

La Fanciulla del West

A Guide for Educators

The Met
ropolitan
Opera

Ken Howard/Metropolitan Opera

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM *LA FANCIULLA DEL WEST*

GIACOMO PUCCINI'S *LA FANCIULLA DEL WEST* (THE GIRL OF THE GOLDEN WEST), the composer's "American" opera, is set in a frontier mining town during the California Gold Rush. Peopled with ruthless bandits, rough-talking but goodhearted miners, a cynical sheriff, and one remarkable female tavern-keeper, it tells a tale of love, money, and betrayal that is as thrilling as any Western movie, wrapped in an unmistakably Italian score. You could even call it the world's first "spaghetti Western." The story explores the shifting line between justice, mob rule, and lawlessness, but on a deeper level, it also plumbs the nature of forgiveness, and its cost—both to an individual and to the community.

From its lovable outlaw-hero to its Bible-teaching heroine, *La Fanciulla del West* is unique among operas of its time for its treatment of American mythology. Not only did Puccini set this rip-roaring tale in America, he also launched it in New York at the Metropolitan Opera, in December 1910. It was the Met's first world premiere as well as the production intended to propel the opera house to global prominence.

La Fanciulla del West provides students with the rare opportunity to explore a classic opera that focuses on familiar and quintessentially American characters and settings. The activities in this guide build on that familiarity to explore the creative choices made by Puccini, his collaborators, and the artists of the Met. By heightening awareness of narrative and theatrical elements and, above all, of Puccini's music, the guide can help you spark young people's fascination with this opera. The activities and information in this guide are intended to offer students tools for creatively engaging *La Fanciulla del West* before, during, and after the Final Dress Rehearsal performance. By inviting students to make connections between the opera, other classroom subjects, and their own life experiences, it will help students develop the confidence to engage with music and other performing arts even after they leave the theater itself.

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THE WORK:

LA FANCIULLA DEL WEST

An opera in three acts, sung in Italian
Music by Giacomo Puccini
Libretto by Guelfo Civinini and Carlo Zangarini

Based on the play *The Girl of the Golden West* by David Belasco
First performed December 10, 1910
at the Metropolitan Opera, New York City

PRODUCTION

Marco Armiliato, Conductor
Giancarlo del Monaco, Production
Michael Scott, Set and Costume
Designer
Gil Wechsler, Lighting Designer

STARRING

Eva-Maria Westbroek
MINNIE (soprano)

Yusif Eyvazov
DICK JOHNSON (tenor)

Carlo Bosi
NICK (tenor)

Željko Lučić
JACK RANCE (baritone)

Michael Todd Simpson
SONORA (baritone)

Matthew Rose
ASHBY (bass)

Production a gift of the Sybil B.
Harrington Endowment Fund
Revival a gift of Rolex

ABOUT THE METROPOLITAN OPERA HOUSE



Photo: Johnathan Tichler/
Metropolitan Opera

The Metropolitan Opera is a vibrant home for the most creative and talented singers, conductors, composers, musicians, stage directors, designers, visual artists, choreographers, and dancers from around the world.

The Metropolitan Opera was founded in 1883, with its first opera house built on Broadway and 39th Street by a group of wealthy businessmen who wanted their own theater. In the company's early years, the management changed course several times, first performing everything in Italian (even *Carmen* and *Lohengrin*), then everything in German (even *Aida* and *Faust*), before finally settling into a policy of performing most works in their original language.

Almost from the beginning, it was clear that the opera house on 39th Street did not have adequate stage facilities. But it was not until the Met joined with other New York institutions in forming Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts that a new home became possible. The new Metropolitan Opera House, which opened at Lincoln Center in September of 1966, was equipped with the finest technical facilities of the day.

Each season the Met stages more than 200 opera performances in New York. More than 800,000 people attend the performances in the opera house during the season, and millions more experience the Met through new media distribution initiatives and state-of-the-art technology.

This guide includes several sections with a variety of background material on *La Fanciulla del West*.

- **The Source, The Story, and Who's Who in *La Fanciulla del West***
- **A Timeline: The historical context of the opera's story and composition**
- **A Closer Look: A brief article highlighting an important aspect of Puccini's *La Fanciulla del West***
- **Guided Listening: A series of musical excerpts with questions and a roadmap to possible student responses**
- **Student Critique: A performance activity, highlighting specific aspects of this production; and topics for wrap-up discussion following students' attendance**
- **Further Resources: Recommendations for additional study, both online and in print**
- **Glossary: Common musical terms found in this guide and in the concert hall**

The materials in this guide will focus on several aspects of *La Fanciulla del West*:

- The historical authenticity of the opera's settings and characterizations
- The musical distinction of Puccini's composition
- Creative choices made by the artists of the Metropolitan Opera for this production
- The opera as a unified work of art, involving the efforts of composer, librettist, and Met artists

This guide is intended to cultivate students' interest in *La Fanciulla del West*, whether or not they have any prior acquaintance with opera. It includes materials for students with a wide range of musical backgrounds, and seeks to encourage them to think about opera—and the performing arts as a whole – as a medium of both entertainment and creative expression.



**Ken Howard/
Metropolitan Opera**

SUMMARY

At the Polka Saloon during the California Gold Rush, miners from the nearby camp order whisky, play cards, sing, and gossip about Minnie, the owner of the saloon. They all have a soft spot for her. Minnie arrives and breaks up a fight, stows away her money, and teaches a Bible lesson. When a stranger enters and introduces himself as Dick Johnson, everyone is immediately suspicious. But Minnie defends him, remembering him from a chance meeting some time earlier. While Minnie and Johnson dance, the miners drag a captured bandit into the saloon. He promises to lead the miners to the notorious bandit Ramerrez, but he secretly passes along plans to Johnson—who is actually Ramerrez himself—on robbing the Polka Saloon. The miners leave while Minnie and Johnson stay behind. Johnson makes no move to steal from the saloon, and instead promises to visit Minnie at her cabin that evening.

Later that night, Johnson joins Minnie for dinner at her cabin. Minnie gives Johnson her first kiss. The thick snow falling prevents Johnson from being able to leave. Jack Rance bangs at her door in search of Johnson. Minnie hides him and lets in the sheriff and group of miners. They reveal that Johnson is actually the bandit Ramerrez. Minnie sends them away, but then calls Johnson out of his hiding place, denounces him, and throws him out into the blizzard. Rance shoots him, and Minnie can't help but bring her injured lover back inside. Rance returns to the cabin and prepares to arrest Johnson. Minnie offers instead a high-stakes game of poker for the fate of Johnson. Minnie wins (by secretly cheating), and Rance storms out.

Some time later, Johnson has been captured by a group of miners. They bring him to Rance and prepare to hang him. Just as he is about to be executed, Minnie rides in. She reminds the miners of their Bible lessons and of her kindness to them. One by one, she convinces them to forgive Johnson. They free him, and the lovers head off alone, never to return again to California.



Ken Howard/
Metropolitan Opera

THE SOURCE: *THE GIRL OF THE GOLDEN WEST* BY DAVID BELASCO

David Belasco (1853–1931) was an American impresario and playwright whose innovations to theater technology were groundbreaking for the age. His stage play *The Girl of the Golden West* premiered at the Belasco Theatre in Pittsburgh in 1905 and featured a story set in Gold Rush-era California, including such spectacular scenic effects as the cinematic projection of California’s forests and mountains. The play’s setting was influenced by Belasco’s own life: His family had emigrated from England to California at the height of the gold craze.

Giacomo Puccini attended a performance of the play while in New York in 1907, later telling reporters that he found the title role “fresh” and “adorable,” and—in keeping with his reputation as a bit of a ladies’ man—also expressing his admiration for American women in general. Once back in Italy, Puccini commissioned an Italian translation of Belasco’s play for closer study (as his English was poor) and set about obtaining the rights to write an opera based on it. Puccini’s publisher Ricordi recommended the poet Carlo Zangarini as a collaborator, seemingly on the merit of his having an American mother. Puccini later also engaged Guelfo Civinini—despite the strong objection of Zangarini—to re-work and polish the libretto. Belasco himself remained involved in the opera’s production and premiere at the Metropolitan Opera. His main concern was to coach the heavily Italian cast and to provide pointers on how to appear American.



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SYNOPSIS

Act I

A miners' camp in California, ca. 1849-50. At sunset in the Polka Saloon, Nick, the bartender, prepares for the miners' return from the hills. Jake Wallace, a traveling minstrel, sings a sentimental song that causes Jim Larkens to break down in tears. The men collect money for his passage back home. Trin and Sonora both bribe Nick to help them win the heart of Minnie, the owner of the bar, with whom all the men are in love. Sid cheats at cards, and Jack Rance, the camp's cynical sheriff, marks him as an outcast. The Wells Fargo agent Ashby arrives with news of the imminent capture of the Mexican bandit Ramerrez and his band. An argument breaks out between Rance and Sonora, each claiming Minnie will be his wife. Things almost get out of hand when Minnie herself appears. The men calm down and sit to listen to Minnie's Bible teaching. Later, alone with her, Rance confesses his love. But she is not interested and, recalling her happy childhood, paints a different picture of her ideal love.

A stranger appears in the bar, introducing himself as Dick Johnson from Sacramento. Minnie recognizes him as a man she once met on the road. The jealous Rance orders Johnson to leave town, but when Minnie declares that she knows him, the others welcome Johnson. As he and Minnie dance, the miners drag in a man named Castro, one of Ramerrez's band. Castro pretends that he will lead them to their hideout. He then whispers to Johnson—who is in fact Ramerrez himself—that he let himself be captured to lure the miners away from the saloon, in order for Johnson to rob it. The men depart with Castro, and Minnie and Johnson are left alone. She tells him about her simple life and that she is still waiting for her first kiss. When she shows him the hiding place where the miners keep their gold, he replies that as long as he is nearby, nobody will harm her or touch the gold. She shyly invites him to visit her in her cabin later that evening.

Act II

In Minnie's cabin in the mountains, the Indian woman Wowkle sings a lullaby to her baby and bickers with the child's father, Billy Jackrabbit. Minnie arrives and excitedly prepares for her meeting with Johnson. Alone with him, she gives in to his declarations of love and they kiss. Johnson, full of doubt as to how to tell her his true identity, is about to leave, but she asks him to stay for the night as it has begun to snow. When several shots are heard, Johnson hides in the closet. Rance appears with some of the men

and tells Minnie that they are concerned for her safety—they have discovered that Johnson is Ramerrez. Minnie claims to know nothing, and the men leave. She then angrily confronts Johnson, who makes excuses about his past and declares that when he met her, he decided to give up his former life. Deeply hurt, Minnie sends him away. Another shot rings out. Johnson, wounded, staggers back into the cabin and Minnie hides him in the attic. Rance returns, certain he has found his man, and demands to search the room. Minnie refuses, and the sheriff is about to give up when a drop of blood falls on his hand from above. Johnson is forced to surrender, but Minnie has an idea: She challenges Rance to a game of poker. If he defeats her, she will give herself to him; if he loses, Johnson goes free. Minnie cheats and wins. Rance leaves.

Act III

Millie has nursed Johnson back to health. Again on the run from Rance and his men, he is eventually captured in the forest. As the miners prepare to hang him, Johnson asks for one last mercy—that Minnie be spared from the news of his execution and told that he is free and far away. Rance is enraged, but the men hesitate. At that moment, Minnie rides in, wielding a pistol. When her pleas to spare Johnson prove fruitless, she reminds them how much they owe her. The miners finally give in and release Johnson. He and Minnie ride away to start a new life together.

VOICE TYPE

Since the early 19th century, singing voices have usually been classified in six basic types, three male and three female, according to their range:

SOPRANO

the highest-pitched type of human voice, normally possessed only by women and boys

MEZZO-SOPRANO

the female voice whose range lies between the soprano and the contralto (Italian "mezzo"=middle, medium)

CONTRALTO

the lowest female voice, also called an alto

TENOR

the highest naturally occurring voice type in adult males

BARITONE

the male voice lying below the tenor and above the bass

BASS

the lowest male voice

WHO'S WHO IN LA FANCIULLA DEL WEST

Character		Pronunciation Guide	Voice Type	The Lowdown
Minnie	A young single woman, owner of the Polka Saloon	MIN-nee	soprano	The "Girl of the Golden West" of the opera's title, Minnie is tough and independent, and although she is surrounded by men, she gently rebuffs their romantic advances.
Dick Johnson	A handsome stranger, Johnson is actually the notorious bandit Ramerrez.		tenor	Although he confesses his original intent to rob the Polka Saloon, Johnson's love for Minnie inspires him to seek a better way of life.
Jack Rance	The mining camp's sheriff		baritone	Jaded and quick to condemn, Rance pressures Minnie to run away with him despite his having a wife back East.
Nick	The bartender at the Polka Saloon		tenor	Nick is sweet at heart but tries to maintain a gruff exterior to protect his status in the camp.
Ashby	An agent for the Wells Fargo stagecoach company		bass	Ashby arrives in the mining camp with news of the bandit Ramerrez.
Sonora	A miner	so-NOR-ah	baritone	Like all the other miners, Sonora has tender feelings for Minnie. He acts as the conscience of the mining camp.
Wowkle	A Native American woman	WOE-kluh	mezzo-soprano	Wowkle works as housekeeper for Minnie.
Billy Jackrabbit	A Native American man		bass	Billy Jackrabbit, a coarsely stereotyped "Red Indian" according to the libretto, works in the saloon. He is the father of Wowkle's son.
José Castro	A member of Ramerrez's gang of bandits		bass	When Castro arrives at the Polka Saloon, he doesn't yet know that Ramerrez ("Johnson") is having second thoughts about robbing it.
Trin, Sid, Bello, Harry, Joe, Happy, Jim Larkens, and Jake Wallace	Miners		tenor, baritone, bass	Members of the company of miners are quick to violence but ultimately tender-hearted—especially when it comes to Minnie.

- 1848** An employee of the pioneer settler John Augustus Sutter discovers flakes of gold in a streambed on his land located near modern-day Sacramento, California. Despite Sutter’s attempt to keep the discovery a secret, the area is soon overrun with fortune seekers and prospectors. By the following year, over 80,000 “forty-niners” (as the newly arrived miners were called) vie for glory in the California gold fields.

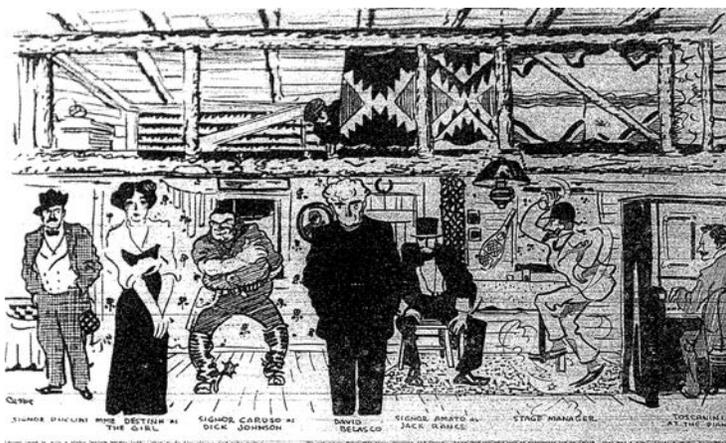
- 1850** California becomes the 31st state in the Union as the momentum of settlement continues to increase, driven by the Gold Rush. Although the early mining camps are often violent and lawless, more permanent settlements adopt systems of law enforcement and government.

- 1858** Giacomo Puccini is born on December 22 in Lucca, Tuscany, to a family of church musicians.

- 1874** Puccini begins training in music at the local music institute, studying with his uncle, Fortunato Magi. He soon begins learning the scores of Verdi’s operas.

- 1880** Puccini’s exemplary musical gifts earn him entry to the Milan Conservatory, the most prestigious musical academy in Italy. In addition to his formal studies, he comes into contact with the bohemian and anti-conformist group of artists known as the Scapigliati (literally “the disheveled ones”). There, he meets many of the leading writers and intellectuals of the day.

- 1883** Puccini composes his first opera, *Le Villi*, which is first performed in a private recital at the home of a member of the Scapigliati. Among those present are the composer Pietro Mascagni, who plays double bass in the orchestra, and Arrigo Boito, who had just become Verdi’s collaborator and was working on the libretto to *Otello*. Impressed with Puccini’s talent, the music publisher Giulio Ricordi signs an exclusive contract with the composer and provides him with a monthly stipend to concentrate on composition. For the rest of his life, Ricordi acts as mentor and friend to Puccini.



A drawing in the *New York World* newspaper shortly before the opera’s premiere at the Metropolitan Opera in December 1910

- 1900** While visiting London for the Covent Garden premiere of *Tosca*, Puccini first becomes acquainted with the work of the American impresario and playwright David Belasco, attending a performance of *Madame Butterfly*, Belasco's stage adaptation of a novel by John Luther Long.
- 1905** David Belasco's play *The Girl of the Golden West* premieres at the Belasco Theatre in Pittsburgh on October 3 and transfers to the Belasco Theatre in New York on November 14, where it runs for 224 performances. The play would return for shorter runs in 1907 and 1908.
- 1907** Puccini visits New York at the invitation of Heinrich Conried, then manager of the Metropolitan Opera House, and attends performances of two of his own works—*Manon Lescaut* and *Madama Butterfly*. Upon his arrival in the U.S., Puccini had announced to journalists that he was interested in writing an opera about the Wild West. While in New York, Puccini sees three of David Belasco's plays on Broadway, including *The Girl of the Golden West*.

By July of this year, Puccini writes to his publisher to begin the process of obtaining the rights to set Belasco's play as an opera as well as for permission to make certain changes to the story.
- 1908** Puccini begins composition on the new opera in earnest, but after only a few months of work, domestic strife in the Puccini household halts further progress until August 1909.
- 1910** *La Fanciulla del West* premieres at the Metropolitan Opera in New York on December 10. It is the first world premiere to be held at the Met and the first U.S. premiere of an opera by a major European composer. The Met spares no expense on the production. For the premiere, the auditorium of the opera house is exuberantly decorated with Italian and American flags. Arturo Toscanini conducts, and superstar tenor Enrico Caruso sings the role of Dick Johnson. The performance elicits no fewer than 47 curtain calls. The following day, the prominent Vanderbilt family hosts a banquet in Puccini's honor.
- 1915** Belasco's play *The Girl of the Golden West* is adapted into a silent, black-and-white film by Cecil B. DeMille. Over the next 23 years, Belasco's story will be adapted into three subsequent films.
- 1924** While in Brussels for treatment of throat cancer, Puccini dies on November 29. His funeral at Milan's cathedral is attended by fellow musicians, dignitaries, and ambassadors from around the globe.

AN AMERICAN OPERA AND ITS AMERICAN ISSUES

One of the most memorable aspects of Puccini's operatic idiom is his vivid depictions of the setting—whether Paris, Nagasaki, or California. His nearly anthropological approach to embedding the details of local character and soundscape into his scores make his operas rich in ambience. The seeming “authenticity” of these depictions can also make his operas stimulating subjects for students of history. Puccini's operas lure us to believe that they portray something true; but how do their worlds correspond to historical reality?

In the case of *La Fanciulla del West*, Puccini's only opera set in America, the composer—whether consciously or not—included an aspect of American life that has been present across our history and which continues to exist to this day: racism. The depiction of the Native American couple, Billy Jackrabbit and Wowkle, and the offensive ethnic epithets used with respect to the Mexican Ramerrez (Dick Johnson), José Castro, and other characters, are unabashedly offensive.

Billy is both presented and described as an inarticulate, scavenging loafer. Wowkle, more dignified in her demeanor, nevertheless moves through the opera grunting “Ugh.” Ramerrez/Johnson is referred to as a “dirty Spaniard,” while Jack Rance, who is not even—as far as we know—of Asian descent, is insulted as a “Chinese face.”

In Puccini's notes, he describes Jake Wallace, the balladeer who enters the Polka early in Act I, as a “minstrel.” For the opera's premiere in 1910, Wallace appeared in blackface, in imitation of one of the minstrel performers who caricatured African-Americans in traveling shows throughout the 19th century United States. (This make-up was not used in subsequent performances.)

Students may be interested to know that the source for the opera's libretto, *The Girl of the Golden West* by David Belasco, includes a scene with Wowkle and Billy Jackrabbit that is omitted from the opera. In it, the Native Americans sing a rendition “My Country 'Tis of Thee,” but perform with perfect English, not the offensively ungrammatical language they use elsewhere. As they sing, the miners comment on their sarcastic tone, and the scene demonstrates that Wowkle and Billy are not only aware of their disenfranchised status, but relish using a pillar of American patriotic song to comment on it. There is no comparable scene in Puccini's opera.

In *La Fanciulla del West*, Puccini certainly did not shy away from depicting some of the ugliest aspects of white Americans' historical view of ethnic minorities. In fact, the manner of Puccini's depiction of Native Americans itself is offensive. The fact that this same opera also features the character of Dick Johnson/Ramerrez, whose narrative moves from hope to love, penance, and redemption, renders the racial tensions of the work even more complex. But the fact that these issues are present in the opera does succeed in demonstrating one thing: that it is, in fact, distinctively American.

The Guided Listening Activities are designed to introduce students to a selection of memorable moments from the opera. They include information on what is happening dramatically, a description of the musical style, and a roadmap of musical features to listen for. Guided Listening Activities can be used by students and teachers of varying levels of musical experience.

IN PREPARATION

For this activity, teachers will need access to a recording of *La Fanciulla del West* and the libretto.

"CHE FARANNO I VECCHI MIEI?"

The miners gather in the Polka Saloon to unwind after a long day. Life in California is difficult: lured by the promise of gold, the miners have traveled across the country, leaving their loved ones behind. Jake Wallace enters the saloon singing a nostalgic folk song, and the hardened miners join him in expressing their longing and despair.

With this song, Puccini hoped to spice up his Wild West opera with a dash of "authentic" American music. The text is based Old Dog Tray, a song by American composer Stephen Foster (who also wrote *Camptown Races* and *Oh! Susanna*), while the tune is based on a melody that Puccini found in a book of American folk songs. The result is a sweetly lyrical song that is both expressive and accessible; in fact, your students may enjoy humming along with the tune!

What to listen for:

- The folk-song structure: different sections (or "verses") of text are sung to the same repeating melody
- How Puccini uses both solo voices and the chorus to express the miners' individual sorrows as well as their shared experience

- (00:00) From outside the Polka Saloon, Jake Wallace can be heard singing the first verse of the song. You may notice that his voice is very faint: in order to approximate the sound of a voice filtering in through the saloon's open door, the performer is actually singing offstage!
- (00:47) Jake enters the saloon just as the first verse comes to a close. The bartender Nick introduces him as "the camp's resident singer." Why do you think Puccini and his librettists chose to describe Jake this way? (Hint: why might it be difficult in an opera to identify when the characters are supposed to be "singing" as opposed to simply "speaking"?)
- (01:01) The second verse begins. Now that Jake is inside the saloon (and on the stage), the song is much louder and stronger.
- (01:24) "How my mother will weep when she sees me," Jake sings. This sentiment is evidently shared by the miners, since the entire chorus (i.e., all the miners onstage) repeats this line.
- (01:38) As the miners continue singing together, the song becomes a communal expression of homesickness. Music has offered the rough-and-tumble miners a safe space to express their grief.
- (02:05) If you listen carefully, you can hear a male voice that stands out from the rest of the chorus. This is Jake Wallace. The chorus creates a musical community, yet it does not demand that everyone be exactly the same; rather, individual characters are still free to express their own feelings.
- (02:34) "Will my old dog recognize me after such a long time?" the miners wonder. This was the most iconic line of the song *Old Dog Tray*.
- (03:04) The libretto specifies that this brief solo (sung by the miner Harry) should sound "like a sob." How does the music reflect this?
- (03:28) As the song draws to a close, the chorus gets very soft and the orchestra drops out entirely. Do you think this *diminuendo* (decrease of volume) represents the physical distance of the miners' homes? Does it illustrate how memories fade over time? Do you think it represents something else?

"MR. JOHNSON, SIETE RIMASTO INDIETRO -- IO NON SONO CHE UNA POVERA FANCIULLA -- QUELLO CHE TACETE"

News arrives that the bandit Ramerrez is has been spotted near the Polka Saloon, and the miners rush out to apprehend him. This leaves Minnie alone with Dick Johnson (who, of course, is actually Ramerrez in disguise). The dashing young stranger expresses his admiration for Minnie, and she finds herself strangely drawn to him as well.

What to listen for:

- The "love theme": a melody used throughout the opera to signify Minnie and Johnson's love
- The contrast between the sung dialogue (which pushes the story forward) and the elaborate solo arias (which express emotion)

- (00:00) Minnie and Johnson find themselves alone, and neither is quite sure what to say. As they stare at each other, the orchestra plays a soaring melody: this is the opera's "love theme." Pay close attention to this theme so you can recognize it when it returns later in the excerpt; it may be useful to play it several times while your students hum along.
- (00:25) Minnie and Johnson begin to speak (and, perhaps, flirt a little). Behind their conversation, the orchestra repeats the love theme.
- (01:37) Minnie's dazzling high note is both difficult to sing and beautifully expressive. Opera composers often use high notes to draw attention to the most important word or idea in a scene, and this sparkling note accompanies Minnie's revelation that she is still waiting for the man to whom she will give her first kiss.
- (02:00) It may seem that Minnie and Johnson are simply exchanging pleasantries. From a dramatic perspective, however, this scene is extremely clever: read it carefully and you will notice that it prefigures what will happen in the next act. Over the course of the conversation, the two characters discuss Minnie's cabin in the mountain, the mystery surrounding "Johnson's" identity, and Minnie's surprise at her willingness to trust this strange new man.
- (03:12) Johnson, too, is surprised by the emotions he feels in Minnie's presence. Although his comment that "I don't know who I am when I'm with you" may sound silly, it reminds the audience that his friendship with Minnie is based on a false identity. The heavy drum beats at (03:18) add power and impetus to what is he saying: perhaps he'd rather stay with Minnie as "Johnson" than return to his lucrative life as the bandit Ramerrez?
- (04:19) The conversational nature of the scene gives way to an exquisite aria (a highly expressive solo song). Compare the long, sustained melodies of this aria to the shorter, simpler utterances of the preceding dialogue.
- (05:19) "I want to lift myself up ... to the level of the stars!" Minnie tells Johnson. Listen to how her melody rises consistently as she sings "su su su" ("up, up, up"). In other words, the music embodies what Minnie is saying (a technique known as "text painting"). Also notice the strumming harps in the orchestra, which sound like the harps of heaven, or the twinkling stars in the night sky.
- (05:40) Now it is Johnson's turn to sing an aria. Does the melody sound familiar? It is the "love theme" that the orchestra played at the beginning of the excerpt!
- (06:38) Minnie responds, and it seems that she and Johnson are about to launch into a romantic duet. Alas, their moment together is interrupted by Nick, who rushes into the Polka Saloon to announce that an unknown fellow is lurking around the camp. Minnie and Johnson will have to wait until Act II to finally profess their love.

"OH, STRANO-- UNA PARTITA A POKER"

Jack Rance suspects that Minnie is hiding the wounded bandit Ramerrez in her cabin. Although Ramerrez is, indeed, hiding in her attic, Minnie swears that she is harboring no one and demands that Rance leave her alone. As Rance turns to go, he notices a drip of blood coming from the ceiling--and instantly surmises where Ramerrez is hiding. The furious Rance threatens to kill Ramerrez then and there. But Minnie, who is desperate to save her beloved "Johnson," offers Rance a deal: a poker game in which the stakes are nothing less than Johnson's life... and her own.

This is one of the most thrilling moments in the whole opera. Since the relationship between music and onstage action is crucial to the effectiveness of the scene, the following descriptions include some of the stage directions from Puccini's score.

What to listen for:

- The use of "normal" speech, screams, and laughter (in addition to the singing used throughout the opera)
- Repeating motifs in the orchestra
- How abrupt musical changes and careful use of the orchestra enhance the drama and excitement of the scene

- (00:00) Jack is about to leave Minnie's house when he notices drops of blood falling from the ceiling. Minnie tries to explain the blood away ("I must have scratched you"), but Johnson quickly realizes that it is blood from the wounded Johnson.
- (00:35) Minnie is terrified, and the harsh music in the orchestra reflects her growing panic. Soon, her frantic song soon turns into a furious scream.
- (00:50) Listen to the sinister motif in the orchestra as Rance menaces the wounded Johnson: a plodding series of four descending notes.
- (01:53) Minnie looks up from the blood-soaked Johnson and stares straight into Rance's eyes. "I have an offer for you," she tells him, "let's solve this like the gamblers we are." The heavy drums, jagged melodies, and unpredictable rhythms in the orchestra reflect Minnie's frenzied attempt to get Rance's attention.
- (02:52) Minnie's voice (and the accompanying music) become cold and calculating as she lays out the terms of the deal: if Rance wins, he can have not only Johnson, but also Minnie. If, on the other hand, Minnie wins, Johnson is hers--and Rance must leave them alone forever. Listen to the orchestra, and you will hear the same four-note motif discussed above, now played by the oboe (the high-pitched, slightly nasal instrument).
- (03:54) Although Rance declares that he "knows how to lose like a gentleman" (and will thus respect the terms of the bet), his guttural growl and the thunderous drums on the words *t'avrò* ("You're mine!") betray a viciousness running just below the surface of his genteel, law-abiding façade.
- (04:25) The woodwinds play a new repeating motif as Minnie begins rummaging in an open drawer. "What are you doing?" Rance asks her. "I'm looking for a new deck of cards," she replies. When Rance looks away, Minnie quickly hides something in her sock.
- (05:24) Rance takes the deck of cards from Minnie and shuffles. They cut the deck to see who will deal first; the deal goes to Rance. The short wind motif continues in the orchestra. Although Minnie and Jack are technically still singing, the clipped rhythms and narrow melodic range make their dialogue sound relatively speech-like.
- (05:50) Turning his attention away from the cards, Rance asks Minnie what she sees in Johnson. In stark contrast to the dialogue that surrounds it, this emotional interjection features a lyrical solo accompanied by a yearning melody in the strings.
- (06:34) The speech-like singing and wind motif return as Minnie and Jack turn their attention back to the game.
- (06:53) Minnie deals the second hand. We might expect Puccini to indicate the game's increasing tension by making the orchestral accompaniment louder and more dramatic. Instead, the orchestra drops out entirely, and the only sounds we hear are the anxious words of the game (now literal speech--they are no longer singing) and an insistent beat in the orchestra. When they turn the cards over, Rance has two aces and a pair, while Minnie has nothing. Rance has won this hand, and he and Minnie are even. Everything depends on the final hand.
- (07:30) The third hand. Rance shuffles the cards and deals. In the orchestra, the drum continues beating like a terrified heart. Slowly, the accompaniment grows in density and volume.
- (08:20) Rance reveals his hand. "Look: two kings!" he declares. "I've WON!" Minnie looks like she will faint. "Help me!" she begs Jack. "Get me something to drink!" Jack goes to find the water jug, and when his back is turned Minnie grabs what is hidden in her sock: it is another hand of cards. She hurriedly hides the hand she was dealt and sits up, ready to finish the game. "I know why you feel faint," Rance says, handing her a glass of water. "It's because you've lost..."
- (08:58) But the game is not over. The drums sound again as Minnie turns over her cards: three aces and a pair. "No!" she cries. "It's because I've won!" The orchestra bursts into a triumphant melody (featuring the four-note motif from (00:00)) as Minnie erupts in hysterical gales of laughter. The curtain falls.

IN PREPARATION

For this activity, students will need the *My Highs & Lows* reproducible handout found in the back of this guide.

COMMON CORE STANDARDS AND LA FANCIULLA DEL WEST

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-12.1
Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-12.1d
Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task.

ENCOURAGING STUDENT RESPONSE IN ATTENDING THE FINAL DRESS REHEARSAL

Watching and listening to a performance is a unique experience that takes students beyond the printed page to an immersion in images, sound, interpretation, technology, drama, skill, and craft. Performance activities help students analyze different aspects of the experience and engage critically with the performance. They will consider the creative choices that have been made for the particular production they are watching and examine different aspects of the performance.

The Student Critique activity incorporates a reproducible sheet. Students should bring this activity sheet to the final dress rehearsal and fill it out during intermission and/or after the final curtain. The activity directs attention to details of the production that might otherwise go unnoticed.

The activity sheet is called *My Highs & Lows*. It serves to guide students toward a consistent set of objective observations, as well as to help them articulate their own opinions. It is designed to enrich the students' understanding of the art form as a whole. The ratings system encourages students to express their critique: use these ratings to spark discussions that require careful, critical thinking.

The *My Highs & Lows* handout can be found at the back of this guide.

FOLLOW-UP DISCUSSION

Start the class with an open discussion of the Met performance. What did students like? What didn't they? Did anything surprise them? What would they like to see or hear again? What would they have done differently? The discussion offers an opportunity to apply the notes on students' *My Highs & Lows* sheet, as well as their thoughts about the visual design of the Met production—in short, to see themselves as *La Fanciulla del West* experts.

The opera depicts several instances in which a character breaks the social or moral code, followed by the community responding with a desire for retribution. As can be a danger with large, passionate groups of people who are eager for vengeance, the miners react to the knowledge of some of these crimes by devolving into a mob and taking justice into their own hands. Even the sheriff Jack Rance behaves less than honorably on occasion, for instance when he shoots Dick Johnson on sight.

Ask students to look back from our understanding of the tenets of the contemporary American justice system—particularly as encoded in the Constitution and its Amendments—that are absent in the world of *La Fanciulla del West*. Which protections exist now that did not in the world of *La Fanciulla del West*? The following list of concepts may be helpful in guiding your discussion.

- The right to due process
- Innocence until proven guilty
- The right of the accused to a fair trial
- The right of the accused to be confronted by witnesses—i.e., the inadmissibility of hearsay
- The right of the accused to an impartial jury of his or her peers

How are these concepts ignored within the world of *La Fanciulla del West*? What type of justice exists in their absence? Is this type of justice fair?

Note that according to the opera's libretto, the action takes place in 1849, just prior to California's application to the U.S. Congress for statehood, and preceding the passage of the 14th Amendment by nearly 20 years. Thus, there was not yet any constitutional directive for the treatment of accused parties in the world of the opera. Frontier mining towns, especially shortly after their founding, were often dangerous and lawless places, with little to protect inhabitants from roving outlaws. As towns grew, so did the systems of law and justice.

Puccini's opera closes with a moving scene in which Minnie turns the hearts of the miners, one by one, away from blind vengeance. Here, Puccini explores a concept beyond the law or "justice," but of forgiveness. Ask students to consider the following questions.

- Does Johnson merit forgiveness? Does he merit punishment?
- Has justice been done for all parties harmed by Johnson?
- Has Johnson atoned for his crimes? Has he been punished or "served his time" for them?
- Consider the behavior of Jack Rance. Is he a just lawman, or corrupt? How should we treat crimes prosecuted by an immoral person?
- Is it right for Minnie and Johnson to go free? Is it right for them to leave the town?

As a wrap-up activity, you may wish to have students write a letter to the editor of a newspaper in a small California city before statehood. Students should take a position on the innocence or guilt of Dick Johnson and make an argument for how justice would have been better served through organized laws, courts, and the judicial system.

IN PRINT

Budden, Julian. *Puccini: His Life and Works*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Budden's biography includes lengthy chapters on each of Puccini's major operas. It is the most scholarly work on this list, but the writing is accessible and engaging, and Budden's book is well worth the effort for those who wish to delve more deeply into the composer's life and music.

Randall, Annie J. and Rosalind Gray Davis. *Puccini and the Girl: History and Reception of The Girl of the Golden West*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.

Based on an extensive study of archival materials at the Metropolitan Opera, this scholarly volume considers the production and reception of Puccini's opera.

Weaver, William. *Puccini: The Man and his Music*. New York: E. P. Dutton, in association with the Metropolitan Opera Guild, 1977.

An entertaining and insightful overview of Puccini's life and work, richly illustrated with numerous photographs and other relevant images.

ONLINE

The Metropolitan Opera. "La Fanciulla del West: Audio Slideshow." (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8GaWVbzZ0BQ>).
Deborah Voigt, who starred as Minnie in the 100th Anniversary production of Puccini's "La Fanciulla del West" at the Met, narrates a special slideshow of images from the opera.

WQXR. "The Horses of Puccini's La Fanciulla del West." (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Xq3MqM289o>).
An interview with All Tame Animals, the animal handlers for the Metropolitan Opera, discussing their work with the five horses featured in the production.

act/scene

Acts and scenes are ways of categorizing sections of operas. An act is a large-scale division of an opera, and each opera will typically include from two to five acts. Acts can be subdivided into scenes, which are often differentiated by a change in setting or characters.

adagio

Literally “at ease,” adagio is a tempo marking that indicates a slow speed. An adagio tempo marking indicates that the performer should play in a slow and leisurely style.

allegro

Italian for “cheerful” or “joyful,” Allegro is the most common tempo marking in Western music, indicating a moderately fast to quick speed.

aria

A song for solo voice accompanied by orchestra. In opera, arias mostly appear during a pause in dramatic action when a character is reflecting musically on his or her emotions. Most arias are lyrical, with a tune that can be hummed, and many arias include musical repetition. For example, the earliest arias in opera consist of music sung with different stanzas of text (strophic arias). Another type of aria, da capo arias, became common by the eighteenth century and feature the return of the opening music and text after a contrasting middle section. Nineteenth-century Italian arias often feature a two-part form that showcases an intensification of emotion from the first section (the cantabile) to the second section (the cabaletta).

articulation

The smoothness or hardness with which a note is begun and ended. Articulation is a way of indicating the degree to which each note connects to the next, and can be seen while watching the bow of a stringed instrument player. A note can be attacked sharply and made short, or it can flow smoothly into the next note.

baritone

Literally “deep sounding,” a baritone is what a typical male voice sounds like—the term refers to a male singer with a low but not extremely low vocal range. A baritone will sing notes that are higher than those sung by a bass and lower than those sung by a tenor. Uncommon until the nineteenth century, baritone roles have grown in popularity in opera since the works of Verdi, who often reserved the voice type for villains.

baroque

A period of music history lasting from approximately 1600 to 1750. The beginning of the Baroque period coincides with the invention of opera as a genre, and its end coincides with the death of the composer Johann Sebastian Bach. The Baroque period saw the rise of modern tonality, an expansion of performing forces, and increased ornamentation. The term “baroque” means bizarre or exaggerated, and was used by critics in the Eighteenth century critics who preferred a simpler and less-ornamented style.

bass

The lowest sounding line in music. Bass also refers to the lowest singing range for the male voice. Opera composers often choose a bass voice to sing one of two opposite types of roles: comic characters or dramatic and serious characters. For example, Mozart and Rossini wrote comic parts for bass voice, using musical repetition and low register for comic effect. Wagner and Mozart wrote serious parts for bass voice, focusing on the gravity that a low register can contribute to the overall musical texture.

bel canto

Referring to the Italian vocal style of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, bel canto singing emphasizes lyricism and ornamentation in order to showcase the beauty of the singer's voice. Its focus on lyrical embellishment directly contrasts with a contemporary Germanic focus on a weighty, dramatic style. Bel canto singing is most closely associated with the music of Gioachino Rossini, Vincenzo Bellini, and Gaetano Donizetti.

cadenza

An ornamented musical elaboration played in a free style by a soloist to display his or her virtuosity. Cadenzas are typically improvised—that is, created by a performer on the spot—though they can also be written out in advance. They most frequently occur near the end of a piece, at a point of harmonic tension when the piece is about to conclude.

chorus

A section of an opera in which a large group of singers performs together, typically with orchestral accompaniment. Most choruses include at least four different vocal lines, in registers from low to high, with multiple singers per part. The singers are typically from a particular group of people who play a certain role on stage—soldiers, peasants, prisoners, and so on. Choruses may offer a moral or commentary on the plot, or participate in the dramatic action.

Classical

A period of music history lasting from approximately 1750 to 1830, bordered by the earlier Baroque period and the later Romantic period. Contrasting with the ornamentation common to the preceding Baroque period, Classical music is characterized by simple and elegant melodies, regular harmonic accompaniment, and contrasts between melodic themes. The composers most closely associated with the Classical period include Joseph Haydn, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, and Ludwig van Beethoven.

coloratura

A rapid and elaborate ornamentation by a solo singer, particularly common in operas of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Requiring vocal agility and a wide and high range, coloratura showcases the virtuosity of a singer by featuring repeating melodic figures, rapid scales, trills, and other embellishments.

conductor

The person who directs the orchestra, setting the tempo, giving interpretive directions to the musicians, and generally holding all the musical elements of a performance together. In orchestra performance, the conductor typically stands on a podium in front of the players and uses a baton to communicate the meter and tempo, and his or her non-baton hand to indicate dynamics, phrasing, and articulation to the musicians. The gestures of a conductor can be likened to a non-verbal language that the musicians understand.

contralto

A deep female voice, with a vocal range that extends lower than that of a mezzo-soprano. Contraltos are known for having a very wide range and for the power and depth of sound with which they can sing. As is the case for roles for basses, many of the earliest roles in opera for contraltos are comic roles, though nineteenth-century composers also wrote dramatic roles for female singers with a lower range.

crescendo

A gradual raising of volume in music achieved by increasing the dynamic level. When music crescendos, the performers begin at a softer dynamic level and become incrementally louder. One of the most famous types of crescendos in opera, the Rossini crescendo, includes an increase in volume together with repeating melodic and rhythmic phrases, higher instrumental registers, and the gradual addition of instruments in order to create a particularly dramatic effect.

diminuendo

A gradual lowering of volume in music achieved by decreasing the dynamic level. During a diminuendo, the performers begin at a louder dynamic level and become incrementally softer.

dynamics

A musical trait pertaining to loudness and softness. During the eighteenth century, composers began indicating their desired intensity of volume in music by writing words such as piano (soft) and forte (loud) into the musical score. Dynamics encompass a spectrum from pianissimo (very soft) to piano (soft) to mezzo piano (moderately soft), all the way up to fortissimo (very loud). Music can shift to another dynamic level either suddenly or gradually, through a crescendo or diminuendo.

ensemble

A musical piece for two or more soloists, accompanied by orchestra. Types of ensembles include duets (for two soloists), trios (for three soloists), and quartets (for four soloists). Sometimes singers will respond directly to one another during an ensemble. At other times, singers will each sing to themselves as if the other singers were not on stage. In ensembles, multiple characters may simultaneously express very different emotions from one another.

finale

The last portion of an act, a finale consists of several musical sections that accompany an escalating dramatic tension. Finales frequently consist of multiple ensembles with different numbers of characters. When it occurs at the end of an early act in the opera, a finale may create a messy situation—and the resolution of this situation will only happen in subsequent acts. One type of finale common in comic operas, a chain finale, features characters entering or exiting from the stage to create unexpected combinations of characters, in turn increasing the opera's dramatic tension.

forte

Meaning "loud" or "strong" in Italian, forte is a dynamic level in music that indicates a loud volume. Adding the suffix "-issimo" to a word serves as an intensifier—since forte means "loud," fortissimo means "very loud."

harmony

The simultaneous sounding of pitches to produce chords, and the relationship between different chords as they succeed one another. Throughout much of Western music, systems of rules govern these progressions to help create our sense of musical tension, expectation, and conclusion. Tonal harmony is based on progressions of chords in relationship to a tonic (or home) key. In the 19th century, as composers sought novel sounds to reflect the originality of their invention, they began to employ chords and progressions of greater dissonance and greater distance from the home key. As such dissonances moved beyond mere sound effects into the musical structure itself, the traditional theory of tonal harmony began to become insufficient as a way to understand and describe musical structure.

intermission

A break between acts of an opera. At the beginning of an intermission, the curtain will fall (that is, close) on stage, and the lights in the auditorium, called the house lights, will become brighter. Intermissions provide audiences with a chance to walk around, talk with one another, and reflect on what they have seen and what could happen next. The break in the performance may also correspond with a change of time or scene in the story of the opera—the next act may take place hours or months later, or be set in a different location. Usually lights will dim and a bell may sound to indicate that the intermission is drawing to a close and the opera is about to resume.

legato

A type of articulation in which a melody is played with smooth connection between the notes. A legato passage does not include any pauses between notes or any accents at the beginnings of notes, as the notes blend into one another without a break. In contrast, a passage that is played staccato features notes played in a separated manner.

Leitmotif

From the German for “leading motive,” a leitmotif is a recurring musical idea, or motive, that represents a particular person, object, idea, emotion, or place. This musical idea is usually a few seconds in length and can occur in the music’s melody, harmony, rhythm, or a combination of the three. Leitmotifs are most closely associated with the operas of Richard Wagner, where they are used repeatedly throughout the opera to provide unity; they also less frequently appear in operas of other composers, including Giuseppe Verdi and Richard Strauss.

libretto

The text of an opera, including all the words that are said or sung by performers. Until the early eighteenth century, a composer would frequently set music to a pre-existing libretto, and any given libretto could thus be set to music multiple times by different composers. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, collaboration between the author of the libretto, known as the librettist, and the composer became more frequent. Some opera composers, most notably Richard Wagner, are known for writing their own text.

maestro

A title of respect used to address a conductor. The term is often applied to conductors with several decades of experience. However, performers often use this honorific when addressing the conductor.

melody

A succession of pitches that form an understandable unit. The melody of a piece consists of the tune that a listener can hum or sing. During arias, the singer will usually sing the main melody, though other instruments may play parts of the melody. Sometimes, such as during ensembles, multiple melodies can occur simultaneously.

mezzo-soprano

A female voice with a range between that of a contralto and soprano. A mezzo-soprano's voice is slightly deeper than that of a soprano, so mezzo-sopranos are often cast in supporting roles as older women, including nurses, confidantes, or maids.

opera buffa

A term applied to Italian comic operas from the mid-eighteenth through mid-nineteenth centuries. The plot of an opera buffa often features scenes and characters from everyday life and addresses a light or sentimental subject, concluding with a happy ending.

opera seria

An eighteenth- or nineteenth-century Italian opera employing a noble and serious style. The plot of an opera seria often upholds morality by presenting conflicting emotions such as love versus duty, or by modeling enlightened rulers.

operetta

Featuring spoken dialogue, songs, and dances, an operetta is a short theatrical piece. Shorter in duration than operas, operettas typically feature a light subject matter, incorporate melodies composed in a popular style, and feature spoken dialogue. Most popular from the mid-nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, the genre is the precursor of the American musical.

ornamentation

An embellishment to the melody, rhythm, or harmony of music, intended to make a melody more expressive or ornate. Ornamentation can be either indicated through symbols written into the music or improvised by the performer.

overture

An instrumental piece that occurs before the first act as an introduction to an opera. After the conductor enters the orchestra pit and takes a bow, the music for the overture begins. Most overtures are a few minutes in duration, and set the mood for the opera—even featuring musical themes that will occur later in the opera.

piano

Abbreviated p in a musical score, piano indicates a soft dynamic level. Musicians may achieve a piano sound by using less bow, less air, or less force. In opera, soft music will often correspond with emotions of sadness or moments in the plot when a character is reflecting on a course of action or emotional state. Pianissimo is “very soft,” and can be so quiet that an audience may need to listen carefully in order to discern its melody and harmony.

pitch

The quality of a musical sound corresponding to its perceived highness or lowness. Scientifically, pitch can be measured as the number of vibrations (or repetitions) of a sound wave per second, which is called its frequency. A sound with a low frequency, like a bass drum, will sound low and have a low pitch, while a sound with a high frequency, like a siren, will sound high.

prima donna

Meaning “first lady” in Italian, the prima donna is the leading female role in an opera. The term may apply to the role or to the singer herself, who usually sings in the soprano register and is the star of the show. Since the nineteenth century, the term has also been applied to a singer of any gender with a self-centered and demanding personality.

recitative

A type of vocal writing between speech and song that imitates the accents and inflections of natural speech. Composers often employ recitative for passages of text that involve quick dialogue and the advancement of plot, since the style allows singers to move rapidly through a large amount of text. Recitative may be accompanied either by keyboard or by the whole orchestra.

rhythm

Rhythm refers to the way music unfolds over time; it is a series of durations in a range from long to short. Along with pitch, it is a basic and indispensable parameter of music. Rhythm is perceived in relation to an underlying beat and within the context of a meter. Western musical notation indicates to the performer the exact duration of each note or rest.

Romantic

A period of music history lasting from approximately 1830 to 1900. Beginning in literature and later adopted by composers, romanticism reflected a newfound focus on individuality, nature, and emotional extremes. Music from the Romantic period often explores music’s redemptive power, focusing on the sublimity of nature, love, and the mysterious. Composers began to experiment with shortening and lengthening the standard forms and durations of musical works, and also added more expressive harmonies to convey the originality of their musical vision.

score

The complete musical notation for a piece, the score includes notated lines for all of the different instrumental and vocal parts that unite to constitute a musical composition. In an opera orchestra, the conductor follows the score during rehearsals and performances, while each performer follows his or her individual part.

Singspiel

Literally “sung play,” a Singspiel is an opera with spoken dialogue. Singspiels are typically in German and are from the Classical or early Romantic eras. The plot of a Singspiel is usually comic in nature, and its music may include songs, choruses, and instrumental numbers that are separated by spoken dialogue.

solo

A piece, musical passage, or line for a lone singer or other performer, with or without instrumental accompaniment. The most common type of solo in opera is the aria, which is composed for a single voice with orchestral accompaniment.

soprano

The highest singing range for the female voice. Roles composed for soprano singers are typically among the leading roles in the opera and require soprano singers to show off their virtuosic flexibility and range.

tempo

Literally “time” in Italian, tempo refers to the speed of a piece of music. Tempo is indicated in a score by a variety of conventional (often Italian) words—such as *allegro*, *adagio*, *vivace*, *moderato*, *grave*, and many more—that not only provide direction on the composer’s desired rate of speed, but also carry associations of gesture and character. For instance, *vivace* indicates not only a brisk speed but also a lively spirit. Additional tempo markings may indicate when a composer asks for a section of music to be sped up (such as “*accelerando*”) or slowed down (such as “*rallentando*”).

tenor

The highest natural male vocal range. By the nineteenth century, the tenor had become the most common vocal range for male leading roles in operas. Tenor roles often feature high-pitched notes for male voice in order to showcase the singer’s range and power. A related voice type is the countertenor, with a range above that of a tenor and similar to that of a contralto.

theme/motive

Themes are the melodic ideas that are musical building blocks for a piece. A theme is often recognizable as a distinct tune and may reappear in its original form or in altered form throughout the piece. A motif (or motive) is a brief musical idea that recurs throughout a musical work. Motives can be based on a melodic, rhythmic, or harmonic component, and their repetition makes them recognizable to the listener. In opera, musical motives are often symbolically associated with specific characters or dramatic ideas.

timbre

Pronounced TAM-bruh, a French word that means “sound color.” It refers to the complex combination of characteristics that give each instrument or voice its unique sound. Just as we can recognize each other by the differences in our speaking voices, operatic singing voices are distinguishable by their unique timbres. Listeners can also identify orchestral instruments by their timbre without being able to see them. The creative combination of different instrumental timbres is one of the artistic aspects of orchestration.

trill

A rapid alternation between two pitches that are adjacent to one another. Trills are a type of ornamentation, serving to embellish the melodic line, and appear regularly within *coloratura* passages. Trills also may appear near the end of a piece in order to prolong the musical tension before the music concludes.

verismo

A movement in Italian theater and opera in the late 19th century that embraced realism and explored areas of society previously ignored on the stage: the poor, the lower-class, and the criminal. Its characters are driven by passion to defy reason, morality, and the law. In order to reflect these emotional extremes, composers of verismo opera developed a musical style that communicates raw and unfiltered passions. Musically, verismo operas react against the forced ornamentation of the *bel canto* style and instead emphasize a more natural setting of the text to music. Before its exploration on the operatic stage, the verismo aesthetic first developed within the realm of literature.

LA FANCIULLA DEL WEST: MY HIGHS & LOWS

October 1, 2018

Conducted by Marco Armiliato

Reviewed by _____

THE STARS:	STAR POWER	MY COMMENTS
Eva-Maria Westbroek as Minnie	*****	
Yusif Eyvazov as Dick Johnson	*****	
Carlo Bosi as Nick	*****	
Željko Lučić as Jack Rance	*****	
Michael Todd Simpson as Sonora	*****	
Matthew Rose as Ashby	*****	

THE SHOW, SCENE BY SCENE	ACTION	MUSIC	SET DESIGN/STAGING
Quiet Time in the Polka Saloon			
My opinion of this scene:	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
The Miners Arrive			
My opinion of this scene:	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
The Ballad Singer			
My opinion of this scene:	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
Fighting over Minnie			
My opinion of this scene:	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
Minnie's Entrance			
My opinion of this scene:	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
The Bible Lesson			
My opinion of this scene:	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
Minnie Scolds Billy			
My opinion of this scene:	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5

THE SHOW, SCENE BY SCENE	ACTION	MUSIC	SET DESIGN/STAGING
A Stranger Appears			
My opinion of this scene:	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
Johnson and Minnie Dance			
My opinion of this scene:	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
At Minnie's Mountain Cabin			
My opinion of this scene:	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
Minnie Learns the Truth			
My opinion of this scene:	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
Minnie Throws Johnson Out			
My opinion of this scene:	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
Minnie Hides Johnson			
My opinion of this scene:	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
The Poker Game			
My opinion of this scene:	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
The Hanging Party			
My opinion of this scene:	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
Minnie to the Rescue			
My opinion of this scene:	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5