla del West* is a success in any European country. How it will be received in Chicago and Boston we shall know in a few weeks.

APPENDIX TWO: GIACOMO PUCCINI—ALICE GARRETT (NÉE  
WARDER) CORRESPONDENCE

Introduction

These letters fill a gap in the current understanding of the compositional process for *La fanciulla del West*. They specify the exact types of musical materials Puccini sought for his study of American music. They also reveal Puccini's interest in the visual aspects of his opera and the importance of redwood trees played in the concept of the final act, the only act whose sets were original to the opera and not the play. They document Puccini's relationship with the American patron, Alice Garrett, née Warder who gave him some materials particularly pertinent to the final act of the opera. Because they are unpublished and not mentioned in the literature discussing the American features of *La fanciulla del West*, I offer them as service to those interested in the documentation of Puccini's interest in the American West. The originals are available through the Evergreen House Foundation of Baltimore, Maryland, U.S.A. The transcriptions and translations are my own. Francesco Dalla Vecchia and Valentina Fulginiti proof-read both my transcriptions and translations of letters one through seven. Any errors or omissions are mine alone. Bracketed question marks indicate words in which the handwriting was unclear or seemed to make no sense.



Evergreen House Foundation, Letter No. 1

22 July 1907  
Torre del Lago, Toscana

Gentile Signorina,

Mi rivolgo a Lei per un grande favore. E la prego volermi scusare per la libertà che mi prendo. Probabilmente scriverò un'opera con soggetto americano del West—Epoca 1850—Avrei bisogno di musica americana antica e anche moderna ma già caratteristica. Anche qualche canzone indiana mi tornerebbe utile. Vuol Ella essere compiacente di occuparsene? Glieme sarò grato oltremodo mille distinti saluti a Lei e all Signor Ellis. Dal Giacomo Puccini.

Dear Signora,

I am addressing you for a big favor. Please pardon me for the liberties that I take. I will probably write an opera on the subject of the American West, during the period of 1850. I need some old and also some modern American music, something already characteristic . . . also some Indian songs would be useful. Would you be so helpful to find some? I will be grateful to you to Signor Ellis. Giacomo Puccini.

Evergreen House Foundation, Letter No. 2

14 October 1907  
Torre del Lago, Toscana

Egredia e gentile Signorinia,

La ringraio infintamente della musica che mi ha mandato. È in tale quantità e di così ottima qualità che certamente mi potrà servire se non altro per inambientarmi musicalmente per la mia nuova opera americana. È troppo ardire domandare ancora qualcosa? Ella è così cortese? che io oso: desidererei aver il motivo d'una canzone americana: dooda, dooda, day! e qualcosa di marcie e canzoni non di negri né di indiani ma del popolo. Tanti distinti saluti e ringraziamenti pregandola. Riverire a mio Mr. et madma Ellis mi dico. Suo devoto Giacomo Puccini.

Dear Signora

Infinite thanks for the music you gave me. It is of such an amount and of such good quality that it will help me . . . there is something else for me to create musical ambience in my new American opera. Do I dare too much if I ask for another thing? You are so kind that I dare: I would like to have the motive of an American song: dooda, dooda, day! and something from marches and songs, but not from negro songs and nor from Indians, but popular. Sincerely yours, and thanks. While I ask you to refer my homages to M. and Mme. Ellis, I declare myself your devoted, Giacomo Puccini.

Evergreen House Foundation, Letter No. 3

10 November 1907  
Torre del Lago, Toscana

Gentile Signorina,

Riceva i miei migliori ringraziamenti per tante gentilezze ricevire. Sono un pò pressante, la so, ma Ella é così buona e gentile che vorrà perdonarmi. Mi occorrebbe qualche fotografia di Foreste Californiane perché mi servirebbero per ricostruire scenicamente l'ambiente dell'ultimo atto della Girl. Vuol esser gentile di procuraruele ben inteso che intendo mi siano spedite contro assegno. Distinto saluti di cui vorra far parte alla gentilissima Signor Ellis. Suo devoto e aff. Giacomo Puccini.

Please accept my best thanks for so many received kindnesses. I am a little insisting you know, but you are good that you'll pardon me again. I would like to have some photographs of the Californian Forest to help me recreate the ambience of the final act of the Girl. Would you be so kind as to procure some, which of course I want sent to us C.O.D. Best regards that you will refer to the most kind Signor Ellis. Your devoted and affectionate Giacomo Puccini.

Evergreen House Foundation, Letter No. 4

16 November 1907  
Torre del Lago, Toscana

Gentil Signorina,

Le avevo scritto di procurarmi dei rolls di Pianola con musica americana, ragtime etc—ora ricevo lettere dalla Aeolian company: dove mi si offrano detti rolls. Lo spero arrivar in tempo perché ella non si dia la pena di cercarli. Rimane sempre la mia preghiéra per le fotografie di Foreste californiane. Mille scuse per la mia insistenza e distinti saluti e ringraziamenti dal suo devoto e aff. Giacomo Puccini.

Dear Signorina,

I had written to ask for some pianola rolls with American music, ragtime etc and now have received a letter from the Aeolian company: they have offered the mentioned rolls. I hope to warn you in time so you don't take the trouble of looking for them. I am still asking for the photographs of the californian forest. A thousand apologies for my insistence and best regards and thanks from your devoted and affectionate Giacomo Puccini.

Evergreen House Foundation, Letter No. 5

25 December 1907  
Via Verdi, 4  
Milano

Tanti auguri felici per il nuovo anno a Lei gentilissima da Giacomo Puccini. Noël 907

Many happy returns for the New Year to you, kindest lady. Christmas 1907.

Evergreen House Foundation, Letter No. 6

12 September 1908  
[Torre del Lago, Toscana]

Ben venuta nella nostra Italia. Potrò aver la Fortuna di vederla qui? Io sono al lavoro della cara Girl.  
Le invio tanti cordiali e distinti saluti, Dev. Giacomo Puccini.

Welcome to our Italy. Will I ever have the good fortune to see you here? I am at work on the dear Girl.  
I send you cordial and best regards, your devoted Giacomo Puccini.

Evergreen House Foundation, Letter No. 7

12 February 1909  
Rome, Grand Hôtel du Quirinal  
Gentilissima Signora,

Mentre la ringrazio tanto per l'invito gentilissimo debbo con mio vivo rincrescimento significarle  
l'impossibilità assoluta di corrisponderai come sarebbe mio desiderio avendo partire da nave America nelle  
prime ore.

Con tanti rispettosissimi saluti per il sig. Garrett [colgo] l'occasione per porgere a Lei i miei devoti ossequi Devo.  
Giacomo Puccini.

Dearest Signora,

While I thank you much for the most kind invitation I must with my deepest regrets inform you of the  
absolute impossibility of corresponding as it would be my desire, having to leave by ship America first thing  
in the morning.

Best Regards to Sig. Garret [?] the occasion to offer to you and my devoted and kindest regards, your  
devoted Giacomo Puccini.

Evergreen House Foundation, Letter No. 8

[Undated]  
Rome, Grand Hôtel du Quirinal  
Gentile Signora,

Le scrissi jeri è probabile che la mia lettera [?] Le sia pervenuta [?].—Io debbo partire per Capalbio Maremma  
incalzi (unreale) doualtrice alle ore 8. Sono tanto dolente di non poter essere da Lei domani[?]. Mi auguro  
di rivedere presto. Con tanti cordiali saluti a Lei, gentilissima e a suo marito. Suo devoti e aff.  
Giacomo Puccini.

I wrote to you yesterday. It is probable that my letter to you did not arrive. I must go by Capalbio, Maremma  
(unreal) at eight o'clock. I am so sorry that I will not be able to be with you tomorrow. I hope to see you  
soon. With cordial greetings to you, kindest lady and to your husband. From your devoted and affectionate  
G. Puccini.

Evergreen House Foundation, Letter No. 9

[Undated]  
Rome, Grand Hôtel du Quirinal  
Gentile Signora,

Lunedì alle 6 sarò ben felice di [?] Le [?] di [?] con i saluti G. Puccini.

Monday at 6 I will be very happy to [see] you. [With] greetings, G. Puccini

## VITA

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