

July 9, 2020 – Giacomo Puccini's *Manon Lescaut*

A spoiled teenager gets her just desserts, dying in a desert in this week's **Thursday Night Opera House**: Giacomo Puccini's *Manon Lescaut*. The composer's first commercially successful opera, it had its premiere in Turin, Italy, on February 1, 1893. The story is based on the 1731 novel *L'histoire du chevalier des Grieux et de Manon Lescaut* by Antoine François Prévost, better known as the Abbé Prévost. The libretto, while more faithful to Prévost than Jules Massenet's *Manon* (1884), sentimentalizes Manon and Des Grieux.

The story begins in eighteenth-century France and ends a few years later in the Louisiana territory that President Thomas Jefferson would purchase for America. The teenaged Manon (soprano **Mirella Freni**), accompanied by her brother Lescaut (baritone **Renato Bruson**), is on her way to a convent. She meets and falls in love with the Chevalier des Grieux (tenor **Plácido Domingo**) and, taking the coach of the elderly Geronte (bass **Kurt Rydl**)—who had himself hoped to use it to abduct Manon—the couple go to Paris. After a while, Manon is seduced by the wealth offered by Geronte and leaves Des Grieux. They are later reunited and decide to go away together; but, before leaving, Manon stops to pick up her jewelry, the gift of Geronte. This delay leads to their arrest by agents hired by Geronte, and Manon is sentenced to deportation to New Orleans. Des Grieux gains permission to accompany her, helps Manon escape in America, and they go in search of an English colony. However, the now-ailing Manon loses her strength and dies in the wilderness.

Giuseppe Sinopoli conducts the Philharmonia Orchestra and the Chorus of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden in this 1984 DG recording.

From his last concert, on August 5, 1960 in Göteborg, Sweden, tenor **Jussi Björling** sings the Act I aria "Donna non vidi mai": <http://youtu.be/w4sZCKRyM2A>.

Please join me next Thursday evening, July 16th, for Richard Wagner's *Der Fliegende Holländer* (*The Flying Dutchman*), with **Norman Bailey** in the title role, **Janis Martin** as Senta, **Martti Talvela** as Daland, and **René Kollo** as Erik. **Sir Georg Solti** conducts this 1976 Decca/London recording.

The **Thursday Night Opera House** is heard every Thursday evening at 7 o'clock in the Eastern time zone on 89.7 FM in central North Carolina. We're also streamed online at <http://www.theclassicalstation.org>, and you can listen on WCPE's Android or iPhone apps.

Bob Chapman

W. Robert Chapman, Host of the **Thursday Night Opera House**