

GIRL CRAZY

December 10, 1910, was perhaps the biggest night the Metropolitan Opera—then just 27 years old—had ever seen. The world premiere of the latest work by the most successful opera composer of his day was a social and artistic event that had New Yorkers buzzing for weeks before and after. Everyone was talking about *La Fanciulla del West*.

Three years earlier, Giacomo Puccini had come to New York to supervise the first Met production of *Madama Butterfly*. While he

Opposite: Enrico Caruso as Dick Johnson and Emmy Destinn as Minnie in a scene from Act II of *Fanciulla's* world premiere

was here, he went to see a Broadway play by writer-producer-director David Belasco (whose *Madame Butterfly* had provided the basis for the earlier opera). But instead of Japan, this one was set in California. Entitled *The Girl of the Golden West*, it became the inspiration for Puccini's next stage work. In the summer of 1910, the composer signed a contract with the Met—*La Fanciulla del West*, his “American” opera, would first be performed in America.

Giulio Gatti-Casazza, the Met's general manager, spared no expense. Enrico Caruso, Emmy Destinn, and Pasquale Amato headed the cast, Arturo Toscanini was on the podium, and

Belasco directed. *Fanciulla* was a rousing success, and Puccini, who was in the audience for the premiere, later called it “the best opera I have written.”

One hundred years later, *Fanciulla* is back at the Met for a special centennial run of performances. American diva Deborah Voigt stars in the title role of Minnie, the fearless bar owner and bible teacher. Marcello Giordani sings the bandit Ramerrez, also known as Dick Johnson, and Lucio Gallo is the sheriff, Jack Rance. Herewith, a collection of photos and clippings from the milestone first run—plus some thoughts from Voigt about her gun-toting, drink-slinging turn. —*Philipp Brieler*



The creative team:
Met General Manager
Giulio Gatti-Casazza,
playwright and director
David Belasco, conductor
Arturo Toscanini, and
composer Giacomo
Puccini (from left)

PHOTOS: MET OPERA ARCHIVES



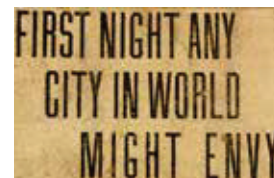
About to be hanged by Sheriff Rance (Pasquale Amato, at right) and the miners, Johnson (Caruso) is rescued by Minnie (Destinn) in Act II of the opera



Double Take Caruso, an avid caricaturist, created this self-portrait in his Fanciulla costume.



Miner Players With the exception of the title role and the secondary character of Wowkle, *Fanciulla* features an all-male ensemble and chorus. Seen here are some of the miners in Act I.



Fanciulla Fever The world premiere of Puccini's opera was one of 1910's major events in New York City.

