

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

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

*La Fanciulla del West* provides students with the rare opportunity to explore a classic opera that focuses on familiar and quintessentially American characters and settings. The activities in this guide build on that familiarity to explore the creative choices made by Puccini, his collaborators, and the artists of the Met. By heightening awareness of narrative and theatrical elements and, above all, of Puccini's music, the guide can help spark students' fascination with this opera. The activities on the following pages are designed to provide context, deepen background knowledge, and enrich the overall experience of this *Live in HD* transmission. This guide will also align with key strands of the Common Core Standards.



WESTBROEK



KAUFMANN



LUČIĆ

### THE WORK: *LA FANCIULLA DEL WEST*

An opera in three acts, sung in Italian

Music by Giacomo Puccini

Libretto by Guelfo Civinini and  
Carlo Zangarini (based on the play  
*The Girl of the Golden West* by  
David Belasco)

First performed on  
December 10, 1910 at the  
Metropolitan Opera, New York City

### PRODUCTION

Marco Armiliato, Conductor

Giancarlo Del Monaco, Production

Michael Scott, Set and Costume  
Designer

Gil Wechsler, Lighting Designer

### STARRING

Eva-Maria Westbroek  
MINNIE (soprano)

Jonas Kaufmann  
DICK JOHNSON (tenor)

Carlo Bosi  
NICK (tenor)

Željko Lučić  
JACK RANCE (baritone)

Michael Todd Simpson  
SONORA (baritone)

Matthew Rose  
ASHBY (bass)

Production a gift of The Sybil B. Harrington  
Endowment Fund

Revival a gift of Rolex

This guide includes five sections.

- **THE SOURCE, THE STORY, WHO'S WHO IN *LA FANCIULLA DEL WEST*, AND A TIMELINE**
- **CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES:**  
Two activities designed to align with and support various Common Core Standard strands used in ELA, History/Social Studies, and Music curricula
- **PERFORMANCE ACTIVITIES:** Two activities to be used during *The Met: Live in HD* transmission, highlighting specific aspects of this production
- **POST-SHOW DISCUSSION:**  
A wrap-up activity, integrating the *Live in HD* experience into the students' understanding of the performing arts and the humanities
- **STUDENT RESOURCE PAGES:**  
Classroom-ready worksheets supporting the activities in the guide

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

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

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



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

Later that night, Johnson joins Minnie for dinner at her cabin. Minnie gives Johnson her first kiss. A snowstorm prevents Johnson from being able to leave. Jack Rance bangs at her door in search of Johnson. Minnie hides him and lets in the sheriff and group of miners. They reveal that Johnson is actually the bandit Ramerrez. Minnie sends them away, but then calls Johnson out of his hiding place, denounces him, and throws him out into the blizzard. Rance shoots him, and Minnie can't help but bring her injured lover back inside. Rance returns to the cabin and prepares to arrest Johnson.

Dick Johnson's near-hanging in a scene from the opera's Metropolitan Opera premiere in 1910  
METROPOLITAN OPERA ARCHIVES

## VOICE TYPE

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

### SOPRANO

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

### MEZZO-SOPRANO

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

### CONTRALTO

the lowest female voice, also called an alto

### TENOR

the highest naturally occurring voice type in adult males

### BARITONE

the male voice lying below the tenor and above the bass

### BASS

the lowest sounding male voice

Minnie offers instead a high-stakes game of poker for the fate of Johnson. Minnie wins (by secretly cheating), and Rance storms out.

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

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

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

## SYNOPSIS

**ACT I:** *A miners’ camp in California, ca. 1849–50.* At sunset in the Polka Saloon, Nick, the bartender, prepares for the miners’ return from the hills. Jake Wallace, a traveling minstrel, sings a sentimental song that causes Jim Larkens to break down in tears. The men collect money for his passage back home. Trin and Sonora both bribe Nick to help them win the heart of Minnie, the owner of the bar, with whom all the men are in love. Sid cheats at cards, and Jack Rance, the camp’s cynical sheriff, marks him as an outcast. The Wells Fargo agent Ashby arrives with news of the imminent capture of the Mexican bandit Ramerrez and his band. An argument breaks out between Rance and Sonora, each claiming Minnie will be his wife. Things almost get out of hand when Minnie herself appears. The men calm down and sit to listen to Minnie’s Bible teaching.



Later, alone with her, Rance confesses his love. But she is not interested and, recalling her happy childhood, paints a different picture of what love means.

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

**ACT II** In Minnie's cabin in the mountains, the Indian woman Wowkle sings a lullaby to her baby and bickers with the child's father, Billy Jackrabbit. Minnie arrives and excitedly prepares for her meeting with Johnson. Alone with him, she gives in to

Emmy Destinn (Minnie), Enrico Caruso (Dick Johnson, center), and Pasquale Amato (Jack Rance) in the poker scene of *La Fanciulla del West* at its world premiere at the Metropolitan Opera, December 10, 1910.

METROPOLITAN OPERA ARCHIVES

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

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



## WHO'S WHO IN LA FANCIULLA DEL WEST

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

**1900** While visiting London for the Covent Garden premiere of *Tosca*, Puccini becomes acquainted with the work of the American impresario and playwright David Belasco, attending a performance of *Madame Butterfly*, Belasco's stage adaptation of a novel by John Luther Long.

*Giacomo Puccini*



**1905** Belasco's play *The Girl of the Golden West* premieres at the Belasco Theatre in Pittsburgh on October 3 and transfers to the Belasco Theatre in New York on November 14, where it runs for 224 performances. The play will return for shorter runs in 1907 and 1908.

**1907** Puccini visits New York at the invitation of Heinrich Conried, then manager of the Metropolitan Opera, and attends performances of two of his own works—*Manon Lescaut* and *Madama Butterfly*. Upon his arrival in the U.S., Puccini had announced to journalists that he was interested in writing an opera about the Wild West. While in New York, Puccini sees three of David Belasco's plays on Broadway, including *The Girl of the Golden West*.

By July of this year, Puccini writes to his publisher to begin the process of obtaining the rights to set Belasco's play as an opera as well as for permission to make certain changes to the story.

**1908** Puccini begins composition on the new opera in earnest, but after only a few months of work, domestic strife in the Puccini household halts further progress until August 1909.

**1910** *La Fanciulla del West* premieres at the Metropolitan Opera in New York on December 10. It is the first world premiere to be held at the Met and the first U.S. premiere of an opera by a major European composer. The Met spares no expense on the production. For the premiere, the auditorium of the opera house is exuberantly decorated with Italian and American flags. Arturo Toscanini conducts, and superstar tenor Enrico Caruso sings the role of Dick Johnson. The performance elicits no fewer than 47 curtain calls. The next day, the prominent Vanderbilt family hosts a banquet in Puccini's honor.

**1915** Belasco's play *The Girl of the Golden West* is adapted into a black-and-white silent film by Cecil B. DeMille. Over the next 23 years, Belasco's story will be adapted into three subsequent films.

**1924** While in Brussels for treatment of throat cancer, Puccini dies on November 29. His funeral at Milan's cathedral is attended by fellow musicians, dignitaries, and ambassadors from around the globe.



## All About a Girl: Minnie and Her Real-Life Contemporaries in the American West

### History / Social Studies

#### IN PREPARATION

For this activity, students will need the reproducible resources available at the back of this guide entitled *All About a Girl*, as well as the audio selections from *La Fanciulla del West* available online or on the accompanying CD.

#### CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS

Social Studies, U.S. History, Language Arts, Media

#### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- To develop an understanding of American history in the mid-19th century
- To practice critical analysis by developing an interpretation of the opera's characters and plot
- To analyze primary sources on women's lives in the western U.S. in the mid-19th century
- To prompt curiosity about the Met's production of *La Fanciulla del West* in advance of the *Live in HD* broadcast

Ever since its world premiere at the Metropolitan Opera in 1910, *La Fanciulla del West* has been understood as Puccini's American opera. For Puccini, the setting was always an integral aspect of the drama, whether his operatic subject was bohemian Paris (as in *La Bohème*), turn-of-the-century Japan (as in *Madama Butterfly*), or Gold Rush-era California. To students in the United States, the opera offers the rare opportunity to consider the veracity of an operatic treatment of their own history. Did Puccini accurately capture the "American spirit"? Is his mining camp historically authentic? What musical hints did Puccini employ to indicate an American character?

In this activity, students will consider the depiction of Minnie, "la fanciulla" ("the girl") herself, within the context of historical accounts by and about women on the American frontier. They will:

- study brief excerpts from the opera
- develop their own interpretations of Minnie's character
- review primary sources to assess the authenticity of Puccini's character
- debate the veracity of historical representation in works of art
- respond to their findings about Minnie's character in a creative writing project

#### STEPS

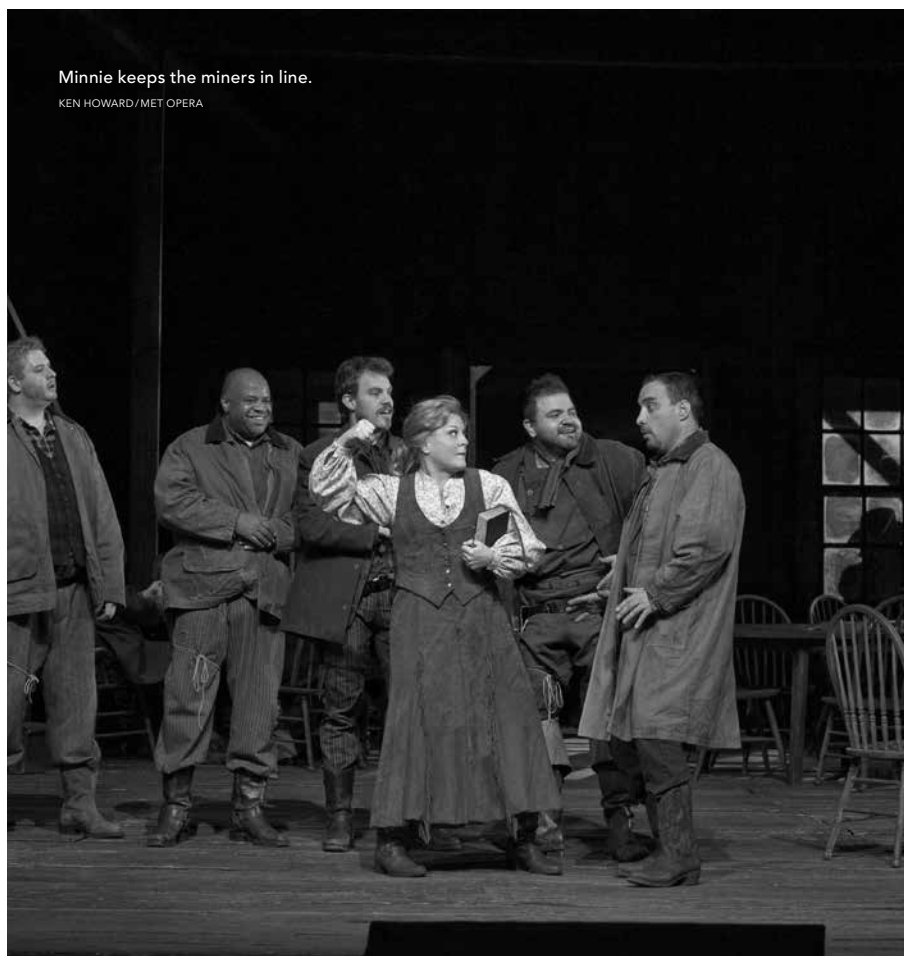
In this activity, students will compare Puccini's California with the actual frontier as described by pioneer women in their published diaries and with depictions of frontier life in documents contemporary with *La Fanciulla del West*. Through their study, students will come to a deeper understanding of the opera's time period and its representation of the American character.

**STEP 1:** Begin the lesson by simply writing the name of the opera on the blackboard: *La Fanciulla del West*. Ask students whether this Italian-language name contains any clues to the subject of the opera. Could 'West' be an English word? Which West might the composer mean? Technologically connected students might use an online translation tool to determine the meaning of "fanciulla." What kind of a girl could Puccini be referring to? Point out that the opera's title is generally translated with the name of the stage play on which it is based: David Belasco's *The Girl of the Golden West*.

**STEP 2:** Let students know that this activity will focus on Minnie, the girl of the opera's title. But before getting into the work itself, ask students to guess what kind of character she might be, based only on the knowledge that she is "of the West." You may notate students' answers on the blackboard. Prod students to specify what their guesses and assumptions are based on. Movies or television shows? Novels? Historical myths? Students may find it interesting to know that by the time Puccini's opera *La Fanciulla del West* premiered in 1910, the notion of the "Old West" was already passing into myth and legend. Facts were less important in stories of the West than the sensationalism of tales depicting outlaws, cowboys, bandits, and desperadoes.

**STEP 3:** Ask students to reflect on other historical periods they’ve seen depicted in movies, on TV, or in novels, such as World War I–era England as seen in *Downton Abbey*; U.S. domestic life in the 1960s as seen in the TV series *Mad Men*; and other examples students may cite. What happens to history when it’s transformed into entertainment? What can you believe? What may change? What kinds of stereotypes can develop? Do students think it’s appropriate to learn history from a work of entertainment? What kinds of biases or blind spots may affect these depictions of history, and how?

**STEP 4:** Following this introductory reflection, let the class know that they will be closely reading a series of excerpts taken from the opera, and each will reveal something about Minnie’s character. Divide students into small groups and assign each one of the following sets of excerpts, distributing the associated reproducible handout found at the back of this guide. In some examples, Minnie herself sings; in others, other characters sing about her. The handouts provide space for students to make notes on what the readings reveal about Minnie’s character and what “evidence” they find for this in the text.



## COMMON CORE STANDARDS AND LA FANCIULLA DEL WEST

This activity directly supports the following ELA-Literacy Common Core Strands:

### CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.3

Analyze the impact of the author’s choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).

### CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.11-12.7

Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

### CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.7

Analyze various accounts of a subject told in different mediums (e.g., a person’s life story in both print and multimedia), determining which details are emphasized in each account.

**FUN FACT:** Puccini was a great admirer of the work of the theater impresario David Belasco and used his plays as the basis for two of his operas: *Madama Butterfly* and *La Fanciulla del West*. Puccini was immediately taken with these works when he saw them on stage, despite the fact that he understood little English.



Minnie intervenes on Johnson's behalf.

KEN HOWARD / MET OPERA

The excerpts are organized into the following sets:

**SET A:** Tracks 1–3 Miners express their love for Minnie (from Act I)

**SET B:** Tracks 4–6 Minnie, cigars, and whisky (from Act I)

**SET C:** Tracks 7–8 Minnie arrives at the saloon and takes charge (from Act I)

**SET D:** Track 9 The Bible lesson

**SET E:** Tracks 10–11 Minnie and Jack Rance (from Act I)

**SET F:** Track 12 Minnie's life in the mountains (from Act II)

**SET G:** Track 13 Minnie, the scorned woman (from Act II)

**STEP 5:** Reconvene the class and invite representatives from the groups to summarize their findings about Minnie, using evidence from the text. From the analysis provided by the various groups, build a single list of adjectives describing Minnie. What kind of person does Minnie seem to be? How realistic do students think this character is?

Each excerpt contains an audio example corresponding to the text. If you wish, you may select a few excerpts to play for students so that they hear how words, tone of voice, and musical expression come together to create a depiction of Minnie's character. Be sure to pass out the corresponding handout to the full class for any excerpts you play so that they may follow along to the text and translation.

# AN AMERICAN OPERA AND ITS AMERICAN ISSUES

Whether Paris, Nagasaki, or California, Puccini's operatic settings are always vivid. His nearly anthropological approach to embedding the details of local character and soundscape into his scores makes his operas rich in ambience. The seeming "authenticity" of these depictions can also make his operas stimulating subjects for students of history. Puccini's operas lure us to believe that they portray something true; but how do their worlds correspond to historical reality?

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

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

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

Students may be interested to know that the source for the opera's libretto, *The Girl of the Golden West* by David Belasco, includes a scene with Wowkle and Billy Jackrabbit that is omitted from the opera. In it, the Native Americans sing a rendition "My Country 'Tis of Thee," but perform with perfect

English, not the offensively ungrammatical language they use elsewhere. As they sing, the miners comment on their sarcastic tone, and the scene demonstrates that Wowkle and Billy are not only aware of their disenfranchised status, but relish using a pillar of American patriotic song to comment on it. There is no comparable scene in Puccini's opera.

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



**FUN FACT:** David Belasco, the author of the play that formed the source for Puccini's opera, was involved in rehearsals for the work's premiere at the Metropolitan Opera. His work in helping the international cast (including Italians, Germans, a Spaniard, a Frenchman, a Bohemian, and a Pole) appear American included such sage advice as to avoid the grimacing and expressive gesticulation to which the singers were prone. In attempting to mimic the nonchalant attitude of the miners, he also advised the cast to slouch and keep their hands in their pockets.

**STEP 6:** Explain to students that historians actually know a good deal about women in the 19th-century American West thanks to the journals and diaries they kept. We also know a lot about the way frontier women and "cowgirls" have been depicted in entertainment, not only in contemporary media, but in historical shows as well. For instance, 20 years before he composed *La Fanciulla del West*, Puccini saw a famous traveling show called "Buffalo Bill's Wild West." It featured a sharpshooter named Annie Oakley (who herself inspired Irving Berlin's musical *Annie Get Your Gun*), who in fact had never lived west of Ohio. Oakley was still performing her routine as late as 1910, when *La Fanciulla del West* premiered at the Metropolitan Opera.

Pass out the next section of the reproducible handouts, entitled *Women of the Wild West*. Have students, either individually or in small groups, read these selected primary source descriptions of the Wild West from the perspectives of five pioneer women. Then, bring the class back together to discuss these women and their descriptions of the frontier. Does Minnie seem to resemble one or more of them more closely? How?

**STEP 7:** Invite students to reflect on how accurately Puccini's opera depicts the life of a pioneer woman in the American West based on their historical primary source readings. How authentically do they think the opera presents the factual, historical situation? Calling to mind the history-based movies and TV shows they've seen (as discussed in Step 3), open up the class to a larger discussion of the license and liberties taken by artists.

- In artworks, how closely should characters' behavior adhere to historical facts?
- Why might audiences prefer less authentic depictions?
- Why might artists and writers prefer to create characters unlike the real people who inspired them?

**FOLLOW-UP:** Have students apply their knowledge of Minnie's character to a brief creative writing assignment. Using the rhyme pattern and structure of a limerick, have students compose a brief poem about Minnie and her actions or character. You may start them off by assigning the first line as "There once was a girl from the West ..." or something similar.



## Opera and the Myth of the American West

There are few things that seem more prototypically American than the idea of the American West: a land of limitless possibility, endless horizons, physical danger, and untamed nature; the lawless land of strivers, bandits, and sheriffs. To contemporary Americans, it is an image familiar from family legend, primary school, and countless novels and movies. To Giacomo Puccini, it was a setting no less exotic than the Nagasaki of *Madama Butterfly* or the mythical Peking of *Turandot*. In creating the unique sound world of *La Fanciulla del West*, Puccini relied on harmonies, textures, and a style of thematic development that alone contain nothing that is distinctly American. But together, Puccini's musical materials evoke this mythical era of America in soaring melodies and a certain kind of rebellious dissonance. The following activity is designed to introduce students to Puccini's creative process and musical materials.

Students will:

- explore the function of operatic prologues and overtures
- listen to and analyze several musical excerpts from *La Fanciulla del West*
- relate some of Puccini's musical choices to character, plot, and the emotional arc of the opera

### STEPS

In the prologue to the opera, Puccini establishes the work's atmosphere in a brief but densely structured orchestral number designed to suggest the majesty and lawlessness of the American West. Meant as a musical corollary to the opening to Belasco's stage play, which featured a cinematic projection of the vast forests of California (considered

## Music

### IN PREPARATION

For this activity, students will need the reproducible resources available at the back of this guide entitled *Opera and the Myth of the American West*, as well as the audio selections from *La Fanciulla del West* available online or on the accompanying CD.

### CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS

Music, Composition, Music History, Humanities, and Arts

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- To introduce and/or reinforce knowledge of musical terminology
- To hone careful listening skills by examining musical themes and their development in selections from *La Fanciulla del West*
- To practice aural recognition and memory



**FUN FACT:** Puccini's fascination with the American West did not begin when he attended a performance of Belasco's play *The Girl of the Golden West*. Many years prior, while a student in Milan, Puccini had attended a performance of Buffalo Bill's Wild West spectacular. As he then wrote to his brother, "Buffalo Bill was here and I liked it. Buffalo Bill is a company of North Americans with a quantity of Indians, redskins, and buffaloes that do splendid tricks and reproduce for real the scenes that happen on the frontier."

groundbreaking for the time), the prelude is a pithy introduction to some of the most recognizable harmonic traits and themes of the opera. In this activity, students will learn new musical terminology, investigate important themes from *La Fanciulla del West*, develop aural skills, and study musical excerpts in order to discern harmonic and thematic material.

**STEP 1:** Start the class with a grand, abstract question: What does America sound like? Students may find the question paralyzingly vague and need further prompting. What are the everyday sounds that students hear on the street? At home? At school? Is there a particular kind of dance music that fills their world? What is the soundtrack to their life? If they could imagine a rhythmic pattern that would accompany their life, what would it sound like? Would it be smooth and regular or syncopated and frenetic? What is the overall emotional effect of this imagined American sound? Is it lush and romantic? Sweeping? Quiet and constrained?

**STEP 2:** Let students know that the brief exercise that they have just participated in is similar to the preliminary work that Puccini did when creating a musical atmosphere for his operas. When choosing a story for a new opera, Puccini was most inspired by settings that included a strong local flavor or ambience. In *La Fanciulla del West*, Puccini took on the task of creating a musical depiction of the American West during the



The original set for the final act.  
MET OPERA ARCHIVES

California Gold Rush. In the activity to come, we will examine the musical techniques he used to create an idiomatic sound for this setting.

For advanced students, you may quiz them further on which American composers come to mind when they think of an American musical world. Do they think of Aaron Copland, Charles Ives, Leonard Bernstein? What makes these composers' works sound 'American'? There are no correct answers, but students might mention such elements as the use of American folk songs, hymns, gospel music, or jazz, or the incorporation of musical styles and rhythms from immigrant communities.

**STEP 3:** Note to students that Puccini, an Italian composer writing at the very end of the Romantic era, had very limited knowledge of America—and he barely spoke any English! Furthermore, the development of American composition and a native 'American' sound in art music was still in its infancy when Puccini wrote *La Fanciulla del West*. For example, Aaron Copland was only 10 years old when *Fanciulla* premiered at the Metropolitan Opera House. In this sense, Puccini had few models to draw from in composing his American opera. As is immediately clear to us in the United States,



## BUFFALO BILL'S WILD WEST



Much of our popular understanding of the "Wild West"—the tales of cunning sharpshooters, highwayman capers, and Indian skirmishes that form our American mythology—comes from a single person: William F. Cody, better known by his stage name of Buffalo Bill. Born in Iowa in 1846, Cody worked as a horseman, cattle driver, Pony Express rider, frontier scout, and buffalo hunter. With a reputation for marksmanship, remarkable endurance, and vast knowledge of Native American customs, Cody's fame spread, first through newspaper reporters and later through dime novels, which transformed Cody into a Western folk hero under the name of Buffalo Bill.

In 1872, Cody performed on stage for the first time, joining a Wild West show organized by the author of some of these dime novels.

*"Young Buffalo Bill Cody Posed with Guns and Game," published in Wilson & Martin's Buffalo Bill's Wild West: An American Legend.*

Although he was initially uncomfortable on stage, Cody became a superb showman and soon recognized the financial possibilities in dramatizing tales from the American frontier. In 1883, he founded his own traveling show, Buffalo Bill's Wild West and Congress of Rough Riders of the World. With a cast of hundreds, the company's outdoor performances featured sharpshooting tricks, reenactments of skirmishes between cowboys and Indians, buffalo hunts, and re-creations of stagecoach captures and a Pony Express ride. The Wild West show traveled throughout North America and Europe for 30 years. As a fictionalized hero, Buffalo Bill Cody was central in shaping the cultural understanding of cowboys, Indians, and the frontier—and was one of the first truly global celebrities. His construction of a fictionalized Old West lives on not only in the West of David Belasco and Giacomo Puccini, but also in movie Westerns, in both the earliest days of film and today.



the work is a depiction of America filtered through the imagination of an Italian opera composer, rather than an authentic portrayal of history. Nevertheless, Puccini incorporated elements into the fabric of his score that lend it a distinct sound—according to his understanding of the American West—and an evocative ambience.

**STEP 4:** Distribute copies of the *Ten Essential Musical Terms* found in this guide and review the terms with your students, using the piano, your instrument, and/or your voice to demonstrate these musical concepts. Where applicable, you may also use the sample audio tracks listed below. Ensure that students have an adequate grasp of the terms and can recognize them aurally, as their analysis of the musical examples to come will build upon this understanding.

<b>Track 14</b>	Augmented triad
<b>Track 15</b>	Cakewalk rhythm
<b>Track 16</b>	Dotted rhythm
<b>Track 17</b>	Sequence
<b>Track 18</b>	Triads: major and minor
<b>Track 19</b>	Whole-tone scale

**STEP 5:** Next, distribute the *Opera and the Myth of the American West* handout. Using the handout as a guide, listen to each theme as a class. The themes can be found on **Tracks 20–23**. The first time students hear each excerpt, ask them to follow along to the notated music on the handout. After students have heard an excerpt once, have them (either individually or in groups) craft written descriptions of the theme in the space provided on the handout, drawing on as many of the *Ten Essential Musical Terms* as they can. Students may need to listen to each excerpt several times. A Teacher's Guide is provided on the following page.



## TEACHER'S GUIDE TO PRIMARY MUSICAL THEMES

### Track 20: Redemption Theme

A brash, fortissimo gesture based on the whole-tone scale and its resulting augmented harmonies (the opening chord is C-E-G#, against a bass pedal of Bb—an enharmonic re-spelling of A#). The following harmonies shift between this chord and an augmented chord built on Bb-D-F#, before settling on yet another augmented chord, one built on F-A-C#.

Note: Although Puccini labeled this motif as the “motif of redemption,” its use throughout the opera isn’t quite so simple. He also uses it to indicate chaos and risk.



### Track 21: Love Theme

A yearning diatonic melody played in a middle string register, punctuated by a harp arpeggio. Although the melody wavers around the narrow range of only a fourth, the effect is one of building ardor.



### Track 22: Minnie's Theme

Recognizable for its characteristic falling 7th interval and unresolved dissonance, Minnie's theme begins by outlining a 9th chord, before sequencing to another falling 7th figure—this time outlining an augmented triad with an added 7th. The theme has a grand, expansive sound, and the second chord's augmented quality connects Minnie to the Redemption theme.



### Track 23: Ramerrez's Theme

A dotted, syncopated repeating figure played by the brass, modeled after the cakewalk rhythm in American ragtime music. With the dynamics marked *fff* and the performance instruction of “violento” (“violently”), this energetic gesture emulates the spirit and frenetic energy of the American West.



**STEP 6:** Now that students are familiar with the most important musical themes of the opera, is it time to have them apply their knowledge of the themes to a larger musical context. If you have not done so already, review the concept and function of a prologue in a piece of dramatic theater, drawing on the definition found in the *Ten Essential Musical Terms*. Explain that the function of this brief instrumental number is to “set the stage” for the opera to follow. It occurs before the curtain rises, and although it’s brief, it contains several themes that will recur over the course of the work. As a class, listen to **Track 24**, which contains the full prelude of *La Fanciulla del West*. As students listen, ask them to imagine what kind of personality or national temperament Puccini is attempting to suggest through his music. The prelude is very brief; you may repeat the excerpt several times so that students retain the music in their heads.

Ask students: Who heard the Redemption Theme? Who heard the Love Theme? Minnie’s Theme? (HINT: Minnie’s Theme does not occur in the prelude.) Ramerrez’s Theme? You may choose to play Track 24 again, this time asking students to raise their hands when they hear particular themes. (You can assign numbers to the themes, with students holding up one, two, or three fingers to indicate which theme they hear at a particular time.) A brief listening map to the Prelude is provided below.



### A LISTENING MAP FOR THE PRELUDE

The Prelude opens with a bombastic statement of the Redemption Theme, followed by an immediate restatement of the theme on a different pitch, all with very full orchestration. This second statement dissolves into the Love Theme, which coincides with a large reduction in the performing forces. The Love Theme begins in the middle string tessitura, accompanied by a harp arpeggio. It is stated twice, and the second statement merges into a rising sequence based on the theme’s quarter-eighth-eighth rhythmic pattern. The dynamics increase as the sweeping nature of the theme takes over. The Redemption Theme suddenly intrudes with its brash, augmented sound. As in the Prelude’s opening, it is stated twice.

The Redemption Theme is followed by a brief connective section in which a heavily dotted rhythm outlines a more diatonic melody. This section functions to increase the dynamics, drive, and tension. It culminates in an even more sweeping statement of the Love Theme—this time, in a much higher string tessitura. As was the case before, here the second statement of the Love Theme moves into a rising sequence. The dynamics increase yet more and the drive culminates in a grand resolution on a *fff* high note in the violins. This arrival coincides with a statement of Ramerrez’s Theme, as a counterpoint in the brass to the strings’ tremolo high note.



To close out your study of the Prelude, return to your initial discussion of the general temperament of Puccini's music and how Puccini aimed to paint a musical portrait of the American West. The following questions may guide your conversation.

- What do students think Puccini was aiming to evoke by relying on augmented harmonies—which are by nature unstable?
- What is the effect of Puccini's avoidance of harmonic resolution?
- What do students make of the way that the redemption and love themes blend into one another?
- How might you interpret Puccini's choice to have some themes return in a disruptive, explosive manner?
- What is the role of orchestration and dynamics in creating the overall atmosphere? Is this music subtle? Or is it grand, outspoken, and expansive?

There is no single correct interpretation of Puccini's compact, dense music in the Prelude. It's possible, however, that his use of whole-tone sonorities and augmented harmonies emphasizes the inherent instability of life in the American West, and the



## A NEW YORK GIRL

The world premiere of *La Fanciulla del West* at the Metropolitan Opera in 1910 was the occasion for a huge groundswell of New York press coverage, depicting the new opera as the perfect marriage of American and European features. The Metropolitan Opera Archives preserves many of the original advertisements, programs, and reviews from the opera's premiere. Included in the collection is an original sketch of Enrico Caruso in costume as Dick Johnson, drawn by the singer himself, who was a gifted caricaturist, as well as photographic portraits of the principal singers.

METROPOLITAN OPERA ARCHIVES





**FUN FACT:** Sharp-eared listeners may notice some similarities between Dick Johnson's Act I aria "Quello che tacete" and a passage in the song "The Music of the Night" from the musical *The Phantom of the Opera* by Andrew Lloyd Webber. Following the musical's premiere in 1986, these similarities were also seized upon by the Puccini estate, who threatened legal action against Webber. The matter was resolved out of court.



manner that this texture resolves into the Love Theme suggests the importance of love in tempering this chaos. Over all of this, Puccini also deploys loud dynamics and a full orchestration to communicate the wild, untamed nature of his setting and the outsize nature of his characters' temperaments.

**STEP 7:** To test students' memory of the musical themes, this final part of the lesson is a simple listening quiz based on the musical themes students have learned. Pass out the final page of the handouts, which includes the "Testing Thematic Knowledge" quiz. With their completed *Opera and American Myth* handouts in front of them, play the tracks listed below and have students write down which musical theme they hear in each track. For a more difficult version, have students turn over their handouts and complete the quiz entirely by memory. The tracks in the quiz are taken from a variety of scenes throughout the opera and may include modified versions of the themes. If students can successfully identify the themes in this exercise, their ears will be attuned to the particular sound world of Puccini's opera.

QUESTION	TRACK #	MUSICAL THEME
1	25	<i>Minnie's Theme</i>
2	26	<i>Redemption Theme</i>
3	27	<i>Love Theme</i>
4	28	<i>Ramerrez's Theme</i>
5	29	<i>Love Theme</i>
6	30	<i>Minnie's Theme</i>
7	31	<i>Ramerrez's Theme</i>
8	32	<i>Redemption Theme</i>

# Ten Essential Musical Terms

The following list of terms provides basic vocabulary to help your students engage more deeply with the music of *La Fanciulla del West*.

**Augmented** Any major or perfect interval increased in size by a half step is called augmented. An augmented triad contains an augmented fifth (rather than a perfect fifth), and is built from two overlapping major thirds. The augmented triad is inherently unstable, as it lacks the restful quality of a perfect fifth; it calls for resolution.

**Cakewalk** Originally a strutting dance performed by African American slaves on antebellum plantations, the cakewalk in its first form lampooned the stylized manners of the white plantation owners. It was later adapted for use in vaudeville and minstrelsy shows, and made its way to Broadway before dying out around 1920. It is a form of ragtime, with a characteristic syncopated rhythm in duple meter:



In addition to Puccini's use of the rhythm in *La Fanciulla del West*, the cakewalk can also be heard in the final movement of Claude Debussy's *Children's Corner* suite for piano, entitled "Golliwogg's Cakewalk."

**Diatonic** A melodic or harmonic quality in which the notes used can be found in the work's given key. Its dissonance is controlled and it does not contain the same relentless drive towards resolution as with chromatic harmonies.

**Dotted rhythm** In a dotted rhythm, the beat is divided into unequal parts, so that instead of having two notes of equal length, long notes alternate with one or more short notes. The term comes from the musical notation, in which a dot is added to the note head to indicate that its duration should be increased by half of its original value. An example of a repeating dotted rhythm is the heartbeat.

**Motif** A musical motif (or motive) is a brief musical idea that recurs throughout a musical work. Motives can be based on a melodic, rhythmic, or harmonic component, and their repetition makes them recognizable to the listener. In opera, musical motives are often symbolically associated with specific characters or dramatic ideas.

**Prelude** An instrumental work at the start of a dramatic work, intended to serve as an introduction to the work's major themes, setting, or overarching style. Preludes are typically shorter than overtures, which serve the same function. Puccini rarely composed self-contained preludes; before *La Fanciulla del West*, the last time he had done so was in his very first stage work, *Le Villi*.

**Resolution** The release of tension by movement from dissonance or ambiguity to consonance or rest. All standard cadences contain resolution. Within a tonal context, dissonant chords (such as diminished seventh chords, augmented triads, augmented sixth chords, and more) call for resolution.

**Sequence** The process of musical development in which a musical idea is repeated successively at higher or lower pitches. Sequences may be based on melodic material alone, or they may include harmony as well.

**Triad** A chord built from three notes, and a basic building block of tonal harmony. A triad's three notes can be transposed to form a root note with a third and fifth above it. Thought of another way, a triad is built from two overlapping thirds. Major triads are formed from a major third with a minor third on top; minor triads are formed from a minor third with a major third on top.

**Whole-tone scale** A six-note scale (seven including the upper octave) consisting exclusively of whole steps (or "tones"). There are only two possible whole tone scales: C-D-E-F $\sharp$ -G $\sharp$ -A $\sharp$  (or B $\flat$ , spelled enharmonically); and C $\sharp$ -D $\sharp$ -E $\sharp$  (or F)-G-A-B. Whole-tone scales and chords are harmonically unstable as they lack the pitches used in chord resolutions typical of the tonal era. Triads built on the whole-tone scale are augmented, in that they contain an augmented fifth rather than a perfect fifth.

### Supporting the Student Experience during *The Met: Live in HD* Transmission

#### IN PREPARATION

For this activity, students will need the Performance Activity reproducible handouts found in the back of this guide.

#### COMMON CORE STANDARDS AND *LA FANCIULLA DEL WEST*

##### CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.3

Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).

##### CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.5

Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

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

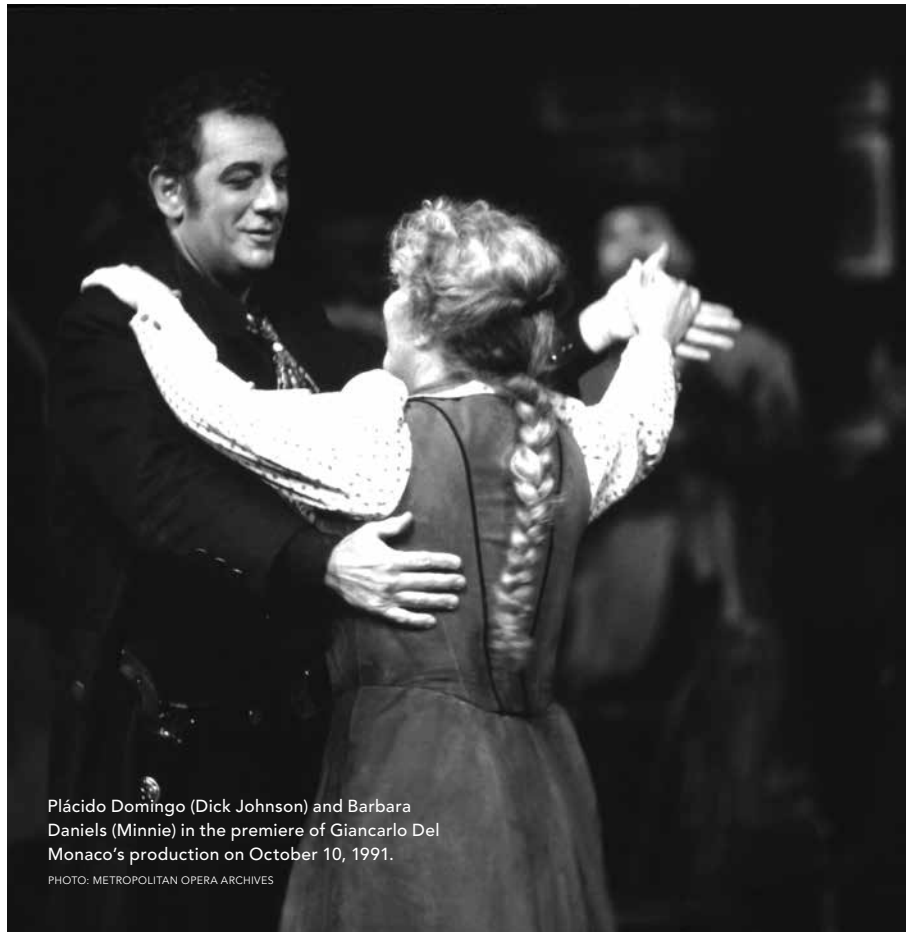
Each Performance Activity incorporates a reproducible sheet. Students should bring this activity sheet to the *Live in HD* transmission and fill it out during intermission and/or after the final curtain. The activities direct attention to details of the production that might otherwise go unnoticed.

For *La Fanciulla del West*, the first activity sheet, *Going Rustic*, directs students' attention to the extraordinary stagecraft seen in this *Live in HD* production. Students will identify props and other aspects of staging used to realistically portray a mining camp in Gold Rush-era California.

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

The Performance Activity reproducible handouts can be found in the back of this guide. On the next page, you'll find an activity created specifically for follow-up after the *Live in HD* transmission.

### Between Justice and the Law



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

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

Ask students to look back from our understanding of the tenets of the contemporary American justice system—particularly as encoded in the Constitution and its

#### IN PREPARATION

This activity requires no preparation other than attendance at the *Live in HD* transmission of *La Fanciulla del West*.

#### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- To review students' understanding of Puccini's *La Fanciulla del West*
- To examine the opera's treatment of laws, lawbreakers, and justice
- To encourage students to consider ethical issues raised by the opera

#### COMMON CORE STANDARDS AND *LA FANCIULLA DEL WEST*

##### CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-12.1

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

##### CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-12.1d

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

Amendments—that are absent in the world of *La Fanciulla del West*. Which protections exist now that did not in the opera? The following list of concepts may be helpful in guiding your discussion.

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

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

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

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

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

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



**Excerpts taken from the  
Metropolitan Opera broadcast of  
January 8, 2011**

**MINNIE**

Deborah Voigt

**DICK JOHNSON**

Marcello Giordani

**NICK**

Tony Stevenson

**JACK RANCE**

Lucio Gallo

**SONORA**

Dwayne Croft

**ASHBY**

Keith Miller

**JAKE WALLACE**

Oren Gradus

Conducted by

Nicola Luisotti

Metropolitan Opera Orchestra  
and Chorus

- 1 Set A, Example 1 (Miners express their love for Minnie)
- 2 Set A, Example 2
- 3 Set A, Example 3
- 4 Set B, Example 1 (Minnie, cigars, and whisky)
- 5 Set B, Example 2
- 6 Set B, Example 3
- 7 Set C, Example 1 (Minnie arrives at the saloon and takes charge)
- 8 Set C, Example 2
- 9 Set D (The Bible lesson)
- 10 Set E, Example 1 (Minnie and Jack Rance)
- 11 Set E, Example 2
- 12 Set F (Minnie's life in the mountains)
- 13 Set G: Minnie, the scorned woman
- 14 Ex. Augmented triad
- 15 Ex. Cakewalk rhythm
- 16 Ex. Dotted rhythm
- 17 Ex. Sequence
- 18 Ex. Triads: major and minor
- 19 Ex. Whole-tone scale
- 20 Redemption Theme
- 21 Love Theme
- 22 Minnie's Theme
- 23 Ramerrez's Theme
- 24 Prelude in full
- 25 Question 1
- 26 Question 2
- 27 Question 3
- 28 Question 4
- 29 Question 5
- 30 Question 6
- 31 Question 7
- 32 Question 8



CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

## All About a Girl

### Set A: The miners express their love for Minnie (from Act I)

#### TRACK 1

**SONORA:** Minnie infine s'è decisa per me?

**NICK:** Certo: Ho capito che siete il preferito.

**SONORA:** Sigari a tutti!

**THE MINERS:** Hurrà!

**TRIN:** Nick, che ti ha detto?

**NICK:** Mah! Se ho ben capito voi siete il preferito.

**TRIN:** Whisky per tutti!

**MINERS:** Hurrà!

Has Minnie finally chosen me?

Sure. I understand you're her favorite.

Cigars for everybody!

Hurray!

Nick, what has she told you?

Well! I understand you're her favorite.

Whisky for everybody!

Hurray!

#### TRACK 2

**RANCE:** Mistress Rance, fra poco!

**SONORA:** No, faccia di cinese! Minnie si prende giuoco di te!

**RANCE:** Ragazzo, è il whisky che lavora. Ti compatisco...  
Di Jack Rance finora nessuno, intendi, s'è mai preso giuoco!  
È buon per te ch'io non curi le offese degli ubriachi!

**SONORA:** Vecchio biscazziere! Minnie ti burla!

**RANCE:** Provalo!

**SONORA:** Ti burla, muso giallo!

**RANCE:** Ah miserabile!

Mrs. Rance, before long!

No, you fool! Minnie is leading you on.

Boy, that's the whisky talking. I'll forgive you.  
Until now, no one—you hear?—no one has ever led Jack  
Rance on. And you're lucky I don't take offense at drunks.

You dumb old gambler! Minnie's playing you!

Prove it!

She's playing you, you dumb mug!

You poor fool!

# LA FANCIULLA DEL WEST

## CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

### All About a Girl (CONTINUED)

#### Set A (continued)

#### TRACK 3

MINNIE: Bello, che fai? Che guardi?

BELLO: Nulla...

A FEW MINERS: Guardava... te!

JOE: Minnie, li ho colti lungo il "Torrente Nero."  
Al mio paese ce ne son tanti!

MINNIE: Oh, grazie, Joe!

SONORA: È passato pel campo oggi un merciaio di San Francisco... Aveva trine e nastri. Questo è per voi... Vedete, è color porpora come la vostra bocca....

HARRY: E questo è azzurro come il vostro sguardo!

MINNIE: Grazie, grazie!

ASHBY: Gli omaggi di Wells-Fargo!

MINNIE: Hip, hip, hurrà!

Bello [*literally: Handsome*], what's up? What are you looking at?

Nothing.

He was looking at you!

Minnie, I picked these flowers along Black Creek.  
Lots of them grow back where I come from.

Oh, thank you, Joe!

A traveling salesman from San Francisco came through camp today. He had lace and ribbons. This one is for you.  
Look, it's crimson, like your lips!

And this one is as blue as your eyes!

Thank you, thank you!

Regards from Wells Fargo!

Hip, hip, hooray!

ADJECTIVES TO DESCRIBE MINNIE	EVIDENCE IN TEXT
1	
2	
3	
4	

# LA FANCIULLA DEL WEST

## CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

### All About a Girl (CONTINUED)

#### Set B: Minnie, cigars, and whisky (from Act I)

#### TRACK 4

TRIN: Cosa c'è?

NICK: Offre Minnie!

ALL: Viva Minnie! La nostra Minnie!

What's this?

Drinks on Minnie!

Long live Minnie! Our Minnie!

#### TRACK 5

MINNIE: 'Regalias?' 'Auroras?' 'Eurekas?'

ASHBY: Se li scegliete voi, la qualità non conta nulla. Ognuno avrà per me il profumo della man che li tocca!

NICK: Vi prego, andate in giro: Ogni vostro sorriso è una consumazione!

MINNIE: Mala lingua!

'Regalias?' 'Auroras?' 'Eurekas?' [*These are brands of cigars.*]

If it comes from you, it doesn't matter what kind. For me, each one will have the fragrance of the hand that touched it.

Please, start moving around the room; every time you smile, it's a sale!

What a mouth on you!

#### TRACK 6

NICK: C'è fuori uno straniero.

MINNIE: Chi è?

NICK: Non l'ho mai visto. Sembra di San Francisco. Mi ha chiesto un whisky ed acqua.

MINNIE: Whisky ed acqua? Che son questi pasticci?

NICK: È quello che gli ho detto: Alla "Polka" si beve il whisky schietto.

MINNIE: Bene, venga. Gli aggiusteremo i ricci.

There's a stranger outside.

Who is it?

I've never seen him before. Looks like he's from San Francisco. He asked me for a whisky with water.

Whisky with water? What kind of slop is that?

And that's what I said to him: At the "Polka," you drink whisky straight.

Great, come on. We'll put hair on his chest.

ADJECTIVES TO DESCRIBE MINNIE	EVIDENCE IN TEXT
1	
2	
3	
4	

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

All About a Girl (CONTINUED)

Set C: Minnie arrives at the saloon and takes charge (from Act I)

TRACK 7

ALL: Hello, Minnie!

Hello, Minnie!

TRACK 8

MINNIE: Che cos' è stato? Sempre tu, Sonora?

What's going on? You again, Sonora?

TRIN: Nulla, Minnie—sciocchezze... Si scherzava!

Nothing, Minnie—it was nonsense. They were kidding around.

MINNIE: Voi manderete tutto alla malora! Vergogna!

You'll send this whole place to hell! Shame on you!

JOE: Minnie!

Minnie!

MINNIE: Non farò più scuola!

I'm not going to teach school anymore!

ALL: No, Minnie, no!

No, Minnie! No!

SONORA: Sai, quando tu ritardi ci si annoia...  
ed allora...

You know, it's just that when you show up late, we get bored.  
And so...

ADJECTIVES TO DESCRIBE MINNIE	EVIDENCE IN TEXT
1	
2	
3	
4	



CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

All About a Girl (CONTINUED)

Set D: The Bible Lesson

TRACK 9

MINNIE: Dove eravamo? Ruth? Ezekiel? No. Esther? No... ecco il segno, Salmo cinquantunesimo, di David. Harry, ricordi chi era David?

HARRY: Era un re dei tempi antichi, un vero eroe che quando ancor era ragazzo, armatosi d'una mascella d'asino, affrontò un gran gigante e l'ammazzò.

MINNIE: Che confusione! Siedi. A posto, Joe! Ora leggiamo. Versetto secondo: "Aspergimi d'issòpo e sarò mondo."

TRIN: Che cos è quest' "issòpo," Minnie?

MINNIE: È un'erba, che fa in Oriente.

JOE: E qui da noi non fa?

MINNIE: Sì, Joe, nel cuore ognun di noi ne serba un cespuglietto.

JOE: Nel cuore?

MINNIE: Nel cuore.

"Lavami e sarò bianco come neve.  
Poni dentro al mio petto  
un puro cuore, e rinnova in me  
uno spirito eletto."

Ciò vuol dire, ragazzi, che non v'è al mondo peccatore a cui non s'apra una via di redenzione. Sappia ognuno di voi chiudere in sè una suprema verità d'amore.

Where were we? Ruth? Ezekiel? No. Esther? Ah, here's the bookmark, Psalm 51, by David. Harry, do you remember who David was?

He was a king in ancient times, a real hero who, when he was still just a boy, having armed himself with a donkey's jawbone, confronted a great giant and killed him.

What a mishmash of stories! Have a seat. To your place, Joe! Now, let us read. Second verse: "Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean."

What is this "hyssop," Minnie?

It's an herb that grows in the East.

We don't have any around here?

Yes, Joe, each of us keeps a sprig of it in his heart.

In our hearts?

In our hearts.

"Wash me and I will be white as snow.  
Plant in my breast a pure heart  
and renew a steadfast spirit  
within me."

That is to say, fellas, that there is not a sinner in this world for whom a new road to redemption will not open. Let each of you keep within himself this highest truth of love.

ADJECTIVES TO DESCRIBE MINNIE	EVIDENCE IN TEXT
1	
2	
3	
4	

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY  
All About a Girl (CONTINUED)

Set E: Minnie and Jack Rance (from Act I)

TRACK 10

RANCE: Ti voglio bene, Minnie.  
MINNIE: Non lo dite.  
RANCE: Mille dollari, qui, se tu mi baci!  
MINNIE: Rance, voi me fate ridere. Su via, finitela!  
RANCE: Tu non puoi star qui sola! Ti sposo!  
MINNIE: E vostra moglie, che dirà?  
RANCE: Se tu lo vuoi, mai più mi rivedrà!  
MINNIE: Rance, basta! M’offendete! Vivo sola così, voi lo sapete, perchè così mi piace... [*She takes out her pistol.*] con questa compagnia sicura e buona, che mai non m’abbandona. Rance, lasciatemi in pace!

I really like you, Minnie.  
Don’t say that.  
A thousand dollars—here—if you kiss me!  
Rance, you’re going to make me laugh. Get out of here—stop it!  
You can’t stay here alone. I’ll marry you!  
And your wife? What’ll she say?  
If it’s what you want, she’ll never see me again!  
Rance, enough! You’re insulting me! I live like this, as you well know, because I like it... with this sure and good companion who won’t desert me.  
Rance, leave me in peace!

TRACK 11

MINNIE: Siete in collera, Rance? Perchè? Vi ho detto il mio pensiero schietto!

Are you angry, Rance? Why? All I did was tell you what I think, straight out!

ADJECTIVES TO DESCRIBE MINNIE	EVIDENCE IN TEXT
1	
2	
3	
4	

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

All About a Girl (CONTINUED)

Set F: Minnie’s life in the mountains (from Act II)

TRACK 12

JOHNSON: Che cosa strana la vostra vita, su questa montagna solitaria, lontana dal mondo!

MINNIE: Oh, se sapeste come il vivere è allegro!

Ho un piccolo polledro che mi porta a galoppo laggiù per la campagna; per prati di giunchiglie, di garofani ardenti, per riviere profonde cui profuma le sponde gelsomini e vainiglie!

Poi ritorno ai miei pini ai monti della Sierra, così al cielo vicini, che Iddio passando pare la sua mano v’inclini, lontani dalla terra così, che vien la voglia di battere alla soglia del cielo, per entrare.

It’s so strange, your life here on your lonely mountain, far from the world!

Oh, if you only knew what a happy life it is!

I have a little horse who carries me galloping down through the countryside; through meadows of jonquils, blazing carnations, by the deep river whose banks are perfumed with jasmine and oranges!

Then I come back to my pines, to my mountains of the Sierra, so near to the sky that God touches you with his hand as he passes, so far from earth that you have the urge to knock on heaven’s door to come in.

ADJECTIVES TO DESCRIBE MINNIE	EVIDENCE IN TEXT
1	
2	
3	
4	

THE MET: LIVE IN HD

LA FANCIULLA DEL WEST

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CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

All About a Girl (CONTINUED)

Set G: Minnie, the scorned woman (from Act II)

TRACK 13

MINNIE: Che voi siate un bandito...ve lo perdoni Iddio. Ma il primo bacio mio vi siete preso, chè vi credevo mio, soltanto mio! Andate! Andate! V'uccideranno, che m'importa?

That you're a bandit ... may God forgive you for that. But you stole my first kiss! I thought you were mine and mine alone. Get out! Get out! They will kill you, what does it matter to me?

ADJECTIVES TO DESCRIBE MINNIE	EVIDENCE IN TEXT
1	
2	
3	
4	

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

All About a Girl (CONTINUED)

Women of the Wild West

1. **Luzena Stanley Wilson** went to Nevada City, California with her husband during the Gold Rush years. She set up a boarding house, feeding between 75 and 200 men at \$25 each per week. She also served as a banker, exchanging gold dust for cash and loaning money to miners. Mrs. Wilson wrote in her journal about starting the business:

As always occurs in the mind of a woman, I thought of taking boarders. There was a hotel nearby and the men ate there, paid \$1 a meal... With my own hands I chopped stakes, drove them into the ground, and set up my table. I bought provisions at a neighboring store and when my husband came back at night he found... twenty miners eating at my table. Each man as he rose put a dollar in my hand and said I might count on him as a permanent customer. I called my hotel 'El Dorado.'<sup>1</sup>

2. **Catherine Haun** arrived in Sacramento with her husband and others on November 4, 1849, ending a nine-month trek from Iowa. She wrote in her journal of her first weeks in California:

Although very tired of tent life many of us spent Thanksgiving and Christmas in our canvas houses. I do not remember ever having had happier holiday times. For Christmas dinner we had a grizzly bear steak for which we paid \$2.50, one cabbage for \$1.00 and—oh horrors—some more dried apples! And for a Christmas present the Sacramento river rose very high and flooded the whole town!... It was past the middle of January before we... reached Maryville—there were only a half dozen houses; all occupied at exorbitant prices. Someone was calling for the services of a lawyer to draw up a will and my husband offered to do it for which he charged \$150.00.

This seemed a happy omen for success and he hung out his shingle, abandoning all thought of going to the mines. As we had lived in a tent and had been on the move for nine months, traveling 2,400 miles, we were glad to settle down and go housekeeping in a shed that was built in a day of lumber purchased with the first fee. The ground was given us by some gamblers who lived next door and upon the other side, for neighbors, we had a real live saloon. I have never received more respectful attention than I did from these neighbors.<sup>2</sup>

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

All About a Girl (CONTINUED)

Women of the Wild West

3. A single woman named **Dorothy Scraggs**, also in Maryville, placed this ad in a local newspaper:

A Husband Wanted... By a lady who can wash, cook, scour, sew, milk, spin, weave, hoe (can't plow), cut wood, make fires, feed the pigs, raise chickens, rock the cradle (gold rocker, I thank you, Sir!), saw a plank, drive nails, etc. These are a few of the solid branches; now for the ornamental. A "long time ago" she went as far as syntax, read Murray's Geography and through two rules in Pike's Grammar. Could find 6 states on the atlas. Could read, and you can see that she can write. Can—no, could—paint roses, butterflies, ships, etc. Could once dance; can ride a horse, donkey or oxen... Oh, I hear you ask, could she scold? No, she can't, you \_\_\_\_\_ good-for-nothing \_\_\_\_\_! Now for her terms. Her age is none of your business. She is neither handsome nor a fright, yet an old man need not apply, nor any who have not a little more education than she has, and a great deal more gold, for there must be \$20,000 settled on her before she will bind herself to perform all the above. Address to Dorothy Scraggs, with real name. P.O. Maryville.<sup>2</sup>

4. A boardinghouse keeper named **Mary Ballou** wrote:

Sometimes I am up all times a night scaring the hogs and mules out of the house. I made a blueberry pudding today for dinner. Sometimes I am making soups and cranberry tarts and baking chicken that cost \$4 a head and cooking eggs at \$3 a dozen. Sometimes boiling cabbage and turnips and frying fritters and broiling steak and cooking codfish and potatoes. Sometimes I am taking care of babies and nursing at the rate of \$50 a week but I would not advise any Lady to come out here and suffer the toil and fatigue that I have suffered for the sake of a little gold.<sup>2</sup>

5. John Burke, the manager of Buffalo Bill's Wild West traveling show, described **Annie Oakley's** role this way:

Miss Oakley comes on very early in the performance. She starts very gently, shooting with a pistol. Women and children see a harmless woman out there and do not get worried. Gradually she increases the charge in her rifles until at last she shoots with a full charge. Thus, by the time the attack on the stagecoach comes, the audience is accustomed to the sound of shooting.<sup>3</sup>

1. Schlissel, Lillian. *Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey*. New York: Random House, 2004.

2. Historic Hwy 49, <http://www.historichwy49.com/women/women.html>

3. Sell, Henry B. and Victor Weybright. *Buffalo Bill and the Wild West*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1955.

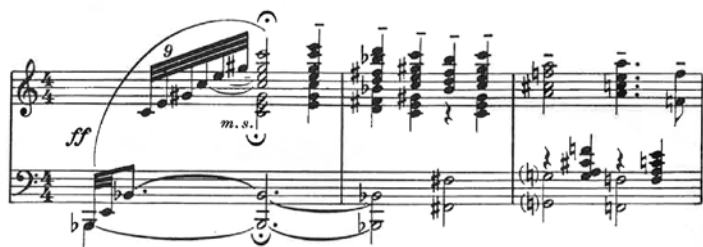


CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

## Opera and the Myth of the American West

### Primary Musical Themes

#### Redemption Theme



Note: Although Puccini labeled this motif as the “motif of redemption,” its use throughout the opera isn’t quite so simple. He also uses it to indicate chaos and risk.

My thoughts/interpretation:

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#### Love Theme



My thoughts/interpretation:

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## LA FANCIULLA DEL WEST

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### CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

## Opera and the Myth of the American West (CONTINUED)

### Minnie's Theme



My thoughts/interpretation:

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### Ramerez's Theme



My thoughts/interpretation:

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CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Opera and the Myth of the American West (CONTINUED)

Testing Thematic Knowledge

1 \_\_\_\_\_

2 \_\_\_\_\_

3 \_\_\_\_\_

4 \_\_\_\_\_

5 \_\_\_\_\_

6 \_\_\_\_\_

7 \_\_\_\_\_

8 \_\_\_\_\_

## At *The Met*: Going Rustic

The creative team behind this production has aimed to recreate the ambience of the American West in a Gold Rush–era mining camp. They fill the set with realistic objects—including quite a few that you might not expect to see on an operatic stage. In the world of performance, these objects are called “props,” short for “properties.” Review the list of props below, all of which play important roles in this production. See how many you can spot. In the space provided, draw conclusions on why that particular prop is in this production and, if you don’t think the prop is taken from real life, how it might be re-created on the stage. In some cases, what would be the downside of using the actual item rather than a prop created for the stage?

PROP	IN WHICH ACT DOES IT APPEAR?	WHY IS IT IN THE PRODUCTION? HOW MIGHT IT BE MADE?
elk head	Act	
gas lamps	Act	
cigars	Act	
stagecoach	Act	
rifle	Act	
horse	Act	
candles	Act	
snow	Act	
water	Act	
pistol	Act	
dripping blood	Act	
deck of cards	Act	
thick woolen sock	Act	
a campfire	Act	
flaming torches	Act	
a thick rope	Act	
two pairs of good walking shoes	Act	

# *La Fanciulla del West: My Highs & Lows*

OCTOBER 27 8, 2018

CONDUCTED BY MARCO ARMILIATO

REVIEWED BY \_\_\_\_\_

THE STARS	STAR POWER	MY COMMENTS
EVA-MARIA WESTBROEK AS MINNIE	☆☆☆☆	
JONAS KAUFMANN AS DICK JOHNSON	☆☆☆☆	
CARLO BOSI AS NICK	☆☆☆☆	
ŽELJKO LUČIĆ AS JACK RANCE	☆☆☆☆	
MICHAEL TODD SIMPSON AS SONORA	☆☆☆☆	
MATTHEW ROSE AS ASHBY	☆☆☆☆	

THE SHOW, SCENE BY SCENE	ACTION	MUSIC	SET DESIGN/STAGING
QUIET TIME IN THE POLKA SALOON MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
THE MINERS ARRIVE MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
THE BALLAD SINGER MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
FIGHTING OVER MINNIE MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
MINNIE'S ENTRANCE MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
THE BIBLE LESSON MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
A STRANGER APPEARS MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5

LA FANCIULLA DEL WEST

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JOHNSON AND MINNIE DANCE  
MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:

1 2 3 4 5

1 2 3 4 5

1 2 3 4 5

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AT MINNIE'S MOUNTAIN CABIN  
MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:

1 2 3 4 5

1 2 3 4 5

1 2 3 4 5

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MINNIE LEARNS THE TRUTH  
MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:

1 2 3 4 5

1 2 3 4 5

1 2 3 4 5

---

MINNIE THROWS JOHNSON OUT  
MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:

1 2 3 4 5

1 2 3 4 5

1 2 3 4 5

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MINNIE HIDES JOHNSON  
MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:

1 2 3 4 5

1 2 3 4 5

1 2 3 4 5

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THE POKER GAME  
MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:

1 2 3 4 5

1 2 3 4 5

1 2 3 4 5

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THE HANGING PARTY  
MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:

1 2 3 4 5

1 2 3 4 5

1 2 3 4 5

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MINNIE TO THE RESCUE  
MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:

1 2 3 4 5

1 2 3 4 5

1 2 3 4 5