

## November 18, 2021 – 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 *The Story of the Chevalier des Grieux and of Manon Lescaut* by the Abbot Antoine François Prévost. The libretto, while more faithful to Prévost than the one used in Jules Massenet's *Manon* (1884), sentimentalizes Manon and Des Grieux.

The story begins in eighteenth-century France and ends a few years later in a desert in the Louisiana territory that President Thomas Jefferson would later purchase for America from France. 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 Geronte's wealth and leaves Des Grieux. They are later reunited and decide to go away together. But before leaving, Manon stops to pick up the jewelry she'd been given by Geronte. This delay leads to them being arrested by Geronte's agents. Manon is deported to America and Des Grieux is permitted to accompany her. Once in New Orleans, he helps Manon escape and they search in vain for an English colony located in a desert in the Louisiana territory. A weakened Manon dies after declaring her love for Des Grieux.

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

German tenor **Jonas Kaufmann** sings the Act 1 aria "Donna non vidi mai":  
<http://youtu.be/w4sZCKRyM2A>.

We'll also hear the first of Puccini's trio of one-act operas, *Il Tabarro* (*The Cloak*), which premiered in 1918 at New York's Metropolitan Opera.