INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

ProQuest Information and Learning
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA
800-521-0600



Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

NOTE TO USERS

Copyrighted materials in this document have not been filmed at the request of the author. They are available for consultation at the author's university library.

Page 28
Photo of James VanDerZee

This reproduction is the best copy available.

UMI

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

AMERICAN OPERA AT THE METROPOLITAN, 1910-1935

A CONTEXTUAL HISTORY AND CRITICAL SURVEY OF SELECTED WORKS

by

CAROLYN GUZSKI

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Music
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2001

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

UMI Number: 3008833

Copyright 2001 by
Guzski, Carolyn

All rights reserved.

UMI®

UMI Microform 3008833
Copyright 2001 by Bell & Howell Information and Learning Company.
All rights reserved. This microform edition is protected against
unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.

Bell & Howell Information and Learning Company
300 North Zeeb Road
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

© 2001

CAROLYN GUZSKI

All Rights Reserved

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Music in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

26 April 2001
Date

Barbara R. Hanning
Chair of Examining Committee

April 30, 2001
Date

Allan W. Atlas (pp)
Executive Officer

John M. Graziano
Ora Frishberg Saloman
Ellie M. Hisama
L. Poundie Burstein
Barbara Hanning
Karen Ahlquist

Supervisory Committee

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Abstract

AMERICAN OPERA AT THE METROPOLITAN, 1910-1935

A CONTEXTUAL HISTORY AND CRITICAL SURVEY OF SELECTED WORKS

by

CAROLYN GUZSKI

Advisor: Professor John M. Graziano

This study examines the early twentieth-century efforts of New York's Metropolitan Opera to introduce works by American composers into its repertoire. The purpose is to realign long-held misperceptions concerning the Metropolitan's contribution to the advancement of an indigenous lyric drama in the United States.

Under the aegis of Giulio Gatti-Casazza, the theater's general manager, and Otto H. Kahn, the chairman of its board of directors, the Metropolitan produced fourteen American operas during the quarter century from 1910 to 1935 that encompass an impressive range of styles and reflect widely divergent points of view with respect to the development of opera composition in America. The initiative resulted from a unique confluence of historical trends and events. Among them were America's emerging world position, the expanding role played by the media and public opinion in national cultural developments, and a significant change in the management structure of the theater itself. This last factor was crucial in the ascendance of Kahn, a Wall Street banker and arts patron, to the position of chairman of the Metropolitan's newly created

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

production company board, an influential post from which he acted as the prime catalyst of the new American events.

Chapters 1-3 investigate historical factors that influenced the initiative: the sporadic course of opera in English dating from early seventeenth-century London; opera's importation to America and the legacy of European hegemony in the genre that affected the early artistic course of the Metropolitan; and the implementation of a progressive new management at the theater during the first decade of the twentieth century. Chapters 4 and 5 summarize the first phase of the Metropolitan's American efforts from 1910-1920, during which nine operas by an eclectic group of composers were produced with varied results. Chapters 6-8 describe the emergence of a second, mature phase from 1927-1935, during which the concept of commissioning new operas was introduced. A detailed discussion is provided of the genesis, production, and reception of four major works that resulted from the new policy: Deems Taylor's The King's Henchman (1927) and Peter Ibbetson (1931); Louis Gruenberg's The Emperor Jones (1933); and Howard Hanson's Merry Mount (1934).

The concluding chapter summarizes the Metropolitan's accomplishments as well as its continuing efforts in the field, and addresses the continuing challenges to opera in contemporary America.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is a pleasure to thank the many persons who assisted me in the preparation of this dissertation. Professor John M. Graziano, who supervised the study from its inception, provided a constant stream of information and generated a wealth of ideas, particularly with respect to the analysis sections. I benefitted greatly from the generosity of my two readers, Professor Ora Frishberg Saloman and Professor Ellie M. Hisama, whose thoughts and suggestions substantially enhanced numerous points of inquiry. I extend heartfelt thanks to Professors Barbara Hanning, L. Poundie Burstein, and Karen Ahlquist for their meticulous review of the final manuscript and the many valuable clarifications and corrections that resulted.

I am grateful to The City University of New York for extending me a Graduate Teaching Fellowship for the period in which this dissertation was written, and to Professor Rufus Hallmark of the Aaron Copland School of Music at Queens College for his encouragement during that time. I also extend my appreciation to Professor Allan W. Atlas, Executive Officer of the Ph.D.-D.M.A. Program in Music, for his fine leadership and support throughout my graduate studies and to his assistant, Peg Rivers, whose efficient and comprehensive assistance was invaluable.

This study could never have been attempted without access to the collections of several outstanding research libraries and archives. I am grateful to Robert Tuggle, Archivist at the Metropolitan Opera, for his interest in the project and John Pennino, Assistant Archivist, for his assistance and advice throughout many months of research. At the Princeton University Library's Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, the efficiency of Archivist Margaret M. Sherry facilitated the

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

arduous investigation of the Otto Kahn Papers; and Richard Boursy, Archivist at the Yale University Music Library, provided invaluable knowledge and support. I extend thanks as well to David Peter Coppen, Mary Davidson, and Esther Gillie of the Sibley Music Library at the Eastman School of Music and to George Boswick of The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

Finally, I express my appreciation to several persons and institutions who generously shared knowledge and information on specific topics: James Pegolotti; John Yohalem; William Pickens of the Paul Robeson Foundation; the staff of Golden Library at Eastern New Mexico University; the University of Texas at Austin; the American Antiquarian Society; and the staff and student assistants of the Hunter College Library.

Manuscript and photographic acknowledgments and permissions

All Metropolitan Opera materials used by permission of the Metropolitan Opera Archives; Otto Kahn Papers by permission of the Princeton University Library.

Reproductions from the scores of *The King's Henchman, Peter Ibbetson,* and *Merry Mount* by permission of Warner Bros. Publications U.S., Inc. *The Emperor Jones,* words and music by Louis Gruenberg, copyright ©1932 (renewed) by The Joan Cominos Trust. International Copyright Secured. All Rights Reserved. Reproduced by permission of G. Schirmer, Inc. (ASCAP).

Page 21: Gerald Murphy, *Cocktail,* courtesy Whitney Museum of American Art; Thérèse Bonney photograph, courtesy Yale University, reproduced by permission of Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley; *Transatlantique* production photograph, courtesy of Music Division, Library of Congress, reproduced by permission of Estate of George Antheil.

Page 28: James VanDerZee, *Marcus Garvey In Regalia,* ©Donna VanDerZee, reproduced by permission; photograph of Paul Robeson by permission of the Billy Rose Theatre Collection, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts; *Jonny spielt auf* production photograph by permission of the Metropolitan Opera Archives.

Page 88: Guy Pène du Bois, *Opera Box* by permission of the Whitney Museum of American Art.

Page 286: Edward Curtis, *Canyon de Chelly,* courtesy Whitney Museum of American Art, reproduced by permission of Christopher Cardozo; photograph of Ted Shawn by permission of the Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts; *Shanewis* production photograph by permission of the Metropolitan Opera Archives.

Page 439: *The Emperor Jones* film still by permission of Paul Robeson, Jr.; photograph of Lawrence Tibbett by permission of the Metropolitan Opera Archives.

Page 446: Soichi Sunami photograph by permission of the Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts; *Merry Mount* production photograph by permission of the Metropolitan Opera Archives.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	vi-vii
List of Charts	x
List of Illustrations	x
INTRODUCTION	
The Metropolitan and American Opera	1
Contextual Issues: Institutional, Economic, Political	7
Significance	12
The Metropolitan at the End of the Great Tradition	14
Chapter 1: American Opera Before the Metropolitan	36
The *stile recitativo* in England	36
The Emergence of Purcell	42
The Italian Conquest of London and the Rise of Ballad Opera	44
Ballad Opera in America and the First Italian Imports	48
Nineteenth-Century American Operatic Efforts	53
The First American Opera Composers	58
The Late Nineteenth-Century Surge in American Opera Composition	69
Dvořàk's Sojourn in America	76
Chapter 2: The Methods of the Metropolitan	87
The First Regime: Henry E. Abbey (1883-1884)	94
Leopold Damrosch (1884-1885)	96
Edmund C. Stanton (1885-1891)	97
Henry E. Abbey, Maurice Grau and John B. Schoeffel (1891-1897)	99
Maurice Grau (1898-1903)	104
Winds of Change: The Conried Metropolitan Opera Company (1903-1908)	108
The Advent of Otto Kahn	120
The New Management and John Knowles Paine's Azara	126
The Demise of the Conried Regime	140
Chapter 3: Gatti-Casazza and the New Metropolitan Management	146
The Metropolitan's First Opera Professional	153
The Metropolitan Opera Company's New Fiscal Policies	162
The American Opera Prize Competition	171
The Question of American Bias	180
American Singers at the Metropolitan	187
The Strange Case of Marion Talley	194

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Chapter 4: The Metropolitan and Musical Style, Part I: 1910-1914 201
The First Phase of the New American Initiative 201
Frederick Shepherd Converse: The Pipe of Desire 203
Early Effects of the Metropolitan's American Initiative 215
Horatio Parker: Mona 220
Walter Damrosch: Cyrano 230
Victor Herbert: Madeleine 240

Chapter 5: The Metropolitan and Musical Style, Part II: 1915-1920 256
Reginald De Koven: The Canterbury Pilgrims 257
Charles Wakefield Cadman: Shanewis 273
Joseph Carl Breil: The Legend 290
John Adam Hugo: The Temple Dancer 302
Henry Hadley: Cleopatra's Night 309

Chapter 6: An American Extension of the Great Tradition: Deems Taylor's The King's Henchman (1927) and Peter Ibbetson (1931) 329

Chapter 7: An American Expressionist Monodrama: Louis Gruenberg's The Emperor Jones (1933) 391

Chapter 8: American Nationalism: Howard Hanson's Merry Mount (1934) 443

CONCLUSION: An American Operatic Patrimony? 498

BIBLIOGRAPHY 515

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

LIST OF CHARTS

Chart I.1	Metropolitan Opera American Productions Under Giulio Gatti-Casazza, 1910-1935	2
Chart 3.1	Chronological List of Prominent American Singers at the Metropolitan Under Giulio Gatti-Casazza, 1908-1935	189-91
Chart 5.1	American Opera in New York and Chicago: 1907-1927	316

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure I.1	Expatriate Influences	21
Figure I.2	Changing Dynamics in 1920s Race Relations	28
Figure 2.1	Guy Pène du Bois, *Opera Box*	88
Figure 3.1	Competition for the New York Opera Market	151
Figure 5.1	The Indianist Movement	286
Figure 7.1	The Emperor Jones	439
Figure 8.1	Nationalist Themes in American Art	446

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

INTRODUCTION

THE METROPOLITAN AND AMERICAN OPERA

New York City's Metropolitan Opera has long conveyed the image of a monolithic institution solely—even myopically—dedicated to the preservation of the Great Tradition in opera, and throughout its history critics have referred to the house as a veritable "musical museum." It thus comes as a considerable surprise to many to learn that the Metropolitan supported an ambitious initiative to produce American operas dating from the inception of its production company in 1908, and that the program was successfully maintained for nearly thirty years, chiefly under the direction of Giulio Gatti-Casazza (General Manager, 1908-1935).[1] The Metropolitan premiered fourteen American productions during the Gatti-Casazza period that encompass an impressive range of styles and reflect widely divergent points of view with respect to the development of opera composition in America. Chart I.1 contains a comprehensive listing of the operas produced from 1910 to 1935, together with their composers, librettists, premiere dates, and performance information.[2]

---

1 Previous to Gatti-Casazza's tenure, the Metropolitan did not maintain its own producing organization. Rather, the house was leased to independent theatrical entrepreneurs who presented operatic seasons: Henry Abbey (1883-1884); Leopold Damrosch (1884-1885); Edmond C. Stanton (1885-1891); Abbey, John B. Schoeffel, and Maurice Grau (1891-1897); Grau alone (1898-1903); and Heinrich Conried (1903-1908).

2 The information given in The New Grove Dictionary of American Music, which states, "Under Gatti-Casazza . . . 17 new American operas were presented, 11 of them full-length productions, as well as several ballets with scores by Americans," is in error. H. Wiley Hitchcock and Stanley Sadie, editors, The New Grove Dictionary of American Music (hereafter, "Amerigrove") (London: Macmillan Press Limited, 1986), s.v. *Opera, § 4*, by Maria F. Rich, Victor Fell Yellin, and H. Wiley Hitchcock. In fact, two of the operas listed therein were not Metropolitan Opera Company productions: Victor Herbert's Natoma was rejected by Gatti and subsequently presented at the Metropolitan Opera House by the Philadelphia-Chicago Grand Opera Company on 28 February and 7 March 1911; and Henry Hadley's Azora has no Metropolitan connection, having received its only New York performance on 26 January 1918 at the Lexington Theatre under the auspices of the

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

CHART I.1

METROPOLITAN OPERA AMERICAN PRODUCTIONS
UNDER GIULIO GATTI-CASAZZA, 1910-1935

OPERA	COMPOSER/LIBRETTIST	PREMIERE/ PERFORMANCES
The Pipe of Desire, op. 21 (1 act, 1905)	Frederick Converse/George Edward Barton (after his play)	18 March 1910 1 season/3 performances
Mona, op. 71 (1910)	Horatio Parker/ Brian Hooker	14 March 1912 1 season/4 performances
Cyrano (ca. 1902-12)	Walter Damrosch/W. J. Henderson (after Edmond Rostand's 1897 play)	27 February 1913 1 season/6 performances
Madeleine (1 act, 1913)	Victor Herbert/Grant Stewart (after French play *Je dîne chez ma mère* of Decourcelle and Thiboust)	24 January 1914 1 season/6 performances
The Canterbury Pilgrims (1916)	Reginald De Koven/Percy W. Mackaye (after Chaucer)	8 March 1917 1 season/7 performances
Shanewis (1 act, 1917)	Charles Wakefield Cadman/ Nelle Richmond Eberhardt	23 March 1918 2 seasons/8 performances
The Legend (1 act, 1917)	Joseph Carl Breil/ Jacques Byrne	12 March 1919 1 season/3 performances
The Temple Dancer, op. 37 (1 act)	John Adam Hugo/ Jutta Bell-Ranske	12 March 1919 1 season, 3 performances
Cleopatra's Night, op. 90 (1918)	Henry Kimball Hadley/Alice Leal Pollock (after Théophile Gautier's story *Une nuit de Cléopâtre*)	31 January 1920 2 seasons/9 performances
The King's Henchman, op. 19 (1926)	Joseph Deems Taylor/ Edna St. Vincent Millay	17 February 1927 3 seasons/17 performances
Peter Ibbetson, op. 20 (1930)	Joseph Deems Taylor/Taylor and Constance Collier (after Gerald Du Maurier's 1891 novel)	7 February 1931 (Radio broadcasts 1932, 1934) 4 seasons/22 performances
The Emperor Jones, op. 36 (1931)	Louis Gruenberg/Gruenberg (after Eugene O'Neill's 1920 play)	7 January 1933 (Broadcast) 2 seasons/15 performances
Merry Mount (1933)	Howard Hanson/Richard Stokes (after Nathaniel Hawthorne's story *The Maypole of Merry Mount*)	10 February 1934 (Broadcast) 1 season/9 performances
In the Pasha's Garden (1 act)	John L. Seymour/Henry C. Tracy (after H.G. Dwight's Stamboul Nights)	24 January 1935 1 season/3 performances

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The new American initiative resulted from a unique confluence of historical trends and events during the first decade of the twentieth century. These included America's emerging world position, the expanding role played by the media and public opinion in national cultural developments (a phenomenon that directly affected artistic policy at the Metropolitan), and a significant change in the management structure of the theater itself. This last factor was crucial in the ascendance of Otto H. Kahn, a Wall Street banker and arts patron, to the position of chairman of the theater's newly-created production company board. It was from this influential post that Kahn acted as the prime catalyst of the new American events.

Although none of the American operas premiered under the aegis of Gatti and Kahn ultimately entered the permanent repertory of the Metropolitan, the program can hardly be adjudged a failure on this criterion alone. The productions were the subject of copious and wide-ranging coverage and criticism in the New York press, and their reception history indicates that public reaction to most of the operas was enthusiastic. Several of the works received performances by other producing organizations across the country and, in a very few cases, abroad. The operas which are the particular focus of this study have enjoyed a number of revivals over the decades, extending in some instances up to the present.

As the United States's leading operatic institution, its only truly international house and the only one to offer radio broadcasts of its productions (dating from 1931), the Metropolitan was able to exert a significant influence over the genre, and its imprimatur on the efforts of Americans to compose dramatic works represented the first sustained institutional

---

Chicago Opera Association. The inclusion of an American ballet produced by the Metropolitan, Henry F. Gilbert's The Dance in Place Congo (1918), among the opera listings accounts for the third erroneous addition. Only two, and not "several," American ballet scores were heard at the Metropolitan during the Gatti regime (the other was John Alden Carpenter's 1926 Skyscrapers). Finally, only six of Gatti's American operas were full-length productions—that is, offered as the sole repertoire of the evening—not eleven as stated in Amerigrove.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

support American opera had yet experienced. The notable appearance of similar efforts by other companies—most importantly, the Chicago Opera—in the wake of the Metropolitan's program was only one result; even after the house began to diminish its commitment to American opera after Gatti's departure in 1935, the spirit of the initiative continued to be felt in a tremendous burgeoning of "native" opera elsewhere in succeeding decades. The City Center Opera Company, a precursor of the New York City Opera that was formed under Laszlo Halasz in 1944, picked up where the Metropolitan had left off and by the mid-1980s had presented more than fifty American works. Events then came full circle at the Metropolitan, when plans for its 1983 centenary celebration resulted in the revival of the long-defunct American program with the awarding of commissions to composers Jacob Druckman and John Corigliano. Druckman's planned opera after the Medea legend was cancelled by the theater's management in 1986,[3] but Corigliano's The Ghosts of Versailles, the first new American work produced by the house in nearly a quarter century, enjoyed a successful premiere in 1991.[4] This was followed by a new Philip Glass opera, The Voyage (1992), commissioned for the Columbus quincentenary, and the

---

[3] The Metropolitan was able to terminate its 1981 contract with Druckman when the composer failed to deliver the completed opera by the stipulated date of January 1986 (extended from an original deadline of January 1985). K. Robert Schwarz, *The Met Proposes . . . and Disposes,* New York Times, 2 August 1992, sec. 2, 1. Subsequent plans for the work's premiere by the Bonn Opera during the 1996-1997 season were also suspended. Druckman died in May 1996, and the opera remains unperformed.

[4] The previous American premiere at the theater had been Martin David Levy's Mourning Becomes Electra on 17 March 1967. Corigliano was initially approached about his commission in 1979, twelve years after the Levy premiere. William M. Hoffman, *Confessions of a Librettist,* Opera News 59 (15 April 1995): 8.

Two classic American operas were heard in the interim between the Levy and Corigliano premieres: Virgil Thomson's Four Saints in Three Acts received its first Metropolitan-sponsored production forty years after its world premiere when it was presented under the auspices of the short-lived Mini-Met at Lincoln Center's Forum Theater in 1973; and the 1985 Metropolitan premiere of George Gershwin's Porgy and Bess celebrated that opera's fiftieth anniversary.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

awarding of commissions to John Harbison (The Great Gatsby, 1999), Tan Dun, and Tobias Picker to extend the program into the new millennium.

Recognition of the Metropolitan's early twentieth-century contribution to an American musical patrimony, thrown into relief by the post-Depression policies of Gatti's successor, Edward Johnson, was noted by Olin Downes of the New York Times: "Of course the Metropolitan has never done for American opera . . . what it did during Gatti-Casazza's regime. That is to be realized today if only in order to assess the present state of affairs with some degree of proportion."[5] The concurrent spectacular rise of several American singers during the Gatti period—a result of policy, not coincidence—was also cited by the Metropolitan in response to frequent nationalist attacks on its artists and repertoire rosters, and its contribution in this area was even confirmed by an avowed enemy, music critic Irving Kolodin:

> One contention frequently directed against Gatti must be refuted. The American singer was rarely at a loss for a hearing and, if ability warranted, an engagement. . . . Mention has been made of a number of Americans who only reached the Metropolitan after rather weary demonstration of their abilities elsewhere—John Charles Thomas, [Richard] Crooks, [Richard] Bonelli, and others. The number of these was no greater than the number of foreign artists whose engagement was similarly tardy or never consummated.[6]

---

[5] Downes, *The Future of Opera in America*, New York Times, 24 May 1942, sec. 8, 7 (reviewing Metropolitan stage director Herbert Graf's book The Opera and Its Future in America). Ironically, the most influential of the American productions were given by Gatti during the Depression years, when the Metropolitan was forced to operate under severe financial constraints.

[6] Kolodin, The Story of the Metropolitan Opera, 1883-1950: A Candid History (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953), 455. For example, Gatti deliberately delayed the debut of Giacomo Lauri-Volpi during the 1920s, even though the Italian tenor had achieved sensational success in Europe and was badly needed in the wake of Caruso's untimely death in 1921: "It would not have been advisable to have him come for this season because his repertoire is still very limited and he still needs to perfect himself. By perfecting himself, completing his repertoire and eliminating certain defects, he will be able to succeed very well at the Metropolitan." Giulio Gatti-Casazza, Venice, to Otto H. Kahn, 7 August 1921. Otto H. Kahn Papers (hereafter, "Kahn Papers"), Box 158, Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Yet the perception remains that the Metropolitan under European management was inimical to American artists.[7]

A comprehensive study of all fourteen American operas presented by the Gatti-Casazza management would encompass a scope far too broad for one dissertation. Thus, in accordance with criteria described more specifically below, I have delineated two distinct phases of the American program: the initial decade spanning the period 1910-1920, during which a diverse sampling of works by an eclectic group of composers was produced; and a second, mature period from 1927-1935, in which the concept of commissioning new operas was introduced. My intention in this dissertation is to provide commentary on the historical factors that gave rise to the conception of the American initiative as well as an overview of the nine operas produced during its first phase (1910-1920), followed by a closer study of the second phase (1927-1935) that includes a detailed examination of the major works produced during those years: Deems Taylor's The King's Henchman (1927) and Peter Ibbetson (1931); Louis Gruenberg's The Emperor Jones (1933); and Howard Hanson's Merry Mount (1934).[8]

The more intensive focus on the latter period is meaningful for several reasons. First, 1927 marks the beginning of a discrete second stage in the Metropolitan's approach. Seven years had elapsed between the previous American production (Henry Hadley's Cleopatra's Night, 31 January 1920) and the highly successful premiere of The King's Henchman (17 February 1927), during which the management searched for a new composer, awarded

---

7 The Edward Johnson management (1935-1950) nevertheless is rightly credited with encouraging the development of numerous important native-born singers. Admittedly, Johnson (a Canadian who became a naturalized American citizen) was forced by World War II to rely more heavily on Americans than any other management before or since.

8 The final American opera of the Gatti-Casazza period, John Laurence Seymour's In the Pasha's Garden, was a minor one-act work that will not be included in the detailed discussion of the second phase operas. See Conclusion, *n*6 for summary of production information.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Taylor a commission, and then waited for him to complete his work. The fact that Taylor's was the first opera ever to be actually commissioned from an American composer—or indeed any composer—by the house up to that time is indicative of this decisive shift in strategy.[9] Second, critical reception confirmed that the new phase ushered in a definite advance in artistic development, particularly with respect to dramaturgy, from the initial decade of the initiative.[10] The three operas that followed The King's Henchman were by far the most successful of all the productions and resulted in the unprecedented distinction of an opening night performance for an American composer when Taylor's Peter Ibbetson inaugurated the Metropolitan's fiftieth anniversary season on 26 December 1933. Finally, these later works are among the very few American operas of the period to have received periodic revivals throughout the century, most recently by the Seattle Symphony, which presented both Peter Ibbetson and Howard Hanson's Merry Mount in concert form during the late 1990s.

Contextual Issues: Institutional, Economic, Political

Apart from the performance and reception history of this music, there exists a complex web of institutional, economic, and political issues with which the entire American program is intertwined. Although such considerations have always played a part in theatrical

---

[9] However Gatti, at the inception of his tenure in 1908 and in direct response to potentially ruinous competition from Oscar Hammerstein's Manhattan Opera House, purchased exclusive rights on behalf of the Metropolitan to several projected works: Gustave Charpentier's Julien (a sequel to Louise); Debussy's The Legend of Tristan, The Devil in the Belfry and The Fall of the House of Usher (despite the composer's prescient caveat that none was ever likely to be realized), and Puccini's La Fanciulla del West, which became the Metropolitan's first world premiere. Giulio Gatti-Casazza, Memories of the Opera (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons Inc., 1941; repr., London: John Calder Ltd., 1977), 156-58 (page numbers refer to reprint edition). The Metropolitan's sponsorship of an American opera competition in 1908 may be considered a commissioning project as well, although the prize might have been withheld if no entry had satisfied the jury's standards (a 1912 production was awarded to Horatio Parker's Mona).

[10] The earlier phase is the subject of the only scholarly study to examine American opera during Gatti's tenure: James William Glass, *American Opera at the Metropolitan, 1910-1920* (M.M. thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 1971).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

management, they were particularly prominent at the Metropolitan during the 1920s, when the concept of nationalism had great currency in the United States and thus constituted an intriguing subtext to what was presented to the public as a purely artistic undertaking. Topics such as the number of American singers and composers represented on the house's roster, as well as frequent opera-in-English crusades directed at its administration, became loaded with political import. These will be examined with respect to the Metropolitan's initial decision—and possible motivations behind that decision—to produce dramatic works of American composers, as well as to the prior "non-American" history of the institution, for the policies of the pre-Gatti period were those that encouraged pandemic charges of the theater's indifference to American talent.

Operatic developments outside the fishbowl of the Met, despite its internationally acknowledged supremacy, also had considerable bearing on its policies. There is substantial evidence, for example, that competition with other lyric theaters was an ever-present concern to the Metropolitan's management. Competition was particularly intense in the area of singers (the supply of truly great artists being exceedingly small in every era), but it was also a decided point of concern with respect to new repertoire items, at that time termed "novelties," especially when the flamboyant impresario Oscar Hammerstein openly challenged the Metropolitan from 1906 to 1910 with his Manhattan Opera House. The end of the Great Tradition having been fixed only in hindsight, audiences of the early decades of the twentieth century carried with them nineteenth-century expectations of newly composed repertoire which presenters were at some pains to satisfy. Indeed, at the onset of the twentieth century, when the new American initiative was in its planning stages, the canon was most definitely not complete, as two of its most important contributors—Giacomo Puccini and Richard Strauss—were arguably at the height of their powers. Such competition from two experienced men of the theater, together with the long

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

shadow cast by Wagner, provoked widely varying responses from American composers which reflected a broad range of the compositional spectrum.

Consideration of which American works were produced vis-à-vis those that were not invites a further line of inquiry, for an artistic agenda—if indeed one is present—may often be more clearly divined from the works an institution declines to present rather than those that it does. Therefore, this study will also examine early twentieth-century works that were declined production by the Metropolitan and either never given or premiered elsewhere. The two most significant American examples are no doubt Virgil Thomson's Four Saints in Three Acts (1928; premiered 1934) and George Gershwin's Porgy and Bess (1935), although the Metropolitan was not the only lyric theater to ignore them. The fact that both were performed with casts composed exclusively of black artists recalls the Metropolitan's unwritten but de facto racial barriers then in effect and the degree to which they may have been ripe for repeal, or at least erosion. The house produced Ernst Krenek's European sensation Jonny spielt auf in 1929 with its title role of a black jazz-band leader redefined as a white performer in blackface, but the unorthodox opera may have paved the way for Gruenberg's The Emperor Jones. There, the title role was still assigned to a white performer, but a black dancer (Hemsley Winfield as the Congo Witch Doctor) became the first soloist of color on the Metropolitan's stage.

Radical developments in European opera composition comprise an additional basis for comparison when assessing the selection of American repertoire. When Gatti asserted in 1933 that Pelléas et Mélisande was thus far the century's most original masterpiece, being "the only case . . . of an opera without true melody which, nevertheless, interests from beginning to end,"[11] he offered some insight into why the house passed on Wozzeck, although Berg's opera

---

[11] Gatti-Casazza, Memories of the Opera, 142.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

was compared favorably to Debussy's shortly after its 1925 Berlin premiere.[12] But Gatti's alleged shunning of contemporary composers as a group is a myth which can be dispelled by statistics. Gatti's securing of Puccini's La Fanciulla del West in 1910 represented the first time the Metropolitan gave the world premiere of any opera, even though it had been in existence for twenty-seven years. Moreover, 21 out of 27 (or 78%) of the house's world premieres up to 1985 were arranged by the Gatti management, as well as 54 out of 92 (59%) of the United States premieres.[13] Clearly, the American initiative was part of an overarching scheme to present new repertoire. Moreover, the growing incidence of contemporary realism in libretti—long termed anathema at the tradition-bound house—was in fact supported by the chairman of its board of directors, Otto Kahn, the principal force behind the American program. Indeed, a statement Kahn issued on behalf of the company in 1925 included a call for *increased* realism in American operatic dramaturgy.[14]

Rather than focusing on the Metropolitan management's subjective opinion of modernist works, however, more attention should be accorded to conductor Erich Kleiber's scheduling of over one hundred rehearsals to prepare the world premiere of Wozzeck at the Berlin Staatsoper, a state-supported institution.[15] The necessity for the lengthy and expensive preparation of many twentieth-century works opens the long-running dispute over government

---

12 "Wozzeck is undoubtedly the most remarkable attempt in the field of opera since Debussy's Pelléas et Mélisande, with which it has certain features in common." Adolph Weissmann, *Unexpected Developments in Germany*, Modern Music 3 (March-April 1926): 37.

13 These figures include both European and American works. Gerald Fitzgerald, ed., Annals of the Metropolitan Opera: The Complete Chronicle of Performances and Artists (New York: Metropolitan Opera Guild and Boston: G. K. Hall, 1989), *Tables*, 287-88.

14 *The Metropolitan Opera: A Statement by Otto H. Kahn* (New York: Metropolitan Opera Company, 15 October 1925), 22-23.

15 Paul Stefan, *Wozzeck, An Atonal Opera*, Modern Music 3 (March-April 1926): 39.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

arts subsidies in the United States, which were virtually non-existent until the formation of the National Endowment for the Arts in 1965. When Livingston Biddle, a former NEA chairman who drafted the original legislation establishing the Endowment declared, "The United States was the last of the so-called great civilized nations to establish a governmental program to assist in cultural progress,"[16] he echoed Gatti's words of 1925:

> When one considers that in Italy which comparatively to America is a very poor Country, the Scala theatre receives a subsidy of several million Lire made up by a surtax paid by patrons of all shows irrespectively: operas, operettas, vaudeville, cabarets, moving pictures, horse races, etc., one has reason to feel a sense of envy. . . . I am sure that you will not feel annoyed and may even share my sentiments if I exclaim here "Evviva l'Italia!" [17]

Although some governmental assistance prior to the NEA's formation was proffered, principally in the form of tax relief, the reality during the Gatti years was that the Metropolitan was required, as a commercial theatrical enterprise, to *pay* taxes on its proceeds and collect taxes on its admissions.[18] The inescapable question of financial risk and who should absorb it returns the issue to the institution's board of directors, whose members were charged with the responsibility of adjudicating such matters. As will be seen, however, during the period 1903-1940 the Metropolitan's interests were actually governed by two boards whose interests should have coincided, but at several crucial junctures (as the Salome debacle of 1907, when not even Kahn could topple competing board powerhouse J. Pierpont Morgan) did not.

---

16 *The NEA: Cultural Essential*, Livingston Biddle to the editor, The Washington Post, 6 March 1999.

17 Gatti-Casazza to Kahn, 2 November 1925. Kahn Papers, Box 257, Princeton University.

18 "There is no municipal or government subsidy of any kind; on the contrary, the Metropolitan pays state and federal taxes, the same as any other incorporation. Tickets to the opera are subject to the 10% war tax on admissions, the same as tickets to any other theater." Edward Ziegler, Assistant General Manager, Metropolitan Opera, to Kahn, 27 February 1920. Kahn Papers, Box 138, Princeton University.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Significance

A much clearer picture of the Metropolitan Opera's role in the burgeoning phenomenon of American opera during the early decades of the twentieth century will emerge as a result of the above points of inquiry. Although formulation of a completely revisionist theory is unwarranted, the existing documentary evidence indicates that a unilateral view of the Metropolitan Opera as a musical museum dedicated solely to the preservation of venerable works of the past is largely incorrect, at least as far as its early twentieth-century history is concerned.

There are several reasons for the historical neglect of the Metropolitan's pioneering Americanist activities. First, the theater's rich history has been understandably dominated by the vast number of legendary performers who have appeared on its stage. Although numerous histories of the Metropolitan have been published throughout the twentieth century, none offers more than a cursory summary of the American works given there.[19] The difficulty of obtaining scores (particularly full orchestral versions) to many of the works, although virtually all were published in piano-vocal reductions, has been a musical obstacle. Another is the lack of available recordings, especially for operas produced before 1931 (when the Metropolitan began broadcasting many of its performances), rendering it impossible to hear the orchestrations of operas that are no longer revived. Although many of the American works performed after

---

[19] A partial listing of the Metropolitan's documented history includes Irving Kolodin's The Metropolitan Opera, 1883-1935 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1936), which has undergone three revisions, culminating in The Story of the Metropolitan Opera, 1883-1966: A Candid History (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966); Mary Ellis Peltz, Behind the Gold Curtain: The Story of the Metropolitan Opera (New York: Farrar Straus, 1950); Frank Merkling, John W. Freeman and Gerald Fitzgerald, The Golden Horseshoe: The Life and Times of the Metropolitan Opera House (New York: The Viking Press, 1965); Quaintance Eaton, The Miracle of the Met: An Informal History of the Metropolitan Opera, 1883-1967 (New York: Meredith Press, 1968); Martin Mayer, The Met: One Hundred Years of Grand Opera (New York: Metropolitan Opera Guild and Simon and Schuster, 1983); Paul E. Eisler, The Metropolitan Opera: The First Twenty-Five Years, 1883-1908 (Croton-on-Hudson, New York: North River Press, 1984); and Gerald Fitzgerald, ed., Annals of the Metropolitan Opera: The Complete Chronicle of Performances and Artists, 2 vols. (New York: Metropolitan Opera Guild and Boston: G. K. Hall, 1989).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

1931 were broadcast, recordings of these programs are generally available only through archival sources.

The paucity of primary source materials relating specifically to the Metropolitan's American initiative has been another factor in its historical neglect. The correspondence of each of the three administrators most closely involved in the selection and production process of the American operas—General Manager Gatti-Casazza, Assistant General Manager Edward Ziegler, and Board President Otto H. Kahn—is extant for much of the period under discussion, but comparatively little of it relates directly to the American productions.[20] In addition, although the collections are well organized and preserved, none is extensively catalogued with respect to content, thus necessitating a lengthy examination process on the part of researchers seeking specific information on American opera.[21] Such a process is illuminating, however, as it affords a comprehensive view of management policies with respect to all repertory, both European and American, considered for production during the period. More significantly, the documentary evidence embedded in these collections often offers fresh insights into areas where scholars were previously forced to conjecture. Finally, two of the primary source collections pose special challenges: approximately seventy-five percent of Gatti-Casazza's correspondence is in his native Italian (the remainder utilizes French, English and German, in descending order of occurrence); and Otto Kahn's papers, while largely in English, are so voluminous as to comprise over five hundred boxes of material, reflecting the full extent of the indefatigable financier's myriad business and cultural activities.

---

[20] The business correspondence of Giulio Gatti-Casazza and Edward Ziegler is located at the Metropolitan Opera Archives; the Otto H. Kahn Papers are held at the Manuscripts Division of the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

[21] I am indebted to Metropolitan Archivist Robert Tuggle for the opportunity to examine a brief unpublished catalogue held at the archives. While selective and limited in scope, it nonetheless provided invaluable guidance on matters which would have otherwise escaped my attention.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

It is no doubt due to such challenges that the historiography of American opera remains incomplete. The need for a comprehensive history of American opera has long been acute, as no such study has appeared since Edward Ellsworth Hipsher's admirable but long outdated American Opera and its Composers,[22] and this lacuna has contributed to numerous misperceptions which have been repeated in the secondary literature for several decades. It is my goal to help realign them.



THE METROPOLITAN AT THE END OF THE GREAT TRADITION

The apex of the American initiative under Gatti-Casazza at the Metropolitan occurred in the decade after the Great Tradition in European opera is considered to have reached its conclusion, upon the posthumous premiere of Puccini's Turandot at La Scala in 1926. The Metropolitan's activities during this period were part of a larger trend already in progress: a surge in indigenous cultural activity in the United States during the 1920s provided significant inspiration and impetus to the American opera composers who were involved in continuing attempts to forge an native musical idiom that would finally achieve artistic independence from the long European tradition.

By the 1920s, the United States had capitalized on the legacy of the Progressive Era's tremendous expansion throughout much of the early twentieth century. A newly self-confident America, modernized through aggressive industrialization, had been forged. The nation's population had more than doubled since the end of the Civil War, and waves of new

---

[22] Philadelphia: Theodore Presser Co., 1927; 2d expanded ed., 1934. Reprint, New York: Da Capo Press, 1978.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

immigrants, chiefly from southern and eastern Europe, swelled the major cities. The tentative step the nation had taken onto the world stage with the Spanish-American War in 1898 expanded into a decisive role in the Great War from 1917-1918. This process of expansion and development, juxtaposed with the early twentieth-century disintegration of Europe into chaos, resulted in the acknowledgment of a power shift between the old and new worlds that had in fact begun during the Gilded Age.[23] By the end of World War I, the United States was widely recognized as having replaced the British Empire as the world's leading state.

Gatti-Casazza kept abreast of developments in his host country and was not remiss in carrying out the diplomatic duty of acknowledging its expanding list of achievements, as required by his position at the head of a semi-public institution. Among the copious correspondence and cables of his professional files for 1927, for example, is a congratulatory telegram sent by the manager from Europe to the New York Times: "I wish to express through your great paper my utmost satisfaction and enthusiasm for the extraordinary flight of Lindbergh. Best regards."[24]

The arts in America had benefitted from the country's prosperity as well. The Metropolitan's 1926 premiere of Puccini's Turandot, commonly identified as the final entry in the historic Great Tradition, coincided with the apex of the American Jazz Age, an explosion of great music and bad gin which also reverberated throughout Europe in a major transfer of artistic inspiration back to its traditional source. For the first time, cultural exchanges between Europe

---

[23] The term refers to an American period of lavish opulence enjoyed by the upper classes of the industrial North in the decades after the Civil War, and was originally coined in the satire The Gilded Age; A Tale of To-Day, by Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner (Hartford, Connecticut: American Publishing Company, 1873).

[24] Telegram from Gatti-Casazza, Genoa, to Adolph Ochs, 22 May 1927. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, Summer 1927, Miscellaneous. The *Spirit of St. Louis* had landed in Paris the day before.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

and the United States became truly bi-directional.[25] Composers George Antheil, Kurt Weill, and Paul Hindemith, for example—recent expatriate and soon-to-be emigrants, respectively—wrote music inspired by the emerging Machine Age: Antheil's 1922 Airplane Sonata initiated his ultra-modern mechanical sound period, and the Weill-Hindemith collaborative radio cantata Der Lindberghflug (1929) celebrated the American aviator's achievement.[26]

One art now firmly in control of the Americans was film, a medium first developed by the French brothers Lumière in 1895. The reason for an inevitable transfer of control was articulated by Laurence Olivier when he recalled his attempts in 1954 to film Richard III's Bosworth Field battle scene in Europe:

> I thought enviously of . . . the more luxurious Hollywood studios and of their . . . birthright from the very infancy of movies—California. How quick were those early boys to find the place where they had God-given light for more than twelve hours a day, 360 days in the year, as well as every known type of landscape from snow to desert, from arid plains to spectacular mountains and everything in between.[27]

By 1926, an important technological development had occurred which had some significance for the Metropolitan, as described to Gatti by assistant manager Edward Ziegler:

> [The Vitaphone Corporation] ha[s], as I told you before you left, bought the patents of the Western Electric Company for synchronizing music and film. I have seen one of these pictures and thought it truly remarkable, as the synchronization is perfect. They have made a contract with the Victor Company, who are going to make records of the voices at the same time that the artists are being filmed.
>
> What we have sold them is the exclusive right for synchronized motion pictures to negotiate with our artists. . . . Inasmuch as this is as yet experimental,

---

25 Carol J. Oja's Making Music Modern: New York in the 1920s (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) examines American musical activity during this period.

26 The original collaborative score, for which Hindemith wrote four pieces, was withdrawn by Weill and subsequently revised as a concert work which incorporated only the music Weill had composed. Hindemith's music to the original version remains unpublished.

27 Laurence Olivier, Confessions of an Actor (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1982), 197.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> as they do not know how the public is going to receive this new form of motion picture, we have a concession in the price for the period between now and the 31st of January.[28]

The new medium held great possibilities for photogenic singers from its early history in America. Sopranos Geraldine Farrar and Mary Garden had achieved Hollywood fame during the silent era: Farrar was chosen by Cecil B. DeMille to star in his 1915 film adaptation of Carmen, and Garden reported receiving $125,000 to appear in Samuel Goldwyn's 1918 Thaïs.[29] Among the beneficiaries of the new "talkies" created by the Vitaphone process were Metropolitan artists Lawrence Tibbett and Grace Moore, whose reputations and incomes were significantly augmented by Hollywood celebrity in the 1930s.

Jazz was the other American-controlled artistic commodity, but one that was cheerfully exported. Leading French composers as well as Central and East Europeans such as Paul Hindemith and Bohuslav Martinů rode the crest of the 1920s jazz wave with wildly popular instrumental works infused with the new music, symbolizing the revitalization of a declining Europe. Yet the hedonism of the era was already revealed by F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby (1925) which, in the words of one commentator, exposed the Jazz Age "in all its false glamour, cultural barrenness, moral emptiness, and desperate boredom."[30] Contradiction virtually defined the age.

That the Met embarked on a new phase of American commissions at precisely the time the Great Tradition was drawing to a close was not coincidental. It was a propitious time

---

28 Ziegler to Gatti-Casazza, Milan, 16 June 1926. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, Summer 1926, Ziegler.

29 Mary Garden and Louis Biancolli, Mary Garden's Story (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1951), 230.

30 Recent Metropolitan commission recipient John Harbison chose Fitzgerald's novel as the basis of his eponymous opera (world premiere, 20 December 1999).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

for American composers to move ahead, for Gatti had been lamenting a dearth of new talent in both opera composition and singing, particularly in Italy, throughout the 1920s:

> The Italian Lyric Theatres . . . are in a serious condition and live with great difficulty. The causes producing these conditions are always the same two: the deficiency of genial composers and the deficiency of lyric artists who know how to sing or possessing at least a personality.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> I have heard and am still hearing artists of all kinds, caliber, and species, coming from all Countries and all schools, but they generally are such mediocrities and of such a low level that it is really impossible even for me with my long experience to understand whether they may have some chance of making their way or not. [31]

Gatti had already acknowledged that the hiring practices of the Metropolitan were changing in response to the situation:

> I regret to have to say that the element [of] Lyric Artists, in Italy, is going through a period of great decadence: I have been able to convince myself of this personally; the exact information which I have received regarding the French artists are [*sic*] as bad and discouraging.
>
> Fortunately, Germany, Austria and the Slavic States and America still offer some convenient resources! [32]

The general manager's frustration in finding new composers was expressed in a moment of candor, laced with some diplomatic flattery, to Giacomo Puccini in 1920:

> To tell the truth, by now I am rather fed up with the theater and things theatrical, and sooner or later I may end up sending this whole weary world of papier-mâché to the devil. Yet, I hope to go once more unto the breach to have the pleasure and the honor of presenting to the public for the first time a new opera by the only composer who in each of the five parts of the world is considered capable of moving, entertaining, persuading and finally knowing how to create a true theatrical opera. A composer whose name and works will not

---

31 Gatti-Casazza, Milan, to Kahn, London, 27 July 1923. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, Summer 1923, Lusardi-Salter.

32 Gatti-Casazza, Salsomaggiore, Italy, to Kahn, New York, 9 September 1922. Kahn Papers, Box 181, Princeton University.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> certainly perish despite all the stupidities, malignancies and baying of Beckmessers large and small! [33]

Although the Metropolitan rarely broke with established policy, Otto Kahn's idea to abandon the theater's longstanding principle against commissioning new works, at least as an experiment to give fresh impetus to American composers, was one to which Gatti readily assented.[34] However, the house was careful not to publicize this.[35]

Expatriation was much the fashion among American artists during this time (nothing seemed as American as an American in Paris), but the Europe to which the bohemians

---

[33] Gatti-Casazza to Giacomo Puccini, Torre del Lago, 16 January 1920. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, 1919-20, P. [*Per dire la verità, io ormai sono piuttosto stufo di teatro e di teatrerie, e una volta o l'altra finirò col mandare al diavolo tutto questo mondo di carta pesta. Tuttavia mi auguro di essere ancora sulla breccia per avere il piacere e l'onore di presentare per il primo al pubblico una nuova opera del solo compositore che in ciascuna delle cinque parti del mondo è considerato capace di commuovere, divertire, convincere e insomma saper fare una vera opera teatrale. Compositore il nome e le opere del quale non periranno certamente malgrado tutte le stupidità e le malignità e gli abbaiamenti dei Bekmesser grandi e piccoli!*]

[34] Exceptions had admittedly been made when a musician of renown was composing a new opera that the Metropolitan wanted to acquire ahead of its competitors (see *n*9 above). But the policy in its strict sense was upheld even in the case of Erik Satie: an admirer of the French master suggested to Otto Kahn in 1923 that the composer be encouraged to set Hamlet (whether Satie knew of the appeal is unclear). Kahn responded: "The prospect of Erik Satie composing an opera is very alluring, whether it be Hamlet or anything else, but I do not know of any one who would 'commander un Hamlet.' The Metropolitan has long made it a principle not to 'commander' operas. However, if it is a question of getting up a fund to enable Satie to live free of financial care in his simple way, in order to concentrate himself upon composing an opera, I shall personally be glad to make a reasonable contribution . . . for 'le bon maître.'" Kahn to H. P. Roché, Paris, 30 March 1923. Kahn Papers, Box 210, Princeton University.

American composer Deems Taylor received the Metropolitan's first formal commission award in 1925, two years after Kahn denied the request made on behalf of Satie.

[35] The house did not want to be deluged with inexperienced composers of any nationality seeking commission support. Gatti wrote to Italian composer Gian Riccardo Cella explaining his refusal to consider the latter's new opera Taziana: "As I already told you personally in Milan, if there is a theater here that is not well suited, for an infinite number of reasons, for the presentation of operas which are completely new to the public, it is the Metropolitan." [*Già Le dissi a Milano che se vi è un teatro poco adattato, per una infinità di ragioni, alla presentazione di opere nuovissime, è proprio il Metropolitan.*] He was, of course, speaking of new works by composers unknown to the public. Gatti-Casazza to Cella, Milan, 3 October 1919. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, 1919-20, C.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

fled could hardly have been quite the promised land it seemed in retrospect. It was Gertrude Stein to whom Hemingway attributed the phrase "lost generation" in his preface to The Sun Also Rises (1926), the emblematic novel of post-World War I disillusionment.[36] Disillusionment careened towards decadence in the 1928 opera Transatlantique, a work written in Europe by the New Jersey-born George Antheil, whose early promise placed him in the heady company of fellow *Zeitoper* composers Ernst Krenek, Paul Hindemith (Neues vom Tage, 1929) and Kurt Weill (Der Zar läßt sich photographieren, 1928) on the roster of Vienna's distinguished music publisher Universal Verlag. When Stein summoned Antheil to her Paris salon for a private audience, the composer, doubtless nowhere near as brash as he pretended to be, brought along a friend for moral support. Fellow expatriate Virgil Thomson, who met Antheil at the Left Bank's Shakespeare & Company bookstore, turned out to be more *sympatico* with the enigmatic Stein than Antheil.[37] The resulting Thomson-Stein collaboration Four Saints in Three Acts (1928) achieved considerable status among the American avant-garde through its now legendary 1934 premiere designed by painter Florine Stettheimer, while Antheil's raucous opera faded rapidly despite an attention-grabbing Weimar Republic premiere (Frankfurt, 1930). Neither, however, was able to find a voice at the Met—such were the contradictions of the Jazz Age.

The Metropolitan did not stand entirely aloof from the period's modernist developments, as has frequently been charged, although many of its responses admittedly

---

36 Stein had heard the phrase *"une géneration perdue"* used by the proprietor of the Hotel Pernollet in Belley, describing the psychological rootlessness of the shattered young French in the wake of the war.

37 Ironically, Antheil was operating at somewhat of a disadvantage because of his close association with Shakespeare & Company owner Sylvia Beach, a fellow New Jerseyan who allowed him to live over the shop with his wife. Beach's friendship with Stein reportedly became strained with jealousy after Beach published, at her personal expense, the first edition of James Joyce's Ulysses in 1922. Anthony Tommasini, Virgil Thomson: Composer on the Aisle (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997), 134-36.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Copyright Estate of Honoria Murphy Donnelly.

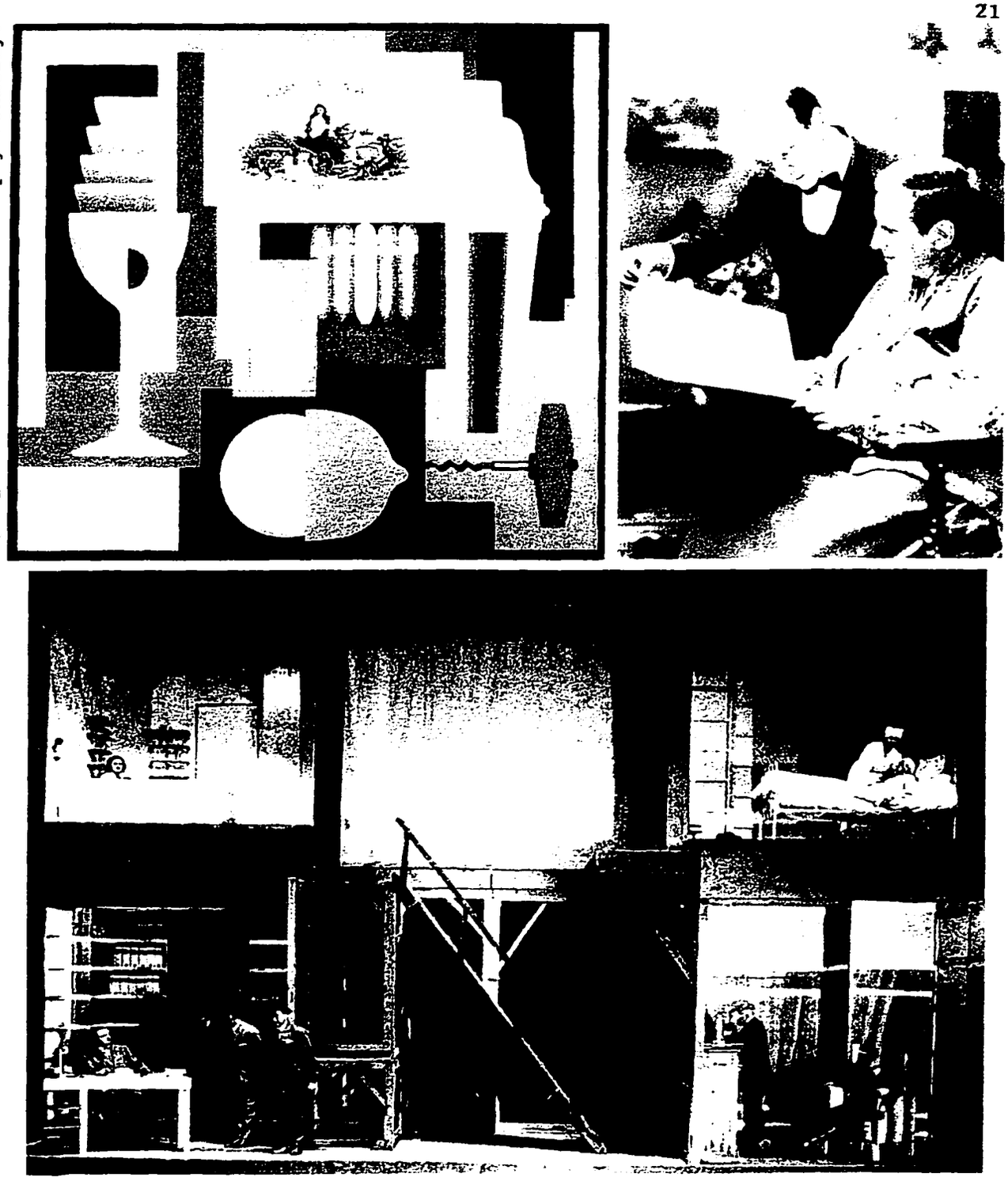


FIGURE I.1: Expatriate Influences (Clockwise from upper left) Gerald Murphy, *Cocktail* (1927) [Whitney Museum of American Art] The exemplar of the American expatriate, Murphy was the model for the character of Dick Diver in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Tender Is the Night* (1934); Americans in Paris Virgil Thomson and Gertrude Stein (photographed by Thérèse Bonney ca. 1929-30) created one of America's most original operas with *Four Saints in Three Acts* (1928) [Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley]; the raucous parody of George Antheil's *Transatlantique* (Frankfurt-am-Main premiere designed by Ludwig Sievers, 1930) appealed to Weimar Republic Germany but, like *Four Saints*, did not interest the Metropolitan [Estate of George Antheil].

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

symbolized reaction to rather than participation in the avant-garde, which it regarded as a radical offshoot of the contemporary music scene. But these responses were not considered reactionary at the time. The mid-twentieth-century practice of articulating an arbitrary dichotomy between groups styled as modern or conservative had not yet taken hold, and has, in any event, been discarded by post-modern historiographers as a flawed ideology. Commenting on pluralistic trends in music publishing at the end of the twentieth century, for example, critic Alex Ross cited a distinct fading of "the prevalent picture of avant-gardists arrayed against conservatives. This is as it should be."[38]

This is not to say, however, that factions did not develop among the new composers. In fact, dogma of the more militant splinter groups probably reinforced much of the misleading rhetoric that developed throughout mid-century. Flinty New England composer Carl Ruggles, for example, an associate of French iconoclast Edgard Varèse, denounced as pandering and populist the attempts of new-music presenter Claire Reis to fill auditoriums with listeners in what seems a foreshadowing of Milton Babbitt's famous diatribe *Who Cares If You Listen?*[39] Radicals battled modernists memorably during the 1923 split of the Varèse-controlled International Composers' Guild, which promoted ultramodern music. However, history has long

---

38 Alex Ross, *The Accidental Revolutionist*, New York Times, 22 September 1996, sec. 2, 28. A prominent example cited by Ross is Richard Taruskin's Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), which discards the long-held view of the composer as an aloof modernist; rather, Stravinsky emerges as one of several pivotal and "self-determined figures pondering ambiguities in various tonal systems," after the manner of Liszt, Rimsky-Korsakov and Richard Strauss.

39 Ruggles's views are described in Tommasini, Virgil Thomson, 186. Babbitt's article first appeared in High Fidelity 8 (February 1958): 38-40, 126-27. Although the deliberately inflammatory title was affixed by an editor (disregarding the author's suggestions of *The Composer as Specialist* or *The Composer as Anachronism*), the author's manifesto was unequivocal: "I dare suggest that the composer would do himself and his music immediate and eventual service by total, resolute, and voluntary withdrawal from his public world . . . . By so doing, . . . [he] would be free to pursue a private life of professional achievement, as opposed to a public life of unprofessional compromise and exhibitionism."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

since vindicated Reis, who, "tired of Varèse's bullying"[40] and his elitist attitude, broke with him to found the League of Composers, which sought to educate the public through its groundbreaking publication Modern Music (originally The League of Composers' Review) in the spirit of the "little magazine" movement initiated the decade before. The League embraced rising young star Aaron Copland, who acted as frequent commentator on the modern music scene. His 1926 article *America's Young Men of Promise*[41] identified seventeen contemporary composers to watch, including three whose operas would later be produced or sponsored by the Metropolitan: Howard Hanson (Merry Mount, 1934), Bernard Rogers (The Warrior, 1947) and Virgil Thomson (Four Saints in Three Acts, Mini-Met, 1973). Ruggles, best known for his remarkable Sun-treader (1926-31), had been able to get his opera The Sunken Bell (after Gerhard Hauptmann's play Die versunkene Glocke) into the planning stages at the Metropolitan in the early 1920s. But the project was abruptly cancelled—by which side is difficult to ascertain at this distance—and Ruggles soon abandoned the work, having embarked on a significant change of style which the opera no longer reflected. The Sunken Bell remains unfinished, although a reconstruction is in progress from extant sketches.[42]

Reactions on the part of artists in all media to the ubiquitous mechanization of the new Machine Age—nowhere so strenuously embodied as in Antheil's early period, culminating in the 1927 Ballet mécanique debacle which seriously damaged his reputation—took varied forms. The responses included a return to nature as a subject in painting, often with the use of abstraction symbolizing a liberation from rationalism (Georgia O'Keeffe's famous Black Iris dates

---

40 Tommasini, Virgil Thomson, 186.

41 Modern Music 3 (March-April 1926): 13-20.

42 Robert Young McMahan, *A Brief History of The Sunken Bell, Carl Ruggles's Unfinished Opera*, American Music 11 (Summer 1993): 131-57.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

from 1926); harmony with the natural world through architecture and interior design (the development of Frank Lloyd Wright's "prairie style"); the founding of the modern dance movement, where performers such as Isadora Duncan emphasized symbolically natural movement garbed in flowing Grecian tunics; and even the iconic film Metropolis (1926), where director Fritz Lang juxtaposed the spheres of magic and the occult with the more chillingly exploitative aspects of cold mechanization.[43] This reactive trend found expression at the Metropolitan when erudite composer Deems Taylor, having interested Kahn in his latest ideas on "opera in American" in 1925, selected as his librettist Edna St. Vincent Millay, a poet who had made her reputation celebrating Greenwich Village bohemianism in A Few Figs from Thistles (1920). She then won the 1923 Pulitzer Prize for poetry with The Harp Weaver, whose sonnets were highly praised for their lyrical mastery of the rigorous Renaissance form and drew favorable comparison with Keats. Eschewing any thought of contemporary realism, Millay reached even further back in history for her libretto to The King's Henchman (1926), set in tenth-century England with a plot reminiscent of Tristan. But though the text was praised as "poetic and glamorous," even Gatti, an avowed advocate of this type of literary approach, admitted the rather static dramaturgy had been a drawback.[44]

The importance of dramatic values had indeed increased markedly at the Metropolitan by the 1920s. The face of operatic acting had been changing over the preceding decade with the help of some charismatic performers who, not incidentally, attracted a younger

---

[43] Lang specifically stated it was this conflict that most interested him in the film's creation. Lotte H. Eisner, Fritz Lang (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 90.

[44] A decade earlier, he had described his rationale for selecting Paul Dukas' L'Ariane et barbe-bleu as the Met's latest novelty: "The work pleased me more than any other modern French work available. I looked the field over pretty carefully .... It is fin de siècle if you like; it treats of the feminist question, and all the world is talking of suffragettes just now, but it is also mystic and symbolic. There is atmosphere and poetry. I am no adherent of the realistic school in art." *How 'Ariane' Came to the Metropolitan,* New York Times, 27 March 1911, 11.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

generation of audience members. Geraldine Farrar, America's brightest operatic star idolized by legions of "Gerryflappers" (a term coined by New York Sun critic W. J. Henderson), had introduced a physicality into her portrayals that was daringly sexual. The media took notice and headlines like *Miss Farrar a Lively Carmen; Introduces a Wrestling Bout in Bizet's Opera* began to appear.[45] Farrar's successor, soprano Maria Jeritza (the Met's first Turandot), pulled out all the stops for her Tosca long before Callas, letting her blonde hair tumble in the Act 2 confrontation with Scarpia before singing "Vissi d'arte" in a prone position that was *de rigueur* for decades.

Taylor was urged to respond to these heightened dramatic expectations with the awarding of his second Metropolitan commission. Gatti instructed assistant manager Ziegler, who was charged with libretto review: "Please keep in mind what I told you in regard to the new libretto which Deems Taylor should choose. He should try to find one that has some importance not only for the argument but also for the *mise-en-scène*."[46] The composer decided to utilize a strategy then common in film by turning to the contemporary theater for inspiration. He wrote his own adaptation of the play Peter Ibbetson (based on George du Maurier's 1891 novel) in collaboration with actress Constance Collier, who had appeared in the original New York production and directed a Broadway revival in 1931, the year of its operatic premiere at the Metropolitan. The 1917 Broadway production had benefitted from an exciting cast which included the brothers Barrymore—Lionel and John—whose sister Ethel was about to score a

---

45 New York Times, 18 February 1916, 9. Farrar's Carmen was visually preserved in a still-available silent film classic directed by Cecil B. DeMille (1915).

46 Gatti-Casazza to Edward Ziegler, 9 May 1927. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, 1926-27, Ziegler.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

major success in another operatic inspiration, The Lady of the Camellias.[47] Taylor's opera was able to draw on this dramatic promise (one headline announced *Play in Which John Barrymore Starred Chosen for 1930 Premiere*)[48] and proved to be the most successful production of the entire American program; it was revived for an unprecedented four seasons at the Metropolitan and chosen by Gatti to open the house's fiftieth anniversary season in 1933.

While classical theater in England was undergoing a Shakespeare revival in the late 1920s—credited to John Barrymore's electrifying 1925 London Hamlet[49]—the American theater was in the midst of changes of a more revolutionary nature. An explosion in American theatrical enterprise had been in progress since the 1910s, with Metropolitan board chairman Otto Kahn, a strong devotee of dramatic art in all its forms, acting as frequent patron. He particularly favored the more radical efforts and actors found his attitude refreshingly open-minded. When the Washington Square Players, an early beneficiary of his largesse, split into two factions over the question of commitment to American playwrights, Kahn saw no conflict in supporting both, as well as the Washington Square's later incarnation as the Theatre Guild.[50] The Americanist faction initially produced some plays of Washington Square dissenters George Cram Cook and his wife Susan Glaspell, but the group struck gold when they recruited a moody drifter, living above a general store at the tip of Cape Cod, named Eugene O'Neill. The Provincetown Players also

---

47 The Barrymores were also responsible for the 1919-20 Broadway success of The Jest (adapted from Italian playwright Sem Benelli's La Cena delle Beffe), which in its original version served as the basis for a 1923 opera by Umberto Giordano that received its American premiere at the Metropolitan in 1926.

48 New York Evening World, 22 November 1929.

49 Three young actors making their first appearances on the British stage were immediate and lasting beneficiaries: John Gielgud, Ralph Richardson, and Laurence Olivier.

50 The Theatre Guild premiered George Gershwin's Porgy and Bess in 1935.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

counted Edna St. Vincent Millay among its early acting talent and produced her play Aria da Capo in 1920.

Kahn never attempted to dictate to the management of any organization he funded, but was in a position to make recommendations. It was in this capacity that he inevitably became the frequent recipient of letters from aspirants to the stage. Many of these amused him but one was different. In 1923 a young Rutgers University alumnus and recent Columbia Law School graduate, ostensibly appealing to Kahn in his capacity as a Rutgers trustee but surely with the knowledge of his Provincetown connection, described an interest in acting in O'Neill's dramas. Although Kahn initially responded noncommittally, within the year Paul Robeson had created the role of young aspiring lawyer Jim Harris in the All God's Chillun Got Wings (wildly controversial for its depiction of an interracial marriage) and taken over the lead in a brief revival of The Emperor Jones from actor Charles Gilpin, the title role's creator, whose quarrels with the playwright had contributed to the controversy also attached to the later play.[51] A decade later, American composer Louis Gruenberg, whose music Kahn had shown interest in since 1915, premiered his new opera The Emperor Jones at the Met, with Kahn's support fending off any potential trouble from the more staid members of his board.

American music's most significant achievement by the end of the first quarter century, however, was not the development of a native opera, but the creation of the American popular standard. An unusually gifted group of songwriters came to maturity in the 1920s: the Gershwins, Cole Porter, Irving Berlin and Jerome Kern. The Broadway musical, a new cultural product, glittered with the sophistication of this new material. Kern and Oscar Hammerstein II (grandson of the opera impresario, who died in 1919) dared to take on the subject of racism in

---

51 Paul L. Robeson to Otto Kahn, [March 1923]; Kahn to Robeson, 12 March 1923. Kahn Papers, Box 210, Princeton University.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

NOTE TO USERS

Copyrighted materials in this document have not been filmed at the request of the author. They are available for consultation at the author's university library.

Page 28
Photo of James VanDerZee

This reproduction is the best copy available.

UMI

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

their new musical Showboat, which opened at the Ziegfeld Theater in 1927. Virtuoso designer Joseph Urban, who worked simultaneously for Florenz Ziegfeld and the Metropolitan, designed The King's Henchman and Showboat premieres in the same year. The role of Joe, originally taken by Jules Bledsoe, became an enduring success for Paul Robeson when he was chosen for the 1936 film version. Ironically, while Bledsoe later appeared in America and Europe as Gruenberg's Emperor Jones in a touring production, thus becoming the first black singer to take the part, the Emperor remained a role that Robeson never portrayed on the operatic stage.[52]

The supremacy established by American popular music during the 1920s was crucially indebted to the vast spectrum of African-American musical styles known collectively as jazz. At first a localized Southern phenomenon, by the 1920s the new music had captured the imagination of a heterogeneous urban public. When Harlem's Cotton Club, opened in 1923 by gangster Owney Madden, gave an unprecedented four-year engagement to Duke Ellington and his Orchestra (1927-1931), it hailed not only the art form's new commercial success, but provided an environment for Ellington's orchestral composing in the genre. The expanded sonority of Ellington's orchestra had been introduced to the public via recordings beginning in 1924, and by 1925, Otto Kahn (whose son Roger led a jazz band) was busy denying persistent rumors that his organization was due to premiere a "jazz opera." But he admitted having approached three popular music composers with the idea of writing a dramatic work:

> I have, in fact, suggested the writing of an American opera to some of our most popular composers, such as Irving Berlin, George Gershwin, Jerome Kern, as I have suggested it to other American composers of demonstrated talent, not particularly connected with jazz music.
> . . . . . .

---

[52] Robeson did sing excerpts from the opera in concert with the Philadelphia Orchestra, Eugene Ormandy conducting, in December 1940.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> A "jazz opera" strikes me as a contradiction in terms. In its literal meaning it is quite unthinkable.[53]

John Kobler's 1988 biography of Kahn, the second to be published since Kahn's death in 1934, erroneously describes Kahn's remarks as occurring as a result of the Metropolitan's production of "German modernist" Ernst Krenek's Jonny spielt auf, attributing them to a new attitude Kahn allegedly took after the work's "failure" at the house after only three performances.[54] In fact, Kahn's remarks were published by the Metropolitan in 1925, four years before Jonny was performed there, and the pamphlet contains a statement in which Kahn dates the remarks as having been written "some time ago." Krenek, a Czech born in Vienna, wrote Jonny during 1925-26; its world premiere took place in Leipzig on 10 February 1927, where Kahn saw it towards the end of its run in late March and immediately cabled the Metropolitan with his enthusiastic recommendation, following it with a letter suggesting Lawrence Tibbett for the title role;[55] the Metropolitan gave the American premiere of the work in early 1929 with German baritone Michael Bohnen as Jonny; and the opera received seven performances, not three, in its single Met season, with Tibbett singing the title role in the final two. More importantly, however, the work did not contradict Kahn's earlier remarks. Although Jonny clearly makes use of the jazz influences pervasive in European music of the 1920s, it cannot in strict musical terms be called a "jazz opera," nor was this Krenek's goal.

Rather, Kahn's remarks, progressive for their time, show remarkable prescience regarding the course the American musical theatre would take throughout the coming decades—

---

53 *Kahn Statement*, 23.

54 "After the debacle of Jonny spielt auf, Kahn came to feel that a jazz opera in the literal sense was perhaps a contradiction in terms." John Kobler, Otto the Magnificent: The Life of Otto Kahn (New York: Scribner, 1988), 61.

55 "The part of Jonny is written for Tibbett." Kahn, Munich, to Edward Ziegler, Metropolitan Opera, 2 April 1927. Kahn Papers, Box 321, Princeton University.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

through composers such as Kern, Weill, Blitzstein, Bernstein and Sondheim—in blurring the boundaries between the musical and opera through skillful use of popular influences, including jazz:

> I hope, and believe, some such [American] operas will be written in the early future, I am not at all convinced that they should attempt to be "grand opera" in the conventional sense. It is a question whether American creative musical talent will naturally express itself on the lines of grand opera.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> I hope some [American composers] will try their hand at opera, and endeavor to express themselves in their own way—themselves and the spirit of the life which surrounds them—however unconventional that way may be. Such an opera will probably contain some of the motives, rhythm, and characteristics of jazz, but whether it does or does not, is immaterial. The main question is: "Has the work got musical merit? Does the composer have something to say, and does he say it in the manner which, to him, is the natural and spontaneous way of expressing himself?" [56]

Only one of the popular composers Kahn approached during the 1920s felt technically equal to following his suggestion. Traveling on out-of-town tryouts for one of his first big successes (Oh Kay!, 1926), the twenty-eight-year-old George Gershwin passed time by reading DuBose Heyward's new novel Porgy (1925). Its story immediately suggested operatic treatment. The young composer had already crossed over into classical territory, earning considerable acclaim with his Rhapsody in Blue (1924), which encouraged a commission from Walter Damrosch and the New York Symphony Orchestra for the Concerto in F. An enthusiastic attendee at the 1925 concerto premiere was Gershwin acquaintance Otto Kahn.[57] The two had met on a transatlantic ocean liner in 1924, when Gershwin was returning to New York from London to go into rehearsal with Lady, Be Good. Although Kahn affected indifference (he was known as a frequent backer and deluged with requests), when he heard

---

[56] *Kahn Statement*, 22-23.

[57] Kahn wrote to Damrosch for tickets on 26 October 1925: "My wife and I and our 'Jazz' son are anxious to go to the first performance of George Gershwin's concerto, and would like to take a few friends." Kahn Papers, Box 247, Princeton University.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Gershwin play "Fascinatin' Rhythm" and "The Man I Love" in the ship's cocktail lounge, he decided to invest $10,000 in the production.[58] He never regretted it. Kahn remained an ardent fan, declaring in a party speech following the premiere of An American in Paris in December 1928: "Gershwin is a leader of young America in music, in the same sense in which Lindbergh is a leader of young America in aviation."[59]

But when the Metropolitan chairman approached the young composer about an operatic commission, Gershwin recalled that his first attempt at musical drama, Blue Monday Blues, had been a failure, which Gershwin partly attributed to an inadequate performance by white singers in blackface.[60] Perhaps suspecting that the Met's racial barriers would not be easily overcome, Gershwin planned to base his first full-length opera not on Porgy but The Dybbuk (1916; premiered 1920), the only completed dramatic work of Shloyme Zanvl Rappoport (writing under the pseudonym Shalom Ansky) and a classic of the Yiddish theatre. Gershwin wasn't fast enough, however; the literary rights had already been secured by Italian composer Lodovico Rocca, whose setting was produced with great success at La Scala in 1934.[61]

If the 1920s were still years of transition for the American composer, they were banner years for the American singer. Lawrence Tibbett had been catapulted to overnight

---

58 Alan Kendall, George Gershwin (New York: Universe Books, 1987), 53.

59 Ibid., 95. During this period, one of Kahn's daughters briefly dated Gershwin, and the financier sought out Lindbergh's advice on planes and parachutes for his son Roger, an amateur aviator who later became an executive at Grumman Aerospace Corporation.

60 The thirty-minute work was produced as part of *Paul White's Scandals of 1922*. It was later revised by Gershwin and performed at Carnegie Hall in 1925 under the new title 135th Street.

61 Rocca's opera Il Dibbuk, however, received a scathing review from Olin Downes when it was presented in New York two years later by the Detroit Civic Opera Company: "As for the opera itself, it represents, on the whole, the emptiest score we have heard from a school of composition which is today singularly lacking in either inspiration or sincerity. . . . The work abounds in banalities . . . . It is plainly shown that the composer has not the slightest real feeling for his subject." New York Times, 15 May 1936, 28.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

celebrity with an unusually committed performance of Ford in Verdi's Falstaff in 1925, and Rosa Ponselle, recognized as a potential "voice of the century" from her 1918 debut, was nearing the height of her considerable powers. Hired by Gatti as virtual beginners (meaning that the first operas in which they appeared were among the first they had heard in their entirety),[62] by 1926 he was planning a long-desired revival of Don Giovanni around their vocal splendor.[63] A strong wave of artistic nationalism in the United States—encouraged by America's retreat into isolationism following the Treaty of Versailles, which Kahn had counseled strongly against—is evinced by contemporaneous internal correspondence at the theater analyzing the percentage of American hires against those of prior managements. Even though the numbers had been indisputably in Gatti's favor practically from the inception of his tenure (he had doubled the

---

62 Ponselle's biographer asserts that the soprano, who at twenty-one was performing operatic arias and duets with her sister Carmela on the Keith Vaudeville Circuit, had only heard two complete operas in her life and "hadn't a single role to her credit." James A. Drake, Rosa Ponselle: A Centenary Biography (Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1997), 18-19. Ponselle's engagement was greatly assisted by the recommendation of Enrico Caruso, who heard her at the studio of voice teacher William Thorner, and by the Metropolitan's shortage of European dramatic sopranos, many of whom who feared the submarine threat associated with an Atlantic crossing during the World War I period (see chapter 3, *n*92).

63 Gatti wrote of his plans to Kahn: "I spoke to Tibbett concerning Don Giovanni. He will study the title part during the summer and in the coming winter we shall see if he has the possibility of making good in this very difficult task." Gatti to Kahn, Paris, 20 April 1927. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, 1926-27, Kahn.

Tibbett unwisely declined the role, but Ponselle was a splendid Donna Anna, although she did not sing the 1929 revival premiere due to illness. In a remarkable letter to Kahn, Gatti described his search for a suitable protagonist: "None of the baritones of our company has the requisites of the role. [German baritone Michael] Bohnen would never have succeeded in learning the role in Italian, . . . his voice is heavy and lends itself very little to the bel-canto. Tibbett too has a voice not well adaptable to the bel-canto and moreover it seems that instead of progressing he has gone back of late. De Luca, excellent singer . . . has absolutely no physique du rôle." Finally, Gatti recommended having the Don sung by a new bass from whom the manager had "received the impression that we could take a chance to give him the role." Ezio Pinza thus became the most celebrated Don Giovanni of his generation. Gatti-Casazza to Kahn, 15 January 1929. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, 1928-29, Kahn.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

number of American singers by 1910, his second season at the theater),[64] the management felt compelled to issue a public response, authored by Kahn, that additionally attempted to quash opera-in-English proponents at the house, which was by then strongly committed to internationalism.[65] Although the pamphlet's truthful content was nothing new at the Met, its issuance was front-page news at the New York Times, and a headline announced *Otto Kahn Defends Opera Policy Here; Americans Favored* on the morning of 16 October 1925.

The company further attempted to bolster its public image by formally engaging an impressive young American coloratura it had been nurturing for several years. The debut of Marion Talley on 17 February 1926 remains the most spectacular the Metropolitan has ever seen, again eliciting front-page Times coverage—*Opera House Mobbed as 19-year-old Girl Makes Her Debut; Police Charge the Crowd*[66]—as well as several arrests for disorderly conduct. Unfortunately, the only lasting remembrance of the Talley event was its total eclipse of another debut: young Danish tenor Lauritz Melchior also appeared for the first time on the Met stage that day, when he sang Tannhäuser at the matinee performance.

A strong commitment to American composers continued as an imperative, although Kahn had never lost faith in it. There had been as many successes as disappointments,

---

64 Kahn had obviously been monitoring developments, for the Metropolitan's Business Comptroller wrote to him in 1914: "As requested, I beg to enclose, herein, statement showing average number of American artists employed by the Metropolitan Opera House during the Grau [1898-1903], Conried [1903-1908], and the present régime." An attachment lists Grau's average as 7 American artists, Conried's as 12 and Gatti's as 23. John Brown to Kahn, 23 November 1914. Kahn Papers, Box 35, Princeton University.

65 Kahn wrote to Edward Ziegler of the Met in 1923, requesting exactly the same information he had obtained from Brown in 1914, in obvious preparation of his response, *The Metropolitan Opera: A Statement by Otto H. Kahn* (see *n*14 above).

66 New York Times, 18 February 1926, 1. Presently, the Times reserves front-page coverage for singers who are fired by the Metropolitan, and now places such stories below the fold. See, e.g., Allan Kozinn, *The Met Drops Kathleen Battle, Citing 'Unprofessional Actions'*, New York Times, 8 February 1994, sec. A, 1.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

which in theatrical endeavor is optimistic. Having completed the first phase of its American program, the Metropolitan's efforts to encourage composers had apparently not been in vain. The first historiography of American opera, Edward Ellsworth Hipsher's American Opera and its Composers, appeared in 1927. That enough activity had elapsed within seven subsequent years for Hipsher to prepare an expanded edition in 1934 was promising, to say the least.

The news in Hipsher's book, however, was not operatic activity at the Metropolitan but rather outside of it. Obviously, if the author had confined his commentary solely to productions at the nation's principal theater, he would have had little to say.[67] The first surge in American operatic composition had in fact begun during the Gilded Age, simultaneously with the country's economic expansion and the concomitant availability of patronage. Nevertheless, the history of opera in America before this time is substantial and directly influenced the attitudes of the composers responsible for the increase in nineteenth-century activity. It was their agitation of the issues central to the development of an indigenous operatic style that provoked the Metropolitan's early twentieth-century response, and this in turn affected the direction of American opera for decades to come.

---

[67] Nine American operas had been produced at the Metropolitan at the time of Hipsher's original publication.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

CHAPTER 1

AMERICAN OPERA BEFORE THE METROPOLITAN

The issues faced by the Metropolitan's early twentieth-century American composers emerged from the often troubled history of opera in English, whose origins date from the earliest British responses to the new genre developed in Florence at the close of the sixteenth century. In this sense, even modern American opera remains inextricably linked to the seventeenth-century English lyric theater, for no event arguably affected the direction of the development of opera in either England or America more than the death of Henry Purcell. The loss of Britain's first great dramatic composer at the height of his powers, and the two-hundred-fifty-year wait for a successor to emerge, seriously hampered the development of a national school of opera in English on both sides of the Atlantic. Thus, a brief examination of the events surrounding Purcell's achievement of a viable English model with Dido and Aeneas, the failure by him or any other British composer to develop the genre along lines that would render it competitive with the Italian lyric drama, and the subsequent development of an Italian hegemony that persisted across the following two centuries is crucial to understanding the state of the English genre as it was inherited by the Americans.

The *stile recitativo* in England

England had not been antagonistic to adopting the new *stile recitativo*, pioneered by the singer Jacopo Peri with the poet Ottavio Rinuccini, as has often been implied.[1] The

---

[1] The innovations of Peri and Rinuccini were based on theories of melodic declamation described in the treatise *Dialogo della musica antica, et della moderna* (1581) by Vicenzo Galilei, a member of the celebrated Florentine Camerata led by Giovanni de' Bardi during the period ca. 1573-1592. However, Peri and Rinuccini were never members of this circle; their initial experiments with

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

earliest attempt at English recitative is attributed to Nicolas Lanier (1588-1666), whose music to Ben Jonson's court masque Lovers Made Men dates from 1617.[2] The effect of Puritan theatrical suppression has also been somewhat misconstrued. In point of fact, the first English opera sung "in Recitative Musick," The Siege of Rhodes (1656; libretto by Sir William Davenant [D'Avenant], score by Henry Lawes, Matthew Locke and others), was occasioned by the Commonwealth ban on spoken drama. This point was confirmed shortly after the Restoration by John Dryden (1631-1700) in his *Essay of Heroick Playes*:

> It being forbidden . . . in the Rebellious Times to Act Tragedies and Comedies . . . [D'Avenant] was forc'd to turn his thoughts another way; and to introduce the Examples of Moral Virtue, writ in Verse, and perform'd in *Recitative Musick.* [3]

William Davenant, a playwright who had succeeded Ben Jonson as Poet Laureate in 1637, acquired a patent from Charles I in 1639 for the construction of a theater in which he apparently intended to present masque—then a highly developed theatrical entertainment approaching opera—as well as spoken drama, for he was authorized "to act plays in such house to be by him erected, and exercise musick, musical presentments, scenes, dancing, or any other the like, at the same or other houses at times, or after plays are ended."[4] The

---

completely sung plays were sponsored by the nobleman Jacopo Corsi after the dissolution of Bardi's group. See Claude V. Palisca, *The "Camerata Fiorentina": A Reappraisal,* Studi musicali 1 (1972): 203-36.

2 "And the whole Masque was sung after the Italian manner, *stilo recitativo*, by Master Nicholas Lanier, who ordered and made both the Scene and the music." 1640 folio of Jonson's libretto, quoted in Eric Walter White, A History of English Opera (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1983), 47. Lanier's music is unfortunately not extant. A score to the masque has been constructed from surviving music of Lanier and his contemporaries by Andrew J. Sabol, A Score for *Lovers Made Men* (Providence, Rhode Island: Brown University Press, 1963).

3 Dryden, *Essay of Heroick Playes*, preface to The Conquest of Granada (1670; published 1672), quoted in White, English Opera, 83-84.

4 Quoted in Edward J. Dent, Foundations of English Opera (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1928), 43.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

opening of Europe's first public opera house in 1637, the Teatro S. Cassiano in Venice, may have provided some impetus for the British venture, for England had always maintained ties to the Italian city, but Davenant's ambitious plans had to be postponed when he was exiled to France in 1641 for allegedly taking part in a political conspiracy. Returning to England to find the theaters closed, the enterprising manager announced an unobjectionable musical program for 23 May 1656, "The First Dayes Entertainment at Rutland-House by Declamations and Musick: after the manner of the Ancients," which reflected the knowledge he had acquired of early Italian opera from performances at the French court.[5] The circuitous journey that resulted in Davenant's fledgling effort to produce opera in England was expressed by the evening's Prologue:

> Think this your passage, and the narrow way
> To our Elisian field, the Opera:
> Tow'rds which some say we have gone far about,
> Because it seems so long since we set out. [6]

Davenant's Commonwealth subterfuge has been more accurately described as a "lecture-recital in costume" than opera, however, since it consisted of prose speeches and declamations followed by songs interspersed with music played by an instrumental consort.[7] But this early effort was closely followed by The Siege of Rhodes, after Knolles's Historie of the Turkes (London, 1603), in the autumn of 1656. Of particular historical interest was an appearance by the singer "Mr. Henry Persill," identified as either the father or uncle of the composer, in the cast.[8] The new work was completely sung to music of Henry Lawes, Matthew Locke and others—its libretto confirmed, "and the Story sung in *Recitative* Musick"—and thus

---

5 Dent, English Opera, 44, 47, 52.

6 Ibid., 53.

7 The music was composed by Henry Cook, Henry Lawes, Charles Coleman and George Hudson. White, English Opera, 67-68.

8 Dent, English Opera, 54-55.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

came to be described as the first English opera.[9] Unfortunately, no music from The Siege of Rhodes is extant.

The first English opera was a resounding success that enjoyed several revivals in the following years. The two works that immediately followed it did not, however, represent a clear line of English development in the new genre, possibly because Davenant, as a poet, privileged words over music. The Cruelty of the Spaniards in Peru (1658) utilized spoken declamation in lieu of recitative; The History of Sir Francis Drake (1659) restored the *recitativo* style a year later. Apparently the shadow of the Italian genre was already beginning to loom, as a rather ominous critique of a performance of Sir Francis Drake on 6 May 1659 was recorded by British diarist John Evelyn, a musical amateur who had toured France and Italy in the previous decade:

> I went . . . to see a new *Opera* after the *Italian* was in *Recitative Music* and *Sceanes*, much inferior to the Italian composure and magnificence: but what was prodigious, that in a time of such a publique Consternation, such a Vanity should be kept up or permitted. . . . [10]

Ironically, the Restoration of Charles II in 1660 did not necessarily improve the genre's prospects, as the concomitant removal of the prohibition on stage plays resulted in a flowering in spoken drama to the detriment of the new English opera.[11] Davenent and Thomas Killigrew, an amateur playwright with court connections, succeeded in quashing the efforts of Italian impresario Giulio Gentileschi to build his own theater for the production of Italian opera, but not because they wished to privilege English efforts; Samuel Pepys testified that Killigrew wanted

---

9 Ibid., 69. The anonymous Preface to the libretto of The Fairy Queen (1692) later referred to this historical precedent: "That Sir William Davenant's *Siege of Rhodes* was the first Opera we ever had in England, no Man can deny."

10 Evelyn Diary, quoted in White, English Opera, 78.

11 Donald Jay Grout, A Short History of Opera, 2d ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), 136-37.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

to produce the new Italian operas himself.[12] Davenant, for his part, wished to augment the role of English music in its dramatic art, but England's brilliant dramatic tradition—which Italy lacked—and its recent restoration to the stage demanded that concessions to the spoken word be made. Davenant thus turned in his post-Commonwealth period to hybrid musical-dramatic productions, culminating in spectacular revivals of Macbeth and The Tempest on "near-operatic lines": "[Macbeth] being all Excellently perform'd, being in the nature of an Opera, it Recompence'd double the Expense; it proves still a lasting Play."[13]

After Davenant's death in 1668, the musical tradition he had fostered on the stage was continued by one of his collaborators on The Siege of Rhodes, the composer Matthew Locke. Locke made a crucial decision to develop further the hybrid musical-dramatic form with which Davenant had culminated his long career in lieu of attempting through-composed opera after the Italian manner. The composer defended his position with an argument along prejudicial nationalist lines in the Preface to Psyche (1675), the first work he produced in the mixed genre:

> [I]t may justly wear the Title [of Opera], though all the Tragedy be not in Musick: for the Author prudently consider'd, that though *Italy* was, and is the great Academy of the World for that Science and way of Entertainment, *England* is not: and therefore mixt it with interlocutions, as more proper to our *Genius*. [14]

Thus, ideas concerning Italy's purported musical hegemony were already in circulation during the period—and perhaps well before—in which the English first attempted to compose opera. Locke's hybrid Psyche initiated a new era of so-called "dramatic opera" in England which continued to flourish throughout the final quarter of the seventeenth century, a

---

12 "[Killigrew] hath gone . . . eight or ten times, he tells me, hence to Rome, to hear good musique; so much he loves it, though he never did sing or play a note. . . . He do intend to have some times of the year these operas to be performed at the two present theatres . . ." Pepys Diary, 12 February 1667, quoted in White, English Opera, 93.

13 White, English Opera, 86.

14 Quoted in White, English Opera, 97.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

period coincident with the musical maturity of Henry Purcell. The genre's appellation is credited to John Dryden, who styled his King Arthur (produced in 1691 with music by Purcell) "a dramatick opera," in the first known use of the term in the seventeenth century.[15] Confusions about nomenclature surfaced, however, which reflected the well-known tension of text-music primacy, as evidenced by a commentary written in 1700 by Roger North which begins with the phrase: "I remember in Purcell's excellent opera of *King Arthur*, . . ."[16] Whether the new theatrical genre was associated more closely with the author of its words or its music apparently depended on the vagaries of one's viewpoint.

The principal philosophical difference between the new dramatic operas and their Italian competitors was that in the English genre, the spoken drama was considered an autonomous entity no matter how lavishly it was embellished. Embellishments took various forms ranging from simple songs, dances and ensembles to the insertion of miniature masques performed by a separate cast of singers and musicians. At the same time, the masque tradition itself continued, and proved capable of drawing the attention of one of England's most distinguished composers with the appearance of John Blow's Venus and Adonis (ca. 1681-2; librettist unknown), the first through-composed masque with full dramatic action.[17] Dryden's attempt to link the two rapidly converging traditions of masque and dramatic opera with Albion and Albanius (1685; score by Louis Grabut) was an unfortunate failure, and it seemed that the celebrated poet would have to postpone his operatic ambitions. Gratefully, he was not compelled to do so for long.

---

15 Ibid., 117. Modern historians also use the term "semi-opera," which first appeared in the early eighteenth-century writings of London musical observer Roger North.

16 Quoted in White, English Opera, 121.

17 Ibid., 103-4.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The Emergence of Purcell

England was at last fortunate in her nearly century-long wait for a dramatic composer of genius with the artistic maturity of Henry Purcell (1659-1695) during the final two decades of the seventeenth century. Through studies with Henry Cook and John Blow, Purcell had been introduced to English traditions in lyric drama dating back to Davenant. He initially found his role in the theatrical world with a prodigious output of incidental music to stage plays that began with Nathaniel Lee's Theodosius (1680) and concluded posthumously with Richard Norton's Pausanias (1696). Purcell's distinction in these works earned him a commission from Josias Priest, dancing-master and proprietor of a Chelsea boarding school for girls, for an entertainment in the masque tradition to be performed chiefly by students.[18] Purcell's fulfillment of this task with Dido and Aeneas (premiered 1689), which is strongly indebted to Blow's Venus and Adonis, heralded a major event in English opera. For the first time, a composer achieved a mastery of all components of the genre—air, arioso, recitative, chorus and instrumental music—in a through-composed format in English.

But the new work did not immediately inaugurate a trend for through-composed English lyric dramas and Purcell's next project was a dramatic opera, The Prophetess, or, The History of Dioclesian (1690), which must have been a notable success, for its score was published in a folio volume available for ten shillings in February 1691.[19] Shortly thereafter, Purcell began to work with Dryden and was asked to reset Albion and Albanius, which had been reworked by the poet in obvious realization of the musical talent now available to him. Especially

---

[18] Despite the fact that the only documented performance of Dido and Aeneas during Purcell's lifetime occurred at Priest's school, the framing of the work by an elaborate allegorical prologue and epilogue (music not extant) argues that its creators may originally have intended it for court performance. Roger Brunyate, *Dido and Aeneas and Les arts florissants Reflect the English and French Courts of 1685,* Peabody News [Peabody Conservatory], January/February 2001, 10.

[19] White, English Opera, 115.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

noteworthy in Dryden's commentary are his remarks on the music-text relationship; for the first time in English opera, the pendulum began to swing in favor of the composer:

> But the Numbers of Poetry and Vocal Musick, are sometimes so contrary, that in many places I have been oblig'd to cramp my Verses, and make them rugged to the Reader, that they may be harmonious to the Hearer: Of which I have no reason to repent me, because these sorts of Entertainment are principally design'd for the Ear and Eye; and therefore in Reason my Art, on this occasion, ought to be subservient to his. [20]

The new work was premiered as King Arthur at the Dorset Garden in 1691, and was followed by The Fairy Queen in 1692. A slight lapse followed due to unsettled theater finances, after which Purcell concluded his operatic career with Bonduca, whose musical content is comparatively small, and The Indian Queen, a full-scale dramatic opera after the 1664 heroic play of Dryden and Sir Robert Howard.[21]

Purcell's unparalleled success in placing English dramatic music on a par with that of the Italians in the consciousness of the public was underscored after his premature death on 21 November 1695 by Roger North:

> He was a match for all sorts of designes in musick. . . . He imitated the Itallian sonnata and (bating a litle too much of the labour) outdid them. And raised up operas and musick in the theaters, to a credit, even of fame as farr as Italy, where *Sig^r Purcell* was courted no less than at home. [22]

An analysis by actor-manager Thomas Betterton, who had performed in The Siege of Rhodes, invokes the tantalizing hypothesis that, had he lived longer, Purcell might have offered Handel

---

20 Ibid., 117.

21 The attribution to Purcell of a new score to The Tempest by the publishers Harrison & Co., which issued it in 1786, has been seriously challenged. Margaret Laurie, *Did Purcell Set "The Tempest"?*, Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association 90 (1963-64): 43-57, quoted in White, English Opera, 125-26.

22 White, English Opera, 127-28.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

significant competition and thus altered the course of eighteenth-century operatic developments in England:

> Let any Master compare *Twice ten hundred Deities*, the Music in the *Frost Scene,* several Parts of the *Indian Queen,* and twenty more Pieces of *Henry Purcel,* with all the *Arrieto's, Dacapo's, Recitativos* of *Camilla, Pyrrhus, Clotilda,* etc. and then judge which excels. *Purcel* penetrates the Heart, makes the Blood dance through your Veins, and thrill with the agreeable Violence offer'd by his Heavenly Harmony. . . . [23]

Yet, despite the great popularity enjoyed by Purcell's music in the wake of his untimely death, it could not stem the rising tide of Italian opera incipient in early eighteenth-century London. This was principally due to the inherent defects of the dramatic opera genre, which were noted circa 1726 by North:

> But there is a fatall objection to all these ambigue entertainments: they break unity, and distract the audience. Some come for the play and hate the musick, others come only for the musick, and the drama is pennance to them, and scarce any are well reconciled to both. . . . . At last these were forc't to yield and give place to their betters the compleat operas. [24]

By 1705, the field of "compleat opera" in England had entered its long period of domination by Italy.

The Italian Conquest of London and the Rise of Ballad Opera

The new atmosphere which was beginning to pervade London in the aftermath of Purcell manifested itself in an increasing fascination with foreign musical influence, particularly that of Italian opera. The 1705 Drury Lane production of Arsinoe, Queen of Cyprus (English translation of Tomaso Stanzani's 1677 libretto by Peter Motteux; score by Thomas Clayton, Nicolino Haym, and Charles Dieupart) marked the new order, with the collaborative effort's objective clearly stated by Clayton: "The design of this entertainment [is] to introduce the Italian

---

[23] Ibid., 133-34.

[24] Ibid., 135.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

manner of musick on the English stage, which has not been before attempted, . . ."[25] In the face of the new onslaught, even John Eccles's Semele (1705-6), a work that might have been the salvation of English opera, could not obtain a performance.[26] The field by then had been successfully invaded by Italian "interlopers" whose most potent ammunition, ironically, was the castrato. The matchless vocal display of the new singers, then unknown to England, achieved a supremacy for the Italians, particularly among the aristocracy, that remained in historical tension with English lyric drama for more than two centuries thereafter. The renowned British essayist Joseph Addison (1672-1719) recorded his dismay at this turn of events as early as 1707 in his prologue to Edmund Smith's new tragedy Phaedra and Hippolitus, which included this rhyming couplet in iambic pentameter:

> Our homespun authors must forsake the field,
> And Shakespeare to the soft Scarlatti yield. [27]

Nevertheless, Handel's well-deserved conquest of London, beginning with the premiere of Rinaldo on 24 February 1711, sealed England's fate. Addison commented shortly thereafter in The Spectator:

> We are transported with anything that is not English: so it be of foreign growth, let it be Italian, French, or High Dutch, it is the same thing. In short, our English music is quite rooted out, and nothing yet planted in its stead. [28]

---

25 Ibid., 140.

26 Stanley Sadie, ed., The New Grove Dictionary of Opera (hereafter, "Opera Grove") (London: Macmillan Press Limited, 1992), s.v. *John Eccles* by Curtis Price.

27 Quoted in White, English Opera, 143. Addison's enmity to Italian music developed after the conspicuous failure on 4 March 1707 of Thomas Clayton's Rosamond, an English opera "after the Italian Manner," which was composed to Addison's only libretto. Perhaps Addison's contribution was not to blame, for a second version of Rosamond composed by Thomas Arne was successfully received at its 1733 premiere at Lincoln's Inn Fields. Ibid., 142, 185.

28 The Spectator No. 18 (21 March 1711), quoted in Frank Kidson, The Beggar's Opera: Its Predecessors and Successors (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1922; repr., New York, Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1969), 27 (page numbers refer to reprint edition).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

British patriots fought back, however, by turning to a musically unperturbable group, the Scots. This chauvinist analysis was penned in 1922:

> While the Italian opera was leading English musical taste astray, the Scottish nation held fast its own musical tradition and was not influenced by that of any other nation. [29]

The first to turn this unsullied national music to dramatic use seems to have been Allan Ramsay, described as "poet, wigmaker, and bookseller," whose pastoral comedy The Gentle Shepherd was first published in 1725, then staged with interpolated songs by one Theophilus Cibber at Drury Lane in 1730 as Patie and Peggy, or the fair Foundling. The entertainment was described as a one-act "ballad opera," and drew on both Scotch dialect as well as tunes that were "well-known north of the [River] Tweed."[30] Concurrent with these general events, and no doubt inspired by them, appears to have been Jonathan Swift's inspired suggestion to John Gay of a satirical parody of the original pastoral. The account was charmingly transmitted by Alexander Pope to Joseph Spence, who recorded it in his 1820 Anecdotes: "Dr. Swift had been observing once to Mr. Gay what an odd pretty sort of thing a Newgate Pastoral might make."[31] Thus the infamous Beggar's Opera (1728), often pointed to as the prototypical ballad opera, was born.

The first documented importation of the new ballad opera genre to America occurred less than a decade later, with a 1735 performance of Flora, or Hob in the Well by Colley Cibber (father of Theophilus) in Charleston, South Carolina. The ballad opera had reached the New World even earlier than this via a rag-tag company which embarked on a tour in Jamaica, and there is even evidence of an ill-fated link between the troupes:

---

29 Kidson, Beggar's Opera, 29.

30 Ibid., 30-31.

31 Ibid., 31, 35*n*1.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> I had an account from a gentleman, who was possessed of a large estate in the island, that a company in the year 1733 came there and cleared a large sum of money; . . . . They received 370 pistoles the first night, to The Beggar's Opera; but within the space of two months they buried their third Polly and two of their men. . . . in two months more there were but one old man, a boy, and a woman of the company left. The rest died either with the country distemper or the common beverage of the place, the noble spirit of rum-punch which is generally fatal to new-comers. The shattered remains, with upwards of 2,000 pistoles in bank, embarked for Carolina to join another company at Charlestown, but were cast away in the voyage. [32]

That these events occurred prior to the first documented concert in New York[33] may have been prophetic, but those seeking the immediate formation of a social schism between the worlds of popular and serious music would be disappointed. Ballad opera producer Theophilus Cibber married the sister of esteemed composer Thomas Arne, whose valiant eighteenth-century attempts to succeed Purcell culminated in Artaxerxes (1762; to an English libretto by the composer after Metastasio), which was staged at Covent Garden and became the only popular through-composed full-length English opera before Peter Grimes.[34] Although Artaxerxes remained in the repertory until the nineteenth century and received more performances in England than any continental opera, repeated waves of bad luck mitigated against English composers building on Arne's model. Early imitators were encouraged by Drury Lane management but lacked Arne's skill, and audience interest regressed disappointingly back to a preference for spoken dialogue in place of musical recitative. The few subsequent composers of promise—Charles Dibdin (1745-1814), Thomas Linley (1756-1778), Stephen Storace (1763-1796)—either died young or did not fulfill their early promise. Drury Lane and Covent Garden

---

32 William Rufus Chetwood, A General History of the Stage (London: W. Owen, 1749), quoted in Kidson, Beggar's Opera, 37-38.

33 By keyboardist C. T. Pachelbel (son of Johann) with an instrumental ensemble, on 21 January 1736.

34 Stanley Sadie, ed., The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians (hereafter, "Grove") (London: Macmillan Publishers Limited, 1980), s.v. *Opera, §V, 1: England*, by Roger Fiske.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

were destroyed by fire in the early nineteenth century, along with most of the important English full scores and orchestral parts. Many of the manuscripts to Arne's ninety stage works are believed to have perished in the 1808 Covent Garden fire. By 1820, Rossini's operas had reached London, igniting a second blaze of virtuoso florid singing that captured public interest. In 1847 Covent Garden became known as "The Italian Opera House" as Verdi's influence began to be felt. Although Gilbert and Sullivan achieved spectacular popularity in operetta in the last quarter of the century, Italian dominance continued to impede English efforts in through-composed opera until the Sadler's Wells Theatre, a permanent company devoted to opera in English, opened in 1931.[35]

Ballad Opera in America and the First Italian Imports

It was clear that in the American colonies ballad opera would rule where it could, as the colonists evidently privileged entertainment over enlightenment. A 1750 Massachusetts law prohibiting theatrical entertainment provided New England Puritans with bad publicity for generations, but may have helped the cause of William Billings, America's first official composer, who produced the first published collection of American music by a single composer, The New-England Psalm-Singer, in 1770. The Puritans were by no means an unmusical people, but the products of the resulting First New England School—vocal music to religious texts—were more to their taste and avoided the "libretto problem" that would plague American composers until well into the twentieth century. Outside New England, however, 1750 was the year The Beggar's

---

[35] Ibid. Sadler's Wells, originally associated with London's Old Vic Theatre, became the English National Opera in 1974.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Opera arrived in America, when it was played in New York.[36] The 1767 publication of the libretto to The Disappointment, or The Force of Credulity, by an unidentified Philadelphia author writing under the pseudonym Andrew Barton, subsequently heralded the first ballad opera written by an American.[37]

The Americans may have been motivated by necessity, as there appears to have been a lacuna in British ballad opera composition between 1737 and two new Arne works that appeared over twenty years later: Thomas and Sally (1760) and the immensely popular Love in a Village (1762). The position in which the first American to write for the lyric stage found himself—having received a mandate to satisfy a pressing public demand—certainly seems, in retrospect, an enviable one. Yet Barton confessed himself reluctant to offer his private amusement for public consumption and in an apologetic Preface confirmed the paucity of musical drama then available in the colonies:

> Conscious therefore of my own inability, I determined to excuse myself to all; and in this determination I persisted for some time, but at last, for my own safety, was obliged to capitulate and surrender on the following stipulations: First, the infrequency of dramatic compositions in America; Secondly, the torrent of solicitations from all quarters; Thirdly, the necessity of contributing to the entertainment of the city. . . . [38]

---

36 John Dizikes, Opera in America: A Cultural History (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), 18.

37 A definitive attribution for the authorship of The Disappointment has never been established. Although Barton was a common surname in colonial America, it is fairly certain that Andrew Barton, Esq. was a pseudonym. Patricia H. Virga, The American Opera to 1790 (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1982), 36. Oscar Sonneck is credited with first associating the pseudonym with Sir Andrew Barton (d. 1511), a Scottish pirate immortalized in ballads; the author's choice thus contributes to the wit of the piece, as its plot mocks the superstitious practice of searching for pirate treasure purportedly buried along the New Jersey shoreline. Oscar G. T. Sonneck, Early Opera in America: Roots and Sources of the American Theatre (New York: Schirmer and Boston: The Boston Music Company, 1915; repr., New York: Blom, 1963), 447, quoted in Carolyn Rabson, *Disappointment Revisited: Unweaving the Tangled Web. Part I*, American Music 1 (Spring 1983): 20.

38 Andrew Barton, Esq., *The Author's Preface to the Public*, The Disappointment; or, the Force of Credulity (New York: [Goddard], 1767), quoted in Rabson, *Disappointment*, 26.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Unfortunately, The Disappointment did not immediately contribute to the entertainment of colonial Philadelphia, for its planned 20 April 1767 premiere was abruptly cancelled with the notice: "N.B. THE DISAPPOINTMENT . . . as it contains personal Reflections, is unfit for the Stage."[39] The libretto had already revealed a number of its characters to be based on prominent Philadelphians, and apparently one Richard Swan objected to his dramatic incarnation as Raccoon, a lecherous ignoramus who is cuckolded by his mistress during the course of the evening.[40]

Despite this opposition, The Disappointment initiated a period of dominance of the ballad opera in America, which extended throughout the Federal period well into the first quarter of the nineteenth century. There followed a renewed effort in ballad opera composition on both sides of the ocean, with the new American operatic history punctuated by a series of "firsts":

James Hewitt's Tammany, or The Indian Chief (produced New York, 3 March 1794; libretto by Anna Hatton) became the first opera produced in North America on an Indian subject, or at least with an Indian character as the leading role;[41]

---

39 Pennsylvania Chronicle, 16 April 1767. A second edition of the libretto published in 1796 by Francis Shallus of Philadelphia presumably indicated preparations for a revival, but no performances of the work can be actually documented until 3 March 1937, when it was seen at the Majestic Theatre in Brooklyn, New York under the auspices of the Federal Theatre Project of the Works Progress Administration. Virga, Opera to 1790, 19, 62-63.

40 Rabson, *Disappointment*, 23.

41 Anti-Federalist French sympathizers closed it after three performances, reportedly due to Hewitt's failure to insert a satisfactory number of French patriotic songs in the score. Only one song from the work is extant. Curiously, the first composers to include New World indigenous populations in their dramatic works were not American; Tammany was preceded by at least three European operas on North American Indian themes: André Grétry's Huron (Paris, 1768); Niccolò Piccinni's Americano Ingentilito (The Ennobled Indian, Rome, 1772); and Samuel Arnold's Inkle and Yarico (London, 1787). Contemporaneous with Hewitt was former Mozart pupil Stephen Storace, whose Cherokee was premiered in London in 1794. Quaintance Eaton, *The New World*, Opera News 29 (1 May 1965): 26-27. Of course, European operas on the subject of the encounters between Old World explorers, particularly Columbus, with indigenous groups of Latin and South America are even more numerous and date from the seventeenth century. See discussion of Cadman's Shanewis at the Metropolitan in chapter 4.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

John Bray's The Indian Princess, or La belle Sauvage (produced Philadelphia, 1808; libretto by J. N. Barker), after the popular romantic legend of Pocahantas and Captain John Smith, was the first on an American subject to have its vocal score published;

Micah Hawkins's The Saw-Mill, or A Yankee Trick (produced New York, Chatham Garden Theater, 1 November 1824) is cited as the first "genuine"opera by an American composer on an American theme, its libretto being inspired by a Yankee story told by one Richard Smith of Setauket, Long Island;[42] and so on.

Eaton reports The Saw Mill being given as late as 29 November 1825 at New York's historic Park Theatre. If so, it must have been a busy day for opera in New York, as that evening the famous García family troupe headed by its patriarch, Spanish tenor Manuel del Pópolo Vicente García, premiered an historic Il barbiere di Siviglia at the Park in what is widely known as the debut of an Italian opera, sung in Italian, in New York.[43] It is indeed unfortunate that Arne's Artaxerxes had not crossed the Atlantic before the Garcías, for a crash course in opera appreciation was apparently necessary in order to assure the success of the new exotic art to a literally uncomprehending public.[44] Accordingly, an anonymous "Musæus" published a

---

42 Quaintance Eaton, *A Yankee Trick*, Opera News 31 (1 April 1967): 6. According to this argument, earlier ballad operas on American subjects are not authentic because their scores were compilations of existing popular tunes and not original music; and The Indian Princess is disqualified because its composer, John Bray, was born in England.

43 The Park, which opened on 29 January 1798, had been sold at auction to real estate investors John K. Beekman and John Jacob Astor in 1806. Astor became the city's first millionaire in 1808 and continued to hold an interest in the property until his death in 1848. He was thus a part owner of the theater at the time of the García visit, initiating the Astor dynasty's long involvement with important operatic institutions in New York. Karyl Lynn Zietz, The National Trust Guide to Great Opera Houses in America (New York: Preservation Press and John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1996), 113; Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 484.

44 Prior to this, New York theatregoers had experienced opera as a polyglot entertainment which could comprise "ballad operas, burlettas, musical farces, curtain raisers, afterpieces, extravaganzas, horse operas (featuring gifted equine thespians), opera-ballets, melodramas, plays in all categories having interpolated songs, and particularly the truncated, pastiche manglings of

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

column in the New-York American providing instruction, complete with a glossary of Italian operatic terms. Although the media's educational efforts were certainly laudable, Musæus may have intimidated a good part of the public when he warned against trying to assimilate everything at once: "Savor all that strikes our senses with pleasure, and await a full understanding of the whole to enjoy such parts as at first make no impression."[45] And though the Park, with its varied bill, enjoyed the patronage of a range of classes, the promotion of the Italian evening largely as a social event set a dangerous precedent for a repetition of events in London a century before.

On 28 November 1825, the day before the great event, a letter to the American was published from "Cinderella," aptly described by Lawrence as the "Fairy Godmother of the sartorially motivated, jewel-festooned American opera house of the future":

> We would suggest that it would be much to the advantage of the managers to have the boxes carefully swept the nights of the opera, and that the ladies should appear more [elaborately] dressed than on ordinary occasions. In Europe they are always in full dress, but that would scarcely be compatible with the crowded seats of our boxes. But it would not necessarily prevent them from paying attention to the dressing of their hair and bust, in order that the theatre might have a gayer appearance.

The impact on the public was immediate, as testified later by a reporter for the New-York Mirror. Apparently a clothing merchant in the city had trouble selling a collection of ladies' silk cloaks to his fashionable customers. But then, "Signor García and the Italian company set themselves down among us and began *una voce-ing* and *poco fa-ing* until everyone's head was turned." An opera-loving clerk hit upon the *ruse de guerre* of advertising the articles as "*Opera cloaks*—a *bran-new* importation" and soon sold the lot.[46]

---

legitimate operas by European composers, often rendered all but unrecognizable by the irreverent dabblings and pilferings of their adapters." Vera Brodsky Lawrence, *First Fling*, Opera News 53 (September 1988): 22.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid., 23.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Nineteenth-Century American Operatic Efforts

The interest generated by the Italian company's visit initially appeared to augur well for American opera composers. The Euterpeiad of 1 July 1830 solicited entries for a

PRIZE OPERA

> In order to inspire genius and encourage talent the proprietors of this work offer a premium of $500 for the best opera; the music as well as the words to be original, and to contain three acts, an overture, and a variety of songs, duets, trios, choruses, etc., with instrumental accompaniments. The opera must be forwarded to the proprietors before the 1st of January, 1831. Arrangements will be made to have it brought out at once at one of the theatres in this city. The premium shall be awarded by a committee of seven gentlemen, to be hereafter nominated for that purpose . . . .

Frédéric Ritter, author of the first complete history of American music, unfortunately reported in 1885 that he was never able to find out whether "'genius was inspired' by this tempting offer."[47] The fledgling American composer may have been seriously hampered by practicalities, as reported by a German musician who was engaged at New York's Lafayette Theatre in the summer of 1828:

> Here the musical situation is the following: . . . . The performance of a whole opera is not to be thought of. . . . The orchestras are very bad indeed; as bad as it is possible to imagine, and incomplete. . . . Oboes are totally unknown in this country. Only one oboist exists in North America, and he is said to live in Baltimore. [48]

Whatever hyperbole the impassioned writer may have employed, it was clear that some reform in production conditions was in order. In 1832, none other than Lorenzo Da Ponte, a professor of Italian at Columbia University since 1825, set out to provide it by teaming with Dominick Lynch, a socially well-connected vintner who had been among those responsible for the

---

47 Frédéric Louis Ritter, Music in America (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1890; repr., New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1970), 203-4 (page numbers refer to reprint edition).

48 Letter dated 27 July 1828 to musical periodical Cæcilia: Eine Zeitschrift für die musikalische Welt [Mainz, Germany], quoted in Ritter, 204-5.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

García troupe's visit, and others to organize construction of the first theater in the United States designed specifically for opera.[49] The lavish Italian Opera House at Church and Leonard Streets in New York was enthusiastically described as "[t]he neatest and most beautiful theatre in the United States, and unsurpassed in Europe," by one of its backers, former New York City mayor Philip Hone.[50] No American composer was an immediate beneficiary, however, since the impresario Vicenzo de Rivafinoli was imported to present exclusively Italian opera. Following Da Ponte's recommendation of Rossini for its popularity—no doubt recalling the Garcías' successful Barbiere debut—Rivafinoli opened his first season with La gazza ladra on 18 November 1833. The Italian Opera House was acknowledged as an architectural gem and attracted the wealth of society by becoming the first American theater to offer a tier of exclusive boxes for rental, but its financial organization was more advantageous to the boxholders than to management. The Italian seasons ultimately could not support themselves, and Da Ponte's dream survived only two seasons before the company disbanded in 1835.[51]

Despite its brief life, the Italian Opera House became emblematic of two opposing trends which began to appear in the development of opera in New York in the decade following the Garcías' visit. At the same time that production conditions were undergoing rapid improvement—precisely the boon American composers needed—a social schism began to divide

---

49 The original shareholder agreement forming the Italian Opera Association, dated 9 November 1832, is held by the New York Historical Society. Karen Ahlquist, Democracy at the Opera: Music, Theater, and Culture in New York City, 1815-60 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 211*n*19.

50 Quoted in Sheila Hodges, Lorenzo Da Ponte: The Life and Times of Mozart's Librettist (New York: Universe Books, 1985), 217.

51 Ahlquist, Democracy at the Opera, 127; Dizikes, Opera in America, 76-77. Da Ponte died in 1838. The Italian Opera House was converted into a National Theatre in 1836, but was completely destroyed by a fire caused by leaking gas jets in 1839. Hodges, Da Ponte, 217; Zietz, Great Opera Houses, 21. Amerigrove erroneously reports the fire as occurring two years after the 1833 opening, obviously confusing the demise of the opera company with that of the building itself; s.v. *Opera, § 4.*

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

both audiences and repertoire. The strong atmosphere of social exclusivity at the Italian Opera House cited by its many opponents became conflated in the minds of the public with the exclusively foreign-language repertoire that was produced on its stage. The victory of Andrew Jackson in the 1828 presidential election, by which he became the first man of common birth to hold the office, had already inaugurated a new era in which the articulation of social polarities predominated over attempts to effect a compromise between commerce and culture.[52] The triumph of Jacksonian Democracy thus provided a firm foundation for a significant flourishing of opera productions in English that occurred in New York throughout the second quarter of the nineteenth century, during the same period in which the three principal antebellum opera houses—the Italian Opera House, Palmo's Opera House (1844-47)[53] and the Astor Place Opera House (1847-52)[54]—failed financially despite evidence of artistic distinction.

---

[52] A central feature of Jackson's campaign was his portrayal as a symbol of the common man.

[53] Italian restaurateur Ferdinando Palmo was unique in the decision to finance his opera house on Chambers Street himself. Opening optimistically on 3 February 1844 with democratic pricing (all seats were $1), Palmo was quickly forced to abandon this system to shore up his dwindling finances. New three-tiered pricing helped broaden the audience base, but the 800-seat theater proved too small to provide an adequate profit margin. Ahlquist, Democracy at the Opera, 132-33.

Palmo's problem resurfaced with the next New York operatic venue designed to operate on an entirely democratic basis, the new Metropolitan Opera House at Lincoln Center (1966). After a preliminary study recommended a 4,500-seat capacity was needed to provide adequate economic support for the season, it took the combined efforts of Rudolf Bing and John D. Rockefeller III, citing advice from theatrical and acoustical designers, to reduce the figure to 3,750. Still considered perilous from a design standpoint, this number was insisted upon as a commercial necessity. The original Metropolitan had been designed with 3,045 seats. Mayer, The Met, 18, 270.

[54] It was at the Astor Place, operated by a committee of wealthy patrons, that the tensions of social polarization which had steadily grown throughout the 1840s escalated into violence. The Astor Place riots of May 1849 erupted between partisans of British actor William Charles Macready and those of his American rival, Edwin Forrest. Although opera ostensibly played no direct role in the riots, which left twenty-two dead, the New York Herald published an editorial under the title *Opera and Fashion* on 1 June 1849 which linked the unpopularity of "the Italian Opera" with the "late tragic events." The house had already been subjected to public lampooning with the Olympic Theatre's production of William K. Northall's play Upper Row House in Disaster Place just three weeks after the Astor Place's 22 November 1847 opening. Ahlquist, Democracy at the Opera, 136, 140-41.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Indeed, impresario Max Maretzek, who arrived in New York in 1848 with hopes of profiting from a realignment of the commercial–cultural relationship, termed Italian opera in America "an establishment whose 'failure' has flourished for the last five and twenty years."[55]

The Jacksonian-era surge in English opera popularity might have benefitted American composers had there been a significant English grand opera tradition to draw on. But the lacuna was quickly filled in the same way it had been in London a century before; namely, with the performance of Italian opera in English translation, a hybrid known as "Englished" opera. The resounding commercial success achieved throughout the 1830s and 1840s by the adaptations, far more sophisticated than their predecessor pastiches, paradoxically augmented the reputation of their foreign-language prototypes just as they had in early eighteenth-century London. By reintroducing the genre and the power of its music to audiences in a form they could more readily digest, American theatrical entrepreneurs ironically contributed to the supremacy ultimately achieved by Italian opera over Englished forms during the latter half of the nineteenth century.[56] The Italian cause was fortuitously aided by the appearance of Giuseppe Verdi at a time when England still had not recovered from the death of Purcell. The Astor Place Opera House opened with Ernani in 1847, the same year in which Covent Garden became known as the Italian Opera House. Although the new sweep of Verdi's music must have been musically exhilarating, the emergence of Italian supremacy threatened to close the small window of opportunity American composers had been afforded.

New York musical activity continued to expand rapidly in all genres throughout the mid-nineteenth century—a notable event was the founding of the New York Philharmonic

---

55 Maretzek, Crotchets and Quavers, or Revelations of an Opera Manager in America (New York, 1855; repr., New York: Da Capo Press, 1966), quoted in Ahlquist, Democracy at the Opera, 116.

56 Ahlquist, Democracy at the Opera, 81.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Society in 1842[57]—but true innovation curiously seemed to thrive elsewhere. America's most creative composers at mid-century were probably Anthony Philip Heinrich (1781-1861), a Romantic nationalist who hailed from Schönbüchel, Bohemia and wrote his first composition in a log cabin near Bardstown, Kentucky,[58] and the redoubtable pianist-composer Louis Moreau Gottschalk (1829-1869), whose New Orleans origins were responsible for a colorful effusion of Afro-Caribbean influence in his music. The second movement of Gottschalk's Symphonie Romantique, for example, is subtitled *La nuit des tropiques* and utilizes a battalion of Afro-Cuban drums and other rhythm instruments such as güiros and maracas. It is indeed unfortunate that this remarkable individualist seems never to have had the discipline to complete a full-scale opera, particularly since he might have had a good chance of getting his work produced.[59] The United States gained a valuable cultural outpost with the purchase of the Louisiana Territory from a cash-strapped Napoleon in 1803, for New Orleans had in fact been the continent's most active operatic city since the 1790s.[60] The growth of a dedicated local audience for French opera throughout the first half of the nineteenth century provided for the opening of the French Opera House in 1859, the same year Gottschalk first attempted a large form with his symphony.

---

57 Although this group had several antecedents, the 1842 Society is regarded as the official founding organization of today's New York Philharmonic. See Howard Shanet, Philharmonic: A History of New York's Orchestra (New York: Doubleday, 1975).

58 Heinrich, who settled in New York in 1837, acted as chairman of the organizational meeting of the New York Philharmonic Society on 12 April 1842. Grove, s.v. *Anthony Philip Heinrich* by David Barron.

59 Gottschalk's character flaws also kept him from entering the front ranks of the great nineteenth-century piano virtuosos. "Gottschalk might have become the king of pianists—or, at least, one high in the nobility—had he wanted to. But a combination of many things—indolence, lack of discipline, extracurricular pleasures—kept him from the heights." Harold C. Schonberg, The Great Pianists (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963), 205.

60 Louis Tabery headed the city's first French opera troupe in 1791 and opened its first theater a year later. By 1810, fifteen years before the Garcías' visit to New York, New Orleans had already established a permanent company for the production of French opera at the Orleans Theater. Amerigrove, s.v. *Opera, § 2.*

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Although there is evidence that Gottschalk did in fact sketch ideas for several operas on various subjects, only one completed dramatic work is now extant, the one-act operetta Esceñas campestras cubanas, composed in Havana in 1860.[61] The restless composer then headed across the country on lucrative concert tours, fled to South America in 1865 after a scandalous romantic incident in California, and died at forty in Rio de Janeiro less than five years later.

The First American Opera Composers

It remained, then, for the more "establishment" composers of the Eastern Seaboard cities to debut through-composed American opera, a turn of fate that was later reflected in the Metropolitan's early production choices. William Henry Fry's Leonora was credited as the first "grand opera" of American authorship to be produced when it was premiered in 1845 at the Chestnut Street Theatre in Philadelphia. The city's former position as the federal capital (1776-1800) had engendered a contingent of distinguished and socially prominent persons among its population who supported a sophisticated level of musical taste.[62]

Fry was born in Philadelphia in 1813 to an educated and affluent family and demonstrated musical talent at an early age. An overture he had composed was awarded a medal and a public performance when Fry was eighteen. By twenty, he had begun to compose his first opera. Although The Bridal of Dunure was left uncompleted, a second stage work, Cristiani ed i pagani (begun 1838) was transformed into the three-act lyric tragedy Aurelia the

---

61 S. Frederick Starr, Bamboula! (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 276.

62 Philadelphia's cultural life during the Federal period reached an apex with the flourishing of the New Theatre in Chestnut Street under the skillful direction of Alexander Reinagle (1756-1809), a London musician who emigrated to America in 1786. A frequent composer for Reinagle's theater (which was destroyed by fire in 1820) was his former teacher Rayner Taylor (1747-1825), whose 1814 score for the "Grand Romantick Drama" The Aethiop, a play by William Dimond, enjoyed tremendous success. Gilbert Chase, America's Music: From the Pilgrims to the Present, rev. 3d ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 98, 102; Amerigrove, s.v. *Opera, § 1.*

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Vestal (1841), to a libretto by Fry's brother Joseph. Surviving copies of this score indicate that a performance was anticipated, but there is no evidence that these plans ever came to fruition.[63]

Since Fry's initial efforts in opera occurred during the time when Italian opera was first gaining popularity in America in both Italian and English versions, it is perhaps not surprising that his early compositional career reflected the linguistic ambivalence of the period. The circumstances of his birth and social position had given Fry the opportunity of hearing an unusually wide selection of French and Italian repertoire in the original-language productions that proliferated in the decade after the 1825 García visit. The Garcías had been emulated by visiting troupes from the French company in New Orleans beginning in 1827; these were in turn followed by a profusion of touring Italian groups, among them the Rivafinoli company from Da Ponte's Italian Opera House.[64] But the fact that the sole surviving vocal excerpt of Fry's Italian Cristiani—a "Duetto per Soprano e Tenore" dated 1838—was absorbed into the 1841 English Aurelia, in which it opens the second act, indicates the direction in which the young composer had turned. From that point, Fry became a fervent champion of the efforts of American composers and wrote operas in his native language. However, his admiration for the Europeans, as well as their influence on his music, remained strong. This was reflected in Fry's participation in preparations for the American premiere of Bellini's Norma (Philadelphia, Chestnut Street

---

63 Opera Grove, s.v. *William Henry Fry*, by John Graziano. Fry's biographer reports attempts by the composer, through a friend identified as "the well known opera singer, Signor Giubilei," to secure a production of Aurelia in London. By 1843, however, these efforts remained unsuccessful and Fry apparently decided to concentrate his energies on his next opera, Leonora. William Treat Upton, William Henry Fry: American Journalist and Composer-Critic (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1954; repr., New York: Da Capo Press, 1974), 25, 29 (page numbers refer to reprint edition).

64 It was at the close of Rivafinoli's 1834 Philadelphia season that an overture composed by the young Fry was reported as having been performed. National Gazette, 19 May 1834, quoted in Upton, Fry, 17.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Theatre, 11 January 1841), which was presented in an English translation prepared by Joseph Fry.[65]

Aurelia had already evidenced Fry's captivation with the *bel canto* style, which he brought to maturity with his next opera, Leonora, composed during the four-year period following the Norma premiere. Leonora represented not only the first production of a "serious" opera by an American composer, but also the first successful attempt on the part of the Americans to depart from the received tradition of the British ballad operas.[66] The libretto, again authored by Joseph Fry, was based on Edward Bulwer-Lytton's well-known stage play The Lady of Lyons. The premiere on 4 June 1845, which had to be heavily subsidized by Fry himself, was nevertheless well received by the Philadelphia public. The opera enjoyed a run of twelve performances, an unusual number of repetitions for the time.[67]

Leonora's florid Italianate vocal writing, as well as its orchestration and dramaturgy, was clearly patterned on that of the *bel canto* masters whose works had dominated the burgeoning opera scene in New York and Philadelphia during Fry's formative years as a composer. In particular, the heroine's closing aria with chorus, "Ev'ry doubt and danger over," follows earlier models such as Rossini's La Cenerentola (1817),[68] La Donna del Lago (1819), and Bellini's La Sonnambula (1831) in its adherence to the dramatic formula of a happy ending after numerous vicissitudes, culminating in a brilliantly florid aria for the victorious heroine:

---

65 Upton, Fry, 25-26.
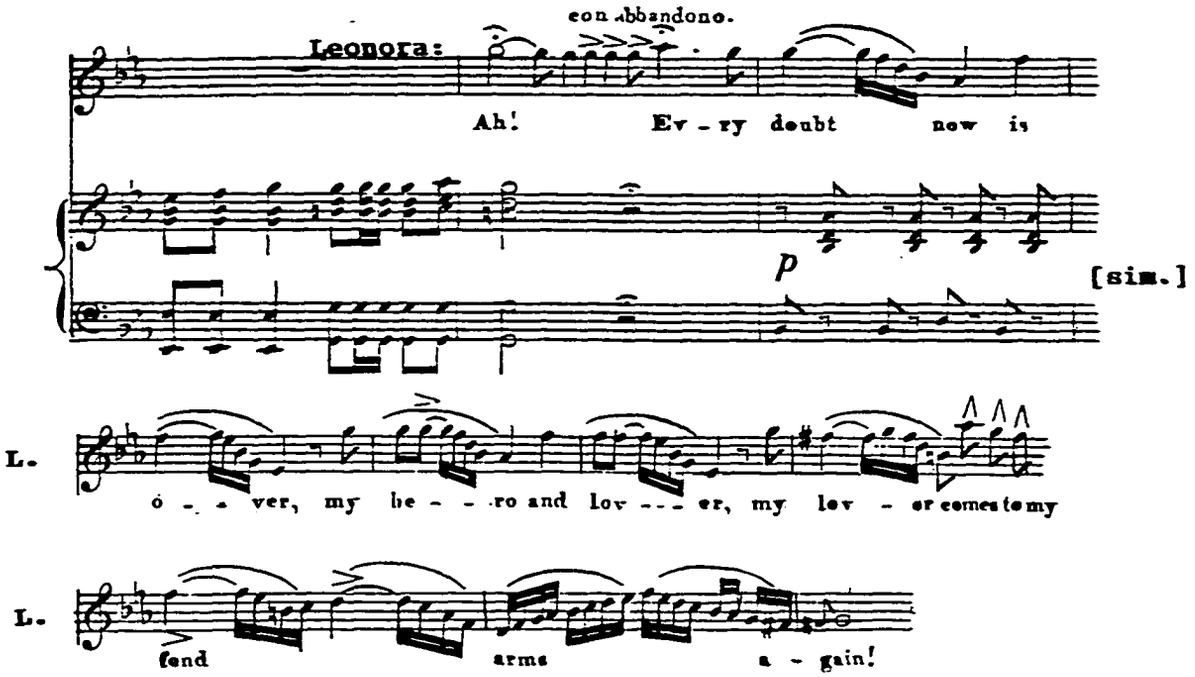
66 Opera Grove, s.v. *Fry*.

67 June C. Ottenberg, Opera Odyssey: Toward a History of Opera in Nineteenth-Century America (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1994), 68, 180.

68 Cenerentola in particular had achieved great popularity with American audiences. Several years after the García troupe had debuted it in Italian at the Park, Rophino Lacy prepared an English version, Cinderella, or The Fairy-Queen and the Glass Slipper, that became a familiar repertory item and successfully toured numerous American cities for three decades.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Ex. 1.1: Fry, Leonora, Act 3, "Ev'ry doubt and danger over"



A revival of Leonora was presented in a revised version the following year at Philadelphia's Walnut Street Theatre, then underwent a second, more radical revision for a 1858 production at New York's Academy of Music, a new operatic venue which had replaced the failed Astor Place Opera House. Occurring four years after the Academy had opened with Bellini's Norma, Leonora's second revival revealed attempts to align it even more closely with the Italian tradition once again in the ascendant under the aegis of an expanding society element. The work was heard in a four-act version retitled Giulio e Leonora and sung in Italian, a translation which provided the added benefit of facilitating the prospect of performances abroad. Yet Fry's repeated efforts to secure productions of his operas in Europe proved unsuccessful, and nearly a half century would pass before an American opera was produced on a European stage.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Fry assumed the post of music editor of Horace Greeley's New-York Tribune in 1852 and continued to encourage the blossoming of a distinctively American cultural landscape, which he considered unnecessarily impeded by the persistence of European hegemony. A large segment of the public, however, remained under the spell of European bias, and Fry's later life became a continuous uphill struggle to gain recognition for native musical talent, reflected in the failure of his own operas to become repertory items in the new American houses, even in Italian translation. Fry's final opera, Notre Dame of Paris (1863), reflected an increasing interest in the contemporary French grand opera school, particularly the operas of Meyerbeer which he had heard in Paris. The opera received a sumptuous premiere at a Civil War benefit conducted by Theodore Thomas (1835-1905), making his debut in opera, at Philadelphia's American Academy of Music on 4 May 1864, and was given a half dozen subsequent performances before vanishing from the repertory. The injustice suffered by Fry throughout his career was recognized by the New York Times in its review of what would be his final operatic effort:

> In the extraordinary derth [*sic*] of composers it is remarkable that one who possesses such gifts should have been slighted so long and so persistently. *Notre Dame* is as good as the average opera that comes to us now from Europe. [69]

Seven months later Fry died of tuberculosis in the Virgin Islands.

But the influence of Fry's views had already affected his successors, including the next important American opera composer. This was George Frederick Bristow (1825-1898), a violinist with the New York Philharmonic Society from 1843-1879 and so outspoken an advocate for the development of native talent that he briefly resigned from the Philharmonic in 1854 in protest over the organization's failure to program orchestral works of American

---

[69] Quoted in Upton, Fry, 228-29.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

composers.[70] Bristow had just completed his first opera, Rip Van Winkle (1853; libretto by Jonathan Howard Wainwright after Washington Irving), heralded as the first "serious" opera by an American composer on a native subject, and was engaged in the tortuous efforts to get his new work produced that were becoming increasingly familiar to American composers. A native New Yorker, Bristow must have been extremely disappointed by the failure of the city's new Academy of Music to mount a production of the work.

The Academy was New York's only theater devoted specifically to concert and opera, and in 1855 its manager, distinguished Norwegian violinist Ole Bull, attempted to establish a permanent opera company there. This led to infighting with Bull's erstwhile business partners, competing impresarios Max Maretzek and Maurice Strakosch, that the press eagerly reported as "the Great Opera House war."[71] The dispute unfortunately occluded another of Bull's planned innovations, which he had announced in rather high-flown language in January 1855:

> TO AMERICAN COMPOSERS.
>
> The undersigned, lessee and manager of the Academy of Music . . . has determined, as far as is in his power, to make the Academy of Music not alone a home of refined and intellectual amusement, where all classes of our citizens may resort with comfort, but also an *academy in reality,* whose principal object shall be the encouragement, the development, and elevation of American art and artists.
>
> In furtherance of this object . . . the manager takes pleasure in announcing that it has been decided to offer for honorable competition a prize of

---

70 During the first dozen years of its existence, the Philharmonic had programmed a single American composition. This was an overture composed by Bristow, which was played at an open rehearsal but never scheduled for a regular performance. Steven Ledbetter, *Introduction* to George Frederick Bristow, Rip Van Winkle: Grand Romantic Opera in Three Acts (New York: Da Capo Press, 1991), viii.

71 Grove, s.v. *Ole Bull* by John Bergsagel.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> one thousand dollars for the best original grand opera, by an American composer, and upon a strictly *American subject.* [72]

But in a stroke of bad luck for American composers, Bull abruptly left the Academy in March 1855 and the prize was never awarded.

The collapse of the Ole Bull management, together with the thwarting of his idealistic plans, was characteristic of New York theatrical enterprise at mid-century. Ritter reports that "Opera-house after opera-house [had] sprung up; and each one was in its turn abandoned, with several wrecked managers behind it."[73] During the Academy of Music's first twenty-four years of existence, the management changed every season.[74] Composers like Bristow, for whom the consequences of the Bull departure must have been especially disappointing—he was a former violin student of the well-meaning Norwegian and may have wrested a production from him—remained undaunted and, following the example of Fry, became a determined champion of his own music. When he was engaged as conductor for the Pyne and Harrison opera troupe's 1855 New York summer season at the popular Niblo's Garden theater, Bristow seized the opportunity to schedule a production of his opera. Rip Van Winkle was premiered at Niblo's on 27 September 1855 and played successfully through the close of the season in November, for a total of seventeen performances. The debut of the first American

---

[72] Ritter, Music in America, 315-16. The announcement of this prize competition is sometimes erroneously cited as the impetus for the composition of Bristow's first opera. Since the score of Rip Van Winkle was completed in 1853 and reports of the opera's possible production began surfacing in New York in February 1855, this claim is clearly impossible. Opera Grove, s.v. *George Frederick Bristow* by Steven Ledbetter; idem, Rip Van Winkle, viii. Rather, Hipsher's inference that Ole Bull may have been inspired by the mid-century advocacy of Fry and Bristow is the more viable thesis. Hipsher, American Opera, 32.

[73] Music in America, 307. One of the first to be wrecked was Rivafinoli of Da Ponte's Italian Opera House. When his first and only season ended with a substantial deficit, the "Chevalier," as he was called, decided to skip town. Dizikes, Opera in America, 77.

[74] Grove, s.v. *New York*, 173.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

opera in English to be heard in New York City was joyously heralded by one critic in terms recalling contemporaneous developments in the Crimean War:

> Sebastopol has fallen, and a new American Opera has succeeded in New York! The clash of Russian steel with the bristling bayonets of the Allies has not been more fierce and uncompromising than the strife in lyric art between the strong hold of foreign prejudice, and the steady and combined attacks of native musicians. [75]

Bristow's score reflected a wider variety of musical influences than had Fry's Leonora. Indeed, it seems to have encompassed elements from most of the other repertory played by the Pyne and Harrison troupe that season: The Beggar's Opera; Auber's The Crown Diamonds; Donizetti's The Daughter of the Regiment; Michael Balfe's The Daughter of St. Mark; Rossini's ubiquitous Cinderella; and Bellini's Sonnambula. Although the score contains a preponderance of simply set duets and solo songs of light melodic charm, Bristow managed to include military spectacle in the second act, which depicts events of the Revolutionary War, together with traditions familiar to mid-century America such as the parlour ballad and Protestant hymnody; aria forms and dramatic gestures common to the *bel canto* school; and spoken dialogue in the manner of ballad opera. One characteristic Rip Van Winkle was immediately recognized as lacking, however, was a true American stamp, which at least one reviewer blamed on the failure of British composers to develop an English model on which the Americans could have expanded:

> If the English had a genuine form of opera, it is probable that it would serve as a model to composers of this country; as the English have not yet an opera of their own (*sui generis*), it would be unfair to demand of Mr. Bristow a school of an American stamp. [76]

---

75 Musical Review, 6 October 1855, quoted in Ledbetter, Rip Van Winkle, ix.

76 Musical World, 13 October 1855, quoted in Ledbetter, Rip Van Winkle, x.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

In retrospect, Bristow may have been more Americanist in his vision than he was given credit for. The concept of an eclectic internationally influenced style was enthusiastically taken up in the twentieth century by composers such as Henry Cowell and Harry Partch, whose pluralistic music has been championed, with some justification, as truer to the American spirit than that of the regionalists who preceded them.[77]

Unfortunately, opportunities to develop this line of thought were limited during the nineteenth century, and Rip Van Winkle experienced a performance history very similar to that of Leonora following the *réclame* of its premiere. A revival, again in Italian translation, was planned at the Academy of Music in 1865 by impresario Max Maretzek, but cancelled by a devastating fire. The opera was shelved for another five years before being revived for three performances at Niblo's Garden and a single representation at Philadelphia's Academy of Music in 1870. Bristow and his librettist optimistically drafted extensive revisions to the score in 1878 which apparently were never staged. The final hearing during the composer's lifetime was a concert performance by the Banks Glee Club of New York two days before Bristow's death in December 1898. Thereafter, the opera disappeared until a 1974 performance by the American Music Group given at a national meeting of the Music Library Association at the University of Illinois. Ironically, while Fry and Bristow are frequently cited as the most historically significant figures in the development of nineteenth-century American opera, their stage works received limited exposure even during their lifetimes.

To be fair, however, one must admit that even the Europeans had had a difficult time in the field of operatic enterprise in the United States from the inception. The New-York American of 25 February 1826 reported Manuel García's failure to solicit adequate patronage for

---

[77] David Nicholls, *Defining American Music*, Institute for Studies in American Music Newsletter 28 (Spring 1999): 14.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

his touring company; after two months of performing he had "scarcely been paid for the salaries of the other performers and his own necessary expenses, receiving little or no compensation for his own services and those of his family."[78] By mid-century Ritter observed that "Company after company—often comprising some of the greatest living European artists—appeared. When one company could scarcely succeed in paying expenses there were at one time three in the field, every one of them a cluster of smaller orbs around a great star."[79] The grim financial truth was pointed out by the New-York Courier and Enquirer:

> If [members of the public] do not know, we will tell them upon authentic information—that there never was a peculiarly successful season of Italian opera in this city; and, more, that there never was a successful season of Italian opera anywhere. [80]

In a summation whose prophetic ring would echo in the ears of independent opera managers (that is, those lacking substantial patronage or subsidy) for decades, Ritter concluded: "Italian opera is a luxury which the mass of the people do not want to buy, and for which those who wish to enjoy it must pay accordingly."[81] The consequent necessity of establishing foreign language opera in America as a social entertainment for the wealthy to ensure its own economic survival became deeply embedded. At the same time, the absence of a true English operatic canon resulted in a relegation of all opera in English—whether in translation or originally composed—to a *Volksoper* status, one to be offered to the lower classes at popular prices.

This status hierarchy did not dissolve readily. As recently as 1991, William M. Hoffman, librettist for John Corigliano's The Ghosts of Versailles (the opera which resurrected

---

78 Quoted in Vera Brodsky Lawrence, Strong on Music, Vol. I, *Resonances* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), *1*.

79 Music in America, 307.

80 Quoted in Ritter, Music in America, 315.

81 Ibid.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the Metropolitan's commissioning program), complained about the seemingly endless query from the public, "Is it in English?":

> I began to realize that the question betrays deep cultural prejudices. . . . I came to the conclusion that most Americans think of opera as a solemn high ritual, similar to a funeral, to be performed in a foreign language. The subject is usually the anguish of a woman with a high voice. The authors of operas, always dead, composed by candlelight wearing wigs.[82]

Hoffman's rejoinder, "May Maria Callas strike me dead for writing in the language of Shakespeare, T. S. Eliot and Melville!", underscores a similar irony faced by the mid-nineteenth-century American composers. The decade span between Fry's Leonora and Bristow's Rip Van Winkle, 1845 to 1855, was in fact a signal period for American letters, and one in which the English language was glorified by an unusually gifted group of American writers. Edgar Allan Poe, nearing the end of his life, wrote The Raven in 1845, and posthumously became the first American writer brought to major attention in Europe through the translations of Baudelaire; Ralph Waldo Emerson, leader of the New England Transcendentalists, published his Poems in 1847 (his two series of Essays had appeared in the early 1840s); Nathaniel Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter brought him lasting renown in 1850, and The Blithedale Romance followed in 1852;[83] Hawthorne's uncelebrated friend Herman Melville wrote Moby-Dick, or The Whale in 1851; Henry David Thoreau published Walden, or Life in the Woods in 1854; and Walt Whitman's Leaves of Grass followed in 1855. It is curious that Whitman never wrote a libretto, since his passion for opera was well documented in his writing, and he was among the most musical of writers in his use of language. Unfortunately, the fact that librettists were traditionally accorded low literary status may have discouraged the very talents who might have lent

---

82 William M. Hoffman, *Is it in English?*, Stagebill, December 1991, 8.

83 It is unfortunate that no librettist has turned to this novel as source material, as it is at least as operatic as The Crucible or Merry Mount in its combination of sensuality and repression.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

distinction to American opera at an early point. Stendhal described the prevailing European attitude (outside France, of course) in commentary describing an 1823 La Scala premiere:

> It is worth remarking that, at the première of any opera, the applause for the singers and the applause for the composer are always kept perfectly distinct. As you may well have guessed, nobody gives a damn for the librettist [*poète*]; for who indeed, unless it were a *French* critic [*littérateur français*], would dream of judging an opera by the *words*? [84]

The resulting literary problem native composers faced—that of developing suitable libretti on which to base their work—was admittedly shared by the Europeans, but would prove particularly vexing for the Americans.

The Late Nineteenth-Century Surge in American Opera Composition

In the face of seemingly insuperable difficulty, American composers nevertheless redoubled their efforts. Northern prosperity after the Civil War and Reconstruction, giving rise to a fabled "Gilded Age," produced increased activity in the arts and the first spike in American opera composition. Part of the surge was due to an improvement in educational resources for American composers. The number of Americans who travelled to Europe (usually Germany) to seek training in the arts steadily increased throughout the last quarter of the nineteenth century,[85] a period during which American educational institutions sought to improve their fine arts offerings, possibly in response to the exodus of their best talent.

In the vanguard of the new advanced educational efforts was John Knowles Paine (1839-1906), considered the dean of American composers. When Paine was appointed an instructor in music at Harvard in 1862, his duties were confined to directing the College choir and acting as organist at services in Appleton Chapel. By the 1870-1871 term, however, he had

---

[84] Stendhal's Vie de Rossini (Paris, 1854), quoted in Arthur Groos and Roger Parker, editors, Reading Opera (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 3-4.

[85] Amy Fay's classic Music Study in Germany was first published in 1880 by A. C. McClurg & Company, Chicago.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

initiated lectures in music history and induced the faculty to approve electives in harmony and counterpoint. In 1873 Paine was appointed Assistant Professor and in 1875 promoted to full Professor of Music, the first in the country.[86] The nation's first Ph.D. in music, Louis Adolph Coerne, was graduated from Harvard under Paine's tutelage in 1905, and that year he joined the elite group of Americans who had had an opera produced abroad when his Zenobia was given at the Bremen Stadttheater. In 1883 Paine himself had begun composing his first opera, Azara, which at its completion in 1898 he considered his greatest achievement. The organization and founding of the Metropolitan Opera during the period 1880-1883 may have inspired an early dream of eventually having his opera produced at the great theater. Although evidence suggests that Azara was considered during the period 1903-1906, Paine's dream never materialized and no American opera was ultimately produced at the Met until 1910.[87]

The numerous dramatic composers active in the United States during the last quarter of the nineteenth century—that is, after the pioneering efforts of Fry and Bristow but before the Metropolitan considered Azara—were a motley group, many of whose members were by no means as patrician as Paine. Among the new Americans were several recent emigrés who drew on the mystique of New World characters and events already evinced in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century European operatic dramaturgy.[88] The premiere of Luigi Arditi's La spia (1856; after James Fennimore Cooper's Revolutionary War thriller The Spy) at the Academy of Music on 24 March 1856 must have irked Bristow, who had been seeking a New York venue only the year before, especially when Arditi's lack of originality was revealed in one tepid review

---

86 John C. Schmidt, The Life and Works of John Knowles Paine (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1980), 47, 235. One of Paine's students, composer Arthur Foote (1853-1937), received the first Master of Arts degree in music conferred by an American university (Harvard) in 1875.

87 A detailed discussion of Azara's fate at the Metropolitan is given in chapter 2.

88 See *n*41 above.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

describing the score as heavily derivative of Verdi and Donizetti. Apparently the only American flavor appeared in the third act with a brief interpolation of "Hail, Columbia."[89] Great Opera War disputant Max Maretzek, under whose auspices an Italian Rip Van Winkle was to have been revived at the Academy in 1865, turned to opera composition himself after he retired from management in 1878; his Sleepy Hollow, or The Headless Horseman, premiered at the Academy in 1879, may well have been inspired by the popularity of Bristow's work.[90] The period also encompassed the inception of the most prolific career in American opera, that of the African-American composer Henry Lawrence Freeman (1869-1954), whose fourteen music dramas based on African, Orientalist and Indianist themes span the period 1893-1947.

Paradoxically, native-born Americans as a group demonstrated a marked tendency to avoid New World subject matter in favor of the mythological and historical events that had dominated the early history of European opera.[91] Metropolitan president Otto Kahn addressed this issue in 1925 when he urged American composers to involve themselves with the contemporary realism emerging in the legitimate theater. A later criticism along similar lines was voiced by Henry Cowell, the globally influenced American composer, who decried "American-composed operas which follow European traditions almost exactly, with flowery music and

---

89 New York Courier & Enquirer, quoted in H. Earle Johnson, Operas on American Subjects (New York: Coleman-Ross, 1964), 30. Arditi was at least the third European to set Cooper's story for the lyric stage. Angelo Villani's La spia, ossia il mercaiuolo americano was given in Turin, 1850; and Jacques Halévy's Jaguarita l'Indienne (Paris, 1855) is described as being "drawn remotely" from the American novel. Ibid., 57. The French-American connection was no doubt a significant factor in the decision to give Jaguarita l'Indienne in the opening season of the French Opera House in New Orleans in 1859.

90 Although Maretzek might profitably have mounted a revival of the Bristow work in the same season as his own Washington Irving opera with the goal of creating increased interest in both, Rip Van Winkle's brief revival at Niblo's Garden in 1870 may have convinced the impresario that the audience for the work had already been exhausted.

91 H. Earle Johnson's systematic study Operas on American Subjects revealed that over half the operas he found on American (including Spanish-American) subjects were written by Europeans.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

artificial setting," and echoed Kahn's words by adding, "Even those which use an American scene as a background usually are located in any time but the present and often prove to be a musical hodge-podge of Verdi, Wagner and Puccini."[92] A typical late nineteenth-century example of this problem was Zenobia, Queen of Palmyra, the first staged opera of Silas Gamaliel Pratt (1846-1916). Pratt, who seems to have followed in the colorful individualist tradition of American composers—he once referred to Wagner as the Silas G. Pratt of Europe—may have possessed the imagination to build on Gottschalk's creative model, but the notices for the New York premiere of Zenobia indicate a composer severely overtaxed by his weighty choice of subject matter:

> Mr. Pratt's prevailing mood is one of gloom. . . . Here and there he chances upon the germ of a theme, but the theme is always an old, familiar one. Mr. Pratt appears to recognize this fact himself, for he drops every theme almost as suddenly as he introduces it. . . . He shows that he knows what a finale ought to be, although he cannot attain his own ideal. . . . Over all there is a dreary sameness in tempo and orchestral treatment that would weary the soul of a monk. [93]

Zenobia's shortcomings notwithstanding, the review is ignorant of the legacy of composers who preceded Pratt in its description of the 1883 audience as one "which had gathered to see if, perchance, the founder of the long-expected American school of music had arrived at last." Statements such as "The man who writes the first American grand opera will stand at the beginning of an art cycle just as surely as Homer or Palestrina did," demonstrate more about the perception of American musical history at the time—and its embodiment of the subtle inference that art in America should follow a teleological line of development based on European models—than they offer about the pluralistic situation that actually existed.

---

92 Henry Cowell, *A New Opera on an American Theme*, New York Times, 24 May 1942, sec. 8, 7.

93 *Theatrical: Twenty-Third-Street Theatre*, New York Times, 22 August 1883, 5.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

For his part, Pratt made attempts at setting nativist subjects with his two final large-scale dramatic works: the opera Ollanta, on an Inca subject, which was never produced; and the massive five-part allegorical cantata The Triumph of Columbus, which was given on 10 October 1892 at Carnegie Hall—and not, as stated in Amerigrove, at the Metropolitan Opera[94]—during the Quadricentennial festivities. Regrettably, the opportunity to compose a massive *pièce d'occasion* produced a result even more turgid than Zenobia, and Columbus vanished without further trace.

Another attempt to duplicate Bristow's success in utilizing native subject matter was made by organist Dudley Buck (1839-1909), a noted composer of sacred music whose life span paralleled that of John Knowles Paine. Buck's fascination with opera may have begun with his 1875 appointment as assistant conductor to Theodore Thomas, whose own debut in the opera pit had come with the premiere of Fry's Notre Dame of Paris in 1864. Buck turned his attention from Pratt's ancient Palmyra to events originating in Palmyra, New York for his first opera, Deseret, or A Saint's Affliction (1880), titled after the Mormon name for the promised land. The events surrounding the founding of Mormonism indeed held considerable promise for a new American opera, ranging as they did from the ecstatic visions experienced by the fifteen-year-old Joseph Smith near the town of Palmyra in 1820 to Smith's founding of the Church of the Latter-Day Saints a decade later based on scriptures said to have been transmitted to him by the angel Moroni; the migrations of Smith and his followers throughout the Midwest to Nauvoo, Illinois,

---

94 Amerigrove, s.v. *Silas G(amaliel) Pratt*, by Robert Stevenson. The distinction is crucial, as the information as stated would make Pratt the first American composer heard on the stage of the Metropolitan, albeit not in a Metropolitan-sponsored production. Yet this cannot possibly be true: a fire disfigured the Met's auditorium on 27 August 1892, resulting in the cancellation of the the entire 1892-1893 season, and the theater was not reopened until 27 November 1893. Fitzgerald, Annals of the Metropolitan Opera, *Chronology 1883-1985*, 47. A report in the New York Times confirms that the Columbus premiere occurred at "Carnegie Music Hall." *Mr. S. G. Pratt's Cantata*, 11 October 1892, 2.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

where he proclaimed the doctrine of polygamy; Smith's incarceration and death at the hands of an angry mob at Nauvoo in 1844; and his disciples' arduous wagon train exodus to Utah Territory, where the new religion flourished under the leadership of Brigham Young. Unfortunately, Buck seems to have capitalized on none of the dramatic potential inherent in these events, and Deseret, styled a "comic opera," received a scathing review after its New York premiere at Haverly's Fourteenth Street Theatre on 11 October 1880:

> It should be said distinctly that the work, dramatically considered, is clumsy, the dialogue flat and vapid, and the language and action in certain parts . . . quite unfit for eyes and ear polite. As to the music, Mr. Buck it is well known is a competent writer, but of the ponderous form. It is evident from listening to "Deseret" that he has been inspired by the success of Sullivan to write a comic opera. When he attempts to be light and sparkling in his score he is plagiaristic, and his music, though well enough written, shows no invention. [95]

Interestingly, as in the case of La spia, a European appears to have been the first to exploit an American subject: an opera entitled Die Mormonen by one Johann Brandl (1835-1913), which also made comedy of the sect's practices, was given in Vienna on 22 November 1879, one year before the Buck premiere.[96]

Despite Buck's failure on the dramatic stage, at least two pieces he composed during the same period as Deseret evinced early signals of a new Wagnerian strain in American music destined to exert a strong influence over composers working in dramatic forms. Buck's

---

[95] *Amusements: Fourteen-Street Theatre*, New York Times, 13 October 1880, 5. The author of Deseret's libretto, journalist William Augustus Croffut, apparently chose to base much of the action on the sensationalized accounts of Mormon polygamy then in circulation. Opera Grove, s.v. *Dudley Buck* by Ellen Knight.

[96] Johnson, American Subjects, 35. The next American who tried to salvage the Mormon theme after Buck's disastrous attempt was Curtis-trained composer Leonard Kastle, whose Deseret was produced for television by Samuel Chotzinoff's NBC Opera Company in 1961. Although Kastle discarded the outmoded comic treatment, neither the libretto nor the score seems to have delivered the requisite dramatic power: "The music flows in a long, even, moderate motion of sweet harmonies and foursquare, repetitive melodies that do not differentiate between the characters or between one dramatic moment and the next. . . . An attempt to magnify and underline the rather weak dramatic conflict [was made] with actual physical motion." Eric Salzman, *TV Opera on Mormons*, New York Times, 2 January 1961, 39.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

cantata Scenes from the Golden Legend, which was awarded a $1,000 prize at the Cincinnati Festival in 1880, and his symphonic overture Marmion (1880, after Walter Scott) both attempted to utilize leitmotif technique by associating specific motives with characters and emotions.[97] Although it is difficult to assess this influence in Deseret, as the complete score was never published, Buck was known to favor Italianate melodic suavity in his writing and never emerged as a strong Wagner disciple.[98] The influence of the great composer, however, was sweeping through nearly every European country except Italy, and soon made itself felt in the continued efforts to develop an English school of opera. Among those welcoming the new German dramatic hegemony was Arthur Sullivan, who compared the aftereffects of the early eighteenth-century Italian musical conquest of London to "a 'great car of Juggernaut' which for a century and three-quarters had overridden and 'crushed all efforts made on behalf of native music.'"[99] The bias reflected in Sullivan's invocation of this image of blind devotion was duplicated in comments on the subject heard in many other quarters, including those supporting an exclusive regime of German opera that had established itself in 1884 at the Metropolitan Opera and would continue throughout the decade.

The specter of Wagner in American opera of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was one that would prove tenacious. Evidence of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* ethic appeared as early as Bristow's 1878 revisions to Rip Van Winkle, in which he discarded its substantial overture, a freestanding musical entity, in favor of a short dramatic prelude leading

---

97 John Tasker Howard, Our American Music: Three Hundred Years of It, 3d ed. (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1954), 594.

98 Selections from Deseret were published in New York in 1880, but a complete vocal score was never prepared.

99 Sir Arthur Sullivan, *About Music*, lecture delivered at Birmingham, 1888, quoted in Eric Walter White, The Rise of English Opera (London: John Lehmann, Ltd., 1951; repr., New York: Da Capo Press, 1972), 127 (page numbers refer to reprint edition).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

directly into the stage action. Examples of this strategy would later be found in the Metropolitan's first two American productions, Converse's The Pipe of Desire and Parker's Mona. Attempts on the part of many composers to write their own libretti began to appear as well; among the earliest Americans who thus sought to emulate Wagner's dramatic coherence and unity were Paine and Pratt. A half century later, composer Deems Taylor capitalized on his well-known literary talent with the libretto to Peter Ibbetson, for which he adapted the source material himself. The Americans' quest for a fresh harmonic language in the spirit of Wagner's emotionally evocative late Romantic idiom was also in evidence as early as the 1880s, as can be deduced from commentary on Pratt's unsuccessful Zenobia: "He searches for lost chords. He seeks after unusual harmonies until he attains only the effect of a constant strain. . . . in the second act he approaches more nearly to true music, . . . but even this is marred by the search after strange harmonies."[100] Finally, adapted leitmotif technique became so widespread among composers of all nationalities as to become a cliché.[101] In the wake of the initial decade of Wagnerism in America, however, a new and unexpected voice appeared on the horizon to thwart it.

Dvořàk's Sojourn in America

While Sullivan viewed Wagner's influence as a welcome respite from the relentless hegemony of Italian opera in England, Antonín Dvořàk sought to escape a German dominance of symphonic music in Europe that had begun with the Mannheim school. When the renowned Bohemian arrived in the United States in September 1892 to assume the directorship of

---

100 *Theatrical: Twenty-Third-Street Theatre*, New York Times, 22 August 1883, 5.

101 Critic W. J. Henderson bemoaned composers' attempts to emulate Wagner as late as 1917 in a review of Reginald De Koven's The Canterbury Pilgrims: "We have [De Koven] to thank for shunning the leading motive. It has been sadly overworked and is a clumsy mechanism except in the hands of a genius." *De Koven's Opera at Metropolitan,* New York Sun, 9 March 1917.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

New York's National Conservatory of Music, he counseled the students in his composition class against the continued creation of Eurocentric music.[102] The American lyric theater had by then undergone a cycle of influences that included British ballad opera, Italian *bel canto*, French grand opera, and Wagnerian music drama, before coming full circle back to England (by way of French *opéra-bouffe* and Viennese operetta) with a Gilbert and Sullivan vogue sealed by the world premiere of The Pirates of Penzance (1879) in New York. The spectacular success of the British team was responsible for a renaissance of comic operetta in English that coincided in America with the Wagner invasion of the 1880s. American composers were drawn into the demand for the lighter entertainment as they had been with the ballad opera a century earlier. Many of the resulting American comic operas drew, as had Gilbert and Sullivan, on the popularity of Viennese operetta and its *opéra-bouffe* predecessors such as The Grand Duchess of Gérolstein, and, like their Continental models, enjoyed tremendous popularity and long theatrical runs.[103] Reginald De Koven's Robin Hood (1890), for example, one of the American genre's first notable successes, remained perennially in the repertory of The Bostonians, the troupe who had premiered it, for over a decade; and Victor Herbert's many hits, beginning with Prince Ananias (1894), helped to extend the popularity of American operetta well into the twentieth century (e.g., Babes in Toyland, 1903; Naughty Marietta, 1910). The box-office success of the

---

102 Among Dvořàk's American students were Harry T. Burleigh, Will Marion Cook, Rubin Goldmark, Harvey Worthington Loomis, William Arms Fisher, Henry Waller, and Harry Rowe Shelley. Merton Robert Aborn, *The Influence on American Musical Culture of Dvořàk's Sojourn in America* (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1965), 127.

103 The British comic opera craze was particularly indebted to the French *opéra-bouffe*, as the first dramatic piece written by Arthur Sullivan, a musical farce entitled Cox and Box (1866), drew heavily on the style of Offenbach in its burlesque of serious musical forms. It was during the first professional run of Cox and Box in 1869 that the composer was introduced to the dramatist William Schwenck Gilbert. Opera Grove, s.v. *Sir Arthur (Seymour) Sullivan.*

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

new works did not go unnoticed by the Metropolitan, which produced new works by both De Koven and Herbert when they turned their attention to through-composed "serious" opera.

Dvořàk had his own vision of America's musical future. His celebrated advocacy of a new American nationalism drawing on indigenous cultural materials was extensively publicized and enthusiastically taken up by many of his students. Dvořàk's views were quoted in a 21 May 1893 New York Herald article titled *The Real Value of Negro Melodies*, which became a sensation and was republished abroad, and critic Henry Krehbiel heralded the rise of a new school of American composers in the Century Illustrated Magazine of September 1892.[104] Three major developments cited as rising from the Dvořàk sojourn were an increased use of traditional black music by composers; the growth of the Indianist movement (championed by American composer Arthur Farwell); and, as a counter-movement, an increase in Anglo-American influences by composers of the Second New England School.[105] Evidence of the first two developments was later seen in American opera in the work of composers William Grant Still (A Bayou Legend), George Gershwin (Porgy and Bess),[106] Victor Herbert (Natoma),[107] Charles Wakefield Cadman (Shanewis), Mary Carr Moore (Narcissa) and others. But most of these new operas were never seen at the Metropolitan: while the house was willing to essay an Indianist opera (Cadman's Shanewis, 1918), its racial barriers apparently did not allow consideration of projects of the type described in a poignant 1919 letter addressed to Gatti-

---

104 John C. Tibbetts, ed., Dvořàk in America, 1892-1895 (Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1993), 16.

105 Adrienne Fried Block, *Dvořàk's Long American Reach*, in Dvořàk in America, 161. Block theorizes that the New England composers rebelled against ceding authority over American music to a European.

106 One of Gershwin's composition teachers was Rubin Goldmark, who had been a National Conservatory pupil of Dvořàk.

107 Herbert was a member of the National Conservatory faculty during Dvořàk's tenure and developed a close working relationship with the composer. See discussion of Herbert's operatic career in chapter 4.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Casazza from William Grant Still, then working at the Pace & [W. C.] Handy Music Company as a performer and arranger:

> Dear Sir: —
>
> I have recently completed an opera based upon Negro life in ante-bellum days. All of my hopes are centered upon its production.
>
> Will you assist me? I should be happy were you to consent to consider it. [108]

And Will Marion Cook later wrote unsuccessfully to Otto Kahn, suggesting a dance project which would utilize traditional black music instead of the jazz that was in the air at the time:

> As a sincere student and lover of opera, I know the limitations of Americans (as yet) in writing a successful opera. . . . Just so will it be with the Jazz of Berlin (whom I have known from his start); Gershwin and Kern. Jazz is of negro origin and these men only dilute it. Their rhythms and melodies are a weak imitation. Moreover, I doubt whether any one of the three mentioned has the required technique to write an opera, Jazz or otherwise.
>
> After writing popular music for thirty years . . . neither have I the technique to write an opera. . . . [But] a negro story done in ballet form with some singing and pantomime artists, could give something worth while to the world.
>
> Understand—Jazz is not the best of negro music. In the ballet I speak of . . . real negro music should play the important part. [109]

---

108 William G. Still to Gatti-Casazza, 26 September 1919. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, 1919-20, Composers. The work's description sounds most like A Bayou Legend, which was not performed until its premiere in 1974 by Opera South at Jackson State University, Mississippi.

109 Will Marion Cook to Kahn, 16 October 1925. Kahn Papers, Box 246, Princeton University. At the time Kahn received Cook's letter, the Metropolitan may already have decided to produce John Alden Carpenter's Skyscrapers (1926), a ballet whose score utilizes jazz elements.

The letter may explain why Cook never finished a projected opera based on Uncle Tom's Cabin. Scenes from the work, which would have been his first professional effort in composition, were to have been presented as part of Colored American Day, 25 August, at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Cook subsequently studied composition under Dvořàk at the National Conservatory from 1894-95 and began composing musicals for the commercial theater in 1898. Eileen Southern, The Music of Black Americans: A History, 3d ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1997), 272.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Ironically, the philosophy espoused by Dvořàk may ultimately have had a more lasting effect on European than American composers: Stravinsky, Ravel, Weill, Korngold and Britten were among the many beneficiaries when the American cultural influences of jazz, Broadway and Hollywood reverberated throughout Europe during the interwar period.[110] Of course the first European to benefit from the newly articulated Americanism was Dvořàk himself, and his Symphony "from the New World" remains its most significant legacy, although the possibility of its musical materials having been derived from either Indian or Negro sources has been hotly disputed. It was also common knowledge that during his sojourn the Bohemian fully intended to supplement America's operatic repertoire with a contribution of his own based on Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's epic verse narrative The Song of Hiawatha (1855), with which he had become acquainted in translation at least twenty years before.[111] The idea of a musical setting after Longfellow was not original to Dvořàk: Arthur Foote's The Farewell of Hiawatha, op. 11, for male chorus and orchestra, dates from 1885; and Edward MacDowell had considered composing an orchestral tone poem depicting the Indian hero while studying in Germany in 1887.[112] Although MacDowell later abandoned the idea, he initiated an interest in authentic Indian melodies shortly thereafter with his Second (Indian) Suite for orchestra, op. 48 (1891-5; premiered 1896). It was MacDowell's Boston pupil Henry F. B. Gilbert (his ballet The Dance in Place Congo was later given at the Metropolitan in 1918) who may have incited the new

---

110 See Jack Sullivan, New World Symphonies: How American Culture Changed European Music (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999).

111 New York Herald interview with Dvořàk, 15 December 1893, quoted in Michael Beckerman, *The Dance of Pau-Puk-Keewis, the Song of Chibiabos, and the Story of Iagoo: Reflections on Dvořàk's "New World" Scherzo*, in Dvořàk in America, 211.

112 Margery Morgan Lowens, *The New York Years of Edward MacDowell* (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1971), 55, quoted in Richard Crawford, *Edward MacDowell: Musical Nationalism and an American Tone Poet*, in Journal of the American Musicological Society 49 (Fall 1996): 551.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Americanist trend, when he procured for his teacher a copy of the only scholarly work then available on the music of North American Indians in 1891, a year before Dvořàk's arrival in America. This was Theodor Baker's dissertation *Über die Musik der nordamerikanischen Wilden* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1882), based on field work done by Baker in New York and Pennsylvania and completed while he was a student at the University of Leipzig.[113] Although Dvořàk may not have been aware of MacDowell's orchestral work in progress when he considered an opera after Hiawatha during the early 1890s, he was cognizant of the level Americans had reached by that point in composition generally,[114] and his documented attitude with respect to the efforts by his own students at the National Conservatory was generally enthusiastic and supportive. Yet his opinion of American opera composition remained negative throughout his stay in the United States, and in an 1895 Harper's Magazine interview, he chastised Americans for neglecting the composers who might ultimately contribute to a national school of opera.[115]

The composer's opinion no doubt stemmed from his experiences as chief adjudicator in a series of prize competitions that was sponsored by the National Conservatory in an effort to encourage the work of American composers as well as to capitalize on Dvořàk's new appointment. Accordingly, the initial prizes were scheduled to be given on or about 15 November

---

113 Crawford, *MacDowell*, 551. Baker's study was translated into English by Ann Buckley and published as On the Music of the North American Indians (Buren, The Netherlands: Frits Knuf and New York: W.S. Heineman, 1976; reprint, New York: Da Capo Press, 1978).

114 A concert given on 26 March 1890 in Washington, D.C. under the auspices of the National Conservatory has been credited as the first comprised exclusively of compositions by American composers. The program included music of John Knowles Paine, Dudley Buck, Edward MacDowell (1861-1908), Frank Van der Stucken (1858-1927), Arthur Foote (1853-1937), and George W. Chadwick (1854-1931), among others. Aborn, *American Musical Culture*, 72-73. Dvořàk would presumably have been aware of this event, as well as other efforts made by the National to encourage American composers.

115 Frank M. Flack, *Dvořàk and American Opera*, Opera News 19 (24 January 1955): 9.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

1892 in six categories delineated as grand opera; opéra comique; libretto; oratorio; cantata; and symphony, suite, or concerto.[116] Winners were announced for all categories except grand opera and opéra comique, and a letter from Dvořàk to his friend Josef Hlávka dated 27 November 1892 explained his view of the situation:

> A great deal of music has come in from all over America and I must go through it all. It does not take much work. I look at the first page and can tell straight away whether it is the work of a dilettante or an artist.
>
> As regards operas, they are very poor and I don't know whether any will be awarded a prize. The other kinds of composition such as symphonies, concertos, suites, serenades etc. interest me very much.—The composers are all much the same as at home—brought up in the German School, but here and there another spirit, other thoughts, another colouring flashes forth, in short, something Indian (something à la Bret Harte). I am very curious how things will develop. [117]

An undated letter from Dvořàk to National founder Jeannette Meyers Thurber indicated that, in his view, the process of developing an American opera school would probably be a long one:

> Dear Mrs. Thurber,
>
> After the experience we made this year, I think it would be good not to let the opera writer enter for competition and leave it out at all [emphasis in original]. [118]

Credit is due the remarkable Thurber, however, for taking immediate action to ameliorate the situation, for it was purportedly at her suggestion that Dvořàk contemplated

---

116 Aborn, *American Musical Culture*, Appendix A, 271.

117 Dvořàk to Hlávka, 27 November 1892. Otakar Šourek, Antonín Dvořàk: Letters and Reminiscences, trans. Roberta Finlayson Samsour (Prague: Artia, 1954; reprt., New York: Da Capo Press, 1985), 152-53 (page numbers refer to reprint edition).

[Francis] Bret[t] Harte (1836-1902), an American author noted as a pioneer in Western local-color writing, became a favorite in European literary circles during his service as United States Consul in Germany and Scotland from 1878-1885. Harte's popular output, which includes *The Outcasts of Poker Flat* (1869), was based on his own youthful experiences in the American West.

118 Aborn, *American Musical Culture*, Appendix B, 305.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

composing his eighth opera to an American subject.[119] The idea apparently captured his imagination. During his famed journey to Spillville, Iowa in the following summer of 1893, he made a special trip to view the Falls of Minnehaha near Minneapolis (the Indian name means "Laughing Water"), and wrote of the experience, "It is so intensely beautiful that words cannot describe it."[120] And although no suitable libretto had transpired by 1894, the composer produced eleven pages of Hiawatha sketches in a notebook during the winter of 1894-1895. At length, the enchanted idea had to be abandoned as it became clear that no librettist could be found who could do justice to the subject matter. Perhaps Longfellow's narrative—ponderous to some critics even in its poetic form—ultimately proved too static for operatic treatment.[121] None of the Hiawatha settings that followed Dvořàk's failed attempt were operas: the American composer Frederick Russell Burton (1861-1909) and his British colleague Samuel Coleridge-Taylor (1875-1912) both produced dramatic cantatas on the Hiawatha narrative in 1898; and Dvořàk's student Rubin Goldmark saw his Hiawatha overture (1898-99) premiered by the Boston Symphony Orchestra soon thereafter. Although Goldmark's work was never published and the manuscript has apparently been lost, program notes dating from the premiere indicate that he made no attempt to employ authentic Indian musical elements, as might have been expected from a Dvořàk pupil.[122] Goldmark also made no attempt to place Hiawatha on the lyric stage, despite the fact that his uncle, composer Karl Goldmark (1830-1915), to whom he was often compared, had achieved

---

119 David Beveridge, *The Reception of Dvořàk's Operas in America: A Social, Political and Aesthetic Odyssey*, in Dvořàk in America, 299.

120 Patricia Hampl and Steven Sorman, Spillville (Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 1987), 90. It was at the Minnehaha Falls that the composer wrote a theme inspired by the Indian legend on his shirt cuff—no one had any paper—that eventually found its way into the Violin Sonatina in G, op. 100.

121 Beckerman, *Reflections*, in Dvořàk in America, 211.

122 David Tomatz, *Rubin Goldmark, Postromantic: Trial Balances in American Music* (Ph.D. diss., The Catholic University of America, 1966), 118-19.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

operatic fame with the sensationally successful The Queen of Sheba (1875; Metropolitan premiere 1885).[123]

Shortly before Dvořàk's eventual departure from America in the spring of 1895, a milestone in international recognition for American opera came from an unexpected quarter when the German emigré Bruno Oskar Klein (1858-1911), who had been Dvořàk's predecessor as professor of composition at the National Conservatory,[124] became the first composer writing in America—although he had not been born there—to have a dramatic work performed abroad. Klein's only opera, Kenilworth (after Walter Scott's 1821 novel), was premiered in Hamburg on 13 February 1895 and received a very favorable review in the Hamburgischer Correspondent.[125] Born in Osnabrück, Klein had studied composition during the 1870s at the Munich Conservatory with Joseph Rheinberger, an influential pedagogue with many American students during this period, among them the future Metropolitan composers Frederick Shepherd Converse and Horatio Parker. Klein may have been inspired by the Americans to travel to the United States on a concert tour in 1878; he decided to stay, becoming a successful teacher and organist, but obviously retained some German connections. Although a piano-vocal score of Kenilworth, which was Klein's only opera, was published by Friedrich Hofmeister of Leipzig in 1894, the

---

123 Aborn mistakenly attributes this opera to Rubin Goldmark. *American Musical Culture*, 128.

124 Klein's addition to the faculty was announced in a newspaper advertisement of 2 September 1888. Aborn, *American Musical Culture*, 66-67.

125 Jerome Mitchell, The Walter Scott Operas (University, Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1977), 246-47. Hipsher's statement (American Opera and Its Composers, 285) that the opera was given under the name Ivanhoe in Hamburg is unsubstantiated. Apart from the obvious literary and historical incongruities (Scott's Ivanhoe takes place in medieval Britain; Kenilworth portrays the court of Elizabeth I), the Hamburgischer Correspondent referred to the opera's title in its report of the premiere: "... auf jeden Fall ist die Oper 'Kenilworth' die Schöpfung eines intelligenten, geschmachvollen und vornehm empfindenden Musikers, ..." Quoted in Mitchell, Scott Operas, 389-90*n*26.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Hamburg performance is its only documented representation. Kenilworth was ironically never heard in America.[126]

Thus, American opera had experienced a plethora of influences throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. By the turn of the twentieth century, its composers had seen their work produced on enough stages—though not the Metropolitan's—to inspire continued efforts. Moreover, during the first decade of the new century, a small number of native-born Americans succeeded Klein's achievement in having their operas accepted by European publishers and produced on European stages. The piano-vocal score of John Knowles Paine's Azara was published on a subscription basis by Breitkopf & Härtel in 1901 and promoted (albeit unsuccessfully) to German houses;[127] William Legrand Howland's Sarrona, or The Indian Slave was premiered in Bruges (3 August 1903) and given in two dozen houses throughout Italy and Austria;[128] and Louis Adolph Coerne's Zenobia was produced by the Bremen Stadttheater in 1905.

Yet Oscar Sonneck, summarizing developments in 1904, was still pessimistic:

> Early American opera was an offspring of English ballad opera and hardly contained any promise for a truly national art. The nineteenth century has by no means improved the outlook. During the first quarter the melodrama thrived simultaneously with the senile ballad operas. Then the definite importance of Italian opera inspired a few composers to boundless imitations of Rossini, Donizetti, Verdi, etc. Meyerbeer, Gounod, and finally Wagner, stood

---

126 Klein's opera was the last in a series of dramatic works based on the popular Scott novel, which includes Auber's Leicester; ou, Le Château de Kenilworth, produced less than two years after the novel's publication, and Donizetti's Elisabetta al Castello di Kenilworth, which received its first revival in London nearly a century and a half after its 1835 premiere. It also appears that William Henry Fry intended to essay the subject, for a group of fragmentary sketches for various projected works found among the composer's papers bears the notations, "Mus. Memo for Kenilworth. W. H. Fry. Air for Amy Robsart" in Fry's hand. Upton, Fry, 313.

127 Schmidt, Paine, 202.

128 Sarrona was heard only twice in America, at New York's Amsterdam Theatre (1910) and in Philadelphia (1911). Howland's first opera Nita (1898) received its premiere at the Théâtre Nouveau in Paris and was also performed at Aix-les-Bains and Monte Carlo, but never in the United States.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> godfathers to the more modern American attempts at opera, and to-day we are as far from American opera of artistic importance as we ever have been. Not that our composers lack the power to write dramatic music, but our operatic life has been trimmed into a hot-house product.
>
> Whether or not a change for the better will take place, cannot be foretold. If not, then the task of the future historian of American opera will not be enviable, for he will have very little to say. [129]

But Sonneck was unaware of significant changes then taking place within the power structure of the Metropolitan and a new attitude developing there toward American opera.

---

[129] Oscar G. Sonneck, Early Opera in America, quoted in Johnson, American Subjects, 20.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

CHAPTER 2

To be in it is merely a bore;
but to be out of it is simply a tragedy.

Oscar Wilde on Society

THE METHODS OF THE METROPOLITAN

The Metropolitan's new policy to promote the production of American opera was not the result of any marked change in public taste at the turn of the twentieth century. Rather, the artistic ideas and concentrated efforts of a very few persons who gained control of the management in the first decade of the new century initiated sweeping policy changes in the selection of all repertoire, both European and American. These new ideals were not easily put into effect, however, for their champions were stymied at nearly every juncture in the process by conservative attitudes which stemmed not only from the foreign-dominated history of opera in America, but the established nineteenth-century traditions of the major lyric theaters themselves. Chief among them, of course, was the Metropolitan Opera.

As will be seen, the Metropolitan's legendary founding as the result of a social dispute rather than a yearning for the enlightenment of art has deeply marked its place in music history. The events that resulted in the decision by a group of families to invest $1.7 million in a building specifically designed for opera performance were greatly embellished over the succeeding century, yet their symbolic interpretation is indicative of the cultural attitudes many patrons retained towards opera as a genre well into the twentieth century.

There is no question that by the mid-nineteenth century in America, attendance at the opera—specifically, foreign-language opera—had become a social ritual associated with

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

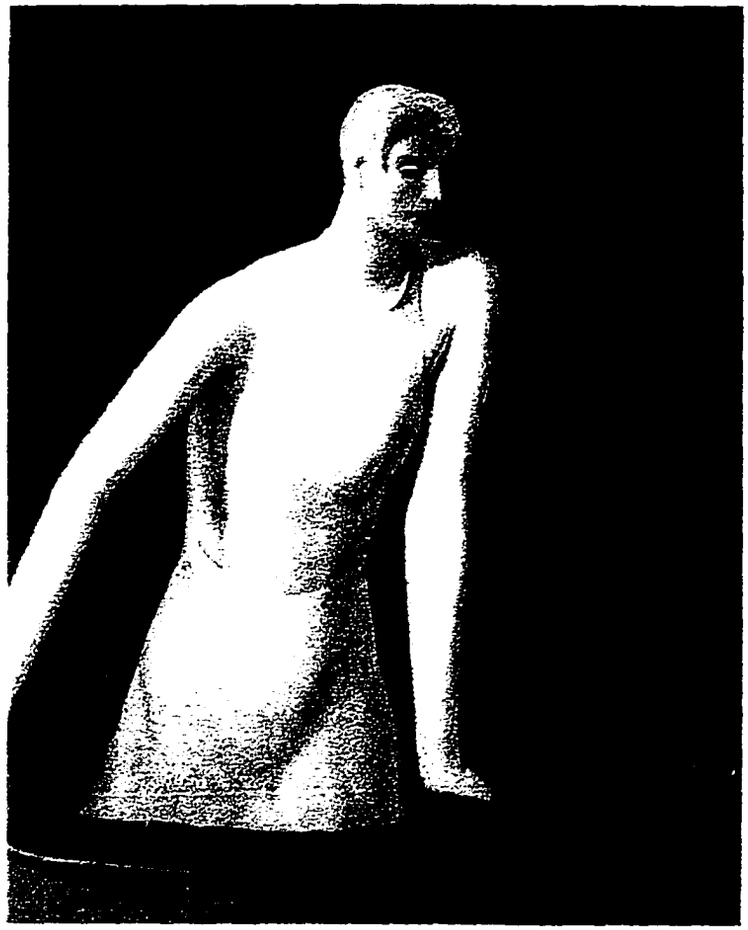


Figure 2.1

Guy Pène du Bois, *Opera Box* (1926) [Oil on canvas, 57½ x 45¼ in. (146.1 x 114.9 cm)]. The son of a music critic, du Bois was fascinated by the world of privilege, symbolized here by the unassailable fortress of the opera box.

Collection of Whitney Museum of American Art. Purchase 31.184.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

status for many members of the upper class. According to Charles Astor Bristed, a grandson of John Jacob Astor who delineated appropriate patterns of wealth consumption in his 1852 sketch of New York society, The Upper Ten Thousand, the elite "[are those] who keep carriages, live above Bleecker, are subscribers to the opera, go to Grace Church, have a town house and a country house, [and] give balls and parties."[1]

Before the Metropolitan, New York's reigning operatic venue was the august Academy of Music on Fourteenth Street. Opened on 2 October 1854 with Bellini's Norma,[2] the house served the Knickerbocker[3] gentry well, until post-Civil War prosperity presented the old guard with the formidable challenge of new money. Up until 1845, there were still only two millionaires in New York City: John Jacob Astor and Peter G. Stuyvesant. But dozens more began to appear as early as the 1850s, rapidly creating a new social reality in which the pockets of exclusivity described by Bristed began to appear with increasing frequency. The problematic new wealth at the Academy of Music was chiefly that of Cornelius Vanderbilt (1794-1877), called "Commodore" after his origins as a Staten Island ferryboat entrepreneur. Upon his death in 1877, Vanderbilt left an estate of some $105 million, a sum greater than that held in the United

---

1 Quoted in Burrows and Wallace, Gotham, 714. Bristed was generous in his tabulation of elite society; its numbers were later reduced considerably, in a famous comment by Caroline Astor's associate Ward McAllister, to four hundred, the number that could comfortably fit in her ballroom. An O. Henry collection of short stories celebrating the lives of ordinary New York mortals was titled The Four Million (1906) in sardonic response to the McAllister assessment.

2 *Opening of the Academy of Music,* New-York Daily Times, 3 October 1854, 4. Kolodin's date of 1849 (Metropolitan Opera [1953], 4) is in error.

3 A term coined by Washington Irving in his first book, A History of New York from the Beginning of the World to the End of the Dutch Dynasty (1809), a satire "authored" by one Diedrich Knickerbocker, representative of old Dutch society in the New World. The term became synonymous with New York society's old guard in the nineteenth century.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

States treasury.[4] Such an amount could not be ignored, particularly since the Commodore, a believer in primogeniture, had kept his estate intact by leaving the bulk of it to his son William H. Vanderbilt.

Dizikes's inaccurate statement that Vanderbilt left his fortune to his two sons is worth clarifying, since the timing of the actual events had a direct bearing upon the Metropolitan's founding.[5] Cornelius Vanderbilt had thirteen children, ten of whom survived him. Although the irascible Commodore was said to be equally abusive to all his descendants, he showed some favor in his later years to his eldest son, William H., whose stolid tenacity won him some grudging respect. The other surviving son, Cornelius Jeremiah, who suffered from epilepsy, did not fare as well and became a chronic gambler—a habit which he later blamed on his father. The Commodore had always threatened that upon his death there would be "hell to pay." At the reading of the will, it was revealed that his eight daughters were to receive several hundred thousand dollars each in railroad bonds and trust funds; of William H. Vanderbilt's four sons, the eldest (Cornelius II) received $5 million and the other three—one of whom was William K. Vanderbilt, who later became an important benefactor of the Metropolitan—received $2 million each; Cornelius Jeremiah (the gambler) received only the interest on a $200,000 trust fund to be maintained by his older brother; and the remainder of the estate, which amounted to nearly $95 million, devolved upon that brother, William H. Vanderbilt. A long legal battle initiated by Cornelius Jeremiah and one of his sisters ensued, and the matter dragged on in the New York courts from 1877 to 1879. Cornelius tried to bring his father's mental stability in question,

---

4 Arthur T. Vanderbilt II, Fortune's Children: The Fall of the House of Vanderbilt (New York: William Morrow & Company, Inc., 1989), 49.

5 Dizikes, Opera in America, 216.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

claiming the Commodore was under the influence of occult beliefs, but it was the younger Vanderbilt's reputation that suffered the most damage, for upon cross-examination it was revealed he had been arrested more than thirty times for forgery, writing bad checks and indebtedness. A settlement was at last effected in the spring of 1879, in which William H. agreed to advance $600,000 in cash and trust fund monies to each plaintiff, thereby reducing his own share in the legacy to approximately $94 million. In April 1882, Cornelius Jeremiah, exhausted and delirious after a night of heavy gambling, committed suicide with his thirty-eight caliber Smith and Wesson revolver.[6]

Needless to say, this spectacular airing of the familial laundry did not encourage the acceptance of the Vanderbilt family into Knickerbocker society, which had always been repulsed by the Commodore's coarse personality. But the fact remained that he—and now his son—was richer than anyone in the United States had ever been. The season immediately after the will was settled (1879-1880) was that in which social tensions finally erupted at the Academy.

It was the wife of the new heir, Maria Kissam Vanderbilt, the daughter of a clergyman, who tipped the social order when she allegedly demanded that her husband take action regarding the box situation at the Academy of Music. The limited box market had already been cornered by a small group of New York's leading families (the Astors, Schermerhorns, DePeysters, Bayards, Beekmans, and Cuttings, et al.) whose wealth dated from the Revolution, and the insiders retained firm control over their holdings by allowing sales only to approved purchasers.[7] William H. Vanderbilt is said to have offered $30,000 for a box in 1880, but

---

6 Vanderbilt, Fortune's Children, 58-69.

7 The actual number of boxes at the Academy has been variously calculated: nine parterre boxes in Peltz, Behind the Gold Curtain; eighteen total in Burrows and Wallace's Gotham, 1074; and thirty in Kolodin, Metropolitan Opera (1953), 5; this last figure is transcribed in Dizikes, Opera in America,

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

according to legend, "the old set snubbed him as they had his father, the Commodore, before him."[8] It remains unclear, however, whether or not the Knickerbockers in fact had anything to sell, since even when a boxholder died, his estate often continued to hold the family box; consequently, boxes became available for purchase only on rare occasions.[9] In any event, a meeting was called by August H. Belmont, President of the Academy's board of directors[10] between a group of Academy stockholders and the renegades, who were represented by George Henry Warren, a lawyer and broker associated with Vanderbilt. A compromise offer to create

---

216. The discrepancy may result from the fact that the theater's box design was reconfigured as a result of several remodelings (one of which occurred after a fire in 1865). In addition, while boxes may exist on several levels of a theater, only the ones in the most prestigious location are calculated where members of society are concerned, as they alone convey social status. At the Academy, these were the "proscenium boxes," so named for their position nestled on either side of the broad proscenium arch. Originally, each of the two groups of these symmetrically-placed boxes contained three tiers, comprised of three boxes each, for a total of eighteen. *Opening of the Academy of Music,* New-York Daily Times, 3 October 1854, 4. In addition to its description of the "very spacious and elegant" proscenium boxes, the Times refers to "balcony boxes" just above the parquet level and "family boxes similar to those at Niblo's Garden" in the rear of the first and second tiers. A drawing of the Academy auditorium with a group of proscenium boxes visible is reproduced in Mayer, The Met, 11.

8 Burrows and Wallace, Gotham, 1074.

9 This practice of maintaining estate-held boxes, which later recurred at the Metropolitan, assisted society's underlying strategy, according to novelist Edith Wharton: "Conservatives cherished [the Academy] for being small and inconvenient, and thus keeping out the 'new people.'" Quoted in Mayer, The Met, 13. Situations later arose at the Metropolitan when an estate was unable to dispose of a box because the stockholders' board refused to approve sales to "unacceptable" purchasers. Kolodin, whose history of the Metropolitan excoriates its boxholders on nearly every page, described this insidious social screening practice memorably: "In commenting, casually, on the transfer of ownership from one member of the firm to another, Secretary Dodd of the Opera and Real Estate Company cast a beam of light on the thinking that governed the choice of 'eligibles.' 'It is more difficult,' he said, 'to find a purchaser acceptable to the board . . . for the boxes in the central portion of the sides of the opera house [those that were most visible] than for those near the stage or in the rear.' The unconscious humor of this is both overpowering and saddening. . . . [and] shows how secure the core of the inner circle felt itself." Kolodin, Metropolitan Opera (1953), 72.

10 Belmont (*née* Schönberg), a German Jew and one of the country's leading private bankers, gained entry to the upper levels of society before religion became a bar to genteel status. Relief is said to have been expressed, however, that he had been married in an Episcopal church. Burrows and Wallace, Gotham, 714.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

twenty-six new boxes at the Academy was rejected.[11] Just three days later, the New York Times reported that Warren, together with Robert Goelet (related to the Vanderbilts by marriage) and George Griswold Haven had announced their intention to construct a new opera house, indicating that plans had probably been in gestation for some time—most likely since Commodore Vanderbilt's 1877 demise. Contrary to expectation, many of the Academy boxholders did not spurn the new group, but made the concession of joining them. Among those subscribing $10,000 to the original Metropolitan boxes were Academy boxholders John Jacob Astor III,[12] Perry Belmont (a son of August) and William Bayard Cutting, whose brother Fulton succeeded George Griswold Haven as president of the Metropolitan boxholders' board in 1925 and figured prominently into opera house politics of the Gatti-Kahn period. By accommodating the new Medici, the old guard paradoxically was able to preserve its reign into the next century, and the Astor name still superseded that of Vanderbilt, even if the latter owned more stock in the new venture.[13]

This compromise in the social system was probably not unexpected by either side, as each had an enormous stake in its continuity. Louis Auchincloss suggests as much in a commentary on the great novelist and chronicler of the age, Edith Wharton:

---

11 New York Times, 4 April 1880. The new boxes would necessarily have been at another location in the theater, connoting lesser social status.

12 The Astor subscription continued the tradition of his family's link with a series of important institutions in New York's operatic history: the Park Theatre, the Astor Place Opera House, the Academy of Music, and the Metropolitan. The tradition has been upheld to the present with the appearance of current New York society *doyenne* Brooke Astor, widow of Vincent Astor (a great-great-grandson of the original patriarch), in a Metropolitan box on opening nights.

13 The fact that three members of the Vanderbilt family, William H. and his sons William Kissam and Cornelius II, all took stock in the new Metropolitan identified it as a Vanderbilt project in the eyes of the public from the inception.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> She had a tight grasp of just what this society was made up of. She understood that it was arbitrary, capricious, and inconsistent; she was aware that it did not hesitate to abolish its standards while most loudly proclaiming them. . . . She knew that compromises could be counted on, but that they were rarely made while still considered compromises. . . . She realized, in short, that the social game was played without rules. . . . The society of which she wrote was an integral part of the American dream—the American myth—the American illusion. [14]

It was the "hot-house" cultural product of this group, grand opera styled for society, that Sonneck lamented in his 1904 comment predicting a dismal future for the American genre forced to develop in such an atmosphere. The intricate nexus between the Metropolitan's owners and its management to that time, however, was more malleable than Sonneck's statement suggests. At times the managers openly served fashion, but at others they aspired to higher artistic ideals. The disparate characters the theater assumed during its early history also mirrored struggles for national hegemony that continued well into the twentieth century, creating somewhat of a vortex into which American composers were drawn.



The First Regime: Henry E. Abbey (1883-1884)

When the new theater was completed in 1883, the owners, now organized as the Metropolitan Opera-house Company, Ltd., faced the secondary concern of what to produce on its stage. Following nineteenth-century practice, the owners hired an independent theatrical manager, commonly known as an impresario, to present seasons of opera in lieu of establishing a permanent production company. The first to be selected was Henry E. Abbey (1846-1896), a theatrical entrepreneur and manager of concert artists, whose decision to style his organization

---

[14] Edith Wharton, New York Novels, foreword by Louis Auchincloss (New York: The Modern Library, 1998), viii.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

"Abbey's Italian Opera Company" clearly indicated his intent to serve fashionable society. Accordingly, the entire repertory of operas—eleven Italian, seven French and one German—including the opening night Faust, was sung in Italian, closely resembling practice established at mid-century at the Academy of Music. Wagner, who had died in Venice earlier that year, was represented by a single work, Lohengrin.[15] Thus the reputation of the Metropolitan as an institution mired in past practice rather than as a future-looking artistic leader was already established.

True to Abbey's formula of presenting familiar operas with proven stars, the company numbered several luminaries, such as sopranos Christine Nilsson and Marcella Sembrich, among its singers.[16] Also appearing on the roster were the brothers Campanini, tenor Italo and conductor Cleofonte—the latter, during a tenure as music director of the Chicago Opera nearly thirty years later, was to instigate a period of aggressive competition with Gatti-Casazza's Metropolitan that involved American repertoire. Despite the fact that Abbey was a Midwesterner born in Akron, no American opera was likely to fit into his scheme at the Metropolitan, and indeed none did. The Met's first roster of artists did include one American singer, Baltimore-born soprano Alwina Valleria (1848-1925), who had debuted at the Academy of Music in 1879 only after the requisite European success.

Abbey's production values were reputed to have been lavish. The equally lavish production expenses, together with high singers' fees—$1,000 per performance to Campanini and Nilsson, an unheard-of figure at the time—and large losses on an ambitious tour resulted in a

---

15 Kolodin, Metropolitan Opera (1936), 17.

16 David Hamilton, ed., The Metropolitan Opera Encyclopedia (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 226.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

financial deficit for the season that has been variously estimated at $250,000 to $600,000.[17] Abbey reputedly had been pressured by the existence of the still-functioning Academy, where impresario "Colonel" James H. Mapleson was featuring prima donna Adelina Patti in direct competition with Abbey's regime. Threats of this type would recur in the Met's history, and usually spurred the management to greater accomplishment. The boxholders' swift decision to terminate Abbey (their budget had provided for only a $60,000 deficit) established an early distaste on the part of the owners for absorbing any substantial financial loss from the venture, for which the millionaires were harshly rebuked—without any noticeable effect—by the press. This too became a recurring theme in the Metropolitan's history.[18]

Leopold Damrosch (1884-1885)

The owners turned to Ernest Gye, well-known impresario of London's Covent Garden, who had been among the candidates for the directorship the previous year. This time the British impresario unwisely pressured the theater to favor his wife, soprano Emma Albani, as reigning prima donna over the popular Nilsson. Negotiations dragged on into the summer of 1884 and the situation became precarious. When Gye held to his terms, conductor Leopold Damrosch (1832-1885), esteemed founder of the New York Symphony Society and a vigorous entrepreneur who had organized the city's first music festival in 1881, stepped in with an offer to assemble a

---

17 Ibid., 11. The $600,000 estimate was attributed to Abbey's later business partner John B. Schoeffel. Henry H. Krehbiel, Chapters of Opera (New York: H. Holt & Company, 1908), quoted in Kolodin, Metropolitan Opera (1936), 20-21.

18 The stockholders' defense was that they had generously invested money with no expectation of return. While the theater was still under construction, James A. Roosevelt told the press: "We never expected that it would pay. No opera house in the world has ever paid as an investment, and none ever will." New York Times, 14 March 1882, quoted in Kolodin, Metropolitan Opera (1936), 7.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

company of German singers on short notice. The fact that the Germans were far less expensive than the Italians appealed to the board, and Damrosch was appointed.[19]

The house's repertoire shifted to a heavy concentration on Wagner and other German operas, as well as seven Italian and French works, all sung in German. Again, no American operas were considered or presented. Although Damrosch's son Walter was to become a strongly vocal advocate of American composers, Leopold's singers, who were accustomed to the vernacular usage of the German court opera companies from which they had come, were unlikely to be enthusiastic about learning roles in another language. Indeed, there is no evidence that Damrosch ever considered presenting a work in English.[20]

Damrosch's regime concentrated on ensemble as opposed to stars, and Walter Damrosch joined the musical staff as assistant conductor. This was a fortuitous addition, for on 11 February 1885 Leopold Damrosch died of pneumonia brought on by exhaustion, and it was the younger Damrosch who finished out the season in his father's stead.

Edmund C. Stanton (1885-1891)

The Metropolitan's boxholders, pleased with the Damrosches' combination of high artistic achievement and low deficits, decided to continue with the German program. Metropolitan Opera-house Company Secretary Edmund C. Stanton (1854-1901) was appointed

---

19 Peltz, Behind the Gold Curtain, 20.

20 It was common for European singers to restrict their performing to one, or at most two, languages until well into the twentieth century. See, e.g., Gatti's comment about German baritone Michael Bohnen, Introduction *n*63. Exceptions, of course, do exist: perhaps the most notable was Manuel García's daughter Maria. In a reputed attempt to escape her father's dominance, the eighteen-year-old soprano married François Eugène Malibran in March 1826 and remained in New York after the family troupe moved on to Mexico. As Maria Malibran, she was engaged by the Bowery Theatre to sing in English during 1827. She succeeded magnificently in repertoire ranging from Arne's ubiquitous Love in a Village to Don Giovanni in English translation, but the experiment was rather short-lived. Malibran returned to Europe in October 1827, where she achieved lasting renown in Italian repertoire. Dizikes, Opera in America, 83-85.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

General Manager, while Walter Damrosch, at twenty-three too inexperienced to succeed his father, negotiated the hiring of Wagner disciple Anton Seidl (1850-1898) as de facto Music Director (Seidl's wife, Auguste Kraus, had been the Met's first Sieglinde). The great conductor's arrival inaugurated a period of famous "Wagner Nights" at the Metropolitan, in which the theater for the first and only time in its history was on the cutting edge of music drama.[21] The entire repertoire, which included Faust and Carmen, continued to be sung in German, no doubt respecting the singers' preference.

The triumph of German repertoire at the Metropolitan was cause for exultation in many quarters, no doubt due to the intrinsic value for which Wagner's music dramas were lauded. But a disturbing undercurrent of ethnic slurs, indicative of a developing rivalry between national styles, had also arisen. The influential critic Henry T. Finck, for example, gloated in 1888: "There is no hope for the Italianissimi, who sigh for their macaronic arias and the *Ernani* and *Gazza ladra* soup."[22] Comments like these would recur well into the next century.

But by the decade's end, the boxholders were growing restless with the relentless serious-mindedness of Seidl's repertoire. Competition, at least, appeared to have been eliminated when Mapleson gave up at the Academy in 1886 with the historic farewell, "I cannot fight Wall Street,"[23] but his presence in New York's opera world was supplanted with the surprising re-emergence of Henry Abbey, who had independently leased the Metropolitan to produce spring seasons of Italian opera with Patti beginning in 1887. If it were Abbey's intention

---

21 See Joseph Horowitz, Wagner Nights: An American History (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

22 Ibid., 126.

23 Quoted in Kolodin, Metropolitan Opera (1936), 32.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

to provoke a nationalist repertoire dispute at the Met, he was successful. According to Walter Damrosch, who had reason to feel dismay at the overturning of the musical regime his father had founded, the boxholders were once again swayed by budgetary concerns. Apparently the deficits of the German company had begun to increase, and Abbey had secured the financial backing of partners who would, for the first time in the theater's history, absorb their own financial losses.[24] Despite fervent protest on the part of Seidl's many supporters, the board announced that the Metropolitan would be turned back over to Abbey and his associates in the 1891-1892 season.

Henry E. Abbey, Maurice Grau and John B. Schoeffel (1891-1897)

Abbey's 1890 supplementary Italian season at the Metropolitan, which he produced in partnership with his new associate Maurice Grau (1849-1907), turned the social public decisively in his favor. Abbey and Grau had joined with silent partner John B. Schoeffel to form America's most successful theatrical management firm by 1890, and in 1891 took over the Metropolitan as scheduled. The theater now presented a cosmopolitan repertory consisting of ten Italian, six French and three German operas by 1893-1894, although the German works (Fidelio, Der fliegende Holländer) were now heard in Italian, and Seidl returned to conduct Die Meistersinger as I Maestri Cantori. But the Met returned to the production of German operas sung in their language of composition during the 1895-1896 season. It is likely that Grau, well known for his business acumen, was responsible for this decision, a wise one considering the demographics of New York's populous German-American community.

---

[24] "The audiences reveled in their *bel canto*, and as Abbey, Schoeffel and Grau assumed the entire financial responsibility of the enterprise, the directors of the opera-house were also well satisfied. They had become tired of the growing deficits of the German opera." Walter Damrosch, My Musical Life (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1923), 104.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

A major historical precedent was set when the new management presented opera in French for the first time upon the Metropolitan stage by opening its first season with Gounod's Roméo et Juliette in December 1891. The new French repertory represented the beginnings of a move towards internationalism at the theater which would prove inexorable.[25] Heralding the new Franco-Italian regime was the engagement of the Polish de Reszke brothers: Édouard, a bass who excelled in Wagnerian roles, and Jean, who moved up from his original baritone to become one of the most distinguished tenors of his generation. Both brothers initially sang Wagner in Italian, then relearned the repertoire in German during the mid-1890s, and their example became a significant model for emerging American singers.

The historic evolution of a new linguistic versatility helped put more Americans on the roster, and internationalism became the most advantageous policy for American singers, for no group adapted as easily to singing both Romance and Germanic texts.[26] This was noted by American baritone Clarence Whitehill, who sang at the Metropolitan from 1909 to 1932:

> An American singer is obliged to go abroad for his experience and he must pass through much before he becomes successful. He is obliged to learn languages at first, and so you will find that the American singers at the Metropolitan Opera House are more proficient linguists than any of the other singers, and consequently more useful. [27]

---

25 The French innovation, however, was not an idea original to the new Metropolitan administration. A demand for French opera that developed at Covent Garden during the 1880s was marked by an 1889 production of Roméo et Juliette in its original language at the theater. Two principals of the London cast, the brothers Jean and Édouard de Reszke, repeated their roles in the Metropolitan's production two years later. White, English Opera, 340.

26 This is somewhat ironic, since Americans are not generally known for their fluency in foreign languages. Another irony is that while most American singers prefer to communicate in English, many loathe singing in it and are not necessarily champions of English-language opera; a notable exception was Lawrence Tibbett. This situation has changed gradually but steadily throughout the twentieth century.

27 *American Singers the Best Linguists*, New York Times, 22 April 1912, 11.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Not surprisingly, many Americans received leading roles in the new French productions: Emma Eames (1865-1952) sang the opening night Juliette; Marie van Zandt (1858-1919) was the house's first Lakmé (1892); 1892 was also the year Lillian Nordica (1857-1914) sang Sélika in Meyerbeer's L'Africaine; Eames again was cast as Charlotte when the theater produced Werther in 1894; and legendary American soprano Sibyl Sanderson (1865-1903), who assisted Mary Garden at the beginning of her career in Paris, sang the title role of Massenet's Manon in 1895.

The new management lost the 1892-1893 season due to a debilitating fire that disfigured much of the auditorium. A reorganized group of boxholders, which included nineteen of the Metropolitan's original stockholders, subscribed to 300 shares of new stock at $100 per share and an additional $30,000 in bonds to finance the reconstruction. The new group was designated as the Metropolitan Opera and Real Estate Company and was comprised of two major power orientations. One, as expected, continued to revolve around the Vanderbilts and included several families into which Vanderbilt daughters had married; the second now circulated around J. Pierpont Morgan, who was at this time in his mid-fifties, and included business associates as well as partners in his banking firm. Although still a decade away from organizing the world's first billion-dollar corporation (U.S. Steel), Morgan had become the nation's most powerful banker, and his firm reigned supreme on Wall Street.[28] Investors in the new Real Estate Company drew lots for their box positions in the reconfigured "Diamond Horseshoe," as it came to be known, and Kolodin is as unsparing of the new order as he was of the old when he observed, "God's will was working well at the second drawing for boxes: first choice went to

---

[28] Jean Strouse, *The Unknown J. P. Morgan*, The New Yorker 75 (29 March 1999): 66, 74.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Morgan and he chose number thirty-five at the direct center of the Horseshoe."[29] In European theaters, this position was always the location of the royal box. Indeed, when President and Mrs. William Howard Taft appeared on a state visit for a performance of Aida, they were seated in Morgan's box.

The social hierarchy of the inner sanctum thus remained in place, as evidenced by Dodd's comment on box placement.[30] The box around which everyone was jockeying for position was Morgan's, even though the banker was not particularly keen on opera—he preferred collecting art—and often took naps in the back of his box during performances, according to his son-in-law.[31] The new alignment included a small but powerful third faction. The old Academy boxholding group—upheld by the names of Astor (box seven), Belmont (box eleven), and Cutting (box twenty-eight), among others—provided a prestigious link with the old guard of the past. Although their numbers made them a minority, the group still included the undisputed *doyenne* of society, Caroline Astor, whom not even the Vanderbilts tried to unseat.[32] On the contrary, managers were often accused of holding the curtain for her on Monday nights, the fashionable evening of the week. Traditionally, however, she did not appear in her box until nine o'clock, well into the first act. Ablaze with jewels, including a diamond stomacher reputed to have belonged to

---

29 Kolodin, Metropolitan Opera (1953), 59.

30 Mary Jane Matz, The Many Lives of Otto Kahn (New York: Macmillan Company, 1963; repr., New York: Pendragon Press, 1984), 63. Dodd's statement appears in *n*9 above.

31 Herbert L. Satterlee, J. Pierpont Morgan: An Intimate Portrait (New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1939), quoted in Kolodin, Metropolitan Opera (1953), 61.

32 Kolodin, Metropolitan Opera (1953), 59-60.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Marie Antoinette, Astor was affectionately described by her friend Harry Lehr as resembling a walking chandelier.[33]

The immutability of a social hierarchy which remained in place for decades was later acknowledged by Otto Kahn, who apparently felt he had to uphold the status quo in his prolonged efforts to get a new opera house built in the 1920s, even though his chief objectives were to provide greater accommodation for the middle and working classes, as well as modern production facilities:

> Inasmuch as a number of the present boxes are owned by estates, the representatives of which might not wish to own boxes in the new house, it would be necessary to invite a certain number of selected persons to become owners of boxes in the new house, but, as stated before, the decision as to who these persons are to be, is wholly subject to the approval of the Metropolitan Opera and Real Estate Company. [34]

It was not surprising, then, that the new trio management became more conscious of catering to society than ever before, with Grau's influence in particular exhibiting itself in the famous "Starry Nights" of the 1890s, when the star system once again predominated. This time it was to the detriment of production values and new repertory—doubtless budget-balancing measures initiated by the financially astute Grau. The new management was responsible, however, for the inclusion of the aforementioned Americans: Emma Eames (a New Englander who was born in Shanghai when her father, a graduate of Harvard Law School, took a position there), the legendary Wagnerian Lillian Nordica, coloratura Marie Van Zandt, and soprano Sibyl Sanderson. Eames, whose important career was made during this time, quoted

---

[33] Mayer, The Met, 23. Caroline Astor was the wife of William Backhouse Astor, Jr., a grandson of the legendary John Jacob Astor, and not William Waldorf Astor, a great-grandson, as stated in Kobler's Otto the Magnificent, 52.

[34] Kahn to George G. Haven, President, Metropolitan Opera and Real Estate Company, 1 December 1922. Kahn Papers, Box 181, Princeton University.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Maurice Grau as saying that although he knew very little about singing, "he could always pick the artist who had the spark."[35]

Maurice Grau (1898-1903)

Yet Grau can scarcely be dismissed. After another cancelled season (1897-1898) due to the deaths of Abbey in 1896 and financial advisor William Steinway, Grau carried on alone from 1898 to 1903, offering a vocal Golden Age with a staggering collection of stars: Lilli Lehmann, Pol Plançon, Ernestine Schumann-Heink, Johanna Gadski, Fritzi Scheff, Antonio Scotti, Victor Maurel, Francesco Tamagno and the de Reszke brothers, among others. Grau's repertory stressed Verdi and Mozart (the latter's operas were by no means considered standard repertory at the time); he also introduced the new Puccini operas and gave the company's first unabridged Ring cycle.[36] Apart from Puccini, however, his modern repertoire items were few—Luigi Mancinelli's Ero e Leandro (to a libretto by Boito); Ignace Paderewski's Manru; Isidore de Lara's Messalina—and included no American works. Grau's was the only regime in the entire history of the Metropolitan, interestingly, to present an opera composed by a woman when British composer Ethel Smyth's Der Wald was given two performances in 1903.

Credit is also due Grau for a slow but steady increase of American singers on the roster, although they remained greatly outnumbered by the Europeans. He retained both Eames and Nordica, and added baritone David Bispham (1857-1921),[37] young soprano Suzanne Adams

---

35 Emma Eames, Some Memories and Reflections (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1927), 235.

36 The first American Ring cycles had been heard at the Metropolitan in the 1888-1889 season under Seidl with cuts (e.g., the Götterdämmerung Norn scene; Waltraute's narrative). Seidl bowed to pressure requiring him to trim Wagner's operas to four hours "with heavy heart." Horowitz, Wagner Nights, 142-43.

37 The baritone lent his name to the Bispham Medal awarded by Chicago's American Opera Society to outstanding American opera composers from 1924 through the early 1940s.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

(1872-1953), and legendary contralto Louise Homer (1871-1947), an aunt of Samuel Barber. More significantly, in a 1900 ancillary season, Grau supported the theater's first opera-in-English venture, an autonomous Metropolitan Grand English Opera Company managed by impresario Henry W. Savage (1859-1927). The company's presentation of British composer Arthur Goring Thomas's (1850-1892) Esmerelda (1883; after Hugo's Notre-Dame de Paris) marked the first time an opera in English was heard on the Metropolitan's stage.[38]

Unfortunately, the opera-in-English venture was not a success, reportedly due to the *Volksoper* approach that Savage employed. This meant using capable but little-known singers from his own Castle Square Opera Company—Clarence Whitehill was the only member to make an important career—whose voices were accustomed to far smaller venues than the wide-ranging spaces of the Metropolitan's auditorium. The blame for this may rest with Grau and his legendary attention to the bottom line. The English season had been designed to provide opera to mass audiences at popular prices, and no one was more familiar with the exorbitant expenses of the vocal star system than Grau. It was also unlikely that he would wish to create vocal competition between the Metropolitan and an ancillary company.

Savage's English repertory consisted of standard European works in translation, including Carmen, Trovatore, Roméo et Juliette, and some Wagner, with British operetta, such as Balfe's Bohemian Girl and Gilbert and Sullivan's Mikado, thrown in. Even the Thomas opera—the only other work originally composed in English—was in a lighter vein, as the composer, reputed to have excelled in lighter textures and forms, drained Hugo's tale of all drama

---

[38] Daniel Gregory Mason, ed., The Art of Music (New York: National Society of Music, 1915-16), vol. 4, Music in America, by W. Dermont Darby and Arthur Farwell, 158; quoted in Glass, *American Opera*, 25.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

and passion by giving it a happy ending.[39] No opera by an American was heard. The fact that all of the repertoire originally written in English was by British composers was particularly vexing considering that Savage was not only an American but a New Englander. His work in Boston at the end of the nineteenth century placed him in contact with some of the finest composers in America, almost all of whom were engaged in opera composition at some point during their careers.

A disappointing lack of response from the New York public to the English productions brought the experiment to a conclusion after a single season. Savage experienced significantly better results in his many touring ventures throughout the provinces with his own Henry Savage Grand Opera Company, formed in 1904, but his attitude toward American composers remained unchanged. The Boston Herald reported in 1903 that he declined to consider presenting Azara, the last major work and only opera of John Knowles Paine, then considered the dean of American composers.

At length, Grau, pleading ill health, retired with a comfortable fortune in 1903, having made the Metropolitan pay handsomely.[40] Given some of the spectacular losses sustained by prior managements, this was no small achievement. However, Grau did not escape heavy criticism for his neglect of production values, including *mise-en-scène* and both chorus and orchestra. Kolodin, for example, commented: "He produced few novelties; he minimized ensemble and orchestra; he ventured scarcely at all from the traditional methods of presenting

---

39 Thomas was apparently inspired in his dramaturgy by his admiration for Gounod's Faust. Ironically, an 1890 Covent Garden production of Esmerelda revived for Nellie Melba and Jean de Reszke, which was sung in French to satisfy the growing public demand for French opera, retained Hugo's tragic dénouement. Opera Grove, s.v. *Arthur Goring Thomas*; White, English Opera, 340.

40 Grau did in fact suffer from heart disease and died in 1907 at the age of fifty-eight. John A. Garraty and Mark C. Carnes, editors, American National Biography (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), s.v. *Maurice Grau* by Karen Ahlquist.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

opera."[41] And a 1924 New York Times assessment of opera at the Metropolitan prior to Gatti-Casazza indeed seems directed at Grau's "Starry Night" regime:

> There were generally the three requisites that Rossini [had historically] regarded as the only ones—voice, voice and voice—and there was often little else. A well-considered plan, artistic proportion, drilled ensemble, efficient orchestral playing, effective scenery and a reasonable cooperation of the various elements of lyric drama did not enter into the calculations of the impresario. [42]

Kobler's assessment that the Grau regime was "unsurpassed in its abundance of superb interpreters, its innovations, and the quality of its conductors and orchestra"[43] is thus correct only as far as its first phrase. Equally open to argument is his statement that Grau "left not only a splendid record as an opera impresario, but substantial profits in the Met till."[44] Grau saw substantial profits, to be sure, but they were not left in the Metropolitan's till. Grau and his predecessors were independent entrepreneurs. Since the Metropolitan had never had a permanent production company, the profits accrued to his benefit and to that of his financial backers (among whom were the stockholders of the Metropolitan Opera and Real Estate Company) and not to the successor regime.[45] The Real Estate Company's books indicate that although Grau's results varied, they could be quite good. At the conclusion of the 1900-1901 season, for example, only a standard 5% interest-dividend was declared, due to an unprofitable

---

41 Kolodin, Metropolitan Opera (1936), 89.

42 *Improved Opera,* New York Times, 16 March 1924, sec. 2, 6.

43 Kobler, Otto the Magnificent, 30.

44 Ibid.

45 The Real Estate Company required Grau to observe the same system as the previous trio management by providing his own financial backing and absorbing his own losses. When Grau was unable to obtain the full guaranty amount of $150,000 the board required, the boxholders decided to invest $26,000 in the Maurice Grau Opera Company in exchange for a one-quarter interest in it. Thus, the boxholders shared in the profits of Grau's Metropolitan seasons. Mayer, The Met, 75.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

tour that had cut deeply into profits. But in the 1901-1902 season, Grau declared dividends amounting to 50%, in addition to the 5% regular interest-dividend, and 42½% in 1902-1903.[46] Of course, Grau himself realized a substantial share of the profits, making him the highest paid manager in Metropolitan history. Upon his death in 1907, he is said to have left an estate of over $600,000, gleaned in large part from his Metropolitan tenure.[47]

Grau's regime thus reinforced stereotypes which had haunted the house from its inception and were gathering force as the twentieth century approached: a theater that existed solely for society and profits, and the continued neglect of American composers.



Winds of Change: The Conried Metropolitan Opera Company (1903-1908)

Grau's sudden retirement for health reasons made him the third Metropolitan impresario, after Damrosch and Abbey, to become physically debilitated in the course of managing the theater. Whether or not the demands of the position were to blame, he would not be the last to experience this phenomenon. The Real Estate Company board ostensibly accepted applications for the position, and after a meeting on 13 February 1903 at which several candidates were given an opportunity to make presentations, theatrical manager Heinrich Conried was

---

46 Annual Meetings, Metropolitan Opera and Real Estate Company, 14 May 1902 and 13 May 1903. Minute Book No. 2 (8 May 1901—6 November 1907), 27, 63, Metropolitan Opera Archives.

47 Kolodin, Metropolitan Opera (1936), 89. Kolodin's source was Henry B. Dazian, a director of the Grau Metropolitan Opera Company and executor of Grau's estate.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

chosen that same afternoon.[48] Years after Conried's death, his biographer revealed, "It was only after he was assured of the unanimous support of the Metropolitan Directors that he consented to have his name put up for consideration."[49] This statement is consistent with Conried's problematically superior personality. Alma Mahler recorded the "unmistakable signs of megalomania" she witnessed during the first visit she and her husband paid to Conried's New York home in anticipation of Gustav Mahler's new conducting position at the Metropolitan, during which the new Metropolitan manager claimed he would "make" Mahler's American career.[50] Conried's reputation for managerial efficiency combined with theatrical showmanship may have gained him the prized lease to the Metropolitan from a board that was apparently seeking another Grau. The renown he had achieved during the previous decade by his astute management of the Irving Place Theater in New York, a German repertory house, had in fact been based on artistic principles that might have been extremely valuable to the Met. As it was, his colorfully controversial tenure did not fulfill this promise; yet Conried—at times deliberately and at others unwittingly—set into place several important tenets that were to rule the succeeding Gatti-Casazza regime and the American composers who benefitted from it.

Heinrich Conried (1848-1909), the son of an Austrian weaver, developed a passion for the stage at an early age. As a young actor in Vienna, the future manager displayed vigorous ambition and the will to fulfill it. Conried's acting career regrettably suffered due to his short stature and the compensatory histrionics of speech, gesture, and pose he adopted in what might be regarded as a stereotypical Napoleon complex. Ever resourceful, he found an outlet for

---

48 Meeting of Board of Directors, Metropolitan Opera and Real Estate Company, 13 February 1903. Minute Book No. 2 (8 May 1901—6 November 1907), 49, Metropolitan Opera Archives.

49 Moses, Life of Conried, 172. Despite this statement, Conried's support was far from unanimous.

50 Quoted in Mayer, The Met, 94-95.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

his excessive energy in an 1878 reorganization of the financially ailing Bremen Stadttheater, which convinced the German theatrical circle that the newcomer possessed serious managerial talent.[51] From that point Conried insisted upon remaining supreme in any situation in which he found himself.

Clearly Conried was temperamentally suited for independent theatrical enterprise as few individuals are, and it was this path he pursued when he was persuaded to come to New York by Adolph Neuendorff, a prominent figure in the city's German theatrical world. Neuendorff had risen from the pit band of New York's Deutsches Stadt-Theater to become a conductor of German opera at the Academy of Music. There he led the American premieres of Rienzi, Lohengrin and Die Walküre, later appearing at the Metropolitan in 1886.[52] Neuendorff smoothed Conried's entry into the New York theatrical world, doubtless encouraging a concomitant appreciation for opera. Conried's early career in New York probably earned him as many enemies as supporters, for his personality remained unaltered. But the construction of the Irving Place Theater in 1888 excited his imagination. He had long dreamed of managing a repertory theater that presented the great German classics of Goethe and Schiller, as well as modern masters like Gerhart Hauptmann. The new theater was erected near property belonging to William Steinway—an erstwhile financial advisor to Abbey and Grau at the Metropolitan—who took a special interest in its development. By 1892 Conried had convinced Steinway to give him the new theater's lease.

The repertory scheme advanced by Conried at the Irving Place was not a new idea. German intellectuals had clamored for it, but no one had found a way to make such a plan

---

51 Conried also performed an indirect service to American opera, as it was this theater that later premiered Coerne's Zenobia.

52 Horowitz, Wagner Nights, 48.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

financially self-sustaining, even with the patronage of New York's populous German community. Conried was able, however, to absorb his inevitable losses through numerous other business ventures he had set in motion during his first decade in America. These included securing contracts for the American rights to various German musical stage works, particularly those of the Viennese operetta composers, in whom Conried recognized a potential gold mine. Although his contractual activities were the subject of numerous legal battles, Conried was able to prevail enough of the time to keep himself in the black. An early venture that did not pan out was his 1886 application on behalf of the newly formed Conried Opera Company to the Metropolitan, then headed by Edmund Stanton of the Real Estate Company board, to produce a summer season of the operettas he had secured: "As I am the sole owner, in this country, of the greatest successes in comic opera that have been produced of late years [by Strauss, Suppé and others] . . . I have a larger repertoire at my command than any other manager in America."[53] Although this deal fell through, another business venture pursued at the same time found considerable success. Under the name Ocean Comfort Company—he was careful not to let his name be attached to purely commercial undertakings—Conried secured contracts with a number of German steamship lines to supply their boats with deck chairs. The shipping lines liked maintaining a business connection with Conried, knowing that his theatrical interests required those in his employ to engage in frequent transatlantic travel.[54]

The use of Ocean Comfort money helped Conried to execute his high-minded goals for the Irving Place. The theater's distinguished repertory in turn attracted the interest of

---

[53] Heinrich Conried to the Metropolitan Opera Board, 14 September 1886, quoted in Moses, Life of Conried, 48-49. As the date coincides with Neuendorff's work at the Metropolitan, Conried may have been seeking to expand on this connection. Moses wrote of the contracts Conried had obtained: "I have them all and they fill a small trunk. He was in contact with the whole Viennese musical world." Ibid., 49-50.

[54] Ibid., 74-75.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

leading educational institutions, several of which, including the University of Pennsylvania and Yale, awarded him honorary degrees in recognition of his service. More importantly, Conried gained the support of business leaders, including that of influential banker Henry Morgenthau, Sr. It was Morgenthau who backed Conried's bid for the Metropolitan upon Grau's departure, believing that his success in the classics would transfer admirably to an American operatic institution, and perhaps hoping for a return to the ambitious German evenings of years past. Indeed, Conried had long agitated for an American National Theater, an idea which had already been advanced by a short-lived National Theatre Society, believing in such an institution's impetus to native playwrights: "Give me a National Theatre, and I am sure that the American Shakespeare will write."[55] Once Conried was at the Met's helm, this ideal might have been expected to bode well for American composers.

Achieving the Metropolitan was not an easy task. The Real Estate Company board, spoiled by Grau's success and skittish about financial loss, restricted consideration to those who could provide a $150,000 guaranty fund. This meant that Conried had to assemble a group of financial backers who would invest by becoming stockholders in his production company. Here Morganthau's advice turned practical. He warned Conried against turning exclusively to the German intellectuals who were admirers of the Irving Place, for many of them—like Conried himself—were Jewish and posed a possible threat to the Real Estate Company, where an unwritten ban restricted box ownership to the Christian sector of society. Instead, Morganthau advised Conried to solicit individuals with whom the boxholder group was likely to feel comfortable; that is, versions of themselves, only several rungs lower on the social ladder and not

---

[55] Ibid., 91. The dream was briefly fulfilled by construction of the lavish New Theatre on Central Park West, which was backed by many members of the Metropolitan's board. Conried did not live to manage the Metropolitan's participation in the repertory, which consisted of light opera and operetta in addition to spoken drama. The project died in December 1910; persistantly bad public relations had branded it a "millionaires' toy" from the inception. Matz, Many Lives, 91.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

as rich. Morganthau thus recommended Henry Rogers Winthrop, Clarence H. Mackay, Eliot Gregory, and similar men. But the most fortuitous addition turned out to be new millionaire James Hazen Hyde (1876-1959), whose father Henry Baldwin Hyde, the founder of the Equitable Life Assurance Society, had died in 1899 leaving his son a majority interest in the company. At twenty-six, the new heir became first vice president of a corporation that controlled over $280 million in assets, but he showed no aptitude for the insurance business. Artistic and flamboyant, he was attracted to the risk of high-stakes corporate finance, provoking a bid for control of the Equitable by its alarmed president, James W. Alexander.[56] Young Hyde was probably saved from his more dangerous tendencies by his astute bankers, Kuhn, Loeb & Company, an esteemed firm which occupied a position on Wall Street second only to the house of Morgan. When Hyde accepted a position on Conried's board, he extended a similar invitation to his banker, Jacob Schiff of Kuhn, Loeb.

Schiff's firm was technically not in direct competition with Morgan's, for, as Morgan's most recent biographer asserts: "[T]he top Yankee and Jewish investment houses maintained gentlemanly agreements not to invade each other's territory."[57] Yet Hyde's nomination created a potential conflict at the Metropolitan that had been avoided on Wall Street. For the first time, the theater was to be governed by two boards instead of one: the Real Estate board, composed of boxholders, controlling the physical premises; and now Conried's board,

---

56 Hyde has been described as "a Harvard-educated Francophile who wore silk shirts, bow ties, yellow gloves, and violets in his buttonhole." His costume ball at Sherry's restaurant in January 1905 achieved legendary status as one of the last great social events of the Gilded Age. Jean Strouse, Morgan: American Financier (New York: Random House, 1999), 543-44.

57 Ibid., 420.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

overseeing production, artists and repertory. The former was controlled by J. P. Morgan and the latter would now include an element from his firm's Wall Street rival.[58]

The Kuhn, Loeb member, however, was not to be Schiff. The banker declined Hyde's invitation, pleading pressing work commitments, but in reality he probably wished to see Conried's chief rival win the Met. This was Walter Damrosch (1862-1950), now thoroughly experienced and director of his own opera company, which had produced his first opera, The Scarlet Letter, in 1896. Schiff pledged to help Damrosch only if Conried failed to secure backing,[59] then recommended a junior partner at Kuhn, Loeb to serve on Conried's board in his stead. The newcomer, who seemed to have an interest in the arts, was Otto H. Kahn (1867-1934).

It is interesting to speculate the direction the Metropolitan might have taken under Damrosch's leadership. Almost certainly, the institution would have embraced American composers at an earlier date than it did. But Conried had reportedly succeeded in assembling a wealthier group of backers than Damrosch,[60] a factor which had a historical record of success with the boxholders. Damrosch had also incurred the wrath of Real Estate Company board president George Griswold Haven during the formation of his Damrosch-Ellis Opera Company a decade earlier in consort with Charles Ellis, the manager of legendary soprano Nellie Melba. Melba claimed she had already decided to leave the Metropolitan's artist roster when Damrosch engaged her as prima donna of his new company at the spectacular sum of $1,500 per

---

58 Although Morgan never held an office on the Real Estate board (he was simply a director), he is said to have been consulted on all substantive matters. The Real Estate Company's books confirm that virtually all boxholder meetings were held at the Morgan residence (site of the present Morgan Library) with Morgan in attendance.

59 Quaintance Eaton, The Miracle of the Met (New York: Meredith Press, 1968), 142.

60 George Martin, The Damrosch Dynasty: America's First Family of Music (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1983), 171.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

performance, but Damrosch himself confirmed Haven's avowal that "as long as he was president of the Metropolitan I should never set foot in it again in a professional capacity."[61]

Another significant factor working against Damrosch was the influence of New York Evening Post critic Henry T. Finck, who opposed Damrosch precisely *because* he was an American composer. Finck claimed responsibility in his memoirs for the aggressive advancement of Conried's candidacy, unrepentantly explaining that Damrosch's background as a conductor and composer might well have resulted in an artistic domination of the theater:

> There were several candidates, among whom Walter Damrosch seemed most likely to be the winner. Now I hadn't the slightest doubt that Mr. Damrosch would make an excellent manager; he had the requisite knowledge, experience and business ability; he spoke several languages and was a "good mixer." But — he was a composer and a conductor! The idea that he might produce a new work of his own most every season and personally conduct all the most important performances, did not fill my soul with unmitigated joy. So I came out for Conried. [62]

Finck was not reticent about exerting his influence. After receiving Conried's assent, he relates how he "hurried down to the Evening Post and dashed off an editorial in which I pleaded with all my might and main for Heinrich Conried as manager of the Metropolitan."[63] Shortly thereafter, the New York Times seconded Finck's motion. Damrosch's impressive musical achievements notwithstanding, he is said to have lost the Metropolitan by a single vote.[64]

---

61 Damrosch, My Musical Life, 123. Despite this threat, Walter Damrosch returned to the Metropolitan to conduct Wagner in the 1900-1902 seasons under Grau's management. The reprieve most likely stemmed from the fact that Damrosch was among the few competent conductors of Wagner in America who could be secured at a reasonable fee.

62 Henry T. Finck, My Adventures in the Golden Age of Music (New York and London: Funk & Wagnall's Company, 1926), 319.

63 Ibid. In view of the negative opinions he expressed concerning the Italian repertoire, Finck may also have been influenced by Conried's demonstrated predilection for German classics, as well as his inexperience with the Italian canon. Despite the strength of his father's Teutonic legacy, Damrosch was known to be much more cosmopolitan in education, experience and taste.

64 According to Damrosch family biographer George Martin, the vote was seven to six. Damrosch Dynasty, 171.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The victorious new board incorporated itself as the Conried Metropolitan Opera Company on 26 February 1903, becoming the first production entity in the history of the theater to use the words "Metropolitan Opera" in its name.[65] A new era of corporate management procedure appeared to be dawning, although many elements of the old impresario structure remained. Conried acted as president of the board he had assembled and continued to have a financial interest in the outcome of his programs, since he owned stock in the company. He was also granted the proceeds of a traditional annual benefit performance, for which the singers were required to volunteer their services. Conried's annual salary was fixed at $20,000, the benefit usually yielded an equal sum, and the impresario additionally shared in the dividends declared by the corporation.

The dual board structure that came into play beginning in 1903 has understandably been the source of much confusion. Damrosch family biographer George Martin, for example, reported that "the Metropolitan directors . . . awarded a five-year lease on the house to Conried," neglecting to specify that it was the directors who sat on the Real Estate Company's board and not those of the newly formed production company that had the power to award the lease. This led him to the erroneous speculation that "Otto Kahn, who fast was becoming the dominant director in Metropolitan affairs, preferred a man who had no existing constituency among Metropolitan employees and supporters," and thus may have been influential in the selection of Conried.[66] Obviously, Kahn had no vote on the lease question as he was not a

---

[65] First Meeting of Incorporators and Subscribers, 5 March 1903, citing Certificate of Incorporation filed with the State of New York on 26 February 1903. Conried Metropolitan Opera Company Minute Book (1903-8), Metropolitan Opera Archives. The Metropolitan Grand English Opera Company, which performed under Grau's aegis in the ancillary season given in 1900, was a visiting company with its own management and roster of singers, and thus not legally affiliated with the Metropolitan.

[66] Martin, Damrosch Dynasty, 171.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

member of the Real Estate Company board of directors; even after he became a shareholder in the Real Estate Company by purchasing a box in 1917, he was never a member of their board. Further, although Kahn did become a dominant director in the Conried Metropolitan Opera Company's affairs over the five-year period of the Conried regime, he could hardly have attained a position of influence by the time of the lease vote in 1903, for he had only recently been invited to join Conried's board.[67]

Kobler's biography of Kahn contains the similarly erroneous report that James Hazen Hyde sat on the boards of some fifty corporations, "among them the Metropolitan Opera and Real Estate Company," and that "despite the aura of anti-Semitism that then pervaded the institution, Hyde, in 1903, invited his banker, Jacob Schiff, to join the directorate."[68] This liberalism would indeed have been news among the Metropolitan's boxholders had it existed, but Kobler obviously conflated the two boards as well. The Real Estate Company sold no boxes, and

---

67 A similar implication is made in the Matz biography of Kahn, which states that Conried was "chosen by a new corporation and new board of directors"; Many Lives, 56-57. The statement is obviously erroneous, since it was Conried, with the help of Morganthau, who assembled his own board of financial backers. Mayer's history of the Metropolitan summarizes events accurately: "Kahn had first become part of the picture at the Metropolitan as a financial backer and board member for Heinrich Conried when the German actor-impresario won the lease in 1903 and organized what he called the Conried Metropolitan Opera Company." The Met, 87. It was not until the advent of Gatti-Casazza in 1908 that the production company board first selected its own Metropolitan manager; this change in administration was effected by forcing Conried to resign from the presidency of his own company.

68 Kobler, Otto the Magnificent, 29. Kobler may have been misled by a passage which appears in the Metropolitan's annals: "Under the leadership of James Hazen Hyde and Henry Rogers Winthrop of the board of directors of the Metropolitan Opera and Real Estate Company, an opera production company was formed. . . . Now, an artistically involved organization, run by shareholders from the board, hired a manager responsible directly to its members." Fitzgerald, Annals, *Chronology*, 123. The statement erroneously implies that it was the board of the Real Estate Company, and not that of the Conried Metropolitan Opera Company, that organized and ran the new production company, and that Winthrop and possibly Hyde were members of the Real Estate Company board (they were not, as neither was ever a boxholder at the theater). The Annals statement is also contradicted by Mayer's history; see *n*67 above.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

therefore no stock, to Jewish patrons other than the Belmonts until Otto Kahn was extended an offer to purchase box fourteen in the summer of 1917.[69]

The issue of anti-Semitism is significant, for although the production company was now gaining much of the control over artists and repertory, the Real Estate Company was still a force to be reckoned with, since it potentially had the power to overrule the production company if it desired. Kahn, an extremely perspicacious man, was thoroughly aware of the existence of clandestine bias; it had long been known that an informal quota situation was operative on Wall Street, making it more difficult for Jewish bankers to advance. Dizikes's disingenuous conclusion that discrimination existed only in social situations, citing a Morgan partner's truthful statement that "anyone who could obtain Kuhn, Loeb's cooperation in a business transaction considered himself fortunate,"[70] is misleading. Morgan certainly remained comfortable as long as Kuhn, Loeb did not surpass his firm, and a recent exhaustive biography of the financier reveals him to have been surprisingly meritocratic in his business dealings. Yet the pressure of growing business competition during the last decade of his life—which coincides with Kahn's arrival at the Metropolitan—uncovered some bias; according to John Baring of the London banking firm, Morgan in 1904 "inveighed bitterly against the growing power of the Jews and of the Rockefeller crowd, and said more than once that our firm and his were the only two composed of white men in New York."[71]

---

69 Kahn was not forced to wait until the 1920s to purchase a box, as stated in Kolodin, Metropolitan Opera (1953), 60 (this error is transcribed in Kobler, Otto the Magnificent, 52). Matz's assertion that the historic box purchase occurred in the summer of 1917 is confirmed by contemporanous Metropolitan programs, which list boxholders and their sublessees. Kahn's name first appeared as owner of Box 14 in the 1917-1918 season programs. Metropolitan Opera Archives; Matz, Many Lives, 66; Eaton, Miracle of the Met.

70 Dizikes, Opera in America, 429.

71 Morgan's biographer comments: "Age, and the pressures of his recent difficulties, brought out an anti-Semitism Morgan had not shown before." Strouse, Morgan, 537.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

With respect to the purchase of boxes at the Metropolitan, the question arises, as in the case of the Academy of Music, whether the Real Estate Company in fact had anything to sell when it said that it did not. The Real Estate board was secretive about its operations, making it difficult for even the production company to secure access to information. Edward Ziegler related to Kahn his travails in securing a proper list of stockholders and directors from the Real Estate group in 1926:

> I am enclosing a list of the stockholders of the Metropolitan Opera & Real Estate Company. Please do not mind the marginal notes, as it was the only list that I could get since the office of the Real Estate Company is inclined to be suspicious. [72]

A 1913 letter from Frank Dodd, the Real Estate Company's official secretary, to Kahn regarding his application for a box rental (it was common for boxholders to sublet their boxes for the performances they did not attend) seems almost defensive about the situation, knowing that Kahn had been on the waiting list for years:

> I have your letter, and will record your application for a box for alternate matinees this coming winter. Although I expect boxes to be unusually scarce, owing to a very large number of recent changes in ownership, yet I think without doubt I shall be able to get these for you. [73]

Although the true procedures governing the waiting list may never be known, since the subject not surprisingly appears never to have been committed to writing, it is true that boxes seldom changed hands over the years. Kolodin comments that "fewer than twenty aspirants [to box ownership] realized this ambition in nearly fifty years," and the New York press, reporting on Kahn's

---

[72] Edward Ziegler to Kahn, 15 December 1926. Kahn Papers, Box 287, Princeton University. This communication occurred at the height of Kahn's push for a new opera house, which threatened to upset the social order by forcing a renegotiation of the box structure. The fact that Kahn did not attempt to secure the information himself, though as a boxholder he was entitled to it, shows how carefully he felt he had to move around the Real Estate group.

[73] Frank Dodd, Metropolitan Opera and Real Estate Company, to Kahn, 15 July 1913. Kahn Papers, Box 26, Princeton University.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

"notable" box purchase of 1917, observed that only twelve boxes had changed hands during the preceding eighteen years.[74]

The Advent of Otto Kahn

Kahn's entry onto the Metropolitan board was paradoxically effected by one of the very men Morganthau had recommended to avoid Jewish domination of Conried's group, which he obviously felt would have intimidated the Real Estate Company. Even more ironic is the fact that Schiff, who sent Kahn to the board in his stead, never really liked his junior partner. Kahn had married the daughter of Schiff's partner Abraham Wolff in January 1896, and Schiff wrote of his misgivings to close friend Ernest Cassel:

> As conditions now stand I probably must follow Wolff's wishes and agree that his son-in-law, Mr. Kahn, shall enter into our firm, unpleasant as it may be to me. I do not want to have Wolff feel badly about it as he has always been a very good friend to me. He told me he would be very unhappy if his eldest son-in-law should not become his successor. [75]

Kahn's personality could not have been farther removed from that of his detractor. Schiff, an Orthodox Jew, was a precise and austere figure with Old World manners and attitude, wholly committed to family and his profession. Kahn, a freethinker and non-observant Jew who was attracted to the ceremony of Roman Catholicism, was gregarious and charming, loved public speaking and became addicted to the volume of publicity which the increasingly insatiable level of activity that he maintained was attracting:

> Kahn professed a dislike for publicity, yet he was in fact unblushingly addicted to it. He scanned the newspapers morning and night for mention of his name. The sight of his picture in the paper gave him more pleasure than the news that he had made several thousand dollars in a stock transaction. [76]

---

74 Kolodin, Metropolitan Opera (1953), 58; Matz, Many Lives, 66.

75 Quoted in Kobler, Otto the Magnificent, 21.

76 Matz, Many Lives, 61.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

All of this probably irritated Schiff deeply; yet his relinquishment of the Metropolitan board position to Kahn became, in retrospect, possibly the most fortuitous event the house ever experienced.

Otto Herman Kahn was born in 1867 into a cultured upper middle-class family in Mannheim. Kahn was one of eight children and reportedly not the favorite. But his life was richly artistic; his mother, Emma Eberstadt Kahn, once declared that her children did nothing but write poetry and plays and sing opera. Kahn heard his first opera at eleven and apparently never forgot it. A student of the piano, cello and violin, at seventeen he was reputed to be among the most proficient amateur musicians in Mannheim. Indeed, Kahn's later artistic patronage was described by at least one of his beneficiaries as rooted in a strong creative urge which he was never able to completely fulfill. According to the radical activist and writer Michael Gold, "He was not just an art patron, but a frustrated artist."[77]

Apparently an artistic career was rejected at an early point, for Kahn was placed by his father, a banker, on the office staff of a small bank in Karlsruhe when he was sixteen. If the young clerk was disappointed that his artistic aspirations were unfulfilled, he did not show it. Rather, an energy and ambition that were to become lifelong traits exhibited themselves, pushing him rapidly through the world of finance. In 1888, at twenty-one, he joined the staff of the Deutsche Bank in Berlin, and in 1890 won a position in their London office and became a British subject. Three years later, he took a position in New York offered to him by the banking firm of Speyer & Company. While with Speyer, Kahn married Addie Wolff, daughter of Abraham Wolff, a partner in Kuhn, Loeb & Company, having met the family through social connections cultivated in London. On 1 January 1897 Kahn overcame Schiff's privately voiced objections to

---

[77] Ibid., 9, 139. Kahn's brother Robert, a pianist and composer, became a professional musician.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

become a partner in Kuhn, Loeb. He became a senior partner in the firm upon Schiff's death in 1920.[78]

Kahn's career at Kuhn, Loeb was brilliant. A clear and facile mind, inexhaustible energy and aptitude for detail allowed him to assimilate the arcane world of international finance with impressive speed and mastery. Kuhn, Loeb's position as a leader in the financial reorganization of railroads even stimulated his imagination and altruistic leanings:

> Reorganizations embody a certain element of romance; they call for constructive imagination. To take a broken-down property, a few streaks of rails, and aid in working a transformation which will bring into being a transportation system to serve the country and, incidentally, to rehabilitate the owners, is a species of creative work that fascinates me. It yields the joy of creation. [79]

One of Kahn's first major assignments was assisting Edward H. Harriman in the acquisition of control and reorganization of the Union Pacific Railroad, a daunting task not only from the standpoint of its business aspects, but also due to the fact that Harriman was one of the most hated men on Wall Street. But Kahn developed a strong admiration for Harriman, whom he regarded as a misunderstood genius and "the embodiment of unfettered individualism. . . . there will be no other career like his."[80] Harriman became an important mentor and advised Kahn on his new Metropolitan post in 1903. In a diatribe against dilettantism, he urged Kahn to treat his artistic responsibilities as seriously as his banking job. It was advice that Kahn never forgot.

Harriman's advice flew in the face of then-acceptable parameters of artistic pursuit handed down from British aristocracy. The ideal of the gentleman amateur resonated strongly before World War I, as exemplified in a famous eighteenth-century letter of Lord

---

78 Ibid., 10-22, 223.

79 Quoted in Kobler, Otto the Magnificent, 34.

80 Ibid., 50.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Chesterfield to his son: "Study the violin by all means, but do not play like a professional."[81] The attitude reflected a rarefied world in which men could pursue the arts as they pursued sport so long as it was made evident that these were somewhat eccentric hobbies not to be taken with undue seriousness.[82] Although Kahn's colleagues often regarded the intensity of his cultural activity with amusement, the banker clung to Harriman's individualistic ideal to the end of his life.

Once his personal fortune was secured, Kahn embarked on the whirlwind lifestyle he craved throughout the first two decades of the twentieth century. Ubiquitous and indefatigable, he became a New York legend. Columnist Lincoln Schuster wrote in the 1920s:

> In one day, Otto Kahn can lay three cornerstones, endow a new opera house; attend *Chauve-Souris*, the Ziegfeld Follies and the Theatre Guild; occupy his box at the Diamond Horseshoe, preside at banquets of the Art League and the Authors Club, welcome a dozen visiting virtuosi at the pier, address a music week mass meeting in the Bronx, reorganize two defunct railroads, float an international loan and issue a formal ukase against the excess profits tax, all without impairing the inimitable twirl of his silver white moustache. [83]

Speaking of Kahn's civic-mindedness, he added: "When an honorary committee is about to be launched, the members do two things. First they make Otto Kahn chairman. Then they decide what they are organizing for." Kahn's sense of public service, which extended to the international arena during World War I, was immense. In recognition, Georges Clemenceau once called him the greatest living American, and he became one of the most decorated Americans of his time, having been designated Chevalier of the French Legion of Honor (1918); Commander of the Order of the Crown of Italy and Commander of the Order of the Belgian Crown (both 1919);

---

81 Philip Dormer Stanhope, Fourth Earl of Chesterfield, Letters to His Son (1774), quoted in Ivor Newton, At the Piano: The World of an Accompanist (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1966), 76.

82 The exaltation of amateur status extended to sports as well. Newton describes a pre-World War I luncheon at an exclusive English cricket club: "In the rarefied atmosphere of those luncheons, one could believe that Lord Hawke had really said, 'I pray God that no professional player will ever captain England.' " Ibid., 37, 76.

83 Matz, Many Lives, 223-24.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Commander of the Legion of Honor and Grand Officer of the Italian Crown (both 1921); and Knight of the Order of Charles II of Spain.[84]

But it was in his role as the quintessential American Maecenas that Kahn's reputation endures most strongly. The Metropolitan was only the beginning of his many artistic ventures. Kahn contributed to individual and group efforts in music, literature, theater, dance, painting and design for three decades in a dizzying cycle of earning and spending that made it impossible for anyone to calculate his net worth at any given time. Although never among New York's richest citizens, he frequently would state, "I must atone for my wealth" as a rationale for his endless artistic patronage. Inevitably he was compared to a Medici: "Kahn was my ideal millionaire," wrote Beverly Nichols in Study in Blonde. "He was a patron of the arts in a sense that has been little understood since the days of the Renaissance. He was one of the few supporters of the Metropolitan who was more interested in music than in tiaras." Another writer who lauded Kahn's aristocratic beneficence was Hugo von Hofmannsthal, who wrote of the "noble lineage in all that he does and the almost inexplicable versatility and the intensity of this versatility."[85]

Kahn's reputation as the Maecenas of his time provided the basis for a memorable jest on the part of Charles MacArthur and Ben Hecht (authors of The Front Page) when they were guests at the banker's Fifth Avenue mansion. Perusing the library's classic volumes, the pair is said to have embellished several flyleaves with inscriptions such as "To dear Otto, without whose help this could never have been written, Plato," "To Otto, in memory of our wild and wonderful weekend at Cape Cod, Shelley," and the like.[86]

---

84 Ibid., 5, 210.

85 Ibid., 129, 236-37.

86 Kobler, Otto the Magnificent, 157.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The underlying humanistic philosophy that drove Kahn's largesse rang with a spirit of democratic access to the arts that was just beginning to be voiced openly. Eager to extend these concepts to the Metropolitan, the chairman engaged in an aggressive campaign for a new opera house which was notable for the inclusion of his openly expressed opposition to class distinction at the opera—long a taboo issue—in a private letter to the Real Estate Company:

> The accommodation in the present house for those who cannot afford to purchase expensive seats is not only inadequate . . . but is far from being in accord with present-day tendencies of consideration for the "plain people." An institution of the public significance of the Metropolitan Opera ought to be made attractive to the masses of the music-loving people and there ought not to exist the degree of differentiation which prevails in the present house between the desirability and comfort of the accommodation offered to them and the desirability and comfort of the more expensive seats. [87]

Kahn's celebrated liberalism, however, together with a reputation as Wall Street's only progressive banker, was said to have aroused suspicion on the part of the boxholders, some of whom believed he was a Socialist. They were also concerned about the extent of his ambition, which was confirmed by his sister Lili Deutsch during the 1911 coronation ceremonies of George V, which the Kahn family attended: "Otto is tortured by terrible ambition, but is generally much better than before and quite original, actually."[88] An offer to support him should he wish to stand for Parliament by his friend Sir William Maxwell Aitken (later Lord Beaverbrook) around that time was seriously considered, then rejected, despite his wife Addie's dearest wish that the family should settle in England. By then Kahn was too much the energetically achieving American to ever turn his back on his adopted country. A year before his death, he was still able to write: "I

---

[87] Kahn to George G. Haven, President, Metropolitan Opera & Real Estate Co., 8 December 1922. Kahn Papers, Box 181, Princeton University.

[88] Quoted in Kobler, 78.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

am hot on the scent of the great adventure of life. I happen to be built that way, and I hope to remain that way, *bis an mein seliges Ende.*"[89]

The New Management and John Knowles Paine's Azara

Conried thus began his work at the Metropolitan in 1903 with the support of a hand-picked board, as well as a valuable bequest from Grau—a contract which gave him an option on the services of Enrico Caruso. The legacy was valuable from its logistical as well as artistic aspects, for the lease on the theater which Conried's company had been required to sign with the boxholders' group included the following terms:

> (Clause 14) . . . Such [operatic] representations shall be in every respect first-class and shall be given with first-class artists, ensemble, chorus, ballet, scenery, properties and orchestra, and not more than forty (40) per cent. of the subscription representations in each year shall be given in German, except with the approval of the lessor given by its Executive Committee.
>
> (Clause 19) The lessee further agrees to submit to the lessor . . . a list of the principal artists engaged for the then next ensuing season and if the lessor shall within ten days after the receipt of such list notify the lessee that any one or more of six principal artists are not satisfactory, the lessee will forthwith secure another or others in the place of the artist or artists deemed unsatisfactory . . . The lessee further agrees that at least two out of the said principal artists shall be announced to appear at every one of the regular operatic representations hereinbefore required to be given . . . [90]

In this way the Real Estate group was able to exert its control and preserve as much of the mid-nineteenth century Academy atmosphere as possible. The strictness with which the new manager would be held to the terms was evidenced by the minutes of a Real Estate Company board of directors meeting held during his first season: "The President stated he had heard a number of criticisms against the number of German operas given this year; but an examination of

---

89 "Until my blessed end." Matz, Many Lives, 276.

90 Lease, Metropolitan Opera and Real Estate Company to Conried Metropolitan Opera Company, 9-10. Metropolitan Opera and Real Estate Company, Minute Book No. 2 (8 May 1901— 6 November 1907), Metropolitan Opera Archives.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the repertoire showed that the Conried Company had kept within the limit of 40% stipulated in the lease."[91]

The Real Estate Company's system was obviously not calculated to favor either new repertory in general or American composers in particular, but American singers did not fare too badly under the requirements of Clause 19. Of the twenty-one principal singers Conried submitted to the Real Estate board for approval in 1904, five were Americans and two were picked, with a third selected as an alternate.[92] The fact that all were women (Emma Eames, Lillian Nordica and Louise Homer; the Real Estate group passed on contralto Edyth Walker and new soprano Olive Fremstad), and that Eames and Nordica were the highest female earners on his roster, contrasted with a historical weakness in American male singers which Gatti would later try to alleviate with some success. Conried also expanded his general pool of American singers with Bessie Abott, a pupil of Jean de Reszke; Marion Weed; Marie Rappold; Robert Blass; and Geraldine Farrar (1882-1967), the spectacularly popular soprano who became the house's highest-paid female singer during Gatti's tenure.[93]

It was during the preparation for Conried's initial season that John Knowles Paine's Azara was said to have been the first American opera finally placed under serious consideration at the Metropolitan. Although the vocal score had been in print since 1901, by 1903 the opera remained unstaged. Paine's Boston reputation was unfortunately of little help to him, as the city did not organize its first resident opera company until 1908, and the three-act full evening work was too ambitious for the resources of a semi-professional group, such as that of the New

---

91 Meeting of Board of Directors, Metropolitan Opera and Real Estate Company, 20 January 1904. Minute Book No. 2, p. 85, Metropolitan Opera Archives.

92 Meeting of Board of Directors, Metropolitan Opera and Real Estate Company, 5 October 1904. Minute Book No. 2, pp. 96-97, Metropolitan Opera Archives.

93 The only singer who earned more than Farrar was Caruso.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

England Conservatory of Music. The Boston Herald reported promising rumors from New York dating from one month after the incorporation of Conried's board:

> They begin to talk again in New York, reports the Sun, about the probabilities of Mr. Conried taking up Mr. Walter Damrosch's Cyrano de Bergerac, and there is pressure being brought to bear on behalf of Prof. John K. Paine's Azara. Either would seal Mr. Conried's disposition to give opera in English.[94]
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Boston must make a push for Azara, now that Mr. Conried has virtually determined to do one opera in English at the Metropolitan. [95]

Although no evidence exists in the new corporation's minutes as to who initiated or promoted the Azara discussions, it is difficult to believe that Kahn was not in some way involved. The fact that he was elected both chair of the initial corporate meeting and a member of its newly formed Executive Committee indicates an eagerness to step forward and assume a leadership position from his first involvement with the Metropolitan.[96] Although Kahn's papers prior to 1908 are not extant, his later documented relationship with Gatti indicates that while the manager was always given the final decision, the banker did everything in his power to promote American talent, particularly American composers.[97] The thesis that Kahn openly expressed his views from the inception of his involvement with the board is supported by a comment he made in 1908, when the Metropolitan finally began to act on his suggestions:

---

94 Boston Herald, 7 April 1903, quoted in Schmidt, Paine, 209. Damrosch's Cyrano was produced by Gatti-Casazza at the Metropolitan in 1913.

95 Boston Herald, 24 May 1903, ibid.

96 First Meeting of Incorporators and Subscribers and First Meeting of Directors, 5 March 1903. Conried Metropolitan Opera Company Minute Book (1903-8), Metropolitan Opera Archives. Conried was elected president of the board at the latter meeting. Kahn did not become chairman of the Metropolitan Opera Company board until 1908.

97 It is impossible to document the Conried-Kahn relationship, as the Metropolitan's archives do not hold any papers from Conried's tenure, and Conried's biographer discusses neither Azara nor his subject's relationship with Kahn.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> It has been the idea of a number of the directors for a long time now that the Metropolitan would be more truly a national institution if English were given there. . . . One of the results would be the encouragement of native singers. [98]

Kahn's attitude reflected renewed efforts on behalf of native art and artists which had surfaced periodically throughout the nineteenth century and were very much in the air at the turn of the twentieth. Arthur Farwell's Wa-Wan Press, an important advocate of American composers, was founded in 1901. In 1905, the annual report of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, whose presidency was assumed in 1904 by J. P. Morgan, indicated that at least one of the trustees had expressed the opinion that a planned new wing "should provide galleries for the adequate housing of paintings and sculpture by native artists."[99] Part of the rationale given however, is enlightening:

> The achievements of American art, using the word in its broadest sense, and the position accorded to it at recent international expositions, warrant us in giving it an important place in our American museum. [100]

It was in this potentially promising atmosphere that Paine hoped to see his opera given in New York. Paine had begun Azara in the spring of 1883 at the inception of his mature period, in which his music relinquished a strong dependency on classical models in favor of late Romantic innovation, reflecting the composer's somewhat belated appreciation of Wagner.[101]

---

98 Eaton, Miracle of the Met, quoted in Glass, *American Opera*, 41.

99 New York Times, 14 February 1905, 10. It is unlikely that the idea was initiated by Morgan; had this been the case, he would have been identified.

100 Ibid. The statement underscores the extent to which Americans still depended on European judgment in artistic matters. A concurrent Metropolitan example is Conried's 1906 engagement of Farrar, whose enviable reputation in Berlin (from 1901) was a critical factor in the decision to extend her a Metropolitan contract.

101 Musical Record 245 (9 June 1883): 107, quoted in Schmidt, Paine, 193; M. A. DeWolfe Howe, *John Knowles Paine,* The Musical Quarterly 25 (July 1939): 265.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

This is evidenced by a wholehearted commitment to the composition of his first—and, as it turned out, only—music drama, in which he emulated the German master by authoring his own libretto. As source material, Paine chose the thirteenth-century Provençal *chante-fable* Aucassin et Nicolette, a medieval romance with potent dramatic possibilities. Set in eleventh-century Provence, the plot involves the love of the Moorish girl Azara (soprano) and the Provençal prince Gontran (tenor). This love is complicated by the other *dramatis personae*, including Gontran's father Rainulf (bass) and the Saracen warrior Malek (baritone), both of whom also love Azara, who is eventually revealed to be the daughter of a caliph. Thus Azara, whose libretto recalls elements of historical operas such as Don Carlos and L'Africaine, draws on the fascination with Romantic exoticism common to operas of the second half of the nineteenth century, including Les pêcheurs de perles (1863), L'Africaine (1865), Don Carlos (1867), Aida (1871), Le roi de Lahore (1877), Lakmé (1883), and Salammbô (1890).

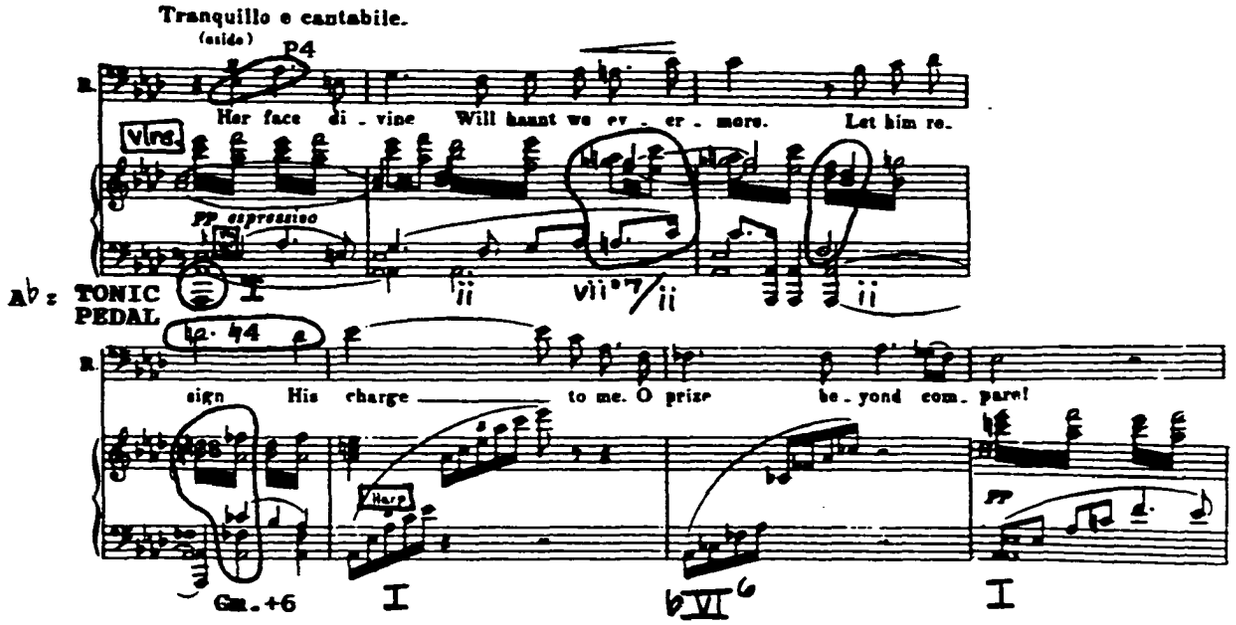
Paine's score, however, is heavily indebted to the harmonic vocabulary of late German Romanticism in its use of extended chromaticism within a tonal framework. Although an extended discussion of Azara's score is outside the scope of this study, musical elements identified by Schmidt and shown in the two passages below are highly indicative of Paine's style throughout the work.[102] In example 2.1(a), Rainulf expresses his emotions upon seeing Azara for the first time:

---

[102] Schmidt, Paine, 586-87. Schmidt's study includes detailed commentary on the music of Azara.
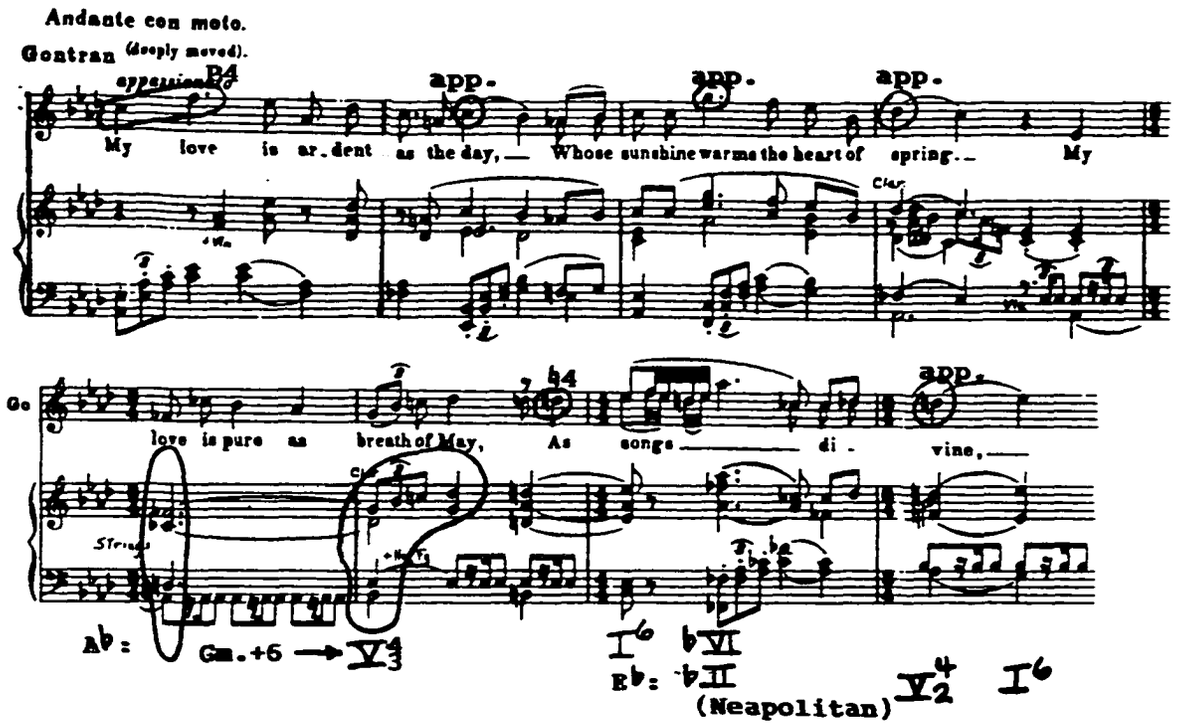
Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Ex. 2.1(a): Paine, Azara, Act I, scene 1, mm. 113-19



Example 2.1(b), taken from the following scene, shows a section of Gontran's love song to Azara:

Ex. 2.1(b): Paine, Azara, Act I, scene 2, mm. 288-96



Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The markings indicate many features Schmidt has identified as common to Paine's music: melodically, the initial perfect fourth leap in both melodies, both ascending and descending appoggiature written into the vocal line, and use of augmented scale degrees (particularly the raised fourth); and harmonically, employment of chromatically altered sonorities for functional, as opposed to purely coloristic, purposes, as well as the use of a tonic pedal point in the first excerpt. The transparent orchestration of the first excerpt also recalls Meyerbeer,[103] who utilized a similar texture comprised of a tremolo in the upper strings, harp arpeggios and a doubling of the vocal line in a lower register—here, lower strings—to portray Vasco da Gama's sense of wonder at the sight of India in the tenor aria "O paradis" from L'Africaine.

Although most of the music in Azara is skillfully composed, dramatically appropriate and quite beautiful, even the brief excerpts given above indicate that it is not particularly original, giving an impression that the period in which the score might have been most successful probably passed rather quickly. Indeed, an examination of additional excerpts indicates a cumulative musical effect of attractive monotony, despite a reliance on the design of the "numbers" opera, which allowed the composer to vary his forms and textures with arias, ensembles and choruses.[104] Although this purely musical impression may well have been modified by simultaneous experience of the dramatic action, it is impossible to judge this from the work's reception history since the opera never received a fully staged performance. Paine himself seemed pleased with the work, as recorded by his Harvard student Frederick Shepherd Converse: "[Paine] did not mind pointing out the superiority of certain features in his opera,

---

103 Ibid., 565.

104 The length of the work, which has never been heard in its entirety, is estimated at three and a half hours. Henry Taylor Parker, Boston Evening Transcript, 10 April 1907, 21, quoted in Schmidt, Paine, 211.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

'Azara' over certain features in 'Tannhäuser.'"[105] The sections of the score accorded highest critical praise were in fact the orchestral ones, which included preludes to each act and the popular Moorish Dances. The orchestral music was performed by the Boston Symphony Orchestra during Paine's lifetime, but the opera was heard with orchestra only once, in a truncated concert presentation by the Cecilia Society at Boston's Symphony Hall in April 1907, one year after Paine's death.

Although Paine's efforts in the operatic sphere were quickly superseded by the greater originality of composers such as Richard Strauss, rendering his music unlikely to be given in an international theater like the Metropolitan, the overall effectiveness of Azara might have made it a good choice for a regional company. Unfortunately, such companies did not exist in early twentieth-century America; even Boston lacked its own opera company while Paine was alive to advocate for the work. After his death, the ad hoc troupes that presented American operas tended to favor works of living composers who often assisted in supervising the productions. By December of 1903, then, it is not surprising that disappointing reports on Azara's chances at the Metropolitan were surfacing:

> Neither [Conried nor Henry Savage] is considering the production of Azara, so far as we are informed, and Prof. Paine is looking forward to a production in Germany, for which a German text is already provided. It seems a pity that a serious opera by an American composer of established reputation should not first see the footlights in the land of his birth. Mr. Walter Damrosch was luckier with his Scarlet Letter; he had his own opera company; but it is not every composer that can afford this luxury. . . . [106]

Nevertheless, the commonly voiced excuse of "the Metropolitan Opera's prejudice against American works, which stood until 1910"[107] may be inaccurate. Conried may well have begun his

---

105 Quoted in Howe, *Paine*, 265.

106 Boston Herald, 20 December 1903.

107 Opera Grove, s.v. *John Knowles Paine*.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

tenure with his early production ideals in place, as the earlier press reports indicate, but he was seriously hampered by the boxholders' lease terms which tended to favor foreign repertoire by requiring the appearance of a certain number of approved artists, the majority of whom were Europeans and reluctant to sing in English. Although it was indeed fortunate that Emma Eames, for whom Paine is said to have conceived the title role of Azara, was on the approved list and seemed favorably disposed toward the work, the soprano was having vocal problems during 1903; her memoirs describe her 1904 return to New York after an eighteen-month period of vocal rest due to nodes. This would have placed her out of commission for the entire 1903-1904 season, making it almost impossible for Conried to have presented the work during that time.[108]

After Eames's recovery, however, the Musical Courier began to publish optimistic reports:

> There is a possibility that Azara, an opera by Prof. J. K. Paine, an American composer, will be produced at the Metropolitan Opera House next season. [109]

In addition, the critic Henry T. Finck, a Harvard alumnus who had studied under Paine, came forward to apply pressure for the opera's production:

> I did all I could to help Paine. I made personal appeals to Emma Eames and Geraldine Farrar to interest themselves in the rôle of Azara, and they were not deaf to my appeals; but nothing came of it. A guarantee fund of $10,000 was discussed. We got up a petition to Conried signed by Carl Schurz and many other eminent men, and that manager seemed favorably inclined, but nothing was done. [110]

Whether or not the favorable disposition Conried presented to his erstwhile supporter was sincere is open to question, for the impresario now had other worries: he was beginning to experience

---

[108] Eames, Memories and Reflections, 246. The Metropolitan's records corroborate this information, as Eames is absent from the artists' roster for the 1903-4 season. Fitzgerald, Annals of the Metropolitan Opera, *Chronology*: 123 and *Tables 1883-1985*: 115.

[109] Musical Courier 50 (15 February 1905): 24, quoted in Schmidt, Paine, 209.

[110] Finck, Golden Age, 79-80, quoted in Schmidt, Paine, 210.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

financial troubles. The Real Estate Company's minutes contain no further reports concerning finances or dividends of the production company after Grau's departure, evidencing their intention to distance themselves from any concerns regarding the economics of production.[111] If Real Estate members wanted to share in potential production profits (or losses), they now had to purchase shares in the separate corporation, and a few boxholders indeed did so. In return, the boxholders had evolved a system that they considered a production subsidy: the rental due under the terms of the opera house lease was exchanged for the boxholders' free use of their boxes for all subscription performances. In other words, boxholders paid no admission to the opera—they were admitted to the theater by a doorman who was expected to recognize them—and the management was unencumbered by a rental fee on the theater.[112] The boxholders assessed themselves a small amount (at this time $3,000 annually) for maintenance, tax and insurance on the premises. Grau had done well under this system, but by 1905 Conried was seeking assistance. The reason may be deduced: his lease terms required that he provide the "first-class" production values that Grau had neglected but with no more of a subsidy than Grau had received. The immense cost of producing opera had apparently begun to overtake him.

Accordingly, Conried appeared before the Real Estate board on 22 November 1905 with a proposal to increase the boxholders' subsidy:

> He addressed the meeting, giving details of financial matters relating to cost of producing Opera, limit of receipts that could be expected under present arrangement of the New York subscription season; and recommended that Thursday night be added to the regular subscription nights in future seasons, for

---

111 This of course was the rationale for the $150,000 required guaranty.

112 This was the system in use at Da Ponte's Italian Opera House, except that the boxholders there gave themselves the option of collecting rent from the management in lieu of free admission to specific performances. If they exercised the option, they would pay only for the performances actually attended. This arrangement was financially ruinous to the management. Ahlquist, Democracy at the Opera, 123, 126.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> which the same subsidy should be paid as for the other subscription nights . . . . Some questions were asked, and then Mr. Conried withdrew.
>
> The President pointed out the fact that . . . [a]ny plan to assist the opera further would mean an increased assessment, probably at the rate of $3,500 a box, instead of the present $3,000. It would be difficult to arrange this, as the Stockholders' Agreement plainly fixed the amount at $3,000 as the maximum, and it was doubtful if they would consent to any change; the individual consents of the stockholders would be necessary.[113]

A committee was then appointed to inquire into the problem of assessing some of the wealthiest and most socially prominent citizens in the United States an additional $500 per annum to support opera in their city. The report was presented at the following meeting:

> The committee . . . finds that no authorization exists by which the assessment can be increased; that the stockholders are already entitled to the use of their boxes for any additional performance of Opera which may be given outside the present regular nights, without additional payment, and that many of the stockholders would refuse to pay the additional amount asked for.
>
> They therefore report to the Board of Directors that they find it impossible to comply with the request of Mr. Conried. [114]

No comment was registered from J. P. Morgan, by then the world's most powerful banker, who was recorded as being in attendance.[115]

Conried soldiered on with the help of Caruso, whose name appeared ever more frequently in the casting—Conried obviously couldn't afford any empty houses if he could scarcely afford full ones. He had also apparently dismissed the possibility of staging Azara, as a letter he wrote to Eames in the summer of 1906 indicates in specifically discussing her upcoming repertoire:

---

[113] Special meeting of the directors of the Metropolitan Opera and Real Estate Company, 22 November 1905. Minute Book No. 2, p. 119, Metropolitan Opera Archives.

[114] Meeting of the directors of the Metropolitan Opera and Real Estate Company, 20 December 1905. Minute Book No. 2, pp. 121-22, Metropolitan Opera Archives.

[115] Morgan's annual income had reached its peak in 1902, when he earned nearly $23.3 million, largely from the launching of U.S. Steel. Strouse, Morgan, 478.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> I really do not know what new opera to submit to you. Cavalleria is too expensive to be given with *you*. What I am looking for is an opera which fills the entire evening. . . . Would you sing Sélika in Africaine, which will be a very big production? [116]

By this time, Azara may have literally seemed a dead issue, as Paine had died in April 1906 at the age of 67. Azara was not the only repertory item lost in the shuffle. Along with burgeoning efforts in the American field, operas of the modern French school were also neglected. Unfortunately, this happened at a time when interest in new French opera was in the ascendant and productions such as Pélleas et Mélisande and Charpentier's Louise were garnering much attention in Paris with the help of a particularly fascinating new interpreter, Mary Garden. Nevertheless, Conried, secure in an exclusive right to new Puccini works he had arranged with the Milan publishing house Ricordi (which he later negligently allowed to lapse), declined Paris theatrical agent Gabriel Astruc's offer to sell him similar American rights to the new French repertoire.[117] Astruc is even reported to have done Conried the favor of informing him someone else in New York was interested in the works, to no avail. In an error of judgment no doubt connected to his personality flaws, Conried was unwilling to believe that anyone could successfully challenge his management of the Metropolitan. By 1906 exclusive contracts to the new French repertoire and its interpreters were in the hands of Conried's old nemesis Oscar Hammerstein, who opened his Manhattan Opera House five blocks from the Metropolitan on 3 December 1906.[118]

---

116 Conried to Eames, 10 June 1906. Quoted in Moses, Life of Conried, 208-9.

117 Gatti-Casazza, Memories of the Opera, 168.

118 Dizikes, Opera in America, 324. Hammerstein, who was two years Conried's senior, had arrived in America fifteen years earlier. He too diverted profits from a commercial venture—he held numerous cigar manufacturing patents—into his theatrical enterprises. Coincidentally, Hammerstein's first foray into opera production had been as publicity manager for Adolph Neuendorff's 1871 German opera season given at New York's Stadt-Theater. Dizikes, 321.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Nevertheless, Hipsher reports a 1907 proposition to stage Azara under Conried's management, but blames its rejection on the failure of "persistent attempts . . . to discover, in either Boston or New York, an operatic contralto or bass who could sing in English well enough to be entrusted with the parts."[119] It is impossible to know why Hipsher neglected the presence of Louise Homer, the future creator of Horatio Parker's Mona, on Conried's roster, as she had been at the Met since her engagement by Grau in 1900. And while it was true that Conried had no English-speaking bass, he need not have exhausted his search efforts on the East Coast of the United States. Many of the best American singers were working in Europe, as Conried was well aware from his annual tour of Continental repertory houses. He did not have to look far to find Geraldine Farrar, as she was singing at the Berlin Royal Opera to fabulous acclaim and well-publicized personal attention from Germany's Crown Prince, and his offer of a Metropolitan contract resulted in her 26 November 1906 debut as Gounod's Juliette. If Conried had been equally serious about Azara, he would have paid more attention to Farrar's colleague Putnam Griswold (1876-1914), a bass-baritone born in Minneapolis who had already made European debuts at Covent Garden and Berlin. A favorite in Berlin who was twice decorated by the Kaiser, Griswold waited to debut at the Metropolitan until 1911, when Gatti had hired him principally for Wagnerian roles, knowing he would also prove useful in the new American wing.[120]

Conried expressed his initial plans for Farrar, which were at variance with Finck's noble appeals on behalf of Paine, in a letter written during the summer of 1906—the same

---

119 Hipsher, American Opera, 353, quoted in Schmidt, Paine, 210.

120 Griswold's American roles included the Roman Governor in Mona and De Guiche in Damrosch's Cyrano before his Metropolitan career was tragically cut short in 1914 by his untimely death after an appendicitis operation. *Putnam Griswold Dead,* The Musical Advance 1 (March 1914): 8.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

period he wrote Eames suggesting repertoire other than Azara—which indicates that Paine may indeed have been in close musical competition with Strauss:

> In case I should come to terms with Richard Strauss—he asks at present ridiculously high terms—I would be very much pleased to have you create Salome, which will very likely be done about the middle of February. [121]

Conried was more concerned about his close commercial competition with Hammerstein, however, whom he knew was his chief rival for Strauss's first modernist opera, which had been a sensation at its 1905 Dresden premiere. Hammerstein, for his part, gloated over his French triumph but knew he was unlikely to convince Strauss to forsake the prestige of an American premiere at the Metropolitan. Once Conried had secured Salome, Hammerstein decided to move on the American front by opening negotiations with Victor Herbert, America's most popular musical stage composer. Herbert had reportedly been working on sketches for an opera since 1905 and had met with playwrights John Luther Long (of Madama Butterfly fame) and Edward C. Carpenter in 1906 for libretto discussions. In April 1907 Hammerstein signed a contract for an operatic commission with Herbert, at which time the composer confirmed his preference for an American subject.[122]

Hammerstein's actions continued to be ignored by Conried, who was having other troubles. Whether the 1905 financial crisis had been real or imagined, he was certainly presented with an authentic one when his company had the misfortune to be on tour in San Francisco during the devastating earthquake and fire of April 1906. Although miraculously none of the musicians was hurt, great losses were sustained through destruction of scenery, costumes and instruments. And on 16 November 1906, unexpected troubles surfaced in New York when

---

121 Quoted in Moses, Life of Conried, 208-9. Farrar wisely declined the strenuous role of the Judean princess, and it was given to another American, dramatic soprano Olive Fremstad.

122 See discussion of Natoma in chapter 4.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Caruso was arrested at the Central Park Zoo for allegedly harassing a woman in front of a monkey cage. Although the complainant did not appear at the November 22 trial (Caruso appeared to defend himself and was ultimately fined $10 for disorderly conduct), the "monkey house incident" was gleefully taken up by the tabloid press, and the accumulated strain began to take its toll on Conried, to the displeasure of his board. Kahn later wrote to impresario Henry Russell, who had solicited criticism on a volume of memoirs he planned to publish:

> I may mention, in respect of the sentence in your article referring to Conried, that 'his downfall was partly due to the earthquake in San Francisco and partly to Caruso's expedition to the monkey house,' that, to the best of my recollection, these events were conducive to his 'downfall' only in the indirect way that they shook his nerves and thereby aided to undermine his health and to warp his judgment. [123]

The Demise of the Conried Regime

It began to look as if a "Met curse" might be overtaking Conried when he became the next manager to experience failing health. At the same time, corporate documents indicate that his board, with Kahn taking an increasingly more active role, began to take over. On 30 October 1906, a committee consisting of Kahn and two other directors was appointed to investigate the financial condition of the Conried Metropolitan Opera Company; on 10 January 1907 they advocated abandoning the fixed percentage of dividends (then 6%) paid annually on the production company's stock in favor of taking a decision at the end of each season as to the division of profits, if any. This gave the directors the option of re-investing capital back into the company, instead of being required to pay it out to the stockholders. The board also changed the number of directors needed to pass a resolution from a majority (eight) to five, indicating an effort to concentrate power in the directors most interested in participating in Metropolitan affairs. A

---

[123] Kahn to Henry Russell, La Turbie, France, 1925. Kahn Papers, Box 262, Princeton University. Russell's The Passing Show (Boston: Little, Brown) appeared in 1926.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

third resolution required the manager to submit his program of artists and repertory to the production company board or its Executive Committee (a select group of which Kahn was a member) for its approval.[124] All of these actions indicated a growing desire on the part of the board—led by Kahn, who was present at virtually every meeting—to take a more active involvement with the artistic affairs of the theater.

Conried desperately hoped that having secured the American premiere of Salome would pull him out of the mire. Instead, he made a fatal error in judgment which would haunt the Metropolitan for the next quarter century and provoke a battle between the two boards for artistic control of the theater. After scheduling the premiere for the evening of 22 January 1907, Conried, as Kahn would later write, "with regrettable lack of tact and of consideration for the proprieties, . . . set the dress rehearsal for a Sunday forenoon during church hours [eleven o'clock], and invited a crowded house. Certain features of the performance were justly considered offensive. A protest from the Metropolitan Opera and Real Estate Company ensued, and in compliance with it, the opera was withdrawn from the stage of the Metropolitan Opera House."[125] A letter from the Real Estate board was presented at the 29 January 1907 meeting of the Conried directors one week after the ill-fated premiere, which was admired by many, amid press rumors that the chief objector was Louisa Morgan Satterlee, a daughter of J. P. Morgan and reputedly the favorite among his four children.[126] Perhaps suspecting that Morgan, not

---

124 Board of Directors meetings, 30 October 1906 and 10 January 1907. Conried Metropolitan Opera Company Minute Book (1903-8), Metropolitan Opera Archives.

125 Letter from Kahn to G. G. Haven, President, Metropolitan Opera and Real Estate Company, 3 January 1922. Kahn Papers, Box 181, Princeton University.

126 Board of Directors meeting, 29 January 1907. Conried Metropolitan Opera Company Minute Book, 119, Metropolitan Opera Archives. Morgan's biographer, who had access to the most comprehensive collection of Morgan's papers ever made available for inspection, states: "There is no mention of the [Salome] incident in the Morgan family papers." Strouse, Morgan, 562.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

known as a moralizer, was only trying to placate his daughter, the directors resolved "that a copy of the letter read by Mr. Kahn in defence of the production of the opera Salome, be mailed to each of the directors of the Metropolitan Opera and Real Estate Company." Surprisingly, Morgan decided to make a bigger issue of the opera than anyone had predicted and refused to back down. Worse, the Conried board began to fracture under the pressure, and opted to table the discussion when Kahn was abroad. In an action indicative of his determination to leave an imprint on the matter, however, Kahn, together with fellow Executive Committee members James Hazen Hyde and Eliot Gregory, cabled threateningly from Paris: "Representing predominating stock holdings maintains its action [to produce Salome] . . . as contracts must be made now we have directed Conried to proceed." But the directors backed down with a compromise solution, wiring back: "Owing to the objection made by the Directors of the Metropolitan Opera and Real Estate Company, it is impossible for the Conried Metropolitan Opera Company to produce the opera of Salome at the Metropolitan Opera House," and instead granted Conried the right to produce the work privately using Metropolitan singers and production materials.[127]

Kahn may have lost the battle, but he was determined to win the war for control of the Metropolitan. In a series of actions over the following year, he set the stage for a new regime featuring himself as the chief player. At the 17 October 1907 board meeting, a resolution increased the number of directors from fifteen to seventeen and two important new men were appointed, both from the powerful Vanderbilt boxholders' faction: William K. Vanderbilt, one of the original heirs to Commodore Vanderbilt's estate and the survivor of a marriage to Alva Vanderbilt Belmont, a woman so venal she seems to have served as the model for the character

---

[127] Board of Directors meeting, 3 June 1907. Conried Metropolitan Opera Company Minute Book, 125-26, Metropolitan Opera Archives.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

of Regina Giddons in Lillian Hellman's The Little Foxes;[128] and Harry Payne Whitney, the husband of Gertrude Vanderbilt (a great-granddaughter of the Commodore), a Hemingwayesque figure who had given up tiger shoots in India for a somewhat more relaxed life as a champion polo player, later becoming the top racehorse breeder in the country.[129] Neither of the new directors, like Kahn, was intimidated by Morgan.

At the same meeting, Kahn and Hyde were elected Vice Presidents of the board (Conried remained President), and Kahn became chairman of the powerful Executive Committee. In addition, a new "European Committee" was created, chaired by Hyde, now living in Paris, which included the Italian Count di San Martino di Valperga, President of Rome's Accademia di Santa Cecilia and one of Italy's most distinguished and respected arts patrons. The tone of the refurbished board was expressed immediately when a resolution was passed rescinding the action of the earlier group against Salome and further resolving "that the question whether and when the opera Salome shall be performed during the coming season be referred to the Executive Committee with power to determine the action of the Company."[130]

Once Kahn had wrested control of affairs in New York, he turned his attention to Germany and the difficult task of placating an obviously livid Richard Strauss. Kahn's letter to Strauss of 29 May 1908 frankly acknowledges the power games being fought at the Metropolitan in an attempt to forestall yet another disaster: the composer had threatened to transfer the

---

128 The Vanderbilts were divorced in 1895 and Alva later married O. H. P. Belmont, a son of August Belmont.

129 Whitney had become one the earliest directors of the Conried Metropolitan Opera Company when Kahn nominated him at the initial Directors' Meeting of 5 March 1903; he had apparently let the position lapse, for Kahn found it necessary to support his nomination as the new seventeenth director at the Board of Directors meeting of 17 October 1907.

130 Board of Directors and Executive Committee meetings, 17 October 1907. Conried Metropolitan Opera Company Minute Book, pp. 135-36, Metropolitan Opera Archives.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

American performance rights to Salome to none other than Oscar Hammerstein, together with those for the hotly contested Elektra.

> Your frank comments are most appreciated. I can understand completely your "lust for revenge" against those responsible for the unfortunate Salome episode in New York. It is also quite understandable that you should regard "Orestes" Hammerstein as ready tool for atonement; but permit me to point out that you are looking for Clytemnestra and her paramour in the wrong place.
>
> The responsibility for the Salome veto must be shared by the clumsiness of Conried and the honestly-felt, but, in this case, totally inappropriate religiosity of Morgan. Conried tactlessly called the dress rehearsal for Sunday at eleven—the hour for church services—and invited "tout New York," thus attracting the attention and anger of churchmen, who stirred Morgan into action. [131]

Nevertheless, despite Kahn's strenuous diplomacy, Strauss's notoriously prickly personality remained unplacated and it was Hammerstein who gave the American premiere of Salome on 28 January 1909 with Mary Garden in the title role, as well as the American premiere of Elektra (in French) on 1 February 1910.

It is not surprising, then, that sometime in 1907 the newly empowered Metropolitan board indicated to Conried that they would be accepting his resignation due to ill health at the end of the 1907-1908 season. An excerpt from a letter sent to Conried on 21 May 1908, which specifies his management errors in full, is significant for laying greatest weight on his repertoire deficiencies:

> During the five years of your incumbency of the Presidency you have received in salary, benefits and profits more than $300,000. In reviewing the results of your management with every desire to do you full justice, we find as against a number of accomplishments, entitling you to commendation, grievous and irreparable faults, such as your failure . . . to produce modern French Operas at the Metropolitan; your failure, at least to protect the Metropolitan Opera House in this respect by entering into a contract with the French operatic publishers, (for which most favorable propositions were urged upon you by Mr. Astruc in 1906 and 1907, though you never informed your Board thereof) the

---

[131] Kahn to Dr. Richard Strauss, 29 May 1908, quoted in *Kahn, Morgan, and "Salome,"* Saturday Review (30 May 1964): 60.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> result being that Mr. Hammerstein was given almost complete possession of this important operatic field, to the exclusion, at least temporarily, and great detriment of the Metropolitan Opera; your gross and most damaging oversight in the matter of the contract for the Puccini Operas; . . . the almost uniform failure or non-success of late years of whatever novelties you selected and produced, and many other acts of omission and commission (most of them against or in disregard of the advice and wishes of your Board) harmful to the Metropolitan Opera and of great advantage to the competing house – so much so, that it is within bounds to say that the very existence today of the Manhattan Opera House is, in considerable part attributable to what you did and failed to do. [132]

Present at the 18 May 1908 board meeting at which the Conried letter was drafted was the impresario's replacement, Giulio Gatti-Casazza. Although the extent of Gatti's knowledge of English was always debatable, the management policies he subsequently adopted at the Metropolitan indicate that with respect to the Conried fiasco, he had taken in every word.

---

[132] Board of Directors meeting, Metropolitan Opera Company, 18 May 1908. Metropolitan Opera Company Minute Book (1908-29), 28, Metropolitan Opera Archives.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

CHAPTER 3

GATTI-CASAZZA AND THE NEW METROPOLITAN MANAGEMENT

Otto Kahn was precisely the man to effect the Metropolitan's transformation from an impresario-dominated structure redolent of the nineteenth century into a sleek corporate design more attuned to the Progressive Era. The sense of artistic creativity he had formerly lent to railroad reorganizations on Wall Street could now be applied towards a true aesthetic goal. The astute financier did not neglect to back his artistic ideals with cool business sense by accumulating stock holdings in the Metropolitan's production company almost from the moment he joined its directorate. By buying out Hyde, Morgenthau, Gregory, and Schiff (who had invested in 100 shares), Kahn became the Metropolitan's largest stockholder by 1908 and was elected chairman of its newly reorganized Metropolitan Opera Company board that same year.[1] And after subscribing, together with important board ally William K. Vanderbilt, to debenture bonds issued against deficits the company incurred between 1908 and 1910, the chairman further consolidated his power by acquiring another substantial block of holdings when the bonds were converted to stock—at his suggestion—in 1917.[2] By 1923, his 2,570 accumulated shares

---

1 Matz, Many Lives, 57; John Brown, Business Comptroller, Metropolitan Opera Company, to Kahn, 14 February 1910, recording the transfer of shares from Jacob Schiff and Eliot Gregory. Kahn Papers, Box 4, Princeton University.

2 Kahn to Gatti-Casazza, 5 July 1917, Kahn Papers, Box 83, Princeton University; Board of Directors meeting, Metropolitan Opera Company, 28 December 1917. Metropolitan Opera Company Minute Book (1908-1929), 102-3, Metropolitan Opera Archives. Through this proposal, Kahn in effect converted the original loans made by himself and Vanderbilt into contributions towards the capital of the Metropolitan's production company, which had abolished the annual payment of dividends at Kahn's behest in 1907 (see chapter 2, *n*124). The entire capital amount of the company, as well as a $1.1 million reserve fund Gatti accumulated during the 1920s, was lost during the Depression.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

constituted a 50.04% majority interest in the Metropolitan.[3] This was the period in which he began more aggressive efforts to push the boxholders to build a new opera house and to present more adventuresome repertoire.[4] Kahn's reputed authority over the directorate by the 1920s was so widespread that when theatrical producer Florenz Ziegfeld wrote him to personally request a rental of the house, he declared: "I know you're responsible for the great success of the Opera and what you say goes."[5]

The new regime was auspiciously poised at the inception of America's maturity, and Theodore Roosevelt presided over a nation whose mood was literally expansive. The rapid accumulation of Gilded Age wealth had given way to the acquisition of international territories upon the settlement of the Spanish-American War (1898), through which the United States gained Puerto Rico, Guam and the Philippines, as well as special constitutional privileges in Cuba; Hawaii was annexed the same year. Already the most technologically advanced world power, the nation scored a coup with the twelve-second flight of the Wright brothers' aircraft Flyer I at Kitty Hawk in 1903. Roosevelt's successful intervention in the Russo-Japanese War, for which he won the Nobel Peace Prize (1905), together with his deployment of the Great White Fleet, a flotilla of

---

3 Edward Ziegler to Kahn, 2 May 1923, with attachment *Metropolitan Opera Company: Certified List of Stockholders*, on which notations in Kahn's hand state: "Please transfer 43 shares out of Mr. [Henry R.] Winthrop's name into mine, making the holdings in my name 2570." Kahn Papers, Box 205, Princeton University. The new transfer put Kahn's holdings just over the 50% mark. Matz incorrectly transcribes Kahn's accumulated holdings at this point as 2,750 (Many Lives, 57); this error is repeated in Kobler, Otto the Magnificent, 31.

4 Gatti confirms that the post-World War I economic situation, in which costs of production were rapidly overtaking revenues, accelerated these discussions: "[T]he situation for the future does not present itself very favorably and is such that it requires deep study and discussion. . . . We spoke several times together about the possibility of a new theatre which would have more comfort and attraction for the public and lately we discussed this subject more frequently. Perhaps the right moment has arrived to take a decision?" Gatti-Casazza to Kahn, 19 November 1924. Metropolitan Opera Achives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, 1924-25, Kahn.

5 Florenz Ziegfeld, Jr. to Kahn, [17] January 1921. Kahn Papers, Box 167, Princeton University. Ziegfeld's request was denied by the board due to the nature of his productions.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

American naval warships, on a mission to circumnavigate the globe (1907-1909), launched the nation on the course of international engagement it was to sustain throughout much of the century. Concurrently, America was just beginning to achieve artistic status abroad. The first operas by native-born composers heard in Europe were produced during the first decade of the twentieth century, the same period in which the European successes of late nineteenth-century American singers Emma Eames, Lillian Nordica, and Sibyl Sanderson were matched by New Englander Geraldine Farrar during her celebrated tenure in Berlin (1901-1906).

But the transformation of America's formerly agrarian society into a modern industrial state had also given rise to the kind of furious capitalist competition the Metropolitan now faced with Oscar Hammerstein's Manhattan Opera House, and the Metropolitan's 1908 reprimand of Conried acknowledged the crucial role that the production of new operas now played in the battle for supremacy. Although the board specifically pointed to the French works Conried had refused from Astruc and the negligent lapse of his exclusive Puccini rights with Ricordi, they might have added that the audacious Hammerstein had snatched up Victor Herbert's projected Natoma while Conried was still vacillating over Azara. In light of these developments, as well as Hammerstein's planned American premieres of Salome and Elektra, Kahn may have finally decided to abandon Paine's already somewhat dated work, which would have proved ineffective competition against Hammerstein's vibrant offerings, in favor of an American premiere by a living composer. By the end of Conried's final season, a group of new American scores had been placed under consideration at the Metropolitan, among them The Pipe of Desire by Paine's former Harvard student Frederick Shepherd Converse.

Kahn's concurrent push for the engagement of La Scala's much-admired director Giulio Gatti-Casazza (1869-1940) as the Metropolitan's chief executive was also a direct response to the repertoire deficiencies of the Conried regime, for Gatti had built his Italian career

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

on the ideal of a European impresario tradition that not only encouraged but actively sought and promoted new works for the repertory. Having been appointed by Arrigo Boito to head La Scala in 1898, Gatti distinguished himself during the decade of his tenure there by presenting the Italian premieres of Pelléas et Mélisande and Salome, together with several Wagner operas then unknown to the Italian public, contemporary verismo novelties such as Mascagni's Iris and Giordano's Siberia, and the world premiere of Madama Butterfly in 1904. In announcing Gatti's Metropolitan appointment to the press on 12 February 1908, Kahn articulated the era's new ideal of music over vocal stars by stressing the fact that the manager's career had been "distinguished by the catholicity of its repertoire, cultivating equally the classical operas and the works of modern French, Italian, and German composers."[6] The eclectic approach Gatti had demonstrated would put him in a position to build on the international foundation already established at the Metropolitan by Grau and the de Reszkes, as well as mesh with Kahn's new American plans.

The fact that Gatti conveniently predicated his acceptance of the Metropolitan offer upon the proffer of a similar contract to Arturo Toscanini as joint music director with Gustav Mahler, during a time when the Metropolitan needed an authoritative conductor of Italian repertory to counteract Hammerstein's effective music director Cleofonte Campanini, has seemed more than coincidental to many. Minutes of an Executive Committee meeting held on 1 March 1907 and attended by Kahn confirm that Conried was authorized to close a contract with Toscanini for the 1907-1908 season,[7] and his failure to do so was commonly attributed to the temperamental conductor's unwillingness to join a regime under a manager unknown to him. Yet Gatti was said to have independently received several strong European recommendations,

---

6 *New Manager for Opera Named,* New York Times, 12 February 1908, 7.

7 Meeting of the Executive Committee, Conried Metropolitan Opera Company, 1 March 1907. Conried Metropolitan Opera Company Minute Book (1903-8), Metropolitan Opera Archives.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

including that of Rome's Count di San Martino di Valperga, who became a member of the Metropolitan European Committee some months after the failed Toscanini negotiations. It was also true that few other candidates possessed the expertise needed to arrest Hammerstein's startling momentum, and none held as much promise for the immediate professional implementation of the American program, even among the nation's own candidates: Walter Damrosch, the most logical choice, was still blacklisted by the Real Estate board; Henry Savage, who had managed Grau's English season, had proved inimical to American works; and the talented Henry Russell, a European working in Boston, was indispensable to Eben Jordan's fledgling Boston Opera Company. Kahn's choice of the most experienced executive then available, as well as one with a proven track record with Wagner—whose operas Hammerstein's repertory lacked—remains a classic corporate business decision.

Achieving control of the Metropolitan was no easier for Kahn and Gatti than it had been for Conried, for J. Pierpont Morgan once again intervened. Although the banker was now in the final years of his life and remained more interested in the Metropolitan Museum than the Metropolitan Opera, Morgan was still bristling with resentment over Kahn's 1907 spirited public defense of his old mentor Edward H. Harriman, with whom Morgan had a long history of conflict, including a memorable struggle for control of the strategically important Northern Pacific Railway in 1901.[8] It was rumored to have been Morgan who, through his influential position with the Real Estate group, countered Kahn's nomination of Gatti with the advocacy of Andreas Dippel (1866-1932), a German-born tenor who had sung over forty roles at the Metropolitan before retiring in the wake of Caruso's debut. The compromise solution Kahn was compelled to

---

[8] Strouse, Morgan, 419-20. Kahn had successfully defended Harriman before the Interstate Commerce Commission in 1907 when an investigation of Harriman's railroad interests was instigated by Theodore Roosevelt.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

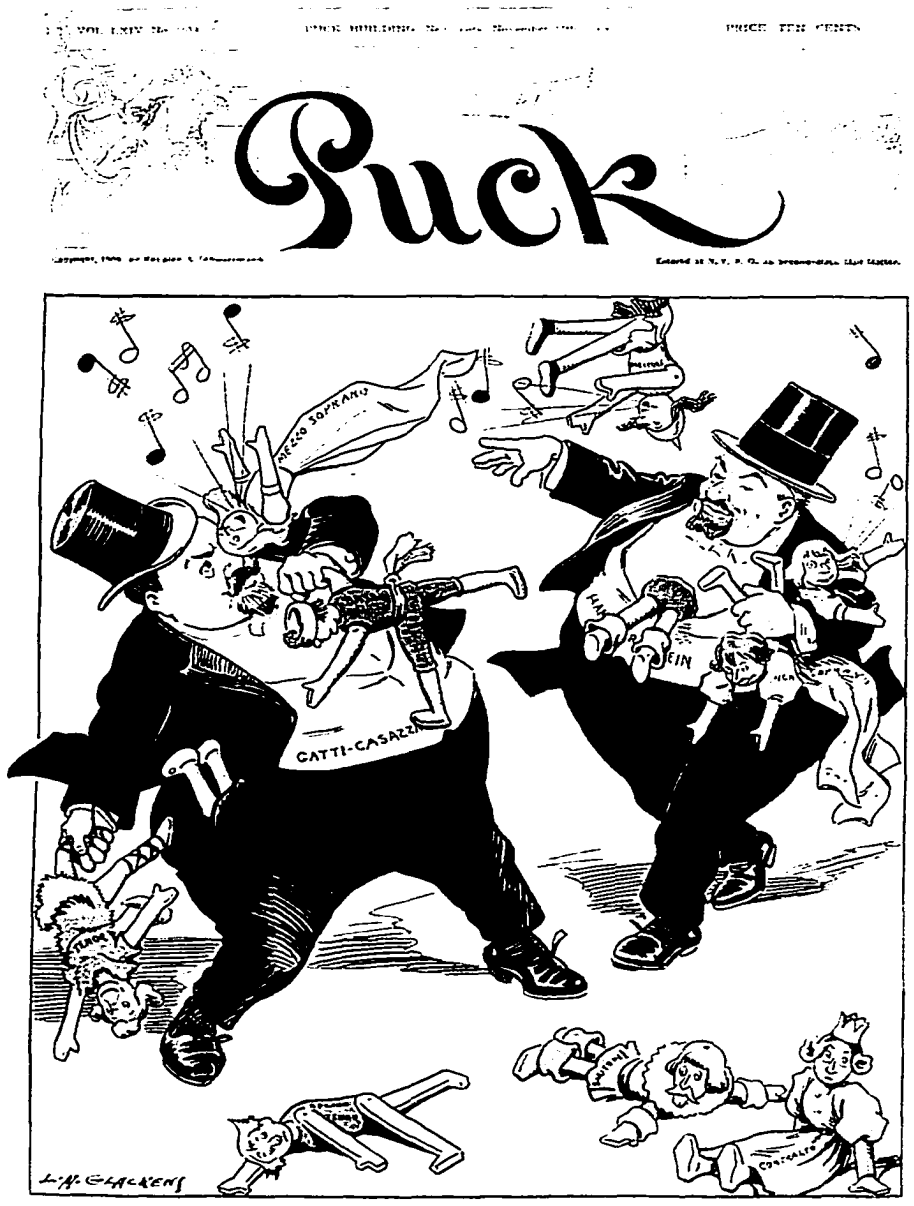


FIGURE 3.1: Competition For the New York Opera Market

The battle for the New York opera market between Oscar Hammerstein's Manhattan Opera House and Gatti-Casazza's Metropolitan was notable for its use of new operatic repertoire as ammunition [Puck 64 (11 November 1908); illustration by Louis M. Glackens, brother of Ash Can School painter William Glackens].

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

arrange with the boxholders required the inclusion of Dippel as a member of Gatti's new management team in the capacity of Administrative Director.[9] Arrangements were completed at a meeting of the Real Estate board to which Kahn and Edmund L. Baylies were invited as representatives of the production company. Although the meeting took place, as always, at the Morgan residence, it was one of the few at which Morgan himself was absent.[10]

The unexpected dual management structure, which remained in effect until 1910 and resulted in large deficits for the production company as the new administrators battled for control, brought to a head the longstanding enmity between Italian and German factions of the house and in particular highlighted the intensity of suspicion the public held against the Italians. Indeed, the Metropolitan's official annals refer to Dippel as the Real Estate board's "watchdog over the Italians,"[11]—an ironic necessity in view of the fact that its own blacklist eliminated the most promising American candidate—and a formal complaint Gatti registered with Kahn's board just two months into his tenure stated that Dippel's "aversion to the italian [*sic*] element and to the italian production was so evident that Mr. Toscanini threatened several times to leave the Metropolitan and to return to Europe; my efforts alone avoided the scandal." More ominously, Gatti revealed that "the intercourse which [Dippel] entertains with Hammerstein are of a caracter [*sic*] too continuous not to cause suspicion not only in me but to everybody, the Press included."[12]

Although Kahn was able to rid the Metropolitan of Dippel honorably in 1910 by dispatching him to the newly organized Philadelphia-Chicago Grand Opera Company, on whose

---

9 Mayer, The Met, 87-88.

10 Meeting of Board of Directors, Metropolitan Opera and Real Estate Company, 11 February 1908. Minute Book No. 3 (7 February 1908—24 November 1925), 155, Metropolitan Opera Archives.

11 Fitzgerald, Annals of the Metropolitan Opera, *Chronology*: 167.

12 Giulio Gatti-Casazza, *Report to the Special Committee of the Board of Directors*, December 1908. Kahn Papers, Box 524, Princeton University.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

directorate he then sat, Gatti would be faced with recurring anti-Italian sentiment throughout his Metropolitan career, particularly from American ultra-nationalists after World War I who repeatedly attacked his record on native singers and repertoire. The curious fact that Gatti was the sole Italian to have managed the Metropolitan during the first century of its existence still resonates: a recent comprehensive historiography of opera in the United States accuses Gatti and Kahn of devising the American opera program for no other purpose than that of warding off xenophobic attacks.[13]

The Metropolitan's First Opera Professional

More than a half century after his departure from the Metropolitan, Giulio Gatti-Casazza's name still embodies a sense of mystery. Distinguished and imposing in appearance, the new manager was an essentially private, reserved, and frequently moody figure of high probity and intelligence who preferred to be judged by the quality of his seasons rather than his pursuit of public relations. The critic H. Howard Taubman, who assisted Gatti when he was reluctantly persuaded to compile his memoirs in an effort to increase public support for the Metropolitan during the Depression, described this aversion to self-promotion:

> Gatti seldom made public appearances, almost never gave interviews and rarely issued statements. Once a year he would call a press conference to announce his plans for a new season, and more stately, duller affairs could scarcely be imagined. . . . An assistant would read a list of operas to be produced and the new singers and conductors who had been engaged. . . . There would be

---

[13] See later discussion in *The Question of American Bias.* An amusing epilogue to the Morgan-Kahn battle occurred on 19 March 1910, when a New York Times front-page headline announced: *Kahn Pays $500,000 for a Hals Picture; Banker Buys Portrait of the Dutch Painter and His Family—J.P. Morgan a Bidder. ON VIEW AT METROPOLITAN.* On the advice of his artistic wife Addie, Kahn had paid what was then a sensational sum to outbid Morgan for the acquisition of a recently discovered Dutch Old Master painting and then promptly loaned it for exhibition to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, of which Morgan was president. The resulting press, which was surely an embarrassment to Morgan, must have pleased Kahn greatly.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> some questions, most of which Gatti would answer with a courtliness that did not conceal the blandness of the reply. Then the session was over. [14]

Further attempts to draw Gatti out on the part of intrepid newspapermen of the day resulted in this example of his charming sincerity:

> Every year I am asked for an interview on how I spend my vacation in Europe and I invariably give the same answer to everybody, as follows: That my life does not offer anything that may interest the readers of American newspapers.
>
> I spend some time in Milan, Ferrara, my native city, Salsomaggiore, for a cure. I sometimes go in incognito [*sic*] to France, or Germany, or Austria, to hear some performances or some artists. However, I hear the largest number of auditions in Milan.
>
> I do not follow any kind of sport and my only exercise is to take some walks.
>
> Do you think, my dear Mr. Hawley, that a life so little interesting deserves to be told to the readers that are so anxious for novelties, brilliant and sensational things? I myself don't think so. I wish however to thank you for having written me and with best regards, believe me,
>
> Sincerely yours, [15]

One could almost apply to Gatti a recent statement describing the equally cryptic George Balanchine: "Very few figures of [his] importance have said so little publicly."[16] Nonetheless, Gatti's twenty-seven year regime endured longer than any other at the Metropolitan—Rudolf Bing's twenty-two year tenure (1950-1972) is its closest competition—and no administration before or since has come near to surpassing the record of repertoire premieres, American or otherwise, that Gatti compiled.

---

[14] Howard Taubman, *Preface to the 1973 Edition*, xi, Gatti-Casazza, Memories of the Opera.

[15] Gatti-Casazza (location unspecified) to Hudson Hawley, Rome Bureau, The Associated Press of America, 9 July 1929. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, Summer 1929, Gatti.

[16] Robert Gottlieb, *Balanchine's Dream*, Vanity Fair 460 (December 1998), 292.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Giulio Gatti-Casazza was born in 1869 to a distinguished family in the northern Italian city of Udine. His father Stefano, who followed a military career, had marched with Garibaldi's Thousand before receiving an appointment to head the board of directors at the Teatro Communale in Ferrara. The elder Gatti-Casazza relinquished the time-consuming theatrical position to his twenty-four year old son upon his reelection to the Italian Parliament in 1893. Although the future Metropolitan manager had taken a degree in naval engineering at Genoa, he had admittedly spent most of his free time at the opera. Gatti's vigorous and efficient management of the Communale, where he met the young Puccini, earned him a national reputation. When Arrigo Boito solicited nominations five years later for a new management to reopen La Scala, which had cancelled its previous season for the first time in its history due to boxholder discontent, he attached significant weight to the recommendations of his fellow composers who spoke in favor of Gatti, among them Puccini, Mascagni, and Alberto Franchetti.[17] Gatti's consequent 1898 mandate to revive the legendary Milan theater was greatly aided by the concurrent appointment of rising star Arturo Toscanini as music director, and together they established the highest artistic standard in Italy. After a decade, however, both must have begun to tire of fighting the rather casual practices that still predominated in the country's theaters. Upon joining the Metropolitan in 1908, the pair duplicated their Continental successes, and the period of their joint influence (1908-1915) has remained in critical consensus the most brilliant in Metropolitan history.[18]

---

[17] Gatti-Casazza, Memories of the Opera, 58.

[18] Kolodin accorded most of the credit to the great conductor: "While a bad conductor can do more to spoil a performance than a bad singer, a good conductor can do more to ennoble it than a good singer. And a great one can do more to set the tone of an opera house as high as it was at the Metropolitan in those several years than all the singers in the company combined." Metropolitan Opera (1966), 255.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Leading the Metropolitan into its new era represented a challenge even greater than that posed by La Scala, for the American theater functioned on a repertoire system, in which a large number of operas circulated simultaneously throughout the subscription calendar for extended periods of time, as opposed to the European *stagione* tradition, where a more limited repertory was offered with each production occupying a discrete block of time. Lack of government subsidy made the more complex American system a commercial necessity, a fact upon which Gatti immediately capitalized by increasing the length of his first season to twenty weeks over Conried's previous seventeen. At its height, Gatti's regime presented a twenty-five week season totalling some one hundred seventy-five performances, with repertoire encompassing up to fifty operas and average gross receipts of nearly $13,000 per performance.[19] As Time magazine noted in a 1925 cover story on the house: "To command an Italian man-of-war would have been a sinecure compared to the business that occupies [Gatti] now—a business that involves 80 principal artists, a chorus of nearly 300, an orchestra of 120, 12 assistant conductors, a ballet of 80 and 700 miscellaneous stage-hands, ticket-takers, office-workers, wire-pullers."[20] The difficulties inherent in maintaining artistic—not to mention fiscal—responsibility among these forces while endeavoring to augment the American contingency were only intensified by the notorious exigencies of the New York public, well known to American artists such as Geraldine Farrar:

> Mme. Farrar rightly claims that the American music public has interest only in the supreme artist; that it finds no interest in watching a voice develop and grow richer from year to year. It is this demand on the part of the American public for opera at its fullest point of development that makes the Impresario's work all the more difficult.

---

19 Memorandum comparing seasons given under Grau, Conried, and Gatti-Casazza. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, 1931–32, Memorandum.

20 *Music: Mr. Kahn & Mr. Gatti,* Time 6 (2 November 1925): 22.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> No wonder the Impresario must always be on guard, night and day. When he leaves for Europe, reporters besiege him to know what his intentions are; when he returns to New York, he issues a manifesto like a conquering general. [21]

Gatti responded to these challenges utilizing a combination of professional insight gained from his European experience, a stable and essentially conservative management style that provided a framework for taking calculated risks when necessary, constant vigilance over all elements of production, and a sense of personal integrity that earned him widespread respect throughout the opera world, even among his enemies. Under Gatti's aegis, the personality of the Metropolitan came to mirror his own: "[A] theater like mine, as you know very well, is an eminently conservative one and changes its singing elements as rarely as possible."[22] Gatti was granted final authority over all operations of the house by Kahn, who made frequent suggestions but wisely insisted on their implementation only on rare occasions. This policy was appreciatively acknowledged by Gatti:

> On my part, I have the certainty, modesty aside, to have accomplished some good to the advantage of the institution which you have entrusted to me, but I must loyally recognize that I could have done very little of efficient [*sic*] if you had not accorded me, as you always have done, a continuous and efficacious benevolence and a liberty of action which was the best proof of the confidence you had in my work and in my person. [23]

In return, Gatti generally ceded to Kahn on matters involving American artists and repertoire, which through unspoken agreement remained Kahn's special sphere of influence throughout his Metropolitan association. The banker, however, avoided divulging the extent of his

---

21 Moses, Life of Conried, 194-228.

22 Gatti-Casazza to musical agent Vittore Deliliers, Milan, 2 February 1926. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, 1925-26, Miscellaneous. [*Un teatro che come il mio, come Ella sa benissimo, è eminentemente conservativo e cambia i suoi elementi canori il meno che sia possibile.*]

23 Gatti-Casazza to Kahn, 18 May 1926. Kahn Papers, Box 287, Princeton University.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

power to the public: "I am greatly in sympathy with, and interested in, the work of American composers, but the decision concerning the acceptance of new operas for production at the Metropolitan Opera House does not rest with me, this being a matter within the jurisdiction of the General Manager, assisted by the expert staff of the Metropolitan organization."[24] He did at times use his position to overrule Gatti, particularly on matters involving American composers:

> I believe you will do me the justice to agree that it is not my habit to attempt to impose my views upon you in the matter of the repertoire, and you know how highly I respect your judgment and your well-tested wisdom. But I am absolutely certain that we should give . . . [Henry F.] Gilbert's Ballet [The Dance in Place Congo] in Boston, even if it should cost us a few thousand dollars, and I hope you will tell me in response to this letter that you will agree to this request and will announce that [it] will be performed in Boston. [25]

While Gatti often acquiesced out of deference to Kahn's position, he personally subscribed to the chairman's ideal of a truly international Metropolitan where American composers would in fact benefit from the absence of parochialism:

> The great opera theaters of all countries possess a cosmopolitan character and are subject to demands which oblige them to accommodate composers and performers without asking for their passports. [26]

At the same time, Gatti was well aware of the clandestine bias his position attracted and concomitant nationalist attempts to subvert his authority:

> From the time I occupied this post until the present, Germans, French and Americans have not failed to try their best to undermine me in order to have my

---

[24] Kahn to Frances V. Cohen, 13 August 1925. Kahn Papers, Box 246, Princeton University.

[25] Kahn to Gatti-Casazza, 10 April 1918. Kahn Papers, Box 104, Princeton University. Gilbert was a native Bostonian, and local critics had been clamoring to hear the ballet.

[26] Gatti-Casazza to Italian journalist Guido Podrecca, Milan, 24 February 1923. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, 1922-23, Podrecca. [*Tutti i grandi teatri d'opera, di tutti i paesi indistintamente, hanno un carattere cosmopolita ed esigenze che li obbligano ad ospitare autori ed esecutori senza chiedere loro i passaporti.*]

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> position given to one of their own, an indication of the great weight given to the nationality of the director of this institution. [27]

In such situations, however, Kahn never failed to marshal visible and loyal support from his board allies:

> Mr. Gatti-Casazza's contract expires in April of next year. We have been in the habit of renewing the contract with him generally 12-15 months before its expiration, so as to sustain his authority and avoid the wire pulling and intrigue by aspiring candidates. I suggest, therefore, that we renew his contract now for three years. [28]

A strong sense of national pride—Gatti never abandoned his Italian citizenship—seems to have prevented the manager from developing any sense of bitterness over political realities of the day which might otherwise have influenced his decisions, as when he wrote to Kahn agreeing to a possible entente with Covent Garden despite his awareness of anti-Italian sentiment among its directors:

> As either Lady Cunard or Mr. Beecham are unfavorable to the Italian element, I believe that in this case it is convenient, if you are of the opinion that the Metropolitan should attempt a "cordiale entente" with Covent Garden, that the first advances . . . be made by you or by one of your friends representing you, but not by myself, as I belong to the Country of Dante which does not enjoy the sympathies of the two future arbiters of the London opera. [29]

An ancillary effect of the Italian question was that it became fashionable to criticize Gatti for not utilizing English as the *lingua franca* of the Metropolitan. This fact was often seized upon by opera-in-English advocates, many of whom linked the issue to that of

---

[27] Ibid. [*Da quando occupai questo posto a tuttoggi, tedeschi, francesi e americani non hanno mancato di adoperarsi, onde scalzarmi e far prendere la posizione ad uno dei loro, segno, questo, che alla nazionalità del Direttore di questa istituzione si da un grande peso.*]

[28] Kahn to William K. Vanderbilt, 10 January 1919. Kahn Papers, Box 121, Princeton University. Vanderbilt's agreement was immediate and Gatti's contract was renewed the following day.

[29] Gatti-Casazza, Milan, to Kahn, 20 August 1919. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, Summer 1919, K.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

American artists and repertoire policies at the theater. A particularly harsh attack came from critic Irving Kolodin, who had other reasons to resent Gatti:

> Even now, after spending at least six months in each of twenty-seven consecutive years in America . . . Gatti has no real command of English, and even the reviews from the newspapers are translated for him. Though he has received over three quarters of a million dollars in salary during that period . . . he found it inconvenient or unnecessary to master our tongue—an example of indifference that is scarcely credible. [30]

Yet Gatti's knowledge of English was far better than most people suspected. As early as 1911, he acknowledged having developed a reading knowledge of the language sufficient to tackle one of Kahn's published speeches: "I am extremely endebted [*sic*] to you for the kind thought in sending me your interesting publication, which I shall not fail to read entirely, in spite of my defective knowledge of English."[31] But those who had worked closely with the manager knew of his extreme disinclination to express himself imprecisely, as confirmed by Taubman:

> Gatti never mastered the English language, although he tried. He did learn enough to read easily . . . . If he did not talk English fluently, it was because he would not trust himself to speak in a tongue which he did not know accurately in all its nuances. He loathed inexactness and slovenliness.
>
> "A manager," he was fond of saying, "should be judged by his productions, by what the audiences see and hear in the theatre. How would it help my productions if I were the best linguist in the world or if I became a social lion?" [32]

It also remains a seldom-discussed fact that while Gatti was grappling with ever-increasing American demands on behalf of nativist art, his commitment to the Italian vocal tradition in America was being hotly disputed in the Italian press. The issue, which intensified in

---

30 Irving Kolodin, *In Memoriam: Gatti-Casazza,* The American Mercury 35 (May 1935): 34.

31 Gatti-Casazza to Kahn, 19 February 1911. Kahn Papers, Box 10, Princeton University.

32 H. Howard Taubman, Opera: Front and Back (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1938), 248.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the years immediately following Benito Mussolini's rise to power, was cited by Kahn in a 1925 public statement which insisted that Americans were given preference at the Metropolitan:

> In fact, Mr. Gatti-Casazza is constantly being criticized in Italy because there is not, and has not been during his entire administration, an Italian woman artist engaged to sing leading roles at the Metropolitan,—with the sole exceptions of Madame [Amelita] Galli-Curci and Madame [Claudia] Muzio,—the simple reason for this apparent discrimination being, of course, that it so happened that there were American women or women of other non-Italian nationality, whose qualifications made them more eligible. [33]

In order to avert the disastrous battles for artistic hegemony that frequently threatened to erupt in the volatile nationalist atmosphere of the time, the beleaguered manager was forced to appeal to influential Italians for their assistance in promoting the balanced cosmopolitan atmosphere to which he and Kahn were committed:

> The number of Italian artists and elements [at the Metropolitan] is superior to those of any other nation except America, and this is understandable because, at bottom, New York belongs to the Republic of the United States and not to the Kingdom of Italy. . . . Naturally the Italian direction must act with tact, discretion and diplomacy, and it is more advisable to operate quietly in order to conserve and improve our own position rather than to gossip and indulge in such flag-waving as can sharpen the sensitivities of local nationalists, who would like all opera to be sung in English and less prevalence of Italian opera. [34]

---

[33] *Kahn Statement*, 4. The house's female roster had been dominated over the preceding two decades by prima donnas Geraldine Farrar, an American soprano who sang no American roles, and Maria Jeritza, the Czech dramatic soprano who became a star at the Vienna Court Opera.

[34] Gatti-Casazza to Count Luigi Grabinski Broglio, Milan, 6 March 1923. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, 1922-23, B. [*Il numero degli artisti ed elementi italiani è superiore a quello di qualsiasi altra nazione meno l'America e questo si capisce perchè, in fondo, New York appartiene alla Repubblica degli Stati Uniti e non al Regno d'Italia. . . . Naturalmente la Direzione italiana deve agire con tatto, discrezione e diplomazia e meglio le conviene operare silenziosamente per conservare e migliorare le proprie posizioni anzichè chiacchierare e fare degli sbandieramenti tali da poter acuire le suscettibilità dei nazionalisti locali che vorrebbero tutte le opere cantate in lingua inglese e meno prevalenza di opera italiana.*]

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The Metropolitan Opera Company's New Fiscal Policies

Gatti consistently avoided direct involvement with the wealthy society element of the house, yet some critics persistently accused him of pandering to their interests, which continued to be generally inimical to opera in English and thus not particularly supportive of American composers. Chief among Gatti's critics were the Sun's William J. Henderson and his protégé Irving Kolodin; the latter was so incensed at society's abandonment of the Metropolitan during the Depression, which forced the theater to seek grassroots support from the public in order to keep its doors open, that he wrote a scathing history of the institution which amounted in large part to an exposé of the delinquent boxholders. His description of Gatti's role in the scenario reveals the underlying reason for his resentment of the manager's efficient fiscal policy, which in his view

> reduc[ed] the production of opera to a veritable conveyor-belt system that would be the envy of Henry Ford. . . . The significance of this accomplishment, to the directors, cannot be minimized. It permitted them to enjoy opera at but a nominal cost for their boxes; to promenade the foyers as patrons of art and public benefactors, while the actual expenses of the company were brought neatly into alignment. [35]

Kolodin's complaints against the boxholders were justified, for the group retained its well-established historical position by extending no more financial support to Gatti than it had to his predecessors. Yet the manager respected the special significance that society then held in the minds of the public and their potential influence over the apportioning of market share, as during the period of the Manhattan Opera House threat: "Hammerstein had unquestionably uncommon qualities of initiative and audacity. He erred in not remembering that society was a unique and indivisible factor and would not abandon the Metropolitan for him."[36] Kahn's leadership inspired

---

[35] Kolodin, *In Memoriam,* 35.

[36] Gatti-Casazza, Memories of the Opera, 169-70.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

some altruism among his own board, but only among a small portion of the directorate, chiefly William K. Vanderbilt, Clarence Mackay, and Harry Payne Whitney. Indeed, when Kahn finally resigned the chair in 1931, it was with a distinct undertone of frustration at the inability, after nearly two decades of vigorous effort, to have developed a greater base of private patronage of the arts in America than he had. The situation was confirmed to Gatti in unapologetic terms by Kahn's successor, attorney Paul Cravath, when the Metropolitan was struggling to remain afloat during the Depression years:

> It is quite out of the question in these times to raise the guaranty fund that would be required to cover next year's losses if the present scale of cost of producing opera is continued. Most of the [Metropolitan Opera Company board] members are so disturbed over the reduction in their incomes and the threatened radical increase in taxes that few of them are willing to increase their commitments. [37]

The position taken by the Real Estate board proved to be equally bleak:

> I sent [Real Estate board president Fulton] Cutting a letter . . . . He thought that his Board would not be interested in taking a hand in raising a guaranty fund, and said that he would not personally contribute another year. [38]

The resultant necessity for Gatti to function as an economic free agent throughout his tenure was undisputed even by his critics, who admitted that new repertoire premieres—including the American operas—were the least likely to be slighted, as they obviously required new productions to be designed and built for them. And it is remarkable how readily Gatti, given his exclusively European background, adapted to the rigors of the capitalist system by managing to make the popular repertory pay, at least in part, for the unfamiliar novelties, thus completing season after season in the black until the 1929 stock market crash. The frequently scathing criticism the Metropolitan's leadership received to the effect that the institution was

---

37 Paul D. Cravath to Gatti-Casazza, 25 March 1932. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, 1931-32, Artists and Staff.

38 Paul D. Cravath to Kahn, Grasse, Alps Maritime, France, 17 February 1933. Kahn Papers, Box 512, Princeton University.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

being run for the enrichment of its wealthy stockholders was untrue. Annual budgets for even the boom years of the 1920s reveal that ticket revenues never exceeded production costs, and that no dividends were paid to shareholders of either the Metropolitan Opera and Real Estate Company or the Metropolitan Opera Company after 1908. Rather, reluctant to raise ticket prices at the risk of losing patrons (particularly when a 10% war tax was in effect on theatrical ticket sales, from which the Metropolitan was not exempted), Gatti closed his deficits—which often ran to over $200,000—by exploiting numerous outside sources of revenue, such as commercial vendor privilege fees for programs, libretti and recordings, commissions taken on outside engagements performed by Metropolitan singers, and leases on apartments that were part of the theater's building complex, as well as private rentals of the theater itself.[39]

Yet when Kahn responded to Depression-era criticisms against the boxholding faction advanced by Deems Taylor, he strongly implied, in a confidential communication the year after he left the Metropolitan's directorate, that Gatti's personal desire for absolute fiscal autonomy did in fact deprive the theater of at least some of the modern repertoire the chairman had wished to see given:

> No one can have a higher opinion of Mr. Gatti-Casazza, or a greater personal regard for him, than I, but it is not a fact that he was "compelled to run the opera house as a purely commercial theatre, dependent upon the box office for its sole support." On the contrary, as Chairman of the Metropolitan Opera Company and its principal stockholder, I said to him on repeated occasions that the paramount consideration was, and must be, the artistic standard of the performances and that, if by a reasonable reduction of the number of weekly performances, and especially by giving up the visits to Philadelphia, that standard would be improved, I should personally see to it (that was prior to the advent of the great American deluge of 1931-32) that any resulting financial deficiency would be made up.

---

[39] Representative figures from the 1922-23 annual budget record the following sums received: commissions on Metropolitan artists, $23,000; program privilege, $36,000; phonograph privilege, $28,628; apartment leases, $30,000; and theater rentals, $25,500. Gatti-Casazza to Kahn, 5 November 1923, attaching actual and estimated budgets for seasons 1922-23 and 1923-24, respectively. Kahn Papers, Box 205, Princeton University.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> Mr. Gatti-Casazza invariably sidestepped such overtures. He would not admit—and I doubt whether he believes now—that a reduction in the number of weekly performances would be an artistic desideratum for the Metropolitan organization. But, mainly, he wanted the opera to be at least self-sustaining, he believed in the wisdom of that policy, and he took pride in his remarkable record as a uniquely successful administrator.
>
> [F]rom 1910 on, Gatti never gave the slightest intimation of any feeling on his part that financial considerations tended to cramp his style, although I gave him repeated opportunity to do so—as, for instance, when I urged him to present certain operas which, because of their high artistic merit, I believed should be in the repertory of the Metropolitan though it was more than probable that they would not "draw." [40]

Gatti was indeed disinclined to reduce the scope of the Metropolitan's operations, as he explained to board member Cornelius N. Bliss when a serious reevaluation of the Metropolitan's artistic mission was forced by the Depression: "To speak of a season with a small number of operas of a purely artistic character and with a reduced number of performances is a thing suitable for Bayreuth and Salzburg (where performances may be superior as to the *mise-en-scène*, but which are certainly inferior as to all the rest) but is not practical for a theater with a basis partly social and partly popular such as the Metropolitan."[41]

Although there is no question that Kahn backed the artistic ideals he advocated with his own funds on many occasions—he truthfully told Taylor, "For your personal and confidential information, I may say that my endeavors, in one way or another, to aid the cause of the Metropolitan Opera have cost me over $2,000,000.00"[42]—there is nonetheless ample evidence that rising costs of opera production, particularly those associated with escalating union demands after World War I, were a serious concern to the chairman and one which he made no

---

[40] Kahn to Deems Taylor, 9 May 1932. Kahn Papers, Box 498, Princeton University.

[41] Report of Gatti-Casazza to Cornelius N. Bliss, April 1934. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, 1933-34, Bliss.

[42] Kahn to Deems Taylor, 11 April 1932. Kahn Papers, Box 498, Princeton University.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

effort to conceal from the management. In a communication to Metropolitan press representative William Guard regarding anticipated chorus salary demands, for example, Kahn worried: "[W]here the Metropolitan is to find the money to meet these ever-increasing costs, is getting to be a serious problem."[43] And negotiations with the orchestra union in 1920 resulted in suggestions for retrenchment that clearly issued from the chairman, as communicated to Gatti from assistant manager Edward Ziegler, a close personal friend of Kahn who was often charged with enforcing a strict bottom line:

> I [made a final appeal] yesterday, confronting the [local union] President . . . and a band of about a dozen of as pronounced Bolshevists as can be found outside of Russia. I stated my case, told them that they were making it impossible to continue giving opera; told them that by their attitude there [*sic*] were discouraging men with idealistic tendencies from helping the cause of music . . . .
>
> Mr. Kahn, incidentally, asked me, also, whether it would be possible to reduce our orchestra. . . . Of course, I understand that there will be considerable objection on the part of the conductors . . . . At the same time it will have great effect on the men and will serve to make them a bit more reasonable in another season. [44]

Yet it was Gatti who held firm, as was confirmed less than a week later:

> Mr. Ziegler received your cablegram and, accordingly, has given orders that the number of musicians to be contracted for in the orchestra next season is not to be reduced. [45]

Kahn, however, may not have been personally responsible for resorting to retrenchment, for his largesse often depended on the extent to which he was able to exert influence over his board, admittedly no easy matter. Even close ally Clarence Mackay had demonstrated reluctance to make a financial exception in the case of Toscanini:

---

[43] Kahn to William J. Guard, 26 September 1919. Kahn Papers, Box 121, Princeton University.

[44] Edward Ziegler to Gatti-Casazza, 29 July 1920. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, Summer 1920, Ziegler.

[45] Thomas McCarthy, Metropolitan Opera Company, to Gatti-Casazza, Venice, 4 August 1920. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, Summer 1920, Ziegler.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> Had a long interview with Gatti last evening and he gave me a summary of the Toscanini situation. I told him very frankly that although I was a great admirer of Maestro Toscanini, I felt that $7,000 per month was an enormous salary, independent of the value that was placed on his services by Russia, Germany or the Argentine, and that our policy should be in the direction of decreasing expenses rather than increasing. [46]

Although Mackay allowed himself to be overruled by the combined efforts of Kahn and William K. Vanderbilt, subsequent financial strictures imposed by the board—particularly those affecting rehearsal time—were a central factor in Toscanini's departure from the house after the 1914-1915 season, as related by Gatti to Kahn:

> Toscanini . . . came forward with his usual story that we do not give him the consideration which he merits and that my only thought is: not to lose money for a Board of Directors consisting of millionaires. [47]

But it is not true, as Kolodin later intimated, that Toscanini refused to reconsider his decision after Gatti and Kahn agreed to accede to his demands, nor that "an estrangement ensued between Gatti and Toscanini which endured for 17 years."[48] Such claims were frequently advanced in support of the argument that the Metropolitan invariably privileged profits over art. Gatti informed Kahn two months before the opening of the 1915-1916 season:

> When I made my new proposition to Toscanini, he did not refuse but desired to think the matter over several days before giving me a definite answer. . . . It is

---

46 Clarence Mackay to Kahn, Santa Barbara, California, 20 October 1910. Kahn Papers, Box 4, Princeton University.

47 Gatti-Casazza, Milan, to Kahn, 16 July 1915. Kahn Papers, Box 47, Princeton University. Gatti's letter also names two other factors considered significant in the conductor's departure: "Toscanini is a raving Nationalist and does not want to leave his country at the present time and go to a place where the German element is numerous. All of Toscanini's friends agree with me that in this whole affair there is one great question of an intimate character which constitutes the principal reason of Toscanini's attitude; this, however, Toscanini does not mention and trying to hide it he has recourse to the old accusations against the Metropolitan in order to justify his behaviour." This was a reference to the conductor's longstanding affair with Geraldine Farrar, which was also cited by Toscanini's biographer: "Toscanini's great New York crisis . . . came in the form of an ultimatum from Farrar, who told him that if he loved her, he must leave his family for her." Harvey Sachs, Toscanini (Philadelphia and New York: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1978), 129.

48 Kolodin, *In Memoriam*, 36.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> unnecessary for me to tell you that I feel entirely satisfied of having done much more than the dignity of my position or my self respect would admit. . . . One thing is certain, i.e., that the famous Conductors of to-day, although they may talk incessantly of art and its sacred rights, have become worse than the old-time Primadonna and they do not even have the excuse of belonging to the weaker sex. It is sad but true! [49]

And Gatti confirmed to both Ziegler and Kahn that a *rapprochement* had occurred as early as 1920:

> As [Toscanini] came to Ferrara to conduct some Orchestra Concerts, I had the occasion to meet him and to stay with him after four years that I had not seen him nor come in contact with him. My impression is that his character has remained the same as we knew it. Further I have noticed in him a pessimism and a discouragement more accentuated than in the past. I attended his concerts and it is only justice to say that as an artist he is superior to any comparison. [50]
>
> . . . . . .
>
> As I already wrote to Mr. Ziegler who may have told you, my relations with Maestro Toscanini have again become cordial and friendly. Myself, who would have had personally a thousand times reason to stay at a distance from him, I have instead made the first step towards him, by inviting him in my city, at Ferrara, to give some orchestral concerts which took place in last June with complete success and satisfaction of the Maestro. [51]

Despite Gatti's constant involvement in such intricately interwoven artistic and financial factors, critics conceded that he successfully shielded the Metropolitan's American initiative from deleterious effects. Rather, the consideration bestowed on the new productions was typically described as lavish:

> Most of [the American] presentations have been made with a lavish outlay for scenery, without stint in the mounting and stage picturing; they have been carefully prepared with all the pains that are expended upon new productions at this house; in some cases prominent and distinguished members of the company

---

[49] Gatti-Casazza, Milan, to Kahn, 6 September 1915. Kahn Papers, Box 47, Princeton University.

[50] Gatti-Casazza (location unspecified) to Ziegler, 28 June 1920. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, Summer 1920, Ziegler.

[51] Gatti-Casazza, Milan, to Kahn, 23 July 1920. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, Summer 1920, Kahn.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> have been cast in them; and, in any event, the performances have been made with a high degree of competence. [52]

Participants included first-rate casts (Louise Homer, Paul Althouse, Rosa Ponselle, Florence Easton, Lawrence Tibbett) that ironically may have resulted in part from the boxholders' longstanding casting strictures; experienced conductors (Alfred Hertz, Artur Bodanzky, Tullio Serafin; Henry Hadley leading his own opera); and renowned designers (Joseph Urban, Norman Bel-Geddes, Jo Mielziner). In addition, each American opera usually received at least one, and sometimes several, performances outside New York as part of the Metropolitan's regional touring activity and, after 1931, a national radio broadcast, giving American composers the widest possible hearing. Gatti also selected Deems Taylor's Peter Ibbetson to open the 1933-1934 season on 26 December 1933, an then-unprecedented distinction for an American opera which has been repeated only once, when Samuel Barber's Antony and Cleopatra inaugurated the new opera house at Lincoln Center on opening night of the 1966-1967 season. Even before becoming the first American composer so honored, Taylor expressed the gratitude felt by many of the Americans whose work had been produced by the Metropolitan:

> In these few hours that intervene before The King's Henchman goes before its first audience, I want to express to you my appreciation of the beautiful production you have given it, and of the attitude of respect and consideration that I have encountered at the Metropolitan—an attitude that, as an absolute novice in the field of opera, I could hardly have demanded as a right.
>
> I have been made to feel that my work was being taken seriously, and that it was being prepared with all the resources and skill at the command of the Metropolitan. I know that the attitude of any organization is inevitably a reflection of the attitude of its head; it is to you first of all, therefore, that I wish to express my thanks. Whatever be the ultimate fate of The King's Henchman, I am deeply sensible of what I owe the Metropolitan. [53]

---

[52] Richard Aldrich, *The Opera: Cleopatra's Night,* New York Times, 1 February 1920, 21.

[53] Taylor to Gatti-Casazza, 14 February 1927. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, 1926-27, Gatti-Personal.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

American composers owed their new equality of status to another of the progressive policies Kahn implemented at the time of Gatti's hiring:

> For the first time in Metropolitan history the entire management staff was to be on salary, Kahn announced. Unlike Conried and earlier Metropolitan impresarios, Gatti and his associates had no direct interest in the box office returns. Any losses would be absorbed by the board, which for the first time used the name Metropolitan Opera Company. [54]

By eliminating the profit motive from the usual capitalist equation, and concurrently relieving Gatti of the responsibility of producing dividends for the shareholders, Kahn in effect established the Metropolitan as a semi-public institution long before government provision existed for such a basis. It was an idea long advocated by artistic nationalists, among them the redoubtable Silas G. Pratt, who in 1893 had presciently observed:

> In considering the subject of the permanent establishment of grand opera in the vernacular and of original productions by native composers, . . . the enterprise should be a public and not a private enterprise . . . . It would appear that to challenge successfully the patriotic support of our people, the undertaking should be made as a public enterprise for the advancement of art and for the encouragement of native talent, and not for the sole profit of an *impresario* or any other individual. This could be accomplished by a corporation under the laws, not for profit . . . [55]

Along similar lines, Benjamin Britten declared a half century later: "The three things English opera needs . . . are business organisation (including cash), public goodwill, and composers to write new operas. Never yet in this country have these three things coincided."[56] Britten's 1951 statement demonstrates how progressive Kahn's ideals were for the time in which he advanced them. Indeed, he had outlined his new vision as early as 1906 in a letter to James Hazen Hyde:

> I am certain that many members of the Board would be disinclined to renew [Conried's] contract on the old terms; the prevailing view being that the profit-

---

54 Matz, Many Lives, 60.

55 Silas G. Pratt, *A Plan and a Plea for American Opera,* The Forum 15 (March 1893): 88-89.

56 Benjamin Britten, introduction to White, Rise of English Opera, 13.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> sharing feature . . . is fundamentally wrong; that he ought to be paid a very liberal salary . . . but that he ought not to have the incentive to run the opera for profit.[57]

The new organizational basis Kahn designed had the additional advantage of providing continued rebuttal to critics, among them the Herald-Tribune's waspish Lawrence Gilman, who persisted well into the 1920s in labeling the theater as an institution whose "[desire] above all things is material prosperity."[58] Kahn authored this response with the assistance of Ziegler:

> As to Mr. Gatti-Casazza, why should that be his motive? He has no financial stake whatever in the results. His predecessors, Messrs. Grau and Conried, did share in any profits realized, but that system was abolished by the Board of Directors when Mr. Gatti-Casazza was engaged. It was abolished for the very purpose of removing from the executive Management any temptation to be influenced by considerations of "material prosperity." . . . What possible inducement could [Gatti] have to put the financial results ahead of the artistic results? [59]

The American Opera Prize Competition

The initial step taken by the Metropolitan Opera Company to promote its new American program was the announcement of a composition contest for native-born composers of opera, with a prize of $10,000 as well as a Metropolitan premiere to be awarded to the winner. Despite the history of such schemes in American musical culture, Gatti appeared to take personal credit for the idea in his memoirs: "The thing to do was to make it known that the Metropolitan Opera Company was hospitably disposed toward American composers, and was intent on discovering the worthiest American efforts. . . . [I]n my first season, I proposed to the board of directors a competition open only to American composers."[60] It is indeed possible that the

---

57 Quoted in Mayer, The Met, 88.

58 Gilman, *The Future of the Metropolitan,* New York Herald-Tribune, 28 May 1926.

59 Ziegler to Kahn, 15 June 1926, enclosing draft of proposed response. Kahn Papers, Box 287, Princeton University.

60 Gatti-Casazza, Memories of the Opera, 237.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

manager, whose accumulated residency in the United States amounted to fewer than three months at the time the competition was announced, was unaware of its historical precedents since they were not known for having inspired any memorable scores. Rather, Gatti may have been inspired by a similar competition launched in England two years before by the Italian music publisher Ricordi in anticipation of festivities celebrating the centennial of its 1808 founding. Ricordi's award for the best new opera by a British composer was given to Edward W. Naylor's The Angelus, to a libretto by W. Thornely, but the premiere of the new work at Covent Garden was allegedly delayed by the publisher's stipulation that its English libretto be translated into Italian. Although common sense ultimately prevailed and Naylor's opera was given in English during Covent Garden's 1909-1910 season, it received only one revival (by the Carl Rosa Company at Covent Garden in 1921) before disappearing from the repertory.[61]

Kahn and his board obviously hoped for better luck in their venture, which they authorized at the inception of Gatti's first season in the knowledge that the project would require several years to come to fruition. The board authorization occurred on 19 November 1908,[62] and public announcement was made on 15 December 1908 with a deadline for receipt of scores set at 15 September 1910. Clearly the intent embodied in the two-year waiting period was to encourage the creation of new operas rather than to consider existing works; the latter category had already received some attention the previous spring, when a group of American scores was placed under consideration. Walter Damrosch was appointed chairman of the competition jury, which included composers Charles Martin Loeffler and George Whitefield Chadwick, as well as Metropolitan conductor Alfred Hertz, who was destined to lead the eventual premiere.

---

61 White, History of English Opera, 340.

62 Minutes of Board of Directors meeting, Metropolitan Opera Company, 19 November 1908. Kahn Papers, Box 524, Princeton University.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

While the mobilization of American plans at the Metropolitan represented for Kahn the long-awaited consummation of nearly five years of policy development, one senses Gatti's keen business sense in the sudden genesis of the prize competition. Gatti's awareness of the extent of Oscar Hammerstein's ambition, as well as his shrewd observation of the impresario's infiltration of his own organization through the duplicitous Dippel, evidently convinced the new Metropolitan chief to move quickly against the threat posed by Natoma. Adding to the sense of urgency was the vigilance of the press, which had seized eagerly upon Victor Herbert's pointed comments in praise of Hammerstein: "[T]he enterprise which he has stimulated in the American operatic field . . . [is] in striking contrast to the conditions and apathy and stagnation that have hitherto prevailed."[63] Yet the Metropolitan did not escape criticism even with its first public gesture in support of American composers. Although William J. Henderson acknowledged that "the sum of $10,000 . . . and other attractive features of the competition have interested the American composers very much,"[64] the comic opera composer Reginald De Koven attacked it:

> [I]t is indeed much to be deplored that the terms of the competition for a prize for the best American Grand Opera, as recently announced by the Metropolitan Opera Company, an idea admirable in its conception in affording the needed opportunity for the American composer to be heard, are such as to render the whole plan nugatory and indeed almost farcical. Through the illiberality and injustice of its financial conditions, whereby the composer, for a sum barely adequate to compensate him for the time spent in its construction, is compelled to give his successful work for nothing for a period of five years, and whereby they carefully reserve to themselves the right not to award any prize at all, the Metropolitan Opera Company have, in my judgment, given conclusive evidence of their entire inability to appreciate existing conditions, as well as of the usual lack of confidence in the ability of the American composer to produce any meritorious musical work at all. [65]

---

63 Unidentified newspaper clipping, New York, ca. April 1907, quoted in Edward N. Waters, Victor Herbert: A Life in Music (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1955), 370.

64 *Opera Prize Bluff Called,* New York Sun, 14 September 1910, 7.

65 Reginald De Koven, *Nationalism in Music,* The North American Review 189 (March 1909): 396.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Although De Koven was known to inveigh frequently against the Metropolitan for its historical role in neglecting the development of a national school of American opera—a subject upon which he had become messianic—it is possible that on this occasion personal circumstances may have influenced his judgment. Despite recognizing that "[t]he tendency inevitable in a new country, where the commercial spirit is the controlling agent of progress, to measure artistic work solely by a financial standard of value has also been a hindrance to the development of our artistic possibilities,"[66] the unparalleled success of his Robin Hood (1890) had placed De Koven in an unusually comfortable position for an American composer, and accumulated royalties on the work's long run in the commercial theater must have amounted to far more than $10,000.

Nevertheless, the amount offered by the Metropolitan to a potentially unknown composer remains an unusually large one for its time, particularly when compared to royalties customarily paid for European works. During the first decade of Gatti's management, these generally ranged from $50 to $400 per performance with a guaranteed minimum of usually no more than six representations, a scale which did not rise appreciably even during the 1920s.[67] Examination of specific royalty amounts reveals them to have been carefully calibrated to reflect principally the renown of the composer and the prior international success of the opera under negotiation;[68] other factors included the work's length, its potential usefulness in the company's

---

66 Ibid., 387.

67 This royalty range is estimated to be equivalent to $920—$7,356 per representation in year 2000 dollars, according to a conversion formula based on composite price indexes calculated by John J. McCusker, How Much is that in Real Money? A Historical Price Index for Use as a Deflator of Money Values in the Economy of the United States (Worcester, Massachusetts: American Antiquarian Society, 1992), addendum to new ed. (in preparation), Table A-1: *Commodity Price Indexes, United States, 1665-2000.*

68 Special consideration was proffered if the librettist were similarly distinguished, as was the case of Albert Wolff's L'oiseau bleu (The Bluebird) to a libretto by Maurice Maeterlinck. Gatti similarly directed that serious consideration be given to Ignace Lilien's Great Catherine (premiered Wiesbaden, 1932), the only opera composed to a libretto of George Bernard Shaw; the Metropolitan's failure to mount the work may have been due to a $2,000 fee for rights to the world

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

repertory, and the degree of novelty or exclusivity of presentation connected with it. Contracts for most of the American composers fell at the low end of the range, particularly when they represented the composer's initial foray into the opera world, but also because many of the American premieres were one-act operas that would require another work to complete the evening. Thus Converse's one-act The Pipe of Desire was contracted at $50 per performance, as was Cadman's Shanewis, Hugo's The Temple Dancer, Breil's The Legend (despite the minor celebrity status the composer enjoyed as a result of his film score to The Birth of a Nation), and even Victor Herbert's Madeleine (in which the title role was sung by Gatti-Casazza's wife, soprano Frances Alda, who demanded that the composer insert an aria for her character). Proven veterans like Walter Damrosch (Cyrano, 1913) and Reginald De Koven (The Canterbury Pilgrims, 1917) were able to command $150 per representation, a sum consistent with their Italian contemporaries whom Gatti was frequently accused of favoring. Franco Leoni's L'Oracolo, for example, long a vehicle for the house's leading Italian baritone Antonio Scotti, received $100 per performance in 1922[69] and Leoncavallo's Zazà, a signature role of Geraldine Farrar, received $150 in 1918;[70] but Max von Schillings surpassed all four composers financially with his Mona Lisa (1915), a lurid example of the German brand of verismo then in vogue, which enjoyed a wide European popularity in its day and commanded $400 per performance at the Metropolitan in 1923.[71]

---

premiere demanded by its publisher, Universal Verlag. Telegrams between Gatti-Casazza, Milan, and Ziegler, 22 June and 6 July 1931. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, Summer 1931, Ziegler.

69 Metropolitan Opera Company to Chappell-Harms, Inc., 27 March 1922. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, 1921-22, Miscellaneous.

70 Compilation titled *Season 1918-1919 Royalties*, Metropolitan Opera Archives.

71 Universal-Edition, A.G., Vienna, to Gatti-Casazza, 8 October 1921. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, 1921-22, Miscellaneous. Schillings's success as a composer

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Mona Lisa, however, was an aberration: the rewards at the top of the monetary range were almost exclusively accorded to Giacomo Puccini and Richard Strauss. Madama Butterfly still received $400 per performance in 1918, fifteen years after its premiere,[72] and Puccini was given special financial cachets for the world premieres he granted to the Metropolitan: 20,000 lire (approximately $3,800 in 1910; $68,058 in year 2000 dollars) for La Fanciulla del West, for which he spent a month in residence at the theater supervising the production premiere;[73] and $7,000 (approximately $79,380 in year 2000 dollars) for Il Trittico's "Premiere performance on Earth" in 1918.[74]

Negotiations with Richard Strauss were invariably protracted affairs, with the savvy composer insisting on due consideration for his unique creations. Despite Gatti's deference to Strauss's artistic position—letters from the Metropolitan to the composer always began with the salutation "Illustre Maître" (Puccini was accorded a similar "Illustre e caro Maestro")—the general manager nonetheless remained unsentimental with regard to commerce and proved a worthy advocate of his employer's fiscal interests. During the 1919-1920 season, for example, he wired Berlin theatrical agent Norbert Salter: "IN SPITE OF BEST INTENTIONS TO PRODUCE

---

proved to be short-lived in both Europe and America, and he is principally remembered for having accepted an appointment to "reorganize" the German theater system on behalf of the newly empowered National Socialist Party in 1933. Although Schillings's sudden death that year prevented him from carrying out his task, the new ideology his position represented resulted in the exodus of superior conducting talents such as Erich Kleiber. Plans aborted by Kleiber's departure included a production of Louis Gruenberg's The Emperor Jones, which the conductor had accepted while director of the Berlin Staatsoper in 1931.

72 *Season 1918-1919 Royalties*, Metropolitan Opera Archives.

73 Royalty contract between Giacomo Puccini and the Metropolitan Opera Company, Paris, 9 June 1910, Metropolitan Opera Archives. The exchange was calculated from information contained in Banking and Monetary Statistics, 1914-1941 (Washington, D.C.: Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, 1943), Table No. 173: *Foreign Exchange Rates,* 673; and foreign exchange information from the London Times, 10 June 1910 and The Wall Street Journal, 9 June 1910.

74 *Season 1918-1919 Royalties*, Metropolitan Opera Archives.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

STRAUSS OPERA IMPOSSIBLE TO ACCEPT REQUESTED TERMS AWAIT RATIONAL PROPOSALS GREETINGS"[75] and confirmed to Kahn: "As usual the negotiations [for Ariadne auf Naxos] are proceeding very slowly because the demands put forward by these gentlemen are exhorbitant [*sic*]. Regarding 'Salomé', as you will remember, on account of the ridiculous demands put forward by [Berlin music publisher] Fürstner and Strauss last winter, which demands are the more excessive in consideration that 'Salomé' is an opera fifteen years old and which has already been performed in New York, we had agreed to let it go for some time."[76] Nevertheless, Strauss had been able to obtain his terms for the American premiere of Der Rosenkavalier, the most complex contract Gatti negotiated and the only one to grant a composer a percentage of the box-office receipts.[77] But Gatti refused a similar arrangement for the Puccini operas proposed by Ricordi, the Milan publisher for which he was later accused of being a "stalking horse":

> After numerous and long discussions I had with the Heads of the House of Ricordi, with whom I kept a rather menacing and reserved position, I have come to a good pacification. They have given up the idea of asking, as Royalties for the operas of their property and especially for those of Puccini, a percentage on

---

75 Telegram from Gatti-Casazza to Salter, Berlin, 20 October 1919. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, 1919-20. [*TROTZ BESTEM WILLEN EINE STRAUS OPER AUFZUFUHREN UNMOEGLICH VERLANGTE BEDINGUNGEN ANNEHMEN ERWARTE VERNUNFTIGE VORSCHLAGE GRUSS.*]

76 Gatti-Casazza, Milan, to Kahn, 23 July 1920. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, Summer 1920, Kahn. A series of telegrams exchanged in 1924 indicates that Fürstner modified its demands to $500 per representation of Salome, which the Metropolitan—in contrast to current practice—did not intend to offer as the sole production of the evening. Gatti refused and counter-offered with $400 per performance, the same terms then in effect for Butterfly. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, 1923-24, F. Dizikes faults Gatti for neglecting his artistic obligation to present Strauss's operas to the New York public without any discussion of the role played by the composer or his publisher in the matter. Opera in America, 423.

77 Royalty contract for Der Rosenkavalier signed by Fürstner, Berlin, 19 May 1913 and Gatti-Casazza, Paris, 21 May 1913, Metropolitan Opera Archives. The agreement granted the Metropolitan exclusive performance rights in America in exchange for 8% of the *"recettes brûtes"* [gross receipts] for the premiere and $600 per performance thereafter, with a $6,000 minimum.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> the receipts and they have agreed to follow the old way. They will perhaps ask for a small increase which can be discussed. [78]

A third recipient of special financial consideration from the Metropolitan was Claude Debussy, who received a payment of 2,000 francs or $384 (approximately $7,062 in year 2000 dollars) as guaranty for the exclusive American performing rights to La chute de la maison Usher (1908-17), Le diable dans le beffroi (1902-11) and possibly a Legend of Tristan.[79] Gatti described the sum as "a very small advance" given to the creator of Pelléas et Mélisande—one of his favorite operas—although none of the projected works, as Debussy had predicted from the inception, was ever completed.[80]

The American opera competition's unusually generous award for its time, together with the publicity generated in response to the unprecedented sum, may well have been devised as a foil for any similar scheme likely to be put forward by Oscar Hammerstein, who was beginning to feel the fiscal effects of the quixotic battle he had initiated with the Metropolitan.

---

78 Gatti-Casazza, Milan, to Kahn, 11 September 1925. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, 1925-26, Kahn. Gatti retained this position despite his concurrent negotiations with Ricordi for the American premiere of Turandot, which he was successful in procuring for the Metropolitan.

79 Edward Ziegler to Oscar Thompson, Executive Editor, Musical America, 22 June 1937. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Ziegler correspondence, 1937-38, D. Ziegler suggests that the Tristan work may have been abandoned by the time the Metropolitan remitted payment, as its records cite only the two Poe operas.

80 Gatti-Casazza, Memories of the Opera 157. It is possible that Debussy's sudden return to his preliminary libretto sketches for Usher in June 1908, after having last mentioned the idea in a letter to Chausson of 6 September 1893, was a result of Gatti's interest in acquiring the work for the Metropolitan. Edward Lockspeiser, Debussy et Edgar Poe (Monaco, 1961), quoted in Robert Orledge, *Debussy's House of Usher Revisited,* The Musical Quarterly 62 (October 1976): 538. Nonetheless, upon signing the 5 July 1908 agreement, Debussy reportedly told the manager: "It is a bad business you are doing. . . . I do not believe I will ever finish any part of all this." Lockspeiser, Debussy: His Life and Mind (London 1965), vol. 2, 141, quoted in Orledge, 550.

A reconstruction of La chute de la maison Usher was prepared by Juan Allende-Blin from the extant autograph manuscripts held at the Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris (Paris: Société des Éditions Jobert, 1979). The premiere performance was given, nearly seventy years after the Debussy-Gatti agreement, by the Radio-Sinfonie-Orchester Hessischer Rundfunk, Eliahu Inbal conducting, on 1 December 1977.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Although the New York public had undeniably benefitted from his efforts to democratize opera, Hammerstein's initial victory turned out to be a Pyrrhic one when alarm over his rapidly dwindling resources impelled his son Arthur to open secret negotiations with the enemy. Kahn could have allowed the cigar-chomping old battler to sink into inevitable bankruptcy, but his admiration for the charismatic impresario—whose productions he had often attended—motivated him to arrange a $1.2 million buy-out of the Manhattan Opera House in 1910 with funds reputedly supplied by himself and William K. Vanderbilt. The purchase was judiciously made contingent upon Hammerstein's signature of a ten-year non-competition agreement with the Metropolitan which prohibited him from producing opera in New York for the next decade. A casualty of the transaction was Victor Herbert's Natoma, in which Hammerstein had lost interest even before its completion, possibly due to his desperate financial state. In frustration, Herbert scheduled an audition of the completed portion of the opera at the Metropolitan, in the first known instance of an American opera composer granted a live audition of his work by the house. The opera was rejected by Gatti-Casazza, ostensibly in favor of other American plans already set in motion, but more probably because he found little sympathy for the Indianist work.[81]

Another controversy ensued in conjunction with the American opera competition when one of the reportedly twenty-four scores submitted was lost.[82] Brooklyn-born composer Albert Mildenberg sued the Metropolitan for $25,000 when the score to an opera identified as

---

81 Kahn salvaged the situation by giving Natoma to Dippel in Chicago, while persuading Gatti to accept Herbert's next opera, the one-act Madeleine, in 1914. See discussion in chapter 4.

82 Jury member Charles Martin Loeffler confirmed the number of manuscripts received when he wrote, "[N]ow my troubles have begun! There are 24 operas to go through!" in an undated letter to Isabella Stewart Gardner, quoted in Ellen Knight, Charles Martin Loeffler: A Life Apart in American Music (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 185.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Raphaelo disappeared while in transit from Damrosch to another member of the jury.[83] The Supreme Court of New York awarded Mildenberg damages of $750 for his manuscript, which was apparently never recovered.[84] The incident offers one of the few clues as to the identity of any of the other scores examined by the jury, which required the operas to be submitted anonymously. Echoes of the opinions recorded by Dvořák nearly two decades before can be discerned in Charles Martin Loeffler's private remarks to composer Horatio Parker on the indifferent quality of most of the manuscripts the Metropolitan received:

> The work was all the more wearisome to me, as I was the one that had [the winning opera] *first* and then 23 more or less indifferently interesting ones (in grade down to very punk!) *after*. Therefore, my pleasure and fun was over after the first score perused, and the rest was one long, wearisome, tragi-comical *corvée*, with very few rays of sunshine in it. All this confidentially! [85]

The prize was ultimately awarded in May 1911 to Parker, one of the country's most experienced composers, for his first opera, Mona (Metropolitan premiere, 14 March 1912).

The Question of American Bias

From a late twentieth-century viewpoint, there may seem to be scant need of establishing a "motive" for a venture as ostensibly benevolent as the Metropolitan's initiative to

---

[83] Both Knight and Gatti describe a similar score disappearance which differs from the Mildenberg incident in its description of the recovery of a package containing two scores; Gatti named them as Raffaelo and Chiaroscuro. Knight, Loeffler, 185; Gatti, Memories of the Opera, 246. However, Mildenberg's obituary implied that the score to Raphaelo remained unrecovered at the composer's death. New York Times, 4 July 1918, 13.

[84] New York Times, 13 November 1912, 8; 15 November 1912, 2. The missing score was erroneously identified by Edith Borroff as Michael Angelo (Angèle), an earlier work by Mildenberg which was given at the Vienna Court Opera in 1908 under the title Michaelo with renowned tenor Alessandro Bonci in the title role. Musical America reported the composer's hope of seeing the opera produced at the Metropolitan, and it may well have been among the group placed under consideration at the theater that spring. The manuscript is currently held at the Library of Congress. Musical America 8 (4 July 1908): 1; New York Times, 4 July 1918, 13; Borroff, American Opera: A Checklist, ed. by J. Bunker Clark (Warren, Michigan: Harmonie Park Press, 1992), 208.

[85] Charles Martin Loeffler to Horatio Parker, May 1911. Isabel Parker Semler, Horatio Parker: A Memoir for His Grandchildren Compiled from Letters and Papers (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1942), 229-30, quoted in Knight, Loeffler, 185.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

produce American opera. But the commonly accepted motivation of artistic idealism has not gone unchallenged. Most recently, American cultural historian John Dizikes weighed in with this assessment of events:

> Gatti-Casazza, a new man in a new position in a new country, and Otto Kahn, chairman of the board of the Metropolitan, an immigrant himself, sensed possible danger. Gatti-Casazza's Metropolitan must not be identified as an American institution run by foreigners for foreign interests. The snobbery which led Americans to favor European names and reputations easily turned into jingoistic xenophobia, and there were those who saw Gatti-Casazza as a stalking horse for the Italian publishing house of Ricordi and its Italian composers.
>
> The result was the emergence of the Metropolitan Opera as a sponsor of American opera. [86]

Problematically, however, Dizikes does not support his hypothesis of clandestine motivation with any documentation. Nor does he explain why a balancing of established society interests—reflected in the Real Estate board's historically pro-Italian stance at the Metropolitan—with growing American populist sentiment would suddenly become an imperative for Gatti, hardly the first European to direct the institution. It may have been that the degree to which ethnic bias was openly expressed in the press, as in one extreme example from as late as 1925, influenced Dizikes's opinion that such a counterassault was necessary:

> I notice in the morning papers that Signor Giulio Gatti-Casazza is off on his annual pilgrimage to flush up a new bevy of songbirds. He is the un-Americanized director of the Metropolitan; a guy with a name like that ought to be making spaghetti. Signor Gatti is paid a whopping salary in American dollars, and his specialty is exploiting some capacious-lunged garlic-eating screecher from Italy, and slamming the door on American operatic talent. The high mogul of the Metropolitan is Otto Kahn, a foreign-born gent who made his millions in the land of opportunity which we Americans furnished. [87]

---

[86] Dizikes, Opera in America, 377.

[87] Memorandum from J. G. Dartt, Secretary to Otto Kahn, to Ziegler, 10 June 1925, attributing quote to syndicated columnist O. O. McIntyre, whose work often appeared in the New York American. The item was said to have appeared in his column *New York-Day by Day*, which was published in newspapers outside of the New York metropolitan area. Kahn Papers, Box 257, Princeton University.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

It is possible, too, that Gatti may have been warned of potential difficulties at the inception of his tenure by Kahn, who was without doubt a highly perspicacious observer of the American scene. And yet, lack of an American repertoire did not seem to trouble the regime of Conried, who was also of foreign birth. In fact, no American opera had been produced by any Metropolitan regime prior to that of Gatti. Similarly, the management of Covent Garden, despite its own apparent anti-Italian bias, appears to have felt only nominally impelled to adopt a nationalist repertoire, even in the immediate aftermath of World War I. Kahn received this information just one week after the Armistice:

> Sir Thomas Beecham and Mr. [Harry] Higgins are joining forces and together taking over the management of the Covent Garden opera. . . . It is not intended to give much opera in English . . . although, theoretically at least, it will be the policy to give a certain number of performances in English with a tendency to increase the proportion of English performances each year. [88]

Contrary to Dizikes's thesis, there is no evidence that Gatti ever responded to xenophobia in his decisions regarding the operations of the Metropolitan. Indeed, had Gatti been inclined toward flag-waving, an excellent opportunity presented itself at the onset of World War I, when Germanic culture was widely shunned, even within the Academy.[89] Instead, two weeks after the declaration of European hostilities during the summer of 1914, Gatti charged his European assistant Otto Weil with investigating the status of the Metropolitan's "enemy" singers from Central Power nations, and instructed him to take precautionary measures for their safety:

> I just received a telegram from Mr. Gatti instructing me to find out about the male portion of our German artists and chorus as to whether any of them had

---

88 Paul Cravath to Kahn, 18 November 1918. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, 1918-19.

89 A funding appeal Kahn received from Columbia University's Department of Germanic Languages ten years after the war stated that "the vast majority" of faculty at American universities were "hostile to Germany from the beginning [of the War], and in many of them the study of German was either curtailed or abolished altogether." Department of Germanic Languages, Columbia University, to Kahn, 5 February 1927. Kahn Papers, Box 342, Princeton University.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> been called to military service. . . . [Wagnerian baritone Otto] Goritz is already fighting at the front—poor fellow. [Bass-baritone Carl] Braun expects to be called in any moment. [Tenor Rudolf] Berger ist [*sic*] first Lieutenant in the Austrian Army, but has not marched to the front as yet. [90]
>
> . . . . . .
>
> I have been [in Rotterdam] a few days making final arrangements for the sailing of the German contingent of our Company, and I may say it was the hardest I ever attended to . . . I did not give [Metropolitan treasurer Frank Garlichs] the dates of the different sailings, as Mr. Gatti has telegraphed me to keep them secret. [91]

Gatti took similar steps to retain the contingent of female singers, despite specific acknowledgment of their potential unpopularity in the United States:

> There are many German artists, especially women, who fear the submarines and are also afraid that in America they may be received with little sympathy, so that they cannot be induced to cross the ocean for any amount of money; all efforts to convince them of their error are in vain. [92]

With regard to the banning of German repertory at the Metropolitan, evidence indicates that Kahn's board struggled for nearly three years over the question; yet Gatti never wavered in his apolitical efforts to preserve the Wagnerian repertoire, which he later identified as a prime commercial base of the theater:

> Until a few years ago our institution could be compared to a great machine driven by two principal wheels, one of which could be represented by the Caruso performances and the other by the performances of the Wagnerian repertoire . . . Fatality has willed that successively we should lose the one and the other wheel with the duty to provide to substitutions of a different character. . . . (although the latter is slowly coming to life again). [93]

---

[90] Otto Weil, Munich, to John Brown, Business Comptroller, Metropolitan Opera, 18 August 1914. Kahn Papers, Box 35, Princeton University. Goritz and Braun survived, but Berger died of pleurisy in February 1915.

[91] Weil, Rotterdam, to Brown, 26 September 1914. Kahn Papers, Box 35, Princeton University.

[92] Gatti-Casazza, Milan, to Kahn, 16 July 1915. Kahn Papers, Box 47, Princeton University.

[93] Gatti-Casazza to Kahn, 14 November 1921. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, 1921-22, Miscellaneous. Caruso had died three months before.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Kobler correctly questions Matz's assertion that Kahn supported a ban on German opera at the Metropolitan as early as 1914, but the truth is more complex than he described.[94] Kahn indeed wired Gatti a month after the war's outbreak: "[D]isappointed that you cannot arrange Russian Ballet for Metropolitan, we all think it would have been best not to have German opera at all this season and have Russians instead."[95] Kahn's seemingly unquestioned acquiescence to his board on the issue at such an early date—markedly out of character both personally and politically—may have been influenced by his longstanding desire to bring Vaslav Nijinsky to America under Metropolitan sponsorship (a goal he achieved the following year), as well as the commonly held belief that the war would be of short duration. But Gatti immediately objected on both practical and artistic grounds, despite citing full awareness of potential American protest:

> Most of the French artists are soldiers . . . as regards the Italian artists I can only say that nearly all of them are mediocre, they ignore the art of singing . . . . A great part of the New York public may not like the German artists, but this does not change the fact that the best interpreters of operatic art are found in German Theatres. Besides, at a time when hardly any new opera of artistic value is being composed, the Wagnerian repertoire is a great resource and constitutes the most solid basis of any season in any country. [96]

Gatti's letter further disputes the assertion that American repertoire was promoted at the Metropolitan during and immediately following the war years for political reasons, a theory that is still occasionally advanced despite the theater's performance record, which clearly indicates the opposite to be true.[97] In fact, the American program experienced a hiatus

---

94 Kobler, Otto the Magnificent, 89. Matz attributed Kahn's actions to distress over the Wagnerian translation of the *Übermensch* philosophy of Nietzsche, which he accused Germany's Prussian ruling class of seeking to fulfill by instigating world war. Many Lives, 167.

95 Telegram from Kahn to Gatti, Milan, 10 September 1914. Kahn Papers, Box 35, Princeton University.

96 Gatti-Casazza, Milan, to Kahn, 27 September 1914. Kahn Papers, Box 35, Princeton University.

97 For example, despite acknowledged awareness of Gatti's pre-war American production record, scholar John C. Canfield observed: "[I]t was interesting to observe increased production of

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

between the January 1914 premiere of Victor Herbert's Madeleine and the March 1917 premiere of De Koven's The Canterbury Pilgrims (possibly due to the perceived dearth of new operas that Gatti described), and Cadman's Shanewis was the sole American opera produced during the twenty-month period in which the United States was directly involved in the conflict. Moreover, The Canterbury Pilgrims was cast with two Germans in leading roles (Johannes Sembach as Chaucer[98] and Margarete Ober as the Wife of Bath) and the Austrian conductor Artur Bodanzky in the pit. The opera was viewed as another casualty of war when the Metropolitan board's vote to dismiss German artists from its roster at the beginning of the 1917-1918 season greatly diminished any possibility of its revival. Had Gatti wished to promote an unequivocally pro-American stance, he is unlikely to have cast German singers in native works or to have allowed the American operas to lapse from the house's repertory during the war years. Obviously, he could have easily capitalized on the political climate by increasing his American offerings in this period regardless of his personal artistic tastes.

The fact that Gatti took none of these actions was not indicative of any insensitivity to the European situation. The manager continued his business sojourns abroad as long as practicable and was thus a personal witness to the catastrophe, as he communicated to Kahn: "This letter will be handed to you by Mr. Guard who leaves by the next steamer. . . . He

---

American operatic works after the conclusion of the First World War. . . . [T]hree operas by [an] American composer were performed within a two-year period; and a proponent of American music optimistically stated: 'The doors of the Metropolitan and the Chicago opera houses are wide open for [the American composer's] work.'" Canfield, *Henry Kimball Hadley: His Life and Works (1871-1937)* (Ed.D. diss., Florida State University, 1960), 177-78. This thesis overlooks the fact that two of the cited operas, Breil's The Legend and Hugo's The Temple Dancer, were not independent full-length works but one-act operas presented on the same evening, thus reinstating but not increasing Gatti's pre-war pattern of presenting one new American production event annually. Further, Canfield's supporting quote, taken from a Pittsburgh Post *Musical Comments and Current Events* column dated 25 October 1918 (Canfield, 141*n*2), obviously could not have been a commentary on post-war cultural developments.

98 The role was originally given to American baritone Clarence Whitehill, who withdrew because of the part's uncomfortably high tessitura.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

will tell you all about the difficulties experienced this summer on the old Continent, which has become a mad-house soaked with blood."[99] And he admitted after the imposition of the German ban, "As an Italian (especially in this moment when my country is, unfortunately, invaded), I certainly do not regret that the burden of presenting German opera is taken off my shoulders."[100] Yet he remained proud of the international harmony maintained at his theater: "Despite the terrible conditions during the war, Italian, French and German artists sang together without any discussion."[101] Only when pushed to the extreme, as when unreasonable salary demands were advanced by German artists in the period immediately following the war, did Gatti openly express animosity: "I cannot understand for what reason we should increase the salaries to the artists belonging to the nations that have wanted the war and that have caused the ruin of half the world."[102]

The American initiative remained disassociated from political crises until the Depression years, when it emerged as a useful factor in the pressing need to rally public support to the cause of a national theater. Even then, no specific attempt was made by the Metropolitan to promote operas on national themes or history, which had emerged as an important theme in visual arts of the period. Howard Hanson's Merry Mount was the sole work to draw on the popular idea of a collective national past, and evidence clearly indicates this to have been the independent inspiration of its librettist. Despite assertions to the contrary—including those of

---

99 Gatti-Casazza, Milan, to Kahn, 8 September 1915. Kahn Papers, Box 47, Princeton University.

100 Gatti-Casazza to Kahn, 1 November 1917. Kahn Papers, Box 83, Princeton University.

101 Gatti-Casazza to German theatrical agent Norbert Salter, Berlin, 9 April 1922. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, 1921-22, Salter. [*Pendant la guerre dans des conditions terribles, des artistes italiens, français et allemands ont chanté ensemble sans jamais avoir de discussion.*]

102 Gatti-Casazza to Salter, Berlin, 30 April 1921. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, 1920-21, Salter.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Hanson himself—the Metropolitan did not commission the opera, nor any other on a specifically American theme.[103]

Rather, the American premieres remained closely aligned with the overarching new repertoire scheme promoted by Kahn which dated from his involvement with the Conried regime. The Metropolitan's strong impetus to modernize its repertory provided by the Manhattan Opera House threat underscores the ironic debt owed to Oscar Hammerstein, although it would have been unusual for Gatti, given his past record in the field and America's emerging world position, not to have at least considered the idea of developing an American repertory. He stated as much in his memoirs: "My hope, when I came to America, was to be able to discover some good American operas, which I could produce and maintain in the repertoire."[104] When the manager, and the singers whom he had to persuade to study the new roles, began increasingly to perceive the effort as quixotic, it was Kahn who countered the growing disenchantment by introducing the novel (at least to the Metropolitan) concept of commissioning new operas. In the process, his efforts resulted in the first major American singing career strongly associated with American roles, that of Lawrence Tibbett.

American Singers at the Metropolitan

The rise of Tibbett (1896-1960) occurred at a time when a publication such as the New York World, speaking of production plans for Deems Taylor's The King's Henchman, could still pose the query, "Who of the Metropolitan's cast can sing English words is another

---

103 See discussion of Merry Mount in chapter 8.

104 Gatti-Casazza, Memories of the Opera, 236.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

problem, and one which Mr. Taylor did not discuss."[105] Yet the Metropolitan's record on American singers had undergone a dramatic metamorphosis over the preceding two decades. Only sixteen Americans had sung leading roles at the house before 1900; Gatti added more than twice this number during the course of his tenure, and not solely in order to cast the American repertoire. Chart 3.1, *Chronological List of Prominent American Singers At the Metropolitan Under Giulio Gatti-Casazza, 1908-1935,* identifies the most important American artists of the Gatti years, together with their principal European and American roles. The record clearly demonstrates that the Americans were not hired solely for their potential duty to native opera, since the overwhelming majority, particularly Tibbett, were cast with equivalent or greater frequency in principal roles of European works. A 1911 comment on the audition of an inexperienced student demonstrates Gatti's early recognition of the inherent possibilities of native singers: "If she [Blanche Manley] continues to study with the will-power of an American, she may perhaps become something."[106] By 1918, he acknowledged that "for reasons of justice and diplomacy, we try to favor as much as possible the American element, who are beginning to assume a certain importance and value which is not indifferent."[107] Gatti had ample reason for optimism: the debut of Rosa Ponselle, arguably the greatest vocal find of his career, had occurred only six weeks before.[108]

---

105 *Taylor-Millay Opera is Secret,* New York World, 19 April 1926.

106 Gatti-Casazza, Paris, to Kahn, 5 September 1911. Kahn Papers, Box 10, Princeton University.

107 Gatti-Casazza to Italian theatrical agent Franco Fano, Milan, 31 December 1918. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, 1918-19. [*Per ragioni di giustizia e di diplomazia, si cerca di favorire per quanto è possibile l'elemento americano, il quale comincia ad essere di una certa importanza e di un valore non indifferente.*]

108 Kirsten Flagstad, the closest contender for this honor, was first recommended to the Metropolitan by Kahn in 1929. Helen Klaffky Noble, Life With the Met (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1954), 153; letter from musical agent Erich Simon, Berlin, to Ziegler, 14 January 1930. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Ziegler correspondence, 1929-30, S.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

CHART 3.1

CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF PROMINENT AMERICAN SINGERS
At the Metropolitan Under Giulio Gatti-Casazza, 1908-1935

I. Retained from prior regimes

Metropolitan Tenure	Singer	Principal Roles [American roles in boldface]
Nov 1891- Feb 1909	EMMA EAMES (Soprano) b. Shanghai of American parents	Marguerite/Juliette/Tosca/Elsa [**Paine's Azara** allegedly written for her, although she never sang it]
Dec 1891- Dec 1909	LILLIAN NORDICA (Soprano) b. Farmington, Maine	Elsa/Isolde/Valentine (Huguenots)/ Aida/Leonora (Trovatore)
Nov 1900- Mar 1935	LOUISE HOMER (Contralto) b. Shadyside, Pennsylvania	Azucena/Dalila/Ortrud/Erda/Orfeo/ created Witch in Humperdinck's Königskinder (1910)/**Naoia (Pipe of Desire)/Mona (Mona)**
Nov 1903- Mar 1915	OLIVE FREMSTAD (Mezzo-soprano) b. Stockholm; adopted and raised by Scandinavian-American family	Venus/Sieglinde/Isolde/Elsa/Kundry/ Carmen
Nov 1906- Apr 1922	GERALDINE FARRAR (Soprano) b. Melrose, Massachusetts	The Met's first Butterfly/created Suor Angelica (1918) and Goosegirl (Humperdinck's Königskinder) (1910)
Nov 1907- Nov 1917	RICCARDO MARTIN (Tenor) b. Hopkinsville, Kentucky	Rodolfo/Radamès/Pinkerton/Turiddu **Iolan (Pipe of Desire)/Gwynn (Mona)/Christian (Cyrano)**

II. Engaged by Gatti-Casazza

Nov 1909- Dec 1915	ALICE NIELSEN (Soprano) b. Nashville, Tennessee	Mimì/Norina/Gilda/Nedda [Sang soprano lead in **Converse's The Sacrifice** with Boston Opera, 1911]
Nov 1909- Apr 1932	CLARENCE WHITEHILL (Baritone) b. Parnell, Iowa	Escamillo/Sachs/Amfortas/Wotan **Old One (Pipe of Desire)**
Nov 1909- Jan 1920	ANNA CASE (Soprano) b. Clinton, New Jersey	The Met's first Sophie (Rosenkavalier)/Micaela/Dew Fairy
Nov 1910- Apr1913	WILLIAM WADE HINSHAW (Baritone) b. Union, Iowa (founded Society of American Singers)	Wotan/Wanderer (Siegfried)/King (Aida)/Herald (Lohengrin)/Kothner **Gloom (Mona)/Le Bret (Cyrano)**

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

CHART 3.1

Nov 1910- Apr 1918	BASIL RUYSDAEL (Bass) b. Jersey City, New Jersey (Pupils included Lawrence Tibbett)	Hunding/Hagen/Sarastro **Old Man (Mona)/** **Miller (Canterbury Pilgrims)**
Nov 1911- Feb 1914	PUTNAM GRISWOLD (Bass) b. Minneapolis, Minnesota	Hagen/Pogner/Wotan/King Marke **De Guiche (Cyrano)/Roman Governor (Mona)**
Nov 1912- Feb 1940	PAUL ALTHOUSE (Tenor) b. Redding, Pennsylvania (Pupils included Richard Tucker and Eleanor Steber)	Turiddu/Pinkerton/Siegmund/Froh/ Tannhäuser/Tristan **Lionel (Shanewis)/François (Madeleine)/Squire (Canterbury Pilgrims)/Stephen (The Legend)**
Nov 1913- Apr 1920	SOPHIE BRASLAU (Mezzo-soprano) b. New York City	Hua Qee (L'Oracolo)/Marina (Boris) **Shanewis (Shanewis)**
Feb 1914- Jan 1921	MABEL GARRISON (Soprano) b. Baltimore, Maryland	Queen (Coq d'Or)/Adina (L'Elisir) & Harriet (Martha) (both with Caruso)
Nov 1917- Mar 1922	THOMAS CHALMERS (Baritone) b. New York City	Valentin/Melitone/Sharpless/Lescaut **Philip (Shanewis)**
Nov 1918- Apr 1937	ROSA PONSELLE (Soprano) b. Meriden, Connecticut (Pupils included William Warfield, Sherrill Milnes and James Morris)	Leonora in Met's first Forza (opposite Caruso)/Donna Anna/Rachel (Juive)/ Norma/Aida/Sélika (L'Africaine) **Carmelita (The Legend)**
Feb 1919- Mar 1921	REINALD WERRENRATH (Baritone) b. Brooklyn, New York (Son of Danish tenor George Werrenrath)	Silvio/Escamillo/Valentin [Sang excerpt from **Herbert's Natoma** on Victor's 1912 pioneering recording]
Jan 1919- Feb 1939	CHARLES HACKETT (Tenor) b. Worcester, Massachusetts	Almaviva/Pinkerton/Des Grieux/ Duke (Rigoletto)
Nov 1919- Apr 1924	ORVILLE HARROLD (Tenor) b. Muncie, Indiana	Rodolfo/Don José/Faust/Lohengrin **Meiamoun (Cleopatra's Night)**
Nov 1920 Jan 1939	MARIO CHAMLEE (Tenor) b. Los Angeles	Almaviva/Pinkerton/Cavaradossi **Caponsacchi (Caponsacchi)/Lover (Amelia al ballo)**
Dec 1920- Feb 1930	MARION TELVA (Mezzo-soprano) b. St. Louis, Missouri	Azucena/Amneris/Marina (Boris)/ Dame Quickly/Suzuki **Mrs. Deane (Peter Ibbetson)/** **Ase (King's Henchman)**

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

CHART 3.1

Nov 1922- Dec 1938	QUEENA MARIO (Soprano) b. Akron, Ohio (Pupils included Rose Bampton and Helen Jepson)	Gretel in 1st Met radio broadcast/Inès (L'Africaine)/Micaela/Marguerite **Duchess of Towers (Peter Ibbetson)**
Nov 1923- Mar 1950	LAWRENCE TIBBETT (Baritone) b. Bakersfield, California	Ford (Falstaff)/Jack Rance (Fanciulla revival opposite Jeritza and Martinelli/ Germont/Iago/Tonio/Boccanegra **Eadgar (King's Henchman)/ Colonel Ibbetson (Peter Ibbetson)/ Brutus Jones (Emperor Jones)/ Wrestling Bradford (Merry Mount)/Pasha (In the Pasha's Garden)/Guido (Caponsacchi)**
Nov 1923- Mar 1932	NANNETTE GUILFORD (Soprano) b. New York City	Musetta/Micaela/Liù/Nedda **Aelfrida (King's Henchman)**
Jan 1926- Apr 1930	MARY LEWIS (Soprano) b. Hot Springs, Arkansas	Mimì/Giulietta/Marguerite/Nedda
Feb 1926- May 1929	MARION TALLEY (Soprano) b. Nevada, Missouri	Gilda/Lucia/Olympia/Philine
Nov 1927- Mar 1950	FREDERICK JAGEL (Tenor) b. Brooklyn, New York	Radamès/Turiddu/Edgardo/Pinkerton **Étienne (In the Pasha's Garden)/ Gower and Lucifer (Merry Mount)**
Feb 1928- Feb 1946	GRACE MOORE (Soprano) b. Nough, Tennessee	Mimì/Louise/Manon/Tosca
Nov 1929- Mar 1945	GLADYS SWARTHOUT (Mezzo-soprano) b. Deepwater, Missouri	Carmen/Siebel/Nicklausse/Stephano **Plentiful Tewke (Merry Mount)/ Mrs. Deane (Peter Ibbetson)**
Nov 1932- Apr 1950	ROSE BAMPTON (Mezzo-soprano and Soprano) b. Lakewood, Ohio	Sieglinde/Aida/Elsa/Kundry/Elisabeth (Tannhäuser)
Dec 1932- March 1945	RICHARD BONELLI (Baritone) b. Port Byron, New York	Tonio/Sharpless/Wolfram/Amonasro
Feb 1933- Dec 1942	RICHARD CROOKS (Tenor) b. Trenton, New Jersey	Ottavio/Faust/Des Grieux/Alfredo
Feb 1934- Feb 1943	JOHN CHARLES THOMAS (Baritone) b. Meyersdale, Pennsylvania	Figaro (Barbiere)/Germont/Amonasro
Jan 1935- May 1944	HELEN JEPSON (Soprano) b. Titusville, Pennsylvania	Marguerite/Mélisande/Violetta/Thaïs **Pompilia (Caponsacchi)/Hélène (In the Pasha's Garden)**

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

American singers owed their greatly expanded opportunities to an aggressive open-door policy maintained by Kahn, who insisted that no one be refused a hearing even when the situation seemed hopeless:

> The enclosed letter from the irrepressible and ever-buoyant Rosalie Miller explains itself. Will you . . . drop her a line to say when and where Mr. Gatti-Casazza could gratify her desire to be heard by him in Europe? Sorry to have to bother him in this matter, but I guess for the "sake of American art" he will have to face the lady and her mother for a quarter of an hour, even though that will probably be the sixth or seventh time that he will have done so. I personally plead guilty to being responsible for at least three hearings which he has already given her in past years. [109]

The numerous audition reports on aspirants of all nationalities which were faithfully provided by Ziegler to Kahn throughout the years are testimony to the long hours Gatti devoted to this task, which he unquestionably recognized as a necessity in any theater. Ziegler apparently enjoyed describing the often onerous occasions in colorful terms to his old friend Kahn, who was frequently present at the hearings himself:

> Another applicant was Miss Z., not unknown to us, because she is a pupil of [William] Thorner [a teacher of Rosa Ponselle who arranged her Met audition] and the latter always uncovers his wares. She has a small, trembling, uncertain coloratura voice, and holds forth little promise. [110]

> . . . Miss W., who sang so badly and who lacked every grand opera quality that I am surprised Mme. [Marcella] Sembrich [the legendary Metropolitan soprano] would acknowledge [her] as one of her pupils. [111]

> Miss A., the recipient of two scholarships of the Juilliard Foundation . . . sang Mozart in so strange a tempo and with such complete lack of interest, and with such a poor quality of voice, that we were tempted to believe everything that Pierre Key is writing in the Musical Digest against the Juilliard Foundation. [112]

---

[109] Kahn to Ziegler, 4 April 1924. Kahn Papers, Box 231, Princeton University.

[110] Ziegler to Kahn, 11 December 1925. Kahn Papers, Box 257, Princeton University.

[111] Ibid.

[112] Ziegler to Kahn, 1 February 1927. Kahn Papers, Box 321, Princeton University.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> Then there was a Miss J., whom you had suggested for audition at the insistence of Miss [Estelle] Liebling [the teacher of Beverly Sills]. She has a huge, unwieldy contralto whose chief charm is volume. This is the end of my report, but honesty compels another statement: That the others who sang were just as bad. [113]

> I have braved this afternoon's storm in my devotion to you and to Art. It proved to be only devotion to you, however, because Miss R., soprano . . . whose qualities have been so highly lauded to you . . . disclosed a rather opulent figure, a very pinched voice, to which qualities she added a non-interesting musicianship and meagre vocal charms. [114]

> Yesterday we had an audition and I congratulate you on your absence. . . . Mr. F., the War baritone, who was fortified with letters from United States Senators, sang the "Credo" from "Otello" in a manner that was indescribable, with practically no voice and with little knowledge of the music. . . . No one had asked him this particular piece and he had brought no other music. His parting words were a threat, namely that he would sing for us again. [115]

At least not all of the horror stories were of American provenance:

> We also heard the French tenor Francell who is quite hopeless, having a thin breathy tone and employing the favored French device of throwing the voice into the head and lingering on every high falsetto note. [116]

If the number of American talents ultimately discovered via the open auditions was small, so too was the number of Europeans. The management was well aware that American singers of the caliber they sought were probably already employed abroad, due to the paucity of regional opportunities then available in the United States, and would have to be secured during the annual European scouting sojourns. But Kahn's efforts did meet with success in more than a few instances: Rosa Ponselle and Lawrence Tibbett auditioned as unknown quantities; Ziegfeld Follies chorine Mary Lewis and musical comedy star Grace Moore were recruited from

---

113 Ziegler to Kahn, 21 October 1925. Kahn Papers, Box 257, Princeton University.

114 Ziegler to Kahn, 27 January 1925. Ibid.

115 Ziegler to Kahn, 21 October 1925. Ibid.

116 Ziegler to Kahn, 11 December 1925. Ibid.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the popular music world (the former admittedly with less success than the latter); and the nurturing of young Missouri coloratura Marion Talley produced at least a brief flash of glory. Her story is worth recounting since it represents one of the few documented instances in which Gatti acted in specific response to pressure exerted by American nationalist interests.

The Strange Case of Marion Talley

During the summer of 1922, shortly after Geraldine Farrar had given a well-publicized Metropolitan farewell performance but before Lawrence Tibbett had emerged as the new American operatic celebrity, Otto Kahn received an urgent solicitation from two Kansas City attorneys, Jacob A. Harzfeld and John Harding, to audition a brilliant new singing talent from the Midwest. The fifteen-year-old prodigy, Marion Talley, had reportedly astounded audiences with a precocious performance as Ambroise Thomas's Mignon in the annual summer production of the Kansas City Grand Opera Company.[117] With the additional backing of music critic Minna K. Powell of the Kansas City Star, auditions were arranged with Amelita Galli-Curci and Ernestine Schumann-Heink, both of whom encouraged the young singer.[118] Kahn's acquiescence to a hearing at the Metropolitan was breathlessly covered by the local Missouri press—*Those "Who Know" Will Hear Her Sing*[119]—and Talley travelled to New York to sing for an assemblage including Gatti, Kahn, and four Metropolitan conductors on 8 November 1922. The performance evinced enough promise for Gatti to encourage Talley to remain in the East under his guidance, a development which was accompanied by fervid media attention on the part of New York's

---

117 *Papers Full of Marion,* Kansas City Star, 15 November 1922.

118 *The Story of Marion Talley's Metropolitan Opera Debut as Told by Her* and *From Main Street to Broadway,* Talley press book, Metropolitan Musical Bureau Press Department. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Talley artist file.

119 Kansas City Star, [November] 1922, undated clipping. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Talley artist file.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Herald, World, and Tribune, among others.[120] The young singer was sent to well-known vocal coach Frank LaForge (later the teacher of Tibbett), who worked with Gatti's wife, soprano Frances Alda, and to voice teacher Salvatore Avitabile, who maintained a studio in the Metropolitan complex. The results of Talley's second Metropolitan hearing, eagerly solicited by her tirelessly enthusiastic Kansas City supporters, were reported by Ziegler to Kahn:

> Mr. Gatti was so much encouraged with the improvement that she appeared to have made, and was again so impressed with the natural beauty of the voice, that he had a serious talk with her Italian singing teacher and suggested that Miss Talley concentrate on learning one or two operas, and then sing again for us a year hence, in which time . . . he would then make a definite decision. [121]

Talley spent her study year in Europe, chaperoned by family and drawing on a $10,000 education fund set up by her Kansas City benefactors and partially funded by proceeds from her local appearances in Missouri. Her formal engagement by the Metropolitan in July 1925, which occurred after a third audition at Gatti's summer headquarters in Milan, was no doubt a result of additional progress but also received special impetus from a fresh series of nationalist attacks on the Metropolitan which had appeared in the New York Daily Graphic some months before.[122] Conductor Artur Bodanzky remembered the palpable sense of pressure which attended the situation:

> I was at the audition in Milan when [Talley] was definitely engaged . . . . I had the distinct impression that I had heard a future Patti, but one who still needed a great deal of work and the experience of apprenticeship in small, exacting

---

120 *Papers Full of Marion.*

121 Ziegler to Kahn, 27 March 1924. Kahn Papers, Box 231, Princeton University.

122 It was in response to these attacks that Kahn issued the pamphlet entitled *The Metropolitan Opera: A Statement by Otto H. Kahn* in defense of the management's policies. See Introduction, *n*14.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> companies. I was frightened when Gatti told me that because she was an American he wanted to put her on the front row at once. [123]

Gatti's report to Kahn was frank in admitting the political advantages of the engagement, but the manager balanced this factor against Talley's genuine artistic potential:

> The most important engagement is that of Miss Marion Talley, of Kansas City, who sang for me an excellent audition. I have concluded with her a contract . . . upon the same terms that we granted to Rosa Ponselle . . . seven years ago. These terms are better than those we generally offer to artists making their debut. . . . I would be very much surprised if this young singer who possesses all the qualities to succeed brilliantly should not make a deep impression. . . . I hope that this time we have found a good ace who will make happy also all the nationalistic element. [124]

Gatti's prediction indeed proved correct when the Graphic reminded readers of the role it had played in Talley's rise, shortly after her 17 February 1926 debut as Gilda in Rigoletto:

> Perhaps, when the history of the new American opera is written, this season and a bit of the last [which featured Tibbett's career-launching performance in Falstaff] will be referred to as the turning point, as the time when the American wedge widened to the extent of making itself felt by even the hordes who cannot get standing room in the Metropolitan Opera House. In this achievement The GRAPHIC feels that its campaign for American singers has had a large share.[125]

Even the idealistic Kahn was forced to acknowledge the role that politics had played:

> Even if Marion Talley should turn out, as the majority of the critics and some other benevolent people are good enough to forecast, a lemon, in due course of time, at least she has brought us a few full houses and the opportunity to squelch for some time to come the absurd talk about the Metropolitan not being willing and desirous to give a fair chance to American artists. [126]

---

123 Artur Bodanzky in collaboration with Donald Marshall, *Fourteen Years at the Metropolitan Opera House,* The Saturday Evening Post 202 (26 October 1929): 92.

124 Gatti-Casazza, Milan, to Kahn, 11 September 1925. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, 1925-26, Kahn.

125 Frieda Wyandt, *American Operatic Course Sent Marion Talley to Top,* New York Graphic, 6 March 1926, sec. M, 3.

126 Kahn to Ziegler, 28 February 1926. Kahn Papers, Box 287, Princeton University.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The role of commerce was indeed an undeniable factor, for the Metropolitan was far more than full for the Talley debut. A crowd estimated at some 5,000 gathered in front of the theater on the historic evening, and the tabloid press provided heartwarming accounts of two hundred Missourians arriving by special train from the West: "They are coming all the way from Kansas City on purpose . . . for the greater glory of Kansas City, the new American prima donna and the Stars and Stripes as the flag of opera." The Metropolitan participated in the furor by allowing the diva's father, Charles M. Talley, a telegraph operator for the Missouri Pacific Railroad, to install a wire hookup in the wings, from which vantage point he communicated his impressions directly to the Associated Press. For her part, the young coloratura turned in an admirably poised performance which earned audience adulation, multiple curtain calls, and kind treatment from a large corps of critics. Predictably, however, the press's cordiality did not last, and less than two weeks later Ziegler reported to Kahn that "Miss Talley is standing up very well under her attacks, is keeping her head, and is being counselled by us not to read the newspapers, or if she does, to smile at them. Meanwhile her vogue and drawing power continue, and the public for the greater part . . . is angry at the critics, which attitude of course is of advantage to us."[127]

A press report testified to one source of the trouble: "She has refused famous teachers, relying on her natural voice."[128] One of the spurned teachers was apparently legendary Metropolitan soprano Marcella Sembrich, retired from the stage but still a formidable force in New York musical circles. When the naive Talley rejected Sembrich's proposal to rework her still-rudimentary technique, the young soprano's natural artistic limitations were ruthlessly

---

127 Ziegler to Kahn, Palm Beach, 4 March 1926. Kahn Papers, Box 287, Princeton University.

128 *Home Folks to See Young Diva's Debut,* New York Telegram, 10 February 1926.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

catalogued by a close Sembrich associate, acerbic New York Sun critic William J. Henderson. Henderson, who inveighed frequently against the Metropolitan, may have harbored especial bitterness after Gatti removed Walter Damrosch's Cyrano (1912), for which Henderson had provided an excellent libretto, from the Metropolitan's repertoire after a single season.[129] This interpretation of events was related by soprano Nina Morgana, who sang at the Metropolitan from 1919 to 1935:

> [Henderson] was a very strange man. Very distant and remote, and completely humorless in my experience with him. . . . Henderson was the promoter for [Marcella] Sembrich . . . and when Marion Talley's family didn't want her to study with Sembrich, Mr. Henderson took it out on her in his newspaper columns.
>
> [Talley] was overpromoted, yes . . . [b]ut she cannot be dismissed as someone who was out of her element at the Metropolitan. [130]

The three years of preparation the Metropolitan afforded Talley prior to her debut took a similar period of time to unravel. Other opportunities included Mozart's Queen of the Night and the American premiere of Stravinsky's Le Rossignol, but the singer duplicated her debut success only with the role of Philine in Thomas's Mignon. At the close of the 1928-1929 season Talley stunned the music world by announcing her retirement from the operatic stage in order to return to domestic life on a farm in Colby, Kansas.[131] Sadly, however, the soprano found she could not go home again. Four years later reports surfaced that she had embarked on a study tour in Germany, where she was briefly married to the distinguished pianist Michael Raucheisen (1889-1983), who was nearly twenty years her senior. A 1933 annulment was immediately followed by Raucheisen's remarriage to soprano Maria Ivogün (a teacher of Elisabeth

---

129 Charles Wakefield Cadman's Shanewis (1918) was the first American opera to be retained for a second season.

130 Interview with Nina Morgana, 3 August 1972, Carnegie House, New York City. Typescript, Talley artist file, Metropolitan Opera Archives.

131 *A Parachute Descent From the Operatic Sky,* The Literary Digest 101 (4 May 1929): 24.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Schwarzkopf) and Talley's unsuccessful comeback performance as Gilda with the Chicago Opera. It is unlikely that any overtures to the Metropolitan would have met with success, for by then Gatti had signed Lily Pons to his roster. Talley's second marriage to pianist Adolph Eckstrom in 1935 was announced three weeks before her only child was born.[132] The marriage was dissolved less than five years later, by which time Talley had found some professional success in broadcasting over the NBC network.[133] At twenty-nine, however, Talley found that public interest in her youthful promise had largely evaporated. Fortunately, the reputed several hundred thousand dollars she had netted during her glory years apparently survived the stock market crash, for she settled at length into a comfortably secluded retirement, together with family members, in California.[134]

A journalist who interviewed Talley in later years reported that the soprano's whereabouts were unknown even to her former Kansas City supporters. But the singer had evidently not become embittered by her experiences, for she was photographed before a group of portraits that depicted her in various Metropolitan roles, among which was a prominently placed autographed portrait of Gatti-Casazza. In a philosophical summation, Talley revealed a certain artistic placidity—perhaps a result of her overprotected and limited background—which had characterized her brief career:

---

132 New York Times, 13 April 1935.

133 Talley was unsuccessful in her efforts to gain a similar foothold in film. A 1934 contract with Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer was terminated after an operatic vehicle, Follow Your Heart, met with little success in 1936. That same year, MGM produced the short subject Every Sunday to showcase two new singing talents, Judy Garland and Deanna Durbin. Apparently having lost confidence in the bankability of opera, MGM retained Garland only. Durbin left for Universal Studios and stardom at fifteen, the same age at which Talley had first come to public notice.

134 Talley's manager calculated her net income from 1926 to 1928 at $334,892.17. *Miss Talley's Earnings,* New York Times, 4 February 1928, 2.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> At the end of 10 years of uninterrupted work and study I felt that I had accomplished what was expected of me in music . . . it seemed far better to exit gracefully than gradually to fade out. . . . When something is finished, it is finished! That is how I viewed my association with music. [135]

Despite the failed Talley venture, the decade of the 1920s remained a critical period for emerging American talent at the Metropolitan. Perhaps the most important development to occur was the theater's engagement of singers who had received their entire education and training in the United States. Consequently, a broader segment of the nation's considerable talent pool was revealed. It was a development which could not fail to benefit attempts by American composers to free their music from European dominance as well.

---

[135] Elza Schallert, *Marion Talley Lifts Veil About Her Life*, Los Angeles Times, [1954]. Undated newspaper clipping, Metropolitan Opera Archives, Talley artist file. Talley died on 3 January 1983, and the Prairie Museum of Art and History in Colby, Kansas established a memorial exhibit in her honor.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

CHAPTER 4

THE METROPOLITAN AND MUSICAL STYLE, PART I: 1910-1914

The First Phase of the New American Initiative

It is laudable that the Metropolitan showed no intention of waiting the stipulated two years for the results of its prize competiton before producing its first opera by an American composer, but it is also probable that the directors wished to have more control over the choice of American premiere than the vagaries of a contest might afford them, as the selection of the prize opera was to be entrusted completely to the jury. In addition, the immediate threat posed by Natoma cannot be ignored as a significant contributing factor, but Herbert's biographer somewhat overstated his case when he posited that "[A] new interest . . . evinced in American opera" at the Metropolitan was "undoubtedly the result of the Herbert-Hammerstein activity."[1] As the aborted attempts to place Azara on the Metropolitan's stage show, the implementation of the new American program represented the culmination of nearly five years of effort initiated by Kahn, supported by developing American cultural interests, and finally effected by the strong impetus of capitalist competition.

The first season prospectus that Gatti-Casazza issued at the Metropolitan indicated the new manager's intent to produce an American opera in his opening season:

> An announcement of the utmost importance to American composers is the fact that the management will make a serious attempt this season to give grand opera in English. For this purpose the sole rights have been secured to Frederick S. Converse's The Pipe of Desire.
> . . . . . .

---

[1] Waters, Herbert, 376.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> Inasmuch as in this production American art will be on trial—in a sense—special attention will be paid to all the details of scenery and costumes. . . . It is the earnest hope of the management that this recognition of native talent may provide an impetus to the composers of this country in creating an individual and American school of opera. [2]

During the initial phase of the American production program in the decade spanning 1910-1920, the stylistic elements encompassed by this new American school were the subject of strenuous debate, with the Metropolitan often accused of taking an unnecessarily conservative position. But while the inaugural American production, The Pipe of Desire, did in fact represent a return to the roots of American musical culture with the selection of a product of the Second New England School, succeeding composers were chosen from a wide variety of venues: the comparatively young musical academy; the commercial theater, which included comic opera and operetta; and the nativist school of composers who followed Dvořàk's dictum of utilizing indigenous musical materials.

The tendency to produce works of lesser-known composers was somewhat more apparent in the latter half of the decade, however. The first four Americans to receive Metropolitan productions were all well known in national musical circles and had achieved varying degrees of recognition for their contributions to artistic life. This ostensibly played little part in the selection of Converse and Horatio Parker, whose scores were probably examined with little regard for authorship.[3] Walter Damrosch and Victor Herbert, on the other hand, were

---

[2] Metropolitan Opera House, Season 1908-1909 Prospectus, Metropolitan Opera Archives. The Converse production was subsequently postponed to the latter half of the 1909-1910 season.

[3] Admittedly, the sophisticated profile of Parker's writing was probably apparent to members of the competition jury which awarded Mona the Metropolitan's American opera contest prize. But Loeffler's comment (see chapter 3, *n*85) indicates that the decision, at least in his estimation, was fairly made.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

greatly aided by the interest of Otto Kahn in their work, as well as by their considerable reputations.[4]

FREDERICK SHEPHERD CONVERSE: THE PIPE OF DESIRE

Boston composer Frederick Shepherd Converse (1871-1940) was a true product of the New England group, having studied composition with both its spiritual father, John Knowles Paine, and one of its prominent members, George Whitefield Chadwick.[5] Together with Edward Burlingame Hill (a teacher of Leonard Bernstein at Harvard) and Daniel Gregory Mason, he was considered among the most promising of a new generation of composers born in the 1870s.

Converse was born to an affluent family of New England merchants whose American origins dated from 1630. Sent to Harvard in preparation for a business career, he instead took full advantage of the advanced musical curriculum John Knowles Paine had put in

---

[4] I am indebted throughout this overview to the perceptive analyses provided by James William Glass in *American Opera at the Metropolitan, 1910-1920.*

[5] The emergence of a significant group of American composers centered around Boston during the last quarter of the nineteenth century was formally identified in Rupert Hughes's Contemporary American Composers (Boston: L. C. Page, 1900), 145-266, in which John Knowles Paine, George Whitefield Chadwick, Horatio Parker, and Arthur Foote are collectively discussed as "The Academics"; John Tasker Howard's Our American Music: Three Hundred Years of It (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1931) added Amy Cheney Beach to the list in his discussion of "the Boston Group," 325-47; Gilbert Chase likewise included Charles Martin Loeffler, styling the group "the Boston Classicists" in America's Music: From the Pilgrims to the Present (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1955), 365-82; and H. Wiley Hitchcock's Music in the United States: A Historical Introduction, 3d ed. (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1988) refers to the composers as "the Second New England School," the appellation by which they are commonly known today. Summarized in Richard Crawford, *Edward MacDowell: Musical Nationalism and an American Tone Poet,* Journal of the American Musicological Society 49 (Fall 1996), 528*n*1.

Chadwick's introduction to W. L. Hubbard's History of American Music, The American History and Encyclopedia of Music 4 (Toledo: Irving Squire, 1908), 1-15, identified the New England group as central to a golden age of American music during the 1890s and named Paine, Foote, Parker, Loeffler, MacDowell, Converse, and Arthur Whiting as its principal participants. See Crawford, *MacDowell,* 529*n*2.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

place a decade earlier, graduating in 1893 with highest honors in music.[6] Converse acquired a certain amount of financial independence upon his father's death the following year, although he continued to be involved in educational and business ventures throughout his life. This security afforded him opportunities for study, travel, and time to compose available to comparatively few Americans of his time. After two years of private study with Chadwick, he enrolled in Munich's Königliche Akademie der Tonkunst under Paine's teacher Joseph Rheinberger (1839-1901), an influential but conservative pedagogue who remained aloof from the New German School. Rheinberger's distinuished list of pupils included Humperdinck, Wolf-Ferrari, Chadwick, Horatio Parker, Ludwig Thuille, and the young Fürtwangler.[7] Following the successful completion of his European studies (his Symphony in D minor, op. 7 was performed at a commencement concert), Converse returned to the United States and assumed a significant position in Boston's musical life. Exemplifying the influences of both the New England Classicists and Rheinberger, Converse composed primarily orchestral works in large forms—notably The Mystic Trumpeter (1904), an orchestral fantasy after Whitman—and his music began to appear on programs of the Boston Symphony Orchestra.

Although the young composer lauded his formal training, he was determined to break free of academic influence as his style developed: "Shall strive to breathe a newer, freer air. Have been getting blue; sure sign that radical steps must be taken."[8] This freedom took the

---

6 Robert Joseph Garofalo, *The Life and Works of Frederick Shepherd Converse (1871-1940),* (Ph.D. diss., The Catholic University of America, 1969), 7.

7 Rheinberger's posthumous influence at the Metropolitan was felt most strongly at the inception of Gatti's tenure. During the five seasons from 1909 to 1914, no fewer than seven operas by Rheinberger pupils were produced: Humperdinck's Königskinder, Converse's The Pipe of Desire (both 1910); Ludwig Thuille's Lobetanz (1911); Horatio Parker's Mona (1912); and Wolf-Ferrari's Le donne curiose (1911), Il segreto di Susanna (1912), and L'Amore medico (1914).

8 *Converse Notebook No. 1,* 1, quoted in Garofalo, *Converse,* 14.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

form of impressionistic influences in his music beginning around 1904, when he was composing his first opera, Iolan, or The Pipe of Desire, to a libretto by Boston architect George Edward Barton.[9] French influence in music of the traditionally Germanic Boston Classicists was not a new phenomenon; Gilbert Chase has noted the significant presence of a French school of organist-composers in nineteenth-century New England, at least one result of which was the publication of New England-born, Paris-trained organist Homer A. Norris's Practical Harmony on a French Basis in 1896.[10]

The production of The Pipe of Desire soon after its completion at Jordan Hall of the New England Conservatory of Music, where Converse had been a faculty member from 1900-1902, belied the work's modest origins:

> We had made the little opera as a labor of love, without much thought of its eventual production. Public performance came about through the encouragement of friends and overflowing and perhaps injudicious enthusiasm on our part. . . . It was entirely a home-made affair. [11]

Gatti's decision to negotiate a contract with Converse after having heard of this semi-professional production was described somewhat cryptically in his memoirs and conceals the more circuitous path the new opera must have taken to reach the Metropolitan's stage. Analytical notes

---

9 Garofalo, *Converse,* 28, 153. Garofalo places the appearance of this new stylistic influence around 1905, but dates the period of composition of The Pipe of Desire to October 1904—April 1905. Since the whole-tone pipe motive prevalent throughout the opera is strongly impressionistic in character, Converse's music was apparently evincing French influence at least a year earlier than Garofalo's date.

10 Chase, America's Music, 391-92. Representatives of the French group included Alexandre Guilmant, Charles-Marie Widor, Louis Vierne (a teacher of Nadia Boulanger), Marcel Bonnet, and Marcel Dupré. Converse may have been receptive to the new French influence in part due to his family's lineage, which had been traced to eleventh-century France; the original family surname was Coigneriès. Garofalo, *Converse,* 2.

11 *Frederick S. Converse, Operatic Composer,* The New England Conservatory of Music Bulletin 8 (February 1926): 2, quoted in Garofalo, *Converse,* 28. Converse's remarks were made upon his receipt of the Bispham Medal for the opera in 1926.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

published by the H. W. Gray Company in conjunction with its 1907 edition of the work were prepared by Boston Post music critic Olin Downes, who was a former theory student of Homer Norris as well as a friend of Otto Kahn. That same year, Kahn was entertained by department store magnate Eben D. Jordan (1857-1916), whom he invited to join the Metropolitan's board, during a Boston season given by the touring San Carlo Opera Company managed by British impresario Henry Russell (1871-1937). Anxious to form a permanent opera group for his city, Jordan organized the Boston Opera Company in 1908 with Kahn's support, naming Russell as managing director and Converse as vice president of his board.[12] By the spring of 1908, under the aegis of the new Gatti-Kahn regime, The Pipe of Desire had found its way into collection of American scores taken to Europe for study by a Metropolitan conductor assigned to evaluate them. The Boston Evening Transcript identified the conductor as Gustav Mahler:

> When the new management of the opera house was shaping its policy, last spring, it desired sincerely to mount an opera by an American composer. . . . The choice of the piece was entrusted primarily to Mr. Mahler. . . . When Mr. Mahler return to Europe last April, he carried with him the scores of various operas by American comosers. From these he finally picked "The Pipe of Desire" as most likely to fulfill the plans and meet the standards of the Metropolitan. [13]

The eventual selection of Converse's opera was confirmed by Gatti the following fall and announced for production in the 1908-1909 season prospectus.

---

12 Dizikes, Opera in America, 359-61. Jordan's family had longstanding philanthropic and administrative ties with the New England Conservatory—they funded its superb concert venue Jordan Hall, in which Converse's opera was premiered—and the magnate doubtless recognized in Converse a socially and artistically influential ally. Quaintance Eaton credits Russell, and not Jordan, with originating the idea of a permanent opera group in Boston in The Boston Opera Company (New York: Appleton & Century, 1965), 9.

13 *Mr. Converse's Opera at the Metropolitan,* Boston Evening Transcript, 10 September 1908, quoted in Garofalo, *Converse,* 47.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

It is fascinating to contemplate the effect exerted on the Metropolitan's American plans by the rather unexpected presence of the great Austrian conductor-composer in the role of adjudicator for its first group of scores. A renowned interpreter of Mozart and Wagner, and perhaps the final inheritor of the symphonic mantle of Beethoven, Mahler may have been sympathetic to works like Converse's which bore greater evidence of Germanic than Italianate lineage. While The Pipe of Desire's libretto indeed contains many elements common to Wagnerian music drama, Barton's mythical story actually derives from the Hebrew legend of Lilith, the first wife of Adam who allegedly tempted her husband with the creative force of a sacred pipe she played.[14] Dissatisfied with his lot, Adam seizes the pipe and plays in contravention of God's command, causing his expulsion from Eden; in Barton's scenario, the pipe falls into the hands of a mysterious ruler called the Old One, who plays it in the depths of the forest. Converse's opera opens with an encounter between the Old One (bass), together with members of his supernatural realm (chorus) and another desirous mortal, the peasant Iolan (tenor), on the first day of spring. At first scornful of its power, the impulsive youth seizes the pipe from the Old One and crudely attempts to play it. At length drawing music from the instrument, Iolan experiences an ecstatic vision of his betrothed, Naoia (mezzo-soprano), and calls in exultation for her to join him. Naoia arrives weakened and delirious from her journey through the forest, and the couple sings a rapturous duet, after which the girl collapses and dies at her lover's feet. Iolan rages against God, but is convinced by the Old One to accept spiritual purification for his transgression through the sacrifice of Naoia. The opera concludes with Iolan's death, as the Old One and his realm sing of the lovers' redemption.

---

[14] The derivation of the plot has also been attributed to an American Indian legend.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Barton may have found inspiration for this phantasmagoric plot in the vividly fantastic and mystical poetry of Pre-Raphaelite leader Dante Gabriel Rossetti, whose Eden Bower (1870) encompasses similar themes, but it must have been difficult for operagoers to avoid being reminded of Wotan, Siegfried and Tannhäuser's Elisabeth. It is Converse's admirable score that distinguishes the rather derivative libretto. Although he did not avoid the pervasive influence of Wagnerian music drama on early twentieth-century composers (particularly those who had received training in Germany), Converse did not confine himself to these features, which generally include a through-composed design absent of set "numbers" (in contrast to Paine's Azara), a prominent role given to the large and complex orchestra, and some application of leitmotif principles. The new infusion of impressionistic sonorities and timbres into Converse's Wagner-inspired design is an integral part of The Pipe of Desire and was admired by critic Henry E. Krehbiel, who praised the score's

> more or less melodic [declamation], over a stream of instrumental music which flows on with moments of placid beauty at times and foams in passionate surges in the climaxes. . . . The themes are deftly woven into a fabric which is frequently of exquisite sheen and iridescent beauty. . . . It is predominantly music which betrays the processes of reflection, but much of it is profoundly beautiful, and Mr. Converse's subtle mastery of harmonic and instrumental devices is most admirable. [15]

An example of these qualities is found in the leading motive of the pipe, which is constructed from a four-pitch segment of the whole-tone scale. The pipe motive is anticipated at the beginning of the orchestral prelude shown in example 4.1(a), where the first three pitches of the melody are heard in extended rhythmic values spaced across two measures. The scoring,

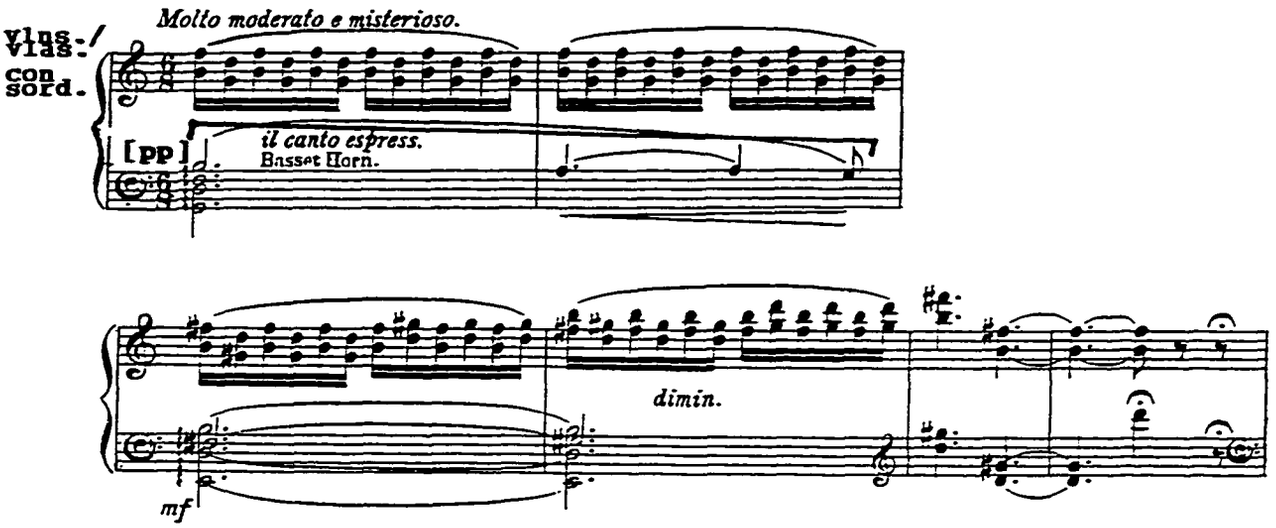
---

[15] *An American Opera at the Metropolitan,* New York Daily Tribune, 19 March 1910, 7, quoted in Garofalo, *Converse*, 53-54. Converse confirmed his admiration of Debussy in an interview shortly after the premiere: "In the musical expression of a mood [Debussy] has gone further than any of his predecessors." *F. S. Converse, American Composer of Grand Opera in English,* New York Daily Tribune, 20 March 1910, 7, quoted in Garofalo, *Converse,* 49.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

reminiscent of Ravel, assigns the motivic fragment to an auxiliary wind instrument, the basset horn, beneath a shimmering tremolo in the upper strings:

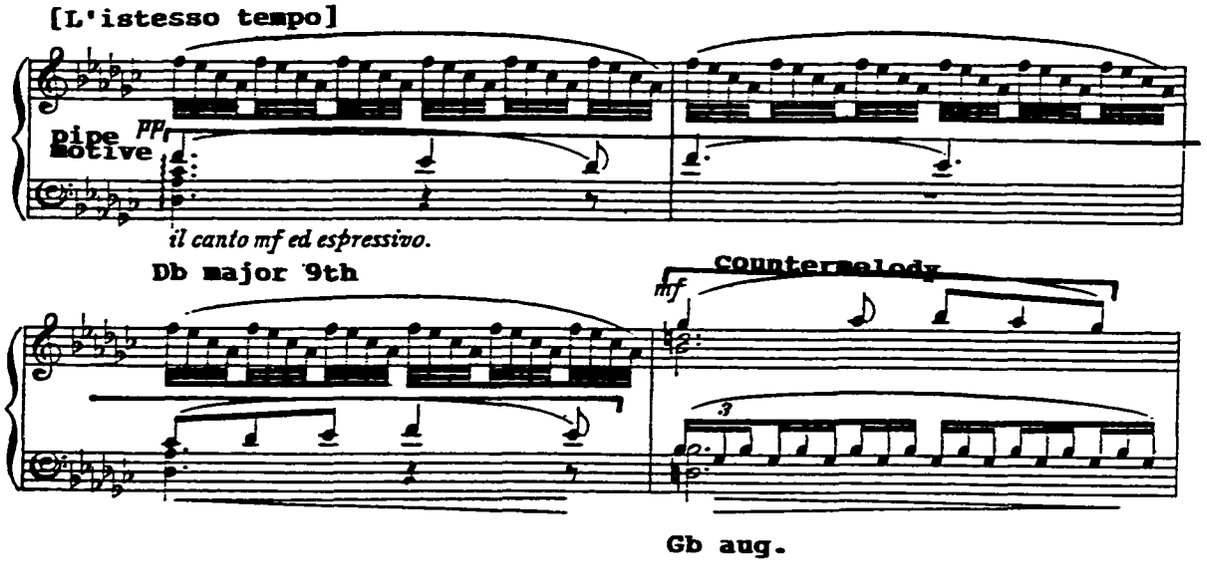
Ex. 4.1(a): Converse, The Pipe of Desire, Prelude, mm. 5-10



For its first complete appearance in the prelude, shown in example 4.1(b), the pipe motive is heard transposed up a tritone—an interval Converse utilizes throughout the score to symbolize man's transgression of sacred law—and in rhythmic diminution which places its initial three tones within the compass of a single measure. The combination of this whole-tone melody, its harmonization by a D♭ major ninth chord followed by an augmented G♭ triad that supports a whole-tone countermelody, and the delicate orchestral color lends an impressionistic tinge to the music:
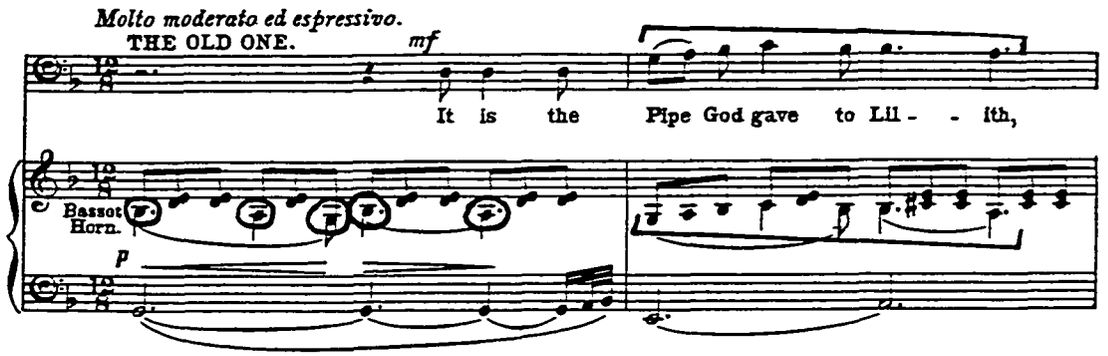
Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Ex. 4.1(b): Converse, The Pipe of Desire, Prelude, mm. 19-22



The pipe leitmotif is subjected to several transformations throughout the opera. The first, shown in example 4.2, occurs at the inception of a narrative by the Old One that describes the pipe's origins. Here, the melody has been recast in the key of D minor and is shared by the instrumental and vocal lines:
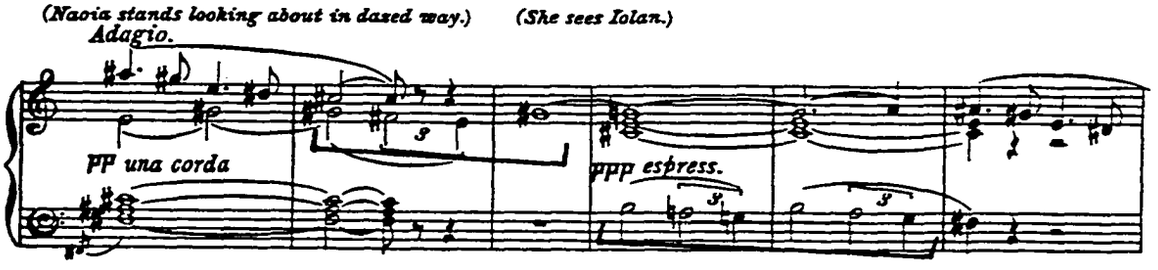
Ex. 4.2: Converse, The Pipe of Desire, piano-vocal score, p. 71



Fragments from the motive transposed to two different pitch levels separated by a major sixth accompany Naoia's entrance in the opera, during a pianissimo adagio orchestral passage that mirrors her delirious emotional state:
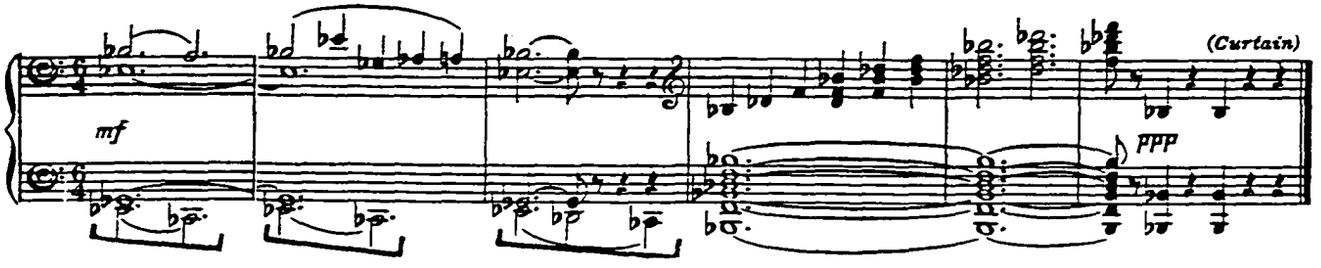
Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Ex. 4.3: Converse, The Pipe of Desire, piano-vocal score, p. 90



At the opera's close, the opening fragment of the motive is first outlined, then stated, by the basses in a dirge following Iolan's death:

Ex. 4.4: Converse, The Pipe of Desire, piano-vocal score, p. 131



Although the inherent beauty and expertise of Converse's orchestration was most probably responsible for Mahler's selection of The Pipe of Desire as the Metropolitan's first American production, Converse maintained that he had given equal attention to his textual settings:

> As the use of English in grand-opera is here somewhat on trial, especial pains have been taken in the first place with the text, in which much attention has been paid to the choice and euphonious arrangement of words, and secondly to the prosody, or setting of the words to musical phrases which shall not cloud, but rather intensify their meaning by proper accentuation and inflection. [16]

---

16 *Converse Notebook No. 1*, 25-28, quoted in Garofalo, *Converse*, 48.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Critical reception to the Metropolitan premiere, which occurred on 18 March 1910,[17] was generally laudatory with respect to the production and Converse's score, but uniformly negative concerning Barton's libretto, whose dramatic stasis throughout the single act of the opera was severely criticized:

> Mr. Converse has accomplished his task with far more skill and certainty of touch than his colleague. His music is not only poetical and often beautiful in itself; it has dramatic force and suggestion, and qualities that fitly characterize the personages of the drama. . . . Mr. Converse in this music . . . is entirely a modern, in his harmonies, in the quality of his invention.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> The opera is a poetical and symbolical interpretation of an idea of ethical, even of philosophical import. Its working out is romantic in form, picturesque and suggestive in its details. But it is far from dramatic in its essence, and it is difficult for the listener to put himself into much sympathy with the characters of the drama, or with the tragedy in which they are involved. . . . They are interesting not chiefly in and of themselves, but for what they stand for, and for their interpretation of the consequences of violated law. [18]

The fact that the opera was premiered on a double bill opposite Pagliacci, a work whose dramatic genius was unequaled even by its own composer, only threw these deficiencies into relief. Yet The Pipe of Desire represented an auspicious musical debut for American composers at the Metropolitan. Gatti later wrote: "I felt that we were on the right path. No national school of opera has ever developed without the incentive of performances."[19] Converse felt similarly: "Press notices of 'The Pipe' a disappointment but not a discouragement. We are bound to write operas in America, just as we have built up great commercial enterprises—they can't stop us."[20]

---

17 Gatti had postponed the premiere by one season in order to allot more production time to the new opera.

18 [Richard Aldrich], *"Pipe of Desire" at the Metropolitan,* New York Times, 19 March 1910, 9.

19 Gatti-Casazza, Memories of the Opera, 237.

20 Converse Diary, 19 March 1910, quoted in Garofalo, *Converse,* 52.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

On the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Gatti regime in 1933, Converse praised the Metropolitan's initiative:

> I wish . . . to express my admiration for [Gatti's] long and efficient management of the Metropolitan Opera Company . . . and especially for his interest and support of the works of American composers.
>
> I have very pleasant recollections of his kindness to me years ago when he produced my opera The Pipe of Desire, and I have always felt deep gratitude to him for the consideration which he showed me. [21]

Although The Pipe of Desire was given only three New York performances, the Metropolitan's imprimatur was felt immediately when the Boston Opera Company scheduled the work as its first American opera (as well as its first production in English) in the 1910-1911 season, together with another opera Converse had recently completed, The Sacrifice. Converse wrote his own libretto for the new work, which may indicate his early awareness of the dramatic problems of the first. Converse's operas played successfully in Boston, although the Indianist plot of The Sacrifice was compared to Victor Herbert's recently produced Natoma, and he was encouraged to team with a more experienced dramatist, playwright Percy MacKaye, for two further projects: Beauty and the Beast (1913; after a story in The Arabian Nights), and The Immigrants (1914), whose gritty Italian-American story mirrors the scenario of his former teacher George W. Chadwick's opera Il Padrone completed two years earlier and rejected by the Metropolitan in 1913. All three works were reportedly under consideration by the Boston Opera, but the company's incipient 1915 bankruptcy and dissolution prevented their production.[22] While

---

[21] Frederick S. Converse, Boston, to Lucrezia Bori, 6 February 1933. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, Season 1932-33, Anniversary.

[22] Bankruptcy was not officially declared until April 1915, but Eben D. Jordan wrote to Kahn on 19 November 1914: "As you know, the Boston Opera Company has been obliged to give up its season on account of the bad financial conditions here." Kahn Papers, Box 35, Princeton University.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the stage premiere of Il Padrone was finally given in 1997 by the New England Conservatory—the same entity that had premiered The Pipe of Desire—Converse's two later operas remain unproduced.

No further stagings of The Pipe of Desire can be documented despite indications that the immediate prospects of the work and its composer were clearly optimistic. In 1911 Converse was offered the full professorship at Harvard formerly held by John Knowles Paine.[23] And the publication of The Pipe of Desire's full orchestral score by the H. W. Gray Company was arguably the first of an American opera to be published in the United States, despite claims of Victor Herbert's Madeleine for this honor,[24] according the work and its composer a seminal position in American opera history.[25]

---

[23] Converse had taught at Harvard from 1903 before resigning to devote himself to composition in 1907. Paine's position had remained vacant after his 1905 retirement from the faculty. Garofalo, *Converse,* 74.

[24] Edward Hagelin Pearson, *Victor Herbert's "Madeleine,"* Opera Quarterly 13 (Summer 1997): 67; Howard T. Bailey, *Herbert's Day,* Opera News 28 (25 January 1964): 7.

[25] The full orchestral score of Iolan, or The Pipe of Desire cannot be definitively dated, as the only date which appears on the original edition is the legend "copyright 1908 by The H. W. Gray Co." on the first page of music. An undocumented assertion of a 1908 publication date appears in the score's sole reprint edition, as well as the statement that a German translation included in the score was made "probably to satisfy those in the opera world who believed English was not suited to opera" (Martha Furman Schleifer and Sam Dennison, eds., *American Opera and Music for the Stage, Early Twentieth Century,* vol. 6, Three Centuries of American Music [Boston: G. K. Hall, 1990], Introduction, xx). The latter assertion is unlikely, as the language into which most English operas were translated to gain social respectability was Italian (e.g., Fry's Leonora and Bristow's Rip Van Winkle).

Nevertheless, a number of factors argue in favor of publication fairly soon after the date copyright was secured. The new German translation prepared by Charles Henry Meltzer affirms Converse's documented intent, beginning in 1907, to promote the opera in the German theatrical system: "[German conductor Karl] Muck offered to take my scores to Berlin. Very friendly of him to do so, and what I have long desired." Converse Diary, 8 May 1907, quoted in Garofalo, *Converse,* 45. The composer sailed for Europe in late 1908 to "try for European success," and in January 1909 signed a contract with Harmonie Verlag to publish a German edition of the opera in conjunction with a planned production in Munich. These plans did not materialize, however, and the publication by H. W. Gray of the orchestral score including Meltzer's translation may have been an attempt to revive interest before it flagged permanently. Such an attempt would have been

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Early Effects of the Metropolitan's American Initiative

Once the Metropolitan had publicly thrown its hat into the American ring, events began to move more swiftly—less than two weeks after the debut of The Pipe of Desire, Gatti-Casazza scheduled an audition of Victor Herbert's Natoma. The composer himself conducted the theater's orchestra in a reading of the second act on 29 March 1910, despite Hammerstein's claims to the work.[26] As a remnant of the moribund Hammerstein regime, however, the opera was already at somewhat of a disadvantage, and Gatti showed little interest. It is unlikely that Hammerstein's threats to protect his interests with an injunction dissuaded the Metropolitan, for the Manhattan Opera House buy-out deal was consummated with Arthur Hammerstein less than two weeks later. Rather, it seems fairly certain that, over and above the politics of the situation, Gatti did not like the opera enough to produce it. He did, however, reluctantly allow Andreas Dippel to bring the Philadelphia-Chicago Grand Opera Company's premiere production of it to the Metropolitan Opera House on a rental basis during the 1910-1911 season. While it was common for the management to rent the auditorium to approved events on its dark nights as a substantial source of non-production revenue, the Natoma arrangement was most probably championed by the astute Kahn—first, as a consolation prize to placate the potentially troublesome Dippel and his erstwhile supporters among the Morgan boxholder faction; and second, as a hedge against the

---

unlikely to be delayed significantly past the opera's 1910 Metropolitan and 1911 Boston premieres, and almost certainly not past 1914, the year of Madeleine's publication in full score by G. Schirmer.

26 *To Hold Herbert to His Contract: Hammerstein Says He Will Not Let Metropolitan Company Produce "Natoma,"* Musical America 11 (9 April 1910): 5. As no mention was made of the participation of any singers, it appears that only the orchestral score was heard.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

very real possibility of Herbert's opera achieving a major success. In that case, the Metropolitan would want to minimize the embarrassment of having rejected the work.[27]

Gatti may have declined Natoma confident in the knowledge that he had indeed scheduled a major American event at the Metropolitan for the following season. The world premiere of Puccini's La Fanciulla del West (after the play of David Belasco, who assisted in the operatic staging), which occurred on 10 December 1910 with the composer in attendance, was the fruit of the manager's 1908 European sojourn in search of new repertoire with which to combat Hammerstein.[28] The first world premiere in Metropolitan history thus went to an Italian rather than an American opera. The premiere of Puccini's ersatz Western did, however, prove to be a glittering "American" affair, despite the fact that its three principal roles were cast with Europeans: Emmy Destinn sang Minnie, Pasquale Amato was the sheriff Jack Rance and Caruso was given the tenor lead of Dick Johnson. Although the opera ultimately never achieved the status of a repertoire staple at the Metropolitan nor at any other theater, it has received numerous revivals, albeit at infrequent intervals.

Puccini was apparently more sanguine about Fanciulla's American reception early in its production history, for an intriguing New York Times item from December 1912 revealed that he had decided to compose another "American" opera at the behest of the enterprising Aborn brothers, who were operating their own opera company on the site of the failed New Theater on Central Park West with Kahn's support.[29] A special report from Ithaca,

---

27 As no specific documentation on the matter has yet surfaced, it remains impossible to substantiate the Metropolitan's true motivation for its actions surrounding the rejection of Natoma.

28 See Introduction, *n*9.

29 In 1902, Milton and Sargent Aborn founded the Aborn English Opera Company, which performed at various theaters in New York City during its early history. By 1913, the Aborns entered into a joint venture with the Metropolitan and the City Club of New York to produce popularly priced

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

New York contained the startling news that Puccini had "decided to compose a new American opera, and has announced that he probably would choose as his librettist an American college student," and that, seeking "fresh ideas and novel execution," he had "invited the undergraduates of Cornell University to write a libretto for his next American work."[30] As American composers had already learned during the preceding decades, however, the prolonged search for a suitable English libretto was not likely to be fulfilled by an inexperienced dramatist, and the tantalizing prospect of a second Puccini American opera obviously never came to fruition.

The burgeoning American opera scene was further enlivened, albeit briefly, in 1912 by the return of Oscar Hammerstein, who resurfaced in New York after his London Opera House failed in 1911. Apparently the British experience was not completely lost on the intrepid producer, for he announced a new-found desire to give opera in English at popular prices in New York if only the Metropolitan would grant him a release from his non-competition agreement to do so.[31] Whether or not Hammerstein had a sincere interest in assisting American composers— he announced plans to begin with European repertory staples in English translation before turning to operas originally composed in the language—the New York public never had a chance to discover, as Gatti-Casazza resolutely opposed his board's granting Hammerstein any easement in his restricted powers. Hammerstein fought back by invoking the Sherman Anti-Trust Act, but the

---

opera at the Century Theater, a reincarnation of the Met-supported New Theater which failed in 1910. Opening with Aida on 15 September 1913, the principally opera-in-English company enjoyed some success but was forced to disband after two seasons, due to financial problems exacerbated by unwise management decisions and the onset of World War I. Glass, *American Opera*, 26-28.

30 *Wants Cornell Libretto; Puccini Asks Collegians to Write Book for American Opera,* New York Times, 3 December 1912, 15.

31 *New Hammerstein House,* New York Times 25 November 1912, 13.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Appellate Division of the Supreme Court of New York ultimately found for the Metropolitan.[32] The impresario died in August 1919 shortly before his enforced ban expired.

While the Metropolitan's 1911-1912 season promised the production of the long-awaited prize opera, its season prospectus announced yet another American premiere: Arthur Nevin's Twilight, later retitled The Daughter of the Forest.[33] Although today Nevin is chiefly remembered as the brother of Ethelbert Nevin, a pianist and composer who authored the popular sentimental songs "The Rosary" and "Mighty Lak' a Rose," Arthur Nevin had achieved considerable notice when his Indianist opera Poia caused a political uproar during its 1910 stage premiere at the Royal Opera House in Berlin.[34] The strong nationalist sentiment of pre-World War I Germany which erupted at the 23 April 1910 performance was reported on the front page of the New York Times the following morning:

> Red blooded American enthusiasm was pitted against stubborn German stolidity at the close of the first production of Arthur Nevin's Indian grand opera "Poia" at the Royal Opera House to-night. For ten minutes the auditorium rocked with the most remarkable counter-demonstrations of approval and disapproval a Berlin premiere has ever evoked. [35]

Further reports testified to the presence of considerable bias against American artists in Germany:

---

32 *Hammerstein Loses Appeal,* The Musical Advance 1 (May 1914): 10.

33 Metropolitan Opera Company, Season 1911-1912 Prospectus, Metropolitan Opera Archives. Excepting the case of the one-act operas The Legend and The Temple Dancer, which were premiered as part of a triple bill with Shanewis, the Metropolitan never again planned two American premieres in a single season. Although Richard Hageman's Caponsacchi and Walter Damrosch's The Man Without a Country were both premiered during the Edward Johnson management's spring supplementary season of 1937, Hageman's opera was originally planned for the inaugural spring season of 1936 but postponed due to "practical difficulties." Ruby Mercer, The Tenor of His Time: Edward Johnson of the Met (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, 1976), 194.

34 Nevin had spent four student years in Berlin, where he studied composition with Humperdinck. Poia was published in 1909 by Adolph Fürstner, the publisher of Richard Strauss.

35 *Greet "Poia" With Cheers and Hisses,* New York Times, 24 April 1910, 1.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> The unanimity of the intemperate comment leaves no doubt that it, as well as last night's hissing, was intended primarily as a concerted demonstration against the "Americanization" of the Kaiser's operatic stage.
>
> The permanent employment of six Americans in stellar positions at the leading German Court opera has long rankled in local breasts, and the Kaiser has for the past six years been under constant fire for "introducing international politics into operatic affairs." The acceptance of an American opera for the royal stage, after a hearing had been refused to modern German composers with the exception of Strauss, simply added insult to injury. [36]

The display of ultra-nationalist sentiment was not a new event at the Berlin Opera. Karl Muck, Poia's conductor, had in fact incited a similar incident eight years before when he accepted British composer Ethel Smyth's (1858-1944) Der Wald for production at the same theater: "There had been slight hissing when the curtain went up, but *before* it went down finally, organised booing and cat-calls broke out simultaneously in three different parts of the house."[37]

Although demonstrations of the sort endured by Smyth and Nevin were, by all accounts, distressingly unwelcome, it cannot be denied that the notoriety they experienced abroad increased their popularity at home. Covent Garden's decision to stage Der Wald occurred so soon after the Berlin incident that the opera's last scheduled performance in Germany had to be cancelled in order to transfer the orchestra parts to London in time for rehearsals. And the interest Nevin generated at home after the American press reported he had been "tomahawked" by the Berlin critics[38] extended as far as the Metropolitan, which evidently gave some consideration to Poia—the libretto as well as the piano and orchestral scores were being held in

---

36 *"Poia" Denounced by Berlin Critics; Really a Hit at the Kaiser,* New York Times, 25 April 1910, 9.

37 Ethel Smyth, What Happened Next (London: Longmans, 1940), quoted in White, English Opera, 357.

38 *Poem Speeds Home Composer of "Poia,"* New York Times, 8 May 1910, sec. 3, 4.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

its safe as late as 1919[39]—before announcing Twilight for production in 1911. But in a curiously unexplained case, the one-act psychological drama, which depicts the torment of a girl whose lover has been called to the Civil War battlefield, was "cast and put into rehearsal, but through a misunderstanding not produced," according to Hipsher.[40] The opera was taken up several years later by the Chicago Opera Association, then in vigorous competition with the Metropolitan, and produced with the composer conducting on 5 January 1918. As the Metropolitan had guaranteed only a minimum royalty payment, it was able to extricate itself from its contract with Nevin for two hundred dollars.[41]

HORATIO PARKER: MONA

Few musical observers were surprised when Horatio Parker (1863-1919), a central member of the Second New England School, was announced as the winner of the Metropolitan's $10,000 prize contest on 3 May 1911 by a unanimous vote of the jury.[42] The forty-eight-year-old musician had achieved a reputation as one of America's leading composers, particularly for his choral works, and had been a professor at Yale University for nearly two decades, where he counted among his students the young Charles Ives.

As a New Englander who received advanced musical training in Germany, Parker's background and training paralleled that of Converse. Parker was born in Auburndale, Massachusetts to an educated family that traced its lineage to seventeenth-century English

---

39 *Scores in Safe, 24 May 1919,* Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, 1919-20, Composers.

40 Hipsher, American Opera, 342.

41 Royalty contract between the Metropolitan Opera Company and Arthur Nevin, 9 February 1911, Metropolitan Opera Archives.

42 Henry E. Krehbiel, More Chapters of Opera (New York: H. Holt & Company, 1919), 169-71, quoted in Glass, *American Opera*, 69.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

colonists. His mother, the daughter of a minister, supervised his musical education and later provided texts for many of his works. Parker secured his first professional position as a church organist in 1880 and became one of George Whitefield Chadwick's first composition students shortly thereafter. Chadwick's description of his student ironically reminds one of Ives: Parker demonstrated "remarkable facility in harmony and modulation," but was "impatient of the restrictions of musical form and rather rebellious of the discipline of counterpoint and fugues. His lessons usually ended with his swallowing his medicine, but with many a wry grimace."[43] Nevertheless, the two formed a lasting friendship, engaging in musical and intellectual discourse throughout their lives.

In 1882 Parker's first published pieces appeared when his Three Songs were accepted by Arthur P. Schmidt of Boston, who published early compositions of Arthur Foote the same year. Parker was also planning a European sojourn in order to continue his training abroad. Chadwick's recommendation of Liszt disciple Joachim Raff, a teacher of Edward MacDowell, at Frankfurt's Hoch Conservatory was aborted by Raff's death, and Parker instead followed the path of Paine and Converse to Rheinberger in Munich. There he turned to choral writing, perhaps inspired by the elaborate cathedral services he had the opportunity to attend in the Bavarian capital. Rheinberger's rather overbearing reputation as a conservative taskmaster did not, however, result in a dominant German influence on either Parker or his pupils. In an 1893 interview, Parker described his German training as "a development of the seeds sown by his American teachers which contained most of the germs of art truth"; he later encouraged several

---

[43] William K. Kearns, Horatio Parker, 1863-1919: His Life, Music and Ideas (Metuchen, New Jersey: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1990), 3-6.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

of his students at Yale, including Douglas Moore and David Stanley Smith, to study composition in France.[44]

Returning to the United States, Parker found employment as a church musician and teacher, culminating in an 1892 appointment to the faculty of the National Conservatory of Music in New York, which coincided with Antonín Dvořàk's arrival as director. Although Parker's contact with Dvořàk was minimal and his music shows no evidence of the nativist elements advocated by the new director, he did win one of the Conservatory's prize competitions adjudicated by Dvořàk with a cantata for tenor solo and chorus, The Dream-King and His Love, op. 131.[45] It was his next choral work, the oratorio Hora Novissima, which established Parker's reputation as one of America's leading composers when it was premiered in 1893. In 1894, he was offered the sole music professorship at Yale vacated by the retirement of Gustave Stoeckel. Parker's position as Battell Professor of Music until his death in 1919 secured for him, as it had for Paine at Harvard, an influential voice in American musical life.[46]

Parker turned increasingly to dramatic forms in his music after the success of Hora Novissima. A second oratorio, The Legend of Saint Christopher (1898), written on a commission from the Oratorio Society of New York and premiered under Walter Damrosch in 1898, is notable for its use of leitmotifs and fluid orchestral connections between sections.[47] Elements of these techniques resurfaced when Parker began to compose Mona, his first opera, as a direct result of the Metropolitan's competition announcement. Parker confirmed that he had

---

[44] Ibid., 6-9.

[45] Parker was later severely criticized in the Baltimore Sun for apparently asserting, in a March 1897 lecture at the Peabody Conservatory, that America had no indigenous music. Ibid., 40.

[46] Ibid., 23.

[47] Ibid., 40.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

been contemplating an opera and had selected Brian Hooker, a Yale English professor and rising literary talent, to write the libretto, but Hooker took no action on the project until the Metropolitan's announcement, delivering a scenario to the composer in February 1909.[48] Although Hooker was as inexperienced in writing for the operatic stage as was Parker, the independent publication of his libretto some six months in advance of Mona's 14 March 1912 Metropolitan premiere elicited high praise for its literary merit and poetic elegance, raising hopes for an improvement in dramaturgy over The Pipe of Desire.[49]

Hooker's plot has often been compared to that of Bellini's Norma, but apart from its central romance between a Druid princess and a Roman soldier, the similarity has been overstated. Romantic tales of antiquity were much in vogue at the time Hooker wrote his scenario; in addition, Glass has mentioned the improbability of the librettist's knowledge of Bellini's opera, as it was largely out of favor during his lifetime.[50] Parker's opera is set in southwestern Britain, the seat of the Druid religion during Roman rule, in the first century A.D. Its plot concerns the dilemma of the princess Mona (dramatic mezzo), who must choose between her love for Quintus, known to the Britons as Gwynn (tenor)—son of the Roman governor (baritone) and an advocate for peaceful compromise between the two peoples—and loyalty to the Britons (chorus), who have vowed to vanquish the Roman invaders in a secret rebellion. In this

---

48 Ansonia (Connecticut) Evening Sentinal, 13 March 1912, Horatio Parker Papers, IV E 1, Yale University, quoted in Kearns, Parker, 60.

49 Arthur Farwell was among the admirers of Hooker's libretto, declaring that the poet had "in this work aimed so squarely at the right mark that the opportunity should not be allowed to pass without signalizing the event by special comment before the music has engaged the attention of the public." Farwell, *The Poem of "Mona,"* Musical America 15 (3 February 1912): 13.

50 Glass, *American Opera*, 80. The Metropolitan first performed Norma in 1890 in a German version with Lilli Lehmann, then did not stage the opera again until 1927, when it was revived in Italian for Rosa Ponselle.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

central conflict between love and patriotism the work is most reminiscent of Aida; in contrast to the Ethiopian princess, however, Mona rejoices when her countrymen, who revere her as a descendant of the legendary warrior queen Boadicea, persuade her to place duty over love. On the eve of the rebellion, Mona is approached by Gwynn, and during a rapturous duet she is tempted to pledge herself to her lover's cause. But when he reveals his Roman identity, she rejects him violently. Having used his influence to save the rebels from Roman persecution, Gwynn is helpless when they actually mount an unsuccessful assault. When he shows his devotion to Mona, who has survived the battle, she falsely accuses him of treachery by revealing the plan of the Briton attack and stabs him to death as he embraces her. In a closing monologue as she is led away to imprisonment, the princess recognizes the fateful decision to renounce her love—and thus her womanhood—as the catalyst of the tragic events which have befallen her people.

Parker identified three artistic goals in his setting of this somber story: a striving for more effective drama, attention to vocal declamation, and more eloquent orchestral expression.[51] He had already rejected Italian opera's suave popularity in favor of developments in Germany and France, naming Salome and Pelléas et Mélisande as the most significant modern works and commenting that in both, "the voices declaim; the orchestra sings."[52] However, those who had admired Converse's impressionistic influences were not destined to find them in the music of Parker, who called the six-tone scale and the augmented triad derived from it—both of which are prominent in The Pipe of Desire—"a definite negation of tonality or the key sense,"

---

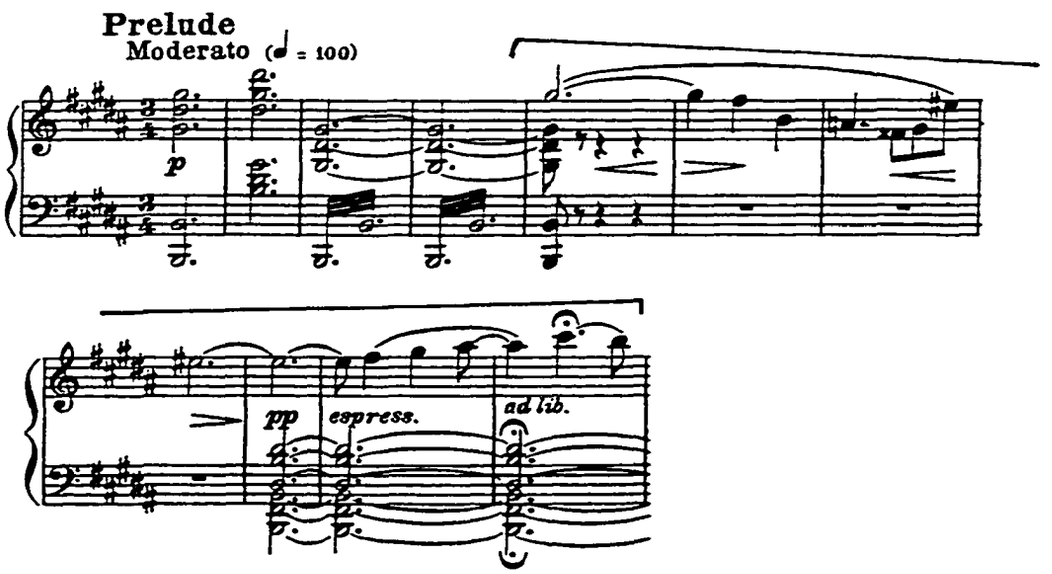
51 *French Opera* (1916), Horatio Parker Papers, V C 35/11, Yale University, quoted in Kearns, Parker, 148.

52 *Contemporary Music* (1909), Horatio Parker Papers, V C S/C7, Yale University, quoted in Kearns, Parker, 147.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

and rejected the French idea of an ambiguous tonality as "the quasi-unitarian noncredo of the modern musical Voltaires."[53] Rather, Mona's score is a dense fabric of leitmotifs (over fifty in the composer's estimation, although he discouraged theorists from focusing on their identification too closely in analysis) linked and interwoven in a tonally fluid post-Romantic harmonic language which has provoked comparison with the French Wagner champion Vincent D'Indy (1851-1931).[54] Parker achieved his goal of orchestral expression most fully with the working out of this technique in the opening Prelude, one of the most impressive sections of the score. After a quiet four-measure introduction, Parker introduces a motive that represents Mona in her relationship to Gwynn, a chromatic melody that describes a lyrical arc throughout its wide span:

Ex. 4.5: Parker, Mona, Act I, Prelude, mm. 1-11



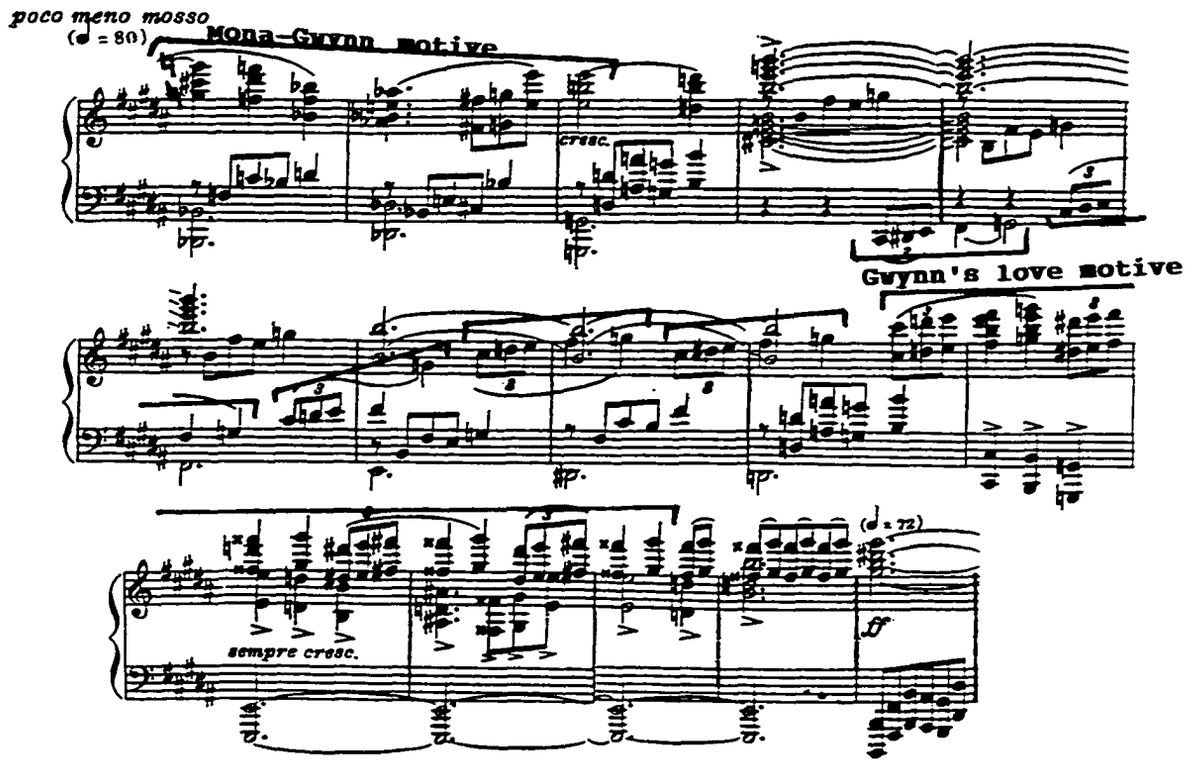
53 John van Broekhoven, *"Mona," The American Prize Opera: A Thematic Analysis*, The Musical Observer 6 (April 1912): 27. Despite Parker's comments, he does stretch the listener's sense of tonality strongly throughout Mona, in part by associating different characters with discrete key areas (a strategy utilized three years earlier by Strauss in Elektra). Kearns's analysis resolves the paradox by concluding that while many progressive and idiosyncratic harmonic features exist at the surface level, they are usually supported by traditional tonal functions among the larger sections. William Kearns, *Horatio Parker's "Mona": Its Place in the Composer's Career and in American Opera*, The Sonneck Society Newsletter 6 (Fall 1980): 12.

54 Richard Korn, *Mona's Master*, Opera News 28 (11 January 1964): 7.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The strong Wagnerian impression created by the expressive chromaticism of this melodic gesture, redolent of the Prelude to Tristan and Isolde, is heightened upon its link to Gwynn's yearning love motive (shown in Example 4.6), whose insistently rising chromatic melody intensifies upon each reiteration in the manner of the Liebestod:

Ex. 4.6: Parker, Mona, Act I, Prelude, mm. 68-82
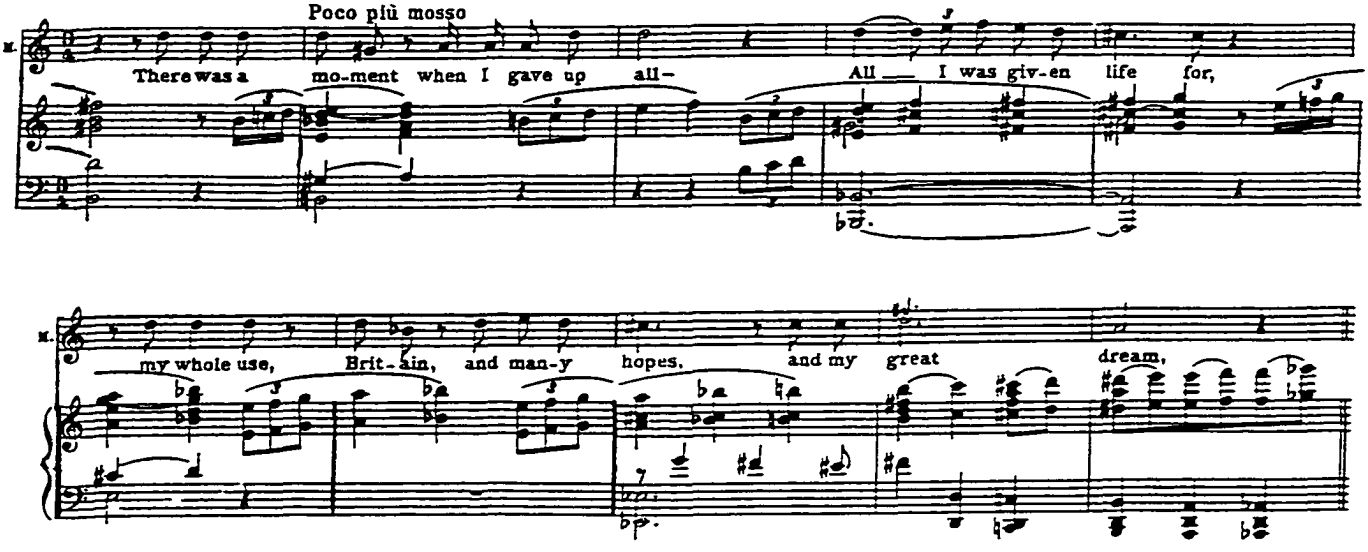


It is when Parker overlays this impressive orchestral fabric with vocal declamation that the score often loses its momentum. Hooker's blank verse, which utilized frequent changes of meter and phrase length, provided for considerable rhythmic flexibility in the vocal lines, and Parker's attention to scansion and prosody in setting the English language is indeed skillful. But the composer adhered so strongly to the nuances and accents of the verse in pitch and rhythm, which necessitated frequent rests, that he often inhibited a sense of melodic expansiveness, especially when the vocal line is subservient to the orchestra, as is often the case

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

in the score. One such example is Mona's Act 3 renunciation of her love for Gwynn, shown in example 4.7, where her vocal line is accompanied by ascending orchestral statements of Gwynn's Tristan-like love motive:

Ex. 4.7: Parker, Mona, Act III, piano-vocal score, p. 219



Here, Mona's lines circle around the pitch D, producing movement without any sense of specific direction or goal. Although there are moments when Parker allows a more sustained lyricism with a greater sense of culmination in the phrases, as in the Act 2 love duet, the score is dominated by the type of vocal writing seen in the above example, in which the singers' lines function not as independent melodic entities but as complements to the orchestral fabric. Although this strategy is a hallmark of Wagnerian music drama, in Parker's hands it becomes rather tedious.[55]
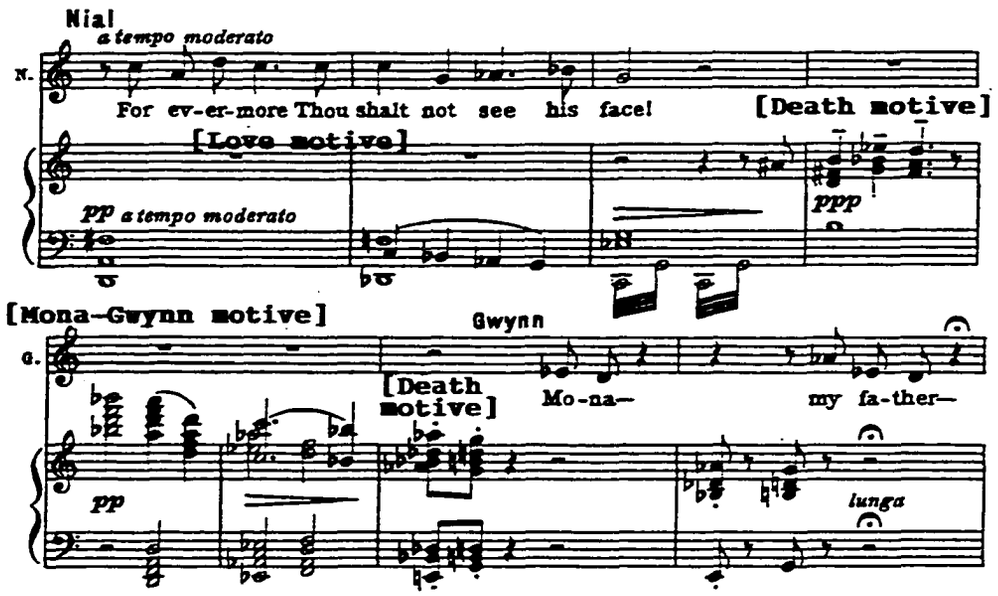
---

55 Glass, *American Opera*, 81-82. On this point, critic Herbert F. Peyser commented: "The American has been all too easily blinded in his belief that the vocal writing of Wagner, the free recitative merging occasionally into broad arioso, is easy to copy. He has neglected to observe its underlying principles—consider the awkward, ungainly vocal parts of "Mona" and the "Pipe." *American Opera To-Day Still A Hypothetical Institution*, Musical America 18 (26 July 1913): 28.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Parker was hindered as well by his adherence to the many leitmotifs, the rapid succession of which at times gives the impression of a disconnected mosaic rather than a developed continuity as in Wagner. Glass cites the final moments of Gwynn's death scene:

Ex. 4.8: Parker, Mona, Act III, piano-vocal score, p. 235



Broekhoven also criticized these static juxtapositions: "Another phase of this music is its lack of movement. . . . The interest which a counterpointic weaving of motives brings about, as in Wagner's Tristan, is . . . lacking in this opera."[56] Moreover, Hooker's scenario, which ultimately did not play as well as it read, was subjected to dramatic criticism in the press similar to that directed at The Pipe of Desire:

> It is undramatic and especially . . . it has little fitness for development and elucidation by music. To begin with, too little happens upon the stage for long stretches of time together. There is too much discussion of a political and religious nature, too much narrative of what has happened and is expected to happen, and too little that actually does happen. [57]

---

56 Broekhoven, *"Mona" Analysis*, 28.

57 [Richard Aldrich], *"Mona," Prize Opera, Warmly Greeted*, New York Times, 15 March 1912, 9.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Nevertheless, the overall discipline, austerity and technical workmanship of Parker's sophisticated score made Mona one of the most admired operas of the initial period of the Metropolitan's American program, and one frequently mentioned as worthy of revival. The critic Paul Rosenfeld emerged as a staunch champion ("The great American opera remains *Mona*"), and advocated a Metropolitan revival after a 1935 performance of concert excerpts by the New Haven Symphony again revealed the opera's undisputed power.[58] Although the Metropolitan never revived the work, a 1961 Carnegie Hall concert presentation of several substantial excerpts introduced Mona's score to a new generation of listeners. While the New York Times once again praised Parker's unquestioned musical competence, its critic found the shadow of the work's Wagnerian heritage overpowering:

> "Mona," as we discovered, is a most Wagnerian opera. . . . Alas, though, there was the fact that Wagner got there first in almost every point it touched—and this includes the type of orchestral sound and the melodic contours, as well as the details of plot and the types of situations. [59]

The evening's conductor, Parker champion Richard Korn, contributed some perceptive commentary on the piece:

> Parker built inventively and well, but the calculations and climaxes so clear on paper seldom come to life in performance to grip the audience as they should. Expressiveness is there, but perhaps it is too patrician, too austere and rarefied, for real opera. A massive scoring, which could profitably be reduced, does not help viability; somehow the orchestra does not gleam, brood or thunder in proportion to its army of players. Here again, the composer's mind and heart were too nobly fixed on musical content to allow much indulgence in effect or color. [60]

---

58 Rosenfeld, *"Maria Malibran" and "Mona,"* The New Republic 83 (19 June 1935): 167.

59 Ross Parmenter, *Orchestra of America Plays,* New York Times, 23 February 1961, 30.

60 Korn, *Mona's Master,* 7. Korn additionally may have been limited by his own abilities and by inadequate orchestral rehearsal time for the challenging score.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

These sentiments were shared by Gatti, who gave Mona only a single season at the Metropolitan, expressing disappointment in the prize opera on the grounds of its primarily intellectual rather than visceral appeal. Although the manager's impressions were similar to those later expressed by Korn, he was perhaps too harsh in his judgment that Parker's erudition precluded true artistry:

> [Mona] was not a great success, although there was the *réclame* that usually attends these premières. Essentially this opera is a cold and arid thing.
>
> Parker was a learned musician, but not a man of the theatre. He did not possess creative power, and, moreover, had a libretto that was certainly too gray and only faintly interesting. For this reason his opera failed to win success or popularity.
>
> He was not an artist, deep down in his soul. He was simply a cerebral, a pedagogue. And from conversations I had with him I could not help but be convinced that he believed himself on the right road and that he considered the public mistaken. [61]

Parker indeed remained undaunted, and three years later even won another $10,000 prize, that of the National Federation of Music Clubs—whose contest may have been inspired by the Metropolitan's paradigm—for his second opera, Fairyland. The work was premiered in Los Angeles in July 1915 as part of festivities celebrating the new Panama Canal and included young California baritone Lawrence Tibbett in its cast, but, as in the case of Mona, it received no further stagings.

WALTER DAMROSCH: CYRANO

A departure from the Wagnerian model was achieved with the Metropolitan's third American production choice. Despite making his professional conducting debut under the German repertoire regime of his father, Leopold Damrosch, and the subsequent formation of his own Damrosch Opera Company for the specific purpose of promoting Wagner's music dramas

---

[61] Gatti-Casazza, Memories of the Opera, 238.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

across America, Walter Damrosch (1862-1950) proved to be an eclectic composer. Cyrano, his second opera, exemplifies the variety of influences he absorbed during his education in America.

Only nine years old when his family left Germany for the United States in 1871, Damrosch inherited the prodigious energy and resourcefulness of his father. While still in his twenties, he was instrumental in persuading Andrew Carnegie to finance the construction of Carnegie Hall and was part of the successful effort to bring Tchaikovsky to New York for its 1891 inaugural concerts. Like Leopold, Walter preferred the excitement of performance to the relentness rigor of composition and became one of the best known conductors of his era. An early champion of American composers such as John Alden Carpenter, Charles Martin Loeffler, Daniel Gregory Mason and Deems Taylor, Damrosch later conducted the premiere of Gershwin's An American in Paris and subsequently commissioned, through the New York Symphony Society, his Concerto in F.[62]

Given his extensive experience in the theater, it seemed inevitable that Damrosch should turn to opera composition. For his first effort in the genre, he secured the assistance of Nathaniel Hawthorne's son-in-law George Parsons Lathrop as librettist for The Scarlet Letter. So in thrall was the young composer to the spell of Wagner, however, that the three-act work was described by Anton Seidl as "a New England Nibelung trilogy." Although Damrosch later conceded the truth of Seidl's assessment, he was confident he could break free of the "overwhelming influence."[63] He was also becoming a strong advocate of opera in English, a cause he would support throughout his life: his 1935 Golden Jubilee celebration at the

---

62 Amerigrove, s.v. *Walter (Johannes) Damrosch*, by H. C. Colles and R. Allen Lott.

63 Damrosch, My Musical Life, 116.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Metropolitan featured the third act of Die Meistersinger in his own English translation, with the evening's program bearing the credo: "Mr. Damrosch strongly believes in Opera-in-English."[64]

Perhaps it is fitting that his second attempt at opera would provoke some comparison to Wagner's only comedy. Damrosch chose to set Edmond Rostand's tremendously popular 1897 play Cyrano de Bergerac, which had already been subjected to musical treatment by Victor Herbert in an unsuccessful burlesqued version made at the request of comedian Francis Wilson in 1899.[65] Neither composer, nor anyone else who translated the work into English, had the playwright's approval, but a court ruling determined that Rostand had failed to secure copyright protection in the United States. Damrosch, undeterred by Rostand's enmity—or perhaps encouraged by the lack of competition, for Rostand had steadfastly refused to allow any French composer to set his play—announced that he would split his royalties with Rostand, which must have been cold comfort to the playwright.[66] Yet it was true that the work had been a labor of love, as Damrosch maintained, for upon its completion around 1902 he had found no venue for the opera and set it aside for the better part of a decade. A Boston Herald report indicated that Cyrano had come to the Metropolitan's attention as early as 1903,[67] but Damrosch's unpopular position with the Real Estate board, together with the same problems that had litigated against Azara, apparently discouraged serious consideration.

By 1911 Damrosch turned to a more practical project, the light comic opera The Dove of Peace, which he hoped to produce at the Century Theater. A gift of $14,000 in

---

64 Lawrence Tibbett, another opera in English supporter, sang the role of Hans Sachs.

65 Waters, Herbert, 154-56.

66 *Walter Damrosch Explains,* New York Times, 26 June 1912, 13.

67 See chapter 2, *n*94.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

production money from his old friend Otto Kahn made this possible in 1912,[68] and Damrosch did not lose the opportunity to interest his patron in the Cyrano manuscript, which he had continued to revise over the years:

> [T]he kind reception of the music from the "Dove" the other night has greatly encouraged me in regard to certain more ambitious work and if it is agreeable to you I should like very much to have Gatti and anybody else from the Opera Company you would suggest, hear the first Act of my "Cyrano" presented in simple fashion by a few singers . . . . I could easily prepare it for some evening the end of January or beginning of February. However, this is simply an idea and if you do not consider it expedient to have it carried out there is no harm done. [69]

Kahn's response was evidently prompt and affirmative, for a week later Damrosch confirmed arrangements:

> Many, many thanks for everything. . . . As I shall want some rehearsals with the singers for the first act of "Cyrano," I would suggest Saturday evening, March 2nd or Tuesday evening, March 5th, for its first "performance" before you as my King Ludwig of Bavaria. [70]

The immediate charm and accessibility of Cyrano's score may well have won over its auditors that spring, as Gatti scheduled it for a February 1913 premiere. Certainly the choice enjoyed Kahn's approval, for he gave the work high praise at its opening.[71] But there were political resonances as well. Not only was there a sense of indebtedness of the part of the theater to the Damrosch family's myriad artistic contributions, but Walter's brother Frank, a former chorus master at the Metropolitan, had become an influential spokesman for the training and development

---

68 Matz attributes Kahn's largesse on this occasion to an attempt to salve Damrosch's injured pride over his second failure to attain the directorship of the Metropolitan. He had allegedly offered his services for the position during the protracted Gatti-Dippel contretemps of 1908-1910. Many Lives, 83.

69 Letter from Damrosch to Kahn, 20 December 1911. Kahn Papers, Box 9, Princeton University.

70 Letter from Damrosch to Kahn, 27 December 1911. Ibid.

71 *Otto H. Kahn Praises "Cyrano,"* New York Times, 28 February 1913, 13.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

of American musicians through his founding of the Institute of Musical Art in 1905.[72] Walter Damrosch had himself contributed to the early foment of nationalist sentiment with an impassioned speech at the twenty-fifth anniversary celebration of his conducting debut, which was reported by the press under the headline *Damrosch Pleads for American Opera; Present Partiality for Foreigners a Humiliating Spectacle.*[73] Adding to the pressure was the fact that Cyrano's able librettist was none other than New York Sun critic William J. Henderson, a frequent antagonist of Metropolitan policies. An unsigned Evening Sun editorial that appeared in 1910 under the heading *Our Little Italian Opera House* denigrated Gatti as "the new autocrat from Milan" destined to serve up "nothing but Italian opera" to "satisfy[y] the cravings of the frivolous."[74] The maliciousness of the attack so angered Kahn that he apparently considered withdrawing the Sun's press privileges at the theater, for the Metropolitan's attorney wrote him the next day confirming that he was within his legal rights to do so.[75] If upon reflection Kahn later decided to appease Henderson, as the Cyrano libretto had undeniable merit and the Metropolitan was favorably disposed towards the opera's production in any case, it proved to be an effective strategy, for Henderson seems to have caused no further upheavals beyond his usual level of critical annoyance until the eruption of the Marion Talley affair.

---

72 Damrosch's successor John Erskine later became a thorn in the Met's side due to his public accusations of the lack of opportunities at the theater for his institution's aspiring pupils.

73 New York Times, 13 March 1910, sec. 4, 5.

74 The Evening Sun, 28 February 1910, 8.

75 Alfred F. Seligsberg, Esq. to Kahn, 1 March 1910. Kahn Papers, Box 6, Princeton University. Seligsberg's citing of a 1906 New York case, People ex rel Burnham v. Flynn (114 App. Div. 578, aff'd 189 N.Y. 180), in which theater critic James S. Metcalfe was barred from a number of New York theaters after anti-Semitic comments against theatrical patrons and managements appeared in his column, demonstrates the level of ethnic bias that existed openly during the period.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The librettist's task in adapting Cyrano de Bergerac was indeed formidable, as the play was

> so opulent in detail and in incident, it has so many ramifications and contains so many diverse subtleties of intellectual and emotional content that it must be severely stripped to make an opera. [76]

Adding to the difficulty was the fact that the drama in its original form was well known to a public who would be cognizant of every omission. Henderson's solution was to construct a fast-moving, highly episodic scenario in verse composed of rhyming couplets which retained the Gallic charm of the original, as in these lines from Cyrano's response to De Guiche's taunting of his enormous nose:

> Poor wit to poorer manners wed!
> I'll tell you what you might have said.
> . . . . . .
> "Were't thou a man or army born,
> That thou dost carry such a buglehorn?"
> . . . . . .
> But you, monsieur, have no such words as these;
> I speak more wit than you if I but sneeze. [77]

Henderson must have been pleased that his literary style forced Damrosch to avoid a feature of his vocal settings which had also worked against Parker in Mona:

> [He] composes songs with strict regard for every detail of the text and thus his work comes to have an intellectual seriousness which is not found in much of the music of our native composers. But the method is antagonistic to the development of symmetrical melodies and a good deal of Mr. Damrosch's song writing runs into declamatory recitative. [78]

---

[76] [Richard Aldrich], *"Cyrano" Applauded at its Premiere,* New York Times, 28 February 1913, 13.

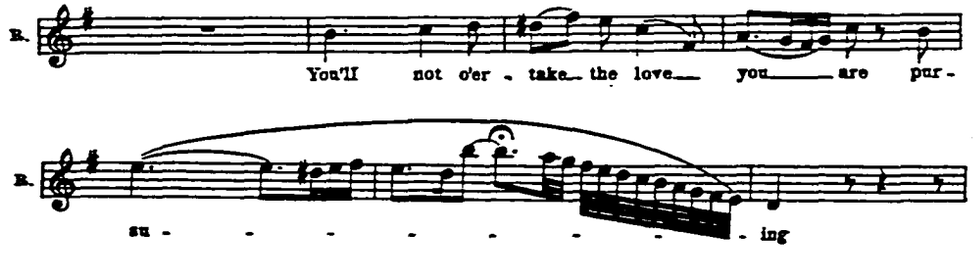
[77] Walter Damrosch, Cyrano, libretto by William J. Henderson, piano-vocal score (New York: G. Schirmer, 1913), 58-61.

[78] Quoted in Martin, Damrosch Dynasty, 167.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

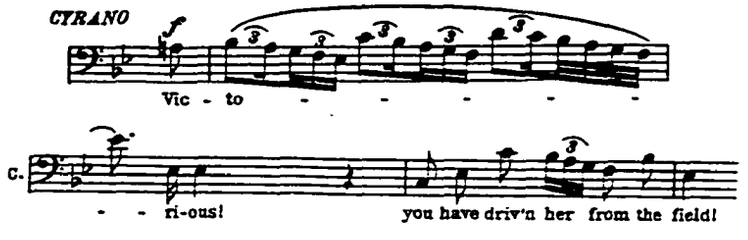
Damrosch's music for Cyrano indeed represented a radical departure from the Wagnerian writing that had dominated American operas like The Scarlet Letter and Mona, for the score hews to the episodic libretto in its utilization of a "numbers" design and is almost entirely composed of such set pieces as arias, ensembles and choruses. But if Cyrano represented a return to the structural principles governing works like Azara, its harmonic language was not nearly as advanced. Drawing principally on the vocabulary of mid-nineteenth century German Romanticism, the score maintains a stable sense of tonality throughout, clearly expressed in functional harmonic progressions and encased in periodic phrase structures which rarely provoke musical interest in and of themselves. Rather, the composer sought to capture attention with a sparkling orchestration, whose emphasis on woodwinds (particularly the flute and piccolo) complements the wit of the text, as well as the Italianate lyricism of the vocal writing, which often exhibits a Rossinian charm in the florid vocalism assigned to Roxane:

Ex. 4.9: Damrosch, Cyrano, Act I, piano-vocal score, p. 34



Damrosch also makes effective use of fioritura to characterize Cyrano's bravura:
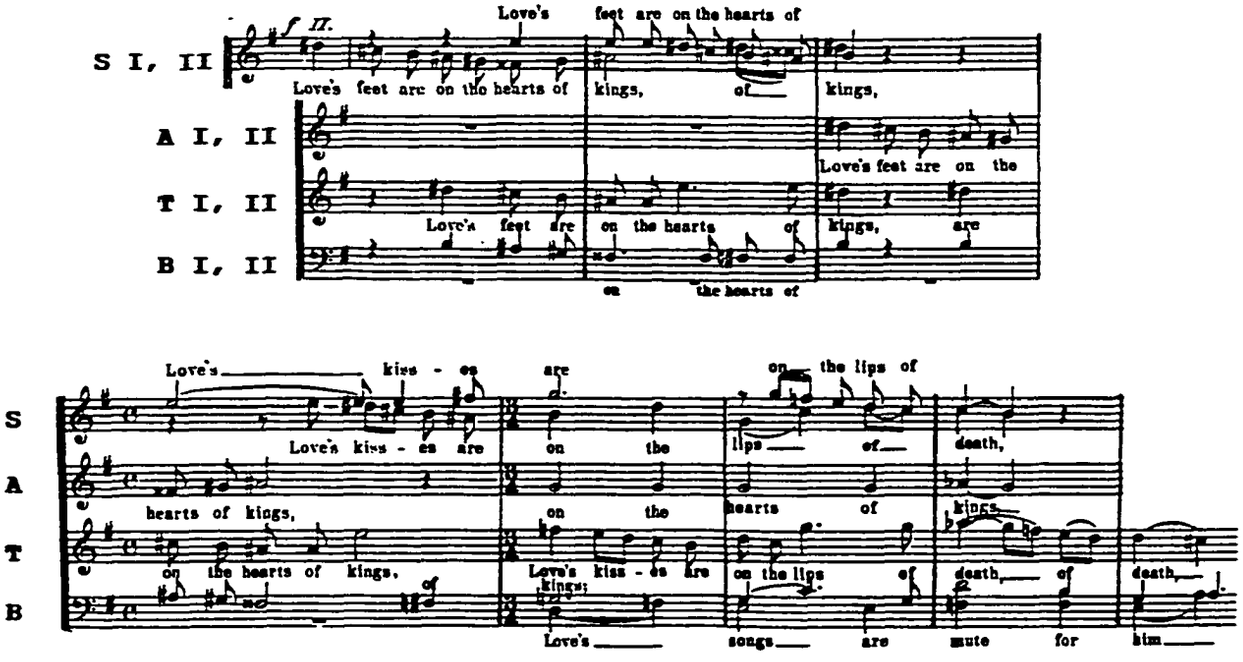
Ex. 4.10: Damrosch, Cyrano, Act III, piano-vocal score, p. 267



Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The influence of Meistersinger exhibits itself particularly in the opening of Act 3, where an ode to love sung by the chorus before Roxane's moonlit balcony involves eight-part polyphony: [79]

Ex. 4.11: Damrosch, Cyrano, Act III, piano-vocal score, p. 221-22



Nevertheless, the score's overall lightness of musical character and its conventional harmonic language align it more closely with the American comic opera genre, which had reached its apex in the preceding decade, than to "serious" opera, but Glass's analysis has rightfully called attention to the successful delineation of deeper levels of characterization, particularly with respect to Cyrano and Roxane, through their vocal lines.[80] This true mark of operatic achievement occurs in the expression of Cyrano's wit, his courage, his loneliness and, in the closing death scene, the nobility of his self-sacrifice. Roxane's development from a coquette to a woman capable of mature love is reflected in the transformation of her early florid music to a
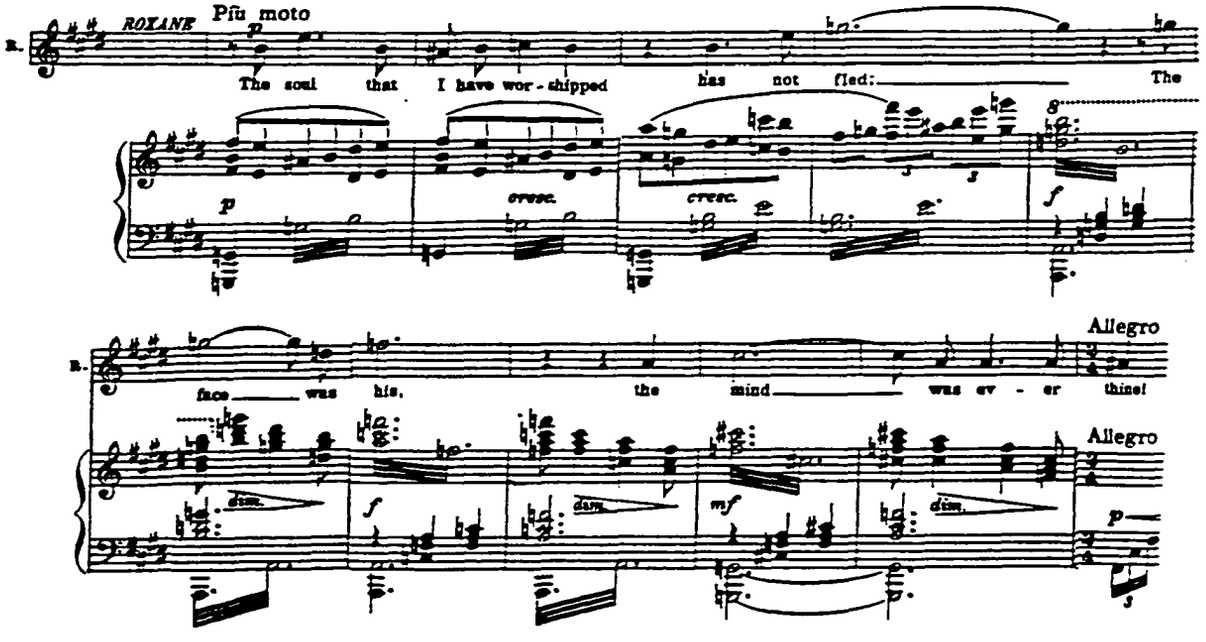
---

79 Glass, *American Opera,* 121.

80 Ibid., 122.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

weightier, more sustained lyricism, a technique perhaps inspired by Verdi's writing for Violetta in La Traviata:

Ex. 4.12: Damrosch, Cyrano, Act IV, piano-vocal score, p. 394-95



Yet Damrosch's sense of lyricism throughout the opera, while often effective, is ultimately never as distinguished as that of his forebears. The score is also hampered by its nineteenth-century cast, which despite a great deal of variety and invention never seems to escape a feeling of conformity. Nevertheless, the overall effectiveness of Cyrano was praised, albeit with reservations, by the press following its premiere:

> The music of "Cyrano" is undoubtedly composed with skill, with verve, and in many parts with spontaneity. It cannot be called music of inspiration, of originality, or, in the highest sense, of power. Undoubtedly there is often a feeling of reminiscence; and yet the reminiscence-hunter would often, though not always, have difficulty in putting his finger on the precise origin of this or that passage. There are transitory reminders that Mr. Damrosch has a large familiarity with the whole body of modern music. There is, especially in the earlier and livelier scenes, a frequent suggestion of "Die Meistersinger" in the music; and there are from time to time suggestions of other Wagnerian works, of the later Verdi, and even lesser me-., but more generally in spirit than in actual forms. There are, it may also be said, certain traits of harmony and modulation

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> so frequently repeated that they become mannerisms and verge on monotony; and this is especially true of the gayer portions of the music in the first two acts. [81]

A more enthusiastic auditor was composer Charles Martin Loeffler:

> The whole work is to me delight on account of its real musicianship—a work evolved from a highly sensitive, very intelligent brain, that has absorbed and assimilated much, without imitating anybody or anything.
>
> Your orchestration sounded superbly. Your choruses blended wonderfully with the orchestra and I have no doubt that with a slight *remaniement* [reshaping] and *raccourcissement* [shortening], Cyrano will give great joy to many in the future. I understand that you have made considerable cuts, still do I advise cutting out more. [82]

Damrosch agreed with Loeffler's assessment, stating to Marcia Davenport in a 1929 New Yorker interview that Henderson's otherwise first-rate libretto had indeed been too long, and that Cyrano required revisions before it could be deemed worthy of revival.[83] Damrosch eventually completed a revised version the year after the Metropolitan under Edward Johnson produced his fourth opera, The Man Without a Country, during a 1937 special spring season designed to highlight American artists. The composer subsequently wrote Johnson that he had been able to interest recent Auditions of the Air winner Leonard Warren in the role of Cyrano, but to no avail.[84] The new regime was far less able or willing to assume the continued financial risk of

---

81 *"Cyrano" Applauded at its Premiere,* New York Times, 28 February 1913, 13.

82 Loeffler, Medfield, Massachusetts, to Damrosch, 26 March 1913, quoted in Damrosch, My Musical Life, 150.

83 Quoted in Polly Damrosch Howard and Anita Damrosch Littell, *Walter Damrosch and Opera,* Opera News 26 (27 January 1962): 12.

84 Telegram from Damrosch to Johnson, Cleveland, 7 April 1938. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Edward Johnson correspondence, 1937-38, D.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

American opera, and the revised Cyrano was never staged.[85] Damrosch himself led the New York Philharmonic in a 1942 concert version broadcast in honor of his eightieth birthday, but no further interest was ignited. It may be that the score's hybrid qualities, as well as the lack of well-known excerpts which might have won it a wider popularity, prevented Cyrano from finding favor with either light opera troupes or touring companies.

VICTOR HERBERT: MADELEINE

A month after the premiere of Cyrano, the Metropolitan entered into a contract with another composer whose musical style had undergone significant changes between his first and second operas. Whether Victor Herbert (1859-1924) adopted a more sophisticated musical language for Madeleine in response to Gatti's rejection of his Natoma, however, remains a point of conjecture.

Herbert's enduring fame as the foremost composer of comic opera in America belies the serious classical training he received during his formative years. Born in Dublin, Herbert was taken to Stuttgart, capital of the small kingdom of Württemberg, at the age of seven when his mother married a German physician after her first husband's death. Herbert was thus exposed to the nineteenth-century Germanic cultural milieu that had nurtured Hammerstein in Berlin, Conried in Vienna, and Kahn at Mannheim. Cello studies with Bernhard Cossmann, who had participated in Mendelssohn's Leipzig Gewandhaus concerts and was appointed first cellist of the Weimar court orchestra by Liszt, enabled Herbert to develop a virtuoso technique on the instrument. The young cellist became a member of the Stuttgart Court Orchestra and began

---

[85] The spring seasons were quickly abandoned, and only five American works were produced during Johnson's fifteen-year tenure.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

composing serious works, including the Suite for Cello and Orchestra, op. 3 (1883) and the Cello Concerto, op. 8 (1884).

Herbert's life changed dramatically when Viennese soprano Therese Förster arrived at the Stuttgart Court Opera. Shortly after the two became engaged in 1885, Förster was offered a Metropolitan contract by Frank Damrosch, who had come to Europe on a talent scouting expedition with his brother Walter and Metropolitan manager Edmund Stanton. Förster made her contract contingent on the offer of an orchestral position to Herbert, and the newly married couple joined the Metropolitan in the 1886-1887 season. Herbert left the following season to pursue New York's freelance opportunities, including membership in the cooperatively run New York Philharmonic Society, which afforded him the opportunity to perform as soloist in his own works. In 1889 he was invited to join the faculty of the National Conservatory, where an early colleague was the opera composer Bruno Oskar Klein.[86] A close working relationship with Dvořàk after the director's1892 arrival may have indeed provided the seeds of inspiration for the Indianist opera Natoma, but Herbert was credited with influencing his colleague first when he premiered his second cello concerto in March 1894 with the New York Philharmonic: Dvořàk, who was in attendance, began composing his famed Cello Concerto in B minor, op. 104 shortly thereafter.[87]

It was not until he was thirty-five that Herbert turned to the genre that would secure his reputation. His second comic opera, Prince Ananias, was premiered in 1894 by The

---

86 Klein's Kenilworth became the first opera written in America to be performed abroad when it was given in Hamburg on 13 February 1895. See chapter 1, *n*125.

87 Waters, Herbert, 5-87.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Bostonians, the troupe identified closely with De Koven's Robin Hood.[88] If Herbert's work did not duplicate the unprecedented success of De Koven's, as its producers had hoped, it did display the newcomer's promise: over the next three decades, Herbert's facility in "pulling melodies from his sleeve" produced over forty shows for the American musical theater. Excerpts from The Fortune Teller, one of Herbert's first major successes, were recorded as early as 1898 on the historic label founded by Emile Berliner, the inventor of the gramophone.[89] Concurrent with his rise in the commercial theater, Herbert continued his activities in the classical sphere unimpeded—or perhaps aided—by his "crossover" success. A conducting career begun with his own ensemble was continued under Seidl's aegis at the Brighton Beach Seidl Society Concerts in 1888,[90] resulting in a tenure as music director of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra from 1898 to 1904. His final season coincided with the first American visit of Richard Strauss, and the two composer-conductors worked together in the spring of 1904 when Strauss and his wife, the singer Pauline de Ahna, appeared with the orchestra.[91]

By 1905, Herbert, now well into his forties, sought to direct his talents toward the composition of an opera, a project his admirers had urged on him for some time. Herbert had evidently made some preliminary progress on the conceptualization of his first opera even before

---

88 Plans for the production of Herbert's first comic opera, La Vivandière, intended for Lillian Russell, fell through sometime between late 1893 and early 1894, allegedly due to Russell's reluctance to risk her reputation on an unknown composer. Waters, Herbert, 72-73.

89 Berliner's improvements to disc recording, based on the cylinder technology developed by Thomas Edison and executed in collaboration with E. R. Johnson, resulted in the establishment of the Victor Talking Machine Company, for which excerpts of Natoma were recorded in 1911. Don Michael Randel, ed., The New Harvard Dictionary of Music (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1986), s.v. *Recording, I.*

90 Horowitz, Wagner Nights, 202-3. Herbert met the great Wagnerian while playing under his direction at the Metropolitan.

91 Waters, Herbert, 242.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Oscar Hammerstein exhibited any interest in the venture. Pittsburgh newspaperman Wilmer M. Jacoby reportedly arranged a meeting between the composer and the playwrights John Luther Long and Edward C. Carpenter in 1906 for the express purpose of discussing operatic possibilities,[92] and Herbert himself told the Baltimore Sun in early 1907: "It is my ambition to write a grand opera, and I will not deny that in a vague way I have already begun one."[93] Although one wonders what progress could have been made in the absence of a libretto, it is likely that Herbert had a scenario in mind which involved an American subject. Upon his agreement to the Hammerstein commission in April 1907, the composer stated: "I should like to have an American subject and a background of American romance. . . . The preference is mentioned, but the hard and fast condition is not made."[94] Hammerstein may have scored a coup by awarding a commission to an American composer two decades in advance of the Metropolitan, but he also committed a blunder worthy of his old enemy Conried when he reportedly examined David Belasco's play The Girl of the Golden West (1905) and deemed it unsuitable for operatic treatment.[95] Herbert's eventual selection of fellow Lambs theatrical club member Joseph Deighn Redding as librettist advances the possibility that the composer wished Natoma's book to be created to his own specifications.[96] In any event, the frustrating production

---

92 Waters interview with Jacoby, 25 September 1947, quoted in Waters, Herbert, 369.

93 Baltimore Sun, 11 February 1907, 14, quoted in Waters, Herbert, 369.

94 Quoted in Joseph Kaye, Victor Herbert: The Biography of America's Greatest Composer of Romantic Music (New York: G. Howard Watt and Crown Publishers, 1931), 213.

95 Waters, Herbert, 371. Hammerstein is also said to have rejected Belasco's The Rose of the Rancho (1906).

96 In addition to Dvořàk's early influence, Herbert's Indianist leanings may have been inspired by his familiarity with MacDowell's Indian Suite, op. 48, which received its Pittsburgh premiere under Herbert's direction five years before.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

uncertainties occasioned by the 1910 collapse of the Hammerstein commission and the Metropolitan rejection were more than alleviated by a glittering Philadelphia premiere by the Philadelphia-Chicago Opera Company with Mary Garden and John McCormack on 25 February 1911, followed three days later by a performance at the Metropolitan which was reported as the social event of the season.[97] "Seldom has society been so brilliantly represented," reported the Herald, listing numerous members of the old guard among the audience, including August and Perry Belmont, William K. Vanderbilt, Metropolitan Real Estate Company board president George Griswold Haven, and Colonel John Jacob Astor IV (who was one year away from death on the *Titanic*).[98] Clearly Herbert's popular reputation, and the American scenario of his opera—which the Metropolitan's own productions thus far had conspicuously lacked—generated an unusual amount of interest.

Critical response to Natoma's music was positive, with many comments on the composer's well-known melodic gift evident throughout the score. In a pattern that was becoming familiar, however, Redding's libretto was universally dismissed as amateur and inadequate to the point of crudeness.[99] Yet Herbert's drawing power with the public enabled him to obtain the recording of several excerpts for commercial release by the Victor Talking Machine

---

97 Dizikes's erroneous report (Opera in America, 381) that the February 25 performance took place in New York stems from the fact that Philadelphia's operatic venue at the time was also called the Metropolitan Opera House. The New York premiere of Natoma did not in fact occur until February 28.

98 *"Natoma" Brilliantly Produced at Metropolitan Opera House,* New York Herald, 1 March 1911, 7.

99 A couplet from the Vacquero's Song suffices as an example of Redding's doggerel: "See how the bull upon his knees/Snorts, when his neck we tighter squeeze." See Deems Taylor, *What Is American Opera?*, Opera News 25 (17 December 1960): 9. Carl Van Vechten's critique actually lamented the excellent English diction of Mary Garden as Natoma: "The vapid speeches of Mr. Redding tripped so audibly off her tongue that their banality became painfully apparent." Van Vechten, Interpreters and Interpretations (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1917), 84, quoted in Waters, Herbert, 386.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Company. Natoma thus became the first American opera to have any of its music recorded.[100] The Philadelphia-Chicago company demonstrated more fidelity to the new American work than was the Metropolitan's custom and kept Natoma in its repertory for the next three seasons, which included performances in Baltimore, Cincinnati, Pittsburgh, St. Paul, Washington, D.C., Los Angeles and San Francisco. A final performance in Chicago was given in November 1913 with Herbert conducting, and the opera was revived in New York in April 1914 when the enterprising Aborn brothers gave it a week of performances at the Century Theater.[101] The fact that the Metropolitan showed no interest in this second opportunity to produce the opera may have sounded its death knell. Thereafter, Natoma sank into oblivion, with only an abridged 1935 radio version featuring young tenor Jan Peerce added to its performance history. Herbert was apparently planning revisions to the opera in the early 1920s in anticipation of a touring company revival, but the score remained unchanged at his death in 1924.[102]

Natoma may ultimately have become a victim of its scenario. Historically, the exoticism of Indianist operas produced only a short-lived allure in the large East Coast cultural centers, and their libretti aged rapidly after the demise of the movement around 1930. The fact that Charles Wakefield Cadman's Shanewis later suffered a similar fate in the East, despite

---

100 Allen G. Debus, "The Early Victor Herbert: From the Gay Nineties to the First World War," liner notes, *Music of Victor Herbert*, Smithsonian American Musical Theater Series, RCA Special Products, DPM-30366 (1979), 4. Regrettably, Herbert was unable to lure Mary Garden into the studio to document her creation of the role of Natoma, although original tenor lead John McCormack did record Paul's Address ("No Country Shall My Own Outvie").

101 Since the Aborns' Century Opera Company operated during the 1913-1915 period according to a joint venture with the Metropolitan and the City Club of New York (see *n*29 above), Natoma did in some sense enjoy a Metropolitan affiliation for its second New York engagement. The fact that the revival did not occur on the Metropolitan's stage, however, is further proof that Gatti's lack of sympathy for the work remained unchanged even after he heard it in its entirety.

102 Waters, Herbert, 391.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Metropolitan support and a better libretto, may be attributable to the greater sophistication of those audiences and their concomitant desire for more progressive artistic styles as modernism advanced rapidly throughout the 1920s. At the same time, the greater success that operas like Shanewis and Natoma experienced in the Midwest may have resulted from the fact that the interracial cultural clashes around which most of the plots revolved had greater familiarity and interest to Americans living in closer proximity to the Indian populations remaining in the early decades of the twentieth century.

In the first flush of Natoma's success, however, Herbert announced plans to continue composing operas on American themes:

> This is only the beginning of opera in the United States. The day is not far distant when Americans will take the lead in all things pertaining to opera, and companies of excellent singers, all American, will sing in English, depicting American life, and therefore the better to be understood by the American people. Had I not had the faith in this which I have, I should never have written "Natoma," nor should I contemplate writing other operas in the English language. [103]

It was also during this period that the usually genial composer began to be quoted in comments that could be interpreted as obliquely deprecatory to the Metropolitan. Once of these concerned Gatti's rejection of Natoma: "When Mr. Hammerstein sold his interests to the Metropolitan I offered it to Mr. Gatti-Casazza. He, however, having produced one American opera last season, did not care to take the risk of another right away."[104] And at a 1912 Lüchow's supper in honor of Karl Muck, the conductor of Poia, Herbert got in a jab at Arthur Nevin—the first American composer Gatti signed after turning down Natoma—during a speech that otherwise praised

---

[103] *Herbert Plans New Operas,* New York Times, 5 November 1911, 15.

[104] *Victor Herbert's First Serious Opera,* New York Times, 10 October 1910, 9.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Muck's encouragement of American composers, by remarking that Poia was not as bad as the Berlin critics declared it to be.[105]

Far from alienating Herbert from the Metropolitan, the comments—issuing, as in the case of Damrosch, from an influential source—may have placed some pressure on the house, for the composer received an invitation from Gatti to play through the partially completed score of his next opera, the one-act Madeleine, in early March 1913.[106] A swift decision in favor of the work's production was reportedly taken after a consultation with Otto Kahn, and a contract signed less than two weeks later.[107] One senses the strong influence of Kahn in the Metropolitan's embarking on a stylistic change of course with respect to American opera after the somewhat tepid critical reception of The Pipe of Desire and Mona. His well-publicized embrace of the role of jazz and other popular elements in American art music during the 1920s was in fact preceded a decade before by an advocacy of artistic eclecticism demonstrated through his support for operas like Cyrano and Madeleine.[108] Kahn's business acumen may have lent additional support to his artistic beliefs. It apparently had not hurt Herbert's cause at the Metropolitan that the first official act taken by Oscar Hammerstein after his April 1910 buy-out

---

105 Waters, Herbert, 412.

106 The exact date was most probably Monday, 10 March 1913. A report dated the following Saturday stated: "At Mr. Gatti-Casazza's invitation, Mr. Herbert played the pianoforte score of his opera last Monday at the Metropolitan and it is said that Mr. Gatti-Casazza was favorably impressed." *Metropolitan May Give Herbert Opera,* Musical America 17 (15 March 1913): 7.

107 Pearson, *Madeleine,* 60; royalty contract for Madeleine between Victor Herbert and the Metropolitan Opera Company, 18 March 1913, Metropolitan Opera Archives.

108 Kahn's prophecy that Cyrano would remain in the repertory, while erroneous, nonetheless testified to his belief in the Metropolitan's new course just two weeks before the Madeleine contract was signed: "At last I believe we have an opera in English which will stay in the repertoire. The story is dramatic, the music effective and pleasing . . . . You may say for me that the opera company will be glad to accept another English work as good. In fact, it will be glad to accept one not as good as 'Cyrano,' for it will probably be hard to find another as good." *Otto H. Kahn Praises "Cyrano,"* New York Times, 28 February 1913, 13.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

was a May 1910 agreement to produce Herbert's enormously successful operetta Naughty Marietta.[109] This, together with the subsequent success of The Enchantress (1911) and the *réclame* of Natoma, firmly established Herbert as the best known composer in America by 1912, and one for whom the operagoing public was obviously willing to turn out in force.[110]

Whatever Herbert's innovations in the realm of musical style might bring to a developing American opera school, however, critical consensus was that he made little progress on the libretto problem afflicting American composers when he selected the slight but charming French play Je dîne chez ma mère of Adrien Decourcelle (1824-1892) and Lambert Thiboust (1827-1867) as the basis of Madeleine. The story, which was criticized as little more than an anecdote, takes place in Paris during the Louis XV period and revolves around the attempts of the prima donna Madeleine Fleury to secure a dinner companion on New Year's Day. Despite receiving a host of admirers bearing lavish gifts, Madeleine's efforts are unsuccessful as each claims to reserve this day alone for dining with his mother. Finally, in response to the diva's escalating pique, the painter Didier, a childhood friend who has arrived with a portrait of Madeleine's deceased mother, relents and invites her to join him at his parents' humble table. In a reminiscence of Figaro, the glamorous Madeleine exchanges clothes with her maid in order not to

---

109 The non-compete clause to which Hammerstein was bound with the Metropolitan did not include operetta. Naughty Marietta turned out to be an important stepping stone in the careers of two American singers who portrayed the male lead, Captain Richard Warrington: Orville Harrold, who later created the leading tenor role in Henry Hadley's Cleopatra's Night at the Met; and retired Metropolitan baritone David Bispham's most famous pupil, Nelson Eddy, whose appearance in the 1935 film version made him a star.

110 Given the public's enthusiastic support of Herbert at the Metropolitan, it is ironic that Naughty Marietta film star Jeanette MacDonald was rebuffed by the Johnson regime when she made a serious bid to sing at the Metropolitan during the early 1940s. By that time, Hollywood stars were considered inappropriate selections for the Metropolitan's artist roster. Letter from Edward Johnson to MacDonald, Los Angeles, 19 October 1943. Metropolitan Opera Archives, MacDonald artist file.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

intimidate the family. At length, however, she decides against the plan in favor of dining at home alone opposite the portrait, singing the poignant closing line, "I, too, dine with my mother."

The play had received some circulation in New York via two English translations, one played by Evelyn Clark Morgan at the Proctor Theater in 1904, and the other by a Mrs. Burton Harrison in numerous amateur performances. The idea of building a show around the role of a prima donna obviously appealed to Herbert; the title characters of Naughty Marietta and The Enchantress are both women with some pretense to the singing profession, and in the French version of Je dîne chez ma mère, the heroine is Sophie Arnould, a singer at the Paris Opéra who created the title role of Gluck's Iphigénie en Tauride.[111] Curiously, Herbert may have been motivated to examine the stage work by the experiences of Richard Wagner, for he cited a passage from the recently published Mein Leben in which the great composer described seeing the "charmingly pretty play" in Paris, where it had become a standard on the French stage.[112] Doubts concerning whether the Gallic flavor of the *comédie intime* could be preserved in English were only slightly dissipated after the 24 January 1914 Metropolitan premiere, as critics generally agreed that Grant Stewart's libretto, which he prepared from an English translation of the scenario provided by Herbert, was no more than adequate. Stewart's text strove for a colloquial conversational tone throughout, no doubt at Herbert's request, with an occasional foray into the kind of witty rhyming couplets that had dominated Cyrano:

---

[111] Arnould was also a notorious prostitute, but this fact is omitted in both the French and English versions of the play. Pearson, *Madeleine*, 60, 73*n*4.

[112] *Herbert's "Madeleine" Has Its Metropolitan Premiere,* Musical America 19 (31 January 1914): 5. Although privately published in installments between 1870 and 1881, the first edition of Wagner's autobiography available to the general public appeared in 1911, one year before Herbert began composing Madeleine. Richard Wagner, Mein Leben (Munich: F. Bruckmann, Ltd., 1911).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Nichette *(receiving gifts for her mistress Madeleine)*:

> Accept our thanks! From the Vicomte Lebeau:
> and I had thought him ruined long ago! [113]

Herbert's score elicited far more diversity of opinion, as he unexpectedly abandoned the lyrically melodic, unequivocally tonal, "numbers" design prototype so familiar in his operettas. Arguably Herbert's most atypical stage work, Madeleine is a compact (fifty-four minutes) through-composed opera comprised of loosely connected scenes punctuated by brief orchestral passages in which rhythmically rapid and often fragmentary vocal lines are declaimed over a tonally fluid orchestral fabric. While Herbert himself did not comment on his sudden change in style, it is possible that he may have felt that a more modern approach in accordance with the tenor of the time would garner more approval at the Metropolitan than had the more traditionally designed Natoma. Yet the obvious comparisons the experimental Madeleine provoked with the work of Richard Strauss were in fact denied by Herbert, although his 1904 association with the composer in Pittsburgh may have influenced his sophisticated handling of the orchestra. Another influence attributed to the work (by critic Henry T. Finck) was that of Ermanno Wolf-Ferrari, whose Le donne curiose was given its American premiere under Toscanini at the Metropolitan in January 1912, shortly before Herbert began work on Madeleine.[114] This was certainly a plausible thesis given Herbert's abundantly stated admiration:

---

[113] Victor Herbert, Madeleine, libretto by Grant Stewart, piano-vocal score (New York: G. Schirmer, 1914).

[114] Herbert stated in a March 1913 interview that he had begun working on the score "something over a year ago." Musical America 17 (29 March 1913): 7; quoted in Waters, Herbert, 393.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> No one could enjoy that work more than I did. It is skillful, tasteful, tactful, and delicious. I take my hat off to its composer; he is a master among masters. I wish I could ever hope to become half as big a man. [115]

The fact that both Europeans enjoyed great favor at the Metropolitan at the time was apparently not lost on Herbert, and may well have provided the impetus for his conscious attempt to write in a more modernist style. But it is dubious whether Strauss's Der Rosenkavalier, for which Metropolitan negotiations were under way at the same time as those for Herbert's opera,[116] could have been a direct influence, even though the numerous comings and goings in Madeleine's drawing room are so reminiscent, both dramatically and musically, of the Act 1 *levée* in the Marschallin's boudoir. Rosenkavalier was not given in America until December 1913, nearly three years after its January 1911 premiere in Dresden, by which time Madeleine was already in rehearsal. Even if Herbert had seen it in Europe in the interim, his encounter with the Wagner autobiography and the subsequent selection of his source material occurred at the inception of that period (1911-1912), making an unlikely case for Rosenkavalier's direct influence on his initial decisions regarding Madeleine's design.

Although Herbert's innovation in essaying a new idiom was praised, he received some harsh criticism for essentially limiting his lyric gift to a single melody, the recurring "portrait theme" which is sung by Madeleine at the conclusion of her aria and heard again in the orchestra at the end of the opera as the diva prepares to dine opposite the painting: [117]

---

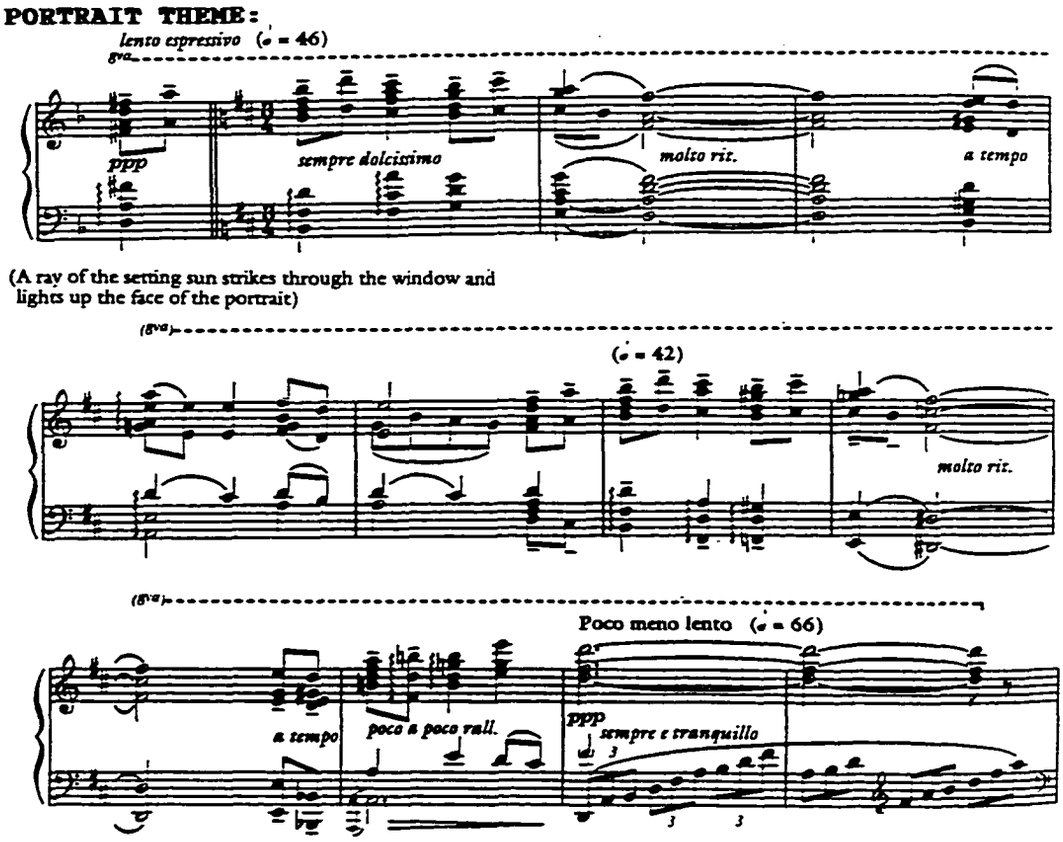
115 Finck, Golden Age of Music, 371 and Musical America 15 (3 February 1912): 3; quoted in Waters, Herbert, 397.

116 Royalty contract for Der Rosenkavalier signed by Fürstner (representing Strauss), Berlin, 19 May 1913 and by Gatti-Casazza, Paris, 21 May 1913. Metropolitan Opera Archives.

117 Pearson, *Madeleine*, 68.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Ex. 4.13: Herbert, Madeleine, piano-vocal score, 1 m. before reh. 105—2 mm. after reh. 106



A perceptive summation of the opera's merits and shortcomings was offered by critic Richard Aldrich:

> Tunes have rather gone out of vogue in certain modern operas, and in "Madeleine," Mr. Herbert has . . . attempted to attain the quick and rapidly moving style of the "conversation opera"; to write in an excited and fragmentary, often disjointed manner, . . . making the orchestra do much tonal picturing of the action . . . with very little regard for musical development and enlargement, except in certain lyric moments. In these the music is given an opportunity to breathe.
>
> Indeed, it seems as if Mr. Herbert had been carefully observing the methods of Strauss, with a memory for much that appertains to Beckmesser; but it appears also that he has not the cleverness and the capacity of a Strauss, and the result of his efforts to be not musical but descriptive, is a score restless, uneasy, but

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> without a real impression of vivacity or animation, lacking musical beauty and refinement and with a false ring of cleverness. [118]

The public ultimately favored Herbert's popular idiom over his operas, although the composer's publisher was more optimistic. The full orchestral score to Madeleine was among the first of an American opera to be published in the United States,[119] but only two further performances can be documented in the period immediately following Madeleine's single season at the Metropolitan: a November 1916 production by the Chicago Opera Company with the composer conducting, and an October 1918 New York revival at the historic Park Theater by the Society of American Singers, a group dedicated to native opera founded by former Metropolitan baritone William Wade Hinshaw. A reawakened interest in Herbert's "serious" compositions which occurred in the 1980s—including performances and a recording of the cello concertos by cellist Lynn Harrell, son of former Metropolitan baritone Mack Harrell[120]—may have provided the impetus for two recent revivals, both performed with piano accompaniment: a semi-staged version in 1984 at the American Victoria Museum in Nevada City, California as part of a series devoted to American opera; and a 1989 staged performance by the DePaul University Opera Theater in Chicago. Clearly the difficulty of Herbert's complex orchestration had placed the piece at a disadvantage for performances by touring or college groups. At length, Madeleine received a true revival with orchestra by the Opera Theater of Northern Virginia in March 1996,

---

118 *Herbert's Opera, "Madeleine," Sung,* New York Times, 25 January 1914, sec. 2, 14.

119 Pearson's claim, "It was the first time that an American opera had been so honored in the United States," (*Madeleine*, 67) is open to debate, as the publication of Madeleine's orchestral score was probably preceded by that of Converse's Iolan, or The Pipe of Desire. See *n*25 above.

120 *Victor Herbert: The Cello Concertos and Five Pieces for Cello and Strings*, Lynn Harrell, cello, Academy of St. Martin-in-the-Fields, Neville Marriner, London 417-672-2 (1988). British cellist Julian Lloyd Webber also recorded the second concerto with the London Symphony Orchestra, pairing it with Arthur Sullivan's neglected 1866 cello concerto; EMI CDC-7-47622-2 (1986).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

more than eighty-two years after its premiere. The positive reception it received may at long last augur well for Madeleine's future.[121]

After Madeleine, Herbert wrote no further operas. The often distressed reaction he exhibited to criticisms of Natoma and Madeleine was perhaps indicative of a sensitivity heightened by the felicitous success usually accorded his stage works. He made an attempt to introduce a serious theme into the operetta genre with Eileen (1917; originally titled Hearts of Erin), which deals with an ill-facted Irish rebellion of 1798, but it was not a success. The American public seemed to have bestowed upon him, for good or ill, the mantle of its most beloved entertainer.



The premiere of Herbert's Madeleine was followed by a three-year break in the American program which ended with Gatti-Casazza's somewhat reluctant acceptance of Reginald De Koven's The Canterbury Pilgrims for production in 1917. During this latter part of the first phase of the initiative, which is discussed in chapter 5, the Metropolitan did not abandon its pursuit of the nation's more experienced composers, for Kahn encouraged De Koven's cause and Ziegler pursued the possibility of Charles Martin Loeffler composing a work for the theater. But Gatti-Casazza, never patient with box-office failure, began to show dissatisfaction with the single-season draw of the American operas thus far given, and exhibited greater willingness to turn to lesser-known composers after De Koven's opera also failed to generate sufficient

---

[121] Joseph McLellan, *In Arlington, A "Madeleine" Baked to Perfection,* Washington Post, 25 March 1996, sec. B, 8; quoted in Pearson, *Madeleine*, 72-73.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

interest. Surprisingly, the move met with some success when Cadman's Shanewis attracted enough favorable attention in 1918 to justify a second season at the theater. Yet, as has been seen, the frequently encountered thesis that Gatti was impelled by the nationalist sentiment surrounding the entry of the United States into World War I to increase his rate of American productions for political reasons can be refuted on statistical evidence alone.[122] Apart from providing some increased opportunity for American works to be heard, due to the ban on German opera effected by the Metropolitan production company board over Gatti's emphatic opposition in 1917, the war period had little immediate effect on the development of American opera. As a result, dramatic composers at the close of the decade found themselves faced with many of the same problems their colleagues had encountered from the inception of the Metropolitan's effort.

---

[122] See *The Question of American Bias*, chapter 3.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

CHAPTER 5

THE METROPOLITAN AND MUSICAL STYLE, PART II: 1915-1920

During the 1914-1917 hiatus in American productions at the Metropolitan, the theater continued its pursuit of dramatic works by the nation's more experienced composers, an admittedly selective approach which the administrators probably felt justified in following. While the management was careful not to let drop any disparaging comments on its general opinion of burgeoning American operatic efforts, occasional references in the musical press to the number of scores the Metropolitan's artistic staff considered and rejected during the decade—reputedly several dozen in number—point to a growing dissatisfaction with the slow rate of development that had occurred since the prize competition, together with a disinclination to produce American works which did not even meet the standard of those already given. A listing of scores held by the theater in 1919 indicates some of its available possibilities: a setting of Hawthorne's Merry Mount by Horatio Parker pupil David Stanley Smith (the opera has never been produced); Simon Bucharoff's Sakhara (premiered 8 November 1924, Frankfurt-am-Main); Henry Schoenefeld's Atala (after François René de Chateaubriand's 1801 novel set in the primeval North American forest; unproduced); and Franklin Peale Patterson's The Echo (premiered 9 June 1925, Portland, Oregon with Lawrence Tibbett among the cast) and The Cripple (rejected for the perceived depravity of its scenario, set in an urban American slum). An increased concern with libretto quality is reflected in handwritten notations to the list indicating that new assistant manager Edward Ziegler, a former journalist and music critic, had been charged with approving libretti of

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

newly submitted scores before they were passed on to members of the musical staff.[1] The relative openness of the American field during this period made the timing of Reginald De Koven's first operatic effort particularly opportune, and may have contributed to Gatti's agreement to produce it in spite of his notably cool relations with the composer.

REGINALD DE KOVEN: THE CANTERBURY PILGRIMS

Reginald De Koven (1859-1920), best known today for his contribution to the American comic opera genre, was almost an exact contemporary of Victor Herbert, his chief rival. Born in Middletown, Connecticut, De Koven was among the American composers afforded the benefits of a European musical education when his father, an Episcopal clergyman, moved the family to England in 1872. De Koven graduated from St. Johns University, Oxford in 1879 and studied music theory with Dionys Pruckner in Stuttgart, singing with Luigi Vannuccini in Florence, and composition with Franz von Suppé in Vienna and Léo Delibes in Paris. The song "Marjorie Daw," written during his student days at Oxford, brought early recognition to the young composer, but he was initially forced to turn to journalism for a livelihood. After returning to the United States in 1882, De Koven wrote for Harper's Weekly, the Chicago Evening Post, and New York's World, Herald and Journal throughout the period 1889-1912,[2] and joined the growing number of musical journalists who voiced vehement opposition to the prevailing dependency of American artistic institutions upon foreign talent.[3] A favorite target was Gatti-Casazza, whose

---

1 *Scores in Safe, 24 May 1919.* Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, 1919-20, Composers.

2 Orly L. Krasner, *Reginald De Koven (1859-1920) and American Comic Opera at the Turn of the Century* (Ph.D. diss., The City University of New York, 1995), 2.

3 De Koven put his theories into practice by founding the Washington (D.C.) Symphony Orchestra, the District's first permanent symphonic organization, in 1902 and serving as its conductor until 1904. De Koven's ensemble and its successors were eventually superseded by the National Symphony Orchestra, established in 1931.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

initial Metropolitan season's opening night Aida (16 November 1908) received favorable press "with the exception of Mr. Reginald De Koven, critic of the World, who found that Toscanini had conducted Aida badly, a statement that caused a great deal of hilarity."[4] But relations deteriorated when the composer's invective was displayed in the Times under prominent front page headlines: DE KOVEN CRITICISES METROPOLITAN OPERA / *Composer Says Gatti-Casazza's Productions Are Ruled by Greed and Social Influence* / AMERICAN WRITERS IGNORED.[5] De Koven wrote Gatti in an effort to modify his more vituperative comments without relinquishing his underlying chauvinist agenda: "I must still maintain . . . that the directors lose sight of the proper mission and ambition of the Metropolitan Opera House, which should be a National opera to formulate, develop, and encourage a National musical art, . . . if we must have a foreign director at the Metropolitan Opera House, it could not be a better man than yourself."[6]

De Koven's proselytizing stemmed from a belief that the lyric drama represented the vanguard of modern musical expression upon which the fate of the American composer would ultimately turn:

> For if to-day opera, as it undoubtedly is, has become the dominant, the most popularly appealing, and most opportune musical form for the expression of creative musical thought, it is also inevitable that the future activities of the American composer must be largely operatic to assure to himself artistic progress and development, and to secure for his art the needed wider national recognition, significance, and importance. [7]

---

4 Gatti-Casazza, Memories of the Opera, 160.

5 New York Times, 10 November 1911, 1.

6 Letter from De Koven to Gatti, quoted in *De Koven Maintains Opera is Influenced,* New York Times, 11 November 1911, 13.

7 Reginald De Koven, *Opera in English: Its Relation to the American Composer and Singer,* The Century Magazine 87 (March 1914): 677. The composer sent a copy of the article to acquaintance Otto Kahn, though he was well aware of the chairman's avowed opposition to opera in translation at the Metropolitan: "Hoping at any rate that a perusal of the article, whether in accord with your

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Despite the general inaccuracy of his prophesy, dramatic music proved to be the arbiter of De Koven's own fate when his third comic opera, Robin Hood (1890) achieved a success unparalleled by any American composer prior to Victor Herbert. The royalties on the show and its celebrated excerpt "O Promise Me" enabled the composer to live lavishly until his death.[8] The fact that he was never able to duplicate this early success may be attributable, at least in part, to a steadily growing discontent with the artistic limitations of the commercial theater, although he ultimately produced twenty-nine works for its stage.[9] Reports dating from as early as 1892 revealed that the newly successful composer had developed "theories and beliefs" which had come to the attention of Oscar Hammerstein, for whom he was said to be contemplating the composition of a "grand opera."[10] Hammerstein tired quickly of his early English opera scheme in the face of growing deficits, but De Koven never lost sight of his aspiration. The long delay that occurred before he acted on it may have been due to the intractable libretto problem that Dvořàk, among others, had experienced during the same period. At length, De Koven approached his longtime collaborator Harry B. Smith sometime in 1913 with the idea of setting Twelfth Night. Although the concept of a Shakespearean opera was eventually abandoned, it

---

personal opinions or not, will not bore you, . . ." De Koven to Kahn, 27 February 1914. Kahn Papers, Box 32, Princeton University.

8 De Koven's reputation also rests upon numerous other comic operas, nearly four hundred songs, and various other works, such as a setting of Kipling's *Recessional* that remained in print for decades.

9 Krasner, *De Koven*, Appendix I, 370.

10 *Snap Shots: Reginald De Koven,* New York Dramatic Mirror, 24 September 1892, 7, quoted in Krasner, *De Koven*, 365-66. Hammerstein was presenting opera in English at his Harlem Opera House from 1890, and in 1891 formed the Metropolitan English Opera Company utilizing the services of Metropolitan conductor (and Conried benefactor) Adolf Neuendorff. The repertory of Italian staples in English translation obviously posed little threat to the Metropolitan, as they appear to have invoked no legal action for copyright infringement of their name.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

appears that De Koven developed a commitment to a historical English subject, possibly in the hope of duplicating his Robin Hood success.

It was the composer's wife, author and socialite Anna Farwell De Koven, who was responsible for a shift in literary source as well as librettist when Percy MacKaye's 1903 comedy The Canterbury Pilgrims (after Geoffrey Chaucer's late fourteenth-century opus) came to her attention while she was reviewing plays as a member of a social committee. MacKaye, whose rise to literary fame began with his verse play Jeanne d'Arc (1906) and was considerably augmented by the international success of the prose drama The Scarecrow (1909; after Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Feathertop*), was enthusiastic about continuing the parallel career in the lyric theater he had developed with Frederick Converse. MacKaye was at work on an operatic adaptation of his play for De Koven by the late summer of 1915, and even suggested that the recent outbreak of war in Europe might have politically favorable ramifications for the new American team:

> I should think that one auspicious result of this terrible war would be to advance greatly the opportunities for creative leadership of the American composer & lyric dramatist. It is all the more a pleasant thought, therefore, that we are at work together on "The Pilgrims." [11]

MacKaye attempted to capitalize on the idea by informing the Metropolitan of the work-in-progress: "I wrote at once to Otto Kahn, from whom I have received a most charming reply, copy of which I enclose. Isn't it delightful and encouraging?"[12]

De Koven may have allowed his librettist to make the first advance due to his unpopularity at the theater; yet it was clearly at the behest of the ever-equable Kahn that Gatti

---

[11] MacKaye to De Koven, 18 September 1914, quoted in Krasner, *De Koven*, 347.

[12] MacKaye to De Koven, 27 May 1915, quoted in Krasner, *De Koven*, 349-50.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

journeyed from his summer headquarters in Milan to De Koven's villa in Vevey to audition the opera in late June of 1915. Summarizing events a decade later, Anna De Koven made no attempt to conceal her resentment of the manager's failure to share the view she held of her husband's artistic genius ("Mr. Gatti's musical perception was no greater . . . than that possessed by most Italians")[13] and recorded the rather strained atmosphere that prevailed: "[W]e were left in strange doubt as to the result of that hearing in spite of Mr. Gatti's reiterated statement of his own satisfaction."[14] Having unsuccessfully attempted to placate the composer despite his reservations about the new opera, Gatti later articulated the reason for his unconvincing acting performance in a report to Kahn which is notable for its adamant refusal to consent to a hasty mounting of an American opera even during the politically charged war period:

> At the end of June I made a special trip to Vevey, in order to hear [De Koven's] music. The libretto certainly has literary merits which I do not question: from a theatrical standpoint the libretto has little practical value. In my opinion, the music belongs to that style lacking entirely in originality, of which the public in every country has become very tired and for good reasons. However, I did not fail to encourage Mr. De Koven and to assure him of my sympathetic interest. When Mr. De Koven—who does not understand anything about the organization of a theatre—asked me to produce his opera this coming season, I proved to him in a very plain and positive way that this request was absolutely impossible to grant.—If Mr. De Koven had such a desire, he should have finished this opera and informed me about it at least five months ago. Instead, the instrumentation will only be finished, I believe, in about two months and at the time of my visit, three weeks ago, he did not even know who would be the publisher of the material for the artists, chorus and conductors. Excuse me, please, if I state that all of this appears to me as a joke. Furthermore, which artists would sing this opera in English?—This is a work which is difficult for everybody, requiring a long and careful preparation and in the outcome of which nobody will have any confidence. Even if the music were ready at present, I in the first place would not know to which artists distribute the different parts. To

---

[13] Anna Farwell De Koven, A Musician and His Wife (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1926), 228. Mrs. De Koven, the daughter of a United States Senator and a redoubtable blueblood, excepted Toscanini from her sweeping ethnic evaluation.

[14] Ibid., 229.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> make up the cast in a proper way may require several months; the artists would have to be convinced and this is a work which I would have to do myself and in person—after their experiences with opera in English, the artists do not even want to hear anybody talk about it.—All of this I have thoroughly explained to Mr. and Mrs. De Koven and I am very much surprised that—after they seemed to be convinced of my argument—they insisted with you that I produce the opera during the coming season. I told them that I would consider the opera with sympathy for the season of 1916/17 and that we could take this matter up again in New York; . . . it is impossible to even think of including an opera of the importance and difficulty such as "The Canterbury Pilgrims" [in the 1915/16 season]. If I would commit the frivolity to give my consent, I would act against the real interests of the Metropolitan and spoil the entire season's schedule. . . . I ask you to believe that my attitude is purely and sincerely the result of clear foresight and independent of the value which I may give to the opera. [15]

Kahn wisely allowed the matter to be tabled until the following spring, when the completed score was heard and accepted for production by Gatti despite his continued reservations. De Koven's recounting of these events to Kahn is amusing in its unintentional confirmation of his naïveté: "After a rehearing of the score . . . I can only think that Mr. Gatti's previous sympathetic impressions at Vevey were strengthened and confirmed . . . [since he] promised to appoint a day this week for the signing of the contracts."[16] Mrs. De Koven seems to have been similarly deluded in her defensive assertion that the opera had actually been "commissioned" on behalf of the Metropolitan.[17]

Notwithstanding Gatti's personal opinions, the Metropolitan stinted neither on production values nor royalties for the new opera. To the contrary, De Koven received $150 per performance (five were guaranteed and seven were given) and acknowledged to Kahn the lavish

---

15 Gatti-Casazza, Milan, to Kahn, 16 July 1915. Kahn Papers, Box 47, Princeton University.

16 De Koven, Boston, to Kahn, 24 April 1916. Kahn Papers, Box 56, Princeton University.

17 "On our return to New York, Mr. Otto Kahn, who had not only commissioned the writing of the opera but had, by letter, promised its production, bringing us at an exceeding dangerous moment across the ocean, was almost disconcertingly reserved in our brief interview." Anna Farwell De Koven, Musician and His Wife, 229. Kahn's benevolent artistic interests were often misconstrued by aspirants for his largesse.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

scenic presentation his work was accorded: "I wrote [Gatti] . . . expressing my heartfelt thanks and appreciation for all that your liberal management did . . . in the way of a really sumptuous production and in every other essential which might contribute to the success of the work."[18] One of the chief theatrical advantages of The Canterbury Pilgrims was the opportunity it provided for such scenic display. Set in April 1387, the opera opens at the Tabard Inn in Southwark, where pilgrims prepare for the annual journey to Becket's shrine at Canterbury. Among the group are Chaucer himself (baritone), traveling incognito; Alisoun, the lusty Wife of Bath (contralto), in search of her sixth husband; and the gentle Prioress (soprano), who wears a bracelet inscribed with the famous motto *Amor Vincit Omnia* [Love Conquers All]. A love triangle quickly forms when Alisoun sets her sight on Chaucer, who in turn loves the Prioress from afar. Undeterred by the poet's disinterest, the Wife of Bath cannily induces him to accept a wager which turns on her ability to gain possession of the Prioress's bracelet; if she is successful, Chaucer must wed her at Canterbury. In a series of ruses played out over the following two acts, Alisoun secures the bracelet but is prevented from claiming her prize by the Man of Law, who declares a sixth marriage to be prohibited without special dispensation. This is provided by the fortuitous appearance of Richard II (tenor) at Canterbury as the pilgrims arrive in the final act. Chaucer's plight is relieved by the royal stipulation that the Wife of Bath may only take a miller as her sixth husband, whereupon the admiring Miller (bass) steps forward to receive Alisoun's happy consent, and Chaucer and the Prioress are reconciled amid general rejoicing.

Criticisms of MacKaye's libretto, which maintained that its underlying premise was too thin to support a full-length opera and the numerous plot complexities too difficult to

---

[18] De Koven to Kahn, 18 March 1917. Kahn Papers, Box 76, Princeton University.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

follow,[19] are misleading. In fact, the persistent efforts of a non-aristocrat to marry despite the ridiculous level of intrigue which occurs in the course of a single day proved a brilliant premise for The Marriage of Figaro. Rather, it is MacKaye's undeveloped dramatization that seriously handicapped The Canterbury Pilgrims from the inception. The son of prominent actor-dramatist Steele MacKaye (1842-1894), the librettist was a young Harvard graduate and inexperienced playwright when he authored The Canterbury Pilgrims at the request of American actor E. H. Sothern in 1903. Sothern never performed the play—possibly because of its weak leading role—but Macmillan published it in conjunction with The Modern Reader's Chaucer, an educational text edited by MacKaye, and the drama gained popularity in American universities but remained untested on the professional stage.[20] While MacKaye drew on the interest inherent in the variety of social classes represented by the pilgrim group (as had Chaucer), he failed to exploit this element as deftly as Da Ponte. The numerous plot intrigues, while clever and amusing, never achieve the mercurial level of farce, and the emotional depth that distinguishes the great Mozart comedies is largely absent. MacKaye's adaptation may have been conceptually flawed in its attempt to fashion a romantic comedy from an episodic literary text that resembles more a brilliant mosaic than a contiguous narrative. Since the principal characters have only recently met, it was difficult for the librettist to create a great deal of authentic emotion from their interrelationship; and any attempt to create a sudden blaze of passion, as in Manon Lescaut, is impeded by MacKaye's pale characterization of Chaucer, who emerges as a chivalric but passive figure entirely at the mercy of the events surrounding him.

---

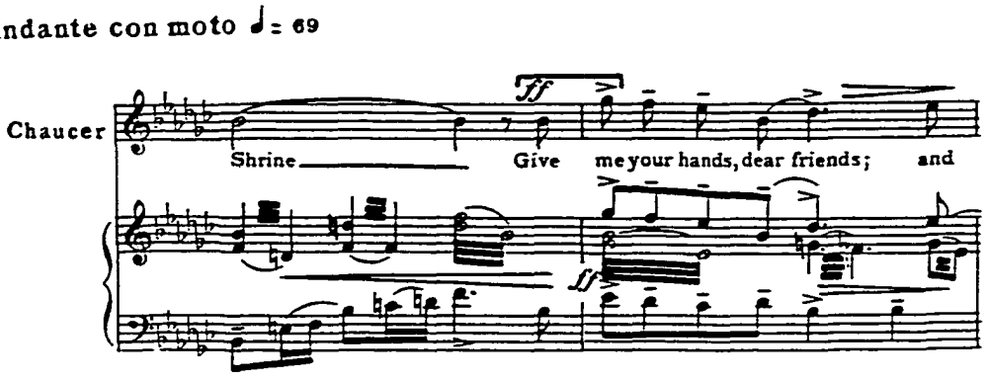
19 Glass, *American Opera,* 173.

20 Mackaye was an instructor at the Craigie School for Boys in New York City during this period. Garraty and Carnes, American National Biography, s.v. *MacKaye, Percy* and *MacKaye, Steele*; see also Glass, *American Opera,* 169.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
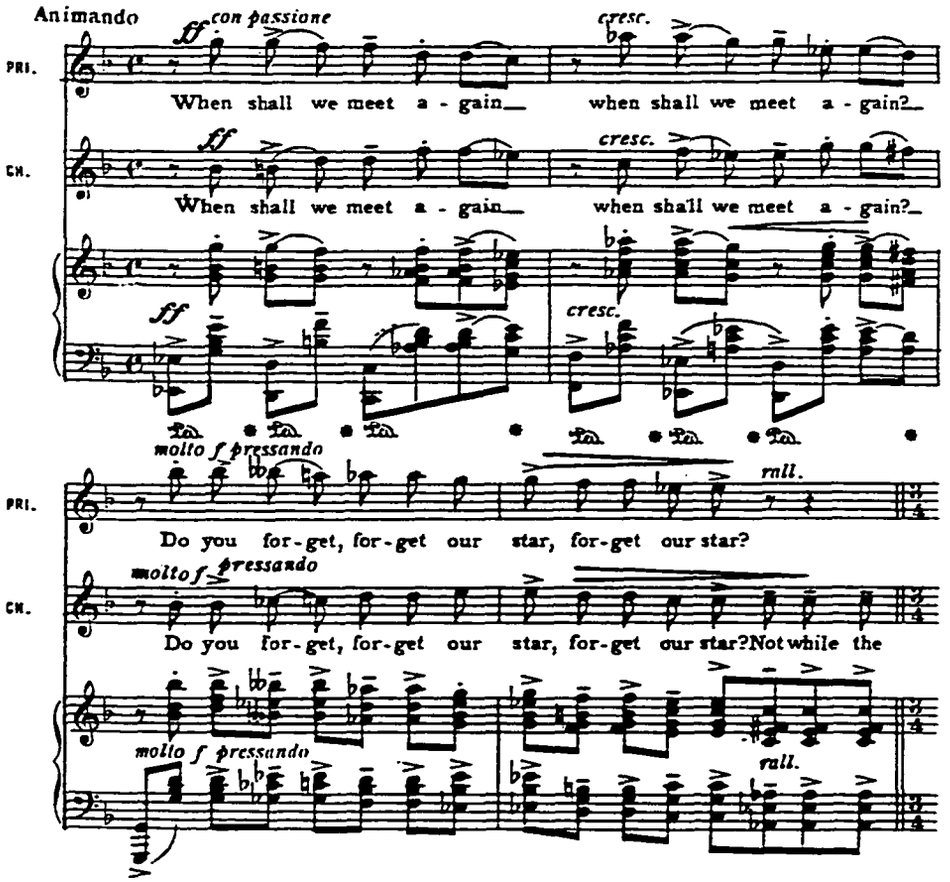
De Koven's score never fails to sound attractive, but nonetheless remains ineffective as it plays into the libretto's weaknesses rather than alleviating them. The vocal writing, while melodically fluid, presents some awkward moments in the *tessiture* of both Chaucer and the Prioress, a problem that is exacerbated by the syllabic setting of the lines. This is particularly true at climactic moments, such as Chaucer's Act 4 address to the pilgrims (Example 5.1[a]), where the baritone must leap to the top of his range on the difficult long "e" vowel while being doubled by a *fortissimo* orchestra, only to be rewarded with an eighth note's duration of time to phonate and accent a G♭ above the staff. Another instance is Chaucer's love duet with the Prioress in the same act (Example 5.1[b]), where her syllabically set lines require some punishing reiteration of tones at the top of her range above the staff, with no vocal approach provided and the doubling of a *molto forte* orchestra beneath her. The presence of such examples testifies to the collision of De Koven's ambition to write a grand opera with his more practiced comic opera talents:

Ex. 5.1(a): De Koven, The Canterbury Pilgrims, Act IV, piano-vocal score, p. 414



Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Ex. 5.1(b): De Koven, The Canterbury Pilgrims, Act IV, piano-vocal score, p. 426



Chaucer's role in particular presented so many problems of this type that Clarence Whitehill, the baritone who was originally cast, had to be replaced by Johannes Sembach, a dramatic tenor. De Koven seems never to have completely understood this flaw, for he blamed the situation on the singer: "I very much fear that from a vocal standpoint Mr. Whitehill has been miscast for the role of Chaucer."[21] Yet the problem was indicative of a larger issue, the fact that the work as a whole was far more closely aligned with the comic opera genre than it was to large-scale opera.

---

21 De Koven, Beverly, Massachusetts, to Kahn, 2 September 1916. Kahn Papers, Box 56, Princeton University.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Male vocal writing in the so-called "barytenor" range was characteristic of the former, as were the relentlessly prosaic syllabic settings and phrase structures in which all the vocal lines are continually punctuated by rests. The lack of significant differentiation among the vocal lines of the various characters—although the Wife of Bath is generally given more vigorous music to sing—also contributes to a sense of broad musical characterization found in the score, rather than the more penetrating portraits one expects in a mature operatic work.

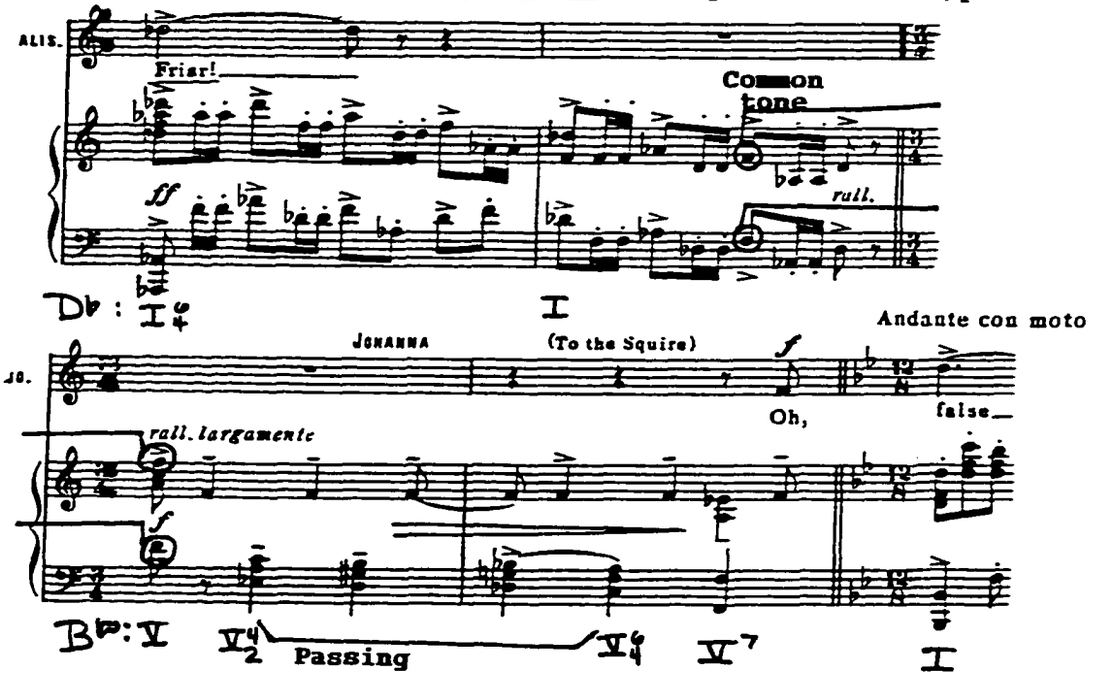
On the other hand, De Koven did not exploit his comic opera expertise fully enough to his advantage by creating any memorable set pieces or even any highly profiled melodies, causing the critic William J. Henderson to remark on the score's "careless melodiousness."[22] Nor did De Koven attempt to compensate with an adventuresome harmonic scheme, for the vocabulary of The Canterbury Pilgrims is even more conservative than that of Cyrano. De Koven adhered closely to the tonic-dominant-subdominant axis, varying his progressions with frequent modulations; however, changes of key are usually introduced by common tone and immediately confirmed by the authentic cadence, which prevents any sense of ambiguity from drifting into the music. One example is the crucial transition to the Act 2 quintet, one of the score's most dramatically effective ensembles, in which the common tone F links the key of the prior music in D♭ major to a dominant seventh chord built on F, which leads into the B♭ major quintet. De Koven can think of nothing more imaginative to enliven this pedestrian passage than a sequence of passing chromatic chords culminating in the dominant seventh:

---

22 New York Sun, 9 March 1917, 8, quoted in Glass, *American Opera*, 184.

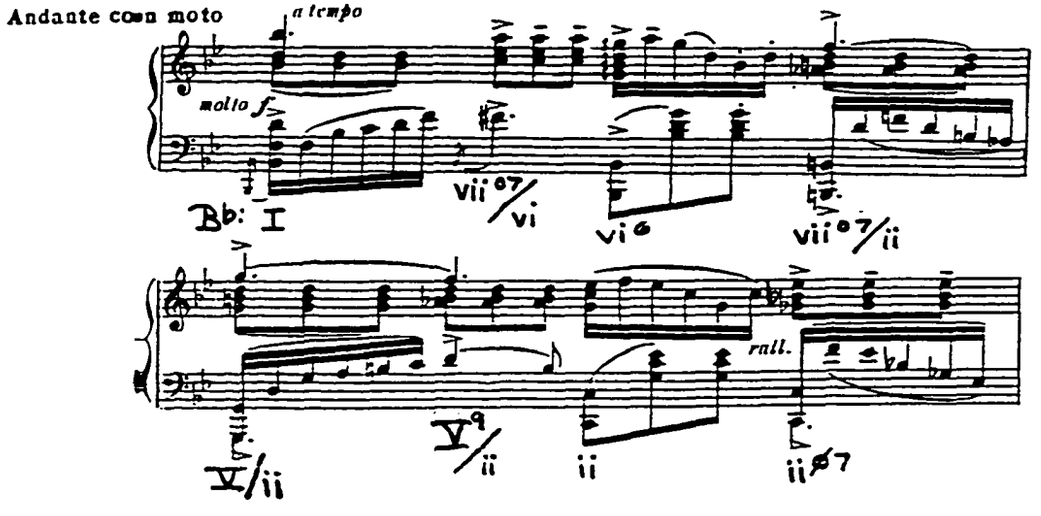
Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Ex. 5.2(a): De Koven, The Canterbury Pilgrims, Act II, piano-vocal score, p. 211



Similarly, the quintet music draws on harmonies no more daring than diminished seventh chords, as shown in this sequential passage:

Ex. 5.2(b): De Koven, The Canterbury Pilgrims, Act II, piano-vocal score, p. 215-16 [23]



[23] The omission of accidentals at the end of the second measure of the excerpt to mark the return to B♭ is clearly an error in the piano reduction; the pitch is correctly notated in the vocal line.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

This banal harmonic landscape might have matched the composer's aural perception of medieval England, but it quickly becomes tiresome to the modern listener. Finally, the unvarying homophony of the score contributes little of textural interest, even when chorus or orchestra might have been called upon to do so. The only striking exception is a large ensemble which greets the arrival of King Richard in the last act. There, De Koven utilizes a double chorus to what one imagines must have been impressive effect: a large group of pilgrims kneeling at the shrine proclaims the monarch's glory while a second group, in an upstage procession of priests and choirboys, sings a Latin Gloria.[24]

Critical response ranged from kind to tepid, with most reviews describing a pleasant evening's entertainment while categorizing the work as an innocuous extension of the comic opera genre. Henderson's Sun review was typical in its weighing of the music's virtues against its shortcomings: "Mr. DeKoven has given us a score which is uneven in its merit in that it has moments of great beauty and others of empty commonplace."[25] Gatti's cabled report to Kahn was more ominous:

> CANTERBURY PILGRIMS HAD SPLENDID PERFORMANCE ITS MISE EN SCENE WAS GREATLY ADMIRED THE PUBLIC RECEIVED NOVELTY CORDIALLY BUT WITH LITTLE CONVICTION AFTER HEARING COMPLETE OPERA I CAN SAY FRANKLY THAT IT APPEARS TO ME FAULTY IN CONSTRUCTION HEAVY AND NOTWITHSTANDING SEVERAL SIMPLE AND POPULAR THEMES OPERA IS PROLIX AND LACKING IN DISTINCTION I FORESEE THAT THE PRESS WILL BE INDIFFERENT AND THAT THE OPERA IS UNLIKELY TO SURVIVE THE PRESENT SEASON KIND REGARDS. [26]

---

[24] Glass, *American Opera,* 192.

[25] William J. Henderson, New York Sun, 9 March 1917, 8.

[26] Telegram from Gatti-Casazza to Kahn, Palm Beach, Florida, 8 March 1917. Kahn Papers, Box 83, Princeton University.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Again, De Koven seemed unwilling or unable to perceive his artistic shortcomings. In a pre-production interview with the Brooklyn Eagle, he declared: "I am proud from my heart to have written 'The Canterbury Pilgrims.' It is so superior to anything that I have ever done that I can hardly believe I wrote it!"[27] But the acerbic critic Henry T. Finck, admittedly no particular supporter of American opera, scoffed in his memoirs:

> Among other American operas produced at the Metropolitan was Reginald De Koven's "Canterbury Tales." Concerning this, which its composer, so I was told, considered the best opera since "Carmen," I wrote a criticism which so displeased him that he sent a long telegram to the Editor of the *Post* in which he said I didn't even know the difference between major and minor! Poor Reggie![28]

Despite its acknowledged entertainment value, The Canterbury Pilgrims vanished like Atlantis, becoming the first Metropolitan American opera since The Pipe of Desire never to receive a revival on any stage. Anna Farwell De Koven blamed the circumstances surrounding the entrance of the United States into World War I, citing a disturbance that occurred during "the third performance, that memorable 17th of March" when "fluttering newspaper sheets made their appearance [with the momentous announcement] . . . among the audience," together with the subsequent dismissal of German singers from the roster, which affected the roles of both Chaucer and the Wife of Bath.[29] Soprano Frances Alda (Gatti's wife at the time) recorded a similar incident in her memoirs, but gave the date as 5 April 1917, "when the news went out to the world that President Wilson had declared war on Germany."[30] Both women recall the performance

---

27 *New English Opera to be Heard Within Year, Says De Koven,* Brooklyn Eagle, clipping ca. April 1916. Kahn Papers, Box 56, Princeton University.

28 Finck, Golden Age of Music, 371.

29 Anna Farwell De Koven, Musician and His Wife, 231-33.

30 Frances Alda, Men, Women and Tenors (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1937; reprints, Freeport: Books for Libraries Press, 1970 and New York: AMS Press, 1971), 226-27 (page numbers refer to first reprint edition).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

being interrupted by a call for cheers for the Allies by James Gerard, the former ambassador to Germany, and conductor Artur Bodanzky's interpolation of "The Star-Spangled Banner" into the proceedings. Glass reports similarly, but identifies the patriotic instigator as "William Gerard, the press manager of the Metropolitan."[31] All accounts, as well as Gatti's memoirs, agree that Margarete Ober, the singer portraying the Wife of Bath and a former member of the Kaiser's court opera, fainted backstage and was unable to complete the final act.[32] But the Metropolitan's Annals record the news as having arrived at the theater during the afternoon of 6 April 1917, when a matinee of Parsifal held the stage, and history indeed confirms this as the date of America's official entry into the conflict.[33] The facts surrounding the disturbance are worth recounting, since they shed some light on the nationalist significance attached to the American repertoire by the various parties involved.

After ending the Metropolitan's potentially dangerous hiatus in the American program by strongly encouraging Gatti to produce the De Koven opera, Kahn did not appear at its premiere, uncharacteristically remaining at his Palm Beach winter estate until the following week. He had a good reason: the second Canterbury Pilgrims performance was to be attended by James W. Gerard, whose official designation as the "former" United States Ambassador to Germany belied his importance as the nation's senior expert on affairs within Germany, a crucial position in the wake of Washington's severance of diplomatic relations with Berlin after February 1917. Gerard participated in a secret conference with President Woodrow Wilson on the evening of March 15 before arriving in New York the next morning to a hero's welcome; that night he

---

31 *American Opera*, 210.

32 Gatti-Casazza, Memories of the Opera, 180.

33 Fitzgerald, Annals of the Metropolitan Opera, *Chronology*, 258.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

heard De Koven's opera as a special guest of the Metropolitan, where he was prominently placed in Box 1. Kahn relinquished the position of official host to the American-born director Clarence Mackay, but made sure his name got into the papers with the information that he had specifically ended his Florida sojourn in order to be present.[34] De Koven was in attendance as well, and praised the smooth progress of the evening in a letter to Kahn.[35] The third and fourth performances continued without incident amid news that Wilson had called a special joint session of Congress for April 2. American correspondents warned that Berlin might retaliate by declaring war at any moment, but this did not happen and the nation waited tensely for developments. On the evening of 2 April 1917, the Metropolitan's fifth performance of The Canterbury Pilgrims began as scheduled, and at 8:35 p.m. in Washington the Princeton intellectual who hated war stepped before the packed Congressional chamber to declare that "The world must be made safe for democracy."[36] By the time Wilson's speech concluded and official declarations of war were introduced in both the House and Senate, telephone and telegraph lines were ablaze up the east coast. The Canterbury Pilgrims was well into its third act when news sheets began to flutter throughout the boxes, and it was most probably the Metropolitan's press agent William J. Guard who called for Allied cheers. Guard was a savvy public relations man who had gotten his start with Hammerstein and was well aware of patriotic attacks against the Met's avowed internationalism. Moreover, it is unlikely that Ambassador Gerard would have returned to hear a second performance of The Canterbury Pilgrims at such a juncture. No other

---

34 *Gerard Hears Native Opera,* New York Times, 17 March 1917, 11.

35 De Koven to Kahn, 18 March 1917. Kahn Papers, Box 76, Princeton University.

36 "At 8:35 o'clock tonight the United States virtually made its entrance into the war." New York Times, 3 April 1917, 1.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

opera was affected by the tumult as was De Koven's; when the House of Representatives signaled an official Congressional declaration of war by approving its resolution on April 6 (the Senate had approved the day before), the vote concluded at 3:12 a.m. and the news was telegraphed around the world within hours, well before the Parsifal matinee had even begun. Indeed, the press specifically reported no untoward demonstrations at the traditional Good Friday performance: "No incident save a slight hitch with the descending dove marked the afternoon's proceedings . . . [German soprano Margarete] Matzenauer achiev[ed] perhaps the best performance she has given as Kundry."[37]

The question of whether the unexpected publicity that attended The Canterbury Pilgrims may actually have been salutary rather than detrimental remains moot, as it never recovered from the tepid critical reception of its initial staging. An optimistic report in the musical press that the Metropolitan would present the opera in the 1917-1918 season with an all-American cast was never fulfilled. Indeed, the notice—placed on the front page of the Musical Courier—may well have been a ploy on the part of the composer or his nationalist supporters to pressure the theater to revive the work.[38] De Koven's only other opera, a setting of Rip Van Winkle written for the Chicago Opera in 1919, also did not outlive its first production. Both operas apparently fell victim to De Koven's artistic limitations and—like Damrosch's Cyrano—to the perils of musical hybridism.

CHARLES WAKEFIELD CADMAN: SHANEWIS

Gatti's Metropolitan evinced little interest in the Indianist movement in American music, through which a relatively small group of composers attempted to advance the cause of

---

37 *'Parsifal' on Good Friday,* New York Times, 7 April 1917, 11.

38 Musical Courier 76 (10 January 1918): 1.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

artistic nationalism by putting Dvořàk's theories on indigenous musics into practice. During the first decade of the twentieth century, when the movement was at its height and Arthur Farwell's Wa-Wan Press (1901-1911) was actively publishing many Indianist composers,[39] the Metropolitan passed over Victor Herbert's Natoma, Arthur Nevin's Poia, and probably Frederick Converse's The Sacrifice.[40] Gatti also declined to produce Albert Bimboni's Winona in 1922, even though President Warren Harding had interceded on its behalf.[41] Yet in 1918, Charles Wakefield Cadman, a relatively late convert to the Indianist cause, saw the first production of any of the three operas he had then written take place on the stage of the Metropolitan.

Cadman (1881-1946), largely self-taught and the only American composer produced by the Metropolitan up to that time with no European training, was born in Johnstown, Pennsylvania and raised in the Carnegie steel mill town of Homestead. Cadman received rudimentary piano training and had already begun to compose small pieces when he was compelled to leave school at fourteen to work as a messenger in the Duquesne Steel Plant.[42] An early musical influence was a 1896 Pittsburgh production of De Koven's Robin Hood which so impressed the young composer that he wrote three operettas in the popular style. Excerpts from

---

39 The Wa-Wan Press was dedicated to the development of American, though not necessarily Indianist, music. Nevertheless, a large proportion of the compositions of the thirty-seven composers it published are based on Indian melodies or subjects. Harry D. Perison, *Charles Wakefield Cadman: His Life and Works* (Ph.D. diss., University of Rochester, Eastman School of Music, 1978), 62; see also Vera Brodsky Lawrence, ed., The Wa-Wan Press, 1901-1911, 5 vols. (New York: Arno Press, 1970).

40 Gatti-Casazza's papers from the period in which Converse composed The Sacrifice (1911) are not extant, but it is difficult to believe that the composer would not have made his second opera available to the Metropolitan before allowing its premiere by the Boston Opera Company, of which Kahn was a director. A factor in Converse's favor would have been the presence of Alice Nielsen, a Tennessee soprano who eventually created the leading role of Chonita, on the Metropolitan's roster from 1909.

41 See chapter 6, *n*8.

42 *Charles Wakefield Cadman: An American Composer,* The Musician 20 (November 1915): 687.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

his Cubanita were performed at Pittsburgh's Duquesne Garden, but Cadman had virtually decided to give up music by 1902, when he sought the advice of local author Nelle Richmond Eberhart (1871-1944) on developing his writing talent. Eberhart had long wanted to work closely with a composer on setting her rather sentimental poetry to music, and Cadman was easily drawn back into his original sphere. The two quickly developed a successful professional partnership, and Eberhart subsequently became the principal lyricist for a large part of Cadman's prodigious song output, as well as the librettist for all five of his operas.[43]

Encouraged by the early sale of a sacred song to Philadelphia publisher William J. Kirkpatrick, Cadman turned most of his energy to the genre during the period 1902-1908, displaying a fluid lyric talent well suited to popular tastes. The new team succeeded in placing much of their work—including "At Dawning" (1906), which was to become their best-known song—with prominent publishers, but Cadman still held other musical work, serving as organist for a large Pittsburgh church and assuming the post of music editor and critic of the Pittsburgh Dispatch from 1908-1910. It was through his newspaper position that he secured an interview with famed Metropolitan soprano Lillian Nordica (1857-1914), who expressed an interest in his music.[44] One of Cadman's earliest Indianist compositions, "From the Land of the Sky-Blue Water" from Four American Indian Songs, op. 45 (composed 1907-8, published 1909), began to

---

[43] Perison, *Cadman*, 35-36.

[44] Cadman's introduction to Nordica may have been effected by Austrian conductor-composer Emil Paur, who had conducted principally Wagnerian repertoire at the Metropolitan from 1899-1900 before serving as conductor of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra from 1904-1910. Paur was credited with giving Cadman "valuable assistance" during his Pittsburgh residency, and Nordica's 1891-1909 tenure as one of the Metropolitan's most distinguished Wagnerian singers would have placed her in close contact with the conductor. Waldo Selden Pratt, ed., Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians: American Supplement, being the sixth volume of the complete work, 3d ed. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1935), s.v. *Charles Wakefield Cadman*, 150.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

appear frequently on Nordica's recital programs, and Cadman's reputation soared.[45] After John McCormack recorded "At Dawning" for the Victor Talking Machine Company, Cadman achieved a measure of financial independence and was able to build a summer retreat, Daoma Lodge in Colorado, entirely from royalties on the song.[46]

Eberhart had already developed an interest in American Indian folklore during a period of public school teaching near the Rosebud Indian Reservation in northeastern Nebraska. Cadman did not become interested in the subject until 1906, when he read Indian Story and Song, a monograph by the pioneering ethnologist Alice Cunningham Fletcher (1838-1923), possibly at the suggestion of Eberhart.[47] Fletcher's work on Omaha music was carried out with the assistance of music theorist John Comfort Fillmore (1843-1898) and Francis La Flesche (1857-1932), an Omaha Indian who had been appointed to the Office of Indian Affairs in 1881.[48] Similar ethnological studies had sparked the creative interest of earlier Indianist composers Farwell (1872-1952), Carlos Troyer (1837-1920) and Dvořàk pupil Harvey Worthington Loomis (1865-1930), among others, and Cadman's contribution of his lyrically attractive, homophonic "idealizations" of collected native melodies helped bring the movement to its apex.[49]

---

45 Robert W. Baisley, *Charles Wakefield Cadman: Completely American,* Music Educators Journal 61 (May 1975): 57.

46 *Cadman: An American Composer,* 688.

47 Pratt, American Supplement, 150. Perison places the date of Cadman's first encounter with the Fletcher monograph as 1907; *Cadman*, 62.

48 Ibid., 62-63. The monograph Cadman read was an abridgment of an earlier article published by Fletcher, *A Study of Omaha Indian Music,* Archaeological and Ethnological Papers of the Peabody Museum, I, 5 (June 1893): 1-57, 79-152, which included Fillmore's *Report on the Structural Peculiarities of the Music*, 59-77. Ibid., 63*n*4.

49 Ibid., 22. Other ethnologists significant to the movement were Frederick Russell Burton, Natalie Curtis, and Frances Densmore.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Cadman's new Indianist interests impelled him to organize a series of lecture-performances under the name *American Indian Music Talks* in 1908, preparations for which brought him into personal contact with both Fletcher and La Flesche. Cadman was enthusiastic when La Flesche suggested that he and Eberhart collaborate on an opera based on a traditional Indian legend;[50] by this time, the composer had augmented his formal training with studies in theory and orchestration in Pittsburgh. An additional impetus may well have come from the American premiere of Arthur Nevin's music for Poia, which had been given a concert performance in Pittsburgh on 15 January 1906.[51] Nevin may have provided a prototype for Cadman's lectures on Indian music as well, when he delivered the first such presentation at the White House in 1907 at the invitation of Theodore Roosevelt.[52] Like Nevin, Cadman collected much of the authentic musical material for his Indianist opera himself, and spent the summer of 1909 on the Omaha and Winnebago reservations recording melodies with the assistance of La Flesche.[53] Cadman had hoped to complete the ensuing work, Daoma, in time to submit it to the Metropolitan's prize competition,[54] but when this was not possible, he used a professional contact

---

50 Harry D. Perison, *The "Indian" Operas of Charles Wakefield Cadman*, College Music Symposium 22 (Fall 1982): 23.

51 The Pittsburgh Dispatch, whose staff Cadman joined two years later, demonstrated its support of the new American opera with the optimistic report that Poia was "destined to take its place among the greatest of the world's classics." Johnson, American Subjects, 80.

52 The research of both Nevin and Cadman was preceded by that of Theodore Baker (see chapter 1, *n*113) and Frederick Russell Burton, a former Harvard pupil of Paine whose field research among the Ojibway culminated in the publication of American Primitive Music (New York: Moffat, Yard and Company, 1909). Cadman utilized a melody collected by Burton in Shanewis's *Ojibway Canoe Song* (see Ex. 5.4). Oscar Thompson, ed., The International Cyclopedia of Music and Musicians, 11th ed. (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1985), s.v. *Arthur Finley Nevin* and *Frederick Russell Burton.*

53 Pratt, American Supplement, 150.

54 Cadman, Los Angeles, to Kahn, 19 February 1916. Kahn Papers, Box 55, Princeton University.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

with Tennessee soprano Alice Nielsen, who often sang his music, to audition the work for Henry Russell in Boston. Cadman later complained to Kahn of the scant attention he had been given: "I remember vividly the circumstances of Henry Russell granting me a half hour for 'showing' him a three act operatic affair some five years ago, and how impossible it was for me to give him any idea of its contents under those conditions."[55] Russell declined the work, citing the "dangerously untheatric" nature of the story, a criticism which was to resurface in Cadman's dramatic work.[56]

It was Cadman's final effort to get Daoma produced that brought him to the attention of the Metropolitan. After unsuccessfully entering the score in the 1915 American opera competition sponsored by the National Federation of Music Clubs (the prize was awarded to Horatio Parker for Fairyland), Cadman apparently wrote to Kahn directly and received instructions to send his work to the theater through press agent William Guard.[57] Guard gave the score of Daoma (which Cadman retitled The Land of Misty Water, hoping the similarity to his now-famous song "From the Land of the Sky-Blue Water" might garner interest), along with a new one-act work by Cadman and Eberhart, The Garden of Death (later retitled The Garden of Mystery, after Hawthorne's *Rappaccini's Daughter*) to Metropolitan conductor Giorgio Polacco on 20 March 1916.[58] A year later, Cadman wrote to Kahn with the news that he had been told

---

55 Cadman, Los Angeles, to Kahn, 24 May 1917. Kahn Papers, Box 74, Princeton University.

56 Perison, *"Indian" Operas*, 24. It is also possible that Russell felt Cadman's opera too similar to Converse's The Sacrifice, which he had produced in Boston the year before with Nielsen in the leading soprano role.

57 Although no documentation of Cadman's initial Metropolitan overtures appears to be extant, the composer's cause may have been aided by his former connections with Paur and Nordica. In any event, Cadman thanked Kahn for his willingness to consider his music and confirmed the receipt of Guard's instructions in a letter of 19 February 1916. Kahn Papers, Box 55, Princeton University.

58 William Guard to James Herbert, Secretary to Kahn at Kuhn, Loeb & Co., 20 March 1916. Kahn Papers, Box 63, Princeton University. This communication, as well as the letter cited in *n*57 above, refute Perison's statement that Polacco examined only the score to Daoma and rejected it in 1914.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

by Guard that his scores "[had] been duly examined and found unavailable [*sic*]." Yet, he thanked the chairman for the theater's consideration, adding pointedly: "[I]t also convinced me that the Metropolitan Opera Company did not close its doors to the American composer at all times!" Cadman then requested consideration of his third operatic attempt; the new scenario he described is clearly that of Shanewis.[59]

As with Damrosch, Herbert, and De Koven, it seemed that a veiled barb achieved its objective. Kahn responded to Cadman's letter the day he received it,[60] and launched into a defense of the Metropolitan's American efforts that he would tirelessly repeat throughout the next decade:

> I need hardly say that any work from a composer of your high merit and recognized standing is sure of a respectful and sympathetic examination at the hands of the Metropolitan Opera Co. The present Management of that Company has, as you know, produced five operas by American composers, whilst not a single such work was performed at the Metropolitan Opera House in all the years of its history before the advent of the present administration. We have accepted for production next season Mr. Gilbert's pantomime-ballet [The Dance in Place Congo] and nothing would be more pleasing to us than to see American Opera take a permanent and considerable place in our repertoire—a consummation, which, of course, does not depend upon us but upon the American composer and the American public. [61]

Kahn suggested that Cadman immediately send him the libretto of the uncompleted opera, frankly citing the difficulties that the literary element had posed to dramatic composers:

> It is the great handicap of the composer that the success of his work is so largely dependent upon the librettist. However good the music, the public will not accept an operatic work unless the libretto has theatrical value or at least theatrical

---

Perison, *"Indian" Operas,* 24.

59 Cadman, Los Angeles, to Kahn, 1 May 1917. Kahn Papers, Box 74, Princeton University.

60 Cadman's original May 1 letter was date-stamped received by Kuhn, Loeb on 9 May 1917.

61 Kahn to Cadman, Los Angeles, 9 May 1917. Kahn Papers, Box 74, Princeton University.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> appeal. Would it not be well, therefore, that you send me the libretto now. If it seems to us appropriate for performance here, the next step would be the hearing of the music next fall. If—which I should greatly regret—the libretto appears unacceptable to our jury, then we could tell you so at once, so as to leave you free to avail yourself of . . . other opportunities. [62]

Cadman scholar Harry D. Perison clearly misinterpreted Kahn's intent when he wrote, "it is evident from the tone of the letter that no serious intentions were involved."[63] The De Koven situation, among others, had convinced the chairman to remain deliberately oblique where the Metropolitan was concerned, as aspirants had the tendency to derive false hopes from his encouragement. In fact, the Metropolitan was more serious than even Kahn guessed, for its administrative correspondence, particularly that of assistant manager Edward Ziegler, indicates that the only other composer under close consideration at the time was Charles Martin Loeffler. Ziegler learned of the existence of a possible Loeffler opera in June 1917 (shortly after Kahn requested Cadman to submit his Shanewis libretto), when the music critic Grenville Vernon informed him that Loeffler had sent the libretto of his only completed opera, The Passion of Hilarion (1912-13; adapted from a play by the Scottish writer William Sharp),[64] to Gatti-Casazza in Paris in 1913 but had never received a response.[65] Ziegler immediately attempted to contact

---

62 Ibid.

63 *Cadman*, 190.

64 Sharp (1856-1905) also published poetry under the pseudonym Fiona MacLeod, some of which was set by the American composer Charles Tomlinson Griffes.

65 Ziegler to Loeffler, Boston, 11 June 1917. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Ziegler correspondence, 1917-18, L. Loeffler was able to confirm the Metropolitan's earlier interest by producing a letter from Gatti dated 21 April 1913 in which the manager requested him to send his libretto, in Italian translation, to Paris. Loeffler acceded to this request, but it appears that the libretto never reached Gatti's hands, for Ziegler reported that when questioned about the work, "[Gatti] was absolutely blank in the matter—this is unusual if he had known anything about it for he has a very good memory." Ziegler to Loeffler, Medfield, Massachusetts, 10 October 1917. Ibid.

The Ziegler-Loeffler correspondence refutes the conjecture of Loeffler's biographer, Ellen Knight, that the libretto he submitted to the Metropolitan was that to The Peony Lantern (ca. 1919) and

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Loeffler, but several months passed before he was able to locate the reclusive composer at his rural retreat, Meadowmere Farm, outside of Boston.[66]

It was during the summer of 1917 that Cadman received word that the Metropolitan was apparently willing to examine all three of his libretti as part of its ongoing American considerations.[67] Cadman resubmitted them, together with the piano-vocal score of Shanewis, and was asked to send samples of his orchestral technique in early September. Before he could do this, however, the composer received a cable from Gatti on 6 September 1917 informing him that Shanewis had been accepted for production that spring. But Perison's claim that the opera was "selected for performance by the Metropolitan Opera Company for reasons besides its actual artistic merit"[68] is misleading: extra-musical factors—such as length, language, casting considerations, difficulty of staging, and publisher's demands, among others—were inescapable factors in the consideration of all new repertoire, European or American. Moreover, despite his technical weaknesses, Cadman had demonstrated in Shanewis the appealing lyricism that had made him a successful song composer. Sixty years after its premiere, critic Andrew Porter could still describe the opera's music as "tunefully Puccinian, with an occasional hint of

---

that it was the composer who initiated further inquiry with the Met: "He wrote two versions of the libretto, one set in Japan (The Peony Lantern) and one in China (The Lantern Ghosts). This may well be the libretto that he sent to the Metropolitan Opera Company, which the Met misplaced and had no knowledge of when Loeffler made enquiries in 1917." Knight, Loeffler, 188.

66 Ziegler letters to Loeffler, Boston, 10 July 1917 and 4 October 1917. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Ziegler correspondence, 1917-18, L.

67 In August 1917, Cadman wrote to Kahn describing his receipt of a letter from American composer A. Walter Kramer (then a staff member at Musical America) that advised him to immediately submit his libretti to the house, "since 'someone at the Metropolitan' desired to read a few librettos of operas by American composers at an early date—and that mine might as well be included in this new reading." Although Cadman did not give the date of the Kramer letter, he obviously received it after his May 1917 appeal to Kahn for consideration of Shanewis (see *n*59 above). Cadman, Drake, Colorado, to Kahn, 21 August [1917]. Kahn Papers, Box 74, Princeton University.

68 *"Indian" Operas*, 47.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Griegian exoticism. It flows, it sounds fresh, and it is affecting."[69] A certain amount of luck was admittedly on the composer's side: the dearth of what Gatti termed "sympathetic" new operas had not abated, making Cadman's timing as opportune as De Koven's; the recently-voted German ban had resulted in far more open space in the 1917-1918 season than anticipated, as Perison points out;[70] Ziegler's efforts to locate Loeffler were as yet unsuccessful; and Giorgio Polacco, the conductor who had rejected Cadman's work in 1916, had been fired from the Metropolitan the previous spring.[71] Moreover, the acceptance of Gilbert's African-inspired one-act ballet The Dance in Place Congo necessitated a companion piece, and Gatti devised a triple bill of works linked by their American scenarios into which the fifty-five minute Shanewis fit perfectly (the third work was Franco Leoni's exotic L'Oracolo, set in San Francisco's Chinatown). The program additionally benefitted from the appeal of indigenous musical trends which had been in use by American regionalists for nearly two decades but had never been heard at the Metropolitan.

Shanewis drew considerable popularity from the appeal of its story, which was based on incidents in the life of "Princess" Tsianina Redfeather Blackstone (1892-1985), an Indian singer who had been introduced to Cadman by Denver vocal coach John "J.C." Wilcox for

---

69 Andrew Porter, *Singtime in the Rockies,* The New Yorker 55 (27 August 1979): 83.

70 *Cadman,* 189.

71 At issue was not Polacco's musical competence but his ethics—the conductor had become involved in a romantic affair with young soprano Edith Mason that was badly handled by the parties, both of whom were married. The requested resubmission of Cadman's works was nonetheless indicative of a decision to disregard the conductor's assessment that very likely issued from Kahn, who had insisted on Polacco's termination: "Mr. Polacco's deplorable conduct and behavior . . . have entirely destroyed [his] authority and usefulness in the Metropolitan Opera House. It is inconceivable that he should remain in his present position." Kahn to Gatti-Casazza, 30 April 1917. Kahn Papers, Box 83, Princeton University.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

possible participation in his Indianist concert series.[72] Cadman toured successfully with Tsianina across the United States from 1913 to 1926, testifying that "an avalanche of admiration was hers."[73] Although her royal title was a publicity idea, Tsianina was in fact descended from a full-blooded Creek chief whose family was among those deported to Oklahoma Territory over the "Trail of Tears" in the 1830s. The singer's musical talents had come to the attention of Alice Robertson, the state's first congresswoman, and arrangements for further study brought her to Denver, where she met Wilcox and Cadman. Wilcox is credited with the idea of suggesting an opera based on the events of his pupil's life to Cadman, who was reportedly not enthusiastic in the wake of Daoma's failure. But the composer felt indebted to Wilcox for the authentic contribution to his concert series, and became hopeful that the relatively brief Shanewis (an approximate transliteration of Tsianina's name) might serve as an introduction to his more extensive opera. Eberhart's libretto develops a love quadrangle from Tsianina's story, a premise which provided an outlet for Cadman's lyric gifts. The Indian girl Shanewis (mezzo-soprano) is taken as a protégée by California socialite Mrs. J. Asher Everton (contralto), whose daughter Amy (soprano) is engaged to Lionel (tenor), a young architect. After hearing Shanewis sing at the Everton home, Lionel declares his love to her without revealing his commitment to Amy. The second scene takes places on an Indian reservation, where Shanewis has taken Lionel to see if he will find acceptance among her people. They are followed by the Evertons, who hope to dissuade Lionel from his choice. Also opposing the match is Philip Harjo (baritone), a foster brother of

---

[72] A. Dean Palmer, *Tsianina Blackstone: A Chapter in the History of the American Indian in Opera*, Liberal Arts Review [Eastern New Mexico University] 7 (Spring 1979): 42. I am grateful to the staff of the Special Collections division of Eastern New Mexico University's Golden Library for providing me with a copy of this article.

[73] Telegram from Cadman, San Francisco, to concert agent David Balsz, Los Angeles, 11 May 1925, quoted in Palmer, *Tsianina Blackstone*, 43.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Shanewis who is secretly in love with her and jealous of her success outside the reservation. When Lionel reveals his engagement to the shocked Shanewis, he is killed by Harjo with a poisoned arrow.

The tragic dénouement was insisted upon by Cadman, who rejected the original idea of Shanewis selflessly giving up Lionel to Amy as hackneyed; the other possibilities he suggested—including suicide by Shanewis, her murder by Harjo, or Lionel's murder by Shanewis—clearly indicated the composer's desire for a *verismo* conclusion.[74] This struck some critics as an abrupt departure from the essentially lyric character of the balance of the opera. Cadman's inexperience in larger forms, which to some degree hampered all of his dramatic output, was actually to blame, as the final scene's dramaturgy required a fuller musical realization than he provided. But a preceding monologue for the title character, in which she effectively denounces the treatment of her people in a hexatonic, chant-like melody, was much admired:

> For half a thousand years
> Your race has cheated mine . . .
> Your ships infest our rivers,
> Your cities mar our hills.
> What gave you in return? [75]

Such sentiments supported the view of indigenous Americans as a tragically exploited people, a portrait which had emerged in the years after the 1890 Sioux defeat at Wounded Knee. The fable of the American West that began with Lewis and Clark's 1804 departure from St. Louis for points unknown had concluded with the Census Bureau's 1890 report that the frontier had been

---

[74] Perison, *Cadman,* 180-81.

[75] Charles Wakefield Cadman, Shanewis, piano-vocal score (Boston: White-Smith Music Publishing Company, 1918).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

closed. Romantic portrayals of the vanishing American Indian were not long in developing, aided by artists who sought to capture their spirit as well as the musical impetus provided by Dvořàk's nationalistic disciples in America.[76]

Shanewis utilizes a number of authentic Indian melodies throughout its score. Most are recast in Cadman's "idealized" idiom, but ceremonial music heard in the reservation scene is comprised of a faithful transcription of an Osage song recorded by La Flesche, set to a spare open-fifth figure in timpani and lower strings and accompanied by wooden rattles filled with buck shot that were designed by Norman Bel-Geddes.[77] Two selections Shanewis sings at the Evertons proved highly popular with audiences and were frequently performed as concert excerpts: the "Spring Song of the Robin Woman" (example 5.3), based on a Cheyenne melody recorded by Natalie Curtis; and the "Ojibway Canoe Song" (example 5.4), adapted from a song collected by Frederick Burton.[78]

---

76 A harbinger of this trend appeared in the tract A Century of Dishonor (1881) published by American writer Helen Hunt Jackson (1830-1885). Her historical novel Ramona (1884) was credited as a significant catalyst in the nation's changing attitude toward Native Americans.

77 Cadman, Shanewis, piano-vocal score (Boston: White-Smith Music Publishing Company, 1918), *foreword*; design sketches for Shanewis, Metropolitan Opera Archives, Shanewis production file.

78 Shanewis, piano-vocal score, *foreword*, 34.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
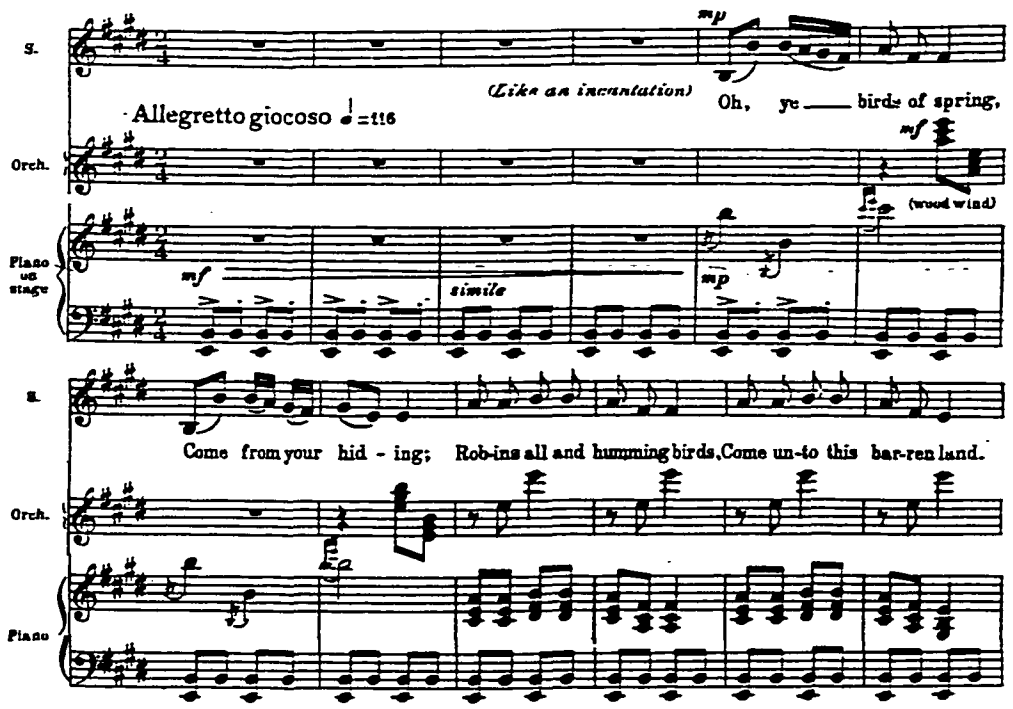


FIGURE 5.1: The Indianist Movement
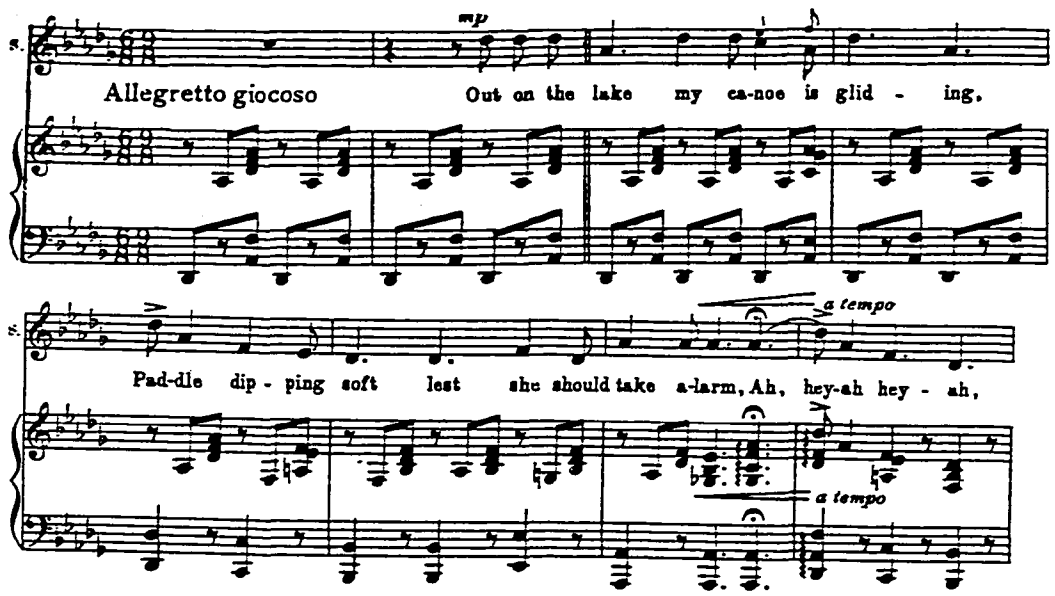
The Sioux defeat at Wounded Knee, together with the official closing of the frontier (both 1890), endowed Native Americans with a mythic status that was romanticized by American artists. (Clockwise from upper left) Photographer Edward Curtis's *Canyon de Chelly* (1904) was part of a visual survey of nearly eighty tribes carried out with the financial assistance of Metropolitan boxholder J. P. Morgan [C. Cardozo, Minneapolis]; the movement was taken up by modern dance pioneer Ted Shawn [Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations]; and the Metropolitan premiered its first Indianist opera, Charles Wakefield Cadman's *Shanewis*, in 1918 [Metropolitan Opera Archives].

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Ex. 5.3: Cadman, Shanewis, Scene 1, piano-vocal score, p. 27



Ex. 5.4: Cadman, Shanewis, Scene 1, piano-vocal score, p. 34



Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Cadman retained much of the Indianist color of the original melodies by preserving their angular contours and using characteristic devices such as the syncopated Lombard-like rhythm (on the words "paddle" and "hey-ah" in example 5.4), chant syllables and open fifths in the accompaniment. Notwithstanding the presence of these authentic elements, contemporary scholars disparage such adaptations,[79] yet critic Andrew Porter defended them: "Lately, I've seen [Cadman] slighted as a sleek popularizer of Indian motifs. Ethnomusicologists may flinch from his music, but I find it enjoyable."[80] Critics of Cadman's day agreed, particularly the exigent Henry T. Finck:

> At last the Metropolitan Opera Company, so altruistically generous to American composers, has launched a score which smacks of genius. Charles Wakefield Cadman's "Shanewis," which had its premiere on Saturday, is undoubtedly the best opera ever composed in America, with the exception of Victor Herbert's "Natoma." It is not the "great American opera" we are all eager to hear; but a man who can, at the age of thirty-seven, write a score like that of "Shanewis," may be capable of accomplishing that feat later on. Verdi was thirty-eight before he wrote the earliest of his operas that has survived: "Rigoletto." Who knows what Cadman might do with a libretto of equal dramatic merit. [81]

While Finck's enthusiastic assessment of Cadman's potential for operatic genius was undeniably excessive, Shanewis's effective combination of lyric freshness, imaginative spark, and sheer entertainment value—qualities evinced all too infrequently in prior native productions— resonated strongly with the opera's initial audiences. Indeed, Shanewis was so successful that it became the first American work at the Metropolitan to be retained in the repertoire for a second season.

---

79 Among the most recent commentators is Tara C. Browner, whose writings include *Transposing Cultures: The Appropriation of Native North American Musics, 1890-1990* (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1995) and *"Breathing the Indian Spirit": Thoughts on Musical Borrowing and the "Indianist" Movement in American Music,* American Music 15 (Fall 1997): 265-84.

80 Porter, *Singtime in the Rockies,* 82.

81 *A Good American Opera,* New York Evening Post, 25 March 1918.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The opera also enjoyed regional successes in Chicago, when it was taken up by Otto Luening's short-lived American Grand Opera Company; Denver, where it opened the mid-winter opera festival of the Denver Music Week Association with Tsianina Redfeather Blackstone in the title role; and Los Angeles, where it was the first opera produced at the Hollywood Bowl (Cadman was a founder) and played to combined audiences of over 40,000 across two evenings.

Shanewis's gradual disappearance from the repertoire coincided with the demise of the Indianist movement around 1930, and despite the fact that much of the period's music retains its ethnic appeal, the libretti of its operas have not aged well. Kahn was frank with regard to Cadman's dramatic deficiencies when he wrote, "Your 'Shanewis,' . . . was a great and well-deserved success and would have been even more so if the libretto had contained . . . grip and sweep of action,"[82] and suggested that the composer "do something" with a recognized playwright or dramatist.[83] Cadman's loyalty to his partnership with Eberhart proved to be only part of the difficulty, however. A student workshop revival of Shanewis in Central City, Colorado, where the surroundings no doubt effectively contributed to the piece's dramatic atmosphere, may have encouraged Porter to call for a full-scale revival, but a more recent New York production of the non-Indianist The Garden of Mystery elicited an unpromising response to Cadman's talents as a dramatic composer: "The opera has a hokey, incomprehensible libretto about a maniacal doctor, a poisonous plant and two pairs of ill-fated lovers. The score is a hodge-podge that borrows shamelessly from Richard Strauss."[84] Never truly comfortable in extended

---

82 Kahn to Cadman, Los Angeles, 27 January 1919. Kahn Papers, Box 113, Princeton University.

83 Cadman, Los Angeles, to Ziegler, 2 July [1919]. Metropolitan Opera Archives.

84 Anthony Tommasini, *Neglected One-Act Operas,* New York Times, 21 February 1996, sec. C, 15.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

forms, Cadman's technical limitations at length caught up with him, and most of his music has faded along with the fabled past.

JOSEPH CARL BREIL: THE LEGEND

The Metropolitan's selection of Joseph Carl Breil's (1870-1926) The Legend as part of a new American triple bill, together with the premiere of John Adam Hugo's The Temple Dancer and the Shanewis revival, was arguably a daring one, as the composer was principally known for his work in the embryonic art of film scoring. In fact, the Breil contract seems to have largely resulted from the same factors that had merely assisted Cadman. The German opera ban was still in effect, no new dramatic composers of note had surfaced, and Ziegler's efforts with Loeffler had taken on a tone of desperation after the composer decided to withdraw The Passion of Hilarion from consideration.

The scenario of Loeffler's opera, similar to that of Thaïs, involves the unsuccessful struggle of the monk Hilarion to overcome his desire for a beautiful woman, and its principal love duet takes place in the confessional of a Catholic church. The composer was apparently so deeply conflicted by the possible connotations of sacrilege and immorality that he wrote Ziegler in 1918 requesting the return of his submitted libretto:

> I have definitely decided not to ever do anything to the score of my Opera, nor to have it performed. My principle [*sic*] reason is of course, that it would cause strife between me and the Mother Church, and that it would pain many of my best friends. What I want in this world is not more dispute but Peace! pour l'amour de Dieu! [85]

---

[85] Loeffler, Medfield, Massachusetts, 5 January 1918. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Ziegler correspondence, 1917-18, L. The letter refutes the inference by Loeffler's biographer that the opera remained unproduced because it was considered unsuitable material for the operatic stage: "But another problem existed regarding staging Loeffler's opera. He had not even considered until he had finished the score that the major love duet . . . was a scene which would not be allowed on an opera stage—not in proper society." Knight, Loeffler, 188.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The fact that Loeffler immediately began work on another dramatic project (Les amants jaloux, for which only sketches survive) must have been small consolation to Ziegler, but the assistant manager made no attempt to dissuade the composer from his position:

> I can only say that I am sorry. I know that a great deal of thought must have preceded your decision in this matter, and I have a feeling that the outcome is scarcely anything that can be discussed or argued. It goes deeper than that. My chief regret is the loss of the music, and the one consolation is that you are working on something else. Will you let me know, approximately, when you hope to finish the work? Of course, I know that such creations cannot be done as per schedule, but we are already making some plans for next season, and I want to do my utmost to have you included in them. Can you hold forth any hope? [86]

Four months later, the Metropolitan was still pursuing the reclusive musician without success:

> Can you give me the faintest idea how your new work is coming on? We are beginning to look about for a new American work for next season . . . . [87]

With the departure of Loeffler from the field, Gatti admitted privately to Kahn that his choice of the Breil work, possibly the most haphazard production decision he ever made, resulted in part from a desire to avoid the overtures of the more experienced opera composer Henry Hadley, whose Azora had been heard in New York in January 1918 when it was staged to mixed reviews by the Chicago Opera Association:

> Mr. Hadley . . . with his Azora, presented in New York by Campanini last January, has set alaughing [*sic*] and perhaps sleeping the few people who had the misfortune of attending the performance . . . .
>
> I firmly believe that we have done very well by deciding to include two new names instead of one, and—we may add—instead of one who has become known by a late insuccess. [88]

---

[86] Ziegler to Loeffler, Medfield, 10 January 1918. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Ziegler correspondence, 1917-18, L.

[87] Ziegler to Loeffler, Medfield, 5 April 1918. Ibid. None of Loeffler's subsequent dramatic projects was ever completed.

[88] Gatti-Casazza to Kahn, 3 August 1918. Kahn Papers, Box 104, Princeton University.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

During the same period, Breil's star was rising. He had composed incidental music for the theater as well as two comic operettas before achieving national recognition from his collaboration on The Birth of a Nation (1915), the controversial Civil War film epic whose narrative and musical score remain among the most discussed in the history of the medium.[89] But opera had always been his chief ambition. Born in Pittsburgh to an affluent family, Breil received musical training as a child but was discouraged from following an artistic career by his father, an attorney. Nevertheless, Breil developed a passion for the theater and began vocal studies at sixteen, a combination of interests which found expression in his first opera Orlando of Milan, a student work which received an amateur performance in Pittsburgh. Breil's experience began to parallel that of his contemporary Frederick Converse when he was sent to Leipzig by his father to study law but spent more time pursuing music at the city's distinguished conservatory. Among his composition teachers was Carl Reinecke (1824-1910), an exponent of conservative Romanticism whose grand opera König Manfred (1867) nonetheless evinced a marked Wagnerian influence that would later emerge in the work of his student. Breil's professional musical ambitions turned towards performance, however, and he undertook further vocal training in Milan and Philadelphia before embarking on a brief career as an operatic tenor, chiefly with the Emma Juch Opera Company, a prominent American touring group which performed its repertoire in English translation. Breil's singing career never progressed beyond the provincial level, and he was forced to turn to other musical endeavors after deliberately sabotaging his opportunities for a legal career.[90]

---

89 Charles Hofmann, Sounds for Silents (New York: DBS Publications, 1970), n.p.

90 Martin Miller Marks, Music and the Silent Film: Contexts and Case Studies, 1895-1924 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 98-99, 198.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Breil's assumption of the duties of choral director and tenor soloist at St. Paul's Cathedral in Pittsburgh resulted in a small output of sacred music, but the composer's practical theater experience soon led him in a new direction. Apparently unsuited for the life of a church musician, Breil began working for theatrical companies as a conductor and composer of incidental music for the stage, supplemented by editorial positions at various musical publishing houses. Significant recognition eluded him until he was nearly forty, when a series of loosely-related events suddenly propelled his career. Breil later said he was hired to compose incidental music to Edward Locke's play The Climax (produced on Broadway at Weber's Theater beginning April 1909) "because they didn't have enough money to hire Victor Herbert for the job,"[91] but he found ample inspiration for his highly praised music to the drama about an aspiring opera singer in his own youthful experiences. The score received wide recognition, and its haunting "Song of the Soul" became a popular song of the day.[92] Breil attempted to capitalize on this success by producing his comic operetta Love Laughs at Locksmiths (1910) throughout the Northeast under the auspices of his own New York Opera Company, but ultimately achieved wider notice for composing "special scores"[93] to three films in 1912: Camille, Madame Sans-Gêne, and particularly Queen Elizabeth, a vehicle for Sarah Bernhardt. Although documentation regarding the genesis of Breil's early film career is sparse and none of his film music prior to The Birth of a Nation is known to survive, at least one account links his engagement as conductor for the initial screenings of Queen Elizabeth with his opportunity to produce an original score to accompany the

---

91 *Joseph Breil: His Opera "The Legend" to be Sung at the Metropolitan,* n.p., n.d. Opera Clippings scrapbook MFC p.v. 3, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

92 Marks, Silent Film, 99, 266*n*99.

93 The term is used to denote music specifically composed to coincide with the visual component of a particular film, as opposed to the then-common practices of improvised or "compiled" accompaniments, which were heavily dependent upon stock material.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

film.[94] In any event, Breil's contribution was credited with raising the role of music in films to new prominence:

> [The music] is of great elaborateness as well as being accurately descriptive to the most minute detail. . . . [I]t shows marvelous care on the part of the composer, and the movement of the play is followed very accurately.
>
> There is considerable "leit motif" used, and the stress and accent of the music follows the line of the story in surprising degree. [95]

The adaptation of this type of motivic technique to the cinematic medium was identified by the composer himself as a conscious emulation of music drama: "I . . . wrote a dramatic score built very much upon the motif lines set down by Richard Wagner."[96] Breil's methods may have been new to the film world, but they placed him squarely within contemporaneous developments in American opera that were being heard at the Metropolitan, particularly in the work of Converse and Parker, who, like Breil, had received much of their professional training in late nineteenth-century Germany.[97] Ironically, it was Breil—far less technically competent than his Metropolitan contemporaries—whose participation in the continuing American fascination with Wagner was destined to make the strongest impact with the public at large.

Breil's composing career reached its apex when he received an invitation from the iconic director David Wark Griffith (1875-1948) to score The Birth of a Nation, at that time

---

94 Gary Marmorstein, Hollywood Rhapsody: Movie Music and Its Makers, 1900 to 1975 (New York: Schirmer Books, 1997), 11.

95 The Music News, n.d., n.p., clipping from Breil scrapbooks, Breil Collection, University of California at Los Angeles, quoted in Marks, Silent Film, 101.

96 Breil, *Moving Pictures of the Past and Present and the Music Provided for Same,* Metronome 32 (November 1916): 42, quoted in Marks, Silent Film, 103.

97 Breil's pioneering methods were emulated in the music for Fritz Lang's Metropolis (1926) and in numerous Hollywood film scores of the 1930s, particularly those of Erich Wolfgang Korngold.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the longest (twelve reels) and most expensive ($110,000) film yet made in the United States.[98] A score compiled largely from the classical repertoire by Bulgarian theatrical conductor and music "fitter" Carli Densmore Elinor had accompanied the initial Los Angeles screenings of the film, then known as The Clansman after the Thomas Dixon novel that served as its source, in accordance with established practice and Griffith's dwindling financial resources.[99] It was during preparations for the film's crucial New York premiere that the director, cognizant of the potential power of the musical scoring, turned to the more celebrated Breil for a special score. The composer claimed to have had little initial enthusiasm for the task, finding that the epic, "founded on Thomas Dixon's almost fanatical work . . . was so replete with lust, brutality, morbidity, debauchery, rapine and murder" that he predicted it would be "doomed to utter failure."[100] It was only at Griffith's insistence that he traveled to Los Angeles to view the film repeatedly, gradually becoming aware of its potential.

Despite the composer's comments, the score he assembled in collaboration with Griffith does not downplay but rather augments some of the features which progressive leaders and groups such as the recently formed NAACP cited as offensive in their attempts to censor the film from the moment it appeared. Griffith's passionate defense—among other actions, he inserted a title reading, "This is an historical presentation . . . and is not meant to reflect on any race or people today"—did not lessen the film's notoriety. It remains known today perhaps as much for its controversial racial aspects as for its undisputed power in depicting the drama of the Civil War period through such memorable scenes as Lee's surrender at Appomattox and the

---

98 Garraty and Carnes, American National Biography, s.v. *D. W. Griffith*, by Charles L. P. Silet.

99 Marmorstein, Hollywood Rhapsody, 10; Marks, Silent Film, 133.

100 Breil, *On Motion Picture Music*, typescript, n.d., quoted in Marks, Silent Film, 136.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

assassination of Lincoln, who is portrayed throughout with unflinching reverence. Griffith's sympathy with the defeated South, which stemmed from a childhood spent on his family's defunct Kentucky plantation, resulted in a portrayal of the rise of the Clan as the inevitable response of a beleaguered people to the abuses of Reconstruction imposed by Northern whites. This culminates in the famous Ride of the Clan scene, for which Breil composed original music to which he appended Wagner's *Ride of the Valkyries*.[101]

Indeed, the shadow of Wagner was cast over the entire film, as Breil elected to develop further the idea of motivic construction he had used in Queen Elizabeth by extending the practice of associating each principal character with a musical motive to the inclusion of what he described as "contrasting ideas" that were to be "contra-distinguished" by the musical scheme.[102] The score, whose contents are divided among original music, traditional and folk melodies, and excerpts from the classical repertory, was lauded for its innovation even while it was being composed:

> A tremendous idea that of Mr. Griffith, no less than the adapting of grand-opera methods to motion pictures! Each character playing has a distinct type of music, a distinct theme as in opera. A more difficult matter in pictures than opera, however, inasmuch as any one character seldom holds the screen long at a time. In cases where there are many characters, the music is adapted to the dominant note or character in the scene. [103]

---

101 The sinister connotation that attached to this scene over the ensuing decades was exploited by film director Francis Ford Coppola in the famous helicopter flyover scene from Apocalypse Now (1979), which is scored with the same Wagner excerpt.

102 Breil, *Music and "Movies" Offer New Art Form*, San Francisco Chronicle, n.d., n.p., quoted in Marks, Silent Film, 283*n*50.

103 Grace Kingsley, *At the Stage Door*, Los Angeles Times, 8 February 1915, pt. 3, 4, quoted in Marks, Silent Film, 137. Despite the considerable attention given to Breil's efforts, which earned him the sobriquet "the father of motion picture music," he did not compose the first original film score, as he sometimes claimed. Among the earliest documented examples of music composed specifically for film are American theatrical musician Walter Cleveland Simon's (1884-1958) series of scores for the Kalem Film Company beginning ca. 1910, and Camille Saint-Saëns' original music for

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Equal attention was paid to the symphonic conception of the music, which was performed by a touring ensemble of some forty players. The spectacle's elicitation of critical commentary describing the new genre as "film opera"[104] no doubt excited Breil's imagination, for his next—and, as it turned out, final—two dramatic works were attempts at serious opera, the first since his student effort thirty years before.

The Legend dates from early 1917, after Breil had completed Intolerance (1916; score not extant) for Griffith and determined to embark on a new musical path which he hoped would "improve the taste of the Far West." The opera was said to have been written for the English soprano Constance Balfour, a conjecture borne out by the score's dedication to her. Plans for a production at the Los Angeles Auditorium were initiated by local impresario L. E. Behymer (who later produced Cadman's Shanewis at the Hollywood Bowl), but the premiere was aborted when financial backing evaporated soon after the country entered World War I.[105] Like Cadman, Breil apparently felt secure enough in his growing reputation to approach the Metropolitan directly, after obtaining a letter of introduction to Gatti-Casazza from a friend in New York. The score was auditioned twice at the theater, with the second hearing featuring singers recruited by Breil. The composer named a major portion of the conducting staff as having been in attendance, including Pierre Monteux, Artur Bodanzky, Gennaro Papi, and Roberto

---

L'Assassinat du Duc de Guise (1908), the earliest film score by a major composer. Marks, Silent Film, 50-51, 78-79, 99; Glass, American Opera, 239.

104 "Those musical interpretations . . . created a sensation throughout the country; some critics named it 'film opera,' best described as the synchronizing of music with dramatic action." Carli D. Elinor, *From Nickelodeon to Supercolossal: The Evolution of Music-to-Pictures,* typescript, n.d., Elinor Collection, University of Southern California, quoted in Marks, Silent Film, 281*n*40. Elinor later corrected the implication that his was the sole score that had accompanied The Birth of a Nation, and extended credit to Breil.

105 *From Movies to the Metropolitan,* Christian Science Monitor, April 1919. Opera Clippings scrapbook MFC p.v. 3, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Moranzoni, who eventually conducted the premiere. The opera was evidently chosen for production with Gatti's new American triptych in mind, for its acceptance was made contingent upon a reduction in scope from two acts to one.[106] The entire process apparently bypassed Ziegler's preliminary libretto review, for the assistant manager later took special pains to avoid any recurrence in the wake of the work's premiere.[107]

The Legend's libretto was authored by Breil's friend Jacques Byrne, a writer of moving picture scenarios who suggested himself as a possible collaborator after the composer confessed to having turned down the attempts of several other writers.[108] According to Breil, after several "false starts, such as supplying a war play, which was too elaborate,"[109] Byrne submitted a romantic drama eventually laid in the mythical Balkan domain of Muscovadia,[110] where an impoverished Count Stackareff (bass-baritone) leads a double life, trading his public identity as a suave nobleman for the deadly persona of his alter ego Black Lorenzo, a murderous outlaw, in order to maintain his estates. Although his secret remains unknown to his countrymen, Stackareff has made no attempt to conceal it from his daughter Carmelita (dramatic soprano), whose lover Stephen Pauloff (tenor), a Hussar commander, happens to be precisely the officer charged with apprehending the bloodthirsty highwayman. When Carmelita arranges a rendezvous

---

106 *Joseph Breil: His Opera "The Legend" to be Sung at the Metropolitan.*

107 "I have made so bold as to give orders that every libretto should be submitted to me, no matter what promise or hopelessness the music contains." Ziegler to Kahn, 23 October 1919. Kahn Papers, Box 122, Princeton University.

108 *From Movies to the Metropolitan.*

109 *Joseph Breil: His Opera "The Legend" to be Sung at the Metropolitan.*

110 Breil later attributed this venue to the Metropolitan's disapproval of the original setting of Czarist Russia; since the leading character is an unscrupulous aristocrat, the house may have wanted to avoid the appearance of aligning itself with the ideals of the revolution which had occurred only one year before.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

with Pauloff at her father's hunting lodge, the Count becomes agitated, particularly upon hearing a mysterious knocking at the door—a portent of doom according to ancient legend—and abruptly flees after revealing his identity. Pauloff declares his intention to spurn Carmelita's love in favor of duty; in response, she stabs him to death. Stackareff is captured and killed by Pauloff's soldiers; when they return to the lodge with his body, Pauloff's murder is revealed. The curtain falls as rifles are leveled in retribution at Carmelita and she bemoans the tragic fulfillment of the ominous legend.

This series of events, while delivering many of the classic requirements of an effective opera libretto, particularly one of the *verismo* school, nevertheless seems more closely aligned with a silent film scenario and never rises above the level of cheap melodrama. Glass points out the particularly illogical incident at the turning point of the action, namely, Stackareff's revelation of his evil identity to an unsuspicious Pauloff.[111] Even subsidiary scenes, such as one in which Carmelita's fortune is read by the servant Marta, strain credulity; as described in the score's printed scenario, "The death card, the ace of spades, shows each time. Marta will not explain what this means and leaves her mistress wondering."

Although it is true that Verdi was able to turn similarly fantastic events to thrilling effect in operas like Ernani, Breil's music reveals him to have been unequal to the task. By attempting to apply the techniques of music drama which had lent impressive unity to his film scores, Breil doubtless hoped to expand on his earlier successes. He may also have been under the impression that the modernity with which leitmotif principles were viewed in the film colony would transfer to the opera world. As Converse and Parker had already learned, this was

---

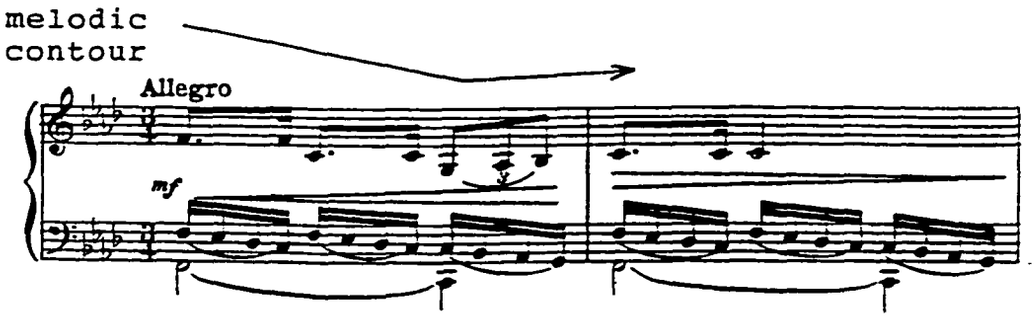
[111] *American Opera*, 244.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

unlikely thirty-five years after the death of Wagner; moreover, Breil clearly lacked the musical sophistication of his Metropolitan predecessors.

The Legend's brief prelude is constructed from a single motive which is repeated with little variation apart from its transposition to successively higher pitch levels. The motive's strong Wagnerian cast stems from its derivation as a kind of inverted adaptation of the opening gesture of the Walküre motive that had figured so prominently in The Birth of a Nation:

Ex. 5.5(a): Breil, The Legend, Prelude, piano-vocal score, p. 1



Ex. 5.5(b): Wagner, Die Walküre, Act III, scene 1
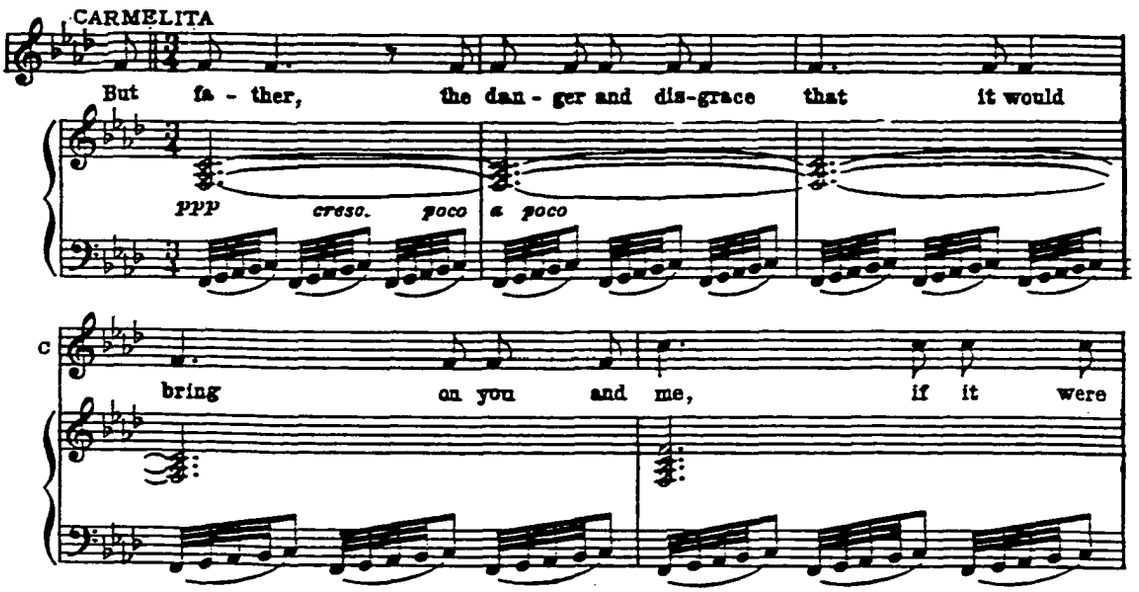


The simplistic developmental techniques utilized in the prelude, where the motive is subjected to unimaginative repetition in the orchestra, are an unfortunate hallmark of the entire opera. Nor did the composer's vocal writing compensate for this lack of subtlety with regard to thematic material. Breil made little progress on the problem of recitative in English, for the most commonly offered solution is a chanted monotone, either on a single pitch (often the tonic), or a tonic-

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

dominant alternation, as in Carmelita's opening line, which is accompanied throughout by a static tonic chord:

Ex. 5.6: Breil, The Legend, piano-vocal score, p. 4-5



Breil benefitted from the luxury casting afforded by the Metropolitan when Gatti-Casazza assigned the soprano role to Rosa Ponselle, then in her debut season at the house. New to the operatic stage, the singer nonetheless proved a perceptive critic when she scrawled a single word across her souvenir copy of the program: "Terrible."[112] During one of the numerous interviews she gave in retirement, the soprano claimed not to have remembered the work:

Q:	After Oberon came Joseph Breil's The Legend.
Ponselle:	Ugh!
Q.	Do you remember anything about it?
Ponselle:	No, thank God!
Q.	Did you like the score at all?
Ponselle:	No. Did it have one? [113]

---

[112] Drake, Ponselle. The program with Ponselle's notation is reproduced on page 99.

[113] Ibid., 97-98.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Ponselle's final comment encapsulates the hackneyed impression conveyed by much of the music: subsequent motives introduced by Breil exhibit no more imagination than the first; the various themes are worked out in a mechanical fashion, principally through dozens of virtually unaltered repetitions which offer little developmental, harmonic or contrapuntal interest; there is frequent use of scale figuration and chord sequences utilizing non-functional chromaticism in conjunction with tremolo accompaniment (a stock device of the silent film era); and the harmonic language is no more advanced than that employed by De Koven, with frequent resort to sequences in an attempt to overcome the static harmonic rhythm.[114]

Critics quickly dispensed with Breil's undistinguished effort. James Gibbons Huneker declared: "It would be idle to deny after a first hearing that 'The Legend' was not legendary . . . and that 'Shanewis,' by contrast, almost seemed a classic," adding, "The Breil score is melodious and commonplace. It ambles along and chokes the action whenever it can."[115] The composer wisely returned to film scoring but made a final foray into opera with Der Asra, a one-act adaptation of Heinrich Heine's drama. The single West coast performance it received (24 November 1925, Los Angeles, Gamut Club Theatre) met with no more success than The Legend. A year later Breil was dead of a heart attack, never having acquired the skill to secure the position in American opera he had long desired.

JOHN ADAM HUGO: THE TEMPLE DANCER

The effort of John Adam Hugo (1873-1945), the least-known quantity among the Metropolitan's American composers, was far more distinguished than that of Breil. Hugo had originally harbored ambitions of becoming a concert pianist, but abandoned his youthful dream

---

114 Glass, *American Opera,* 244-54, 257.

115 *Opera: A Triple Bill at Metropolitan,* New York Times, 13 March 1919, 9.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

when he found his temperament unsuited to the pressures of the concert stage. He benefitted greatly from the European training his family had afforded him when he turned to composition. During an extended sojourn in Stuttgart, Hugo began composing and produced an early opera, The Hero of Byzanz. He succeeded in auditioning the work for Ricordi, the Italian music publishing house then headed by Giulio Ricordi (1840-1912), a cultured man who composed himself and had guided the early career of Puccini. Hugo's music held promise, but the young composer was stymied by Ricordi's suggestion that he procure a more dramatic scenario, since "librettos [were] not to be bought in Italy for less than $2,000 [approximately $40,000 in year 2000 dollars]."[116] After returning to the United States, Hugo pursued a teaching career, initially at the Peabody Conservatory in Baltimore and then independently in his hometown of Bridgeport, Connecticut.[117] Hugo's German training under famed piano pedagogue Theodor Leschetitzky assured him a large private studio, but like many of his colleagues he struggled to find time for composition. Hugo lamented the lack of a patronage system which might have alleviated some of the obstacles American composers faced in developing a native art music:

> It is more sympathy and respect that the American composer needs than cold cash. . . . [T]he lack of [the patronage system], since America has never had it, is conspicuous above all else for depriving him of that appreciation which is his birthright.
>
> Meanwhile, I teach and try not to have too many inspirations for symphonies, concertos, songs and so on, to make life livable on the terms that an American composer is forced to reckon with. [118]

---

116 Dorothy J. Teall, *What American Composer Needs in Struggling to the Heights,* Musical America 30 (26 July 1919): 37.

117 Pratt, American Supplement, 71.

118 Teall, *American Composer,* 37.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Hugo was finally able to make progress on his extended libretto search when he came into contact with Jutta Bell-Ranske, a New York voice teacher who also harbored literary ambitions. Bell-Ranske had founded the New Assembly Salon, which met regularly at the Plaza Hotel, as an outlet for new talent. Among the activities of the Salon was an art song competition for composers in which Hugo won second prize in 1914. Concurrently, Hugo was a member of the Manuscript Society, a New York association of composers that counted Wallingford Riegger among its members and met for periodic readings of new music.[119] Hugo's growing visibility in New York musical circles led Bell-Ranske to offer him a libretto she had written on an Asian Indian theme for consideration. Hugo was immediately attracted to the scenario, and his ensuing one-act opera The Temple Dancer appeared to be nearing completion in 1914, as the Musical Advance announced plans for its first public reading at an Assembly Salon meeting in April of that year. The performance apparently failed to take place, for Hugo was reported as participating in a performance of his trio for piano and strings instead.[120] Nevertheless, work on The Temple Dancer obviously proceeded to completion soon thereafter, for the composer later reported engaging in extended efforts to obtain an introduction to the Metropolitan. By 1918 Hugo had obtained an entrée through Albert Reiss, a French tenor who had sung the role of Nial in Parker's Mona.[121] Reiss may have become acquainted with Hugo's work through Bell-Ranske or her salon.

---

119 *Song Competition Winners,* The Musical Advance 1 (April 1914): 15; *Manuscript Society Meeting,* The Musical Advance 1 (May 1914): 14.

120 *The Temple Dancer,* The Musical Advance 1 (March 1914): 9-10; *Hugo Compositions Heard,* The Musical Advance 1 (May 1914): 14.

121 *The American Operas,* New York Tribune, 9 March 1919.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The compact, forty-minute opera fit well into Gatti's new American triptych, a conception perhaps indebted to the contemporaneous highly anticipated world premiere of Puccini's Il Trittico which was scheduled to occur at the Metropolitan in December 1918.[122] In contrast to Breil, Hugo possessed the technical sophistication to do justice to his subject. The opera takes place in the sacred Indian shrine of Mahadeo, where the beautiful Temple Dancer (soprano) is one of several young women forced to sacrifice her virtue to acquire precious jewels for the god. Having secretly taken a lover of another faith and caste, the embittered dancer decides to escape her cruel fate by stealing the jewels purchased with her charms. Before she can flee, she is caught by the Guard (tenor) and threatened with death. The girl gains his protection by seducing him with her dancing, but when he discovers a letter she carries from her lover, he becomes enraged with jealousy. The dancer asks for water before submitting to her inevitable punishment. After surreptitiously poisoning it, she convinces the Guard to drink to her courage, and he falls dead at her feet. When the dancer jubilantly climbs the steps of the sacred altar to procure the jewels, she is summarily struck down by lightning. The curtain falls as acolytes (chorus) pray to Mahadeo for the dancer's forgiveness and redemption.

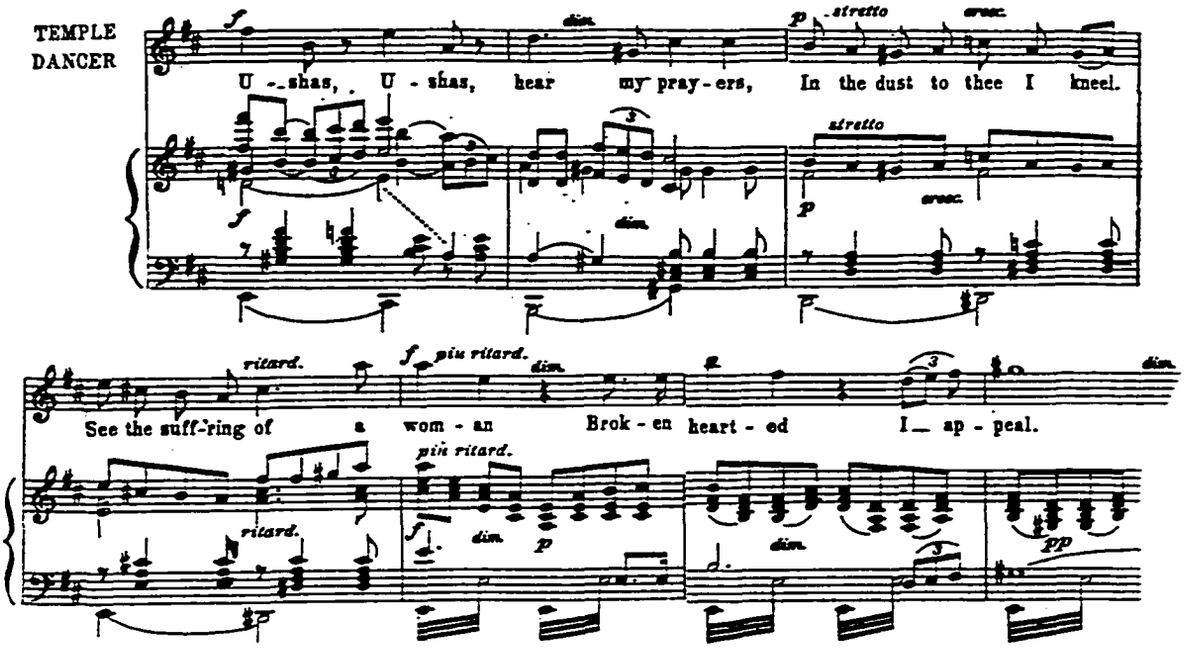
As with Herbert's Madeleine, the scenario was criticized for being more of a dramatic situation than a plot, yet its blend of passion, seduction and betrayal undeniably provided its composer with many effective opportunities. Hugo's employment of a lush post-Romantic idiom in conjunction with the compressed dramaturgy produced an atmosphere of overheated passion similar to that achieved by Cavalleria Rusticana, as in the Temple Dancer's initial soliloquy:

---

[122] Max Smith, *A 'Native Operatic Triptych' is this Week's Novelty,"* New York American, 9 March 1919.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Ex. 5.7: Hugo, The Temple Dancer, piano-vocal score, p. 21-22



Despite pronouncing the libretto to have been superior to anything offered him over the preceding two decades, Hugo received considerably less textual inspiration than had Mascagni, as Bell-Ranske's effort was only adequate. As with Eberhart's Shanewis, the writer appears to have been somewhat overextended in her quest for dramatic depth. An obvious example is the *deus ex machina* conclusion, which Glass has criticized as a contrived attempt at rapid dénouement rather than a logical working-out of the events of the plot. Perhaps for stylistic unity, Bell-Ranske insisted upon casting virtually the entire libretto in trochaic tetrameter with an *abab* rhyme scheme, a device which lends a repetitive cadence as well as an unintended singsong quality to the poetic lines.[123] Hugo sometimes erred in his faithful adherence to the turgid rhythms of much of the prosody, for it often impeded his attempts at broader lyricism. One example of this is found
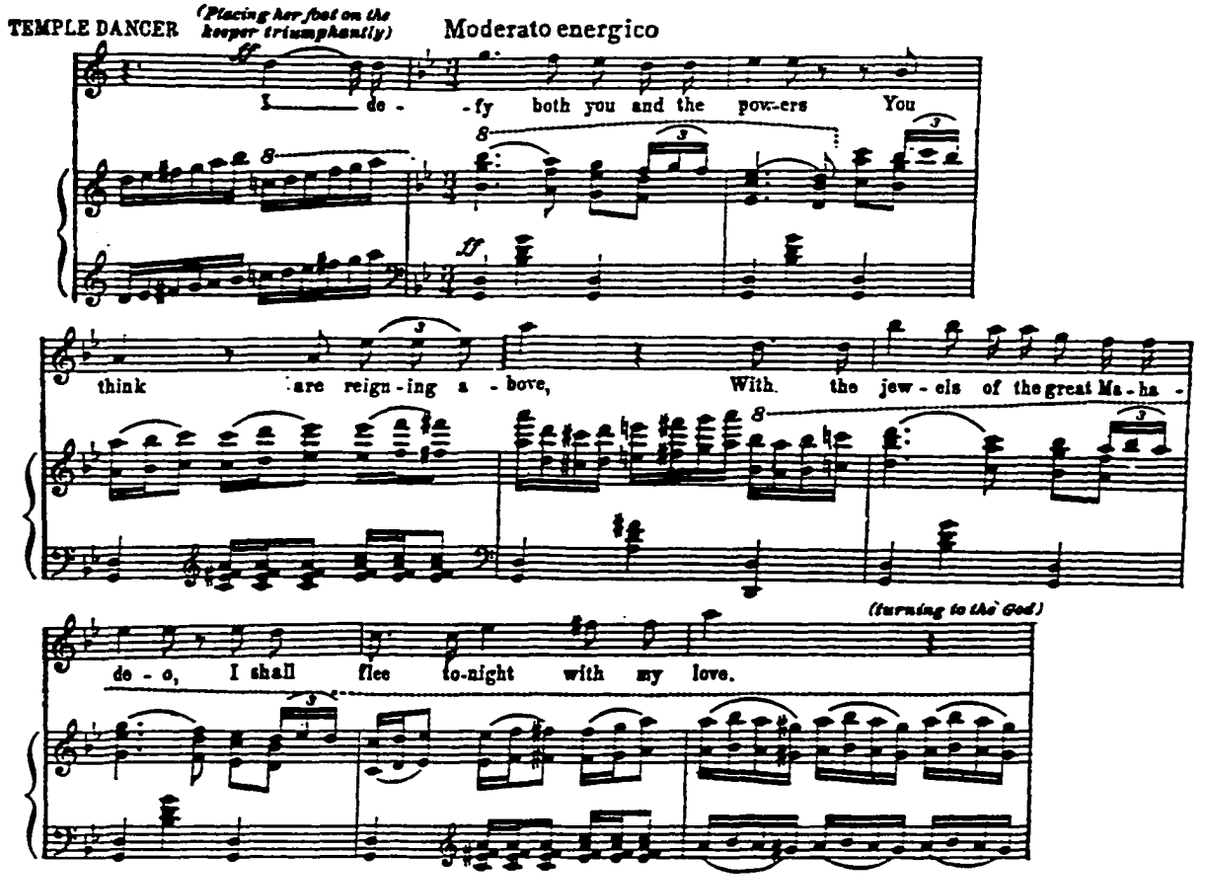
---

123 Glass, *American Opera,* 262-63.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

at a particularly climactic moment, when the Dancer exults in her imagined triumph over the Guard:

Ex. 5.8: Hugo, The Temple Dancer, piano-vocal score, p. 63-64
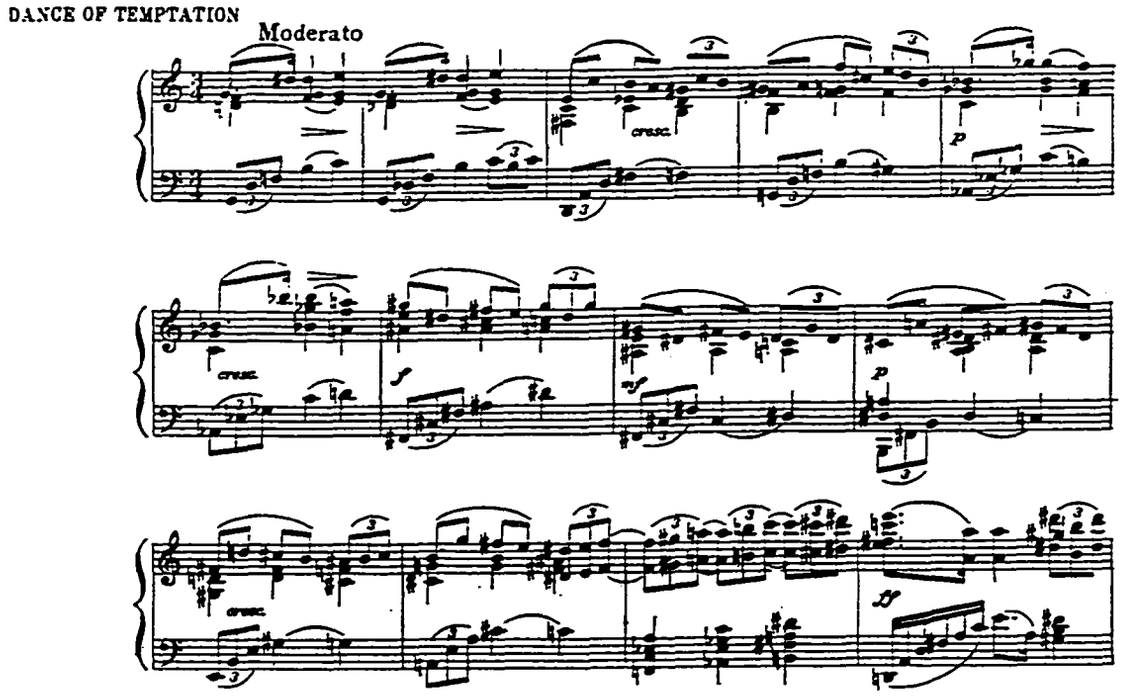


Both the score's overall harmonic language—far more complex than in the operas of Damrosch, De Koven or Breil—and the rhythmic vitality of its orchestral sections are admirable and compensate to some extent for the flaws of the libretto. Adding to the musical interest is the prominent role accorded the orchestra, as in Herbert's Madeleine, which Hugo was able to utilize advantageously in several fluid dance passages:[124]

---

[124] Ibid., 267-71.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Ex. 5.9: Hugo, The Temple Dancer, piano-vocal score, p. 55



While response to The Temple Dancer's premiere was generally positive, with most critics assessing Hugo's efforts on a higher level than those of Breil, the opera was to some extent marred by its juxtaposition with an inferior work. Even the inclusion of Cadman's admired Shanewis was of little help, for the perception of commercial popularity which attached to Cadman's idiom was unfairly extended to Hugo's writing as well:

> Candor compels us to state that the three works would shine to advantage across the street from the Metropolitan Opera House; in a word, at the Casino, the home of light operatic entertainment. [125]

The Temple Dancer received only three performances at the Metropolitan but remained in the repertory in the United States for several seasons: a production was scheduled at Chicago's Ravinia Festival the summer after its premiere; the Opera in Our Language Foundation presented

---

125 Huneker, *Triple Bill*, 9.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

it in Chicago during 1922 and 1923; and the work was staged in Honolulu in 1925, becoming the first American opera heard there. The opera was awarded the Bispham Medal that year as well, but the honor did not improve its prospects. The Temple Dancer seems to have been ultimately superseded by works such as Gustav Holst's equally compact but more sophisticated Sāvitri, premiered 5 December 1916 in London.[126] Holst's adaptation of his own text, after a diligent study of Sanskrit, as well as his utilization of a sparer idiom more closely aligned with the setting, resulted in a work of greater authenticity and effect.

HENRY HADLEY: CLEOPATRA'S NIGHT

Despite Gatti's unfavorable impression of the Chicago Opera Association's production of Henry Hadley's Azora, no doubt influenced by an intense rivalry which had developed between the Metropolitan and Chicago companies, the eventual inclusion of a Hadley opera in the Metropolitan's American program seemed inevitable. Although his renown faded rapidly after his death, Henry Hadley (1871-1937) was one of the best-known musicians working in America during the first quarter of the twentieth century. Hadley's accomplishments were prodigious: he succeeded in bringing most of his compositional output to performance throughout the United States and, in many cases, abroad; he was said to have had more works published than any other American composer;[127] his appointment as the first associate conductor of the New York Philharmonic in 1920 was lauded as the highest recognition yet accorded a native-born conductor; his numerous conducting appearances throughout the world brought American scores

---

126 While it has never achieved the status of a repertoire staple, Sāvitri enjoyed an impressive performance history in the decades following its premiere, particularly in England: the opera was revived there in 1921, 1923 (Covent Garden), 1926, 1935 (Sadler's Wells), 1937, 1952, and 1956 (Aldeburgh Festival); it aiso received American stagings in Chicago (1934) and Cincinnati (1939).

127 Henry Atkin, *Henry Hadley Enthusiastic Over the Many Opportunities for Development of Native Music*, Asheville Citizen, 15 June 1923, quoted in Canfield, *Hadley*, 227.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

to the attention of a wide international public; and his tireless advocacy of music in America resulted in the inauguration of the Berkshire Symphonic Festival (precursor of the Tanglewood Festival), the founding of the National Association of American Composers and Conductors in 1932, and the posthumous establishment of a Henry Hadley Foundation in his memory.

Recognized by his contemporary Frederick Shepherd Converse as a third generation of the New England School,[128] Hadley was born in Somerville, Massachusetts in 1871 to a musical family. Both his father and grandfather were significant figures in the advocacy of public school music education centered in nineteenth-century Boston. Together with exposure to these early ideals, Hadley gained practical experience in conducting and orchestration by assisting his father, a career educator, in the preparation of large ensemble programs. Skilled on piano and violin, he participated in family quartet readings which often included young Cambridge violinist Henry F. Gilbert, whose ballet The Dance in Place Congo was to receive its premiere at the Metropolitan two years before Cleopatra's Night.[129] At fifteen, Hadley began composition lessons with George Whitefield Chadwick; three years later, he presented a full-length program of original works in an early display of the prolific industry which would mark his entire compositional career. Hadley heard his orchestral overture Hector and Andromache performed under Walter Damrosch at an 1893 concert of New York's Manuscript Society before sailing for Europe to pursue advanced training. Over the following year, he studied counterpoint with Eusebius Mandyczewski in Vienna, met Brahms at a chamber music evening, and heard the premiere of Tchaikowsky's Symphonie pathétique. Upon his return to America, Hadley

---

128 Frederick Shepherd Converse, *Henry Hadley* (1937), eulogy reproduced as Appendix E in Garofalo, *Converse*, 233.

129 Canfield, *Hadley*, 30-38.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

succeeded Horatio Parker as music director of St. Paul's Cathedral School on Long Island when the latter was appointed to the faculty at Yale.[130]

Seeking to advance both his compositional and conducting careers, Hadley decided to solicit the advice of Victor Herbert and was elated when an unannounced call on the older composer resulted in a lifelong friendship. Herbert urged Hadley to attempt a large-scale work, and the resulting Symphony No. 1 ("Youth and Life") was premiered under Anton Seidl in 1897 and taken up by Herbert's Pittsburgh Symphony and Adolf Neuendorff with the American Symphony Orchestra. By his thirtieth birthday, Hadley had composed a second symphony which won two important composition prizes, the Paderewski and New England Conservatory awards, and received its world premiere by the New York Philharmonic. But the composer had also begun to receive the type of notices that would plague him throughout his career: "[Hadley] writes fluently and effectively for the orchestra. It was in the evident meagreness of his musical ideas that the larger compositions heard last night were least satisfactory."[131] The lingering impression that Hadley's technique was superior to the underlying ideas expressed in his music was one he would never completely succeed in dispelling.

Hadley returned to Europe in 1904 in search of conducting opportunities beyond those available to Americans at home. The resulting sojourn extended his work in an unexpected direction, for during the winter of 1906-1907 Hadley met the American baritone Clarence Whitehill (1871-1932), then singing in Cologne. Hadley quickly developed a keen interest in the

---

130 Ibid., 40-49.

131 Unidentified newspaper clipping, New York, 17 January 1900, Hadley scrapbook, vol. 1, 46, quoted in Canfield, *Hadley,* 66-67.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

lyric theater and secured an apprentice conducting position at the Mainz Stadttheater.[132] By the end of his two-year tenure he had obtained a Mainz premiere of his first operatic effort, the one-act Safié (libretto by Edward Oxenford after a Persian legend), but not without personal sacrifice. Rather than making provision for royalties on the new work, the contract extended to the composer required his contribution towards production costs in the amount of 400 Deutschmarks (US$95.17; approximately $1,783 in year 2000 dollars), as well as the assumption of deficits incurred in the event that post-premiere non-subscription sales did not reach 300 Deutschmarks (US$71.38; approximately $1,337 in year 2000 dollars) per performance.[133] Not surprisingly, despite some positive reaction in the German press, Safié's 4 April 1909 premiere remains its only performance of record.

Undaunted, Hadley returned to America to take up conducting posts in the West, serving as music director of newly developing orchestras in Seattle (1909-1911) and San Francisco (1911-1915) while continuing to compose prolifically. Theatrical ambitions consumed much of his energy throughout the ensuing decade, and in early 1914 he reported progress on a second opera, Azora, the Daughter of Montezuma, a full-length work set in Mexico during the period of European conquest.[134] Despite expressing hopes of producing Azora in Germany through his European connections, Hadley submitted the score to the Metropolitan in 1915 through staff conductor Giorgio Polacco, whose power at the house greatly increased upon Toscanini's

---

132 Canfield, *Hadley*, 86-88.

133 Contract for Safié production between Theaterdirector Behrend, Mainz and Hadley, Wiesbaden, 4 March 1909. Henry Hadley Collection, Special Collections MNY-Amer. (Group M, Box 3, Folder 11), Music Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

134 Letter from Hadley, San Francisco, to unidentified addressee, 5 March 1914. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Hadley artist file.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

departure after the 1914-1915 season. Whether Azora received serious consideration, however, remains open to question; Hadley scholar John Canfield claimed that the score was relegated to "a corner of the Metropolitan offices, unexamined, for about a year."[135] A certain amount of circumstantial evidence supports this account, since Cadman's operas seem to have suffered a similar fate at Polacco's hands, prior to the 1917 resurrection of Metropolitan interest in him after the conductor's dismissal and the intervention of Kahn. But Canfield offers no documentation for his thesis, and it remains impossible to substantiate. What is certain, however, is that shortly after Hadley obtained the return of his libretto from the Metropolitan late in 1916,[136] Azora was accepted for production by the Chicago Opera Association under the directorship of Cleofonte Campanini, the brilliant conductor who had been a member of the Metropolitan's artist roster during its initial Italian season under Henry Abbey.

While the Metropolitan's activities on behalf of native opera undoubtedly spurred similar innovation on the part of nationalist regional groups who sought to emulate Kahn's ideals, motivations in Chicago arose from a complex web of events set in motion by Oscar Hammerstein a decade before. In a bold move designed to trump the Metropolitan, Hammerstein had named Campanini as music director of his competing Manhattan Opera Company in 1906. Alarmed, the Metropolitan's board fixed the blame squarely on the administration of Heinrich Conried and replaced him with Gatti-Casazza, a move that was widely debated in the media as a possible ploy to secure the La Scala manager's close friend and colleague Arturo Toscanini as ammunition

---

135 Canfield, *Hadley,* 178.

136 Edoardo Petri, Musical Secretary, Metropolitan Opera, to Hadley, 1 December 1916. Hadley Collection (Group G, Box 1, Folder 10), New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

against the enemy.[137] In any event, Campanini's fury upon learning of his erstwhile Italian colleagues' engagement at the Metropolitan was exacerbated by the fact that Gatti had been forced to replace Campanini at La Scala in 1905 when the conductor left Milan in a huff after clashing with the theater's intractable orchestra.[138] Considered by some musical observers to be on the artistic level of Toscanini, Campanini was less successful in deploying an equally explosive temperament and never achieved the renown of his contemporary, which he resented as a bitter injustice.[139] In 1909, when Hammerstein's faltering New York finances resulted in a curtailment of rehearsal time, Campanini angrily quit the Manhattan company and resurfaced in Chicago, where he was joined the following year by refugees from the Metropolitan buy-out. The Philadelphia-Chicago Grand Opera Company was organized in large part with former Hammerstein forces that included Mary Garden, yet it remained heavily dependent upon board support from the Eastern artistic establishment whose members—Kahn among them—hoped that the formation of such regional companies would rid New York of local competition.[140] Chicago indeed proved a useful repository for the troublesome Andreas Dippel, who jumped at Kahn's proffer of Victor Herbert's Natoma in 1910 after Gatti declined it. The strenuous efforts on the part of the new Dippel-Campanini team to make a brilliant success of Herbert's opera thus owed

---

137 Conried had already attempted such a maneuver with the engagement of Gustav Mahler in 1907. Despite some brilliantly acclaimed performances, the great conductor's effectiveness at the Metropolitan during his two-year tenure was hampered by declining health and his greater desire to compose.

138 Gatti-Casazza, Memories of the Opera, 138-39.

139 Dizikes evaluates Campanini's career in greater detail. Opera in America, 345-47.

140 Ibid., 414. Similar efforts to assist Eben Jordan in the formation of the Boston Opera Company were part of an overarching plan to establish a regional network of companies administered by a system of interlocking directorates. The plan faltered in the face of financial strictures caused by the impending European war and the strong anti-trust sentiment of the time.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

more to the pair's vengeance against the Metropolitan than altruistic sentiment for the cause of American composers.[141]

With the assistance of patrons Harold McCormick and his wife Edith Rockefeller (a daughter of the founder of Standard Oil), the Chicago company freed itself from Eastern control in 1915, and the reorganized Chicago Opera Association rewarded Campanini with a promotion to the post of General Director. Chart 5.1, *American Opera in New York and Chicago: 1907-1927*, chronicles the development of Campanini's regime from Hammerstein's New York company against contemporaneous events at the Metropolitan and shows a marked increase in American repertory among Campanini's production choices following his appointment as Chicago's commander-in-chief, one of several strategies he adopted in an aggressive bid to place his organization on a par with the Metropolitan.[142] It is startling to note how many of the works with which Campanini hoped to achieve notice were, like Natoma, Metropolitan cast-offs: virtually every American composer and opera produced in Chicago during Campanini's period of influence was already known to the Metropolitan.[143] A new strategy employed in Chicago to capture audience interest was the enlistment of American composers to conduct their own works, a practice then forbidden at the Metropolitan.[144] The charismatic Herbert led performances of both

---

141 Indeed, a self-satisfied Dippel later wrote Natoma librettist Joseph Redding that his acceptance of the opera had incurred the displeasure of Gatti-Casazza. Letter dated 3 April 1932, quoted in Waters, Herbert, 376.

142 Information on the Chicago productions was taken from Edward C. Moore's Forty Years of Opera in Chicago (New York: H. Liveright, 1930).

143 It was, of course, a standard procedure of many American composers to submit their work for Metropolitan consideration no matter how slim its chances seemed of being produced there.

144 Gatti described the prevailing policy upon his decision to grant an exception to French conductor-composer Albert Wolff for the 1919 premiere of L'oiseau bleu: "No composer, as a matter of principle, has yet been permitted to direct his own work at the Metropolitan." Gatti-Casazza to Henry Russell, 9 May 1919. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, 1918-19,

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

CHART 5.1

AMERICAN OPERA IN NEW YORK AND CHICAGO: 1907-1927

NEW YORK

METROPOLITAN OPERA COMPANY (1908)
Giulio Gatti-Casazza, General Manager

The Pipe of Desire (Converse), 18 March 1910

Metropolitan buys out Hammerstein, April 1910
[Natoma (Herbert) auditioned and rejected by Gatti-Casazza, April-May 1910]

Mona (Parker), 14 March 1912

[Twilight (A Daughter of the Forest) (Nevin) cancelled ca. 1912]

Cyrano (Damrosch), 27 February 1913

Madeleine (Herbert), 24 January 1914
(Polacco conducting)

[Cadman's Daoma and The Garden of Death submitted to Polacco, March 1916; rejected 1917]

The Canterbury Pilgrims (De Koven), 8 March 1917

Polacco dismissed from Metropolitan, ca. May 1917

[The Passion of Hilarion (Loeffler) negotiations, June 1917-January 1918]

Shanewis (Cadman), 23 March 1918

The Legend (Breil)/
The Temple Dancer (Hugo), 12 March 1919

Cleopatra's Night (Hadley), 31 January 1920

[A Light From St. Agnes (Harling) rejected, 1923]

Deems Taylor awarded first Metropolitan commission, 18 April 1925

The King's Henchman (Taylor), 17 Feb 1927

NEW YORK → CHICAGO

MANHATTAN OPERA COMPANY (1906-10)
Oscar Hammerstein, General Director
Herbert's Natoma commissioned, April 1907

Cleofonte Campanini leaves Manhattan Opera, 1909

PHILADELPHIA-CHICAGO GRAND OPERA COMPANY (1910)
Cleofonte Campanini, General Music Director

Natoma, 25 Feb 1911 (Phil.); 28 Feb 1911 (New York) (Campanini conducting); 30 performances, 13 Dec 1911—29 Nov 1913 (composer conducting)

CHICAGO OPERA ASSOCIATION (1915)
Cleofonte Campanini, General Director

A Lovers' Knot (Simon Bucharoff), 15 Jan 1916

Madeleine (Herbert), 18 Nov 1916
(composer conducting)

[Hadley-Campanini negotiations for projected Galli-Curci opera, Aug-Oct 1917]

Azora (Hadley), 26 Dec 1917 (Chic.); 26 Jan 1918 (Lexington Theatre, New York) (composer conducting "first all-American opera production")

A Daughter of the Forest (Nevin), 5 January 1918 (composer conducting)

Polacco joins Chicago conducting staff, 1918

Death of Campanini, 19 December 1919

Rip van Winkle (De Koven), 9 Jan 1920 (Chicago); 30 Jan 1920 (New York) (Smallens conducting)

CHICAGO CIVIC OPERA COMPANY (1922)
Giorgio Polacco, Music Director (1922-31)

The Snowbird (Theodore Stearns), 13 Jan 1923

A Light From St. Agnes (W. Franke Harling), with Rosa Raisa, 26 Dec 1925

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Natoma and Madeleine, and the choice of the American-born Hadley to preside over his Azora was pointedly billed as the "first all-American opera production," an obvious swipe at the Metropolitan's exclusively European conducting staff.[145] While Hadley's New England pedigree was thus a significant point in his favor during the consideration of Azora—it was probably not coincidental that other scores Hadley reported seeing on Campanini's desk were the Massachusetts-born Parker's Fairyland and Pennsylvanian Arthur Nevin's A Daughter of the Forest—the composer was able to negotiate terms only marginally better than those he had received for Safié:

> Campanini is a fiery nature. I have had to handle him with gloves.
>
> [W]hile he is ready to spend . . . for costumes, scenery, etc., he will not pay one penny royalty.
>
> I held out very strong for royalties, but when I saw that he had the option on 'Fairyland' (gratis) and Nevin's opera . . . I decided we would lose this chance if we did not agree to his terms.

R. [*Or, aucun compositeur, pour une raison de principe, n'a jamais été admis au Metropolitan à diriger son oeuvre.*]

The policy may have been initiated to keep rehearsal time under control, as composers are often idealistically exacting in the preparation of their own music. Hadley was the first American exception allowed, when he was invited to conduct (but not premiere) Cleopatra's Night two months after Wolff's debut. It was not until the Edward Johnson administration that American composers Richard Hageman and Walter Damrosch were enlisted to prepare the premieres of their own operas, Caponsacchi (1937) and The Man Without a Country (1937), respectively.

145 The opera is still cited for this distinction: "Azora is especially noteworthy for its fortuitous role in the history of United States opera, as it probably was the first production carried out exclusively by United States artists, including librettist, conductor, stage director and cast." Malena Kuss, *Contributions of the New World to the Music of the Old World,* Acta Musicologica 63 (January-April 1991): 7.

Otto Luening's short-lived American Grand Opera Company, desperate to attract funding after its ideological break with patroness Eleanor Everest Freer, took the concept to its final level with the billing of its 1922 Shanewis production as the "first all-American opera performance in the history of the country," a claim which, unlike Chicago's, included orchestra members and stagehands. Luening, The Odyssey of an American Composer (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1980), 248.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> I did my best to make him stand for half the expense of the orchestral and chorus parts, which Herbert told me in New York ran up to $1000. . . . Nothing doing![146]

Hadley's frustrated acquiescence to the onerous terms offered by Chicago nonetheless provided artistic benefits beyond the Azora premiere, for Campanini's interest encouraged public perception of Hadley as an American opera composer of considerable promise. Campanini even proposed awarding Chicago's first commission—a practice then also forbidden at the Metropolitan—to Hadley for an opera featuring the company's new singing sensation, coloratura Amelita Galli-Curci (1882-1963).[147] The project was particularly well calculated to advance Campanini's agenda. After Galli-Curci made a spectacular Chicago debut as Gilda in Rigoletto on 18 November 1916, the singer and her husband Luigi Curci lost little time in publicizing the fact that Gatti had shown no interest in her when Curci had approached the Metropolitan the season before.[148] Arrangements for a Hadley commission were never consummated, however, possibly because of other artistic pressures claiming Campanini's attention and his untimely death from pneumonia two years later. Moreover, it remains to be seen whether the Italian-Spanish Galli-Curci, whose career was comprised entirely of Italian and

---

146 Letters from Hadley, Chicago, to Azora librettist David Stevens, Boston, 24 February 1917. Hadley Collection (Group G, Box 1, Folder 15), New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. Hadley eventually agreed to divide the costs of preparing materials with his publisher G. Schirmer, which ironically resulted in his incurring greater production costs for Azora than he had for Safié.

147 Correspondence between Campanini, Chicago and Hadley, West Chop, Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts, 9 August—12 October 1917. Hadley Collection (Group G, Box 1, Folder 22), New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

148 Kahn made written inquiry on the point to Gatti after he was approached by a board member whose wife had heard gossip emanating from the couple. Gatti defended his decision, maintaining that contacts in Havana and Buenos Aires had disparaged Galli-Curci's performances there, which convinced Gatti that Metropolitan coloraturas Frieda Hempel and Maria Barrientos were superior talents. Gatti-Kahn correspondence, 2 May 1917. Kahn Papers, Box 83, Princeton University. After the expiration of her five-year contract with Chicago (as well as a divorce from Curci), Galli-Curci made a November 1921 debut at the Metropolitan and sang there until 1930.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

French roles, would have been able to negotiate opera in English as successfully as had Maria Garcìa Malibran.

It was in this atmosphere of intrigue that Gatti maintained his annoyance with the "all-American" production of Azora, which Campanini had taken pains to include among Chicago's programs on its annual visit to New York's Lexington Theatre. Ever vigilant on the competition issue, particularly as it was perceived by the media, it must have nettled Gatti to read Max Smith's review in the New York American: "That Azora held its own very well when placed in juxtaposition with the experiments of other Americans, few are likely to deny. . . . The opera is, on the whole, distinctly superior to its fellows."[149] Yet the manager affirmed the possibility of staging Hadley's next major opera, Cleopatra's Night, at the Metropolitan, chiefly due to his admiration of the literary text upon which it was based:

> If the very interesting story by the same name written by Théophile Gauthier [*Une nuit de Cléopâtre*] has really been conveniently adapted for the stage, I believe that we could in principle accept his opera for a serious consideration of producing same during the season of 1919/1920, but not during this coming season of 1918/1919. For the latter season I have already made arrangements with the two composers Hugo and Breil . . . who as a whole, I believe deserve as much consideration as Mr. Hadley. Besides, these two composers present the advantage of not having as yet annoyed the public with any operas, thus still allowing hopes and illusions to be entertained as to their works. [150]

Thus, Canfield's conjecture, "Perhaps the successful production of Azora by the Chicago Opera Association, as well as American patriotic sentiment engendered by the war victory, influenced

---

149 Max Smith, *Hadley Opera Ranks Above Rivals*, New York American, 27 January 1918. The opera's libretto, however, was universally disparaged: "[Azora's] libretto has signed its death warrant." (Felix Borowski, *Concerning American Opera*, Chicago Herald, 30 December 1917); "[The] libretto will remain forever a poor copy of Aida." ("*Azora,*" *Monday, January 7*, Musical Courier 76 (17 January 1918); "If there be a worse libretto than that of Azora, it is not readily accessible." (Frederick Donaghey, *Mr. Hadley's Opera Azora*, Chicago Daily Tribune, 27 December 1917).

150 Gatti-Casazza to Kahn, 3 August 1918. Kahn Papers, Box 104, Princeton University.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

manager Gatti-Casazza in his decision to produce Cleopatra's Night at the Metropolitan,"[151] remains purely speculative. The manager affirmed only that the Chicago presence had prevented him from reducing the budget for new productions: "[I]t is impossible to reduce these expenses . . . on account of the competition created by the Chicago Opera Association at the Lexington Theatre, which season is based on a number of Revivals and Novelties."[152]

Hadley's interest had been captured by the popular Gautier story during his student days in Vienna, long before he had even considered essaying an opera. During a tour of the East in 1905 he reacquainted himself with its atmosphere in the shadow of the pyramids. Like many French composers of the preceding generation, Hadley was attracted to the infusion of Orientalist color in his music but professed to have little taste for the authentic product. After visiting a Cairo nightclub, he wrote of the music he heard: "One cannot possibly forget the barbaric and wild savagery of it," and decided against attempting to adapt it to his purposes.[153] Instead, he seems to have emulated his hero Richard Strauss by taking Salome as a model. One of Hadley's most successful orchestral compositions had in fact been a 1905 tone poem inspired by the Salome story. An opera after Gautier's narrative took much longer to emerge due to Hadley's inability to find a suitable librettist. After a search of over five years, his friend Alice Leal Pollock produced a text based on a translation by the Greek-born American writer Lafcadio Hearn that the composer claimed to have set in eighteen days during the summer of 1918.[154]

---

151 *Hadley,* 178.

152 Gatti-Casazza to Kahn, 27 November 1918. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, 1918-19.

153 Ibid., 77-78. Whether the performances Hadley heard represented authentic examples of traditional Egyptian music is dubious.

154 *Dr. Henry Hadley Hopes Philadelphia Will Copy California's Open-Air Bowls For Outdoor Music,* unidentified newspaper (Philadelphia), July 1925, quoted in Canfield, *Hadley,* 164.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Although Pollock's efforts were unequal to the sensual descriptive power of either Gautier or Hearn, her libretto is nonetheless vivid and effective. Cleopatra's Night takes place amid the sultry languor of a single summer day and revolves around the hopeless infatuation borne by the hunter Meiamoun (tenor) for the beautiful Egyptian queen (soprano). After an arrow carrying a message of love lands at her feet and the young suitor emerges from a sunken pool in which she is about to bathe, Cleopatra surrenders to her intrigue and promises Meiamoun a single night of passion if he will accept death at dawn as the price. The servant girl Mardion (soprano), who loves Meiamoun, stabs herself in despair at his rash acceptance and the romantic couple sail away triumphantly down the Nile. The second act opens with a sumptuous evening banquet at which Cleopatra places Meiamoun beside her on the royal throne. As the brilliant festivities draw to a close, the queen prepares to take her lover to a hidden temple, but he points sorrowfully to the light of dawn emerging in the east. A servant appears bearing a rhinoceros horn filled with poison, and Meiamoun drinks as the approach of Mark Anthony is heralded in the distance. Cleopatra lets fall the only tear she has ever shed over Meiamoun's body, then resolutely rises to meet Mark Anthony as the curtain falls.

The scenario's numerous opportunities for lavish scenic pictures were utilized to full advantage by Metropolitan production designer Norman Bel-Geddes. The Musical Courier described a "splendidly and even sumptuously mounted hearing of Henry K. Hadley's two-act Cleopatra's Night,"[155] and Henry T. Finck declared, "More beautiful attire than [Cleopatra's] bejewelled gowns has never been seen on this stage."[156] Hadley tried hard to evoke an

---

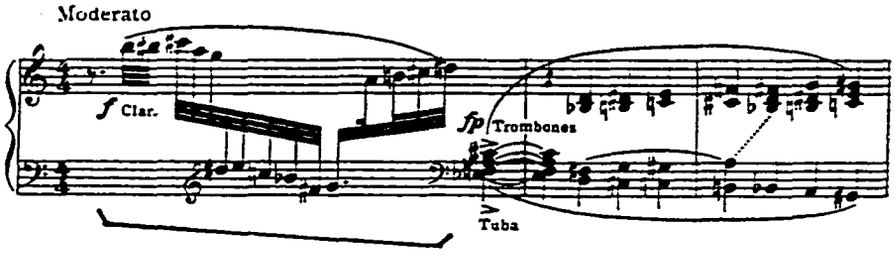
155 *"Cleopatra's Night" Has A Beautiful Production at the Metropolitan*, Musical Courier 80 (5 February 1920): 5.

156 *Music: Hadley's Egyptian Opera*, New York Evening Post, 1 February 1920.
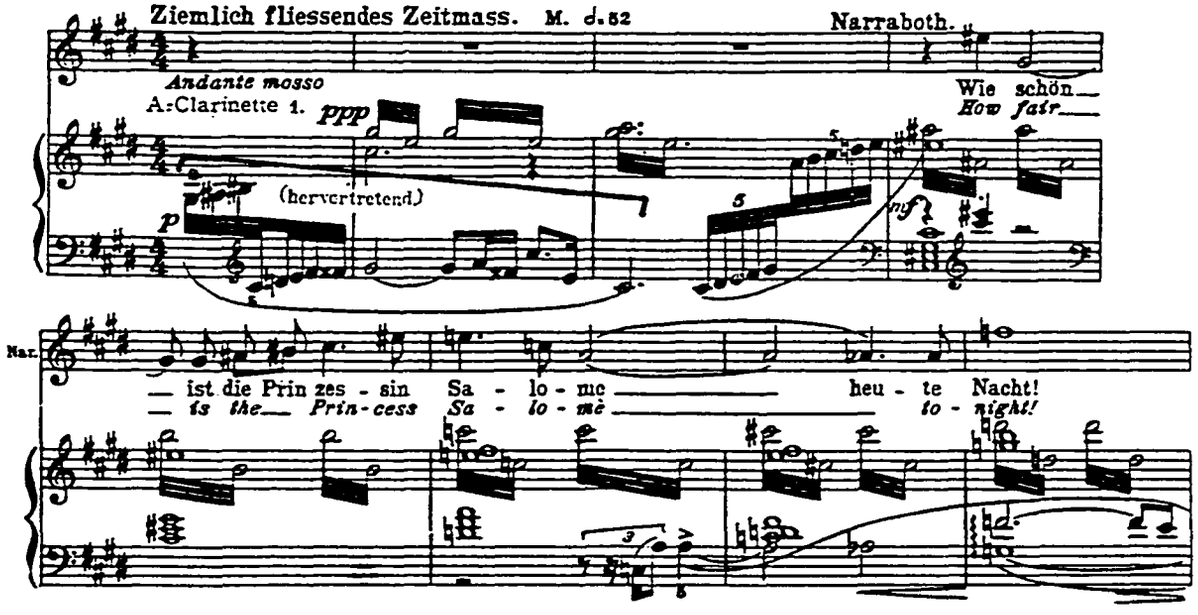
Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

atmosphere of languorous passion in his score and opened the first act with a compact prelude whose imaginative opening gesture for solo B♭ clarinet seems an homage to Salome:

Ex. 5.10(a): Hadley, Cleopatra's Night, Act I, Prelude, mm. 1-3



Ex. 5.10(b): Strauss, Salome, scene 1, mm. 1-8



Hadley somewhat cryptically described his opening motive, which expresses Meiamoun's longing for the queen, as "a combination of two curious scales";[157] in fact, the pitch collection

---

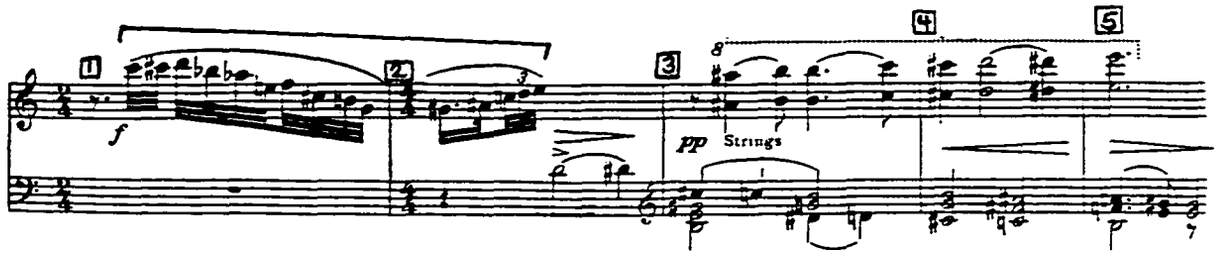
157 *Mr. Hadley and "Cleopatra's Night,"* Metropolitan Opera House program, Season 1919-1920.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

D♯/E/F♯/G/A/B♭/B♮/B♯/C♯ comprises (with the exception of the extraneous tone B♮) an octatonic scale, a formulation perhaps indebted to the influence of Stravinsky, who utilized it in much of his music of the preceding decade (notably *Le sacre du printemps*).

It was in the development of materials that Hadley's setting evinced less promise. The next statement of the Meiamoun motive, shown in mm. 1-2 of example 5.11, appears simply transposed up a semitone and followed, at mm. 3-5, by a rather obvious evocation of Tristan:

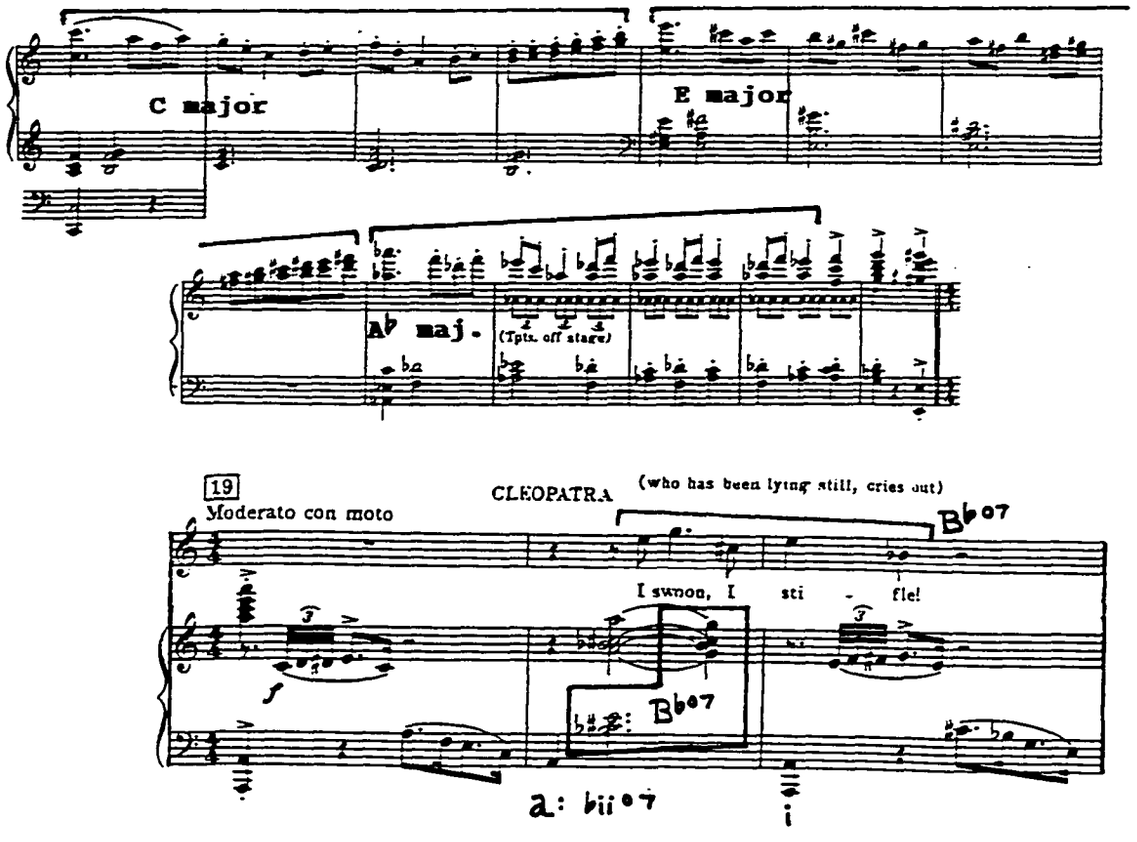
Ex. 5.11: Hadley, Cleopatra's Night, Act I, Prelude, mm. 10-14



Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The vocal entrance of Cleopatra is preceded by an orchestral passage whose limited rhythmic and harmonic interest is augmented by simplistic use of sequence. Here, the composer reiterates a rather banal melodic idea at three key levels separated by major thirds (C, E, and A♭ major, respectively):

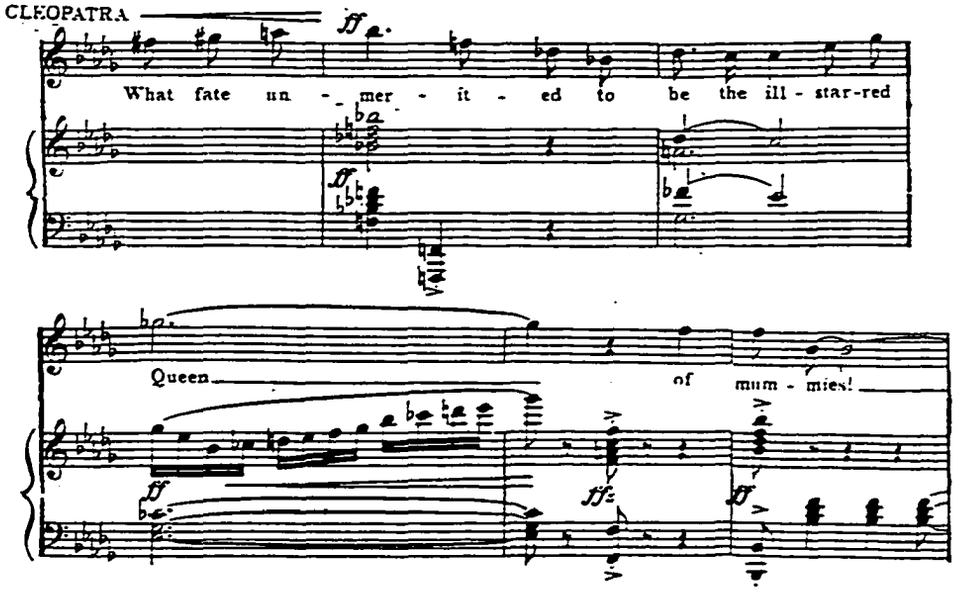
Ex. 5.12: Hadley, Cleopatra's Night, Act I, piano-vocal score, pp. 20-21



Similarly, one wishes Hadley could have devised a more original harmonic underpinning for the queen's first utterance than a fully-diminished seventh chord. The opening soliloquy does gather more interest as it proceeds, however, and culminates in a grateful vocal gesture:

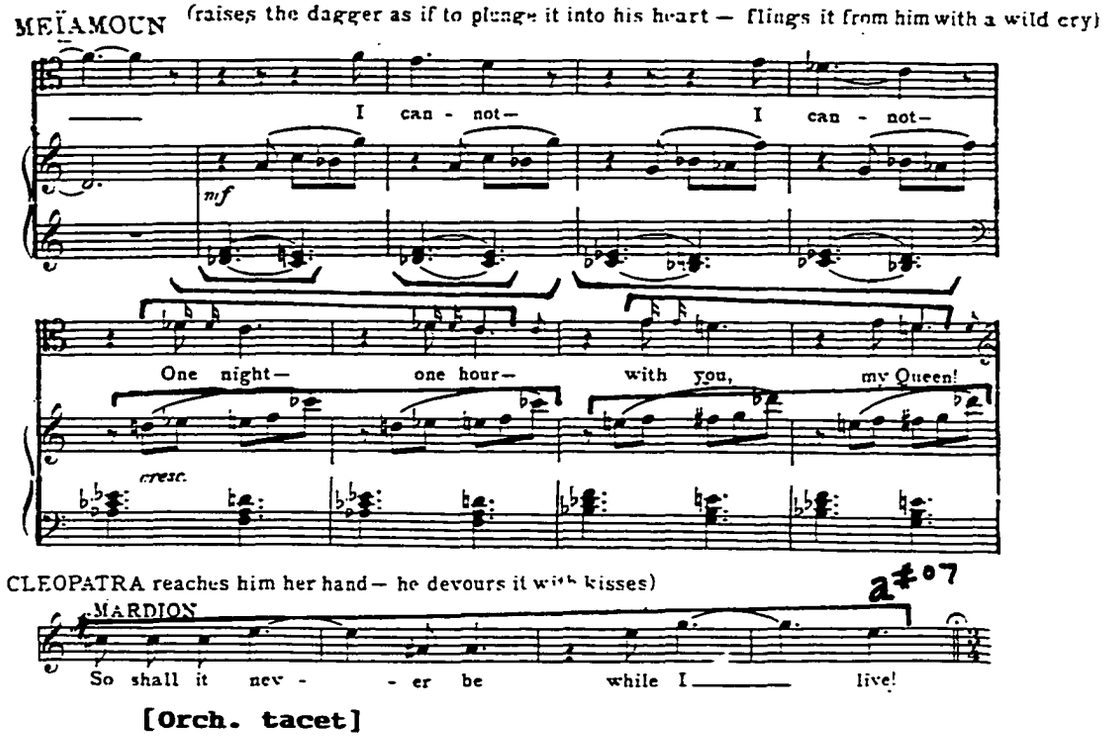
Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Ex. 5.13: Hadley, Cleopatra's Night, Act I, piano-vocal score, pp. 26-27



But the crucial moment of Meiamoun's surrender to Cleopatra and the suicide of Mardion is accompanied by literal repetition of one-measure phrases, unimaginative sequences built on the resulting two-measure units, and the passage's culmination in another diminished-seventh outline:

Ex. 5.14: Hadley, Cleopatra's Night, Act I, piano-vocal score, pp. 75-76



Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Critical opinion was nonetheless respectful of Hadley's effort, balancing the opera's many elegant passages against its less inspired moments:

> Mr. Hadley's score . . . is worth serious consideration. Of originality, to be sure, one cannot find a trace. The idiom is undisguisedly that of Wagner, with a liberal admixture of Richard Strauss. . . . But here is a work, at any rate, that has musical logic and continuity, and reveals at every turn the skill of an accomplished craftsman.
>
> In fact, Mr. Hadley is far more successful when he permits the orchestra to carry the full burden of his message than when he is calling on the human voice for assistance. Cleopatra's final song is thoroughly conventional and insipid. [158]

Similar sentiments were echoed in the composer's 1937 obituary:

> [Hadley] had the marvelous facility of setting down whatever came into his head, which we have had frequent occasion to admire; but also the willingness to set down everything, regardless of its value, which we have had just as many occasions to deplore. . . . [T]he discrepancies between his aims and achievements are great. [159]

Yet the Metropolitan honored Cleopatra's Night by making it only the second American opera to that time retained in the repertoire for a second season, encouraged by audience fascination with the subject and the enthusiasm of the title role's interpreter, soprano Frances Alda, whose status as Gatti's wife may well have aided Hadley's cause.[160] Moreover, in a rare bow to Chicago's precedent, Hadley was granted two opportunities to conduct the opera. His appearances at each season's final performance of Cleopatra represented the first time an American composer-conductor had been so honored at the Metropolitan.

But after the *réclame* had faded, Hadley's operatic output largely dropped from sight, with excerpts heard only on an occasional radio broadcast. When Hadley approached the

---

158 Max Smith, *Hadley's New Opera Staged*, New York American, 1 February 1920.

159 *Henry Hadley, 66, Composer, is Dead*, New York Times, 7 September 1937, 21.

160 Alda, Men, Women and Tenors, 240-41.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Metropolitan a decade later suggesting a commission arrangement, Edward Ziegler forwarded the idea to Kahn with the unpromising comment, "Personally, I have little hope that the opera will be any better than 'Cleopatra's Night.'"[161] Not surprisingly, neither Hadley nor Kahn ever pursued the project, and the chairman opted to award the next Metropolitan commission to Deems Taylor, whose The King's Henchman had by then revealed a new opera composer of greater promise.



While the latter part of the first decade of the Metropolitan's American initiative produced the first native operas to remain in the repertory for longer than a single season, the overall artistic quality of the works produced during this time had not risen appreciably above those of the pre-war period. Each of the three Metropolitan executives who administered the program had a somewhat different view on the possible reasons for this. Kahn, the most progressive, felt that the scenarios did not reflect contemporary American life (only Cadman's Shanewis had featured American characters and locale), which may have prompted his somewhat quixotic suggestions to Jerome Kern, Irving Berlin, and George Gershwin to consider opera composition. Yet his encouragement may have contributed to Gershwin's inspiration to set Porgy, which Kahn unfortunately did not live to see. Ziegler thought that American librettos lacked overall dramatic quality, a shortcoming Kahn had already pointed out to Cadman. And Gatti believed that the music of the American operas, though often skillfully composed, was neither sufficiently compelling nor grateful to audiences accustomed to the most enduring examples of the European tradition. The next fifteen years of the American program, while

---

[161] Ziegler to Kahn, 16 May 1930. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Ziegler correspondence, 1929-30, K.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

encompassing far fewer productions, were devoted to solving these problems. It was this commitment that led to the theater's first formal commissioning effort.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

CHAPTER 6

AN AMERICAN EXTENSION OF THE GREAT TRADITION: DEEMS TAYLOR'S THE KING'S HENCHMAN AND PETER IBBETSON

The Second Phase of the American Program

The first decade of the Metropolitan's American initiative concluded as the Great Tradition seemed to be drawing to a close as well. The pace of new European productions at the house remained brisk throughout the quarter-century of Gatti's tenure, but the rate of absorption of operas into the repertory declined precipitously from the glory days of the nineteenth century. The promise of a significant *verismo* extension to the legacy of Verdi faded in the decade after Cavalleria Rusticana and Pagliacci, and the vogue of composers like Ermanno Wolf-Ferrari (1876-1948), championed by Toscanini during his Metropolitan period, did not outlast the Great War. Even Puccini and Strauss struggled to maintain the brilliance of their pre-war reputations: by the mid-1920s, Gatti was referring to La Fanciulla del West as an "opera that we no longer give,"[1] and Kahn refused to even consider producing Die Frau ohne Schatten: "Much beautiful music, but an utterly dull and sour libretto, and quite impossible for New York."[2]

Pressed by Kahn to continue the American program despite its disappointments, Gatti wearily referred to the existence of political considerations in a letter to the chairman

---

1 Gatti-Casazza to Conte Luigi Grabinski Broglio, Milan, 26 January 1924. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, 1923-24, Broglio. [*È inutile però che il Pomé studii la 'Fanciulla del West,' opera che noi non diamo più.*] Despite his prediction, Gatti revived the opera in 1929 for the celebrity cast of Maria Jeritza, Giovanni Martinelli, and Lawrence Tibbett.

2 Kahn, Munich, to Ziegler, 2 April 1927. Kahn Papers, Box 321, Princeton University. The same letter instead advocated Ernst Krenek's Jonny spielt auf: "The success of the opera has not been equalled since 'Rosencavalier'."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

discussing the selection of the Breil and Hugo operas over those of Hadley: "Since the question of American Operas is entirely a matter of expediency and diplomacy, I firmly believe that we have done very well by deciding to include two new names instead of one."[3] Paradoxically, the apparent frankness of this statement did not represent Kahn's true feelings at all, for it appears to have resulted from a ruse devised by Ziegler only four months earlier to induce Gatti to produce an American work on the company's spring tour in Boston:

> I think . . . we should give "The Dance in Place Congo." [Composer Henry F.] Gilbert is a Bostonian, and the newspapers are craving to hear this work up there. Mr. Gatti doesn't agree with me, so if you will kindly ask him if he will, for reasons of policy and politics, . . . it would be a wise thing. [4]

Nevertheless, having successfully kept political considerations at bay throughout most of the war period, Gatti was forced to acknowledge diplomacy as a growing necessity in his theater's post-war strategy when a wave of isolationism accompanied by ultra-nationalist sentiment made itself felt across America. The press, generally laudatory of the first American production phase efforts, now began to needle the house for its failure to develop a lasting repertory across the preceding decade:

> It is difficult to understand . . . why Mr. Otto Kahn and his associates do not appoint a jury of experts to pass judgment every year on the value of scores by native composers. [T]he public is not informed clearly and definitely how and by whom the ultimate selection [of American repertory] is made. . . . Then, and only then, will the public be convinced that the Metropolitan Opera Company is sincerely seeking to encourage American opera and is not simply trying to guard itself, as some persons would have us believe, against criticism. [5]

---

[3] Gatti-Casazza to Kahn, 3 August 1918. Kahn Papers, Box 104, Princeton University.

[4] Ziegler to Kahn, 9 April 1918. Kahn Papers, Box 104, Princeton University. Gatti's objection resulted from his belief that the exuberant work would fare poorly in a heavily Catholic city during Lent.

[5] Max Smith, *"A Native Operatic Triptych" is This Week's Novelty,* New York American, 9 March 1919.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Even Charles Wakefield Cadman, stung when Shanewis was dropped from the Met's repertory after its second season, joined the fray:

> I know as well as anyone else that my "Shanewis" was more or less of an experiment and that in order to grow one must . . . profit through past mistakes. Yet one also must have a chance to hear American things more than a "few times" to know, as our brother composers abroad learn, . . . just what one's work lacks. [6]

In response, Kahn cited the intransigent libretto problem faced by the Americans: "Whether it ought to be so or not, it is a fact that the libretto has a great deal to do with . . . the lasting popular success of a modern opera. It is also a fact that, generally speaking (there are, of course, exceptions), American composers have singularly misjudged the public taste in the choice of libretti."[7] Kahn demonstrated the sincerity of his artistic convictions when he refused to intervene politically in the Metropolitan's rejection of yet another Indianist opera, Alberto Bimboni's Winona (1923; a tale of an American Indian princess in which authentic Chippewa melodies are used) despite the fact that President Warren Harding, an acquaintance of the composer's wife and her family, wrote him twice on Bimboni's behalf. Kahn stood by Gatti's decision after receiving a report on the work from Ziegler:

> Mr. Gatti had a talk this morning with Bimboni . . . [and] stressed the point that the work had no theatric value whatever, but he has an idea that Bimboni is going to take the matter "higher up." . . . [I]t would obviate a great deal of discussion if you would simply say that the work has no theatric value, without adding the qualifications that it was, musically, zero-minus, and that the libretto is deadly dull. [8]

---

6 Cadman, Los Angeles, to Kahn, 4 July [1920]. Kahn Papers, Box 131, Princeton University.

7 Kahn to Cadman, Los Angeles, 14 July 1920. Ibid.

8 Ziegler to Kahn, 10 April 1923. Kahn Papers, Box 205, Princeton University. Ziegler acknowledged Harding's intervention in an 11 January 1923 letter to the chairman, to which Kahn replied two days later: "Thanks . . . I have had another letter from our amiable President on this subject." Ibid.

Winona was later premiered on 11 November 1926 in Portland, Oregon under the auspices of the American Grand Opera Company, with the composer conducting.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Gatti's stringent artistic critiques of the Americans were applied equally to European composers during the same period, despite allegations to the contrary. For example, when requested by the Conte di San Martino, the president of Rome's Accademia di Santa Cecilia who had supported Gatti's nomination to the Metropolitan in 1907, to give special consideration to Ottorino Respighi's new opera Belfagor (premiered La Scala, 1923; after a pungent Machiavellian tale recounting the devil Belfagor's investigation of matrimony among mortals)—in part because of the composer's position as an Academy member—the manager refused on artistic grounds:

> I believe the musical treatment of comedy to be one of the most arduous tasks for a composer, and Maestro Respighi, despite his knowledge and talent, has not demonstrated, in the opinion of many, the indispensable qualities necessary to succeed in this.
>
> In America, as everywhere else, the public has tired of operas of purely technical merit (so-called "well-made"), and desires something of sincere ingenuity and, since we are speaking of comedy, pleasure! [9]

The influential critic Henry Finck held forth similarly on the European situation in his 1926 autobiography: "[T]here are no new [operas] that hold their own. . . . always the same list of some twenty favorites—a damnable iteration which is one reason why I gave up musical journalism."[10]

It was in seeking a solution on the American front that Kahn opened the idea of commissioning by suggesting opera composition to Irving Berlin, Jerome Kern, and George

---

[9] Gatti-Casazza, Milan, to Conte Enrico di San Martino di Valperga, Rome, 13 July 1923. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, Summer 1923, Offers of Services. [*Il trattare musicalmente una commedia, io credo sia uno dei compiti più ardui per un compositore e il Maestro Respighi, per quanto uomo d'ingegno e di sapere, non ha dimostrato, per concorde opinione, le qualità indispensabili per riuscire nel difficile impegno. In America, come dappertutto del resto, si è stanchi di opere di valore puramente tecnico, cosidette ben fatte, e si desidera qualche cosa di sincero, di geniale e, poichè siamo in materia di commedie, di piacevole!*]

[10] Finck, Golden Age of Music, 390.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Gershwin in the early 1920s. The bracing openness of Kahn's cultural philosophy remained unaltered since his promotion of Victor Herbert at the Metropolitan, and he had long accepted the possibility of America's popular influences as a source of its *Zukunftmusik*: "[Jazz] has a just claim to be taken seriously. It has more right to be ranked as . . . American art than a savorless grand opera composed with painstaking erudition and technical impeccability after the model of Wagner, Debussy or Strauss."[11] The concept of a commission had, of course, already been tentatively broached with the pursuit of Charles Martin Loeffler's uncompleted opera, and Gatti had sought to develop Henry F. Gilbert's promising vernacular strain by suggesting an opera after the 1918 premiere of The Dance in Place Congo. Unfortunately, Gilbert chose a libretto entitled Fantasy in Delft which attempted to rehash a hackneyed Italian intermezzo theme in Dutch guise,[12] and his nearly completed adaptation of Joel Chandler Harris's 1880 folk classic Uncle Remus, His Songs and His Sayings had been aborted a decade earlier when the rights were found to be in possession of another composer.[13] Hypersensitive to criticism, Gilbert is said to have "turned away, in disgust and discouragement, from the theatre" when the Metropolitan showed no interest in the Delft project.[14] Gatti eventually succeeded in his pursuit of the vernacular path

---

11 Quoted in Matz, Many Lives, 226.

12 Olin Downes, Boston, to Ziegler, 16 October 1919, enclosing summary of scenario. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Ziegler correspondence, 1919-20, D.

13 Claire McGlinchee, *American Literature in American Music*, The Musical Quarterly 31 (January 1945): 111. An unpublished manuscript score of Uncle Remus survives, and two instrumental excerpts from it, the Comedy Overture on Negro Themes and American Dances, achieved considerable popularity in Gilbert's time. Elliott Carter, *American Figure, with Landscape*, Modern Music 20 (May-June 1943): 219-25; repr., Jonathan Bernard, ed., Elliott Carter: Collected Essays and Lectures, 1937-1995 (Rochester, New York: University of Rochester Press, 1998): 137.

14 Olin Downes, *Operas and Librettos*, New York Times, 3 February 1935, sec. 8, 7.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

when he secured John Alden Carpenter's jazz-inspired ballet Skyscrapers independent of Kahn's assistance.[15]

Meanwhile, the ongoing process of reviewing existing American scores continued, but on a more cautious basis. The question of institutional diplomacy again arose when the sharp-tongued Austrian conductor Artur Bodanzky jousted briefly with British-American composer William Franke Harling, whose one-act, jazz-infused A Light From St. Agnes was eventually premiered by the Chicago Opera Association:

> Yesterday morning I had Bodanzky and Harling together, and we threshed the whole matter out. Bodanzky was convincing when he told this chap that he did not say his opera had no chance because it was an American opera; what he did say was that we had had so many "lemons" that we had to be very careful in choosing our American operas. [16]

In addition to fending off the American nationalist attacks that followed such incidents, Gatti was ironically forced to ward off his own country's composers when they pursued him with their works. His characteristically frank responses to such production solicitations are significant as they contain virtually the only openly stated summaries of an overarching repertoire policy that had evolved at the Metropolitan by the 1920s. Gatti's letter to composer Franco Alfano (1875-

---

[15] Telegram from Gatti to Kahn, Rome, 18 April 1925, Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, 1924-25; Olin Downes, *J. A. Carpenter, American Craftsman*, The Musical Quarterly 16 (October 1930): 453.

[16] Ziegler to Kahn, 21 April 1923. Kahn Papers, Box 205, Princeton University. Ziegler's letter also relayed Bodanzky's opinion that A Light From St. Agnes was "more of an operetta than an opera," and that staff conductor Roberto Moranzoni had also been requested to review the score. Moranzoni's report was apparently not promising and the Metropolitan allowed the premiere to be given in Chicago, although Ziegler—obviously at Kahn's behest—closely monitored the new opera's reception: "Regarding the American opera 'A Light from St. Agnes' I wish to tell you that the reports now printed in the Chicago newspapers about Chicago offerings are not to be taken very seriously. I understand that Mr. [Samuel] Insull has marshalled the newspapers into line. . . . I have had another report . . . and understand that it is not effective." Ziegler to Kahn, 7 January 1926. Kahn Papers, Box 287, Princeton University. Kahn's subsequent advocacy of Jonny spielt auf clearly indicates that Harling's "jazz opera" was superseded by Krenek's.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

1954) refusing consideration to La Legenda di Sakùntala (1920), for example, described a position which obviously owed its formulation to the continuing influence of Kahn:

> Being a matter of a composer absolutely new to the United States and nearly wholly unknown by name, I was obliged to bring the question before my Board. It found that there was no possibility of promoting the creation at the Metropolitan of an opera composed by a Maestro, however talented, whose work has never been produced in this country.
>
> It was also said to be impossible to make an exception for your opera when they refuse every day those of American authorship, which indeed possess merit and are written by persons known to the public and in whom a number of influential people have taken a lively interest. [17]

This policy was shortly thereafter reiterated to another composer:

> I can tell you frankly that if your opera has not been successfully produced in an Italian theater, I cannot give it any consideration. Here it is not a principle established by me, but sanctioned by a majority of the Board of Directors, which has decided that only European composers of international renown may be produced at the Metropolitan. And with regard to American composers, this is understood to mean those composers born in the United States. [18]

In Alfano's case, the policy was indeed implemented as described: Madonna Imperia (1927), the composer's only opera to be given at the Metropolitan, was scheduled only after the highly successful American debut of his Risurrezione (1904), produced by the Chicago Opera in 1925 as

---

[17] Gatti-Casazza to Alfano, Bologna, 19 October 1920. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, 1920-21, A. [*Trattandosi di un compositore assolutamente nuovo per gli Stati Uniti e alla quasi totalità sconosciuto anche di nome, dovetti portare la questione dinanzi al mio Board. Il quale trovò che non era il caso di favorire la creazione al Metropolitan di un'opera composta da un Maestro, certo valente ma di cui nulla fu mai prodotto in questi paesi. . . . Fu detto anche essere impossibile fare un'eccezione per la tua opera quando se ne rifiutano ogni giorno di autori americani, che pure hanno qualche pregio e sono scritte da persone conosciute e alle quali una quantità di persone influenti s'interessano vivamente.*]

[18] Gatti-Casazza to Pietro Vallini, Boston, 5 May 1921. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, 1920-21, Composers. [*Le dico francamente che se la Sua opera non viene rappresentata con successo in un teatro italiano, non è possibile ch'io la possa prendere in considerazione. Qui non si tratta di un principio stabilito da me, ma di un principio di massima sanzionato dal Board of Directors, col quale ha deciso che soltanto i compositori europei di una rinomanza universale possono avere eventualmente la creazione delle loro opere al Metropolitan. E per quel che riguarda poi i compositori americani, è convenuto che per compositore americano s'intende quegli che è nato negli Stati Uniti.*]

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

a vehicle for Mary Garden. While Alfano's reputation was also augmented by his completion of Puccini's Turandot the following year, the Metropolitan's continuing competition with Chicago (albeit on a less aggressive level after Campanini's 1919 death) litigated strongly in Alfano's favor. Kahn even utilized the issue to advance his advocacy of Jonny spielt auf: "I feel convinced that if we do not take it, Chicago will."[19]

The removal of Campanini from the battlefield, however, slowed the impetus of American production at both theaters during a time when artistic demands placed by the public on native composers were increasing in intensity. When the combined efforts of Kahn, Gatti, and Ziegler yielded no promising American scores by the mid-1920s, search efforts wisely began to shift from a focus on the Great American Opera to a quest for a better American opera. As the necessity of awarding a commission increasingly seemed inevitable, the Metropolitan turned to Deems Taylor.

The First Metropolitan Commission: The King's Henchman

The choice of Taylor as the recipient of the Metropolitan's first official commission came as somewhat of a surprise, since the composer-critic had never before essayed an opera. It was the growing success of his orchestral work, coupled with several years of experience in the legitimate theater, that influenced Kahn to advance his candidacy. The chairman's patronage of the emerging American theater over the previous decade encouraged him to develop a vision of American opera as a true fusion of music and drama, and he saw in Taylor a likely catalyst for progressive change.

Joseph Deems Taylor (1885-1966) was born in the Greenwich Village section of New York City and named after Charles F. Deems, a popular Unitarian clergyman. The son of

---

[19] Kahn, Munich, to Ziegler, 2 April 1927. Kahn Papers, Box 321, Princeton University.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

public school educators, Taylor received his primary education in the New York City system before attending the newly founded Ethical Culture School, a progressive institution which offered an excellent liberal education. Taylor was a precocious student and mastered musical notation after receiving ten months of piano lessons in addition to rudimentary classroom instruction; he also nurtured a growing literary talent by founding the school newspaper *Inklings*. An aptitude for drawing led him to enroll in New York University as an architecture major, but he lacked an affinity for mathematics and eventually settled on literature, receiving his baccalaureate degree in 1906 with a thesis entitled *George Bernard Shaw as a Dramatist*. Taylor's two closest college friends, William LeBaron (later a successful Hollywood producer) and Reinald Werrenrath (a baritone who later sang at the Metropolitan), encouraged the development of his musical interests; Taylor and Werrenrath were in fact the only members of the University Glee Club who were able to read music. When Werrenrath was too busy with his burgeoning singing career to compose the annual school musical, LeBaron suggested himself and Taylor as substitutes. The Isle of Skidoo (1906), a collegiate romp about two Americans stranded on a cannibal island, was the first of five successful shows produced by the pair and fueled Taylor's early dream of becoming a musical comedy composer. His second effort, The Oracle (1907), brought him into contact with Victor Herbert, whose family was acquainted with a member of the show's cast. Having recently decided to extend his own musical horizons with Natoma, Herbert generously encouraged Taylor to pursue serious musical study.[20] Accordingly, Taylor spent the following

---

[20] Draft biography of Deems Taylor, author unknown (ca. 1940), 1-8. Yale University, Irving S. Gilmore Music Library, Deems Taylor Papers, MSS 66, Series III.H., Writings About Taylor. This manuscript, a notebook containing 36 handwritten pages, is a brief but detailed account of Taylor's life until the late 1930s and was found among the composer's papers after his death with no information identifying either its author or the intended purpose. The draft is not in Taylor's hand, but its witty tone and wealth of detail (much of it corroborated by other sources) indicate that the author either knew Taylor well, enjoyed his collaboration on the narrative, or both.

Additional biographical information on Taylor throughout this section was drawn from a Winter

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

summer under the theoretical tutelage of trumpeter and arranger Oscar Coon, who took him through E. F. Richter's Manual of Harmony and Janssen's Counterpoint during a two-month period.[21] Apart from this experience, Taylor was an autodidact largely by economic necessity, carrying pocket scores to concerts and perceptively absorbing the eclectic influences of New York musical life.[22]

Taylor experienced his initial success in serious composition when he was awarded second prize in a National Federation of Music Clubs competition for his tone poem The Siren Song (1913). Over the following decade, the young composer painstakingly developed his craft while supporting himself with various journalistic endeavors that drew on his literary talents. Taylor worked under noted columnist Franklin P. Adams at the New York Tribune, embarked on a brief career as a war correspondent reporting from the Western front, and held an associate editorship at Collier's magazine. By 1919, he had written the chamber suite Through the Looking Glass, which was premiered by Walter Damrosch's New York Symphony Society in a full orchestral version in 1923 and became his best-known piece. But in 1920 the thirty-five-year-old composer showed no sign of shortly developing into one of the most visible commentators on the American musical scene. This changed dramatically when Taylor directly approached New York World editor Herbert Bayard Swope to apply for the post of chief music critic that had been

---

2000 exhibition of materials on Taylor's life and work at the Gilmore Music Library, Yale University curated by archivist Richard Boursy, which provided much valuable information.

21 Richter's (1808-1879) text, subtitled "a practical guide to [harmonic] study prepared especially for the Conservatory of Music at Leipzig," in particular linked Taylor to the long line of American composers trained in the German Conservatory tradition. Ernst Friedrich Richter, Richter's Manual of Harmony, translated by John P. Morgan (New York: G. Schirmer, 1891).

22 Jane Moore Howe, *Deems Taylor Recounts Rugged Road to Success,* Indianapolis Morning Star, 20 April [1955], 8. Taylor Papers, Series III.H.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

vacated by the death of James Huneker in 1921. Taylor's sample columns won him an influential position that quickly brought him into contact with the New York artistic world.[23]

Taylor supplemented his regular critical columns with Sunday "thought" pieces, one of which attracted the interest of Otto Kahn by agitating the longstanding opera-in-English question.[24] The banker apparently suggested a personal meeting early in 1923, for Taylor wrote to him: "Needless to say, I should be delighted to talk over opera in 'American' with you. At present, the whole question seems to be in the hands of self-appointed patriots, and I should welcome a chance to discuss it with someone who looks at it as a matter of art."[25] Taylor's involvement with the burgeoning American theater of the early 1920s—his incidental music for several Theatre Guild productions included Elmer Rice's The Adding Machine and George S. Kaufman and Marc Connelly's Beggar on Horseback—had clearly affected his views on the future of the American lyric stage:

> I should like to see an institution . . . giving opera in English as a branch of the drama. That is a fact about opera that Americans have never realized, chiefly because they have never heard opera in their own language. Until they do realize it, and take opera naturally as a form of dramatic entertainment, there will never be any American operas written worth hearing, because there will be no public desire to hear them. [26]

Taylor's ideas evidently resonated with Kahn, for in the spring of 1925 Edward Ziegler invited the composer to lunch and mentioned that the Metropolitan was dissatisfied with the dramatic effectiveness of the American operas it had produced to that time. When Ziegler asked Taylor to suggest a composer with the musical and theatrical experience to remedy the

---

23 Draft biography of Taylor, 13-29. Taylor Papers, Series III.H.

24 Kahn to Taylor, 3 January 1923. Kahn Papers, Box 213, Princeton University.

25 Taylor to Kahn, 11 January 1923. Ibid.

26 Taylor to Kahn, 4 January 1923. Ibid.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

situation, Taylor recommended himself.[27] The Metropolitan immediately extended him its first commission offer and announced the award on 18 April 1925, though without divulging the name of the recipient.[28]

Having accepted effective musical drama as a mandate of the commission, Taylor selected renowned poet and dramatist Edna St. Vincent Millay, whom he knew through theatrical connections, to author the libretto. Millay's first scenario, The Glass Coffin, was based on the Snow White fable; however, she soon rejected this in favor of a tenth-century Saxon legend with a reputed basis in fact which she found while researching the origins of the English language.[29] While the plot of The King's Henchman bears obvious resemblance to that of Tristan und Isolde, Henchman's source actually predates that used by Wagner in his opera. At the Saxon court of Eadgar of Wessex, King of England (baritone), the ruler dispatches his beloved foster brother Aethelwold, Earl of East Anglia (tenor) to procure the noblewoman Aelfrida (soprano), daughter of Ordgar, Thane of Devon (bass), for him in marriage. The young henchman loses his way in the Devonshire forest and is guided by a beautiful woman who has appeared there on All Hallows' Eve to seek the image of her future husband in accordance with an ancient legend. Aethelwold falls immediately in love with her but is horrified to discover that she is Aelfrida. Unable to overcome his passion, he sends word to Eadgar that Aelfrida is undesirable and marries her himself. As the lovers prepare to flee to Ghent, Eadgar arrives at Devon unannounced. Aethelwold warns his new wife to disguise her beauty, but the vain

---

27 Draft biography of Taylor, 29-30, Taylor Papers, Series III.H.; Jay S. Harrison, *Deems Taylor, Composer, Talks About 'Ibbetson,'* New York Herald Tribune, 3 July 1960, sec. 4, 1.

28 Olin Downes, *Gatti to Produce American Opera,* New York Times, 18 April 1925, 18. Despite the theater's ostensible reticence to identify the commission recipient, Downes named Taylor in his article, stating, "[I]t has been more or less of an open secret that Deems Taylor is the composer to whom Mr. Gatti refers."

29 Andrew Farkas, ed., Lawrence Tibbett: Singing Actor (Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1989), 22.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Aelfrida, piqued at learning her husband prevented her from becoming queen of England, appears before the monarch in radiant splendor. Shamed by the deceit of his actions, Aethelwold commits suicide; Eadgar chastises Aelfrida for her vanity and mourns the tragedy of Aethelwold's death in a poignant closing elegy.

The contribution of Millay, "accomplished in delicate yet tragic dramatic dialogue," and described in the New York Herald Tribune as a writer "whom no other living poet has excelled . . . in pure ecstatic lyrical expression,"[30] was eagerly awaited. Correspondence between Taylor and Millay during the libretto's genesis early in 1926 indicates that the Metropolitan's Edward Ziegler was afforded the opportunity of reviewing completed scenes and that Millay acknowledged his suggestions with appreciation. Yet the author's remarks reveal the efficacy of her own dramatic plans, as well as definite ideas about the poetic flavor of the piece:

> I insist on using real names of the time, not making up any. . . . NO! Eadgar and Aelfrida could NOT be modernized into Edgar and Elfreda! For who-the-hell am I writing this libretto anyway, Deems Taylor or George Gershwin?
>
> . . . . . .
>
> "If but thy belly be as deep as thy lung" etc. Have you given me your real reason for wishing to cut these lines? Or is it that you think the word belly should be deferred a little, until the box-holders have had time to digest their floating-islands? Of course, these lines can easily be cut, but they seem to me to set the color of the times in a beautiful fast dye.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> I thought you would probably want to run several sets of speeches at the same time, à la Moscow Art Theatre, and wrote quite a bit with that in mind, for it seemed to me it would give you a lovely chance for some broad swashbuckling counter-point, and be, dramatically, too, extremely effective. [31]

---

30 Elinor Wylie, *A Nightingale at the Court of King Eadgar,* New York Herald Tribune, 20 February 1927, sec. 7, 6.

31 Edna St. Vincent Millay, Austerlitz, New York, to Deems Taylor, February 1926. Yale University, Beinecke Library for Rare Books and Manuscripts, Mary Kennedy Papers, Box 33; transcription by James Pegolotti, Taylor Papers, Series XI, Addendum.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The finished libretto, cast in metric prose with occasional use of blank and rhymed verse, won universal accolades for its evocative poetry, such as that of the opening Harper's song which recalls the characteristically alliterative phrases of Saxon verse:

> Wild as the white waves / Rushing and roaring,
> Heaving the wrack / High up the headland,
> Hoarse as the howling / Winds of the winter,
> When the lean wolves / Harry the hindmost,
> Horseman and horse / Toppled and tumbled . . . [32]

Also much admired was Millay's eloquence in the drama's central emotional scenes, as when Eadgar discovers Aethelwold's deception:

> So. So.
> Why, then, my life hath been but a heaping of sticks under an empty pot.
> Soft, let me get my bearings.
> In this light no tree is where it stood.
> Yea, in this wood I must seek behind me what I hear before me,
> And hold my bow with my other hand. [33]

Despite the libretto's unusual linguistic density—a result of Millay's insistence on authentic Anglo-Saxon of the pre-Norman period, giving rise to such lines as "And I ween the chest of silver mancuses / Beside her father's bed / Doth not bedim her, neither"—critic W. J. Henderson pronounced the text largely intelligible from his orchestra seat, declaring, "In the end this libretto commands recognition as the best that any American opera has had."[34] Taylor deserves much credit for his precise musical setting. He had, in fact, identified English prosody as a central problem of American opera which he hoped to solve: "I am simply trying to write an opera which can be sung and understood in English. . . . There are not half a dozen composers in this country whose work shows any comprehension of the fact that English words demand a

---

[32] Deems Taylor, The King's Henchman, libretto by Edna St. Vincent Millay, piano-vocal score (New York: J. Fischer & Bro., 1926), 3.

[33] Ibid., 257-58.

[34] *American Opera Has Premiere,* New York Sun, 18 February 1927, 29.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

setting peculiarly their own."[35] He had also resolved to concern himself more with drama than particularity of musical style: "As to what style the opera is, I have no idea. . . . [T]he music attempts to set its words faithfully and singably, to reflect its moods, and to enhance its emotional and dramatic situations. Its form has undoubtedly been influenced by the methods of past masters . . . as to that, I can only hope that its spiritual grandfather may turn out to be Wagner rather than Puccini."[36]

Like Mona, the American opera to which it bears the most topical resemblance, The King's Henchman indeed owes much to Wagner in its fluid dramatic conception, expert prosody, *arioso* vocal lines, and lush orchestration. Unlike Parker's opera, however, it utilizes no system of leitmotifs (although there is recurring thematic material) and its dramatic pacing is more effectively handled. Indeed, Taylor was so concerned with the dramatic efficacy of the piece that he refused to reveal the opera's plot in advance of its premiere:

> It seemed to me that under the circumstances I might be able to get an audience to take opera, for once, as a form of the drama.
>
> I've been moved to try to keep book and music quiet by another consideration, too; and that is the very definite (and, God knows, well-founded) prejudice against American opera. I've an idea that, if they learn the story beforehand, most people are going to make up their minds beforehand. [37]

Taylor's music, which makes abundant use of extended chromaticism within a tonally oriented framework, was the most harmonically challenging to be heard in an American opera since Mona, but provoked similar reactions from otherwise admiring critics: "He has put his hand too trustfully in Wagner's, and has allowed himself to be led unprotestingly, into the

---

35 *Taylor-Millay Opera is Secret,* New York World, 19 April 1926.
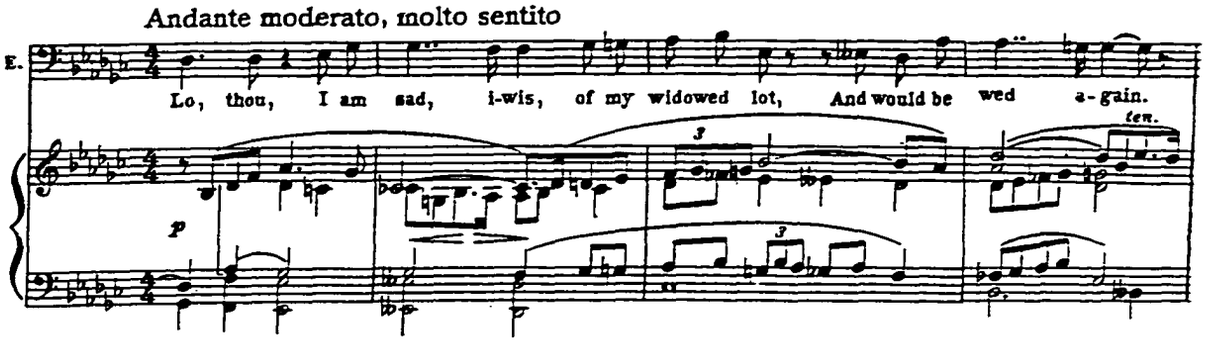
36 Deems Taylor, *"By Request": The King's Henchman,* The Musical Digest 11 (4 January 1927): 32.

37 Taylor to Lawrence Gilman, 2 January 1927; quoted in Elaine Brody, *The King's Henchman: Fifty Years Later,* Music Library Association Notes 34 (December 1977): 321.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

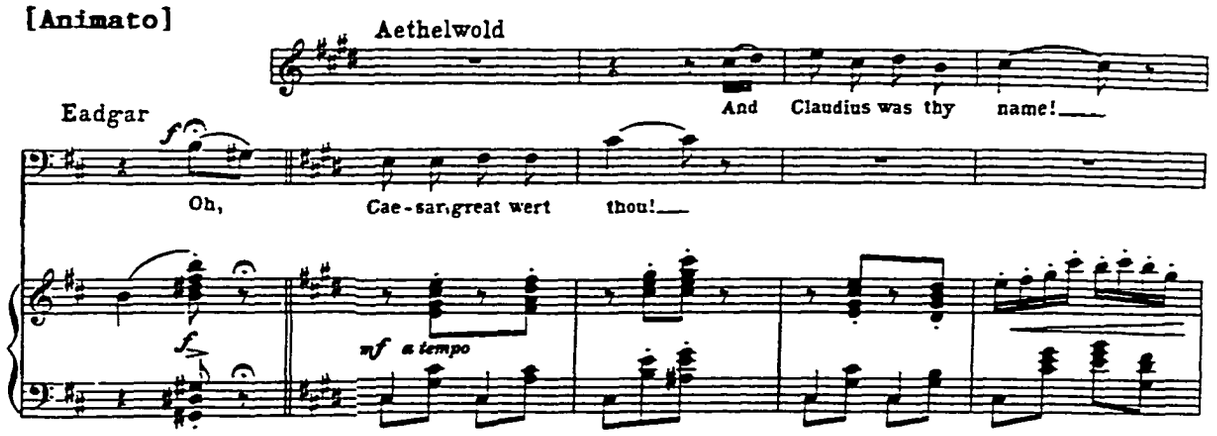
enchanted garden where that terrible necromancer lays his spells."[38] A stylistically representative passage occurs in Eadgar's Act 1 lament:

Ex. 6.1: Taylor, The King's Henchman, Act I, piano-vocal score, pp. 42-43



Taylor varied the prevailing late Romantic idiom with some traditional British modality, particularly in the Act 1 finale, "Oh Caesar, great wert thou," a rousing drinking song at Eadgar's court utilizing the Aeolian mode, which one critic termed a "Cornish *brindisi*":[39]

Ex. 6.2: Taylor, The King's Henchman, Act I, piano-vocal score, pp. 66-67
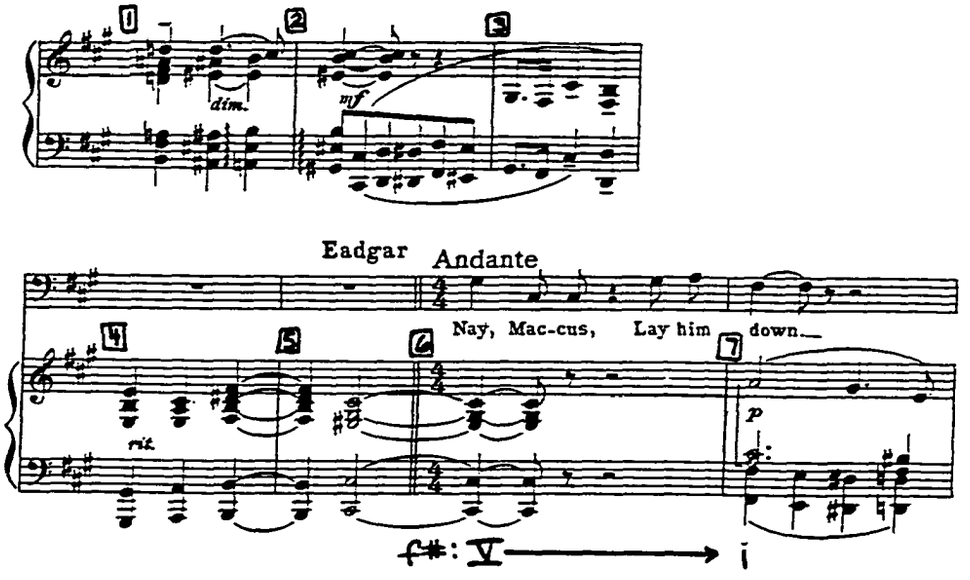


---

38 Lawrence Gilman, *New American Opera is Heard at Metropolitan,* New York Herald Tribune, 18 February 1927. Gilman's colorful metaphor clearly alludes to Act 2 of Parsifal.

39 It became the opera's most celebrated excerpt, due in part to a commercial recording made by Lawrence Tibbett with the Metropolitan Opera Chorus for Victor in 1928 and reissued on at least two anthologies: *Toward an American Opera,* New World Records NW241 (1978) and *Souvenirs from American Operas,* International Record Collectors' Club IRCC-CD 818.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Elements of both styles are juxtaposed in the music leading into Eadgar's final elegy; "Nay, Maccus, Lay him down," shown in example 6.3. The chromaticism of measures 1-3, stylistically redolent of the King's Act 1 lament (particularly the predominant movement by semitone in the bass) gives way to the stark progression of measures 4-5, in which the lowered sixth and seventh degrees of the C♯ minor scale again imply the Aeolian mode. The passage resolves rather unexpectedly to the parallel major, and the C♯ major triad in measure 5 then functions as the dominant of F♯ minor, a resolution to which occurs in the second measure of the elegy:

Ex. 6.3: Taylor, The King's Henchman, Act III, piano-vocal score, p. 266



But Taylor's procedure throughout much of the score—smoothly lyrical chromaticism elides over cadences in a traversal of continually shifting key centers, carrying the vocal lines with it (no doubt an homage to Wagner's "endless melody")—exasperated some critics: "The irritating lack of a sense of tonality makes the entire opera a foundation-less structure, and produces a sense of aimless drifting, as if one were on a raft in the middle of the

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Atlantic Ocean without compass, sextant or chronometer."[40] Other commentators, despite commending the overall competence of Taylor's writing, noted a lack of strong stylistic profile in the score: "What one misses in it . . . is a style consistently self-sprung and independent."[41] This view seemed to magnify over time. Reviewing a 1976 revival, one critic termed Taylor's smooth writing "infernally pleasant" and his chromaticism "undistinctive," yet admitted that the music was "not ineffective."[42] In fact, the skill of Taylor's setting resulted in an ecstatic reception at the opera's 17 February 1927 premiere, which featured Lawrence Tibbett as Eadgar, Canadian tenor Edward Johnson as Aethelwold, British soprano Florence Easton as Aelfrida, and Tullio Serafin conducting. The New York Times pronounced: "Mr. Taylor and Miss Millay have produced what is undoubtedly the most effective and artistically wrought America opera that has reached the stage";[43] and Kahn indicated that the Metropolitan might well be open to future commissioning projects as a result, confirming in a telegram: "I expressed gratification at Taylor-Millay opera and expectation that Metropolitan will find occasion in due time to commission operas from other American composers."[44] The opera also enjoyed the most extended performance history of its era for an American opera: it was retained in the Metropolitan's repertory for an unprecedented three seasons; broadcast on the inaugural program of the Columbia Phonographic Broadcasting Company (later CBS) network on 18 September 1927;[45]

---

40 Edward Robinson, *Deems Taylor's American Opera,* The Fortnightly Musical Review 1 (14 March 1928): 7.

41 Gilman, *New American Opera is Heard.*

42 Stephen Wadsworth, review of *The King's Henchman,* New York City, Bel Canto Opera, Opera News 40 (May 1976): 38.

43 [Olin Downes], *"King's Henchman" Stirs Opera Throng,* New York Times, 18 February 1927, 1, 14.

44 Kahn, Paris, to Ziegler, 7 March 1927; quoted in letter from Ziegler to Kahn, Paris, 31 March 1927. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Ziegler correspondence, 1926-27, J-K-L.

45 Peter Wynne, *Wireless Wonders,* Opera News 58 (November 1993): 34-35.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

and taken on a forty-six city tour of the United States during the 1927-1928 season in what Taylor described as the first transcontinental tour of an American opera.[46] Thereafter, however, its visibility declined. Ironically, this may have been due, at least in part, to the superiority of Taylor's second opera, Peter Ibbetson, which the Metropolitan commissioned in the wake of Henchman's success. Gatti apparently did consider retaining the earlier work for a fourth season, for he assigned the role of Aelfrida to new Metropolitan soprano Elisabeth Ohms over the summer of 1929.[47] However, the work's 28 March 1929 performance turned out to be its last at the theater, and despite one observer's impression that the 1976 revival by New York's Bel Canto Opera should have provoked a reawakened interest in the personality and individuality of Taylor's writing,[48] the opera has disappeared from sight, sharing the fate of Parker's Mona.

PETER IBBETSON AND THE GREAT TRADITION

The fact that the Metropolitan's second American commission, Peter Ibbetson, proved to be an even stronger homage to the established European canon than The King's Henchman has been cited as an example of the theater's purportedly retrogressive attitudes in practice. Yet apart from dramatic considerations, Taylor was largely given carte blanche in the creation of his second opera, and the prospective scenarios selected for development by the eclectic composer over the following two years in fact evince his openness to a variety of stylistic approaches.

---

46 *The King's Henchman,* 1927 broadcast script. Taylor Papers, Series V, Scripts. The tour was conducted by an ad hoc King's Henchman Opera Company organized by Jacques Samossoud.

47 Gatti to German theatrical agent Erich Simon, Berlin, 9 July 1929. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, Summer 1929, Simon.

48 Arthur Satz, *Bel Canto Opera: "The King's Henchman,"* High Fidelity and Musical America 26 (July 1976): MA27.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The awarding of Taylor's second commission the day after the premiere of The King's Henchman bore the stamp of Kahn's indefatigable vision: "Mr. Taylor's opera . . . is such a remarkable product that we must ask him to repeat."[49] That this buoyant optimism could verge on the quixotic was evidenced by an Associated Press report that the new work would inaugurate the opening of a projected new opera house which the chairman had tirelessly urged on the boxholders for nearly two decades—a dream which would not in fact be realized until the completion of the Lincoln Center location in 1966.[50] Perhaps infected by the utopian view of the flourishing Machine Age of 1920s America, a period when Kahn's dream of a technologically advanced new theater seemed likely to come to fruition, Taylor was encouraged to express his initial libretto ideas in terms celebrating the sweeping growth of industrialism: "I would like to . . . produce a series of operas that would depict in graphic, romantic form the industrial progress of the American nation, with its Carnegies, its Morgans, its Schwabs, Mellons, and all the rest."[51] The impracticality of a grandiose Ring of Industrial America, however, rapidly gave way to more plausible efforts which encompassed Taylor's attempts to work through at least three other scenarios before settling on Peter Ibbetson.

Rather than a modernist depiction of an industrialized America—which might have linked American opera to the maturing Precisionist movement which celebrated the glories of mechanization in the contemporary visual arts—Taylor's first serious libretto draft, The Man Born to be King, was a romantic legendary drama redolent of Millay's Henchman; it differed

---

49 *Taylor to Put Epic of Business In Next Opera,* New York Herald Tribune, 21 February 1927, 1. Although the contract was officially signed on 20 February 1927, the New York Times claimed confirmation of the second commission on 18 February 1927: "The rumor became a certainty tonight. . . . Questions in authoritative quarters failed to elicit a denial." Associated Press release, 18 February 1927, Metropolitan Opera Archives, *The King's Henchman* production file.

50 Associated Press release, 18 February 1927. Ibid.

51 *Epic of Business,* 15.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

from its predecessor in a triumphant conclusion for the protagonist, a woodcutter's son who succeeds against all odds in his efforts to marry a princess. Perhaps it was this close similarity of genre that induced the composer to quickly reject the idea, for the scenario bears the notation: "Begun July 1927 / Abandoned July 1927."[52] Taylor was also endeavoring to comply with a request for more dynamic drama in his second opera that issued directly from the Metropolitan. A documented exchange on the subject, while confined to Gatti and Ziegler, nevertheless evinces strong congruence with the views Kahn had expressed to Charles Wakefield Cadman a decade earlier:

> Please keep in mind what I told you in regard to the new libretto which Deems Taylor should choose. He should try to find one that has some importance not only for the argument but also for the mise-en-scène. [53]
>
> Had a talk yesterday with Deems Taylor. He has not yet found a libretto, but is searching earnestly for one, and I reminded him of your wishes that he try and find something with more action than the work which he composed last year. [54]

By October 1927, Taylor had seized upon the allegorical fantasy Gandle Follows His Nose published the year before by his old friend and New York World colleague Heywood Broun (1888-1939).[55] The well-known columnist and writer had styled his third and final novel as an adult fairy tale in which a protagonist named Bunny Gandle must tackle giants, sorcerers, evil spirits and even an army. Although the work's critical reception was disappointing, Taylor reportedly "fell in love with the intellectual contents" and devoted a considerable amount of work

---

52 *The Man Born to be King,* Taylor Papers, Series I.H., Librettos.

53 Gatti-Casazza, Milan, to Ziegler, 9 May 1927. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, 1926-27, Ziegler.

54 Ziegler to Gatti-Casazza, Milan, [8] June 1927. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, Summer 1927, Ziegler.

55 Taylor to Mary Kennedy, 5 October 1927. Mary Kennedy Papers. "Nothing much doing on Gandle, although I saw Eddie Ziegler . . . and he's going to read it as soon as I'll let him have it."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

to developing its plot before shelving it two years later for much the same reason: "I found I had a situation dominated by thought instead of emotion. . . . [I]n an opera, . . . if the emotions develop a situation where you think your way out, that is fatal."[56] The problem was apparently never resolved, for notations to the original typescript adaptation indicate an attempt to rework the draft in 1942 without tangible results.[57] It is interesting to note that while neither Broun's left-of-center politics nor his May 1928 dismissal from the World (for protesting the executions of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti in his columns) evinced any reaction from the Metropolitan, its management responded immediately when the same newspaper questioned the upcoming opera season's omission of an American opera on its editorial page two months later. The passing of Taylor's original deadline of 1 July 1928 was not viewed with great alarm by the management—particularly since plans for the new opera house had stalled as well[58]—but Gatti was clearly annoyed by the media's renewed attempt to portray his organization as inimical to the American composer:

> As soon as I read the editorial, I asked Mr. Guard to telephone . . . to advise them exactly of the Taylor matter and of his new opera which was not delivered according to the contract.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> It is needless to me to tell you that the operas by American composers, which were received by the Metropolitan until June, were carefully examined and

---

56 *Shelves New Opera After 2 Years' Work*, New York Times, 18 February 1929, 1.

57 *A Lantern in the Sun* (typescript libretto), lyric drama in 4 acts and 6 scenes founded on Heywood Broun's Gandle Follows His Nose. Taylor Papers, Series I.H., Librettos.

58 Kahn first received confirmation of the boxholders' attempts to thwart his plans shortly after the awarding of Taylor's second commission: "[Y]ou will probably glean a curious new phase of the Real Estate Company; namely, that an opposition to the site seems to have developed. . . . I think you should be advised that all is not smooth sailing here, and that I think the situation has not cleared up." Ziegler to Kahn, Paris, 19 May 1927; Kahn Papers, Box 321, Princeton University. A contingent arrayed around Grace Wilson Vanderbilt (wife of Cornelius Vanderbilt III and society's reigning *doyenne* after the death of Caroline Astor), anxious about renegotiation of the old box structure, took the position that Kahn's planned site (the Manhattan block bounded by 56th and 57th Streets and Eighth and Ninth Avenues) did not possess sufficient distinction for the new house.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> judged as not convenient to perform, especially considering the fact that it is not advisable to spoil with bad, tedious and insignificant things, the good and serious impression which for the first time an American opera has made—I mean the "King's Henchman." [59]

Shortly after dropping Gandle in February 1929, Taylor returned to the possibility of contemporary realism when he considered the grim urban drama Street Scene by Elmer Rice, whom he had known since composing incidental music for The Adding Machine. By this time, however, the Metropolitan had begun to transfer its mounting media pressures to the composer. In a cable from Europe, Gatti specifically instructed Ziegler: "Before you sail please make sure if new Taylor opera will be ready for performance season thirty thirtyone," to which Ziegler responded: "Deems Taylor has assured me that the opera will be ready for 1930-31."[60] The ironic result of the intense press scrutiny was that Taylor, who at the time of his statement to Ziegler had not written a note of the opera he would eventually deliver to the Metropolitan,[61] felt compelled to drop the gritty American scenario for one of a more conventionally operatic—and thus European—cast: "When I got into 'Street Scene,' I found it was going to be a terrific job. Rather than do a sketchy and hurried piece of work, I thought it would be better to try something more adaptable to the requirements of opera."[62] He had already become aware of the possibilities of George Du Maurier's late Victorian novel Peter Ibbetson through a chance encounter with the actress Constance Collier (who had adapted a London stage version) at a

---

59 Gatti-Casazza to Kahn, 18 July 1928. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, 1927-28, Kahn.

60 Ziegler to Gatti-Casazza, 27 June 1929, confirming Gatti telegram to Ziegler, 21 June 1929. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Ziegler correspondence, 1929-30, General.

61 "Composing Time," worksheet with notations in Taylor's hand, Taylor Papers, Series I.H., Music: Librettos. The composer calculated that Peter Ibbetson took 223 days to compose during the period between 9 December [1929] and 19 July 1930.

62 *Taylor Writing Opera Based on "Peter Ibbetson,"* New York Evening World, 22 November 1929.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

party given by New York theater legend Katharine Cornell.[63] Press announcements of Taylor's formal adoption of the subject revealed that his work on the new scenario had actually begun several months before, placing the composer's final topic decision around the time of the Metropolitan's escalating deadline demands.[64]

The plot of Du Maurier's first novel revolves around the unusual psychological idea of lovers separated by fate who are reunited in their dreams. Following its 1891 serialization in the American magazine Harper's Monthly, the story enjoyed a considerable vogue on both sides of the Atlantic that took several decades to dissipate completely. George Louis Palmella Busson Du Maurier (1834-1896), the progenitor of a renowned British artistic family which included actor-manager Gerald Du Maurier and the novelist Daphne Du Maurier, was a successful artist and illustrator for the venerable periodical Punch with no major literary work to his credit when, having received polite encouragement from his friend Henry James, he responded to a solicitation from Harper's with a novel inspired by his childhood in Paris. Although he possessed a certain deft wit in light verse and prose (a product of his admiration for Thackeray), Du Maurier produced a pale romantic tale which sought to unite the narrative interest of Dickens with the mystical passion of the Brontës. Set in mid-nineteenth-century Paris and London, the story concerns the fate of the moody young architect Peter Ibbetson who, as the child Gogo Pasquier, is wrenched from his idyllic life in Paris when his beloved but impractical father is killed "by the explosion of a safety lamp of his own invention, which was to have

---

63 Irma Kraft, *Constance Collier Recalls Part Chance Played in Her Career,* New York Herald Tribune, 22 February 1931, sec. 8, 4.

64 *'Peter Ibbetson' Chosen for Opera,* New York Sun, 22 November 1929. Taylor confirmed that the deadline was the principal factor in his decision without revealing the underlying political pressures: "I have not exactly changed my mind again. It is that, since I had promised the Metropolitan Company to finish an opera for the season of 1930-31, . . . I thought best to finish 'Peter Ibbetson' first and then later to again take up 'Street Scene.'" *Taylor to Use "Peter Ibbetson" for New Opera,* New York Herald Tribune, 22 November 1929.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

superseded Sir Humphrey Davy's," in the novel's most Dickensian touch. Adopted and renamed by the wealthy but nefarious Colonel Ibbetson, a distant cousin who had been refused by Peter's mother years before, he is faced with a miserable provincial existence when he becomes infatuated with the beautiful Mary, Duchess of Towers at a society gathering. When the two finally meet, Peter is startled to discover that Mary is in fact his childhood friend Mimsey Seraskier, now the unhappy wife of a profligate English aristocrat. The couple is shocked to find that they have shared a dream in which their adult personas observe and relive the idyllic events of their mutual past, a phenomenon Mary describes as "dreaming true." Peter's momentary happiness is shattered when Colonel Ibbetson vengefully intimates to his society friend Mrs. Deane that he is really his ward's father; in response, Peter initiates a bitter confrontation during which he unintentionally kills the older man with a blow of his stick. A sentence of death is commuted to life imprisonment through the intervention of the Duchess, who continues to appear with lifelike clarity to Peter in his dreams across the next twenty-five years. The balance of the novel is devoted to detailing the mystical union the lovers achieve in their escape from reality and its transcendence beyond death, an ambitious undertaking which "was not conducted with much art," even in the opinion of Du Maurier family friend Alfred Ainger.[65]

The dramatic incarnation of Peter Ibbetson's "tale of fragile sentiment so unmistakably breathing the lavender-scented literary air of the nineteenth century"[66] ironically received its chief impetus from the sensation created by Trilby (1894), Du Maurier's second novel about an artists' model cum opera singer who falls under the spell of the lurid Svengali.

---

[65] Sir Leslie Stephen and Sir Sidney Lee, eds., Dictionary of National Biography (London: Humphrey Milford, 1901; repr., London: Oxford University Press, 1921-22), s.v. *George Louis Palmella Busson Du Maurier*, by Alfred Ainger.

[66] Irving Weil, *Taylor's "Ibbetson" Town Talk After Opera Premiere,* New York Evening Journal, 9 February 1931.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Dramatizations of the latter work immediately captured the interest of England's leading actors, among them Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree, who appeared as Svengali at London's Haymarket Theatre.[67] It is possible that John N. Raphael, a British journalist whose attempts to produce his own stage version of Ibbetson were unsuccessful, requested an interview with Tree some years later in the hope of interesting the great actor in the role of Colonel Ibbetson. Instead, he ended up giving the scenario to Tree's colleague Constance Collier, who rewrote it for a 1915 war benefit in which she appeared as the Duchess of Towers.[68] Collier's efforts to interest London theatrical producers in Ibbetson, however, proved as fruitless as Raphael's, and she brought the play to the attention of American playwright Edward Brewster Sheldon (1886-1946), a significant force in New York theatrical circles. Sheldon was then in the midst of a crusade to transform the popular light comic actor John Barrymore into a serious dramatic performer and recognized in Collier's script an effective vehicle for his protégé, as well as an opportunity to induce Barrymore's older brother Lionel to return to the New York stage after a voluntary absence of some twelve years.[69] When inadequate financing threatened the distinguished undertaking, Collier turned to theatrical patron Otto Kahn, who was obviously familiar with the novel: "If the play is anything near as fine as the story, it must be an admirable one, and with the fine cast you have secured and your own co-operation a great success should be assured."[70]

---

67 The role continued to fascinate actors throughout the twentieth century: a film version starring John Barrymore (Svengali, Archie Mayo, 1931) became a classic; it was followed by two inferior remakes featuring Donald Wolfit (Noel Langley, 1955) and Peter O'Toole (Anthony Harvey, 1983).

68 Lionel Barrymore with Cameron Shipp, We Barrymores (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1951), 165-66.

69 Ibid., 167-68.

70 Kahn to Constance Collier, 29 March 1917. Kahn Papers, Box 75, Princeton University.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The resulting production was a great artistic and financial success—Kahn apparently told Constance Collier, "It's the first play that has paid me for my investment, and the play that has given me most pride to be associated with"[71]—and renewed interest in the story fueled a 1920 production at London's Savoy Theatre featuring Basil Rathbone in the title role, as well as the American silent film Forever (1921) starring Wallace Reid and Elsie Ferguson. It was not surprising, then, that Taylor's 1929 selection of the romance as the basis for his libretto was lauded by the press:

> In the libraries copies of it are dog-eared with much reading. The movies, which frequently make a hash of such delicate things, reached one of their high points in the filming of this story. . . . Of the libretto choices before Mr. Taylor, it would seem that he has made a selection full of enchanting possibilities. If only Mr. Barrymore could sing! [72]

Although Kahn granted the American composers an extraordinary amount of freedom in their artistic choices, Taylor must have felt relieved that the prolonged delay in developing his scenario ended with a book that already enjoyed the sympathies of the chairman as well as the public. While the opera was still being written, the Metropolitan cast Ibbetson with Taylor's choice of singers: Spanish soprano Lucrezia Bori and Canadian tenor Edward Johnson—a popular stage couple who had scored successes in Gounod's Roméo et Juliette and Debussy's Pelléas et Mélisande—as the lovers Peter and Mary; and rising star Lawrence Tibbett, who had earned accolades for his nuanced portrayal of King Eadgar in Henchman, for the role of Colonel Ibbetson.[73] The fact that Bori's accomplished English was slightly accented

---

[71] Collier reminded Kahn of his statement in a 31 January 1931 letter soliciting production funds for a New York revival of the stage play. Kahn Papers, Box 467, Princeton University.

[72] *Mr. Taylor's New Opera,* New York Times, 25 November 1929, 24.

[73] Taylor's original plan to cast Tibbett in the role of Peter's beloved father Pasquier de la Marière indicates that he intended the role to be a fairly significant one. When dramatic considerations relegated the part to comprimario status, Tibbett was promoted to the role of Colonel Ibbetson, which was originally intended for veteran bass-baritone Clarence Whitehill. Peter Ibbetson first

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

actually mirrored Du Maurier's intent, for the Continental Duchess also spoke European-accented English, and Tibbett enjoyed the advantage of coaching his part with Lionel Barrymore, who was then directing Tibbett's first Hollywood film venture, The Rogue Song (1930), for which the baritone received an Academy Award nomination. The dramatic values that were uppermost in Taylor's mind were thus fully supported by the Metropolitan, and the management additionally arranged to have a print of the film Forever shipped from Hollywood and privately screened for the benefit of the entire cast.[74]

Taylor extended equal credit to Collier along with himself for authorship of the libretto, but the two were never true collaborators on the project. Rather, the composer reworked the script of the 1917 stage version, which in fact reflected the combined efforts of Raphael, Collier, and Sheldon.[75] The usual pragmatic steps were taken: four acts were reduced to three; peripheral characters were excised; and dialogue was drastically pared to make way for music. Taylor's most surprising move was to rewrite the second act largely in French in order to realistically portray its Parisian venue, an approach which resulted in the novelty of a bilingual opera libretto.

Taylor also abandoned the somewhat deliberate dramatic pacing of Henchman—one of the qualities responsible for its rather Wagnerian cast—for a fast-moving episodic narrative more characteristic of mid-nineteenth-century Italian opera, particularly those of Verdi. The strategy was as much musical as dramatic:

---

draft libretto, initial "Cast of Characters" page; Taylor Papers, Series I.H., Librettos.

74 *"Peter Ibbetson" in Rehearsal,* New York Times, 1 February 1931, sec. 2, 8.

75 Script of 1917 stage version from Brandt & Brandt Dramatic Dept., Inc. with Taylor's annotations; Taylor Papers, Series I.H., Librettos. Taylor confirmed this method on the occasion of a 1960 revival. Harrison, *Taylor Talks About 'Ibbetson,'* 5.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> This question of timing occasioned me no little planning, especially in so detailed a story as the present one. In many operas, particularly the Wagnerian music dramas, a single incident often occupies an entire act. . . . [S]et to music by an ordinary human composer, it might not be very exciting.
>
> If opera is to survive in America at least, its composers have got to get out of the orchestra pit and . . . into the modern theatre. . . . [T]o stand a chance of success, he has got to present it in a manner that will hold the interest of an audience of his contemporaries. [76]

It is interesting to note that Taylor returned the action to Du Maurier's original date of 1855 (the stage version had been updated to 1870, possibly at the request of its designer),[77] for his dramaturgy bears many resemblances to that of La Traviata, which is set in the same period, particularly in its opening ballroom scene. Like its predecessor, Ibbetson's ballroom venue comprises the entire first act and includes a stage band playing dance music over which the characters socialize and interact. The libretto's language reflects their conversational tone, for it is cast in free naturalistic prose throughout with the single exception of Colonel Ibbetson's first-act aria, a dramatic recitation of a French poem by Alfred de Musset comprised of four-line stanzas of rhymed verse.

Each act of the compact two-and-one-quarter-hour operatic adaptation of the drama was well calculated by Taylor for optimal dramatic momentum. Act 1 introduces the three principals who function not as a love triangle but as in Traviata, with the tenor (Peter) as a poetic young man who falls in love across the ballroom with a sophisticated soprano (Mary, Duchess of Towers) currently in the possession of another man (in this case, her unseen husband), and a patriarchal baritone (Colonel Ibbetson) who bodes ill. Act 2, in which Peter returns to Paris to revisit childhood memories, initially provides an idyllic retreat for the lovers through a mutual

---

[76] *Deems Taylor's New Opera,* New York Times, 24 August 1930, sec. 2, 6.

[77] Script of 1917 stage version, page titled "Dramatis Personae" with Taylor's annotations; Taylor Papers, Series I.H., Librettos.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

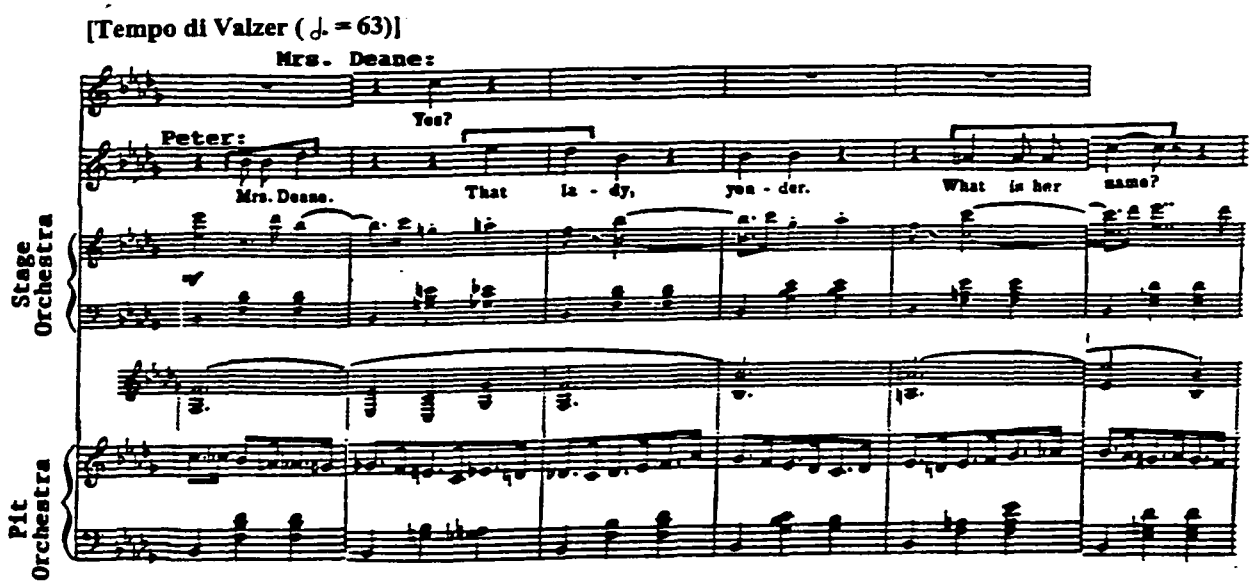
experience of "dreaming true." Peter awakens to find Mary in the salon of the inn where he is staying, where they actually meet for the first time. An emotional recognition scene, in which each becomes aware of the other's past identity, is followed by a wrenching farewell occasioned by propriety and the Duchess's married status. In Act 3, the baritone emerges as the arbiter of the tenor's fate: when Colonel Ibbetson falsely brags to the society hostess Mrs. Deane (mezzo-soprano, a benevolent Flora) that his ward is his illegitimate son, she reveals the lie to Peter, who confronts and kills the Colonel in a violent quarrel. A somber prison sequence follows, and Peter's ultimate consignment to life imprisonment is relieved by the dream appearances of Mary, with whom he is eventually reunited in death during an epilogue that closes the opera.

Given his overriding goal of effective music drama, Taylor was practically impelled by his choice of source material to cast it in a Romantic idiom. He was able to avoid writing a completely retrogressive work, however, by allowing himself a few decades of musical anachronism and utilizing the full palette of late-Romantic—and, to some extent, post-Romantic—compositional resources. Taylor's lifelong facility in absorbing diverse influences allowed him to draw on national styles of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that logically emphasized the legacy of the French school (Massenet, Chausson, Franck, Charpentier, Debussy), but also included an admixture of Italian (Puccini), German (the continuing influence of Wagner), and even Russian (Tchaikovsky) Romantic styles. The result was an opera that admittedly looked to the past but interpreted the dramatic material at hand in a skillfully eclectic idiom that yet allowed for an infusion of the composer's personal expression, if not a distinctly individualistic stamp. In a sense, Taylor closed the Romantic-era gap that had long existed in American opera's contribution to the Great Tradition—one that might have been filled by Paine's Azara—and in so doing, assured himself a degree of popular support by supplying the traditional segment of the Metropolitan audience with exactly what it wanted to hear.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
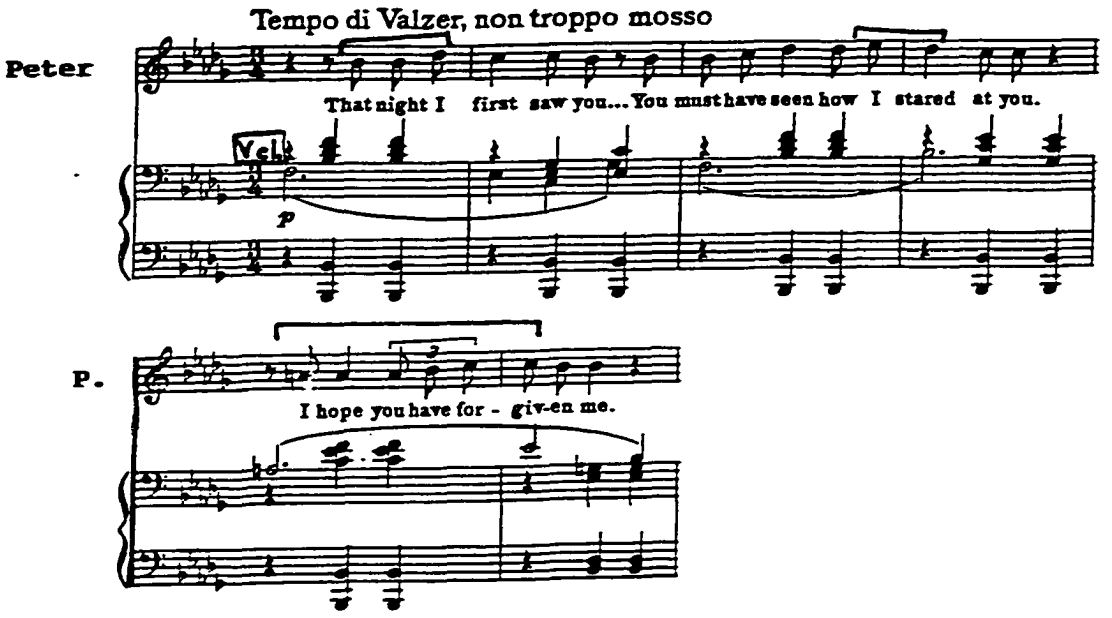
From a formal standpoint, Taylor provided musical unity across Peter Ibbetson through the use of recurring thematic material, most of which is assigned to the orchestra, and by utilizing an overarching key scheme—each act progresses to (and seals with a dramatic *fortissimo* chord) the closely related tonalities of D♭ major, its parallel minor b♭, and the parallel major B♭, successively. There is also some development of thematic material heard across acts in a loose adaptation of cyclic principles, a legacy of Berlioz, Liszt, and Franck. A prominent example of this technique occurs at the inception of the Act 2 recognition scene, which is a variation of an Act 1 episode in which Peter first questions Mrs. Deane about Mary's identity. The two passages, shown in examples 6.4(a) and (b), are linked by key, meter, tempo, textual reference, and a number of pitch correspondences between Peter's respective vocal lines. In addition, the mournful B♭ minor tonality, together with the Act 2 variation's yearning melody in the cello section, are particularly evocative of the strain of Russian Romanticism heard in Eugene Onegin:

Ex. 6.4(a): Taylor, Peter Ibbetson, Act I, piano-vocal score, p. 82



Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Ex. 6.4(b): Taylor, Peter Ibbetson, Act II, scene 3, piano-vocal score, p. 181
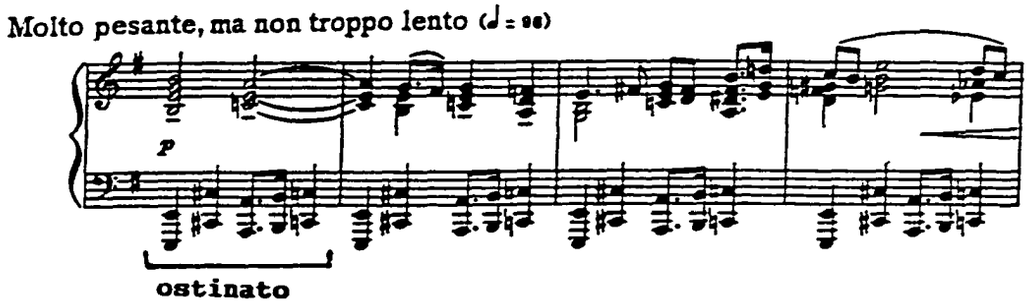


Within acts, scenes are connected by orchestral interludes in the manner of Pelléas et Mélisande, an opera Taylor admired for its development of "musico-dramatic principles to their logical conclusion."[78] In order to maintain fluidity within scenes, formal structures such as set pieces are rarely used. The most notable exception is Colonel Ibbetson's freestanding Act 1 aria, which nonetheless does not employ the formal structure common to Verdi, but is freely rhapsodic in the manner of Puccini. Another formal construction employed is a grim ostinato in Act 3, shown in example 6.5(a), which provides the foundation for much of the prison scene and evoked a positive comparison with Parsifal by critic Noel Straus (see note 88 below). Successive statements of the ostinato are varied by transposition as well as rhythmic augmentation in which the vocal line joins, as shown in example 6.5(b):
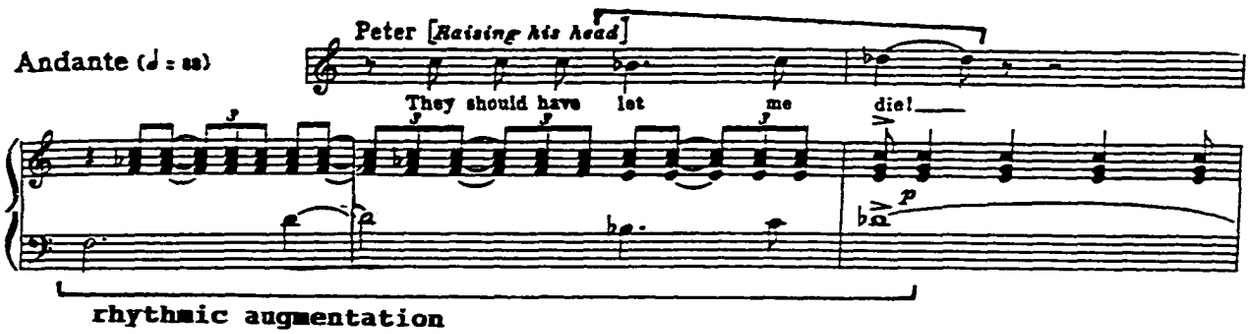
---

[78] *Deems Taylor's New Opera.* The device also appeared prominently in the more recent Intermezzo (1924) of Richard Strauss. Of course, all composers who employed this technique were heavily indebted to Wagner.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Ex. 6.5(a): Taylor, Peter Ibbetson, Act III, scene 2, piano-vocal score, p. 224



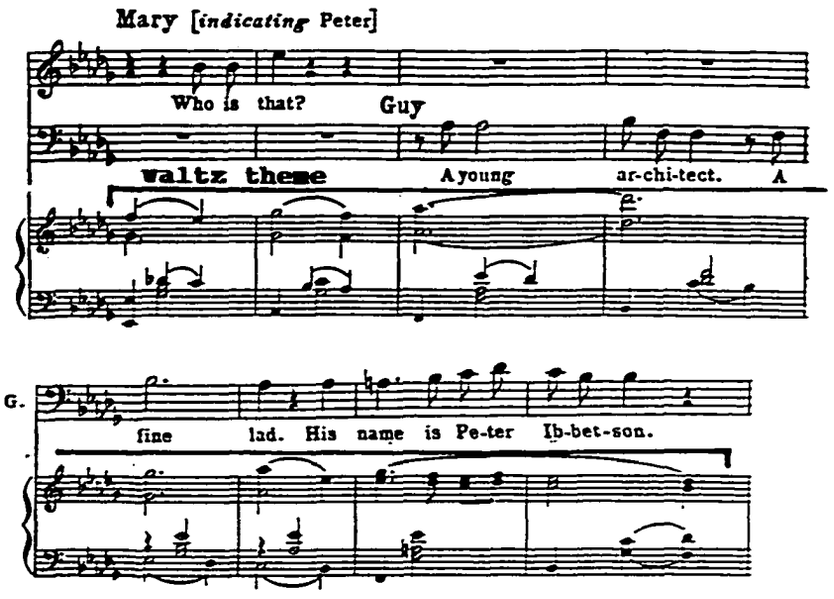
Ex. 6.5(b): Taylor, Peter Ibbetson, Act III, scene 2, piano-vocal score, p. 240



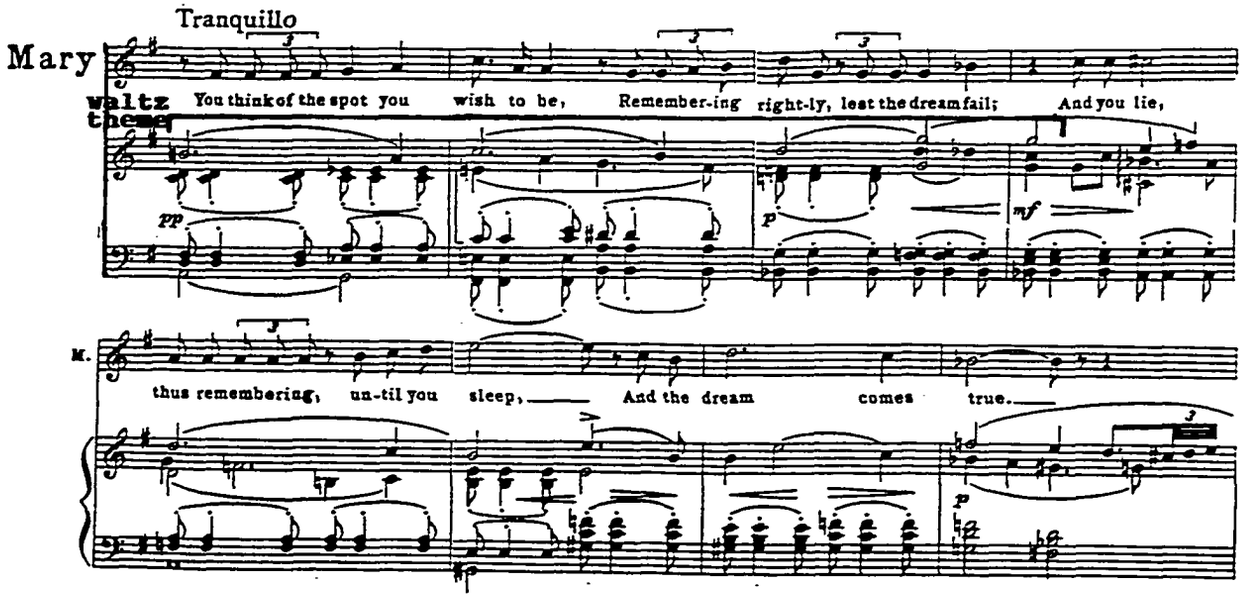
The tenor's line in example 6.5(b) is typical of the vocal writing across the opera, in which the singers' lines, cast principally in an *arioso* style, complement a symphonically conceived and continuous orchestral fabric which delineates most of the important thematic material. At times, the vocal line joins with a thematic line in the orchestra, as shown above, but more often it acts independently as an accompanying voice in the texture. Examples 6.6(a) and (b) illustrate Taylor's use of this technique, which he developed from the similarly Wagnerian-inspired vocal writing of Henchman. Here, Mary's appearance in Peter's first dream episode in Act 2, shown in example 6.6(b), is accompanied by a fragment of the principal waltz theme of Act 1 that was heard upon their first glimpse of each other, shown in example 6.6(a), but now recast in 4/4 meter. The vocal lines in both excerpts are woven into the harmonic texture, only occasionally rising above the instrumental melody:

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Ex. 6.6(a): Taylor, Peter Ibbetson, Act I, piano-vocal score, p. 78
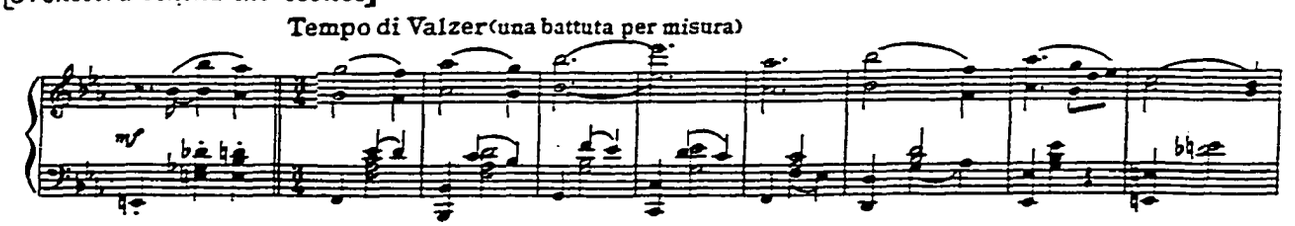


Ex. 6.6(b): Taylor, Peter Ibbetson, Act II, scene 2, piano-vocal score, p. 147



Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The abundant use of recurring thematic material such as the waltz melody also serves specific referential functions, often supported by the text, in the manner of Puccini and Massenet. Taylor thought of this technique as a substitute for the rigorous application of leitmotif principles, which he wished to avoid in a score that would have been suffocated by Teutonic influence: "Puccini . . . practically adopts the Wagnerian formula, disguising it by using complete melodies for leitmotifs."[79] This technique is most frequently utilized in conjunction with the Act 1 dance music, as has been seen in examples 6.4 and 6.6, as well as a love theme which derives from the principal waltz theme, suffusing the score with a sense of Italianate lyricism. The charming waltz that smoothly emerges from the opera's brief opening prelude (shown in example 6.7[a]), while provoking comparisons to Rosenkavalier, actually embodies a sense of tender yearning shared by the theme of the Act 2 quartet from Puccini's La Rondine (example 6.7[b]), which had received its American premiere at the Metropolitan in 1927.[80] This quality is enhanced by Taylor's similarly appoggiatura-laden setting; the two excerpts are also both in the key of E♭ major. While this may be coincidence rather than design, Ibbetson does share with Rondine a preponderance of flat keys, particularly in its first act.

Ex. 6.7(a): Taylor, Peter Ibbetson, Act I, piano-vocal score, pp. 2-3
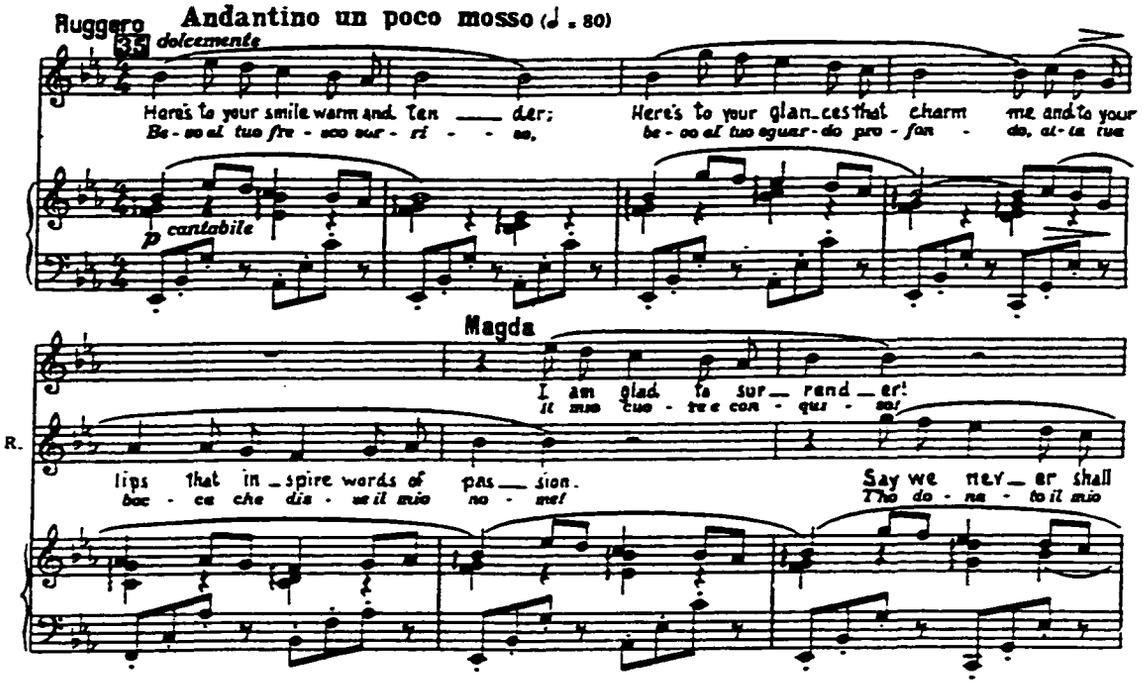


79 Ibid. Taylor's remarks fail to acknowledge the historical presence of reminiscence or "recollection" music in nineteenth century Italian opera before Puccini and its tradition of thematic recurrence.

80 At least one critic observed this emotional quality as well: "Both the waltz and the polacca are not the clear-cut lilting strains of a Strauss [Johann Jr. (1825-1899), the "Waltz King"], for Mr. Taylor has permitted his air of the psychological to be placed above and over even this bit of momentary physical relaxation. The introspective Peter stands out in every line of his score." Harold A. Strickland, *Between the Leger Lines,* Brooklyn Times, 8 February 1931.
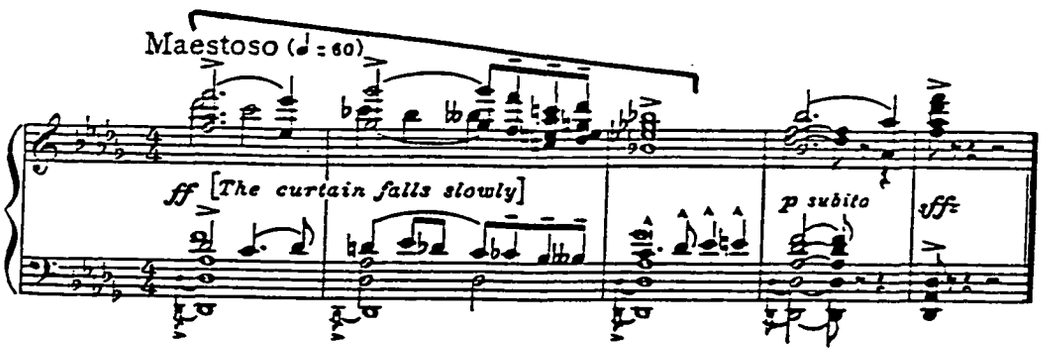
Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Ex. 6.7(b): Puccini, La Rondine, Act II, Quartet, piano-vocal score, p. 126



The Ibbetson waltz generates the thematic material for a love motive that first appears at the conclusion of Act 1 upon the revelation of Peter's emerging love for Mary. Although the love motive's derivation from the waltz is musically and dramatically logical, it is unfortunate that the result bears so close a resemblance to the principal theme of Tchaikovsky's first piano concerto, particularly since they both appear in the key of D♭ major:

Ex. 6.8(a): Taylor, Peter Ibbetson, Act I, piano-vocal score, p. 91



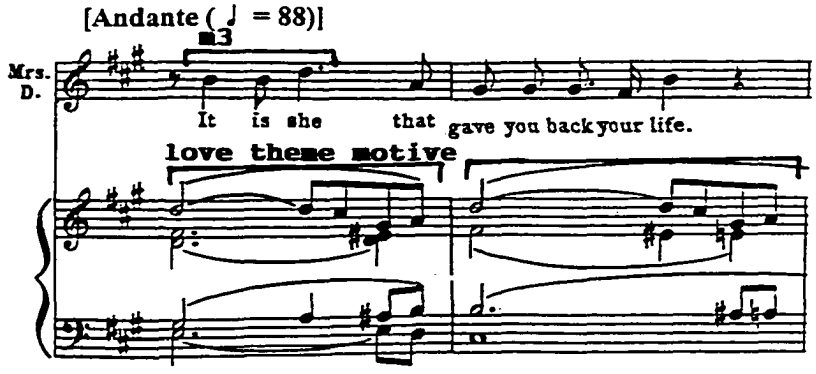
Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Ex. 6.8(b): Tchaikovsky, Piano Concerto in B♭ minor, op. 23, I, mm. 7-11



The second measure of Taylor's love motive—particularly its characteristic rhythmic profile—is developed throughout the score, usually retaining its melodic contour, and is always used in reference to Mary or her effect on Peter's situation even when she is not present in the scene. Example 6.9 illustrates an occurrence from the Act 3 prison scene in which this motivic development in the orchestra accompanies Mrs. Deane when she brings Peter the news of Mary's successful effort to commute his death sentence. The rising minor third at the beginning of the vocal line describing Mary forms an additional correspondence with the minor thirds found in the vocal lines of examples 6.4(a) and (b):

Ex. 6.9: Taylor, Peter Ibbetson, Act III, scene 2, piano-vocal score, pp. 240-41

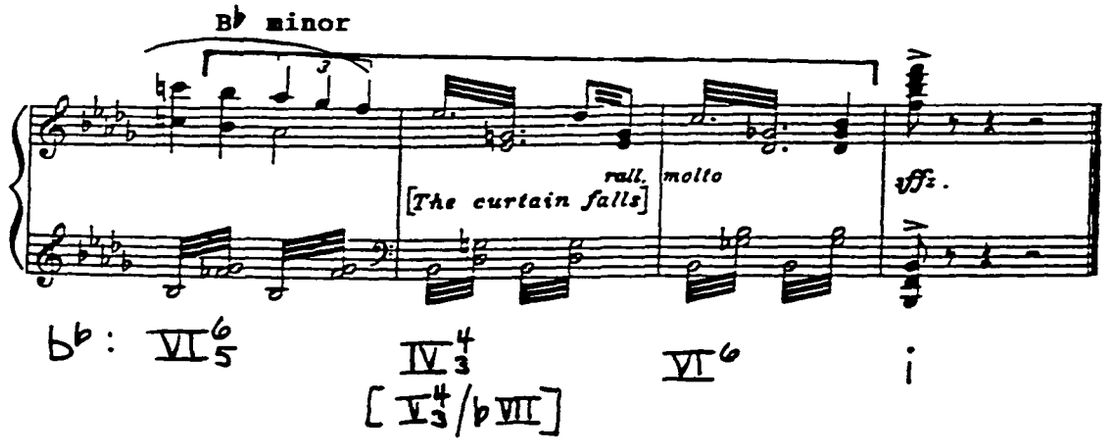


A full restatement of the love theme, however, is reserved for the climax of the recognition scene near the end of Act 2. After the couple's enforced parting, the act concludes with a reminiscence of the descending waltz appoggiature from which the love theme was derived, an

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

appearance which brings the cyclic principle full circle by returning to the theme's source material. The B♭ minor tonality (the relative key of the love motive's initial D♭ presentation) that was introduced in the recognition scene, shown in example 6.4(b), is manifested here in the prominent descending B♭ minor scale in the upper voice, albeit in an unusual harmonization whose preponderance of chords of subdominant function and avoidance of the dominant conceals the passage's ultimate destination:

Ex. 6.10: Taylor, Peter Ibbetson, Act II, scene 3, piano-vocal score, p. 195
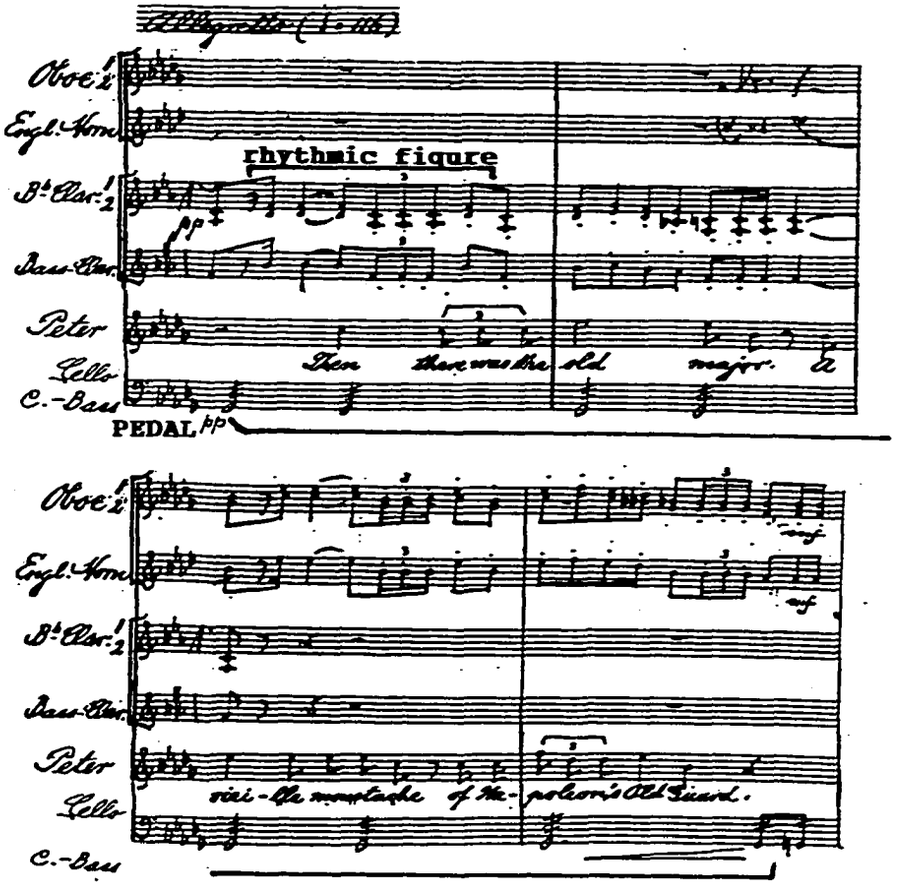


A somewhat modified use of referential thematic material occurs in connection with the character of Major Duquesnois (bass), a remnant from the Napoleonic Old Guard and a beloved figure from Peter's Parisian childhood. The music associated with him is heard when he is described during Peter's Act 1 narrative (shown in example 6.11[a] in both full score and piano reduction) as well as throughout a poignant scene in Act 2 where the aged soldier fails to recognize Peter. The Duquesnois material, however, is not subjected to the type of motivic transformation described above; rather, it recurs in its entirety, transposed to various pitch levels, and is used more for the purpose of coloristic effect (as in Charpentier's Louise) in evoking Peter's childhood memories of a vanished Paris than for thematic development. Here, Taylor was cited for "slavishly imitat[ing]" the central theme from Debussy's "Fêtes" (shown in example

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

6.11[b]), where the music serves a similar function in recalling the Garde Républicaine.[81] While Taylor never denied his music's indebtedness to the past, he was probably unwise—as with the Tchaikovskyan love theme—to use material so strongly redolent of celebrated passages by other composers. Musical correspondences between the Duquesnois theme and the "Fêtes" episode include the initial rhythmic figure; scoring for woodwinds (Debussy uses the full group while Taylor alternates between clarinets and oboes); the shared key signature of D♭ major and the harmonic movement to that key from a tonality a whole step away (Debussy moves from B minor to D♭ major; Taylor moves from E♭ minor to D♭); and the use of a prominent pedal tone:

Ex. 6.11(a): Taylor, Peter Ibbetson, Act I, orchestral score, p. 73
(Vocal line with woodwinds and lower strings only)
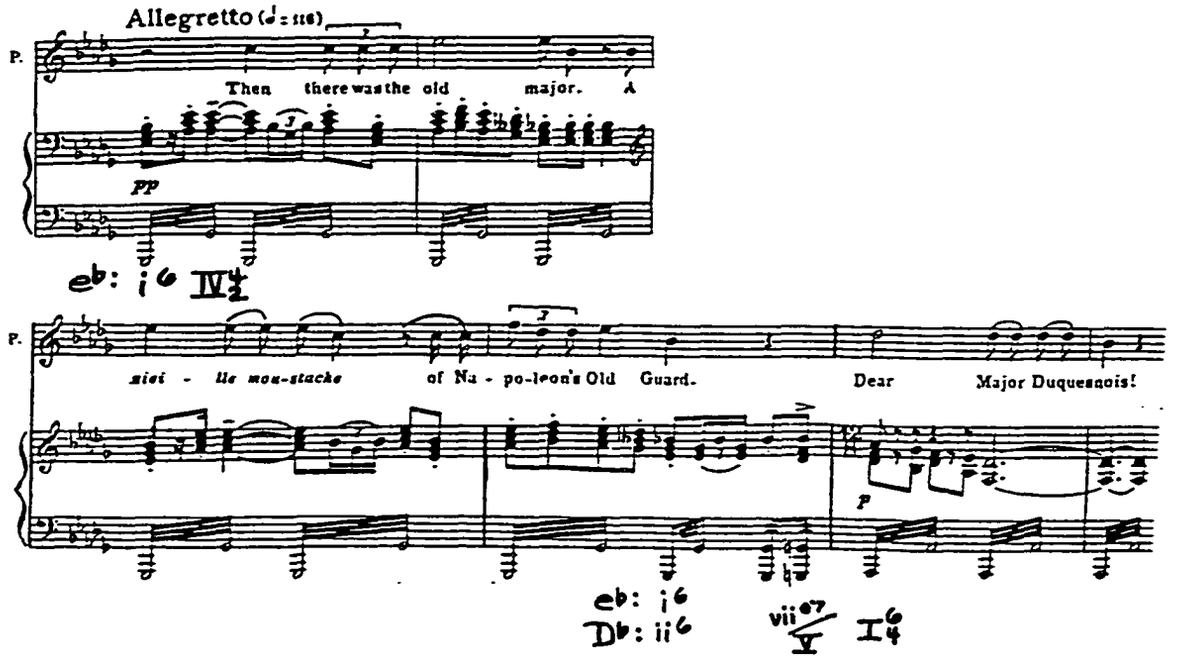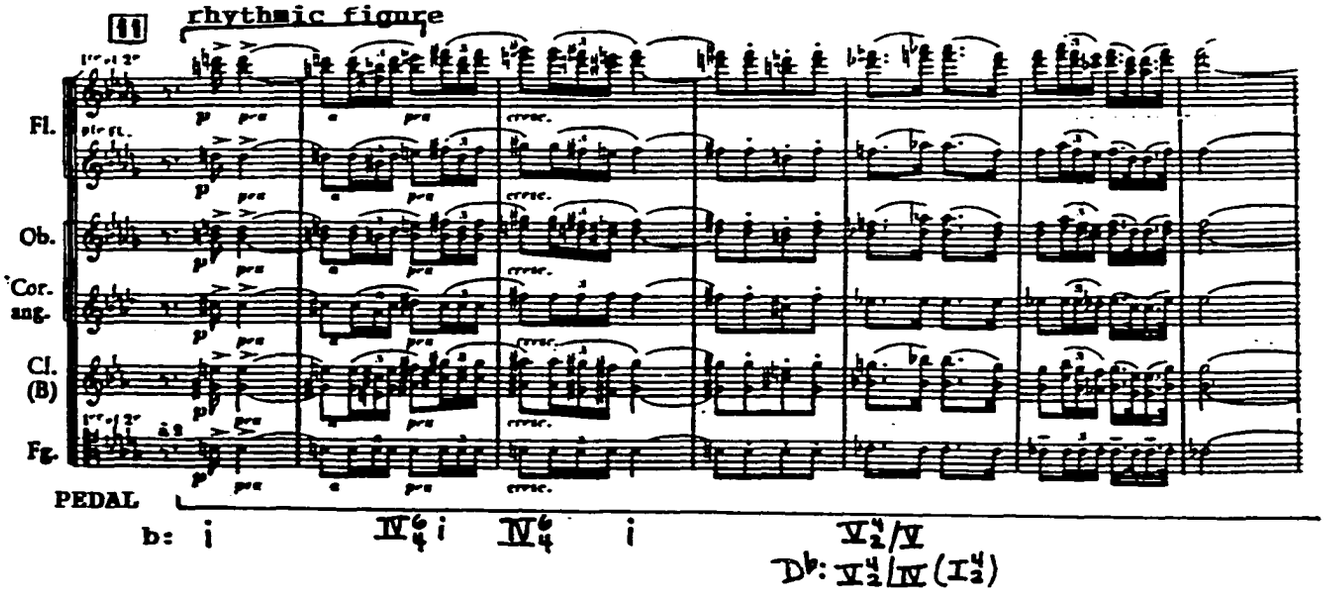


---

81 Noel Straus, *Music,* New York Evening World, 9 February 1931.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Reduction of ex. 6.11(a), piano-vocal score, p. 48



Ex. 6.11(b): Debussy, Trois Nocturnes, "Fêtes", reh. 11, mm. 1-7 (woodwinds only)



Taylor's harmonic language in Ibbetson also contributes strongly to the evocation of a French atmosphere throughout the score, as it is predominantly drawn from the highly

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

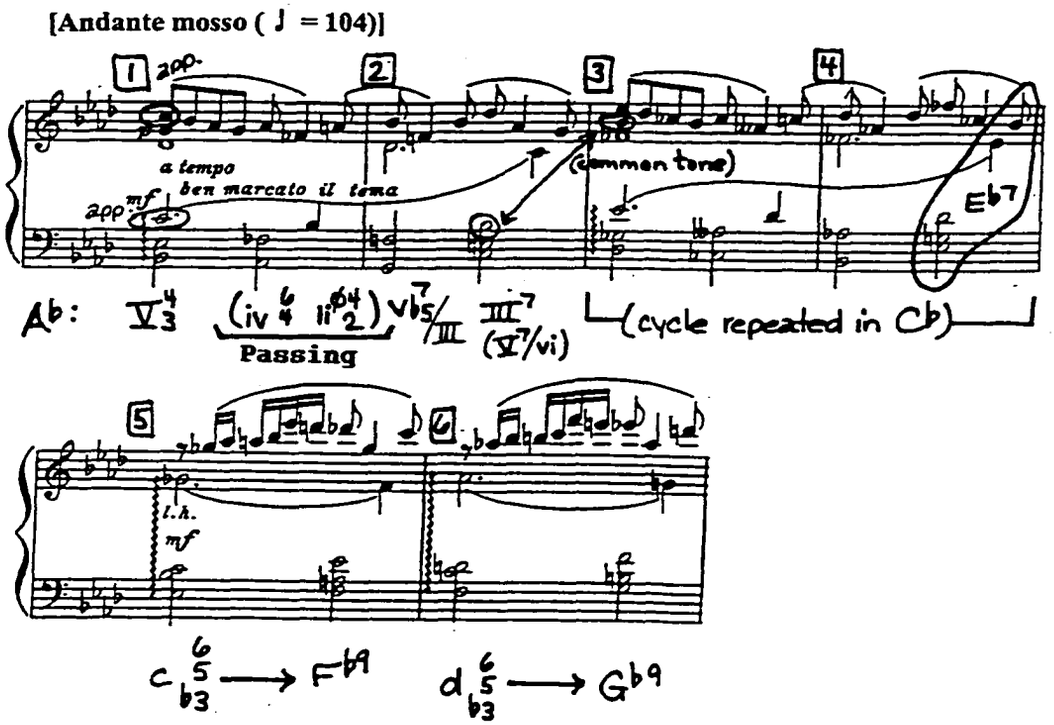
chromatic tonality of the late French Romantic period represented by composers such as Jules Massenet, Ernest Chausson, and the Belgian César Franck. Although Taylor had already developed a Wagnerian-inspired language of extended chromaticism in Henchman, he modified his vocabulary in Ibbetson by saturating his textures with expanded tertian harmonies—principally chords with added sevenths and ninths—which aurally aligned much of the score with the music of Wagner's French admirers, such as Chausson and Franck. Like his models, Taylor's music was tonally oriented but infused with a sense of harmonic ambiguity through the employment of a considerable amount of passing dissonance (principally in the form of suspensions and appoggiature), chromatically altered chords built on secondary scale degrees, and irregular resolutions which often elide over expected cadential points.

A passage representative of these techniques is shown in example 6.12, an excerpt from an Act 3 orchestral interlude that acts as a transition between the stark prison scene and a dream sequence in which Peter and Mary are spiritually reunited. The ostensible tonality of A♭ is disguised by a string of chromatically altered seventh chords, and the half-cadence reached at the end of the second measure with a secondary dominant built on C (V^7/vi) does not resolve as expected to the relative minor (F minor). Instead, the common tone B♭ functions as a tenuous transition to a sequential passage in which the harmonic cycle is heard transposed up a minor third. The corresponding E♭ dominant seventh reached at the end of this cycle (m. 4) is again irregularly resolved: D♭ descends to C, but the common tones E♭ and B♭ are retained as part of a new C♯7 sonority, which begins a second, more compressed sequential passage at mm. 5-6. Taylor introduces some conventional root movement by fifth at this point (C → F and D → G), but the passage still does not conform to the traditional dominant-tonic pattern, and the listener never experiences a clearly defined sense of key or harmonic resolution. This situation persists throughout the balance of the interlude, mirroring Peter's emotional tumult at this point in the

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

opera. Dissonant pitches occur throughout the excerpt in the form of passing appoggiature and suspensions:

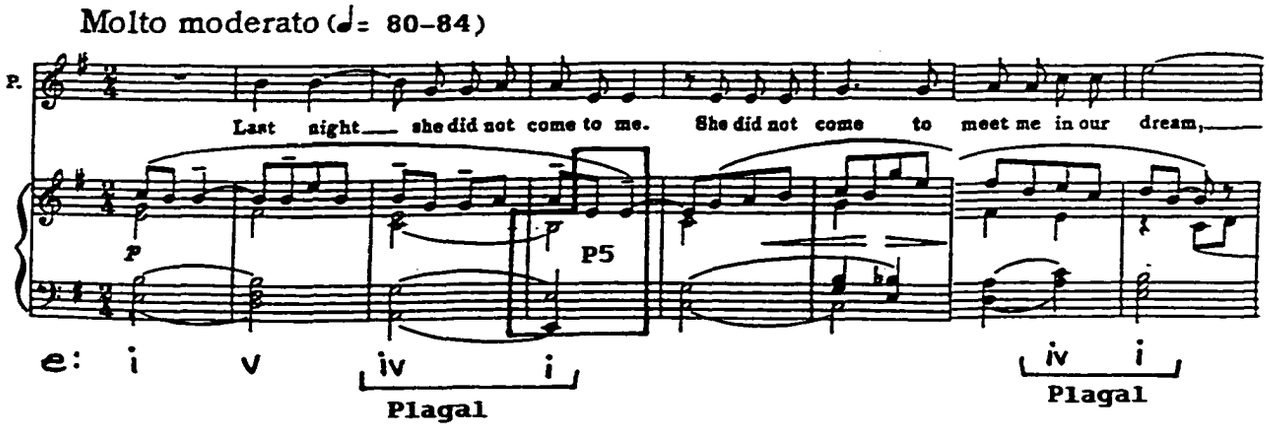
Ex. 6.12: Taylor, Peter Ibbetson, Act III, scene 2, piano-vocal score, p. 248



Although this harmonic language and texture seldom varies throughout the opera, the composer did occasionally provide an effective sense of contrast, as in the starkly modal-oriented passage in which Peter learns of Mary's death, shown in example 6.13. Taylor contributes effectively to the expression of Peter's despair through his utilization of the lowered sixth and seventh degrees (implying the Aeolian mode), as well as with plagal cadences utilizing the minor subdominant, and the resolution of the first such cadence to a desolate open fifth in E minor:

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
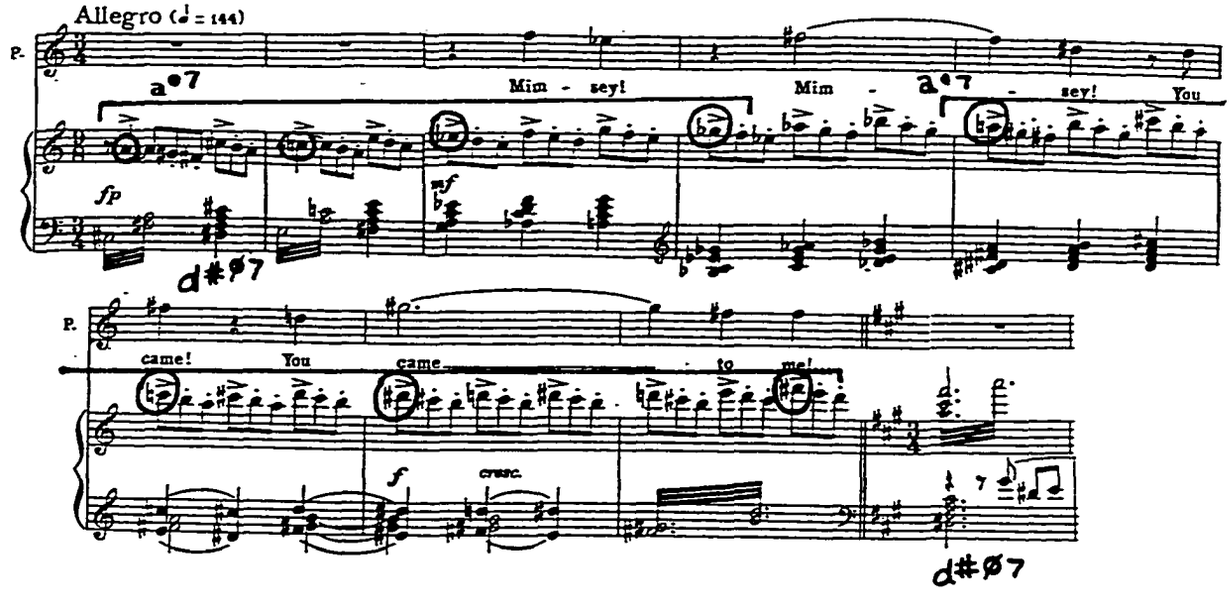
Ex. 6.13: Taylor, Peter Ibbetson, Act III, scene 5, piano-vocal score, p. 311



In general, however, Taylor's musical language in Ibbetson is heavily dependent on the almost constant employment of extended tertian harmony, together with an almost continual avoidance of cadences. Too frequently, this lends to the music a sense of motion lacking specific direction or goal, a problem that had irritated some critics of The King's Henchman. This problem resurfaced in Ibbetson, particularly in conjunction with passages involving sequences, where the effect is often one of banality instead of dramatic tension. In passages such as the one shown in example 6.14, where Taylor cycles through the outline of a fully diminished-seventh chord twice, accompanied by a string of half-diminished harmonies that culminate on the same D♯°7 with which the passage began, the material reveals itself as too thin and inherently uninteresting to withstand such treatment:

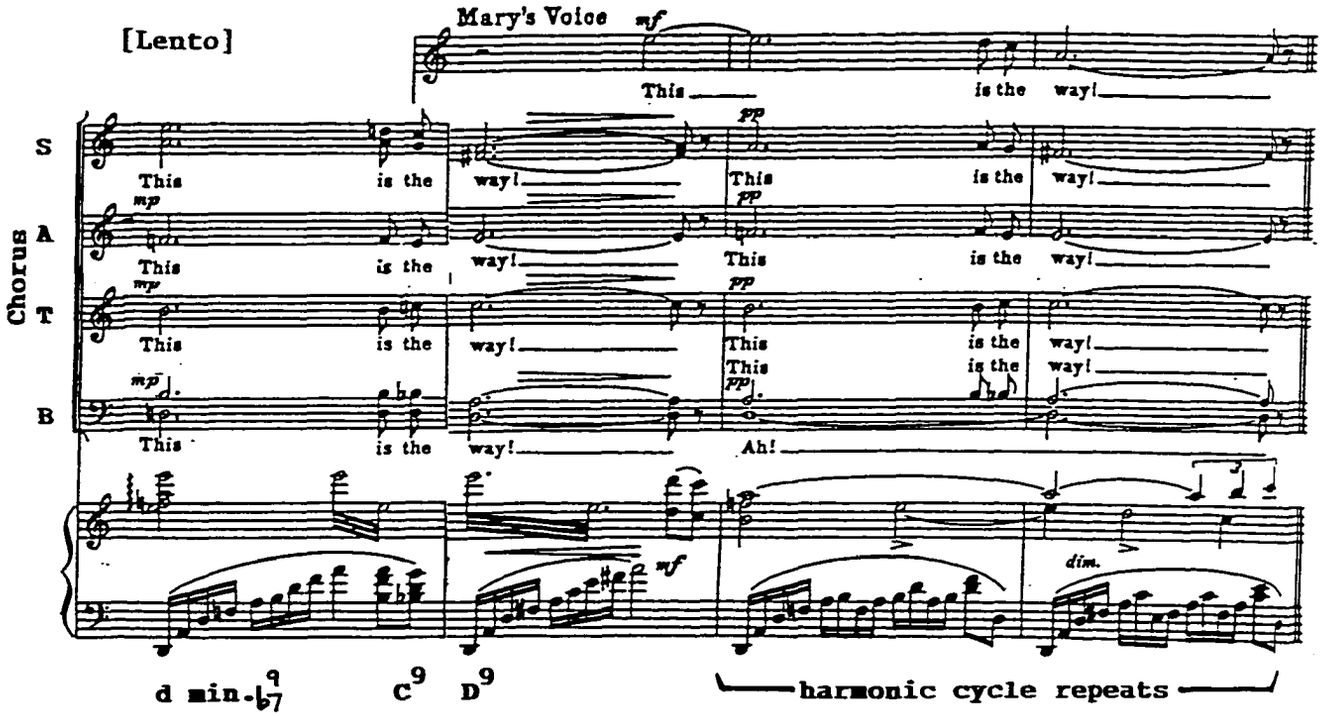
Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Ex. 6.14: Taylor, Peter Ibbetson, Act III, scene 3, piano-vocal score, p. 271



The use of such strategies is much more effective in the dream passages, where they are more appropriate to the dramatic situation. In example 6.15, a choral interlude preceding the first dream episode utilizes a series of non-functional undulating ninth chords built on the pitches D and C, connected by a pedal point on D, that lends a highly expressive Impressionistic tinge to the passage:

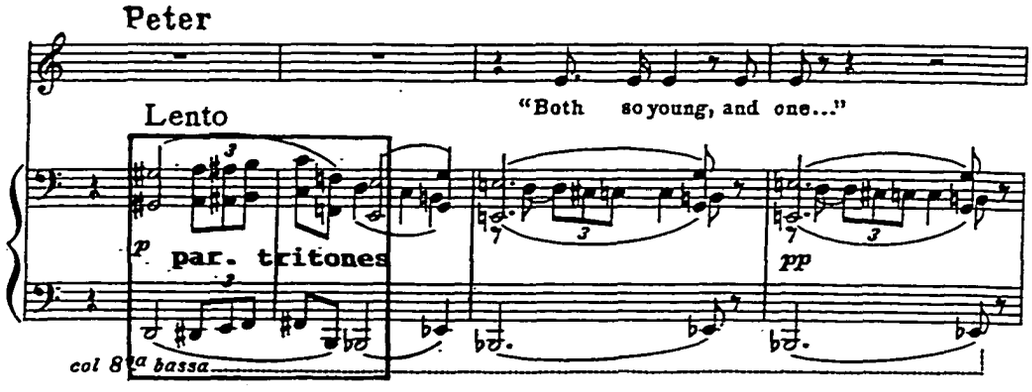
Ex. 6.15: Taylor, Peter Ibbetson, Act II, scene 1, piano-vocal score, p. 136



Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

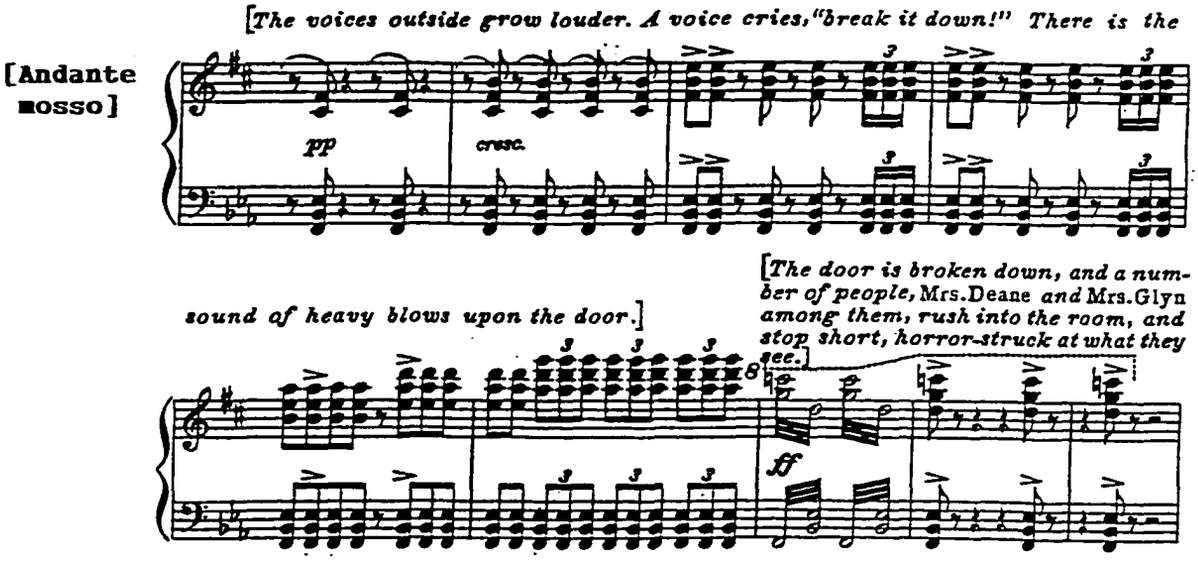
Taylor's use of true dissonance—that is, dissonant intervals not resulting from passing tones, appoggiature or suspensions—is almost exclusively reserved for purposes of dramatic effect. Parallel tritones are used, albeit briefly, in Act 3 (shown in example 6.16) after Mrs. Deane produces a letter in which Colonel Ibbetson falsely claimed to have seduced Peter's mother. Peter's enraged reading of the incriminating letter immediately precedes the murder:

Ex. 6.16: Taylor, Peter Ibbetson, Act III, scene 1, piano-vocal score, p. 210



Taylor also makes use of some quartal configurations in the actual death scene which follows, as shown in example 6.17. Initially, these occur in association with textual references to the incriminating letter; then the music following Ibbetson's murder is saturated with them, dissonantly juxtaposed in the score's only instance of bitonality:
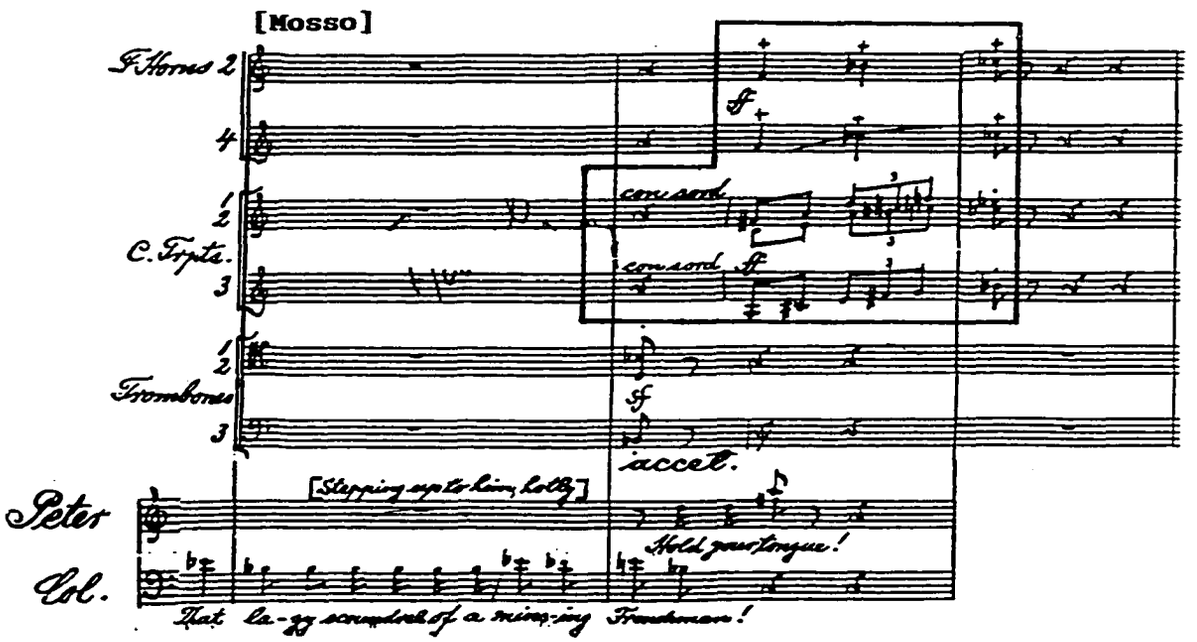
Ex. 6.17: Taylor, Peter Ibbetson, Act III, scene 1, piano-vocal score, p. 218



Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

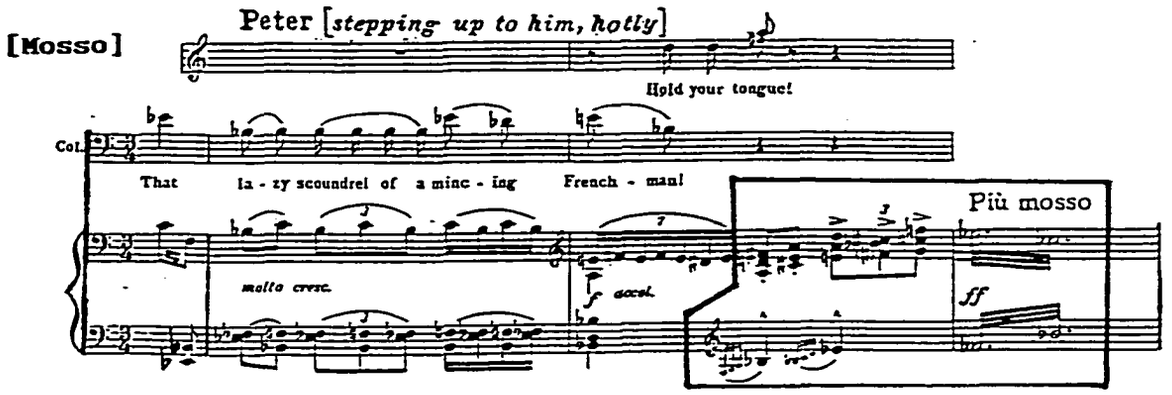
As the examples given above represent the most dissonant music in the score, it is evident that Taylor made no attempt, even in the opera's most dramatic scenes, to extend his musical idiom beyond the parameters of his Romantic and post-Romantic models. While he achieved an impressive sense of stylistic unity across the work, at crucial dramatic junctures such passages emerge as rather pallid when a more powerful emotional effect is required. To some extent, the composer compensated for this with imaginative orchestration. The opera requires the forces of a full romantic orchestra, with woodwinds expanded to include an English horn and bass clarinet, and a substantial brass section comprising three trumpets, four horns, three trombones and bass tuba. A prominent example of Taylor's use of orchestral color occurs when the nasal sound of muted trumpets and stopped horns is used to denote the menace of Colonel Ibbetson. During the baritone's attempted seductions of both Mrs. Deane and Peter's mother in Acts 1 and 2, respectively, and in his Act 1 confrontation with Peter (shown in example 6.18 in both full score and reduction), Taylor assigns the modified brass a brief series of non-functional sonorities containing clusters of dissonant tones:

Ex. 6.18: **Taylor, Peter Ibbetson, Act I, orchestral score, pp. 56-57**
(Vocal lines and brass only)
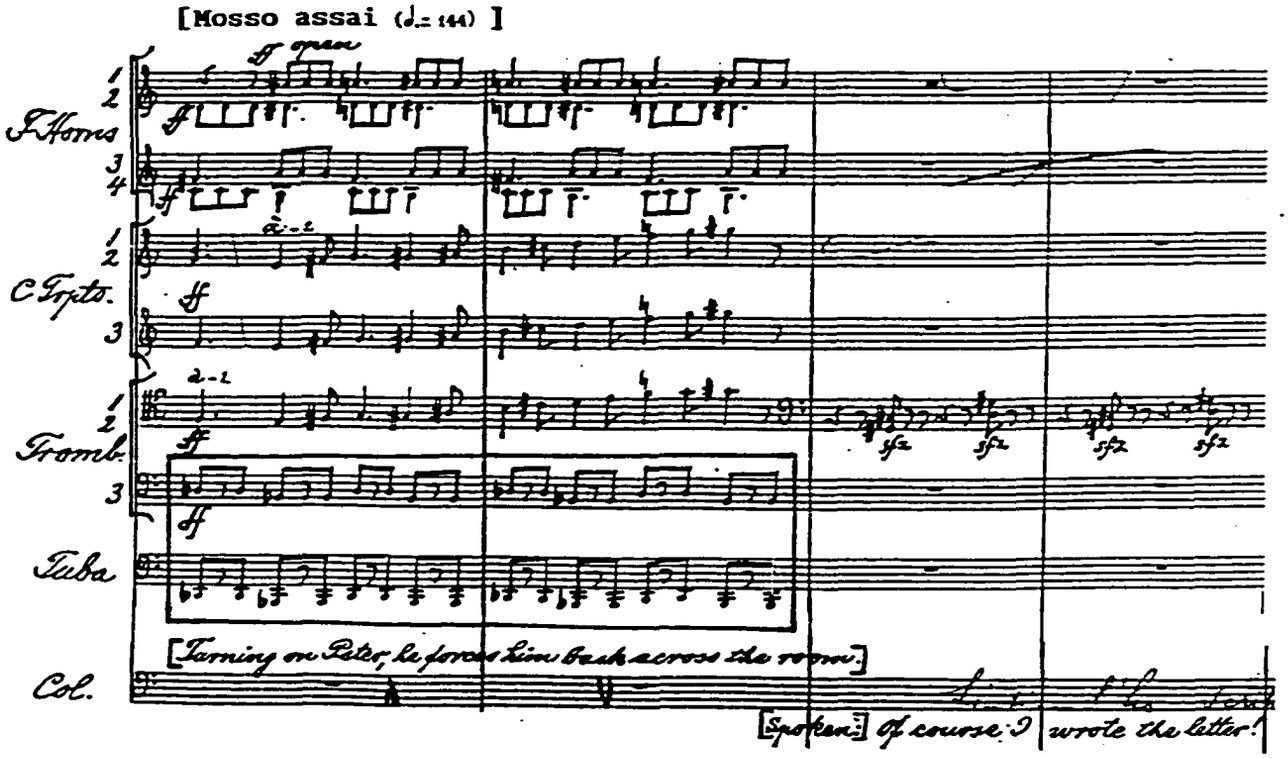


Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Reduction of ex. 6.18, piano-vocal score, pp. 36-37



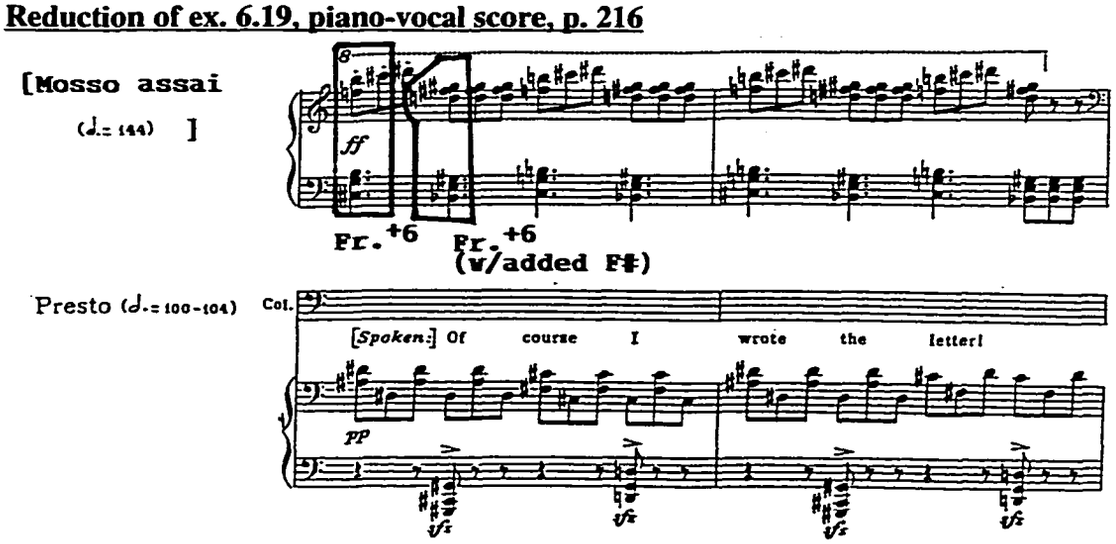
The powerful lower brass is reserved for the Act 3 murder. As the argument between Peter and the Colonel escalates, the third trombone and tuba play a relentless rhythmic alternation of two pitches, D♭ and B♭, which function as the roots of alternating French augmented sixth chords (each with a dissonant added tone) heard in the balance of the orchestra (shown in example 6.19 in full score and reduction). Taylor solved the problem of vocal balance in this scene by resorting to spoken (actually shouted) dialogue at its climactic moments:

Ex. 6.19: Taylor, Peter Ibbetson, Act III, scene 1, orchestral score, p. 359
(Vocal line and brass only)



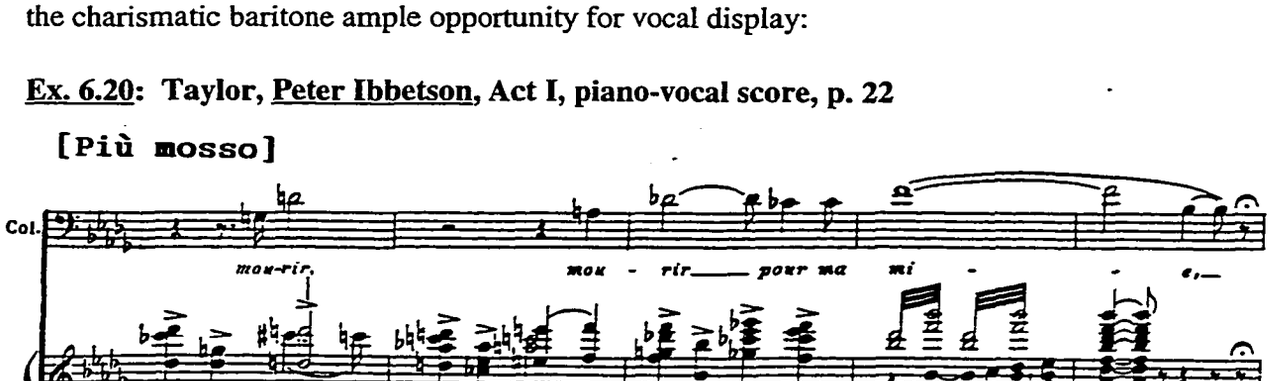
Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Reduction of ex. 6.19, piano-vocal score, p. 216



The majority of Taylor's vocal writing, however, is highly lyric and appropriate to the delicate romantic tint that dominates the narrative. Since the singers' lines are largely designed to complement the thematic orchestral fabric, however, there are few highly profiled vocal melodies, a situation which caused some debate over how grateful the score really was to its singers. The roles do contain individual characterization challenging to the singing actor: Peter's music is poetically expressive; Mary's is more soaring and ecstatic; and Colonel Ibbetson's is aggressive and blustering. Taylor took care to offset this last set of qualities, which might easily run to caricature, by generously supplying Lawrence Tibbett with an aria which gave the charismatic baritone ample opportunity for vocal display:

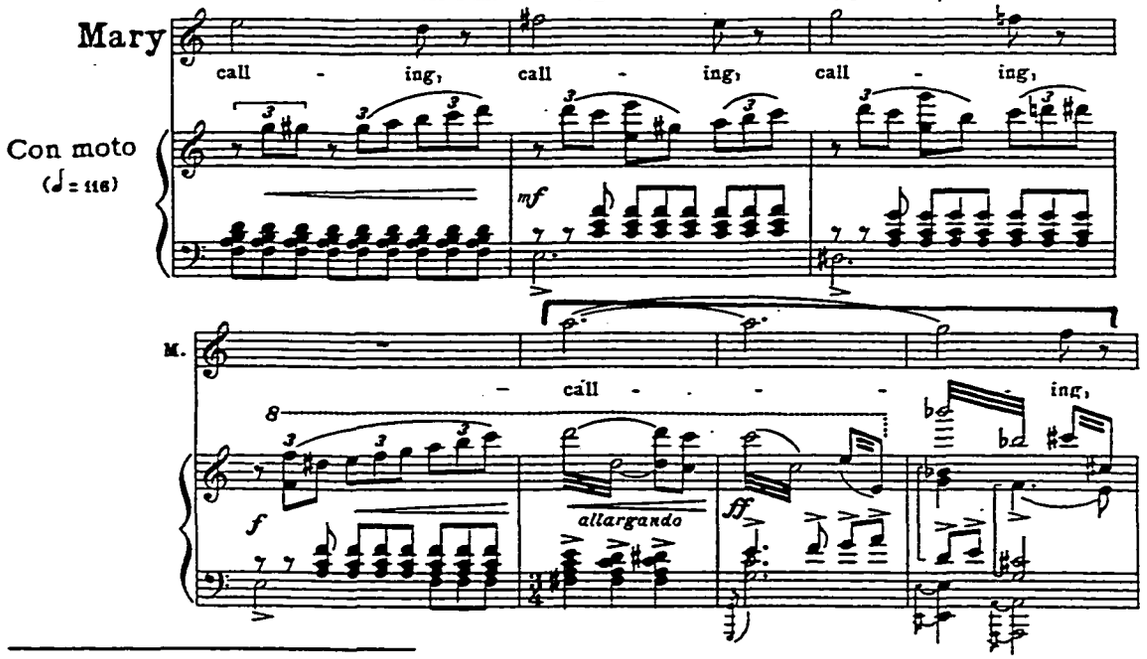
Ex. 6.20: Taylor, Peter Ibbetson, Act I, piano-vocal score, p. 22



Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Taylor's relatively few modifications to the score during its tenure at the Metropolitan reveal attempts to extend this quality to the other two principals as well. Insertions made to the manuscript orchestral score of the opera reveal that the original version of Mary's original Act 1 aria (shown in example 6.21[a], as it appears in the piano-vocal score published in 1930) was subsequently expanded and its conclusion altered to provide a wiser approach to the climactic high note, which was raised by a whole tone (example 6.21[b] shows the orchestral score insertion and its reduction): [82]

Ex. 6.21(a): Taylor, Peter Ibbetson, Act I, piano-vocal score, p. 75
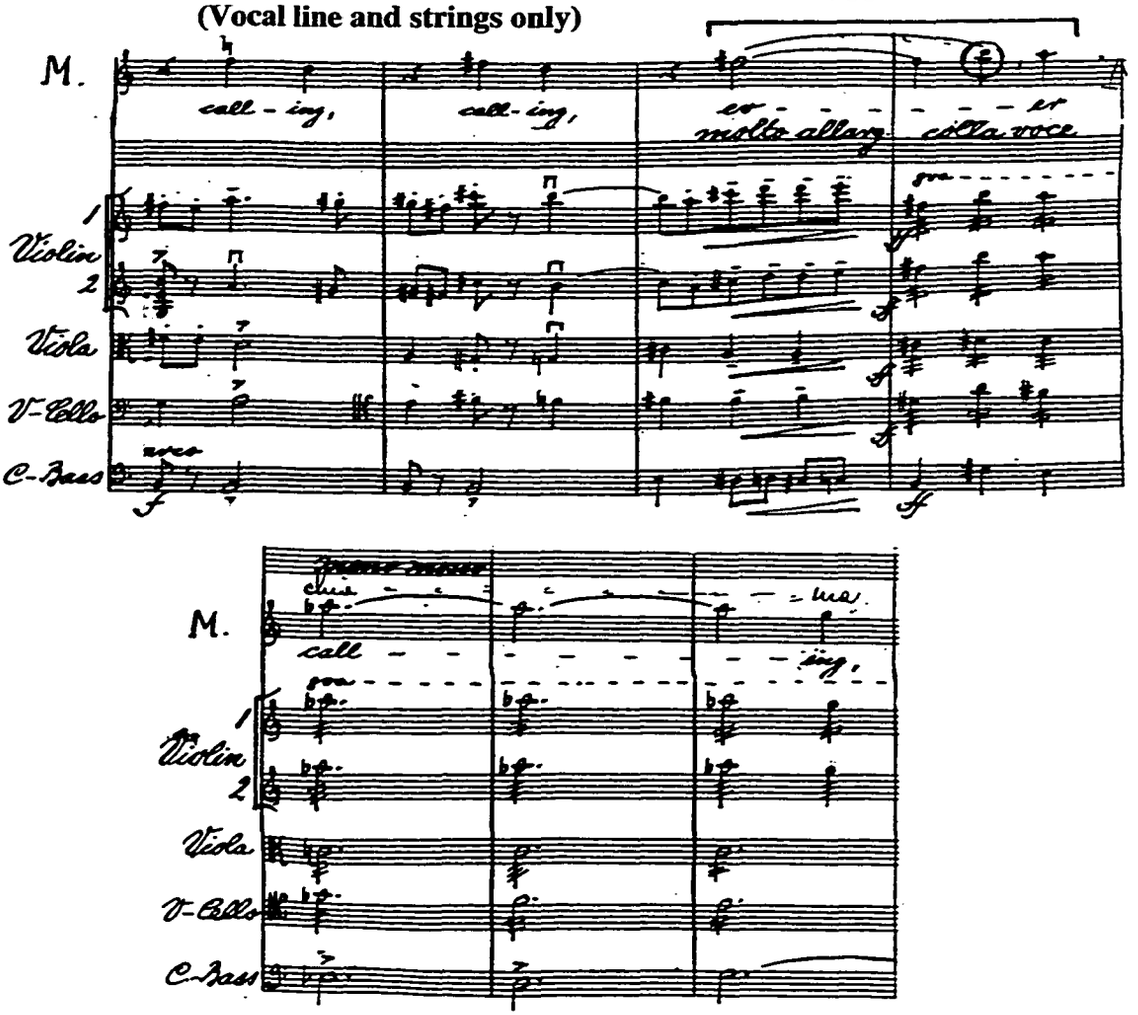


82 Peter Ibbetson, op. 20, piano-vocal score (New York: J. Fischer & Bro., 1930); orchestral score, Taylor Papers, Series I.A., Music: Stage. The full score of the opera was never published, either in its original or amended versions. None of the insertions to the sole surviving manuscript of the full score held at Yale is dated, but a separate manuscript copy of the new aria exists, dated "New Year's 1934" and bearing an inscription from Taylor to conductor Wilfrid Pelletier, who led performances of the opera at the Ravinia Festival in 1931 and at the Empire State Festival in 1960. Special Collections JPB 96-6, Music Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

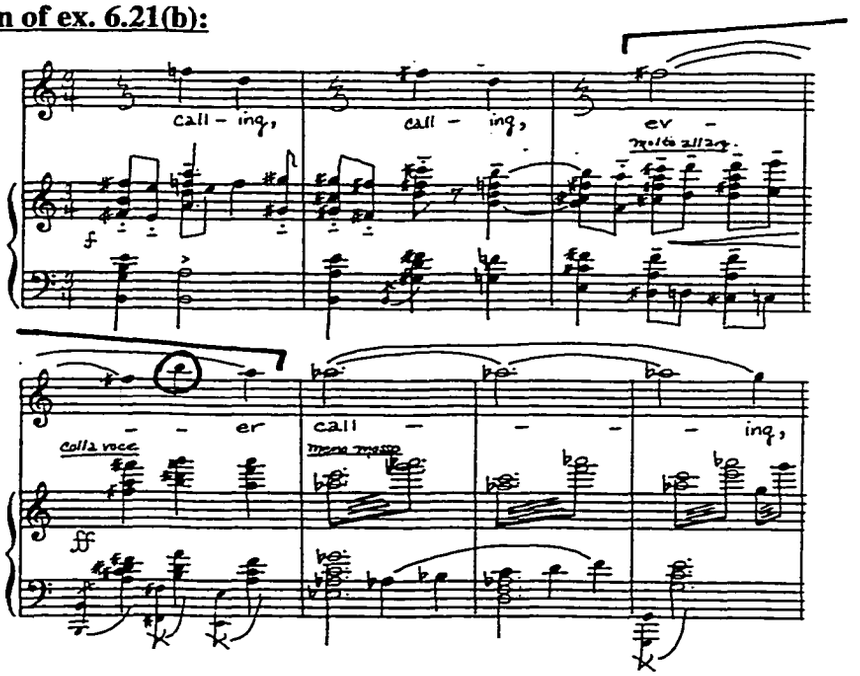
The earliest extant recording of the opera, taken from the 17 March 1934 Metropolitan radio broadcast, reveals that the amended version of the aria was performed by Lucrezia Bori on that occasion. *The Golden Age of Opera,* Celebrity Record Company, EJS-187; Unique Opera Records, UORC-143, Rodgers & Hammerstein Archives of Recorded Sound, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. No recording survives of an earlier Metropolitan broadcast of excerpts from the opera that took place on 26 March 1932.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Ex. 6.21(b): **Taylor, Peter Ibbetson, Act I, orchestral score, pp. 121A-121B (Vocal line and strings only)**



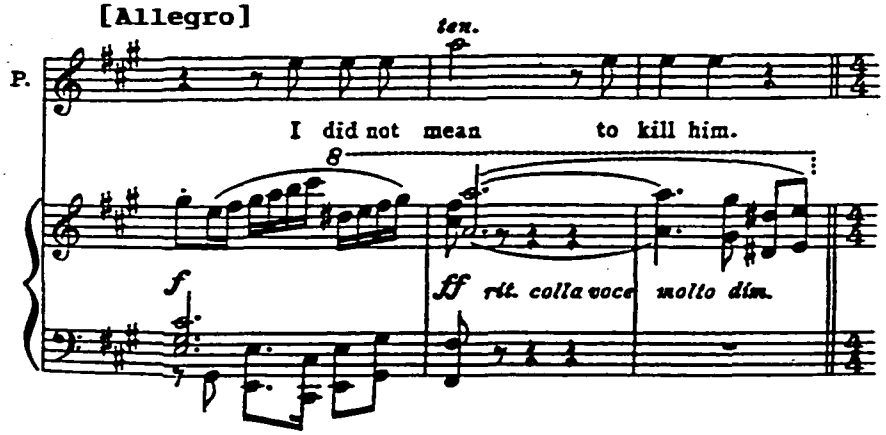
Reduction of ex. 6.21(b):



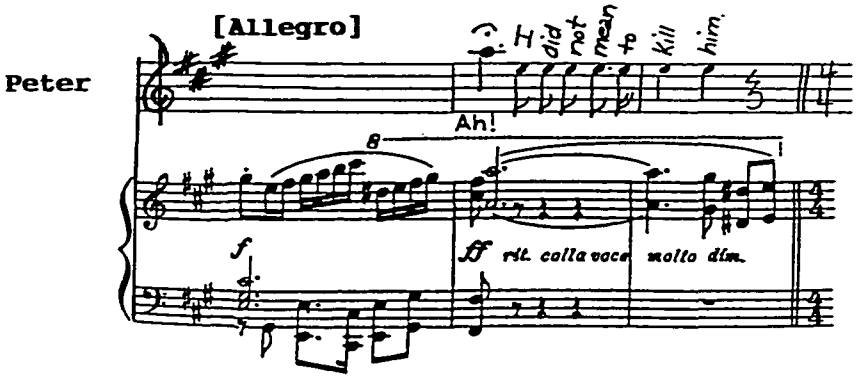
Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Conversely, the vocal approach to Peter's murder confession to Mary in Act 3, shown in example 6.22(a), was removed in order to convey a more dramatic sense of outburst. The alteration, shown in example 6.22(b), also eliminated the necessity of singing the word "mean," with its long "e" vowel, above the staff.

Ex. 6.22(a): Taylor, Peter Ibbetson, Act III, scene 3, piano-vocal score, p. 273



Ex. 6.22(b): Taylor, Peter Ibbetson, Act III, scene 3, piano-vocal score, p. 273 with alterations transcribed from orchestral score, p. 441



Taylor also made effective use of his chorus. After its participation in the ballroom scene of Act 1, the group was placed offstage to aurally evoke the atmosphere of the opera's dream scenes. This was accomplished through the infusion of a number of traditional French folk songs into its Act 2 music, a much-admired strategy that distanced the flashback sequences from the prevailing late nineteenth-century sound of the balance of the score and

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

provided an effective emotional conduit into the opera's dream world. Ibbetson's score is at its best in such lyrically expressive moments.

Overall, however, the music is less successful in capturing the drama of the more powerful events of the narrative. Partly for this reason, and despite its potently evocative Romantic atmosphere, the opera ultimately lacks the expressive power of its more enduring late Romantic predecessors, such as Eugene Onegin, Werther, and La Bohème. Ibbetson's score is less independent from the specific narrative events of its libretto than any of the above-named works, whose overriding sense of universality of human emotion, and the superb musical expression of that universality, made them enduring classics. Despite the admirable craftsmanship of Taylor's music, the composer's insistence on constructing a true *dramma per musica* with a primary emphasis on theatrical efficacy paradoxically may have cost him the very interpretive depth that might have secured Peter Ibbetson a more durable position in American opera than it eventually gained. When its libretto became perceived as too dated to be viable to modern audiences—a situation which overtook the opera rather quickly, as its strong dependence on Victorian sentiment was considered old-fashioned even at its premiere—Ibbetson's music suffered a similar fate. From a practical standpoint, Taylor also erred in privileging dramatic continuity to such an extent that few of Ibbetson's excerpts can be effectively extrapolated from the opera without significant loss of atmosphere. This is not the case with many works of Puccini, Massenet, and Tchaikovsky, whose dramaturgy displays equal or greater effectiveness. Finally, Taylor's facile musical technique never fully matured into a decisively individual style. While such judgments on most of the fledgling American opera composers' comparative lack of originality relative to that of the most successful Europeans may seem unduly harsh, it must be admitted that there is little in Peter Ibbetson that cannot be found in the music of other composers.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Peter Ibbetson's Metropolitan premiere on 7 February 1931 was a glittering occasion which recalled the New York debut of Natoma two decades before. Press reports described a tumultuous reception encompassing thirty-six curtain calls during a twenty-minute final ovation given by an audience that included numerous celebrities and other prominent persons: the Spanish Ambassador to the United States, Alejandro Padilla; composers John Alden Carpenter, Henry Hadley, Walter Damrosch, and Irving Berlin; New Yorker editor Harold Ross; Edna Ferber, Antoinette Perry and Alexander Woollcott from the New York theater world; actors Elsie Ferguson and Montague Love (both had appeared in the 1921 silent film Forever), Constance Collier, Ruth Chatterton, Charlie Chaplin, and Harpo Marx. Critics lauded the stylish production and polished performances, particularly that of Edward Johnson, whose poetically elegant appearance and manner captured the title role's Victorian pathos: "This was one of the finest creations that we have seen in an opera. . . . We understand that it was modeled after John Barrymore's Peter Ibbetson."[83] The emotional impact of the romance was undeniable: "The answer to every argument of sophistication that can be raised against it was found Saturday in streaming tears."[84] Taylor's effective dramaturgy was universally admired, with sanguine predictions regarding the Americans' prolonged libretto struggle: "[T]hat an American opera composer actually has found a successful book . . . may mean the beginning of the end of a tedious lament that our stage composers lack first of all a sense of the theatre."[85] Perhaps the composer received his greatest theatrical plaudit from attendee Mary Garden:

---

83 Olin Downes, *Mr. Taylor's New Opera,* New York Times, 8 February 1931, 26.

84 Oscar Thompson, *Pathetic Appeal of Du Maurier Story Carries Taylor Opera, "Peter Ibbetson," to Tearful Success at Premiere,* New York Evening Post, 9 February 1931.

85 Ibid.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> The love of my life is music drama, and you gave it to us in a most intensely interesting way in Peter Ibbetson. That is to my mind real opera—and that is what the future of opera will have to be built on— [86]

It was in assessments of the musical value of his score that Taylor was most harshly criticized. The composer's undisputed craftsmanship was grudgingly acknowledged by critics as acerbic as Paul Rosenfeld (who never retreated from his view that Mona was the great American opera) and Noel Straus:

> His score is sufficiently mellifluous, fluent, well orchestrated, bare of desert spots, to gratify the lightly critical ear. And it is dramatically relevant, and occasionally . . . very pretty. In Taylor, America, for better or worse, has produced an operatic composer the equal of the Mascagnis, the Wolf-Ferraris, and other European makers of effective operas. [87]

> At times [the orchestration] is splendid, as in the [Act 2] love duet. . . . This duo reaches a remarkable climax and is one of the two finest achievements of the whole work. The other is the magnificent [Act 3 prison scene] funeral march. . . . Here Mr. Taylor shows mastery of tone color and uncommon expertness in the treatment of a Parsifalian ostinato. . . . This is by all odds the best thing in the opera, and Mr. Taylor may well be proud of it. [88]

But this very craftsmanship was held against the composer in assertions that his setting was highly sophisticated incidental music that in fact made little progress towards a true American opera idiom. The New York critics were almost unanimous in this view: Olin Downes found "much facile and well-turned music, although the writer does not find very much in it that is new with Mr. Taylor or original in idiom";[89] Edward Cushing noted "[t]he music's . . . thinness of substance, the anomalous character of its style . . . that no amount of technical cleverness can

---

[86] Garden to Taylor, 13 March 1931. Taylor Papers, Series II, Correspondence.

[87] Paul Rosenfeld, Discoveries of a Music Critic (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1936), 282.

[88] Straus, *Music,* New York Evening World, 9 February 1931.

[89] *Mr. Taylor's New Opera,* New York Times, 8 February 1931, 26.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

suffice to conceal or ameliorate";[90] Grenville Vernon "found nothing original, striking or poignant in the music, nothing which by the wildest stretch of the imagination could be said to add to musical or operatic literature";[91] and theater critic Robert Garland called the entire commissioning venture into question when he referred to the score as "a first-rate piece of journeyman craftsmanship, a made-to-order musical setting for a glamorous fairy story which is better off without it."[92]

Samuel Chotzinoff's assessment of the music as "musicianly and sincere," yet "for the most part . . . rambling and indefinite" was an inevitable result of Taylor's suave but directionless extended tertian harmonic language.[93] Lawrence Gilman's commentary was more pointed: "[T]he unbridled chromaticism and chords of the ninth numb the attention long before the end."[94] Harold Strickland ameliorated this by positing a dramatic nexus: "In a word it is 'moody' music. . . . Thematically, . . . a hesitant Peter leaning now one way and again another offered a field for uncertain conjecture rather than for finite reality."[95] But Marshall Kernochan's view seemed to amplify on those previously expressed against Henchman: "The music . . . has been governed . . . by an aristocratic and sometimes far too fastidious taste, which leads [Taylor] to

---

90 *More About 'Ibbetson,'* Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 15 February 1931.

91 *Peter Ibbetson,* The Commonweal 13 (25 February 1931): 470.

92 *Cast and Miscast,* unidentified newspaper ca. February 1931. Peter Ibbetson clippings file, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

93 *Opera-Goers Hail "Peter Ibbetson,"* New York World, 8 February 1931.

94 Quoted in Elizabeth Eulass, *American Opera at the Metropolitan After Ten Years,* Opera News 5 (3 February 1941): 28.

95 *Leger Lines,* Brooklyn Times, 8 February 1931.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

avoid at all costs any obvious harmonic and melodic leading, disregarding the fact that if we rebuff the obvious . . . we run the risk of also discarding the natural."[96]

Nevertheless, Peter Ibbetson sustained its public popularity through three additional seasons at the Metropolitan, to this day a record tenure for an American opera at the theater. In addition, a radio broadcast of excerpts from the opera on 26 March 1932, occurring just three months after the Metropolitan's inaugural Christmas Day 1931 broadcast, was the theater's first such transmission of an American work. Gatti's personal opinion of the opera remains unrecorded, but he made no secret of his managerial belief in a dictum handed down by Verdi: "The theatre is intended to be full, and not empty."[97] The opinion of the public, moreover, had assumed greater significance as the Depression deepened. After the boxholding element disclaimed responsibility in closing deficits caused by the general drop in opera attendance, and funds from a $1,000,000 surplus fund Gatti had judiciously accumulated throughout the 1920s neared exhaustion, the organization was forced to appeal to the middle-class patrons who had long formed the backbone of its clientele. The 1933-1934 season thus was a highly opportune one in which to open with an American opera:

> Mr. Gatti-Casazza said that he considered it an appropriate time, after so many years, to begin with an American opera; that "Peter Ibbetson" had been written for the Metropolitan, and had scored a success with the public, and added that he was the first general manager of the Metropolitan to present an American opera in this house. [98]

It was also widely suggested that the gesture was devised in part to honor celebrity fundraiser Lucrezia Bori, whose leadership during the house's first pledge drive allowed its doors to remain

---

96 *"Peter Ibbetson,"* The Outlook 157 (18 February 1931): 272.

97 Gatti-Casazza, Memories of the Opera, 5. Gatti maintained that the great composer "judged all operas, including his own, by their measure of success with the public."

98 *Opera Season Opens Dec. 26 at Metropolitan,* New York Times, 14 October 1933.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

open through the darkest days of the Depression, by presenting the diva in one of her most attractive roles.[99]

Ibbetson's success was not confined to the Metropolitan. Chicago's Ravinia Festival presented it with tremendous success during the summer of 1931, and rising young critic Claudia Cassidy heard a more progressive work than her New York colleagues had:

> Mr. Taylor . . . has frankly accepted the sentiment of a bygone day, but has translated it into terms of music as far from saccharine as a cool, thinking drink with a dash of lemon. As a result, he will doubtless be accused of forgetting to write great music; nevertheless, his "Peter Ibbetson" score is a refreshing glimpse of what the brilliant modern may do to restore grand opera to the contemporary scheme. [100]

Nor was Hollywood ready to abandon the subject. The presence of a contingent of film industry representatives at Ibbetson's Metropolitan premiere resulted in the Paramount production Peter Ibbetson (Henry Hathaway, 1935) with Gary Cooper and Ann Harding as the lovers and Constance Collier's collaboration on the screenplay, but a disappointing reception among American critics gave the operatic version little additional publicity. Curiously, Hathaway's film achieved the status of a minor classic in France when 1930s Parisian Surrealists championed the story's potent elements of irrationality.[101] The opera was never produced abroad, however, and the only opportunity Europeans received to hear it was a 1938 Italian radio broadcast conducted by Fernando Previtali.[102] Paradoxically, Ibbetson had by that time received virtually its last

---

99 Lawrence Gilman, *Metropolitan Opens Its Season with U.S. Opera for First Time,* New York Herald Tribune, 27 December 1933, 1.

100 *"Peter Ibbetson" is Acclaimed with Enthusiasm at Ravinia,* Chicago Journal of Commerce, 4 August 1931.

101 In his novel L'amour fou (1937), André Breton cited Ibbetson and the Salvador Dalí/Luis Buñuel classic L'Âge d'or as expressions of "the exaltation of total love as I envision it." Quoted in Michael Atkinson, *Between Worlds,* Film Comment 29 (July/August 1993): 81.

102 An Italian singing translation that was made for this occasion appears in the manuscript full score held by Yale University.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

staging in the United States in a 1935 Detroit Civic Opera production which marked Edward Johnson's final appearance in the title role. Johnson's removal of the opera from the Metropolitan's repertory shortly thereafter when he assumed the administrative helm upon Gatti's retirement provoked gossip of his reluctance to let any other tenor sing the role at the theater. While Ibbetson was indeed the sole part that remained Johnson's exclusive property upon his retirement from the stage, he himself acknowledged the opera's profitability: "*Peter Ibbetson* made more money than any other single opera during the past twenty years—more than $150,000."[103] Whether the new manager simply wanted to present his own roster of American works (possibly believing Ibbetson had reached its audience saturation point) or whether his ego prevailed over cool business sense remains a matter of speculation in the absence of further evidence.

Along with that of many other twentieth-century composers who did not wholeheartedly adopt modernism in their music, Taylor's idiom was considered conservative by the 1940s. Moreover, in a reminiscence of the memorable International Composers' Guild/ League of Composers schism of the 1920s, his quixotic vision for American opera as a true dramatic art of interest to the public at large began to be regarded as populist.[104] Although Taylor subsequently developed a highly successful career in broadcasting, his music gradually faded from public view. One can only conjecture as to why he did not capitalize on Ibbetson's immediate

---

[103] Quoted in Mercer, Tenor of His Time, 148.

[104] Elliott Carter described his friendship with critic Paul Rosenfeld during the 1930s in arguably self-serving terms that reflected these attitudes: "[W]e recalled the exciting days when the music of Varèse stirred up storms of anger and enthusiasm. Now all that seemed to have given way to mildly expressive pieces by men more concerned with getting ahead in popularity than with reflecting new and convincing sound worlds." Carter, *The Genial Sage,* in Paul Rosenfeld: Voyager in the Arts, ed. Jerome Mellquist and Lucie Wiese (New York: Creative Age Press, 1948); repr., Jonathan Bernard, ed., Elliott Carter: Collected Essays and Lectures, 1937-1995 (University of Rochester Press, 1998), 306-7.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

réclame by composing another opera during the 1930s, particularly since he was enjoined by Lawrence Tibbett to do so on at least two occasions:

> I really feel that these productions have marked a stable beginning of important American music. But surely you are not going to stop writing operas, are you? Where is that "Cyrano" for me or that "Svengali"? [105]

> Why don't you follow through on that very sweet and thoughtful wire of yours and write an opera for one L.T.? You had better hurry up and do it before the Emperor [Jones] has worn me to a frazzle. [106]

Unfortunately, Du Maurier's Trilby had already been set by British composer Hubert Bath (ca. 1920; unproduced), who may still have been in possession of the literary rights.[107] And Tibbett began experiencing vocal problems towards the end of the decade that reduced his interpretive powers until his retirement.

Taylor eventually composed the lyric drama Ramuntcho to his own libretto after a Basque tale (premiered Philadelphia Opera Company, 10 February 1942), but its success did not equal that of Ibbetson. Despite "talk of a possible [Metropolitan] revival [of Ibbetson] for the season of 1951-52,"[108] the post-World War II Rudolf Bing administration was even less inclined to produce American works than was Johnson's, a fact Taylor realized by the early 1950s: "I, like Menotti, have given up hope of getting anything done by the Met, and am at work on what I shall call a 'musical play.'"[109] Bing had come to the Metropolitan with an agenda for

---

105 Tibbett to Taylor, 5 April 1932. Taylor Papers, Series II, Correspondence.

106 Tibbett to Taylor, 13 January 1933. Ibid.

107 Grove, *Hubert Bath (1883-1945)* by H. C. Colles; Charles H. Parsons, comp., The Mellen Opera Reference Index (Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1989), *Opera Composers and Their Works,* 134.

108 Madeleine Goss, Modern Music-Makers: Contemporary American Composers (New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, Inc., 1952), 110.

109 Taylor to Washington, D.C. Times-Herald columnist Glenn Dillard Gunn, 7 January 1953. Glenn Dillard Gunn Collection, Library of Congress. I am grateful to James Pegolotti for bringing this item to my attention.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

modernization (which he realized most fully in the realm of *mise-en-scène*), but his American premiere of Stravinsky's The Rake's Progress on 14 February 1953, one month after Taylor's comment, was indicative of the new manager's tendency to assume the heavy financial risk associated with contemporary works only when a renowned—and usually European—composer was involved.[110] Taylor's colleague Abram Chasins, then music director of the New York Times's radio station WQXR, recommended revivals of Henchman and Ibbetson to the nationally-oriented New York City Opera on the company's Rockefeller grant for the production of American works. In a pattern typically experienced by the more conservative composers of his generation, no action was taken on Taylor's music, but he was honored with an invitation to sit on the overseeing City Center's Advisory Council.[111]

At length, Peter Ibbetson received a staged revival at New York's Empire State Festival during the summer of 1960, where distinctly mixed reviews did not augur well for the opera's future. In a reversal of its 1931 reception, modern critics almost uniformly expressed pleased surprise at Taylor's musical mastery, yet unanimously pronounced the Du Maurier source

---

Despite Taylor's statement, Bing's Metropolitan produced Gian Carlo Menotti's The Last Savage (Le Dernier Sauvage, 1963) in 1964 and gave The Telephone in 1965 as part of a summer season of concerts under its auspices at the Lewisohn Stadium in New York City. The composer's Amelia Goes to the Ball (Amelia al ballo, 1936) and The Island God (1942) had been produced at the Metropolitan under Edward Johnson in 1938 and 1942, respectively.

110 The brief production history that even the Stravinsky work experienced in New York (seven performances in two seasons) did not encourage Bing to change this strategy during his long tenure. Only four American works were produced on the Metropolitan's stage during his twenty-two year reign: Samuel Barber's Vanessa and Antony and Cleopatra, Menotti's The Last Savage, and Martin David Levy's Mourning Becomes Electra.

111 Chasins to Taylor, 30 October 1957; Newbold Morris, Chairman, City Center of Music and Drama, to Taylor, 22 May 1963. Taylor Papers, Series II, Correspondence.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

material "relentlessly sentimental and mannered,"[112] "terribly old-fashioned,"[113] "thoroughgoing Victorian,"[114] "fustian drama,"[115] and "rambling fantasy";[116] in short, "a museum piece."[117] While Du Maurier's theme of the transcendent power of romantic love is shared by many (if not most) of the libretti of operas that endure from the Great Tradition, the narrative vehicle the author utilized to transmit his message was unusually dependent upon fantasy and audience suspension of disbelief, qualities that ultimately caused it to date as rapidly as the romanticized Indianist scenarios of the two preceding decades. Some observers defended Ibbetson as at least as deserving of occasional revival as Massenet's Manon, to which it was often compared in musical style and technique. But posterity has favored only Massenet: aided by its libretto's potent blend of sexual betrayal and self-destruction, Manon has resurged in the international repertory while a recent concert revival of Ibbetson by the Seattle Symphony under Gerard Schwarz provoked a response similar to that of four decades before. "The score is eminently worth exhuming. . . . Audiences here, however, were decidedly less enthusiastic than those who cheered the Met premiere, a fact which probably owed more to the weak, dated libretto . . . than to the commendable performance."[118] Yet, if the Taylor commissions produced shooting stars

---

112 Ronald Eyer, *Taylor, Janáček Operas at Empire State Festival*, Musical America 80 (September 1960): 9.

113 Jay S. Harrison, *"Peter Ibbetson" Revived at Empire State Festival*, New York Herald-Tribune, 24 July 1960.

114 *"Ibbetson" Revisited*, Time 76 (1 August 1960): 52.

115 *News: America*, Opera 11 (November 1960): 753.

116 Thomas R. Dash, *"Peter Ibbetson" at Festival Yields Enthralling Music*, Women's Wear Daily, 26 July 1960.

117 *Sentimental Moment*, Newsweek 56 (1 August 1960): 54.

118 Melinda Bargreen, *In Review: Seattle*, Opera News 64 (September 1999): 110.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

fated to ultimate extinction, they also provided—as Lawrence Tibbett predicted—a significant foundation upon which future efforts could rest.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

CHAPTER 7

AN AMERICAN EXPRESSIONIST MONODRAMA: LOUIS GRUENBERG'S THE EMPEROR JONES

A radical departure from the traditional operatic conventions observed by Deems Taylor occurred with the Metropolitan's next American production, Louis Gruenberg's adaptation of Eugene O'Neill's pathbreaking drama The Emperor Jones (1920). Considered the first expressionistic play by an American,[1] it was also commended for its central focus on a fully realized black character, a notable event in the American theater. Gatti made special mention of the exotic piece upon his retirement in 1935 when requested to summarize his production history at the house:

> The most unusual opera, or so it seemed, among the many produced at the Metropolitan, I can name as The Emperor Jones of Louis Gruenberg, an opera composed on themes of Negro music, and performed as well with a partially black chorus. It had a brilliant success, particularly in its first season. [2]

The spectacular rise and enigmatic decline of the opera curiously paralleled that of its composer as well as the drama's protagonist, Brutus Jones.

Louis Theodore Gruenberg (1884-1964) was born in the small Russian town of Brest-Litovsk, near the Polish border, and brought to America as an infant when his father, a violinist, secured an orchestral position in one of New York City's Yiddish theaters. The younger

---

1 Benét's Reader's Encyclopedia, 3d ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), s.v. *Eugene [Gladstone] O'Neill.*

2 Gatti-Casazza to Italian journalist Arnaldo Fraccaroli, Balboa, Canal Zone, 23 January 1935. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, 1934-35, General. [*L'opera più strana, o che tale è sembrata, fra le molte prodotte al Metropolitan, posso notare THE EMPEROR JONES di Louis Gruenberg, opera composta su temi di musica negra, ed eseguita anche con una parte di coristi di razza nera. Essa ebbe un brillante successo, sopratutto la prima stagione.*]

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Gruenberg exhibited a pronounced musical talent which brought him to the National Conservatory of Music, then headed by Dvořák, at an early age. Gruenberg actually came into brief personal contact with the illustrious composer during a scholarship interview but was so intimidated by the experience that he failed to receive the much-needed assistance. Nevertheless, under the tutelage of his father and National faculty member Adele Margulies, Gruenberg developed into a first-rate pianist and began to tour on the Keith Vaudeville Circuit (under whose auspices future Metropolitan diva Rosa Ponselle would perform a decade later). The public's interest in Gruenberg as a child prodigy eventually faded, however, and he was forced to earn money playing with hotel orchestras. One such engagement led to his first rudimentary lessons in harmony after the German tradition when he discovered that the ensemble's leader had studied at the Leipzig Conservatory.[3]

Gruenberg found the impetus to advance to the next stage of his career shortly thereafter: "In 1901 I attended in New York a concert of a pianist with a Christ-like head who made such an impression on me that I decided at once to approach him in some way or other."[4] Gruenberg did not attain this goal until nearly seven years later, when he was accepted into the Vienna master class of Ferruccio Busoni. He had already published his first piece, the Scherzo for piano (G. Schirmer, 1907), and found in his new mentor an inspiring model for the development of his potential as both pianist and composer.[5] Not only did Busoni conduct Gruenberg's well-received debut with the Berlin Philharmonic in 1910, he authored the German libretto to his student's first serious dramatic work, the one-act Damayanti, or, The Bride of the

---

3 Robert F. Nisbett, *Louis Gruenberg: His Life and Work* (Ph.D. diss., Ohio State University, 1979), 10-11.

4 Quoted in Hans Heinsheimer, *Emperor Resurrexit*, Opera News 43 (10 February 1979): 16.

5 Nisbett, *Gruenberg Life and Work*, 14.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Gods [Die Götterbraut], op. 2 (1913), after a Hindu legend from the Mahabharata. By this point Gruenberg had received his first composition prize (second place among 784 entries was awarded by the German periodical Signale for his piano piece Scène de Ballet in 1910) and had presented an entire program of his music in Berlin.[6]

The young composer's European momentum was harshly interrupted by the realities of the impending war. Although he considered himself fortunate to have been in London at the time of Archduke Francis Ferdinand's June 1914 assassination, and to have secured a steerage ticket to New York from the American consul, Gruenberg was not prepared for the artistic oblivion that awaited him in his own country:

> Upon my arrival in the United States, I soon found out that a European reputation alone did not guarantee a penniless musician a welcome reception. I am quite sure there wasn't a manager, publisher or even a piano firm whom I did not try to interest in my career, with unsuccessful results. [7]

Among the potential patrons Gruenberg approached was Otto Kahn, who generously supplied the composer with occasional opera tickets and forwarded the score of the still-unperformed The Bride of the Gods (an English translation was prepared by Charles Henry Meltzer) to Metropolitan conductor Artur Bodanzky for review.[8] Apparently Busoni's contribution provided little practical or artistic benefit, as the theater took no action on the work and Gruenberg made the notation, "Libretto bad but the music worse," next to its title in a catalog of his compositions.[9]

---

6 Ibid., 14-15. In addition to Gruenberg's performance of his Impressionen, op. 4, his first sonata for violin and piano was played by Carl Flesch and Egon Petri, and the Sechs Lieder, op. 5 were sung by baritone Hermann Weissenborn (later the teacher of Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau).

7 Ibid., 21.

8 Letter from L. T. Grünberg to John Brown, Business Comptroller, Metropolitan Opera House, 2 January 1915, extending appreciation for Kahn's forwarding of tickets; Kahn Papers, Box 47, Princeton University. Letters from Kahn to Artur Bodanzky, 22 November 1915 and 11 May 1916, discussing the Gruenberg opera; Kahn Papers, Boxes 48 and 63, respectively.

9 Quoted in Nisbett, *Gruenberg Life and Work*, 20.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

It was Gruenberg's pianistic skill that brought him to the Metropolitan in 1919, when he accompanied the violin virtuoso Toscha Seidel at one of its Sunday concerts; Gruenberg also partnered Enrico Caruso on the tenor's final American concert tour the following season. The composer's familiarity with popular styles of the day resulted in the musical comedy Roly-Boly Eyes, which he wrote as a money-making venture in collaboration with concert violinist Eddy Brown. The show was a commercial success when it opened with famed minstrel entertainer Eddie Leonard at New York's Knickerbocker Theatre in the autumn of 1919, but Gruenberg had no inclination to continue in this vein and made plans to return to Europe. He had already sailed when he received word that his symphonic poem The Hill of Dreams, op. 10 had won the newly established Flagler Prize for orchestral works by American composers. The award convinced Gruenberg to return to the United States and pursue composition exclusively.[10]

Gruenberg's return to New York was accompanied by the renewal of his acquaintance with former Busoni pupil Edgard Varèse as the latter was preparing to establish the International Composers' Guild. Although Gruenberg was already active in the less radical American Music Guild (which counted Deems Taylor as well as Gruenberg among its founders), his enthusiastic participation in Varèse's group led to his conducting the American premiere of Pierrot lunaire on 4 February 1923 under its auspices. The schism that soon split the group along ideological lines occurred partly as a result of the performance's public success—Gruenberg

---

[10] Ibid., 23-25. Harry Harkness Flagler was a noted arts patron who served as president of the New York Symphony Society. The competition judges were George Whitefield Chadwick, Walter Damrosch, John Alden Carpenter, Franz Kneisel, and Leopold Stokowski; Chadwick and Damrosch had been among the Metropolitan's opera prize adjudicators a decade before. *The New Flagler Symphonic Prizes,* Musical Courier 80 (5 February 1920): 5.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

joined the new League of Composers faction after Varèse and Carl Ruggles, citing ICG bylaws, opposed a repetition of the Schoenberg work on the grounds of commercialism.[11]

Gruenberg's situation was actually aided by his break with Varèse. He assumed a leadership position with the League as one of five composers on its Executive Board,[12] contributed to its new League of Composers' Review (which became Modern Music), and attended the annual festivals of the International Society for Contemporary Music as its delegate from 1923 to 1928. The premiere of Schoenberg's expressionist monodrama Erwartung at the 1924 festival in Prague undoubtedly influenced Gruenberg's work on The Emperor Jones in 1931,[13] but at the time he was in the midst of tortuous negotiations to secure literary rights to Anatole France's novel Celui qui épousa une femme muette (He who married a mute wife, after Rabelais), which he had already set as the two-act chamber opera The Dumb Wife, op. 12. The composer's failure to gain permission from the estate of the author, who died in 1924, despite over five years of effort must have been extremely disappointing. The score has never been published or performed.

Gruenberg turned to the task of developing his ideas that had been coalescing for several years on the possible role of African-American elements in art music. Gruenberg scholar Robert F. Nisbett cites infusion of either jazz or Negro spiritual elements in the composer's two violin sonatas (op. 9 [1912] and op. 18 [1919]), as well as the piano piece Polychromatics, op. 16

---

[11] Louise Varèse, Varèse: A Looking Glass Diary, Vol. I: 1883-1926 (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1972), 177, quoted in Nisbett, *Gruenberg Life and Work*, 29.

[12] The others were Arthur Bliss, Leo Ornstein, Lazare Saminsky, and Emerson Whithorne. Minna Lederman Daniel, The Life and Death of a Small Magazine (Modern Music 1924-47) (Brooklyn, New York: Institute for Studies in American Music, 1983), 3.

[13] This connection was also posited by Andrew Porter in a review of a revival of Gruenberg's opera. *Island Emperor*, The New Yorker 55 (5 March 1979): 115.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

(originally Polychrome [1922]), and dates what is possibly Gruenberg's earliest statement on the subject from 1921:

> A matter which has often interested me, and which always eluded practical application, has been the possibility of adapting the fresh and unspoiled rhythm, so-called jazz atmosphere to serious music. [14]

The composer obviously overstated the problem of practical application, since by that point Debussy had utilized American vernacular elements, as well as the popular European music-hall style, in such pieces as Golliwog's Cake-walk, Minstrels, and Général Lavine—eccentric, and more ambitious works with similar infusions—Satie's *ballet réaliste* Parade (1917), Stravinsky's L'histoire du soldat (1918), and John Alden Carpenter's "jazz pantomime" Krazy Kat (1921)—had already been written. Yet Gruenberg's extended development of jazz influences across a series of compositions written during the mid-1920s—including Four Indiscretions for string quartet, op. 20 (1924); Jazzberries for solo piano, op. 25 (1925); and Jazzettes for violin and piano, op. 26 (1925)—earned him a place in the interwar artistic landscape as an innovative new voice.[15] The composer enlarged upon Dvořák's nationalism by pointing to the cosmopolitan sense of universality embodied by the young art form:

> Although jazz perhaps originated with the cakewalk, I don't think that in its present form it is the music only of the Negro. Something else has emerged from it, which is very American in its significance, its sentiment, its inborn nervous tension. It is the musical expression of . . . the American race. [16]

Gruenberg secured his international reputation with the impression made by the Daniel Jazz, op. 21 (1924) for tenor and chamber ensemble, a setting of Vachel Lindsay's 1920 narrative poem about Daniel in the lion's den, at the 1925 ISCM festival in Venice. The acclaim

---

[14] Robert F. Nisbett, *Louis Gruenberg: A Forgotten Figure of American Music*, Current Musicology 18 (1974): 91.

[15] Nisbett, *Louis Gruenberg's American Idiom*, American Music 3 (Spring 1985): 26.

[16] Quoted in Heinsheimer, *Emperor Resurrexit*, 16.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

included that of fellow composers: Alfredo Casella reported, "It was the first time that Broadway made an authentic appearance at a festival of the Society," and Egon Wellesz declared, "*Daniel Jazz* is a landmark in the history of American music."[17] Gruenberg was immediately invited to join the illustrious stable of Universal Verlag, which eventually published fourteen of his works, and his music was performed throughout Europe.

As the iconoclastic decade drew to a close, however, so too did the vogue of *Kunstjazz*. Universal editor Hans Heinsheimer later recalled: "And then they became tired of it all, returned some of [Gruenberg's] music, unpublished, to the composer and were glad . . . to see him sail back to America."[18] This time, however, the composer returned home to considerably brightened prospects. A number of loosely related events in his burgeoning American career over the next five years combined to bring it to an apex with The Emperor Jones.

Gruenberg renewed his acquaintance with patroness Alma Morgenthau Wertheim, a colleague from the League of Composers' Executive Board who was now subsidizing the new Cos Cob Press dedicated to the publication of American composers.[19] Cos Cob published Gruenberg's first attempt at symphonic jazz, the Jazz-Suite, op. 28, in 1929. Obviously undeterred by declining European interest in his work, he had considered extending the idiom to opera (perhaps inspired by Universal composer Ernst Krenek's 1927 Jonny spielt auf) for at least a year. But he met with little success in libretto discussions with authors Alfred Kreymborg and Elmer Rice (not yet optioned by Taylor):

---

17 Ibid., 15. Among the other composers represented at the festival were Stravinsky, Schoenberg, Honegger, Hindemith, Janáček, Szymanowski, Villa-Lobos, and Ruggles.

18 Ibid., 16.

19 Wertheim's grandfather, Henry Morgenthau, Sr., had assisted Heinrich Conried's ascendance to the Metropolitan in 1903; her father, Henry Morgenthau, Jr., became Secretary of the Treasury (1934-45) under President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> I cannot get anywhere with Rice; he doesn't want to write anything new, and I do not want the old pieces, besides he is not romantic enough for me.
>
> Kreymborg remarked that I don't need him or [Eugene] O'Neill, that I can write a libretto myself, and now I am flirting with the idea to write one this summer. I am trying to reach O'Neill in England. I read his "Desire Under the Elms" and it is a wonderful play. [20]

The quest after the brilliant but enigmatic Eugene O'Neill (1888-1953), who had fled to Europe with actress Carlotta Monterey during divorce proceedings with his second wife, writer Agnes Boulton, continued for two years. During this period, the Jazz-Suite was premiered by the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra and Gruenberg was immediately impelled to discard a libretto he had written entitled Jungle Jazz as well as the Desire Under the Elms idea in favor of The Emperor Jones, despite acknowledging that the eight-scene tragedy would not result in a full-length opera.[21]

Shortly thereafter, Gruenberg came into contact with German conductor Erich Kleiber (1890-1956), the music director of the Berlin Staatsoper who had risen to international prominence after leading the 1925 world premiere of Wozzeck. A well-received 1929 performance of Gruenberg's tone poem The Enchanted Isle, op. 11 under Serge Koussevitzky and the Boston Symphony Orchestra led to an October 1930 repetition of the piece by the New York Philharmonic under the direction of Kleiber, who had recently been engaged to make guest appearances with the ensemble.[22] Gruenberg had finally secured a contract with O'Neill for the literary rights to The Emperor Jones in June 1930, and it is possible that Kleiber, zealous about retaining the Staatsoper's vanguard position in contemporary opera, expressed considerable

---

20 Quoted in Nisbett, *Gruenberg Life and Work*, 41-42.

21 Ibid., 35, 42.

22 Ibid., 35-36; *Plans of New York Orchestras and Choruses*, New York Times, 5 October 1930, sec. 9, 8.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

interest in the project, for the composer labored assiduously on his own adaptation of the libretto over the following winter and departed in May 1931 for a rented cottage in Old Orchard Beach, Maine to compose all summer in isolation.[23]

Kleiber heard the piano score of the opera when he returned to New York in October 1931 to conduct the opening weeks of the Philharmonic season and immediately accepted the opera for production the following year in Berlin.[24] Less than two months later, New York Times critic Olin Downes, a longtime friend of Otto Kahn, forwarded a copy of the libretto to Gatti-Casazza at the Metropolitan for his review, having heard "a piano performance of the score in a small room."[25] The performer was undoubtedly Gruenberg, but whether Downes and Kleiber were present at the same audition of the opera is not known. The Metropolitan contacted Gruenberg for a personal audition in early February 1932 at which enthusiastic new music proponent Tullio Serafin, who had conducted both the Henchman and Ibbetson premieres,

---

23 Gruenberg had his first personal meeting with O'Neill in Paris in January 1931, at which time the playwright refused to collaborate on the libretto. After receiving the composer's adaptation the following April, O'Neill wrote a cordial letter expressing his unqualified approval. Nisbett, *Gruenberg Life and Work*, 43-44.

Some reference works cite the collaboration of Kathleen de Jaffa on the libretto of The Emperor Jones, but neither Nisbett, the published score of the opera, nor any Metropolitan source cites the collaboration of another writer on the project. All press accounts and reviews pertaining to the opera give Gruenberg sole credit for the adaptation.

24 *Gruenberg's "Emperor Jones,"* New York Times, 3 January 1932, sec. 8, 8.

25 Downes to Gatti-Casazza, 14 December 1931. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, 1934-35, Operas.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

was requested to be present.[26] A provisional decision by the Metropolitan appears to have been taken within a month's time, for Ziegler wrote to the composer on 12 March 1932:

> Please treat our talk this morning as entirely confidential and see to it that no news of any kind leaks into the newspapers yet.
>
> One day next week . . . I would like to arrange another meeting between you, one of our artists and conductor here. [27]

The unnamed artist was undoubtedly Lawrence Tibbett, the only possibility among the Metropolitan's baritones for the demanding role of the Emperor; he had appeared in the title role of Jonny spielt auf for three performances but had never taken on an acting challenge equal to the part of Brutus Jones. The meeting evidently proceeded satisfactorily, for a contract was signed with the composer on 12 May 1932.[28] Official press announcements that The Emperor Jones would be produced at the Metropolitan with the participation of Tibbett and Serafin appeared the following day, and the Times included the somewhat ominous proviso that due to Kleiber's concurrent interest, "It appears, therefore, that Berlin and New York will vie for the right to give the work its world premiere." The matter was considered of sufficient gravity to justify its placement on the front page, which it shared with news of the discovery of the Lindbergh baby.[29]

---

26 Edward Ziegler to Gruenberg, 8 February 1932, Metropolitan Opera Archives, Ziegler correspondence, 1931-32, F-G; Gruenberg to Ziegler, 9 February 1932, Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, 1931-32, Miscellaneous. Gruenberg's original February 9 letter bears handwritten annotations obviously made after its receipt at the Metropolitan: "Ladies Parlor [a frequently-used rehearsal space] / Mr. Gatti / Mr. Serafin / Mr. [Giuseppe] Sturani [a staff conductor]."

27 Ziegler to Gruenberg, 12 March 1932. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Ziegler correspondence, 1931-32, F-G.

28 Memorandum from Ziegler to Metropolitan treasurer Frank Garlichs, 12 May 1932, noting contract made that date. Metropolitan Opera Archives, royalty contracts. The Metropolitan's copy of the original contract is no longer extant.

29 *Metropolitan Lists New American Opera,* New York Times, 13 May 1932, 1.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

It is intriguing to speculate on the role that Kleiber's interest in The Emperor Jones played in the Metropolitan's decision to produce the work, since the circumstances recall the competitive repertoire battles waged with both Hammerstein and Campanini. Competition with Chicago had helped advance both Alfano and Krenek to the Metropolitan during the late 1920s, and the theater remained alert to developments abroad, particularly where American composers were concerned. In May 1930, for example, Ziegler requested German theatrical agent Erich Simon to provide a report of the Frankfort premiere of attention-grabbing iconoclast George Antheil's Transatlantique despite his personal dislike for the composer's idiom.[30] Simon's report on the jazz-infused opera was not promising:

> I am of the opinion that the work, which bears the original title "The People's Choice," is completely unsuited for America, as it concerns a presidential election battle in the U.S.A. The music is entirely engaged with the jazz idiom and is (I must unfortunately tell you) extremely kitschy. . . . In delirious tempo and countless scenes the entire campaign plays itself out.
>
> The ensemble scenes are strongly realized for the theatre, yet nowhere does the libretto, authored by Antheil himself, approach the level of genuine poetry of its time. . . . Antheil contents himself with the monotonous rhythms of dance music produced with ultra-modern means. An audience which is only interested in undemanding amusement will not find itself bored by the numerous diversions of "Transatlantique." [31]

---

30 "Mr. Ziegler thinks [Antheil] is a 'faker' and is only trying to use you as a means of publicity." Note from Kahn's secretary James Dartt to Kahn, 2 April 1928. It was Kahn who pressed the Metropolitan to look at Transatlantique: "Tell Mr. Ziegler from me that, notwithstanding the craziness of Antheil's former compositions, it would be interesting to become acquainted with his new opera, inasmuch as I understand that his style of music has changed and has now become reasonably sane." Kahn, Palm Beach, Florida, to Dartt, 10 March 1928. Kahn Papers, Box 337, Princeton University.

31 Simon, Berlin, to Ziegler, 31 May 1930. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Ziegler correspondence, 1929-30, S. [*Ich bin der Ansicht, dass das Werk, welches im Original den Titel "The Peoples Choice" trägt, sich ganz und gar nicht für Amerika eignet, da es sich um einen Präsidenten-Wahlkampf in den U.S.A. handelt. . . . Die Musik ist gänzlich auf "Jazz" eingestellt and ist (ich muss es leider sagen) höchst kitschig. . . . In rasendem Tempo und auf zahllosen Schauplätzen spielt sich die ganze Wahl-Campagne ab. . . . Die Massenscenen sind entschieden mit starkem Sinn für das Theater hingestellt, jedoch dring das Textbuch, das von Antheil selbst verfasst ist, nirgends in die Bezirke einer wirklichen Zeitdichtung vor. . . . [G]enügen Antheil die Rythmen einer mit modernsten Klangmitteln erzeugten Tanzmusik. Ein Publikum, das nur auf*

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The Metropolitan took no further action on the opera, and it appears that before hearing of The Emperor Jones the theater's interest turned briefly to Wozzeck, for Alban Berg wrote Erich Kleiber in November 1930: "You'll be interested to know that there will be four performances this year by the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia and in 1931 it's going to the Metropolitan. What do you say to that???!!!"[32] The American premiere of Wozzeck, however, was secured by Leopold Stokowski (Philadelphia Academy of Music, 19 March 1931), and it is possible that financial conditions were a factor. European publishers often demanded four-figure sums from the Metropolitan for premiere rights, and the theater was then enduring the harshest economic conditions it had yet known. Treasurer Frank Garlichs reported to Gatti in June 1931 that "our losses during the past season only amounted to $322,231.90," and by March 1932, the general manager was forced to appeal to company artists for voluntary salary reductions due to the unrelieved economic conditions.[33] Yet two months later, Gruenberg was extended a generous contract for The Emperor Jones which gave him $200 per performance of the one-act work, plus an immediate payment of $500 towards the preparation of the orchestral score. Whether the Metropolitan made these figures contingent upon procuring the world premiere that it eventually obtained is unknown, however, since the original contract is not extant. Downes's Times report on the May agreement asserting Kleiber's continued involvement argues to the contrary, and neither Downes nor Gruenberg, both admirers of Kleiber, is likely to have manipulated the situation against the influential conductor.

---

anspruchslose Unterhaltung bedacht ist, wird sich in "Transatlantic" schon durch das enorme Aufgebot an optischen Ereignissen nicht langweilen.]

32 Berg letter of 24 November 1930, quoted in John Russell, Erich Kleiber: A Memoir (London: André Deutsch, 1957; repr., New York: Da Capo Press, 1981), 137.

33 Garlichs to Gatti, Milan, 9 June 1931, Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, Summer 1931, Garlichs; *Statement of Mr. Gatti-Casazza to All the Members of the Metropolitan Opera Company*, 25 March 1932, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, 1931-32, Kahn.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

In any event, the Gatti-Kleiber contest was tragically superseded by the realities of Germany's developing political situation. Kleiber's plan to produce an opera of a Jewish composer with a leading black character in the atmosphere of 1932 Berlin was at best quixotic, as public demonstrations against so-called *entartete Kunst* ["degenerate" art] had been escalating in Germany and Austria since the late 1920s. The New York Times reported in 1928, for example, that "Vienna police were obliged to guard [black American dancer] Josephine Baker, who had been threatened by university students" who "declared they would prevent negro performers from playing in Vienna."[34] Similar actions attended the work of even renowned composers, as related by artists' manager George Kugel:

> It must have been in 1932 or 1933, before Vienna had awakened to the acuteness of the Nazi menace; . . . [violinist Joseph] Szigeti gave a recital under my management featuring [the] then much-discussed [Ravel sonata] with the famous "Blues" movement.
>
> In all my long managerial experience, this was the first time that such a "bagarre" developed at a recital in venerable Musikvereins-saal! After the Blues, hoots and cries of "Negermusik!" and "Pfui!" from the few Nazi provocateurs back of the orchestra stalls soon developed into a free fight, in the course of which the rowdies were ejected. Little did we realize that incidents like these, which we minimized then . . . were all part of the Nazi master plan. [35]

By the autumn of 1932, when Emperor was to have gone into rehearsal at the Staatsoper, conditions in Germany were such that Kleiber had to battle for a revival of Wozzeck, which he bravely mounted to give Berg the financial means to complete Lulu, whose premiere the composer had promised to Berlin. Berg acknowledged the prevailing conditions in December 1932: "I have to thank you . . . above all for managing in these times to get the work back in the

---

34 *Vienna Bars Negro Dancer,* New York Times, 4 February 1928, 2.

35 Letter from Kugel to the Music Editor, New York Times, 22 February 1942, sec. 8, 6, quoted in Homer Pearson, Music at War (Poughkeepsie, New York: Vassar College, 1943), 107.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

repertory. Believe me that I am well able to judge what that implies, in the Germany of today."[36] By 15 March 1933, shortly after the National Socialists had gained control of the government, the broadcasting of "negro" jazz had been officially banned by the director of the Berlin broadcasting station and Gruenberg's opera had no further hope.[37] Yet one still encounters assertions that German performances of Kaiser Jones, as it was translated in Cos Cob's optimistic dual-language score of the opera, went forward as planned.[38]

At the Metropolitan, Otto Kahn was not actively involved in the Emperor negotiations (having resigned the chair in 1931 amid speculation that his patience with the Real Estate board had been exhausted by the defeat of plans for the new theater), but it is unlikely that the opera would have found as smooth a path to acceptance there as it did without the liberal

---

36 Berg to Kleiber, Christmas 1932, quoted in Russell, Kleiber, 141. Kleiber's efforts were defeated the following year when Berg informed him: "I have just had a letter from Furtwängler to say that in view of 'the gravity of the situation' it is quite out of the question that Lulu should be accepted, for the present, anywhere in Germany." Ibid., 143.

37 Pearson, Music at War, 107. Dutch composer Richard Hageman also saw his opera Caponsacchi (1932, after Robert Browning's The Ring and the Book) banned from German stages in 1933 despite a successful premiere in Freibourg the previous season which had elicited contracts with a dozen theaters throughout the country. The composer commented: "Don't ask me why. I never understand such things. The leading character is a priest, and the Pope himself appears on the stage, but I am sure it is the first time that Browning has ever been considered a subversive propagandist." *Opera Banned by Nazis Will Be Heard Here*, New York Times, 27 April 1936. Caponsacchi was given its American premiere at the Metropolitan under Edward Johnson's management in February 1937.

38 The Emperor Jones [Kaiser Jones], op. 36 (New York: Cos-Cob-Press, Inc., 1932). Johnson's Operas on American Subjects reports that "*Kaiser Jones* . . . was well received at the Berlin Opera under the direction of Erich Kleiber, 1933," and Borroff's American Opera: A Checklist lists a 1935 performance in Germany. The latter was in fact planned as part of a 1934-1935 European tour featuring black baritone Jules Bledsoe but cancelled due to the political situation. Alfred Loewenberg's Annals of Opera, 1597-1940, 2d rev. ed. (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 1970) correctly lists no German performances of the opera.

Kolodin commented: "A performance [of The Emperor Jones] in Berlin that would have anticipated the New York production was cancelled, for reasons that were never clearly understood. The imminent rise to power of the National Socialist party and its rejection of all foreign musical activity was said to be Kleiber's reason for tabling the work." Metropolitan Opera (1936), 441*n*1.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

artistic policies established during his tenure. The Metropolitan's unprecedented replacement of its corps de ballet with the Negro Art Theatre Dance Group for the ritualistic celebration with which Gruenberg concluded his opera, as well as its casting of the group's leader Hemsley Winfield in the role of the Congo Witch Doctor who lures Jones to his demise, proceeded without Metropolitan production board censorship to the distinct relief of at least one dance critic: "[W]hen Hemsley Winfield's troupe of Negro dancers stormed on in the final scene, so much raw vitality and exuberance was a distinct shock. . . . The experience has done much to neutralize the unhappy memory of another aboriginal 'ballet,' that charming banality in 'L'Africana' which has too frequently pranced on the same stage."[39]

Gruenberg's employment of a chorus that offers interpolated commentary on the unfolding action in the manner of Greek tragedy was the greatest structural alteration he made in transforming The Emperor Jones into opera. Otherwise, apart from an altered conclusion, O'Neill's lines were transcribed virtually verbatim. The play opens in the nearly deserted palace of the ruler of a Caribbean island, where the unscrupulous Cockney trader Smithers bullies an old native woman into revealing that a revolt of the oppressed native population is imminent. The entrance of the shrewd and charismatic Emperor initiates an expository dialogue which reveals his past: he is the American Brutus Jones, an ex-Pullman porter who murdered a man for

---

[39] Mary F. Watkins, *With the Dancers*, New York Herald Tribune, ca. January 1933. Gruenberg clipping file, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. Hipsher's statement that October 1933 performances of the opera in Los Angeles featured "the innovation of a genuine Negro male chorus" (American Opera and its Composers, 225) is somewhat misleading. Since the members of Winfield's dance troupe were not trained singers, the Metropolitan did position its own chorus offstage to perform the choral interludes, but allowed chiefly Winfield's dancers to be seen by the audience.

Thus, Rudolf Bing's assertion that during his opening night Aida of 13 November 1951, "Janet Collins, a black ballerina, became the first of her race to appear as a featured solo artist in a Metropolitan Opera production," is incorrect, since that honor had already been taken by Winfield. Sir Rudolf Bing, 5000 Nights at the Opera (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1972), 184.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

cheating in a crap game and served time with a chain gang before killing a sadistic prison guard. Escaping as a stowaway to the West Indies, he played upon native superstitions and set himself up as an emperor who could only be slain by a silver bullet. Smithers, who has assisted Jones in his rise and now functions as his factotum, regards the wily dictator with a mixture of fear, skepticism, and admiration, particularly when Jones confidently reveals a plan to escape through the dense forest to the coast, where a French gunboat will transport him to safety and a cache of embezzled wealth. Jones is certain that his superior intellect will outwit his credulous subjects and suffers a psychological setback when he becomes disoriented at the edge of the forest and cannot find his secreted provisions. While forging through the jungle's impenetrable darkness, he is haunted by a series of hallucinations depicting his past crimes and experiences the horrors of a collective racial unconscious through imagined participation in a slave auction and slaveship voyage. Each futile discharge from his revolver at the visions is accompanied by the acceleration of a persistent drumbeat sounded by the natives. The progressive dismantling of the Emperor's psyche is completed with the appearance of the Congo Witch Doctor, whose pantomime of ritual sacrifice reduces Jones to aboriginal terror. In the final scene, a group of native soldiers patiently awaits its quarry armed with specially-cast silver bullets; Jones is shot offstage at the same point he entered the forest, having circled back in disorientation. It remains for Smithers to deliver the fitting epitaph: "Silver bullets! Gawd blimey, but yer died in the 'eighth 'o style, any'ow!"

The drama's denouement, which has the advantage of advancing O'Neill's psychological theme of the superiority of primitive intuition over modern intellect, was altered by Gruenberg to provide a more dramatically charged operatic conclusion. At the climax of the Witch Doctor's dance, as Jones's captors close in, Jones rises up in a final act of defiance and shoots himself with his remaining silver bullet.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The story bears some resemblance to that of Henri Christophe (1767-1820), the ill-fated king of Haiti who committed suicide with a silver bullet during a native rebellion. O'Neill also identified his source as Haitian:

> The idea for *Emperor Jones* came from an old circus man I knew . . . [who] had been traveling with a tent show through the West Indies. He told me a story current in Hayti concerning the late President Sam . . . to the effect that Sam had said they'd never get him with a lead bullet; that he would get himself first with a silver one. . . . This notion about the silver bullet struck me, and I made a note of the story. . . . The effect of the tropical forest on the human imagination was honestly come by. It was the result of my own experience while prospecting for gold in Spanish Honduras. [40]

The playwright developed his material along expressionist lines, but maintained he "had never heard of expressionism until long after the play was written. Its technique grew naturally out of my own problems."[41] These involved his quest as a dramatist to expose modern humanity as psychologically fractured, burying primal impulses under layers of acquired intellect.[42] O'Neill's portrayal of the psyche in the early expressionistic plays like Jones and The Hairy Ape was strongly influenced by theories developed by Carl Jung, particularly that of the collective unconscious:

> [O]ur emotions are a better guide than our thoughts. Our emotions are instinctive. They are the result not only of our individual experiences but of the experiences of the whole human race, back through all the ages. They are the deep undercurrent, whereas our thoughts are often only the small individual surface reactions. [43]

---

[40] Interview with Charles P. Sweeney, New York World, 9 November 1924, 5M, quoted in Mark W. Estrin, ed., Conversations with Eugene O'Neill (Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 1990), 57-58.

[41] Interview with Malcolm Cowley, Brentano's Book Chat 5 (July/August 1926): 17-21, quoted in Estrin, Conversations, 79.

[42] Ben Brantley, *Putting the Downtown Element Back Into O'Neill*, New York Times, 13 March 1998, sec. E, 3.

[43] Interview with Mary B. Mullett, American Magazine 94 (November 1922), 34*ff.*, quoted in Estrin, Conversations, 27.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Among the technical means O'Neill utilized to express this concept were elements of primitive ceremony and ritual, with which he had a lifelong fascination:

> One day I was reading of the religious feasts in the Congo and the uses to which the drum is put there; how it starts at a normal pulse-beat and is slowly intensified until the heart-beat of everyone present corresponds to the frenzied beat of the drum. There was an idea and an experiment. How would this sort of thing work on an audience in a theatre? [44]

> For rhythm is a powerful factor in making anything expressive. . . . You can actually produce and control emotions by that means alone. [45]

A strikingly imaginative feature of The Emperor Jones that contributed substantially to the sensation created by the drama was the continuous drumbeat that begins as Jones prepares to flee his palace and gradually accelerates throughout the subsequent action until his death.

Although Gruenberg was surely attracted to the musical opportunities inherent in the drama's African elements, he attempted to develop O'Neill's experimental expressionism chiefly in accordance with models provided by the Second Viennese School, notably Schoenberg's Erwartung (1924), which depicts the inner psychological torment of a woman wandering through a forest in search of her lover. Gruenberg's score, like that of Schoenberg, is dominated by orchestral dissonance and a *tour de force* principal role for singing actor that incorporates a liberal use of *Sprechstimme*. Underscoring Emperor is the hypnotic beat of multiple tom-toms; with this element, Gruenberg departed from O'Neill's specification of a continuously accelerating drumbeat by directing the tom-toms to cease during the hallucinatory episodes, then return at a faster tempo.[46]

---

[44] Sweeney interview, quoted in Estrin, Conversations, 57-58.

[45] Mullett interview, quoted in Estrin, Conversations, 35.

[46] The film version of the drama featuring Paul Robeson as Jones (Dudley Murphy, 1933) also utilizes this modification in its scoring.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The composer's chief concern in the formal design\ of the opera was dramatic continuity and compression:

> [T]he first impression [of the drama] is that it is too long even in this medium, so that great care will have to be taken in the composition of it, to gain still greater concentration. This continual crescendo must never let up for a moment, the audience must have no opportunity to take a breath. [47]

To this end, he constructed a taut seventy-five minute drama in two acts and six scenes (compressed from O'Neill's eight), with just three singing roles: Jones (dramatic baritone), Smithers (tenor), and the Native Woman (soprano). At the conclusion of the Act 1 palace scene, the set is transformed into the forest of Act 2, during which a contrapuntal percussion interlude and a choral commentary on Jones's imminent fate are heard. Several such passages for the chorus are interspersed among the scenes, but Gruenberg ensured that the group's presence would not disrupt the dramatic flow by directing them to be placed in the orchestra pit, with gesticulating arm movements gradually becoming visible to the audience as the opera progressed.[48] Metropolitan stage designer Jo Mielziner (1901-1976) complied fully with the composer's concept and eliminated the usual curtain between scene changes by designing a drop set for Act 1:

> From the first curtain until the very end of the opera, no curtains need be used. . . . By this method, a unity and continuity will be achieved. . . . By setting [the throne room] scene close to the footlights, from 10 to 12 feet from the setting line, the remainder of the opera may easily be set in place above scene one. [49]

---

[47] Gruenberg letter dated 30 August 1930, quoted in Nisbett, *Gruenberg Life and Work*, 43.

[48] Since the Metropolitan's pit was too small to accommodate both chorus and orchestra, the singers were instead placed upstage left and right behind two small groups of dancers. The scenery was designed to only partially conceal them so that the effect of their gradual emergence from the forest could be achieved.

[49] "The Emperor Jones: Notes on Production," prepared by Jo Mielziner, 30 August 1932. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Ziegler correspondence, 1932-33, F-G.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The designer was also responsible for a modernist visualization of the expressionist mood:

> I believe that both the outside landscape and the actual doors of the room may be better conceived and more effectively dramatized by suggesting, rather than actual construction and painting. This type of design will enable us to bring the audience more completely into the mood of fantastic imagination, which is so important to put across in the later vision scenes. I want to get entirely away from the convention of "a part of a solid wall suddenly lighting up behind the gauze to reveal a dream scene realistically." [50]

Gruenberg had originally envisioned the inclusion of film projections, as specified in Antheil's Transatlantique (1930) and Berg's Lulu (1935): "I shall try and get moving pictures of Jones' hallucinations instead of actual players, I find that actual actors muddle up the clearness."[51] However, as with the placement of the chorus, the Metropolitan's facilities were not technologically equipped to realize this idea.

Gruenberg furthered his goal of fluid formal design in his handling of musical materials, particularly by employing a non-traditional language of non-functional harmony which allowed him to write in large sections unimpeded by conventional phrase structures or cadences.[52] But Gilbert Chase's assertion that "the significance of Emperor Jones is that here at last an American opera appeared that was both musical and dramatic,"[53] is an overstatement, as Taylor had already accomplished this in Peter Ibbetson. Gruenberg's real achievement was in composing America's first bracingly modernist-sounding work for the lyric stage, one that

---

50 Ibid.

51 Gruenberg letter, 30 August 1930, quoted in Nisbett, *Gruenberg Life and Work*, 43.

52 The opera's harmonic language is discussed more fully in conjunction with examples 7.14-7.16 below.

53 America's Music (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1955), 636, quoted in Nisbett, *Gruenberg Life and Work*, 221. Chase's statement is repeated in the book's revised second edition (1966); however, all references to Gruenberg and his operas are excised in the revised third edition (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), reflecting the declining interest Gruenberg's music experienced over the succeeding decades.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

perhaps owed more to the inspiration (albeit not the actual techniques) of the Viennese modernists, specifically the dissonant and athematic Erwartung, than to the prevailing models of Wagner and Strauss that had long dominated the American genre.

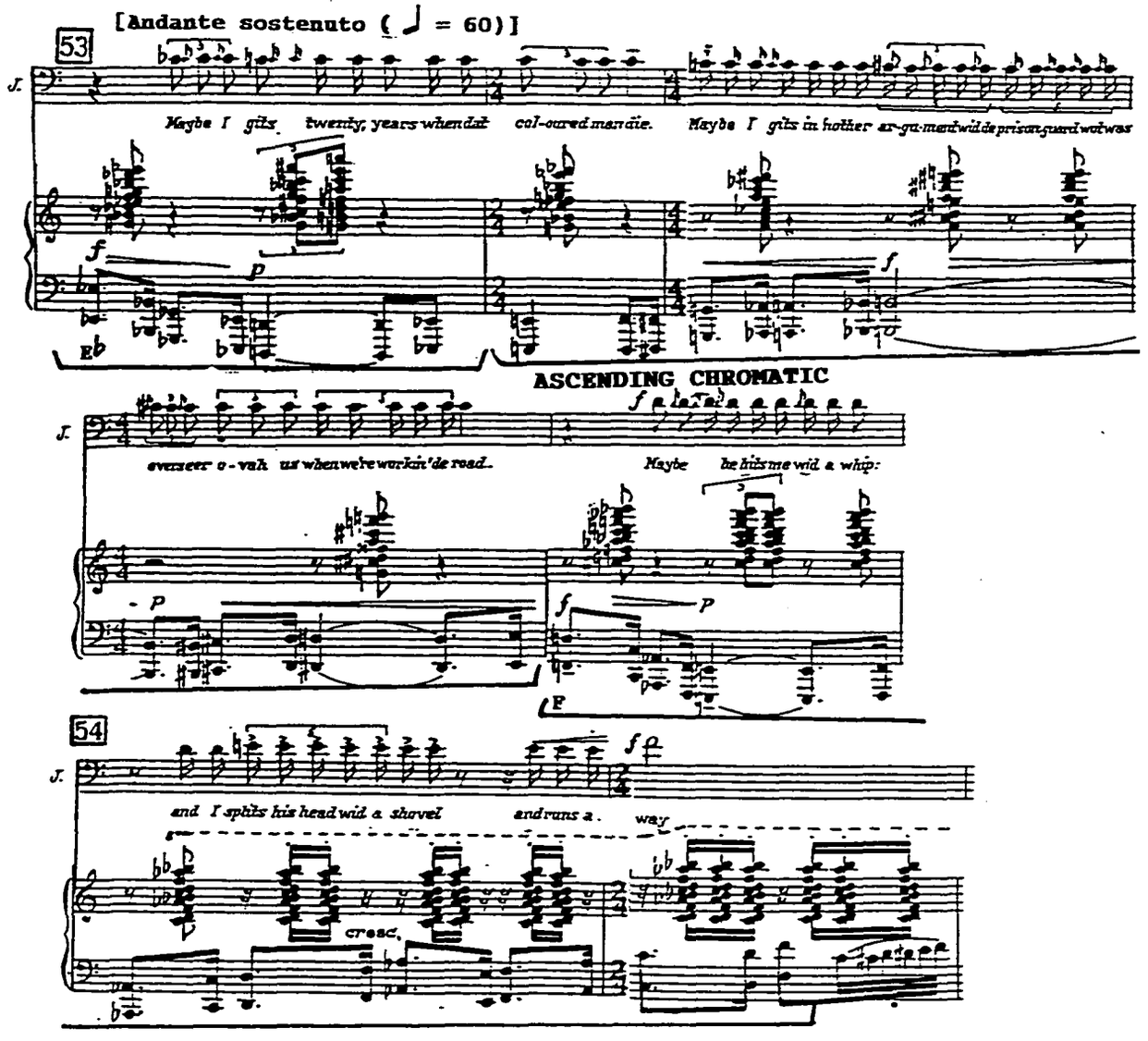
If Gruenberg's goal had been to compose an American Erwartung, however, he did not succeed. While The Emperor Jones remains the most modern work of Gruenberg's output, and several of its aspects were unquestionably far more forward-looking than any other Metropolitan American production yet heard—the composer's selection of a monodrama (abandoning the traditional operatic concept of a love triangle) as his source material, the innovative use of the chorus, and the tom-tom ostinato—the composer's musical language was not nearly as advanced as that of contemporaneous works of the Second Viennese School, nor were his techniques as avant-garde as his "ultra-modern" American contemporaries Cowell, Antheil, Ruggles, and Ives. Rather, much of the score of The Emperor Jones is in fact based on triadically conceived configurations. In the absence of functional harmonic progressions and voice leading, these configurations are subjected to a great deal of parallel movement that often obliterates an aural sense of key center yet preserves the underlying triadic sonority of the music's principal structures. The composer further "modernized" his music by almost completely avoiding melodic or motivic constructions (the sole exceptions are quotations of Stephen Foster's "Old Folks at Home" and the traditional Negro spiritual "Standin' in the Need of Prayer"), thus duplicating the athematicism of Erwartung, but lacking its atonal language. It was not, of course, necessary for Gruenberg to align himself with the most recent twentieth-century musical developments in order to produce an effective operatic setting of O'Neill's drama, yet many observers speculated as to whether his score actually made a substantial contribution to the play's interpretive aspects, or merely ornamented it with the surface trappings—but not the substance—of musical modernism.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

In the absence of formal structural techniques such as thematic development, serial procedure or pitch-class set organization, the opera is heavily dependent upon vocal and orchestra effects to interpret the stage action. This strategy can in fact work to support O'Neill's dramatic intent, for the progression and development of the narrative is secondary to the effect of the psychological revelations it uncovers. The principal vocal technique Gruenberg employed for all the characters is accompanied recitative, supported by a continuous orchestral texture and often delivered in a quasi *parlando* style. The role of Jones encompasses considerable bravura, as shown in example 7.1, an expository passage from Act 1 in which the Emperor alludes to events in his past during a conversation with Smithers. Jones's ascending chromatic vocal phrases are accompanied by a bass line that provides a tonally oriented framework for the passage organized around the key centers of E♭ and F, which are defined by descending minor arpeggios and linked by an ascending chromatic scale that moves in independent counterpoint with the vocal line:

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
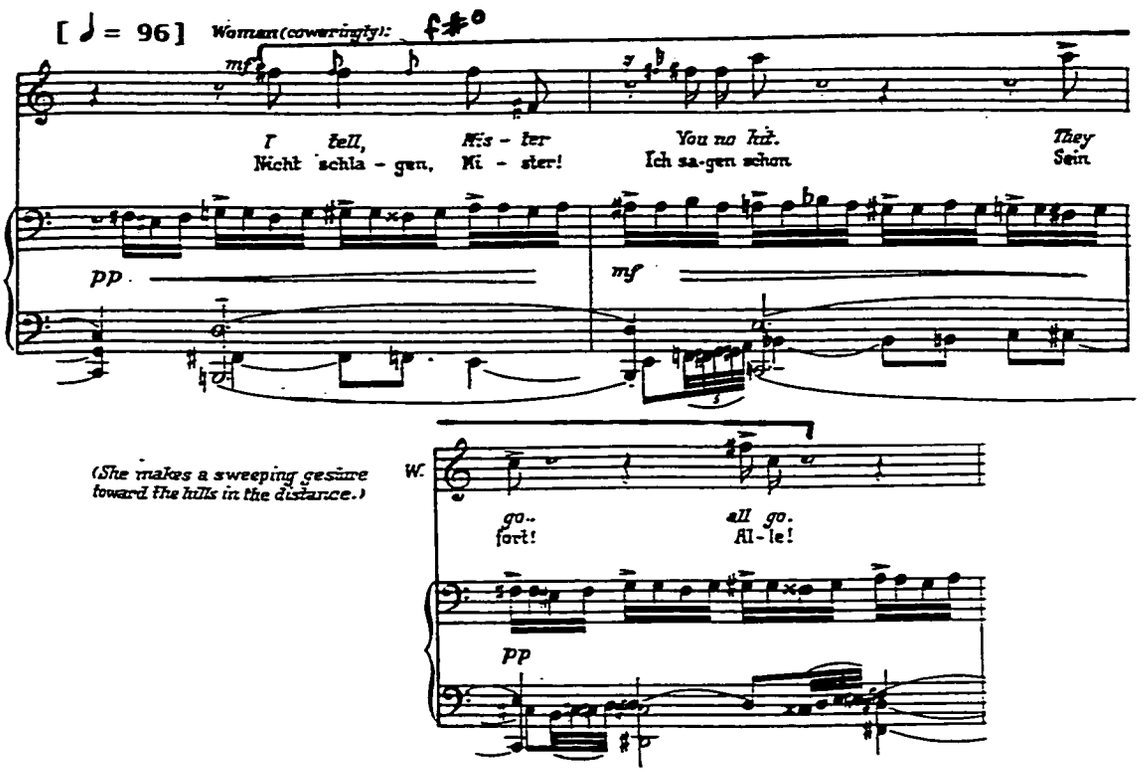
Ex. 7.1: Gruenberg, Emperor Jones, Act I, piano-vocal score, pp. 44-45



Gruenberg's vocal writing also makes liberal use of the wide leaps and jagged contours, frequently outlining the tritone, characteristic of expressionist melody. Unlike the atonal linear phrases found in contemporary scores like Erwartung, Wozzeck, or Hindemith's Mathis der Maler, however, Gruenberg's are frequently conceived as triadic outlines. Example 7.2 illustrates a vocal phrase of the Native Woman from Act 1 which is derived from an F♯ diminished triad:

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
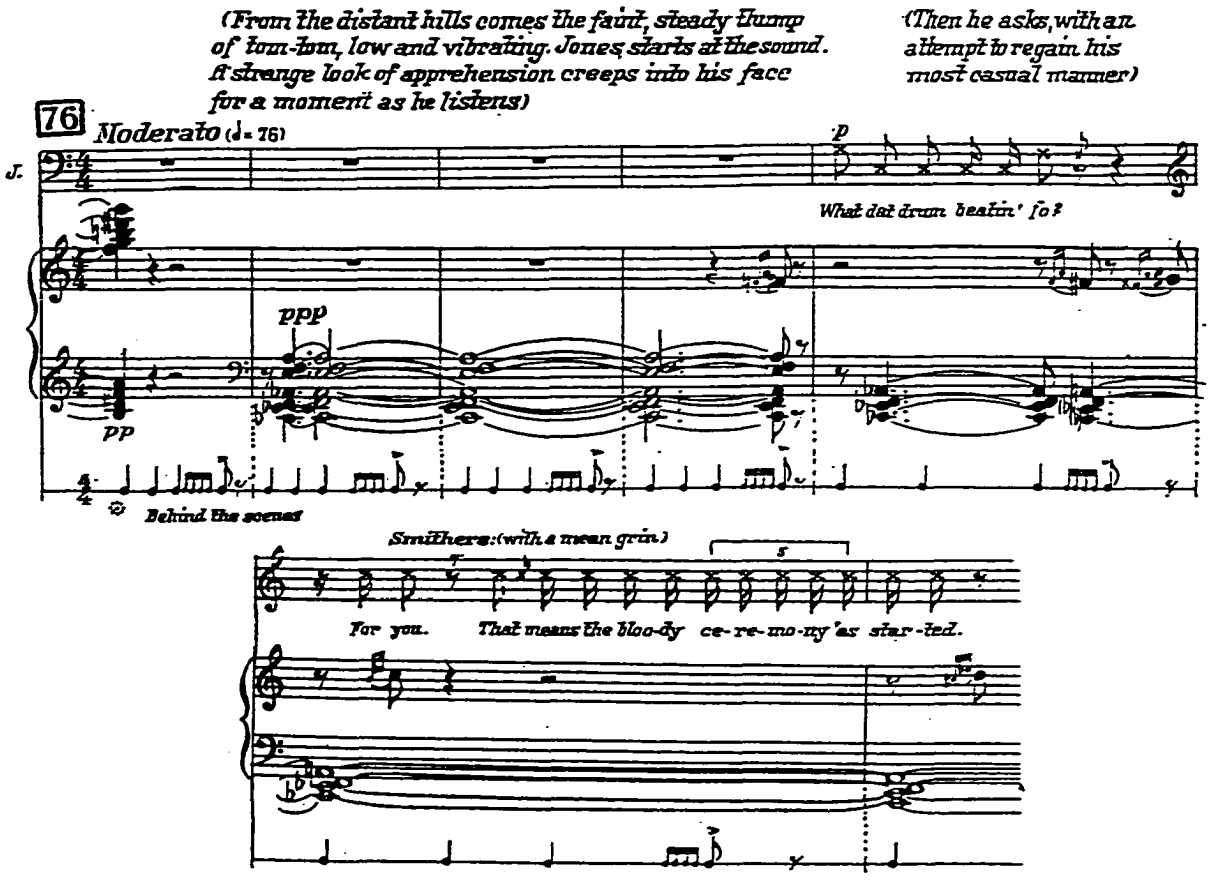
Ex. 7.2: Gruenberg, Emperor Jones, Act I, piano-vocal score, p. 15



The use of *Sprechstimme*, a technique with which Gruenberg became intimately familiar through his work on Pierrot lunaire a decade before, is introduced into the score upon Jones's reaction to the onset of the natives' pulsating drumbeat. Although this innovation was generally welcomed for its use in an American score, Gruenberg's treatment was criticized for lacking the precision and subtlety of the Viennese modernists. Example 7.3, which shows the initial *Sprechstimme* lines in the score, illustrates this point. In Jones's phrase, pitch changes occur on the relatively unimportant words "What" and "for," instead of the more significant sentence subject "drum" and its verb "beatin'." Similarly, the reference by Smithers to the primitive ceremony that will terrorize Jones across the balance of the opera is notated as a monotone with no pitch inflection on any of the words:

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Ex. 7.3: Gruenberg, Emperor Jones, Act I, piano-vocal score, p. 56



Although only a small portion of the opera's vocal writing is notated as *Sprechstimme*, critical reviews of the premiere as well as the only surviving recording from the period indicate that Lawrence Tibbett used it liberally in his portrayal of Jones as a matter of performance practice, even when Gruenberg's notation did not so indicate.[54] Gruenberg ostensibly approved of this

---

54 No recording of the world premiere broadcast of 7 January 1933 is known to be extant. In 1934, Tibbett was engaged to host The Packard Hour radio program; a surviving broadcast of 16 October 1934 was a condensation of The Emperor Jones with narrated commentary. This recording is sometimes misidentified as the world premiere. *The Emperor Jones*, Lawrence Tibbett, baritone, John B. Kennedy, narrator, Celebrity Record Company, EJS-124.

Critical description includes that of Oscar Thompson: "*The Emperor Jones* gives the effect of being more spoken than sung," (*Questions of the Future of American Opera Raised by Gruenberg's "The Emperor Jones,"* New York Evening Post, 14 January 1933); and Lawrence Gilman: "Mr. Gruenberg often contents himself with allowing the characters to speak their lines, or he gives them something roughly equivalent to the *Sprechgesang* of Schönberg or Alban

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

method of execution, for it is prominent in Tibbett's only extant recording of the role made nearly two years after the Metropolitan premiere. Both composer and executant may have been influenced by the original dramatic portrayal of Jones created by black actor Charles Gilpin, which had acquired near-legendary status:

> [Gilpin] rose his singularly rich and musical voice, almost like a disembodied sound. . . . The effect was almost that of a recital, in which the organ-like baritone should set itself to run the whole gamut of emotions. [55]

Tibbett may also have been impelled to increase the use of *Sprechstimme* by the exacting demands of pacing the role. In the opinion of Heywood Broun, Gilpin was able to sustain the drama's intensity "not only because his voice [wa]s one of a gorgeous natural quality, but because he kn[ew] just what to do with it,"[56] and the baritone may have been inspired to take this as a model worthy of imitation.

Another vocal effect employed by Gruenberg was the reversion to spoken lines (which occur intermittently throughout the score) at the climax of Jones's death scene, shown in example 7.4, where he is accompanied solely by the rhythmic counterpoint of the frenzied tom-toms.[57] While the post-gunshot exclamation is dramatically effective, Gruenberg might well have sought a musical solution for Jones's final climactic outburst before his suicide:

Berg," (*"Emperor Jones" as Opera*, New York Herald Tribune, 8 January 1933, 19).

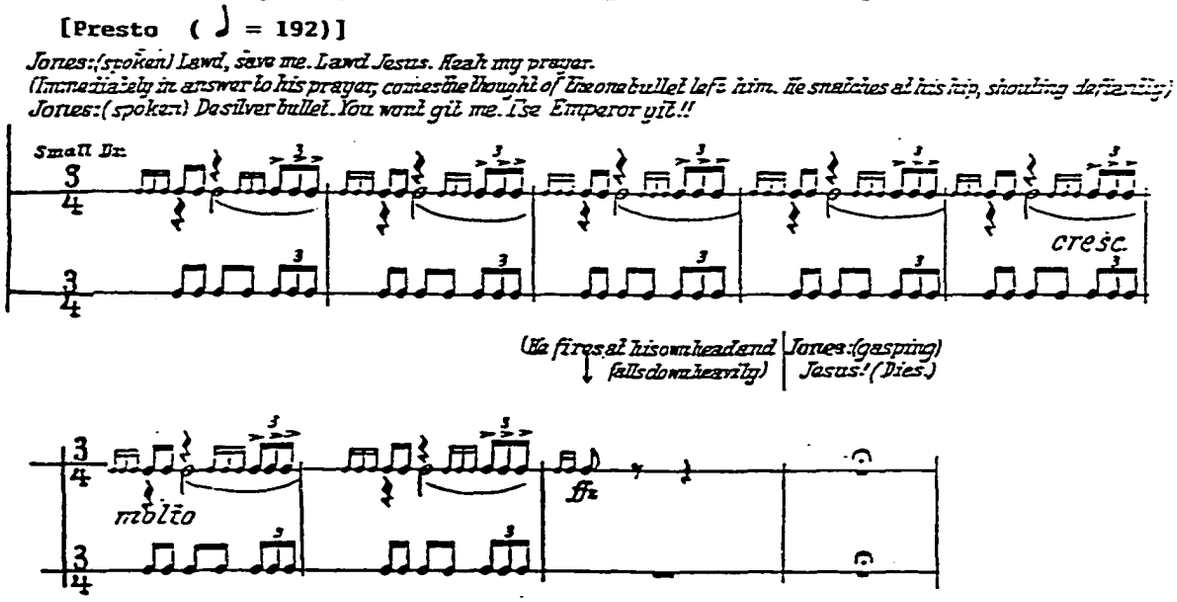
55 St. Louis Post-Dispatch, 31 October 1921, quoted in David Krasner, *Whose Role Is It Anyway?: Charles Gilpin and the Harlem Renaissance*, African American Review 29 (Fall 1995): 491. It is unlikely, however, that either Gruenberg or Tibbett actually saw Gilpin (who died in 1930) in the role. Gruenberg saw his first performance of the play given by a local group in Stockbridge, Massachusetts in 1930, and Tibbett's press interviews make no specific reference to Gilpin.

56 New York Tribune, 4 November 1920, quoted in D. Krasner, *Gilpin*, 491.

57 Gruenberg directed several sets of tom-toms to be placed not only offstage but around the perimeter of the auditorium as well, in order to give the aural effect of Jones being encircled by his captors. Because of space limitations in the theater when filled to capacity, however, the Metropolitan was not able to realize this idea, and utilized three drum sets in a semi-circular formation behind the scenery only.
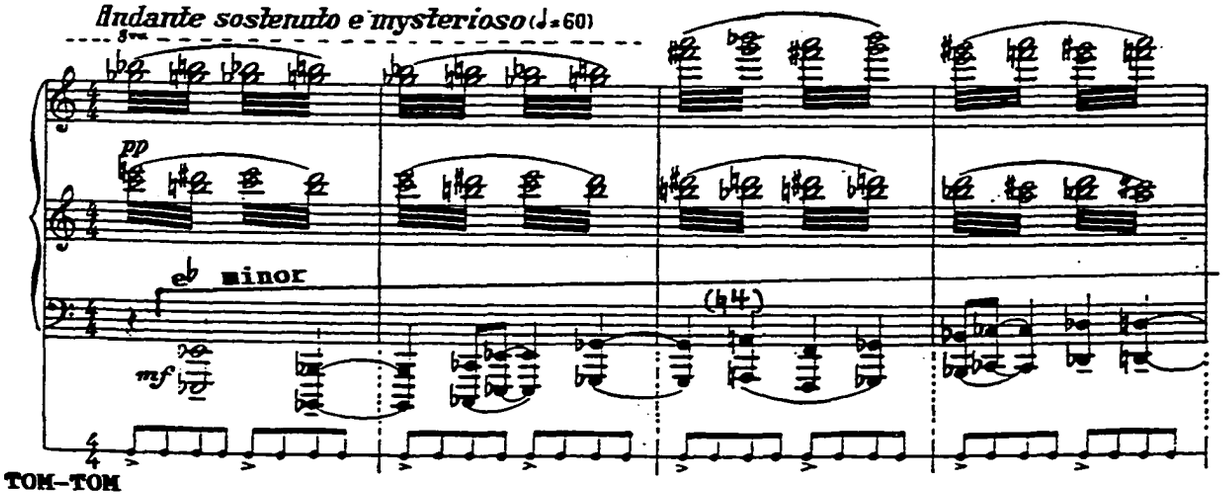
Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Ex. 7.4: Gruenberg, Emperor Jones, Act II, piano-vocal score, p. 172



Gruenberg did, however, make effective use of orchestral timbres at several key moments in the drama. One of the most significant is Jones's reluctant entry into the inky blackness of the forest—a metaphor for the unlayering of his subconscious—in which he is accompanied by a shimmering string tremolo in double thirds, an evocative coloristic effect that exhibits the influence of Richard Strauss. The configurations are again triadic in construction (albeit chromatically altered), and are supported by a bass line moving predominantly in E♭ minor and accompanied by a new steadily pulsating rhythmic pattern in the tom-tom:

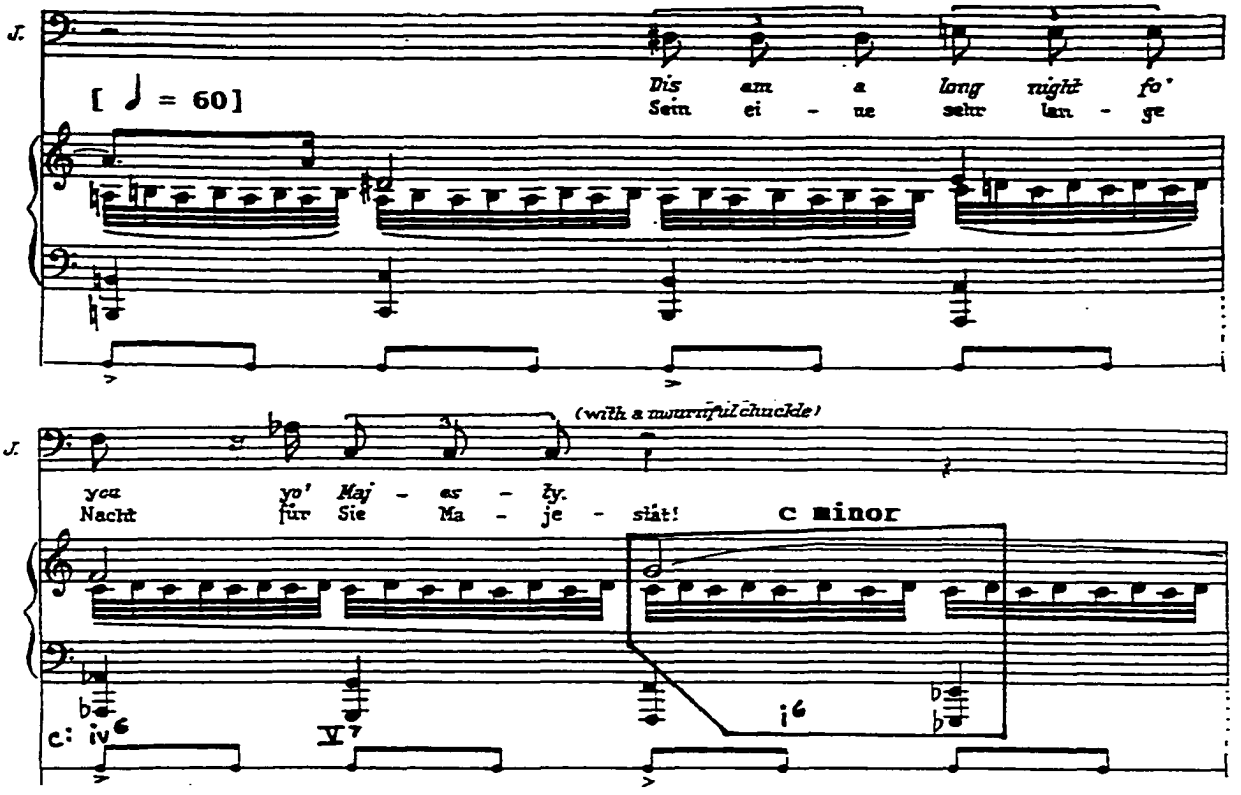
Ex. 7.5: Gruenberg, Emperor Jones, Act II, piano-vocal score, p. 89



Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Jones's uneasiness in this atmosphere is conveyed by a restless inner-voice trill which belies his veneer of self-deprecating confidence. Here again, the Straussian orchestral effect is supported by triadic sonorities that are nearly functional in their progression to C minor:
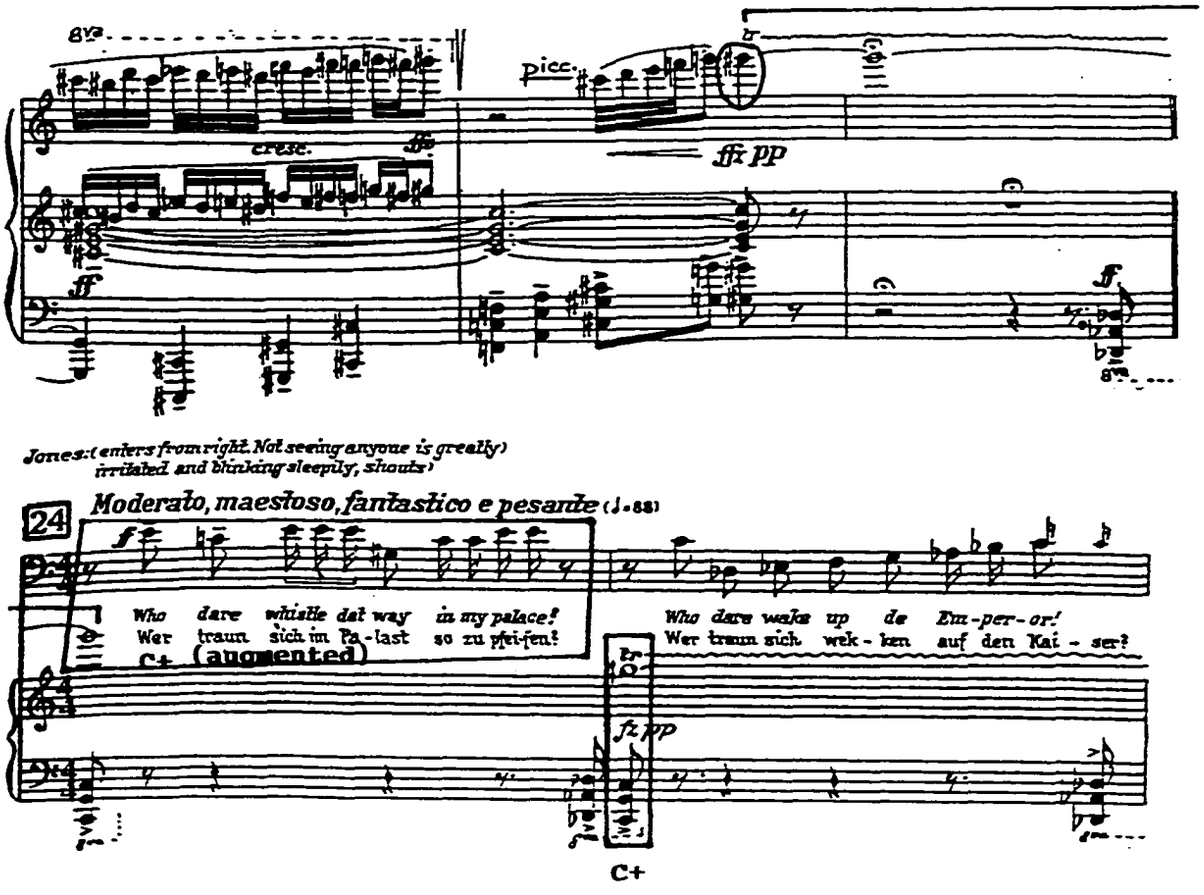
Ex. 7.6: Gruenberg, Emperor Jones, Act II, piano-vocal score, pp. 93-94



Other instrumental effects throughout the score include a sustained whistle-like tone in the piccolo which unnerves Jones, both in his palace and in the forest when it accompanies his first hallucinatory episode. In the first instance, shown in example 7.7, the piccolo's G♯ acts as a functional tone in the augmented triad with which Jones makes his vocal entrance in the opera:

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Ex. 7.7: Gruenberg, Emperor Jones, Act I, piano-vocal score, pp. 20-21
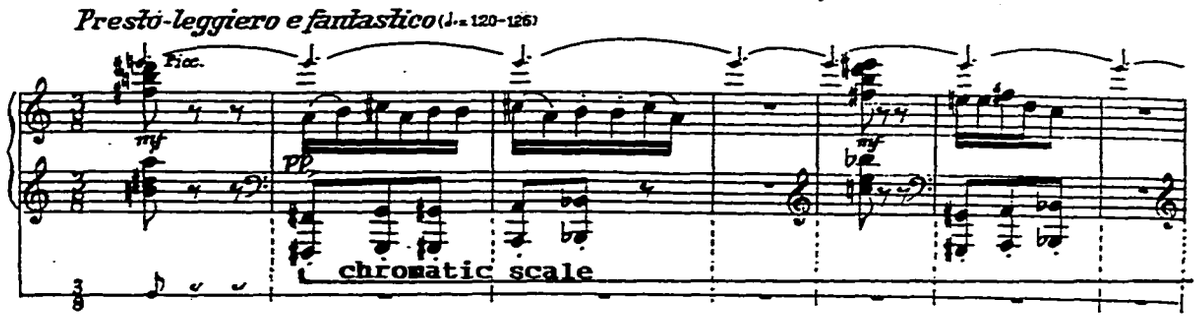


In the second occurrence, shown in example 7.8, the music is more freely atonal, but Gruenberg utilizes another chromatically moving bass line (here, spanning the entire chromatic scale between F♯ and G♭ an octave above) as the structural underpinning of the passage:
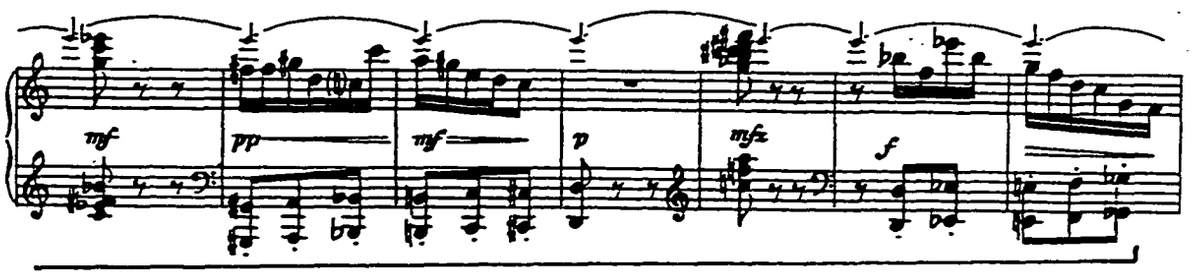
Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Ex. 7.8: Gruenberg, Emperor Jones, Act II, piano-vocal score, p. 98

(The first of the scenes on the upper stage has mysteriously lit up, and the figure of the Negro, Jeff, can be discerned crouching on his haunches. He is middle-aged, thin, brown in color, is dressed in a Pullman porter's uniform, cap, etc.
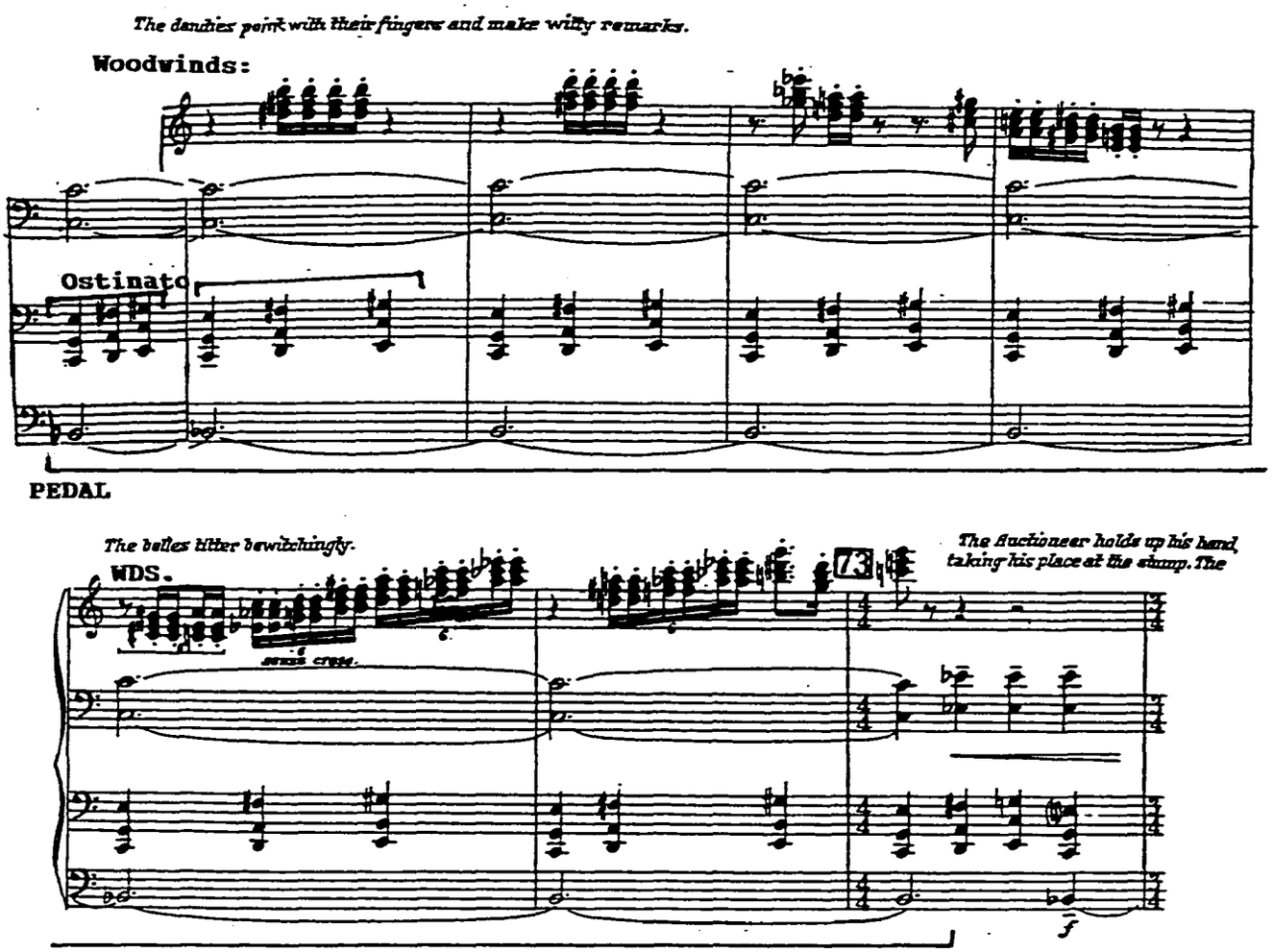


(He is throwing a pair of dice on the ground before him, picking them up, shaking them, casting them out with a regular, rigid mechanical movement of an automaton.! Jones, with his back to the scene, takes a step forward, then stops-worriedly)



The woodwind group produces an eerie psychological effect similar to that of the piccolo when it is used descriptively in the auction vision, shown in example 7.9, to depict the tittering laughter of the spectators. Here, the winds play a series of parallel major and minor triads in root and first inversion positions over a unifying ostinato on the pitch series C, D, and E, over which a repeating sequence of three widely spaced triads (C major, D major, and C augmented) is constructed. Another unifying device for the passage is a pedal point on B♭, a non-functional harmonic tone in this context. The passage is another illustration of Gruenberg's predominant technique throughout the opera of combining procedures and sonorities of tonal music in an original and somewhat unorthodox manner:

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

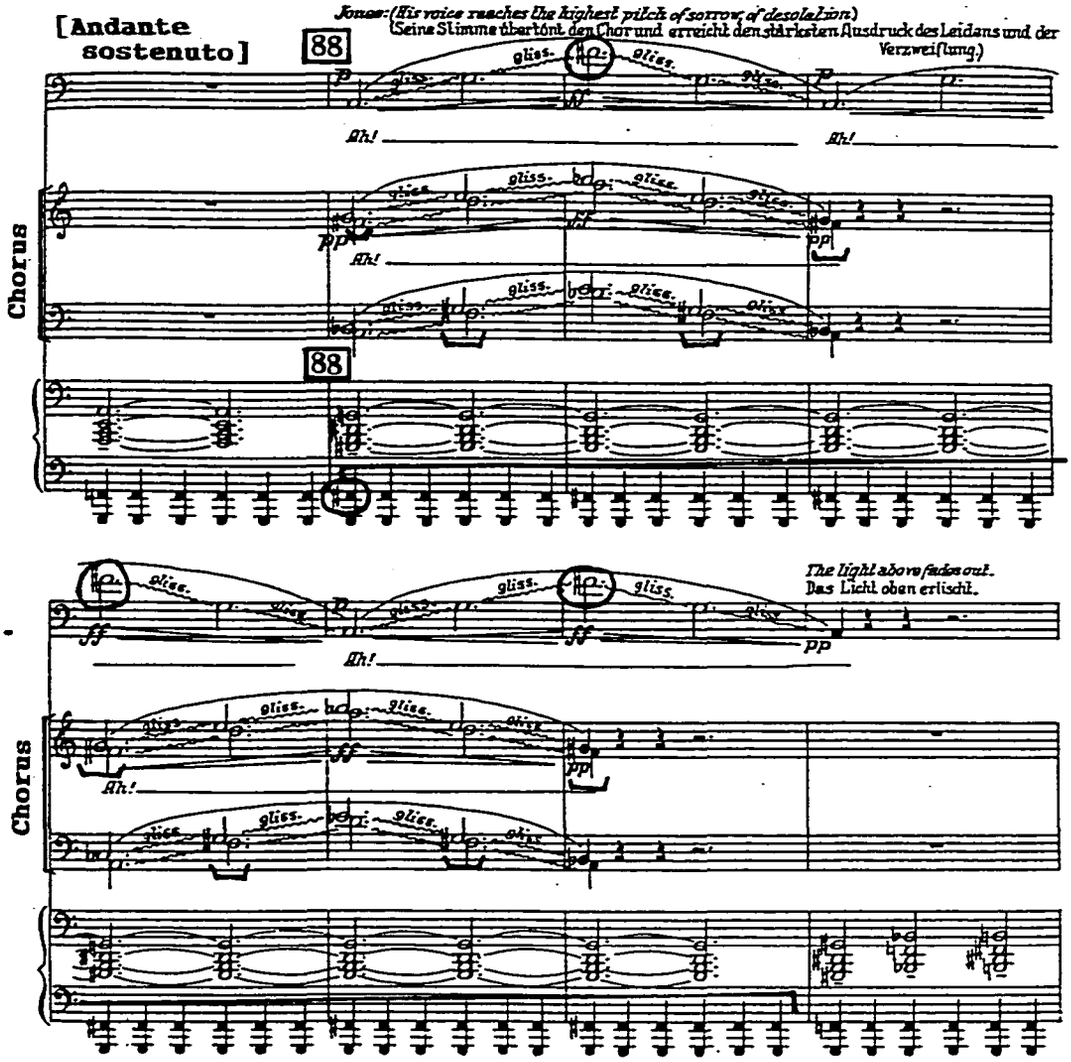
Ex. 7.9: Gruenberg, Emperor Jones, Act II, piano-vocal score, pp. 132-33



Gruenberg also utilized his chorus for expressionist vocal effects, as in an eerie series of pianissimo vocal glissandi that emerge as melancholy wailing during the slaveship vision. Jones's vocal line joins the chorus's pitch continuum (another modernist device) among three tone clusters in both parallel and contrary motion. Beginning at rehearsal 88, the pitch F♯, the sole common tone among all the clusters and the orchestral accompaniment, is continuously sounded as part of the supporting orchestral sonority and acts as another pedal point which unifies the passage:

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Ex. 7.10: Gruenberg, Emperor Jones, Act II, piano-vocal score, p. 151
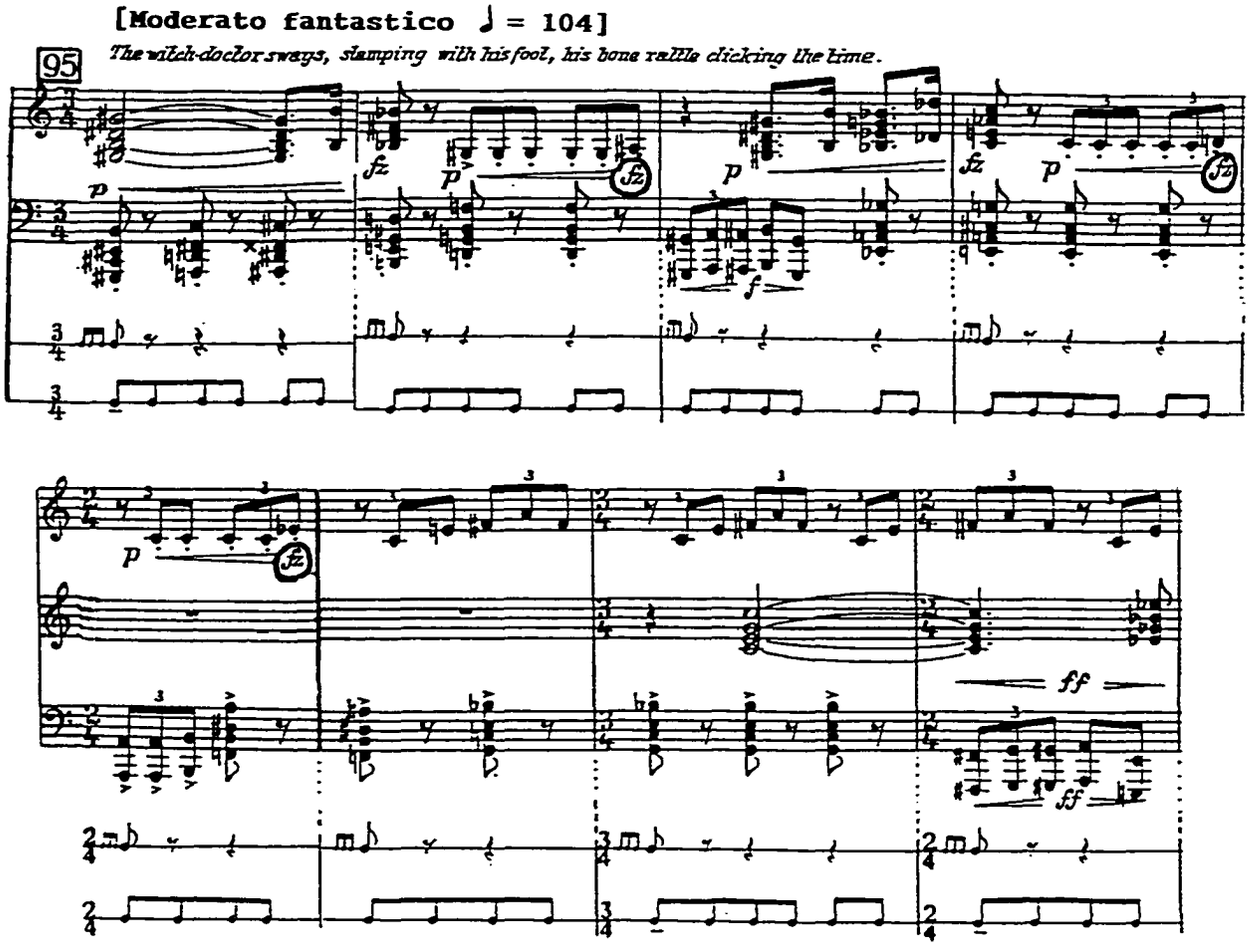


Rhythm is a crucial facet of the deliberately primitivist sound of much of the score, of which the relentless drumbeat (usually heard in a hypnotically regular four-beat cycle of repetition) is the principal manifestation. Given the importance of this factor, however, the opera does not contain a great deal of metrical variety. One departure from this is the ritualistic dance of the Congo Witch-Doctor, shown in example 7.11, which is unique in the score in its shifting between duple and triple meters. The rhythmic effect created by the mildly asymmetrical patterns thus created, as well as by the placement of *sforzandi* on the weak part of the final beats in several measures, is somewhat redolent of similar effects heard in Le sacre du

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

printemps, though considerably lacking in the potent visceral qualities achieved by Stravinsky. Gruenberg's music does, however, support the erratic motions of the scene's solo dancer, whose stage directions require him to "strut noiselessly, with a queer prancing step": [58]

Ex. 7.11: Gruenberg, Emperor Jones, Act II, piano-vocal score, pp. 159-60



The opera also evinces few of the rhythmic influences of jazz, ragtime, or popular musical styles that had dominated Gruenberg's output during the 1920s. They are used only occasionally for characterization and dramatic effect, as in example 7.12, a bravado declaration of Jones to Smithers from Act 1 which contains some jaunty dotted figures (these recur intermittently in the Witch-Doctor dance discussed above). Although in example 7.12 the figures are almost
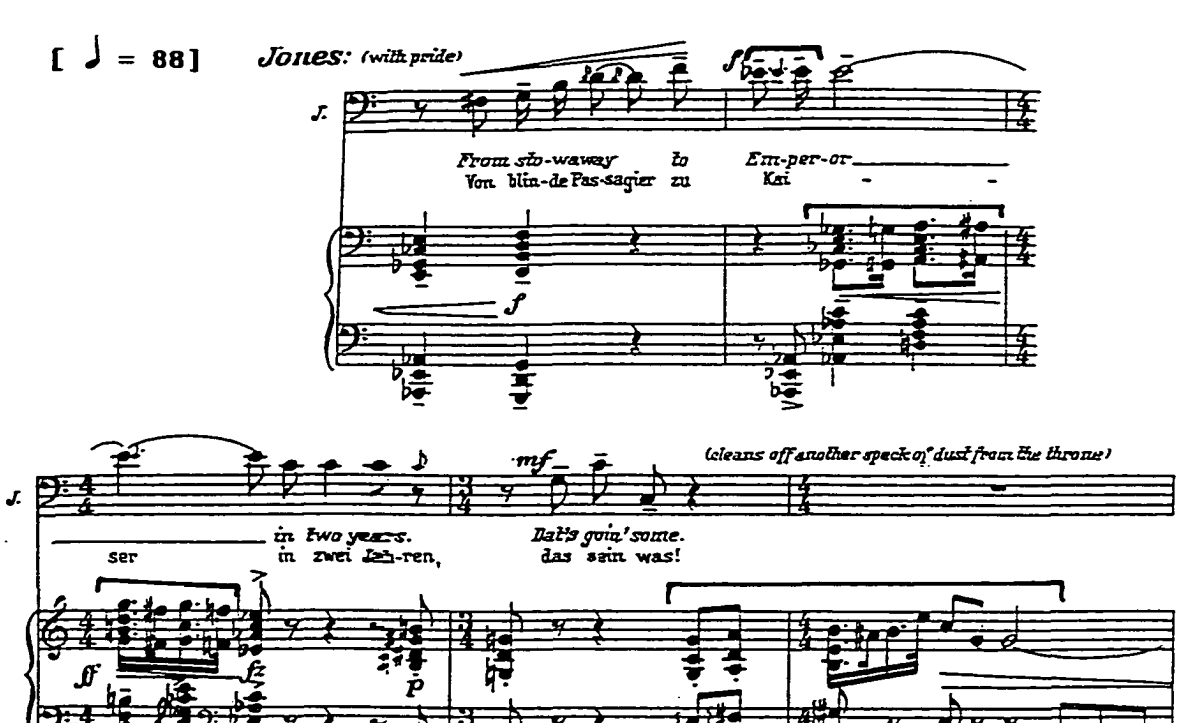
---

58 Nisbett, *Gruenberg Life and Work*, 259.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

completely assigned to the orchestra and utilize virtually no syncopation, the closing instrumental commentary provided for Jones's stage action of cleaning a speck of dust from his throne is a witty touch:

Ex. 7.12: Gruenberg, Emperor Jones, Act I, piano-vocal score, p. 27



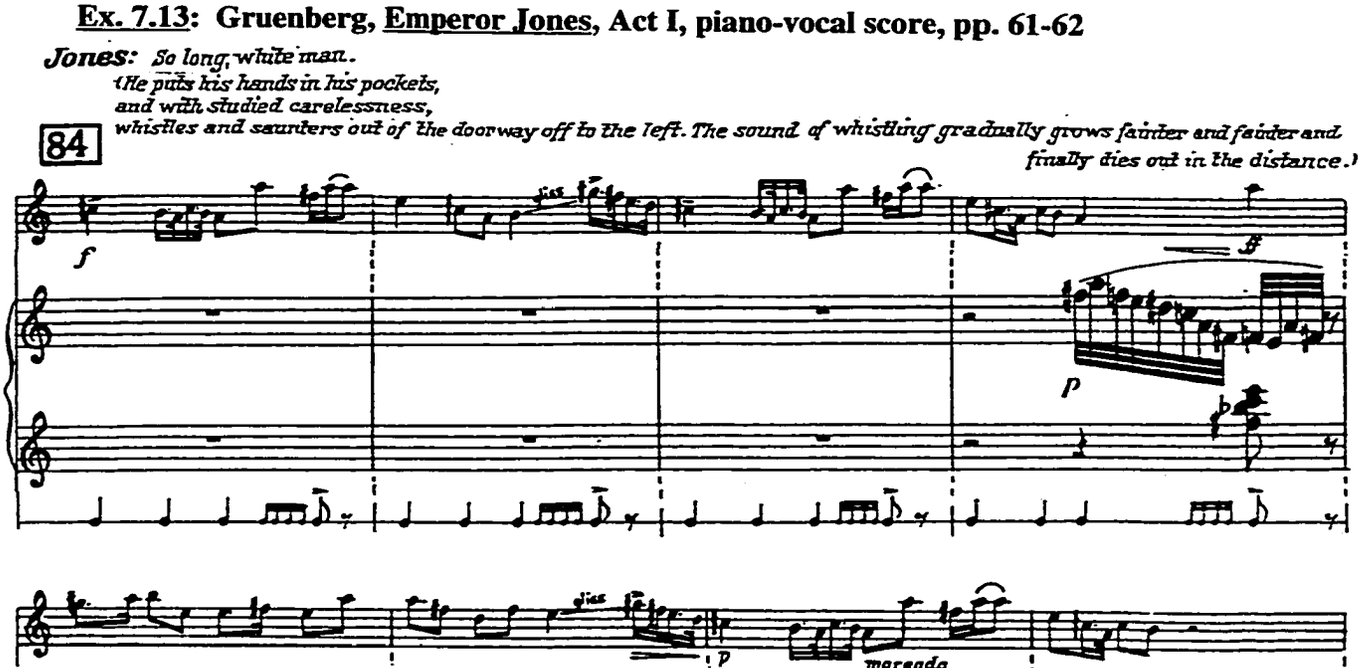
The four-note dotted sixteenth rhythm was a particular favorite of Gruenberg's that Nisbett has traced to a frequent cadential pattern of popular music of the 1920s.[59] It recurs in the opera with the quotation of a strain of Stephen Foster's "Old Folks at Home," and effectively conveys Jones's hubris when he casually whistles it upon quitting his palace:

---

59 Nisbett, *American Idiom*, 30.

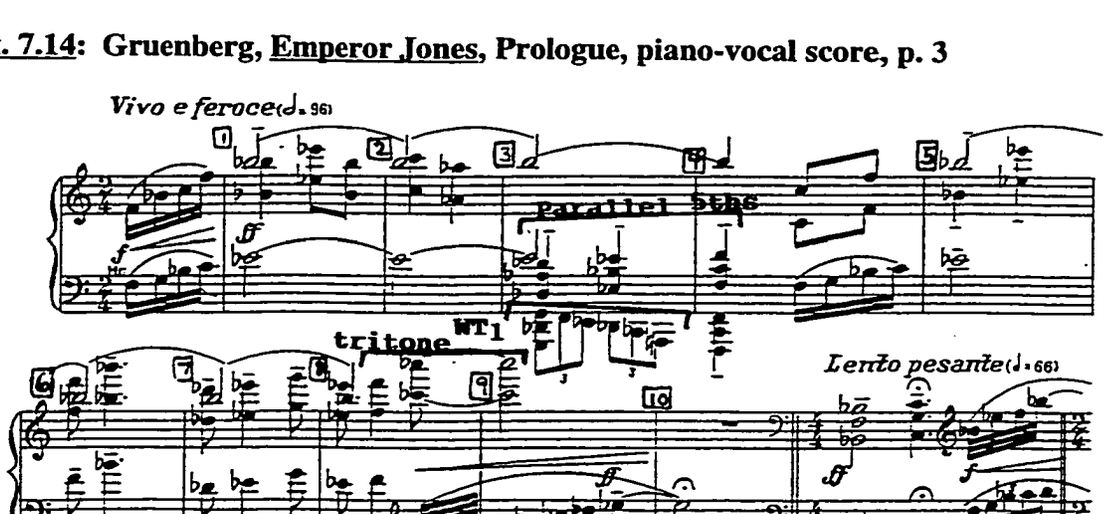
Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Ex. 7.13: Gruenberg, Emperor Jones, Act I, piano-vocal score, pp. 61-62



The predominant harmonic language utilized by Gruenberg in the opera, a mildly dissonant idiom more indebted to the French-Russian school of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries than to the Viennese atonalists, is heard from the opening of the orchestral prologue and immediately establishes the composer's intent to distance himself from common-practice tonality:

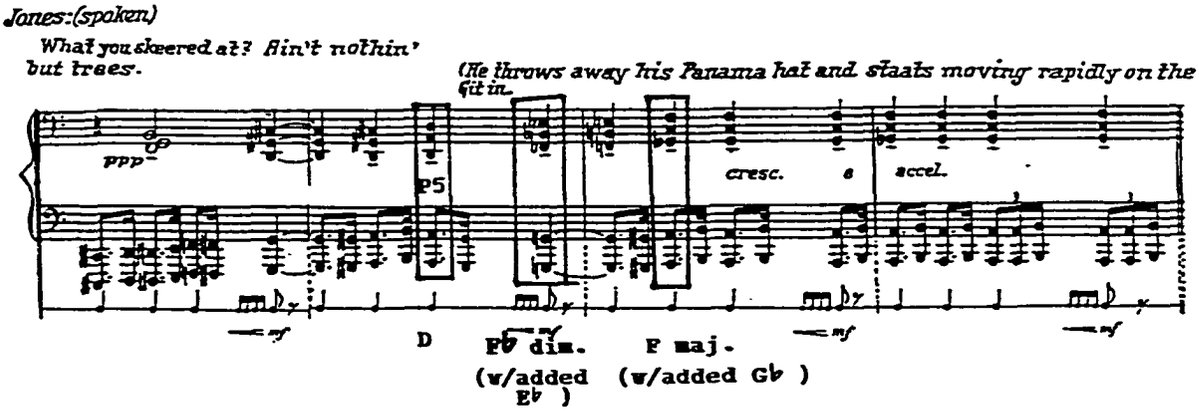
Ex. 7.14: Gruenberg, Emperor Jones, Prologue, piano-vocal score, p. 3



Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The intervallic content of the passage, saturated with major and minor seconds as well as the perfect fourth, fifth and octave, evinces Gruenberg's abandonment of traditional techniques of functional harmony. Yet he did not move as far in the direction of modernism as he might have intended, for elements such as the consecutive fourths in the opening measures, the appearance at m. 3 of the whole-tone scale WT_1 (for its construction around C♯, pitch-class 1), and the conclusion of the opening statement on the interval of a tritone in m. 8 were already present in the music of early twentieth-century innovators such as Scriabin, Satie, and Debussy. While parallel open fifth sonorities such as those in m. 3 are the most common configuration that appears in the score, Gruenberg does make use of some parallel quartal constructions, as in the scene in which Jones forces himself to enter the forest shown in example 7.15. Here again, however, the harmonic language has not been radically altered, for the underpinning of a crawling chromatic bass line transforms two of the quartal sonorities into parallel chromatically altered triadic constructions built on E and F, successively; these in turn are preceded by Gruenberg's interruption of his quartal series with an open fifth implying a triad built on D:

Ex. 7.15: Gruenberg, Emperor Jones, Act II, piano-vocal score, p. 86

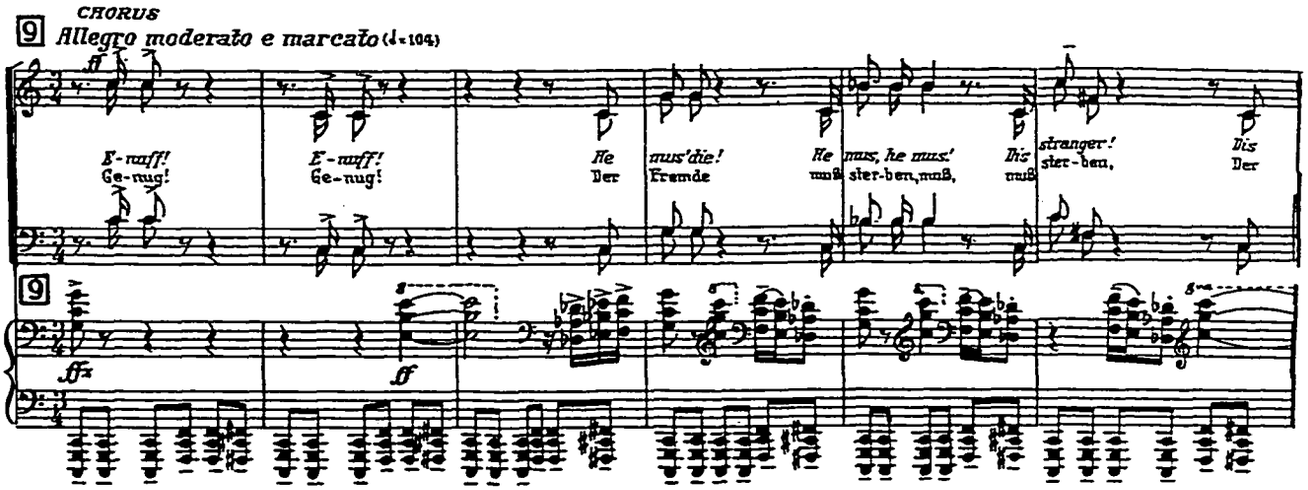


Gruenberg's music nevertheless does succeed in achieving a pungent modernist sound through its high degree of unresolved dissonance. In lieu of a truly atonal language, however, the composer often organizes his non-functional sonorities around a key center in an

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

adaptation of the concept of tonal centricity found in much of Stravinsky's music of the preceding two decades. Nisbett has identified C as the central pitch-class around which half of the opera's music circulates, as seen in the initial choral passage shown in example 7.16:[60]

Ex. 7.16: Gruenberg, Emperor Jones, Prologue, piano-vocal score, p. 6



Centricity around this single pitch-class serves the important function of providing formal unity across the opera's disparate scenes, and acts as a foil to the disjunct expressionist effects that might otherwise disrupt the composer's goal of continuous dramatic flow.

Another unifying device found in the opera is the recurrence of musical materials, both within and across large sections. Nisbett has analyzed the brief prologue's development of its opening musical elements shown in example 7.14; of particular note is the prologue's conclusion with a restatement of its opening figure transposed up a whole tone to reflect a centricity on C, in a rare instance of motivic transformation in the score.[61] An occurrence of development of materials across larger sections is shown in examples 7.17(a) and (b), where

---

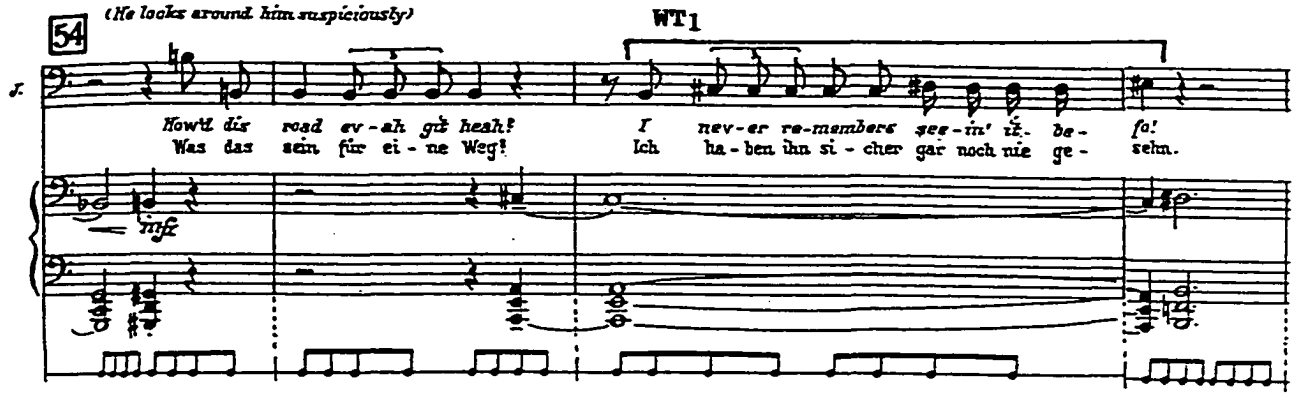
60 Nisbett, *Gruenberg Life and Work*, 326. Nisbett found that a substantial portion of Gruenberg's music generally exhibited the harmonic characteristic of centricity around the pitch-class C.

61 Ibid., 232.
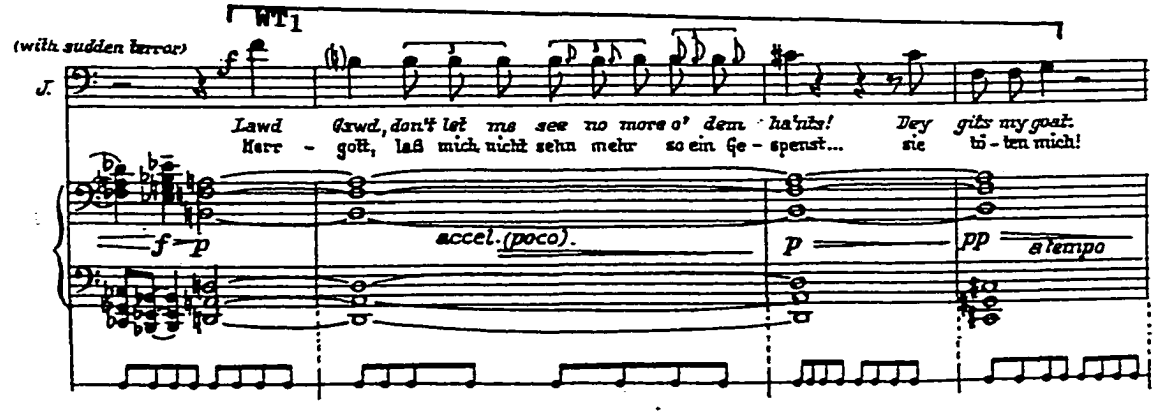
Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

fragments from the whole-tone scale WT_1 heard in m. 3 of the prologue are utilized in Jones's vocal line during an Act 2 hallucinatory episode, where they convey an effective sense of his bewildered disorientation:

Ex. 7.17(a): Gruenberg, Emperor Jones, Act II, piano-vocal score, p. 111



Ex. 7.17(b): Gruenberg, Emperor Jones, Act II, piano-vocal score, p. 111



The prevailing orchestral texture in which the opera's harmonic language is couched involves a great deal of parallel voice leading. At times this results in precise and rather static instrumental sound blocks over which the melodic line ranges throughout multiple registers, a prominent feature of Stravinskyan neoclassicism. The Russian modernist utilized this texture prominently in Oedipus Rex (1927),[62] during the concluding cabaletta of Jocaste's aria, shown in
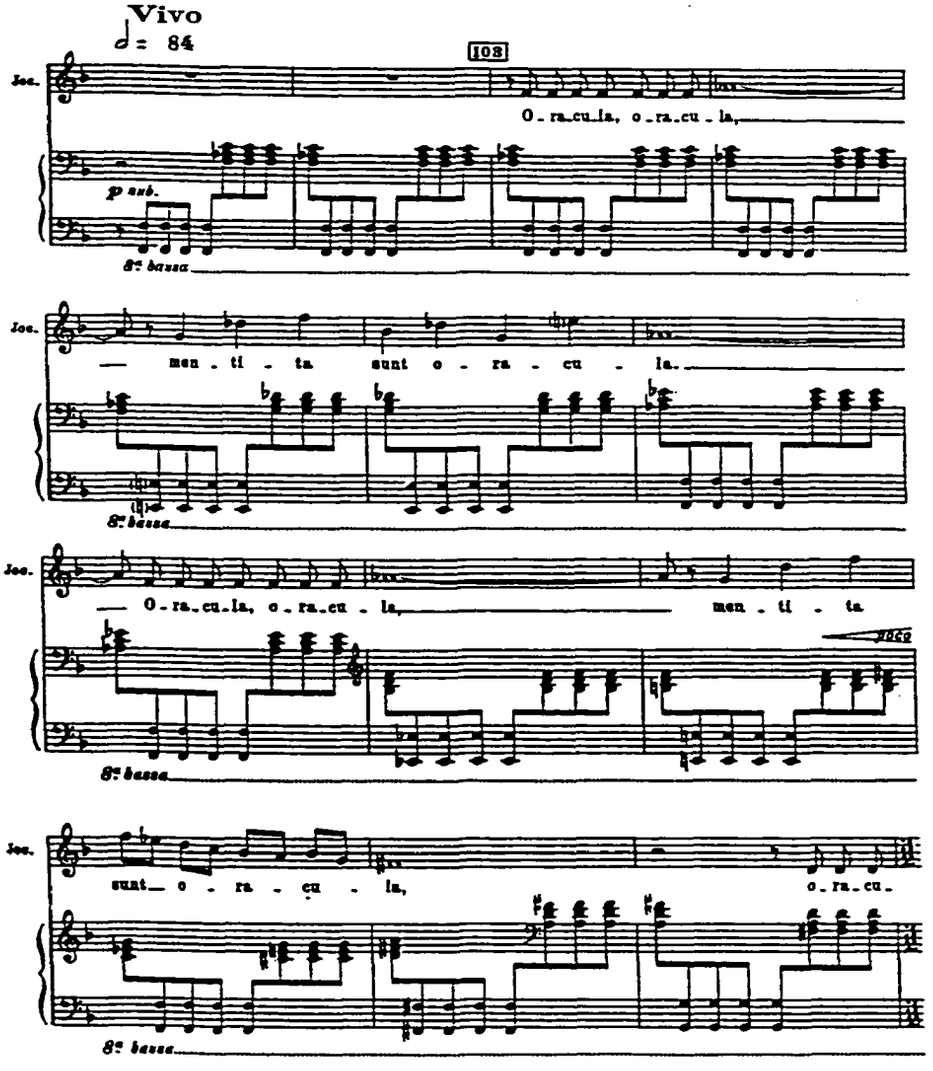
---

62 The technique also appears prominently in his later neoclassical opera The Rake's Progress (1953).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
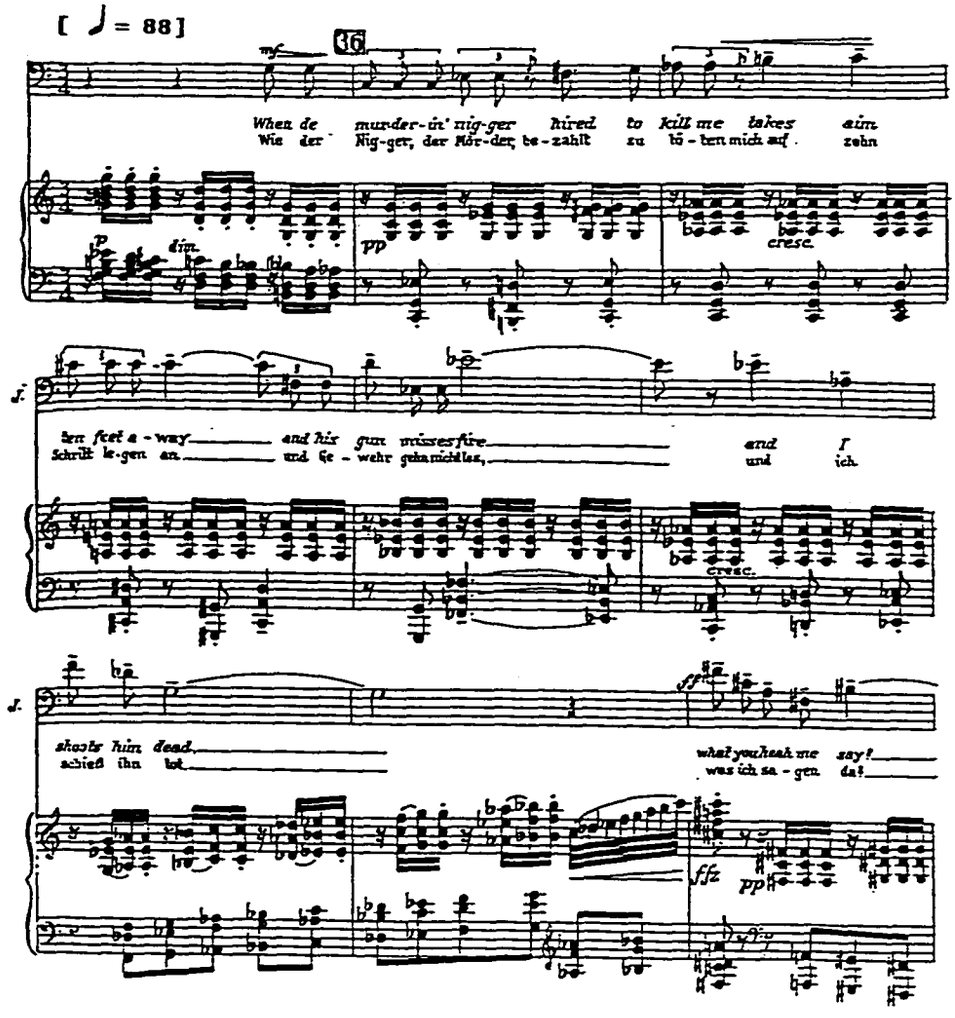
example 7.18(a). It may have influenced Gruenberg in his setting of Jones's Act 1 narrative, in which the Emperor describes to Smithers the events surrounding his dramatic rise to power, shown in example 7.18(b):

Ex. 7.18(a): Stravinsky, Oedipus Rex, Act II, aria of Jocaste



Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Ex. 7.18(b): Gruenberg, Emperor Jones, Act I, piano-vocal score, pp. 32-33



While both composers utilize triadically-conceived constructions from which the pitches of their vocal lines derive, Stravinsky's harmonic movement differs significantly from that of Gruenberg in its sense of progression in the excerpt from F minor to D major. In contrast, Gruenberg maintains the parallel voice leading that dominates much of his score. While this procedure indeed conducts the music through several key centers, Gruenberg's writing ultimately lacks the power that Stravinsky conveyed through a more hierarchical manipulation of sonorities.
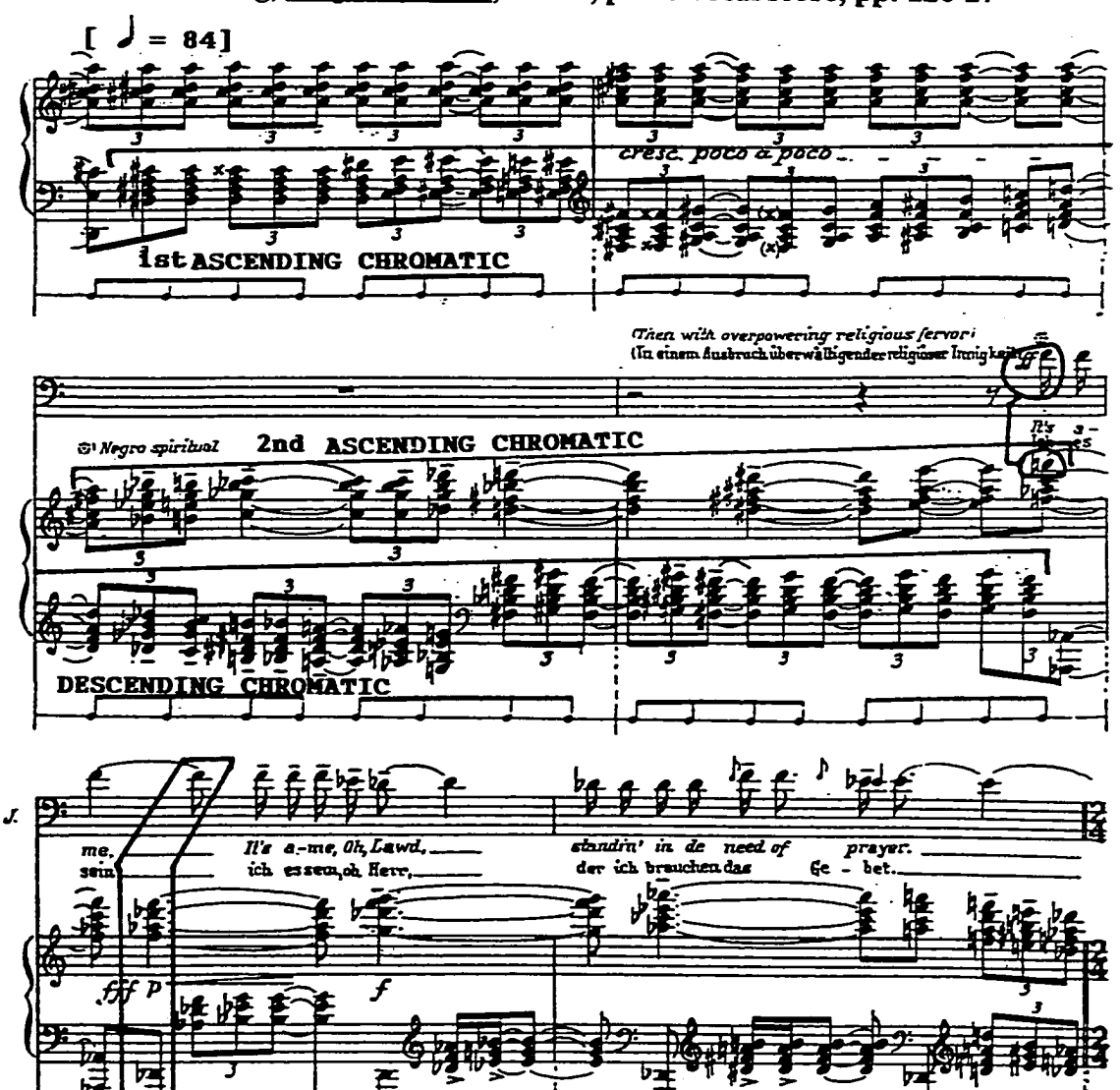
Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

This problem raises a basic stylistic issue underlying much of The Emperor Jones. Gruenberg clearly wished to write in a modernist vein free from the strictures of common-practice tradition, but was disinclined to structure his music as rigorously as that of the Viennese modernists. While many major twentieth-century composers such as Stravinsky, Bartók, and Ives succeeded in producing highly original and effective modernist scores that did not make principal use of specific formal techniques such as serialism, Gruenberg had not yet developed a personal idiom capable of an equivalent level of expressive power. Thus, much of his opera's music gives the impression of wandering throughout the tonal spectrum without any specific direction or destination, a problem The Emperor Jones ironically shares with Peter Ibbetson.

Yet Gruenberg did produce some remarkably effective passages in the opera. The composer's inspired interpolation of the Negro spiritual "Standin' in the need of prayer," shown in example 7.19, which occurs at the climax of Jones's terror and provides the principal character with his only opportunity in the opera for lyrical musical expansion, is such a moment. Gruenberg utilizes his previously heard strategy of juxtaposing a non-functional series of sonorities with a chromatic bass line underpinning, but modifies it by embedding the scale in an inner voice, where it ascends throughout its full compass before descending as far as F♯. Simultaneous with this descent, a second chromatic scale ascends to a culmination on F, the opening pitch of the D♭ major spiritual excerpt. Gruenberg's expansion of the chromatic line into a chain of thickly-textured triadic sonorities ascending principally by semitone produces an ornamental virtuoso effect redolent of Liszt, yet it provides a strikingly vibrant musical and dramatic effect that stands out as a high point of the score:

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

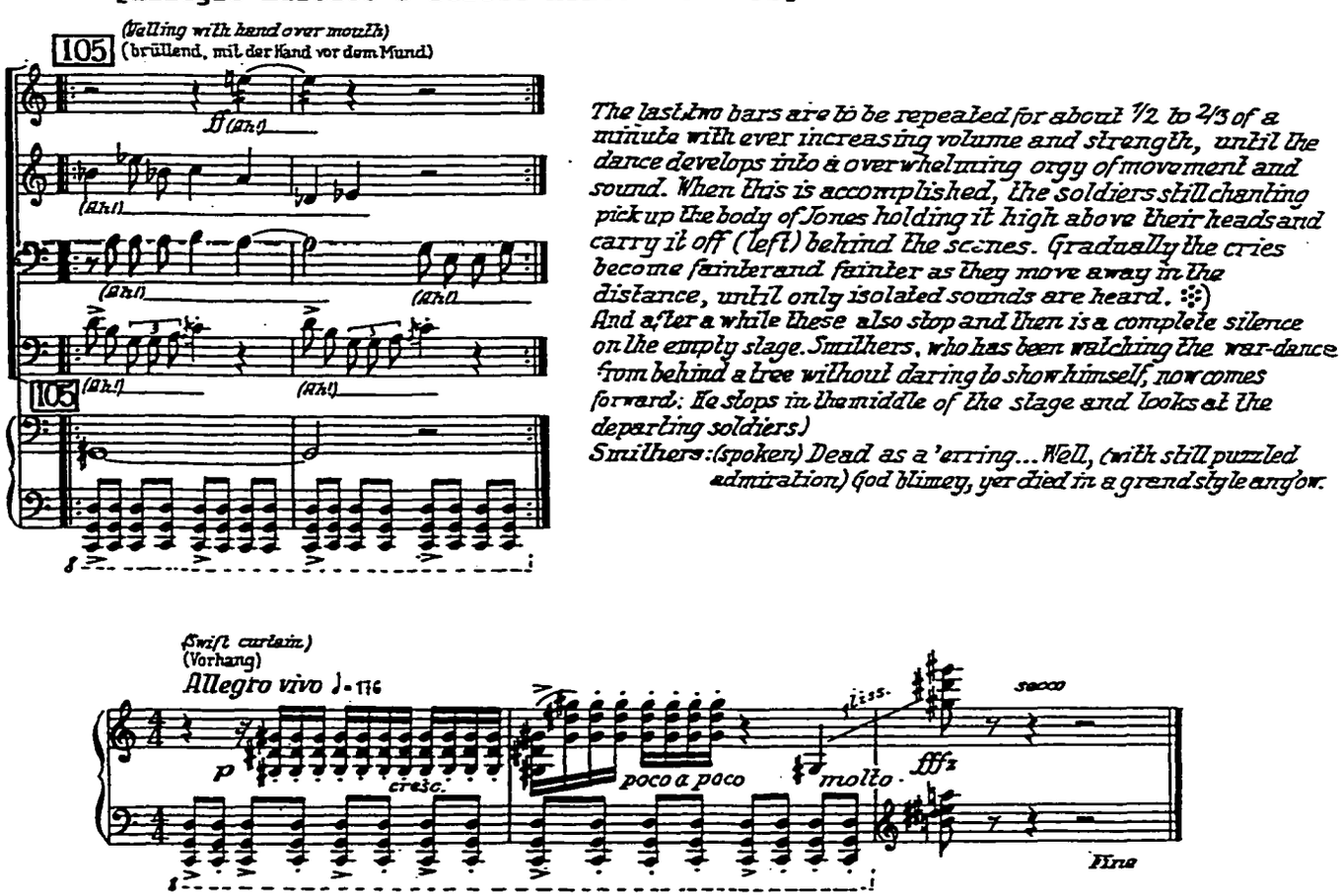
Ex. 7.19: Gruenberg, Emperor Jones, Act II, piano-vocal score, pp. 126-27



Parallel open fifth constructions are also prominent in the final war dance which concludes the opera, as shown in example 7.20. The rather pedestrian closing measures (which, given the *Allegro vivo* tempo and dramatic crescendo from *p* to *fffz*, amount to a final dramatic orchestral effect) are preceded by the opera's most authentically avant-garde passage: a two-measure cycle of polytonality among four groups of the divided chorus that also makes use of rudimentary aleatoric procedure in its direction to predicate the musical repetition on the progress of the stage action during the removal of Jones's body.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Ex. 7.20: Gruenberg, Emperor Jones, Act II, piano-vocal score, p. 174



The overall dependence of the opera's score upon surface effect accounted for an initial *réclame* even beyond that normally generated by the American premieres, as substantiated by Gatti-Casazza's later evaluation (see note 2 above). Yet, the lack of deeper musical penetration into the drama's justly renowned characterization and psychological elements was most likely responsible for the opera's eventual failure to achieve a permanent position in the American repertory.

The operatic premiere of The Emperor Jones proved to be as exciting an occasion as that of Ibbetson, with a large and noteworthy audience in attendance. A unique sense of dramatic tension hung over the theater, for Gatti-Casazza had reputedly confessed the

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

day before the premiere he wasn't sure whether the event would be "a terrific fiasco or a tremendous success."[63] The city's two most influential dailies, the Times and the Herald Tribune, placed their reviews on the front page of the Sunday editions, and Gruenberg received congratulatory telegrams from his American colleague John Alden Carpenter ("a very great achievement") and British conductor-composer Eugene Goossens ("a splendid addition to opera in the vernacular") after they heard the national radio broadcast of the performance, which was significantly the Metropolitan's first world premiere of any opera to be broadcast.[64] The composer also received plaudits from Randall Thompson, who reviewed the opera for Modern Music: "Gruenberg has fully matched the virtuosity of O'Neill. As might have been expected, it is now proved that we have the technic to create American opera."[65] A similar tinge of nationalist pride was evident in the comments of Leonard Liebling: "This score is easily the most distinctive, convincing, artistically powerful that has been written by any American composer. It is worth a dozen of the new modern foreign importations which we have heard at the Metropolitan during the past decade."[66] Olin Downes, a great supporter of his friend Kahn's Americanist vision at the Metropolitan, voiced similar sentiments, in spite of reservations as to whether the music could stand on its own merits:

> [W]hatever the ultimate rating of libretto and score, [Emperor Jones] is incontestably . . . the finest American opera as yet produced anywhere, and . . . the first American opera by a composer whose dramatic instinct and intuition for

---

63 Goss, Modern Music-Makers, 92.

64 Telegrams from Carpenter, Chicago, and Goossens, Cincinnati, 7 January 1933. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gruenberg artist file.

65 *The Emperor at the Opera,* Modern Music 10 (January-February 1933): 109.

66 *"Emperor Jones," New American Opera, Has World Premiere at Metropolitan,* New York American, 8 January 1933.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> the theatre seems unfailing, and whose musical technic is characterized by a very complete modern knowledge and a reckless mastery of his means. [67]

Nearly every member of the sizable New York press corps in attendance expressed the same musico-dramatic reservations that had attended Peter Ibbetson, with the Herald Tribune's Lawrence Gilman again the most outspoken commentator:

> It is not easy to feel that Mr. Gruenberg's musical additions to the drama are truly contributive. . . . On the contrary, there are many passages in which it seemed intrusive and superfluous.
>
> The score as a whole, indeed, seems to me negligible from almost every point of view, though it is a pleasure to recognize the craft and earnestness with which Mr. Gruenberg has gone about his unproductive task. [68]

And Musical America editor A. Walter Kramer once again agitated the issue of a distorted influence of Wagnerian music drama on American opera composers generally, this time with regard to the predominantly symphonic conception of their dramatic works:

> For years we have contended that one of the greatest faults in our native operas is the inability (or is it the conscious highbrow unwillingness?) of our composers to write a vocal line with some sense of beauty, that can be sung. There is hardly a successful work that does not adhere to this. Yet our composers kill their chances year after year by writing instrumental parts for the principal roles in their operas. . . . [T]he public insists on singing parts that are something more than declamation. The music drama is, I admit, a truer form than the old opera, but what Wagner began and Strauss continued, our composers have departed from in a manner that spells inevitable doom for their works. [69]

Yet the performance opportunity Gruenberg provided in the principal role was unquestionably brilliant, and much of the universal acclaim Lawrence Tibbett received somewhat ironically credited him, together with O'Neill, for the opera's public success:

---

67 *"The Emperor Jones" Triumphs as Opera,* New York Times, 8 January 1933, 1.

68 *"Emperor Jones" as Opera Fills the Metropolitan at Premiere,* New York Herald Tribune, 8 January 1933, 19.

69 *Emperor Jones, in Opera Guise, Has World Premiere,* Musical America 53 (10 January 1933): 5.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> It was, beyond question, [Tibbett's] afternoon, his and O'Neill's—though that lonely and inimitable genius was nowhere to be seen. [70]

Indeed, Tibbett's achievement of the role's technical demands, from the mastery of its dialect to the relentless athleticism, elicited rare praise from the Sun's W. J. Henderson:

> His impersonation was commanding. It mastered and moved, excited and thrilled the great audience. It was brutality incarnate and plasticity perfected. Whatever the fate of the opera, this realization of its one figure will not be forgotten. [71]

The modernist veneer of Gruenberg's writing was welcomed in nearly all the professional commentary, and the use of *Sprechstimme* was credited for providing the work's effective pacing. Francis Perkins commented: "Mr. Gruenberg's score can be credited with . . . avoiding that impression of retarded dialogue which has been a drawback in not a few American operas;"[72] and Pitts Sanborn felt that it was only "[in] singing the words lost clearness and the pace turned leaden."[73] Henderson even posited a progressive (if inaccurate) line of development between Jones and the eight-year-old Wozzeck: "Alban Berg may have founded a new school of opera, for assuredly his 'Wozzeck' acquired a full-blooded Afro-American brother . . . on the stage of the Metropolitan Opera House."[74]

But the question of whether Gruenberg's score had initiated an American modernist dramatic style was seriously debated in the press as part of the overriding question on

---

70 Gilman, *"Emperor Jones" as Opera,* 19. O'Neill rarely attended performances of his works. An interviewer wrote in 1933: "[H]e has seen neither play nor motion picture in several years. . . . As for *The Emperor Jones*, he is frankly more interested in [the film adaptation with Paul Robeson] than he is in the operatic version of the play, presented at the Metropolitan last season." Richard Watts, Jr., New York Herald Tribune, 9 September 1933, 7, quoted in Estrin, Conversations, 136.

71 *"Emperor Jones" Has Premiere,* New York Sun, 9 January 1933.

72 *Tibbett Scores Again in Role of the Emperor,* New York Herald Tribune, 2 January 1934.

73 *Week-End Music in Review,* New York World Telegram, 9 January 1933, 48.

74 Henderson, *"Emperor Jones" Has Premiere.*

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the advisability of adapting great dramas to the lyric stage. Gilman wondered whether Emperor was an appropriate candidate for an operatic setting: "Some of us have doubted whether O'Neill's superb play is the sort of drama to which music can profitably be added. . . . It has its own sufficing and self-contained element of musical intensification, that of the famous and incessant drum-beat."[75] Critics Paul Rosenfeld and Arthur Mendel agreed:

> What the music actually does is externally to accentuate what was already given by O'Neill, to work theatrically on the spectator while leaving the playwright [to] perform the veritable labor and touch the emotions. . . . [F]orced to rival a lot of other and similar sounds, the drum note is far less impressive in the opera than it was in the play. [76]

> By superimposing music on the drumbeat, which is thus heard only intermittently, [Gruenberg] has destroyed the effect of that device. . . . Even considered as incidental music, Gruenberg's work is definitely a liability, I think. [77]

Nearly thirty-five years after he witnessed the excitement of the opera's premiere, Howard Taubman continued to maintain that the often impressive exterior surface of the score did not penetrate to the emotional depths found in drama-cum-opera masterpieces like Figaro, Otello, Pelléas, and Wozzeck:

> Gruenberg's idiom was what I would call undistinguished international. It provided the singers with vocal lines of no personality, and it filled the background with a running commentary of instrumental sound that satisfied no more than the minimal, superficial expectations of contrast, thunderous climax and, naturally, the persistent beat of the drums. [78]

Nonetheless, he acknowledged the tremendous vogue initially generated by the opera: "People in the swim felt they had to see it."

---

[75] Gilman, *"Emperor Jones" as Opera,* 19.

[76] Rosenfeld, Discoveries of a Music Critic, 296.

[77] Mendel, *Music: "The Emperor Jones,"* The Nation 136 (15 March 1933): 297-98.

[78] *The Measure of Greatness,* Opera News 31 (1 April 1967): 9.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

A prime beneficiary of the opera's premiere season was Lawrence Tibbett, who starred in productions given in Chicago, San Francisco, and Los Angeles that same year and brought the role back to the Metropolitan for a second season. Thereafter the role was taken on tour by black baritone Jules Bledsoe, but a projected European phase was severely truncated by the inability to include Germany and Austria.[79] Over the next decade, performances declined as the excitement of the premiere dissipated. In addition, Cos Cob Press became defunct (its catalogue was subsumed by Arrow Music Press in 1938),[80] and other publishers willing to bring out a new edition of the opera were stymied by Gruenberg's condition that they take many of his unpublished works as well.[81] Paul Robeson, who starred in the 1933 film adaptation of the drama, sang concert excerpts from the opera in 1940 with the Philadelphia Orchestra under Eugene Ormandy, an admirer of the world premiere broadcast,[82] and Tibbett even attempted a staged revival in Chicago under Fausto Cleva in 1946,[83] but a planned television broadcast in the early 1950s by the NBC Opera Theatre with William Warfield in the title role was cancelled twice due to perceived political ramifications.[84] The atavistic elements in the play (which O'Neill further developed in The Hairy Ape with respect to its central white character), as well as the

---

79 The only European representation that can be documented was a 1934 Dutch performance in The Hague. Daily American, 20 December 1951, Gruenberg clipping file, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

80 Carol J. Oja, *Cos Cob Press and the American Composer*, Music Library Association Notes 45 (December 1988): 246.

81 Nisbett, *Gruenberg Life and Work*, 51.

82 Letter from Ormandy, Minneapolis to Gruenberg, 7 January 1933. Gruenberg clippings file, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

83 Fausto Cleva, Chicago Opera Company to Gruenberg, Beverly Hills, California, 14 October 1946. Ibid.

84 Sidney Lohman, *News of TV and Radio: N.B.C. Opera Troubles*, New York Times, 26 November 1950, sec. 2, 11; Olin Downes, *"Emperor Jones," Slated for N.B.C. Series, Defended as Suitable for Showing*, New York Times, 9 August 1953, sec. 2, 5.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.





FIGURE 7.1: The Emperor Jones
The complex role of Brutus Jones was a highlight in the careers of both Paul Robeson (with Dudley Diggs in the 1933 film version directed by Dudley Murphy) [courtesy Paul Robeson, Jr.] and Lawrence Tibbett (1933 Metropolitan premiere of Louis Gruenberg's opera) [Metropolitan Opera Archives].

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

depiction of black exploitation by a black protagonist who gives the appearance of functioning as a surrogate white imperialist, thus providing ostensible validation for the prevailing racial ideology,[85] were viewed as racially pejorative in much of the black community, a substantial segment of whom had opposed the drama from its 1920 premiere. Defenses of the work were offered by some black intellectuals, as well as performers like Gilpin, Bledsoe, and Robeson, but the play remains a controversial work.[86]

Nevertheless, the piece continued to generate interest as both drama and opera. The Theatre Guild presented it as a radio drama in 1945 (five years before the NBC opera cancellation) and students at Howard University, one of the nation's leading historically black educational institutions, staged the drama in 1953 after plans to produce the opera became impracticable.[87] European interest in the opera resurged after a successful revival at the Rome Teatro dell'Opera instigated by Tullio Serafin, who prepared an Italian translation for the production in which his son-in-law, baritone Nicola Rossi-Lemeni, sang the title role.[88] But plans for a European tour again failed to materialize, this time because Gruenberg refused to allow the opera to be performed in Germany.[89] Several years later it was announced that theatrical producers Norman J. Seaman and Marvin Z. Goldstein had obtained the rights from Gruenberg

---

85 Carolyn T. Brown, *Creative Imitation: Hung Shen's Cultural Translation of Eugene O'Neill's "The Emperor Jones,"* Comparative Literature Studies 22 (Spring 1985): 154.

86 For example, Montgomery Gregory maintained that The Emperor Jones "will tower as a beacon-light of inspiration"; Alain Locke, The New Negro (1925), 157, quoted in D. Krasner, *Gilpin*, 487. On the other hand, W. E. B. Du Bois referred to the play in 1921 as "a splendid tragedy" (*Negro Art*, The Crisis, quoted in D. Krasner, 487), but modified this in 1926 when he wrote that blacks in the theater were "still handicapped and put forth with much hesitation," and cited Lulu Belle and The Emperor Jones as examples. Quoted in D. Krasner, 487.

87 Downes, *"Emperor Jones," Slated for N.B.C. Series.*

88 *Gruenberg's "Emperor Jones" Scores in Rome*, New York Times, 19 December 1951.

89 Nisbett, *Gruenberg Life and Work*, 72.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

for a projected production in London (which had seen Robeson's dramatic portrayal of Jones in the 1920s) and that "an international tour culminating on Broadway might be expected," perhaps with William Warfield alternating in the role with Robeson.[90] However, these plans never came to fruition, and the last opportunity the opera received for a possible revival before Gruenberg's 1964 death, when it was considered by the Metropolitan's new touring National Company, also disappeared when the idea was apparently rejected for the same reasons it had been dropped from the NBC Opera Theatre schedule.[91]

It is ironic that Gruenberg and Taylor should have shared similar artistic fates given the disparity of their musical idioms. But Gruenberg's attempts to obtain another Metropolitan production in the early 1950s, for his full-length opera Volpone (1950; after Ben Jonson), were thwarted, as were Taylor's, by the new Bing administration's limited resources for contemporary opera. Bing himself openly confirmed that the new Stravinsky opera was given precedence over Gruenberg's:

> I am very much afraid there is no hope for us to produce your opera in the coming season. The Metropolitan's financial situation is worse than ever.
>
> It is quite certain, however, that after a contemporary production (The Rake's Progress by Stravinsky) this year, we shall not be able to afford the same risk in a consecutive year. [92]

As in Taylor's case, Gruenberg at length received a modern staged revival of his Metropolitan work, although the honor was a posthumous one. The Michigan Opera Theatre gave The Emperor Jones five performances in 1979 with black American baritones David Arnold and Andrew Smith alternating in the principal role. Critic Andrew Porter admired the modern

---

90 *O'Neill Musical*, The Stage, 8 September 1960; and unindentified clipping ca. 1960, Gruenberg clippings file, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

91 Nisbett, *Forgotten Figure*, 95*n*14.

92 Bing to Gruenberg, 21 November 1952, quoted in Nisbett, *Gruenberg Life and Work*, 71.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

minimalist production, but reported that the score left him with an impression "neither as admirable and potent as Downes thought it nor as meretricious as Paul Rosenfeld . . . declared it to be," and added:

> This score puzzles me. It is bare—much of the time just two opposed lines, each of them thickened with block harmonies. It is almost athematic. The only tune is the three-note spiritual, and that lasts only eleven measures. The rest is declamation, cries, plain speech, rhythms, and sounds.
>
> And yet the first impression, that there is "no music" (as Strauss said of "Pelléas"), is soon modified by the discovery that *something* is holding one's attention—propelling, shaping, and articulating the drama, and making it vivid in a way that a plain spoken performance would not be. Probably, it is Gruenberg's control of timbres, density, and rhythmic tensions. [93]

The Michigan revival was the last staged representation the opera received. While the experimental spirit which dominated its creation could not be expected to generate continued excitement in the artistic results for more than a finite period of time, the opera served the important function of jolting American opera decisively into the twentieth century. As such, it continues to occupy a unique position in Metropolitan history.

---

[93] Porter, *Island Emperor*, 116 [cf. *n*13].

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

CHAPTER 8

AMERICAN NATIONALISM: HOWARD HANSON'S MERRY MOUNT

The gratifying success of Deems Taylor's first Metropolitan commission in 1927 evidently convinced the management that its new emphasis on theatrical values had finally given American opera a solid foundation on which to build. The receptiveness the Metropolitan showed in 1929, before the premieres of either the Peter Ibbetson or Emperor Jones, to a promising new libretto by music critic Richard Stokes demonstrated its intent to develop this concept. The theater committed to producing Merry Mount, which Stokes adapted from a short story of Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864), even before Howard Hanson had finished composing it, a situation which later resulted in erroneous designations of the opera as a Metropolitan commission.

Richard Stokes was reporting on concert and theatrical activity in the Midwest for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch during the mid-1920s when he came across a volume of Hawthorne's Twice-Told Tales (1837) by chance. The author's "The May-Pole of Merry Mount" (1836), an allegorical tale of Puritan struggle against a group of insurgent Cavaliers for the soul of early seventeenth-century America, struck Stokes not only as a theatrically effective topic on which to base an opera, but one which would affirm values he had already identified as essential to the constitution of a distinctly American genre. These included a scenario with a nationalist theme that would distinguish lyric drama of the New World from its "exotic and alien" European models; source material that offered the opportunity to cast the libretto in English of poetic distinction, a stance with which Stokes distanced himself from the "prosaic and conversational" tone of contemporary realism; and, in an attempt to resolve the opposition of

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

traditional and contemporary strains in American culture, the opportunity for theatrical spectacle, which he identified as an American "racial disposition" that legitimately manifested itself in the popularity of musical comedy and revue despite their often "hair-raising illiteracy of text and score."[1]

Stokes took Hawthorne's brief tale, which embellishes on the historical events surrounding the Puritans' violent razing of a "pagan" maypole erected at the Ma-re Mount settlement (near present-day Quincy, Massachusetts) by a Cavalier group headed by the renegade English solicitor and adventurer Thomas Morton (ca. 1590-1647), only as a point of departure. Hawthorne's Puritans were led by Massachusetts magistrate John Endicott, the colony's first colonial governor, but Stokes centered puritanical wrath in the newly created figure of Wrestling Bradford, a fiery but hypocritical minister who becomes obsessed with the proud and beautiful Lady Marigold Sandys, a fictitious niece of Morton betrothed to the haughty Cavalier Sir Gower Lackland. Hawthorne's story also included a pair of young lovers, Edith and Edgar, whose marriage ceremony at the maypole is interrupted by Endicott and his forces, but the Hawthorne account resolves its underlying dialectic of mirth and piety (in turn derived from Milton's 1632 companion poems L'Allegro and Il penseroso)[2] through Endicott's acceptance of the couple into the Puritan community, where their redeeming qualities might fit them "sober to toil, and pious to pray . . . in our Israel."[3] In contrast, Stokes supplemented Hawthorne's historical material with the lore of demonology gleaned from texts of the fanatical New England

---

1 Letter from Stokes to Lawrence Gilman, 23 January 1934, quoted in Gilman, *Music,* New York Herald Tribune, 28 January 1934.

2 David D. Joplin, *"May-Pole of Merry Mount": Hawthorne's "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso,"* Studies in Short Fiction 30 (Spring 1993): 185.

3 *The May-Pole of Merry Mount,* Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Vol. 9 (Ohio State University Press, 1974), 66.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

divines, such as Cotton Mather's Wonders of the Invisible World (1693), and turned the events at Merry Mount to more dramatic effect by making Bradford's inner sexual torment the focal point of the story.[4] In Stokes's libretto, Bradford fervently prays for mercy after having acknowledged the desire to possess Marigold as his true motivation for ordering an attack on the Cavaliers (and the Indians to whom they have traded arms), then collapses into an exhausted stupor in which his obsessions are enacted in a fantastic dream vision of demons and courtesans who induce him to sign the Devil's book. The minister awakens to find the Puritans facing a retaliatory Indian attack which has left their settlement in flames. Consumed by guilt, Bradford rips off his skullcap and exposes the red mark of the fiend on his forehead to the horrified congregation, then rushes with Marigold into the conflagration with the vow that their souls shall be united in death.

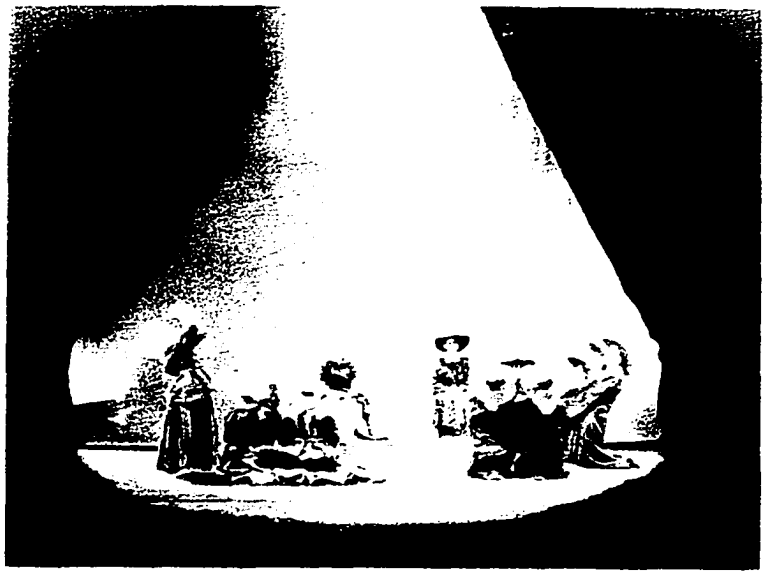
By the time he completed the scenario, Stokes had joined the critical staff of the New York Evening World, from which influential position he felt confident enough to submit his idea to the Metropolitan. Although he posited a contemporary relevance in the moral struggle he depicted with the nation's ongoing debate on Prohibition, it is obvious that neither this theme nor the historic national setting influenced Edward Ziegler's objective literary opinion, which was promising in a report to Otto Kahn: "I think it is a very good job, although the period is rather stilted and unexciting. At the same time, I think the libretto has succeeded in making fairly interesting reading, and is a carefully done job."[5] At the same time, the assistant manager noted

---

[4] Hawthorne too had read extensive accounts of New England's Puritan past (of which he was a direct descendant) held at the Salem Athenaeum, but projected the theme of guilt and expiation more strongly in works such as The Scarlet Letter (1850). The May-Pole of Merry Mount is more cognizant of early Puritan religious motivation in its depiction of "Puritan piety asserting the strength *and* mercy of God's Providence." See Thomas Pribek, *The Conquest of Canaan: Suppression of Merry Mount,* Nineteenth-Century Fiction 40 (December 1985): 353.

[5] Ziegler to Kahn, 26 September 1929. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Ziegler correspondence, 1928-29, L.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.



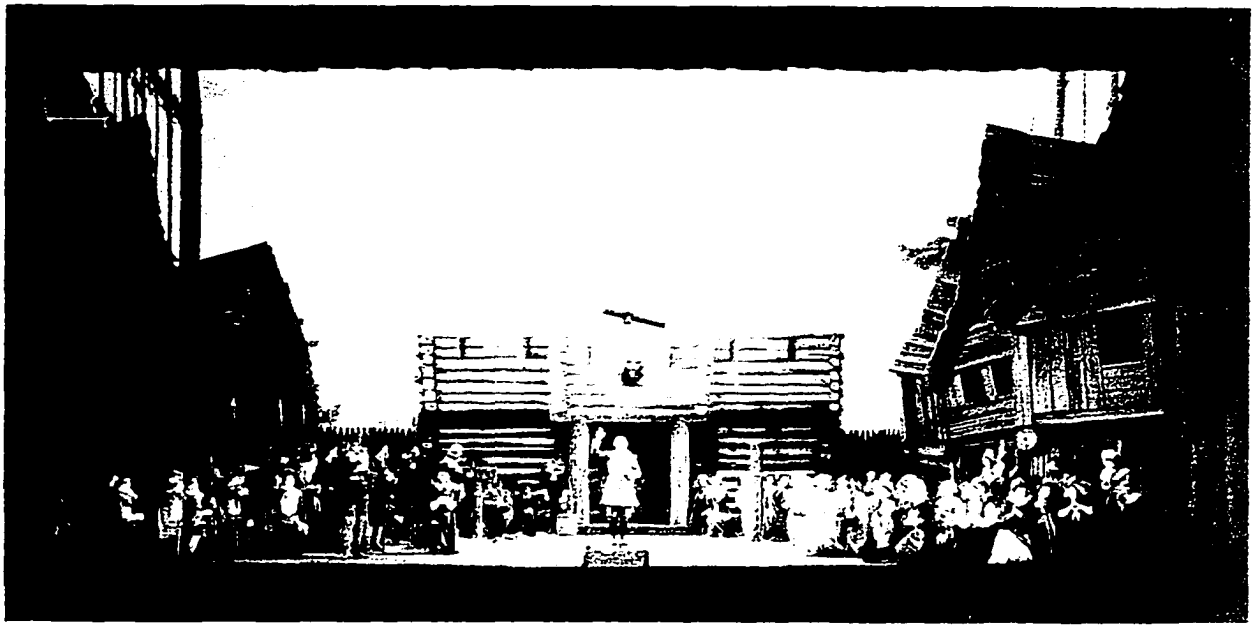


FIGURE 8.1: Nationalist Themes in American Art
Artistic movements that drew on the inspiration of a collective national past were prominent during the Depression years. Choreographer Doris Humphrey's *The Shakers* (photograph by Soichi Sunami, 1931) celebrated the religious sect [Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations]; Howard Hanson based his opera *Merry Mount* (1934 Metropolitan premiere with Lawrence Tibbett, center) on the darker vision of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The May-Pole of Merry Mount* [Metropolitan Opera Archives].

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Stokes's calculated maneuver of letting the theater know he had shown the scenario to his colleague Lawrence Gilman of the Herald Tribune, an often acerbic critic of the Metropolitan:

> Stokes sent it to Lawrence Gilman and asked him to suggest someone to set it to music. Gilman wrote him a flattering note about the text and suggested Howard Hanson, whose compositions you have probably heard as they have been played by various orchestras.
>
> This is how the matter stood in June, and Hanson began making overtures to find out how the Metropolitan would like to receive an opera composed by him to the text of Stokes. It was at this juncture . . . [that] I promised to take up [the matter] with you and Mr. Gatti. . . . The case is a bit complicated because of Stokes' position on the World. [6]

Ziegler's account crediting Gilman with the selection of Hanson is not quite accurate, for Gilman later published Stokes's account of the music's genesis in which the librettist attributed the idea to former Metropolitan soprano Estelle Liebling. After the New York premiere of Hanson's First Symphony ("Nordic"), Liebling had apparently commented to Stokes, "That young man has an opera in him."[7]

In any event, Kahn clearly supported the undertaking, for Ziegler notated, "Talk Gatti / Kahn approves" on his copy of the September 1929 proposal to the chairman, and Stokes sent the completed libretto to Ziegler the following month with the comment, "May I thank you for the interest you have shown in the undertaking of Dr. Hanson and myself."[8] The new artistic team immediately attempted to capitalize on Kahn's interest by pressuring him to commit to a production of the work. Stokes even suggested the possibility of displacing Taylor's Peter

---

[6] Ibid.

[7] Quoted in Gilman, *Music*, 28 January 1934. Liebling (1880-1970), the sister of pianist and music critic Leonard Liebling (1874-1945), sang briefly at the Metropolitan during the 1901-1902 and 1903-1904 seasons. After taking up a teaching career in New York, her pupils included Beverly Sills.

[8] Stokes to Ziegler, 28 October 1929. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Ziegler correspondence, 1928-29, L.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Ibbetson (which had just been announced as the composer's newest libretto topic) by emphasizing Merry Mount's nationalist qualities:

> I dislike to trouble you, but I think it not unreasonable to ask whether, if the work Dr. Howard Hanson and I are doing is finished in time and proves acceptable, the Metropolitan will wish to do two new operas in English in one season, or would postpone ours in favor of Mr. Taylor's, or would choose between them on their merits.
>
> If there is no chance for us in 1930-31, . . . we might wish to start negotiations for a production in Chicago or London. Would you be so good as to advise me on these points?
>
> I should like to point out also that my book, which has for weeks been in Mr. Ziegler's hands, is an original one, not an adaptation from anything else, and that its locale is American. I am familiar enough with opera librettos to know that my book is one of the best in the entire literature of dramatic poems for music. [9]

Stokes may have based his veiled threat to offer the work's premiere to Chicago on his inside knowledge of the irritation that the internecine opera-house battles caused the Metropolitan, but the ploy would have been an empty one. The Chicago Civic Opera was later reported to have had Midwestern composer Rossetter Gleason Cole's Merrymount (1920-27; libretto by Carty Ranck) under consideration during the same period as the Metropolitan's negotiations for the Hanson/Stokes work.[10] While it is entirely possible that Stokes's letter irritated Kahn—particularly the suggestion that the chairman brush aside the second Taylor commission which he had personally effected—he was not unaccustomed to such tactics and composed a characteristically diplomatic and gracious reply:

> I am looking forward with confident anticipations to the result of your collaboration.

---

9 Stokes to Kahn, 23 November 1929. Ibid.

10 *Find Three "Merry Mount" Operas in Existence*, Musical America 51 (25 April 1931): 10. The Chicago Civic Opera under the leadership of Samuel Insull did not survive the Depression and never produced Cole's opera. The work, in which the love between a Plymouth man and a woman of the Merry Mount group is happily resolved, was awarded the Bispham Medal in the mid-1930s.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> Your inquiry is a perfectly natural one, but I am not the person to answer it. My wish coincides with yours, but I have long made it a principle to consider my functions in connection with the Metropolitan Opera as limited by constitutional restrictions which I believe to be necessary, and to leave the actual conduct of affairs to the man in executive charge, i.e. the General Manager. If I were to act otherwise, there would be apt to ensue crossing of wires and confusion. [11]

In fact, Gatti did not formally commit to a production of Merry Mount until he had received a report on the music from conductor Artur Bodanzky, who was dispatched to a piano audition of the first act performed by Hanson at the Stokes residence in early March 1930. The librettist once again somewhat crassly advanced his case with Kahn by reporting Bodanzky's alleged impression of the piece as "full of ideas, instead of being 'empty trash' like previous native operas he had encountered,"[12] a possible disparagement of Reginald De Koven's The Canterbury Pilgrims—the only American opera Bodanzky ever conducted at the Metropolitan—whose production Kahn himself had urged on Gatti. Kahn ignored the gaffe, as he had previously disregarded De Koven's sharp criticisms of Gatti's "foreign" influence at the Metropolitan, and confirmed Merry Mount's acceptance: "Your and Mr. Bodanzky's views coincide with what I have heard from others who have had occasion to become acquainted with Dr. Hanson's score. With you, I am greatly looking forward to the production of the work."[13]

The Metropolitan's unusual commitment to produce the work in advance of its completion—at least in part a result of Kahn's involvement—occasioned a series of claims by both Stokes and Hanson that the opera had been commissioned by the chairman on behalf of the organization. Stokes even attempted to induce the Metropolitan to style the arrangement as such in a suggested press announcement he drafted and forwarded to Ziegler which included the

---

[11] Kahn to Stokes, 26 November 1929. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Ziegler correspondence, 1928-29, L.

[12] Stokes to Kahn, 11 March 1930. Kahn Papers, Box 442, Princeton University.

[13] Kahn to Stokes, 13 March 1930. Ibid.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

statement, "Giulio Gatti-Casazza, General Manager of the Metropolitan Opera Company, announces that Dr. Howard Hanson, Director of the Eastman School of Music at Rochester, New York, has been commissioned to compose a score to a libretto entitled 'Merry Mount,' by Richard L. Stokes, music editor of The Evening World."[14] But Ziegler immediately objected and contacted Kahn for a directive:

> According to my understanding, it is not strictly in accord with the facts, as I am certain the Metropolitan did not "commission" Hanson to write this score. We have only committed ourselves to give it production.
>
> Will you be good enough to let me have your reaction to this. [15]

Kahn obviously refuted the commission designation, for the Metropolitan's wording of the official press release modified Stokes's language to omit the claim:

> General Manager Giulio Gatti-Casazza announced yesterday that the Metropolitan Opera Company has accepted for performance an opera composed by Dr. Howard Hanson, Director of the Eastman School of Music at Rochester, N.Y., to a libretto entitled "Merry Mount" by Richard L. Stokes, Music Editor of the Evening World. It is planned to produce the work during the season 1931-32. [16]

Hanson nevertheless continued to perpetuate the commission account even after a harrowing series of events across the following two seasons, during which the Metropolitan twice postponed its production plans and the opera threatened to become a victim of the fiscal austerity plan forced on the house in early 1932. As late as 1961, Hanson wrote: "As I recall the original arrangement that I be asked to write the music for 'Merry Mount' were [*sic*] made by

---

[14] Ziegler to Kahn, 28 March 1930, enclosing copy of draft press release. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Ziegler correspondence, 1929-30, K.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Press Release, 8 April [1930], Metropolitan Opera Company Press Bureau. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Merry Mount production file.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Mr. Stokes with the management of the Metropolitan."[17] Although this statement is not actually incorrect, as the composer was careful not to use the word "commission," he elided over the events of his own overtures to the theater and the Bodanzky audition perhaps in the belief that a commission designation would add more cachet to the opera and promote its chances of public success. The actual events are more impressive, as the score had to survive Bodanzky's jaundiced eye before finding acceptance at the Metropolitan.[18]

It was also likely that Stokes's libretto captured Ziegler's interest to a greater extent than that of David Stanley Smith's Merrymount, op. 36 (1911-14; libretto by Lee Wilson Dodd), of which the Metropolitan was made aware by conductor Alfred Hertz before 1915 and again in 1919 by Bodanzky. Smith, a faculty member, and later dean, of the music school at Yale, approached Hertz, who had conducted the Metropolitan premieres of The Pipe of Desire, Mona, and Cyrano, on the recommendation of his former teacher Horatio Parker. It is possible that the conductor was, as Smith later wrote, "extremely interested in the work and made vain efforts to have it performed,"[19] but Hertz's efforts amounted to little after Gatti decided to replace him in 1915 as the head of the Metropolitan's German wing with Artur Bodanzky, whom he considered a superior talent. Bodanzky nonetheless may have given Smith's opera serious consideration, and

---

17 Hanson, Rochester, to William Starr, Music Publishers Holding Corporation, 5 June 1961. Sibley Music Library, Eastman School of Music, Merry Mount collection, Correspondence.

18 The error seems to been perpetuated in the secondary literature by Irving Kolodin: "One of the last influences of Otto Kahn on the Metropolitan was discernible in [the 1933-34] season . . . in the production of *Merry Mount*. The work had been accepted by the Metropolitan, through Kahn, before Hanson had written a note of this or of any other opera, on the basis of the composer's work for the concert hall." Metropolitan Opera (1940), 457. Among the many writers who relied on Kolodin's account were John Kobler, whose description of the opera as a Kahn commission in his biography Otto the Magnificent was repeated without question in Joseph Horowitz's review of the book (Notes 48 [March 1992]: 898); and Dizikes, whose brief summary on the opera is derived entirely from Kolodin (Opera in America, 452).

19 David Stanley Smith to Artur Bodanzky, 12 November 1919, quoted in Johnson, American Subjects, 90.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the score was indeed in the possession of the Metropolitan in 1919, when Smith requested a second hearing.[20] But Ziegler, who had joined the management team in 1916, effected an official preliminary libretto review of all new operas at the beginning of the 1919-1920 season, an action he confirmed to Kahn one month before Smith appealed to Bodanzky.[21] Whether Smith's Merrymount was rejected due to its score, libretto, or a combination thereof is unknown, but the composer's obvious swipe at Gatti, "To be sure, the managers of the Opera (Metropolitan) seem to find it difficult to understand this work (because they don't know enough about American history),"[22] indicates that the lack of interest stemmed in part from the libretto.

Another casualty of the Metropolitan's selection process was Virgil Thomson and Gertrude Stein's collaboration Four Saints in Three Acts, which was surprisingly ignored by Kahn shortly after the announcement of the Hanson/Stokes Merry Mount acceptance. Thomson first made Kahn aware of his first opera during the chairman's stay in Paris at the end of a European sojourn in the autumn of 1930: "I write you at the suggestion of Mr. Carl Van Vechten who urged me show you an opera I have written. . . . The text is in English, by Gertrude Stein, and I am certain the work will interest you."[23] But Thomson's offer to audition the work personally for Kahn was turned away: "I appreciate your suggestion, but regret to say that I cannot comply with it, as I am leaving for London this afternoon en route for New York. With

---

20 *Scores in Safe, 24 May 1919.* Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, 1919-20, Composers.

21 "I have made so bold as to give orders that every libretto should be submitted to me, no matter what promise or hopelessness the music contains." Ziegler to Kahn, 23 October 1919. Kahn Papers, Box 122, Princeton University.

22 Smith to Bodanzky, 12 November 1919, quoted in Johnson, American Subjects, 90.

23 Thomson, Paris, to Kahn, 10 October [1930]. Kahn Papers, Box 443, Princeton University.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

best wishes for the success of your opera, . . ."[24] Another appeal sent the following day appears to have gone unanswered; carelessly scrawled on a single thin sheet was the following:

> Dear Mr. Kahn,
>
> I hope that you will give Mr. Virgil Thomson an opportunity to show you his opera which is in the opinion of those competent to judge of very great importance,
>
> Sincerely yours,
>
> Gertrude Stein [25]

It is unknown whether Kahn had received advance notice of the work, which Thomson completed in 1928 and later declared no opera house would touch,[26] or whether the Metropolitan's prior commitment to Ibbetson and Merry Mount—both productions of considerable size and expense—during the deepening depression litigated against even a consideration of Four Saints. Kahn died in March 1934, one month after the premieres of Merry Mount and Four Saints, and left no known written impression of the matter.

A third American project was briefly on the Metropolitan schedule a year before Thomson contacted Kahn. This was an agreement to produce George Gershwin's first projected full-length opera, The Dybbuk, to be adapted from Shalom Ansky's [a/k/a An-Ski; pseud. Shloyme Zanvl Rappoport (1863-1920)] celebrated Yiddish drama Tzvishen tzvei Velter [Between Two Worlds] (1916; premiered 1920). Kahn and Gershwin had been friendly since the mid-1920s, and the composer had attended at least one of the financier's famed social weekends

---

[24] Kahn, Paris, to Thomson, 11 October 1930. Ibid.

[25] Stein, Belley, France, to Kahn, 12 October 1930. Kahn Papers, Box 442, Princeton University.

[26] Thomson was equally unsuccessful in his attempts to interest either London producers or the Chicago Civic Opera in the project: "Nothing came of these efforts; the time was not for novelty." Virgil Thomson, Virgil Thomson (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), 162-63.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

held at Oheka, his Long Island estate.[27] In late 1927, while Taylor was still searching for his second commission libretto, Gershwin was summoned to a lunch meeting with Kahn at his Kuhn, Loeb office.[28] It is possible that the meeting's purpose was to rekindle Gershwin's interest in opera composition before Broadway claimed him for good, for the following fall Gershwin reported to his friend Isaac Goldberg: "I have been doing a lot of thinking about the 'Dybbuk' . . . I have also spoken to Otto Kahn about my idea and he is very eager to have me do the opera. I think something will come of it."[29] Ziegler sent Gershwin a draft contract for the opera on 31 October 1929,[30] but less than a month later press rumors had reached Italian composer Lodovico Rocca (1895-1986), who had been setting Renato Simoni's Italian translation of the Ansky drama, Il Dibbuk, since 1928. Rocca immediately cabled Gatti's assistant Luigi Villa: "Please wire me . . . if true Metropolitan performance Dybbuk of George Gershwin on libretto taken from Anski drama I am setting to music."[31] Upon Villa's immediate confirmation, Rocca asserted the existence of exclusive literary rights he had obtained in Warsaw and declared his intention to take legal action against competing claims to set the work in any language.[32] Ziegler's instructions to Gershwin to determine whether Ansky was in fact Polish or Russian suggest that the

---

27 Correspondence between Kahn and Gershwin, May 1926. Kahn Papers, Box 278, Princeton University.

28 Kahn to Gershwin, 18 November 1927. Kahn Papers, Box 313, Princeton University.

29 Quoted in Kendall, Gershwin, 101-2.

30 Ziegler to Gershwin, 31 October 1929. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Ziegler correspondence, 1929-30, G-H-J.

31 Telegram from Rocca, Turin, to Villa, 21 November 1929. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, 1929-30, Artists G-S. [*Prego telegrafarmi Corso Valentino 40 se conforme verità esecuzione Metropolitan Opera Dibuk di George Gershwin su libretto tratto da dramma omonimo di Anski, dramma che sto musicando. Cordialità, Maestro Lodovico Rocca.*]

32 Telegram from Rocca, Turin, to Villa, 24 November 1929. Ibid.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Metropolitan considered legally circumventing Rocca's claim, but to no avail.[33] Polish statutes prevailed, and Gershwin's contract—which would have made him the second American composer to receive a Metropolitan commission—was annulled.

Despite the cancellation of the projected Gershwin production and the unparalleled financial success of Peter Ibbetson, Merry Mount was imperiled at the Metropolitan from 1931 to 1933 at least in part due to the worsening fiscal crisis. Having originally announced the opera for the latter half of the 1931-1932 season, the Metropolitan decided in March 1931 to postpone it for a year ostensibly due to the "unusual dimensions of the work . . . and its exceptional choral requirements."[34] But a related issue may ironically have been Ibbetson's tremendous success just one month before: the expectation of reviving Taylor's opera the following year would have presented the Metropolitan with the new problem of casting two American works in the same season. Although the house eventually dealt with this in the 1932-1933 season, when both Ibbetson and The Emperor Jones were produced, the only principal artist affected was Tibbett, whose role in Ibbetson was comparatively brief. In contrast, Hanson wrote the part of Wrestling Bradford for dramatic baritone, and the role was the most vocally challenging of any of the American operas given. Moreover, the initial casting suggestions that appeared for Merry Mount involved all of the principals of Ibbetson:

> The collaborators said they did not know what singers would be assigned to the leading roles. It is believed, however, that Lawrence Tibbett, baritone; Edward Johnson, tenor; Lucrezia Bori, soprano, and Marion Telva, contralto, who had the leading roles in "Peter Ibbetson," will be selected for the new work. [35]

---

[33] Ziegler to Gershwin, 25 November 1929. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Ziegler correspondence, 1929-30, G-H-J.

[34] Stokes to Ziegler, 17 March 1931. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, 1930-31, Artists.

[35] *Dr. Hanson Writing an Opera for 1932*, New York Times, 12 February 1931, 24. Stokes had originally suggested Rosa Ponselle for the role of Lady Marigold Sandys. Stokes to Ziegler, 28

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

By early 1932, Hanson reported the completion of the vocal score of Merry Mount, and the independent publication of Stokes's libretto by Farrar & Rinehart was imminent,[36] when Gatti was forced to confront the threat posed by the interest of Kleiber and the Berlin Staatsoper in Gruenberg's Emperor Jones. At the same time, the Metropolitan's plummeting financial situation reached its nadir. Approximately two weeks after Gruenberg's February 1932 audition of his score, Gatti summoned Hanson and Stokes to a personal meeting in which he requested their consent to another postponement of Merry Mount solely due to the financial crisis. No mention was made of Gruenberg's opera.[37] Ziegler confirmed to the pair:

> [Gatti] and I w[ere] utterly frank in our talks with you and Dr. Hanson because we wanted you to understand the situation thoroughly. You may be certain that whatever can be done by us is being done. To tell you the truth, we have done nothing but fight for the existence of this institution since we assembled in New York after the summer. [38]

Notwithstanding the fact that the Metropolitan's finances during the period were indeed the source of constant media attention, Hanson clearly became suspicious over the impending fate of his opera. Using the pretext of submitting a report on the matter to the work's dedicatee, Rochester philanthropist George Eastman, the composer attempted to extract a written commitment from the house and even tried to invoke an increased sense of responsibility for the piece by referring to it as a commission:

> Would you be kind enough to put in writing the conversation which you and Mr. Gatti had with Mr. Stokes and me in connection with your request for a postponement of the production of "Merry Mount," commissioned by the Metropolitan Opera Company, together with, of course, your reasons for this

---

October 1929. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Ziegler correspondence, 1928-29, L.

36 Stokes to Ziegler, 10 January 1932; and Hanson, Rochester, to Ziegler, 26 January 1932. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Ziegler correspondence, 1931-32, L-M.

37 Stokes to Ziegler, 29 February 1932. Ibid.

38 Ziegler to Stokes, 1 March 1932. Ibid.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> request? I want this to show to Mr. Eastman, and I do not want to quote from memory in such an important matter. [39]

Ziegler, however, was far too shrewd to provide Hanson with any ammunition against the theater—particularly given the power of the media where American repertoire was concerned—and refused to commit the matter to writing in a letter that diplomatically appealed to the composer's own best interests:

> I . . . appreciate why you would like me to write to you as requested, but you must realize also that the conversation that we had here in the "family" the other day, is of so intimate a nature that I would hesitate to put it on paper. Would you mind if in presenting the case to Mr. Eastman, you trusted to your memory, and if then I could possibly supplement this with any specific details you might need in order to answer Mr. Eastman's query, I shall be very happy to do so.
>
> Please don't misunderstand me; but we were utterly frank with you and Mr. Stokes because we realized that it was the only way to treat the situation. The information we gave you on that day had, up to that time been treated as secret by Mr. Gatti and myself.
>
> Please drop me a line to assure me that you appreciate my position in this matter. [40]

Ziegler's underlying message was not lost on Hanson, who immediately assured him, "I certainly would not want to do anything that would embarrass you in the slightest way."[41] Stokes was not so subtle, for he attempted to intercede with Kahn even after the chairman's official retirement from the board had taken effect. The move not surprisingly met with little success, and the

---

39 Hanson, Rochester, to Ziegler, 2 March 1932. Ibid. It is unlikely that Eastman had evinced concern over the matter at that point. The elderly philanthropist was depressed over health problems caused by a debilitating disease of the spine; on 14 March 1932, less than two weeks after Hanson's letter to Ziegler, Eastman ended his own life at his Rochester home with a bullet to the heart. Garraty and Carnes, American National Biography, s.v. *George Eastman* by Elizabeth Brayer.

40 Ziegler to Hanson, Rochester, 3 March 1932. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Ziegler correspondence, 1931-32, L-M.

41 Hanson, Rochester, to Ziegler, 4 March 1932. Ibid.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

financier's response was indicative of his former colleagues' complete lack of interest in the subject of American opera:

> I received your message about yourself and Dr. Hanson appearing before the Board of the Opera Company to discuss the production of your opera "Merry Mount" next season.
>
> I am sure such a meeting would be useless. I am to discuss the subject with Messrs. Gatti-Casazza and Ziegler in a day or two and will then write you. [42]

Undaunted, Stokes pressed on to the new Metropolitan chairman, Kahn's longtime friend and personal attorney Paul D. Cravath, with the suggestion that production materials for Merry Mount might be assembled with remnants from other operas, among which he named a production of The Scarlet Letter (presumably Walter Damrosch's setting), which in fact was never given at the theater.[43] Ziegler must have drawn heavily on Kahn's eloquent example in similar situations in order to have framed the theater's response:

> [Gatti] and I are both appreciative of your offer to reduce the difficulties in the production of the work, but he fears that if the work be curtailed in musical contents and reduced in scenic presentation, it may not make the proper appeal. If it failed in its appeal and success, he is fearful of the fact that the blame would be ours because you and Mr. Stokes could justly say that the work presented was not the work composed by you. [44]

It must have required the diplomatic efforts of the entire management team to explain to Stokes and Hanson the 12 May 1932 announcement that Gruenberg's Emperor Jones had been placed on the American production schedule ahead of Merry Mount. The much greater demands in casting and production required by the pair's full-evening work provided an obvious

---

[42] Kahn to Stokes, 12 April 1932. Ibid.

[43] Stokes to Paul Cravath, 20 April 1932. Ibid.

[44] Ziegler to Hanson, Rochester, 5 May 1932. Ibid.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

explanation, but Stokes predictably voiced his displeasure with an inference that the decision may have been a political one, and included another ploy to force a production commitment:

> I had not foreseen what distress I should feel from the announcement of the postponement of our opera and the substitution of another. It caused me some bad hours, particularly as people kept telephoning to ask why a Gruenberg should be preferred to a Hanson . . . .
>
> We once discussed having Mr. Robert Edmond Jones, himself a New Englander, do the sets and costumes. It might be forehanded to ask him to begin work this summer, as it will be a rather elaborate job, and as he tells me he will be occupied next winter. [45]

Hanson made no direct reference to his reputation vis-à-vis that of Gruenberg, but made sure the Metropolitan knew he felt insulted by the action:

> I do not want to seem unduly sensitive, but you can readily understand that the average musician seeing an announcement of the second postponement of "Merry Mount," coupled as it was in the New York Times with a long article on the new Gruenberg opera, might draw conclusions therefrom which would be embarrassing to me and unjustified. I knew that you would feel with me that a loss of artistic prestige, due to possible false assumptions on the part of the general public, would be poor compensation for three or four years of hard work. [46]

It must have been a distinct relief to all parties when a contract was signed on 3 May 1933 and Merry Mount was scheduled for the Metropolitan's 1933-1934 season.[47] By then, Hanson had decided to avail himself of his only other opportunity to present the work when the University of Michigan's annual Ann Arbor Festival expressed an interest in mounting a

---

45 Stokes to Ziegler, n.d. Ibid.

46 Hanson, Rochester, to Ziegler, 25 May 1932. Ibid.

47 Hanson received a $200 per performance royalty with a guarantee of payment for four representations. Thus, he received the same amount as Gruenberg for a work that was approximately twice as long. Merry Mount royalty contract between Dr. Howard Hanson and the Metropolitan Opera Association, Inc., Metropolitan Opera Archives.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

concert version in May 1933. Gatti gave his unqualified consent,[48] and received a report on the event from Ziegler that indicated some prior concerns about the opera's reception: "Reports from Ann Arbor . . . are rather reassuring. Of course the composer and librettist are enthusiastic, but from other sources, not prejudiced, I hear that the music is really very beautiful and that the orchestration is very effective."[49] Perhaps the most striking impression was achieved with the massive choral effects of the opera, which were often compared to those of Boris Godunov; as a result, Stokes tried to induce Gatti to augment the Metropolitan's chorus with auxiliary forces: "At Ann Arbor, with its choir of 350, the choruses came crashing down like a volley of thunderbolts. The effect was so electrifying that the Metropolitan cannot afford to miss the chance of repeating it and bettering it."[50] By this time, however, Gatti had reached the limit of his patience, for he responded on the matter to Ziegler:

> If such operas as "Die Meistersinger," "Aida," etc., can be given with the regular chorus of the Metropolitan, and if this Chorus seems to be insufficient for "Merry Mount," it means that "Merry Mount" from the choral standpoint has not been composed with a just and theatrically practical judgment. [51]

Howard Hanson had in fact adjudged this aspect of his first opera quite capably, for his utilization of choral forces to enact the Puritan-Cavalier struggle was widely admired. Over the decade preceding his Metropolitan association, the composer had developed into one of

---

48 Ziegler to Gatti's assistant Luigi Villa, Milan, 29 August 1932 confirming Gatti's decision in letter to Ziegler of 13 August 1932. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, Summer 1932, Ziegler.

49 Ziegler to Gatti, Milan, 31 May 1933. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, Summer 1933, Ziegler-Cravath.

50 Stokes to Ziegler, 24 May 1933. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, Summer 1933, Gatti. The 20 May 1933 performance was conducted by the composer and included the relatively unknown baritone Nelson Eddy in the role of Second Puritan. Official Program, Fortieth Annual May Festival, 1933, University of Michigan. Sibley Music Library, Eastman School of Music, Merry Mount collection, Box 72.

51 Gatti, Milan, to Ziegler, 14 June 1933. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, Summer 1933, Gatti.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the country's most promising talents in symphonic and choral composition, a result of musical training and opportunities he had acquired largely in the United States. Born in the Midwestern town of Wahoo, Nebraska (near Lincoln) in 1896, Hanson was descended from Swedish immigrants who had arrived in America during the early nineteenth century. Despite his isolation from the major American cultural centers, Hanson benefitted from the rigorous if highly traditional educational system offered in the tight-knit Lutheran community. Encouraged in his musical studies by his mother, an amateur singer, Hanson mastered the piano and cello and received a thorough background in harmony and counterpoint at Luther College, where the ideals of the music department were represented by Bach, Handel, and Grieg.[52]

At eighteen, Hanson entered the Institute of Musical Art in New York City as a piano student of James Friskin and concurrently developed a growing interest in composition under theory pedagogue Percy Goetschius (1853-1943).[53] Hanson later discounted the influence of any specific composition teacher on his personal style, and Goetschius's method indeed seemed to offer limited inspiration in its blatant opposition to contemporary trends:

> [V]ery little attention was paid to original composition; they were mostly exercises that we did. We wrote canons and fugues and different forms. . . . I remember that the old man said to me, "Hanson, [your] fugue was magnificent, but the prelude was terrible," because in the prelude I used some whole-tone scales borrowed from Debussy and he was very much offended by that.
>
> [Goetschius] wrote me after my fourth symphony ["Requiem," 1943] won the Pulitzer Prize . . . he liked it very much and [said] that it was a very fine work, but he wanted to warn me against using modern devices. [54]

---

52 Burnet C. Tuthill, *Howard Hanson,* The Musical Quarterly 22 (April 1936): 141.

53 The Institute was taken over by the Juilliard Musical Foundation in 1926; its subsequent amalgamation with the Juilliard Graduate School in 1946 resulted in the Juilliard School of Music.

54 Quoted in David Russell Williams, *Howard Hanson (1896-1981),* Perspectives of New Music 20 (Fall-Winter 1981/Spring-Summer 1982): 18.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Moreover, the young composer received surprisingly little encouragement from the Institute's founder, Frank Damrosch, whose brother Walter had seen his opera Cyrano staged at the Metropolitan the previous season: "He'd never heard anything that I'd written, . . . but in the true Germanic tradition, he figured that nobody from Nebraska could possibly write good music . . . but that I could play the piano."[55] Rejecting the idea of a concert career, Hanson left the Institute the following year to accept a teaching fellowship at Northwestern University. There he became interested in the study of acoustics and indulged in some modernist experimentation which only reinforced his belief in the limitless possibilities of the traditional Western system:

> In 1917 when I was a student at Northwestern, I constructed two pianos in quarter tones, so that I had a 24-note scale. . . . It was an experiment . . . it wasn't very successful.
>
> There have been occasional departures from the strict half-tone scale which have been effective. . . . As far as I'm concerned, the ordinary chromatic scale still offers such huge opportunities that I haven't met with yet or conquered, that I would be perfectly willing to spend a couple more lifetimes working [with it] and not feel that I was being hemmed in. [56]

After receiving a bachelor's degree at Northwestern, Hanson continued his teaching career in the theory department of the Pacific College in San Jose, where he was appointed dean of its Conservatory of Music in 1919. Among his research projects was an empirical study of psychological reactions to isolated sonorities, by both musically trained and untrained subjects. Again, Hanson's results reaffirmed his underlying belief in the common-practice primacy of hierarchical consonance-dissonance relationships and their role in emotional expression: "There are those who say that an isolated chord has no meaning. I cannot hold with

---

[55] Ibid., 16.

[56] Ibid., 17.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

this theory. . . . When we investigate sensation and reaction we are seeking to understand not the mechanics of music, but the very essence of music itself."[57]

Hanson immersed himself in writing orchestral music during this period and apparently found no hardship in his enforced distance from the larger metropolitan cultural centers, as he was recognized as one of the most promising talents working on the West Coast and his work quickly came to the attention of area music professionals. Fortuitously, the conductor Alfred Hertz had taken over the music directorship of the San Francisco Symphony from Henry Hadley upon his forced retirement from the Metropolitan, and retained a lively interest in presenting new music. Both Hertz and Walter Henry Rothwell, the conductor of the Los Angeles Philharmonic, afforded Hanson the rare opportunity of hearing his orchestral scores performed soon after their completion, a luxury to which the composer later attributed his "whole-souled love of the orchestra as a means of complete emotional expression."[58]

In 1921 Hanson won the prestigious Prix de Rome on the strength of his early orchestral work and spent the following three years in residence at the American Academy as a pupil of Ottorino Respighi. Hanson further honed his orchestration skills under Respighi and wrote his Symphony No. 1 ("Nordic"), which was given its 1922 premiere in Rome under the composer's direction. Hanson later acknowledged that, "Sub-consciously, I had the same feeling that many young composers of that period had, namely, that opera was a musical form which held little promise or hope for Americans."[59] But a 1920 commission to compose the score to the California Forest Play, a theatrical pageant held in the Redwood National Park, had required him

---

57 Marjory M. Fisher, *Psychological Reaction to Isolated Chords Shown by Pacific Coast Musician's Tests,* Musical America 33 (5 March 1921): 45.

58 Hanson, *Article on Merry Mount,* typescript dated 2 April 1934, 1. Sibley Music Library, Eastman School of Music, Merry Mount collection, Box 1.

59 Ibid., 1-2.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

to write for chorus. Intrigued by the possibilities of the human voice, Hanson included a wordless chorus in his symphonic poem North and West (1923), written in Rome, and expanded his technique in The Lament for Beowulf (1925), a choral setting of portions of the Anglo-Saxon epic.

Returning to the United States, Hanson accepted invitations to conduct the Nordic Symphony with Walter Damrosch's New York Symphony Society and in Rochester, where he met George Eastman (1854-1932), the inventor of the Kodak camera and founder of the Eastman Kodak Company. Hanson's growing artistic reputation had come to the attention of the industrialist, whose noted philanthropic interests in science and education had impelled him to acquire Rochester's DKG Institute of Musical Art, which he reorganized in 1921 as the Eastman School of Music. In 1924 Hanson was appointed to the directorship of the young but substantially endowed conservatory, and it was from this influential post that he was to make an important and sustained contribution to American music across the next four decades. One of his first innovations was the establishment of the American Composers' Orchestral Concerts in 1925 (later developed into an annual Festival of American Music), which afforded young American composers the same advantage that Hanson himself had enjoyed in having newly composed scores brought to performance. Hanson's own compositional activity kept him highly visible on the contemporary scene throughout the decade, and at the time of Merry Mount's genesis he was in the midst of his Symphony No. 2 ("Romantic"), written on a commission from Serge Koussevitzky to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Boston Symphony Orchestra.[60]

The musical style Hanson developed later came to be regarded as conservative, but during the 1920s and 1930s many commentators drew attention to its innovative elements.

---

[60] Press release, 8 April [1930], Metropolitan Opera Company Press Bureau. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Merry Mount production file.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

These included the utilization of the full palette of modern orchestral resources (a product of his study with Respighi), with an emphasis on the brass and percussion groups; experimentation with the construction and particularly the voicing of new sonorities; and an invigorating redefinition of classical forms, such as the symphony, in which Hanson found particular inspiration in the example of Sibelius.[61] In his larger works, Hanson achieved a Neoromantic sense of melodic expansion, together with a rigorous organicism in formal construction, principally through the formulation of thematic groups which generated the musical material of an entire work and were technically integrated within and among large sections to produce the ideal of a unified whole. Indeed, during the 1940s Hanson even developed a method for the systematic theoretical analysis of all tonal possibilities inherent in the chromatic scale for use as compositional material, in advance of writings on the related concepts of interval vectors and pitch-class set analysis which were published by several important theorists during the 1950s and 1960s.[62]

---

61 Edward Royce commented in 1933 on "the sure grasp of the varied harmonic and orchestral palette of the modernist already evident in the composer's earlier works." *Howard Hanson,* in American Composers on American Music: A Symposium, ed. by Henry Cowell (Stanford University Press, 1933; repr., New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., Inc., 1962), 98 (page numbers refer to reprint edition).

62 Although the publication of Hanson's research was delayed until 1960, when Harmonic Materials of Modern Music: Resources of the Tempered Scale (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts) appeared, the underlying concept was first formally announced in 1951 (*Hanson Announces New Musical Theory,* Musical America 71 [15 December 1951]: 23), and several of his composition students attest to his having taught aspects of the theory at Eastman during the late 1940s. Both Robert Sutton (*Howard Hanson, Set Theory Pioneer,* Sonus 8 [Fall 1987]: 17-39) and Allen Cohen (*Theory and Practice in the Works of Howard Hanson,* D.M.A. diss., The City University of New York, 1996) concluded that Hanson charted many aspects of the 220 unordered pitch-class set types and relationships governing them in advance of the early theorists.

The relevant theorists and their initial writings are: Milton Babbitt, *Some Aspects of Twelve-Tone Composition,* The Score and I.M.A. Magazine 12 (1955): 53-61, *Twelve-Tone Invariants as Compositional Determinants,* The Musical Quarterly 46 (1960): 246-59, and *Set Structure as a Compositional Determinant,* Journal of Music Theory 5 (1961): 72-94; Allen Forte, *A Theory of Set-Complexes for Music,* Journal of Music Theory 8 (1964): 136-83 and The Structure of Atonal Music (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1973); David Lewin, *The Intervallic Content of a Collection of Notes,* Journal of Music Theory 4 (1960): 98-101; and Donald Martino, *The Source-Set and Its Aggregate Formations,* Journal of Music Theory 5 (1961): 224-73.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Salient aspects of Hanson's mature style are evident in the structural design of Merry Mount, thus aligning its music with many of the formal techniques that had defined the development of large instrumental forms throughout the common-practice period. Yet, at the time of Merry Mount's premiere, Hanson's style was in no way considered retrogressive. Unlike Peter Ibbetson or The Emperor Jones, Merry Mount is neither deliberately nostalgic nor self-consciously progressive in style. Its music was, perhaps to a greater extent than that of the other composers the Metropolitan produced during the early 1930s, the product of a deeply-considered personal idiom developed by a composer who, despite having been somewhat biased by his formal training toward an approach founded upon traditional principles, nonetheless had conducted intellectual inquiry into other ideas and compositional approaches. The overall impression of artistic sincerity conveyed by Hanson's music resonated with many musical observers, and Merry Mount received much of the respectful praise it deserved. It did not, however, capture the public's imagination in the way that the showier Taylor and Gruenberg works had, and it was largely for this reason that Gatti removed Merry Mount from the Metropolitan's repertoire after a single season, an action which caused much distress to Hanson and resulted in some lingering bitterness on his part towards the organization.

Although Taylor and Gruenberg had certainly achieved a strong sense of stylistic unity in their operas, Hanson's demonstrates the most stringent formal organization of the three, a product of his prolonged experience with orchestral composition in large forms. A significant portion of the musical material of the three-act,[63] two-and-one-half-hour work is generated from a half dozen germinal ideas, almost all of which are first encountered in the opening act. Hanson's
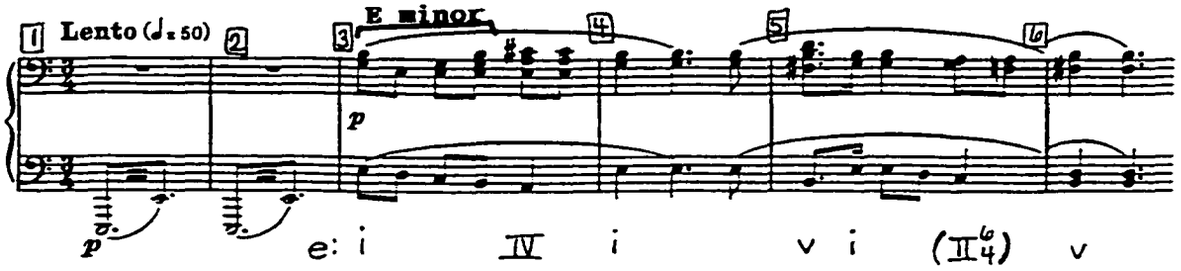
---

[63] The Metropolitan performed the opera in four acts by dividing the original second act into two. This allowed more time for complicated set changes, as well as a more conveniently spaced intermission.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

plan along these lines is clearly discernible from a manuscript fragment found among his sketches for the work in which three of the ideas are copied together onto a single page and numbered in the order of their occurrence in the opera.[64] The first of these, shown in example 8.1, is the theme of a Puritan hymn in the Dorian mode on E which opens the orchestral prelude to the first act:

Ex. 8.1: Hanson, Merry Mount, Act I, Prelude, mm. 1-6



Several qualities of the theme transmit the strength of the Puritan character as well as its bleak harshness: the stark E minor arpeggio outline in m. 3; the simple, primary-chord harmonization of the modal melody; and its dark scoring, in which a lower brass group (three trombones and tuba) predominates. Hanson identified a predilection for modal writing in his own commentary on Merry Mount, pointing to his early encounters with the predominant Dorian and Aeolian melodies of Swedish folk music, as well as the chorale melodies of the Lutheran service and aspects of Gregorian chant he explored during his studies in Rome.[65]

The second phrase of the hymn, shown in example 8.2(a), differs markedly from the first: at mm. 6-7, the move to a major VI sonority, together with a melodic leap up a perfect fourth (the largest ascending interval thus far), invigorates the music with a sudden sense of passionate urgency. The subsequent stepwise melodic descent through the compass of the

---

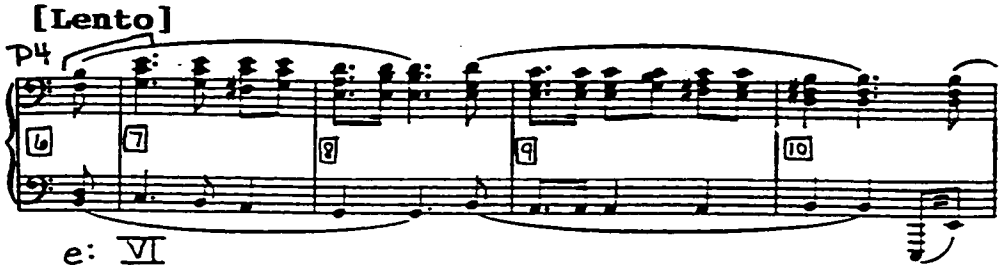
64 Merry Mount sketches. Sibley Music Library, Eastman School of Music, Merry Mount collection, Oversize Box 64.

65 Hanson, *Article on Merry Mount*, 5. The introduction to the first movement of Hanson's Nordic Symphony (*Andante solenne*) also begins with a theme in the Dorian mode on E.

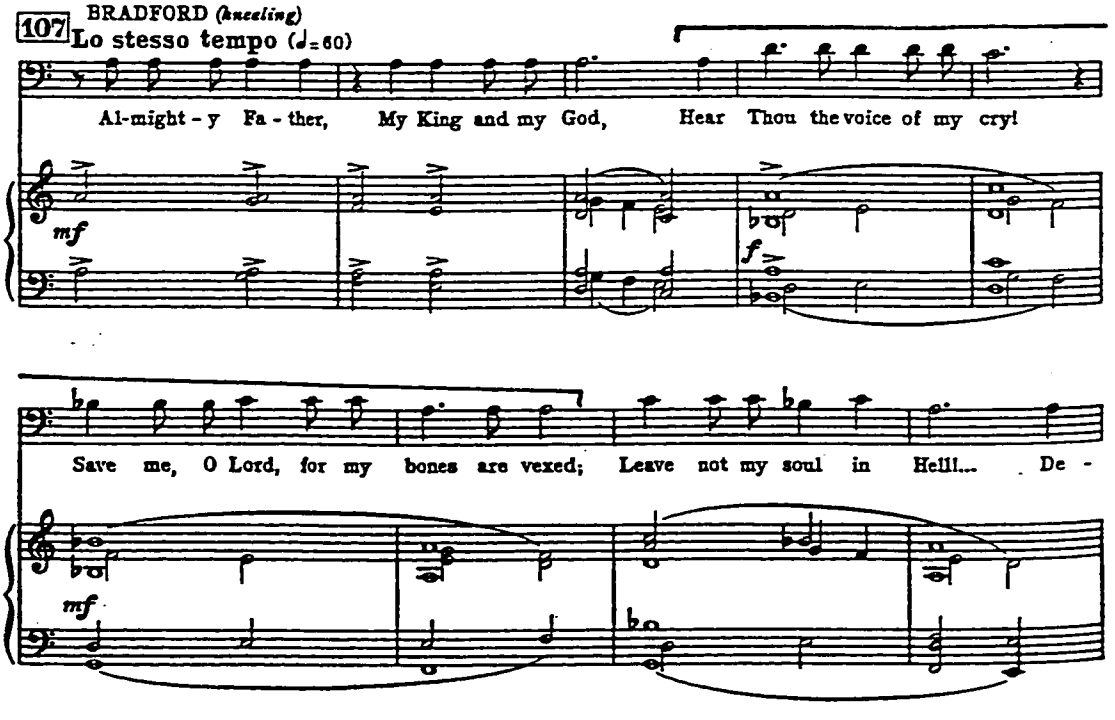
Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

perfect fourth interval at mm. 7-10, with its implication of descending melodic appoggiature, conveys an emotionally yearning quality (also achieved by Taylor with descending appoggiature in the opening waltz of Peter Ibbetson) which Hanson utilizes later in the opera in Wrestling Bradford's impassioned pleas for God's mercy, one of which is shown in example 8.2(b):

Ex. 8.2(a): Hanson, Merry Mount, Act I, Prelude, mm. 6-10



Ex. 8.2(b): Hanson, Merry Mount, Act II, scene 2, piano-vocal score, p. 162

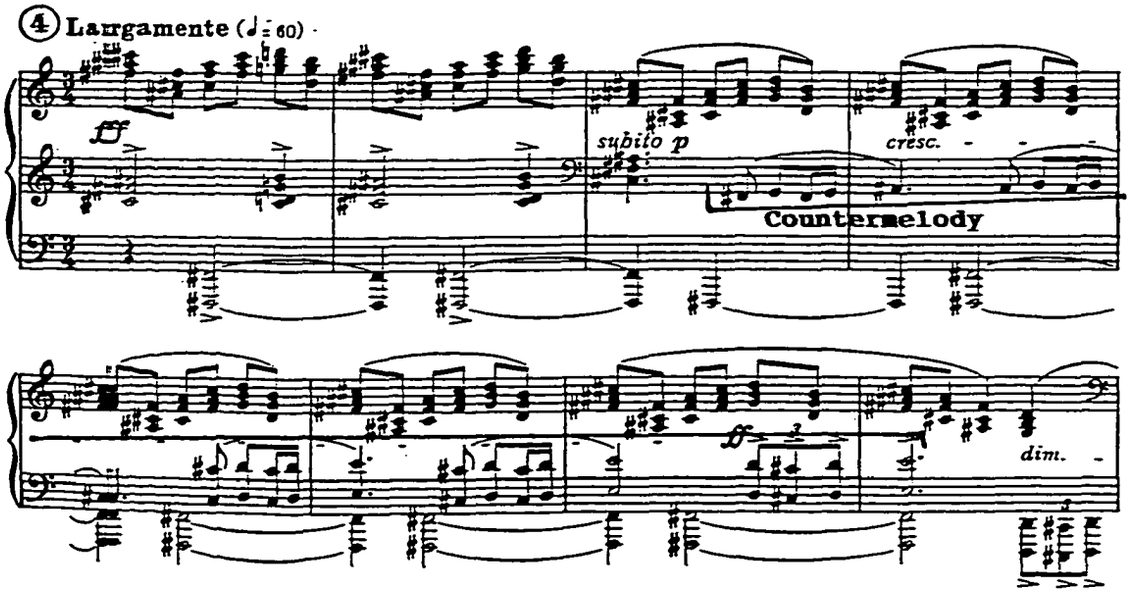


After a brief development of this contrasting mood, the orchestral prelude concludes with the second idea delineated in Hanson's sketch manuscript (see note 64 above): a

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

restatement of the opening hymn theme, now transformed by its recasting in F♯ major into an exalted melody which borders on the bombastic. A new countermelody which ascends through the bass line provides an element of contrapuntal interest. The transformed hymn theme, shown in example 8.3, conveys a sense of self-righteous victory and is used throughout the opera in connection with the Puritans' triumph over their Cavalier adversaries:

Ex. 8.3: Hanson, Merry Mount, Prelude, mm. 39-46



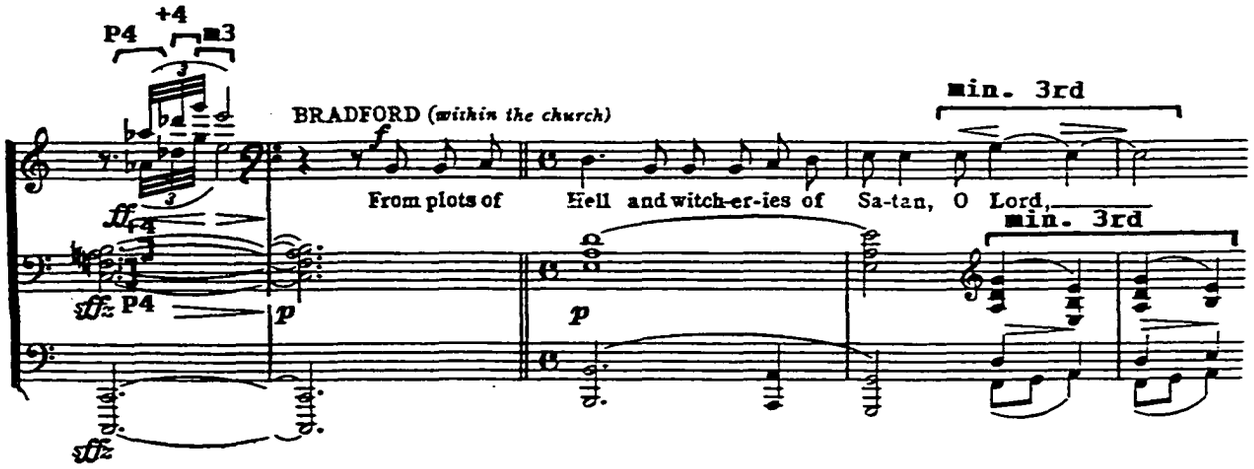
The hymn in its original modal form initiates the opera's stage action when it is sung in the opening scene by a chorus of Puritans to lines which express the sect's unyielding religious philosophy:

> Be as a lion, dread Jehovah
> And tear the flesh of unbelievers;
> Tread down the necks of froward men,
> And break the teeth of the ungodly!
>
> With fire and plague torment the wicked!
> Their name shalt Thou put out forevermore.
> O smite the heathen with Thy rod
> Of slaughter, pestilence and famine!

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

This statement is followed by an orchestral statement of a significant contrasting motive (and Hanson's third sketch idea), which is constructed from two ascending fourths—one perfect and one augmented—followed by a descending minor third. This motive is heard throughout the opera in conjunction with the imagined influence of Satan. Its initial presentation precedes Wrestling Bradford's vocal entrance, shown in example 8.4, where the minister is heard praying fervently in a melody that exploits the motive's descending minor third interval, which is doubled, then reiterated, in the orchestra:
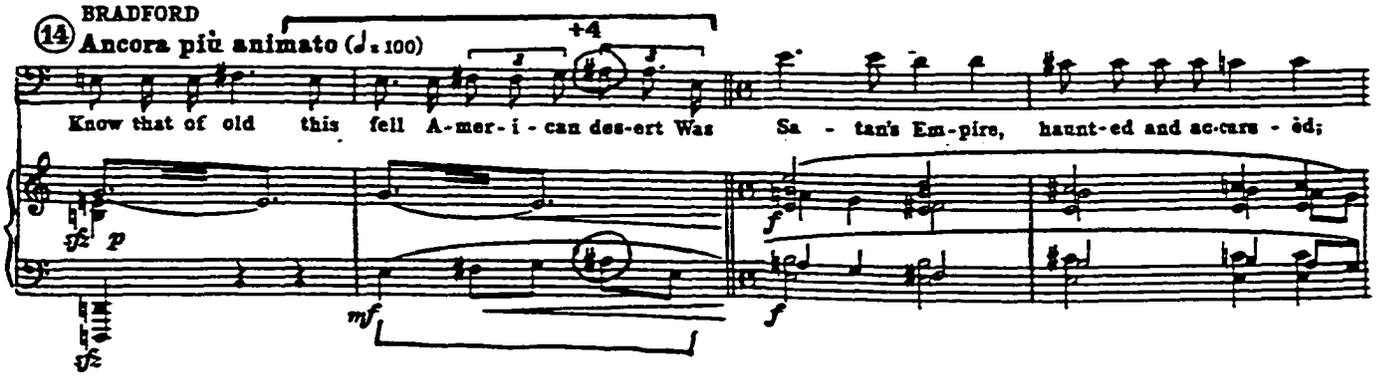
Ex. 8.4: Hanson, Merry Mount, Act I, piano-vocal score, pp. 5-6



Hanson also extrapolates the tritone interval from the Satan motive and uses it independently, as had generations of composers preceding him, to refer to Satan. He wisely avoided the problem of cliché, however, by first presenting the tritone as part of a more complex motivic construction, where its juxtaposition with the perfect fourth (particularly in the vertical sonority that accompanies the motive) is reminiscent of similar configurations found in the music of Satie. The composer also skillfully integrates his independent use of the tritone interval into the prevailing musical texture. One such instance occurs in Bradford's opening narrative, shown in example 8.5, where he describes the Puritan belief in Satan's dominion over the New World before their emigration threatened the evil empire:

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Ex. 8.5: Hanson, Merry Mount, Act I, piano-vocal score, p. 11

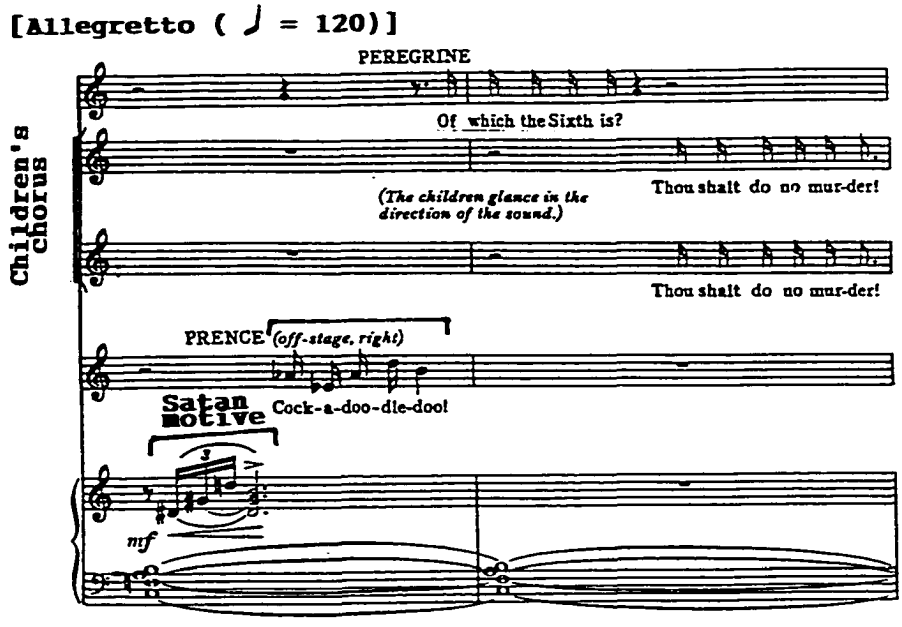


Here, the ascendance of Bradford's vocal line through the Dorian scale is distorted by the appearance of the raised fourth degree (A♯) upon his reference to the moral wasteland of pre-colonial America. Hanson calls attention to the "foreignness" of the tone by immediately following it with the modal final (E), creating a jagged tritone leap which he further accentuates by doubling the vocal line in the orchestra.

It is significant that in its first appearance, the complete Satan motive contains three tones integral to the opening phrase of the Puritan hymn—namely E / G / C♯—albeit in the retrograde order D♭ / G / E (see example 8.4). This subsuming of the Puritans' music into that of Satan is a potent musical metaphor which Hanson exploits dramatically in his development of the Satan motive across the opera's first act. Two prominent instances of Puritanical hypocrisy are accompanied by the Satan motive in a musical commentary on their own corruption by evil. One occurrence, shown in example 8.6, involves the first appearance of the Merry Mount group in the person of the Cavalier mountebank Jack Prence (tenor) as the Puritan boy Peregrine (treble), whose "precocious gravity shows him fated to the cloth," holds forth on the Ten Commandments:

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Ex. 8.6: Hanson, Merry Mount, Act I, piano-vocal score, p. 55

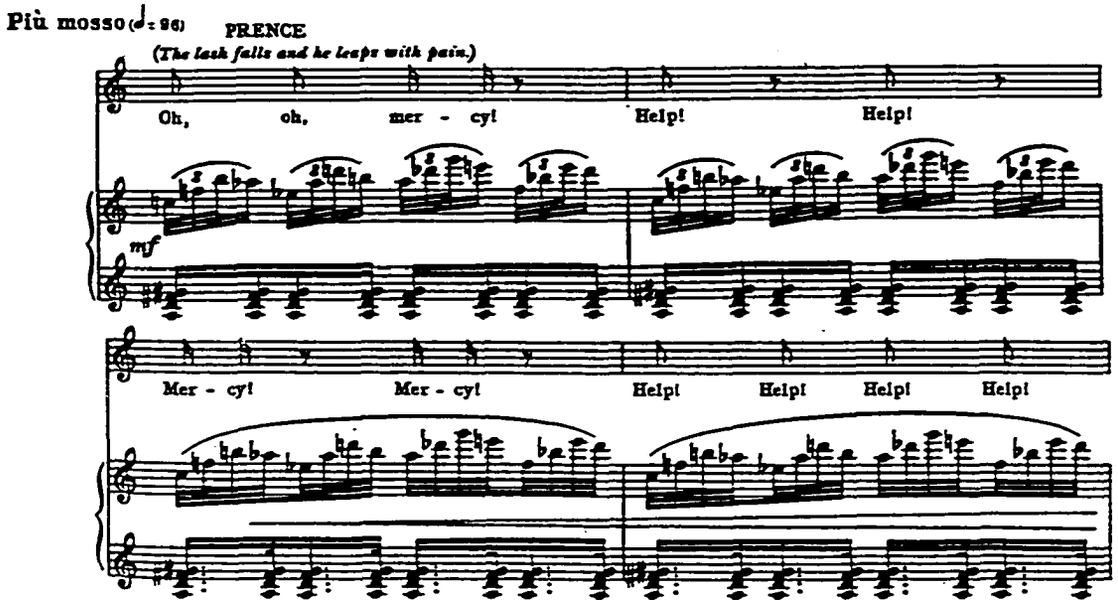


Prence's singing of the Satan motive to herald his arrival while Peregrine interrogates his young charges on the sixth commandment forbidding murder invests the dramatic situation with musical meaning that becomes clear in retrospect: the Puritans regard Prence and his group as ambassadors of Satan, yet they become enmeshed in the evil they claim to oppose when they murder members of the Cavalier group during the maypole destruction that occurs in the second act.

The second example of the Puritans' exposed hypocrisy occurs when the Puritan elder Brodrib (baritone) subjects Prence to the whipping post, having discovered his connection to Merry Mount. This action is accompanied by orchestral statements of the Satan motive, shown in example 8.7, transposed to different pitch levels:

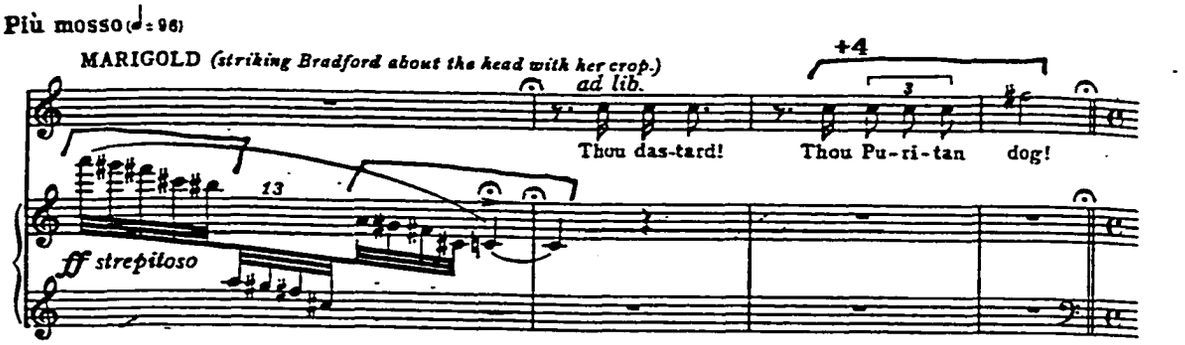
Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Ex. 8.7: Hanson, Merry Mount, Act I, piano-vocal score, p. 67



The torture is quickly ended by the appearance of Lady Marigold Sandys (soprano), whose entrance is accompanied by Hanson's exploitation of the duality inherent in the Satan motive. As shown in example 8.8, an instrumental roulade constructed from tones of the motive (with an added G♯) introduces her, and her first vocal utterance is the motive's stark tritone aimed directly at the Puritan oppressors:

Ex. 8.8: Hanson, Merry Mount, Act I, piano-vocal score, p. 162
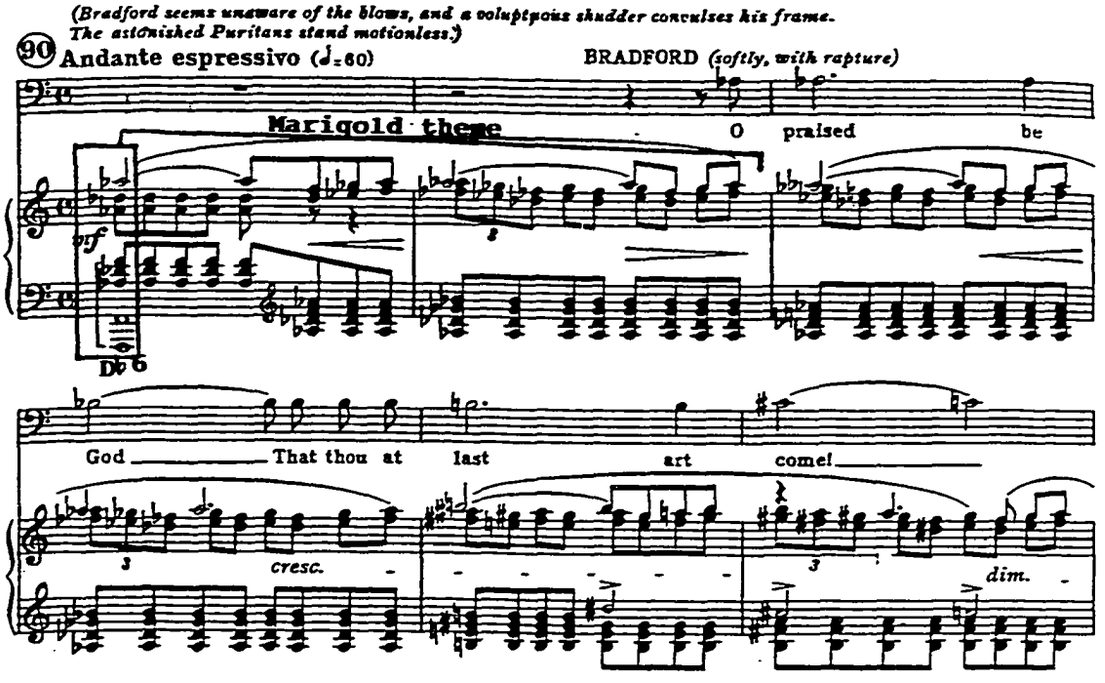


The tritone is then reconceived as a diminished fourth and resolved into a D♭ major chord; this tonality embodies a newly Romantic color which gives rise to Marigold's lyric theme, shown in

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

example 8.9. The theme has already been anticipated in Bradford's Act 1 aria, "Oh, 'tis an earth defiled," where it is heard during a description of the minister's tortured dreams of sexual obsession. Here, it accompanies his perceived fulfillment of those longings upon the appearance of Marigold:

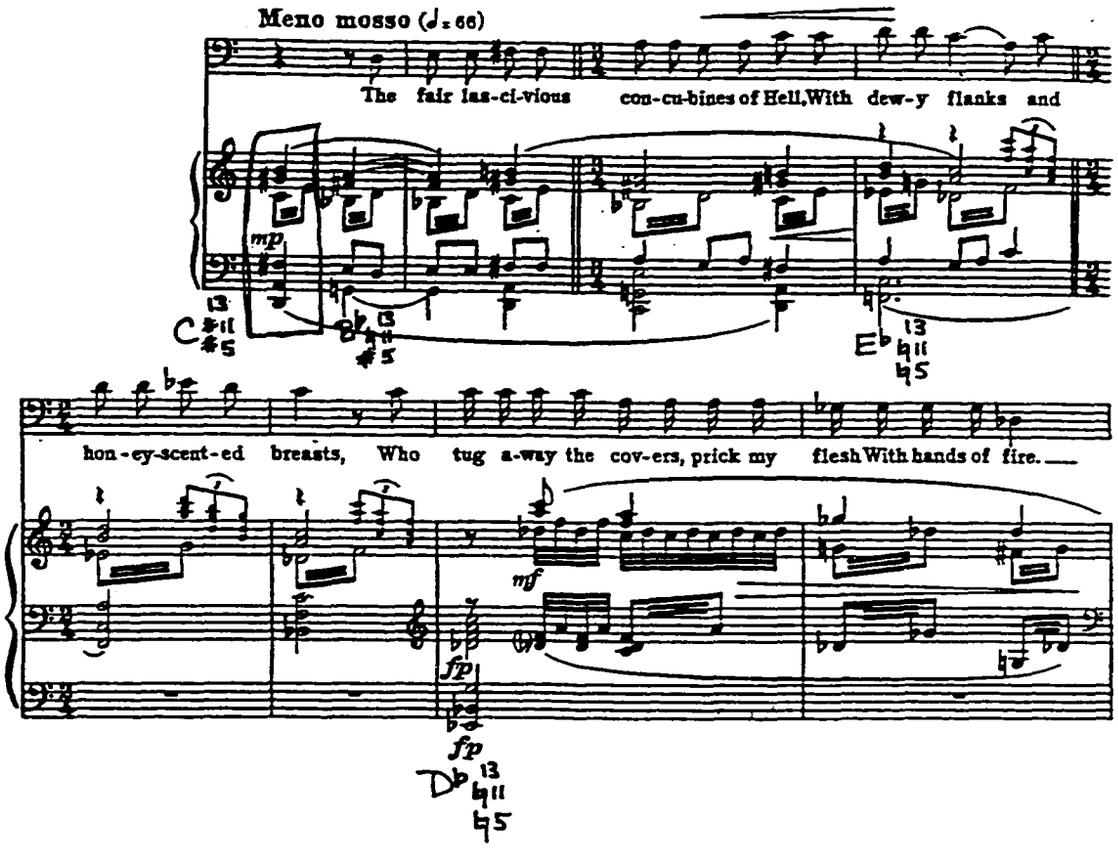
Ex. 8.9: Hanson, Merry Mount, Act I, piano-vocal score, p. 68



Bradford's immediate expression of desire for Marigold upon her first appearance may seem dramatically abrupt, but Hanson has musically anticipated the minister's unstable psychological state with another transformation of the Protean Satan motive. The composer uses it to generate a new sonority of major significance throughout the opera, as it is frequently heard when Bradford is tempted from the path of Puritan morality by his sexual desires. The temptation sonority is first heard during the minister's Act 1 aria, shown in example 8.10, where it immediately precedes the section containing the initial statement of the Marigold theme:

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Ex. 8.10: Hanson, Merry Mount, Act I, piano-vocal score, p. 40



In the above example, Hanson derives the skeleton of a major seventh chord with an augmented fifth degree by extrapolating the tones A♭ / E / G from the original Satan motive, which he transposed up a major third (producing C / G♯ / B) and expanded by superimposing on it a series of thirds (D / F♯ / A), one of which (F♯) has been raised to create a tritone with the root (C). The resulting polychord is a combination of the extrapolated $C^{7}_{\sharp 5}$ with a D major triad that may be thought of as a chord of the thirteenth (C^{13} with raised eleventh and fifth degrees) and illustrates Hanson's lifelong interest in experimenting with extended tertian harmonies, which he

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

characteristically revoiced, often placing an upper member of the chord (here, the ninth) in the bass.[66] The temptation chord does not resolve conventionally, but rather fluctuates with parallel constructions built on B♭, E♭, and D♭ during Bradford's feverish description of his nightly torments.[67] The exotic sound of the non-functional juxtaposition of these chromatically-altered chords is heard throughout the opera to convey the extremity of Bradford's psychological state, a technique redolent of the music of Scriabin.

The melodic material associated with Marigold is likewise used to generate the score's important love theme, which often accompanies Bradford's expressions of longing for Marigold. Hanson uses the rising minor third figure from Marigold's music in a rhythmically augmented form as the basis of the new theme, but varies the figure with a semitone vacillation in the central pitch. In its first appearance in Act 2, shown in example 8.11, the extrapolated tones occur at the same pitch level as in Marigold's theme when it is heard after her entrance (see example 8.9), but the central pitch alternates between G♮ and G♭, reflecting the unstable basis of Bradford's unrequited passion. Here, Bradford's vocal line joins the orchestral statement of the love theme as the minister prays for the salvation of Marigold's soul:
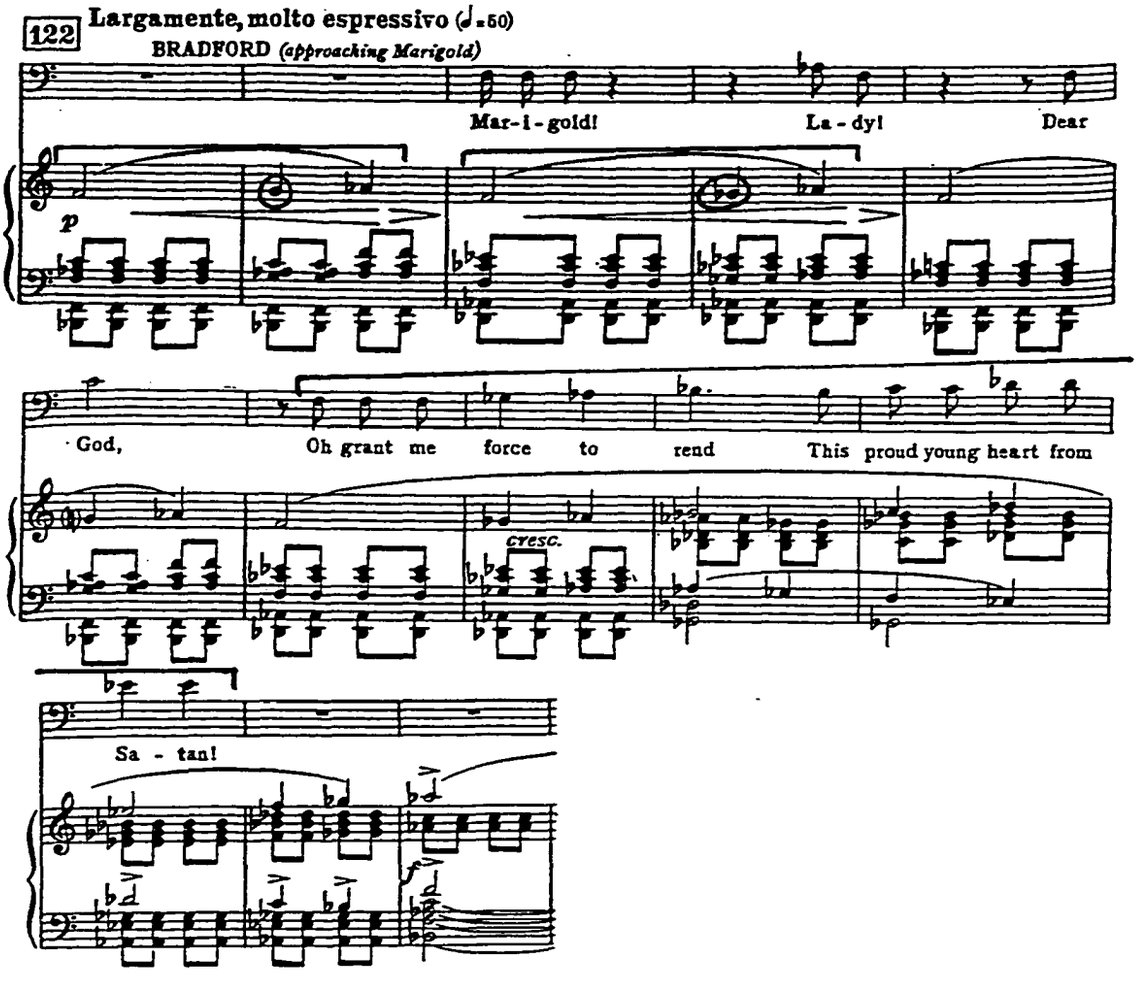
---

66 Alternatively, the sonority may be analyzed with D as the root (D^{13} with a raised eleventh degree).

67 A common usage by late Romantic composers (e.g., Liszt) of the major seventh with augmented fifth was on the subdominant degree, where the augmented tone resolved to the supertonic in the progression $IV^{7}_{\sharp 5}$ → ii. Walter Piston, Harmony, rev. 4th ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1978), 435-36.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Ex. 8.11: Hanson, Merry Mount, Act I, piano-vocal score, pp. 90-91
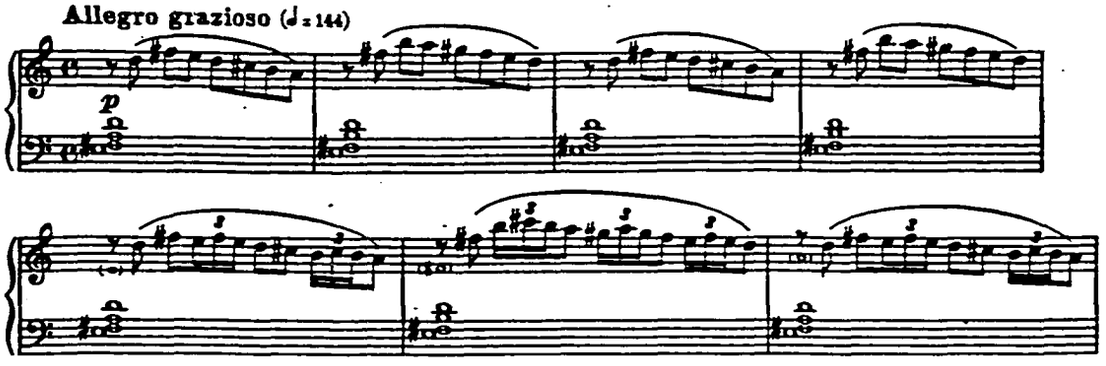


While the motives delineated above are the principal ones that recur throughout the opera as the dramatic situations and conflicts they represent are played out, Hanson constructs the first scene of Act 2, which depicts the maypole revels at the Merry Mount settlement, largely with contrasting thematic material representative of the pleasure-seeking character of the Cavaliers. A graceful melody with a stepwise descent, subsequently ornamented with triplet turns, as shown in example 8.12, opens the act. The flowing lyrical line of the melody, which circles around an A major scale, is a characteristic shared by much of the maypole music

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
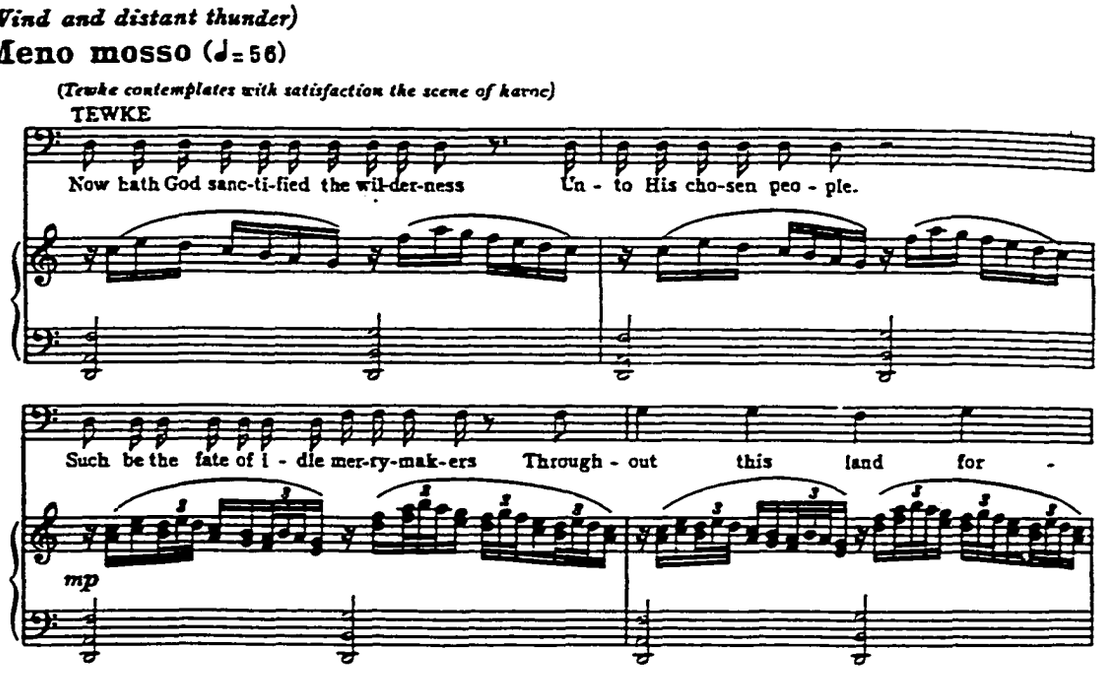
heard throughout the act that contrasts strongly with the starkness of the modal Puritan hymnody of Act 1:

Ex. 8.12: Hanson, Merry Mount, Act II, scene 1, piano-vocal score, p. 103



After the violent destruction of the maypole, however, the Dorian mode returns with the introduction of a new chorus, "It is the house of gay carouse," sung by the Puritan vanquishers. The scene concludes with the maypole music recast in the Dorian mode as sounds of an approaching storm are heard (example 8.13), an aural metaphor for the harsh—and potentially Pyrrhic—Puritan victory:
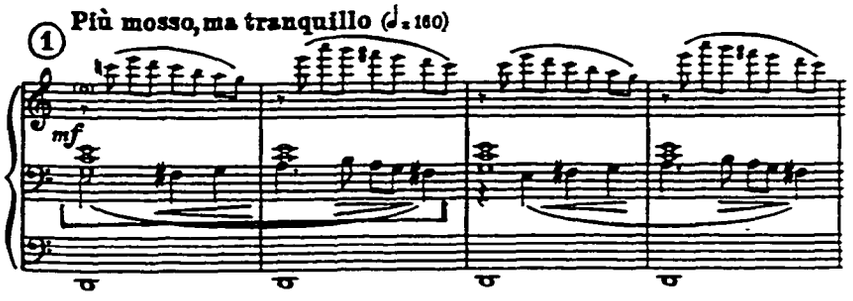
Ex. 8.13: Hanson, Merry Mount, Act II, scene 1, piano-vocal score, p. 150



Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

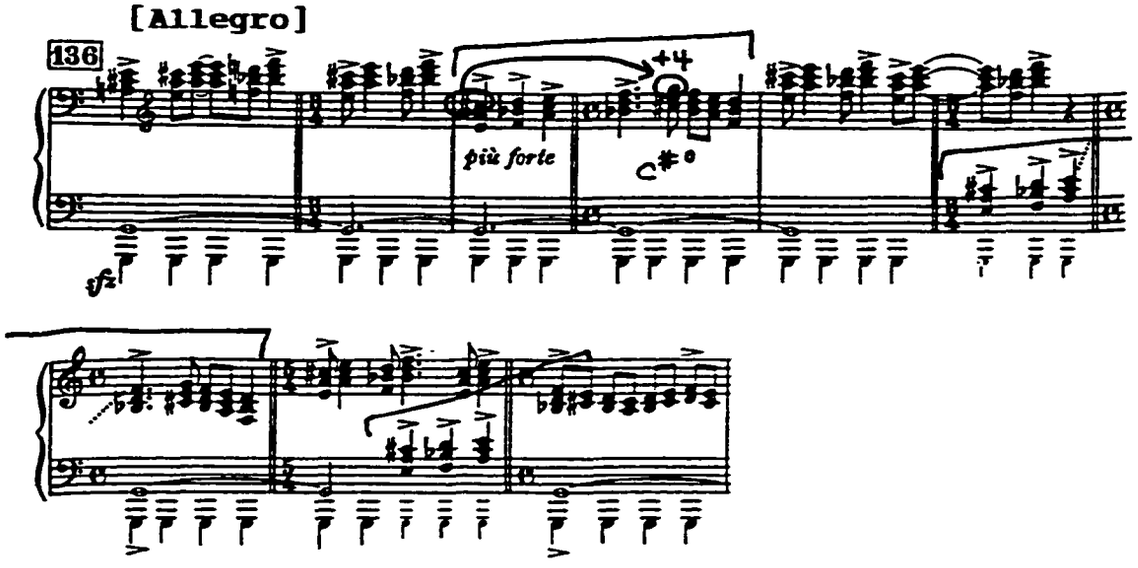
The combination of contrasting elements from Acts 1 and 2 is most significant in the spectacle of the "Hellish Rendezvous" scene (originally Act 2, scene 3; Act 3 in the Metropolitan version), in which Bradford's guilty torment finds expression in a fantastic dream vision of a Satanic empire where the conquered Merry Mount settlers appear as denizens of hell. This scene contains the most metrically irregular and harmonically dissonant music of the score, which Hanson constructed by "distorting" elements of several excerpts of the maypole music from the beginning of Act 2. The entrance of Lucifer (tenor; the role is taken by the singer who portrays Sir Gower Lackland) is accompanied by a combination of two dances from the maypole scene, juxtaposed within a metrically-shifting structure that heightens the asymmetrical effect created by irregular phrase lengths and frequent rhythmic syncopations. The melody of one of the dances, shown in its original Act 2 form in example 8.14(a), has also been altered by lowering several of its pitches a semitone, as seen in example 8.14(b). This tonal distortion is heightened by the predominantly parallel voice leading of its harmonization, which includes the appearance of the tritone as part of a diminished triad in the series:

Ex. 8.14(a): Hanson, Merry Mount, Act II, scene 1, piano-vocal score, p. 103



Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

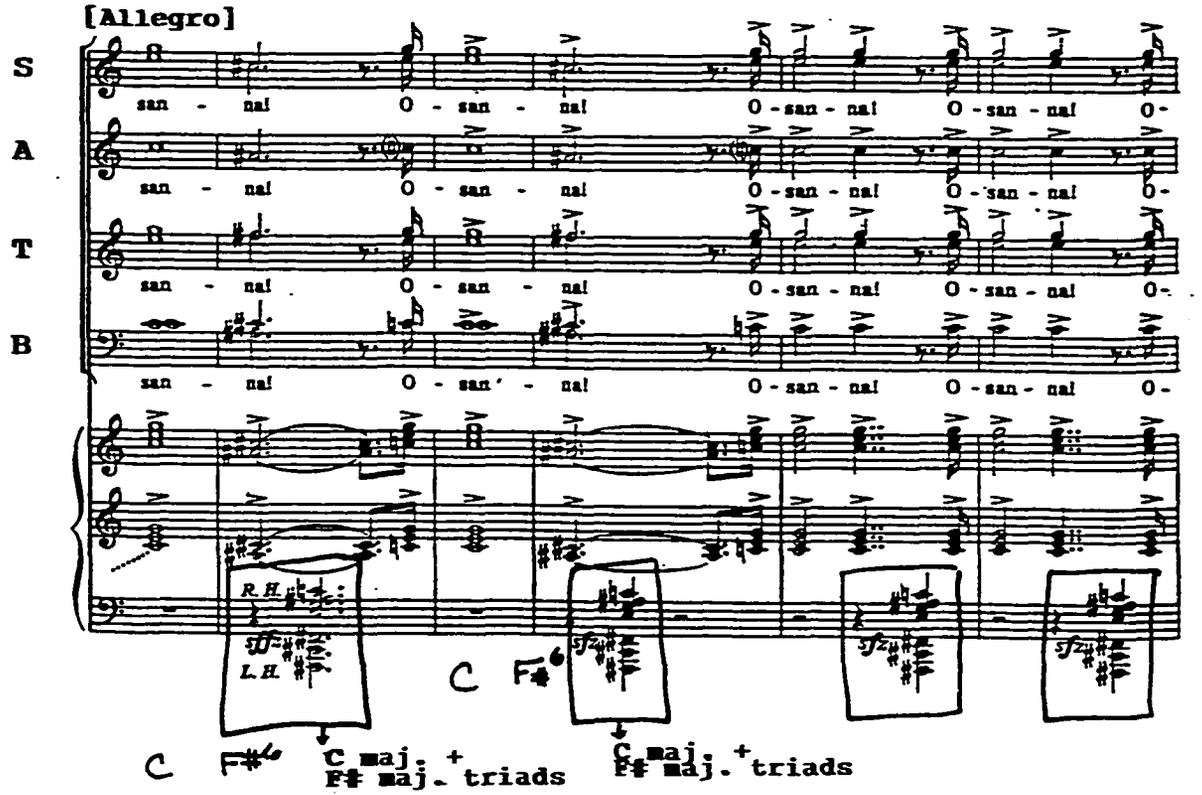
Ex. 8.14(b): Hanson, Merry Mount, Act II, scene 3, piano-vocal score, pp. 178-79



In this scene, however, Hanson reserved prominent exploitation of the opera's pervasive Satanic tritone for a choral salute to Lucifer, shown in example 8.15, which occurs at the height of the pageantry surrounding his entrance. The choral succession of two triads separated by a tritone (C major and F♯ major) is followed by the orchestra's sounding of the dissonant aggregate of both triads, which is thus saturated with three tritones: C—F♯, E—A♯, and G—C♯.

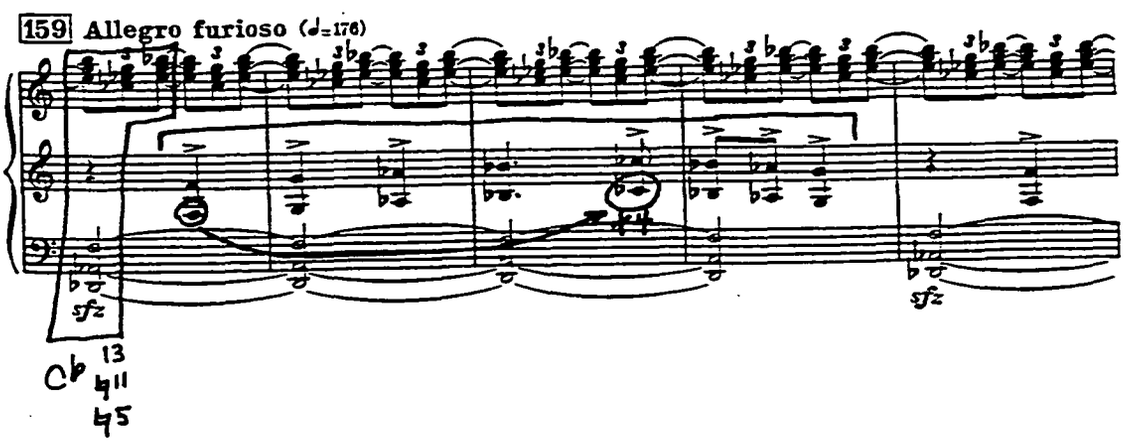
Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Ex. 8.15: Hanson, Merry Mount, Act II, scene 3, piano-vocal score, p. 180



Hanson's inclusion of the temptation polychord associated with Bradford's sexual guilt in this scene, shown in example 8.16, musically foreshadows the minister's induction into the Satanic rites. Here, the reiterated scnority is heard in counterpoint with the maypole dance of example 8.14(a), which has again been distorted to produce the melodic compass of the Satanic tritone:
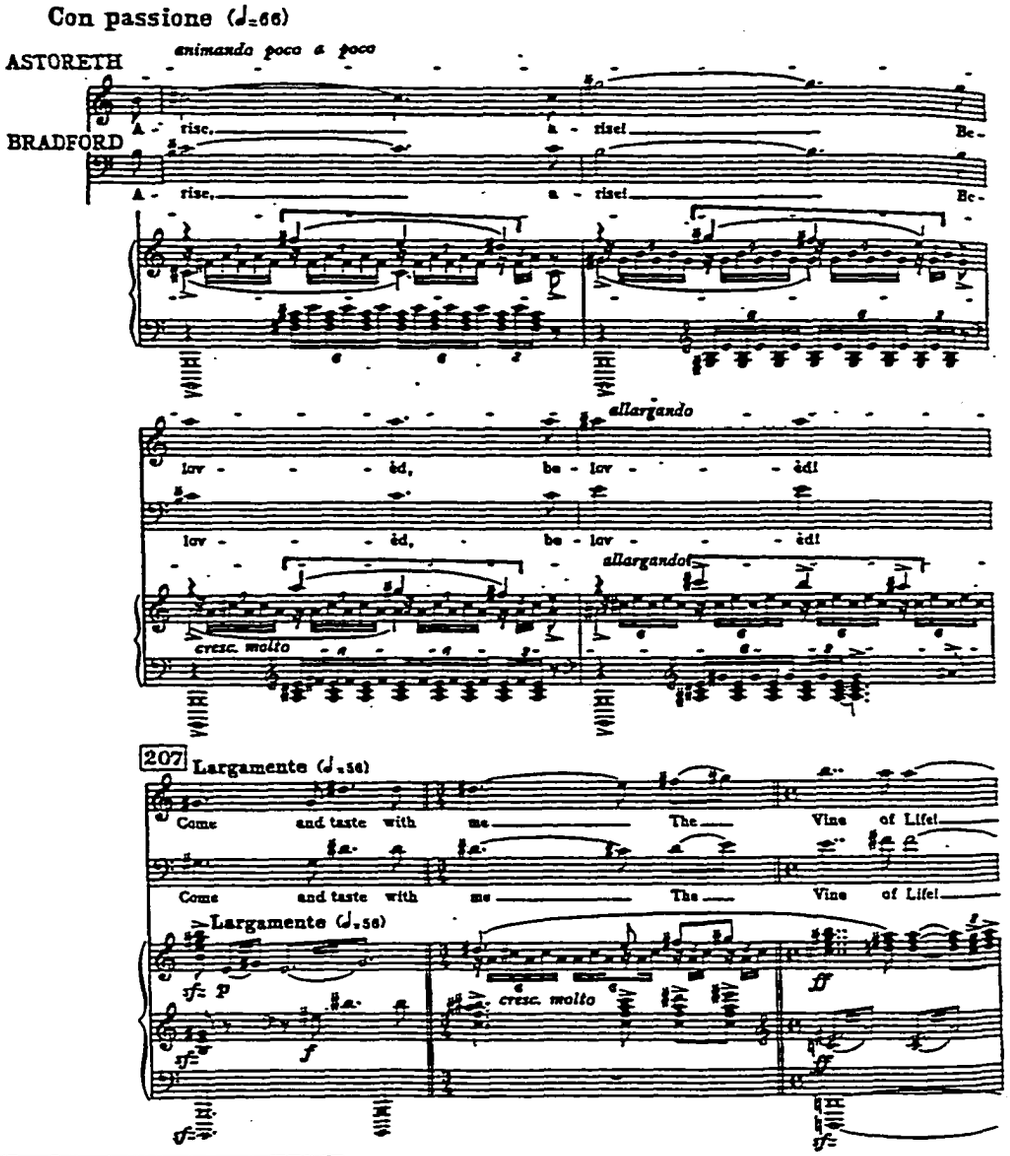
Ex. 8.16: Hanson, Merry Mount, Act II, scene 3, piano-vocal score, p. 193



Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

After Bradford has been induced to sign the devil's book, the scene concludes with an extended development of the love theme, cast as a rapturous duet between the minister and the beautiful courtesan Astoreth (soprano; the role is taken by the singer who portrays Marigold), a satanic incarnation of Marigold as the Babylonian goddess of love. The phrases leading to the duet's musical climax, shown in example 8.17, are typical of Hanson's vocal writing throughout the opera and illustrate some of its problems:[68]

Ex. 8.17: Hanson, Merry Mount, Act II, scene 3, piano-vocal score, pp. 227-28



68 The text of the duet is taken from the Old Testament *Song of Songs* attributed to Solomon.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Like Taylor and several other of the Metropolitan's American composers, Hanson often conceived of the singers' lines as counterpoint to thematically related material in the orchestra. Here, the instrumental melody that predominates is an inversion of the initial three-note ascending figure from the love theme, repeated at successively higher pitch levels. Hanson's complementary vocal lines are not as graceful or fluid as those of Taylor, however, as his textual settings are almost entirely syllabic, with no metrical or rhythmic variety provided for text repetitions. Moreover, the rhythmic values assigned to the singers are predominantly long and sustained, the melodic lines are heavily dependent on pitch repetition, and there is little independence of the vocal lines in relation to one another. The prevalence of such writing throughout the score thus presents the singers with arduous and tiring roles of limited musical interest and with little differentiation in vocal character.
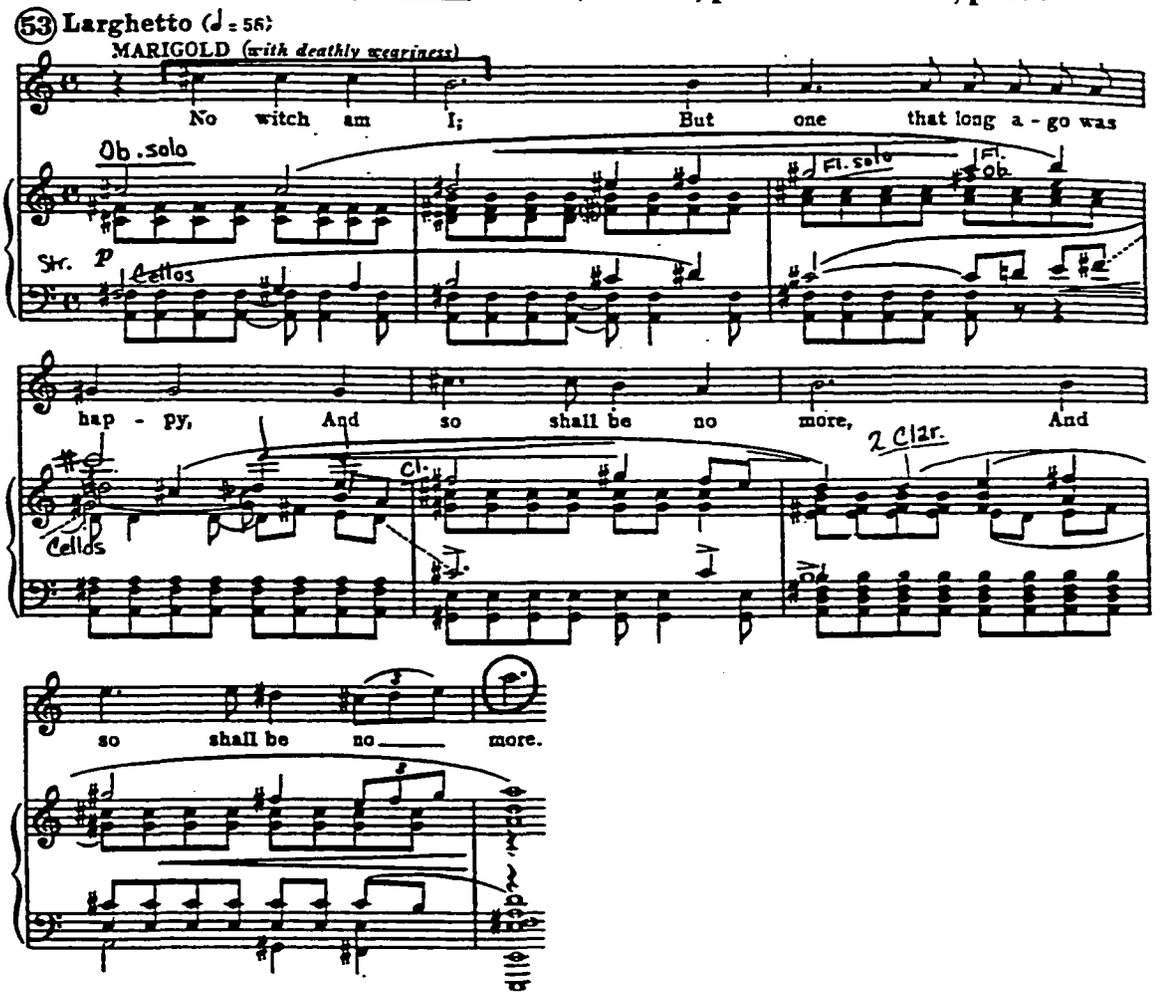
A particularly obvious instance of these problems occurs in Marigold's final act aria, in which she denounces her Puritan oppressors. In addition to the tiresome reiteration of pitches and rhythmic values in the soprano's line, the initial section of the aria contains a text repetition rendered ineffective by the minimal variation between its musical settings, shown in examples 8.18(a) and (b). Here, the two settings of "No witch am I" are little more than melodic inversions of each other, and the culmination of the latter excerpt on an A♭, a semitone lower than the apex of the earlier phrase, is anticlimactic. While Hanson's strategy ostensibly supports the character's emotional state of exhausted despair, the effect actually conveyed by the scene is one of turgidity rather than tragic resignation.[69]
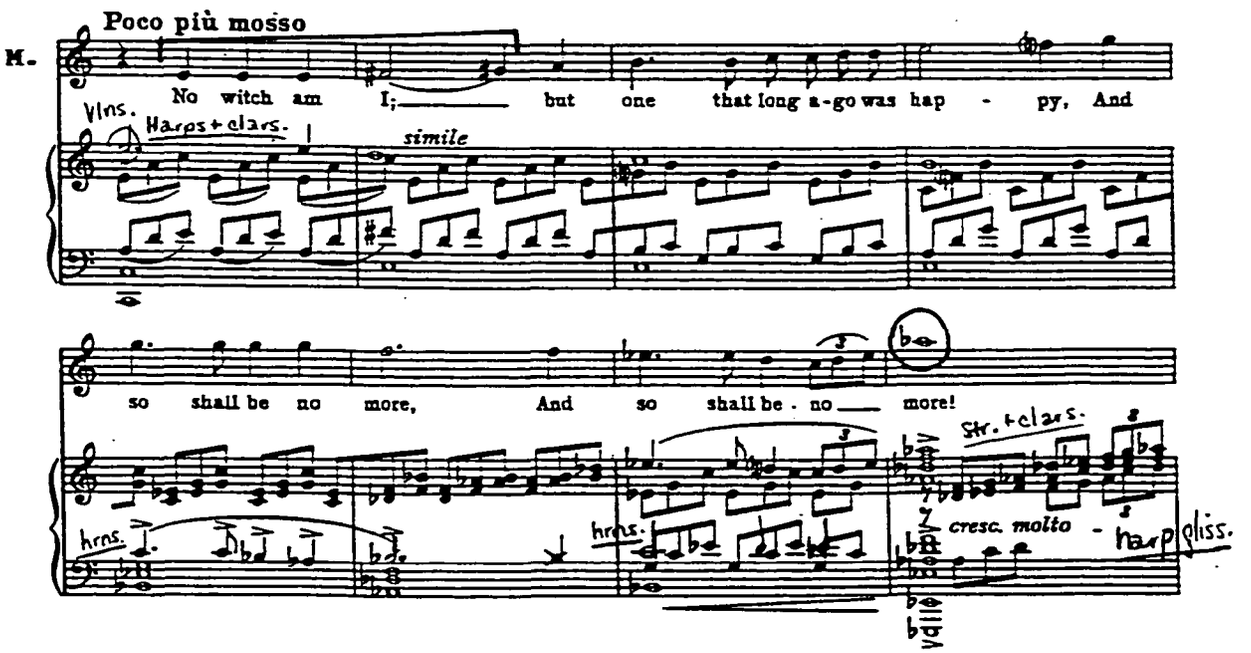
---

[69] Hanson's final aria for his dying heroine also suffers by comparison to more distinguished efforts offered by other composers in analogous dramatic situations: "Addio del passato" (La Traviata); "Pace, pace, mio Dio" (La Forza del Destino); "Sola, perduta, abbandonata" (Manon Lescaut); and "Tu, piccolo Iddio" (Madama Butterfly), among others.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Ex. 8.18(a): Hanson, Merry Mount, Act III, scene 2, piano-vocal score, p. 256



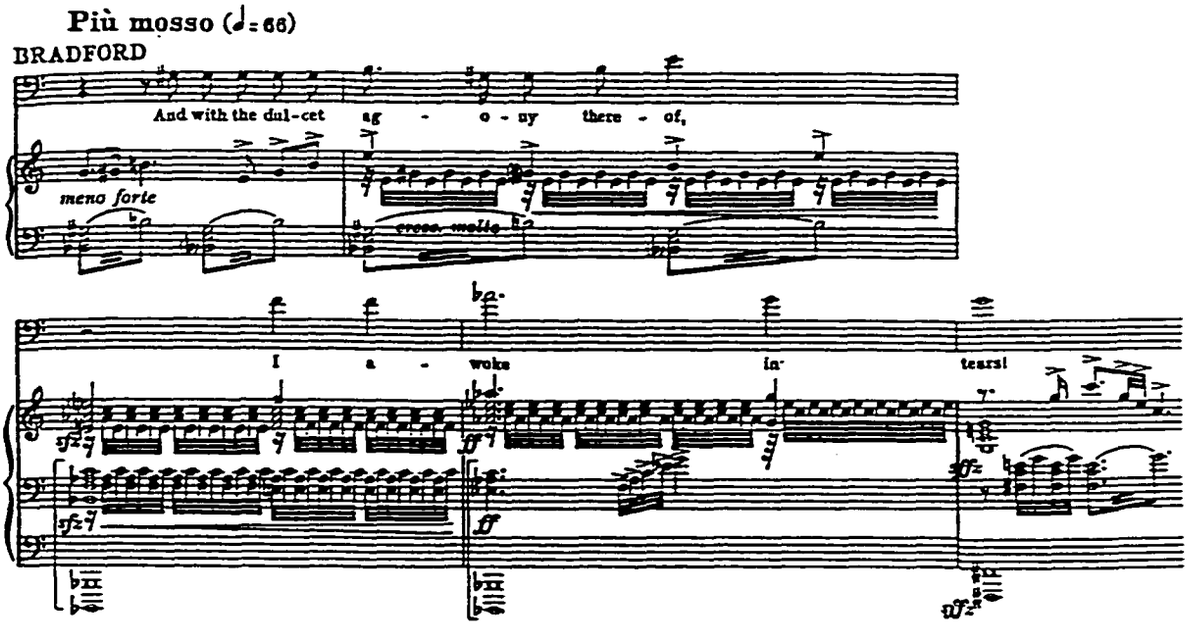
Ex. 8.18(b): Hanson, Merry Mount, Act III, scene 2, piano-vocal score, p. 257



Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Hanson produced his most satisfying vocal writing in the opera for the character of Wrestling Bradford, and its bravura demands of range and power place the role on a level of difficulty equivalent to those for dramatic baritone in the mature works of Verdi. Example 8.19 illustrates a vocal passage from Bradford's Act 1 aria which takes the singer to a climactic A♭ above the staff:

Ex. 8.19: Hanson, Merry Mount, Act I, piano-vocal score, p. 43



Yet, as is evident in this brief excerpt, even Bradford's music does not escape the shortcomings enumerated above: relentlessly syllabic settings, limited rhythmic invention, and tiresome pitch repetition in the melodic construction.

As a result, despite its impressive organically conceived symphonic design and the utilization of interesting motivic and thematic ideas which are subjected to much skillful and dramatically effective development, Merry Mount inevitably suffers from its ungrateful solo vocal writing. The composer's acknowledged predilection for symphonic composition resulted in

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

impressive effects with massed sound,[70] but his relative inexperience in solo instrumental and vocal writing (particularly song) was apparent when he turned, admittedly by circumstance, to opera.[71] Despite the plethora of confrontational situations offered by its libretto, the principal characters of Merry Mount are rarely presented in vocal ensembles; the only exceptions are the Bradford-Astoreth love duet and an earlier duet between Marigold and Gower Lackland that exhibits the same techniques of its Act 3 counterpart, as well as its chief shortcomings: insufficient differentiation between the singers' lines and the concomitant absence of vocal characterization.

To some extent, Hanson attempted to compensate for these flaws with his powerful choral settings, for he admitted that he had conceived of the chorus as the opera's second most significant character after Wrestling Bradford.[72] But while the massed vocal effects of the chorus used liberally throughout the score are indeed impressive, as in the Puritans' impassioned hymnody and the satanic chorus's worship of Lucifer, they cannot fully compensate for the ungrateful principal roles. Hanson also made no attempt to combine his vocal forces by including any arias or ensembles with chorus, which might have produced a powerful synergy. A principal reason for this seems to have been his underlying musico-dramatic design for the opera,

---

70 The opera is scored for a large post-Romantic orchestra including two flutes and piccolo; two oboes and English horn; two clarinets and bass clarinet; and two bassoons and contra-bassoon; four horns; three trumpets; three trombones and tuba; a percussion battery consisting of timpani, bass drum, snare drum, cymbals, xylophone, tubular bells, gong, tambourine, triangle, temple blocks, and marimba; two harps, and strings.

71 Hanson's prolific lifetime output includes only a limited amount of chamber music, solo instrumental compositions, and songs, and many of these works are student efforts dating from before 1920. Amerigrove, s.v. *Howard (Harold) Hanson*, by Ruth T. Watanabe.

72 Hanson, *Article on Merry Mount*, 4.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

which he conceived as through-composed dramatic action with minimal pause for vocal interludes.[73]

Unfortunately, among the first to disparage Hanson's vocal writing in the opera was tenor Edward Johnson, whose experience with the role of Gower Lackland was evidently not a positive one, despite evidence of an outstanding performance from a surviving recording of the world premiere broadcast.[74] His reported comments after two weeks of rehearsals to the effect that he was "pretty well fed up with it. . . . Merry Mount is a very pretentious, ineffective work,"[75] sealed the opera's fate at the Metropolitan when the tenor took administrative control of the theater in 1935. Merry Mount's libretto also aroused some controversy for the dramatic license it took with historical events. Three days before the premiere, Gatti-Casazza received a letter from the Society of Mayflower Descendants which angrily protested Stokes's (as well as Hawthorne's) erroneous conflation of the Pilgrim and Puritan colonists and the resulting anachronistic depiction of the former as a group of intolerant religious fanatics. The incident occasioned a lively exchange in the press from which the Metropolitan immediately distanced itself by insisting that responsibility for the libretto lay solely with its author.[76]

The general public's reaction to the world stage premiere of Merry Mount, however, was overwhelmingly positive. The 10 February 1934 event was attended by a capacity

---

73 This plan was confirmed by Stokes in a 14 February 1934 interview with the Philadelphia Public Ledger.

74 *Merry Mount*, Metropolitan Opera radio broadcast of world premiere, 10 February 1934. Deems Taylor, commentator. Celebrity Record Company, EJS-134, Rodgers & Hammerstein Archives of Recorded Sound, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

75 Quoted in Paul Jackson, Saturday Afternoons at the Old Met: The Metropolitan Opera Broadcasts, 1931-1950 (Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1992), 50.

76 Letters from Francis R. Stoddard, Society of Mayflower Descendants in the State of New York, to Gatti-Casazza, 7 February, 8 February and 19 February 1934. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Ziegler correspondence, 1933-34, M.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

audience that included American composers Harry T. Burleigh, Randall Thompson, George Antheil, Bernard Wagenaar, and Deems Taylor,[77] and accorded the cast and creators an estimated fifty curtain calls, more than either Peter Ibbetson or The Emperor Jones.[78] The momentum of this reception resulted in an impressive nine-performance run for the opera during its single Metropolitan season, including one in Philadelphia and another at the Eastman Theater in Rochester before an audience of nearly 4,000 Hanson supporters. Lawrence Tibbett, as Wrestling Bradford, added another American role to his collection of memorable portrayals, although critic Samuel L. Laciar noticed, "He seemed at certain times to have some difficulty in precipitating himself into the role in the same manner which he did in 'The Emperor Jones' and 'Simon Boccanegra.'"[79] The evening's conductor, Tullio Serafin, was equally enthusiastic about adding another native opera to his repertoire, for Robert A. Simon commented that, "Mr. Serafin conducts as if he were a zealot for American opera."[80] With respect to the production, which was particularly lavish in its realization of the satanic vision scene, even the Sun's W. J. Henderson admitted, "The production was accomplished after laborious preparation and was in many respects honorable to the Metropolitan. It can be said that the musical possibilities of the opera were completely realized."[81]

Critical opinion regarding the libretto and score was generally respectful to the overall effort of the creative team, but perceptions of the opera's musical and dramatic details

---

77 *Audience Hails Composer and Librettist; "Merry Mount" Scores a Popular Success,* New York Times, 11 February 1934, sec. 2, 3.

78 *Music: Curtain Lifts 50 Times to Cheers for "Merry Mount,"* News-Week [Newsweek] 3 (17 February 1934): 37.

79 *"Merry Mount" Acclaimed,* Philadelphia Public Ledger, 15 February 1934.

80 *Hell at the Metropolitan,* The New Yorker 10 (17 February 1934): 70.

81 *"Merry Mount" Has Premiere,* New York Sun, 12 February 1934, 11.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

were varied. Almost all the East Coast critics agreed that Stokes had supplied a libretto of potent theatrical possibilities, albeit of a somewhat stock nature, as described by Lawrence Gilman:

> If those devices of the opera house which have always been sure-fire continue to exert their immemorial appeal, "Merry Mount" should make its way into the public heart.
>
> There is a sumptuous provision of spectacle . . . Maypole songs and dances . . . love duos, and dramatic monologues, and battles and murder, and an Indian war-dance. [82]

But there was some discussion on the depth to which the libretto's poetic elements really penetrated into the emotions and motivations of its principal characters. The exigent Grenville Vernon felt that, "The libretto gives the composer admirable opportunity for musical expression,"[83] but Stokes's effort impressed Philadelphia critic Odell Hauser as "a synthetic product":

> What he has done is to concoct a conventional operatic 'plot,' merely freshening it by deriving its external incidents from American sources. . . . [W]here there is so much attention to manipulation of events, there will be little room for attention to expression of genuine feeling.
>
> Howard Hanson's presumption suffers because there is so little emotional lift in the poem. That is to say, he writes in a way to suggest that were there broader moments of lyric import in the text, he would be able to take advantage of them. [84]

The majority of the New York critics echoed Hauser's sentiment that while the music evinced considerable skill and sincerity, like Stokes's libretto—or perhaps because of it—the score failed to supply characterization and expressive commentary on the narrative events on a level necessary for emotionally satisfying and illuminating lyric drama. Many critics

---

82 *"Merry Mount" World Premiere Is Acclaimed at Metropolitan,* New York Herald Tribune, 11 February 1934, 1, 25.

83 *A New American Opera,* The Commonweal 19 (2 March 1934): 498.

84 *"Merry Mount" Received with Enthusiasm Here,* Philadelphia Evening Public Ledger, 14 February 1934.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

observed a sharp delineation between the dramatic efficacy of the score's choral episodes as opposed to that of its principal characters. Vernon, for example, wrote: "In the choruses Mr. Hanson has shown a vitality and sonority of writing unequalled in any previous American work. . . . Unfortunately [his] writing for the individual singer is not as sympathetic. It is often labored and never inspired. Yet taken as a whole the score is admirable."[85] Simon added: "The music of Howard Hanson matches the libretto in vigor, and the opera is a spectacular effort . . . but the preponderance of mass singing submerges the players in the drama. Even the extended solo passages often sound like choral music rather than songs for a single voice."[86] Along similar lines, a Philadelphia critic praised the music's "considerable pretense and value, chiefly in the elaborateness of its orchestration and the dominating power of its choral passages," but noted that Hanson "has not given much of felicitous opportunity to the singers in the cast, their parts being mostly in laborious recitative and declamation."[87]

Hanson's meticulous technique in the structure and development of his principal themes and motives unfortunately failed to make as strong an impression as had similar strategies in his orchestral works, and a few commentators implied that this element may even have been a distraction to the composer in seeking a deeper musical expression. Philadelphia critic Isaac Goldberg wrote: "What Dr. Hanson provided was chiefly well-mannered writing. . . . The nearest that this music comes to suggesting the inner turmoil of the preacher is the shouting into which Lawrence Tibbett at last degenerated. . . . Even in the scene of the bacchanale, all was

---

85 *A New American Opera*, 498.

86 *Hell at the Metropolitan*, 70.

87 *New American Opera*, Philadelphia Evening Bulletin, 14 February 1934.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

noise and rhythm, but nothing was demonic,"[88] and the redoubtable Paul Rosenfeld complained, "[O]ne finds [Hanson] repeating his ideas over and over again as though he could not get from the spot. If *Merry Mount* indicates anything, it is that his medium remains the chorus."[89] Finally, Henderson—like many critics of his generation—once again cited the continuing curse of Wagnerian music drama on American opera composers:

> [T]here is too much orchestral interluding. Wagner set a very bad example in this matter. Minor composers fail to realize that they cannot make such a mighty explicator of their orchestras that they can keep their actors waiting through eight or ten measures while the instruments tell what they are feeling. [90]

It is possible that the mixed critical reception affected public perception of Merry Mount during the course of the season, for Gatti's removal of the opera from the Metropolitan's repertoire at its conclusion was ostensibly due to his vigilant attention to public opinion and its effect on box-office potential, which he could ill afford to ignore. In a report on the economic condition of the theater one month after Kahn's death to Cornelius N. Bliss, a board member who had assumed a key role in keeping the institution alive during the Depression years, Gatti inserted an opinion on the opera that apparently went unchallenged:

> The Management is of the opinion that "Merry Mount" should not be given again next year. This opera was little liked and has all the probabilities of not being liked at all next year. It would again require a large amount of work and rehearsals of every sort which it is much better to use in a more convenient way. [91]

---

88 *"Merry Mount" and American Opera—Old Form and New,* The Musical Record 1 (February 1934): 356-57.

89 Rosenfeld, Discoveries of a Music Critic, 306.

90 *"Merry Mount" Has Premiere.*

91 Report of Gatti-Casazza to Cornelius N. Bliss, 16 April 1934, *Production Costs*, 2. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, 1933-34, Bliss.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

While Gatti never formed a close artistic relationship with either Hanson or Stokes, it is unlikely that the irritation he experienced during Merry Mount's production genesis at the Metropolitan would have affected his business decision regarding the opera's retention in the repertoire. Yet the economic conclusions he reached concerning the opera's future were almost certainly supported by the fact that Merry Mount was exactly the type of technically "well-made" opera that he described as tiresome to both himself and the public in his report on Belfagor (coincidentally by Hanson's teacher, Respighi) to the Conte di San Martino.[92]

Despite the success of the opera's premiere, Hanson's position had weakened by the end of the 1933-1934 season not only due to the mixed press reaction but by two unforeseen events: the death of Merry Mount's original advocate Otto Kahn one month after the premiere, and the departure of conductor Tullio Serafin (1880-1968) from the Metropolitan. The loss of Serafin in particular, one of American opera's greatest advocates, assured that a Merry Mount revival would be nearly as arduous a task as that of its premiere. Gatti had long suspected that the government of Benito Mussolini, desirous of recapturing the golden age of Italy's international operatic hegemony, would attempt to lure Serafin back to his native country, and the manager took steps to convince the Fascists that their cause would be ill-served by undermining Italian operatic supremacy in America.[93] By 1934, however, Gatti no longer possessed the economic

---

92 See chapter 6, *n*9.

93 Kahn had a personal audience with Mussolini in 1927, after which he cabled to Gatti: "Saw your great chief who says has no idea interposing difficulties but on contrary highly appreciates Metropolitan and its distinguished General Manager." Kahn, Rome, to Gatti-Casazza, 9 April 1927. Kahn Papers, Box 321, Princeton University.

Gatti's concerns resurfaced in 1931, when he attempted to intervene through the Italian Ambassador with the argument that Serafin's departure from the Metropolitan would result in the *de facto* promotion of Artur Bodanzky to the position of principal conductor at the theater and the resumption of German hegemony. Gatti to Senator Giacomo de Martino, Ambassador of the King of Italy, Washington, D.C., 30 April 1931. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, Summer 1931, Miscellaneous. Gatti reported on the conductor's actions to Kahn: "Serafin . . . had a long conversation with Hon. Mussolini. . . . he has begged the Duce . . .

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

leverage with Serafin that he had throughout the previous decade, and on 22 June 1934 the conductor cabled from Milan that, partly in response to "new authoritative pressures," he had decided to accept the artistic directorship of Rome's Teatro Reale, a post he held until 1943.[94] Suspecting that this unexpected development would affect the fate of Merry Mount, Stokes wrote Gatti that Hanson had been "filled with anxiety" by the news and wished to make immediate contact with Serafin's replacement to discuss revisions he had made to the opera.[95] The librettist also took it upon himself to inquire into the situation during his annual summer sojourn in Europe, and it is entirely possible that the report of his findings to Ziegler was an attempt to politically turn the situation to his advantage by encouraging Gatti's resentment of Serafin's departure:

> Maestro Serafin [drove] over to Pontresina with his wife . . . and stayed about an hour. He seemed anxious to give his side of the circumstances under which he left the Met. He said that Il Duce had often before invited him to join the staff of the Royal Opera House in Rome, but that this year, for the first time, Signor Mussolini offered him supreme command at that institution, with carte blanche and instructions to raise it to the leading opera house in Europe and if possible of the world. . . . He said his salary was twice that in New York. [96]

The ploy was not a successful one, as Ziegler's subsequent report to Gatti also contained the information that Metropolitan board chairman Paul Cravath had consented to allow official notification of Merry Mount's non-inclusion in the following season's repertoire to be delivered to Hanson and Stokes under the aegis of the board's Executive Committee rather than the General

---

> to let him remain in New York also for the years to come, accompanying his request with arguments proving the fact, that he, Serafin, considers himself much more useful in New York than in Italian Theatres." Gatti, Milan, to Kahn, 24 July 1931. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, Summer 1931, Kahn.

94 Telegram from Tullio Serafin, Milan, to Gatti, 22 June 1934. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence 1933-34, Serafin-Marinuzzi-Muzio.

95 Stokes, Pontresina, Switzerland, to Gatti, Milan, 20 July 1934. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, Summer 1934, Miscellaneous.

96 Edward Ziegler to Luigi Villa, secretary to Gatti-Casazza, Milan, 11 September 1934. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, Summer 1934, Ziegler.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Manager, thus effectively quashing any claims the pair might advance against continued "foreign"—and therefore anti-American—influence at the Metropolitan. Such a possibility was evidently taken seriously, for Gatti's assistant confirmed that he would personally brief Cravath on the situation to prepare him for the inevitable encounter with Stokes.[97]

Edward Ziegler's subsequent assurance to Hanson that "it does not of necessity mean that [Merry Mount] would disappear entirely from the repertoire of the Metropolitan"[98] was nevertheless not an improbable prospect, as Gatti's impending 1935 retirement was accompanied by a bid on the part of the nationalist-oriented Juilliard Foundation (which had saved the Metropolitan from bankruptcy with an infusion of funds in 1933) to gain control of artistic policy at the theater. The group succeeded in obtaining the appointment of its candidate, Juilliard voice teacher and former Metropolitan bass Herbert Witherspoon, to the General Manager's post, but its agenda was derailed by Witherspoon's untimely death of a heart attack in May 1935. The replacement of Witherspoon by his designated assistant, Edward Johnson, was the worst scenario Hanson could have experienced: although Johnson professed genuine enthusiasm over the continuation of Gatti's American program, the last score he wished to revive was Merry Mount.

Despite the fact that Hanson was among the last of a select group of composers to have benefitted from the largesse of the Gatti-Kahn initiative embarked upon nearly a quarter of a century earlier, his dismay seems justified at being ultimately stymied in attempts to keep Merry Mount from vanishing at the Metropolitan. The composer Robert Ward, a student at the Eastman School during the late 1930s, remarked on Hanson's "bitterness with respect to the

---

97 Luigi Villa, Milan, to Gatti, Lesa, Italy, 17 September 1934. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, Summer 1934, Gatti.

98 Reported by Ziegler to Villa, Milan, 21 September 1934, quoted in Jackson, Metropolitan Opera Broadcasts, 52.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

development of certain aspects of the American scene such as opera."[99] It is interesting that while Hanson demonstrated the depth of this sentiment by never again attempting a dramatic work, Ward's opera The Crucible (1961; after Arthur Miller's drama about the Salem witch trials) has become the most popular American operatic commentary on its colonial past.

Merry Mount regrettably languished for nearly two decades before it was heard again in an abridged concert version conducted by Hanson in 1952 at Southern Methodist University in Dallas. It is unfortunate that the opera's immediate European prospects were effectively nullified by political realities: while Serafin remained a proponent of American opera (as evidenced by his advocacy of The Emperor Jones in Rome) and Artur Bodanzky had apparently promised to recommend the score to theaters in Germany and Austria,[100] one could hardly imagine a less likely prospect for any of those venues during the 1930s than an opera which portrays the ultimate destruction of an intolerant group of ultra-conservative fanatics.

In the post-war years, Hanson emerged as Merry Mount's chief advocate, and a lecture-performance recording he made in the 1950s of an orchestral suite he had judiciously fashioned from the score two decades before disseminated some of its best music and reawakened interest in the work.[101] Three staged revivals took place across the following two decades: a December 1964 performance with Hanson conducting the San Antonio Symphony, featuring Beverly Sills and Chester Ludgin and funded by a Ford Foundation grant; a 1974 staging

---

99 Quoted in Williams, *Hanson,* 25.

100 Stokes to Kahn, 11 March 1930. Kahn Papers, Box 442, Princeton University.

101 Hanson had obviously not lost all hope, as he commented: "The record, 'The Composer and His Orchestra,' based on the 'Merry Mount Suite' seems to be going great guns both in this country and in England and I hope that this will have an effect in increasing the interest in the work. I notice from my royalty checks that the choruses are still in demand." Hanson to Frank Campbell-Watson, Music Publishers Holding Corporation, 22 February 1960. Sibley Music Library, Eastman School of Music, "Merry Mount 1934-1961," Box 9/1.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

commemorating the one-hundredth anniversary of the Chautauqua Festival, with Hanson conducting a cast that again featured Ludgin with soprano Johanna Meier; and a 1976 Bicentennial performance organized by the Eastman Summer Music Festival in celebration of Hanson's eightieth birthday. As with Taylor's Peter Ibbetson, the work was never taken up by the aggressively nationalist City Center Opera (later New York City Opera), despite the fact that Ludgin, an American baritone, had achieved the strongest resonance with the role of Wrestling Bradford since Lawrence Tibbett. After another two decades of neglect, the opera was exhumed by American music champion Gerard Schwarz, who conducted a concert version with the Seattle Symphony in 1996 in which the principal roles were sung by the outstanding young American artists Lauren Flanigan and Richard Zeller.

In contrast to the operas of Taylor and Gruenberg, critical reaction to revivals of Merry Mount, despite some variation in the perception of details, has remained virtually unchanged in its overall assessment over time:

> Though there are solos and duets that have grace and dignity, if not lyricism, it is the majestic choruses that emerge as the work's best, most pervasive feature. . . . As a whole, *Merry Mount* is an expression of an American nationalism that now seems largely out of fashion. (San Antonio, 1964) [102]
>
> [*Merry Mount*] remains a problematic opera. It is a choral opera, in the manner of "Boris Godunov" yet other influences are felt too. . . . These allusions are more dramatic than musical, and are probably more due to the librettist, Richard Stokes, than Hanson. (Rochester, 1976) [103]
>
> If these performances did not reveal *Merry Mount* as a neglected masterpiece, they did justify the effort. . . . [T]here are plenty of opportunities for the singers, with gratifyingly expansive music, especially Bradford's big aria, made famous by Lawrence Tibbett. Hanson's monolithic, essentially conservative orchestral

---

102 Gerald Ashford, *Other Puritans,* Opera News 29 (23 January 1965): 31.

103 Michael Walsh, *"Merry Mount" Excellent,* Rochester Democrat and Chronicle, 26 June 1976; and High Fidelity/Musical America 26 (October 1976): MA22-23.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> sound recalls his symphonies of the same period. His best music, however, is reserved for the chorus. (Seattle, 1996) [104]

The piece has continued to generate commentary that is respectful to its undisputed musicianly qualities, yet never enthusiastic enough to warrant more than an occasional hearing.

Hanson himself flourished, both as a composer in non-operatic media (his "Requiem" Symphony was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1943) and throughout a long administrative tenure at Eastman, but his music became increasingly—and perhaps unjustifiably—regarded as retrogressive over time. This was noted in his 1981 obituary:

> Whether fairly or not, the music world tended to draw a sharp line between Dr. Hanson's school and the more "progressive" group [of composers] that was influenced by Stravinsky, Schoenberg and . . . Nadia Boulanger. That group included people such as Edgard Varèse, Aaron Copland, Elliott Carter and Roger Sessions. [105]

Yet it was perhaps fitting that this most American of musicians from Wahoo, Nebraska should have been the composer to supply the Gatti regime with its final "grand" American opera. Only four native-born American composers after Hanson have had similarly full-length works on an American-inspired scenario produced at the Metropolitan: Martin David Levy (Mourning Becomes Electra, 1967); George Gershwin (Porgy and Bess, 1985); Philip Glass (The Voyage, 1992); and John Harbison (The Great Gatsby, 1999). Merry Mount thus remains an enduring achievement in American operatic history.

---

[104] F. B. St. Clair, *In Review: Seattle*, Opera News 61 (8 February 1997): 49-50.

[105] Donal Henahan, *The Hanson Legacy: Challenges to Modernity in American Music*, New York Times, 28 February 1981.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

CONCLUSION: AN AMERICAN OPERATIC PATRIMONY?

When examined in its entirety, the sustained commitment of the Metropolitan Opera to the production of American opera during the initial decades of the twentieth century emerges as a remarkable achievement in the musical history of the United States. The program was notable not only for the number of American composers it was able to assist during its unprecedented quarter-century duration, but also for the role it played in inspiring other opera-producing organizations to initiate similar efforts, the effects of which continue to reverberate throughout American musical life. Thus, in contrast to the frequently encountered view of American opera's pre-World War II period as a succession of inconsequential works composed with slavish adherence to European models, the Metropolitan's production history represented a substantial foundation of accomplishment upon which future efforts could stand, one that also developed a growing audience for native works and solidified a sense of musical patrimony among American dramatic composers that traced its origins to the pioneering nineteenth-century works of Fry and Bristow.[1]

---

[1] In an example of the former view, the American composer Ned Rorem claimed in a 1991 article that "[Gian Carlo] Menotti singlehandedly revitalized the concept of living opera in the United States," and referred to opera composers preceding him as a "sterile generation." In support of his statements, Rorem cited "patriotic 'Pocahontas' affairs with tom-toms" and "German-educated pap by Cadman et alia," in an obvious confusion of Indianist composers like Cadman (the first Metropolitan composer trained solely in the United States) with the Wagner-inspired pupils of Rheinberger, such as Converse and Parker. Rorem did express curiosity about American operas composed before those of Menotti, particularly The King's Henchman due to the authorship of its libretto by Millay, but admitted he had never had the opportunity to hear them. Rorem, *In Search of American Opera,* Opera News 56 (July 1991): 10. An otherwise incisive commentary on stylistic aspects of American opera since World War II, the article received an ASCAP Deems Taylor Award in 1992.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Given the technical skill of most of the Metropolitan's American composers, the ultimate low rate of absorption of their works into the national repertory may be attributed to the operas' overall lack of a high level of creative inspiration rather than alleged musical incompetence. Gatti-Casazza singled out the former element in his own evaluation of the program: "The principal weakness of American operas, as of all others that do not succeed, is lack of imagination or creative power."[2] As his statement implies, the developing history of American opera predictably mirrored that of Europe in its production of a body of work that exhibited varying levels of inspiration and encompassed multiple approaches to the genre which future composers could either profitably develop or reject. Commenting generally on the uniquely finite parameters of the Western musical canon necessitated by the requirement of performance time, the art historian Vernon Lee noted: "I have learnt to recognise that in the case of music the amount of what I must be allowed to call *available immortality* is extremely small, and is so far reserved for only a few perfect representatives of a few surviving styles."[3] While Gatti refused to override this dictum by artificially prolonging the life of any opera, even for the sake of politically advantageous artistic patriotism, he nevertheless recognized the inherent benefits of nurturing American opera's crucial developmental stages: "[T]he efforts of those [composers] who fail have a strong effect in preparing the ground for those who 'arrive'."[4]

---

2 Gatti-Casazza, Memories of the Opera, 246.

3 Vernon Lee [V. Paget], Studies of the Eighteenth Century in Italy (London, 1887; 2d ed. Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co., 1908), preface to new edition, xliv-xlv; quoted in Carl Van Vechten, *Sir Arthur Sullivan,* in In the Garret (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1920), 171. Particularly in a genre where a single work occupies an entire evening (or a considerable portion of it), the attrition rate is inevitably high—critic Patrick J. Smith has asserted a consistent survival rate, for both European and American operas, of no more than five percent of the repertoire across four centuries of history. *A New Birth for American Opera,* New York Times, 27 September 1998, sec. 2, 1.

4 Memories of the Opera, 246.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

In a 1932 report in the British journal Music and Letters, William Saunders credited Gatti's approach for the steady artistic progress achieved by the Americans since the inception of the Metropolitan program and named Taylor's two operas as a new apex in the continuing effort, declaring: "There is . . . nothing surer than the fact that the future of opera lies largely with America."[5] The continuing vitality predicted by Saunders was not aborted by Gatti's 1935 departure from the Metropolitan in the wake of his most conspicuously successful American productions. Rather, his successor Edward Johnson confirmed that between forty and fifty new American operas—twice the number received in response to the Metropolitan's inaugural competition by 1910—had already been submitted for consideration before his first season at the theater officially began.[6]

A significant ancillary effect of the Metropolitan initiative was its contribution to the evolving public debate on the viability of American art as it played out principally in the media. By offering an eclectic sampling of contemporary indigenous works in first-rate productions, the theater helped to focus the discussion on the state of existing national efforts and plans for their immediate development, rather than continued quixotic speculation over what American composers might achieve if provided with appropriate support. Public interest generated by the Metropolitan's initiative unquestionably contributed to similar efforts, whether they resulted from a desire for emulation (as in the Boston Opera Company's introduction of opera in English with two

---

5 Saunders, *The American Opera: Has It Arrived?*, Music and Letters 13 (April 1932): 155.

6 Mercer, Tenor of His Time, 184. Nor did Gatti allow the program to lapse after the death of Otto Kahn in 1934; the manager followed Merry Mount (the final American opera to receive Kahn's imprimatur) with California composer John Laurence Seymour's In the Pasha's Garden (libretto by Henry C. Tracy after H. G. Dwight's Stamboul Nights), an atmospheric albeit rather static one-act drama of a love triangle set in modern Istanbul. The production featured Americans in the three principal roles—baritone Lawrence Tibbett, tenor Frederick Jagel, and debuting soprano Helen Jepson—as well as a modernist design by Viennese architect Frederick J. Kiesler. Following the premiere, Henry Hadley presented Seymour with the David Bispham Medal of the Amerian Opera Society of Chicago on the Metropolitan's stage.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Converse works) or competition (as in the protracted Hammerstein-Dippel-Campanini imbroglio). A concomitant benefit was a steady increase in the presence of American singers on both the national and international opera circuits and their increasing commitment to the performance of native works, a phenomenon that peaked during Gatti's tenure with the career of Lawrence Tibbett. In succeeding decades, a wealth of singers emerged whose creation of American roles—such as Brenda Lewis in Marc Blitzstein's Regina, Eleanor Steber as Samuel Barber's Vanessa, Phyllis Curtin as Carlisle Floyd's Susannah, and Beverly Sills in Douglas Moore's The Ballad of Baby Doe—remain signature accomplishments. The trend has continued with the commitment of a new generation of major singers to the portrayal of roles in American works, among them Renée Fleming (John Corigliano's The Ghosts of Versailles; André Previn's A Streetcar Named Desire), Lauren Flanigan (Hugo Weisgall's Esther; Virgil Thomson's The Mother of Us All; Martin David Levy's Mourning Becomes Electra), and Dawn Upshaw (John Harbison's The Great Gatsby). The American tenor Jerry Hadley (who created Harbison's Jay Gatsby at the Metropolitan) has even co-founded an American Lyric Theater Association for the concert presentation of neglected stage works. Among the operas the singer expressed interest in reviving were The Pipe of Desire, Cleopatra's Night, The King's Henchman, and Walter Damrosch's The Man Without a Country, all products of the Metropolitan program or its immediate aftermath.[7]

Why, then, is American opera still perceived as a troubled genre? Even taking into account the acknowledged defects of the individual operas presented by the Gatti-Kahn administration at the Metropolitan, many observers expressed disappointment that the overall progress of the initiative was so slow and its successes seemingly minor as compared to

---

[7] James M. Keller, *Jerry Speak*, Opera News 64 (December 1999): 49.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

contemporaneous international sensations like Wozzeck and Jonny spielt auf. The question remains as to whether specific factors existed—both musical and non-musical, as well as instrinsic and extrinsic to the institution—that militated against the Metropolitan's unqualified success in achieving its goals for the American initiative, and that continue to prevent the house or any other in the United States from building on its early model.

Throughout the twentieth century, there has been no lack of critical commentary in response to the issue, much of it to apportion blame among the various parties involved. Irving Kolodin's history of the Metropolitan, for example, excoriated society for privileging social factors over artistic obligations and abdicating much of its stewardship responsibility in the process; Kahn privately complained of a persistent lack of involvement among members of his board; and Gatti cited American political leaders for failing to emulate European traditions of cultural subsidy, thus forcing artistic institutions to operate as capitalist enterprises. Later commentators have thrown responsibility back to the institutions: critic Joseph Horowitz, for example, has held tenaciously to the belief that widespread rejection of opera in English translation among the leading American theaters continues to force composers to win audience acceptance of the very concept of a native genre with each work they write;[8] and Virgil Thomson railed against the traditional American system of music education, maintaining that its suspicion of modernism prejudiced audiences by placing an inordinate emphasis on "dead men's music."[9] Critics Paul Rosenfeld and Patrick J. Smith extended responsibility to the listening public by insisting that the viable American

---

8 Horowitz, *An Exotic Entertainment: The Failure of American Opera,* in The Post-Classical Predicament: Essays on Music and Society (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1995), 164-76.

9 Quoted in Anthony Tommasini, *Keep it Simple, But Get Out There and Fight!,* in The Virgil Thomson Centenary, 1896-1996, ed. by Joseph Horowitz (Brooklyn Philharmonic Orchestra Program Book, 1996), 29. In another article, Horowitz maintained that the American public "was actually tutored—by the 'music appreciators' of the 1930s and 1940s—to reject new and native works." *The Composer as Emigrant: Korngold and Weill, Hollywood and Broadway,* in The Post-Classical Predicament, 105.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

repertoire that existed was repeatedly rejected by audiences in favor of the more prestigious European canon of established masterpieces.[10] Musicologist Charles Hamm, however, broke sharply with prevailing views in a 1961 article that assigned responsibility almost entirely to the nation's composers, asserting that the majority have not approached lyric drama as a highly specialized musico-dramatic skill.[11] Their various viewpoints notwithstanding, the arguments delineate the major obstacles confronted throughout the Gatti-Kahn period and, despite the noteworthy progress achieved by the Metropolitan, still facing the genre in America. It seems likely that at least partial resolution of the issues is necessary for the continued growth of an indigenous lyric drama in the United States.

Gatti's criticism of federal policies that denied public subsidy to national cultural institutions and forced them to operate as capitalist enterprises was indeed well founded. In 1933, Gatti's assistant echoed sentiments expressed by the general manager several years earlier when he complained: "La Scala . . . received, for last season, a subsidy of almost 5.000.000 Lire (about $350.000 at the present rate of exchange). If the Metropolitan had a similar subsidy, there would be no further need of 'Campaigns to Save the Opera'."[12] The question has never been completely resolved, for thirty-five years after the establishment of the National Endowment for the Arts the United States remains a reluctant arts patron. Private support on the part of individuals, foundations, and corporations has developed considerably since the Metropolitan's Depression-era fundraising appeals, however, and now provides a substantial foundation for many

---

10 Rosenfeld, *The Fate of "Mona,"* in Musical Chronicle (1917-23) (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1923), 54-60; Smith, *Viewpoint: Opera Education 101,* Opera News 57 (May 1993): 6.

11 Hamm, *Opera and the American Composer,* in The American Composer Speaks: A Historical Anthology, 1770-1965 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966), 284-97.

12 Luigi Villa, Milan, to John Scotto, 18 August 1933. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence, Summer 1933, Miscellaneous. See Introduction, *n*17 for Gatti's 1925 statement on the subject.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

operating budgets. But while this modified patronage system frees artistic organizations from the whims of changing political administrations and the onerous specter of government censorship, its limited scope has prevented producing the large body of work necessary for the distillation of a true national canon. The problem is particularly acute in the expensive genre of opera, as articulated by conductor Christopher Keene during his leadership of the New York City Opera, the company which has built most extensively on the Metropolitan's American model: "[W]ithout a system of state subsidy, we can never do what is our absolute obligation, which is to present many, many new works. You have to remember how many bad operas were composed for every *Carmen, Aïda,* or *Fidelio.*"[13] The conductor's point had in fact been articulated by a New York critic during the initial decade of the Metropolitan's American program: "We recently saw a list of five hundred new operas which had been produced in Germany since . . . Wagner's death. . . . This, against a gross total of perhaps fifteen or twenty American operas . . . in the same period."[14] While the nation's leading theaters, including the Metropolitan, continue to be severely limited in this respect, one effective response has been the indirect public funding of new work through university music departments and independent conservatories, since student workshops and "works-in-progress" projects under their aegis benefit from educational subsidies. Such programs additionally provide composers with far greater opportunity to develop and revise their work than is possible in the professional theater.

Progress has also been made towards the fulfillment of Kahn's dream of the growth of an enlightened group of American arts patrons, although the idealistic financier never lived to see the delayed effects of his exhaustive contributions. On the contrary, shortly after his

---

[13] Quoted in Horowitz, *An Exotic Entertainment,* 176.

[14] New York Tribune clipping ca. 1917, quoted in Canfield, *Hadley,* 177.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

1931 resignation as Metropolitan chairman, Kahn revealed to New York Times critic Olin Downes his belief that latent anti-Semitism among his board colleagues had to some extent hobbled him throughout his long tenure there and prevented him from accomplishing as much in the realm of artistic innovation as he might have wished.[15] That his board could be particularly obdurate where American opera was concerned was evident from Kahn's advice to Merry Mount librettist Richard Stokes against appearing before the group to advocate the opera's production.[16] Cultural observers such as New York Times critic John Rockwell continue to note the lack of visionaries of Kahn's caliber in contemporary America: "I am generally dismayed at the low level of culture in our ruling classes. Sitting on boards is a social thing to do. . . . American leaders, especially men, and very much including politicians—especially politicians—seem to pride themselves on being philistines."[17] Nevertheless, enlightened leadership has continued to emerge sporadically throughout the century, often with far-reaching ramifications. The success of Tobias Picker's opera Emmeline at the innovative Santa Fe Opera Festival, for example, was a significant factor in the Metropolitan's selection of the composer as its most recent American commission recipient.[18] Although social position remains a factor in the composition of many of today's cultural boards, the majority function by necessity according to a dictum issued by Louise Humphrey, chairman emeritus of the present Metropolitan Opera

---

15 Downes transmitted a summary of the interview to Irving Kolodin in 1935, possibly in anticipation of the latter's forthcoming history of the theater. However, Kolodin uncharacteristically suppressed the information until the appearance of the book's 1953 edition, giving the explanation that "now . . . virtually all the persons involved are dead." Kolodin, Metropolitan Opera (1953), 299-300.

16 See chapter 8, *n*42.

17 Rockwell, *The Vanishing Arts Page,* Opera News 63 (July 1998): 15.

18 Smith, *New Birth for American Opera,* 1.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Association: "Give, get, or go."[19] And while the operatic star system so vigorously advocated by the Metropolitan's former Real Estate board shows no sign of waning after more than a century, at least a significant percentage of the celebrities are now Americans, a result of focused efforts dating from the Gatti-Kahn administration.

The rise of American singers so crucial to the continuing development of indigenous opera was paradoxically dependent upon their celebrated linguistic versatility and resultant indispensability that began with the Metropolitan's "internationalization" during the Maurice Grau regime at the close of the nineteenth century, a historic factor that essentially vitiates arguments in support of opera in the vernacular as the essential foundation of a national lyric theater in America. The promulgation of this theory in nationalist diatribes such as those of Reginald De Koven served in their day as a rallying cry against the "foreign influences which have controlled, and still control, [our great opera-houses]."[20] They continue to be advanced in modified form by commentators such as Joseph Horowitz, who has asserted that America sealed its operatic fate by ignoring the example of nineteenth-century European schools of national opera, whose growth was stimulated by audiences acclimated to the foreign genre from its presentation in the vernacular.[21]

More illuminating, however, is an examination of the idiosyncracies of the English language itself, since claims of the alleged incompatibility between the consonant-rich Anglo-Saxon strain of its vocabulary and virtuoso singing date from Handel's early eighteenth-century

---

19 Quoted in Walter Price, *Board Games,* Opera News 53 (15 April 1989): 10.

20 De Koven, *Opera in English,* 676.

21 Horowitz, *In the Age of Supertitles, A Place for Opera in English,* New York Times, 19 April 1998, sec. 2, 31.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

conquest of London (the "Handelian Catastrophe," as a British historian charmingly termed it),[22] and the theory continues to be perpetuated by numerous adherents. The allegation can be dismissed with the fact that English is no more gutteral than German, Russian, or any other language upon which a successful national repertory has been built, as well as by the fortuitous existence of The King's Henchman, whose exclusively Saxon-derived libretto remained fully intelligible to at least one exigent critic.[23] Rather, British musicologists have argued persuasively that the native poetic and dramatic forms inherited by Purcell and his predecessors resisted transmogrification into lyric drama to a far greater degree than many of their Continental counterparts. The genesis of the Elizabethan drama, for example, along the lines of Senecan tragedy—the Roman form static and declamatory as opposed to more dialogic Greek models—encouraged the use of music as interpolation or incidental embellishment rather than in continuous engagement with the text.[24] The casting of text into blank verse (or its rhymed counterpart, the heroic couplet) later developed unparalleled sublimity of expression in the hands of Marlowe and Shakespeare, yet the classic English poetic line's saturation with the metrical regularity of iambic pentameter ultimately rendered it less suited to the *stile recitativo* than the irregular cadences embodied in Romance language forms such as the Italian madrigal.[25]

These acknowledged handicaps to an English genre encompassing both poetic and musical viability, however, were brilliantly overcome in the operas of Benjamin Britten, the true successor to Purcell. As Patrick J. Smith has noted, America's lack of a comparable genius

---

22 White, Rise of English Opera, 47. The phrase is actually a double entendre, as White later utilizes it to describe the eventual precipitous decline of the great composer's London career.

23 See comment of W. J. Henderson in chapter 6, *n*34.

24 White, Rise of English Opera, 26.

25 Dent, Foundations of English Opera, 52.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

devoted to the lyric stage has been conspicuous.[26] A particularly daunting obstacle for the Americans may have been the historical difficulty of meeting the uniquely exacting demands of the lyric theater, as detailed below by Charles Hamm, in their own country:

> No matter how different the personalities and backgrounds of Gluck, Mozart, Verdi, Weill, Handel, and Wagner may have been, a common pattern can be traced in their preparation. After mastering the rudiments of music theory and practice, each set out to acquire as intimate a knowledge of opera as possible. They studied, in score and on the stage, the currently successful works; they sought out as teachers men who had demonstrated an ability to write workable operas themselves; they learned about the practical side of opera by singing, conducting, coaching, or playing in an opera orchestra; they cultivated some of the better singers of their day in order to learn what they could about the curious and complex art of singing; they thought and talked and wrote about opera, from the sociological, philosophical, practical, or national point of view. These men approached the composition of opera as a highly specialized craft which would take years to learn and many more to master. Their hope was that if they were diligent enough in learning this craft and in serving a period of apprenticeship, they might finally come up with a successful opera on the fourth or seventh or eleventh try. [27]

Considering the Metropolitan's American productions in this light, it is interesting to note the large proportion that represented an initial effort in the theater: The Pipe of Desire, Mona, Shanewis, The Legend, The Temple Dancer, The King's Henchman, The Emperor Jones, and Merry Mount were either the first operas written, or the first to be professionally produced, by their respective composers, who were generally well represented in other media. Of course, the dearth of professional venues otherwise available to the Americans was a nearly insurmountable obstacle to gaining substantial dramatic experience. Commenting on this phenomenon in 1925, Richard Strauss cited the era's most popular scapegoat, America's Puritan forebears: "Due to Puritan influences, the opera is in America not the core of musical life, but

---

[26] *New Birth for American Opera,* 1.

[27] Hamm, *Opera and the American Composer,* 292.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

rather something standing somewhat apart."[28] Expatriate composer George Antheil offered a more incisive historical perspective, however, by noting that Americans had traditionally been prejudiced in favor of abstract forms by the preponderance of Germans who educated the country musically.[29] This opinion was affirmed in a general critique of twentieth-century opera by critic Harold C. Schonberg, in which he arrived at conclusions similar to those of Hamm:

> Composers of abstract music can get away with technique as the main element of [their work], but not an opera composer, who cannot be too subtle, who has to explain character, mood and situation in musical terms, and who generally has to think in terms of song rather than of pattern. And if the history of opera in the last 50 years shows very few works with staying power, it is because composers have not thought of opera in operatic terms. . . . In the last 50 years a great deal of important music has been composed, and accepted by the public, in every form except opera. . . . The fault is that of the composers themselves, who have lost sight of operatic verities. [30]

One does not have to search far to uncover numerous factors in the American composer's defense. The absence of substantial public subsidy has reduced not only the number of productions possible, but the very existence of professional regional theaters in which new work can be given.[31] Moreover, even the nation's leading opera houses have offered little

---

28 *Strauss Raps Our Opera,* New York Times, 17 April 1925, 25.

29 Rosenfeld, Discoveries of a Music Critic, 314.

30 Schonberg, *Modern Opera: A Pretty Mess,* New York Times, 9 April 1967, sec. D, 15. Both Schonberg and Hamm acknowledged the musical mastery of several celebrated twentieth-century works but maintained that none was unequivocally successful as opera: "Serial writing has yet to prove itself in the opera house, 'Lulu' or 'Moses and Aaron' notwithstanding" (Schonberg, 15); "[A]lmost no one has bothered to notice that long stretches of [*Wozzeck*] do not work as opera . . . . Most of *Moses and Aaron* cannot be followed in performance in the way that opera has been followed since the very early seventeenth century. . . . *The Rake's Progress* is burdened with a libretto which . . . does few of the things a libretto can and must do" (Hamm, *Opera and the American Composer,* 294-95). In light of the fact that all of the cited works have achieved the status of twentieth-century repertoire classics, it is possible that both writers have since modified their positions.

31 Gatti complained on the subject: "Unfortunately, as is well known, in this enormous, rich country which is the confederation of the United States of North America, there are fewer opera theaters overall, for example, than exist solely in the province of Milan!" Gatti to Italian Ambassador Giacomo de Martino, Washington, D.C., 22 December 1930. Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

financial incentive for composers to devote a substantial portion of their careers to an apprenticeship in the genre, a problem that persisted even in the face of public success. Operas such as Peter Ibbetson and The Emperor Jones, for example, were reported to have produced gross receipts in excess of $100,000 during their Metropolitan runs, but Taylor and Gruenberg netted scarcely more than two hundred dollars per representation. The retreat of many American composers into the more sequestered atmosphere of academia, however, was blamed by commentators like Virgil Thomson for the ultimate curtailment of their creative powers: "Daily dealing with the music of the past is probably all right after fifty. It never fails to produce in a younger man a derivative manner of writing that no amount of surface-complexity can conceal."[32]

Another negative phenomenon has been a curious "masterpiece syndrome," an inevitable result of the opera public's deep immersion in the European canon and apparently suffered even by American composers who demonstrated marked skill in vocal or theatrical writing. Terry Teachout, for example, commented on the experience of Leonard Bernstein:

> From 1960 on, much of Bernstein's creative energy was poured into repeated attempts to write the Great American Opera. He tried out and discarded one ambitious libretto idea after another: Nabokov's *Lolita,* Brecht's *The Exception*

Casazza correspondence, 1930-31, Artists. [*Purtroppo, come è ben noto, in questo enorme, ricco paese, che è la confederazione degli Stati Uniti del Nord America, vi sono, complessivamente, meno teatri d'opera di quanti ve ne siano, per esempio, nella provincia di Milano!*]

32 Quoted in Tommasini, *Keep it Simple,* 29. Thomson's comment was to a large degree nullified by the post-World War II development of academia in America as a significant participant in the musical avant-garde. Composer Otto Luening, who benefitted from this trend as a founding member of the Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center, had already rejected film scoring (one of the few practical alternatives to pre-war academia) after he was advised by a Hollywood veteran: "You must be able to compose in every style except your own." Luening, Odyssey of an American Composer, 346. This situation also changed dramatically after World War II and the demise of the autocratic studio system, which had largely prevented composers from working on an independent basis or selecting their own projects. At present, many of America's most capable composers are actively engaged in writing for film, and two recent Metropolitan commissionees have received the Academy Award for an original film score: John Corigliano (The Red Violin, François Girard, 1999) and Tan Dun (Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon, Ang Lee, 2000).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> *and the Rule,* Thornton Wilder's *The Skin of Our Teeth.* But trying to produce a masterpiece through sheer force of will can leave a composer impotent. [33]

Ned Rorem also described an aspect of what has been termed "the anxiety of influence" as a failure complex that has historically afflicted Americans to a greater extent than Europeans: "[A] failed opera carries with it a more paralyzing after-effect than a failed song cycle. If at first you don't succeed at opera, don't try again: the world will not permit you to be burned twice."[34] This factor indeed seems to have been borne out in the careers of several of the Metropolitan's American composers who either reduced their commitment to the genre or eventually abandoned it altogether, among them Converse, Herbert (who continued writing operetta but produced no further operas after Madeleine), Hugo, and Hanson. Echoing sentiments expressed by John Adam Hugo decades earlier, veteran arts administrator Schuyler Chapin, who headed the Metropolitan briefly during the 1970s, concluded: "The underlying basic problem is recognition of the arts as important in our society. We still do not take the arts seriously. Any policy in the arts must address this problem."[35]

Notwithstanding the fact that only partial resolution of the issues mitigating against the unqualified success of its early twentieth-century efforts has been achieved, the

---

33 Teachout, *How Good Was Leonard Bernstein?,* Commentary 98 (October 1994): 53.

34 Rorem, *In Search of American Opera,* 17. Rorem was deeply discouraged by the failure of his opera Miss Julie (after Strindberg), which was premiered by the New York City Opera in 1965. Although many American composers throughout the century have felt similarly, others—such as Parker, Cadman, and Gruenberg—did continue to compose in the genre even after the Metropolitan lost interest in them.

35 Quoted in Charles B. Fowler, *Arts Policy in the U.S.—Do We Have One?,* High Fidelity/Musical America 34 (December 1984): MA10. For Hugo's 1917 comments, see chapter 5, *n*118.

Chapin was clearly referring to the fine arts, as opposed to the popular or commercial forms which comprise a significant and progressive force in American cultural life. Rather than a lack of national recognition of the former, Chapin's comments more precisely articulate frustration over the historic reluctance of Americans to expend public funds for the advancement of the arts generally, and their traditional dependence on market forces alone to govern the availability and distribution of the arts in American society.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Metropolitan came full circle during the final quarter of the twentieth century by resuming an American commissioning schedule redolent of the latter phase of the Gatti-Kahn initiative.[36] The new effort has drawn on a mixture of first-time opera composers (John Corigliano, John Harbison) with those who have experienced at least one prior stage success (Philip Glass, Tobias Picker). Like its predecessor, the program has also garnered its share of criticism, particularly when Jacob Druckman's projected Medea was cancelled in 1986 after the composer, overcommitted due to increased demand for his work, failed to deliver a completed score by the stipulated deadline.[37] As the similar events surrounding the creation of Peter Ibbetson indicate, such an action would never have been sanctioned by Kahn.

The contemporary Metropolitan has also been criticized for organizing most of its American support around high-profile commemorations and anniversaries rather than as an integral component of the season's repertoire. Such events include the awarding of the commission that produced Barber's Antony and Cleopatra to inaugurate the new Lincoln Center house in 1966; the commissioning of operas from Corigliano and Druckman to honor the 1983 centenary of the Metropolitan's founding; the golden anniversary house debut of Porgy and Bess in 1985; the celebration of the 1992 Columbus quincentenary with Glass's The Voyage; and the

---

36 The period between the Gatti-Casazza regime and the current Joseph Volpe-James Levine leadership was not devoid of American opera, although the number of productions dropped precipitously in the decades following Gatti's departure: Edward Johnson produced five American works during his fifteen-year tenure (1935-50)—Richard Hageman's Caponsacchi, Damrosch's The Man Without a Country, Menotti's Amelia Goes to the Ball and The Island God, and Bernard Rogers' The Warrior; Rudolf Bing (1950-72) gave four on the Metropolitan's main stage—Barber's Vanessa and Antony and Cleopatra, Menotti's The Last Savage, and Levy's Mourning Becomes Electra—as well as Floyd's Susannah by a short-lived National Company that was sponsored by the house; Schuyler Chapin (1972-75) produced Thomson's Four Saints in Three Acts at Lincoln Center's Forum Theater as part of a "Mini-Met" concept that was also aborted; and the subsequent Anthony A. Bliss administration (1975-85) presented the house debut of Gershwin's Porgy and Bess to commemorate the opera's 50th anniversary in 1985.

37 See K. Robert Schwarz, *The Met Proposes . . . and Disposes*, New York Times, 2 August 1992, sec. 2, 1.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

premiere of Harbison's The Great Gatsby on the eve of the new millennium, as well as that opera's selection for the Metropolitan New Year's Day 2000 nationwide radio broadcast. These invitations to create *pièces d'occasion* seldom serve American composers well; rather, many have underscored the inescapable fact that the Metropolitan's stage has never been the ideal venue for the development of new work, particularly by unseasoned dramatic composers.

A more positive move has been the recently negotiated agreement with the Lyric Opera of Chicago for the exchange of the Metropolitan's Gatsby production with Chicago's The View From the Bridge, a setting of Arthur Miller's provocative play by American composer William Bolcom. Such an entente would have been unthinkable in Gatti's time and may finally bring to a close—for good or ill—the historic rivalry that has existed between the two companies.[38]

The methods of the Metropolitan will thus continue to be applied towards the quest for American opera well into the twenty-first century. While the increasingly unwieldy administrative apparatus of the great theater cannot be said to have served the nation's composers well since the departure of Kahn and Gatti, the modern house nonetheless deserves credit for recognizing the achievements of the progressive early regime in the realm of indigenous opera and for attempting to revive a significant effort in emulation of its ideals. Now the Metropolitan must recognize that a revival of the spirit of the founding initiative will also be necessary if the current program is to develop the considerable momentum necessary for sustained public support and success. This will mean a commitment beyond the token or

---

[38] Gatti was approached on the subject of an entente with the Chicago Civic Opera Company in 1923 by its music director, Giorgio Polacco, whom Kahn had dismissed from the Metropolitan in 1917. Ziegler reported the unpromising direction of the negotiations to the chairman: "Mr. Gatti refused to make any definite arrangement with Polacco because, as he frankly told him, he does not trust him or his policy; and that any kind of an entente he desired would have to be established between you and Mr. [Samuel] Insull." Ziegler to Kahn, Palm Beach, 23 February 1923. Kahn Papers, Box 205, Princeton University.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

ceremonial, and one in which a larger number of composers, perhaps approaching the Gatti-Kahn pattern of one new American per season, can be accommodated.

It is those composers, however, upon whom the fate of all such efforts will ultimately continue to depend. It appears that the sagacity of Kahn's assessment of this inescapable truth for his era will endure for our own:

> [N]othing would be more pleasing to us than to see American Opera take a permanent and considerable place in our repertoire—a consummation, which, of course, does not depend upon us but upon the American composer and the American public. [39]

---

[39] Letter to Charles Wakefield Cadman, 9 May 1917. Kahn Papers, Box 74, Princeton University.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

MANUSCRIPT AND ARCHIVAL SOURCES

Metropolitan Opera Archives. Metropolitan Opera House, Lincoln Center, New York, New York. Official correspondence of Giulio Gatti-Casazza, Edward Ziegler, and Edward Johnson; artist and production files; royalty contracts; season programs and prospectuses.

Otto H. Kahn Papers. Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library, Princeton, New Jersey.

Howard Hanson Collection. Sibley Music Library, Eastman School of Music, Rochester, New York.

Deems Taylor Papers, MSS 66. Irving S. Gilmore Music Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut.

Mary Kennedy Papers. Beinecke Library for Rare Books and Manuscripts, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut.

Henry Hadley Collection. Special Collections MNY-Amer., Music Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations, New York, New York.

Glenn Dillard Gunn Collection. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Rodgers and Hammerstein Collection of Recorded Sound. Music Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations, New York, New York.

BOOKS, MONOGRAPHS, THESES AND DISSERTATIONS

Aborn, Merton Robert. *The Influence on American Musical Culture of Dvořák's Sojourn in America.* Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1965.

Ahlquist, Karen. Democracy at the Opera: Music, Theater, and Culture in New York City, 1815-60. Music in American Life Series. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997.

Alda, Frances. Men, Women and Tenors. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1937. Reprints, Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1970; New York: AMS Press, 1971.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Baker, Theodore. Über die Musik der Nordamerikanischen Wilden. Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1882. Translated by Ann Buckley as On the Music of the North American Indians, Source Materials and Studies in Ethnomusicology, 9 (Buren, The Netherlands: Frits Knuf and New York: W. S. Heinman, 1976; reprint, New York: Da Capo Press, 1977).

Barrymore, Lionel, with Cameron Shipp. We Barrymores. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1951.

Benét's Reader's Encyclopedia. 3d ed. New York: Harper & Row, 1987.

Bernard, Jonathan, ed. Elliott Carter: Collected Essays and Lectures, 1937-1995. Rochester, New York: University of Rochester Press, 1998.

Bing, Sir Rudolf. 5000 Nights at the Opera. Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1972.

[Blackstone], Tsianina Redfeather. Where Trails Have Led Me. Santa Fe: Vergara, 1970.

Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System. Banking and Monetary Statistics, 1914-1941. Washington, D.C.: Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, 1943.

Borroff, Edith. American Opera: A Checklist. Edited by J. Bunker Clark. Detroit Studies in Music Bibliography, No. 69. Warren, Michigan: Harmonie Park Press, 1992.

Browner, Tara C. *Transposing Cultures: The Appropriation of Native North American Musics, 1890-1990.* Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1995.

Burrows, Edwin G. and Mike Wallace. Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Burton, Frederick Russell. American Primitive Music. New York: Moffat, Yard and Company, 1909.

Canfield, John C., Jr. *Henry Kimball Hadley: His Life and Works (1871-1937).* Ed.D. diss., Florida State University, 1960.

Chase, Gilbert. America's Music: From the Pilgrims to the Present. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1955. Rev. 2d ed., 1966. Rev. 3d ed., Music in American Life Series, Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987.

Chase, Gilbert, ed. The American Composer Speaks: A Historical Anthology, 1770-1965. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966.

Chetwood, William Rufus. A General History of the Stage. London: W. Owen, 1749.

Cohen, Allen. *Theory and Practice in the Works of Howard Hanson.* D.M.A. diss., The City University of New York, 1996.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Cone, John Frederick. Oscar Hammerstein's Manhattan Opera Company. Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966.

Cook, Susan Carol. Opera for a New Republic: The Zeitopern of Krenek, Weill, and Hindemith. Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1988.

Copland, Aaron. The New Music, 1900-1960. Rev. and enlarged ed. New York: W. W. Norton, 1968.

Damrosch, Walter. My Musical Life. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1923. Reprint, Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1972.

Daniel, Minna Lederman. The Life and Death of a Small Magazine (*Modern Music* 1924-47). ISAM Monograph No. 18. Brooklyn, New York: Institute for Studies in American Music, 1983.

Darby, W. Dermont and Arthur Farwell. Music in America. Vol. 4 of The Art of Music, edited by Daniel Gregory Mason. New York: National Society of Music, 1915-16.

De Koven, Anna Farwell. A Musician and His Wife. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1926.

Dent, Edward J. Foundations of English Opera. Cambridge: At the University Press, 1928.

Dizikes, John. Opera in America: A Cultural History. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993.

Drake, James A. Rosa Ponselle: A Centenary Biography. Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1997.

Eames, Emma. Some Memories and Reflections. New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1927.

Eaton, Quaintance. The Boston Opera Company. New York: Appleton & Century, 1965.

———. The Miracle of the Met: An Informal History of the Metropolitan Opera, 1883-1967. New York: Meredith Press, 1968. Reprints, Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1976; New York: Da Capo Press, 1984.

Eisner, Lotte H. Fritz Lang. New York: Oxford University Press, 1977.

Estrin, Mark W., ed. Conversations with Eugene O'Neill. Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 1990.

Farkas, Andrew, ed. Lawrence Tibbett: Singing Actor. Introduction and discography by William R. Moran. Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1989.

Fay, Amy. Music Study in Germany. Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Company, 1880.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Finck, Henry T. My Adventures in the Golden Age of Music. New York and London: Funk & Wagnall's Company, 1926.

Fitzgerald, Gerald, ed. Annals of the Metropolitan Opera: The Complete Chronicle of Performances and Artists. 2 vols. New York: Metropolitan Opera Guild and Boston: G. K. Hall, 1989.

Forte, Allen. The Structure of Atonal Music. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1973.

Garden, Mary and Louis Biancolli. Mary Garden's Story. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1951.

Garofalo, Robert Joseph. Frederick Shepherd Converse (1871-1940): His Life and Music. Composers of North American Music, No. 14. Metuchen, New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, 1994.

———. *The Life and Works of Frederick Shepherd Converse (1871-1940).* Ph.D. diss., The Catholic University of America, 1969.

Garraty, John A. and Mark C. Carnes, General Editors. American National Biography. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Gatti-Casazza, Giulio. Memories of the Opera. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons Inc., 1941. Reprints, with a new preface by Howard Taubman, New York: Vienna House, 1973; London: John Calder Ltd., 1977.

Glass, James William. *American Opera at the Metropolitan, 1910-1920.* M.M. thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 1971.

Goss, Madeleine. Modern Music-Makers: Contemporary American Composers. New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, Inc., 1952.

Graf, Herbert. The Opera and Its Future in America. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1941. Reprint, Port Washington: Kennikat Press, 1973.

Grout, Donald Jay. A Short History of Opera. 2d ed. New York: Columbia University Press, 1965.

Hamilton, David, ed. The Metropolitan Opera Encyclopedia. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987.

Hampl, Patricia and Steven Sorman. Spillville. Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 1987.

Hanson, Howard. Harmonic Materials of Modern Music: Resources of the Tempered Scale. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1960.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Henry, O. [William Sidney Porter]. The Four Million. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran, 1906.

Hipsher, Edward Ellsworth. American Opera and its Composers. Philadelphia: Theodore Presser, 1927; 2d expanded ed., 1934. Reprint, New York: Da Capo Press, 1978.

Hitchcock, H. Wiley. Music in the United States: A Historical Introduction. 3d ed. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1988.

Hitchcock, H. Wiley and Stanley Sadie, eds. The New Grove Dictionary of American Music. 4 vols. London: Macmillan Press Limited, 1986.

Hodges, Sheila. Lorenzo Da Ponte: The Life and Times of Mozart's Librettist. New York: Universe Books, 1985.

Hofmann, Charles. Sounds for Silents. New York: DBS Publications, 1970.

Horowitz, Joseph. The Post-Classical Predicament: Essays on Music and Society. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1995.

———. Wagner Nights: An American History. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.

Horowitz, Joseph, ed. The Virgil Thomson Centenary, 1896-1996. Brooklyn Philharmonic Orchestra Program Book. New York: Brooklyn Philharmonic Orchestra, 1996.

Howard, John Tasker. Our American Music: Three Hundred Years of It. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1931. 3d ed., Our American Music: A Comprehensive History from 1620 to the Present, New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1954.

Hubbard, W. L. History of American Music. Introduction by George Whitefield Chadwick. Vol. 4 of The American History and Encyclopedia of Music. Toledo: Irving Squire, 1908.

Hughes, Rupert. Contemporary American Composers. Boston: L. C. Page, 1900.

Irving, Washington [Diedrich Knickerbocker, pseud.]. A History of New York From the Beginning of the World to the End of the Dutch Dynasty. New York: Inskeep & Bradford, 1809.

Jackson, Helen Hunt. A Century of Dishonor. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1881.

———. Ramona. Boston: Little, Brown, 1884.

Jackson, Paul. Saturday Afternoons at the Old Met: The Metropolitan Opera Broadcasts, 1931-1950. Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1992.

Johnson, H. Earle. Operas on American Subjects. New York: Coleman-Ross, 1964.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Kaye, Joseph. Victor Herbert: The Biography of America's Greatest Composer of Romantic Music. New York: G. Howard Watt; Crown Publishers, 1931.

Kearns, William K. Horatio Parker, 1863-1919: His Life, Music, and Ideas. Composers of North America, No. 6. Metuchen, New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, 1990.

Kendall, Alan. George Gershwin. New York: Universe Books, 1987.

Kidson, Frank The Beggar's Opera: Its Predecessors and Successors. Cambridge: At the University Press, 1922. Reprint, New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1969.

Knight, Ellen. Charles Martin Loeffler: A Life Apart in American Music. Music in American Life Series. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993.

Kobler, John. Otto the Magnificent: The Life of Otto Kahn. New York: Scribner, 1988.

Kolodin, Irving. The Metropolitan Opera, 1883-1935. New York: Oxford University Press, 1936. 2d ed., The Metropolitan Opera, 1883-1939, New York: Oxford University Press, 1940.

———. The Story of the Metropolitan Opera, 1883-1950: A Candid History, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953. 2d ed., Alfred A. Knopf, 1966.

Krasner, Orly L. *Reginald De Koven (1859-1920) and American Comic Opera at the Turn of the Century.* Ph.D. diss., The City University of New York, 1995.

Krehbiel, Henry Edward. Chapters of Opera. New York: H. Holt & Company, 1908. Reprint, New York: Da Capo Press, 1980.

———. More Chapters of Opera. New York: H. Holt & Company, 1919. Reprint, Westport, Connecticut: Hyperion Press, 1980.

Lawrence, Vera Brodsky. Strong on Music. Vol. 1, *Resonances*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.

Lockspeiser, Edward. Debussy et Edgar Poe. Monaco: Éditions du Rocher, 1961.

———. Debussy: His Life and Mind. 2 vols. London: Cassell and New York: Macmillan, 1962-65. Reprint, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978.

Loewenberg, Alfred, comp. Annals of Opera, 1597-1940. 2d rev. ed. New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 1970.

Luening, Otto. The Odyssey of an American Composer. New York: Viking Press, 1957. Reprint, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1980.

Maretzek, Max. Crotchets and Quavers, or Revelations of an Opera Manager in America. 1855. Reprint, New York: Da Capo Press, 1966.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Marks, Martin Miller. Music and the Silent Film: Contexts and Case Studies, 1895-1924. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Marmorstein, Gary. Hollywood Rhapsody: Movie Music and Its Makers, 1900 to 1975. New York: Schirmer Books, 1997.

Martin, George Whitney. The Damrosch Dynasty: America's First Family of Music. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1983.

Matz, Mary Jane. The Many Lives of Otto Kahn. New York: Macmillan, 1963. Reprint, New York: Pendragon Press, 1984.

Mayer, Martin. The Met: One Hundred Years of Grand Opera. New York: Metropolitan Opera Guild and Simon and Schuster, 1983.

McCusker, John J. How Much is That in Real Money? A Historical Price Index for Use as a Deflator of Money Values in the Economy of the United States. Worcester, Massachusetts: American Antiquarian Society, 1992. Rev. ed., 2001 (in preparation).

Mercer, Ruby. The Tenor of His Time: Edward Johnson of the Met. Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, 1976.

Merkling, Frank, John W. Freeman and Gerald Fitzgerald. The Golden Horseshoe: The Life and Times of the Metropolitan Opera House. New York: The Viking Press, 1965.

Mitchell, Jerome. The Walter Scott Operas. University, Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1977.

Moore, Edward C. Forty Years of Opera in Chicago. New York: Horace Liveright, 1930.

Moses, Montrose J. The Life of Heinrich Conried. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1916. Reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1977.

Newton, Ivor. At the Piano: The World of An Accompanist. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1966.

Nisbett, Robert F. *Louis Gruenberg: His Life and Work.* Ph.D. diss., Ohio State University, 1979.

Noble, Helen Klaffky. Life With the Met. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1954.

Norris, Homer A. Practical Harmony on a French Basis. Boston: H. B. Stevens Company, 1895.

Olivier, Laurence. Confessions of an Actor. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Ottenberg, June C. Opera Odyssey: Toward a History of Opera in Nineteenth-Century America. Contributions to the Study of Music and Dance, No. 32. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1994.

Parsons, Charles H., comp. The Mellen Opera Reference Index. Lewiston, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1986.

Pearson, Homer. Music at War. Poughkeepsie, New York: Vassar College, 1943.

Peltz, Mary Ellis. Behind the Gold Curtain: The Story of the Metropolitan Opera. New York: Farrar Straus, 1950.

Perison, Harry D. *Charles Wakefield Cadman: His Life and Works.* Ph.D. diss., University of Rochester, Eastman School of Music, 1978.

Piston, Walter. Harmony. Rev. 4th ed. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1978.

Pratt, Waldo Selden, ed. Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians: American Supplement, being the sixth volume of the complete work. 3d ed. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1935.

Randel, Don Michael, ed. The New Harvard Dictionary of Music. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, Belknap Press, 1986.

Reis, Claire R. Composers in America. New York: Macmillan, 1947.

Richter, Ernst Friedrich. Richter's Manual of Harmony. Translated by John P. Morgan. New York: G. Schirmer, 1891.

Ritter, Frédéric Louis. Music in America. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1883. Reprint, New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1970.

Rosenfeld, Paul. Discoveries of a Music Critic. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1936. Reprint, New York: Vienna House, 1972.

Russell, John. Erich Kleiber: A Memoir. London: André Deutsch, 1957. Reprint, New York: Da Capo Press, 1981.

Russell, Henry. The Passing Show. Boston: Little, Brown, 1926.

Sachs, Harvey. Toscanini. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1978.

Sadie, Stanley, ed. The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians. 20 vols. London: Macmillan Publishers Limited, 1980.

———. The New Grove Dictionary of Opera. 4 vols. London: Macmillan Press Limited, 1992.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Satterlee, Herbert L. J. Pierpont Morgan: An Intimate Portrait. New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1939.

Schmidt, John C. The Life and Works of John Knowles Paine. Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1980.

Schonberg, Harold C. The Great Pianists. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963.

Semler, Isabel Parker, in collaboration with Pierson Underwood. Horatio Parker: A Memoir for His Grandchildren Compiled from Letters and Papers. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1942. Reprint, New York: Da Capo Press, 1973.

Shanet, Howard. Philharmonic: A History of New York's Orchestra. New York: Doubleday, 1975.

Smyth, Ethel. What Happened Next. London: Longmans, 1940.

Sonneck, Oscar G. T. Early Opera in America: Roots and Sources of the American Theatre. New York: G. Schirmer and Boston: The Boston Music Company, 1915. Reprint, New York: Blom, 1963.

Šourek, Otakar. Antonín Dvořàk: Letters and Reminiscences. Translated by Roberta Finlayson Samsour. Prague: Artia, 1954. Reprint, New York: Da Capo Press, 1985.

Southern, Eileen. The Music of Black Americans: A History. 3d ed. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997.

Stanhope, Philip Dormer [Fourth Earl of Chesterfield]. Letters to His Son. London, 1774.

Starr, Frederick. Bamboula! New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

Stendhal [Marie Henri Beyle]. Vie de Rossini. Paris, 1823.

Stephen, Sir Leslie and Sir Sidney Lee, eds. Dictionary of National Biography. London: Humphrey Milford, 1901. Reprint, London: Oxford University Press, 1921-22.

Strouse, Jean. Morgan: American Financier. New York: Random House, 1999.

Sullivan, Jack. New World Symphonies: How American Culture Changed European Music. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999.

Taruskin, Richard. Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.

Taubman, H. Howard. Opera: Front and Back. New York and London: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1938.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Thompson, Oscar, editor in chief. The International Cyclopedia of Music and Musicians. 11th ed. Ed. by Bruce Bohle. New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1985.

Thomson, Virgil. American Music Since 1910. Twentieth-Century Composers, ed. by Anna Kallin and Nicolas Nabokov, Vol. 1. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970/71.

———. Virgil Thomson. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966. Reprint, New York: Da Capo Press, 1977.

Tibbetts, John C., ed. Dvořák in America: 1892-1895. Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1993.

Tomatz, David. *Rubin Goldmark, Postromantic: Trial Balances in American Music.* Ph.D. diss., The Catholic University of America, 1966.

Tommasini, Anthony. Virgil Thomson: Composer on the Aisle. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997.

Twain, Mark and Charles Dudley Warner. The Gilded Age; A Tale of To-Day. Hartford, Connecticut: American Publishing Company, 1873.

Upton, William Treat. William Henry Fry: American Journalist and Composer-Critic. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1954. Reprint, New York: Da Capo Press, 1974.

Van Vechten, Carl. In the Garret. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1920.

———. Interpreters and Interpretations. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1917.

Vanderbilt, Arthur T., II. Fortune's Children: The Fall of the House of Vanderbilt. New York: William Morrow & Company, Inc., 1989.

Varèse, Louise. Varèse: A Looking Glass Diary, Vol. I: 1883-1926. New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1972.

Virga, Patricia H. The American Opera to 1790. Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1982.

Wagner, Richard. Mein Leben. Munich: F. Bruckmann, Ltd., 1911.

Waters, Edward N. Victor Herbert: A Life in Music. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1955. Reprint, New York: Da Capo Press, 1978.

Wharton, Edith. New York Novels. Foreword by Louis Auchincloss. New York: The Modern Library, 1998.

White, Eric Walter. A History of English Opera. London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1983.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

———. The Rise of English Opera. Introduction by Benjamin Britten. London: John Lehmann, Ltd., 1951. Reprint, New York: Da Capo Press, 1972.

Whitesitt, Linda. The Life and Music of George Antheil, 1900-1959. Studies in Musicology No. 70. Edited by George Buelow. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1983.

Zietz, Karyl Lynn. The National Trust Guide to Great Opera Houses in America. New York: Preservation Press and John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1996.

ARTICLES AND REVIEWS

A Parachute Descent From the Operatic Sky. The Literary Digest 101 (4 May 1929): 24.

Ashford, Gerald. *Other Puritans.* Opera News 29 (23 January 1965): 31.

Atkinson, Michael. *Between Worlds.* Film Comment 29 (July/August 1993): 78-81.

"Azora," Monday, January 7. Musical Courier 76 (17 January 1918).

Babbitt, Milton. *Set Structure as a Compositional Determinant.* Journal of Music Theory 5 (1961): 72-94.

———. *Some Aspects of Twelve-Tone Composition.* The Score and I.M.A. Magazine 12 (1955): 53-61.

———. *Twelve-Tone Invariants as Compositional Determinants.* The Musical Quarterly 46 (1960): 246-59.

———. *Who Cares If You Listen?* High Fidelity 8 (February 1958): 38*ff.*

Bailey, Howard T. *Herbert's Day.* Opera News 28 (25 January 1964): 6-7.

Baisley, Robert W. *Charles Wakefield Cadman: Completely American.* Music Educators Journal 61 (May 1975): 56-58.

Bargreen, Melinda. *In Review: Seattle.* Review of performance of *Peter Ibbetson*, by Deems Taylor, Benaroya Hall, Seattle, Seattle Symphony Orchestra. Opera News 64 (September 1999): 110.

Beckerman, Michael. *The Dance of Pau-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. by John C. Tibbetts, 210-27. Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1993.

Beveridge, David. *The Reception of Dvořák's Operas in America: A Social, Political and Aesthetic Odyssey.* In Dvořák in America: 1892-1895, ed. by John C. Tibbetts, 297-319. Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1993.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Block, Adrienne Fried. *Dvořák's Long American Reach.* In Dvořák in America: 1892–1895, ed. by John C. Tibbetts, 157-81. Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1993.

Bodanzky, Artur, in collaboration with Donald Marshall. *Fourteen Years at the Metropolitan Opera House.* The Saturday Evening Post 202 (26 October 1929): 10*ff.*

Brody, Elaine. *The King's Henchman: Fifty Years Later.* Music Library Association Notes 34 (December 1977): 319-22.

Broekhoven, John van. *"Mona," The American Prize Opera: A Thematic Analysis.* Musical Observer 6 (April 1912): 22-28.

Brown, Carolyn T. *Creative Imitation: Hung Shen's Cultural Translation of Eugene O'Neill's "The Emperor Jones."* Comparative Literature Studies 22 (Spring 1985): 147-55.

Browner, Tara C. *"Breathing the Indian Spirit": Thoughts on Musical Borrowing and the "Indianist" Movement in American Music.* American Music 15 (Fall 1997): 265-84.

Carter, Elliott. *American Figure, with Landscape.* Modern Music 20 (May-June 1943): 219-25.

———. *The Genial Sage.* In Paul Rosenfeld: Voyager in the Arts, edited by Jerome Mellquist and Lucie Wiese. New York: Creative Age Press, 1948.

Charles Wakefield Cadman: An American Composer. The Musician 20 (November 1915): 687*ff.*

"Cleopatra's Night" Has a Beautiful Production at the Metropolitan. Musical Courier 80 (5 February 1920): 5, 39.

Cook, Susan C. *George Antheil's Transatlantique: An American in the Weimar Republic.* Journal of Musicology 9 (Fall 1991): 498-519.

Copland, Aaron. *America's Young Men of Promise.* Modern Music 3 (March-April 1926): 13-20.

Crawford, Richard. *Edward MacDowell: Musical Nationalism and an American Tone Poet.* Journal of the American Musicological Society 49 (Fall 1996): 528-60.

Curtain Lifts 50 Times To Cheers for "Merry Mount." News-Week 3 (17 February 1934): 37.

De Koven, Reginald. *Nationalism in Music.* The North American Review 189 (March 1909): 386-96.

———. *Opera in English: Its Relation to the American Composer and Singer.* The Century Magazine 87 (March 1914): 676-79.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Downes, Olin. *J. A. Carpenter, American Craftsman.* The Musical Quarterly 16 (October 1930): 443-68.

Eaton, Quaintance. *The New World.* Opera News 29 (1 May 1965): 26-27.

———. *A Yankee Trick.* Opera News 31 (1 April 1967): 6-7.

Eulass, Elizabeth. *American Opera at the Metropolitan After Ten Years.* Opera News 5 (3 February 1941): 28-29.

Eyer, Ronald. *Taylor, Janáček Operas at Empire State Festival.* Musical America 80 (September 1960): 9.

Farwell, Arthur. *The Poem of "Mona."* Musical America 15 (3 February 1912): 13.

Fillmore, John Comfort. *Report on the Structural Peculiarities of [Omaha Indian] Music.* In Archaeological and Ethnological Papers of the Peabody Museum I, 5 (June 1893): 59-77.

Find Three "Merry Mount" Operas in Existence. Musical America 51 (25 April 1931): 10.

Fisher, Marjory M. *Psychological Reaction to Isolated Chords Shown by Pacific Coast Musician's Tests.* Musical America 33 (5 March 1921): 45.

Flack, Frank M. *Dvořák and American Opera.* Opera News 19 (1955): 8*ff.*

Fletcher, Alice Cunningham. *A Study of Omaha Indian Music.* In Archaeological and Ethnological Papers of the Peabody Museum I, 5 (June 1893): 1-57, 79-152.

Forte, Allen. *A Theory of Set-Complexes for Music.* Journal of Music Theory 8 (1964): 136-83.

Fowler, Charles B. *Arts Policy in the U.S.—Do We Have One?* High Fidelity/Musical America 34 (December 1984): MA10-13.

Goldberg, Isaac. *"Merry Mount" and American Opera: Old Form and New.* The Musical Record 1 (February 1934): 356-57.

Gottlieb, Robert. *Balanchine's Dream.* Vanity Fair (December 1998), 270-97.

Hamm, Charles. *Opera and the American Composer.* In The American Composer Speaks: A Historical Anthology, 1770-1965, ed. Gilbert Chase, 284-97. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966.

Hammerstein Loses Appeal. The Musical Advance 1 (May 1914): 10.

Hanson Announces New Musical Theory. Musical America 71 (15 December 1951): 23.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Hawthorne, Nathaniel. *The May-Pole of Merry Mount.* Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Vol. 9. Ohio State University Press, 1974.

Heinsheimer, Hans. *Emperor Resurrexit.* Opera News 43 (10 February 1979): 15-21.

Herbert's Madeleine Has Its Met Premiere. Musical America 19 (31 January 1914): 5.

Hoffman, William M. *Confessions of a Librettist.* Opera News 59 (15 April 1995): 8-10.

———. *Is it in English?* Stagebill, December 1991, 8.

Horowitz, Joseph. Review of Otto the Magnificent, by John Kobler. Notes 48 (March 1992): 896-98.

Howard, Polly Damrosch and Anita Damrosch Littell. *Walter Damrosch and Opera.* Opera News 26 (27 January 1962): 8-13.

Howe, M. A. DeWolfe. *John Knowles Paine.* The Musical Quarterly 25 (July 1939): 257-67.

Hugo Compositions Heard. The Musical Advance 1 (May 1914): 14.

"Ibbetson" Revisited. Time 76 (1 August 1960): 52.

Joplin, David D. *"May-Pole of Merry Mount": Hawthorne's "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso."* Studies in Short Fiction 30 (Spring 1993): 185-92.

Kahn, Otto H. *The Metropolitan Opera: A Statement by Otto H. Kahn.* New York: Metropolitan Opera Company, 15 October 1925.

Kahn, Morgan, and "Salome." Saturday Review (30 May 1964): 60.

Kearns, William. *Horatio Parker's "Mona": Its Place in the Composer's Career and in American Opera.* The Sonneck Society Newsletter 6 (Fall 1980): 11-12.

Keller, James M. *Jerry Speak.* Opera News 64 (December 1999): 44-49.

Kernochan, Marshall. *Peter Ibbetson.* The Outlook 157 (18 February 1931): 272.

Kolodin, Irving. *In Memoriam: Gatti-Casazza.* The American Mercury 35 (May 1935): 33-40.

Korn, Richard. *Mona's Master.* Opera News 28 (11 January 1964): 7.

Kramer, A. Walter. *Emperor Jones, in Opera Guise, Has World Premiere.* Musical America 53 (10 January 1933): 3*ff.*

Krasner, David. *Whose Role is it Anyway? Charles Gilpin and the Harlem Renaissance.* African American Review 29 (Fall 1995): 483-96.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Kuss, Malena. *Contributions of the New World to the Music of the Old World.* Acta Musicologica 63 (January-April 1991): 3-11.

Laurie, Margaret. *Did Purcell Set "The Tempest"?* Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association 90 (1963-64): 43-57.

Lawrence, Vera Brodsky. *First Fling.* Opera News 53 (September 1988): 20-23.

Lewin, David. *The Intervallic Content of a Collection of Notes.* Journal of Music Theory 4 (1960): 98-101.

Manuscript Society Meeting. The Musical Advance 1 (May 1914): 14.

Martino, Donald. *The Source-Set and Its Aggregate Formations.* Journal of Music Theory 5 (1961): 224-73.

McGlinchee, Claire. *American Literature in American Music.* The Musical Quarterly 31 (January 1945): 101-19.

McMahan, Robert Young. *A Brief History of The Sunken Bell, Carl Ruggles's Unfinished Opera.* American Music 11 (Summer 1993): 131-57.

Mendel, Arthur. *The Emperor Jones.* The Nation 136 (15 March 1933): 297-98.

Metropolitan May Give Herbert Opera. Musical America 17 (15 March 1913): 7.

Mr. Gatti and Mr. Kahn. Time 6 (2 November 1925): 19*ff.*

The New Flagler Symphonic Prizes. Musical Courier 80 (5 February 1920): 5.

News: America. Opera 11 (November 1960): 752-53.

Nicholls, David. *Defining American Music.* Institute for Studies in American Music Newsletter 28 (Spring 1999): 14.

Nisbett, Robert F. *Louis Gruenberg: A Forgotten Figure of American Music.* Current Musicology No. 18 (1974): 90-95.

———. *Louis Gruenberg's American Idiom.* American Music 3 (Spring 1985): 25-41.

O'Neill Musical. The Stage, 8 September 1960.

Oja, Carol J. *Cos Cob Press and the American Composer.* Music Library Association Notes 45 (December 1988): 227-252.

Orledge, Robert. *Debussy's House of Usher Revisited.* The Musical Quarterly 62 (October 1976): 536-53.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Palisca, Claude V. *The "Camerata Fiorentina": A Reappraisal.* Studi musicali 1 (1972): 203-36.

Palmer, Allen Dean. *Tsianina Blackstone: A Chapter in the History of the American Indian in Opera.* Liberal Arts Review [Eastern New Mexico University] 7 (Spring 1979): 40-64.

Pearson, Edward Hagelin. *Victor Herbert's "Madeleine."* Opera Quarterly 13 (Summer 1997): 59-75.

Perison, Harry D. *The "Indian" Operas of Charles Wakefield Cadman.* College Music Symposium 22 (Fall 1982): 20-48.

Peyser, Herbert F. *American Opera To-day Still a Hypothetical Institution.* Musical America 18 (26 July 1913): 11*ff.*

Porter, Andrew. *Island Emperor.* The New Yorker 55 (5 March 1979): 115-17.

———. *Singtime in the Rockies.* The New Yorker 55 (27 August 1979): 83.

Pratt, Silas G. *A Plan and a Plea for American Opera.* The Forum 15 (March 1893): 88-89.

Pribek, Thomas. *The Conquest of Canaan: Suppression of Merry Mount.* Nineteenth-Century Fiction 40 (December 1985): 345-54.

Price, Walter. *Board Games.* Opera News 53 (15 April 1989): 8-11, 44.

Putnam Griswold Dead. The Musical Advance 1 (March 1914): 8.

Rabson, Carolyn. *Disappointment Revisited: Unweaving the Tangled Web. Part I.* American Music 1 (Spring 1983): 12-35.

———. *Disappointment Revisited: Unweaving the Tangled Web. Part II.* American Music 2 (Spring 1984): 1-28.

Robinson, Edward. *Deems Taylor's American Opera.* The Fortnightly Musical Review 1 (14 March 1928): 1, 7.

Rockwell, John. *The Vanishing Arts Page.* Opera News 63 (July 1998): 12-15.

Rorem, Ned. *In Search of American Opera.* Opera News 56 (July 1991): 8-17, 44.

Rosenfeld, Paul. *The Fate of "Mona."* In Musical Chronicle (1917-1923), 54-60. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company: 1923. Reprint, New York: Blom, 1971.

———. *"Maria Malibran" and "Mona."* The New Republic 83 (19 June 1935): 167.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Royce, Edward. *Howard Hanson.* In American Composers on American Music: A Symposium, ed. by Henry Cowell, 97-100. Stanford University Press, 1933. Reprint, New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., Inc., 1962.

Satz, Arthur. *Bel Canto Opera: "The King's Henchman."* High Fidelity and Musical America 26 (July 1976): MA27.

Saunders, William. *The American Opera: Has It Arrived?* Music and Letters 13 (April 1932): 147-55.

Sentimental Moment. Newsweek 56 (1 August 1960): 54.

Simon, Robert A. *Hell at the Metropolitan.* The New Yorker 10 (17 February 1934): 70.

Smith, Patrick J. *Viewpoint: Opera 101.* Opera News 57 (May 1993): 6.

Song Competition Winners. The Musical Advance 1 (April 1914): 15.

St. Clair, F. B. *In Review: Seattle.* Opera News 61 (8 February 1997): 49-50.

Stefan, Paul. *Wozzeck, An Atonal Opera.* Modern Music 3 (March-April 1926): 39.

Strouse, Jean. *The Unknown J. P. Morgan.* The New Yorker 75 (29 March 1999): 66-79.

Sutton, Robert. *Howard Hanson, Set Theory Pioneer.* Sonus 8 (Fall 1987): 17-39.

Taubman, H. Howard. *The Measure of Greatness.* Opera News 31 (1 April 1967): 9.

Taylor, Deems. *"By Request": The King's Henchman.* The Musical Digest 11 (4 January 1927): 32*ff.*

———. *What is American Opera?* Opera News 25 (17 December 1960): 9*ff.*

Teachout, Terry. *How Good Was Leonard Bernstein?* Commentary 98 (October 1994): 49-54.

Teall, Dorothy J. *What American Composer Needs in Struggling to the Heights.* Musical America 30 (26 July 1919): 37.

The Temple Dancer. The Musical Advance 1 (March 1914): 9-10.

Thompson, Randall. *The Emperor at the Opera.* Modern Music 10 (January-February 1933): 109-10.

To Hold Herbert to His Contract: Hammerstein Says He Will Not Let Metropolitan Company Produce "Natoma." Musical America 11 (9 April 1910): 5.

Tuthill, Burnet C. *Howard Hanson.* The Musical Quarterly 22 (April 1936): 140-53.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Vernon, Grenville. *A New American Opera.* The Commonweal 19 (2 March 1934): 498.

———. *Peter Ibbetson.* The Commonweal 13 (25 February 1931): 469-70.

Wadsworth, Stephen. Review of performance of *The King's Henchman,* by Deems Taylor, New York City, Bel Canto Opera. Opera News 40 (May 1976): 38.

Walsh, Michael. *"Merry Mount" Excellent.* High Fidelity/Musical America 26 (October 1976): MA22-23.

Weissmann, Adolph. *Unexpected Developments in Germany.* Modern Music 3 (March-April 1926): 37.

Williams, David Russell. *Howard Hanson (1896-1981).* Perspectives of New Music 20 (Fall-Winter 1981/Spring-Summer 1982): 12-25.

Wynne, Peter. *Wireless Wonders.* Opera News 58 (November 1993): 30*ff.*

NEWSPAPERS

Brooklyn Times: 8 February 1931

Brooklyn Daily Eagle: April 1916; 15 February 1931

Chicago Journal of Commerce: 4 August 1931

Chicago Herald: 30 December 1917

Chicago Daily Tribune: 27 December 1917

Indianapolis Morning Star: 20 April 1955

Kansas City Star: 15 November 1922

London Times: 10 June 1910

New York American: 27 January 1918; 9 March 1919; 1 February 1920; 8 January 1933

New York Evening Journal: 9 February 1931

New York Evening Post: 25 March 1918; 1 February 1920; 9 February 1931; 14 January 1933

New York Evening Sun: 28 February 1910

New York Evening World: 18 February 1929; 22 November 1929; 9 February 1931

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

New York Graphic: 6 March 1926

New York Herald: 1 March 1911

New York Herald Tribune: 28 May 1926; 18 February 1927; 20 February 1927; 21 February 1927; 22 November 1929; 22 February 1931; 8 January 1933; 27 December 1933; 2 January 1934; 28 January 1934; 11 February 1934; 3 July 1960; 24 July 1960

New York Sun: 14 September 1910; 9 March 1917; 18 February 1927; 22 November 1929; 9 January 1933; 12 February 1934

New York Telegram: 10 February 1926

New York Times [New-York Daily Times]: 3 October 1854; 4 April 1880; 13 October 1880; 14 March 1882; 22 August 1883; 11 October 1892; 14 February 1905; 12 February 1908; 13 March 1910; 19 March 1910; 24 April 1910; 25 April 1910; 8 May 1910; 10 October 1910; 27 March 1911; 5 November 1911; 10 November 1911; 10 November 1911; 15 March 1912; 22 April 1912; 26 June 1912; 13 November 1912; 15 November 1912; 25 November 1912; 3 December 1912; 28 February 1913; 25 January 1914; 18 February 1916; 17 March 1917; 3 April 1917; 7 April 1917; 4 July 1918; 13 March 1919; 1 February 1920; 16 March 1924; 17 April 1925; 18 April 1925; 18 February 1926; 18 February 1927; 4 February 1928; 18 February 1929; 25 November 1929; 24 August 1930; 5 October 1930; 1 February 1931; 8 February 1931; 12 February 1931; 3 January 1932; 13 May 1932; 8 January 1933; 14 October 1933; 11 February 1934; 3 February 1935; 13 April 1935; 27 April 1936; 15 May 1936; 7 September 1937; 22 February 1942; 24 May 1942; 26 November 1950; 19 December 1951; 9 August 1953; 2 January 1961; 23 February 1961; 9 April 1967; 28 February 1981; 2 August 1992; 8 February 1994; 21 February 1996; 22 September 1996; 13 March 1998; 19 April 1998; 27 September 1998

New York Tribune: 9 March 1919

New York World: 19 April 1926; 8 February 1931

New York World Telegram: 9 January 1933

Philadelphia Public Ledger: 14 February 1934; 15 February 1934

Philadelphia Evening Bulletin: 14 February 1934

Washington Post: 25 March 1996; 6 March 1999

Wall Street Journal: 9 June 1910

Women's Wear Daily: 26 July 1960

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

SCORES AND RECORDINGS

Barton, Andrew, Esq. [pseud.] The Disappointment; or, the Force of Credulity. New York: [Goddard], 1767. 2d ed., rev. and enl., Philadelphia: Francis Shallus, 1796. Facsimile edition, ed. by Walter H. Rubsamen, The Ballad Opera, vol. 28, *American Ballad Operas*, New York: Garland Publishing, 1974. Modern edition, ed. by Jerald C. Graue and Judith Layng, Recent Researches in American Music, Madison, Wisconsin: A-R Editions, 1976.

Breil, Joseph Carl. The Legend. Libretto by Jacques Byrne. London and New York: Chappell & Co., Ltd., 1919.

Bristow, George Frederick. Rip Van Winkle, op. 22. Libretto by Jonathan Howard Wainwright. Piano-vocal score. New York: G. Schirmer, 1882. Reprinted as Rip Van Winkle: Grand Romantic Opera in Three Acts, edited and with a new introduction by Steven Ledbetter. Earlier American Music, vol. 25. New York: Da Capo Press, 1991.

Cadman, Charles Wakefield. Shanewis; or, The Robin Woman. Libretto by Nelle Richmond Eberhart. Boston: White-Smith Music Publishing Company, 1918; rev. ed., 1927.

Converse, Frederick Shepherd. The Pipe of Desire, op. 21. Libretto by George Edward Barton. German translation by Charles Henry Meltzer. Orchestral score. New York: The H. W. Gray Company, sole agents for Novello & Co., Ltd., ca. 1908.

———. The Pipe of Desire, op. 21. Libretto by George Edward Barton. Piano-vocal score. Boston: The H. W. Gray Company, 1907. Reprint, Three Centuries of American Music, edited by Martha Furman Schleifer and Sam Dennison, vol. 6, *American Opera and Music for the Stage, Early Twentieth Century*, Boston: G. K. Hall, 1989-1992.

Damrosch, Walter. Cyrano. Libretto by William J. Henderson. Piano-vocal score. New York: G. Schirmer, 1913.

De Koven, Reginald. The Canterbury Pilgrims. Libretto by Percy Mackaye. Cincinnati: The John Church Company, 1916.

Debussy, Claude. La Chute de la Maison Usher. Reconstruction by Juan Allende-Blin. Paris: Société des Éditions Jobert, 1979.

———. Trois Nocturnes. Miniature score. Edition Eulenburg, n.d.

Fry, William Henry. Leonora. Libretto by Joseph R. Fry. Piano-vocal score. Philadelphia: E. Ferret & Co., 1845.

Gruenberg, Louis. The Emperor Jones, op. 36. Libretto by Louis Gruenberg. Piano-vocal score. New York: Cos-Cob-Press, Inc., 1932. Reprint, Newton Centre, Massachusetts: GunMar Music, 1990.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

———. *The Emperor Jones*. Transcription of 16 October 1934 Packard Hour radio broadcast. Lawrence Tibbett, baritone. John B. Kennedy, narrator. Celebrity Record Company, EJS-124.

Hadley, Henry. Cleopatra's Night, op. 90. Libretto by Alice Leal Pollock. Piano-vocal score. Boston: Oliver Ditson Company, 1920.

Hanson, Howard. *The Composer and His Orchestra.* Excerpts from Merry Mount Suite. Howard Hanson, conductor. Eastman-Rochester Symphony Orchestra. Mercury MG-50175 (1959).

———. Merry Mount, op. 31. Libretto by Richard L. Stokes. Piano-vocal score. New York: Harms, Inc., 1933.

———. Merry Mount, op. 31. Metropolitan Opera radio broadcast of world premiere, 10 February 1934. Deems Taylor, commentator. Celebrity Record Company, EJS-134.

Herbert, Victor. *Cello Concerto No. 2.* Julian Lloyd Webber. London Symphony Orchestra. EMI CDC-7-47622-2 (1986).

———. *The Cello Concertos and Five Pieces for Cello and Strings*. Lynn Harrell. Academy of St. Martin-in-the-Fields. Neville Marriner. London 417-672-2 (1988).

———. Madeleine. Libretto by Grant Stewart. Piano-vocal and orchestral scores. New York: G. Schirmer, 1914.

———. *Music of Victor Herbert.* With liner notes, "The Early Victor Herbert: From the Gay Nineties to the First World War," by Allen G. Debus. Smithsonian American Musical Theater Series. RCA Special Products DPM-30366 (1979).

Hugo, John Adam. The Temple Dancer, op. 37. Libretto by Jutta Bell-Ranske. Bridgeport, Connecticut: John Adam Hugo, 1918.

Lawrence, Vera Brodsky, ed. The Wa-Wan Press, 1901-1911. 5 vols. New York: Arno Press, 1970.

Nevin, Arthur. Poia. Libretto by Randolph Hartley. Berlin: Adolph Fürstner, 1909.

Parker, Horatio. Mona, op. 71. Libretto by Brian Hooker. Piano-vocal score. New York: G. Schirmer; Boston: The Boston Music Co.; London: Schott & Co., 1911.

Puccini, Giacomo. La Rondine. Libretto by Giuseppe Adami, Alfred M. Willner, and Heinz Reichert. Milan: Casa Musicale Sonzogno and Vienna: Universal Edition, 1969.

Sabol, Andrew J. A Score for *Lovers Made Men*. Providence, Rhode Island: Brown University Press, 1963.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Souvenirs from American Operas. Sound recording. International Record Collectors' Club IRCC-CD818.

Strauss, Richard. Salome, op. 54. Piano-vocal score. Berlin: Adolph Fürstner, 1905.

Taylor, Deems. The King's Henchman, op. 19. Libretto by Edna St. Vincent Millay. Piano-vocal score. New York: J. Fischer & Bro., 1926.

———. Peter Ibbetson, op. 20. Libretto by Deems Taylor and Constance Collier. Piano-vocal score. New York: J. Fischer & Bro., 1930.

———. Peter Ibbetson, op. 20. Excerpts from Metropolitan Opera radio broadcast, 17 March 1934. *The Golden Age of Opera.* Celebrity Record Company, EJS-187 and Unique Opera Records, UORC-143.

Tchaikovsky, Peter Ilyitch. Complete Piano Concertos. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1992.

Toward an American Opera. Sound recording. New World Records NW241 (1978).

Wagner, Richard. Die Walküre. Orchestral score. Leipzig: C. F. Peters, 1910. Reprint, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1978.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.